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ABSTRACT

In an effort to determine the effect of sex-role expectations and low economic return on the number of men teaching at the preschool level, this study surveyed 116 women and 10 men involved in early childhood education. A questionnaire sent to participants raised questions about either an imaginary young man or woman who had recently received a B.A. in early childhood education. Questions were about what quality the new teacher would need most for success with young children, what would be his or her most important problem in teaching, why he or she was going into early childhood education, and how long he or she would continue teaching. Results indicated that women teachers needed to be more concerned than men about earning a living while men, (more than women) needed to have love for children to be successful, a desire to change the schools, and a less friendly rapport with colleagues. Results are discussed.
(SB)

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PERCEPTIONS OF MEN IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION.

Kelvin Seifert

The common wisdom of early childhood education asserts that young children benefit if men, as well as women, work with them, play with them, and generally help the children to develop. Whether the men are found at home or at school, children learn their sex-roles more easily and appropriately. A boy can identify with a real, live person, rather than with an abstraction, and a girl has an alternative source of care and nurturance, balancing any idiosyncracies of the mother in her life. Much research and writing has supported this point of view (for example, Ostrovsky, 1959; Hetherington & Deur, 1972; McCandless, et al., 1973). Whether at home or in programs for groups of children, it is good to have a man around.

In programs, however, men have remained extremely scarce. Two reasons are often suggested for their scarcity. First, it is sometimes claimed that salaries and promotion possibilities are too poor in early childhood education, and especially preschool teaching, to attract and keep men. Second, it is sometimes suggested that sex-role expectations, even within the teaching profession itself, prevent men from working with young children. A kind of self-fulfilling prophecy may occur, though perhaps unconsciously: men are expected to do poorly with young children, and so they do.

The relative importance of these hypotheses would affect the strategies needed for attracting men into early childhood education. Is it "only" an economic problem, a matter of getting

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higher salaries? Or must we also become aware of and deal with negative expectations of what men can accomplish with young children?

The present research was undertaken with these ideas in mind. It focused especially on the second hypothesis above, that we in early childhood education may be expecting less from men than from women in the field, but it also provided considerable insight into the economic roadblocks, as perceived by our profession.

The Problem

Recent research and writing suggests that men encounter special problems with entering early childhood education, and with being accepted by other professionals once they are there. Since salaries tend to be relatively low for many jobs with young children, hiring committees may not trust the sincerity of a man who applies, as much as they would trust a woman with the same qualifications. Will he stay on the job? Even if he does, supervisors and boards of directors may feel more pressure to promote a man sooner than they would feel for a woman, "because he needs the money more than she does." Men may find themselves promoted rapidly--perhaps too rapidly, without enough tangible experience with children or classrooms.

Problems may persist, though, even when salaries are adequate, as they are for many public school teaching positions (Seifert, 1973, 1974, 1975). Like other minority groups, men may experience significant isolation from their (female) colleagues. The staff may not trust a man's motives for teaching, or his competence to handle important aspects of working with young children.

They may think he has come into early childhood education for the "wrong" reasons (fast promotion, idealism, ...?). Expectations like these from his peers seem likely to interfere with his effectiveness on the job.

Getting men to work with young children, then, may not be just a matter of getting them interested in the first place. It may also involve giving them a "proper welcome" into the profession, so to speak. Teachers of young children may need a deeper awareness that some men may be able and willing to earn a relatively low income, and a deeper awareness of how our culture may lead us to expect only poor quality child care from men.

These possibilities suggest several interesting questions for research:

- 1) Do we expect men to enter early childhood education for the same reasons that women enter it?
- 2) Do we believe that men entering early childhood education need the same personal qualities for success that women need?
- 3) Do we expect men entering early childhood education to have the same problems that women have?
- 4) Do we expect men to persist working in daily contact with children for as long as we expect women to do so?

To answer these questions, the present study was carried out.

