A GENDERED STUDY OF MEN ELEMENTARY EDUCATORS THROUGH COLLECTIVE MEMORY WORK

by

CHRISTOPHER MICHAEL HANSEN

(Under the Direction of JoBeth Allen)

ABSTRACT

This qualitative, gendered study’s purpose was to explore, critique, and disrupt the discourses surrounding men elementary teachers and to use our new knowledge to better understand the lives of men and women educators. Starting from a critical, feminist framework, this study was guided by the overarching question how might engaging in collective memory work with men elementary school teachers assist us in better understanding our identity at the intersection of gender and profession?

Following Collective Memory Work methodology (Haug, 1983/1987), ten study participants from the southeastern U.S. met in facilitated, collective discussion in order to identify avenues for inquiry. A writing focus was identified by the researcher through discussion analysis, and narrative writing was undertaken individually by study participants. Once written, these anonymous, identity narratives were analyzed in collective meetings using a narrative analysis format similar to that used by Kivel and Johnson (2009). Narratives and discussion transcripts were used to create an analysis narrative of each of the participants’ stories. These analysis narratives (the original story texts, quotes from the discussions, and researcher analysis) were shared with participants,
and then participants engaged in voluntary, one-on-one reflective interviews. Interview excerpts were then integrated into the analysis narrative stories to elaborate on primary findings. The study concluded that in the female-populated space of elementary schools men continue to be privileged in hiring and promotion, while at the same time these privileges position many men in unsustainable roles of hegemonic masculinity. Men’s presence in elementary schools also is disconcerting because of the established discourse that men and women cross gender boundaries only for reproductive purposes or possibly because they are deviant. While elementary teachers live within the context of masculine privilege, the discourses responsible for these unequal conditions are constructed at an early age and reconstructed by the men who enjoy those privileges and the women who suffer the de-privileging effects. Telling and analyzing our stories helped the participants become more aware of these conditions and also brought a collective conscious to considering ways in which men contribute to these conditions, and possible pro-feminist ways to confront them.

INDEX WORDS: Education, Men, Elementary School, Feminist Studies, Collective Memory Work, Critical Pedagogy
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the people who have made my life a wonderful journey, and who have helped me to be the best person I could be.

My parents, Marcia Loew and Jorge Garza, and Michael Hansen, have been supportive of all of my endeavors. I appreciate all of the love and encouragement from them in both my graduate studies and all of my previous adventures. Not only are they some of my best cheerleaders, they lead by example in their humility, caring, and intellect.

To Leigh Erin Griffith: graduate school years are supposedly some of the most difficult for a relationship, and the dissertation writing months the worst of them. You had the luck of meeting me right as I plunged into my prospectus and dissertation. Thank you for being a loving and supportive part of these last two years.
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This dissertation and all of the graduate work that led up to it are completely mine. I am responsible for all of it, especially the mistakes and missteps. Fortunately for me there were a host of wonderful people who helped me along the way.

The staff and students of Fowler Drive Elementary School (Athens, GA) during my years teaching second grade (2003-2008) helped me become a better and more reflective teacher. My experiences there were the stimulus that led me to enter graduate school to seek answers beyond the day-to-day classroom activity. Some of the most influential people include Marie Babcock, Ann Benedek, Freida Hammett, Andrea Neher, Halley Page, Taulbee Randolph, and Dale Rogers. I wish you all the best.

The faculty and staff of the University of Georgia’s Department of Language and Literacy Education challenged me to be a better student, to think bigger thoughts, and to read and write more critically. They also made sure that I got my paperwork completed and turned in. Special thanks go to Donna Alvermann, Misha Cahnmann-Taylor, and Bob Fecho for their leadership in my coursework, and especially to Joel Taxel not only teaching me, but also asking me when I was considering a Ph.D. program what I was going to do after I finished my degree. I hope you all continue to inspire through your teaching and research.

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Nordstrom, and Trevor Stewart. Special thanks to Scott Ritchie, who was a friend before I started my graduate work and then a colleague in the department. Scott has had to listen to more complaints from me than just about anyone else, except for… my office-mate and confidante, Elizabeth Friese. We laughed together, bitched together, and cried together in our 126 offices for the last four years. You are the sister I never had, and I couldn’t have finished this without you. I hope to keep all of you in my life even as I do my best to relocate far away from you.

Committee members Melissa Freeman, Corey Johnson, and Stephanie Jones were more than just guides through my comprehensive exam, prospectus, and dissertation. Not only were their contributions in these last stages of my degree important to my success, but they also led a significant number of my graduate courses. They are an inspiration in teaching and researching.

JoBeth Allen has performed all of the above and more. She has been my teacher, mentor, advisor, committee chair, and surrogate mom-away-from-home during my stay in Athens. She taught my first graduate course, was the first professor to visit my second grade class to see our three-act play during one of my more magical years of teaching, and then paid me the greatest compliment: that she wished her granddaughter could attend second grade in my classroom. JoBeth has encouraged me with kindness and understanding above and beyond what should be asked from an advisor, but I am so happy that she did it. I am glad that my final act as a student at UGA will be to receive my doctoral hood from her.

Lastly, I must acknowledge that the nine other participants carried the most difficult work of this study. Without their generosity of time and willingness to share
their stories this study could not be completed. This was truly a collective project in that even when I digress from their words and stories, I believe that my experiences with the other participants guided my thinking and writing. I hope that my efforts to present their thoughts and experiences do justice to the wonderful people that they are. I also hope that they continue to strive to be the best men that they can be, so that their students, colleagues, families, and friends will live richer and more caring loves because of them.
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CHAPTER 1
FROM PERSONAL EXPERIENCE TO COLLECTIVE STUDY

Poker has never been my game, but one recent spring evening found me sitting at a table playing Texas Hold ‘Em at a friend’s home. It felt a bit like those paintings of poker-playing dogs that for the life of me I can’t find any reason why someone would actually hang, but that seem to show up at the strangest places, like on the kitchen wall of your aunt and uncle’s place on the lake. Cigar smoke filled the air, fighting for olfactory attention with the aromas of homemade chili-cheese dip warming-to-burnt on the stovetop and some other unhealthy, but completely-appropriate-for-poker-night foods issuing forth from the kitchen – just visible from my seat at the table – which was also masquerading that night as the liquor cabinet of one of the larger bars in our small, college town. Like those poker-playing pooches, we five poker-playing people shared the same occupation. We were teachers. There was my friend the junior college English teacher, his girlfriend and her friend the language arts high school teachers, another woman who taught language arts in middle school and me, the elementary school teacher. My friend David (a pseudonym) and I were pursuing our graduate degrees in the same department, which is how a general education teacher of first and second graders gets invited to a poker gathering of secondary language arts teachers. At some point the conversation turned from the challenges of the teaching profession to what David and I were doing with our time up at the university:
“I’m writing my dissertation proposal right now, although I’m not making as much progress as I’d like.”

“What are you going to study for your dissertation?”

“The experiences of men teaching in elementary schools. Particularly the men who choose to teach the very youngest students. There aren’t many of us and I think people have a lot of ideas about who we are and what we do, and that affects us and our teaching. I think that makes our experience worth studying.”

Nods all around. Big smiles from the women.

“So many of those students, especially the boys, can really benefit from having male teachers. It must be really great that you teach them. You must be a great teacher.”

“But you see that’s just it. We often hear things like that about us, but I don’t know if we really know that that’s true. I mean what makes me a great teacher?”

“A lot of the children you teach are from poor families with no father. You’re a role model for them, a father-figure they don’t have.”

“And you can be a strong, disciplining force in their life. The students must love you.”

**Rationale for the Study**

Except for David, this group of well-meaning people had known me for less than half an hour – those thirty minutes spent mostly complaining about the early hours that we teachers have to wake up, and the commute, and the piles of papers to grade – and yet they were able to reach the conclusion that I was a wonderful teacher and just what was needed in the elementary school. What did they know about me that could have led them to believe all of that? Surely it wasn’t my whining about early mornings that boosted me
into the heights of teaching greatness, and it definitely was not my mediocre poker-playing. I think it was because I am a man. I believe that my gender was the aspect of my identity that allowed my new acquaintances to draw the conclusions that they had, which leads me to believe that perceived elementary school teaching greatness for men comes with our performance of masculinity.

This poker conversation and many similar situations during my teaching life have been corroborated by my fellow men elementary school teachers. Like my own experiences, they talk about their administrators and peers overloading their rooms with boy students, and often with boys who others have decided are too challenging to teach. They talk about social situations where practical strangers with no specific pedagogical knowledge or experience effuse to them that the students of this teacher whom they have just met are so lucky because they have a man teaching them. They can relate to my feelings of tokenism when I relate how one of my principals proudly explained during an initial staff meeting that she was thrilled to be able to brag to the other school district principals about having the most men at any elementary school. They nod and grin when I tell them that my women colleagues send their students to my classroom when they misbehaved and reported that the very threat of my room would often change student behavior. Like me, my fellow men teachers explained how other teachers claimed that they were allowed to divert their class’s curriculum from the suggested/mandated curriculum simply because they were men.

Many of the above discourses could be viewed as advantageous and stem from the privilege afforded men in U.S. society, but being a man in the elementary school also produces discourses that are at the least disadvantageous but also sometimes scary and
disturbing. My teaching of young children has been viewed with suspicion in terms of my sexual motivations and sexual orientation. I have been questioned about my ability to take on the nurturing teacher role that is often identified with teachers in early childhood education. I have also experienced feelings of loneliness and been intentionally ostracized from specific conversations by my peers because I did not share their gender, or because I was viewed as privileged due to my gender. These discourses – both those that privilege and those that de-privilege – play havoc with our teacher identities and add to the challenges of our chosen profession by hurting both the men and women who teach. They create an inner conflict for men teachers that can play out something like this:

<table>
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<th>Men teachers:</th>
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<tr>
<td>are special,</td>
<td>are not normal,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are allowed to diverge from the school’s mandates,</td>
<td>do not or will not be allowed to fully participate with our peers’ social groups,</td>
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<tr>
<td>can teach boy students because they look up to us and are better behaved for us,</td>
<td>are physically threatening to some students,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have abilities to handle the most difficult children,</td>
<td>sexuality is in question and threatening,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are positive role models.</td>
<td>are not able to teach in the nurturing ways needed by young children,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All of this is true because we are men.</td>
<td>need to be closely monitored.</td>
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Like my men teacher peers, I do not believe all that is said about us is a true representation of who we are, but we have heard these ideas from our women teacher peers, our administrators, our students’ parents and the lay public. There seems to be an understanding among men teachers that these special discourses – both the positive and
negative ones – stem not from our teaching abilities (something that few if any of the above commentators would have actually observed us doing – including our peers and sometimes even our administrators) but from our identity as men in the feminized workspace of the elementary school. I believe that neither the privileging nor the de-privileging discourses surrounding men teachers helps our society achieve equality for all its citizens. Men teachers are special, but not because we are all these things to all these people; Men elementary school teachers are special due to the discourses that surround our rare, masculine presence in the primary grades. Our work experience in the elementary school is influenced by our gender and by the manner in which those we come in contact with treat us because we are men.

These discourses – whether resulting in privileging or de-privileging consequences – work against our efforts to educate our communities’ children. They create dissonance in our teacher identity and tensions within our professional peer group, often demeaning the work of the majority of teachers – the women teachers. These factors contribute to the challenge of recruiting and retaining qualified men elementary school teachers, which is something that a society striving for equitable representation in its institutions must confront in order to create a society that respects and nurtures its citizenry.

As a critical pedagogue, I feel compelled to study the discourses that have contributed to the definition of my masculine teaching identity in order to better understand them and in an effort to confront them. As a profeminist teacher and researcher, I believe that it is my duty to confront the men teacher identity discourses that are injuring the profession by either privileging me above my women teacher peers or
that oppress the desire of men to become primary school teachers. To those ends I have conducted research and written this dissertation as a report of my study of the men elementary school teacher discourses. This study engaged men who teach or have taught in the elementary grades in dialogue using a Collective Memory Work methodology. As a methodology proposed and first used by a feminist collective in West Germany (Haug, 1983/1987), Collective Memory Work satisfies my interest in engaging my community in research that helps us better understand our experiences and also provides us with the means to do the work of social justice championed by feminist theorists interested in gender equity and critical pedagogues interested in bringing about social justice through education. What follows is my report on our collective efforts (the participants and mine), to answer the question *How might engaging in collective memory work with men elementary school teachers assist us in better understanding our identity at the intersection of gender and profession?* This question guided my study design and implementation. Also these three sub-questions were used to guide our collective writing and conversations toward answering the study’s primary question:

1. What privileging and de-privileging themes do men elementary teachers identify when engaged in collective memory work?
2. How might collective memory work assist men elementary school teachers to not only understand the privileges afforded to them, but also engage them in developing a profeminist view of their profession?
3. How might the application of feminist thought to the gendered workspace of the elementary school inform those men who have chosen the elementary teaching profession?
A note on gender words. Let’s be honest: In common, American parlance, nobody would say or write “man elementary school teacher” as I’ve just done in the text above. It’s just not what we’re used to saying or hearing in the United States. If you’re not sure about this, then say it aloud, and see how much easier it is to say and hear “male elementary school teacher” instead of what I’ve written. In popular usage, Americans interchange the words “male” and “man” (and similarly the words “female” and “woman,” and their plurals) without much consideration for the implications of word choice. But there is a difference, and for me, a researcher interested in better understanding issues of gender, word choice is important.

In simple terms, the word “male” is a biological classification for those of us born with the chromosomes XY and phenotypic expression that is most obvious in the sex differences of reproductive roles of males and females. This includes both the physical and hormonal differentiation that leads to males having external genitalia, breast differentiation, higher production of the hormone testosterone and lower production of estrogen, and differences in muscle mass, body hair and height (when compared with females). Although these biological characteristics used to characterize males (and females often as not-males) are simply scientific averages, they provide people with a starting-point for which to see and name the world around them. The word “men” is a societal classification that includes many of the same individuals who would be classified as males.

As historical-social beings, our ideas of gender change as our society changes over time. Being a man means to embody a suite of characteristics that include a combination of biological and behavioral characteristics that society associates together,
which is very much associated with our sexual characteristics and the normative, heterosexual behaviors associated with males. In the term man we find all the ideas commonly expressed as what it means to be masculine, which is often expressed as behaving in a way opposite that of commonly-held ideas about what it means to be feminine, or a woman. For example during the 2011 Boise State versus Georgia football game the ESPN commentator suggested that the coach for the team which was losing at half time needed to challenge his players’ manhood in order to inspire them to win in the second half of the game. For an elementary school teacher, an example of this would be the situation I saw plenty of times: an elementary-age boy who is crying is told by an adult to “stop crying like a girl and be a man.” Perhaps those two examples are the same phenomenon simply separated by a few years of schooling. My choice of using man or men to classify myself and my participants is to acknowledge that, no matter our sex, we are identified (at least at first) as gendered men, bridled with those behaviors ascribed to us by society regardless of our actual behaviors, sex or identity.
CHAPTER 2
THEORIZING GENDER AND RESEARCHING TEACHERS

In order to better understand events like those highlighted in the first chapter, I have turned to literature that speaks to the particulars of gender and schools. The following sections provide a review of what I have learned to explain how feminist theory, critical pedagogy and the situation of men in schools inform my understanding of my experiences and how they relate to this current research.

**Feminist Theory and Critical Pedagogy in Social Science Research**

Placing the work of critical pedagogists like Freire alongside that of feminist theorists like Grumet might seem a disconcerting choice. Given feminist criticism of Freire’s approach to liberation, that it “constructs a phallocentric paradigm of liberation – wherein freedom and the experience of patriarchal manhood are always linked as though they are one and the same” (hooks, 1994, p. 49), it is credible to believe that patriarchal notions of critical pedagogy, and feminist theory and research could be incompatible approaches. Fortunately for this study’s current efforts, some of the same critics of early liberation theory also engaged in efforts to salvage its usefulness for feminist study.

hooks (1994) both acknowledged criticism of Freire’s work and explained her intent to use critical pedagogy. She explained that “Freire’s sexism is indicated by the language in his early works, notwithstanding that there is so much that remains liberatory” and also that the “model of critical pedagogy invites a critical interrogation of this flaw in the work. But critical interrogation is not the same as dismissal” (hooks,
1094, p. 49). So within Freire’s work there is also space for its criticism. This is an important element that, at least for hooks and me, creates space for using critical pedagogy despite its flaws.

Both Grumet and Freire focused their attention on theorizing the conditions of oppressed people and how education plays a role in both that oppression and possible liberation. They approached this work from different directions: Freire’s focus was on oppression based on class, while Grumet’s lens was oppression based on gender. I believe that these approaches compliment and strengthen the liberatory work that this study engages in through gendered study of the elementary teaching man.

When justifying the need to study female teachers’ experience, Grumet (1988) explained that “women constitute the majority of all public school instructional personnel; nevertheless, our experience of this work is hidden” (p. xi). Grumet’s work helped highlight the unique experience of women educators and the importance of a gendered study of the educational experience. She showed us that the body and history of women played an essential role in the structure of education in America and that these bodies and histories were oppressed by the patriarchal nature of education. Freire (1970/1993) saw the need for educators to take deliberate action to improve society by naming and fighting against those oppressive forces that he initially identified as capitalist in nature. He appealed to educators to view their work critically and to teach in a critical manner. This notion of critical pedagogy fits well with Grumet’s notions of establishing an anti-sexist pedagogy.

Freire explained that traditional forms of education were based on a belief that students had no knowledge to contribute to a topic of study, and thus the role of
schooling was for teachers to represent topical knowledge to their students as complete and unchanging. He called this the banking method of education and explained that “[b]anking education inhibits creativity and domesticates (although it cannot completely destroy) the intentionality of consciousness by isolating consciousness from the world, thereby denying people their ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human” (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 83-4). Freire believed that “banking theory and practice, as immobilizing and fixating forces, fail to acknowledge men and women as historical beings” (p. 84). These two ideas open up the possibility of making a critical examination of society’s structures, including the normative actions of the traditional classroom. Calls for changes in education have been taken up by many feminist educators. hooks (1994) believed that educators had to bring a strong love of the subject and its learning into the classroom in order to assist students in their learning. Noddings (1992) suggested that a pedagogy of caring, that was based on a focus of nurturing both academic and emotional needs of young children was an alternative to the institutional nature of present day schooling.

While Freire’s theorizing of the need for critical pedagogy had immediately applicable aspects for those involved in practical matters in education like curriculum studies, they also open up education’s theoretical landscape to allow for the examination of the implications that gender has for the teaching force and their teaching efforts. Work of critical theorists like Freire and Grumet continue to influence the work of researchers interested in both gender and education. Researchers like Maher (1999), Jones (2006, 2009), and Johnson (2010) continued the work of earlier theorists with their focus on gender in our society’s education and leisure institutions.
Maher used her work to highlight the positioning of women in the teaching profession first in their training and then in their relationship to their students. She explained that the stereotypical passivity of girls follows women teachers into the classroom as their role tends to be theorized as that of the relatively passive, nurturing, enabling female “other” of the “active” masculinized child. Her own position is naturalized and essentialized; the positive exercise of her authority and its problematics, including both her powers and her responsibilities, is minimized or even erased altogether. (1999, p. 45)

Maher’s work traced the positioning of women, first as students, then as teachers in training and finally to full-fledged teachers. She saw that this gendering act solidified the traditional roles of women in our society and women teachers in their profession. Although it was not her focus, I believe that similar gendering acts occur for the boys as they go through socialization into society through institutions like schooling. These traditional, masculine roles would then be evident in work done with men in our society and men teachers in their profession.

Jones (2006, 2010) studied the intersection of class and gender for girl students and women teachers. In her more recent work she explored the experiences of her university courses as she and her students navigated teacher education. Jones explained that the discursive histories of – especially – women teachers have provided trajectories of being classed and gendered in particular ways that ignore the body altogether and repress productive discourses of the body.
Speaking of the body becomes vulgar, and therefore taboo and unrefined. So I shouldn’t be surprised at their hesitation or embarrassment around talk of the body, but these young women will be teachers soon. (2009, p. 9-10)

Jones brought forth an important aspect to feminist studies – that of the disembodied self. In her teaching and her scholarship she pressed for a more honest consideration of and conversation with the bodies before her. Although Jones focused her article on the all-women-enrolled college course that she was teaching at the time, these taboos surrounding discourses of the body also affect the ways that men and men teachers engage in talk about the body. Creating the condition where adults and educators are unable to use the medical term for reproductive body parts in their dialogue with students and other adults perpetuates the debilitating taboo and degrades our ability to talk about an important aspect of our lives.

Although his research occurred in locations other than schools, Johnson (2010) brought the focus of feminist theory to his gendered study of men, their bodies and the discourses surrounding them. While not focused on the school environment, Johnson’s utility of feminist theory for the study of men has been influential to my own thinking about how profeminist teachers and researchers might approach their work using the feminist methodology Collective Memory Work. Johnson’s (2010) ethnographic work focused on the bodies of men as they negotiated their occupation of the leisure space of a gay bar. Johnson claimed a space within feminist studies for his work as both a study of gay men as a group gendered by the same constructs within society that women are
subjected to, although different enough to warrant separate study, but also as gendered study that furthers the social justice work of all those engaged in such work:

At the center of my scholarship is interplay between my situated self as a gay man, my interests in masculinity and sexual identity in leisure, and my goals as an advocate for social justice. Understanding these intersections and their tensions helps the reader to know more about myself as a researcher, and ultimately the topics of focus in this chapter—my musings on masculinity, scholarship on gay bars and media consumption and recommendations for future research. (2010, p. 3)

Johnson also expanded his studies to include my chosen methodology, Collective Memory Work, and his contributions to the methodology and my thinking about it will be discussed in the following chapter.

These three researchers are important to my understanding of myself as both a researcher and teacher of children. Like them, I am interested in our society’s spaces which we reconstruct to make our own while at the same time contending with essentializing notions of our identity, whether based on our chosen profession, our gender, sexual preference, race, or any other of the numerous and intersecting characteristics that are used to define our identities.

**Studying identity.** Just as the identity of women teachers has been essentialized, so I believe has the identity of men teachers. As an institution, education seeks to discount the gender of all its participants. Current American education policy seeks to dehumanize its population of teachers and students by emphasizing the standardization of
student assessment and teaching. In a recent interview Jonathan Kozol explained that current education policy is

… segregative and divisive in yet another sense. In inner-city schools, where principals are working with a sword of threats and punishments above their heads -- for fear that they'll be fired if they cannot "pump the scores" -- they inevitably strip down the curriculum to those specific items that are going to be tested, often devoting two-thirds of the year to prepping children for exams. There's no time for arts or music or even for authentic children's books…. So culture is starved. Aesthetics are gone. Joy in learning is regarded as a bothersome distraction…. Even good and idealistic inner-city principals tell me that they feel they have no choice. So NCLB, in itself, adds a whole new level of division on the basis of a child's economic class or race. An apartheid of the intellect. (Cody, 2011)

This emphasis on numbers and categories of student characteristics (like gender, socioeconomic level, race) pushes our collective understanding of education farther from the people who populate our schools. Brosius (2005) warned “the most powerful weapon any person can possess is the ability to make one group of people see another group of people as a category and thereby to deny them their humanity.” The move to teacher- and student-proof the public school room effectively discounts the individuals present. A teacher-proof curriculum flows from a business model of education that sees no difference among participants even though a casual observer can see that every classroom participant is unique. These intersectionalities play out within the classroom and demand that the individuals present not be denied their humanity or their specific education and
social needs. They also influence how we conduct our research of education. Morgan (1981) argued that in research "taking gender into account is 'taking men into account' and not treating them . . . as the normal subjects of research" (p. 93). This idea was reinforced by Layland (1990) who explained that seeing feminist research as research solely about women’s lives could leave men’s lives uninvestigated and lead to the notion that research has stopped questioning the normative nature of masculinity. These researchers make a strong case for the need to study the gendered experience of all those who inhabit the education environment. This is especially true when taking into account that even in a school where all of the teachers are women, they are not teaching in a masculine-free environment: half of their students are boys, and much of the school leadership (both political and administrative) is made up of men.

Grumet’s work, while focusing on the situation of women in schooling, also acknowledged that men had contributed to her work when she explained that although this is a book about women, it is also a book about men. I know that when it celebrates the presence and affection of my mother, my daughters, and my friends I am also celebrating the care and commitments of my father, my husband, my son, and many of the men who are wonderful teachers and with whom I am proud to share my work. The designation of teaching and nurturance as the work of women in this text is necessary in order to avoid the emulsifying and idealist standard of androgyny, which distracts us from the analysis of our experience of reproduction by stripping it of gender. (Grumet, 1988, p. xix)
Like Grumet, I feel that focusing on gender within the educational experience is an important part of a critical examination of schooling in order to re-humanize it and also to resist the reinforcing, hegemonic structures of society’s understanding of what it means to be a man and a primary school teacher. When contemplating the situation of men teachers and their contributions to children’s academic success, Cushman (2010) said that “it is now evident that any approach to raising student achievement has to bring to the fore deconstruction of gender difference in order to help challenge stereotypes and encourage diversification of skills and interest” (p. 1213). These gender researchers have identified ways in which gender comes into play for both educators and students in schools. Their efforts to examine and illuminate the complex nature of identity serve to complicate traditional notions of schools and their inhabitants.

**Multidimensionality of identity.** Part of challenging the discourses of identity is not only engaging in gender study, but also acknowledging the complexity of gender. Race theorists like Ladson-Billings and Tate IV (1995) made the argument that racial identity, the discursive history of “property” and education intersect to create the unique situation in schools that results in an unjust society. Their theorizing opened up the intersectionality of a multitude of identifying characteristics of an individual (race, socioeconomic status) with their student identity within education.

The work of Gonzalez (1988) also broke ground by introducing the ideas of a multidimensional nature to how young Mexicanas in the U.S. view their identity. Her work showed that participants could identify and discuss the ways in which they viewed their identity based on the context of their situation. More recent work in thinking about gender by theorists like Connell (2006) supports the notion of a multidimensional nature
of identity where masculinities and feminities are shaped by factors beyond gender and include social class, race, sexuality, age, and ethnicity.

Maher’s work also emphasized this multitude of intersections, and furthered the idea that there is a fluidity to identity best explained when she said that teachers’ “identities and subjectivities are multiple, changing, and always constructed in relation to others” (1999, p. 50). It is within this research environment where the multiple influences on our identities both complicate and destabilize those identities ascribed to us by our society. Similar to Maher’s argument, I believe that the identities of men teachers are multiple, changing and constructed in relation to others, and that in order to further our understanding of ourselves as teachers and men we must examine our fluid identities and their relation with others.

**Education and Oppression**

Feminist theorists like Grumet have shown that women and girls inhabit unique positions in United States society. More than biological difference, women are positioned in gendered ways based on social expectations of what it means to be feminine. Men are also positioned in ways that define who they are as masculine beings. Walkerdiine explained that these socially-constructed, gendered concepts of “femininity and masculinity are fictions linked to fantasies deeply embedded in the social world which can take on the status of fact when inscribed in the powerful practices, like schooling, through which we are regulated” (1990, p. xiii). That Walkerdiine specifies schooling as one location of the powerful practices that regulate our gendered identities signifies the importance of identifying and its relationship with schooling, both of which are important for those of us wanting to better understand those who choose to spend their working
lives in schools. Most importantly, using a feminist lens improves our understanding of the discursive practices that bring about and maintain gendered positions that oppress both women and men.

Critical pedagogy theory also considered schools as important places of transmission of oppressive discourses. Critical pedagogy’s first focus was class-based oppression, and Freire believed that this oppression of both societal- and self-depreciation started in the home as parents transmitted these ideas of worthiness based on class to their children. During this time parents also inculcated other forms of oppression like gendering their children. These oppressions are amplified as children venture into society’s institutions where the adults once again limit their (and teachers’) options through ideological notions of class, race and other intersecting characteristics of oppression:

- a rigid and oppressive social structure necessarily influences the institutions of child rearing and education within that structure. These institutions pattern their action after the style of the structure, and transmit the myths of the latter. Homes and schools (from nurseries to universities) exist not in the abstract, but in time and space. Within the structures of domination they function largely as agencies which prepare the invaders of the future. (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 154)

As an educator, Freire saw that his professional institution was an essential part of the process of oppression. Schooling institutions were a powerful point of contact for children and the greater society. In their present form Freire believed that education furthered the oppression of Brazilian society. He believed that focusing on oppressive
forces within schooling provides an opportunity to take critical action to address these practices within the classroom in ways complimentary to his idea of conscientização as the goal of a liberating pedagogy:

Humankind *emerge* from their *submersion* and acquire the ability to *intervene* in reality as it is unveiled. *Intervention* in reality—historical awareness itself—thus represents a step forward from *emergence*, and results from the *conscientização* of the situation. *Conscientização* is the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence. 

