

# GENDER AND SECONDARY EDUCATION: TEACHER EXPERIENCES AND STRATEGIES

 Maria Helena Santos<sup>I</sup>

 António Manuel Marques<sup>II</sup>

 Catarina Delgado<sup>III</sup>

Translated by: Kevin Rose<sup>IV</sup>

<sup>I</sup> Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, CIS-Iscte, Lisbon, Portugal; [helena.santos@iscte-iul.pt](mailto:helena.santos@iscte-iul.pt)

<sup>II</sup> Escola Superior de Saúde do Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal (ESS/IPS) and Centro de Investigação Interdisciplinar Aplicada em Saúde (CIIAS), Setúbal, Portugal; [antonio.marques@ess.ips.pt](mailto:antonio.marques@ess.ips.pt)

<sup>III</sup> Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal; [maria\\_catarina\\_delgado@iscte-iul.pt](mailto:maria_catarina_delgado@iscte-iul.pt)

<sup>IV</sup> Freelancer; Coimbra, Portugal; [karose44@gmail.com](mailto:karose44@gmail.com)

## Abstract

The main objective of this study was to analyse the eventual negative effects associated with male teachers in Portuguese secondary education as well as their strategies for integrating into a profession where women are in the majority. We carried out sixteen individual semi-structured interviews with eight male and eight female teachers and with the contents then submitted to thematic analysis. The analytical findings demonstrate how men, in this context, experience different consequences from those experienced by women facing similar situations while also identifying advantages accruing due to membership of the minority. The experiences of men and the perceptions of women suggest the existence of pressure for men to portray, as teachers, the traits of hegemonic masculinity.

SECONDARY EDUCATION • TOKENISM • GENDER RELATIONS • MASCULINITY

## GÊNERO E ENSINO SECUNDÁRIO: EXPERIÊNCIAS E ESTRATÉGIAS DOS PROFESSORES

### Resumo

Este estudo analisou os possíveis efeitos negativos associados aos homens docentes do ensino secundário português, bem como as suas estratégias para se integrarem em uma profissão em que as mulheres são maioritárias. Foram realizadas 16 entrevistas individuais semiestruturadas com 8 professores e 8 professoras, e os seus conteúdos foram submetidos a uma análise temática. A análise evidencia que os homens, nesse contexto, experienciam consequências distintas daquelas que as mulheres em situações similares vivenciam, assinalando-se, ainda, vantagens pela pertença à minoria. As experiências dos homens e as percepções das mulheres sugerem a existência de pressão para que os homens evidenciem, enquanto professores, os traços da masculinidade hegemônica.

ENSINO SECUNDÁRIO • TOKENISM • RELAÇÕES DE GÊNERO • MASCULINIDADE

## GÉNERO Y EDUCACIÓN SECUNDARIA: EXPERIENCIAS Y ESTRATEGIAS DE LOS PROFESORES

### Resumen

Este estudio analizó los posibles efectos negativos asociados a los hombres profesores de la educación secundaria portuguesa, así como sus estrategias para integrarse en una profesión en la que las mujeres son mayoría. Fueron realizadas 16 entrevistas individuales semiestructuradas con 8 profesores y 8 profesoras, y sus contenidos fueron sometidos a un análisis temático. El análisis muestra que los hombres, en este contexto, experimentan consecuencias diferentes de aquellas que las mujeres en situaciones similares experimentan, destacando también las ventajas de pertenecer a la minoría. Las experiencias de los hombres y las percepciones de las mujeres sugieren la existencia de presiones para que los hombres demuestren, como docentes, los rasgos de la masculinidad hegemónica.

EDUCACIÓN SECUNDARIA • TOKENISMO • RELACIONES DE GÉNERO • MASCULINIDAD

## GENRE ET ENSEIGNEMENT SECONDAIRE: EXPÉRIENCES ET STRATÉGIES DES ENSEIGNANTS

### Résumé

Cette étude a analysé les effets négatifs possiblement associés aux enseignants hommes dans l'enseignement secondaire portugais, ainsi que leurs stratégies d'intégration dans une profession majoritairement féminine. 16 entretiens individuels semi-directifs ont été menés auprès de 8 enseignants et de 8 enseignantes et leur contenu a été soumis à une analyse thématique. L'analyse montre que, dans un même contexte, les conséquences sur les hommes diffèrent de celles vécues par les femmes et, qu'en outre, appartenir à la minorité présente certains avantages. Les expériences des hommes et les perceptions des femmes suggèrent qu'il existe une pression pour que les hommes, en tant qu'enseignants, revêtent les traits de la masculinité hégémonique.

ENSEIGNEMENT SECONDAIRE • TOKENISM • RELATIONS DE GENRE • MASCULINITÉ

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## Introduction

Teaching represents one professional context in which conceptions of sex and gender are particularly rooted (Bailey & Graves, 2016; Moreau, 2015; Sabbe & Aelterman, 2007; Sargent, 2000; Simmie, 2023) and where there the numerical predominance of women continues (Cognard-Black, 2004; Drudy, 2008; Pruit, 2015; Sabbe & Aelterman, 2007), particularly in pre-school education (Cortez, 2015; Santos et al., 2022; Sullivan et al., 2020), in elementary education (Rabelo, 2016; Santos & Amâncio, 2018) and in secondary education (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2022).

The feminisation of teaching has broadly resulted from urbanisation processes, socioeconomic development, the sexual division of labour, conceptions of femininity and masculinity, the social positioning of women and the value assigned to children and the care they need (Drudy, 2008). Other factors explaining the under-representation of men and, therefore, the predominance of women in the education sector include the poor remuneration and the low status associated with these professionals (Allegretto & Mishel, 2016; Ashcraft & Sevier, 2006; Sargent, 2000) and their close association with the field of care and femininity and therefore deemed especially appropriate to women and unattractive to men (Hedlin & Åberg, 2019; OECD, 2022; Pruit, 2015; Rabelo, 2016; Santos & Amâncio, 2018).

