

A Comparative Thematic study examining Gender-Related Experiences within the Primary Teaching Profession.

Abstract

Psychological research has previously examined the unique barriers males face in early years education and the issues women face in succeeding in leadership in schools. This study is the first psychological research to examine male and female primary school teachers' experiences in a comparative study to gain insight into barriers faced due to gender stereotyping. A qualitative approach was employed with a comparative, reflexive thematic analysis used as the method. Eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted, comprising one early years educator, five male and five female primary school teachers employed within UK schools. A comparative thematic analysis revealed two major themes relating to career paths. Firstly, 'Unintended sexism', revealed the existence of sexism based on gender stereotypes. Secondly, the theme 'Relationships' related to qualities required for leadership. The findings from this study indicate that gender-based stereotypes impacted both male and female participants uniquely.

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Acronyms used within education settings:

NASEN- National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination

NPQML- National Professional Qualification for Middle Leadership

SENCo- Special Educational Needs Coordinator

GTP- Graduate Teacher Programme

NPQEYL- National Professional Qualification for Early Years Leadership

NPQSL- National Professional Qualification for Senior Leadership

NQT- Newly Qualified Teacher

ECT- Early Career Teacher

SLT- Senior Leadership Team

Introduction

Despite the gender makeup of the teaching workforce being predominantly female, there is a noticeable disparity in their presence within leadership roles and in primary schools in particular, female teachers take longer to progress than their male counterparts (Department for Education, 2022). Further, male teachers are in a minority within schools, and less likely to work in primary and nursery schools, with male teachers making up 14% of this workforce (Department for Education, 2023). Therefore, it is important to examine gender-specific experiences that both male and female teachers face to enable any barriers identified to be eradicated, creating equality of career opportunities for each gender working within this sector. The focus of this research was to examine the experiences of both male and female primary school teachers to understand if gender stereotyping impacts career paths.

Literature review

Gender stereotypes

Sex-based stereotyping could help to explain the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions and the lack of men working within the younger age groups in primary schools. Ellemers (2018, p.276) notes that stereotypes “reflect general expectations about members of particular social groups.” There is a large body of research surrounding sex-based stereotyping, spanning decades. Shein’s (1973) study demonstrated that men perceive that they have the qualities and attributes associated with leadership, and Shein’s (1975) study demonstrated female managers believed this also. Shein (2001, p.678) notes that subsequent replications of the early studies continue to demonstrate men’s perception that they possess the qualities required for leadership, however, women no longer “sex-type” leadership, perceiving that they possess the qualities necessary and expect equality.

Heilman (1983, cited in Heilman and Caleo, 2018) proposed a lack of fit model, explaining a mismatch can occur between the attributes people believe women possess and those needed to succeed in management positions. This results in incongruity and negative expectations of women's ability to perform the job and produces bias and discrimination. Heilman and Caleo (2018) note that the lack of fit model is still very relevant, decades on from the original theory, with stereotypical expectations remaining prevalent, with men thought to be "assertive, bold and aggressive" and women thought to be "relationship-oriented, nurturing and kind" (Heilman and Caleo, 2018, p.726). Further, Heilman (2012, p.123) notes that stereotypes are not just descriptive but also prescriptive, with women not just thought to possess communal qualities, but expected to demonstrate social sensitivity and nurturing qualities. Additionally, there are prescriptions of behaviours that women are not meant to display, for example agentic, masculine qualities such as self-assertiveness and dominance (Heilman, 2001; Heilman, 2012).

However, recent research suggests gender stereotyping is less static and is evolving. Charlesworth and Banaji (2022, p.14) conducted a time-series analysis over ten years and the results suggest a weakening by as much as 19% of gender stereotypes in the United States and many other countries across the world, demonstrating shifts in gender stereotyping across the globe. Further, Hsu et al (2021, p.1005) examined communion levels and results demonstrated women's communality is reducing and men's levels remain stable.

The backlash effect.

If men and women violate prescribed gender expectations, this can lead to negative consequences (Heilman, 2001, p.667). Moss-Racusin, Phelan and Rudman's (2010, p.140) findings demonstrate that when men behave counter-stereotypically and demonstrate qualities associated with women, such as warmth, they experience a backlash effect that pressures men to conform to stereotypes. Likewise, women who display agentic qualities also suffer penalisation for violating the expected gender norm (Rudman et al, 2012; Williams and Tiedens, 2016).

