

Male Primary Teachers and Perceptions of Masculinity

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ABSTRACT *The drive to recruit more male primary teachers is an aim of several western countries, including England. One of the explanations for increasing the number of men teachers is to counteract the 'feminisation' of primary schooling. The assumption underpinning such a strategy is based on sex role socialisation theories which have been superseded by more sophisticated and complex understandings of gender identities. In an attempt to explore differences between the perceptions of male (and female) teachers, a national study investigating the attitudes of student teachers towards gender and primary schooling was undertaken. The findings indicated that male student teachers of upper primary children (7–11 year-olds) were more likely to be concerned about and supportive of traditional images of masculinity than those men who were training to teach lower primary pupils (3–8-year-olds).*

Introduction

The relatively low number of male teachers in primary schools has become increasingly seen by governments across the western world as a matter of real concern (Smith, 1999; Lahelma, 2000; Hutchings, 2001; Sargent, 2001). The basis for this disquiet seems to have arisen from the discussions around boys' underachievement where one of the explanations for the apparent disaffection of schoolboys is the 'feminisation' of primary schooling. There are various ways in which this 'feminisation' is perceived to be taking place but the main issue is the predominance of women teachers which has been argued to have led to primary schools favouring girls and 'girls' learning styles' over those of boys (Biddulph, 1998; Hoff-Sommers, 2000). So great is the concern that in the UK the Teacher Training Agency Corporate Plan for 2001–4 fixed a target recruitment for male entrants to primary initial teacher training (rising from 12.4 to 15%). The government drive in the UK to increase numbers of male primary teachers is to combat 'laddish' forms of behaviour whereby it is 'cool' not to engage in academic work (Francis, 1999).

The assumption that raising the proportion of male teachers will provide boys with positive, work-oriented 'role models' is based on notions of gender which have long been challenged; that is, such strategies are underpinned by sex role socialisation theories whereby masculinity and femininity are located solely within male and female bodies respectively. This unidimensional, essentialist way of conceiving of gender has been unsatisfactory in explaining and understanding differences between men and men, and women and women (for discussion see Connell, 2002). More

recent thinking on gender argues for a consideration of the multidimensionality of identity whereby masculinities and femininities are seen as being shaped by social class, sexuality, religion, age, ethnicity and so forth (Connell, 1987; Skeggs, 1997; Whitehead, 2002).

In keeping with the idea that schools are sites where a range of masculinities are produced and used (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 1996), the aim of this paper is to contribute to the literature that provides insights into how men primary teachers perceive masculinity and the ways in which this impacts upon their professional lives. There is a growing body of evidence emerging from various western countries about how men primary teachers engage with masculinities in their daily work (Allan, 1993; Sumsion, 1999; King, 2000; Roulston & Mills, 2000). This research is useful in identifying common concerns and experiences of male teachers of primary children. For example, themes that often occur in interviews include male teachers as role models (Allan, 1993; Thornton, 1998) and enforcers of discipline (King, 2000; Stroud *et al.*, 2000). Interviewees have also suggested that female colleagues often doubt their ability to do the job effectively in terms of nurturing/caring because they are men (Allan, 1993; Oylar *et al.*, 2001). And issues of sexual orientation and child-sexual molestation for those men teachers working with young children are frequently raised (Skelton, 1991; Smedley, 1999; Thorne, 1998; Sumsion, 1999; King, 2000; Roulston & Mills, 2000).

Whilst these research studies allow for insights into how masculinities of men primary teachers are subjected to scrutiny, and constructed and re-constructed within school sites, they are small-scale and localised. One of the difficulties faced by researchers in undertaking small-scale case studies is in exploring differences as well as similarities between the concerns and experiences of participants. So when investigations into masculinities and primary men teachers suggest a number of common, parallel themes and experiences, there is a danger that these might come to be used in essentialising ways. Thus, there is a case for carrying out larger scale research in order to explore differences *between* men primary teachers. In an attempt to broaden the issues raised in existing research, a national study of both male and female primary student teachers was undertaken by a research team based at the Universities of Newcastle and North London (England) [1]. Drawing upon both open-ended and closed data this paper examines gender differences in the student teachers' images of gender and primary teaching. Importantly, the study considers similarities and differences in the attitudes of men teachers of younger and older primary pupils.

