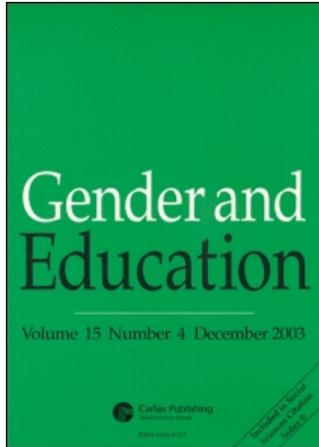


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### So what exactly do you want? What principals mean when they say 'male role model'

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## So what exactly do you want? What principals mean when they say ‘male role model’

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The need for more male role models in young boys’ lives is one of the main reasons underpinning the call for more male teachers in primary schools. However, the exact responsibilities and attributes associated with the term ‘male role model’ have yet to be clearly established. The purpose of this survey of 250 New Zealand primary school principals was to investigate the views of one major group of stakeholders to determine how principals defined male role models and what they considered the specific attributes of that role. The study found that the principals favoured men who exhibit a hegemonic masculinity couched in heterosexual, rugby-playing, ‘real men’ attributes.

**Keywords:** male; primary school teacher; role models

### Introduction

One of the more commonly espoused reasons underpinning the call for more male teachers in primary schools is that young children, especially boys, need ‘male role models’ in their lives. The increasing number of New Zealand children being raised in sole-parent families (Action for Children and Youth Aotearoa 2003) and the decreasing number of male teachers in primary schools (Cushman 2005) have raised concern within society that many children are growing up lacking a positive male role model at home and at school (Farquhar 2005).

In 1956, the percentage of male primary school teachers in New Zealand schools was a comparatively healthy 42%. A gradual decline was afforded extra impetus in the early 1990s by a ‘moral panic’ that swept the country as the result of one highly publicised case of sexual abuse by an openly homosexual preschool childcare worker (Hood 2001). For over 15 years, as the nation followed the contentious case and its associated appeals, media attention was never far from issues facing men who choose to work with children. In 1998, another male teacher, acquitted of charges of abusing his students, headlined the evening news warning men not to consider a teaching career (Child Forum 2004). That same year, the teachers’ union’s ‘hands-off’ policy (New Zealand Education Institute 1998), designed with the intention of protecting all teachers, exacerbated a climate of confusion, stress and suspicion, further emphasising gender inequities in teachers’ practices. By the end of the 1990s, the percentage of male primary school teachers had fallen below 20%, and in 2005 stood at 18% (Ministry of Education 2005).

Bad press has only served to compound the public perception of teaching as low status, a factor that has been a major deterrent to attracting more men to the profession (Cushman 2005; Ministry of Education 2006). Why is it ‘low status’ is inextricably related to society’s perception of work involving children as being the role of women, and the work of women being historically undervalued and underpaid (Thornton and Bricheno 2006)? As men teachers are afforded higher status than women teachers in New Zealand (Ministry of Education 2006), the steady decline in

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their numbers has contributed to a plummeting in the status of teaching to the point that studies (Cushman 2005; Garden 1997) found teachers rated their own social status as a 'moderate' or 'extreme' concern. For those men who do choose to teach, years in the classroom are often short-lived, with men promoted to the role of principal more rapidly than their female counterparts (Brooking 2004). Similar to the situation in other western countries, New Zealand primary schools exemplify institutionalised gender hierarchies (Williams 1992), with men teachers located mainly in senior classes and with problematic role theories governing their behaviours.

In recent years, international popular media and governmental reports have highlighted the need for more men teachers and called for more aggressive recruitment strategies on the premise that more men in the classroom will advantage the educational and social needs of children, particularly boys (Education Queensland 2002; Lyng and Blichfeldt 2003; Training and Development Agency for Schools 2005). Coinciding with the dramatic drop in the number of men teachers, a ministerial campaign was similarly announced in New Zealand in 1999, based on the premise that boys, particularly those from an increasing number of sole-parent families, needed positive male role models (Ministerial Announcements 1999). Internationally, the call for more men is based mostly on concerns regarding boys' academic achievement, and so academic researchers have tended to focus their concomitant debate on the robustness of the links between underachievement and behavioural issues and the lack of a male teacher presence (Ashley 2002; Carrington and Skelton 2003; Foster and Newman 2005). However, until recently, they and other educational stakeholders have made few attempts to define and critically examine the term 'male role model'. More particularly, the exact responsibilities and personal attributes that this male role model 'job description' entails, and how these are or should be manifested in the classroom and wider school environment, appear to have been largely overlooked in the crusade to increase the number of men teachers.

