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Diversifying the Teaching Profession

Dimensions, Dilemmas and Directions for the Future

Edited by Elaine Keane, Manuela Heinz and Rory Mc Daid

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6 Teacher Gender Diversity

Uncovering a Hidden Curriculum of Masculinities

Kevin F. McGrath

6.1 Introduction

Gender diversity in the teaching profession is inhibited in many countries by a dearth of male teachers, particularly in the early years of schooling. Although occupational gender segregation (i.e., the division of men and women into different vocations and workplace positions) is a persistent phenomenon across industries, given the critical role of teachers in the lives of children, and of schools as sites for developing gendered identities among young people, it is important to understand the factors that restrict male participation in the teaching profession and the potential impacts that a lack of teacher gender diversity might have. Drawing upon international research and scholarly work from several disciplines, this chapter identifies socioeconomic conditions that limit male participation and portray teaching as an occupation better suited to women than men. To examine the merits of teacher gender diversity, a multilevel theoretical framework is summarised, situating a need for male teachers on four levels: the child, the classroom, the organisation and broader society. The chapter then considers how a shortage of male teachers may manifest as unintended lessons about gender within a hidden curriculum, and what students inadvertently learn about masculinity in the context of a lack of male teachers. Throughout this chapter, it is important that teacher gender diversity is not only thought of as the numeric representation of male and female personnel—as reported in workplace data—but also in terms of intersectionality, diversity within genders (including marginalised gender identities) and gender diversity across workplace roles. Indeed 'male teachers' are not a single, homogeneous social group, but encompass a broad range of ways of being male.

6.2 The Male Minority and Women's Work

Internationally, teaching is a female-dominated occupation. Indicative of universal trends in occupational gender segregation, in all countries participating in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) with available data, gender distribution within education labour markets is skewed by students' age. The representation of female teachers in OECD countries is greatest at the pre-primary level (96 percent) and decreases with each successive year of schooling, with women representing 83 percent of teaching

staff at the primary level, 63 percent at the secondary level (see Figure 6.1) and 44 percent at the tertiary level (OECD 2020a).

The reasons why fewer men than women choose to work as schoolteachers can be interpreted with regards to socioeconomics (i.e., the study of social economics) as follows. Assuming vocational liberties for women and men, the interactions between social processes and economic behaviour that restrict male participation in the teaching profession can be summarised in two ways. First, with potential earnings impacting occupational choice, teaching bears greater financial incentives for women than men when compared to other occupations. On average, male teachers earn less than other men with tertiary-level qualifications, whereas female teachers earn a similar income to their tertiary-educated counterparts in other professions (OECD 2020b). Hence, male teachers incur a greater 'opportunity
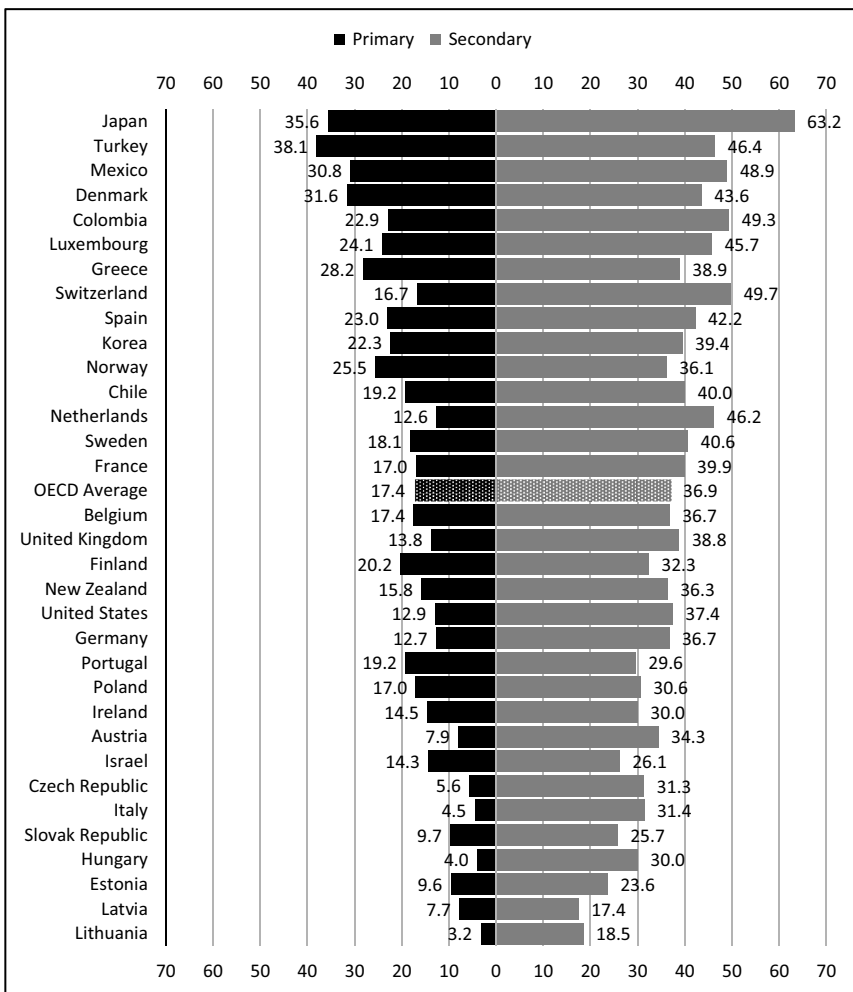
Figure 6.1 Percentage of Male Teachers in Primary and Secondary Schools by Country.

