

Plaisir, Jean-Yves (2021). **Four Men at the ECEC Cross-road: A Comparative Analysis of their Intrinsic Motivations, Work Experiences and Career Trajectories.** Paper presented on the 30th EECERA Annual Conference, Online, 10.9.2021.

Abstract

This study seeks to increase understanding on how gender, working conditions and social mobility impact the decision-making processes and the professional trajectories of men who choose to leave or stay in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) profession. I expand on previous research focused on intrinsic and extrinsic factors that impact men's careers in ECEC (Cole et al., 2019; Brody, 2012) to share fresh perspectives on social class factors impacting men's work in early learning settings. I utilize a Bourdieusian theory to analyze the interlocking relationships between gender, work and class (Bourdieu, 1990a; Huppertz, 2012; Lipset, 2018) issues among male educators in ECEC settings, with an understanding that the social and cultural context of mobility, both upward and downward, influences men's career trajectories in this workforce. I use qualitative research methodology to gather interview data from four male educators, and my analysis shows that downward mobility and its associated stress deter men from pursuing careers in ECEC. I have applied APA (2017) ethical principles for human research in this study. Men who work in early childhood education grapple with various classed and gender-related factors including economic supports, cultural capital and social mobility (both downward and upward), which tend to influence their decisions to leave or stay in this workforce. There is a dynamic relationship between working conditions, pay equity and class positions that influence men's decisions to work in EL settings, and this has implications for policy and practice about the recruitment and retention of men in ECEC.

Keywords

men, early childhood education, social mobility, career trajectories, decision-making processes.

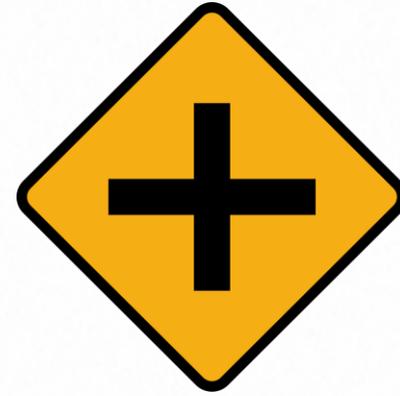
Presenter

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Four Men at the ECEC Crossroad:

An Analysis of How Gender roles, Working Conditions, and Social Mobility Impact Men's Career Trajectories in Early Learning

- Professor Jean-Yves Plaisir



Study's Goal, Theoretical Framework & Methods

Increase understandings of how gender roles, working conditions, and social mobility impact men's decision-making processes to leave or stay in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) profession. Guiding question: What roles do economic and social capitals play in men's decisions to work in ECE?

Bourdieu's theory of the social conditions of the reproduction of practices (habitus) is used as a lens in this secondary analysis about men's career trajectories in ECEC. Bourdieu (1990a) posits that *activity can be directed towards an exclusively economic goal* (p. 118), but social capital (legacy) also matters in professional practice. Drawing from this theory, this paper argues that men's decisions to leave or stay in ECEC are shaped not only by collective conditionings about gender roles and the working conditions in early learning structures but also by male educators' economic goals and the reconvertibility of symbolic capitals (e.g., credentials) to and from this workforce.

This analysis utilizes interview data, storylines, and survey questionnaires as research tools from both the Men's Career Trajectory international research project (Brody, Emilsen, Rohrmann & Warin, 2020) and a two-year study (Plaisir, Cole, & Reich-Shapiro, 2019) to examine the decision-making processes and trajectories of four (4) male educators who either left or stayed in ECEC. Critical portraiture, as a qualitative research method (Meyer, 2018; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffmann Davis, 1997), is used to introduce each of the four men featured in this presentation with a focus on their cultural backgrounds, academic credentials, and aspirations.

Summary of Findings from Study by Plaisir, Cole & Reich-Shapiro (2019)

1. 66% of the male educators (n= 41) reported that friends and family members supported of their decision to work in early learning.
2. Most of the male educators viewed themselves as “role models,” challenging gender stereotypes and negative social biases by working in ECE.
3. Only about 10% of the respondents reported that they faced negative judgment for choosing to work with young children.
4. Low pay seems to be a factor impacting retention among male educators across NYC’s ECE workforce, but the problem appears especially acute with males where there are cultural expectations for them to be higher wage earners.
5. Participants felt a moral commitment to make an impact in children’s lives.



Portrait 1: Marcos

Demographic information:

Self-identified as Puerto Rican male in his mid-30s; he is a father of two boys and a resident of New York City.

Academic qualifications & work experience:

Marcos earned a Master's degree in early childhood education and worked as a lead teacher in ECE for 7 years before moving to an administrative position.

Current status in ECEC: Persister

Marcos left the classroom to become a field supervisor and teacher coach with one of the regional ECE headquarters of New York City.

