

Professionalism and Masculinity in ECEC: Men's Voices from Around the World

Boys and Girls in Nomansland
Asker, Norway 2015

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The ethic of caring in ECEC professionalism

- Caring is a moral and ethical relationship, in which a special relationship is established between the caregiver and the cared for.
- The caregiver shows total and nonselective presence towards the recipient.
- The essence of professional positioning in the caring role is relational. (Noddings, 2003, 2005)
- Teaching = caring = female (? mothering)
(King, 1998) =

Men and caring in ECEC

- Men ECEC workers tend to be wary of touch (Sargeant, 2004)
- This caution leads men to seek alternative forms of caring (King, 1998) and compensatory activities (Sargeant, ibid)
- Men tend to reject female teaching styles and to seek a masculine discourse (Connell, 2005) to satisfy their need for an appropriate gender identity in their work.

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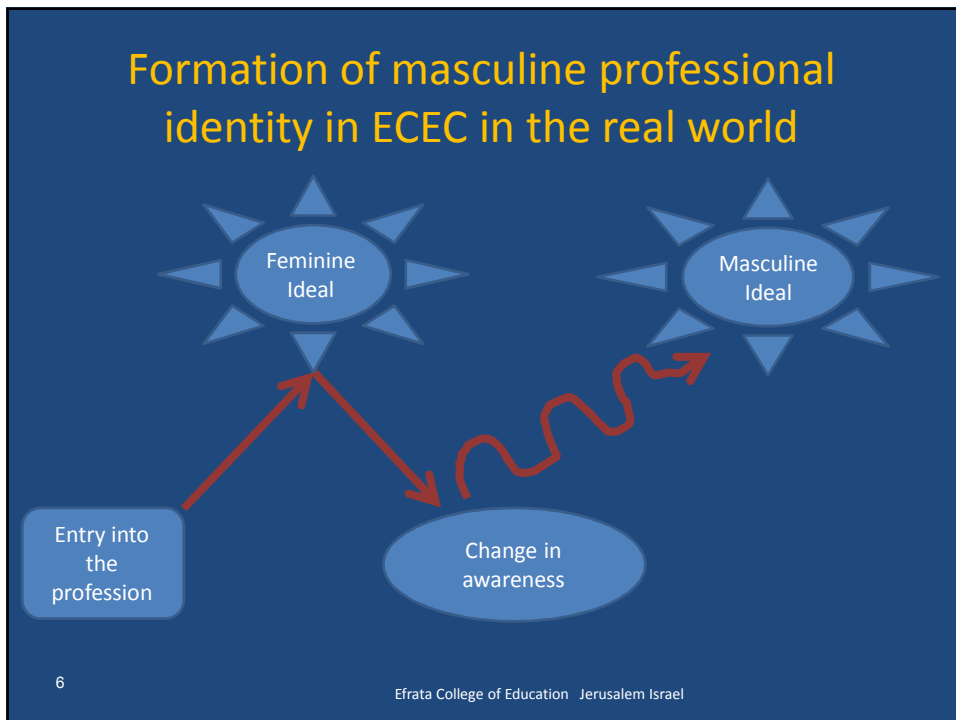
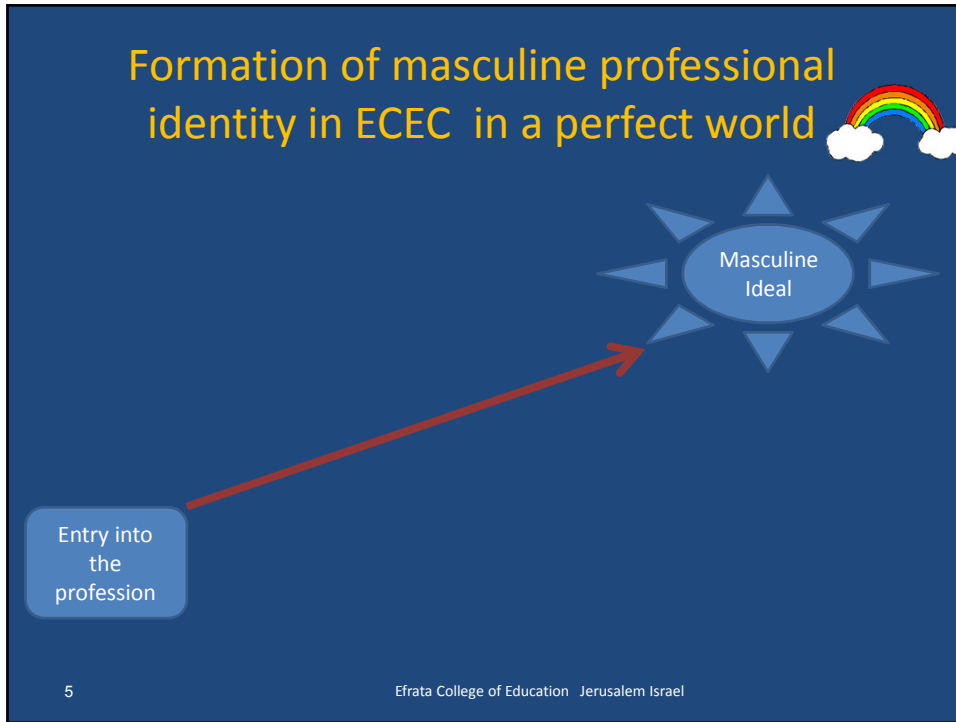
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Continuum of expressions of caring - (Vogt, 2003)



