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 **Tim Rohrmann**

**SOME OPEN QUESTIONS  
ON GENDER IN EARLY CHILDHOOD**



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**Interrelations between children's  
gender and adults' sex in research  
on gender in Early Childhood**

**Dresden international ERASMUS+ workshop  
24<sup>th</sup> march 2015**

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## Some open questions

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What is "gender" about?

Who reinforces gender differences?

- ... parents or peer groups?
- ... adults or children?


How does gender segregation happen?

What is the role of sex/gender of adults?

- parents and professionals
- gendered relations in ECEC settings

How can gender equality be achieved?

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## „sex“ or „gender“?

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Many studies are looking for differences between men and women, or boys and girls.

- Do we talk about gender, or about sex – biological differences?
- Are studies *constructing gender differences* instead of analysing processes of the construction of gender?

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## „sex“ or „gender“?

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Expressions used for the male/female duality differ between languages and countries, and different meanings are connected to these words.

- Some languages use one word – e.g. *kjønn (Norwegian)*, *nem (Hungarian)*, *Geschlecht (German)*. A second word is used for marking “biological” and “social” aspects of male/female duality.
- Other languages use two words – e.g. *sexo/genero (portuguese)*.
- The “sex”/“gender”-division was introduced to the scientific world around 50 years ago in the US psychology/sociology.

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## „sex“ or „gender“?

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- The origin of “gender” is “genus” as a linguistic expression.
- The concept of “gender” has been developed (and criticised) in various theoretical directions, and has also been adapted in political discourse.
- In the last decades, in several countries/languages, the (English) expression “gender” was introduced for expressing social and psychological aspects of the male/female duality.
- At the same time, the use of the expression “gender” has changed. It could be said that today, “gender” is a “catch all” term. Sometimes it is also used for “sex” differences, e.g., “gender” instead of “sex” as a category in study samples, “gender roles” instead of “sex roles”...

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## Parents or peer groups?

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Research has shown the important influence of peers on gender development.

Still, there is few research on interactions between family and peers regarding gender development in the early years.



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## ECEC: adults or children?

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Many ECEC professionals are critical about gender stereotypes and support aims of gender equality.

Nevertheless, gender-stereotyped behavior increases substantially during early childhood.

Some research in ECEC settings points out the active participation of children in the construction of gendered patterns of behavior.

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## ECEC: adults or children?

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### BIKS 3-10 study

In a huge quantitative study, the authors found that ECEC professionals don't play an important role in the development of gender-stereotype behavior of children.

They conclude: If ECEC settings influence gender development, then in a direction towards equality, not towards a reinforcement of stereotypes.

Kuger, Kluczniok, Sechtig & Smidt, 2011, p. 238

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## ECEC: Adults or children?


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### Tandem study:

The Dresden Tandem study presents a more differentiated view on reciprocal influences between adults and children.

Nevertheless, it is said that "the statistical findings appear to be influenced to a greater degree by the gender of the children than that of the ECE workers".

Brandes, Andrä, Röseler & Schneider-Andrich, 2015



Forschungsprojekt zu Frauen und Männern  
in der Elementarpädagogik


 **How does gender segregation happen?**

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Research clearly shows that gender separation increases substantially between 4 and 7 years. But how does it happen, if nobody intends it?



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 **Adults or children?**

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Are these results “truths” about gender development of children? Should we not blame parents and ECEC professionals for reinforcing gender-stereotyped behaviors, because the children themselves want it like that?

Or is it

- an issue of complex, partly unconscious influences and interactions?
- a question of research methodologies?

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## Parents and ECEC professionals

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Can findings from family research be transferred to the relations between ECEC professionals and children?

- Professionals have another role than parents in adult-child-relationships ...
- Professionals are not “substitute mothers” or “substitute fathers” ...
- ... but nevertheless they are seen – and sometimes see themselves – as “public” mothers / fathers.

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## Gender preferences in adult-child-relations

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Research has shown relevant differences between women-girl relations and women-boy relations in ECEC settings.

- An international meta-analysis found more secure attachment relations between females and girls compared to females and boys. (Ahnert, Pinquart & Lamb 2006)
- A huge german nationwide study on quality of ECEC found a better quality of adult-child-relationships among women and girls, compared to boys. (NUBBEK study 2014)

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## Gender preferences in adult-child-relations

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### **NUBBEK study:**

„Practitioners report more often a better relational quality with girls (...). Children with high practitioner-child-relation quality showed highest scores of receptive vocabulary in German, of communicative competences (...) and social-emotional competences, and lowest scores of problem behavior “.

