Promoting gender equality in primary schools through teachers' reflections upon their own constructions of gender and the implicit messages that they may convey to pupils

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to develop teachers' understanding of their pedagogy with the purpose of promoting gender equality in primary schools.

In early childhood, children can receive extensive and formative messages about the significance and implications of gender with possible consequences for their future interests and career choices. Taking a social constructionist approach, this study takes the position that gender is performative, with understanding of appropriate behaviour governed by social norms. Teachers are identified as one of the significant influences in children's lives. Focussing specifically on teachers' reflections on their own attitudes to gender and how these can impact on their practice, this study furthers understanding of how teachers' promotion of gender equality in the classroom can be enhanced through seeking to explore and evaluate the attitudes of a sample of teachers. Participants were interviewed about their gender construction, life experiences, influences, childhood and attitudes towards gender equality. They reflected on the implicit messages they may convey to their pupils concerning gender and how they could improve their practice in this area, considering language, learning environment, resources and curriculum content. What emerged from the interviews was the power of the reflective process itself and the findings suggest that inviting teachers to reflect on their practice in this way has potential to be a powerful tool in promoting gender equality when teaching children.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis was composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or processional qualification except as specified.

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Contents

Chapter One
Introduction

In this chapter, I will present an introduction to the study, explaining the context and background of the origin of the research and justify its relevance and importance. The research aims and objectives will be shared along with the key questions. The approach and findings of the study are summarised and the chapter concludes with an explanation of how this research study contributes to knowledge.

1.1 Research Summary

All day every day, teachers unconsciously pass on messages to their pupils regarding how gender should be performed with potentially significant implications for the child on their behaviour, their aspirations and their future outcomes. This study explored the teacher's role and how the process of reflection could enable teachers to bring about changes in their practice with the specific intention of challenging gender stereotypes with their pupils. I gathered data through one-to-one life history interviews with 14 primary school teachers, which I analysed thematically to draw conclusions about contemporary understandings of gender, how these gender constructions develop and most significantly the value of reflection as a tool for bringing about change and promoting gender equality in primary schools.

1.2 Origins of the study – A personal journey

As a primary school teacher, I have become increasingly aware of the self-segregation of pupils by gender. Generally, pupils seem to cease to play with other genders at an early stage and to begin to conform to stereotypical patterns of behaviour and interest. Over my years in teaching, I have also observed that the aspirations of children, not universally but predominantly, are different between boys and girls and traditional expectations for gender roles in the home and workplace remain prevalent amongst pupils.

Each year, when teaching children a unit of Personal Social and Health Education on the topic of gender equality, I use a discussion prompting activity in which pupils are given a picture of a baby. Half of the children are asked to describe the characteristics, career, living arrangements and interests of the baby when "she" grows up and half of the children when "he" grows up. A pattern

often emerges in which the baby girl is described by the children as kind, artistic and engaged in a caring profession, enjoying dancing and singing in her spare time as well as looking after her children. The baby boy is often described as strong and intelligent, he grows up to become rich and powerful with his hobby usually being football. There are exceptions, of course, which are the source of a great deal of debate. When one group, for example, suggests the baby girl grows up to be a firefighter, other pupils willingly engage in debate about the likelihood of this. It is a topic which excites great interest from pupils. Pupils will fervently argue their right to play with "whatever we like". Through such experiences, my interest has been drawn to the individual choices made by each child, how these have been affected by gender stereotyping and what impact, if any, teachers may have in challenging or reinforcing these.

Scrutiny of my values and ideals has led me to a greater awareness of my own perspective on this topic. I hold equality at the core of my practice as a teacher and this influences my actions. I am motivated to understand the values of my colleagues and to analyse how our vision of the world impacts on the attitudes and aspirations of our pupils. I was raised by politically active parents, both teachers, who were concerned with social justice. I appreciate that my understanding of the world is informed by the specific influences of my life history and living contexts – my age, race, class, gender and sexuality. My positionality as a researcher is further explored in chapter four.

Growing up I recall incidents of being patronised by male peers and teachers when studying maths and physics at A-level and later instances of prejudice and condescension when vastly out-numbered by men during my career in the City of London. It is entirely possible that these experiences, particularly working in financial public relations in London, may have been significant in my perception of the gender issue. I was valued at the PR consultancy at which I worked and quickly gained promotion to a senior role but felt angered by the attitudes of some clients whose old-fashioned 'banter' exposed their sexist beliefs.

When my own children started school, I noticed the significant proportion of families in which women still did the majority of childcare. At toddler groups and the school gate, fathers remained a rarity. Analysing the choices made by my peers and myself, I realised that it was often the case that with heterosexual parents, the traditional male and female roles remained; it was the mother that most often took a period of maternity leave, changed careers or broke off from a career in order to prioritise family life. I began to question why the gender pay gap still existed decades after the women's liberation movement, after feminist politics had become mainstream and equal

opportunities were enshrined in law. These questions prompted an ongoing interest in feminist theory.

These experiences and values led me to question my own practice as a teacher and created a desire to understand how children can become constrained by gender socialisation and how critical pedagogy could impact on the process. Responding to Skelton's (2010) concern that much feminist writing on education is increasingly distanced from the daily lives of teachers, and Goodson's (1992) suggestion that literature which locates teachers' lives within a wider contextual understanding is underdeveloped, I wanted to understand better how to tackle what I consider an important issue.

1.3 Why Gender Matters: Inequity of adult outcomes, childhood aspiration and attainment

Feminist upsurge

In the 21st century, there has been a powerful resurgence of feminism (Aune and Hollyoak, 2018). This movement has been termed by some the fourth wave of feminism (Diamond, 2009; Peay, 2005; Bates, 2014). Contemporary activism has focussed on sexual freedom, domestic violence, workplace harassment and pay equality. This political activism is generally amongst young women, is often initiated through social media (Charles and Wadia, 2018), and has become part of mainstream culture. Attitudes to sexuality and gender fluidity also appear to be changing. Gender fluidity, the concept that gender is not a rigid entity but can be changed, has become more widely accepted. There has also been an increasing understanding of queer theory, re-examining literature and issues beyond the heteronormative viewpoint (Hines and Sanger, 2010). In this climate, it is relevant to examine how expectations about education have changed to consider how gender stereotyping can be avoided within this emerging culture, with the aim of minimising inequality.

Adult outcomes

Childhood exposure to gender stereotypes can have a lasting impact. Studies suggest that some children can constrain their ambitions based upon their gender (Eccles, 2009; Francis, 2002) and it has also been found that interests in occupations can become affected by gender during childhood and remain so in adulthood (Hayes *et al*, 2018). In the same vein, Bian, Leslie and Cimpian (2017) argue that attitudes toward gender emerge early with an impact on later careers. In a quantitative study of 400 American children between 5 and 7 years old, they observed that boys and girls were both more likely to equate *brilliance* with males and *niceness* with females and extrapolated that this is likely to narrow the range of careers they will one day contemplate. The responses of the children

demonstrate an association with certain traits dependent on gender, though the impact on the eventual adult choices of these individuals is yet to be discovered.

By adulthood, attitudes to gender roles can be deeply entrenched. According to a report into British social attitudes, in the 'average' home in modern Britain, household chores are not performed equally by men and women (Park *et al*, 2013). The study used both ONS data on working patterns and a national survey of 953 people. The women surveyed reported spending 13 hours per week (down from 14 hours in 2002) on housework on average compared to 8 hours spent by men (up from 7 hours in 2002). Caring for family members was also undertaken more by women who reported on average spending 23 hours caring for family members with men on average spending 10 hours each week. There was no data available to show how this had changed. The report also does not state what proportion of the sample was single person/headed households or same sex couples. The quantitative nature of this survey prohibits thorough investigation into the causes of these attitudes, yet the scale of its findings suggests that in modern Britain, women still take the primary responsibility for additional work undertaken in the home, referred to by Hochschild (1989) as the 'second shift'. The results of the survey also suggest that a lingering proportion of the population (13%) are of the opinion that males should be "bread-winners" and females "home-keepers" (Park *et al*, 2013, p 121). In fact, Lewis and West (2016) argue that this is one of the reasons why early years' childcare has remained restricted in the UK relative to other economically developed countries.

Examining the impact of the Covid19 pandemic and consequent lockdown, some suggest that, in the UK at least, there may have been set backs to the feminist movement. The research of Collins *et al*. (2020); Blundell (2020); Hupkau and Pentrongolo (2020) and Connolly *et al*. (2020) all indicates that whilst many people were forced to work from home or were furloughed from their employment, the bulk of home schooling was undertaken by mothers and a greater burden of housework shifted back to women. If children are observing greater inequality in the home and the further embedding of gender stereotypes, it becomes even more important to understand the role that schools can play in confronting stereotypical attitudes and promoting equality.

It is also significant that more than four decades after the Equal Opportunities Act, a gender pay gap remains; for full time employees in the UK, women earn 7.9% less than men (Office for National Statistics, 2021). Whilst it is suggested that in the 21st century there has been a "rising tide" of support for gender equality (Ingelhart and Norris, 2003, p.169), Esping-Andersen (2009) argues that thus far it has been an incomplete revolution. As Park *et al* (2013, p. 134) conclude, "Even if dual-

earner households are now the norm, it is wrong to think that the gender role revolution is anywhere near complete", emphasising the value of this research.

Aspirations

Describing the changes to work, the welfare state and family life in 1978, Weiner suggested that the expectations of career trajectories of young men and women were altering, with young people describing less proscriptive gender stereotypical career aspirations. Over the subsequent years, Weiner's prediction appeared to be supported by the gradual changes taking place in academia, in workplaces and in homes around the country (Stotsky *et al*, 2016); however, decades later research still suggests that young males and females perceive their futures differently (Francis, 2010; Ardies *et al*, 2015). The conflicting discourses that we experience through the media suggest that we no longer live in a patriarchal society (Kuper and Jacobs, 2018) or that women continue to be oppressed (Ford, 2019). Because of this divergence, it is helpful to ascertain the attitudes of teachers and whether some children are still being exposed to traditional gender stereotypes within their early education.

Francis (2010) found that aspirational divergence can begin very early in life. Her research suggests that toy preferences can be highly gendered, with boys' toys and resources concentrated on technology and action and girls' on care and stereotypically feminine interests. The links between this and curriculum and career choices are clear. Indeed, research suggests that curriculum preference at primary and subject choice at secondary school age and beyond have remained gender-differentiated (Colley *et al*, 1994; Francis, 2000; Department for Education, 2019). Universities UK (2017) published patterns and trends in higher education which demonstrate how traditionally male dominated subjects of engineering, mathematics and computer science remain so, but that the ratios are reducing, year on year. Despite this trend, some subject areas remain dominated by female students including those allied to medicine, veterinary science and education without the ratio reducing (Universities UK, 2017). This correlation between toy choices as a young child and career choices seems to suggest there may be links between the activities undertaken in childhood, the aspirations of young children, the subjects studied at higher education and the careers undertaken in adulthood, however no conclusive connection has yet been made. The journey from childhood toy selection to adult occupation is endlessly complex and the isolation of any one factor is impossible. This complex journey is addressed in the research design which is discussed in chapter four.

Despite espousing that any career is open to people of any gender, children often appear to stick to traditional gender roles in their own aspirations, as research by Croft *et al* (2014) implied. In their US based study into the impact of parents' views and actions upon children's aspirations, they argue,

> …even in our current, progressive society in which explicit (verbal) messages of gender equality are encouraged, young girls' developing beliefs about gender roles may very well be shaped by more indirect and subtle cues from their mothers' and fathers' behaviours.

(Croft *et al*, 2014, p1427).

The most significant influence identified was that of fathers on their daughters, although both mothers and fathers were observed affecting the aspirations of children of all genders with their expectations concerning non-stereotypical jobs, work outside the home and housework (Croft *et al*, 2014). Analysing responses from over 9000 primary school pupils in the UK, DeWitt *et al* (2013) observed that pupils' aspirations for careers in science were affected by gender, social class and ethnicity. Additionally, girls in the study expressed weaker aspirations in science and less positive self-concepts in science than boys, despite there being no marked difference in their attitudes to school science. In another UK study by Moulton *et al* (2016), over 19,000 seven-year-old children were asked about their career aspirations, and it was found that 67% of these were gender-typical. The most popular aspirations for boys were sportsman, police officer, fire fighter and scientist, and for girls, teacher, vet, hairdresser and singer/entertainer. Although it is important to note that career aspirations are thought to be more significantly developed during adolescence (Bandura *et al*, 2001), these trends in early and middle childhood are of interest when considering the possible long-term outcomes for these individuals, the equality of their opportunities and the role that gender stereotyping can play in childhood.

Childhood Attainment

Weiner (1994) and Arnot el al (1996) describe the educational landscape for girls in the 1980s and early 1990s. They suggest that, during this time, girls' opportunities were diminished through educational processes. However, from the 1990s on, concerns emerged over *failing boys.* This marked a turning point in public perceptions of gender and attainment. The discourse of boys' failure pitted against girls' educational successes presented a cultural dilemma which suggested a crisis of masculinity at the hands of a feminist triumph (Ringrose, 2007). In the UK, there was a concern that boys' attitudes in the classroom were becoming disruptive to the detriment of their attainment

(Younger and Warrington, 2005). UK media expressed alarm over boys' relatively poor attainment in relation to girls', energising debates about single-sex schooling, societies' attitudes towards masculinity and men's rights (Weale, 2015; Press Associaton, 2016; Gurney-Read and Kirk, 2016). In response, some schools implemented policy, for example, aiming to get boys writing through selecting 'boy-friendly' texts, with the unintended consequence of emphasising difference and encouraging stereotypical macho behaviour (Roberts and Pinkett, 2019). Research suggests, however, that the best way to alleviate gender inequality in results is to promote gender equality in pupils' behaviour (Skelton and Francis, 2009). I was interested to learn whether my participants would raise this issue as relevant when reflecting on their teaching practice.

1.4 Aims and objectives

The aim of this research was to develop teachers' understanding of their pedagogy in a way that will consider their impact on the gender construction of their primary school pupils with the purpose of promoting gender equality. The research aim was achieved through meeting the following objectives:

- Collect interview data from 14 teachers from 5 primary schools to comprehend their attitudes toward gender stereotypes and the origins of these.
- Reflect with teachers on how their own experiences may affect their attitudes towards gender and the implicit messages given through their pedagogy.
- Analyse these data to identify key themes.
- Consider areas for development in my own and other schools, beginning to determine ways to improve practice, specifically focussing on the explicit and implicit messages teachers convey in the classroom, curriculum decisions, use of language, teachers as role models, selection of resources, and management of the learning environment.
- Draw conclusions about how teachers' reflections on their own practice can be used to help to avoid gender stereotyping and promote gender equality.

1.5 Key questions

- How are do teachers perceive the relevance of their childhood and adolescent experiences on their attitudes to gender?
- What issues do teachers raise when reflecting on their own gender constructions?
- Who are the key influences in the gender constructions of teachers?
- Do teachers perceive that their attitudes to gender affect their interactions with pupils and, if so, how?

- Have teachers' attitudes to promoting gender equality changed over the course of their careers and if so, how?

- What experiences prompted any change?

- Can reflecting upon one's own teaching practice help to highlight implicit messages given through teaching, and in doing so provide opportunity to minimise these?

1.6 Summary of approach and findings

Following a literature review, the findings of which are presented in chapter three, the aims, objectives and key questions for the study were refined. The theoretical context and adopted positions on the nature of gender development are presented in next chapter which informed the methodological approaches which are described and justified in chapter four. In short, this is a social constructionist study which assumes gender to be performative. These acts of doing gender are deemed to be both conscious and unconscious and constructed by numerous influences which vary throughout our lives but are a constant presence. With this understanding, a methodology was sought which recognised the complexity of gender as a social construction. A qualitative approach was taken. Employing feminist critical theory, the data (gathered through 14 individual life history interviews with primary school teachers from England) were analysed thematically, drawing conclusions about the nature of gender constructions and the effectiveness of reflection as a tool for bringing about changes in attitude and pedagogic approaches.

Analysis suggested that the teachers made associations between femininity and nurture and an expectation to perform gender through physical appearance. In contrast, they associated masculinity with physical strength, enjoyment of sport, a propensity to show anger and the role of financial provider. The teachers' representations of gender were largely binary, overlooking contemporary discourses surrounding the experience of genderqueer pupils and teachers. The stereotypical nature of these representations of gender suggest that some teachers may be inadvertently passing on limiting messages about gender to their pupils. Given teachers' potential to influence their pupils, these depictions of masculinities and femininities could be potentially harmful in their restrictive nature and play a part in the continued oppression of pupils through gender. The study provides significant implications for practice, as, having reflected on their gender constructions, the teachers in this sample appeared more inclined to modify their practice for an increased focus on equality. The major conclusion of the study is that the process of reflection is an effective tool in initiating change.

1.7 Contributions to knowledge

This research illustrates the pervading nature of teachers', often stereotypical, understandings of femininities and masculinities in order to better understand the potential influence this may have on the implicit messages passed on to pupils. Through building a greater understanding of the underlying perceptions of femininities and masculinities of this group of primary school teachers, this provides opportunity for greater insight into how gender stereotypes may become established, and gives guidance to professionals seeking to challenge these preconceptions to promote gender equality with their pupils. This study therefore adds to a body of knowledge about the nature of gender stereotyping in the context of primary schools and furthers awareness of how to develop a more authentic approach to equality in this context.

In both academic and professional spheres, the research provides endorsement of the power of reflection as a tool in bringing about changes in attitude amongst educators and learners which could be applied in schools to challenge gender stereotypes. This reflective approach also has the potential to be used to promote equality in other areas.

Chapter Two

Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will explore the theoretical context of this study, examining theories relating to gender construction, development and enactment. Amongst others, the works of Foucault (1977, 1979), Butler (1990, 1994) and Bronfenbrenner (1981, 1984) are used to address the issues of how gender is understood, adopted and enacted. I propose that where these theories interact is in the way that individuals' gender identities are influenced by both their personal lived experiences and by the societal expectations of the day.

2.1 Gender through a lens

From the outset, it is necessary to understand my positionality and the theoretical context in which this study is undertaken, in order to place it within the landscape of prior research. Considering understandings of gender, how it develops and its role in formulating identity are crucial in approaching this research. The following discussion presents the ontological and epistemological grounds for the study.

Using the theoretical insights of Foucault (1977, 1979, 1982) and Butler (1990), I argue that pupils are subject to the gendered discourses of contemporary society which are steeped in traditions of millennia but constantly evolving. I use cognitive and socialisation theories to explain gender construction and its development in children, in order to identify the role that teachers play in influencing pupils' attitudes to gender and, ultimately, the choices they may make in adulthood.

Gender as a performative act

Gender is a slippery term and multifarious concept. Butler (1990) seeks to examine the concept of gender and its constraints, arguing that gender, is not an essential quality following from biological sex, nor is it an essential identity, but rather suggests it is an *act* which is influenced by societal norms. They suggest that this act then continues to reinforce those social norms from which it develops.

As I read Butler's texts (1990 and 1994), I frequently flicked from the abstract to the concrete as I asked, how does this relate to the behaviour of the people I know? My family, my friends, my colleagues, my pupils and those I have observed in the street and in the media? Butler (1990) questions the language pertaining to sex (p11), to gender (p31), to sexuality (p37) and to the labels *man* and *woman* (p33). They conclude (p190) that

> gendered bodies are so many "styles of the flesh". These styles are never fully self-styled, for styles have a history, and these histories condition and limit the possibilities. Consider gender, for instance, as *a corporeal style*, an "*act*", as it were which is both intentional and performative, where "*performative*" suggests a dramatic and contingent construction of meaning.

From this perspective, gender and gender identity may potentially be conflated. The extent to which one has autonomy over one's gendered enactment may be contested and difficult to define. What is conscious and what is sub-conscious may be difficult to isolate. Also, how we *choose* to do gender – the specific behaviours we adopt which may be deemed (by us or by others) to be masculine or feminine - may be the result of years of observing others' gender enactments. Butler (1993) clarifies the difference between performance and performative: that gender is not an outfit to put on, interchangeable day by day, but understood only through the enactment of behaviours which are societally deemed masculine or feminine. This suggests a social construction of the patterns which derive gender. It may be perceived that what are deemed gender stereotypes could also constitute cultural knowledge; a sophisticated, developed and nuanced understanding of how groups of people behave. These various observations of social norms are what Butler (1990) argues are the building blocks from which gender is constructed. The definitions of terms are included in chapter three.

Butler (1990) asks whether gender is constructed coercively and why deviations from gender 'norms' are so troubling to some. They suggest there is a deep fear, or anxiety, which tells individuals you must comply with gender norms or else risk exclusion or abuse. As a pedagogue, this is important because it suggests that I may play a role in encouraging my pupils to comply with these gender 'norms'. Butler (2004) argues that we have desires which stem from social norms rather than our own innate individuality, echoing the thinking of Foucault (1979) who suggests that normalising power makes us want to do what we have to do, believing that these are our own ideas. As teachers, we hold the power to create an atmosphere of tolerance or acceptance in our classrooms or, potentially, to add to the tapestry of stereotypes. Butler (1990) proposes that by repetitively performing certain ritualistic acts, deemed feminine or masculine, we create the notion of gender. This is the sense in which gender is performative – it exists only through its enactment. In the primary school, this could include the wearing of a school summer dress or pair of shorts, playing football or

making up a dance during playtime, choosing from a selection of fairy or beast books in the school library. This public behaviour, Butler (1990) argues, then becomes part of the internalised gender construction of the individual. Davies (2006) describes how Butler's concept of subjectification through mastery and submission – master the skill, the technique and at the same moment submit to its normalcy - relates to a teacher's exertion of power within the classroom. In this study, I analyse how this act of subjectification has been experienced by a sample of teachers in their own lives and how this might impact on children, as teachers unconsciously exert power on their pupils.

Butler's (1990; 1994) theories about gender and its performative nature are directly relevant to this study in understanding that the ways in which teachers perceive and do gender form part of the environment in which their pupils learn to perceive and do gender. Using this conception of gender as an entity only in how it is enacted, it is possible to recognise the way that pupils, as fledgling performers of gender, learn *appropriate* behaviours.

Gender as a social construction

What I believe to be true may be different to others and Foucault (1984) suggests that it is likely to change over time. I argue that 'truth' is culturally created and that how I should behave as a woman, or indeed, as a teacher, has been interpreted by me based on my view of what I have observed in the world and from the messages that I have received from society. Our understanding of what children need is similarly culturally created and individually interpreted. Concepts such as how one's behaviour could be affected by gender are complex. As a highly personal, individual experience, gender construction is enacted and felt differently by each individual due to the myriad social influences experienced. The ontological understanding within this study is that there is no one single truth about what gender is or should be, but that it is interpreted by the individual resulting in multiple truths. Lyotard (1984, p24) defines post-modernism as "incredulity towards metanarratives", in other words, rejecting homogeneous concepts and instead believing reality to be produced by the observer, creating multiple truths. Post modernists argue that there is no objective truth and that complexity and difference should be celebrated (McHale, 1992). In social constructionism, society creates a plethora of meanings through which we navigate, adopting those which suit us, shaping our individual understanding of the world, influencing our behaviour and outlook. Therefore, in looking at pupils' attitudes to gender stereotypes, I suggest that teachers contribute to these societal influences. I also conclude that the individual teacher's *truth* about gender and the resulting impact upon the child are influenced by far more than school policy and are wholly personal.

Our understanding of how gender should be performed changes over time. In his book *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault (1977, p30) argues that a new "regime of truth" develops as acceptable punishments are devised to suit a crime, entwined with the discourse of the time and the associated application of power. I have applied this concept of socially constructed truths of the day to the creation of gender norms. Foucault (1977) explains that reality is a social construct and analysing where views come from helps us to understand the relationship between knowledge and power. He suggests that a point of view put forward in a number of texts or situations will be adopted elsewhere and become institutionalised, becoming part of the social structure of dominant values or norms. Consequently, morals and values are developed by societal norms in relation to the discourse of the day.

Bronfenbrenner's (1981) argument that the influences on a child's development will change over time, the chronosphere, link with this idea. How the world appears to us aged 5 will be very different from the world that we see by the time we reach adulthood. Also, participants coming of age in the 1970s may have a significantly different experience to those growing up in the 2000s. I argue that although we may believe that our morals, values and choices are of our own making, they are actually a product of our prior experiences and very much of the time and geography of our existence. This means that teachers' lived experiences will vary hugely, and that their understanding of societal norms and attitudes to gender roles will be affected by these individual experiences, including: the time and place in which they grew up (and the political landscape at the time), the people they interacted with, the media they consumed and the key events which they encountered.

Foucault (1977) suggests that understanding comes through discourse; language gives us the power to define the nature of an object, an event or a concept, attaching meaning to it. Contemporary understandings of gender and some of the dominant discourses surrounding them will be analysed through looking at the literature in chapter three. I argue that my own truth, that of my participants and that of the reader will be individual, though culturally and socially constructed, and it is through this lens that the literature and data have been analysed. This epistemological stance is evident in the research design, which seeks to unpick the social frameworks which demonstrate or even dictate to educators and their pupils how gender should be performed.

2.2 Context – How gender develops

Although physical sex differences (anatomical, neurological and hormonal) are often called to account for gendered behaviour, others argue that gender is an entirely social construct. Buchann

(2008) argues that literature debating inequalities tends to cite social and economic factors whilst ignoring biological differences. Remaining open to the concept that physical sex has a bearing on behaviour and traits, and without isolating the impact of any individual socializing factor, my study examined the nature of gender inequalities from a sociological perspective. It is necessary, however, to consider the biological arguments. Attempting to align the biological and sociological factors in understanding the differences between humans, Freese *et al* (2003 p233) encourage sociologists to "push us past the commonplace view that biological and sociological explanations are inevitably opposed." I adopt the position that, considering the brain, the body and hormonal influences, the most acceptable framework for understanding is that there is some biological difference between boys and girls per average of the population, however, there is an enormous overlap in their traits (Fausto-Sterling, 1992; Joel, 2011; Fine, 2010). I hold that there are plenty of girls who are stronger, more aggressive, more ambitious and more risk taking than some boys and that there are a significant number of boys who are more empathetic, more nurturing and more linguistically capable than the 'average' girl. From the inherited traits that we are born with, we are then sculpted by the world in which we live, responding to the people around us to learn that some behaviours are rewarded whilst others are not. We copy the actions of others. We learn to fit in.

It is evident that the world around us has a bearing on what we become and social learning theories can be both observed and reinforced. Social learning theory is based on the notion that reward or punishment for actions will generate a response from the individual (Bandura, 1977). For example, when children choose a toy that is considered to be gender inappropriate, they may be reprimanded or corrected by their parents; in which case they will quickly learn to avoid that toy in future. They may also learn that carers or peers are more likely to play with them if they choose a gender appropriate toy, thus reinforcing their understanding of what is acceptable and favoured (Langlois and Downs, 1980). Modelled or copied behaviours also come into this category and I will discuss more about imitation when considering the influence of various socialising agents.

Chick *et al* (2002) have suggested that gender is a social construct, proposing that through imaginative play, children explore and understand gender roles. Mead (1934, p162) argues that "A person is a personality because he belongs to a community, because he takes over the institutions of that community into his own conduct." Mead (ibid) describes how society precedes and constructs the individual. I have drawn on Foucault's (1977) concept of 'docile bodies' to consider how individuals feel that they are under surveillance and subject to constant covert regulation which can lead to normalization and acceptance of gender stereotypes. It can be argued that Foucault challenges (as well as supports) feminism, but this concept of docile bodies can be applied to form

an understanding of how the development of a teacher's identity is critical to both their pedagogical approach and to their interactions with and influence upon children's gender schemas. This is further explored in the literature review.

To understand the various agents of socialisation, it is important to recognise that individuals play an active role in filtering and synthesising the information they receive. There is a tendency to assume that children play a very passive role in their own socialisation, by soaking up the world around them, and to overlook the child's own agency (Montgomery, 2005). Describing how children seek opportunities to seize power and exert agency, Paechter (2017) suggests that children may engage in play, acting out gender stereotypical adult roles in order to assume more power. This is an instance in which power in its individual (agency) and societal (structure) forms can be seen to interact (Foucault, 1977). If children are imitating parental roles, they may be emulating the power dynamics they have observed, affected by societal power structures as well as asserting their own agency.

If, as argued, gender is socially constructed, it is necessary to understand both what is meant by society and how it influences an individual. Considering how a human develops, Bronfenbrenner (1981) coined the term ecology of human development, which he represented through concentric rings of impact on the child. I have adopted and tailored this model to examine the structure of interactions between the many agents of socialisation acting on a child, influencing their construction of gender. The concentric circles described by Bronfenbrenner begin with the child her/himself, their biological determinism, their sex and their health. After this, the first stage of influence comes from the microsystem that they encounter, including the impact of the family and other people and institutions close to the child. This might include peers, school and religion as well as other members of the community with a direct influence on the child such as neighbours, family friends, extended family and other carers such as childminders. Bronfenbrenner (2004) describes the significance not only of the impact of these factors on the child, but the reciprocal nature of the interaction between the child and, for example, their carer. As the aims of this study are centred around the impact that a *teacher* can have on promoting a willingness amongst pupils to defy or to adopt stereotypes, examining the reciprocal nature of the relationship between pupil and teacher, Bronfenbrenner's (1981) model has been tailored to focus specifically on the role of the teacher in this interplay.

I have elected to use Bronfenbrenner's (1981) model for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is adaptable: I have been able to tailor the model to examine the gender construction of both pupils (through the structuring of the literature review) and the teacher participants (analysing the experiences and influences discussed in their life histories). Secondly, it provides a methodical way of categorising and

organising a wide-ranging list of influences. Thirdly, it recognises both the interaction between these influences and the two-way nature of influence which will be further discussed later in the chapter.
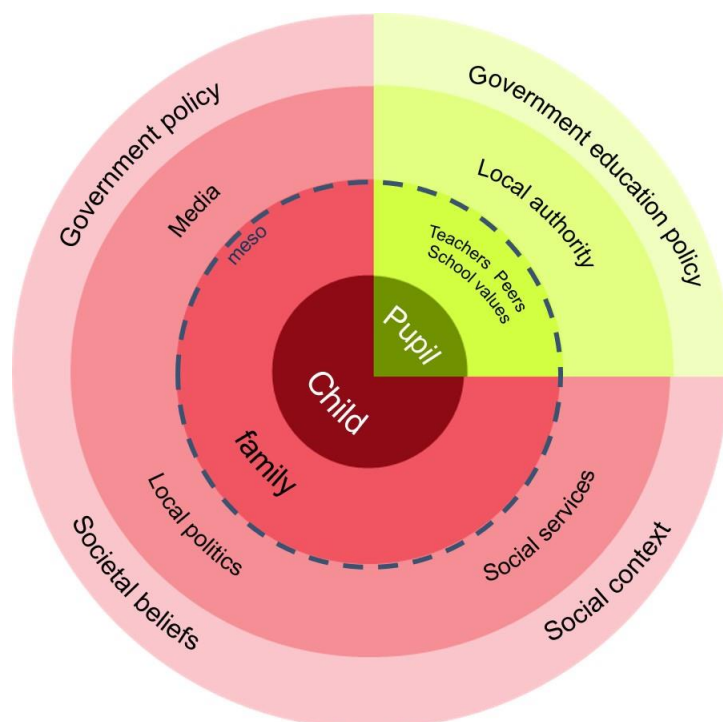
Figure 1: An adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of development

Bronfenbrenner (1981) outlines the importance of interactions between the people and institutions surrounding the child as having a crucial impact on their development, calling this level of interaction the mesosystem. This includes, for example, how parents might interact with peers, how the values and practices of the school and the family are aligned and whether there are divergent ideals amongst carers. This concern over, for example, parent and school working in partnership, is likely to have a bearing on the development, beliefs, progress and behaviour of the child (McDowall Clark, 2020). As the differing experiences of the participants in this study are analysed in chapters five and six, conflicts between influences are discussed. Bronfenbrenner (2004) emphasises the importance of the integration of the different elements of the support network of a child, suggesting that working in partnership will maximise their efficiency. Within this study, the interactions between school and family and between the teacher and their own circles of influence have been examined.

Bronfenbrenner's (1981) macrosystem describes the culture in which the individual lives. In this realm lie public policy, cultural influences, the beliefs and values of the society in which the child grows up as well their physical environment. Within this study, UK government education policy and

legislation relating to gender equality have been particularly relevant. Since the organisation of public services is dependent on the values and beliefs of the government of the day (McDowall Clark, 2020), the contemporary situation in the UK has been examined. Whilst Bronfenbrenner's (ibid) model suggests that these influences are more peripheral to the development of the values and attitudes of a person, I argue that the relative sway of these various influences may vary for each individual. The dominance of media, for example, may have a much greater significance to some, overriding the influence of family, school or friends to encourage an individual to behave in a certain way.

As previously explained, Bronfenbrenner (2004) acknowledges the importance of changes both geographically and over time, which he calls the chronosystem. Emphasising the importance of ecological transitions, he describes how movement to new settings or the loss or gain of an important figure (for example, when moving schools) would impact the child's development. This consideration of how perspectives change over time has been very relevant when working with teachers to understand how their attitudes to gender may have been influenced at different periods through their lives. It is particularly pertinent to consider how attitudes to feminism have changed over time and the stage in an individual's life when they may become aware of feminist philosophies. For example, three of the participants reflected on how their attitudes towards gender equality changed in motherhood. One young woman talked about how her feminist attitudes developed as she became aware of her father's adultery and several participants described how they had felt when they were treated differently from their siblings because of gender. As the pervasive discourse of a generation shifts attitudes to gender, the perspective of an individual may either move to align with the current trends or become out of step with modern attitudes. This is where the theories of Bronfenbrenner (1981), Butler (1990) and Foucault (1977) fit together to interpret both the attitudes of the participants and the way in which our pupils may develop.

The individual develops based on the influence of society

Bronfenbrenner

Macro influences adopt to the dominant discourse of the day

Societal attitudes change over time

Foucault

Societal expectations of the day and lived experiences influence gender identity

Gender identity develops based on the life experiences of the individual

Gender is performed based on society's expectations

Gender is performative

Butler

Figure 2: Intersection of theoretical concepts

A social constructionist study of teachers' attitudes to gender contributing to new knowledge

A body of research exists which suggests gender socialisation occurs in primary schools and there are a number of qualitative studies which provide rich data to enable us to examine the complex relationship between teacher and pupils (Mayeza, 2017; Mayeza and Bhana, 2017; Renold, 2006; Hamilton and Roberts, 2017). Building upon existing research, this study focuses not only on the role played by teachers in socialising children, but more particularly on how teachers' own life experiences and construction of gender might affect their pedagogy. Given the understanding that gender is socially constructed and that teachers can play a role in this construction, this study seeks to investigate the acquisition of knowledge, truth and power within the primary classroom, with regard to challenging gender stereotypes.

Chapter Three

Literature Review

In this chapter, I analyse the literature relating to various influences on gender development, with a particular focus on educational establishments. The chapter begins with an explanation of how the chapter has been structured and clarification of the terms used throughout this study. I then review the literature relating to how these elements may influence an individual's gender construction: government policy, educational trends, community, media, family, educators and carers, the learning environment, curriculum, resources, teachers and other school staff and peers. The chapter closes by considering how primary schools may develop their practice in the future and the relevance of the role of the teacher in promoting gender equality amongst their pupils.

3.1 The structure of the literature review

This literature review focuses on the research outcomes of recent and seminal literature, seeking to identify the central issues of prior research. I have noted the common ground and the contentious issues raised regarding gender socialisation in primary schools and the development of stereotypes. The coverage of this area of literature concentrates largely but not exclusively on the experience in the UK and in the USA where similar trends are observed. It has been suggested that patterns of gender inequality are different in developing countries from those of industrialized countries (Buchmann *et al*, 2008).

This review will begin with defining the key terms included in the study. Various agents of socialisation will then be discussed in turn following an adaptation of the concentric spheres of influence which Bronfenbrenner (1981) used to illustrate their significance.
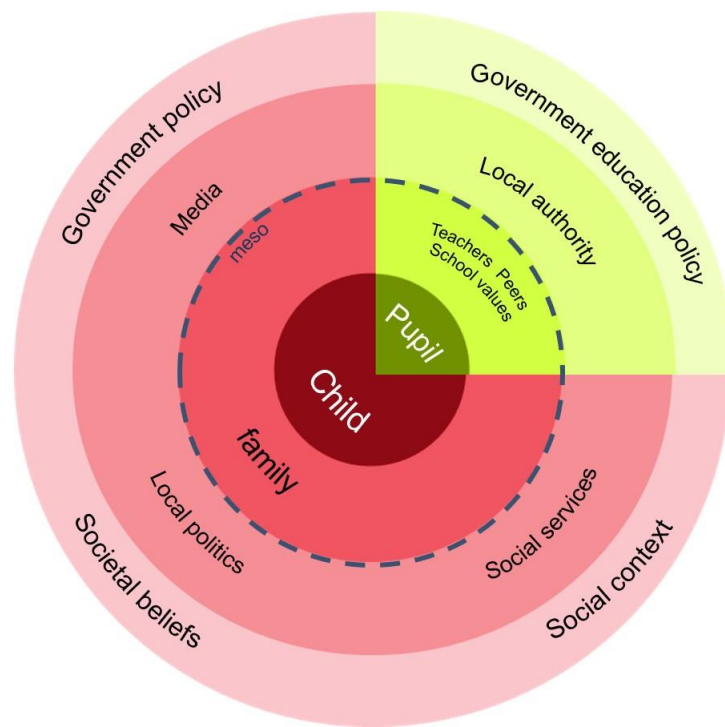
Figure 3: An adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory of development

With a focus upon the influence of schools upon gender construction, the review concentrates most specifically on various elements of school life.

Definitions

There are a number of provisos which must be considered and terms which should be defined before embarking on this review of the literature. Firstly, defining the individual by *sex* (physiologically defined at birth by the anatomy of genitalia) is more complex than one would first think, as a number of babies are born intersex. The labelling of *gender* is a more commonly used term in sociological texts, which refers to the social role adopted by the child, based primarily, but not exclusively, on biological sex. Gender is a fluid term, and the binary selection of male or female raises problems both in terms of categorisation and for individual freedom. *Gender identity* is a term which refers to the personal identification of one's own gender based on an internal awareness. This concept is becoming increasingly important in contemporary literature, including in the classroom (Renold *et al*, 2017; Jackson, 2010c). Butler (1990) argues that gender is performative and that we learn to adopt behaviour and make choices based on society's expectations, attaching cultural meaning to biological sex. This is significant in terms of how we, as teachers, are able to influence our pupils and constrain or broaden the opportunities they deem relevant for their own lives, as discussed in chapter two. Francis and Paechter (2015) discuss the dilemmas present in research around gender and education and in particular the need for gender categorisation in the process of analysis, labelling the child in

the name of research. Their research suggests that this classification is justified given the "resilient role" (Francis and Paechter, 2015, p787) that gender plays in inequalities of power.

The simple division into two genders (which has been superseded in most developed countries by a more multifarious categorisation discussed shortly) was rarely universally accepted. For example, the dichotomous assumption was long rejected by some Asian, South Pacific and North American Indian societies who held there were three genders, including the *berdaches* (Native American), people who adopted behaviour associated with *the opposite sex* (Renzetti, Curran and Maier, 2016). As a social construct, gender may vary over time and geographically. As observed by Bradley (2013, p4), being a man or a woman in Britain today is not the same as in Ancient Egypt or Medieval Europe. We must consider that the roles portrayed today as *normal* will not be common across the globe and are unlikely to be recognisable by future or past generations. It is argued that more recent Western values have biased some anthropological studies, giving an ethnocentric and androcentric slant to the interpretation of other societies (Renzetti, Curran and Maier, 2016). Even across different school settings and cultures, there will be varied attitudes to *normality* which must be taken into account in this research.

Hyde *et al* (2019) review five sets of empirical findings from multiple disciplines to refute the concept of the gender binary. Seeking to overturn decades, if not centuries, worth of psychological research (including the categorization of people into two categories: men and women), their paper synthesizes a range of research to call for an end to this concept and to include: gender conformist and non-conformist*, transgender* (those who self-label differently to their birth-assigned gender) and non-binary categories including those who identify as *agender* (those who adopt no gender), *genderfluid* (those who chose to adopt different genders at different times) and *bigender* (those who experience two gender identities, either simultaneously or varying between the two).

The term gender studies has come, by some, to take on the sense of women's studies (Kirkup *et al,* 2015) however, the study of masculinities is an endeavour which is equally relevant to understand society and has seen a plethora of recent publications discussing the virtues and pitfalls of masculinity (some examples include Taylor and Voorhees, 2018; Perry, 2017; Anderson, 2012; Elliott, 2018). Connell (2005) suggests that gender is so pervasive because "patterns of masculinity are relevant to happiness, health, and even to human survival on the planet" (Connell, 2005, p5). The concept of a range of masculinities or femininities is useful in considering gender as performative – created only through the enactment of these *masculine* or *feminine* behaviours. I use the term 'doing' gender to denote this enactment.

Post-modern feminists consider a number of other factors beyond gender when talking about inequality and have recognised that class, race, sexuality and a host of other issues contribute to the lived experience of any individual. Debate around gender, it is therefore argued, can be categorised under power, intersectionality and identity (Bradley, 2013). Isolating gender as a source of social injustice could be argued to have painted an over-simplistic picture of the world which could be construed as unhelpful in terms of analysis or bringing about change. Consequently, *intersectionality,* an understanding of how various aspects of an individual's social and political identity interact to contribute to their own experience of discrimination, will be of huge importance within this study as individuals' experiences must be considered in context.

The aim of this research is to promote gender equality in the classroom, so it will be seeking to overturn and challenge gender stereotypes. By way of defining stereotypical behaviour, Connell (2005) argues common themes of hegemonic masculinity are aggression, limited emotionality, and heterosexuality. She also suggests that "'masculinity' does not exist except in contrast with 'femininity'" (ibid, p68). Although there may be difficulties in the use of these terms, associating certain behaviours with femininities and masculinities (used in the plural to suggest a greater range of possibilities), merging these terms loses clarity (Paechter, 2006). I therefore suggest that these terms are used to describe behaviours which may be performed by people of any gender. The manifestations and understandings of the terms are more deeply explored in chapter six. Stereotypically male and female attributes frequently include those shown below which are taken from lists presented by: Murray (2000) and Vetterling-Braggin (1982).

