

Using Collective Memory Work to Explore Nonconformity and Stereotypical Expectations for Men Elementary School Teachers

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Abstract

This study explores the discourses surrounding men elementary teachers through Collective Memory Work methods with a group of elementary-teaching men. Through collective analysis the ten participant-researchers (all men and current or former elementary teachers) identified a number of intersectionalities, including gender and profession. These are illuminated here in the memory story of one participant (selected from the group's nine stories) and the subsequent analysis discussion it generated. This work provides insight into the intersectionality of gender and profession in the work lives of men and women educators which can be used to promote a more equitable work and learning environment as part of feminism's "movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (hooks, 2003, p. 1).

Keywords

Collective Memory Work, gender, masculine hegemony, man elementary teachers

Introduction

I had a substitute teacher come in... and she saw my hair as it is now <the style often called a Mohawk cut> and she said that it was quite remarkable that the administration would allow me to have hair like this. And wasn't I concerned that my students would try to emulate me and show up with Mohawks. And the real easy, clear response was "I'm a male elementary school teacher. I can pretty much do what I want." And I think there's truth to that. It's a bit oversimplified, but there's truth to that. I think I'm given more leniency in the things that I do and I can push the envelope a bit. Now I don't always push it, but I think that it's true.

Harold's story was told to me as we shared some wine in his kitchen one spring evening during his reflective interview. It was told from the perspective of a man teacher who is very comfortable in his elementary school. In a few short years, at his first and current school, he was able to understand his privileged status and use it to push the boundaries often associated with women teachers. Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody (2001) have explained girl students are often rewarded by schools expecting them to be submissive, quiet, attentive, docile "teachers' pets," and that these rewarded students, having found acceptance in schools, often grow up to become school teachers. Harold's comment illustrates the different expectations of boys and the men they grow up to be. By wearing his hair in a style reminiscent of the "Savage Indian," I believe Harold established himself apart from his "docile teachers' pets" women colleagues in much the same way that the Mohawk hair style has been more recently identified with the counterculture punk scene.

While Harold's actions may be seen as daring in the context of the public elementary school, they still lie within the expectations that men (the term *men or man* instead of *male* is used throughout this work to highlight the gender—and not the biological sex—of the participants to indicate the importance of the participants' gendered identities within the context of their professional experience) teachers are different from and more privileged than their women colleagues. This is in much the same way that Walkerdine's (1990) opening story in *Schoolgirl Fictions* revealed ways in which boy students enacted symbolic, sexual violence upon their women teacher in order to shift the classroom discourse to one that positions them as powerful and the girl students and women teacher as not. Although his story does not suggest any violent threat like Walkerdine's pre-Kindergarten boys, Harold is enacting a discourse of power and privilege both in his choice of hairstyle from counterculture and in his discourse with the woman substitute teacher. These choices fit with our expectations of men as powerful and privileged, operating as independent bodies, and by doing these two things, satisfying society's expectations for men.

Moving Forward with Critical Memory Work Methodology in Education

As a qualitative form of seeing and researching the world, feminist theory-informed research looks to privilege the individual's story over popular discourse and statistical treatments of populations. The revealed story of the individual provides a humane treatment of participants in social science research and a counter to the dehumanizing that quantitative research often leads to when individuals are grouped into broad categories and statistical generalizations are applied to them (Brosius, 2005).

Gonzalez (1988), as a researcher interested in feminist theories, used group conversations with her participants in the more social setting of high school lunch time to establish a less formal interaction time. Jones (2006) used an informal

conversation time during after-school meetings to explore topics important to her elementary students' lives. I used similar methods through the story writing and group analysis vis-à-vis Collective Memory Work.

Collective Memory Work Method

Three phases of CMW were identified by Onyx and Small (2001):

- Phase 1: individual reflections indicating the processes of constructions
- Phase 2: collective examination of the memories in which the memories are theorized and new meanings result
- Phase 3: the material provided from both the written memories and the collective discussion of them, is further theorized. This is often done by one member of the collective (the Principal Investigator) in consultation with the others.

