Procuring Gender-Situated Voices of Male Early Childhood Professionals in Canada

Tina Heather Bonnett1 · Chase Edwin Wade1

Accepted: 15 August 2022 / Published online: 18 October 2022
© The Author(s), under exclusive licence to Springer Nature B.V. 2022

Abstract
Across the globe the prevalence of men who work in the early education and care field is scant. This phenomenon is evidenced in the Canadian childcare milieu where male early childhood professionals constitute a modest fraction of the sector. At the nucleus of this are gender-situated scrutinization, role model binaries, and adverse occupational outcomes. Subsequently a Qualitative Intrinsic Case Study, rooted in a Social Constructivist Philosophical Paradigm, was applied to secure the voices of men who work in Ontario, Canada. Novel to findings of this study are the heterogenous reactions of family and friends, male role model disharmony, strategies adopted by participants to self-protect and avoid speculation, forgotten child voices, and nuances affiliated with working in a care profession. Participants of this study urge other male early years professionals and communities to intentionally probe this domain of study, with the aim to bolster male participation in the sector.

Keywords Early childhood education and care · Males · Men · Marginalization · Voices

Introduction

Internationally men comprise approximately 2–3% of the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce (Reich-Shapiro et al., 2020; Rolfe, 2006). This trend translates to the Canadian context where in the province of Ontario only 1% of the ECEC workforce is held by men (Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, n.d.). Central to this phenomenon are the unique obstacles that men face, by virtue of their gender, including being habitually scrutinized by colleagues and parents (Bhana et al., 2021; Hedlin et al., 2019), and labelled as a sexual threat (Anliak & Beyazkurk, 2008; Moosa & Deevia, 2020; Pruit, 2015). Furthermore, male ECECs experience negative physical, psychological, and occupational symptoms of burnout more

1 Fanshawe College, London, ON, Canada
routinely than their female counterparts (Sak, 2018; Salvagioni et al., 2017). Compounding these challenges is a labour shortage in the sector whereby “men present a largely untapped source of staff” (Thorpe et al., 2020, p. 3). Likewise problematic is a dearth of research that explicitly explores the lived experiences of men in Canada who work in the sector, with a distinct focus on gender. Hence, a Qualitative Instrumental Case Study, guided by a Social Constructivist posturing, was utilized to procure the gender-situated voices of men who work as ECECs in Ontario, Canada. Findings from interviews reveal six overachieving themes, which denote male ECECs are 1. drawn to work in the profession, 2. subject to variant responses of others in relation to their career choice, 3. habitually cast into traditional gender roles in their work settings, 4. initially met with apprehension prior to being accepted, 5. compelled to self-protect, and 6. in need of intentional spaces to elucidate their voices and gain visibility. Findings of this study conjointly unearth that although gendered tensions permeate the work of males who work in the early education and care sector, these tensions appear to be adult musings which are absent of the voice of the child. Outcomes of this research also point to the need for the nuances of care, which has historically been allied with the work of women (Langford et al., 2017; Powell et al., 2021; Taggart, 2016), to be probed expressly in relation to men who work in the early years sector.

Literature Review

Clarifying Gender Terminology and Related ECEC Marginalization

Gender and sex are complex constructs, from both sociological and biological perspectives (Chrisler & Lamer, 2016; Schudson et al., 2019). For some sex is based on biology with males having an XY, and females an XX, chromosomal makeup (National Human Genome Research Institute, n.d), whilst gender is socially constructed and adaptable based on temporal, cultural, and social factors (Bhana et al., 2021; Weaver-Hightower, 2011). The complexity and interplay of sex and gender therefore cannot be understated as radical revisions surrounding sex, sexuality, and gender, continue to morph in current day (Schudson et al., 2019; Young & Shipley, 2020). Although it would likely prove advantageous to conduct early years postured research concentrated on gender identities outside of the traditional notions of ‘man’ and ‘woman’, that is not the intent of this study. Consequently, ‘man’ and ‘male’ are utilized in this study to refer to male biology (XY), and ‘woman’ and ‘female’ are employed when referring to female (XX) biology.

Furthermore, although this study is focused on the male population, it is first requisite to take up gender and associated implications for women who work as early childhood professionals granted that they frequently assert institutional and social barriers adversely inform their work (Boyd, 2013; Brownhill & Oats, 2017; Hardwood & Tukonic, 2016). ECEC is commonly referred to as women’s work, and work that is traditionally ascribed to women carries with it low status (Boyd, 2013; Reich-Shapiro et al., 2020) including poor remuneration and workplace benefits (Boyd, 2013; Brownhill & Oats, 2017; McDonald et al., 2018). In Ontario, early childhood
professionals and kindergarten teachers work side-by-side sharing similar professional responsibilities, investing comparable hours in the classroom. Despite this, an ECECs annual salary is less than half that of a kindergarten teacher’s (Atkinson Centre, 2022; Hardwood & Tukonic, 2016). While inequities for women ECECs demand ongoing attention, most notably because men by virtue of their gender experience these challenges in the general workforce to a lesser extent (Bhana et al., 2021; Cameron, 2001; Sargent, 2004), it is also critical to draw attention to gender-driven marginalization that men face when they work with children in their formative years. Prevalent to these disenfranchisements is the categorizing of male ECECs as sexual threats, male role model constraints, double standards, disapproval, and burnout.

**Labelled as a Sexual Threat and Role Model Pressures**

With reference to male ECECs the most salient theme uncovered in the literature pertains to fear of being accused of sexual misconduct due to society’s propensity to view them as a sexual threat (Bhana et al., 2021; Eidevald et al., 2018; Foster & Newman, 2005). Case in point, the supposition that male ECECs constitute a sexual threat is identified within Sargent’s (2004) study as the single greatest hinderance to increasing male participation. Similarly, Eidevald et al. (2018) and Bhana et al. (2021) report that trepidations about sexual misconduct allegations acutely impact retention of men in the sector. Central to this is ‘moral panic’, which is society’s exaggerated and persistent response to an inflated social threat (Tufan, 2018). As an illustration, within the USA and Canada child sexual abuse cases began to rise in the 1970s and peaked between 1992 and 1993 (Shields et al., 2016; Tufan, 2018). The overwhelming majority of perpetrators were men and society thus began to view them as a threat to children, catalyzing the sentiment that men who have close and consistent contact with children warrant close supervision. Since this time substantiated child sexual abuse cases have continually declined in the USA and Canada (Shields et al., 2016; Tufan, 2018), however, society has yet to emerge from a state of hyperarousal. In this sense male ECECs are guilty of association, because of their gender, and thus endure the consequences of crimes to which they are not associated.

