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**Personal and Societal Factors in Men’s Choosing and Remaining in an Early Childhood Career: an International Perspective**

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**Abstract**

The presented study aims at identifying both personal factors enabling men to challenge cultural norms by choosing to teach young children, and cultural hurdles concomitant with this decision. The research also explores determinates of retention and longevity of men in the ECE workforce. Previous studies describing men’s trajectories in ECE (King, 1998; Watson & Woods, 2011) are largely non-analytical and limited to the American context (Nelson & Sheppard, 2005), focusing on lower elementary grades (Sargeant, 2001) to the exclusion of preschool settings. Gender construction theory (Connell, 1995) sheds light on decisions to enter the field, suggesting that gender identity is not only shaped by employment choices but also determines them. Deterance from remaining in the field relates to gender role conflict exacerbated by fear of accusations (Sumson, 1999). Furthermore, pressure to move into administrative and academic positions lures men away from the classroom (Parnell, 2011).

This study includes six veteran male early childhood teachers and caregivers from different countries. Qualitative methodologies include classroom observations and narrative interviews. Findings show two career choice patterns: self-awareness of a propensity for working with young children, and a midcareer search for personal meaning. Career longevity correlates with familial and societal support, parental approval, job satisfaction, and inertia, which help overcome anxieties arising from gender role conflict. Seen through a cultural lens, the support mechanisms were found to compete with societal norms mitigating against continued employment in the field. Implications for recruitment and retention of men in early childhood settings will be discussed.

**Bibliography**


**Keywords**

masculinity, career choices, career retention
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Personal and Societal Factors in Men's Choosing and Remaining in an Early Childhood Career: An International Perspective
Location of 6 subjects in the study.

Critical Issues
- Expressive or Instrumental Significance
- Passive or Active Approach
- Identity Construction or Identity Deconstruction
Expressive or Instrumental Significance

“I came home one day and asked myself: ‘What did you do today?”...
The smile on the face of a child - it was better than 3 months of work at (the transport company).”

-Benny

Expressive or Instrumental Significance

“I had no real particular focus in my life, I was kind of drifting around for a long time...and people said to me: “Have you ever thought of working with children? You seem to have a really good connection with them”, and ... I suppose that I had never thought of working with children, particularly very young children... it’s a job.”

-Leon
Expressive or Instrumental Significance

“And when I graduated, a kindergarten position opened up here at Jefferson School, it was half time, and I took that job. And then a first grade opened up and I taught first grade for probably about 17 years, then a kindergarten teacher retired, so kind of by default, I ended up in kindergarten, but ended up enjoying it.”

-Elton

Active or Passive Approach

“I give this one about three months...”
“I (considered) informal education or early childhood. I said that I will go for one of those two ... because here I know that I can influence as an educator, pave the way, put forth values and not just go into a classroom to say what I have to say and then leave, rather to give something, something beyond reciting lessons. That’s the reason that I went there.” - Elli
David Brody: Factors in Men's Career Choices
EECERA 2012

Front Door

R revolving Door

David Brody: Factors in Men's Career Choices
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Identity Construction vs. Deconstruction

“I think I make them tougher because I don't want them with every little pain to come to me, because when it's really painful I don't believe them if they are coming a hundred times before – I have pain, I have pain, I have pain – and when there is something really wrong, I don't believe them.”

(continued on next slide)

Identity Construction vs. Deconstruction

“So that's why I try to teach them, ok in Dutch I say – Pijn is fijn, bloed is goed: Pain is nice, Blood is ok! …. I was hanging this (picture) and (a tack was stuck in my hand). So I said, ‘Ok now, look, look, look – and I was smiling, but I said – it hurts, but I don't have to cry ....’ It was painful but I didn't need to cry, it wasn't that bad.” - Levien
“So kind of by default, I ended up in kindergarten, but ended up enjoying it.” - Elton

Practical implications

- Consider marketing for instrumental as well expressive motivations.
- Second career or late career seekers may prove to be a productive source of candidates.
- Exposure of male degree candidates to ECE settings may prove useful.
- Support novice teachers with positive male role models.
Issues for further research

- How do men construct and deconstruct their gender identity in other female occupations?
- What is the role of different types of significant others (family, friends, mentors) in men’s choosing to work and to remain in ECE?
- In what ways do cultural definitions of masculinity affect men’s career choices in ECE?

Thank you for your attention!

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