

'If you're a male primary teacher, there's a big "why are you doing that? What is wrong with you?"

Gendered expectations of male primary teachers: The 'double bind'

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Funding information

University of Hertfordshire SSAHRI
Research Grant

Abstract

The underrepresentation of men in non-traditional fields of work is often attributed to essentialist gendered beliefs that associate such roles exclusively with women. This phenomenon is not limited to any specific country but is observed worldwide. Moreover, male teacher drop-out rates remain a consistent issue. This article examines the detrimental impact of gendered expectations of masculinity on male primary teachers through interviews conducted with both male and female teachers in the UK. It argues that men in this occupation face a 'double bind,' being judged for conforming to hegemonic masculine norms while also facing judgement for deviating from them. All male teachers interviewed expressed feeling the pressure of gendered expectations, which primarily stem from one central misconception fuelled by traditional conceptions of gender; that the occupation is unsuitable for men. As a result, men who enter the profession encounter challenges not only related to their gender but also their sexuality and their sense of professional identity as teachers. Addressing the damaging role of gender beliefs is crucial in promoting the numerical representation of men in the teaching profession.

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KEYWORDS

attrition, double bind, gendered expectations, male primary teachers, masculinity

1 | INTRODUCTION

The well-documented lack of male primary school teachers is a worldwide phenomenon (e.g., in Australia, see McGrath & Van Bergen, 2017; South Africa, Bhana & Moosa, 2016; Germany, McDowell, Klattenberg, & Lenz, 2021; Vietnam, Nguyen, 2020; United Kingdom, McDowell, 2022, 2019; Iceland, Johannesson et al., 2022). Moreover, teacher attrition rates, especially male teacher drop-out, is also an issue (see Amitai & Van Houtte, 2022). In the U.K, male teachers are less likely to work in nursery and primary schools than in secondary schools, with recruitment numbers across all remaining low (14.1% and 35.8% respectively, Department of Education, 2022).

To address the lack of male primary teachers in the U.K, there has been a call from both policy makers and schools for their increased recruitment, citing a range of reasons of their necessity in the role. One such discourse centres on the need for male-role model/father figures in the pupils' (namely boys) lives due to the high level of 'one parent families'. However, this 'male-role model' rhetoric is also dominant in many countries that do not have a high proportion of single parents (see Cruickshank et al., 2020; McDowell & Klattenberg, 2019). But such recruitment attempts have only reinforced stereotypes by creating a gendered response that seeks to carve a masculine niche into primary teaching to make it more 'suitable' for men (see McDowell, 2022). By promoting supposedly 'masculine' characteristics of the occupation, damaging stereotypes are advocated and perpetuated.

Various studies conducted worldwide have explored the experiences of male primary teachers and the gendered expectations they encounter. These studies include Sargent (2004) in the USA, Hjalmarsson and Löfdahl (2014) and Heikkilä and Hellman (2017) in Sweden, Cruickshank et al. (2020) in Australia, Stroud et al. (2000) in America, Brody et al. (2020) in Switzerland, the USA, the Netherlands, Israel, the UK, and Norway, and Johannesson et al. (2022) in Iceland.

This current study specifically focuses on primary school teachers in the UK and explores the detrimental effects of gendered expectations of masculinity on male primary teachers in England, arguing the existence of a 'double-bind' for these men.

It is crucial to address the damaging role of gender beliefs in hindering higher numbers of male teachers in our teaching staff. Despite some growth in the visibility of men in primary schools in the UK, the percentage remains below 15% (Department of Education, 2022). While it is unclear whether achieving equal representation of men in teaching will eliminate gender inequalities, there are numerous benefits to having more men in the field. One such benefit is the neutralisation of children's gender stereotypes by providing visible counter-stereotypes in education. Studies have shown that exposing children to images of people working in non-gendered stereotypical jobs can shape their own future aspirations in non-gendered ways (Jones, 2020). But actual personal interactions with individuals working in diverse job roles can challenge gender stereotypical beliefs about occupations and gender in a much stronger way (Della Giusta & Steven, 2020). Of course, it is not only the gender of the teacher that matters but also the attitudes of parents, teachers, and various forms of media (Della Giusta & Steven, 2020; Rippon, 2019). This is largely due to stereotypical beliefs about gender and assumptions regarding what individuals can do based on their biological sex.

1.1 | The persistence of gendered occupations

Gender essentialism is the idea that men and women are essentially different because of the disparities between the sexes (Humbert et al., 2018); and that biological sex naturally determines the intrinsic and unchangeable traits

we possess (Rippon, 2019). So, gender is the cultural construct imposed on us because of our biological sex, placing constraints on how we should perform within society. This sex dichotomy has formed stereotypes of masculine and feminine skills and characteristics which frames, and to some extent controls, the occupations deemed suitable for men and women (Kelan, 2010). This means that professions are frequently categorised as suitable for either one gender or the other (Huppertz & Goodwin, 2013). Furthermore, occupational culture genders those who are involved in it, and participants must 'do' gender in ways reflective of the societal gender hierarchy (Sargent, 2004). Feminised workplaces are indexed by stereotypical features of femininity (caring, supportive, person orientated) and masculine workplaces with those associated with masculinity (dominance, aggressiveness, competitiveness). These gendered 'traits' sustain the notion that one gender does not have the skills needed to perform the role of the 'other', and are therefore not suitable (McDowell, 2015a). Such assumptions—that men and women have different skills, abilities, and preferences for work—exist on a global scale (Humbert et al., 2018). This is inaccurate, outdated and has led to discriminatory attitudes, which is when essentialism becomes potentially damaging. The view that women and men behave 'differently'—due to their biology—reflects a naturalist view, and a dangerous one. The perception of 'suitable' behaviours for both sexes is often subject to socio-cultural variation dependent on geographical location. But what is globally consistent is that gender politics is closely linked to cultural ideologies (McDowell, 2022; Moosa & Bhana, 2017). The different skills and characteristics attributed to men and women sustain the patriarchal status quo that gender inequality is 'natural' (Rippon, 2019). Such worldwide beliefs perpetuate occupational segregation by sex, and gender inequalities within the workplace.