The Research: gender and primary student teachers

Research Aims

The study focused on the September 2000 intake to the one year Primary Post Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) in England and Wales. Although it aimed to explore the attitudes of male and female students towards a career in primary teaching, of particular importance were intra-gender differences in the responses of male student teachers; that is, the research team were alert to the fact that teaching upper primary children (i.e. 7 to 11-year-olds) may be more readily reconciled with prevailing notions of masculinity than working with younger children (i.e. 3 to

8-year-olds). Thus, the research sought to consider any observed differences in response between males in each phase.

Data Collection and Analysis

In Spring 2001, the research team identified thirty initial teacher training (ITT) institutions that would provide a broad cross-section of male entrants to this sector of teaching. The course directors distributed copies of a questionnaire to all male students on the Primary PGCE and a numerically matched group of female students selected at random from the same cohort. Initially, 22 institutions agreed to take part but two later withdrew. The remaining 20 institutions consisted of eight pre-1992 universities, 10 post-1992 universities and two colleges of higher education. All of the participating institutions bar one (a Welsh university) were located across all regions of England. Of the 514 questionnaires issued, 210 (92 females and 118 males) were returned, giving a response rate of 41%.

The final student sample comprised around 13% of the annual male intake to the Primary PGCE and nearly 2% of the female intake (Graduate Teacher Training Registry, 2000). Just over 5% of the respondents came from ethnic minority backgrounds, slightly below the national average. With a mean age of 27 at the point of entry to the PGCE, the men were on average a year older than the women.

It came as no surprise to find that relatively few of the males were planning to work with younger pupils. Indeed only 15% (18) indicated that they were enrolled on courses focusing on the lower primary age range while 69% (82) said that they were preparing to work with 7 to 11-year-olds (i.e. Key Stage 2 [KS2]).

The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended items and invited the students to indicate the extent of their agreement (on a 5-point scale) with a number of propositions relating to popular images of primary teaching as a career. Follow-up telephone interviews were carried out towards the end of the students PGCE year to explore issues arising from the survey. The research team had planned initially to approach a stratified sample of 40 respondents (20 males and females), drawn in equal proportions from the upper and lower primary sectors. However, we were unable to contact four of the students and so the final interview sample comprised thirty-six students. Of these, nineteen (i.e. 10 males and 9 females) were preparing to teach lower primary children and seventeen (i.e. 8 males and 9 females) had opted to work in the upper primary sector. (For more details of the methodology see Carrington, 2003).

The findings

Perceptions of primary teaching

Our survey confirmed several findings of previous research such as the importance to teachers of intrinsic rather than extrinsic considerations [2] and the high value placed on working with children and young people (e.g. Thomas, 1984; Lortie, 1975; Evetts, 1990; Johnson *et al.*, 1999; Reid & Thornton, 2000, 2001; Carrington & Tomlin, 2000; Carrington *et al.*, 2001). Whilst this information is useful in that these findings from our national investigation support those of smaller scale studies, the focus here is on how gender influences perceptions of primary teaching. The questionnaire presented a range of statements grouped under the headings of Primary

Teaching as a Career (Tables 1 and 2) and Gender and Primary Teaching (Tables 3 and 4). Each section will be discussed in turn.

In terms of Primary Teaching as a Career a number of key issues emerged:

Primary teaching is intellectually demanding: There was broad positive agreement from males and females to several general statements on primary teaching; that is, it is as intellectually demanding as secondary teaching, a stressful occupation, and involves excessive paperwork.

Gendered perceptions of who is better qualified to teach primary and secondary pupils: A statistically significant difference between males and females emerged in response to the statement 'Secondary PGCE courses often attract better-qualified applicants than primary PGCE courses' (Table 1). While over half of the females disagreed with this statement half of the male sample were unsure as to whether secondary PGCE courses attracted better-qualified applicants than primary PGCE courses. It can be seen from Table 2 that this uncertainty was more prevalent in upper primary male students. Of course, it is not possible to be sure how the term 'better qualified' was interpreted by the respondents as it is a phrase which encompasses academic qualifications and personal attributes. It may be that a high percentage of upper primary male students were simply unsure as to what the entry requirements for secondary teaching are. However, there is evidence from our study that suggest that students hold gendered perceptions of who is 'better qualified' to teach primary and secondary pupils. For example, in a large scale study by Johnston *et al.* (1999) of 334 BEd students from two Belfast teacher-training colleges the researchers found that male student primary teachers thought that men make 'better secondary teachers'. The authors argue that this perception arose out of the student teachers' internalisation of the association of 'femaleness' with primary teaching, thus female teachers make 'better primary teachers'. Certainly students in our study corroborated this gender division of the teaching profession:

