

## **Gendered aspects of Leisure-time teachers' care – social and physical dimensions**

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### **Abstract**

This article aims to gain knowledge on how gender and profession are accounted for and expressed in leisure-time teachers' (LtTs) work in Sweden, with a specific focus on the caring aspects of the profession. Our results show that LtTs take up various positions in navigating between aspects connected to managerialism and external auditing as well as trust and internal valuation. We argue that the need exists for an expanded understanding of care in order to recognise and reward various gendered actions and activities in teachers' caring orientation. The article provides knowledge to both researchers and practitioners on gendered nuances of care that by tradition have been connected to women.

Keywords: gender, leisure-time centres, managerialism, profession, teachers' work

### **Introduction**

This article draws attention to care as a frequently unrecognised and unrewarded aspect of teachers' professional lives. Our interest in this topic is positioned within a critique of neo-liberal influences in education, in which care is downgraded in comparison with measurable academic achievement and an emphasis on performativity (Ball, 2006). Some educational contexts exist in which professionals have a less-esteemed status, such as early childhood education (ECE) and professional roles in Leisure-time Centres (LtCs) (Hjalmarrson and Löfdahl Hultman, 2015). The aim of this article is therefore to gain knowledge on how gender and profession are accounted for and expressed among leisure time teachers' (LtTs') work, with a specific focus on the caring aspects of the profession.

In Sweden, LtCs are governed by the Education Act (SFS 2010:800) and the curriculum developed for compulsory school, preschool class and LtCs (Skolverket/National Agency for

Education, 2016). The main tasks of the LtCs are to complement school; offer pupils meaningful leisure and social fellowship; and support their intellectual, emotional, physical and social development and learning by combining pedagogy and care. As many as 86 % of younger school children attend LtCs, which are heavily subsidised by the state and located in tax-funded Swedish schools. All pupils between five and thirteen years old have the right to be enrolled in LtCs but the majority of the pupils engaged are between six and eight years old. The LtC is located in the school building. Provision of activities has increased with respect to LtCs in Sweden, as in many other countries, during the last two decades; for example, see Hollister's 2003 review of US after-school provision. In the UK, this provision is sometimes known as 'wraparound' care (Lowndes and Dennison, 2012), and can include provision of care for pupils before and after the formal school day. The teachers who are employed in this type of work are particularly interesting because of the way their practices are based on different and often contradictory teaching values and practices.

During the last decade, leisure-time teachers (LtTs) in Swedish LtCs have been subject to several changes regarding their profession, including an increasing scrutiny of quality in their professional practices, which might be understood in relation to the tendency towards increased school inspection and regular supervision in Swedish schools (Lindgren, 2015). This emphasis leads to an increased mission for the LtTs to study, measure and improve their pedagogical methods and results. Lager (2015) showed that the concrete work related to the systematic development of quality-related initiatives in LTCs differs due to how policy is reformulated and adjusted with regard to institutional conditions.

Being a professional educator is demanding in a climate where parents and the state inspectorate expect increasing quality. A three-year formal teacher training programme is required to gain certification for compulsory teaching in LtCs. The LtCs have a mission to combine care and pedagogy in their support for pupils and are expected to complement school activities rather than, as previously, supporting their pupils' home environments. LtTs may be expected to collaborate with the compulsory school teachers and being held responsible for practical and artistic content during the school day. However, the existence and degree of such collaboration vary due to the traditions and organisation at each local school. The LtTs are not forced to handle pupil's school work during the LtC hours, but if the pupils prefer to do their homework at the LtC before the parents come to pick them up they help the pupils with this activity. To elaborate on this, LtTs are expected to be professional pedagogues whilst also providing an arena for meaningful recreation. In addition, new demands exist that LtTs provide systematic

documentation of quality. This orientates the LtT profession towards more measurability and results in conflicting demands informing the work of LtTs.

### **Gender and care in Early Childhood Education**

While the amount of studies focusing specifically on care in the context of LtCs is limited, there is a more thorough body of research in a broader ECE context. We start by discussing gender and care in ECE in general and then proceed by more specifically discussing Swedish LtCs.

