

Gender, Care and Career Trajectories in Early Childhood Education and Care in Ireland

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'I, Joanne McHale, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.'

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Signed: Joanne McHale

Abstract

Men comprise approximately 1.8% of the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workforce in Ireland, despite national and international recommendations to increase this number. This thesis examines the career trajectories of men in the ECEC workforce in Ireland. Underpinned by Connell's theories of gender as structural, an embedded mixed-methods design was employed using semi-structured interviews with men and women in the ECEC workforce, a focus group with post-primary school careers guidance teachers and a survey of parents accessing ECEC provision. The factors that influence men's entry to the ECEC workforce and experiences which shape their trajectories are explored. Key findings suggest an interaction of micro, meso and macro factors influence men's entry into and trajectories in the ECEC workforce. Societal expectations of men and men's roles, family and friend influences and their own aspirations form a complex set of influences. A lack of visibility of men in caring roles, awareness of caring professions as options in adolescence, and lack of careers guidance in post-primary school are evident. The impact of the onset of the economic recession in 2007-2008 which had a significant impact on male dominated industry is influential for the men in this study. The expectations of men and their experiences within ECEC are often contradictory, and influence their vertical and horizontal trajectories. Key events can have a significant impact on their sense of belonging and satisfaction. This thesis makes recommendations in relation to increasing visibility of ECEC as a career in post-primary education, policies to support increased entry, career pathways and professionalisation in which men and women can see a viable career in ECEC.

Impact Statement

As a rapidly developing sector, the Irish early childhood education and care context is benefitting from the development of a body of research expertise and output in recent years. As part of the development of the sector, focus has turned to quality provision for children, diversity and equality measures and the workforce and there are a number of key developments forthcoming. However, relatively little has been done in relation to gender diversity in the workforce in recent years. Findings from this research are relevant to policy development in diversity and equality, in quality in ECEC and in workforce equality in general. The timing of this research is relevant in terms of the current Irish ECEC landscape.

As an early career researcher teaching on a pre-service ECEC higher education programme and supporting students on practice placements, I have the opportunity to embed the learning from my research activities in the syllabus of the programme and promote gender diversity supported by my findings through my professional networks: Children's Research Network Early Childhood Education and Care Special Interest Group and Plé: The Irish Association of Academics in Early Childhood Education and Care in Higher Education. Plé acts as a stakeholder in policy development consultations in ECEC.

Internationally, I am a member of the European Early Childhood Research Association (EECERA) Gender Balance SIG. This has facilitated the development of an international research community on gender in the ECEC workforce and over a number of years, I was one of seventeen (representing my country context) researchers across twelve countries who collaborated in a research project on men's career trajectories in ECEC. I collaborated on two of the chapters in the book published from this research. The connections made have allowed me to pursue additional collaborations with in

the EECERA SIG group to submit an additional chapter for publication in a forthcoming book on leadership in ECEC and collaborate on a project on ethical codes in ECEC with two of my EECERA SIG colleagues. Resulting from the connections made through the EECERA SIG I am facilitating a visit of students from an international ECEC programme.

I have disseminated preliminary findings at the EECERA International conference in 2017, 2018 and 2019. I have presented on my research outputs at the UCL Institute of Education Doctoral School Conference 2016, 2018, 2019. I presented preliminary findings in the context of gender targets to the Irish Social Policy Association Postgraduate and Early Career Researcher Conference 2018. As a result of my research and focus on gender in the ECEC, I was invited to speak at a seminar for early childhood educators by the Wicklow County Childcare Committee in November 2019.

I intend to submit sections of this thesis for publication in academic journals focusing on a number of related topics based on the strands of this study. I intend to develop some materials for gender awareness for inclusion in the ECEC pre-service programme on which I teach and promote gender diversity in the ECEC.

Contents

ABSTRACT	2
IMPACT STATEMENT	3
CONTENTS	5
LIST OF TABLES	12
LIST OF FIGURES	13
GLOSSARY AND ABBREVIATIONS:.....	15
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	19
1 INTRODUCTION	22
1.1 RESEARCH QUESTIONS, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES.....	22
1.2 CONTRIBUTION	25
1.3 THE IRISH CONTEXT	26
<i>'Ireland has grown up': The new Ireland of the 21st Century.....</i>	<i>26</i>
<i>The Development of the ECEC Sector</i>	<i>30</i>
1.4 CURRENT PROVISION IN ECEC.....	33
<i>The professionalisation of early childhood education and care</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>The Early Childhood Identity Crisis.....</i>	<i>36</i>
1.5 GENDER AND THE ECEC WORKFORCE.....	37
1.6 THE ARGUMENT FOR MORE MEN IN ECEC	42
<i>Equality.....</i>	<i>42</i>
<i>Complementarity.....</i>	<i>43</i>
<i>Challenging stereotypes</i>	<i>44</i>
<i>Diversity, inclusion and representativeness.....</i>	<i>44</i>
1.7 TERMINOLOGY	45
1.8 CONCLUSION AND THESIS OUTLINE	45
2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	48
2.1 INTRODUCTION	48
2.2 GENDER AS A CONCEPT.....	48
2.3 GENDER ORDER, REGIMES AND IDENTITY	52
2.4 GENDER AS RELATIONAL	54
2.5 CONNELL'S FOUR DIMENSIONS OF GENDER:	55
<i>Power relations.....</i>	<i>55</i>

	<i>Production consumption and gendered accumulation</i>	55
	<i>Emotional relations</i>	56
	<i>Symbolism, culture and discourse</i>	57
2.6	CONCEPTS OF MASCULINITY AND SOCIAL ORDER.....	58
2.7	GENDERED DIVISION OF LABOUR	60
	<i>The domestic sphere (private domain)</i>	60
	<i>Occupational segregation and the 'breadwinner' (public domain)</i>	62
2.8	GENDERED ASPIRATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS	66
2.9	CONCLUSION	68
3	LITERATURE REVIEW	70
3.1	INTRODUCTION	70
3.2	APPROACH TO LITERATURE REVIEW.....	70
3.3	OVERVIEW OF THE MEN IN ECEC LITERATURE	71
3.4	FACTORS INFLUENCING MEN'S PRESENCE IN THE ECEC ENVIRONMENT	72
	<i>Entry: Factors and Barriers</i>	72
	<i>Men's work, women's work & crossing the occupational binary</i>	72
	<i>Gender, and the education hierarchy</i>	74
	<i>Career aspirations</i>	75
	<i>Careers guidance</i>	76
	<i>Intrinsic motivations: for the love of the children</i>	79
	<i>Second-chance career entry</i>	80
	<i>Friends & Family influence</i>	81
	<i>Critical moments as influential</i>	82
3.5	ENTRY FACTORS SUMMARY	83
3.6	FACTORS WITHIN THE WORKFORCE INFLUENCING MEN'S EXPERIENCES.....	83
	<i>Vertical trajectories - Accelerated or diminished roles and responsibilities</i>	84
	<i>Horizontal trajectories: Expectations and experiences</i>	88
	<i>Gendered expectations</i>	89
	<i>The Irish context</i>	97
3.7	STRATEGIES FOR INCREASING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION	100
	<i>Policy</i>	100
	<i>Targets</i>	101
	<i>Recruitment Campaigns</i>	102
	<i>Retention</i>	106
	<i>Gender sensitivity</i>	108
	<i>Social Pedagogy as a uniting framework</i>	109

3.8	CONCLUSION	110
	<i>Framing the thesis</i>	112
4	METHODOLOGY	113
4.1	INTRODUCTION	113
4.2	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	113
4.3	CONSTRUCTION OF METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND RESEARCH DESIGN	114
	<i>Piloting the research</i>	115
4.4	SAMPLING, DATA COLLECTION AND APPROACH TO ANALYSIS	116
	<i>Strand one: Sample and Contexts</i>	119
	<i>Strand two: Sample and contexts</i>	121
	<i>Strand three: Sample and contexts</i>	122
4.5	APPROACH TO DATA COLLECTION & ANALYSIS	122
	<i>Strand one: approach to data collection & analysis</i>	123
	<i>Thematic Analysis stages strand one:</i>	124
	<i>Strand two: Approach to data collection and analysis</i>	127
	<i>Thematic analysis</i>	129
	<i>Strand three: Approach to data collection and analysis</i>	130
	<i>Analysis of strand three</i>	130
4.6	THE ROLE OF RESEARCHER REFLECTING ON THE PROCESS	131
4.7	ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS.....	133
	<i>Confidentiality, anonymity and boundaries</i>	134
	<i>Informed consent and the right to withdraw</i>	134
	<i>Risk, Potentially vulnerable participants, & sensitive topics</i>	134
	<i>Safeguarding/child protection</i>	135
	<i>International research</i>	135
	<i>Data storage and security</i>	136
4.8	SUMMARY.....	136
5	FINDINGS I PEN PROFILES.....	138
5.1	INTRODUCTION	138
5.2	LONG SERVICE.....	140
	<i>Karen</i>	140
	<i>Robert</i>	142
	<i>Sharon</i>	143
	<i>Ed</i>	144
	<i>Mary</i>	146

	<i>Jenny</i>	148
5.3	SHORT SERVICE	149
	<i>Alan</i>	149
	<i>Joshua</i>	151
	<i>Martin</i>	152
	<i>Jamie</i>	155
	<i>Tracy</i>	157
	<i>Patrick</i>	158
	<i>Pam</i>	160
	<i>Sean</i>	162
	<i>Geoff</i>	163
	<i>Anthony</i>	166
5.4	CONCLUSION	167
6	ARMED WITH NAIVETY: ENTRY STORIES	169
6.1	INTRODUCTION	169
6.2	ENTRY	170
	<i>The Economic Downturn</i>	170
	<i>Chance, loss and opportunity</i>	173
	<i>Taking a chance</i>	176
	<i>Non-Academic and practical focus</i>	177
	<i>Temporal factors</i>	177
	<i>Alternative routes to cognate areas</i>	180
	<i>Role of employment schemes and SNA Roles</i>	182
	<i>Getting a flavour for the role</i>	183
6.3	REACTIONS.....	185
	<i>Family</i>	185
	<i>Friends</i>	186
6.4	GUIDANCE.....	188
	<i>School careers guidance teachers</i>	188
	<i>Employment centre advisors</i>	191
	<i>Recruitment:</i>	191
6.5	SCHOOL CAREERS GUIDANCE TEACHERS.....	193
	<i>Structure of the Irish post-primary education system</i>	193
	<i>Findings of the careers guidance teacher focus group</i>	194
	<i>What needs to change?</i>	201
6.6	CONCLUSION	203

7	EXPERIENCES	206
7.1	WHAT IS IT TO BE A MAN IN AN ECEC SETTING?	207
	<i>Job satisfaction and fulfilment</i>	<i>207</i>
	<i>Building relationships</i>	<i>209</i>
	<i>Challenges in the ECEC sector</i>	<i>210</i>
7.2	GENDERED EXPECTATIONS	211
	<i>Physical play</i>	<i>212</i>
	<i>Behaviour management & boys</i>	<i>214</i>
	<i>Role modelling</i>	<i>215</i>
	<i>'Men's Jobs'</i>	<i>216</i>
	<i>'Women's Work'</i>	<i>218</i>
	<i>Simultaneously challenging and reinforcing stereotypes</i>	<i>220</i>
	<i>Intimate care</i>	<i>221</i>
	<i>Expectation of Leadership</i>	<i>224</i>
7.3	PRACTICE: 'HARD TO PUT INTO WORDS'	225
	<i>Valuing play</i>	<i>226</i>
	<i>Humour: 'I'm just a big kid'</i>	<i>227</i>
	<i>Care</i>	<i>228</i>
	<i>Embodiment:</i>	<i>229</i>
	<i>Communication and Teamwork</i>	<i>231</i>
7.4	STATUS	233
7.5	CONCLUSION	236
8	CRITICAL INCIDENTS/PARENTS	238
8.1	MEN'S EXPERIENCES OF PARENT/CARER RESPONSES	238
	<i>From reticence to acceptance</i>	<i>238</i>
	<i>Building relationships: Children as advocates</i>	<i>243</i>
	<i>A supportive culture: the importance of management responses</i>	<i>245</i>
8.2	'ABILITY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN GENDER' RESPONSES FROM PARENTS	249
	<i>Profile of children and services used</i>	<i>250</i>
	<i>Profile of parents</i>	<i>251</i>
	<i>Experiences of men and women in the early childhood sector</i>	<i>253</i>
	<i>The value of men in the early childhood setting</i>	<i>255</i>
	<i>Challenging stereotypes</i>	<i>257</i>
	<i>Practice</i>	<i>258</i>
	<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>261</i>
	<i>Women's work, intimate care and risk</i>	<i>262</i>

	<i>Preferences</i>	265
	<i>Value</i>	268
	<i>Qualifications/training</i>	270
	<i>Balance and equality</i>	270
8.3	LOOKING TO THE FUTURE: MEN AND WOMEN’S CAREER ASPIRATIONS	271
8.4	CONCLUSION	273
9	DISCUSSION	275
9.1	WHAT LEADS MEN TO ENTER THE ECEC SECTOR?	276
	<i>Influential factors</i>	276
	<i>Visibility and the education hierarchy</i>	277
	<i>Careers Guidance</i>	278
	<i>Accidental entry and the economy</i>	282
	<i>Family and Friends</i>	283
	<i>Timing</i>	284
	<i>Recruitment to services</i>	285
	<i>Personal factors</i>	286
9.2	TRAJECTORIES	287
	<i>Work satisfaction and fulfilment</i>	287
	<i>Pedagogical differences</i>	288
	<i>Gendered expectations</i>	292
	<i>Experiences with colleagues</i>	294
	<i>Extremes of experiences</i>	296
	<i>Management responses</i>	298
	<i>Future aspirations and expectations</i>	298
9.3	SUMMARY	302
10	CONCLUSION	306
10.1	POSSIBILITY	307
10.2	PATHWAYS	307
10.3	PROFESSIONALISATION	308
10.4	POLICY.....	309
10.5	LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY	312
10.6	FINAL WORDS	314
	REFERENCE LIST	316
	APPENDIX I INFORMATION SHEET	365

APPENDIX II CONSENT FORM	368
APPENDIX III INTERVIEW TOPIC GUIDE.....	369
APPENDIX IV FOCUS GROUP TOPIC GUIDE	374
APPENDIX V PARENT SURVEY	376
APPENDIX VI SUMMARY INFORMATION ON THE IRISH EDUCATION SYSTEM.....	385

List of tables

Table 1.2 ECEC Provision in Ireland	35
Table 1.3 Percentage of men in early childhood.....	38
Table 3.1 Approach to literature searching and review	71
Table 4.1 Approach to sampling, data collection and analysis.....	118
Table 4.2 Strand one sample	120
Table 4.3 Profile of careers guidance teachers.....	129

List of Figures

Figure 3.1 Trajectory of the ECEC workforce from 2000-2019	99
Figure 4.1 Men's combined transcript word clouds	125
Figure 4.2 Women's combined transcript word cloud.	126
Figure 4.3 Example of Excel coding frame.	127
Figure 4.4 Thematic analysis cycle	127
Figure 5.1 Year of Entry by worker	140
Figure 5.2 Karen's timeline	140
Figure 5.3 Robert's timeline	142
Figure 5.4 Sharon's timeline	143
Figure 5.5 Ed's timeline	144
Figure 5.6 Mary's timeline	146
Figure 5.7 Jenny's timeline	148
Figure 5.8 Alan's timeline	149
Figure 5.9 Joshua's timeline	151
Figure 5.10 Martin's timeline	152
Figure 5.11 Jamie's timeline	155
Figure 5.12 Tracy's timeline	157
Figure 5.13 Patrick's timeline	158
Figure 5.14 Pam's timeline	160
Figure 5.15 Sean's timeline	162
Figure 5.16 Geoff's timeline	163
Figure 5.17 Anthony's timeline	166
Figure 8.1 Type of provision accessed by respondents	250
Figure 8.2 Ages of the children in early childhood provision	250

Figure 8.3 Parent age and gender profile	251
Figure 8.4 Parent employment status	252
Figure 8.5 Division of caring responsibilities in the home.	252
Figure 8.6 Experience of male educators	253
Figure 8.7 Experiences of female educators.....	254
Figure 8.8 Women and men as equal role models	255
Figure 8.9 Men as role models	256
Figure 8.10 Men as challenging stereotypes	257
Figure 8.11 Men and women's practice	258
Figure 8.12 Caring practices.....	259
Figure 8.13 Relationships	261
Figure 8.14 Managing difficult behaviour	261
Figure 8.15 More appropriate for women to change nappies.....	262
Figure 8.16 Men as risk of abuse.....	263
Figure 8.17 Perception of men as risk by gender of parents.....	264
Figure 8.18 Preference for educator gender by parent gender	265
Figure 8.19 Preference for educator gender by age profile of parent.....	266
Figure 8.20 Preference for educator gender by child gender	267
Figure 8.21 Preference for educator gender by experience of male educator.....	267

Glossary and Abbreviations:

- ADM: Area Development Management was a supporting agency for government initiatives. Renamed as Pobal.
- BA: Bachelor of Arts. Refers to level 7 (ordinary degree) or level 8 (honours degree) on the National Framework of Qualifications (<https://nfq.qqi.ie/>)
- CAO: Central Applications Office. This office processes undergraduate Higher Level programme applications (<https://www.cao.ie/>)
- CECDE: Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education was established by Dublin Institute of Technology and St Patrick's Teacher Training College, Dublin under the Department of Education and Science in 2002 to develop and progress the objectives of Ready to Learn: The White Paper on Early Childhood Education and Care (DES, 1999). The Centre published Siolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education (CECDE, 2004).
- DCEDIY: Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth is the new name (2020) for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. This Department was originally established as the Department of Children in 2011, with its first ministerial appointment and is responsible for policy in relation to children, child protection,

ECEC, youth justice and adoption (DCEDIY, 2021)

DCYA: Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Department responsible for ECEC prior to DCEDIY (see above).

DES: Department of Education and Science. Department responsible for formal education from 1997-2010 when it was renamed as the Department of Education and Skills. Currently named Department of Education since October 2020.
(<https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation/departments-of-education/>)

DJELR: Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform. This is the name of the Department of Justice from 1997-2010, when it was renamed as the Department of Justice and Law Reform. It is currently named the Department of Justice (<https://www.justice.ie/>).

ECCE: Early Childhood Care and Education. This term refers to the funded preschool provision for children aged between two years and eight months and five years and six months.
(<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2459ee-early-childhood-care-and-education-programme-ecce/>)

ECEC: Early Childhood Education and Care is defined as arrangements that providing 'education and care for children from birth to compulsory school age' (European Commission n.d.; OECD 2001).

ECEC Workers:	Those working with Children in the ECEC. Also referred to as early childhood educators in this research.
EOCP:	Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme which was set up to provide funding for ECEC services. Funding included capital grants for both community and (to a lesser degree) private operators in addition to staffing grants and targeted interventions in community provision (Hayes, 2010).
FETAC:	Further Education and Training Awards Council. It was the former awarding body in further education qualifications which is now represented on the National Framework of Qualifications (Quality and Qualifications Framework Ireland, QQI, 2018). FETAC 5/QQI level 5 in ECEC (Childcare) is the minimum qualification required to work in an ECEC setting (Irish Statute Book, 2016)
IBEC:	Irish Business and Employers Federation is a business representative group in Ireland (https://www.ibec.ie/)
Leaving Certificate:	Final state exam of following two years of senior-cycle in post-primary education. Results equate to points on the CAO (see above) for applications to undergraduate programmes in higher education. Students typically take 6-8 Leaving Certificate subjects (Department of Education, 2021).

NCCA:	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is the agency responsible for the development of curriculum for formal education (primary and post-primary) and Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009).
NESF:	National Economic and Social Forum was formed “to contribute to a wider consensus on social and economic policy’ (The Irish Times, 1999).
OMC:	Office for the Minister for Children was the precursor to the Department of Children. It was responsible for policy development but did not have a ministerial appointment.
QQI:	Quality and Qualifications Ireland is responsible for the oversight and quality assurance of further education and higher education programmes in Ireland (https://www.qqi.ie/)
SNA	Special needs assistant is a role in the Irish Education system in which assistants are assigned to students with identified educational support needs.
STEM:	This is the acronym typically used to refer to subjects and occupations in science technology engineering and maths

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During the course of this journey, I became a member of the EECERA Gender Balance Special Interest Group. What I learned from my colleagues in this group and through my collaboration with the Men's Career's trajectories research team, has helped to develop my skills as a researcher and broadened my understanding of the issues. Thank you so much for your contributions and welcoming me to the group. It's a privilege to be part of it.

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The PhD journey can be a long and lonely one. Eighteen months ago, when the pandemic took hold and my motivation was waning, I came across the PhDForum online. To say that this has been a source of great comfort, support, camaraderie, madness and inspiration would not do it justice. I am forever grateful to Dr Donna Peach for creating this beautiful community and to all my new friends across the globe. You know who you are and you are truly amazing. I am so glad I found you. I have been so privileged to share the highs and lows of the journey with you all. To those who have gone before

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1 Introduction

This thesis seeks to explore the trajectories of men in the ECEC workforce in Ireland, compared with their female counterparts, by investigating the avenues in which men are entering a woman majority occupation (WMO, Schaub, 2015)¹, their experiences within the workforce, their workplace settings and the perceptions of parents in relation to men's roles.

1.1 Research Questions, Aims and Objectives

Given the extreme underrepresentation of male workers and the predominant gender division of caring roles in Ireland, I was interested in the following research questions:

Entry: What leads men to enter the early childhood education and care workforce?

- What are the factors that influence them?
- What are the hindrances and barriers?

Trajectories: What path do their careers take?

- Where do they go when they enter?
- Do their trajectories differ from women's?

Objectives:

Synthesise relevant research literature on men's participation in the ECEC workforce in Ireland and internationally.

¹ Schaub (2015) recommends the use of the term Women Majority Occupations in place of female dominated occupations on the basis that while an occupation may be largely made up of women, often the power structures and the leadership is still in the hands of men.

Examine the factors which influence and hinder men's entry and experiences in the ECEC workforce in Ireland through interviews with men and women working in the sector and focus groups with careers guidance teachers.

Explore the experiences and trajectories of male workers in ECEC services in Ireland in relation to their female colleagues through the worker interviews and parent survey.

Draw conclusions based on the data from a range of perspectives on the implications of the gendered nature of the workforce and make recommendations on diversifying the ECEC workforce in Ireland based on international perspectives and the experiences of those interviewed for this research.

The 2019 Early Years' Sector² Profile Report for Ireland estimated that 1.8% of Early Childhood Educators, working directly with children in Ireland were men (Pobal, 2019). This represents a .5% increase since 2000 when the first sector census was conducted and reported a figure of 1.3% (Area Development Management (ADM), 2000). Internationally, men's participation is low in early childhood education and care³ (ECEC) with figures ranging between 2% and 6%, for countries where figures are known, with only a slight upward trajectory (Besnard & Diren, 2010; Brody, 2014; Brown, 2004; Cameron, Moss and Owen, 1999; Conroy, 2012; Cremers, Krabel, and Calmbach 2010; Owen, 2003; Peeters, Rohrmann and

² The Early Years Sector refers to the 4,598 services which deliver early childhood care and education from birth to six months through private and part-funded provision. This includes full day care, and sessional (three hours per day) preschool. The term 'early years' is used in some government publications to refer to the early childhood education and care sector (Pobal, 2019).

³Early Childhood Education and Care is defined as arrangements that providing 'education and care for children from birth to compulsory school age' (European Commission n.d.; OECD 2001)

Emilsen 2015; Rohrmann, Brody & Plaisir 2021). Norway tops the table with 9% men in the ECEC workforce (Rohrmann et al., 2021).

While much international research has been conducted on the gendered workforce of ECEC services, research on the Irish context is limited to a handful of studies (Fine-Davis, 2005; Harty, 2011; King, 2015; Walshe 2011; 2012), though there has been some literature on the gendered nature of care and caring work (Hanlon 2008; 2011; Lynch and Feeley, 2009; McElwee and Parslow, 2003). The reasons suggested for such a low level of male involvement include a view of ECEC as women's domain, the potential risk of abuse and fear of allegations, low status and pay (Brody, 2014; Cameron, Moss & Owen, 1999; Cremers et al., 2010; Farquhar & CHILDForum Education & Parenting Research Network, 2006; Rolfe, 2005).

Though policy makers have acknowledged the potential benefits of male participation in ECEC and made commitments to increase involvement in the form of targets (Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), 2016a; European Commission Network on Childcare, 1996; National Economic and Social Forum Ireland (NESF), 2005; Office of the Minister for Children (OMC), 2006), there is little evidence of a strategic approach to recruitment or that those targets have made any difference in terms of participation numbers. Within the international research, there is an acknowledgement that of the few men who enter ECEC domain, many find themselves promoted or working with older children in a disproportionately short timeframe (Williams, 1992; Wright and Brownhill, 2018), yet until recently, little of the research focused on men's trajectories (Brody, Emilsen, Rohrmann & Warin, 2021) or how they differ from their female counterparts. In a time where there is increasing participation of men in the domestic (though not yet near equal) sphere (Dette-Hegenmeyer, Erzinger & Reiche, 2014; Fine-Davis, 2016; Russell, Grotti, McGinnity & Privalko, 2019;

Schoon & Eccles, 2014), how this shift might benefit the ECEC sector and the children it serves is worth investigating.

1.2 Contribution

This study has drawn on Cameron, Moss and Owen's (1999) foundational work: *Men in the Nursery* adapting much of the design. However, it is unique in the Irish context against the backdrop of rapid social change and the economic recession beginning in 2007. My own position as a former worker in ECEC before my current role in higher education delivering an ECEC degree programme and as placement coordinator has positioned me uniquely on the intersection of preservice education and the ECEC sector which has been the focus of much policy development in recent years. There are three unique elements to this study. Research on men's participation in the ECEC workforce from an Irish perspective is limited. This research will serve to develop this, in particular in light of the rapid social and economic changes in Irish society in the last fifteen years. Secondly, the focus on men's trajectories, the routes they have taken to get to ECEC and their progress within it, compared to that of their female counterparts is of unique focus. During the course of this research, I have been involved in a parallel study exploring men's career trajectories from an international perspective (Brody et al., 2021) and this helps to provide a comparative lens.

The influence of the economic recession in Ireland starting in 2007 was of particular interest to me as I was aware of a number of men who had entered the ECEC workforce as a result of unemployment from other sectors. Parent surveys provide context for the experiences reported by the men. Finally, the views and practices of careers guidance teachers in promoting ECEC as a career option offers some insight into the factors that influence men's trajectories

and ways in which we can better promote ECEC as a career option for men and women.

1.3 The Irish Context

'Ireland has grown up': The new Ireland of the 21st Century.

Ireland in 2021 is a society that has undergone intense social change in the last forty years, bearing little resemblance to its former shape (Fine-Davis, 2015; 2016). From an equality perspective, women's rights and workforce access were considerably curtailed until the late 1970's when the marriage-bar (forcing women to leave the public sector workforce on marriage) was lifted in 1977, following the introduction of equal pay legislation in 1974. Both developments were the result of European directives (Fine Davis, 2015). A previously traditionally conservative country heavily influenced by the Catholic Church has since been moving rapidly towards a more liberal and equal society (Fine Davis, 2015) in an era when freedom and equality across the world are under threat. Divorce, which was outlawed in the Constitution of Ireland (Irish Statute Book, 1937), and reinforced in 1986 in a rejection of a referendum to legalise it (63.5%), was finally legalised in 1995 after a second referendum with a slim majority (50.28%) (Fine Davis, 2015; Laver, 1995). A further referendum was passed in 2019 reducing the wait period from four years to two years and passing by a majority of 82%, suggesting considerable changes in public attitudes to divorce in the intervening time (Horgan Jones, 2019). Ireland still has one of the lowest divorce rates internationally at 0.7 per 1,000 and the lowest in Europe in 2015 (Eurostat, 2016; McCrave, 2019).

In 1983, a referendum which added the 8th amendment to the constitution, giving equal rights to unborn and mother, essentially further restricting access to abortion services, was passed. This had serious implications for the next thirty years. Following a high-profile case in which 14-year-old was prevented by the high court and

subsequently permitted by the supreme court to travel to the UK for a termination, a further referendum was held to establish the right to information, the right to travel and the right to include risk of suicide as grounds (O'Carroll, 2012). The right to travel and the right to information were passed but the risk of suicide as grounds was defeated and for a second time again in 2002. However, in 2018 the eighth amendment was repealed by a majority of 67%, legalising abortion in Ireland for the first time and further demonstrating significant attitude change. In 2015, Ireland was the first country in the world to legalise marriage equality by public referendum by a majority of 62% (O'Cailli and Hilliard, 2015). The Gender Recognition Act was also passed in the same year. This most recent series of developments has caused commentators to suggest that 'Ireland has grown up' (Amnesty Ireland, 2018; Towey, 2018) in recognition of an increasingly secular and liberal society.

The fading influence of the Catholic Church on moral and legal rights in Ireland may also be attributable to a series of high-profile clerical abuse revelations which shook Irish Catholicism and represented significant breaches of trust and abuse of power (Holohan, 2011). This is not to suggest that Ireland had become an egalitarian utopia. A report on the investigation into abuses at Mother and Baby Homes for unmarried women, the last one of which closed as recently as 1996, was published recently (Murphy, Daly & Duncan, 2021). It has been widely condemned as inaccurate and re-traumatising the women and children who resided within them with the added complication of the testimony recordings having been destroyed (Hogan 2021; O'Halloran & Keena, 2021). The process of redress established for the victims of abuse has been widely criticised as slow and has had little engagement from the Church (Irish Independent, 2017; Casey, 2019). Homelessness has increased by 150% in six years (Social Justice Ireland, 2020) and Direct Provision, Ireland's Protection and Accommodation Service (recently renamed from Reception and Integration) for asylum

seekers (Department of Justice and Equality, 2010) currently holds at least 7,000 people, 30% of whom are children, for in excess of two years (many considerably longer) in sub-standard conditions, without the ability to work to earn a living (Doras, 2020).

As a result of the vast change in women's rights in the 1970's and 80's, their participation in the paid workforce increased significantly (Fine Davis, 2015). The Employment Equality Act came into force in 1998, banning discrimination in employment, though women are still more likely to reduce working hours after having children (Russell, McGinnity, Fahey & Kelly, 2018). A further development was the introduction of parental leave in 1998 (amended in 2006) allowing up to fourteen weeks' unpaid leave per child under 8 and increased to eighteen weeks under EU regulations in 2013 and to twenty-six weeks in September 2020 (Citizen's Information, 2020). Both parents have separate and equal rights to this unpaid parental leave (Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection, 2019), a move that recognised the role of both parents in children's upbringing, though in the majority of cases, mothers avail of this option largely linked to the social acceptability (and lower economic impact) of women's part-time and broken employment service (Hogan, 2019). In September 2016, two weeks paid (either by employer or through paternity benefit) paternity leave was introduced to allow fathers to take some time off after the birth of their child (Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, 2020a). More recently, Parent's Benefit allows each parent to take five weeks leave in the first two years of their child's life (Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection 2020b). This signifies a recognition of increasing focus on fathers' roles in the upbringing of their children. Despite this, women's place in the home is still enshrined in the Irish constitution:

'In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the

common good cannot be achieved... The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of her duties in the home.'

Bunreacht na hEireann (Article 41, Constitution of Ireland, Irish Statute Book, 1937)

This article has been debated over the last number of years with suggestions that it should be removed completely from the constitution. However, some have suggested that it should remain but that the term 'mothers' should be replaced by 'parents' and thereby recognising the right of at least one parent to remain at home with children should they wish to do so and to not be required by economic factors to engage in paid employment. This reflects changing social attitudes that parents take a more equal role in childcare and domestic duties, not previously seen.

A recognition of the changing social expectations by both the EU and Irish Governments is reflected in a number of policies relating to flexible working conditions for families, for example, the publication of the long anticipated *First 5: Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families* (Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), 2018a). The aim of the strategy to support parents and families in work-life balance and material resources and includes the development of quality ECEC provision (DCYA, 2018a). There is certainly evidence of greater equality in parenting with fathers taking a more 'hands on' role in their children's upbringing than did previous generations (Russell et al., 2019). However, the extent of that equality may be overstated and falling short of real equality (Russell et al., 2019). With the high cost of ECEC in Ireland, it is still largely mothers who stay at home, not least because they are still more likely to be the lower earners (Russell et al., 2018). They also still carry considerably more of the

caring and domestic role in the home even when in full time work (Russell et al., 2019). This has been exacerbated by the current global pandemic, in which women have borne the larger responsibility for home-schooling, managing the care of their children and in many cases continuing to work (O’Kelly, 2020), often in the largely female care and teaching professions (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2021a, 2021b; Blundell, Costa Dias, Joyce, and Xu, 2020).

The Development of the ECEC Sector

Reacting to changing social attitudes and practices, development of the ECEC sector in Ireland has been confused with competing needs and agendas and involvement of number agencies and Government departments. The sector has evolved rapidly over the last two decades in particular as a result of the increased participation of women in the paid labour force through the 1980’s and 1990’s and an increasing recognition of the value of preschool for children (Donoghue and Gaynor, 2011; Hayes, O’Donoghue-Hynes & Wolfe, 2013). In 1983, discussions began to focus on how to facilitate women’s labour force participation through expanding the provision of ECEC services. Ireland had one of the lowest levels of formal childcare in the EU (Moss, 1990 cited in European Parliament, 2013) with little political attention paid to child centred practice or the quality of provision (Hayes, 2010).

During the late 1990s, the focus on labour force participation shifted towards children’s needs. The Child Care Act (Irish Statute Book, 1991) came into effect as a result of Ireland’s (1992) ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (Hayes, 2010; Donoghue and Gaynor 2011), but ECEC provision remained unregulated until 1997 when the relevant section of the Child Care Act (Irish Statute Book, 1991) was enacted through the creation of the Child Care (Pre-School Services) Regulations 1996 (Department of Health and Children, 1997; Hayes,

2010). In 1998, *Strengthening Families for Life – Report of the Commission on the Family* was published which highlighted the need and indeed, under Article 18 of the UNCRC, the responsibility of the Government to support families in carrying out their duties, particularly in relation to investment in ECEC provision and supporting parents' choices (Commission on the Family, 1998). In the same year, the National Forum for Early Childhood was established and was comprised of stakeholders from different areas of the ECEC sector, which led to the publication of the White Paper on Early Childhood (1999). Titled *Ready to Learn*, this paper has been central to many of the developments in ECEC since (Department of Education and Science, 1999).

In 1999, the National Childcare Strategy was published by the Expert Working Group on Childcare. Under the remit of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (DJELR), it included representation from other departments and stakeholders within the sector. It was an attempt to address a growing crisis in terms of 'inadequacy of services, affordability, fragmentation, lack of coordination, need for legal requirements and standards to be established and monitored, poor pay and conditions for workers, the role of the voluntary sector, funding, tax relief on expenditure, capital outlay and training personnel,' (DJELR, 1999 p.2). It also aimed to incorporate principles of 'children's needs and rights, equality of access and participation, diversity, partnership and quality' (Donoghue & Gaynor, 2011 p.9) but was still linked to employment policy. From this developed the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme which was set up to provide funding for ECEC services. Funding included capital grants for both community and (to a lesser degree) private operators in addition to staffing grants and targeted interventions in community provision. This was facilitated through The National Childcare Coordinating Committee which coordinated and informed policy and thirty-three City and County Childcare Committees. City and County Child Care Committees are

development agencies which provide information and supports to families and the ECEC sector and 'coordinate the implementation of the national childcare policy and programmes at local level on behalf of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth' (DCEDIY, 2021b).

The White Paper on Early Childhood Education (1999) included a focus on quality in ECEC provision, a recognition of the importance of research, and recommendations on establishing specialist units particular to ECEC and acknowledged the importance ECEC provision for children at risk of disadvantage (Department of Education and Science, 1999). This led to the development of two key frameworks: *Síolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education* (Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education (CECDE), 2006) and *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (2009), published by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the agency responsible for curriculum in Irish Education. The publication of the *Aistear Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009) was designed to support *Síolta* (CECDE, 2006), the existing Child Care (Pre-school Services) Regulations, no.2 (2006) (Department of Health and Children, 2006) and the primary infant class curriculum, which covers the first two years of compulsory primary education.

By 2015, 96% of children under compulsory school age (six) accessed ECEC provision, mostly on a part-time basis in the year prior to starting formal schooling, aided by the introduction of a free preschool year (ECCE – Early Childhood Care and Education) in 2010 and increased to two years in 2015 (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2019a; Oireachtas Library & Research Services, 2012). While it is noted that compulsory schooling must begin by age six, many children begin school as young as four (European Parliament 2013; O'Connor & Angus 2014) though with the introduction of the funded preschool years, the age of school entry

has risen (DCYA, 2019a). In terms of full-time ECEC, Ireland still ranks low in comparison to some other European countries in childcare provision for under 3's at 29% (European Commission, 2018).

1.4 Current Provision in ECEC

Reflective of the ad hoc manner in which the sector has evolved, provision falls into two categories: i) that which meets children's needs and ii) that which meets the needs of parents in relation to labour force participation (Donoghue and Gaynor, 2011).

While two categories exist, some overlap occurs in the function and provision. ECEC services can be private or community provision (see table 1.1). Both are currently under the auspices of the newly titled Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) which was established as the Department of Children Youth Affairs (DCYA) in 2011 and included a ministerial appointment for the first time (DCYA, 2011) and renamed after the formation of the current Government in 2020. Prior to 2011, there was no Minister for Children and ECEC services came under the Department of Health and later the Department of Health and Children. A small number of services are linked to primary schools. Called Early Start Programmes, they provide services in designated disadvantaged areas for children who may not previously have accessed any formal provision with a view to developing skills in school readiness. These fall under the Department of Education and Skills (Department of Education, 2021). Despite most provision being outside the formal schooling, Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework was designed with both ECEC and infant classes in primary school in mind (NCCA, 2009). Regulation and standards of ECEC provision (other than the Early Start Programme) falls under the remit of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency since its establishment in 2014. However, an additional

function of the Department of Education has been introduced in the form of Early Years Education Focused Inspections (EYEI), which commenced in April 2016 (Department of Education and Skills (DES), 2016). This has resulted in a split system of regulation and criticism of an overly regulated, underfunded sector (Moloney, 2015; 2018a; Walsh, 2018).

A further criticism of the DES inspections is that they only inspect those services funded for the funded ECCE (free preschool) years and therefore neglect children under three years of age, which is widely acknowledged as a critical developmental period (Berk, 2018). This has resulted in the more qualified staff being positioned in the older ECCE groups as there is higher capitation paid for degree level staff in this scheme (DCYA, 2019b; Moloney, 2015).

Services designed to meet children's needs and development are usually referred to as sessional services called preschools, and generally operate for one or two three-hour sessions per day (Donoghue and Gaynor, 2011). They cater for children from two years and eight months to five-years-old and are generally funded by the free preschool years 'ECCE scheme' described above through Pobal, an organisation which administers department funding (DCYA, 2019b). Preschools operate under a number of models of curriculum: Naíonraí (Irish language preschool), playschool (play-based/emergent), Montessori, and more recently, particularly in targeted services, High Scope. Aistear: The National Curriculum Framework works alongside these curricula (NCCA, 2009).

The second category of provision is full time crèche or day care services which operate usually on a private basis, but also in community services in areas of disadvantage or need and offer full day care for parents working or in education. They usually take children from six months upwards and often provide full day care,

sessional ECCE scheme, school drops and collections and afterschool care. Childminders or family day care also fall under this category, though this is currently largely un-regulated (Department of Children, Equality, Disability and Integration, 2021a; TUSLA, 2021). Community provision was previously subsidised under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP) through the administration of a number of schemes for parents in education or of low income. These schemes have recently been replaced by a Single Affordable Childcare Scheme under measures announced in Budget 2017 (DCYA, 2016a).

Type of Service	Function	Hours of operation	Private or State-funded	Department responsible
Full day care (crèche, nursery)	Full day care. Children from 6 months – afterschool (up to 12)	7.30-6.30pm or variation	Private or community	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Inspected and regulated by TUSLA, Pre-school classes availing of the free preschool year subject to education focused inspections by inspectors from the Department of Education
Sessional Preschool	Provides 3 hour sessions to children of 3 years & 3 Months – 4 years and 6 months	9-12.30 and/or 1-4.30 or variation	Private or community	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth. Inspected and regulated by TUSLA, subject to education focused inspections by inspectors from the Department of Education
Early Start	3 years and 3 months – 4 years and 6 months Staffed by primary school teacher and “childcare worker”	9-11.30 and/or 12-2.30	State funded	Department of Education

(DCYA, 2015; DES, 1999, 2012; Donohue and Gaynor, 2011; Hayes, 2010; TUSLA, 2021)

Table 1.1 ECEC Provision in Ireland

The professionalisation of early childhood education and care

Over the years, the focus has shifted from labour market participation (though this is still a considerable factor) to quality in provision, something which is very much on the political agenda since 2014 (Department of Education and Science, 1999; DES, 2014) and influenced in recent years by the *Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care* (CoRe Report) (Urban, Vandebroek, Lazzari, Peeters & Van Leere

2011). This was further accelerated by a damning under-cover expose of treatment of children in a number of services in the Dublin region in 2015, once again causing the sector to react. The ECEC workforce professionalisation came under the governmental glare, with increased capitation paid to higher qualified staff in the funded provision, targets outlined in numerous policies, the introduction of minimum qualifications in 2016 (Level 5 ECEC qualification, equivalent of school graduation level) with an aim towards a graduate-led workforce of 50% and an interim target of 30% by 2021 (DCYA, 2019) and has culminated in *Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines for Initial Professional Education (Level 7 and Level 8) Degree Programmes for the Early Learning and Care (ELC) Sector in Ireland* published in 2019 (DES, 2019a) and informed by and *the Review of Occupational Role Profiles in Early Childhood Education and Care in Ireland* carried out by Urban, Robson and Sacchi (2017) and by which all higher education degree programmes must comply by September 2022. The *Workforce Development Plan* is under development and has been long promised and will provide occupational profiles for the sector (Department of Education and Skills, 2019a). However, Urban (2017; 2019; 2020) argues that governance, resourcing, fragmentation and the marketised nature of the sector are four key issues still to be addressed in the ECEC arena.

The Early Childhood Identity Crisis

Despite a time of considerable investment, change and scrutiny, discussion surrounding quality, care and education, the terminology used to describe the sector and those who work within it (childcare worker, child carer, edu-carer, teacher, early childhood professional, educator, pedagogue, practitioner) has resulted in little consensus (Wolf, 2015). Indeed, the terminology used by the various government departments to describe the sector has been inconsistent and confused with terms such as 'Childcare and Early

Childhood Education' (Department of Health and Children, 2000) 'Early Years' (DCYA, 2014; DES, 2018; Pobal, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019), 'Childcare sector' (DCYA 2018b), 'Early Childhood Education' (CECDE, 2006; NCCA, 2009), 'Early Childhood Education and Care' (DCYA, 2016b) and most recently a unilateral change in terminology, much criticised for the lack of consultation and further confusing an already complex sector 'early learning and care' (DCYA, 2018a; 2019a; Urban 2020). The removal of the term education is seen as a retrograde move at a time when the sector is moving towards increased professionalisation (Hayes, 2019).

1.5 Gender and the ECEC Workforce

Until 2016, estimating the number of men working in ECEC in Ireland proved difficult with estimates ranging from <1%-2% (ADM 2000; CSO 2011; Walshe, 2012). ADM (now Pobal), the administration body for government funding of ECEC published a sector census in 2000 estimating the percentage of men at 1% as a baseline measure. Further census/profiles were not published again until Pobal began publishing an annual *Early Years Sector Profile* in 2016 estimating the percentage of men at 1.5% (Pobal, 2018). The 2018/2019 report suggests an increase to 1.8% (Pobal, 2019). However, there is no disaggregated data in the 2019/2020 report (Pobal, 2021). The table below also gives an indication of how much the ECEC sector has grown over two decades, though in a sector which is poorly paid and valued, turnover rates remain high across staff at 18%, though this is a decrease on previous years (Moloney, 2018b; Pobal, 2021). The current Covid-19 pandemic has created difficulties for the ECEC sector, a situation not unique to Ireland (Carson and Mattingly, 2020; Irish Independent, 2020; UN, 2020). In 2020 it is estimated that 192 ECEC services closed (Hosford, 2020).

Year	Total	Men	%
2000	6275	63	1.0%
2016	18906	290	1.5
2017	20110	317	1.6
2018	22132	332	1.5
2019	22767	423	1.8

(ADM, 2000; Pobal, 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019)

Table 1.2 Percentage of men in early childhood

The Irish Men in ECEC figure broadly reflects international levels with an estimated 3% in England and 4% in Scotland (Warin, Wilkinson, Davies, Greaves & Hibbin, 2020). There have been documented cases of higher numbers of men in some areas as a result of targeted initiatives for example Sheffield Children’s Centre and Pen Green Centre (Cameron, Moss & Owen, 1999). Norway is consistently held as exemplar comparatively at 9% (Horne, 2015; Nordfjell, 2015; Rohrmann, Brody & Plaisir, 2021). More recently Sweden and Turkey report a figure of 6% (Şahin, and Sak, 2016). However, an estimated international figure of 95% of the ECEC workforce comprised of women falls well short of the 20% recommended by the European Commission Network on Childcare in 1996, twenty-five years ago (Jensen, 1996).

In terms of diversity in the workplace, much of the focus of Irish policy makers is in relation to getting women into science, technology, engineering and maths fields (STEM), almost exclusively male sectors (Department of Education, 2020; Engineers Ireland, 2017) and increasing women’s participation in leadership roles, particularly in academia (O’Shea, 2019). Little attention is paid to the ‘caring’ sector of nursing, social care and education, typically women majority occupations (WMO’s), though nursing and social care, less so than the ECEC and early education sectors. However, there was some consideration given to gender balance in ECEC in the *National Childcare Strategy: The Report of*

the Partnership 2000 Expert Working Group on childcare (DJELR, 1999) suggesting an intended target of 20% of male employees in the workforce reflecting that of the European Commission (Jensen, 1996). The Competence Requirements for Early Childhood Education and Care (CoRe) report suggested a recommended target of 10% (Urban et al., 2011) and recommends further consideration.

The Diversity and Equality Guidelines for Childcare Providers, (Office of the Minister for Children, 2006) and its successor Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education (DCYA, 2016b) both focus on equal opportunities recruitment stating 'Childcare is not a career option just for women. The importance of children interacting with men in the childcare environment needs to be recognised' (OMC, 2006, p.24) but caution 'Understanding the benefits of diversity within the team is not the same as saying that we should select people simply because of their background or gender. Applicants must have the professional skills and relevant experience required for the position' (DCYA, 2016b, p.78). Recruiting more men into the sector, while maintaining the integrity of recruiting the 'best person for the job' will require having more men choose ECEC as a possible career path and so the reasons why those that do enter and stay become important factors to consider in careers guidance and recruitment drives. Aside from these segments, much of the overall diversity and inclusion discourse is focused on educational, cultural and religious diversity and largely on the children availing of the services rather than the workforce.

The Workforce Development Plan in 2010, made no mention of gender or recruitment of a gender diverse workforce (Department of Education and Skills, 2010). A new Workforce Development Plan is forthcoming (Department of Education and Skills, 2019b) and it remains to be seen if gender will have been considered. *First 5: The*

Whole of Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families, objective eight focuses on participation in ECEC but the focus is on children and families and makes no mention of the diversity of the workforce (DCYA, 2018a).

Gender equality in the labour force is enshrined in Irish Law in the Employment Equality Act (Irish Statute Book, 1998) and the Equal Status Act (Irish Statute Book, 2000), yet the gender pay gap persists, and women are predominantly found in the caring professions which are largely underfunded and low paid (Eurostat, 2018; Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC), 2018). In other sectors of the workforce, intense focus has been on increasing gender balance, for example discussion surrounding the introduction of gender quotas in elections, ensuring greater female representation. In higher education, where there is a disproportionate number of men in higher and leadership roles, the Minister for State for Higher Education, Mary Mitchell O'Connor launched the Gender Equality Action Plan 2018-2020 to address the imbalance (Gender Equality Taskforce, 2018). Despite the gender equality discourse, it has been predominantly focused on getting women into male dominated sectors and has paid little attention to the gender imbalance in the women-majority sectors.

This is not to say that there hasn't been any mention of gender balance in the ECEC sector, but it has been largely notional with a cursory nod to the European Commission's recommendation of 20% without any real plan or action to address it, unlike countries such as Norway who have invested resources and taken action to address gender balance bringing the number men in ECEC to 9% (Peeters, Rohrmann and Emilsen, 2015). There is a grassroots organisation Men in Childcare who are supported by the County Childcare Committees and who strive to promote and support more men entering ECEC. However, despite increasing gender balance in other areas of society, more women entering the ECEC workforce

and more ECEC places being created, the proportion of men has largely stayed the same.

Two key recent developments in 2021 are of particular significance to the ECEC sector and gender equality. A Citizen's Assembly on gender equality was established in January 2020 to consider gender equality in Irish society (The Citizen's Assembly, 2021). The purpose of the assembly was to 'consider gender equality and make recommendations to the Oireachtas (Irish Parliament) to advance gender equality...' (The Citizen's Assembly, 2021, p.6). In April 2021 they published their final report which included recommendations in relation to care:

'Even pre Covid-19, it was clear that we need to transform our models of care to ensure that our society values every person and provides high quality care for all who need support at every life stage. Post the pandemic, it is even more urgent to commit to well designed, publicly funded pay and career structures for carers whose invaluable work in the home and wider community contribute so much to the common good of our society.' (The Citizen's Assembly, 2021, p.9)

The report points to the deeply ingrained and 'destructive' gender norms and recommends the changing of Article 41.2 (women in the home) in the Constitution to be gender neutral, implementation of gender quotas in politics, cultural organisations and boards. In relation to ECEC in particular, they recommended taking steps towards a publicly funded ECEC sector, increasing expenditure on ECEC and provision of non-transferable paid parental leave (The Citizen's Assembly, 2021). The publically funded model of ECEC provision recommended has been welcomed by advocates for ECEC and academics, as the market model of ECEC in Ireland has long been a source of criticism (Bernard, Byrne-McNamee, Hayes, Jeffers, Murray & Urban, 2020; National Women's Council, 2021;

Urban, 2021). The second significant development in 2021 is the recommendation by the Minister of State for Enterprise, Trade and Employment for the establishment of a Joint Labour Committee (JLC) as of 1st of April 2021, which will establish standardised terms and conditions of employment of workers in the ECEC sector (Government of Ireland, 2021a).

1.6 The argument for more men in ECEC

There is general consensus from the literature that more men in the ECEC would be a positive development (Alharahsheh, Pius & Guenane, 2019; Cameron, Moss & Owen, 1999; Cameron, Owen & Moss, 2001; Carrington and McPhee, 2008; Cremers et al., 2010; Rolfe, 2005; Farquhar & CHILDforum, 2006; Rohrmann, 2016; Thorpe, Sullivan, Jansen, McDonald, Sumsion & Irvine, 2018; Warin et al., 2020). The reasons cited for this vary, from gender equality (Norway) or to role model specific masculine traits and roles (Malaysia).

Equality

Greater gender equality may be a result of men's increased participation, not just for men, but may also benefit women as it has been suggested that greater male participation will push up the status, pay and conditions of the sector and allow flexibility around family commitments for men as well as women (Rolfe, 2005). Cameron, Moss & Owen (1999) and Farquhar & CHILDforum (2006) argue that increasing the gender balance would enhance equality by pointing to issue of the:

'high concentration of women in any single occupation, including early childhood teaching, is problematic for women's overall economic and career advancement. The clustering of women in a narrow range of traditionally female-intensive lower-paying occupations has been noted to be a problem by

government agencies concerned about women's equality and status in paid work' (Farquhar & CHILDForum, 2006 p. iv).

Cameron, Moss & Owen (1999) suggest that gender cannot be extricated from ECEC work since this work is modelled on a maternal understanding of caring. On the other hand, considering gender as a fixed entity is rather limited as 'gender is a lived experience constantly subjected to construction and reconstruction, it is imbedded within workplace institutions and provides a framework for how to be' (Cameron, Moss & Owen, 1999, p.20). Male participation in ECEC may provide women with better opportunities and the more even the balance of gender in the setting, the less likely stereotyping. The gender equality debate is most often focused around equality for women (UN Women, 2015) but, in terms of education, it has shifted to include men and boys in addressing new employment pathways for boys (Cremers et al., 2010; Uba & Cleinman, 2013). Changing gender roles in the home, where fathers have more involvement are not being replicated in the ECEC workforce, even though men's participation will also likely benefit women in terms of equality of opportunity (Owen, 2003).

Complementarity

The complementarity argument that men are in some way complementary to women in what they provide in an educational setting has been criticised in more recent times as perpetuating heteronormative and traditional gender roles (Warin et al., 2020). Warin (2019) argues for gender flexibility and not gender complementarity to move away from essentialist views of care as an extension of the heteronormative family with distinct gendered roles and found that a whilst mixed gender workforce can challenge and transform gender stereotypes, they can also unknowingly reinforce them.

Challenging stereotypes

The argument for men challenging stereotypes is reiterated (Farquhar, 2012), although Warin et al. (2020) suggest that despite a commitment and belief in gender-neutral practices, gender stereotypes still influence the roles allocated and taken on by both men and women, suggesting a gender awareness needs to be fostered. In terms of men's influence on the gender construction of boys, Sumison (2005, citing Lewis and Warin, 1998) suggests that men's involvement is unlikely to influence gender construction as it overemphasises the role of the adult and underemphasises the role of the child in constructing their own gender understandings.

Diversity, inclusion and representativeness

Having a workforce that is representative of the diversity of society and of adults with whom children can bond (Cameron, Owen & Moss, 2001; Cremers et al., 2010) and a diversity of staff bringing a diversity of teaching practices (Farquhar, 2012) have been proposed as benefits to increasing men's participation in the workforce. Carrington and McPhee (2008) suggest that any aim to get more men into teaching should be in the name of inclusion and more equitable setting than for any attempt to address boys' underachievement, discipline or lack of role models. Rohrman (2016) argues that when looking at inclusive environments, we must go beyond just thinking about inclusion for the children and consider workers and families. Inclusion for children should include the opportunity to interact with a wide variety of people. As Sansone (2017) and Alan, Ertac & Mumcu (2018) have pointed out in relation to children's aspirations at post-primary level, the attitudes of teachers rather than their gender may be influential in the gender messages and experience of education received by young children. Warin et al. (2020) cautions against taking an essentialist view of the need for more men in ECEC, stating that in doing so, it will influence practice which sees inherent differences between the roles and

expectations of men and women that will further embed and perpetuate limiting gender stereotypes. Alharahsheh, Pius & Guenane (2019) argue that although there is a need for diversification of the ECEC workforce to support the promotion of ideals of diversity and equality and to be representative of society as a whole, there is lack of political will. Challenges included masculinities, suspicion and gendered expectations of competence. They suggest that some of the challenges were within the men themselves and how to reconcile this with their work.

1.7 Terminology

The terminology used to describe workers in the ECEC sector is a matter of much discussion and debate. For the purposes of this thesis 'early childhood educators' or 'ECEC workers' will mean anyone working directly with the children in an education and care capacity in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) setting. Some documents quoted will use terms such as 'early years', 'early learning and care', 'early childhood care and education', 'early childhood education and care' and may refer to workers as 'teachers', 'practitioners,' 'educarers', or 'pedagogues,' though 'teachers' and 'practitioners' are most frequently used. The context of this research is the republic of Ireland. When reference is made to Ireland, it is in relation to the twenty-six counties of the Republic of Ireland. Northern Ireland remains part of the UK, and as such has different models of ECEC provision and funding and, much of the recent legislative change in the Republic has not extended to Northern Ireland.

1.8 Conclusion and thesis outline

Despite rapid social and political change and an increasingly egalitarian and gender balanced society, one which has shaken the constraints of the Catholic Church and voted for legislation of equality in the last number of years, Ireland still has a way to go in

relation to ECEC provision that supports the needs of both children and parents. While much political will and investment has focused on the ECEC sector, focus on the workforce and in particular the diversity of the workforce has been lacking. With men currently comprising just 1.8% of the workforce, it is clear that notional commitments to increased balance have not been supported by strategies for implementation. The ways in which those men who do enter the workforce, the experiences they have and trajectories they take is the focus of this research in order to inform practices that might further increase their participation. The issues that come up in relation to men's presence have been the subject of much international research over the last twenty years and will be considered in the chapters that follow.

The remainder of this thesis is outlined as follows: The theoretical framing of this thesis will be detailed in chapter two. In this instance, gender is theorised as embedded in social structures and practices (Connell, 2009). Chapter three will present the literature in relation to men in ECEC internationally: the nature of their entry, presence and experiences such as gendered expectations, bias, suspicions and questions of practice and competence. Following this, the methodology employed in the research will be detailed (chapter 4). A mixed methods embedded design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011) was employed involving perspectives of early childhood educators, careers guidance teachers and parents. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten men and six women ECEC workers; surveys were conducted with parents on their experiences and attitudes in relation to men in the ECEC setting. A focus group was conducted with careers guidance teachers who shared their practices in relation to promoting ECEC as a career option. Chapter five presents a pen profile of each of the early childhood educators who are the primary focus of this research. Timelines and synopses of their career trajectories are presented, and some initial themes identified to be discussed in the subsequent chapters. In chapters

six, seven and eight, the interpretation of the data will be presented. The findings will be discussed in the context of previous research in chapter nine and chapter ten will conclude with the implications of this research and recommendations for practice, policy and further investigation.

2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

Gender theory and research has been the focus of much discussion in the literature across many disciplines. Many of the origins of the current wave of gender theory stems from the women's liberation movement in the 60's and 70's (Connell, 2009). This research is framed by a social theory of gender articulated by Connell (2005, 2006a, 2006b, 2009) and Connell and Pearse (2014) as actively constructed and embedded in the structures in all levels of society from the personal, workplace, state and world order. How gender is constructed and re-constructed influences the roles in the domestic sphere, in employment aspirations, expectations, opportunities and compensation and while not fixed, is maintained by dynamics of social relations. This chapter will consider the development of early childhood education and care (ECEC) as a gendered space through a Connellian lens.

2.2 Gender as a concept

Differences between men and women have long been of interest and the focus of debate across many disciplines including biology, sociology, psychology, anthropology and neuroscience (Rippon, 2019) and often used to justify the existing social order, the power relations defined by notions of masculinity and femininity (Macionis and Plummer, 2008). Within sociology it has been the focus of the theoretical perspectives of structuralism, post-structuralism, post-modernism and post-humanism (Braidotti, 2006; Butler, 1999; Connell, 2009; Pilcher and Whelehan, 2017).

Howards and Alamilla (2001) outline four ideological perspectives on gender but described them as being on a continuum: i) *essentialism*, that gender is biological and fixed from birth; ii)

socialisation, where children learn their identities in childhood; iii) *social construction*, where gender is learned and understood through interaction and negotiation; iv) *social structure* in which the organisation of society impacts our understanding of gender. Using the continuum analogy allows some overlap or agreement across perspectives.