The education sector in Portugal, especially at levels prior to higher education, has also maintained the numerical predominance of women (Pordata, 2022) and this may thus be assumed as a suitable context to analyze the experiences of men, in terms of gender, in a socially atypical profession (Cognard-Black, 2004; Simmie, 2023). However, the literature did not return any studies adopting a gender perspective to deepen knowledge about the experiences of Portuguese teachers in secondary education. Indeed, in Portugal, men have constituted a minority in this education cycle ever since 1972 even if less pronounced than in the earlier cycles (Santos & Amâncio, 2018; Santos et al., 2022), as detailed in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
*Number and percentage of male teachers in lower and upper secondary education*

Year	Total	Number of men	Percentage of men
1972	16,209	7,600	46.9
1977	30,782	13,573	44.1
1982	35,914	15,634	43.5
1987	50,788	19,411	38.2
1992	*	*	*
1997	81,338	24,950	36.8
2002	87,636	25,244	28.8
2007	88,280	26,101	29.6
2012	83,525	24,412	29.2
2017	75,567	21,330	28.2
2021	78,523	22,312	28.4

Source: Pordata (2022).

\* No data available.

Table 1 details the sharp rise in the total number of teachers in this level of education, particularly between the years 1972 and 1977, as a result of the greater investment in education in

Portugal after the April Revolution of 1974 (Loura, 2020). The figures presented also convey how, in 1972, the percentage of male and female teachers was almost equal. Since 1977, the minority position of male secondary education teachers has increased dramatically and thus this constitutes an ideal context for studying the gender dynamics associated with a specific profession.

### **Tokenism – The relevance of numerical proportion**

Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1977, 1993) pioneered the study of tokenism theory by studying group dynamics and gender inequalities in organisational contexts. Her theory has underpinned various research studies oriented towards analysing the effects of numerical balance and distortion in relationships and between the groups constituted, especially based on gender (Santos & Amâncio, 2014).

In her study, carried out in the United States of America, Kanter analysed the organisational dynamics in a context marked by the under-representation of one group (women) in relation to another (men), thus understanding how the interaction between both was affected by the very marked numerical imbalance and to what type of consequences women were subjected as members of the under-represented group. The author concluded that the numerical proportion of the groups is a fundamental factor in social life and that this has effects on the interactions established between the members of each group (Kanter, 1977, 1993).

Kanter (1993) began by defining four types of groups existing in an organisational context, categorising them by the numerical proportion of their composition: i) the “uniform groups”, homogeneous, made up of only one socially significant category in a proportion of 100:0; ii) the “skewed groups”, made up of a proportion of about 85:15, in which one category predominates and the “phenomenon of tokenism” occurs. The author designates the members of majority groups as “dominant” because they control the group and its culture, and the minority category individuals as “tokens”, “loners” or “solos”, as if single individuals. The tokens are so named because they are treated as representative of their social category, as “examples” or “symbols”, rather than as individuals; iii) the “tilted groups” have a 65:35 ratio, with less extreme distributions and effects in interactions, because there is greater numerical balance between the majority (dominant) and minority (dominated). Minority individuals become allies and may create coalitions and affect the culture of the group, thereby becoming differentiated from one another; and iv) “balanced groups” are composed of a ratio ranging from 60:40 to 50:50, with the culture and interactions reflecting this numerical balance.

According to this author, in contexts where there is a numerical balance between the groups, the organisational dynamics should be more positive. Focusing on a context of skewed groups, Kanter (1977, 1993) concludes that, in comparison with the dominant group, tokens are disadvantaged and subject to three negative consequences: i) high visibility, leading to additional pressures to turn in good performance levels in an attempt to meet the expectations of the dominant group, which may cause their performance to increase or decrease; ii) contrast or polarisation of the differences in relation to the dominant group, which, due to their minority situation, may lead to their isolation or accommodation or even attempts to integrate into the dominant group; and iii) assimilation of the stereotypes attributed to their social group by the dominant group members in order to meet their expectations, which may prevent free expression and thus lead to their further marginalisation.

### **Tokenism from a gender perspective**

One current of research has criticized Kanter’s perspective by arguing that gender-neutral, numerical proportion-based analysis is insufficient to fully understand the “phenomenon of

tokenism” (Budig, 2002; Ott, 1989; Williams, 1992; Yoder & Sinnett, 1985; Yoder, 1991, 1994; Zimmer, 1988). In as early as 1975, Laws (1975) argued that only “double deviant” tokens, i.e., members of groups proportionally under-represented in the context and of socially low status, such as women in male-dominated professions, will experience negative consequences in organisations. Thus, this author added the social normative context to the numerical factors and, following her perspective, men, in general, with high social status, would not be expected to experience the consequences of tokenism even when underrepresented because they are not, as a group, double deviant.

Concerning studies subsequent to Kanter’s (1977, 1993) research, Yoder and Sinnett’s (1985) research corroborated Laws’ (1975) “double deviant” theory by demonstrating that, unlike women tokens, men tokens do not experience the negative effects of high visibility, contrast/polarisation or assimilation of stereotypical gender roles, thus suggesting that numbers alone do not explain the negative consequences of tokenism. Zimmer (1988) has further shown that male tokens in a female profession (for example, nursing) have more benefits, such as receiving greater consideration and prominence, than women tokens in male professions. Yoder (1991), in turn, claimed that Kanter conflated four factors: numerical imbalance, gender status, professional inappropriateness and intrusiveness. This author maintains that the gender of the token affects the status, with male tokens not experiencing the same negative consequences as women because of their higher social status. Yoder (1991) thus argues that Kanter’s findings are only generalizable to women tokens integrated into male-dominated professions.

In turn, Budig (2002) argues that token men experience some effects of tokenism but, contrary to the case of token women, they do not suffer negative impacts at the professional level and are still even more likely to benefit from career promotion. She added that the typical sexual division of labour and occupations causes women to have more domestic and childcare responsibilities, which leads to them not being perceived as “ideal workers” as organisations attribute value to employees with fewer non-work obligations, that is, men.