Therefore, in pursuit of leadership roles, women face difficulty relating to gender stereotypes. Eagly and Karau's (2002, p.573) role congruity theory suggests that it is more difficult for women to become leaders due to the incongruity between the expectation of the female gender role and the expectation of what is required to be a leader. Furthermore, there are different expectations of male and female leaders, with female leaders expected to display communal and agentic qualities, and male leaders expected to display only agentic qualities (Johnson et al, 2008, p.39; Koenig et al, 2011, p.637; Rudman and Phelan, 2008, p.65).

Gender stereotypes dictate that men are not meant to possess communal qualities and pursue careers in communal roles. Croft, Schmader and Block (2015, p.361) note that when men work in communal roles such as careers in early childhood education or nursing, backlash effects occur, and the negative consequences are far more pronounced than for women excelling in agentic roles. Sczesny, Nater and Haines (2022, p.693) also state that men are prevented from working in communal roles due to incongruity between the qualities expected of the male gender and the communal qualities that the role requires.

Research undertaken within education contexts confirms that male teachers are perceived in line with broader gender stereotypes, with female teachers viewed as possessing more nurturing qualities than male teachers (Wood, 2012) and male teachers lacking warmth relative to female teachers, resulting in less likelihood of being hired (Halper, Cowgill, and Rios, 2019). Furthermore, Stereotype threat is an additional factor that could discourage men from working with younger children. Stereotype threat (Steele, 1997) is defined as "the social psychological threat that arises when one is situated or doing something for which a negative stereotype about one's group applies. This predicament threatens one with being negatively stereotyped, with being judged or treated stereotypically" (Steele, 1997, p.614). Kalokerinos et al (2017) identified male primary teachers as at greater risk of stereotype threat. This could prevent male teachers from working with the youngest age groups.

The rationale for the study

There is a gap in the current literature, with no studies comparing male and female primary teachers' experiences of stereotyping and perceptions of the qualities required for leadership. This study sought to fill this gap by using comparative thematic analysis to examine each gender's experiences, using a reflexive approach (Braun and Clarke, 2022). Thematic analysis enables a flexible, inductive approach to allow for both latent and semantic themes to be captured for each gender (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

The research question stated is:

What are the gender-based experiences of male and female primary school teachers in the UK? A comparative thematic study exploring the impact of gender stereotyping.

Method

The research design.

The ontological position taken in this study was critical realist and the epistemological position adopted was contextualism. Using a critical realist approach for reflexive thematic analysis allowed access to the participants' reality but also recognised that this is set within and shaped by context. By using contextualism as a position this acknowledged that participants' realities are situated and based on the individual's perspectives. A qualitative approach was employed, with individual semi-structured interviews conducted with male and female participants. All participants were asked questions relating to their experiences and perceptions (for a full schedule of interview questions see Appendix A). Firstly, reflexive thematic analysis allowed the identification of shared patterns of meaning across the entire data set. Secondly, the method enabled the identification of patterns specific to each gender, allowing for a comparison between male and female experiences.

Participants

The population sample comprised male and female primary school teachers working in schools in the UK. The sampling method was purposive to find participants with the experience of working as a primary school teacher and recruitment occurred through

local contacts within schools and by advertisement via social media. Inclusion criteria stated that teachers had at least 5 years of teaching experience and were not in the process of completing Early Career Teacher Training. A pilot interview was conducted with a male early years educator and is included in the analysis. Ten primary school teachers took part in the study, five female and five male participants. The participants worked in a range of year groups from the Early Years Foundation Stage through to Year 6. 33% male participants and 60% of female participants worked in a senior leadership role. See *Table 1*.

Table 1

The profile of the participants by phase currently teaching

Male participants	Phase Teaching	Female participants	Phase Teaching
Pilot	Preschool	FP1	KS2
MP1	EYFS	FP2	EYFS/KS1
MP2	KS1	FP3	KS2
MP3	KS1 and KS2	FP4	EYFS
MP4	KS2	FP5	KS2
MP5	KS1 and KS2		

Note 1: MP represents Male participant. FP represents Female participant.