Because of gender stereotyping, men often report feeling deterred from entering what society deems as 'women's work', and this is evident worldwide (Cruikshank et al., 2020; McDowell, 2018; McDowell, Lazzaro-Salazar, & Marra, 2021; Moosa & Bhana, 2017). Too few men enter non-traditional areas of work due to essentialist gendered beliefs, having internalised that such work is only suitable for those with female characteristics. In the U.K, 85% of primary school teachers are women (Department of Education, 2022). Furthermore, primary teaching is seen to be a feminised role, deemed by society as appropriate only for those with feminine characteristics (Skelton, 2009). Therefore, school teaching is a job not seen as gender neutral. This makes the very small proportion of U.K primary schools in which male teachers are present important foci for study.

The UK government, primary schools, and Initial Teacher Education hubs have attempted to recruit more men into the occupation through various initiatives. However, men are still not entering the profession in sufficient numbers. This, coupled with a high male teacher-trainee attrition rate, means that there remains a 'huge gender imbalance' across teaching staff (Mistry & Sood, 2016, p. 283).

1.2 | The expectations of being a 'male' teacher

The interrelationship between sex and gender leads to the common belief that men behave in masculine ways and women behave in feminine ways (Basow & Rubinfeld, 2003). Kiesling (2007) explores masculinity as social performances that are culturally indexed to men rather than women. As a result, men have various practices that enable them to exert power in different domains, and they may be perceived as more powerful in certain aspects than others. So men are expected to use language in interactions that exerts their social dominance. Despite a lack of empirical evidence to support these beliefs, recruitment drives commonly claim men are needed as teachers to prescribe 'hard' discipline (e.g. giving direct and aggressive orders, Read, 2008); to be an authoritative male role model (inevitably linked to delivering said 'tough' discipline, Hjalmarsson & Löfdahl, 2014) and to forge positive relationships with boys to get them better engaged in their schooling (Spilt et al., 2012). In short, more male teachers are thought to be needed to provide 'hard' discipline to improve boys' academic engagement (see McDowell, Klattenberg, & Lenz, 2021 for a discussion of discipline). Having a higher number of female teachers are said to have led to a softer, 'liberal' style of classroom discipline (for example, the use of mitigated directives and criticism, [see however Read, 2008; McDowell & Klattenberg, 2019 for counter-arguments]). This has, apparently, led to the underachievement of boys in the classroom. Such discourse has numerous consequences.

Firstly, this belief is based on gendered expectations and assumptions of hegemonic masculinity, disregarding the existence of multiple masculinities (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). It assumes that women cannot perform certain classroom tasks and devalues the work they do, perpetuating the ideology that men bring something to the role that women simply cannot offer (Johannesson et al., 2022). This places gendered expectations on both male and female teachers. Secondly, this belief perpetuates stereotypical thinking about discipline, suggesting that it must be direct and aggressive (indexically masculine) to be effective. However, research has shown that such discipline strategies can damage positive teacher-learner relationships (Carrington, Tymms & Merrell, 2008; McDowell, 2022). Thirdly, the view that men are better at discipline and classroom management solely because of their biology often leads to their attrition from the profession. Many male teachers find it challenging to meet these expectations as they may not align with their own teaching styles (Johannesson et al., 2022) and struggle to cope with them (Amitai & Van Houtte, 2022). Furthermore, the classification of discipline strategies as feminine or masculine is limited. Generalisations about 'male' and 'female' linguistic behaviour only reinforce gender dichotomies and strengthen sex-role stereotypes. This oversimplification reduces a group's behaviours and creates an 'imagined community' (Talbot, 2003, p. 70) where essentialist gender stereotypes prevail. It perpetuates the belief that men are needed to perform 'hard' discipline, while women can only offer 'soft' discipline (which is considered ineffective for dealing with male students).

Gendered expectations of male teachers extend beyond being disciplinarians in the classroom. They are also assigned other roles linked to stereotypical social constructions of hegemonic masculinity. These roles include being the school's IT guru, sports coach (particularly in football), the school handyman, and the 'heavy lifter' (Cruickshank et al., 2020; Johannesson et al., 2022; Skelton, 2009). Men are expected to be subject experts in 'masculine' fields such as mathematics, science, and technology. These expectations reinforce gender stereotypes and incorrectly index certain behaviours and roles based on teacher gender due to essentialist beliefs.

Overall, policy makers, teachers, headteachers, parents, and the community often have gendered expectations of men in teaching. These assumptions, rooted in cultural constructions of gender, have damaging consequences of gender bias (Basow & Rubenfeld, 2003; Mistry & Sood, 2016). Expectations related to hegemonic masculinity and how men are expected to perform in the seemingly 'feminine' environment of primary school pose challenges for male teachers (Brody, 2015; Cruickshank et al., 2020; Thornton & Bricheno, 2006). While masculinity has been recognised as pluralised, acknowledging multiple masculinities (and femininities), a dominant or hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) persists in every culture. Therefore, expectations of what men can/should bring to the teaching role may pressure them, even at a subconscious level, to conform to this 'alpha' form of masculinity (Coates, 2003; Kiesling, 2007).