On the topic of role modelling literature conveys variant theoretical suppositions in relation to male early childhood professionals. Some studies claim that male ECECs are an appropriate patriarchal substitute for young boys who are parented by mothers who are single (Anliak & Beyazkurk, 2008; Eidevald et al., 2018; Rolfe, 2006). This begs the question if males are recruited on account of their professional competency to work with children, or whether they are adopted into the field as tokens of hegemonic masculinity. Other studies purport that it is ideal to have males work with children in that they possess the capacity to model behaviours that disrupt gender stereotypes which assert that masculinity and sensitivity are dichotomous (Cameron, 2001; Reich-Shapiro et al., 2020; Rolfe, 2006). On the contrary, other bodies of research signal that mothers prefer that their children are cared for by female early years professionals, as although they are cognizant of the value that male ECECs can bring to early years programs when they act as role models, their
worries about males caring for their female children override male role model worth (Ahmad et al., 2017; Mukuna & Mutsotso, 2012). Tenuous in this is that some male ECECs posit that providing children with a positive male role model is one of their primary motivations for staying in the field (Bhana et al., 2021; Reich-Shapiro et al., 2020), while others contend it should not be assumed that they desire to take on the responsibility of being a male role model in their work with children (Brownhill & Oats, 2017; Sargent, 2004). More specifically, some participants in Brownhill and Oats’ (2017) study affirmed that they willingly adopt a male role model stance for young boys, while others disclosed that they fulfil this role in their work begrudgingly. These divergent viewpoints, of both male ECECs themselves and others, point towards the necessity to further illuminate the perspectives of men who work in the profession.

**Double Standards, Disapproval, and Burnout.** There is robust evidence that a double standard exists amongst men and women who work in the ECEC sector (Eidevald et al., 2018; Hedlin et al., 2019; Sargent, 2004). The former are restricted from engaging in practices that their female colleagues are not, including changing diapers and other physical care routines (Hedlin et al., 2019; Pruitt, 2015; Xu, 2019). These exclusionary practices are not officially mandated within childcare policy but are informally implemented as a way of alleviating parents’ anxieties about male ECECs (Cameron, 2001; Hedlin et al., 2019; Sargent, 2004). Furthermore, male ECECs frequently report the necessity to employ alternative behaviours that communicate their affection for the children they care for, such as substituting hugs with high fives (Pruitt, 2015; Weaver-Hightower, 2011). Overt displays of physical affection towards children create internal disequilibrium within male ECECs as they hold strong convictions about the benefits of touch when engaging with young children, but also acknowledge that when touch is a relational element of their practice that it can make them vulnerable to scrutiny (Foster & Newman, 2005). As such, unlike their female colleagues, males who work in the sector routinely disregard their beliefs about touch as a means to foster connection, hence sacrificing their own pedagogical convictions about care.

What’s more, disparate from their female counterparts’ men frequently grapple with family and friend discouragement when pursuing a career in the early years field (Anliak & Beyazkurk, 2008; Bhana et al., 2021; Cooney & Bittner, 2001). Interestingly, male ECECs within Weaver-Hightower’s (2011) research specifically named that their fathers questioned their career decision with resolute scrutiny. Research suggests that some men persist despite a lack of support (Bhana et al., 2021), whilst others succumb to their fathers’ disapproval by terminating work in the sector or withdrawing from the early years post-secondary program in which they are enrolled (Cooney & Bittner, 2001). While men are shown to be more critical than women towards men who wish to enter this female-dominated occupation (Bhana et al., 2021), it is worthy to note that women can also be disparaging (Foster & Newman, 2005). Exacerbating this is the teasing that male ECECs profess is typical to working in this profession (Cooney & Bittner, 2001; Foster & Newman, 2005; Rolfe, 2006) and discomfort linked to feeling as though they are observed though a far more critical lens than their female colleagues (Anliak & Beyazkurk, 2008; Bhana et al., 2021; Cooney & Bittner, 2001). This disapproval is communicated
covertly as “it’s more looks than what they say” (Rolfe, 2006, p. 111) and most readily applies to parental perceptions (Hedlin et al., 2019; Rolfe, 2006; Sargent, 2004). This amplified monitoring plausibly holds male ECECs to a heightened standard of performance, which is troubling given the already existing low retention rates of males in the sector (Brody et al., 2021; Foster & Newman, 2005; Okeke & Nyanhoto, 2021). Consistent with this is Sak’s (2018) postulation that male ECECs experience higher levels of organizational cynicism and occupational dissatisfaction than their female colleagues, resulting in burnout. Discomforting in this is that burnout is associated with several physical, psychological, and occupational consequences including increased risk of heart disease, respiratory problems, insomnia, depression, and medical leave (Salvagioni et al., 2017). This occupational dissatisfaction, coupled with the unfavourable consequences of burnout, calls for notice especially provided literature is meagre in this domain of study. Brody et al. (2021) advise that this “gap in research calls for an international perspective” (p. 7), on the grounds that this critical area of study holds significant implications for the ECEC workforce across the world. As such, this research sought to garner the gender-situated voices of men who work in the early years profession with the objective to contribute to a Canadian context.

**Methodology**

A Qualitative Instrumental Case Study was utilized to guide this research. Crowe et al. (2011) note that case study is a well-established research design that is extensively employed in the social sciences. Moreover, case studies can be a particularly appropriate methodology when a researcher seeks to explore a phenomenon in depth (Baxter & Jack, 2015; Crowe et al., 2011) as was the case with this study. The instrumental case study methodology organically aligns with this research as it is conducive to generating and refining theory (Mukherji & Albon, 2010; Tardi, 2019), which in this instance was gaining a broader understanding of theoretical underpinnings pertaining to male ECECs who are employed in a profession that is comprised predominately of females, and who have been found in the literature to be subject to marginalization. Furthermore, a Social Constructivist (SC) theoretical positioning and philosophical paradigm informed all facets of this investigation as this approach aims to make meaning of a phenomenon by leaning on the experiences of participants (Adom et al., 2016; Salvador, 2016). On this account individual interviews were conducted as this set the stage for data to be collected using a method that captured the experiences of participants, hence honouring SC’s core tenet that individuals create their own meaning and understanding of the world through their own subjective experiences (Adom et al., 2016; Salvador, 2016).