Using Collective Memory Work in this Study with Men Elementary Teachers

I believed that the methods used by past Collective Memory Work scholars were transferable to my study. As a group of college-educated professionals, teachers are well versed in the tasks required for such work: narrative writing, reflection, discussion, and analysis. Collective Memory Work has not been used to focus on the intersection of gender and career identity, or on the K-12 teaching experience. I felt that conducting research into the hegemonic identity discourses that come to bear on men in relation to their teaching career through Collective Memory Work had the potential to examine teacher identity from a unique direction while at the same time expanding the use of the method in studies of gender and career identity, ideology, and discourses.

In line with other studies, my goal was to recruit between five and ten participants, preferably among those men who teach or have taught children in Grade 3 and younger. I sought teachers in this teaching age-range for two reasons. First, as a former first and second grades teacher, I felt working with others who have also taught young children would be most appropriate. Also, as research illustrates, teachers of our youngest students are rarely men (Snyder, Tan & Hoffman, 2004; Zumwalt & Craig, 2008) and are expected to possess feminine qualities like nurturing personalities that are seen as strange or suspect in men (Arnold, 1965; Murgatroyd, 1955; Priegert Coulter & McNay, 1993; Triplett, 1968).

This study's methods could be seen as a blend of original and current approaches to Collective Memory Work. This study included four stages of data gathering and analysis, each of which had a collective component consistent with feminist theory and Collective Memory Work:

- Stage 1: Introductory discussion group

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- Stage 2: Individual story writing
- Stage 3: Collective story analysis
- Stage 4: Sharing of initial findings and one-on-one interviews.

Because of the paucity of men elementary school teachers in my immediate community, participant recruitment included a nearby city. The wide geographical distribution of participants resulted in two separate groups forming. One group formed around a university town and had seven participants including myself, while the second group was created from an additional three (making for four discussants with the addition of me) participants living in the nearby city. The two groups shared stories between them for analysis, but due to the geographic and scheduling divides we were never able to meet all together. Like my plans for the university town group, this city group met once for introductions (Stage 1) and then once more for collective story analysis (Stage 3). The university town group presented the challenge of not being able to reach a collective agreement on the time and place for the analysis meeting. Because of the scheduling challenge our analysis meeting (Stage 3) was scheduled for two dates and times in order to accommodate the most people for the university town group.

Once enough teachers had agreed to participate, the study moved into its first stage, which was designed to more closely model the strong, social bond created through long-term group study that Haug's collective was able to achieve. To that end the participants were invited to an initial, introductory meeting where I explained the goals of the research, talked about my experiences as a man and elementary school teacher, and then opened the conversation up to them. Participants provided pseudonyms and agreed to keep our work confidential. From these first meetings' conversations, I developed what I believed was a writing prompt that was both broad enough to encompass the variety of experience revealed during our meetings, but also focused enough so that participants could create a story that helped us zero in on important aspects of our gendered experiences within our profession:

Think about a time when your being a man and being a teacher have intersected in your interactions with others. Write a short, anonymous narrative of this memory in as much detail as you can so that your readers come away with a deep understanding of your experience. Like many of the examples from our conversation, this story might be about a time when being a man seemed to privilege you in your profession, or perhaps it disadvantaged you, or like many events in life, it might have seemed both privileging and disadvantaging at the same time. Or perhaps the incident just made you feel uncomfortable/unsettled even if you can't identify how it fitted in with the privileging/disadvantaging split because

it was more complicated than that. However it fits in with your idea of who you are as a man and a teacher is fine, as long as you feel that it's a good example that shows your reader how your gender comes into play as part of your professional identity.

In keeping with more recent studies in Collective Memory Work (Johnson, Richmond & Kivel, 2008; Kivel & Johnson, 2009), participants were told that they should write their narratives so as to allow for author anonymity. Stories were collected, read and edited for anonymity. I distributed a copy of the stories to the participants so that they could read them prior to our collective analysis, our third activity.