The majority of men that I know have gone into secondary teaching because that seems to be the thing to do. If you want to be a teacher—and you are male—secondary teaching is more acceptable. (Adam, lower primary)

One of the biggest sort of things within society, is that men are considered to be more adept for teaching secondary children; I don't know what it is but it's a society thing that has developed. And I think you could probably trace it back to Victorian times when primary school teachers were women who weren't married—in the caring role basically—and then when the children have got old enough to go to secondary school, people just assume that's more of a male area. (Tony, lower primary)

Men are brought up in a way of thinking that it is a woman's job. (Julie, upper primary)

People still see it as a woman's job. (Mary, lower primary)

It can be seen from Table 1 that, with the exception of this one statement regarding secondary PGCE courses attracting better-qualified applicants than primary courses, there were no statistical differences in the responses of male and female students to

TABLE 1. Primary teaching as a career: males and females

	Males (n = 118)				Females (n = 92)				All (n = 210) Mean	SD	t-test (2-tailed)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%			
Primary teaching is a career equally suitable for both men and women	90.6	6.0	3.5	92.4	3.3	4.3	4.48	0.78	NS		
Primary teaching is as intellectually demanding as secondary teaching	88.0	6.0	6.0	93.4	2.2	4.4	4.43	0.82	NS		
Primary teaching is a stressful occupation	89.0	8.5	2.5	94.5	4.3	1.1	4.38	0.72	NS		
Primary teaching involves excessive paperwork	83.1	11.0	5.9	81.5	10.9	7.6	4.19	0.97	NS		
Increasing the number of men in primary schools will enhance the status of this sector of education	49.2	29.7	21.2	46.7	30.4	22.8	3.37	1.09	NS		
Parents are more likely to encourage their daughters to train as primary teachers than their sons	41.9	41.9	16.3	54.3	29.3	16.3	3.33	0.90	NS		
Primary teaching is a well-respected career	44.0	21.2	34.8	50.0	15.2	34.8	3.13	1.08	NS		
Men enter primary education because it provides them with a rapid means of career advancement	18.8	25.6	55.5	10.9	40.2	48.8	2.49	0.96	NS		
Primary teaching is reasonably paid for the work involved	11.0	21.2	67.0	10.9	16.3	72.9	2.09	0.97	NS		
Secondary PGCE courses often attract better-qualified applicants than primary PGCE courses	9.3	50.0	40.7	8.7	34.8	56.6	2.43	0.97	p < 0.05		
Primary teaching provides men and women with the same opportunities for promotion	30.8	28.2	41.1	31.5	33.7	34.7	2.97	1.04	NS		

TABLE 2. Primary teaching as a career: males

	Males Lower (n = 18)			Males Upper (n = 82)			All (n = 100)		t-test (2-tailed)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	Mean	SD	
Primary teaching is a career equally suitable for both men and women	88.9	5.6	5.6	88.9	7.4	3.7	4.47	0.84	NS
Primary teaching is as intellectually demanding as secondary teaching	94.4	5.6	0.0	89.0	6.1	4.9	4.41	0.78	NS
Primary teaching is a stressful occupation	72.2	16.7	11.1	95.2	3.7	1.2	4.34	0.73	p < 0.05
Primary teaching involves excessive paperwork	77.8	11.1	11.2	82.9	12.2	4.9	4.20	0.94	NS
Increasing the number of men in primary schools will enhance the status of this sector of education	33.3	38.9	27.8	48.8	29.3	22.0	3.36	1.10	NS
Parents are more likely to encourage their daughters to train as primary teachers than their sons	38.9	33.3	27.8	43.2	40.7	16.0	3.24	0.93	NS
Primary teaching is a well-respected career.	61.1	11.1	27.8	40.3	23.2	36.5	3.05	1.05	NS
Men enter primary education because it provides them with a rapid means of career advancement	11.1	16.7	72.3	19.7	27.2	53.0	2.46	0.99	NS
Primary teaching is reasonably paid for the work involved	16.7	11.1	72.2	7.3	19.5	73.1	2.07	0.91	NS
Secondary PGCE courses often attract better-qualified applicants than primary PGCE courses	16.7	27.8	55.6	6.1	53.7	40.2	2.50	0.92	NS
Primary teaching provides men and women with the same opportunities for promotion	27.8	33.3	38.9	32.1	25.9	42.0	2.97	1.06	NS