Note 2: EYFS represents Early Years Foundation Stage, KS1 represents Key Stage One, KS2 represents Key Stage 2.

Procedure

Ethical approval was received from the Open University Ethics Board. See Appendix A for a copy of the ethical approval form. Participants were invited to take part in the study via an email which contained a participant information sheet and an informed consent form (See Appendix B and C). After receiving the signed informed consent forms, the interviews were conducted online using MS Teams software, which also recorded the interviews. The interviews lasted between 18 minutes and 50 minutes each. The participants were informed that they would be asked questions about their experiences working as a teacher. The interview schedule was piloted before the interviews, and questions surrounded teachers' career paths, qualities required for

leadership, qualities required of teachers, behaviour management and relationships with parents (See Appendix A). After the interview was completed participants were emailed a debrief form (see Appendix D).

Semi-structured interviews enabled the interviewer to ask follow-up questions, allowing participants an opportunity to elaborate or clarify points made. The interviews were transcribed verbatim, and to ensure transcription accuracy the transcripts were proofread whilst listening to the audio recordings. For reasons of confidentiality identifying details were omitted or altered in the transcripts.

Reflexivity

Through using a contextualist epistemology, there is an acknowledgement that the researcher played a role in shaping the research, for I occupy multiple positions, as a female, primary school teacher and a researcher. Therefore, potential bias has been acknowledged and controlled for, through regular reflection as to how the data is engaged with.

The analytic process

A reflexive thematic analytical approach was undertaken following Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-stage approach to explore patterns of meaning across the whole data set. The first stage of the analysis involved familiarisation with the data through repeated, in-depth reading, repeated listening to the audio recordings and note-taking. Whilst engaging with the data at this stage annotations were made on the transcripts in NVIVO on sections of the data that could have potential within the analysis. The second stage, phase two, involved inductive coding of the transcripts, producing 35 codes that were semantic initially and some shifted to latent codes. During phase three, the codes were organised into patterns of shared meaning by identifying the topics they clustered around, with initial theme generation occurring. A selection of the codes were taken forward and clustered together to establish four main themes. During phase four, the themes were developed and reviewed in relation to the codes and the data set as a whole. Shared patterns of meaning were produced across specifically male and female data sets, and these gender-specific codes were then

reviewed. During phase five the themes were then refined and named. At this stage on reviewing the themes across the data set it became clear that there existed relationships between several themes, altering them to sub-themes and unifying around two main overarching themes (see Appendix E for Thematic map, code table and example coding summary).

Analysis

Two overarching themes were constructed, 'Unintended sexism', which reflects the impact of gender stereotypes on participants, and contains gender-specific sub-themes. The second theme 'Relationships' does not contain gender-specific themes and demonstrates how male and female participants alike valued empathy in all relationships, reflecting the requirement for leaders to possess communal qualities. See Appendix E for the Thematic map.

Overarching Theme 1- Unintended sexism

Sub-theme: A predetermined path to leadership...if you want it?

There were clear differences between male and female participants' perceptions of support in their careers. Each male participant expressed feeling proactively supported in their career progression. What was evident in the male participant's accounts was the sense that for all, the path to leadership was actively encouraged if that was what they wanted. Consider the extracts,

MP2: "I'm sort of to-ing and fro-ing in on that idea at the moment I'm not utterly convinced that's that's for me, having done sort of management roles in a previous life. If you like, before teaching and but I know that my my head is supportive and he's he's keen for me to do that, but he's, he understands where I sit with that" (line 388)

MP3: "I was supported COMPLETELY, whatever I wanted to do as long as there was the space to do it. Like I couldn't just go up to the head teacher's room. Knock, knock, knock. Make me English lead. Couldn't do that, but she would then find space for me.

For what it was I wanted, so I've always felt completely and utterly supported” (line 676)

The proactive encouragement of male participants towards leadership can be interpreted as evidence of deeply entrenched gender stereotyping (Haines, Deaux and Lofaro, 2016). Traditional gender stereotypes of males possessing agency, encompassing the ability to take charge, be competent, and decisiveness (Heilman, 2012, p.115) can explain the proactive support for the male participants' career progression.