One might therefore ask whether, in the absence of any formal policy or guidelines, school principals interviewing potential male employees have a particular 'type' of man teacher in mind. What attributes do they seek or consider undesirable? Do they even have a set of defined attributes in mind? Do highly publicised issues regarding men teachers appear to have influenced desirable attributes? The purpose of this paper is to investigate the views of New Zealand primary school principals regarding the desired components of the term 'male role model' and the extent to which their responses can be set within the context of essentialist or constructivist theories (definitions of these two terms follow). It is hoped that the findings will contribute a New Zealand perspective to the global debate surrounding men teachers as male role models in the primary school.

## **Background**

Gender (femininity and masculinity) refers to the social construction of differences in behaviour according to sex (Francis and Skelton 2001). Essentialism is based on the theory that gender is largely biologically fixed and the belief that 'masculinity must be identified in opposition to femininity' (Ashley 2003, 258). Ashley found this belief to be a common thread in investigations into relationships between men and boys. It implies that women act in stereotypically female ways and men act in stereotypically male ways.

Intertwined with essentialism is the suggestion that the perceived academic and behavioural issues of boys in primary schools are a result of the dichotomy between the nature of boys and popular pedagogy (Biddulph 1994). This argument posits that the greater number of women than men teachers has resulted in a feminised schooling institution where the needs of boys are neither recognised nor catered for (Education Forum 2006). In New Zealand, this concern appears to underlie the suggestion that 'consideration may need to be given to increasing the number of men

in teaching' (Education Review Office 1999, 11). Roulston and Mills (2000) argue that this call for more men teachers is grounded in 'therapeutic' politics that reject feminising influences and thereby reinforce dominant constructs of masculinity. More recently, Lyons (2005) has suggested that many of the perceived potential benefits of a greater male presence are 'based on naïve assumptions about gender and how it is constructed and enacted, and fail to take account of broader sociocultural, political and economic structures that entrench traditional gender roles' (7). His comments align with other contemporary views on gender that argue for a consideration of the 'multidimensionality' of identity, where men and women are seen as shaped by factors such as social class, religion, age and ethnicity (Martino and Kehler 2006; Whitehead 2001).

Thus, although some discourse in the literature establishes our expectations of a male role model as culturally conditioned, much of what is evidenced continues to focus on oppositional definitions wherein men offer something women cannot (Burn 2002). Accordingly, the call for more men teachers appears to be based on the need for men who model a hegemonic masculinity, or are 'real men', defined by Connell (1995) as modelling power, authority, aggression and technical competence. Other descriptions have identified focused, goal-oriented, physically strong, technically competent and disciplinarian (Biddulph 1994); adventurous, emotionally neutral, competitive, loving 'masculine' pursuits and sports and favouring more structured learning (Kenway and Fitzclarence 1997); sport, football, father figure, interested in vehicles (Burn 2002); and heterosexual, interested in male things and active (Foster and Newman 2005). Smith's (2004) finding that current expectations establish men primary school teachers as 'sporty, fun, manly, father substitutes and not soft and caring nurturers' (7) supports research (Ferguson 2004; Skelton 2000) that showed how male teachers' interest and involvement in football constructs dominant masculinities in primary schools. The extent to which these traditional male attributes are modelled in schools obviously differ between men and schools. However, Burn (2002) found that they still largely operate to define male primary school teachers. On the other hand, Ashley (2001) provides some evidence of schools wanting men to model behaviours that show men can be 'cultured, caring, and have a "feminine" side' (2).

Not everyone supports the call for more male teachers. Studies have found the qualities learners value in teachers are non-gender specific (Ashley 2003; Foster and Newman 2005; Lahelma 2000; Mills and Keddie 2005; Skelton 2001) and that, above all, young people want a teacher (regardless of gender) whose primary focus is on forging good relationships with them (Bishop and Glynn 2003). On the other hand, Renold (2001) and Mills and Keddie (2005) found gender politics seemingly playing a part in the disengagement of boys with schooling. While these findings appear to support Biddulph's (1994) rationale for increasing the number of men teachers and (hence) male role models in the classroom, Mills and Keddie (2005) found academic achievement differences *within* groups of boys and girls, rather than across gender groups, to be more significant than has usually been acknowledged. Martino and Berrill (2003) agree that approaches that normalise how boys learn are not grounded in 'sophisticated research-based knowledge about the ways in which gender construction affects schooling for both boys and girls' (104).