TABLE 3. Gender and primary teaching: males and females

	Males (n = 118)				Females (n = 92)				All (n = 210) Mean	SD	t-test (2-tailed)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%			
The gender of teachers is irrelevant in the primary school	33.1	11.9	55.1	45.1	16.5	38.5	3.01	1.25	$p < 0.05$		
It is vital that both male and female teachers are recruited to primary schools	95.7	3.3	0.8	94.6	3.3	2.2	4.63	0.67	NS		
Pupils identify more readily with teachers of the same gender	28.8	34.7	36.4	20.7	30.4	48.9	2.79	0.98	NS		
Male teachers have a crucial part to play in fostering positive attitudes to study among young boys	88.9	11.1	0.0	83.7	9.8	6.5	4.20	0.76	NS		
More male teachers are needed as 'role-models' in the primary school	88.2	9.3	2.5	73.6	14.3	12.1	4.04	0.86	$P < 0.01$		
Women teachers often have better communication skills than men teachers	11.0	21.2	67.8	8.7	21.7	69.5	2.23	0.88	NS		
Women teachers are generally more caring than men teachers	14.4	13.6	72.0	8.7	14.1	77.2	2.20	0.90	NS		
Women have a harder time when disciplining boys than their male colleagues	13.6	22.9	63.5	19.6	23.9	56.6	2.48	0.96	NS		
The public tends to be wary of men who work with very young children	67.8	22.0	10.2	50.0	27.2	22.8	3.55	0.93	$P < 0.01$		
Schools tend to be wary of men who work with very young children	10.2	38.1	51.7	9.8	31.5	58.7	2.46	0.88	NS		
Men entering primary schools are strongly motivated to work with young children	56.4	31.6	12.0	44.6	43.5	12.0	3.53	0.92	NS		
As society changes men will feel more comfortable about wanting to work with young children	38.4	47.0	14.6	45.6	48.9	5.4	3.37	0.79	NS		

TABLE 4. Gender and primary teaching: males

	Males Lower (n = 18)			Males Upper (n = 82)			All (n = 100)		t-test (2-tailed)
	% Agree	% Unsure	% Disagree	% Agree	% Unsure	% Disagree	Mean	SD	
The gender of teachers is irrelevant in the primary school	61.1	16.7	22.3	26.8	11.0	62.2	2.84	1.31	$p < 0.05$
It is vital that both male and female teachers are recruited to primary schools	88.9	5.6	5.6	98.7	1.2	0.0	4.73	0.60	NS
Pupils identify more readily with teachers of the same gender	16.7	27.8	55.5	31.7	36.6	31.7	2.86	1.04	NS
Male teachers have a crucial part to play in fostering positive attitudes to study among young boys	83.3	16.7	0.0	88.9	11.1	0.0	4.29	0.67	NS
More male teachers are needed as 'role-models' in the primary school	83.3	16.7	0.0	89.0	8.5	2.4	4.29	0.77	NS
Women teachers often have better communication skills than men teachers	0.0	16.7	83.3	15.8	22.0	62.2	2.25	0.98	$P < 0.05$
Women teachers are generally more caring than men teachers	0.0	5.6	94.4	17.0	15.9	67.1	2.24	0.98	$P < 0.05$
Women have a harder time when disciplining boys than their male colleagues	5.6	16.7	77.8	14.7	25.6	59.8	2.43	0.95	NS
The public tends to be wary of men who work with very young children	61.1	27.8	11.1	69.5	19.5	10.9	3.73	0.93	NS
Schools tend to be wary of men who work with very young children	11.2	38.9	50.0	9.7	37.8	52.4	2.48	0.88	NS
Men entering primary schools are strongly motivated to work with young children	61.1	33.3	5.6	59.2	28.4	12.3	3.68	1.01	NS
As society changes men will feel more comfortable about wanting to work with young children	38.9	50.0	11.1	35.8	50.6	13.5	3.30	0.83	NS

the statements on primary teaching as a career. Similarly, there were differences between the views of upper and lower primary males on only one item.