However, the first extract notes that although the headteacher is 'keen' for him to pursue a headship role, he is supported in his choice not to. Likewise, other male participants were disinterested in pursuing leadership. Consider the extract,

MP1: “I'm a male in primary, I imagine that if I wanted to go into headship, I could have been a head 10 years, I could have been here 10 years ago. I'm a male in primary school. That's what they do. But I don't. I've got a family. I've got five kids, I want to spend time with my children and my wife, and I'm very aware that going into leadership takes more and more of that time away, and that's not really what I want because I enjoy being in the classroom” (line 715)

In this extract, the participant notes ‘I'm a male in primary school. That's what they do’, highlighting the prescriptive gender stereotyping in place, evoking a sense of expectation of him as a male to enter leadership (Heilman, 2012). He is not just thought of as possessing the qualities for leadership, he is expected to pursue leadership. The extract also evokes a feeling that male primary teachers entering leadership is a long-standing tradition, with traditional gender stereotyping remaining consistent and stable within this context (Haines, Deaux and Lofaro, 2016).

The prescription that a male participant is suitable for leadership was not dependent on family commitments, on being asked whether he worked in a senior leadership role, a male participant who worked part-time due to sharing childcare responsibilities commented,

MP4: “No, mainly because it was part-time and this is something that I was potentially interested in and I did ask them about that at the time erm and they were willing to put me through the courses in order to get there” (line 58).

The extract demonstrates that there was no fatherhood penalty in place, with the continued perception that he has the qualities for leadership. He evokes a sense of proactive encouragement from his leadership team to put him through the courses ‘to get there’, and as a male, he is not viewed as losing competency on becoming a father (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick, 2004).

Sub-theme: Forging a path...barriers and struggle

In comparison, the Sub-theme ‘Forging a path...barriers and struggle’ presents codes from only female teachers relating to the difficulty faced in their career progression.

One female participant expressed that she felt support in her career, although overall female participants did not express proactive support in their career progression. The road to leadership for female teachers was not predetermined as the male participant's interviews evoked. For instance, on discussing the road to management a female participant noted,

FP5: “It’s been really hard, and I don’t feel particularly supported, I think you’ve got to really forge your own path” (line 723)

Lack of encouragement and support can be understood as representing the influence of gender stereotypes on female participants, with stereotypical depictions of women as communal and nurturing creating a mismatch between the skills required for leadership and the qualities women are thought to hold (Heilman and Caleo, 2018; Eagly and Karau, 2002). These descriptive and prescriptive gender stereotypes can result in gender bias (Heilman, 2012). Consider the extract,

FP5: “I didn’t feel like the road into management was easy at all. I knew I had a lot of the skills and I’d put myself on every training course. Umm, only when I found a way

in through being assistant SENCO and really PROVED myself. Did I then have a headteacher at my last school who was like 'oh yeah, you could be assistant head, you could be deputy head" (line 588)

Here she evokes a sense of the lived impact of prescriptive and descriptive stereotyping. Despite her knowledge that she had the skills and qualities required to be in a leadership position, prescriptive stereotypes ensured that she was not automatically thought of in leadership terms (Heilman, 2012) and was required to work hard to prove that she could occupy a leadership position and needed to manage the impression of competency (Glick, Zion, and Nelson, 1988). This contrasts with the male participants' experiences who were automatically regarded as suiting a management position due to the stereotyping of males traditionally as leaders (Koenig et al, 2011).

For one female participant, support in her career progression altered on becoming a mother. Consider the extract,

FP2: "So my head erm put me forward for like middle leadership things. So I did my NPQML. And erm, Had I NOT have had my daughter and had not have moved to a part-time role, I think she would have given me well, she would have done. She would have given me management erm opportunities. But erm having had my little girl, I didn't want to work full-time and part-time. And that absolutely closed every single door at that school" (line 557)

The extract gives a sense that the participant faced a choice between her career and being a mother. The lack of further career opportunities for part-time staff limited her options for progression at that school, demonstrating a motherhood penalty. This contrasts with the experience of the male part-time participant who maintained proactive support in his school. Research suggests being a mother further heightens gender stereotypes, with the maternal role affecting career advancement as women are viewed as losing competency when becoming a mother (Heilman and Okimoto, 2008).