Essentialist theories have suggested that there are innate differences between men and women, and each played a distinct role in society with men being the 'breadwinners' and women being the home-makers and mothers (the public/private divide). This has been posited as the natural order (Connell, 2009; Rippon, 2019) with theorists suggesting that there are inherent differences in the sexes other than the reproductive organs. However, Connell (2009) criticises approaches that begin from the perspective of looking for difference often in order to justify the current status quo. Rippon (2019) points to the idea of complementarity as a prevalent justification for differences suggesting that men are rational leaders and women the sensitive and nurturing home-makers, however she rejects the notion of their being inherent biological differences between men and women based on her neuroscience research and suggests that children are born into a societal 'tsunami of pink and blue' (2019, p.198) which influences how gender develops.

Sex- role socialisation suggests that children learn their identities during childhood through socialisation, messages about what is consistent with their sex (Howards and Alamilla, 2001). However, Connell (2009) is critical of this perspective as 1) mistaking 'what is dominant for what is normative' (2009, p.95); 2) defining it as learning characteristics of the sex; 3) positioning the participant as the passive recipient of gender whereas, she contends constructing gender and identity is active and can be seen as early as primary school and; 4) ignoring the multi-directional nature of construction of gender.

The *social construction of gender* is considered a fluid and 'processual' form of gender identity. It develops throughout life and through interactions and experiences, the meaning attached to those, and personas dependant on circumstances. It is based on cultural and biological understandings of gender and that children are not passive recipients of gender role socialisation (Howards and Alamilla, 2001; Connell, 2009). To consider gender as binary is a social construction in itself (Howards and Alamilla, 2001; Weber, 2009). This has been reiterated by gender scholars such as Connell (2009) who suggests that if societies have to regulate the sexual and gendered behaviour of their members, it suggests that what is being regulated is not necessarily the natural order of things but more likely to be an attempt to maintain the existing gender order which benefits those in power. This has been amplified by globalisation and western influence and neo-liberal ideologies (Connell, 2009).

The terminology around 'gender' and 'sex' has added to the conflation in that they are often used interchangeably (Francis & Paechter, 2015) however, Weber (2009) defines sex as 'biological and anatomical characteristics attributed to males and females' whereas gender relates to 'culturally and socially structured relationships between women and men' (Weber, 2009, p.8). More recently the term gender/sex has been coined (Fausto Sterling 2019; Fine, Joel & Rippon, 2019) to acknowledge the inter-relatedness of the terms. However, some theorists argue for the retention of a distinction between sex and gender on the basis that women still frequently experience inequality and violence based on their sex class (Sullivan, 2020).

Connell's perspective suggests that *active construction* within prevailing *structures* influencing gender may be resistant to change. However, these structures are not fixed and can be disrupted either in individual regimes or in crisis events. It is this perspective that will be considered here. Connell paraphrases Simone de Beauvoir

stating: 'Being man or woman is not a pre-determined state. It is an act of becoming, a condition actively under construction' (2009, p.5). The construction of gender may be influenced by everything in society that is divided along gender lines, from clothes to services, toys and occupations, making it easy to assume that it is the natural order.

Connell (2009) dismisses gender binaries and traditional dichotomous definitions as falsehoods that pervade about men and women's characteristics, arguing that humans are more nuanced, and when we look for differences by gender, we then do not see gender where differences do not exist. It neglects differences within genders and does not take account of the processes that construct gender. She calls for a refocus on relations rather than difference, relations which reinforce the structures that govern the social world and that gender research which typically focuses on women (influenced by feminist movements) needs to also focus on men in order to fully understand the gendered nature of society. Men have held the vast majority of powerful positions in politics and business globally. And men and women's lives and occupations are divided along gendered lines, with men expected to be breadwinners and the public face of the family unit and women expected to maintain the domestic sphere and work in the caring realms. Connell (2009) sees gender as a multi-dimensional social structure which is entwined with the physical body linked to power, work and sexuality and rejects the argument that gender differences are merely a presentation of biological differences. Connell describes gender patterns as fluid stating, 'human action is creative, and we are constantly moving into historical spaces that no one has occupied before' (2009, p.23).

'Gender is the structure of social relations that centres on the reproductive arena, and a set of practices that bring

reproductive distinctions between bodies and social processes' (Connell, 2009, p.11)

2.3 Gender order, regimes and identity

According to Connell (2009), the *gender regime* influences the arrangements in social institutions along gender lines i.e. how work is identified and allocated, how social and emotional relations are conducted and the interactions between different social institutions e.g. gendered jobs. She points to the endurance of these regimes when, despite political and theoretical moves towards equality, the practice takes longer to change. For example, government initiatives in Ireland to increase leave for both parents has taken some time to be fully accessed by new fathers (Hogan, 2019). These gender regimes reflect wider patterns in society referred to as the *gender order*. Connell identifies these as relational (both direct and indirect). They arise out of the 'reproductive arena' (2009, p.73) and are not confined to relations between men and women, but also within them for example, hierarchical masculinities. They are also not fixed and are being re-made daily through human relations which bring gender into existence. Connell (2009) cites West and Zimmerman (1987) in describing gender as being 'done' (but not necessarily freely) in routine interactions. However, our gendered behaviours are policed and punished through the relations in social institutions and therefore create and maintain gendered structures. Our practices are conditioned by social structures which develop over time and are historically embedded but not fixed.

Gender identity as a concept first was coined by Stoller (1968, cited in Connell, 2009) but Connell critiques this as simplification as it only focuses on one aspect of a person linked to gender and implies that gender is fixed and not multiple and fluid. She again argues that there is more variation within 'genders' than between them. This has led to the idea of gender identities, but Connell suggests that this is

a way of highlighting one's difference from others (2009). However, she recognises its usefulness in understanding the belonging one might feel to a particular gender category. Drawing on deconstructionist theory, she reiterates that gender identity is not necessarily fixed (stable) and is created with language and suggests that the term *identity* is overused and unhelpful. She describes gender as a process which is constructed by individuals and changeable over time rather than externally imposed. Individuals will show both masculine and feminine traits in various ways. Attempts to impose what is seen as the 'natural order' have been made at various points in time but underpinning the gender order is inequality. Women experience less wealth, more violence, forced dependence and unequal access to opportunities in education and in occupations, in other words 'marginal... to the men' (2009, p.7). Indeed, even as the beneficiaries of these inequalities, men experience inequality if they deviate from the masculine expectation and yet when they conform to expectations, they may also experience difficulties in terms of their mental and physical health.

Connell (2009) suggests that construction of gender is embodied, that the typical bodily functions associated with the sex are insignificant until the symbolism humans attribute to them is applied. She suggests the socialisation model does not take account of the complex interactions between the various competing institutions and dismisses the notion of stages for gender formation. Trajectories will vary depending on experiences though children will be aware of the dominant expressions of masculinity and femininity. She refers to the idea of a third gender as something not falling distinctly into male or female but comments that this may also be oversimplification as it encapsulates a whole range of expressions of gender which are not fixed and open to change. She suggests that:

'Globalisation involves enormously complex interactions between sexual customs and gender regimes that are in any

case, diverse and divided. The result is a spectrum of sexual practices and categories formed in contexts of cultural disruption and economic inequality' (2009, p.110).

Connell (2009) describes the State as a gender structure which is patriarchal and ruled mainly by men for generations. It is central to gender and power with an internal gender regime and division of labour (defences and infrastructure vs human services). It regulates gender and creates identities in its policy development but can also be the focus of calls for change. It can be defined and redefined through shifts, crises and changes and points to the state traditional facilitation of patriarchal relations in the home.

2.4 Gender as relational

Connell (2009) states that gender dynamics are diverse and complex and include 'relationships, boundaries, practices, identities and images that are actively created in social processes' (2009, p.30). At the core of Connell's work is the emphasis on gender relations and how they structure gender divisions and understandings. She identifies four dimensions of gender relations which can differ from context to context. She provides the following example:

'the modern liberal state defines men and women as citizens, that is, alike. But the dominant sexual code defines men and women as opposites. Meanwhile customary ideas about the divisions of labour in family life, define women as housewives and carers of children. Accordingly, women entering the public domain - trying to exercise their rights as citizens – have an uphill battle to have their authority recognised'

(Connell, 2009, p.75).

Change may happen in one domain, and trigger change in another or but it can take time for shifts to evolve. Connell's contention is that gender structures are multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and intersect with other structures such as class, race and disability and then therefore difficult to map in any linear way.

2.5 Connell's four dimensions of gender:

Power relations

Connell (2009) points to the historical notion of patriarchy where wives and daughters are under the domain of the male head of house. Despite accepted changes to this belief, there are still biases which influence women's experiences of the environment. In particular, the legal system, recruitment processes and procedures that perpetuate inequalities. This can still be seen today and is also very much experienced in racial and class and heteronormative structures, shown by recent studies on biases in algorithms in calculating exam results and preference for default white faces (Criado-Perez, 2019; Fry, 2018; Zimmerman, 2020). Power is also seen within the gender classification with hegemonic and subordinated masculinities identified by Connell (1995, 2005). She draws on a post-structural Foucauldian theory on power linked to the language we use to categorise people which produces identities which she describes as having the capacity to be 'both free choice and fiercely controlling', using an example of women's conformity to dominant heterosexual expectations (2009, p.78). She attributes current gender structures to the development of global empires and colonisation over 500 years but suggests it can be 'weakened... manoeuvred around ...[or] contested' (p.78).

Production consumption and gendered accumulation

In the second dimension, Connell (2009) points to the 'sexual division of labour' as being the focus of much social science research on gender and points to the change over time that has

occurred in clerical and indeed, teaching roles that previously were men's work and now considered women's. However, the biggest issue with the sexual division of labour is in relation to the unpaid division of labour in the home, typically considered women's domain, and that understandings of what is masculine and feminine are tied into this and because domestic work (equally challenging) has a different meaning in the gender structure. This, according to Connell (2009) is a largely western colonised phenomenon that places women dependent on the male breadwinner. Even when women and men are equally in the paid employment domain, their employment and accumulation of wealth and status is different and unequal along gender lines with women's work cheap and flexible. These expectations are understood early in how children and students are guided with boys being directed into mechanical, trade or business with girls being guided into 'human service' jobs (2009, p.81)

Emotional relations

Connell (2009) suggests that traditional theories of relationships such as Freud etc. are context-dependent i.e., embedded in the cultural and social structures and do not take account of alternative contexts. She describes emotional relations as being both positive and negative, embedded in bodily relationships and the dominant structures (heteronormativity & romantic love) reinforced or challenged by other structures such as religion and creating generational tensions with more traditional forms and structures. For example, global expectation of women as carers and men as breadwinners are being challenged by the concept of 'new fatherhood'. Men are becoming more involved in their children's lives but still expected to be breadwinner. This creates tension in balancing the two roles. Despite this, women are still expected to be carers and the shift has not extended to care work. Relationships can be both symbolic and real.

Symbolism, culture and discourse

How we experience the world is constituted by meaning: how we understand words and what they symbolise. For example, when we use the terms 'man' or 'woman' the understanding of what they mean is more than just the biological categories. Similarly, when the boys use the term 'you're a girl' as an insult, it does not mean that their peer actually has the female anatomy but that he is associated with the connotations that are embedded in the term woman and what we understand by that. Symbolism influences us through media, clothing and products. In western society symbolism privileges the masculine and can be reflected in social struggle, how masculinity or femininity is constructed, but it is not fixed. This can cause inter-generational tensions as it shifts (Connell, 2009).

Connell (2009) sees the four dimensions as multifaceted and interconnected, making them difficult to map: 'in real life context, the different dimensions of gender constantly interweave and condition each other' (2009, p.85) and with other structures such as class, race and disability. 'Social situations are produced out of mutual conditioning' (2009, p.86) across structures. These are linked to superiority and inferiority, but Connell (2009) warns against conflating with other structures as it is one of and in itself. Historical factors influence the dimensions, accumulating and evolving over time and produced and re-produced through language. Connell (2009) points to historically different social structures and attributes current divisions of labour along patriarchal lines to globalisation and suggests these divisions disappear just as they appeared and where gender patterns change in one domain, they may influence another (e.g., over time increased father participation may see more men in caring roles). Disruptive patterns may influence change for example, the global recession impacting disproportionately on male dominated sectors as an opportunity to shift some of the gender patterns e.g., more men at the school gate, more women as the

breadwinner, though the shift to women earning enough to be a breadwinner will probably take some time. Connell (2009) suggests aiming for a gender-free society as a 'conceptual benchmark for thinking about change' (2009, p.89). She describes issues of internal and external gendering as being unstable and produced through language, but they change slowly due to conflicting interests and privilege. There are inherent contradictions in the structure which can create tensions that mobilise change, 'crisis tendencies,' as Connell calls them (2015, p.81). She uses the division of labour as an example of this and the increased level of women's participation in the workforce in the 20th and 21st century and while their participation has increase exponentially, they still experience unequal pay and conditions. While women's activism has increased, in the intersection with class, women who benefit from the privileges of the current system are unlikely to engage in and support this activism. As Connell points out 'gender orders are far from homogenous, and that gender politics are complicated and turbulent' (2009, p.92). Connell repeatedly points to colonialism as a significant contributing factor in the current gender order but reiterates that it is not fixed and can change when new struggles arise.

2.6 Concepts of masculinity and social order

While binary understandings of gender exist, there are degrees to which individuals conform to them. One explanation of this and how it influences behaviour is the notion of masculinities (Connell, 2005). Rather than distinguishing between two dichotomous poles, it is likely there is as much if not more difference within the sex/gender categories than between them. Connell (2005) describes gender in terms of masculinities and femininities. Masculinity is sub-divided to explain variations within the gender itself (Connell, 2005) but suggests that they exist in a hierarchy. Hegemonic masculinity is described as the superior, dominant, heterosexual masculinity,

defined by strength and aggression. This is followed by complicit masculinity in which men do not fully meet the hegemonic notion but who display some traits and benefit as a result of the privileges it brings. Subordinated masculinity describes men who are perceived to fall short of complicit masculinity and are subordinate such as homosexual men or heterosexual men who demonstrate traits more associated with femininity (Connell, 1987; cited in Fulcher and Scott, 2007; Connell, 2005). Fulcher and Scott (2007) state that there are variations in femininity also, but femininity cannot be described as hegemonic as it is already subordinate to masculinity. Within this gender order, masculine traits are seen as independent, task driven and technical whereas feminine traits are considered sociable, relationship centred and caring. Connell (2009) suggests that the current gender order which privileges hegemonic masculinity and disadvantages subordinate masculinity, and femininity is harmful to both men and women though the disadvantages and inequalities experienced by women are more evident in occupational roles and remuneration and land ownership. Hegemonic masculinity is associated with dominance in the public sphere and has implications for equality, human rights, well-being and the environment (Connell, 2009) and makes those who may not fit the perceived hegemonic norm vulnerable, something which is evident in boys as young as 10 (Thorne, 1993 cited in Connell, 2009) where terms such as 'girl' or 'gay' become insults.

Masculinity is associated with being male and has particular significance in terms of how men see themselves, how society sees them and how they conform to those expectations expressed in the gender regime of the institutions of family, classroom or workplace and the gender order of society. It is this dichotomous notion of gender, that we are either male or female, and the roles associated with this dichotomy, the meaning of masculinity and femininity that becomes problematic when males or females work in non-traditional roles and the regime is upset. For men in caring professions, the

notion that a man can exhibit caring characteristics and still be a man without ulterior motives upsets the traditional gender order. And within this context, his role becomes unclear. Is he masculine? Are these the traits that should be espoused? Or should he display traits that are considered more feminine and as such caring? And are there multiple ways of caring? The ways in which men and women are socialised into particular career paths and the gender regime maintained are often perpetuated within the family, through the distribution of care and the expectations of boys and girls in the school system. But as Connell previously states, these regimes and orders are not fixed and can shift over time, influenced by significant political or economic factors. For example, the economic recession in 2007 predominantly impacted construction and world banking, two male-dominated sectors and described as the 'man-cession' by Newsweek (Cook, 2009), left many men unemployed and unable to fulfil the breadwinner expectation.

2.7 Gendered division of labour

The domestic sphere (private domain)

Looking after the home and the children has been seen as the woman's domain and what women are naturally supposed to do based on the fact that they carry and birth the children. Connell (2009) describes this as the 'cultural definition of women as caring, gentle, self-sacrificing and industrious i.e. As good mothers' (Connell, 2009 p.3) in the private domain with fathers being the breadwinners in the public facing sphere. Over the years there have been attempts to impose stricter gender policing for example from religions organisations. The Pope in 1988 issued a letter 'reminding everyone that women were created for motherhood and their functions should not get mixed up with those of men' (Connell, 2009, p.6). Indeed, in Ireland, a traditionally Catholic country with little separation between church and state in the past, included the role of the woman in the home in the Irish constitution (Bunreacht na

hEireann). Article 41 remains to this day, despite commitments to have it abolished or amended in favour of changing the language to 'parents' (Irish Statute Book, 1937; The Citizen's Assembly, 2021; Visser, 2018).

However, imposing these boundaries perpetuates inequalities. Similarly, caring responsibilities to other older or dependent family members often falls to women who are seen as the natural nurturers, allowing men to continue with their careers with unbroken service which not only ensures continuity of current income but security of future income.

Even in more recent times, in homes where both partners work full time, research suggests that most of the childcare and domestic burden falls to the woman, what Connell (2009, p.25) calls the 'second shift'. This equates to thirteen hours more per week on average in the EU (European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), 2020), work that is often unseen and unpaid and thus not valued (Connell, 2009; Russell, McGinnity, Fahey, & Kelly 2018). Connell (2009) suggests that there is nothing to indicate that men cannot 'mother' but that economic necessity dictates that they will be the more likely to engage in the paid workforce and suggests changes to leave policies may help this. Making space in the public realm needs to be supported by good family-friendly policies that allow for equality in the domestic sphere. Efforts in this regard have been made by the Irish Government in recent years with the introduction of two-weeks paternity leave in 2016 (Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, 2020a), one of the last in Europe to do so (Eurofound, 2019), followed by an additional two-weeks for each parent introduced in 2019 and separate and equal entitlements to parental leave of 26 weeks for both parents of children up to the age of 12 or 16 in cases where children have a disability (Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, 2019; 2020b). It would appear however, that not all fathers avail of these provisions,

(Hogan, 2019) most likely because the male 'breadwinner's reduction in income would be too big a loss to the family financial situation, a situation reinforced by the prevailing gender order. Indeed, more recently, it would appear that women have been disproportionately impacted by Covid-19 in terms of the increased caring responsibilities associated with lock downs (EIGE, 2021b) and the impact on work productivity as focus on economic recovery after Covid-19 focuses on male-dominated work sectors, a phenomenon referred to as a 'shecession' by one Australian commentator (Ziwica, 2010).

Occupational segregation and the 'breadwinner' (public domain)

Women's contribution to the labour force has in the past been undervalued by virtue of the fact that much of it was unpaid and located in the domestic sphere. Just as the domestic sphere is divided along gender lines, so too is the occupational environment in a way that privileges men who predominantly inhabit the upper levels of science, technology, finance, economics, law and education and women extending their caring roles into the lower paid workforce (Lynch, 2008). Traditionally men were seen to occupy the public sphere and women were responsible for the domestic, making them reliant on their husbands, while also enabling them to progress in the public domain (Connell, 2009).

While over generations, increasing accessibility of higher education to women, has meant that they are entering higher education in equal numbers and indeed, performing better, causing concerns over the 'underperformance' of boys (Rubery and Hebson, 2018), they are still under-represented in male dominated occupations and higher positions in many occupations and areas of employment, politics and culture (Lynch, 2008). Recognising the structural inequalities that have prevented women from availing of certain employments, the Irish Government has made efforts to increase

women's opportunities and representation, considered to have been historically impeded by attitudes, discrimination and stereotyping. They have implemented gender quotas in election candidates and have created women-only leadership positions in higher education (Department of Foreign Affairs, 2019; Gender Equality Taskforce, 2018). However, strategies to encourage women into the workforce at any level, need to first address the imbalance in the domestic division of labour and care work in the home which, despite recent changes still falls to women and influences their job prospects and earning potential (Connell, 2009; Hogan, 2019; Russell et al., 2018).

Rubery and Hebson (2018) have pointed out that efforts to recognise gender issues or take a gender-neutral approach starts from the male default position and therefore keeps care in the women's domain and that issues of equality are often the erosion of men's advantages rather than the improvement of women's. 'A gender lens provides a response to these limitations by embodying work and recognising that gender is not only brought into the workplace but is also configured and reconfigured at work through the "doing of gender"' (2018, p.416).

Changes to paternity and parental leave in Ireland have sought to address this with men being offered more of caring responsibility in their children's lives Likewise, men are under-represented in caring professions as a result of them being considered the feminine domain. Despite this, less attention has been paid to increasing the number of men in caring professions, partly due to the fact that care in itself is undervalued (as something women naturally do often unpaid) and efforts to improve equality in the workforce still positions care as women's domain (Rubery and Hebson, 2018). Gender stratification of the labour force continues with men and women typically employed in different sectors along gendered lines and including a gender pay gap (Macionis and Plummer, 2008; Rubbery and Hebson, 2018) with references to gender really meaning women

(Connell, 2009; Rubery and Hebson, 2018). Connell (2009) reiterates the need to see that there are hegemonic and subordinated masculinities with the classification and that the state control is in the hands of those in the hegemonic class.

In the case of Ireland, Adema (2013) suggests that while women surpass men in terms of level of education (59.9% of women versus 52.2% of men according to the Central Statistics Office CSO, 2020a), their employment rates are lower in general (64% for women and 74% for men) and significantly lower in leadership and management roles (CSO, 2020). Despite gender quotas in politics, in 2019 women represented only 22.2% of TDs (Member of Parliament) in the Dáil (Irish Parliament), up from 16.3% (CSO, 2020). Even when women do get to government positions, their briefs usually include welfare or education (Connell, 2009). This has often been the case in Ireland, though currently the Minister for Justice is a woman, the second female to have held the post and is the first sitting TD to take maternity leave while in post (Department of Justice, 2021). The former head of the Irish Police force was also a woman, though generally across the force the gender balance stands at 27% women, a figure that is above European average (RTE, 2019).

Cockburn (2002) suggests that although labour law has favoured women in terms of maternity protection, it has a contradictory impact in that women are still seen as responsible for the domestic arena and it is only when men are afforded the same 'privileges' that women may begin to experience equality. We see efforts to address this in more recent Irish policy developments (Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, 2019; 2020a; 2020b). Siltanen (2002) describes two types of income: Full wages, which are adequate to maintain a household and component wages which are not. Women predominantly earn component wages and Siltanen

(2002) found that women who earned full wages were more likely to be working in traditionally male dominated fields.

Not only are occupations gendered, but even in sectors where there is a more equal balance of men and women working there, the men are more likely to be at the top. Despite equality measures and so-called 'gender-neutral policies' critiqued by Acker (1990; 2012), organisations still display a large degree of gender disparity. Women, while increasing in the workforce tend to be 'lower down the hierarchy' in service roles. Men dominate the heavy machinery, accounting and business workforce, and women's labour is paid at lower levels to men's even in the higher professions, making many women financially dependent on men (Connell, 2009). Connell (2009) and Lynch (2008) attribute some of the issues that persist to neoliberal market-driven policies that have privatised traditionally public services that would have been most likely to employ women and embrace the gender equality measures.

Despite this apparent 'natural order' the notion of the culturally understood 'breadwinner' man is a relatively new phenomenon and a product of colonialism and globalisation that came in the 19th and 20th century industrialisation. With this and the establishment of governments, state agencies and financial institutions, western aid agencies, resources went almost exclusively to men (Connell, 2009). Even when strategies in the 1970's were established to direct financial supports to women (for example microcredit), they often still ended up in the control of men. Connell describes the 'corporation as a key institution of developed capitalism' (2009, p.116) which for many years has been the men's domain though challenged in the 70's with the rise of feminism. Even when women were in the labour force, they were in low paid work and promotions non-existent.

Connell (2009) refers to Acker (1990) and argues that 'gender discrimination is not an accidental feature of a basically gender-neutral bureaucracy, that can be fixed by changing a few attitudes. Gender is a structural feature of corporate life, linked to gender relations in other sectors of society, that shapes job definitions, understandings of 'merit' and promotion, management techniques, marketing and a whole lot more' (2009, p.117). She cites the US Congress Glass Ceiling Commission findings in 1991 as identifying a set of 'barriers' around access to education, bias and discrimination and little awareness about the issues and a culture where 'male-bonding' activities outside the office prevailed to the exclusion of women. Connell (2009) criticises lack of sustained commitment to the issue by authorities. Norway has legislated that corporations must have 40% women on their board of directors. This approach has been criticised elsewhere with the argument against affirmative action that women are getting positions based on gender rather than merit, despite that having historically been the case for men in a patriarchal society (Chamorro-Premuzic, 2021). Connell (2009) outlines a shift in the gender expectations of women in the workplace between the 70's and the 90's where women were originally expected to demonstrate a traditional femininity to a later expectation that they would 'manage like a man' (Connell, 2009; Wajcman, 1998). Connell (2009) also points to the big corporations' influential owners of privilege who traditionally see women as a commodity for 'producing heirs'.

2.8 Gendered aspirations and expectations

'Working-class boys who don't have the other resources that will lead to a professional career, become the main recruits into jobs that require the use of force: police, military, private security, blue-collar crime and professional sport. It is mainly young women who are recruited into the jobs that repair the

consequences of violence: nursing, psychology and social work.' (Connell, 2009, p.4)

In order to address the gendered career trajectories of men and women we need to consider one of the primary social institutions where gender regimes are reinforced - school, and the ways in which understandings of gender influence aspirations and expectations of children. Furlong and Biggart (1999) found that career aspirations and expectations of 13–16-year-olds were largely fixed and along gender lines with some change in expectations over time attributed to increasing realism with maturity. Traditional approaches to aspirations and expectations take a developmental (perceived ability) or opportunity (visibility and access) approach to trajectories. In their study, nursery nurse featured in the career expectations of the girls but not the boys. They pointed to the importance of good careers guidance in school that might broaden the adolescents' horizons around choosing different types of careers (Furlong & Biggart, 1999). However, Cartei, Oakhill, Garnham, Banerjee and Reby (2020) found that children as young as five have fixed expectations of what occupations are suited to boys and girls. Their research also suggested that boys were more sensitive to gender-role boundaries, suggesting that women may more easily cross the gender divide into male dominated fields (Cartei et al., 2020), though there is some historical evidence that they do not remain there (Jacobs & Grusky, 1989; Torre, 2014; 2017). Connell (2009) citing Thorne (1993) describes 'borderwork' in which children make gender boundaries, i.e., Chasing, jokes, language, clothing etc., with boys more likely to look for power and use girls as a put-down for fellow non-conforming or out of favour boys which develops into homophobic insults. Gender assumptions and behaviours about what is acceptable masculinity are evident by about ten years old. This suggests that children are not passive in this construction (Connell, 2009).

Given the lack of men both in ECEC and in primary education, the perpetuation of gender roles cannot be attributed to men alone. Female teachers may inadvertently reinforce gender in the language they use, differing expectations of girls and boys and the wider systems which segregate boys and girls on ability or perceived direction (Weber, 2009). Though Connell (1987) states:

‘Teachers need to do more than just role-model desirable gender behaviours or provide environments that present alternative gender images and messages to young children. Instead, teachers need to actively engage in complex processes through which young children negotiate and produce gendered, cultural meanings, so that teachers’ understandings of gender identity become part of young children’s experiences in the classroom.’ (Quoted in MacNaughton, 2003, p.37)

2.9 Conclusion

Gender roles and gender socialisation are complex, embedded and multi-dimensional which makes them difficult to disrupt. This chapter has discussed Connell’s (2009) theory of gender as embedded in structures of society and which is resistant to change but can be disrupted by crisis events. Connell (2009) identified the gender order as societal patterns and the gender regime as the organisation within institutions which reflect the gender order. Within the gender order and regimes, gender roles are relational in routine interactions and policed and punished within relationships. As most of society is constructed along gender lines, it is often seen as the natural order with men as the public face and women in the private domain in a heteronormative family system. This serves to advantage men and disadvantage women forcing dependency. The feminised private domain positions women as the natural carers and therefore ECEC reflects this assumption. Connell (2005) also points to the hierarchy

within gender classifications, in particular masculinities in which boys and men are categorised and policed and as a result deterred from crossing the perceived gender divide with any trait resembling femininity seen as a weakness and subordinate masculinity. This influences the career aspirations of boys and girls and perpetuates the gender order. The next chapter will consider how this is borne out in the literature on men in ECEC.

3 Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the various discourses in the literature on the phenomenon of men's participation in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce. Following Connell (2009), the construction of gender is seen here as embedded in the structures of society (macro level) as a whole and reconstructed in the micro and meso levels through interactions in the home and workplace (Connell, 2009). How men enter the ECEC workforce and their experiences within it, are likely to be influenced by wider social structures as well as their individual interactions within the organisation. Warin, Ljunggren & Andrä (2021, p.17) describe this as 'multi-level influences on men's decisions, mediated by gender' and use a photography-range metaphor to describe the levels of influence.

3.2 Approach to literature review

In order to complete this review, I employed a number of approaches to literature searching and analysis as can be seen in table 3.1. I conducted a number of key word searches using the Institute of Education (IOE) Library databases and refined the results accordingly. The output of those search results was supplemented with cross checking of reference lists, recommended reading lists, online alerts, academic publications, social media and relevant conference presentations. The results are presented thematically in this chapter.

Approach/action	Database/Source	Process
Key word search	UCL Explore; Scopus; Web of Science; Open DOAR; Google Scholar	Search terms: "Men" "male" "gender" "teacher" "educator" "practitioner" "pedagogue" "early childhood" "early years" "early education" "pre-school" "kindergarten" "day care"
Reference lists & citations in key literature	All articles	Relevant cited literature identified and catalogued in Zotero bibliographic software for further reading
Recommended reading from gender and ECEC networks	EECERA Gender Balance Special Interest Group; Men in Childcare Ireland Network	Recent or relevant publication lists are provided at intervals; checked against already identified literature and any new references added to Zotero bibliographic software
Key word alerts	Google alerts	Set up google alerts for identified academics and key words
Academic publication databases	Researchgate	Searched additional publications of academics identified as publishing on the topic
Social Media	Twitter	Following gender-related content; identified academics & institutions
Conferences	Men in the Early Years (MITEY) (London 2019, Bristol 2018, Southampton 2016); Gender and Education (GEA) Conference (Portsmouth 2019); British Educational Research Association (BERA) Conference (Brighton 2017); Boys and Girls in No Man's Land (Norway 2015)	Attendance at relevant symposia, academics noted and follow up with relevant literature.
Online visual tool	Connected papers	Used this as a final tool to identify any potential literature missed from other actions

Table 3.1 Approach to literature searching and review

3.3 Overview of the Men in ECEC literature

In 1996 the *European Commission Network on Childcare and Other Measures to Reconcile the Employment and Family Responsibilities of Men and Women* made a recommendation of a 20% target for the proportion of men in the ECEC workforce (EU Commission, 1996). In 1999, Cameron, Moss and Owen published *Men in the Nursery*, a text considered foundational and the first comprehensive study on the experiences of men in ECEC (Brody, Emilsen, Rohrmann and Warin, 2021). Since then, much international research has investigated the factors influencing entry, experiences, expectations, perceived benefits, and the barriers to men's involvement from a variety of perspectives: the men themselves, female colleagues, parents, and other stakeholders in ECEC. Concerns about suitability, risk, gendered expectations of differentiated practice and pedagogy and, assigned tasks outside of the ECEC role are common. Issues of societal expectations of men and women's roles and the problems associated with gender essentialism and heteronormativity are also considered in explaining the low number of men in the ECEC workforce globally. Considering

all of these perspectives across multiple contexts builds a picture of an acutely gendered workforce which has proved resistant to change over twenty-five years despite initiatives and changing gender patterns elsewhere. This chapter reviews the literature providing some insight into the factors that influence men's entry, experiences, practices and in some cases exit, including the limited literature in the Irish context. The chapter concludes with reflections and suggestions from the literature for increased recruitment and a gender sensitive approach to practice based on the literature presented.

3.4 Factors influencing men's presence in the ECEC environment

Entry: Factors and Barriers

Research suggests that men enter the ECEC sector through atypical routes unlike women who tend to come into the sector having had previous experience of working with children or an early knowledge that they would like to do so (Fine-Davis et al., 2005). The dominant belief that women's role as a mother and carer, makes working with children visible and almost a 'natural' transition. This section will examine the factors that influence men's entry to the workforce.

Men's work, women's work & crossing the occupational binary

Connell (2009) posits that gender roles are embedded in the structures of society. These are not fixed but are resistant to change. Dominant understandings of gender roles position men as the breadwinners in a nuclear heteronormative and traditional family unit and therefore influence the expectation that men will earn salaries sufficient to support a home. Much discussion in the literature regarding the low number of men highlights status, pay, and the societal breadwinner expectation as contributing factors (Besnard

and Diren, 2010; Jones and Aubrey, 2019). The often part-time nature of much of the work is seen as a deterrent and inconsistent with men's breadwinning responsibilities but compatible with women's child rearing (Rolfe, 2005).

Despite recent shifts in the dynamics of family and caring responsibilities, ECEC remains stubbornly resistant to the change and continues to be a site of gendered caring (Farquhar & CHILDForum Education & Parenting Research Network, 2006). The implication of ECEC as women's work is that it is not men's work and the status of the work is undervalued. Despite increased qualification requirements, pay and conditions have not reflected these (Moloney, 2019; Murphy, 2015). Women's expanding career choices mean fewer are naturally going into ECEC which is creating a recruitment crisis (Schoon and Eccles, 2014). Much of the literature has raised the issue of the value that is placed on the work and that aside from the financial constraints, it is seen as women's work or mothering care seen as reflective of or replicating the traditional gender roles in the home (Brody, 2014; Cameron et al., 1999; Cremers, Krabel & Calmbach, 2010). Skelton (2001) quotes from an English Government report in 1925 which describes teaching as:

'a field of effort for the girl of average intellectual capacity and normal maternal instincts ... for a man to spend his life teaching children of school age is to waste it doing easy and not very valuable work he would not do if he was fit for anything else.' (2001, p.122)

Cushman (2005) also points out that men in junior classes in primary schools hold less status than those in senior classes. Indeed, Roberts-Holmes (2003) points to the fact that despite teaching overall being a feminised profession, the proportion of women decreases as the age of the children increases creating a distinction

between care and education. Care is seen as more natural maternal in the lower ages with disproportionate number of men in leadership roles (Roberts-Holmes, 2003; Skelton, Francis and Valkanova, 2003).

The visibility and understandings of the value of caring work can begin early. Gender essentialist beliefs begin in early childhood and can be compounded by the current gender imbalance (Warin & Adriany, 2017; Xu, 2020). Xu (2020) found that children in ECEC already have established views of men and women's roles with them understanding caring for children as the women's domain. Within gender understandings, boys develop strong negative associations with all things 'girl' and engage in 'othering' which reinforces a gender binary understanding of opposites (Roberts-Holmes, 2003) and may impact the type of work they see as appropriate.

Gender, and the education hierarchy

The value placed on the care of children can be seen in the hierarchical education system. In Ireland, primary and post-primary school teachers, holding a BA qualification, are paid a salary, and, in most cases, posts are permanent and pensionable. In ECEC, much of the work is part-time and temporary. Staff in the funded ECCE scheme years get paid better, have a higher level of qualification, and more in-depth inspection than those in the younger years. However, they may still be 'laid off' or redeployed to other areas of the service for the summer months when the ECCE (funded) programme is not running. Early Childhood Ireland, a representative group for the sector estimates the annual salary of an ECEC worker in a sessional service providing two sessions per day as €12, 780 for 38 weeks (ECI, 2018) compared with €37 – 70k salary scale in teaching for thirty-seven and thirty-four weeks respectively for primary and post-primary teaching (Department of Education and Skills, 2020a). The Special Needs Assistant (SNA) salary scale ranges from €24-40k per annum (Department of

Education and Skills, 2020b). Special Needs Assistants are a role in Irish compulsory schooling to support children with self-care needs. In ECEC, the babies (birth to three) are typically cared for by the least qualified and poorly paid staff. In the US the median salary for ECEC teachers is just over half that of middle school teachers (Washington & Yarkony, 2019). This further points to the low value placed on caring work at the lower end of the education hierarchy.

Career aspirations

The ways in which young people make career decisions are likely multifaceted and non-linear influenced by many factors including visibility, essentialist views of gender roles, family, teachers and subject availability in school (Lynch & Feeley, 2009). Perceived academic aptitude and gendered expectations about what boys and girls can and should do, can influence subject and career choice (Weiss, Wiese & Freund, 2014). These expectations can be displayed by teachers and the children themselves based on the messages they have picked up since early childhood. In other words, opinions about jobs that children see as possible begin to form as early as ECEC and are often influenced by gender stereotypes, social class, experiences, and visibility (Cartei, Oakhill, Garnham, Bannerjee & Reby, 2020; Chambers, Rehill, Kashfepakdel, & Percy, 2018; Karunanayake & Vimukthi, 2020; del Río & Strasser, 2013) rather than actual differences in brain development or capacity (Rippon, 2019; Roberts-Holmes, 2003) so that by the time they reach their teens, career aspirations are largely fixed along gender lines (Furlong and Biggart, 1999). Boys are more sensitive to gender-role boundaries, suggesting that women may more easily cross the gender divide into male dominated fields (Cartei et al., 2020; Roberts-Holmes, 2003).

It would appear that that the gender of the teacher is less influential to post-primary students' interests than the teacher's attitude to and treatment of boys and girls in terms of their ability and competence

(Alan, Ertac & Mumcu, 2018; Lynch & Feeley, 2009; Sansone, 2017). This may suggest that by just having more male teachers in the 'caring' subjects in schools will not necessarily make it more visible to boys but that the teachers' attitudes and expectations have a part to play. The type of school attended by the student may also influence expectations, self-concept, subject choice and decisions (Henderson, Sullivan, Anders & Mouton, 2018; Sullivan, 2009). Traditional single-sex schooling which can still be seen in England and Ireland often separated girls and 'infant' boys from older boys, and therefore separating care and education. While there has been a shift to mixed post-primary schooling, Leonard (2006) suggests that just making schools co-educational does not necessarily eradicate gender inequalities and there are often differences in the subject choices and more traditional career choices of girls and boys. However, debates over the hyper masculine environment of all boys' schools, and the persistent discourse around boys' underachievement problematises the discourse moving from more rounded attributes to attainment (Leonard, 2006). Leonard (2006) also criticises the shift in education as prohibiting meaningful studies on the effects but recommends teacher training to include gender awareness, 'to value diversity and reflect critically "on the constraints and limitations imposed by a particular gender order which defines the masculine in opposition to the feminine" and the homosexual' (2006, p. 200; quoting Martino et al, 2005, p.142).

Careers guidance

The type of careers guidance received by boys and girls in post-primary has been given some consideration in relation to the factors that influence men's entry to ECEC. Igbo, Onu & Obiyo (2015) found in Nigeria the gender of the student influenced the courses that they were encouraged or discouraged from by both teachers and parents. Cameron (2001) found in a largely female cohort that careers guidance was absent in terms of influencing ECEC staff

career choices, when examining the English ECEC workforce. Under the Education Act (1998) in Ireland, post-primary schools are required to have 'appropriate guidance to assist them in their educational and career choice' (Section 9 (c) Irish Statute Book, 1998). According to Indecon (2019), adolescents begin to think about potential career choices in the junior cycle⁴ of post-primary school. However, most are not exposed to any form of career guidance until after Junior Certificate Examination, by which time they've made the subject choices for Leaving Certificate which may influence further education options. Indecon (2019) suggests that family and friends (though mediated by socio-economic status), as well as careers guidance and work experience are influential in student career choice. There is some suggestion from the findings that one-to-one meetings with guidance teachers can impact on student career choices. However, Warin, Wilkinson, Davies, Greaves & Hibbin (2020) found that careers guidance was less likely to lead to or suggest alternatives, but rather take the lead from the students' existing interests and therefore does not challenge individuals to look beyond the obvious. The use of online tools to help with careers decisions, was found to be problematic due to competence in using them well. 'Quality online tools in themselves do not guarantee quality in career guidance,' (Indecon, 2019, p. xi) and therefore should be used in conjunction with personalised guidance which will need to be gender aware.

⁴ Irish post-primary education is comprised of two 'cycles' completed by the two state examinations. Students complete junior cycle (lower post-primary) in years 1-3 of post-primary education and sit the junior certificate examination at the end of year three. Senior cycle (upper post-primary) begins in 5th year and concludes with the Leaving Certificate examination at the end of sixth year. Fourth year is an optional Transition Year which moves away from the traditional subject choices of the two formal cycles and offers students the opportunity to try out new experiences. (Department of Education, 2021.)

Work experience as a form of exposing young boys to ECEC work has been suggested, however some work needs to consider this as Osgood, Francis & Archer (2006) found that when opportunities for work experience are presented in schools the experiences taken up reflect occupational segregation. Since those work experiences are gendered, it is likely to follow that they will choose traditional gendered occupational paths. Jones (2016) stresses the importance of early opportunities in school to see and experience working with children as an option. One participant in Warin et al.'s (2020) GenderEYE study pointed out that it was not the low pay but the lack of visibility that kept young men out of ECEC. The importance of exposure through work experience, volunteering or 'compulsory civilian service' (Cremers et al., 2010, p.20) are indicated as important factors (Cameron et al., 1999; Indecon, 2019; Vandebroek and Peeters, 2008).

Overall, neglecting of the early school experience as a site of visibility and awareness perpetuating gendered understanding of roles, coupled with lack of careers guidance promoting ECEC leaves ECEC as an invisible option for young men (Jones, 2016; Jones and Aubrey, 2019). The cyclical and self-perpetuating nature of gender role expectations becomes evident. Beyond compulsory schooling and in pre-service training, there is evidence that gender stereotypes and understanding of ECEC as a role for women prevail, further embedding the gendering of the work and workforce. Murray (2006) suggests that in Higher Education Initial Teacher Education, women do the 'hidden work' of emotional support and pastoral care for the wellbeing of students. In her study on initial teacher education she states:

'The model of the caring teacher educator found in this study, whilst validating the existing professionalism of the women, also traps them in the maternal metaphor and their students in

dependent and child-like positions, inappropriate for young women learning to be teachers' (2006, p.393).

Bhana and Moosa (2016) found that male preservice teachers who did not choose ECEC held opinions about the lower levels of the education spectrum being better suited to women and linked to its association with mothering and maternal care.

Schoon & Eccles (2014) point to the importance of structure and agency and the impact of accumulated early experiences of stereotyping and expectations. Girls perceptions of their ability and personal values shape their career choices and are therefore a social reproduction. These are compounded by structural gender discrimination in opportunities and remuneration and devaluation of feminised occupations such as caring and teaching. Women are more likely to be disproportionately represented in low paid work. Lynch and Feeley (2009) recommended that care work be 'resourced and promoted as valuable work for men as well as women' (2009, p.7). Other recommendations included gender education in school and teacher training in gender awareness but also a need to influence wider societal attitudes and stereotypes. In their report, they recognised that gender assumptions and stereotypes are not unique to post-primary education but that 'pedagogical practice from preschool across the education and training fields, exhibits gendered expectations of learners.' (2009, p.7).

Intrinsic motivations: for the love of the children

Jones (2016), Xu (2019) and Kedar, Andrä & Sullivan (2021), found that intrinsic motivations such as interest in and love of children and the ability to make a difference could be found as a factor in men's reasons for entering ECEC. When men did choose to teach young children, Ravhuhali, Mashau, Lavhelani, Mudzielwana & Mulovhedzi (2019) found that an increased number of men had various reasons

for choosing teacher training in the earliest phase of compulsory education (foundation phase) in South Africa. These included addressing the current gender imbalance experienced when they themselves were children, being father-figure role models and wanting to make a difference in children's lives. However, a number of men found themselves choosing foundation phase teaching as an alternative to being unsuccessful in their first choice but once there, they found a love of it. This leads to the most commonly cited route for men into ECEC, that of the second-chance career (Cameron et al., 1999; Vandenbroeck and Peeters, 2008).

Second-chance career entry

Much of the literature shows men entering ECEC as a 'second-chance' career (Cameron et al., 1999) or 'rethought careers' (Vandenbroeck and Peeters, 2008) where they come to ECEC having had a career elsewhere previously (Cameron et al., 1999; Cremers et al, 2010; Farquhar 1997; Fine-Davis 2005; Jones and Aubrey, 2019; Wohlgemuth 2015b). On leaving school, these men's career paths took a different, more expected route and somewhere along the way, there was a change in direction often in the case of redundancy (Farquhar, 1997; Fine-Davis, 2005). However, other research has found similar accidental routes for women but more influenced by the natural progression or compatibility with other life choices, for example, through being a parent themselves (Kenny, 2006).

Cremers et al. (2010, p.36) classified four entry routes into ECEC: i) 'non-deliberate', ii) 'convinced', iii) internal career switches and iv) external career switches to describe respectively those who join as a normal course of action but see the role as primarily minding children, those who knew they wanted to become ECEC workers from a young age, those who began in cognate areas but opted for ECEC instead and, those who came from an unrelated career. Kenny (2006) looked at the impact of retraining in ECEC in Ireland

from the perspective of women choosing it as a second-chance career. He found that while it often provided the opportunity for part-time work, but by its nature as an employment activation mechanism from the perspective of the Government, it was still undervalued and poorly paid and therefore likely to perpetuate social inequalities. Jones and Aubrey (2019) found early aspirations for ECEC were only present in one of their male participants and that the others had many other influential factors in their lives and that fatherhood was a factor in influencing men's decisions in ECEC. This reiterates the point of exposure and visibility as a potential factor.

Friends & Family influence

Family and friends can be influential in men's decisions to enter the sector (Xu, 2019) and in cases where men were previously involved with children, family members are often unsurprised by their choice to then work in ECEC (Vandenbroeck and Peeters, 2008). For those with no previous experience, some did experience some resistance though most were in favour. Bartlett (2015) suggested that parent, friend and colleague attitudes, relevant experiences and access to training, inactive recruitment focus, and low pay are all influential. Jones & Aubrey (2019) found that mother's occupation in a teaching role was instrumental in men's entry to ECEC, echoing the findings of Karunanayake & Vimukthi (2020) on the influence of parent occupation on children. In their research, Jones and Aubrey (2019) found that in later career entry, influence of men's wives was a factor in choosing ECEC. Farquhar (1997) found a lack of peer and family support for men who entered ECEC suggesting some shift in attitudes in the quarter century since. However, in South Africa, there still seems to be a salient resistance to crossing the gendered boundary. Bhana and Moosa (2016) found that men in South Africa believed that they would be rejected by friends for choosing a career not consistent with their expectations of masculinity. The sexuality of men choosing this career also comes under scrutiny and is linked

to subordination when not aligning with the expected masculinity. The impact of masculinities on expectations and experiences is considered in the next section.

Critical moments as influential

One consideration that comes up when looking at the influences on young people's career choices and indeed their later career trajectories, is the idea of critical moments (Brody & Hadar, 2017; Şahin Sak, Sak, Eidevald & McHale, 2021; Thomson, Bell, Holland, Henderson, McGreillis & Sharpe, 2002). Thomson et al. (2002) looked at family, education, relationships, and place and the degree of perceived control the young person had over an event or ability to respond to it (agency). They position young people, not as passive recipients but response – able agents. The nature of the critical moments described can be influenced by identity, social demographics and often inter-connected serendipitous events, making timing important (Thomson & Holland, 2015). This has been discussed elsewhere in the literature looking at trajectories from a storyline perspective to analyse the situations and turning points that influenced decisions (Brody & Hadar, 2017; Şahin Sak et al., 2021) and suggests the potential of critical moments for creating opportunities not previously considered. Critical events may also be more than one moment (Thomson and Holland, 2015). Jones and Aubrey (2019) similarly conducted a life-history approach asking men to reflect back on their decisions and routes into ECEC and found family (primary socialisation) and early experiences in creating visibility as a factor retrospectively but not education experiences (secondary socialisation). Friends' encouragement, positive experiences working with children and personal life events can all be seen as critical moments (Şahin Sak et al., 2021).

3.5 Entry factors summary

Based on available literature, it would seem that there are a number of interconnected factors at micro, meso and macro levels which influence men's (and women's) entry to ECEC. Early development of gendered understandings, perpetuated and reinforced throughout all levels of the education cycle, leaves ECEC as an invisible and less valuable career option for boys and young men. Traditional family expectations, including the male breadwinner and the low pay associated with ECEC, may act as a further deterrent. Early exposure and experiences with children are seen as a positive factor. When it is a visible option, factors such as family support and reactions, love of the children and a desire to make a difference are motivating factors. However, the power of gendered structures which puts masculinity on the top of the hierarchy, means that some boys and men will find it more difficult to cross that gender divide. The impact of critical moments, turning points in later career trajectories is an influential factor on men's entry in the existing literature.

3.6 Factors within the workforce influencing men's experiences

Once in the workforce, trajectories in ECEC careers are those steps taken by individuals to shape their advancement in the field either vertically or horizontally. It is a somewhat problematic term since there are limited career opportunities (Warin et al., 2021). However, there is some evidence that men are disproportionately represented in the management structures in ECEC (Williams, 1992; Wright and Brownhill, 2018) suggesting that trajectories are important for male workers. In this context, I look at vertical trajectories, those which see a man's work elevated or devalued in comparison to their female colleagues. The roles and expectations and their influence on men's

experiences and transitions are considered here as horizontal trajectories that comprise the totality of ECEC workers' experiences.

Vertical trajectories - Accelerated or diminished roles and responsibilities

Within the ECEC setting, by the nature of their extreme minority status, men are hyper visible (Warin, 2018) and have reported experiencing instances of parent scrutiny and commentary (Cameron et al., 1999; Farquhar, 1997), issues around differentiated tasks, for example intimate care (Xu, 2019), and unusual looks or responses when they identify themselves as ECEC workers (Washington and Yarkony, 2019). Here, a contradiction emerges between men as standing out and being 'othered' and being held in higher esteem (Thorpe, Sullivan, Jansen, McDonald, Sumsion & Irvine, 2018). Within the ECEC environment, there is a trend for men to generally move up through the hierarchy at a more rapid pace than women (Browne, 2004). They therefore pose a threat to women's prospects (Cameron et al., 1999). Men's experiences range from receiving preferential treatment by virtue of their token nature or being the focus of suspicion of being sinister or at least, inept. They, therefore, experience differentiated roles such as exclusion from intimate care, increased supervision, being undermined by female colleagues or promoted out of the classroom. The 'glass escalator' effect (Williams, 1992; Williams, 2015; Wright and Brownhill, 2018) where men are disproportionately promoted to leadership roles, is challenged by Rohrmann and Brody (2015) as not borne out in their research but reported by Williams (2015) as most commonly experienced by white straight men, supporting Wright's (2018) reported pressure to demonstrate hegemonic masculinity.

Risk and (self) protection

The reasons for the glass escalator effect may be two-fold. Men have traditionally been promoted at disproportionate rates in women majority occupations, for example, the proportion of male school principals is disproportionate to the ratio of male to female staff members (Martínez, Molina-López & de Cabo, 2020). A second reason may be related to perceived parent and staff discomfort surrounding men's role and interactions with children. Men's motivations for entering ECEC may be a source of scrutiny. There is evidence of men modifying their behaviour around children and avoiding intimate care so as not to leave their interactions open to misinterpretation (Jones and Aubrey, 2019). The perceptions of the parents using the service may act as a barrier. The notion that men pose a greater risk to children in terms of perpetrating abuse has been given some consideration in the literature and indeed, many men's experiences suggest that their choice of career path has, on occasion been met with suspicion or reticence with some reporting parents' wishes that they not engage in intimate care with their children (Besnard and Diren, 2010).

It would appear that services take a variety of course of action in relation to this. Few have an open discussion with staff about the issues as they arise and have a witnessing policy for all staff so that nobody is left alone with a child therefore protecting the child and the staff member from untrue allegations. There appears to be differences in relation to how risk is approached and managed internationally. In the UK and US and more recently Sweden, it seems to be a more prevalent concern than for instance, in other Scandinavian countries, likely fuelled by high profile cases, which are in the minority but played out in the media (Cameron, 2001; Eidevald et al., 2018). Strategies for addressing these concerns vary with some having tight screening processes for all employees and witnessing for any intimate care and, open dialogue and reflective

practice which acknowledges concerns and works through them (Woltring, 2012). In other cases, unwritten rules about men's role in intimate care, or parents requesting that men do not carry out toileting duties with their children have been reported. There are fewer known cases of abuse in Scandinavian countries than elsewhere, but it is hard to ascertain whether this is as a result of good screening and open practices or poor discovery (Woltring, 2012). However, in Sweden, in recent years, the narrative around men in ECEC has turned to the issue of risk as a result of a high-profile case in the 1990s. Bergström, Eidevald & Westberg-Broström (2016) suggest that there is a disproportionate perception of risk to children of child sexual abuse (CSA) in ECEC which is having an impact on men and their relationships and practice with children who consciously aim to be 'unsuspicious' (2016, p.1524). Protection and preventative strategies, much of which are informal, are often used to protect the staff rather than focusing on children's needs and often implemented with or by male staff. However, Bergström et al. (2016) do acknowledge that abuse mostly happens in cases of trusting relationships and that very young children may not be in a position to alert someone to their experience. Where abuse may be suspected, they point to a lack of confidence in staff members and conflicting feelings about the difficulty in making a report. They describe the 'tension between the preschool teacher as a safe guarder and potential abuser' (Bergström et al., 2016, p.1526).

While statistics suggest that men are more likely to be the perpetrators of abuse, particularly sexual, an early study by Finkelhor, Williams and Burns (1988) in the US, found that in cases where abuse had occurred it was more likely to be a male family member of someone running a home-based care, than in centre-based care (cited in Owen, 2003). Owen (2003) goes on to state 'most men who work in childcare are not involved in abuse and not all the abusers are men. It is clear from this study that eliminating all men from childcare work would not eliminate the risk,' (2003, p.4).

Indeed, known cases of sexual abuse in ECEC settings in Ireland are relatively few, however a number of exposés of bad practices and poor physical and emotional treatment of children by female staff have come to light in recent years leading to tougher regulations and inspection (Moloney, 2014; Nursery World, 2019).

Hedlin, Åberg, & Johansson (2019) found two juxtaposing pictures of men in ECEC in Sweden, those of the 'fun guy' and the 'possible perpetrator' suggesting that men experience specific expectations and behave in ways consistent with these. The description of the fun guy links to the types of activities that the men typically were reported as engaging in, the physical activities, rough and tumble play and sports. Hedlin et al. (2019) link this to traditional notions of masculinity. In some cases, this role is taken on reluctantly, there is a negotiation of the expected behaviour: embracing it, reluctantly accepting it or rejecting it. The possible perpetrator narrative creates a need to be conscious of physical positioning, even calling attention to oneself to show safety. This creates pressure to position oneself as part of a heteronormative ideal, i.e. The father of children, to justify one's presence. Gulbranasen (2012) suggests that we should not be generalising men on one case of abuse and that always protecting children should be a common goal underpinned by debate and reflection, though he suggests that the 'subject be brought up for discussion regularly with the whole staff.

Eidevald, Bergström & Broström (2018) report on the importance of nurturing interactions with children as important bonding and attachment behaviours associated with children's wellbeing but that are actively avoided by men who are acutely aware of themselves as potential suspects of paedophilia, but which are seen natural for women. This resistance to certain behaviours may have the effect of further embedding gender stereotypes by having certain tasks that men and women can or can't do. This creates tensions and contradictions for men's feeling of professionalism when there are

tasks from which they are excluded or avoid. They describe different strategies for managing: avoidance, prevention (explaining clearly what is happening) and persistence. Eidevald et al. (2018) suggest that when CSA cases become public, drop out increases. They challenge the feminine discourse of professionalism that allows men and women to safely take part in all elements of ECEC practice and care of children.

Vandenbroeck and Peeters (2008) found an awareness among the men of the suspicions they may face and how it impacted on their behaviour. Surveillance is an issue throughout the literature. However, Jones (2016) found that the men who participated in her research did not see this as an issue and felt protected by their employer. Cushman (2005) in a study of male primary teachers in New Zealand, notes that guidelines suggest that all primary school teachers should remove themselves from physical contact with children (such as hugs) but that female teachers tend to ignore this on the basis that it impacts working conditions and relationships causing a disconnect between what is acceptable for a female teacher and that of a male, further perpetuating the stereotype and concern for risk.

Horizontal trajectories: Expectations and experiences

Much of the literature on men in ECEC focuses on men's experiences and expectations being a minority in a feminised ECEC workplace. However, it tells little about how those experiences affect their decisions and trajectories. The first major study of trajectories in the Men in ECEC field came with the recent publication of *Exploring Career Trajectories of Men in the Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce* (Brody, Emilsen, Rohrmann & Warin, 2021) in which a number of factors in men's decision making were investigated based on an international collaboration across twelve countries with both 'persisters' (those who have stayed in the workforce) and dropouts (those who leave). Through analysis of

personal story lines narrated by the men interviewed, it found that men's trajectories were influenced by multiple factors along the way, often mediated by their gendered experiences such as those documented in the existing literature.

Men's decisions were found to be multi-layered and multi-faceted. At the micro level, men's intrinsic motivations to work with children, make a difference, and enjoyment of the work shaped their decisions. Their level of autonomy, professional identity and agency were positive factors that drew men to and maintained them in the ECEC workforce (Brody, Andrä and Kedar, 2021; Brody, Emilsen, Rohrmann & Warin, 2021; Kedar, Andrä & Sullivan, 2021). At the meso level, men's working relationships with their colleagues, the nature of the leadership both organisational and relational were found to influence men's decisions (Ljunggren et al., 2021; Sullivan et al., 2021). At a macro level, societal expectations of men and women particularly in relation to hegemonic masculinities where crossing the gender divide is a risk but conversely may afford men additional status and serve to perpetuate rather than challenge the gender norms and stereotypes (Bhana, Xu & Emilsen, 2021; Plaisir, Thordardottir & Xu, 2021). This section considers the wider literature which has documented men's gendered experiences.

Gendered expectations

Being a man in the predominantly female environment has been found to have contradictory expectations associated with it, including men's own gendered perspectives of their role (Cameron et al., 1999; Farquhar, 1997; Fine-Davis et al., 2005; Warin et al., 2020). These experiences are often as a result of the interaction between the macro societal expectations and how they play out in the meso context of the organisation. Men are often expected to both 'embody notions of masculinity but also challenge' them (Owen, 2003 p.5). Xu (2019) found that gender is an important factor in how men experience the ECEC workplace. They are hyper-visible by

virtue of their unique and extreme minority status and this shapes expectations along gendered lines (Cameron, 2013; Warin, 2018). Men can experience marginalisation or 'othering' in the women's world, with their needs overlooked as the majority needs are seen as default (Cameron, 2013; Heikkilä, 2019) often leading to isolation and loneliness (Wohlgemuth, 2015b). This serves to continue to homogenise gender categories, while at the same time overlooking the needs of men. Despite this, men often simplify differences as individual rather than gendered (Cameron, 2013) and take one of two approaches: assimilation or rejection of the gendered expectations (Cameron, 2001; Santos & Amâncio, 2019; Simpson, 2009).