The majority of upper primary males thought that teaching is stressful whilst less than three-quarters of lower primary males agreed with this statement (a difference of $p < 0.05$). It is difficult to draw conclusions from this difference as all students (males and females) rated the job as stressful with almost the whole female sample citing it as a major issue. A speculative response would be that teachers in KS2 are under particular pressure as it is the test results from KS2 examinations that are used to establish a school's position in the league tables.

Turning now to the second set of statements, it is possible to explore more specifically how the student teachers perceived the significance of gender in primary teaching. What is of particular note here is not so much the statistical differences that emerged in Tables 3 and 4 but the tensions and apparent contradictions that emerged across the data set as a whole. Now, it may well be that these tensions and contradictions are partly a result of using a Likert scale. However, there was some consistency in these disparities and, as such, are worthy of comment.

Perception of significance of gender in teaching: Firstly, almost the entire sample agreed that primary teaching is a career equally suitable for both men and women. Yet, although participants agreed that it is 'equally suitable', they did not see it as providing equality in terms of offering the same promotion opportunities for men and women. These comments are representative of the students' responses:

Not many male primary school teachers are seen—they all seem to be either deputy heads or heads, not just normal teachers. (Stephanie, upper primary)

... there are not that many (men teachers) and the thing about them as well is most of them go quite high up in management quite suddenly so that is where they are seen ... (Bill, lower primary)

I think it's a good thing to have more male teachers, particularly as class teachers, because I feel there are a lot of male teachers as headteachers and deputies. (Alison, upper primary)

Explanations of how men teachers come to be located in the dominant management positions in primary schools can be attributed to a combination of two factors: the positioning of some men as 'natural leaders' in patriarchal societies (Bradley, 1999), and the endeavours of individual men to emphasise those aspects of teaching compatible with 'proper masculinity', such as leadership and management (Connell, 1985; Francis & Skelton, 2001). One of the male students indicated an implicit acknowledgement of the supposed desire of all men for rapid and public career success in his response to the question regarding how the government could make primary teaching more attractive to men. As one participant pointed out:

Strategies would be some kind of fast track promotion that could appeal to men that don't just want to be a teacher all of their life but want to progress. (Chris, upper primary)

Further tensions and contradictions emerged in students' responses to the significance of gender in the teaching force of a school.

Importance of recruitment of men to primary teaching: The overwhelming majority agreed with the statement that 'It is vital that both male and female teachers are recruited to primary schools' and there was also strong agreement with the idea that male teachers have a crucial part to play. Two female students agreed, saying:

I think it is important to encourage men to join primary teaching as I believe they have as much to offer to the profession as women. In my experience the male teachers I have had have been an inspiration. (Emma, upper primary)

I believe that positive male role models are of crucial importance for both boys and girls. Children need to see men in a strong but caring role, and one of the places where this can best be achieved is in the primary school. (Tamsyn, upper primary)

The importance of recruiting more men into primary came across in the strong levels of agreement with the statements that male teachers were crucial in fostering positive attitudes to study among boys and that they were needed as 'role models'. Despite the apparent importance placed by all the students on having a mixed sex teaching staff 45.1% of females and 33.1% of males went onto to say that the gender of teachers is irrelevant in the primary school. Here there were differences between the views of particular groups. Over half of the male students thought that the gender of the teacher was important as in comparison to female students who tended towards the view that it was irrelevant. A similar distinction appeared within the male group where the upper primary students saw it as relevant while lower primary males view gender as unimportant. It might be argued from the responses of students to the questionnaire and in interviews that the gender of the primary teacher is more of an issue to some groups. For example, upper primary males were the most keen to emphasise the importance of recruiting men and women teachers and were more likely to endorse the idea that increasing the number of men in primary schools would enhance the status of this sector of education.

