

Change of Male Nursing Students' Learning Passion in A China Vocational Health College: A Case Tracing Study

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Abstract

Background: Some male nursing students who graduated from higher vocational education in China intend to change careers. Why? Method: Tracking a student to analyze reasons for his learning passion changes from the emotional sociology perspective. Results: The learning passion of this Chinese male nursing student in higher vocational education experienced five stages: establishment, decline, adjustment, disillusionment and equilibrium; The reason for this change is the learning organizations, society, family, system, workplace, interpersonal relationships, personal characteristics etc. can both promote and inhibit the learning passion; The deep reason is changeable of the sense of belonging and achievement in the learning process. Discussion: The equilibrium of learning passion is a loss of emotional energy, which is caused by the marginalization of occupational gender mismatch persons among vocational college education in learning organizations, interpersonal relationships, promotion and employment systems. Conclusions: Nursing educational stakeholders should be good at protecting male nursing students' learning passion by providing emotional value.

Keywords: China Vocational Education; Male Nursing; Learning Passion; Trends and Reasons

1. Introduction

Most male nursing students are majoring in nursing when there are no other options (Yeong et al., 2019). There is a common stereotype of occupational gender in China that certain occupations should be performed by populations of a certain gender (Jiang, 2017). Influenced by this traditional concept of occupational gender, many male nursing students suffer from psychological and emotional problems such as low self-confidence, weak drive, strong anxiety, femininity and boredom (Wang et al., 2017). In China, male nurses are not the mainstream professional image, and the public does not generally recognize vocational education. Under double social-emotional pressure, how has the learning passion of these occupational gender-mismatched male nursing students changed in a higher vocational college education?

The existing quantitative and qualitative research can roughly present the current situation of the learning passion lost by undergraduates and postgraduates. Internal factors include personality traits, self-identity, emotional intelligence, etc., and external factors include social support, learning pressure, life pressure, etc. (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003; Durán et al., 2006; Reyes et al 2016; Lin & Huang, 2014). Other studies found excessive academic burden, external influence, lack of personal motivation, physical and mental health and teacher attitudes and behaviors weaken the learning passion (Cushman & West, 2006). In another study, six major influencing factors were constructed: individual characteristics, learning ability, training methods, scientific research characteristics, learning situation and coercive force (Chen, 2016). However, the existing research rarely paid attention to the learning passion of persons under occupational gender stereotypes and rarely involved dynamic process analysis. This study does not intend to measure the level of learning passion, nor does it intend to use the passion as an independent variable to explore its correlation with other variables but hopes to explore the deep-seated reasons that affect this passion. Based on the above, this study conducted tracking interviews and observations with one male nursing student from a higher vocational college, and mainly based on the following questions:

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- 1: Why did you choose this vocational health college?
- 2: How was your interpersonal relationship during your studies?
- 3: How was your learning experience?
- 4: How did your learning passion change during your studies?

2. Theoretical Foundation

Humans have not only physical and psychological emotions but also social emotions; Socialized emotions are influenced by the situation of the living environment and the social structural framework system in which humans are located (Ma, 2016). The "sociology of emotions" holds emotions point to behavior, situations, structures and interactions that affect emotions; Passion is not a fleeting emotion (Jonathan & Jan, 2005). Learning passion is the emotional driving force that guides learning behavior (Stoeber et al., 2011). This study applied passion as a long-lasting emotion and focused on the influence of context, structure, interaction and personality on learning passion.

Occupational gender stereotypes are fixed opinions and concepts that classify occupations according to gender. They refer to people's expectations and requirements for individuals of different genders in their careers and majors (Jiang, 2017). Occupational gender stereotypes still exist, which affect the concepts and behaviors of men and women in an automated way, prompting people to often modify their cognitive styles, behavioral reactions and career choices based on gender stereotypes (Wang et al., 2017). Some studies focus on the relationship between male nursing students' occupational gender stereotypes and vocational identity and career planning (Yeong et al., 2019; Lan et al., 2020). Some studies surveyed gender stereotypes about nursing careers among undergraduate university students (Wang et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2017; Chen, 2023). Existing Chinese scholars lack attention to the male nursing students' dynamic change of learning passion in higher vocational college education.