Previous studies on the ECE profession have developed categories for professionalism. For example, there is a distinction between soft values vs management values in which the soft values are related to female-coded working tasks (Löfdahl 2014). Osgood (2006; 2013) refers to such professionalism as *emotional labour*, asserting that practitioners in ECE are regulated in their efforts to conform to policy demands for 'performativity and technicist practices' (2006, p1). Moyles (2001) highlights the tension between professionalism and the emotional nature of working in ECE. In a similar way, we have previously described the professional care practices of female LtTs in terms of ethical skills in a manner that is related to Nodding's (2002) theory on an ethics of care (Hjalmarsson & Löfdahl, 2014). However, the work of ECE teachers not only relates to care but is also concerned with managerialism, report writing and documentation (Löfgren, 2014, Löfdahl, 2014, Löfdahl & Folke-Fichtelius, 2015). These accounting tasks have been interpreted among LtTs as a means to legitimise their work, providing a possible positive transformation of their less-esteemed status and potentially broadening the scope of perception with respect to their positions (Hjalmarsson & Löfdahl, 2015).

Traditional gender orders affect the school system. Gannerud and Rönnerman (2007) suggest that tasks connected to the female-coded social and emotional dimensions of teachers' work are undervalued and unacknowledged as important parts of overall school organisation, in which cultural comprehension is generally masculine and images of masculinity predominate. This tendency implies that skills entailed in handling aspects of care are viewed as part of 'the female nature' (Wernersson, 2006, p. 49). Moreover, ideas on what is 'female' or 'male' affects how similar skills are interpreted and acknowledged in different ways, depending on whether these tasks are performed by a woman or a man (Gaustad and Raknes, 2015).

Warin (2014) recognises that government educational reforms in both Sweden and England have sidelined the caring aims of education, and claims that neo-liberal concepts are interlaced with hegemonic masculinity in educational policy aims. This also results in a pattern of low male employment in educational settings among younger children, which Warin acknowledges as a global phenomenon and which has brought about the problematic call for 'male role models',

which today exists both in a Swedish and an international context (Brownhill, 2015; Osgood, 2005; Wernersson, 2015). There is a risk that the qualities, knowledge and competencies that have traditionally been associated with female-coded, care-orientated areas of work remain invisible in formally documented activities. If these aspects are absent from formal accounts of teachers' practices, the risk exists that economic resources will not be provided to support these practices. For example, a demand for increased efficiency often leads to growing numbers of children per teacher. This dysfunctional pattern, in which pupil/teacher ratios are consistently increased, will persist in an environment where values related to care, and activities related to these values, remain invisible. Previous studies of the LtT profession have shown how difficult it is for LtTs to make their work more visible, as this work is strongly linked to social and emotional support, which does not necessarily result in demonstrable learning outcomes (Hjalmarsson, 2013).

The patterns described above actualise what Biesta (2004) recognises as a significant kind of professional tension. In his research, Biesta asserted that '...the culture of accountability makes it very difficult for the relations between parents/students and educators/institutions to develop into mutual, reciprocal, and democratic relationships, relationships that are based on a shared concern for the common educational good (or goods)—relationships, in other words, characterized by responsibility' (p. 249). We suggest that this might cause what Colnerud (2015) calls *moral stress*, which can occur when teachers are convinced of proper ways to handle various situations, while at the same time being constrained by institutional conditions. In these types of situations, teachers are shaped by reform contexts and discourses, as well as by the need to negotiate and provide resistance with the purpose of positioning themselves within both their local workplace and the existing national policy and reform climate (Buchanan, 2015).

The distinction identified above can be linked to wider debates about the philosophical and political purposes of education for children and young people. In particular, the distinction can be linked to critiques of neo-liberalism's education policy drive, which emphasises academic achievement at the expense of children's social and emotional development. Recognising that care has been undervalued as a 'soft element' of education, Wrigley, Thomson and Lingard (2012) say that care is not a 'wooly' ideal but is at the centre of intellectually demanding and equitable pedagogies: 'Deep care is central to socially just pedagogies, which understand the need to scaffold from where the students are at, in respectful ways' (p. 196). Fielding and Moss (2011) portray neo-liberal education policy as a 'techno-managerial exercise in control and normalisation' (p. 38). In response to this exercise, Fielding and Moss (2011) elevate care as a value that is

integral to their re-conception of the purpose of education, which is based on 'education in its broadest sense' (EBS).