During analysis participants met as a group to read and analyze the participant narratives created in the second activity. Because of time constraints, I ordered the stories in hopes that we would move through all of them, but in a manner that assured that if we ran out of time, that we would be able to get through a substantial number of the stories that showed promise for furthering our conversations during analysis that we had begun during our initial meetings. Of the ten stories submitted, we were able to read and analyse nine (for the purposes of this article only one story is presented). The participant whose story was not analyzed was consulted and allowed the group to skip his story in order for the meeting to end in a timely manner. These meetings were recorded for transcription and analysis, and the transcripts were forwarded to participant groups once they were complete. Analysis focused on the meaning and function of the stories in their present context.

This process followed the methods employed by other Collective Memory Work researchers. Like Haug (1983/1987, 2000) we used group analysis to examine the discourses presented by the narratives' authors because

it is important to discover the common sense reactions of the group so that if necessary they too can become the subject of discussion...If this is not done, we pass up the opportunity to learn something from ideas that are commonly held about cultural hegemony and perhaps also the power of dominant theories in everyday life. (Haug, 2000, p. 159)

I also facilitated deconstruction of the texts in order to look at "the different elements that go to make up the story in a different light, to reassemble them in different ways, if necessary, or else to make visible any gaps, ruptures or contradictions" (Haug, 2000, p. 160). For narrative analysis, I employed the categories used by Kivel and Johnson (2009) in their research with men and media messages, although the questions were modified to address the particular characteristics of this study and our stories.

During the collective analysis (See analysis questions, Appendix A), I first led the group through a more general discussion of the meaning of the text (both how it might relate to them individually and as members of a group built on gender and career choice) and then into a more specific analysis that included consideration of the words used by the author to describe the actions and emotions of the narrative's characters. After this we returned to a more global discussion about the meaning of the piece and how that meaning/its multiple meanings might inform us about how boys are taught to be men and how individuals are taught to be teachers in our society. All of the data generated through our collective meetings was made available to the participants afterwards.

Because this study's group and their meetings were divided by space and time, our efforts again moved away from the intent of Collective Memory Work's creators to involve members in all aspects of the study. As the coordinator of the study, I was the only one who read and analysed all of the collective's stories. This allowed me to see both connections between stories and discussions that the groups were unable to analyse during their meetings, and also afforded me the opportunity to read across the geographic and scheduling barriers to make connections among the two groups' stories and conversations. This analysis stage of the study included a consolidation of participants' stories and our collective understandings as a set of tentative findings. These findings were shared with the participants for their review. Individual participants were invited, if interested in further exploration of the work, to a one-on-one interview. Four of the nine recruited participants sat for interviews. These were conducted at a time and place most convenient for participants. Because these interviews were structured more like a discussion, as opposed to a structured, question-and-answer interview, I also chose to regard my part of the conversations as the interview of a fifth participant. The discussions centred on both the findings and the research process, but also included a more specific discussion about the participant's experiences as gendered elementary school teachers. These interviews were recorded and used as data for further refinement and expansion of study findings.

Stereotypes of Masculine Behaviour and Physique

The following memory story examines the expectations and stereotypes of men elementary school teachers. Its protagonist is portrayed in ways very different from Harold above; its protagonist does not conform to those expectations of masculine hegemony:

A Few Extra Boys

“We decided to put a few extra boys in your room who need a male role model in their life,” the man was told his first year of public school

teaching. “Lucky me,” he thought, as this information brought forth a cacophony of voices in his head.

First, the man was honoured that his colleagues trusted him not only to teach these children but also to nurture their development as boys. Male elementary teachers are a privileged lot, as our gender often accrues special privileges, such as preferential treatment in hiring decisions. When trying to think comparatively about whether this might happen to a woman teacher—that she would get extra girls placed in her room because they need a woman role model—he felt that such a scenario was likely not to happen because of the relative scarcity of men in the elementary grades. Being able to work with a population of students, boys, as a father figure or role model is a unique privilege (whether one considers it desirable or not) in a work environment dominated by women.