One of the various criticisms of Kanter’s theorisation is that the numerical proportion, although relevant, is not the only explanatory factor of the “phenomenon of tokenism” in organisations and, therefore, social factors (for example, differences in the treatment of women and men, blacks, and whites, etc.), ideological, cultural, and psychological factors should also be integrated into the analysis. This perspective is based on the idea that the negative consequences identified by Kanter do not occur evenly across social groups (Santos & Amâncio, 2014; Santos et al., 2015) because the division of labour tends to benefit men and organisations through valuing more the qualities associated with masculinity to the detriment of those related to femininity (Acker, 1990; Maume, 1999).

Organizational structures and dynamics are not gender-neutral; they are “gendered” (Acker, 1990). Under this assumption, Williams (1992, 1995) undertook a study of under-represented men in traditionally female professions: nurses, elementary teachers, librarians, and social workers. She concluded that women and men in “gender-typical” professions or occupations experience discrimination but the consequences and types are different for each gender. Token men are generally treated differently by women but in a positive sense, for example, gaining advantages in promotion and hiring in professions where they are a minority. In these situations, it is common for men to benefit from a “glass escalator” that takes them up to higher positions and higher pay. In contrast, women tokens often face “glass ceilings”, which hinder and prevent them from accessing higher hierarchical positions and then becoming the object of marginalisation (Williams, 1992). In addition, the above-mentioned studies have shown that the main difficulties and situations of negative discrimination experienced by women tokens occur in the workplace; the greatest obstacles

experienced by men tokens are external to their profession as they originate outside the organisation. These men are mainly faced with the effects of negative stereotypes, usually associated with their masculinity, expressed by people external to the working context, with accounting for the main source of their negative discrimination.

Another effect of the influence of gender relations on the dynamics of tokenism relates to the reception in professions of minority group members. Women in majority situations, in an attempt to boost the status of their professions, tend to welcome men, making them feel integrated (Heikes, 1991; Santos & Amâncio, 2018, 2019; Santos et al., 2022). On the contrary, in masculine professions, the process of women's entry and integration does not prove as positive as their entry often becomes perceived as a threat to the status of these professions (Marques, 2011; Santos et al., 2016).

### **Men in atypical professions: The case of teaching**

Men who choose to be teachers at levels of education prior to higher education often experience difficulties in negotiating their professional identity with their identity as males as these are socially perceived as contradictory (Rabelo, 2016, 2019; Sabbe & Aelterman, 2007; Sargent, 2000). Preschool and elementary school teachers are often perceived as more feminine, homosexual and/or potentially paedophilic (Ashcraft & Sevier, 2006; Pruit, 2015; Rabelo, 2021; Santos & Amâncio, 2018; Santos et al., 2022). These social attributions may lead to the need to change their ways of teaching and acting (Hedlin & Åberg, 2019; Sargent, 2000), moving away from the domains associated with femininity to affirm and confirm their masculinity (Ashcraft & Sevier, 2006; Sabbe & Aelterman, 2007; Rabelo, 2019; Santos et al., 2022). Thus, in order to display the traits stereotypically associated with men and the conformity to traditional masculinity, teachers and educators tend to maintain greater distance from their students, avoid emotional involvement, control their affective expressions, and exacerbate authoritarian traits (Ashcraft & Sevier, 2006; Pruit, 2015; Santos & Amâncio, 2018).

Furthermore, social expectations regarding female and male teachers differ. Male teachers associate with discipline, leadership, and authority, and are thus expected to be more objective and interested in what is stereotypically associated with their sex (Drudy, 2008; Hedlin & Åberg, 2019; Santos & Amâncio, 2018). As for female teachers, it is socially expected that they show understanding, affection, and attention towards their students (Drudy, 2008; Hedlin & Åberg, 2019). The division of responsibilities at school may have direct gender effects, for example, through the greater involvement of men in the management of situations of indiscipline among students, their connection to the so-called "more problematic" classes, as well as to areas related to technologies and physical strength (Colombo & Barabanti, 2020; Santos & Amâncio, 2018).

Cognard-Black (2004) tested the theory of tokenism from a gender perspective, focusing on men in so-called feminine professions, specifically, elementary school teachers. The study findings did not support Kanter's proposal as they did not demonstrate that male elementary school teachers, despite being in a numerically female-dominated environment, experienced the disadvantages of tokenism. Instead, this study supported Williams' (1992, 1995) view by identifying the existence of the "glass escalator", which facilitates male elementary school teachers moving up the ladder more quickly than their female counterparts and often experiencing privilege. Cognard-Black (2004) thus found that male and female teacher teaching and experiences as professionals are more related to their gender than to numerical proportion as primary school teachers benefit from their male status and are more likely to be promoted, rewarded, and privileged than their female colleagues.

Also applying the theory of tokenism from a gender perspective, Santos and Amâncio (2018) carried out a study focused on the experiences of elementary school teachers. In this study, as part of a minority group, male teachers were indeed more visible than female teachers (the majority group)

but this did not lead them to feel pressured to perform better and to prove their competences to their colleagues. Furthermore, the polarisation of differences neither led to social isolation nor did it create obstacles for male teachers; on the contrary, they were often discriminated against positively, leading them to reach higher positions more quickly. The authors also found that the assimilation of stereotypical male roles ended up benefiting them. Furthermore, the entry of more male teachers into this grade was perceived by female teachers as adding value to the profession as it would increase its prestige.

In sum, these results contradict Kanter's theory (1977, 1993) and demonstrate how at least elementary school teachers do not experience the negative dynamics of tokenism. The authors conclude that, in agreement with the Williams (1992, 1995) perspective and with the symbolic gender asymmetry model (Amâncio, 1992), although men are a small minority in elementary education, they not only do not lose the social advantages that benefit them but also actually seem to gain several privileges. In this way, tokenism seems to be limited to maintaining the social gender order (Santos & Amâncio, 2018).

