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# Educator Perceptions: The Impact of Male Elementary School Teachers

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Action Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Masters of Art in Education

California State University, Monterey Bay

Fall 2014

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**Educator Perceptions: The Impact of Male Elementary School Teachers**

Action Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in Education

Rod Matthew Garcia  
California State University Monterey Bay  
2014

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### **Abstract**

Male teachers at the elementary school seem to have stagnated over the years, hovering between 18-20 percent levels. Much commentary and popular press articles attribute this phenomenon to the notion that elementary school is a female occupation. As a male elementary school teacher, I wanted to explore the reasons why this might occur and to find out if what was true for my male colleagues was also true for me. This phenomenological study examined the potential impact male elementary school teachers have within their professional environment. Data collection included in depth interviews with male teachers as well as meaningful conversations to discern perceptions regarding role and function. Results from the data indicated that male teachers view themselves as an important and viable entity within a predominantly female elementary school environment. The investigation also corroborated current research regarding gender differences and how those differences impact instruction, decision-making, and interaction at the elementary school level. Perceptions discerned from the interviews provided an enhanced understanding of the complexities of the role as well as the importance of gender balance and equity in order to provide male students with not only role models, but with differing points of views, attitudes, and most notably, teaching styles. It also provided an opportunity to reflect on my practice as male teacher and the impact I can make now and in the future.

### **Acknowledgements**

I would like to dedicate this work to my mother. Thank you mom, Milna Garcia, for being the unconditional beacon of support I need and continue to need as I pursue my goals in education. I hope I've followed in your footsteps as an educator and person well. I would like to thank my father, Dr. Rudy Garcia MD, for being the role model I needed to always chase my goals and aspire to be great. I love you both very much and I'm so proud to have you as my parents.

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## **CHAPTER 1: STATEMENT OF PURPOSE, RATIONALE, AND OVERVIEW**

### **Introduction**

In elementary education, the scarcity of men working as teachers has evoked an educational culture that perceives the near non-existence of male primary teachers as a common predicament amongst other institutions (Bittner & Cooney, 2001). Studies dating as far back as the 1920's have documented elementary schools to reflect a 1:10 male to female teacher distribution. When viewed comparatively to today's elementary teacher work climate, the ratio remains relatively unchanged and appropriately represents the student demographic attending elementary education programs (Hebert, 2000).

In "Only A Teacher", a PBS film mapping the chronology of the United States education system, American education was a male dominated profession between the colonial beginnings up until the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. Contrastingly, a 2011 report conducted by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics documented that less than 19% of elementary and middle school teachers are men. Students attending school within compulsory elementary institutions often experience a multitude of female teachers (Weaver-Hightower, 2011). In contrast, students who experience male teachers are rare from a statistical perspective.

According to the National Educational Association (2008), the percentage of men who worked as teachers in compulsory education was approximately 24 percent. In addition, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009) expanded upon these findings to indicate that the disparity between students receiving instruction from male teachers increases when descending down grade levels. In other words, a K-3 student has less of a chance of

having a male teacher than a student in grades 4-5 does; however, students in grades 4-5 have less of a chance of having a male teacher than students in grades 6-8, and so on.

A possible injustice in elementary education is the notion of male primary school teachers being temporal positions for men. The assumption that male elementary teachers are educators in transition toward a higher position is a relevant experience for many elementary teachers (Wingfield, 2009).

### **Problem statement**

Students attending school within compulsory elementary institutions often find their experience to include having a multitude of female teachers (Weaver-Hightower, 2011). Contrastingly, students who are coupled with a male teacher are “lucky” from a statistical perspective. According to the National Educational Association (2008), the percentage of men who worked as teachers in compulsory education was approximately 24 percent. In addition, the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2009) expanded upon the 2008 NEA findings to indicate that the disparity between students receiving instruction from male teachers increases when descending down grade levels.

As the awareness of the unbalanced number of female to male teachers expands, increased attention to the recruitment and retention of men in public education has resulted (Griffen, 1997; Herbert, 2000). Research indicated that the potential influences of men working as teachers in elementary institutions could be beneficial (Herbert, 2000). Statistics show that people working as the minority population, in a job that is gendered in a particular direction have distinct experiences from the majority group (Sching, 2012). There is a paucity of research on the impact that male elementary schools teachers have in regards to motivating and engaging students in the classroom. There also continues to

be the common misconception that male teachers should teach at the secondary level, an enhanced and elevated position accepted by societal norms (Skelton, 2003). However, male teachers at the elementary level provide an important gender balance which in turn offers a salient model for both boys and girls both socially and academically (Wood, 2012). Since male teachers at the elementary level continue to be approximately 7%, it is imperative that more research on the impact male teachers can have on student motivation and active engagement in schooling takes place. Interestingly, not much research has been done on how male teachers perceive themselves in regards to their role and position on an elementary school site. Therefore, there is a need to analyze the distinctions in regards to the impact male teachers have on students and colleagues.

### **Purpose of Study**

The goal of this study is to describe the phenomenon of what it is like to be a male elementary school teacher. In addition, the study intends to provide definitional clarity about the roles, benefits, and problems associated with being, or having, a male as an elementary educator. As a male elementary school teacher, I have encountered predicaments within my work experience that I presume are unique to me because I am a man. For instance, whether it is professional dispositions amongst colleagues, social interactions between students and parents, or other work related scenarios, I am noticing distinction in male and female teacher interactions with school. In addition, the study intends to investigate whether being a male elementary school teacher has any impact on student motivation and engagement?

The findings will help clarify if male elementary school teachers within my school, district, and California experience the irregular professional relationships stated

earlier. In addition, the findings will provide real perspectives and accounts of male educators working in California. The correlations and or dichotomies derived from the findings can aid other researchers looking to explore more into male elementary school teachers or persons working as the minority gender in a traditionally opposite gendered profession. . This study provides me with an opportunity to compare my own experiences with other male teachers within my school, district, and state.