Cruickshank et al. (2020) discuss how male teachers employ various coping strategies to navigate the challenges posed by persistent gendered stereotypes. However, they are aware that dealing with these challenges often entails performing masculinity in gendered ways, thereby perpetuating such stereotypes in the first place. Similarly, Amitai and Van Houtte (2022) found in their study of secondary school teachers that novice teachers reported 'doing what was expected of them' to maintain job security (a major factor contributing to attrition). This raises the question of whether male teachers in primary education often feel compelled or coerced to behave in ways that align with expectations of being a 'real man' in order to keep their jobs. Hjalmarsson and Löfdahl (2014) discuss how teachers, although not strictly adhering to norms of hegemonic masculinity, contribute to establishing gender order by attempting to do so. Moreover, the expressions of the need for men and masculine actions in schools by their female colleagues also contribute to this gender order.

Therefore, male teachers can benefit from being men, but being in the minority position lies a vulnerability as their actions are more exposed and visible (see Kanter, 1977).

1.3 | The workplace 'double bind': A women-only problem?

Coates (2014) states that the public/private dichotomy and the 'seemingly' different speech styles of men and women have long had an adverse effect on women entering the public arena. To be successful, or achieve any status

within a typical male domain, women are often urged by their workplaces to adopt male linguistic norms, to 'lean in' to their environment (Holmes, 2006; Holmes & Maria Stubbe, 2015; Priola, 2004) and 'adopt the powerful modes of speaking associated with men' (Barrett, 2004, p. 392). When women do adopt ways of speaking indexed as masculine, they are labelled to be 'unfeminine' as they are seen as too authoritative, competitive or aggressive. This then, is the 'double bind' women in 'men's' work often face (Talbot, 2010, p. 96). Interestingly, this has also been noted true for women working in 'women's work', reported by female teachers for example, If female teachers *do* provide stern, tough discipline (indexed as masculine) they are seen as less nurturing and as a result, less feminine (see Pruit, 2014).

The concept of the 'double bind' has traditionally only been applied to women working in male-dominated environments, where they are judged by their colleagues as either being too assertive or too weak (Baxter, 2011). However, this term has not yet been extended to men working in female-dominated work environments. While extensive research has highlighted the recurring issues faced by men in teaching related to gender, the argument that they too face a double bind similar to women in male-dominated fields has not been made.

Terms such as 'double standards', 'double-edged sword' (Hjalmarsson & Löfdahl, 2014), and 'gender-bind' (Sargent, 2004) have been used to describe the predicament of male teachers. However, these terms do not fully capture the complexity of the position in which men are placed. They do not represent the same concept as the double bind, which has thus far been considered a problem exclusive to women. However, the association of caring with feminine occupations often leads to the perception that caring is a trait only possessed by women. Hegemonic masculinity, characterised by power, strength, and the subordination of women, is considered the norm (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Caring therefore, is not typically associated with hegemonic masculinity (MacDougall, 1997). As a result, occupations involving care, such as teaching or nursing, are deemed unsuitable for men (see McDowell's 2015a, 2015b discussion on male nurses). Consequently, when men enter roles that involve acts of gentle care, they face a dilemma (Brody, 2015). Sargent (2004) emphasises that men in early years careers are perceived as dangerous when they exhibit either too much masculinity or too much femininity. Masculinity marks them as violent, while femininity marks them as suspicious. So male teachers are encouraged to be masculine role models but discouraged from engaging in interactions that might raise parental suspicion.

Male teachers therefore face numerous challenges, including societal biases, gender stereotypes, homophobic reactions, and doubts about their competence in the profession (Brody, 2015; Sargent, 2000, 2004). Which are powerful enough to place them in a double bind. The next section will outline these expectations in detail, while the results section will present evidence of the double bind phenomenon.

1.4 | Male teachers are not 'real' men

As well as expectations for men to perform hegemonic masculine roles in their teaching role, male teachers often face discrimination due to their markedness in this environment (Sargent (2004). The questioning of men's motives as to why they would want to work as primary teachers, creates the common discourse they are not 'real' men, but instead are effeminate or homosexual (Thornton & Bricheno, 2006); sexual predators, molesters and paedophiles, Sargent, 2004; Pruit, 2014; Heikkilä & Hellman, 2017); or 'freaks' (Warwick, Warwick, & Hopper, 2012). For example, Sargent (2004) highlights a significant theme reported by male teachers, which is the challenge of facing suspicion of molestation. The teachers interviewed unanimously confirmed that school policies regarding physical contact with children differ for male and female teachers. These rules accentuate the distinctions between men and women, ultimately influencing the teaching style of male teachers and reinforcing the perception that men are incapable of providing the same level of love and nurture as women.

But why? To challenge and ultimately remove the expectations of male (and female) teachers, it is important to ask why such beliefs exist in the first place. Such expectations are arguably created by the social construction of gender, as well as expectations of the role of being a primary teacher, what it entails. Strong opinions still exist regarding gender segregated jobs with many feeling that any 'care' related job is only suitable for women (Hjalmarsson &

Löfdahl, 2014; McDowell, 2015b). The nurturing element that comes with teaching children in the earlier years (early years, preschool, primary school) are seen to be female-only characteristics (Brody, Emilsen & Rohrmann, 2020). Caring is not seen as part of hegemonic masculinity (McDougall, 1997). Men are not seen to be legitimate actors in this work role, and this is where essentialist beliefs about gender become dangerous. They have led to bias beliefs, discrimination, and inequality for men in this occupation. Pruitt (2014) for example, examines how male teachers accomplish identity construction in a preschool in the US. He found that society constructs notions of men as a threat to children due to the predator stigma and as a result, the school has created rules and policies which disallow men (and only men) to perform certain caring roles such as taking children to the bathroom. This policy was based on the headteacher's preconceptions of the views parents may have about male teachers. In fact, such preconceptions of how parents 'may' react is arguably ignorance created by beliefs about men being in the occupation in the first place. Men are expected to follow and accept these constraints. They are told not to question or ignore them at the risk of performing an act judged by others as inappropriate behaviour. Gendered conformance is sold by schools as 'for your own protection'.

