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University of Applied Sciences

Men in early childhood education: Understanding barriers, motivations and solutions

**Special Interest Group - Gender
European Early Childhood Education Research Association**

Dr. Serena Haines

5 March 2026

Competence Centre for Mental Health

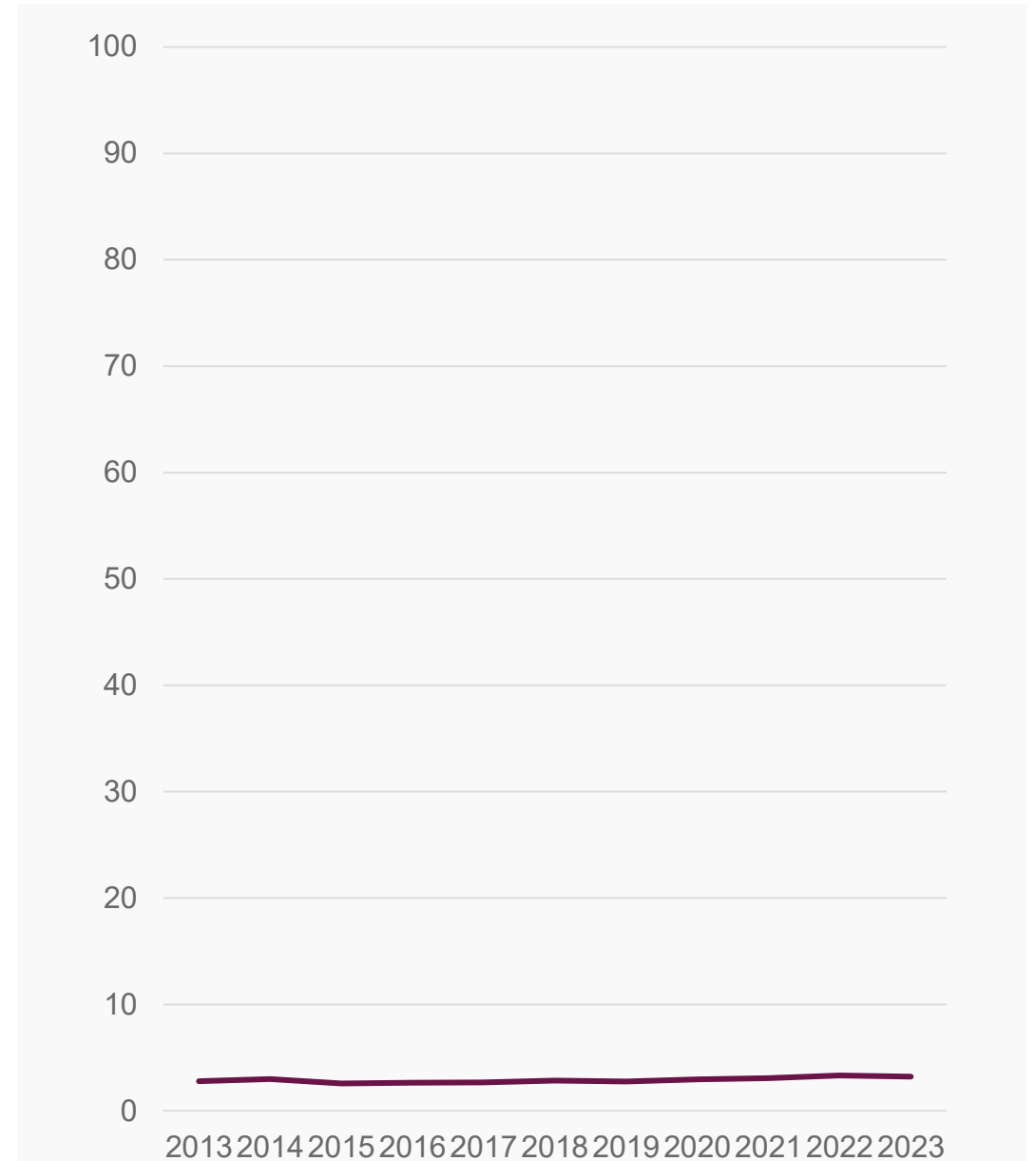
**Men are chronically
underrepresented in
early childhood
education and care**

5 March 2026



Men are chronically underrepresented in early childhood education and care

Average percentage of men in ECEC in EU countries over time



5 March 2026

**Men's underrepresentation in early
childhood education and care (ECEC)**

occupational gender segregation

**reinforces the idea of caring as
“women's work”**

**hinders progress towards gender
equality**

Project Aims

Information Gathering

Other Perspective

Gender stereotypes of men working in early education and care

Self Perspective

What men themselves think of working in early education and care

Impact / Mechanisms

Understanding the potential effects on men's engagement in early education and care

Affecting Change

Recommendations for social and organizational change to encourage men's sustainable representation in early education and care

01

What do people think of men working in childcare?

How stereotypes
influence support for
male childcare workers

5 March 2026



01

What do people think of men working in childcare?

How stereotypes influence support for male childcare workers

02

What do men think about working in childcare?

Gay and straight men's interest in childcare work

5 March 2026



01

What do people think of men working in childcare?

How stereotypes influence support for male childcare workers

02

What do men think about working in childcare?

Gay and straight men's interest in childcare work

03

How can men be encouraged and supported in childcare work?