**Sampling, Participants, and Recruitment**

Three male ECECs between the ages of 27–53 were recruited to participate in a single virtual individual semi-structured interview. Purposeful sampling was applied as
this sampling technique allowed for intentional selection of individuals who possess lived experience in the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Mukherji & Albon, 2010). Inclusion criteria stipulated that the participants had to be registered ECEC males within Ontario, working in a regulated early education and care setting, with access to high-speed internet and an electronic device that supported Bongo video-conferencing software including a microphone, speakers, and camera. To enhance the depth and breadth of the study, maximum variation sampling was utilized as this strategy intentionally recruits participants that possess delineated characteristics (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The variance that existed within participants in this specific study was the setting in which they practiced as they were located in different geographical settings in south-western Ontario. In light that a gatekeeper is recommended for this sampling approach (Holloway & Galvin, 2017) one was secured. Foundational to the role of the gatekeeper who supported this study was assurance of credibility and objectivity in recruitment processes, which Reeves (2010) declares is primary to this designation. A faculty member of an early years leadership degree assumed this role given her extensive network reach in the community and surrounding geographical areas. The gatekeeper recruited by forwarding the research poster to early years programs where inclusion criteria could be met. Interested participants were issued a letter of informed consent to sign, which was again reviewed individually with each participant prior to conduction of the interviews.

Data Collection Method and Analysis

Data sources included three virtual semi-structured individual interviews totalling 193 min of recorded interview data, the researcher’s reflective audio journals totalling 155 min of audio journal data, and demographic questionnaires. The three data sources acted as a quality measure to triangulate the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Saldana, 2014), which heightened trustworthiness (Holloway & Galvin, 2017; Stahl & King, 2020). Primary to this was the researcher’s reflective journals as they were utilized to monitor the researcher’s subjective reality and accuracy of theme development in findings (Annink, 2016; Vaismoradi et al., 2016). Due to the COVID-19 health and safety guidelines that were in place at the time of data collection the interviews were conducted virtually, rather than in-person, as virtual interviews can be an effective and safe method of data collection (Archibald et al., 2019; Krouwel et al., 2019; Lobe et al., 2020). Demographic questionnaires offered participant context, which deepened insight in data analysis (Allen, 2017; Hughes et al, 2016). An interview guide and coding template were employed as tools to ensure that all questions were addressed in each of the interviews in a responsive manner, and that they harmonized with the research objectives (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015; Pilarska, 2021). Seven questions guided the interviews, which included probes such as “What motivated you to pursue a career in early childhood education and care”, “As a man do you feel that there are specific challenges or benefits that accompany your work in a profession that is predominantly occupied by women?”, and “What do you think needs to happen to interrupt the gender barriers, that men face, to increase
participation?”. Bearing in mind that a cardinal focus of the study was to contribute to theory centred on the experiences of men within the ECEC sector an inductive stance was taken as this analysis strategy supports systematic generation of theory that is rooted in the lived experiences of participants (Johnson, 2008; Liu, 2016).

A coding template was used to extract and organize the raw data, including both the participants interviews and researcher journals. In vivo coding, which is verbatim transcription of participants’ words (Manning, 2017; Schwandt, 2011), informed the thematic coding that shaped the findings of this study. Elements of data that were relevant to the research were marked and assigned a label in thematic coding processes (Coates et al., 2021; Holloway & Galvin, 2017). Recurring labels designated during coding were analysed and grouped into principal themes (Neuendorf, 2018; Vaismoradi et al., 2016). These salient themes informed the overarching findings of this study.

Ethics. The study was conducted in a manner that honoured TCPS 2’s three core principles: Respect for Persons, Concern for Welfare, and Justice (Government of Canada, n.d.). Accordingly, a Research and Ethics Review Application was submitted and approved by an Ontario post-secondary Research Ethics Board. This research was deemed as low risk due to the study design. Specific ethical concerns do warrant consideration, however, as ethical challenges may arise when utilizing videoconferencing technology to conduct interviews (Archibald et al., 2019; Lobe et al., 2020). To ensure privacy and confidentiality only participants who had signed and returned the letter of informed consent were given the virtual interview link. To preserve participant confidentiality the recorded individual interviews, interview and audio journal transcriptions, and all digital communications regarding the study were saved to the researcher’s personal password-protected laptops. In the research design explicit consideration was given to how taking up a gender-postured subject could pose specific risks for male ECEC participants as they are deemed in literature to face inequality (Heikkilä & Hellman, 2017; Mistry & Sood, 2013). To further minimize risk an interview guide was crafted to intentionally investigate gender-based professional, and not personal, experiences of male ECECs. A list of community organizations was distributed to all participants prior to data collection in the unlikely event that they were psychologically provoked due to study engagement. At the closure of each interview a check-in occurred, and all participants reported that they felt regulated and fortunate to have the opportunity to give voice to their experiences working in the early years sector.

Findings

Three male ECECs, who have worked in the sector for eight years or more in both urban and rural settings, informed the findings of this study. Overarching themes that were evidenced in the data include participants experiences with being 1. drawn to work in the profession, 2. subject to variant responses of others in relation to their career choice, 3. habitually cast into traditional gender roles in their work settings, 4.
initially met with apprehension prior to being accepted, 5. compelled to self-protect, and 6. in need of intentional spaces to elucidate their voices and gain visibility.

**Drawn to the Field**

At the onset of each of the interview’s participants gave voice to how their earlier life experiences led them to ascertain that they possessed a natural inclination for working with young children. One participant noted that, “as a kid, I was babysitting neighbours and helping out with younger siblings and cousins”. Another participant echoed this point when he verbalized that he discovered an enjoyment for working in the profession through volunteer experiences with children who were diagnosed with Down syndrome. This participant surmised “I think it was the first time I kind of had that something inside of myself that said you know, I kind of enjoy this”. This mention of feeling called to work in the sector was noted to correspond with researcher audio journaling, where the idea that men are intrinsically pulled to work in the ECEC sector. Participants likewise reported that educational experiences prompted them to identify their fit for a career in the ECEC sector. Relatedly, a participant stated that through a human services placement experience, that was not specific to early childhood education and care training, that he discovered how fulfilling it was to work with young children. He explained, “while I was there, I did a placement at a daycare getting some experience working with that [childcare aged children] and really finding that was something I really enjoyed”.