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The masculine ideal

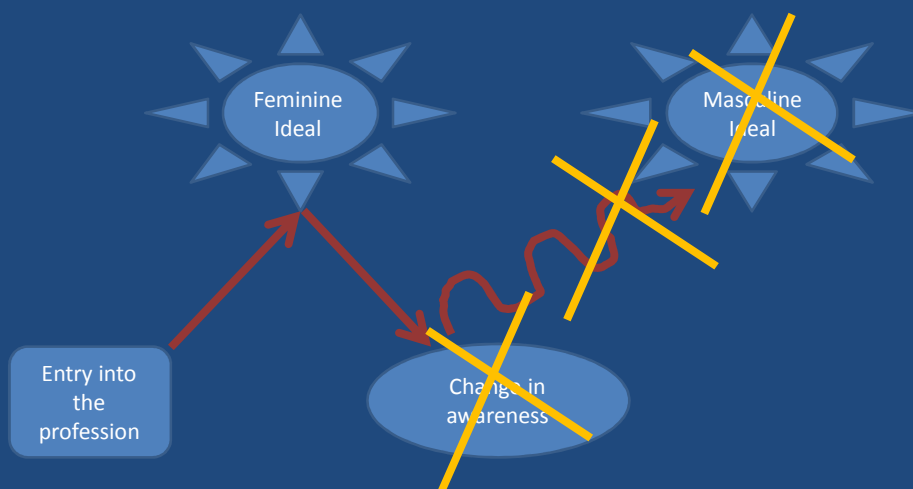
“If you imitate the movement of women, people will think you are a homo. You won't be you, the male kindergarten teacher, and you won't be (an authentic) female teacher either. But the moment you are a male teacher, accept it. You are a male teacher with the drum, you sing with the children, and you dance with them, and you do it with less delicate movements, because men are built differently. You look different, and you move differently.”

Eli Kruk, Israel

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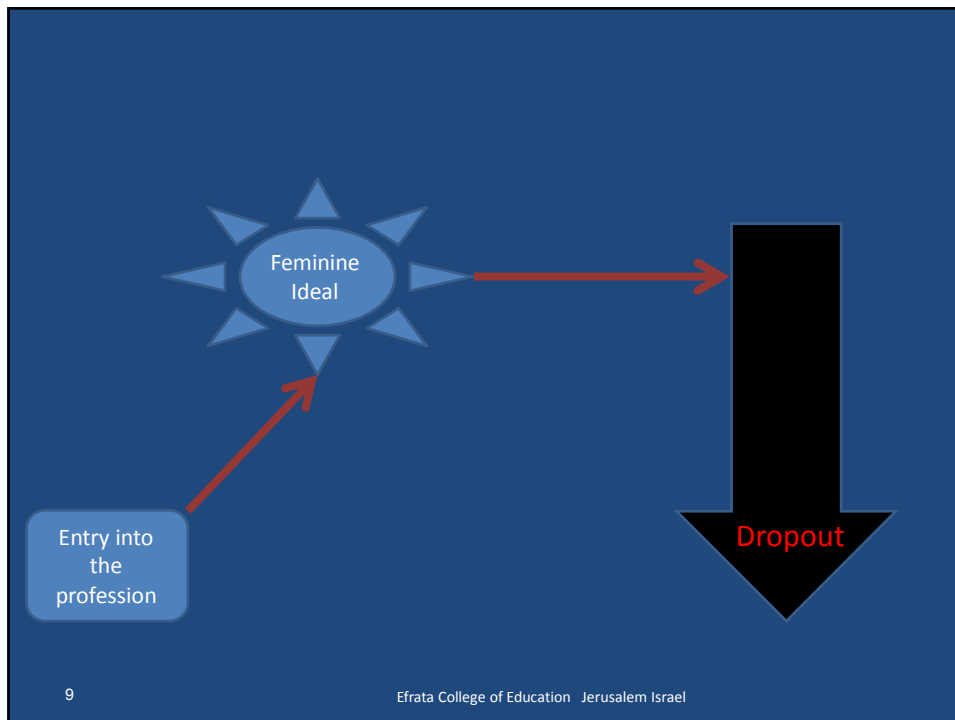
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What if?



