

A Man's Work in a Female World? Gender Paradoxes of Male Childcare Workers

By Markus Tünte, University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany

Abstract:

The analytical focus of this article is on everyday occupational life of male teachers in German pre-schools and male care workers in childcare centers. In light of the minority status of men in this occupation, attention is paid particularly to tensions experienced by male care workers and how these tensions are dealt with in relation to identity formation. Are male childcare workers the prototypical "new men," with implications for de-gendering and professionalising care work? Or are male childcare workers faced with the same structural disadvantages of female occupations, in addition experiencing contradictions in relation to their masculinity? In order to address these questions, the actions and experiences of male childcare workers are examined in relation to work colleagues, parents and the children with whom they interact on a daily basis as part of their work practice.

Introduction¹

1 German pre-schools and childcare centers² are typically the subject of public discourse and political debates everytime the results of the international PISA studies are announced, or most recently, in light of the controversial discussions about expanding childcare centers and capacities for infants and children under the age of three years. The relevance of a gender perspective for understanding working life in childcare facilities has hardly been addressed either in the media or by research. From a critical perspective on the state of gender relations in society, the lack of attention to the gendering of childcare work is cause for concern, since, as Ursula Rabe-Kleberg argues, the pre-school is a social institution embedded in societal gender relations, characterised by segmentation and inequality (Rabe-Kleberg 10). This study focusses specifically on men and gendering in reference to masculinity in pre-schools and childcare centers in Germany. Although some authors (cautiously) contend that public interest is growing in the topic of men in child care and teaching occupations (Krabel/Stuve 7), the links between everyday working life in pre-schools and the reproduction of gender differences and traditional gender relations are neither addressed nor adequately examined. Thus for Jan Kasiske and his co-authors the question of whether mixed-gender work teams in childcare

¹ The author wishes to thank Prof. Karen A. Shire for assistance with the translation of this article from German into English.

² The reference is to what are called Kindergärten (translated as pre-schools) and Kindertagesstätten (childcare centers) in German. Children from the age of three years are secured a place in a pre-school in Germany. Pre-school and childcare center staff are expected to have completed a vocational school training to become a care worker (Erzieher/in) in Germany. Although Erzieher/in literally translates as educator, given the location of training in the schooling rather than the university system, it is more equivalent to what in English is called a childcare worker. An important difference is, however, the standardisation of training in specific vocational school streams.

facilities develop a gendered division of labor or not is raised as an open question (Kasiske et al. 23), and one which the research presented here attempts to answer.

2 There are in fact very few studies in the sociology of gender which examine everyday working life and relations between men and women in either childcare or teaching occupations.³ The absence of much prior research in this area of study is surprising in consideration of the gendering of childcare as an occupation. Childcare as an occupational field is extremely gender segregated, with the proportion of male childcare workers who have completed government training programs as licensed early childhood educators at only 1.7% (Kasiske et al. 22). This fact alone is enough to make the gendering of childcare occupations of interest to research in the sociology of gender, especially in light of the number of studies about women in men's occupations and men in women's occupations (e.g. Leidner; Hall; Heintz et al.; Williams, *Gender Differences*).

3 The analytical focus of this article is on everyday occupational life of male teachers in German pre-schools and male care workers in childcare centers.⁴ In light of the minority status of men in this occupation, attention is paid particularly to tensions experienced by male care workers and how these tensions are dealt with in relation to identity formation. Are male childcare workers, as Zulehner und Volz suggest, the prototypical "new men,"⁵ with implications for de-gendering and professionalising care work? Or are male childcare workers faced with the same structural disadvantages of female occupations, in addition experiencing contradictions in relation to their masculinity? In order to address these questions, the actions and experiences of male childcare workers are examined in relation to work colleagues, parents and the children with whom they interact on a daily basis as part of their work practice. The institutional dimensions of childcare occupations in Germany are also considered in analysing the experiences and tensions faced by male care workers in a female occupation.

4 The research presented here is based on work completed as part of a masters thesis at the University Duisburg-Essen. The empirical research involved a total of nine semi-

³ To my knowledge, Kaisa Kaupinnen-Toropainen/Johanna Laimi and Christine L. Williams were the first to do research on male childcare workers. While Williams' study focussed on care workers in an American kindergarten, the work of Kaupinnen-Toropainen/Laimi dealt with Scandinavian cases. Only recently has a qualitative study of male care workers in Germany been conducted; however, it focused mainly on the motivation of men to enter childcare occupations (Kasiske et al.).

