

***Build me a male role model!* A critical
exploration of the perceived qualities/
characteristics of men in the early years**

Research Seminar, 2013

University of Lancaster

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'The main drivers'

The 'gender gap'

(Carrington *et al.*
2007: 397)

The 'feminisation'
of teaching
(Skelton, 2009: 39)

Father figures

(Ivens, 2008)

**'Strong male
role models'**

(Parkin, 2009)

'Common-sense truth claims'

- *'If boys see men reading books and doing lots of neat writing, then boys will avidly read books and produce volumes of neat writing'* (Ashley, 2002: 1)
- Making schools and settings '**boy friendly again**' (McPhee, 2007: 35)
- The 'replacement father' who can **relate, support, model** and **provide** better for boys (Skelton, 2002)
- '*...inspir[ing] children to feel **more confident, work harder** and **behave better***' (Bryon, 2008)



Existing tensions

- The ‘soft **pedagogical practices** of females’
(Odih, 2002: 91)
- The **deficient upbringing** of children with no
‘stable male’ (Jones, 2008: 694)
- ‘**Women...as the problem and men as the
solution**’ (Smedley, 1998 cited in Mills *et al.* 2004: 361)
- ‘Role model’ – **a diversity of meanings**
(Sargent, 2001: 118)



The Research

- **Research Aim:** To critically explore perceived qualities/characteristics of male role models for boys in the early years (0-8 years)
- **Research questions:** Rank ordering and identifying additional qualities/characteristics
- **Participants:** Men who worked/trained in a variety of roles with children in 0-8 settings in a central county in the Midlands, UK



Research Strategy

Paradigm location	Methodological approach
Interpretivist	Mixed method

S1

- **174 questionnaires** (48% return)
- Males training/working **directly** with children (0-8)

S2

- **1 focus group interview**
- 3 males at an **operational level** in schools (5-8)

S3

- **6 semi-structured interviews**
- Exploring lines of enquiry/areas of interest (S1/2)

Building a profile

A father figure	Emotional	Kind	Reliable
Good sense of humour	Able to demonstrate positive attitudes towards learning	Professionally committed	An authoritative figure
A nurturer	Good at writing	Trustworthy	Work orientated
Intelligent	Athletic	Generous	Aggressive
Good at sports	Respectful	Charismatic	A disciplinarian

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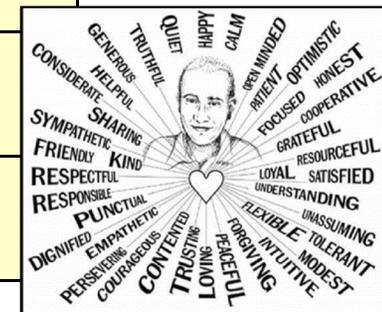
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Building a profile

Rank order position	Quality/characteristic
1	Reliable/Able to demonstrate positive attitudes towards learning
2	Trustworthy
3	Kind
4	Respectful
5	Good sense of humour

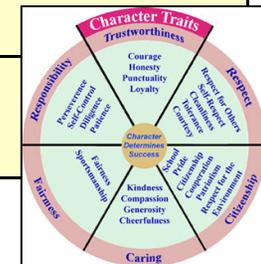
Additional qualities/characteristics

Good listener (n12)
Fair (n9)
Approachable (n7)
Honest (n5)
Consistent (n4)
Supportive (n4)
Being themselves (n3)
Understanding (n2)



Qualities/characteristics: categories

<p>‘Being real’ – <i>in touch with reality</i></p>	<p>‘Empathetic’ – <i>compassionate</i></p>
<p>‘Skilled’ – <i>practical problem solving</i></p>	<p>‘Leadership’ – <i>responsible</i></p>
<p>‘Virtues’ – <i>fair</i></p>	<p>‘Dispositions’ – <i>warm</i></p>
<p>Personality traits – <i>playful</i></p>	<p>Physical appearance – <i>smart clothes</i></p>
<p>Additional – <i>popular, successful</i></p>	



Discussion



- Most qualities/characteristics were associated with *personal* ‘good person’ **attributes** e.g. trustworthy and respectful
- The need for the male role model to have a ‘good sense of humour’
- Emulation of *professional* characteristics
- The **androgynous** nature of many identified qualities/characteristics

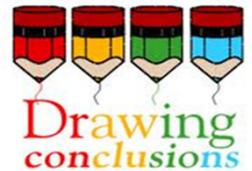
Discussion



- Qualities/characteristics are shaped by **context, situation** and the **expectations** of others e.g. parents, colleagues and children
- Qualities/characteristics that emulate the **‘millennium man’** (Jones, 2007: 192)
- The importance of qualities/characteristics that are *natural* to the role model – danger of those which are forced or ‘artificial’

Conclusions

- **No two role models are the same** – different contexts, situations and expectations seek different requirements of the role model
- The **pressure** on male role models to emulate different qualities/characteristics
- The **negative impact** of the role model on those children who are repelled by the emulation of ‘fake’ or ‘false’ qualities/characteristics
- **‘General lack of clarity’** (Jones, 2006: 71)

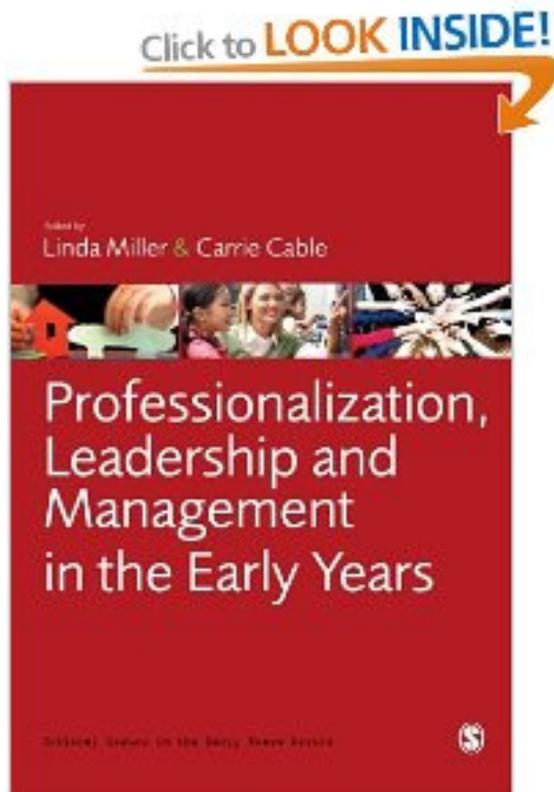




**THANK
YOU**

Any questions or comments?





See Chapter 9: *WHERE ARE THE MEN?* by Guy Roberts-Holmes and Simon Brownhill for ‘a critical discussion about male absence in the early years’ in the following book:

Miller, L. and Cable, C. (eds.) (2011) Professionalization, Leadership and Management in the Early Years. London: Sage Publications.

Please also visit <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-13600611>

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