(Freire, 1970/1993, p. 109)

Examination of the gendered positions of men elementary teachers is an intervention in reality in order to move towards conscientização of those involved in schooling.

Because of the powerful position of teachers as the representatives of the school institution and society at large, the identity of the teacher is an essential component of the educational experience. Grumet (1988) explained that

if at least some of the motives that we bring into our work as educators can be understood and acknowledged as issuing from our genderization and reproductive projects, then the argument that the school has a dynamic function in mediating the public and domestic oppositions in our culture is persuasive, inviting those who care for children in homes and schools to be the very agents of this transformation. (p. xiv-xv)

Although she focused on the experience of women teachers, Grumet’s justifications are also valid for similar study of men who choose to teach. In order for women to be gendered, there must be a group of non-women. Much like Freire’s assertion that “the
dialogical I, however, knows that it is precisely the thou (“not-I”) which has called forth his or her existence” (Freire, 1970/1993, p. 167) – the idea of the definition of the I is the not-you – the gendering of humans comes about by assigning a label of either man or woman to each of us, and then socializing the individual through the expectations transmitted by gendered discourses of what it means to be a person with the label of man or woman.

These labels play out in the hiring processes in elementary schools in the U.S., where principals compete for bragging rights of who has hired the most men in any given year. At the very least this much-sought-for difference is a biological difference, as Grumet explained that “what is most fundamental to our lives as men and women sharing a moment on this planet is the process and experience of reproducing ourselves” (p. 4). From this notion that our reproductive selves are fundamental to our lives and that the gendered woman teacher is a location of study, I believe that a similar argument can be made for the importance of studying the gendered, man teacher just as our principals seem to put a premium on our employment in their schools.

**Alternative possibilities through a pedagogy of caring.** Both theorists of critical pedagogy and gender have explored alternatives to the authoritarian pedagogy commonly found in U.S. schools. Freire believed that liberatory pedagogy could be achieved through dialogue, and that this dialogue could only come about in the presence of “a profound love for the world and for people” (1970/1993, p. 89). He went on in later writings to discuss his suggestions for a democratic learning that attends to both the intellectual and emotional needs of learners. Freire believed that educators “must do everything to ensure an atmosphere in the classroom where teaching, learning, and
studying are serious acts, but also ones that generate happiness” and added that “democratic educators can only see the acts of teaching, of learning, of studying as serious, demanding tasks that not only generate satisfaction but are pleasurable in and of themselves” (1997, p. 90).

Similar ideas can be found in the work of Noddings (1992), who challenged U.S. education advocates who maintained that schools should have the singular goal of intellectual development:

To make real changes in education and escape the dull tick-tock of pendulum swings, we have to set aside the deadly notion that the schools’ first priority should be intellectual development. Further, we must abandon the odd notion that any institution – family, school, church, business – has one and only one stable, main goal that precludes the establishment and pursuit of other goals. (p. 12)

Noddings (1992) instead suggested that schools should promote the intellectual and emotional development of their students through a more democratic process (p. 173) with caring relationships as its foundation. She explained that the goal was to engage in caring relationships as a method to explore intellectual learning while at the same time build the caring capacity in students: “Teachers not only have to create caring relations in which they are the carers, but that they also have a responsibility to help their students develop the capacity to care” (p. 18).

hooks also examined the conditions of modern U.S. schooling and found them wanting:
segregated schools today, particularly in our public school system, function merely as reservations where students are housed, disciplined, and punished, or taught that they cannot achieve academically. In fact students in segregated schools public schools often feel that they have been ‘set apart’ because no one believes in their capacity to learn. (2003, p. 79)

hooks went on to explain that she believed that “public schools as well as institutions of higher education must be transformed so that learning is an experience that builds, enhances, and affirms self-esteem” (2003, p. 79). Her prescription for accomplishing this transformation required a shift in mindset of those involved in education so that they would “bring a spirit of study to learning that takes place both in and beyond classroom settings. Learning must be understood as an experience that enriches life in its entirety” (2003, p. 42).

Many of the important discussions about shifting U.S. pedagogy towards a caring pedagogy have originated from feminist theory’s examination of conditions in public schooling. At the same time some of these theorists like Noddings and hooks use the work of critical pedagogy theorists like Freire as a foundation to their study. They are able to take some of the important ideas of Freirian theory and apply them to U.S. schooling and the gendered condition of those involved in education.

Gender in Schools

For all that I claim that the elementary school is a majority women-populated space, education remains a men-dominated institution at the administrative and policy-making levels. de Santa Ana (2008) reported that some 85 percent of school
superintendent positions were held by men. Taking on leadership roles has been a struggle for women both in and out of schools. This seems to be due to both the gendered positioning of women as non-leaders and men as leaders, and the actions of providing opportunity and promotion based on these gendered notions. Jamieson (1995) argued that women who sought the highest levels of political leadership in the U.S. and abroad found that women were given the choice to embrace their gender identity and be seen as incapable of leadership, or to deny their gender by presenting a more masculine identity (like deepening one’s voice) in order to convince voters that they were “tough enough” for leadership. At the school-leadership level, the National Center for Education Statistics (2010) reported that in the 2007-2008 survey year, 56 percent of elementary school and only 29 percent of secondary school principals were women. These statistics speak to the notion that the possibility of taking on leadership roles is often acknowledged when we first identify ourselves as similar to those who currently occupy those positions.

Grumet (1988) explained that, historically, women entering the teaching profession found similar paternal controls that they were trying to escape from in their homes:

mothers were trapped and isolated in child care. Their daughters who entered teaching to flee a suffocating domesticity were absorbed by the institutional paternalism that substituted the discipline of the state, of the school day, its language, rituals, and coercion, for the moral responsibility of the family. (p. 84)

Although educational institutions remain patriarchal, they are increasingly inhabited by women. Within the elementary school, men teachers operate in a
decidedly women-populated space and this condition influences the situation of men who choose to teach there. Allan (1993) argued that studying men who do work in women-populated spaces can be helpful in the work of understanding gender and occupation because "gender is highly problematized and [men teachers] negotiate the meaning of masculinity every day" (p. 114). This situation – of a man employed in a women-populated space – is unique when compared to that of men employed in fields seen as traditionally acceptable for men, and because of that it provides a unique experience and perspective for those men who do choose to teach and those who engage in research with them.

Although the institution of teaching perpetuates the paternalism of our society, one of its most interesting aspects is that the teaching of our very youngest children – those at the primary or elementary level – is at this time carried out almost exclusively by women. Snyder, Tan and Hoffman (2004) reported that the gender make-up of the teaching staff for elementary and secondary schools in 2001 was 79 percent women and 21 percent men. Keeping in mind that the presence of men teachers increases with the age of the student population leads me to believe that my experience of working with teaching staffs that are 90 to 100 percent women is typical in elementary schools. Also, these populations are even more homogenous than just in gender. Zumwalt and Craig (2008, p. 404) asserted that the teaching staff is mostly female, White and monolingual. This lack of diversity within the teaching force is not representative of the U.S. society, whose population is becoming increasingly diversified: while the teaching force has remained female, White and monolingual, the U.S. Census Bureau data sets claim a
statistically significant increase in both the non-White and multi-lingual or non-English-speaking population from 2000 to 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000, 2009).

Among this mostly women workforce are a small number of men teachers like me. In my experience men teachers are found teaching older elementary students – those in fourth grade and above – and are almost absent from the grades of the youngest students – those in third grade and below. I belonged to this rarest of the rare group of men teachers. I taught first and second grades. My elementary school teaching career began in a metropolitan school district and ended in a small, college town. In seven years I can recall working with one other man teacher of children under 8 years old. He taught second grade at my first school assignment. In that school there were only two other men classroom teachers – one teaching third grade, the other teaching fifth grade – and the physical education coach. In a school with over seven hundred children, the student population came in contact with no more than five men on any given school day. My second school was very similar. This was the school where having five men elementary teachers was bragging rights for the principal. Those five were part of a staff of almost fifty teachers, and I was the only man to teach in a grade below third.

Grumet’s work helped to highlight the idea that something unique resides in the situation of the woman teacher working in the patriarchal school institution. I believe that something unique resides in the rare occurrence of the man teaching in the elementary school, whose workforce and leadership is numerically dominated by women. Grumet opened the possibility of what to do with these rarities when she explained that she hoped to transform schooling from a reinforcing place of the traditional, gendered positions into a “middle place” that invited “the most loving and creative expressions of masculinity
and femininity” (1988, p. xix). This desire for a middle place brings on even greater significance when placed alongside Zumwalt and Craig’s (2008) work, which looked at the issue of a teacher’s gender on the achievement of students:

Parents and students know on a personal level that teachers make a difference—it does matter who teaches them. And politicians and the public generally agree that teachers are a significant factor in students’ learning. Yet there is not strong research evidence that teachers’ demographic characteristics and most of the quality indicators described here make a difference in student learning. (p. 409)

How we reconcile this discontinuity between the discourses that individual teachers, and particularly men teachers, make a difference in the lives of students with the lack of empirical evidence confirming this is where the work of feminist theory and critical pedagogy play a significant role. I believe that examining these discourses of masculine teaching identities will help the teaching community to better understand and confront the detrimental effects of these discourses.

**A review of research on men in the elementary classroom.**

Valued as that rare commodity, men in elementary teaching, their motives, abilities, and sexuality were nonetheless often viewed with suspicion. Taking up non-traditional work as a way to question and confront gender relations, they faced enormous pressures to conform to traditional notions of masculinity which then only reinforced traditional patterns of sex differentiation. (Priegert Coulter & McNay, 1993, p. 411)
Qualitative researchers like Priegert Coulter and McNay have investigated the experiences of men elementary teachers and found that while many men teachers take a profeminist stance with their career choice and daily practice, their choice presents the challenge of being both privileged and under suspicion by their peers, their administrators, and the public. Research that delves into the career-lives of men elementary teachers has the potential for conscious-raising that leads to a more nuanced understanding of the men and their relationship to the teaching profession. It also has the potential to expose those discourses that injure the profession’s ability to build a teaching force that is representative of society and works to counter sexist discourses present in the classroom and society.

“Investigation of gender roles and role expectations in education should go deeper than a simple count of males and females in various positions” (Clifford, 1989). The advent of gendered studies of elementary school teachers inspired by feminist theory spurred an interest in understanding the situation of the small number of men who chose K-12 teaching for their profession. Studies of the experiences of men teachers occurred concurrently with those of women teachers, and what emerged was a complex picture—one that highlighted the unique challenges and experiences attributed to teachers who were situated in their gender. This complexity was evident from participants’ reports of such experiences as tokenism and false-authority, a “glass escalator” effect of recognition and promotion (Williams 1992, 1995; Cognard-Black, 2004) and also a suspicion of motives/emasculating of self in order to appear safe to those who accuse (Arnold, 1965; Murgatroyd, 1955), all of which highlight the complex nature of the experiences of men
as they navigate the societal expectations of what an elementary teacher is supposed to be.

Researchers of gender representation in the teaching force have identified and studied the paucity of men in the profession. These studies focus on both the effects of public policy and teacher preparation on the career choice of men teachers. One example is the work of Brookhart and Loadman (1996) who used data generated in two separate studies that surveyed teacher candidates and elementary teachers in an effort to quantitatively establish the characteristics of elementary teachers, regardless of gender. Each group consisted of approximately 1000 participants, and they were given a survey instrument that included multiple choice, yes/no, and Likert scale responses. The authors examined the responses of those survey participants who indicated their gender as male, and performed statistical analysis of their responses in an effort to discover gender differences among those surveyed. The authors reported that their study was evidence that men elementary teachers were a unique facet of the teaching work force in that they

- were less academically oriented than other candidates,
- had fewer years of academic coursework in high school,
- were less likely to have chosen teaching because they enjoyed school,
- were more confident in their teaching abilities than are females,
- reported they reached the decision to enter teacher preparation later than their peers, and
- reported lower expectations of the usefulness of teacher preparation for developing the knowledge and skills necessary for teaching. (Brookhart & Loadman, 1996)
Brockhart and Loadman’s findings highlight some of the challenges to recruiting and supporting men teachers. Their work hints at some of the potential discourses that might be impeding the choice of men to teach, like those characteristics that point to their K-12 schooling’s experience to potentially encourage or discourage their career choice.

At the same time the work exemplifies the power of quantitative work to create broad generalities that can be applied to an equally general grouping of participants, while also limiting study participant autonomy through quantitative means of data gathering. Work like that done by Brockhart and Loadman provides a general foundation of understanding, but also an understanding that needs qualitative data gathering methods in order to paint a rich picture of study participants and how they interact with the sorts of general discourses that work like those above. This personalizing of the work of men teachers is something that I believe this dissertation study provides. The following sections explore some of the discourses that other gender researchers have identified in their research of the intersection of gender and teaching.

**We want you to be a man: The call to teach.** Cushman (2010) explained that the “call to teach” that has been extended to men is often linked to a perceived need for men to serve as role models for boys coming from single-parent homes, to provide inspiration and engagement in learning for boy students, and as a balance to the ways in which women are perceived to teach. These calls to teach are based on the assumptions that men teachers “behave and teach differently” than women and that serving as role models “increases the engagement and subsequent academic achievement of students, particularly boys” (p. 1211). At the same time researchers Younger and Warrington (2008) found a lack of interest in recruiting men who could provide a range of masculine
role models that challenged stereotypical attitudes. These sorts of perceptions lead to greater gender stereotyping and decrease the chances for gender equity in society.

These efforts appear to be a policy reversal from the earliest attempts to populate U.S. public schools. At the same time that public schooling was seen as part of the ‘normalizing’ or ‘civilizing’ of the lower class by the upper class, calls went out for women to fill the teaching ranks. Beecher (1846/2003) became a famous figure in women teacher recruitment, believing that women’s social position as domestic nurturers was a natural fit to the work of the primary school teacher. Mann (2008), in his efforts to bring about common schooling in Massachusetts, argued that recruiting women to the teaching profession would allow the public school system to pay only a fraction of the salaries that a similar system staffed by men would cost.

Priegert Coulter and McNay (1993) and Wood and Hoag (1993) examined the assumptions and stereotypes about men in nontraditional occupations and found that the call for more men in elementary school oversimplifies complex issues, both social and psychological. Priegert Coulter and McNay (1993) explained that “support for this call rests largely on the claim that male teachers serve as role models for boys and father substitutes for children from female-headed, lone-parent families” (p. 398-399). Priegert Coulter and McNay’s participants were seven men elementary teachers at the beginning of their teaching careers. Focus group interviews began at the end of the participants’ pre-service year and ended during their first year of teaching for a total of four group interviews. The data gathered showed a diversity of thought among participants. The researchers presented conversations where some participants espoused support for, while others resisted those roles assigned them by discourses like the one quoted above.
other themes identified by researchers of men teachers include the man teacher as “handyman, sportsman, sexual predator, precocious careerist, potential child abuser, staff room sex symbol, discipline man, father figure, or simply a comment-worthy rare commodity” (Foster & Newman, 2005, p. 345).

Other researchers (Pleck, 1981; Robinson, 1981) found that there was no evidence that increasing the proportion of men teachers would provide the sort of masculine presence supposedly missing in students’ lives. Allan (1993) concluded after reviewing the available literature that calls for men in the elementary school are based largely on "folk theories" unsupported by research. Benton DeCourse, and Vogtle (1997) concluded that despite the unfounded reasons for having more men in the lower levels of school, there is at the very least the public policy problem of gender representation in teaching. This follows similar public policies calling for a teaching staff population that better reflects the student population.

Benton, DeCourse, and Vogtle (1997) suggested that calls for equal representation in schools, and especially in elementary schools, “may not so much transform teaching as create a more balanced education for children” (p. 39). Goodman and Kelly (1988), advocating for men to be equal partners in establishing an anti-sexist society suggested that for men teachers "physical presence is not enough. The need is not for men who simply pass on the traditional male-centered culture unproblematically. To make a significant difference, we need more men who will mediate culture from an anti-sexist perspective" (p. 1). Their research and that presented above points to a worrisome problem with promoting teaching as a desirable profession for men: it is based on false ideas of a universal and correct masculine identity, and that that hegemonic masculinity
needs to be present in schools in order for our children (especially our boys) to grow up healthy. Such thinking discounts the current and historical efforts of the majority of the teaching workforce – which has been and will continue to be women – that has for the entirety of public schooling’s existence maintained the schooling institution and educated children (both boys and girls) in a manner that allows them to grow up to be gendered beings similar to past generations. Although this gender norming process is problematic in itself, in no way can a credible argument be made that in our contemporary society somehow the overwhelming numerical presence of women as teachers is debilitating our children’s abilities to learn and grow up into recognizable members of our society.

Despite the research findings that indicate privileging of men in teaching during the hiring and promotion process (Williams, 1992, 1995; Cognard-Black, 2004), there still remains a lack of interest among men to enter the profession as deduced by their representation in the teaching corps. Benton DeCourse, and Vogtle (1997) suggested that this was due to our society “characterizing the classroom teacher as female, subservient, and second-rate” (p. 40); Such a discourse of teacher identity leaves little room for men who look to be leaders in their field and be financially and socially rewarded for their efforts. These researchers concluded that a career in teaching is seen as neither legitimate nor lucrative for a man, and so family members – often fathers – encourage their sons to find a career that would be more challenging and acceptable given their gender (p. 40).

Despite what seems to be preference for men teachers when the rare one seeks work, some of the participants in Benton DeCourse, and Vogtle’s (1997) who were able to get past the discouragement of their families reported that they underwent greater scrutiny then their women peers during the hiring process: “Several participants
described an *under-the-microscope* feeling. They believed that they were observed and treated differently from other potential teachers, that others held them to higher standards” (p. 44). Like Priegert Coulter and McNay’s work, this study recruited most of its participants from those men in pre-service programs in two U.S. universities. Researchers gathered from these participants through focus group meetings at the end of their teacher preparation programs. The researchers also conducted semi-structured interviews with two men currently teaching and their responses served as an in-career check of the analysis of the focus group data.

That a teacher feels under scrutiny and overly-exposed to observation is a commonly recognized situation. Feminist theorists have discussed the public nature of teaching and its being subject to the observer’s gaze and judgement (see Alsup, 2006; Johnson, 2005; Walkerdine, 1990). These theorists focused their work on the conditions of women teachers’ bodies. Although men are considered and observed differently, I believe that the man classroom teacher also experiences negative effects related to Lortie’s suggestion that school children have an “apprenticeship of observation” (1975/2002, p. 61) as they learn the structure of schooling institutions through their observation of the adults within their schools.

Both the recruitment and hiring practices for teachers hold contradictory messages for men considering a teaching career. On one hand men are sought after as a rare commodity, while at the same time they are sought in order to fill a hegemonic masculine role within the school. They are also recruited into a profession that has been classified by society as second-rate. These influencing factors could easily be seen as detrimental to
attempts at creating a teaching staff that provides a more complete representation of our society’s diversity.

The recruitment and hiring process for teachers is an early career activity that highlights some of the possible advantages and disadvantages that come with being a man. This is one of the first places where the institution – through its representatives in administration – imposes its idea of gender roles in the classroom and also a location for examining our experiences as we work to understand how institutional discourses work against equity in education by pigeon-holing men and women into strict roles within the profession.

Reactions by others/public perception of men as teachers. Men who manage to find their way into teaching face a public that continues to question their career choice and their suitability to the task of nurturing young students. Benton DeCourse, and Vogtle (1997) explained that inherent in public reactions and participants’ suppositions about those reactions is the inference that elementary teaching is a questionable profession for males. Females’ reaction to males’ choice of teaching denotes another layer of complexity; they reinforce males for being sensitive to children, yet their surprise they would do this indicates they think it is out of the ordinary. p. 40

This exceptionality in work choice favors men teachers in that they are rewarded with attention and support by their peers (Priegert Coulter & McNay, 1993, p. 405): “At the beginning of the year, [a participant] had found the primary teachers ‘very supportive.’” The researchers also reported that several of the men “received complimentary notes and
comments from parents, most of which made some reference to their being male” (p. 410). At the same time, men teachers reported a sort of social barrier present when their teaching peers were overwhelmingly women. One of Priegert Coulter and McNay’s (1993) study participants reported that despite the feeling of welcome and support from his peers throughout the year, that even at the end of the year he could "still sense in the staff room . . . that they are not completely used to [a man in Grade 1]” (p. 405).

Other participants in Priegert Coulter and McNay’s study reported that some of the welcome that they received was due to a desire to have a man available to teach physical education or be responsible for other physical activities that the women teachers were disinterested in leading. Men also reported that, although they did not see themselves as "traditionally macho,” they were, “explicitly advised to use a stereotypical masculinity for disciplining students” (p.408). Cushman’s (2005) participants also found themselves typecast by their gender. They “felt they were frequently and illogically assigned roles involving manual labour and behaviour management” (p. 238). This sort of assumption of competency based on gender creates a level of expectation that not all men can or wish to perform. It also exposes children to role differentiation that can limit their abilities based on their perceptions of what activities are appropriate for their gender.

Outside of school, Priegert Coulter and McNay’s (1993) participants reported that friends and family were comfortable with their choice to teach, but had difficulty with their choice to teach young children. Triplett’s (1968) men kindergarten and first grade teachers, believed that there was a “stigma attached to men working in elementary schools,” while Johnston (1970), a kindergarten teacher, claimed that “people … began to wonder about my mental stability, academic ability, moral character—or all three.”
Much like what researchers and their participants have reported during recruitment and hiring, men teachers face a teaching corps and public that is both enthusiastic about their presence in schools, but at the same time not completely comfortable with their choice to teach young children. Some of these men report that their women peers see them as a stereotypical husband-figure: helpful with the tasks that require physical strength and height, the physical disciplining of children, and engaging children in physical activity. At the same time some teachers and the public exhibit confusion when confronted with men teachers who act in nurturing ways towards very young children. These contradictions in the roles and responsibilities of the man teacher, and its potential conflict for the man teacher’s identity will continue to be a source of discussion and discovery. The contradictions provide a location to examine the potential for discord within the identities of my participants.

*Suspicions of sexuality and ‘deviance.’* Wilson, Epstein, Feeney, and Wilson (1966), when studying the near-absence of men in the primary grades, suggested that those who chose to teach young children were suspected of being homosexual. Although the research – and its societal norms – conducted by Wilson, et al. (1966) might be dismissed as almost fifty years old, current research shows that men who do not conform to accepted, normative views of masculinity continue to fall under suspicion as unfit to teach. Martino’s (2008) study included a gay teacher who reported that he felt intensely scrutinized by students’ parents when they discovered that he was not married and believed that the scrutiny stemmed from parents’ anxiety about their children being taught by a gay man (p. 580).
The issue of male sexuality arose in other ways. How to show affection appropriately was a particular concern, since OPSTF guidelines caution men about touching children. Buck questioned those guidelines strenuously: Why is it ... the women teachers are hugging the boys and girls but I have been told I have to be really careful about that ... ? I don't feel I should have to--[if there's] a little kid that's fallen and hit her head and she's crying--that I [should] have to catch the attention of another teacher [before I can] comfort her.... Am I allowed to do this or not?

(Priegert Coulter & McNay, 1993, p. 404)

As reported by Priegert Coutler and McNay, men in the elementary school come under suspicion through the conduct guidelines even before they enter the classroom. Cushman (2005) also found similar policies in New Zealand. She cited New Zealand education policy that directs teachers, regardless of gender, to remove themselves from situations where children seek physical contact – a policy followed by most men and ignored by their women colleagues. During teacher training, men students in New Zealand were discouraged from any form of physical contact with children. Teachers reported that “such messages were deeply ingrained and a reality in their everyday interactions with children [and a] paranoia they could not shake off” (p. 235). An example of such “paranoia” included the report of a man teacher “who installed a camera in his room for the sole purpose of self-protection” (p. 238).

I received similar messages when I was first trained. Although I believe guidelines such as those referred to above are meant to protect the teacher as much as it is intended to protect his students, spending much time with young children causes me to
conclude that many of them use physical contact with the people around them as a means to communicate and seek comfort. I remember wondering what I was to do with my first graders when I was told not to touch them – ever! What happens when they fall down, or are on the way to falling down? Do I let them fall and leave them on the ground until they are able to get up?

Like me, the participants in the Benton DeCourse, and Vogtle (1997) study explained they found that “on the one hand, they know their role in nurturing includes friendliness, including touch, in the course of each day. However, they all described precautions they should or will take to circumvent possible misinterpretations of these actions” (p. 43). These precautions were seen as a necessity by the participants because of the “conflicting responses about the ways media represent male teachers. Images of child abuse, sexual harassment, and other negative aspects of being in a profession dealing with young children were evident in all responses” (p. 43). Priegert Coulter and McNay’s (1993) participants believed that the “concerns about touching had been overly magnified, and that, in Lee's words, ‘You can still be a mature, normal human being and not worry about lawsuits ... in this profession’” (p. 404). At the same time, another participant, while explaining how his male body was most evident and a topic of interest during physical education – particularly during a swimming lesson – “suddenly seemed to realize what he was saying and quickly protested, ‘There was nothing sexual, God help me.... They just don't often see a male walking around in a bathing suit’” (p. 404). This research illustrates the conflicting situation that men teachers face: On one hand we know that our children can benefit from the same physical contact from us that they would get from their women teachers, but on the other hand feel that we are under suspicion for
being male bodies in close proximity with children. As males we have the same physical features as many of the perpetrators of sexual crimes and so are often viewed as guilty until proven innocent by our peers, administrators, students’ parents and lay public.

Teachers also reported that their choice to teach with young children was seen as an admission of homosexuality. Like those involved in the work of Wilson, et al. (1966), some professionals within the teaching community also implied that those who sought to work with young children should have their sexuality questioned. Priegert Coulter and McNay (1993) reported that while some men were enthusiastically welcomed by hiring committees and colleagues, others “sensed an unspoken suspicion about sexual orientation. ‘Why do you want to teach elementary school?’ interviewers asked, but in tones that suggested the real question was, ‘Is there something wrong with you’” (p. 403)? Another participant explained that a teacher peer, who was confused about why someone who had taught at a community college would want to teach in high school, asked him if he was queer after he corrected her and explained that he was interested in working with elementary-age children (Priegert Coulter & McNay, 1993, p. 403). No matter the era, men who choose to teach young children fall under suspicion simply for wanting to work in a manner that our discourses has pigeon-holed women into fulfilling. As illustrated by the more recent research, our society continues to struggle with understanding sexuality as it relates to occupation and how to deal with men who choose to perform their masculinity in non-traditional ways.

Hyper-vigilance within our society has led to a teaching community that is placed under suspicion of despicable offenses against children. But more specifically, it is men teachers who are being scrutinized so closely. I know that the cautionary messages that I
received from my colleagues and instructors did not help me to be a caring teacher. Instead they created for me a hyper-vigilance and paranoia regarding safety and the possibility of litigation if I should have physical contact with the children. I see similarities between my own experience and Priegert Coutler and McNay’s participants’ struggles to find a balance between their instincts to nurture, the sorts of nurturing performed by women teachers, and the perceived need for hyper-vigilance. I know that for me these are difficult ideas to work through because they cut to the heart of the relationship that teachers need to cultivate with those they work with: trust.

*Understanding privilege in order to enact profeminist teaching.* Within the literature, there seems to be a much smaller number of men teachers reporting or willing to report discourses that privilege men teachers. Sometimes the privilege was made available only to those men who performed their masculinity in a hegemonic manner. Other men teachers found it difficult to see the privilege they received due to their gender, or, like Martino’s (2008) gay participant, had identities that did not provide the same gender privileging.

Other participants in Martino’s (2008) study explored the ways in which they benefitted by being men elementary teachers. They reported that women peers when contemplating issues like authority and discipline in the classroom and garnering respect from students’ parents, they felt that men teachers were “a step ahead to start with” (p. 581-582). Cushman’s (2010) participants also reported pressure from colleagues, administrators and parents to manage student behavior through hegemonic masculinity based on “old-fashioned and outmoded beliefs concerning the particular power that men are expected to wield” (p. 1216). Skelton (2003) also reported that men teachers felt that
it was expected that they perform in hegemonic, masculine ways supported by their schools and communities. Francis and Skelton (2001) also found similar masculine performances among their men participants, but also that men teachers often acted “as one of the ‘lads’” (p. 12). Cushman (2010) explained that these attempts by men teachers to identify with their boy students often center around sporting ability and result in marginalizing those students – both boys and girls – who are not involved in the sports seen as appropriate for boys and men. In these studies, participants who were able to enact hegemonic masculine identities during their teaching work found that benefits flowed to them from those around them. Whether it was belief in their greater authority, or ability to relate to students on a more informal level, men teachers perceived as acceptably masculine were granted similar privileges afforded to men in larger society. These enactments in turn reinforced such behavior among boy and girl students, which served to reproduce hegemonic masculine and feminine identities for the next generation of teachers.

