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# Men who teach young children: Masculinity under surveillance, regulating male bodies and reconfiguring male power

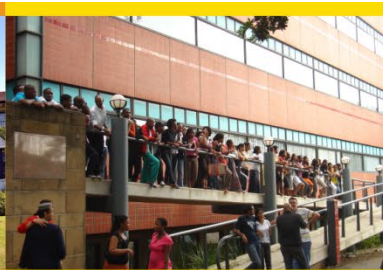
Shaaista Moosa and Deevia Bhana



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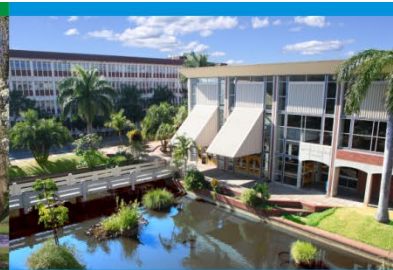
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# Introduction

- In this qualitative research study, we explore how male preservice Foundation Phase (FP) teachers in South Africa negotiate their identities in the FP teaching profession alongside narratives that position men as sexual dangers to children.

# Men as 'sexual predators'

- **Suspicion and Regulation of Touch:** Concerns over child safety create scepticism around child-adult physical contact, affecting male teachers more than female teachers (Jones, 2004).
- **Sexualisation of Male Teachers:** Unlike women, who are seen as natural caregivers, men in caregiving roles are often perceived as hypermasculine or potential abusers (Weaver-Hightower, 2011; Scrinzi, 2010).

# Men as 'sexual predators'

- **Media Influence:** Cases of male perpetrators of child abuse fuel public fears, reinforcing stereotypes and deterring men from Early Childhood Education (ECE) (Cushman, 2008).
- **Pressure to Perform Hegemonic Masculinity:** To counter suspicion, male teachers may adopt dominant masculine behaviors, limiting diverse expressions of masculinity (for example showing affection to and hugging children) in schools (Cushman, 2008).

# Men are Violent in South Africa: Hegemonic Masculinity, Heterosexuality and the effects on men who teach FP in South Africa

- **Patriarchal and Colonial Legacies:** Masculinity is historically tied to dominance, strength, and heterosexual prowess, reinforcing violent expressions of male power (Morrell, 2001).
- **Crisis of Masculinity:** Economic marginalisation and unemployment fuel heteropatriarchal violence against women, children, and marginalised men, reinforcing rigid gender hierarchies (Hunter, 2021; Msibi, 2012).

# Men are Violent in South Africa: Hegemonic Masculinity, Heterosexuality and the effects on men who teach FP in South Africa

- **Heterosexual Men in FP Under Suspicion:** Due to rising heterosexual male violence and sexual abuse cases, heterosexual male teachers are often viewed as potential threats to children and unsuitable teachers for young children (Moosa & Bhana, 2020). While heterosexual men hold dominant societal power, they are also demonised in ECE due to prevailing societal fears of sexual danger.
- **Gay Men Perceived as ‘Safer’:** Unlike heterosexual men, gay male teachers are conflated with femininity and not associated with male violence. Gay male teachers are thus sometimes more accepted as male FP teachers, highlighting gendered contradictions in South African society (Moosa & Bhana, 2022).

# Gender Binaries: Men as sometimes violent and women as inherently caring

**SM:** *okay and do you think gender plays a role on who will make a successful foundation phase teacher?*

**Ndlozi:** *currently they are not equal but women are -play important and significant role more than men in the context of South Africa, yes because more men are violating women and children, there are these campaigns that are being done all over the country against women and children abuse*

**Ndlozi:** *according to my views I believe women were created to nurture and care for people, that have it in their blood so I prefer them more than men but I'm not rejecting other men coming to the phase*

**SM:** *and what kind of men do you think need to teach foundation phase, what kinds of men?*

**Ndlozi:** *I think it is people who -just a man with qualifications yes, who qualifies with no criminal record yeah, I think that's who*

# Gender Binaries: Men as sometimes violent and women as inherently caring

**Mandela:** especially in our culture, our communities, its difficult for us to stay with a baby for an hour.

**SM:** Hmm, why do you think this is the case?

**Mandela:** its how we grow up. Its how we grow up for example, girls who play alone and boys who play alone if they come in contact someone is hitting the other one then the girl has to come crying. So, its as if men have got a a what, they are sharp in a way, whenever they come closer to women or children they they somehow become wrong for them.

