

Mousena, Eleni & Trifeni, Sidiropoulou (2018).

Contemporary challenges and the rise of men in early childhood education and care in Greece.

Paper presented on the 28th EECERA Annual Conference, 30.8.2018, Budapest, Hungary.

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to investigate the reasons why, in recent years, more and more males choose to study and work in Early Childhood Education and Care. Is this a result of the prolonged economic crisis and unemployment that exist or is it a real desire for young people to work in this profession? Rising men pedagogues in ECEC is one of the goals set by the European Union (ET, 2020), which has sparked the scientific debate on this issue (Peeters, 2007). The theoretical framework for this study draws upon current theories of sexism and professionalism in ECEC (Farquhar et al, 2006), and upon studies on the conceptualization of the role of preschool professionals (Oberhuemer, 1999). The research was carried out by structured interviews with two focus groups. The first included male students in ECEC and the second one male workers in preschools settings. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and negotiated time of the interview. They took part voluntarily and had the opportunity to withdraw at any time. The names of the participants were replaced by pseudonyms. The results show that young people choose the profession out of real interest, rather than because of unemployment. This also shows, that the social perceptions about female and male professions have changed. Increasing men in ECEC should continue to account for, at least 3% of professionals, which is the Barcelona target. Furthermore, Universities and the state should take action to inform young people in choosing that profession.

Keywords

preschool, workforce, men, social perceptions, economic crisis

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Contemporary Challenges and the Rise of Men in Early Childhood Education and Care in Greece

Budapest, 30 August 2018

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Greece

Total area: 131.957 km²

Population: 10.8 million (Census 2011)

Capital city: Athens



Structure of the presentation

1. Part 1: Introduction
 - The purpose and the research questions
 - Method and ethics of the research
 - Limitations of the research
2. Part 2: Literature review
3. Part 3: The research
 - Data analysis and discussion
 - Conclusion and proposals



The purpose and the research questions of the study

- The purpose of this research was to investigate the reasons why, in recent years in Greece, more and more men choose to study and work in Early Childhood Education and Care.
- Is this a result of the prolonged economic crisis and unemployment that exist or is it a real desire for young people to work in this profession?
- What incentives have encouraged male students and employees to choose ECEC studies?
- What are their relationships with students, colleagues, children and parents?
- What do they expect from the profession?

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Method and ethics of the research

- The research was carried out by structured interviews with **two focus groups**.
- We have interviewed face to face **12 men**.
- The first group included (9) male students in ECEC Department of University of West Attica. They were the newcomers, the **1st semester students**.
- The second one included (3) male workers in preschools settings of the Athens area. They had a professional experience of **10 to 20 years**.
- Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and negotiated the time of the interview. They took part voluntarily and had the opportunity to withdraw at any time.
- They responded to questions about their **incentives, feelings, and expectations** from the profession.
- The names of the participants are replaced by **codes**.

Limitations of the study

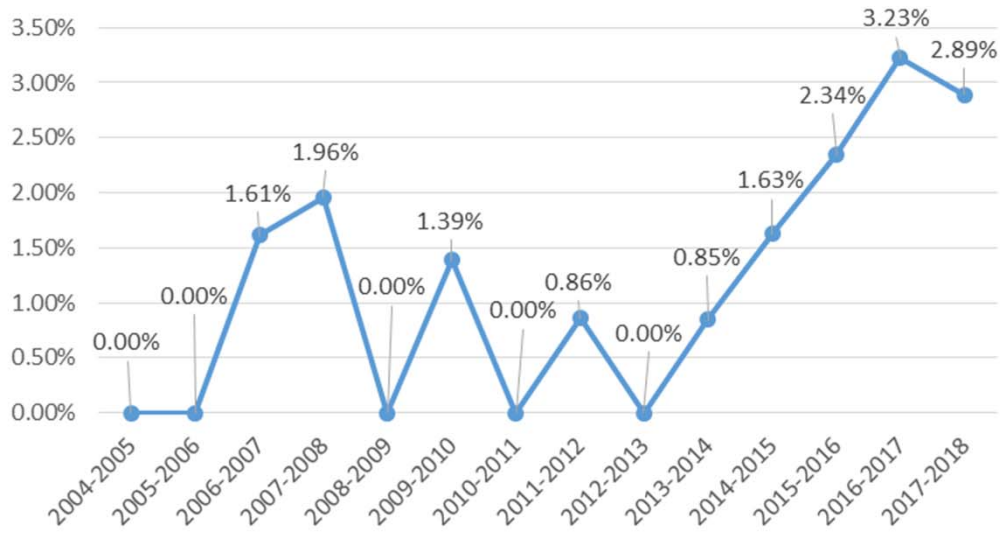
- The sample of **students**: they were not from all ECEC Departments of the Universities
- The sample of male **workers**: they were only from Athens area not from the whole Greece
- Female exception: **women** did not participate to this research, although their values and experiences would be valuable