Stereotypically female attributes
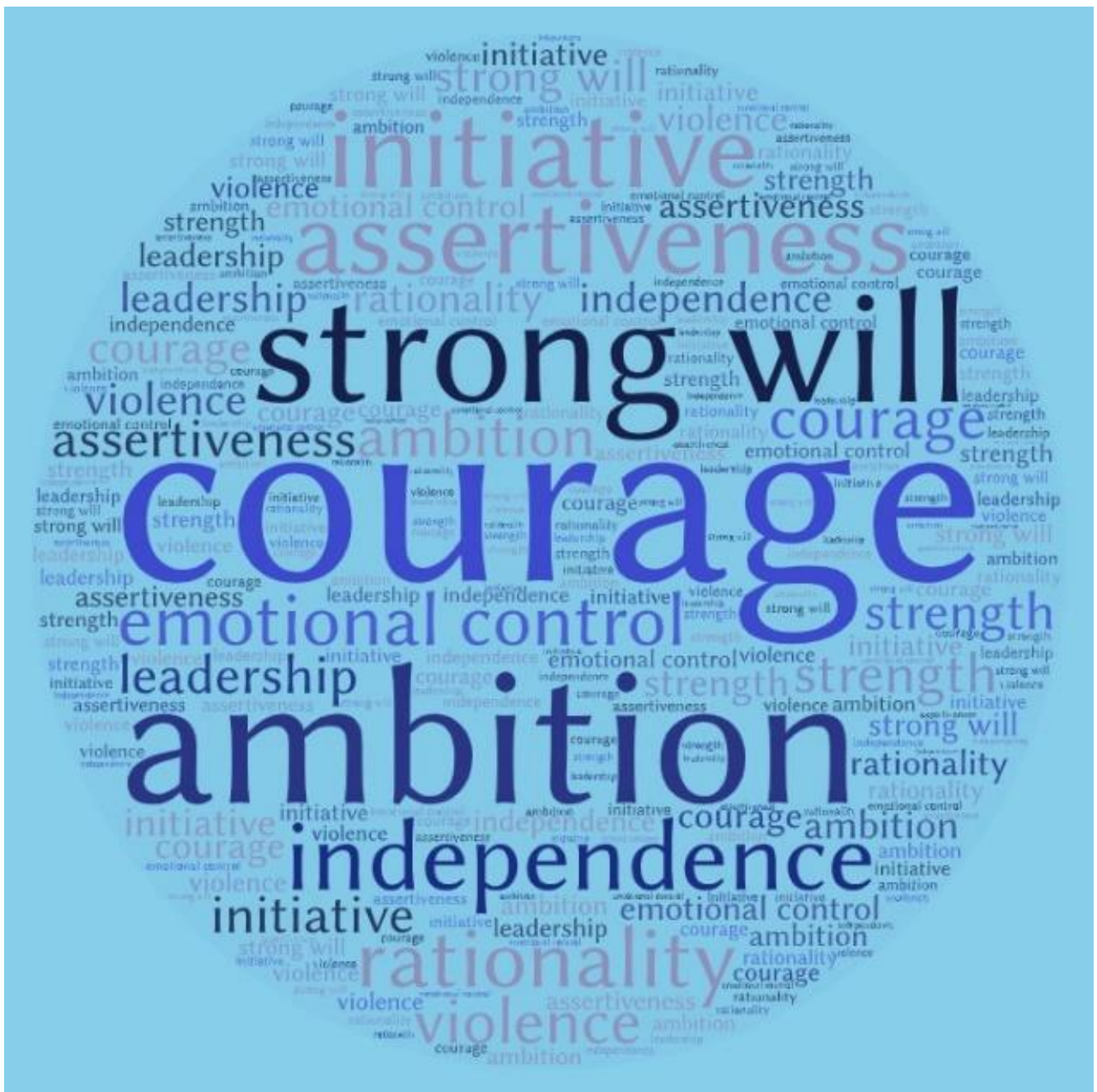
Stereotypically male attributes

Figure 4: Commonly perceived gender stereotypes (From lists presented by: Murray, 2000; Vetterling-Braggin, 1982)

Associated with these stereotypical traits are a number of expected behaviour patterns and societal roles which have been developed due to perceived gender differences in cognitive and physical abilities: leadership roles, entrance into the workplace, likelihood to undertake certain roles and pursue certain occupations, to perform tasks in the home and to partake in particular activities (Diekman and Eagly, 2000; Schein, 1975; Connell, 2005). When, throughout this study, gender stereotypical roles or behaviours are mentioned, it is these to which I refer.

Likewise, when, throughout this document, the term *gender equality* is used, I refer to equal access to opportunities, rights and responsibilities for people of any gender. The European Institute for Gender Equality (2019) suggests that gender equality is achieved when people of all genders enjoy the same rights and opportunities across all sectors of society, including economic participation and decision-making, and when the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of people of all genders are equally valued and favoured. In the suggestion that all organisations have inequality regimes, Acker (2006) describes inequities of power, control over goals, resources and outcomes, opportunities for promotion and interesting work, pay, respect and pleasure. In this study, I have focused beyond the equal provision of resources, equal access to the curriculum and gender blindness to attainment. I advocate teachers' promotion of the freedom of choice for individuals which results in opportunities, aspirations and achievements which are equally diverse and challenging for pupils of all genders. As described by Ringrose (2007), it is necessary to avoid the trap of over-emphasising the 'successful girls' and 'failing boys' narratives as the primary focus of gender inequality in schools. Instead, I take gender equality to refer to fair treatment of pupils in school, avoidance of gender stereotyping in language, curriculum and resources and acceptance of diversity with parity of expectations for all genders.

With the understanding that gender is both performed and socially constructed, as discussed in chapter two, this review seeks to synthesise and evaluate literature concerning familial, educational and other societal factors. I have analysed the various influences on the child, adopting Bronfenbrenner's (1981) ecology of human development to classify the primary influences on a child's development as they learn to 'do' gender.

3.2 Macrosphere

The contemporary cultural values of any society will shape expectations. Consequently, we would expect to see changes in gendered behaviour both geographically and over time (Bradley, 2013). Duffy (2021) argues that there are three distinct forces which shape people's attitudes: the period in which they live, the cohort into which they are born and the stage they are at in the lifecycle. The first describes the impact of key events which occur in the era (this overlaps with the theory of Strauss and Howe, 1997). The impact of the pandemic, for example, would be an event which may play a role in shaping the views of these generations. Or the relative size of the cohort into which they are born which may affect the prospects and particularly the economic experience of a generation. Within this section, I will examine the literature pertaining to gender influences within the macrosphere. I focus

specifically on the UK within this literature review, but some global trends and the wider context were considered both in terms of educational practice and other influences on gender.

3.2.1 Government

The lived experience of a citizen in any nation will be impacted directly and indirectly by government policy. For a child growing up in the UK in the 2020s, relevant recent government policy which may impact their gendered behaviour and aspirations could include a host of legislation. *The Sex Discrimination Act of 1975* prohibited sex discrimination in admission to schools, the appointment of teachers (with exceptions for single-sex schools) and in giving careers advice. This legislation decreed that neither boys nor girls should be refused access to courses, facilities or other benefits on the grounds of their sex [sic]. The *Crick report*, published in 1998 setting out the government's vision for citizenship education, championed equality and diversity and insisted that schools show a commitment to equal opportunities and gender equality. *The Children Act* 2004 enacted legislation from the *Every Child Matters* document, which predominantly concerned government agencies working together to ensure effective safeguarding of children. Within its remit came a further statement calling for services to "focus particularly on addressing inequalities across gender and ethnicity" (DfES, 2003, p20). The Gender Recognition Act 2004, brought in legislation to allow people to change their legal gender. Equality Act 2010, consolidated earlier legislation outlawing discrimination, including the Equal Pay Act 1970, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Race Relations Act 1976, and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The Equality Act 2010 also specifically protects children against discrimination, harassment and victimisation in relation to education and requires public bodies including schools to take active steps to eliminate discrimination and to promote equality. Ofsted (2022) inspects schools to evaluate how equality and diversity are promoted within the school, and in order to be graded 'good', a school must promote equality of opportunity and diversity effectively. A government publication entitled *Gender issues in school – What works to improve achievement for boys and girls* (DCSF, 2009) sought to raise boys' attainment, particularly in English where it perceived there to be a greater discrepancy, however the messages it contained were strongly focussed on minimising gender differences and the recommended actions prioritised discouraging pupils to adopt overtly gender stereotypical behaviours. In summary, although there is no specific government policy on an approach to gender equality in education, the tone of legislation promotes equality, suggesting that schools have a responsibility to more actively promote it. I argue, therefore, that it is no longer good enough to simply comply with the equality legislation, now schools are expected to show that steps are being taken to actively promote equality.

3.2.2 Compulsory schooling

Most children in the UK spend a large proportion of their waking hours in educational establishments which have a major influence on their pupils and which mould society. Foucault (1977) argues that children's bodies and sexualities are denied within a school system where an institutional regime allows them little freedom and little privacy. Schools have been described as 'active makers of a range of femininities and masculinities' (Mac an Ghaill, 1994, p9) as children are regulated within the classroom and to some extent on the playground. The effects of this regulation on pupils' gender construction will be examined through a review of the literature concerning gender socialisation, specifically in primary education.

3.2.3 Educational systems

England has had strong traditions of state-sponsored single-sex education, however, the latter part of the 20th century saw an increase in co-education: the number of single-sex state schools fell from 2500 to 400 over a time span of 40 years, and between 1996 and 2006, 130 independent schools that were single sex either became co-educational or closed down (Asthana, 2006). Scottish education, on the other hand has always been largely mixed, and Wales introduced dual schools in 1889. In England, most secondary education was single-sex until the 1970s. It is worth noting that in the USA, a reversal of the English trend has been observed where there has been an upsurge in the popularity of single-sex schooling (Jackson, 2010c).

Since the 1990s, there has been academic and media interest in the perceived deterioration of boys' attitudes and attainment (Skelton and Francis, 2009). The recruitment and retention of male teachers in primary schools and early years' settings, under the assumption that it would provide much-needed 'role models', has been much discussed (NLT, 2012; Carrington and Skelton, 2003). A drive began under the Blair administration to recruit more male teachers (Carrington and Skelton, 2003) and this effort continued under later governments. Amongst many other initiatives which contributed to this effort, the then education secretary Michael Gove, announced plans in 2008 to introduce a 'troops to teachers' scheme which encouraged those in the armed forces to retrain as teachers, specifically targeting males. Policymakers followed the discourse that more male primary teachers are needed to provide disaffected, working-class boys with positive models of masculinity to counter negative attitudes towards schooling in an effort to close the gender attainment gap (Skelton, 2001). However, this role model theory has been questioned in the absence of adequate evidence to show that educational performance can be improved by matching teachers and children

by gender or ethnicity (Carrington and Skelton, 2003). It may be argued, however, that initiatives to make the teaching profession more representative would provide children with inspirational figures of the same gender and ethnicity (Skelton and Francis, 2009; Rezai-Rashti and Martino, 2010). Gosse (2011) explores two espoused theories commonly discussed in the call for more male primary school teachers: the first that suggests good teachers can teach all pupils regardless of their own identity and secondly that more males teachers are required to better reflect diversity and counterbalance the overwhelming numbers of female role models in school. In conclusion, he calls, not simply for more male teachers, but a greater understanding of the relevance of teachers' intersections of race and ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, disability, geographical location, language and culture, among people of a range of genders. Brownhill (2014) argues that the emphasis on the need for male teachers to fulfil this role places a burden on them as there may be a discord between the characteristics of the male role model that are expected by others and the beliefs and qualities of the individual. Additionally, Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2012) suggest that the narrative is unhelpful in that it subversively promotes hegemonic masculinities.

Through the decades, it has been recommended that initial teacher training programmes should be places where stereotypical attitudes and behaviours are challenged (Siraj-Blatchford, 2021; Younger, 2007). Younger (2007) argued that in secondary initial teacher education, there were glaring omissions in terms of gender awareness resulting in the continuing disadvantage of girls and issues of homophobia. He determined that all teacher educators should engage in debate about the desirable threshold knowledge which NQTs should possess about gender issues. Around that time, Skelton (2007, p678) suggested that the expectation that gender equality was not taught specifically as a theme within initial teacher training but rather expected to "permeate" throughout the course meant, in many cases, that it was omitted from the course altogether. More recent research (Mohamed, 2019) recommends that Initial Teacher Training should be developed with strategies which evaluate the impact of instructional pedagogies on awareness raising to improve equality of outcomes for all children. Currently, there is no mention of gender equality within the *Initial Teacher Education Inspection framework and handbook* (DfE, 2021). Successive UK governments have stipulated the importance of valuing diversity and equality, seeking to create an inclusive and egalitarian environment. The current Ofsted policy, which shapes how schools operate, requires schools to adhere to policy which promotes gender equality (Ofsted, 2022).

3.2.4 Media

De Zengotita (2005) argues that how life is portrayed in the media is likely to influence the expectations and aspirations of the receiver. According to Bauwel and Krijnen (2021) the focuses within research into gender representations in the media have changed rapidly over the last decade, honing in on gender and its intersections with other identity markers such as age, ethnicities, class, disabilities, sexualities. They also note the varied responses to the #MeToo movement, arguing that in some contexts it has caused a strengthening of traditional gender norms, whilst in other media outlets it has affected significant progressive change. Krijnen and Van Bauwel (2015) argue there have been some positive changes although the general pattern remains similar to that detected in the 1970s, with males frequently represented in the public sphere as the breadwinner and occupying themselves with politics and technology, and with females more commonly represented in the domestic sphere. Carter (2011) succinctly summarises decades' worth of literature in the role of the media in reinforcing cultural gender stereotypes, describing the role that the press, television, cinema and women's magazines play in representing women and men through stereotypes, perpetuating inequality. Her focus is on the US in particular, but also describes the phenomenon within the UK. Her investigation of these specific media show how vastly the landscape has changed. In contrast, older research has cited the extremely important influence that television had in moulding children's views of gendered behaviour, observing that the children who watched the most television had the most traditional gender-role development (Morgan, 1987; Lewin Jones, 2009) and Walkerdine's (2007) study suggests the influence of computer games on children's gendered play.

Weber and Dixon (2007) describe a cultural shift in response to the growth of online activity, suggesting that the generation that have grown up online place an increasingly high value on social media. Renold and Ringrose (2017) describe a teenage landscape in which the growing impact of social media dominates gender construction and sexualisation and Manago (2013) suggests that social networking sites act as arenas for young people to construct their identities. Outlining the challenges faced by second-wave feminist scholars, Gill (2007) portrays a world dominated by media which proved both hostile and more complex than earlier women's movements had experienced. Since then, a new significant medium has evolved. Some have argued that fourth-wave feminists have embraced the opportunities held by social media platforms to further their cause (Charles and Wadia, 2018) however it could also be argued that the unprecedented rise in the importance of social media, which is still largely unregulated, has damaged gender equality. For example, online abuse faced by high profile women and particularly those espousing a feminist viewpoint has been well documented in the press (Filipovic, 2019). In whatever form, the media consumption of the individual

may form one significant element which influences their understanding of the world. The breadth of this area is vast, and the enormity of the topic means it is well beyond the scope of this research, however, it must be considered as amongst the influencing factors on a child's gender development.

3.3 Exosphere

3.3.1 Local Authority

Local authorities in England have increasingly diminished power (Coldron *et al*, 2014), however at different times have been responsible for the policy which has both threatened and promoted gender equality. Forrester and Garratt (2016) discuss how, in the 1980s, some schools and local authorities adopted strategies to counter gender inequalities in schools, although gender equality was rarely a high priority for government and received minimal resources for research. They explain how, thanks to the decentralisation of British education during the period, there were locally specific projects which had some success. In particular, some Labour-controlled Local Education Authorities supported equality projects and initiatives, as part of a political confrontation with Thatcher's government. This ultimately led to the 1988 Education Reform Act and subsequent legislation which reduced the powers of the local authorities, centralising education policy (David, 1993; Forrester and Garratt, 2016). Social justice in education and gender equality initiatives received less funding and status following the changes as focus shifted to achievement, standards and data. Extensive UK educational reforms between 1988 and 1994 brought about heavily centralised and prescriptive curriculum and assessment changes, representing the views of the Conservative government, which valued consumer choice and greater efficiency within a competitive market framework (Weiner, 1997; Forrester and Garratt, 2016). The remit of the 150 English Local Authorities centres around securing sufficient school places; overseeing the admissions process; and ensuring that children with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities have access to appropriate quality provision (Local Government Association, 2022).

3.3.2 Community Groups

For some children, their local community will play a significant role in their early lives. For others, it may be more peripheral. Children raised within a tight-knit religious community may be frequently exposed to the opinions and social practices of a wider group of people beyond the family but for others with only a passing acquaintance with their neighbours this is unlikely to create a strong bond which will influence their behaviour or attitudes. Lei *et al* (2014) suggest that neighbourhood

characteristics influence how people behave in gendered ways, going on to conclude that gender equality at the neighbourhood level could play a central role in understanding gender differences in violent behaviour. Literature also suggests that there may be varied attitudes to gender according to race and religion. Richmond Abbott (1992) proposes that those with strong religious beliefs may be more likely to have more traditional attitudes about gender roles. Although there is a great variation in how religious practice and belief will impact on the life of an individual, it must be considered that there may be some influence on the gender construction of a child raised within a faith. Much has been written on the subject which lies beyond the scope of this review. Similarly, race, as a contributing factor to a child's development, is a significant topic too broad to be included within the realms of this study. It should, however, be considered as an important contributing element in the socialisation process and the intersectional approach to analysis of data will take a holistic approach to the understanding of an individual.

3.3.3 Social class

Skelton (2001) suggests that the masculinities and femininities encouraged within families may vary within social classes. She also notes that in the working-class communities that she studied, white working-class boys, in particular, were likely to conform to the traditional tough stereotypical roles expected of them with the consequence that their behaviour in school was not conducive to academic success. Renold (2007, p279) notes from her ethnographic study in two UK schools that those boys who continued to invest in their "alternative masculinities" were white, middle-class high-achievers. She defines alternative masculinities as those, for example, who disliked football or who were quiet and studious. Both studies suggest that pervasive gender stereotypes may be more dominant amongst working class children. Reay (2017) observes that, regardless of race and gender, working class children describe a powerful sense of injustice about the way they are seen and treated but cites extensive research documenting, in particular, white, working-class boys' sense of futility in relation to formal, school-based learning. These comments echo the seminal work of Willis (1977) in his ethnographic study of a group of working-class schoolboys resisting the demands of their school to conform to middle-class values through a culture of machismo and the denigration of academia. Skeggs (2004) argues that there are strong parallels between the generation of classifications of social class and the production of sexuality and gender. In her earlier work, Skeggs (1997) recalled that, due to the working-class woman's quest for respectability, she often adapted her behaviour to fit with a feminine and caring role that was expected of her. These considerations of how social class can have a bearing on perceptions of gender may be of significance in the deconstruction of gender with the individuals in this study.

3.4 Mesosphere

The mesosphere considers the interaction between micro and exo layers. For the purposes of this study, these interactions include the way that local authority policy is interpreted by local schools and how schools can influence local authorities. In terms of the messages received by a child, the parents' work may be relevant in a number of ways. Firstly, as a role model to their offspring, since it is suggested that children may follow their parents into certain roles, aspiring to these shared goals (Archer *et al*, 2013). Secondly, the work that a parent does may impact on the child in that it may take them away from the home, reducing the hours spent with the child. It may also affect the parent's attitude, stress levels or ability to interact with the child (Beutell, 2010). Additionally, the parent or the child may be influenced by issues of status associated with the parent's occupation which could have further repercussions (Ermisch and Francesconi, 2001). It is also relevant to consider how the parents and school interrelate. Are the messages received by the child at odds or in line? Skelton (2001) suggests that middle-class masculinities can be supported by teachers whereas in the working-class communities which she observed, a violent and machismo ideal was presented by role models in the community which conflicted with the messages given at school.

3.5 Microsphere

3.5.1 Family

Parents and primary carers can make a significant impression on a child. Vygotsky (1978) suggests that a parent is a child's first educator, scaffolding their understanding of the world. Researchers such as Mischel (1966) and McHale *et al* (2001) have suggested that they have an early and long-lasting effect on their offspring's construction of gender. Witt (1997, p259) notes that parents who "espouse an egalitarian view regarding gender roles" are likely to pass these on to their children and, she continues, this has positive implications for the children's self-esteem and for their sense of self unhindered by gender. Similarly, Dawson *et al*'s (2016) study shows that during middle childhood, parental influence continues to affect gender role attitudes. However, it notes that siblings within families may be dissimilar in terms of their gendered attitudes, personality traits and preferences, suggesting that individuals respond differently to their parents' attitudes and behaviours (Dawson *et al*, 2016). This appears to support the notion that whilst parents do have an influence on their offspring's attitudes, they are not the sole influence.

Although the westernised perception of the 'nuclear family' persists, increasingly we are presented with a range of familial structures. With the concept of the family constantly evolving, it is important to consider that we must think of the family as consisting of a plethora of permutations, all valid and all important for the child. When considering the impact of family on the development and socialisation of the child, it is advisable to consider the predominant carers for the child who have a significant influence, regular contact and an authoritative and/or nurturing role in the child's life. These may include parents, step-parents, foster carers or many other possibilities. McDowall Clark (2020) describes the concept of family as an activity, or family practices to be undertaken, rather than a social form.

In whatever form, in early childhood, family begins to have an impact on children's awareness of gender. Lytton and Romney (1991), in their analysis of a wide range of studies into parents' differential socialisation of boys and girls, called into question earlier studies by Fagot (1978) and Block (1978), which ascribe gender differences in younger children to the behaviour of their parents. They suggest that whilst fathers, in particular, are more likely to treat sons and daughters differently and are more likely to use physical punishment on sons than on daughters, overall, the effect size of the differential behaviours was deemed minimal. In contrast, more recent studies do appear to show support for the idea that early gender socialisation is occurring in the home. Karraker *et al* (1995), for example, observed how parents perceived different facial features and traits in their newborn boys and girls. Mondshein *et al* (2000) set up a slope for 11-month-old babies to climb. Despite there being no difference in the performance of the male and female babies, there was a marked difference in the mothers' expectations for the performance of baby sons and baby daughters with the mothers of girls predicting failure and the mothers of boys predicting success. Despite the small sample size in the investigation (23 infants were observed), the marked difference in the mothers' expectations is notable as an example of how parents may unwittingly pass on their own conceptions about gender to their offspring.

Gender-normative behaviour is commonly reinforced by parents (Martin, 2009). Interestingly, however, one US study by Kane (2006) indicates that gender-nonconformity is met with a range of responses by parents. Conducting 42 interviews with a diverse sample of parents (in terms of class, sexuality and ethnicity), Kane (ibid) undertook a qualitative study to analyse parents' perceptions of their children's gendered attributes and behaviour. Although there were some occurrences of gender stereotyping, the research found that boys demonstrating nurturing skills, or the acquisition of domestic skills were in many instances met with approval by parents though fathers seemed to be less enthusiastic. Despite the small sample size, the variety and nature of the responses presents a

broad range of viewpoints regarding parents' attitudes towards their children's gender non-conformity. Leve and Fagot (1997) suggest that single-parent families convey less traditional gender role socialisation than two-parent families, and children in lesbian families have been observed to feel less parental pressure to conform to gender stereotypes and be less likely to experience their own gender as superior (Bos and Sanfort, 2010). Based on a review of 21 studies, Stacey and Biblarz (2001) argue that children with lesbian and gay parents are more likely to depart from traditional gender roles.

In modern Britain, many parents may choose to dress their sons and daughters differently (Department for Education, 2011), decorate their bedrooms in shades of pink and blue (Ruble and Martin, 1998, p974) and even give them different toys (Francis, 2010) encouraging early gender-stereotypical behaviour amongst some. This is a contemporary Western behaviour which has not always been observed nor is it practised worldwide. A US study by Boe and Woods (2018) showed that by 12 months, their sample of children were already showing a preference for gender stereotypical toys. Their preference was linked to the types of toys present in the home, suggesting gender-typical toy preferences may be negated by providing a range of toys in infancy to promote optimal development. Martin (2011) and Eliot (2018) argue that play matters, because it is through play that children act out and begin to perform their own gender. The play opportunities that parents/carers offer their children has been seen to vary based on the child's gender (Kollmayer *et al*, 2018). These varied play opportunities may encourage children to alter their behaviour or lead to the development of different skills (McPhee and Prendergast, 2018; Orenstein, 2011). Francis (2010) argues that this early play could affect curriculum choices and thus career choices later in life. It seems that there are numerous ways, then, in which parents and carers influence the early gender construction of their offspring.

3.5.2 Early childhood care and education

Beyond the family, other carers in the early years can play a significant role including foster carers and childminders (McDowall Clark, 2020). From a very young age, gender socialisation is taking place not only in the home but in other settings of the child's microsystem. Early caregivers such as childcare or day nurseries may also influence the child's gender construction and prior to entering primary school, some children, who have been through the early childhood education system, may have already experienced gendered approaches. Good practice in early years' settings would avoid replicating the kinds of inequities observed in other studies (Heikkinen, 2016). For example, Chick *et*

al (2002, p150) observed, in a five-week ethnographic study based in a Pennsylvanian child-care centre that:

- Boys received more attention than girls, even when there were fewer of them
- Boys exerted more power and control when their numbers were equal to females
- Girls were praised for their dress, hairstyles, and helping behaviours, while boys received more comments on their size and physical skills
- Caregivers used linguistic bias when communicating with children
- Gender separation in selection of toys, activities, and playmates was set by age 3
- The toys that are available to children were often stereotyped.

A literature review by the Fawcett Society (2018) which notes the significant role that early educators can play in the construction of gender of young children, suggests that gender stereotypes are reproduced in early education through a number of means including teachers' attitudes and expectations of children, gendered materials, peer interaction and gender imbalance in staff.

3.5.3 School Culture and Values

The culture and values of a school will heavily impact on the experience of its pupils. If the values are the core traits and qualities that represent the guiding principles of a school, they will form the foundation of how its staff and pupils behave. The ethos of a school refers to the character or atmosphere of the school whereas a school culture describes the shared experiences and common behaviour that evolve over the school's history, going beyond its structures, resources, and practices to include the beliefs, perceptions, relationships and attitudes (Solvason, 2005). Much of this is written into school policy but a great deal of it may be unwritten or unspoken but understood by staff, pupils and visitors to the establishment.

Sarason (1971) suggests that to understand the culture of a school it is necessary to observe patterns of behaviour. He acknowledges the importance of individuals' behaviour but deems the ecological approach across the school even more significant. In many institutions, power is held by the head teacher (Sarason, ibid) who is frequently responsible for steering the culture of a school in any one direction, with their own personal values aligning with those central to school policy however, Deal and Peterson (2016) argue that successful schools have leadership emanating from many people. External mandates imposed on schools will also play a role in the development of policy within a school however the importance of school culture and the symbolic roles of its leaders in shaping

patterns and practices must not be overlooked. Examining how a shared set of values, passion and purpose create a school culture, Deal and Peterson (2016) argue that change requires deeply ingrained cultural support at a local level.

Warin (2017) and Desimone (2002) suggest that school values are pervasive, and that policy and pedagogy depend on the ethos of an institution as well as the values of an individual teacher. Within this review, areas of influence that a school may exert are examined individually which might all come under the bracket of 'school culture'. The aims and cultural values of a school will be evident within their policy, the shaping of their curriculum, their attitudes to teaching practice, their recruitment, the use of language and the school environment.

Other factors which I suggest may influence pupils' attitudes to gender are:

- Policy
- Curriculum
- Teachers' language
- Teachers' attitudes
- Teachers as role models
- Other teaching and non-teaching staff
- Resources
- Learning environment
- Peers

A UNESCO literature review into gender socialisation, carried out by Stromquist (2007), noted that the majority of research undertaken in this field takes place in the UK, the USA, Canada and Australia. After analysing international studies from a ten-year period, Stromquist (2007, p30) asserted that:

> Schools engage in substantial gender ideology formation and transmission through classroom practices, teachers' attitudes and expectations, and the intense but rather invisible work of peers.

Stromquist (2007) also noted that most public education policies overlooked the role of schools to promote gender equality and suggested little progress had been detected in that area in the prior decade. These conclusions were based on a range of international literature and therefore it must be understood that they were broad-ranging and covered a huge amount of data, however, the significance of the conclusions is worth examining for their relevance in the UK. In a more recent review of the literature concerning gender equality in the early years, Culhane and Bazely (2019) draw similar conclusions, noting how young children's opportunities appear to be restricted by gender stereotypes.

The school environment appears to place a value on gender over other ways of organising pupils with, as Bem observed: "…society's ubiquitous insistence on the functional importance of the gender dichotomy" (Bem, 1998, p362). Similarly, Paechter (2007, p77) argues that educational establishments are set up to embrace this process of labelling, suggesting that "School is an institution that … selects, labels and sorts children." This constant classification of pupils emphasises sameness and difference. Examples include pupils' segregation by age, in year groups and classes; constant monitoring and assessment, often associated with ability grouping; arbitrary grouping for example by house; and classification by gender.

In the 1980s and 1990s, a number of studies suggested concern about the inequalities in our education system (Macleod, 1988; Stanworth, 1981; Weiner, 1994), indicating that girls tended to lack self confidence in the classroom (Spender, 1982). On the other hand, Weiner's (1994) research indicated that boys were overtly confident, leading to some teachers assessing them to be more able than the girls. Teachers wanting to initiate change faced "enormous inertia" from some of their colleagues (Smith, 1986, p16). Skelton's (1989) research suggested that, in primary schools, boys commandeered practical equipment and girls were pushed to the periphery of the classroom, metaphorically and literally. She makes the assertion that student teachers were themselves likely to have experienced discriminatory attitudes and practices when they attended school and '*learned*' that boys are noisier, more disruptive and better at technical subjects.

From the 1990s onwards, as girls began to outperform boys academically in the UK in certain areas, the discourse changed. A raft of studies into "failing boys" and how to raise attainment for particular groups of boys shifted the focus of the ongoing inequality debate (Bleach, 1998; Francis, 2000; Francis and Skelton, 2001). Skelton and Francis (2009) have argued that this preoccupation with raising boys' attainment has led some schools to misguidedly use gender stereotypical books about 'strong' male characters in an attempt to engage boys in writing which may inadvertently increase gender differences, whereas they have shown that this attainment gap is most significantly reduced where gender differences are minimised and schools pay particular attention to promoting equality and reducing gender constructions.

3.5.4 The Learning Environment

Schools have been viewed as feminized arenas (Skelton, 2001) whilst promoting a masculine competitive ethos (Paechter, 2007). Paechter (2007, p79) purports that it is:

> extremely difficult for girls to construct femininities that involve publicly celebrating, enjoying or even taking ownership of their academic achievement without a strong risk of permanent peripherality.

This argument is perhaps contrary to research by Younger and Warrington (2005), who suggest that a willingness to take responsibility for their own learning is a characteristic of girls. Nuttall and Doherty (2014) describe how disaffected students, typically white British boys, frequently display aggressive and disruptive behaviours and an apathy to learning which seem to frame the classroom as an uncomfortable and forbidding environment for certain groups of children.

In a study in Denmark, Heikkinen (2016) observed that boys and girls are typically expected to have different needs and abilities. In the classroom, it was suggested, the girls are often paired with boys, so as to keep the boys quiet, with children often divided according to gender when it comes to planning group activities. These boy-girl seating arrangements have also been observed in the UK (Ivinson and Murphy, 2003; Skelton and Francis, 2009) and may continue in some classrooms today where girls may be expected to regulate the behaviour of boys. This once again perpetuates the silly/sensible dichotomy (Francis, 1998) in which teachers expect boys to be unable to sit still (Myhill and Jones, 2006). Warrington *et al* (2003) suggest children are aware of teachers' different attitudes and expectations to boys' and girls' behaviour. Datnow and Hubbard (2013) describe their experiences in a school which, in the name of respect, expected pupils to stand to greet only female teachers and visitors. This strict discipline, they surmised, instilled a sense of male privilege and authority. Further examples of segregation during the course of the school day may include toilets and changing rooms, cloakrooms and possibly lining up separately for movement around school. Constant reinforcement of difference may hinder the concept of gender equality and should be minimised where possible. It is certainly worth teachers reflecting on the decisions made to separate children, when and why they were made, and what benefits they hold.

Another example of how the school environment can promote or challenge gender stereotypes is in the use of displays. Some schools seek to fairly represent diversity whilst in other settings this may be overlooked. Looking around a school at the images of famous historians, scientists, artists and so on, can provide a clue to the school's position on diversity. Similarly, representations of family around school may vary. In some settings, mothers may be presented as primary carers and assumptions may be made regarding home arrangements. Van Leent (2017) asserts that schools can be places

where heteronormativity can impact on teachers' attitudes and pupils' experiences and Guasp, Ellison, and Satara (2014) suggest that homophobic bullying remains prolific in British primary schools. On the other hand, some schools seek to represent family as a diverse range of options. The *No Outsiders Project*, for example, has introduced participating schools to books and resources which portray families beyond the heteronormative examples of vintage literature (DePalma, 2010).

School uniform may also be an instant visual cue to gender differentiation. Traditionally, school uniform has meant skirts or dresses for girls and trousers or shorts for boys. It is common but not universal now for primary schools with a school uniform policy to have relaxed these rules with many allowing girls to dress in trousers if they wish and for a minority of schools introducing policy inviting pupils to choose a skirt or trousers regardless of gender (Mroz, 2017).

A school committed to eradicating gender stereotypes may also avoid the casual use of gender stereotypic colour or logos. Providing rewards, presents and prizes decorated with football motifs and butterflies could easily reinforce common stereotypes. Orenstein (2011) suggests that this poses a danger to children at an impressionable age and describes how children socialised to desire these stereotypes become hungry for more, encouraged by a marketing machine built to feed them.

3.5.5 Curriculum

Paechter (2007) suggests that children develop an understanding of their gender based on messages received in school through texts, the curriculum and teachers' performances. The formal curriculum delivers the subjects and content that has been agreed is necessary to teach our children the skills and knowledge they need to equip them for useful work in society. The hidden curriculum delivers value messages about what it means to be part of society and our place within it (Renzetti, Curran and Maier 2014). Skelton (1997, p188) defines the hidden curriculum as,

> that set of implicit messages relating to knowledge, values, norms of behaviour and attitudes that learners experience in and through educational processes. These messages may be contradictory, non-linear and punctuational and each learner mediates the message in her/his own way.

These messages are delivered through the resources chosen and teachers' performances. As each teacher has their own gendered experience, so any number of hidden curricula may be delivered. Supporting a post-modernist approach to researching the hidden curriculum, Skelton (1997, p189) endorses the theory that social change may be considered a "local affair". She suggests that strategies to bring about change, which are culturally and historically bound, should be assessed for their usefulness. These theories have been considered in the research design of this project.

The National Curriculum came into effect in England and Wales in 1988 (Arnot *et al*, 1999). Apple (2013) calls into question the notion of a national curriculum, asking questions about the power implications of who deems the knowledge to be relevant for inclusion, suggesting it may support a homogeneous way of life-giving selective version of national culture and social identity. He asserts that contemporary curricular practices are likely to reproduce existing racial, class and gender-based inequality, citing the English system as perpetuating long standing forms of structural inequality. These assertions are at odds with the UK government guidance which encourages schools to build their own curricula of which the national curriculum forms a part (DfE, 2013) and also to ignore the possibility of teachers having autonomy over what and how they teach. Priestly *et al* (2015, p58) suggest that teacher beliefs may be more "malleable" than some researchers believe as environmental factors may constrain a teacher's scope for independent action and judgment. They argue that teacher agency is dependent upon both individuals' capacities and environmental conditions, namely the cultures, structures and relationships in which they work. Within this study, it was relevant to understand how teacher beliefs are developed and how a variety of approaches may exist with some teachers executing the will of others whilst others feeling they have professional autonomy.

Educational beliefs tend to derive from prior experiences and critical incidents in an individual's past and can strongly influence a teacher's behaviour (Nespor, 1987). Some suggest that teacher beliefs, based on early childhood experiences, are difficult to alter even when faced with contradictory experience (Pajares, 1992) whilst others argue that powerful professional development can alter teachers' beliefs (Borg, 2011). Meirink *et al* (2009) suggest that teachers may change their beliefs in response to teacher education programmes, though possibly in contradictory ways, namely some teachers in their study changed their beliefs in support of the aims of the reform whilst others had experimented with methods contrary to the reform. Tillema and Knol (1997, p582) suggest that the procedure of 'belief change' occurs as one recognises one's current beliefs and evaluates one's own perspective before making a decision to change and reconstructing a revised knowledge structure. Elements of this process have been adopted within this study which will be further discussed in chapter four.

Griffin (2018) and Roberts and Pinkett (2019) argue that to promote equality schools must offer a curriculum which actively challenges sexism. Pupils can be educated to recognise and challenge sexist remarks (Lamb *et al*, 2009). Organisations such as Lifting Limits (2022), Gender Action (2022) and Gender Respect Project (DECSY, 2022) suggest that, through a whole school approach and progressive curriculum, even young children can be taught to recognise and question gender

stereotypes. Weiner (1994) recommends making changes to the curriculum and to classroom organisation that allow for increased participation of girls and women, encouraging educators to ask critical questions about the curriculum and breaking down hierarchies that exclude girls. This requires an understanding of power relations which echoes the work of Foucault (1977) which is referred to in chapter two.

3.5.6 Resources

When considering the role of children's literature in shaping early readers' constructions of gender, it would appear, through a study of titles, that little has changed in the past 50 years to move away from the gender stereotypical roles which were portrayed in the past. Analysis of prize-winning and popular children's fiction in the US shows fathers portrayed as breadwinners, disciplinarians or absent, whilst mothers are largely represented at home, as primary carers and quick to express their emotions (Anderson and Hamilton, 2005; Trepanier-Street and Romatowski, 1999). Even the illustrations of children's books seem to conform to these stereotypical notions according to a New Zealand study (Jackson and Gee, 2005) which found that amongst a random selection of school texts, girls and boys were illustrated in differing poses with for example girls clutching or cuddling objects (such as dolls) close to their bodies but with boys holding objects at arm's length. These subtle cues were deemed by the researchers to create a construction of masculinity and femininity which would be observed and emulated by the readers. In the past, research has suggested that sexist books in schools were damaging pupils' understanding of equality and reinforcing gender stereotypes (Adler *et al*, 1992, p169).

More recent analysis suggests positive change with children's literature representing more diversity (De Palma, 2016; Epstein, 2013). A Barcelona school received media attention for removing 200 children's books from the school shelves which were deemed sexist (Flood, 2019). Olika, a publishing house in Sweden, publishes books which aim to reflect to children contemporary lifestyles, seeking to represent all groups and living situations. Their books represent a significant change from some titles from reading schemes of the past. The influence of such resources on children's attitudes is considered within this study, as well as teacher's role in the selection of resources.

3.5.7 The Teacher

Teachers, amongst many other socialising factors, may continue to support gender-stereotypical messages, which build on the early construction of gender that has taken place in the home and early

years settings (Duffy *et al*, 2001; Gunderson *et al*, 2012; Fromberg, 2005). Teachers have been shown to influence their pupils' attitudes to gender (Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2012). For example, adults have been observed using different language with boys and girls at nursery school, girls continue to receive more terms of endearment and girls' appearance and clothing are more regularly discussed than boys' (Chick *et al*, 2002). Wingrave (2018) observed that a group of early years' teachers, who believed that they did not create a gendered environment and as professionals they do not gender, universally accepted claims that girls are better able to express their feelings and that boys were more physically active. It has been suggested that within the classroom, even competent and experienced teachers are often unaware of the implicit and explicit gendered messages they pass on through teaching and learning (De Groot & Kim, 2011). Stereotyping based on gender, ethnicity, family income and other factors appears to form biases in teacher judgement of pupils' ability and attainment (Campbell, 2015). Myhill and Jones (2006) suggest that teachers take to their classrooms stereotypical assumptions and expectations which may influence their pupils' construction of gender which Francis (2000) suggests can affect the way they interact and communicate with pupils.

Analyses of US government data from kindergartens, suggested that boys were more likely to show disruptive conduct in class and less positive orientations to learning activities (Zill and West, 2001), echoing UK studies which indicated that on average boys and girls will experience different feedback from teachers in schools, with boys likely to receive reprimands in terms of behaviour and girls receiving more praise (Morgan, 2001; Skelton, 1989). Furthermore, the nature and content of interaction between teachers and pupils may differ. Female pupils were observed receiving more positive feedback relating to their classroom conduct and presentation of their work whereas male pupils received more competence related feedback (Duffy *et al*, 2001; Dweck *et al*, 1978). Whether teachers favour one gender over another has been contested and has appears to have changed over time. Earlier studies suggested that teachers were more inclined to invite responses from and praise boys (Duffy *et al*, 2001; Sadker and Sadker, 1994), whereas more recent research suggests this phenomenon has reversed and that teachers favour girls (Consuegra and Engels, 2016).

Another relevant study in this area is the work of Hamilton and Roberts (2017): an ethnographic case study in a rural primary school in North Wales. The discoveries of this small-scale study demonstrate the prevalence of traditional ideas of gender roles in this community. The nature of the study provides rich data which are analysed to draw conclusions about how gender is constructed and the role of teachers and peers in reinforcing stereotypical views. It calls for further research into how these can be challenged and into the situation in other settings. This UK based study suggests that daily micro inequities, created unwittingly by teachers, contribute to the overall practice of gender

role construction which was described as prevalent in schools decades ago (Thorne, 1993). These findings are particularly relevant to this study in that they suggest that teachers' daily practice has a significant impact on pupils' gender construction.

Bigler and Liben (2007) used formal intervention studies to examine the impact of exposure to counter stereotypical models on children's gender role attitudes. Creating and manipulating novel groups, they were able to create opportunities for empirical study, by providing groups of children with new situations in which they were dressed, for example, in t-shirts of different colours and assigned meaning to these groupings. By regularly commenting on the colour of the t-shirts, asking the children to line up by t-shirt colour or even positing positive or negative reinforcement about what it meant to be part of that grouping, these researchers were able to compare children's responses to the control groups. After observing large numbers of children in a variety of scenarios, these studies appear to indicate the impact of teacher input on the development of prejudices (Bigler and Liben, 2007). The potential implications of these theories are that through unintentionally sharing messages about the strengths and weaknesses of boys or girls, teachers may inadvertently affect pupils' behaviour and understanding of the world. This could, for example, include a teacher choosing the winner of the weekly maths prize to be a boy for several weeks in a row, with the consequence that girls begin to underperform in maths. Or, by commenting regularly on girls' appearance, a teacher may unconsciously pass on the message to all girls that appearance matters more for them than it does for boys. Bigler and Liben's (2007) study is reminiscent of the blue eyes / brown eyes experiment carried out by Jane Elliott, a US teacher, in the 1970s to highlight the perils of racism to her class (Sanchez, 2017). During the experiment, Elliott gave privileges to children with blue eyes which led them to begin to see their brown-eyed peers as inferior and to treat them badly. The inverse patterns were observed when she reversed the 'superior' group and gave privileges to the brown-eyed children.

Teachers can unknowingly use language that endorses cultural gender stereotypes and prejudices, for example showing preferences for same gender individuals. They can model gender stereotypic behaviour which is emulated by their pupils and can regularly reinforce the importance of gender labelling by using it as a tool for classroom organisation and for grouping (Bigler and Liben, 2007). The habitual use of naming children with the group label of Boys or Girls is common. When describing a character in a story, a nurse or a mechanic, it takes a concerted effort to override deeply embedded learnt notions and not to lapse into gender stereotypes. Even the assumed roles at home are frequently encountered as teachers ask children to "Get your mum to sew in a name label'" or "Ask Dad to give you a hand to fix it." Sadker and Sadker (1994) assert that boys can expect to receive

more positive feedback relating to their academic performance and more attention generally in the classroom but more negative feedback relating to their classroom behaviour and presentation, resulting in boys learning that they are bright but rowdy and girls that they are less academically gifted but can receive praise through behaving well and being quiet (Renzetti, Curran and Maier, 2014). It is this range of behaviours which I am inviting teachers to analyse and deconstruct through this study.

3.5.8 Other teaching and non-teaching staff

Whilst the role of the teacher as an agent of socialisation has been discussed, it should also be remembered that many other adults act as role models within schools, including teaching assistants, the management team, lunchtime supervisors, site managers, cleaners, administrators, volunteers and many other visiting adults. There is little research into the specific role of these individuals in maintaining or challenging gender stereotypes in schools, yet their part in maintaining a whole school culture of equality is significant. Teaching assistants, in particular, in a primary school are significantly influential through their daily interaction with pupils, imparting knowledge and sharing their own values as well as those of the school. The role of the teaching assistant has changed significantly, evolving from "pot washer" to para-professional and pedagogue (Clarke, 2019, p263). Reviewing literature pertaining to teaching assistants' gender, Clarke (2019) suggests that characteristics of the teaching assistant role are often considered as pertaining to women and, in particular, to a "mothering role". Consequently, pupils may add this experience to their developing gender schemas in addition to any other messages implicit or explicit being delivered by teaching assistants.