In refuting suggestions that current classroom practices are not 'boy-friendly', Mills and Keddie (2005) also emphasise that calls for a specific pedagogy for boys assume that all men teachers should and can adopt the same behaviours and attitudes. As Francis and Skelton (2001) point out, there is no evidence of behaviours specific to men and specific to women teachers. Instead, and similar to the learning styles of children, differences exist within as well as between gender groups, an argument employed by the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (2003) in rejecting an application by the Catholic Education Office to offer teacher training scholarships to male students only.

While the links between men teachers and academic outcomes are tenuous, Carrington and Skelton (2003) suggest that men teachers can have a positive effect on other aspects of the school

experience, by acting as mentors, advocating for the teaching profession and providing inspiration to students. In New Zealand, however, these reasons pale in comparison to the more widely accepted view that men teachers are required in schools to compensate for absent fathers (Farquhar 2005; Ministerial Announcements 1999). Studies in Australia (Lyons 2005) and England (Training and Development Agency for Schools 2005) also found an overwhelming number of parents, concerned their children did not have enough contact with positive male role models, would welcome more men teachers in primary schools. In New Zealand (Ministerial Announcements 1999), the UK (Training and Development Agency for Schools 2005), Australia (Smith 2004) and the US (Milloy 2003), this rationale has been voiced in governmental strategies to address the teaching gender imbalance in primary schools. However, this 'compensatory' rationale for increasing the numbers of men in schools is disputed by researchers. One of them, Ashley (2003), suggests that factors related to level of education, cultural and religious beliefs and socioeconomic status influence the degree to which boys experience nurturing fathers at home. Ashley observes 'the degree to which these issues are overlooked when generalisations such as "boys from single parent families" are employed can be remarkable' (2). Furthermore, Ashley and Lee (2003) found little evidence to support the idea that boys growing up in single-mother households need to have a compensatory male role model at school. Rather, they found a poor male role model at home or school could do considerable damage whereas the absence of a role model was not necessarily problematic. Despite Ashley's (2003) misgivings, the plethora of sole-parent families headed by women continues to play a major role in justifying the need for more men teachers in New Zealand.

In a country where respondents placed losing the rugby world cup near the top of a list of global disasters (Ferguson 2004), and where dominant masculinities are strongly associated with this sport, it is plausible that the desired attributes of the male role model and the rugby role model have much in common. 'Rugby is rough, confrontational, a real test of physical superiority, and in New Zealand it is fiercely competitive. Because of its status as the national game, these values are exalted and seen as natural masculine qualities' (Ferguson 2004, 83). Furthermore, Ferguson's finding that New Zealand boys appear to have experienced their active initiation into sport through their fathers suggests that if men teachers are to compensate for absent fathers, part of their role would be to provide sports leadership. This thinking is endorsed by 2005 'New Zealander of the Year' Celia Lashlie, who toured New Zealand schools emphasising the need for fathers to communicate with their sons and to 'play a bit of sport together' (Chenq 2005, 3). In the absence of fathers, Lashlie asked mothers to ensure their sons had male role models in their lives. If male role models in the form of men teachers are to provide sports leadership, one might conceive that the associated characteristics of strength, heterosexuality, interest in male activities (Foster and Newman 2005) and other traditionally 'manly' qualities (identified by Burn 2002; Kenway and Fitzclarence, 1997; Smith 2004) would be those characteristics desirable in male teaching applicants.

However, Ashley and Lee (2003) disagree with the compensatory theory, emphasising that the discourse of caring in primary schools is clearly different to the discourse of parenting, and that just as we need to move away from a conception of primary teaching as 'mothering', so we must move away from any conception of primary teaching as 'fathering'. Smith (2004) concurs with Ashley and Lee, stating the compensatory theory conflates the roles of teaching and parenting. Smith argues there is obviously confusion about the role of a teacher, and that proponents of the 'male role model' rarely explain how teachers can replicate the role of parents.

The role model argument, particularly when considered in conjunction with Ferguson's (2004) view of New Zealand's hegemonic masculinity, becomes more problematic with findings of studies such as those conducted by Francis and Skelton (2001) and Martino and Berrill (2003). In both studies, beginning men teachers reported fears of being perceived as deviant if they