Participants also gave testimony to the vital role that early employment experiences played in enabling them to realize that other care-based professions were not as well-suited for them. One participant divulged, “I worked in a few summer camps [with children] as a developmental service worker, and I really enjoyed it. I said, you know, I kind of have enjoyed the ECE part more than the developmental service worker”. Another participant echoed this sentiment when he acknowledged that he had thought about becoming a social service worker, but it was his previous experience working in a group home that led him to conclude that ECEC was a more suitable profession for him. He detailed “working with some teens in the group home, I realized what social service work was and it just wasn’t something I felt a calling to”. These findings suggest that early personal and professional experiences were pivotal in awakening recognition, in the males central to this study, about their suitability and passion to work in the early childhood sector.

**Responses from Others**

Participants experienced both affirming and derogatory responses when they revealed to family and friends that they had chosen to study and work with young children. Reflecting on how his family reacted to his desire to pursue a career in ECEC, one participant pronounced that they were “super supportive of it”. Another participant outlined “I discovered my passion working in the ECEC field with children with special needs. When I shared this with my family, they supported me one
Procuring Gender-Situated Voices of Male Early Childhood…

Procuring Gender-Situated Voices of Male Early Childhood…

hundred percent”. Not only was this participant’s family supportive of his decision to enter the sector, but he acknowledged that they were excited for him as he conveyed “I have an aunt who is a preschool teacher in Columbia, so she was very excited” and “I have another cousin who works as an educational assistant in Los Angeles, so he was super excited too”. Another participant relayed a congruent perspective when he communicated “I have an aunt who I was really close with and a grandmother. I grew up in a single parent home till age ten, so I could see strong women in my life that really supported me”. Ubiquitous to all participants was family support with their choices to work in the early years field. These findings are compelling as they sit in opposition to previously conducted studies which report that men who intend to pursue a career in ECEC struggle to secure family approval (Cooney & Bittner, 2001; Rolfe, 2006; Weaver-Hightower, 2011). Equally as thought provoking is that participants did not offer mention to responses of their father in relation to their career choice. These facets therefore require examination in future studies.

Conversely, and more in alignment with the literature review that informed this study, is the reprisal of peers when participants divulged that they were entering the field of early education and care. One participant detailed some occurrences where his friends stigmatized him because of his vocational aspirations. He reflected “my friends from high school thought it was weird, and I did get that stigmatized” as they questioned “what are you, some kind of weirdo?” and “what are you a pedophile? Do you just want to be close to little kids?”. Noted in this interview is that this was not an isolated event, but rather one of the many demeaning interactions that this participant faced with his high school peers following his disclosure that he had applied to an early childhood education diploma program. This parallels previous research that indicates that men who seek to enter the ECEC field often are at the receiving end of critical and unsupportive peers (Anliak & Beyazkurk, 2008; Bhana et al., 2021; Sargent, 2004).

Cast into Traditional Gender Roles. Participants also proclaimed that they are persistently projected into roles that are typically associated with “men”. One participant articulated that throughout his career he has been frequently called upon to support children who have behavioural needs, suggesting that by virtue of his gender it is assumed that he has the capacity to support these needs. He voiced “I remember a few times I would get children with behaviors in the classroom. There’s sometimes like ‘you’re the male so therefore you can solve it’ kind of thing”. Similarly, another participant denoted that he is invariably projected into roles typically ascribed to men as he is assumed to possess a thorough knowledge of general maintenance skills and thus holds the role of the “handyman”. He asserted that “when there’s maintenance things to do they’re like ‘hey, we have [participant] on our staff team, he’s probably really good at doing this,’ and if things need to be fixed, they usually ask me”. This illustrates the propensity for those who work with men in the ECEC sector to presume that they possess knowledge, skills, and a desire to adopt roles that have been historically affixed to men. As the nuances of this stereotypical gendered posture were explored one participant pronounced that male ECECs are expected to espouse traditional roles because they lack an understanding of how to care for children, as care is often viewed within a feminine construct. He deliberated this sharing
“another bias I face is that sometimes they think because I am a man, I don’t have the same experience as a female educator. They’ll assume if a child is crying, I don’t know how to comfort them”. Hence, gendered constraints were noted to be twofold in the data as participants asserted that they were expected to take responsibility for tasks typically associated with being a man, while they were conjectured to possess little to no knowledge or competencies tied to the care of children.

Initial Apprehension Replaced by Acceptance. Initial apprehension of others was deemed as typical to the experiences of all participants in this study. Critical to draw attention to is participants assertions that the apprehensions of others are most often latent and expressed via non-verbal cues. As an illustration one participant advised new families “are kind of, ‘oh, ok’—you can see in their faces—like, ‘oh there is a male here” and that “when I was in the other part, the side which was only the daycare side, I was the only male there. There was more like kind of the eyes, like ‘oh a male here”. Another participant reinforced the implicit nature of caregivers’ apprehensions when he disclosed, “when they [parent] first meet me or they’re first introduced to me, It’s kind of ‘wow’”. In the same line of inquiry, he vocalized:

They’re [parents] kind of standoffish, very short and to the point. You know, ‘I’m here to get my child’ or ‘they had a good night.’ Where you can see that same parent interact with a female and they’ll have a whole conversation about what the child had for breakfast, how their night went. Where sometimes, it’s just, ‘ok, here they are—they had a good night.

While all participants concertedly expressed that they are habitually greeted with apprehension when parents realize a male ECEC will be caring for their child, they similarly agreed that the tentativeness is generally replaced by acceptance. One participant conveyed “they [parents] are a little hesitant at first, but you just have that conversation with them, and then, once they get to know you, once you make them comfortable with you, you can see that the hesitation goes away”. Another participant punctuated this premise as he proposed “a few days after [meeting him], they’re [caregivers] fine”.

Contrarily, data in this study point towards the ideology that some family members do not transition to acceptance. A participant described an experience where a grandfather requested that he be forbidden from caring for his granddaughter. The participant recalled “I worked in a room, and there was a child whose grandfather did not want any males around his grandchild”. In reflecting on this he discerned that this request seemed to stem from adult fears and not the child’s apprehensions as he identified “that child didn’t have a problem with anybody— males, females, they did not care at all”. These findings signify that parents are generally approving of men caring for their children, but that rigid gender stereotypes about men in the early years field continue to be entrenched in viewpoints of some.