It may be that some men choose to enter upper (as opposed to lower) primary teaching in order to maintain and demonstrate more easily conventional forms of masculinity. Certainly, several of the upper primary men distinguished between themselves and those (males) who worked with younger children. Reference was made to the idea that working with younger children is not 'proper teaching' because of its association with child care and is, therefore, not appropriate for 'real men'. A mature upper primary male student clearly articulated his lack of inclination and interest in teaching younger children:

I mean, thinking about the nursery and lower primary end, there are very few men involved in that. From my own personal point of view, I don't think how I react to children would go down well at the lower end of the scale and I don't think I could cope with that and I think perhaps a lot of men feel that way. (Patrick, upper primary)

Patrick felt that the reason why his 'reactions' would not 'go down well at the lower end of the scale' was because he did not equate teaching with working with young children. He referred to his experiences of teaching practice:

I was with Year 3's and I looked forward to that but found that the reality was, it was still quite close to infants, and so [spent] some of the time

remind[ing] them of full stops, whereas [with] Year 4's you don't necessarily have to do that every day. I think there's that aspect to it as well. You don't tend to find [men] lower down, like in reception or nursery, so perhaps male attitudes [are] better orientated towards an older child.

He was not alone in this perception as shown in the following comment by one of the other upper primary male students:

I've heard it through the staffrooms, from female teachers, that female teachers can expect less of younger children in terms of academic work and can sometimes [...] put more emphasis on mothering kind of skills you know, whereas [...] male teachers are more interested in the actual learning in terms of academic [work]. (Robin, upper primary)

Perceptions of male teachers as child abusers: Of particular concern to several participants was the problem of being seen as a potential child abuser. Mark expressed his concern about the possibility of wrongful accusations in a climate where there is a media/public preoccupation with paedophilia. He said:

As a man it does worry me how one child's comments could end your career. (Mark, upper primary)

Robin felt that it is 'society' which views working with men as suspicious. He argued:

... it's built in as not [being] a man's job. [...] I suppose some people might still think that men who go into primary school teaching, particularly early years primary schools, have got suspect motives.

It was interesting how Robin reproduced gendered ideas of primary teaching. Firstly he defined early years teaching as child care and, therefore, 'women's work'. The implication then was that the kind of men who would want to enter this sector must have an unnatural sexual interest in children. This argument was produced by using the notion of what 'others' think. In so doing he established a distinction between himself as a teacher of older pupils (upper primary/KS2) and those 'carers' of younger children (lower primary/KS1). This division was reiterated at several points as with the comments above and his statement later in the interview on KS1 teaching that 'I suppose people would think of ... men would think that the job was a glorified babysitter'.

Alan also positioned himself clearly as a KS2 teacher before going on to suggest that it was parents' wariness that prevented men working with younger children:

Well I think it is a good idea to encourage more men to go into Key Stage 1 but I'm Key Stage 2 and, having done some cross stage experience, I have to say I'm not sure I hold out much hope of it happening because parents, in particular, are very wary about men wanting to work with young children.

In a similar way, Dick pointed to the perceptions of 'others' as a deterrent from undertaking KS1 teaching. He was keen to stress that he had entered KS2 teaching because of his experience and if it had been with younger children he would have opted for that sector despite the fact that 'it's obviously a little bit weirder to everyone else—men going into early years'. Presumably Mark, Robin, Alan and

Dick all felt they had avoided any possibility of being perceived as 'suspect' or 'weird' by 'others' by opting for KS2.

Conclusions

The discussion in this paper is to offer a contribution to the debate about male teachers as 'role models' for young boys by exploring the views of those who have opted for a career in primary teaching. In particular, the paper explores the gendered attitudes of the students towards primary teaching and has noted the importance of taking account of *intra* gender differences; that is, differences between male teachers of younger and older primary pupils. Two interrelated issues emerged and are discussed below.

First of all, the majority of students appeared to hold an optimistic view of primary teaching as offering equal opportunities and primary schooling as a 'gender free' zone. This can be seen in their support of the statements in the questionnaire that primary teaching was a career equally suitable for both sexes and that gender is irrelevant in the primary school. But attitudes that support egalitarian ideals have to sit uncomfortably alongside ways of thinking about primary teaching that are highly stratified by gender. So, on the one hand students may have doubts as to whether pupils identify more readily with teachers of the same gender but then, on the other, give support to the idea that male teachers are needed as 'role models' and have a crucial part to play in fostering positive attitudes in boys. The point here is that gender is a fundamental factor in the way in which individuals construct their identities as well as central to social systems.