Role modelling

Central to the expectations of men in ECEC is the prevalent and persistent expectation of role-modelling. This emerged as a discourse in the 1990's when concerns began to rise over the perceived underachievement of boys in the education system. This was partly attributed to the overly feminised environment and the absence of quality father figures in many homes (Brownhill, 2014; Cremers et al., 2010). The increase of men could be seen as a way to increase boys' engagement in education with 'boy-friendly' practice. However, there is little evidence to support this (Carrington & McPhee, 2008). Expectations of men to provide father-figures have been criticised for the assumption of the absence of positive male figures (Cooney and Bittner, 2001), but also perpetuates a heteronormative ideal (Warin, 2019) and creates an unrealistic expectation of men's roles which are generally not expected of women.

Notwithstanding the problems with the absent father narrative, difficulties have also arisen in terms of the meaning of the term 'role-model' and what exactly it is that the men are supposed to be modelling (Brownhill, 2014; 2015; Cameron et al., 1999; Owen,

2003). Some argue it is an over-simplification based on social learning theory and ignores children's active participation in gender positioning which is fluid and context-dependant suggesting that they are more likely to discount a token male presence as deviant from the norm (Bricheno and Thornton, 2007; Browne, 2004; Sumsion, 2005; Thornton and Bricheno, 2006). Brownhill (2014; 2015) argues that the term is problematic, not least because of differences in conceptualisations and definitions even within educational guidance documents but also the essentialist position from which the idea of a role-model emerges and the responsibilities and practice associated with it, the idea that it is strictly a male responsibility and that it can have negative as well as positive consequences. In contrast to the prevailing narrative in the Global North, Moosa & Bhana (2019) point to a different perspective in South Africa, where the male role model expectation concerns girls rather than the boys suggesting that the notion of role modelling is neither universal or fixed, a position reinforced by McElwee & Parslow (2003) who argue in that roles are simply behaviours that have been learned and therefore are not fixed. However, as Connell (2009) notes, they can be resistant to change. As a result, dominant understandings (hegemonic masculinity) of what it is to be male and male roles continue to limit and there is a responsibility to push beyond those traditional expectations.

Cameron (2001) and Jones (2016) caution against defining the 'role' which men should be modelling in favour of a diverse workforce displaying a range of beliefs and practices and children developing quality relationships with a range of adults. The 'role model' discourse positions men and women as different or complementary and perpetuates the heteronormative gender binary in which men and women play different roles (Warin, 2019). This positions men and women as opposing homogenous categories with the male role model narrative situating 'the man' in the ECEC setting as representative of 'all men' ignoring the innumerable differences

within the gender categories (Cameron et al., 1999; Carrington and McPhee, 2008; Owen et al., 1998; Owen, 2003; Warin & Adriany, 2017). Overall, critics of the role model discourse argue in favour of promoting ECEC as a career for both men and women and greater gender balance would create a more inclusive and equitable environment (Cameron 2001; Carrington and McPhee, 2008; Jones, 2016; Warin and Adriany, 2017). Warin et al. (2020) show that a mixed gender workforce challenges gender stereotypes by 'de-essentialising care as a feminine characteristic' (2020, p.20).

All of these factors intersect to create a complex set of experiences both personal and professional which influence career decisions depicted by high and low points or critical moments on story lines as presented by Sahin-Sak, et al. (2021). Brody et al. (2021, p.179) suggest the need for men to be supported to 'construct an appropriate male identity as an ECEC worker' through transformative gender aware leadership and state that 'problematizing gender norms involves challenging the power of hegemonic masculinity at the macro, meso and micro levels' (Brody et al., 2021, p.191).

Practice/pedagogy

Aside from the perceived benefits to children of men's inclusion in the ECEC workforce as the potential to have gender balanced learning experiences, they have also conversely been described as giving an outlet for the type of play boys tend to engage in, the physical and risky play that may not always be tolerated by female early childhood educators. Ultimately, Cremers et al. (2010) suggest is that a mixed workforce makes a range of experiences available to children. Jones and Aubrey (2019) reported that men and women see men's presence as bringing something different both in practice and in language, though this can be disputed on the basis of reinforcing stereotypes of what it is to be men or women and over-simplified in that there are more differences within the gender

classifications than between them. Whether pedagogical differences exist between men and women has been considered in the literature (Besnard and Letarte, 2017; Brandes, Andrä, Röseler, & Schneider-Andrich, 2015; Brody, 2014; Warin, 2018; Xu, 2018) and like expectations, can be fraught with contradictions where men navigate a line between their own inclinations and competences and, assimilating to the dominant practice.

The complementarity narrative comes to the fore again when workers describe practice (Vendenbroeck and Peeters, 2008). Børve (2017) found differences in the expectations of work practices between male and female ECCE workers, with women wanting routine and standardisation in the day and activities, and men looking for more flexible working practices where they could pursue interests and aptitudes. This links with Brody et al.'s (2021) findings in relation to the importance of professional autonomy for men's experiences (Brody et al., 2021; Eidevald et al., 2021). Van Laere, Vandenbroeck, Roets, & Peeters (2014) argue that the ECEC environment is female embodiment causing issues for male workers who have to deny/reject their physicality. Some evidence suggests that men distance themselves from 'typically' female tasks (Børve, 2017). Emilsen & Koch (2010) found that men were more comfortable in the outdoor environment rather than feeling the need to comply with the feminised indoor work environment and recommend more opportunities for outdoor practice, though recognise that this can perpetuate existing stereotypes about what men and women do. They argue for more varied options of practice and motivations. Sandseter (2014) found that male ECEC educators were more likely to be positively disposed to risky play behaviours. However, Rohrmann (2020) cautions that taking gendered roles in the ECEC setting perpetuates the essentialist position and that it is important to recognise children's role in differentiated pedagogy and the relevance of the gender of the children (Rohrmann, 2020).

Despite evidence of differentiated practice, others have suggested that the practices of men and women reported were largely the same, neutral and dictated by job description or role within the classroom (Besnard & Letarte, 2017; Thorpe et al., 2018; Warin et al., 2020), what Warin describes as gender flexibility (2019). However, Perkins & Edwards (2018), Warin (2019) and Warin et al. (2020) did find that men and women also often drifted into stereotyped roles finding a 'mix of gender sensitivity co-existing alongside gender blindness' (Warin, 2019, p. 304). Xu (2020) found that where there was a gendered preference it was more likely to be as a result of the established practices along those gendered lines and so familiar to the children and suggests that there is an opportunity to challenge gender norms in the ECEC environment (Xu, 2020). It is argued that this can be addressed with more gender-aware conversations and reflective practice and professionalisation (Besnard & Letarte, 2017; Perkins & Edwards, 2018; Warin, 2019; Warin et al., 2020).

Identity dissonance and masculinities

The approach of seeing men as different or 'other' to women and the dichotomy of gender categories (Cameron et al., 1999) centres on how gender is constructed in the same way as women's role as maternal and caregivers can be constructed. Connell's (1987, 2005) theory of gender comes up in much of the literature around the gendered nature of caring work. Her discussion of masculinities and femininities can give some insight into men's experiences and challenges when entering a women majority caring profession (Brody, 2014; Cameron et al., 1999; Fulcher and Scott, 2007). As long as men distinguish care as women's work, they will continue to reject it as a career (Bhana and Moosa, 2016). Men demonstrated stereotypical beliefs about what is to be man or woman and this construction of masculinities creates a barrier to participation (Bhana and Moosa, 2016; Wright, 2018). The regulated and

embodied nature of masculinity (Connell, 2005) leads to suspicion of men who choose this as a career. Browne (2004) suggests that the possibility of multiple masculinities and femininities must be acknowledged for men to feel secure and that the lack of men in ECEC only serves to perpetuate gender stereotypes suggesting that more men are needed to give a more balanced representation of society in general and ultimately diminish gender inequality.

Wright (2018) describes the levels and depth of embedded gendered understandings that even when aware and challenging them may resurface in other areas of practice and behaviour whether as self-preservation to avoid judgement or scrutiny 'fearing for my safety, reputation and livelihood, it was simply too scary and painful to reject hegemonic expectations completely' (2018, p.126). Sullivan, Coles, Xu, Perales, and Thorpe (2020) found there was a general agreement that men's participation would be an asset, there were some biases or concerns against men's inclusion in the ECEC workforce stated by some female employees but attributed to others. Men were presented as 'other' in many of the responses in terms of the expectation of his role: role-model, demonstrating traditional masculinity, challenging traditional masculinity.

Men report feeling treated equally while at the same time being different (Xu, 2019) but also felt their minority status had advantages for recruitment and progression. Nentwich, Poppen, Schälín & Vogt (2013, crediting Warin, 2006) discuss the notion of 'identity dissonance' and the practices that men engage to manage this, switching between what are considered feminine and masculine roles. They identified six discursive practices which men engage to manage the dissonance: 'Building the male niche; referring to the (symbolic) position of father; referring to the male breadwinner; emphasising equality; appropriating femininity; becoming a pedagogue'. Their first three emphasise difference, four and five emphasise sameness and six emphasises professionalism. Brody &

Gor Ziv (2020) use the terms 'Mestiza' as the negotiation of the 'borderland' between their masculinity and their role in a feminised environment and that this may give some insight into the reasons some may leave and some stay and may provide insight for future attraction and retention of men.

Moosa & Bhana (2020) reflecting Rohrmann's (2020) recognition of culturally different norms and reasons for supporting more men in the field, point to a global northern tendency to link men and paedophilia to their sexuality, though in the global south men are preferred in the ECEC setting if gay and therefore likely to espouse more traditional female behaviours (subordinate masculinities) and see straight male teachers as more likely perpetrators.

'Dual-identity' (Rohrmann, 2020) or 'flexibility' (Warin, 2019) are used to describe the ability to respond as the situation requires in a range of ways. However, Warin et al. (2020) found that men and women do still slip into stereotypical roles. On the other hand, Xu & Waniganayake (2018) found that Chinese early childhood educators were more likely to espouse traditional masculinities rather than attempting to use their position to challenge gender stereotypes. Where there is 'A rhetoric of gender equality, the creation and perpetuation of the 'genderless' practitioner, masks the existence of gender stereotypes in the early years setting' (Warin et al., 2020, p.18) and so men's role in the ECEC setting is fraught with contradictions and implicit biases. Wright (2018, p. 126) describing his 'embodied experience of hegemony' and how his physical presence was policed by both himself and others, a process that has a negative effect on relationships with children. He describes the contradiction between doing what children need and what is expected of him as a man. Rohrmann (2020) recommends more research 'on the processes of "doing gender" between children and adults' (2020, p.14).

The Irish context

Although Ireland featured in the Brody et al. (2021) study, little additional research has been conducted in the Irish context in recent years. That which has previously been conducted focused primarily on men's entry (Fine-Davis et al., 2005), experiences and parent's expectations with similar results to that of the international literature discussed in the sections above. As a relatively young sector and therefore research field, the profession evolved out of an increased number of women entering the workforce, supported by national policy during the *Celtic Tiger Era* of rapid economic growth during the mid-1990s. With employment levels high, and women, having traditionally been responsible for the caring responsibilities within the home, there was a need for increased ECEC provision (Fine-Davis et al., 2005). However, little consideration was given to the gender make-up of the sector itself with the exception of the establishment of a Men in Childcare Network in 2004, stemming from a conference on the topic in 2002 (McDonagh, 2008; Walshe & Healy-Magwa, 2012).

One notable publication by Fine-Davies et al. (2005) reports on a pilot project to address the issue of the gender imbalance and the resultant almost invisible message that caring is women's work, by actively recruiting men to the ECEC workforce through employment activation and a targeted advertisement campaign. Findings from this and subsequent research indicated that men more often encountered ECEC inadvertently but were as satisfied in their work as their female counterparts (Fine-Davis et al., 2005; Harty, 2012). Centre leaders, workers and parents alike approved of men as role models in the centre overall although there were differences in what that meant to the participants. Issues of caring in a way that is masculine or traditionally feminine can have the effect of both challenging and reinforcing stereotypes (Fine-Davis et al. 2005). McElwee & Parslow (2003 p.50) talk of 'gender duality' in this regard,

the expectation that men and women take on some of the traditionally opposite gender roles, though their focus is mainly residential care. Irish research studies have also found that there were some initial reservations from some parents about having men carrying out intimate care duties (Fine Davis et al., 2005; King, 2015; Walshe & Healy-Magwa, 2012), highlighting the conflicting and contradictory feelings regarding men's participation and roles reflecting those of the international literature.

Management awareness, protective measures (for both staff and children) around intimate care routines and developing trust between parents and educators was found to have ameliorated against this sense (Fine-Davis et al., 2005, reflecting that of Ljunggren et al., 2021). Career progression to management roles was more likely to be anticipated by the men in this study and the value of care as women's work in general was noted (Fine-Davis et al., 2005).

Fine-Davis et al. (2005) noted that the Irish Government Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (2000-2006) focused on stimulating participation in the workforce, particularly for women, by increasing provision in ECEC as an employment activation mechanism. However, it overlooked the ECEC sector as an opportunity to increase gender balance in the sector itself. This was seen as a missed opportunity and only a short term measure perhaps reflecting the ad hoc and unintentional nature of the development of the ECEC sector (Fine-Davis et al., 2005).

Notably, Fine Davis et al.'s, (2005, p.29) research also included the views of children who had developed bonds with both male and female ECEC workers and did not 'particularly see them carrying out different functions' although the authors comment on the importance of the male role in relation to the number of children in one-parent families led by women. They do, however, indicate that increasing

the number of men in the sector is not necessarily about balancing the gender division but challenging the notion that women should take responsibility for all of the caregiving.

Drawing from the research, the authors conclude that despite the momentum at a European level in terms of men's involvement in children's lives (citing European Commission 1992; 1994; European Network on Childcare, 1996), there has been little impact on the number of men recruited to ECEC in Ireland and suggests that any increase will be gradual and needs to be given more political focus and increased status and value (Fine-Davis et al., 2005). The arguments presented in this study are prevalent within the international literature, and despite the sixteen years since the research was published, with further rapid development in the ECEC sector in Ireland, and a shift in focus from labour activation to quality experiences for children, has not yielded any increase in men's participation in the growing workforce which has remained relatively static (ADM, 2000; Pobal, 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019), see figure 3.1.

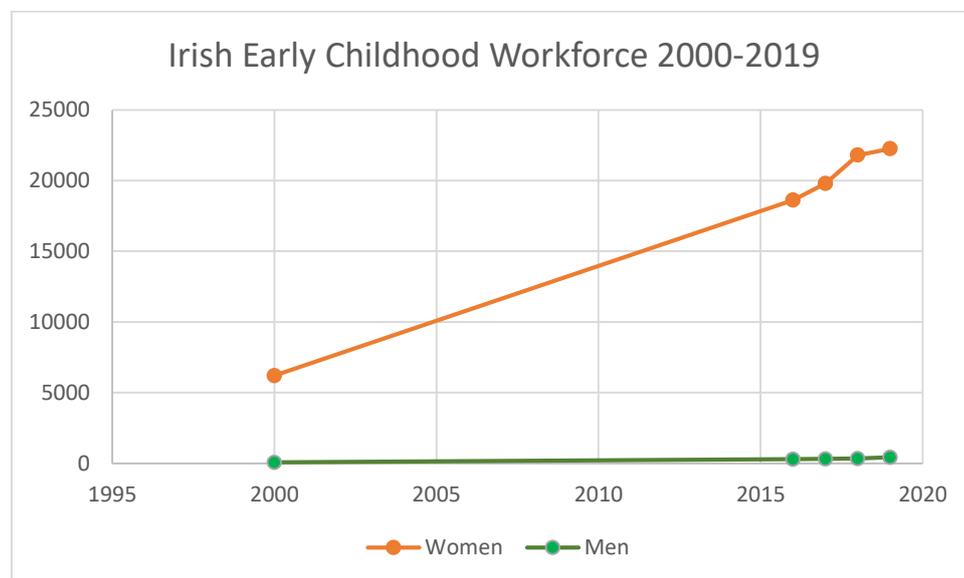


Figure 3.1 Trajectory of the ECEC workforce from 2000-2019

Subsequent literature in the Irish context includes recommendations in relation to recruitment through development of visibility and awareness at ECEC events, with adolescent boys in post primary school and creation of men-only modules or courses in ECEC programmes in recognition of their unique role and need for support (Walshe, 2011) but there is little evidence that this has occurred in any meaningful way.

3.7 Strategies for increasing recruitment and retention

Policy

Clear pathways, government priorities and societal attitude shift, something which has been particularly stubborn in this area despite changes elsewhere, are suggested as mechanisms to increase men's participation in the sector (Jones and Aubrey, 2019; Lynch and Feeley, 2009). Given the stubborn nature of the low numbers of men in ECEC, any attempt to increase will need political momentum. As Vandebroek and Peeters (2008) and Roberts-Holmes (2003) have suggested, family friendly policies that support more engagement of fathers in the early years of their children's lives and as can be seen in countries such as Sweden and Norway (Roberts-Holmes, 2003) are necessary to shift gendered roles. However, despite commitments on gender equality and international expectations, much of the focus on gender equality has focused on increasing the participation of women in male-dominated fields. While this is desirable in order for women to gain greater equality in economic life, the idea that care is the role and responsibility of women will prevail as long as ECEC and teaching are seen as feminised professions. In Ireland in 2005, the National Economic and Social Forum, an advisory committee made up of stakeholders which makes submissions to the Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) on social and economic policy made wide ranging recommendations in

relation to ECEC provision, many of which have been implemented. One of the recommendations included:

‘Widening the gender diversity in ECCE has proved difficult but measures to address the under-representation of men in ECCE settings should be encouraged through active recruitment policies and through networking to support those already in the sector as well as raising awareness among parents’.

(National Economic and Social Forum (NESF), 2005 p.92)

To achieve this there is a need for increased commitment and coordinated approach (Jones, 2016; Rohrmann, 2020); visibility for the current generation coming through the education system, and inclusion of ECEC workers in the discussions (Jones, 2016). Rohrmann (2020) adds the need for culturally aware gender equality and gender-sensitive education and recognises the wider social factors that influence notions of gender, attitudes and behaviours.

Targets

Setting targets like those indicated by the European Commission Childcare Network (European Commission Network on Childcare and Other Measures to Reconcile the Employment and Family Responsibilities of Men and Women, 1996) of 20%, a target reiterated by the Irish Expert Working Group on Childcare (Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, 1999) in the National Childcare Strategy, have proved ineffectual without some political will and commitment behind them. In 2011, the European Commission stated that the gender balance is a key issue and ECEC needs to be promoted to men (European Commission, 2011). The Competence Requirements for Early Childhood Education and Care (Urban, et al., 2011) suggested a more reasonable target of 10% and while this report has underpinned much of ECEC policy

development in Ireland in the subsequent years, the commitment to increase the gender balance has not followed. It is therefore, prudent to look to other jurisdictions and learn from the strategies that have been implemented in order to increase the visibility and numbers of men in ECEC. In the UK a target of 6% by 2004 was proposed and missed (Warin et al., 2020) largely due to lack of action, but interest has been renewed by the publication of the Early Years' Workforce Strategy (2017). Warin et al. (2020) suggest that the Norwegian success of 9% has been as a result of a coordinated approach to family friendly policies indicating that targets, alone will not change the status quo.

Recruitment Campaigns

Cremers et al. (2010) outlined a number of targeted campaigns in Norway which have seen the proportion of men in ECEC increase from national equality conference, regional support, national website, guidance books, promotion of research. These are strategies that have now been implemented in England with MITEY network, national conferences and the Gender EYE project (Davies, 2020; Warin et al., 2020). However, it is recognised that these measures are more successful when supported by family-friendly public policy such as parental leave etc. (Roberts-Holmes, 2009). Cremers et al. (2010) make recommendations across all levels of policy, planning, training and individual Kitas (ECEC services) level and shared knowledge and successful campaigns. They recommend the use of employment activation and retraining schemes to increase male numbers across ECEC. Rolfe (2005) recommends work experience programmes and apprenticeship routes to challenge stereotypes and give a taste but warns that it needs more commitment and support to work well. However, these approaches need to be supported by gender equality policies and gender awareness (Cremers et al., 2010).

Rolfe (2005) and Uba & Cleinman (2013) identify affirmative action as a mechanism for increasing men's participation in ECEC. Uba & Cleinman (2013) point to advertisers who are now seeing the shift in societal roles and recognising men as carers and targeting their marketing accordingly and argues for a need for visibility in the environment from the earliest stages of childhood. Literature has pointed to effective long-term recruitment strategies as essential to addressing the gender gap in the ECEC workforce (Barnard et al., 2000; Besnard & Diren, 2010; Vandebroek and Peeters, 2008; Walshe & Healy-Magwa, 2012). In Norway's case, funding and Government Action plans with 'binding obligations' (Peeters et al., 2015, p.3) and support networks were influential and while numbers have increased and Norway is the best comparatively, the numbers still remain below 10%. In Belgium, an advertisement campaign, research on the curriculum (which found bias) and targeted recruitment of second chancers had an impact on numbers and recommended more sustained attempts. Campaign posters were designed to draw men and resulted in a 20% increase of male students and the number of male workers in after-school increased by 68% but there was no corresponding increase in men's involvement in the birth to three age group.

In Germany, funding, regional projects and gender awareness initiatives have seen results that have been regional and urban in concentration. Turkey has seen increased numbers without any such interventions and possibly attributable to a modernising country, rapidly expanding ECEC sector that has professional status with qualification requirement and associated remuneration (Peeters et al., 2015). Peeters et al. draw on Connell's (2000) gender regime where gender is recognised as being 'institutionalized in the structure, as well as being an aspect of the individual character and personality' (2015, p. 6) and so the environment and behaviours are influenced by this and the feminised expectations of care positioning men as other which has

contradictory expectations or complementarity and object of suspicion. They also caution against the increased focus on education over care which may lead to the 'schoolifying' of ECEC (Dahlberg and Moss, 2005, p.25).

In Denmark, men comprise 7% of the workforce and ECEC is a one part of a professional qualification of Social Pedagogue spanning the life course (Wohlgemuth, 2015b). Wohlgemuth (2015b) suggests that recruitment initiatives rarely capture the multitude and complex reasons men enter ECEC. Rohrmann (2016) criticises some previous campaigns to get men into the sector by depicting them in traditional masculine ways with which not all men identify. He points to the accidental nature of many men's entry to the field so questions the effectiveness of the campaigns and suggest they need to come under a more gender-scrutinised perspective. There is a need to be careful in promotions that we don't descend into stereotypes (Rohrmann, 2020). Peeters et al. (2015) call for a 'gender-sensitive construction of professionalism' and 'new perspectives in the concept of care' (2015, p.9). and Rohrmann (2016; 2020) recommends reflection in teams on gender issues.

A comprehensive study, The GenderEYE project (Warin et al., 2020) found that there was a lack of strategy in recruitment of men to the ECEC workforce where in England, like Ireland, the number has remained static for some time. Careers guidance and early experience were also identified as absent. Jones (2016) found that despite poor pay and prospects, many of the men in her survey intended to stay in ECEC, so the issue for her becomes about how to recruit men but also to look at other factors than pay as part of the mechanisms for why they stay.

Warin et al. (2020) found there was a lack of any deliberate strategy to bring men into the ECEC and there was a distinct lack of applications from men. Where recruitment happened, it was often

when managers were willing to look past the absence of relevant qualification and experiences. Having men visible in recruitment posters was also considered important. Dealing with issues of unconscious bias and the importance of diversity in recruitment team but that is dependent on getting the men applying in the first instance which tends to be the issue. Some recommendations for recruitment include men visible in recruitment literature, positive discrimination clauses, inclusion on recruitment panels (to ameliorate against unconscious bias), looking at both qualified and potential, exposure of boys to experiences that make ECEC visible to boys and challenges their assumptions about careers in care.

The Fatherhood Institute have provided some guides to encourage settings to think about male participation and put in place practical steps to address it (Bartlet, 2015). In England, Kidsplanet a private Nursery company, in conjunction with MITEY and Greater Manchester Combined Authority have set up an apprentice programme to recruit men into ECEC (Marwood, 2021). A number of initiatives have also been developed in the US (Washington and Yarkony, 2019).

There is an argument for increased salary and qualification requirements and progression routes in recognition of the importance and value of the work as a universal need regardless of the aim of gender balance (Jones and Aubrey, 2019). In Belgium, according to Peeters (2005), attempts were made to increase male participation and to increase salaries in the sector by 30%. The salary debate is ongoing in Ireland too, where in 2015 and 2020, ECEC professionals marched to the Dáil (parliament) campaigning for higher salaries and where policy makers are currently looking at the possibility of a national salary scale (The Labour Court (Ireland), 2021).

Retention

Heikkilä (2019) found that recruitment initiatives were not enough in themselves and needed to be supported by awareness, attitude change and early intervention in post-primary school information. She also concluded that it must be processual and continued and not a one-off initiative. Clear responsibility and funding are important factors within this. Creating shared multi-dimensional processes rather than individual initiatives had been seen to create lasting change and value on increasing men's participation. Heikkilä describes how the municipalities addressed these needs and created multi-dimensional processes as relational agency which build over time. 'The work of recruiting more men into preschools rests on combining preschool expertise with HR expertise and gender equality expertise' (2019 p.147). She recommends a shift in focus away from what men do in preschools in favour of getting men recruited; lasting change of structures will take time and as a result needs long-term commitment on multiple levels (Heikkilä, 2019).

Once recruited, Besnard and Diren (2010) recommend that there be male mentors and role models and a strong supportive environment, although how this can be achieved in the short term with such low numbers is unclear. Walshe (2012) reiterates much of the sentiment expressed elsewhere that positive promotion, getting teenage boys on work experience, having male tutors during training and increasing salary and conditions and providing research that supports their participation are the most likely approaches to make a difference. Whatever recruitment strategies are employed it is likely that the necessary shift to critical mass will take some time to achieve. Wohlgemuth (2015b) found in the case of Danish pedagogues that career opportunities were a positive factor in recruitment, something that is lacking in many ECEC sectors internationally. Wohlgemuth (2015a) outlining some strategies aimed at increasing men's participation in ECEC cautions against

an assumption (often by the female educators) that men will bring specific skills or attributes as well as expecting them to just slot into the existing culture which has been constructed by women. Any attempt to get men into ECEC should look first at the reasons that those who have, did so and there is a need to be cautious of the expectations of men's addition to the workforce. Change is likely to be slow with small numbers who are more likely to be assimilated than initiate change (Wohlgemuth, 2015a). Wohlgemuth (2015a) also points out that all the recruitment drives in the world will be ineffectual if we do not also consider retention. Warin et al. (2020) found men were less likely to remain long term and appeared to be more likely to look for more challenge.

Ultimately, one of the most salient factors in staff retention, is job satisfaction. Şahin & Sak (2016) found that female early childhood educators rated their job satisfaction levels in relation to pay and status and interpersonal dynamics higher than that of their male counterparts and linked it to primary breadwinner expectation of men and the potential isolation of being in the minority in a staff group. Sak (2018) found that men rated their job satisfaction lower than women in ECEC which may point to the higher turnover rates in men in ECEC, perhaps linked to gendered experiences and the contradictions of being a man in a feminised environment. Cameron (2001) found that in female workers, retention was based largely on individual factors rather than the focus of policy. Most stayed for love of the job. Low pay was considered a factor in choosing to leave. Wohlgemuth (2015b) found isolation and loneliness as the only man, presenting a further argument for networks and mentorship. In the Brody et al. (2021) study, the pull-factors (Hard and O'Gorman, 2007; Ljunggren et al., 2021) that positively influenced retention were internal motivations and job satisfaction, including a sense of autonomy and professional identity and supportive leadership. Push factors which negatively influenced men's desire to remain were issues around masculinities, poor leadership, lack of value in the

work and role strain (Brody et al., 2020). The intersection and timing of these factors serve to create critical moments, or turning points where men make decisions about staying in the sector or leaving (Şahin -Sak et al., 2021) and any focus on the retention of men will need to consider the interplay of factors mediated by gender.

Gender sensitivity

Because of men's minority status, they experience both being the subjects of scrutiny but also, exposed when equality efforts result in them being treated the same rather than according to the needs arising from their experiences and feelings of loneliness (Farquhar, 1997). Often the responses of leadership and management are less than helpful. Lack of support has been reported as an issue for men in the sector and the reaction of parents (Rolfe, 2005). There have been many references to gender sensitivity throughout the literature presented above. The issue of support being needed for men as a group was resisted by some in order to not compound or create gender differences. However, Van Laere et al. (2014) argue for a move away from 'gender-neutral ECEC as disembodied practices would not be a suitable environment for a holistic view on care and education' (2014, p.241) but towards a more gender-sensitive practice. Warin et al. (2020) found that some of the men's experiences were unique and warranted awareness and reflection. They argue for a focus on equity in which individual needs are met, rather than equality in which everyone is treated the same and stress the importance of a gender-sensitive leader (Warin et al., 2020). Gender-sensitive leadership has the capacity to support men's introduction to, retention in and experience of the ECEC environment (Ljunngren, et al., 2021; Warin et al., 2020). Warin et al. (2020) state: 'although there is a gender blindness around providing support specifically to men...tailored support (based on the principles of equity rather than equality) in moments of vulnerability is key to retaining male practitioners' (2020, p.1).

Gender neutrality is not about gender balance but about awareness and reflexivity (Børve, 2017).

In thinking about the supports and mentorship for men in ECEC, Williams (2015) suggests that more research is needed to understand the different ways in which men benefit from these. She questions whether men should have male or female advisors, suggesting that male-male mentor relationships could reinforce hegemonic traits. We need to consider hegemonic masculinity, intersectionality and heterosexism and take into account that there are both internal and external factors that influence those who 'cross-over' (Williams, 2015).

Social Pedagogy as a uniting framework

According to Wohlgemuth (2015b) the notion that ECEC is an extension of the home and therefore the role needing little or no professional education needs to be challenged in order for it to be seen more as a profession for both men and women and lack of gender awareness in pre-service training may also not only act as a deterrent, but gender awareness and team reflexivity is increasingly being seen as important for a mixed gender workforce embedded in equality. Cameron (2013) critiques the resistance to acknowledging gender and has the unintended consequence of embedding gender essentialism and homogenises views rather than 'acknowledging the multi-faceted constructions of practice' (2013, p. 41). She argues for a rejection of 'sameness' in favour of embracing diversity and for new conceptualisations of care that moves away from its association with motherhood toward more 'pedagogic values', such as the 'gender-conscious pedagogy' referred to in Warin and Adriany (2017, p384) and aligns with the notion of a Social Pedagogue. Wohlgemuth (2015b) outlines the Danish training as that of a Social Education that equips learners to teach across all levels of the lifespan but typically prepares for ECEC. Urban et al. (2011) refer to the concept of social pedagogy in the Danish example in the

Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care (CoRe) Report which has influenced much of Irish ECEC policy development in recent years.

3.8 Conclusion

While much has been written in relation to men's involvement in ECEC, and difficulties remain in terms of agreement on the role of men, some common themes are identified. The reasons for their under-representation in the ECEC workforce are seen as a complex interaction of factors at societal (macro) organisational (meso) and individual levels (micro). The barriers to men's involvement centre on issues of visibility, pay and status, wider issues of equality, dominant social norms, and the perception of the risk they pose to children. There is general consensus about the benefits of men's participation, ranging in the literature from notions of role modelling and a masculine pedagogy which meets the needs of boys in particular and the opportunity to de-essentialise what has long been a feminised workforce modelled on an understanding of care as an extension of maternal roles. However, these gendered understandings and expectations of men, can lead to experiences within the ECEC workplace which are not typically experienced by women and can impact on their career trajectories.

Vertical career trajectories can be seen as those which elevate or devalue a man's status in the workplace. Here they can experience promotion to supervisory or management positions or limitations to their role such as exclusion from intimate care or care of the younger children. Horizontal trajectories are those that see men modifying their behaviour to either resist or assimilate into the environment. Meeting contradictory expectations of both modelling masculine traits and challenging stereotypes; following the established work practices created by women, but also creating opportunities for different pedagogy. Hostility, scepticism and suspicion from parents,

colleagues and even ECEC leaders influences how men experience and behave in the environment, often challenging their professional autonomy.

Caution in considering 'man' as representative of all men should be exercised and discussions of gender need to move away from binary definitions. It is acknowledged throughout that men have something to offer, though it is not always clear what that something is, though their presence could contribute towards gender equality and diversification of workforce, in which children see men and women sharing caring responsibilities in a workforce that is representative of wider society. The gender order of how society is set up along gendered lines with the expectation of breadwinning of men and caring of women posited by Connell (2009) is evident in the literature. The messages about what men and women do are absorbed early with children's understanding, developing as young as ECEC. The way schooling is organised with sex-segregated schools and subject choice along gendered lines, little opportunities for traditional career choices to be challenged or alternatives offered making ECEC invisible to young men embarking on their careers. Notions of hegemonic masculinity which influences boy's and men's behaviour, makes it difficult to cross the gender binary into feminised workspaces and those that do, risk having their masculinity, sexuality and motives questioned. This adds to the gendered experiences of men both from the perspective of societal expectations and how they play out in their interactions and relationships with friends and family members outside of the workplace and their interactions and relationships with parents, co-workers and workplace leaders within the ECEC organisation.

Current focus in the literature is on fostering gender sensitivity and awareness in the ECEC environment in contrast to gender neutrality which ignores the gendered experiences. Efforts to recruit and retain

more men into the workforce need to be sustained and multi-faceted and supported by political commitments and family friendly policies.

Framing the thesis

Based on the literature reviewed, we turn to the Irish context and ask: What leads men to enter ECEC in Ireland, and once in ECEC, what trajectories do their careers take compared with their female colleagues? The Irish context is relevant here due to the paucity of recent relevant literature in this context and in light of considerable policy focus and much economic, social and political change in recent years. Understanding the factors which influence men's trajectories, presents an opportunity to take steps to diversify the ECEC workforce during what might be seen as a window of opportunity during economic and social change and increased political focus.

4 Methodology

4.1 Introduction

Consistent with the theoretical framework based on Connell's (2009) analysis of gender as socially constructed and embedded in the structures of society, I take a pragmatic methodological approach to this research which recognises the constructed nature of reality and experiences but availing of a quantitative strand to aid and build on the qualitative analysis. In this chapter, I discuss how the methodological approach was designed and constructed in order to answer the research questions and objectives of the study. Sampling, context and approach to data collection and analysis are detailed across the three strands of this embedded mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

4.2 Research Questions

Taking the positions outlined above, I aimed to answer the following questions:

1. **Entry:** What leads men to enter the ECEC sector?
 - a. What are the factors that influence them?
 - b. What are the hindrances and barriers?
2. **Trajectories:** What path do their careers take?
 - a. Where do they go when they enter?
 - b. Do their trajectories differ from women's?

Objectives:

Synthesise relevant research literature on men's participation in the ECEC workforce in Ireland and internationally.

Examine the factors which influence and hinder men's entry and experiences in the ECEC workforce in Ireland through interviews

with men and women working in the sector and focus groups with careers guidance teachers.

Explore the experiences and trajectories of male workers in ECEC services in Ireland in relation to their female colleagues through the worker interviews and parent survey.

Draw conclusions based on the data from a range of perspectives on the implications of the gendered nature of the workforce and make recommendations on diversifying the ECEC workforce in Ireland based on international perspectives and the experiences of those interviewed for this research.

4.3 Construction of methodological approach and research design

To answer the research questions and address the objectives, an embedded mixed-methodological approach was adopted allowing for the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In an embedded design, one methodological perspective is more prominent and aligned with the theoretical perspective informing the research (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). In this study prominence was given to the qualitative strands with the quantitative strand following to add additional perspective. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) suggest that there are seven purposes of taking a mixed-methods approach: complementarity, completeness, developmental nature of the strands, expansion, confirmation, compensation, and diversity (Bucker and Walliman, 2016; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009).

The rationale for mixed methods in this research was to obtain complementary views of men's career trajectories from the perspective of the men, their female colleagues, career guidance teachers and parents of children in ECEC services to give a more complete picture of the factors that influence men's entry and

trajectories. The findings from each strand informed the direction of the subsequent strand to expand on the perspectives gained in each proceeding strand and aiming to understand the phenomenon from a diversity of perspectives with data sources compensating for each other (Thurmond, 2001). This also allows for flexibility of design, evolving from each stage based on researcher reflections. The initial design for this research was proposed based on a pilot study carried out in 2016 which led to an interest in careers guidance teachers' and parents' reactions as factors in men's experiences that had been absent from women's.

Piloting the research

I carried out a pilot study of the research by conducting semi-structured interviews with two male ECEC students. These students were recruited in my professional capacity as an educator on a higher education ECEC degree programme. For this, in addition to ethical approval from UCL Institute of Education, I obtained ethical clearance from my own employer Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (now TU Dublin) having demonstrated understanding of and strategies to mitigate against potential ethical issues arising. The rationale for the pilot study was to introduce the key findings from the literature and to explore the participants' experiences. This allowed for the testing out and reformulating of the wording of potential interview and survey questions for the main study. Questions in relation to male participation in ECEC, future career trajectories and aspirations and the issues they have experienced were explored.

I coded responses using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) with initial themes based on the interview topics. A process of coding and 'memo-ing' (Charmaz, 2006) was conducted and preliminary codes were created under the initial themes. Later, these codes were redrafted and categorised into new themes based on the analysis of the data.

Findings from the pilot reflected previous findings in the literature in relation to the route of men's entry into ECEC as often being 'accidental' in nature and issues of making ECEC a visible and viable option presented to adolescents through post primary school careers guidance suggested this is further investigated in strand two of the current research. Differential treatment, experienced both positively and negatively based on gendered assumptions and biases was reported, in particular where parents' responses were concerned, and this led to consideration of parents' perspectives in the current study (strand three). Further development of my own interviewing techniques and opportunities to probe and encourage elaboration of reported experiences has also been an outcome of the pilot study.

4.4 Sampling, data collection and approach to analysis

The research was carried out in three strands. In order to answer both research questions: What leads men to enter the early childhood sector taking into account influencing factors and barriers and; what paths their careers take (and how do they differ from women's). To explore their career trajectories, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with men and women working (or who had worked) in ECEC were carried out in strand one. 'Most qualitative research operates from the perspective that knowledge is situated and contextual, and therefore the job of the interview is to ensure that the relevant contexts are brought into focus so that situated knowledge can be produced,' (Mason, 2017, p.110). The rationale for qualitative interviewing is to explore the experiences of entry and progression of men and women working in ECEC settings in Ireland to make comparisons between their respective experiences and the factors which influenced their journeys. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for a set of questions to be created aimed at answering the research question, but allowing for probing,

clarification and development of themes depending on the responses of the participants. Alternative approaches may have been to complete observations of practice in the ECEC setting in addition to interviews as has been the case in previous studies (Xu 2018; Brody, 2014; 2015). However, as my focus was on career trajectories, the self-reporting of their own journeys was appropriate in this case. I could have carried out storyline analysis to have the men and women chart their own stories, critical moments and turning points as Brody and Hadar (2018) and Brody, Emilsen, Rohrmann & Warin (2021) have done, but this was an approach I encountered after my strand one data collection had been completed. However, I have charted their trajectories as narrated by them, indicating key points, in a more linear fashion than those of Brody and Hadar (2018) and Brody et al. (2021). These charts are presented in chapter five.

Based on the findings of the pilot study and the initial interview data from strand one, strand two consisted of a focus group with careers guidance teachers as part of the examination into the factors that influence men's entry to explore the career advice that this provided for young men and women. Previous studies have suggested that in order for men to consider a career in ECEC, careers advice should begin in the early teens (Indecon, 2019; Jones, 2016). Both men interviewed in my pilot suggested that careers guidance was not something that had influenced their career decisions with one suggesting that the nature of his school (technical, all boys) meant that he was very much guided in the direction of typically male technical occupations. Thus, I wondered whether careers guidance differed for boys and for girls and what influence it might have on their trajectories. I was aware that my employer, a higher education institution hosted an annual careers guidance teacher workshop, and I approached the head of the marketing department to request access to this cohort in order to invite them to take part in a focus group. Individual semi-structured interviews may well have provided

sufficient data for this purpose. However, using a focus group allowed for consideration of each other's perspectives and generated discussion about the processes within their respective schools which may not have otherwise been provided in what Morgan and Hoffman (2018) describe as the 'twin processes of sharing and comparing, which create dynamics that are not available in individual interview' (2018, p.251). The disadvantage of focus groups is that individual points may not be considered in depth (Morgan, 2019) and certainly there were time constraints on the day of the focus group that may have further impacted this.

Strand three of this research involved parent surveys to address some of the experiences reported by the men from the parents' perspectives and help to answer the trajectories question in aiming to understand their experiences. In both strands one and two, thematic analysis was conducted (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to identify and interpret themes from the men's, women's and careers guidance teacher experiences for comparison. Descriptive analysis was completed on strand three to illustrate a sample of parent attitudes to men in the ECEC workforce, linked to the experiences reported by the men in strand one. The approach to sampling, data collection and analysis can be seen in table 4.1.

Methodological approach: Mixed Methods			
Stage	Method of data collection	Participants	Data analysis
1	Semi-Structured Interviews	16 ECEC workers: 10 men and 6 women either currently working or formally (2) working in ECEC settings	Thematic analysis
2	Focus Group Discussions	4 Careers guidance teachers in secondary schools	Thematic analysis
3	Parents online and hardcopy surveys	Parents of children attended centre-based care and under the age of 6	Descriptive analysis using MS Excel
Data collection site: Various locations: places of work, Institute of Technology Blanchardstown			
Data Collection period: July 2017 – May 2019			

Table 4.1 Approach to sampling, data collection and analysis

Strand one: Sample and Contexts

The primary sample for my data collection was sixteen early childhood educators across a broad geographical area in Ireland. I first recruited male early childhood educators through personal contacts and advertisements through many of the fora through which early childhood educators connect and communicate (for example, the County Childcare Committees and the Men in Childcare Network who tweeted or posted my request). The sampling strategy could be considered purposive and both that of convenience and snowballing in many cases (Teddlie and Yu, 2007). The sampling criteria here required that the participant be currently working or have previously worked in an ECEC setting. By including those who may have left, it allowed me to get a sense of the reasons why, from a career trajectory perspective. Being a small community of workers, the men in ECEC whose paths cross tend to remain in touch and this was of benefit to me (though arguably may miss those who do not engage in these forums). My intention was to ask each of the men who volunteered to nominate (with their permission) a female colleague who would be willing to also be interviewed. Ultimately eleven men and six women volunteered. One man withdrew for personal reasons at the outset. All participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their anonymity and are outlined in table 4.2. Their profiles are presented in more detail in chapter five.

Male Participant	Female Participant
1. Alan 2. Joshua	3. Karen
4. Robert	5. Jenny
6. Martin	Participant has left the sector. No corresponding colleague
7. Jamie	8. Tracy
9. Patrick	10. Martina
11. Sean	No corresponding colleague
12. Geoff	13. Sharon
14. Ed 15. Anthony (not currently working)	16. Mary

Table 4.2 Strand one sample

Two of the men in my sample worked in the same service and so there were two men and one woman from that service. Two of the men were not currently working in the sector (Martin and Anthony). However, Anthony was formerly employed in a setting with Mary and Ed. Despite no longer working in the sector Anthony and Martin's accounts provide an insight into their experiences within it and their routes out of the sector. With the exception of Anthony and Martin, all the men and five of the women were working in ECEC services. Out of the eight services represented in this study, four were community-based and four were privately operated. Sessional services can fall in to both categories and are characterised by a morning or afternoon session (3 hours) and are funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability Integration and Youth (also known as the ECCE scheme or the free preschool year (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, 2020) These are distinct in that they do not offer full day care and take children from two years and eight months to school-going age for a maximum of two academic years. One woman (Sharon), was working as a development officer in the ECEC sector, having previously worked in ECEC services. One man's (Sean) current role and experience was such that he felt uncomfortable in

recommending a colleague and so in that case, no corresponding female was interviewed. Participants varied by age and length of service in ECEC, and this is presented in chapter 5.

Strand two: Sample and contexts

The focus groups with careers guidance teachers were designed to add an additional perspective to the reported influences (or lack thereof) in men's routes into the sector. From the pilot interviews, it was clear that careers guidance was not an influence for the men interviewed and so I was interested to hear how careers guidance teachers advise their students and this provided the sampling criteria for strand two. A focus group was carried out with four post-primary school teachers who had been recruited through my employer (Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, now TU Dublin), which holds an annual careers guidance event. Sampling was both purposive and convenience in that the nature of their role as careers guidance teachers was my reason for selecting them and I had ready access to a group of careers guidance teachers (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). My employer, Institute of Technology Blanchardstown, acted as gatekeeper in this instance. The focus group discussion was conducted in October 2018. On the day, we were confined to a tight time schedule of the careers event they were attending, which limited discussion and brought the focus group to an abrupt end. However, the teachers were forthcoming with their experiences and practices during the limited time we had. The sample consisted of one male and three female careers guidance teachers in Irish post-primary schools. All four teachers were from mixed (co-educational) community school settings i.e., under the patronage of regional Education and Training Boards (ETB's). In an Irish context, post-primary schools are made up of co-educational (ETB Patronage), all-boys schools and all-girls schools, both usually under the patronage of religious orders. Fee-paying (private schools) also exist and can be under the patronage of private organisations or

religious orders (Department of Education, 2021). The contexts of the teachers in the focus groups included a large school in a small town, a small school in an urban area (city) and a large school in an urban area. The final school was a further education school which offers courses in specific subjects and often bridges the gap between compulsory schooling and higher education offering pre-university courses. The ways in which careers guidance was administered within each school varied, and this is documented in chapter six.

Strand three: Sample and contexts

Strand three of the research consisted of distributing surveys to cohorts of parents, through a number of channels. Online survey links were distributed to ECEC services known to me through my professional contacts and through the participants who took part in strand one and therefore both purposive and convenience (Teddlie and Yu, 2007). Additional hardcopy surveys were distributed where the gatekeepers indicated that they would be more likely to get a higher response rate. Ultimately, two sets of surveys were distributed this way, one in a service that had male workers present and one in a service that did not. This allowed me to see whether the responses from parents who had experience of a male worker in their child's setting would differ from those of parents who did not. Additionally, a survey link was posted on parenting notice boards (purposive). I hoped that I would get as large and diverse a sample as possible across many demographics to enable some conclusions to be drawn from the findings. In the end, I had a sample of sixty-nine which provided some context to add to that of strand one.

4.5 Approach to data collection & analysis

Data collection and analysis were carried out in separate strands between July 2017 and May 2019 with each strand following and informed by the previous strand(s). Data collection consisted of

semi-structured interviews in strand one, a focus group in strand two and surveys in strand three. Strands one and two were thematically analysed (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and strand three was summarised using Excel to create a representation of the data.

Strand one: approach to data collection & analysis

First strand data collection was conducted between July and December 2017 and spanned a wide geographical area in the republic of Ireland where I met early childhood educators in their place of work, my place of work or in one case, at his home. I created a topic guide based on the objectives of the research to find out: the factors that influence men's entry to ECEC, the barriers experienced, the roles and contexts in which they find themselves, and how they compare to that of the women. The questions were devised based on existing literature and the initial findings of the pilot study. One topic guide was developed to ask the same or similar questions of the men and women so that their responses could be compared. The topic guide consisted of biographical questions about their entry into ECEC and the factors that influenced their decisions, questions related to their experiences with children, work colleagues, parents and management in their services and their future plans and ambitions. A copy of the topic guide can be found in appendix III.

Interviews ranged in duration from twenty-five to seventy-six minutes for the men's interviews (with an average of forty-eight minutes) and eighteen to twenty-seven minutes for the women's interviews (average twenty-three minutes). Interviews were audio recorded on my mobile device and immediately transferred to a password protected file on my organisation's secure storage. The difference in length of interviews can be attributed to the depth of the stories (narratives) men had to tell about their experiences as atypical, whereas with ECEC being 98.2% female, the default, women were less likely to report specific incidents of note or

othering. Initially, I had planned to carry out a thematic cross case analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) but as I transcribed the interviews and their stories began to take shape, I began to consider a narrative approach (Riessman, 2008) to the men's stories rather than de-contextualise them using thematic analysis. I spent some time reviewing the transcripts through a narrative lens but struggled to adopt an approach that worked for me and in light of the additional strands, I opted to stay with a thematic analysis approach in order to capture the four perspectives across the three strands: men, women, careers guidance teachers and parents, to remain consistent with my pragmatic mixed-methods design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). I did however, through this process identify some themes to consider further in my analysis: visibility, family influence, gender awareness, autonomy. I also began to see an ecological picture in terms of the men's experiences and influences at micro (individual immediate environment), meso (intermediate and organisational and macro (societal) levels. In further developing this research after completion of the thesis, I plan to take a narrative approach to re-analyse the men's stories. In order to create a picture of the participants and their contexts for the current study, I have created pen profiles of each of the sixteen participants and these are detailed in chapter five.

Thematic Analysis stages strand one:

Transcribing of the interviews was a long and laborious process. However, it allowed me to begin noting down initial thoughts and codes, similarities and differences between the men and their colleagues. I used thematic analysis based on Braun and Clark (2006) with some variation. There was a mix of priori codes and themes identified during the pilot and literature review and a-priori codes which I identified during the process of reviewing the transcripts (Boyatzis, 1998). After two rounds of coding, I colour coded the codes by participant and combined them, creating

and critical moments, and exit or future plans. Within each of these clusters, temporal factors such as timing and age and ecological factors such as influences in the immediate environment versus wider societal influences were evident. The themes were divided onto tabs on an Excel sheet, with the codes within and relevant quotes from participants alongside (see figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3 Example of Excel coding frame.

The steps completed (1-5), and their alignment to the thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006) in the analysis can be seen in figure 4.4.

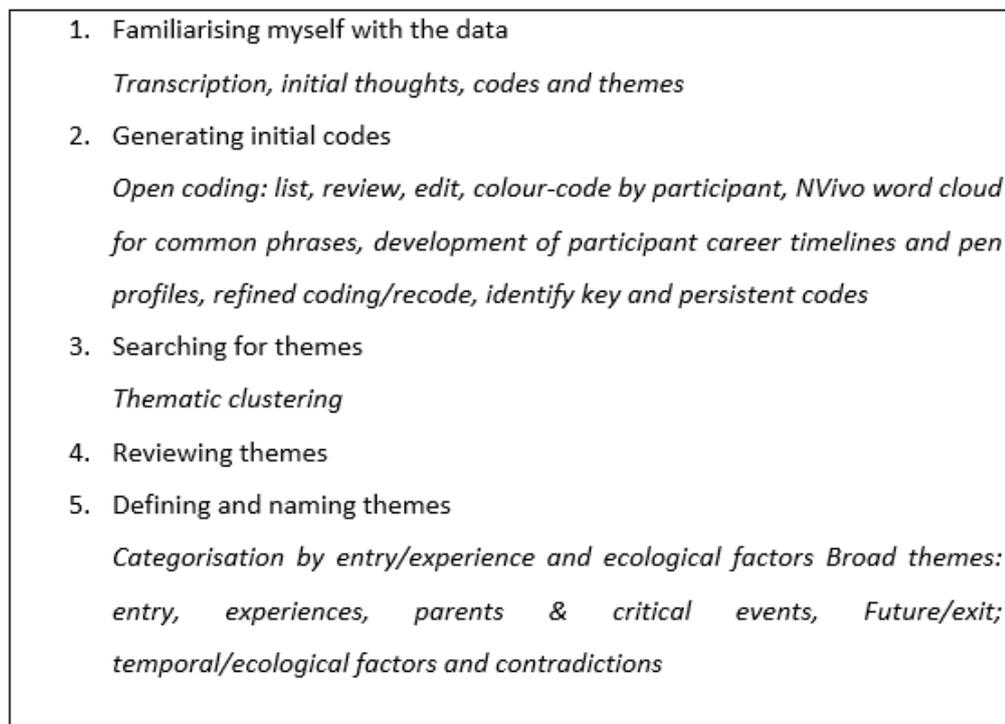


Figure 4.4 Thematic analysis cycle

Strand two: Approach to data collection and analysis

The careers guidance teachers focus group took place on the 11th of October 2018 and lasted approximately forty-five minutes. During an annual workshop for careers guidance teachers in the higher education institution in which I am employed, interested teachers were invited to join me for a session to participate in a focus group

on gender in the ECEC workforce. Four teachers volunteered and joined me in a nearby classroom. The teachers were advised of the nature of the research and provided with the information sheet and consent form and were then invited to browse and write comments on the flip chart paper posted around the room with themes linked to the questions on the topic guide. They were then invited to join a discussion on the topics where I asked questions and probed their comments on the flip chart sheets. This segment lasted twenty-seven minutes and was audio recorded on my mobile device and immediately uploaded to my organisation's secure storage drive. It was an engaging session, and they were forthcoming with their responses and comments on each other's experiences generating discussion that might not be experienced in individual interviews (Morgan and Hoffman, 2018). Unfortunately, as they were scheduled between two other sessions, our time was restricted, and I feel a longer session may have provided additional insights. The topic guide can be seen in appendix IV.

Profile

The profile and demographic details of the schools represented differed as did the approaches to guidance. Three of the teachers were female and one male. Their profiles are detailed in table 4.3.

Teacher	Profile of school	Approach to guidance
T1 (M)	Community school (co-educational (mixed) non-denominational) Student population just below 600. About one in six will be female. Small town – rural.	Subject choice introduced in first year & third year. Specific careers class for once a week in transition year. Used to have one class a week with in fifth and sixth year but this year it's only one class a week in sixth year (final year). Most of the work is done one on one so each sixth-year student we see a minimum of two if not more times depending on the needs of the class.
T2 (F)	Community school (Co-educational (mixed) non-denominational) Higher proportion of girls School population: 1200+. High immigrant population City/urban	Class on subject choice in third year T.Y. (optional) one class per week 5 th year: 1 class per week 6 th year: 1 class per week + meeting with guidance counsellor 1:1 Additional meetings dependent on needs
T3 (F)	Small Community school (co-Educational) Student population: 200 students 2/3 male student population Large traveller and immigrant communities Urban area	Senior classes (5 th & 6 th) 2 career classes per week Junior Cycle SPHE (Social Personal Health Education) and careers Class time impacts ability to give individual appointments to 6 th year students
T4 (M)	Further Education college (c-educational, post compulsory education) Student population: 820 students Two early childhood classes (all female)	No career guidance classes One to one with workshops. Initial guidance in using the systems and researching – students are adults and level of direction reflects this.

Table 4.3 Profile of careers guidance teachers

Thematic analysis

Following a similar approach to strand one, I had the audio transcribed and transferred the written comments from the flip chart to a word document. I coloured-coded each of the participants' written and verbal responses and clustered their responses into themes. The broad categories had been previously defined by the questions in the topic guide to include: profile of the teachers and their contexts, issues relating to career guidance approaches, factors influencing student choice, factors influencing guidance provided and, factors hindering ECEC as a career choice. Given the shorter nature of this strand, the transcripts and the influence of strand one, coding and clustering was a simpler process requiring only two reviews of the material for codes to be confirmed. The findings from this strand are presented in chapter six with the entry stories of the men and women from strand one, where their

experience of careers guidance teachers is compared with the practices of the guidance teachers.

Strand three: Approach to data collection and analysis

Strand three was designed to address the second research question: What path do their careers take? The objective of exploring the experiences and trajectories of male workers in ECEC services in Ireland in relation to their female colleagues is relevant here. Some men reported negative reactions from parents that were not evident in the women's experiences and may be a factor in men's trajectories or decisions to stay or leave. I began noting thoughts and questions for the parent surveys as I completed strands one and two of the research and reviewed similar studies by Sak, Rohrmann, Şahin Sak & Schauer (2019) and Wright and Brownhill (2018). After a number of iterations to ensure that the survey questions were not leading but provided statements both stereotypical and non-stereotypical in nature to allow parents to indicate the degree to which they agreed or disagreed using a Likert scale (Sullivan & Artino, 2013). Some basic demographic questions were also included to allow for consideration of factors linked to gender and age. For example, were fathers more likely to object to men's presence as was reported by some of the men in strand one? I also wanted to see if previous experiences of male early childhood educators were linked to positive attitude to male workers. However, I am careful not to make statements in relation to causation or indeed generalisation on a sample so small. Finally, a number of open-ended questions were included in the survey to allow for additional detail and comment. A copy of the survey questions can be found in appendix V.

Analysis of strand three

Due to the relatively small number and the supplemental nature of strand three of this research, I've used MS Excel to complete the

descriptive analysis of the quantitative data from the parent surveys (Blaikie, 2003). This is presented in chapter eight. As there were also some open-ended questions in the surveys, the responses from these have been thematically analysed and are also presented in chapter eight and compared in the context of men's experiences of parents in the ECEC setting.

4.6 The role of researcher reflecting on the process

Accessing and collecting data from the participants, particularly in strands one and two meant that I needed to reflect on my role as the researcher, recognising the influences and biases I may bring and also consider the need for rapport building with my participants. Fundamentally, I took a pragmatic but constructivist approach which allows the flexibility of mixed methods in answering my research questions, but recognises knowledge as subjective, context dependent and constructed in the recounting of experiences and influenced by the audience (Buckler & Walliman, 2016; McChesney & Aldridge, 2019; Schwandt, 1998). Analysis is an interpretation from the perspective of the researcher and therefore requires reflection and consideration of the data and recognition of this role (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Ortlipp, 2008).

Overall, my participants self-selected or nominated a colleague participant (in the case of the men nominating a willing female colleague). Many of the men volunteered based on hearing about the research. This made building rapport easier since men had an interest in telling their stories. Their introduction of their colleagues to me also paved the way for good rapport with the female participants. My own background stems from working in ECEC and my current role in ECEC pre-service training allowed me to understand the nuances and characteristics of the work and the ECEC environment, while recognising their unique and individual

experiences. I did wonder if I was a male researcher, would the men have found it any easier to discuss their experiences, though I did not detect a sense that any of them were hesitant. Admittedly, I had some expectations about what I might find and hear and some of those expectations were borne out. However, others provided unexpected insights. For example, I was expecting to find that men were not advised towards ECEC by careers guidance teachers but that women were. However, from my interviews and focus groups, it would appear that neither men or women are guided in the direction of ECEC, for a number of reasons. This will be discussed further in chapter six.

Strands two and three were designed prior to the move towards narrative analysis and based on both of the research questions: men's entry into the sector and their experiences. This orientation was based on my pilot research which identified lack of careers guidance and awareness of ECEC as a career for men and, some parents' reactions as being a significant negative experience. I endeavoured to interpret the meaning expressed by the participants and in which the construction of that meaning was a reflection of understandings in space and time. In my pilot interviews, those notable parent experiences were a very small proportion but stood out in the men's telling of their experiences. I expected that generally parents would be favourable to men's presence but that there may be some who are not entirely comfortable with it.