cost' than do female teachers (Carroll et al. 2021). This disparity may deter young men from considering teaching as a viable career option. Research conducted with high school students in France, for example, has identified that boys take potential income into account more than girls when making educational choices and are more likely to choose competitive career pathways than girls (Rapoport and Thibout 2018). In addition to the possibility of obtaining greater personal wealth elsewhere, lower potential income may dissuade males from the teaching profession due to gendered social repercussions attached to income. For example, research has shown that, across cultures and on average, men with high incomes have more offspring than other men, and women with high incomes have fewer offspring than other women (Nettle and Pollet 2008). An explanation for this pattern, derived from evolutionary biology, is that as income is often used as a proxy for resources, and resources tend to be a determinant of heterosexual female partner preferences, heterosexual males with low income may appear less desirable and face greater competition in intimate relationships (Trivers 1972; Whyte et al. 2019). Furthermore, given the prevalence of male-dominated occupations, broader occupational choice provides added opportunities for men to avoid particular gendered occupations (Torre 2018).

Second, as childrearing is associated more closely with women and with stereotypically feminine traits (e.g., gentleness), women receive greater social approval than men to undertake employment that requires engaging with children. Hence, teaching is often perceived as 'women's work', or work better suited to women. In comparison, men gain greater social approval to pursue competitive and hazardous careers than do women. By choosing a profession associated with childrearing and perceived to be better suited to women, male teachers deviate from social norms—provoking social sanctions attached to gender-inappropriate behaviour, thus placing themselves at risk of scrutiny and ridicule. Such scrutiny appears to commence during teacher education, where men, particularly those wishing to teach primary school-aged children, have described encountering negative perceptions held by loved ones, students' parents, female teachers and the media, that perpetuate an 'othering' of men who work with children (e.g., Pollitt and Oldfield 2017). These negative perceptions, which range from being wrongly perceived as feminised men through to potential paedophiles (Moosa and Bhana 2020), serve two social functions: acting as a gatekeeping mechanism to deter unwanted men from the profession, and reinforcing the heteronormative position of males in society by pressuring men to conform to dominant masculine ideals (McGrath 2021). Such pressures may lead some male teachers to validate their masculinity by emphasising stereotypically masculine attributes, emotionally distancing themselves from students, seeking promotion (where interactions with children are reduced), or by leaving the profession (McGrath 2021). Indeed, in settings lacking in teacher gender diversity, male teachers are more likely to be perceived favourably by their female colleagues when they conform with masculine norms; adopting roles such as disciplinarian, manual labourer, sports coach, or lead in stereotypically masculine subject areas (Cruickshank et al. 2020). This may differ for men who are homosexual, however, who may receive greater social approval to teach young children when male homosexuality is associated with femininity (Moosa and

