Quality Teachers and Quality Teacher Education

Exploring Wellbeing, Gender and Job Satisfaction

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Suzanne O'Keeffe

This chapter explores four Irish male primary teachers' daily experiences of care and gender in contemporary Irish schools. Taking a feminist poststructural approach, the study employs three data-collection phases using the interview as the primary method of enquiry. It employs a voice-centred relational method of data analysis, which involves four readings of data with each reading troubling the data in different ways. The current climate of professionalisation within the profession creates a dispassionate distance dictating how teachers should conduct their professional lives. This is further problematised through the concept of gender. Men who perform "caring" roles face special difficulties as "feminised" discourses of service and care often carry a devalued status and do not align with dominant definitions of masculinities. If men perform femininity through nurturance and care, their sexuality is called into question; if they display masculinity through emotional distance and control, their caring skills are questioned. Is there a link between gender, care and teacher wellbeing? How does the concept of "care" impact on teacher job satisfaction?

Keywords:

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Home

Introduction

Wellbeing and happiness are a major subject of public policy concern internationally. The need to include mental health among the first priorities of the public health agenda has been increasingly recognised in Europe over the past decades (EU Joint Action on Mental Health and Wellbeing, 2016). International performance indicators routinely include data on wellbeing. In 2013, a dedicated module containing 18 indicators on subjective wellbeing was included in the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) survey, which has been collecting data through its European Quality of Life Survey (EQLS) since 2003. According to the Years Lived with Disability (YLD) statistics, mental disorders represent 22% of the EU's burden of disability. More recently, *Health at a Glance: Europe 2019* (OECD, 2020) reports that mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety disorders and alcohol and drug use disorders, affect more than one in six people across the European Union in any given year. Mindful of the current educational landscape, the emotional atmosphere in a school setting is a worthy area of further exploration in terms of wellbeing, gender and job satisfaction. This may be even more relevant when considering that many educational policies are at odds with teacher identities of public good, further impacting on job satisfaction. Performance targets, curriculum changes and heavy workloads are the realities of educational policies that impact daily on teacher wellbeing and job satisfaction.

Increasing literature exists that details the positive relationship between job satisfaction and wellbeing (Sironi, 2019; Judge et al., 2001). The promotion of wellbeing is central to European educational policy, which intends to enable children and young people to achieve their full potential and contribute to Europe's social, cultural and economic development. Wellbeing in the workplace has increasing prominence in the policy and research agenda in Europe, and education is a key context in which the challenge of occupational stress has been reported (Skinner et al., 2019). This may be, in part, owed to socio-cultural understandings of teaching prior to its professionalisation. In Ireland, schools have traditionally been embedded in communities. High cultural prestige has been placed on teaching as a "vocation" and on teachers hearing "a call" to teach (Coolahan, 2013). Indeed, Irish novelist John McGahern referred to teaching as the second priesthood. This vocational interpretation of teaching has focused teachers'

commitment on the "social good" of their work rather than on personal occupational stress. In recent times, the increasing move towards neoliberal conceptions of quality in education has created new forms of occupational stress, particularly for male teachers. The evolving requirements of global capitalism have meant that the nature of work requires the cultivation of an elite masculinity that is more sensitive and reflexive (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2013). There is now a greater emphasis on feminised features such as empathy, patience and understanding as assets in business, which also inform our understandings of "good teaching", since emotions are considered more powerful than thought when used as "tools" for career advancement (Ahmed, 2014). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), gender is one of the critical determinants of mental health as it determines the power and control men and women have over the socio-economic causes of their mental health and lives; their social position; social status and treatment in society. Despite the presence and acceptance of a variety of versions of "maleness" in the classroom, gender issues such as gender stereotyping and the inability to reconcile their professional and personal identities (Mills, Haase & Charlton, 2008) result in male teachers' subsequent decision to withdraw from teacher education or to cut their career short (Cushman, 2005).

The principal focus of this chapter is to underpin the complicated interplay between emotions, gender and teaching with the everyday experiences of four Irish male primary school teachers. This chapter begins by exploring the concept of emotions and its relevance to teaching. Next, gender is examined in relation to education. Then, the body and what the body says about a person in an educational setting are discussed. This chapter concludes with a discussion centred on the problems of and possibilities for men who teach at primary level.