In spite of the fact that the man had been bestowed with this privilege of extra boys who “needed” a male role model (i.e., had emotional and behavioural problems), the teacher questioned the assumptions that led to such a decision. His experience as a man elementary teacher had been that whenever testosterone was needed, men get called upon, whether it is moving furniture, fixing computers, straightening boys out who have behaviour problems, or leading sports activities. The placement of extra boys in the man’s room was no different. “Do they really know who I am?” he thought to himself. “How long will it take before they realize I am a phony, a fake, a man who went into elementary teaching precisely because I didn’t want to play the role of the hyper-masculine teacher/coach or disciplinarian, because I wanted to teach children before they had gotten entrenched in stereotypes about men and masculinity among other things?” Surely, it was only a matter of time before his students and colleagues would be disappointed.

Sure enough, that first year the man’s masculinity was called into question by both students and peers. “We heard you were gay,” his students told him. “Don’t you have muscles?” they asked. Likewise, the man’s colleagues grew tired of his treating students with the same regard he treated other adults rather than treating them as children: “We like to have fun and games, too. But students are here to learn.” The way the man spent extra time getting to know each child, making home visits, having students engage in authentic, hands-on learning experiences, while it earned recognition from outsiders coming to evaluate the instruction in his school, was decidedly not authoritarian enough for his teacher peers.

“These boys, like all children, just need to be treated with love and respect, not get yelled at or constantly get told what to do,” he thought,

noticing that he seemed to be a minority in this environment of power and control. Yet his maleness suggested just the opposite: that the man should be the one evoking power, authority, and control, even more so than the rest of the faculty and staff, all of whom, except for five others, were women. One of the ways in which this control was enacted—and the man was expected to play the game—was “behaviour management.” Because he had several boys with extreme social-emotional needs, the man had special education teachers and school psychologists coming into his room, meeting with him, and giving him advice. The assumption was that the man would use token systems, individualized point plans, and other behaviouristic strategies for maintaining order and control of these boys. Behaviourism, behaviourism, behaviourism. The man started to feel like children were rats in a lab. Yes, he was a man, but no, this did not fit his personal philosophy of how children learn. What was going on when the school’s women faculty and the school’s practices embraced more machismo than the man wanted to express?

While this was only his first year teaching, the next and subsequent years, guess what? The man had more boys in his room than his peers and more children on individualized education plans, especially for emotional-behaviour disorders. What he had come to recognize is that in spite of all the tensions that are inherent in a man elementary teacher, the simple fact that he was a man in many cases trumped the real man, the sensitive, gentle, and playful man who loves learning alongside children.

This narrative generated much conversation about the expectations our peers and community have for men and men teachers, and also how those expectations relate to those for women and women teachers. The story presents its protagonist as someone who does not fit stereotypical expectations of men as disciplining forces or having hyper-masculine physiques. It also presents a school where a behaviourist model of teaching is being implemented, and that emphasis on disciplining children goes against the protagonist’s theories of education. Brian suggested that “it’s like he has one view of what being a man teacher is, but the school has this other view of what it means.”

Our group discussed whether or not we felt the story presents the man as someone looking to break the masculine stereotypes that were presented or if the author just wished to be allowed to teach according to his teaching philosophy. The group did agree that it was clear that he resented having the idea of man-as-disciplining-force forced upon him. AJ felt that the protagonist did not have “the intention to break it, as just to be accepted,” and Brian suggested that perhaps the intention was “that the school would accept his version of a man just as much as it would accept this other [stereotypical, disciplinarian] person.”

AJ explained that the story illustrates how there is an “expectation that this male lives up to society’s expectation of what a man is and also the story is about really a huge emphasis on this male teacher and other male students,” and went on to emphasize that “having boys with this male teacher was important also, at least in the eyes of the school and how their philosophy was.” Clyde supported these ideas by suggesting that the story showed that the school wasn’t merely concerned with the discipline of all boys but a select group “who had... been identified as having special needs based on their behaviour or emotions.” He went on to relate similar experiences where others, both in and out of education, opined that he would be a good teacher for boy students identified as having social or emotional problems.

