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Navigating The Classroom: A Critical Reflection of Male Art Teachers and The Complexities of Negotiating Gender, Identity, And Art Education in the Post #MeToo Era

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Abstract

How should male art teachers consider the complexities of navigating the visual arts classroom in a Post #MeToo era, one which provided a 'watershed' moment for victim-survivors to speak out, in new and nuanced ways (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019). Our art teachers encourage students to apply critical and creative thinking as well as respecting social and cultural practices (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2023), however, we are warned of possible misunderstandings when individuals negotiate complicated and ambiguous relations involving sexuality and power (Zarkov & Davis, 2018). Unfortunately, there is a moral anxiety of the male teacher, focusing on gender relations, student dynamics, sexuality, pedagogical practices and a reverse sexism (Lingard & Douglas, 1999; Martino, 2008); as it is open to layers of interpretation through the complexity of the 'women's gaze' and then men's responses to that gaze. Such interpretations are problematic, as men are heralded as both potential school leaders, and potential paedophiles, resulting in the distrust of men working in a female environment with young children (Smedley, 2006). This distrust is exacerbated as the art teacher identity is also perceived as free thinking, non-conformist and unconventional, as a fine art education and its sensibilities may not always sit comfortably with the expectations of teachers in secondary schools (Thornton, 2005). In reflecting on male art teachers, pedagogy, professional identities, gender, and art education, it may provide insight into the morals, ethics and routines of school life, and further opportunities to critique gender roles in the classroom.

Keywords: art education; gender; identity; pedagogy; teaching