3. Methods & Materials

The case tracking method is a research method that continuously tracks and studies a single person or thing over a long period, collects various data, and reveals its development, changes or trends (Case study method, 2012). For example, Chen Heqin (1892-1982), a famous Chinese Educator and Psychologist, conducted a three-year case tracking study on his eldest son. This study mainly used this case-tracking method to track a male nursing student (Chen) from a higher vocational health college in China. Chen majored in Clinical Nursing, for two years in college and the third year in the hospital for clinical nursing rotation internships. He was chosen as the follower because he showed high learning passion when he was enrolled and was willing to participate in our research. The research time ranged from the beginning of the first semester to the end of the sixth semester. Mainly applied 4 stages of formal one-on-one semi-structured interviews and multiple informal talks to collect data, another complementary method of data collection was incomplete participatory observation. The numbering format is "person + type + time", the interview data type is "I", the observation data type is "O", Chen is "C" and the researcher is "R". The situational analysis and the categorical analysis were applied to find a changing trend of Chen's learning passion and to reveal the reason for this changing trend.

Tab. 1 Demonstration form of research records

Type	Person	Time	Duration	Number
Formal Interview	Chen	2018.10.03	13 minutes	C.I-20181003
		2019.09.17	17 minutes	C.I-20190917
		2020.10.01	20 minutes	C.I-20201001
		2021.07.27	15 minutes	C.I-20210727
Observation	Researchers	2018.11.01	45minutes	R.O-20181101
		2019.11.09	45minutes	R.O-20191109

Note: The content is limited and not all are displayed

4. Findings

From Chen's experience, most males chose nursing in vocational colleges out of the gap in the National Higher Education Entrance Examination (Gaokao) results in helplessness in the early stage, but employment prospects, peer incentives and interest in medicine stimulated their learning passion. But as the learning went, an ordinary high school graduate like Chen did not have a nursing foundation like secondary vocational nursing graduates. Therefore, the lack of basic nursing knowledge and the fineness feminine of nursing skills made male ordinary high school graduates feel powerless in the study of nursing. The lack of teachers' understanding and learning support exacerbated this sense of learning powerlessness. However, the interest in medical knowledge and the yearning for benefits made male nursing students adjust their mentality and generate learning passion again. Although in the process of adjustment, the learning passion also fluctuated, when they found being a male nurse was irreversible, expectations of employment prospects also supported adjusting the learning passion. When male nurses entered the clinical internship, due to the lack of study guidance, unreasonable work assignments and restrictions on career advancement, the only remaining career expectations of male nurses faded, resulting in negative emotions such as anxiety and helplessness. The focus of these negative emotions caused male nurses' learning passion to wane to a low point. Finally, male nurses gave up struggling under the pressure of survival. They calmly accepted that they became male nurses and began to learn, train and work step by step.

In summary, a model diagram for the factors of these male nursing students' learning passion in China's higher vocational health colleges is shown in Fig. 1. The change of the nursing learning passion goes through five stages: establishment, decline, adjustment, disillusionment and equilibrium. The change has the characteristics of exogenous and fluctuating due to the factors of learning passion having both positive (pull force) and negative (push force) effects. External factors include structure factors: systems, organizations and communities; Context factors: society's expectations, college-workplace atmosphere and family trust; Interaction factors: teacher-student interaction and peer relationships. Internal factor includes personal factor: personality traits, self-identity and vocational identity. But these factors are indirect forces that affect the learning passion. The sense of achievement and belonging are direct forces that compress learning passion.