The man's role as chief breadwinner in the home is frequently linked to demonstrating hegemonic masculinity in many societies (Fan, 2022; Padavic & Reskin, 2002). Therefore, the type of work a man performs is an important aspect used to shape and demonstrate their masculine identity. The teaching profession in the U.K is well-known for being low-paid and having relatively low status. Furthermore, as masculinity is defined in opposition to femininity and homosexuality in Western societies, men who work in feminised jobs are seen to be more effeminate or anomalous, and thus initiate a challenge to the traditional ideas of what is seen as 'appropriate' gender behaviour (Evans, 1997; Hjalmarsson & Löfdahl, 2014; Lupton, 2000; Williams, 1995). Those who step out of typical gender constructs are often 'marked', seen as deviant and separate from the mainstream (Baxter, 2010). Therefore, a common discourse surrounding male teachers in the U.K include accusations of being homosexual, and/or paedophiles and/or effeminate. A less frequent but equally alarming discourse is that male teachers are violent (Pruitt, 2014). Such gender bias result in male alienation from the role and high male teacher attrition rates, which then perpetuates even stronger gendered beliefs, as pupils often only see the male staff in their school in the caretaker or head teacher role.

As previously mentioned, U.K Government initiatives and policies have attempted to tackle the lack of men by emphasising seemingly masculine elements of the role, and masculinising the classroom to defeminise teaching (McDowell, 2022). The common rhetoric that more men are needed to be a role model, and to discipline and manage male pupils in particular, all fuel this gendered belief system. By trying to deal with discourses of gendered expectations, are men being forced into acting a certain way, a way that fits in with indexical masculine behaviour, to survive in the role? As men in this role are already often viewed with suspicion, if they do not adhere to gendered expectations, does it cause further issues? How do male teachers deal with the rhetoric that surrounds male teachers, one of suspicion, judgement, and fear? This current paper explores the experiences of teachers working in primary schools in the U.K to investigate their experiences of gendered expectations in their workplace and argue that male teachers face a double bind. After findings are discussed, practical recommendations will then be made.

2 | METHODS

This study adopted a qualitative, multiple case study approach to gather and perform an in-depth analysis of primary teachers' narratives.

2.1 | Recruitment and data collection

Fieldwork was conducted in 3 co-educational primary schools in Hertfordshire, UK; selected because they had male teachers, resulting in a multiple case study of 18 teacher participants, 9 men and 9 women. All teachers were white and British. This is not a representative sample of gender, social class, or race, and cannot provide insights into

intersectionality, but is sufficient for a qualitative, in-depth exploratory case study to allow teachers an active role in discussing and addressing issues surrounding gendered expectations in the workplace.

Ethical approval was granted from the researcher's Higher Education Institution before approaching sampled schools for recruitment. Initially contact was made with the Headteacher of each school to explain the research project and seek permission to enter the schools and talk to the teachers. The research was fully then explained in group meetings with teachers interested in taking part, and informed consent received from all involved.

Data collection involved interviewing participants. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each teacher to provide insight on their experiences in the role. Interviews with all the teachers took place on a one-to-one basis on the school grounds during lunch breaks or after the school day had finished. Interviews all lasted approximately 45 min. Although the interview focus was on gendered stereotypes, and gendered expectations, the interviewer was careful to probe gently as to avoid leading questions about gender or sex. All participants were asked about their experience of male teachers in their school (either identifying as one or working alongside one); their thoughts on their own, 'female' and 'male' teaching and discipline styles; their thoughts as to why we have so few male primary teachers in the U.K. The interview also focused on expectations that have been typically noted as gendered, and whether they were part of any of the teachers' experiences. However, the interviewer ensured not to ask about *gender*-related challenges (e.g., the term 'gender' was not used) as the teachers themselves may not often attribute an issue to their gender. These questions were motivated and designed by recurrent key themes evident in previous research on men in feminised jobs (e.g., Cruickshank et al., 2020).

2.2 | Thematic analysis

Interview data was transcribed and anonymised, and NVivo 12 used to store and manage data. To begin, data was coded using deductive analysis allowing for a top-down approach to analysis by applying predetermined codes to the data. These codes were created from key concepts taken from literature and propositions from earlier research. This permitted a first initial coding of broad categories. Although a deductive driven analysis was performed (in relation to the interview schedule which was based on previous research findings), the interview was semi-structured allowing for more open questions to be asked where relevant. So, an inductive analysis was then undertaken to allow for more themes and subthemes to emerge from the data itself. Axial coding was carried out to place related themes together to form sub themes which allowed for comparative analysis at this stage. Pattern coding allowed an identification of patterns across and within the interviews. Themes were then merged or developed to then answer the research interests of this paper. After interviews were analysed and thematically coded, the researcher met again with participants to discuss interpretation to warrant data analysis (see Holmes, 2014).