Sub-theme: Societal gender role expectations

Several female participants mentioned how parents sought advice and they acted as an additional parent. It is notable no male teachers explicitly commented that parents actively sought parenting support from them. Consider the extracts,

FP4: "So I think as I've become an older teacher, I feel like I get a bit more respect just by virtue of being an older teacher. (laughs) Like more like motherly, it's SO weird" (line 473)

FP5: "I had a parent on the gate say to me the other day. Look, you've got quite like a parental approach to the children and that really we appreciate that. Because their daughter was struggling to come back to school after having had an operation and she said like, I knew you'd deal with that all right. Because you're quite like a nurturing. Yeah, she called me like a mothering type or something, I think is the word that she used" (line 559)

In line with descriptive gender stereotypes of women as nurturing and relationship-oriented, female participants were perceived to have communal qualities such as nurture and kindness (Heilman and Caleo, 2018) by parents. The second extract evokes a sense of comfort in having 'a mothering type' caring for her child. In contrast, the perception that female teachers possess qualities associated with care and nurture acts in a discriminatory manner toward a male teacher working with the youngest children. Consider the extracts,

MP1: "So every school I've worked at, I've always struggled. Not always, not struggled, but the first term or two I get complaints. And that's happened in four schools to begin with. There's always been complaints. But then it settles down when they get to know me" (line 570)

MP1: "I've seen it's hard for the parents to adjust to me because I'm not. I'm not Miss Honey, I'm not that. I'm not that teacher, but I get excellent results on the kids and I build really positive relationships with them, but it's always and all four schools I've

taught at it's always taken a little while for the parents and the families to get used to me" (line 587)

The extracts can be interpreted as discrimination based on the persistence of gender stereotyping. Parents' initial unease with him occupying an early-year's teacher role can be understood as stereotypes depicting him as not possessing the necessary qualities for teaching in the early years, such as possessing warmth (Halper, Cowgill, and Rios, 2018) or being nurturing (Wood, 2012). This results in a backlash effect when gender stereotypes are violated (Moss-Rascusin, Phelan and Rudman, 2010; Croft, Schmader and Block, 2015).

Further, a few male participants acknowledged differences in communication with parents as males, demonstrating an awareness that they hold an automatic hierarchy over female colleagues. Consider the extract,

Pilot MP: "Males coming into the setting will always turn to me to talk. And I'm like she's the manager go and talk to her!" (line 608)

The presumption by parents he is in charge and not the female manager sits in line with the cultural leader stereotype as masculine (Koenig et al, 2011) resulting in sexism towards the female manager.

Overarching Theme 2- Relationships

Sub-theme: A fine balance between being liked and being authoritative as a leader.

Both male and female participants evoked a sense that leaders tread a fine balance between being personable and holding people to account. Consider the extracts,

FP2: "I think if you've got good control over your staff and they respect you, you probably don't need to come down like a ton of bricks or, you know, put the fear of God into people. I think it's about relationship. I think if you can build a respectful relationship where people know that you mean business but but that you're nice with it" (line 238)

MP1: “But what she did do was give me my foundation stage and just trust me with it. And she has and, obviously she's questioned me. And you know, I've gotta be accountable to her, but because she's got trust in me and listens to me” (line 252)

Each extract acknowledges that the leader position requires authority and the ability to hold people to account, a demonstration of the requirement of leaders to hold agentic and stereotypically masculine qualities. This is positioned alongside the requirement for leaders to be ‘nice with it’, as noted in the first extract, and to be able to listen to and trust staff, demonstrating the requirement for leaders to possess communal qualities, matching with stereotypically female qualities. This sits in line with existing research that leadership is becoming more communal (van Dierendonck, 2011).