Recommendations for organisations and policy



Who Cares? Stereotypes of and Support for Men Working in Childcare

Serena Haines^{1,2} · Sabine Sczesny³ · Sylvie Graf¹

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Abstract

Men are vastly underrepresented in early childhood education and care, particularly in childcare work. To uncover stereotypes that motivate or hinder support for men in childcare in society, we employed a representative sample ($N=280$) from Czechia, which has one of the lowest percentages of men working in childcare in the EU. We identified and contrasted descriptive, prescriptive, and proscriptive stereotypes about men, women, or childcare workers without a specified gender. Next, we examined the link between convergence of descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes about men in childcare and support for men working in childcare. In both open responses and trait ratings, men working in childcare were less often perceived or expected to be warm than women working in childcare. In the trait ratings, men working in childcare were less often expected to be moral and competent than women working in childcare. Yet, the overall stereotypical profiles of men converged with childcare workers with no gender information. Greater convergence between descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes about men working in childcare was associated with higher support for them. These findings highlight the specific role that normative beliefs play in support for men in childcare in the larger social environment.

PROJECT

What do people think about men working in childcare?

Haines, S., Graf, S., & Sczesny, S. (2025). Who cares? Stereotypes of and support for men working in childcare. *Sex Roles. Volume 91, article number 19*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-025-01559-5>

Project 01

What do people
think about men
working in
childcare?

Study aims

01

Identify descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes about men working in childcare

02

Compare beliefs about men and women working in childcare and childcare workers in general (unspecified gender)

03

Explore the relationship of these stereotypes with support for men in childcare work

Project 01

What do people
think about men
working in
childcare?

Representative Czech sample

$N = 280$

Random allocation

men

women

no gender

Project 01

What do people
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Representative Czech sample

$N = 280$

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men

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Open responses

How are they?

How should they be?

How should they not be?

Project 01

What do people
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$N = 280$

Random allocation



Open responses

How are they?

How should they be?

How should they not be?

Trait ratings

How _____ are they?

How _____ should they be?

16 traits measuring 4 dimensions:

warmth, morality, competence, assertiveness

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Stereotype profiles

Descriptive stereotype profile
Prescriptive stereotype profile

For each target category

Project 01

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How **should** they be?

How should they **not** be?

Trait ratings

How _____ are they?

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16 traits measuring 4 dimensions:
warmth, morality, competence, assertiveness

Support for men in childcare work

Stereotype profiles

Descriptive stereotype profile

Prescriptive stereotype profile

For each target category

5 March 2026

Project 01

What do people think about men working in childcare?

Findings



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Project 01

What do people
think about men
working in
childcare?

Findings

Open responses

How **are** they? How **should** they be?

- Childcare workers of all genders were described and prescribed **warmth**
- Men were described (and expected to be) **less warm** than other childcare workers

How should they **not** be?

- Women and childcare workers with no gender information were **proscribed traits more often than men**
- **Men proscribed traits relating to physical threat** (e.g., violence) almost twice as often as childcare workers without gender information, and more than twice as often as women
- **Men proscribed traits relating to sexual threat** (e.g., paedophilia) twice as often as childcare workers without gender information; no mention of sexual threat for women

Project 01

What do people
think about men
working in
childcare?

Findings

Trait ratings

Descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes

- Men working in childcare were described as **less warm** than other childcare workers
- Men working in childcare were prescribed **less warmth, less morality and less competence** than other childcare workers
- Men were **not perceived as a threat**: low ratings on threatening and harmful items

Project 01

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Methodology matters!