The Necessity to Self-Protect. As a buffer to the gender discrimination, that participants reported invades their work as male ECECs, employment of various strategies to protect themselves was uncovered in the interviews. One participant pointedly claimed that he had to exercise a great degree of caution when interacting with children physically as he expressed, “you see many female educators carrying children, kissing them, things like that. As a male, we are vulnerable
that way. You have to be very mindful of the way you interact with children”. To
harbour himself from possible suspicions of sexual misconduct this participant
also proclaimed that “to protect myself and not put myself in a vulnerable posi-
tion I never put children on my lap, not because there’s a policy against that but
it’s because as a male I know unfortunately things can be perceived different”. An-
other participant echoed similar sentiments when he acknowledged that his
gender affected the way he interacts with children, especially when in his prior
work he cared for infants and toddlers he had to be “a little bit more aware of that
[his gender] because there was a lot more of that hands-on, that comforting, that
kind of approach”. This testimony exposes participants uneasiness about engag-
ing physically with children, for fear of being perceived as a sexual perpetrator,
which mirrors previously conducted studies (Bhana et al., 2021; Eidevald et al.,
2018; Foster & Newman, 2005).

Another means to self-protect was evidenced in the data as one participant
recalled how he avoided intentionally reflecting on his friend’s query about being “a
pedophile” who “wants to be close to kids”. As a response to this demoralizing line
of questioning this participant “kind of blocked it out” and “just ignored it [teasing
by friends] and just kept going”. A subsequent protective strategy one participant
imparted that he uses is to display his credentials where they are in clear view to all
so that his qualifications and reason for being in the program will not be questioned.
He rationalized:

You feel the eyes on you a little bit more, going into a childcare room or a kin-
dergarten room and it’s like, ‘oh, who’s this?’ That kind of thing, right? So, I
always make sure I have my name badge on, you know, that kind of thing.

Whether it was refraining from allowing children to sit on their lap, avoiding
memories that were psychologically painful when others questioned their intent, or
clearly displaying professional identification, the male ECECs in this study devel-
oped shields to guard themselves from being accused of having ill or jaded inten-
tions in their work with children.

Voice and Visibility. The final theme that resonated in the data centred around
participants yearning to gain voice and visibility in the ECEC sector, as well as
within society. In interviews participants harmoniously articulated their need to cre-
ate spaces that set the stage for them to voice and deconstruct the gendered nature of
their work with others in the sector. Paramount to this aspiration was the notion that
male ECECs needed to feel connected and united with other males who work in the
profession. Participants proposed that concerted and allied efforts hold the potential
to elevate retention and recruitment in the early years workforce. As such, one par-
ticipant voiced “I think when a new male comes to the field, and they have a network
and are not going to be alone, they’re going to be more motivated to continue in the
field”. Another participant shared congruent sentiments as he explained:

I think that we as men need to come together and go to community events,
talk about the experiences of being a male ECEC. Get the word out there. Tell
them that they don’t need to be afraid to be a male in a female dominated pub-
lic sector.
In addition to engaging collectively, participants felt that it is requisite to position male ECECs in view of the public eye suggesting “[male ECECs need to] showcase [their] work, showcase the things that [they] do”. Another participant advised that he felt it would be fortuitous for male ECECs to attend ECEC open houses in colleges and universities to entice male participation as he asserted that “just having a male come in and talk to students that come through at an open house”, would be beneficial. Advocacy was heralded as necessary to actioning voices and visibility of males ECECs as it was argued that “something that needs to happen is [the male ECECs] that are in the field [need to] become advocates for the male educators that are trying to pursue their dream of becoming an ECE”. This calls for preconcerted efforts that advocate for both recruitment and retention of men, in the early years workforce.

Discussion

Not surprisingly, and in alignment with the literature review that apprised this study, participants affirmed that gender impacts their work as early education and care professionals. Expressly, all three participants named that they are ritually designated to conventional gender roles that have been historically appointed to men. This included assumptions that they are well versed in behaviour management, and repair which positioned them as “handymen”. Conversely participants, by merit of their gender, were presupposed to possess limited capacity to care for and nurture children, therefore requiring their female colleagues to intervene. These findings reiterate the gendered nature of care and the likening of early childhood professionals to a substitute mother (Moss, 2006). Moss’s assertion coalesces with social role theory which posits that when an occupation is predominantly comprised of one gender, it is mistakenly believed to be because that gender possesses innate qualities that make it optimally suited for that occupation (Clow et al., 2014). Currently the ECEC sector, both within Ontario (Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, n.d.) and abroad (Brody et al., 2021; Reich-Shapiro et al., 2020), is predominantly comprised of females, reasserting dominant discourse that care is innate to women. This not only devalues the professional capacity of women, but arguably also men who are employed in the sector. Problematic for both male and female ECECs is the paucity of recognition affixed to care-based professions, which is often accompanied by low status, remuneration, and poor working conditions (Halfon & Langford, 2015; OECD, 2022; Richardson et al., 2017). In this it is vital to note that caring for young children has not always been considered a profession best suited for women (Lascarides & Hititz, 2011). Early childhood programs supervised by Frederick Froebel in 1837, for example, were staffed exclusively by men (Martin & Luth, 2000). Since these seminal early childhood programs there has been a tremendous shift in perceptions about men caring for young children (Carrington & McPhee, 2008), which was noted in researcher audio journal reflections in this study when the following was pondered:
It’s amazing that Frobel is called the Father of Kindergarten. Men dominated these professions, and for a time, it was only men who could do these things, now it’s only women and it seems unacceptable for a man.

Also worthy of contemplation is participant testimony which demonstrates that male ECECs are conventionally accepted by families following an initial period of apprehension. Tentativeness about male ECECs appears to be an adult, rather than a child, disposition. This novel finding illuminates the absence of perspectives and voices of young children relating to this phenomenon, which is disquieting granted children have perspectives and the capacity to action their voices (MacNaughton et al., 2010; Murray, 2019; Schnoor, 2012). Data also showcase that participants endeavour to address the gendered tensions that inhabit the early childhood field to ascertain how they can be deconstructed, dismantled, and reorientated. Instrumental to this is pedagogical leadership that embodies advocacy, which is attainable for early childhood professionals (Heikka & Waniganayake, 2011; Macdonald et al., 2015). This behooves post-secondary institutions, who ready the next generation of early years leaders, to intentionally strategize about ways in which to optimally prepare pre-service ECEC professionals to subscribe to leadership approaches that interrupt dominant discourse. In disrupting prevailing narratives that presume men are ill equipped to work with young children it is paramount to brace the next generation of early years professionals with “the necessary tools to critically question the system in which they work” (Macdonald et al., 2015, p. 9). Consequently, a movement towards degree credentials recommended in research (Bowne et al., 2017; Norris, 2010), as opposed to diploma credentials, may be warranted given a four-year academic program may provide the time and space for pre-service professionals to critically examine the gender-situated frictions that permeate the profession, for both women and men. In this the protective mechanisms that the men in this study purported to action, most notably in relation to their apprehensions towards physical contact and touch with the children in their care, obliges notice in light that appropriate physical touch can be auspicious to the holistic wellness of the developing child (Owen & Gillentine, 2010; Svinth, 2018). Pedagogical leaders of childcare centres may similarly benefit from assessing the culture of their programs to uncover if they are contributing to or destabilizing the gendered tensions that participants unearthed in this study. In this it is obligatory that pedagogical leaders remain mindful and intentional about the lower job satisfaction that is reported in some countries to be higher for males than females, inclusive of wages, team collaboration, promotion, professional development, and overall organizational climate (Sahin & Ramazan, 2015), so that these retention barriers can be addressed and remedied. Perhaps looking to Norway, given it possesses the globe’s highest rate of males employed in the early years workforce (Brody et al., 2021), is a fitting starting point for continued examination of this complex dilemma.