The theoretical approach of Noddings (2002) and related feminist philosophers such as Tronto (1993; 2006) and Baker Miller (1986) can be harnessed to our concern with rescuing care from its invisible and undervalued status within the work of LtTs and ECE practitioners. Together, these writers promote a feminist ethic of care based on a relational approach to morality that recognises interdependency and affect, while rejecting an androcentric idea of human beings as independent rational agents. Tronto's analysis of care (2006) reminds us that we all are *receivers* as well as providers of care—a vision that paves the way for valuing and rewarding care activities within education. This understanding implies a value for care as both a means and an end to educational policy and practice, and suggests that caring capacities are the attributes that teachers should promote in the next generation. We will never manage to recognise and reward the reciprocal and interdependent conceptions of care that Tronto and Noddings outline whilst educational purposes continue to be aimed towards the private and independent individual following a set of goals that envision autonomy as the endpoint. As Persson (Persson and Gustafsson H, 2016, p. 22) argues; the Swedish National Agency for Education 'seldom hold love and care about the child as quality aspects and as something to be improved in the next plan of action' (quotation translated into English by the authors).

### ***Gender and care in Leisure-time Centres (LtCs)***

LtTs are a unique group of teachers working in a contradictory field where the basics of school curriculum apply to their activities, and where the quality of their work is monitored but in which activities in general lack clear goals. Similarities with preschool teachers are often stressed, as both professions work within the field of ECE and are female-dominated professions holding a low professional status within the broader field of the teaching profession. When comparing LtTs with preschool teachers, the more regulated curriculum of preschool and the targeting of individual children's specific learning goals must be kept in mind, as does the fact that preschools are relatively independent from primary schools (though both are part of the overall Swedish educational system). In comparison, LtCs are located in and closely linked to the primary school. Swedish pupils spend their time in the LtC before and after school hours while their parents work or study. One distinctive difference between preschools and LtCs is that due to the different ages of the children, the staff's direct involvement in physical care is not as noticeable in LtCs as it is in preschool (for example, with toilet, recreation and meal routines). The main focus

of this article is on the professional practices performed within the LtC, both before and after school hours.

In LtCs, the pupils' well-being and security is elementary, as each pupil's feelings related to being cared about are crucial to the ability to join and appreciate the activities offered (Schröder, 2015). Research has shown that the LtTs themselves prioritise the provision of care, *in loco parentis*, by organising possibilities for recreation, comfort, meaningful activities, and emotional relationships (Hansen, 1999). To nurture this type of social climate, LtTs emphasise their competence with respect to identity development in their pupils, strengthening of positive behaviours and creation of a comfortable environment (Hippinen, 2002). Furthermore, research shows that pupils' most positive memories from their involvement in LtCs relate to their relationships with the LtTs (Söderlund, 2000). However, the School Inspectorate's report of 77 LtCs (Skolinspektionen, 2010) presents several areas of potential care-related improvement. These including deepening the relationships between pupils and LtTs and broadening the limited support provided for pupils' emotional and intellectual development. Andersson (2013) confirms that LtTs are adversely affected by changes in structural conditions (such as the growing number of pupils in LtCs). In such circumstances, it is difficult to safeguard the relationship-orientated methods and the caring rationale that informs the goal of these centres, both of which by tradition have been significant to the work of the LtT profession.

### **Data and analysis**

Our complete data set consisted of seven interviews, three with male and four with female LtTs, as well as diary notes from three participants. A total of nine LtTs were spoken with, as some of the interviews were joint interviews. Two male (M1 and M2) and three female (F3, F4, F5) LtTs were interviewed individually, while two of the men (M3 and M4) and two of the women (F1 and F2) were interviewed two at a time in gender-homogenous groups. Those LtTs who were the only interviewees at a given local school were interviewed individually. The LtTs that had a colleague at their work place who also agreed to participate in the study decided on their own if they preferred to be interviewed individually or as part of a group; this is the primary reason that both types of interviews (individual and joint) were conducted. In addition, we had diary notes from three female participants (F6 – F8). They are all qualified and have been working in the profession for at least 13 years (and, in one instance, up to 40 years). The fictive names M1 – M4 and F1 – F8 are used in the presentation of the results with the aim to clarify which data derive from individual versus group interviews and diary notes.