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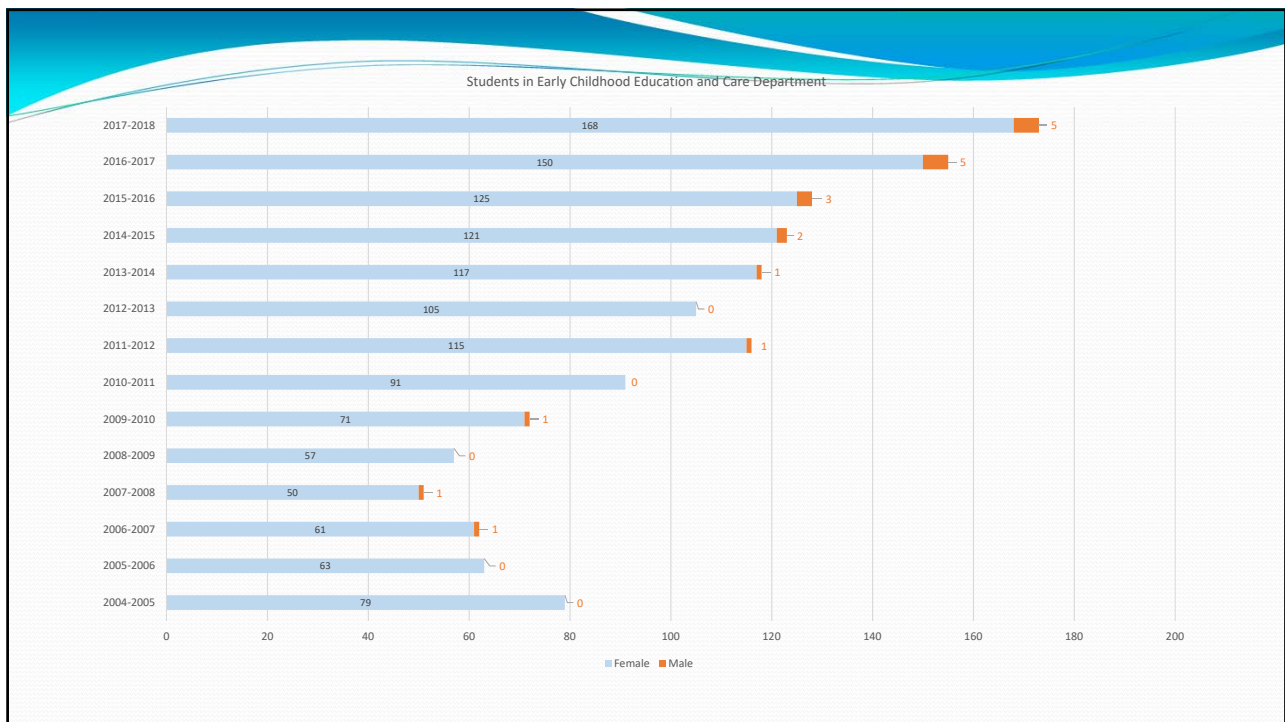
Students in Early Childhood Education and Care Department, University of West Attica