### **Research questions**

Within the context of my phenomenological research project, I propose the following research question:

- What constitutes one's perceptions of choosing to become a male teacher at the elementary school level?
- Is there a difference between male and female perceptions of male elementary school teacher impact?

### **Theoretical framework**

The study intends to add clarity to the reasoning behind why male elementary teachers are beneficial. To address the multiplicity of each response, the underpinning theories include socially complex issues such as, social roles and external influence, as well as intrapersonal dynamics impacting career selection. The theoretical foundations of this study reside within Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, James Marcia's status theory, and John Holland's theory on career choice.

Erikson's (1968) theory of psychosocial development expands upon Sigmund Freud's 1923 theory of identification. Erikson (1968) agreed with Freud's (1923) sense of self; however, had the insight to recognize personal identity does not happen in a

vacuum. The result of one's identity ultimately had to incorporate external factors and influences. The focus of this study involves multiple stakeholders all with their own sense of identity and the subsequent interpretations each group has on the benefits of male educators. Erikson's (1968) theory correlates intra and interpersonal dynamics of male teachers, female teachers, administration, parents, and students involved within an elementary school.

Marcia's (1966) Status Theory involved four distinctions: Foreclosure, Identity Diffusion, Moratorium, and Identity Achievement. Marcia (1966) created four subcategories or "statuses" that could be associated to individuals. The statuses have distinct external interactions between oneself and their environment. The results of these encounters manifest themselves in the behaviors of each individual. His theory has direct implications for the impact that male teachers may have within the intense sociology encountered within an elementary school. His theory is especially pertinent to this research to address the status of identity.

Holland's (1973) theory on career choice involves individuals choosing careers based on personality type and compatibility groupings. For the purpose of this study, Holland's (1973) connection pertains in majority to the male teacher stakeholder group. Holland's compatibility index adds credibility to the reasons male teachers choose to work in elementary schools. Research has identified that a negative stigma and stereotype exists when referring to men who choose to work in a socially considered female profession (Benton Decorse & Vogtle, 1997).

### **Researcher Background**

As a male teacher working within an elementary school, I have noticed and experienced a few peculiarities, in which I believe was a direct result of me being male. For the purpose of this study, the research on male elementary teachers was motivated by my experiences as a male elementary teacher. During my first year of teaching, I've spoken with a multitude of people: colleagues, students, principals, parents, and other educational professionals. Amongst my conversations, an all too common phrase, or some rendition of, "oh it's so good to have a male teacher here" has consistently arisen. On occasion, I replied to that statement with more than a "thank you", but also asked "why". Mostly, I received generalized responses with no substance similar to "well there is not very many around" type answers. As the school year continued and I encountered more conversations, I eventually began to question myself why and or what is it about being a male teacher in elementary schools that seems to encompass so much additional novelty.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Phenomenological* – The study of the development of human consciousness and self-awareness as a preface to or a part of philosophy

*Gender roles* – Cultural and personal roles that determine how males and females should think, speak, dress, and interact within a context of society. These gender schemas are deeply embedded cognitive frameworks regarding what defines masculine and feminine.

*Societal norms* – The behaviors and cues within a society or group; the explicit and implicit rules that a group uses for appropriate and inappropriate, values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Introduction**

In the current state of the elementary education, the pedagogy received by most students is coupled with a female teacher. Reports have reflected the same disproportion to be consistent throughout the entire existence of public education, a greater awareness of the unbalanced gender proportions, over the past decade or so, resulted in an increased attention towards the recruitment and retention of men in public education (Herbert, 2000). The research conducted in this literature review will focus on the elementary level.

For the purpose of this study, the increased attention entails any professional disposition, for better or for worse, experienced by males who worked in elementary school classrooms as teachers. This literature review is intended to help readers further understand how, and in which ways, the increased attention toward the recruitment and retention of men is beneficial to elementary education. This study will explore the different perspectives of administration, female teachers, and male teachers to help provide insight into how the benefits of male elementary teachers.

### **The Problem**

While the statistics the large disparity between the ratios of men to women in the elementary teacher workforce, the rational behind whether or not this unbalance warranted a recruitment and retention effort was not consistent. The research indicated

that fragmented opinions between public elementary school stakeholders existed regarding the importance of more men needed in elementary schools (Sumsion, 2000).

### **Theoretical Development**

Despite calls for the increase in male participation in elementary schools, there is no definitive or tangible statistic that validated a need for more male teachers. Instead, reasons for men needing to be recruited into the profession are subjected to a multitude of theoretical and commonsensical opinions about gender equity promotion (Sumsion, 2005). In addition, gender demographics reflected a near split between boy and girl students enrolled in elementary schools.

### **Administration**

From an administrative standpoint, the argument for the benefit of having more men in elementary education is often centralized around the notion that boys in elementary school would benefit from a more gender equitable teacher experience. The environment of school instruction did not cater to the “needs” of boys. The common assumption is summarized well by a quote from Cameron and Moss’ 1998 book, *Men as workers in services for young children: Issues of a mixed gender workforce*.

“...the absence or presence of men in early childhood services contributes to or challenges dominant ideologies about gender roles and relationships in the wider community. A center with a mixed gender workforce, for example, is part of a gender equity discourse, including equal sharing of childcare between men and women, just as a center with only women workers is part of a very different discourse which identifies woman as particularly suited to caring for young children.” (P.16)

Administration perspectives are surrounded around the belief of perceived benefits. Through the lenses of administrative officials, the benefit of pedagogical instruction received by children from male teachers did not only extend to students. A secondary benefit focused on the assumption of improved social status for the profession. Relative to other professional careers, Cameron and Moss' 1998 findings represented a community perception that teaching was a low status profession that warranted low pay. With an increased infusion of men in the elementary profession, the administrative assumption contended that more male participation rates benefit the elementary teacher profession by making it more gender equitable. Mancus' 1992 book contextualized the administrative perception well, "As a greater balance between male and female elementary school teachers is achieved, non-stereotypic responses and egalitarian projections of positive and negative qualities of male and female teachers are likely to increase for girls and boys" (P.126). Administration believed equitable representation of men and women in schools would innately enhance a schools status and the status of those within profession. In turn, administration actively recruited and retained men more so than their female counterparts (Mancus, 1992).