Dan reminded us that the story illustrates that the issue of having a stereotypical view of men was greater than just the adults in the school: “It’s not even [just] the school [staff], it’s the school *and* the students.” Both groups’ initial meetings included some discussion about the expectations of men teachers to fulfil certain social roles, often roles expected by their students. Brian explained that people expected him “to bring this level of masculinity to the classroom that I didn’t necessarily enact or engage in myself, you know, like kids wanting to talk about hunting and fishing and stuff that I didn’t know.” His comments are similar to those from Mark during the introductory meeting where he explained that he did not share the same interests as many of his boy students and that this led to what he thought of as an “interesting dilemma” for his students:

A lot of their parents—especially their fathers—are into the sports. They’re into hunting. They’re into those kinds of things, and I don’t want to criticize them, those just aren’t the things that I’m into. And for a lot of my students they have this predefined notion of what it means to be a male, and when they come to my classroom, I don’t necessarily fit that mould, I think that can also be kind of an interesting dilemma, especially for some of my male students.

Many of the participants related stories of how their physical presence, or their voice, was seen as a disciplinary force by fellow teachers, their students’ parents, and the students themselves. Mark went on to explain that his students have reacted differently to his discussions versus those they had with women teachers:

I can say the exact same thing to a child in the exact same tone that one of my female colleagues might say but it’s taken completely differently by the child. I think that’s because I’m a male, and for whatever reason because I’m a male it comes across more harshly. I’ve found I have to be very careful in what I say.

Using Collective Memory Work to Explore Nonconformity

Mark believed that a man's conversation is different from his women peers' conversation, and has learned to be careful with his approach. Unlike Mark's story, sometimes the gendered difference in message delivery is the desired result. Brian explained that he was called on to take over disciplining when his administrator

was out and I happened to be up in the office, and a teacher came by and was like, "The principal is out so Mr. Brian is going to talk to you!" And I had to use my best imitation of what I thought the principal would say, but it was totally out of character, you know.

Clyde also discovered that his presence in the school was used as a disciplining tool for children he did not know and had never come in contact with: "I had teachers who said, 'I've never sent a kid to you but I use you as a threat. I would say something like 'Oooh, I'm going to send you to Mr. Clyde's class if you don't behave!'" He went on to wonder at the effectiveness of such threats to children:

Do they see the physical size or do they see our gender as a threat. So, it's like Mr. Clyde down the hall has never done anything to you, you don't know him, but he is a man so he is a threat to you.

Dan explained that some parents seemed genuinely pleased with their child having a man teacher so as to address their perception that their child needed disciplining: "I had another [parent] walk into my room one time at open house and she goes 'Thank God he finally has a male teacher!' and that was the perception. She talked so bad about this little boy."

Dan went on to point out that the narrative we were reading might also reveal how parents' hetero-normative views might be influencing the protagonist's ability to be an effective teacher:

If students are saying this, are they getting it from their parents, are the parents thinking the same thing the students are thinking and concerned? You know, because the gayness issue, are they saying 'I'm not sending them to this gay man's classroom?' Something like that?

Dan extended our discussion of stereotypes of men and raised another point that struck home with some of the other participants: that the choice to work in an elementary school could often make a man feel that he was under suspicion of homosexuality.

Brian supported this notion by relating his experience when he moved to a new school: "One of my new colleagues on my grade level team was really scrutinizing me and wanted to know was I married, did I have children... The

implication was that she wants to make sure I'm not gay." Brian also added to Dan's thoughts by suggesting that another suspicion of men elementary school teachers is that they could be paedophiles. Dan explained his thoughts this way:

It's shocking to me that students would already be picking up on that also. We don't know what grade this is but, for them to understand that, the students are saying "Because you're a male elementary school teacher, you're gay." They have that perception of male elementary school teachers, the students already have that perception: "There is something wrong with you, you're gay." Because that's the reason you're asking that, so you're an elementary school teacher and therefore you must be gay and so there is something wrong with you.