During the process of data collection and analysis, I maintained a reflective diary intermittently which allowed me to collect and express thoughts and insights on the process and identify themes. This allowed for critical self-reflection and for transparency in the research process (Ortlipp, 2008). This was particularly useful when considering the use of Narrative Analysis for the analytical process. Other methodological approaches could have been considered for this research. For example, an ethnographical study may have been

appropriate in strand one of the research but in order to make sense of the three strands and the four perspectives explored, I decided the original pragmatic mixed-methods design with thematic analysis in strands one and two made more empirical sense in answering questions of men's trajectories. Reviewing my reflections, I note thoughts and feelings about the tension around narrative analysis and thematic analysis, difficulties at different stages of the process, for example, a tendency towards self-doubt, decisions around terminology, frustration at the inconsistent opportunities to work on my research alongside full-time work, over-commitment and unrealistic expectations. Reflecting also allowed me to identify some themes for further development such as those identified during my consideration of narrative analysis: visibility, family influence, gender awareness, autonomy. I also began to see an ecological picture in terms of the men's experiences and influences at micro (individual immediate environment) and macro (societal) levels which has also been documented elsewhere (Warin, Ljunggren & Andrä, 2021). Contradictions and resistance to expectations also began to become apparent to me. I also noted opportunity to consider sense-making theory (Weick, 2005). Reflecting on the process also allowed me to identify gaps or potential for further consideration in future research such as age, class and intersectional factors.

4.7 Ethical considerations

I sought and was granted ethical clearance from the UCL Institute of Education in April 2017. I also, applied for ethical approval through my employer (formally) Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (ITB) as I would be accessing some of my participants through my professional contacts. As ITB also facilitated my contact and focus groups with careers guidance teachers, it was important to seek their approval. I consulted The British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research and Good Practice in Educational Research Writing

(BERA, 2000). I also consulted the Institute of Technology Blanchardstown (2005) Research Ethics and Code of Good Practice to inform and guide my research ethically.

Confidentiality, anonymity and boundaries

Each method had its own implications. By taking part in interviews and focus groups, participants were making themselves known to me. Participants were assured of their right to anonymity and confidentiality within the boundaries of good practice and child protection. Participants were informed of this prior to taking part.

Informed consent and the right to withdraw

Participants in strands one and two were given an information sheet (see appendix I) and afforded the opportunity to ask questions before signing a consent form (appendix II). They were also advised of the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to decline to take part, answer certain questions or withdraw. All participants were adults and not considered vulnerable and therefore having read the information sheet and availing of the opportunity to ask any questions, they will be considered informed. In the case of questionnaires, participants were asked to self-select and respond. Participation was voluntary and information was provided in the preamble to the questionnaire. Participants completed the questionnaire anonymously and completion/return of survey was considered consent.

Risk, Potentially vulnerable participants, & sensitive topics

The wellbeing of the participants was of utmost importance. The risk of potential harm to either participants or myself was relatively small. Participants were not considered vulnerable or dangerous and therefore any risk to myself was limited to typical risks associated with going about my daily routine. Potentially sensitive topics which may have arisen for the participants are issues around intimate care,

allegations of improper care or inappropriate practice and had the potential to cause some discomfort to participants. Participants were advised of their right to withdraw or decline to answer questions should they wish to do so, to minimise risks associated with the impact of the research on the participants. The rights and wishes of participants were of primary importance. Caution was exercised and participants were reminded that they had the option to decline to answer questions should they wish.

Safeguarding/child protection

While the participants themselves were not considered vulnerable, the children in their care were. Issues of witnessing poor practice when carrying out research in settings in which there are children had potential to arise. In taking consideration of this, I committed to consulting with my supervisor and following my obligated protocol in the light of my role as a teaching council member and researcher with access to children and take steps necessary to follow up based on the Children First Act (Irish Statute Book, 2015) and National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of children (Tusla, 2017) as a mandated person. Participants were advised of the limits to confidentiality in relation to child protection and poor practice.

International research

As the research was carried out in the Irish context, it was considered International research. All precautions were taken to comply with ethical requirements in the Irish context, from Child Protection and Safeguarding (Irish Statute Book, 2015; Tusla 2017), to Irish Data Protection Act (Irish Statute Book, 1988) and Data Protection Amendment Act (Irish Statute Book, 2003) and the UK Data Protection Act, (Government of the United Kingdom, 1998; 2018). The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012) Guidance for Developing Ethical Research Projects Involving Children has also been consulted in relation to matters of child

protection and safeguarding (though this research did not involve work directly with children). During the course of my research the General Data Protection Regulation (European Commission, 2018b) was enacted which governs data collection and retention. My research fell under UCL's Statement of Tasks in the Public Interest, and in compliance with GDPR (European Commission, 2018b) data was obtained with express permission, clear information on the purpose and retention and participants gave informed consent on that basis.

Data storage and security

Data in relation to participants has been stored securely (password protected) both during and after the data collection and analysis and will be transferred to UCL's research office for archiving and retention in line with UCL's Research Data Policy and Retention Schedule. Dissemination of the findings through my thesis, publications and conference presentations will continue to maintain the ethical standards outlined.

4.8 Summary

This chapter has described in detail the embedded mixed-methods approach taken in order to address the research questions: What leads men to enter the ECEC sector (entry) and what paths do their careers take (trajectories). I took a predominantly qualitative approach in line with the constructed nature of gender outlined in the theoretical framework (Connell 2009). Emphasis in this approach was placed on the initial strand of semi-structured interviews with men and their female colleagues, thematically analysed to understand their entry and trajectories in the ECEC sector. This was supported by the data from strand two, a focus group with careers guidance teachers and strand three, quantitative parent-surveys to add additional perspective to reported experiences of the participants in strand one. Strands two and three were thematically

and descriptive analysed respectively. Findings from each of the data sets are presented in chapters five to eight.

5 Findings I Pen Profiles

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will introduce the participants for the primary (first) strand of the research. Sixteen workers volunteered to be interviewed for this research: ten of them men and six women, and there are a number of ways in which their stories converge and diverge. The depth of experiences will be considered in more detail in the chapters that follow. This chapter aims to introduce the participants and make brief links to existing literature some of the themes that will be considered.

The original intention had been to have an equal number of men and women. The men who volunteered were to suggest a female colleague from each of their practices for comparison. Ten men came forward. Of those men, one had been out of the sector for some time when interviewed and did not have a corresponding colleague to suggest. However, his participation added additional depth to the research in considering why some men leave the sector. In two of the services, there were two male workers interviewed and, in these cases, only one female colleague was interviewed. Finally, one man was in the midst of a complicated transition in his workplace and did not feel comfortable to suggest a colleague.

The qualification levels of the workers show half of the women having obtained degree level qualifications but only three of the ten men doing so. This may be indicative of an uncertainty in the men in relation to committing to remaining in the field or just of a more recent entry, and therefore haven't worked up to subsequent qualifications. Further explanation of this may link to the routes through which men and women entered. Only three of the workers started their careers in ECEC: two women and one man. The man, Martin, chose ECEC straight from school, but it was as a route to

primary teaching rather than his intended final destination, so it has been considered a second-choice career here. The same applies to Pam, whose BA and first job were in ECEC, but paediatric nursing had been her preference. In terms of their age on entry to ECEC, all of the women were under 30 when they began working in the sector and only five of the ten men fell into this category, with five being over thirty when they began working in ECEC. An interesting trend began to appear when looking at the previous employment in those who came in as a 'second chance' career: four of the men had previously worked in construction (a predominantly male sector which was significantly impacted by the economic recession in 2007/2008) and half of them reported entering ECEC through employment schemes. None of the woman had previously worked in construction, but one had entered ECEC on an employment scheme, having previously been unemployed. Their individual stories and experiences will be discussed later, but it gives a first indication of the link between the wider social context, for example recessionary times and the influences in men's entry.

The types of services in which the men and women were employed was evenly split. Given that corresponding women were interviewed for all but two of the men, that would have been an expected result. During interviews, the special needs assistant (SNA) training or practice came up in a number of cases and that was considered. On investigation, half of all workers had had some SNA training which in all but one case, preceded their entry into ECEC, and may have provided an initial experience with children.

Their individual timelines and profiles will be presented here by way of introduction. Due to the nature of large volume of data, they have been divided, not by gender but by their duration of time in the sector: greater than ten years (long service) and less than ten years (short service). Their individual points of entry can be seen in table 5.1 below.

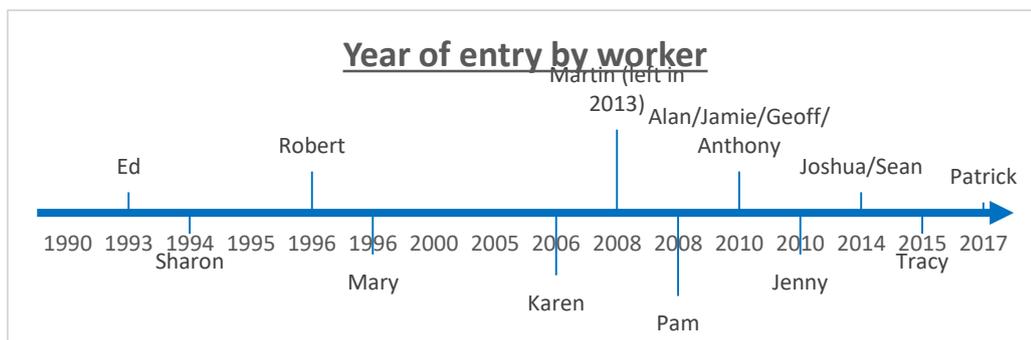


Figure 5.1 Year of Entry by worker

5.2 Long service

Karen

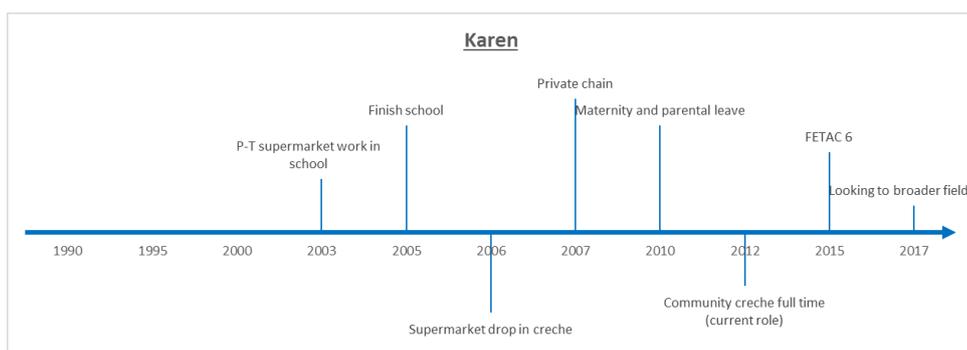


Figure 5.2 Karen's timeline

Karen describes her entry into ECEC as 'by accident'. Having worked part-time in a supermarket bakery, when she left school she was offered a role in the drop-in crèche associated with the supermarket. She was sent on a three-day *Practical Play* course and having discovered that she enjoyed the work, progressed to completing her basic ECEC qualification (FETAC 5⁵). She took up a

⁵FETAC is the Further Education and Training Awards Council and was the former awarding body in further education qualifications which is now represented on the National Framework of Qualifications (Quality and Qualifications Framework Ireland, QQI, 2018).

job covering maternity leave in a private suburban crèche for six months and followed this with a role in a private chain crèche in another suburb, where she remained for five years. She took a break in employment for 2-3 years to have her daughter and then returned to work, taking up a role in a Community Childcare (see chapter 1) service where she has remained for the last four years and completing her FETAC 6 in 2015. Karen is considering pursuing a degree but thinks she might choose something broader than ECEC which might allow her to move other roles as she feels ECEC is undervalued and those working in the sector cannot live on the salary commanded by it.

Karen's entry is, while not typical of the entry of other participants, certainly reflective of the ways in which others have come into the field. She has a range of experiences, from drop-in, private and community-based services and enjoys the work but recognises that diversifying her further qualifications might lead into a better-paid role in a cognate area. The issues around pay, and value will come up with other workers and will be discussed in more detail in the remaining findings chapters (6-8).

Robert

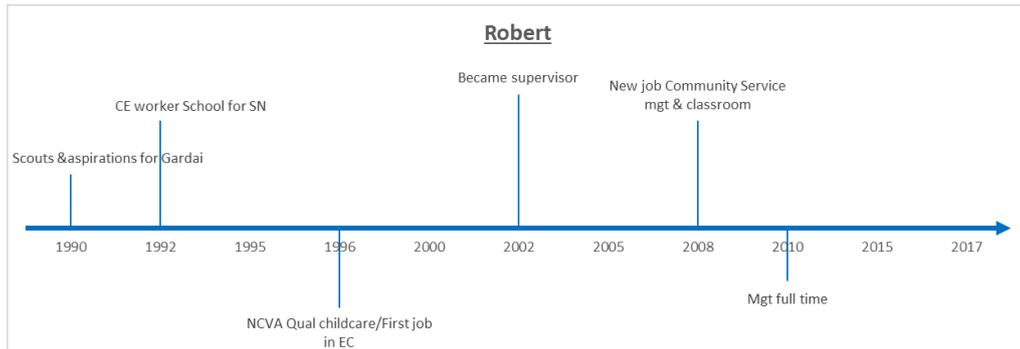


Figure 5.3 Robert's timeline

Robert is one of two men who have significant length of experience in ECEC. He attended an all-boys Christian Brothers (religious order) school and never received any guidance towards ECEC. He said that the role of the careers guidance teachers at that time was to guide students in filling out their CAO⁶ (Central Applications Office) rather than supporting their choices. The only guidance he received was from a friend who suggested he do something linked to his interests as a Scout. He originally wanted to join the Gardaí (Irish police force) but his eyesight did not meet the criteria. He spent a year working in retail before taking up a community employment (CE) position in a special school in 1992, followed by a spell as an SNA in a primary school. He applied for an ECEC job without realising that was preschool and not primary school. He describes it as the best mistake he ever made. He, like Karen, describes his route into ECEC as accidental. The service in which he began his career catered for a high level of need, based on referrals. He says that the manager there, having worked in England previously, was open to having a male ECEC worker but he was not involved in intimate care during that time for his own protection. During his time

⁶ 'The Central Applications Office processes applications for undergraduate courses in Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)' (CAO, 2021).

there he progressed after six years to management, where he remained for another six years. In 2008, he took up an initial dual role as worker/manager in another community service and now runs this service full time. In terms of future directions, he plans to remain in the sector, having been there for twenty-one years but he would like to develop the parent outreach element of the role.

Robert's profile echoes some of Karen's, in that he describes his entry as accidental or in his words a 'mistake'. Entry for him was through an employment scheme, a factor that seems to influence many of the men's initial entry giving them a taste of the role. He comments on a progressive manager hiring a man but also reports not having any role in intimate care, an issue that will come up in subsequent profiles and will be considered in chapters seven and eight.

Sharon

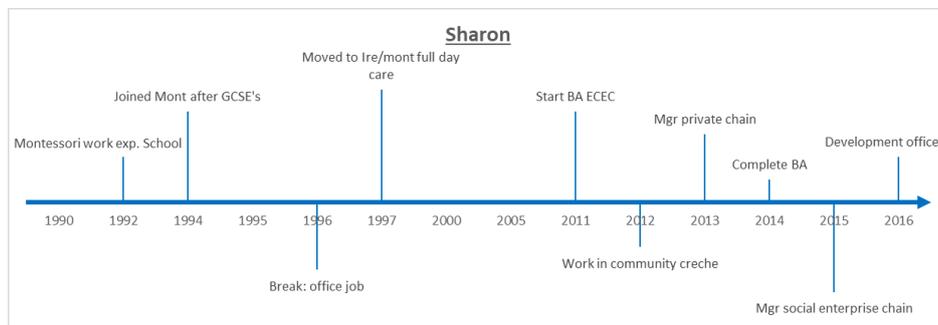


Figure 5.4 Sharon's timeline

Sharon is a development officer for an ECEC support network. Her path into ECEC started on completion of her GCSE's in the south of England. There was no expectation of going on to complete A-levels and she had done some work experience in a Montessori preschool attached to her school and so decided to pursue a course in Montessori after leaving school. She worked in a Montessori preschool in England for a number of years, with a brief break to work in an office in London but returned to her ECEC career. Moving to Ireland, she took up work in a number of services both private,

sessional and community full day care. While ECEC was her first career, she wouldn't describe herself as having ambitions for ECEC. Montessori appeared to be almost an apprenticeship option, having done some work experience in school. She was not given any specific careers guidance that influenced her move into ECEC and her family and friends were supportive of it, assuming that she might open her own service. She did care for children in her home for a time but missed the service environment. Having experienced many roles from classroom assistant to manager in both private, community and social enterprise, she is now working in a development role within the ECEC sector and sees herself there for the foreseeable future.

Sharon's description of her entry into ECEC suggests that while she loved the Montessori environment, she hadn't any real ambition for it. While it was her first role out of school and she has stayed with it a significant duration, it was almost by default rather than any serious consideration. She, like Robert comments on the lack of careers guidance in school and while that was an expected response from the male workers, it was unexpected from the female workers. Careers guidance will be given consideration in chapter seven.

Ed

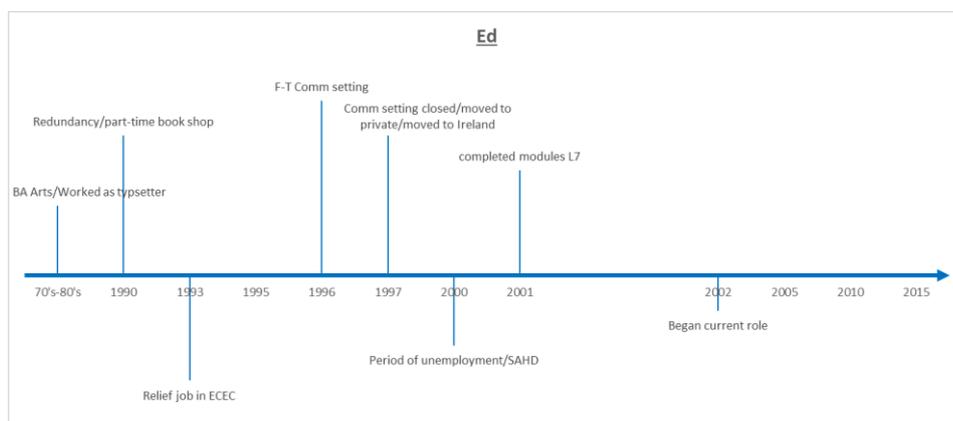


Figure 5.5 Ed's timeline

Ed began working as a typesetter in Eastern USA during his undergraduate studies in the 1970's and after being made redundant, moved west and took up a substitute job in a private ECEC service with toddlers in an affluent suburb. He worked in a number of services on the west coast, before marrying an Irish woman and moving to Ireland. Having partially completed an ECEC qualification in the US, he started again in Ireland, feeling that he wouldn't be taken seriously as a man and a foreigner in the mid-1990's. He was in the fortunate position of not needing to work initially. He and his wife had children of their own during this time. He got some work in a crèche in a regional higher education institution but was not rehired the following term, which he found disappointing. Around this time, a large number of ECEC courses began to emerge. Having unsuccessfully applied for a number of jobs, he was eventually hired for afternoon work by a private crèche provider who had seen him at a birthday party and had known he was looking for work. Following this, he moved to his current position in a busy community setting in a large city, where his own children attended. His main positions have been with the afterschool and preschool children and he is currently the afternoon manager. Ed recognises that while in the early days, his gender may have inhibited his ability to get work, there is also a uniqueness that gives him privilege as a man. He had no specific careers guidance and no difficult responses to his choice. He recognises that entering the profession aged thirty-one gave him a maturity but also points out that in his twenties he'd had little exposure to children. Ed feels that he often ends up dealing with children's behaviour and that boys' play can often be less valued than girls' play. He has completed a master's degree in Leadership and Advocacy but sees himself remaining in the sector for now. He recognises that his position as the only man when he attends events often elevates him and presents him with opportunities he might not otherwise experience.

Ed has raised an interesting observation on the dynamics of being a male in the ECEC sector and changing attitudes to men's participation but also almost an elevated position, separate to the glass escalator phenomenon (Williams, 1992; Thorpe et al., 2018). This may be reflective of changing societal expectations about gender and gender roles (Fine Davis, 2015). He is another example of accidental entry with no careers guidance but is unique in his considerable length of service, representing the longest serving of the sixteen workers interviewed. He comments on the maturity of being older entering the field, a phenomenon discussed in wider literature (Cameron et al., 1999; Cremers et al., 2010; Farquhar, 1997; Fine-Davis, 2005; Jones and Aubrey, 2019; Vandenberg and Peeters, 2008; Wohlgemuth, 2015b) in relation to 'second-chance' careers and presented in more detail in chapter seven.

Mary

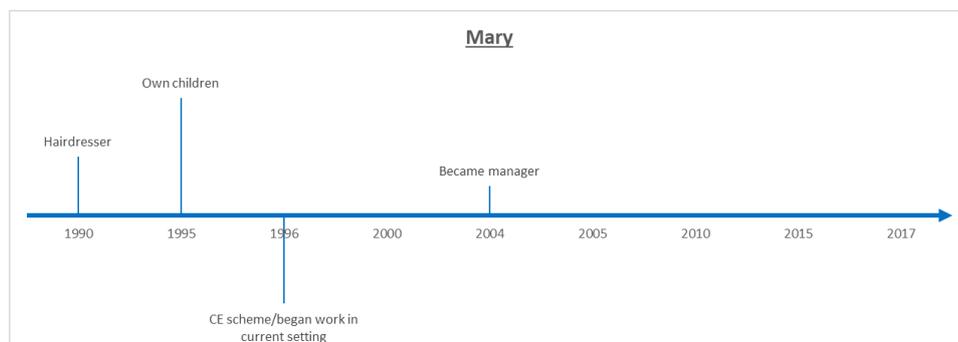


Figure 5.6 Mary's timeline

Mary previously trained as a hairdresser but while still young and with two relatively young children, her sister suggested she follow her path and work in ECEC. She started working in her current service as part of a community employment (labour market activation) scheme. She has worked twenty years in the same service and brought all her children here over the years. She hadn't received any careers advice other than her sister's suggestion and her family and friends were supportive. She describes her choice as an 'age and stage' thing. It suited her circumstances at the time. She

has managed the service for thirteen years, is currently studying for her BA in ECEC. Following that, she would like to stay in the field in some way but not necessarily in her current role. In terms of her experiences, they have been largely positive. She says that there is a fundamental difference in how men and women interact with children with men tending to be more boisterous and humorous initially but settling into the role after time.

The differences that Mary reflects on will be given consideration in chapter seven. Differences in pedagogy and the influence on those differences (if any) are discussed widely in the literature (Besnard & Letarte, 2017; Emilsen & Koch, 2010; Rohrmann, 2020; Sandseter, 2014; Thorpe et al., 2018; Warin, 2019; 2020) and many of the workers talk about subtle differences. Their reflections will be considered in detail. Mary's route, in some ways, is similar to Sharon's in that their entry was almost of convenience. It was there and suited her needs at that time, and perhaps reflective of expectations of female school-leavers in the early nineteen-nineties. Karen's entry (documented earlier) may also be reflective of that assumption in her being transferred from the supermarket bakery to the drop-in ECEC service. The notion of ECEC being a natural step for women has been a focus of the literature on gendered occupations in general and men in ECEC in particular (Brody, 2014; Cameron et al., 1999; Cremers et al., 2010; Farquhar & CHILDForum, 2006; Rolfe, 2005) and whether the experiences of Karen, Sharon and Mary are reflective of the societal expectations will be considered in chapter nine (discussion).

Jenny

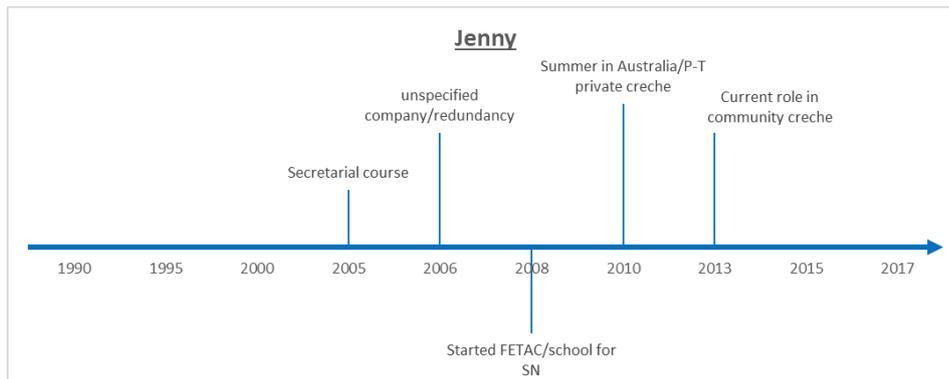


Figure 5.7 Jenny's timeline

After completing a secretarial course on leaving school, Jenny took a job in a company in an Irish city, where she remained until the company closed and she was made redundant. She admits that, had she not been made redundant, she may well still be working in that role. Having previously had an interest in children, she used this as a catalyst to try a new direction. Though she never had any guidance towards ECEC as a career, she took up a role as an SNA in a school in a regional town and completed her basic SNA training in 2008. The work confirmed her desire to work with children. She spent two years in this role while completing her level six (FETAC) training, before going to Australia for a summer. On her return, she began applying for jobs. After some time, she got some part time hours in the afternoons in a private crèche. During this time, she also took other positions and maternity cover to build up her experience, before successfully applying for current role in a large community service in a regional town in 2013. She is now ten years working in the sector. During her time in the ECEC sector, she has gained experience mainly with toddlers and preschool children and describes her roles as 'just a childcare worker' but emphasises the importance of teamwork. Her current role includes deputy manager, but she maintains key children. She feels there is not much room for progression in the ECEC sector. She is enjoying the supervisory role she currently has, the increasing administrative burden of being a manager does not interest her, so for now she is happy to remain in

the classroom. Jenny feels that both men and women are deterred from the field by the low pay and in the case of men, the maternal nature of the role.

Jenny is an example of being in the right place at the right time in terms of the opportunity that was presented to her by her redundancy, a factor which will come up in subsequent profiles, particularly in relation to the male workers. Issues of pay and progression are of importance to Jenny, but she does not have ambitions for management where the role becomes more administrative than being with the children. Her comment about being 'just a childcare worker' may reflect the value on the work by broader society (Cameron et al., 1999; Cremers et al., 2010 Schoon and Eccles, 2014; Skelton, 2001). The value of the role can be an influencing factor in career choice and will be considered more fully in chapter nine.

5.3 Short service

Alan

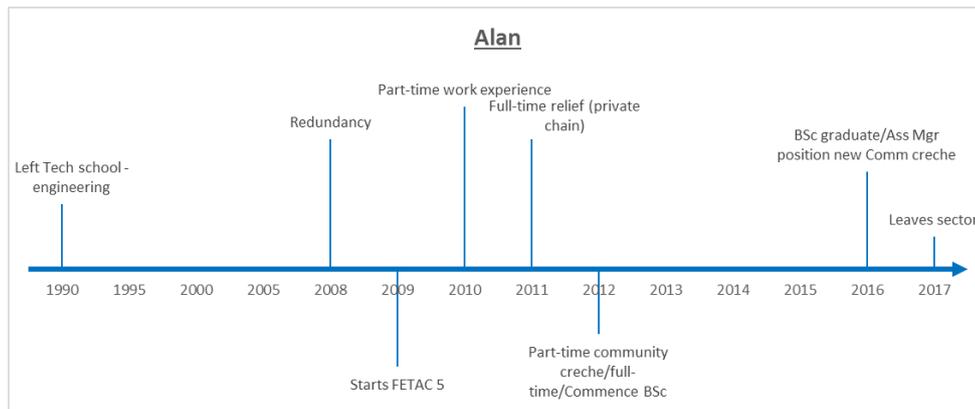


Figure 5.8 Alan's timeline

Alan attended a technical all boys post-primary school during the 1990's and as a result, he felt he had little choice but take an engineering route after school at a time when the construction industry was buoyant, but he had always had an interest in humanities. During the economic crash, Alan was made redundant. This gave him an 'opportunity' to consider other career options. In

late 2008 or early 2009, he began taking individual modules for a basic qualification in ECEC (FETAC level 5). He discovered that he both enjoyed and had an aptitude for the content and pursued this. He never considered that he might be the sole man either in his class or workplace. Through his classmates, he got an opportunity to volunteer for two hours per day in a small private crèche and found that he enjoyed the practice too. He applied for and got a job in a small crèche which, was part of a large chain in a city suburb in 2010. Reactions to his choice varied from mild surprise from his wife who initially felt it was a whim, though she supported his choice, to lack of awareness of the roles from male friends. He experienced more appreciation of the value of what he was doing from his female friends. During his time in the crèche, a negative experience occurred was when a parent of twin boys objected to his role in intimate care. This created an additional burden on his female colleagues. The manager of the service approached the parents who withdrew their objection on the basis that they had witnessed his relationship with their boys and as a result were more comfortable with his role in nappy changing. After the service closed, Alan got some part time work in a community-based service attached to a resource centre for lone parents and over time his hours became full time and he advanced to room leader. From 2013 to 2016, Alan pursued and completed his BA (Hons) in ECEC and in 2016, he took up a post as deputy manager in a neighbouring community service, where he still worked with key children. He had one negative experience in this setting where a great-grandparent objected to his role in intimate care with her great-grandchild, a sentiment not shared by her granddaughter and mother of the child. The use of the word 'paedophile' was especially distressing to Alan, who left the sector soon afterwards.

Alan is the first worker who has had a construction background in which timing and wider social factors influenced his choice and the expectations of him, almost conversely to Sharon, Karen and Mary,

discussed above. The role of the economic boom followed by the recession and the expectations of boys leaving an all-boys school meant that Alan's path was almost assumed, and no alternative options were presented in terms of guidance. He reflects on having always had an interest in humanities and seeing his redundancy as his opportunity. Entry into ECEC as an opportunity is reflected in the responses of some of the other workers as will be seen later.

Joshua

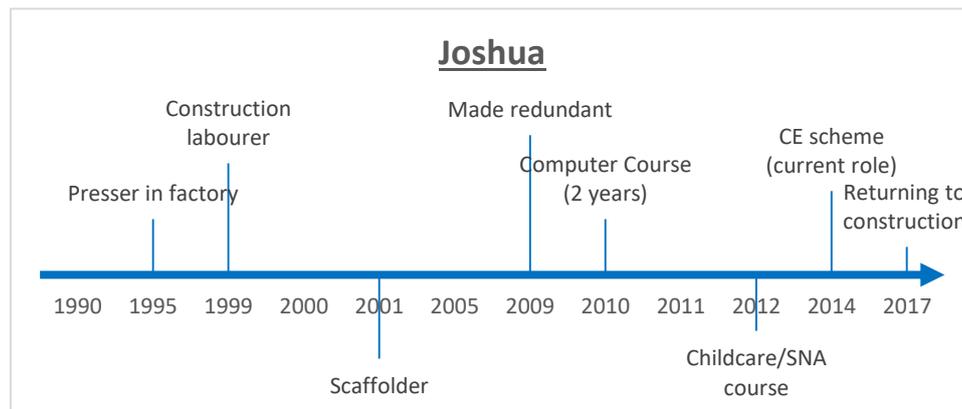


Figure 5.9 Joshua's timeline

Joshua came to ECEC late in life, having worked in a factory, followed by construction for eleven years, first as a labourer and then as a scaffolder. In 2009, he was made redundant when the economy crashed. He spent two years doing a computer course but felt that he would not be able to sit at a desk all day. At the end of the computer course he was given the choice of completing a basic course in ECEC (FETAC 5) or green energy. He chose the former as he had been encouraged to do so by family members who had commented on his natural competence. During this time, he also did some training as a SNA. In 2014, he took up a place on a community employment (CE) scheme designed to retrain/upskill people who are unemployed. CE schemes run for twelve months to three years (depending on circumstances), after which, it is expected that the candidate will take up full time employment (Government of Ireland, 2021a). Joshua describes loving his work in the ECEC sector. He describes the reactions to his presence as initially reticent but that

they settle with familiarity. Joshua’s CE scheme was to be completed in September 2017 after which he was reluctantly returning to scaffolding as the industry had picked up and once CE scheme in which he was participating came to an end, he would no longer benefit from assistance with his mortgage, something he could not maintain on the salary of an ECEC worker.

The issue of pay and being able to maintain a reasonable standard of living is a common theme in gender balance discourse. Joshua’s experience, while unique reflects social responsibilities, in particular of men, in terms of being able to provide as the breadwinner (Besnard and Diren, 2010; Connell, 2009; Jones and Aubrey, 2019). His is a particularly stark illustration, having to leave a job he loved or risk losing his home. He also reflects on the accidental nature of his entry and the community employment scheme in offering him that first taste of the work. His reporting of initial reticence followed by acceptance also reflects a persistent theme.

Martin

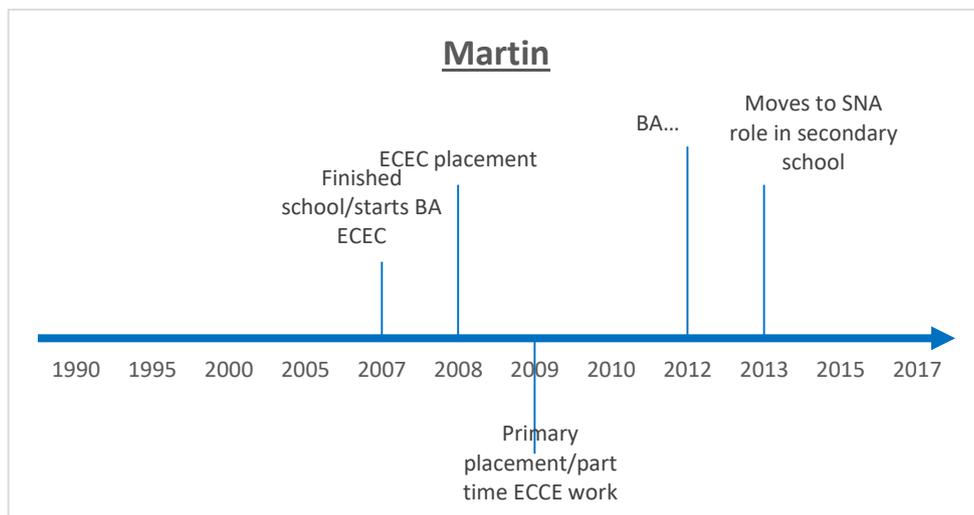


Figure 5.10 Martin’s timeline

Martin is twenty-six years old. He completed his leaving certificate in 2007 and at sixteen years old went straight into a BA in ECEC. It wasn’t his first choice but rather seen as a route into primary

teaching which required higher CAO (Central Applications Office) points and a minimum competency in the Irish language. He saw ECEC as a related area that might afford him the opportunity to pursue his intended career in primary teaching. He received no careers guidance from school, in fact he said that he was encouraged to do 'anything but' but that his dad was the most supportive proponent of it. On his first day on the programme, he was the only man in a group of 72 students. He said that he almost left that first day, until he saw another male student enter the room. They are still friends today. His first placement was in a family resource centre which he loved. He described having approached a number of services before the resource centre but feels that in hindsight it was the best place he could have been. When his second placement period came along, he completed it in a primary school, still with the intention of pursuing primary teaching afterwards, but found that he disliked the primary experience with large classes, lack of opportunity for individualised attention and a heavy curricular burden. Immediately after his BA studies, he completed a taught master's while continuing to work part time in the family resource centre in which he completed his first placement experience. While there, he worked with all ages, but his constant role was with afterschool children. He loved his time in the crèche and was not deterred by being 'yer man who works in the crèche... in the purple tunic.' On completion of his master's degree in 2012, he was offered a position as an SNA in a nearby post-primary school in a new ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) class attached to the school, that had just opened. At the same time, he was offered a part time role teaching adult education ECEC (FETAC) to a group of male students and from that was offered a temporary teaching position in a regional college on the ECEC programme. Martin has since fully moved into the realm of adult education and away from the area of ECEC having been attracted by the prospect of better pay and conditions. He bemoans the lack of professional standing of a sector

that has so much responsibility. He has fond memories of his time in ECEC. He describes his experience as very positive with very supportive colleagues and management. Any initial parental surprise at his presence very quickly made way to acceptance as he built relationships. He describes one negative experience where parents of a little girl raised concerns about him being involved in intimate care, but his manager supported him, and they very soon accepted his role.

Martin is the only man of those interviewed that went from school directly into an ECEC degree programme, but it was as a route to primary teaching, a sector also low in the numbers of men, but considerably higher than ECEC at approx. 14% (Department of Education, 2020c). His decision reflects a hierarchy within education where men are predominantly at the top, both in terms of the level of education being provided and in terms of the leadership structures (Department of Education, 2020c; Roberts-Holmes, 2003; Skelton, Francis and Valkanova, 2003). Indeed, his most consistent role within an environment that caters for children from birth to twelve being in after-school provision or the older of the children is symptomatic of this. He, like Joshua reports the pay and status of the role, particularly in light of the responsibility of the care and education of young as being inadequate and one of the factors that drew him away.

Jamie

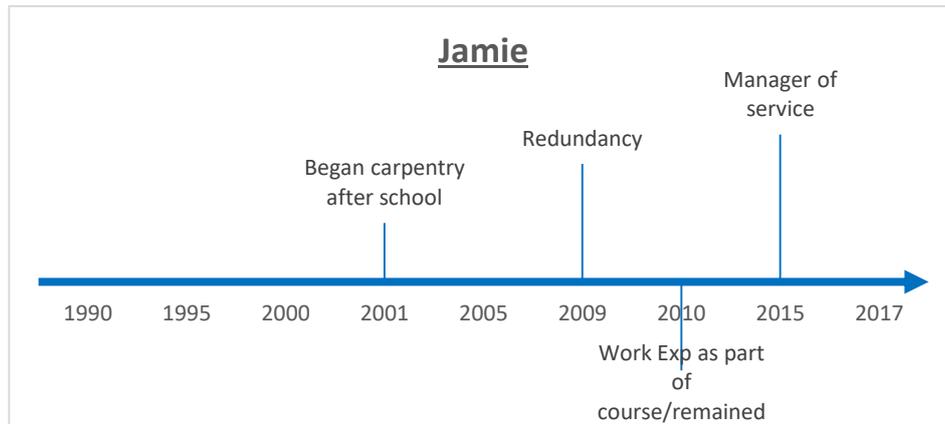


Figure 5.11 Jamie's timeline

Jamie was a carpenter for seven years before the recession of 2007/2008. He had always had a practical aptitude and construction or engineering were his planned career paths. He had no careers guidance in school directing him to ECEC. On being made redundant, he spent some time trying to get work before being encouraged to do IT by the careers advisor attached to the Department of Social Protection job centre. When Jamie indicated that he had no interest in IT but might like to do something with sports or children, he was directed to the local community college. He says he contacted a number of crèches to gauge the appetite for having a male worker to mixed responses. One provider indicated that they were open to having a male worker but that some parents may not be. On starting his basic training course (FETAC 5), he got work experience two days per week in a large activity based ECEC setting and has remained on working there for the last seven years. Initially, his experience was in the afterschool. After the year, he got full time work in the crèche, which meant working with younger children. He remained in the crèche for three or four years and completed his higher certificate (FETAC 6) before taking up the manager position which he has held now for two years. He feels that despite the initial mixed responses of ECEC services to his gender, it was a positive factor in his recruitment in this case. In terms of

objections to his role, he describes a small number of instances where parents have questioned men doing intimate care, but he says that his manager, though initially inclined to change practice, was supportive as he now is with his staff. On future plans, Jamie is happy where he is and has no plans to move on in the near future. He is completing an additional (FETAC) level 6 qualification in crèche management but doesn't see himself going on to complete his BA as he prefers practice to academic pursuits.

Jamie's trajectory echoes that of Joshua and Alan in some ways. All three were in construction and made redundant. In Jamie and Joshua's cases, they were first encouraged to pursue IT but it did not appeal to either of them. Jamie reports mixed responses but overall sees his presence as accepted and perhaps even an advantage. This is something which will be discussed in chapters six and nine in relation to recruitment practices. He also highlights intimate care as a potential issue for parents but reflects on the importance of the response of the service to such queries. This is in contrast to Robert's experience of having been excluded from intimate care in his early career in order to protect him as the worker. Risk of abuse and intimate care has been given considerable attention in literature (Bergström et al., 2016; Besnard and Diren, 2010; Finkelhor et al., 1998 cited in Owen, 2003; Woltring, 2012) on male participation the ECEC sector with a variety of perspectives. In many of the narratives that will be presented in chapter eight the issue of intimate care and parents' responses will be considered in depth.

Tracy

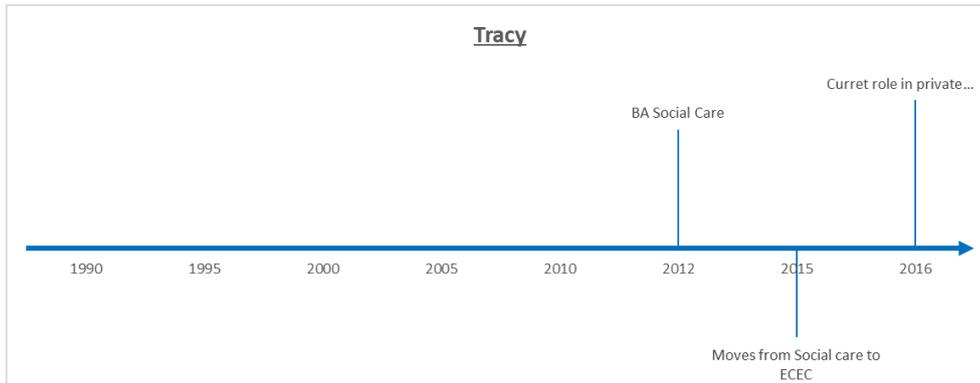


Figure 5.12 Tracy's timeline

On completing post-primary education, Tracy took up a course for SNA which she loved and as a result pursued a BA in Applied Social Studies but discovered that her passion was with children rather than other areas of the field. While she felt she would enjoy working as an SNA, it was a time when funding had been cut and SNA roles were in short supply. Looking to a related line of work, she began applying to crèches. Her previous basic training as a special needs assistant allowed her to meet the minimum criteria for working in ECEC and she has since completed her higher certificate (FETAC 6). She has been in the ECEC sector now for two and a half years – a year and a half in another private chain crèche and a year in her current role in a large activity-based crèche. Her main area of experience to date has been with 'wobblers' (1-2-year-olds) but has just recently moved up to preschool. People's reactions to her choice of career tend to be awe in being able to work with a number of small children but family delight in her stories of her work. When asked about careers guidance, she states that she did not receive any but focused on her own interests and knew that she was not inclined towards office work. Tracy thinks that there is a societal expectation that women should do the caring work but she feels men may command more respect from parents. In terms of her future plans, Tracy hopes to remain working with young children but sees herself perhaps moving into a child protection or advocacy role like

Barnardo's where some of her social care training may be put to good use.

Tracy is one of a number of workers whose first experience with children was as an SNA. Interestingly, this role requires no formal qualifications and on securing a stable contract, commands better wages and terms and conditions than ECEC (Department of Education and Skills, 2020b). However, when the Irish economy was poor, funding for SNA's was reduced considerably (Smyth, 2010). As a cognate area, it appears to provide a route into the sector for workers who may not have already had prior experience working with children. Tracy comments on knowing that she did not want to work in an office. This sentiment is reflected in the narratives of other workers such as Joshua and Jamie, who described himself as more hands-on or practical. Given the number of men whose previous roles were in construction, the practical, non-office-based work, may have been an influence.

Patrick

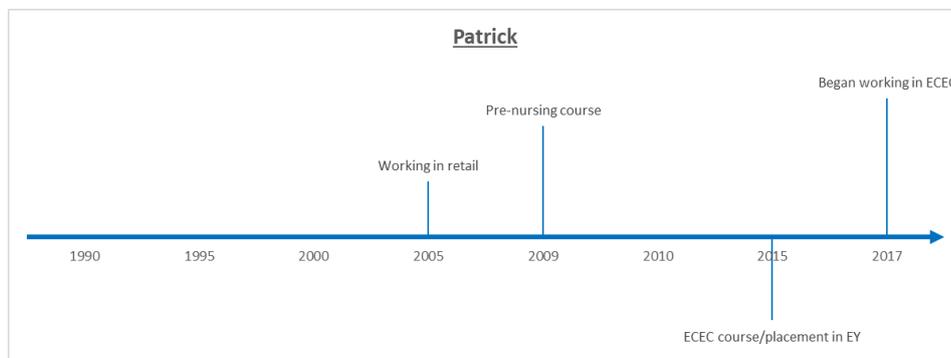


Figure 5.13 Patrick's timeline

Patrick began his working life in retail, where he spent ten years before completing a course in pre-nursing. From there he became a carer in a foundation for children with life-limiting conditions. He found the work challenging due to its nature and returned to education in 2015 and completed his basic training and higher certification in ECEC (FETAC 5 & 6) with an associated special needs assistant element. He also trains cadets in a medical

response volunteer service and has a passion for seeing the development of the people he teaches. His placement during his certification was in his current employment, where on the first day a parent commented on his gender and that she did not want him near her child. This experience made Patrick question his choice, but about a week later, the parent returned and apologised, having gotten to know him a bit better. 2017, the year in which he was interviewed was his first full year working in ECEC. He works in a small two-person service and as a result his role includes deputy manager. The children range in age from two and a half to twelve years. In terms of his decision to enter the profession, he attributes his guidance to his late aunt who pushed for him to pursue it. He describes himself as being naturally drawn to children and enjoying the company of his niece and friends' children. Patrick attended a mixed post primary school but received no careers guidance indicating ECEC as a career path, but rather suggesting paramedics based on his membership of a volunteer medical response service. In his practice, Patrick's key children are mostly boys, so they can relate, and he feels parents take him more seriously in relation to administrative and management tasks. Looking forward, Patrick plans to stay in the sector and pursue his BA once he has a little more experience behind him.

Situations with parents, as reported by Patrick, have come up across many of the men's narratives, but none of the women's and have been previously indicated in the literature (Fine Davis et al., 2005; King, 2015; Walshe & Healy-Magwa, 2012). Patrick's comment on being key worker for mostly boys, reflects another phenomenon about men's role in particular with boys in terms of role modelling and dealing with difficult behaviour as reported by Ed. Further examples of this will be seen in the chapters that follow and will be discussed in the context of the theoretical framework and existing literature (Brownhill, 2014; Cremers et al., 2010; Connell, 2009; Cooney and Bittner, 2001). Patrick also comments on the family

influence of his aunt in encouraging him to pursue ECEC. This is something that Martin reported in relation to his father. Influences of family and friends will be considered in chapter six. One final comment which is reflective of both Tracy's belief about men experiencing more respect from parents and Ed's reflection on his role a man elevating him, Patrick comments on being taken more seriously as a man. This will be discussed in chapter eight.

Pam

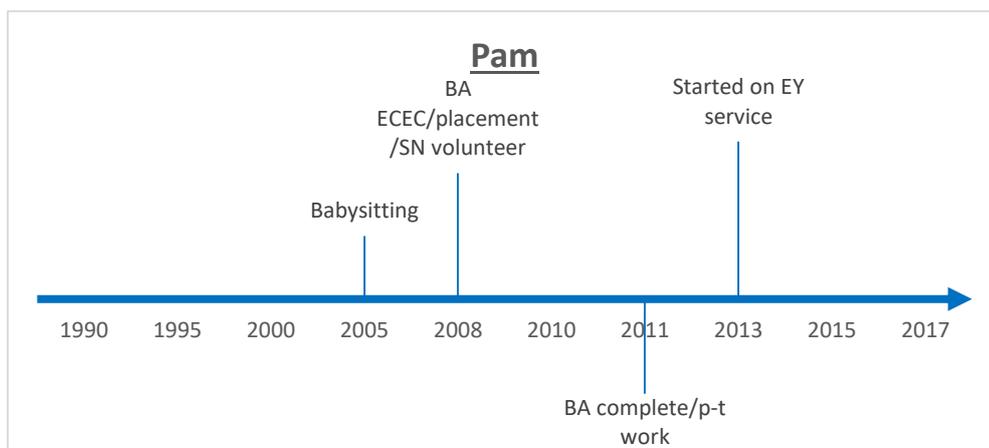


Figure 5.14 Pam's timeline

Pam has always had an interest in working with children. She has been babysitting since she was fourteen years old and has many younger siblings and cousins. Her first choice of course on graduating from school, where she attended a mixed private school, was paediatric nursing, but circumstances prevented her from taking the place and so she opted for ECEC and is glad that she did. She graduated with her BA (hons) ECEC in 2011 and has worked full time since, eventually setting up her own small service in a large regional town. During her studies she did childminding and volunteer work. Her placements during college were in family resource centres, a primary school and a foundation for children with additional needs. Her work prior to setting up her own service included some time in an international full-time day care in Germany and working in the baby room of a crèche in a city. She has been running her own service for five years now. She received no careers

guidance suggesting ECEC as an option prior to commencing her studies. She runs a small sessional service (see chapter 1 for explanation) and employs one male educator. She reports having cameras installed as there is still a stigma attached to men working with children which she attributes to historical clerical abuse revelations that have persisted in Ireland in recent years. Her attitude is that a male with the same qualifications and vetting should be expected to do the same work. Future plans for Pam include the possibility of reducing her hours to part time and pursuing a master's degree. She would also like to see herself starting a family in that time, but her long term plans remain in the sector.

Pam, like Sharon, Mary and Robert, began her ECEC career early and has stayed the course. She was not quite ten years in the sector at the time of interview but indicates that she will remain in some capacity. While not her first choice she, like Martin chose the BA straight out of school as an alternative and so her first work was in ECEC. Having had some experience of children through babysitting in her teens, her two choices for further study and career were both child-related: paediatric nursing and ECEC. Both she and Martin had clear paths in mind when leaving school in contrast to many of the other workers who entered by accident or convenience. Her comment in relation to having cameras installed for her colleague's protection echoes Robert's report of being excluded from nappy changing for his own protection. Issues of risk persist in the literature (Bergström et al., 2016; Besnard and Diren, 2010; Finkelhor et al., 1998; Owen, 2003; Woltring, 2012) and in the men's narratives creating a consciousness of their gender that may not exist in women's experiences.

Sean

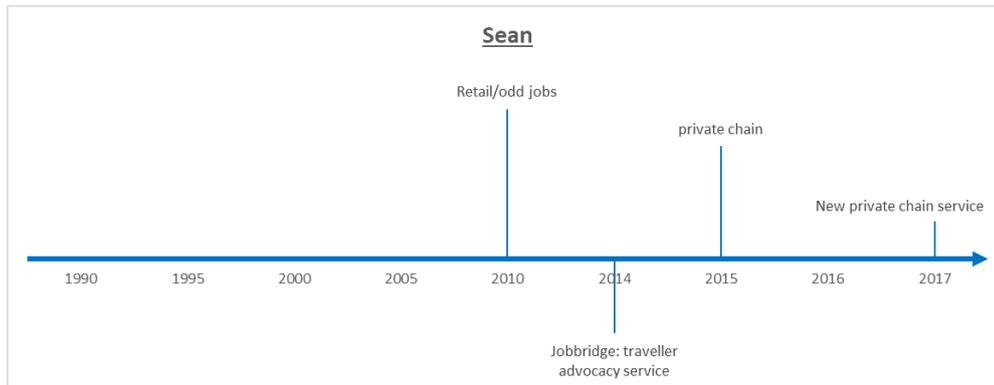


Figure 5.15 Sean's timeline

Sean 'fell' into ECEC when forced to make the decision between IT, ECEC and cooking in order to reskill while receiving social welfare payments. Not able to see himself in either of the other sectors and describing himself as 'lost', he chose ECEC. Before that, he claims he enjoyed his twenties and drifted through jobs which included bar work and retail. Having engaged in the course, once he did his first placement, he knew ECEC was for him. He describes himself as not academic but having found ECEC, is considering pursuing a qualification in primary teaching. His first job was working with a Traveller group and despite initial unexpressed nerves on both sides, he really enjoyed the role and got on well. This role was on a Job Bridge (unpaid internship, Department of Education and Skills, 2011) scheme and Sean remained there as a *childcare assistant* for nine months after which he was taken on in a part time capacity and as maternity cover until those contracts ended and funding was no longer available. Children in the setting ranged in age from six months to five years but included drop-in and sessional which meant numbers varied. From there he moved to a private chain crèche and worked with pre-Montessori children (3-4 years). His most recent role of four weeks finds him in the Montessori preschool room. Reactions to his choice were generally positive from his supportive parents and female friends, many of whom were working in the sector. He states that he received no careers guidance in his mixed

post primary school and that being from a disadvantaged area, the goal was to get students to Leaving Certificate rather than considering their options beyond. He feels his gender worked in his favour in recruitment despite his experience in one of his settings to exclude him from intimate care which has made him conscious of his gender. He describes experiences with parents as being initially hesitant but has never had any problems. Sean likes working on the floor with children and has no immediate aspirations for a supervisory role. He has given himself until he is thirty years old, to make a decision on whether to pursue a BA qualification in either ECEC or primary teaching, but either way he wishes to remain in direct contact with young children.

Sean echoes some of the other experiences of initial reticence followed by acceptance to their presence, but interestingly his most negative experience, unlike the other men interviewed, was with his employer's attitude in excluding him from toileting which gave rise to feelings of self-consciousness. Sean describes himself as having been 'lost' but only coming by ECEC accidentally and finding his feet. His narrative will be considered in the context of the themes in subsequent chapters.

Geoff

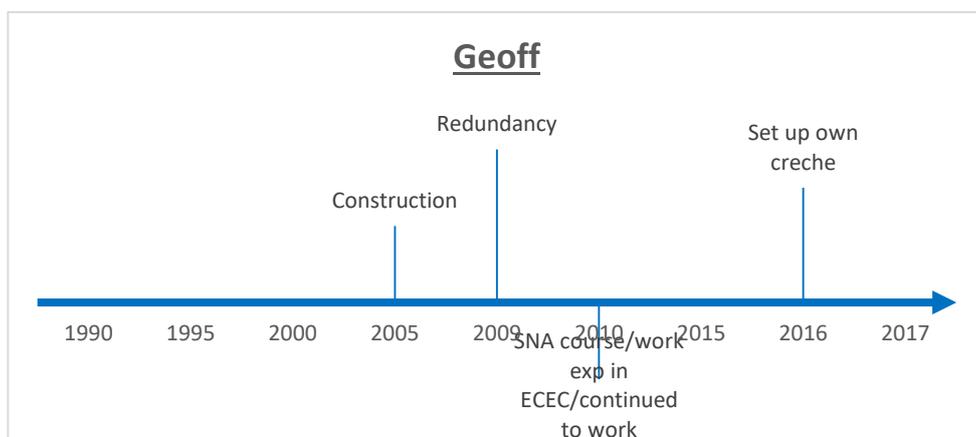


Figure 5.16 Geoff's timeline

Geoff switched from a career in construction to ECEC when Ireland fell into recession and construction work dried up. He wound down the small company he ran with his brother who then emigrated to Australia. Geoff, having met his current partner decided to remain on in Ireland and look for work but the lack of it began to get him down. He said he'd always had a love of working with children from his days as a schoolboy football coach and referee, something he got into as a result of spending time with his friend and his friend's young son. Enjoying it, he decided he wanted to pursue something related to that. So, six years ago, at age thirty, he completed an SNA course, which gave him some direction. As part of the course he had to do twenty hours' placement but was concerned that once that was complete, he would be aimless again and so applied for a community employment role in a large early years' service to work with an autistic child on the basis that he could also use this role to complete the placement hours for the course. He loved the work and was offered the opportunity to pursue the basic qualification in ECEC (FETAC) during which time he was assigned mornings in another branch of the service. His experience during his time here began with the older children, followed with the older preschool group and ended up with babies after another staff member moved on. Geoff was involved in all areas of intimate care but describes being aware of his gender and announcing when he was doing anything with the children. He learned afterwards that a couple of parents had raised concerns, but the manager reassured them that he was qualified and vetted and asked them to give him a chance. Nothing more ever came of those queries. After two and a half years, as the CE scheme was ending, Geoff had to make a decision. Having moved out of the area in which he was working and the morning service closing for the summer months, he decided to either look for work in an ECEC service closer to his new home or set up his own service. In consultation with his partner, he chose the latter which would also allow him to have his new-born daughter with him.

He had hoped to set up a full-day care service and in a couple of years offer sessional preschool under the ECCE scheme, but the required modifications to his home would be too costly and so he has registered as a childminder and currently looks after five children. He initially worried about parents taking 'a punt' but it has worked out well and he is happy with the set-up. He is in operation since September 2016.

His decision to enter the field was met with surprise from those who knew him. His mum was supportive and offered to come to help him when he set up initially, an offer that he doesn't feel would be extended if he had been female. Geoff's qualifications include basic SNA training (FETAC 5) and modules in both SNA and ECEC at higher certificate level (FETAC 6). He intends completing his level 6 ECEC major award qualification. Looking to the future Geoff sees himself remaining where he is and developing his service, increasing the physical facilities, and moving towards offering more services. This is what he wants to be doing.

Geoff's trajectory, while reminiscent of some of the other men in so far as construction had been his first calling and special needs assistant training forming part of some of his experiences, in his case, he had an idea from previous experiences that he might enjoy working with children. Family support played a role in his decision, but he also felt some of the support offered was gendered in its nature. He too, reported initial concerns or hesitation from parents, but hadn't had any specific incident to report unlike Martin and Alan. His consciousness of his gender echoes that of Sean and which we will see with Anthony. It will be further explored in chapter seven.

Anthony

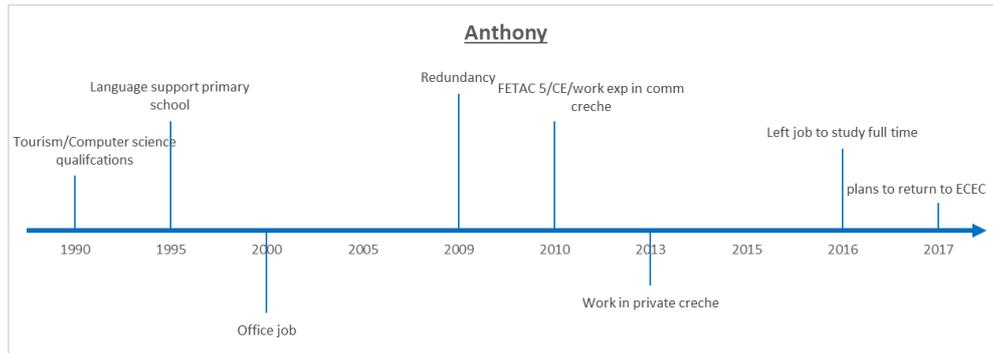


Figure 5.17 Anthony's timeline

Anthony had worked in primary school settings in his homeland of Spain on foot of a tourism degree, supporting South American children's language development. He also obtained qualifications in computer science and graphic design. However, since moving to Ireland, he worked in an office until he was made redundant in 2009. He hadn't considered a job in ECEC until the careers advisor attached to the job centre took a look at his CV and suggested it to him based on his previous primary school experience in Spain. He took on his FETAC five qualification and then entered a city community crèche on a community employment (CE) scheme, where another man worked. After completing his CE scheme, he went to work in another ECEC service in an Irish tourist town, but not having a car and a three-hour roundtrip by bus, influenced him to quit his job and take up his FETAC level six training full time. Now at fifty, he says he has found his passion working with three to five-year olds. His family and friends were very supportive as they felt the role was perfect for him. He's very quick to attribute differences in practice and responses down to personality, age and his accent rather than gender. He stresses the importance of experience as he recounts an incident in his job where a parent objected to his having a child on his knee and through lack of experience, the service over-reacted. Both he and the service manager sought and received support and guidance. He contacted the Men in Childcare Network and she contacted the County Childcare Committee, and the matter

was resolved through the guidance provided. He describes it as a learning experience and stresses the importance of policies and procedures. As the only man, he feels on the outside, but it doesn't bother him as he describes himself as not very social and he often will make jokes and admits to being a 'messenger', but he doesn't crave the inclusion. He characterises himself as sporty but not handy and was only once ever asked to complete a DIY task. He sees himself working with the children long term and has no aspirations for leadership or management. He just wants to be with the children and to let the manager look after the other matters.

