

## Selected (inter-)national research findings on 'Men in ECEC'

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In the following selective presentation of the current state of (inter-)national research on 'Men in ECEC', our discussion of the findings focuses above all on the two most extensive studies thus far, *Männliche Fachkräfte in Kindertagesstätten* (cf. Cremers, Krabel and Calmbach 2010) and *Elementar – Männer in der pädagogischen Arbeit mit Kindern* (cf. Aigner and Rohrmann 2012), since other (inter-)national studies often reach similar conclusions, as Tim Rohrmann explains in the Coordination Centre's 2012 book *Männer in Kitas*.

It is impressive how similar the statements from various countries throughout the world are, despite very different social systems and historical developments. This applies to preconceptions and clichés as well as sophisticated analyses. (Rohrmann 2012, p. 293).

When confronting and evaluating the state of (inter-)national research it is striking, however, that there have been few if any robust scholarly findings thus far on the question of whether, and if so, how, the presence of male ECEC workers affects work with children in the pedagogical context. Thus as late as 2010 Aigner and Poscheschnik still noted:

Overall, one can speak of a glaring absence of investigations of the influence of professional education by men on child development (Ibid. 2010, p. 429)

To close this gap for the German context, the Federal Ministry of Family, Seniors, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) commissioned a study, which is described in more detail in the final section of this article, in order to explore how and if so to what extent the behaviour of male and female professionals differs in their concrete interactions with children. The so-called Tandem Study was commissioned in 2010 and conducted up to mid-2014 at Dresden's University of Applied Sciences for Social Work, Education and Nursing. Using a design combining various methods and a quasi-experimental approach, the study seeks to understand the behaviour of male and female professionals in everyday pedagogical situations. The study design focuses on a standardised play situation with a range of various materials and tools in which each of the professionals involved is filmed interacting with one child at a time. The study included 41 men and 65 women in all from several of the new and old federal states. The behaviour of the professionals in the videotaped play sequences is assessed according to a rating system and translated into quantitative comparative data. The research project also incorporates the analysis of personality questionnaires filled out by the ECEC workers and individual interviews with them (cf. Brandes et al. 2014).

For the Austrian context, the Federal Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Consumer Protection (bmask) commissioned a study on the impact of male ECEC workers on children in everyday early childhood education. The so-called Innsbruck Impact Study (W-INN) was conducted as a follow-up study to the research project *Elementar - Männer in der pädagogischen Arbeit mit*

*Kindern* at the University of Innsbruck's Institute for Psychosocial Intervention and Communication Studies in the period between November 2010 and October 2012. Based on videotaped behavioural observations of relations between pedagogues and children, standardised questionnaires, observer assessments of the children and projective tests, the studied pursued the question of how male ECEC workers affect pedagogical work with children and how male and female ECEC workers interact with one another. The most important findings of the study are also discussed below in the final section of the article (for a detailed account, see Aigner et al. 2013).

In Switzerland, in the framework of the research project 'Puppenstuben, Bauecken und Waldtage: (Un)Doing Gender in Kinderkrippen' (Dollhouses, block corners and nature days: Un/doing gender in crèches), the research group around Prof. Julia Nentwich and Prof. Franziska Vogt at the University of St. Gallen (project period: 2010–2014) studies how gender is constructed in the everyday lives of ECEC centres and which processes of change are or can be set in motion by the inclusion of male ECEC workers. Interviews and video-based observations were conducted and analysed in 20 ECEC centres with at least one male ECEC worker. One of the central questions the research project poses is whether, and if so to what extent, male ECEC workers in ECEC offer children alternatives for interaction. The research project is part of the Swiss national research programme on 'Achieving Gender Equality'. At the time of writing, however, the research project had published very little in the way of findings (see Nentwich et al. 2013).

The research projects and studies whose findings we treat selectively in what follows, in contrast, were largely qualitative in nature, questioning ECEC workers, trainees, interns and young men doing their alternative community service (*Zivildienst*) particularly about their vocational choice biographies, attitudes towards work and occupational or training experiences as well as experiences of discrimination (cf. BVZ Frankfurt 2006, Kasiske et al 2006, Kreß 2006, Farquhar 1997, Sargent 2000, Uhrig 2006, Vandenbroeck and Peeters 2008, Watermann 2006, Wohlgemuth 2012). In addition, the perspectives of parents were analysed based on guided interviews (Cameron et al. 1999, Aigner and Rohrman 2012) or representative samples (Cremers et al. 2010)<sup>1</sup>. Up to now, only two studies within the entire research field have integrated sample surveys into their methodological design (Cremers et al. 2010; Aigner and Rohrman 2012). In a very few cases, studies include female ECEC workers, trainees and interns as reference groups (Cameron et al. 1999, Cremers et al. 2010, Aigner and Rohrman 2012) or explore constructions of masculinity among male ECEC workers (cf. Buschmeyer 2013, Nentwich et al. 2013, Tünte 2006; Warin 2006). Three multi-method (experimental) ethnographic research projects (Aigner et al. 2013, Brandes et al. 2014, Nentwich et al. 2013) as

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<sup>1</sup> Furthermore there are now a number of surveys focusing exclusively on the attitudes of parents towards male educators, such as the survey by the English 'Major's providers group' (see: <http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1051053/parents-voice-overwhelming-support-childcare>) [3.3.2014], and the online survey by the magazine *Baby und Familie*, which is distributed through pharmacies (see: [www.ad-hoc-news.de/maenner-an-die-kita-front-umfrage-viele-eltern-wuenschen--/de/News/22297399](http://www.ad-hoc-news.de/maenner-an-die-kita-front-umfrage-viele-eltern-wuenschen--/de/News/22297399)) Accessed: 3.3.2014]

well as two reviews of the literature (Rolfe 2005, Sumsion 2005) round out the state of the empirical data on Men in ECEC<sup>2</sup> thus far.

In the following discussion, we will explore or describe the professional paths of men whom positive experiences (might) lead to become ECEC workers and to (wish to) work in ECEC. Following that, we describe possible explanations for the very low percentage of men in ECEC internationally, despite the fact that the acceptance of male professionals in ECEC is high and that increasing the percentage of male professionals in the field is considered very desirable. Finally, we present the arguments that the interview subjects offered for (more) men in ECEC and their descriptions of the influence of professional care and education by men on children's development.

