Title: Examining Intrinsic and Extrinsic Factors Impacting Men's Decisions to Teach Young Children

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Study Background/Overview

The study's purpose is to increase understanding about intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence men's decisions to work with young children (Birth - 8 years). This inquiry will help to illuminate gender-based discourses and practices that continue to construct the nurturance and education of young children as *female-only* work (Burn & Pratt-Adaoms, 2015; Cushman, 2010). Men who work within female-dominated professions such as early childhood education (ECE) are challenged by a set of invisible factors (i.e., *glass door effect*) that become apparent only after they enter the workforce (Koch & Farquhar, 2015). We divide these workplace variables into two major categories: extrinsic (i.e., structural and societal) and intrinsic (e.g., personal) drivers. Extrinsically, men's engagement in child care work is influenced by structural factors that support male workers' aspirations within the ECE field. These educators often find themselves taking on the mantle of "role models," which can have many implications in the profession. Additionally, men may be precipitously pushed to administrative positions (*glass elevator effect*) because they are rare (2.5-3%) in ECE settings nationwide. What's more, they are likely to benefit from unofficial coaching and mentoring by experienced men teachers and decision-makers in early learning environments. Despite the advantages that men may enjoy in ECE structures, the literature shows that gender stereotypes and negative social bias (Shpancer, 2019; Burn & Prat-Adams, 2015; Brownhill and Oates, 2016), suspicions of child molestation by children's parents and microaggressions by female colleagues (Cole et al., 2019;), low pay and the professional status of child care work generally deter men from joining this workforce (Koch & Emilsen, 2017; Peeters, 2007). Intrinsically, personal aspirations influence men's decisions to work in ECE. Despite the challenges they face in venturing outside the stereotypical masculine niches, men who join the ECE field are motivated by their passion for working with young children and by the opportunity to make an impactful difference in their communities and to "give back." Many also express a sense of personal fulfillment in *intentionally* challenging gender stereotypes and embracing more comprehensive views of manhood (Cole et al, 2019).

Theoretical framework

Understanding how the above factors interplay with other social constructs, such as race, ethnicity, class and gender identity, can help policy makers, practitioners and other stakeholders to develop initiatives for achieving relatively higher rates of gender inclusion and diversity in the ECE workforce. Foucault's (1978) work on discourses and their effects on individual and group behavior, in combination with perspectives gained from gender studies (bell hooks, 1984; Butler, 1990; Connell, 2017), provide our study with a strong theoretical framework to explore both extrinsic and intrinsic factors that influence male teachers' decisions to participate in the implementation of the PreK-For-All initiative in New York City. Foucault's theory on discourses holds that gender is socially constructed through the operation of social power. This theory also informs us about the intersections between gender, race and class that advantage or disadvantage men and women in specific situations (Burn & Pratt-Adams, 2015; Connell, 2017). Connell (2017) maintains that men generally benefit from their ability to perform "gendered" tasks in a patriarchal society. Burn and Pratt-Adams posit that, although male teachers may be subject to microaggressions from female colleagues during initial training, "qualified men can be advantaged in their careers due to their rarity" in the ECE profession (2015:6). We also review the literature on men's experiences in ECE to deepen our knowledge about recruitment and retention strategies that have been effective in national and international contexts.

Methodology and data collection protocols

The above theories have provided the tools to design our research methodology and to interpret our study data to understand how intrinsic and extrinsic motivations interplay with gender practices and public discourse to impact the decisions of a diverse group of male teachers and assistant teachers working in the New York City education system. We posed three guiding questions:

- What are the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence men's decisions to work with young children?
- How do male educators perceive their experiences within the field of early childhood education?
- How are male educators recruited, retained and supported in early learning settings in New York City?

To answer the above research questions, we utilized a variety of qualitative instruments to capture information about the career trajectories of the male educators in the study, including descriptive statistics (i.e., race, ethnicity, role, site types, years of service, etc…) and compelling narratives about their personal experiences in the field. In the first phase of data collection, we gathered 46 responses from a lengthy questionnaire that we administered to 82 men working in ECE program sites within low, medium and high resourced school districts in New York City. For the sake of comparison, we distributed a nearly identical survey with queries specific to a relatively smaller sample of 28 men working in upper elementary and secondary grades, and we received 19 responses from this pool of participants. We created both paper and electronic versions of the questionnaires. In this phase of data collection, we recruited participants from 19 public schools, 19 community-based organizations, and 3 tuition-based programs that provide ECE services in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens.