⁴ The term "care workers" or "childcare workers" is used in this article to refer to both the staff of pre-schools and of childcare centers.

⁵ In a large-scale survey these authors find that 20% of German men view themselves as "new men." Among other things these "new men" can be characterized as "active fathers" who wish to participate more in the daily family life and the education of their children. The sole focus of the study on changes in men's attitudes has evoked critique, for example by Michael Meuser, who argues that shifts in attitudes should not be confused with changes in practice and behaviours (Meuser, "Ganze Kerle" 231).

structured interviews⁶ with male and female teachers in two pre-schools and two childcare centers located in Germany. Male and female teachers who work together in the same work groups were selected for interviews, and further interview partners were selected from different positions in the facility hierarchies, including group leaders and facility managers and directors. The interviews preceded a three-week observation of working life in the pre-schools and childcare facilities by the author, during which short interviews with the care workers observed were also conducted whenever possible or necessary. In addition to this qualitative research, the analysis also covered secondary analysis of quantitative data on childcare employees. The study only covered childcare services offered in facilities, and did not cover home-based childcare work, another important site of childcare in Germany.

The division of labor and gender-based cooperation among co-workers in childcare facilities

5 As other research on women and men in atypical (for their gender) occupations has demonstrated (Heintz et al.; Kaupinnen-Toropainen/Lammi; Williams, World), mixed-gender work groups in childcare facilities tend to develop a "gender-constitutive" division of labor (see Wetterer). A consequence is the emergence of "gender-connotated niches" within work practice, important for understanding how men in female-dominated occupations "do gender." As Christine L. Williams has also observed, "doing masculinity" permits men in female-dominated work situations "to maintain a sense of themselves as different from and better than women —thus contributing to the gender system that divides men from women in a way that privileges men" (Williams, World 123).

6 The observation of childcare work in several centers and interviews with care workers also revealed the existence of niches of work tasks which, while not exclusively so, were nonetheless primarily domains of work for male teachers. For example, in all of the pre-schools, work like small repairs and renovations was done by male care workers. Female staff as well as their male colleagues tended to justify this division of labor in relation to gender-based stereotypes (for example, differences in body composition and the physical strength of men). Similarly striking was the extent to which activities with the children involving physical exercise and sports became an explicit speciality of male care workers.⁷ The staffs tended to explain this division of labor by the fact that male colleagues were more involved in sport activities in their free-time. It should also be emphasized, however, that sports offers an

⁶ All interviews were conducted in German and translated into English by the author.

⁷ Similar findings are evident in another study of male care workers conducted by Jan Kasiske and colleagues (Kasiske et al.).

opportunity *par excellence* for men to "perform" gender. As Petra Gieß-Stüber et al. note, sports as an institutional "setting" is one of the most masculine of social institutions (73). For Robert W. Connell sports involves a continual display of male bodies in movement (74). Therefore, such niches of childcare work activity enable participation in the constitution of a gendered division of labor. The ordering of work activities among co-workers, legitimated with recourse to gender stereotypes, leads to the reproduction and highlighting of gender difference. Thus the division of labor functions as a resource for underlining gender difference, and differences are then again fed back into the division of labor (Wetterer). At the (micro-) level of everyday working life and occupational practice, these niches of male work serve to illustrate what Candace West und Don H. Zimmermann, using the terminology of "accountability" and "accomplishment" (135-137), conceptualize as the interactive construction of gender. These authors emphasize how mutually conditioned expectations are in play in everyday interactions, whereby actors "accomplish" a gender by performing and "showing" it, while at the same time depending on other actors' acknowledging their gender.

