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Kontakt / Contact:

peDOCS
DIPF | Leibniz-Institut für Bildungsforschung und Bildungsinformation
Informationszentrum (IZ) Bildung
E-Mail: pedocs@dipf.de
Internet: www.pedocs.de

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Explaining gender effects in teachers' evaluation of exclusion among students: The role of communion

Hanna Beißert  · Miriam Staat · Benedict C. O. F. Fehringer  ·
Hanna Weiß · Meike Bonefeld 

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Abstract The aim of this research was to replicate and extend prior research on gender effects in teachers' reactions to social exclusion among students. Prior research has recurrently shown that whereas teachers generally evaluate exclusion as reprehensible, female teachers reject social exclusion even more strongly than male teachers. To date, there are no studies examining explanations for these gender differences in teachers' reactions to social exclusion.

We hypothesize that this gender effect is mediated by the teachers' level of communal character traits. Based on gender-specific socialization, and according to Bakan's (1966) theory of the two basic dimensions of human existence, women have a higher level in communion, which refers to striving for participation, cooperation, and bonding, and thus focusing on the well-being of the community. In line with this, we assume that teachers' level of communion mediates the link between teacher gender and the rejection of social exclusion.

✉ Hanna Beißert · Hanna Weiß

DIPF | Leibniz-Institut for Research and Information in Education, Frankfurt am Main, Germany
E-Mail: h.beissert@dipf.de

✉ Hanna Beißert

Goethe University, Frankfurt am Main, Germany

✉ Hanna Beißert · Hanna Weiß · Meike Bonefeld

Center for Research on Individual Development and Adaptive Education of Children at Risk (IDeA),
Frankfurt am Main, Germany

Miriam Staat
Heidelberg, Germany

Benedict C. O. F. Fehringer
University of Mannheim, Mannheim, Germany

Meike Bonefeld
Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg, Freiburg, Germany

Using a hypothetical exclusion scenario, 214 teachers from different school tracks ($M_{\text{age}} = 37.15$, $SD = 10.33$, range: 23–64, 154 females, 60 males) were examined in their role as observers of exclusion among students. Teachers' evaluations of the exclusion behavior in the scenario were assessed. Analyses demonstrate in line with prior research that teachers generally rejected exclusion, whereby female teachers rejected exclusion even more strongly. Further, as expected, this gender effect was completely mediated by the extent of the teachers' communion. That is, with the level of communion, we present an explanation for the gender differences in teachers' evaluations of social exclusion.

Keywords Social exclusion · Gender · Teacher reactions · Socialization · Gender effects

Erklärung von Geschlechtsunterschieden bei Lehrkraftreaktionen auf Ausgrenzung unter Schüler*innen: Die Rolle von Communion

Zusammenfassung Das Ziel der vorliegenden Arbeit war die Replikation und Erweiterung früherer Untersuchungen zu Geschlechtsunterschieden bei den Reaktionen von Lehrkräften auf soziale Ausgrenzung unter Schüler*innen. Frühere Studien haben wiederholt gezeigt, dass Lehrkräfte soziale Ausgrenzung generell ablehnen, die Ablehnung bei weiblichen Lehrkräften jedoch stärker ausgeprägt ist als bei männlichen Lehrkräften. Wir nehmen an, dass dieser Geschlechtereffekt durch die Ausprägung kommunaler Persönlichkeitseigenschaften mediiert wird.

Basierend auf geschlechtsspezifischer Sozialisation und Bakan's (1966) Theorie der zwei grundlegenden Dimensionen menschlicher Existenz, sind Frauen tendenziell kommunaler. Dies geht mit einem Streben nach Partizipation, Kooperation und Bindungen einher und legt damit einen Fokus auf das Wohlergehen der Gemeinschaft. Damit einhergehend nehmen wir an, dass die Ausprägung von Communion aufseiten der Lehrkräfte, den Zusammenhang zwischen dem Geschlecht der Lehrkräfte und der Ablehnung sozialer Ausgrenzung erklären kann.