behaved in non-stereotypically masculine ways, and these fears influenced how these teachers related to students. Such anxieties appear grounded in the public perception of the association of non-normative masculinities with attributions of homosexuality, which in turn are conflated with paedophilia (Martino and Berrill 2003). Francis and Skelton's (2001) finding that men risk marginalisation from peers if they do not 'achieve' an acceptable construction of masculinity further justifies Roulston and Mills' (2000) claim that homophobia often works in 'insidious ways to reinforce dominant constructs of masculinity' (227). It is not surprising then, that Burn's (2002) interviews with men and women primary schoolteachers found traditional stereotypes still operating to define the role of men primary school teachers. That this situation caused angry reactions from men who did not want to be defined in essentialist ways can be no surprise, but it does have major implications for teachers' attitudes to their position and importance as role models. Coleman (2005) and Foster and Newman (2005) point out that whenever men enter predominantly female occupations, or when a previously male-dominated occupation becomes the province of women, as has happened in teaching, there are likely to be issues around masculinity and masculine identity. According to Paechter (1998), men (and women) continue to be constrained within a gendered discourse where they are expected to behave in ways consistent with their gendered role. The potential tensions are apparent in the experience of men teachers in primary schools as evidenced by Burn (2002). Coleman (2005) goes so far as to suggest men primary school teachers become 'abnormal' men, moving from the social expectations of maleness to the socially prescribed role of primary school teacher. To counteract the essentialised stereotypes that favour women as primary school teachers and to ward off the aforementioned accusations, men, Skelton (2001) proposes, are compelled to present themselves as 'properly masculine' by, at times, exaggerating various aspects of masculinity.

Lack of clarity and understanding of the term 'role model' underpins much of the variance between and within stakeholders' views. In a comprehensive review of relevant literature relating to the origins of the 'role model' concept, Carrington and Skelton (2003) express concern at what they see as an uncritical acceptance of the role model argument in terms of the male primary school teacher. For example, is the male primary school teacher as role model expected to model the qualities of a good 'male' person or a good male teacher? Does society agree on the qualities of a good man? Finding little evidence to support the notion that students see their teachers as role models, Carrington and Skelton (2003) concur with Brown (2006) that young people today tend to equate 'role model' with an 'inspirational figure', who is more likely to be a media star or idol than a teacher. Their argument that children do not regard teachers as role models receives some support from Ashley (2003), who found popular peers, rather than teachers, to be the main role models for boys. Carrington and Skelton (2003) also note that the qualities of a role model – respect and admiration – are not won automatically, but need to be earned.

Most studies, regardless of the stance of those conducting them, agree that stakeholders generally see men teachers as desirable both in the classroom and in the wider school environment. The reasons are that men uphold traditionally 'masculine' ideals and values (Lyng and Blichfeldt 2003); are 'naturally' more interested in sport and ball games (Burn 2002; Smith 2004); enhance staffroom dialogue (Lahelma 2000; Lyng and Blichfeldt 2003); and represent the diversity of society (Carrington and Skelton 2003; Foster and Newman 2005). This body of work strongly links these rationales to the need to counter the feminisation of primary schooling, which various educational stakeholders consider influences, in turn, delivery of the curriculum, management strategies and teacher expectations in favour of girls. (For a discussion of these views, see Mills and Keddie 2005.) Whether primary schools are, in fact, 'feminised' has been the subject of debate for the last decade. It is worth noting, even though this consideration is outside the boundaries of this paper, that Ashley (2001) and Skelton (2002) critically examined the term 'feminised' in relation to schools and concluded their critiques by challenging the notion that

primary schools are 'feminised' institutions. Skelton (2002) provides a particularly worthwhile discussion of the possible meanings and concurs with Smith (2004) that, regardless of the interpretation, the 'feminisation of teaching' is portrayed by many in society as something that 'carries negative connotations, and is a worrying trend that needs to be reversed' (3). For these authors, the message implicit in this concern is that men teachers are needed to provide positive masculine images for boys and, to a lesser extent, girls.

While an essentialist approach appears to be largely responsible for the current 'homogenizing tendency to normalize all boys and male teachers' (Martino and Kehler 2006: 120), mounting evidence in the literature points to a range of different ways of being a male teacher (Carrington and Skelton 2003; Mills and Keddie 2005). The differences between men in terms of their personal attributes and pedagogical approaches can be as great as the differences between those of women and men teachers (Francis and Skelton 2001). And, as Weaver-Hightower (2003) observes, 'there is no single, universal ahistorical version of masculinity to which all cultures subscribe or aspire. Rather, ideals of masculinity are historically and contextually dependent, making a nearly infinite number of masculinities possible' (479).

