

**Last Men Standing:
The Absence of Males in K-12 Education and the Impact on Adolescent Males**

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“The two types of mind and heard (i.e. male and female) are distinct and were designed to have their combined effect on the youthful character. Any scheme of education and training that leaves out either is defective and cannot secure that symmetrical development which is possible under the other plan.”

- Report of the U.S. Commissioner of Education for the Year 1887-1888 (1889)

I love watching you interact with the students in the classroom, but as a man, I don't know if I will be able to interact with them in the same way as you do. It's just different for male teachers. I looked at the pre-service teacher observing in my classroom and was not sure how to respond. As a teacher with over a decade of experience in the classroom, I admit that there are some practices and approaches that I have adopted as second nature, many of which are better suited to a female teacher than a male teacher such as hugging a student who is excited to see me or calling students pet names like “honey” or “sweetie.” Although his teaching career had not even begun, this teacher candidate realized that his role in the classroom – and even in the school – would be very different than mine, simply because of his gender.

Although men and women are increasingly considered equal in many professions, in contemporary education, there are significantly more women in K-12 classrooms than men. This trend began at the turn of the nineteenth century when nearly 75% of all American teachers were female (Albisetti, 1993, p. 255), and has continued into present-day classrooms. In twenty-first century classrooms, however, the dearth of male teachers is noted, and there are academic and social impacts on staff and students. There are many reasons why men choose not to enter into

teaching – salary, gender dynamics, professional status, and physical contact concerns – but the lack of males within classrooms (specifically through grade eight) has both academic and social impacts with boys showing less academic growth and indicating lower levels of curricular interest in courses taught by female teachers.

While solutions (and the exact reasons behind the student impact) are not immediately evident, it is evident that the lack of male teachers in K-12 classrooms must be addressed in order to benefit students and transform the profession of teaching, and changes must occur in today's teacher training programs to positively impact tomorrow's leaders. By addressing the feminization of teaching, it is possible to see that the dearth of male teachers is rooted in educational tradition and that males have valid concerns about entering into careers in K-12 education. By further examining the impact of male teachers on student academic and social progress, and the need for more men in K-12 classrooms, it is possible to see potential solutions for teacher education programs.

History of Women in Teaching in America

Gender politics are not new to education. In fact, for well over a century they have been the topic of discussion. Catherine Beecher saw education as the only means of providing women with opportunities to independently make a difference in the world, and in the early part of the nineteenth century (prior to the era when women could attend college, enter into ministry, or train to be doctors or lawyers), she began campaigning to allow women into the profession of teaching. She believed that working in the classroom would afford women “influence, respectability, and independence” without compromising their modesty or threatening their feminine nature. “Beecher came to believe that women were likely to be the most effective teachers not only of girls, but of boys as well” (Goldstein, 2014, loc 330). In 1823, she

established the Hartford Female Seminary to educate young ladies in Latin, Greek, algebra, chemistry, philosophy and language.

This controversial move served as a platform for Beecher who argued that women were an ideal teaching force because they would cost less and did not have a family relying on them for income. This effort combined with Horace Mann's establishment of normal schools (used to train teachers) in Massachusetts led to the transformation of teaching from a largely male-profession to a female-dominated career path. "By the early 1840s, four times as many new Massachusetts teachers were female than male...The Boston masters, an association of university-educated male high school teachers, complained that bringing normal school alumnae into the classroom would weaken academic standards and school discipline, and that adolescent would run amok" (Goldstein, 2014, loc 472). Mann, however, noted that women in the classroom not only saved Massachusetts taxpayers over \$11,000 annually, but they served as pillars of virtue, morality, and faith. Mann even went so far as to note that women belonged in the classroom because of their angelic natures and maternal instincts:

As a teacher of schools...how divinely does she come, her head encircled with a halo of heavenly light, her feet sweetening the earth on which she treads, and the celestial radiance of her benignity making vice begin its work of repentance through very envy of the beauty of virtue (Mann, 1853, p. 37).

By 1847, Beecher (with the insight and assistance of Mann) had establish the Board of National Popular Education, a missionary-style teaching approach that would allow for a cohort of female teachers to travel to frontier schools to educate youth. With limited training, and even less understanding of the living conditions of the West, the young women were sent from Illinois and Wisconsin to Michigan and Tennessee, among other states, with the purpose of establishing

schools, and Sunday schools, if necessary. This effort, combined with low teacher salaries, limited professional respect for female educators, and a genuine bias against women's intellectual aptitude led to a shift in thinking about teaching. Goldstein (2014) notes: "Teaching became understood less as a career than a philanthropic vocation or romantic calling" (loc. 545).