Understanding the relationship between gender and emotions

The everyday language of emotion is based on the presumption of "interiority" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 8). Emotions are considered as individual, internal and private responses to situations. Such a model of emotion looks inside to "idiosyncratic" conditions (Walby et al., 2012, p. 4) or to feelings that "are mine" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 8). Yet, like everything else that is human, emotions are in part socially constructed,

"bearing the marks" of the society that created them (Jaggar, 2008, p. 386). We know that emotional experiences connect persons to others, both moving us and holding us in place. We absorb the norms and values of our society in the form of social and cultural practices that preserve society. Within a hierarchical society, the norms and values that predominate tend to serve the interests of the dominant groups, which in turn inform our emotional constitution in particular ways (Jaggar, 2008). In other words, emotions are brought into line with the rules proposed by society or by the self. Dominant values are implicit in responses taken to be pre-cultural or acultural, hampering alternative ways of living (Jaggar, 2008). As Butler (1999, p. 17) suggests, gender is a culturally authorised performance, "a repetition and a ritual". These understandings are significant for men in non-traditional occupations such as teaching.

It is significant that teaching is considered a "soft option" career for men (Connell, 1985) and an essentially feminised occupation rather than a masculine one. Softness is very often defined in terms of weakness or proneness to injury (Ahmed, 2004) and is associated with all that is considered feminine, including the body. Typically, reason is associated with the mental, the public and the male, and emotion is associated with the irrational, the private and the female (Jaggar, 2008). To be emotional is to be "reactive rather than active, dependent rather than autonomous" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 3). Therefore, emotions are always subordinate to reason and potentially or actually subversive of knowledge (Jaggar, 2008). The association of emotions to the body, or the "inner" self, works to remind us that the very concept of the body has been formed in opposition to the mind or as "the chief enemy of objectivity" (Jaggar & Bordo, 1992, p. 4). Doing work that involves emotions is fundamentally an "act of doing gender in the context of 'women's allegedly greater facility with emotions – the feminine capacity to console, and comfort, flatter'" (Frith & Kitzinger, 1998, p. 300, cited in: Mirchandani, 2008, p. 265). Indeed, King (1998, p. 126) notes that it is "[...] striking that the options for care are identical for men and women, but the choices are weighed differently based on gender". Certain behaviour is seen as appropriate for female teachers but not for male teachers. This is illustrated in David's story, a participant, about holding children's hands on the yard.

David: *There was a special unit in the school I was working in... I remember I had to bring them [the pupils] out to the yard and you have to hold hands with them and stuff but I would not feel comfortable holding hands with kids. I know it is for their safety but still, you would not feel comfortable holding hands and people walking past the school... Whereas for a female teacher, probably, it is completely natural.*

One way of reflecting on David's story is to consider a rethinking of the relationship between emotion, bodily sensations and reason. Whilst it is somewhat true that physiological disturbances characterise emotions – sweating, trembling and tears are "instinctive biological responses" (Jaggar, 2008, p. 381) –, emotions are not pre-social, involuntary responses. A cognitivist view (as cited in: Ahmed, 2004, p. 5) suggests that emotions involve appraisals, judgements and attitudes shaped by memory and by histories that come before the subject. Emotions in this way are social and cultural rather than a presumption of interiority.

Research Design

This chapter draws on research that was inspired by feminism and poststructuralism (O'Keeffe, 2016). Feminism places the personal being at the centre of one's enquiry. A feminist theoretical orientation disrupts traditional ways of knowing through its commitment to studying the lived experiences of gender, as outlined by Pillow and Mayo (2007). This creates rich new meanings by highlighting concerns of boundaries, identities and speaking. Running parallel to this is poststructuralism, which facilitates a constant engagement with the tensions and omissions in a text (Jackson & Mazzei, 2012). A poststructural reading of data troubles the innocent idea of any term. As a result, poststructuralism holds the idea that no reading or writing of a life is ever complete. From this belief emerges accounts that are playful, open-ended, and incomplete (Van Maanen, 2011). This study draws on the work of the feminist theorists and methodologists Karen Barad, Judith Butler, Patti Lather and Susan Hekman to methodologically engage with the concepts, ideas and theories put forward by the male teachers. Together, a feminist perspective and a poststructuralist methodology critically deconstruct gendered social practice and

support alternative understandings of power and subject formation. Deconstruction, in this sense, does not mean dismantling. Instead, it is a tool that facilitates the possibilities for the stories of each teacher to go far beyond the pages of this chapter.

