

Brody, David (2019). **Hybridised agency among male early childhood workers as a factor in their career decisions.** Paper presented on the 29th EECERA Annual Conference, 21.8.2019, Thessaloniki, Greece.

Abstract

This study aims to understand the agentic behaviours of men in ECEC. Agency theory has been applied to career decision making in teaching (Cochran-Smith et al., 2012; Smith, 2011), and thus holds promise as a lens through which men's careers in ECEC may be productively examined. Anzaldúa's (1987) concept of new mestiza provides a theoretical foundation for this study. Bandura (2006) proposed the agency as a construct to explain how people influence their future. Feminist perspectives, such as Mahmood (2011) and McNay (2013) emphasize resistance as an agentic characteristic. Anzaldúa (1987) refers to mestiza as negotiation between cultural and marginalized identities which may be conflictual, thus creating a hybrid space. A qualitative hermeneutic paradigm was chosen to reveal participants' unique blend of male and female agentic styles responding to challenges of a gender normed profession. Methodology entails life histories of three men who chosen the ECEC profession. Methods include a narrative interview and drawing a longitudinal storyline. Anonymity of the participants was guaranteed. IRB approval was attained. The men's status incongruity resulting from choosing "women's work" framed career decision-making and lead to construction of hybridized agency. Each man constructed agency bordering on traditional male and female typologies, thus maintaining their masculinity while engaging in the caring work. These findings reconceptualise agency among male ECEC workers as balancing the contradiction between masculinity and a commitment to the ethos of caring. These findings engender sensitivity among ECEC leaders regarding needs of men who choose the profession.

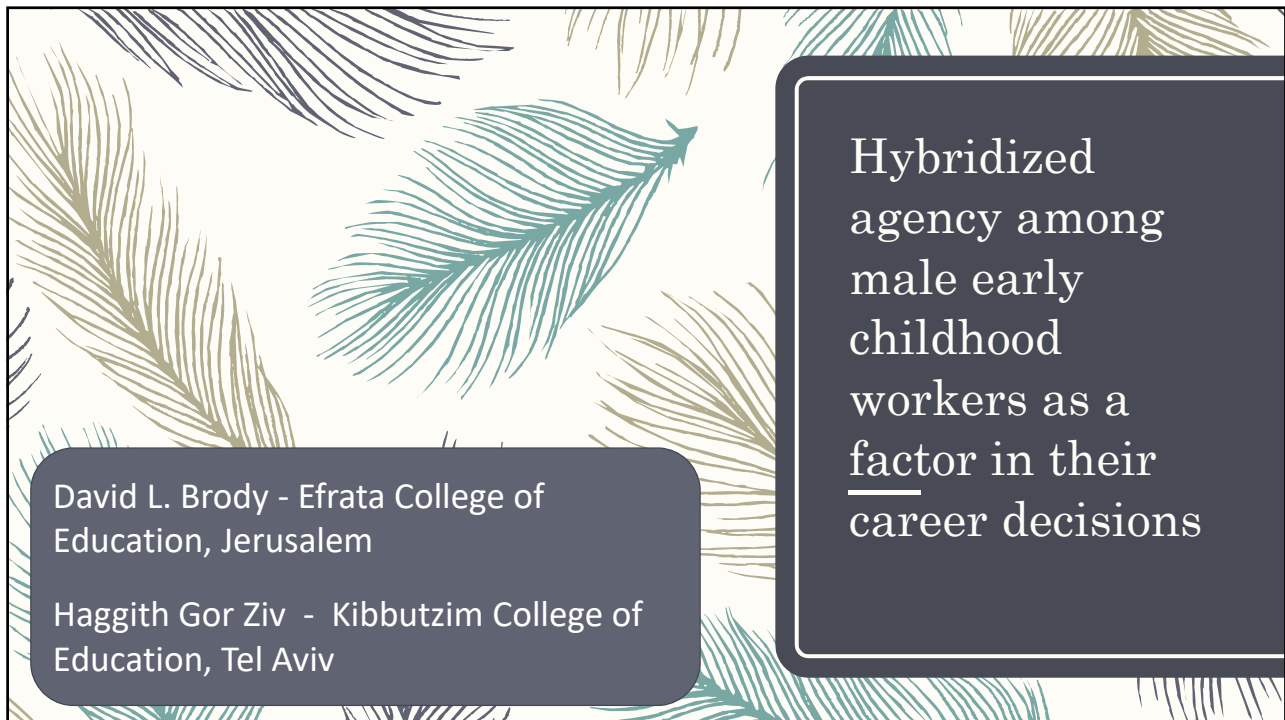
Keywords

agency, men in ECEC, masculinities, career decisions, mestiza

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Hybridized agency among male early childhood workers as a factor in their career decisions

What is agency and why does it matter?