### **Female Teachers**

As the earlier statistics indicated, female teachers dominated the teaching workforce in elementary education. While not within the parameters of their control, the unbalanced ratio of male to female teachers had an unsettling impact on female elementary educators. Griffen (1998) suggested women are now marginalized and found less preferable to men. Because of the scarcity of men in relation to the abundance of female teaching prospects, female teachers contended they were disadvantaged in terms

of professional mobility and stability and are inherently judged as less desirable when compared to men.

For the female teacher, much of the opinion that indicted the recruitment and retention effort resonated, to some significant degree of similarity, around one permeating question. Why does the under-representation of men even matter in the first place? Given the administrative stance on the recruitment and retention of men in the elementary workplace, female teachers recognized the theoretical good intentions of the administrative point of view; however, claimed the stance to be naïve and subjective to the personal reservations of individuals (Sumsion, 2005). For female teachers, the recruitment and retention of male counterparts should be done on the basis of broader socio-cultural, political and economic structures that serve to entrench traditional gender norms. In Sumsion's 2005 article, she challenged the administration perspective by questioning the assumption that there are essential gender differences between elementary boys and girls:

“...these [administration] views reinforce unhelpful constructs of gender as a binary divide, with males and females positioned as fundamentally and essentially different. Such views celebrate and reinforce traditional gender stereotypes and perpetuate limiting the problematic gender-stereo typed behaviors, privileging boys who conform to dominant forms of masculinity and disadvantaging girls and non-conforming boys” (p.111)

The female perspective contended that the lack of empirical evidence regarding the influential benefits of male elementary teachers made it difficult to support the retention and recruitment effort for more men in elementary schools (Sumsion, 2005)

### **Male Teachers**

For the male teacher, the experiences encountered while working in elementary education is convoluted by a myriad of contrasting obstacles. Unlike their female counterparts, the success of the male teacher is determined by how successful they were at challenging social and professional norms (Francis, 2008) Some men report a number of negative experiences while teaching and many men do not feel encouraged to choose caregiving as a profession (Johnson, 2010). The research indicated male elementary school teachers needed to account for the traditional obstacles all teachers experience. For instance, curriculum developing, planning, adjunct duties and all the other day-to-day activity experienced by all teachers regardless of gender. However, in addition to the daily obligations, male teachers are also challenged with additional considerations that female teachers did not encounter.

If a male chose to become an elementary teacher, he was entrenched in a battle against what is traditionally and socially common or normal perception of elementary education, that teaching and care giving of young children is a female profession. For one example, community unrest and suspicion with men working with young children. When men choose to teach elementary children instead of higher status and more traditionally masculine positions, the inevitable questioning as to “why?” one chose to teach must be answered. The male teacher can be expected to encounter a lieu of questions fielded from all patrons of the community. That included himself, his family, friends, colleagues, administration, parents, students, and the curriculum (Decorse, 1997).

### **Impact of Male Elementary School Teachers**

With the societal norm of elementary school teachers being accurately perceived as a female dominated profession, a mounting interest in the feminization of the profession has led to the need to analyze the subsequent impact of this reality (Drudy, 2008). Amongst the narrative surrounding male teacher impact within an elementary institution, themes such as: *Boys need male teachers to achieve academic success, Boys need males as elementary role models, Female teachers are less competent when relating to the social and developmental needs of boys, or Feminization of the profession has led to the academic disconnect boys have in school* has led researchers to analyze the intricacies of how, if, and why the preceding themes are impacting elementary schools.

### **Parent and Student Perception**

Academic and social success in education is often tied to the nature of the relationship between the teacher and student, teacher and parent, as well as parent and student in lieu of the first two types of relationship dynamics (Ebey, 2006 & Harrell, 2011). When students and parents perceive their teacher in a favorable light, the overall success of the student tends to improve (Harrell, 2011). The collective effort of all three major stakeholders has been tied to student investment and willingness to work through difficult problems.

### **Summary**

The research conducted in this study has indicated a need for more awareness toward the issue of the recruitment and retention of male teachers in elementary education. Despite the administrative effort to increase male participation in schools, history appears to be reciprocating as we move forward toward the future. Men still tend

to have shorter elementary teaching careers than females. While how much of that is attributed to the “glass-elevator” support of administration or the inherent distrust or disconnect between community and professional social norms is still up for debate. I argue that societal gender reform may be the only way to balance the gender scale of the elementary

teaching workforce. For the male teacher who wants a long career working within an elementary classroom, I contend that by challenging traditional perspectives of masculinity and choosing to become an elementary teacher is the first step toward recruiting and retaining more male teachers moving forward. As a current male elementary school teacher, I personally tend to agree with the notion that it is important to have male educators working with students. The irony is, I credit the female perspective for validating my own stance on the issue. While more research must be done for any definitive answers, I think the low percentage of men working in elementary schools, as well as, the low enrollment of prospective males in teacher education programs is a direct reflection of the socially traditional representation who a teacher should be.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS**

### **Introduction**

In the following section, a description of the methods I used to accumulate and interpret data is provided in order to show how I will answer the following proposal question:

- What constitutes one's personal perceptions of choosing to become a male teacher at the elementary school level?
- Do male teachers perceive their impact within a school differs from female teachers?

### **Research Design**

For this study, I am using qualitative action research. According to Creswell (1994), qualitative research methods are best suited to answer the type of research question I am investigating. In other words, qualitative methods use a multitude of related data sources including, especially, detailed information from informants in a natural setting to build a complex, word-based, and holistic portrait of the problem being investigated. Answers are then derived from the themes extracted from the data sources. Further, a qualitative approach is the ideal method for investigating social issues (Glaser, 1969).