Um Lehrkräfte in der Rolle als Beobachtende sozialer Ausgrenzung zu untersuchen, verwendeten wir hypothetische Ausgrenzungsszenarien und erfassten, wie die Lehrkräfte die Ausgrenzungssituation bewerteten. An der Studie nahmen 214 Lehrkräfte ($M_{\text{Alter}} = 37.15$, $SD = 10.33$, Range: 23–64, 154 Frauen, 60 Männer) unterschiedlicher Schulformen in Deutschland teil. Im Einklang mit früheren Befunden, zeigen unsere Ergebnisse, dass Lehrkräfte Ausgrenzung generell ablehnen, wobei weibliche Lehrkräfte Ausgrenzung stärker ablehnen als männliche. Weiterhin wird dieser Geschlechtereffekt vollständig durch die Ausprägung von Communion mediiert. Demnach scheint die Ausprägung von Communion eine wichtige Rolle für die geschlechtsspezifischen Reaktionen von Lehrkräften auf soziale Ausgrenzung zu spielen.

Schlüsselwörter Soziale Ausgrenzung · Geschlecht · Reaktionen von Lehrkräften · Sozialisation · Geschlechtereffekte

1 Introduction

Social exclusion affects the fulfillment of children's or adolescents' desire to belong and be related to others (Williams 2009) which represents a very basic human need (Baumeister and Leary 1995). When social exclusion happens repeatedly and systematically it can negatively affect children's health and wellbeing (e.g., Fuhrmann et al. 2019; Gazelle and Druhen 2009; Sebastian et al. 2010), their social and emotional development (Gazelle and Druhen 2009; Murray-Close and Ostrov 2009), or their academic self-concept (Buhs et al. 2006). As social exclusion takes also place in school, it is important to examine how teachers react to social exclusion among students. Prior research has shown that teachers generally reject exclusion and report that they would very likely intervene when they observe exclusive behavior among students (e.g., Beißert and Bonefeld 2020; Grütter et al. 2021; Kollerová and Killen 2021; Szekely et al. 2022). Further, it has repeatedly been shown that female teachers reject exclusion more strongly than male teachers (e.g., Beißert and Bonefeld 2020; Beißert et al. 2022; Szekely et al. 2022). However, the reason for this recurrent finding remains unclear. The current study wants to examine a higher level of communion in female teachers as a possible explanation for this pattern.

1.1 Social exclusion and the role of teachers

Social exclusion can be defined as the experience of being physically or emotionally kept apart from others and not being allowed to join (Riva and Eck 2016). This includes, for instance, being excluded from conversations or activities by one or more individuals (Wesselmann et al. 2016). Although children and adolescents typically reject exclusion based on its unfair nature and the harm that it can cause (Wesselmann et al. 2013), social exclusion happens a lot in children's daily lives (Andresen and Möller 2019; Killen et al. 2013). Social exclusion often happens based on reasons related to smooth group functioning, often combined with intergroup processes (Hitti et al. 2011; Mikami et al. 2010; Mulvey 2016). But even though, there can sometimes be reasonable reasons for students to exclude a peer, social exclusion nevertheless threatens the fulfillment of basic psychological needs such as social belonging (Williams 2009) and can have severe consequences for children's health and wellbeing (e.g., Gazelle and Druhen 2009; Juvonen and Gross 2005; Sebastian et al. 2010) and thus should be prevented.

Since children and adolescents spend much time in educational contexts, school is of great importance as an environment in which social exclusion can take place and often does (Andresen and Möller 2019; Killen et al. 2013). In this context, teachers play an important role. More specifically, teachers can have direct and indirect effects on their students. Mulvey et al. (2021) for instance, showed that students are more likely to rate social exclusion as wrong and expect themselves to defend victims of exclusion, when they perceive to have a better relationship with and feel more supported by their teachers. Furthermore, teachers determine which behaviors are acceptable and which are not by setting norms in the classroom (Cooley et al. 2016). This is also the case regarding social exclusion. Thus, by responding to social exclusion among students, teachers convey their own attitudes

toward it and are also important role models. With all these things, teachers can be assumed to influence children's attitudes and behaviors regarding social exclusion. Therefore, it is important to examine teachers' attitudes toward and reactions to social exclusion in order to understand how teachers can be better sensitized and trained to deal with exclusion among students.