Bandura (2006): How people function and deal with life circumstances.

- Intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness, and self-reflectiveness



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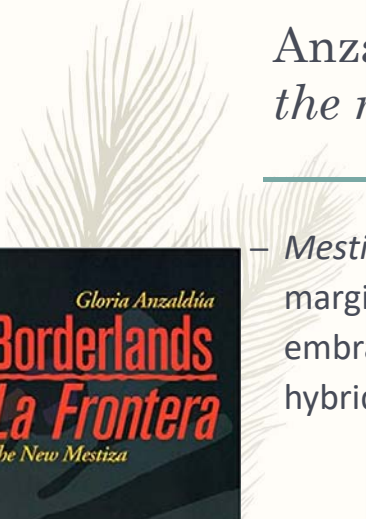
Little, Snyder, and Wehmeyer (2006): Distinction between agentic and non-agentic people

- *Agentic traits: autonomy and self-determination, high aspirations, perseverance, learns from failures, and views challenges as opportunities*
- *Non-agentic traits: extra personal forces determine actions, low aspirations, and feelings of helplessness*

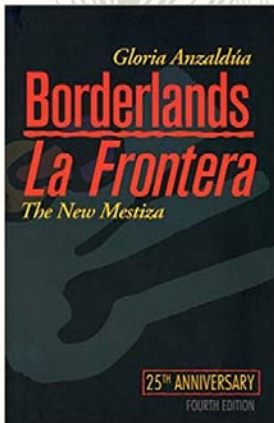


Feminist theories of agency

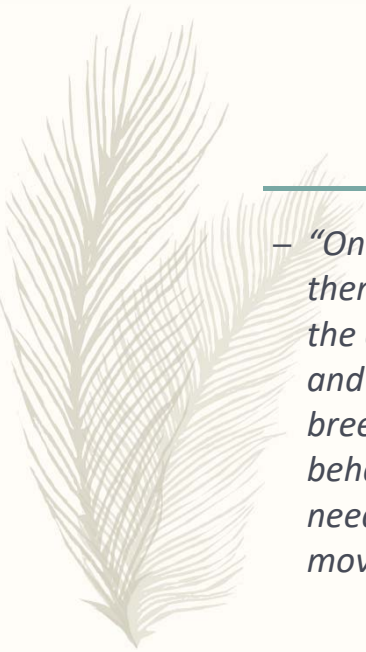
- Conventional definitions of agency seem male oriented
- Female alternatives to identify agency among women
- Harstock (1998): women find agency through telling their own narratives
- Abrams (1999): women find agency through resisting patriarchy in society
- Mahmood (2011): subversive responses in oppressive regimes
- Rozmarin (2018): personal agency as the process of renewing one's wellbeing, integrating individual and societal change.



Anzaldúa (1987): Hybridized agency, *the new mestiza*



- *Mestiza*: negotiating between two or more cultural and marginalized identities that are conflictual. This involves embracing each of the clashing identities, thereby creating hybrid borderline space where the individual functions

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- *“Only gay men have had the courage to expose themselves to the woman inside them and to challenge the current masculinity. I’ve encountered a few scattered and isolated gentle straight men, the beginnings of a new breed, they are confused, and entangled with sexist behaviors that they have not been able to eradicate. We need a new masculinity and the new man needs a movement” (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 106).*

Why do men stay in ECEC?

- Men in ECEC live in a borderland created by their compromised identity.
- Society tells them that they have chosen the wrong profession, thus questioning their masculinity.
- Nonetheless many who enter ECEC choose to remain.
- This study asks the question:– Why do they remain? and seeks to examine the role of hybridized agency (as Anzaldua defines it) in these men’s career decisions.