The Feminization of the Teaching Profession in America.

Although teaching had slowly become known as a woman's calling, by 1925, the profession had been so significantly feminized that males entering into the profession were questioned. In fact, by 1860, "women outnumbered men among teachers in the United States and their preponderance has never been reversed" (Clifford, 1989, p. 293). Indeed, a 1925 English government report about training elementary school teachers detailed teaching as a "field of effort for the girl of average intellectual capacity and normal maternal instincts," but warned that "for a man to spend his life teaching children of school age is to waste it in doing easy and not very valuable work he would not do if he was fit to do anything else" (cited in Skelton, 2001, p. 122).

The profession of teaching so transformed over the course of the nineteenth century that women were effectively educating the nation's children almost exclusively, and by 1891, the Chicago Board of Education began encouraging the "increased hiring of male teachers" (Montgomery, 2009, p. 221). Similar efforts to hire male school teachers were undertaken in Philadelphia in 1893, while in New York, male teachers began to complain that the profession had been cheapened by women who were willing to work for unreasonably low wages (Montgomery, 2009). Indeed, in an examination of Massachusetts teachers from 1840-1860, Geraldine Joncich Clifford found that the combination of high male wages in other fields and an increasing effort to reduce the costs of schooling "was the single most important cause of shifts

to women teachers” (Clifford, 1991, p. 121). Finances may not have been the only driving factor in the feminization of education, but they were a large force that still dominates the landscape of education today.

Politics and social expectations further feminized the profession. During the era of the American Civil War, many men who served as teachers voluntarily entered the military while others were drafted. These men vacated positions that were filled by educated women, and when the war ended, many of them returned to more financially lucrative professions than classroom teaching: “Responding to the call of their states to join the army, hosts of men left their classrooms never to return. While many of them lost their lives on the battlefield, more of them came back to enter occupations which promised larger financial returns than teaching” (Elbree, 1939, p. 206). The former landscape of male-taught classroom shifted irrevocably, in part because of the war, and gender balance was never regained within American classrooms because other benefits were realized once men vacated their teaching positions. Williard S. Elsbree (1939) explained that the unique political and economic situation of the Civil War era presented specific challenges in education that ultimately promoted the feminization of education:

To rely alone upon men was certain to spell failure. The cost of attracting and retaining in the profession the proportion of males that formerly held sway in the classroom would have met with a storm of opposition from taxpayers. New schoolhouses, normal schools, institutes and educational supplies had made heavy inroads in local and state budgets and some measure of relief seemed almost imperative. Since it was possible to secure the services of equally qualified women teachers for as little as one-third to one-half the salaries required by men, the solution finally resolved seemed inevitable (p. 206).

While the Civil War was but one factor that led to nineteenth-century feminization of teaching, it had a marked impact on the future of teaching and the gendered nature of the profession.

As schools became increasingly feminized in the beginning of the twentieth century, efforts to recruit and retain male teachers began in earnest in many parts of the country. This was rooted in the belief that “male teachers provided stronger discipline than females and served as role models for male pupils” (Montgomery, 2009, p. 222). The desire to recruit and retain male teachers has never truly gone away. There remains a dearth of male teachers within American schools, particularly in grades K-8. While the path to the feminization was paved by political, social, and economic factors, contemporary males have a distinct view of teaching in the modern American classroom and are often deterred from teaching for specific reasons. Although there are diverse explanations as to why a male would have reservations about entering into the profession, the most commonly cited are the status of the teaching profession; salary; working in a female-dominant profession; and physical contact with children (Cushman, 2005). In order to fully understand the impact of the lack of male teachers in the classroom on adolescent students, it is important to examine each of these areas of concern briefly.

Causes for concern: Reservations men have about teaching

There are many theories regarding why teaching might be attractive or uninviting to males. Literature, however, emphasizes four specific areas. These are the historically low salary; the relatively poor public perception and status of the profession; the feminization of the profession (both regarding the number of female co-workers that a male teacher would have and the association of teaching as woman’s work); and concerns regarding physical contact with children. It is important to examine each briefly in order to understand the male attitude toward teaching as a career in contemporary society.

Salary.