7 The gender-based ordering of tasks in the care work facilities studied was not demanded by the male teachers, or the result of open struggles and negotiation about work responsibilities which colleagues then had to accept. Instead, the acceptance and ordering of work tasks was a *cooperative action*; the male niches of work tasks were both assigned the men by their female colleagues, and eagerly taken on by the men themselves. At the same time however, it should be emphasized that the dividing lines between the various activities and work tasks were not always clearly drawn. In the following interview passage, a female teacher indicates that she also engages in one of the male domains:

I was also sawing and hammering, and [. . .] sanding down wood with the children. But then, naturally, at some point, when we wanted to build a platform, I let the men do it [...]. I might say "That is too short," "Saw this off," or "Screw these boards together," and "Do that" [. . .]. If I did not have a man around, I probably would have done it myself; [. . .]or I could say, "Could you maybe take that fabric up there down." Those, I guess, are the men's jobs [. . .]. [T]hose are the things that [. . .] I let the men do [...]. Because it is easy. I could probably also do it myself, that is not the point. It is just easy, because I think men are just more skilled in this kind of handy work. (Female care worker, childcare facility)

This passage illustrates how some work tasks are pushed to the male teachers in a way that makes the gendering of work almost a self-fulfilling-prophecy. On the other hand this sequence shows how such a small difference at the level of "doing gender while doing work" (Gottschall 63) can advance to an important criteria of difference. The female teacher cited above notes that she is also doing such handy work for the children. At the same time a specific task (building a platform), which does not really entail any further skills than what

she has already done, is declared as "men's work." This case illustrates a point made by Judith Lorber, referring to Gayle Rubin's idea of "sameness taboo" (178): "Women and men have to be distinguishable" (Lorber/Farell 1). In respect to the situative context, a divergent logic of inequality for the actors in other gender occupations seems to unfold exactly out of this "sameness taboo." While female "go-betweens"⁸ have to either downplay gender difference or enact a practiced form of "gender management"⁹ (Heintz/Nadai 84) in order to insure an "equal" acknowledgement of their occupational performance, the interviews show that "amplifying difference" (Wetterer 149; my translation) does not have negative consequences for male care workers, at least not in their work relations. Exactly the opposite is more likely the case: the female coworkers regard their male colleagues as an extremely important counterpart in their daily working life in the pre-school:

Maybe, it is simply having someone who can just tackle more, handle more, who plays more football, which the women don't necessarily do so much. We found it really positive for the group actually, found it to be something special. It is something special to have a man here as a care worker and I think it is also really a good thing for the kids too. (Female care worker, childcare facility)

In this interview passage the work of the male care workers is judged positively, not only on the basis of their distinct contribution to a (gender-constitutive) division of labor, but also because employing men in pre-schools can have an important influence on the work with children. As almost all the interview partners argued, mixed-gender groups are seen as important for the range of activities covered in childcare facilities. The teachers interviewed explained this with recourse to a bi-polar gender order, which makes the presence of male care workers important for the development of the distinct gender identities of boys.¹⁰ The reference of the care workers themselves is to what, from a gender sociological view, could be called a "masculine work habitus." All the interviewed teachers depicted male care workers as having a different way of dealing with the children. An example relating to physical activities is how male care workers were considered to be more courageous and embracing of risks:

I think a lot of people notice that I am handling the children differently than the female staff. It is just the way it is, as a man; I think as a man I just handle things differently. In physical activities, for example, I have a different strength than a woman. I play

⁸ Heintz et al. uses the term "go-betweens" to describe women and men who work in atypical (from a gender perspective) occupations.

⁹ "Gender management" is a term mainly used in reference to women in male-dominated professions who attempt to cope with the complexities of alternating between "undoing" and "doing gender."

¹⁰ The female director of one of the pre-schools in this study remarked that for this reason she preferred to have mixed-gender groups. Even a man with bad references would, she admitted, be hired over a female applicant. None of the men interviewed reported having any difficulties at all in finding jobs in pre-schools.

differently or I start up different sorts of things. Sometimes I take more risks or something. (Male care worker, public sector pre-school)

The male care workers also described themselves, in contrast to the female staff, as having more of a "buddy-like or boyish" way of dealing with the children, though for these male care workers, this goes beyond "doing masculinity" to form a specifically professional work style, undertaken in pursuit of pedagogical goals. Here lies a striking similarity to the findings of Bettina Heintz and her co-authors on male health care workers who performed their gender status by emphasizing what were assumed to be male connotated characteristics like "coolness" associated with a professionalized care-giving style establishing a "new model of professionalized care-giving" (Heintz/Nadai 85; my translation).