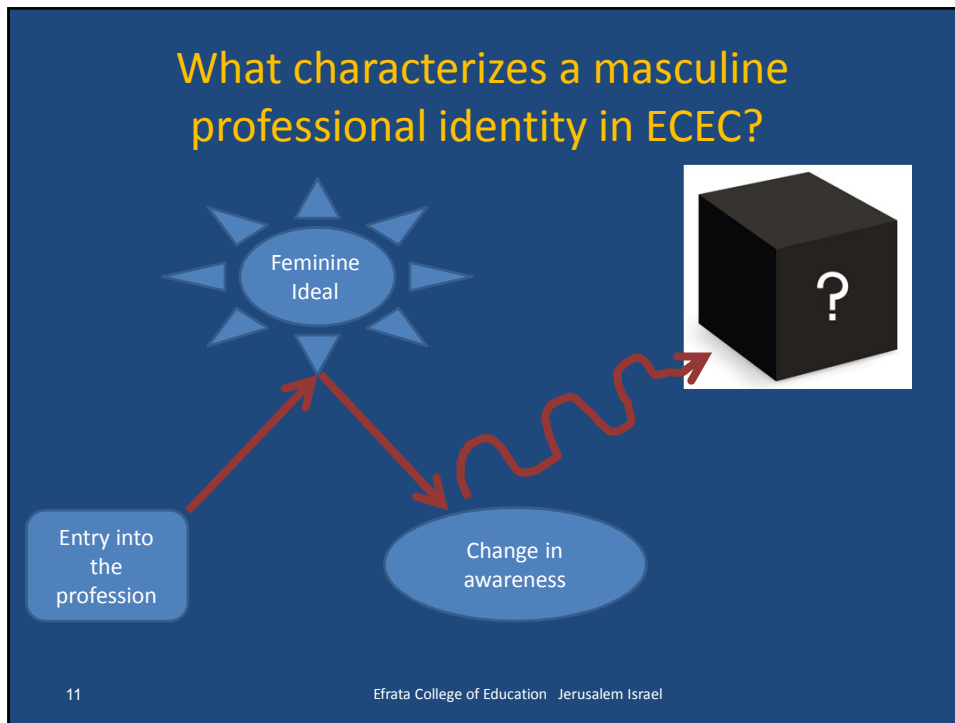
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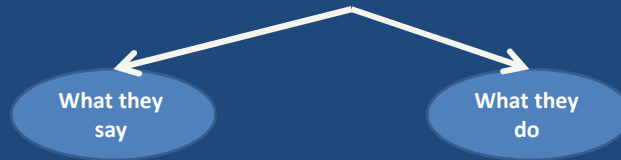
Elton's quest for a professional masculine identity

- I don't want to stereotype kindergarten teachers, but the ones I worked with were very nurturing, I wouldn't say they were older but they were just very *motherly*, and I believe they kind of took me under their wing.
- She wore a linen skirt which never got dirty even though she did messy art projects with the children, and she was very *motherly*.
- As a male you probably bring into the classroom and into the program unique traits, and I don't know if that has to do with demeanor (or) if it has to do with the way you talk, the words you choose.
- I guess I consider myself nurturing, but just not very *motherly*.



- ### Research aims
- How do male ECEC workers relate to caring in their practice?
 - How do they relate to physical touch and affection?
 - How is the professionalism of male ECEC workers affected by the cloud of suspicion which surrounds their work?
 - How do these men understand their own professionalism?
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Multiple case study data collection



- Non-participant observation – one complete day of work, backed up with video and photos
- Narrative interview – 2 to 3 hours, followed by a semi-structured interview
- Interviews with work supervisors, and gender balance experts within the cultural context.