A constructivist approach focuses on providing boys with role models that allow them to visualise other ways of being male. Lyng and Blichfeldt (2003) suggest that it is important for students to experience adult men in professions that entail involvement in and display of caring. At the same time, Lyons (2005) warns that a simple increase in male numbers may be a simplistic response, as 'those who flout social expectations about gender in their choice of occupation may inadvertently act in gender-stereotyped ways' (7). It is concerns such as this that give credence to Martino, Lingard and Mills' (2004) claim that it is more important for schools to acknowledge the social construction of gender *and* to challenge dominant constructions of masculinity (and femininity). This less commonly articulated role for male primary school teachers appears plausible, despite Delany's (cited in Davis 2003: 26) contention that 'expecting male teachers to come into schools as role models has a problem: what happens if they don't have the professional development, skills and training to engage boys in issues of gender, and reinforce undesirable notions of dominant masculinity?'

These and the other findings cited in this review show that the perceived need for men as role models in primary schools varies between stakeholders. The same can be said of the reasons that stakeholders give for their respective stances, many of which appear to be based on tenuous grounds. While the views of various stakeholders have been canvassed in the literature, I could find little research investigating the views of those who hold the power in employment decisions in regard to teachers, that is, school principals. I certainly could not find any research pertaining to how principals defined male role models and what they considered to be the specific attributes of that role. This study endeavoured to obtain this information from a group of New Zealand primary school principals and, by doing so, to add a New Zealand voice and perspective to the cross-national debate.

## Method

In 2005, I mailed a survey to 250 randomly selected New Zealand primary school principals. State, private and integrated contributing primary, full primary and intermediate schools were included. This number represented 12% of New Zealand primary schools or 250 out of a possible 2120.

The survey questionnaire consisted of 15 questions set out in two parts. The first 10 sought information on the demographic attributes of the represented school and the gender balance of staff. Questions 11 to 15 sought to elicit the respondents' attitudes towards gender balance, employment preferences and practices and their understanding of the term 'male role model'.

Questions 11, 12 and 13 involved the use of Likert-type scales (five points ranging from 'very important' to 'definitely not important') and provided for additional optional comment. The following presentation of findings and discussion is limited to Questions 13, 14 and 15.

13. Do you think there is a need for more 'male role models' in primary schools?
14. What do you understand by the term 'male role model'?
15. Please list any personal qualities you associate with the term 'male role model'.

Analysis of data comprised grouping on the basis of similarity and relatedness for both the quantitative and qualitative sections. ANOVA and chi-square tests were carried out to determine the significance of results related to the principal's gender and type of school.

The limitations of questionnaires when not utilised as part of a multi-method approach need to be acknowledged. The disadvantages of problematic data quality cannot be dismissed, but in the case of this present study, I viewed the advantages of a large-scale survey together with respondent anonymity and lack of interviewer bias as important in eliciting a general indication of trends in principals' views. I also employed the large-scale survey, in part, to provide data that might suggest further specific in-depth research, and furthermore hoped that a strong response rate would provide testimony to the development of the questionnaire and its perceived importance. A response rate of over 90% from men teachers to an earlier questionnaire (Cushman 2005) attested to the importance of the topic to the teaching profession. Moreover, while subsequent follow-up group interviews in that case provided a forum to further explore the dynamics underlying responses, it was notable that many respondents made the effort to explain and rationalise their beliefs in extensive responses to the questionnaire. Given that I used a similar methodology in the present study, I anticipated, perhaps optimistically, a similar response. Nevertheless, the complexity of the issues surrounding male role models and normative hegemonic masculinity and the interplay between this and interview and appointment decisions no doubt warrant a more interactive follow-up forum in order to provide better access to this sort of dynamic.

Verbatim comments are included throughout the results section for illustrative purposes.

## Results and discussion

At the time of analysis, four weeks after the mail-out, I had received replies from 169 schools, a response rate of 67.6%. Between them, the 169 schools represented a wide range of geographical locations, authorities and school types. The 169 schools employed 2134 teachers, with 409 (19%) of them male. One hundred and eight (63%) of the school principals were men, and 61 (37%) were women. These figures closely approximate (and so are representative of) corresponding official statistics for New Zealand education (Ministry of Education 2005).

Ninety-four per cent of the men principals and 87% of the women principals agreed with the need for more male role models. Further analysis of the data showed that 67% of the men, compared to 46% of the women, were in the 'definitely agree' category, a response that shares commonalities with Carrington and Skelton's (2003) findings that suggest men rate the value of male role models in primary schools more highly than women rate the value of male role models.

There are several reasons why men principals might rate the value of male role models more highly than do women principals. Given the common perception of primary school teaching as 'women's work' (Farquhar 2005), and thereby feminised and of low status (Ministry of Education 2006), it is not untenable that those men still in the profession might associate their declining numbers with a further highlighting of this perception and associated undermining of their social status (Thornton and Bricheno 2006). Certainly, increasing the number of male teachers must lessen the visibility, and therein vulnerability, of each man teacher. In addition, given the problematic nature of the institutionalised gendered hierarchies (Williams 1992) currently

evident in New Zealand primary schools, increased male numbers would decrease the occurrence of the all too common scenario of a male principal heading a staff of female classroom practitioners. These reasons appear inextricably interwoven into recuperative masculinity politics that place men and boys at a disadvantage in the primary school (Martino and Kehler 2006).