3.5.9 Peers

Prior to commencing school, children have already been significantly influenced by the world around them. Studies suggest, however, that it is in the first years of schooling that attitudes and expectations about what it is to be a boy or a girl really become significant (Bigler *et al* 2013; Eliot 1999; Thorne 1993; Walkerdine 1998). Blaise (2005) argues that through their talk and actions, children create and recreate their own meaning of gender. Through the primary years, boys' and girls' peer cultures become established with clear differences between the two (Goble *et al*, 2012; Lever, 1976). Individuals who lean more towards a feminine or masculine ideal may enjoy greater popularity amongst their peers with higher status afforded to boys who are "athletic, cool and tough" (Adler *et al*, 1992). Martino (1999) describes the normative pressure applied to a group of boys to adopt

certain practices in an attempt to become *cool boys.* Children may be concerned about maintaining sex-type behaviour because assimilation into their peer group requires them to conform to group norms (Harris, 1995). Distinctions between the sex-segregated groups become important and belief in the "superiority of one's own group is a necessary component of self-esteem for the group" (Halpern, 1997 p1097). A more recent US study found that adolescents felt pressure to conform to gender norms with a significant impact on gender identity (Kornienko *et al*, 2016). A review of the literature suggests that that peers can influence children's understanding and enactment of gender.

Entering school, children encounter other children who influence them. At primary school, they will come into contact with older children who act as "staging posts on the journey to adulthood" (Paechter, 2007, p77). Many of these peers will model traditional gendered behaviour, reinforcing gender stereotypes. Children tend to choose same-gender playmates and this gender segregation further reinforces these stereotypes. Observing pre-school children, it was noted that the amount of time spent in same-sex peer groups appeared to reflect the extent to which the child displayed gender stereotypical behaviour (Martin and Fabes, 2001). This gender segregation may affect their play experiences, resulting in more time spent in "stereotypic play" (Goble *et al*, 2012, p435). Mayeza (2017), Lamb *et al* (2009) and Liben and Bigler (2002) observe that peers consciously 'teach' their classmates stereotypes and punish them for failing to conform to stereotypes. However, intervention by educators has been shown to teach young children to recognize and challenge their peers' sexist remarks (Lamb *et al*, 2009). A South African study analysing peer interactions on the playground examined the ways in which children monitor and regulate each other's behaviour and, in particular, exposed how girls were policed and prevented from participating in sport on the playground (Mayeza, 2017). This phenomenon was similarly encountered by Skelton (2001) in the UK.

Foucault's (1977) premise of disciplinary power can be seen to have a dramatic effect as children look around to their peers and seek to fit in. The result of this is that in many cases children have become aware of their own identity as male or female and have absorbed the multitude of messages around them to segregate the two ideas and begun to adapt to one. By age 3, children are thought to be aware of their own gender and the peak of *pink and blue* thinking has been suggested to be age 5 (Martin, Ruble, and Szkrybalo, 2002). At this stage, it is argued, children are most constrained by gender norms as they have been exposed to a wealth of messages conveying men and women in particular roles but before they have become aware of exceptions to the rules they have observed.

Considering how these perceptions develop throughout primary school, we can draw upon the ethnographic fieldwork undertaken by Renold (2006) into the sexualisation of pupils in their final

year of primary school. The study highlights how a hetero-normative discourse pervaded in the setting, exploring the ways in which children interact and experiment with romantic and sexual roles as 'girlfriends' and 'boyfriends'. Attitudes amongst older children however appear to be changing. Bragg *et al* (2018) discovered, when talking to young people, that gender diversity is dramatically changing ideas about gender identity and equality in educational contexts and beyond.

Paechter (2007) suggests that children show their membership of communities of masculinity and femininity practice through how the body is clothed. In school uniform, this is frequently beyond the personal choice of the pupil. However, Paechter (ibid) also introduces us to the complexity of the landscape, suggesting that different clothing styles can be associated with different femininities, bringing to mind Reay's (2001) depiction of the girls in one class as being tribal: nice girls, Spice girls and tomboys and demonstrating their belonging through how they choose to dress as well as how they behave and who they associate with. Teachers will be familiar with battles over girls' hair adornments and those pushing the boundaries of school uniform with glittery tights or forbidden jewellery. Many school uniform policies attempt to set the acceptable parameters of masculinities and femininities by prohibiting or proscribing the wearing of trousers or skirts and dictating what is appropriate and inappropriate adornment. An undercurrent of performance and a desire to fit in with social norms is interwoven with these physical representations of femininity (Butler, 1990). Wanting to be the same as others within your peer group appears to be a comfort.

3.5.10 Challenging attitudes

Returning to Smith's (1986, p16) experience that teachers wanting to initiate change faced "enormous inertia", it is pertinent to consider the scope for contemporary change. A common theme in the conclusions of literature in this field is that more needs to be done to promote gender equality (Culhane and Bazely, 2019; Aina and Cameron, 2011; Elliott, 2018; Hamilton and Roberts, 2017; Skelton and Francis, 2009) with some authors describing potential barriers to change (Roberts and Pinkett, 2019; Griffin, 2018; Myhill and Jones, 2006; Skelton and Francis, 2009).

Culhane and Bazely (2019) argue that many teachers feel helpless to bring about change. They also conclude that some resistance to change comes from a belief that gender equality may equate to a characterless or "beige" world (Culhane and Bailey, 2019, p32). DePalma (2010) suggests that seeking to bring about change requires activists to be working at the breach of the norm, engaging with it, in each case deciding if it is to be negotiated with, resisted or conceded to. Hamilton and Roberts (2017, p133) call for

practitioners to become more reflexively aware of the constraints of normalised gendered discourses and to incorporate multiple ways of thinking, working and doing gender in classrooms.

The barriers to which may be time or knowledge rather than apathy. Apple's (2013) argument that the heavy workload of teachers prevents many from reflecting on their practice or initiating individual change to the curriculum could, in part, explain this situation. It appears that society has been slow to adopt attitudes which were at the *breach of the norm* decades ago, to actively promote gender equality. This may be as there is resistance to disaffect the status quo because it benefits those who hold the power. Reluctance within an organisation to promote gender equality could be a manifestation of a patriarchal hegemony (Spender, 1982). If teachers' attitudes reflect the normal distribution of society, it could be assumed that these views will proliferate for future generations. Consequently, it is necessary for individual professionals to seek to initiate change. What draws certain teachers to embrace critical pedagogy will be considered in the next chapter.

3.5.11 What next for primary schools?

Across the literature reviewed, three goals emerged: first that educators hold a belief of equality as intrinsic; secondly, to provide equality of opportunity; the third, most ambitious aim, sought various forms of equality of outcome, focussing on attainment or aspiration - for example academic outcomes between genders.

Recent research has shown that gender socialisation is evident but that the processes leading to gender differentiated outcomes are not understood, suggesting teachers need training to recognize their own explicit and implicit biases and how these affect their classroom behaviour and pedagogy (Bigler *et al*, 2013). Previously, Buchmann *et al* (2008) called for research on how the structure and practices of schooling relate to gender differences in educational outcomes and asked how can research examine the influences of parents' and teachers' perceptions and behaviours on children, when these perceptions and behaviours are themselves shaped by children's personalities and behaviours?

In order to affect change, Aikman *et al* (2005) recommend a cohesive approach from stakeholders including policy makers and government officials, teacher trainers, school heads and teachers. They propose that schools and teachers need to work with communities and parents for success, advocating an integrated, coherent approach with good communication. In particular, they argue that: "policies need to be translated into practical curricular and pedagogical responses which challenge gender inequalities and pay particular attention to eradicating abusive or violent relations"

(Aikman *et al* 2005 p52). This study focuses on the impact that teachers may have in promoting equality. Whilst it is recognised that a wider reaching approach is most effective in bringing about change, the aim of the study is consciously focused on the interest of rigorous academic endeavour. The role that teachers play is explored. The literature review has therefore highlighted potential for further research into the collaboration with other stakeholders.

There are a number of bodies already working towards these goals. For example, Lifting Limits (2022), a UK based non-governmental organisation has been set up to encourage schools to examine the part they play in perpetuating or challenging gender stereotypes and to equip their pupils to demand a more gender-equal world, whilst engaging parents and carers in these conversations. Similarly, Gender Action, a partnership founded by the Institute of Physics, UCL's Institute of Education, Kings College London and the University Council of Modern Languages, has initiated an award programme which promotes and supports a whole school approach to challenging stereotypes, encouraging schools to ensure all young people can reach their full potential (Gender Action, 2022). Other charities and organisations working in this field include Stonewall, Mermaids, the National Union of Teachers and the Fawcett Society.

3.5.12 Investigating teachers' role in promoting gender equality

Through this chapter, I have argued that a body of research exists to demonstrate that the individual's understanding and experience of gender and how it may impact on their life is influenced by a whole host of factors, of which one is the school. It is evident that gender stereotypes can affect the lives of children and may play a part in perpetuating gender inequality, resulting in disparities in achievement, expectations and goals in adulthood. In the interests of freedom of choice and raising the aspirations and achievements of all, schools should play a role in promoting gender equality. Government policy, school policy and teacher attitudes will all affect the experience of a pupil within the education system, and all will be affected by wider societal norms. Studies indicate that teachers' relationships with their pupils, the messages they convey both explicitly and implicitly and their performance in the classroom can all impact on pupils' gender construction. Learning from these prior studies and grounded in this knowledge, this study seeks to analyse how teachers' attitudes to gender have been constructed and how, through reflecting on this, teachers can promote gender equality in their classrooms.

Chapter Four
Methodology

This chapter explains how I came to choose the methodological approaches that I did, the ontological and epistemological grounding for these and how they are aligned to my own values. I explain the end research design and the justification for my choices.

In summary, the ontology is post-modernist, accepting there are multiple truths or varied understandings of gender. The epistemic perspective is that these understandings of gender are individually interpreted but societally constructed. From this position, qualitative data were sought to understand teachers' individual perspectives of their own gender constructions and the implications these had on their pedagogy. Life history interviews were conducted with 14 primary school teachers. Employing feminist critical theory, the data were thematically analysed. The process is fully explained within the chapter.

Throughout the chapter, I discuss the ethicality of my decisions. I also explain how my epistemological approach came to influence the data collection tools and analysis techniques which were ultimately employed. Pseudonyms are used throughout for the schools and participants to protect confidentiality. The chapter begins and ends with a summary of the research methods.

4.1 Summary of Research Methods

In depth, one-to-one semi-structured life history interviews were conducted with 14 teachers, recruited from 5 primary schools in the Midlands and London. These interviews were designed principally to explore the ways in which teachers' life histories shaped their understandings of gender and their classroom practices. Within each interview, the teachers reflected on the influences who had shaped their attitudes and the way that these attitudes may have impacted on their pedagogic approaches and daily interaction with their pupils. These interviews were transcribed and the data thematically analysed to draw conclusions about the ways in which teachers' experiences affect their attitudes and the impact these have on their practice.

What emerged from the interviews was that the processes of reflection itself and the discussions within the interviews had in some cases helped the teachers to develop their understandings of gender and led them to change their practice. This conclusion led to another phase of data collection.

Following these interviews (up to six months later), a follow-up email was sent to each participant to ascertain the impact (if any) of their participation in the research on their practice. Of the teachers who replied, all reported that the interview had prompted them to reflect further on their role in influencing their pupils and that they had continued to amend their practice to promote gender equality.

4.2 Ontology

As outlined in chapter two, I adopted an interpretivist viewpoint (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) because each individual interprets their own understanding of what gender means, resulting in multiple versions. There are countless interpretations of femininities and masculinities and how these are represented and performed forms each individual's truth. Built on the premise that typical male or female behaviour does not exist, nor is there one pedagogical approach waiting to be discovered which will immediately eliminate gender stereotyping entirely, my aim was to explore the possible ways in which teachers' reflections on their own understandings of gender could more positively impact on the implicit messages they deliver in the classroom, consequently shaping the views of their pupils.

4.3 Epistemology

This study is grounded in the philosophical belief that knowledge is acquired and interpreted by humans collaboratively, each having an individual perspective. This means that this research is approached from the position that there is no single truth when it comes to gendered behaviour but that which we perceive as truth has ***evolved from our own lived experiences***.

Meaning and identity are created through language, experience and behaviour. This concept is based originally on the work of Berger and Luckmann (1966), who proposed that the way in which individuals and groups interact socially creates a set of concepts which are replicated by one another, a process they call *habitualization*. They suggest that this effect is reciprocal, with individuals influencing one another. When it spreads beyond, into a larger part of society, these concepts can be said to have been *institutionalized*, suggesting that reality is a social construct (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). My understanding is that we acquire socially developed constructions based on lived experiences which evolve from childhood into adulthood. Social phenomena, such as expectations for gendered behaviour, are therefore built on a shared language and shared experience. From this social constructionist perspective, my aim was to acquire knowledge concerning these interpretations in collaboration with a group of teachers, reflecting on both the

ways our beliefs and experiences affect our own construction of gender and the implied expectations we then relay to our pupils.

Popper (1972) argues that the essence of research begins with a problem and that the purpose and goal of the research is to find a solution to the problem. If positivist research is focussed on disproving or proving a theory, it suggests that there is already an answer in sight but with the challenge of combatting gender stereotyping amongst children, the issue is so *messy* that there can be no one clear solution. Indeed, Skelton (2007) and Ringrose (2007, 2013) warn of the danger of oversimplification of the issue or seeking to implement a one-size-fits-all response to the problem, endorsing the qualitative approach adopted within this study. Primary school teachers can play a part in tackling the challenge to enable children to reach their full potential through overcoming gender stereotypes. This led me to question my own practice and to explore the challenge with other teachers.

4.4 Methodology

I combined life histories with feminist theory and critical pedagogy to focus on understanding how primary schools can promote gender equality by encouraging teachers to reflect upon their own constructions of gender and their pedagogical approaches. In this section, I explain the appropriateness of each element of this methodology.

4.4.1 The researcher's role within the research

As described in chapter two, the origins of this research came from my role as a primary school teacher and my wish to understand and challenge the gender stereotyping that I was concerned persisted in school. My research stemmed from a desire to improve my teaching. At the outset, I was determined to have an impact on the pupils that I taught with the aim of challenging gender stereotyping to raise the aspirations of children.

The purpose and direction of this research were conceived in its early days whilst cogitating on how I could alter my practice and support others to reflect on theirs. I took my time to locate an approach which would be rigorous to scrutinise my own practice, in contrast with the rapid decision making and policy implementation which is necessary in education on a daily basis. I found that, like many teachers, I had little time to reflect. Apple (2013) describes what he calls the *proletarianization* of teachers, removing their professional, executive capabilities through the burden of a heavy workload. By stepping out of the maelstrom to carry out a PhD, I hoped to find space to develop my own practice. I then planned to share what I had learnt with colleagues.

I sought a methodology which enabled me to:

- Learn from the knowledge and experiences of other teachers

- Better understand how a complex individual is formed by their experiences

- Understand how teachers' experiences impact upon their teaching

- Use this new knowledge to develop my own interactions with children

- Share this new understanding with fellow practitioners

- Engage in discourses which would help to bridge the theory-practice divide

Before starting this research, I was aware that there was more that I could do in my classroom to challenge stereotypes and to promote gender equality. On reflection, after initiating the research, I realised that it was necessary to understand more about my own gender construction, my motivations and the origin of my own perspective to improve my practice. As I discovered more about life as a researcher, I began to value the reflexive nature of research, I began to analyse my own behaviour and decisions and revisit earlier ideas. As noted in chapter two, prior research has, to some extent, considered how teachers' gender experiences contribute to their framing of expectations for children. **This study contributes to new knowledge in the landscape of prior research through exploration of how teachers' reflections on their own gender construction can impact on their intention and ability to improve their practice in promoting gender equality.**

Skelton (2010, p132) suggests that much feminist writing on education is theoretical and "distanced from the daily lives of teachers". With a focus on furthering my understanding in the realm in which I work, I chose this approach in order to better understand how my own actions could impact on my pupils, aware of the potential limitations and pitfalls but confident that the acquisition of this knowledge would be beneficial to others seeking to do the same.

To this end, using my positionality as practitioner researcher, I have been able to reflect on my own and others' practice and to consider how it could be interpreted by others. As a teacher, I have been able to get close to the data but as a researcher I have had the privileged opportunity to take the time and space to reflect upon them as both insider and outsider.

4.4.2 Reflexivity

Etherington (2004) shared her fears that others might not consider her personal experience a legitimate source of knowledge when she described how she included herself in her own research. This resonated as I laid out my own motivations for the research and wrote in my research diary,

reflecting on my own practice, my own gender construction and my *journey* as an inexperienced researcher. However, defining reflexivity as: "an ability to notice our responses to the world around us, other people and events" (Etherington, 2004, p19) helped me to realise that it has been the most important skill I have developed as a researcher. I came to understand that the rigour that is required in qualitative research could only be achieved through an awareness of how my values and prior experiences shaped my understanding as I attempted to represent the participants' views. I felt justified in the inclusion of such personal reflection in that the social construction of gender is an individual experience. Throughout my research diary, I continued to reflect on how the participants and I were shaped by the process of involvement in the study.

Understanding the nature of reflective practice has been a recurring theme within this study. Dewey (1938) emphasised the importance of reflection in good teaching, proposing that teachers could be compliant with an existing code and unable to see problems from a range of viewpoints or more flexible in their thinking and able to reflect more fully to solve problems. This suggests a binary set of options, that one can be a reflective teacher or not. Stenhouse (1979) suggests that teachers should be confident in their own abilities to analyse situations, reflect on their own practice and override researchers' advice or government policy where necessary. Engaging in frequent on-the-spot problem solving, fast paced decision making, which was described by Schon (1983) as reflection in action, is necessary in classrooms on a daily basis. Reflection on action (Schon, 1983) can be considered as a process of reflection both before an event – through the careful consideration of activities, planning of lessons, construction of a curriculum, and after – considering how an event could have been handled differently, dwelling on the solution to a problem. Focussing particularly on whether and how teachers could reflect more deeply on the issues of gender portrayal in their classrooms, I asked myself how reflective dispositions are developed and whether teachers engaging in reflective practice was dependent on the culture of a setting.

4.4.3 Critical pedagogy

Marx explains that critical theory prioritises action over theory in order to bring about change (Marx and Engels, 2011). Inscribed upon Marx's gravestone are his words, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it." Brazilian educator and activist Freire (1972) used the term *conscientisation* to describe the action of connecting people to their world and perceiving reality as a process, and this formed the philosophical underpinning of his pedagogy. Drawing awareness to issues of injustice and highlighting previously unseen realities became the foundations for this study. The project's aim is to bring about changes which benefit

pupils. If we understand critical theory to be built around the belief that the world is a battleground of hegemonic interests (Crotty, 1998), then this project aims to challenge some existing gender stereotypical views which arise from a patriarchal hegemony. Not satisfied with shining a light on how teachers' perceptions about gender had come about, I wanted to understand whether and how they could be altered to the benefit of pupils. I phrased my research question to prioritise promoting gender equality in schools in order to focus on bringing about change. This led to a research design which invited teachers to look at their own practice and to consider how it could be altered.

My experience, at the point of designing the research, suggested that many teachers were reflective professionals who seek to improve their practice and to analyse their own performance; however, I was also aware that time constraints meant that for both myself and my colleagues, deep reflection was seen as peripheral, or a luxury. Teachers have ever increasing workloads, leaving little time or energy for criticality. This lack of criticality which impacts negatively upon their autonomy. Apple (2013) notes that those teachers who become militarised or politically active must be driven. One must have a significant desire to bring about change to be willing to make the necessary sacrifices.

Having understood that my own lived experiences were interwoven with my values and pedagogy, I was fascinated to understand the perspectives of other teachers. Would their upbringing induce the same political responses as mine or one another's to what they saw in the world or how they interact with their pupils? Porfilio's (2015) edited book compiles the work of a selection of leading, self-proclaimed, critical pedagogues who describe their own upbringing and how they came to follow the work of Freire (1972) and others. What the pedagogues had in common was that they had all experienced or witnessed oppression of varying kinds. I was not fully satisfied by this as the definitive answer. Surely, the majority of the population, if not all of us, have witnessed oppression, yet few are willing to take the risk (Reynolds, 2015 in Porfilio) to embrace critical pedagogy. This question of what motivates us to work to overturn the power structures which we see as oppressive endorsed a research method which sought to understand the individual teacher's view. To draw comparisons between teachers' experiences and their developed viewpoints, I chose to gather and analyse data from teachers on an individual basis.

4.4.4 Life Histories

In searching for the right tools for data collection, many possibilities were considered. Stenhouse (1979) espouses the collection of evidence rather than data – rich and valuable information about subjects such as observational records or interview transcripts. The study was based on the theoretical understanding of Foucault (1977), Butler (1990) and Bronfenbrenner (1980) described in

chapter two. Given these ways of considering how the individual is constructed by society, to understand the individual's experience, an approach was required in which I, as researcher, aimed to be empathetic to the standpoint of others. I came to understand that what I really sought to unravel was how teachers' views had developed and whether and how they could be altered through supported reflection.

Focussing on teachers, I sought to immerse myself in the understanding of others, without judgement, in order to better understand rather than simply describe. Considering how best to gather this rich understanding of teachers' views and practice, I decided that semi-structured interviews would be the most conducive to this aim. Goodson (1992, p10, 234) argues that in:

> understanding something so intensely personal as teaching, it is critical we know about the person the teacher is.

Life history interviews were chosen as the most appropriate means of gathering data about teachers' attitudes to gender and the experiences which contributed to these attitudes (Goodson and Sikes, 2001; King and Horrocks, 2010; Brinkmann and Kvale, 2018; Cohen et al, 2007). Dhunpath (2000) suggests that the life history approach is:

> probably the only authentic means of understanding how motives and practices reflect the intimate intersection of institutional and individual experience in the postmodern world.

This recognises that the approach values the complexity of the individual experience and also seeks to link the individual with the social context in which they exist, which chimes with the theoretical context I have outlined in chapter two.

In an era when data from social media may be readily available, it could be argued that gathering data from a larger sample may be a preferable option, however, in collecting my data, I prioritised depth over breadth. Lanford *et al* (2019) endorse the life histories method and present the limitations of drawing findings from what they describe as "big data", arguing that individuals' first-hand knowledge can provide authenticity and legitimacy which may be lacking in a quantitative approach. Avoiding cursory conversations with an extensive study sample, I sought to spend more time with a smaller number of participants, inviting them to reflect on their own experiences, views and practice. Dhunpath (2000, p548) argues,

> Traditionally, research has tended to present an archetypal image of teachers, by using positivistic approaches … [which] strip research of the rich tapestry of human experience and emotion.

These interviews, in contrast, valued the *rich tapestry* and the context it provided. The interactive nature of the interview enabled me as researcher, as interviewer, to ask open-ended questions, allowing the teachers to guide the interviews to discuss what they deemed most relevant and to prompt the teachers to give more detail in some of their responses. From an ethical standpoint, this allowed the participants to reflect on their own life history and share both what they felt was pertinent and what they were comfortable with discussing. Goodson and Sikes (2001, p21) argue that life histories provide a tool to examine the social context of an individual's experience and that the method can be used to provide "useful data on practically every social issue". The life history method, therefore, was appropriate to gather data which enabled analysis of the complexity of the individual experience of gender.

Goodson and Sikes (2001) and Clough (2002) all provided inspiration and showed the wealth of valuable data that was available through traditional life histories. The nature of the individual stories varied but shared similarities in the way they were enriched by the social backdrop to understand their relevance. The life histories presented by Clough (2002) are presented in a fascinating and highly readable style in which the details on an individual's story provide the reader with an understanding of their experiences as well as the environment in which they dwell. These encouraged me to see value in the details that the participants shared. I felt that my interviews should take a narrative path, allowing participants the opportunity to reflect (possibly chronologically) on how at different stages of their lives, gender had been important to them and how this might impact on their pedagogy.

4.4.5 Feminist perspective

In essence, this research conforms to post-structural ideas of feminism as it has an emphasis on the social construction of gendered identities. De Beauvoir's (1949, p293) assertion that "One is not born but rather becomes a woman" epitomises my epistemological stance. Through chapters one and two, the grounding for the assumption that gender is socially constructed has been outlined. Discussion in chapter two of the philosophical conclusions of Foucault (1977, 1979) and Butler (1990) determined the role of societal power on shaping how gender is enacted. Arguing that "The world has always belonged to males", De Beauvoir (1949, p73) suggests that women have always been deemed the *second sex* and oppressed by a patriarchal society. Although this assertion is simplistic, reducing gender to a binary code, and based on the Western woman's experience, it is the basis for much feminist thinking. Postmodernist feminist theory avoids sweeping statements describing the woman's plight and is more concerned with the individual experiences of women. From the epistemology that gender is both experienced and performed individually, the concept of generalisation becomes contentious, since the individual is a product of language, individual

psychology, history and culture. By considering the language used by participants, the experiences they chose to discuss and the cultural context of those, I could begin to develop theory based on their life stories. Their part in the process of analysis and their own development as they reflected during and after the interviews was critical. I considered the politics of knowledge, who participated in the acquisition of knowledge, whose analysis was relevant and who benefited from the knowledge. A feminist approach was applied as the data were analysed, seeking out evidence of oppression and disadvantage in the social context and life experiences of the participants.

Throughout the process of comparison of data, I searched for connections between contributions which explored and contextualised a feminist agenda. I refer to Luca's (2009) justification of the researcher's positionality within her research as, like Luca, I recognise that researchers exercise their agency uniquely. Through my analysis of the data, a feminist lens was applied and my own agency as a researcher employed (Luca, ibid). Since the 1990s, queer theorists have argued that a heteronormative perspective and binary oppositions have dominated research (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1990 and Butler, 1990). As one branch of critical theory which examines the role of societal expectations on sexuality, queer theory provides a different perspective through which to examine literature and to contest prior assumptions about gender binaries. Later in the chapter, I discuss how the data were analysed, giving consideration to these branches of critical theory.

Foucault (1979) theorises the roles of power, culture, and society in the construction of sexuality. It is upon this construction that Butler (1990) based the theory that gender and sexuality are performative, with important implications for identity. Isolating gender as a source of social injustice ignores other significant influences on the life of the individual such as race, ethnicity, sexuality and social class (still the biggest predictor of academic success: Webber and Butler, 2007; Webber and Burrows, 2018). Consequently, intersectionality was a central part of the design of this project, favouring a qualitative approach in which the complexity of the influences upon the individual could be discussed and understood. The thematic approach adopted in the analysis of the data allowed exploration of the range of backgrounds of the participants. For example, even across different school settings, there are varied attitudes to *normality* in relation to gender. Aware that, as a white heterosexual woman, my interpretation of the literature and the collected data may have omitted considerations of race or sexuality, I consciously revisited each section with criticality. Even so, it is likely that my own cultural biases have dominated the decisions made throughout which some may consider a weakness within the parameters of qualitative research. Conversely, Luca (2009) suggests that the positionality, experience and empathetic nature of the researcher adds context, honesty and rigour to qualitative research. Researcher positionality is addressed throughout this chapter.

4.5 Data Collection Methods

In this section, I outline the way that the life histories approach (Goodson, 1992) was used to gather data. Having chosen this approach, I reflected on the most effective means of gleaning these life histories. Group interviews were not appropriate as they might stifle the opportunity for individuals to fully reflect on their own experiences and individual accounts were sought. Goodson and Sikes (2001, p28) recommend one-to-one interviews as effective in establishing the intimacy and conditions which encourage interviewees to share their experiences and stories. Consequently, to best understand the actions, motivations and contextual life history of teachers, to encourage greater openness and honesty and to protect their anonymity, I chose to conduct each interview individually. Initially, rejecting the idea of written or telephone interviews, I decided that face-to-face interviews provided the best environment for participants to open up about their lives and to feel that they had the time to reflect upon the content of the conversation. (As we planned to discuss deeply personal experiences and opinions, it may have been argued that a 'faceless' method of data collection might have been more suitable, however, I decided that face-to-face meetings would be most appropriate). Later, during the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated lockdown, I had to revise my decision. Having waited for a period of time to continue with face-to-face interviews, I conceded that some of the interviews would have to take place online. I used Zoom to meet virtually. Although, as I had anticipated, the intimacy and sense of trust which was established at the face-to-face meetings was preferable, the online meetings served their purpose well. All of the participants I met online seemed to openly share their stories and reflected on their practice with candour and consideration.

4.5.1 Sample selection

During my literature review I established that teachers have the opportunity to influence their pupils. Additionally, from my own experience, I understood the dynamics of this relationship and was keen to explore how others' experiences affect their pedagogy. I selected only teachers as the sample, rather than teaching assistants or other members of school staff, with the intention that they would be best placed to bring about change in the classroom. I deemed it important that through direct contact with pupils, they might pass on not only explicit messages within the curriculum, but also implicit messages though their behaviour and interactions with pupils.

The sample of teachers came from three sources: my own school (Pearmain School), other local schools and one London school (Borland Primary). Beginning in my own setting, a large primary school with a staff of 108, all teachers were invited to participate in the study. Within the scope of the project, I hoped to recruit up to 10 teachers for interview. From the initial invitation to

participate, 8 teachers quickly responded. This sample comprised 6 female and 2 male teachers, all white British between 26 and 42. This range of teachers from my own school were invited to participate in order that I could compare the perspectives of different individuals in one setting. As discussed in the literature review, the culture and ethos of a school can have an impact on the views of its teachers, therefore it was important to compare the individual outlooks of a number of teachers.

It was also important to seek understanding of gender issues in other schools, where my own influence was not an issue; because of this, teachers from further schools in the city were also invited to participate. In line with BERA (2018) guidelines, this invitation was extended by way of an email to head teachers from a number of schools chosen for their contextual diversity. The head teachers acted as gatekeepers, choosing whether to become involved in the project and then inviting individual teachers to participate. To some extent therefore this is a self-selecting sample as, avoiding coercion and ensuring informed consent, teachers were invited to participate but under no obligation to do so. From the 10 schools invited to participate, five responded but only one interview took place. Others were cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic which prevented contact at the time. Two further participants from other local schools were later recruited as a convenience sample, through colleagues at Pearmain School who made contact with them directly to invite them to take part. This served to extend the size of the sample, providing more data and had the added advantage of introducing participants from other schools which could add further perspectives. It should be considered that the connection that these individuals had with other participants may introduce an element of bias in that they may well share similar experiences or attitudes with these participants

The third sample came from a Borland Primary School which had already been involved in a programme to promote gender equality. I approached this large primary school in North London because I was aware that they had spent one year working with an organisation to focus on developing their curriculum and applying a whole school approach to gender, adjusting routines and practices. I made contact with the head teacher by email who put me in contact with three teachers who were invited to take part. The inclusion of these three teachers from Borland School came from a desire to understand the views and experience of teachers when they had experienced professional development in this area, but also to see how their views might compare across a small sample. These participants also extended the geographical reach of the study.

I was keen to have a sample which represented teachers of different genders and a variety of ages. I considered the appropriate sample size and deemed that the number of participants I would be able

to interview would never be representative. It could however be illustrative. There are simply too many factors to ever select a sample which would exhaust the possibilities of all life histories, all backgrounds, ages and experiences and I never sought such saturation of data. I took the pragmatic approach that I aimed to interview between 12 and 20 participants which would be an appropriate number given the available resource (Robinson, 2014). During the process of analysis, I was satisfied that further data collection was not necessary to aid the theory-development process (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

4.5.2 Ethical considerations

For all potential participants, I carefully spelt out what was involved and the nature of the research. Within my presentation and participant information sheet, I explained what would be done with the data collected and assured colleagues that their participation was entirely voluntary and that there was no obligation at all to join.

BERA (2018) assert that:

- participants' voluntary informed consent to be involved in a study will be obtained at the start of the study, and that researchers will remain sensitive and open to the possibility that participants may wish, for any reason and at any time, to withdraw their consent
- researchers should do everything they can to ensure that all potential participants understand, as well as they can, what is involved in a study
- recognise the right of all participants to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, and at any time, and participants should be informed of this right

Consequently, I provided participants with a Participant Information Sheet (PIS) and consent form (Appendices 1 and 2) which clearly explained the purpose of the research, how data would be gathered and what would be done with it. I also explained the role that the participant would play and potential risks and benefits of their participation before seeking their consent.

As knowledge is connected to power and can be used to oppress (Foucault, 1980), it is important to consider my positionality as a practitioner. In some senses, with colleagues, I could be wielding power as the instigator of the project and the 'expert in the field'. This imbalance could well jeopardise both the relationship and the honesty of the responses as the participants' felt a desire to give the 'right' answers and to tell me what I wanted to hear. As long-standing colleagues and in many cases friends, my relationship with these participants was more complex and subtle than it would have been with a researcher unknown to them. This relationship led to its own ethical dilemmas and issues associated with positionality and power. All of the participants from the focus school I would consider

peers. To convince them that their views were equally valid to mine as 'expert', I engaged in open, honest conversation about how my own practice had developed and the barriers I had experienced to change. I described the ongoing nature of my journey, how long-lasting habits were tough to overcome and how my own preconceptions were still evident in much of my behaviour. BERA (2018) dictate that researchers should aim to be open and honest with participants and I approached them with warmth, transparency and a willingness to expose my vulnerabilities. This approach was even more important when meeting participants from outside of my own school, most of whom were strangers to me before our interview. I contacted them by email and in some cases by telephone before meeting and communicated the purpose and nature of the interviews in as much detail as possible beforehand to allay apprehensions and to make the meeting as comfortable as possible.

Throughout this study and particularly in the design stage, I considered complicated ethical dilemmas including my role as practitioner researcher. Sikes (2010) claims that writing lives is always auto/biographical and emphasises the ethical duty of the researcher to position themselves within the research and understand the nature of the gaze being brought to bear. The ethicality of presenting the views and experiences of others is therefore relevant. My own positionality has been presented and I have, at all stages, considered and recognised the inherent bias within the research. The ethics of safeguarding and privacy were also paramount in the process of selecting a methodology which lead to continual reflection throughout. I have continually aimed to act ethically and to employ a research methodology which fits with my values. Full ethical approval was sought from the university and both the University of Worcester's Ethical Research Guidelines and those of BERA were adhered to throughout (BERA, 2018).

At the outset, the question design focussed on an ethical dilemma: how to promote the fair treatment of pupils. I was, in the words of BERA (2018, p6),

> mindful of the ways in which structural inequalities – those, for example, associated with 'race', gender, LBGT+ issues and socio-economic status – affect all social relationships.

Researchers have a responsibility to consider how to balance maximising the benefits for, and minimising any risk or harm to, participants (Bloor, 2010). Prior to the interviews, I considered that the topic had the potential to raise psychological or emotional issues if dealing with sensitive matters which may have a significant effect on the interviewee or even myself. I was aware that life history interview, which asked teachers to reflect on how incidents in their lives have shaped their views, may draw on difficult memories for some. To minimise the likelihood of this, the participants were clearly informed what the interview entailed beforehand. Precautions were taken to avoid any

harmful impact in that privacy was assured (unless there was danger of harm to an individual) and support was prepared and offered to all interviewees prior to the interview. Having acknowledged that this was a sensitive area that might be difficult for some, I determined there needed to be a genuine option to participate or not. During my presentation to colleagues and in the letters sent to gatekeepers, as well as in the Participant Information Sheet (PIS), I laid bare the purpose of the study, what would be involved in the interview and the possible negative consequences. There were also clear signposts in place for those who had volunteered to take part but found the experience destabilizing. Therefore, details of support services were clearly detailed in the PIS. Prior to each interview, I also verbally reiterated the points made in the PIS and went through the Informed Consent Form.

Counter to the possibility of any negative effects, I very much hoped that participants would benefit from the research in terms of insights gained in the process. Stern (2016) highlights the value of research in provoking an emotional response in the participants and the virtue of really listening to someone. This appeared to be the case, as at the end of the interviews, many of the participants thanked me for the opportunity, sharing how much they had enjoyed the conversation.

4.5.3 Interviews

I held semi-structured interviews with all participants to gather data which would illuminate their perspectives. Brinkman and Kvale (2018) suggest that an interviewer can be positivist and act as a knowledge collector, like a miner, or be postmodernist and be a knowledge producer, like a traveller, gathering data on a journey and constructing the meaning thereof. With this in mind, as I designed the interviews, the umbrella question was always in sight: How can primary schools promote gender equality by encouraging teachers to reflect upon their own constructions of gender and examine their pedagogical approaches? Within the framework of the questions posed, the meandering paths of discussion were navigated by the interviewee, encompassing the areas which were of importance and relevance to the research. The interviews sought teachers' reflections on how their attitudes to gender developed, what impact they considered this may have on their interactions with pupils, their experiences of challenging gender stereotypes in their own schools and their recommendations for the development of a pedagogy best suited to minimising gender stereotypes in primary schools.

Through narrative inquiry, I sought to explore the participants' practice and understanding against the backdrop of their worldview and culture. Crotty (1998) suggests that unstructured interviews can be more informative, and in this spirit, the interviews were planned to allow the interviewees the freedom to focus on the topics they deemed most pertinent. Broad questions were designed to

encourage free-flowing conversation which covered a variety of areas, avoiding presupposition and allowing each participant to explain the context to their own understanding. The aim was to allow space for answers to be extended but also to probe more deeply. Each interview served to understand how that teacher made sense of their own attitudes to gender in the classroom, seeking to examine how people differ in relation to the same phenomenon. Because of this, it was essential that participants did not feel there was a right or wrong answer. The same ethical considerations were applied to those from other schools as had been given to my own colleagues, and the same ethical processes adhered to.

Prior to the data collection, I undertook a pilot interview with a group of ex-colleagues which highlighted to me the need for broad initial questions. Kvale (2018) recommends the use of a pilot interview and I found it very informative. Following this, I altered my interview technique to allow greater autonomy on the part of the interviewee. Later interviews were much more successful in that I had learnt to allow space for participants to expand their answers, being unafraid of longer pauses. Having learnt to let the participant guide the interview in this way, I found that my prompts or questions became less necessary and less frequent. This gave richer data and drew out themes that might otherwise have remained unconnected. As the interviews took place, I began to notice early themes and draw some preliminary conclusions which developed my questioning as I went along. I considered that asking the questions that I did was part of the process of reflecting with the participant on their practice. Rather than challenging their views, I was inviting them to delve deeper into the reasons for their interest or, perhaps more tellingly, their lack of interest in gender issues. In some cases, an absence of data was significant. To take one example, where the participants omitted to mention the influence of media on their attitudes, it may suggest that they were unaware of this potentially significant influence on their own and possibly their pupils' attitudes.

With a reflexive approach, it is important to highlight the positionality of the researcher and to discuss the power imbalances at play. Prior to the interviews, I considered how best to minimise any imbalances of power and took measures to aid this process such as arranging the interviews to take place at a time and location chosen by the participant. I ensured that correspondence before the interview was clear and put the interviewee at ease, explaining the content and purpose of the interview and the sort of questions which would be posed. Dressed in a semi-formal style, appropriate to everyday school life, I arrived punctually with minimal paraphernalia. Before the interview began, we chatted informally and I explained again the purpose and nature of the interview, their right to withdraw and amend their contributions, and how the data would be recorded, used and stored. In most cases, we sat side by side, or I positioned my chair so that we

were arranged diagonally, avoiding a formal *face-to-face* interview set up (excepting the online interviews).

Stern (2016) analyses the virtues of a good researcher, discussing each with a number of educational researchers. The list of virtues includes, amongst many others, creativity, curiosity, criticality, courage, authenticity, kindness, fairness, humility, hope and humour. During the interview process, many of these had to be employed and developed. Prior to and during the interview, authenticity, humility and kindness were crucial to avoid a sense of a power imbalance and to ensure a comfortable, easy exchange. The participants, for the most part, spoke very freely and minimal questions needed to be asked. Curiosity and criticality were also essential skills during the interviews not only during the analysis of data. Probing questions did need to be asked at times where the participant's meaning was not clear, when they revealed something of interest without explanation or reflection, or when they suggested that they were unsure of their own viewpoint on an issue. At these moments, it was necessary to ask them to reflect further or to explain more fully. In many cases, this meant a simple open question, asking, 'Why do you think that is?'. But in some instances, they would struggle to pinpoint their own position. I learnt that allowing time, moments of silence left for reflection, enabled the participant to consider their contributions. Where this yielded no results, from my own ethical stance, I eased off. Where other interviewers may have delved deeper, my position was always respect for the comfort of the interviewee.

Each interview took place in a quiet meeting room, some in the school and some off site. The majority were held after school hours or during school holidays. Three took place online. The setting of the interviews varied, but in all cases, a peaceful, atmosphere was created by avoiding interruption, seeking a quiet location and time earmarked for the interview to encourage participants to feel unhurried in their responses. Each interview lasted around one hour. The interviews were audio recorded with permission from the participant to use their contributions anonymously, with the opportunity to review and amend their contributions after verbatim transcripts were made. Data was stored in line with GDPR and the data protection act. When I planned the process by which the data would be collected and stored, I considered the BERA (2018) guideline that confidential and anonymous treatment of participants' data is considered the norm for the conduct of research and took all reasonable precautions to avoid identification by changing identifying features. As a consequence, audio recordings were made on a handheld device which was password protected. Data was stored on a password protected computer and encrypted USB stick. The possibility of data being reused was made clear when gaining initial consent. Only anonymised and disaggregated data

have been archived. Ten years after the publication of this research, electronic files will be deleted in line with the University of Worcester Policy for the Effective Management of Research Data.

Following the one-to-one interviews, at the point when transcriptions of the interviews were sent to the participants, they were given the opportunity to amend or withdraw any part of their contributions. Within the email, I also asked them to consider whether their practice had changed at all since the interview, reflecting on how the process had highlighted any areas which they felt warranted amendment. The purpose of this individual reflection was to give the participants time and opportunity to consider how their involvement in the project up to this point had affected their perspective. This occurred approximately two weeks after the interview.

Inviting those schools that I was less familiar with to nominate a teacher for involvement in the project, meant that to some extent the group comprised a self-selecting sample. Although ethically sound, I was aware that those selected were likely to already be interested in the issue of gender equality and not necessarily representative of the profession as a whole, introducing an element of bias into the results. However, if that were the case, then coming to understand how that interest had come about would also provide valuable data. Seeking to analyse the particular circumstances of their lives which may have aroused a particular interest in the topic became one theme of the research.

The possible benefits to participants of joining the study were an opportunity to:

- reflect and further their own practice,
- broaden their knowledge,
- benefit their pupils,
- learn more about academic research,
- gain personal status within their own schools.

Although time is a precious commodity and scarce for teachers, some were willing to participate in the project thanks to a combination of some of these factors. As BERA (2018) outline, ethical research design and execution aim to both put participants at their ease and avoid making excessive demands on them. Throughout their involvement, I demonstrated that I was grateful for their time and commitment, and I sought to maximise the beneficial elements wherever possible.

I was also aware of the potential for sharing conflicting views and that this could potentially cause disharmony in the workplace. It was my aim that the project should include a range of perspectives

and to understand different viewpoints. I was aware that I may have felt compromised in not challenging views which endorsed gender stereotypes during interviews, however, the ethical implications of this were considered and interviewees were invited to share, discuss and reflect upon their perspective without judgement. BERA (2018) suggest that individuals should be treated fairly, sensitively, and with dignity and freedom from prejudice. In preparation for the interviews, I had considered this an ethical dilemma. Could I both respect the individuals' views and avoid any sense of judgement as well as putting forward alternative ideas? As the interviews proceeded, I found that it was entirely comfortable to invite the participants to reflect on their own assumptions and attitudes. There was no confrontation or judgement involved. Instead, participants were interrogating their own ideas and how they had developed. In some cases, I was able to proffer alternative ideas with such phrases as: 'Some of the participants have suggested that… do you think this applies to you?' Or 'Would you agree?'.