Bhana 2020). Nonetheless, the gender-specific social pressures that arise from men violating social norms by electing female-dominated employment typically result in higher attrition rates among those men, with time spent in female-dominated employment being detrimental to men's career transitions and potential earning power (Torre 2018).

In addition to teaching appearing to be more financially viable and socially appropriate for women, some evidence initially appears to support the notion that women may be better suited to teaching than men. Ehrich et al. (2020), for example, investigated teaching dispositional traits amongst 230 female and 94 male undergraduate primary teacher education students in Australia, finding that female participants rated themselves more highly than their male peers on the traits of teacher efficacy and interpersonal and communication skills. Female teachers may also experience better relationships with their students. Specifically, findings from a study of 467 female and 182 male primary schoolteachers' relationships with 1,493 students in the Netherlands (Spilt et al. 2012) showed that female teachers reported less conflict and closer relationships with students overall; however, they reported significantly less close relationships with boys than with girls. Male teachers, in comparison, reported similarly close relationships with both boys and girls, yet poorer relationship quality overall.

Notwithstanding findings indicating that female teachers rate their own abilities and relationships with students more positively than their male colleagues, there is little to indicate that female teachers are more effective educators. Despite some (albeit slight) indications that female teachers have a more positive effect on learning (Winters et al. 2013), other analyses show a beneficial effect of male teachers on engagement (Roorda et al. 2011). Indeed, although students may have individual preferences for teachers with particular interpersonal characteristics, in terms of effectiveness, subject-matter knowledge and teacher quality appear to be more important attributes than teacher gender. There is also little to indicate that matching students and teachers by gender is beneficial for learning, despite benefits noted for matching students and teachers by ethnicity especially in classrooms lacking in ethnic diversity (Rasheed et al. 2020). Cho (2012), for example, analysed the effects of student–teacher gender matching amongst a sample of 201,477 secondary students across 15 countries and found no universal benefit for students assigned to a teacher of the same gender. These findings may not be surprising, however, given meta-analytical research showing greater support for the gender similarities hypothesis than the traditional gender differences model (Hyde 2018). Although there are a few exceptions, it is estimated that around 80 percent of human psychological and behavioural traits show gender similarities, not differences (Hyde 2018). Hence, differences identified between male and female teachers' perceptions and experiences are likely indicative of the social construction of gender, rather than predetermined traits or innate abilities. In other words, the scrutiny that male teachers may experience for choosing a career commonly regarded as 'women's work' may lead them to rate their own abilities and relationships with students more negatively. Addressing the social stigma attached to men who choose to work with children is therefore critical to ensuring a gender-diverse workforce of teachers.

6.3 Why Teacher Gender Diversity Is Important

Popular rhetoric in support of teacher gender diversity by way of greater male participation in the profession has tended to focus on social benefits for boys; namely, for male teachers to provide boys with positive male role models and father figures. As a basis for enhancing teacher gender diversity, however, such positions are either incomplete or incompatible with professional practice. To better interpret and analyse the potential impacts of teacher gender diversity on children, schools and societies, McGrath et al. (2020) proposed an interdisciplinary and multidimensional framework informed by theory and empirical evidence, consisting of four levels: the child, the classroom, the organisation and society (see Figure 6.2). An overview of the framework proposed by McGrath et al. is given herein to provide a more holistic foundation to examine the merits of teacher gender diversity.