Clyde also found that his teaching experience included a certain defensiveness in order to defuse any suspicious feelings towards him because, as he explained

early on, I picked up that I needed to assure people that I was safe so I would intentionally bring up my spouse and talk about things that I thought were very expected of this general idea of what men are like in hopes that I made the parents feel comfortable, my peers feel comfortable, the students... It's like the whole gay Boy Scout leaders thing. It's not the same thing but yet there is at least one element in our society that's really afraid of allowing people who don't fit these stereotypes to be in leadership positions or in contact with children.

Fear of gay influence on children continues in US society as evidenced by efforts by organizations like the Boy Scouts of America to remove any openly gay individual from their leadership ranks. A recent example was the removal of Cub Scout Den Leader Jennifer Tyrrell from her Bridgeport, Ohio Troop 109 after another scout leader complained to Scout leadership. Tyrrell was told "that her sexual orientation 'did not meet the high standards of conduct set by the Boy Scouts of America'" (Donaldson, 2012).

Brian humorously challenged the hetero-normative assumptions that have led to concern over having gay men in contact with children:

I don't know. There was this whole thing that if you're a male elementary school teacher you're automatically gay—as if that's a problem. Even if you were, I mean, who cares, you know? Catholic school kids have a nun for a teacher, they don't grow up to become a nun. There is this idea that you're gay and if you are gay, you're going to rub it off on those kids...

Both Dan and AJ suggested these situations are solely a problem for men teachers. Dan asked “Do we ever ask the female teacher if they’re concerned about if they’re gay or not?”

The narrative’s introduction also referred to the sorts of privileges, like hiring preference, that often accrue to a man who chooses to teach in the elementary. The bulk of the story highlights one of the dangers of that preference: that it is based on the expectation of a stereotypical role for the hired man. As Clyde explained, the story illustrates the precarious situation “that along with it is a whole set of expectations about what role you shall play as a man, it’s already been prescribed in a very specific way.” AJ explained that the assumptions that were probably unvoiced by the teacher’s interviewers led to the administration’s placement of more disciplinary-problem boys into the man’s classroom. Several of us were surprised that this occurred despite this being the teacher’s first year teaching.

Dan wondered if there had ever been an instance when classroom choice for a girl student was determined based on gender. Dan’s comment led the group to also identify a complimentary, if unexpressed parallel theory: that women teachers are incapable of handling the task of teaching certain children. Brian suggested that the discourse might be “we don’t want these boys to get the wrong role model, or we don’t want them to start acting like girls.” The group was uncertain whether this was the intent of the administrator’s actions. Dan suggested that “they’re letting you take over the problem, they’re giving you the problem,” as if the administrators and other teachers were saying to the man teacher ‘We couldn’t handle the problem so you get the problem.’”

Both Dan and AJ felt that the story’s most important message was that men should feel comfortable acting in nurturing ways towards their students. Dan suggested such actions challenged stereotypes by sending the message that “it’s alright to love, just like the female teachers are deemed as you’re ‘a loving, caring person’ men teachers are there to love, nurture and care. We’re there for the same reason,” and AJ added that it was important that teachers stand by nurturing teaching philosophies even if to do so is in conflict with a school’s environment. They suggested that these actions were necessary so that our students could see alternative gender models. In this case, Dan saw this narrative’s moral as “men are loving and caring, and it’s alright for boys to see that and to be loved, which I think teaches them to love and care.” Brian agreed and expanded on the idea that men teachers can play a role in conveying the message “that men are not just drill sergeants. That a boy can grow up to be a man who has a range of emotions.”