All of the interviewees except one of the male LtTs worked in the same medium-sized town, thereby representing areas with different socioeconomic conditions—while this man worked in a smaller surrounding municipality.

The female interviewees were already cursory known to the authors professionally through the LtT's previous involvement in a continuing professional development course conducted in the municipality where they work. They were provided with verbal information about the aim of the study and its ethical aspects. All of the LtTs who were asked if they wanted to participate in the study were willing to be engaged. The interviews were arranged with consideration in respect to convenient timing for the LtTs.

Because of our wish to broaden the empirical base of the study, we were anxious to include male interviewees too. No men were involved in the continuation course mentioned above. Consequently, contact was initially made with a male LtT that we supposed to have a good circle of contacts among other LtTs due to his official role in the specific town. This person offered to get in touch with some male LtTs, provide them with information about the study and its ethical aspects, and then come back to us. After a couple of weeks our contact presented us with a list of six LtTs that he had spoken to. We sent an e-mail to each with a request to participate. Four responded positively. As was the case with the female interviewees, the interviews were planned with consideration for the tasks and routines each LtT had during the course of the week. Two men were interviewed together at the premises of a club in town suggested by our contact; the third was interviewed at the university; and the fourth interview was conducted in a public area at a compulsory school in the municipality where he worked.

The themes discussed during all of the interviews dealt with the LtTs' interpretations of their tasks and practical work in LtCs, with a specific focus on pedagogy and care, and expectations placed upon them as professionals. Further, the interviews focused on changes in the LtC's tasks and the LtT's work over time. A further topic was collaboration between LtTs and colleagues with other educational backgrounds which helped to ground the interviewee's perceptions about the status of both LtCs and the LtT profession. The interviews were recorded and transcribed word-for-word after completion.

With the aim to include still more professional experiences from rural areas, and thereby broaden the empirical base further, we asked the three LtTs working in the same municipality as the male LtT mentioned above to write diary notes at the end of their working day for a period of one week. These three female LtTs were asked to write about tasks and situations that had been

actualised each day without any other directions. Our motive for not providing the LtTs with more detailed instructions was that we were curious about which contexts and activities they would choose to write about.

All participants gave informed consent to take part in the study. The research process was guided by the ethical outlines formulated by the Swedish Research Council.

We undertook a thematic analysis of the overall data (Charmaz, 2000) that produced the themes: managerialism; trust; interpretations of care; implicit and explicit pedagogies and traditional gender roles. Our analysis revealed a distinction between the male and female responses. Consequently, we looked at these dissimilarities in more detail, separately analysing the set of responses from the sub-samples of men and women responding to the questions.

### **The empirical data: Findings and discussion**

The empirical results will be presented in accordance with two aspects that have been extracted from the data: Challenging an ethic of care in the LtT's work and the challenging the notion of care as female coded. Quotations from the interviews and the diary notes are used, presented in italics, to outline clearly the perspectives of the LtTs. These quotations illustrate the evidence for our interpretations.

#### ***Challenging an ethic of care in the LtT's work***

All of the male LtTs reported that their tasks are diffuse, which has a negative impact on their professional pride. During the interview with M3 and M4, M3 highlighted a need for improving the quality of the LtC. He interpreted LtC quality as the provision of meaningful activities. He explained quality in the context of LtCs as a concern for meeting the pupils' needs for physical and artistic activities and also the capacity to respond to their need to be valued as individuals. The working conditions in everyday practice make these needs hard to fulfil. This might be related to the moral stress that Colnerud (2015) reflects upon, implying a sort of conflict between teacher's professional judgements regarding proper ways to handle certain situations and constraining institutional conditions.

The male LtTs understood that pupils' physical needs in terms of care are generally related to quality. M3 claimed that it is hard to measure the level of quality in LtCs, but suggested that the

pupil's willingness to be present and their feelings of joy and security are important quality indicators.