### **Research Plan**

Since I intend to describe the meaning, or essence, of a lived experience from both personal and subjective perspectives, the type of qualitative research I am doing is phenomenology. Because this specific research plan isolates my own preconceptions and allows the views of participants to describe the phenomenon, this type of study is ideal and "...[powerful for understanding subjective experience, gaining insights into people's motivations and actions, and cutting through the clutter of taken for granted assumptions and conventional wisdom]" (Lester, 1999).

## **Location**

While the essence of my research question is still centrally tied to a classroom and school, the experiences of the participants does not have a central institution location or district. Because of this variable, the subsequent settings portion will reflect data at a macro county level. The participants in this study all experience the phenomenon within the regional county lines.

The county is Ereymont, a coastal county in central California. According to published county census data, Ereymont has a population of 426,762. Forty-five percent of that population is a renter. The majority population is Hispanic or Latino at 56.4%. In addition, just over 23% of the population has a bachelor's degree or higher; 7% below the state average.

## **Participants**

The study involves 7 male participants. All participants are currently working as teachers or students within a teaching credential program. Of the 7 participants, 6 of them are elementary school teachers and the 1 a credential student. In the following quick descriptions of each participant, a favorite quote (if provided) from the interviewee is accompanied.

- “Aikman” – is a 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher with 8 years of teaching experience. He is a self-proclaimed traditional Italian. He instructs his classroom with the discipline and structure that he received during his compulsory education career. “Let’s take time to be champions!”
- “Irvin” – is a 1<sup>st</sup> grade teacher with 20 years of teaching experience. He is a Caucasian male originally from San Francisco. At times, he admits to being worn

down by the consistent energy levels of his student demographic; however, has no intention of dealing with the “less sensitive” nature of older primary students.

- “Smith” – is a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher with 2 years of experience. He is Hispanic and a 1<sup>st</sup> generation American citizen. The students at his school naturally gravitate to his demeanor and energy. Smith is well received by his staff and colleagues. “Be prepared!”
- “Landry” – is a combo class teacher with 12 years of experience. He is a 1<sup>st</sup> generation Asian American citizen. He sets his demands high and expects results. “Don’t be sad that it’s over, smile because it happened.”
- “Dez” is a Mexican American multiple subjects teaching credential student in the first semester of his program. According to his master teacher, he flashes the passion and ability to be an effective teacher; however, has much development to do in his areas of professional dispositions and classroom management. He student-teaching in a 5<sup>th</sup> grade assignment.
- “Murray” is a Caucasian multiple subjects teaching credential student in the second semester of his program. He has natural ability, but often gets derailed by the unexpected circumstances that interject themselves within the weekly discourse. He is co-teaching in a 1<sup>st</sup> grade assignment.
- “JJ” is a veteran teacher who believes success within the classroom is attained when the investment is equally shared between teachers, students, and the home.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

I will be conducting a phenomenological research design through the use of in-depth participant interviews and conversations.

### **Implementation**

- Prior to the interviews, I will create questions that are based on information required to answer my research question.
- The questions will be reviewed to ensure they do not unintentionally “lead” interviews in a particular direction.
- After the interview questions have been established, I’ll answer the questions myself as a participating member of the study and have a fill in interviewer.
- For the remaining interviews, the location will be set on a case-by-case basis. The interviews will be recorded and are intended to be colloquially fluid.
- After each interview commences, the conversation will be transcribed and subsequently coded for resonating themes.

### **Data Collection and Sources**

*Qualitative Data Interviews:* All 7 participants will respond to, but not be limited or held to, specific interview questions. The questions are focused on building a capsule description of their experience navigating their career choice as male educators.

*Data collectors:* I will do all data collected. The data will be collected in multiple ways that include, quick notes, verbal responses, recordings and conversations.

### **Summary**

The study will gather qualitative data using personal interviews of 7 other male elementary school teachers. In hopes to receive genuine accounts of their teaching experiences, the verbal discourse of the interviews intends to be colloquially structured. Subsequently, the individualized information acquired will be analyzed and thematically coded for consistencies within their narrative.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of my phenomenological research on the male perception of themselves and the subsequent impact they make as elementary educators. The results center around the following research questions: 1). What constitutes one's perception of deciding to become a male teacher at the elementary level? 2). Do male teachers perceive there is a difference in the way female and male teachers impact an elementary school?

Qualitative data was collected through interviews and in-depth conversations. The goal of the interviews was to gain an enhanced understanding of why other men have chosen this profession and to ascertain if perceptual differences exist among them. I was also interested in discerning if male educators perpetuate stereotypes associated with occupations that are traditional female by undermining their credibility and undervaluing their role and profession. During data collection several topics and conversational points from the participants formed into themes for analysis. I was able to quantify the data by clustering response topics together. The following themes emerged from my first research question:

- Male teachers who chose their profession to become agents of change.
- Male teachers who view their profession as a job necessary to source of income; used to make ends meet.

The following themes emerged from my second research question regarding perceptual impact male teachers have that are distinct from their female colleagues:

- Pedagogical differences
- Role Models
- Presence / Physical Dynamic
- School Agenda / Politics

The graph below indicates key reasons constituting why these seven male educators chose the profession.