Also adopting a gender perspective, Santos et al. (2022) set out to verify whether men involved in pre-school education experienced the negative consequences of tokenism identified by Kanter (1977, 1993). This study conveyed how male early childhood educators are indeed more visible in this professional context, experience some pressures to prove good standards of performance but only at the beginning of their career due to their lack of experience and knowledge rather than their token status. They felt that although there was a polarisation of differences between themselves and female early childhood educators, this neither led to their isolation nor hindered their professional careers, and they were additionally also associated with advantageous characteristics. However, they did experience some negative situations related to physical touch and closeness to children, largely due to the paedophilia case at Casa Pia.<sup>1</sup> This led them to adopt self-defensive behaviours on their own part in order to avoid situations of mistrust arising mainly with parents and guardians.

Santos et al. (2022) conclude that, apart from this specific contingency, male early childhood educators did not, in general, experience the negative consequences identified by Kanter (1977, 1993). However, the authors emphasise, as a relevant observation, that the women interviewed clearly expressed the attribution of stereotypical traits of masculinity to their male colleagues in the form of expectations that naturalize the differences, which are picked up by men, thus circumscribing them within the rigidity of the meanings of "being a man".

In sum, studies carried out in the context of education have shown that men, as tokens, experience the phenomenon of tokenism in ways different to women and they tend to benefit from certain advantages that derive from their superior social positioning.

As stated before, in skewed groups, tokens experience the negative consequences of the "phenomenon of tokenism", thus, visibility, polarisation and assimilation (Kanter, 1977, 1993). However, according to this author, in contexts where there is a greater numerical balance between groups, there would be less discrimination, the organisational dynamics would be more positive, and the "phenomenon of tokenism" would be less evident. On the other hand, some studies (for example, Rabelo, 2016; Santos & Amâncio, 2018, 2019; Santos et al., 2022; Taylor, 2010; Williams, 1992, 1995) have since pointed out that when the minority group is made up of men, and because they also belong to a socially dominant group, they are not discriminated against (or only to a very slight degree) in keeping with their status as tokens.

1 In the so-called "Casa Pia case", abuses in educational institutions were identified as being carried out only by men. (Santos et al., 2022, p. 12).

Therefore, with this study we intend to observe whether, in a context that may be considered close to a “skewed group” (Kanter, 1977, 1993), the minority constituted by men experiences the negative consequences of “tokenism” identified by the author, as well as the perspectives of women in the same profession on this aspect. We start out from the theory of tokenism (Kanter, 1977, 1993), adopting a gender perspective, specifically seeking to: i) analyse the experiences of secondary school male teachers in order to identify and characterise the possible obstacles and difficulties they experience; ii) identify the strategies adopted by male teachers to manage the gender imbalance situations in which they find themselves; and iii) analyse the perspectives of their peer female teachers about the presence of men in their profession.

## Methodology

### Participants

We carried out 16 individual semi-structured interviews with Portuguese teachers working in 12 different secondary schools: 8 men and 8 women. Aged between 36 and 59 years old ( $M=47.56$ ;  $SD=6.92$ ), male teachers were on average 48.86 years old ( $SD=7.09$ ) and female teachers 47.75 years old ( $SD=7.13$ ). The participants held between 13 and 36 years of service in this cycle of education. In the 12 schools involved, located in the districts of Évora, Setúbal and Portalegre, the percentage of male teachers varied between 22% and 33%, so that, according to the categorization put forward by Kanter (1977, 1993), these may be considered, by approximation, as “skewed group” contexts.

### Procedure

The recruitment of secondary school teachers to participate in the study began among our personal contacts, through e-mail, Facebook, and telephone, and we proposed an interview and presented the framework of the content. The interviews were scheduled with male and female teachers according to their availability. We subsequently adopted the “snowball” technique to identify and contact more participants. A poster was also produced to encourage participation in the study and distributed across social networks, aimed mainly at men due to the greater difficulty in attracting male respondents.

Due to the pandemic situation, the interviews took place online through the Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Meet platforms, between November 27, 2020 and February 11, 2021, with their duration varying between 28 minutes and one hour and two minutes. All interviews were transcribed and analysed in full.

We previously sent an informed consent form to the participants, which presented the study objectives, ensured participant anonymity, and ensured the confidentiality of the data collected. In this document, which was signed by all participants, we also requested their permission to record the interview in order to allow for their accurate transcription.

Following the positive opinion issued by the Ethics Committee of the institution of two of the authors (133/2020), we started the data collection process.

### Instruments

We collected data through individual semi-structured interviews, following a script oriented towards achieving the study’s objectives and aligned with the literature review, which included certain questions necessary for the sociodemographic characterisation of the participants (for example, sex, age, years of professional experience). Two versions of the script were constructed, one for male and one for female teachers, sharing the following three areas in common: a) the phase



of entry into the profession; b) the numerical gender imbalance in secondary education; c) their experiences in the current professional context, exploring any eventual effects of tokenism.

### Data analysis

The transcripts of all interviews constituted the corpus which was subject to thematic analysis in accordance with the perspective of Braun and Clarke (2006). This deliberate choice arises from its appropriateness to the study's objectives, specifically by summarising the discursive elements collected and, simultaneously, describing them in depth while also highlighting similarities and disagreements. In undertaking this analysis, we followed the six phases recommended by the abovementioned authors, and performed a type of analysis that they call mixed analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). We started with deductive analysis, guided by the three organising interview themes, in turn, supported by the literature review, that is, visibility, polarisation and assimilation while accepting the scope for identifying other relevant themes or subthemes, thus assuming an inductive analytical positioning.

### Findings

Our analysis led to the identification of the six themes presented in Table 2 and designated as follows: i) asymmetric judgements on the choice of profession; ii) genderization of the profession; iii) relevance of the presence of more men in the profession; iv) in/visibility of male teachers; v) from non-polarisation to beneficial polarisation; and vi) assimilation of stereotypical masculine roles.

**Table 2**  
*Themes and subthemes*

Themes	Subthemes
Asymmetric judgements on the choice of profession	Teaching as a momentary opportunity
	The reactions of people close to them
Genderization of the profession	A profession associated with women
	A profession unattractive to men
Relevance of the presence of more men in the profession	
In/visibility of male teacher	Visibility of men
	Pressure for good performance
	Men's successes and errors
From non-polarisation to beneficial polarisation	Gendered vs. neutral treatments
	Integration and valorisation of men in the professional context
Assimilation of stereotypical masculine roles	Male teacher management of their minority status
	Advantages of being a man in secondary education
	Stereotypical expectations associated with men
	Pressure to exercise management positions
	Evidence of femininity traits in male teachers

Source: Authors' elaboration.