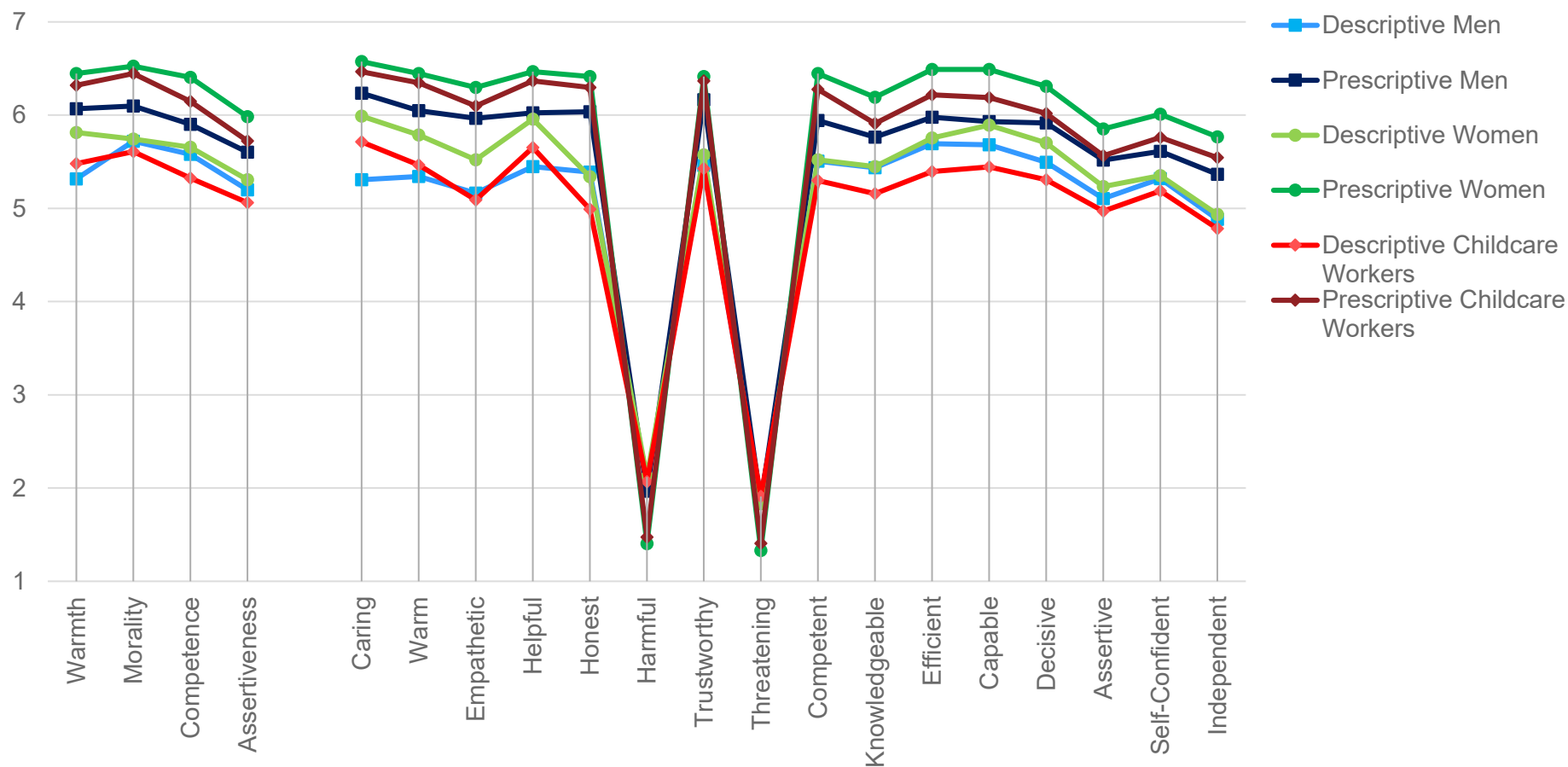
The current differences in quantitative and qualitative findings in the literature is likely a methodological artefact

Future research should continue to use mixed methods to further examine perceptions of male childcare workers

Project 01

What do people think about men working in childcare?