As seen in the previous discussion of hiring practices, some hiring policies assume that men are needed in the classroom because they teach differently from women and their role-modeling presence would improve academic achievement. These ideas have been criticized by Cushman (2010) as “based on limited sex socialisation theories that position masculinities and femininities solely within male and female bodies” (p. 1211). Despite this criticism, Cushman (2008) found that the employment process favors men who demonstrate dominant masculinities because administrators continue to behave in a manner that reinforces the essentializing of gender. In review of other studies of this essentializing, Cushman (2010) found that researchers
concluded from their respective studies, assumptions of gender-based differences and abilities inevitably perpetuate gender-stereotypical behaviours because the teachers have different expectations of boys and girls, relate differently to boys and girls, and base their interactions with their students on gender-based notions. (p. 1213)

Cushman (2010) also found that these studies concluded that men teachers enacting dominant discourses in class were disenfranchising girl students and boy students who were not inclined to embrace those dominant masculinities (p. 1211). Cushman (2010) did find that it was possible to teach all children in an equitable manner because – at least in Sweden where gender equity discourses were present throughout society – “none of the men was able to recall ways in which boys and girls learned differently or favoured different activities” (p. 1217). In this study, Cushman obtained her data through semi-structured interviews with twelve participants distributed between three countries. Their teaching experience ranged from those new to the profession to those eligible for retirement. Cushman acknowledges validity issues arise with such a small number of participants, and also the challenges that could be associated with the power differential of being a woman researcher studying men teachers. Cushman also explains that culture and language difference could also contribute to misunderstandings within the research and analysis processes.

Despite the obstacles and privileges that being a man affords an elementary school teacher, some teachers actively work in an anti-sexist, or profeminist, manner within their teaching and with their peers. Priegert Coulter and McNay (1993) reported that some of the men in their study made “conscious efforts to challenge the stereotypes,
particularly the definitions of women's work and men's work prevailing among students and staff” (p. 407). One of Cushman’s (2010) Swedish participants used his physical education classroom as a place to challenge issues, like what sorts of sports activities were preferred by his boy and girl students and who should lead teams, in order to encourage his students to find the activities that they enjoyed and excelled at no matter their gender and the gender expectations of historical Swedish society.

Some men teachers involved in Priegert Coulter and McNay’s (1993) study also recognized the importance of women teachers and the preferential treatment that men received when they chose to teach. The men “acknowledged the unrecognized contribution women make to education, and the support many female teachers offered them as first-year teachers. They also saw the "old boys' network" still operating [in ways that favored the men teachers]” (p. 406). Some men teachers also challenged the way in which recruitment of their gender is situated in political and popular discourse. Cushman (2010) explained that in New Zealand the appeal for men teachers is based on “recuperative masculinities,” a belief that the overwhelming numbers of women teachers creates an school atmosphere that addresses the needs of girl and minority students to the detriment of boy students, and that this situation can be countered by recruiting men into the teaching ranks who will act in hegemonic ways that provide role models of masculinity (Martino & Kehler, 2006). Efforts by men teachers to work against these expected, traditional roles of gender both within and outside of school shows promise for creating a school system and society that both acknowledges diversity in identity and works to mitigate the harmful effects of hegemonic gender discourses.
New Directions in Identity and Discourse Research in Schools

These discourses – whether resulting in privileging or negative consequences – work against our efforts to educate our communities’ children. They create dissonance in our teacher identity and tensions within our professional peer group, often demeaning the work of the majority of teachers – the women teachers. These factors contribute to the challenge of recruiting and retaining qualified women and men elementary school teachers, which is something that a society striving for equitable representation in its institutions must confront in order to create a society that respects and nurtures its citizenry. As a critical pedagogue, I feel compelled to study the discourses that have contributed to the definition of my masculine teaching identity in order to better understand them and as an effort to confront them.

As a profeminist teacher and researcher, I believe that it is my duty to confront the men teacher identity discourses that are injuring the profession by either privileging me above my women teacher peers or that oppress the desire of men to become primary school teachers (and of course often do both at the same time). To those ends this project studied men elementary school teacher discourses by engaging in dialogue with other men who teach or have taught in the elementary grades. By including myself as a full participant and including my participants in both a story-telling exercise and the subsequent analysis of those stories, I believe I engaged men teachers in a more inclusive participatory research project so that we could examine those discourses that shape our men teacher identity and also begin a critical discussion about ways in which profeminist teachers can use this identity knowledge to work towards a more equitable education system for all its stakeholders.
Research into how gender discourses influence teacher identity has continued for over fifty years, and during that time many of the discourses have endured. These discourses of the teaching profession and masculinity continue to both advantage and disadvantage men who choose the teaching profession. By addressing gender and career identity and the discourses that inform them through my chosen methodology, Collective Memory Work, my study introduced a new identity group, men teachers, to a methodology that takes the importance of participants and their collective efforts to understand their condition further than studies that have come before. The methodology was proposed and first used by a feminist collective in West Germany (Haug, 1983/1987). Collective Memory Work satisfied my interest in engaging my community in research that helped us better understand our experiences. It also provided us with the means to do the work of social justice championed by both feminist theorists interested in gender equity and critical pedagogues interested in bringing about social justice through education.

**Collective Memory Work as a Feminist Methodology.** Haug and her collective-mates embarked on creating Collective Memory Work as a methodology to accomplish the following goals:

- as a systematic reading of memory
- as a bridge between theory and practice
- as a critical cultural production

Their goal was to create a methodology that allowed them to “move the body into the world” to place it in “more fully socialized areas of concern” (Carter, 1983/1987, p. 13).
Haug explained that the methodology was meant to allow the collective to “investigate the historical process of our constitution as women” in order to better understand the socializing process of gendered women and the way that bodies constitute a socio-biological unity (1983/1987, p. 30). Choosing to study the gendered aspects of identity in a collective manner fits with Haug assertion that “human beings produce their lives collectively” (p. 44). The collective’s goals and efforts grow out from and mesh with those of other feminist theorists.

Grumet’s work also valued the social aspects of our knowledge when she explained that in her writing “the fundamental argument of this text is that knowledge evolves in human relationships” (1988, p. xix). She also placed great value on women’s experience and the ways that that experience influenced schooling:

The project of this text is to draw that knowledge of women’s experience of reproduction and nurturance into the epistemological systems and curricular forms that constitute the discourse and practice of public education. It is an argument drawn from the experience in my own life that is most personal and at the same time most general as it links me to those who share my sex and gender. (1988, p. 3)

Collective Memory Work will be treated to greater discussion in the following chapter, but it is worthwhile here to explain that the methodology is a decidedly feminist methodology. This can be seen from its very origins, as an outgrowth of the work of a feminist collective, whose mission was to teach and learn together so that “individuals can complement each other” (Haug, 1992, p. 56). Its focus on the experience (through remembering) of the collective member and an interest in the bodily experience of the
member as a gendered woman contribute to its feminist theory applicability. The collective also entered their work from the perspective that “women are primarily victims… of men and of social relations” (Haug, 1992, p. 3-4). This focus on gendered oppression in social relations places Collective Memory Work squarely within critical efforts of feminist theory in order to “work on memory and experience in both a constructive and a destructive way” (Haug, 1992, p. x). Although the collective’s work was focused on a feminist study of women, I believe that Collective Memory Work can also be employed in a gendered study of men elementary teachers as I explain further in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 3
MOVING FORWARD WITH IDENTITY AND DISCOURSE RESEARCH THROUGH CRITICAL MEMORY WORK METHODOLOGY

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).

Towards a Critical, Feminist Methodology

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

By using participant-created stories of instances from their teaching lives, and then providing space for the group to read and analyze them, I believe we gained a richer understanding of our identities as men teachers. Analyzing those experiences helped us to build on common experiences, but also dispelled the idea that there are common, or essential experiences associated with men elementary school teachers. I also believe that
our gatherings were an exceptionally rare chance for a group of men elementary school teachers to do collaborative work within their gender group. The uniqueness of the gathering spurred spontaneous conversation that served the purpose of our study that contributed additionally to my efforts at facilitation of the collective analysis.

My other hope was that bringing together the participants would create – at least for those meeting times – an informal support network. My participants’ teaching experience ranged from those who are just entering the profession (one individual was teaching his first year) and those who have taught for many years (two reported having taught for almost twenty years). Even if it was just for our meeting times, I believe that bringing the participants together gave them an opportunity to build relationships among themselves and provide the kind of experience and assistance that they might not be able to have in a school where few if any of their colleagues are men.

The Trouble with Memory and Having a Primary Investigator in Collective Memory Work

In keeping true to Collective Memory Work methodology, my experience influenced and became part of the data collection and analysis activities. My teaching experiences led me to first consider doing this study, and the more I spoke with other men elementary teachers, the more my ideas that our work experience differs from our women colleagues was confirmed. This study’s introductory, initial group meetings were places for all of the participants to discuss issues related to their profession and gender, and those conversations reinforced my original belief that men experience elementary school teaching in a unique way. Collective Memory Work allows for autobiographical accounts and their analysis to be central to the research process, with the expectation that
the researcher participate in all of the activities with his participants. I believe this is important in order to better understand the data that I gather and to inform my study’s readership. Grumet (1988) explained in her work that

For data we turned to autobiographical accounts of educational experience. For methods of analysis we turned to psychoanalytic, phenomenological, and feminist theories. As we study the forms of our own experience, not only are we searching for evidence of the external forces that have diminished us; we are also recovering our own possibilities. We work to remember, imagine, and realize ways of knowing and being that can span the chasm presently separating our public and private worlds. (p. xv)

This collective experience of autobiographical sharing helped to bridge participants’ lives and made it possible for them to recognize the ways in which their private, individual lives span the chasm to the collective, shared experiences of similar and/or different individuals and groups within society (Haug, 1983/1987; Johnson & Dunlap, 2009).

I understand that relying on my experiences and those of my participants opens my work to criticism. My subjectivities and use of autobiography to anchor my analysis could point to concerns of bias in the study. This is also true for the study's reliance on the memory work and story writing of my fellow participants. Crapanzano (2007) examined memory and recall in his anthropological field work and saw the situation determining the validity of observation as a corruption of reality: “What I observed was neither the ideal nor the “realistic” version” (p. 91). Crapanzano (2007) believed that the
observer, even when immersed in the activity of other participants, will come away from that activity with an individual’s perception of what has occurred, and that that perception of reality may be radically different from that of other participants due to historical memory, emotion, ritual and differing viewpoints from which participants take in the activity. As researchers we have a three-fold dilemma to puzzle us in our work: our reality, our participants’ reality and our perception of our participants’ reality.

This corruption of reality underlies the work here in that Crapanzano (2007) asks us to attend to the messy emotions and memories that become an important component of our interactions with our participants. This kind of messiness is present in my teaching stories and those of other participants. It is integral to any situation that is experienced by a person since we are all experiencing the world through our understandings and emotions. I believe that much of the difficulty of institutional spaces of education come from this interaction of realities as we work together. Grumet (1988) explained that “we have all come to form within the very forms we wish to study. And so it is difficult to separate the well-taught consciousness from the consciousness that teaches” (p. 124). This idea was useful as I tried to understand the experience and analysis of the participants of my study. It also challenged me to pay attention to my own thoughts and emotions regarding my teacher identity and that of my participants, and try to better understand how this affected my research.

Haug (2000) also understood that memories were a reconstruction of an individual’s identity and that they were a location for understanding ideologies. Because of this, she proposed using a group analysis process of study:
The underlying assumption is that beneath the scraps of memory that have been assembled so as to create a specific meaning, other meanings, paths and possibilities become visible. They become manifest as contradictions, as disharmony, as rupture, as incongruities or inconsistency, etc. (p. 157)

Instead of seeing the corruption of reality as a problem for research, Haug (2000) sees memories as an appropriate place to study those ideologies that often go unexamined in society. This suited my research interests as well, because the identities of men elementary teachers is also formed and forms within the discourses of masculinity and elementary schools.

Another challenge to the study was the central position that I held as the Primary Investigator and facilitator of the two groups of teachers who participated. Facilitating the project placed me at a more privileged place than the other participants, and this, along with being its originator and publisher, meant that I owe my reader and participants the acknowledgement that my influence greatly affects the very collectiveness of our collective work. Because of this I believe that it is worthwhile to admit that I come to this work as a non-objective participant and to explain some of my history with teaching.

I am a man who has taught in the younger grades of elementary schools for seven years. During that time I knew no other teachers in my school who were men and teaching in grades below third grade. In my experience there seemed to be an understanding among both my peers and my students’ families that men simply did not teach in grades below third grade, and that even at the upper elementary grades – third through fifth grades – men were rarely present. Because
I am a participant in my study and also its facilitator, my experiences as a man teaching within a women-populated space greatly influences this work. From its origination to its presentation, I see evidence of my identity as both a teacher and researcher. Because of this I made an effort to reveal and acknowledge this to my participants as we met, and also again as I presented preliminary results from our collective work. One example is that within the analysis are more traditional presentations of collective analysis along with my efforts to build on our collective theorizing. At the same time I have presented analysis from the privileged position of having read and analyzed the entire body of collective writing, something that my participants were not able to do. This less collective analysis is presented first in the findings section that follows this section, but is not intended to upstage the collective analysis that follows it. Instead, my order choice seemed appropriate because it allows me to introduce the stories and illuminate some of the connections and disconnections found within the experiences of men elementary teachers, and is an effort to further bridge practice with theory.

**Collective Memory Work.** Feminist critique looks to bridge the space between theory and practice by using the histories of women to represent the issues brought forth through the theoretical work. Using histories and observation allows researchers to support, but also complicate the theories from which they are working from. I used feminist theory to inform my representation of experiences of men in the elementary school by prioritizing our experiences and our analysis of them, as they related to our masculinity within the teaching
experience. Grumet (1988) argues for this mixing of histories and theories when she explained that her work sought to anchor these arguments in examples drawn from my own experience of childhood and parenting because I am convinced that if only a theoretical presentation of these issues were offered, we would literally “overlook” the ways that each of us is implicated in them and the ways that our own practices as educators are motivated by them. (p. xvii)

Collective Memory Work, a research methodology introduced by a West German feminist collective whose writings were collected and edited by Haug (1983/1987), combines the theoretical focus on the individual participant encouraged by feminist theory with the inclusive ideals of educational, participatory research (Freire, 1970). Haug’s (1983/1987, 2000) work focused on the way in which, through the socialization process, individuals take on the practices that produce them as gendered beings. She recognized the importance of studying the ways that women’s identities are produced through practices related to appearance, speech and sexual behavior, among others. Haug (1983/1987) recognized both the intense influence of this process while at the same time she recognized that women are also actively engaged in their own identity formation:

We start by contrast from the assumption that human beings do not simply fulfill norms, nor conform in some uncomplicated way; that identities are not formed through imitation, nor through any simple reproduction of predetermined patterns, but that the human capacity for action also leads individuals to attempt to live their own meanings and find self-fulfillment, albeit with a predetermined social space (p. 42)
Concurrently, Haug (1983/1987) acknowledged that the individual experience always ultimately belongs to the greater, collective experience, and thus justified the need to engage in a collective analysis of experience:

The number of possibilities for action open to us is radically limited. We live according to a whole series of imperatives: social pressures, natural limitations, the imperative of economic survival, the given conditions of history and culture. Human beings produce their lives collectively. It is within the domain of collective production that individual experience becomes possible. If therefore a given experience is possible, it is also subject to universalization. (p. 43-44)

Haug’s work was part of a group of fourteen women who formed a collective research group that created and used the feminist methodology Collective Memory Work. The collective took an egalitarian approach to their work, including letting their research focus be determined by the interests of individuals within the group and through group study. Once a topic was agreed upon, the group created narratives from their lives that focused “on scenes, events, particular stories and hope that be reproducing them in detail it will be possible to subvert the self-censorship that creates harmony in a whole-life story” (p. 157). The narratives were analyzed within the focus group which looked for what ideologies were represented, but also worked to deconstruct the narratives “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). As a final step the authors rewrote their narratives in an attempt to write a story that criticized the oppressive ideologies present in society.
Other researchers who adopted Collective Memory Work in their research have kept many of the methods introduced by its creators. Many followed the example of Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, and Benton (1992) that did not include a final round of narrative writing. Instead they proposed a third phase carried out by an individual researcher where the previous writing and the analysis group work would be further theorized. Onyx and Small (2001) explained this phase as

> essentially a recursive process, in which the insights concerning the “common sense” of each set of memories is related back to the earlier discussions and to theoretical discussions within the wider academic literature…drafts of this process [are] subject to further discussion by other members of the collective. (p. 777)

I also decided that a rewriting of the narratives was unnecessary for my purposes. I believe that the collective analysis of the focus group served a similar purpose, and that giving my participants a chance to provide feedback as results were presented to them, and also through one-on-one interviews discussing the research and group analysis process gave participants an important role in shaping the research findings.

**Men employing feminist research and theory.** Although initial studies in Collective Memory Work were performed as a feminist critique of hegemonic gender discourses wherein women explored ways that men oppressed them, other researchers have shown that it is a methodology that can also used by men in the study of both oppressive discourses and masculine identities. Their work flows from a number of men researchers who have chosen feminist theory as a foundation for their work with
masculinity studies with men. These men employ feminist theory to examine identity through the lens of gender, and also to critique identity discourses.

In their introduction to *Men’s Lives*, editors Kimmel and Messner acknowledge that “the pioneering work of feminist scholars… has made us aware of the centrality of gender in our lives. Gender… is a central feature of social life, one of the central organizing principles around which our lives revolve” (1989, p. 2). They go on to explain that while considering gender has become important when understanding power relationships in our society, “Too often, though, we treat men as if they had no gender, as if only their public personae were of interest to us as students and scholars, as if their interior experience of gender was of no significance” (1989, p. 3). This “blind spot” in acknowledging gender is problematic because by not understanding the ways in which men are “also ‘gendered,’ and that this gendering process, the transformation of biological males into socially interacting men, is a central experience for men” (1989, p. 4) is a major factor in the oppression of others. The theorists’ work acknowledges the ways in which men come to oppress women. They also work to expand our understanding of the diversity found within the masculine identity and the complexity of experience within the power relationships of gender.

Kimmel (2002) showed how masculinity studies, which employ feminist critique in the study of men’s identities, helped expand our understanding of masculinity as a multifaceted aspect that given the contradictory locations experienced by most men, men not privileged by class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, physical abilities, one must also consider a certain forgiveness for actual embodied men as they
attempt to construct their lives of some coherence and integrity in a world of clashing and contradictory filaments of power and privilege. (p. x)

This expansion of masculinity to include such contradictory locations of experience helped blur the simpler definition of men in merely gendered terms. Kimmel also explained that the development of queer theory within identity studies “enables one to theorize masculinity as a system of power relations among men as well as a system of power relations between women and men” (2002, p. xi). This furthers complicated our definitions of oppressed and oppressor by illustrating ways that men use hegemonic masculinity in power relationships with one another as well as with women.

Messner (1990) drew connections between his theorizing of masculinity in sport sociology and the work of both feminists and critical pedagogues. He explained that “the social world itself is constantly being constituted through human practice; true knowledge about the social world is thus produced through the dialectical interaction between subject and object” (p. 202). This sort of work relies on the same sort of social constructivist thinking employed by critical feminists in rejecting objectivists assumptions of an equally knowable object-world, and also the critical pedagogues’ approach to constructing knowledge through dialogue.

Connell also devoted his research to studying the complexities of masculine identity. He explained that “our everyday knowledge of gender is subject to conflicting claims to know, explain and judge” (1995, p. 5) and went on to suggest these “conflicting forms of knowledge about gender betray the presence of different practices addressing gender. To understand everyday and scientific accounts of masculinity we cannot remain at the level of pure ideas, but must look at their practical bases.” (1995, p. 5). Connell
called for a qualitative examination of the foundations of gender as practiced by men, and
looked to criticize attempts to objectify scientific knowledge by training a feminist lens
upon its practices:

Natural science itself has a gendered character. Western science and
technology are culturally masculinized... The guiding metaphors of
scientific research, the impersonality of its discourse, the structures of
power and communication in science, the preproduction of its internal
structure, all stem from the social position of dominant men in a gendered
world. (1995, p. 6)

Connell went on to also criticize attempts to essentialized the masculine (and thus
all other) identity by declaring that difference between and within cultures shows that
“there is no masculine entity whose occurrences in all societies we can generalize about.
The things designated by the term in different cases are logically incommensurable”
(1995, p. 43). Connell’s work, along with that of Kimmel, Messner, and also some of the
other theorists presented in this and the prior chapter explained and then expanded our
understanding of identity to include gender and the power relations between the genders
and among the individuals who inhabit those gendered positions. The work of these three
theorists also helped illustrate how men learned from feminist theorists and then used
their understanding of feminist critique to train a critical lens upon masculine identities.
Other contemporary researchers (both men and women) have also employed the feminist
methodology Collective Memory Work to expand our understanding of gendered identity
to include masculine identity. Their research follows.
Contemporary work in Collective Memory Work. Men researchers who have chosen Collective Memory Work have found that this methodology has helped men to “distinguish between their individual understandings of self and the pressures of gender socialization” (Johnson & Dunlap, 2010, p. 12). By providing an opportunity to both present and analyze their stories within a focus group setting, participants were able to conduct research that examined their own hegemonic thinking related to what it means to be white men and men of color (Johnson, Richmond & Kivel, 2008), straight men and gay men (Johnson & Dunlap, 2010), and men without specific focus on sexual-orientation or race (Kivel & Johnson, 2009). Johnson and Dunlap (2009) performed Collective Memory Work research with two focus groups for a total of eleven participants including the researchers. Their work focused on media influences on the gender identities of their participants, and each author (one gay, the other straight) recruited participants of a similar sexual orientation in order to facilitate data gathering.

Kivel and Johnson (2009) also recruited men on a west coast campus to engage in Collective Memory Work around their earliest experiences with media’s messages regarding their gender identity. In this study the thirteen participants were divided into three smaller groups for the focus groups, which allowed for a greater number of stories analyzed across the meetings. Following Haug’s (1992) earlier work, the researchers facilitated the collective analysis through a narrative analysis of the solicited stories of each of the participant’s experience. I believed that this methodology could also be used by men elementary teachers and researchers to recall, examine and analyze their teaching memories and experiences within a broader cultural context. Collective Memory Work provides the framework in which participants can compare their experiences as men and
teachers by sharing and interpreting their stories of the intersection of their gender and profession. To that end I recruited participants who were willing to share their stories and participate in collective analysis of their experiences.

Collective Memory Work builds on the primacy of the individual experience to also include the story teller during the analysis stage of research through a focus group format where all participants’ ideas are respected and considered. This methodology compliments my experiences and research agenda. I believe that the discussions, stories and analysis of our experiences as men teaching young children provide insight into the intersection of gender and career, which expands the discussion of gender equity in society. Coffey and Delamont (2000) explained that:

> By listening to and making sense of teachers’ experiences and accounts we are better placed to understand those everyday teaching realities. The work of teaching is not only about managing the classroom and delivering the curriculum, it is also about managing and negotiating biographies, identities and selves. (p. 74)

Like the introductory vignette offered in Chapter One, the experiences that best exemplify the intersection of gender and career come at unanticipated times in a teacher’s professional life. If this is true, then the manner in which data is collected needed to be able to capture those unpredictable events. Collective Memory Work does that by soliciting stories of its participants. Participants were asked to remember and then write a story that exemplified the research focus. This allowed the study to capture the events that form the randomness of experience, which is something that is difficult to capture when researching identity and experience. Collective Memory Work also brings
participants together in a facilitated discussion group to analyze the stories of the participants. Using the discussion group for data analysis served two purposes. First, as a critical methodology, Collective Memory Work’s discussion groups honor the participants for not only their stories, but also their abilities to discuss and understand the implications of their stories. Johnson, Richmond and Kivel (2008) explained that in the analysis stage “the collective engages in a process of discourse analysis whereby they examine and deconstruct their use of language in their own personal written narratives” (p. 10). In their study Johnson, et al., engaged seven undergraduate students in a collective analysis of media’s influence on participants’ racial and gendered identity. This stage of simultaneous data generation and analysis allowed its participants to collectively deconstruct their language within their stories in order to recognize the complexities that are hidden by the tacit and implied knowledge found within conversation. Collective Memory Work’s goal is to reveal these subconsciously hidden ways in which we use our language and identity to construct ourselves into the very social structures that act to oppress us (Haug, 1983/1987).

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 that 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).

Participants were recruited through my personal network of teaching colleagues and contacts through my university and professional organizations. The scarcity of men in the elementary school and at younger grades played out in my recruitment efforts, as I was unable to locate enough men within the younger grades who were able to participate. My recruitment efforts were expanded to include men teachers in all elementary grades. Interest from two areas approximately 90 miles apart resulted in the need for two separate groups to form and meet. A total of ten participants were involved in the study (nine others plus me). Their elementary teaching experience spanned from prekindergarten to Grade 5, with some in their first year of teaching and others with over ten years’ experience. All continued to teach in elementary schools, except for one who was teaching in a university’s teacher preparation program and me, who had left the classroom to work full-time on my doctoral studies. One group formed around a
university town and had seven participants including myself, while the second group of an additional three (making for four discussants with the addition of me) participants lived in a nearby metropolis.

This study’s methods could be seen as a blend of original and current approaches to Collective Memory Work. This project is first and foremost my project, since it originated with my interests to study the experience of men elementary teachers, and also because its research is the dissertation for my doctoral degree. Keeping that in mind, I tried to build back a more collective experience by conducting initial, introductory meetings with the collective. These meetings allowed for two things. First, they let the participants get to know one another through talk in more general terms about their experiences within the teaching field and to explore the conditions of men working in a space that is predominantly populated with women. They also gave me a foundation from which to create a writing assignment that took into account this first conversation’s themes. This incorporated a more collective approach to our efforts to write about and analyze our experiences in our second meeting discussions, which is similar to the initial work by Haug’s feminist collective. 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
- Stage 2: Individual story writing
- Stage 3: Collective story analysis
- Stage 4: Sharing of initial findings and one-on-one interviews.
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 as explained in the IRB paperwork.

I believe that both groups seemed comfortable with the activity, with each talking past the two hour time limit set to respect their busy lives. The real challenge appeared before we met. Reaching a collective agreement on the time and place for the meeting was impossible for all members of the university town group. Because of the scheduling challenges, some in the university town group participants were unable to attend all meetings, and our analysis meeting was scheduled for two dates and times in order to accommodate the most people.

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 times 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 fit in with the privileging/disadvantaging split because it was more complicated than that. However it fits in 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, 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. The complete instructions can found in Appendix B.

One of the challenges that appeared in the writing and analyzing stages was the presence of participants who had some identifying characteristics that were unique within the group. Although it was not true in every case, in two instances participants chose to include some aspect of their identity in their stories that was also readily observable to the collective. Both of the authors consulted with me about their interest in including the identifying characteristic in their narratives. My response was that they didn’t need to worry if their story was less than perfectly anonymous, and that they did not need to declare their authorship to the group during our analysis meeting.
Interestingly, these two narratives’ analysis sessions played out quite differently. In the first the participant’s story emphasized both his gender and race, but because the participant did not make any effort to identify the story as his own, the collective chose to go along with his choice to participate as a fellow analyst and not the narrative’s author during our story analysis. I will respect his choice and not name him here. In the second instance, the narrative’s author chose to both include his disability in his story and to declare that the story was his during the analysis. Forrester also took the additional step of suggesting that he would not participate in the analysis of his story, except to be available to answer our questions. The analysis process played out in different ways than others and it is presented in greater detail in the findings chapters.

All four members of the metropolitan group (three recruited participants plus me) were able to attend both meetings and write stories for the analysis meeting. At the analysis meeting, time allowed us to analyze three stories. The university town participants’ analysis meeting became our analysis meetings, with two sets of stories and two meetings occurring across three months’ time. This allowed our group to analyze three stories with a group of three participants (two recruited participants plus me) during the first analysis meeting, and then three additional stories with a group of five (four participants plus me) during the second. Between all of the meeting attendance configurations, time allowed for nine narratives to be analyzed.

A method variation during the analysis meetings was how our conversations were recorded. The small attendance size of the first university town meeting and the lack of appropriate meeting space for the metropolitan group resulted in both meetings being conducted as a simple, protocol-driven discussion that was audio recorded. The second
analysis meeting for the university town group was larger and one of the attendees was deaf. These two factors led me to follow Kivel and Johnson’s (2009) method of using a chart in addition to the audio recorder to record the discussion, something that had been my original intent for all of the analysis meetings. While it was something that Forrester, our deaf participant, thanked me for, it proved to also be useful for others. Another participant Montie suggested that charting our ideas were both helpful and an incentive to participate: “It does help us keep track and another thing, I think it inspires some motivation to respond. You want to see your response get up there. Just like with the kids, I mean.”