I was aware that the act of reflection as a teacher can make an individual vulnerable, so how could a teacher be encouraged to feel safe to question her/his own practice and values? Benade (2018) suggests that the willingness to collaborate with others, and to invite their feedback, to question their own practice, and to commit to change, which comprise the requirements of a reflective teacher, calls for high levels of interpersonal trust which are underpinned by a preparedness to be vulnerable to betrayal. In the same piece, Benade goes on to propose that reflective practitioners may display certain dispositions, including the courage to be publicly critical of one's own assumptions and beliefs and to being open and transparent about their failures. He suggests, therefore, that reflective activities demand a high-trust environment. To create such an environment during the interviews it was important to expose my own vulnerabilities. Whilst the interviews gave the participants a forum to reflect personally and I generally avoided making reference to my own situation or experiences, I was able to share my concerns over how my own practice had developed and the difficulties I held in breaking old habits. This had the aims of both demonstrating how practice could evolve and positioning myself alongside the participant as a professional seeking to improve my practice. I did not wish to appear judgmental or suggest that I held all the answers.

4.5.5 *Email follow-up*

As mentioned above, shortly after each interview, I sent a transcript to the participant inviting them to consider their responses and confirm that the content was accurate. In addition to this email, further communication was used to invite the participants to provide further insight. This action was taken in response to the initial findings of the research. Namely, that during the interviews, the

participants appeared to be suggesting ways in which they were planning to make changes to their practice or explaining how earlier reflections had initiated changes in their interactions with pupils. Consequently, I chose to engage in a second phase of data collection. Approximately six months after the interview, I sent out a further email to each participant inviting them to reflect on their involvement in the study and any impact it may have had on their practice. The email asked:

- How did you find the experience of the interview? Did you find it enjoyable? If so, in what way?

- Were there elements of the interview that you did not enjoy? Why was this?

- After the interview, did you make any alterations to your practice as a teacher or to your behaviour more generally? Please give examples.

- It has now been over six months since the interview. Have any alterations that you have made to your practice been sustained? If no, why do you think this may be?

Eight of the participants replied by email and their responses were included in the data set and analysed accordingly. This process of the follow up email served two purposes: first, it enabled me to collect valuable data, the analysis of which allowed me to draw conclusions to answer my research question; second, it enabled the participant to further reflect on their practice. Bloor (2010) suggests that it is the responsibility of the researcher to bring about good, and as such my project was designed for both positive outputs and a positive process. Through raising the topic or asking the questions about gender equality in settings, a snowball effect was initiated. The value of the research, therefore, will hopefully extend beyond the explicit results and findings found in chapters five and six, to include positive, longer term, impacts upon each of the participants, and possibly their pupils and their colleagues.

4.5.6 *Positive Impact of Data Gathering Process*

Conducting the interviews was a joy and a privilege. It was the stage of my research when I felt most at home, most in control and happiest. Beforehand, I had been apprehensive. I knew that the data I collected would be crucial, I had little experience and felt, as ever, that reading could only prepare you so far for a practical activity. However, as soon as I conducted the first interview, I realised that gathering data was simply hearing stories and being curious. I had carte blanche to ask questions and to listen, really listen. As an enthusiastic talker, the experience of staying mute for sections of time, pausing to wait for the participants to reflect and reveal more of their thoughts was novel and refreshing. The other revelation was how much the participants seemed to enjoy the process. As I have already mentioned, Stern (2016), describes qualitative research as an opportunity for the

participants to be listened to, but until I conducted the interviews, I did not fully appreciate this concept; I was merely conscious that I would be eating into their time. Bloor's (2010) assertion that it is a researcher's duty to bring about good not solely at the conclusion of their research through its findings, but throughout the process through their interactions, is relevant here. Bloor suggests that a researcher should ensure that their presence is not a burden and that the process should not be onerous. I was acutely aware of this, and so delighted when several participants described the opportunity to have their experiences and their opinions listened to and valued, as 'therapeutic'.

Costley, Elliott and Gibbs (2010) argue that there are many additional ethical considerations to be made when working with colleagues as research subjects and Bloor (2010) suggests that it is impossible for field research not to have an impact on the research setting. Seeking ethical approval for my research, I was keen to minimise this impact, sensing that my intrusion into the daily lives of the teachers could be a burden and made the assumption that my fieldwork would be an inconvenience. On the contrary, the atmosphere created in the interviews was respectful and conspiratorial. All of the participants had volunteered to take part and were, it seemed, people who enjoyed talking about their own lives and so valued this time.

Part of the motivation for conducting life history style interviews with teachers was to encourage others to become more reflective and to critically analyse their own experiences and their own practice. Breault's (2017) experience with trainee teachers suggests that many teachers are heavily influenced by their early experiences. His participants reflected on their life histories and the development of their pedagogy and acknowledged how helpful the process was in unpicking their values and practice. The ethicality of this decision seems initially straightforward; encouraging reflective practice seemed a 'noble endeavour'. However, when examining the issues more closely, I considered that inevitably some of my colleagues may have felt obliged to participate in the research. I realised that the consequences of this would be greater, too, for those who may have had negative experiences in their past or for those for whom gender and sexuality was a problematic issue. Consequently, I chose to limit numbers from my own school in order to access a sample from outside. This had the benefit of both broadening the scope of the study and avoiding any sense of coercion into participation from my colleagues.

4.6 Methods of Data Analysis

The initial phase of data collection produced transcripts of 14 interviews which were analysed thematically as Braun and Clarke (2006) recommend. Whilst doing so I engaged feminist critical

theory to particularly seek out any emerging themes of oppression (Frost and Elichaoff, 2014). As thematic analysis is compatible with various theoretical standpoints, it is conducive to a feminist social constructionist approach (Burr, 1995; Gavey, 1989). Before this process, consideration was given to the validity of the analysis, the positionality of the researcher and the inherent bias involved within the process of representing others' voices.

Highlighting the importance of avoiding presuppositions in data analysis, Dey (1993) introduces a metaphor of an empty cup. They tell the story of how a professor is guided by a Zen master who continues to pour tea into their cup, even when it is overflowing. The Zen master then shows the professor that they cannot learn since their cup is already full of opinions and speculations. This story suggests that the researcher should commit to emptying their cup in order to be ready to objectively analyse the data. However, like Dey (1993), I argue that it is neither possible nor desirable to suspend your assumptions or to empty your mind of what has come before, but to be aware of these prior understandings and how these will shape your perspective. Coles and McGrath (2010) say that you cannot approach research with an empty mind, but you can with an open mind and Luca (2009, p7), similarly, argues 'that whilst subjectivity cannot be bracketed, depth reflection can'. She advocates a process she calls 'circling of consciousness' by which the thought process is scrutinised and the researcher's perspectives are acknowledged. The values I brought to this process have been clearly documented and my own positionality can be felt throughout. Despite this, I sought to enrich my empathetic understanding and knowledge along the course of the study. Below, I explain how the data were analysed through four stages and how themes were developed.

4.6.1 Process of Data Analysis

When analysing my data, I sought to understand the individual experiences of my participants. I examined the similarities and differences in their responses and sought suggestions of cause and effect within the individual's experience. I also explored the different reactions to the same situations and analysed how the participants talked differently about the same themes. I was not seeking to excavate a hidden truth but rather to analyse what others presented about themselves to piece together, to use another metaphor, a patchwork quilt (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018), reconciling ideas to tell a story. The fabrics I had obtained in my data – first person accounts of my participants' lives, their ideas about how their own experiences had impacted on their attitudes to gender and the messages they would pass on to their pupils, could be arranged, by me, into patterns. How I went about creating these patterns was influenced by the literature review and my own instincts about

what was important. I chose to conduct an inductive thematic analysis because it afforded me the flexibility to interpret the various key aspects of my research topic across the data set. I established themes which were led by the data themselves rather than preordained theories. Having established in earlier chapters my social constructionist stance, it is relevant to consider how this was relevant during the analysis of the data. Waring (2017) suggests that data analysis can be seen as social construction which reflects the time, space, culture and situation in which it is undertaken. I have been keen to be transparent about my own positionality and accept that the process of data analysis has been filtered through my own prior understandings. These understandings are shaped by the current political climate and geographical location. For example, if the same research had been undertaken in 1980, it is possible that the participants' presentations of gender as binary would not have been noted.

Costly, Elliot and Gibbs (2010) describe the stages of qualitative data analysis as organizing the data into a workable form, coding the data to identify categories which summarise the data until a saturation point is reached, selecting the key themes which are relevant and returning to the data to engage in a dialogue with the original texts. I undertook four stages of data analysis guided by these approaches of Costly, Elliot and Gibbs (2010), but also by the ideas of Braun and Clark (2006), Bazeley (2013), Dey (1993) and Bell (1993).

Familiarisation
Listening to each interview recording, transcribing
Proof reading each transcript, cogitating on early ideas

Descriptive Coding
Attaching a number of initial codes to segmented transcript
Progressively refining codes

Interpretive Coding
Clustering descriptive codes
Blending ideas, interpreting meaning, applying codes to full data set

Overarching Themes
Deriving key themes across the data set
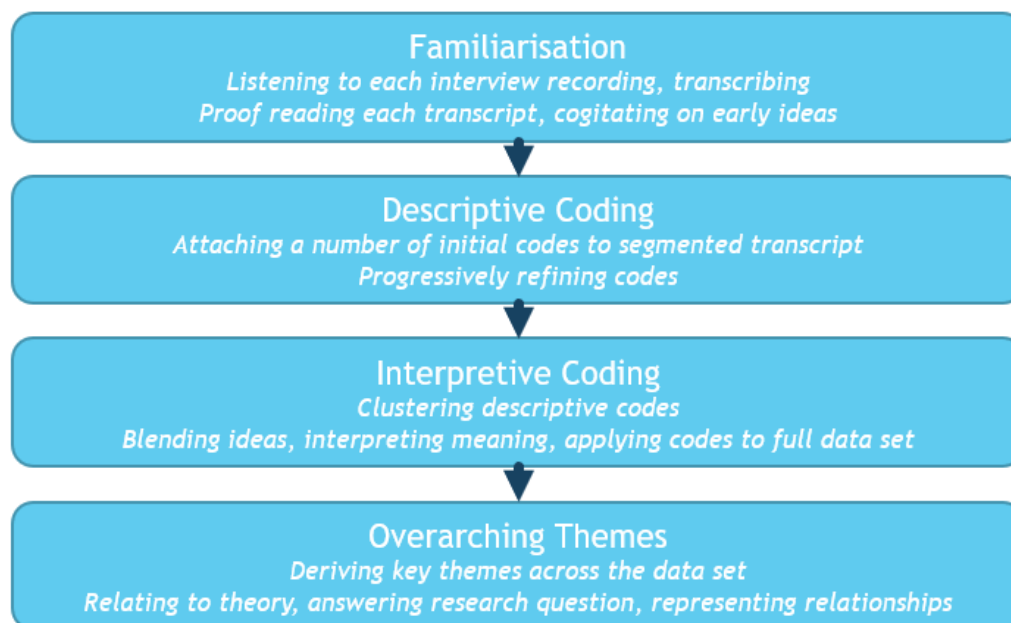*Relating to theory, answering research question, representing relationships*

Figure 5: Coding process

4.6.2 *Familiarisation*

I began analysing my data whilst still conducting interviews and began to follow emerging leads. As the interviews took place, I began to recognise themes and amended the schedule accordingly, asking participants to comment on the ideas and theories which were developing. For example, having noticed that sport had been a recurrent theme in early interviews, I introduced a question on it in the one interview in which it was not raised by the participant. I observed that some of the female participants of my own generation had made choices in their youth based on assumptions about gender which they had challenged later in life. In short, it seemed that the older female participants had had a 'feminist awakening' whereas their younger female colleagues did not seem to share these views. With this emergent theory in mind, I added an interview question which specifically probed this area, inviting the interviewees that followed to reflect on the issue.

During the interviews, I began to notice commonalities and differences between the responses and approaches of the participants, and during the initial phase of transcription thoughts were already bubbling in my subconscious. I proofread each transcript before sending it to the participants for their perusal. At this stage, I was becoming more familiar with the data, again noting areas of particular interest. During this early phase of cogitation, a period of immersion in the data, I keep notes in a research diary which mapped out the development of my ideas.

4.6.3 *Descriptive Coding*

Next, I began to employ a more rigorous and regimented process of coding each transcription, distilling the meaning from each section. Through coding section by section, I was able to further familiarise myself with the data. I used *meaning coding* rather than *language coding* (Brinkman and Kvale, 2018) in order to establish patterns amongst the responses. However, there were instances where the use of particular phrases appeared to be important and these were analysed within the context of their use; for example, the words *tomboy* and *lad*. The raw data were coded to maintain the action and meaning of each line or section (Bazeley, 2013). I continued to keep a research diary throughout the process which I had used throughout the early stages of my research and during the data collection phase. The entries to this diary acted as memos, or a chronological file, on my early analyses and were a valuable tool in privately developing my own ideas about the meaning behind my data.

4.6.4 *Interpretive Coding*

On completion of the interviews, I had amassed a large number of interesting codes, each of which I felt I could explore further. But what did these data mean? What patterns could I find? How did they answer my questions and what messages were there for my practice? After selecting the themes which stood out to me as important, I began to test categories and sought to link concepts and see relationships between actions and experiences described by my participants. This is where I acknowledge that the data were being viewed through my own lens. I have outlined my positionality and the likely impact that this will have on both the collection of the data and the analysis. Some may view this as a flaw with the qualitative paradigm and something to be avoided (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) however, Luca (2009) argues the power of transparency and the presence of the researcher within the research which helps to 'illuminate meaning'. The "bracketing" of one's own viewpoint (Ahern, 1999, p407) has been suggested as the route to objectivity, but, in addition to Luca (ibid), Norum (2000) and Holloway and Biley (2011) all argue that this is not possible nor desirable. As a practitioner researcher, my awareness of how my own lived experience leaks into my pedagogy and develops my values as a teacher gives me an insight and knowledge that enhance my research.

At this phase of moving from data-derived (or descriptive) codes to more researcher-derived (or analytical) codes, I adopted the advice of Braun and Clarke (2006) to be generous and inclusive in the process of deciding what to include, understanding that irrelevant data could be removed later more easily than adding it. Consequently, many lines or sections could be coded in numerous ways and became part of several thematic analyses. The progression from descriptive to interpretive coding came as I began to group ideas, asking myself what had caused certain reactions, what they meant for pupils and why the teachers had chosen to raise certain issues as important.

4.6.5 *Overarching Themes*

I identified broad categories which showed initial connections after handwriting the codes on sheets of paper and grouping them into overarching topics and sub-themes within these. Silverman (2020) advocates focussing initially on a small part of the data, intensively analysing, seeking patterns which can then be applied to the full data set. Having first analysed five of the transcripts in depth, I developed some provisional hypotheses about the patterns. I then examined all of the material and returned to my initial themes which were revised accordingly. I repeated this process having analysed the remaining data and returned to the original sub-set to re-examine these interviews in light of the newly developed themes. This process helped me to understand when I had reached a point where

I could find no further meaningful categories which were answering my question; a saturation point. I found further ways to classify my data and other links between the participants' life experiences, but I was searching for connections with gender specifically and excluded any irrelevant categories at this stage. As Braun and Clarke (2006, p82) suggest *"The 'keyness' of a theme is not necessarily dependent on quantifiable measures – but in terms of whether it captures something important in relation to the overall research question".* I maintained this approach throughout my analysis.

As Dey (1993) recommends, I sought to draw connections within the data to develop themes. Ultimately, through a process of abduction, themes were established linking participants' experiences. Taking an inductive thematic approach, this move to generality sought to identify common themes across the data which could meet the initial aims of the project. This process resulted in the development of six general thematic areas which overlapped. In tabular form, I could present these in any number of ways. Once I had developed overarching themes from the entire data set, I constructed diagrams and tables which helped me to organise my analyses and to represent the relationships which I had extracted. Early examples of these tables are included in appendix five. King and Horrocks (2010) demonstrate how it is possible to organise these patterns within a hierarchical relationship and how these themes and relationship can be presented by way of a tree diagram. This was a method I used to organise my codes, eventually grouping them in a tabular form for my own use. With these six themes established and a set of sub-categories developed within each, I then returned to the literature and compared my findings with the theory, the discussion of which is presented in the following chapters.

4.6.6 Presenting the views of the participants

In my presentation of the results in the next chapter, I have included quotations from the participants to illustrate the themes discussed and to illuminate their experience. Taylor (2012) advises researchers to use quotations from participants with caution. She suggests that there is a tendency in some qualitative research to introduce the quotation with a short description of the speaker as, for example, a *white male aged 40*, which serves to provide the reader with adequate knowledge to understand the context of the quotation, which seems set to encourage stereotyping. She also suggests that quotations are often applied as a means of endorsing the view of the author. The analysis presented in this document is that of the author and not that of the participants. Their comments are presented as spoken for the purpose of authenticity and to allow the voices of the participants to be heard. The reader will interpret them, as I have done, through their own lens.

The ethics of influence

Asking myself whether I had the right to act on behalf of others, I reflected on the philosophical work of De Beauvoir (1948). She asserts that one cannot have a point of view other than one's own, refuting the possibility of a universal ethical code. If we intend to act on behalf of others, she argues, we need to question whether our actions are truly taken on behalf of the other or merely depicted or defined as such. In this case, the drive to promote gender equality in primary schools comes from the assertion that all individuals, regardless of their gender, should have access to the same opportunities. The guidelines of BERA (2018) insist that researchers should contribute to the community spirit of critical analysis and constructive criticism that generates improvement in practice and enhancement of knowledge. I designed a research project which encouraged teachers to reflect on their practice in order to better promote gender equality. This design supported my application of De Beauvoir's (1948) philosophy in that each participant was individually interpreting their own understanding of gender.

If gender is performative and constructed, argues Paechter (2007), then it can be learned, and interventions can be made to contribute to it. Whilst arguing that change can take place, she warns of the sense of belonging and identity bound up within the practice of a community. However, she suggests that for a fairer society, educators can intervene and offer alternative conceptions of male and female. Similarly, Egan and Perry (2001) suggest that there is a level of well-being associated with gender conformity. Whilst hegemonic masculinity is an ideal of masculinity embodied by only a small minority of men and boys, it has been argued that many more males support it because it gives them privilege over females (Connell, 2005; Hearn and Morrell, 2012). Huuki and Renold (2015) suggest that boys, in particular, are invested in reinforcing gendered play, endorsing this theory. Given the inequities in our society described in chapter two, I argue that upsetting these hegemonies is in the interests of all of the pupils. When promoting gender equality, the ethicality of seeking to eliminate differences should be considered. A Canadian study (Pendleton Jimenez, 2017) found that happiness with gender is not always easy or possible and it may be at odds with others' happiness where there is conflict in the expectations of how to do gender. Within that study however, there were many examples of how children were able to describe their own happiness with their construction of gender, either by conforming to gender norms or showing contentment in crossing boundaries of expectations. Pendleton Jimenez (ibid) also explored parents' willingness to endorse children's alternative gender for the reason that it promoted the happiness of the child. Egan and Perry (2001) investigated the contentedness of children linked to their gender compatibility and found that a level

of maladjustment comes with a discord between one's abilities and one's own gender and that if a child becomes aware of a shortcoming in one area of their masculinity or femininity, he or she will compensate for it in another area, seeking to restore their felt gender compatibility. Rather than promoting "a reduction in gender identity to a monolithic entity", Egan and Perry (2001, p461) advocate further research into gender identity development and its impact on children's mental well-being. It might be considered that there may be some positive effects therefore to gender stereotyping: for some they may promote a sense of belonging, reinforce identity which may stimulate wellbeing. For others this may not be the case. My aim during the interviews was that participants' perspectives were valued with individual identity rather than boiled down to an essence of masculinities or femininities.

4.7 Summary

Interpretivist
Each individual has their own interpretation of gender.
Social constructionist
Individual understandings of gender are shaped by societal norms and collective culture.
Feminist critical pedagogy
The research design was influenced by an intention to promote gender equality. Data collection and analysis were conducted from this perspective.
Life histories
Life histories provided rich qualitative data which explored individuals' experiences and attitudes and the social context in which they exist.
Data collection
Life history interviews were conducted with 14 teachers from 5 primary schools.
8 teachers from Pearmain School, a large primary school in a small Midlands city
5 teachers from a range of primary schools in the same Midlands city
3 teachers from Borland Primary, a large London primary school
6 months after these interviews, a follow-up email was sent to these participants, inviting further reflection on the interview and any subsequent changes to practice - 8 responses
Data analysis
Transcripts of the interviews and discussions were coded line by line and analysed thematically, grouping data based on themes identified through an initial period of immersion in the data.

Figure 6: Summary of research design

Chapter Five

Findings

In this chapter, I discuss the key ideas that arose from the inductive thematic analysis. The overarching developed themes have been discussed, exploring the representations of gender and then the influences which the participants described. The chapter goes on to relate these themes to pedagogy, analysing how the teachers spoke of changes to their practice and the implications for pupils.

I present the most significant representations of gender which were present in the data, such as that the teachers made associations between femininity and nurture and an expectation to enact gender through physical appearance. In contrast, they associated masculinity with physical strength, enjoyment of sport, a propensity to show anger and the role of financial provider.

The next section presents the participants' discussions on the theme of influences. These include family, friends and the wider society, including the role of teachers on their own lives. The participants' life histories also described significant events which they perceived had influenced their attitudes including positive experiences such as academic success and forming healthy, loving relationships and negative events such as illness, loss of a parent and dealing with difficult relationships.

I have presented the findings regarding the way that the teachers used language pertaining to gender, including terms such as tomboy, girly and lad. Finally, I have explored how the teachers' attitudes to gender equality have changed over their careers and presented the findings regarding the ways in which the teachers discussed how they planned to change their practice or had already sought to make changes with the intention of minimising implicit messages given through teaching.

5.1 Introduction

The data were collected from interviews with fourteen teachers (nine female and five male). In summary, the data suggest that teachers' understandings of gender are socially constructed and individually performed which can result in different attitudes in the classroom. These understandings include attitudes developed as a result of exposure to gender stereotypes from a range of sources. The data collected suggest that teachers' reflections upon their own gender construction, and the

possible impact of this upon their own actions and their own practice, has the potential for significant changes in approach.

Many common themes arose when teachers reflected on their own gender constructions. For example: how the inequity of treatment of siblings of different genders affected perceptions of gender; the complexity of power relations; the pressures which can lead to boys' misbehaviour and girls' unhealthy focus on appearance and the role that sport plays in reinforcing masculinity. Pseudonyms are used throughout, including in the examples given by respondents.

Below is a brief introduction to each of the participants.

Name	Gender	School	Age bracket
Lily	Female	Pearmain Primary School (Midlands)	21-30
Becky	Female		21-30
Jackie	Female		31-40
Tom	Male		31-40
Alison	Female		31-40
Hannah	Female		41-50
Steve	Male		41-50
Mary	Female		41-50
Lena	Female	Borland Primary School (London)	31-40
Samuel	Male		31-40
Maggie	Female		51-60
Sophie	Female	Rural one form entry primary school in the Midlands	21-30
Phil	Male	Urban one form entry primary school in the Midlands	31-40
Nick	Male	Independent private school in the Midlands	41-50

Figure 7: Participants' age and school

5.2 Representations of Gender

"I was horrified that they wanted me to put a moustache on and dress up."

Throughout the interviews, it appeared that the participants had distinct early understandings of differences between boys and girls. Mary and Hannah described how they were uncomfortable when these boundaries were unclear. Mary recalled her desire for clear definition between genders in her childhood:

I remember growing up in the 80s and some teenagers you didn't know if they were a boy or a girl and that intrigued me…. I didn't know how to place them, I think. Not so much they didn't fit, but I didn't know where they fit. Which box to place them in.

She confirmed that she liked to segregate "*everything*" by gender; "*everything was black and white and neatly in boxes."* Hannah was similarly uncomfortable with publicly crossing boundaries despite having a group of male friends at school:

I got given the role of a drummer boy in the Christmas nativity and I was horrified that they wanted me to put a moustache on and dress up. And my sister was in the choir, my friends were all beautiful swans and I remember I had this huge, big meltdown about it because I didn't want to dress up and I wanted to be a swan and all the other drummer people, they were all boys. I couldn't understand why I'd been chosen for that role.

"Put a bit of lippy on for God's sake."

The participants described their behaviour and their own understandings of femininities, including many pertaining to appearance. For the female participants, six mentioned their appearance almost immediately in the interview. Lily clarified, *"I suppose I'm kind of thinking as gender as two separate things. I'm thinking of it as your appearance and as your qualities as a person."* For most, wearing dresses and make-up played a part in feminine identity. Jackie explained that she saw herself as feminine in that she loved to wear, *"Dresses and bright colours,"* and Becky's interest in, *"Hair, make-up and all that jazz,"* was part of her feminine identity; an interest she did not share with her mother:

My mum, I wouldn't say, is that feminine. She's feminine in some ways but in other ways, I'm like, Mum, put a bit of lippy on for God's sake. Do you know what I mean? She's like, no I don't need it.

The suggestion here is that the application of make-up is viewed as a necessary element of femininity. There is also potentially a generational aspect to consider. The positions of mother and daughter are interesting in that it could suggest that this association between femininity and make-up has increased over time and is more prevalent amongst Becky's generation than in her mother's.

There were several instances where the participants expressed their discomfort when they considered their appearance caused them to stand out, especially in adolescence. Mary's early maturation gave her concern in her childhood as she felt conspicuous amongst her peers, saying, *"I think I look feminine. Body wise, I'm quite curvy…. I developed quite early and I was quite self-*

conscious." Hannah explained how, in adulthood, she would reluctantly join her female friends in *feminine* activities, saying:

> *I wouldn't say I'm particularly feminine. I'd say, things like I haven't got my ears pierced, I don't really put too much make up on, I'm not one for really following fashions and going out and going on massive shopping sprees so I wouldn't say particularly feminine…. [My female friends] can persuade me to go on shopping trips now and again and go to a make-up counter and have a makeover and try something but yeah, I wouldn't go seeking it out, I guess.*

An undercurrent of performance and a desire to fit in with social norms is interwoven with physical representations of femininity which may be damaging for some. Lily described how the pressure she felt to look a certain way resulted in some damaging behaviours, saying:

> *When I got to about 14…I basically I starved myself quite severely and had a bit of an eating disorder for a couple of years and that's…. went very, very thin. And that's when the make-up came, the hair came, the glamour came and people would say to me, you look really good, you look amazing and I liked that so I kind of… That's probably what started me loving being feminine and girly and looking feminine and girly.*

Despite encouragement from her mother to dress differently, Lena resisted and continued to wear trousers. She had shown her willingness to defy convention and, in her teenage years, she recalled recognising an explicit association between portrayals of femininity and a desire to please others. She explained:

> *I only used to wear sports clothes and you know the clothes you'd associate with a boy. I was never into skirts or anything like that and my mum used to bother me a lot about that. She used to buy lots of skirts for me to wear and it was only when I was 13, 14 that I became like more conventionally like feminine if you want to use that word. I only started becoming interested in boys and things like that a bit later.*

> *There's just a few of those girls and I would look at them and they were just interested in make-up and boys and looking pretty and wear different clothes every day and they weren't interested in books, and they weren't interested in music, and I would look at them and I would go, oh my goodness that's just a sad existence. Why are you so insecure that you're just doing this to please others?*

Both Lily and Lena recognised that their childhood behaviour and style of dress no longer felt acceptable when they reached their teenage years. They each grappled with the implications of their own and others' appearance, before finding their own comfortable space in society and with their own ways of doing gender. Reflecting on youthful experiences might be one way to encourage teachers to connect with the experiences of their pupils, helping them to empathise with possible consequences for their approach in the classroom.

"I was brought up to be a great little housewife I have to say."

Within the lifespan of all of the participants, it would seem there was a trend towards further blurring of traditional household roles. Even so, in the interviews, there were many references to the female role as carer. Thirteen of the participants spoke of their mothers' role in the home as caregivers: some with pride, some with gratitude and some as a warning to themselves to avoid the same trap. Rosie made a flippant comment about her education and upbringing in 1970s Ireland when she was taught skills which would equip her for such a lifestyle, explaining, "*I was brought up to be a great little housewife I have to say*".

Half of the participants talked about their mothers leaving paid work to raise children and look after the home and more, 12 out of the 14, described the role their mother played in the home as being more present in their childhood than their father; or taking on a more nurturing role. Nick, Becky and Mary outlined their mothers' choices without judgement or qualification, merely as statement of fact. Nick's qualification that his mother was a "*traditional mum of the time"* showed his interpretation of a more contemporary understanding of social roles, suggesting that, having been exposed to this *normality* in your own upbringing, it is possible to change your expectations with generational shifts in line with the norms of the day. Further exploring the full-time carer role, Sophie considered her mother's choice, explaining:

> *She fell into the role of care giver. She's very maternal and you go home, and she'll give you a blanket even when you're not cold 'cause she'll be so worried that you're cold, so I think she very naturally did that for a long time. That was fine. My dad was the breadwinner. My mum was at home. She loved raising children. She was really happy with that.*

Sophie's language here that her mother "*fell into"* the role could suggest some passivity, that cultural norms expected her to do this, but Sophie also clarified that her mother was content in the role. Hannah's experience of fulfilling this role for her siblings in her twenties, however, suggested that it was arduous in nature, saying:

My mum moved out so I kind of stayed at home. With two younger siblings, I kind of had to be the head of the family. Mum kind of came backwards and forwards and they got back together later for a couple of years in my twenties but yeah, I kind of had to step up then and had to be that kind of motherly role. Going through university trying to keep it together for all three of them really so yeah, really tough…… I've kind of had to step up and do that motherly role and I'd seen that. She was always cooking, cleaning and looking after us.

Both Sophie and Lily described their mothers fulfilling a similar role in the home. Lily's associations with femininity and motherhood, in particular, centred around nurture which she seemed to admire and seek to emulate, explaining:

[Mum]'s a real feeder. She loves feeding people. When anyone arrives at the house, she feeds them. She cooks massive meals. She's northern. She grew up in Yorkshire. Traditionally, it's all about food. Her mum used to own pubs and do all the food, the cooking the roast dinners all of that so mum's very much like that. I'm now like that. People come to my house; I want to cook. I like my house to be tidy, to be clean. I'm like my mum in that way.

Sophie's interpretation of the same kind of behaviour is much less positive. She dislikes the way her mother acts in a subservient manner towards her family. She said:

[My mother] now resents a lot of things that happened but she's in that cycle of it's easier to just do it. Like they won't tidy up. My brother still lives at home even though he's 25 and he's been on furlough and my brother hasn't done anything. No chores. Even though my mum's asked him to and my mum's been at work.

Overlapping with this role of full-time carer, came strong suggestions that women, and mothers in particular, can be nurturing, protective and empathetic. Nick's praise of his mother, *"She was a great mum, smiley, supportive,"* and Becky's admiration of certain teachers*, "I really liked all of the teachers who were just really mumsy, really maternal and nice and just yeah softly spoken teachers I really warmed to,"* conform to the veneration of maternal, gentle, nurturing females.

From the data, it is possible to conclude that for the most part, as children, the participants experienced or witnessed a woman in the role of primary carer and observed women carrying out more household tasks. These lived experiences may make it more likely that these teachers will make assumptions about the home lives of their pupils or inadvertently pass on implicit messages about the role of women in society, for example in creating resources, choosing books or communicating

with parents. They may also make assumptive comments with their pupils, such as suggesting that they ask mum to sew on the button and dad to fix the bike.

"My mum was rock solid."

Another dominant narrative within the interviews appeared quite contradictory to the traits outlined above. There were instances where strong women, and mothers in particular, were lauded. This was exemplified by Alison's comments:

> I mean I wouldn't necessarily say that I'm feminist or anything like that, but you know to empower women and be strong women is a good attribute to have and to give to other people.

She later described her own personal development, reflecting that,

> Something inside me was that inner strong person who was like, no you need to do something for yourself. I found out I did have a resilience and I was still quite a strong individual, but I think I'm not confrontational... I think doing the teaching thing gave me an opportunity to make me realise that I am able to do things and that I am stronger than I think I am or making me realise how strong I am.

Throughout the interview, Jackie was keen to represent herself and her mother as strong women and Lily described herself and the female pupils she admires as the antithesis of the image of the docile and deferent woman, *"'Cause I would often say there's nothing wrong with being fiery and sassy."* Steve also expressed his admiration of, *"Strong women. Strong, independent women have definitely had an influence on me. On the way I speak and the way I think and the way I dress."* Sophie shared how she strives not only to be, but to be seen to be, independent, saying:

> I constantly consciously try to challenge the roles to prove a point, to show that I'm an independent woman. It's almost comical. Alexander [my partner] says I do it as a disservice to myself. I'll make sure I carry the thing even though I can't carry it to prove a point.

Throughout the interview, Lena spoke most frequently and most candidly about the importance of being perceived to be strong. *"I think being a strong independent woman is important to me and having that strength is important because I got that from my mum."* Later she unpicked how this was at odds with the cultural norms in her upbringing in Portugal and emphasised the important role her mother played in her childhood and adolescence. It appeared that both Lena and her mother's unwillingness to show emotion derived from a desire to protect their image of strength. Mary also

discussed the damaging effect of having to live up to a stereotype of strength and perfection which she felt came as part of her family's role within the community. As the daughter of a church minister, she explained, her desire to live up to an idealised perfection came from aspiring to be strong like her parents. This suggests that the strong woman stereotype can provide its own source of oppression for women, just as the nurturing and servile stereotype. All of the themes explored here suggest that, although we have individual understandings about what femininity entails, there are commonalities which can be viewed as both enjoyable and oppressive for those identifying as female.

"He's massive. He's got this big beard. He plays rugby."

In line with the understanding that gender is an individually interpreted concept, the participants described a wide range of masculinities. However, there were, once again, common themes, including: dominance, temper, practicality, financial independence, physical capability, interest in sport, showing emotions and being protective.

There were fewer depictions of masculinity than femininity within the data set. This in itself is interesting as it could suggest that the participants are less comfortable exploring or articulating these (though it should be remembered that the sample is majority female). Lily described her brother as typically masculine, saying*:*

> *He speaks very slowly with this deep voice. He's massive. He's got this big beard. He plays rugby. He rows. He dresses in a very understated male way. He's not into trends or anything like that.*

Steve mentioned his own appearance, saying, *"I'd say I identify as masculine by the way I dress and facial hair and the way I act,"* and his resemblance to his father, "*We were so similar, just exactly the same person. Except he was a foot taller…. Two foot taller. I'm a short arse."* No other references to masculine appearance were made within the data set and none of the other male teachers discussed their appearance which may indicate that appearance is more deeply embedded amongst societal understanding of femininity. The behaviour associated with masculinity across the sample included displays of anger and dominance as well as displays of emotion, empathy and providing support, both financial and emotional.

Nick summed up certain forms of masculinity in "*rugger PE departments*" with shorthand, *"Sort of lad culture. Drink beer."* He appeared to assume that he had described to me a great deal in these few words. His brevity implies that such gender stereotypes are well understood.

Sport emerged as a strong element of influence within the data that I had not foreseen. The data suggests that sport is strongly associated with masculinity. Steve makes this association throughout the interview, indicating that sport is central to his understanding of gender. He introduced the concept early on, saying:

> I would suggest I would be deemed more masculine than feminine. As in the company I keep, the sports that I do, what I do in my spare time.

He was almost apologetic in his explanation, avoiding directly making the association and reflecting within his response on how it would come across, saying:

> I'd say general things, watch football, play football, coach football. Not that there aren't female coaches out there and I don't think it's gender specific but I would associate football myself with … would I do them if I was female? Yes. So that's probably not the best answer is it? 'Cause I'd still do it if I was a mum not a dad. I know I would 'cause I know what sort of personality I am.

Nick was also "*surrounded by male sporty role models*" in his childhood and spoke a lot about the importance of sport in his life and his understanding of masculinity, saying:

> I went to an all-boys school erm from the age of 8 where to be successful you would probably perceive that you needed to be sporty and in with the right crowd.

This realisation, his father's encouragement and an early aptitude set him on a 'sporty' path. He explained:

> So very quickly at school I came to realise I was better than most other children at physical activity, which in itself creates a character, and I was the sporty kid and that carried so from a young age people talked to me about how good I was at sport. I was put into tennis academies, told I was a prodigy, all really damaging stuff.

His suggestion that this was damaging implies that there were negative consequences to these early decisions which he considers affected his attitude to himself and to his peers. Others held the power to guide his future and make choices on his behalf. He notes how he was treated differently from his sister, "*My sister played an instrument. I played football,*" and, as a PE teacher, he recognises the role that parents play in reinforcing the stereotype that sport is a masculine endeavour, "*Boys are easy. Dads kick balls with boys.*"

Though they weren't encouraged by their parents to take part in different activities, Phil noted that he and his sister chose to participate in different pastimes, explaining:

Now I did all those sort of stereotypical boy things of football training on a Saturday morning and things when I was at primary school level and my sister did dancing so they were very much the sort of stereotypical things that boys and girls of that age would do.

His introduction to football came through the encouragement of his peers. He said:

I don't remember making a conscious decision myself that I really wanted to do football because I would say that because my dad wasn't a massive football fan, that it wasn't something that was part of my life early on, so it was only once I got to sort of 7, 8 where I really even knew that football existed and I think that was probably what drove me to that was all my peers were doing it as much as anything.

Tom also spent much of his childhood playing sport and was encouraged from an early age by his father, developing a close association between sport and masculinity. He reflected:

I think a lot of it stems from sport. I was on a lot of sports teams. In fact, every sports team available. So rugby, hockey, football teams. And I think you know that probably pushed that feeling of masculinity as well in terms of how I felt.

Sam also spoke about the important role sport played in his childhood, *"Sports. Any sport. Football, squash, swimming. Swimming I did from the age of 2. My life was sport."* Most of the sports he played, like Tom and Steve, were played against other boys. He recalls one occasion where he played and was beaten by a girl; this memory drew Sam into a reflection on his attitudes, saying:

Squash, I played with girls and I remember there was a girl. She was really good. She was a few years older than me - she was really good. I don't remember ever being like, I'm being beaten by a girl. I don't ever remember that kind of stuff. She was older than me. I wonder if she was my age, if that would have made a difference. If I'm honest, I don't know. It never bothered me, but I don't know.

All of the male participants talked about the role that sport had in their upbringing and seven out of the nine female participants also expressed this connection between certain sports and stereotypical masculinity. For example, Lily explained:

He went off and he coached a lot of rugby, my dad, to quite a high level and then my brother played quite a lot of rugby to a high level. So, on the weekend, this is classic

actually, Dad would go off with Adam and do all the rugby, 'cause Dad coached Adam's team.

Alison remarked on her interest in outdoor adventures which were the realm of her brothers, recalling, *"Just having brothers as well and they were very sporty you know so I would just play football with them… climbing trees… but just being involved in all manner of things."* She continued this association between masculinity and physical capability when describing her daughter, *"She loves climbing, she loves riding a bike and just being in there and getting on and doing stuff that maybe other girls might not want to do."* Jackie spoke about this stereotype in explicit terms, saying:

I've seen, especially in reception and early years' base, everybody expects the boys to be more physical than the girls. The girls want to write and draw and the boys want to play Power Rangers and make weapons is generally the stance that a lot of people tend to think reception do.

A number of participants raised the stereotype that boys and men are expected to be physically stronger, more capable and have a greater interest in sport. Phil acknowledged the stereotype in his disclaimer, *"I wasn't a rough and tumble typical boys' boy,"* and where the female participants described themselves as sporty, it was often mentioned as an antithesis to femininity. Like Alison, Maggie spoke about her physical play with her brothers, recalling:

I actually played a lot of sports as a kid. I was very sporty. I played football. I played a lot with my brothers. I did a lot of rough and tumble with my brothers.

The word *actually* emphasises that this was not to be expected. There were other examples of female participants mentioning their interest in sport as unfeminine and even within school there were instances of sport being described as the preserve of the boys. For example, in PE lessons, Alison noted:

Lots of the girls, without wanting to sound gender specific, do have a tendency to just stand in the corner and they'll want to talk. I think probably because it can be quite a contact sport and some of them just don't like that.

Analysis of the data suggests that sport equates to masculinity in the mind-set of these teachers, if not in practice, with potential consequences for how we teach physical education, promote competitive sport in schools and encourage extra-curricular activities. Although it is clear that the female participants may engage in sport, the evidence suggests that the majority (7/9) specifically

acknowledged that they associated this with masculinity, emphasising its significance amongst the data despite my prior oversight of this theme.

"He did have a bit of a temper on him."

It is possible that teachers' perceptions of aggression or anger being a masculine trait could influence their expectations for their pupils' behaviour. Lily spoke of her father with love and respect but stated that she feared him during her teenage years. Her representation of him as an authoritarian police officer with a domineering physical presence conforms with stereotypical forms of masculinity associated with power and physical strength. Jackie spoke about her father's abusive relationships and having witnessed him *"bashing women around";* whereas in describing her father, Mary spoke of how he differed from her conception of stereotypical masculinity, saying:

> *My dad is a very gentle man with a quiet authority I suppose in his role. I've never known*
> *him to lose his temper. I've very rarely known him to shout at all, I think.*

She later went on to describe three male teachers, all with fiery tempers. Despite her own experience in the home, it would appear that Mary still perceived that masculinity equated with anger, her father being an exception to the trend. Others also mentioned male teachers' displays of temper. Alison recalled:

> *Mr Mead, who I thought was brilliant. He did have a bit of a temper on him and I*
> *remember him grabbing a boy who would play up quite a bit, round the scruff of the neck.*

She played down his physical handling of a pupil, later going on to explain that although corporal punishment was not permitted at the time, it was commonplace. Steve also suggested a different attitude towards corporal punishment in the past, commenting:

> *Walker, he was horrible. Of course, they were a bit more physical in them days, weren't*
> *they? I remember quite a few times being frog-marched from the classroom by Mr Walker.*
> *Yeah, he was horrible. I remember getting thrown at as well. Yeah, by Mr McAughtrie. He*
> *used to throw chalk at us. So, I remember the negative male role models in primary.*

Steve's reflection suggests that he had made a conscious effort to be a different kind of teacher to those he feared at school. None of the participants spoke of any female teachers losing their temper, although some were described as strict.

Five of the teachers appeared to have gendered expectations of behaviour for learning. This was reflected in how they discussed their ways of managing pupils' behaviour and their own childhood experiences. When speaking of his own adolescence, Nick talked of, *"Being a lad, rugger bugger"*. As a teacher, he described how his approach to behaviour management changed when he moved from an all-boys school to a co-educational institution. He described his time in the PE department at a boys' school as a, *"Relatively aggressive environment of trying to keep a thousand boys in control or under control. We did that through quite black and white measures of strict behaviour and detentions".* He spoke of how he tired of the approach, *"That sort of aggressive environment of just bollocking kids the whole time and dealing with them in a certain way, which is what I'd seen around me."* At the co-educational school, teaching A-level students, Nick respected the attitude of his female pupils and enjoyed teaching the girls' PE group, becoming frustrated with, *"the boys, who ironically that would have been me, the slightly laddish boys, not concentrating that much."* Nick's experience at school, fulfilling a stereotypical pattern of misbehaviour and then as a teacher recognising the same traits in his pupils supports the notion that teachers' preconceptions of gendered behaviour are established in their own childhood experiences.

Mary had an early memory of boys' misbehaviour in nursery school when some of the boys sucked up their paint instead of blowing it to create a bubble picture, recalling:

> *They'd got paint all over their faces and I was washing my hands and I remember feeling*
> *such disgust. Why couldn't they follow the instructions? These boys that didn't know… So,*
> *in my head it was the boys who were being silly and didn't follow instructions.*

Later in the interview, she discussed her preconceptions as a teacher and how she was aware of her assumptions that boys' behaviour in the classroom is more challenging than girls'. For Mary, the act of identifying her earliest memories of this conception, served to draw her attention to its lingering impact.