Methodology



- Five year follow up study on my research involving men who were veteran ECEC educators.
- In depth narrative interview followed by a semi-structured interview
- Storyline drawing
- Data analysis: thematic analysis based on grounded theory

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	Liam	Rolfe	Eitan
Country	UK	Norway	Israel
Training	2-year certificate	M.Ed in ECEC	BEd in ECEC MA unrelated field
Years employed in ECEC	17	13	12
Ages of children taught	Infants	Toddlers through age 5	Ages 4 and 5
Family status	Married, 1 child	Single	Married, 4 children
Age at time of interview	46	33	42
Job at time of interview	Nursery caregiver, team leader	Assistant manager, large day care center	Initiator and manager of science kindergarten

Findings: case studies with a focus on *mestiza* - hybridized agency



– Liam



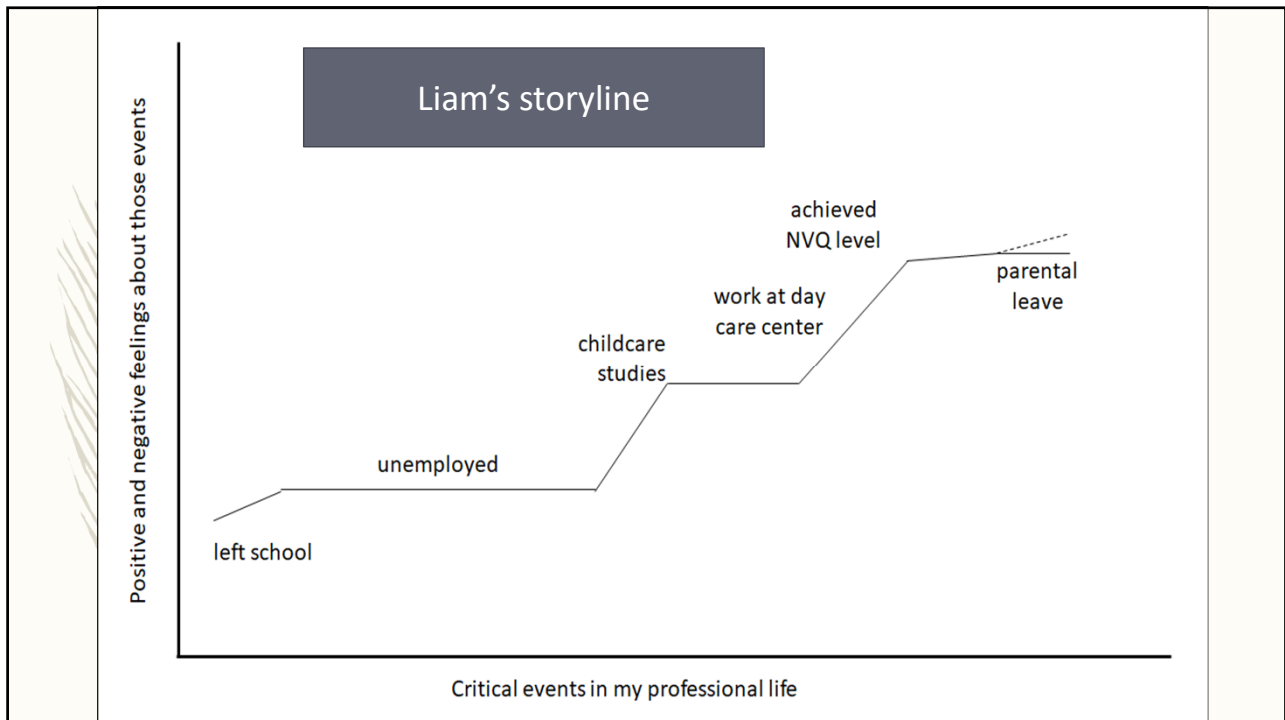