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 analyze nine. 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. 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. (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 C), 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 groups 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 analyzed all of the collective’s stories. This allowed me to see both connections between stories and discussions that the groups were unable to analyze 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 centered 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.

Moving from Collective Analysis to Dissertation Analysis

For purposes of the dissertation analysis, all meeting transcripts, participant stories, and participant written comments were treated as sources for data. Participant stories are presented in their entirety in the findings. This was done in an attempt to present the reader with a similar experience to that of the participants. The discussion that follows each narrative uses the discussions from both the analysis and introductory meetings in order to present the themes identified through collective analysis. Also I
chose to blend comments across the two participant groups because I believe that the issues and ideas discussed were similar despite the geographic difference. I am responsible for the choices that led to the themes that were elevated and presented, and chose those that I felt best supported those which were commonly treated in feminist work.

Themes were chosen through my recursive process of reading feminist theory, listening to our meeting discussions and one-on-one interviews, reading meeting and interview transcripts, and writing. Looking for themes in our work that reflected themes in feminist theory felt in many ways like a written version of the Connect-the-Dots drawings found in children’s activity books. One example comes from the following chapter, which is the first of the findings chapters. During introductory and analysis discussions, and as part of the three narratives presented, we men teachers discuss our belief that gender creates privileging and de-privileging events in the employment decisions of our school administrators. Talking about the privileging/de-privileging of hiring and promotion took up a significant portion of our conversations, and so it seemed important to me. It also is a theme present in feminist theory. By pulling ideas and quotes from our study’s data and then adding parallel ideas and quotes from feminist theory, I believe I was able to tell the story and connect-the-dots of how we men teachers understand and talk about gendered privilege in our profession. Work like this was done for each of the following four chapters

The four findings chapters present the participants’ narratives. After each story presentation, excerpts from the story’s analysis discussion are presented along with supporting excerpts from the introductory meetings and one-on-one interviews. Although
the ideas presented in the stories and discussed by the participants are often complex, the stories have been grouped together according to themes I established using a feminist theoretical framework to interpret the data. The first three chapters focus on the privileging/de-privileging effects of gender, the presence of the sexual body in the workplace, and the non-conformity in the face of stereotypical expectations of men. In Chapter 7, I explore a theme that complicates this study. The two narratives’ authors’ choice to focus on identity characteristics beyond gender challenge the simplicity of this study of masculine identity and also highlight the multidimensional nature of identity which has been considered by a number of feminist researchers (see Gonzalez, 1998; Maher, 1999; Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001). Much of the following four chapters is devoted to the words of the study’s participants, and I believe that that is a good way to come to know both the individuals and their collective efforts. For those who feel that they benefit from a more organized and concise presentation of data, I have also included a table with the pseudonym and some basic information about each of the participants to be found in Appendix D.
CHAPTER 4

ECONOMIC PRIVILEGE AND ITS DE-PRIVILEGING EFFECTS

Another advantage to being a man is dealing with the parents… This is my tenth year, and I’ve had one male curse me out, and no females. I’ve never had a woman parent <crosses arms, then points and wags finger at invisible self> ‘Blah-blah-blah, you blah-blah-blah-blah!’ …I talk to teachers every day in this school who say some parent cursed them out using profanity. Daily. That’s something that they deal with from other women [parents]. The women they get it. They get earfuls from parents, and I don’t. We have parents curse the principal out. Some of my parents – forgive me God, it’s so terrible. And I’ll talk to them and they won’t curse at me at all. They’ll call her and say ‘I’m calling downtown on you M-Fers, blah-blah-blah-blah.’ And I’ll talk to them and they won’t curse at me at all. So they curse at our principal cause she’s a woman, and won’t curse at me.

Privilege can take on many forms. In the above excerpt from his reflective interview, AJ perceives that his gender shields him from the sorts of belligerent communication – with at least his students’ mothers – that he believes is a common challenge for the women educators in his school. Although there is no indication that AJ has made some special effort that affords him a different, more respectful relationship with his students’ parents, it exists nevertheless and allows him to devote energy to other professional challenges that his women colleagues must devote to managing these
confrontational situations. I believe that this situation illustrates the sort of false-authority attributed to men teachers based on their gender, and also hints at the reasons why men often find success in moving through the leadership career opportunities given them in schools.

This chapter focuses on the potential privilege found in the institutional processes of hiring and promotion within schools. It also looks at ways that the privileging process de-privileges both the privileged men and their women colleagues. Three participant narratives are presented, and after each one a narrative has been created to present the discussion that ensued during story analysis. This chapter concludes with a section connecting our group’s theories about these stories’ themes and feminist theory that informs this study.

**Economic Privilege and Its De-privileging Effects in Hiring and Promotion**

The three pieces presented in this section present a topic that resonated with many of the participants: finding a job in a profession that seeks men applicants. In the first the author presents his theory that hard work and persistence are rewarded in the job hunt, but then brings his reader into his dawning awareness that other factors may have come into play in order for him to “be lucky.” The second author gives us a glimpse at what it means to be a numerical minority and how that may lead to differential treatment of applicants and teachers, but also candidly reveals his inability to live up to what he believes are his administrator’s expectations. In the final example, the author takes advantage of leadership opportunities despite feeling that his gender and not necessarily his skill and experience are the deciding factor in his selection to participate at his new school.
A Hiring Story

This sample was difficult because the idea of who he is as a man and a teacher didn’t cross the teacher’s mind very much until joining this research project. Since then he’s received at least five comments/complements on being a man teacher. “We need more men in our schools.” Since when did this become such a big deal? The man had not really noticed it as much before.

The first time he realized the connection between gender and professional identity only began after the man moved to this university town and was hired at a local elementary school. After relocating, he persistently worked toward finding any teaching job in the area. There didn’t seem to be much opportunity out there for a middle/high school social studies teacher. The man enrolled in the substitute teacher reserve for the local school district and persistently contacted the district office. The sub finder coordinator noticed his drive and sent him to a long term substitute teaching position at an elementary school. Upon arrival the principal seemed bothered that the man had been sent in for the job as she already had a substitute in mind. The other sub was an African American woman who had close ties with the school. The man told her he was there to sub for the class and she told him the position was filled. He asked if there was any place in the school where he was needed as he was already there and wished to serve her school. “Wait here,” she replied. The principal went to her office and called the district sub office. From the
front the man heard her exclaim, “I’ve already got someone in mind for this job and you need to call me before sending someone!” The principal returned and informed the man that there was a substitute needed for the day helping children with severe and profound disabilities. He took the opportunity. At the end of the day the principal called the man to the office and said she would give him a chance in the long term position the next day. How is it that the man was given this chance before an African American woman who was familiar with the students? The man returned the following day to a day of madness. The children had been without a consistent teacher for a month and were completely unruly. At the end of the day the principal asked the man to return the following week, prepared to be the long term sub for that class. This was a trial period during which the man would show his drive by writing lesson plans, staying late, and being involved in collaborative planning meetings. Three months later the principal offered him a full time teaching position. Keep in mind that the man’s post graduate education was for middle/high school. He had not yet been certified for elementary education and wondered how this was happening so fast and so well. Without question the man gratefully accepted the position. At this point, it still had not occurred to him that most people agree that, ‘We need more men in our schools.’ It wasn’t until after successfully completing his certification for elementary education that the man began to notice a strong tie between his gender and professional identity. It seems as though the man’s principal considers the
common mantra, “We need more men in our schools” when hiring new teachers. The man began to notice the number of men in his school.

Fourteen of the staff members including a paraprofessional and a counselor at his elementary school are men. There seems to be about two men for each grade level. Although a minority, the men are a strong presence. After working with this research project the man really began to realize how many compliments and pats on the back he receives just for being a man elementary school teacher. This revelation makes the man proud of his work and inspires him to become the best at what he does.

The hiring process is something that all study participants could relate to, with many telling similar stories about finding first jobs in somewhat unconventional ways. The narrative also echoed our conversations from our initial meeting. Two others from the group had reported that their first, permanent teaching positions came through mid-year hiring to fill an immediate need. Like the narrative, the men were hired without certification for the position.

Harold explained how he had first found a part-time, temporary job where he rotated among local schools. This gave him the chance to get to know staff at many schools before a permanent position became available at one of them. Clyde told of how, when he was unemployed, he visited teacher friends in their schools, and one day was told that the principal was looking to replace a teacher after one month of the school year had gone by. He explained that the interview consisted of two questions from the principal: “Do you have any questions?” and “When can you get your paperwork to the
district?” Both participants told of having to enroll in alternative certification programs and teaching for a number of years while they attended certification classes.

Seeking out men for teaching jobs and rewarding them for their gender in the hiring process and afterwards was a common experience shared by many participants. Harold believed that his principal was “single-handedly trying to form an all male elementary school,” while Clyde told of an experience where he went to interview at a rural, Kindergarten through second grade school, and the main topic of conversation among the interviewers was their excitement of having a man in the building. The school experience for men can be unique beyond the hiring process.

Dan explained his experience at a school with a large number of men: “there were a bunch of men teachers… the principal made a calendar, the Men of [the School].” Dan went on to explain that because there were twelve men on staff that he “thought it was a great experience because… we had all these men there together that… seemed like we were respected more.” It might be important to make note that the school’s staff was still a majority women, but that a collection of twelve men elementary school teachers is seen as extraordinary in a workforce that is more than 79% women (Snyder, Tan and Hoffman, 2004).

Mark expressed his desire to see the hiring process as one based on merit, but confided that he had strong doubts that that was so:

When I’ve gone into interviews in the past, I’ve always hoped that I am impressing them with my background and my ideas and what I want to bring into the classroom and what I want to do with the kids, but I feel like a big part of me being hired has been the fact that I’ve been a male.
Mark’s experience was supported by many of the other participants who had worked in teaching long enough to work at multiple schools. While we were grateful to have work, we also understood that the tokenism present in the hiring process privileged us for our gender. Mark explained that he felt the story’s author chose to include the race and gender of the competing substitute teacher because “a lot of times when we’re looking at hiring, we’re looking at administrators trying to fill a quota.” He went on to explain that a principal might be aware of the paucity of certain groups within her school, as if she was telling herself that she was

Trying to make sure ‘I’ve got enough males. I got enough African-Americans.’ Here you have this substitute position and she’s choosing between an African-American woman or a male. Both fill a quota. Which one gets more weight?

While Mark confessed to feeling unsure about calling the hiring process he’s hypothesized as “filling a quota,” others’ in the group were quick to take up the conversation. Montie said that he liked “the use of the word quota. Because the principal of course, wants to look good in her position,” and that being able to hire so many men is at the very least a public relations success because “it looks pretty good to have this many guys working at your school.” Clyde contributed his belief that this is true “because there’s this other idea that it’s a good thing to have men working in elementary schools.”

Montie extended the conversation by asking the following question: “Is it better for the student population that’s being served to be served by an African-American woman? Someone maybe who is of that culture as opposed to a White male?” Although
we did not try to answer the question in a direct way, Mark suggested that the hiring practices of the school were attempting to create an element of balance. He says he’s one of a number of men in the school. Fourteen staff members including an assistant professor and a counselor are men. So I think if we had to give the school a characteristic, I would say it’s balance. Or there’s a focus on… a gender representation.

Clyde suggested that these ideas about the hiring process and seeking a balanced gender representation could be summed up as:

People have a very positive image of men who teach in this story. Like this whole part of the beginning and then the whole understanding of what his principal’s philosophy is: “Men are needed. That they’re valued. Their contribution is important.”

Despite those efforts, Mark was not satisfied with leaving the story until we interrogated the privilege that he believed was present. He suggested that we needed to look more critically at the story’s hiring decision:

Here this principal has gone on to hire fourteen and I’m sure they’re very confident and they’re great teachers, don’t get me wrong, but it seems like she has a real focus on, “I want there to be representation in my school.”

Clyde responded by suggesting that there may be a large number of certified teachers who were not currently employed, and that this was due to the economic recession’s budgeting effects forcing a decrease in hiring by local districts during previous years.
We also understood that by getting the job because of gender, we were taking an opportunity from women teachers, who have to work that much more to stand out from the crowded, women-populated applicant field. Mark expressed many of our feelings:

Every interview that I’ve been in, I’ve been offered the job on the spot, which has been wonderful, but I know that that is not how the real world operates in most cases. And you have to wonder how much of that is because I’m a male, and I don’t want to say that they are trying to fill a quota, but it kind of feels that way at the same time.

The protagonist of our narrative is written as a man who has – as Forrester suggested was like so many others in the U.S. – taken advantage of the random and fleeting opportunities presented to him. The narrative contributes to the meritocratic notion that once such an opportunity presents itself, a protagonist who works hard to make the most of it will succeed once his superiors see his dedication to the job. This story gives us a glimpse into the protagonist’s determination to be hired and then prove himself worthy of the position. Clyde suggested that the story paints the protagonist as someone who

didn’t give up. Even when he was pretty much told, ‘I’ve already got somebody for this job.’ He could have been like ‘okay, alright.’ Because I think you still get paid once you’ve been sent to the school, even if they don’t use you. He was like ‘No, no, I’m here, give me work.’ He’s got a greater goal. He’s not satisfied with just going along. He wants something permanent.
Montie added that just getting hired was not enough, that the protagonist was “still expected to be able to prove [his] worth” as if the principal had told him “‘not just because you’re a man I’m going to hire you on. I’m going to give you a chance and you’ve got to step up to the plate.’” He looked to salvage our discussion from labeling the story as simply one of the privileged man, and focused on the protagonist’s efforts, suggesting that “even though there is a privilege – there is an advantage to being a man and applying for an elementary school teaching position– you still have to step up and show that you can handle unruly children.” While this story tells of a teacher who was able to secure a teaching position and find success within it, the following story, while also touching on the hiring process, reveals a different result once the protagonist secured his teaching position.

Another Hiring Story

It was the end of the school day, and all the children had gone home. The teachers were slowly gathering in the elementary school’s media center for the first of the school year staff meeting. Teachers were sitting around tables, mostly clustering by grade level, although plenty of the non-grade-level staff (like ESOL teachers) were mixed in among them. There was plenty of conversation going on, some quiet, some loud. Some teachers had brought a stack of papers and were grading or writing information into their planners and grade books. The man walked in, looked for the newly-familiar faces of the others in his grade level, and sat down at the table they occupied.
This was only his third year teaching, and since for him this was a new school in a new community, he was still feeling a bit lost and unsure of himself. The school staff was large, and mostly made up of women. There were only a few Black teachers, even though the school’s student population was predominantly Black. There were no Latino teachers, even though the remainder of the student population was Latino. There were a few men teachers, and he became aware of that pretty quickly as he surveyed the meeting attendees. He had already heard plenty from his grade level about how unusual it was that there was a man (this man) teaching such young children. They had been very positive and supportive, and also had mentioned the names of the few other men teachers who they had known were teaching in the primary grades at other schools in the area.

The principal arrived and began the meeting by quieting the staff conversations. She was a nice lady, if a bit gruff at times. She had been very kind to the teacher when he came for his interview. It had been only a few weeks before school started, and he had been desperate for a job. She had interviewed him in just a few minutes, had offered a school tour, and hired him on the spot. During the interview she had said, ‘We need more men teaching in our elementary schools.’ That was fine with the man, because he really needed a job, and this school had one to offer. Once the teachers had quieted down, the principal launched into a discussion about how the new school year had started off well. She then introduced the new
staff members, and the man was made to stand up to be welcomed by the staff. As soon as his name was called and he stood, the principal declared that she was so happy to have a man teaching at the younger grades, and that she now had five men teaching at her school. She asked the others to also stand. There were five of men out of a teaching staff of almost sixty. She declared that at the principals’ meeting she had just come from at the district office that she was able to brag that she had the most men teaching at an elementary school. The staff laughed, clapped, and made other noises of approval, and the man felt proud. He was being welcomed into this school’s teaching community and he was singled out as special. It felt really good to him.

It was only afterwards that the man changed his thinking. While at first he had felt proud and happy for being part of the large group of men on staff, his thinking started to change when he thought about things beyond this numbers game that the principals seemed to be playing. He knew how things were going in his classroom: really not so good. He was still trying to get a grasp on the curriculum at this school. It was very different from where he had last taught. He also was struggling to manage the classroom and his students’ behaviors. Things were a little out of control in his room. When he thought about it, he really wasn’t feeling all that proud or confident in his ability to teach. Then he started thinking back to the job interview, and remembered that his wasn’t the only job application the principal had on her desk. She had a stack of them, and yet
when he had come he hadn’t seen any other applicants. That seemed really
strange since this town had a large school of education at the local
university, and some of those teachers were placed at the school as student
teachers every year. Where were all those teachers? Surely some of them
would have had more experience working with this school’s population
than the man.

Although he doesn’t know for sure, the man felt that a big part of
the hiring decision had been based on his being a man. He was glad to
have the job, but at the same time, worried that he was not being hired for
his abilities (which he definitely thought needing a lot of improvement)
but for his being a man. It seemed unfair that there might be more
qualified women who were being passed up because his being a man was
considered a more important qualification for employment in an
elementary school.

The study group looked at this story first, and our conversation quickly turned to
the job-seeking experiences of the author as they compared to our individual history.
Harold found common ground with the narrative’s protagonist experience: “I really
connect with the story because… I didn’t even sit through an interview for my job. Yeah,
I was a sub and… they pretty much offered me the job after being a substitute teacher
there.” The theme of this conversation was also part of the initial meeting discussion. The
majority of the group related experiences where they felt that they were given preferential
treatment during the hiring process. Forrester explained that his hiring at a school for the
deaf in the Northeast U.S. happened when, during a spring break trip and on a whim, he
decided to visit the school and ask if there were any job openings. After a school tour and informal interview with the school supervisor, he returned to his southern home the following week to find he had an offer waiting for him. Later he explained that the supervisor told me ‘You know that day you came to visit, you know that day, we were so busy with a lot of things… but they told me that you were deaf and I was like really? So I took the opportunity to meet with you. It was so rare for a deaf male teacher to be in this profession.’

In this situation being an educator who was both a man and deaf gave Forrester access to the hiring authority in the school, even though the supervisor makes it very clear in her conversation that her day’s schedule was full of more important work than visiting with an interested teacher applicant. In this case Forrester’s identity as a man and as deaf had a direct influence on the hiring process, and can be seen as interacting to privilege his efforts.

Like Forrester, Montie had also been hired after a short time substituting at his elementary school. While his story was interesting on its own, the conversation that followed helps illustrate the tension that exists for men applicants seeking work while knowing that they are being treated preferentially because of their gender:

Montie: … I was there on a Friday… and so the following Monday the principal comes to me and says, ‘Ok I’m going to need you to take the [state teacher certification exam]. You start immediately.’ <laughter>…

<group laughter>

Montie: So it’s just, kind of like awesome.
John: So they made an exception.

Montie: Right, right, so I was on temporary certificate until I got my scores back which was like…

Mark: Which is wonderful, I mean, and it’s very fortunate for you, and I’m glad it worked out and…

Montie: yeah, yeah…

Mark: … but I can’t help but think about all those other people out there who already have their [scores], have been looking for teaching jobs, were certified, that weren’t given that option.

Montie: Dually noted, and it doesn’t feel fair, like you said. I wanted to be hired because I’m awesome.

<group laughter>

Mark: Right.

Montie: … it just doesn’t feel fair for others.

The group as a whole expressed the desire to be hired for their experience and skills as opposed to their being the uncommon gender among elementary school staff.

Steve’s explanation of his recent hiring as a school librarian (media specialist) explains it well:

I’m fairly convinced that every job I’ve got has had a large part to do with me being a male. This is my first year being a librarian, and there’s so many of us looking for jobs. Dozens and dozens of us looking for jobs, and some of them are like, these girls are way better than me, these women are way better than me. But I still get the job, and I feel like that’s
happened multiple times, especially when Clyde and I worked together at that school, the interview was nothing. I was there, and sort of like Forrester said, I talked to them for like ten minutes, and on the drive home I had a phone call asking me do I want the job. I’m like is this what this is really like for women? You know, I don’t think this is what it’s really like for women.

Steve’s explanation of his hiring, and reflection that the ease with which he was hired resulted in a more challenging hiring process for women applicants (at the very least in that his quick-hiring means fewer job opportunities for them) is a location of tension for men and oppression for women educators. Also his initial use of ‘girls’ and then of ‘women’ reveals a common situation: while men shed the label of ‘boys’ as they move into the workforce, it is very common for women to continue to refer to themselves as girls throughout their professional lives. I cannot help but think that the practice of referring to women as girls does not help an applicant when the pool also includes men. Research on sporting event commentary by Messner, Carlisle Duncan, and Jensen (1993) showed that “women were commonly referred to as ‘girls,’ as ‘young ladies,’ and as ‘women’… In contrast, the male athletes, never referred to as ‘boys’…” (p. 127). The authors went on to argue that this was a diminution of women and women’s sports. They cited work by Brannon (1978), who determined that when told a story about a woman executive, his college student research participants rated women described in a story differently depending on whether they were referred to as ‘girls’ or ‘women,’ with women rated as “more tough, brilliant, mature, and dignified, more qualified to be hired,
and more deserving of a higher salary than the girl” (as cited by Messner, Carlisle Duncan, & Jensen, 1993, p. 128-129).

During our analysis meeting Harold also suggested that gender bias in hiring might have detrimental effects on students. He explained that for administrators “maybe the perception is that… being a male trumps… the training and skills” necessary to be an effective teacher. Within the narrative we discover that gender can take a teacher only so far, as the author reveals the difficulties that he is having in the classroom. Harold also saw within the author’s admission of difficulties the possibility that his gender is separating him from the colleagues who might assist him with his professional challenges: “I wonder if… he’s not getting the support from other teachers because he is male… like he’s struggling, he knows that he has problems… but it seems like he’s struggling alone with it.” Although the group did not come to consensus about what we thought was the most likely cause of the author’s omission of whether or not he sought help from his peers, we did consider that the very process of celebrating the presence of men teachers at the school could in itself divide the men and women teachers. Clyde suggested that the library scene might provide a clue to this separation:

Here he is, physically separate and above all the other people ‘All the men stand up. We’re now above you’ It’s kind of a weird image to think about: Here we’re in a space that’s female-populated and above them stands the men, and here’s a place where a woman is running it, but she’s going to elevate the men above the other women.

Clyde’s explanation of the scene supports the tokenism of men in the elementary school that some men felt, and also points to the danger of such behavior of the
administration and staff. John explained that this idea creates the possibility that such a
scene sends a message to women educators that their gender and possibly also their skills
and experience are not assets in the elementary school: “It wasn’t like she was going to
recognize those teachers who have taught for ten years of something, you know what I
mean, it was [because] you’re a man.”

Although this study group did not include school administrators, participants
shared experiences that suggest that men are also favored for leadership positions in
elementary schools. AJ explained that he

was on the local school council [involved in the school’s principal search]

last year and all the teachers were like, ‘AJ, bring us a man…’ the

sentiments were from the teachers at the school: ‘We get a man in here,

everything will be fine.’

In the experience of the group, there seemed to be a common expectation among adults at
elementary schools that men are the appropriate leaders for the school, and that any man
found in the schools must be more than just a classroom teacher. Dan explained this
sentiment when he related an experience from his student teaching, pre-service time:

I was either asked was I the college professor coming to observe student
teachers – not the fact that I was a student teacher – or was I one of the
administrators. I was either the college professor or one of the principals at
the school.

Ideas that men are more than just teachers – are in a profession with higher
pay and status than the classroom teacher as either professors or school leadership
– creates a climate of advantage for the men who choose to work in elementary schools. The following narrative explores one such leadership advantage.

**Men Are Leaders**

Although he had taught for four years prior in another school system, this was the teacher’s first year in this particular school. Only 27 years old, he was one of the youngest teachers in the school, and the only male faculty member other than the assistant principal and a couple of custodians. Compared to the majority of his colleagues, this teacher was still a novice in the profession. However, this did not hinder the school’s administration from calling upon the teacher often to help redeliver professional learning in faculty meetings or facilitate book studies. The teacher wondered why he was being utilized as a leader while so many of his more experienced, female colleagues were not. Although all of his coworkers seemed receptive and worked with him readily, the young male teacher wondered what they really thought. He wondered if they were skeptical of this new kid on the block or upset with the administration for placing a beginner at the helm. He wondered – why him?

At the end of the year, the principal visited the young man’s classroom after school. She stated that the superintendent had asked her and the assistant principal to be part of a four person team to attend the ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) conference in Utah to learn about differentiation. The team would then redeliver the information learned to different schools within the school
system throughout the following year. She and the assistant principal invited the young man to be a part of the group to attend. Of course, the teacher was deeply honored and thrilled to be part of such a team. As the teacher discussed the logistics with the principal and assistant principal during the following weeks, he learned that the school system would be paying for the flight, hotel, and food during the trip. He also learned that the fourth representative would be the system gifted coordinator, a female. While his excitement grew, the young man also worried what his colleagues would think as they discovered the story. Was it fair that a teacher new to the system was being awarded such an opportunity while so many of his female colleagues had served the same district loyally for many years and had not had this experience offered to them? Was he simply chosen because of his gender? These questions continued to nag at him.

As the trip to Utah drew nearer, the teacher asked his administrators why he was chosen. They responded that he was selected because he showed strong leadership skills and they liked the way he presented at different times in front of the faculty. They said that these were important features since the team would be redelivering to the school system. While the teacher wanted to feel honored, he also knew that these same qualities were shared by many of his female colleagues. In the end, he knew that his selection was based on his gender. He understood that his
gender granted him privileges not offered to his colleagues. The team would consist of two females and two males.

The team traveled to Utah in July of that year, had a wonderful experience, and learned a lot. The following school year, the team continued to collaborate and redelivered professional learning about differentiation throughout the school system. However, due to increasingly limited budgets, the school system has been unable to extend similar opportunities to any faculty members at the school level in any of the schools in the system. The young male teacher continues to feel fortunate to be have been granted such an opportunity, but he also realizes the inequity that his gender provided.

As with the other two stories in this chapter, participants quickly took up the narrative’s themes of being a privileged man in the elementary school. Montie suggested that the story’s theme was one of a “question of gender inequality.” Mark supported his idea by suggesting that the story presented the reader with an example that leads us to ask and answer the question “does being male grant us certain privileges?” Harold added that it was not only about the privilege granted to this young man teacher, but also “it’s kind of a story of his own guilt” that results once he has realized his privileged position.

At the same time, some other members of our group were interested in exploring the possibility that that these privileges were not necessarily a bad thing, at least from the standpoint of the protagonist. Forrester suggested that the protagonist was telling us “‘this is not what I expected. But I’ll take it,’” and that we should, as Clyde clarified “take the opportunities that are given us.” Forrester went on to explain that the narrative was
“basically teaching kids if the opportunity comes your way, if you don’t feel like you deserve it, take it anyway.” Forrester suggested that while the protagonist might be presented as someone who felt bad about being chosen instead of the more experienced teachers, or as Harold suggested as someone who desired “to be viewed not for his gender only but for his actual skills,” that he still takes the opportunity presented to him. Forrester went on to point out that “he takes the opportunity and proves that they were right about him,” and suggested that this episode in the teacher’s life was about the administration’s efforts “to groom others” for leadership positions in the school and district.

Montie saw a connection between these “grooming” actions by the school leadership and the traditional economic role of American men:

There’s this assumption you’re going to be rising up this ladder. I think it goes back to the economics. You’re, at some point, you’re going to have a family to provide for and your being an administrator, it’s going to be higher pay.

Forrester’s and Montie’s ideas about the administration’s motivation and how it might connect to society’s expectations for men’s work elicited empathetic discussion among the analysis group, including the following exchange, that through group laughter, involved everyone:

Forrester: Right. That’s how I felt like at the school for the deaf. I was being groomed there for a higher position of work and then I moved, so…
Clyde: You should have stayed. By now, you could be the king.

<laughter>

Forrester: I probably would have. I was very popular there.

Clyde’s response and the subsequent laughter and response could be this group’s attempt to confront the very serious issue of privilege in recruitment for leadership in schools from a more light-hearted, and possibly less threatening, direction.

Clyde also recounted his own experience with the assumptions made about a man teacher’s qualifications and career desires. He explained that he had been told this by teachers who have twenty plus years experience, ‘You should start your own school and I’d come work for you,’ and my first thought was, ‘What are you talking about? I should be working for you. You know everything.’

Harold suggested that one approach to helping change these types of discussions was to let people know that “I really like being a teacher actually, and have no desire to [move into administrative work].” Using responses like Harold suggests helps push back against the discourse that men belong in school administration and not the classroom, that men use the classroom as a stepping-stone toward higher salaried, administrative jobs. This in turn opens space to converse about what a teacher really wants from their profession, and also allows other men to resist pressure to move away from work that they find rewarding.

This conversation about the expectations that men teachers will move into administration also produced some exasperation for Forrester. He reflected on the situation in schools and asked,
why have the administrators for so long been men? Like forever. Yeah.