Procedures

Two hundred members of the NAEYC were sent a written questionnaire that asked the questions above. Half of those receiving the questionnaire were asked about a young man, "George Smith, age 21, who has just received a B.A. in early childhood education." The other half were asked about a young woman, "Linda Smith, age 21, who has just received a B.A. in early child-

hood education." Subjects were not told that the purpose of the study was to compare expectations of one sex with expectations of the other. They were not told in order to minimize any tendencies to give socially desirable responses. In this case, "socially desirable" responses might be ones that minimized differences, especially prejudicial differences, in expectations between the sexes. The results therefore probably underestimate the amount of such differences that might be expressed in other circumstances.

For the first three questions above, respondents were asked to rank several suggested answers in order of importance. For the fourth question, they chose one of several suggested estimates of how long, in years, they thought that the imaginary teacher would work with young children directly, and how long he/she would work in some other capacity for children. The suggested responses for all the questions are listed in Table 1.

One hundred and twenty-six persons responded to the questionnaire with usable information. Many of these, however, found themselves unable to use the structured suggestions, and wrote in various other responses. These often proved just as informative as the more quantifiable answers were, and both kinds will be discussed below.

Some characteristics of the responding group are summarized in Table 2. Persons responded to the "George" (male) and "Linda" (female) conditions in almost equal numbers, though those in the "Linda" group tended to be a bit older. It is not clear why this occurred, nor how it might affect the results of the survey. Nearly everyone had taught in a preschool program at some point in her life, though only about half the groups was doing so now.

About half of all the preschool teaching was or had been part-time, whether in the past or at present. Of all those responding, only ten were male--not enough to analyze separately.

Results

Expectations of "George" and of "Linda" were compared by using the Mann-Whitney U-test for each structured response in questions #1, 2, and 3, and by using a t-test on question #4. The Mann-Whitney statistic compared the average ranks given to the response in each of the two conditions, but unlike the t-test, it assumes only ordinal data (Hays, 1972).

The results showed a mixed pattern: differences in rankings occurred on some responses, but not on others. Overall, however, the results suggested that early childhood educators do hold some sex-linked role expectations which may tend to keep men from working with young children.

Table 3 presents the responses that showed significant differences between "George" and "Linda," as well as the direction of those differences. In question #3, for example, the desire to coordinate work with family responsibilities was given a higher priority or ranking for "Linda" than for "George." The imaginary female, Linda, would be more likely to choose preschool teaching from a desire to coordinate work and family than would the imaginary male, George--or so the respondents seemed to say.

For question #1, which concerned the personal qualities needed by new teachers for success, several differences were found between expectations for George and for Linda. Compared to Linda, it was thought that:

- 1) George would need less of a desire to earn a living;

- 2) George would need more love for children;
- 3) George would need more desire to change the schools;
- 4) George would need less of friendly rapport with his colleagues.

The other structured responses showed no significant differences between George and Linda. These are summarized in Table 4, grouped by the question they refer to. More structured responses showed no difference between sexes than showed a difference, though this fact by itself may not mean that early childhood educators are "not prejudiced."

Thirty-five of the respondents also wrote comments on their questionnaires of at least a sentence in length. Many even wrote extended comments, ranging up to several hundred words in a few cases. These comments centered on various combinations of three themes:

- 1) The phrasing of the structured, suggested responses needed changing (and changes were often then written in);
- 2) Individual differences among teachers, male or female, are so substantial that no generalizations are possible at all;
- 3) Men avoid working with young children because such jobs do not pay well enough, or because they are promoted to administrative positions quickly.

For the first two themes, the responses generally could not be used in the statistical analysis. In the first case, the modified responses that were written in were too different from each other to be easily compared. In the second case, no responses were made at all.

Ironically, several who received George's questionnaire announced that they could not or would not answer for a male

in the same way as for a female. One person, for example, wrote only one word beside each question: "male?!" She made no other responses, implying that discussion of men in this field could simply not be done.