Especially boys profit from a high quality of practitioner-child-relations.

Mayer et al. 2014, S. 812f., *translation T.R.*

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## Gender preferences in adult-child-relations


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- For secure attachment between female practitioners and children are group processes of specific relevance (Ahnert 2010, Rohrmann 2009)
- Recent studies give first hints on a special importance of male professionals for boys in early childhood (Tandem-Studie Dresden, Brandes et al. 2013; Innsbrucker Wirkungsstudie, Aigner et al. 2013)

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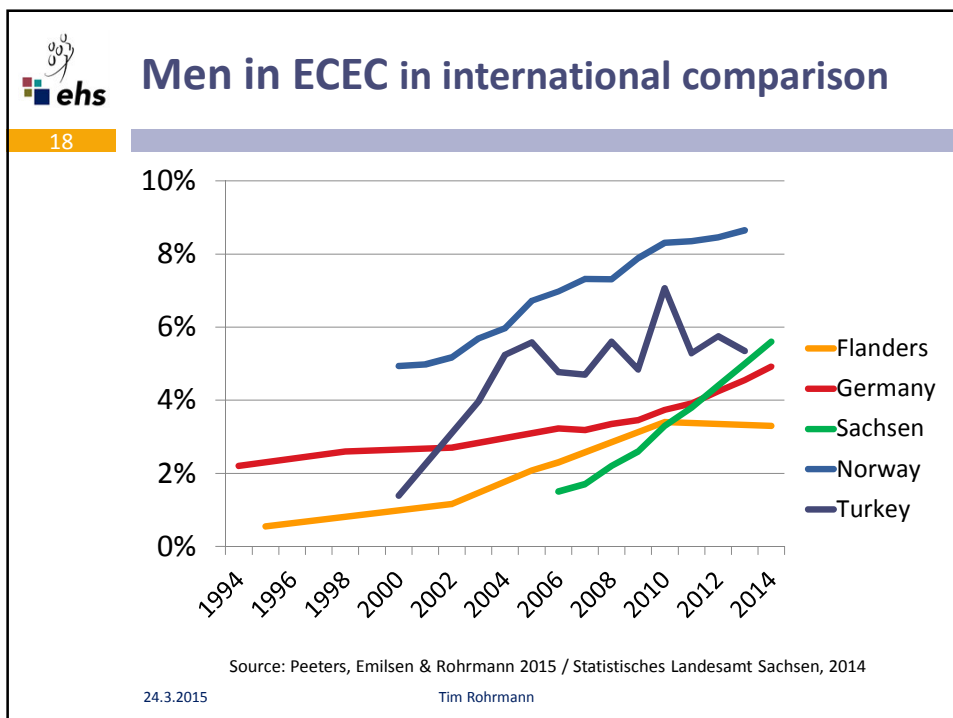


 **Gender preferences in adult-child-relations**

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- What are the reasons for better relations between female professionals and girls?
- How do individual and group processes work together?
- Would more male professionals make a difference, and if yes, why?

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## Is it gender – or age?

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Several studies show relevant differences between younger and older workers – or professionals with more or less vocational experiences.

If younger, less experienced men work together with older and/or experienced female colleagues, differences might be attributed to gender instead of age.

Moreover, young female workers might be more willing to adapt to established customs in ECEC institutions than young male workers, even if they dislike them.

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## How can gender equality be achieved?

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For the work against gender stereotypes and the aim of achieving better gender equality in ECEC, it is often agreed that two things are relevant and necessary:

- self reflection of professionals
- more men in ECEC.

Is this true – does it work?

There is nearly no evaluation of these factors available.

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## How can gender equality be achieved?

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### **BiKS-3-10 study:**

Self reflection and participation of practitioners in trainings / further education leads to better educational conditions for boys and girls. This can contribute to a compensation of gender-stereotyped differences.

(Kuger, Smidt & Sechtig 2014)

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## How can gender equality be achieved?

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### **Evaluation of the Norwegian action plan:**

“A higher proportion of men increases the probability of a positive assessment of efforts put into gender equality work (...). The causal relationship however, is uncertain. Does increased gender awareness result in a larger proportion of men? Or does a larger proportion of men lead to increased gender awareness? Other factors than the proportion of men, such as size, public/private and age have to be taken into consideration.”

(Hoel & Johannesen 2010)

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