In the second phase of data collection, we conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with 16 male educators (10 lead/co-teachers, 5 assistant teachers/paraprofessionals, and 1 instructional coordinator from the New York City Department of Education) followed by 14 individual interviews with the program administrators (7 male and 7 female) who supervise these men's work. We concluded data collection in this phase with two focus group interviews: a) the first one within a men's support group comprising of 3 teachers, 2 family advocates and 1 administrator in ECE; and b) the second one with 6 program administrators (4 male and 2 female), who provided feedback on the study's preliminary findings and recommendations for policy and practice.

The average one-on-one interview lasted over one hour and each focus group ran for about two hours of randomized turn-takings, active listening, and deep reflections about issues impacting men's participation in ECE. Immediately after completing each interview or focus group, we wrote fieldnotes to describe the characteristics of the participant's program site, the biographical profile of the interviewee, and the most salient issues or themes that emerged in the interview or focus group. This technique helped us to draw contextual understandings that we later applied in our data analysis. Lastly, we transcribed the audiotapes of the semi-structured interviews and the focus groups to accurately represent the voices of

participants in textural-structural descriptions while also maintaining the authenticity of the spoken word. We assigned fictious names to the participants and applied APA ethical principles and code of conduct (2017) to ensure confidentiality and the protection of human subjects in our research.

Sample data and analysis technique

We drew on qualitative research coding technique widely used in the literature on men's studies in ECE (i.e., recruitment, retention, masculinity, gender practice, societal expectations, internal and external motivations among others), and we used grounded theory elaborated by Charmaz (2006) to organize our data and identify emergent patterns in our analyses of the semi-structured interviews and the two focus groups. In analyzing the interviews, we used textural-structural descriptions (Moustakas, 1994) to capture and report how the participants make sense of their experiences in the field, how they challenge gender stereotypes and normative masculine behaviors as well as the ways they construct and express varied forms of masculine identities. We also utilized a co-constructed reflexivity check (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009) whereby the lead investigators and their research assistants referred to their fieldnotes when reviewing transcribed materials so as to keep into perspective the different program types and the diverse demographic landscapes where the data was collected. This approach was also important for paying attention to the intersectionality of gender, race ethnicity, cultural identity, professional status and other social categories that are implicated in our samples.

Summary of key findings

The self-identified male educators in this study ranged in ages from 18 to 64, with the largest percentage (38%) aged between 25 and 34. Also, there was a broad range of race and ethnicity among the participants ranging from 19 Black or African American, 15 White and 11 Hispanic or Latino to 4 Asian or Pacific Islander and 1 Middle Eastern or Northern African. These men had served for a varied number of years in the field, with the highest percentage (36%) working for over ten years and the second highest (24%) having worked for three to five years. In terms of positions held, 55% were employed as assistant teachers or paraprofessionals and 45% described their position as lead or co-teachers. Preliminary analysis and comparison of the respondents' demographic information revealed some significant yet troubling trends

about race/ethnicity, education attainment and professional status as shown in Figures 1 and 2 below. Figure 1 compares the levels of education attained by the male educators, cross tabulated with their reported race and ethnicity. Similarly, Figure 2 compares the positions/roles held by male educators, again cross tabulated with race and ethnicity. There is a visible opportunity gap by race/ethnicity in both cases.