Academic Year	Students	Female	Male	Female %	Male %
2004-2005	79	79	0	100,00%	0,00%
2005-2006	63	63	0	100,00%	0,00%
2006-2007	62	61	1	98,39%	1,61%
2007-2008	51	50	1	98,04%	1,96%
2008-2009	57	57	0	100,00%	0,00%
2009-2010	72	71	1	98,61%	1,39%
2010-2011	91	91	0	100,00%	0,00%
2011-2012	116	115	1	99,14%	0,86%
2012-2013	105	105	0	100,00%	0,00%
2013-2014	118	117	1	99,15%	0,85%
2014-2015	123	121	2	98,37%	1,63%
2015-2016	128	125	3	97,66%	2,34%
2016-2017	155	150	5	96,77%	3,23%
2017-2018	173	168	5	97,11%	2,89%

Male Students Percentage in Early Childhood Education



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Greece: Unemployment of tertiary graduates

- The tertiary attainment rate is **high**, but
- the employment rate of recent graduates is **low** leading to a significant outflow of highly skilled people.
http://ec.europa.eu/education/content/highlights-country-analysis_en
- In Greece it is **49.9 % in 2015**, and is very far away from the **EU-28 average at 81.9 %**. (EU, ET, Monitor 2016).

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Current challenges

- Social diversity and multiculturalism
- Role model changes, stereotypes
- New family models: homosexual marriages, sole parents, etc
- Financial crisis and limited resources
- Inequalities at work, payments, higher positions, administrative level

- A big challenge for the future, in the current economic climate, is the **gender balance** of the ECEC workforce and the **promotion of their qualifications.**

Literature review



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It is accepted, in general, that men should play a greater part in the care of their own children, but being employed to Early Childhood Education and Care is controversial.

- The ECEC workforce in Europe is currently homogeneous in terms of gender and ethnicity (OECD, 2006).
- Moss (2003) states that, gendering is related to the children's age: the younger the child, the higher the gendering.
- According to Cameron (2001) female workforce reproduces its own patterns in recruitment and training.
- A primary reason for the limited number of men in ECEC is that it is based on the concept of *mothercare* (Cameron, Moss and Owen (1999)).
- According to Peeters, (2003) it is difficult to encourage young men to consider a job in ECEC, which they regard as female at a time when they are developing their self-identity.

- A second-chance career suggests that some men may waste years in jobs they dislike, because they did not know they liked working with children (Peeters, 2005).
- Many studies argue that not only must men embrace their roles as caregivers and educators of young children, but also **women must examine their own beliefs and attitudes** toward men in ECEC (United Nations Children's Fund, 1995).
- The number of male staff will increase to a point where the culture of ECEC is **free of the biases**, scrutiny and the commonly held assumptions about men (Piburn (2006)).

Literature review

Farquhar (2006) underlines the **reasons** why ECEC is female dominated

1. ECEC has been a site for feminist activism since the late 1970s.
2. ECEC work is commonly viewed as an extension of the role of women as mothers.
3. Women are perceived to be doing a perfectly good job.
4. Men who enter to ECEC work are often thought of as men who are not “real” men.
5. ECEC teaching work is a low-pay and low-status occupation.

Major barriers to male involvement

- Stereotypes
- Child abuse
- Lack of support
- Low social status
- Absence of male peer group

Emergent thoughts

Statements

1. School is a small society
2. Democracy starts at school (Dewey)
3. Society is changing
4. Learning is experience rather than information
5. The ECEC curriculum content promotes equality and solidarity.

Challenges

1. Into ECEC settings children see the feminine option of the society
2. Democracy in ECEC is not representative
3. ECEC society is changing so slowly
4. Pre-school learning is incomplete due to gender imbalance
5. ECEC experience does not validate the curriculum content.

The Greek case – A split system of ECEC

Ages 2 months – 4 or 5 years:
Children Centers (CC)
–Ministry of Interior

Ages 4 or 5 - 6 years:
Pre-primary schools (Pps) –
Ministry of Education

1. Parents are entitled to nine (9) months of maternity leave.
2. Children Centers and pre-primary schools are both **state and private**

Data analysis

- Incentives
- Feelings
- Expectations

Incentives for ECEC studies- 1st choice?

St-1: It was my second choice, initially I wanted to be a primary school teacher, but I did not regret it, I just found that **I am better suited** to younger children.