**SM:** in what way?

**Mandela:** or wrong to them. Uh for example I was saying uhm,

**SM:** harsh?

**Mandela:** yes. I think its how we we are, we are rude sometimes but not all of us are rude, not all of us are abusive, not all of us are always resort to violence because in grade 1 you wouldn't expect me to hit a child. For a man but if a man hit or if you say a male teacher hit a a a child then I think its its more understandable.

**SM:** than a woman hitting?

**Mandela:** yes yes, they call it uh in isiXhosa they call it inimba . Its like they say uh women, they say they have "inimba" its something they have that is not there but its as if women are born with it.



# Accepting the narrative that men and not women present a sexual risk to children in close-contact situations

**Pedro:** *it's fair cause as us men, you cannot judge a book by covers, I can be caring and do that thing you see and abuse children sexually all right, okay yeah even children themselves, they will be scared of getting in the toilet with a male teacher you see yeah, I think it's fair cause a women teacher is their mother you see, she can even bath them you see yeah,*

**SM:** *do you think that it's unfair that women can show their affection openly but it's hard for a male foundation phase teacher in the same position to do the same thing?*

**Ubisi:** *yeah it is -it is -it isn't fair but there's nothing we can do because we know we not all innocent, that actually we cannot trust everyone yes so it has to -I think it has to be like this, it has -if you change it there's a lot of things that may happen, we need to have another plan so if we stay like this I think it's much better*

**Mandela:** *I wouldn't myself I used to say sometimes but can I allow my 7 year old to be here in a class with a male uhm. I usually think twice and say "ay ay but no I don't think I would."*

**Mandela:** *you know these days sexual abuse is like at the top you know. So taking your kids to uh a male teacher would be uh risky you may say "ahhh it won't happen but sometimes ay "if this and this happens why wouldn't it happen. So I think its around that, its around that.*

# Accepting the narrative that men and not women present a sexual risk to children in close-contact situations

**Lunga:** *they are afraid of that (child abuse by male teachers) cause they don't trust the males, they believe that they are abusive and stuff.*

**SM:** *where does this come from?*

**Lunga:** *it's because of the county we live in and there are some instances that have happened that male teachers abusing girls in school, yeah that's the case*

**SM:** *okay*

**Lunga:** *and I don't blame parents for that because they have fear for their children, it's okay.*

# Employing strategies to avoid suspicion

**Ubisi:** *yes it's a big challenge -it's big challenge and this -it's obviously happening you know, children are getting raped by teachers so I think it's a problem, you cannot just spend time with the students.*

**Mandela:** *its its it's a very difficult one I have to say because you see in our school where I was doing teaching practice, the windows were so high like this windows.*

**SM:** *you can't even see inside the class?*

**Mandela:** *yes yes you can't see what is happening so even myself being inside the class with them I kinda felt that I had to leave the door open, I had to leave the door open even though its in my manner that I know nothing will happen*

# Neutralising narratives that position male teachers as a sexual danger to children

**Minenhle:** *ey that's some men right -I think partially it is the case because there are cases where men over step but there are very few cases so it does not mean that every man has that thought but some men are fallable to that thought, yebo -they do make the mistake of doing the thing or thinking that but it's not all men, it's not even Maybe 50%, it's not a balance between is cause some of us sleep with children, some of us don't. It's just a few men that make all men look bad because when one man does something they put a 'E' in the centre -men, yebo when someone -when a man does good then it's a good man.*

**Minenhle:** *as a -as a male teacher, I accept things like cards and gifts, I let the children be but without letting them cross the line cause when you stand there you are a parent you see, you can't say don't send me this, don't hug me or don't do this because you are a parent. They must know this is my parent in school. My other parents is at home so they can't stop them from showing love because love helps them grow, helps them be happy I think. If the teacher say no go away with the thing, they not going to learn properly cause they will be sad.*

# Conclusion

- Male pre-service FP teachers acknowledge societal fears about men as a sexual danger to children but do not interpret them as discrimination.
- They contextualize suspicions within South Africa's broader issue of male violence.
- By self-regulating their behaviours, they inadvertently reinforce male power and surveillance structures.

# Conclusion

- Their discomfort with men teaching their own children further amplifies suspicion, contributing to gendered scrutiny in the FP.
- These dynamics reconfigure male power in feminised spaces, deepening gender disparities in the profession.
- Critical interrogation is thus needed to understand how men navigate and reproduce power structures in the FP of schooling.