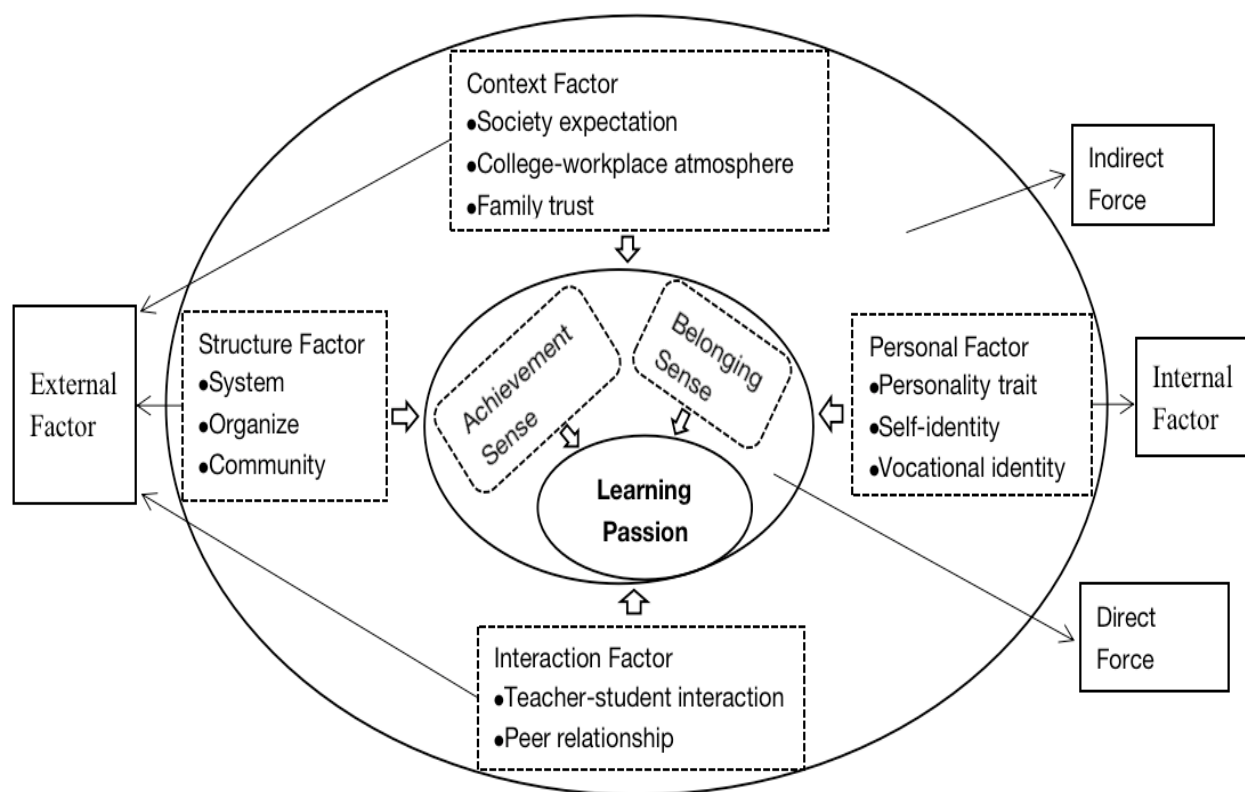


Fig. 1 Model diagram of the influence of male nursing student's learning passion

4.1 External changing factors of learning passion

4.1.1 Context factors: college-workplace atmosphere, family trust & society's expectation

Newly enrolled, Chen "felt the same campus facilities as other undergraduate universities" (C.I-20181003). Slowly atmospheres were strange. He frankly said:

"Many curriculum frameworks were unclear, and teachers dictated superficial knowledge and simple operations.....Sometimes nurses in the hospital were invited to tell us cases, but it was not systematic." (C.I-20190917).