1.2 Teachers as observers of social exclusion

In general, people who observe social exclusion tend to reject it when there is no apparent reason for the exclusion behavior (Wesselmann et al. 2013). This seems to be also the case for teachers observing social exclusion in school. Using hypothetical scenarios, several studies demonstrated that teachers in the role of observers of exclusion among students tend to reject exclusive behaviors among students (e.g., Beiert and Bonefeld 2020; Beiert et al. 2022; Grtter et al. 2021; Kollerov and Killen 2021). This general tendency to reject social exclusion may be due to teachers'—or rather generally people's—moral attitudes related to justice and inclusion (Beiert et al. 2021; Rudert and Speckert 2023) and to the sense of empathy one feels when witnessing social exclusion (Wesselmann et al. 2009). Empathy can be understood as the ability to understand and experience another person's perspective or emotional state (Feshbach 1975; Hoffman 1996). Wesselmann et al. (2013) demonstrated that social exclusion typically elicits a sense of empathy for the excluded person. This has also been shown to be true for teachers observing social exclusion among their students (Grtter et al. 2021; Szekely et al. 2022). For instance, Grtter et al. (2021) found that sadness and sympathy for the excluded student are frequent emotions when teachers are reasoning about exclusion scenarios. Further, research shows that higher levels of empathy are associated with more prosocial behavior (Kamas and Preston 2021). This is in line with prior research showing that teachers also report a high intention to intervene when witnessing social exclusion among students (Beiert and Bonefeld 2020; Beiert et al. 2022; Grtter et al. 2021; Kollerov and Killen 2021). Based on these considerations and as a replication of prior research, we assume that teachers show a general tendency to reject exclusion among students (Hypothesis 1).

But even though teachers of both genders evaluate social exclusion as not acceptable, female teachers have repeatedly been shown to reject exclusion even more strongly than male teachers (Beiert and Bonefeld 2020; Beiert et al. 2021, 2022; Szekely et al. 2022). To date, there are no studies examining explanations for these gender differences in teachers' reactions to social exclusion. Thus, the current work aims to provide an explanation for this recurrent finding.

1.3 Gender effects in teachers' evaluations of social exclusion

So far, a variety of studies has demonstrated that the tendency to reject social exclusion is more pronounced among girls and women than among boys and men (Beiert et al. 2019a, b; Horn 2003; Killen and Stangor 2001; Malti et al. 2012). Further, several studies have shown that this gender effect is also evident among teachers in the role of observers of social exclusion among students (e.g., Beiert

and Bonefeld 2020; Beißert et al. 2022; Szekely et al. 2022). In the current study, we want to replicate these finding and thus assume that female teachers report a stronger rejection of social exclusion than male teachers (Hypothesis 2).

However, while prior studies recurrently found that female teachers reject exclusion more strongly than male teachers it remains unclear why this is the case. Thus, in the current study, we do not want to limit ourselves to replicating this finding but want to investigate the underlying mechanisms. Understanding the underlying mechanisms is essential for approaching this issue and developing effective interventions. Thus, the main goal of the current study is to present a possible explanation for this pattern. Accordingly, we suggest that the stronger rejection of exclusion among female teachers is not due to their biological sex, but rather due to specific personality traits that are more pronounced among women. More specifically, we want to analyze whether a higher degree of communal character traits in female teachers can explain the recurrently found gender effects.