The LtC activities are based on a mix of pedagogy and care. During the interview with M3 and M4, M4 accentuated the importance of promoting all pupils' social competence and their ability to interact with others. These LtTs stressed the minimal amount of time children spend with an adult and claimed that it is regrettable that the LtTs do not have enough time to interact more.

M4 further explained that LtC pedagogy complements schools because it supports the pupils as they develop competence that is valuable in a range of social situations.

The importance of social competence and relationships are also highlighted in the diary notes written by F6, F7 and F8. It is shown that they face strong expectations from parents to support the well-being and of the pupils and the social fellowship in the LtC group; in other words, conduct their work guided by ethic of care. For example, one of the LtTs (F6) made notes in her diary about a difference of opinion between herself and the mother of one of the pupils. The mother had told staff that her child had been hit by another child, a situation which had then been adequately resolved according to the LtT. However, the LtT explained that the mother had another opinion:

*Now, the mother thinks that this has been handled in a very bad way and that her daughter is insecure, that she does not want to go to school, that she is scared and worried. The mother stresses that there is a significant lack of information and that this situation is very grave (F6).*

The diary notes confirm that the LtTs constantly work to support the comfort and well-being of pupils as part of the relationships they build. Examples of this include making sure that all pupils have someone to play with during the break and checking in to see how pupils enjoyed their break. When some pupils cannot decide what to do in the school yard, the LtTs help them to find out what to play while ensuring that everyone has a playmate. According to the diary notes, the LtTs are also engaged in the cloakroom before and after the breaks, helping the pupils to talk in a suitable conversational tone and reminding certain pupils to visit the lavatory (F8).

The importance of conversations with the pupils about their well-being runs through all of the accounts given during the interviews. One of the LTts wrote about her engagement during a time of free play:

*It is a nice play time where I manage to talk to most of the children about their experiences of school and the leisure-time center—how they feel about eating meals in the large dining hall, how they experience their relationships with their friends and if there is something they think of and want to talk about (F7).*

These notes show how the LtTs face daily ethical dilemmas during which spontaneous care situations occur and require immediate resolution. They also show how caring activities are planned and repeated in order to support a long-term durable and sustainable caring climate. These results support the view that care is central to intellectually demanding and equitable pedagogies (Wrigley et al, 2012) as well as to a broadened perspective on education and its purposes (Fielding and Moss, 2011).

Furthermore, the LtTs make use of their caring and ethical attitudes in their efforts to engage the pupils in emotional conversations. For example, one LtT (F8) focused on listening to and accepting a vulnerable pupil's anxieties about leaving their school and village for a faraway location. She supported this pupil by talking about the future in a positive and hopeful manner.

During the interview with two female LtTs (F1 and F2), the discussion turned to aspects of quality in relation to various LtC activities. F1 and F2 stressed that letting the pupils sit at the computer is not seen as a useful and wholesome activity. Indeed, they explained that they feel embarrassed when parents come to pick up their children and find them engaged at the computer. As a way to make up for this, these LTs display information on the noticeboard in the cloakroom about which activities the pupils have been offered for the afternoon. It seems as if these LtTs, implicitly or explicitly, face expectations from parents to arrange certain LtC activities. Still, some of the LtTs (F4 and F5) said that parents hardly express any expectations at all. The female interviewees identified high-quality activities as those that had been specifically planned by them, and that also depended on follow-up and evaluation within reports. It seems as if the activities as such, are emphasized when documenting LtC quality rather than the pedagogical processes or the activities' impact in terms of joy, well-being and strengthened social fellowship in the group of pupils. This might be understood in relation the tendency of sidelining the caring aims of education (Warin, 2014) which in turn confirm the statement of Persson (Persson and Gustafsson H, 2016); aspects such as love and care about the child are not often acknowledged as important enough to be developed in the next plan of action.

As we understand it, the female interviewees' perceptions about their professional competence are based on their ability to arrange meaningful and ongoing activities, and to document, evaluate

and report on these activities. LtTs are currently required to carry out systematic quality assessments (SFS 2010:800). Documenting the quality of activities is a way to legitimate the LtC activities and to make the professionalism of LtTs explicit. Most of the female LtTs seem to view the documentation work as something positive that has made them more focused on the aims and goals of the activities offered.