St-1: I did not know that there was **no unemployment** in this area, I chose it because I thought diversity would be interesting.

St-2: It was not my first choice, **on the way I just liked this**, initially I could not imagine myself being so busy with the kids, now I'm doing well with the kids.

St-3: It was not my first choice, at first I did not expect to like it, but after attending the lessons, **I find that I like it. I was ashamed at first**, now all is well, I've outgrown it.

St-4: I chose it out of **genuine interest** in this subject, it helps me dealing with children, their needs, and everything ... I have a more **general picture** of how a child develops. Because I am a teacher of special education...

St-5: I chose it because I knew that with this degree you can **also do a master's degree in speech therapy.**

Incentives...

St-5: No, **I do not do it for the labor market**, I want it because I myself have Asperger's and some things I can understand a little deeper than somebody else, I want to try to help these guys.

St-3: It was not my first choice, I had not thought of working there at all, but then when I looked at it and learned how open it was to the labor market, I was pleased that there would be little unemployment, **I found it very positive.**

St-5: When I was at night high school my professor helped me choose what I wanted to study. I remember talking and I told him **"I want to be a teacher, it's my life's dream."**

Worker-1: I chose to study pedagogy. Although our department, when I was studying, was called *Nursery Studies*, I looked at it a little more to understand that it was not related to a paramedical profession but that it was related to pedagogy. **Time has made me happy**, I've been working for **15 years** in the profession and I am not getting bored, I do not want to change anything.

Worker-2: To choose my studies, I was helped by the teachers at KESYP, I did not know what I wanted, I definitely **wanted something interesting.** With children you get this, I am pleased to have chosen it.

Previous experience from ECEC or not...

- **St-1:** I had no experience with young children, only with a little girl, if I had now I would know better ...
- **St-2:** My own experience from pre-school as a child was **not bad**, I went, I had friendships, there were times I liked and moments I did not like.
- **St-5:** I first studied **nursing**, I worked seven years in a nursing home, I did not like dealing with people in a raw manner, "Mr Mitsos died, another got a turn ..." the nurses were saying this in front of them. "The old men do not understand," they were saying. **Here it is ok, I like it more, the children tell the truth, and there is no lies in their eyes.**
- **Worker-1:** I started studying **Theology**, I went only one day and never returned. In the second year I chose to study **pre-school pedagogy.** When I started I said I would finish it, I liked it as a field.

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Feelings: Experience of studies

- **St-1:** I feel **great**, I was a bit **nervous at first**, how can I do it, it's not a common profession for men, yet I'm comfortable with it and I feel **fine**.
- **St-2:** Our teachers prepare us well and give us advice on internships at kindergartens, and they mostly tell us to **respect children and their needs**.
- **St-1:** At the beginning of my studies **I was like a fish out of the water**, it was a little strange at first and I did not know how people like me in the field would be confronted by my teachers, or even by my fellow students. I was **alone** and the adjustment was difficult.
- **St-3:** With my fellow students I have a **very good relationship**, they do not treat me as a stranger or look at me strangely, except on the first day when I was **alone**, otherwise they are very friendly.
- **St-2:** I feel that I like it, and initially I did not expect that I would like it **to this extent**. I realized it more after the internship when I went to a Children Center.



Feelings...

- **St-5:** In the first year of my studies I felt quite **uncomfortable**, not by the confrontation by the teachers, but more from the fellow students, they looked at us intensely as if they were asking why are you here.
- **St-4:** Sorry, I see even the current lesson notes are structured as if there are **no men**, only the female sex is represented.
- **St-6:** It is ugly that some teachers say **girls** do this, **girls** do the other, it is ugly, and it is impossible not to see us, like the fly in the milk we are.
- **Worker-1:** While studying, although we were few men, we were **conscious**, that is, there was no one just to say that he was in a school. We attended the lessons and proceeded normally. There were **5-6 men overall** in the Department, in all semesters.

Feelings: Working with children

St-1: Working with children is not immediately possible. They are **not accustomed to seeing men** in the kindergarten, but after a while they have an inexplicable enthusiasm, and this helps me even more to do my job. Surely it takes patience, as there are many children.