Men. They’ve always been men. Men, men, men, men, men. It’s real strange. The field is mostly women but the administrators always tend to be men. You look at the superintendent. Look at the educators around them, they’re all men.

Harold took up Forrester’s line of thought, expanding upon the details to include a consideration for the changes in teacher population from the very youngest grades where

many educators are “female teachers and then as they get older and older, then it shifts to mostly male teachers in the high school. In high school and then even in college. Professors are mostly men.”

These questions and observations illustrate the complicated understandings that we worked on and are still working through as we come to better understand our experiences as men teachers. While on one hand we might be in agreement about a privilege coming to us, like in the hiring process, on the other we are not committed to seeing how that same privilege then works in our favor to attain the skills and experiences that make men desirable candidates for school leadership. Forrester wondered if it was something in our gender when he wondered “Could it be that maybe men are more ambitious or more cutthroat?” Clyde’s response – “I don’t know. Have you seen some of the women I work with?” – challenges the notion that men have gender-determined behaviors, while at the same time functioning to alleviate differences of opinion through humor as it elicited laughter from the group. Montie suggested that
there might simply be a different expectation for men than women: “to be a male teacher would be high expectations of being a leader.”

Harold identified a possible effect of privileging men in leadership as he contemplated how the themes of the story might inform how our students understand school:

One way to look at it is kids see their [man] teacher being given these privileges and saying ‘Oh, I guess men, or males are viewed in this way. Oh I guess my teacher who is a man is a leader.’ Maybe that’s the role that males play.

Although we could only speculate on how men in leadership positions might be seen by their students, it is worth noting that there exists the possibility of a normative effect in schools if only certain roles (like leadership) are taken-up by men. Clyde suggested that understanding that men are privileged could be part of the career path decision-making:

Maybe one of the lessons is that this is a field – as it stands right now – [where] you can go into and end up privileged. Because you’re competing against mostly women and there’s still a big part of the administration who sees things very differently based on gender. That’s one way for your resume to rise to the top.

The analysis group also spent time contemplating how the administration is portrayed in the narrative and discussing their own school administrators. Forrester believed that the protagonist was written to be skeptical of the explanations given by his administrator when he asked about their decision to include him in the conference. He suggested that the administration’s expectations
of the protagonist were assumptions based on gender: “Okay, you’re a man. You’re a chief. A man teacher. You should know how to do it. You can do it. Do it.” Harold and Mark complicated our thoughts further by suggesting the administration might be making an aesthetic or economic decision: “I get this impression too, do they just want to present this team of two females and two males. Like that looks good?” suggested Harold, or, as Mark wondered, possibly that it’s just a matter of economics since the man vice principal was attending and that left a spare bed in a typical, two-bed hotel room. Harold went on to wonder about the other teachers’ response to the protagonist being chosen over them:

I almost feel like there’s passivity on the part of the other teachers in the school. Nobody ever steps up and says ‘This is B.S.’ You know, like, ‘Why do you get to do this? I’ve been here for 20 years.’

Harold’s thoughts about what a more powerful faculty might do in the face of administrative decisions taken without their consent can be found in a number of the narratives presented here. Harold explains the reality for the faculty, including the protagonist in his portrait of a faculty that follows their leadership without question or complaint:

I think that’s one of the interesting contrasts in the administration being the deciders. ‘You go, you go, and you go.’ And it seems like even the protagonist in the story is… I don’t want to say feeble, but like, everybody else just kind of seems to be either waiting to be chosen or just passive.

Clyde concurred with Harold’s assessment and extended the situation to the faculty of many of our schools:
So the power seems to rest in the administration. I wonder what would have happened if the protagonist had said, ‘I don’t think I should go. There are three or four other teachers at this school I know have the experience and can totally do this, and do a great job and have more experience in leadership than I have.’ But that’s not always what teachers do in the face of administration, right? We often… go with their decisions.

Although the group did not come to consensus regarding whether to see our story’s protagonist as inappropriately privileged, lucky, or being rewarded for his perceived potential as a future school leader, we did identify some important themes of the story that could be applied in our and others’ schools: men occupy a disproportionate number of leadership positions in the school structure, those leadership positions lend power to the individuals, and that power is used in controlling ways with school faculties. Particularly in this story, we saw a man who believes that he is being granted privileges beyond his status and experience, but who takes advantage of those privileges even though he feels that such actions are de-privileging the more experienced women in his school.

**Connecting Across Economic Stories of Privilege and Feminist Theory**

In attempting to reach across these stories and our collective analyses to find understanding of the gendered condition of men and women in elementary schools, it seems appropriate to revisit the literature and remember the purpose of my efforts to use a feminist lens through which to view men in the elementary school. Johnson cautions other men researchers using feminist theory for gender study that we must engage in
weighty consideration of the issues surrounding our privileged subjectivity as men, ensuring that we are not responsible for creating and recreating andocentric biases, reinforcing male privilege, and/or erasing the important position of women in the creation and dissemination of new knowledge. (2010, p. 6)

Looking back at our discussions of the above narratives reveals to me that we, as a group, are aware that men hold a privileged position in the elementary school from the very moment that our resumes land on the principal’s desk. From promoting non-certified substitute teachers to permanent jobs, to hiring men over women applicants even if gender does not guarantee effective teaching, to giving opportunities for learning and leadership development to the new man teacher when the school is full of experienced and skilled women teachers, these story’s authors acknowledge the privilege afforded them at their schools and hypothesize that their privileged status stems from their gender.

While acknowledging our privilege is an important step for men to take if they hope to be part of working towards a more equitable workplace and student learning environment, we must find ways to take action when confronted by instances like that faced by our third story’s protagonist. Men taking pro-feminist actions promotes feminist understandings, criticizes sexism of their colleagues, and “move[s] material resources to women and to feminists” (Goodman & Kelly, 1988, p. 161-162). These actions require the possibly painful action of denying ourselves the economic privilege that is illuminated by our first stories and their ensuing discussions.

**Understanding and confronting privilege in the hiring and promotion process.** This important task of attending to our gender and the ways in which it comes
into play in our professional lives can be both difficult and enlightening to those of us who choose to do it. Our first story’s author confesses in the first few lines of his narrative that his writing task “was difficult because the idea of who he is as a man and a teacher didn’t cross the teacher’s mind very much until joining this research project.” By joining this research project and examining his career with gender in mind, the author is able to identify and reveal to us that gender privilege comes into play not long after joining his school staff as a substitute teacher.

Whether it was their intention or not, our first stories’ protagonists’ career choice plays a part in fulfilling the feminist call for contributing towards an equitable society by providing elementary boys and girls with “many or varied models of male behavior, in a sustained, first-hand way” (Goodman & Kelly, 1988, p. 1). At the same time our stories call attention to the ways in which gender privilege sets up men for greater success when applying for work and taking on leadership roles in elementary schools as opposed to the overwhelming majority of women teacher candidates (Strizek, Pittsonberger, Riordan, Lyter & Orlofsky, 2006). The majority of our participants’ experiences with the ease of obtaining work and advancing within the elementary school parallels the work of Foster and Newman who found that men teacher candidates “may believe that, as a scarce and valuable resource, they will be greeted with an unqualified welcome in primary schools and that their journey through training and the early years of teaching will be largely unproblematic.” (2005, p. 347).

Men teacher candidates’ belief that they will be granted an “unqualified welcome” seems like common sense given that men are practically absent from elementary schools. Zumwalt and Craig found that to be the case with their study of
gender issues in education. Although they explained that there was no empirical evidence
to support the idea that teachers of one gender affected greater academic achievement
with students, “parents and students know on a personal level that teachers make a
difference – it does matter who teaches them” and that politicians and the public continue
to believe that gender plays a part in that difference (2008, p. 409).

This situation can be traced back to a more than 150 year history of
encouragement by leaders such as Beecher (1846/2003) who advocated to make primary
education “the true and noble profession of a woman” (as quoted in Hoffman, 2003, p.
75). Her efforts and, those of others like Horace Mann (as quoted in Urban & Wagoner,
2008, p. 126), to create public education as a career path for women, supplied a readily
available workforce of women working for lesser pay (as compared to their men
counterparts) and subjugating their bodies to the patriarchy of school leadership (Grumet,
1988). These efforts have been successful: the teacher population skews more than three
to one, women to men (Snyder, Tan & Hoffman, 2004). It has also resulted in today’s
society “characterizing the classroom teacher as female, subservient, and second-rate”
(Williams, 1992). While this condition makes men less likely to choose teaching, it does
mean that those who do find enthusiasm for their choice (Priegert Coulter and McNay,
1993) and instances of “preferential treatment in hiring and promotion decisions”
(Benton DeCorse & Vogtle 1997, p. 42).

The men teachers of this study acknowledge having traded their value as a “rare
commodity” (Priegert Coulter and McNay, 1993, p. 411) for professional and social
privilege in schools. During his reflective interview, AJ explained that he had applied for
a fellowship that would be rewarded to one woman and one man, and that at the informational meeting

there’s a whole room of women. I’m the only man, and I’m thinking ‘Whoa!’ And there are all these women. I didn’t see one other guy in the room… a lot of times women have to be more competitive with each other.

AJ is confronted with the situation where his gender and the gender preference of the fellowship providers gives him a “glass elevator” effect for the selection process (Williams 1992, 1995). He also went on to explain that he was given preferential social treatment by his work colleagues: “I’ve got one lady that brings me coffee every morning. Every morning. She brings me a fresh cup of coffee into the classroom. Right here. Drops it down.” He explained it well when he concluded, “I’m spoiled.”

Brookhart and Loadman (1996) postulated that historically different career paths are reflected in the gendered conditions in our schools. A telling statistic of the persistence of patriarchy is the gender make-up at the highest levels of leadership: approximately 85 percent of school superintendent positions are held by men (de Santa Ana, 2008). While only one participant in this study – Forrester, who contemplated leadership but only at a deaf school – confessed an interest moving into administration, Brookhart and Loadman (1996) reported a higher interest in that career path among men pre-service teachers and suggested that this could be traced back to different role expectations for men and women inside schools and within society at large. These career path expectations might also be
seen as driving the condition of “tokenism and false-authority” of men teachers (Cognard-Black, 2004) which could explain participants’ experience with being granted easy access to employment and leadership opportunities.

While we understand that the preferential treatment of men in schools leads to deleterious effects for women, it is also important for men to understand that this treatment can also affect men negatively. Sometimes, as Dan pointed out during a following narrative’s analysis, a staff of women educators can choose to not take a man elementary teacher seriously: “They even joked about – apparently it was the whole school – joked about the token male.” Priegert Coulter and McNay (1993) suggested that men who wish to remain as teachers in the classroom might feel that favoritism in promotion creates pressure to leave the classroom and take on leadership roles in administration. Participants like Harold suggested that men need to change the discourse of men teachers as “precocious careerists” (Foster & Newman, 2005, p. 345) by doing what he does and letting others know that “I really like being a teacher actually. I have no desire to become an administrator.” Benton Decourse and Vogtle (1997) identified a common concern among men teachers: that others take their career choice seriously, particularly that their choice to be classroom teachers be recognized as legitimate and not merely a path to career advancement into administration.

**Seeking equity from a privileged position.** Freire believed that institutions for schooling were influenced by “a rigid and oppressive social structure” and that both “pattern their action after the style of the structure, and transmit the myths” of the social structure to their participants (1970/1993, p. 154). The employment and promotion
actions that my participants experienced can be seen as examples of the oppressive nature of a patriarchal society and the education institutions it creates. Priegert Coulter and McNay criticized the recruitment of men into elementary teaching as an oversimplification of the issue of equity in schools (1993, p. 398).

Our discussion also included examination of the perceived need for men elementary teachers and the effects of that perception on our employment outcomes. Although readers might conclude that it was done too diplomatically, efforts were made within the group to increase the understanding of our privilege and search for actions that challenge men’s privilege. In one case already cited, Harold called for men to declare their intent to stay in the classroom in order to lessen the expectation that we move into administration instead of working to better our pedagogy and serve our students. In another discussion, Mark gently suggested that we need to understand the implications of the preferential hiring processes: “I can’t help but think about all those other people out there who already have their [scores], have been looking for teaching jobs, were certified, that weren’t given that option.”

Goodman and Kelly explained that going beyond simply becoming aware of our advantage requires the more difficult thing to become aware of the way in which our own power may oppress others… Learning how to listen and watch, to be sensitive and thoughtful, and to legitimate ambiguity and doubt are not traditionally part of most men’s socialization. Yet, it is the lack of these very characteristics that often ends up oppressing women and girls with whom we come into contact. (1988, p. 6)
Although our study group represents men at very different places in their understanding of men’s privilege, or an acceptance of a role in anti-sexist action, the small steps of finding ways to speak our truths to gender power, even if in gentle ways, are positive steps towards equity.

**A final thought by AJ on using privilege to combat inequitable situations.**

Another example of where a man teacher can acknowledge and use his privilege in equitable ways came when AJ realized that the parents of his students treat him with greater respect than the woman faculty (including his woman principal) in this chapter’s opening quote. While he seems pleased to not have parents confronting him with language he finds offensive, he also uses the power differential to mediate the relationship between his students’ parents and the principal by explaining that

I’ve gotten to the point where I tell the parents to call me and let me deal with it. Call me. Tell me what’s going on. They can call me and I can take care of it instead of calling her and using belligerent language.

Although more work should be done in investigating the school and community relationship at AJ’s school with the goal of increasing collaboration and civility in educating the school community’s students, AJ has taken two anti-sexist actions. First he has acknowledged the privilege that gender has afforded him in his communication with his students’ parents, and then he has used his gender power to shield his women principal from what he perceives is unacceptable forms of communication.
CHAPTER 5

BODIES, SEX, AND PROFESSIONALISM IN TEACHING

AJ: I’m single, so it’s nice to be able to date and explore

<laughter>

Chris: So it’s an advantage, socially?

AJ: Yeah, socially. Exactly. It’s like will I go out with the fellas?

Of course I’ll go out with the fellas, but you know, I like the change of pace. So I appreciate the social aspect of being able to hang out with all the girls, and go out with the girls. That’s fun for me. So that’s another advantage.

Chris: Yeah, and if you’re straight, then there’s the possibility for more than just friendship.

AJ: Yes.

Chris: I remember looking around at my new school and thinking there’s a dozen women in this school who are available, single, and under thirty-five.

AJ: Oh yeah, yeah. It’s like ‘Whoa! Gold mine!’

AJ and I are single men who spend much of our teaching day surrounded by women. Like the protagonists in this chapter, our experience includes forming relationships with our women colleagues (both professional and personal) as we work together in school. The conversation above, during AJ’s reflective interview, illustrates
that, while we may put effort into maintaining a professional identity during our school day, we remain Straight men who are attracted to women, including some of our work colleagues. We carry these attractions with us even when operating in a professional capacity, and they influence our identities and the outcomes of our professional and personal efforts.

The two narratives presented in this section shifted our analysis discussions toward topics like relationship-forming with women colleagues and the group’s views of the gendered differences in communication styles in the elementary school. In the first story the protagonist deals with workplace gossip which forces him to confront the fact that his masculine, potentially-sexual body is present in the elementary school even if he chooses to see his presence as strictly professional and non-sexual. In the second piece the protagonist is faced with an administrator who makes decisions without consulting him or looking for alternatives when she decides that mixing men and women at a conference is impossible.

**Sex and Gossip in the Elementary School**

**School Gossip**

It was a new school year, and the man was quickly hitting his stride with teaching his elementary school students. Things were good. The students were mostly used to the routines that he had established, and they were getting to know each other. The teacher was feeling like this was going to be a great year. He was confident that he understood all that was expected of him, and, this being his fifth year at this school, he felt that he was respected by his colleagues and students’ parents.
Like all new school years, this one brought with it a group of new teachers to his school. Every year a large number of staff members moved on to other schools. This year there were two new teachers in the teacher’s grade. Last year there had been two new teachers. At this point there was only one other teacher who had been teaching with him for more than a year. It made the man feel a bit disconnected from the staff of his grade level.

Instead of putting in the effort to make new friends, the man spent a lot of time with some of the other teachers at other grades. They had been there for more years than his grade level colleagues, and he had had a chance to get to know them. He was close to some of them. They would not only help each other professionally, but also had a friendship outside of school. Since most of the other teachers at his school were women, most of the man’s friends were women. This seemed alright to him. He liked his friends. They were nice to him, they had good conversations, and their interests weren’t solely about the things that seemed to occupy most of the men in this town: making money, hunting, sports, cars, things that the man felt were expected topics of interest for men. This man didn’t really have much to say about those things because they weren’t important to him. To him relationships with people were important, his students and his teaching were important, and bigger political issues were important (especially when they affected his job). So he socialized with the other teachers who also were interested in those things.
One day one of the newest teachers in his grade leaned towards him as they were gathering for a grade level meeting and said, ‘I’ve been warned about you.’ She had a smirk on her face, and the man felt embarrassed by the comment. He felt the woman was flirting with him, and she was attractive, and the attention felt good. But he was completely confused by the comment she had made. He knew that he was known as a maverick teacher when it came to following all the rules of the school, but this seemed like something different. The meeting began and so the man didn’t have time for a discussion, and simply smiled and in a friendly way said, ‘Oh yeah, what have you heard? And from whom?’ The woman smiled and the meeting began before they could finish the conversation. Nothing came of the conversation that day, and so the man went back to teaching and stopped thinking about it.

The next Friday a group of teachers gathered after school at a local bar. The man was a regular with this group. Many of them were his friends. He enjoyed spending time with them. This time the woman from his grade level showed up, and the man immediately started thinking again about the cut-off conversation they had had earlier in the week. He was sure she had flirted with him, but didn’t understand how flirting would be connected with the fact that he didn’t follow the school rules lots of times. It was confusing. Eventually the two found themselves sitting together, and the man broached the subject.
‘Hey, what was that all about when you said you had been warned about me?’

‘The other new teacher and I had been told by [a teacher who was teaching for her second year at the school] to watch out for you.’

‘Because I don’t follow the rules?’

‘No, because she says she walked in on you and [another teacher who was a close friend] kissing in your room.’

The man was stunned. He was embarrassed. He had not done that! He had not kissed anyone, ever at his school! And he hadn’t kissed his friend. He started feeling like this is what he deserved for being close friends with women. They were expecting it to be sexual, and even went so far to say that they saw something sexual that he was sure had not happened. It felt so unfair. He felt like he was being told that he wasn’t allowed to have a relationship with a woman unless it was sexual, and that once it was told that he did, then other women had the right to flirt with him at his school. This felt so wrong to him. How come he couldn’t have a friendship with a woman colleague without this being about sex and becoming an object of flirtatious desire from others at his school?

Unlike many of the other stories, this one did not produce a flood of participants telling similar stories during the analysis. This time the analysis group conversation did not include any new stories supporting the idea that sexual attraction and relationships can and do exist within the workplace. At the same time, this story generated plenty of discussion about the challenges that gossip and the possibility of sexual relationships
could bring to the workplace. The story also connects well with a conversation during our introductory meeting. In it, Forrester suggested that one of the problems he faces in the workplace is the presence of women teachers who gossip and bring their emotions into school:

Their emotions are making the issue worse than it really is. They’re upset with something, maybe they’re upset with me. I’m like be professional.

Some women let personal life, their, whatever’s going on, affect their school, their school life. If something’s going crazy in my personal life, when I get to school, I put a mask of professionalism on my face. I’m like it’s time to work. My personal life, I push aside, work, and when I get home then I will deal with my life.

Forrester seems to be suggesting that many of the women teachers he has worked with do not separate their personal lives from their professional lives. His statement shows that he believes that a person can separate those emotions caused during his life outside of work from himself when at work. This reveals a belief on his part that the teaching profession requires a person to separate (or at least attempt to separate) his personal from his professional life, his emotions from his work.

Dan also expressed similar frustration during his first meeting. He related how changing from a school where there were multiple men at each grade level to one with a more typical staff numerically dominated by women changed the school conversations:

There is just all this gossip <laughs> that goes on and I guess, all us men, we never liked gossip and here all of a sudden you’re at this school, I’m the only male and it’s like, all they do is gossip all the time <laughs>.
Dan’s feelings about the value of gossip in the workplace and its proliferation among women found no voiced decent from other participants. This opinion seems to be a commonly held belief among men teachers, and an example where men teachers differentiate themselves from their women colleagues along gender lines. It is also a source of criticism of women teachers.

While many of the participants reported common experiences with their women colleagues, Clyde explained that his first experience as an adult in elementary schools was quite different. Although he did not challenge the notion that women are gossipers incapable of separating their emotions from their work, he related this story about a school whose staff was almost entirely women, but who seemed intent on discussing sports, which is often seen to be a topic more acceptable to men:

I was helping with this literacy program in the school, and I remember sitting in the teachers’ lounge and realizing two-thirds of the conversation I could not participate in because I had no clue about the [local college football team]. I really don’t care about sports, but all the women in the room seemed to.

A comment by Mark during his group’s introductory meeting extends these ideas of gossip in the schools and the ways in which men teachers relate to their students. Mark explained the contrast of communication between himself and his students and his women colleagues and those students:

I had a female student teacher last semester and every day, I guess she would also get caught up in the fifth grade drama. She knew all the
nuances between the students, and for me I don’t care. I’m there to teach and not there to keep tabs on their social interactions.

Mark stated his preference to focus on a less emotional role of Teacher instead of Counselor that he sees is a role readily taken-up by many women at his school. He attributes this difference in teacher’s roles first to gender, but then also perhaps to age and experience:

I think that also stems from me being a male. Because I think that a lot of the students don’t bring those types of things to my attention and talk to me about it because they don’t think that that’s something I’m going to be able to relate to with them on. Younger female teachers do tend to be more likely to get involved in that. I know that students want to come up and talk with those teachers. I don’t, they don’t seem to include, to come to me as readily about the social connections, social challenges.

Mark’s admission that students seem less likely to approach him with their social issues seems appropriate given his feelings that his job does not include attending to his students’ social needs in the way in which a counselor might. Forrester concluded that “women just gossip,” which was followed by laughter from the group.

These experiences where men teachers felt that their work was not to attend to students’ emotional or social needs were challenged by those participants who teach younger students. Both Clyde and John explained that they believed attending to their students’ emotional needs was part of their jobs as teachers. Steve, whose new position as a media specialist requires him to work
with students from all grades in his elementary school, explained that his youngest children sought out physical affirmation while his older students did not: “I don’t think that any fourth or fifth grader, or probably any third grader has ever initiated a hug with me. But it’s a constant thing with preK and Kindergarten and I always just hug them.”

Men’s frustration with the emotions of women has been a common criticism identified by feminist writers as a common medical condition given to women in the 19th Century and is considered now to be symptomatic of the patriarchal oppression of women by men through labeling women emotional, out of control, and hysterical (Chodoff, 1982; Smith-Rosenberg, 1972). Although there have been plenty of examples of women in professional leadership positions for decades, our society still seems to struggle with shedding the ideas that women bringing their emotions to their work is bad or that men possess some special ability to separate their emotional state from their professional life. One example of that was criticism based on gender of Democratic Party vice-presidential woman candidate Geraldine Ferraro during the 1984 U.S. presidential election cycle. Ferraro was hounded by questions of her ability to be “tough enough” (Jamieson, 1995, p. 129), while at the same time Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher was leading the British government just two years after concluding a violent episode of war with Argentinian forces in the Falkland Islands (Jamieson, 1995, p. 121).

Using these criticisms against women’s ability to perform in a professional manner persists despite multiple examples of professionalism at some of the
highest levels of government. Despite a somewhat uninterrupted tenure of women as U.S. Secretaries of State during the past two decades – Madeleine Albright (1997-2001), Condoleezza Rice (2005-2008), Secretary of State Hilary Rodham Clinton (2009-2012) – men in the U.S. continue to perpetuate negative ideas regarding women’s ability to be professional.

The notion that men and women have differing abilities to separate their emotions and personal lives from their professional lives was also picked up during story analysis. Our group identified the story as a cautionary tale:

Harold: I think the author is really trying to figure out if his maleness makes it so that he’s not allowed to have this type of relationship as [women] are allowed to have.

Clyde: So, it’s a cautionary tale?

Harold: It is.

John: Uh huh.

We saw the situation as both a symptom of a society where men and women often refrain from having close friendships across the gender line and where those relationships, when they do happen, are viewed by others with suspicion. John summarized this idea that a man’s “interactions must be sexual because he’s a man. If you’re a man and you’re talking to an attractive woman that’s close to your age then you must be trying to… get with her.”

This discourse that men and women who cross gender boundaries are doing so for reproductive purposes or possibly because they are deviant begins at an early age in U.S. society. Thorne trained a critical, feminist eye on the interactions of girls and boys in two
U.S. elementary schools. She found that “gender was a visible marker in the adult-organized school day” (1989, p. 141), with educators regularly addressing, dividing, and comparing students by gender. Thorne also documented ways that adults used gender-segregated competition in their classrooms, a practice which also reinforced hegemonic discourse that divides people into two clearly defined and seemingly reified gendered groups.

When interaction across the gender boundaries occurred, Thorne explained that both adults and children employed specific strategies to reinforce gender boundaries and define the motivations for those who chose to boundary-cross:

Children, and occasionally adults, used teasing – especially the tease of ‘liking’ someone of the other sex, of ‘being’ that sex by virtue of being in their midst – to police gender boundaries. Much of the teasing drew upon heterosexual romantic definitions, making cross-sex interaction risky, and increasing social distance between boys and girls. (1989, p. 142)

Given that discourses of sexual reproduction and deviance were observed by Thorne at even the early grades of the elementary schools she studied, it follows that as adults we continue to deploy these discourses to understand gender boundary crossing in our adult relationships and when understanding the relationships formed between our students.

The group interpreted the woman teacher’s provocation as sexual flirting. Harold explained at the end of the discussion that this sort of behavior could also be interpreted as sexual harassment if the genders of the characters were reversed:
When you have a gender minority in a workplace and that means… because again I was trying to… flip it to… a more typical profession where it’s male-dominated with maybe only a few women, do those same things happen to those women? and they probably, absolutely do, because all of these issues with sexual harassment and all these things are very real and very prominent. And then you flip to a female-dominated profession with only a few males… you know, it happens.

The notion that such a conversation might be both unwanted and unprofessional in the workplace was an important conclusion of the group. A similar conversation also occurred among the other participants’ group. Two members referred to times when it felt like being a numerical minority meant that the women at the school took advantage of them. Brian believed that “the work space becomes so sexualized because they’re one of the few men. I had female teachers flirting with me inappropriately because, you know, we only had three men on the staff.” AJ discussed having similar experiences where women staff members discussed him while in his presence:

You know with this discussion at the table: why or why not I might be a good man or whatever your little conversation is. It’s like, am I not at this table? It’s such a fine line because it’s like, okay, well… I’m single so…

The men expressed both surprise at the very public airing of women’s feelings towards themselves and other men. They also seemed uncomfortable with being the topic of conversation among their women colleagues, while, at least in AJ’s case, acknowledging that it should not be so surprising given that some of us may be available for a possible, intimate relationship. That we are able to see the story’s conversations as inappropriate
and sexually threatening is an important step towards identifying with the more common experience of women as targets of workplace sexual harassment (according to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, more than 80% of sexual harassment cases are reported by women (U.S. EEOC, 2012). It also illustrates that in any given situation, multiple, competing discourses that come into play in order for us to find understanding in our situation as both professional teachers and also sexual beings.

**Accommodating Men and Women in the Workplace**

**The Conference**

It was 2006. Each year there was an annual reading conference hosted by the reading initiative partner. This conference was the largest conference sponsored by the school district. At least 30+ schools sent multiple staff members. These members included the Reading Specialist and the principal or assistant principal. In addition to administration, classroom teachers and support staff were also expected as conference attendees.

The place was Los Angeles or Vegas or somewhere warm and exciting (and out of the classroom!) Wow. There was a buzz in the air during the staff meeting as discussions stirred about the upcoming conference and who might accompany the administrative team. The principal announced the dates of the conference and informed the staff that invitations would be shared later in the week.

The teacher in this school, being the man with the most seniority, was excited at the prospect of attending the conference. He had friends and family out west and could envision visiting with them after the long
conference days. To his surprise, the teacher was chosen to attend. LA
here he comes!

Somewhere in the accommodations phase, the man was called to
the principal’s office. Unaware of the nature of the matter, he entered the
office attentively and sat down. It was explained that the man would not
be able to attend the conference due to budget and space logistics. ‘Budget
and space logistics?’ he thought. The teacher spoke up quickly. ‘What’s
the concern?’ The principal went on a rather long rant... in the end her
conclusion was that those going to the conference would be sharing
rooms. Travelers per district guidelines should reserve double occupancy
accommodations.