### ***Vocational paths: What causes men to become ECEC workers and (wish to) work in ECEC?***

The interviews with male and female trainees and ECEC workers conducted in the framework of our study *Männliche Fachkräfte in Kindertagesstätten*<sup>3</sup> show that men emphasise far more often than women that their desire to pursue the profession of 'ECEC worker' arose only out of positive experiences with children and young people, for example their experiences as youth leaders in sports clubs, volunteer fire departments or during their alternative community service, Voluntary Year of Social Service (FSJ) or an internship in the social sector. Most other studies repeat this finding (cf., among others, Buschmeyer 2013; Cameron et al 1999; Kasiske et al 2006; Uhrig 2006; Vandenbroeck and Peeters 2008; Waterman 2006). Thus Uhrig for example stresses:

In general it should be noted, and the interviews confirmed this, that before entering this occupational field men found that they had a good rapport with children. That is, they always had positive experiences, be it through sports clubs, working with children and youth (e.g., in the Boy Scouts), privately (e.g., babysitting), through their church (e.g., as altar boys) or an internship (during their school days). These positive experiences influenced their choice of occupation. (Uhrig 2006, p. 29).

But positive experiences caring for children in the family can also contribute to their interest in the profession. Furthermore, many of the men questioned in our study found their way into ECEC as lateral entrants, that is, they came from a different field of work.<sup>4</sup> This finding is

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<sup>2</sup> Rohrmann (2012, pp. 292–293) notes that in recent years a few smaller studies have also treated individual aspects of men in ECEC, including a German (Korek et al. 2011) and a Greek study (Tsigra 2010).

<sup>3</sup> In the framework of our study we conducted a total of 40 leifadengestützte interviews mit 78 persons from relevant sub-groups (provider programme directors, ECEC centre administrators, male and female educators and male and female trainees). In addition, a survey by telephone sampling was conducted with 100 provider programme directors, 600 ECEC administrators and 1,000 parents. The study's central research questions were: To what degree are male educators considered desirable? Are ECEC providers and centres pursuing strategies to increase the proportion of male staff? What conditions are necessary in the workplace, and what learning conditions in training, to encourage men to enter the profession of ECEC and want to work in ECEC centres?

<sup>4</sup> In our study we also interviewed female trainees and educators who had worked in other professions before training in ECEC. They were rather rare, however, in contrast to male lateral entrants.

confirmed by the national studies too (e.g. Buschmeyer 2013; Kasiske et al. 2006; Kress 2006; Uhrig 2006; Watermann 2006;) as well as investigations from other countries (e.g. Aigner and Rohrmann 2012; Cameron 1999; Vandebroek and Peeters 2008; Wohlgemuth 2012). Men's vocational reorientation during a later phase of life is described in the literature as a 'second career opportunity' for men (cf. Cameron et al. 1999, p. 50). The interviews conducted as part of our study also show, however, that many male trainees and ECEC workers 'inherited' their interest in working in the social field from their parents: They frequently grew up in families in which either their mother, father or another person significant to their own socialisation worked in this area (cf. Cremers et al 2010, p. 39).<sup>5</sup> Koch et al. note for Austria that, contrary to their original hypothesis, it was not fathers or other male caregivers who decisively influenced the career choices of (budding) ECEC workers, but rather mothers and other female caregivers who pointed the interviewed men towards their future occupation (cf. Koch et al. 2012, p. 352).

Cremers et al. (2010) and Wohlgemuth (2012) also point out that men specifically chose to work in ECEC on the assumption that this was a field with expanding occupational opportunities in future, and that pedagogical training will assure them job security (cf. Cremers et. al. 2010, p. 72; Wohlgemuth 2012, p. 388).

Well first of all, it was clear that the job opportunities are pretty good. I have always heard, at least at the school here, that many graduates actually find a job, and it doesn't go without saying anymore nowadays that you can actually get work when you finish your training. And that certainly makes a training programme quite attractive. Male trainee, 25 years old (Cremers et al. 2010, p. 72)

### ***Barriers and hurdles: Why have so few men (thus far) worked in ECEC?***

All of the studies show that interviewees regard the meagre salaries and chances of advancement and low social prestige in the occupational field as the main culprits for the small proportion of men in ECEC. In the perceptions of the people we interviewed, the low status of the profession manifests itself in the following points:

- unpaid training;
- low payment within the profession;
- negative image of the profession or of ECEC workers. For instance, ECEC workers are frequently regarded as people who just sit around drinking coffee and doing crafts with children, or trainees only realise the high degree of professionalism and the high educational requirements in the field after they have begun training;

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<sup>5</sup> In the attempt to categorise male but also female educators according to their different modes of entry into the profession, in our study we suggested distinguishing between the 'impetuous' (having chosen the profession of ECEC without any clear motive and without clear knowledge of what the field entails), the 'determined' (having chosen the profession early on during school or the Voluntary Year of Social Service) 'lateral entrants from similar professions' (having chosen to become an educator after completing training in another social profession) and 'lateral entrants from dissimilar professions' (having chosen to become an educator after training or experience in other than social professions. To what extent these categories can be quantified, however and clearly distinguished from one another remains a task for further investigations. It would certainly be interesting to undertake a representative survey of male and female educators in Germany.

- lack of recognition of the health hazards involved in working in the profession, such as the stress of high noise levels;<sup>6</sup>
- understaffing, which makes it much harder to maintain the increasingly high quality standards in ECEC;
- the sometimes negative reactions of friends and family at the choice of profession (especially among peer groups)

All groups in our study stated that ECEC workers are inadequately paid. The following assessment is especially striking: The salary for ECEC workers who had completed their training was too low for men in particular because it is insufficient to support a family. The interviewees assumed as a rule that men would continue to (or have to) orientate themselves toward the traditional model of the family breadwinner. This is an assumption that we quite surprisingly—despite the originally different gender orders in the FRG and GDR—encountered equally in the western and eastern federal states, and that—also surprisingly, given the current transformation in gender relations— was actually expressed by the male trainees and ECEC workers we interviewed.<sup>7</sup> The men questioned stated that they often felt compelled to take on the role of family breadwinner in the long run, although they frequently did not personally aspire to a life based on traditional gender roles.<sup>8</sup>

In this connection it is interesting, however, that once these men had consciously decided to undergo unpaid training and to pursue a relatively poorly paid profession, the ‘money’ factor increasingly faded into the background and other factors came to the fore: for example, the potential for exercising creativity in educational work ‘even with the littlest ones’ or the ‘positive working atmosphere on the team’. Other studies also stress this circumstance. Thus Koch et al., for instance, write:

For professional practice, our research findings substantiate the high degree of job satisfaction felt by men and women working in ECEC. The cooperation between women and men in particular gains high marks, even if differences and frictions repeatedly arise in everyday life that can lead to problems. The fun and pleasure of helping children in their development is a major factor in this job satisfaction. The scope for creativity and possibilities for self-fulfilment in the workplace are experienced as extremely positive. (Koch et al. 2012, pp. 356–357)

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<sup>6</sup> The wage agreement between the German Federation of Municipal Employers’ Associations and the trade unions ver.di (public employees) and GEW (education workers), which went into force on 1 November 2009, recognised the stresses of working in ECEC and for the first time provided for binding health protections of educators. In so-called health circles, stresses and their causes are analysed for each workplace and suggestions developed for improving working conditions (cf. GEW 2009: *Erziehung und Wissenschaft, Zeitschrift der Bildungsgewerkschaft GEW*, p. 16).

<sup>7</sup> The proportion of women who serve as family breadwinners in Germany has now risen to more than 20% (cf. Brehmer et al. 2011).

<sup>8</sup> The representative study *Wege zur Gleichstellung heute und morgen* (Sinus Sociovision 2007) shows that half of men would prefer not to bear the brunt of responsibility for earning money.

Koch et al. and Uhrig note, however, that the high degree of job satisfaction that ECEC workers find in their work has not been communicated to the public very well thus far (cf. Koch et al. 2012, p. 357; Uhrig 2006, p. 30).

Apart from the reasons relating to salary, recognition and general conditions, 'traditional notions of masculinity and gender' as well as 'ECEC as a territory perceived as female'<sup>9</sup> and the 'sweeping suspicions against men who are or wish to become ECEC workers' are in the forefront of the arguments cited in the studies to explain the low proportion of men in ECEC.

### **'Traditional notions of masculinity and gender' and 'ECEC as a territory perceived as female'**

Thus all studies show that among young men thinking about future careers, the main hindrances to choosing ECEC are the widespread stereotypes that childrearing (both privately and professionally) is women's work and that male ECEC workers are gay and/or paedophile, as the following interview sequence with a male ECEC worker from our study illustrates:

The stereotypes came early on. At school people tended to say... What are the preconceptions about men in kindergarten? Either they're gay or they want something from the kids or both. Right? And so then I also thought: Okay, it could be weird to be in a kindergarten.<sup>10</sup>

Koch et al. also write that the male trainees and ECEC workers they interviewed generally encountered positive responses to their career choice from their immediate environment (parents and other relatives), but repeatedly found themselves confronted with negative reactions from their peer groups in particular:

While during the vocational orientation phase about one-fourth of male youth expressed a fundamental interest in working with children, a similarly large group of young men strongly opposed male ECEC workers: One-third of the boys surveyed were of the opinion that men in ECEC were 'not real men'. Three out of ten believed that men were likely to be a 'danger to children' and one in five even agreed with the statement that men in ECEC were 'perverts' who 'abuse the kids'. This is the group from whom those boys who are interested in working with young children can expect negative reactions (Koch et al. 2012, p. 355)

From our perspective it is also noteworthy, however, that the profession of ECEC worker in Germany not only has to fight against traditional clichés (for instance that they just sit around doing handicrafts), but also that the profession of ECEC has such a vague profile among even those (young) women and men who are interested in or have decided to undergo training in the field, as the following excerpt from a group interview with female trainees illustrates:

I1: Well, I didn't really look for information in advance [...], I didn't really have much of an idea. [...] I mean, if you want to do it, you just have to do it anyway.

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9 On the concept of gender territories, see Helga Krüger (2002).

<sup>10</sup> From a group interview with male educators in the context of the study 'Männliche Fachkräfte in Kindertagesstätten'.

I2: It was pretty much the same for me, actually. [...] It was a spontaneous decision. And you know approximately, ECEC workers, children, but I didn't really know what exactly goes on, what the training is like, what all is involved. I only realised after a few months.<sup>11</sup>

These statements underline that youths and young adults need more information about and experience of the vocational field of ECEC. Our interviews and the experiences in the area of vocational orientation decisively show, however, that given the current staffing shortages and the increasing professionalisation of the field, such offerings (for example within vocational guidance in schools) should target not just boys and young men, but also girls and young women.

### **'Sweeping suspicions of men who are or wish to become ECEC workers in ECEC'**

Although in our study only 2% of ECEC centre administrators, 3% of ECEC provider programme directors and 4% of parents fully support the statement that 'It is a risk to use men as ECEC workers for young children' (Cremers et al. 2010, p. 61),<sup>12</sup> our study also shows that, at least before the federal initiative 'More Men in ECEC',<sup>13</sup> male ECEC workers were still considered slightly disturbing. Thus nearly half of the ECEC provider programme directors, ECEC centre administrators and parents surveyed had already considered the danger of potential abuse by male ECEC workers. Forty-eight % of provider programme directors, 43% of ECEC centre administrators and 40% of parents agreed more or less clearly with the following statement (top-box 1&2): 'Even if it is unfair to many men, I have thought of the danger of possible abuse by male ECEC workers' (Ibid., p. 62). The interviews with male trainees and ECEC workers show furthermore that the sweeping suspicions of men among male ECEC students and male ECEC workers lead to insecurities and can hamper them in their daily professional work. Male ECEC workers frequently report that they do not dare let children sit on their laps or kiss them on the cheek, or that they avoid hugging or gymnastic exercises that involve close body contact. This finding is confirmed by many (inter-)national studies (e.g., Aigner and Rohrmann 2012; Buschmeyer 2013; BVZ Frankfurt 2006; Cameron et al. 1999; Farquhar 1997, Kreß 2006; Uhrig 2006; Vandenbroeck and Peeters 2008; Watermann 2006). While some of the authors of these studies, such as Watermann and Kreß, do not describe sweeping suspicions of men in ECEC as one of the central obstacles to men's integration into the profession, Cameron et al., Cremers et al., Farquhar and Koch et al. in particular stress that blanket suspicions certainly can prevent young men from choosing to work in ECEC. Thus Koch et al., for example, conclude:

Overall one can identify two areas in which the 'general suspicion' becomes a problem: first, in the phase of choosing a training programme and a profession, and second in dealing with physical closeness in everyday life with children in the workplace. Negative reactions from peers make it harder for boys and men to choose to train as ECEC workers or to work in childcare. This is especially

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<sup>11</sup> From a group interview with female ECEC training college students in the context of the study 'Männliche Fachkräfte in Kindertagesstätten'.