One of the most commonly cited reasons why men are not interested in teaching as a profession is that the salaries have been historically low (Cushman, 2005). Teacher salaries are largely determined locally with districts setting a salary schedule based on state-determined base pay, then incrementally increasing teacher pay based upon experience and education, and being capped at a predetermined maximum salary. Typically, per union negotiations and state law, teachers are paid equally for equal service (Murnane, Singer & Willitt, 1989). For decades, however, teacher salaries have failed to keep up with inflation and actual costs of living, causing many males to question teaching as a career (Murnane, Singer, & Willett, 1989). This was not always the case, though. Dana Goldstein (2014) notes that “In 1850, four-fifths of New York’s eleven thousand teachers were women, yet two-thirds of the state’s \$800,000 in teacher salaries was paid to men. It was not unusual for male teachers to earn twice as much as their female coworkers” (loc. 623). Feminist activists like Susan B. Anthony were outraged and insisted on equality within the profession, even going so far as to announce the following at the 1853 New York Teachers Association annual meeting:

It seems to me gentlemen, that none of you quite comprehend the cause of the disrespect of which you complain. Do you not see that so long as society says a woman is incompetent to be a lawyer, minister, or doctor, but has ample ability to be a teacher, that every man of you who chooses this profession tacitly acknowledges that he has no more brains than a woman? And this, too, is the reason that teaching is a less lucrative position, as here men must compete with the cheap labor of women? (Goldstein, 2014, loc. 624).

Although women would not early equal pay for another half century, the feminization (and resulting change in salary) led to a shift in interest among male teachers who recognized that the profession was not the lucrative position that it once had been.

High need fields like math and science are particularly hard to fill because the salary of a teacher is not competitive, and will not entice highly capable individuals in these male-dominated fields to enter into a challenging career for a lower salary with little opportunity to become economically competitive (given the salary schedule previously described). Murnane, Singer, and Willett (1989) note: “The logic underlying their argument is that college graduates trained in chemistry and physics command higher salaries in business and industry than do those trained in the humanities” (p. 327). Mills, Martino, and Lingard (2010) acknowledge that pay is a significant contributor toward the dearth of male teachers: “it is regularly argued that to increase the involvement of men in teaching, and in particular primary education, the status of the profession needs to be improved through higher pay levels” (p. 358).

Cushman (2005) studied male high school students and practicing male teachers and found that all were concerned about salary: “salaries still did not seem fair or reasonable when compared with the salaries of peers in other occupations” (p. 231). While many teachers note that they don’t enter the profession for the money, males working in the classroom note that because of the traditionally female teaching force, the salaries have remained low: “If there were more males, traditionally they would have been seen as the breadwinners, so maybe the money would have been better” (Cushman, 2005, p. 231). In general, the salary does not appear to be the deciding factor in whether men enter into the teaching profession, but it is a consideration, especially for men who recognize that their salary in a historically feminized profession is less than what they could be making in other male-dominated fields.

Indeed, pay serves as a dominant factor that promotes many young males to reject teaching as a career option: “61% of [males surveyed] who had decided against teaching rated salary as a moderate or extreme concern” (Cushman, 2005, p. 232). Young males recognize the disparity in pay between teaching and other professions and this causes many of them to choose other professions. “Like many other so-called feminized occupations, such as nursing, the salaries are lower...” (Mills et al, 2010, p. 358). Despite many advancements in teaching, the chronically low salaries of teachers are one of the remnants of the early days of the feminization of the profession, and one of the factors that drive males away from considering teaching as a career.

Status.

Within the United States, teachers are rarely considered to be in the upper echelons of society. Indeed, status is of concern for males deciding whether or not to enter into the teaching profession. Status in the teaching profession is often based upon the perceived intellectual capacities of the individual teacher (assumed levels of education, job requirements, and teaching experience), so males in elementary and middle school teaching positions are typically given less status than their counterparts working in secondary classrooms (Cushman, 2005).

Many practicing teachers note that they rarely feel that they are given the status and respect in the community and that teachers are no longer looked up to as respected pillars of the community. This is acutely noted by male primary school teachers who believe that the caring and nurturing qualities of teachers often associated with teaching undermine their roles as teachers: “the association of caring with primary teaching is significant in defining teaching as this level as a low-status, women’s occupation” (Cushman, 2005, p. 230). Carrington and McPhee (2008) note that “working with young children is often associated with nurturing and care, and as a

consequence of such constructions, primarily teaching is often viewed as a quintessentially female domain by potential recruits to the profession, practicing teachers and the general public” (p. 109). This nurturing and caring aspect of working with children and adolescents results in a profession that can be threatening and off-putting to males considering teaching young students, especially those who value status and a “macho” image (Cushman, 2005).