3 | RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section explores the key themes that emerged in interview to address whether male teachers experience expectations of gender in their workplace, and if so, whether this can be classified as a 'double bind'. Three interrelated themes will now be discussed in turn to demonstrate the experiences faced in this role, and how they are linked to gendered beliefs about work. These themes emerged from the expectations placed on male primary school teachers which exist for no other reason than '*because they are male*' and fall in line with stereotypical beliefs about hegemonic masculinity. After these themes are discussed, this paper will make the argument that these gendered expectations can act as potential attrition factors for men in this role as they place men in the 'double bind'.

3.1 | Gendered expectations: Primary teaching as an unsuitable career for men

All male teachers interviewed felt the pressure of gendered expectations which seem to stem from one central misconception fuelled by traditional conceptions of gender: that the occupation is unsuitable for men. Therefore,

men who entered the job were faced with challenges to not only their gender, but also their sexuality and their teaching identity (e.g., their ability to be a primary teacher).

3.1.1 | Men viewed with suspicion: Not a 'normal' or 'real' man

A common theme was the feeling amongst male teachers is that they were not viewed as a 'real man' because they were different due to their job-choice. This was implicit in discussions of them being not being 'the norm':

In one of my placements, it was a completely female dominated environment, I stuck out like a sore thumb and for a lot of people there, it was really weird, because I wasn't the norm

(Bob)

As a 'real' man would not want to work in a 'women's' role, they must therefore not be 'real' men. As hegemonic masculinity is defined in opposition to femininity and homosexually, male teachers often face slurs and accusations. That there must be something 'wrong' with them to want to work as a primary teacher as Andrew states:

If you're an infant male teacher, there's a big "Why are you doing that? What is wrong with you?"

(Andrew)

Some male teachers reported having a feeling of 'guilty until proven innocent' attributable only to societies' perceptions of men who work in roles which are seen to be feminine. Society views such men with suspicion. As a result, male teachers felt that they constantly must be on alert to prove themselves as a normal teacher, not as deviant nor a sexual predator:

There is that conception that for men working in a very stereotypically female environment that you are a sexual predator you're guilty until proven innocent. I do feel that I need to prove myself that I'm not a pervert that I'm not some weird child abusing freak.

(Thomas)

There is no other explanation as to why these men face such suspicion except for the simple fact that they are men. Or more specifically, men in a 'woman's' role. These men are thought to be working in an occupation unsuitable for (and beneath) 'real' men's abilities (McDowell, 2018, 2022). As a result, they often face suspicion not just from parents and strangers but reported that this rhetoric was also explicitly or implicitly embedded in the expectations held by the school in which they worked. For example, assumptions of being a sexual predator fed into feelings of existing double standards within the school, evident in restrictions faced by male teachers but not their female colleagues. As Thomas explained:

The head mistress said that she saw me hugging someone in front of the children which she said was inappropriate and not really adhering to school policy but yet I've seen loads of female teachers do every day, you see the T.A's and her herself hugging members of staff.

(Thomas)

Thomas continued to discuss one such experience where he was trying to comfort an upset child and was warned by a fellow male teacher to *'be careful'*:

He {the pupil} was freaking out at lunch time and I to get him to calm down... and I had his hands in front of him and so they were like that resting on my knees and Andrew walked past and said that "you know as a friend you need to watch that because someone would because that's quite close to your crotch...you've really got to watch that".

(Thomas)

Andrew also referred to an occasion when he had been told something similar by the school regarding physical contact with pupils even though his female colleagues frequently hug pupils to offer comfort:

The only time I will touch a child is on their shoulders, just gently, if I really need to just to reassure them, but generally I don't touch them at all. As a man in a primary school, you're told from day one to be really, really careful about that and you'll see women in school who will hug children and console them. You're just aware in those situations...generally don't touch children.

(Andrew)

It is interesting to note that all this school 'guidance' and 'instruction' was not codified nor explicitly stated in any school policy.

The men reported feeling 'bullied' by such perceptions. Thomas for example, discussed how he has been forced to change how he would have naturally behaved as a teacher simply because he is a man:

It... bullies over into your conduct. How you behave and how you treat others as a male. I feel more than ever I'm guilty until proven innocent. You've got this continual worry. I had a student come to me crying and I don't even know then is it appropriate for me? I asked one of my colleagues "do you?" because that is your first instinct to give them a cuddle.

(Thomas)

And Andrew reported:

I learned very early on if a child's upset... just to sit with them and sit on my hands. The instant reaction is to want to hug or console somebody ...and you can't do that. It's said that you shouldn't do that as a man because it could be misinterpreted.

(Andrew)

This is evidence of men being put into a 'double bind'. If they follow their instincts to physically comfort a child, they may be judged as a sexual predator. It is this fear that prevents them from acting out this very integral part of a teachers' identity. Furthermore, not hugging children (as it is taboo for them to do so) only further perpetuates the existing belief that men cannot offer care or nurture (MacDougall, 1997; Sargent, 2004).

But for me when I see someone upset you want put your arm around them ...but the fact is that you're a man and you can't do this ...you've

just got to sit on your hands and that's what you know.

(Thomas)

To help deal with this fragmented identity, some men devised other ways to reassure children that did not rely on physical contact. Their place of employment did not offer any training, guidance or policies on this matter. Instead, they were just warned by headteachers and other staff members not to 'touch' the children. They were not offered any suggestions of alternative 'permissible' ways to give comfort. Andrew noted:

Very early on I learned to use verbal nods and verbal clues and verbal reassurances and use my voice very carefully and very skilfully to reassure the children. You've managed to do it just by talking and not do it with any physical interaction. That's a skill that you need to develop early on as a male teacher.