Although qualitative studies are deemed rigorous when theoretical saturation is attained, which does not necessarily demand a multitude of participants (Hennink et al., 2017; Sargeant, 2012), future studies may be advantaged from recruiting more than three participants. While findings of this research offer insight into the lived experience of three male early childhood professionals who reside in the same
province, as with most other qualitative research, they should not be overgeneralized (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Engel & Schutt, 2009). A focus group may also be appropriate in further research considering this qualitative method of data collection is advantageous when participants engage and cooperate with one another to generate data that addresses the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2012; Creswell & Poth, 2018). By the same token, although the Social Constructivist schema that steered this research was well suited, a gendered philosophical paradigm may also be fitting in subsequent study.

**Conclusion**

While some professions are evolving to assume more gender-balanced positioning (Anliak & Beyazkurk, 2008; Heath et al., 2021), the early education and care sector continues to be predominately comprised of women (Peeters et al., 2015; Reich-Shapiro et al., 2020). Former research has sought to unmask institutional and societal barriers faced by female ECECs, typically in linkage to working in a profession that is care-rooted (Halfon & Langford, 2015; Moss, 2006). Divergent from this is that participants who were recruited to partake in this Qualitative Instrumental Case Study gave voice to the gender-influenced challenges that they encounter as male ECECs. Interestingly, ubiquitous to both female and males who work in the early years sector, are care-apprised contentions that decree more robust examination. There may also be utility in further probing the covert disapproval that men are subject to when they work with children in their formative years, with a concentrated lens on non-verbal cues of parent’s, colleagues, and children. Findings moreover summon early years communities, including post-secondary programs that provide academic training, to craft strategies and initiatives that foster male recruitment and retention. This study augments previous research in this domain of inquiry with the prospect to catalyze further research that casts a wider net to capture the voices of other male early years professionals and their colleagues, families, and above those of children, across the globe.

**References**

Adom, D., Yeboah, A., & Ankrah, A. K. (2016). Constructivism philosophical paradigm: Implication for research, teaching and learning. *Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences, 4*(10), 1–10.

Ahmad, J., Al-Zboon, E., Alkhawaldeh, M., & Khatib, A. (2017). Jordanian mothers’ and female preschool teachers’ perceptions of men working in preschools. *Journal of Men’s Studies, 26*, 77–91.

Allen, M. (Ed.). (2017). *The Sage encyclopedia of communication research methods*. Sage Publications Inc.

Anliak, S., & Beyazkurk, D. S. (2008). Career perspectives of male students in early childhood education. *Educational Studies, 34*(4), 309–317. [https://doi.org/10.1080/03055690802034518](https://doi.org/10.1080/03055690802034518)

Annink, A. (2016). Using the research journal during qualitative data collection in a cross-cultural context. *Entrepreneurship Research Journal*. [https://doi.org/10.1515/erj-2015-0063](https://doi.org/10.1515/erj-2015-0063)
Archibald, M. M., Ambagtsheer, R. C., Casey, M. G., & Lawless, M. (2019). Using Zoom videoconferencing for qualitative data collection: Perceptions and experiences of researchers and participants. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 18*, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919874596

Atkinson Centre. (2022). *Early Childhood Education Report*. ecereport.ca

Baxter, P. E., & Jack, S. M. (2015). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *Qualitative Report, 13*(4), 544–559. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2008.1573

Bhana, D., Xu, Y., & Emilsen, K. (2021). Masculinity, sexuality, and resistance. In D. L. Brody, K. Emilsen, T. Rohrmann, & J. Warin (Eds.), *Exploring career trajectories of men in the early childhood education and care workforce: Why they leave and why they stay* (pp. 138–150). Routledge.

Bowne, J., Magnuson, K., Schindler, H., Duncan, G., & Yoshikawa, H. (2017). A meta-analysis of class sizes and ratios in early childhood education programs: Are thresholds of quality associated with greater impacts on social, cognitive, achievement, and socioemotional outcomes? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 39*(3), 407–428. https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373716689489

Boyd, M. (2013). “I love my work but …” The professionalization of early childhood education. *Qualitative Report, 18*(36), 1–20.

Brody, D., Emilsen, K., Rohrmann, T., & Warin, J. (2021). *Exploring career trajectories of men in the early childhood education and care workforce. Why they leave and why they stay*. Routledge.

Brownhill, S., & Oates, R. (2017). Who do you want me to be? An exploration of female and male perceptions of “imposed” gender roles in the early years. *Education 3–13, 45*(5), 658–670. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004279.2016.116421

Cameron, C. (2001). Promise or problem? A review of the literature on men working in early childhood services. *Gender, Work, and Organization, 8*(4), 430–453. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0432.00140

Carrington, B., & McPhee, A. (2008). Boys’ “underachievement” and the feminization of teaching. *Journal of Education for Teaching: JET, 34*(2), 109–120. https://doi.org/10.1080/02607470801979558

Chrisler, C., & Lamer, S. (2016). Gender, definitions of. In *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies*. Retrieved online.library.wiley.com

Clow, K., Ricciardelli, R., & Bartfay, W. (2014). Attitudes and stereotypes of male and female nurses: The influence of social roles and ambivalent sexism. *Canadian Journal of Behavioral Science, 46*(3), 446–455. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0034248

Coates, W. C., Jordan, J., & Clarke, S. O. (2021). A practical guide for conducting qualitative research in medical education: Part 2—Coding and thematic analysis. *AEM Education and Training, 5*(4), e10645. https://doi.org/10.1002/aet2.10645

Cooney, M. H., & Bittner, M. T. (2001). Men in early childhood education: Their emergent issues. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 29*(2), 77–82. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1012564610349

Creswell, J. (2012). *Educational research. Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.