Bringing Feminist Thought into Our Discussion of Nonconformity and Stereotypes

Being a man in a women-populated space does not assure absolute or continual privilege. Because of our numerical rarity as men teachers, sometimes our presence is a confusing, first experience for those we come in contact with. John, as a pre-Kindergarten teacher, found that some of his parents held strong reservations regarding his ability to fulfil his professional obligations:

During parent conferences, I had five parents tell me to my face “I was really nervous for you being my child’s teacher.” It was because I was a man, not because it was my first year teaching, or because I had just moved to [the state] and never interacted with southern culture and things like that before. It was because I was a male.

Negative reactions to the presence of men in the very youngest grades might also stem from those adults’ theories on the role of men in society. Confusion ensues when a man occupies a space that has been identified as the domain of the domestic, nurturing woman. His students’ parents were incapable—at least at first—of accepting a man in the role of nurturer of their three and four year old children.

Examining expectations of bodies and social needs.

The memory story above treats the man’s body as central to the story as the protagonist renounces those masculine identities expected of him by his peers. Connell explained that “renunciation means giving up every day masculine privileges and styles of interaction and also has important consequences for sexuality and emotional expression” (Connell, 2006, p. 131). Unfortunately making such choices meant de-privileging for our protagonist.

In *A Few Extra Boys* (above) the analysis group confronted a common expectation among teaching staff and community members: that men teachers should exhibit hyper-masculine qualities (both physical and behavioural) as an anecdote to the preponderance of women in the teaching field and as a disciplining force for students deemed “troubled.” These idealized notions of masculinity were also identified as common themes in the work of Foster and Newman whose participants reported that they were seen as a “discipline man” or “father figure” (2005, p. 345). In this story the protagonist is given *a few extra boys* in his first year of teaching because the administration believes that these boys, who have been identified as discipline problems or in need of a “positive male role model,” would benefit from the protagonist’s gender enactment.

The story confronts these commonly held ideas, like the need for men to have large and well-defined muscles, when the teacher reveals that he doesn’t resemble this idealized man that his students expect him to be. He also reveals that an

expectation of the staff is that he implements behaviourist disciplinary methods as part of some sort of “tough love” program for his students. The author painstakingly shows his readers that he does not subscribe to these definitions of the masculine body or expectations of masculine discipline. His story rejects his community’s attempts to locate a hyper-masculine identity within his body, which is a rejection of what researchers like Cushman (2008) have shown is often the compelling reason for hiring men teachers.

Although this story could be used to highlight what is wrong or broken in our school culture—something that we devoted much of our time during analysis—I believe that it can also be viewed for a positive message about non-traditional men taking up important roles of influence, like teaching, and bettering education through their example and their efforts to care for their students without enacting hegemonic masculine identities. Goodman and Kelly explained that “the need is not for men who simply pass on the traditional male-centred culture unproblematically. To make a significant difference, we need more men who will mediate culture from an anti-sexist perspective” (Goodman & Kelly, 1988, p. 1). Our discussants identified the man in this story as a positive example of embodying through thoughts and actions this anti-sexist perspective.

Confronting Patriarchal Notions of Schooling with a Pedagogy of Love.

While our analysis concluded that the story primarily focused on the protagonist’s attempts to navigate the stereotypical expectations of gender expressed by colleagues and students, the story also provided a springboard for discussions about our expectations for the raising and schooling of children. Much of that conversation focused on the conflict between the protagonist’s belief in teaching as a nurturing action (Noddings, 1992) and teaching in a behaviourist manner. Noddings argued for a reorganization of schooling, away from “the modernist view of progress and its outmoded tools” and towards “a multiplicity of models designed to accommodate the multiple capacities and interests of students” (Noddings, 1992, p. 173). Much like our story’s author, Noddings criticizes the continuing belief that “we can improve education merely by designing a better curriculum, finding and implementing a better form of instructions, or instituting a better form of classroom management.” She concludes that “these things won’t work” (Noddings, 1992, p. 173).