Anthony's trajectory has elements in common with some of the other male participants: redundancy and options presented. In his case, he did get guidance, from the careers advisor in the job centre. Whether ECEC would have been considered as an option for him, had he not had some experience in primary previously is unknown. His experience with a parent objection, while distressing, he sees as a learning experience. This incident will be considered in more detail in chapter eight. Anthony describing himself as a 'messenger' is reflective of a theme in which some workers describe men's interactions with the children as more humorous in nature and will be presented in relation to pedagogy and practice in chapter seven. Finally, Anthony describes himself as being on the 'outside' and while he claims it does not bother him, as do other men in this research, it may contribute to an awareness of his gender in addition to the critical incident with the parents described above.

5.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, brief profiles of all sixteen participants have been presented, with some general comments on themes identified in their narratives. The research questions at the outset concerned factors that influence entry and trajectories of men in ECEC and how those differ with that of women. Factors such as accidental entry,

redundancy and issues of careers guidance, or lack thereof in many cases arise for both. But in many cases, family influence played a part. None of the participants actively chose ECEC as a first choice and careers guidance was inconsistent and lacking. The economic downturn in 2007 is linked to at least five of the male workers and its impact on the construction industry on four of them. In terms of trajectories and experiences, men reported being conscious of their gender and significant incidents that impacted their experience (in both positive and negative ways) where women did not report any such incidents. In fact, the men's interviews were considerably longer than their female counterparts, recounting experiences which will be discussed in the chapters that follow. Gender differences in practice were reported by some but not others and has only been briefly touched on in this chapter in relation to Anthony and Mary but will be considered in more detail in chapter seven. The chapter following this, will consider the entry routes and themes arising in more detail.

6 Armed with Naivety: Entry Stories

‘When I talk to my wife about it and reflect about it... me wife came out with a great saying and I it sticks with me to this day, is I went into this armed with naivety, like I never gave it any thought to the fact that I was a man, I never gave it any thought to the fact that there wouldn't be men in childcare... so I was kind of a bit naive about the whole thing, but... because I didn't think of that, it didn't stop me, it didn't become a barrier I just kind of went with it.’ (Alan)

6.1 Introduction

The entry stories described by the participants in this research had many similarities, some gendered and others more general. Four of the men in the research moved from male dominated sectors, specifically construction into ECEC. Their move occurred in the period between 2007 and 2010 when Ireland's previously buoyant construction industry crashed with the economic recession and many men found themselves redundant and in need of reskilling. Their reasons for choosing ECEC over alternatives varied. In addition to this, many of the participants described their entry into ECEC as accidental or incidental, for example, Sean described himself as 'falling into it'. This chapter will consider the factors that influenced the men's entry to ECEC. It will compare their routes with those of their female colleagues. Similarities can be seen in their trajectories in some cases and in others there are distinct differences. The findings of the careers guidance teacher focus group will also be presented in the context of the men's experiences. During the analysis of the data, an ecological system was evident where some themes related to wider societal beliefs and structures and others were situated in the microsystem, influencing the men and their paths directly. This will be considered more fully in the discussion chapter.

6.2 Entry

The Economic Downturn

Many of the men in this research attributed their route into ECEC to wider economic influences, a macro level factor. In the cases of four of the participants: Alan, Joshua, Jamie and Geoff, it was the financial crisis and economic crash beginning in 2007. All four men had worked in the previously strong construction sector and were made redundant when the market collapsed.

'I got laid off when, when the crash happened and so I was going to have to up-skill... and I didn't really want to go back into engineering because that had kind of changed dramatically from when I started in it and I kinda wanted to work in a humanities kinda based job but I didn't know really know what I wanted to do but I was always good with kids, always good around kids so I can't remember how I came across it but I in [area in north of the city] they were running the childcare, the level 5 and you could do it per module... so I said I'd speculate... and see how it goes. So, I went in and I did that, really liked it, found I was kind of interested in it and so because I was interested in it, I was engaged in it, and that was it.' (Alan)

The reasons for choosing ECEC as an option over other careers for re-training represents a more micro-level decision. For Alan, after twenty years in engineering, he felt he wanted something different. He had an interest in humanities and his redundancy provided an opportunity to re-train based on that interest. Geoff reported a similar decision process. But he also reflects on his personal circumstances, settling down with a partner, as an influence.

'I used to work in bars and on the building sites and stuff like that and...and me brother who I was working with, the two of

us had our own little company... but he went to Australia. Now, he asked me to go with him, but I said no because I'd just met me present partner... But I always wanted to get back to working with kids because I done a lot of coaching and refereeing down the years and it was always underage stuff it was little with the little kids, always enjoyed it and I sort of saw that as me opportunity, I think I was thirty at the time when he left and I think yeah, probably about thirty and he and that, I says "either I do it now or I never do it." (Geoff)

For Jamie, sports or children were his stated preferences when attending the employment centre which led to careers advisor suggesting ECEC. He admitted what while he stated the preference, he never would have considered that ECEC would be an option pointing to the lack of visibility of the sector.

'So, when I was out of work and they sent me there [the employment centre], I was just having a chat with him basically and ... I just said, "oh either sports or working with kids" ... I think he was kind of taken aback a bit as well and he was like "oh would you really like to?"... and he goes "I'll put you in contact with these places."' (Jamie)

The surprise of the careers advisor in the employment centre suggests that the idea of a man re-skilling to work with children was not something he had previously experienced or presented as an option to others in a similar situation. The fact that these men began their careers in the male dominated construction sectors in the first instance may reflect societal gendered expectations of men's jobs. This will be considered later in the chapter in relation to the careers guidance which led men on their career trajectories.

Joshua's decision was less clear. He had also not considered work with children as an option. He had tried a course in computing but

found the sedentary nature of the work at odds with his affinity for outdoor and active work.

'I couldn't sit at a computer eight hours a day. I just couldn't do it, cos after been spending me life outdoors, do you know what I mean? So, it wasn't for me, right? So, then it was during that transition, when I went looking for courses, there it was in front of me [ECEC] and there was the green energy thing. So, I discussed it with me partner and she said "yeah, why not?", so I went and did level five and then level six.' (Joshua)

Ed's entry to ECEC preceded Joshua, Alan, Jamie and Geoff by many years, but his case also reflects changing economic factors. He said:

'I was I was lucky because they automated something and I was made redundant, I mean I might never have left but so I worked that job in ten years and that was in [East Coast US] and then what I when I was terminated I kind of kicked around for a while and then I moved out to the west coast to [West Coast US].' (Ed)

Ed's entry into ECEC, like the others came as a result of a redundancy, but like Joshua's, he didn't have a sense that ECEC was for him. It was an option that was presented to him at a time when he needed work, thus setting him on his ECEC path.

While the economic and occupational shifts were catalysts in the men's entry, there were personal and individual reasons for choosing ECEC over alternative options in the cases of the four men leaving the construction industry. Some of these individual factors can be seen in the trajectories of others who did not come from construction. In Ed's case, the automation of his job left him as he describes 'kicking around'. This state of uncertainty is born out in many of the men's narratives.

Of the women interviewed for this study, only one reported moving into ECEC as a result of a redundancy. Jenny reported working in a factory before being made redundant when it closed. She saw this development as an opportunity to pursue her interest in working with children an interest that was cemented when she completed work experience alongside her training

'I knew they ran a FETAC childcare course but you also, as well as doing the course, you got the experience of working in the school Monday to Friday, so I just went in first of all just for experience, the course had already started, but went in and just pretty much instantly knew, yeah I love this and that was it, really.' (Jenny)

While the catalyst for change may have been the redundancy, in Jenny's case, she knew she wanted to work with children, and this provided the opportunity. She described her previous career trajectory as completing a secretarial course out of school which led to her job in the factory, a route followed by many women. While she acknowledged her interest in working with children, she also reflected that she might never have left the factory had it not been for the redundancy. The opportunity provided by redundancy is a common feature of the men's narratives.

Chance, loss and opportunity

Many of the men described being at a critical moment in their lives, or a fork in the road and seeing it as an opportunity to take a chance on a previously absent option. The ways in which the men described that opportunity varied. In many cases, the men expressed feelings of loss, whether that was as a result of redundancy or just uncertainty about the direction their lives and careers were taking, coupled with then being presented with ECEC as a lucky opportunity. Sean described his decisive moment thus:

'Well... I fell into it. I was on social welfare and I had to do a course and it was between IT, childcare and cooking... so I just chose childcare... [when] we started our work placement... I knew this is what I wanted to do... So, I was interested but I never thought I would work with children until I started... So, it couldn't have been more fall into it. Presented 1, 2 or 3, I picked 2...No, I was lost.' (Sean)

Ed described his position as not being 'gung-ho about what am I going to do with my life, I was not. I didn't have any notion'. Anthony reported a number of career moves over a long period of time, only stumbling on ECEC as a result of his redundancy:

'Ah I got very lost, d'you know I was really lost and so I mean I working ... I moved work from time to time after three four or five years you know so ... when I said that [ECEC] to everybody it made sense, they said "well now you're starting to talk."' (Anthony)

While some of the men described that sense of loss, Joshua Alan and Geoff also described ECEC as an opportunity:

'For the first time in my life I was out on a limb, I've worked every day since I left school and I was always in engineering... I was made redundant I was in a position now to actually make me own choices ...and I had kind of always wanted to work in the humanities to be honest with you.... the, moving to childcare was just "right ok, here's the opportunity now to make me own decision, based on what I'm interested in and what I like" and you know working with people was the idea and again I wasn't sure but the one thing I did know was that I was good with kids and it was something worth pursuing anyway.' (Alan)

Robert's route in was through an interview for a job that he understood to be for primary school and while the notion terrified him, he now describes himself as lucky and his error as fortuitous:

'so I took the position and I was a bit nervous initially, my supervisor said... like it took me about three weeks to get out from behind the sandpit, cos I was afraid I was going to sneeze and they were all going to start crying, but then once I settled into it, and I suppose I was oblivious to what early years was, do you know and once I actually started to get into it, enjoyed it. Never looked back. Do you know, and I suppose things happen for a reason and that's one of the best mistakes I've ever gone by applying for the job.' (Robert)

Robert's report reflects another recurring theme which is that for some of the men (Jamie, Geoff, Robert, Anthony), they had an idea that they might like to work with children but had no awareness that ECEC was a viable option until it was presented to them.

Many of the men describe their entry as accidental, a description also used by Karen who began her working life in a large supermarket which had an on-site drop-in crèche. Originally, assigned to the bakery, she found herself moved to the crèche when staff were required (in a time when ECEC not subject to minimum qualifications) and found that she enjoyed the role:

'It was kind of really by accident. ... they offered me the chance to work in that [crèche] full time and then I realised I actually enjoyed working with the children and done my FETAC and... I kinda went from there.' (Karen)

Karen and Jenny reflected on similar circumstances described by many of the men interviewed in that they hadn't initially set out with ECEC in mind, both going into jobs typical for young women, but found their way to ECEC as a result of circumstance.

Taking a chance

Linked to the narratives of loss and opportunities were the men's reflections on chances along the way: for them to take a chance with uncharted territory, for services taking chances by employing men and, for those chance encounters where, as Anthony describes:

'It all came together... 'It was by chance, in 2009. I lost my job...[as] an office assistant, ok then but in Spain, [I] work[ed] in primary school as an assistant for children especially for children ah who came from South America.' (Anthony)

'So, for the manager in the crèche that took me in, and I will say I'm sure in her head, she might have been taking a chance, but I will say from day one to day end she supported me in every aspect, in every aspect, gave me experience in every room, where it might have been very easy to put me in with the after-schoolers.' (Martin)

Geoff also described how when he took the leap to set up his own ECEC service, families took a chance on the unknown:

'It's a bit of a double edged sword but it's you are pitching yourself to the one age group rather than having a three-year-old and a one-year-old and you know what I mean so it's eh, so as I said the mummies all knew each other outside coming up here and as I said, fair play to them cos it's giving me a living but eh they took a punt on it you know.' (Geoff)

Non-Academic and practical focus

Returning to Joshua's description of his rejection of IT as not suitable due to its sedentary nature, several the men reflected on their academic aptitude in unfavourable terms. It would seem that ECEC appealed to them because of its more active non-desk-based nature:

'I've always been a hands-on person... School just wasn't my thing, like I didn't do really well. I wasn't like I was quite smart. ...Ah I did the FETAC five first, then I did a FETAC level six a few years later... I don't like college.' (Jamie)

'I was not a stellar student...And that's one of the things I like about the job. It's varied, you know I couldn't work in an office. It's just the way that it engages you, that's it's a you've to think on your feet, that's another remarkable quality of the work.' (Ed)

'I'm not academic, I didn't do well in the Leaving Cert. I enjoyed my twenties. I went to all the college parties with the friends, but I didn't study or do anything myself...' (Sean)

'I wasn't amazing at school, I you know I, I knew my limit in terms of points [the system for applying for university courses in Ireland] ... So, I knew my limit, in terms of my options and I knew what I enjoyed, and I knew that I could do a particular degree and then get to where I wanted to be another way. So, I said "right, I'll take a chance. I'll take a chance at doing it" you know? And I did. I just took a chance and it worked out well, in fairness.' (Martin)

Temporal factors

The age at which men entered ECEC and the impact of timing and age on their trajectories has come up repeatedly. Many of the men

entered ECEC later in their careers. Alan and Geoff both reported their entry into the construction sector as expected during the Celtic Tiger Boom while Anthony, Ed and Sean had little experience in their twenties to draw from and influence their trajectories into ECEC. Ed reflected on the fact that while he had younger siblings, it was never his role to help out with them at home because of his gender. Anthony reflects on his career trajectory to discovering ECEC later in life:

‘The thing is that you know I have if you've seen my CV is ah but now everything came together, but it was, you know I am nearly fifty, and I just have the computer science, it was when I was in my twenties, mistake and then, I started at twenty-five I went for graphic design and I have a qualification in graphic design.’ (Anthony)

Age comes up again in relation to their long-term futures and where they want to be:

‘I feel like at this point, I have woven together some really good ideas about how to be with children and I want to share that, you know. I don't think I don't think that, I am kind of aware, that I'm getting older, eh energy (laughs) diminishes, I don't think I'm... I don't think my engagement has diminished.’ (Ed)

Timing is also evident in relation to how the opportunities came to them at a time when they were lost or looking for a change or had changing personal circumstances. For example, Geoff's decision was influenced by his new partner and growing family and Ed's employment was influenced by his own children being in the crèche environment reflecting the almost serendipitous nature of the men's entry into the sector.

Age and Stage – women’s entry

In contrast to the temporal factors outlined above, and almost parallel to Geoff, Alan, Jamie and Joshua’s entry to construction, Mary, Sharon, Pam and Tracy described typical but differing routes into ECEC. Mary described it as:

‘An age and stage thing... I was I was quite young with two quite young children and my sister had just done a childcare course and she suggested that maybe I do likewise or look into likewise and that's what I did.’ (Mary)

It was seen as viable route for a young mother to balance the responsibilities of needing to earn a living and look after her children, something not experienced by Ed, who in a similar position with young children, struggled to find work in ECEC on relocating to Ireland:

‘She did, she never said it, but I believe it's because I was a man, you know? And then, it's like once I was, you know I remember going to a birthday party and she was there, you know and she could see me, do you know what I'm saying? And then she realised ok, he's actually, somebody who does, has experience with kids...’ (Ed)

Sharon’s route was assumed as an alternative to university which was not an option to her. Having done some work experience at GCSE level, she never questioned going elsewhere and began a course and working in a Montessori school in her locality straight out of school.

‘It was really the work experience at school and a combination of enjoying it but also not really knowing what my other options were to be honest, d’you know?’ (Sharon)

However, the low pay and envy of her peers' city lifestyles drew her away for a brief spell, but she missed the work and returned to it shortly before relocating to Ireland. She has been in the sector now for twenty-four years.

Pam reported early experiences of babysitting and volunteering in a centre for people with disabilities as influencing her choice. She had shortlisted her career choices to nursing or ECEC but was precluded from nursing on medical grounds and so took up a place on an ECEC programme and completed her BA, following which, she worked in a German Kindergarten before returning to Ireland and setting up her own service.

The routes described by Mary, Sharon and Pam suggest a route that was natural and expected of them when they were young as a natural progression from school and likely reflect the traditional role expectations of men and women. In Mary's case, ECEC suited her own parenting responsibilities; in Sharon's, it was the assumed natural route. Pam's previous experience as a babysitter influenced her decision, unlike Ed who, despite having younger siblings, had not been expected to take on a caring role. Ed's experience is also in contrast to Mary's where ECEC was a natural fit for a young mother, but not necessarily a young father. In keeping with the temporal theme, while Mary, Ed and Sharon all began their ECEC careers in the 90's and in a time when arguably traditional roles were more entrenched, Pam's trajectory is more recent, in the last ten years.

Alternative routes to cognate areas

Three of the men reported their route into ECEC as alternatives to their first choices. They represent men who entered the occupation in their younger years unlike those who had come from construction. Martin had aspirations to be a primary school teacher but did not have the requisite Irish language grades. (To be a primary teacher

in Ireland, applicants must have a required level of Irish language fluency):

'I actually always aspired to be a primary school teacher... Now, coming up close to Leaving Cert, the reality set in with the dreaded honours Irish which I did not have and I didn't have much interest in trying to get but even at that stage I said ok, I can't go and do a primary degree, ah to be a primary school teacher straight off the bat, so I might as well do a degree that's some way related... So, I decided to do Early Childhood education in [Regional town] Institute of Technology.' (Martin)

Patrick began working in children's hospice care, utilising his first responder training, but the nature of the work took its toll. However, he decided to stay working with children:

'Ok, before I started working in early childcare, I was actually a carer. I went and did pre-nursing back in 2009, qualified and went working with [children's hospice], so I loved working with the young kids, you know? Unfortunately, with [children's hospice], not the best thing, because they're life-threatening conditions so about two years ago I decided maybe I might go back and do something, so I went back and did my level 5 and level 6 in early childcare then.' (Patrick)

Patrick's route is similar to that of Tracy who took a route through social care and working as a SNA. When the climate for SNA's became difficult for securing work, she moved across to ECEC where she has been since. Robert, having not met the requirements to become a Garda (Irish police force), took the advice of a friend to use his experience as a scout leader, though as outlined earlier when he interviewed for a job in ECEC, he was unaware of the role:

‘when I left school at Leaving Cert I was adamant I was going to be a gard [sic] and unfortunately, eyesight wasn't there and I know a friend of mine had advised me I suppose to, if I'm looking at careers, maybe look at something I enjoy and maybe what I love doing and out I can make that into a career, so I suppose it came from there around, you know enjoying scouts, to looking at working with children.’ (Robert)

Role of employment schemes and SNA Roles

We can see from the men's responses that the recession played a role in their dramatic career changes, but within that, the role of employment schemes was common to many of them. Some of the men reported being assigned to Community Employment (CE) schemes. These are designed to support those receiving unemployment benefits with their income while re-skilling and keeping them active in the workforce. The role of CE schemes was not limited to those coming from construction (Geoff and Joshua) but also for men coming from other disciplines (Anthony and Robert), nor is it particular to the men with Mary also reporting her route commencing with an employment scheme.

‘I started as a CE worker in in a special school in [large regional town] like an SNA, would have been early, early nineties, so I got a year there and from there I sort of moved on to SNA'ing in another primary school and after doing that for about two or three years, I suppose it was mid-nineties and... So, it was mid-nineties and the first NCVA course came out in childcare, so I did that mid-nineties.’ (Robert)

‘When I finished my I finished my FETAC five in May, ok and I contact *Ed [who said] ‘let me know and you can go for a CE scheme’. So, I went in straight to [city community crèche].’ (Anthony)

'I came across a CE scheme, and the CE scheme then I had a look at it, and I went for an interview and they had a child there who was autistic, so when I was doing the interview, they asked do you have any questions and I said "yeah look as you know I'm doing my course...." really you know really felt I was going somewhere with it, and what happened then was, I was asked, there's a [location in city] in the city centre, directly across from the [corporate area].' (Geoff)

While Alan did not report having been on a community employment scheme, he did reflect on the fact that the schemes brought him in to contact with other men in the ECEC workplace:

'Working with other men directly in the rooms, this is the only service I've worked in, so we've two men on CE schemes here working with the kids...' (Alan)

Robert and Geoff both pointed to another factor common to many of the men, the role of working as special needs assistants (SNA), also reported by Geoff and Joshua. Men reported the CE schemes they were on giving them SNA roles, suggesting that initially even when they were given opportunities to work with children, it was outside of the ECEC arena. Jenny and Tracy also reported working as SNA's but their roles were not as a result of employment schemes but pursued out of personal interest. Conversely, Martin who started his education and employment in ECEC, later left for an SNA post.

Getting a flavour for the role

Many of the men interviewed had never had any previous concrete experience with children so the opportunity to try it out, gave them a sense of what the role would entail and indeed, if it was something worth pursuing. Many of them had never had that opportunity until the economic climate forced it. For Ed, Jamie, Sean and Alan, these first experiences had a strong impact.

'I had never stepped foot inside a crèche, you know, the idea of working in childcare seemed like a good idea but actually I had no idea what was entailed in working with children so I used to go in there for two hours every morning and I just kind of took to it.' (Alan)

'When I say that in my twenties I didn't know young children, I did actually previous to that never ever thinking of it as a career but it probably had a bearing on the fact when I walking into the classroom and that I my person recognised the caring nature of the work, there was some resonance for me to my previous experience, if that makes sense... '(Ed)

Martin spoke of his disappointment when he realised that primary, which he had long dreamed of, was not for him having had his first placement in the ECEC environment:

'My second year placement was in an early childhood care and education setting, crèche basically, which I absolutely loved. Loved it. Loved the one to one education, loved the time, loved the kind of ah you know interactions, and the structure and the routine and the bond, I suppose you build up with families and build up with the children and then I said, obviously enough with, with the primary school teaching in my head, that my third year placement would be in a primary school... and to my surprise, I didn't like it half as much as I thought I would, which is a bit, it was a bit disappointing I will say, and it was a bit of a shock to the system really.' (Martin)

The fact that the men never considered ECEC until such a time as they accidentally found themselves in a position of having to make a choice or getting a taste for the work, speaks to the visibility of ECEC as a career for men in particular in contrast to their female counterparts, three of whom were clear on their route and early entrants to the field.

6.3 Reactions

Family

The reactions men experienced fall into two categories: the reactions of family and the reactions of friends. For the most part, family reactions were positive. In some cases, it was the family members who encouraged the men to pursue ECEC. For example, Martin's father saw it as a route to his preferred career. In other cases, family members responded positively acknowledging that the work with young children would be a good fit. Martin juxtaposed his father's traditional male role with his support of Martin's pursuit of a traditionally female occupation

'My father is you know thirty-five years in the army, very disciplined, very structured, but in fact, he goes against the kind of stereotypical view of a of an army man discipline and so on, you know. He was the one who suggested early childhood care and education... he was like "no, no, no if that's [primary teaching] what you want to do, let's see what we can do with it" and he helped me.' (Martin)

In contrast to Martin, Robert, whose dad was also in a male dominated and masculine profession, wished to see Robert follow suit:

'My dad's reaction was would you not do a trade, (laughs)... Cos he, he was a plasterer himself. Mam was supportive'.
(Robert)

In Sean, Anthony, Joshua and Patrick's cases, relatives recognised their potential and were fully supportive of their choices, in many cases there was a relief at them finding something suited to them. Alan's wife was a little more reticent initially, not at his choice but the fact that it appeared to be a sudden decision:

'Well I suppose me wife would have kind of... rolled her eyes and went "ah here we go again, no I don't know, it's another kind of whimsical move", eh but she was all behind me, so she was fine with it, and she kind of knew, she knew I would have had it about me to kind of work with kids, so she was ok, but she kind of doubted that it would see itself through if I'm honest.' (Alan)

Geoff described his mother as supportive but felt she doubted his ability, offering to come and work with him initially when he set up his own service:

'Especially, when I was setting up now where she was supportive and everything, she, she was very much that "oh I'll move in for the first couple of months to help you because there's no way you'll be able to do it" ... While she was supportive, I think she, it took her a long time to accept that I could do it.' (Geoff)

Geoff's mother's opinion may have reflected a generational and societal understanding that looking after children was a woman's natural domain, a response not experienced by any of the women interviewed. Mary, Sharon, Pam and Jenny's parents expressed joy at their choice, with Tracy and Jenny's families relieved at them settling into a career.

'Well. to be honest, my ehm, my family kind of thought oh this is great' (Sharon)

'Oh God, I think they were quite proud of me at the time and quite happy' (Mary)

Friends

Many of the men talked about there being 'banter' or a good-natured mocking of their choice, but in some cases such as Martin and Geoff

reflected back on friends who grew to see the value of it or were enabled to recognise their potential. Alan reflected that the gender of his friends influenced the reactions he received, with female friends more likely to acknowledge the value of the work.

‘Friends were like, just I they, I think they were like, they didn't really know what to make of it because, like, like at that stage some of them wouldn't have had kids... so they wished me the best of luck but they'd really no idea what it was I was actually going to be doing... the female friends would have said, were more, would have been much more kind of interested in it, they were more interested in it and they kind of felt it had some value to it and it was worthwhile you know.’ (Alan)

Alan's experience reflected that of Robert, and which is reported elsewhere, that boys and young men often have no awareness of what ECEC is or what it entails and in fact, becomes a focus of jest:

‘like you get the usual bit of banter, lads "ah doing a woman's job" that kind of crap like but nothing... that's just lads being lads, and there wasn't anything cynical in it.’ (Jamie)

‘Did I get a slagging? Absolutely. 100% you know, "how many nappies did you change today?"’ (Martin)

‘Friends, some of them pulled the P.I.S.S, but like they know they know me too well like even on my days off, I have my niece or I might have a friend's child hanging off me.’ (Patrick)

‘A few of me mates now, the lads would go “are you mad? How can you put up with screaming children?”’ (Joshua)

Despite friends' mocking reactions, there did not seem to be a sense of it being problematic or having put the men off. In Patrick and Martin's situations, their young age may have influenced the responses of their peers. In some cases, once their friends had a

better understanding of the role or had children themselves, any sense of disdain evaporated. In Ed, Robert and Anthony's cases, their friends were supportive and in Anthony's case were almost relieved that he was finally seeing what they knew all along:

'One friend of mine told me and I think it's very interesting, twenty years ago, very close friend told me "you are dumb to do something that you like to do" that you know otherwise, what you want to be I mean I was dumb... so for them made sense, made sense...' (Anthony)

There were no reactions from friends reported by the women, just that everyone was supportive. None of them experienced questioning or mocking, reflecting the sense that a woman working with children is considered natural.

6.4 Guidance

School careers guidance teachers

One of the areas of focus at the outset of this research was the role that careers guidance teachers play in the choice of ECEC as a career. None of the men interviewed indicated that the careers guidance in school made them aware of ECEC as a career option. This may reflect societal expectations of ECEC as a female occupation and that seemed to be the case for Alan and Robert who attended all boys' schools:

'Oh right it would have been CBS [Religious order: Christian Brothers School] so it would have been all boys so I suppose in hindsight now as parent, if it happened to my son that he wasn't given career advice by a career guidance teacher I would be quite upset cos that's their job d'you know but back then it was just that little bit more laxi-daisy.' (Robert)

‘Absolutely none. no... I went to a technical school and I had technical aptitude, so they said technical work is for you and I had kind of always wanted to work in the humanities to be honest with you. but when you're seventeen and you're leaving school and you're going into what we were going into kind of the Celtic Tiger at that stage, we were approaching that time and work was plentiful and there was lots of trade jobs and they paid well, so you know you're going to bow to people's superior knowledge and go "ok that's what I should do". so and that's what I did.’ (Alan)

‘The career guidance teacher in school and I'll be perfectly honest, suggested everything but that. That's the truth. I went to her after speaking to my parents with the suggestion and she said, "listen, is there, look do social care"... will you do social care? Will you do nursing? Will you just do something, why are you doing childcare? Don't be doing early years education.’” (Martin)

‘No, no, the career guidance in my secondary school suggested paramedic route.’ (Patrick)

Sean described any careers guidance in his school as lacking, stating that the ‘disadvantaged’ status of the school meant expectations of the students were limited.

‘No, we were [a] disadvantaged school, there was nothing like that at all. They [focused on] ... our Leaving Cert, not for life, that type of thing yeah...’ (Sean)

The experience of careers guidance reported by the men suggests a system that did not work for them. In the cases of Robert and Alan, attending an all-boys school meant that traditional female occupations were not in their awareness (or that of the careers guidance teachers). The timing of Alan's graduation from school in

an economy that was buoyant for anyone with what he calls a 'technical aptitude' meant that engineering seemed the only option. However, looking to the men who attended mixed schools, they were not informed of ECEC and in some cases, actively counselled against it. Equally, none of the women can recall ECEC being proposed as a career option. However, Sharon stated that there was no careers guidance in her school, just an assumption that they would go into ECEC or secretarial roles.

Robert captured the career guidance issue looking at it from his current position:

'It's very seldom ye'd be having somebody coming from secondary school up, but what happens is say like when we were recession kicked in and we had an awful lot more stay at home dads, we've had more men coming into it that way, than they may have been initially volunteering or d'you know having to bring your child to preschool and then realising that you actually enjoy it.' (Robert).

Later he commented:

'We had the chap that was convinced not to do childcare because he was a guy, d'you know it was like the career guidance teacher did speak to him, and was like psychiatric nursing, social care, social work, d'you know, anything bar childcare.' (Robert)

Robert's comment suggests that ECEC is not a visible occupation for boys at school leaving age, that many of the men (and we see it among the participants here) enter at later stages in their lives. Despite this, Martin reported that the career guidance teacher who counselled him away from ECEC, later invited him in to speak to the students about his experience as a male early childhood educator.

Employment centre advisors

A trend that became apparent in the interviews was in relation to advisors attached to job centres who were more open to offering ECEC to men in need of re-skilling. This may have been as a result of ECEC being more widely available as an option, and certainly there seems to be some evidence that it was presented as one of several options (as Sean and Joshua reported) or suggested after the men had indicated an interest in working with children in the case of Jamie and Anthony:

‘When I lost my job, I went to a very helpful person here, in [city]. She is the... career assistant, is a counsellor in careers, and she asked me for a CV... and then she said "oh, you you are working with children" and I go “yeah, yeah”, I explained the situation, “are you thinking of you know work with children in preschool” and I think “eh no because I can't”, and she told me “yeah you can.” (Anthony)

Recruitment:

Once the men were aware of ECEC as an option, the issue of recruitment and whether their gender would be factor became a consideration. There were mixed reports from the men in relation to their recruitment and their gender. Jamie, Alan and Robert expressed that they felt their gender led to favourable treatment in recruitment:

‘I would say if anything it could have been an advantage, because they're very open minded, like the directors are all lads, ...There's a lot of lads that have been through the place between weekend staff and afternoon staff, so I'd say when they saw someone coming that wanted to do crèche as well, it probably worked to my advantage, possibly but I guess that's a decision someone else made. Not me.’ (Jamie)

'I was looking for work in childcare and a position came up in [private chain] crèche... and I applied for it and I actually got the job at the interview so that kind of perked me up a little bit, that gave me a little confidence...' (Alan)

'I suppose the supervisor at the time, she worked in Manchester and she had worked in children's centres where there were men, you know, working there and she knew the benefits of mixed gender so she was delighted to have a guy there as well, so I took the position.' (Robert)

However, others felt their gender may have been a deterrent, with Martin suggesting that prospective managers may have worried about the policy and practice implications of hiring a man.

'You know and I met managers shook their hand and so on and I suppose at the time I wouldn't have been as aware, but looking back on it now I could see some of their faces and kind of saying "ok, he's a nice fella, right you know and I'm sure we could easily take him on, he's only looking for placement, extra free help, you know, but do we. [need to change our practice/policies]?"' (Martin)

Ed experienced both positive and negative responses. He found it difficult to find work in ECEC on moving from the US to Ireland in the 1990's. He attributed this to his gender but also his identity as a foreigner. Despite this, he recognised that he has experienced privilege as a result of his gender:

'It's easy for people to remember me, so as a result, it kind of elevates my position, do you see what I'm saying? And... I have to acknowledge that, and that has helped me a lot.' (Ed)

None of the women had a sense that their gender was a factor in their own recruitment. However, two of the women suggested that it might be a negative factor in men's recruitment:

'Probably the female candidate... always has that little bit more of an edge to the male, just because people assume, I suppose that females are more maternal and just that the people just assume that they might be better.' (Jenny)

6.5 School Careers Guidance Teachers

Structure of the Irish post-primary education system

The Irish post primary school system is divided into two cycles: junior and senior. Junior cycle begins in first year when students are approximately twelve years old and concludes with the junior certificate examination at the end of third year, the first state exam that students will complete in their academic lives. Students typically take 9-12 subjects for the Junior Certificate exam. English, Irish and Maths are compulsory (with the exception of some exemptions in Irish). Senior cycle consists of 5th and 6th year and concludes with the Leaving Certificate examination, which typically includes seven subjects (minimum of six). 4th year is a Transition Year between the end of junior cycle and the beginning of senior cycle. It is optional in many schools and indeed there are some schools which do not have it on offer (Department of Education, 2021). It is a year that provides opportunities for students to try out other areas of learning and experiences not typically covered by the compulsory curriculum. Most schools will have at least one careers guidance teacher who may also teach another subject. How the career guidance is delivered will vary from school to school.

Findings of the careers guidance teacher focus group

Challenges relevant to the careers guidance

There were variations in how time was allocated across the schools. This led to challenges in how careers guidance was delivered i.e. Whether it was one-to-one, classroom-based or the cycle(s) in which it was delivered. T3's contact time was across all year groups in classroom-based setting which she felt left her stretched and unable to meet the needs of the students in senior cycle while at the same time duplicating the material presented in junior cycle when the students were not engaged.

'I'm top heavy on juniors- because the principal thinks ... it's ... I heard it somewhere- It's not, absolutely not [useful]... you may as well be talking to the wall. Even one period a week would be fine. But I've two periods a week with each group so it's I've run out of material ... I've nothing to do.' (T3)

T2 suggested that this approach was a wasteful exercise, but that it is likely to become more of a norm going forward and causing unnecessary duplication and disengagement by the students, with T4 agreeing that it's a 'box ticking' exercise and symptomatic of a role that has no curriculum. T1's response: 'You don't have time- You don't need junior cycles [be]cause they have no clue- It's not efficient or effective.' (T1)

Factors influencing student career choice

All four of the teachers were in agreement that student career choice is often made without really knowing what the student wants to do and will reflect occupations or subject areas of which they have some prior experience and therefore implicitly gendering choices made in subject selection. T1 suggested that this limits the range of careers and further education choices.

'they don't know a lot. And there's so much stuff at third level that's ... is in no way linked whatsoever to the second level curriculum. A lot of them will do business because they're doing business in school, they do science because they've got the Biology and Physics. They forget about the likes of product innovation or design; they forget about Social science. It doesn't exist in their world....' (T1)

Age was suggested as a factor by T3, in that the students may be too young at the point of careers guidance to really know what they want to do. T4 suggested the model of the school in which she works which is post compulsory education and allowing students to do one-year post-leaving cert courses (PLC's) in a chosen area giving them the opportunity to test it out without the commitment of a four-year bachelor's degree as a better way of giving students the time to consider their options and develop maturity and understanding of the academic environment.

'But the good thing about that is gives them a taste for ... about things that year. And we'd have ... we'd have students say, like would go in ... didn't get [Leaving Certificate] points to do law and they come to us to do pre-university law. By the end of the year they say "thanks be to God I didn't get the points cos I don't like it". That's a real clear example and it's something like Law... it nearly should be compulsory like level five. And you ... instead of TY [transition year].' (T4)

She added that it allows them to get a taste of third level education bridging the gap between the supported environment of post primary school where T2 suggested 'we spoon feed them' and the largely autonomous and anonymous environment of college or university. While she suggested that this might be an option 'instead of TY'. The transition year in school between the two cycles is often where students get opportunities to try out and get a taste of experiences

not covered in the junior or senior cycle curricula, such as work experience.

There were two types of students identified during discussions: those who had no idea what they wanted and those who were very clear:

‘They panicked. They think, "I need a job." And the first thing they saw was doing a job is doing business I talked to a guy I know, he's a form... was from our school, he's a fourth year in [large regional town institute] at the moment ...I asked him ... "How many people left?" He said, "we started with one hundred, we're down to twenty.”’ (T1)

‘With the child ... we find like that as well the childcare people, the nurses ... you know, anybody like that ... or even computer guys as well, they know they want ... that's what they want to do. They've known it for a very long time. they stick with the course and without much change for them in their course and there's not much change.’ (T4)

T4's students are in post-compulsory programmes having chosen an area and her experience in the caring and computing programmes that there is little attrition in contrast to T1's example where students pick a course without clear rationale and find that it is neither what they want or expected. How the students come to these decisions needs further consideration.

Advising students on career options

Career guidance teachers had similar approaches to supporting students in considering career options. There are a number of online interest tests available to indicate suitability for career types and these are utilised by all the teachers in the focus group as a starting point with student. Asked if they were reliable, T2 stated 'no' and that he 'tell[s] them to take those things with a barrel of salt' but that

they do provide a starting point, if even to rule out options that don't appeal to them. Despite T1 acknowledging that students' career choices are limited by their existing experiences and subject areas, all four teachers used the information that students bring to them to give them suggestions about possible options. This information is based on hobbies, previous subject choice and interests. They are also guided to view the college courses available and narrow down their options through this process and additional research. This would suggest that unless young men (and women) are coming expressing an existing interest or experience in work with children, they are unlikely to be advised in that direction.

Promoting Early childhood

T1 and T2 suggested that when approached by students interested in working with children and young people generally, they are more often directed to social studies programmes, though T2 states she frequently suggests ECEC too.

'Social Studies, Social Care, nursing Sort of... Froebel Primary School Teaching doesn't even come to mind... even sport development peoplely [sic] orientated type of course, social courses.' (T1)

'Community and Youth as well development, Foroige [youth work] that kind of thing.' (T2)

In terms of how often students express an interest in ECEC specifically, T3 suggested that girls often do but it is rare for boys. T1 and T2 both reported interest in ECEC as low for both boys and girls with neither expressing interest very often, with T2 suggesting that it's higher in girls who have done transition year or Applied Leaving Cert in which work experience forms a part, often giving them experience in local ECEC services. T4's position differs in that she meets students when they have already chosen an area and

has two classes of ECEC post-leaving cert students, all of whom are girls. This would suggest that ECEC is not high on the list for either boys or girls.

When students express an interest in early childhood:

‘My advice is, what I always say, which is probably wrong and biased and everything else, is that if you are looking at early childhood education, you need to be the boss. Running your own crèche, not working in a crèche Cos I don’t want you knocking on my door in ten years’ time saying “I’m not earning enough money”’ (T1)

Factors hindering choice of ECEC

Exposure – role modelling

The careers guidance teachers made some suggestions in relation to the factors they believed influenced the choice of career. Exposure was universally expressed as the biggest issue. ‘This is a result of environmental and cultural conditioning’, T3 wrote on the flipchart. The teachers talked at length about the lack of visual role models in the environment as a factor hindering men’s pursuit of ECEC. They described what they see in the environment around them at the school gates and ECEC and crèche workers in the settings they attended themselves (including during their primary education) as all being women. Some boys may express an interest in primary teaching. T2 suggested a link between this and boys who are actively involved in Gaelic games. Many elite athletes in GAA are teachers and the school calendar can be conducive of that level of athleticism when the peak of the GAA season is during the summer when the extended summer holiday allows the necessary commitment to gruelling training schedules and match fixtures. T1 argued that in his locality, primary teaching is an option for boys, unlike the teachers from urban schools. Where there are more boys pursuing post-primary education, the teachers felt that it was because

they see more men in post-primary teaching than in primary and there are a wider range of subject areas. T2 also suggested that in homes with absent fathers, not seeing a male in a caring role may act as a barrier to boys' interest in ECEC.

In wider terms, T2 suggested media as an issue in exposing children and young people to the notion of men in caring roles, indicating that even now social media, soap operas and movies often portray men and women in stereotypical traditional roles:

‘And so, it is ... you know we talk about the home as well, but it is what's being portrayed. The wider social structures which also goes for engineering like we were talking earlier on, I mean, it's on both levels.’ (T2)

References to the social environment, what children are seeing and the messages that they pick up would suggest that ECEC is still viewed as women's work and that until children are routinely seeing men in these roles, they are unlikely to see it as a viable option for boys. Linked to this is the issue of stereotyping and the potential negative response from peers for choosing what is considered women's work as was noted by T1, T2 and T3 as ‘fear/cultural stereotypes’ on the flip charts. T4 wrote ‘seen as girls’ job, peer slugging, no understanding of the role’ reflecting the experiences of Martin, Jamie and Joshua in this study.

Working conditions and status of the profession

A further suggested factor that hinders choice of ECEC was working conditions, salary and lack of progression. T1 suggested that when enquiring about career options, boys more frequently ask what the salary is likely to be, with girls more likely to follow their interests, suggesting that status and pay is recognised as an issue, though he suggests that it is better for men. T2 reflected on a new phenomenon in recent years where she is seeing students who have been through

ECEC and view it from their own experiences as children. This is reflective of the ECEC sector and women's increased participation in the labour force (and the resulting need for increased ECEC) in Ireland as relatively recent. She noted that the students she sees can reflect on the workload and long hours of early childhood educators and not wanting that lifestyle.

The following exchange between T2 and T4 illustrates this:

'A lot, a lot of students I'm finding now, have come through that system. They have been in crèches or their brothers and sisters are in crèches. And they've seen what happens in them, and they know. And it's ... if that's a ... only after happening in that last couple of years. They're like, "Oh I was in the crèche and it was great." But like, they work really long hours and you know, and they're bossed around, and you know, they could be with...' (T2)

'And underpaid.' (T4)

'...The babies all day, [be]cause I think there's different rooms or toddlers, I don't know what they are called and they're aware of that. They're very aware of that, you know. And that they could be there from half seven, and then they might be ... you know, and they know that and that's never happened ... that's only after happening the last two years.' (T2)

T4 expressed finding career guidance with post-leaving certificate students in ECEC more challenging than in other areas because progression routes are more difficult to see. When she did compile a list, much of it meant branching out into other areas of social and community work.

'It's easier to go into the science group, the business group because they can progress to so much courses... so when I

went off and worked on actually compiling sort of a list of different areas they could go into, actually had a whole page load and all related to, um, not necessarily all just childcare but into youth ... youth centres and stuff like that as well.' (T4)

T3 talked of a boy interested in social care as a result of his own difficult background and sees that as a catalyst for going into social care which, while still female dominated has a higher proportion of men and T4 responded that in their three social studies programmes, about one third of the class are men, but in the ECEC programme it is 100% women in both classes.

What needs to change?

Working conditions, salary and progression

Reflecting the discussions outlined above there was clear agreement on the need for increased salary and better working conditions in ECEC for women and to attract men. The notion that it has the same level of qualification but none of the job security, working conditions and a fraction of the salary expectations to that of a primary teacher, means it is not an attractive option generally. Security of employment was one of the points raised by T1, a reference to the fact that many early childhood educators are released from employment for the summer months and rehired in September.

'Your biggest barrier is that it's just not well paid. Once the guys do a little investigation, they find out it's actually, it's quite poorly paid and not, not for me.' (T1)

But T4 argues that it's more than just about pay: 'I don't believe that even if it was well paid the way it's viewed now at the moment would it still even attract boys? seen as such a girl ...' She also reflected on the lack of promotional opportunities being a result of the sector being seen as a job for women compatible with their childcare

responsibilities in the home as illustrated by Mary's experience but not Ed's.

Exposure

T2 while reflecting on experiences in crèches as being a deterrent to students considering ECEC as a career, pointed to breakfast clubs in primary schools as being favoured by students and as having a positive influence on their choice in ECEC. This relates to getting an opportunity to experience the environment, something that T1 and T3 promoted heavily as having a positive impact on students' decisions to go into ECEC. These comments would suggest and link to the experiences of Ed, Jamie, Sean and Alan that having a taste, or some prior experience may be a factor in getting more men in to ECEC.

T2 suggested that education on the role of ECEC in the same way that STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects are being heavily promoted to girls might be of benefit:

'Then with the science teachers and that, like they have posters in every single room it's all STEM, STEM, STEM, STEM in all the labs.' (T2)

Following this, T4 reflected on a previous careers day in another institution when the person promoting the STEM presented on a shift at around aged 13 which puts girls off pursuing STEM subjects, a phenomenon that is not seen across all countries, and coming to the conclusion that the issues are embedded in social structures:

'As soon as you get to age ... up to about age 13, the boys and girls perform the same in maths and all that. And then when you get about thirteen something different happens and it wasn't neurological, it was ... Like there's so many girls a high percentage of girls, going into STEM whereas we just completely drop off the planet in, at that stage. So that shows

then it's something that is in the way we're delivering it and it must be the same across other areas then as well. Like that's happening in STEM, that actually happened in childcare areas as well as you know, other areas.' (T4)

6.6 Conclusion

Looking at the experiences of the men, women and careers guidance teachers in this chapter, there is a sense that ECEC is still widely understood to be a career for women, though that the few men that enter it may be viewed favourably in recruitment. Whether that elevated status is borne out in their experiences within the service will be considered in the chapter that follows but certainly Jamie, Alan and Robert felt that their recruitment was enhanced by their gender, though that was not necessarily Ed's experience. The routes men took into ECEC reflect changing economic circumstances in which a largely male dominated sector was lost to the economic recession and there was a need to re-skill and employ a large number of men in the remaining available options, two of which were ECEC and special needs assistant roles. The same economic factors only influenced one woman's (Jenny) entry, with three women (Sharon, Mary and Pam) entering early in their careers as a natural progression and stage of life as an expected transition.

The age and time of entry differed between the men and women's experiences with seven of the men entering later in their working lives (often after long careers in other fields) and three of them choosing ECEC when a first preference option did not work out. Narratives of change, opportunity and chance, often forced by circumstances are consistent across the men's interviews but also appear in three of the women's. However, a move to ECEC was considered more 'natural' in the case of the women who did not experience any strong reactions from family or friends. The role of employment schemes and SNA training cannot be underestimated

in giving both men and women a taste of the work, though the motives for this from an economic policy point of view may need consideration.

The role of careers guidance teachers in schools seems to be negligible, both from the experiences of the men and women interviewed but also from the perspective of the careers guidance teachers themselves. They reported only recommending ECEC when a student expresses an interest in working with children but also recommend humanities-based careers such as social care, nursing, primary teaching, which are viewed as better options in terms of salary, progression and working conditions. These were seen as significant barriers to ECEC as a career option for both boys and girls but in particular boys who consider salary early on in their career research according to T1. Lack of exposure to ECEC was also seen as a barrier to men's participation. The lack of males visible in ECEC, in caring responsibilities and portrayed in the media is seen as a barrier from the perspective of the careers guidance teachers. Opportunities for work experience in the area was seen as a factor in positively influencing career choice. This appears to be reflected in the men's experiences with Jamie, Ed, Sean and Alan reporting this. What appears to be consistent, whether as a result of lack of visible role models or experience is that the men had no awareness of what ECEC was or entailed until they engaged with it, a point also reflected in the careers guidance teachers' responses.

Factors influencing entry can fall into two ecological categories. Micro factors are specific events impacting individual's employment: the options presented to them, their experience of recruitment and getting an experience of the role, the responses of their immediate family and friends which influenced them along the way. Macro factors include the wider economic climate which impact employment and societal norms, suggest that ECEC is a career for women and result in lack of visibility of ECEC for men. These factors

will be considered in the chapters that follow documenting the experiences of men and women once employed in the sector and their resulting trajectories.

7 Experiences

‘It's amazing really like, the learning involved in this sector... It's difficult, but it's also rewarding in a way that other jobs [are not] ...because it's human, because it's care, because it involves human beings, it's vast. It's expansive, there's always more to learn and I've always enjoyed that part of the professionalism. The learning, you know so when I say I have really been helped by the whole conversation and the whole, so for me, the conversation about how do you how do you hold children, enough and not too much.... That resonates so deeply with me, is that children's social learning is something that lasts their whole life you know. And to be able to facilitate that is a wonderful thing.’ (Ed)

In the previous chapter, men and women's routes into ECEC were considered. Their experiences in the setting day to day comes in to focus in this chapter. The differences in the men's and women's experiences and the resulting impact on the men's trajectories are examined here. The elements of the job that give them joy and satisfaction, their practices and how they compare to their female colleagues and gendered experiences are explored. From existing literature, we know that the presence of men in the ECEC environment can be desirable from the perspective of both parents and female co-workers (Fine-Davis, 2005; Peeters, Rohrmann & Emilsen, 2015). However, they often experience and practice stereotypical and role-modelling expectations (Brownhill, 2014; 2015; Warin et al, 2020) and can be the object of scrutiny and suspicion (Besnard & Diren, 2010; Cameron, 1999; Cushman, 2005; Peeters, Rohrmann and Emilsen, 2015; Woltrung, 2012). Issues of differentiated treatment and accelerated progression have also been discussed in the literature (Brody & Rohrmann, 2015; Brownhill & Wright, 2018; Williams, 1992; 2015). The ecological systems,

introduced in the previous chapter and which can be seen to be an influence on their decisions and trajectories are developed further in this chapter.

7.1 What is it to be a man in an ECEC setting?

Job satisfaction and fulfilment

All of the men in this study talked about the satisfaction of working with the children. There was a real sense of passion and commitment to their work in their narratives. Anthony talked about getting immersed in the classroom and loving the engagement with the children. Robert reported that despite challenges, especially as manager, it was a positive and fulfilling role:

‘The great thing about working in childcare is the buzz and the energy from the staff and that keeps you going. It’s the mutual support and as well as that, it’s the benefit you see to children.’

(Robert)

Ed described the enjoyment ‘goofing with the children’ but also expressed his commitment to giving the children quality experiences: ‘I don’t want to just get by, I want to have a good classroom. I really want the children to have a great experience’ (Ed).

Core to any committed professional is a sense of identity and belonging, the importance and value of being part of something. Ed reflected on his early positive experiences as enabling him to say ‘Yes, I’m a preschool teacher’ and remaining committed to that identity during the years when he found it difficult to get work. Joshua and Anthony talked about their growing confidence with every experience and opportunity and thus developing their identity as early childhood educators.

The variety and diversity in the work was seen as a positive in many of the men's narratives, the range of age-groups and related challenges and differences means that 'every day was different' according to Martin. This variety also suited Ed who had rejected more sedentary roles such as office work and valued the opportunity that ECEC gave him to incorporate his passion for music and art into the working day. Indeed, as we saw in the last chapter, the practical and hands-on nature of the role is what drew Jamie to ECEC above other options.

Ed and Martin both commented on a professional component to the role that is not always widely recognised.

'It's a very professional for what it looks like on the surface, you know you'd be going in, you're getting paid to build jigsaws, you're getting paid to, to paint and all these things. There's a very, very professional aspect to it, that not a lot of people realise, like I said, until you're involved in it.' (Martin)

By 'professional', study participants referred to having to make judgements in the moment, in line with policies and professional training, and developing very human skills of compassion and emotional warmth.

'You have to have the ability to switch on and off really fast, because sometimes all of a sudden, somebody would be upset you you'd have to straight away you have to deal with that with all, with a completely different set of skills. And that's the way. And that's one it's just the way that it engages you, that's it's a you've to think on your feet, that's another remarkable quality of the work.' (Ed)

This wider recognition of the skilled and professionalism of the workforce is very much in focus in the Irish context currently. And the men in this study were very clear on the professional and

dynamic nature of the role as Ed so eloquently describes in the quote at the beginning of this chapter. Above all, when discussing the positive aspects of their roles, the men talked about the impact on the children: seeing their development over time, developing relationships with them, learning to give them just the right amount of support to see them thrive.

Building relationships

Central to their love and passion in their roles as early childhood educators were the relationships developed with the children. Male participants reported being sensitive to children's early reticence about forging relationships based on initial encounters and getting to know one another. There was no suggestion that initial reticence was because of the gender of the male staff.

Anthony described children's initial fears disappearing once he 'got down' and engaged with them and feels the response would be the same with a woman. Martin suggested that children develop attachments with different people for different needs and that it is really a matter of personality and fit rather than a gendered preference. Although he did acknowledge that children who are not used to having men around, may take a little longer to warm up. Though he recalled an example when his similarity to a child's father was a source of comfort to the child:

'There was one particular child, small boy and I actually looked very similar to his dad, would you believe, and what he actually got most comfort out of was you know, the hugs are there and up on the lap for a few minutes, he'd, he'd actually just scratch my beard... like that he'd come up to me and the comfort would be there straight away there was no, sort of you know awkwardness or, or over awareness of it. You're comforting the child, the child is upset, you comfort the child, that type of

thing doesn't come in to play, in in the moment, you know?'
(Martin)

Patrick also reported a number of occasions where his relationship with children was important when they were in crisis and felt that they could confide in him: 'The young fella, if he sees me in town, no matter if he's on his own or with a group of friends, he'll cross the road to give me a hug on the main street.' Relationship building is a cornerstone of a quality ECEC environment (CECDE, 2006) including physical comfort and touch as well as activities and dialogue carried out together, a fact that was recognised and valued by the men interviewed here.

Challenges in the ECEC sector

The ECEC sector in Ireland is currently in crisis (Irish Independent, 2020; Moloney, 2019; Murphy, 2015). It has been the focus of much political wrangling and funding initiatives which have left it facing increasing administrative burdens, costs, high staff turnover and many services being forced to close (Hosford, 2020). Some of the men in this research discussed the impact of these issues on them, and while their experiences may not be gendered in this instance, it does impact on the experiences of the men (and women) in this research.

Some of the men discussed the increasing administrative burden of the Irish ECEC sector both from the perspective of a worker in the classroom and in management position as problematic:

'Some days I think I love the job. I love working with the staff, love working with the children and the parents, myself, like an awful lot of others, it's the pressure from the powers that be, like DCYA [Department of Children and Youth Affairs] and Pobal [funding body] and things like that, it takes the joy out of

it and it's just sometimes you do feel like, aw why bother.'
(Robert)

'No it was because all the paperwork, all their time, all day every day doing paperwork right, and what happened was that they spent feck all time with the kids.' (Geoff)

'But there's so many regulations and things involved in the crèche now, it's hard. I don't know if it's even worth the pressure, the hassle, the like the amount of crèches that have closed down especially smaller ones.' (Jamie)

Apart from the frustration of endless seemingly arbitrary paperwork, the real issue experienced by men and women and expressed by Geoff above is that it takes them away from the work with the children, which is the reason they entered the sector in the first place. The lack of job security which already existed in the sector was further exacerbated by the threat of services closing down as articulated by Jamie.

7.2 Gendered Expectations

By the nature of their unique status in a women majority occupation (Schaub, 2015) men often find that expectations of their roles are different to that of their female colleagues. The men in this research reported that in their experiences, there were certain expectations of them as men. In some cases, it was in relation to the boys, physical play and behaviour management, and in other cases it was related to DIY and practical tasks around the building. In some cases, where expectations were expressed, the men were happy to oblige, stating a natural affinity for the expected task. In others they resisted or reluctantly accepted the role. Expectations fell into two categories: the expectations the men had of themselves and the expectations others' had of them.

Physical play

All of the men reported having experienced the expectation that they would be involved or interested in more physical aspects of play and outdoors including sports and rough and tumble play. In some cases, they resisted the expectation, claiming that they were not sporty as was the case for Patrick and Sean. In others, they recognised that they have an interest in outdoors and sporty play but resented the assumption that it should be their responsibility and felt that it was often used as an opportunity for their female colleagues to avoid it or to do easier tasks.

‘I think there seems to be this idea that men will be a bit more will engage more with kind of risky play and rough and tumble kind of play and generally speaking that seems to be true, certainly it's true for me.’ (Alan)

‘I found it a little bit frustrating sometimes in that I might be fully involved in a game of six on six football and I'd look over and there could be two or two or three of the lads [female co-workers] and they're relaxing and they're look you know, the sunglasses out you know getting a tan.’ (Martin)

There was also a sense that while women expected and were happy to allow the men to take on that role, they often expressed concern or actively objected to it, displaying more risk aversion than their male colleagues. This expectation of an alternative type of practice while also policing it is reported by Alan and Geoff, as Geoff states:

‘Any of the, shall we say, more physical things that you'd be doin’: the running and the chasing and all that, they'd, when I first started they'd be absolutely having heart attacks because they were just afraid that every child was going to fall and split their head and there was going to be accidents left right and

centre, and the they'd be asking me "can you not just tone it down a bit?" (Geoff)

Geoff also suggested that his female colleagues avoided the outdoors through an aversion to cold and rain, limiting the opportunities for children to experience muddy play and puddles. Alan described a situation where he developed the outdoor area to include elements of risky play by putting small logs around the garden for children to use as stepping stones, something his colleagues supported when he was there to supervise, but which would put up out of reach when he was not there. He expressed a feeling of being undermined as a result.

Robert, Sean and Patrick were keen to point out that the stereotypical expectation doesn't always hold true, with Robert suggesting that some of the women in his service were keen sports fanatics, though he himself enjoyed the outdoors too. Patrick suggested that in his service the roles were reversed with his female colleagues more likely to be found in the outdoor area than him and Sean stated that he was not at all sporty and would favour a science kit. Ed suggested that despite the gendered expectations, there is a growing appreciation across the board for the value of outdoor and risky play for children's development.

'I really sense that in the past, in the past few years with this real concentration, with this real upsurge in outdoor play and the acknowledgement that it's really important for children, certainly women are accepting that and taking it on. No question about it. I think that it may be, it may be in some ways easier for men to do it, but the learning is happening, you know, our sector is really learning, the value of it'. (Ed)

Five of the six women agreed that men were more willing than themselves to encourage risky play and engage in physical and outdoor play. This suggests that the association of gender and

engagement in physical play is still prevalent among those who participated in this research.