Male childcare workers and parents: the struggle for recognition

8 Parents can be seen as the customers of childcare facilities, in the sense that they expect a (social) service and that their expectations, requests, and ideas about how the service should be performed will be considered (see Becker-Textor). Although the childcare facilities in this study all encouraged the engagement of fathers as well as mothers, it was mainly mothers who were involved in discussions and issues concerning their children, a situation related to the fact that care work is traditionally the domain of women (see Scharfenroth). A male care worker depicted the situation as follows:

We have to assume that 95%, in fact I would even wager to say 98%, of all parents who initiate contact with us are, as a rule, mothers. It is the women who are responsible for the well-being of their children, so it is the women who turn up at the pre-school. (Male director, childcare facility)

In order to involve fathers more in parenting, some of the facilities in this study invited them specifically for "father-child actions" initiated for this purpose, such as campfires or certain arts and crafts projects. In the context of a heavily gender-segmented occupation, where the responsibility for childcare is delegated mothers, the minority or "token" status (Kanter 1996) of male care workers becomes highly relevant in their first contact with the childrens' parents. While the first reactions of parents to male care workers are varied, some parents cannot imagine that the man they encounter is a member of the childcare staff. Some of the male teachers are assumed to be repair men, well-informed fathers or young men doing their civil service, while other parents make the assumption that they are meeting the facility director or manager. Exactly this last reaction of parents is illustrated in the following sequence from an interview with a male care worker:

And naturally, when new parents come who do not know our pre-school, I am often the director for them, though I am not the director. This assumption has nothing to do with me as a person, rather simply with the fact that I am a man. When a man is working in a pre-school, then he must be the director, since nothing else could be the case. (Male teacher, public sector pre-school)

As suggested by this passage, women, but not men are assumed to be care workers. The sentence "When a man is working in a pre-school, then he must be the director" indicates an unconscious reference to the hierarchical order of gender relations in the world of work, where men tend to occupy the higher positions in organizational hierarchies than women, and are more likely than women to climb the career ladder. The placement of men in managerial functions suggests that stereotypes of male competencies are playing an important role. This interview passage can also be interpreted as the differentiation of sets of competencies for men (in this case, managerial, professional, authoritative, rational) in contrast to women, and only through this association of maleness and managerial functions are the parents able to make sense of and legitimate the presence of a man in a childcare facility.

9 Generally, once the actual occupational status of the male care workers in the facilities is clarified, the reactions of parents in interactions with the male teachers are quite varied and potentially full of tension. On the one hand are parents who react positively to male teachers, seeing them as enriching the care provided by female staff. However, this view results from the fact that they see male care workers in line with gender-based stereotypes: "Now they finally have someone to play football with" (Female care worker, childcare facility, in reference to the reaction of some parents to her male colleague). Some of the male care workers seem to be very popular among the childrens' fathers, as one of the female care workers noted in reference to her male colleagues: "There are of course fathers who have a particular way of interacting with them like another man, as one of us in the pre-school, knocking shoulders and greeting each other in this male way" (Female teacher, public sector pre-school). At the other extreme are parents who reject the employment of men in pre-schools and childcare facilities. This attitude usually rests on a recourse to assumed differences in the gendered characters of men and women, seen as diametrically opposed to each other:

The other scenario we have encountered concerned parents who don't trust a man to do the job. "No, they are not sensitive enough for such things [. . .]." This is what the parents think about the men, that they cannot possibly be sensitive enough, that they are surely some kind of macho type or something [. . .]. They say, "No he cannot imagine what is best." (Male childcare worker, childcare facility)

The fact that male care workers chose a female-dominated profession had no effect on such parents' projections of stereotypical masculine behavior and characteristics onto the male staff members. Significantly, neither the parents who saw male teachers as making a positive contribution to childcare work nor parents who rejected men as childcare workers questioned the masculinity of the male staff. In the latter case however, the allocation of gender difference had a quite different connotation: the male teachers become a prototype of a kind of masculinity which can be depicted as "hypermasculinity" (Meuser, *Geschlecht* 118; my translation), and which represents the practice of "hegemonial masculinity" (Carrigan/Connell/Lee 590; see Connell) par excellence. This assumption clearly underlies the suggestion "that they cannot possibly be sensitive enough, that they are surely some kind of macho type or something."