On the other hand, another respondent crossed out the name "Linda" wherever it occurred and wrote in "Frank" to replace it. She then answered all the structured questions as requested, and apologized at the end for rendering her questionnaire "useless." Preschool teachers should not be assumed to be women, she wrote, and the questionnaire showed unconscious sex-role prejudice in this regard.

About forty persons did not respond to the structured questions at all, implying that generalizations about beginning teachers cannot be made at all. Several of these persons offered freehand comments instead. For example:

"Your case study of Linda is limited. I know nothing about her. Is she white, middle-class, poor, only child, engaged, in good health? She sounds like a stereotype."

Which, indeed, she was. Another person wrote:

"I don't think these (structured choices) can be ranked because of individuals and their differences."

On George's questionnaire, several persons spontaneously mentioned poor salaries as a reason why George might avoid teaching young children, or why he might not stay with it:

"I think there is great need for George in the preschool classroom. However, other than as a Director or as an owner, I don't think the salary is enough for a young man with a wife or family."

"(If the new teacher is a man,) he will be promoted to bigger and better things."

Presumably the "bigger and better things" would include better wages. All of the comments about salaries were made in response

to George's questionnaire. Only one respondent mentioned that money might pose a problem for Linda.

The note of resentment in the last example occurred in several of the written comments on George, though not always in the context of promotion and salaries. One person, for instance, wrote the following, with no further comment:

"My opinion of men in the preschool is very low."

On the other hand, another person wrote:

"We have two young men working off court fines, and they are both doing well!"

But criticism, implied or stated, was more common than praise.

Discussion

These results contain both good news and bad news, and some in between. The good news is that early childhood educators sometimes express, and presumably therefore feel, a desire for men to work with children. Furthermore, in many ways the profession seems to hold similar expectations for the young men and for the young women entering the field. On the average, for example, there are no significant differences in the problems that "George" and "Linda" are expected to encounter teaching, and few differences in their reasons for entering the field. In this sense, the profession can be said to lack sex-role prejudice.

The bad news is that in certain other ways, our expectations of new teachers are indeed influenced by their gender, and generally in ways that discourage men from working with young children. Some of the expectations seem to derive from attitudes held throughout our culture. In this category are the following beliefs,

which early childhood educators tended to express in this survey:

- 1) Women, more than men, choose preschool education to facilitate coordination of work and family life.
- 2) Men, less than women, need good rapport with their colleagues.
- 3) Men, more than women, are more successful in preschool education if they concern themselves with changing the schools (perhaps at the expense of concern for their classroom?).

Other differences in expectations found by this survey might be interpreted as reactions to conventional sex-role expectations, reactions needed specifically in preschool teaching to insure success:

- 4) Women, more than men, must be concerned about earning a living. Perhaps this expectation reflects the tendency for women to be confined to very low-paying positions.
- 5) Men, more than women, need a "love of children" to insure their success. Perhaps this expectation results from the plentifulness of other roadblocks, economic and cultural, that prevent men from entering and staying in preschool education: they have got to like children more, or for them it would not be worth it.

Taken together, these expectations would seem to discourage men from working in programs for young children. Because of such beliefs, men tend to be removed from daily contact with children by promotion, or they are discouraged from seeking contact with children in the first place by beliefs that they should have other interests.

Only belief #1 above would seem to leave men freer than women to dedicate themselves to young children. But given the scarcity of high-paying jobs in classrooms, there may not be much around for an interested man to dedicate himself to! Not much, that is, except for higher-paid administrative positions, where the children would not see him much, or benefit from his presence in the sense described at the beginning of this article.

In between this good news and bad news lies the widespread realization in the profession that working with young children often does not pay a living wage. The realization is good for the profession in that it points to one area--salaries--where change must occur, not only to encourage more men into early childhood education, but also to encourage more women who must support families as well as subsist. The realization is also good in showing that much of the problem of attracting men lies outside the profession, with the persons and agencies funding the programs. It might be noted that these agencies are mostly dominated by men, and in this sense men are preventing themselves, as well as many women, from working with children by starving programs of decent salaries.