– Rolfe



– Eitan



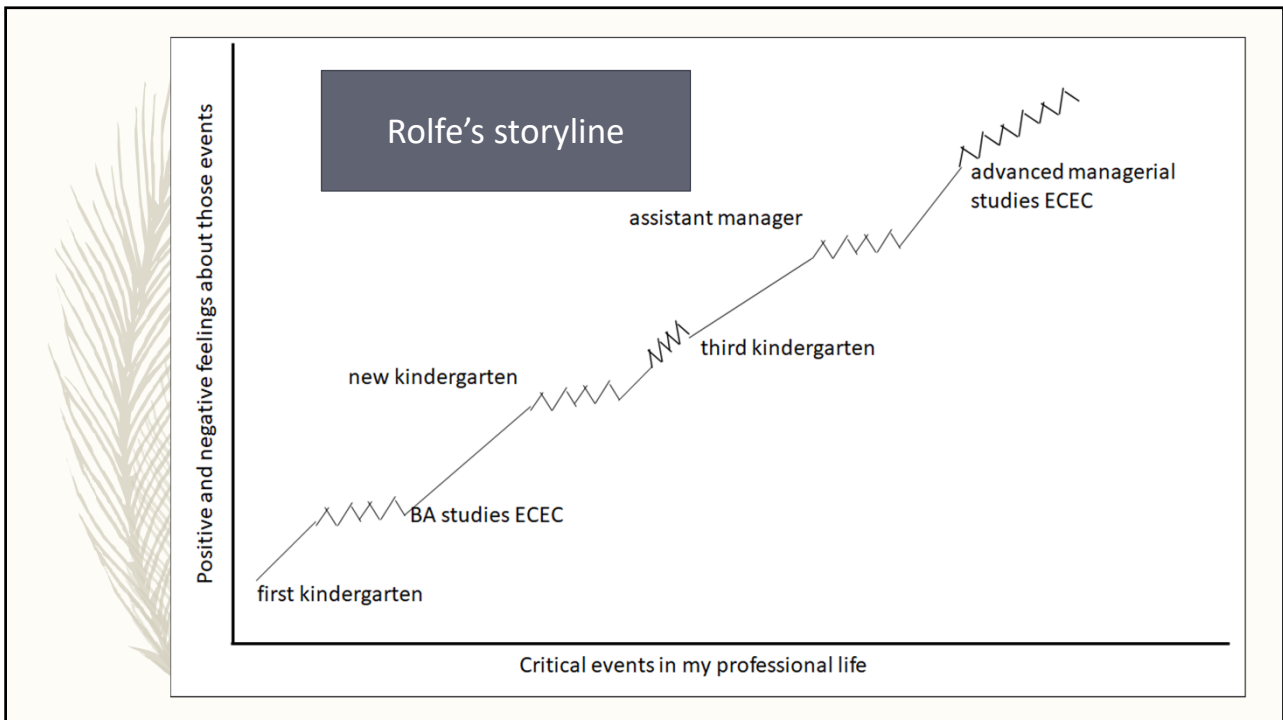
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Liam: Relational decision making

- Commitment to children, fellow workers, community, and immediate family
- Personal and collective agency involving discrete actions based on sincere responsibility for colleagues at work and for the community as a whole: temporary deputy manager for the summer, union rep, political action to resist closure of center.
- Resists societal masculinity norms by choosing the role of nursery caregiver and then leaving his job after 17 years to care for his own daughter
- His agentic *mestiza* interweaves 'male performativity' with a more 'female emphasis on caring.'

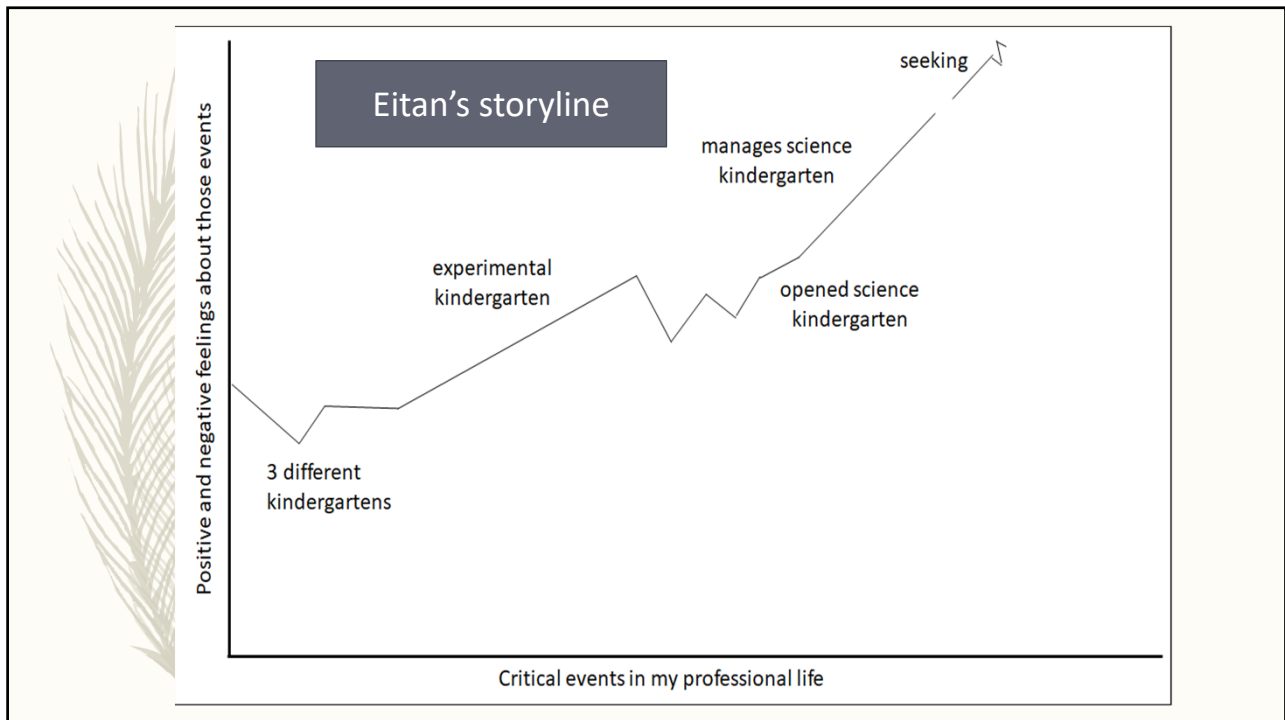
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Rolfe: Negotiating caring with children and with adults.