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Population

- 6 men from different cultures: Norway, the Netherlands, UK, Switzerland, Israel, and the USA
- Veteran teachers 5– 27 years of experience
- 2 nursery caregivers; 4 kindergarten teachers
- 2 married, 2 in long term heterosexual relationships, 2 bachelors



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Method of analysis

- Identification of themes in the data sets
- Thick description of the classroom practice, and profile of personal background
- **Submission of the case study to the participant for comments**
- **Revision and resubmission to the participant**
- **Consensus between researcher and participant**
- Comparison of cases, emphasis on commonalities and differences

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Findings: Personal ethos of caring

What they **do**:

- Focus on relationships with children (Levien, the Netherlands)
- Emphasis on the needs of the child rather than the mandates of the curriculum (Elton, USA)
- Awareness and immediate response to children (Reidar, Norway)
- Intense interest in the child's work (Benny, Switzerland)
- Intense eye contact (Elton, USA)

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Personal ethos of caring

What they say:

- “We are very important persons for this time in the child's life. What I think, what I say, what I do, what I live, so that's all important. You can give them images of life. You can give them pictures of how to act, how to interact, yes.
(Benny, Switzerland)
- “I believe in the importance of forging a really strong connection with the child. I try to enter into their world.” (Leon, UK)

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Touch

- Immunity to fear of touching
- With the toddlers: touching, hugging, holding, and speaking gently
- Gentle encompassing
- Resilience – enabled use of touch despite suspicions surrounding them



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Attitudes towards work

Expressions of pleasure and satisfaction from their work with young children.

- "On my morning bus ride I think how happy I am to be going to work in a profession I love." - Reidar, Oslo
- Involvement throughout the day (Leon, UK)
- Non stop interaction except for allotted breaks (Levien, the Netherlands)
- Intense energy (Eli, Israel)

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The Importance of Play

"Playing with the children was an important part of the day. The teachers play not only because they know that this is how the children learn, but also because they enjoy playing. Their eyes glimmer when they stretch out on the floor to join in a construction project (Levien) or toss a ball in an unexpected direction for the toddler to retrieve (Reidar). Jointly with the children they explored the wonders of water, trying out different ways of pouring and seeing what happens (Leon), worked together on a Lego construction (Benny) or played a card game (Eli) at a table, *all engaging with the children as equals.*"
(Brody, 2014)

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Styles of interaction

- child-centeredness
- charisma
- promoting thinking
- emphasis on physical activity
- encouragement of daring acts of physical prowess
- encouraging independence – shrinking their own power and influence to make room for the child's decisions



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Presentation of self

- Dress codes
- Speech codes
- Behavior codes



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Daring and caring

“When a child climbs on a tall chair a man and a woman will see this situation totally differently, regarding fears.”

-Eli, Israel

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What's your perspective?



With permission, Louis Tavecchio, U. of Amsterdam

Risk taking and attachment

- Fathers activate children in risky situations to explore, to take risks, in short – to be active in their environment.
- No differences were found in risk stimulation between girls and boys.
- Fathers provide more emotional support and basic care to girls than to boys.
- The lower the degree of emotional support, the greater the boy's activation score.

Paquette, D., & Dumont, C. (2013). The father-child activation relationship, sex differences, and attachment disorganization in toddlerhood. *Child Development Research*, 2013.