Participants commented that the best leaders should demonstrate genuine empathy and care towards their staff. Consider the extracts,

FP4: “A good leader should be better, should be good at actively listening to other people, not just holding court, but actively listening to what's being said. Taking on board the, the difficulties and challenges we all face” (line 227)

MP3: “You need to have your staff know that if they aren't coming to find you, you've still gotta get off your backside and go and check that your staff are OK, because it might be that one of them's bottling stuff up and could really just use. Is everything OK?” (line 299)

The extracts highlight the expectation for a school leader to proactively check on staff and empathise with the day-to-day reality of being a teacher. This can be interpreted as the need for a leader to demonstrate a communal approach to leadership, which fits with a servant leadership framework (Liden et al, 2008).

Discussion

The primary focus of the research was to compare male and female primary teachers' experiences to understand the impact of gender stereotyping on career paths and perceptions of the requisite skills for school leadership. There are two key points to take from the study results, firstly, the main result from the analysis was the existence of unintended sexism occurring through the persistence of gender stereotypes acting upon participants. This occurred externally via parents' gender-stereotyped expectations and through the differences in career support within schools according to teacher gender. Secondly, the results indicated participants' expectations of a leader did not align with traditional gendered leader stereotypes, emphasising the need for leaders to be authoritative and empathetic, combining agentic with communal qualities.

The study results provide evidence of differing levels of career support according to teacher gender, with male teachers in a position of advantage in comparison to female teachers. The proactive encouragement towards management for male and not female participants can be viewed as evidence of the influence and impact of descriptive gender stereotyping of males possessing the skills required to be leaders, and the prescription for males to become leaders (Heilman, 2012; Heilman and Caleo, 2018; Heilman 1983, cited in Heilman and Caleo, 2018). Further, the results support research that leader stereotypes are viewed in primarily masculine terms (Koenig et al, 2011; Shein, 1973; Shein, 1975).

Moreover, the results support Williams's (1992) glass escalator theory suggesting that men working in female-dominated professions are in an advantaged position due to being male, being fast-tracked to management due to being seen to possess the qualities necessary for leadership. Cousins (2020) examined the glass escalator effect within UK primary schools and concluded that the effect occurs due to upholding the societal belief of males as role models. However, the results of this study offer an alternative explanation, indicating the glass escalator effect could occur in primary schools due to deeply ingrained prescriptive gender stereotyping, resulting in gender bias.

The results indicate female participants did not receive proactive support in their careers, and this can be understood as evidence of unintended or implicit sexism. Taken alongside the results of wider, societal gender expectations of female teachers possessing communal qualities such as being an additional parent, and viewed as nurturing, the results indicate that female teachers may not be viewed as possessing the agentic qualities for leadership. This results in the incongruity between the skills perceived to be required for leadership and the attributes female participants are thought to possess, in line with Eagly and Karau's (2002) role congruity theory of prejudice and supporting Heilman and Caleo's (1983, cited in Heilman and Caleo, 2018) lack of fit model. It is important to note the results do not indicate any instances of explicit bias against female participants, with no female participant portraying experiences of explicit sexism. The results indicate that due to the durability of gender stereotypes, there appears to be implicit or unintended bias against female participants, in line with Rudman and Glick's (2001) findings indicating implicit stereotyping can occur.

The study results demonstrated female participants are perceived differently from male participants by parents, with female and not male participants considered to hold communal qualities. The results support existing education research that female teachers are considered more nurturing than male teachers (Wood, 2012, p.317) and rated higher in perceived warmth (Halper, Cowgill, and Rios, 2019). Furthermore, the experience of the male early years teacher receiving complaints highlights that violations from the prescribed gender stereotype can lead to a backlash effect (Moss-Rascusin, Phelan and Rudman, 2010; Croft, Schmader and Block, 2015; Sczesny, Nater, and Haines, 2022). The results reflect the oppositional nature of gender stereotypes, with women seen as communal and not agentic, and men seen as agentic and not communal (Heilman and Caleo, 2018, p.726).

Further to gender bias, the results also indicated additional barriers in place for female teachers, with a motherhood penalty in place for one participant. This is concurrent with research acknowledging that being a mother affects career advancement, as

women are seen as losing competency on becoming a mother (Heilman and Okimoto, 2008) and childcare responsibilities become more salient in pursuit of leadership for female teachers (Weiner and Burton, 2016). The support for male teachers was in place irrespective of their family commitments, which supports existing literature highlighting men do not reduce in competency ratings on becoming fathers (Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick, 2004).