## Asymmetric judgements on the choice of profession

This theme focuses on the choice of profession, encompassing two subthemes: i) teaching as a momentary opportunity; and ii) the reactions of people close to them. Both subthemes identify differences between women's and men's perceptions.

Regarding the first subtheme, women predominantly mentioned they had expressed the desire to become teachers from an early age, having been greatly influenced by people close to them, such as aunts, mothers and/or teachers. Men tended to emphasise that they opted for the profession later and often as a momentary and temporary opportunity as the following excerpts portray:

*Ever since I was little, I said I was going to be a teacher, I always knew that's what I wanted to be. Since I was born, practically. I was very influenced by my mother, who was a teacher . . . , I never thought I would be anything else. (I3, women).*

*I am a teacher by chance . . . I decided to go to work, I started in the call centre . . . and I start taking the training of trainers and giving training and I start liking it . . . , I started thinking that teaching could be an option . . . , I saw teaching as an option to earn money . . . , but always thinking it wouldn't be something I wanted to do for life, it would be a temporary option . . . , but I ended up entering, I started liking it and I've stayed until today. (I16, man).*

Regarding the subtheme "reactions from people close to them" when they entered the profession, most men mentioned the first reactions they encountered were of surprise, having heard some less pleasant comments about their professional choice particularly its social association with women and not valued very highly. The women stated that, in general, everyone reacted well and was happy with their choice:

*In the phase when we are pre-adults, some friends made some not so nice comments . . . , they commented several times "are you really going to be a teacher? That's for women...". The truth is that the teaching profession is still associated with women and there is still the idea of "there's nothing else to do, you're go to teach", there is still some prejudice . . . , and the teaching profession is not properly valued. (I4, man).*

*From my family, it didn't cause any big reactions, they all accepted it well and were happy that I was following and fighting for my dreams. My friends all reacted very positively. (I6, woman).*

## Genderization of the profession

This theme encompasses ideas concerning the disparities in the proportions of women and men in secondary education teaching careers with all interviewees aware that the number of female teachers has long been and continues to be much higher. This theme also contains two subthemes: i) a profession associated with women; and ii) a profession unattractive to men.

In relation to the first subtheme, participants mentioned how the main factor explaining why there are fewer female teachers in secondary education stems from the profession being, historically and socially, more associated with women as teaching requires characteristics that are stereotypically attributed to them, specifically traits such as "more maternal", "relational" and "caring", which would dissuade men as they lack, from the point of view of social constructions, these stereotypical traits:

*It can be explained by the fact that teaching is very much associated with caring, with a greater sensitivity and these are characteristics, these are traits more associated with women. (I9, man).*

*I think women are more “cut out” for the profession, perhaps because they represent the maternal figure a bit. Women have more of a vocation for teaching. They are more sensitive, they have more of a maternal side, and I think that is why there are more women teachers in secondary education and in education in general. (I13, woman).*

*We still associate women as more education-oriented . . . to take care of children, women with more patience for children and adolescents and all of this drives men away. (I2, man).*

The second subtheme reports how, according to the participants, the education sector does not attract men because it is socially undervalued, with low subsequent employability and low pay, so men tend to prefer more advantageous jobs in these two areas. There was also common reference to how men commonly feel more attracted to professions in areas perceived as more masculine, such as engineering and technology:

*Teaching careers are not very attractive, not well paid, and it is easy for men to find other career opportunities that are more advantageous in economic terms. . . . Men opt more for engineering courses . . . , often, for better paid areas and teaching becomes unattractive. (I6, woman).*

*I think that engineering attracts men a lot and channels their aspirations and grants them more attractive careers, in economic terms, and men often seek that side. (I4, man).*

### Relevance of the presence of more men in the profession

The third theme identified aggregates the ideas about the value attributed by the interviewees to men entering secondary education teaching.

It is noteworthy that female interviewees consider the entry of more men into secondary education important, stating this would contribute to improving the school environment, making it more relaxed and, simultaneously, changing the dynamics, because men would bring new ways of working and would make use of the authority socially associated with being male. The female interviewees also expressed how the presence of male teachers would improve school relations, making them less conflictual and constituting “role models” for boys, namely so that they would also perceive teaching as a professional outlet for males. Furthermore, female interviewees highlight that the entry of more men is important because it would increase their own social value:

*I think it would be important to improve the school climate itself, the dynamics of the relationships between male and female teachers. It would also be good for the students to have more examples of men. If more men teachers entered the teaching profession, it would change the very dynamics of the school and the profession, I think that if they did, they would start to look at the teaching profession with other eyes, I think society would start to value it more. (I8, woman).*

*The fact of having more men would function almost as a role model for students and would open horizons about what it is to be a teacher and how the profession can be for anyone. . . . The entry of more men could even contribute to a greater appreciation of the profession because the profession would no longer be related only to the teacher-woman ideal. (I11, woman).*

*I think that the entry of more male teachers would bring less stress. . . , men can transmit a calmer life at the school level . . . , they would also end up imposing more respect. . . . The entry of more male teachers might also bring greater tranquillity to us female teachers. Because the more relaxed side of men would improve the school environment in terms of the relationship between male and female teachers. (I3, woman).*

However, it is also noticeable that the men interviewed do not consider the entry of more men into secondary education to be very important, stating that, more than being a man or a woman, it is crucial for a teacher to be competent, professional, and committed:

*I don't think it is a relevant issue for teaching. What is important is what the person brings as a teacher and not whether they are a male teacher or female teacher. (I9, man).*

*I distinguish my colleagues as good and bad professionals, whether they are competent or not as competent, not because they are men or women. It doesn't make any sense to me to think that the entry of more men is something important, I don't see it in terms of sex. (I16, man).*

### **In/visibility of male teachers**

This theme encompasses three subthemes: i) visibility of men; ii) pressure for good performance; and iii) men's successes and errors.