1.4 Explaining gender effects in teachers' evaluations of social exclusion

To understand the role of teachers' gender for their reactions to social exclusion, social expectations such as stereotypes depending on gender might be of importance. In this context, Bakan's (1966) theory of the two basic dimensions of human existence, namely the masculine gender role "agency" and the feminine gender role "communion", is of interest. Whereas gender stereotypes are descriptive beliefs about how men and women are, gender roles are stereotypical prescriptive beliefs about how men and women should traditionally be like (Eckes 2008). Agency, the masculine gender role, refers to the autonomy of an individual and manifests itself in self-assertion, self-development and self-protection and thus focuses on the wellbeing of the individual. Communion, the feminine gender role, describes the emphasis on striving for participation, cooperation and bonding and thus focuses on the wellbeing of the community. Importantly, these two dimensions described by Bakan (1966) are related to gender stereotypes. While agency relates to the masculine stereotype, communion relates to the feminine stereotype (Abele and Wojciszke 2007; Bem 1974; Eagly 1987; Spence et al. 1975). Furthermore, research shows that females and males are socialized to act in accordance with stereotypical gender roles (Helgeson 1994; Klaczynski et al. 2020; Martinez et al. 2020). In line with that, Korlat et al. (2022) conclude, that agency and communion can be equated with stereotypical masculinity and stereotypical femininity. Thus, it can be assumed that females are typically socialized with a stronger orientation toward community-oriented goals, whereas males' socialization is strongly oriented toward agency-oriented goals.

Accordingly, the socialization of girls often emphasizes harmony and the prevention of interpersonal conflicts more strongly (Cross and Madson 1997; Hwang and Mattila 2019; Zahn-Waxler 2000), whereas in the socialization of boys, aggressive behaviors are much less criticized than in girls. This communion-oriented socialization for girls leads to a stronger focus on communal goals and higher levels of empathy in girls (Smetana 1989). As a result, women are communion-oriented individuals who thus experience greater fulfillment through community, whereas men, as agency-oriented individuals, experience fulfillment through the achievement of

their individual goals (Guisinger and Blatt 1994). Hence based on the communion-oriented socialization of girls, women score higher than men on the dimension of communion, as could be shown in a meta-analysis by Hsu et al. (2021). Especially, recent studies show, that although these concepts may seem outdated today, women are still perceived as more communal which shows that, despite that there have been little changes, the concepts still seem to be relevant (Eagly et al. 2020; Haines et al. 2016; Hentschel et al. 2019).

In line with these findings, many studies have shown that girls and women are especially more empathic than boys and men (e.g., Chen et al. 2018; D'Ambrosio et al. 2009; Plant et al. 2019; Rueckert and Naybar 2008; Schulte-Rüther et al. 2008; van der Graaff et al. 2014). These higher levels of empathy may in turn lead to more compassion and prosocial behavior in girls and women (Kamas and Preston 2021). Based on these considerations, we want to examine higher levels of communion in female teachers as an explanation for the finding that they reject social exclusion more strongly than male teachers. Thus, we assume that the relation between gender and the evaluation of social exclusion is mediated by a higher level of communion in female teachers. More precisely, we assume that the relation between the strength of rejection of social exclusion and gender is mediated by the score on the dimension of communion (Hypothesis 3).

1.5 Current study

The purpose of the current study is to replicate and extend prior research by providing an explanation for the recurrent finding that female teachers reject exclusion more strongly than their male colleagues. More precisely, we want to examine whether these gender differences can be explained by a higher degree of communion of female teachers.

Using hypothetical scenarios, we examined teachers in the role of observers of social exclusion among students and assessed their evaluations of an exclusion situation. Further, we assessed the level of communion in order to examine it as an explanatory mechanism for the effects of teachers' gender on the evaluation of social exclusion. In summary, we examined the following hypotheses:

1. Teachers show a general tendency to reject exclusion.
2. Female teachers reject social exclusion more strongly compared to male teachers.
3. Teachers' communion mediates the link between teacher gender and the rejection of social exclusion.