Interestingly, the status of the profession is of greater concern to younger males than their older peers considering teaching. Older male teachers did not believe that their status within the community had diminished greatly, but high school males indicated that they had moderate to extreme concern about the status of teachers, perhaps because popular media has effectively promoted elementary school classrooms as “a no-man’s” world and a low-status women’s occupation” (Cushman, 2005, p. 231). Erden, Ozgun and Ciftci (2011) reinforce this, noting that the status of the profession is a significant deterrent, especially to males considering working in the primary grades who are often faced with questions from friends and family regarding their future career. The negative perception of males who enter into teaching (specifically to work with younger children) is often surrounded by confusion (*Why would a male want to work in a female-laden career?*), misunderstanding (*Did the man understand what he was training for?*), or surprise (*Why would you go to college to have such a menial position?*) (Erden et al, 2011). It is these questions and concerns that frequently surround the low status of the teaching profession and preclude potential male teachers from choosing careers in the classroom.

Women’s work.

In a feminized profession like teaching, it is of little surprise to discover that men are reluctant to begin teaching because of both the number of females who serve as teachers and because of the promotion of gendered roles within the school house. “The feminization of the

teaching profession is not a recent phenomenon but can be traced back to the advent of mass education” (Carrington & McPhee, 2008, p. 109). After reformers like Beecher, Anthony, and Mann began promoting the role of women in the classroom, females dominated the classroom landscape by sheer volume, if not by power. According to a U.S. Department of Education report (2014), only 24 percent of teachers are male. This figure is even lower within certain subject areas and grades, such as 8th grade English, where only 17 percent of all teachers are male (Dee, 2005), and is lowest within early childhood development classrooms where the male teachers make up only one percent of the population (Sumsion, 2005).

For many men, this is a deterrent as they don’t want to be a gender minority and are frequently concerned with segregated gender roles that may exist within the school house community (Haase, 2010). Not only does a dominant female workforce determine lunch time conversation, but it dictates the workplace culture and community. Male teachers may feel out of place or struggle with their role within the larger school setting. Additionally, because of their solitary nature within the primary grades, many male teachers are forced to adopt the role of father figure for young students. While female teachers may be willing to act in a maternal manner, many male teachers struggle with the lack of choice and the reality that the paternal role has been thrust upon them (Cushman, 2005).

Beyond the school culture, many men find themselves in a situation where, for the first time, they are a gender minority; some come to question whether their position was earned because of their masculinity or because of their expertise within the classroom environment and academic performance. Cushman (2005) noted that some men commented that “even though they had worked hard to qualify as a teacher, they perhaps had been awarded their teaching positions for a reason they considered had little to do with their teaching ability” (p. 232). When

there is the assumption that a male was hired because of his gender, he is often expected to abide by and promote gender norms. For example, serving as a male role model, a disciplinarian, or the physically strong profession are all roles that male teachers commented on as both confusing and frustrating (Cushman, 2005). The complex nature of working with a heavily female workforce in a setting that is dominated by feminized traditions leads many young men and potential teachers to question their role within the classroom, especially at the primary grades.

Although older males who transition into teaching from another career, after gaining other professional experience and advancing in maturity, have fewer concerns with working with a predominantly female staff, younger males believed that their female counterparts treated them in a somewhat ignorant manner by emphasizing conversations that fell along gender lines (i.e. sports and vehicles rather than more broad reaching topics). Additionally, given that many female teachers view male teachers as ideal disciplinarians, many men find that they are forced to adopt the role of “dispensers of discipline in schools” (Cushman, 2005, p. 235). This role (along with other such as coach) often further promotes gender stereotypes and concerns that males have regarding staff assimilation (Cushman, 2005).

Physical contact.

The fourth aspect that frequently deters males from entering into the teaching profession – physical contact with students - is perhaps the most difficult contact as it is often inherent with teaching, but also the emotional aspect of feminized teaching for many men. Because of the feminized nature of teaching, males are often viewed with skepticism when they elect to teach elementary school students, and are treated differently than their female counterparts. While all teachers are expected to abide by moral conduct and avoid all inappropriate conduct, males

frequently have specific concerns that regarding working within close proximity with young children.