It seems consensual among participants that in the context of secondary education, men are not more visible than women on the grounds that the visibility of each professional comes from personality and competence, without any gender effect:

*I don't think anyone is more visible because they are male or female. In my profession, I think personality and building a cohesive career path is worth more than gender. (I7, woman).*

*If someone gets more attention or is more visible . . . it is because of who they are as a person, their personality . . . nobody is more noticed because they are a man or because they are a woman. (I15, man).*

*I don't feel someone is more visible or is the focus of greater attention, and if someone is more of a focus of attention or more visible, it will not be because they are a man or a woman, but because they stand out in a positive way or in a negative way. (I13, woman).*

The second subtheme suggests that men would not feel pressured to perform well and/or to demonstrate their competences. The males interviewed refer that the pressure they feel is generated by their intrinsic need to succeed and not by their peers, a view corroborated by the female interviewees:

*No, I was never pressured in that sense. Except the internal pressure that I felt at the beginning, because I wanted to be a good teacher. But I never felt pressured by anyone to show that I'm good at teaching, that I'm a good teacher, that I'm good at what I do, I never felt that. (I9, man).*

*No, there is no such pressure to show good performance. I think that, as in almost all professions, men don't have to prove anything to anyone. It is we women who often feel more insecurities and the need to prove that we are good at what we do, to prove that we are competent. (I8, woman).*

In the last subtheme, the females interviewed argue that the successes and errors of male teachers do not receive greater attention than those of female teachers, but they do consider that the success of the latter is often more highlighted and the object of greater recognition. Therefore, female teachers understand that success is more easily achieved by males than by females because they have much less availability to devote themselves to the profession. The males interviewed, in turn, state that their errors and their successes are not more salient than those of their female colleagues and that the recognition any teacher gains corresponds to their individual professionalism and competence without any influence of gender:

*The errors of male teachers do not get noticed for long. Now, if a male teacher is successful, I think that perhaps he can be praised more, perhaps that success can be given more prominence, perhaps because of the greater status the man has in society, that he is more valued. If a woman is successful, it seems this success is always associated to other causes. It seems as if they never acknowledge the merit of female teacher as much. They say “she was successful because...”, while men are praised and congratulated. (I7, woman).*

*No, I don't feel that. It is more for the person himself, for his personality . . . , and I don't notice differences between sexes. . . . Even if I make a mistake or even if I am successful, at no time is it more noticed just because I am a man. It is not more noticed if I am a woman, because if a woman makes a mistake, it will be the same. (I16, man).*

### **From non-polarisation to beneficial polarisation**

The fifth theme aggregates the ideas associated with the polarisation of differences between male and female teachers in secondary education and integrates three subthemes: i) gendered *vs.* neutral treatments; ii) integration and valorisation of men in the professional context; and iii) the management of the minority condition by male teachers.

In the first subtheme, the females interviewed highlight that sometimes men benefit from advantages as they often receive more esteem from female teachers as the latter seek to make them feel welcome and well received. The males interviewed refer to male and female teachers being treated equally and that any eventual differentiations in treatment are not dictated by sex but rather by the personality of each individual:

*I think they end up being treated differently because they are men but not in a negative way. On the contrary, they end up being treated very well, they end up being very well received, women like having them there, they are more “pampered” because there are so few of them. (I7, woman).*

*I am not treated differently because I am a man. . . . What might lead a person to be treated differently . . . will be the personality of that person, the way that person relates, how he makes himself known, how he interacts and not because he is a man. (I4, man).*

In this subtheme, the opinions of male interviewees, that they are not excluded and/or negatively discriminated against, stand out. On the contrary, these male teachers claim to be well integrated in the context, in the school dynamics, including in informal groups, and that they are professionally valued:

*I never felt that we were excluded and much less discriminated against. . . . If it is about having lunch, they don't leave us out, if it is to discuss student related matters, the subjects, some projects, we are all together and we speak men and women. Even the groups that are formed in the teachers' room are mixed, there is no attempt for women to exclude us. . . . More than resisting our entry, they integrate us. (I9, man).*

*We, women, accept the entry of male teachers very well. They are even treated better because we even facilitate the process and are always available to promote an easier adaptation and to integrate them into the school environment. (I11, woman).*

The last subtheme aggregates respondent positions about how male teachers manage their minority situation. Our analysis suggests that men do not feel the need to adopt specific strategies as female teachers facilitate their entry and value it, thus creating a cohesive, flexible, and egalitarian environment in terms of dynamics and gender relations:

*It may sound strange, but it is very easy to manage. I never had any kind of problems. . . . So, it is very easy to be a teacher and to belong to a world that is associated with women, I never felt any difficulty in this aspect or any prejudice, I always felt very good. (I12, man).*

*They manage with the greatest of ease, they have more women colleagues than men, but they don't feel different from us professionally because they are men or because they are under numbered. (I11, woman).*

*I think they manage it well; I don't think there are strategies to manage the situation. It is an environment in which there is no gender prejudice. . . . We, women, even integrate them well. We like them to come into teaching, to come into our schools. They bring new things . . . , and they also end up feeling this, they end up feeling welcome and integrated. (I1, woman).*

### **Assimilation of stereotypical masculine roles**

The sixth theme identified associates the ideas related to the male assimilation of masculine social stereotypes and encompasses four subthemes: i) advantages of being a man in secondary education; ii) stereotypical expectations associated with men; iii) pressure to exercise management positions; and iv) evidence of femininity traits in male teachers.