"He worked hard and worked late and made some good money"

Eleven of the participants' spoke, with pride, respect or in neutrality, of their fathers going out to work and earning money - much like the way that they spoke of their mothers' decisions to stay at home to care for them; there was no judgement of paternal absence. For example, Maggie discussed how her father went out to work and came home expecting to be able to read the paper or watch the television in peace and when Nick spoke of his father's role in the family, he explained, *"He was a busy chap, he worked hard and worked late and made some good money."*

Though Jackie's mother and stepfather were both wage earners in her home, her grandfather thought differently. She explained:

> He was very much of the generation of the wife stays at home and the man goes out and does the breadwinning but he didn't want that for me which I felt was quite powerful because he was still in that generation where, you know, you got married.

She also described the different attitude held by her grandmother and her mother in terms of financial independence, with her grandmother ignorant of how to withdraw money from the bank after her husband's death. Sophie railed against her parents' financial arrangements, suggesting that her father held the power, dominating her mother. Sophie had resolved to set up her own finances differently and to maintain financial independence, stressing, "*If we have kids, I'll go back to work 'cause that's where it happens, that's where the men get power.*"

"Boys don't cry"

There were conflicting ideas within the data set about masculine expectations for showing emotion. Tom, specifically, recalled that he was aware that his father's expectations for his behaviour were enmeshed with stereotypical attitudes towards masculinity, which he associated with playing sport. He commented:

> He [my father] was a PE teacher so he was very much wanting me to pursue sports and with that came a lot of attitudes as to how stereotypically males would approach those sorts of things and that kind of attitude that, you know, boys kind of get up, get on with it, don't cry.

Samuel, who was also very involved in sports in his childhood and adolescence, did not share this experience and felt free to express his emotions, crying as readily as his father. Through his own analysis, though, he suggested that his empathetic nature may not have been commonplace amongst boys in the community in which he grew up. In contrast, Hannah suggested that, in her experience, men running a nursery had less empathy with parents and prioritised the use of empathy less than women; her implication was that empathy is not a masculine strength.

It appeared that the stereotype of strong, silent masculinity, tacitly buttoning up emotions and avoiding intimate conversations in public is perhaps so ingrained, that deviations from this were specifically raised. Lily commented:

It's funny 'cause Dad and Ed are so masculine and in control on the exterior but so emotional and deep…. I remember at my wedding when I got married, [my father] stood up and was talking about how I was so awful as a teenager and how I came back round, and he was crying. He often cries when he talks about how proud he is of me that I've turned a corner and come back around. He's a very emotional and deep man.

Whereas there were many examples of associating femininity with protective and maternal tendencies (referred to by 10 participants), there were fewer examples of masculinity linked with protective and paternal tendencies (referred to by 4 participants). Nick acknowledged that his interest in fatherhood is not shared by all of his peers, noting that his wife compares him favourably to her friends' husbands. He explained that she had said, "*You should hear what I'm having to listen to from my friends about what they have to put up with their husbands. They're just awful.*" Tom suggested that his relationship with his pupils had altered since he became a father, saying:

I suppose [I have] more of a paternal attitude to children in school, in my class and pay more attention to their personal and social health and how they're feeling than I'd say probably at the start of my career.

From his comments, it could be inferred that Tom did not feel the need to fulfil a paternal role in the classroom at the beginning of his career. In contrast, Becky and Lily (who are not parents) spoke regularly of their maternal roles as teachers which may reflect a gendered expectation amongst the group.

5.3 Influences

It was interesting to see what had influenced the participants regarding their attitudes to gender and more widely. Their responses revealed many commonalities from which it was possible to draw conclusions about the nature of influence on gender construction.

Parents

As is clear from the discussion above, a key influence upon the participants' conception of gender was their parents. In the most part, they described emulating their parents' attitudes and behaviour. Copying or rejecting modelled behaviour and drawing on similarities and dissimilarities became a recurring theme. Jackie, for example described her mother as a "*massive influence*" throughout the

interview. She referred to her mother's attitude to problem solving, resilience and having given her the belief that she could do anything she wanted to do "*if you work hard enough*".

Steve succinctly concluded that, *"My biggest influence was my dad. Definitely*." He went on to explain his father's interest in sports, how he interacted with others and his need for privacy. Mary described how she sought to be like her mother, and this was the root of her understanding of what a woman should be – even down to not drinking tea or coffee as her mother did not like them. Finally, Lena described the value that she placed on being a *"strong, independent woman"* which came directly from her own mother. Nick and Tom both explained the importance of sport in their formative years and specifically associated it with shaping their masculine identities. They had both been heavily influenced in this by their fathers. These examples, amongst others, suggest that parental influence on the participants' outlook on life in general, and understanding of gendered behaviour more specifically, was stark in childhood, continued into adolescence and in some cases was still present in adulthood.

Phil, for example, mused on the origins of his and his sister's interests in gendered toys and the role that his parents played in these choices. He commented:

> *I would imagine, to start with, that [my parents] chose in the same way that virtually every parent does in the very early years where you choose toys you think your children would enjoy based on the fact that they're a boy or a girl. We do it with our girls. They haven't got any action figures and they've got dolls. They [my parents] would have started that process. Then, when we got old enough, we would have picked. I would've gone action figures and she would've still gone dolls.*

Alison also explained that she may have inadvertently steered her son and daughter into gendered behaviours, saying, "*I would like to think that I'm not pigeonholing in any way but I think maybe subliminally you do".* These reflections echo the comments of other participants on the possible role played by parents in shaping attitudes to gender. None dismissed the influence of their parents, however four stated that they have sought to avoid copying elements of their parents' behaviour. For example, Sophie's depiction of her parents' relationship, which she deemed unequal, inspired her strong feminist views and her desire to develop a different dynamic in her adult relationships. Jackie, having observed her father's maltreatment of female partners, was eager to avoid ever finding herself in a similar kind of relationship, commenting:

I think he's had an influence…. but not necessarily positive…. 'cause I know what I want
for myself. I'm never letting myself get into those situations and this is what I want from
a relationship.

These conversations suggest that, whilst the influence of parents is significant on the development of attitudes more generally, and gender in particular, there are many other influences which can supersede or complement them.

As previously discussed, there were frequent references to mothers being seen as strong and/or nurturing. There were also many references to parents as equal or unequal partners (mentioned by 8 of the participants). It appears that this dynamic in parents' relationships was deemed by many to be pivotal in their early understanding of gendered roles in the home. For example, Samuel's early experiences of his parents being "*nothing but equal*" in contrast to Sophie's growing frustration at seeing what she deemed to be an unjust arrangement. Sophie explained:

I think seeing that, I didn't want to be like them. I don't think it was a gender point initially,
but I just saw the injustice of it…I remember thinking, I'm going to be independent.

It should be remembered that the parent-child relationships explored here are reciprocal. Although the balance of power in childhood is such that parents will usually exert greater influence over their offspring, there are specific examples within the data of children influencing their parents. These include the way in which Maggie was influenced by her 19-year-old daughter, discussing the Black Lives Matter movement and how Sophie had discussed feminism and anti-racism with her father, changing his opinions.

Siblings

Amongst the nine participants who had siblings of a different gender, eight explained that their earliest memories of noticing differences between genders was in how they were treated differently from their sibling/s. This early recognition of injustice and frustration at the inconsistency led some to question the nature of the gendered roles they were expected to play. Some of the participants, including Becky, noted how they had played with toys which were specifically marketed in a gendered way, saying, *"I have an older brother who is very typically masculine… He was always the toy cars and I was always the pink Barbie dolls"*. Similarly, Phil recognised that certain toys were for him and others for his sister, *"I liked to play with action figures and she was much more interested in playing with dolls and My Little Ponies."*
Maggie's earliest recognition of different treatment of the boys and girls in her home appears to have been a trigger for her later feminist outlook. She reflected:

I think it was when I first had to do housework at home for my brothers. I had two brothers and I always had to iron their shirts for school. I remember doing that and I always had to do a lot more in the house. I had to do a lot more housework. There were definitely roles for girls and roles for boys when I was growing up…. [My mother] would leave the dinner to be put on by me and I would come home and my brothers would be doing nothing in the house and I would be mad. It drove me crazy at the time. I was furious. It just seemed so unfair and unjust.

Similarly, Steve noticed an inconsistency in the expectations for behaviour for him and his sister, saying:

I used to get in a lot more trouble than my sister did and we used to fight. We used to fight like cat and dog. She used to get away with it and I used to always get in trouble 'cause I was told never to hit a girl. She used to laugh at me behind their back 'cause she knew she'd got me in trouble.

Even in adulthood, differing expectations for siblings of different genders, appeared to cause irritation. For example, Lena observed how she had been treated by her godfather after her mother's death, sharing,

My godfather is a very traditional, old views, archaic kind of man. He said to me, 'your brother has to come straight away because you won't be able to sort this out. He's a man. We need a man right now to do this'. So some men still uphold these views and that's something that's really stuck with me.

Sophie explained how irate she became when her father would not let her have her long-term boyfriend stay the night in the house but allowed her younger brother to have "*random girls stay over*". Both of these two final examples illustrate how the participants recognised injustice which in both instances led to a determination to assert their independence and stand up to what they deemed a constricting force, emphasising to them a wider issue of gender inequality.

Nick and Tom each have a son and a daughter and each shared similar experiences growing up in a household with their parents and a sister. For both of them, their fathers prioritised playing sport with them and largely ignored their sisters, which both Nick and Tom noticed and were uncomfortable with. Both are now keen to avoid this pattern of behaviour with their own children.

The childhood experiences discussed in this chapter may have influenced the early interests, the development of their skills and strengths and even the later careers of the participants so it appears that the importance of these early memories should not be overlooked.

Copying the behaviour of older siblings was mentioned by some. Becky showed a childhood willingness to follow her older brother's advice, saying:

> *I think 'cause he's three years older, he had that natural older influence. … He'd say you should buy this or wear that. These trainers are really cool. All the people in my year are wearing this, so you should get these so it was stuff like that. I thought, yeah I will 'cause I want to be like that.*

This suggests, as with parents, the seniority of older siblings may give them more power in a relationship and therefore greater influence. The data certainly suggests that siblings can affect the way children see the world and that comparing oneself to one's sibling can play some part in the development of identity. A number of the participants referred to the importance of maintaining relationships with their siblings in their adult life, suggesting significant long-term bonds.

Friends

The data suggest that the ways in which the teachers perceive their own childhood friendships may have an impact on their perceptions of their pupils' relationships. Their reflections on this issue have been analysed to examine how this may have affected their views on gender. Half of the participants explained they had followed a similar pattern moving from early childhood into adolescence, having almost exclusively friends of same gender early on and then a mixed gender friendship group during their teenage years. There were exceptions: Lily, Hannah, and Lena spoke of having male friends from a younger age. Alison described how having brothers and spending time with their male friends led to her being more relaxed with boys than she observed her female friends were. Phil explained that he had enjoyed friendships with mostly girls at primary school and then a mixed gender group at high school and beyond.

Considering the influence of peers on attitude and behaviour, it was evident that 'fitting in' and 'being cool' were relevant to some of the participants, particularly during adolescence. Nick's description of *"laddishness"* exemplifies how behaviour can be manipulated by peer expectations as can Phil's understanding of the impact of wanting to be accepted by the 'in crowd', governing behaviour and interest, saying, *"The ones you would consider to be the coolest ones in school were all into football … so that was a general influence on me."* These echo Lily's adolescent experiences which she cites

as one cause of the development of an eating disorder. Some of the participants reflected on the power dynamic within relationships with discussion about who led and who followed in certain relationships. Phil, for example, told me, "*My best friend is younger than I am so, if anything, I would have had an influence on him from that point of view*". These reflections suggest an understanding of hierarchy and dominance which resonate with the concept of power imbalances and seniority in relationships. It could be that the relationship between older and younger peer equates to that of older and younger sibling, parent and child and teacher and pupil.

It is also relevant to consider the interaction between influences and how the participants' views may be influenced by their peers in a contradictory way to the influences at home or from teachers. There were various instances of the participants reflecting on when they had noticed differences from their own home life. One example is Sophie's relationship with a friend at primary school who lived nearby. She shared how after visiting their home, she began to question choices made in her own family, admiring the lifestyle of her neighbours, saying, "*I clearly respected something about her family that made me want to emulate what they were doing.*" This illustrates the conflict between different influences and how differing ideas can be processed and accommodated by the individual. It appears that the way in which friendship groups develop plays an important part in a child's exposure to gendered behaviour which may have an impact later in life.

Teachers

Reflecting on how their attitudes to gender had developed, the participants spoke about the teachers who had influenced them. They described those teachers they had most respected and liked. There were, however, some who were vividly recalled for negative reasons. The positive role models in the participants' school years fit four distinct archetypes: "nice" female teachers who were maternal, gentle and calm; famously strict teachers who commanded respect; sporty role models and inspirational or flamboyant teachers, particularly those with a good sense of humour. With the exception of the maternal teacher, these archetypes did not conform to gendered stereotypes or hold particular associations with masculinities or femininities. These have, however, been included for two reasons: they are relevant in expanding knowledge about the nature of the influence of the teacher and they suggest that teachers, as role models, impart implicit messages to their pupils who may seek to emulate them.

Becky's reflections on her own style of teaching suggest that she values the pastoral side of her role. She shared:

> *I warmed to the teachers, one in particular, who … was just really gentle, really calm,*
> *never shouted and yeah those were the ones that I got on with the most, well felt most*

comfortable around I would say. And maybe it's just that maternal thing that they would just scoop you up. I don't know.

In contrast a number of the participants cited strict teachers as the most influential on them. For example, Sophie recalled the teacher who inspired her, explaining:

I had a favourite teacher when I was about year 5 who made me want to be a teacher. She was like the strict teacher which to be fair I'm really not so that's interesting. But she was the strict teacher who then went on to be head teacher and everyone was scared of her …. I really liked her and looked up to her, but I don't know why. I wanted to be a teacher from a young age.

Similarly, Phil recalled:

She was always the one with the reputation for being really strict teacher. You don't want her as your class teacher but I had a really good year with her… I was relatively high flying so she gave me lots of stuff to push me on and stretch me as much as possible.

In contrast, Nick admired the *"sporty role models"* and Jackie identified an influential teacher from high school:

I think one of the main influences of me feeling more settled was a PE teacher…. who was a massive influence to me and showed me that I could be sporty and that gave me a massive amount of direction through high school.

Tom made the same associations:

Most of my memories growing up, were really strong memories to do with sport. I had a PE teacher, again a male PE teacher who led all of the rugby at my school that I went to and he was quite a big influence in terms of… again I'd say quite a strong male role model and probably in terms of masculinity was on that side of masculinity again.

Other participants described the teachers who influenced them most as being those who stood out from the rest for their willingness perhaps to break conventions. Hannah admired a teacher she met when volunteering in a school who was *"very creative and passionate and just had this flair about the way she was teaching."* Maggie's recollections of her favourite teachers were those she found inspiring although her overall impression of her teachers was that they were not generally inspirational, so she tries to inspire her own pupils now. She recalled:

Miss Moran who I thought was pretty cool. She'd lived in Italy and was very independent and free she seemed to me. She taught us recipes and things and I cooked them all. She was very cool.

I had a very nice teacher called Sister Catherine who I thought was fantastic. She was a nun but she was very funny and she rode a motorbike and she was quite a character. I really liked her. Everyone liked her. She still managed to have this very strict religious way but she was very joyous in the way she taught. We all looked forward to her lessons. You could have a bit of fun with her, you know.

Another theme within the teachers' reflections on their teachers was that of humour. For six of the participants, it appeared to be the key to a successful relationship between pupils and teachers, making learning fun but there were instances of humour being used to belittle pupils with negative effects. Alison's Mr Moir was a notorious disciplinarian. She admired him regardless, *"But he had an amazing sense of humour, and you know it almost didn't matter that he was maybe a bit volatile."* Mary's science teacher's cruel, off-hand joke has stayed in her memory for nearly three decades. She noted:

Mr Blake completely put me off science forever. He thought he was funny and he used to make jokes at people's expense and …. one lesson he was doing some experiment and he said, we need a heavy weight on this. Mary, will you come and sit on it?

These reflections bring home the significant responsibility and opportunities that teachers have to influence their pupils. It appears that the ways in which this sample of teachers were inspired and influenced by their own teachers had a bearing on their own pedagogy and their understanding of what makes a good teacher. More specifically, these impressions may have influenced their attitudes to gender. Analysis suggests that the participants recalled teachers whom they admired and were role models; the participants sought to emulate their behaviour with consequent influences on them as a teacher, as a person and how they perform gender. Yet, as with the impact of the parents, there was also evidence of an inverse relationship. Some of these teachers recognised behaviours which they sought to avoid; they had teachers who inspired them to do the opposite.

Extended family

There was a view amongst the participants that their grandparents' attitudes towards gender did not always align with their own. Overall, there was a suggestion that attitudes had changed through the generations to allow men and women more freedom in their choices. Some suggested that there were clashes which caused them some discomfort, others discussed influence in a way that suggested

they had been able to alter the views of their older relations. Hannah reflected on how attitudes had changed over time and on the influence that parents have on their offspring, saying:

> *I think you learn from your parents and their viewpoints and its very much up to you whether you kind of follow those or you break free from them. Going back to the generations of my nan and my grandad, you know, having strong views against things and I remember growing up thinking, you can't really say that, you know that's not right anymore. You can kind of understand where they were coming from because it was a different society and culture when they were growing up compared to the society we live in today.*

Hannah's willingness to accept and understand what she deemed old-fashioned views shows her empathy with those holding views outside of contemporary societal norms and her belief in socially constructed meaning. She, along with eleven other participants, recognised and acknowledged the way that attitudes had changed over time. The data suggest that teachers like Hannah feel a responsibility to teach about gender equality whilst recognising that not everyone shares this viewpoint.

For some, the differing opinions they heard from their relations was a cause for concern. Samuel, for instance, was unhappy with his grandparents' attitudes to race and sexuality. A similar clash brought discomfort to Steve, whose chauvinistic uncles sought to influence the young men in the family to "*project that air of being a man…alpha male*". These conflicts heightened in Steve his resolve to behave differently, *"I think it had the opposite effect 'cause I didn't want to be like them."*

Across the data set, there were numerous examples of the participants expressing the influence that their grandparents in particular had had upon them, and several spoke of the close relationships they had had. Nevertheless, it seems that on the whole, the participants were able to recognise when their older relations' attitudes towards gender was at odds with contemporary expectations. This supports the theory that attitudes shift with generations which will be further explored in the next chapter.

Partners

Almost all (11/14) of the participants revealed that they were in heterosexual relationships and living with their partner. The ways in which the participants spoke about their relationships were possibly telling of their expectations for gender roles in general and suggested that amongst the sample there was an avoidance of gender stereotypes in the household. One recurring theme that emerged was equality between partners although there were some complications around this. Some of the female participants described their good fortune to have a supportive partner who "allowed" them to

behave as they chose, redolent of a society in which women cannot take this for granted. For example, Alison described her relationship with her husband Sean, saying:

I'm just lucky that you know Sean has always been really supportive and the fact that he worked from home so he could pick up maybe what's perceived as maybe the woman's job in order for me to go and do my training which has just been amazing for me because I think you, again 'cause I kind of lost my way a bit and you like doubt your own ability or you know. I guess its 'cause you kind of have to be selfish for a bit. It was for the greater good. It wasn't just for me. It's for all of us so you know that feels quite empowering. You know that Sean allowed me to do that and that I was able to do it.

Alison's use of the word *lucky* seems to infer that she deems not all relationships work in the same way. When she compared her marriage with that of her parents, she suggested that the equality in her own marriage was an important part of strengthening their bond. She explained:

My mum just did everything with us, took us to clubs whereas you know I think that now with me and Sean the dynamic has to be almost shared because I'm the one that's going to work full time. He obviously is supposed to work full time but 'cause he's got his own business, he juggles that around the children and so I guess I kind of hope that maybe they can see that that's fine. It doesn't have to be mum staying at home. I think that maybe me and Sean are more together than my mum and dad. Sean does so much with the children, but I think we like doing loads of things together as well.

Similarly, Jackie's acknowledgement of the support she receives from her partner Phil suggests an understanding that not all relationships afford both partners the same freedom. She said:

I think, as well, it helps that Phil's very much like 'yeah you go for it love'. And that support helps as well. I don't have a husband who's like, 'Oh you get back in your box'. He's like, 'Oh love what you learning to do now?' … And he lets me sort everything.

The way in which these women acknowledged the support of their partner in helping them to (or 'letting' them) succeed in their careers suggests some residual existence amongst these women of stereotypes of working mothers needing to prioritise their home-life or make sacrifices in their career or at home, or at least an awareness that not all households run in the same way.

Colleagues

There were instances where the participants described how their attitudes to gender had been shaped by other professionals with implications within this study for the importance of reflection

with colleagues. Hannah spoke of how important it was to her that her colleagues shared the same values in the pre-school nursery and that the ethos of the nursery incorporated promoting gender equality. She explained:

> *[My team] really kind of have the same way of thinking really which is lovely because I'm never up against those barriers or those conflicting viewpoints … Our views seem the same. We're all on board.*

Steve explained how his behaviour had been influenced by his colleagues. He said:

> *I do always think, before I phrase something. … if I was in a room with certain teachers, how would it come across? Even if I didn't mean it to seem as if I'm treating boys and girls differently, how would it come across?*

These testimonies illustrate how teachers are affected by their colleagues' views and practice. In section 4.6, there are further examples of how colleagues may affect a teacher's practice, particularly in regard to their approaches to promoting gender equality.

Public influences

Some of the participants recognised the role that the media had played in shaping their ideas. For example, Becky recognised how she was influenced by advertising as a child, saying:

> *I think the media has so much to do with [encouraging gender stereotypes]. How it's portrayed on adverts 'cause you see it and then you want it don't you. You see the typical blue and the typical pink and you think, yeah, I'll have the pink stuff. I think toys being a big one. Barbie dolls and pink houses. I absolutely loved it. I was in my element. It made me happy and that probably stemmed from there really.*

Her initial reflection appeared to suggest some passivity in the consumption of the media messages although there was subsequently more of an indication that she had made a conscious choice to accept those messages and to enjoy the choices. Lily also identified the media as a significant influence during her adolescence, saying:

> *I did used to watch, as well on the telly, when Mum and Dad were out, rap videos, like RnB videos where the women are wearing almost nothing, stomachs out. I think that was probably another thing that made me want to lose a load of weight and change my physical appearance and I used to look at them and think, Oh my gosh look at everyone. They're amazing… I would say maybe people I saw in the media, people I saw in magazines and things like that [influenced me].*

Alison recalled how her confidence was eroded during her time at home caring for her children. She compared her own media consumption with that of her husband, explaining:

You just end up watching a load of rubbish on daytime TV and I just didn't have time to read books…. [whereas my husband] would be at work and they would be listening to 6Music [Radio station], you know, or listening to something cultural or a podcast and you're almost being drip fed this thing aren't you? And I think I was just so focussed on being a mum, I felt like I was being excluded from the outside world and for the first time in my life I felt like I didn't have anything to say and that was awful you know 'cause I like to have a chat and I like to talk about stuff.

Alison's reflections appeared to suggest that she felt that she lacked agency in her choices. She acknowledged the influential nature of media in her use of the phrase "*being drip fed*" which Samuel also pointed to when he reflected,

It wouldn't have been social media. I was in the, one of the last generations that didn't have that. Facebook came in when I was 18 so … if we go back to then it would have been some sort of media. Media then was very entrenched in gender stereotypes.

Each of these reflections demonstrate not only that the media has played a part in shaping the participants' attitudes but also that, in the act of reflecting on their gender constructions, the participants have increased their awareness of media's influence.

More of the participants showed a keenness to expand their ideas through literature: Nick described himself as a *"deep reader"* and explained how he had sought to expand his understanding through reading, particularly psychology; several times throughout the interview, Sophie referred to feminist literature she had read or recommended to others and clearly felt its value in challenging attitudes and Maggie explained how books were more important in her *"political awakening"* than her peers, explaining, "*I was very keen on literature and I read a lot of feminist literature at the time as well. Germaine Greer and all these people who I thought were fab.*"

Lena discussed how she felt children's books played a part in reinforcing or challenging stereotypes, saying:

Sharing books with the class should get them into reading. Have male role models, female role models so I try to do that. I audited the book corner. We found lots of books on princesses, with pink covers. And we thought, oh is this offering a gendered view of what women should be? Let's have a think. Let's read more about it and then found, it's very limiting about a girl who wants to be a princess, asking a dragon to grant her a wish to be a princess. There was no more to it other than a very limited narrative so we do have those discussions.

Lena's reflections on how literature had influenced her and the power of literature to influence her pupils had led to direct action in the classroom. This example illustrates how teachers' practice can

be altered through their awareness of the need to promote gender equality and the means by which it can be encouraged.

Within the literature review, religion appeared to be a relevant theme in the discussion about gender construction however it was mentioned in only three of the interviews. For each of these three participants, their religious upbringing played a part in their early attitudes to gender and sexuality, however, for the majority of the sample, religion was not a significant influence on gender construction. The nature of my thematic analysis required me to include what was pertinent and exclude more peripheral themes which were not embedded throughout the data. It could be deemed that as religion was a small part of the data, it could be excluded, however, I concluded that its salience to this small group justified its inclusion.

Maggie and Lena were both raised in Catholic countries in what they described as a "patriarchal" society and both women were critical of the institution. Maggie commented,

> I was a staunch Catholic as a child so I made my communion. Everyone went to church in those days. Everyone was a Catholic and I had a great faith point as well. I was very holy. I had a terror that I'd get the calling to be a nun…. [The Catholic church] is a patriarchal institution… so when I was growing up you did have to fight back against the church and women's position in the home and also the anti-abortion groups.

Lena also recognised the societal impact of a patriarchal institution and reflected, "Our heritage is Catholicism and it's male dominated so being a strong female in that environment is a personal [value]". Mary was raised in a Baptist household and her faith continues to be an important element of her life. This has led to dilemmas in her role as a primary school teacher when her own beliefs are at odds with school policy, as she explained:

> I find it difficult because I believe that the Bible says you shouldn't have a physical homosexual relationship and that is not politically correct and that is not the way society thinks…. As a teacher, I would never say that to children. I would never put that onto a class, that it's something that's wrong or something you shouldn't do but that's my personal belief. Alongside that, my personal belief is not having sex outside of marriage. Which again a lot of people wouldn't agree with and I'm not going to shout it around.
> It's a really difficult one because I don't consider myself to be homophobic or anything like that and I don't want to be discriminatory and I want to be friends with everyone.

The data suggest that for those for whom religion is an integral part of their lives, there may be some important implications for their attitudes to gender and to sexuality.

The Nature of influence

The data suggest that there are multiple influences constructing the gender of an individual. Both as former pupils and as teachers, the participants were able to recognise that teachers only have limited impact. Within the landscape of other influences though, it appears that teachers do aim to play some role in providing their pupils with an understanding of gender and of challenging stereotypes. For example, Lena shared her desire to promote change by being a good role model to her pupils; Nick described his ongoing project to encourage girls, particularly, to enjoy and participate in sport; and Samuel explained his attitude to proactively challenging gender stereotypes with pupils. The interviews focussed largely on the positive influences which had been exerted on the participants yet throughout the data there were also examples of negative or inverse relationships such as teachers, parents, peers and relations that the participants feared emulating and sought to avoid the same mistakes in their own lives.

The interaction between choice and constraint involved in decisions about familial roles is complex. Sophie's mother's decision to become a full-time carer was deemed by Sophie to be both an individual choice and an example of how she had been affected by societal norms. There are numerous instances in the data set where the participants suggest that their individual choice has been eroded by others' influence. There are also circumstances in which they have deemed they have made a choice, but it could be argued that external influences have affected that choice. For example, consider Phil's discussion about his early involvement in football. Hannah's comments about the emotional conflict she felt returning to work when her daughter was young indicated that she felt obligations both to go out to work and to stay at home, saying, *"I guess it was being a young mum, feeling guilty about working with other people's children leaving your own at home. That kind of pulled at my heart strings."* There were also occasions in which the participants made a conscious decision to reject the influence of others. For example, Steve's consternation at the stereotypical macho behaviour of his uncles; a performance which he sought to avoid. Though it is clearly possible that the participants have emulated the behaviour they saw in others, there are instances where the behaviour they have witnessed has served as a warning. Steve's fear of becoming like his uncles was reminiscent of Jackie's avoidance of establishing a relationship with a man like her father and Sophie's determination to be financially independent unlike her mother. These examples point to the complexity of these clashing influences and the importance of the exertion of power.

5.4 Other significant life experiences

In addition to those areas outlined above, the participants discussed other significant life experiences which they felt had shaped their attitudes to gender and their pedagogy. These included positive experiences such as academic success and forming healthy, loving relationships. They also discussed more negative events such as illness, loss of a parent and dealing with difficult relationships. As the participants reflected on their successes, ambitions, how they had sought challenge, reaching their potential and working towards a goal, they related these aspects to gender stereotypes they had encountered and events that had shaped their attitudes to gender. Some significant moments which led to such changes included recognition of injustice in their family life, at school, in society more widely or in their careers. Several specifically described how and when they had rejected parochial views. For example, for Samuel, the desire to rigorously question stereotypes he had accepted as a child came in his early adulthood. He explained, "*I grew up. I wanted to be informed, to question. That didn't come to me until I qualified as a teacher and was living in London so I was probably 22, 23 something like that.*" Maggie's feminist awakening came in her teenage years, prompted by her recognition that family life appeared unfair. She said:

> *By the time I was 15, I was reading Simone de Beauvoir and the L-shaped Room and I was absolutely, my God no one's going to make me do these jobs and I was having none of it so absolutely staunch feminist and I was reading Spare Rib and I was having absolutely none of this business. I was born in '65 so it was kind of that second wave feminism so I guess as a teenager, it was all about women's rights and women were getting a lot more freedoms in the workplace as well and life was changing a lot. The 70s, 80s, I was a teenager in the 80s and life was changing a lot for women at the time. So that was something you were very aware of.*

There were also step changes in attitude associated with moving to a bigger school, attending university, moving to a new city and making a career change. Higher education was cited several times as an opportunity to become more intellectually curious and to become more questioning of the world, in some cases bringing about a greater awareness of gender equality. Becky felt a freedom to be more expressive and "*be myself*" at university, saying:

> *It's nice at uni 'cause everyone comes from such different places and different backgrounds and all judgement kind of goes out the window doesn't it? You're at an age where you can do what you want, go where you want and think what you want to think and it's almost all accepted when you're at that age; at uni rather than at secondary*

school. … That's just what I felt about views and things at uni. [Diversity] was all just widely accepted.

In general, the data show the teenage years as the height of conformity, particularly in terms of gender. There were instances of the participants appearing to feel trapped in certain situations. At different stages, certain key moments changed the life path of the participants or those close to them which they felt had had an impact on their understanding of the relevance of gender. For example, Hannah recalled a childhood incident which affected her career choice, saying:

I remember a careers fair particularly back in the nineties, where you had to tap in a computer and had to answer all these questions and you'd get a slip of paper that says what possible career you're going to be. I remember at the age of 17, 18 and I really wanted to go on to do corporate law. I was doing psychology and business studies and I really got into the business studies and the law side of things and this machine kind of churned out, printed off this slip that says you know, funnily enough it did say teaching. I was really like, Why can't I be a legal cooperative? And I remember this careers advisor lady she was really, well it's not a job for ladies to do. You know the answers that you've given, this is where it's pushing you to go on to and whether that's kind of influenced my job now, it possibly may have. That I kind of thought well maybe I can't go and do that. I definitely didn't pursue it and I should have done. But yeah that was kind of interesting, around 17 18 that kind of choice. I remember the conversation with her clearly. I can still remember her face.

Later, she also reflected on her sister's choice of career, explaining:

My sister was good at engineering as well but she chose to… I don't know, for whatever reason, changed and didn't want to go down that career path so she started looking after children.

Sophie suggested that the stereotype of the feminine "carer" role can be detrimental to women's career options. She also felt she had been encouraged to seek a career in a caring profession, saying:

We[women] go into teaching, which is a lower paid job, because it's a feminine job because that was the option given to us. I have this argument with my brother. My dad's a tradesman, my brother's a tradesman. I would have loved to have been a tradesman. Never even thought about it. My brother was always pushed to work for my dad. I was never ever. No one ever said to me, would you like to … do you want to be a plumber? Never on the radar. And actually, in hindsight, I might like to have been a plumber. I think

I would have been good at it you know, instead of teaching. My dad thought I should have been a nurse.

When Maggie received similar gendered careers advice though, she recognised the constricted choices being offered and, with her friends, found a way to protest, feigning an interest in a more stereotypically masculine career. She recalled:

When we [schoolgirls] saw the careers person, we were offered a home economics teacher or a secretarial course. That was it. I remember going, um, I'd like to be in the army. My friends were all doing this. I'd like to be in the army and fight and they [careers advisors] were all aghast. We were just trying to be awkward but yeah that was literally what we were offered at school.

There were other examples of the participants reflecting on paths not taken which led them to question their own actions. Some described how they had *"drifted"* or *"coasted",* some faulting their own passivity and others suggesting that their parents had not pushed them. For example, Alison recalled:

When I was younger I was, and I think I've just always been, a little bit of a drifter maybe and I think that maybe because my parents weren't really… they didn't force us to do anything.

Several of the participants discussed their path to becoming a teacher, mentioning a number of early indicators. For example, describing an early rapport with children, playing teacher in their childhood and encouragement or inspiration from their own teachers or parents.

Each participant verbally drew out a map of their childhood, adolescence and career, highlighting the events which they felt had shaped their gender construction. The connections between these experiences played a part in understanding the nature of influence. Additionally, the act of selecting these experiences enabled each teacher to examine their own gender construction.

5.5 Use of Language: *Tomboys, girly-girls and rugger buggers*

The data were coded through meaning rather than by language, however, within the theme of understandings of masculinities and femininities, a number of key terms stood out. Alison reflected on her gender construction, considering herself to be both *tomboy* and *girly*. She described her *girly* side with humour in the first instance in terms of appearance and also with the behaviours she associated with femininity, saying:

I used to want really long hair so I would walk round with a pair of tights on my head (laughs) to recreate long hair so you know I would probably do those things that would be maybe perceived as a girly thing. I enjoyed singing to girly songs and prancing in front of the mirror.

Lily equated a *girly-girl* with a glamourous appearance which brought her both sorrow and joy. Whilst she related cooking and cleaning and later in the interview caring for others with femininity, for her, these were not part of the *girly-girl* moniker. She explained:

My mum is, she is not your girly girly woman. She is very sporty, she is, doesn't wear any make-up, barely a scrap of make-up…. She cooks, she does most of the cleaning but she isn't really feminine and girly and glamourous at all.

Jackie's definition of *girly-girl* also related, in part, to appearance. She shared:

I would say that I'm not a typically girly girl but, that said, I love dresses and bright colours but when it comes to practically, I would say that I'm far more likely to give what people would technically say were blokey kind of things.

Mary defined the word *girly* when describing her daughter both through what it is and what it is not. She said:

She's a lot of things that I would consider to be traditionally girly: her favourite colour's pink and she likes dolls and all of that and then there's a lot of things that I would think of as boys' traditionally and I'm trying not to put that on her and it's all, you're welcome to do whatever. She likes climbing trees and she's sporty.

For Sophie, the word *girly* was loaded with negative connotations and had been used by her male pupils as a term of abuse, *"I think when someone says, that's girly. They're not saying girly's a good thing or oh that's girly in a neutral sense."*

A number of the participants talked about themselves, their daughters or their pupils as being *tomboys*. In every case it was used as a positive label, suggesting that the individual referred to was free from the shackles of gender identity and at liberty to express themselves and play as they chose. In most cases it was used as an explanation for their participation in physical activity, particularly team sports, possibly with boys. In some cases, it was linked to early childhood play and as a phase that one grew out of. In teenage years, these "tomboys" may have found an interest in more "feminine" activities and begun to conform to the roles expected of them. Alison, reflecting on her gender identity, thought back to her childhood, saying:

I think I'm a mixture of both maybe. I like girly things, I like getting dressed up but equally, I think probably, having two brothers and no sisters, I think when I was a child, I was a bit of a tomboy and so I think maybe…. Maybe a bit of both…?... I think my daughter's very similar to me actually. Like a little bit of tomboy but loves girly pink things.

Similarly, Nick's description of his daughter Molly and former pupil, Harriet, appear to equate physical activity with masculinity and an interest in appearance with femininity. He explained:

She's definitely a tomboy. Neither me or Liz have ever been people that are that sort of fussed about our image and spending money for that sort of shallower reasons and our kids are like that. Our kids are happy running around in tracksuits. Molly got a pair of trainers for her birthday and oh god she was so happy to have a pair of trainers like her brother.

I had a girl called Harriet Wilson, who was year 4 at the time, who told me everything I needed to know about girls. She was a tomboy. She used to love beating the boys. She was the fastest kid in the school. She was tough as old boots. She loved sports. She loved me.

Becky described how the parents of one of her pupils regularly described her as a tomboy. In this instance, the term was used with affection. She said:

I'm thinking of a girl currently whose parents, every time I see them, they say, oh she's a tomboy isn't she? And you know she's shaved all her hair off and wears a cap and all this sort of stuff. And mum's completely happy with it 'cause the girl is now happy and she's happy how she is.

Hannah associated tomboyish behaviour with sport and with having male friends, saying:

I've always been a bit of a tomboy. I used to play a lot of football at school. I was always out with the boys in the playground rather than playing you know ring o ring o roses and skipping around with the girls and I think that's sort of continued on in later life really. I don't really see myself as a girly girl. So yeah I guess in some ways I am. I'm quite motherly I guess. I think I get that from my mum. So I think there's certain aspects of being feminine in there. At the same time, there's quite a sort of tomboyish side in there. I think it certainly helps in my job to have that sort of rough and tumble side that comes out during interaction with the children so hopefully I kind of give the best that I am to them.

I think growing up you know I didn't have many friends that were girls but, as I say, I was more of a tomboy, hanging around in the playground with the boys, not really

participating in kind of in the girly activities going on and I was always up to my elbows in

mud, off down in ditches, climbing trees.

Hannah suggested that her interest in physical play as a child had benefitted her as an early years' teacher; she perceived being *tomboyish* to be a strength.

For Lily, the teenage years brought a growing interest in her appearance. She recalled:

When I was little, I was a real tomboy until I was about 14 so I always had friends who were boys. My best friend when I was younger was a boy called Ayaan, who was this Asian boy and he was my best friend through primary school and I was a real tomboy. I used to wear sports clothes all the time because I was really sporty and it was really strange when I went to high school. I was almost really scared of things like make-up and ear-piercings and I remember going into high school and feeling, even though I was really tall, and bigger than most of the children, I felt younger because most of the girls who came in from other city schools perhaps, they were quite teenager-y and they might perhaps be wearing make-up or do their hair in a certain way whereas I looked like a little girl so I've been on quite a journey actually because as a small child, I was very much a tomboy and then when I hit 14, 15, I had a kind of identity crisis, I suppose and wanted to be this skinny, attractive girl and kind of forced myself into that and then since then I've been really happy and comfortable.

Lily later went on to describe her interest in "*girly things*" and how she gave up team sports in favour of a new interest in make-up and spending more time with her female friends.

The positive connotations of the term tomboy imply superiority of the masculine. In proudly calling their daughters tomboys, these participants appear to suggest that they have been promoted to a higher status role than 'girly girl'. Throughout the interviews, there were few references to males who showed an interest in stereotypically feminine activities. It seems most teachers would evade pointing out deviance from masculine norms for fear of causing offence. Nick described how his father influenced his own gender construction whilst explaining the importance of sport in his upbringing, saying:

He probably sat on, not in the group of sporty people, he sat on the edge of that. He was a bright guy, ended up being an accountant, a senior partner in an accounting firm and did extremely well for himself and for our family but my dad was a bit camp actually, when I think back. He had a bit of a limp wrist. He was a lovely guy who I loved spending time

with but despite that side to him, he was passionate about me playing sport and he invested, I dread to think, how much money into me playing sport from the age of 6.

Sam's reflections on his family's musings on his brother's teenage behaviour and sexuality suggested that his attitudes had shifted over the years. He explained:

My oldest brother…. This'll be quite interesting. He was into drama. He was into drama, very expressive and... I don't want to sound too [provincial] when I talk about this but if I think back to how I thought when I was 13, 14. He was very expressive, very … you would say, we used to say effeminate. He was. And you know I remember, I used to talk with Mum and Dad and they thought Tom might be gay and there were… It wasn't a closed-minded thing. There wasn't an issue but we did associate those two things. We did. And I remember that being really clear and talking about that.

The use of language, in both of these cases, was used uncomfortably. In both situations, the participants used the phrases *camp* and *effeminate* almost apologetically, the implication being that the labels were not politically correct and were not complimentary, unlike the use of the word tomboy. Nick used other phrases as short-hand for another type of masculinity. His use of the term *lad* recurred throughout the interview, which to him depicted loud and socially confident behaviour without sensitivity and with a keen interest in sport. Later in the interview, he used the phrase *rugger buggers* again with more judgement as a way of distancing himself from the behaviour of a colleague. He said:

I think I probably swayed between different groups at school where your typical rugger buggers as they would probably be called later in life. I sort of was on the edge of that without trying to be I the middle of it but I sort of tried to sway between different groups but yeah I would probably have perceived myself as being a lad fitting in that group which was… probably gave me a confidence that you're part of a bigger thing with lots of other like-minded lads that liked sport, the same type of music, going out together and probably when you think about it now, being at school in the 90s you're in the middle of that culture that was developing through music, sport, TV, advertising so yeah I think thinking back now that probably was where I would have perceived myself then.

Analysing the use of these labels, it is of interest to note that language can be indicative of awareness. The frequency of the use of the word tomboy surprised me as I had not previously noted its prevalence. Like the "lad" label, the term "tomboy" is imbued with meaning, which is succinctly conveyed, perhaps accounting for their casual use by some of the teachers. None of the teachers from the school which had undergone the gender equality training used the term tomboy and

generally appeared keener to avoid labels altogether. For example, when asked whether she thought of herself as particularly masculine or feminine, Lena answered, *"No. I think of me as being Lena."* It is possible that, through the consciousness raising exercise of their training, the teachers explored the impact of labelling to stereotype and restrict choice.

Although the participants were raised in different geographical locations, at different times and with a range of different influences, there was a significant overlap in their cultural understandings of masculinities and femininities. It would appear that conforming to social norms can result in complicit acceptance of gender stereotypes. In another illustration, Nick described how the pressure he felt to conform to heteronormative expectations amongst his peer group led him to feign an interest in girls, saying:

> *And I would question that I was gay aged 13, 14 and I did question because everyone else seemed to be wanting girlfriends and having sex and I was like …. I just want to play sport. I don't want a girlfriend, so I kept having to pretend to have girlfriends. I'd have to keep pretending to be going out with someone.*

This situation was similar to Samuel's experience. He recalled:

> *There were all those stereotypical relationship things which we probably got from our parents. Boy girl, husband and wife. That should happen. There was probably a certain pressure there for that to happen. It's what you should do. It was probably easier, and I just accepted that. I was, yeah, OK, that's what should happen. I never had any doubts. I never had any… I wasn't fighting with anything in my mind. I accepted and we all did the same.*

5.6 How these teachers' attitudes to gender equality have changed over their careers and the triggers for change

None of the teachers involved in this study received any specific training about gender equality as part of their initial teacher training. In fact, Samuel emphasised that gender stereotypes were "entrenched" within his course, mockingly saying:

> *Disruptive boys, he's a boy, boy writing, boy topics, dinosaurs. Entrenched in it. You know. How do you get the boys writing? Get them in the mud… Even 7, 8 years ago that was still everywhere.*

The knowledge and experience of the participants in promoting gender equality varied greatly. Sophie, Mary and Lena were all committed to promoting gender equality before they trained as teachers, so it naturally became a pertinent element of their pedagogy. For eleven of the participants, their understanding of and emphasis on promoting gender equality had increased throughout their careers. They put this down to societal changes as well as moments of consciousness raising which will be explored further here. Prior to his engagement with this study, Phil had not really considered gender at all as a relevant issue within his practice, though he did suggest that he tried more generally to treat all children equally. No one teacher was against the idea of promoting gender equality and all believed in gender equality, but the salience of the topic varied amongst the sample.