St-2: Most boys approach me, they feel more **comfortable** with me and tell me all the experiences you can imagine.

St-1: In the beginning they did not call me with my name, but with other names, they called me **grandmother, grandfather**, maybe other people who were missing, but now they call me M.

St-2: We go with P. to the nurseries, as the educators have told us, the children are very different with our presence there, and **we draw the children's attention more.** Perhaps because there are usually female pedagogues and when a man suddenly appears, this **diversity** drives them more.

Feelings: With children...

St-6: The children are near me, I try through **observation** to understand what they like, and they also try to understand me, they do a lot of things and wait to see my reactions.

St-5: I work in a camp, I am one of the good teachers, I have **codes of communication** with the children. The kids prefer me when we play a theatrical play ... we have made an improvised game that we liked so much, we called it "faster".

St-5: The kids come near me, they want to play, to be embraced, to be their airplane, to be their donkey, **with the kids I become their play.** Today, seven children had been on my back and one wanted to sit first and the others never allowed it, and I say "guys when I step up we'll all fall together!" **Children are happiness.**

Worker-2: With children I go along very well, they are very good kids, we play together, I love them, I **keep rules**, I'm not all the time hugs and kisses.

- **St-1:** In practice, in Children Centers, at first I did not know what to do and how. **I just watched the kids and smiled.** I had good associates there, thank God, and I managed to work harmoniously.
- **St-5:** Teachers at Children Centers are pretty friendly and let me do things with the sand I had. I had sand in a bag and I had toys with the kids. But I have met pedagogues who have **forbidden** me to do many activities with children. **Maybe because I'm a man and they see it differently.**
- **St-3:** I have a great time with kids, I like to talk to them, play with them, feed them, change them, **change diapers to several children, and I'm in my fourth semester of study.**

Feelings: Collaboration with in service pedagogues

- **St-1:** When I went to MITERA, in the next semester, which I think was **my best experience**, because there I realized how it was to take care of children and at the same time to work and play with them.
- **St-2:** In MITERA I did more and I **realized the practical part** of my studies. In nurseries the pedagogues told me you are a man, do not change diapers, do that, do the rest. There is a mentality of this sort.



Feelings: Collaboration and prejudice

Worker-1: The workshops at MITERA have treated me in the best way. Bili was there, I was in his unit. **There is a solidarity**, not in the bad sense, in the sense of support. And if I see a man I will support him.

Worker-1: The female educators did not give me kids at first to change their diaper, Bili said why not, you can change the kids' diapers. I did it. I don't think it is nice to **discriminate**, does the father not change a diaper like a mother does?

Worker-3: In the nursery workshops I had experienced it, in relation to the younger children. That is, they always took care to put me in a bigger group, because that's where they were the liveliest, so as a man I would impose immediately.

Feelings: Parents

Worker-1: With regards to the parents in the infantile department, **the pedagogues** were trying to tell them that they would be among older children, that they felt bad that they had a male pedagogue and should apologize to the parents, that they had a poor care of an infant, that the man did not look like a woman, that mentality was there.

Worker-3: Parents never raised the issue, this was what educators thought 17-18 years ago, the people who are now retired.

Feelings: Parents...

- **Worker-2:** I have not felt anything peculiar, I do not see any difference compared to my colleagues. In informative meetings with parents my colleagues talk about organizational and social issues, while I focus on pedagogical, theoretical issues.
- **Worker-1:** I have been working since 2003, I have never experienced different behavior from parents because I was a man. I believe that if this happens, it is because the supervisor of the Children Center has not handled it correctly, i.e. he feels he needs to apologize for some reason or to explain the paradox, so the parent is just whispering and saying what is going on here? Why are they trying to tell me that she will have a male educator?

Feelings: Stereotypes expression

St-1: There were **stereotypical views**, not from my family but more from my social circle, it seemed strange to them, my friends were surprised and many said "are you sure you can do it because it is difficult".

St-6: There is **no discrimination in MITERA** ... they asked me if I ever changed the diapers of my own children and told them no, so they started showing me in order for me to learn the process.

St-2: I have not felt any prejudice among the educators. They are friendly with me, of course, it makes them feel like I chose these studies, but up there, that is they **have a very good level**. I personally have a very good experience.