The consistency of responses from the principals surveyed suggests there is still a focus on oppositional definitions wherein men offer something women cannot (Burn 2002). The fact that 'women's work' and dominant New Zealand masculinities are almost diametrically opposed renders the sexualities of those who have chosen to work in the predominantly female environment of the primary school, suspect (Farquhar 2005). To circumvent such supposedly hostile assumptions, it is tenable that men may feel a need to emphasise masculinities, a supposition that aligns with work by Allan (1993), Connell (1995) and Skelton (2001), who found men primary school teachers needed to identify themselves as 'real men' and 'properly masculine'.

With the ongoing media attention that continues to plague New Zealand men who, despite the furore surrounding the 1992 childcare centre sexual abuse case, choose to work with children, it could be suggested that a need to validate the heterosexual and therein 'safe' nature of a male teacher must impact at some level on principals engaged in the employment process. Employing more men and, in particular, more 'real men' removes the onus from the few, and in addition renders the attributes of those who do not strictly conform to a hegemonic masculinity, less visible. A more equitable staff gender balance would also help to challenge the widely held belief that schools are feminised institutions. While this notion has been challenged elsewhere (Ashley 2001; Skelton 2002), major work will need to take place to break down binary oppositional frameworks for making sense of gender identity and gender relations in schools. Currently, the emphasis on particular dominant masculinities helps to ensure that men maintain a gendered distance from the supposedly feminised classroom. At the same time, it ensures children are not exposed to a range of masculinities in the school environment, limiting role model options for young children as they develop and explore their own gender identities and relationships.

The main reason principals gave for needing more male role models was to meet the needs of children from single-parent families. Twenty-three per cent of the principals ( $N = 39$ ), representing an almost equal percentage of men and women principals, specifically stated that male role models in the school were needed to compensate for a lack of male presence in the home. Seven per cent ( $N = 13$ ) specifically mentioned the need for a 'father figure'.

They need a father figure as too many in today's society are fatherless. (52-year-old male principal)

Given the popularity of Biddulph's (1994) book *Manhood*, which has sold more copies in Australasia than any other book on men's lives (Wikipedia 2006), as well as the highlighting of this issue in ministerial papers (Ministerial Announcements 1999) and the popular media (Ross 2003), this response may not be unexpected. To what extent the need for more men in children's lives reflects the publicity afforded to campaigners such as Celia Lashlie is obscure but cannot be ignored. While Lashlie's two-year tour of 25 schools focussed on secondary schools, subsequent publicity that highlighted the need for male role models in boys' lives preceded the distribution of this survey. Despite Ashley and Lee (2003) finding no evidence to support its validity, this compensatory rationale for more men teachers appears well supported in New Zealand. While teachers might strongly resist any suggestion that primary school teaching is substitute mothering, it appears that the association of male teachers and 'fathering' is more palatable. Strongly grounded in therapeutic politics (Roulston and Mills 2000), such a rationale reinforces dominant constructs of masculinity and ignores the multidimensionality of identity (Whitehead 2001). In addition, it supports the recuperative masculinity stance that schools are feminised institutions and men teachers, with their 'manly' qualities are necessary if the balance is to be redressed (Lingard 2003).

The second most cited reason principals gave as to why they thought schools needed more male role models was to provide sports leadership. Sixteen per cent of the principals ( $N = 27$ ) saw a sporting interest as highly desirable in male role models. Thus, Smith's (2004) finding that current (Australian) expectations posit men primary school teachers as 'sporty, fun, manly, father substitutes' found support in this present study. Eighteen per cent of the men and 13% of the women principals commented on the sporting aspect of the male role model, and three men and one woman specifically nominated rugby, findings which support research into the construction of masculinities both in New Zealand and internationally (Ferguson 2004; Skelton 2000).