It could be seen from his statement that the didactic atmosphere in this higher vocational health college needed enhancement. The learning atmosphere also seemed to be "deformed". Chen said: "There were four people in our dormitory, and three did not want to study. They played video games overnight and I could not sleep." (C.I-20201001). In addition, the working atmosphere during the internship also exacerbated the changing learning passion. During the hospital clinical internship, some of the tasks assigned to Chen by the workplace master (trainer) were trivial. He stated, "I was depressed to do many trifles." (C.I-20210601). The internship did not improve his practical ability but increased his doubt about his nursing career.

An 18-year-old student needs to rely on family financial support, at this point, the attitude of parents toward vocational college education is crucial. Chen said: "My parents as migrant workers came to the city from the countryside. They felt it was better to work and marry earlier than go to a vocational college." (C.I-20181001). Since the time of Confucius (479 BC), it has been popular for people who are educated academically to manage people who are accepted vocational training (Yu, 2021). The low societal expectations for vocational education subtly influenced his parents' expectations. In addition, there is a widespread stereotype of occupational gender that certain occupations are held by people of a certain gender. It is widely misbelieved by social cognition that the nursing profession should be undertaken by females. For example, "the taxi driver asked with amazement: How can a boy be a nurse?" (C.I-20210727). This kind of professional misunderstanding made Chen "want to find a hole to get in" (C.I-20210727).

4.1.2 Interaction factors: teacher-student interaction & peer relationships

Overall, "alienated" teacher-student interaction and peer relationships left Chen without a sense of belonging. In his opinion, "Having a good relationship with your teacher can help you win more learning opportunities." (C.I-20201001). However, the teacher-student interaction did not meet his expectations, the impatient guidance made him afraid of lessons. When he was prepared for the upgraded unified recruitment examination to undergraduate universities, his relationship with his classmates strengthened his negative emotions toward learning. "In the vocational college, you will be isolated for not behaving like others. You are striving to be motivated will bring you a sense of stigma." (C.I-20210727). The isolation among classmates made him doubt his learning behavior. There was a phenomenon among classmates, "whoever learnt well was the enemy." (C.I-20210727). For example, in some lessons, someone answered questions, but other classmates jeered loudly. (R.O-201809.201907). Such a phenomenon caused Chen to be afraid to be active in lessons. During Chen's clinical internship, he also saw that "there was competition among colleagues in the workplace." (C.I-20210601). Female nurses welcomed the entry of male nurses, while they were reluctant to allow these individuals to cannibalize their professional core fields of work and were only willing to assign male nurses to marginal occupations. This peer atmosphere in workplaces awakened his negative emotions again.

4.1.3 Structure factors: learning organizations, workplace communities & promotion systems

In the process of preparation for the College-To-Undergraduate Examination, he did not get enough learning support from the vocational college. Chen said "The types of books in the library were very rich, but they were outdated. I always bought learning materials by myself." (C.I-20201001). Vocational college education is a supplement to the education system in China, and it is marginal in terms of funding and other levels of support (Zhang, 2020).

In the nursing profession, gender discrimination is not members of one sex thinking they are better than members of the other sex, but "regional protectionism" by management system defects (Yeong et al., 2019). ".....I heard that male nurses would have high wages and good employment." (C.I-20190908). The employment advantages of male nurses due to gender misalignment will make it easier for them to enter workplaces. But females occupy the main positions in the industry, and they will regard males as "intruders". Although female nurses need the presence of other males to handle certain tasks, they are not willing to hand over management rights to males. "When faced with job assignments, most of the tasks assigned to male nurses were non-core jobs." (C.I-20210727). This regional protectionism has also resulted in the marginalization of male nurses and the difficulty of getting promoted and raising their salaries in the future.

4.2 Internal changing factors of learning passion

4.2.1 "Benefit-biased" vocational identity

In a sense, the fluctuation of Chen's learning passion is related to his vocational identity, which is biased towards benefits, so his learning passion is utilitarian. Chen said:

"My mom said if you do not pass Gaokao to undergraduate education, you need to go to work. I did not want to be, so I convinced my parents to accept higher vocational colleges.....I wanted to study medicine, but I could not go to medical university, so I could only choose clinical nursing in vocational health colleges.....I heard that male nurses enjoy high wages and good employment.....A few seniors went to sell medical equipment and some went to take the civil service examination." (C.I-20190908).