(Andrew)

This provides further evidence that a 'double bind' exists for male teachers. If they do what female teachers readily do (show caring through physical contact), they are seen more as 'less of a man' and therefore suspicious as often, physical contact comes with accusations of being homosexual:

I can't hug children because of the perceptions of it, because people do assume that you're gay...I've never even asked they just assume that you are

(Bob)

Job satisfaction in teaching mainly comes from interactions and relationships with pupils (Amitai & Van Houtte, 2022). But this bond, this positive reason for teaching, diminishes when teachers feel they cannot relate to students, when they are not allowed to bond. This could be a contributing factor for male teacher attrition when they report such feelings of discontent that any relationship forged may be viewed as suspicious. Perceptions caused by gendered beliefs appear to be the cause of male restriction rather than real life events. Arguably this could be is part therefore of a bigger rhetoric of the 'male rape threat'. That every man is a potential sexual predator (see Pruitt's 2014 discussion of male teachers not allowed to escort children to the bathroom). The fact that men may have entered teaching because they want to care for children is not one that is fully accepted, or believed, by society:

I think it's the nurturing aspect that you can't be a nurturing person, you can't have a nurturing personality or be nurturing if you're a male

(Bob)

I know a lot of men might think it's a bit too feminine, having to be all reassuring constantly. Like if they {pupils} got the question wrong, when they're hurt, when you've got crying children... like it's a female career, and that's just the appearance of teaching

(Karen)

Historically I think it's always been women with young children....I think there is gender stereotyping.

(Susan)

This discourse of male teachers being sexual predators seemed to be intertwined with stereotypes of homosexuality:

Regardless if you're straight, people will assume that you are gay or a failed teacher
...then there are some ignorant people who then go "well if he's gay then he is probably
going to be a kiddie fiddler."

(Thomas)

The fact that there are certain behaviours that female teachers are allowed, moreover *expected*, to perform whilst the same is not true for their male counterparts, is further evidence of the men's double bind. As discussed above, primary teaching is strongly associated with a nurturing role, and with providing pastoral and physical care to young children (Bullough, 2015). Rarely are these seen as masculine traits. What we see being reported here is that gendered expectations of the role mean it is not seen to be suitable for men, which has led to men taking the role being viewed with suspicion (see also Heikkilä and Hellman (2017) discussion of 'the ever-present paedophilia dilemma'). As a result, male teachers are encouraged, expected, or even forced to perform hegemonic masculinity (e.g., not to provide physical care to the children). Even if this is not explicit (in school policies for example) it is arguably implicit, implied, and felt by all the teachers in this current study.

Another subtheme linked to the 'occupation not suitable for men' theme is that of the desire/need/lure of better jobs/pay, and the lack of the 'professional' status of the role. All teachers noted how men are often deterred from entering, or staying within, teaching due to its low status and low pay. This is linked to gendered expectations of men being the breadwinner in Western society (fuelled by traditional conceptions of masculinity). And the teachers clearly understand that such expectations about money-earning are due to traditional gendered expectations:

It's what (primary teaching) women seem to dominate in, it's seen as women's work, Therefore, men who go into it are seen as deviant in some way because, well, that's for women, therefore it is low status, it's low pay, it's not seen as a profession...Well, I suppose traditionally a man is supposed to be the breadwinner and salary's not particularly marvellous for a primary school teacher.

(Mia)

It's not fantastically well paid and it still seems society says that the man should be the bread winner.

(Bob)

Lack of pay and status acts as a push factor for men who often move on to other occupations with more pay or are deemed to be higher in status. This is arguably part of expectations of hegemonic gender roles and masculinity (Fan, 2022).

We had a couple of men teachers who came and then went on to do something else and in our college, there were quite a few young men at the beginning and more men left during the course... because they didn't feel it was going to be enough money or status for them.

(Susan)

The teachers in this study were struggling with societal expectations that they must work in jobs that produce higher rewards. In other words, in more acceptable 'masculine' jobs (which have more status and financial rewards as they are 'male' occupations).

3.1.2 | Expectations to perform 'gendered' roles within the school

Stereotypical beliefs about appropriate gendered behaviour also affected expectations of the roles male teachers could take on in the school. The biological aspects of being a man was reported as sometimes beneficial in terms of making them a presence in the classroom and therefore a tool for delivering discipline. This included men having a deeper (and scarier) voice to perform authoritative work:

Guys tend to have bigger voices...and that is something different.

(Mia)

Maybe the children take more notice because they're more scared of male figures, whereas lots of females have discipline problems.

(Andrew)

It was evident in the data that the view that men are naturally better than women at providing discipline still exists (Johannessen et al., 2022). For example, teachers discussed parental expectations of male teachers being better at discipline and therefore held in higher esteem:

I do think that some parents do think that it is an absolute treat {to have a male teacher} as men are better at discipline

(Andrew)

The discourse reveals that expectations regarding male teachers perceived 'abilities' in discipline are rooted in the belief that certain skills are inherently linked to biological sex. Men are often regarded as possessing different (and supposedly superior) discipline styles that make them more adept at controlling pupils:

Male teachers tend to be a lot stricter and their style is different as well.

(Bob)

I think as a female teacher if you were doing something silly or joking around that you'd never get them {pupils} back... they'd be off the walls for the rest of the afternoon.

(Matthew)

The class I had last year were really unruly and there were children that were never...unruly for me...whereas if you spoke to a female teacher who had taken them she said they had been absolutely hell all afternoon whereas for me they'd been absolute saints (.) so being a male meant those children were instantly on their guard

(Bob)

The above extracts highlight the connection between language as a social performance and cultural discourses of masculinity. They demonstrate how linguistic features, such as discipline strategies and voice pitch, are associated with gendered norms that view men as more powerful in these performances. The discourse strategies used by men are seen as indexical of powerful stances, and the perception of power is shaped by how others respond to their social performances. In essence, the speech of male teachers is attributed more power simply based on the reactions of others, which is influenced by indexical beliefs about gender (Kiesling, 2007).