There were no other men going to the conference, nor would there
be any other. The school had three men classroom teachers, including him.
The principal suggested that the man look into other conferences because
this reading one was no longer a consideration. Women teachers could
meet the double occupancy guideline without many changes to the current
attendee list, except for removing his name.

The man lumbered the halls, greeted with smiles and hugs from his
other co-workers. Apparently the story had gotten out. He was one of the
last to know. The women staff had been discussing the change earlier that
day. They knew that he would not be able to attend.

It was difficult, especially after he had made preparations to be out
of town for a week. Being a full time classroom teacher and dad meant
that he spent time preparing for the conference. A last minute budget oversight? Hard to believe. The teacher had been replaced because he was a man.

The analysis of this story focused on exclusion of the teacher/protagonist because of his gender, and the isolation he felt from his women peers. The group felt that the protagonist was excluded in a number of ways at his school. The story presents him as excluded from the conference because his administration cannot find a solution for housing the lone man chosen to attend. At the same time the situation also illustrates his exclusion from the decision-making and problem-solving involved in the administrator’s decision. Finally the reactions of the women staff members revealed that they had prior knowledge of the administrator’s decision, and had chosen not to warn him. Dan suggested that a man’s experience at the conference could be a benefit to the school, but that the administrator didn’t value it: “They didn’t value the input that a man might gain from the conference through a different [masculine] lens.” Dan also suggested that the teacher felt that a teacher’s seniority at the school was important but that his was trumped because of his gender.

The group also discussed the lack of inclusion of the man in the deliberations of the administrator and what appeared to be the other women staff members, but quickly identified both possible solutions and possible problems with the assumptions we felt were needed in order to conclude that a man could not be sent to the conference. The group suggested other solutions for the administrator: that she include another man from the school so that the two men could share accommodations, or that she give the man she had selected a chance to network through the conference website for other men who
might be looking for accommodation solutions. AJ pointed to the story’s explanation of that option, that “there were other male teachers but they weren’t going either. So, it wasn’t even an option of sending two male teachers. <laughter> One was a consideration; two was like ‘no way, forget it.’” Dan supported this idea and suggested that a form of gender discrimination was being perpetrated by the administrator when she failed to consider taking an opposite approach: “They could have gotten rid of [a] woman teacher and added another man teacher.”

The group also troubled the decision by suggesting that it starts with two important hetero-normal assumptions: that placing men and women in the same room will be a problem and that that same problem would not occur when housing people of similar gender. Two group members told stories of their own experiences sharing conference rooms with women, and neither expressed having problems with the situation. Brian explained that “we shared a room, I mean, it wasn’t a big deal.” Clyde affirmed Brian’s example with his own, while at the same time acknowledging that this experience was probably uncommon: “I’ve done the same thing. But I’d say still today, I would imagine that’s still kind of an exception. There is still that feeling like…”

Clyde went on to explain another conference situation where the only time that a man was sent resulted in a very different situation:

I went to one conference and I was the only one who went even though we normally would bring four. They always send four teachers, every year. I was like ‘I really want to go next year because it’s in my hometown’ and ‘I can save you guys money. I can go stay with my family’ and the response was ‘Great, awesome, you’re totally in.’ But then no one else
was going, and I was like, ‘But you can still get them a room,’ and they were like ‘Nah, nah. No one else was interested.’ It was really funny, really strange.

At the same time Dan suggested that the responses of his wife and that of a woman teaching peer fall more in line with the thinking that led to our story’s protagonist’s situation:

My wife wouldn’t allow me to share a room with a woman. <laughter>

Well that was the contemplation for this year for [a national conference]. I was the only one going and I needed a roommate and I found a roommate from Arizona, but some of the ladies were like, ‘Oh, you can just room with us.’ And one lady said, ‘My husband wouldn’t allow that.’ And I was like, ‘My wife wouldn’t allow it either’ <laughter>.

Brian challenged the hegemonic discourse present in these statements and those made in the narrative – that conference attendees were assumed to be heterosexual and that those were the relationships to be guarded against – when he suggested, “and sexuality, I mean, what makes you think that two men or two women are not going to be sexually frisky with each other.”

Despite a lack of men in elementary schools, the division of space and tasks by gender is present both in spaces like conference accommodations and also inside school buildings. These in-school divisions seem to follow along similar lines of reasoning to the division of conference rooms by gender: that placing a man in a space with women (and children) will lead to some sort of sexual encounter. Like most other public and commercial facilities, restrooms are gendered school spaces. This leads to an interesting
situation when children need assistance or their actions result in adult intervention. These situations proved to be common experiences with the participants, and led to discussion about contact with students and the need to observe and enforce expected behavior norms of students. Dan related one experience this way:

I actually taught a little boy that had Down’s Syndrome and he’d come mornings without his pants zipped and I would either – he was assigned to a [women] parapro and so I’d make sure that the parapro would take care of it – but there were a few times where I had to meet him at the front door and he’d come and I’d go into the office and make sure there was another adult because I didn’t want anybody to ever say anything. And so it was a conscious decision that there was no way I was going to zip his pants without someone knowing about it.

Dan’s experience seemed to resonate with many participants. They felt that there is an expectation that women and not men handle situations such as assisting to dress children, and that if men do engage in such activities that they must take steps to protect themselves from the interpretation of their actions as sexual and deviant.

Being present in students’ bathrooms in order to maintain discipline also was a place where participants acknowledged that a tension existed for both teachers and parents. Brian explained that suspicion was cast upon him because he was performing what he felt were appropriate, disciplining actions:

I did have a parent ask me why I follow the boys into the bathroom and it was because they were peeking on each other and pulling each other’s
pants down, squirting water everywhere. So, yeah, I’ll go into the
bathroom occasionally, you know?

Participants agreed, but most reserved these actions only to the boy’s restroom. Clyde
challenged this idea that a teacher should be restricted by gender if he needs to address a
problem in the bathroom when he explained that “I always stuck my head in [the girls’
bathroom] because I didn’t care. If I hear a ruckus in there, I don’t care. I mean they have
stalls.” While Brian agreed, he also cautioned the group by suggesting that even when it’s
a man present in a boys’ restroom

there was this question, of, okay, just because you’re a man and they’re
boys, that you’re going to molest them or some weird sexual stuff. Just by
being in the same place with them, in the bathroom, that you have violated
something or crossed the line somehow.

An adult’s presence during something seen as an intimate student act, like using
the restroom or dressing, seemed to participants to be safer for women than men teachers.
This difference in expectations of gender also seemed true for instances of physical
contact with children. Clyde explained that at his first school

I saw right away that the teachers did not touch students at all. I was
teaching first grade. They fall down, they fall onto each other, they start
hitting each other, they hug you. I mean, they’re first graders, they’re six
year olds. They need you to help them tie their shoes or get their pants up
because they’re still figuring it out. How does this fit with a school’s no-
touch policy?
Clyde also related his shock when he moved to a new school system and saw women teachers who would place students in their laps while reading with them, explaining that at the first instance he understood that he could never do the same because he was a man.

AJ explained that he was defensive in his actions because he did not want anyone to misinterpret them, despite his fifth grade students’ desire for physical contact and reassurance:

I do a pat on the back now or rub on the back. They’ll come and give me a big squeeze and I’ll stand to the side a little bit and just, one of these rubs on the back or a little pat and you know, that’s it for me. A hug is probably too much just because of the perceived culture in the school.

Although participants expressed a common belief in being defensive in their actions with children, Brian challenged the group to consider that we might, in the end, be doing a disservice to our students:

It’s sad because, you know, I was not a parent for most of my teaching career but now that I am, I would want to treat my students as I treat my own children. It’s sad that we can’t hug children, treat them with love. I mean, and then we wonder why they are having emotional issues or social issues in the classroom when we can’t even nurture in the way that they need developmentally.

The analysis group expressed discomfort with the final scene in the narrative. The protagonist leaves the office only to be greeted by others in the staff who, by their actions, show that they already knew the outcome of the meeting that had just occurred.
Dan explained it as silence from the staff in excluding the protagonist in the deliberations leading up to the administrator’s decision:

All they did was greet him and smile with hugs but they didn’t say anything. It didn’t say they said “Sorry.” There were probably some people that he walked by [on his way to the principal’s office] that didn’t say a word and knew what was happening.

AJ reinforced this idea by suggesting that teachers have an expectation of collegiality that includes keeping peers informed about administrative decisions that affect them: “He didn’t get any kind of heads up about not being able to go. Sometimes you hope that before you get to the principal’s office one of your colleagues tells you what is going on.”

Dan also noticed something that was uniquely evident in this narrative and not present in any others, and that was the author’s choice to write the definition of the man to include more than his professional identity: “as a full time classroom teacher and a dad.” Although this aspect of our identities – as family members and fathers – was not a focus of any of the conversations during our meetings or any of the other narratives, one participant did relate a story of some significance. Harold, the father of a one year old, revealed the challenges he faced when trying to get paternity time off from his school district. He explained that his district’s policy was to allow men one paid week’s leave to stay with their newborn, with an additional week off without pay if he petitioned the administration and provided ample reason. Harold explained that when inquiring about the second leave week, his school-based administrators seemed unwilling to assist and directed him to district administrators. He reported that district personnel dismissed the utility of taking more time, because they suggested to him that those first months were
strictly “mommy-baby time.” Harold’s frustrations with the system was a striking example of how the historic improvement for women worker’s rights for maternity leave did not take into consideration the ways in which a paternal presence might also benefit newborns and their mothers. An example of where both parents are being treated as important elements in raising children is Sweden. There some 85% of fathers take paternal leave for at least two of thirteen legally-mandated, paid paternal leave months to care for their young children, and where “those who don’t face questions from family, friends and colleagues” (Bennhold, 2010).

Dan explained the challenge for the narrative’s protagonist as an attempt to balance responsibilities when perhaps the other characters (particularly the administration) involved do not fully understand them:

You’re the equal as everybody else who is a full time classroom teacher.

You’re a parent and so again, as a dad you have your responsibility just like the females. They are moms and they have responsibility to figure out what to do with their children and so I think that shows that, again, there should be equity there.

Dan and Brian both felt strongly that this story presented the protagonist as a victim of gender discrimination due to the workplace context. Brian saw that elementary school was a place where women dominated in number and power: “You’ve got a female principal and female colleagues,” Dan explained that “gender played a role in decisions. Being a man hurt you.”
Taking a pro-feminist standpoint in such circumstances might require a man teacher to be sensitive to others’ lack of experience with men in the elementary school. Clyde suggested that a man teacher has to advocate for themselves because not only will the women not see it, they won’t step up and come up with solutions. So they have to advocate and be creative and have to know that, almost like anticipate where the, see, the tradition is seniority, but the tradition is also all women. So it might be not an intentional act of malice but it could be ‘Oh, man, we didn’t even think about that because we’ve never dealt with that before.’ So, it’s almost like you have to be proactive all the time and sensitive to that fact.

AJ suggested that women in elementary schools might see their workspace as “one of the only strongholds” of women’s power and control. Clyde suggested that this story could also be more about ignorance due to the elementary having a history without men. He related the situation in the U.S. Congress in the 1960s when congresswomen found that bathroom facilities were limited and not easily reached from the House chambers. Brian suggested that “if you go into a field that is dominated by women and be a teacher in an elementary school you’re going to need to expect to not always have the same privileges you have in society.” Brian’s comment brings to light an important experience for some of the men elementary teachers. Their professional choice gives them the possibility of losing some of the privileges afforded them in other workplaces that are numerically (and administratively) dominated by men.
Writing Feminism Across Stories of Bodies, Sex, and Professionalism in Teaching

The body in all its forms and functions remains an important aspect of feminist thought and action. Although our group maintained a wide range of opinion on the presence of bodies of sexual possibilities and of emotions that we carry with us no matter our context, feminist theory as explained by Grumet is unequivocally certain that the body is central to our experience and understanding of our world:

Male or female, heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, monogamous, chaste, or multipartnered, we each experience our sexuality and attachments within a set of conditions that contain the possibility of procreation. Our identities incorporate our position relative to this possibility. They encode our assent, or our refusal, our ambivalence, our desire, our gratification, or our frustration. Whether we choose to be parents or to abstain from this particular relation to children, the possibility of procreation is inscribed on our bodies and on the process of our own development. (1988, p. 6)

Grumet cautioned her readers that those wishing to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the work of teachers and condition of schools must attend to the gender of those involved in education in order “to avoid the emulsifying and idealist standard of androgyny, which distracts us from the analysis of our experience of reproduction by stripping it of gender.” (1988, p. xix). In our two stories above, any attempt to strip the protagonists of their gender renders the stories either meaningless or at least meaning-different. If we try to find reason for the gossip and the flirtatious invitation for an “office romance” in the first piece or the denial of conference attendance in the second, where might we direct our analysis without attention to gender and its reproductive
possibilities? Grumet (1988) considered “the process and experience of reproduction” as fundamental to understanding the context of our lives. In the case of our authors and their stories’ analysts, we found connection with our own experiences as men in a space that seems to conform to the social and physical needs of its women occupants before it considers the particular needs of its men. We also saw the potential of sexual relations between Grumet’s (1988) “reproductive bodies” that are found within schools while at the same time expressing a desire to maintain a degree of professionalism with our interaction with our peers no matter our attraction or their potential as reproductive partners.

Despite discussions that called for women to be professional, to leave their personal lives at home, those of us in the group who were single and attracted to women found that there was great advantage to be had in a woman-populated workspace. While contemplating his privilege at his elementary school, AJ explained in his reflective interview that “I’m single, and it’s nice to date and explore… I appreciate the social aspects of hanging out with the girls.” AJ’s thoughts, digested from the longer excerpt provided at the beginning of this chapter, shows that, at least when it serves our social and sexual goals, men are capable of and ready to embrace the idea of an embodied and emotional workplace. Understanding that the workplace, even if it is an elementary school, or perhaps because it is, is a place for socializing that can lead to more intimate relationships means that we men teachers are being honest about the situation. This reinforces Foster and Newman’s findings that stereotypical themes present in stories of primary school men teachers identity include the “staff room sex symbol” (2005, p. 345).
Attending to Our Bodies in our Work Memories

The stories *School Gossip* and *The Conference* present two examples of how men cannot perform their teaching jobs unaware of, or in denial of, the presence of our physical/sexual bodies in the workplace without there being deleterious consequences. They and many of the other stories in this study, illustrate how the personal is in many ways inseparable from the professional.

In *School Gossip*, the analysis group was challenged to think through the possibility of sexual tensions that occur within work settings. Because that setting is a public elementary school, those tensions are especially challenging due to the prevailing expectations of teachers as sinless beings. One example of this comes from the case of *D. Payne v. Barrow County School District*, where the plaintiff alleged that she was illegally pressured to resign from her teaching position by the principal after he was told by an anonymous source of two photographs showing the teacher holding alcoholic beverages along with the appearance of the word “bitch” on her Facebook webpage. In our story there were no reports of photographs taken or online postings. Instead the protagonist is confronted by a colleague in a flirtatious manner. The confrontation leaves the man upset and confused. He presents himself as a professional who seems either unable to accept or clueless to the possibility that his work relationships could develop into sexual ones. This naivety of the sexual possibilities of his working body illustrate a possible attempt on the author’s part to compartmentalize his life and deny that he is a sexual being and that his body and actions may be viewed as such by coworkers.

Jones explained that this protagonist’s attempts to operate in a disembodied state is not unusual and stems from forces greater than his own:
Schooling and formal education is traditionally thought to be the work of the mind, assumed to be disembodied, making it irrelevant whether one is a female or male, white or black, poor or wealthy, straight or gay, able-bodied or dis/Abled bodied. A discourse of disembodiment saturates schooling. (2010, p. 1)

Our story and discussions illustrate that the notion of the disembodied, and perhaps even the dis-emotional self appears to be a natural expectation of many of the study participants. While this may create some short-term efficiencies for work purposes, like Forrester’s explanation of his ability to leave difficulties in his personal life at home when he works, I find it difficult to not think of such attempts as attempts to create a less-than-complete self.

This section’s second story presented the dilemma of the protagonist’s body’s sexual potential presented as a problem for participating as a full member of the teaching profession. In The Conference, the man’s body is seen by his administrator as the source of trouble if the administrator allows him to attend a conference with his women colleagues. This should come as no surprise when viewed through a feminist theory of education. A number of feminist theorists have postulated that the school workplace makes teachers objects of students’, parents’, administrators’ and the community’s gaze (Alsup, 2006; Johnson, 2005; Walkerdine, 1990). Although their work focused on the woman teacher’s body, I believe that our stories and discussions illustrate many of the ways in which men’s bodies are also subjected to the objectifying gaze of those we come in contact with. Lortie explained this situation as the result of the “apprenticeship of
observation” (1975/2002, p. 61) that school children experience as they learn the structure of schooling institutions.

The threat of unacceptable behavior embodied by the protagonist is countered by the administrator’s view that the protagonist is incapable of being involved in the conversation or any possible solution to the perceived problem. Instead, the administrator has conversations with others on staff, who are women, and informs the teacher that he will not be attending, despite his selection. In effect, the protagonist, while first seen as a potential, sexual aggressor, is rendered impotent by his superior even though the solution of finding housing for conferences is one that can often be easily solved as illustrated by the suggestions quickly generated during story analysis.

Other stories in this study also present arguments that a man’s body and its presence in the elementary school is an important part of his teaching identity. In our second employment story Another Hiring Story, our author relates his feelings of both confidence and uncertainty in his work as an elementary school teacher. A poignant scene comes in the middle of the piece, when the author and the four other men elementary teachers are asked to stand at a school staff meeting. These five men are singled-out by their administrator because of their gender, and the author presents his readers with the image of the men standing among a much larger group of seated women who are asked to appreciate these elevated men. It is as if the administrator has elevated her men staff members to a higher status than that of her women teachers, even though, at least in the case of the protagonist, it is quite probable that these seated women are both more experienced and possibly more successful (at least more confident) teachers than the protagonist.
The story points to a common situation where men who pursue elementary teaching positions are mostly successful in obtaining them, and then are granted favored status among the staff. Foster and Newman suggested that “public discourse about male primary teachers inevitably impacts on them as they construct their professional and personal identities. This discourse constructs and reconstructs varied and contradictory stereotypes” (2005, p. 342). In our story, the administrator’s actions of seemingly lifting the men above their women peers appears to construct an idea directed at the school faculty that these men are special, better and to be celebrated. At the same time actions such as these put undue pressure on men teachers to feel like they need to perform at possibly higher levels of achievement in order to fulfill the expectations for someone deemed better than his colleagues.

**AJ has the last word on men, our bodies, and how we relate with women.** One of the challenges to the work that we engaged in with this project is that it has the possibility of devolving into sessions where we only focus on what we perceive are the injustices done to us as men in a woman-populated work environment. Part of guarding against that possibility is remembering through our thoughts and conversations the current state of equality in this our society:

Women still are not in the position that they should be in…and I came out of a woman but somehow they’re not good enough to our country. We didn’t give women the right to vote until Blacks got the right to vote. I mean really? Really? For 200, or 150 years you don’t respect your mother enough to cast her opinion on the people that she brought into the world? That’s a huge slap in the face! But what it says is a lot of why we’re
viewed this way is because of our actions. So I don’t want to say the world is bad and women don’t look at us right. We’ve set up a dynamic by our actions.
CHAPTER 6

NONCONFORMITY AND THE STEREOTYPICAL EXPECTATIONS FOR MEN

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 told to me as we shared some wine in his kitchen one spring evening during his reflective interview 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) explained that girl students have often been rewarded by schools that expected 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 teachers are different from and more privileged than their women colleagues 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.

The following two pieces also deal with the expectations for and stereotypes of men elementary school teachers. In these narratives, the authors portray their protagonists in ways very different from Harold. While they extend our earlier discussions about the expectations for men teachers, they complicate that by introducing two protagonists who do not conform to those expectations. In the first piece, our author explains the challenges he faced when his identity as a man and a teacher clashed with those of his teaching peers and administrators at his new school. In the second narrative the author reveals his
experience with isolation at his new school, and provides us with an opportunity to
discuss expectations of men’s emotional expression.

**Stereotypes of Masculine Behavior and Physique**

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 honored 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 behavioral 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 behavior 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 ‘behavior 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 behavioristic strategies for maintaining order and control of these boys. Behaviorism, behaviorism, behaviorism. 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-behavior disorders. What he had come to recognize is that in spite of all the tensions that 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 behaviorist 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 behavior.
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 fulfill 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 mold, 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.

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 ‘Ooooh, I’m going to send you to Mr. Clyde’s class!’” 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 revealed 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 pedophiles.

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 U.S. 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 James, 2012).

Like he did during our conversation about roommate selection for our narrative *The Conference*, 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. Specifically he wondered “whether this might happen to a woman teacher that she would get extra girls placed in her room because they needed a woman role model, you never hear that.” 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.”

**Social Isolation of the Token Man**

**A Team Player Without a Team**

In the past, the man had helped open an elementary school with men teachers on every grade level. Being a man and an elementary school teacher was seen as a positive of all and just a normal part of the school climate. So upon moving to open another elementary and being the only man teacher, even joked about being the ‘token’ man, his eyes were opened to how lonely life became at school. The man had no one like himself to confide in, talk sports with, or socialize with outside of school. However, he plunged right in building new relationships with his new team of all women, expecting the best. At the beginning of the first year of the new school, the honeymoon stage was uneventful. The man felt accepted by all and was happy that his ideas and thoughts were accepted by his teammates. He did feel left out when he heard how his teammates had met with their spouses over the weekend for dinner or how that they met at the mall to shop. He began really missing his old school and the relationships he had formed with other men teachers. The man would discuss quite often with his wife that he was beginning to feel very lonely at school and was regretting the move. The first year ended with him not wanting to be a part of this team anymore. To top it off, the one teacher
who did include him in the conversation and would plan with him was moved to another grade level for the following school year.

Since by the end of the first year, the man felt his team was not accepting him as a person nor were his ideas being accepted anymore, he determined that he would just do his job and not worry about building relationships with his teammates during the next school year. He would be a team player but only as much as would be required of him. When the second year at this school began, he had a student teacher in his classroom. Because he was free to create new lessons and assessments while the student teacher taught, being the person he was, he had to share with his team what he had created even though in his mind he had said he would not share. The administration was requiring common assessments and probes to be created along with mini lessons to help those that were not meeting the standard. The man took it upon himself to create what the administrator was requesting since he had the time. Even after doing all this for the team, the team leader walked into his classroom one morning and said the other team members were concerned that he was not being a team player. He was shocked and angered by this statement since he had been doing all the extra work. She went on to say they wondered why he would not eat lunch with them. Again, the man was shocked and angered by this since at the beginning of the year, they never came to the teacher’s lounge to eat lunch and had never even told him where they were meeting to eat. He felt they didn’t want him to be a part of their lunch gripe
session. The man began crying in front of her as the conversation continued. Crying was not seen as manly and embarrassed him. The man decided he needed to confront his teammates about this matter. Upon confronting them, he came with all guns ready to go off. However, as he was talking to them, he began crying again. This was another embarrassing moment. His teammates just made excuses and never said anything about all the extra stuff he had created for them. The meeting ended with nothing changed except the fact that he had decided that he would no longer create and share anything with this team. As he was leaving the room, the man overheard one teacher say in a sarcastic tone, ‘Why did we have to get the token male? They only want to do things their way and not take our feelings into account.’ Again, this statement blew the man away. After this meeting, he really did become a non-team member, which caused conflict for the rest of the year but he didn’t care anymore. It even became enjoyable to see how he could drive them crazy.

The group saw the major themes of the piece to be exclusion, loneliness and how they can be, as AJ said, “emotionally draining or emotionally taxing.” Dan suggested that the author presented himself as a “token” representative of his gender at the school, and that his peers saw him as present only for gender representation. AJ also felt that the author was challenging the stereotype that men are not emotional, or do not show their emotions:

the author’s theory is really also kind of breaking the mold of, you know, saying the author was crying and recognizing that maybe that’s not
something that might be seen as manly and so the author is also trying to say, ‘Hey, look, we don’t necessarily follow or have to follow the typical stereotype of men that we don’t cry any time. No matter if you five or fifty-five, there’s no setting where that’s acceptable.’ So the author here is saying that ‘Well, we do cry and we do have feelings and so that shouldn’t be so odd or strange.’

While we were celebrating this author’s attempts to question gender stereotypes, Dan reminded us that the protagonist was not presented as strong in his convictions as some of us might have been wanting, when he said, “But there was embarrassment about the crying.” Dan suggested that feeling embarrassed might be expected because for many men “when you were five years old and you fell and scraped your knee: ‘Okay, you’re a man, stand up, take it like a man. Don’t cry.’” Clyde said that discourse like this continues with today’s children: “I often hear people and even at my school with a teacher saying this: ‘Don’t be a baby’ or ‘Don’t act like a girl.’” AJ added to this notion that crying is reserved for infants and women by explaining that he’s “seen women cry a whole lot in the schools but can’t really remember a time that I’ve seen a man cry, [but] that it shouldn’t really be very different for men and women.”

Both AJ and Brian discussed the importance of teamwork for grade level peers, especially when opening new schools. AJ drew parallels to his experience with his religious community, that opening new schools

is like a church [opening] almost, like we’re going to start a new school in some area and so the author isn’t just going to teach at school but helping or being a part of teams that are setting up new schools. So, even more a
reason why he needed to be part of the process because there isn’t one in place.

Brian focused on the author’s efforts to be part of the team by “creating all the common assessments and stuff, wanting to feel appreciated for doing that work.” The group also was quick to point out fault in the team leader’s actions in the narrative. Clyde pointed out that she “says she wants the team to be cohesive” with AJ adding “but did nothing to that end” until the team had stopped functioning. The group also felt that the remainder of the team was presented as first socially exclusive, and then as silent or confrontational towards the social and emotional needs of the man.

Another theme present in the story and discussed by the participants was work relationships. Like the story School Gossip, this narrative reveals challenges that the author faces trying to maintain positive personal relationships with his school colleagues. In this story the challenges are presented as detrimental to the well-being of the teacher and the professional function of the school staff. The protagonist creates a contrast between his first school where, as Dan suggested,

he had had the relationships at the old school, and you’d assume even though the other school had men on every grade level he was probably still on a team that was mostly women, so there wasn’t always interaction with men when you had your team meetings, but there was this desire for relationship.

Dan went on to wonder, “Is that normal for men to want those kinds of relationships?”
Many in the group seemed moved by these ideas, and expressed their concern about social challenges faced by men in the social climate of schools. Brian and AJ saw the teacher’s lounge as a place of hostility towards men:

Brian: And in the teacher’s lounge everybody gets quiet and…
AJ: ….and they look up and think, “What are you doing in here?”

Clyde went on to wonder if there was a parallel situation in our classrooms, with boys and girls segregating by gender and developing acrimonious relationships early on:

I wonder if part of it, if you look at young boys, maybe we start very early helping them miscommunicate with each other, boys and girls, [and as adults] you find out that the rest of the team went and did something and you don’t speak up because you’re like ‘Oh, I must be on my own.’

The group concluded that the narrative also encourages building a collaborative community within schools by presenting some of the detrimental effects from not doing so. Participants suggested that this could be done through team-building professional development activities provided by school leadership, especially in new schools like this one with a completely new staff. Brian concluded that “unfortunately, a lot of administrators don’t do that.” AJ agreed, adding that teachers are “expected to be professionals, [that] we should already know how to act and deal with each other and that’s not a good assumption to make that adults can do that.”

The group also saw the author as brave to reveal that he had cried and at the same time felt embarrassment about it. They felt it was important to send the message that displaying sadness by crying was “alright” and “nothing to be ashamed about.” Clyde suggested that gaining acceptance for men expressing their emotions could be “an
example of where we could seek help of our women colleagues. It’s like society is comfortable with [them] showing these emotions.”

AJ led the group in a discussion about gender stereotypes regarding emotional expression, suggesting that “whatever the perceptions are for men in our society that, you know, the larger message is that it’s wrong, the perceptions, a lot of times the stereotypes are wrong and they should be challenged.” Clyde was concerned that doing so might disrupt the privileges that also come with those stereotypes, but AJ countered that ultimately the stereotypes hurt everyone for men to have to be expected to be the non-emotional, gun-blazed, mow-everybody-down, and then have a beer and not think twice about it kind of mold… because that’s really not who we are as humans.

Brian also added that another stereotype that hurts men and was evident in the narrative was “the idea that men are capable of just going it alone and that men don’t need to socialize or work on a team.” This idea seemed especially poignant given that we were a group of men, working together, and supporting one another’s experiences.

**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, 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 fulfill 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.** This chapter’s two narratives both treat the man’s body as central to the story as each protagonist renounces those masculine identities expected of them by their peers. Connell explained that “renunciation means giving up everyday masculine privileges and styles of interaction and also has important consequences for sexuality and emotional expression” (2006, p. 131). Unfortunately making such choices meant de-privileging for our protagonists.