6.3.1 Knowledge and Identity Construction

The child level asserts that the gender composition of the teacher workforce influences children's gender knowledge, efficacy beliefs and aspirations through processes of social transmission. Drawing on social cognitive theory, children develop gendered identities and interaction styles via interactions between their observations of others and individual motivational and regulatory systems (Bussey and Bandura 1999). Through having regular and frequent contact with children, teachers are important actors in modelling gendered behaviour, with their actions providing social cues for learned behaviour that in turn influences the qualities that students selectively express. Whilst children do not necessarily perform all learned behaviour, as the number of same-gender actors displaying the same conduct increases, so does the tendency for children to emulate the behaviour of those same-gender actors (Bussey and Bandura 1999). Where teacher gender diversity provides children with a broad range of observable gender performances

The Child Level ▶
Knowledge and identity construction

The Classroom Level
Interpersonal relationships and school belonging

The Societal Level ▲
Social acceptance and equitable identities

The Organisational Level ◀
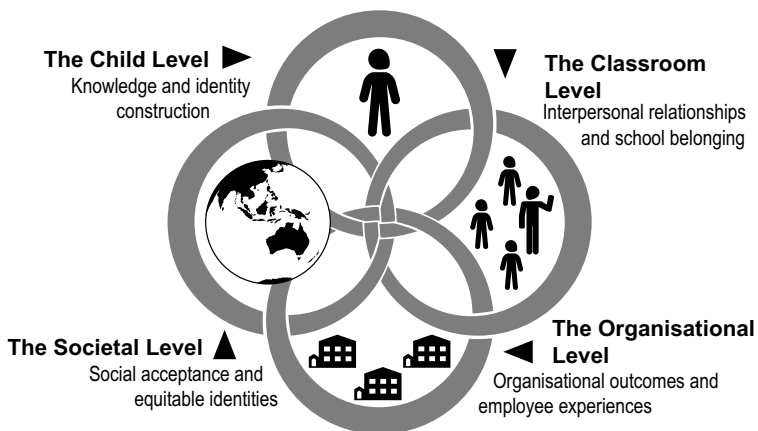Organisational outcomes and employee experiences

Figure 6.2 Multilevel Framework for Examining the Effects of Teacher Diversity.

across workplace roles, gender knowledge and flexibility in gender constructions is enhanced, and particular qualities are not easily tied to gender. In this way, teacher gender diversity may broaden children's academic aspirations by combating gender stereotypes in academic domains. In contrast, a lack of teacher gender diversity may restrict children's observable gender performances to alternative, and sometimes less equitable, sources. Accordingly, the presence of male teachers may be particularly important for some children, permitting observations of men who are non-violent, compassionate and interact with women and children in positive ways.

6.3.2 Interpersonal Relationships and School Belonging

At the classroom level, drawing on social psychology, McGrath et al. (2020) identify that teacher gender diversity may be a feature of interpersonal relationships and psychological membership (i.e., a sense of school belonging). Here, greater diversity increases possibilities for students to interact with teachers who are similar to themselves, allowing students to feel understood by those in charge and promoting feelings of belonging and acceptance. A key tenet of this level, the principle of homophily, is the tendency for human social networks to frequently form around shared social and demographic characteristics (McPherson et al. 2001). This phenomenon has been observed across a broad range of social systems, indicating that relationships with similar others facilitate effective social bonds that are more stable over time and better able to survive structural changes, providing an important source of resilience. Notably, students themselves have reported finding it easier to relate to and confide in a teacher of the same gender (McGrath and Sinclair 2013). While the quality of students' relationships with teachers and sense of school belonging are fundamentally important, research finds that boys are at greater risk of negative relationships with teachers throughout schooling (McGrath and Van Bergen 2015) and commence high school with a lower sense of school belonging than do girls (Gillen-O'Neel and Fuligni 2013).