Figure 1: Self-Reported Race/Ethnicity and Education of Male ECE Educators (N=42)
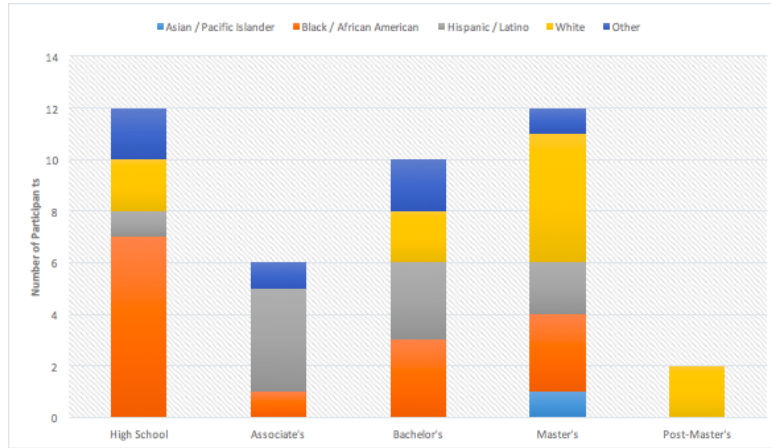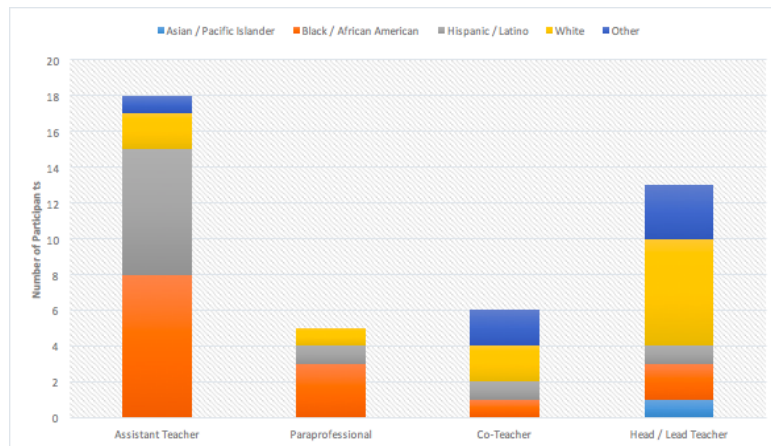

Figure 2: Self-Reported Race/Ethnicity and Teaching Role of Male ECE Educators (N=42)

While comparing these cross tabulations, issues of racial justice and educational equity emerge. African American and Latino male educators hold fewer Lead/Head Teacher positions and also do not reach the same levels of educational attainment as White and Asian/Pacific Islander male educators. This troubling trend clearly suggests a need for policies and practices that would provide specific funding and other supports for African American and Latino male educators in the ongoing advancement of their careers.

When male ECE educators were asked *'What first drew you to the field of education?'* they provided responses that could be categorized along some common themes. Nearly a quarter of respondents cited volunteer or paid work experience in their youth, e.g. working at summer camp or afterschool program, providing tutoring, or teaching Sunday School. These experiences offered these male educators the opportunity to see their own capacity for this work. One respondent described it thus:

> I first started working with children as a counselor in training for a Boy Scout camp when I was fourteen years old. The thrill I got from successfully teaching a six-year-old who was struggling to tie a knot stuck with me.

Another quarter of the respondents described having a family connection to the field of ECE. Nearly half of those described assisting their mothers who worked in the field, either as a nanny or preschool teacher, and many recalled experiencing satisfaction in caring for younger family members such as cousins, nieces, or nephews. Several of the respondents described the impact that becoming fathers themselves had on their sense of their own capacity to care for young children. One participant, who recently began a job as an assistant teacher after years of staying home with his own children, provided the following compelling narrative about his decision to become an ECE educator:

> I believe it was my experience with my now 8-year-old triplet boys. Having to be a stay-at-home father throughout that process from birth, through the countless hours of therapy and center-based programs. Witnessing, basically being a part of something that helped with their overall development, changing their lives and mine forever. Again, it made me want to give back, helping guide others through those trying times by sharing my experience.

Our respondents also often cited a moral commitment to the work. Several described their desire to address issues of poverty and educational inequality through their service. Some shared that they were motivated by their great curiosity about young children and their development. Many reflected proudly on the recognition of their own capacity to nurture children's growth and learning. One respondent specifically cited the importance of providing young children with access to male figures in their daily lives, explaining his choice as being motivated by '*the fact that there were young children without any male representation in their household.*' While the field may not offer high levels of financial compensation, clearly many men were drawn to this work for the emotional rewards the work brings.

Public perception of ECE impacts all educators, whether they identify as male or female. However, due to the rigidity with which gender roles are constructed in American society, men who choose to enter the field of ECE often face a particular kind of scrutiny. These perceptions have implications for recruitment of men into the field. When asked how friends and family responded to their decision to enter the field of ECE, male educators shared a range of responses. Over two thirds of the respondents reported that friends and family are overwhelmingly supportive of their decision to work as ECE educators. Several indicated that their community values their contributions, as the respondent who stated *'[They] are proud that I'm a male in this job, as you're hard pressed to find them. They also know that's it's a great fit for me as I thrive when working with kids.'* Only about 10% of the respondents reported that they faced open, negative judgment of their decision. One participant shared, '*Friends will say, 'Why not become a police officer?*'" Another respondent learned that family members considered his work, *'A thankless job that doesn't 'pay enough.''* Echoing this sentiment, another respondent explained, '*There are some people that have a very ignorant view towards education, and think that I am a glorified babysitter.*' Close to 20% of the respondents faced neutral or mixed responses from friends and family about their work. Even in cases where their community supported their choice, the persistent issue of low compensation and lack of prestige seemed to be a recurring concern.