<sup>12</sup> In presenting the quantitative data from our own study, we have generally used a four-step scale. If not otherwise mentioned, the first top-box or the highest degree of agreement ('agree completely') is always indicated. The response categories of the four-step scale were: 'completely agree', 'mostly agree', 'mostly disagree', and 'completely disagree'.

<sup>13</sup> See also: <http://www.bmfsfj.de/BMFSFJ/Gleichstellung/perspektiven-fuer-jungen-und-maenner.html>

relevant for youths, since the peer groups of male youths have a strong tendency to object to and denigrate men in ECEC. (Koch et al. 2012, p. 362)

For Germany, however, the conclusion is that despite sweeping suspicions of male ECEC workers, they are well accepted and considered desirable in ECEC, as the sections that follow show.

### ***Acceptance and Desirability: Arguments for more men in ECEC***

The (few) studies that explore the desirability of male ECEC workers make it clear that they are most welcome in ECEC. Our study shows for Germany that in the occupational field of ECEC, all groups surveyed expressed the widespread wish for an increase in male professional staff. This is true of parents as well as ECEC centre administrators, female ECEC workers and provider programme directors.

All of these groups believe not just that men are suited to the profession of ECEC, but also argue unambiguously for mixed-gender teams in ECEC. Thus it is not surprising that one-third of parents 'completely' agree with the statement that an ECEC centre that also employs male staff is more attractive to them than one with only female ECEC workers (Cremers et al. 2010, pp. 48ff.). A closer analysis of the quantitative data also permits more precise statements on which demographic sub-groups of parents have the highest acceptance of male ECEC workers in ECEC. It is thus striking, for example, that

- Parents who have had positive experiences with male ECEC workers, interns or those doing their Voluntary Year of Social Service or their alternative community service supported raising the proportion of men in ECEC more than the average of all parents surveyed;
- Parents from socially more advantaged strata in particular argued for more men in ECEC, although it should be noted that the differences between social strata were rather slight overall;
- Parents in the old federal states accorded more significance to the topic of 'male ECEC workers' than those in the new federal states;
- There was, in contrast, no difference in the acceptance of male ECEC workers between mothers and fathers or parents from urban and rural areas;
- Moreover, single parents did not strikingly differ in their fundamental openness to male ECEC workers from parents raising their children together.

In England and Austria, too, countries for which data exists on the desirability of male ECEC workers in ECEC, they meet with a high degree of acceptance. Cameron et al. and Rolfe as well as several online surveys show that the majority of parents in England favour more male staff in ECEC (cf. Cameron et al. 1999; Rolfe and the online surveys Day Care Trust 2003 and the English federation of ECEC providers 'Major's providers group').<sup>14</sup> Cameron et al. stress, however, that mothers frequently express more confidence in female than male ECEC workers (cf. Cameron et al. 1999, pp. 99–100). The Austrian researchers from the project 'Elementar – Männer in der pädagogischen Arbeit mit Kindern' even refer to the high degree of support for more male

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<sup>14</sup> See: <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/798/Men-And-Chilcare.aspx> [Accessed: 3.3.2014] und <http://www.cypnow.co.uk/cyp/news/1051053/parents-voice-overwhelming-support-childcare>) [Accessed: 3.3.2014],



professional staff in ECEC among all sub-groups surveyed as one of the main findings of their study. In Austria, for example, 90% of male ECEC workers and 79% of female ECEC workers, as well as 93% of students at ECEC training colleges and 89.5% of parents agreed with the statement that more male professionals should be employed in ECEC (cf. Aigner and Rohrmann 2012, p. 328).

From the perspective of the ECEC workers, trainees, provider programme directors and ECEC centre administrators as well as parents questioned in the framework of our survey, there are many reasons to support more male ECEC workers in ECEC.

- Male ECEC workers are important role models for boys and girls
- The cooperation between male and female ECEC workers can show children how men and women deal with one another
- Male and female ECEC workers could learn from each other in their pedagogical work
- Male ECEC workers are valuable for work with parents, especially in their capacity as contact persons for fathers.
- More male ECEC workers could also contribute to raising the social status of the profession of ECEC

The arguments formulated by the various groups surveyed in support of more men in ECEC nevertheless contain quite contradictory, highly gendered attributions and expectations. Thus on the one hand a large segment of those questioned hoped that increasing the proportion of male ECEC professionals would expand traditional images of men and gender. Parents as well as ECEC centre administrators and provider programme directors expect and want male professionals not to exhibit primarily traditionally male-connoted qualities and capacities, but rather mainly female-connoted social skills. One female ECEC centre administrator expressed this as follows:

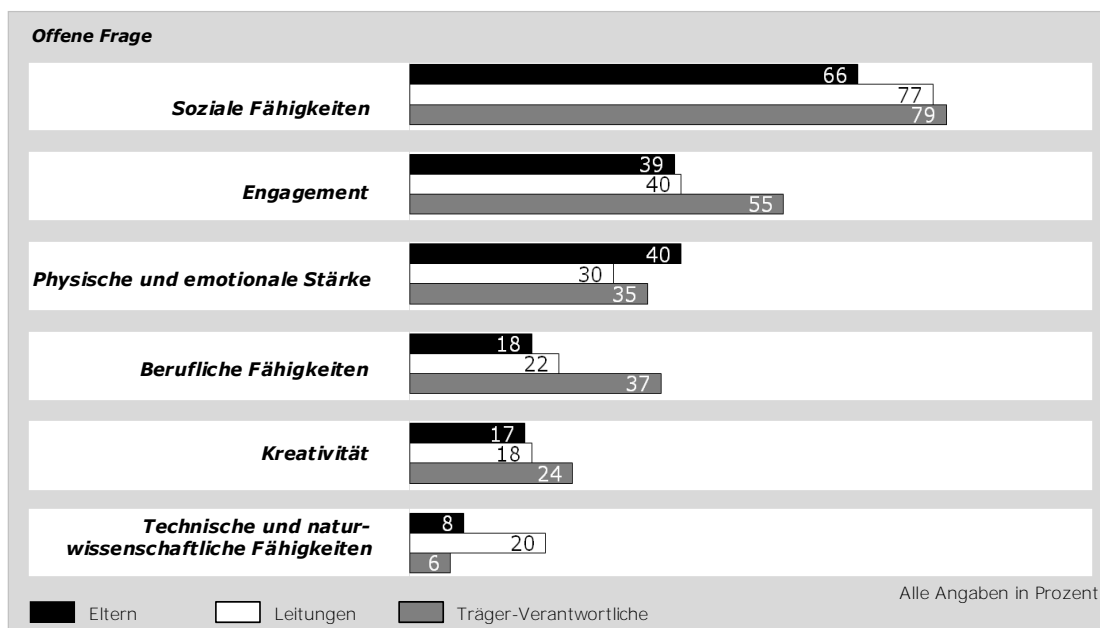
But the unusual side of the encounter between a very young child and a man—standing in for the father, you might say—is how much touching can happen there. How much devotion, how much love and care. That is something not all children and not all adults experience in their everyday lives. And to see and experience that on the ground makes it easier in my opinion to break down rigid role models. (Cremers et al. 2010, p. 54)

