

Ljunggren, Birgitte; Emilsen, Kari; Sullivan, Vicky; Thorpe, Karen & Xu, Yuwei (2019). **Different cultures different men? A cross cultural and comparative study from Australia, China and Norway.** Paper presented on the 29th EECERA Annual Conference, 21.8.2019, Thessaloniki, Greece.

Abstract

The paper explores the available subject positions for men working in Early childhood education and care (ECEC) offered by cultural gender discourses in Australia, China and Norway. It discusses whether those men's gender subjectivities reproduce or challenge nationally and globally persistent gender binary thinking in the ECEC sector and whether this affects retention. The paper answers to a lacking research on career trajectories of men in ECEC (Brody, 2017). It builds on Warin's (2018) identification of different male worker identities in British ECECs by adding a comparative aspect while comparing findings from three countries. This paper adds to the paucity of cross-cultural studies in research related to gender and men's participation in ECEC (Rohrman and Brody, 2015). The paper applies a poststructuralist discourse theoretical perspectives (Winter Jørgensen & Phillips 2013) which enables analysis of individuals' gender subjectivities situated within cultural contexts and gender discourses. Discourse analysis detects the present subject positions in a set of data generated through a three-part data collection protocol applied in current countries. It includes narrative interview, semi-structured interview, and a graphic storyline from three men with ECEC experience from each country. This methodology aligns to a poststructuralist paradigm. Anonymity secured in interviews, and in any written recordings of observations. We find traces of national and global gender and masculinities discourses that open for both challenging and reinforcing gender patterns in career choices of men in the ECEC sector. Findings may raise sensitivity to gender in policy and practice and better gender balance.

Keywords

Men in ECEC, discourse, gender, comparative analysis, retention

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An intersectional approach to men's career trajectories in ECEC: Comparisons of Australia, China, and Norway

Birgitte Ljunggren, Yuwei Xu, Victoria Sullivan, Kari Emilsen and Karen Thorpe

EECERA conference

21st-23rd August 2019

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Background and initial apologies

- ▶ Apologises for diverging from the abstract in a rather substantial degree!
 - ▶ However, this is the result of the ongoing research process
- ▶ This paper is the product of the MCT project of which all the authors take part in
- ▶ Given us the opportunity to explore men's own constructions of their career trajectories using data from different countries.
 - ▶ This data consist of: storylines of different men and interview data on specific issues and also connected to the story line:
 - ▶ Result of an inductive process and common analysis: co construction of knowledge

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- ▶ The paper also answers to a general lack of knowledge about men`s career trajectories in the ECEC sector:
 - ▶ Particularly cross national analysis
 - ▶ Perspectives that goes beyond a genderperspective
 - ▶ reasons for staying or leaving?
 - ▶ Broaden understandings of career trajectories as intersectional social constructions

Research question

- ▶ How are men`s subjective constructions of career trajectories, in ECEC, shaped by intersections of social factors in the three cultures?
 - ▶ What can such an analysis tell us about men`s reasons to stay in- or leave the ECEC sector?

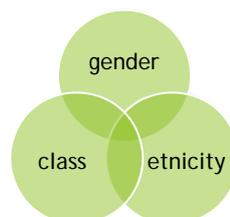
Theory: Career trajectories and life stories as narratives

- ▶ Career trajectories seen as narratives:
- ▶ They are made/constructed by individuals, must be regarded as actively produced by the men to make sense of their life, their choices and life occurrences
 - ▶ They are to be regarded as social products: societal factors is woven into these stories since they are woven into us:
 - ▶ The contexts, the self understandings etc
 - ▶ They are peep-holes into the social reality and the creation of it

▶ «Stories are powerful means of making sense of our social reality and our own lives» (Brinkann & Kvale 2015:65)

Theory: Debated intersectionalities

- ▶ Beyond being a man in ECEC:
 - ▶ Life stories as constructed form more than gender
 - ▶ These men` stories seen as social products are more than just a product of their social gender
 - ▶ Actualizes how gender work together with other social factors (processes) such as class, culture and ethnicity: intersections



“The overall aim of intersectional analysis is to explore intersecting patterns between different structures of power and how people are simultaneously positioned—and position themselves—in multiple categories, such as gender, class, and ethnicity” (Christensen & Quotrup Jensen, 2012)

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How to study intersections

- ▶ We are inspired by Christeisen og Qvotrup Jensen (2102) and their analysis of life stories as narratives in an intersectional perspective:
 - ▶ life-story narratives contain actual information and are at the same time representations
 - ▶ important way of to approach constructions of identities and the role that social structures play in people's lives: men`s lives in the ECEC sector
 - ▶ Analyzing the lifestories of participants by looking for the common and central themes appearing where intersectionality are useful to the construction of life stories and meaning connected to a career in ECEC

So, then what central themes are analyzed as intersectional themes in the analyzed lifestories and how do they relate to descisions to stay or leave?