The Site

The Republic of Ireland, the site of this paper, is an interesting place to engage with issues of identity, politics and power as the societal landscape of Ireland has recently experienced a gender political awakening. The historic 2015 Irish Marriage Equality Referendum (Griffith, 2013) is such an exemplar. Similarly, in 2015, the Gender Recognition Act was enacted and came into effect. This Act allows all individuals over the age of 18 to self-declare their own gender identity in Ireland. These historic changes initiated a series of passionate public discussions and high-profile debates in Ireland. Gender emerged, to borrow Woodward and Woodward's (2015) words, as a field that was "hotly contested". Such intense debate has resulted in an increased public awareness of gender and gender politics. The topic of men in primary education is a controversial political issue, particularly when one considers increasing global calls to increase the number of male entrants to the teaching profession without empirical evidence that proves that their presence is of actual benefit to students' learning and attainment. As men have traditionally been seen to hold a privileged role in national and international society in terms of power and prestige, very little opportunity is afforded to men in marginal positions, such as primary teaching, to have their voices heard. As Michael, a participant in this study, stated, "If you accept that there is some sort of element of maleness about men, then you either value it or you do not value it. At the moment, we do not value it".

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval for this study was sought from, and granted by, the Research Ethics Committee (MIREC) at Mary Immaculate College, Ireland. Participants were advised of the following: the voluntary nature of their participation, their confidentiality and anonymity, and the purpose of the research. The participants were offered the choice of using a pseudonym. Many participants were in favour of this option, while others were happy to retain the use of their name.

Feminist ethical considerations

The attention given to relationships with the participants illustrates the goals of feminist research to be "for" rather than "on" people. This suggests that research "on" a particular group is not necessarily beneficial for them. However, research "for" people fosters empowerment, gives back reports to participants to check descriptive and interpretive validity and is highly interactive. Relationship-building was an important consideration in this research and was fostered by:

1. Regular and open communication before, during, and after each phase of the interviews,
2. Inviting participants to select the most convenient time and place to meet,
3. Informing participants of emerging themes,
4. Offering transcripts to participants for review, and
5. Offering draft chapters to participants for feedback.

Findings

Finding 1: The Relational Realities of Nurturing

Care is a priority topic for all teachers due to the key roles they play in the transmission of values, knowledge, and the development of human potential and skills. Care is also a practical consideration for every teacher regardless of gender. Teaching involves care and emotions as much as "pure reasoning" (Connell, 1993, p. 63). However, when men exhibit caring attributes at work, they are not considered compatible with dominant definitions of masculinities. Caring qualities are not deemed appropriate for the masculinised domain of management or authority. This results in the relational realities of nurturing constituting a concealed site of social practice through which inequalities are created (Lynch, 2013).

The gendered aspect of teaching considers that emotions and care are the "natural" domains of women. However, this belief is problematic because it assumes that emotions are something we have. Emotions are not "in" an individual. Emotions are both movement and attachment, which connect us and hold us in place. It is their regulatory force (Butler, 1993) that shapes the very surface of bodies and worlds. The power of emotions is a productive power that produces the bodies it controls (*ibidem*). This is clearly illustrated when adult behaviours such as patting and hugging are deemed

feminine until they are performed by men. Then they are marked as conspicuous.

Michael: One of the girls [teachers] here would not have thought twice about giving them a hug, would not have thought twice, but as a man you do think twice.

Michael's words can be read in relation to Ahmed's belief that we are shaped by, and take the shape of, contact with others. Ahmed (2014, p. 10) suggests that emotions create a social presence rather than a self-presence. It is through emotions, or how we respond to objects and others, that boundaries are made. Ahmed's theory builds on Butler's concept of materialisation (1993, 1999), which suggests that emotions shape the surface of the body through the repetition of actions over time. The performativity of gender illustrates that what is taken to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts. It is through the repetition of norms that worlds materialise and boundaries are produced (Butler, 1993, p. 9). The boundaries of our understanding of bodies are relevant here. Boundaries are not merely epistemological, what we know to be true, but ontological, how we understand the world. Questions concerning abstract bodies such as neoliberalism, neoconservatism, meeting economic needs and their interaction with education are pertinent considerations in the study of job satisfaction.