In her book *Doing Women's Work*, Williams (1993) states that men who enter female occupations have their masculinity placed under scrutiny and, in response, often emphasise it by acting out ways of being 'properly masculine'. Small scale studies of male teachers of young children provide evidence of how both the men themselves and their female colleagues and parents are often uncomfortable at finding a man doing a 'woman's job'. For example, an interviewee in Allan's (1993, p. 123) study says 'You need to be a role model. Be the opposite of being feminine' (see also Smedley, 1999; Sumsion, 1999). One way in which male teachers cope with working in a female profession is to redefine their contribution as different to, or better than, that of female teachers (King, 2000; Oyler *et al.*, 2001). It has been shown earlier how the upper primary, that is KS2, men in our study distinguished between themselves as 'proper teachers' ('real men') and those who worked with KS1 pupils. There is a comfort and security in knowing what is expected of ourselves and others as gendered beings. There is a discomfort and insecurity when individuals position themselves, or are positioned as, an 'other'. Hence, many men teachers in the female environment of the primary school constantly construct and negotiate their masculine identities (Francis & Skelton, 2001). This leads to the second question about how gender shapes the perceptions of primary teaching held by men teachers of younger pupils.

It is worth reiterating some comparisons between the views of upper and primary male students in the study. A higher percentage of lower primary males thought that the gender of the teacher was irrelevant (61.1% lower primary, 26.8% upper primary). They were especially keen to distance themselves from stereotypes of women teachers as being more 'caring' (94.4%), or better communicators (83.3%). And they were slightly less concerned about the public wariness of men who work

with young children (61.1% lower primary, 69.5% upper primary). Various explanations can be put forward to account for the stance taken by the lower primary males. It might be the case that because lower primary males are more in the 'firing line' than upper primary males when it comes to being associated with the 'femaleness' of early childhood teaching, they are keen to demonstrate that they possess the necessary skills and dispositions to work effectively in a traditionally female domain. It might also be the case that, having made the decision to enter lower primary (which is particularly seen as a female area of work), they had confronted the fact that their sexuality would be open to question and had decided to continue their chosen course regardless. Thus, it may be that these men were more comfortable with their masculinity than their upper primary peers (see also Johnston *et al.*, 1999).

The current strategies adopted by the government in England and Wales to increase the number of men teachers in primary schools are based on somewhat simplistic ideas of men as 'role models'. The idea that a shift in the gender balance would tackle the 'feminised' nature of primary schooling is naïve. A particularly important factor is the extent to which primary schooling can be considered to be feminised in a culture where masculinised new public management systems have been introduced is debateable (see Mahony & Hextall, 2000; Skelton, 2002). A major problem, then, for the current initiatives is that they are not based on any research evidence and therefore lack clear direction. As Smith (1999, p. 2) pointed out in her paper looking at the moves of the Australian government, 'opinions and debates become accepted as commonsense [while] certain issues are silenced and excluded'. She goes on to say

Issues which have been silenced or excluded in the 'we need more males in primary teaching' discourse include the experience of the males who have chosen to become primary teachers, the opinions of female teachers who will work with the males and the needs of the female students who will be taught by the males. [...] the call for more male primary teachers does not even critically examine the experience of boys in schools, and makes no attempt to document whether boys in schools will actually benefit from the presence of more male teachers.

The importance of a teaching force which is representative of both sexes (as well as representative of a range of ethnicities, social class and so on) is obviously a goal worth aiming for. However, in order to develop strategies to bring this about, we require more questioning and explorations than have been undertaken so far. In particular, the multiple ways in which gendered behaviours are enacted and displayed across a range of masculinities and femininities needs to be recognised. Furthermore, there needs to be some consideration given to the fact that 'masculinity' and 'femininity' is not simply a property of bodies but is intertwined into the daily management and organisation of primary schools.

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NOTES

- [1] I am particularly grateful to Bruce Carrington who undertook the analysis of the quantitative data and provided the detailed description of the methodology that appears here.
- [2] For the purposes of this paper we are using the term 'intrinsic' to denote a set of motivations that are seen to be inherently worthwhile or satisfying; whereas 'extrinsic' motives are linked to more instrumental concerns, including those to do with income, status, power and prestige.

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