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**Doing Masculinity and Professionalism:  
Exploring the Intersectionalities of Gender and Professionalization  
in Early Childhood Education**

Presentation on the 23<sup>rd</sup> EECERA annual conference, 30.8.2013, Tallinn/Estonia

**Abstract**

Our research project 'Dolls, building blocks and outdoor activity days: (un)doing gender in the nursery' investigates how interactions and everyday practices in the nursery tend to either emphasize differences between women and men or make gender differences retreat into the background. Increasing men's presence in early childhood education is closely connected to expectations of as well increasing professionalization of the occupation. However, there is also a huge contradictory discourse constructing them as potentially dangerous, somehow suspicious or ill-motivated. Men are not only positioned by but also have to position themselves according to these discourses.

Using discursive psychology (Edley and Wetherell 1997; Davies and Harré 1990) as well as the concept of doing gender (West and Zimmerman 1987, Deutsch 2007) as theoretical framework, we analyze how our interviewees position themselves as male childcare workers by engaging in several discursive practices. For this paper, the results of the narrative interviews with ten male childcare workers will be introduced. The interviews focused on their entry into the organization, their perceptions of daily routines, and their experiences in the interaction with their female colleagues.

Focusing on gender as a social and discursive accomplishment illuminates the mechanisms of gender inequality. Six discursive strategies that men engage in were identified: Three refer to discourses of gender difference, two to equality/sameness and one strategy, which highlights professionalism, seems to move beyond this binary gender structure. A better understanding of discourses of gender difference and sameness contributes to gender equality in the field of early childhood education.

**Keywords**

discourse analysis, gender, subject positions, male childcare workers, professionalism

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# Doing masculinity & professionalism: exploring the intersectionalities of gender and professionalization in Early Childhood Education

## Research Project

- The research project was funded by the Danish National Science Foundation
- Interaction and everyday activities exploring gender differences (day, gender or both) that reflect in the background (gender power)
- Ethical and legal aspects in relation with minority subjects. Interviewed with male and female educators without gender-label observations

## The subject position of the Professional Pedagogue

Advantage of subject, the distinctive strategy of working in the professional pedagogy

- power of interpretation
- highly specialized
- education, discipline

## Professionalization: a masculine project?

Professionalization as a masculine project? A historical perspective on the professionalization of early childhood education in Denmark. In: *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 2010, 42(1), 1-15.

## Empirical findings

Building the male actor: experience of the historical position of the father profession in the labor market

gendered capacity: experience of the historical position of the father profession in the labor market

gendering in the professional pedagogy

## the intersectional practices

gendering differences

gendering similarities

gendering professionalization

## Taking up the subject position of the professional pedagogue

1. Pedagogical style & philosophy
2. Job presentation
3. Avant-garde
4. Agency

# Doing masculinity & professionalism: exploring the intersectionalities of gender and professionalization in Early Childhood Education

## Research Project

- The research focuses on workers' activities, their feelings, gender in the nursery, rooted by the Gender National Science Foundation
- interactions and everyday activities exploring gender differences (class, gender, or both) that reflect in the background (gender power)
- Ethical and legal aspects: interviews with nursery managers, interviews with male and female staff (with various other-label children)

## The subject position of the Professional Pedagogue

Advantage of what, the distinctive strategy of working in the professional pedagogy

- power of interpretation
- highly specialized
- education expertise

## Professionalization: a masculine project?

Professionalization as a masculine project? A research project on the professionalization of early childhood education in Sweden. The project is funded by the Swedish Research Council for Gender Equality.