10 The reactions male care workers receive from their circle of friends and acquaintances are also quite varied. Most of the men interviewed claimed to have experienced reactions to their occupation that either called their masculinity into question or ridiculed their choice of job. A pre-school director responded to the question about his friends' reactions to his occupation as follows: "Someone or other would reply with epithets like *pansy* or *sissy*, *being a girlie*, such jokes. One also hears remarks wondering whether men in childcare work are for real. Or maybe a bit homosexual" (Male director, childcare facility). There is a tendency in the reactions documented by these interview passages to symbolically feminize men who are in traditionally female occupations. A possible interpretation of this behaviour is that as commonly understood, the competencies needed for this occupation can only be imagined in relation to female characteristics. On the other hand, male childcare workers are viewed with a degree of suspicion, as being homosexual for example. This suspicion derives from the fact that from the perspective of hegemonial masculinity, being homosexual is made equivalent to being feminine (see Connell), and thus being lesser than the "normal" man. Thus male childcare workers are in a tense "double-bind-situation" (Kaupinnen-Toropainen/Lammi 108), where they are faced with contradictory expectations: for some parents they embody the prototype of a form of "hypermasculinity," while for others they are feminized.

11 The negative as well as (stereotyping) reactions to the presence of male childcare workers by parents can exert pressures encouraging the facilities to adopt a gender-based division of labor. This need not be *intended* by the childcare personnel themselves. At many of the pre-schools the contact with parents is not only through official parent-teacher or parent-child events, but also integrated into the normal rhythm of dropping off and picking up the children, and this more frequent contact is mainly with the mothers of the children. These

opportunities are not only used by the childcare workers to relay information to the parents, mainly mothers, but also used by the parents to inform the staff about their children or changes in familial circumstances. According to several of the male care workers interviewed, it is not uncommon for them *not* to receive such information, in contrast to their female colleagues:

When there are specific problems, then we strongly sense that the focus is more on the female staff. They are taken into confidence, considered as the ones who understand better what the man won't be able to get [. . .]. It is even more evident when the female staff member, because of illness, vacation or further training, is going to be absent, and the mother wants to tell us something, then you sometimes see how the mother indirectly and circuitously tries to communicate with the female staff [instead of a male staff member]. . . . Well, it surely is part of building (pause to think) relations, and in these cases women or female care workers have an advantage. (Male director, childcare center)

Since such ("specific") problems could contain important information relevant to understanding or effectively supporting the developmental process of the children, some of the male care workers use the weekly staff meetings in their facilities to get the information they need from their female colleagues. The fact that they can do so is an indication of how well male staff are in fact integrated into the work group.

Precarious masculinity in interactions with the children

12 Working with children is without a doubt the main activity of childcare work. The "token" status of male care workers is just as evident in relation to the children's views, as it was for female care workers and parents. All the men interviewed reported being received very positively by the children in their facilities. One male care worker reflected:

Well naturally we are very exotic in the childcare centers. You see, a man in a childcare center, that was before the position I now have, [. . .] that was really something great. You were something special in a sense. (Male careworker, childcare center)

The role of the male care workers, like that of their female colleagues, is not only to play with and socialize the children. The children expect and demand an emotional relationship and care, also in the sense of being physically close and cuddling with them. As the care workers reported, this is also encouraged when some of the children push them into the role of mother or father. As indicated by those interviewed, some of the children did not even realise that for the staff, being there is a job. And so it often happened that teachers were addressed as "mummy" or "daddy." The children's demands for affection, but also some tasks —such as changing diapers —necessarily involved physical contact with the children. Though contact is

clearly part of childcare work, dealing with such situations is not always so easy for the male childcare workers, as noted by one of the facility directors:

The role set is not so easy for a man. Because he is always sitting a bit on-stage and for that reason is now and then looked upon with suspicion [. . .]. It gets difficult in those situations, when, because in our line of work one of the issues is sexual abuse, so that those are things that get hairy. Because, there is the assumption, when one thinks about it, that you always would view the man in the role of abuser and that is a difficult association for the male colleagues in the center. So things like [. . .] for example, cuddling, or something, always requires a very careful approach. (Male director, childcare center)