2 Method

2.1 Participants

The sample of this study included 214 teachers from different school tracks in Germany ($M_{\text{age}} = 37.15$, $SD = 10.33$, range: 23–64, 154 females, 60 males). Teachers were from primary schools ($n = 44$), from secondary schools ($n = 118$), from vocational schools ($n = 32$), and from schools for special needs education ($n = 13$).

Seven more persons were from other school types. The teachers' working experience ranged from less than one year to 42 years ($M=8.92$, $SD=8.57$). Participants were recruited via various mailing lists and groups on social media platforms (e.g., Facebook groups) that address teachers all over Germany.

2.2 Procedures

The study was conducted with the online survey software Unipark. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, participation was voluntary. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of DGPs (German Psychological Society). As compensation for participating in the study, participants were able to take part in a lottery for two Amazon vouchers à 25 €.

First, participants were informed of their data protection rights and that participation in the study was anonymous and voluntary. They were also made aware of the fact that there were no negative consequences if they decided not to participate or to leave the study early without completing it. All participants had to confirm that they understood the information and were willing to participate in the study.

At the beginning of the questionnaire, participants provided demographic information. Then, they were presented with a hypothetical exclusion scenario. Afterwards, participants completed a survey that assessed communion. Participation in the study took approximately ten minutes per person.

2.3 Materials and instruments

To assess teachers' reactions to social exclusion, we used a hypothetical exclusion scenario suggested by Beißert et al. (2022). The scenario describes a situation in that one student is excluded from a study group by his/her classmates. The gender of the excluded protagonist was randomized between participants in order to avoid possible effects of the gender of the excluded student. In order to control for unsystematic variance, we specified a concrete age of the students in the scenario, ensuring that all participants referred to the same age group. The translation of the exact wording of the scenario was as follows:

While packing up after class in 7th grade, you observe some students making an appointment to study together. Lukas/Julia would like to join the study group. The other students tell him/her that he/she can't join.

After reading the scenario, participants were asked to evaluate the exclusion situation described in the scenario on a seven-point Likert-type scale. The scale consisted of three items to assess the evaluation of the exclusion scenario. Specifically, we asked the participants to rate how (1) *not okay/okay*, (2) *unfair/fair*, and (3) *unjustifiable/justifiable* the behavior in the scenario was. We averaged these three items into a single score indicating a participant's overall evaluation of the exclusion. Low scores indicate strong rejection of exclusion, high values indicate a high acceptability of exclusion.

Teachers' level of communion was assessed with the gender typicity scale (GTS+) by Altstötter-Gleich (2004). The scale consists of the two subscales "agency" and

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Estimates

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	Skewness	Kurtosis	α
<i>Evaluation of exclusion</i>	Total	3.15	1.16	1.00–7.00	0.17	0.25	0.75
	Female	3.07	1.15	1.00–7.00	0.15	0.41	0.75
	Male	3.38	1.15	1.00–6.00	0.24	–0.29	0.76
<i>Communion</i>	Total	3.46	0.79	1.57–5.00	–0.16	–0.70	0.82
	Female	3.60	0.74	1.57–5.00	–0.28	–0.39	0.79
	Male	3.10	0.82	1.62–5.00	0.32	–0.83	0.82

“communion”, each consisting of eight items. For the current work, the subscale “communion” was used. Using a four-point Likert-type scale (seldom—almost always), participants had to indicate the extent to which various personality traits (e.g., “empathetic”, “emotional”, etc.) apply to them.

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of all considered variables and the reliability estimates of the scales.

2.4 Analytical approach

In order to test hypothesis 1 (teachers show a general tendency to reject exclusion) we ran an one sample t-test with the expected population mean at 4.00, the mean of the scale. Additionally, the mode and the median of the distribution were considered to see whether the majority of the distribution is lower than the mean of the scale (indicating the rejection of exclusion).

Hypothesis 2 (female teachers reject social exclusion more strongly compared to male teachers) was tested by a two sample t-test expecting a higher tendency to reject exclusion for female than for male participants.