Determining factors:

Marcos's promotion to this supervisory position afforded him relatively more visibility than working as a lead teacher in ECE. He reported that he intends *to build a charter school to provide boys with guidance from positive male examples*. Marcos is inspired by his mother who was an ECEC teacher.

Portrait 2: Moses

Demographic info:

Self-identified as African American male in his mid-30s; he is the father of one boy and a resident of New York City.

Academic qualifications & work experience:

Moses earned a Master's degree in urban education and worked for 5 years as an elementary school teacher before advancing to a vice-principal position in a middle school.

Current status in ECEC: Dropout

Moses started a two-year training program in early childhood education but changed his major to elementary education before completing the program.

Determining factors:

Moses is completing a school leadership program to become a school principal (headmaster). He reported that his goal is to convert his teaching experiences and leadership skills into assets (stepping stones) for *pursuing political office in the future*. Moses is inspired by his mother who is an elementary school teacher.

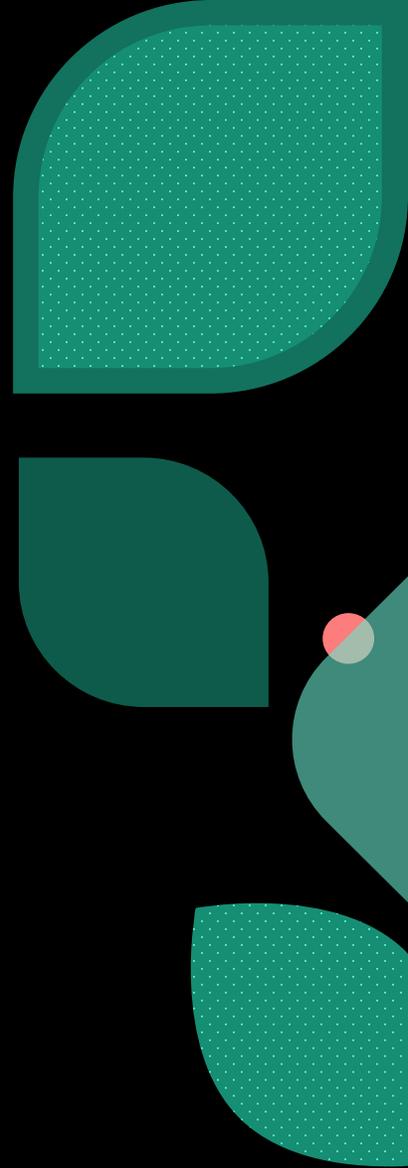
Portrait 3: Bill

Demographic information: Self-identified as Caucasian male in mid-20s, single; a resident of New York City.

Academic Qualifications & Work Experience: Bill earned an Associate's degree from a two-year teacher preparation program in early childhood education. He has been working in his family-owned and operated early childhood center since he was a teenager.

Current status in ECEC: Persister
Bill continues to work in his family-owned ECE center.

Determining factors: Bill is poised to assume leadership of the family-owned ECEC center following his parents' retirement. He reported that *[his] parents have worked hard to leave [him] a thriving business.*



Portrait 4: Joel

Demographic info: Self-identified as Haitian American male in mid-20s, single; a resident of New York City.

Academic qualifications & Work Experience: Joel earned an Associate's degree from a two-year teacher preparation program in ECEC; he worked for 3 years as a co-teacher before leaving the sector.

Current status: Dropout

Joel left ECEC to join the New York City Police Department (NYPD).

Determining factors: Joel indicated that his work colleagues recognized and valued him as excellent educator, but the *long hours and the many demands at work and the low salary prompted [his] decision to leave ECEC.* He stated that his parents *invested a lot of money to send him to private school so that he would have a better future.* Joel is completing training to become a detective with the NYPD, and he hopes to move up through the ranks and *inspire young people to serve their communities through law enforcement.* He finds inspiration and encouragement from his mother who works in adult care.

Key Findings from this Secondary Analysis

Men who stay in ECEC endeavor to grow professionally while building on the legacies of their parents and/or creating their own social capitals in the sector.

Men who leave ECEC aspire to relatively greater social mobility or relatively higher salaries in other sectors of the economy.

Equitable salaries and opportunities for upward mobility in combination with societal perceptions about gender roles influence men's decisions to leave or stay in ECEC.

Men who achieve higher levels of education tend to have more opportunities for upward mobility in and out of ECEC.



Conclusion

Academic qualifications along with opportunities for achieving upward mobility and personal goals seem to be the most influential factors shaping men's decisions to leave or stay in ECEC.