Given the feminization of the profession, men who elect to enter into teaching are often questioned and even considered suspect for wanting to work with young children. Men who decide to become classroom teachers, particularly for younger grades, are often viewed negatively because of “homophobic reactions from...others, suspicions regarding the men’s motives for working with small children, questions regarding men’s abilities to care for children...”(Sargent, 2004, p. 176). Indeed, many male teachers note that they are constantly working under suspicion; because teaching is dominated by females who are considered nurturing and maternal, it is questionable to have a male (who is socially viewed as dominant and powerful) to be working with young children and adolescents. The role of the male in the school house is also frequently questioned simply because of traditional gender norms.

Men are unmistakably seen as inferior to their women peers in terms of providing a nurturing adult to ‘be there’ for the children all day. This is not a trivial matter in the pre-school and primary grades where nurturing is understood to be a major component of teaching. Early education is strongly associated with ‘motherhood’ and, as such, with physical contact and tender ministrations. While women teachers can safely and uncritically integrate these behaviors into their pedagogy as a means of transmission of curriculum content, men cannot (Sargent, 2004, p. 179).

This distinction between what is acceptable and not acceptable from teachers of different genders does not go unnoticed by male teachers. Sargent (2004) notes “Almost every teacher spoke of his reluctance to be in physical contact with the children because the action might be misconstrued.

Touching the children, according to all the participants, can be a sign the men are pedophiles or are gay” (p. 178).

Furthermore, because of the feminized nature of teaching and the reinforcement of gender roles (especially within primary grade settings), there are often perceived double standards for male teachers and female teachers. Sargent (2004) noted this: “All of the teachers whom I interviewed contend that school policies regarding the touching of children are enforced differentially for men and women and thus produce disparate working conditions...This affects the men’s teaching style, deprives children of needed affection, and reproduces the image of men as not being sources of love and nurturing” (p. 178).

Female teachers almost never face this sort of moral panic as they are working in a highly feminized profession and are expected to fulfill their roles as nurturing, moral figures. Given that this was one of the primary reasons that teaching transitioned from a male-dominated career to an almost exclusively female profession, it is evident that there are multiple causes for concern among young men considering teaching. This attitude of a double standard for men and women, however, does little to promote a gender-equal workplace and diminishes the working conditions, relationships with colleagues, and feelings of self-worth among male teachers. “For the majority of the men, their inability to respond with ease to the children’s needs compounded their anxiety and confusion over the physical contact issue” (Cushman, 2005, p. 236). While many want to act as nurturers and comfort a young child in need, they recognize that there is a double standard among male and female teachers and they frequently struggle to communicate appropriate boundaries to children: “This reinforces the notion that men and women have different teaching styles, where nurturing is permissible for one gender, but not the other” (Cushman, 2004, p. 236). Sargent (2004) reinforces this notion: “Nurturing children isn’t just

seen as something women can do better, it is perceived as a talent that men lack. In fact, many seem to feel that men might do more harm than good in their interactions with children” (p. 181).

Clearly, concerns regarding physical touch (not just what is perceived as appropriate, but also how to support children in a way that is natural, but does not cause female colleagues to raise questions) abound for males in teaching. Given that teaching is viewed as a nurturing profession, and much rests on making children feel cherished with the school environment, men frequently see that they must work much harder than their female counterparts to find balance with any physical contact and to prove their skill, credibility, and trustworthiness in the profession. Recognizing how difficult it is to balance these gendered expectations with curricular and administrative expectations, it is easy to see why some males might be reluctant to enter into the teaching profession, particularly for primary grade positions.

Meaning.

Clearly there is cause for concern when an entire segment of a population avoids or questions entry into a career path because it is inhospitable or unsupportive of them. Teaching in the United States today is largely unwelcoming to men because of factors that came about because of the feminization of the profession. Sargent (2004) noted, “There is widespread belief that men’s lack of participation in women’s work is the result of men’s own resistance to the resulting downward mobility associated with feminized jobs” (p. 175). In reality, though, with four major areas of concern, it is evident that males considering the teaching profession factor multiple aspects of the field of education into their thoughts before rejecting it or entering into it. Unfortunately, these four aspects of the profession - salary, status, feminization, and physical contact - not only contribute to the highly gendered nature of teaching, but also mean that adolescent boys are suffering academically and socially. Not only does a gender gap among

teachers exist because of the feminization of the profession, but a gender gap among students is evident, as girls outperform boys in classes traditionally taught by females (Dee, 2005).