The mediation-hypotheses 3 was tested by a path analysis to analyze the indirect effects of teachers’ gender (1: female; 2: male) on the evaluation of exclusion over the extent of communion as well as the direct effects within the path models. However, the prerequisite for a mediation effect is a significant direct effect (without considering an indirect effect, Baron and Kenny 1986) as it is tested in Hypothesis 2. The mediation effect would be supported if the bootstrapped 95%-confidence interval of the indirect effect in the path model did not include 0.

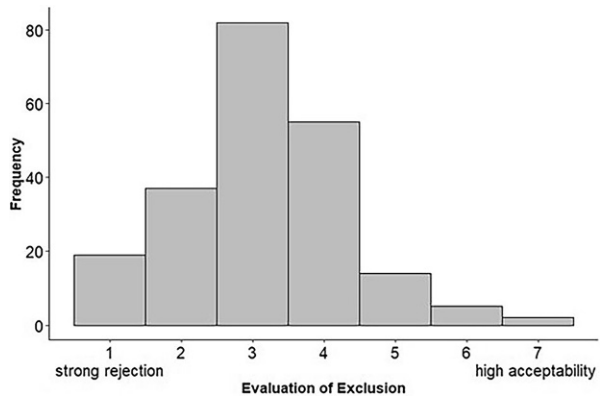
The statistical analyses were performed using R, version 4.2.3 (R Core Team 2023) with the packages foreign, version 0.8.84 (R Core Team 2022), psych, version 2.3.3 (Revelle 2023), sur, version 1.0.4 (Harel 2020), lavaan, version 0.6.15 (Rosseel 2012), and ggplot2, version 3.4.2 (Wickham 2016).

3 Results

3.1 Hypothesis 1: General tendency to reject exclusion

The distribution of the evaluation of exclusion score shows that the majority of the distribution (modus=3; median=3) is lower than the theoretical mean of the

Fig. 1 Distribution of the Means of the Evaluation of Social Exclusion Scale



scale which indicates the rejection of exclusion. Further, a t-test showed that in our sample, the mean differed significantly from the theoretical mean of the scale, $t(213) = 10.69$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 0.73$. See Fig. 1 for the distribution of the means of the evaluation of exclusion scale.

3.2 Hypothesis 2: Gender effects in teachers' evaluations of social exclusion

In a second step, we analyzed effects of the teachers' gender for the evaluation of exclusion. According to Hypothesis 2, it was expected that female teachers reject exclusion more strongly than their male colleagues. There was a significant difference between male and female teachers regarding their tendency to reject exclusion, $t(108.1) = 1.82$, $p = 0.036$, $d = 0.28$, supporting Hypothesis 2. This indicates that female teachers show a stronger tendency to reject exclusion than male teachers.

3.3 Hypothesis 3: Explanation of gender effects with communion

Eventually, in order to examine whether the extent of teachers' communion can explain the differences based on the teachers' gender, we calculated a mediation model for the evaluation of exclusion. The estimated mediation model (Fig. 2, Hypothesis 3) showed a significant indirect effect from the teachers' gender on the evaluation of social exclusion via communion considering the bootstrapped 95%-confidence interval, $a * b = 0.145$ [0.053; 0.317]. The direct effect of gender on the evaluation of social exclusion was not significant, $c' = 0.173$, $z = 1.01$, $p = 0.315$. Given that the total effect was significant if it was considered alone (see Hypothesis 2), the results of the current analyses support a complete mediation.