Asked in an open-ended question (that is, one without fixed response categories) which qualities or abilities male ECEC workers should ideally bring to the profession, provider programme directors, ECEC centre administrators and parents mention mainly social and thus female-connoted skills. The single mentions (Fig.1) were assigned to appropriate more general categories.

ZUORDNUNG DER NENNUNGEN DER OFFENEN FRAGE (AUSWAHL)					
Soziale Fähigkeiten	Engagement	Physische und emotionale Stärke	Berufliche Fähigkeiten	Kreativität	Technische / naturwissenschaftliche Fähigkeiten
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empathie, Respekt</li> <li>• Feinfühligkeit</li> <li>• Freundlichkeit</li> <li>• Fürsorglichkeit</li> <li>• Anpassungsfähigkeit</li> <li>• Kommunikativität</li> <li>• Kompromissfähigkeit</li> <li>• Konflikte lösen</li> <li>• Kritikfähigkeit</li> <li>• Sensibilität</li> <li>• Soziale Ader</li> <li>• Teamfähigkeit</li> <li>• Toleranz</li> <li>• Umsichtigkeit</li> <li>• Zuhören können</li> <li>• Trösten können</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engagement</li> <li>• Einsatzbereitschaft</li> <li>• Motivation</li> <li>• Fortbildungswilligkeit</li> <li>• Energie</li> <li>• Freude am Beruf</li> <li>• Aufgeschlossenheit</li> <li>• Begeisterung</li> <li>• Lernwilligkeit</li> <li>• Eigenständigkeit</li> <li>• Liebe zum Beruf</li> <li>• Unternehmungslust</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geduld</li> <li>• Ausdauer</li> <li>• Sportlichkeit</li> <li>• Durchsetzungsvermögen</li> <li>• Belastbarkeit</li> <li>• Humor / gute Laune</li> <li>• Selbstbewusstsein</li> <li>• Gelassenheit</li> <li>• Gute Nerven</li> <li>• Besonnenheit</li> <li>• Stressresistenz</li> <li>• Courage, Mut</li> <li>• Charakterfestigkeit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fachwissen</li> <li>• Pädagogisches Geschick</li> <li>• Hauswirtschaftliche Fähigkeiten</li> <li>• Sprachliche Kompetenzen</li> <li>• Allgemeinwissen</li> <li>• Beobachtungsgabe</li> <li>• Berufserfahrung</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Experimentierfreudigkeit</li> <li>• Kreativität</li> <li>• Phantasie</li> <li>• Künstlerische Fähigkeiten</li> <li>• Musikalität</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Handwerkliche Fähigkeiten</li> <li>• Technische Fähigkeiten</li> <li>• Computerkenntnisse</li> <li>• Experimentierinteresse</li> <li>• Bauen, Konstruieren</li> </ul>

(Figure 1)

Two-thirds of the parents and approximately three-quarters of providers and administrators stress social skills as an important quality and ability of male ECEC workers; empathy and a capacity for teamwork are mentioned (Fig. 2). It is also striking that, at least when responding to open-ended questions, only 20% of ECEC centre administrators also want or expect male-connoted technical and scientific abilities from male ECEC workers. These qualities and capacities are apparently less significant still for parents and provider programme directors.



(Figure 2)

On the other hand, male professionals are also desirable specifically because people hope that they will bring different pedagogical offerings, activities and structures of interaction and communication into ECEC. These wishes, hopes and expectations recur in (nearly) all of the other studies. Thus for instance Koch et al. describe how in the Austrian research project 'Elementar' many female ECEC workers express the hope or expectation that male ECEC workers will offer the children gender-typical sports, such as football, but also rough and tumble games and woodworking (cf. Koch et al. 2012, p. 358). The authors of other studies point out that the male ECEC workers or trainees they interviewed found themselves confronted with the gender-typical expectations of their female colleagues (e.g. BVZ Frankfurt 2006; Cameron et al. 1999; Kasiske et al 2006; Uhrig 2006, Vandenbroeck and Peeters 2008; Watermann 2006; Cremers et al. 2010; Buschmeyer 2013). This finding also recurs in regional and international studies (including Aigner and Rohrmann 2012; Kreß 2006; Kasiske et al. 2006; Uhrig 2006; Watermann 2006).

The studies of Cameron et al. 1999, Cremers et al. 2010 and Aigner and Rohrmann 2012 in particular continue to stress that in the interviews, alongside the emphasis on gender-related differences, the ECEC workers questioned also repeatedly reported that male and female ECEC workers make no distinctions in their pedagogical work with children. Koch et al. 2012 also interpret this statement as the expression of an 'ideology of sameness' widespread in ECEC (Permien and Frank 1995) that prevents ECEC workers from perceiving (or wanting to perceive) gender-related differences (cf. Koch et al. 2012, p. 358). Buschmeyer 2013, in contrast, speaks more precisely of a 'discourse of equality in the field of ECEC institutions'. Buschmeyer refers here to the concept of 'gender knowledge' (see also Andresen et al. 2003; Wetterer 2008 and 2010). She stresses that this field-specific discourse, or in this case the individual 'gender

on the one hand the male respondents emphasise their difference to their female colleagues in the interviews, for example by explaining that they are rougher and more athletic with the children or, unlike the women, are able to take on a paternal role for the children (of single mothers). According to Nentwich et al., this argument is used to legitimise the work of male ECEC workers in the female field of ECEC (on this, see also our remarks below on male strategies of resovereignisation).