Boys in the classroom: Gendered learning

Boys are graduating at lower rates than girls (Lewin, 2006), enrolling in and graduating from college at lower rates (Dee, 2006; Majzub & Rais, 2010), and underperforming in subjects like reading (Dee, 2005). Males made up 50 percent of all ninth grade students in the year 2014, yet they received only 48 percent of all high school diplomas, and they comprised 43 percent of registered college students, yet were awarded only 40 percent of all bachelor's degrees (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015, as cited by Owens, 2016). This gender gap is not news to many in education and its impact has been noted for some time with the gradual decline of males on college campuses and dwindling dominance in STEM-based fields that were once almost exclusively filled with men (Carrington & McPhee, 2008). While the persistence gap (the disparity between what a student starts and what they complete) is evident at high school and college graduation ceremonies, the achievement levels of young males is rarely more evident than in the K-12 classroom, and is seemingly linked to the dearth of male teachers within classroom settings.

When children enter into kindergarten, they perform similarly on standardized assessments of reading and math. “But a few years later, by the spring of the 3rd grade, boys, on average outperform girls in math and science, while the girls outperform the boys in reading. Disconcertingly, NAEP results show that for children between the ages of 9 and 13, the gender gaps in science and reading roughly double and the math gap increases by two-thirds” (Dee, 2006, p. 70). This suggests an alarming trend – one which persists on through high school. Dee (2006) continues: “In reading, 17-year-old boys score 31 percent of a standard deviation below

17-year-old girls” (p. 70). Another way to communicate this is to note that by their junior year in high school, the reading proficiency level of boys is approximately 1.5 years below that of their female peers (Dee, 2005). A large portion of boys’ underperformance in reading is due to the fact that English/Language Arts courses are taught predominantly – 83 percent in 8th grade - by women, and the curriculum, dynamics, and interactions are colored by the teacher’s gender (Dee, 2005).

Not only to boys underperform on standardized assessments, but they are much more likely to repeat a grade and are less likely to complete college and attain a degree (Dee, 2006). Additionally, boys are less likely to have a positive attitude toward schooling and are more likely to be seen as apathetic and unmotivated (Van Houtte, 2004). Both Dee (2005) and Van Houtte (2004) note that there are greater variances, academically speaking, within boys than girls, thus making them more likely to be extreme achievers or low performers and enthusiastic learners or distracted risk-takers. Although these individual traits do little to explain gendered trends, it appears that boys on average are struggling academically more than their female peers are.

While researchers have suggested a variety of root causes ranging from biological and physiological differences to increased pressure for boys to eschew academics in favor of popularity, there is little certainty regarding root causes. Furthermore, Van Houtte (2004) notes that academic achievement may be incongruous to adolescent boys developing what they view as a masculine identity. Additionally, gender habits are reinforced in adolescence through the almost exclusive association of individuals with peers of the same gender, magnifying distinctions between boys and girls. Although all of these are potential factors in what leads to the achievement gap between boys and girls, it is important to consider the impact of teacher gender on student performance.

Teacher gender and male achievement

One emerging theory that helps to explain the achievement gap between boys and girls in school is the gender gap within the classroom. Teacher gender has the potential to not only influence communications between a teacher and student, but also allows for a teacher to serve as a gender-specific role model for pupils. Regarding role models, Dee (2006) notes “students are more engaged, behave more appropriately, and perform at a higher level when taught by one who shares their gender (p. 70). While available evidence is scant (and at times contradictory), a review of the literature suggests that students who share the teacher’s gender feel a greater sense of sex-equity within the classroom; this is not to suggest that teachers consciously target students of the opposite gender, but a student who feels consistently discriminated against may struggle with content, curriculum, and their instructor (Dee, 2005).

The presence of a male teacher for male students, however, allows adolescent boys to have access to a role model within the classroom, and in a sense, prove that academic achievement is possible and admirable. “The potential existence of a ‘role model’ effect implies that a student will have improved intellectual engagement, conduct, and academic performance when assigned to a same-gender teacher” (Dee, 2005, p. 7). On the contrary, if a student lacks an academic role model of their same gender, they may fear being viewed in a stereotypically negative manner, and may refrain from being academically invested. In the classroom, however, the role model effect can have a positive impact because male teachers know how they themselves learned in childhood, and bring these methods into the classroom:

Boys tend to benefit from more active learning experiences more effectively conducted by male teachers. Boys prefer to learn through concrete hands on body kinesthetic activities while girls who excel in language ahead of boys prefer activities based upon

linguistic experiences and creativity. Thus it is suggested that boys' interest in school may be encouraged by the role modeling given by male teachers instead of female (Majzub & Rais, 2010, p. 686).