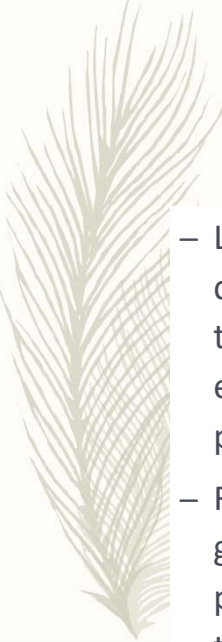
- Teacher 'on the floor' vs. managerial role (managing fortuity)
- Negotiates male element of promotion with female caring in a relational managerial style
- Self-awareness and intentionality
- Awareness of complexity of his own growth over time (zig zag lines)
- Norwegian ethos of gender equality contextualizes his promotion based on merit and not male patriarchy.
- His *mestiza* involves applying the ethos of caring to both child care and to managerial roles

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Eitan: Patriarchal initiative with concern for young children.

- Career characterized by initiative; 'start-up' mentality combined with a deep commitment to working directly with children
- Male agentic traits: Goal setting, creating opportunities, initiating purposeful action, using available resources, hopefulness, persuasion and influence
- Female agentic trait: motivation to improve education for young children across the country, genuine concern for the well being of young children.
- His *mestiza* maintains a focus on child welfare and education to a larger playing field achieved through initiative.



Variations in agentic *mestiza*: personal preferences, workplace circumstances, and surrounding culture.

- Liam resisted traditional gender norms by choosing ECEC. He chose to remain in the infant room eschewing promotion yet taking responsibility for his colleagues' wellbeing, and eventually rejecting the 'breadwinner' male role by exiting the profession to care for his child.
- Rolfe slide into his job in ECEC within a supportive cultural of gender equality. He questioned leaving the children in favor of promotion, and transferred his caring from children to the teachers under his supervision.



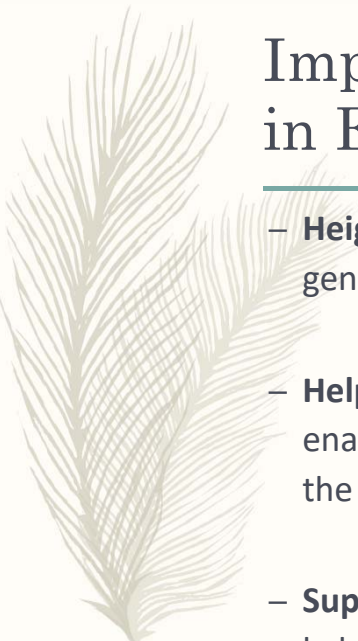
Variations in agentic *mestiza*: personal preferences, workplace circumstances, and surrounding culture.

- Eitan resisted militaristic patriarchal norms by choosing ECEC. He missed extended contact with children as manager of the science kindergarten, and was driven to improve science education for a wider child population.



Living in a gender borderland

- Men in ECEC function in a female work environment.
- They confront a gender binary reality: need to construct and preserve their masculinity while engaging in caring functions required by the profession.
- Each man balances the two by creating their own ‘in-between’ space, their own *mestiza*.
- This hybrid agency allows for coexistence between the two social fields.



Implications for retention of men in ECEC

- **Heighten awareness** that men in ECEC are living in a gender borderland.
- **Help them construct** a hybridized identity, which will enable them to negotiate their masculine identity with the female territory they have chosen to work in.
- **Support** these men to **feel comfortable** with their hybridized identity in this borderland existence.

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