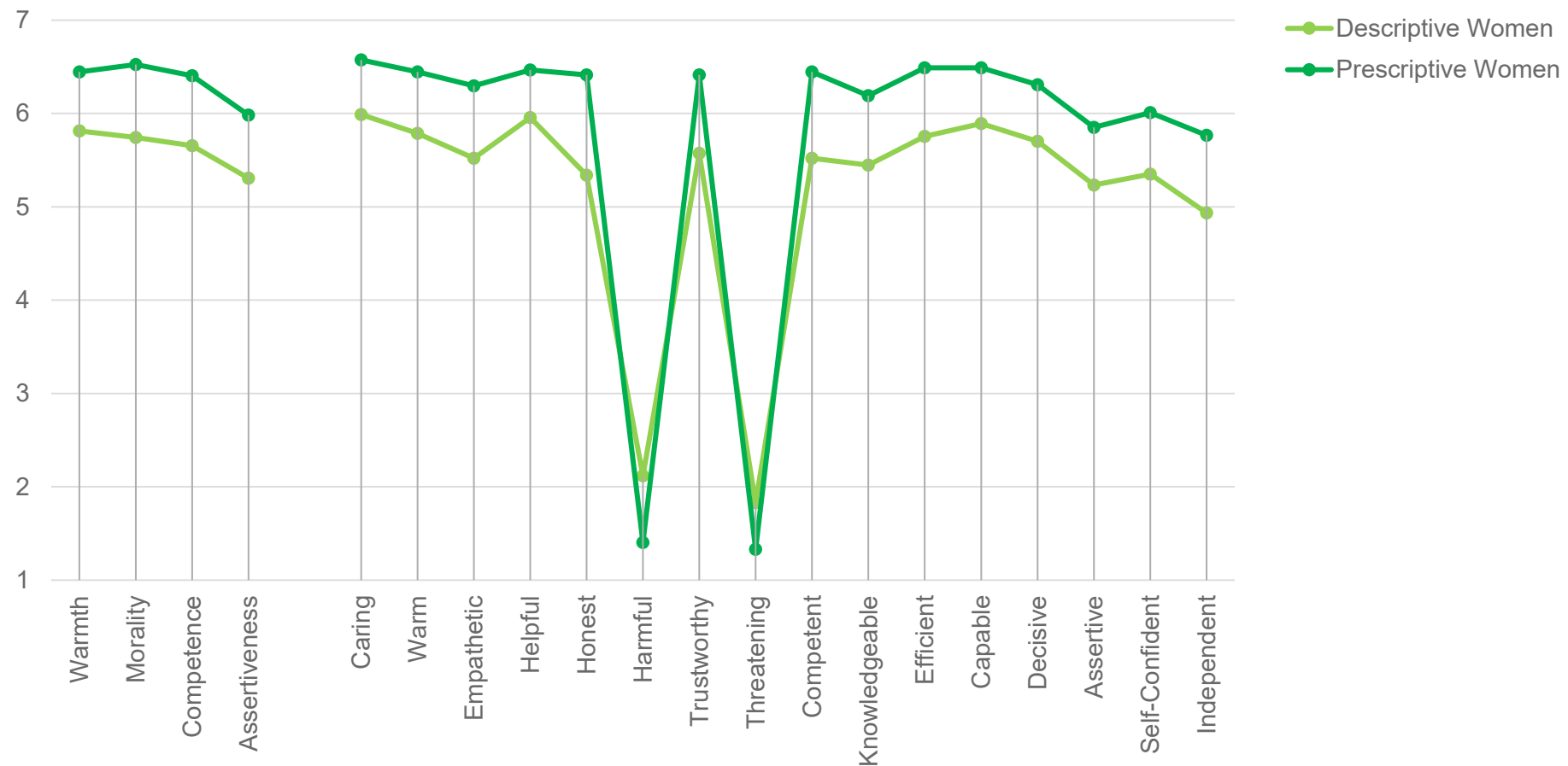
Stereotype profiles



Project 01

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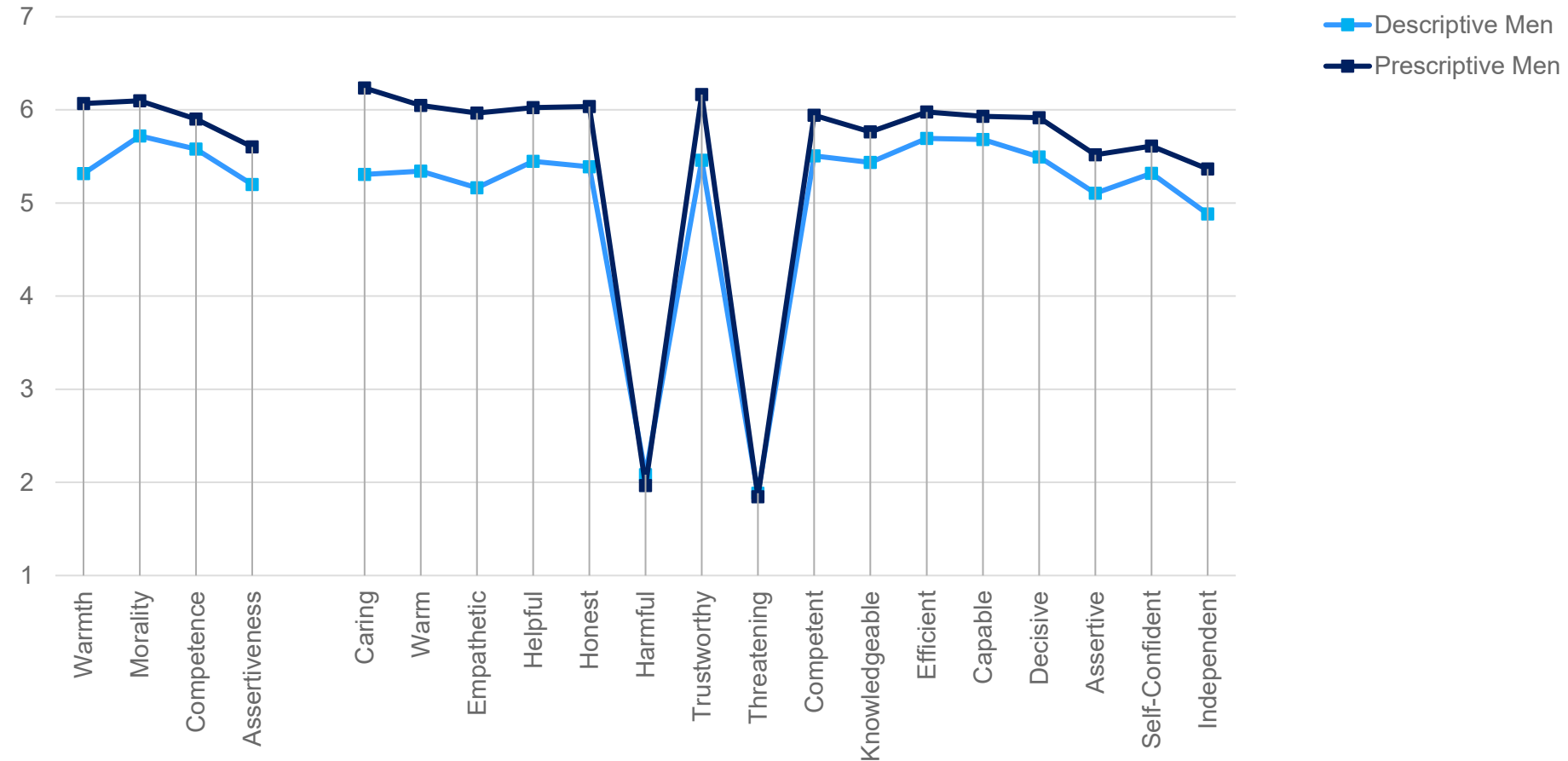
Stereotype profiles



Project 01

What do people think about men working in childcare?

Stereotype profiles



Project 01

What do people
think about men
working in
childcare?