## Empirical findings

Building the male worker's experience of the importance of the father's profession for their professionalization

emphasizing equality

emphasizing equality

emphasizing equality

## for academic practices

emphasizing difference

emphasizing difference

emphasizing difference

emphasizing difference

## Taking up the subject position of the professional pedagogue

1. Pedagogical style & philosophy
2. Job presentation
3. Avant-garde
4. Agency

four strategies

# Research Project

- "Dolls, building blocks and outdoor activity days: (un)doing gender in the nursery", funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation.
- interactions and everyday activities: emphasizing gender differences (doing gender) or making them retreat to the background (undoing gender)
- mixed method design: interviews with nursery managers, interviews with male and female child care workers, video-based observations



# Men working in ECE: a paradox

Nursery education is strongly associated with femininity or mothering in particular

'ideal worker' (Acker 1990): competences & attributes that are perceived female, such as caring, nurturing, and comforting (Vogt, 2002)

male childcare workers run in danger to be considered as suspicious: subjected to the suspicion of being homosexual or paedophilic

the  
unwanted other

strong discourse "feminization of education"

work of female childcare workers constructed as insufficient: the interests of -mainly boys - can not be met satisfactorily by women

masculinity as highly valued male: childcare workers as something new and potentially innovative

the wanted  
other

# Empirical findings

Six discursive practices.

building the male niche

referring to the (symbolic) position of the father

referencing the 'male breadwinner'

emphasizing equality

appropriating femininity

referring to the professional pedagogue

emphasizing difference

emphasizing sameness

emphasizing professionalism

## Taking up the subject position of the professional pedagogue

four strategies.

1. Pedagogical style & philosophy
2. Job presentation
3. Avant-garde
4. Agency

Develop a philosophy of working with children, special methods or a pedagogical style that shows your competence and talk about it. Try to distinguish it positively from other possible styles.



**Reto:** I also have a movement building site. ... Well I do not even take nails out of the way here, that the children will do, and with the building site, that is to me a social building site, a life building site. they build themselves, and they need all imagination when they build something. They have to negotiate with each other, they have conflicts and they need to solve them and also have to explore, and then they discover static, and heavy, long, short, colours, materials and they build something and they are responsible for themselves, what they build ...

1. Pedagogical style & philo

2. Job presentation

3. Avant-garde

4. Agency

ASSESS the job as being demanding and ambitious,  
let the others know you are working very hard  
and long hours.

**Paul:** And they saw something is happening now. A great, passionate deputy, does the early morning duty and is still here on six o'clock in the evening oftentimes, works 12 hours. And therefore due to this story there has always been a positive feedback from the parents. Or I realize these moments, when you come to total deepness to really basic topics in parent - teacher meetings, they talk about their life stories, tales of woe and you try to develop a strategy how they could get out of the spiral. For me, these are the really cool and intensive moments.



2. Job present

3. Avant-garde

4. Agency

Present yourself as being vanguard.  
Being in this position makes the others  
know you  
are a pioneer.

**Reto:** I prepare the setting outside, what is nice is that the female apprentices now come and say:

„Look, Reto, we re-arranged the setting“

and I realize that the first approaches or inputs that I gave back then were laughed at and [whistling]

“he has bats in his belfry, he has no clue anyway“

Ehm, I realize now that slowly it comes back [...]

3. Avant-garde

4. Agency



Stay agentic. Make sure the others know that you have a rather high influence and freedom of action to a high degree.

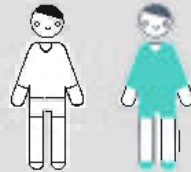
**Paul:** At first there was the idea that I would change the job before the cancellation period ended. But then I said:

**"wait, they will have a problem then!"**

And, ehm, the children and the group they need to have a good process ending as well. And that is why I also blocked a bit. I think the goal was to stabilize and calm down the situation that would have been the idea from my side.

# The subject position of the Professional Pedagogue

summary.



advantages of using the discursive strategy of referring to the professional pedagogue

- power of interpretation
- highly legitimate
- protective character

## Professionalization - a masculine project?

- account for professionalization of Early Childhood Education paves the way for the entrance and integration of men in the field
- by taking up the position of the professional pedagogue, men are able to resolve the conflict between the female connotation of the job and their gender identity
  - danger: implicit degradation of femininity & (non-) inclusion of men as "professional other"