Male vs. Female Teachers: Men in the Classroom

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Introduction

In a National Educational Association survey taken in 2006, the ratio of female teachers to male was 3:1 (Cleaver, 2010). What effect with this have on the American society? The changing of the educational field and its instructors has wide effects on the national perspective towards teachers, specifically males; the socio-sexual effect of fewer males in role model positions; and efforts to draw males into the field of teaching. Our research will also cover, in conjunction with the declining number of male teachers, the effect of male teachers in the classroom in comparison to female teachers. Through the use of statistics and research of educated sources we will show the rate at which male teachers has fallen in recent decades, and the importance this topic has towards our national perspective concerning gender related jobs due to publicly accepted social norms and perceptions pertaining to the field of education.

Shortage of Male Teachers

School districts and researchers are concerned with the growing shortage of male teachers in grades K through 12. Speculation has grown concerning the reasons and possible solutions while figures continue to show a declination of male teachers in recent years. With growing statistics and widening gaps in the past years gender equality in schools has never been so one-sided. Many are asking, "where have all the male teachers gone?" Deborah Cohen (1992), in "Why are there so few men in early grades" discussed figures from the National Center for Education Statistics stated that in 1987 to 1988 that 12.4 percent of the nation's near 1.2 million teachers of elementary grade levels were male. In a survey we performed of 53 college-age individuals, the majority of the subjects felt that there were a larger number of female teachers in grades K-6 than male teachers.
In Mr. Teacher it is shown that according to a National Educational Association survey taken in 2006, about 25 percent of all school teachers are male, whereas the percentage in 1970 was nearer to 32.8 percent (Cleaver, 2010). Further, Cleaver writes that the representation of males in elementary school classrooms has decreased drastically nationwide, leaving 10 percent of teachers male, while in middle school and high school grades respectively the percentages are 25 and 40-45 percent.

Fig. 1 Male teachers overall.
Fig. 2 Percentage of male teachers in different school levels.

*Graphs were created using the follow sources: Cleaver’s Mr. Teacher, Cohen’s Why There are so few Male Teachers in Early Grades.

The previous graphs easily show the decline of male teachers in elementary over past decades and the correlation between the different grade levels taught by male teachers. In Figure 1 the percentage of men teaching since 1970 has dropped by 7.8% over thirty-six years in all grades of education. Figure 2 illustrates that throughout the different grades there are considerably more males teaching as the grade level increases. Figure 3 is a compilation of all information that could be graphed and used to correlate percentages in their respective years.

With these percentages and available data showing that there are fewer male teachers in the work force of schools, one must ask why are the numbers decreasing when there are equal opportunities for males to teach? It is arguable that low salaries, sexual stereotypes, loss of social status and social pressures, along with current concerns
towards male teachers and child molestation cases have deterred men from entering the field of education and led to the widespread pandemic of fewer men in teacher positions worldwide.

**Low Salaries**

The low numbers suggest a multitude of reasons for the shortage of male teachers. Many have speculated that it is the low salaries of teachers that have dissuaded men from teaching as a career. According to Cloud and Fastenberg (2010), annual wages of teachers in general are not high. Looking at Kindergarten, elementary, middle, and secondary school teachers, they show that the bottom 10% of teachers made from $30,970-34,280 annually. The median was $47,100-$51,180 annually, while the top 10% made $75,190-$80,970 annually (Cloud & Fastenberg, 2010).

In their book *Missing Men in Education*, Mary Thornton and Patricia Bricheno (2006) quote the following regarding why males often choose not to enter the field of teaching:

…poor wages in relation to the work performed; limited career path for those not seeking administrative roles; the labeling of male primary school teachers as homosexual or not ‘real men’; the current media spotlight on allegations of child abuse; the fear of being labeled a pedophile. (p. 55, qtd in [another] Mills, 2005)

Similarly, Shaun Johnson, a graduate research assistant at CEEP argues in USA Today, "There are a lot of guys who take very low paying jobs...Yet, they're still not teaching” (Missing, 2009, p. 6). With another possible rationale for the lack of male teachers regarding salaries is that men are more likely to taking higher paying jobs in
administration or upper management, leaving the female teachers to fill in their empty slots. Some women see this as evidence of sexual discrimination in favor of men over equally qualified women. However, it is not seen as sexist that in the public perception it more acceptable for a female to teacher smaller children than men who likewise may be just as capable.