Method and analysis

- ▶ Data collected as part of the MTC-prosjekt
 - ▶ More in detail here the nature of the datamaterial:
 - ▶ Collected
 - ▶ These three contries chosen because they represent different cultures: goal was to be able to compare, and therefore maybe become more sensitive to intersections:
 - ▶ Also through our different cultural and professional background: able to challenge eachother in the grup

Country	stayers	abandoners
Australia		
China		
Norway		

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Analysis process - but, this is not only about being a man...

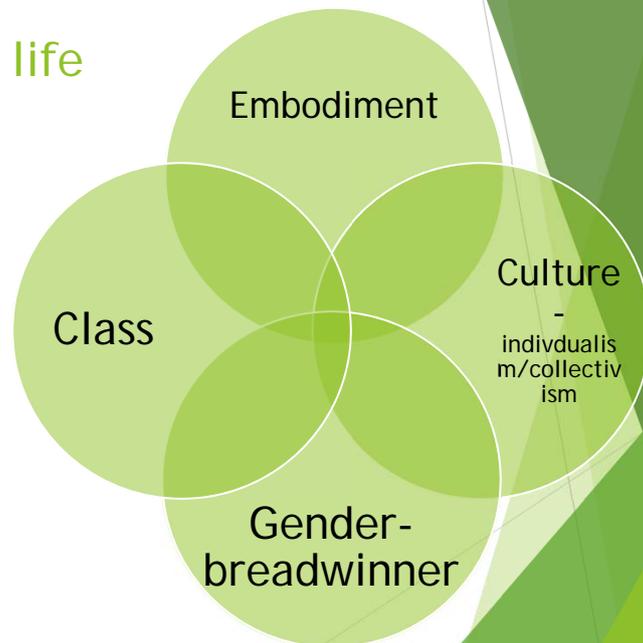
- ▶ What happens if we analyze this using intersectionality perspective?
 - ▶ To agree about a definition: what is intersectionality?
 - ▶ Making a common analysis scheme/template
 - ▶ To individually analyze one`s own material using this lense
 - ▶ Writing up a summary and sharing with the group
 - ▶ Our cultural blindness being questioned: «that has to be typical norwegian....»
 - ▶ Rising cultural sensitivity in the analysis
 - ▶ Bumping into the problems discussed in the theory: to see several aspects at the same time- detecting intersectional phenomenons
 - ▶ Common discussion: do we find some intersectional «hotspots» in the material?
 - ▶ Similarities and differences in the emerging themes?

Findings: two major themes

- ▶ Theme 1: Making a life
- ▶ Theme 2: Professionalism

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Making a meaningful life



Example for data

- ▶ From China:
- ▶ Yu (24) being a 90s is somewhat resistant to the cultural and parental expectations of job steadiness. Although he was pushed into applying for a tenured kindergarten job when the interview was conducted. Yu has taken up many jobs albeit his young age and has been in and out of ECEC for several times.
- ▶ *, teachers will have winter and summer holidays, which other jobs would not have (for that long), so I felt that I am suitable for this occupation/major. And from a long-term career perspective, male preschool teachers are also lacking. Men are in hot demand and would be easy for us to find a job.*
- ▶

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Example from data

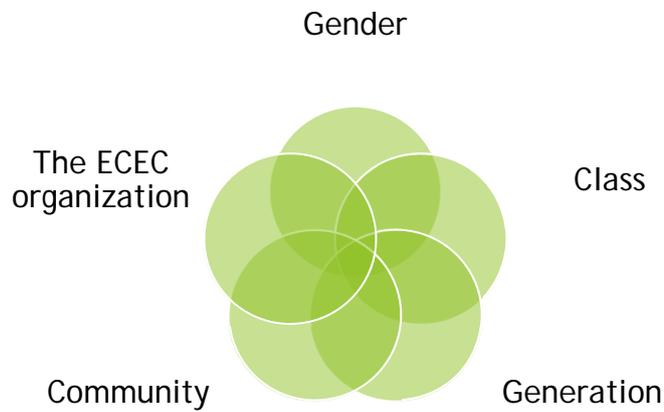
- ▶ Liang (34) remained as a kindergarten teacher for over 10 years. This is enabled through financial support from his parents, who paid for his housing and cars (two 'must-have' for Chinese men to get married). The financial privilege from his parents
- ▶ *It is hard to say. It would be better to get this extra amount of money. I am local so I get support from my parents which release part of pressure from my life. However, it was a different case for other male teachers who came from other places. This 400 RMB can't change too much but may help a little bit if they intend to establish their life in XX.*
- ▶ *Y You mean your pressure was released due to the support from your parents? You mean buying the flat? Or other aspects?*
- ▶ *L Yes, car and flat. I refer to financial pressure.*
- ▶