Such beliefs allow men to embrace discipline as a legitimate way to demonstrate hegemonic masculine identity. They are leaning on indexical norms expected of men. With the threats they face due to being a man in the

role, such construction of apparently 'manly' behaviour may be a conscious way of alleviating such threats (see also Cruickshank, 2019). This demonstrates that male teachers are aware of their school's expectation to perform gendered roles, especially in relation to giving discipline in classrooms. Some teachers evidently use this to carve out a masculine niche, using it to exhibit they are hegemonically masculine. But not all. Some male teachers did not feel like they fitted into that 'tough' discipline category and instead claimed they disciplined in a more stereotypically feminine way. For example, Thomas wanted to challenge the stereotypical views of male teachers and how they perform discipline. He attempts to challenge not just gendered norms, but also prevailing stereotypes of what 'good' discipline should look like (see McDowell, Klattenberg, & Lenz, 2021). However, found he had to resort to fulfilling gendered expectations providing further evidence of the double bind placed on men:

Anyone that's been in my class knows that I'm not remotely disciplinarian. I probably would say that I would be the most stereotypically feminine teacher because I find it really difficult to shout at the children. But I have to as that is what is expected of me

(Thomas)

The female teachers also noted the men's 'ability' to manage the pupils better than themselves, but did not specifically attribute this down to gender:

When Steven punishes him, he comes back more contrite than when Christina punishes him. But it could be just personal style and not gender related, you know?

(Mia)

Another common theme concerned male teachers being utilised to teach sports. Teachers were aware that the only reason such duties were allocated (or even enforced upon) to them were due to gender:

Advantages of men in teaching? They do football club. The rest of us wouldn't be able to teach football properly because we wouldn't have a clue how to do football [chuckles].

(Karen)

All male teachers reported that they had been given some form of typical 'manly' role, simply because of expectations indexical of hegemonic masculinity. In most cases, the teachers claimed not to even like Sport, nor have any knowledge of I.T., but noted that the school headteacher assigned them such roles regardless:

I was given the football club because that's the instant thing where oh he's a male, so he'll do that, and I.T. ah he's a male so he'll be interested in that, he'll do that.

(Matthew)

So I had to plough on and teach sport and I.T with no interest nor knowledge of either.

(Bob)

This is further evidence of the 'double bind'. Men are judged for being not 'real' men in this occupation. Therefore, performing such gendered roles allows them in some form to perform hegemonic masculinity and so they choose not to challenge their situation. Sport for example, is seen as a masculine pursuit, so often men carry on with this role as it allows them to exhibit their maleness that is threatened by being in the job (Johanneson et al., 2022). For one male teacher, being the Sport coach (albeit it forced upon him), afforded the opportunity for him to perform the

masculine traits expected of him. It allowed him to refer to the hegemonic characteristics he claimed to possess (in this case, the love of football):

That's because I love it (football) anyway, but I can imagine even though I didn't it probably would have been pushed on me anyway.

(Bob)

3.1.3 | Positives of being a 'male' primary teacher

Some teachers commented that having male teachers present in the school, or being a male teacher, comes with benefits, such as acting as male role models for male pupils (although no one could really define what being a 'role model' meant when asked):

Lots of people say they want their children to have a balance of men and women and especially if the child's from a split family and got no father then it's a male role model

(Andrew)

A positive male role model for the boys especially for example there's a lot of single parent families and there's no man around

(Bob)

There are single parents, men not being around so much and women being on their own more on their own...and so to have a good male role model at a young age.

(Karen)

I think that they {parents} think that it's a bit of a treat to have a male primary school teacher it's a very it's a very uncommon place thing... so it's a bit (.) it's kind of like gold dust

(Thomas)

Such comments seem to run in contradiction to the previous themes. That these men are viewed as suspicious and face many challenges due to gendered expectations. But yet at the same time, were also viewed by parents and head-teachers as a valuable resource. So, men, who are more exposed and visible, are viewed as both valuable and suspicious. This paradox is a common discourse (Cruikshank et al., 2020; Heikkilä & Hellman, 2017; Hjalmarsson & Löfdahl, 2014) but it difficult to understand, or explain, why it exists. What is evident however is that the contradictory feelings towards male teachers provide further evidence that they are in a double bind. All teachers interviewed reported the importance of being a 'male role model' in a society that has a high number of single parent families where only a female is present in a child's life. Based on this, it can be argued that male teachers are desired, or seen as 'gold dust' because of hegemonic concepts of masculinity. Children already have a 'feminine' presence in their life in the form of their mothers, and therefore need a masculine presence too. And this masculine presence must be hegemonic one, evident from the recurrent references to men having to conduct tough discipline, play masculine sports, and most importantly, control the boys in their classroom (as they lack a 'father figure'). If this is indeed the main reason that society appreciates men in teaching, it is understandable that men perform behaviours indexical of hegemonic masculinity, even if this goes against their own teaching style, preferences, and instincts, placing them in a double bind.