Creswell, J. W., & Guetterman, T. C. (2019). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (6th ed.). Pearson Education.

Creswell, J., & Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design. Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications Inc.

Crowe, S., Cresswell, K., Robertson, A., Huby, G., Avery, A., & Sheikh, A. (2011). The case study approach. *BMC Medical Research Methodology, 11*(100), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-11-100

Eidevald, C., Bergström, H., & Broström, A. W. (2018). Maneuvering suspicions of being a potential pedophile: Experiences of male ECEC-workers in Sweden. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 26*(3), 407–417. https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2018.1463907

Engel, R. J., & Schutt, R. K. (2009). *Fundamentals of social work research*. Sage.

Foster, T., & Newman, E. (2005). Just a knock back? Identity bruising on the route to becoming a male primary school teacher. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 11*(4), 341–358. https://doi.org/10.1080/13450600500137091

Government of Canada. (n.d.). *Panel on research ethics*. https://tcps2core.ca/welcome

Halfon, S., & Langford, R. (2015). Developing and supporting a high quality child care workforce in Canada: What are the barriers to change? *Our Schools, Our Selves, 24*(4), 131–144.

Harwood, D., & Tukonic, S. (2016). Babysitter or professional? Perceptions of professionalism narrated by Ontario early childhood educators. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education, 8*(4), 589–600.
Heath, D. A., Spangler, J. S., Wingert, T. A., Chan, M., Smith, E. L., Grover, L. L., & Flanagan, J. G. (2021). 2017 national optometry workforce survey. *Optometry and Vision Science, 98*(5), 500–511. https://doi.org/10.1097/OPX.0000000000001688

Hedlin, M., Åberg, M., & Johansson, C. (2019). Fun guy and possible perpetrator: An interview study of how men are positioned within early childhood education and care. *Education Enquiry, 10*(2), 95–115. https://doi.org/10.1080/20004508.2018.1492844

Heikilä, M., & Hellman, A. (2017). Male preschool teacher students negotiating masculinities: A qualitative study with men who are studying to become preschool teachers. *Early Child Development and Care, 187*(7), 1208–1220. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2016.11616

Heikka, J., & Waniganayake, M. (2011). Pedagogical leadership from a distributed leadership perspective within the context of early childhood education. *International Journal of Leadership, 14*(4), 499–512. https://doi.org/10.1080/136031124.2011.577909

Hennink, M., Kaiser, B., & Marconi, V. (2017). Code saturation versus meaning saturation: How many interviews are enough? *Qualitative Health Research, 27*(4), 591–608. https://doi.org/10.1177/104973231665344

Holloway, I., & Galvin, K. (2017). *Qualitative research in nursing and healthcare* (4th ed.). Wiley Blackwell.

Hughes, J., Camden, A., Yangchen, T., & College, A. (2016). Rethinking and updating demographic questions: Guidance to improve descriptions of research samples. *The International Honor Society in Psychology, 21*(03), 138–151.

Johnson, P. (2008). Inductive analysis. In R. Thorpe & R. Holt (Eds.), *The Sage dictionary of qualitative management research* (pp. 113–115). Sage Publications Ltd.

Krouwel, M., Jolly, K., & Greenfield, S. (2019). Comparing Skype (video calling) and in-person qualitative interview modes in a study of people with Irritable Bowel Syndrome—an exploratory comparative analysis. *BMC Medical Research Methodology, 19*(1), 219–219. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-019-0867-9

Langford, R., Richardson, B., Albanese, P., Bezanson, K., Prentice, S., & White, J. (2017). Caring about caring: Reasserting care as integral to early childhood education and care practice, politics and policies in Canada. *Global Studies of Childhood, 7*(4), 311–322.

Lascarides, V. C., & Hinitz, B. F. (2011). *History of Early Childhood Education*. Taylor & Francis Ltd.

Liu, L. (2016). Using generic inductive approach in qualitative educational research: A case study analysis. *Journal of Education and Learning, 5*(2), 129–135. https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v5n2p129

Lobe, B., Morgan, D., & Hoffman, K. A. (2020). Qualitative data collection in an era of social distancing. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 19*, 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920937875

Macdonald, L., Richardson, B., & Langford, R. (2015). ECEs as childcare advocates: Examining the scope of childcare advocacy carried out by ECEs from the perspective of childcare movement actors in Ontario and Manitoba. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Young Children, 40*(1), 100–110.

Mac Naughton, G., Rolfe, S., & Siraj-Blatchford. (2010). *Doing early childhood research. International perspectives on theory and practice* (2nd ed.). Open University Press.

Magnusson, E., & Marecek, J. (2015). *Doing interview-based qualitative research: A learner’s guide*. Cambridge University Press.

Manning, J. (2017). In vivo coding. In *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*. Onlineibrary.wiley.com

Martin, D. M., & Luth, F. W., Jr. (2000). Where are the men? The scarcity of males in early childhood classrooms. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 21*(3), 321–330.

McDonald, P., Thorpe, K., & Irvine, S. (2018). Low pay but still we stay: Retention in early childhood education and care. *Journal of Industrial Relations, 60*(6), 647–668. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022185618800351

Mistry, M., & Sood, K. (2013). Why are there still so few men within early years in primary schools: views from male trainee teachers and male leaders. *Education 3–13, 43*, 115–127.

Moosa, S., & Deevia, B. (2020). ‘Troubling men who teach young children’: masculinity and the paedophilic threat. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society, 30*, 511–528.

Moss, P. (2006). Structures, understandings, and discourses: Possibilities for re-envisioning the early childhood worker. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood, 7*(1), 30–41.

Muñoz, P., & Albon, D. (2010). *Research methods in early childhood. An introductory guide* (2nd ed.). SAFE Publications Ltd.

Mukuna, T., & Mutsotsos, S. (2012). Gender inequalities in early childhood development education teaching profession in Kenya. *Educational Research, 2*, 1876–1885.
Murray, J. (2019). Hearing young children’s voices. International Journal of Early Years Education, 27(1), 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2018.1563352

National Human Genome Research Institute. (n.d.). Sex chromosomes. https://www.genome.gov/genetics-glossary/Sex-Chromosomes

Neuendorf, K. A. (2018). Content analysis and thematic analysis. In P. Brough (Ed.), Advanced research methods for applied psychology (pp. 211–223). Routledge.