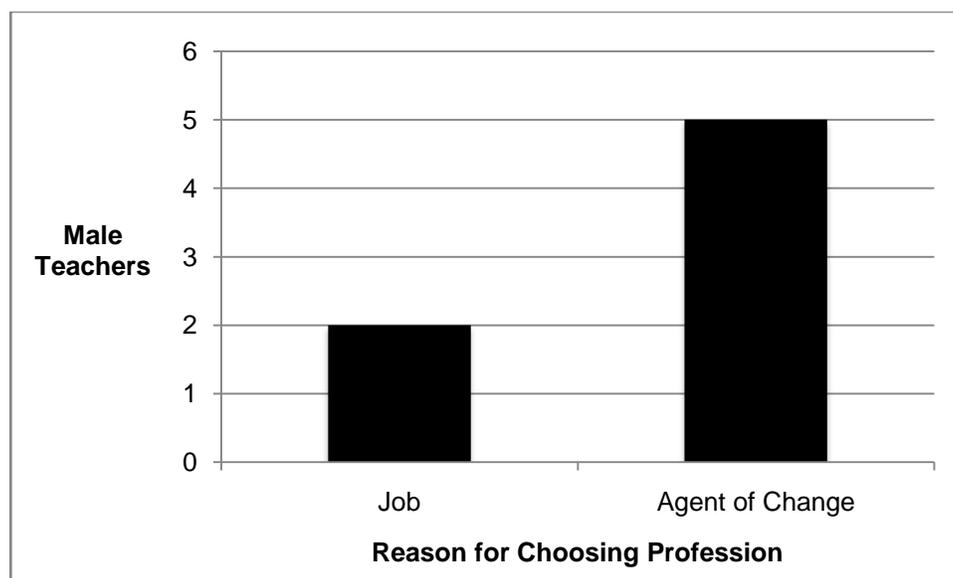


Figure 1: Seven male teachers were asked the question, *What constitutes their personal perception of choosing to become a male educator?*, the results presented themselves in the two categories presented in the chart.

### Personal Perceptions

**Agents of Change.** Analysis of the data showed that 5 of the 7 participants perceived themselves as important entities that are in a professional position to make a difference. While the explicitly stated dialogue of the participants differed, the responded remarks were all coded under the same theme. While all participants stated personal goals of seeing student success at some point of the conversation and/or interview, 5 teachers in

particular had explicitly signified student success and correlated it to the students' progress beyond the academic year in their classrooms. The following table contains salient quotes from the teachers and helped classify the findings research question 1:

Male Teacher	Quoted Response
JJ	"The reason I teach is to make a difference for these students so they can, hopefully, think critically and make good choices".
Irvin	"I'd like to think that what I'm ultimately accomplishing with my students is that they feel prepared to move forward confidently".
Smith	"I love being able to think that what I chose to do for my career can inspire some of these guys to want to be professional too...".
Landry	"My reason for being a teacher stems from a long line of educators. I've been around the classroom my whole life so it felt like a solid fit".
Dez	"Teaching is an incredibly important job. You need grit to inspire your students nowadays. Plus, some of these kids need male role models".
Murray	"Since, I'm not yet in my very own classroom, I think the reason I'm pursuing a career in education is to help be part of the 'fix' our country needs in education."
Aikman	"Well, I tried other endeavors but this is what stuck. Teaching is how I support my wife and kids"

Figure 2: Salient responses of male educators who were asked why they chose to be a teacher were quoted and presented in the table above.

One teacher in particular spent a lengthy amount of time explicating his reasoning. For this teacher, education was not only a way to make a difference in the lives of the students, but also an avenue for him to fulfill a personal obligation to find ways to serve our country. In the conversational interview, this teacher stated:

We're[USA] not doing so well anymore. You turn on the news, listen to peoples experiences and feelings about being American and it's not good. It's like we're [Americans] not caring about anything anymore but ourselves. I see the types of kids walking into my class every year and they are just uninspired. There are two fights I see; the one outside of America that our military upholds and the fight

within our country boundary. We've got to inspire these kids to see the big picture and be role models of what we want to see.

The interview with the teacher took on a conversational tone as he began to express the displeasures he had with the United States. It is important to point out that while he vented about the country's wrongs, in nearly the same breath, he expressed how important it was to do one's part to try and fix it. For this teacher, educating our nation's youth is an important step toward national progress.

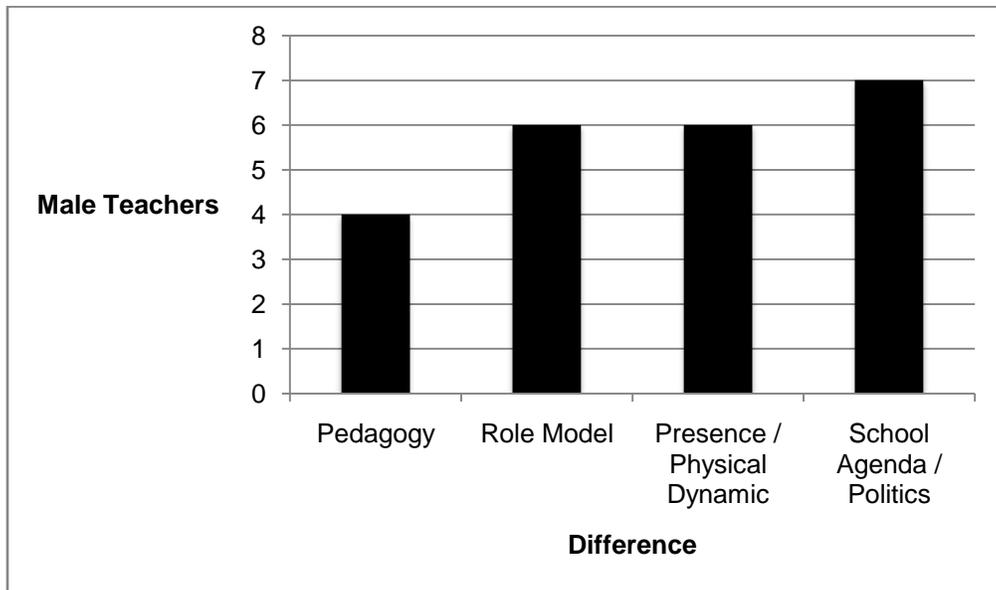
**"It's My Job"**. Two teachers from the other five teachers were clearly distinguishable regarding their perceptions in career choice. While these two teachers also expressed professional desire to see their students do well, these two teachers did not credit that as a paramount reason for their career choice. These two teachers want to do well, but approach teaching as they would any job. They acknowledge what is required of them; however, are resistant to stepping outside the curriculum to challenge their students. In *Figure 2* above, Landry and Aikman's quotes reflected a personal perception of being a male teacher as a means of monetary income. Through multiple conversations with one of these two male teachers, I jotted down many notes and summarized his perception in the following excerpt:

The teacher does not actively make attempts to work outside of the district curriculum and pacing calendar. In addition, contract language is a lens continually driving his viewpoints on a subject matter. Based off of his perception of how his grade level team perceives him, this teacher, Aikman, collaborated with the other teachers based on professional requirement, not lesson enhancement. He constructed methods that are efficient and effective for him: not

necessarily the students. With that said, this teacher, despite his 9-5 approach to the profession, he is productive and maintains his position as an elementary school teacher earning tenure in the district.

**Differences in Elementary School Impact**

The findings pointed out that 7 of 7 participants felt being a male elementary school teacher inherently changes the experience and impact they have when compared to female colleagues. While all of the participants acknowledged and spoke of the different impact they perceive to have as male educators, the specific differences were not as uniformly shared. For example, all seven educators believed they approached and impacted school agendas/politics differently than female teachers; however, only 4 of 7 teachers believed they made a different impact in terms of classroom pedagogy. The following graph displays the areas of commonality:



*Figure 3:* Seven male teachers were asked if they perceived themselves to have an impact within their schools that differed from female teachers. All seven teachers perceived that there in fact was a difference. The graph above displays the most commonly grouped differences.

**Pedagogy.** Four of seven male teachers perceived the pedagogy delivered in their classroom differed from their female colleagues. Although they perceived their pedagogy was different, it was not necessarily more effective; a point distinguished explicitly by all four of the teachers in this grouping. I asked these four teachers to determine what criteria they considered about their pedagogy was different, all four responded citing the impact they have on the boys within their classrooms. The following excerpt from one of the participant interviews is an example of the previous mentioned rationale:

How I perceive my teaching style to be different is [within] the relationship I have with the boys in my class. I'm not saying that I can teach better than female teachers...we have incredible female teachers. I'm saying that, as a man, I think I'm more in tune with the behaviors and impulses boys tend to have. That is not saying I'm more lenient than the other {female} teachers, but I don't think women are as aware of the development and needs of boys that don't or can't behave in a manner that traditionally reflects the norms of the girl students or the students that they perceive to be properly behaving...For this reasoning I think my teaching style is more adapted to be supportive of boys in the classroom because I'm not swayed by their intensity or the way they like to interact with the material.

As the interview conversation continued, this teacher added he has noticed some of his colleagues don't respond well to the content boys like to write about. He continued to cite a personal experience he had during a teacher collaboration focused on grading 5<sup>th</sup> grade writing tasks. In his example, the teachers cross read material, scored them, and then compared how they scored. This teacher noted that the female teachers continually

made comments about the boys writing especially if the content they wrote about involved excessive action scenes, superpowers or competition. For this teacher, he felt those comments reflected personal biases that inherently made other teachers perceive boys through a negative lens.

**Role Model.** 6 of the 7 teachers felt being a male teacher innately changed the way they are perceived as role models. The outlying teacher maintained neutrality when responding to how he perceived himself different as a role model. He held the position that role modeling is about interaction and relationships; an area he felt was not related to gender roles. For the majority group regarding this topic, the opposite perspective influenced their positioning on the subject. These six teachers felt that being a male teacher both directly and indirectly shapes the manner in which they are role models and the impact their role has on boys at the school. The following excerpt from one of the interviews frames this groups thinking:

Being a man [male teacher] in an elementary school changes how I am perceived by the students because there just aren't that many of us. By the time they get to my class in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, I'm usually the first male teacher they have had and maybe the last until middle school... I know the boys are immediately in tune with some of the things I say and I believe it is important for them to see a man be a professional and successful figure within the school so that they may also see this profession as a desirable one. The girls in the class will also benefit from having a male presence as a teacher because it provides an example of the investment men have in education and that men can do and love this job just as much as any

other. It is unfortunate to read narrative or hear discussion stating that labels our job as a female one.

**Presence/Physical Dynamic.** Six of the seventeachers perceived their presence to be different than female teachers because of their gender. The outlying teacher acknowledged that society has inadvertently determined an unfavorable perception of men who choose to work with young children; however, did not consider that stigma as an influencing difference on how he interacted with his lower primary students. For the other six teachers, that social stigma was a driving factor in how they presented and protected themselves within their profession working with young students. To help explain this dynamic, the following catch phrases or statements reflected their thinking:

- “I’m a handshake only type”
- “No hugs”
- “Slacks, tucked in shirt, and a tie allows our presence to students, parents, colleagues, and others to always be looked at within a professional way”.
- “You never know how a kid may interpret and later explain a situation...the best bet is to never put yourself in one where that explanation of the predicament may occur”.
- “My class knows, High fives and Handshakes are the only way to go”.
- “I’m always weary of when I’m in the classroom by myself with a student, if that situation occurs, I make sure our interaction is close to an open door and windows. In other words, I just make sure that I’m able to be seen at all times”.