Always an important part of their practice	Highlighted at some stage during career	Changed as a result of in-school training / colleague	Considered for the first time as a result of this study
Sophie Maggie Lena	Nick Hannah Samuel	Alison Lily Jackie Steve Becky Tom Mary	Phil

Figure 8: Participants' attitudes to prioritising gender

Analysis of the data suggests that consciousness raising is vital to bringing about change. What was evident from the interviews was that the teachers who had received professional training (as part of the gender equality training programme) and those teachers in my own school, with whom I had shared some thoughts about challenging gender stereotypes in a staff meeting, were more aware of a need to take positive action to promote equality. Some of the participants who are my colleagues at Pearmain School mentioned the impact that my interest in this area has had on their own teaching. Alison, for example, said:

> *I know we've had conversations about that kind of thing [promoting gender equality] and*
> *I know your viewpoint does kind of inspire me as well because I think possibly certain*

things I will do without really thinking. Not that I would... I wouldn't for one second say, oh you can't do that 'cause you're a girl or you can't do that because you're a boy or anything like that at all, but I think just talking to you highlights it to me about how to just bear that in mind when you're thinking 'cause I guess certain things you could say that I don't know could be perceived the wrong way.

Steve mentioned the impact of *"a certain Mrs Sheehy"* on his attitude to gender in the classroom and how it had changed over time, *"I'm very aware. Much more aware than I was, from working with a strong female role model."*

Jackie also reflected on how her practice had changed, saying:

When I first started teaching, and the kids would have the Mobilo out and I just sort of presumed that boys would make trucks with it and the girls would put Mobilo together and put them on as hair and it's not until I've kind of throughout my practice, kind of reflected on it and said, girls, why aren't you making swords? Or why aren't you making a truck? And there's definitely been a shift in that... It's been things that you've said at staff meetings that have made me think about things.

Tom also recalled the comments I had made in a staff meeting several years prior to the interviews which had evidently resonated. He reflected:

I think as a society, you don't even think about some of the things we say, but if you did focus on them you'd realise that is actually stereotypical of male or female, and it strikes me that some of the comments that you've made in staff meetings that I would not have even thought of. Things where in a story, in a sentence you mention a mechanic and you just challenge that perception by making it a female mechanic and those sorts of things you know perhaps I haven't given enough thought to and I'm sure I'm guilty of that in the classroom but it's those sorts of things we can adapt and improve.

A growth of interest in tackling a perception of gender inequality was evident amongst the sample as a whole. Nick articulated how he felt "passionate" about it and explained why he chose to participate in the study, sharing:

I've got such strong feelings now about how girls get such a bad deal in society and primary school children in general get such a bad deal and a growingly, a growing bad deal I think.

Catalysts for change appeared to stem from moments which raised awareness such as recognising injustice, becoming judgemental of a system or noting sexism. For some these moments resulted in

a feminist awakening, a moment to challenge parochial attitudes. Some of the participants were seeking to "*make it fair*" which led to them questioning their own actions. Sophie described how in her conversations with colleagues she sought to "*plant a seed*" from which she hoped their awareness would grow. Through elevating the importance of an issue, it appeared that more change could occur. Rosie spoke of how it was important to acknowledge what she called our unconscious voice. She explained how she had recognised how many times she used the word *guys* and its possible implications. She also spoke of how she had taken the same analytical process to her practice to examine her racial bias. The participants reflected on their values and drew conclusions about their practice. Amongst them, recognising the importance of creativity in the curriculum and balancing pastoral and academic achievement.

Hannah explained that a societal change, focussing more on equality, had altered her outlook, saying:

> *I guess it's maybe my own viewpoints changing over time and society changing as well with maybe more feminists, actually, women can have as much rights as men. You can go off and be in the army, you can have that kind of career and seeing more of it I guess coming through, whether it be on TV or other influences. The world's definitely changed in the last kind of 5, 6 years that I've been working here and changing my own career. Yeah, I think maybe wider experiences and influences have impacted on that really. Nobody ever sat me down and talked to me about gender equality and said this and that and I want you to do this in a certain way. I think it has, my own mind-set really has kind of changed.*

Together we unpicked Hannah's change in attitude, looking at some of the instances where she had recognised injustice: her experience with the careers advisor, recognising how her sister's career choice had been guided by her gender and her priorities and viewpoint at different stages in her career. From these it was possible to conclude that once her consciousness was raised to the issue, she became resolute to make all the changes she could in her classroom.

For Nick, the move to a co-educational setting really changed his outlook. He cited his growing interest in gender equality as stemming from a recognition that girls' attitude to physical education was affected by societal attitudes and their home lives. As a PE teacher in boys' schools, he had not previously noted the relative reluctance of girls to do sport. He emphasised his passion to promote the importance of sport with girls, listing benefits for physical and mental health and helping to solve issues. He argued:

> *I think primary school girls are probably one of the most susceptible groups to inactivity, obesity, mental health problems … what I'm trying to elevate is to show people what we're*

capable of here by just giving girls positive influence around them. I think I need to do
more in influencing parents of what they need to do with their daughters at a young age.

However, for Jackie and for Tom, their attitudes have also been affected by concerns over the future of their own children. Both stressed how parenthood had drawn their attention to the issue. Jackie explained:

I want them [my daughters] to have the same opportunities that men might have and if
they're doing the same job, that they get the same pay for it and are recognised in their
own right, not because of gender, because it's just not right you know, they deserve to be
recognised in their own right not because of the gender they are because it's not fair.

Becky shared how the catalyst to change within her practice had been teaching pupils with concerns over their own gender. She expressed how she felt ill equipped to deal with these situations having had "*no CPD here really*".

Samuel, Jackie and Lena are all teachers at a London school which had delivered a gender equality programme. All three acknowledged that the training had heightened their awareness of an issue which they already believed was part of their practice. Maggie reflected:

I think that I thought it was. But when we did the [gender equality] programme, I went
Oh my gosh, OK. Right. It made me think about my practice then. So, I think I always felt
that I did it, that it was just a natural thing that a person would do but I really think having
to examine my practice and how we all worked together to really pin down what we were
teaching. I think that was really important and that was so valuable. I really linger on that.
I remember the first time they came in and observed us. I was doing an assembly and I
never knew I said guys so many times. It's that unconscious voice that you bring into your
speech. So yeah, I really enjoyed doing that because I perhaps… even though one would
think that I would be gender aware, I don't know if I was.

Samuel's comments seem to support the necessity to reflect, *"It takes that to see it to reflect and see it and think about what you do and say."* He also talked about the process after the moment of reflection and how breaking habits of speech posed a problem, saying:

We don't use that. Good morning [smiling, welcoming, high pitched] to the girl and Alright
[low pitched and gruff] to the boy. It's mad. So I definitely would have done that early on
in my teaching career; I would have. I even remember being like, don't do that Sam, you
know. But it's so ingrained in you. In me. That that's how you're meant to greet a child.
It's mad.

These comments echoed with the way Tom talked about battling habits to try to consciously make a change to his use of language, saying:

I think it's really easy to slip back into old habits unless it's in the forefront of your mind. So when it was mentioned in the staff meeting, the following week I actually consciously pushed to get those sorts of stereotypes addressed in the work that I was doing but I think it's almost something that needs constant reminders in order to ensure that we don't slip back. And obviously, I think we all strive for equality of opportunity for boys and girls, but it's just sometimes quite difficult. Not just because of the things that children are told, but also it's quite difficult because of what they see and experience themselves. Because I think sometimes the reason those stereotypes are there are because it is evident in the children's world, and we should be challenging those stereotypes. But there's examples again, that you can challenge them, but the children experience that typical perception of male and female as well.

Lily's reflections during the interview suggested that the act of examining her own practice would lead to changes in the future, reflecting:

But I would say and the more I'm talking, the more I'm realising this. It is important to me. I think I'm still slightly unbalanced in the way I'm more thinking about how I'm thinking, how can I give the girls more opportunities? Rather than, I'm starting to think as I'm talking, that I give the girls an easier ride than the boys.

Some of the participants indicated within their interview that they intended to be more careful to examine their practice in the future. Follow-up communication emails received from the participants 12 months later, suggested that the interviews did have some lasting impact on the practice of the teachers. For example, Lily replied,

I have consciously tried to not identify the children by their gender and instead to use 'children' (rather than 'girls and boys'). I also don't split the children into girls and boys 'teams'. When planning and resourcing work, I make a conscious effort to ensure that I'm representing different genders in a variety of job roles. I have sustained these efforts over the 12 months.

Jackie sent a response saying:

> *I really enjoyed the interview. It made me reflect on aspects of my life that I have never really felt had impacted me. It made me reflect on some of the language I use day to day both in school and socially and question whether in fact it was showing equality. For example, I used to use the general term guys loads but now try hard to use different words for a collection of children. I also try to use they instead of he/she. I'm more savvy with the books I share during story times. When things are broken, I model asking someone to help me fix it that wouldn't be your stereotypical norm. e.g. if a button has fallen off "oh, hopefully my Grandad will sew that on for me". What are you having for tea? I am hoping Mr Wilson cooks me something tasty tonight! Maybe Mummy could help to fix your bike chain! I feel these are all now embedded in my day-to-day practice!*

Alison replied,

> *I've been more aware of the impact of what I say to the children. I try to use examples which reverse gender stereotypes and really think about the resources I use. I'm much more selective now and take the time to search for pictures and books which will inspire the children.*

Mary replied,

> *I think about the way I speak to the children and try not to say boys and girls anymore. I've started to think more about my language and the resources I use and I notice when I hear other people using sexist language too…. I make sure I challenge the children if I hear them saying, "Girls can't do this or boys can't do that."*

In conclusion, it seems that moments of reflection enable teachers to scrutinise their own behaviour and the origins of these behaviours and to resolve to bring about change. Although reversing entrenched habits can be difficult and may require time, reminders and fresh energy, it is possible for teachers to make changes to their practice which may result in fairer outcomes for pupils of all genders.

5.7 Minimising implicit messages given through teaching

Recognising areas for development

Some of the participants (Lily, Phil and Tom) described treating all children equally or inferred that they were 'gender blind'. This could be deemed positive in the drive towards equality, that they do not label according to gender, however, it may also suggest an indifference to gender equality as an

issue or that they had not fully examined the potential for challenging gender stereotypes or even recognising their existence. Similarly, in eschewing feminism, some of the participants gave clues to a discomfort with confronting inequality. Becky's honest reflection on gender equality saw her examine her own position and acknowledge the origins of her indifference.

A: *Would you call yourself a feminist?*

B: *No. Not at all.*

A: *Why not?*

B: *I just don't feel that strongly about it. I just think, you've got men and women and we can do what we want in this day and age and I completely understand… I just don't feel that strongly about it all in terms of … I don't know. I think maybe in my head it doesn't seem like a big issue. I mean maybe it is a big issue but maybe my naiveté is just not aware of how big an issue it is for some people but I'm sure it really is an issue and my ignorance of it… It is my ignorance. I think my ignorance of it just makes me think, I don't think enough about it maybe. Maybe I should think more about it.*

A: *So you don't think your gender's ever been a barrier to you?*

B: *No never.*

A: *Am I putting those words in your mouth or have I got that right?*

B: *No. Absolutely spot on.*

A: *And maybe that's why it's not been important to you…?*

B: *Yeah. Not that it's not important to me but I don't think… Maybe there are a lot more people who are more passionate about it for various reasons but it's never been a barrier to me. But then you've got to think about the journey I've taken with teaching. It's quite female orientated isn't it? So if I went on a different trajectory towards a different career, would it be barrier then? Probably and in which case I'd probably feel strongly about the inequality in terms of pay or promotion or being chose against men potentially. But I'm quite happy with where I am. Maybe I don't place as much importance on it as I should do. It's an ignorant thing to say I know.*

Lily and Becky's suggestions that gender had been not a barrier to them made me examine my own preconceptions. I realised that I had previously understood that feminism was increasingly important to young women. To meet two educated women in their twenties who shared the view that the battle had been won and that they personally were largely unaffected by sexism alerted me to my own prejudice. Becky explained that, as a primary school teacher, she was surrounded by women in positions of power and that she felt there was no glass ceiling for her in her career. 27 year-old Sophie, mused on this possibility, saying:

I think lots of my friends who don't see it, it's because they haven't experienced it,
explicitly experienced it. That's why Jayne [my friend] doesn't think it's an issue. Because
she hasn't explicitly experienced it and isn't aware enough of things like the fact that we
go into teaching, which is a lower paid job, because it's a feminine job because that was
the option given to us.

Jayne and Athena [my friends] think I'm ridiculous. That it's not important. And I find that
interesting. When I talk about gendering children with blue and pink, they think … I
remember Jayne telling me, that's what gives feminists a bad name because they're
fighting those battles that are irrelevant so that makes people think that it's too extreme.

It appeared from the interviews that when the teachers reflected on their practice, many could identify opportunities to make progress. They were able to recognise how their actions or language were inadvertently emphasising difference or employing stereotypes. Alison spoke about segregating pupils by gender. Some spoke of being either tougher on or more playful with boys than with girls and others described how they had used endearments such as *mate* and *love*.

Changing practice

The data suggest that those teachers who were aware of their power to bring about positive change by promoting gender equality, actively sought to do so. There were numerous changes that the teachers discussed they had made or intended to make to their practice, including:

- o Avoidance of labels
- o Altering language
- o Considering representation in displays
- o Changes to curriculum
- o Initiating change with parents/ carers

The participants explained how they had begun to challenge stereotypes, change their use of language and had sought opportunities to promote the confidence of children of all genders. Steve, for example, shared:

Whereas before those quiet girls who just seem to get on, I'd tend to not push them but
now.… I would say that I was harsher with boys than I was with girls at the start of my
teaching career. I was, without a doubt but now, I think academically wise especially, I
push all children regardless of gender, but I would say I was probably a bit softer on girls

when I first started. Not any more though …. I think because it's come much more to the forefront of people's thinking that you do question the way you behave and the way you ensure that gender doesn't matter. That it should be the same across the board.

Additionally, they sought ways to influence female pupils by encouraging physical activity and participation in sport. Nick put it succinctly, *"What we then did was raised the profile of girls' sport really easily. Kids are kids. Kids like playing sport. Bottom line."* Jackie described how she had become more focused on the need to involve pupils in construction and practical tasks and considered how the curriculum could promote pupils of all genders to get involved in a range of activities:

I see more girls in construction outside now which can only be a positive thing. Yeah, and I very much say, Oh I love how you're being a mechanic and use those terms with them. Which some people would say were stereotypically male roles but using those words with them or, I love how you're using that spanner, that's fantastic. And also, those sorts of comments like, do you ever see Mummy doing these sorts of things? And I have this sort of conversation so we're just planting the seed. I think it's making sure that in our topic-based learning, our curriculum stuff that we're hitting all of the potential aspirations that come from those.

Samuel vehemently argued that to bring about significant change, one must be active not passive in promoting equality, saying:

It's not good enough not to be accepting, you've got to challenge, you've got to confront and highlight and elevate, all those things. You have to go out of your way to make the children feel a certain way. To make them accepting and loving and all those things that you can't assume they have. There are too many other influences. You have to fight that. As soon as they're in nursery and reception. As soon as they're in. It's there. They've got roles and influences that you have to consciously unpick and battle and it's not good enough just to hope that you saying a couple of things or you not giving out blue and pink is going to be good enough.

Barriers to change

Some of the participants were aware of potential barriers to change. As discussed in section 4.5, Tom and Samuel talked about the challenge of avoiding reverting to "*old ways*" and Maggie spoke of how she had sought to break habits with her language. It appears that in order to maintain long term change, it is necessary to review and refresh the relevance of the issue and draw attention back to its necessity. Changing habits with language, for example can take time and regular reflection can aid

this process. The email feedback from the participants about the longevity of their endeavours to amend their practice suggested that it was possible.

As a long-term campaigner for gender equality, Sophie expressed her frustration over her ability to bring about change. She saw her awareness as a responsibility, even a burden that others lived their lives free from. When she talked about the way in which her pupils were influenced by so much more than just their teacher, her inference was that she was fighting against the tide and that with each new cohort she would face a new battle. Sophie's disillusionment suggested that teachers may become disheartened if they do not see their actions bringing about the changes they would hope.

The participants all supported the idea of promoting gender equality (though, as previously discussed, there was a range in the relative weighting to which the issue was prioritised within their practice). It is, therefore, not possible to surmise on the impact of this process with individuals who hold contradictory views. None of the teachers, for example, expressed a view that gender differences are entirely inherent and that boys and girls should be treated differently or expected to progress on different paths. It appears, however, that there is the potential to bring about change amongst the more reluctant participants. For Becky, who as previously discussed did not call herself a feminist, promoting gender equality was not a priority, however she still felt a duty to raise the issue with her pupils, saying:

> *Even though I don't feel overly passionate about it, I want them to come through thinking about it and I think it's our job to instil that awareness regardless of our own views because I think it's the right thing to do.*

Sophie articulated a concern that pupils may be giving the "*right*" answers when discussing a topic such as gender equality. They may be aware of what you want to hear and phrase their responses accordingly. This is telling of the power dynamics of the classroom. Pupils may feel coerced into acting in a certain way in a certain environment (language and behaviour may vary in the classroom, on the playground and at home) or disguise their true feelings for fear of chastisement. In some senses this equates with the discussion in chapter four regarding participants' responses within the interviews. Mary raised how her views on homosexuality were at odds with school policy and how she dealt with this conflict. She explained how she was able to bracket her own views and to maintain a distanced position, saying:

> *As a teacher, I would never say that to children. I would never put that onto a class - that's something that's wrong or something you shouldn't do - but that's my personal belief.*

Further study would be beneficial into the power of reflection in changing attitudes and practice amongst those who would argue against the need to challenge gender stereotypes.

Conclusion

The data suggest that reflection on practice as well as personal values, attitudes and the roots of these is a powerful tool in bringing about change to pedagogy. How my own findings compare to previous research is discussed in the next chapter and its application and consequences for teachers and pupils is discussed in chapter seven.

Chapter Six

Discussion

The previous chapter presented the data and the themes developed through the process of analysis. In this chapter, the findings are positioned in relation to the literature. The aim of this research has been to develop teachers' understanding of their pedagogy in a way that will consider their impact on the gender construction of their primary school pupils with the purpose of promoting gender equality. In order to achieve this aim, the ways in which the participating teachers presented their understandings of femininities and masculinities have been considered. These representations are analysed within the landscape of prior knowledge (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs, 2010), examining the power/ knowledge relations at play and exposing the continued existence of gender stereotypes and how they may manifest in teachers' choice of language and actions. The ways in which the teachers' attitudes have evolved are explored and the influences which shaped these attitudes examined. I argue that there exists a four-stage process by which change occurs which results in teachers altering their practice. This process begins with an event which raises the awareness of the individual to gender inequality, followed by a period of attitudinal shift. During the third stage, the teacher begins to take action, altering their practice. Some will reach a fourth stage in the process, progressing to elevate the issue with other professionals. This four-stage process is fully explained in the final section of this chapter.

6.2 Gender, Power and Knowledge

Power as a concept is threaded throughout this analysis. It is important to be clear about how it has been understood. Foucault (1979) suggests that power is omnipresent. His understanding is that power is dispersed, pervasive and operates at all levels of social relations, since it modulates the construction of our bodies and identities. Similarly, my data suggest that knowledge and enactments of gender are present in all actions and interactions, often without conscious thought. Foucault's (1979, p93) statement that "Power is not an institution and not a structure," suggests that power relations are embedded within all exchanges in human life. This understanding was pertinent in how the data were examined. For example, the way the participants described interactions with their families and peers was considered through this lens. The overt and subtle influences of peers,

relations and even institutions demonstrated how power is exercised in social interactions at the micro-level rather than through a dominant and oppressive sovereign power. Whilst there is an understanding here that power is not a structure or great, towering edifice, it is helpful to consider the nature of disciplinary power which regulates the behaviour of individuals in the social body through physical movement or segregation. Foucault (1979, p187) suggests that institutions may create this disciplinary power which "imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility". Discipline is a form of power that tells people how to act by coaxing them to adjust themselves to what is 'normal'. Amongst the data, there were many examples of individuals seeking to conform to the group which supported this notion.

In contrast, there were also clear indications that the participants had made choices to resist expected gendered behaviour and to forge for themselves a new role or way of 'doing' gender which may have caused some discomfort to themselves or to others. Resistance can be seen as an iteration of power in the form of agency. For example, Maggie's playful insistence with the careers advisor that she intended to join the army or Sophie's refusal to accept her father's inconsistent treatment of her and her brother. In these instances, the individuals could be seen to have resisted disciplinary power. This can be compared to Foucault's (1979, p 95) comments that, "Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power".

Foucault (1977) proposed that individuals' behaviour is controlled and observed in social groups or public institutions through panoptic surveillance. This concept was built upon the design of a prison (Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon) in which inmates have no way of knowing when they are being observed. The potential that one is being scrutinised at any moment, it is suggested, encourages an individual to police their own behaviour. The way that Becky described her high school experiences, suggested a high level of awareness of the 'accepted' behaviour. When Nick and Samuel described the teenage expectation to have a girlfriend, they appeared to be affected by nameless entities who were policing the behaviour of the group. Self-scrutiny appears to have encouraged behaviour which complied with the understandings of "normal" gendered and sexual behaviour of the day.

Foucault (1977) also argues that power and knowledge are inextricably linked. He suggests that mechanisms of power produce knowledge upon which individuals build their understandings of the world. The literature review also discussed how this acquired knowledge then further reinforces the ways in which power is exercised. I have recognised these complex relations between power and knowledge throughout the analysis of the data in the sections below. Finally, it is relevant to consider

the notion that power is productive as well as repressive (Foucault, 1979). Every event described by the participants can be seen to be the result of power/knowledge relations which is evident in the themes discussed below.

6.3 Constructions of Gender

The participants' individual accounts of gender indicate oppression in terms of the 'normalising' structures within which gender roles are acquired, but the participants also reveal power in the form of agency when they consciously choose to go against the norm. Similarly, Butler (2004) argues that our enactments of gender are not automatic and suggests that we have desires that do not originate from ourselves but from social norms, suggesting that culturally imposed ideas may be at odds with our own personal inclinations. These arguments build on Foucault's (1977) depiction of a soul moulded by society which is shaped by the contemporary discourse. These theories could be applied to many of the issues discussed by the participants, which have been outlined in the previous chapter. For example, generational shifts in attitudes; conflict between competing influences and the will or compulsion to fulfil certain societal roles based on one's gender. In this section, I will discuss some of the ways in which the participants have been influenced by society and some of the resultant images of masculinities and femininities.

Competing influences

The data indicate that early parental influence reinforces expectations for gendered behaviour in line with the findings of the literature review. Gendered toys in childhood appeared to be relevant to later development, supporting Kollmayer *et al*'s (2018) findings. Phil's reference to the toys he and his sister were encouraged to play with by their parents and Steve's recollection of the toys he and his sister were provided with mirrored the findings of Kollmayer *et al* (2018), which suggest that parents rated *same-gender-typed* and *gender-neutral toys* as more desirable for their children than *cross-gender-typed toys*. However, there appeared to be a significant, complex relationship apparent in the data, between this parental influence and other influences external to the home. Within this complex web of influences, it appeared from the data that the way that an individual felt oppressed or held power within society was also a function of their individual identity.

By using Bronfenbrenner's (1981) model to analyse the literature and the data, considering the micro, meso, exo and macrospheres, it became apparent that the relative significance of any one influence varied between participants and at different stages within their lives. What could be a primary

influence in childhood may later become more peripheral. For example, for some of the participants, the influence of their peers appeared to have become a more significant influence than their parents during their adolescence. This is discussed more fully later in the chapter.

Within the data set, there were attitudinal shifts described from generation to generation. For example, Jackie's depiction of the difference between the restrictions her grandparents placed on her mother and how she had felt freer to make career choices growing up; or Samuel's recognition that his grandparents' views on gender and race felt "old-fashioned". Strauss and Howe (1997) present a similar depiction of generational changing attitudes. They argue that a cyclical pattern exists within the behaviour and values of generations and suggest that within a cycle of 80-90 years, there will be four generational archetypes which repeat in sequence. These archetypes (idealist, reactive, civic, and adaptive) will share similar attitudes to family, risk, culture and civic engagement. One might argue that to band together a whole group of people by their age and to suggest that they share the same traits and values holds as much credibility as predicting behaviour based on astrological star signs. However, by applying a social constructionist epistemology and arguing that an individual is shaped by their environment and their lived experiences, it is fair to assume that those who have shared similar experiences might hold similar outlooks. In which case, it seems that the wide-scale political events, overriding dominant discourse of the day, or regime of truth (Foucault, 1977), would have a similar effect on the development of that generation.

In terms of attitudes to gender equality, there has been much written of the *culture wars*: a largely media induced debate pitting younger more progressive generations against more traditional older generations (Duffy *et al*, 2021). The way that this conflict has been presented suggests that all millennials, born between 1981 and 1996 (Strauss and Howe, 1997) and gen Z, those born after 1995 (Katz *et al*, 2021), would be very supportive of gender equality; however, the data suggested otherwise. Within the data collected from this small sample of teachers, this binary division did not appear to apply. For the younger teachers, Becky and Lily, (both in their twenties) gender equality was far less important than it was to Hannah and Maggie, who were far older and who had perhaps witnessed and experienced more injustice. However, Sophie and Lena, also both in their twenties, vehemently argued the importance of promoting gender equality with their pupils, suggesting that there were different outlooks and priorities across generational bands.

From the data, it appeared that attitudes of individuals may vary at different stages in the lifecycle. This confirms the ideas presented in the literature review about generational attitudes. It appeared from the interviews that the women, in particular, more closely questioned how their womanhood had affected their career options and confidence at the stages in life when they had become mothers

or had peers who were mothers. Sophie and Becky (both in their twenties) both commented that this may be a future stage at which gender equality may become more relevant in their lives, considering the implications for their careers. Jackie and Alison (both mothers in their late thirties) noted how this had been a critical point in recognising injustice in the experiences of their peers and themselves. The sample size is too small to make generalisations about generational attitudes towards gender, but this glimpse supports the findings of Wang and Coulter (2019) and Duncan (2010) who argue that attitudes vary within generations.

The generational effect of society at large may be considered a macro influence, but the micro influences and the interaction between them, what Bronfenbrenner (1981) calls the mesosphere, made up a more significant element of the teachers' discussions. They discussed their parents, siblings, peers, teachers and relations with much greater frequency. Overall, the data suggest that parental influence, particularly in childhood, can reinforce expectations for gendered behaviour amongst a more complex picture of competing and reinforcing societal influences. These findings appear to be in line with the work of Halpern and Perry-Jenkins (2016) who argue that parents' behaviour is more influential than their ideology in the development of their children's attitudes about gender roles; what children observe in the home is more significant than the espoused views of their parents. If the participants observed an egalitarian division of labour in the home, this suggests, then they would be more likely to expect this for themselves in later life (Croft *et al*, 2014). It is worth noting that none of the participants was raised by same-gender parents. This may be an influence which could not be deemed through this sample. Those raised in a single parent household did not speak of the impact of this situation although Hannah did describe her own experience as a single parent and how she felt she had provided a role model to her daughter that "women can do anything".

Early understandings of gendered difference, for some of the participants, came as they ventured out into the world. For others, they recognised how they were treated differently from their siblings. As observed in chapter five, there were participants who had siblings of a different gender and who they recognised as having behaved or been treated differently from themselves. Similarly, Bank and Kahn (1997) emphasise the important and complex role that siblings can play in human development. Their acknowledgement that a sibling can be *"one's worst enemy or sweetest companion"* (Bank and Kahn, 1997, p15) chimed with the ways in which the participants had described their relationships with their siblings, particularly in childhood. When considering the relevance of siblings in gender development specifically, however, it appeared that the influence from the sibling was less critical than the effect of observing differences between how they were each treated and the experiences

of their sibling. McHale *et al* (2001) observed that children's attitudes to gender roles are more significantly influenced by older siblings than younger siblings which also appeared to be the case within the data.

The participants referred to childhood friends as potential influences, and the majority described how they had had mostly same gender friendship groups at primary school, extending to mixed-gender groups at secondary school. This reflects the findings of the literature review that amongst young children, friendship groups often appear to develop in same-gender groups which may lead to policing of certain gender stereotypes (Martino, 1999; Reay, 2001). This could have consequences in the classroom. With the understanding that adults tend to emulate their own childhood experience, teachers may replicate how they were organised in primary school as 'the norm'. The data indicate that for those teachers for whom in childhood same-gender friendships were dominant, for example, made them more likely to arrange classroom seating with the expectation that pupils will be unhappy working with a partner of a different gender. Through perpetuating this pattern, an expectation is set that continues to segregate pupils which may result in more engrained gender differentiated behaviour (Roberts and Pinkett, 2019). The reverse is also contentious. Boy-girl seating arrangements may be used by some to prevent misbehaviour in the belief that it will separate groups of friends. This action puts forward to pupils a message that boys and girls are different, and that boys and girls should not be friends. It also accentuates a binary discourse.

From the literature review, it was evident that teachers influence their pupils' attitudes to gender (Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2012) through use of language (Chick *et al*, 2002), inadvertently conveying subconscious understandings that boys are more physically active and girls are more emotionally expressive (Wingrave, 2018) and through other implicit and explicit gendered messages delivered in the classroom (De Groot & Kim, 2011). When reflecting on their childhood, the participants, however, did not express concerns that their teachers had influenced their attitudes to gender in a negative way. This is suggestive of two possibilities: either the participants' teachers had not delivered these messages, at odds with a wealth of literature arguing otherwise, or that the participants were not aware of these influences taking place. The participants discussed the teachers who had been positive role models, but not in a way that had significantly affected their attitudes to gender. The conclusion that this sample of teachers sought out role models could be seen to reconcile with the call for more male primary-school teachers as positive male role models in schools (McGrath and Sinclair, 2013), but the participants did not all wish to emulate a teacher who was the same gender as them. Instead, they searched for a role model who inspired them.

The data suggested that the media played some part in shaping the participants' attitudes and that the act of reflection heightened their awareness of media's influence on their own lives, however there appeared to be a lack of awareness of the heavy influence that the media may have on their perceptions. The media, in their many forms, both reflect and shape society at large and it can be said that the media re-present gender (Richardson and Wearing, 2014). The media encompass abundant representations of gender - consider rom-coms, television soap operas, make-over shows, current affairs programmes, lifestyle magazines, print journalism, radio phone-ins, online dating apps and social media platforms. The literature suggests that there are copious ways in which we receive messages about how to do gender within each of these forms yet there were few direct references to media within the data set (Media was mentioned only nine times explicitly during the interviews). Lily spoke of how the media (specifically social media platforms and music videos) had influenced her, Becky recognised the effects of advertising during her childhood and Alison discussed the effect of her television consumption during her maternity leave. All of these were described as passive forms of media consumption. They suggested little agency in choosing what they were seeing, yet recognised that they may have had a negative impact. On the other hand, Samuel, Lena and Maggie spoke of their active engagement with literature which suggested that they had actively sought out material which may have consolidated or broadened their views. This illustrates the possibility that as media is consumed in a more selective and active way, the images we see may be more aligned to a single narrative. Bauwel and Krijnen (2021, p3) argue that

> Young people are digital natives, and social media platforms like Instagram are considered to be the place to articulate new femininities (and many other gender identities).

Richardson and Wearing (2014, p124) suggest

> the ideas that we maintain about ourselves – such as class, race and, most importantly, gender – do not just happen but are discursively constructed.

In line with these ideas, most of the ways in which the participants discussed these influences suggested that they fit with social learning theory; they generally imitated the behaviour they admired in others yet there were also instances where the participants reflected on how they had sought to avoid copying the behaviour of others and specifically mentioned the inverse influence of individuals in their lives. For example, Jackie referred to her father's treatment of his female partners and Steve spoke of his uncles' attitudes to gender as providing examples of how *not* to behave.

The data indicate, therefore, that this hierarchy of influences, and the web of power and agency described, results in a range of structures which affect our behaviour. That at any one moment in an individual's life, there will be a number of significant influences acting upon them. There will also be

a history of diverse forces which will have influenced them in the past. The cumulative effect of these influences will create the attitudes and behaviour of the individual at that moment. Those around us influence our behaviour and attitudes at different times and in different ways. To reflect my findings, this diagram shows an example of how a range of influences will be present in an individual's life. The thickness of the arrows is used to illustrate the relative influence of that agent during that stage of the life cycle. It appeared, for example that parents were a more significant influence during childhood, whereas media and friends became more significant during adolescence.
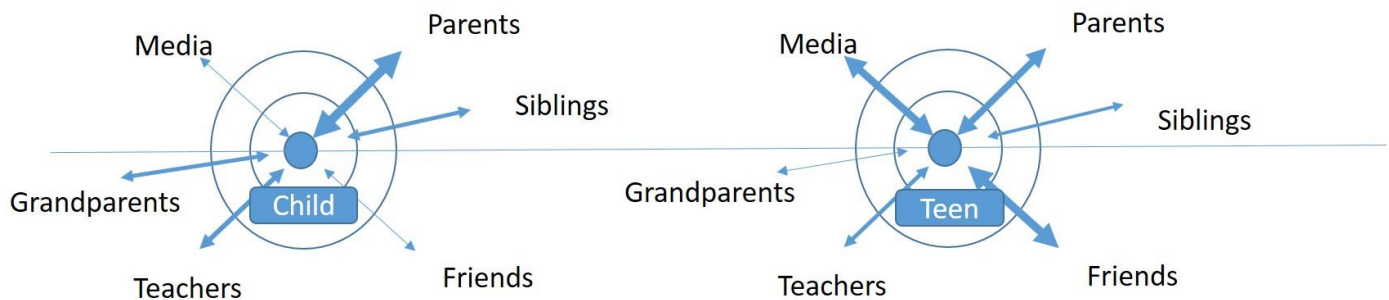

Figure 9: Influences through life stages

The data suggested that the effect of these multifarious influences, with regard to gender, is a catalogue of stereotypes and associations which are perceived in some cases without our consciousness. Having examined the representations of masculinities and femininities described in the interviews, below are some of the depictions drawn out.

Caring female

Motherhood and females' responsibility to nurture were significant themes which emerged from the data. De Beauvoir's (1949) position that the trappings of motherhood are social constructs that engineer the patriarchal oppression of women, can be seen in the opinions of some of the participants, however the majority spoke in neutral or positive tones about their own and their mothers' experiences. Some of the participants equated femininity with nurture, a maternal or protective instinct which resonates with the views of French philosopher Perrier who compared human behaviour with that of the animal kingdom, concluding that maternal instinct is inherent and that women are naturally devoted mothers (Thomas, 2014). There remains some societal expectation that women should seek fulfilment through motherhood and should show an interest in the home, which is evident, for example, in the media in the proliferation of lifestyle magazines marketed to women.

In the data, there were multiple representations of the hardworking and capable mother. Likewise, in Bradley's (2013) chapter, *Having it All*, she notes the multiple burdens of work and motherhood as being exciting and fulfilling but coming at a cost. UK women have reported spending on average 5 hours per week longer on housework than men and 13 hours more caring for family members (Park *et al*, 2013). Hochschild (1983) suggested that emotional labour was undertaken more by women and that it was thought by many to be a woman's job to keep others happy, extending into the workplace and the home. Decades later, Hartley (2018) argues that unpaid, often unnoticed work that goes into keeping everyone comfortable and content is a continued burden for women, which was suggested by the data. Sophie reflected on her mother's situation and how she herself was determined to avoid what she felt was commonplace amongst women – namely taking on an unequal share of the household work whilst continuing to work outside of the home.

There was contrast within the data in how this maternal role was perceived along with discussion around the potential challenge of combining it with a career. This contrast is also present in the literature. Friedan (1963) presents the resentment that some American women felt at being denied the opportunity for intellectual fulfilment and career success. More recently feminists have spoken about the difficulties of combining paid work and family life (Hochschild, 1983; Slaughter, 2012). Balancing career and home life is portrayed as a modern dilemma for working parents, and Bradley (2013) concludes that working mothers may experience guilt and a pressure to excel in all areas at the expense of their own enjoyment in life. Her participants, like mine, describe juggling their many responsibilities. The data suggested that the teachers in this sample had greater experience of women in the role of primary carer, which may lead them to subconsciously pass on messages to their pupils about the role of women in society. For example, the language used by female participants about them being 'allowed' by partners to secure a career. Bringing our awareness to the influence of these experiences on our thinking can lead us to make a conscious effort to overcome previous assumptions and impact on our interaction with pupils.

Appearance and femininity

Butler's (1990) argument that gender is performative was borne out in the data by the association most of the women made between femininity and appearance. Bradley (2013, p23) discusses how much time, money and effort is spent by women and girls in "creating the bodily appearance of being feminine." Applying make-up, styling hair, choosing appropriate attire and walking in heels could all be considered as part of the rituals undertaken in the enactment of femininity. There were several

instances where the participants expressed their discomfort when they considered their appearance didn't align with cultural expectations, especially in adolescence.

The data suggest that many equate femininity with not only looking a certain way but also showing an interest in appearance. The way that some participants felt compelled to dress, to wear make-up and to represent femininity can be seen as an example of subjectification (or subjection) (Butler, 1995). The more the practice of beautification is mastered, the more fully subjection is achieved. Butler (ibid) suggests that submission and mastery take place simultaneously: that one is yielding to an external order and at the same time mastering the technique. This can be observed in Lily's example of how she came to enjoy not only others' reactions to her "glamorisation" but also to her own sense of self. Beautification can be considered a positive and even empowering experience for women (Cahill, 2003) though it may also be associated with objectification and an oppressive element of a patriarchal society (Bordo, 1993). Both viewpoints were evident in the data with, for example, Lily and Jackie suggesting the former and Lena and Hannah suggesting the latter. Overall, the teachers' reflections suggested that the messages they may subconsciously convey to their pupils are that girls could or even should pay heed to their appearance more than boys.

'Modern' masculinities

The teachers depicted a range of masculinities throughout the interviews. Much has been written about the changing nature of modern manhood and conflicts between historic alpha-male archetypal masculine identity and a more complex range of masculinities (for example, see Jablonka, 2022; Anderson, 2012; Connell, 2005; Perry, 2017). From the data, themes emerged which suggest that the teachers' representations of 'modern' masculinity are in fact, on the whole, largely traditional. Analysis of these themes of masculinities is necessary to understand the implicit messages which we, as teachers, might convey to pupils. The themes within the dataset represent an understanding of 'modern' masculinities amongst this sample of teachers which may be indicative of the broader understanding in English primary schools.

In the data there appeared to be a connection between masculinity and anger. Connell's (2005) concept of *hegemonic masculinity,* describing the dominance of men over women and a hierarchy of intermale dominance, can be exemplified by Nick's representations of his experiences in PE departments, and the way he explained his understanding of male pupils' acceptance of hierarchy:

I believe boys are really much easier to manage if they know who's the boss and their rank below him.

Connell (2005) recognizes, however, multiple masculinities, including: complicit (those who support the hegemonic masculinity by ascribing to its ideal), subordinated (those whose masculinity is at odds with the hegemonic ideal and therefore is subordinate to it, including for example homosexual males) and marginalized masculinities such as race/ethnic marginalization, physical disability or class inequality. Connell (ibid) suggests that, whilst hegemonic masculinity is not the most common pattern in the everyday lives of men and boys, it holds the most social power. The way that Tom, Samuel and Nick discussed their childhood power relations with their fathers can be seen to support these theories. Connell's (ibid) depiction, therefore, of the archetypal male, the pinnacle of the hegemonic masculine ideal, is that which subordinates or marginalises other forms of masculinity.

The principal traits of hegemonic masculinity include violent behaviour, aggression and resistance to the expression of emotions. The data suggested that there was some association made between masculinity and showing anger, and these associations align with Connell's (2005) theory and the suggestion that hegemonic masculinity is equated with dominance through aggressive behaviour. Mary's reflection, for example, that her father was not like other men in that he never lost his temper suggests an understanding of masculinity in line with Connell's model; not all men show the characteristics of the archetypal male but that, nevertheless is what embodies masculinity. When Nick spoke about the ethos within the PE department of his previous school, he described a culture of hegemonic masculinities where to fit into the group, it was necessary to comply with the "rugger bugger" culture, using the phrase, "our way or the highway". This data provides an interesting illustration of the power/knowledge relationship which determines how gender is, or continues to be, performed.

Whilst Anderson (2018) argues that there is a contemporary tendency for young men to be comfortable expressing emotions, the data contained residual signs that this still may hold some stigma. This contradiction was apparent in Samuel's discussion of his own and his father's readiness to cry in front of others but Tom and Nick's descriptions of their fathers who discouraged them from public shows of upset. Shields (2013) notes that expressing emotion is viewed as a stereotypically feminine trait within popular culture which would lead to some men or boys being fearful of readily showing emotions in public, apparent in the data in the childhood experiences of Tom or the exchanges Sophie described between her year one pupils. Gough (2018) suggests that anger is widely considered to be a 'masculine' emotion which can be expressed without fear of damaging the

masculine persona. Anderson (2018) suggests that many young straight men now reject homophobia, are more emotionally intimate with friends and embrace activities and artefacts once coded feminine. His depiction of a range of masculinities which favour a more empathetic outlook were initially founded on qualitative research with mostly middle-class heterosexual men (Anderson, 2009) but latterly have been extended to encompass research which suggests that young working-class men may also be moving towards more inclusive masculinities. Jackson and Sundaram (2020) however paint a different picture of trends amongst young men, suggesting sexism, sexual harassment and violence are commonplace within "lad" cultures in higher education. They argue however that within these communities this *laddishness* is performed to varying degrees. The participants shared a range of performances of youthful masculinity which could be seen to align with these depictions. The impact of the #ME TOO movement (Vogelstein and Stone, 2021) and the prevalence of unwanted sexual advances made by men towards women (Palmer *et al*, 2021) also suggest that there may remain a contingent of men with misogynist attitudes. These were only very briefly referred to by some of the female participants.

In contrast to the role of primary carer associated with femininity, there was a connection made within the data between masculinity and providing financially for the household, complying with the traditional gendered model for work and family centred around a male earner and female carer (Zuo, 2004). For example, Nick's description of his father who "worked hard and worked late and made some good money". Although theoretically, the male *breadwinner* role has been in decline in the UK and across Europe due to state policy changes and societal shifts as women gain greater access to the workplace (Crompton, 1999), a continued expectation for the role was apparent within the data. Reeser (2010) theorizes that the masculine association with wealth subjugates men who are forced into a role which society proscribes under the misapprehension that they have made a choice. Being forced into the role of carer or of provider at the expense of one's individual agency to choose a role is another example of the perils of gender stereotypes. The rigidity of these roles, created by societal power structures, limit personal liberty which was apparent in the way that some of the participants spoke of their own, their parents' or their peers' experiences.

Glock and Kleen (2017) argue that some teachers implicitly associate male students with negative and female students with positive student behaviours, and this emerged in the data; there was an acceptance that male pupils are more likely to misbehave in school. These views have been echoed by teachers and pupils with consequences for outcomes (Skipper and Fox, 2021) for example, concern over boys' attainment has previously been linked to a gendered expectation for behaviour. Skelton and Francis (2009) argue that these assumptions have brought about practice which may

inadvertently result in more entrenched gendered stereotyping, emphasising difference. From this sample, it appears that there remains an attitude that *boys will be boys* which could be damaging to children of all genders.