With males, this role model position can even take on a father-figure nature, teaching young men things outside of the academic curriculum which allow them to become more personally invested in their learning and the school environment (Mills et al, 2004).

While females attending high schools with a higher number of female teachers performed better academically, there were no additional educational gains among male students; given the dearth of male teachers, no anticipated gains for adolescent males can be expected in schools with predominantly female teachers. In fact, while a female teacher may lead to small positive gains on girls' test scores, she actually reduces the test scores of boys by .05 standard deviations (a statistically significant amount). Furthermore, while girls assigned to female science, English, and history teachers make positive academic progress, boys assigned to female teachers in these subjects suffer academically, especially science and reading. Interestingly enough, though, both girls and boys assigned to male math teachers make significant academic gains, although it is unclear why (Dee, 2005). Overall, "girls have better educational outcomes when taught by women and boys are better off when taught by men" (Dee, 2006).

The educational impact of a young boy having a female teacher are significant, and cannot be ignored.

For three subject areas – science, social studies, and English – the overall effect of having a woman teacher instead of a man raises the achievement of girls by 4 percent of a standard deviation and lowers the achievement of boys by roughly the same amount,

producing an overall gender gap of 8 percent of a standard deviation, no small matter if it can be assumed that this happened over the course of a single year. In fact, those estimates suggest that the effects of a year with a teacher of a particular gender are quite large (Dee, 2006, p, 72).

Indeed, there is a significant gender gap in reading and writing demonstrated in all countries participating in international testing that corroborates that girls are achieving and scoring in the top quartile at higher rates than their male peers (Sokal & Katz, 2008).

Not only are male students impacted academically – as evidenced by their lower high school and college graduation rates – but they are socially influenced as well. Male students express a dislike for and disengagement in school, in part because of the “dominance of female teachers and the lack of masculinity as expressed by the male teachers” (Majzub & Rais, 2010, p 686). Furthermore, boys are socially impacted in that when assigned to a female teacher, they are more likely to be seen as disruptive and report that they do not look forward to the class (Mills et al, 2004; Dee, 2005).

Clearly there are gender gaps not only in the teacher workforce, but there are academic and social implications for students as well. Gendered interactions between teachers and students influence test scores, teacher perceptions of student behavior and academic ability, and student engagement with core subjects. Young men appear to struggle more when assigned to female teachers, yet the lack of male teacher candidates (especially at the primary grades) makes it difficult to address this problem easily.

Why Male Teachers are the Solution

The gender achievement gap among male students is rooted in the fact that as a feminized profession, teaching has proven inaccessible or undesirable to potential male teachers. This dearth of males within the classroom has impacted not only the culture and community of schools, but has had academic and social consequences for male students, especially within the primary grades where the shortage is greatest. Indeed, assignment to an opposite-gender teacher reduces student achievement (as measured by standardized assessment data) by at least .042 standard deviations. “This effect size implies that just one year with a male English teacher would eliminate nearly a third of the gender gap in reading performance among 13 year olds” (Dee, 2005, p. 25). If only half of all middle school English teachers were male (instead of the current 17 percent that persists in middle-grade English classrooms), the reading gap that exists between male and female students would fall by approximately a third (Dee, 2005).

Existing literature acknowledges the need for more male classroom teachers. Sacks (2002) noted “boys in particular need strong, charismatic teachers who mix firm discipline with a good-natured acceptance of boyish energy. Concomitantly, a sharp increase in the number of male teachers is also needed, particularly at the elementary level where female teachers outnumber male teachers six to one” (p. 8). Although some would argue that this suggests that women are the problem and men are the solution, and that all of education would be reformed if more males were in classrooms, this is not the case.

Male teachers have specific qualities which allow them to serve as role models to promote gendered interactions and compassionate care of boyish behavior that might be intolerable to a female teacher. Furthermore, examining the subjects that boys struggle with the most (reading and writing), the large number of female teachers lead adolescent boys to view reading and writing as feminine activities; shifting the demographic – even slightly – to

incorporate more males into the classroom could shift this perception. Indeed, American boys' perceptions of their skill in reading and writing drops steadily over the course of elementary school, specifically during the years that boys begin to recognize normalized gender roles; shifting the teaching population to include more males could diminish this (Sokal & Katz, 2008).