4 | DISCUSSION

What is evident in this present study is that men deal with challenges fuelled by traditional conceptions of gender such as the ability to deliver 'tough' discipline, take on sporting roles, all the while being viewed with suspicion by society (and sometimes even by their own colleagues). Moreover, the male teachers demonstrate an awareness of their gender as the cause of these challenges, and because of suspicion and gender discrimination, do what is expected of them to keep their job (see Amitai & Van Houtte, 2022). The effect of gendered beliefs on the primary teaching profession, and how such expectations to some extent control the type of professional workplace identity male teachers can therefore display, was often highlighted. They often felt coerced into behaving like a 'real man' to live up to gendered expectations. As a result, we see gender stereotypes exasperated rather than challenged. And being forced to display such hegemonic masculine behaviours puts men in a double bind which is problematic for three main reasons. Firstly, it acts as a deterrent to men entering the teaching profession in the first place. Because of societies' views of masculinity, and caring being viewed as essentially feminine, male teachers often live with the constant fear of accusations (see also Cruickshank et al., 2020). They are not able to perform their professional teaching role in the same way as their female colleagues due to gendered discrimination caused by essentialist beliefs. But if they act in any way seen as feminine, they face even more accusations of being gay, or being a sexual predator (as they are not 'normal'). It is not surprising then that men are often deterred from entering into this profession. Secondly, it may be a contributing factor to the high attrition rates among male primary teachers as their expectations of the role do not match how they are expected to perform. Men are being pushed into a performance that is indexical of their gender by NOT being allowed to perform such roles that are essential to their teaching identity. Finally, the double bind projects gender stereotypes onto children, and does so in two ways. Firstly, if male teachers must 'perform' hegemonic masculinity or otherwise face more suspicion and accusations, their pupils only see men act in stereotypical ways. This behaviour reinforces gendered beliefs of role performance, which is detrimental to teaching pupils about gender equality (Cushman, 2010). Secondly, if pupils are only taught by women, they will not learn that this is an occupation that everyone can perform equally well as competent teachers.

5 | CONCLUSION

There is a multitude of interconnected barriers that prevent men from entering primary teaching including the low status and low pay, the homophobic comments, and the slurs of being a sexual predator. Arguably, all the issues may be caused by one major factor: society's attitudes to work roles and gender (Haines, Deaux, & Lofaro, 2016). It is societies' gendered stereotypes of what the teaching role entails, and the characteristics assumed necessary to adequately perform that role, that is the root cause of the continued lack of men in primary teaching. Male teachers in this present study self-report that their school's expectations of them to fulfil hegemonic, masculine roles often made them unhappy and uncomfortable (see also Sargent, 2000; Skelton, 2003). This can account for the high attrition rate of male teacher trainees and teachers (see Cushman, 2010). It is therefore of vital importance to challenge the social construction of gender, of primary school teaching, and the expectations of male (and female) teachers. Primary school teaching must be de-gendered and detached from femininity, but this should not be achieved by merely forcing men into performing stereotypical hegemonic behaviour. Occupations which involve delivering an element of care needs to be regarded as a professional skill, and not an issue of gendered ability.

So, what can be done to challenge gender stereotypes? Based on the findings, the following recommendations are presented as potential solutions:

1. Adopt a whole school approach to challenge gender stereotypes (Jones, 2020). Headteachers should consult with staff, communicate effectively with them, and provide support. Schools should develop a framework for school strategy and policy on gender matters, involving all stakeholders to establish best practices for tackling gender

- stereotypes and stereotypical expectations. As many expectations stem from unconscious bias, it is crucial for the school to create an action plan supported by policies, which can be delivered by the headteachers. Research within the school can be conducted to gather the perspectives of staff, parents, and pupils. Ongoing professional development and awareness are essential, and clear policies should be established to fulfil statutory responsibility. Written documents should outline strategies, goals, and actionable steps, supported by written policy.
2. Implement clear guidance, messages, and activities to prevent gender stereotyping among both staff and pupils. This can be achieved through training and the use of appropriate materials. Engaging parents and carers is important, and policies should be discussed during open days while addressing misconceptions about male teachers as they arise. Information sessions and workshops with parents, carers, and pupils can be organised. Staff should also receive training on how to respond to enquiries or comments about men in teaching roles. Adequate professional development and support should be provided, including targeted programs that address gender expectations and equip all staff with effective strategies to navigate challenges. Mentorship programs play a crucial role in providing ongoing support, professional development, and career growth, and should be implemented.
 3. Treat male teachers no differently than other teachers. Schools should avoid expecting or enforcing specific teacher behaviours based on gendered stereotypes. It is important for schools to be aware of the stereotypes they may inadvertently promote and actively challenge them to promote gender diversity. Headteachers should consider how work roles are allocated, such as assigning male teachers nurturing and domestic roles as part of a broader effort to promote inclusivity. By implementing these recommendations, schools can contribute to a more inclusive and equitable environment for both male teachers and students.
 4. Government policies and recruitment drives should cease relying on gender stereotypes to recruit more men based solely on the notion that their value to the profession is limited to their gender. Policy makers should prioritise addressing gender-related issues, particularly the unjust suspicion towards men, in order to recognise the challenges faced and develop policies that support teachers at both local and national levels.

Due to the small sample size of the cohort in this study, the findings cannot be generalised to the entire teaching population. However, the case study research enabled in-depth data collection, resulting in a valuable dataset. Additionally, the findings aligned with several other studies in the field. Future research should aim to expand data collection by including a larger number of teachers, which would allow for the exploration of the intersectionality of teacher identity, including factors such as ethnicity, culture, and age.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my thanks to all the teachers that participated in this study, as well as Dr Christina Schelletter who kindly reviewed this paper before submission. This research project was funded by a University of Hertfordshire SSAHRI Research Grant.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There are no conflicts of interest.

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How to cite this article: McDowell, J. (2023). 'If you're a male primary teacher, there's a big "why are you doing that? What is wrong with you?"' Gendered expectations of male primary teachers: The 'double bind'. *Sociology Compass*, e13145. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.13145>