Most of the women we interviewed related strongly to managerialism and external auditing. Offering activities that have clear measurable goals is often considered to be more important than the contents and process of the activities. Female interviewees representing different LtCs explained that, although they offer the pupils pleasantrecreational activities, it is still important that these activities are matched to clear goals. What had previously been recognised as important content has now been harnessed to a significant goal that requires conscious LtT planning—accordingly, activities are now planned so they can be described and evaluated in relation to quality criteria. According to one of the women (F3), the activities that are actually offered have hardly been changed, but now the LtTs are more concerned about documenting these activities. When F3 was asked if she now works in a different way due to the need for reports about quality, she said her way of working is still the same, but that now she is *much more* aware of how the activities *shall be shown in the text*. In a similar vein F4 told us: *Nowadays, one shall take pictures all the time and present the documentation on the municipality's homepage, and one shall use these pictures a lot as a basis of their marketing and put words to what one can do* (F4). This quotation might be understood in relation to the increased demands on reporting and making visible LtCs of high quality. One main reason for LtTs to exert themselves regarding the documentation work relates to the recruitment to the profession; as F5 asserted, *if we want more LtTs, real professional LtTs, us LtTs must display ourselves and our activities more*. According to our understanding, these LtTs feel pressured to demonstrate their professionalism and show off the LtC activities they offer with the aim of displaying improved quality provision in an integrated school market. Market forces mean that LtCs are scrutinized and judged both by the inspection authorities and also by parents in their choices of school for their children. LtTs try to make improvements ahead of time, based on their expectations about what the inspectorates want to see, but without actually know beforehand what the inspectors will focus on. We recognize a concern with a general competence to be able to show and put words to one's professional skills and how this competence influences quality in the educational setting. With reference to Ball (2006) we understand the scenario described to us as a fear of performativity, where performances are seen as means for control and change. Consequently LtTs feel they are being judged, in various ways, by various means and through various criteria on a constant and continual basis.

Our analysis of the data shows that the male interviewees and the female teacher's diary notes actualise an ethic of care as fundamental to their tasks and daily work. However, the female interviewees strongly relate to aspects such as control, external auditing and managerialism when discussing their tasks and daily work in a way that their male interviewed colleagues don't. These women's accounts challenge the notion of an ethic of care as crucial to the quality in LtCs, highlighting neoliberal politics and policies.

### ***Challenging the notion of care as female coded***

Care in the context of LtCs is interpreted by M3 and M4 as actualising both more practical aspects (such as nutrition and clothing) and social and emotional needs. These LtTs (M3 and M4) assert that acknowledging and affirming each pupil as an individual—recognising each child's competence and ensuring respect from others—is an act that reflects caring. They reject what they identify as 'molly coddling' and suggest that children need to be confronted with challenges early on in their lives and then need to move on to harder challenges. One of the other men (M1) reported that he is able to respond well to the needs of each individual child. He is not sure if he *does the right thing*, but says that he *has not noticed any other adult that has such close relations to the children* as he has:

*But it can also be negative, because my back hurts when having them climbing on me all the time (laughter); we do get physically close to each other. There are children up to the intermediate level that come and talk when they see me because they need to jostle and get some hugs, sort of, and I see to it that I always have the possibility to do so (M1).*

The quotation sheds light upon a physical aspect that is seldom acknowledged and discussed in terms of care. This, we argue, might be understood as reflecting a male-coded caring orientation. It seems as if the quoted LtT thinks that none of his colleagues manage to get as close to the pupils as he does. He's not sure if his actions are 'right', but he seems unconcerned. His account suggests he is compensating for a deficit in the LtC provision, thereby implicitly rejecting aspects of managerialism in work. According to this LtT, the pupils need and demand these distinct aspects of his time and availability as part of his LtT caring orientation, a consequence of responding to pupils with sensitivity. Our interpretation is that M1 implicitly relates to the feminist ethic of care, in a strong way, based on a relational approach to morality that recognises interdependency and affect, that Tronto (1993; 2006) and Noddings (2002) outline.