Example from data: Norway

- ▶ Nicolay have a strong sense of a what is valid masculinity (active and complementary to women, earning money). He felt he had to take some kind of education when his plan of becoming a professional skier failed. He came from a small farm and had been growing up having a "free childhood" and not affluent parents. He started preschool education because he had gotten good feedback on his play with children. Also, in his narrative the body and Nicolay's experience of the body's role in his working life plays an important part in his considerations to start an education as a preschool teacher: he did not need to have a passive white collar office job. He had however left education and started up as a carpenter apprentice. When he explained his choice his experiences manifested themselves bodily as a restlessness. He described the ECEC field (from practice) as marked by too much feminine rigidity and rules as well as an education that he felt presented to him "common sense", particularly pedagogical theory he found boring and "common sensical". He did not want to fill his life with what he saw as nonsensical knowledge, planning and responsibilities going with the teacher job:
- ▶ *But did you feel that restlessness when you were in the ECEC?*
- ▶ *C Yes, slightly, yes, I felt that it was, heh, yes, I actually wanted to work. I was fed up with, I couldn't bear, I didn't want to go to school anymore. I could educate myself in anything I wanted, on internet and in books and everything.*

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Theme 2: Professionalism



Examples from data: Australia

So, it was weird being a guy. It was different and you were out of place. I didn't let it really bother me, but I definitely know that there was some of the other people there and the centre director and I remember them thinking it was best that I probably didn't change nappies by myself. That didn't bother me. I wasn't really super keen to do that. But there was certainly that I was different and that maybe I needed to take some extra steps just in case parents thought it was weird. That was kind of a bit strange to me, I suppose... Maybe a little. Yeah, I suppose. I was just kind of like, "All right, if that's what we've got to do." It definitely felt odd. I'd never been in such a gender division job before. There'd never been that kind of thing happen before, so it was weird. I know one of the girls who had been there for a long time, 10 or 12 years, she said I was the fourth man she'd ever worked with in 12 years. The other people had been there for two or three weeks. There was one that lasted a little while, so it was pretty rare. Look, one of the big things was the parents, I think. A lot of considerations were always made to, "What will the parents think?" Not just about this, but a lot of things. I think their approach was, "Well, let's cover ourselves and make sure the parents aren't upset by doing these steps," I guess. AndrewDW1Vicky

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Examples from Norway

- ▶ Nils is a preschool teacher who had a particular interest and glowing engagement in outdoor pedagogy. This is also the special field of pedagogy attractive to men in the education system. Nils left the sector starting up as a truck driver. In his narrative this is explained by the difficulties he had in the meeting with a feminized ECEC culture marked by low motivated staff with little professional consciousness. He, as a preschool teacher is supposed to lead and guide the staff in Norway, and thus find himself in a hierarchy. His colleagues were older women having trouble finding other jobs in a labor market that discriminate on age. There were lacking leadership support for him and he had to handle tasks he did not feel up to. There were also organizational restructuring raising the stress and a male colleague who left. He worked hard to handle the situation trying to live up to the the organizational expectations and professional standards, but he burned out and left the sector to become a truck driver.
- ▶ *Interviewer 2 : Resisting change, do you think that is a women's culture? Or is it ECEC culture?*
- ▶ *Interviewer 1 : Is it about gender?*
- ▶ *Informant 1 : In my experience it , yes, gender and education*
- ▶

Summing up

- ▶ We have found that particularly two intersectional themes appears in the material from our three countries and relates strongly to career decisions:
 - ▶ Making a meaningful life and
 - ▶ Professionalism
- ▶ Men`s career trajectories are complicated social constructions shaped by many structures, where gender is solely one, intersecting with other aspects such as culture, generation and class