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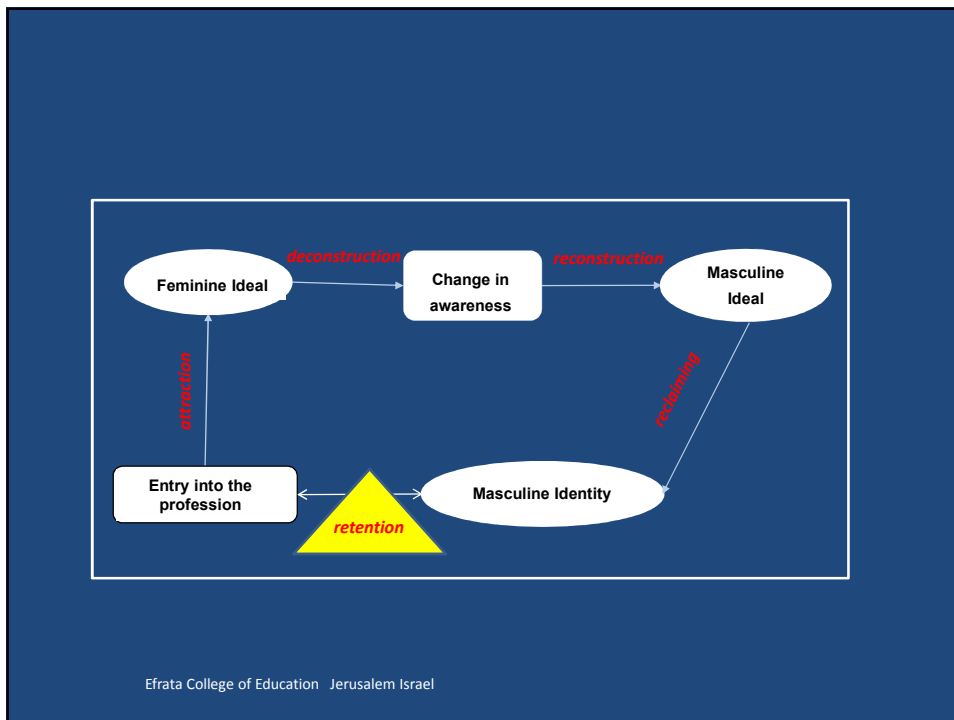
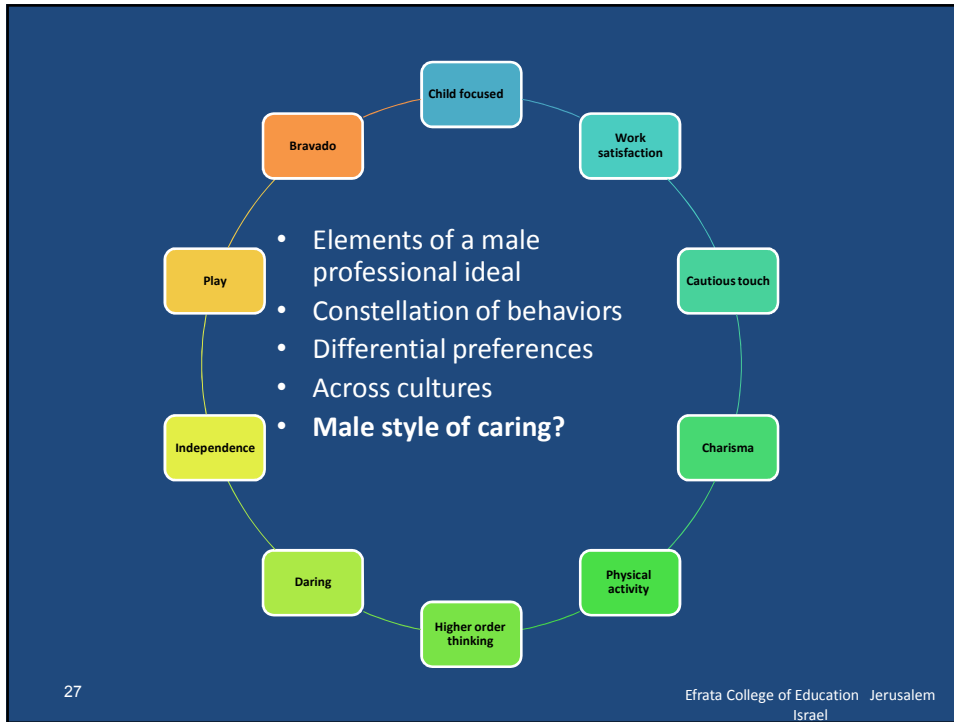
Bravado - toughness

“I was saying, ‘Ok now, look, look, look,’ and I was smiling. And I said, ‘It hurts, but I don't have to cry.’ And I went to the other class to the first aid person and I told them, ‘I can't get it out, could you help me?’ And then after that I talked to the children and said, ‘You see? It was painful but I didn't need to cry, it wasn't that bad. And then I told them a Dutch rhyme: Pijn is fijn, bloed is goed! (Pain is nice, blood is ok!).”

-Levein, the Netherlands

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Take Home Message

- Construction of male identity is central to the nexus of men's career decision making
- Importance of sensitivity towards expressions of male professional identities in its various forms
- Significance of support for helping men find their own voice in ECEC

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“Caring comes naturally to women, and has to be learned by men with great effort.”
(Leon, London)

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Thanks for your attention

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