Men working in female-dominated professions often fear feminisation and stigmatisation that influence the way men carry out their job. Tim believes people question his sexuality because he is an infant teacher but also believes that he still has his "authority" because "there is Mr. in front of my name". In Western culture and in our society, women usually fulfil the role of caregiver (Hekman, 2005, p. 125). However, care in relation to male teachers is a concept that is often misinterpreted and surrounded with suspicion. David alludes to this suspicion by giving an example of a junior infant female teacher who "might have them up on their lap" and who "might give the child a hug, you know like, affectionate stuff..." However, a male teacher does not have the same options of care: "if that was a male, they could not really do that, it is not an option [...] and it is not professional either [...] it only takes one person to be suspicious".

This is in part due to the fact that emotions are treated and interpreted differently when expressed by a woman or a man (Gottfried, 2013, pp. 83–84). Furthermore, it is a result of the complicated ways in which gender is constructed and embedded in work norms and practices. When men work within an environment of care and exhibit caring and emotional attributes, "these qualities are not consonant with dominant definitions of masculinities" (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003, p. 27). Consequently, men appear out of place when performing work that contradicts gender-stereotypical expectations. When men do not correspond to the perceptions of occupational masculinities, assumptions regarding heterosexuality are informed by "ordinary and academic discourses on sexuality" (Butler, 1999, p. xxi). However, men in female-type jobs often experience different expectations and rewards from women doing the same work (Gottfried, 2013, p. 84). A male teacher can shift from exhibiting nurturance to exercising rational authority without appearing abrupt. This notion of feminisation suggests a more complex analytical understanding that goes beyond the simpler framework of male and female employment participation rates (Haywood & Mac an Ghaill, 2003, p. 27). As education is a process "operating through relationships" (Connell, 1993, p. 19), care is an issue that confronts all teachers in primary schools. However, for men who wish to teach within a caring environment, the understanding of these issues can take interesting "twists and turns" (King, 1998, p. 24), which have real consequences in terms of job satisfaction and wellbeing.

Finding 2: The school and the cultural landscape

Locating the school on the cultural landscape meant bringing culture and society into an uneasy relationship (Butler, 1993). This can be read in relation to the stories presented in this section, which illustrate a sense of powerlessness and a sense of attack. Apple (1996) believes that a relationship exists between education and larger issues of economy and politics. He advises that more attention should be paid to the creative ideological work that the Right has been doing, for "we are not alone in acting in the space of changing the connections between education and other major institutions in society" (Apple, 2013, p. 128). Apple also considers that the unrest associated with issues such as international assessment measures

and league tables are used by dominant groups to shift the debate on education "and all things social" onto the "terrain of traditionalism, standardization, productivity, marketization, and industrial needs" (2013, p. 6). Citing the Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci (1971), who believed that cultural experiences and religion coupled with people's "good sense" and "bad sense" embodies popular understanding, Apple (2013) argues that part of the success of this shift of focus has been the tension between a neoliberal emphasis on market values and a neoconservative attachment to traditional norms and values. This tension and the driving force behind it have established "ideological tendencies" that have been introduced to schools by "neoconservative intellectuals who want a 'return' to higher standards and a 'common culture' [...] accountability, measurement and management" (Apple, 2013, p. 128). Within education, we must question the neoliberal agenda and how it has influenced common sense understandings of schools and society's expectation of what a school should provide. It supports the binary between us and them; hard-working and law-abiding with lazy and permissive. Behind this ideological agenda is "a thoroughgoing attack on teachers and especially teacher unions [...] a massive weakening of teachers' power plays a large part here" (Apple, 2013, p. 7). This observation correlates with Neil's and Eoin's observations. Firstly, Neil feels that teachers have no professional support:

Neil: There is no support for teachers now [...] Nobody feels like it is their job [...] The job is overwhelming. It is all-encompassing. It is the first time that on a Sunday I am thinking about Monday.

Eoin develops this point by referring to trade unions, their lack of influence and how gender may be impacting on decisions made within the unions:

Eoin: I just think they are a professional organisation for teachers rather than a trade union. They lost any kind of connection, grasp or influence that they ever had [...] If it was 50:50 [the gender ratio in the union], teachers would not be taking on a lot of the initiatives that are being bounced into schools. What is the school actually for?

Similarly, Eoin goes on to state:

Eoin: Society's view of the primary school now has more like that of a caregiver and a lot of parents, working parents, are actually quite happy with the idea. You know, there is no problem if it is an all-female institution [...] There is a public view out there that would say that it is actually probably kind of better.