4 Discussion

The present study examined gender effects in teachers' evaluations of social exclusion among students. Using hypothetical scenarios, teachers' evaluations of an exclusion situation were assessed. Replicating prior research (e.g., Beißert and Bone-

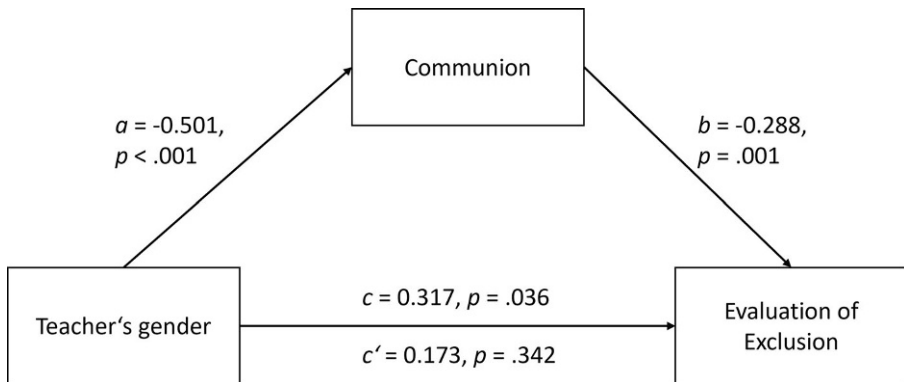


Fig. 2 Mediation Model Showing the Prediction of Evaluation of Social Exclusion by Teachers' Gender Mediated by Communion (Hypothesis 3)

feld 2020; Beißert et al. 2022; Grütter et al. 2021; Kollerová and Killen 2021) we found that the teachers in our study generally rejected social exclusion and that female teachers rejected exclusion even more strongly than male teachers. Further, the main goal of the current study was to provide an explanation for the recurrent finding that female teachers reject exclusion more strongly than male teachers. We suggested a higher degree of communion in female teachers as the explanatory mechanism for these differences. In fact, the level of communion fully mediated the relation between teachers' gender and the evaluation of social exclusion. It can be assumed that the stronger communal traits in female teachers seem to make them more sensitive regarding social exclusion resulting in a stronger rejection of it.

4.1 Gender-specific socialization as the reason for differences in communion

We assume that the gender differences in teachers', or generally people's, levels of communion are due to aspects of gender-specific socialization. As described above, the socialization of girls is traditionally focused on harmony and the avoidance of interpersonal struggles (Cross and Madson 1997; Hwang and Mattila 2019; Zahn-Waxler 2000). In line with this, prior research has already shown, that women score higher than men on the dimension of communion (Hsu et al. 2021) and that girls and women are more empathic than boys and men (e.g., Chen et al. 2018; Rueckert and Naybar 2008; van der Graaff et al. 2014). This could indicate that females may have a greater awareness of the emotional and social impact of exclusion. Our results support this idea suggesting that the higher levels of communal traits make women more sensitive regarding social exclusion which results in female teachers' stronger rejection of exclusionary behaviors. This also suggests that fostering communal traits in all individuals, regardless of gender, could lead to more inclusive and cooperative attitudes in various settings.

4.2 Theoretical and practical implications

As the current findings as well as prior studies show, gender seems to play an important role in the context of social exclusion. Female teachers reject social exclusion more strongly than male teachers. However, the most important finding of the current study is that these effects seem not to be based on the biological sex of the participants but are due to traditionally female properties, i.e., the higher level of communion in women.

Hence, our research shows that it is important not only to view gender-specific differences as given facts, but also to question what lies behind them. It can be assumed that in many instances, not the aspects of the biological sex can explain differences between males and females. Thus, future research should focus much more on the characteristics that are typically related to being male or female instead of focusing on the gender or sex of a person per se. Whenever gender effects are at play, researchers should look for explanatory mechanisms in order to identify on what characteristics the respective effects are really based on. This has also practical implications as the sex of a person could of course not easily be changed, but personal characteristics can. Understanding the underlying mechanisms is essential for developing effective approaches for interventions.

In the context of social exclusion at school, it could be useful to develop interventions that deal specifically with the issue of exclusion in order to sensitize teachers to this problem. More specifically, future research should focus on how the level of communion can be enhanced. However, such interventions should not only address male teachers, but all teachers, independent of their biological sex. This is especially important, as there are also male teachers with high and female teachers with low levels of communion. Hence, all teachers might benefit from such interventions, even if they already are highly communal. Thus, such interventions could be implemented in teacher training to promote specific character traits such as empathy in all teachers, independent of their biological sex.

