

Bhana, Deevia; Xu, Yuwei & Emilsen, Kari (2019). **Why men stay and why men leave early childhood education: Masculinities, sexuality and resistance.** Paper presented on the 29th EECERA Annual Conference, 21.8.2019, Thessaloniki, Greece.

Abstract

The study sought to address the dropout and retention in men's career trajectories in ECEC. Aims: To identify factors which contribute to men's decisions to remain in and exit out of the ECEC profession. We examine why men stay and why men drop out of ECEC by drawing from qualitative in depth interviews conducted with 37 male teachers. Brownhill (2015) focused on male and female teachers, service providers and parents to show that there is need to address different levels of barriers to men's involvement in ECEC. Brody's (2015) study shows how gender boundaries can be broken as men in ECEC resist gender norms about traditional work. Warin (2018) addresses the problem of gender balance and theorises gender as fluid rather than biological basis upon which to include men in ECEC. Theory: Critical masculinity studies by Connell (1995) is conceptualised as a social construction of the relations between men and women. Dominant masculinity is based on the denigration of the feminine. Multiple masculinities exist thus also potential to change. Interpretive approach used in this study. Individual interviews conducted with 37 men. Qualitative research approach used to gain in-depth knowledge of meanings. Participants signed consent forms. Pseudonyms are used. Confidentiality is guaranteed. Masculinity is key to understanding why men stay and why men exit ECEC. Men both resist and reproduce dominant masculinity and are under pressure to avoid care work and children in ECEC. Policy proposed to increase men in ECEC. Role model theory and biological theories of essentialism are outdated.

Keywords

men, masculinities, gender, sexuality, power

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Why men stay and why men leave early childhood education and care (ECEC): masculinity, sexuality and resistance

Deevia Bhana, Yuwei Xu, Kari Emilsen

Overview

- Introduction: Studying Men, Masculinities and EECE
- How we conducted the study?
- *Theoretical perspectives*
- Findings: Men who stay and men who leave
- Men who stay in ECE: Challenges, complicity and contradictions
- *Negotiating Masculinity and challenging gender inequalities*
- *“A Thing is Valued when it is Rare” or ‘Because we are Dudes’: Men as a drawcard in ECEC*
- Men who leave ECE: ‘It’s difficult to be a man in ECE’
- *‘Men don’t do this job’: Policing and regulating masculinity*
- *Masculinity, Sexuality and Suspicion*
- Conclusion

Introduction

- Broader 12 country project
- How did we come together
- The problem with men and ECEC
- Our aims in this study
- Why do we continue to have low numbers of men teachers in ECEC

How we conducted the study: Theme E Gender

- perceived gender advantages/disadvantages
- gender bias / stereotypes
- gendered workplace responsibilities
- child protection issues / risk management
- gender inequalities / differences
- reaction of parents in ECEC setting

Theoretical Perspectives

- Masculinities: An issue of power
- Power as fluid and masculinity as malleable
- R Connell as theoretical anchor- masculinity as hegemonic and subordinated
- Masculinity as heterosexual

Findings

Men who stay in ECE: Challenges, complicity and contradictions

Negotiating Masculinity and challenging gender inequalities

- ...sometimes people would look at you differently when they first see, especially in the creche environment, d'you know especially working with toddlers, but then when they got to know you like, I said I had them for nearly three and a half years, ehm they kind of look at you funny sometimes, just like "why, why are you here? (Dylan, Ireland)

Dylan added:

- "Does he do it?" They [parents] wouldn't have said it to me. But they would have asked the manager, "well does he change nappies?"...especially when I was in the creche work and I'd say maybe the mother and father would come in and they'd be like "Oh god, he's going to be changing nappies", like that kind of thing.

Marcos, from the USA noted the fine line in touch, affection and care:

- ...it would be important for men to understand how they can be perceived, but yet still do these things that children need. Because children come to me, for example, I'd come into class and they hug me, but over the years, I learned how to hug and touch children [in a way] that doesn't seem inappropriate, you know, but you still give the children what they need, which is physical contact.

"A Thing is Valued when it is Rare" or 'Because we are Dudes': Men as a drawcard in ECEC

- Men in ECEC resist and contradictorily endorse hegemonic masculinity. In negotiating masculinity, men are complicit in reproducing hegemonic status by endorsing their status around exceptionalism. 45-year-old Norbert from Norway recognised this stand out value associated with being a man in ECEC, 'It's a competence in itself just to be a man'. To be man is indicative of asymmetrical relations of power and suggests how the sex-gender categorisation and gender binary is harnessed in the expression of male power. We argue here that the 'rarity value' (Warin, 2018: 48) that men observe about themselves is a contradictory process.

Men who leave ECE: 'It's difficult to be a man in ECE'

'Men don't do this job': Policing and regulating masculinity

I think there's organisational issues about the way we frame things that can be gendered so far that people feel like, "Well, why am I working in this place when it's so female dominated?" that the style of communication, that the way we set up the environments, that the expectation around all of that further alienates men (Josh, Australia)

- Nicolay (Norway) indicates:

...there's a difference between men and women, and we have sort of different roles and ideas, and that can work, that could work so well, if you in a way are allowed to just be true to those roles like it's created from nature's side, in such a way that it would work. But, such men are probably not attracted to the profession, probably it's more the men who are more, like, pedagogical and more like (sigh), a bit more "tøffel" (translator: local expression, meaning a coward, a pussy) (laughter), but, yeah.

Masculinity, Sexuality and Suspicion

- Tzvika (Israel) notes:

...was not allowed to work as a kindergarten teacher because he was a male, because he had to be gay. It wasn't even a question, was he gay, of course he wasn't gay, but it wasn't a question, because he had to be gay (laughs).

- It's the world's best job. It's the best. It's so rewarding and you learn a lot. I would love to work in preschools again if it is paid better and if it was different ... not so large children's groups. If it was like when I started working but not as it is now in society; it's not worth that risk unfortunately (Sven, Sweden)

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Conclusion

- Being a man in ECEC involves disruption accommodation, rejection and complicity in hegemonic masculinity.
- Men (like women) are subject to gendered structures of power and accountable to these dominant understandings of how to be a 'real man'.
- Established gender regimes in institutions of ECEC, as well as deeply-held beliefs about men's and women's roles in society (Rohrman & Emilsen: 299), significantly shape men's choices to persist in or drop out of ECEC.
- Our findings about men from 12 countries further suggest that those regimes and beliefs are powerful discourses on a global scale, mirroring the international phenomenon of men's low participation in ECEC.
- However, optimistically, the findings also reflect the potential for some men who work in ECEC to challenge gendered norms and discourses.
- It is therefore recommended that, recruiting and retaining men in ECEC and interrogating the gendered nature of ECEC require challenging the power of hegemonic masculinity at socio-cultural, institutional/organisational, and individual levels.
- Policies and support are desired to both empower ECEC practitioners (men and women) and enable practitioners to empower themselves - so that they become gender 'transformers' in ECEC and the wider society.