The second key point from the analysis surrounds the qualities required in leaders. The results indicated the preference and need for school leaders to possess communal qualities, emphasising the need for empathy alongside the requirement for agency. This supports existing literature suggesting that leadership is becoming more communal (van Dierendonck, 2011). Further, this fits with research by Koenig et al (2011) which states that leadership is primarily viewed in masculine terms but now includes additional communal qualities, and this is more apparent for leader stereotypes working in the education sector. Koburty, Syed, and Haloub (2019, p.844) note that if new trends of leadership include communal qualities so associated with women then why are women so underrepresented in leadership? The results of this study point towards an unintended, unconscious gender bias in occurrence.

There are strengths to the study, firstly, using a qualitative approach allowed for a detailed exploration of the topic in question. Further, using reflexive thematic analysis as the chosen method enabled a comparative approach between male and female participants. This allowed differences to be highlighted between each gender, alongside the ability to notice similarities across male and female participants' experiences. The study is not without limitations, the sample was influenced by who was available to approach and who decided to participate in the study. This could have influenced the study results introducing bias.

This is the first study to comparatively examine primary school teacher's experiences of gender-based stereotyping. Therefore, it would be beneficial if future studies examined the experiences of male and female teachers using a different sample, to corroborate the findings of this study. Further, it would be beneficial if future studies

compared male and female headteacher's experiences of gender stereotyping, for this study did not recruit headteachers and this could offer further insight.

In sum, the results from this study identified that gender-based stereotyping impacted each gender uniquely. Specifically, the research results from this sample demonstrate instances of unintended sexism acting on career paths, with differences in career support between the sexes, resulting in a male advantage in career progression to leadership roles. Furthermore, the results from this sample demonstrated the impact of broader stereotypical gender expectations on the participants. The results could be used to explain the overrepresentation of men acting in headships in primary schools and the underrepresentation of men working in the early years. There could be practice implications for school leaders to ensure equality of opportunity and support for all teachers, irrespective of gender, in whatever role an individual may seek.

Word count checked to be 5298 words.

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Appendix A:

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Can you describe your career path so far?
2. Did you choose the Key Stage/year group that you work in?
3. Is there a key stage/age range that you feel you are most suited to working in?
4. What qualities do you think make a good teacher?
Do you think there are qualities needed that are specific to the age range you work with?
5. In terms of leadership in schools, what qualities do you think are required to be a good leader in school?
6. How do you feel your students and colleagues respond to your behaviour management strategies?
Can you describe some?
7. How do you feel parents respond to you, e.g. your classroom management skills? And your ability to build a rapport with your students?
8. Generally, how supported do you feel in your career progression as a teacher?

Information provided but not asked directly in the interview:

- Name
- Gender
- Years in teaching
- How many years in teaching was it before you were offered a management role, if at all?

Appendix B:

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent for the D811 student RESEARCH PROJECT -
A comparative thematic study examining gender-related experiences within the primary teaching profession.

Researcher: Yvonne Herring- **[redacted]**
Supervisor- DR. Victoria Collard **–[redacted]**

Please highlight your choice by clicking inside the appropriate box

1. Taking part in the study

<p>I have read and understood the information sheet for the following study: D811 research project 'A comparative thematic study examining gender-related experiences within the primary teaching profession.' I have been able to ask questions about my participation and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.</p>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>I am aged 18 or over</p>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study and understand that I can refuse to answer questions I am not comfortable with and I can withdraw from the study at any time by contacting Mrs Yvonne Herring- [redacted] up until 21st April 2024, without having to give a reason.</p>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>I understand that taking part in the study involves taking part in an audio recorded interview conducted online via MS teams, lasting approx. 45 minutes.</p>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>
<p>– I agree to the interview being audio-/video-recorded</p>	YES <input type="checkbox"/>	NO <input type="checkbox"/>

2. Use of the information in the study

<p>I understand that the information I provide will be used for Yvonne Herring's MSc Psychology (Conversion) research project report and any publications that arise from the study.</p>	<p>YES <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>NO <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>I understand that personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as my name or where I live, will not be shared.</p>	<p>YES <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>NO <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>I understand that my data will be stored on a password protected laptop and encrypted external hard drive until end of July 2024 and subsequently will be deleted.</p>	<p>YES <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>NO <input type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>I agree to being quoted anonymously.</p>	<p>YES <input type="checkbox"/></p>	<p>NO <input type="checkbox"/></p>

4. Signature

<p>Name of participant [in CAPITALS]</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>Signature</p> <p>_____</p> <p>(electronic signatures are accepted)</p>	<p>Date</p> <p>_____</p>
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This research project has been approved by the D811 Module Team

Appendix C

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

THE STUDY:

The research project explores gender-related experiences within the Primary teaching profession.