Norris, D. J. (2010). Raising the educational requirements for teachers in infant toddler classrooms: Implications for institutions of higher education. Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 31(1), 146–158.

OECD. (2022). Encouraging quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC). Research brief: Working conditions matter. www.oecd.org

Okeke, C., & Nyanhoto, E. (2021). Recruitment and retention of male educators in the preschools: Implications for teacher education policy and practices. Southern African Journal of Education, 41(2), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v41n2a1910

Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care. (n.d.). Around 1 percent of early childhood educators are men. https://www.childcareontario.org/around_1_percent_of_early_childhood_educators_are_men

Owen, P., & Gillentine, J. (2010). Please touch the children: Appropriate touch in the primary classroom. Early Childhood Development and Care, 181(6), 857–868. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2010.497207

Peeters, J., Rohrmann, T., & Emilsen, K. (2015). Gender balance in ECEC: Why is there so little progress? European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 23(3), 302–314. https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2015.1043805

Pilarska, J. (2021). The constructivist paradigm and phenomenological qualitative research design. In A. Pabel, J. Pryce, & A. Anderson (Eds.), Research paradigm considerations for emerging scholars (pp. 64–83). Channel View Publications. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781845418281

Powell, A., Johnston, L., & Langford, R. (2021). Equity enacted: Possibilities for difference in ECEC through a critical ethics of care approach. In A. Abawi, A. Eizadirad, & R. Berman (Eds.), Equity as praxis in early childhood education and care (pp. 65–84). Canadian Scholars.

Pruit, J. C. (2015). Preschool teachers and the discourse of suspicion. Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 44(4), 510–534. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241614545882

Reeves, C. L. (2010). A difficult negotiation: Fieldwork relations with gatekeepers. Qualitative Research, 10(3), 312–331. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794109360150

Reich-Shapiro, M., Cole, K., & Plaisir, J. Y. (2020). “I am the teacher”: How male educators conceptualize their impact on the early childhood classroom. Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education. https://doi.org/10.1080/10901027.2020.1754310

Richardson, B., Hughes, J., & Whitty, P. (2017). The centrality of caring: Embracing our work as political practice. ecelINK, 19–25.

Rolfe, H. (2006). Where are the men? Gender Segregation in the childcare and early years sector. National Institute Economic Review, 195, 103–117. https://doi.org/10.1177/0027950106060438

Sahin, F., & Ramazan, S. (2015). A comparative study of male and female early childhood teachers’ job satisfaction in Turkey. Early Childhood Education Journal, 44, 473–481.

Sak, R. (2018). Gender differences in Turkish early childhood teachers’ job satisfaction, job burnout and organizational cynicism. Early Childhood Education Journal, 46(6), 643–653. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-018-0895-9

Saldaña, J. (2014). Coding and analysis strategies. In P. Leavy (Ed.), The Oxford handbook of qualitative research (pp. 581–604). Oxford University Press.

Salvador, J. (2016). Revisiting the philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research. International Education & Research Journal, 2(6), 4–6.

Salvagioni, D. A. J., Melanda, F. N., Mesas, A. E., González, A. D., Gabani, F. L., & de Andrade, S. M. (2017). Physical, psychological and occupational consequences of job burnout: A systematic review of prospective studies. PLoS ONE, 12(10), 1–29. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0185781

Sargeant, J. (2012). Qualitative research part II: Participants, analysis, and quality assurance. Journal of Graduate Medical Education. https://doi.org/10.4300/JGME-D-11-00307.1

Sargent, P. (2004). Between a rock and a hard place: Men caught in the gender bind of early childhood education. The Journal of Men’s Studies, 12(3), 173–192. https://doi.org/10.3149/jms.1203.173

Schnoor, O. (2012). Early childhood studies as vocal studies: Examining the social practices of ‘giving voice to children’s voices’ in a crèche. Childhood. https://doi.org/10.1177/0907568212466902
Schudson, Z. C., Beischel, W. J., & van Anders, S. M. (2019). Individual variation in gender/sex category definitions. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*. https://doi.org/10.1037/sgd0000346

Schwandt, T. A. (2011). *The Sage dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (3rd ed.). London: SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412986281

Shields, M., Tonnyr, L., & Hovdestad, W. (2016). Is child sexual abuse declining in Canada? Results from nationally representative retrospective surveys. *Health Promotion and Chronic Disease Prevention in Canada*, 36(11), 252–260. https://doi.org/10.24095/hpcdp.36.11.03

Stahl, N., & King, J. (2020). Expanding approaches for research: Understanding and using trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Developmental Education*, 44, 26–28.

Svinth, L. (2018). Being touched – the transformative potential of nurturing touch practices in relation to toddlers’ learning and emotional well-being. *Early Child Development and Care*, 188(7), 924–936. https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2018.1446428

Taggart, G. (2016). Compassionate pedagogy: The ethics of care in early childhood professionalism. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 24(2), 173–185.

Tardi, S. (2019). Case study: Defining and differentiating among types of case studies. In A. Baron & K. McNeal (Eds.), *Case study methodology in higher education* (pp. 1–19). IGI Global. https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-9429-1

Thorpe, K., Sullivan, V., Jansen, E., Mcdonald, P., Summison, J., & Irvine, S. (2020). A man in the centre: Inclusion and contribution of male educators in early childhood education and care teaching teams. *Early Child Development and Care*, 190(6), 921–934.

Tufan, M. (2018). Public perceptions and the situation of males in early childhood settings. *Educational Research and Reviews*, 13(3), 111–119.

Vaismoradi, M., Jones, J., Turunen, H., & Snelgrove, S. (2016). Theme development in qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. *Journal of Nursing Education and Practice*, 6(5), 100–110.

Weaver-Hightower, M. B. (2011). Male preservice teachers and discouragement from teaching. *Journal of Men’s Studies*, 19(2), 97–115. https://doi.org/10.3149/jms.1902.97

Xu, T. (2019). Exploring the experiences of male early childhood aspiring teachers. *Journal of Multicultural Affairs*, 4(1), 1–17.

Young, P. D., & Shipley, H. (2020). *Identities under construction: Religion, gender, and sexuality among youth in Canada*. McGill-Queen’s University Press.

**Publisher’s Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Springer Nature or its licensor holds exclusive rights to this article under a publishing agreement with the author(s) or other rightsholder(s); author self-archiving of the accepted manuscript version of this article is solely governed by the terms of such publishing agreement and applicable law.