St-3: My friends are impressed. At first I was a little bit concerned because there are some **prejudices**, but I overcame it completely, **I am fine saying it freely**.

St-2: Some friends have expressed a **bias**, but I did not pay attention, the girls say bravo. I am of the opinion that no work is a shame, so I do not care much about what others say.

Stereotypes...

- **Worker-2:** From my friends, I had some strange reactions, because **they are Cretans**, they are of a different culture compared to Athens...
- **St-5:** The pedagogues in Children Centers said to me: "You will go get us **some coffees**, and I said, I'm not here to bring you coffees, I'm here to spend three hours with the kids, that's our workshop. She looked at me and said, "**Well, you men are useless.**"
- **Worker-1:** I never felt strange, many said, "how did you feel with 80 women, did you not feel uncomfortable?", but I never felt that and my fellow students never had a weird treatment against men, there were **more advantages than disadvantages**.
- **Worker-1:** The second stereotype that existed was that if you go to a baby section because you have a **stronger voice**, as a man, you will scare the babies, you cannot embrace them like the female mother pedagogue, that's what the mindset was like.
- **Worker-2:** The only surprise I have felt is by colleagues. Oh, you came here, a man, I do not believe it, and **they show me as an attraction** to all the staff of the Nursery, look at this man that came here! Never from parents, only educators see me as strange.

Expectations: Pedagogues, managers and owners

- **St-1:** For the future, I think of two things, one is to open **my own Children Center** and the other to work in a public kindergarten, the first one is more interesting to me.
- **St-3:** For the future, I'm thinking of opening **my own Children Center**, and I want to work as a teacher, but to have my own kindergarten is what I want more.
- **St-5:** I would like to play the theatrical play in the special education, I would like **to have a place for myself and where all children and those with special needs can come.**
- **Worker-1:** Perhaps later on, as a progression, I intend to take up the **management post**, in the kindergarten, that is, the head of a department, **where apart from the administrative duties you also have pedagogical duties.** I would be more interested in this than going to an office and dealing with purely administrative duties.

Expectations: changing the agenda

- **Worker-3:** It is good to talk about other matters too, let's not just talk about food, the parents know and they ask, we educators **should focus more on child development issues**, young people do it.
- **Worker-1:** It is good to see **parents as collaborators rather than clients.**
- **Worker-2:** The School has helped us to **not make pedagogical discounts** when applying the knowledge we have acquired in our profession.
- **Worker-2:** There are no training sessions. They should be done more often. Previously it happened more often, it has to do with **the crisis, the funding has been cut.**
- **Worker-1:** I see the **increase** in male sex in the seminars, previously in a group of 1000 people the 50 were men, now in a group of 1000 people the 150 are men, but they are not only preschool educators attending them, they are also teachers, and psychologists and others who are more interested in the preschool age.

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Conclusions

- The results show that young people choose the profession **out of real interest, rather than because of unemployment.**
- Financial crisis has affected the field through **many cuts** in staff, materials and seminars.
- **Male** students feel fine with their choice, although they initially felt uncomfortable.
- **Children** show enthusiasm to male pedagogues.
- **Parents** are open to working men in Children Centers.
- The real interest of men in studying ECEC shows that social perceptions of women's and men's professions **have begun to change.**
- **Women** pedagogues in Children Centers express prejudices about the male workforce. Also, the students' **friends** are surprised by this choice.
- Somehow **two forces** are distinguished. A centrifugal force that leads to change and a defensive force that prevents change.
- Due to the current social and economic challenges, we hope that **the power of change will prevail**, and so the great challenge of gender balance in ECEC will have a positive development.

Proposals /What can be done

- Emphasis on promoting ECEC as an interesting and valuable profession for both men and women
- Information to the public about the benefits for children, colleagues, parents, setting and profession
- Data collection and research
- Recruitment or active invitation of males: photos, funds, training programs, sharing best practices, mentoring programs, ongoing support
- Changing terminology in the field: gender, definition of diversity
- Media, Advertising and promotion
- Status of pay

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Thank you for your attention!

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