Both men who leave and those who stay in ECEC endeavor to build social capitals and improve their economic statuses while also *making a difference in their own communities.*

Implications

The study's findings have implications for recruiting, developing, and retaining men in ECEC. The following are strategies that could be implemented to achieve gender balance and inclusion objectives in ECEC:

Recruit, support, and retain men from differing social backgrounds to help achieve gender balance and inclusion objectives in the ECEC workforce both at the national and international levels.

Professionalize ECEC to unlock possibilities ('potentialities') for achieving equitable distributions of economic and social capitals in this sector.

Offer equitable salaries for ECEC workers to adequately provide for the needs of their own families while they are taking care of other people's children.



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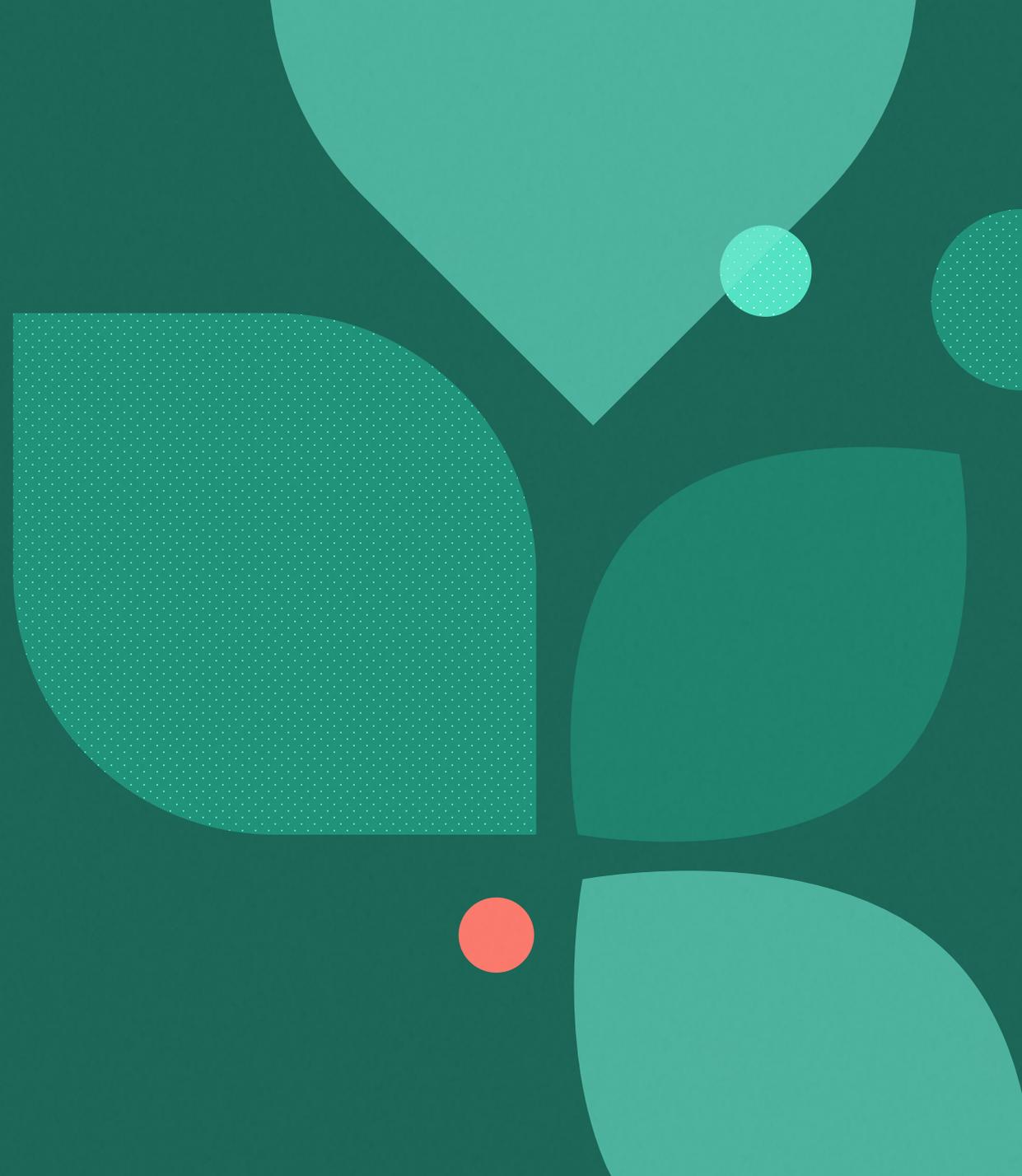
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Q & A



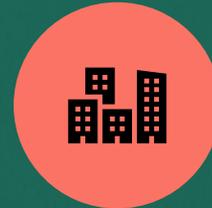
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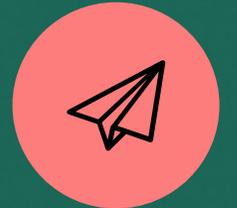
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