Summary






Women are held to a higher standard than men, even in the women dominated field of childcare work

Men working in childcare were expected to be **less warm, less moral and less competent** than other childcare workers

Warmth may be less relevant to men's perceived suitability for childcare work than previously thought

ORIGINAL ARTICLE **OPEN ACCESS**

Motivations and Barriers to Men's Interest in Childcare: The Role of Norm Perception and Sexual Orientation Stereotyping

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Keywords: gender stereotypes | men in early childhood education and care (ECEC) | occupational gender segregation | pluralistic ignorance | sexual orientation stereotyping

ABSTRACT

This study examined how sexual orientation stereotypes and perceived norms shape young gay and straight men's perceptions of motivations and barriers to interest in early childhood education and care (ECEC) careers. Gay and straight men ($N = 364$) estimated interest and then reported barriers and motivations influencing men's interest in childcare work; either for themselves, gay men, or straight men. Men overestimated gay men's interest in childcare work, regardless of their own sexual orientation. As key barriers, participants cited the low salary, poor working conditions, and the gendered association of childcare with femininity, whereas key motivators were positive interactions with children, salary increases, and intrinsic rewards associated with a care-oriented career. Patterns of distorted norm perception and sexual orientation stereotyping emerged: straight men believed traditional masculinity norms discouraged other straight men more than themselves (i.e., pluralistic ignorance), and gay men overestimated communal motivations of other gay men. These findings highlight how sexual orientation stereotypes and misperceptions of norms reinforce occupational segregation. The discussion addresses the implications of these dynamics for diversifying the ECEC workforce and calls for interventions that challenge restrictive identity-based assumptions about caregiving roles.

PROJECT 02

What do men think about working in childcare?

Haines, S., Hegarty, P., Nater, C., Graf, S., & Sczesny, S. (2026). Motivations and barriers to interest in childcare: The role of norm perceptions and sexual orientation stereotyping. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.70051>

Project 02

**What do men think
about working in
childcare?**

Study aims

01

Understand how interested young men are in childcare work

02

What barriers and motivations men may perceive in relation to working in childcare

03

Assess whether sexual orientation plays a role in interest, or understanding the interest and barriers of other men

Project 02

What do men think
about working in
childcare?

Men aged 18-30 from USA

N = 334

approximately half of participants were straight (47.9%)

Random allocation



Project 02

What do men think
about working in
childcare?

Men aged 18-30 from USA

N = 334

approximately half of participants were straight (47.9%)

Random allocation



Interest rating

How interested are [target group] in childcare work?

Open responses

Barriers:

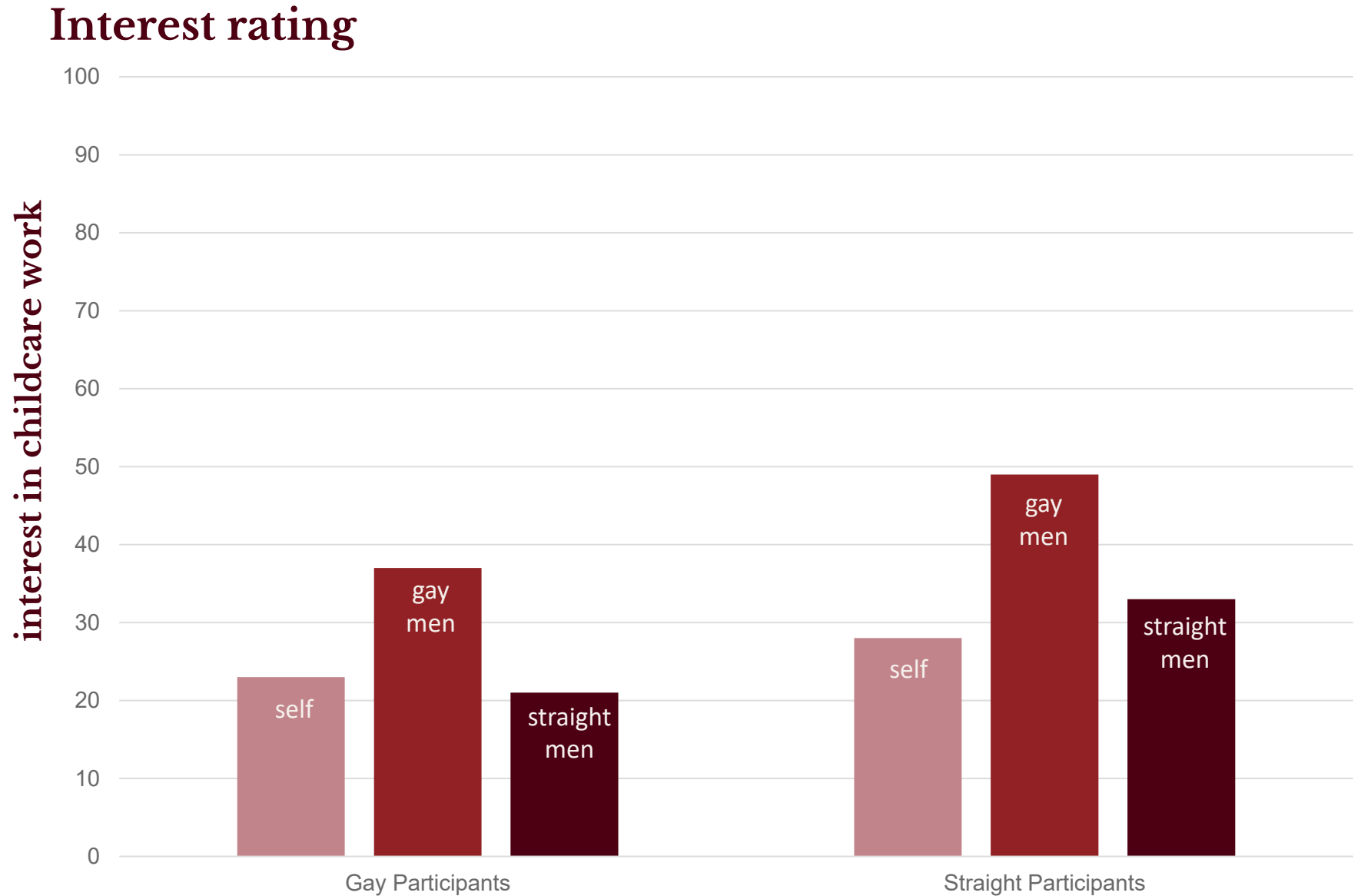
List factors that would make [target group] less interested in working in childcare