On the other hand, the male ECEC professionals also stress in the interviews that they do not differ from their female colleagues, pointing out for example that they enjoy performing rather 'feminine' tasks at work such as 'singing' or 'storytelling' with the children. Moreover, the men defend themselves against the sweeping suspicion of them as professionals and refuse to accept the prohibition on performing certain activities involving children's bodies, such as changing nappies. In this regard the men insist that they want to be treated the same as their female colleagues.

According to Nentwich et al., the various discursive strategies cannot be attributed to individual male ECEC workers. In the course of the interviews, the male respondents frequently use all six discursive strategies in different contexts (for a similar discussion, see also Buschmeyer 2013).

The varying gendered expectations, wishes, experiences and self-assessments sketched here, which respondents cite in the context of the research projects on the topic of 'Men in ECEC' show two things above all: *On the one hand*, the line of argument that 'Men bring something new and different to ECEC' tends to presuppose that men and women are very different or opposite and to reproduce or bolster gendered constructions of identity. This figure of argumentation, however, also tends to solidify stereotypical images of men and gender while *on the other hand* standing in striking contradiction to the above-described wish for male ECEC workers to help in the multiplication of non-stereotypical images of masculinity. It is obvious that contradictory expectations contain the potential for conflict—for example when there are differences of opinion on an ECEC team about which tasks and spheres of activity the (new) male colleague should take over, and he perhaps does not want to or cannot (fully) meet the expectations placed upon him. Several studies also point out that male trainees and ECEC workers sometimes find the gender-typical expectations of female colleagues and the children to be disruptive (for instance Aigner and Rohrman 2012; BVZ Frankfurt 2006; Cameron et al 1999; Kasiske et al 2006; Uhrig 2006, Vandenbroeck and Peeters 2008; Watermann 2006; Buschmeyer 2013).

With these findings in mind, it seems only logical for the studies of Cameron et al. 1999, Cremers et al. 2010, Kasiske et al. 2006, Uhrig 2006 and Watermann 2006 to highlight the importance of gender-reflective communication within the team for conflict-free cooperation between men and women.

### **Gender-typical tasks in ECEC practice and a perceived 'female culture' in the overall occupational field**

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gender differences. The two discursive practices 'emphasizing equality' and 'appropriating femininity' in contrast serve to emphasise gender equality. The sixth discursive practice, 'becoming a pedagogue' is used to highlight the professionalism of male educators' pedagogical work (Nentwich et al. 2013). See also Buschmeyer 2013, which develops similar categories with the concept of 'gender knowledge' (rather than 'discursive practices').

Although in actual practice male and female ECEC workers repeatedly ‘cut through’ gender-typical spheres of action or behave in a decidedly gender-atypical fashion,<sup>16</sup> the gender-stereotypical wishes and expectations described above can sometimes also be found in the respondents’ accounts of their practical experiences. Thus the ECEC centre administrators, trainees and male and female ECEC workers in our study describe how, as soon as men and women work together on a team, ECEC professionals tend to cultivate gender-typical working styles and to offer children the corresponding modes of play. According to the interviewees, male ECEC workers offer sport and active games far more often than their female colleagues, engage in more rough and tumble play with the children and believe that male ECEC workers are more likely to take risks than their female counterparts. Male and female ECEC workers alike also state that men frequently exhibit a clearer, more direct and results-oriented communication style. This finding is substantiated in regional and international studies (e.g. Aigner and Rohrmann 2012; Buschmeyer 2013; Kreß 2006; Kasiske et al. 2006; Nentwich et al. 2013 Uhrig 2006; Watermann 2006).

Furthermore, nearly all studies describe perceptions of a ‘female culture’ in the occupational world of ECEC. In our study we understand this to mean the following assumptions and notions, among others:

- Women speak more about ‘personal’ and ‘trivial’ matters (men frequently find conversations about teaching or team meetings insufficiently goal oriented. They have the impression that they do not produce clear decisions).
- During team discussions, women place more value in a pleasant and harmonious atmosphere than in the professional, well-structured handling of the points on the agenda.
- Women weigh the pros and cons instead of reaching quick, uncomplicated decisions.
- Women emotionalise their working relationships. In the perceptions of male colleagues, this produces personal conflicts that the entire team is repeatedly drawn into.
- Women encourage children to play in ways that are cautious and avoid danger.
- Women set different priorities in their pedagogical work. According to the men, many female trainees and ECEC workers concentrate on artistic and creative activities and neglect sport and movement (see also the statements by male and female ECEC workers on gender-typical activities in Cremers et al. 2010, pp. 44ff).
- Women attach great importance to an attractive environment, even if this restricts the children’s freedom of movement and play.

Koch et al. and Vandenbroeck and Peeters add further examples to our findings with respect to a ‘female culture’ perceived as dominant. Thus Rohrmann et al. note that from the perspective of the respondents in the Austrian study, ‘male’ topics rarely appear in the training of ECEC workers.

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<sup>16</sup> For example, male professionals who are not interested in technology and do not like rough and tumble play or football, or female professionals who feel responsible for the computer, enjoy playing football or approve of children climbing big trees.

Above all in physical education, but also in handicrafts and the technical field, boys but also girls are of the opinion that 'male' interests are not, or only insufficiently, taken into account. (Koch et al. 2012, p. 356)

What is more, in their textual analysis of several textbooks used in Belgian training colleges, Vandebroek and Peeters note that male ECEC workers and fathers are virtually absent. In the rare cases where fathers appear, they are presented in a negative light in childrearing (cf. Vandebroek and Peeters 2008, p. 711). Gilbert und Williams, who analysed textbooks in the USA, also come to the conclusion that they portray male and female preschool teachers in a gender-stereotypical manner. The two authors emphasise that the books they analysed seldom contain pictures of men dealing with children in a caring way (Gilbert and Williams 2008, quoted in Aigner and Rohrmann 2012).

In analysing the reported experiences of male ECEC professionals as well as the interviews we conducted with male ECEC workers and students at ECEC training colleges, it becomes clear that some men speak disparagingly of behaviours considered typically 'feminine'. These men emphasise, for example, that male ECEC workers are more likely to bring professionalism to their work while their female colleagues get lost in petty emotional details or talk too much and therefore are not productive enough.