In her work, Maher found that a classic view of education was that “the whole question of the teacher’s authority becomes confounded with, trivialized, and buried by the main issue of concern to outside powers, namely the maintenance of ‘classroom discipline.’” (Maher, 1999, p. 47). Our author and discussants Dan and AJ argued that it should be expected that men also take on nurturing and caring roles in children’s lives, and that school communities need to allow them to do so without hoisting upon them unrealistic expectations that men teach best when they

are tyrannical disciplinarians whom their students fear. Unfortunately expectations like these are prevalent in public school education: Priegert Coulter and McNay explained that “although all the men in our study saw themselves as different from ‘traditional macho’ or ‘jock’ male teachers, they were, in many instances, explicitly advised to use a stereotypical masculinity for disciplining students” (Priegert Coulter & McNay, 1993, p. 407).

Goodman and Kelly argued against those disciplining practices in our schools by explaining that “the education of children has an impact on our society in general, and the unchallenged perpetuation of patriarchal practices and attitudes eventually affects us all” (Goodman & Kelly, 1988, p.8) and Grumet explained that education must embrace a postmodern view that “what is fundamental is that although there is no one way of being concerned with children, we cannot deny our responsibility for the future whatever form our projects of nurturance assume” (Grumet, 1988, p. 7). Our discussants cheered-on the protagonist to keep up his efforts to take a nurturing approach to education, but we also understood that to do so meant to work against his colleagues, administration, and possibly students’ families’ beliefs.

Goodman and Kelly also identified such actions as important to the profeminist teacher, but also cautioned that by “questioning masculine notions of epistemology, and advocating for greater equality and social justice, the profeminist teacher risks being accused of professional misconduct (e.g., deviating from the standardized and approved curriculum, indoctrinating impressionable young children against community values)” (Goodman & Kelly, 1988, p. 7-8). Fortunately for his school’s children, the protagonist took such profeminist ideas to heart, and like hooks explained of her work at the university level, he taught his students “it was expected that we would bring a quality of care and even ‘love’ to our students” (hooks, 1994, p. 194).

A Final Look at the Challenges of Essentialized Notions of Masculine Identity

Like we found in our story analysis discussion, Foster and Newman’s participants reported that more often than not, “the people who dealt the blows [to identity] were with one exception, women....These women’s gendered perceptions and expectations were at odds with the men’s views of themselves (Foster & Newman, 2005, p. 354). While it could be tempting to claim the role of the victim in situations like those presented in the above vignette, AJ suggests that we must first take a profeminist stance and examine our own complicity in the conditions of our society:

I appreciate this topic and conversation and the thought that it brings up, and then I also want to balance that with the clear perspective that I love and support women, and it’s not a bashing of women. Men have to take

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responsibility for the views that people have about men...We have been in charge and we have made it so that women treat us the way they do.

AJ's comment is an example of a situation in which men elementary teachers often find themselves. Because they are "out-of-place" in their workspace, they often become aware of privileging/de-privileging discourses delivered to them by the women who surround them. The real challenge comes not when we recognize the ways in which our gender privileges men above women, like in the opening conversation about hair styles, but when we find ways to go beyond giving lip-service to women and actually take action for a more equitable workplace.

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Appendix A: Collective Analysis Guide

Guiding questions for collective analysis of teacher narratives (derived from Table 1, Kivel & Johnson, 2009, p. 112):

1. What is this story about? What does it mean?
2. What is the author's theory on what it means to be a man teacher?
3. Literal interpretation of the text. Participants should underline verbs (actions) and circle adjectives (emotions). A chart should be used to record the following information:
 - a. Activity of the author
 - b. Emotions of the author
 - c. Interests/wishes of the author
 - d. Activity of others
 - e. Emotions of others
 - f. Interests/wishes of others
 - g. Contradictions
 - h. Empty spaces/silences
 - i. Observations about the use of language
2. How has the author/narrator been created in the story?
3. How have others in the text been created in the story?
4. What does the story mean?
5. How can the author's understanding of what it means to be a man and a teacher be applied to how boys are taught to be men and individuals are taught to be teachers in our society?
6. What is the larger message of the story beyond the author's individual experience?

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