The first subtheme illustrates how the majority of interviewees initially reported that there were no gender associated advantages or disadvantages in teaching even while identifying several advantages that men gain, such as: being valued and welcomed by female colleagues; being able to command more respect and authority, particularly from students, due to their social status as men; and also being more frequently invited to higher or senior positions. Two female teachers identified an “external” disadvantage that men experience due to being in a female associated profession and which reflected in their devaluation due to their profession:

*They are male teachers, just like we are female teachers, I think that's what it is to be a man in secondary education. . . . If they have advantages . . . , perhaps they have that of being able to more easily maintain respect, because the male figure ends up transmitting more authority and respect than the female one. They have the advantage of feeling “welcome” and received. (I13, woman).*

*Being in a world of women ends up being an advantage because they can easily dominate, they can arrive at a meeting and easily assume the role of leader and put order in the room. . . . I don't think there are any disadvantages. (I7, woman).*

*What I think is that a man's loud voice still makes a difference, mainly in more problematic or undisciplined classes, and it tends to have more effect if it's a man working with problematic classes, things tend to go better. (I14, man).*

*I don't think there are advantages or disadvantages associated with being a male teacher in secondary education. I feel . . . that we can have an advantage by being so few in the context, because actually we feel welcomed and we integrate and there is that effort by female teachers, and so we feel heard and valued. (I10, man).*

The contents of the second subtheme reveal how the interviewees generally claim that the desirable professional and personal characteristics are common to both male and female teachers. Nevertheless, expectations attributed to male and female teachers are listed: less sensitive and affectionate, more objective, authoritarian, practical, focused on the profession and normally more respected by students. Most of those interviewed claim, however, that

they are not required to demonstrate these characteristics as there is the freedom and openness to act according to who they are:

*Men are more pragmatic, more objective, and rational and we end up expecting this from them, they end up being like that. . . . I think they expect them to bring this practicality, not to be so emotionally attached, not to be petty, not to raise relationship problems. . . . A meeting with only women tends to be more dispersive, men are very focused. . . . Men have this more authoritarian role, of being more able to easily lead a meeting and take the reins of the situation than a woman. But, it is natural for them, we don't make them be like that. (I7, woman).*

*Maybe they think that, in the relationship with students, we are more authoritarian and that we are not as affectionate as they are because they have a very maternal side. . . . And they know that we are more practical. . . . , they always think very much with the heart and we, as more rational as we are, it is easier for us to decide . . . my colleagues expect this, but we are not always like that, and they don't try to make us meet the expectations. They just expect but I don't feel that I have to show that or be like that. (I15, man).*

Another subtheme unveils how most of the males interviewed mentioned having already felt pressured to take on management positions, which does not seem to occur with female interviewees, some of whom also expressed a lack of ambition regarding such positions as they prefer teaching:

*It is easier for us [men] to become directors. This happens because, as we are men, we are more associated with good leaders and managers. This leads to invitations for this position being made mainly to men and it is men who are told "so, why don't you apply for director?" or "so, don't you want to be a director? I think you should take a chance". (I14, man).*

*And I never felt this pressure. Men are able to feel this pressure more, I think, if they feel some pressure in teaching, . . . even because they have more availability than women and have more discipline to deal with more complicated situations. (I8, woman).*

*I have the greatest respect for that position, however, what I really like is teaching. . . . Management positions never attracted me in the least, never really. . . . I never felt pressured to do so. (I5, woman).*

The last subtheme suggests a consensus among the interviewees as to the non-assumption by men of so-called "feminine" attitudes because they exercise their activity in a women's world. However, some male interviewees mention that, in some situations, the profession requires greater sensitivity and concern and, therefore, because they relate to young people, there is sometimes a need to show traces of relational dimensions socially attributed to women. On the other hand, the women's perceptions are divided: most of them state that men do not tend to emphasise their masculinity or to assume more feminine attitudes, but some do mention that males tend to distance themselves from more feminine traits, which they are not always able to do:

*Well, I don't think I assume traditionally feminine postures, however, we teachers tend to show some affection, an emotional side that is more characteristic of women, because we . . . are dealing with adolescents who are often still very young. So, I think it is normal to highlight this side and show more affection. We tend to adopt a close posture towards the students and, in a . . . natural way, we highlight this more affectionate side. (I2, man).*

*I think they tend to distance themselves a little . . . , in the sense of not being so affable, so close to the students, of being less maternal . . . , but it's funny that I think they don't always*

*succeed. . . . For example, they get into women's gossip a lot . . . men always say that they are not gossips but they are. . . . They tend to try to show their masculinity, and to move away from traditionally feminine traits, but they don't always succeed. (I1, woman).*

## Discussion

This research was guided by the theorization of Rosabeth Kanter (1977, 1993) about the experiences of members of token groups, in this case, male secondary education teachers. In Portugal (Pordata, 2022), as in most countries (Bailey & Graves, 2016; OECD, 2022), men constitute a minority and exercise their profession in a universe numerically dominated by women and socially associated with them (Santos & Amâncio, 2018). Therefore, in this privileged context, we defined observing the emergence of some of the negative consequences of tokenism identified by Kanter (1977, 1993) as our main objective: the high visibility of the dominated group, the polarization of their differences and their assimilation of stereotypical masculine roles. Another objective also considered identifying the possible inclusion strategies deployed by men in a specific “skewed group” situation (Kanter, 1977, 1993) while equally valuing the perspectives of women as members of the dominant group.

Increased visibility is one of the negative consequences for people in token situations (Kanter, 1977, 1993). Based on our analysis of the narrated experiences, belonging to the minority seems to have no significant effects for men as regards this domain in accordance with the unanimous opinion that the greater or lesser visibility of people is not influenced by their sex or gender but rather by their personality and competence. Furthermore, within the scope of visibility, men expressed neither feeling any pressure to turn in better performance standards nor any need to prove their competences to their colleagues in line with what Santos and Amâncio (2018) found in a study of elementary school teachers. Female interviewees, on the other hand, highlighted that while the errors of male teachers are not noticed more than theirs, their successes tend to gain greater praise and recognition as due to their own particular merit unlike the case with females. Thus, in this professional context, competence and/or merit also seem to be perceived as something intrinsic to men (Amâncio & Oliveira, 2006).

The female interviewees also state that it is easier for men to achieve success because their greater availability leads to more investment in the profession and the attribution of greater value to their careers (Santos et al., 2015). These judgments are not corroborated by the male interviewees as they consider that professional recognition does not relate to gender but rather to the competence of each person, thus denying that their mistakes and successes are more noticed than those of their female peers and praising the gender equality perceived in their professional context.