In *A Few Extra Boys* the analysis group confronted a common expectation among teaching staff and community members: that men teachers should exhibit hyper-masculine qualities (both physical and behavioral) 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 behaviorist disciplinary methods as part of some sort of “tough love” program for his students. The author painstakingly shows his readers that he does not subscribed 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.

In A Team Player Without a Team, the author presents his emotional and social needs as important aspects to his success as a teacher. Unfortunately this story presents a negative situation where the protagonist is excluded from his peers’ social interactions. This leads to isolation in his profession that creates a loneliness and sadness for the man. In the final scene from the story, the protagonist is written first as an angry, attacking man. This image is quickly replaced as he cries in frustration and sadness because of the social and professional isolation that he feels his peers have caused him. The author’s presentation of himself as an emotional being who expresses strong feelings in front of his colleagues makes for an interesting, if alarming, juxtaposition with his representation of his colleagues’ stony silence and final, sarcastic comment as he leaves the room.
Although these two stories could be used to highlight what is wrong or broken in our school culture – something that we devoted much of our time to during analysis – I believe that they can also be viewed for the positive message they send 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-centered culture unproblematically. To make a significant difference, we need more men who will mediate culture from an anti-sexist perspective” (1988, p. 1). Our discussants identified the men in these stories as positive examples of men who embodied both in thoughts and actions this anti-sexist perspective.

**Confronting patriarchal notions of schooling with a pedagogy of love.** While our analysis concluded that the stories are primarily focused on the protagonists’ attempts to navigate the stereotypical expectations of gender expressed by their colleagues and students, the two stories discussed in this chapter also provided a springboard for discussions about our expectations for the raising and schooling of children. Our first piece focuses much of its energy on the conflict between the protagonist’s belief in teaching as a nurturing action (Noddings, 1992) and teaching in a behaviorist 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” (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” (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.’” (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” (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” (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” (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 (1988) 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)” (p. 7-8). Fortunately for his school’s children, the protagonist took such profeminist ideas to heart, and like hooks (1994) explained of her work at the university level, he taught his students like “it was expected that we would bring a quality of care and even ‘love’ to our students” (p. 194).

**Confronting homophobia and misconceptions of masculinity.** Like our protagonist in *A Team Player*... men elementary teachers often find themselves in situations where they are one of a small handful of men teachers at their school. AJ explained that there were only two other men classroom teachers at his school, which was the same reported by Harold, thus making those men a desired and “rare commodity” (Priegert Coulter & McNay, 1993, p. 411). While this situation causes privilege to flow to a small group of men, at the same time it directs a great deal of attention to them. The additional attention paid to men teachers, especially in the early days of their career when they “perceived themselves to be in the limelight,” can also create “paranoia” where men feel that they are “under-the-microscope” (Benton DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997, p. 44; Cushman, 2005, p. 235). This can lead to men believing that they are being held to higher
standards than their women colleagues, and observed and treated differentially during their school’s teacher-evaluation process (Benton Decourse & Vogtle, 1997, p. 44).

This same scrutiny can be interpreted as suspicion of the motivations for a man’s choice to work with young children, as both Clyde and Brian explained when discussing *A Few Extra Boys*. Both men talked about feeling like they were being interrogated either about their sexual orientation or their potential to be sexual predators. Priegert Coulter and McNay reported that some of their study participants “sensed an unspoken suspicion about sexual orientation” (1993, p. 403). Others also reported direct questioning from students’ parents regarding the appropriateness of their choice to teach Kindergarten or comments suggesting that wanting to teach first graders was an abnormal choice for a man (Arnold, 1965; Murgatroyd, 1955). Two stereotypical themes of men primary school teachers that Foster and Newman’s participant teachers identified were “sexual predator” and “potential child abuser” (2005, p. 345).

Clyde’s admission that he sensed a need to alleviate concerns of differing sexual orientation or potential child abuse was also reflected in the literature. Skelton’s (2003) teacher-participants reported feeling compelled to represent themselves as “properly masculine” within the school environment by emphasizing hetero-normative identity characteristics. Johnson explained that

for as long as I can remember I have been cognizant of the essentialized notion of what it is supposed to mean to be a man – most men do. I have not always been successful in my performance of it – most men aren't (2009, p. 6).
Our discussions illustrate Johnson’s explanation of his and other men’s “failure” to successfully perform those essentialized notions of masculinity. After AJ exclaimed using a dramatic voice “men aren’t supposed to cry” at any age and in any place, he then went on to insist that just because we understand the essentializing messages does not mean that we will choose to follow them.

For those who do work to enact hegemonic masculinities, like Brian’s turn as the school disciplinarian when the principal could not be found, Allan believed that situations such as those presented by our authors and reinforced by the discussion of our own challenges with the expectations (both our own and others’) of the meaning of masculinity illustrate how "gender is highly problematized and [men teachers] negotiate the meaning of masculinity every day" (1993, p. 114). Given these factors, it is very understandable if men teachers find the maintenance of their masculine identity to be an emotionally and psychologically draining part of their work life. This is made doubly so when considering Walkerdine’s assertion that socially-constructed, gendered concepts of “femininity and masculinity are fictions linked to fantasies deeply embedded in the social world which can take on the status of fact when inscribed in the powerful practices, like schooling, through which we are regulated” (1990, p. xiii).

An important aspect to the consideration of masculine identity maintenance is to be cognizant of ways in which we teachers reinforce or dispel these fictions of gender as we go about our work with our students. Goodman and Kelly (1988) explained that our knowing that our performance of identity is being consumed by our students creates a need for profeminist efforts to present “an alternative image of what it means to be a man” by not “‘acting like a man’ but in disproving the notion that men need to act in
some special ‘manly’ way.” This approach allows the profeminist elementary teacher the freedom “to include a strong nurturing component” in his pedagogy (p. 7). This sort of prescription for change is greater than asking for a change in pedagogy. Confronting hegemonic discourses of masculinity requires critical identity work by educators and students, and asks them to challenge the ways mainstream notions of gender identity contribute to oppressive acts against those that do not conform.

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

Like we found in our story analysis discussions, 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 (2005, p. 354). While it could be tempting to claim the role of the victim in situations like those presented in the above vignettes, 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 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 this chapter’s 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.
CHAPTER 7
TROUBLING THIS GENDER STUDY’S FOCUS ON A SINGLE IDENTITY FACTOR

I feel that you’re very lucky, because for me, ever since I was a little kid, I always, you know, where’s the role models for me? Where’s the deaf men for me? To teach me something. There’s so much injustice, discrimination, for me. I feel like you’re lucky. You kind of live in the perfect world, with me it’s just been a problem all my life, not recognizing who I am. I mean, I’ve gone through hell, many times at work, and I get angry over it. I ask myself, why am I deaf? Why can’t people respect me as a person? They look at the deafness as my being dumb. They can’t conceive that deaf can learn, that deaf can communicate, that they can express, can communicate their thoughts and feelings, on anything! But they look: “Oh they can’t hear? Oh they’re dumb.” Automatically. But I face that every day. Even now, right now, I can’t believe it.

This impassioned speech by Forrester came early in our final group analysis meeting as we were making small talk while waiting for a fellow participant to arrive. The level of animation from Forrester as he signed his thoughts to us and his interpreter was much greater than anything we had witnessed in our time together. Physical animation during discussions was something that I noticed early on when meeting Forrester. It had been awhile since I had spent much time with deaf people (my mother
signed American Sign Language and taught deaf students during my childhood, and I spent time with her and her students) and I had forgotten the rules that Forrester explained to us in our first meeting:

Forrester: My deaf culture, when I was taught, showed that you have to show everything on your face, or your hands. Not with a blank look. You can’t sign with a blank look. \( \langle \text{affects a blank look} \rangle \).

\( \langle \text{group laughter} \rangle. \)

Forrester: … that’s just not deaf culture. So I’m used to being expressive. I’ve grown up doing it as a kid. I’m used to it. But most men can’t do it. They have this blank look on their face. They feel like, if I show my feelings it’s a weakness and I don’t want to do that…

Forrester then switched roles. After explaining that the members of our group seemed both expressive and capable of discussing our emotions, he considered a possible avenue of inquiry into elementary men’s identity: “I’m just wondering if all elementary school teachers have that same personality type: being able to express themselves.”

Although Forrester’s story and many of his other contributions to our conversations reveal his understanding that his gender is at play in his teaching experience, Forrester’s disability is the primary lens through which he experiences his world. Much like his story that follows as our last story of the study, the first piece below adds complexity to our study by introducing the interaction of race and gender in its protagonist’s experience. Both of this chapter’s stories and their participants acknowledge and understand that their masculinity is important to their identity, but they
also insist that we attend to other characteristics that they believe are equally and sometimes much more important. These narratives trouble this study’s gendered identity focus.

In the first piece, the man’s teaching success has garnered him enough recognition to be assigned a student teacher, but perhaps not enough to be noticed by the occasional visitor. The author posits that his invisibility is both part of his gender and race/ethnicity. In the final story, our author shows how his hearing disability is an overwhelming identity characteristic.

**Considering Race and Gender**

*You Mean Mr. Wu*

The man is a 2\textsuperscript{nd} grade teacher. He is quite clearly of Asian descent. At this point, he is teaching his third batch of 2\textsuperscript{nd} graders and is becoming much more attuned to, and confident in his pedagogy. As we enter the scene, he is standing behind the check-out desk at the school library. His students are milling about searching for books to take home to read. Standing next to him is the student teacher he has been supervising, a college-aged, white woman, who stands somewhat in the periphery, observing the students engaged in their hunt. He stands with a pivoting head, broadcasting suggestions and pointing students to various areas in the library to assist them with their book selections. As students scurry hither and yon, an unfamiliar, middle-aged woman enters the library with a beige file folder in her hand. Her gaze darts briefly around the library,
surveying the scene, and she approaches the check-out desk. She approaches the student teacher and asks, ‘Are you Ms. Wu?’

While initially a bit startled by the question, the student teacher quickly responds, ‘Are you looking for Mr. Wu?’

‘No, I’m looking for Ms. Wu,’ the stranger replies, a bit confused. ‘I think you must mean Mr. Wu,’ says the student teacher as she points directly at her supervising teacher, not more than five feet away from their interaction.

The stranger turns her head just enough to verify to herself that the person the student teacher was referring to was indeed a man, and quickly returned her attention to the student teacher. Obviously getting a bit flustered, the stranger says, ‘I’m looking for the teacher of this class of 2nd graders.’

Again, the student teacher gestures toward Mr. Wu and replies, ‘Here. Mr. Wu, here, is the teacher of this class.’

As the reality of the situation begins to sink in, the stranger finally turns her attention to Mr. Wu, extends her hand, and introduces herself as a social worker assigned to one of Mr. Wu’s students.

As the scene, above, played out, the man actually didn’t pay it much mind. He was engaged with managing his students, and had only a tangential understanding of what was going on with this unknown woman who had entered the library and had begun speaking with his student teacher. However, at the end of the day, the man was able to re-visit the
scene and truly understand what was going on. Upon considering it, the man found it to be quite humorous. That this social worker just could not fathom that the man in the room could possibly be the teacher of this 2nd grade class was only one part of it. That she would approach the white student teacher and ask if she was Ms. Wu, while a very Asian looking individual was so close at hand, was another part of it. And finally, that she required such an explicit and blunt explanation – that this man, here, is the teacher of the class – in order for her to fully comprehend the situation, was yet another part of it. After the humor had worn off a bit, the man felt a sense of invisibility. The rarity of men as elementary school teachers sometimes makes them more transparent. It’s almost like, if they’re present, they don’t have to be acknowledged because they surely don’t hold the power in the room. That power is reserved for the teacher, and that teacher is almost certainly a woman. It’s interesting that, in stark contrast to the patriarchal society we live in, the power structure in elementary schools often places women on top. Clearly, this is not universally true, as it would not be uncommon to have the lone man in an elementary school hold the position of principal, or other such examples of men being systematically viewed as in control. Yet it is humbling, nonetheless, to battle the assumptions and stereotypes that precede you.

Our group immediately became conflicted by what might be the overriding issue for Mr. Wu’s invisibility: Was his masculine identity enough to render him invisible, or did it require his Asian identity also? The assumption of the stranger in the story that the
classroom would be led by a woman does not need to be seen as a slight, but could just as simply be seen as an acknowledgment of the statistics that almost no men are teaching in early elementary grades. As Dan related from his time as a pre-service, or student teacher, the assumption that the men who are present in elementary schools are not teachers is common: “I was either asked was I the college professor coming to observe student teachers, or was I one of the administrators.” Our author’s choice to emphasize both his Asian appearance and last name complicates this scenario. It is quite possible that here we are dealing with two identity factors that both contribute to the character’s invisibility to the outsider. He is unusual for both his gender and his ethnicity, both of which he reported are rarely seen in elementary schools in his university town.

John found common cause with the narrative’s protagonist when he explained that, while his pre-Kindergarten classroom has a woman teacher’s assistant, he is the one ultimately responsible for the students. He shared that a lot of times [parents] will approach and tell [the teacher’s assistant] information and tell her things about their kid. I mean, these are the parents that obviously know I’m the teacher but they almost feel more comfortable going to her and telling her these things.

His comment also speaks to a common situation for teachers no matter their gender: very little of our day is reserved for anything besides the instruction of students. It also shows that, although John’s students’ families know him, some of them still prefer to conduct teacher-appropriate conversations with his woman teacher’s assistant.

Another aspect of the narrative that we found difficult to agree on was how we interpret the author’s choice to stay aware of, but to not intervene in, the interaction
between the stranger/social worker and his student teacher. One suggested possibility was the man’s need to stay more attuned to his students and their needs while they navigate the library: these students are his responsibility. Again, John explained that this was common in his classroom, and that he allowed his teacher’s assistant to deal with parent communication during class time even though he could kind of take control of the situation and walk up and be like ‘What’s going on? Can you take control of the morning circle time and I’ll handle this,’ but I don’t. I stick with my students and let [parents] talk to her. Another possibility was that he might have chosen to not intervene but simply observe because he felt powerful in his position as the authority that the confused stranger would eventually have to acknowledge and deal with, or perhaps similarly interested to see how his student teacher would react when left to negotiate an unfamiliar situation. John also related to this notion of being in charge without taking action/intervening: “I can put myself in that situation and it’s almost like a test to see how this woman is going to react. I think that’s what I do, too.” A final thought was that the author’s reflective, theorizing writing at the end of the narrative might be an indication that the author feels powerful and in control within his classroom and with his students (and possibly also with the student teacher), but feels in a less powerful position beyond the classroom space or when confronted by someone of outside authority, much like the position occupied by the district-level social worker in the story.

Clyde explained that he thought the author “felt like he was in charge of everything but by the end it’s more like ‘yeah, I’m actually feeling a little smaller than I was at the beginning because I kind of got taken down a couple pegs.’” This idea of
needing time to process more of a situation before having a more complete understanding of it was echoed by the group. Participants related to feeling that teachers typically must juggle a great number of responsibilities and demands, which force them to reflect less in the moment and more at later, calmer moments in the teaching day.

The idea that the narrative’s protagonist maintains a position of power within the school but experiences a feeling of diminishment at the story’s conclusion holds possibilities for critique. At the center of the story is confusion – perhaps something that could be considered a dispute – between the two women characters. As this dispute continues, the author chooses to observe without intervening. This is despite the position of power that he has written for himself in the introduction. He positions himself as a man of authority and action with his students, and most likely also his student teacher. Yet, when his student teacher is confronted with a stranger who is obviously confused about the identity of the class’s teacher, the man leaves responsibility for resolution of the situation to his student teacher, who, as a student teacher with no employment relationship with the school system, is the least powerful adult in the narrative. Despite (or because of) the numeric dominance of women and presence of women administrators at his school, this man maintains power within the context of his classroom and when with his students. By exercising that power by choosing inaction, he allows injuries to occur: his student teacher must defend her identity to the insistent social worker, the social worker is placed in a position of increasing confusion and perhaps also a diminishing of her authority as she continues to insist on her incorrect understanding, and finally, it is a diminishing of the teacher. The protagonist feels like he is invisible, which is caused by his identity as an Asian and a man, an identity that does not conform to the
typical elementary teacher identity of white women. Perhaps he also feels this way because his inaction led to a diminution of all of the adults involved in the narrative. Harold explains it as a contradiction to the story: “the teacher is very confident yet lets this unfamiliar woman walk straight up to the student teacher and engage in this conversation and not really attend to it.”

The Disability Trump Card

A Role Model and Teacher

When he was little, the future teacher and his father were doing yard work. He had to wait for his father to start the lawn mower before he could use it. He was put out by the fact that he had to work when his classmates told him they didn’t have to work at home. He told this to his father. His father stopped and looked at him. His father then said something the man would never ever forget, ‘Son, being deaf doesn’t mean you can be lazy.’

For all of the teacher’s academic life, he worked very hard. He felt blessed to have had great teachers and interpreters. While he felt very fortunate to have friends when in school, he had never seen a Deaf male teacher or adult. There were rare times when he met some at the deaf events. However, he couldn’t, for some reason, relate to them. Perhaps it was because he didn’t see them on a daily basis. Perhaps it was because he felt he came from a totally different life than them.

It had been the man’s dream to become a writer by profession. When writing jobs didn’t appear for him, through a series of unexpected
events, he became a teacher. He attended college to study to become a teacher and, at the same time, to receive a Master’s degree. Since he graduated, he worked at several schools. He worked at three hearing schools and one school for the Deaf. Through it all, he made an interesting observation.

The majority of teachers were women. Virtually, all were hearing (except the school for the Deaf). When he was employed at hearing schools, the man had to teach the staff how to work with a Deaf adult because the staff tended to try to apply their experiences of working with deaf children to working with deaf adults. He had to teach them to respect him as an adult and as a teacher. Educating the staff at two different schools was extremely difficult and draining.

Furthermore, the teacher realized that there were significant differences between female and male teachers in how they teach and nurture their students, especially when it came to the deaf students. The man felt that most of the female teachers coddled the deaf students to their detriment. They had a ‘mother hen’ complex in which he felt was damaging the students’ opportunities to learn and grow up. Indeed, he had had his share of hen teachers when he was a student and he recalled feeling resentful toward them. He hated, hated being looked down at and hated, hated being viewed as a helpless child who needed lots of hand-holding guidance.
Therefore, it has always been the teacher’s philosophy to be a strong role model for his students. He also believes in treating them fairly and justly. He always has high expectations for them. He strives to give them lessons in life to help them understand the world they live in. He feels his role as a deaf male teacher is very, very important. It is a fact that in the field of Deaf Education, male deaf teachers are very, very rare which explains why he got hired so quick when he applied to the school for the deaf.

This was the second of the two narratives whose author chose to reveal his authorship during its analysis and to shift his position in the group from fellow analyst to narrative’s authority. Because of the particular identity characteristic that he chose to highlight, and his being the only deaf participant, the group knew that this was Forrester’s story. Unlike our only Asian American author of the last narrative, Forrester chose to acknowledge the fact at the beginning of the discussion and declared that he would be happy to function as the author during our discussion by answering our questions instead of playing an active part as a fellow analyst. So we muddled on without him, and tried not to get discouraged on the occasions when he would smilingly insert a “No, not really” into silent moments during our theorizing about the narrative’s elements.

Harold appreciated the complicating identity characteristics in the piece, and called our attention to their significance in light of our research’s focus:

One of the things that I really liked about the story is the fact that we can look at it from a male perspective, but even within the male perspective of teaching there’s all this diversity, you know, in dealing with not only
gender, but race [and other characteristics] can play a factor. And in this case, being deaf is a big factor in the experience of being a male.

Because of the complexity of identity presented by the author, our discussions during both the analysis and introductory meetings included working through our understandings of deafness and teaching the deaf. This narrative furthered our discussion by directing us to consider both disability and gender in raising deaf children and employing deaf adults. Mark suggested that the story explained how being deaf in a speaking school means that the protagonist has to “teach others, like not just teach students, but also teach your coworkers what it’s like to work with you. And not just as a deaf person but also as a male.”

The story also follows a path that other participants could relate to from their own childhood experiences with fathers who had a goal for raising strong, independent sons. Clyde explained that the protagonist’s “dad wants him to work as much as everyone else, right? ‘Be strong. Be confident.’ Maybe more. Because he’s saying, ‘Hey, you’re not gonna get a break.’” Mark pointed out that the child who was encouraged in these ways by his father “learns from his father the importance of work and he develops that within himself. And now he’s trying to help others evolve as well... and instill that same ethic in them.” He went on to wonder about how the protagonist’s father might have felt about his son taking-up those early lessons and working to pass them on to his students: “What was the father’s perspective now that he’s an adult? You know, does he see that the hard work has paid off? Does he see that his son has those tendencies?”

Montie suggested that the protagonist as a child felt “an element of angst” and quoted from the story to emphasize his thoughts: “‘He hated, hated being looked down at.
And hated, hated being viewed as a helpless child who needed lots of hand holding guidance.’ Like he’s resenting the mother hen thing.” Montie directed us to what we agreed was an important theme in the piece. The group also felt that the author made a strong argument for a difference between the pedagogical approaches of men and women teachers regardless of ability. Montie suggested that one lesson from the story was that male teachers have… female and male teachers have high expectations, period. But the male teachers have expectations for the students to be stronger. That’s the way it sounds to me. It’s like male teachers expect their students to be stronger. You know, ‘I’m not going to baby you. I’m not going coddle you. It’s time for you to step up and take responsibility, work hard,’ you know.

Montie’s analysis touches on a number of aspects of the story and its suppositions. First, while he acknowledges that both genders can have high expectations for their students, it is the author’s notion of building strength of character in students that seems to be a greater focus of men teachers. The second aspect is that men teachers believe that strength in character is instilled by not coddling students, but instead insisting that they take responsibility and work hard. Montie’s analysis focused our attention on the author’s philosophy of teaching, which follows along the common lines of hegemonic masculinity. A discussion of these ideas prompted Forrester to rejoin the discussion as a fellow analyst.

Breaking his silence, Forrester explained how he felt men teachers fulfilled a need within U.S. society, which he felt had lost its male role model in the traditional home:
“That’s why maybe we need men in the school maybe because they feel we can teach them something that they’re not getting at home. The male teachers at school means there’s good men in the school.” While he was theorizing that men teachers are a welcome presence in schools because of their ability to act as substitutes for absent fathers, Forrester also acknowledged that there was another, negative side to the presence of men in elementary school teaching:

At the same time I can see women not trusting men because there are a lot of stories in the news about men abusing children, abusing their authority in the schools and doing bad things. So it seems like you hear these stories almost every day, so the women mistrust us.

Harold suggested that expectations of how men teachers interact with students set up a dynamic in schools where those expectations and the resulting actions feed off one another. He explained that to him it seems like a self-fulfilling prophecy because through our discussion, it does seem that male teachers tend to be a little more firm and strong with their students and want them to be more independent. And then society views male teachers as that and says things like, ‘Oh, I have a student that needs to be in class.’ Or ‘I think this child would do great in your class’ with this idea that males… so it almost seems to fulfill that same prophecy.

Harold’s ideas challenge the notion of men teachers as sources of desired role modeling and an ability to strengthen coddled children by suggesting that we men might simply be taking on these roles in order to fulfill societal expectations of gender.
Although much of our conversation focused on the ways the author treated gender in the narrative, it was the combination of deafness and masculinity that enriched this story’s ability to inform our understanding of teacher identity. During the analysis conversation of the story *Men are Leaders* we discussed the possibility of taking up leadership positions in our schools, and Forrester’s response seems a fitting inclusion here to illustrate how a school’s context affects the decisions and actions of its occupants.

In it, Forrester answers the leadership question:

> For me? At the hearing school? I don’t want to be a principal at the hearing school. At a deaf school, I don’t mind. Being a good principal or an administrator, I don’t mind those positions. But not at a hearing school. No way. It’s hard enough getting respect from my coworkers. Imagine me as a principal. I wouldn’t get any respect at all.

Forrester’s comment highlights the struggles that he, and possibly other deaf educators, face when moving into hearing schools where the faculty does not have much experience with hearing-impaired individuals.

Forrester’s deep, emotional connection to his story and to what he sees as a continuous challenge to his professional identity, despite being a successful, veteran teacher with a graduate degree, was clearly evident during our discussions. His feelings of loss in his life because of a lack of men role models and due to his working and living in a speaking society were evident in both his story and many of his contributions to our conversations. His efforts to inform his fellow participants about his disability and its importance to his identity enriched our work and expanded our understanding of disability’s role in identity formation.
Training a Feminist Lens on Our Stories of Identity

Foster and Newman wrote that “public discourse about male primary teachers inevitably impacts on them as they construct their professional and personal identities” (2005, p. 342). While this has been true for the all experiences about which we have discussed and written, this chapter’s narratives and conversations clearly present the challenges men face in constructing their professional identities while at the same time illustrating the fluidity of identity that we all experience. Placing ourselves in a workspace assumed to be feminized requires negotiating between our career choice and our perceptions of our identity.

Gender’s proprietary rights to teaching. In the narrative You Mean Mr. Wu, the protagonist seems both powerful as the authority of his classroom and student teacher, while at the same time powerless to fulfill the stranger’s expectation that he be a she. Lee (1973) explained that the stranger’s expectation of gender is a common experience in the elementary school despite being counter to traditional practices in our larger society: people reflexively refer to elementary teachers with the feminine pronoun ‘she,’ although the masculine form ‘he’ is always used when referring to human beings of unspecified sex. Evidently, women have come to have proprietary rights in the area of elementary teaching [italics added]. (p. 82)

Given that the commonly held image of the elementary teacher is a woman, and most likely a White, heterosexual woman due to that description being the identity of a preponderance of elementary school teachers (Zumwalt & Craig, 2008), then it appears unsurprising that a visitor to an elementary school might assume that the teachers she
comes in contact with will be women. This expectation was met in the story by the presence of the White woman student teacher, and so the case of mistaken identity took place.

Foster and Newman explained that “identity construction is dynamic and it is about structure as well as agency” (2005, p. 346). Analysis of the narrative reveals the dynamic of structure and authority as the structure of the elementary school creates an expectation of race and gender for teachers, while at the same time the protagonist maintains his authority within the classroom. The author carefully places each of the three characters in specific orientation to one another. For instance, the woman student teacher is written as “two arm lengths” from the teacher, behind and to the side of him. These specifics are important to the theme of the man’s sense of invisibility in the eyes of the third character, the stranger/social worker. He places himself in close proximity to the other characters, while at the same time chooses to not engage in the conversation. Because of the conversation between the two women and the lack of conversation between Mr. Wu and his student teacher – something that could quickly resolve the misidentification – the invisible Mr. Wu creates a sort of isolation of his body as not a woman’s (and so not expected to be the body of a second grade teacher) and also as not a powerful body that intervenes despite being aware of the conversation’s content. The few moments that it takes to resolve the story’s problem illustrates both the power of Mr. Wu as a man teacher, and also the ways in which his identity is fluid. Johnson explained that

The masculine power is balanced by the general symbolism of difference whereby the masculine is valued over the feminine. While masculinity is
grounded in difference, it is not a static characteristic or personal identity trait. Instead masculinity is a fluid construct that is organized within social relations and ultimately changes those social relations. (2009, p. 6)

The dynamic nature of the protagonist’s identity is an example of the fluidity of identity and an example of how an identity study such as this one must account for intersecting or interacting identity characteristics despite having a single-characteristic focus.

Troubling single-focused studies of identity. Mr. Wu is a man, but he is also an Asian man. Forrester is a man, but he is also a deaf man. Both of these men teach, and so their professional identity embraces intersecting, or interacting characteristics of gender, race, dis/ability, and profession. These are not the only aspects of identity that they bring to their work, but they are the ones chosen by the authors for our collective consideration. Walkerdine also considered the implications of gender and identity in schooling and explained that “both female teachers and small girls are not unitary subjects uniquely positioned, but are produced as a nexus of subjectivities, in relations of power which are constantly shifting, rendering them at one moment powerful and at another powerless” (1990, p. 3). While her focus was on women and girls, we see with our stories that men and possibly boys also experience the shifting relations of power that result in changes in their production of identity.

Work with women and girls by others has also informed feminist thinking about identity’s multidimensional characteristic. Gonzalez, while working with young Mexicanas in California explained that “in a culture of shifting and changing realities, life is seen through the multidimensional frame of intersectionality where meanings and
feelings of displacement, poverty, and racism are acknowledged and written as different kinds of truth” (1998, p. 95). Our participant stories and discussions revealed ways in which we have come to understand the multidimensional frame of our identities and have used them to acknowledge and write our meanings and feelings as different kinds of truths. These truths complicate our understanding of both our gender and the multiplicity of other identity characteristics, and how they come to play in our professional identities.

Ideas of the fluidity of identity and classroom authority were also considered by Maher, who postulated that

- our identities and subjectivities are multiple, changing, and always constructed in relation to others. So, too, with our “authorities.” Classroom authority thus need not only be theorized as a finite entity to be won by either teachers or students, or even split between them. Rather it may be viewed as an ongoing process of active participation and negotiation.