**School Agenda and Politics.**Seven of the seventeachers perceived they differ from female colleagues in the area of school interactions behind the scenes of the

classroom. All seven participants suggested displeasure with the amount of time spent talking about school issues that are beyond their parameters of control. For instance, curriculum/policy adoptions, district site collaboration procedures, class-size, and others were notable mentions by most of the participants. For many of these male teachers, they felt frustration with how school meetings, professional developments, and other collaborative opportunities were often wasted by the complaints of female teachers. In addition, some of the participants stated they were often uninspired by some of the issues being discussed. The following interview excerpt accounts for the general perception of this group of male teachers:

I recognize the importance of grade and school level collaboration, as well as the necessity of school site meetings. I just wish they were more productive. On countless occasions I've sat at my school site meetings and mentally checked out because, before any work gets done, somebody has a complaint about planning time, district tasks, printing pages, or something that turns the first third of the meeting into a vent session. I mean, I have issues too, but to bring them and vent so the whole school can hear about it is never something I or the other two male teachers at my site have ever done. School meetings are not a therapy session. On top of that, the one time I did speak out and try to redirect the group back to the agenda was not fun. At that time, I really felt how outnumbered I was in terms of gender and attempting to end the 'therapy' sessions only made me feel like I was being insensitive; especially when the other [female] teachers are giving you that look."

## **Summary**

The interview and conversational responses provided cogent and informative data. The first research question regarding the personal perception of why these male teachers chose to become an educator produced two distinguishable classifications. The second research question was framed to elicit open discussion from these male teachers about how they perceived their impact to be distinct from female colleagues. The findings generated a variety of themes indicating that the male elementary school teachers in this study value their profession, feel committed, view themselves as role models, and were able to discern clear differences between their female colleagues.

## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND NEXT STEPS**

### **Introduction**

In order to further understand the reasons male teachers chose a professional career in a predominantly female gendered occupation, this phenomenological study qualitatively investigated the experiences of seven male educators. In addition, the study expanded its focus to include whether or not these educators perceived their experience as a teacher differed from female colleagues because they are men. The research findings revealed data that generated several themes that were divided into categories for analysis by the researcher. The data was gathered via interviews, conversations, and observations. As I corroborated their data with current research and my own personal experience as an

elementary male educator, I found the perceived conditions and subsequent impact held true to these teachers mirroring many of my own perceptions.

### **Discussion**

In the developmental steps of forming a study, I knew I wanted to explore the reasons why there was little male presence in elementary school classrooms. I was starting my second assignment at a local elementary school and had already encountered atypical relationship dynamics because I was a man. My intention was to explore this phenomenon in depth. Although I had an area I wanted to explore, I had a difficult time constructing a specific topic focus. I brainstormed countless ‘WHY’ and ‘WHAT IF’ questions only to be repeatedly unsatisfied by them all. It was not until I eventually asked myself what do I really want to know about male elementary school teachers and why there continues to be a shortage of them entering the profession that my research questions for this study crystallized.

**Research Question 1.** With the intention of finding the reasons these teachers chose a career in compulsory education, I developed a set of interview questions and prepared to gather data. After the first couple interviews, I was able to get answers to my questions; however, the data felt so structured, textbook like, and lacked sincerity. The information gathered in these initial interviews was done verbally with a recorder. I listened to the interviews on tape and realized the most intriguing part of the recording was during the tangents, when conversation was about something else. In the third interview, I changed my approach. While the participants knew I was gathering data, I engaged conversation with the research focus and question, but did not ask probe questions to find more information outside of what they voluntarily shared with me. My

data gathering increased and instead of waiting for me to ask probing questions, the participants began to give reasons for choosing to be a male educator adding personal anecdotes about their teaching experience.

**Agents of Change.** When the data was analyzed, the majority of the participants stated, in some form, that they taught to make a difference. A difference that had an effect on not just the immediate future of the students, but also on the subsequent impact that their success as students may have on prosperity. I found this commonality among the male teachers most interesting. I also began to compare my own perceptions about student accomplishments and felt a sense of camaraderie. I was intrigued with my own reactions and was most interested in how I would respond as interviews and conversations progressed.

**Job.** The other category distinguished by the data analysis was a practical one. The participants in this category produced sufficient measurable outcomes to satisfy the job description. The primary reason they teach is to support their family and hobbies. I appreciated this response. Although the response is very practical in nature, I assumed the response was also a baseline commonality between us all.

**Research Question 2.** Data gathered on the perceived difference in impact these teachers had on their professional practice because of gender was much easier to distinguish. Because much of the information was done in personal anecdotes and experiences we were sharing, I gathered responses I felt were sincere and not directed by me. In the initial interviews, I provided topic areas and asked if the participant perceived differences from their female counterparts.

**Pedagogy.** The participants included in this category perceived a special awareness regarding the demeanor and development of boys as inherently male. Because of this innate biological connection, these participants felt the interaction, motivation, and determination of the boys differed under their instruction. I too recognized a distinction in my pedagogy; however, I disagreed with the participants in this group on the basis of their reasons. Interaction, motivation, and determination are all areas of teaching I feel are insignificant because of gender.

**Role Model.** I connected with the participant's responded answers in this category. Answers included the need for men to be present in the development of student education, as well as, the benefit for both boys and girls to see men as effective teachers. More specifically, I feel the professional dispositions displayed by male teachers are important models for young boys to see; especially those who don't have readily available role models at home.

**Physical Presence/Dynamic.** I anticipated the data would code all participants into this category; however, one participant mentioned nothing about felt social pressures suggested by the other participants. As a male elementary school teacher, I decided early on to pay attention to the importance of social taboos associated with men working with young children. Much like the commentary expressed by the majority of the study participants, the feeling that elementary female teachers do not have to be conscious of the same social preconceptions is personally shared as well.

**School Agenda/Politics.** As I analyzed the data, the findings revealed this category and I was pleasantly surprised. Not only did all seven participants mention this category as a perceived distinction they had from females, but the manner in which they

specified the distinction was uniform as well. As the results point out, the male teachers felt that “venting” or “therapy session” conditions during school meetings were futile and attributable to mainly female interaction patterns.

### **Limitations**

The participants work within a certain geographical demographic and was limited to the sample size of the group. The data was collected in various formats across several weeks making data collection cumbersome especially in the more informal conversations with the male teachers. Transcription of the anecdotes, though accurately noted in Chapter 4, may not have been exact interpretation thus a threat to validity.