Male teachers are necessary to promote boys' sports, rugby. (50-year-old female principal)

Despite New Zealand rugby attracting a strong following among women, and the Black Ferns (national women's rugby team) having been world champion since 1996, our 'national sport' remains firmly entrenched in the masculine arena (Ferguson 2004). One principal's description of attributes he associates with the male role model deserves a mention because it embodies many of the hegemonic masculinities that appear to underpin the call for more male teachers (Burn 2002; Connell 1995; Foster and Newman 2005; Kenway and Fitzclarence 1997; Lahelma 2000; Smith 2004). In answer to the request on the survey questionnaire to, 'List any personal qualities you associate with the term "male role model"', the response stated:

Strong, stoic, consistent, reliable, good-humoured, rugby follower/player. (60-year-old male principal)

The fact that the number of references among the principals' responses to sporting attributes far outweighed those to learning and achievement supports Ferguson's (2004) finding that New Zealand culture places a higher priority on sports than academic achievement, and that sports leadership and talent are still seen to be the male prerogative.

In light of the moral panic that swept New Zealand in the wake of the aforementioned highly publicised preschool child abuse case, it is not surprising that men primary school teachers featured high on the casualty list. Despite Ashley's (2001) finding that schools wanted men to model behaviours that show men have a 'feminine side', some New Zealand principals appeared more concerned that those who chose to work in the predominantly female environment clearly demonstrated they were 'real men'. Given the tide of publicity, bordering on mass hysteria (Hood 2001), that hung over men who chose to work with children in the 1990s, it is possible our teaching profession has not yet recovered. While 11 principals made the comment that men teachers should act as 'real men' it is interesting that 8 of the 11 were women. This suggests that not only do men teachers feel the need to act as 'real men' but some women principals also want assurance that their teachers conform with dominant masculinities. Three women specifically mentioned that men needed to be heterosexual, with one stating:

Male, i.e., manhood qualities. Not every male is a man! (50-year-old female principal)

That a man is not a 'male role model' unless he 'looks like a man', 'dresses like a man', 'enjoys being a male', 'undertakes "male" tasks', 'walks the talk of a male', and 'displays the indefinable essence of maleness as opposed to femininity' were among the comments made by the other respondents who addressed this matter. Their statements provide classic examples of the association of non-normative masculinities with homosexuality (Martino and Berrill 2003). Moreover the following response exemplifies Francis and Skelton's (2001) finding that an unacceptable construction of masculinity risks marginalisation by peers.

Recently we had 2 positions going in our school. We interviewed males for each. To be honest they appeared ineffectual and woosy. Their handshakes were limp and they were not what I would call male role models. We employed 2 efficient, strong females. (47-year-old female principal)

This principal's comment implies that unless men teachers model certain behaviours that reassure colleagues they are 'real men', they not only are vulnerable to homophobic accusations (Francis and Skelton 2001; Martino and Berrill 2003; Roulston and Mills 2000), but also jeopardise their chances of employment.

While current research continues to scrutinise the reality of men primary school teachers as role models, Carrington and Skelton (2003) note there is little doubt that men contribute to the school ethos through their roles as mentors, advocates for the teaching profession and 'inspirational figure roles'. Although Carrington and Skelton do not clarify the meaning of the 'inspirational' figure role, a number of principals commented on the need for boys to have someone of the same sex to 'look up to'. For 12 principals (10 men and 2 women), this implied the modelling of traditionally masculine behaviours embodied in terms such as 'assertive', 'firmness', 'leader', 'protective', 'fatherly', 'strong in management', 'stricter', 'courageous' and 'less emotional and less complicated'. Of interest here is that 24% ( $N = 41$ ) of the respondents referred to the qualities they looked for in men teachers in terms of their importance for boys. Except for a 51-year-old male principal, who specifically mentioned the need for men teachers to display the 'caring male side to female students', the respondents appeared to have overlooked the importance of men in young girls' lives.

Eleven principals (eight women and three men) supported Ashley (2001) and Lyng and Blichfeldt (2003) in stating that the importance of men as role models is to deconstruct stereotypes and demonstrate that men can be gentle, caring, compassionate, talk about feelings and show emotions. The following exemplars of a constructivist stance support Ashley's (2001) view that men can also be viewed as role models through showing their 'feminine' side.

Someone who relates positively with women and is not afraid to explore and express his feminine side. (56-year-old female principal)

A male teacher performing a nurturing role. (48-year-old male principal)

Such responses indicate that these principals might well support mounting evidence that there are different ways to be a man teacher (Carrington and Skelton 2003; Martino and Kehler 2006; Mills and Keddie 2005). Moreover, these principals do not appear tied to binary oppositional frameworks when defining gender identities in their schools. Endorsing that there are different ways to be a man is perhaps the first step in moving away from an essentialist role model discourse and towards a stance supportive of Martino et al.'s (2004) claim that dominant constructions of masculinity need to be challenged.