Motivations:

List factors that would make [target group] more interested in working in childcare

Project 02

What do men think
about working in
childcare?

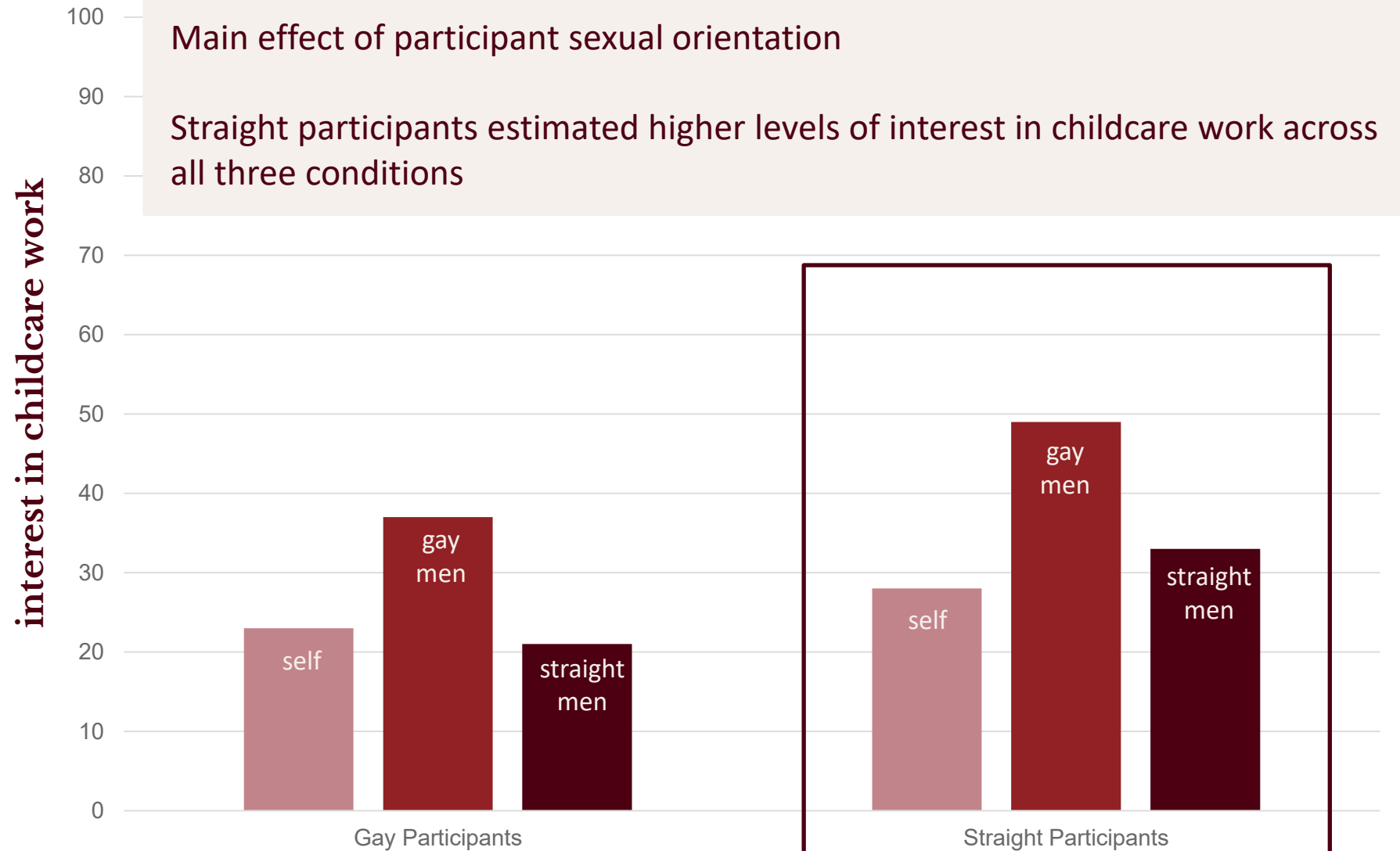


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Project 02

What do men think
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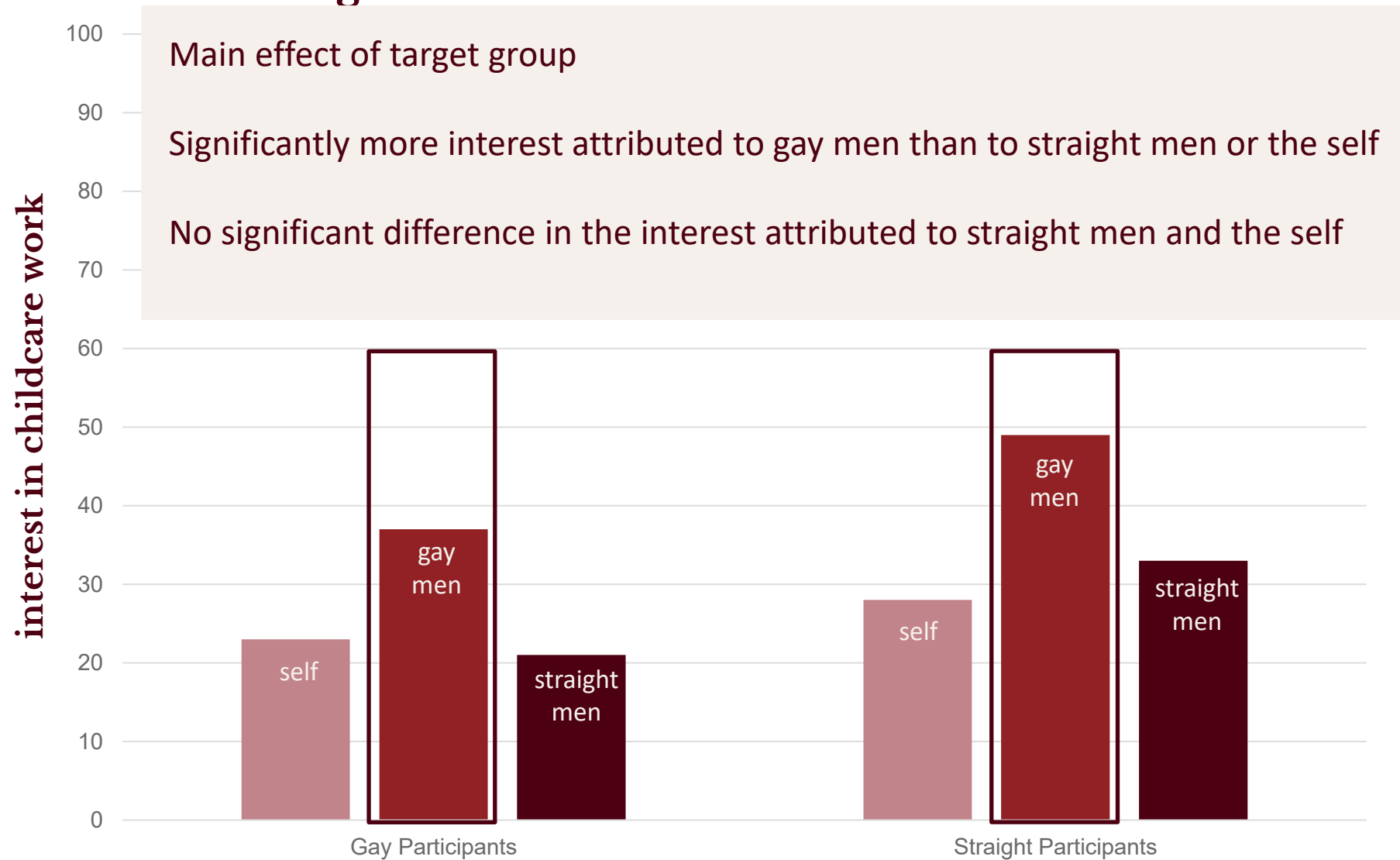
Interest rating



Project 02

What do men think about working in childcare?

Interest rating



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Project 02

What do men think
about working in
childcare?

Open responses

Barriers

General lack of interest:

Regardless of sexual orientation, men listed **more barriers than motivations** to enter childcare work

Negative evaluations:

Regardless of sexual orientation, men believed **negative evaluations, gender stereotypes and perceptions of threat would be a greater barrier for other men** than for themselves

Low Salary:

Men believed **salary would be a greater barrier for themselves** than for other men

Project 02

What do men think
about working in
childcare?

Open responses

Motivations

Salary and benefits:

Men indicated that a better salary would make the profession more attractive, esp. for straight men

Having communal qualities:

Gay men perceived as more communal than other men (even by other gay men)

Difficulty having biological children:

Both gay and straight men suggested that gay men may be more interested in childcare work as a consequence of difficulty in having biological children of their own

Project 02

What do men think
about working in
childcare?