CONTACT DETAILS:

If you are interested in taking part in the study, please contact:

Yvonne Herring- **[redacted]**

Supervisor- Dr. Victoria Collard – **[redacted]**

WHAT IS THE RESEARCH ABOUT?

The purpose of the research is to explore gender-related experiences of primary school teachers. The project aims to explore the impact that gender may have on the career-related experiences of both male and female primary school teachers in the UK. By participating in this research you will help to identify and understand these experiences in richer detail. The project has been approved by the D811 module team and individual interviews will be conducted until the end of March 2024.

WHAT WILL I ASK YOU TO DO IF I AGREE TO TAKE PART?

Participation will mean meeting me for an interview on MS Teams – and this will last 30-45 minutes. Participation is entirely voluntary, and if you decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. Your participation will help further our understanding of gender-related experiences of primary teachers in the UK.

HOW WILL THE DATA I PROVIDE BE USED?

The data will be stored in a password-protected folder on a hard drive and an encrypted external hard drive. Data will be kept until the end of July 2024 and then destroyed. Confidentiality will be ensured via the anonymization of quotes and no personally identifiable information will be recorded.

YOUR RIGHT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY

- You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time during your participation by leaving the interview.
- You have the right to ask for your data to be removed after your participation in the study by contacting Yvonne Herring on **[redacted]** up until 14th April 2024, after which withdrawal is not possible.

HOW DO I TAKE PART?

Complete the consent form, sign, and return the consent form via email.

DATA PROTECTION PRIVACY NOTICE

The research study complies with UK and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act 2018. The data collected in this study is anonymous. That means when taking part in this study it is not possible to identify you individually.

You will be asked to indicate your gender and age, but this cannot be linked back to you as an individual. The nature of the research is such that you will not be asked to disclose sensitive personal information. The experiment does not require you to disclose special category data (race, ethnic origin, political views, religious affiliation, trade union membership, health issues, or sexual orientation).

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS

If at any point you need more information about the study, or you have any concerns, please contact the researcher by emailing **[redacted]**. You can also contact the project supervisor (Dr. Victoria Collard) at **[redacted]**. If you wish to make a formal complaint, please contact the D811 module chair at **[redacted]**.

THANK YOU

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix D:

PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF FORM

A comparative thematic study examining gender-related experiences within the primary teaching profession.

This study has aimed to explore gender-related experiences of Primary Teachers. My hope is that the findings will contribute towards identifying and understanding gender-specific experiences faced by both female and male teachers working in the Primary phase.

This research has taken place as part of a student psychology project for an MSc with the Open University.

The student conducting this research is Yvonne Herring who can be contacted at **[redacted]**. The supervisor of this project is **[redacted]**.

Right to withdraw

Note that if at any time you wish to withdraw from the study, you can do so simply by letting me know. You can withdraw at any time, for any reason and you will not be asked to explain your reasons for withdrawing. Note however, that once the interview has been transcribed, anonymised, and analysed (expected to be by 14th April 2024), it may not be possible to withdraw your individual data from the research.

Data collected will be stored confidentially and transcripts will be anonymised. Your name will be removed from the transcript, and information that could directly or indirectly identify you will be removed. Only anonymised quotations will be used in the final written report and any publications derived from it.

Concerns

If you have any complaints or concerns about this research, please contact the D811 module chair at the following email address **[redacted]**.

Organisations

If participating in this research has resulted in you feeling distressed, the following may be able to support you:

Your own GP

Mind - <https://www.mind.org.uk>

Once again, thank you for participating in this project. Your time is much appreciated!

Yvonne Herring

Appendix E: Thematic map