Behaviour management & boys

A recurring theme in the literature and borne out in some of the men's experiences is the idea that boys' behaviour is problematic and should be handled by the men. Both Alan and Ed reported finding themselves assigned to the children whose behaviour was seen as challenging, a role they both resented: 'I ended up kind of being a kind of go to person for children who had... when they had really difficult behaviour' (Alan). Ed reported:

'I have a feeling sometimes, I'm being left to deal with... that some of the other members of the team are really focused on meeting the needs of the who are not settling, do you see what I'm saying? And as a result, I'm left with the boys. [It] is very complex because I believe that a lot of times people don't realise and I'm you know I speak as if, I can see everything, but I can't (laughs) I can't. I just have these vague perceptions. I think that you know the I think gender stuff starts from, dot and it's really deep and it's really subtle...' (Ed)

Ed raised an important point about the subtlety of gendered expectations. It works at a subliminal level and shapes the way he thinks about his work. Others have an implicit view that he will be good with the boys and as a result he is excluded from settling work with the girls. In contrast, Patrick explicitly embraced his 'bad cop' role and assignment to the boys as being easier for him, just as, according to him, working with the girls was easier for his female colleague.

Ed raised issues of gender and association with specific emotions, such as aggression in boys emerging from a deeply rooted ideology about ways of expressing emotions and who can and cannot. While

Ed expressed an interesting insight into the gendered nature of children's behaviour and the difficulty in supporting children through that behaviour and the responsibility assigned to him, he recognised that while he has learned skills in dealing with these situations, he attributed his learning to female colleagues and shows a reluctance to associate it with gender:

'There's a type of maleness, there's a type of male energy, that presents in young children which makes people, which makes people uncomfortable, both male, females, when people are aggressive, you know it's the rare, it's the rare person, childcare worker, preschool teacher who really feel comfortable you know really, handling, controlling, ok, you know the hitting and all that stuff, let's call it male because generally speaking a lot of people, I think a lot of people would have a have a would put that type of a label on it, you know they would they would kind of think of it more as more male than a female behaviour... I will not, say for a second that I learned how to deal with this male difficult aggressive behaviour from men, I haven't. I've learned how to do that from women.' (Ed)

Role modelling

Role modelling was an important factor for most participants, not necessarily that children (especially boys) would see typical male behaviour but that they would have positive experiences of men in their lives. The men expressed this as an expectation of themselves as well as reporting the expectation from their colleagues and parents.

'Some of our kids that we had last year, they don't have a daddy figure, so they know automatically the male role model kind of kicked in, and they were looking at me as a, a father-

figure... the parents picked us because I was working here.’
(Patrick)

‘A lot of them [parents] like seeing a man in the classroom. I think some are surprised when they come in and see, when I was in the classroom and what the general response was "I think it's great" and given that there's so many families that are separated parents or parents possibly and stuff now, that there's no kind of male role model kind of in it, I think they really love having someone here.’ (Jamie)

Robert saw the role of men in the service as being more about having a mixed gender team with positive role models of both genders but does also allude to the absence of men in some children’s lives. This was something also suggested by Jenny stating that in other professions, there is a healthier balance between male and female workers and is a persistent commentary in the existing literature.

‘Men’s Jobs’

Both the men and women in the research reported certain expectations of male members of staff in relation to DIY and ‘heavy lifting’. Some of the men reported that they did not mind as they had a natural flair for those types of jobs, particularly those who had come from construction as was the case for Jamie, while Anthony reported that he was only ever once asked to take on a physical task which was so unsuccessful, he was never asked again.

‘What’s funny... they thought that I was handy... mistake, mistake... I am not handy at all, so they made me do a kitchen. I was three hours doing the kitchen work [assembling a child's kitchen] and another thing and then no more... I think they made the kitchen in twenty minutes; it took me three hours

three hours and with the plans (laughs) construction, oh my!’
(Anthony)

Robert admitted to being expected to engage in DIY tasks but qualified it with ‘I love DIY myself anyway’ and on the other hand stated that he would not allow his male colleague near a drill ‘cos he’d take the fingers off himself’. Joshua reported that he often offered to do tasks around the setting as did Patrick who claimed that there was no expectation, but it was quicker if he did the jobs himself rather than waiting for his manager to arrange, an experience that Geoff echoed though he felt that there were expectations of him. Martin also reported:

‘Now maybe, part of it cos I’m very tall ok and it’s you know, but part of it then was kind of like the, the unsaid presumption that I can, I can fix anything, which I can but seventeen at the time as well, like you know, I’m no tradesperson or craftsman but “can you fix that hinge?” “Can you put up that shelf?” You know? “Can you do, can you move, can you move this heavy piece of equipment?” which I would of course, I remember one time... that I was working the summer camps and I got an extra two days’ work because one of the rooms needed painting.’ (Martin)

While Martin admitted to being appreciative of the extra work but reflected on whether any of his female colleagues would be offered such a role. Like Martin, Ed and Sean attributed any special requests to their height advantage over their female colleagues rather than any gendered rationale. In Ed’s case, he stated that he might reach a higher shelf but that there’s no expectation on the men to fix things, stating that in the service where he works, gender equality is very important and so they try to model it as well as provide it for the children. He also stated that they have a staff member for caretaking duties, something both Alan and Joshua reported also. Tracy also

reported gendered expectations of the men outside of their education role:

‘Ah 100%, sure if a spider walks into the room the poor person getting called in [is] Jamie ... real damsel in distress kind of thing... but I know here the men would take care of the facility itself, a lot more than the women, like we'll do the cleaning.’ (Tracy)

‘Women’s Work’

‘People have that shocked look and I think some guys especially or even the managers or workers can misinterpret the shocked look as a negativity but sometimes it can be a little like "oh I didn't realise a man can be a childcare worker.”’ (Robert)

The status of ECEC as a woman’s job is evident in some of the narratives in this research. Because women are the default worker, they are often rendered invisible, making the men hyper visible in many ways. While often having a male member of staff was greeted with a positive response such as ‘ah we have a man, ah lovely’ in Joshua’s case, the positivity did not always extend to being open to different practices unless it was to complement the ‘natural’ women position and meet gendered expectations, such as sports, outdoor and risky play or behaviour management. Geoff talked about any attempt to work in a way with what was inconsistent with the way the women in his services had always done it was met with contempt and while on one hand, his female colleagues would embrace his presence, on the other hand, they would undermine and police it. In the example below, Geoff is describing a physical type of play for which children were drawn to him.

‘The women I worked with especially in [crèche], how shall I describe it, they were old school who'd be there a good while,

shall we say right and they were set in their ways ... so an awful lot of the times the aul ones would be shouting over "leave him [Geoff] alone" or "give him some space" or something like... I was absolutely blue in the face telling people, "you're grand" they're fine.' (Geoff)

The notion that caring is innate and what women naturally do was evidenced in this study. Two of the female participants reported that children would be more drawn to the female workers for comfort. Whether they attributed this to what children see in the environment and in parenting, and have come to expect rather than some biological inclination towards a female 'maternal' carer is not clear.

'I find that the children are naturally more comfortable around a female...because of the way the industry is, it's they're more comfortable around females I'd have to say, the majority of them are.' (Tracy)

Joshua expressed difficulty in challenging the practices of his female colleagues when he disagreed with their approach, not feeling confident enough to speak up in what he considered to be their domain. It is important to note that he was on an employment scheme during this research and therefore not permanent member of staff with key children and this may have impacted his sense of belonging and ability to challenge.

Ed reports feeling the need to prove himself as man in the ECEC environment:

'As a man I've always wanted to prove that I can do this work. I've always wanted to and I've always wanted to be really good at it and sometimes I've hit the mark (laughs) like you know.'

(Ed)

Although he goes on to state that being a man is an asset by virtue of its rarity in the sector. At a later point, though he makes an observation about women's practice being just assumed as natural and women feeling no need to be held to account in the same way as men. He reports on a conversation with a female colleague:

'Rules need to be the same for males and females and I did, and sometimes that's a surprise to women because, women might automatically assume oh ah I'm going to go change, help this child change their clothes and so that other people don't see them, I'll just close the door and I said "if I did that, how would you feel?" And she said, well, I'll feel fine cos I know you. I said "if you were a parent how would you feel?" So you have to look at it from every angle. So I got her to realise that she can't do it either, do you see what I'm saying so? It's easy you know, when you think that when you equate the men and the women, then it's easy to have a sound policy, you know.'

(Ed)

This assumption around women's practice implying the women's role as the 'natural' with assumed abilities and competence, leads to the discussion about the men's involvement in caring responsibilities and the reactions this elicits.

Simultaneously challenging and reinforcing stereotypes

The expectations of men described earlier in the chapter, give rise to a discussion on stereotyping. While it can be argued that the expectations of the men were based on stereotypical notions of what men and women do and should do, many of the men tried to actively challenge those stereotypes as we have seen with Sean and Anthony rejecting the expectation of being skilled in DIY. It could be argued that by being men in ECEC they are already challenging stereotypes and while they reported resisting the gendered expectations of them, many of them fit the expectation in terms of

sports and DIY, though there are individual differences within this. One statement that captures the duality of being a man in ECEC, resisting and challenging stereotypes, but still being influenced by them is from Joshua 'Yeah, now I can play with little girls just as easily as I can play with little boys but because I'm a male, if they boys want sport, I'm kind of drawn to that straight away.' While challenging the notion that he should be just playing with the boys and indicating that he can also work with the girls, he made a gendered assumption about the activities to which the girls and boys are likely to be drawn.

Intimate care

Linked to the notion that ECEC is women's work, the corollary of that is that is not men's work and therefore a man who wishes to engage in this work is worthy of intense scrutiny. Where this becomes acutely visible is intimate care practices with children and to some extent comfort behaviours. Nappy changing and toileting with young children are a persistent theme in the men and women's narratives. While there was little in terms of colleagues' scrutiny or objection reported, the men were often very aware of themselves in a way that women were not, as Ed articulated in the previous section. Where toileting and intimate care became an issue was when parents in particular raised objections or concerns and the resulting impact and responses by management. These are discussed in detail in the next chapter.

All the study participants reported engaging in nappy or toileting duties. Both Alan and Martin commented that to not do so would have a negative impact on their female colleagues and would not be in the spirit of shared work and responsibility with Martin pointing to an injustice and inequity in excluding men from some aspects of the role based on their gender:

'If they turned around to me day one and they said look Martin, don't worry about it, you're not going to be changing a nappy, you're not going to be helping the child to toilet train", I would have felt hurt. I would have. Cos like that, it's an essential part of early years development and for someone to turn around and say to me "well, you can't be involved in helping a child to get to that stage in development because you're a male" sure to me, that's, that's utterly disgusting ...' (Martin)

Jamie pointed out that having trustworthy staff members is key to ensuring equality of practice and experience:

'So, as I said, you have to put a bit of trust in your staff. And in the people that work for you. If you don't trust them like that, you shouldn't be working, you shouldn't be employing him in the first place.' (Jamie)

Joshua reported having only changed one nappy in three years but attributed this to his position as a CE (Community Employment) worker and therefore not having sole charge of children, though if the need arose it would be expected of him. Ed was fully involved in intimate care in his previous role but not since. He attributed this to his being more frequently engaged in supporting children's (boys') behaviour. The age of the children in Anthony's group meant that he was rarely involved in supporting toileting although he had been in the past. Tracy reflected on the impact of socialisation on the practices in relation to caring for young children:

'Ehm, yeah, I do I feel like society kind of conditions you to think that it's the woman's job to do the changing and you kind of... I know I find myself saying "do you want me to do that?" like I, I it's not because I don't think that you're capable of doing it, a man's capable of doing it but I, I expect myself "well that's my job" I'm the carer, so I'll do it which is interesting.' (Tracy)

Here, Tracy picked up on the societally gendered expectations of caring and internalised it and she has to stop herself from falling in line with the rules.

In terms of supervision, most of the men, despite their own awareness of themselves, did not feel they were supervised any more closely than their female colleagues. However, Patrick's case, the service provider had installed cameras in a bid to protect him from allegations of malpractice. Robert also reported that he had not changed nappies in a previous job, again a stipulation put in place in order to protect him. The issue with protecting the male workers perpetuates the notion of ECEC or certain parts of ECEC as women's domain. Apart from creating inequalities in practice, the message it sends to the children that men do not change nappies. Robert reflected on the problem that this creates:

'There's so much focus that d'you know the risk of men that the risk of women has been over looked, that there are female paedophiles out there and sometimes it's like, oh no sure Mary couldn't have done that, but sure women don't do that, and there is and that's even more dangerous because you have, you have an awful lot of eyes on men but then you're overlooking... [the women].' (Robert)

Robert reported that the focus on ECEC being women's work is slowly shifting and any reluctance is generational and the more we see men in ECEC, the less people will take note. He recommended open discussion on the topic and reflected on an incident with a male radio host who during a broadcast at Robert's service stated on air 'I wouldn't let a man mind my children, not the least [sic] put sun cream on them'. However, upsetting this was to Robert, it was compounded by the same host having a male primary teacher on the show the following day which Robert reported as the 'best thing since sliced bread. Just something to do with early years cos they're

that bit younger, d'you know?' Sharon reported that among some members of staff, there was more focus on Geoff's activities:

'Geoff was extremely caring but there were times when maybe other people's kind of interpretation of, may have effected d'you know in terms of confidence and stuff, of that person.'
(Sharon)

Expectation of Leadership

Patrick and Ed reported experiences of parents expecting them to be the manager and responding better to their requests than to their female colleagues. Patrick says:

'I... had one parent this year at the start of the year... he was very aggressive, [would not] listen to Pam, full stop, don't matter what he would not listen to her.' (Patrick)

He reported that some parents responded more favourably to his requests for timely payment of fees than when the same request was made by his female colleague who happened to own the service. Ed reported a similar experience with one parent who 'talks to me in a different way than she talks to the other two women and it's more favourable to me.' Pam and Mary both reported similar experiences of men being perceived to be in the leadership role, despite both of them being the manager in their respective settings. Whereas Sharon suggested that parents would choose different members by their gender depending on the nature of their query with females more likely to be seen in the 'teacher' role and so approached in relation to pedagogical enquiries. However, in contrast to this, Alan had the experience that a parent bypassed him in favour of his female colleague indicating that while men may be treated in some instances as more managerial, in other cases the belief that ECEC is women's work means that some parents will favour speaking to the female members of staff about their children's

development. It would suggest that men and women are channelled into different roles by parent beliefs and expectations.

There is a theme in the literature which suggests that men who do enter women majority occupations progress quicker than their female counterparts, a phenomenon known as the 'glass escalator' (Williams, 1992). Whether this is due to men being seen as more capable or natural in leadership roles, as happens in a range of occupational contexts, or to move them away from the younger children and the intimate care responsibilities is not clear. There was no sense from the men that they had advantageous progression in their trajectories. Jamie and Robert were both managers and out of the classroom in their services. Ed, Patrick and Alan were assistant managers with female managers. All three worked hands-on in the classroom alongside their assistant roles. Anthony, Joshua and Sean were class-based workers and did not indicate any desire for management. In fact, both Anthony and Sean shunned the idea. Geoff was a classroom-based worker until he set up his own service and is now both owner and sole operator. Martin was also based in the classroom until he changed careers and left ECEC.

Opportunities for progression in the ECEC sector in Ireland are limited, so that other than management, which is often still classroom-based except in very large services, there is narrow scope for career advancement.

7.3 Practice: 'Hard to put into words'

In day-to-day practice with children, while recognising that there were gendered expectations of them and their unique position as men in ECEC, in terms of practice there were some differences reported by the men in this research. In some cases, it was meeting the expectations discussed in the previous section. The degree to which those differences were personal, as Jamie, Martin and Anthony suggested, rather than gendered is difficult to unpick.

Anthony was quick to point out that age was a factor in differences in practice with him being in his fifties and many of his female colleagues in their twenties. Joshua felt that the level of training should ensure that practices do not differ. This warrants the question about how training is devised and whether it might too, be inherently gendered based on an understanding of what women do as being the definition of care. Martin acknowledged that people's experiences (gendered or not) means that they bring 'different viewpoints and ways of thinking' and that having a mixed gendered workforce brings balance. Some of the differences identified by the men have been discussed in the preceding sections and we return to some of them here. The main differences articulated related to communication, responding to children and approaches to play. Other differences were harder to 'put into words' as Robert suggested while acknowledging that differences did exist.

Valuing play

Linked to the gendered expectations identified above, is the idea that the types of play valued by men and women differ in some way, with the men more likely to engage in physical types of play as reported by Geoff, Jamie, Robert, Joshua and Martin. This assertion was echoed by Sharon and Pam. And while some of the men such as Patrick rejected the notion of being more inclined to be outdoors, he did suggest that he was more likely to engage in rough and tumble play. Sean also rejected the expectation of certain types of play, preferring to engage in more scientific and enquiry-based learning with the children. However, when Ed reflected on his experience, he says 'we do value all different types of play, you know, and I think that that's typical of gendered instance'. Robert suggested that having different approaches is complementarity rather than a right or wrong scenario and often gives an opportunity of looking at something in a new way if the staff member is open to it. Robert was keen to encourage individual autonomy in this way.

Martin also suggests complementarity of practice as an outcome of a mixed-gender workforce:

‘Because having both genders in an environment of care and education, brings different viewpoints, brings different ah ways of thinking, and brings different ... just different aspects to the crèche and I think it brings actually a more well-rounded in a way, you know? In in some ways, you know so. I don't know if I'm saying the right thing there or not.’ (Martin)

Jamie reflected on the different life experiences influencing practice. For instance, he suggested that his interest in sport and construction background influenced his enjoyment of physical play and construction-type projects with the children. Both Sharon and Pam suggested that the type of play in which the men engaged was much more likely to be physical in nature based on previous gendered experiences.

Humour: ‘I’m just a big kid’

Robert, Jamie, Martin, Anthony and, Ed all reflected on the use of humour in men’s practice. Robert and Jamie both suggested that adult men are often just ‘big kids’ and can relate to children on that level. It was the one difference that was clearly articulated. Anthony and Robert described being a ‘messenger’ [someone who uses silliness and humour in their interactions] as a core part of their practice.

‘I do think a lot of guys do come in to childcare d’you know often they’re big kids themselves...? And the thing is, when I go on the floor, here as a manager and when I was in the early years it's lot of high fives and messing.’ (Robert)

‘Ah everyone brings something different; you know some men bring silly silliness you know like humour is another is another factor that is that, is not quite gender balanced, you know that

like men probably are more, use the humour card more than women do, you know.' (Ed)

Care

Despite male study participants' self-awareness and that of others in relation to intimate care, in practice, the men reported caring behaviours largely being the same as that of women with some individual variations. Sean, Patrick, Alan, Jamie, Ed, Robert and Geoff reported being at ease with comfort and quiet activities with all. Robert suggested that those moments were largely the same as children's interactions with women, with both genders sitting quietly with children and responding to their needs. Anthony, who had had an incident in relation to reactions to having children on his knee (which will be discussed in the next chapter), reported that no staff member should initiate physical contact with children and so that any approach for physical comfort must come from the child and fall within a policy set out by the service which should apply to both male and female staff equally. This was not in place at the time of his experience but resulted from it. Despite this, two of the women (Tracy and Pam) suggested that there were subtle differences in caring practices with women being 'naturally' more caring and children naturally gravitating towards women for comfort. However, Tracy suggested that this was likely to be because caring is largely defined by our previous experience of it and therefore influenced by a female version of caring without considering that there may be other ways of caring that are not of less value. Alan described differences in caring practices as giving 'just enough care that they know you are there'. He elaborated on this by stating that in his experience, women spend more time 'fussing' over a hurt or upset child, whereas he would check that they're ok, give them a little bit of encouragement and send them on their way.

Robert reported that caring practices are often down to individual differences and that while he engaged in this type of care, he had a

female member on his team who was a lot less tactile and that the approach to care is often influenced by our own upbringing. He stressed the importance of physical interaction with children:

'If you don't have that natural interaction and I think it's it goes with the needs of the child not as the needs of the adult, yeah. But the thing is, not having it, I said you're teaching the children that having the cuddle and having that closeness isn't natural.'
(Robert)

Jamie also pointed to physical comfort as natural and normal, though admitted being a little apprehensive initially. Patrick stressed the importance of helping children during transitions, particularly when they are struggling to settle in the early days or through family stressors such as illness or bereavement. Alan described it as part of the role with young children:

'If they're upset or hurt is always and I'd always I'd have them on me lap and I'd give them a cuddle yeah I've never had a problem with that and I've never felt uncomfortable with that. That's part of the reason I felt I was able to go into childcare that that wouldn't be a problem for me.' (Alan)

There was a very clear sense across all participants that physical care in comforting a child is important and should be facilitated by both men and women but only at the instigation of the child and on the child's terms. Touch and comfort are essential to meeting children's developmental and emotional needs and points to a difficulty in the current understanding of care as naturally women's domain. Until gender is de-linked from touch, the issue of men's caring as unnatural or a safeguarding issue will remain problematic.

Embodiment:

One of the themes visible in this research is the concept of embodiment. Many of the men's experiences and the expectations

of them are linked to the physicality of their presence. From expectations of the types of play in which they should engage and, in some cases, do, to the assumption that they should be responsible for moving heavy items, putting up shelves or using their height to reach. From there, there is the assumption that their physical presence is in some way inherently hazardous to children and their need to defend physical comfort of the children in their care. These experiences lead to a situation where some of the men reported always being aware of themselves as men. Geoff expresses being 'hyperly aware' of himself and points to the previously discussed notion of the assumption that anything that his female colleagues do is considered ok and not given a second thought:

'I just I just think it was more to do with the fact that I did not want to leave myself open to anything like that, that it something could be misconstrued... it was never specifically said to me as in 'you cannot go over and comfort a child' but the same level of physical like you'd always see them, now technically they probably shouldn't be doing it or whatever, like that, even the women shouldn't be but they definitely would have given plenty of hugs and kisses to an upset child, where I couldn't well I just felt, well I wasn't comfortable doing it even, no one said you cannot do that but she can because she's a woman, because they know they couldn't say that but I was, I would have been very aware of that, you know.' (Geoff)

Martin reflected on a similar awareness and ensuring that he never found himself alone with a child, an awareness not articulated by the women except in Sharon's case where she suggested there was a different awareness of Geoff among other staff members.

Communication and Teamwork

The men spoke positively for the most part about their interactions with their co-workers, with Martin and Ed making particular mention of how lucky they have been with the team they have worked with.

'I know in my heart and soul that I was very lucky with the team I had. Serious balance of experience, creativity, enthusiasm, it's a huge thing.' (Martin)

'I'm really lucky. I've worked with some people that are just excellent and have really done so much for me in terms of their openness to me, and my and really believing in me as someone who can learn and do it.' (Ed)

Some men though reported differences in how members of their team communicated with each other, with some attributing it to gender and other suggesting that it was just individual differences in approaches. Martin felt there were differences in how staff communicated with parents but also acknowledged that some of the difference may be influenced by the role of the staff member or in Anthony's case as he believed his accent and use of language.

The way in which men and women deal with conflict was suggested as a difference with Alan reporting: 'women would have kind of let things fester a little bit longer, and kind of disengaged with each other', an observation also made by Jamie. However, he qualified this with pointing out that when there are only other women to compare to, it's hard to judge whether it is a gender difference or a personality difference. Geoff and Joshua both compared their experiences of communication and conflict on building sites with those of the ECEC environment as being distinctly different, with the men in construction being direct about their feelings unlike their experiences of women in the ECEC environment as being subtle and relational, with his colleagues more likely to speak to others than

the colleague with whom the issue had arisen. Joshua reported finding it difficult to broach tricky situations with his female colleagues, unsure of their response. Anthony did not see a difference but suspected that was because in all his previous employments, he was among women, unlike the men who had come from construction. By contrast, Sean's experience was that women are more direct and vocal. Karen described women as being more emotional and men being more logical but the reasons for this assumption were not clear.

Staffroom conversations were another area where differences were identified, not so much for the different communication styles, but that they revolved around what were seen as 'women's subjects' but many of the men did not necessarily see it as problematic despite their awareness of it.

I've a joke, which is you know, people start to talk about stuff everyone and I say, 'yeah what about that Man United?' you know cos like (laughs) everybody gets a good laugh. I haven't, I have not felt it as a deterrent. Do you know what I'm saying, I don't see it as a negative thing?' (Ed)

Whether the women in these situations were aware that their conversations were exclusionary is not clear. Although Geoff reported that in the early stages of his employment, the conversation would stop when he entered the room until he became more familiar, as he described being: 'part of the furniture.' Two men: Joshua and Ed, reported pointing out to their colleagues that the conversation was exclusive, where in Alan's case, he was happy to just sit in a corner and read a book. Jamie reported: 'Yes, sometimes it's nice to have a few lads there as well like but it doesn't bother me'. Karen attributed the lack of awareness of the gendered nature of the conversation being due to the dominance of female staff and that it would likely be remedied by a better balance:

'd'you know what it might be more light-hearted if there were men, d'you know sometimes I think there's a few women and they're all in together in the work and maybe you can start talking about personal things a bit more, what's going on, not that there's anything wrong with that at all, but maybe if it was more mixed, you'd just end up talking about more neutral things.' (Karen)

7.4 Status

There is an inherent contradiction in positions in ECEC in terms of the status afforded to them. The educational hierarchy, research (Roberts-Holmes, 2003; Skelton, Francis and Valkanova, 2003) suggests that there are more men in the higher levels of education or in management roles reflecting an elevated position where they are taken more seriously. However, when a man enters an ECEC role, on the lower end of the educational hierarchy, it can have the effect of decreasing his status among his peers and in society. The idea that working with children is not serious work and more suited to women prevails and this is reflected in the salary. The reactions that some of the men experienced and discussed in the previous chapter illustrate this. Martin reported:

" Don't be doing early years education? What?" Now, not to a very, not to the fact that it was a negative stereotype, although I'm sure looking back on it now, that's probably part of it. It was more so that or maybe it was lack of awareness towards what the degree entailed. I really don't know, but I was pushed away from it.' (Martin)

A deterrent to men working in the ECEC sector and impacting on their status, seems to be the prevailing notion that men should be the breadwinner in any household and that as such, they need to work in a sector that pays well enough to maintain this. This is likely compounded by the gender pay gap across many industries in which

women are paid less, meaning that they are often dependent on the male earner in the household. With the economic recession influencing some of the men's entry to ECEC, Robert reflected on this expectation and how it limits both men and women in changing economic times in terms of policy in families where the man may have been made redundant and found himself at home:

'We had a situation where the mum had the maternity leave, the dad was unemployed and d'you know and because she had an ok job, they couldn't sign on so they were trying to survive on the maternity leave, so she ended up going back to work early d'you know not using the maternity and, like dad was there but, like Dad should have been allowed to have the maternity d'you know what I mean and it was just tough, d'you know it's just I think sometimes, it's so rigid, it's not family friendly... I do think that's like part of like why I've had no negative experiences from parents, cos I do think parents are in tune with modern society 99.9% of the time, and like I said the only negative experience I've had was in the media.'

(Robert)

Robert felt that more flexible family policies at state level in conjunction with increased pay and conditions in the sector and a wider recognition of it as a role for men could shift the balance. The issue of the breadwinning expectation will be developed in chapter eight.

Joshua reflected on the sorrow of having to leave ECEC in the months that followed, because despite loving the job, he could not afford to remain on in it once his employment scheme came to an end: 'I have a very high mortgage and at the moment the State is helping me with my mortgage, so I go back to work, the State takes away the help.' Karen also summed up the expectation of men as breadwinner:

'I suppose, I think a lot of the reason why, I think I know a couple of the men that work in the early years is during the recession time, they lost their jobs and there was a lot of jobs in childcare and that's why they trained up but I think a lot of men are kind of like the breadwinner in the family and money is just not enough to keep a family afloat if the partner doesn't work or if they have a lot of children. It's just there's just not enough money in it. yeah, it's just not sufficient.' (Karen)

In contrast to this, the men who do enter and stay in the ECEC service often experience an elevated status. The glass escalator and expectations of leadership has been discussed earlier in this chapter and while the men interviewed did not think their position had been enhanced by their gender, some did report preferential treatment by certain parents. Ed talks of his elevated position as a man

'so it's been you know that has set me apart and enough above, do you know what I'm saying and not in a negative way, set me a part, sorry I don't want to say above, set me apart, and I haven't suffered from that setting apart. If anything, I've, that's been an advantage, yeah.' (Ed)

As all of the participants discussed their experiences in ECEC, the language they used to describe their colleagues may subtly reflect differences in how men and women are viewed. The female workers were often referred to as 'girls' by both the men and the women, whereas the male workers were more frequently described as 'men' though there are instances of the terms 'boys' and 'women' This may further reflect an unconscious elevated status of men within the ECEC environment.

7.5 Conclusion

Throughout this chapter we have seen the challenges men experienced in reconciling their own and others' expectations with the reality of their practice. There are a series of contradictions evident where the men are expected to be both an alternative to the default woman role and care like women, to simultaneously reinforce and challenge stereotypes and where their status is simultaneously lowered (in society and the setting) and raised (in the setting) and to do it all under scrutiny. While this was not necessarily the experience universally, there are certainly examples of it within the narratives of the men that are not seen in the women's experiences. Even when some men were aware of the gendered expectations and trying to resist them, they were still influenced by prevailing gender expectations themselves. Where men were embracing the gendered expectations, they made qualifying comments such as stating that any difference was down to individual characteristics or age or previous experience or preference for the type of activity, particularly in relation to DIY and previous construction experience.

The very fact that the previous experience was gendered illustrates how much gender influences the experiences and stories both consciously and unconsciously as illustrated in the nuances of language such as referring to the female workers as girls. On a micro and meso level in the day-to-day interactions, men experienced gendered assumptions about their abilities and practice while also struggling with the macro expectation that men should be breadwinner and that ECEC is a role for women, reflecting the policing of gender roles outlined by Connell (2009). Despite this, the men spoke very positively about their experiences in ECEC overall with the satisfaction of supporting children's development and building relationships giving them a real sense of meaning in a job that they felt was particularly professionally rewarding if not financially so. Notwithstanding the positive sense of self-provided by

the ECEC work, some of the men had stand-out incidents that negatively impacted their experiences, often related to parents' responses and these will be discussed in the next chapter.

8 Critical Incidents/parents

‘She kind of was instantly a bit off with me, I wasn't really sure what the story was... she was kind of going, “no I want to speak to that girl over there”, so I was like “ok”, so it was one of the girls who was in the room all the time so I handed it over to her, but the next day she came in to me and she said that... she only wanted the girls in the room changing her nappies, and she said... “I don' even, like my husband wouldn't even change her.”’ (Alan)

During the course of this research, five men talked about significant incidents during their time in ECEC that had a negative impact on their experiences. In all but one of these cases, they related to carer or parent responses to their presence in the setting. Beyond these critical incidents, nine of the men reported a range of reactions from parents, reactions which were not reported by the female workers. This chapter will explore those incidents and their impact on the men's experiences of ECEC. The role of management at these times often had an ameliorating effect and is discussed below. The sixty-nine parent responses to the survey will be discussed in the context of the men's experiences.

8.1 Men's experiences of parent/carers responses

From reticence to acceptance

All of the men interviewed reported reactions from caregivers. Many of the reactions were an initial surprise at a man being in the ECEC setting, in what is largely seen as women's domain and has for so long been inhabited by women. While in many cases, once the initial surprise had passed, parents embraced the idea of a male worker, often coming to see it as a benefit in terms of role modelling and different types of practice. Getting to know the men often resolved any initial trepidation as Joshua reports: ‘There was one or two and

I can't obviously point them out were a bit apprehensive of a man, right, but once they got to know me, that they're fine'. Sean also noted an initial reticence from the Traveller families, with whose children he was working. The Travelling community is noted for its traditional gender roles (Casey, 2014; Griffin, 2002; McGaughey, Pavee Point & Crisis Pregnancy Agency, 2011):

'Yeah, it was the [Traveller advocacy] in [City], so it was primarily with Traveller children, and I was quite nervous starting, and I found out afterwards, they were quite nervous having a male coming in too and there was not one issue, all the parents loved me and thought it was a brilliant idea that I was there.' (Sean)

Geoff suggested that there were gender differences in parent responses, with fathers taking a bit more time to accept the presence of a man:

'No once they were happy that I was competent at me job, they saw past it you know like, but they the dads, the dads would have all took a while to suss you out, d'you know what I mean?... I would have found the fathers a lot more standoffish as a rule of thumb, trying to suss you out and they... the mams to your face anyway would at least have given you a chance, you know?' (Geoff)

Robert and Martin both suggested that that initial surprise was as a result of the uniqueness of a man being in the setting and that once that passes, the men's presence becomes normalised, suggesting that the more men that are recruited to ECEC, the more natural and expected it will become:

'There was times where new parents would come in or new children would come in and there's that moment of awkwardness slash uneasiness... they don't expect to see me

here, like I'm 6ft 2, you know what I mean, big fella and, and working in a crèche, you know, down on me hands and knees doing a jigsaw in a purple tunic, you know what I mean? But then, like that, once they see it, it starts to become normal. And one thing I would say is that when you're working in childcare, the children are your biggest advocate as a male in childcare or as any worker, in that, the children go home and they're like "well, me and Martin did this today" and "me and you know Lisa did this today" or "me and Mary did this today" and like that, it just becomes normality.' (Martin)

In some cases, the parents' misgivings were specifically around intimate care and toileting. It seems those parents did not have an objection to the idea of men working with their children, but the concern around the risk of abuse persisted in a way not considered with the women:

'On three or four occasions, you know I believe that the parents were kind of more so asking out of curiosity and kind of just affirmation in their own head as to my involvement in toilet training or in nappy changing or so on.' (Martin)

'Since I've been here there have been a few parents who have questioned what I actually do. One of them was asking, did I go into the toilet with them, and the manager said basically, in fairness, she backed me up and was like, "no he waits at the door, if they need help, he gives them help" she was honest but backed me up as well. You got a few.' (Jamie)

Both Robert and Pam reflected on Ireland's history of child sexual abuse, particularly at the hands of the clergy in situations where they were entrusted to the care of children. While this is not unique to Ireland, there have been a number of very high-profile cases of large-scale abuses over a long period of time with a largely inadequate response from the institutions and the State.

'In Ireland, sometimes as well you do have the fear of d'you know of the media with the historic issues of abuse, d'you know that is in the back pipeline as well d'you know and it is in fairness to people it is fear, d'you know as well and it has to be recognised and I think that's the important part of the, we're talking about men in childcare about being open and having that chat.' (Robert)

'[I] think it could be a societal thing here in Ireland like kind of originated because of all the scandal with the church going back years ago and things like that.' (Pam)

Some parents expressed more than just a curiosity or reassurance around intimate care in the cases of Alan and Martin:

'As part of that kind of introductory process, they enquired as to whether... I would be involved in toilet training and nappy changing, and the manager of course said that I would and they, they would have expressed cautious concern, I suppose over their worries and I was made aware of this. The manager made me aware of this just out of my own safety I suppose, or you know awareness.' (Martin)

'When I was in the baby room and one of the parents didn't want me changing nappies and yeah now that was kind of a complicated situation because she they were there was twins, two boys and they were same-sex couple and I, to me that that doesn't matter to me I don't know why but this was, the manager of the put this forward as like an excuse... so I was called in and she said "look it you know one of the parents said she doesn't want to change nappies," I supposed what happened with that was eventually what happened was the staff had to say, "listen, we're now having to do those two extra nappies" and so on and they were saying it to me and I said, "look it, you're right, so but you need to bring that forward to

somebody else you need to bring it forward to the manager” and the manager went back to them and they said “look it, here's the thing, we've been up in the room and we've seen cos I had a really good relationship with these two kids, and we've seen Alan with them and you know, we, we're going to move on from that and it's fine, he can change the nappies again,” so that was the end of that it was all kind of awkward I suppose.’ (Alan)

The response of the management in each of these situations differed. The manager in Martin's situation took the stance that Martin was an early childhood educator and that was part of role and the parent's accepted this position. In Alan's case, the manager accepted the parent's objection, restricting Alan's role in intimate care with those children. Alan reflected on the impact of this on his colleagues. Ultimately, once the parents got to know Alan, they were happy to let him resume his full role in caring for their children. The importance of relationships with parents is evident in Alan, Joshua and Patrick's experiences. In Patrick's case, his first experience on placement could have been his last until the parent, having gotten to know him, apologised for her initial reaction:

‘It kind of made me start thinking about it, but within a week of the child getting to know me, the mother actually came back and apologised for that remark.’ (Patrick)

In one very extreme case, Alan had a very negative reaction from a great-grandparent of a child in his care which had a lasting impact on him and is recounted in the quote at the top of this chapter. He went on to state:

‘So I spoke to the mother, she was kind of, she got really annoyed about it, she was like “that's not my feelings at all”, so eh but listen, that grandmother was going to be coming in and bringing her home all the time so you kind of have to have

some kind of respect for where she's at so, we just... left at that... I kind of didn't like it, the way she approached it wasn't really good... this was kind of was addressed out there in front of people and was a bit messy and the word "paedophile" started getting thrown around... and I don't think she kind of grasped the you know how damaging that would be now I was fuming I have to be honest with you but we got through it, that was, I think that's been my worst experience...' (Alan)

Alan's experience may reflect a generational element to this woman's reaction. Being older, her experience of men and women's roles is perhaps more traditional. However, traditional roles don't necessarily posit that men are abusers, rather that caring for children is not their role. Whatever the rationale for this woman's reaction, its impact on Alan's professional reputation could have been severe.

In contrast to the stories recounted above, once in the ECEC workforce, Ed experienced acceptance from parents:

'I'm really lucky, parents really accepted me from the beginning, and that always was it's always been very important and it's the combination of my own confidence eh which comes from my first experience, being accepted by the woman who ran the place, being accepted by the woman who I worked in the room with, my friend, *Lucy her name was and then being accepted by the parents and being accepted by the children so it's always there's all these players.' (Ed)

Building relationships: Children as advocates

It is important to note that most of the experiences the men had with parents were positive. The negative reactions recounted above are isolated incidents, but however isolated, they are significant enough to stand out in the men's narratives and similar experiences are not

reported by the women interviewed. Building positive relationships with parents was an important part of the men's (and women's) roles as early childhood educators. Despite the two incidents reported by Alan he reflects on his relationships with parents:

'Generally speaking, they've been really good, really positive, particularly, with, you know when I've worked with children, who had say behavioural issues, and I kind of you know stuck with them and you no work with them.' (Alan)

Robert suggested that becoming a parent himself, made him better able to relate to parents:

'I would have done a lot of training before kids, but the thing is I think, being a parent gives you a bigger insight about who you're working with because I know, years ago when I was in the early years because it was great, I worked 9-4, I went canoeing after work, d'you know and that and sometimes parents would be coming in and they would be genuinely struggling and the kids, their kids would be great in the service and then when they go home, you're finding it tough, and you'd be like "sure they're grand here, why can't you just manage them at home?" And it's that, I think being a parent you get a better empathy for parents... I think that allows me better to better relate to parents...' (Robert)

Ultimately, the children were the biggest factor in promoting positive relationships with parents. Robert, Sean, Martin and Geoff all commented on the advocacy provided by the children in their care:

'I think it's more when the child goes home and starts talking about me, then cos they're only in the room ten minutes in the morning, ten in the afternoon, it's what "oh you got them, or you got a haircut or you're doing hairdressing with him, ok, it's I'm not only outside kicking a ball.' (Sean)

'Once the kids went home and were giving you good reports, because I'm sure they were grilled when they got home what your man like and they would have said "ah sure he's great, he does this or he does that or he whatever he said this or he reads this or whatever", sort of report they gave, once the kids are giving you good reports, the parents are grand... That's my experience anyway.' (Geoff)

'I think that kids can be the best advocates for men, because they go home, they sort of say what they did during the day and things like that d'you know and I think that eases parents' minds' (Robert)

A supportive culture: the importance of management responses

When describing experiences with parents, many of the men reflected on the impact of the management responses. Some of the men described feelings of being supported by their management in times when initial queries are raised by parents, for instance Martin and Jamie talked of a matter-of-fact approach by management that served to make them feel supported while giving a clear message to parents.

'Thankfully... I had a manager ... she was extremely supportive and for other men in childcare, I know for a fact when they don't have that, that can very much hurt because it because I can't do anything about the fact that I'm a male... I've got the qualifications and the Garda [police] vetting and all this and I'm very good at my job and my professional capacity is being questioned based on me gender and that's a very hard thing to take... thankfully it only happened that one time. That's the only memory of childcare that I have where I was a bit uncomfortable. Other than that, no issues.' (Martin)

Jamie and Robert describe their responses as managers to queries:

'I think that's one of the issues with childcare as well and men coming into childcare, sometimes people worry about what parents will think, without consulting the parents. D'you know that they, cos I do know there would have been issues over the years with loads of services contacting and saying "I've got a guy, he's brilliant with the kids, we're really looking forward to employing him but I don't know how to tell the parents", whereas when I started working in the early years, I remember asking *Christine on me first day, I said "did you tell the staff or did you tell the parents that I'm a man?" and she said "no" she said "but sure what difference does it make? A childcare worker is a childcare worker." Now that's 21 years ago, but the thing is, as we sort of say, as we were saying to the, like now we often give them the flyers and the posters, to put up cos I said, it's the dialogue around it, it's not to be shy to talk to the parents and talk about the positives of it and it sort of "we're delighted Mary is working with us, she's this, this, this and this... and we're delighted Tom is working with us and he's this, this, this and this..." (Robert)

'When I was first taking over [as] manager... there was another lad working in the crèche at the time and he was in a room that required nappies and a parent did say... I think someone said to her that... "such and such changed a nappy and he noticed that their bum was sore" and the parent made a comment as like "oh is that a thing here?" So, I, thing is she's like "yeah, he's in the class, he changes...", Like I've no time for that kind of stuff, especially as a manager. It's like I'm a man and I can do my job the same as any other person. Just because, I know whatever the stats are on other things and doesn't mean that everyone... I'm vetted, I'm trained, qualified the same as anyone else down there.' (Jamie)

Alan and Anthony's experiences of well-meaning managers responding to parents however led to situations where their positions as early childhood educators were undermined. In Alan's case, described earlier, it led to unequal workload on his colleagues. Ultimately, the parents withdrew their objection. Anthony's situation set of a chain of events which escalated unnecessarily:

'We were in the circle time, and I have one girl, two girls but they were not in my lap, they were on my knees... the father look at me, I look at the father, no problem. The thing is that the next day... the mum, the wife called and say straight to... the owner, that eh she doesn't want to have never ever ah a girl in a man's lap... The owner came to me and said "ah Anthony they are the parents and they, they they dislike, you're going to have the rest", but not them, so I was in shock. Now, completely by chance it was a Wednesday and that Wednesday I have a meeting in the Men in Childcare [Network]...' (Anthony)

Anthony's manager chose to remove Anthony from the care of the child. However, when Anthony sought guidance from the Men in Childcare Network, he was advised to go back to his workplace and discuss a common policy with management around appropriate child-initiated contact. In the meantime, his manager had also sought guidance from their local Childcare Committee and was given similar advice. While Anthony ultimately viewed the situation as a positive lesson, none the less it has affected his confidence:

'Ah parents, the thing is that I don't know if it's my perception, do you know what I mean?... I am very cautious you know.... My strategy is that I start to work, I don't go very much. I prefer that my manager deal with them. I don't go. I am with the children... I entertain them I can be eight hours in the day... The thing is also, is the language you know I have a very

strong accent I want to do a course now you know so I don't have confidence.' (Anthony)

In contrast to the other men who were largely supported by their management in various ways, Sean was hired by an ECEC service, he believed because he was a man and paid more than his female co-worker hired at the same time but was excluded from intimate care and being alone with children by the management. This led to a situation of him feeling devalued because of his gender:

'And it has never been an issue before, if someone wouldn't change a nappy, you'd be a hindrance to someone else in the room, but I'm completely barred from it. I wouldn't have accepted the job if they'd told it to me beforehand and when I got called for the interview, he asked me "do you ever have issues with toileting, training or nappy changing?" and I said "no". Very taken aback. And nothing was said until I started then. So, it was obviously something that was playing in the head before they met me. Yeah. there was an addendum in my contract...I'm not allowed be in the room on my own with the children... [despite other colleagues being] who started the same day.' (Sean).

While parent curiosity in relation to men's role in the ECEC setting as something unusual may be understandable, a service deliberately employing a male worker and then implementing contract stipulations not required of his female colleagues seems at odds with equality legislation and it is hard to understand the rationale that would pay a man more but restrict his practice. It suggests that the potential for parent objections did not influence the recruitment but it's possible it influenced the roles assigned.

Feeling supported and valued is an important factor in satisfaction in any occupation. The men describe the significance of this in their experiences. For example, Patrick: 'Like my manager is very you

know, “your opinion matters the exact same as mine.” Despite his negative management experience in his current role, Sean describes the support of his colleagues as valuable.

‘I have found and yet when you when I feel supported, I know that I have the support of all the staff members. That then I know they’re behind me and I know that we’re all equal...
(Sean)

8.2 ‘Ability is more important than gender’ Responses from parents

‘Children should have the opportunity to have both male and female carers in their settings if they are suitable qualified. Male and female carers are both capable of caring professions given the chance by employers and parents. Male carers are sometimes an absent role model in crèches due to stereotypes (not a man’s job). This affects children’s opportunities.’ (P65)

Following the interviews with men and women and informed by their responses, a parent survey was devised and distributed to willing services during March 2019 with the intention of gaining some insight from parents themselves on their attitudes to male workers. Most of the questions were quantitative and closed with initial demographic questions, followed by Likert scales covering topics such as care, practice and risk. The survey included a number of open-ended qualitative questions which have been thematically analysed. A total of sixty-nine completed surveys were returned and the findings are presented below. A copy of the survey can be found in Appendix V. While this survey gives some insight into the attitudes of parents, it’s small size means that it cannot be generalised to the population.

Profile of children and services used

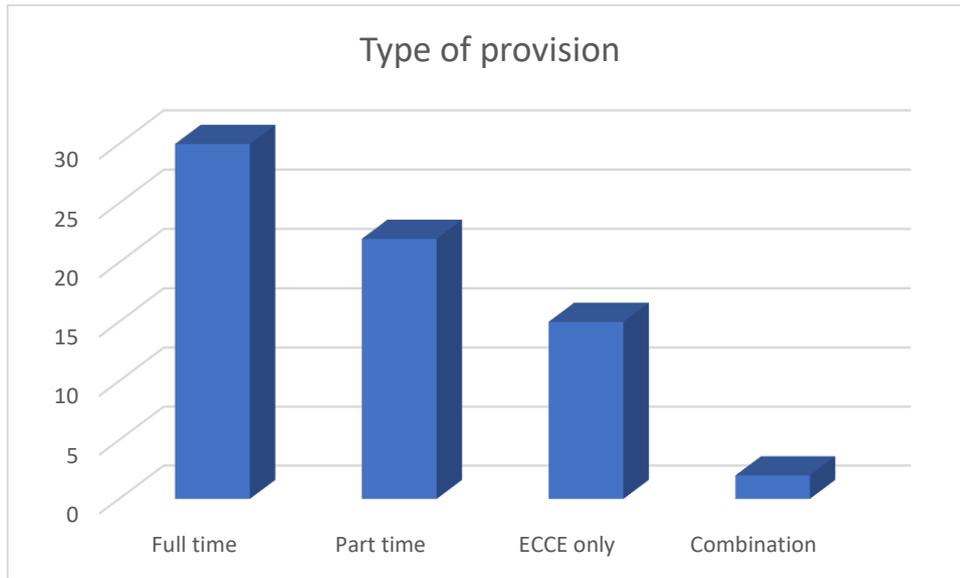


Figure 8.1 Type of provision accessed by respondents

The individual services accessed included one service where men had been interviewed as part of the first strand and one service who had agreed through a mutual contact to distribute surveys to parents. Online responses from the survey were also collected from a parent forum. Efforts to distribute additional surveys to services were impeded by time and circumstances within the organisations. An overview of the type of provision accessed by respondents can be seen in figure 8.1.

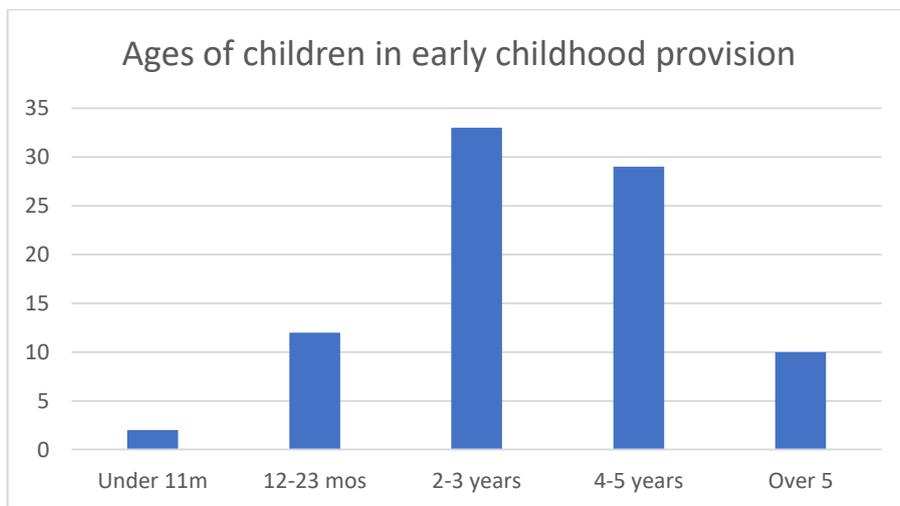


Figure 8.2 Ages of the children in early childhood provision

The majority of respondents in this survey were availing of full-time (n=30) care for their children under the age of six with half that number availing of ECCE only (the funded two-year ECCE sessional programme for children between two years and nine months and four and a half years old). The full-time and part-time provision include the ECCE programme, so many children could be availing of a full day care and also be in receipt of the ECCE funded programme for three hours per day. This is reflected in the age profile of the children in this research which can be seen in figure 8.2 which represents eighty-one children as fifteen of the families surveyed and more than one child in ECEC provision.

Profile of parents

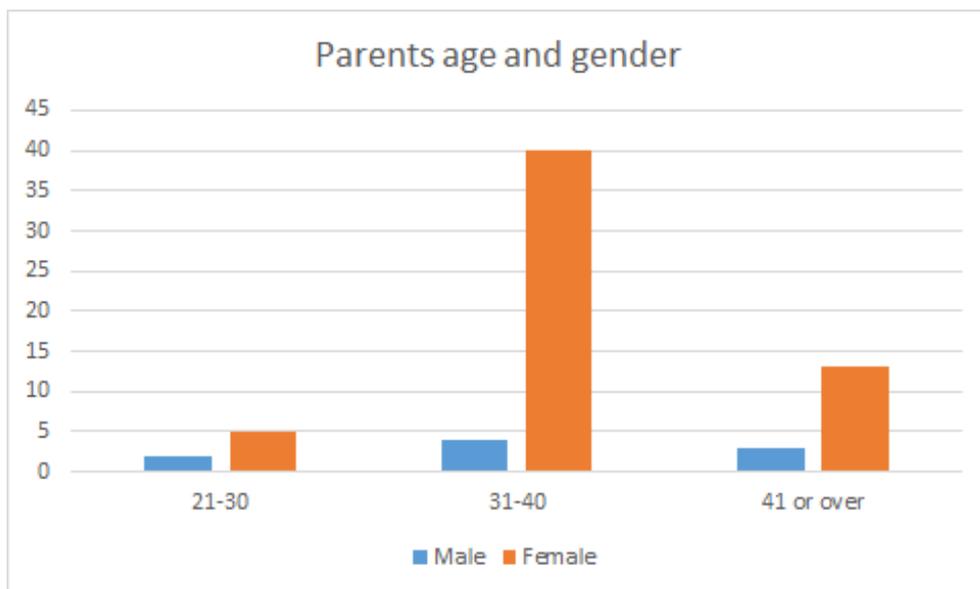


Figure 8.3 Parent age and gender profile

The majority of the parents surveyed (87%, n=60) were mothers with 13% fathers. The age profile in figure 8.3 indicates that 64% were in the 31-40 aged category with none under twenty and 23% (n=16) were 41 or over.

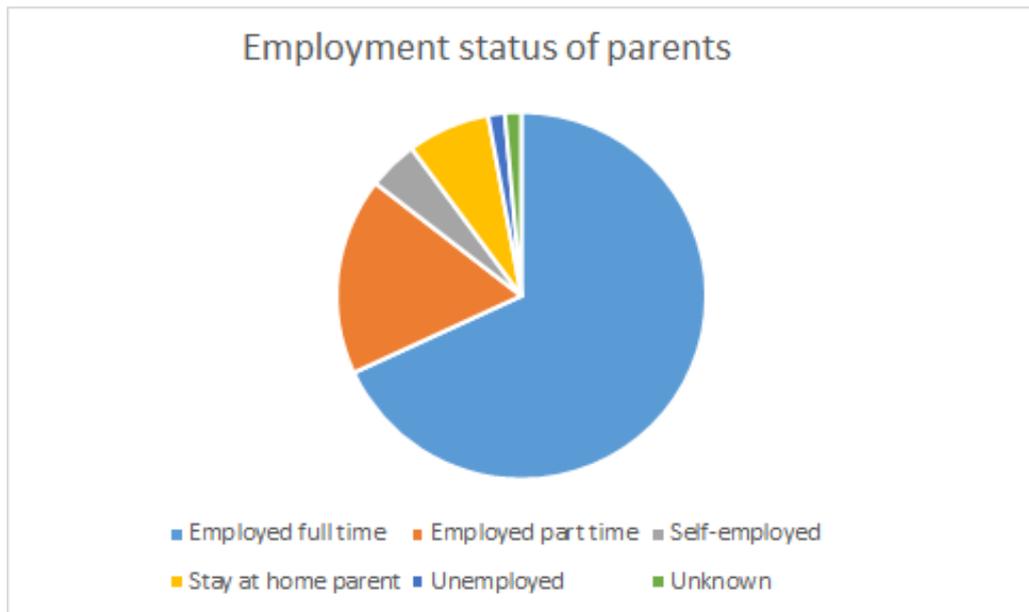


Figure 8.4 Parent employment status

Most parents were in full-time employment (figure 8.4), typical of those who avail of ECEC, though there is universal provision of 15 hours of preschool education for children between the ages of two years and nine months (DCYA, 2019a). In this case, provision is for children’s education rather than parent’s needs.

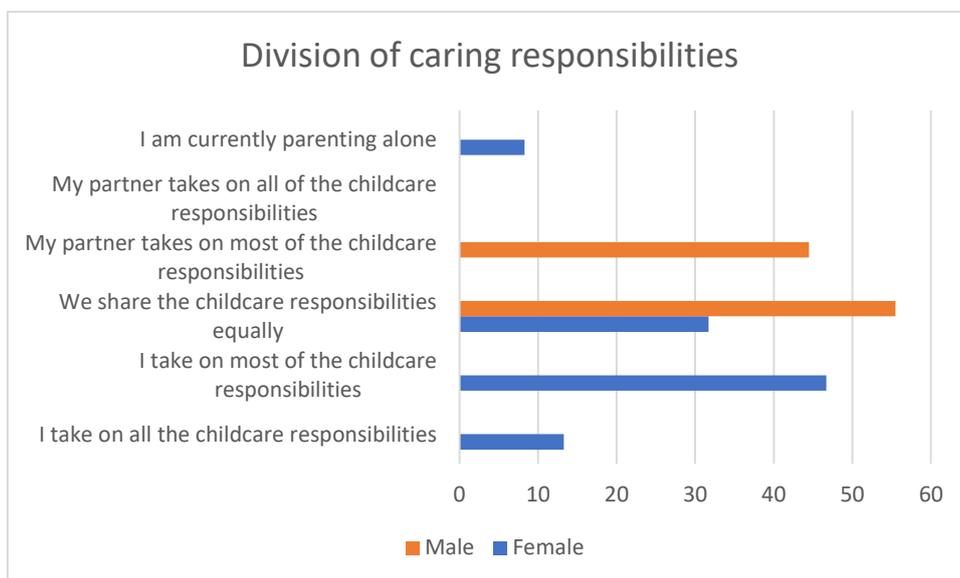


Figure 8.5 Division of caring responsibilities in the home.

Parents were asked about their caring responsibilities in the home. The responses are displayed by gender of the parent in Figure 8.5. 68% of the women surveyed claimed to be responsible for all or most

of the childcare responsibilities and 32% of the women (n=19) and 56% of the men (n=5) suggested that the caring responsibilities are shared in the household. This reflects changing gender roles in the family while a large proportion of the responsibility still falling to the mother.

Experiences of men and women in the early childhood sector

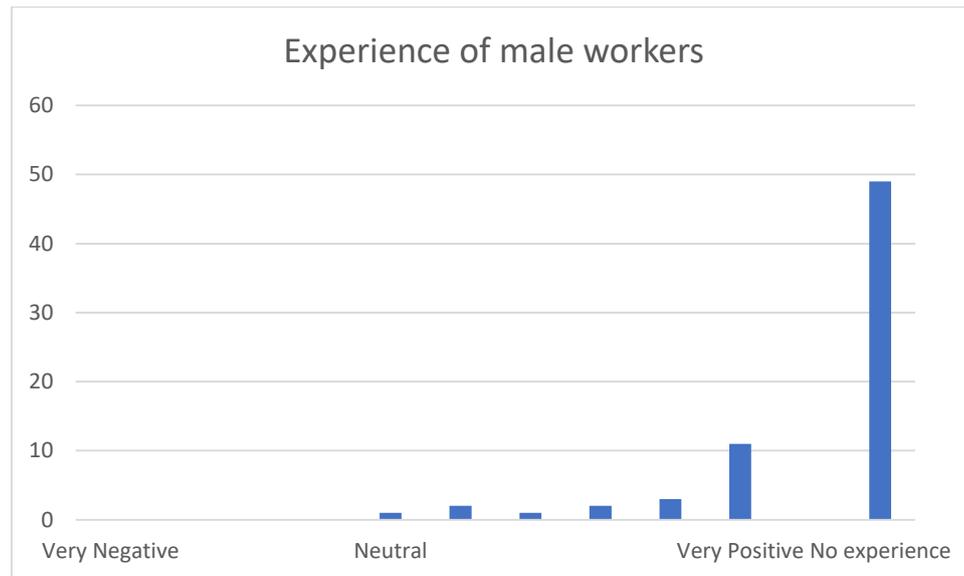


Figure 8.6 Experience of male educators

Reflective of the small number of men in the sector, 68% of the parents surveyed had never experienced a man as an early childhood educator (figure 8.6). Of those who had, their responses varied from neutral to very positive with 55% indicating very positive.