(1999, p. 50)

Maher’s suggestion that authority is not a “finite entity” but instead a shared entity among classroom participants creates an opening to view our work as beneficial in helping us see the possibilities for a more democratic and equitable approach to education.

**Final considerations on the fluidity of identity, and giving Harold the last word.** These final participant stories build on our prior work in understanding masculine identity of men elementary teachers, while at the same time trouble the study of identity by introducing other characteristics that seem as equal to, if not more important, than gender. They show both the protagonists’ views of their identity (as an Asian man
teacher; as a deaf man teacher) and the disenfranchising views of others (as invisible; as incompetent). Like our authors, Foster and Newman reported that their participant’s stories told of a disjuncture between how the men perceived themselves and how others in the primary school environment saw them. In all the stories the men had been surprised by their experiences; they were unsuspecting and unprepared for the incidents that they recalled (2005, p. 346).

Having an understanding that our professional identities are both fluid and determined by our perceptions and the perceptions of others who also inhabit the elementary school can better prepare us for the incidents Foster and Newman’s participants experienced and those that we chose to write about and tell one another. During his interview, Harold reflected on the factors that influenced his decision to write a story that considered both race and gender:

I think growing up I have always been aware of my difference. And being Asian and how that was different, because I grew up in a very Caucasian homogenous community. So I always knew I was different. I was never ever bullied; no one said a word about me being different. But I knew I always knew. I spent so much of my life just trying to assimilate and be a white person. And I thought that if I tried hard enough that I could make my difference go away and I could just be like everybody else. And that’s how I grew up. And it wasn’t until after college and moving to California that I began to accept my difference and try to use it as a strength and engage with it and embrace it. So ever since I’ve made that transition I’ve
tried to see how my difference has played a role in my interactions with people.
CHAPTER 8

RAISING CONSCIOUSNESS AND WORKING TOWARDS EQUITY

Montie: Thanks for inviting me to participate in your research project.

I was a little bit skeptical at first…

Montie was skeptical of the study at first, and so were a number of other participants who often waited until the end of a meeting to convey to me something like Montie’s message as we were cleaning up. Some participants were unsure that there was very much to study about men, like when Dan explained in his interview that “there’s a lot about being a male teacher that I really don’t think about. But this has made me think about it more than I ever have.” Others weren’t so certain about the process, wondering if perhaps the project was more focused on self-help than research.

Haug (1983/1987) was adamant that her proposed Collective Memory Work methodology was not a consciousness-raising session for feminists. But our group’s efforts did include plenty of consciousness-raising, as evidenced by Dan’s quote above. While the intent of the gathering was not focused on teaching or supporting each other in our work as men elementary school teachers, these things happened anyway. There were a number of instances when the discussion protocols broke down as participants chose to address each other’s ideas by presenting empathetic vignettes from their own experience, or when they explored novel approaches to a dilemma.
One example that produced both confessions of deep frustration but also laughter occurred when Forrester explained that in his university-level American Sign Language classes he was unable to stop his students from talking:

I tell them to turn it off. If you hear silence, then they’ll be able to know how deaf feel, and they’ll learn to use their hands, but they don’t respect me. They’ll continue to talk all the time, or they’ll try to talk discreetly.

Forrester’s confession produced an avalanche of suggestions, with a number of participants looking for solutions to his problem. One inventive response came from Harold, who used his domestic experience to come up with a possible solution for our deaf teacher’s challenge of knowing when students are speaking:

My baby. When she sleeps, she has a monitor in the room that we put in the kitchen so that we can hear if she’s crying or not. And the monitor has lights that light up when there’s sound, so you can see when there’s noise going on.

This situation is an exemplar of the sorts of tangential conversations found within the participant discussions. As participants shared experiences or reacted to the stories presented to them in the participant narratives, it was common that some of the group would present similar challenges in their own work or look to find solutions to problems that arose, especially, like in the situation above, when the problem was teaching-related. These were important outcomes for the participants. It helped participants bond with one another, recognize ways that we
could help one another, and laid a foundation for the more difficult work of giving and receiving criticism of each others’ writing and conversation.

But what is the “so what?” for the education field? This study and other efforts in Collective Memory Work were not undertaken so that a small, collective group could explore an issue and then walk away from the project feeling more aware. While awareness-raising was for many of us an important component of the project, this study set out to better our understanding of our identity at the intersection of gender and profession. Collective Memory Work was created as a research act within the feminist movement in order to identify and confront gender-specific oppression. This project was created along similar lines, although we approached gender inequality from the direction of the oppressing gender intent on understanding our gendered relationship with our professional choice to teach in the women-populated elementary school setting.

Although each of the previous findings chapters includes a final section that began the process of connecting our stories and collective analyses to educational and feminist theories, this final chapter is devoted to a more summative and independent analysis. Here I will use theory to forge stronger links across stories and conversations and make recommendations for future directions. The chapter is organized by the three organizing questions presented in the first chapter:

1. What privileging and de-privileging themes do men elementary teachers identify when engaged in collective memory work?
2. How might collective memory work assist men elementary school teachers to not only understand the privileges afforded to them, but also engage them in developing a profeminist view of their profession?

3. How might the application of feminist thought to the gendered workspace of the elementary school inform those men who have chosen the elementary teaching profession?

After these questions have been reviewed, I present two final sections where I bring back the voices of the participants in order to speculate on this study’s implications for research and teaching practice.

Privileging and De-privileging Themes Related to Gender in Elementary Schools

The narratives and discussions of this study reinforce many of the ideas put forward by other gender studies in consideration of identity formation and acknowledgement of privilege. Many times our work illustrated what Kimmel and Messner (1989) posited when discussing the inability of White men to recognize their race and gender as central to their identity: “The mechanisms that afford us privilege are very often invisible to us. What makes us marginal (unempowered, oppressed) are the mechanisms that we understand, because those are the ones that are most painful in daily life” (1989, p. 3). It does not hurt to be a man when applying for an elementary teaching position, or once in school when being considered for professional development or advancement. Our gender privilege reinforces hegemonic discourses about how men are needed to occupy education positions as masculine role models and leaders for women and children of our schools.
Within the activities of this study, there were times we were able to recognize some of our gendered privileges, and at least begin to question and understand how women are de-privileged by those situations. We recognized that men were often given “unqualified welcome” (Foster & Newman, 2005, p. 347) and that this meant that this advantage was gender-specific and injured our women colleagues by discounting their efforts and experience when measured against our gender.

Women also suffer from the perception among many parents and students who believe that men teachers affect greater achievement with students (Zumwalt & Craig, 2008). Despite a lack of empirical evidence, this discourse persists, and in persisting, the belief that gender affects achievement serves to discount the efforts of the vast majority of teachers who teach and teach well despite being women.

Our study also revealed some ways that the very discourses that assist men in their employment efforts cause injury to them as men are expected to enact the hegemonic masculine identities for which they were hired. Some men discover that being a man in the elementary school means the possibility of social and professional isolation due to the belief that our gender confers an ability to operate socially independently within the social environment of schooling and also unspecified skills and abilities unavailable to women. Maintaining hegemonic masculinity also results in expectations that we maintain a hyper-masculine physique, enact behaviorist management styles, and also reinforce and encourage oppressive behaviors by his students (Skelton, 2003; Thorne, 1989).

Men who choose to reject or pushback against the normative stereotyping that comes along with the gendered privilege in the teaching job market often results in loss
of those privileges and possibly even accusations of being “not man enough” and possibly even deviant and unacceptable for the responsibility of teaching children (Murgatroyd, 1955; Priegert Coulter & McNay, 2006; Triplett, 1968).

**Developing Profeminist Views Within the Profession**

In many ways this study resulted less in tangible, reported actions on the part of the participants and more in an acknowledgement by some of the ways in which the privileging/de-privileging discourses of gender effect elementary school teaching and those involved in elementary teaching and learning. Acknowledgment of privilege is an important first step, especially for men who usually receive the privileges of gender. This follows along with Freire’s (1970/1993) charge that revolutionary change requires both awareness and action from those who are oppressed in concert with their oppressors. Men must be involved in pro-feminist actions that move resources to women (Goodman & Kelly, 1988). Goodman and Kelly explained that going beyond simply becoming aware of our advantage requires the

more difficult thing to become aware of the way in which our own power may oppress others… Learning how to listen and watch, to be sensitive and thoughtful, and to legitimate ambiguity and doubt are not traditionally part of most men’s socialization. Yet, it is the lack of these very characteristics that often ends up oppressing women and girls with whom we come into contact. (1988, p. 6)

Awareness is the first step towards developing pro-feminist practices and is something to be hoped for from participants in a short-term project where a number of them confessed to being unaware of or unable to verbalize the gender privilege in their
professional experience. It is also important to acknowledge that our group may be exceptional within the exceptional group of rare, men elementary school teachers; as John explained in our first meeting, “We all knew before we came here that we were going to be sharing some of our stories too” about our experiences as men who taught in elementary school. Although I believe that our responses showed a variety of stances concerning our feelings about gender privilege and the conditions within schools, I also must acknowledge that none of the participants persistently rejected and resisted my attempts to keep us focused on gender. That aside, our group activities revealed that most of us have not found substantial ways to take up Freire’s and Goodman and Kelly’s charge to take revolutionary action.

One action that men in this study and others can take is resisting pressure (both external and internal) both to play hegemonic masculinity roles and to encourage heteronormative thinking among our colleagues and students. By resisting these pressures, we can work towards providing our school communities with “many or varied models of male behavior, in a sustained, first-hand way” (Goodman & Kelly, 1988, p. 1). Our actions of resistance can also result in greater acceptance of humanizing pedagogies like those proposed and practiced by Freire (1970/1993), Noddings (1992) and hooks (1994, 2003). Inviting our students into a more democratic relationship with their teachers and learning, men teachers can assist their students in developing the skills to interrogate the discourses of their lives.

**Applying Feminist Thought to the Gendered Workspace of the Elementary School**

As in our final analysis meeting when Forrester was so exasperated by the predominance of men in school leadership, any critical examination requires some
historical inquiry into our present condition. Men have been privileged within schools for as long as public schools have existed in the U.S. A very intentional effort was made by public schooling proponents such as Beecher (1846/2003) and Mann (as quoted in Urban & Wagoner, 2008, p. 126). While the first expressed an eagerness to see the opening of the teaching profession to women as a feminist movement, the second saw women as a readily available and compliant workforce for a public works project that he had to sell to the businessmen, landowners, and politicians (mostly men) who would fund it. Now 150 years later, we men teachers continue to reap the rewards of gender expectations that place men as the acceptable leader and higher-salary earner as unearned opportunities based on gender.

Despite evidence to the contrary, a discourse of *man the good provider* (Thorne, 1989) persists and plays a part in gender oppression within schools. Although most men in this study and some in the past (Brookhart and Loadman, 1996) clearly state their intention to be classroom teachers and not school administrators, men report that their persists an expectation that they will move out of the classroom as part of a man’s desire to advance in a hierarchy to higher pay. At the same time this discourse injures those women who desire just the thing that so many men claim to not want. Although the numbers of women in leadership (especially elementary school leadership) have grown, when compared to the percentage of women in the profession it becomes evident that a bias favoring men in school leadership persists (de Santa Ana, 2008; National Center for Education Statistics, 2010). Men are placed in a double bind, where if they choose to stay in the classroom, then they are relegated to lower pay (often seen
as not adequate to support a family) and perhaps also viewed as not ambitious or a poor provider, while those who choose to move into leadership do so within a system of institutional sexism. This advancement bias hurts women both in removing leadership positions that are occupied by men, but also by creating a classroom teacher salary that is not intended to allow teachers to provide adequately for their families.

Many times this study’s participants reinforced the discourses that situate men as natural leaders and women as not. Men have been situated as the logical half of humanity, as the gender which can control emotions. Women are gossips, are unable to come up with an objective solution, and are unable to control their emotions. A history of such accusations supports these de-privileging assertions. Women who suffered under the oppression of 19th Century patriarchy were commonly diagnosed as mentally deficient because of signs of hysteria, over-wrought emotions and illogical behavior by men medical practitioners instead of doctors seeing the oppressive conditions that were the true cause (Chodoff, 1982; Smith-Rosenberg, 1972). Keeping in mind this historical precedent, men might pause in their accusations and instead look for ways in which we are implicit in oppressive conditions, or explore the possibility that we might be the ones who suffer from poor communication skills, disconnection from our emotions, and delusional beliefs in objectivism. At the very least we might recognize how inaccurate and unfair it is to brush such criticisms with broad strokes across an entire category of people.
Expanding, Hypothesizing, and Maybe Also Poking Holes in the Research

One unintended result of this study and its method is that a number of participants found time during our conversations to problematized the study, or suggest other directions that could be taken. Given the study’s method of including participants in many of the processes for the study, from recruitment efforts to data generation to analysis of the data, it seems understandable that participants might reflect on their experiences during the study and share those thoughts with the group, or with me during end-of-study interviews.

Also the definition of who makes for a qualifying participant meant that my sample group would be populated with college-educated men. In particular, we are ten men with undergraduate degrees, seven of whom hold a Master’s level degree, with three of those seven pursuing either an Education Specialist or a Doctoral degree and another one having already completed his Ph.D. and joined the education faculty of a regional university. Although in no way does that guarantee a high degree of reflexivity, it does mean that there is a good chance that many participants have taken courses that emphasized and cultivated reflective practice in their pedagogy. Also in the case of Brian, he is the professor of some of those courses at his university. I believe that this led to a number of occasions when participants did more than just look to fulfill the goals of the study.

One example of this was when during his interview Harold diplomatically started his criticism by telling me that while he liked hearing other people’s perspectives, he did wonder if having a discussion format might have weakened participants’ resolve to take
divergent views: “I almost feel that we were all coming from the same sort of perspective. There weren’t many times when we had real disagreements. I felt like we all came to consensus pretty easily.” Harold went on to theorize what the cause might be: “I don’t know if that’s because we all have these similar experiences of being men in elementary schools, or if our analysis of these situations is so blatantly obvious. Perhaps it’s both.” Another possibility that I believe was at play was a social interest in getting along with each other since we were not all well known to each other, had chosen to participate, and were interested in seeing the project completed with some form of success.

Other examples came during our meetings. Montie questioned and theorized on a number of the topics as we discussed them. His inquiry stance often led the discussions, and opened the door for others to participate in his ideas. One example of that was how men decide to enter the teaching profession, when Montie wondered:

Do we realize that there are male educators needed and step into that role or do we find some intrinsic motivation within ourselves? We like to do this, we like working with children. It’s a just a personality trait that we have that leads us to this profession. Or did we see a need and go there?

Kind of a supply and demand sort of effect? I don’t know. Situations like this might indicate times in the study where participants felt comfortable enough to take on greater responsibility for the discussion and the direction of the study.

At other times participants reflected on the study content and suggested further research directions. As the group contemplated the ways in which the first *Hiring Story* might inform us about how we teach our children about gender expectations in our
society, Montie identified a potentially important source of information: “I would wonder how the principal would answer that question, applying how boys are taught to be men.” Montie called our attention to the importance of the administration in the story’s (and our own) explanation of the hiring process, and suggested that further research might include the ideas of school personnel, like administrators, who work with men elementary teachers.

Harold also suggested something similar during his reflective interview, wondering how those close to men elementary school teachers view the economic realities of choosing to teach in public schools:

Harold: I think that’s another interesting element too. Men are traditionally viewed as the bread winners. But here we have men teaching elementary and they’re definitely not making enough to support a family… I think it’s interesting that we have these men, who are fighting for these jobs that don’t pay enough to raise a family. So what does that mean for potential spouses…

Chris: Yeah that would be interesting. I’ll have to save it for the next study.

Harold: Well my wife will be home in <checking the time, grinning at the interviewer>….

Although he used humor in the conversation, I could not help but believe that the economic realities of Harold’s professional decision do weigh upon him. Our interview took place in his mortgaged home, with his one-year old daughter sleeping down the
hallway, and his wife returning from a day trip to interview participants for her doctoral dissertation. Montie’s earlier query into the motivations to become a teacher seems to take on a clearer importance when faced with the sorts of economic responsibilities of Harold. At the same time our interaction illustrates how the opinions that others hold of men elementary school teachers forms an important part of how we define ourselves and possibly measure our self-worth.

**Taking the Work Forward into Our Teaching Practice**

A number of participants seemed genuinely happy for the chance to gather with other men and share their experiences. Because of this, I decided that during one-on-one reflective interviews I would ask participants about the possibility of their forming similar groups and pursuing conversation with other men within their school communities.

Harold and Forrester were teaching colleagues from the same school. Although they were familiar with each other before the study, Harold confessed that he had had limited contact with Forrester. Harold explained it as a combination of physical separation of classrooms and working with a different population of students (Harold taught second grade; Forrester taught fourth and fifth grades). Harold explained how the study might have affected their communication/collaboration in the following way:

Our only times have been when he sends an email to the entire faculty and I respond, or things like that. So I know Forrester, and we’ve had a chance to communicate... But I do feel that after reading his story and having a
chance to sit down and analyze these stories together that he has an extremely interesting story to tell.

Although he was the only study participant at his school, AJ also reflected on his relationship with other men in his school and district. In his school, AJ identified two other classroom teachers and two educators who taught specialized subjects (like music). AJ saw value in our work and suggested that something similar was needed in his district:

I think it would be great to have a male teachers group where we get together and talk about things that just pertain to us. That idea for something like that could come out of your research. You know, going through this research, just to think we don’t have something like this in [my district]…

Like Harold, he confessed to feeling that even though he desired it, there were obstacles to greater interaction with his peers. When I suggested that he might initiate work with his school colleagues, AJ saw that to be a difficult thing to do:

But when it’s “get the guys together for structured guys’ activities” where we sit around together and hold hands or something…. There’s nothing stopping me from going around the corner and checking up on the guys, but it’s not something innately in me to do. I mean, what’s he going to do? Like, “I’m fine, honey.” <laughter> You know it’s like “We’re men so you don’t have to check in!” You know it’s just that whole culture where men are men, and we don’t cry. and you don’t have to check up on each other. Maybe that whole thing is not very accepted, or not as developed… He’s the lion, you know head of the pride, you know “Rarr!” You’re the
strong one and you can’t be weak and we talked about those things in our meeting because that is the overwhelming stereotype. Part of it is our doing, as chauvinist as this world is.

While a number of participants confessed that they faced barriers – both structural and personal – that they saw as preventing them from building reflective relationships with the other men in their schools, I hope that our work together might be the beginning of movement in that direction. Some men like AJ confessed that they would like to keep doing this sort of work, but cannot do it on their own. Others like Harold feel that the school itself – both classroom placement and schedules – gets in the way of his efforts. School leadership might take this research and find ways to help men overcome these barriers in order to find the type of conversations and support that they appear to desire.

Group-building within schools might make the difference in job satisfaction of men teachers and also help men become involved in discussions important to the success of schools in terms of issues of gender equity. Men can become allies to the feminist cause of gender equity, but, as our study indicates, many of us are working on our identity awareness. These first steps are important to moving men towards not only understanding their privileged position in elementary schools, but also taking action to support their fellow women teachers’ efforts to gain equality within the profession.

Cushman (2010) believed that it is these sorts of efforts that can help us make our school system better for our students: “it is now evident that any approach to raising student achievement has to bring to the fore deconstruction of gender difference in order to help challenge stereotypes and encourage diversification of skills and interest” (p. 1213). Our work as men teachers must ultimately be to improve our teaching and the teaching of our
women peers so that we can build a more equitable school system for our students. One way we can do that is by studying the ways in which gender difference hurts our teaching. AJ also seemed to agree with Cushman’s idea when he explained that

One way to expose that need is by this type of research and work, which brings a focus and the attention to the dynamic and dichotomy that is set up in general so that people can explore it and see it and make considerations in general based on it.

I believe that if an international researcher looking at the conditions of men teaching in places like New Zealand, England, and Sweden can see similar possibilities as a fifth grade teacher in a big city school system in the United States, then I can conclude that we men have an important part to play in school system success through gender study.

**Attending to identity.** At other times participants volunteered ways in which being involved with the research group had attuned them to take notice of instances when gender seemed to be an important aspect of their profession. At the start of the final analysis meeting, Montie explained that he felt that “I’ve been oblivious to it beforehand but since you’ve stared this project I’ve gotten at least ten comments” during the planning of an upcoming wedding. He went on to explain that his response to questions about his profession were often met with statements like “’Oh we need more men in education. Good for you, good for you.’”

After teaching in public schools for more than five years, Harold was also quite familiar with the experience Montie referred to – “’Good for you.’ That’s my favorite
response. But there’s also the ‘You must be great.’” – while at the same time acknowledging his duplicity in these social interactions:

In public education it’s almost like a badge you wear, you’re a martyr… But it’s almost like a badge that I chose: <said in a pompous, theatrical voice> “I turned down tons of money and lots of fame that I could have had in corporate America… I get paid crap, the kids are really hard, I could be doing all of these other things, but you know I’m a teacher” And I sometimes wonder if maybe I play into that. You know, maybe I’ve bought into the whole image and that’s why I keep going.

Harold’s thoughts were echoed by a number of other participants, especially those working in high-poverty schools. Being able to listen to the experiences of the participants like Montie and share their understanding of the situation proved to be an important aspect of our work together for some of the veteran teachers like Harold:

I understand where you are, I understand what you’re going through, I understand those feelings. And there is in the back of my head the feeling “Oh yeah, I know where you’re at. You’ll get it. You’ll figure it out.” But that seems condescending. I think they’re doing great. And having an opportunity to be part of the study and talk to you about their gender will probably benefit them a great deal. Because it will give them opportunity to make informed decisions about whether they will try to play that male card or try to look for other ways.
For some participants, it seems that spending the time together in research about gender allowed them to reach a greater audience than they normally would, like when Dan explained that

It was neat to think back, to reflect on certain situations and decide what to share. To be able to open up with the group. I felt like I could do that. You know usually the only person you have to talk about those things is your spouse.

Along with providing an outlet for sharing their stories, the research also allowed the group to take a critical stance on both their written and spoken experiences, providing a gender focus to our thoughts and words. These helped us to define who we are as men teachers and how we relate to our personal and professional worlds through that identity.

Similar work might be helpful as school professionals look for ways to acknowledge and confront the gender discourses that we found are at play in our school experience. Devoting efforts to better understand our individual conditions and those of our peers and students is an important step towards building a more democratic and equitable school system, which in turn may pay forward our efforts so that our society also begins to reflect a more critical citizenry who are ready to do the difficult work of inquiry into their histories and their institutions.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

IRB CONSENT FORM

CONSENT FORM

I, _________________________________, agree to participate in a research study titled "Where the Boys Aren’t: Collective Memory Work With Men Elementary School Educators" conducted by Christopher M. Hansen from the Department of Language and Literacy Education at the University of Georgia (210-602-1906) under the direction of Dr. JoBeth Allen, Department of Language and Literacy Education, University of Georgia (706-542-4526). I understand that my participation is voluntary. I can refuse to participate or stop taking part at anytime without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I can ask to have all of the information that can be identified as mine returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The reason for this study is to investigate the discourses of identity of current, or former men elementary teachers.

Beyond the opportunity to share my stories and participate in a gathering of like-situated individuals (other men who teach or have taught elementary school), I will not benefit directly from this research.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to participate in the following three activities:

a. In the first activity all of the participants will meet together in a focus group to have a general discussion about the unique position of being a man teaching in elementary school. We will discuss our experiences and also decide on our writing topic for the second activity. This meeting will take approximately two hours, be audio-recorded and written notes will be taken.

b. In the second activity I will be asked to write about my experience in relation to the topic that we participants decide is our topic during the first focus group meeting. Although time commitment for this task will vary with the participant, story length should be limited to two, double-spaced pages. This text will be submitted to the study’s researcher and will be distributed to the other participants as part of the second focus group meeting. This text will be written in such a way as to retain participant anonymity.

c. During the third activity, I will meet once with the other participants and the researcher together for approximately two hours. During this focus group discussion we will read and analyze the memory stories written during the
second activity. This meeting will be audio-recorded and written notes will be taken.

d. The fourth activity is optional and will involve an interview with the researcher. The researcher and I will review our focus group work and the researcher’s analysis of the work that we did in the previous activities in order to clarify or deepen our exploration of the data. This meeting will be audio-recorded and written notes may be taken, and should last approximately one hour.

I can choose to participate in any or all of these activities and still be considered a participant in the study. I can skip any questions to which I don’t feel comfortable giving a response. My participation in the study will span a total of 3-6 months, during which I will spend approximately six hours in the meetings and interview (the first, third, and fourth activity), and a variable amount of time that is estimated to take no more than three hours writing the story for the second activity.

This study will provide the opportunity to develop reflective professional practices and become more thoughtful practitioners and people. The knowledge generated from this study may provide insight into how teachers are regarded as professionals, how to better prepare preservice teachers for their jobs, and what factors into teacher’s job satisfaction, dissatisfaction, or attrition.

There are minimal foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this research, but participants will share stories on personal topics. There exists the possibility for emotional/psychological discomfort among participants and between participants and the study’s readership, due to the content of the narratives and our discussion and analysis of them. Any discomforts will be minimized by the researcher being sensitive to my needs as a participant in the study and through his efforts to establish a supportive and confidential atmosphere among participants in the focus group meetings. It is also possible that participants in the focus group meetings will discuss the study’s stories, conversations, and participants’ identifications with people other than those in the study. This could lead to further emotional/psychological discomforts for individuals who are identified to non-participants. During the study the researcher will emphasize the need for mutual trust among the study group and ask that all participants honor the confidentiality of all participants, their stories, and their conversations. The researcher will not share individually-identifiable information unless expressly permitted by me.

No individually-identifiable information about me or provided by me during the research will be shared by the researcher with others without my written permission. My participation in this study will be confidential, and will not be released. I will be assigned a pseudonym, and my identity will not be linked to my responses in interviews or focus group meetings. Because this study is part of the researcher’s dissertation work, results of the study will be disseminated and possibly published. These results will not be individually identifiable when published/presented. Even though the investigator will emphasize to all participants that comments made during the focus group session should be kept confidential, it is possible that participants may repeat comments outside of the
group at some time in the future. The signed consent form will remain with the researcher in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s office. The audio files and transcripts from interviews will be stored on the researcher’s personal laptop computer and will be destroyed three (3) years after the completion of the study. Names and background information that could lead to identification will be changed for the audio files, in transcripts, in any research report so that confidentiality is guaranteed.

The investigator will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project (210-602-1906).

*My signature below indicates that the researchers have answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.*

Christopher M. Hansen  
Name of Researcher  
Signature  
Date  
Telephone: 210-602-1906  
Email: hansenc@uga.edu

Name of Participant  
Signature  
Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

*Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to The Chairperson, Institutional Review Board, University of Georgia, 629 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-Mail Address IRB@uga.edu*
APPENDIX B

TEACHER NARRATIVE WRITING PROMPT (DEVELOPED IN COLLABORATION WITH THE COLLECTIVE MEMBERS)

1. 1-2 pages long, double spaced.

2. Write in third person, so your story can be anonymous. Write "The teacher" or "he" where you'd write your name, or "I" and "me" (instead of “I talked with my fellow second grade teachers” write “The teacher talked with his fellow second grade teachers”). Of course there will be some identifiers that you might not be able to edit out, like if your story identifies specific characteristics about yourself or your students. That's ok!

3. Choose a short conversation, a quick event, that you can really hone in on to provide us with as much detail as possible about the event, your understanding of it, and how it relates to your being a man and being a teacher. It could be a conversation with another adult, like a fellow teacher, your administrator, or a parent of one of your students, or it could be a conversation with your student(s) or even someone outside of teaching who you were talking with about your teaching. It could also be an event or action-focused piece if it was physical in nature. Write with description so we can understand not only what happened, but also what you thought about it, how you felt about it, and how you think it all relates to your gender and profession.

4. Use this as your writing prompt:
Think about times 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 fit in with the privileging/disadvantaging split because it was more complicated than that. However it fits in 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. Please make your story 1-2 pages, double spaced.

5. Get these to me by email by Saturday evening (earlier is okay too :)). I'll read them, make any minor edits for stuff like assuring anonymity, and then send them to the group.
APPENDIX C

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

4. How has the author/narrator been created in the story?

5. How have others in the text been created in the story?

6. What does the story mean?
7. 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?

8. What is the larger message of the story beyond the author’s individual experience?
### APPENDIX D

**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Study Location</th>
<th>Activity Participation</th>
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<td>Discussion Analysis</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Interview</td>
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<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Discussion Analysis</td>
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<td>7 years elementary, 3 years university</td>
<td>Metropolitan/University town</td>
<td>Discussion Analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan</td>
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<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Discussion Analysis</td>
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