Going one step further, our findings challenge traditional binary notions of gender, suggesting that behaviors and traits often associated with femininity (like communion) can be influential regardless of biological sex. It encourages a broader understanding of gender as a spectrum of traits rather than a strict dichotomy.

4.3 Limitations and future directions

One obvious limitation of the current study is that we used hypothetical scenarios. We must keep in mind that with this approach, we can only examine what teachers think how they would evaluate such a situation. Of course, these answers could be biased by social desirability on the one hand, and on the other hand teachers' actual reaction might be affected by situational aspects or prior knowledge (e.g., information about the specific student, the class, etc.). However, research on the usefulness of vignettes in educational research demonstrated that case vignettes provide ecologically valid representations of the outcomes of teachers' decision processes (Krolak-Schwerdt et al. 2018). But as this research was not specifically about social exclusion it would be very interesting to investigate teachers' evaluations

of social exclusion in more naturalistic settings to see how findings relate to our results.

Another limitation is that the scenario depicts only one specific situation to which not all teachers might be able to relate equally well. As the scenario portrays a situation in grade 7, it might have been more challenging for primary school teachers to relate with the situation. Consequently, future research should try to use various scenarios and examine whether it elicits different reactions when the situation described is more closely related to the teachers' experiences. Additionally, future research should examine whether teachers' reactions to exclusion scenarios vary as a function of the age of the protagonists in order to see whether our findings replicate for older and/or younger age groups. Further, it would be interesting to systematically compare teachers' reactions to various exclusion situations in which possibly relevant aspects are manipulated as well. For instance, it might be interesting whether additional information about the protagonists, their behavior, their relationships, etc. might affect teachers' evaluations of the scenario and whether the current findings replicate across different settings.

Further, one restriction of the study is the low proportion of male participants (28%). However, low rates of male participants are not uncommon in online studies in general (Beißert and Bonefeld 2020; Cheung et al. 2017; Cull et al. 2005), especially in studies that address social exclusion (Beißert et al. 2021; Butler 2012; Butler and Shibaz 2014). The proportion of male participants in the current study reflects well the proportion of male teachers in the overall teacher population in Germany (which is appr. 27%, Statista Research Department 2021) and is much higher than in many prior studies on teachers' reactions to social exclusion (e.g., Beißert et al. 2021 and Beißert et al. 2022 included only 17% male teachers). This is a clear improvement of this study compared to previous studies and suggests increased external validity. However, spoken in total numbers, our results rely on only 60 male teachers. Thus, if we want to better generalize the current findings, future studies should try to replicate these results and deliberately attempt to achieve larger samples and higher participation rates amongst male participants.

Yet, despite these limitations our research provides important insights into teachers' evaluations of exclusionary behaviors.

4.4 Conclusion

It can be concluded that gender seems to play an important role in teachers' reactions towards social exclusion among students. Moreover, the current findings show that this gender-effect is not due to biological sex but can be explained by the higher level of communal character traits in female teachers. This underlines how important it is to focus on gender-related traits instead of sex or gender per se.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest H. Beißert, M. Staat, B.C.O.F. Fehringer, H. Weiß and M. Bonefeld declare that they have no competing interests. No funding was received to assist with the preparation of this manuscript. No funding was received for conducting this study.

Ethical standards A formal ethical review was not required for this study, in accordance with the local legislation and institutional requirements. Nevertheless, the study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of DGPs (German Psychological Society). All subjects gave written informed consent in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and in line with the General Data Protection Regulation of the EU. Before starting the actual survey, participants were informed of their data protection rights and that participation in the study was anonymous and voluntary. They were informed that there were no negative consequences or disadvantages for not participating or leaving the study early without completing it. Prior to the assessment, participants had to confirm that they were willing to participate in the study and understood the information.

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