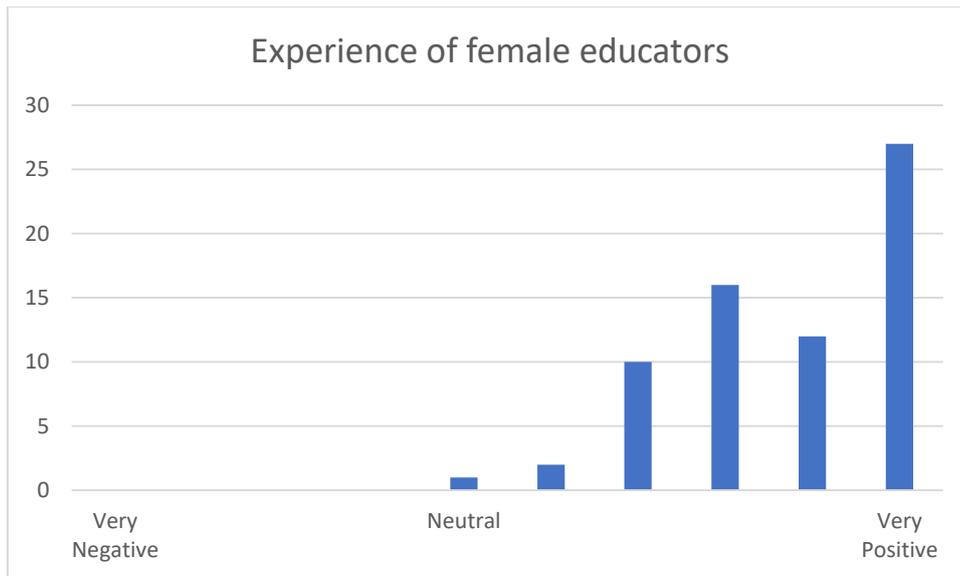


Figure 8.7 Experiences of female educators

While all the parents had experiences of female early childhood educators, similar results were shown with 39% indicating the highest level of satisfaction for the female workers (figure 8.7). Two comments associated with the ranking of experiences of female educators stand out for comment:

‘They don't have to make the same effort as a male colleague and can become lax with the children and lax in their communication with the parent.’ (p14, mother)

‘Some great lovely put 100% into their roles. A few not so great. Some very good, some average, some very poor.’ (p46, father)

The comments above may reflect a situation where women workers, seen as default have the potential to become complacent in their roles and that men by virtue of being different and not woman are in a position where they must prove themselves. Parent 14 also points to a situation in any role where there are individuals (regardless of gender) who are exceptional at their work and others who may be considered not meeting expectations or standards.

The value of men in the early childhood setting

Looking to the reasons men and women are valued in the ECEC setting, the parents responses reflect some of the themes that have been discussed in the careers guidance teachers and workers' responses. They are categorised thematically below with relevant comments from the parents.

Role modelling

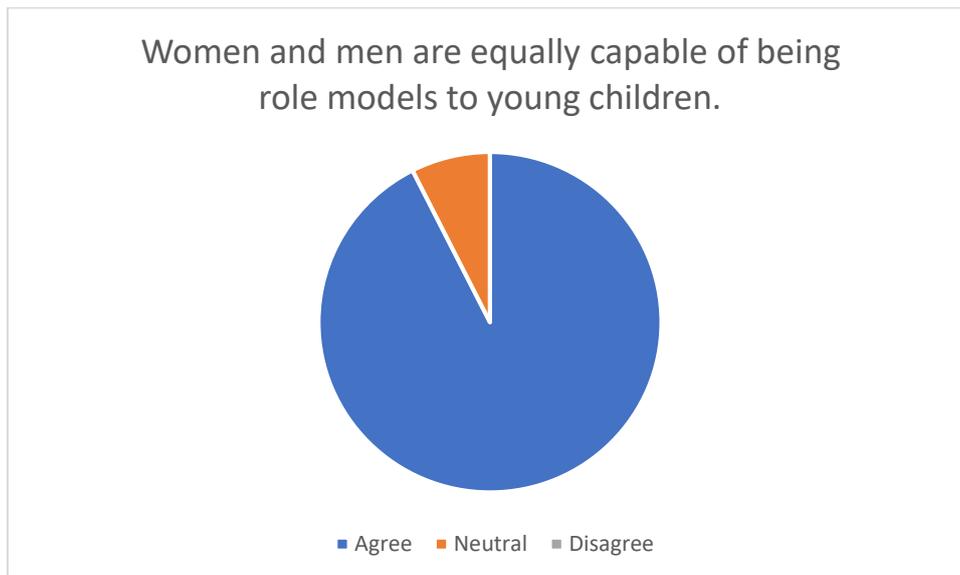


Figure 8.8 Women and men as equal role models

Expectations of role modelling was reported by men in this research, both of themselves and of others. Of the parent participants, 93% indicated that both men and women are equally capable of being role models for young children. However, what roles they are modelling is not clear (see figure 8.8).

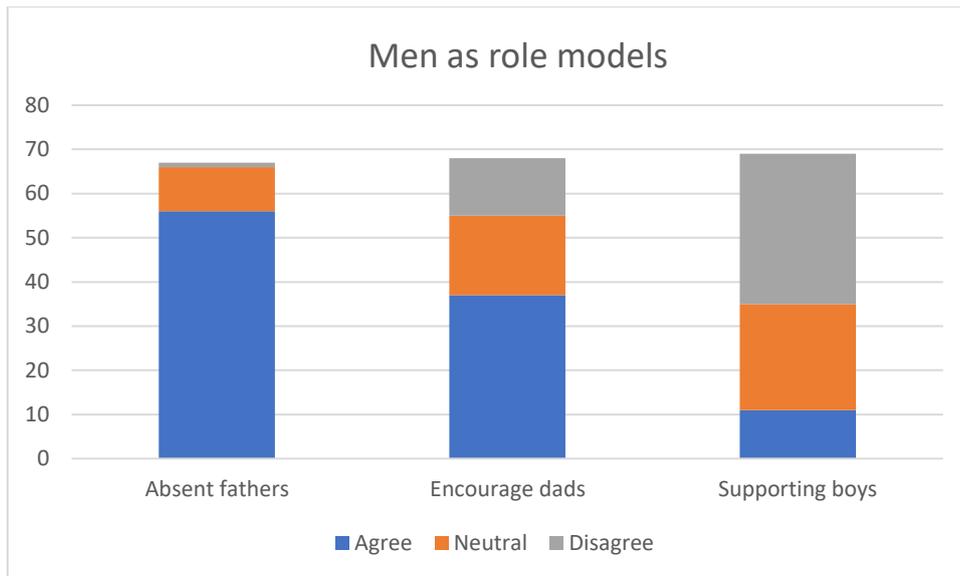


Figure 8.9 Men as role models

When we look at specific expectations there are some variations in responses. 81% (n=56) of respondents indicated that men provide role models for children with absent fathers, with only one participant disagreeing (figure 8.9). The response was less clear in relation to their role in encouraging fathers' participation and engagement in ECEC with 54% (n=37) in agreement and 19% (n=13) in disagreement. Men's roles in supporting boys in particular was more clearly rejected by the participants with almost half (n=34) indicating that they disagreed with this statement and 35% (n=24) taking a neutral position. This suggests that some parents felt it was important for children to have positive men in their lives, but their role was not necessarily to draw in fathers or that they would be of specific value to young boys:

'I was thrilled that my son would see men in this role.' (P48)

'They have a huge influence on the kids in their care and it would be nice to see male role models as well as female.'
(P58)

'Male/female equally capable. I think it's a good idea that children have both male and female teachers, mentors and role models.' (P64)

The comments quoted above indicate a preference for men and women as complementary and balanced workforce rather than singling men out for specific roles to model.

Challenging stereotypes

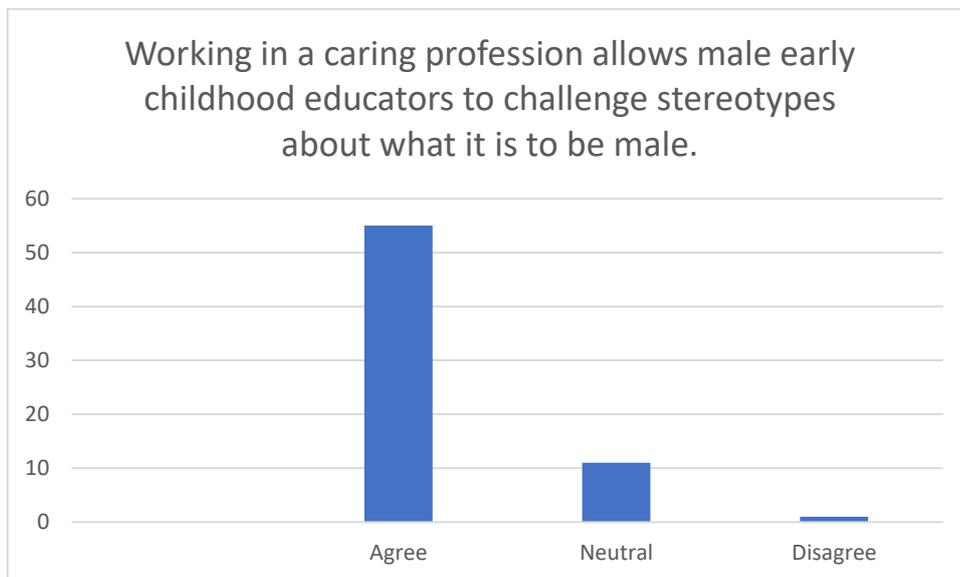


Figure 8.10 Men as challenging stereotypes

Figure 8.10 demonstrates the parents' responses to the statement: *Working in a caring profession allows male early childhood educators to challenge stereotypes about what it is to be male.* There was a high level of agreement to the statement with 80% (n=55) concurring and only one parent of the sixty-nine disagreeing. In a similar way to role modelling, it is not clear how men are challenging stereotypes, since the reports from the men would suggest that within the ECEC service, while they are unique in working in what is considered a female occupation, the roles that they are expected to perform are often stereotypical, such as DIY, rough and tumble play etc.

'I'd like to see more men as it allows children to see that all roles are open to men & women in life and that minding children is not just women's work.' (P48)

Practice

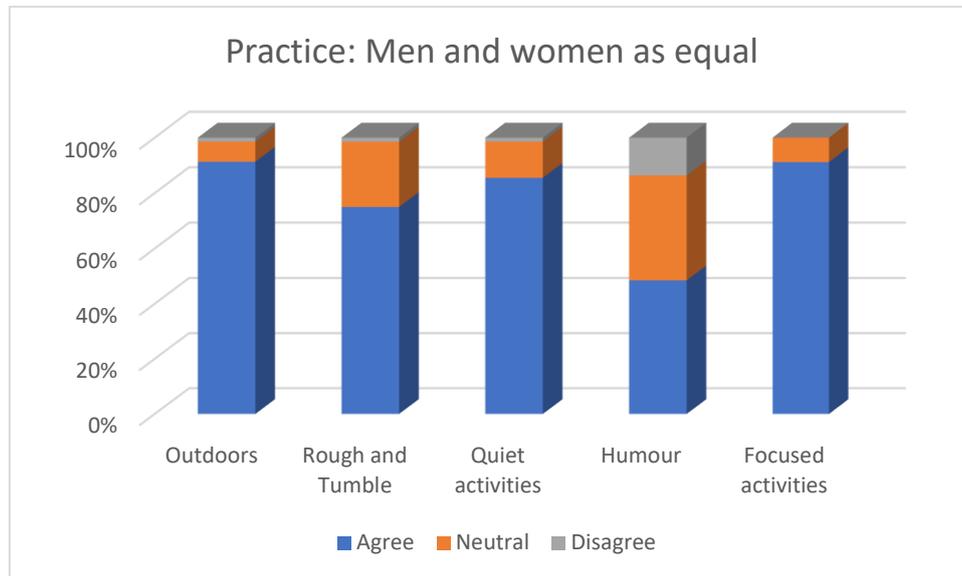


Figure 8.11 Men and women's practice

The practice of men and women in the ECEC setting was divided into outdoor play; rough and tumble; quiet activities (such as reading); humour; and focused activities (such as table-top work). 91% of parents indicated that men and women were equally capable of engaging children in outdoor play and activities, with one participant disagreeing (see figure 8.11). While this may be the case for parents, many of the men interviewed suggested that there was an expectation of outdoor play and a reluctance from some of their female colleagues in this regard. In fact, when it came to rough and tumble, quiet activities and focused activities the results from the parents were similar with agreement rates of between 74 and 91%. Although one parent commented: 'Males are probably better than females at rough and tumble play.' (P66).

However, the one area where there was less of a consensus was in the way in which men and women engage in humour with less than half (46%) in agreement that *Men and women use humour equally*

in their roles as early childhood educators with 36% (n=25) taking a neutral position and 13% (n=9) suggesting that men are more likely to use humour.

Five of the men interviewed mentioned humour as something the men were more likely to use in their engagement with children, with the confession of being ‘big kid(s) (Jamie) or ‘Messers’ (Anthony) themselves. The parents who commented in relation to this stated:

‘He is playful and fun with the children. He is interested in their stories and engages them in activities.’ (P43)

‘I think women can be (not necessarily, but mostly) more sensitive to children, but men can be more relaxed and more fun.’ (P37)

The parent quoted above suggested that caring is more naturally the purview of women. However, when we look at the responses in relation to care and comfort, overall, they are less stark than those in the pedagogical arena.

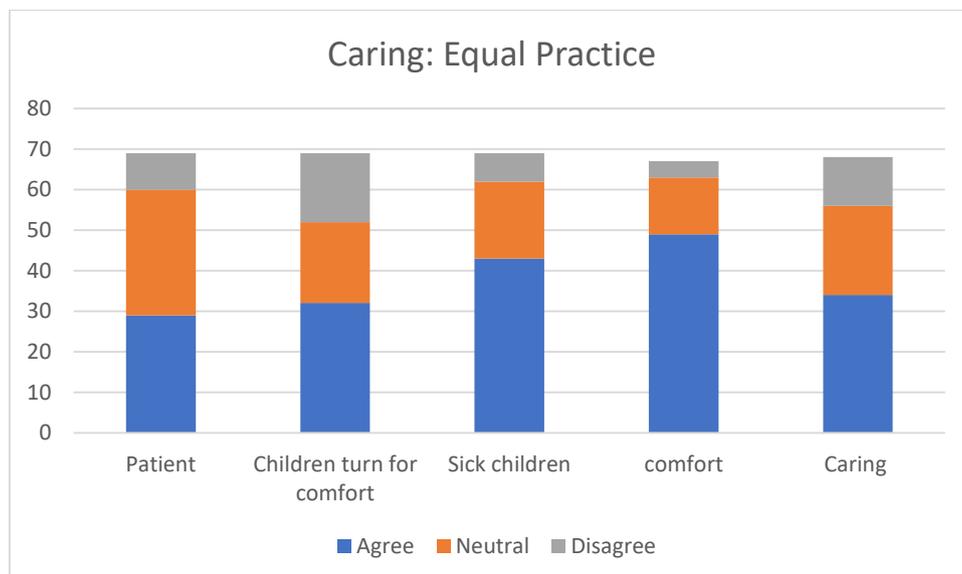


Figure 8.12 Caring practices

Looking at figure 8.12, we can see that there are more neutral responses to the statements concerning the equality of caring

behaviours between men and women although it does appear that over two thirds of the parents believe that men are as equally equipped to provide comfort to children. It seems while more parents are in agreement with the statements than in disagreement, the greater number of neutral responses would suggest that some parents are not necessarily sure.

Care

Some of the comments provided by the parents would suggest that caring behaviours are a high priority for them. And perhaps the individual definitions of care are where some of the ambiguity presents. Care, as a female behaviour does not necessarily mean that the type of care that men engage in is any less. P9 suggests 'I have no issue if the teacher is male or female as long as they care', an attitude reflected by P16: 'I believe a kind, patient and caring person can do the job whether they are male or female'. However, that notion of caring being what women naturally do is reflected in P10's comment that women are 'more motherly and comforting, more empathy shown' and P12's suggestion that women have 'more patience'. The issue of patience was the one area of caring where respondents were less in agreement with the statement that: *Men and women are equally patient in caring for young children.* This notion of caring as a traditional female domain was reported by the men and women in the previous chapter with two of the women suggesting it was a more naturally female trait but with the men claiming they were mostly similar, with only Alan suggesting that it is more understated at times.

'It does not follow through that women are better at caring for a child just because they can bring them into the world' (P45)

Central to the role of both men and women and as reported in the previous chapter and a high point in their professional lives is the development of relationships with young children. Indeed, as we

saw earlier in this chapter, those relationships were often significant in allaying any concerns parents had about male early childhood educators. There was very clear consensus in the parents' responses in relation to the ability of men and women to equally develop relationships with children with 88% (n=61) in agreement and none disagreeing (figure 8.13).

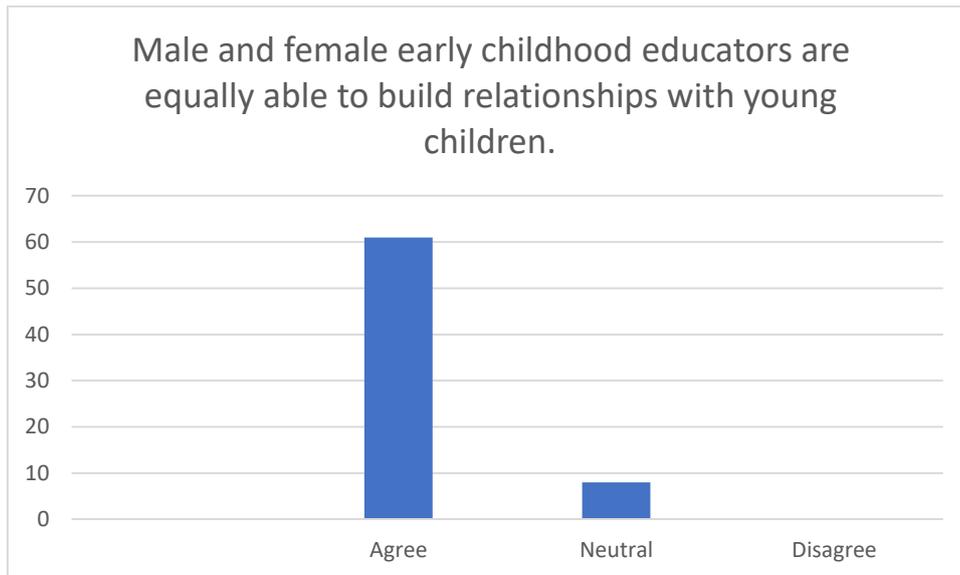


Figure 8.13 Relationships

Behaviour

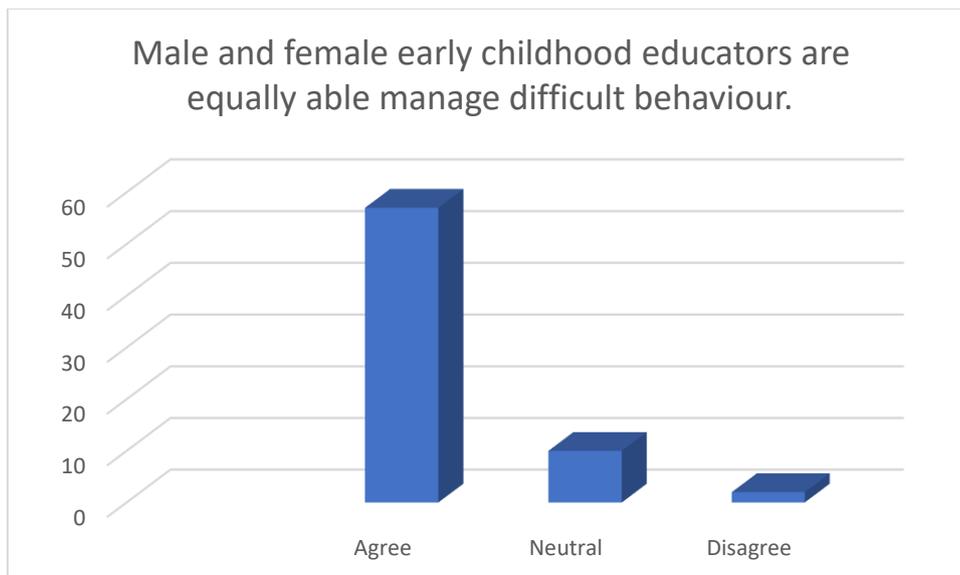


Figure 8.14 Managing difficult behaviour

One of the roles that some of the men interviewed felt they were more likely to be assigned based on their gender, was managing the behaviour of children (and in particular boys). The parents' responses would suggest that they felt both women and men were competent in this regard (figure 8.14) with 57 of the 69 parents (83%) in agreement. However, one parent commented 'Generally very good, my son is happy, can be a little stricter than his female colleague but this is also important '(P40).

Women's work, intimate care and risk

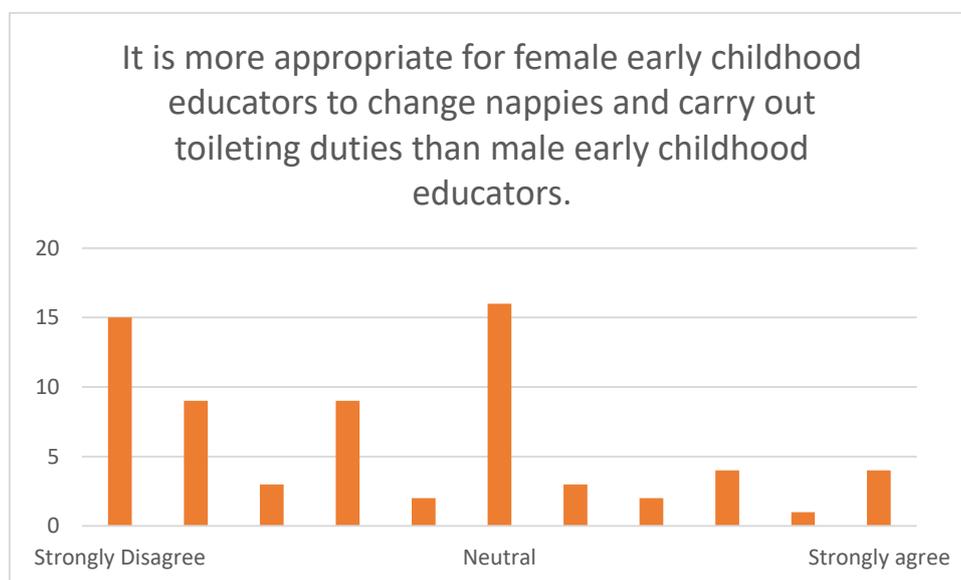


Figure 8.15 More appropriate for women to change nappies

The notion of the care of children as being naturally women's domain and that therefore what men do is at odds with this assumption still prevails. In this regard, intimate care of children and the issue of risk and suspicion comes up repeatedly in the literature and in this research. As we have seen, for the men who reported experiences of parental objections, while they were a small minority, the impact of them on the men's confidence and experience was significant. Even for the men who had not had such experiences, there was a constant awareness of themselves in relation to physical contact with the children and in particular in nappy changing and toileting duties. The parents' responses would suggest a similar picture with

a majority (52%) (n=36) rejecting the notion that *It is more appropriate for female early childhood educators to change nappies and carry out toileting duties than male early childhood educators.* However, 16% agreed with the statement and 4 parents (6%) indicated strong agreement (see figure 8.15).

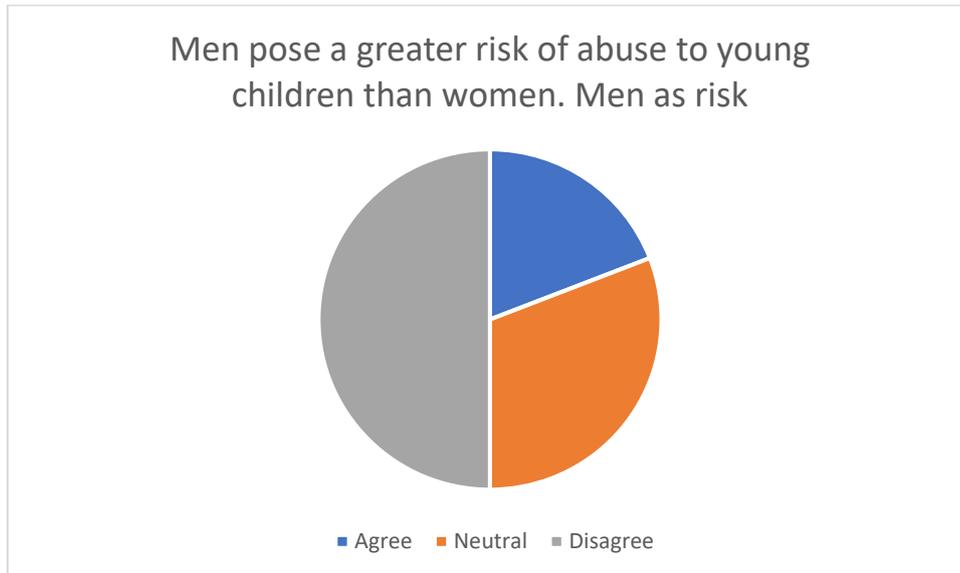


Figure 8.16 Men as risk of abuse

Parents were asked if they believed men posed a greater risk to children than women did and the results can be seen in figure 8.16. Half of the parents disagreed with 29% selecting 'strongly disagree'. Almost a third of parents (30%) indicated neutral and 19% agreed with the statement *Men pose a greater risk of abuse to young children than women* with five participants selecting points nine and ten on the Likert scale indicating strong disagreement.

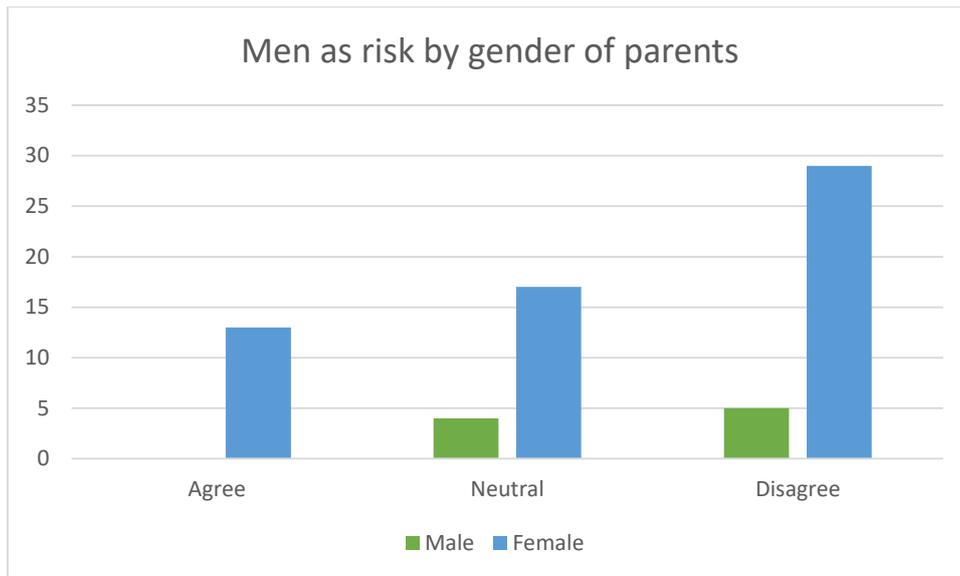


Figure 8.17 Perception of men as risk by gender of parents

There is a perception that men are more likely to resist crossing the gender binary in terms of roles. However, the caregivers and parents reported by the men to have objected to their presence were often female. This may be because as we have seen from this research and existing literature, women are more likely to carry the weight of responsibility in childcare and therefore more likely to be those that are meeting the staff in the ECEC service. However, Geoff did indicate that in his experience, fathers tended to be warier. Based on this I broke down the response to the question in relation the risk of abuse into the responses by gender. The breakdown can be seen in figure 8.17.

Of the 60 female respondents, thirteen (22%) indicated that men were a higher risk to children, seventeen (28%) responded neutrally and 48% indicated that men were not at higher risk of abusing children. None of the male respondents agreed with the statement suggesting that they did not believe that men are at greater risk. However neutral and disagreement were almost the same with four (neutral 44%) and five (disagree 55%) respectively. Almost half of women and more than half of the men indicated that men were of no greater risk to children with one parent stating: 'Females can abuse

too, therefore it is the person, not the gender that should be focused on for suitability.' (P70).

Despite this, there were some reservations in relation to toileting expressed in the parent's comments:

'I think its important girls have females to help when toilet training.' (P18)

'I feel a bit bad that I am so biased against men changing nappies etc.' (P7)

'Not comfortable with a male changing nappies or taking young children to the toilet. I would prefer a female as regards changing clothing, cleaning bottom etc.' (P34)

Preferences

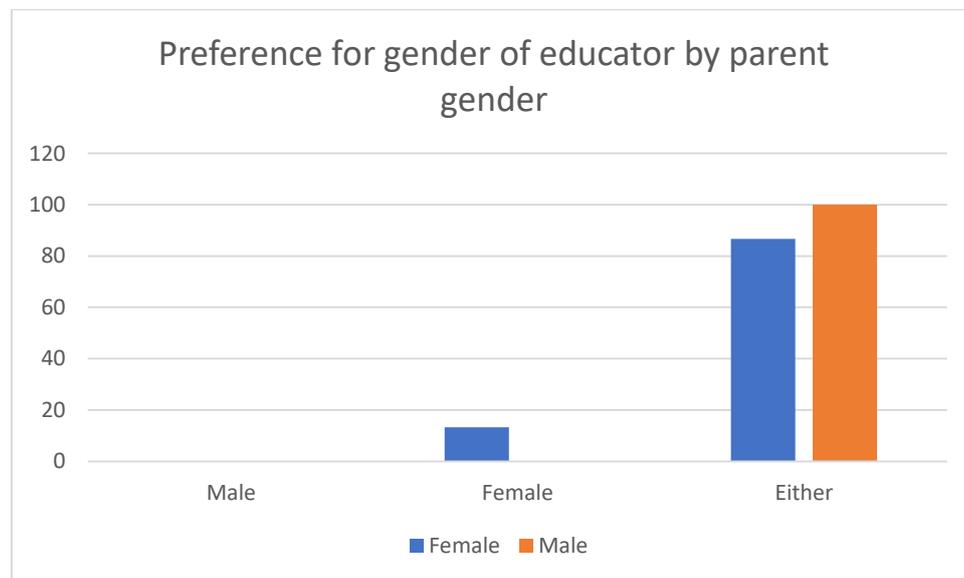


Figure 8.18 Preference for educator gender by parent gender

In the final segment of the survey, parents were asked to indicate their preference for a male or female worker. Not one respondent indicated a preference for men but only eight respondents (all female, see figure 8.18) indicated a preference for a female educator. This represents 12% overall and 13% of the female participants. All of the men indicated that they had no preference for

the gender of their child's educator. This may be as a result of the men completing the surveys being open to male caregivers by virtue of their involvement in their own children's caregiving.

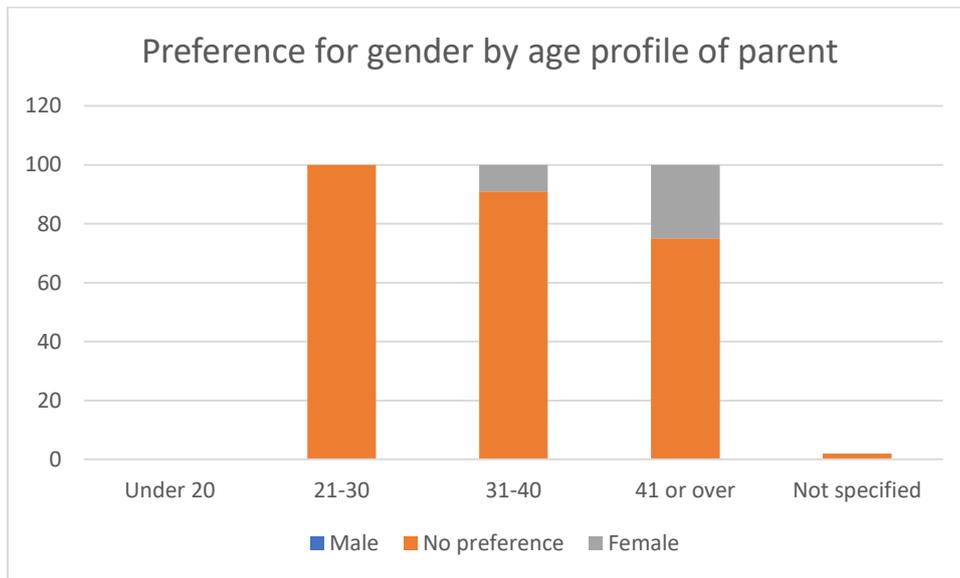


Figure 8.19 Preference for educator gender by age profile of parent

A further breakdown of preference by age was considered, based on the reports from two of the men that there may be a generational element to objections to men's role in ECEC. In figure 8.19, the age profile of the parent was compared to the stated preference for the gender of the educator, and we can see that none of the youngest cohort (21-30 year olds) indicated a preference for a woman educator, 91% of the mid age range represented stated no preference with 9% of the 44 parents preferring a female educator. In the oldest age range (41 or over), three quarters of the parents had no preference with four of the sixteen parents expressing a preference for a female educator. The small sample size makes it very difficult to draw any conclusions, but it would appear that age is not necessarily a factor in preference in the cohort surveyed here.

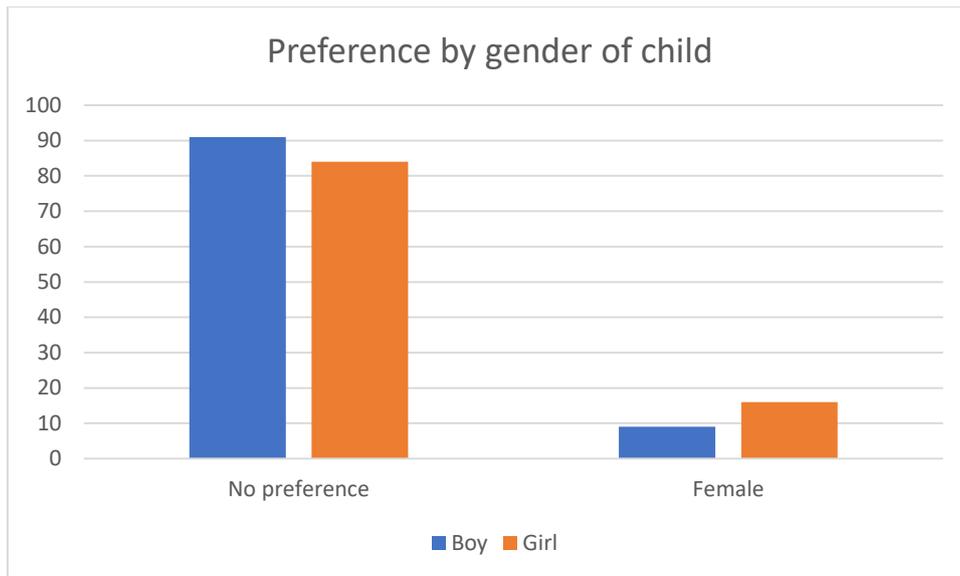


Figure 8.20 Preference for educator gender by child gender

The gender of the child was indicated by one parent in relation to toileting and a preference for a female educator on that basis in relation to the toileting and nappy changing with girls. This prompted a breakdown on preference in relation to the gender of the child in the care setting (figure 8.20). 91% of parents of boys stated no preference in comparison to 84% of parents of girls. This is difficult to analyse as some parents may have been parents to both boys and girls where multiple siblings attend ECEC.

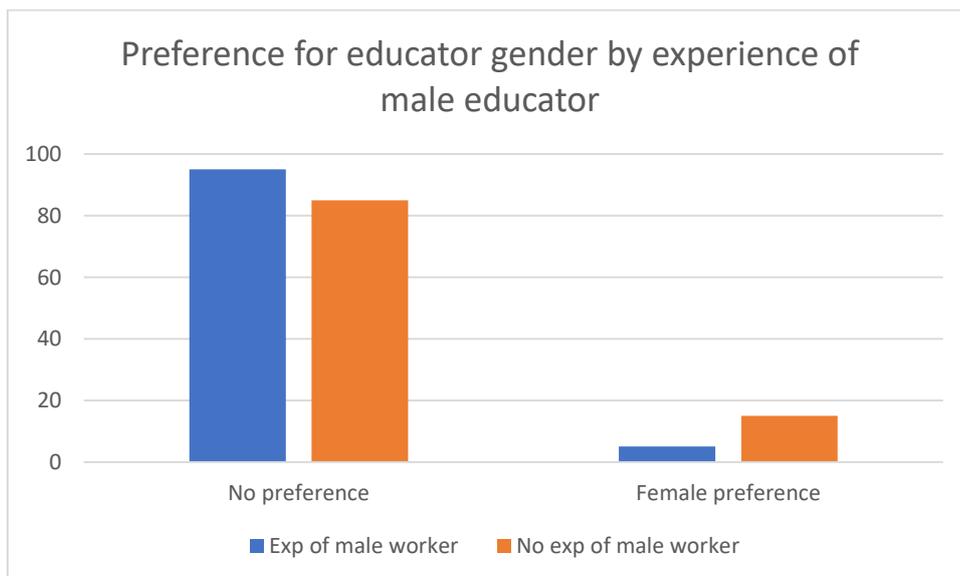


Figure 8.21 Preference for educator gender by experience of male educator

Finally, whether a previous experience would have any influence on preference for male or female educators was charted (see figure 8.21). From the results, we can see that 95% of those who have had previous experience of male educator would have no preference, a slightly higher result than for those who had no previous experience of a male educator. The men interviewed for this research commented on the relationships with children and parents getting to know them as key to their acceptance into ECEC. While it does seem that a higher number of those who had experience indicated no preference than in the cases of those who had no prior experience, there was still a small percentage who had a preference for female (5%) suggesting that there are still issues with attitudes to traditional roles, albeit in a small number of cases.

A number of themes not covered above but based on the comments in the open-ended questions were identified. One, *value*, links to status in chapter six and the other qualifications and gender balance have not been dealt with in any great depth to this point but will be addressed here.

Value

There was a clear awareness among some parents about the value and status of ECEC in relation to the training and work involved. There was an awareness that in its current form and with prevailing expectations of men to earn a breadwinning wage, that it was unlikely that ECEC would be an attractive option:

‘Early childhood professionals are undervalued and underpaid and if more men were in the sector that might change.’ (P11)

‘I would like to see male carers however issues regarding pay for staff which may encourage retention may help attract a broader range of staff to the sector.’ (P13)

Conversely, it was also acknowledged that men are valued more highly in employment generally and that an increase in men working in the sector would likely increase the status of the sector and as a result the salary and conditions as P48 articulated:

‘I’d like to see more men as it allows children to see that all roles are open to men & women in life and that minding children is not just women’s work. Also, and unfortunately having men in the profession [sic] will really focus the gender pay gap, I think if men worked in childcare, it would be better paid... incomes need to improve as men usually are the main breadwinner in households.’ (P48).

On the issue of value and of ECEC as women’s domain, P14 recalls an experience in her local Department of Social Protection Office:

‘While the pay is so low for childcare workers there are less likely to be a high number of males. As a single parent the local Social Welfare continue to try and push me into childcare work (even though I am not a fan of children) I guarantee they don’t do that to single fathers on their books.’ (P14)

While we know from some of the men interviewed that their local Social Protection office careers advisors did offer them ECEC as a choice, it was often based on something in the men’s interview that suggested an affinity with children, though in the case of Joshua and Sean it was one of a number of options presented. This leads to a discussion about employment centres and their role in recruiting for the ECEC sector and whether it is simply because there’s a vacancy or the gender of the client (in P14’s, case female) and the ultimate suitability of the candidate being put forward. This will be discussed in chapter nine.

Qualifications/training

One of the themes identified in the parents' responses is the issue of suitable qualification with several of them pointing to it in the open-ended questions. ECEC in Ireland has only been very recently regulated and more recently had a minimum qualification imposed at Level 5 certification. Many workers are not qualified above this level, though there is a strong push towards a graduate-led workforce of 50% (DCYA, 2018a). Investment has focused on paying a higher capitation to those qualified to degree level in an attempt to keep graduates in the sector.

Despite this, parents commented on the need for proper training and qualifications and commitment in the staff working with their children regardless of gender. Parents indicated that staff should be 'trained and vetted appropriately,' (P13) and 'suitably qualified' (P15). This suggests that parents may be less concerned about the gender of their child's educator and more so their suitability.

Balance and equality

The final theme from the parents' comments relates to the workforce in general and the importance of a gender balance and representation in the workforce for the benefit of the children. Some were prompted to point out that quality ECEC provision is not about gender: '[I] don't really understand why there would be issue based on gender,' (P45). Personality and suitability for the role, with a mix of genders is a positive experience with children seeing men and women in all types of roles:

'I think gender has nothing to do with the way you work.' (P53)

'I'd like to see more men as it allows children to see that all roles are open to men & women in life and that minding children is not just women's work.' (P48)

'Would be great to have both male and female child's early childhood educator. So, the kids would see that both men and women can do same things and same jobs.' (P57)

'Personality is more important than gender.' (P27)

The parent quotes above point to the importance of the visibility of men in the ECEC environment so that children can see men in these roles and know that it is a possibility, something the men in interviews and the reports from the careers guidance teachers suggest is currently lacking. This is not just an issue of gender balance in the workplace or plugging a staff shortage, it is as P65 at the start of the segment suggests, about opportunities for children.

8.3 Looking to the future: Men and women's career aspirations

During the course of the strand one of this research, participants were asked about their future plans and aspirations. Martin had already left ECEC following opportunities as they arose. Sean and Anthony both indicated a desire to stay in the classroom with no aspirations for management, though Sean was not sure at the point of interview whether he would stay in ECEC or pursue primary teaching.

'Going to management I would have no interest in. It's just paper work, I don't. I want to be on the floor, I want to be getting messy and I want to be that's what I want to do. I see that as nearly a complete separate job.' (Sean)

Patrick also planned on remaining but pursuing his BA in ECEC. Alan and Robert both indicated an intention to stay in the sector but move beyond their current roles: Robert hoped to incorporate family support into his practice but like Sean, has previously commented on the administrative burden of his current role.

Alan, like Robert had aspirations for quality support or an inspection role. He cited advancing years as the motivation for this: 'No, I don't, I don't think at sixty-five I could be down on my hands and knees still, you know, so you know you do have to plan for the future as well' (Alan). However, since his interview for this research, he has moved out of the sector completely. Ed was doing a master's degree in ECEC leadership and commented on his age as an early childhood educator, but reflected that he did not feel that his energy for the role had declined and likes to see the application of his new knowledge. Geoff's plans for setting up his own service had run into some structural hurdles in relation to registering for and delivering the ECCE scheme to the children for whom he was currently caring. This was a matter that he and his partner were due to discuss in the coming days and weeks. Jamie was pursuing a qualification in crèche management and planned on staying in his current management role for the foreseeable future.

One of the men's reports which stands out for mention, is that of Joshua who, throughout his interview commented on having no choice and having to leave the sector. His three-year community employment scheme had come to an end and as he would no longer receive state support for his mortgage, he could not afford to remain in ECEC despite having been offered a job and completed his basic and intermediate training. This reflects the low pay in the sector and the breadwinning expectation of men:

'I'm going back to scaffolding. Like I said *Mary [manager] offered me a job. I cannot afford to take it. That's what's made my decision. if I had a choice of keeping me home and staying in childcare, I'd be happy to do it.' (Joshua).

Of the women, all reported a wish to stay working with children in some capacity though Mary, Karen and Jenny reflected on the limited progression opportunities within ECEC itself. Jenny indicated

a wish to stay in the classroom and not take on the admin burden of management. Karen looked to a broader qualification with more options such as community work, and Tracy looked to support or child-protection work. Sharon hoped to remain in her development job and Pam hoped to complete a master's degree, start a family and continue to run her service part-time with staff employed.

The women and men in this study wished to continue working with children. Many of them shared the same concerns that there were limited opportunities within the sector, particularly if you did not wish to become a manager and take on the associated administrative burden and bureaucracy. This will be discussed in relation to the existing literature and the ECEC system in Ireland in the next chapter.

8.4 Conclusion

It is interesting to note the parallels between the men's experiences and the attitudes and comments reflected by the parents. The parent responses were largely in line with the experiences of the men interviewed. The majority of parents indicated a willingness and positive attitude towards the idea of male early childhood educators and indeed overall suggested that many of the practices were equal (if perhaps with subtle differences). There was to some extent an expectation of role modelling but also that they would challenge stereotypes, reflecting the contradictions experienced by the men. Despite these positive dispositions towards men's presence, there were still issues for some parents around caring, especially intimate care, again reflecting the experiences of the men themselves.

While the negative reactions experienced by the men were small in number, in some cases they had significant impact, something which may need to be considered in efforts to increase participation of men in the sector. The degree to which these experiences can be ameliorated or exacerbated by the actions and responses of

management were demonstrated in the cases described. The importance of the relationships with children (and the resulting relationships with parents) is key to both the men's job satisfaction but also the acceptance by parents.

Finally, the value of the profession and men in society is reflected in the data presented. Men talked of their elevated status within the ECEC setting and parents acknowledged that the current value of the sector could be raised by an increase in men's involvement but the converse of that is that they are unlikely to be drawn to it in its current crisis state such is the prevailing expectation that they will be the main income in a household.

There are many contradictions and gendered dilemmas throughout the men's experiences, and evident in responses from careers guidance teachers and parents. It is a complex web of deeply ingrained beliefs and attitudes often outside of the awareness of those holding them and this web of contradictions will be discussed in the chapter that follows in the context of existing literature.

9 Discussion

In this chapter, I draw together the data from this research and discuss it in the context of the existing international literature in order to address the research questions, and associated objectives in relation to the factors that influence men's entry and trajectories in the Irish ECEC Workforce:

Entry: What leads men to enter the ECEC sector?

What are the factors that influence them?

What are the hindrances and barriers?

Trajectories: What path do their careers take?

Where do they go when they enter?

Do their trajectories differ from women's?

During the course of the research men and women's entry routes to ECEC were examined and their experiences and trajectories explored through semi-structured qualitative interviews. Findings suggest that entry and trajectories are influenced by a complex interaction of ecological factors falling into three levels of the system: micro, meso and macro and reflect those of previous national and international research on men's entry, experiences and trajectories within ECEC. The influence of gendered structures, order and regimes at societal (macro), organisational (meso) and individual (micro) level and the interplay between them are evident throughout (Connell, 2009; Warin et al., 2020). This thesis has built on previous research but is particular to the Irish context and the rapid economic, social and sectoral changes that have occurred creating the potential for more favourable environment for the diversification of the ECEC sector. This provides a framework for considering the

multi-layered approach required to address issues of recruitment and retention in the Irish ECEC sector.

9.1 What leads men to enter the ECEC sector?

This section outlines the factors in this study which influence men's entry into the ECEC environment. Findings suggest that the influential factors for men reflect those found in the literature such as limited early experience and careers guidance pointing to ECEC, second chance entry and influence of family and friends. One notable influence in this study was the impact of the onset of the recession in 2007/2008 and the resulting crash of the construction industry, a male dominated sector. This and the advice of careers advisors in job centres was a mechanism by which ECEC became a visible option to some of the men. The findings of this study are discussed in relation to the literature in the sections below.

Influential factors

The factors that influence men's decisions to enter ECEC have been found to be multi-dimensional and varied. It would seem from the findings presented and existing literature that the few men who make it into the sector have had a number of influential factors coincide in an almost serendipitous way. This research has found that the visibility of the ECEC sector for adolescents and young men is negligible: not only do they not consider it themselves, but it is not brought to their attention. The notion that caring is women's work persists across the structures of society (Connell, 2009), as does the notion that ECEC is a natural transition from maternal care (Cameron et al., 1999; Farquhar, 1997; Jones and Aubrey, 2019; Wright, 2018). As work in ECEC is often part-time or casual nature, it can be seen as incompatible with men's breadwinning role (Besnard and Diren, 2010; Jones and Aubrey, 2019) as reported by Joshua and Karen.

Visibility and the education hierarchy

Most of the male study participants had never considered ECEC as a career until it was presented to them in a seemingly accidental turn of events, suggesting that it is not visible as a career for men, unlike in many of the women. Robert's comment that 'I suppose I was oblivious to what early years was' typifies this collective ignorance. Four of the men had not had any previous exposure to the work or in some cases, children whereas some women reported experiences of babysitting, natural progression from school and a role compatible with their maternal caring roles. This has been evidenced elsewhere suggesting it is not limited to the participants in this research or in this context (Brody, 2014; Cameron et al., 1999; Cremers et al., 2010; Fine-Davis et al., 2005; Rolf, 2005).

The absence of men in all levels of the education system, but in particular ECEC and primary school, is problematic since children develop their understanding of gender and gender roles as early as ECEC (Warin & Adriany, 2017; Xu, 2020). Those understandings get reinforced throughout their education (Cartei et al., 2020; Chambers et al., 2018; Karunanayake & Vimukthi, 2020; del Río & Strasser, 2013), so that by the time children reach adolescence, they have fixed ideas about ability and aspirations along gendered lines (Furlong and Biggart, 1999; Roberts-Holmes, 2003; Weiss, Wiese & Freund, 2014) with boys less able to cross them (Cartei et al., 2020; Roberts-Holmes, 2003) to consider more non-traditional occupations. That was the case for the men in this research: they had no awareness of ECEC as a role for them during their post-primary education. In Martin's case, while he did have an aspiration for primary teaching, it was his lack of the requisite Irish Language competency assessed at Leaving Certificate, that led him to consider ECEC as an alternative route to his preferred occupation.

Careers Guidance

The continuing gender segregation of schools in Ireland, was not a strong theme in this research, but it was reported as a factor in Alan and Robert's experiences, and it needs consideration in the context of wider gender discussions. The opportunities (or lack of) that single-sex schools present for both boys and girls, where the subject areas are limited by the gendering of the schools will likely further entrench gendered occupational choices and stereotyped expectations (Leonard, 2006). In light of teacher T1's comment that the system does not allow adolescents to see outside their subject areas, gendered limits to the available subjects is problematic. Leonard's (2006) observation on the hyper-masculine environment of all boys' schools may further inhibit boys from caring aspirations even if they were visible as it may be viewed as not meeting the hegemonic masculine expectations (Connell, 2005). For Alan and Robert, their attendance at all-boys schools meant that ECEC and caring professions were not presented to them. Alan felt very much pushed into a technical role based on ability and expectations, whereas Robert felt that careers guidance was largely absent. Limited careers guidance was also experienced by Sean but attributed by him to his school's disadvantaged status putting a ceiling on the expectations of the students. The gendered phenomenon is however not limited to single-sex schools. Martin and Patrick who went to co-educational schools reported being actively advised against ECEC. This becomes problematic when considered in the context of the influence of teacher expectations on children's outcomes (Alan et al., 2018; Lynch and Feeley, 2009).

Study findings suggest that school careers guidance does not routinely offer ECEC as an option for boys or girls. The careers guidance teachers in this research reported their role and function as supporting students to navigate a range of applications and resources for considering their own career paths and applying for

various college courses based on the students' own aspirations, interests or hobbies. This finding is reflected in those of Indecon (2019). This study suggests that girls may come to careers guidance with ECEC as a considered option whereas boys do not. Careers guidance teachers spoke of a frustration with the limits of their roles dictated locally by school administrators and more globally in terms of resources.

The reports of the careers guidance teachers in relation to guidance for students in junior cycle of post-primary (lower post-primary) is inconsistent with Indecon's (2019) findings that choices are beginning to be formulated in lower post-primary and that guidance beginning in the senior (upper) cycle of post-primary may be too late. The careers guidance teachers felt that by introducing careers guidance in lower post-primary, the students were not ready and it became repetitious in later school years. This may be as a result of the type of guidance provided as outlined above rather than challenging gendered ideas and stereotypes as Lynch and Feeley (2009) have recommended. Given that early exposure and visibility has come out as key elsewhere in the literature and these findings, it might be worth considering the guidance at junior levels be in the form of work experience or guest speakers to give younger students a taste of the options available, but without duplicating the role of the careers guidance teachers. Of course, there would likely be resource implications and need to consider how this would fit in around examinable subjects. This would give students an opportunity to see career choices beyond the scope of the school subject areas and careers of family members, a factor that has been raised as an issue with the current system by T1.

Exposure and conditioning was universally agreed as a key factor by the careers guidance teachers, particularly when the responsibility for the domestic sphere and teaching in primary education still falls predominantly women (Department of Education,

2020c; Schoon & Eccles, 2014). In terms of promoting ECEC, there was some sense that interest in general was low and rather than promoted, it is considered when students come to them with it in mind. T2 suggested that interest in it is higher in the girls who have done Transition Year or Applied Leaving Certificate (vocational Leaving Certificate) where work experience is a component and therefore have had a taste.

The careers guidance teachers interviewed for this research commented on the age at which decisions were being made as a possible factor, with children too young to know what they want. This may still be related to visibility of a range of options. A suggestion offered by one of the careers guidance teachers is the option of Post-Leaving Certificate one-year programmes in the subject areas of interest. This would allow students get a taste of possible courses prior to committing to a three or four-year university degree and gives them a sense of the options that are wider than the school subject curriculum. However, the one-year programmes she indicated tend to still be very gendered and if invisible, unlikely to be taken up. She acknowledged that the one year ECEC basic (Levels 5 & 6 certification) qualification offered at her further education college was comprised of 100% women. This reflects Osgood, Francis & Archer's (2006) contention that when experiences are offered the choices made are still along gendered lines and need to be challenged.

Careers guidance teachers commented on the peer responses as a factor in choosing a non-traditional role, with the likelihood of boys being reluctant to choose something that might cross the gender divide, reflecting findings in previous literature (Cartei et al., 2020; Roberts-Holmes, 2003) and suggested by Connell (2009) that gender roles are policed in the interactions in the meso system or in Connell's (2009) terms the gender regime. Working conditions and the status of the profession, particularly the workload and long hours

comparatively in relation to other areas of the education sector were also cited as problematic. Lack of progression routes were also seen as barrier according to T4 and reflecting Warin et al.'s (2021) contention in relation to career trajectories. The focused promotion of STEM subjects and occupations to girls was raised in the focus group and the need for similar focus on caring professions for boys. Much of the public equality focus has been on increasing the number of women in male dominated sectors but little has focused on diversifying the caring professions.

Careers advice employment schemes

The role of training and employment schemes in the entry of men and women into ECEC has been given little attention, but I have found it to be a significant influence. By contrast to school teachers, the advisors in the employment centres appear to have had more of an influence on the entry to ECEC in particular in the case of the men. It is likely that this was more accidental than by design and it had the effect of encouraging men into the sector. Four study participants, all men, Joshua and Geoff, Anthony and Robert, began their careers as a result of employment schemes. Alan did not come in as a result of an employment scheme but did find that it ensured there were more men in the centre, decreasing the feeling of isolation. In total, five men and one woman entered the sector as a result of employment schemes or SNA training courses. During the recession, funding for these positions was cut which may be a factor in the link between people moving from SNA roles to ECEC under the employment schemes (Smyth, 2010).

Many of the men attributed their choice of ECEC to the guidance of the advisors in the employment and training centres. But this was largely due to ECEC being one of a number of sectors presented to them (for example IT, Chef, Green Energy etc.) and being the least objectionable and desk based. This begs the question whether an intentional mechanism can be put in place to seek out potentially

suitable candidates and present the option to them. This was the focus of an Irish pilot project in 2003 (Fine-Davis et al., 2005) though short-term and limited in nature. The mechanisms put in place were a victim of circumstances (postponement of training courses) and so did not have the desired impact. Given the passage of time and further changes in gender roles and norms and changes in social policy, it may be time to re-visit this as part of a longer-term integrated approach to recruitment and retention. Clearly the recession's impact on male-dominated sectors was a factor. We are likely on the precipice of another recession as a result of the economic impact of Covid-19. However, the sectors impacted may have less of a gender dominance. Despite this, the pandemic has highlighted the need for caring professions. However, we need to be cautious about the use of employment schemes as mechanism for increased gender diversity which may serve to further devalue a sector that is developing professionally. It is important to provide opportunities for increased visibility and access for under-represented groups, however we must be considered in the ways in which these mechanisms are provided.

Accidental entry and the economy

Despite men and women making personal decisions to enter ECEC, many of their routes were influenced by wider societal (macro) changes. For four of the men, the decline of the construction industry in 2007/2008 was the catalyst for a forced career change reflecting both the 'second chance' routes that are so evident in previous research (Cameron et al., 1999; Cremers et al., 2010; Farquhar, 1997; Fine-Davis, 2005; Jones and Aubrey, 2019; Vandebroek and Peeters, 2008; Wohlgemuth, 2015b) and critical moments where events create decision points for men along their career trajectories (Sahin-Sak et al., 2021). The choice of career may have been influenced by a growing understanding of their aptitude for a more humanities-based occupation or that as older men, they felt

more confident to choose a humanities-based career, reflecting more individual (micro) and intrinsic motivations, as was the case for Alan.

The fact that some of the workers (both men and women) saw redundancy as an opportunity (Jenny, Ed, Alan) suggests that while their hands were forced by the circumstances, they provided an opportunity that might not otherwise have presented itself or that they may not have had the confidence or motivation to pursue. There is a common refrain of being lost and finding ECEC as a fortuitous accident creating critical moments (Sahin-Sak et al., 2021). While the economic crash was a common factor in their change of direction, the reasons for choosing ECEC varied, for instance Alan felt that he had been directed into the trades from school despite having an interest in humanities and this was his opportunity to try it out, a factor that is evident in the literature (Alan et al., 2018; Leonard, 2006; Lynch & Feeley, 2009; Sansone, 2017). Sean and Joshua saw it as an alternative to the other options being presented to them. Jamie, Ed and Sean comment on their lack of academic achievement being an influence, suggesting that ECEC was seen as less academic and more practical than other options. This may be a result of the relatively recent introduction of the minimum qualification level for ECEC set at Level 5 on the QQI framework in 2015 (DCYA, 2018a) and with only 27% of the workforce working directly with children having obtained a BA level qualification (Pobal, 2021).

Family and Friends

For some of the women (Sharon, Mary and Pam) ECEC was seen as a natural option, one which elicited positive responses from family and friends ranging from expectation to awe and pride in contrast to the men's experiences which ranged from support and offers of help to mocking and general lack of understanding of the role. Martin and Geoff reflected on friends who engaged with 'banter' when they first

heard of their career choices, a further link to the value, visibility and difficulties of men crossing the gender barrier reported by Cartei et al. (2020) and Roberts-Holmes (2003) and the policing of gender norms by peers, through interactions and relationships in the meso level (Connell, 2009). However, Alan reported friends growing to appreciate it often after having children of their own and therefore making ECEC more visible. The power and policing of hegemonic masculinities (Connell, 2005) and the difficulty in challenging dominant beliefs is evident here.

Some of the men had family members who were influential in their decisions. Martin's father, himself a man in a very male dominated role was actually the one to encourage Martin to look at other avenues to his preferred primary teaching. Anthony and Joshua, both older coming to the sector had family members who recognised their rapport with children. Similarly, Sean and Patrick were encouraged by family members. Alan was met with some supportive scepticism from his wife, while in contrast, Robert's father suggested a trade (building) as more fitting. Much of the literature has pointed to the influence of family members on men's trajectories either directly or indirectly (Bartlett, 2015; Bhana & Moosa, 2016; Indecon, 2019; Jones & Aubrey, 2019; Lynch & Feeley, 2009; Vandebroek & Peeters, 2008; Xu, 2019). Geoff reported his mum as supportive but experienced her response as doubting his ability, perhaps representing a generational and more traditional attitude that caring work was women's domain (Connell, 2009; Roberts-Holmes, 2003; Skelton, Francis and Valkanova, 2003). There were none of the same reactions to the decisions of the women.