Summary

Gay men perceived as more interested in childcare work, even by other gay men

Men believe **negative evaluations are a greater barrier for others** than themselves

Salary is clearly a barrier for men (likely also an issue for women)

Creating a System That Cares: A PRISMA Review and Road Map to Increase Men’s Representation in Early Childhood Education and Care

Serena Haines^{1, 2}, Christa Nater³, and Sabine Sczesny³

¹Institute of Psychology, Czech Academy of Sciences

²Department of Psychology, Masaryk University

³Institute of Psychology, University of Bern

Careers in early childhood education and care (ECEC) are stereotypically perceived as the work of women, and men less often pursue them. Consequently, men are highly underrepresented in child care work worldwide, and when men work in ECEC, they are often treated as “other”—different from the feminine default. Yet, increasing men’s representation in ECEC would bring various benefits such as reducing the rigidity of gender roles across society, addressing labor shortages, and increasing job opportunities for men. Following the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines, we reviewed 120 qualitative, quantitative, and theory articles on redressing the issue of men’s underrepresentation in ECEC from 2003 to 2023 to develop a theory-based road map of strategies to foster men’s greater inclusion in these careers. Our review identifies key areas for systemic change in organizations, which educate and care for young children, and describes how action is required to professionalize child care, engage gatekeepers, and foster caring masculinities. Further, it highlights relevant issues to be aware of when designing interventions in this specific context, such as the valuing of “women’s work,” the importance of intersectional approaches, and the critical evaluation of intervention methods. To sustainably increase gender diversity in ECEC, our road map identifies actors that have the most influence and describes how efforts need to come from government, policymakers, organizational leaders, and broader society.

PROJECT

How can men be encouraged and supported in childcare work?

Haines, S., Nater, C., Sczesny, S. (2024). Creating a system that cares: A PRISMA review and road map to increase men’s representation in early childhood education and care. *Psychology of Men and Masculinities*, 25(4), 451-465. <https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000486>

Project 03

How can men be encouraged and supported in childcare work?

Study aims

01

Systematically review literature from a variety of disciplines relating to men working in childcare from the last 20 years

02

Identify key areas for systemic change in organisations which educate and care for young children

03

Develop a roadmap highlighting relevant issues and outlining recommendations for policymakers, organisations, and broader society

Project 03

How can men be encouraged and supported in childcare work?

Literature from the last 20 years

N = 120; qualitative, quantitative, and theory articles

Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) Guidelines

Screening

Included if related to:

- gender equality
- gender diversity
- gender of professionals in ECEC fields (e.g., primary education, kindergarten teaching, childcare work)

Excluded if related to:

- domestic childcare (e.g., fatherhood, babysitting)
- childcare work in general (e.g., research that does not look at educator's gender)
- post primary education

Project 03

How can men be encouraged and supported in childcare work?

Recommendations

5 March 2026

Project 03

How can men be encouraged and supported in childcare work?

Recommendations

01 Reshaping gendered expectations

Acknowledging systemic gender inequalities in ECEC

- Gendered stereotypes around care
- Glass escalator effect for men

Create gender reflexive environments

- Examining how gendered experiences and assumptions bias actions and interactions
- Conscious and continuous questioning of the ways in which gender shapes perspectives, behaviours and power dynamics

Project 03

How can men be encouraged and supported in childcare work?

Recommendations

02 Creating masculinities that care

Foster caring masculinities

- Masculinity is not a rigid concept
- *Caring masculinities* – defined by their lack of dominance and integration of caring values (Elliott, 2016)

Support boys' communal engagement

- Initiatives
 - Jungen-Zukunftstag — www.boys-day.de/
 - Boys in Care (2017-2019) — www.boys-in-care.eu

Project 03

How can men be encouraged and supported in childcare work?

Recommendations

03 Intersectionality and mentoring

Intersectional perspective

- Approach gender diversity initiatives in early childhood education and care from an intersectional perspective
- Gender not sole focus, but diversity in general

Mentoring

- Mentoring programs for men in early childhood education and care
 - Gender-related challenges
 - Inclusion and support

Project 03

How can men be encouraged and supported in childcare work?

Recommendations

04 Engaging gatekeepers

Focus on leadership

- Engage early childhood education and care leaders in equality efforts

Bias literacy trainings

- Reduce systemic bias & discrimination through bias literacy trainings

Summary

5 March 2026



Summary

01 Methodology matters – differences in perceived threat between open responses and rating scales

Summary

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- 02 Women are generally held to a higher standard than men, even in the context of women-dominated careers

Summary

- 01 **Methodology matters – differences in perceived threat between open responses and rating scales**
- 02 **Women are generally held to a higher standard than men, even in the context of women-dominated careers**
- 03 **Men believe negative evaluations are a greater barrier for other men, while salary is perceived as the greatest barrier for themselves**

Summary

- 01 **Methodology matters – differences in perceived threat between open responses and rating scales**
- 02 **Women are generally held to a higher standard than men, even in the context of women-dominated careers**
- 03 **Men believe negative evaluations are a greater barrier for other men, while salary is perceived as the greatest barrier for themselves**
- 04 **Men's underrepresentation can be addressed with social and organisational changes, such as reshaping gendered expectations, fostering caring masculinities, mentoring and engaging gatekeepers**

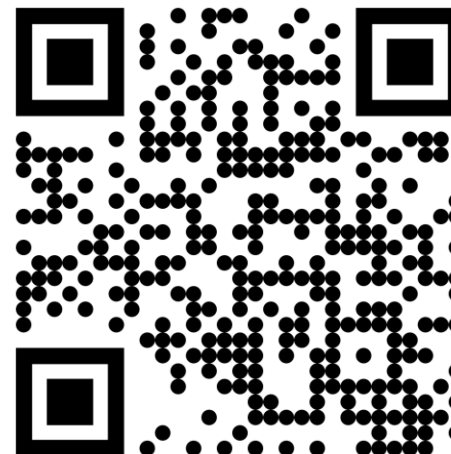


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THANK YOU

5 March 2026