Things where we [men] might say, for instance, we don't need to discuss that yet again—are reopened for the tenth time. Where we might think, okay, if we just leave it, we'll be ahead in other areas. And that makes things so exhausting.<sup>17</sup>

In the concrete interview situation in which the male trainees and ECEC workers are addressed in their capacity as male pedagogues, some of the interviewees also describe themselves as better and more professional— an attitude that in our view can also be interpreted as a resovereignisation strategy by individual men<sup>18</sup>(cf. Cremers/Krabel 2012a), with which they try to re-establish male claims to superiority that 'threaten' to be lost in a female-dominated occupation (on this, see also the remarks on 'hypermasculinity' in Aigner and Poscheschnik 2011 and on complicitous masculinity in Buschmeyer 2013). When we also note resovereignisation strategies among the men in our study, we are not interested in pointing the finger at individual trainees and ECEC workers and judging them. The emphasis on 'male superiority' or 'strategies of masculine self-assurance' (see Aigner and Poscheschnik 2011) or the orientation towards hegemonic masculinity (see Buschmeyer 2013) are inherent in the societal gender discourse and can also be understood as coping strategies used by men to legitimise their occupational choice to themselves and others, or to disassociate themselves from the feminine in order to establish their own masculinity as ECEC workers. Nevertheless, we want to show that relations between male and female ECEC workers must also be read against the backdrop of a social gender relationship characterised among other things by the higher worth placed upon male-connoted norms, practices and values. If the resovereignisation strategies of individual men and a discourse that highlights the male ECEC worker as 'other' and 'special' dominate the pedagogical work in ECEC, there is a danger that relationships on mixed

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<sup>17</sup> From a group interview with male students at an ECEC training college in the context of the study 'Männliche Fachkräfte in Kindertagesstätten'.

<sup>18</sup> Forster uses the term resovereignisation (*Resouveränisierung*) to refer to male strategies for (re-)establishing claims to dominance and power in a society increasingly orientated towards equality (cf. Forster 2006).

ECEC teams will become marked by gender difference and gender competition and ultimately fail (cf. Neubauer 2012; Cremers and Krabel 2013).

### ***The influence of professional childcare and education by men on child development***

While Aigner und Rohrmann (2012) believe that the question of to what extent the everyday practice of male and female ECEC workers truly differs in regard to working with children cannot yet be answered conclusively (Ibid.), the results of the abovementioned Austrian impact study as well as the preliminary findings of the Tandem Study have been available since March 2013. Based on these new research findings, one can demonstrate among other things that male professionals provide 'effective diversification and enrichment of everyday relationships' (Aigner et al. 2013, p. 113) in ECEC. Thus in the presentation of their results to date, Brandes et al. 2014 conclude *on the one hand* that from a professional standpoint, male ECEC workers scarcely differ from their female colleagues. There are only insignificant differences, for example, between male and female ECEC workers along the five dimensions of *empathy, challenge, dialogical interaction, type of cooperation and communication contents*, and they found that attachment-theoretical assumptions from parenting research (women tend to be more 'empathetic and attachment orientated' and men more 'challenging and exploration-orientated') cannot be applied to ECEC professionals or rather to the sample of ECEC workers undertaken in the Tandem Study.

A comparison of the averages for male and female professionals yields only minimal, insignificant differences throughout. Thus with regard to the sample's man/woman tandems, there are no apparent gender effects in the rating scale. Across all dimensions and items, there are no significant differences in the assessment of behaviour between male and female professionals. (Brandes et al. 2014, p.)

If, *on the other hand*, the focus is shifted to the children's gender, that is, to how male and female ECEC workers interact with boys or girls, remarkable differences emerge. Thus both female and male ECEC workers are more likely to discuss activities with boys in a more objective and functional manner. They tend to ask the boys more questions intended to make them think, and to speak with girls more frequently about experiences or personal matters (cf. Brandes et al. 2014, p.).

Male and female professionals behave differently towards boys and girls, particularly in regard to communicative contents and in the manner of cooperation. This tendency is similar in men and women. (Brandes et al. 2014, p.)

Furthermore, the tandem study emphasises that in interactions between male ECEC workers and boys and female ECEC workers and girls, respectively, one can observe 'authentic situations and key scenes in which the category of 'gender' is activated and gender identity/ies (co-)constructed. Brandes et al. describe how these key scenes are created, for example while building a paper roll cannon or stringing beads onto a necklace, thereby conjuring up 'male or female communities'. As the following two examples from Brandes et al. 2014 show, these key scenes are generally associated with specific materials or activities (wood, nails, hammers for boys/male ECEC workers, beads or magic wool for girls/female ECEC workers) or fantasies/associations (pistols and knight's castles for boys; hair and dresses for girls) that exhibit a 'suitable gendered connotation'.

*When building a knight's castle the male ECEC worker and the boy consider how they might integrate a paper roll into the structure. The ECEC worker strikingly lowers his voice and whispers to the boy: 'We can make a cannon out of it'. Both of their eyes sparkle and the observers cannot help but gain the impression of a male community, with the whispering not merely expressing the closeness of the actors, but also awakening associations that they are 'accomplices' who are sharing an idea that might otherwise perhaps not be uttered in this way.*

*In a video sequence of a female ECEC worker and a girl, the woman holds a wire and a girl strings beads onto it. The two of them chat about which beads they like best. The ECEC worker waxes enthusiastic: 'I just love pink with glitter'. And the girl responds with 'I love orange'. The two of them gaze raptly at the necklace and time seems to stand still for a moment of intense understanding. At this point they, too, form a clearly female-connoted community.*

Thus to answer the question of whether the gender of professionals has consequences for pedagogical work in ECEC, and if so what they are, one can show differences between male and female staff,

when it comes to their inclinations, what they do with the children and which interests and leanings among girls and boys they tend to pick up on. This can be considered evidence that the cooperation between male and female professionals in fact brings greater diversity to everyday life in ECEC, to the extent that men and women prefer different materials and that different products are made with them. (Brandes et al. 2014, p. )

Furthermore, against the background of the statistical data analysis performed as part of the Tandem Study, the main finding is that the gender of the children has a greater impact on pedagogical events than the gender of the ECEC professionals. The second study, too, which dealt with the question of whether, and if so, how, the presence of male ECEC professionals affects pedagogical work with children, reaches similar conclusions.