In the interviews, there was little mention of masculine appearance which suggests that there was limited connection made, in contrast to the evident associations between femininities and appearance. Feminists have argued that women have been subject to endless pressure to strive to look a certain way and to conform to societal ideals of feminine beauty (Rhode, 2016) and there was evidence of this in the data. Liebelt (2016) argues that this pressure is increasing rather than waning. Bordo (1993) and Ricciardelli *et al* (2010) suggest that this pressure has also, increasingly, been applied to men potentially resulting in oppressive and harmful patterns of behaviour for people of all genders in future generations, however, this was not evident in the sample.

These assorted depictions of masculinity provide both an indication of the possible implicit messages which may be passed on to pupils and evidence that masculine stereotypes are pervasive and potentially damaging.

Sport

Throughout the dataset, there was a strong association made between sport and masculinity and this is similar to the findings of Mackinnon *et al* (2003) and Cooky (2009). Mackinnon *et al* (2003) suggest that for boys, playing and watching sport can act as a form of initiation into manhood and Reeser (2010) suggests that the important part that sport can play in masculinity goes beyond its impact on the body. Both in the data and in the literature, there remains a perception that physical capability and sporting prowess are more commonly masculine skills. Marta *et al* (2012) suggest that at primary school age, competence in strength, dexterity and speed are more equally shared across genders than in adulthood although they do advise that teachers should be aware of gendered physiological differences in order to maximise the enjoyment of PE lessons. Cooky (2009) argues that girls' disinterest in sport is socially constructed which aligns with the views expressed by some of the teachers in the sample. The perception that boys should enjoy and excel in sport and physical activity was generally borne out by the data with phrases such as: "Boys are easy. Dads kick balls with boys".

Asking why girls are less physically active than boys, Telford *et al* (2016) conclude that girls' physical activity is less favourably influenced by socio-ecological factors at the individual, family, school and environmental levels; though they suggest that all of these are subject to change so the gap may be

lessened in the future. It has been observed that girls participate less in organised sport (Vella *et al*, 2014). Telford *et al* (2016) suggest that this may be a consequence of receiving less social support to engage and conclude that, as a result, girls may not enjoy physical education as much as boys. Similarly, the data suggested this was an issue with the understanding that it was more difficult to engage girls in PE lessons. For example, Alison's reflection that,

> *Lots of the girls … do have a tendency to just stand in the corner and they'll want to talk. I think probably, because it can be quite a contact sport, some of them just don't like that you know.*

Since, stereotypical forms of masculinity have been associated with power and physical strength (Reeser, 2010), the resultant cultural norms prioritise the presence of sport and physical activity as a part of boyhood. This was a commonly shared experience of all of the male participants. The female participants who discussed their enjoyment of sport did so to point out that it was at odds with their feminine identities. It appears that sport is still a significant indicator of gendered difference in the primary school. International studies suggest this is also an issue outside of the UK. In Columbia, Cárcamo *et al* (2021) suggest that gender stereotypes are reflected in children's choice of activities and in how they use the school sports facilities. In South Africa, Mayeza (2017) notes the way that boys dominate playground football with girls excluded from play and gender roles policed by pupils. The role of sport in school goes beyond timetabled PE lessons, with inter-school sports competitions, extra-curricular sports clubs, recreational sport (at playtimes and after school) and a range of physical activity in the early years. In all domains, there is the potential for pupils to receive messages about gender and their role.

Gender segregation is common in school sporting fixtures, within some PE lessons and in extra-curricular sports clubs (Davis, 2003). Girls' participation in sport was a concern for some of the participants. Lena shared how she sought to be a role model for her female pupils, encouraging them to run regularly, always running with them and telling them of her own weekend sporting activities. Samuel spoke of the impact of the female PE lead at his school who inspired pupils and Tom noticed the obvious gendered divide at his school. From a large teaching staff, he pointed out, there were only two male teachers and they were the teachers who led the well-attended (mostly male dominated) football clubs. It appears from the data that the teachers understood their role in encouraging pupils to take part in extra-curricular sport and that, as role models, the gender of the teacher mattered.

Bowles and Sullivan (2012) argue that teachers' personal biography has a strong impact on their commitment to school sport. For teachers growing up with an interest in sport, it appears that their involvement in extra-curricular sports clubs is more likely. From the small sample of teachers in my study, the male teachers had sport feature as a significant element in their childhood. This suggests that, in order to promote gender equality and avoid perpetuating an ongoing gendered divide, teachers of all genders should ascribe to the notion that encouraging *all* pupils to take part in sport is beneficial. With government funding and support, organisations such as This Girl Can (2022) and Girls Active (2022) are striving to encourage more girls to see the benefits of participating in sport. School physical education plays an invaluable role in allowing girls to gain the skills and confidence required to encourage a lifelong participation in physical activity (UNICEF, 2000; United Nations, 2003), suggesting that government policy should continue to focus resources and attention on the issue. It also appears to be an area for reflection within schools and for teachers as individuals.

Language

Coates (2004) suggests that language can be seen as an indicator of our interpretation of the world and as its usage changes over time, so do acceptable and unacceptable terms. Correspondingly, some of the terms used by the participants illustrated their underlying attitudes and may contribute to gender stereotypes conveyed to their pupils. For example, the word *tomboy* was used frequently in the interviews. Hannah suggested that her interest in physical play as a child has benefitted her as an early years' teacher. Her assertion suggests that she perceives being *tomboyish* to be a strength. This positive use of an old-fashioned label adheres to Thorne's (1993, p112) understanding of tomboy lore:

> Fictional tomboys chafe at the restrictions of imposed femininity. They struggle with those who would tie them down and put them in the confines of dresses, housework and 'manners'.

Thorne (1993) notes how these stories conclude with the entry to young womanhood when the tomboy character succumbs fully or partially into valuing the traits and activities she has previously resisted. For Lily, the teenage years brought a growing interest in her appearance. She later went on to describe her interest in "girly things" and how she gave up team sports in favour of a new interest in make-up and spending more time with her female friends. Despite the optimistic implications of emancipation, Thorne (ibid) suggests that the term *tomboy* has sexist overtones as its suggestion is that an energetic, independent girl who climbs trees and dresses comfortably is abnormal, therefore

reinforcing a stereotype of passive, inactive demure girls who avoid physical activity and prioritise appearance over enjoyment.

Amongst children, research suggests there is a similar confusion over tomboys. Reay (2001) argues that a self-determined tomboy in her study "recognised and responded to prevailing gender hierarchies which situate being male with having more power and status" (Reay, 2001, p162), implying a degree of canny resistance in her affiliation with the boys and rejection of all things girly. Francis (1998) suggests that one girl in her study had defended girlhood against the sexist implications of her girlfriends who aspired to maleness and held the assumption that males are superior, using the phrase, "girls are good enough". Her assertion is that tomboys are showing disloyalty to the girls.

The positive connotations of the term tomboy made me question whether masculinity 'trumps' femininity; the implication is of the superiority of the masculine. In proudly calling our daughters tomboys, are we suggesting that they have been promoted to a higher status role than "girly girl"? When we consider the reverse, what do we call boys who participate in what are regarded as more feminine activities or who choose to play with girls? Are these labels used with pride? Thorne's (1993) equivalent term for such "gender deviance" is sissy, which she suggests is used exclusively as a term of abuse. This word was not used by any of the participants and I have never heard it used by pupils in my years of teaching, however, throughout the interviews, there were few references to males who showed an interest in stereotypically feminine activities.

Teachers, it appears, may use labels without consideration of their effects. Paechter (2007, p5) comments on pupils' use of the label, noting:

> Tomboydom was constructed either in terms of being 'like a boy', with a greater or lesser degree of explanation of what this might mean, or in terms of a strong contrast with the identity seen as its polar opposite, that of 'girly-girl'.

Like the *lad* label, the term *tomboy* is imbued with meaning, which is succinctly conveyed, perhaps accounting for their casual use by some of the teachers.

Gender fluidity

References to gender fluidity and transgender children were almost entirely absent from the dataset, despite their prevalence in academic and media discussions about gender. The teachers largely discussed boys' and girls' experiences and achievements and made some observations that there were differing experiences for men and women. In the most part, their observations were binary in

nature, although there were some instances where the discussion centred around a more diverse understanding of gender. There is a trend in recent literature in the field of gender and education towards a focus on transgender, gender fluid and agender pupils (Bower-Brown *et al*, 2021; Winters *et al*, 2018; Kosciw and Pizmony-Levy, 2016). But in stark contrast with the literature, the modern media and academic discourse around gender appears to be more advanced than the everyday experience of this group of teachers' lives and careers. The data suggest that amongst teachers the gender discourse may be generally binary which could unwittingly be harmful to young children confused about their gender identity.

Reflecting later on the interview questions, I considered the possible impact these may have had on the participants' responses. At one point, I had introduced the terms *feminine* and *masculine* which may have subliminally presented the notion of these as opposing discrete terms though it was not my intention to encourage a binary understanding of gender. On reflection, this might have been an issue I could have explored with the teachers during the interviews and asked them directly to reflect on their understandings of femininities, masculinities and gender.

6.4 Life Journey and Evolving Attitudes

This study is built on the premise that lived experiences shape the attitudes and behaviour of the individual (Berger and Luckman, 1966). Each of the participants spoke about their influences and attitudes during childhood, adolescence and adulthood. For this group of teachers, ideas about gender and the restrictive role it can play developed during childhood and for some reached a peak of conformity during the teenage years. For ten of the interviewees, their attitude shifted over the course of their adult lives, giving greater credence to promoting gender equality later in their careers. Below I discuss the journey made by the participants and analyse some of the causes and effects of their evolving attitudes.

Childhood

The data suggested that children can have firm ideas of appropriate gendered behaviour, endorsing the assertions of Martin *et al* (2002) who argue that young children may be aware of gender roles and hold an assumption that these roles are rigid. Similar to the participants' reflections, Martin *et al* (ibid) suggest that as children grow older, they can develop a greater understanding of the flexibility of gender roles but, in early childhood, take them to be firmly defined. For example, Hannah was

distraught when asked to play a drummer boy in the school nativity play and Mary explained how she had been perplexed by androgynous looking teenagers of whom she was unable to identify their gender. Adopting Foucault's (1977) concept of panoptic surveillance, Paechter (2007, p20) argues that in childhood, and adolescence particularly, there is a *mutual panopticism* in which "everyone exerts disciplinary gaze on everyone else". The participants' early memories support this notion. The upset and confusion felt by the young Hannah and Mary might suggest that the ways of doing gender that Butler (1990) argues are being mastered throughout life are, during childhood, inextricably linked with their early understanding of the world. The connotations of this firm early understanding of the importance of gender and associated behaviour suggest that early intervention to quash stereotypes may have a resultant impact on the childhood (and potentially lifelong) interests, attitudes and choices of children.

The recollections of the group that they were encouraged to play with gender stereotypical toys and undertake activities which their parents deemed appropriate for them, support the findings of Kollmayer *et al* (2018) who argue that parents provide differing opportunities for their children based on gender. Likewise, this, combined with the influence of siblings, relations, peers and the media, appears to have created an environment in which some of the participants were coaxed into stereotypically gendered activities from an early age. Alison, Nick, Lily, Steve, Phil, Becky, Tom, Sophie, Mary and Maggie all described ways in which they had been thus affected in their childhoods. As outlined in the literature review, there is evidence that childhood interests can impact later career choice (Francis, 2010) and Rippon (2019) has argued that differentials between genders, a perceived predetermination to succeed in certain areas of the curriculum, could be accredited to early exposure to certain skills through play. The argument, for example, that boys are more likely to be given construction toys to play with, enhancing their early spatial awareness (Fulcher and Hayes, 2018) could lead to a theory that men are more likely to become engineers if they are given these toys early on.

There were instances where the participants directly related their adult selves to these formative childhood influences. For example, Tom outlined his lifelong interest in sport and its association with masculinity as stemming from childhood influence. Becky shared how she had been encouraged to play with dolls in childhood and continued to describe the importance of nurture in her role as a teacher and her association of nurture with womanhood. Phil had been offered different toys from those offered to his sister. He accepted this gendered divide and explained that he now made the same choices on behalf of his daughters. One can make the assertion that as a parent or a teacher, one will not stand in the way of any child's choice to buck a trend and to choose to play with toys or

take part in activities which do not fit with gendered stereotypes, however, there was evidence of an acceptance that certain toys or activities are for boys and others for girls. Unpicking these assumptions may have brought to the attention of the participants the nature of gender stereotypes and the barriers they present to children. It suggests that one must take an active role in promoting activities to all genders to counter these deep-rooted preconceptions.

Adolescence

Despite the popular image of the rebellious teenager (Muncie, 2004), the data suggest that adolescence may in some ways be the peak of conformity, with feelings of powerlessness and vulnerability leading to a desire to imitate peers, fearing the consequences of standing out from the crowd. Some of the participants discussed how their attitudes to gender and to social conformity had changed during adolescence. For example, Lily explained how she had previously felt quite comfortable in the company of males and wearing sporty clothes, but this changed during adolescence and for Becky, high school was a time when it was difficult to "be yourself". These instances of conforming to societal norms demonstrate Foucault's (1977) assertions that we are shaped by dominant discourses of the day. An individual's desire to look and behave a certain way could be seen to be influenced by their gender and their expectations for their gendered appearance. Butler (1990, p63) suggests that masquerade is a feature of doing gender, 'appearing' holding precedence over 'being', arguing that, "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender". This suggests that our enactment of gender is wrapped up with our behaviour and our appearance. For those who select femininity or masculinity as a part of their identity, this is very likely to influence their choice of appearance, style of dress, way of walking, talking and interacting. During adolescence, as an individual's identity is developing, the data suggested that this is particularly cogent. Jackson (2010a) described how her female adolescent participants understood the necessary traits required for popularity: to be pretty (and thin), fashionable and sociable. These were the keys to 'fitting in'. This experience was present too in my data. Becky explained:

> *At that point [going to high school] you want to fit in don't you? So I think you just conform don't you to what's out there? Regardless of whether you like it or not, you just conform 'cause you don't want to be socially isolated or excluded.*

The coercive and darker side of the gendered performance can result in unpleasant consequences. Lily's experience shows the extent to which a desire to look a certain way can affect our behaviour. During her teenage years, feeling compelled to look a certain way to fit in with her peers and

influenced by representations of women in the media, Lily was affected by an eating disorder. Galmiche *et al* (2019) suggests that the onset of eating disorders is highest in adolescents and young adults and more common amongst females. Ferguson *et al* (2014) interviewed adolescent girls with eating disorders and concluded that social comparison plays a more significant role in their development than the use of media, however, they also conclude that media, and social media in particular, may lead to increased peer comparison. Similarly, DeVries *et al* (2016) conclude that social network site use predicts more frequent exposure to peer appearance-related feedback, arguing that use of social network sites poses a risk to adolescents' body image. These studies validate Lily's assertion that her self-comparison with her peers and women she saw in the media damaged her self-image, contributing to the development of an eating disorder. None of these themes had come up in the literature review and it was thought-provoking to establish a connection between gender and body-image. Around 75% of those affected by an eating disorder are female and most eating disorders develop during adolescence. It appears that people of any gender and of all ages can be affected by eating disorders, but the issue is most prevalent among teenagers (Priory, 2021; BEAT, 2021).

Both Lily and Lena recognised that their childhood behaviour and style of dress no longer felt acceptable when they reached their teenage years. They each grappled with the implications of their own and others' appearance, before finding their own comfortable space in society and with their own enactments of gender. The data suggest that reflecting on their own youthful experiences may encourage teachers to connect their own adolescent experiences with those of their pupils, encouraging them to empathise and consider possible consequences for their approach in the classroom.

Similarly, some of the male participants spoke of how they had negotiated their masculine identities in their teenage years. Nick and Steve both felt affected by 'lad culture'. In the 1990s, *laddism* was a cultural phenomenon which saw a reclamation of traditional masculinity, birthing the *new lad* (marked by hegemonic masculine values). This culture was most clearly embodied in men's magazines of the day such as Maxim, FHM and Loaded (Weldon, 2012). Jackson (2010b) explains how pupils demonstrate "laddishness" in school by being disruptive in class, prioritising sport and avoiding any engagement in academic work. These behaviours have been associated with the continued concern over boys' attainment. Paechter (2017) has suggested that this kind of behaviour provides a way in which children can experience the power of naming themselves as part of the social world. In the data Steve felt pressure from his uncles to conform to these kind of behaviours, a form

of masculinity which Steve himself rejected. Nick and Samuel both discussed the ways in which they felt some pressure to have relationships with girls in their adolescence. They accepted this practice as part of the enactment of masculinity and heterosexuality. Walby (in Grosz and Probyn, 1995) describes masculinity as the avoidance of anything feminine or anything homosexual and Butler (1990) argues that, like gender, sexuality is performed. Butler (ibid) also asserts that sexuality is a societal construct, and the reflections of Nick and Samuel appear to endorse the notion that there are expectations for the performance of sexuality which are influenced by social norms. In primary schools, there may be expectations for children to engage in this performance of heterosexual relationships (Renold, 2006; Morison *et al*, 2021) so it would appear that teachers would benefit from an understanding of how these early conceptions of sexuality develop and how potentially restrictive and confusing exposure to a heteronormative culture could be.

Adulthood

The teachers described the ways in which their attitudes toward gender had changed over the course of their careers, with the majority (11 out of 14) saying that they prioritised promoting gender equality more now than when they first qualified as a teacher. What had prompted this change varied between the participants. For some it related to their own lived experiences and for others it was a growing awareness of inequality.

Alison and Steve explicitly spoke about the impact I had on them as a colleague, recalling how I had shared my thoughts on gender stereotypes and how to challenge them in school. They both asserted that this had changed their practice. In a similar way, Lena, Maggie and Samuel described the impact of the gender equality training they had undertaken in their school. All three explained that they had held gender equality to be an important part of their practice prior to the training but emphasised the value of really examining their own practice and scrutinising their curriculum and resources. They reflected on how they had altered their language, for example, and noticed opportunities of which they had not previously been aware. These examples support the findings of Consuegra and Engels (2016) whose study with secondary school teachers suggests that interventions can reduce gendered inconsistencies in teachers' feedback to pupils.

Hannah, Samuel, Alison and Steve reflected on the ways in which society's perception of gender equality had changed over time. They suggested that there was now increased public awareness in the expectation of egalitarianism. Hannah highlighted this with her comments about her own attitudes changing in line with societal changes, saying: *"Maybe my own viewpoints have changed*

over time and society is changing as well with maybe more feminists …. the world's definitely changed." Samuel acknowledged that he had not felt the need to confront issues of oppression in the earlier parts of his life and had therefore had to have his consciousness raised to issues of inequality.

> *It's my generation, I'd go back to that exposure. If you weren't that sort of person who felt that they didn't fit in or were different, you know, someone like me would just go along until… I would have had to really seek out to question because where would I have learnt about gender equality?*

These comments acknowledge both the changing nature of societal attitudes but also the relevance of one's own experience being within or outside of dominant sectors of the social hierarchy. Attitudes to gender change over time (Bradley, 2013) and the position of an individual within societal power structures may determine the individual's ability to recognise injustice that they personally have not been limited by (Foucault, 1977). For Maggie and Sophie, recognition of their own unfair treatment in their teenage years led them to question the gender roles they observed in their own homes. Both women claimed the label of feminist at an early stage and were strong advocates of gender equality before embarking on their teacher training. They explained how they had held equality as an important element of their pedagogy throughout.

Evolving Attitudes

I have outlined the ways in which the participants described their understandings of gender and how the implications for their behaviour have evolved throughout their lives. In some cases, the participants were able to define explicitly how their attitudes and behaviour had changed over time as we have seen above. For others, it appeared that similar changes in outlook had occurred without the participants consciously recognising it. For example, Mary did not specifically acknowledge that her attitudes had become more egalitarian over time, but she described her childhood understanding of rigid gender roles and later spoke of her desire to see greater gender equality particularly on behalf of her daughter. Drawing on the experiences across the group, it is plausible to infer that young children hold quite limiting views about the implication of gender for their lives. In adolescence it appears that the desire to conform to social norms may be at its peak, but that this may also coincide with a political awakening and/or a desire to rebel.

In adulthood, the participants felt more able to make choices about their own behaviour without the same fear of judgement. However, the conventional familial roles, with women as primary carer and man as wage-earner may have had some implicit impact on their expectations for family life. As teachers, the participants all supported the ideal of gender equality and there was a general increase in the motivation and knowledge of the group across the span of their careers. The data suggested that these teachers' views on gender evolved through their lives with events prompting change occurring at different stages along the way. This is similar to Bronfenbrenner's (1981) proposal about the development of an individual and to the social construction theories of Berger and Luckmann (1966). Specifically, the way that social action has a significant effect on a biological individual and that this development comes as a result of a complex system of relationships through multiple levels of the environment which alter over time. Francis and Skelton (2001), Measor and Sikes (1992), Olaiya and Petronella (2011) and Thorne (1993) also suggest that teachers can have a potential influence on their pupils, affecting further change. Connecting these ideas across the dataset suggests that this may have a cyclical effect, which I have illustrated below.
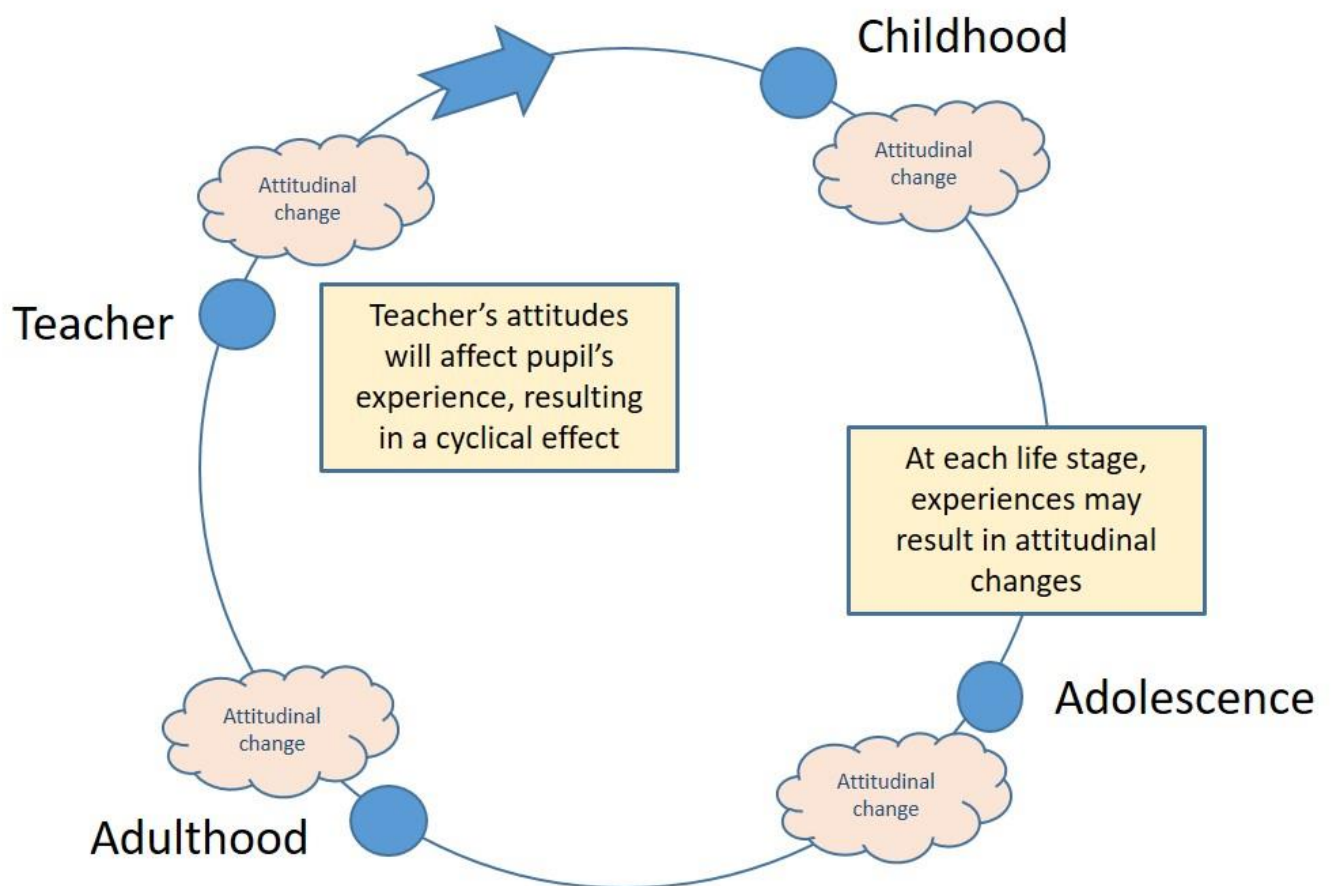

Figure 10: Experiences affecting attitudinal changes at all stages in life

6.5 Initiating Change: Four stage process

There were a wide range of events and people that precipitated a change in the attitudes and/or practice of the participants. It emerged that there were triggers which initiated changes to the teachers' practice but that the steps to taking action may not have happened instantly. There appeared to be evidence of a three-stage process by which change occurs, which results in teachers altering their practice. In some cases, individuals may reach a fourth stage in the process, elevating the issue through engagement with other professionals.
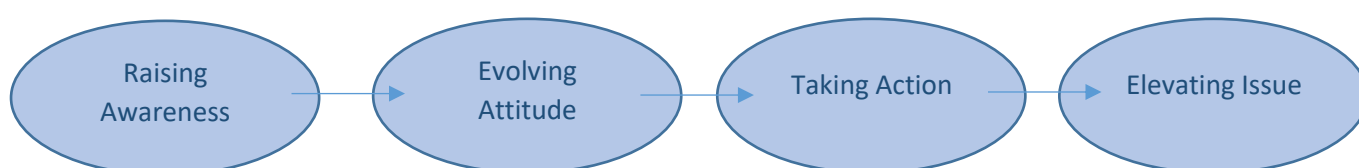

Figure 11: Teachers' reflection prompting changing practice – a four stage process

Raising awareness

Across the data set, there were numerous examples of ways in which the teachers described how they had been prompted to reflect on the nature of gender inequality and encouraged to think more deeply about a need to initiate change. The stimuli for change which were discussed in the data could all be categorised within the following themes which will be explained in this section:

- recognising injustice
- literature
- consultation with a colleague
- professional training

Some of the participants described how their consciousness of gender inequality was raised through an incident which highlighted to them the nature of discrimination. For some, this moment of raised awareness was part of a wider teenage awakening and politicisation whereas for others, it was in response to incidents later in life. Hercus' (2004) chapter, *Becoming Feminist*, describes the paths and passages by which her participants came to feminism. Hercus categorises the women into three groups: those who have described themselves as *always feminist* which they attribute to incidents in their childhood; *evolving feminists*, who slowly and gradually shifted their position to a more feminist

viewpoint in response to personal experiences and a greater exposure to literature and media which awakened an interest in feminism; and a third group which she calls *personal quest*, for whom dissatisfaction with life led them to seek a new way of understanding the world. These categorisations bear similarity to the experiences and reflections of some of the participants. For example, Sophie and Maggie might be seen to belong to the first category of *always feminist* and Alison and Jackie as *evolving feminists*. Recognising injustice in their own lives or those of people around them was a trigger for pedagogical change or a call to learn more about feminism. For example, when Alison reflects on her isolation during maternity leave or when Jackie describes her frustration with her peers' domestic arrangements. Within this small sample, those who acknowledged they had experienced or recognised sexism were more likely to take steps to alter their practice.

It was also evident that remarks made by a colleague can initiate the reflective process. In the interviews all of the participants from my own school (Pearmain School) mentioned the effect that my own previous comments had had on their practice. Likewise, all of the participants from the Borland Primary School spoke about the impact that the gender equality training had upon raising their awareness to the issue, sparking reflection. It was apparent from the data that other teachers and external bodies also provided a stimulus for discussion and thought. These findings support the literature which suggests that the exchanges of knowledge between teachers can initiate a process of reflection which may ultimately lead to pedagogical development, be they "tiny talks", snatched discussions in the corridor or whilst making a break time coffee (Zoshuk, 2016); peer led interactions (Tarrant, 2013) or a more structured whole school process.

Evolving attitude

It appeared that once a seed was planted in the minds of the participants, their awareness grew of the need to actively pursue equality. This is in line with Dewey's (1938) suggestion that after an individual's eyes have been opened to an issue, they become more receptive to recognising it in the world around them. In this case, noting the nature of gender discrimination, the participants appeared more aware of daily encounters with gender stereotypes. Following the moment of recognition of a need for action, they spoke of questioning their own behaviour and acknowledging their own sub-conscious bias. This process, however, appears not to be immediate: none of the teachers used the word *transformed*, they explained that their attitudes had developed or evolved. McNiff (2016) suggests that educational practitioners receive ideas, guidance and instruction from others but choose whether to adopt changes to their practice. Individuals have agency to decide whether or not to be influenced by others. Likewise, the participants in the study showed that they

had reflected on the issue of gender equality and in some cases, their heightened understanding developed into changes in practice.

Beyond the issue of gender equality, there were other examples within the data of teachers reflecting on their practice and implementing change. Considering, for example, the balance between the pastoral and academic elements of their practice and the desire to implement more creativity in the curriculum. Where the teachers discussed their values, it appeared that they were able to recognise how these had an impact on their practice and they understood how their pedagogic approach developed according to these values. None of the teachers explicitly described themselves as critical pedagogues, however, it was evident that some actively aimed to encourage their pupils to question structures of power and oppression and all had, over the course of the research come to support the notion that promoting gender equality was part of the responsibility of the teacher.

Taking action

Once the teachers had reflected on the issue and recognised the benefit of making some change to the attitudes or experience of their pupils, they shared the ways in which they had sought to bring about this change. These included:

- o Avoidance of labels
- o Altering language
- o Considering representation in displays
- o Changes to curriculum
- o Initiating change with parents/ carers
- o Teacher as role model
- o Overcoming assumptions
- o Promoting activities
- o Sharing good practice

A wider explanation of these practical steps which can be taken by primary school teachers to promote gender equality in their classrooms is presented in appendix 3.

It must, however, be acknowledged that there were barriers to change which were mentioned in some of the interviews. Mary explained that she felt there was some conflict between her desire to promote equality and her religion. She expressed her aim to "treat boys and girls equally" but had reservations about how to discuss sexuality without contravening her religious beliefs. This conflict might be seen to be an exemplification of Foucault's (1977) argument that Christianity uses language and rituals to control bodies and discourse. The individual bound by these rituals may be required to resist elements. Tom explained that although he had reflected previously and sought to change his

practice, particularly in thinking about how his use of language challenged gender stereotypes, he suggested that it was all too easy to slip into old habits. To make a longer lasting change, he argued, it was necessary to be reminded of the importance of the issue to keep it fresh in the mind. In contrast, Sophie had, at times, become "tired of banging the drum". She became despondent when, having worked hard with a class to alter their attitudes, she was faced with a new cohort and a new battle. She also expressed doubts over the effectiveness of her endeavours when working with younger children in the face of so many other socialising factors beyond school's control. Both Lena and Hannah mentioned facing resistance from their pupils' parents when attempting to promote gender equality, highlighting the importance of working with parents and carers and other stakeholders. Additionally, this appears to be absolutely key when considering the influence that parents had in the life stories of this group of teachers. In the next chapter, further consideration is made of the ways to engage parents and carers.

Even when a teacher has understood the goal of gender equality and is on board with the idea that they may do something about it, it is possible that they may be unsure of the best way to proceed. Alison's discussion about fairness was illuminating:

> I think I just try to go down the route of fairness… but then you can't put a spin on that either way can't you? Fairness as in am I picking fairly the person who was the better sportsperson or am I picking fairly to make sure that both boys and girls equally feel empowered that they were you know a good sportsman on that day or a good artist.

She was reflecting on her choices and explaining the conflict that she felt. Nick had experienced this slightly differently. He and a colleague shared the same agenda: to encourage more girls to take up extra-curricular sport, however, he faced conflict with another member of staff in how to achieve this goal. This is a potential issue when seeking to bring about change. Some of these issues align with the suggestions made many years ago by Smith (1986) to explain the difficulties faced by teachers wanting to bring about change. In particular, facing opposition from parents/carers, feeling despondent at the inertia of colleagues and losing impetus after an initial period of activity.

Finally, it should be noted that not all of the participants responded to these stimuli in the same way. For example, although Lily and Sophie shared similar family dynamics growing up, they reacted to them differently. This could perhaps be explained by Kolb's (1984) theory that individuals respond differently to the same learning experience. There are contextual factors which influence teachers' pedagogical practices with some teachers feeling challenged to meet pupils' diverse needs and feeling frustration at the conflict between what they seek to achieve and what they are able to deliver (Gemmink *et al*, 2021).

Elevating importance

Finally, a fourth stage may occur, where the teacher becomes so convinced of the need to bring about change and enthused by their own ability to take action that they seek to encourage other teachers to do the same. For example, Hannah explained how she raised the issue with her colleagues in the pre-school nursery and actively engaged in conversations with parents and carers to encourage them to allow their children to play with a range of toys and to dress up in whatever they liked, speaking of the limiting nature of restricting choice based on gender stereotypes. Nick was working hard with his colleagues, families and the community to share his passion to encourage children of all genders to enjoy sport. Sophie had long been an advocate of gender equality and had sought in her various workplaces to educate her peers in their responsibility to act as role models for children and to consider how their practice and their language affected their pupils. She mentioned the "snowball effect" and that she had heard her peers sharing the same thoughts with others, at which she expressed her satisfaction. Lena, Maggie and Samuel were all strongly enthused by the gender equality training they had undertaken and championed it at Borland Primary.

These instances of professional development echo the findings of Vescio *et al* (2008) who suggest that teachers influence the practice of other teachers, and that teacher collaboration can be seen to have a positive impact on outcomes. Similarly, Levine and Marcus (2010) maintain that comments made by one teacher on successful implementation of strategies may then be adopted by others. Likewise, from this research, it appears that my own colleagues at Pearmain Primary school have been influenced by my own prior interventions and sharing the impact of these. Two of the participants (Samuel and Maggie) also reflected during their interviews on the possibility of applying the same reflective process to their attitudes to race and the implications for their practice. This stage of the process, whereby teachers influence their peers, can be seen as the development of a community of practice (Wenger-Trayner *et al*, 2015). This is the forming of a group (in this case promoting equality) who learn together as they interact and reflect with the potential for a *ripple effect*.

There are significant implications for practice in these findings. Having understood the power of reflection as a tool and its role in critical pedagogy, we may draw the conclusion that inviting teachers to reflect on their experiences and their practice is an effective way to initiate change. These implications will be further explored in the final chapter.

Chapter Seven

Implications for Practice

In this chapter, I draw conclusions about the wider implications of my findings. The theories I have formed are considered within the current educational landscape in England. I make suggestions about how these theories can contribute to the promotion of gender equality in primary schools and discuss the ramifications of their application. I discuss the effectiveness of reflection as a tool, in particular exploring its potential in altering educators' practice. Using the example of Pearmain School, I discuss the ways in which teachers can be encouraged to reflect on their own practice with the intention of promoting equality.

7.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to develop teachers' understanding of their pedagogy with the purpose of promoting gender equality in their classrooms. I have met this aim through drawing conclusions about how teachers' reflections on their own practice can help to avoid gender stereotyping and promote gender equality. From the data, it appeared that there is a commonality in understandings of femininities and masculinities which can be both enjoyable and oppressive. When teachers consider their life experiences, they are able to pick out relevant recollections which are salient to the development of their attitudes to gender. The relevance of these understandings of gender are that they exemplify the societal norms through which teachers and pupils navigate their gendered lives. In summary:

- Bringing awareness to the influence of life experiences on our thinking can lead us to make a conscious effort to overcome previous assumptions.
- Teachers' attitudes may change following reflection.
- By identifying one's own prejudice, one may seek to overcome it.
- Reflection on attitudes and practice could be a useful tool to challenge other areas of stereotyping such as race.
- Reflection can be an effective mode of bringing about change in an organisation.

- The process of reflection on gender construction and pedagogical approach can result in beneficial changes to practice such as:
  - Consideration of representations of gender in the classroom.
  - Use of language.
  - Choice of resources which challenge gender stereotypes.
  - Promotion of sport and physical activity amongst pupils.

Within this chapter, I explain how the act of reflection on these understandings of femininities and masculinities, their roots, their manifestations, and their consequences for pedagogic approaches can encourage teachers to alter their practice, challenging gender stereotypes and seeking ways to promote equality. These conclusions will be fully explored here.

7.2 Reflection as a tool

The process of reflection has been central to this study and its process and impact have been explored. I have analysed the ways in which participants' reflections comply with established theory on the process of reflection and what can be learnt about the role of reflection in terms of promoting gender equality. Dewey's (1938) writings on reflection have been highly influential and have inspired later researchers in the field of reflective pedagogy. He defines reflection (Dewey, 1933, p6) as the:

> Active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it, and the further conclusions to which it tends.

Dewey describes the acquisition of knowledge through the process of reflection as a stage-by-stage process which includes experience, observation and reflection. This sequential process of thinking was apparent in the ways that my participants presented their reflections on their own pedagogy, though through Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning, the cyclical nature of the process is more evident.

Figure 12: Reflective Cycle (Kolb, 1984)

Each of the participants reflected on their practice and their experiences through the course of the interviews. They had been prompted by me to do so. Those (8) who replied with follow up emails suggested that they had continued to think about the subject and that this was having an impact on their teaching. To take one example, Alison spoke of how she was now more conscious of her use of language and was spending time analysing the curriculum for ways to further promote equality but even within the email she was continuing to reflect, considering how she could further change her practice and what impact her changes were having on her pupils. Overall, the data suggest that this act of reflection requires a conscious effort or trigger and is also dependent on teachers having the space to reflect. Similarly, Boud *et al* (1985, p19) recognise the work required in the act of reflection which they cite as

> an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it. It is this working with experience that is important in learning.

This idea of requiring space and distance from the daily practice of both doing gender and from teaching is relevant in the process of bringing about changes in behaviour. Schön (1983) describes reflective practice within two contexts: reflection on practice and reflection in practice; the distinction coming from proximity to the experience. He defines *reflection on practice* as taking place before or after the event, calling for space and distance from daily practice. *Reflection in practice,* however, Schön (ibid) defined as an approach in which professionals consistently examine their practice whilst in the moment, evaluating their effectiveness and seeking improvement. They ways in which Maggie, Lena and Samuel described their pedagogic approaches after they had undertaken the whole school gender equality training, suggested they were more readily engaged in this daily reflective practice with regard to gender issues. They explained how they considered their use of language, how they were aware of themselves as role models to their pupils, how they reviewed their choice of resources and activities during planning sessions and the way they dealt with interactions between pupils. It is, therefore, possible to conclude that the act of reflection *on* practice, focussing on an issue and analysing our own actions through a particular lens, can lead us to be more reflective *in* practice, with a heightened awareness of the implications of our actions.

7.2.1 Facilitating reflection

I sought to encourage teachers to discuss their experiences and their practice to grow awareness, incite reflection and generate knowledge. When Habermas (1987) theorises the process of generating knowledge through the process of reflection, he categorises knowledge into three areas: technical (control of the environment); practical (social interaction) and emancipatory (self-knowledge). In these terms, my study focused on the self-emancipation of teachers from *false consciousness* (Habermas, 1987) through critical reflection. I invited teachers to reflect on their own experiences, how they had been affected by them and what impact this may have had on their practice. I invited them to determine what had they learnt that they may wish to unlearn. Dewey (1938) recognises the power held by a teacher, wielded in the form of knowledge, describing the way that a teacher may pose a question, field the "spontaneous reflections of the pupils" (Dewey, 1938, p98) and accept or reject them. He suggests that this is only one step on the pupil's journey to the acquisition of knowledge, missing the reasoning phase necessary to complete it. This echoes my role in this study; I elected myself as facilitator in the process of reflection. Through the recruitment of participants to the study, I was able to focus their attention on the topic of gender. My participants came to this study from various initial positions. For some of them, the impact of the process appeared to bring about change to their attitude and their practice. I would suggest that for those with a minimal prior interest or lack of prior understanding in gender issues, their involvement in this project provided food for thought.

Dewey (1938, p120) proposes that,

> All judgment, all reflective inference, presupposes some lack of understanding, a partial absence of meaning. We reflect in order that we may get hold of the full and adequate significance of what happens. Nevertheless, something must be already understood, the mind must be in possession of some meaning which it has mastered, or else thinking is impossible.

Dewey's (1938) model requires that we build on an initial understanding. He argues that where an individual has a concrete understanding, it is not necessary to reflect further on our thinking. The example he gives is that we do not need to think to grasp an understanding of what is a chair or a table. I argue that for some people, the concept of gender may fit into this category. Some may feel they do not need to think to understand what is a man and what is a woman. In order to consciously unpick some of our preconceived ideas around gender, it was necessary to provoke reflection on these ideas. Freire (1972) asks whether individuals can be invited to seek out emancipation or if they must seek the change for themselves. This research suggests that through bringing others' attention to an issue and inviting them to reflect on their own and others' circumstances, the implications of

their actions and their causes, one is able to begin a process which may continue, namely that the individual may choose to continue to reflect and see the world differently.

7.2.2 The role of reflection in critical pedagogy

The data suggest that the act of reflection can be considered as an effective tool in initiating change. Without questioning one's own position and the origins of it, one cannot avoid reflecting an inherited gendered view or even being used by the state to further its own political objectives (Foucault, 1977). Apple (2013) argues that schools control people and control meaning. He therefore invites teachers to take responsibility for what and how they teach, advocating critical pedagogy. Even for those teachers who would not describe themselves as political or as having a feminist agenda, raising awareness of a political issue can result in pedagogical change. Austin and Birrell (2015, p131) argue that "most decisions about education are not taken in a political vacuum", suggesting that teachers should reflect on each decision (and its political context), critique it and act against it if appropriate. They argue that teachers should be political in order to avoid becoming an "unthinking sheep … and deliverer of others' agendas*."* (ibid, p132). According to Giroux (2011), radical pedagogy requires an analysis of how hegemony functions in schools, how it is resisted and challenged, without which he suggests there is a passive acceptance to sustain it. Based on my analysis of data gathered from this sample, it appears that teachers may challenge the patriarchal hegemony through reflecting on their role in the gender constructions of their pupils. This was achieved through the act of drawing others' attention to the issue and inviting them to examine their own practice.

There are significant implications for practice in these findings. Having understood the power of reflection as a tool and its role in critical pedagogy, I draw the conclusion that inviting teachers to reflect on their experiences and their practice is a potentially powerful way to initiate change.

7.2.3 How individual reflection can bring about change

When teachers consider their life experience, they are able to pick out relevant recollections which are salient to their attitudes to gender. Bringing awareness to the influence of life experiences on our thinking can lead us to make a conscious effort to overcome previous assumptions. Consequently, teachers' attitudes may change following reflection and by identifying one's own prejudice, one may seek to overcome it. This reflection could be instigated by an external agency, a colleague or self-

initiated following an event. For example, some teachers suggested that their attitudes and practice had been affected by colleagues who had incited them to reflect.

The teachers reflected on their gender construction in a way that was personal. Their own understandings of gender were laid bare, and they examined their own interpretations of themselves in the context of femininities and masculinities, reflecting on the experiences and influences which had shaped them. In the professional sphere, they also reflected on their practice, coming to understand the approaches that they took in the classroom and the possible implications of their actions. The overlap between the personal and professional came in the way that the participants sought to understand how their pedagogic approaches had developed. It is this particular area of reflection which is at the heart of the approach of this study. Having argued that reflection is a powerful tool for bringing about change, I also suggest that the nature of this process of examining both the personal and professional elements, is particularly important given the role that a teacher plays in affecting pupils' attitudes to and understandings of gender. Habermas (1987) theorises the interaction between the personal and professional realms. He terms the social interactions individuals have with their families, friends and communities on an informal basis as the *lifeworld*. He argues that the institutional arrangements in the professional or administrative sphere, which he calls the *system*, are embedded within and tend to encroach upon the personal sphere. This he calls the *colonisation* of the lifeworld by the system. This term evokes a suggestion of submission or oppression, that the professional realm weighs more heavily than the personal. Within my study, it appears that the lifeworld described by Habermas is, indeed, affected by the system, but that the professional is also affected by the personal.