Realizing the "importance" of salaries, however, may be bad if it distracts attention from other expressions of prejudice, such as those suggested by this survey. Not all preschool programs, it must be remembered, do pay poorly; many now are financed by the public schools and pay salaries approaching or equal to those earned by primary grade teachers. Yet even in such programs, male teachers remain scarce. Why? In part, perhaps, because the early childhood profession does not always expect men to interact sensitively and skillfully with children or colleagues. The results of this survey suggest such a tendency, in spite of obvious and wide variations in the responses.

Table 1

Suggested Responses to Questionnaire Items

1. Which quality will Linda/George need the most for success with young children?
 - a) an ability to set limits for children in groups;
 - b) a desire to earn her/his own living;
 - c) a love of children;
 - d) a desire to change the schools;
 - e) a sense of humor;
 - f) a willingness to discuss teaching problems with colleagues;
 - g) a friendly rapport with colleagues.

2. What will be her/his most important problem in teaching?
 - a) a tendency to set too many limits on the children;
 - b) a tendency to set too few limits on the children;
 - c) a concern with earning a living;
 - d) a lack of opportunity to discuss teaching problems with colleagues;
 - e) a lack of rapport with colleagues.

3. Why do you think Linda/George is going into early childhood education?
 - a) a desire to work with children;
 - b) a secure and respectable job;
 - c) she/he couldn't think of anything else to do;
 - d) she/he wanted a job that could be coordinated easily with family responsibilities;
 - e) an inability to succeed at other kinds of work.

4. a) How long do you think that Linda/George will actually teach in a preschool classroom? 0-1 year __, 1-2 years __, 2-5 years __, more than 5 years __.
b) If Linda/George leaves the classroom, but keeps working for young children in some other way, how long do you think she/he will work at her/his new job? 0-1 year __, 1-2 years __, 2-5 years __, more than 5 years __.

For questions #1, 2, and 3, respondents were asked to rank order the suggested responses. For question #4, they were asked to select one response for each part of the question.

TABLE 2

Characteristics of the Survey Sample

Median Age: 37.5 ("George" group)

42.0 ("Linda" group)

Women Responding = 116

Men Responding = 10

Types of work engaged in, both groups:

preschool teaching or teacher aide	52%
preschool or day care administrator	24%
college faculty	10%
consultant	7%
unemployed	7%

Teaching preschool now? 56% Full-time now? 54%

Ever taught preschool? 98% Full-time ever? 53%

Table 3

Differences in Expectations of "George" and "Linda"

	<u>Direction of Difference</u>	<u>Level of Significance</u>
3. Reasons for entering preschool teaching?		
d). a desire to coordinate work with family responsibilities	Linda > George	p < .05
1. Personal qualities needed for success with young children?		
b) a desire to earn her/his own living;	Linda > George	p < .05
c) a love of children;	George > Linda	p < .05
d) a desire to change the schools;	George > Linda	p < .01
g) a friendly rapport with colleagues.	Linda > George	p < .05

Table 4

Similarities in Expectations of George and Linda

No significant difference was found on any of the following items:

1. Personal qualities needed for success with young children?

- a) an ability to set limits;
- e) a sense of humor;
- f) a willingness to discuss teaching problems.

2. Most important problem in teaching?

- a) setting too many limits;
- b) setting too few limits;
- c) a concern with earning a living;
- d) a lack of opportunity to discuss teaching problems;
- e) a fear of discussing teaching problems;
- f) a lack of rapport with colleagues.

3. Reasons for entering preschool teaching?

- a) a desire to work with children;
- b) a secure and respectable job;
- c) couldn't think of anything else to do;
- e) a lack of rapport with colleagues

4a) How long will she/he teach in a preschool classroom?

- b) How long will she/he work in early childhood education in some other way?

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