Becoming a speech and language therapist:
A qualitative exploration of the experiences of male speech and language therapy students and early career professionals

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Abstract

At present there are approximately 13,000 registered speech and language therapists, the majority of these are female. The current ratio of male to female professionals in the United Kingdom stands at 3:100. A decade ago, the figure stood at 1.9% (Sheridan 1999), indicating that in recent years, the number of male professionals has been gradually rising, however, this figure remains low in comparison to other professions within the health and education sectors. Previous research has offered explanations for the lack of diversity in the profession (Greenwood et al 2006, McAllister and Neve 2005), citing poor remuneration, employment opportunities and knowledge base of the profession; this has resulted in few men choosing to enter the profession. In addition, it means that male students are likely to find themselves as the sole male in a cohort of students. The minority status that such a position entails is thought to lead to negative consequences, reduced motivation and feelings of isolation (Boyd and Hewlett 2001).

This research examined the everyday lived experiences of being a male student speech and language therapist in order to develop an understanding of how they constructed their professional identity and to ascertain whether their gender identity influences this journey.

Twelve male speech and language therapy students and early career professionals were interviewed with a semi-structured format through a variety of mediums. The participants shared their stories and experiences of being a speech and language therapy student in both the university and clinical settings.

The participants shared their experiences of isolation and of dealing with the assumptions that other professionals made about their position within the speech and language therapy profession and these experiences were reported to have had an effect on both their training and their positioning within the wider profession.
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