The polarization of the differences between members of the dominant and dominated groups, carried out by the former, is another of the negative consequences experienced by tokens (Kanter, 1977, 1993). Our analysis here highlights that men generically defend the non-existence of differentiated treatment between the sexes even though female interviewees highlight how men, while being a minority, benefit from positive differentiation as they are very well received and esteemed by their female peers, thereby resembling the results returned by the studies of Williams (1992, 1995), Rabelo (2016, 2019) and Santos and Amâncio (2018).

In their narratives, the men praised their female colleagues for facilitating their integration process into the profession and the school and noted there were no attempts at marginalization or negative discrimination. In illustration, male teachers highlight how their opinions are solicited and appreciated and their inclusion in groups reflects in their participation in school projects and



activities as well as in informal gatherings between male and female teachers, making them feel valued and integrated.

According to our analysis, men are not disadvantaged by belonging to the minority group; on the contrary, women's investment in their professional and personal integration brings them benefits and advantages. This observation corroborates the study by Heikes (1991) that concludes how in professions numerically dominated by women, these women, in order to achieve an increase in the status of their profession, are commonly very receptive to the presence of men. On the contrary, in male-dominated professional contexts, the entry and integration of women may well be perceived as a threat to the status of the profession, often leading to women not being well received (Marques, 2011; Ott, 1989; Santos et al., 2015, 2016).

The assimilation of stereotypical roles, in this case masculine, is the final negative consequence of the token situation (Kanter, 1977, 1993) that constitutes one of the themes of our analysis.

Initially, as we mentioned regarding visibility, all male and female interviewees mentioned the egalitarian and non-discriminatory relationship, in terms of gender, in their workplace contexts. However, our analysis identifies discourses that highlight the differences between the sexes, with recourse to the stereotypical traits of each gender.

In the ideas expressed by female interviewees, men, as teachers, are described as more practical and objective, less sensitive and affectionate and, furthermore, with more leadership skills and more efficacy in conflict resolution and correspondingly capable of imposing more respect and authority. Both male and female interviewees associate women, as teachers, with affective traits related to sensitivity and being more "maternal".

The female and male interviewees seek to attenuate the degree of pressure of these stereotypical figures on the behaviours of men, stressing the individual freedom to correspond or distance themselves from them. However, the vehemence, clarity and consensus of the descriptions made about their male colleagues, as well as their full knowledge of the expectations hanging over them, lead us to value their overlap with the traits that, socially and traditionally, define the masculine being (Amâncio, 1992; Santos & Amâncio, 2019; Simmie, 2023), a phenomenon also observed by Colombo and Barabanti (2020).

In our interpretation, this demonstrates how the gender representations present in this professional context stem from the affirmation of existing traits and aptitudes as specific to men, in this case as teachers, thus complying with one of the interactive processes that contribute to the maintenance of gender divisions in the organisational culture as identified by Acker (1990). Hence, we would emphasise that the reactions of those closest to persons deciding to embark on this career also mirror these stereotypical representations about the profession, which are rooted in the rigidity of the traits proper and desirable in women and in men.

We may therefore affirm that men, in this professional context, are subject to pressure to portray the main traits of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) confirming that, as a minority group, their assimilation of the stereotypical roles of their sex is expected, as predicted by the theorisation of Kanter (1977, 1993), which may contribute to the phenomenon of "role entrapment".

Through processes that, in our analysis, establish a relationship with the three negative consequences of inclusion in a group of tokens (Kanter, 1977, 1993), men refer to the pressure to take up management positions in the school, which is confirmed by women. In our interpretation, this phenomenon derives from their special visibility, the polarization of their differences, which favours them and the assimilation of their distinctiveness as men. Thus, although in general these teachers have not expressed any special motivation and ambition to become managers, they, as members of this minority group, receive invitations and encouragement to this effect in keeping with the attribution of presumed leadership and management abilities, in addition to their equally supposed

greater availability. We believe this serves to reinforce and illustrate the valuing of masculinity traits in the leadership of organisations, which are socially attributed (Collinson & Hearn, 1996) and thus perpetuating the gender stereotypes concerning men.

Our observations are in keeping with the results of the studies by Ashcraft and Sevier (2006) and Drudy (2008), which report that men are more likely to be promoted to senior positions and are even pressured to assume them. Such situations directly relate to the privileges associated with the social status assigned to men (Cognard-Black, 2004; Moreau, 2015; Rabelo, 2016; Santos & Amâncio, 2018) which then produces the “glass escalator” phenomenon, as coined by Williams (1992), reflecting the high number of men who, despite their only token status, nevertheless occupy positions on school management boards (Ashcraft & Sevier, 2006; Drudy, 2008).

Regarding the strategies adopted by men to manage their gender imbalanced position in the profession and seeking to respond to our second objective, our findings lead us to state males do not feel any need to adopt such practices. In effect, they underline the great ease of managing the numerical imbalance which, in their words, does not give rise to gender inequality. On the contrary, a cohesive and equal environment is created between men and women, which is why they feel perfectly accepted and integrated. For female interviewees, men’s contribution to creating a less conflictual interpersonal and organizational climate, due to their masculinity traits, also facilitates and becomes an added value in these integration processes.

Overall, we may conclude that, in the Secondary Education context, the minority proportion of male teachers highlights some particular effects of tokenism, albeit in substantially different ways to when women find themselves in this situation. Visibility, in this case advantageous, the accentuation of differences based on gender, with socially positive connotations, and the attribution of stereotypical traits to men result in scenarios that appear favourable to men. However, the question remains regarding eventual efforts by males to meet the expectations established in the professional context, especially according to the judgments and actions of female teachers, as well as the underlying factors, which are never independent of a gender order that generates asymmetries but remains socially prevalent.

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### Note on authorship

Conceptualization, research, and methodology: M. H. Santos; Supervision: M. H. Santos; Validation: M. H. Santos and A. M. Marques; Original written draft: C. Delgado and M. H. Santos; Written revision and editing: M. H. Santos and A. M. Marques.

### Data availability statement

The data cannot be made publicly available, as we assure participants of anonymity and confidentiality of data, in accordance with the ethical procedures of Iscte – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa.

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