A "management by stress" (Robertson, 1992, p. 36, cited in: Apple, 2006, p. 7) pattern can be read in the accounts of these four teachers, as illustrated by Neil and Eoin. Neil specifically alluded to the concept of "management by stress" when he referred to a lack of teacher support from managerial levels.

Neil: That creates a climate of fear because when you know there is no back up at the top that creates [...] if you know there is nothing behind you, you are done. A lot of schools, I think a lot of teachers feel that now. They kind of say to themselves that is creating this culture [...] there is bad management, they will abandon you immediately to make sure to protect themselves [...] That creates a very bad atmosphere in schools...

The words and worlds of the teachers in this section outline how gender, whether real or perceived, has practical implications for teachers' wellbeing and job satisfaction within the profession.

—— Discussion

Gender in teaching: problems and possibilities

According to Skelton et al. (2013), gender-related matters are a particularly important facet of the experience of being a primary school teacher. Primary teaching is commonly and problematically constructed as a "female" occupation, with its ethic of care understood as compatible with the nature of women (Thornton & Bricheno, 2006). For men who choose to become teachers, the decision is frequently influenced by factors related to their gender, such as a call for more male teachers as role models (Cushman, 2008), the ease of winning jobs (Mulholland & Hansen, 2003) and promotional opportunities.

This expectancy was also evident in male teachers in the early stages of their career in England who reported fears of being perceived as "deviant" if they behaved in non-stereotypically masculine ways (Francis & Skelton, 2001; Martino & Berrill, 2003). These anxieties are commonly grounded in the public perception that associates non-normative masculinities with attributions of homosexuality, which in turn are conflated with paedophilia (Martino & Berrill, 2003). Francis and Skelton's (2001) finding that men risk marginalisation from peers if they do not "achieve" an acceptable construction of masculinity further justifies Roulston and Mills' claim that homophobia often works in "insidious ways to reinforce dominant constructs of masculinity" (2000, p. 227). Similarly, Connell (2000, p. 153) notes that the "most important" feeling rules in schools are those relating to "sexuality, and the prohibition on homosexuality". These feeling rules may be particularly important in definitions of masculinities and wellbeing at work.

The body and teaching

The body is one of the first identifiers of a male teacher's presence in a primary school. An association between the feminised environment and the male body indicates something unusual or strange in our mind's eye. This is primarily due to a taken-for-granted relationship between male bodies and masculinities. Society categorises men as active and women as passive in order to address and attempt to deal with "the chaos" that surrounds both concepts (Grosz, 2011, p. 78). If we consider that men's bodies and destructive work are "proof of the toughness of the work and the worker" (Connell, 1995, p. 36), then men who teach young children are not believed to be traditionally masculine. Additionally, feminine conduct combined with a male body "is felt to be anomalous or transgressive" (Connell, 2000, p. 12). When teaching is considered a caring profession carried out in an emotional environment, recognition is given to the central role of the body. This is because we associate all that is biological and natural with the body and the feminine. As a result of lateral associations, which "link the mind / body opposition to a whole series of other oppositional (or binarized) terms, enabling them to function interchangeably" (Grosz, 2011, p. 3), the body is associated with women's social subordination. Further associations of lateral thinking include outside and inside, natural and

cultural, self and other, depth and surface, and so on. The body and all associated feminine characteristics are presumed to be the latter, and the mind and all associated masculine characteristics are considered the former. The relationship between care labour, gender and work does not align with traditional Western reasoning, and this has practical consequences for male teachers' job satisfaction.

Conclusion

Understanding how gender emerges from a set of linkages with abstract "bodies" such as economic practices, increasing workload demands and decreasing pay scales assists in gaining a full picture of the interplay between gender, wellbeing and job satisfaction. Feminism shares with poststructuralism the need for renewed conceptual creativity in research. This chapter supports a reinsertion of the material into an analysis of gender and job satisfaction, which is considered to be highly valuable in future evaluations of wellbeing at work. People's practices are constrained by educational institutions and their structures, which go deep into an individual's emotional life. This chapter aimed to provide readers with an insight into the lives of four Irish male teachers focusing specifically on gender and care. The overall theme running through the interviews is that gender is a performance that is dependent on how others receive it. Daily interactions with the materiality of their teaching worlds create sets of linkages with other bodies: human and nonhuman. Job satisfaction and wellbeing is an inextricable part of this matrix. Focusing on these complex constructions afford future research with the possibilities of advancing knowledge in our contemporary world.

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