Given the reality that boys are underachieving in the standard American school setting, it is essential that steps be taken to ensure that students of both genders are able to succeed academically and socially; by addressing the lack of male teachers in contemporary classrooms, it may be possible to remedy the current situation. Furthermore, adding male teachers to school staffs would allow both girls and boys to be increasingly successful in math: "Both girls and boys scored 7 percent and 8 percent of a standard deviation lower, respectively, [with a female teacher], than if they had a man" (Dee, 2006, p. 74). This implies that adding males into the teaching force would benefit students of both genders.

Furthermore, much as women were touted, in the days of Catharine Beecher, as the ideal teachers for girls who could then become teachers themselves, it is possible to see how a generation of boys educated by young men could become a generation of teachers who mentor another generation in the classroom. Clearly, though, this level of transformation within the world of education is not at hand, and several things must change in order to make teaching a desirable profession for males. Teacher education programs must aggressively change the way in which they recruit (and in turn retain) male teacher education candidates in order to utilize men as a resource for academically and socially struggling students.

Next Steps

Not only is there a dearth of male teachers within K-12 classrooms, but there is limited literature regarding what can be done to remedy the current situation. Prior to offering suggestions, it is essential to acknowledge that teacher education programs must rethink their recruiting strategies in order to attract a career-oriented population of intellectual, educationally-minded males; schools also must reconsider their institutionalized practices in order to retain male teachers who have the potential to positively impact struggling male students; and communities at large must adjust how they view teachers and the teaching profession in order to celebrate nurturing, inspiring males who can have a positive impact on young men. As a result of our current lack of male teachers, I offer the following. These are not research-based solutions, but remedies rooted in my professional teaching experience and interviews with aspiring and beginning male teachers. Although none of the following suggestions are rooted in research as of yet, I believe that each has the potential to lure successful, bright, enthusiastic males into the K-12 classroom in order to transform the academic experiences of adolescent males and inspire generations of young men.

Potential solutions range from service learning efforts that would provide males with supportive peers, increased pay to make teacher salaries competitive for the best and brightest recruits, allowing coaching options to males to show that teaching skills are much like coaching skills (and therefore less threatening to would-be teachers), and offering recruitment bonuses for high need populations so that the teaching force reflects the student population. Another suggestion is to develop cohorts of male teachers who are able to study together from various universities and get hired in the same schools. This approach would allow not only for an increased male presence to promote excellence for male students, but would provide a colleague with whom the male teacher can collaborate and could potentially shift the feminized dynamic

within the school setting. Finally, it is essential to shift the way in which communities view male teachers; rather than seeing them with skepticism and concern, male teachers should be seen as individuals with distinct personalities and unique qualities which contribute to a specific classroom dynamic. By viewing all male teachers with negativity, it is unlikely that communities will be able to recruit and retain successful individuals and thereby will see little change in the vulnerable male student population. Although all of these efforts appear to have promise and merit, it is challenging to know which avenue to take.

While I do not advocate single-sex classrooms and I recognize that there is conflicting literature to suggest that too much stock was placed in the power of the male teacher, any profession that has been feminized the way teaching has promoted gender inequity and cannot serve as a standard for the students or the community. Furthermore, as a female teacher, I believe that I do my best working with students of both genders, but if there is a way that my underperforming male students will have the opportunity to thrive academically, I do not feel diminished or invalidated as a professional. Instead, I see it as an opportunity to further promote success for all students. Given the serious nature of boys academic performance in the United States today, though, determining how to recruit and retain male teachers is worthy of consideration.

Recognizing the complex nature of this problem and the reality that it will not be solved overnight, it is impossible to conclude my research efforts during the term of my NEH Seminar. I have been inspired and begun to question established practices, but as a critical thinker, I see that without further investigation, a more thorough examination of the literature, and interviews with potential and practicing teachers, I am not able to adequately furnish an answer that addresses the realities of the situation. While I am loath to conclude with such ambiguity and uncertainty, I aim

to conduct a close examination of the above mentioned factors in order to determine how best to transform teacher education programs, school sites, and communities so that males will be attracted to and stay in the profession and male students will thrive academically.

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