Timing

The timing of events, age and stage of entry in the men's lives is a factor to consider. Many of the men joined the sector as established adults, some in their thirties but even those who entered earlier had experienced some time in other areas before settling into ECEC. For

the women, their entry was earlier though some also had tried other options first. The expectations of men and women's life trajectories and the visibility of the caring professions for men converged to create the opportunities that led to the decisions that were made reflecting those critical moments reported by Brody & Hadar (2017); Brody & Gor Ziv (2020) and Sahin-Sak et al. (2021). The men and women had divergent paths on leaving school into jobs typical for their gender and the contrast between Mary and Ed where ECEC was seen as a natural option for Mary a young mother but not for Ed, a young father reinforcing the natural maternal care compatible with domestic responsibility (Rolfe, 2005).

Recruitment to services

A contradiction emerged in the men's entry stories: the contrast between being lucky that 'progressive' employers (Robert) and parents 'took a punt' (Geoff) when faced with a male educator and that of others who experienced their gender as a positive factor in their recruitment (Alan and Sean). Robert's manager employed him almost twenty years ago, at a time when Ed was struggling to be recognised and hired as a male and needing to prove himself as competent educator to more recent times when having a male 'role model' in the service is largely seen as a positive. Lingering concerns about risk (Alan, Sean), were generally alleviated by placing the men with the older children (Martin, Ed, Jamie). However, Geoff's report of parents taking a 'punt' and, reflects some persistent reticence to men's place in the sector. None of the women reported their gender as a factor in their recruitment but two suggested it could be a discriminating factor for men reflecting the still prevalent belief that men are 'other' than women's natural caring role (Rolfe, 2005).

Personal factors

Half of the men in this study were over thirty years old and nine out of ten of them did not enter the sector as a first choice from school. This would suggest that perhaps maturity and experience provided some perspective that wasn't previously considered in their youth or that as older men, they were more forthcoming for interview. Entering ECEC later may be indicative of those personal factors and perhaps a growing self-awareness, confidence and in Geoff's case, his changed family status. For the women, the age and stage factor differed. It was seen as a natural progression early in their careers and in the case of Mary complementary to her role as single mother and while that may be similar to Geoff, their age of entry differed considerably.

The choice of ECEC for some was less of a step towards ECEC and more a step away from the alternatives such as IT (Jamie, Joshua and Sean) or Green Energy (Joshua) and the only way in which ECEC became visible to them. The non- desk-based nature of ECEC appealed to Anthony, Joshua and Jamie. Yet once in in the workforce, they were suited to the role. Jamie, Geoff, Robert and Anthony had a sense that they wanted to work with children, though they had been unaware of ECEC. The only woman in this study to come from a redundancy situation already knew that she wanted to work with children suggesting that it was a visible option to her. These findings align with the literature suggesting that opportunities for work experience in the caring professions, may give boys and men an early taste of the work and make it visible as a career option to them (Cameron et al., 1999; Cremers et al., 2010; Vandebroek and Peeters, 2008; Indecon, 2019). There has been much focus on encouraging girls into traditionally male dominated sectors or the STEM occupations by making these areas more visible to girls from school and within higher education institutions, to challenge gendered aspirations. For example, In TU Dublin, my own institution,

there is the ESTEeM (Equality in Science and Technology by Engaged Educational Mentoring) Programme which provides mentorship by women in STEM companies for women completing higher education degrees in STEM subjects, thus making them visible as career options for girls (TU Dublin, 2021). A similar programme for ECEC or more widely, the caring professions, which liaises with post-primary schools early, could provide a model for making caring visible to boys and men.

9.2 Trajectories

The directions that men's careers take once they enter ECEC as workers, can be seen to be influenced by the expectations of others and the experiences that shape their decisions. This section will look at how the expectations of men in the ECEC environment and their experiences influence their movement within the sector and in some cases exit out of it. Findings in this study reflect those of previous literature in that job satisfaction and professional pride, autonomy and agency were sustaining factors but that the men created identities to navigate the conflicting and contradictory experiences and expectations such as role modelling, challenging stereotypes, engaging in different types of play while emulating women's care but being aware of themselves as men hyper visible and the objects of scrutiny.

Work satisfaction and fulfilment

We have already considered the practical nature of ECEC as a pull factor in men's decision making. All of the men in this study reported high levels of job satisfaction in relation to their work with the children and took the role seriously, despite their scenic entry to the workforce. Similar findings have been reported by Brody, Andrä & Kedar (2021), Kedar et al. (2021) and Ravhuhali et al. (2019). The impact they had on the children's development was a source of pride and the relationships built with children and their families as crucial,

but alongside that, many of the men reported the 'fun' element, the idea that they were big children themselves (Robert) and that joking and humour were fundamental to their roles and relationships with the children. This can be seen as a way to navigate the conflicting expectations on men's practice by aligning with expected behaviours and positioning themselves with an identity. Heldlin et al. (2019) described the dichotomous position of men in the Swedish context as the 'fun guy or possible perpetrator' as the two identity positions available.

Despite this there was a strong sense of commitment and identity from the men in this study in what they do. It was not just a job to keep them going as a stopgap. They had a real interest and commitment to their relationships with children and the role and their own professional identity and development. Brody, Andrä & Kedar (2021) found that agency and professional autonomy were factors impacting men's desires to stay in the ECEC. Self-reflection and confidence were associated with those who stayed. Motivation for advancement and taking opportunities was evident in those who did not stay (Brody et al., 2021). This is reflected in Martin's report of his exit from the workforce as availing of the opportunities available to him. A strong negative factor in this study was the increasingly burdensome and sometimes seemingly arbitrary nature of the bureaucratic administration that has become a dominant part of running an ECEC centre, something which both men and women reported as taking away from the valuable time with the children and was at odds with the relationship-based nature of the role. This is a likely factor in the burnout and high turnover rates in general in an over-regulated sector (Moloney, 2014).

Pedagogical differences

The men in this study felt there were subtle differences in their approach and practice, but they were difficult to articulate. Some attributed those differences to individual rather than gendered

factors with Anthony suggesting age as a factor. Martin suggested that their differences were likely down to their past experiences. However, based on the nature of gendered institutions in society, it is likely that those past experiences were gendered and had some influence as Connell (2009) has pointed out that societal expectations are mediated and policed in the relationships in the meso level or gender regime. As we have seen from this and other research, men and women reported different experiences of subject choice, expectations and responses to their choice of career along gendered lines. Communication, responding to children emotionally and approaches to play, were cited as the distinctions between men and women's practice in this study. Some reported the women as more task oriented.

Approaches to play tended to differ along gendered lines with a couple of notable exceptions of Patrick and Sean rejecting gendered expectations of outdoor play. The humour that the men report bringing to their work may be a positive approach to interacting with children that they can claim in order to find their place in the women's domain. It is suggested that they work with the children on the children's level which may enhance relationship development. This links to Brody & Gor Ziv's (2020) and Brody, Andrä and Kedar's (2021) findings on agency and professional autonomy, which acted as positive factors in men's decisions to stay in ECEC and could be aligned with a social pedagogical approach to ECEC. The Danish social pedagogical approach of being with and having shared experiences based on situational and contextual factors rather than a didactic traditional classroom approach was identified in the CoRe report (Urban et al., 2011) as an example of quality practice. The CoRe report has influenced much of the sectoral change in ECEC in Ireland in recent years (Urban, Robson & Sacchi, 2017). The parents' surveys suggested that they believe that men and woman are equally able to engage in typical types of practice such as

outdoors, structured focused and quiet time and rough a tumble which has typically been seen as a man's domain

In terms of intimate care, reported practices were the same apart from men's hyper awareness of themselves as men and potential subject of scrutiny and suspicion. Many of the men were quite comfortable and assured in their role. However, they maintained a constant awareness of themselves as men. In relation to comforting children there were some differences reported with Alan suggesting that men provided 'just enough care' to set children on their way in contrast to the women who were more likely to engage more tactile comforting behaviours. This is likely linked to men's awareness of themselves and the socially conditioned belief that women's apparent comfort with physical contact is a 'natural' maternal processes which have also been previously reported in the literature (Cameron et al., 1999; Farquhar, 1997; Jones and Aubrey, 2019; Wright, 2018) but also demonstrated a gender-flexibility in which the men inhabit different roles at different times depending on the need (Warin, 2019). However, Warin (2019) found that despite a gender flexible practice, there was a tendency for men and women to fall into stereotypical roles.

The parents' responses to the caring behaviours were more complex. While many parents agreed that men and women were equally able to provide care and comfort and show patience with children, the results were less categorical with many parents taking a more neutral position and demonstrating some reticence. This has been a prevalent narrative in the literature both in Ireland and internationally and reflects a concern about men's motives and child sexual abuse (Besnard & Diren, 2010; Cameron et al., 1999; Fine Davis et al., 2005; King, 2015; Rolfe, 2005; Walshe & Healy-Magwa, 2012; Woltrung, 2012). Robert, in this study, suggested that Ireland's recent past in terms of revelations of institutional abuse, particularly in education and church may be a factor in parental

concerns about men's motivations. This may well have some substance since, Eidevald et al. (2018) suggested that when cases on CSA are played out in the media, the number of men in the workforce drops, so it is likely that it also increases the awareness of parents of children in ECEC. However, as has been pointed out by Owen (2003), not all men commit abuse and there is a danger with homogenising a whole gender category based on a small number of cases and indeed to assume that it is just men who abuse. As we have seen in the Irish context in recent years with exposes of emotional and physical abuse in ECEC centres (Moloney, 2014; Nursery World, 2019) women are also capable of abusive behaviours. However, this study demonstrated that the idea that only men are the issue still persists with cameras installed in the ECEC setting for the man's protection (not the children or female workers) and the exclusion of Robert in intimate care in an early job, and indeed in Sean's current job. This notion has been criticised by Cameron (2001). Gulbranasen (2012) and Woltrung (2012) point to the importance of good policies to protect all children and workers, a point that Anthony in this study was very clear on, based on his own experience.

Robert suggested that differences in practices could be both gendered and individual and that a mixed gendered workforce provides for complementarity. This complementarity narrative has been criticised by Warin & Adriany (2017) as essentialist, stereotyping and reinforcing the binary idea that men and women have different roles and functions. Much of the literature challenges the assumption that men and women are homogeneous groups and they contend that the difference within is just as varied as the difference between (Cameron et al., 1999; Carrington and McPhee, 2008; Owen, Cameron & Moss, 1998; Owen, 2003; Warin & Adriany, 2017), yet gendered expectations prevail.

Gendered expectations

The complementarity assumption, is reflected in the numerous examples of gendered roles and expectations that were reported by the men, as were examples of seeming contradictions where men were simultaneously challenging stereotypes and reinforcing them. Requests in relation to DIY and other tasks considered masculine and not required of their female colleagues were reported. However, some felt that their previous construction background may have influenced those requests rather than their gender. Despite this, the men who had not had previous experience also reported such requests though in Anthony's case, he was only ever asked once such was his lack of proficiency. Many of the men reported offering to do certain tasks and had gendered expectations of themselves. We can see from the work of Cameron et al. (1999); Farquhar (1997); Fine-Davis et al. (2005); Warin et al. (2020) that this a persistent phenomenon in the literature and reflects the gendered structures and policing of gendered roles in the interactions in the workplace identified by Connell (2009).

The contradiction of the expectation of men to carry out typical gender roles and somehow still challenge stereotypes has been evident throughout this research. The men either embraced the typical male roles or rejected them, illustrating the difficulty with gender binaries and the assumption that men/male is a homogenous group, the rejection or assimilation that has previously been reported by Cameron (2001); Santos & Amâncio (2019); and Simpson (2009). The expectations reported centred around physical and outdoor play, behaviour management (particularly with the boys), being a male role model. However, both Alan and Geoff had difficulties in navigating the expectation and the resistance of their female colleagues to rough-housing or risky play. Several of the men were quick to point out that the expectations of them were as a result of individual differences and their personal attributes

rather than gender, despite those personal attributes being along gendered lines. Cameron (2013) reported similar findings and it illustrates the pervasiveness of gendered stereotypes. When men reported challenging the stereotypes there was still stereotyping evident, for example in Joshua's comment 'whereas I've no problem sitting down and playing with dolls with a girl' typifies this.

The expectation of role-modelling was experienced by the men but also one they had for themselves with Alan reporting that this was one of his reasons for entering the sector. Having men in the centre was seen as a positive from the perspective of parents and that they could provide a positive male in the lives of children where they were absent. The role-model ideal persists in both this research and within the literature though it has been challenged repeatedly (Bricheno and Thornton, 2007; Browne, 2004; Brownhill, 2014; 2015; Cameron et al., 1999; Carrington & McPhee, 2008; Cooney and Bittner 2001; Owen, 2003; Sumsion, 2005; Thornton and Bricheno, 2006; Warin, 2019). In the parents' survey 81% of parents agreed that men could be role models for absent fathers, though 93% suggested both men and women could be role models. Robert & Jenny suggested that men's role is more about having a mixed-gender complementary team reflective of other occupations and society in general. However, there was a clear expectation from the parents that men in the ECEC centre would challenge stereotypes (80%). Where men have indicated that role-modelling is something that they expect of themselves, it is likely that it relates to their intrinsic motivations to make a difference in children's lives and can be linked to their professional identity but expectations of role modelling may add to the pressure experienced by men that is not generally experienced by women.

Central to the 'women's work' narrative and the men as 'other' is the issue of intimate care and comforting practices. Many of the men reported being very aware of themselves in a way that women were

not, deliberately announcing what they were doing so as not to be misconstrued. Alan and Martin were very clear that intimate care was part of the job and not engaging in it would create an inequality in staff workloads and set them apart, however Alan had the experience of being excluded from the process in a previous employment due to the concerns of parents. Other men reported being excluded for their own protection. This is problematic in that it reinforces the women's role stereotype.

Some of the men found that parents expected them to be the manager when they observed them in the setting, a further example of the stereotype that the caring work be done by the women with the 'real' work of managing the centre being done by the men. There were however contradictions. Some men felt the parents responded more favourably to them while others found they were bypassed in favour of their female colleagues. The notion that men are elevated out of the classroom at disproportionate levels to women is evident in the literature as far back as 1992 with Williams coining the phenomenon the 'glass escalator'. The managerial role may be seen as more fitting for a man's capabilities, reinforcing the stereotypes of men's perceived natural supervisor aptitude or whether it is to move them away from the children, seen as women's domain and to avoid the risk that men supposedly pose. This reflects Connell's (2009) explanation of the man as the public role and the women as the private in the gender order. However, in this study there was no real sense that men had advantageous promotion to management, despite five of the men holding management positions (assistant to female managers in the case of three) and reflecting Rohrmann and Brody (2015).

Experiences with colleagues

Overall, the experiences of men in this study of working with their female colleagues was positive. Communication between staff was acknowledged as a point of difference between the men and

women, with women reported to have been less likely to speak out and men having a more direct form of communication. Men sometimes felt excluded from and invisible in staff room conversations that centred around topics of interest to the women. While none of the men expressed an issue with it, there was definitely a sense that they were 'other' in their settings. Their interactions with their colleagues were largely positive but being a single man in a female workforce, meant that they experienced staff room conversations as exclusionary and in some cases over familiar. The othering experienced by the men in this research has been reported elsewhere in the literature (Cameron, 2013; Heikkilä, 2019; Thorpe et al., 2018; Wohlgemuth, 2015b) and adds to the gendered challenges they face as they navigate their roles in the ECEC workforce.

Their experiences of parents' reactions and in some cases the responses from management meant that the men in this study were constantly aware of themselves as men rather than just being early childhood educators. Much of this may be a result of prevailing stereotypes and gendered expectations. Robert commented on this being as a result of their uniqueness and that once more men enter, the surprise and concern that it generates will cease to exist. Robert, likened it to the increase of women as airline pilots and that it is now the norm, stating 'once you see it, you don't see it'. Should a time come that there is a more equal balance or at least it is common to see a man in the ECEC classroom, it is likely that people will no longer notice. It is because of its relative invisibility in people's lives that when they see it, it is a surprise and speaks to the importance of making it visible early, for children to experience and see men and women in the same types of roles so that they can visualise these roles for themselves. In order for the number of men to increase, the visibility of ECEC as a career option for men will need to improve. This includes children seeing men in ECEC and in caring roles generally when they are developing their gendered understandings

of what men and women do and challenged to look past gendered subject choice, work experience and career aspirations (Cartei et al., 2020; Chambers et al., 2018; Furlong and Biggart, 1999; Karunanayake & Vimukthi, 2020; del Río & Strasser, 2013).

Extremes of experiences

Most men reported their visibility as a source of reticence initially with parents followed by acceptance once a relationship had developed with 'children being the best advocates.' However, in a number of cases, parent concerns about intimate care or outright rejection were experienced by men. It is important not to over-state the experiences of objection from parents. They were from a relatively small number. However, for the men who experienced this and the questioning of their ability and motives, it could have a lasting negative effect. We have already seen how men were constantly aware of their presence, the potential for scrutiny or for their actions to be misinterpreted, linking back to Hedlin et al.'s (2019) discussion of the narratives that positioning men as possible perpetrators in a way that is not visible in the women's experiences, despite the fact that we know not all men abuse and abuse is not confined to just men as Owen (2003) has pointed out. However, the experience of parents overtly pointing to the gender of the worker as the source of their concern, can have lasting effects on confidence and their motivations to stay.

The parent survey results reflected the men's experiences. Most parents were open and positive about men working with their children and acknowledged the benefits of a mixed-gender workforce. However, there were a small number (9%) who still believed a female educator is preferable in general, but yet 44% in relation to intimate care. The constant undertone of risk meant that the men reported being very aware of themselves as men, and some were prevented from intimate care (Sean and Robert) or had cameras installed 'for their protection' (Patrick), something that is

rarely considered in a female only workforce and was not reported by the women. The assignment of men to the older children is consistent with the evidence of a gendered hierarchy in education where men are assigned to older classes where the serious work happens, and the assumption that women are more naturally caring and nurturing with younger children and men pose a greater risk to them (Martínez, et al., 2020; Roberts-Holmes, 2003; Skelton, Francis and Valkanova, 2003). While evidence suggests that men are more likely to be perpetrators of sexual abuse, research also suggests that the risk is higher in the home and family environment than in settings where rigorous vetting is part of the normal process of recruitment. There was some indication from Robert and Pam that issues of historical sexual abuse in schools, the revelations of which have both shocked and remained in the collective psyche and influenced some reactions. However, concerns about risk of men's presence in ECEC settings is not a phenomenon unique to Ireland and has been reported elsewhere particularly in Sweden, considered an egalitarian society. Sadly, there has been a case in the Irish media in recent years of a male educator who has been charged with sexual abuse in an ECEC setting but a jury failed to reach a verdict in the case (Hayes, 2020a; 2020b; Hayes & Brennan, 2020). Infrequent as cases may be, and not at all minimising the brutality and horror of them, one case in the media can have a lasting impact and leave those men who continue to work in the sector feeling exposed and under increased scrutiny. When female offenders are prosecuted, there is not widespread suspicion of women as can be seen from the cases of physical abuse highlighted earlier (Moloney, 2014; Nursery World, 2019). In the men's experiences, where parents showed initial reticence, men felt that the children and their relationships with them were the best advocates for acceptance.

Management responses

The support (or lack of) for the men from those in management and leadership positions was seen as important to the participants in this research. Most had positive experiences, particularly when parents raised questions or concerns. In particular Martin reported a very supportive manager who defended him when parents raised questions. The response of Anthony's manager to a parent led to an escalation of an event that, while Anthony reports it as a learning experience and which ultimately had a satisfactory outcome, nevertheless created a stressful environment for Anthony whose confidence with parents in particular is low. Alan's manager's response to a query from parents led to an unequal workload. Sean, on the other hand experienced an employer who hired him because of his gender and paid him at a higher rate than his co-workers but restricted many of his duties relating to young children and intimate care, leaving Sean feeling hurt and abandoned. Leadership is seen as crucial to gender sensitive approach to ECEC and retention of both men and women in the sector (Ljunggren et al., 2020). Sean's experience of being hired as a man but excluded from many of the roles because of this seems to be an exception. However exceptional this experience, it had a very negative effect on Sean's feeling of belonging. Where men have been employed, they typically have positive experiences of their managers, however flawed their responses to situations may be. This suggests that leadership training on gender sensitivity could provide a more comfortable working environment as has been pointed out across the literature (Brody et al., 2021; Peeters et al., 2015; Perkins & Edwards, 2018; Rohrmann, 2016; 2020; Warin, 2018; 2019)

Future aspirations and expectations

The value of the ECEC sector cannot be overlooked as a factor, both in real terms and in how it is perceived at societal level. Despite changing gender roles in society, shifts in family responsibility and

endeavours to even up the opportunities, and salaries that can be achieved by women in more male dominated sectors, the breadwinner norm and expectation seen in Connell's (2009) theory and borne out in the literature (Besnard and Diren, 2010; Jones and Aubrey, 2019; Nentwich et al., 2013; Warin, 2006) prevails and has been evident in this research. Men who enter ECEC can lose status in relation to their peers due to the nature of ECEC's status as women's work and the bottom of the education hierarchy. However, getting the men into the sector was not enough. Beyond the issues of recruiting men to the ECEC is the issue of retaining them. While turnover in ECEC is high generally (Pobal, 2021), there is some indication that men leave in higher proportions to women (Rohrmann et al., 2021). Of the two other men in Patrick's ECEC course, one has moved to primary teaching and the other to a fast food restaurant. Of the men interviewed for this research, Martin had already left the sector, citing better opportunities, first in primary school (SNA) and then in further education, making his way up the education hierarchy.

'unfortunately... if other opportunities present themselves to you it's hard to turn down. It really is and it's such a pity it really is, and it irks me to this day like that that that recognition isn't there and hopefully it will change in the future.' (Martin)

In Brody et al.'s, (2021) research, availing of opportunities was a factor in the stories of dropouts.

Joshua, in this study, was due to leave once his employment scheme came to an end, citing financial reasons, the ability to pay his mortgage once he was no longer in receipt of state assistance. Other examples of this were cited by Karen. Of the three men who were planning in staying in their current roles, all three were in management positions. While leaving may be influenced by financial considerations, these were also present for the female workers. In a

sector where pay and status is low, expectations are largely based around the female default, progression opportunities are few, the notion of trajectories is a bit of a misnomer as Warin et al. (2021) have suggested.

Certainly, the economic situation has brought men to the sector who would not otherwise have considered it, but equally the economic situation and societal expectations of men's roles is likely to have some influence on exit, whether that is as a result of more promising opportunities elsewhere or purely financial motives is likely to account for only some of the reasons. Age and stage of life was also considered a factor for Alan and Ed who could not see themselves being able to sustain their vigour long term. In Alan's case, he was looking for progression opportunities in the future.

'I'd like to think in five years' time, I would be working in some sort of inspection role, or in the... maybe in the Access and Inclusion model [support programme for children in preschool settings] you know working for Pobal, something like that, where you're where you're going in and you're helping services to get where they need to be... I don't think at 65 I could be down on my hands and knees still, you know, so you know you do have to plan for the future as well.' (Alan)

The low pay of the ECEC sector (and caring professions in general) may not have deterred the men in this research from entering the sector, but in one case, it was preventing him from remaining as once the employment scheme he was engaged in concluded he would have to return to construction in order to earn a salary that would pay his mortgage. Both men and women interviewed identified pay and conditions as factors in recruitment and retention generally and specifically in the cases of men in their traditional expected role as breadwinners. While low pay and status is generally not considered the only deterrent to men's entry, it may

certainly be a factor and evidence that this may be the case can be seen in the increasing numbers of men in ECEC in Turkey where no other measures have been put in place except that it is a professional post with a commensurate salary (Şahin and Sak, 2016).

ECEC for the most part has few progression opportunities. Many services in Ireland are either small privately run sessional services with one or two key workers or in the case of larger chain businesses, not well paid. Community settings tend to have better pay and conditions and less staff turnover, but they are subject to funding and are operated by boards of directors. For this reason, progression is either up to management level or out to something cognate, both of which bring workers away from the children. There is a workforce development plan due for publication (Department of Education and Skills, 2019b) and in March 2021, the government announced that ECEC would be considered under the Joint Labour Committee which will negotiate salary scales and put them on a legal footing. This may be a key step in improving the terms and conditions of the sector and addressing some of the retention issues. However, Urban (2017; 2019; 2020) argues that there is still some work to do in how the sector is resourced and the model of provision currently in place.

One of the persistent issues with the shortage of men working in ECEC is attributed to the low pay and conditions associated with care work in general but in particular ECEC, where educators are living on below minimum wage with precarious contracts and in many cases the need to sign-on with social welfare over the summer months (ECI, 2018). Despite much of the change in the family and societal expectations of men and women, men are still expected to be the higher earners and the breadwinners in the family home, with women's income often seen as supplementary and therefore acceptable to be less.

The gender pay gap has received considerable attention internationally over the last number of years. Valuing ECEC as a professional vocation for both men and women that is paid accordingly and in parity with cognate professions such as compulsory school teaching, though aspirational would likely make a difference though the gendered notion of caring would still need to be addressed. The Workforce Development Plan should provide some clarity about occupational role profiles according to qualification. However, it is difficult to see how even the top role profile will compare to the living wage. There is an opportunity now in these pandemic times when as a society we can see what is possible when required to consider moving ECEC to a fully public model as has been suggested by a group of academics (Bernard, Byrne-McNamee, Hayes, Jeffers, Murray & Urban, 2020; Urban 2021). This has also been among the recommendations of The Citizen's Assembly on Gender Equality (2021) along with an acknowledgement of the need to address the ingrained and 'destructive' gender norms at societal level (2021, p.6). As professionalised sector with pay scales and progression, it may become a more attractive option for both men and women as Eidevald, Ljunggren and Thordardottir (2021) have suggested though with a warning that professionalisation should come from within and not pushed by a neo-liberal agenda.

9.3 Summary

For the men in this study in Ireland, their entry to ECEC, far from being deliberate or even on the periphery of their awareness, it was entirely invisible as a career option, reflecting much of what has been found in studies of men in ECEC in other countries. Rather their entry was a complex jigsaw of circumstance across all levels of the ecological system: school, guidance, family influence and personal factors against a backdrop of gendered societal structures. Their decisions represent what Thomson et al. (2002); Brody &

Hadar (2017) & Şahin-Sak et al. (2020) refer to critical moments when men make career choices based on the circumstances that have presented themselves. While the routes are complex and multi-dimensional, they have a number of common factors which may give some insight to enable future recruitment of men and boys to ECEC. Factors such as visibility across all levels of the education system, early exposure in lower post-primary school to a range of potential non-traditional career choices, in the way the STEM subjects are promoted to girls, deliberate careers guidance both in school and in employment schemes so that potential men can be targeted. Aside from these measures, the gradual shifting of traditional gender norms and roles associated with domestic and paid labour coupled with ongoing equality measures through parental leave, efforts to close the gender pay gap and the upcoming joint labour committee which will put ECEC salary scales on a legal footing.

Men's visibility in ECEC has been a recurring theme throughout this research. The lack of visibility of the ECEC sector means that it is not seen as a viable option for young men. The current 98% female workforce embeds and perpetuates gendered notions of care. In contrast to this, the men who do enter become hyper visible by the nature of their uniqueness. This leads to the contradictory responsibilities of both challenging and reinforcing gender stereotypes, being both nurturers and disciplinarians and being aware of their gender and physicality and resulting vigilance around intimate care and comforting behaviours. The sense of othering in the staffing environment is felt when conversations are dominated by female themes with little awareness of the experience of the men. Within this research, the notion that once men become visible, they will no longer be hyper visible by their extreme minority status is evident. However, many of the men, despite their enjoyment of the role, felt that the invisibility they are supposed to enjoy, leads to their needs not being met in the environment. Academics in recent times

have spoken of the need for gender sensitivity and awareness at all levels of education to recognise the need to make caring work visible to young men but also to understand that within the ECEC environment where female care has dominated, that there is a need for an awareness of the uniqueness of the experiences of men to support them to find their place. The general consensus is the ECEC sector needs men, though the reasons for that need vary between parents, their female colleagues and the men themselves.

Navigating the pedagogy path that is entrenched in women's ways is challenging and nuanced. The discussion centring around what men do differently has its origins in the notion of gender binaries and that caring for young children is women's work, what women naturally do, an issue that persists in care work and continues to ensure that it is undervalued and underpaid and not an attractive or even visible vocation for men. This makes the men who are in the sector hyper-visible and often the subject of scrutiny and suspicion as reported by many of the men and reflected in some of the parent's surveys. While these instances may be in the minority, the fact that they occur can have a significant effect on the men's confidence and personal autonomy and illustrate that those views and attitudes persist including among some of the female workers (both reported here by the workers themselves and in the men's experiences of some female colleagues) which had the effect of undermining the men's roles. These instances reflect the men's experiences on a meso level but reflect wider societal attitudes that still prevail at a macro level.

Carving out a professional and autonomous role for both men and women and un-coupling ECEC from maternal understandings of care is something that has been considered in the literature. Returning to Connell (2009), when we understand that the gender order is reinforced and policed through the relationships in the meso level, taking a gender-aware approach to a professional pedagogy

may help to disrupt the gender regime. Connell (2009) contends that while the prevailing gender order is resistant to change, it can be shifted through crises. The onset of the 2007/2008 economic crash created a situation where ECEC became a possibility for more men. The current Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of care. Ireland is in a shifting space with changing social norms and increased focus on gender-equality measures which presents us with a unique opportunity to disrupt the current ECEC model.

10 Conclusion

Against a backdrop of rapid social, economic and ECEC sectoral change in the Irish context, I set out to examine the ECEC career trajectories of men in comparison to their female counterparts and investigate the factors that influenced their trajectories. I employed a mixed methods embedded design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) and Connell's (2009) theory of gender as a theoretical framework in which to situate the study.

Returning to the research questions: What leads men to enter the ECEC sector? We can see that entry to the sector is multifaceted and visible in the ecological systems. Men are influenced by a range of factors: changing economic climate forcing a career change, Intrinsic motivations, often identified with maturity, family and friends' guidance and timing. Hindrances and barriers are seen as lack of visibility, lack of careers guidance, social construction of caring work as women's, the associated poor status and value of the work.

Once in the sector, men's trajectories are generally similar to those of women. Some men in this study had taken on management roles but equally so had some of the women. There was no evidence of men's trajectories being enhanced by their gender. However, their experiences did differ. The men found that they were objects of scrutiny and in some cases objection, they experienced expectations and encounters that were gendered and can be explained by Connell's (2005; 2009) construction of gender within the structures of society, the hierarchal theory of masculinities in which masculinity is policed through social interaction. In this study, a picture of complex interaction of influences and factors at the micro, meso and macro levels is

visible. Findings reflect and confirm those of previous research at a national and international level.

Drawing from my findings and subsequent discussion, I make the following observations and recommendations, using four interconnected headings for clarity: Possibility, Policy, Pathways & Professionalisation.

10.1 Possibility

Findings indicated a largely accidental entry to the sector for the male participants, often as a second career. Visibility is a key issue in this research. ECEC as an occupation was largely invisible to men unlike their female colleagues who often had a sense of the role or a knowledge that they wanted to work with children. The education hierarchy ensures that relatively few men work in the lower levels of the education sectors and those that do are often promoted to leadership roles. Careers guidance in post-primary school was absent in terms of promoting ECEC but both the literature and the careers guidance teachers who participated in this study suggested that there is a gap in the provision of guidance. There is an absence of opportunities for students to investigate and try out non-traditional occupations and to challenge the choices that are largely made along gendered lines. As has been discussed elsewhere in the literature, there is need for gender-awareness and gender-sensitivity in making ECEC a visible option for both boys and girls. Central to this, is challenging gender stereotypes at all levels of the education system so that girls and boys may more easily make non-traditional subject choices.

10.2 Pathways

Linked to the possibility of ECEC as a viable option for men, is the idea of pathways and the mechanisms by which they enter. We know that the men in this study and in other countries, often came

into ECEC by accident and in the case of this research, many came through employment activation schemes or as a result of starting out as SNAs. The notion of trajectories as a difficult concept in ECEC has been pointed out by Warin et al. (2021). Once in the sector progression opportunities are limited. In a sector where there has been focus on professionalisation, the danger exists that those who are well qualified, will not stay in positions working directly with the children as they are the least well paid. Yet taking on a managerial role leaves workers with an intense administrative burden which has been the subject of criticism in the sector (Moloney, 2014). As part of a professionalising sector and in line with other areas of the education system, there needs to be more structured progression opportunities within the early childhood educator role. This may be addressed to some degree in the publication of the Workforce Development Plan and the Joint Labour Committee agreement.

10.3 Professionalisation

Once in the sector, men reported experiencing differentiated expectations, practice and some negative reactions to their presence. Issues of contradictory expectations of role modelling and challenging gender stereotypes, engaging in caring but finding their form of care policed by female co-workers were evident. Expectations of certain types of practice such as outdoor play and behaviour management were also experienced, but equally that practice was often undermined. Issues of risk and scrutiny were also reported, ranging from a hyper awareness of themselves, mild curiosity at their presence, to outright objection and exclusion from some aspects of practice because of suspicions over their sexuality or motivations. However, response of management and leadership was key in these situations. Men experienced simultaneous elevation of their status as a man in ECEC but also a reduction as not a woman (and therefore naturally suited to the role). Issues of othering and isolation occurred where dominant conversation did not

take into account the presence of the men and led them to them feeling invisible. And yet as men in a largely female environment, they were hyper visible. These are experiences that are not reported by their female counterparts as the default ECEC workers. This further reflects Connell's (2009) assertion that gender roles are policed in relationships.

Despite this, many of the men reported high satisfaction rates in their experiences of working with children and some had real confidence in their practice and awareness of their unique and privileged role in supporting children's early development. Identity, agency and professional autonomy were key to their feelings of accomplishment and confidence in their roles. Relationship development was crucial both in relationships with the children but also with their families. There is a need uncouple ECEC from notions of a maternal 'natural' caring.

I have referred to the *Competence Requirements in Early Childhood Education and Care (CoRe Report)* (Urban et al, 2011) throughout this study. The CoRe report formed the basis of many of the developments in ECEC in Ireland in recent times and within it, an example of practice in the Danish context is presented, that of the social pedagogue. I suggest that social pedagogy, based on a context-dependent professional relationship may provide a uniting framework which challenges the assumption that ECEC is women's domain and what women naturally do.

10.4 Policy

Irish society has experienced rapid social change in the last two decades, with the increasing separation of church and state. The passing of divorce, abortion and marriage equality referenda and increases in equality-focused legislation and actions point to an evolving society and commitments to equality. Recent family friendly policies including increased paternity and parental leave and the

publication of the National Children's Strategy, *First 5* (DCYA, 2018a) and changes to the ECEC sector with a focus on education and quality provision demonstrate a commitment to a better balance for families. However, there is much to be done within the sector to improve the experiences of workers. The ECEC workforce is currently in crisis, brought about by years of neo-liberal policy encouraging the marketisation of what should be recognised as a public good and children's right (Cameron, 2020; Moss & Cameron, 2020; Urban, 2020). Pay continues to be low, work is often part-time or seasonal and progression routes are few. The crisis has been compounded by the Covid-19 pandemic in which the value of care and public services have become acutely visible, and during this time, demonstrated the ability of governments to find the funding for public sector services when required. We see from this research that the recession beginning in 2007-2008 forced a change in circumstances, what Connell (2009) refers to as crisis events which led a number of men into the ECEC sector. There is an opportunity now as Urban (2020 p.31) has stated to 'take stock, re-evaluate, and redesign how we provide early childhood education and care in this country'. Taking the increased funding and political attention and the Citizen's Assembly (2021) recommendations, it is possible to reimagine ECEC as 'education in its broadest sense' with unified provision (Moss, 2020 p.59) staffed by a professionalised and diversified workforce, and underpinned by children's rights and social justice. However, this will require political will. One key conclusion from my study is that employment schemes are not a sustainable mechanism for recruiting men into the ECEC sector. To use such schemes at a time when the sector is fighting to be recognised as a profession on a par with other levels of education and requiring a qualified workforce devalues the sector further. We need to find and support mechanisms which encourage a diversity of educators without devaluing the role and undoing the progress that has been made in relation to professionalisation.

Based on the findings of this research, the existing body of evidence, and in line with current developments in the Irish ECEC sector, I make the following ambitious recommendations:

For Early Childhood Education and Care

- Increased visibility of men in ECEC and early primary education. This would require active promotion and gender awareness/sensitivity in placement of workers with groups of children.
- Coordination and sustained approaches to recruitment and retention of a diversity of early childhood educator.
- Gender sensitivity training, particularly for leadership, in ECEC workplaces so that the needs of the few men who make it in to the ECEC sector are understood, promoting equity rather than equality.
- Mechanisms for re-skilling for those changing careers with ECEC as a visible and viable option for both men and women.
- There needs to be an appetite and commitment to increase the diversity of the early childhood workforce to one that is equal and representative of society.

For the education system

- Increased gender awareness at all levels of the education system so that that gender stereotypes and subject choices along gendered lines are actively challenged.
- Increased focus on alternative career pathways in lower post-primary school where students have opportunities to try out different types of work that are not immediately obvious based on available subjects.
- Strategies to make early childhood a visible and viable career choice for boys and men but also for girls and women.

- Mentorship programmes such as those used to promote STEM with young women (for example the ESTeEM programme).
- Structures for entry and gaining qualifications, progression, visibility & promotion in schools and recruitment.

For national policy

- Parity of pay and progression with other levels of the education sector.
- Further development of family-friendly access to ECEC and employment that allow for more shared division of both domestic labour and working conditions of parents.
- Further development of ECEC policy to include commitments to gender diversity linked to the recommendations of The Citizen's Assembly and tied into improved employment conditions stemming from the Workforce Development Plan and Joint Labour Committee.
- Actual commitment and strategies towards meeting targets (merely stating intended targets will not influence number of men entering the sector).

This doesn't underestimate the societal shift and perceptions that needs to take place, though setting and committing to targets and making ECEC visible and viable may help that shift

10.5 Limitations of this study

During my first European Early Childhood Research Association (EECERA) conference presentation in 2017 of the preliminary findings of strand one, a question was raised from the audience in relation to class as a factor and this has not been considered in any great detail but provides an interesting focus for future research. Storyline analysis (Brody and Hadar, 2018; Brody, Emilsen, Rohrmann & Warin, 2021) may also have enhanced the men's

stories and offered a visual comparison with the women's. This may have also lent itself to a more narrative form of enquiry and analysis (Brody and Hadar, 2018; Sahin Sak et al., 2021).

In strand two of the research, the focus group data collection was time limited. A longer period of time made available and perhaps a follow-up or second group with additional participants may have yielded additional results. Certainly, early influences in career choices is an area for further research on this topic. Finally, ideally a quantitative sample would yield more responses to be in a position to make inferences based on the data collected. A national parent-survey under less time and material constraints, might provide additional insights.

Despite these limitations, this study provides a picture in context of the experiences of men and women in ECEC which can be used beyond the immediate context to make recommendations.

Recommendations for further research

In addition to the suggestions for expanding on this study indicated in the limitations above and in reviewing the findings of this research, I make recommendations for further research

- In relation to this study in particular, I would like to do a follow up study on participants to see how their trajectories have continued in the four years since the initial interviews were conducted and how their narratives are constructed reflecting back.
- In the interest of identifying factors which influence exit from the sector, it would be useful to carry out research on both men and women who have left the sector. Brody et al.'s (2021) international study has initiated research with this population.

- The careers advisors in job centres were significant in this research. While I caution against the use of employment schemes as mechanisms for recruitment, some research on the factors that influence their recommendations and how that information may inform further recruitment pathways may be of value.
- This study and the existing literature would suggest that gender issues are not necessarily context-specific and that gendered ideas are pervasive. Opportunities for cross-national links through EECERA Gender SIG and my collaborations during the course of this research have arisen.

10.6 Final words

This thesis has brought together the perspectives of men and women ECEC workers, careers guidance teachers and parents to form a multi-layered picture of the gendered workforce in Ireland. The multiple factors that influence men's and women's entry into and trajectories through the sector are evident at all levels of the ECEC eco-system, generally mirroring the findings of international research in this field. What is unique here is the backdrop of the rapid societal change in Ireland coupled with the economic recession of 2007-2008, which influenced the entry decisions of a number of participants in this study, constituting an example of what Connell (2009) calls a 'crisis event' which can shift previously resistant regimes. While the proportion of male early childhood educators in Ireland remains low, the recent and rapid social change with increased policy focus on equality measures, particularly in relation to workforce participation and work-family balance and a sector in crisis, exacerbated by the current Covid-19 pandemic presents an opportunity to take steps to redress the workforce diversity among other areas of the ECEC sector. This thesis both

contributes to the existing body of literature internationally and provides original evidence in relation to Ireland's ECEC sector. My data provides suggestions for increasing visibility, documents pathways of entry and progression within the sector, ideas for professionalisation and makes clear the policy implications. The gendered nature of the Irish ECEC workforce has indeed been resistant to change but in the context of crisis events, there is an opportunity to diversify the ECEC workforce.

Inevitably, the policy context has changed during the study's preparation period, which may have a bearing on study recommendations. Two such examples are: *Nurturing Skills: The Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare 2022-2028* (Government of Ireland, 2021b) and the Report of the Expert Working Group to develop a new funding model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare (Government of Ireland, 2021c) *Partnership for the Public Good*, both launched in December 2021. While the report of the Expert Working Group makes recommendations for funding reform stating that there should be public management so that the 'market serves the public good' (p.117), it falls short of recommending full public provision, though it does suggest that in medium term, the possibility of introducing some public provision should be investigated. Pillar 4 of the Workforce Plan 'Supporting recruitment, retention and diversity' (p.75) draws on the recommendations of the European Commission (2020) and makes commitments to improve recruitment and retention by addressing pay and status through the Joint Labour Committee (JLC) process, promotion of ECEC and providing a range of entry routes alongside actions to increase the diversity of the workforce stating that 'careers actions will have a particular focus on information and supports for potential entrants to the workforce from minority groups and men...' (p.80) making the findings of this thesis particularly timely.

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Appendix I Information sheet

Men in Early Childhood Education and Care Information Sheet

What is the research about?

Have you ever wondered whether young children in ECEC services are getting the very best care and education? We know that what staff bring is essential but currently nearly all early childhood practitioners are female. Maybe children are missing something? I am interested in why there are so few men working with young children in early childhood education and care services. I would like to find out what helps and hinders men who want to work in this field and what their experience of work is. I want to compare their experience with that of women who work in ECEC. One of the factors may be what parents think about men working with young children. I am approaching early childhood practitioners, parents, and careers guidance teachers to help me answer these questions.

Who is carrying out the study?

My name is Joanne McHale. I am a Doctoral student at the UCL Institute of Education. My research supervisors are Prof Claire Cameron and Charlie Owen of the Thomas Coram Research Unit at the UCL Institute of Education. I am a member of the Teaching Council of Ireland and have been vetted by the National Vetting Bureau.

What does the research involve?

The research will involve:

- Interviews with male and female early years workers
- Surveys of parents
- Focus group with careers guidance teachers in post-primary schools

What does it mean for me?

You may be asked to participate in the study as a parent or professional with expertise in relation to ECEC. I plan to interview early childhood practitioners, both male and female about experiences of being employed in the field and of early childhood practice. I will ask parents to complete a questionnaire about their experiences of their children attending a service where a male worker is employed and I plan to talk to guidance teachers about the kinds of advice they give to prospective early childhood students.

What will happen to the information?

All personal information will be kept confidential. Your personal details will be kept securely. None of your responses will be attributed to your name in any publication. Your data will not be used for any purpose beyond this specific project unless you have given permission to do so. All personal details will be removed from records on completion of the project unless you agree that they can be kept, in case there is a follow up study and I wish to get in touch with you again. Your responses will not impact on any future interactions with the researcher.

Do I have to take part?

I would be very grateful for your participation in this study. However, you are under no obligation to do so and if you do take part, you can withdraw at any time, without having to give a reason. Your decision to take part or not will not have an impact on any future interactions with the researcher.

What will you do with the findings?

The findings from the initial interviews will inform part of my PhD thesis fieldwork and subsequent interviews and surveys will be used in PhD thesis with the potential to be published after completion. No personal details will be published.

Who do I contact if I have any further questions?

If you have any further questions in relation to this research, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher:

Joanne McHale – XXX XXXXXXX

Email : XXXX@XXXXXXXX

Appendix II Consent Form

Institute of Education



Men in Early Childhood Education and Care: Informed Consent Form

Thank you for your interest in this research. Before you agree to take part, the researcher must explain the study to you and you should read the information sheet provided.

If you have any questions arising from the explanation or information sheet, please ask the researcher before providing your consent below. You will be given a copy of this consent form and the information sheet to keep for your information.

Participant's statement:

I Agree that:

	Yes	No
I have read the information sheet and understand what is involved in this research.		
I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time by notifying the researcher.		
I consent to the processing of information for the purposes of this research study.		
I understand that my responses will be recorded and consent for their use as part of the study.		
I understand that the information will be treated in the strictest confidence and handled in accordance with the provisions of the UK Data Protection Act 1998/Irish Data Protection Act 1988 and Data Protection Amendment Act 2003		
I understand that the findings of this study may be published as part of a PhD Thesis and may be used in conference presentations and published papers. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained ensuring that personal details of participants will not be revealed from any publications. I understand that I can request a copy of the findings from the researcher.		
I agree that the research project named above has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part in this study.		

Name:

Date:

Appendix III Interview topic guide

Men in Early Childhood Education and Care: Topic Guide for Interviews

Preamble

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this interview. I am conducting research on how and why people enter the early childhood sector and how men's experiences and trajectories may differ from women's. As part of this research, your participation is welcome and valuable. Before we begin though, I need to go through some information with you to ensure that you are clear about the research and what your participation means and what will happen to your information. As will be outlined in the information sheet, your participation is completely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw or decline to answer at any point without any consequence or reason. Your information will remain confidential and will not be published as part of this research, but by virtue of the unusual nature of your role as a man in early childhood (male participants only), it cannot be guaranteed that you will be completely anonymous. Having said that every possible effort will be made to protect your anonymity. The only caveat to assurances of confidentiality is in relation to disclosures or witnessing of practice of concern where Children's First or the Inspectorate may have to be invoked. Please take a few moments to read through the information sheet and be sure that you are happy with the information provided. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask them. Once you are happy that you are fully informed, I will ask you to read and sign the consent form. You may keep a copy of the information sheet and consent form for your information and as a point of contact for me, should you wish to contact me in relation to the research at a later date.

During the course of this interview, I will be using my mobile phone to record your responses. I may take some notes also. Your interview will be uploaded (and the recording deleted from my phone) to my organisation's secure file and will be stored there until the research is complete, after which it will be archived to IOE, UCL's. The only people with access to your information will be myself and my two supervisors: Prof Claire Cameron and Charlie Owen. Are you happy to have your responses recorded?

Biographical

Can you start by telling me how you came to the decision to work in or study Early Childhood Education and Care? (prompt: what led you to the decision?)

Was this your first-choice course/career?

How long have you worked in ECEC? /What year did you begin?

Can you tell me the ECEC services in which you have worked either as an employee or on placement? (Prompt: What was your first job? What roles have you held? What dates? Have you done any volunteer work? What role do you currently hold?)

How did family and friends react to your choice of career/study path? (Prompt: Were they supportive?)

Did you receive any specific careers advice which led you to consider early childhood (either formally – careers service, or informally – suggestion from friend/relative etc.)?

Is there anything else about your choice of career that you think it is important for me to know? *(for example, was entry into workforce non-deliberate, convinced, switch within the sector, or from outside the sector – if this has not already been made apparent from previous answers)*

Experience of work with children

How do children react to you as a man?

Experiences of work practice

Thinking about working with children, play, focused learning times and so on, do you think there are any differences between what men and women do? (Prompts: How they react to children, or the things they suggest to children?) Do you feel there is a difference between how men and women value outdoor play?

In terms of day to day routines, do you think there is any difference between how male early childhood workers engage in activities such as those that require physical touch or intimate care, mealtimes and managing challenging behaviour? For example, thinking about comforting an upset or hurt child, nappy changing, story time, rest times (if so, what are the differences, and why do you think they are different?)

Do you feel there are differences in the expectation of how male and female workers engage in those activities? Why do you think that is? Whose expectations are they?

What has your experience been of supervision during those times?

Are there formal requirements in relation to witnessing during intimate care/nappy changing etc.?

Do you think your gender has any bearing on your work? In what ways?

Experience of work with staff/students

How do you get on with other members of staff? Are there any specific issues to do with being a man in a mostly female staff group?

Do you work in teams?

Does team working differ between men and women/Do men and women behave differently in teams?

Is there a key worker system in place?

Do you have key children for whom you take responsibility?

Have you ever worked with other men?

Do you think there are different expectations of you as a male worker?
(for example, the jobs that are required)?

What about staff room or informal conversations – do you think it's different when there are mixed gender staff groups to single gender?
In what way?

Experience of work with parents

What have your experiences been of parents' responses to a male early childhood worker in their children's services?

Do you feel men and women have been treated differently? In what way?

Future plans and ambitions

In terms of your decision to enter the field of early childhood education and care and pursuing your qualification in relation to that, where do you see yourself going from here?

What are your next steps in your career?

Where do you see yourself in five years?

Is there anything else you would like to add or feel is relevant to the research?

Thank you very much for your participation

*Once again, my contact information is on the information sheet that I have given to you, should you have any queries after I have left today.
[Check for signed consent form and information sheet]*

Appendix IV Focus Group Topic Guide

Gender and Career trajectories in Early Childhood Care and Education: Factors influencing choice of career

Men in Early Childhood Education and Care Careers Guidance
Teacher Focus Group 11th Oct 2018

Topic Guide:

Can you give me a brief overview of how careers guidance works in your school (e.g. When do students begin to receive guidance? How does that look – classes? Individual meetings etc.?)

What do you take into account when thinking about giving advice to a student?

What are the reasons for recommending a particular programme of study?

If a student came to you expressing an interest in working with children, what jobs or careers do you recommend?

If a student comes with no idea of what they want to do, how do you go about advising them?

Have you ever recommended ECCE to students? How frequently?

Have you ever recommended ECCE to male students?

Have students ever come to you expressing a wish for ECCE specifically/how often?

Do you ever notice that the gender of the student influences your advice given at all?

Are there certain careers more suited to boys or girls?

What are the factors that influence the promotion of ECCE to male/female students?

Why do you think more boys do not go for ECCE?

What would need to change/happen for ECCE to be a more relevant choice for boys/girls?

Where do you see prospects in ECCE in terms of wage, career, social advancements?

In light of increased focus on stem subjects, have you consciously promoted stem to female students?

Thank you. Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Appendix V Parent Survey

Gender Balance in the Early Childhood Workforce in Ireland

My name is Joanne McHale and I am a doctoral student at UCL Institute of Education in London studying gender in the early childhood workforce in Ireland. The aim of this survey is to explore how parents view the roles of men and women in relation to early childhood education and care services (childcare), such as crèche, preschool, community childcare and so on. This information will be used to inform the early childhood sector on the roles and capabilities of male and female workers. All information is anonymous (you are not asked for any identifying information) and will be treated in the strictest confidence. This survey should take no longer than 15 minutes to complete.

Any queries about this survey can be directed to j.mchale.14@ucl.ac.uk

1. Please state the number of children you have attending early childhood care and education (crèche, preschool etc.)

2. Please state the ages of children you currently have in early childhood care and education (crèche, preschool etc.) Tick all that apply

11 months or under	
12-23 months	
2-3 years	
4-5 years	
Over 5	

3. Please state the gender(s) of your children currently in early childhood care and education.

Male	
Female	

4. Please indicate whether your child(ren) attend full or part-time childcare (tick all that apply)

Full-time creche (can include ECCE scheme)	
Part-time creche (can include ECCE scheme)	
ECCE scheme only (sessional preschool or Montessori)	

5. Please indicate your own gender

Male	
Female	
Other	

6. Please indicate your age category.

Under 20	
21-30	
31-40	
41 or over	

7. Please indicate your employment status.

Employed full-time	
Employed part-time	
Self-employed	
Stay at home parent	
Unemployed	
Other	

8. How would you describe your profession/job

9. How would you describe the division of caring responsibilities in the household (this includes arranging childcare, picking up and dropping to childcare, arranging mealtimes and preparing food)?

I take on all the childcare responsibilities	
I take on most of the childcare responsibilities	
We share the childcare responsibilities equally	
My partner takes on most of the childcare responsibilities	
My partner takes on all of the childcare responsibilities	
I am currently parenting alone	
Other	

10. Have you experienced a male early childhood educator in your child's service?

Yes	
No	

If Yes, answer 11 & 12 below. If no, skip to question 13

11. If yes to Q10, how would you describe your experience of male early childhood educators

(tick appropriate box)

Very Negative				Neutral			Very Positive			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

12. Please comment on why you made the selection you did in Q11 above.

--

13. How would you describe your experience of female early childhood educators?

Very Negative				Neutral			Very Positive			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

14. Please comment on why you made the selection you did in Q13 above.

--

For the questions that follow, we are interested in the perspectives of parents as to whether there are certain types of roles that suit men or women particularly. Please give your honest answer to each of the questions (there are no right or wrong answers and all answers are anonymous). Please click on the number that indicates your level of agreement to the following statements:

15. Women are naturally more suited to caring for young (birth to six) children than men.

Strongly Disagree				Neutral			Strongly agree			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

16. Men and women are equally patient in caring for young children.

Strongly Disagree				Neutral			Strongly agree			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

17. Young children are equally likely to turn to men and women for comfort when they are upset.

Strongly Disagree				Neutral			Strongly agree			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

18. It is more appropriate for female early childhood educators to change nappies and carry out toileting duties than male early childhood educators.

Strongly Disagree				Neutral			Strongly agree			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

19. Men and women are equally well suited to caring for sick children.

Strongly Disagree				Neutral			Strongly agree			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

20. Men and women are equally suited to comforting an upset child.

Strongly Disagree				Neutral			Strongly agree			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

21. Men pose a greater risk of abuse to young children than women.

Strongly Disagree				Neutral			Strongly agree			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

22. Men and women use humour equally in their roles as early childhood educators.

Strongly Disagree				Neutral			Strongly agree			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

23. Women and men are equally capable of being role models to young children.

Strongly Disagree				Neutral			Strongly agree			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

24. Men can be role models for children with absent fathers.

Strongly Disagree				Neutral			Strongly agree			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

25. Working in a caring profession allows male early childhood educators to challenge stereotypes about what it is to be male.

Strongly Disagree				Neutral			Strongly agree			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

26. Male and female early educators are equally well suited to outdoor activities.

Strongly Disagree				Neutral			Strongly agree			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

27. Male and female early childhood educators are equally suited to rough and tumble play.

Strongly Disagree				Neutral			Strongly agree			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

28. Male early childhood educators are better able to support young boys than female early childhood educators.

Strongly Disagree				Neutral			Strongly agree			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

29. Male and female early childhood educators are equally able manage difficult behaviour.

Strongly Disagree				Neutral			Strongly agree			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

30. More male early childhood educators would encourage more dads to be involved in their young child's early childhood service.

Strongly Disagree				Neutral			Strongly agree			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

31. Male and female early childhood educators are equally able to build relationships with young children.

Strongly Disagree				Neutral			Strongly agree			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

32. Men and women are equally capable of supporting children in focused learning activities (table-top work, instruction)

Strongly Disagree				Neutral			Strongly agree			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

33. Male and female early childhood educators are equally suited to story time and quiet activities.

Strongly Disagree				Neutral			Strongly agree			
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

34. If you were to indicate a preference for the gender of your child's early childhood educator, which would you choose?

Male early childhood educator	
No preference as long as they are suitably qualified	
Female early childhood educator.	

35. Briefly state the reason for your selection in Q34 above.

36. Any other comments you would like to make?

Your participation has been very much appreciated

Thank you.

Please return this survey to the person who gave it to you and I will arrange collection.

Appendix VI Summary information on the Irish education system

Early Childhood Education and Care
<p>The Early Years Sector refers to the 4,598 services which deliver early childhood care and education from birth to six months through private and part-funded provision. This includes full day care, and sessional services (three hours per day) pre-school. The term 'early years' is used in some government publications to refer to the early childhood education and care sector (Pobal, 2019).</p>
<p>Early Childhood Education and Care is defined as arrangements that providing 'education and care for children from birth to compulsory school age' (European Commission n.d.; OECD 2001)</p>
<p>Non-compulsory. Includes full day care, sessional funded ECCE provision from 2 years and 8 months. Curriculum: Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009) The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment is responsible for the curriculum development of ECCE, primary and post-primary education (NCCA.ie)</p>
<p>Thirty-three City and County Childcare Committees. These City and County Childcare Committees continue to provide advice, support, training and information to ECEC services, including childminders and parents throughout the country within their representative administrative areas (Hayes 2010; Donoghue and Gaynor 2011).</p>
Primary Education
<p>Compulsory schooling begins age six. Many children begin as young as four years old Comprises eight years Two "infant" years: junior infants & senior infants followed by classes 1st class – 6th Classes of up to 32 children are delivered by a class teacher. Some children with identified needs may be assigned a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) Curriculum: Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009) (junior and senior infants)</p>

The Primary Curriculum (all years)
Post-primary Education
<p>Two 'cycles' concluding with state examinations.</p> <p>Students complete junior cycle (lower post-primary) in years 1-3 of post-primary education and sit the Junior Certificate examination at the end of year three. Students typically take 9-12 subjects for Junior Certificate examination.</p> <p>Senior cycle (upper post-primary) begins in 5th year and concludes with the Leaving Certificate examination at the end of sixth year. Students typically take 6-7 subjects for Leaving Certificate. The results of the Leaving Certificate are converted to points for applying to higher education undergraduate programmes through the CAO (Central Applications Office).</p> <p>Fourth year is an optional Transition Year which moves away from the traditional subject choices of the two formal cycles and offers students the opportunity to try out new experiences. (Department of Education, 2021.)</p> <p>Classes are delivered by subject-specific teachers Some students with identified needs may be assigned a Special Needs Assistant (SNA) Most schools will have at least one careers guidance teacher who may also teach another subject.</p> <p>In an Irish context, post-primary schools are made up of co-educational (ETB Patronage), all-boys schools and all-girls schools, both usually under the patronage of religious orders. Fee-paying (private schools) also exist and can be under the patronage of private organisations or religious orders (Department of Education, 2021).</p>
Further and Higher Education
<p>The Central Applications Office processes applications for undergraduate courses in Irish Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (CAO, 2021).</p> <p>FETAC is the Further Education and Training Awards Council and was the former awarding body in further education qualifications which is now represented on the National Framework of</p>

Qualifications (Quality and Qualifications Framework Ireland, QQI, 2018). FETAC 5/QQI level 5 in ECEC (Childcare) is the minimum qualification required to work in an ECEC setting (Irish Statute Book, 2016).

The National Framework of Qualifications can be viewed here: <https://nfq.qqi.ie/index.html>

Students who have not reached the required points for a desired university programme or wishing to get an initial experience of a field of study can complete a one-year post-leaving certificate course in the subject area which may then allow them to meet the criteria for entry to their desired university programme.

Minimum qualification for ECEC is QQI Level 5.