Thus we observed that it is children themselves who make a *distinction* between the ECEC workers. What is decisive for boys here is that on average and *cross-dimensionally*, they more frequently seek out or maintain contact to male professionals, which might suggest a *fundamental need for same-sex communication and identification on the part of boys*. This is not to say that girls, who apparently attract less attention, have no need for communication and identification with opposite-sex (adult) caregivers, and we consider it equally probable. Nonetheless our data across various levels of the survey show that girls respond less strongly to the gender of the ECEC worker, while in contrast it is *precisely the boys, who—whether because of the under-representation of the 'masculine' or a lack of contact with male caregivers at home—are attracted to a man on the ECEC team* and require him to offset the largely 'feminine' factor. From our perspective, this viewpoint also does not contradict the notion, which has been discussed controversially in the gender discourse, of whether and to what extent certain attitudes, activities etc. are socio-culturally constructed and/or hardwired by nature. Just as it is impossible to deny the influence of cultural and historical factors on our gendered relationships to children, it is neither possible nor desirable to



wholly 'neutralise' the dimension of sex and the body or to deny its subtle influence on our socio-cultural practices. (Aigner 2013, p. 111)<sup>19</sup>

Overall, the Austrian impact study by Aigner et al. 2013—whose conclusions we cite in what follows, because the study appears to have received scant attention in the specialist discourse thus far—provides '*important confirmations or indications*'<sup>20</sup> that

- there are no significant preferences for children of one sex or the other depending on the sex of the ECEC professional, but there is a certain tendency for some female professionals to interact more frequently with girls
- professionals in ECEC approve of men's different way of dealing with children and stress the fundamental necessity of equal access for boys and girls to men and women
- male ECEC workers have an increased significance above all for boys, which is revealed in various dimensions
- girls in comparison to boys seem to have an 'easier time of it' in ECEC because they cultivate better relations with professionals of *both sexes* (seeking closeness, fewer conflicts etc) and are less troublesome in their social behaviour (better able to concentrate, less hyperactive)
- the social mobility in groups of boys led by male ECEC workers is significantly greater than that in groups led by female colleagues
- the creation of transitions in group activities is practiced more appropriately in mixed-gender teams of ECEC professionals
- girls in mixed-gender teams of professionals exhibit on average higher values in the area of social-emotional skills (higher than the average value for girls)
- male pedagogues evidently—again especially for boys—seem to encourage the acceptance of extroversion and externalising behaviour
- in various respects (eye and body contact, looking for undivided attention etc) boys more frequently seek proximity to male staff, while coming into conflict somewhat more often with female personnel
- boys also seek support in exploration, tasks and play from male staff far more often than female staff
- girls almost as frequently seek support in exploration and affect attunement from male ECEC workers
- boys mention the male ECEC worker to their parents far more often than do girls (which is open to variously significant interpretations)

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<sup>19</sup> Emphasis in the original.

<sup>20</sup> Emphasis in the original.

- one can speak overall of a clear 'boy-man-effect', which needs to be backed up in detail by larger samples and more detailed studies. (Aigner et al. 2013, S. 112f.)

## Summary and conclusions

As described here, male professionals are not only deemed highly desirable by all actors in the occupational field of ECEC, and not just in Germany, but in the meantime can also be described, on the basis of the current research, as providing 'effective diversification and enrichment of everyday relationships' (Aigner et al. 2013, p. 113) in ECEC, although we naturally need additional empirical studies (Ibid., p. 112). The hurdles and barriers to increasing the proportion of men, however, continue to lie chiefly in a traditional gender order and the accompanying stereotypical gender images and a gender-segregated labour market—for example in the fact that vocational training is divided into a dual system on the one side and classroom education on the other, and that young men generally resort to the wider selection of occupations in the dual system, which are male-connoted and better paid. But they are affected as well by the gender-stereotypical advice offered by vocational counsellors (cf. Schiltz 2012). Gender segregation is also constantly being reproduced through cultural gender stereotypes that young men and women internalise. In their book on men in the female-dominated caring professions, *Männer in Frauenberufen der Pflege und Erziehung*, Jens Krabel and Olaf Stuve (2006) explain that gender identity must be regarded as a resource that, in a dominant 'culture of binary gender', promises to reward boys and girls and men and women for gender-typical conduct and to punish them for gender-atypical conduct. This also applies to choice of occupation: A female-connoted workplace, for example one in which a young man changes nappies and devotes himself to early childhood education or sings children's songs during morning circle and watches and documents a child's developmental phases, means not just relatively poor pay for hard work with little social prestige, but also always represents a potential threat to his own masculinity, as we discussed in the section on occupational paths and the remarks on strategies of male resovereignisation. If this aspect is neglected, there is reason to fear that programmes to increase the participation of girls and women and boys and men in so-called male jobs and female jobs will come to nothing. Reflection upon the gains and losses that arise from fulfilling or failing to fulfil demands on gender identity is a necessary precondition for breaking through the cycle of gender segregation on the labour market (cf. Krabel and Stuve 2006, p. 38). Career guidance in schools, vocational schools, career information centres, youth social work etc should thus be conceptualised and conducted taking gender into account, in order to correspond and do justice to the individual starting positions and future perspectives of young women and men (for more detail, see Cremers 2012; Koordinationsstelle 'Männer in Kitas' 2013). Against the background of the expectations of and wishes for male ECEC professionals described here or the gender-differentiating tendency when it comes to what male and female ECEC professionals 'do with the children, and which of boys' and girls' interests and leanings they prefer to take up' (Brandes et al. 2014, p. ), in our view it is necessary for training and continuing education institutions for ECEC workers as well as ECEC providers and ECEC centres to initiate 'gender sensitisation processes' among their instructors and staffs in order to analyse and, where necessary, change their institutional gender-typical division of tasks, preconceptions, working and communication practices (cf. Cremers and Krabel 2012b, 2013; Koordinationsstelle 'Männer in Kitas' 2014). In this sense, 'more men in ECEC' can also contribute to more gender diversity and with it more professionalism. For it is becoming increasingly clear in the professional debate over quality standards in ECEC that (heterogeneous) teams, in which women and men with diverse cultural and professional backgrounds and biographies work together, are beneficial for

team development and educational work. In order for this to function, however, ECEC administrators and ECEC workers alike need to consciously perceive and cultivate team heterogeneity as a strength (cf. Cremers and Krabel 2014).

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