Public Perception and Social Pressures

Public perception is a factor in public education. Teaching has come to be seen as a more feminine profession in western society (Thornton & Bricheno, 2006, p. 57). The public has varied views on teaching, especially at the primary level, as a female occupation. In our survey 58% of respondents felt there was a public bias against male teachers, while 42% felt there was not.

The most common fuel behind the drive to increase the number of male teachers is that the “teaching profession has become increasingly ‘feminized’ and thus the education of boys has suffered because of the resultant lack of male role models” (Mills, Martino, & Lingard, 2004, p. 355). Thornton and Bricheno (2006) give many reasons why public perception has such an impact on males considering education. One such reason that has helped to maintain the public perception against males entering the teaching field is that it is often considered a low-status job. Because of the lasting effects of sexism on the perception of women, and the high population of female teachers in education, teaching as a career has unfortunately assimilated, leaving it with a feeling of being an unpopular and undervalued career. This idea is well summarized by this statement:
… if I go into teaching it’s probably one of the least paid options available, whereas if you go into something marketing or advertising you can work yourself up the scale a lot faster. But I don’t think pay’s everything and it certainly doesn’t help that the teachers have such a bad deal in the press. You know, every time you open a newspaper you hardly hear anything good being said about the teachers, it’s always like, ‘Oh, the teachers are on strike again’, and the teachers are, you know, do this and they get a very bad press report… I think their status is low… I think rather than the government always saying teachers must do this, must do that and have to prove themselves and so on, they should occasionally praise them and say yes they are doing a good job. (Reid and Thornton, 2000, p. 46, qtd in Thornton & Bricheno, 2006, pp. 62-63)

Another concept discussed by Thornton and Bricheno (2006) is how people tend to look at men who enter the primary teaching field as having an ulterior motive or having something else wrong. The scare of having a child molested by a pedophile is one constantly in the back of the public mind, and because men are uncommon in the primary education field, people often wonder if they are entering the field to gain easier access to young children. Alongside that is the wonderment if these men are homosexual. Why would a man willingly want to enter a field that is female-dominated if he didn’t have an ulterior motive or wasn’t homosexual? (p. 64). In our survey 13% of respondents felt that people believe male teachers have inappropriate sexual interests regarding their students.

One of the more prevalent obstacles is presented by Martino (2008), who uses various research to discuss the ideas of how male teachers are viewed and view
themselves in a “female-dominated occupation” (p. 190). Not only is the educational profession becoming more feminine but male teachers who seek after status are not finding the recognition they desired nor deserve. Robert Ash, an assistant superintendent, states concerning status and teaching, "when a man gets married and goes to his in-laws' family reunion, it is not a status thing to say, 'I teach kindergarten, first grade, or early childhood" (Cohen, 1990). In our survey 21% of respondents believed that teaching in grades K-12 is not a masculine profession and that female teachers are better suited to teach children.

**Concerns Relating to Male Teachers and Effectiveness**

There have been questions about just how effective males are at instructing in the classroom as compared to females. Many people focus on the ability for males to give a good role model to young boys on how men should be, but what about other areas of learning? Several studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of male versus female teachers, on various subjects.

In our aforementioned survey, 52 persons were surveyed. Of them, 79% of respondents felt that female teachers were more effective in grades K-6, 11% felt males were more effective and 10% felt neither were more effective. Conversely, 79% felt males were more effective in grades 7-12, 13% felt females were more effective and 8% felt neither were more effective.

One study performed was that by Raymond Lam and associates (2009), regarding reading literacy of students in Hong Kong. Raymond Lam *et al* looked to previous research on the subject which supported the idea that male teachers had no real effect in raising the performance of boys, whereas female teachers were able to increase the
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performance of both boys and girls (p. 755). Raymond Lam and company, for their research, looked at children in Hong Kong schools Grade 4 (age 9-10). The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) test was administered in 2001 to these students, along with many other students around the world. The results from Hong Kong were collected and analyzed. As a result of this study, Raymond Lam's researchers concluded that “The argument that more men should be persuaded to enter the primary school in order to reduce the gender gap in pupils is not strongly supported by the findings of this research: men did not teach boys better and women taught both boys and girls better” (p. 759). Though this study was conducted specifically regarding literacy rates, it seems to be supported generally by other research.