One of the LtTs (M4) reports that the work situation previously allowed the LtT to develop close relations to each pupil and offered possibilities for supporting pupils who had problems at home. According to M4, now it is harder to make deeper connections to individual pupils because of the high pupil/teacher ratio. M3 and M4 stated that today they mostly focused on care in the sense of ensuring that the pupils do not get hurt and that they have clothes suitable to the weather. We claim that the development described by these LtTs does not provide a fruitful base for the ethic of care that Tronto (1993; 2006) and Noddings (2002) advocate, as staff are not able to give sufficient time to supporting caring and collaborative relationships within the LtC. The presence of the strong managerialism discourse means that no room exists for an emphasis on mutually caring relationships that is emphasized within the feminist ethic of care.

The male LtTs have all thought about the ‘female domination’ of the profession and suggest they are breaking gender barriers through their choice of profession. One LtT (M2) said that when he started to work as an LtT he met explicit expectations on him as a man to *take care of the situation*, and he suggested that his colleagues became disappointed when he showed up.

*I guess they took for granted that their new male colleague would be big and strong and manage to put his foot down, and there I stood, twenty four years old, very short and on the top of that not interested at all in carrying out work in an authoritarian manner. They saw a need for that sort of man (M2).*

Furthermore, he discussed his colleagues’ expectations with regard to the kind of caring tasks he might choose as a man: they expected him to go outside *and play football with the lads*, while the women stay inside. We regard this quotation as illustrating how, as Gannerud and Rönnerman (2007) discuss, cultural images of masculinity might be expressed in teacher’s everyday practices.

Moreover, the quoted LtT reflects upon *the positive sides with the rowdy boys having someone to look up to and talk to, but it should not depend on the gender of the LtT*. It seems as if, to a large extent, these LtTs contribute to gender division through their actions. However, at the same time, they also seem to criticize and reject gender division. We recognise and understand that he relates to the discourse about the need for male role models that Brownhill (2015), Osgood (2005) and Wernersson (2015) report and reflect upon.

Our analysis of the data shows that the male interviewees challenge the notion of care as something that is exclusively female coded. When providing the pupils with physical challenges or getting physically close to them, these men show a caring orientation with the purpose of

meeting the pupil's social and emotional needs, strengthening and widening the pupil's competence and self-esteem.

## **CONCLUSION**

Our results show that both the female and the male LfTs show a caring orientation. The women's accounts link more explicitly to external auditing, report writing and documentation. However, their diary notes, together with the men's accounts, actualise aspects of care to a high degree. This study strongly suggests that the gender codes of LfT work (and LfTs) need to be problematized. On the basis of these findings, we assert that the breakdown of male versus female LfTs is not related to internal and external auditing in a gender-distinct fashion. Instead, we argue that the LfTs take up various positions in navigating between aspects connected to managerialism and quality documentation versus a caring orientation and internal valuation. Furthermore, the results reveal and confirm the absence of gender-specific perspectives on the topic discussed. Second, the overview of previous research showed that, by tradition, care has been connected to femininity and pedagogy has been linked to masculinity. On the basis of the results of this study, we claim the importance of widening the meaning of the concept of care with the purpose of recognising and rewarding it as a central aspect of teachers' tasks and overall work, not only in the context of LfTs but in the teaching profession in general. Most of all, an expanded understanding of care is necessary to capture the actions and activities of teachers that at first might not be interpreted as evidence of a caring orientation. While gender research often discusses caring values and skills as being female-coded by tradition, we stress the need for recognising and rewarding the sort of care highlighted by the male LfTs in the study. This includes being physical and jostling with the children, and engaging in 'rough and tumble' play—practices that have been shown in this article to contribute to discussions about care as a gendered concept.

Managerial forms of education operate to suppress (or make invisible) the caring dimensions of teachers' work. We have seen this clearly reflected in the voices of our research participants as they consider changes in their work as LfTs. Warin and Gannerud (2014) called for 'an opening up of the concept of care that disentangles it from its traditional interweaving with women and femininity and its traditional exclusion of men and masculinity' (p. 196). Our analytic focus on the gender perspectives of our LfT participants makes caring practices visible, and makes a

contribution to an opening up of the concept of care. It has served to draw out and elaborate a nuanced set of caring practices.

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