I have argued that gender is individually performed and understood, based on the societal expectations of the day. As each teacher will then have their own individual interpretation of gender with consequences for their performance in the classroom, inviting each teacher to reflect in the personal and professional realms, can result in individual professional development. There is a third element in this act of reflection: the political connotations of a teacher's practice. Teachers who consider themselves as critical pedagogues may consciously reflect on the political sphere and the implications of the curriculum and their pedagogic approaches. For those who do not, being invited to reflect on how and if they promote gender equality may or may not seem like a political act.
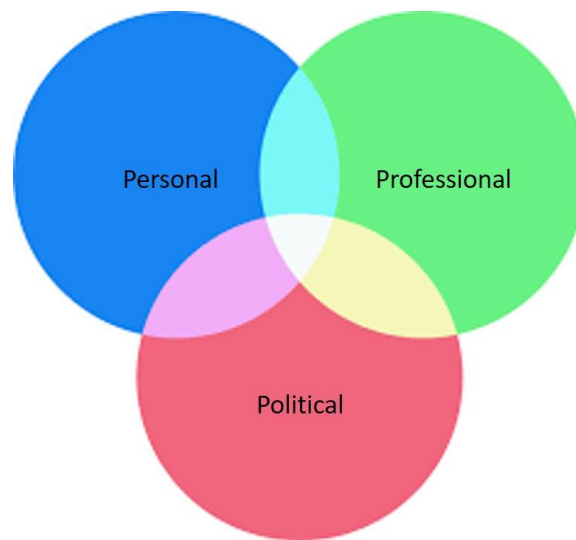
Figure 13: Reflecting on attitude, behaviour and life experience – personal, professional and political

As presented above, the approach taken in this study encouraged teachers to engage in a period of reflection incorporating their personal and professional selves and how these intersect within a wider political sphere.

7.2.4 A Model for Employing a Reflective Approach to Promoting Gender Equality

Within this study, there were three phases to the reflective model. The first, **prompting reflection**, was initiated through the recruitment of the participants to the study. From their earliest engagement with the process, the participants were invited to consider their own attitudes to gender, even through assessing their interest in participating in the project. This process continued throughout the interviews and in the follow up email contact. I posed questions to the participants which prompted them to reflect on their gender constructions, their attitudes and the possible impacts of these on their practice.

The **reflective process** took place, within the study, during and after the interviews. The participants reflected during the interviews on their practice and its impact. The follow up emails from the participants suggested that this reflective process continued after the interviews and led to changes in practice.

Through the analysis of the data, I was able to ascertain that the process of reflection had led to changes in the practice. More strikingly, the participants themselves were able to **observe the impact** of the reflective process both within the interviews and in the follow up emails; they acknowledged that they had altered, amongst other things, their use of language, behaviour with and treatment of pupils, curriculum content, use of resources and management of the learning environment. Although

this study was not designed to observe the ultimate impact on learners, the reported effect on the educators was apparent.

7.2.5 Implementation: A case study at Pearmain School

I carried out this academic research study with a sample of fourteen teachers and have discussed the apparent effectiveness of the approach. To understand how this approach could be implemented more widely, I would like to demonstrate how I have subsequently initiated a professional project at Pearmain School by way of a case study. Since 2020, I have held the role of Equalities Lead at Pearmain School and, amongst other initiatives, I have delivered whole school training in which teachers were invited to reflect on their attitudes to gender and to examine where these came from. They were given time within the CPD session to reflect and discuss, focussing on their personal understandings and the professional impact. The teachers were in pairs or small groups for their discussions. I also delivered a similar, shorter session, with teaching assistants. As the sessions took place during the pandemic, they were delivered online (via Zoom), however the discussion groups were held face-to-face, as year groups met in teams. I provided a number of prompt questions which were displayed during discussions and gave around 20 minutes for discussions in breakout rooms (Appendix 4). At the end of the session, I invited the team to continue to reflect on their practice and our discussions over the coming weeks and months and informed them that they would be asked to feed back later on their reflections and the impact (if any) on their practice.

Three months later, the teachers were invited to feed back on the impact of the session. They reported the ways in which they had altered their practice, most commonly referring to how they had altered their use of language, consideration of representation in resources and changes made to the curriculum. The feedback suggested that the approach was effective in bringing about change in practice, which may have resulted in gains for pupils. Informally, many colleagues have continued to share with me their experiences and how their practice is evolving. Discussions of how we can promote equality more generally continue to permeate and I have had a sense that the culture within the school is shifting. Of course, I cannot take full credit for this – there may be any number of factors at play here, not least a wider societal trend towards equality. However, this case study does suggest that the approach I have trialled could be applied in a similar way in a range of educational settings.

7.3 Effecting Change

7.3.1 Teachers' Ethical Duty to Promote Gender Equality

In chapters one and two, I have made the case that gender inequality in UK society continues to affect the lives of children and adults. Having established that schools have an opportunity contribute to the many influences which affect the attitudes of their pupils regarding attitudes to gender, I argue that schools have an ethical duty to promote gender equality. This assumes two premises that others may contest: firstly, that gender essentialism is damaging; and secondly, that educators are morally compelled to engineer social change. The damaging effect of gender stereotyping has been presented within earlier chapters. Given this understanding, it would appear that educators are ethically bound to seek to minimise the gender stereotypes to which their pupils are exposed. Contemporary attitudes to gender afford more flexibility to our understandings of the nature and permanency of gender than in the past, though these can be contentious. Educating children about transgender issues, for example, has been the focus of debate in some areas (McFadden, 2019; Mohdin, 2020; Bower-Brown *et al*, 2021; Winters *et al*, 2018; Kosciw and Pizmony-Levy, 2016).

Schools may be seen as places of social transformation driven by different ideologies; some with the motivation to give a voice to oppressed people, others to promote a traditional social order (Apple, 2013). Critical pedagogues such as Freire (1972) and Giroux (2011) have presented the philosophical arguments for the educators' role in influencing pupils to aspire to a fairer society; in essence, presenting education as the production of agency, transforming learners into critical thinkers, setting them up to question. In the current political landscape in the UK, it appears that the moral argument for promoting equality in schools is widely accepted, although the political nature of education can cause conflict. In general terms, government policy since the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 has been progressively further advocating equal treatment of people of all genders (Arnot, 2007; Cole, 2018).

In the past, teachers wanting to initiate change faced "enormous inertia" (Smith, 1986, p16). In recent years, there has been a rise in the cultural significance of and enthusiasm for diversity and representation, particularly in the media (Nwonka, 2021; Malik, 2013). Current government policy appears to endorse a culture of fairness and inclusion (Gov.uk, 2022), although in 2018 Bowl *et al* argued that the focus on academic competition and marketization of the UK education system impedes progress towards social justice, and little seems to have changed. In the current political climate, within academia and the media, it appears there is little tolerance for intolerance. Take for example, so called *no-platforming* of academics or cases of media outlets and publishers dropping celebrities who cross lines of acceptability (Peters and Nottelmann, 2021; Todd, 2018; Flood, 2020).

It seems, within this current environment, that there is potential for further academic research into gender and education as well as trends in educational policy to develop, growing out of the social and civil movements and a cultural insistence for inclusivity, equality and widespread representations of diversity. This would echo earlier policy change which responded to the second-wave feminist movement (David, 2015).

Significant drivers for change in education are the contemporary priorities of Ofsted which have been seen to determine trends in education (Perryman *et al*, 2018). Ofsted (2018, p2) assert that "promoting equality is at the heart of all we do" and their handbook (Ofsted, 2022) states that schools will be inspected on the promotion of equality of opportunity and an inclusive environment. Ofsted (2022) inspects schools to evaluate how well they fulfil their statutory duties, including their duties under the Equality Act. They assess pupils' understanding of the protected characteristics and how equality and diversity are promoted within the school and in order to be graded 'good', a school must promote equality of opportunity and diversity effectively. This suggests that in the near future, all educational settings will be working harder to show the progress they are making in promoting equality. Ofsted may be seen to exercise disciplinary power (Foucault, 1977) over schools through which it is able to engineer societal change. If some see the education system as a political football and a tool for social engineering (Forrester and Garratt, 2016; Apple, 2013), then Ofsted may be regarded as the enforcer of this agenda (Perryman *et al*, 2018).

7.3.2 Shared Responsibility

For many years, feminists have sought to bring about social change in their drive towards equality. Feminist movements have faced resistance and pioneers (mostly female) have made sacrifices to bring about change. Considering whose responsibility it is to continue to seek this change, Jablonka (2022) argues that men should be as involved in gender justice as women. He suggests that society must alter the discourse so that men define themselves by the rights of women. In this study, it was interesting how some of the participants avoided the term feminists for themselves even though they were strong advocates of gender equality. All of the participants appeared to be of the opinion that gender equality was a goal worth working for. It appears that all of society and all educators should be involved in striving for gender justice and Griffin (2018) argues that this is best achieved through a whole school or whole setting approach.

How best to bring about positive change in an organisation may be seen as a contested issue. Beycioglu and Kondakci (2020) argue that change interventions in schools frequently fail to accomplish their purposes, in part due to the human factor and the resistance associated with it.

They suggest that planned change, which is commonly arranged or deployed by policymakers, is often perceived as top-down, repressive, and therefore resisted by those who must implement it. They suggest that continuous change requires a change within an educational organization which is most effectively brought about by "attributing the role of change agency to ordinary organizational members" (Beycioglu and Kondakci, 2020, p802). Fisher and Wood (2012) argue that to provoke sustained changes in practice, practitioners need to be convinced that they can address the problems and challenges that are situated in their practice, supporting research by Nuttall and Edwards (2009) who argue that educational reform alone is not enough to bring about change. Frost *et al* (2000) suggest that a personalised and reflective approach is effective in bringing about educational practice reform. The findings of this research endorse these views. I have argued that the model outlined in 6.3 is effective in encouraging educators to take on the responsibility of promoting gender equality and therefore adjusting their practice in the ways most appropriate and pertinent to them.

I have presented the argument that teachers have the power to influence, both deliberately and inadvertently. Each teacher's experience, outlook and behaviour are individual and so each individual delivers different messages in the classroom. Change through policy may have a greater impact on explicit messages but I would argue that it may be less effective on implicit messages passed on by each individual educator. Recognising the relevance of the hidden curriculum, the importance of the singer not the song, it is vital that each teacher accepts their own responsibility to bring about change. Making changes to school values, local authority guidance or national government policy may go some way to overseeing the content of the curriculum, however, this research suggests that change at the teacher level is effective, too, in altering pervasive everyday practice, such as use of language and treatment of individual pupils.

7.3.3 Application of The Reflective Model

In section 6.2.5, I have explained how the reflective model described in section 6.2.4 has been effectively employed in a setting. In this section, I discuss the potential application of the same model in other settings. Implementation of the reflective process can affect the practice of an individual teacher. Where a school (or other educational setting) adopts this process, there is the potential for significant impact on practice and ultimately on learners' attitudes to gender.

Through this study, I have developed a model in which teachers, as a key influence on the children they teach, are invited to reflect. This model has been considered initially for its impact in primary schools but could be amended to be applicable in different settings. It appears from the data that the

teenage years may be the most influential stage in an individual's life when it comes to developing attitudes to gender. With this in mind, I suggest that this reflective approach could also be adopted in secondary schools with the aim of improving teachers' understanding of the issue and altering their practice.

A prompt is required to initiate the process of reflection, to highlight the nature of gender stereotypes and their impact, to invoke in the participant a willingness to engage in the project and to encourage a personal commitment to the endeavour. How this is done may vary. The European Institute for Gender Equality (2022) suggest that the content of awareness-raising activities should be tailored to their purpose and context. They encourage careful selection of choice of language and imagery, using emotions or facts and rational arguments, and presenting the consequences of (in)action as losses or gains. Possibilities include the use of images, videos, pupil voice, discussion, a presentation or lecture but this is by no means an exhaustive list.

The data suggested that for some of the teachers, a process of reflection on the issue of promoting gender equality with their pupils had occurred prior to their involvement with this study. For some, this was entirely self-governed, following their attention to the issue being raised by personal experiences, or through exposure to literature. However, the data also indicated that the interviews provided these participants the opportunity to *further* reflect on their practice and was therefore beneficial. To facilitate staff reflection, schools may choose to provide structured training or employ other methods to initiate the reflection process. These might include, for example, staff meetings, other CPD sessions, release time for colleague discussions or allocated sessions during Teacher Education Days. The reflection may be facilitated by an external trainer or a member of staff or other stakeholder within the organisation. Staff may choose to initiate their own research projects, prompted perhaps by webinars or trainers. There are very many ways in which this approach could be adopted and delivered.

The reflective process could also vary widely in nature. It may take place in the form of discussions, in pairs or groups or could be a solo activity with each practitioner undertaking personal reflection. The interview process which occurred within this study could be replicated in a variety of ways. Practitioners could be guided in structured conversations through a set of pre-prepared questions or discussion prompts. They may be invited to respond to these through face-to-face or online discussions or individually, written, recorded or simply in thought.

Monitoring any demonstrable impact of change following this act of reflection would support the likely engagement of implementers and encourage schools to enter into a process from which

benefits can be directly observed. Impact could be ascertained through gathering teachers' feedback following the process (immediately and/or after a period of time) or through pupil voice or other form of registering the impact on pupils. However, it should be understood that altering attitudes to gender is a complex process and taking a positivist approach to monitoring any change should be avoided. Schools seeking to "measure" the impact of the process may find that they oversimplify the issue.

Prompting Reflection	The Reflective Process	Observing Impact
Highlight the nature and prevalence of gender inequality through use of: • Statistics • Images • Video • Presentation • Pupil Voice	Educators to reflect through: • Group discussions • Paired interviews • Individual reflection • Diary / personal log • Video • Time for contemplation	• Teacher feedback • Questionnaires • Pupil Voice • Observation of pupil/staff behaviour • Monitoring attitude changes to subject preference

Figure 14: How the model described in 6.2 might be implemented in other settings

7.4 Wider Implications

I have argued that gender labels can have lasting and wide-reaching consequences. People of all genders may be affected in a multitude of ways by gender stereotypes, often without awareness of their impact. Unconscious bias may affect the choices we make on a daily basis as we go about the business of 'doing' gender, some of which may be restrictive. Societal expectations have been seen to affect our attitudes toward gender and they ways in which we behave. Within educational settings, communities of practice are established which teach us how to perform femininities and masculinities (Paechter, 2007). These communities of practice may provide individuals with a sense of belonging as one feels comfortable and at home within 'a tribe' but may also be a source of discomfort as they police behaviour, encouraging conformity. Educators have an opportunity to influence society through actively educating learners and the wider community about the nature of gender stereotyping. Additionally, it is possible for educators to minimise the stereotypes inadvertently conveyed to learners through developing an understanding of the implicit messages passed on through language, behaviour, the curriculum, resources and the learning environment. Educational professionals, from teachers, to lecturers, to early years' practitioners, all have an ethical duty to recognise this opportunity and to take responsibility for the content that they teach and the

nature of the teaching and learning, as well as considering the ways in which their behaviour and language may impact on the learners (and their own peers). With an understanding that gender stereotypes can be harmful, it is advisable that educators embrace the opportunity to promote gender equality through their practice.

The data suggest that where teachers engage in a process of reflection over their own gender construction and their practice, it may encourage them as individuals to begin to accept the impact of their interactions with learners and they may make steps to alter their practice accordingly. I have suggested that this process, which appears to have been effective with this small sample of teachers and more widely within my own school setting, could be adapted to be implemented in a wide range of settings.

7.4.1 Limitations of the Study

The choices made in the design of this study afforded opportunities which brought with them challenges, and the findings of the study have to be seen in light of some limitations. The first is a methodological issue; the data collected from each participant were entirely subjective (each spoke from their own viewpoint and expressed their own truth as they had experienced it). As explained in the methodology, this was fully the intention of the research design, though it brings with it an inherent bias in the data. The individuals who agreed to participate in this study may well have had an interest in the area and could be deemed not to represent teachers more widely. The time and access constraints of a solo researcher carrying out doctoral research resulted in the small sample size which also limits the scope of the study. A relatively small number of voices have been heard and the time asked of the participants was limited to under two- hours for each interview. Qualitative studies prioritise gleaning a larger volume of data from a smaller number of people and, as with the majority of such qualitative studies, the design of this project has been subject to such limitations. However, the richness of the data and the depth of the analysis they afforded have justified the decisions made at the design stage.

It must also be considered here that the sample of participants were all primary teachers, and as such predominantly female, as the view persists of this a 'feminine' profession. There is the potential that this has had an impact on the nature of the representations of gender which were made by the sample, bringing bias in to the study. To reduce potential bias, the sample was selected to represent male and female teachers of a variety of ages. The semi-structured nature of the interviews was such that the participants spoke of what interested them, giving a true picture of each participant's priorities but limiting the scope for direct comparison between the participants. Like any case study,

this study suffers from the problem of generalisability. The findings of this case-study are restricted to Pearmain School and the experiences of the other individual participants and their schools; the findings therefore are difficult to generalise. My considerations of the appropriateness of the proposed model in its application to other settings are yet to be tested.

The final limitation to be considered in this study, that could be addressed in future research, is the lack of pupil voice within the research. The overall findings were in favour of the beneficial impact of the reflective process as a means of initiating change for the benefit of pupils. Nonetheless, these results must be interpreted with caution and these limitations should be borne in mind.

7.4.2 Further study

Whilst I have argued that the impact of individual teacher reflection is a powerful tool in bringing about change in schools with the intention of promoting gender equality, this study has not examined the relative impact of this process against a more traditional model of bringing about organisational change. It would be interesting to make a direct comparison between the implementation of whole school policy against individual teacher reflection, analysing the relative merits and pitfalls of each. Further study could also be undertaken to show the effectiveness of the use of this reflective model on a wider scale and/or the impact on the pupils. Additionally, there is potential for similar projects to be undertaken which could employ a reflective model, inviting teachers to examine their attitudes to race, sexuality or religion and the implication for these on practice. Finally, the significance of sport as a theme within the data suggests that further study could focus more specifically on the impact of the reflective model, engaging educators to examine their attitudes to sport and gender, with the aim of promoting greater participation in sport of children of all genders.

7.4.3 Looking to the Future: What difference will my research make?

Government policy both responds to and shapes societal norms and, consequently, educational policy on gender equality appears likely to continue to embrace diversity and promote equality, at least in the short-term. However, the way in which educational settings choose to respond to policy can vary. For some progressive settings, diversity and equality may be at the heart of their practice and a central value of their ethos whilst others may alter little whilst notionally adhering to the same guidelines. Whole school policy may be seen as more effective than the efforts of an individual

(Griffin, 2018; DECSY, 2022; Gender Action,2022). On the other hand, I have also argued that individual practitioners have a responsibility to examine their own practice and the impact of their pedagogic approaches upon the children that they teach.

Looking to the future, I argue that further research is required to fully understand the most effective means of educating learners about gender equality. My findings suggest that the model of reflection used within this study can be a powerful tool in encouraging teachers to alter their practice to promote gender equality for the benefit of learners of all genders. Within the landscape of prior knowledge, this provides greater insight into an innovative approach which may be applied in a variety of settings to bring about change. I suggest that the application of this model may contribute to the range of tools available to policy makers within education to promote gender equality. It may also have implications for those focussed on promoting equality more generally with potential application in examining attitudes to race, religion or sexuality for example. There are implications here for practice for all ethical educators; reflecting on their practice may enable them to play a role in building a fairer society in which people of all genders, ethnicities and sexualities are free from the oppressive power of stereotypes.

Contribution to Knowledge

To reiterate, I argue that my research constitutes to new knowledge in both the academic and professional spheres. This research provides contemporary understandings of femininities and masculinities which contribute to the existing body of knowledge in this area. Additionally, it furthers understanding of the ways in which reflection can be used as a tool in education.

This leads on to significant implications within the professional realm. My research indicates the scope for using reflection as a tool in promoting equality more widely.

7.4.4 How will I make the difference?

I sought to improve my own understanding of this issue; to gain knowledge and to improve my practice. These aims have been achieved and I feel vastly better informed on the subject than I did at the commencement of the project. Looking to share my knowledge, I plan to publicise my findings as widely as possible within the professional and academic community. This will be achieved by engaging through different communication channels. I will seek to place articles within practitioner publications and to submit papers for publication in journals, in order to promote the reflective process in consideration of stereotypes, its benefits and its scope. I hope to share my experiences

within my local community and beyond. Other educators and learners stand to benefit from this research as I have done, and my participants have expressed they have too. To best engage as wide an audience as possible, I will seek to make contact with other interested educators locally and nationally. In order to measure or evaluate the impact of the engagement, it will be necessary to maintain communication with those who engage in the process. I will invite them to share their experiences and to feed back about the effectiveness of the approach in bringing about change and promoting equality within their settings.

From my own viewpoint, I have gained extensively from this project in a huge number of ways, personally and professionally and the journey does not end at this point.

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Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet

University
of Worcester

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET AND PRIVACY NOTICE

TITLE OF PROJECT: Promoting gender equality in primary schools: Working with teachers to explore the origin of gender stereotypes and to find approaches that schools can take to avoid them.

Invitation

The University of Worcester engages in a wide range of research which seeks to provide greater understanding of the world around us, to contribute to improved human health and well-being and to provide answers to social, economic and environmental problems.

We would like to invite you to take part in one of our research projects. Before you decide whether to take part, it is important that you understand why the research is being done, what it will involve for you, what information we will ask from you, and what we will do with that information.

We will in the course of this project be collecting personal information. Under General Data Protection Regulation 2016, we are required to provide a justification (what is called a "legal basis") in order to collect such information. The legal basis for this project is "**task carried out in the public interest**".

You can find out more about our approach to dealing with your personal information at https://www.worcester.ac.uk/informationassurance/visitor-privacy-notice.html.

Please take time to read this document carefully. Feel free to ask the researcher any questions you may have and to talk to others about it if you wish. You will have at least 14 to decide if you want to take part.

What is the purpose of the research?

This study aims to understand how we as teachers can encourage children to overcome gender stereotypes to raise their aspirations and broaden their opportunities.

Who is undertaking the research?
Amanda Sheehy
PhD student
University of Worcester
SHEA1_18@uni.worc.ac.uk

Who has oversight of the research?
The research has been approved by the Research Ethics Panel for the College of Arts, Humanities and Education in line with the University's Research Ethics Policy. The University of Worcester acts as the "Data Controller" for personal data collected through its research projects & is subject to the General Data Protection Regulation 2016. We are registered with the Information Commissioner's Office and our Data Protection Officer is Helen Johnstone (infoassurance@worc.ac.uk). For more on our approach to Information Assurance and Security visit: https://www.worcester.ac.uk/informationassurance/index.html.

Why have I been invited to take part?
You have received this invitation because of your role as a primary school teacher in Worcester. We are hoping to recruit up to 20 participants for this study.

Do I have to take part?

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not you want to take part in this study. Please take your time to decide; we will wait for at least 14 days before asking for your decision. You can decide not to take part or to withdraw from the study at any stage until September 2020. If you wish to have your data withdrawn, please contact the researcher and your data will then not be used. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form.

What will happen if I agree to take part?

If you agree to take part, I will conduct with you a one-hour confidential interview in which we will discuss your attitudes to gender, your views on stereotyping and equality, significant incidents in your life and influences which may have had an impact on these views as well as your thoughts on your own teaching practice and how it may influence your pupils' attitudes to gender. These interviews will be held with a number of teachers from XXX as well as teachers from other Worcester schools. The interviews will take place between November 2019 and June 2020 and could be conducted at XXXX or XXXX at a time convenient to you.

In the summer term, I will also hold two twilight meetings to be held at XXXX (dates to be confirmed) to which you will be invited. The purpose of these meetings will be to develop an audit tool to promote gender equality which you could use in your school if you choose to do so.

I am aware that time is precious for teachers and therefore aim to minimise the time commitment involved. The contributions from you would be:

- A one-to-one interview (one hour) to be held at your convenience between November 2019 and June 2020
- Two twilight meetings (4-6pm) in the summer term to be held at XXX Primary School

- Your contributions to the group discussions and during the one-to-one interview will be used anonymously within the study.

What are the benefits for me in taking part?

In order to understand how teachers may consciously and subconsciously influence their pupils' attitudes to gender, I will be working with teachers to reflect on how our experiences may affect our own attitudes and our classroom practice.

Recent research suggests that gender inequality is still an issue which needs further study and action in the UK. Your school's involvement in this project will enable you to further your knowledge of the issue and for your school to have the opportunity to implement change to promote equality, to the benefit of your pupils.

Are there any risks for me if I take part?

Within the one-to-one interviews it is possible that psychological or emotional issues may arise as the nature of the interviews may deal with sensitive matters. The focus of the interview will be your teaching and interaction with pupils but when you are asked to reflect on how incidents in your life have shaped your views, you may recall incidents which have been upsetting to you. The interview will be confidential and your data will be used anonymously (as explained below). If your involvement in this project triggers any distress, please seek support from the Education Support Partnership on 08000 562 561.

What will you do with my information?

Your personal data / information will be treated confidentially at all times; that is, it will not be shared with anyone outside the research team or any third parties specified in the consent form unless it has been fully anonymised. The exception to this is where you tell us something that indicates that you or someone else is at risk of harm. In this instance, we may need to share this information with a relevant authority; however, we would inform you of this before doing so.

During the project, all data / information will be kept securely in line with the University's Policy for the Effective Management of Research Data and its Information Security Policy.

We will process your personal information for a range of purposes associated with the project primary of which are:

- To use your information along with information gathered from other participants in the research project to seek new knowledge and understanding that can be derived from the information we have gathered.

- To summarise this information in written form for the purposes of dissemination (through research reports, a thesis, conference papers, journal articles or other publications). Any information disseminated / published will be at a summary level and will be fully anonymised and there will be no way of identifying your individual personal information within the published results.

- To use the summary and conclusions arising from the research project for teaching and further research purposes. Any information used in this way will be at a summary level and will be fully anonymised. There will be no way of identifying your individual personal information from the summary information used in this way.

If you wish to receive a summary of the research findings or to be given access to any of the publications arising from the research, please contact the researcher.

How long will you keep my data for?

Your personal data will be retained for 10 years as required by law or a specified regulatory body.

At the completion of the project, we will retain your data only in anonymised form. This anonymised data will be archived and shared in line with our Policy for the Effective Management of Research Data.

How can I find out what information you hold about me?

You have certain rights in respect of the personal information the University holds about you. For more information about Individual Rights under GDPR and how you exercise them please visit: https://www.worcester.ac.uk/informationassurance/requests-for-personal-data.html.

What happens next?

Please keep this information sheet. If you do decide to take part, please either contact the researcher using the details below.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information.

If you decide you want to take part in our project, and we hope you do, or if you have any further questions then please contact: Amanda Sheehy by email SHEA1_18@uni.worc.ac.uk

If you have any concerns about the project at this point or at any later date you may contact the researcher (contact as above) or you may contact the Supervisor: Carla Solvason c.solvason@worc.ac.uk

If you would like to speak to an independent person who is not a member of the research team, please contact Esther Dobson at the University of Worcester, using the following details:

Esther Dobson
Secretary to Research Ethics Panel for College of Arts, Humanities and Education
University of Worcester
Henwick Grove
Worcester WR2 6AJ
ethics@worc.ac.uk

Appendix 2: Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (NON-NHS RESEARCH)

Title of Project: Tackling gender stereotypes in primary school through critical pedagogy
Participant identification number for this study: X
Name of Researcher: Amanda Sheehy

I, the undersigned, confirm that (**please initial boxes as appropriate**):

1.	I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in the Information Sheet dated _____ or it has been read to me.	
2.	I have been able to ask questions about the project and my participation and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.	
3.	I understand that taking part in this study involves one to one interviews (audio recorded) and group discussion (audio recorded) with written transcriptions made later. These recordings will be deleted after transcription. No names or identifying information will be used within the transcritpions.	
5.	I understand I can withdraw at any time by July 2020 without giving reasons and that I will not be penalised for withdrawing nor will I be questioned on why I have withdrawn.	
6.	I understand that the information I provide will be used for the purposes of dissemination (through research reports, a thesis / dissertation, conference papers, journal articles or other publications). Any information disseminated / published will be at a summary level and will be fully anonymised and there will be no way of identifying your individual personal information within the published results.	
10.	The procedures regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymisation of data, etc.) to me.	
11	I understand that personal information collected about me that can identify me, such as my name, or where I live, will not be shared beyond the study team.	
12.	Separate terms of consent for interviews and audio data collection have been explained and provided to me	
13.	I consent to the audio recording	
14.	I understand that other researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the data and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form.	
15.	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	
16.	I know who to contact if I have any concerns about this research	

Appendix 3: Practical approaches to promote gender equality in primary schools

The purpose of this research was to reflect on my own professional practice. Within the interviews and the subsequent contact made by email, the participants outlined the ways in which they sought to challenge gender stereotypes with their pupils. From my engagement with the literature, these teacher interviews and my own reflection on my practice during the course of this project, I have developed a set of recommendations for ways in which primary school teachers can promote gender equality in our classrooms. The following actions are recommendations which I am suggesting could be considered for use in primary schools. Not all of these actions are appropriate in every setting and there is no one-size-fits all approach which will immediately alleviate the stubborn gender stereotypes which have developed over decades and centuries in the UK. The following discussions are based on the findings of the research, my own practice and recommendations made by organisations working in the field of promoting gender equality in education. I have grouped these actions as follows:

Integration	Language and Behaviour	Curriculum	Resources	Shared responsibility
Seating arrangements	Avoid labels	Counter stereotypes	Images	Whole school approach
Toilet blocks	Use gender neutral language	Challenge sexism	Books	Teaching assistants
Sports clubs	Overcome assumptions	Promote activities (STEM / Arts /Language / Sport)	Examples	Support staff
Girls vs boys	Teachers as role models	Explore gender in different communities	Learning environment	Pupils
School uniform			Displays	Parents / carers
Roles and responsibilities			Outdoor space	Stakeholders
			Awards	

Avoid segregation

Griffin (2018) suggests that some educators continue to routinely use gender to arrange groups. Through reminding pupils of their gender in this way, it is argued, associated established stereotypes are brought to the fore (Francis and Skelton, 2008). Within the classroom, teachers hold the power to arrange their pupils through the use of seating plans, and gender is commonly considered in this process, either through choosing to seat children with others of their gender or to separate them (Gremmen *et al*, 2016). Roberts and Pinkett (2019) suggest that this girl-boy seating approach could be damaging as it emphasises difference and perpetuates unhelpful stereotypes of obedient girls and misbehaving boys. It is important that when educators consider their seating plans, they organise the

learning environment in order that learners are mixed so they work with people of different genders and the same gender. Likewise, that they avoid making the assumption that children will only wish to work with and play with children of the same gender.

Toilet blocks are another way in which pupils may be separated in schools which Browne (2004, p332) argues "can be sites where individuals' bodies are continually policed and (re)placed within sexed categories". Some settings have elected to avoid this segregation by providing gender neutral toilet facilities. Slater *et al* (2018) argue that toilets are political spaces which intersect with notions of identity and through the removal of a binary segregation of pupils, settings can not only avoid the constant reminder of the meanings attached to what it is to be male or female, but also to avoid the exclusion of those who are uncomfortable in either bracket.

Language and Expectations

Words and phrases which perpetuate gender stereotypes can be avoided. Phrases such as: 'boys will be boys', 'man up' or 'tomboy' may be harmful in both the messages they pass on but also in the complicit acceptance amongst users of the essentialist nature of gender. More modern alternatives to gendered nouns have been available for some time but their usage is not universal (Sczesny *et al*, 2016). Replacing fireman with firefighter, actress with actor, chairman with chair and dinner ladies with lunchtime supervisors should be an easy adjustment, but it may take time. Where teachers engage in a process of reflection over their gender construction and their practice, it may encourage them as individuals to begin to accept the impact of their language and they may make steps to alter it accordingly. Adopting a whole school approach may create an environment in which the gender neutral alternatives are more habitually used. Young children are familiar with being introduced to new vocabulary and are unlikely to be unaware of older precedents and of their connotations. Teachers may have differing expectations for their male and female pupils' motivation, maturity, responsibility and behaviour, expecting boys' behaviour for learning to be more challenging (Arnot and Gubb, 2001) and, in particular, a belief that disengaged boys' disinterest in school and unruliness are a perpetual distraction in the classroom (Gray and McLellan, 2006). Becoming aware of these prejudices may be the first step towards overcoming the assumptions.

Curriculum

It is argued that in order to promote equality schools must offer a curriculum which actively challenges sexism (Griffin, 2018; Roberts and Pinkett, 2019). Pupils can be educated to recognise and challenge sexist remarks (Lamb *et al*, 2009). Organisations such as Lifting Limits (2022), Gender Action (2022) and Gender Respect Project (DECSY, 2022) suggest that, through a whole school approach and

progressive curriculum, even young children can be taught to recognise and question gender stereotypes.

As discussed, children's career aspirations can be affected by their gender (Moulton *et al*, 2016)*.* In an investigation by the Education and Employers charity (Inspiring the Future, 2016), 66 children at a primary school in Kent were asked to draw a picture of a firefighter, a surgeon and a fighter pilot. 61 drew men and five drew women. They were then introduced to a female firefighter, surgeon and fighter pilot. The purpose of the investigation was to broaden the aspirations and interests of children about jobs and careers. It is both possible and necessary to counter stereotypes and provide role models for children to expose them to the possibility of undertaking a variety of occupations. When telling a story which features an astronaut, stereotypically portrayed as a man, switch the gender of the character in the story. When you come across, for example, a mechanic, a nurse, an engineer or a dancer in a story, take the opportunity to overcome assumptions where necessary and present an alternative.

Subject selection and preference has also been recognised as gendered (Barone and Assirelli, 2020; Driessen and Van Langen, 2013; Henderson *et al*, 2018) which can lead to gendered career choices in adulthood (Francis, 1998). For example, Reilly *et al* (2019) suggest that reading and writing are deemed feminine subjects and Pariser and Zimmerman (1990) outline the gendered associations made in art at primary age. It is important that teachers attempt to redress the balance by promoting activities which may traditionally have masculine or feminine connotations with children of all genders. To promote the idea that sport, craft, music, maths or dance are for everyone, there are steps educators may take. For example, STEM Learning (2022) actively work to promote science, maths and technology as subjects for all. They cite the work of one primary school which conducted a questionnaire with pupils and discovered that 70% of boys loved science but only 30% of girls had the same level of enjoyment. They list some of the successful initiatives the school took to improve girls' enjoyment of science as: including more school visits, more science-related visitors in school and more practical lessons. Roberts and Pinkett (2019) and critiqued the many ways teachers have attempted to engage boys in writing, concluding that competition or "boy-friendly" topics only creates greater difference and emphasises the stereotypical behaviour which discourages some boys from engaging in the educational system.

Resources

In recent years, children's literature has begun to represent more general diversity (De Palma, 2016; Epstein, 2013). For example, Olika, a publishing house in Sweden, publishes books which aim to

reflect contemporary lifestyles to children, seeking to represent all groups and living situations. Their books represent a significant change from some of the titles from reading schemes of the past which present extremes of gender stereotyping. It is entirely possible that many of these older texts remain in school libraries around the UK, and organisations such as *Lifting Limit*s and *Gender Action* recommend auditing school resources to remove books which represent gender stereotypes. If reading scheme books which have resided in book boxes for decades depict domestic scenes in which the mother wears an apron and spends all day cooking and cleaning whilst the father goes out to work in his suit, coming home to makes the decisions, then replacing them with more modern and varied depictions of family life could provide one way of altering the experience of young primary school pupils. With older children, it may be more effective to discuss the stereotypes evident in a range of books and to educate the pupils to consider the context in which they were written and the influence they may have. Consequently, educators may seek out resources to help educate young learners about respect, empathy, resilience, and self-esteem, choosing children's books which are informative and inspiring which specifically engage with the subject of gender equality. The *No Outsiders Project*, for example, has introduced participating schools to books and resources which portray families beyond the heteronormative examples of vintage literature (DePalma, 2010).

Sharing responsibility

Although it appears that the teacher, as role model, has a significant role to play in shaping pupils' understanding of gender identity, as already established, this is within a wider spectrum of influence. In order to best educate learners about the benefits of gender equality, it is necessary for a range of influences to endorse the same message. Olaiya and Petronella (2011) advocate a setting-wide approach to counteracting stereotypes with young children and similarly Gender Action (2022) suggest that the biggest impact will be made when the whole school community works together. What happens in a classroom is only one element of the school day and Thorne (1993) suggests that even the language used and activities undertaken on the playground play an important part in pupils' gendered experience. Children have been seen to police gendered expectations when outside of the classroom (Mayeza, 2017) and we do not know the extent of the influence within this less supervised environment. Therefore, there is an argument for schools to seek to engage parents and carers, as well as support staff, in the drive to progress and to educate the community more widely in the dangers of stereotypes and positive routes to equality. Gender Action (2022) argue that involving parents and carers can help young people to challenge gender inequality in wider life.

Appendix 4: Questions posed to prompt reflection with colleagues

Can you recall, as a child, when you first became aware of your own and others' genders?

What gender stereotypes are you aware of?

Do you think you have ever been affected by gender stereotypes? If yes, how so?

What do you think has influenced your attitudes to gender at different stages in your life? Have your attitudes changed? If yes, how so? Why?

Do you think gender stereotypes affect your pupils? If yes, how so?

Do you think you have ever treated children differently because of their gender?

At Pearmain School, we aim to promote gender equality so that children of all genders share equal opportunities and feel confident to make choices unrestricted by gender stereotypes.

What do we already do to encourage this?

What could we do as educators to improve our practice in this area?

Appendix 5: Derivation of themes

Understandings of masculinities and femininities		
Femininities	Masculinities	Thoughts on gender
Appearance Make-up Dressing feminine Body conscious / body shaming Nurturing Protective Seeking to please Emotional Empathetic Gentle Quiet "Good" girl Being strong / independent Sexuality "Tomboy"	Not showing emotion Protective Discussing emotions Misbehaviour Temper Avoiding machismo Being a "lad" Being practical Trying "blokey" things "Rugger bugger" "Camp"/effeminate Power Financial control	Gendered toys Being unhappy about being mistaken for a boy Confusion over those who don't "fit" Recognising difference Having varied interests Sexuality Avoiding labels Masculine for all – feminine things to be avoided by boys Language Appearance / behaviour

Influences					
Parents	Siblings	Friends	Partners	Teachers	Colleagues
Emulating relationships Copying / rejecting modelled behaviour Strong mum Seeing parents as (un)equal partners Mum as housewife Being like/unlike parent Dismissing influence Conflict with / between parents Respecting selflessness Seeking to please Children influencing parents Encouraged/ forced into activity / role	Treated differently by parents Recognising injustice Inconsistency Copying behaviour Gendered toys Jealousy Maintaining relationships	Friends of same gender Friends of diff gender Fitting in Being a "lad" Being relaxed with others of diff gender Changes in teenage years Moving between groups Being cool Following / leading Noticing differences from own home life	Strong women Being equal Influencing their attitudes to gender Being strong in a relationship Both working Acknowledging support	Showing respect Approval from Inspirational "Nice" female teachers (maternal, gentle, calm) Strict teachers – respect Role models Father figure Unaffected by T Male sports teachers Recognising inconsistency Humour – positive and negative Disliking school / misbehaviour Admitting what you don't know	Sharing values Strong women
Relations	Literature	Media	Society	Religion	Nature of influence
Grandparents Understanding old-fashioned views Inverse – chauvinist uncles	Feminist Broadened views Reinforcing / challenging stereotypes	TV Social media Technology Pop music	Being different Fitting in Being cool Multiple cultures Parochial attitudes University (change) Social class	Patriarchal At odds with school policy Homosexuality	Multiple influences – teachers only have limited impact Drawn to people with similar traits / beliefs Negative / inverse relationship

Life Journey		
Positive	Negative	Teaching
Being ambitious Seeking challenge Reaching potential Working towards a goal Reflecting on success Academic achievement Loving / healthy relationships	Drifting / coasting Passivity Regretting choices / paths not taken Conflict Difficult emotions Difficult relationships Losing a parent	Playing teacher in childhood Early rapport with children Decision to become a teacher Subjects studied Enjoying teaching Males in teaching / on teacher training

Maintaining relationships Coming of age – rejecting parochial views Changing career / lifestyle Forming early relationships (heteronormative) Teenage awakening – raised consciousness Moving to a bigger school / uni/ city Higher education Curiosity Rejecting materialism	Illness Discouraged from / prepared for marriage Individual experiences relate to adult behaviour Sacrifice Teenage years as height of conformity Being trapped	

Confidence	
Positive	Negative
Gaining confidence Academic challenge Focus on self Making own choices Having opportunities Seeking fulfilment Investing in self Having varied interests Taking lead in relationship Being resilient Seeking challenge Being creative Being approved of Being liked (by cool group) Solving problems Encouraged to do anything Being yourself Looking natural Encouraging pupil's confidence High expectations	Losing confidence Losing confidence after parenthood Having nothing to say Being quiet Missing opportunities Drifting Lack of drive Lacking confidence – masquerading Body image – leading to ED Lack of choice / options Fearing reaction Avoiding self promotion Wanting to be liked by cool group

Sport		
Being active	Segregation	Making change
Being sporty Playing sport as a child Engaging in sport as an adult	Associating sport / physical activity with masculinity Football – boys Netball - girls Inter school team sport Representation – males PE teachers Encouraged by Dad Segregated sports Beaten by a girl	Promoting sport with pupils Encouraging children to do physical activity Fine motor skills Representation

Changing attitudes			
Before reflection	Catalyst for change	Changing practice	Barriers to change
Language which emphasises difference Being gender blind – not seeing equality as an issue Eschewing feminism Recognising "abnormality" M / f segregation Making gender assumptions about pupils Being tougher on boys Being more playful with boys Using endearments Rarity of males in teaching Blind to stereotypes Gender not a barrier – battle won (women in positions of power) Unaffected by stereotypes / sexism Gender equality given a low priority	Recognising injustice Reflection on practice Raised consciousness Planting a seed Making it "fair" Teenage awakening Applying gender reflections to other areas (race) Acknowledging sub-conscious bias Being transformed Elevating importance Questioning own actions Raising awareness Catalyst for change Judgemental about system Attitudes developing / evolving Sexism as catalyst for change Feminist awakening Challenging parochial attitudes	Resisting / challenging stereotypes Influencing pupils Considering language Providing opportunities : promoting confidence Encouraging sport Involving pupils in construction / practical tasks Encouraging quiet boys Offering gender neutral toys Active not passive Trying new things Challenging / supporting parents Starting early Treating children as individuals Familiar teaching style Being yourself Being a role model Inspiring pupils Avoiding labels	Reverting to "old ways" Breaking habits Bracketing own views (at odds with school policy) Awareness = burden / work Multiple influences – teachers only one Disillusionment = new cohort / new battle Guilt Pupils giving the "right" answer

Lack of training Fed misguided information about "Getting boys writing"	Reflecting on values: pastoral / academic; creativity in curriculum	Crating role models Inverting stereotypes Academic challenge Showing your own personality Challenging patriarchy Ripple effect Breaking habits High expectation Changing school environment Tolerance / acceptance Making own choices Freedom of choice – led by child Curiosity Having varied interests Understanding transgender chn	