6.3.3 Organisational Outcomes and Employee Experiences

The organisational level in McGrath et al.'s framework proposes that teacher gender diversity informs decision-making processes, influences student outcomes and fosters innovation. Inclusive and gender-diverse work environments promote teachers' feelings of connectedness, self-worth and job satisfaction. Emanating from the political sciences, the application of representative bureaucracy theory posits that education systems are best situated to meet the needs of all students when the diversity of the workforce mirrors that of the broader school community, ensuring, for example, that all groups are considered in decision-making processes. Rather than being tied to individual teachers, the application of representative bureaucracy theory finds that students' disciplinary outcomes, academic achievement and assignment to gifted education settings are each associated with the demographic composition of teaching staff (Grissom et al. 2015). In addition, the gender composition of the workforce impacts how teachers
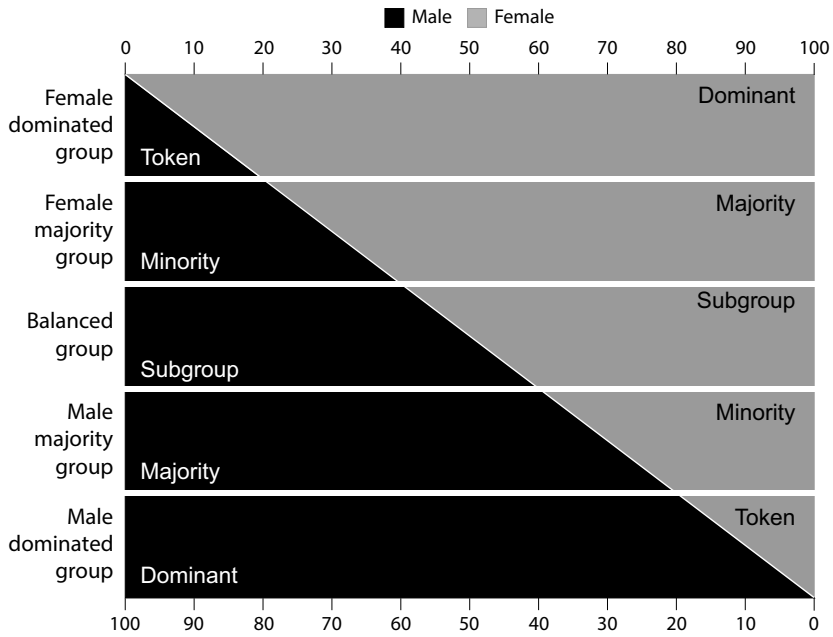
Figure 6.3 Gender Ratio Group Types by Proportional Representation.

experience the profession and are perceived by others. Notably, where a sizable proportional imbalance exists in a workplace, interactional experiences are fundamentally different for male and female staff. Describing various group types based on the gender distribution of a workforce (see Figure 6.3), Kanter (1977) identified three perceptual phenomena of token group members, who represent less than 20 percent of a group:

- Visibility—tokens receive a greater awareness share in the workplace, generating differential performance pressures.
- Polarisation—differences between token and dominant members are exaggerated, heightening group boundaries.
- Assimilation—characteristics of tokens are distorted to fit familiar stereotypes, leading to role entrapment (i.e., where workplace performances are confined to predetermined, expected roles).

Although Kanter's group types oversimplify diversity, the perceptual phenomena identified remain useful for understanding the experiences of under-represented groups of employees. A gender-balanced teacher workforce instead improves social cohesion amongst staff by reducing group boundaries, and thus the potential for some employees to experience loneliness, isolation or differential treatment.