He hoped to escape the pressure of early entering the workplace through a vocational college education. He chose nursing when there were no better options. His perception of the male nursing vocational identity was high wages and employment rates. For these reasons, early he became self-comfortable with accepting nursing. However, with the in-depth learning and vocational training, he found there was a big gap between his actual career situation and ideals for the future through feedback from seniors and exposure to the real working environment. His positive vocational attitude turned negative due to this psychological gap.

4.2.2 "Negative" self-identity

Under the triple environmental pressures from education, society and family, the negative sense of self-identity gradually expanded, overdrawing Chen's learning passion.

"I was an ordinary high school graduate, so I was quite confident about my learning ability.....I had no talent for learning.....I used to lose sleep all night, and my mind was full of thoughts about the past, present and future. It was like falling into a deep hole and I tried to escape but was powerless, I could only watch the light go away from me." (C.I-20181002; C.I-20210727).

During his studies, Chen oscillated between inferiority and self-confidence, which made him curl up in a corner and play the role of a fringe. He was swallowed by a sense of learning powerlessness and his dissatisfaction with the outside environment turned into self-blame.

4.2.3 "Sensitive" personality traits

Individuals' negative perceptions of study and work are closely related to their sensitive personal traits (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003; Chen, 2016). "I used to be a cheerful person, but I did not know why I became like this step by step, I felt that my edges and corners had been smoothed by the reality." (C.I-20210727). It could be seen from Chen's change in his passion for learning that he was sensitive to changes in people, events and circumstances around him. "I tried to play games with my roommates but felt guilty about not learning." (C.I-20201001). Chen felt learning did not bring him a sense of achievement and thus gave up learning to pursue a sense of belonging in relationships. However, the alienation of peer relationships and teacher-student interaction brought insecurities to him.

5. Discussion

Randall Collins (1941-) proposed the theory of emotional energy, emotional energy is a continuous emotional state, a perceptually continuous system, which includes happiness and passion; transitions to a neutral emotional state in the middle and a negative emotional state such as a lack of motivation (Wang & Lin, 2006). Emotions are energy, which can be positive, negative or neutral. Once emotions are generated, they may be transformed into actions, resulting in different results. Chen's learning passion experienced establishment, decline, adjustment, disillusionment and equilibrium. The deep direct cause of the fluctuating force of push and pull in the learning passion is the changing of individual emotional energy in learning and working ecosystems. But this equilibrium is a helpless choice out of reality, which is essentially a loss of learning passion manifests as a loss of emotional energy. To expand, the loss of emotional energy is mainly caused by the marginalization of occupational gender mismatch persons among vocational educatees in learning organizations, interpersonal relationships, promotion systems and employment systems.

5.1 Emotional energy-loss in learning organizations and inter-personal relationships

The goal of China's higher vocational education is to shape students into skilled industrial reserve armies and to achieve another possibility of life development through skills (Du, 2021). Therefore, the focus of higher vocational colleges is skill development. However, Chen's stories show the daily teachings in health vocational colleges become heavily disciplined and simple skills training. Braverman once worried that the schools will have large numbers of unskilled and unknowledgeable workers in the future, because the more things that need to be learned, the fewer reasons for teachers to teach (Braverman, 1974). Researchers' observations while teaching at higher vocational health colleges also reinforce the impression: Teachers generally asked students to sit quietly to ensure smooth teaching in the classroom, and it became a dull classroom in the end (R.O-201809.201907). Students repeatedly experience negative emotions in such learning environments leads to a loss of their sense of belonging to the learning organizations.