Societal barriers to men entering the field are deeply entrenched in the patriarchal structure of a sexist society that limits possibilities for both men and women. One of the male administrators signaled the persistence of '…*a social agenda that boys don't do certain things and men don't do certain things and girls are the caregivers.'* As men are not considered capable of nurturance and women are expected to provide it, the field of ECE becomes "women's work" (Burn & Pratt-Adams, 2015). Because sexism causes women's contributions to society to be considered less valuable, the complex and important "gendered" work of ECE is not adequately recognized or esteemed (Cole et al, 2019). As another male administrator noted, *'Teaching will never get the value that it needs, because people go, 'Oh, anybody could do that. It's just something that women do, like, something simple,' not understanding the real work that happens.'* This diminishment of the work of ECE means that there exists a stark disparity in pay between ECE and other

fields, including work with older children. The men in our study have already faced and, to some extent, surmounted a variety of challenges and obstacles, including the widely-held perception that working with young children is a low-status profession suited only for women. While most of the men (77%) did report that they plan to remain in the field of ECE, 73% said that increased salary and/or benefits and 51% said that opportunities for career advancement would be key motivating factors. One male educator working in a Head Start program in the Bronx, succinctly encapsulated the problem of retaining men in the field: *'It's easy to get people to enter the field, but it's hard to get them to stay, given the salary.'*

When administrators were queried about outreach strategies and the hiring process, one Head Start administrator noted that the active role that parents play in the hiring process at Head Start in particular has led to the hiring of male educators. She recalled, '*We have one, in particular, gentleman who was the chairperson of the personnel committee, and he's been instrumental in the process of making decisions on hiring. And one of the things that they always said, 'We need more men!'*' Other administrators documented parents' concerns about male educators or their misconceptions about what having a male in the classroom would bring. Another key point that emerged from the data was the importance of providing professional development opportunities that support men's continuing education and career advancement. Many of the men spoke strongly about a desire to continue their education and about the positive impact it would have on their work with children.

Conclusion

Our study points to a range of both extrinsic and intrinsic factors that influence men's participation in the ECE field. We conclude that men's under-representation in the field is not only linked to low wages and the lack of respect for ECE educators, but to traditional recruitment approaches that do not address the gender imbalance in the field. Our data show variations across program sites in approaches toward recruiting and supporting men in the field. Within some programs, administrative leaders and decision-makers already seem to be making intentional efforts to customize strategies and focus recruitment efforts to address the need for gender inclusion and racial balance at their sites. Therefore, we call for a renewed sense of commitment to gender inclusion in the field, and particularly, greater support for racially diverse

men who experience personal fulfillment from working with young children (0-8 years old). We encourage deliberate actions in recruiting men from under-represented communities, placing ads in publications and websites that men tend to use, while also posting job announcements in after-school programs, community centers, places of worship, athletic facilities, and other places where both men and women of diverse backgrounds tend to volunteer their time and work with children and families. Any concerted efforts toward attracting qualified, culturally diverse men in the field of ECE must focus resources and energies on developing a male teacher pipeline. While intentional efforts seem to yield positive outcomes in diversifying the staff of certain ECE programs, we recognize that gender-flexible efforts and race-conscious strategies may be less impactful if they are not backed by sentient community support, public policies and coherent institutional philosophies to keep men in the field. We must make clear that the policies we advocate for do not require stringent ratios of female and male educators in ECE programs or "quotas," which are often disparaged, as they are perceived as diluting the quality of the workforce. Nonetheless, we strongly recommend reflective measures that will bridge the gender gap, reduce male teacher turnover, and promote racial balance in the ECE workforce within and beyond local, regional and national contexts. One of the limitations of our study is that it only shares viewpoints from those who have persisted as educators and program leaders in the ECE field. We understand that the voices of 'persisters' alone do not adequately provide critical and holistic perspectives on the experiences of men working with young children. Further research is therefore needed to integrate the voices of men who left the field. Conversely, one of the strengths of our study is that it focuses on examining timely changes and challenges in the field so as to inform policy and practice rather than exploring decades-old issues and barriers that impede gender inclusion and diversity in the ECE workforce.

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