A recent contribution to knowledge within the organisational level confirms a positive relationship between teacher gender diversity and job satisfaction. Lassibille and Navarro Gómez (2020) investigated the impact of teacher gender diversity on

job satisfaction amongst lower-secondary teachers across 46 countries. Their findings indicate that higher representation of female teachers is significantly and negatively associated with job satisfaction. Moreover, female teachers gain significantly more job satisfaction as the representation of male teachers in the workplace increases, whilst male teachers' job satisfaction is not significantly affected (Lassibille and Navarro Gómez 2020). Variations between countries, however, may suggest that increasing the representation of male teachers will improve job satisfaction in settings where teacher gender diversity is lacking and notions of equality are valued (e.g., Australia), but decrease job satisfaction in already gender-balanced workplaces (e.g., the Netherlands), or where job satisfaction may be negatively affected by increased male competition in the workplace (e.g., the United States of America [USA]).

6.3.4 Social Acceptance and Equitable Identities

The societal level in McGrath et al.'s framework proposes that a gender-diverse teacher workforce supports the acceptance and visibility of alternative and equitable gender identities and expressions. In this way, teacher gender diversity demonstrates that education is inclusive of, uniformly valued by, and of significance to, a wide range of demographic groups. Framed by sociology and guided by Connell's (2005) ontological conceptualisations of masculinities, social systems operate within a world gender order, where particular social groups hold dominant positions over others. Beyond simplistic descriptions of inherent male dominance, recognition of the interplay between gender and other demographic characteristics, such as ethnicity and class, yields multiple masculinities (hegemonic, complicit, marginalised and subordinate) and multiple possible positions of domination and subordination (Connell 2005). Overlaying these concepts with occupational prestige suggests that, while women who enter male-dominated occupations gain social status and may be perceived as righteous, men who enter female-dominated occupations lose status and may be perceived as deviant. This is probable for all men, even those who may hold social dominance in other contexts. Nonetheless, a gender-diverse teacher workforce would have a positive effect on social equality by contributing to a reduction in occupational gender segregation and legitimising the role of men in the lives of children.

6.4 Hidden Lessons about Masculinity

The concept of the 'hidden curriculum' refers to the unofficial, unintended and informal transmission of norms, values, expectations and attitudes that takes place via schooling (Giroux and Penna 1979). The content of the hidden curriculum, inadvertently selected for transmission, is partly a reflection of the demographic composition of the organisational structure imposed on students. Although, arguably, no other workplace has as profound an influence on children's developing gender knowledge and identities than the school, teachings about gender typically manifest within the hidden curriculum. These unofficial lessons about gender are frequent and varied—extending from everyday classroom dynamics through to the

way the education system is structured and operates. Extending upon what has been described thus far, the concept of the hidden curriculum is utilised to consider what students might inadvertently learn about masculinity in the context of an under-representation of male teachers and to stimulate further discussion about the unintended consequences that a lack of teacher diversity might have.

Given the influential role of schooling in shaping children's world views, surprisingly little attention has been given to the role of teacher gender diversity in defining and reproducing stereotypic conceptions of gender. As the rigidity of gender stereotypes (i.e., generalised preconceptions of male and female attributes) depends on the frequency with which they are reinforced by same-gender actors showing similarities, observing teachers with different gender identities displaying the same attributes may reduce the likelihood that those attributes will be ascribed to gender or become stereotypic. In support of this possibility, findings from a classic study conducted by Mancus (1992) suggest that the presence of both male and female teachers reduces students' stereotypic conceptions of gender. The study included 188 students in the USA from two primary schools: one where 33 percent of the teachers were male, and the other with no male teachers. Both schools had female principals. Students were invited to attribute a series of descriptive statements (indicating nurturing, academic, authority and management traits) to either a male or female fictitious teacher, with responses scored based on the number of non-gender stereotypical attributions made. The study found that students who attended the school with both male and female teachers made fewer stereotypical attributions. Notably, boys from the school with male teachers made the most egalitarian attributions. Boys and girls from the school with no male teachers were instead more likely to attribute classroom mismanagement to a teacher of the opposite gender.