John Krieg of Western Washington University (2005) conducted a study of teacher and student gender and the outcomes of high stakes test scores of students. In concluding his research, Krieg relates that while there appeared to be no support for the idea that interactions between student and teachers based on gender had any impact on the outcome of the test, there did appear to be indications that the gender of the student and teacher were correlated with the results of the tests. Generally speaking, it was found that students of male teachers performed 2.7% below students of female teachers, with the results changing with different controls added or removed. Krieg finishes by stating that boys in general tended to perform 8.6% below girls regardless of any other factors. “In conclusion,” Krieg says, “while this paper does not address if students are treated differentially by teachers of similar gender, it does suggest that if some type of gender bias occurs, it has little impact on student’s standardized test scores” (Krieg, 2005).
Looking at the evidence in whole, it would appear that there is still no final consensus as to whether or not the gender of the teacher has any large impact on students. Many continue to claim that there is an impact, especially into the potential “feminizing” of male students, but as a general whole, no final statement can be made and affirmed.

**Efforts to Increase Number of Male Teachers**

Because of the continually decreasing number of male educators located around the world, there are an increasing number of efforts to attract new male teachers (Mills, Martino, & Lingard, 2004, p. 355). Mills and his fellow researchers (2004) quote from Kindler and Thompson’s book *Raising Cain: Protecting the Emotional Life of Boys* to reinforce that there are calls for increased male teachers: “Boys benefit from the presence of male teachers and authority figures as role models of academic scholarship professional commitment, moral as well as athletic leadership, and emotional literacy. The presence of men can have a tremendously calming effect on boys,” (p. 50, qtd in Mills et al, p. 360).

A newspaper published in Bristol (UK) makes a note of the efforts that their Department of Education are undergoing to make teaching a more appealing field, and that despite the number of male applicants is increasing, they still are seeing a great need to recruit many more prospective males (Lister, 2010, p. 5).

Bryan Nelson, president of Men Teach, an organization committed to increasing the number of men in primary education, thinks the percentage of men in the classrooms may increase in the near future. The combination of a recession that’s affected men disproportionately, along with the current G.I. Bill and organization like Troops to
Teachers, thinks Nelson, may encourage more men to consider careers in education. But other experts disagree (Cleaver, 2010).

A prominent effort to recruit more male teachers has been found in Queensland, Australia’s *Male Teachers’ Strategy* document, created in 2004-2005. This proposal states why the effort to increase the number of male teachers is being made.

Education Queensland is committed to providing students with diverse learning experiences. To achieve this, we recognize that it is necessary to create and sustain a diverse workforce that reflects the student population and the community we serve. This strategy has been developed to assist Education Queensland to create a diverse workforce by increasing the number of males engaged in the delivery of educational services.


Mills, Martino, & Lingard, (2004), in their analysis of the Education Queensland *Strategy* report that, according to the *Strategy*, it will have made a difference when it has:

- Increased the number of males applying for teaching positions;
- Enhanced employer of choice status for males wishing to enter teaching as a career;
- Increased the representation of male teachers;
- Increased the job satisfaction level of male teachers working for Education Queensland; and
- Improved working conditions and established a culture that values and acknowledges the needs of male teachers (Education Queensland, 2002, p.2, qtd in Mills et al, 2004, 357).
While this and many more efforts are being made to increase the number of male teachers in schools, they are having to leap hurdles to attract those males.

**Conclusion**

The decline of male teachers is the result of many factors discussed and not discussed in this research that have changed the way in which schools are perceived, as well as teachers, and the ways in which public education is being run to facilitate the ever depleted population of male teachers. Whether low pay rates or cases of child molestation are deterring men from the field of education is yet to be decided, yet the issues remain concerning the depleting source of masculine role models for boys in school and the effect that the feminization of schools will have on students.

As perceptions change and educational systems work towards greater gender equality through the use of active hiring of male teachers and in-sourcing programs to provide schools with male teachers, the outcome of the males in the classroom is still dependant on the social norms of society and the few nonconformist men who strive to remain an active force in education. In maintaining a balance for children in schools, as both role models for boys and providing students with diversity and experience, the declination of male teachers is an important issue for educational institutions and society to become aware of and establish their role in determining the fate of males in the classroom.
References