### **Next Steps**

To help further the research, a phenomenological study conducted on the reasons female teachers chose the profession and the perceived impact they feel are distinct to women would substantiate if the perception revealed in this study were valid. In addition, the study corroborated some of the perceptions I have as a male educator. A copy of this study will be archived in a database at CSUMB. The findings may provide others with additional clarity regarding the perception of male elementary school teachers.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of the study was to distinguish potential reasons men chose to work as male elementary school teachers; a profession socially and statistically understood as predominantly female. The male teacher participants shared personal responses that intended to substantiate my own personal experiences with the narrative surrounding current empirical research. The study revealed the need for additional research to be done

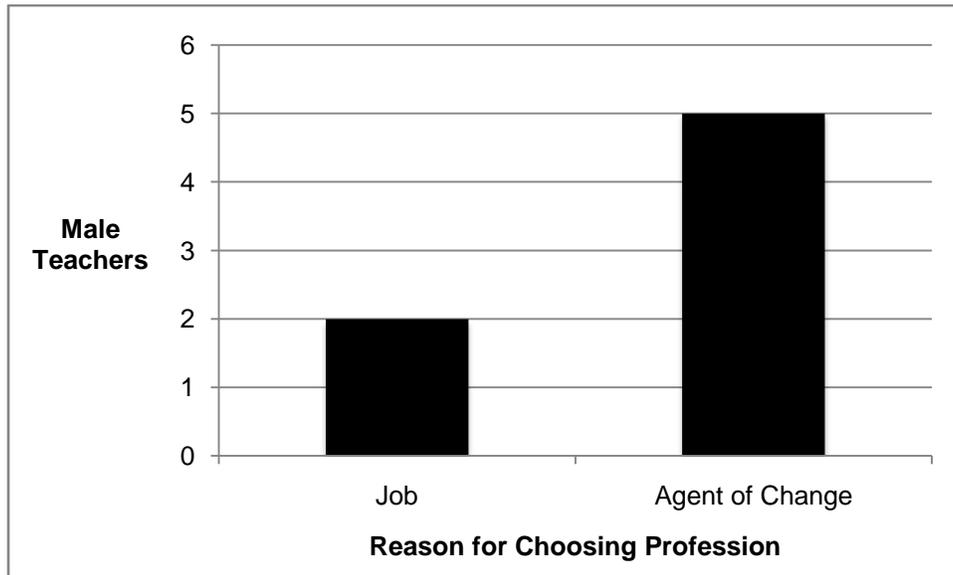
on the perceptions of the other stakeholders: female teachers, students, parents, administration, and classified staff working with both male and female educators in elementary schools.

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**Appendix A**

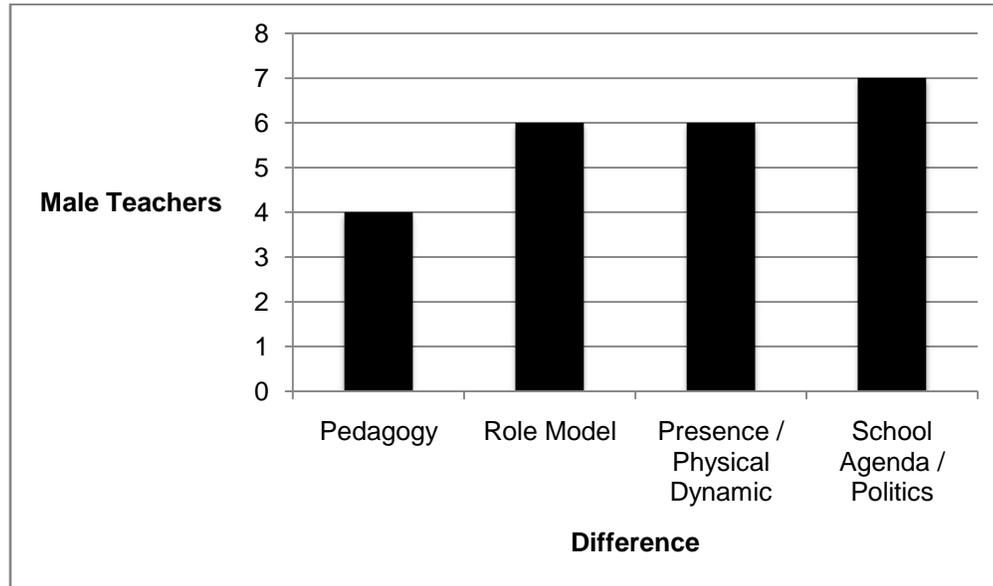
*Figure 1: Seven male teachers were asked the question, what constitutes their personal perception of choosing to become a male educator?*

**Appendix B**

Male Teacher	Quoted Response
JJ	"The reason I teach is to make a difference for these students so they can, hopefully, think critically and make good choices".
Irvin	"I'd like to think that what I'm ultimately accomplishing with my students is that they feel prepared to move forward confidently".
Smith	"I love being able to think that what I chose to do for my career can inspire some of these guys to want to be professional too...".
Landry	"My reason for being a teacher stems from a long line of educators. I've been around the classroom my whole life so it felt like a solid fit".
Dez	"Teaching is an incredibly important job. You need grit to inspire your students nowadays. Plus, some of these kids need male role models".
Murray	"Since, I'm not yet in my very own classroom, I think the reason I'm pursuing a career in education is to help be part of the 'fix' our country needs in education."
Aikman	"Well, I tried other endeavors but this is what stuck. Teaching is how I support my wife and kids"

**Figure 2: Salient responses of male educators who were asked why they chose to be a teacher were quoted and presented in the table above.**

## Appendix C



**Figure 3:** Seven male teachers were asked if they perceived themselves to have an impact within their schools that differed from female teachers. All seven teachers perceived that there in fact was a difference. The graph above displays the most commonly grouped differences.