The presence of male teachers alone, however, may not be sufficient to reduce students' stereotypic conceptions of gender when male teachers comprise a token group ($\leq$ 20 percent) for two reasons. First, as token employees experience unique perceptual phenomena and social pressures that place them at risk of role entrapment, token male teachers are likely to be concentrated in roles that instead perpetuate masculine stereotypes (e.g., sports coach, leadership positions). Second, when male teachers comprise a token group, there may be too few same-gender male actors performing alternative expressions of masculinity within school settings to counteract masculine stereotypes or harmful representations of masculinity portrayed elsewhere. Such possibilities suggest that a critical mass of male teachers is therefore needed for school systems to challenge rigid masculine stereotypes and promote equitable, caring and non-violent representations of masculinity. The absence of such a critical mass accentuates the framing of the teaching profession as 'feminised' work; where men are anomalies, teacher gender differences are exaggerated and stereotypically feminine traits are emphasised as key teacher dispositions.

In addition to facilitating unintentional teachings about stereotypic conceptions of gender, teacher gender diversity may also inadvertently guide students' academic aspirations, status expectations and the sorts of competencies that students cultivate. Although, traditionally, attention has been directed toward teacher

gender bias as a mechanism for subtly conveying differential expectations that see students judging themselves as more efficacious in gender-stereotypical domains (Bussey and Bandura 1999), researchers have more recently begun to consider the gender composition of teaching staff as a resource for students' personal orientations and vocational choices. Such work has found, for example, that girls are more likely to pursue careers in science and mathematics when they have attended schools with higher proportions of female science and mathematics teachers (Stearns et al. 2016). Though considerably little is known about the potential influence of teacher gender diversity on boys' academic aspirations and status expectations, the higher representation of male teachers within upper grades than within the early years of schooling may inadvertently communicate to students that men are more often specialists than generalists and less involved in the lives of children than women.

Notwithstanding broader representations of masculinity, a plethora of research indicates that boys and girls have different scholastic experiences, driven in part by differential teacher attention that conjures an image of the ideal student as female: compliant, polite, organised and independent. Although girls typically have more ambitious career expectations than boys (OECD 2015), "being an ideal student in school may not necessarily deliver better outcomes in the post-school years … It may be that compliant girls are more of a benefit to their teachers than they are to themselves" (Beaman et al. 2006, p. 354). In comparison, boys attract a disproportionate amount of negative attention from teachers and are more often perceived to be distractable, demotivated, disruptive and disorganised (Beaman et al. 2006). As boys are more likely than girls to display unfavourable externalising behaviours, they are also more likely to be reprimanded, suspended and referred to special education settings. Although these distinctions may reflect a poor fit between socially prescribed masculine norms and the student role, the gender homogeneity of the teacher workforce means that negative teacher interactions, experienced directly or vicariously by boys, predominantly involve female teachers, particularly in the formative years. There remains, however, little empirical examination of how classroom gender dynamics affect, or are affected by, boys' personal orientations and attitudes towards females, nor girls' expectations and understandings of males. Nonetheless, in the context of a lack of male teachers, primary school students have reasoned that while female teachers show favouritism towards girls, male teachers are impartial (McGrath 2011).

6.5 Conclusion

The hidden curriculum is an important, yet underutilised, concept for exploring the potential collateral lessons that are imparted when education systems lack teacher gender diversity. Where socioeconomic conditions restrict male participation in the teaching profession, students' knowledge of masculinities may become organised around various uncontested assumptions; magnifying stereotypic conceptions of gender, disproportionately positioning men as specialists and reproducing divergent gender expectations and aspirations. A gender-diverse workforce of teachers may instead reduce occupational gender segregation,

increase job satisfaction among teachers, improve school belonging among students and enhance social cohesion more broadly. Undoubtedly, many more hidden lessons about masculinity transmitted via the demographic composition of the teaching profession remain to be uncovered. Certainly, if diversity is valued and equitable gender relations desired, it is imperative that hidden lessons about masculinity be illuminated and redressed.

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