In detailing the personal qualities they associated with a 'male role model', 82% ( $N = 138$ ) of the respondents nominated those typically associated with good citizenship, such as honesty, integrity, respect and consideration. Fifty-three per cent (89) of the principals used only gender-neutral terms to describe these qualities.

Fair and compassionate, approachable, able to form good professional relationships, willingness to be involved and a great teacher. The same qualities I would like for all teachers. (46-year-old male principal)

This suggests that the qualities just over a half of the principals look for in a male 'role model' are the same qualities that they look for in any teacher. These findings are important given that research by Ashley (2003), Foster and Newman (2005), Labelma (2000) and Skelton (2001) indicate the qualities students value in teachers also tend to be gender-neutral. The remaining 32% of the respondents (15% did not answer the question) used a combination of gender-specific and gender-neutral terms.

That only 29% of all respondents added the proviso that a male role model needed also to be a good teacher might indicate that some principals were prepared to compromise good quality

teaching in order to increase the number of man teachers. On the other hand, given that these principals added this statement as a 'proviso' could suggest an adherence to 'political correctness' rather than personal conviction. Without further investigation, such as that afforded by face-to-face interviews, the degree to which such declared attitudes might actually govern employment practices is unclear.

### Conclusion

While the majority of the New Zealand principals who participated in the survey wanted more male role models in their schools, their reasons seemed generally grounded in unsubstantiated theories. However, in line with international findings, the majority of principals apparently (based on their comments) did not see the major reasons for a stronger male presence as linked to either better academic outcomes or behaviour management skills. Rather, the need for more men teachers in New Zealand appears linked to societal concerns regarding the lack of positive adult male role models for many children, particularly boys, in their homes, and the need to provide children with models who largely reflect dominant masculinities. A simple translation from the absence of an adult male in the home to the need for male role models in the school underestimates the complexities inherent in making comparisons between parental and teacher relationships. This translation is based on sex role socialisation theories that have been called into question by more sophisticated understandings of gender identities. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to suggest that the essentialising of qualities of men primary school teachers is contrary to New Zealand's multicultural and diverse society, where the boundaries between masculinity and femininity are increasingly blurred.

The aftermath of a highly publicised child abuse case, coinciding with an increase in sole-parent families and associated campaigns to provide boys with male role models, appears to have culminated in teacher employment practices in New Zealand where men who exhibit a hegemonic masculinity couched in heterosexual, rugby-playing, 'real men' attributes are seen as desirable. While most principals nominated gender-neutral criteria as essential attributes in male teachers, they tended to position these beside traits that clearly indicated a preference for 'real men'. Current literature in the field and the results of this study suggest that the call for an increased masculine presence in the primary school gives little indication of what model or range of 'masculinities' society wants available to its young children. This consideration highlights an urgent need for policy-makers, recruitment agencies and employers to be more explicit about why more men are needed and how their presence in the school will help to address and overcome perceived issues. Without any clear governmental guidelines on what kind of 'man teacher' is needed, principals appear to have favoured a compensatory rationale, which positions as dominant those masculinities evident in our sporting heroes and deemed necessary for the initiation of New Zealand boys. The heterosexist and homophobic nature of these dominant masculinities arguably serve to maintain men teachers' gendered distance from the supposedly feminised primary classroom and to reinforce sex role stereotypes. They may also go some way towards explaining the current unattractiveness of a heavily gendered career to prospective teacher education applicants.

It seems the New Zealand media, through 15 years of sporadic attention to a case of sexual abuse by a homosexual childcare worker, have contributed to a suspicion of men who choose to work with children, as well as a conflation of homosexuality and paedophilia, with dire effects for prospective and practising male teachers. It might be posited that men teachers are now subconsciously compelled to act in stereotypically male ways that perpetuate some of the less desirable facets of hegemonic masculinity. The media, through their misguided attempts to draw attention to gender-related issues that impact negatively on school children and teachers, have

played a major role in further disadvantaging them both. By fuelling a moral panic regarding men working with young people, they have denied children a range of visible masculinities in schools, made school teaching an unattractive proposition for those who do not reflect dominant masculinities or are unprepared to behave within a narrowly prescribed gender role and forced principals to either consciously or subconsciously favour applicants who comply with the hegemonic masculinity.

While a small number of principals in the study recognised the importance men teachers might play in acknowledging the social construction of gender and challenging dominant constructions of masculinity, this is unlikely to happen until society and educational stakeholders openly seek to identify and debate the influences that contribute to a gendered education system. If *all* boys are to be provided with role models in schools then a constructivist approach that allows them to visualise a range of different ways of being male will necessitate the employment of male teachers not bound by the conventions of a heavily gendered career.

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