According to the concept of "emotional energy," personal emotional energy has its active construction and is also constrained by the learning environment (Collins, 2015). The continuous loss of emotional energy is derived from students' extreme dissatisfaction with learning organizations. The production of low-level emotional energy occurs when dominant in power and high levels of control (Wang & Lin, 2006). On the one hand, the role of students is embedded in the learning status network and individuals play a subordinate role, but teachers are in a high position and have the absolute right to teach. Students feel powerless in the face of teaching authority and choose to submit to the implicit rules of learning organizations. So, they adopt strategies to avoid interaction to minimize the loss of emotional energy. On the other hand, the repression of real emotions makes students lose their emotional energy towards vocational colleges.

Skill de-escalation and labor control also occur in workplaces. The lack of learning power and subjectivity in workplaces is also one of the sources of emotional energy consumption. Subjectivity is Foucault's questioning and exploration of individual subjective initiative that quests the structure confers or deprives the subjectivity rights (Smith, 2015). In an internship, students have the dual roles of learners and workers. However, the learner identities are not highlighted, and students' autonomy and subjectivity are deprived to a certain extent. The role expectations assigned to them by the internship organization are temporary workers. Moreover, the workplace has absolute authority, which leads to affiliation relationships during the internship. The alienation of relationships reduces the passion of students to participate in internships and even causes resistance.

5.2 Emotional energy-loss in promotion and employment systems

Employers' talent management systems make it difficult for people with occupational gender mismatches to enter management. Male nurses with more daily clinical chores only passively accept work tasks and complete the work mechanically. They are on the brink of a job promotion, which ultimately exacerbates the vicious circle of male nurses' negative emotional energy. This situation of hopeless promotion and salary increase starkly contrasts their occupational expectations. Male nurses have occupational gender stereotypes, which are negatively correlated with nursing vocational identity and career planning (Lan et al., 2020). It is generally believed that individuals have low job satisfaction and are more likely to leave (Yeong et al., 2019). For male nurses of higher vocational college education with strong occupational gender stereotypes, even if their learning and job satisfaction are low and leaving intention is strong, they do not leave their diploma education and job positions easily, because without diplomas they do not have an advantage in the job market, and it is too costly for them to move into other industries due to occupational gender mismatch.

The "structural employment contradiction" of labor markets and the absence of degrees from vocational college education affect students' learning passion. There is "job polarization" in Chinese society, with an increase in high-skilled (management positions, etc.) and low-skilled (nursing, service, etc.) occupations (Zhang, 2020). The high-skilled and high-welfare talent market is biased towards degree holders. Vocational college graduates are easily blocked from high-skilled jobs and high-welfare positions without a degree. At the same time, high-welfare jobs are saturated, and degree holders who lack skills are also starting to compete for low-skilled positions. This employment gap between vocational college education and university academic education leads vocational college students and their families to feel that vocational college education is not worthwhile. Although occupational gender mismatch persons have less competition in the job market, there are also fewer positions. When positions are saturated, occupational gender mismatch persons such as male nurses will not have employment advantages. In this situation, they will lose emotional energy in the employment system.

6. Conclusion & Implication & Limitation

Case-tracking findings pointed to male populations in higher vocational nursing education suffering from dual social-emotional disadvantages of vocational education and occupational gender mismatch. Adjusting situations, structures and interactions to protect social emotions requires a multi-party macro-coordination, which is difficult. Microscopically, emotional energy can stimulate students' interest in learning and provide learning motivation, nursing educational stakeholders should be good at protecting male students' learning passion by providing emotional value. This study helps to explain the dynamic changes in the learning passion of male nursing students in higher vocational colleges. Future research is needed to test the feasibility of this change in different individuals and contexts.

Declaration

Conflict of interest Authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Human participant This survey complies with the ethical standards of the China Psychological Association.

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study and all participants were informed why the research was being conducted, whether anonymity was assured, how the survey data would be stored, and informed of any other associated risks involved in participation in the study before the survey.

Data availability Can be obtained from the authors.

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