The fact that the men are always "a bit on-stage" can result in difficulties, especially in those situations where there is physical contact with the children. This is mainly a result of the fact that "the exercise of physical violence [. . .] is generally attributed to men" (Döge, *Geschlechterdemokratie* 57; my translation), which in reference to the occupational context of childcare work means that men are taken to be the primary suspects in cases of child abuse. A female care worker also addressed this issue: "Men are always generally the ones accused. One seldom hears of women who have engaged in sexual abuse" (Female care worker, childcare center). As Peter Döge argues in relation to the concept of "male coercive power" ("MachtMann"), "men are not only the perpetrators of patriarchal violence, but also the victims, as a consequence of violence between men" (*Geschlechterverhältnisse* 47; my translation; see also Connell). While the men interviewed did not sense that their female colleagues viewed them suspiciously, the opposite seemed to be the case with some of the parents. Also the male staff themselves displayed a great deal of sensitivity about the issue, in light of a case of abuse in the mid-1990s in Germany, which made nationwide headlines:

Well six or seven years ago [. . .], there was a big case of sexual abuse; from the perspective of being accused, [. . .] I do think that a few of us or even oneself had this case somewhere a bit in the back of our heads. And when you are in this job, and when you cuddle with the children or get a little close, physically, well [. . .], you think about what if the parents come in and see, sometimes. It is silly, but you get a bad conscience for something which in fact is completely ok. It's because there is also this possibility out there of being accused. (Male care worker, public sector pre-school)

The reflection of this male care worker signifies how gendered assumptions about child abuse renders men uneasily into the role of childcare giver. Some of the male childcare personnel took measures to protect themselves in situations where they come in close physical contact with the children, for example, making sure a female colleague was also present in the room. These behavioral strategies show how the male childcare staff try to insure that "gender" in its negative connotation for men, is *not* thematized. Drawing on the work of Stefan Hirschauer,

this could be seen as an example of men "undoing gender" (679; my translation), since gender differences in this context are not emphasized, but rather actively downplayed.

The tension between men's career expectations and the structural reality of care work occupations

13 The previous sections have shown the tensions in the performance of gender in relationships with parents and children for creating quite different ideals, valuations and experiences of masculinity for men in female-dominated childcare work. In this section we turn to contradictions between work expectations of male care workers and the general lack of professional opportunities in care work. Here mismatches become evident between the men's expectations and career goals on the one hand, and the structural disadvantages of the occupational field on the other hand.

14 As Helga Krüger has shown, in contrast to most male-dominated occupations many female dominated occupations in Germany are not learned in the context of the dual-training system, but in vocational secondary schools, with fewer opportunities for further training. This type of qualification generally, and childcare work particularly, has a low occupational prestige, lower pay and few or no structures for career advancement (Krüger 524; Teubner; Wetterer). All these aspects of the occupational reality of childcare work were thematized by the workers interviewed. Many of the childcare staff found further training opportunities quite poor, not least of all due to budget cuts in the facilities. Nearly all staff also found one of the problems with their occupation to be the low social status of working with children. Many of the care workers reported being faced with degrading comments about their occupation, being likened to a "playmate" or "gossip" Staff interviewed were also often given the feeling of being seen as babysitters, or their activities were likened to a children's play group, quite in contrast to their own professional understanding of their work. Their own self understanding as educators placed their contributions in the realm of early childhood development, as socializing agents "making [the children] socially competent" (Male care worker, childcare center). In contrast to their occupational identity, especially the male care workers, as discussed above, experience a clear degradation of their work.

15 In addition to the more symbolic disadvantages of pre-school care work, employment in this field also carries serious material disadvantages. In comparison to most male-dominated professions with the same or lower levels of formal qualification and skills, pay and income was relatively poor. Information on pay provided to the author by a public sector childcare facility provides some proof of the gap experienced by male care workers in

reference to same-level male occupations. This particular facility was a public sector childcare center involved in special education. A locksmith was also employed by the facility, to take care of repairs and maintenance. The childcare workers in the German federal state where this study was conducted typically complete vocational schooling for the occupation, which included an internship, followed by three years of occupational training. The occupation of locksmith by contrast involved a three-year vocational training in the German dual-training system, which followed completion of the ninth year of mandatory schooling. In terms of qualification streams, care workers were required to complete more years of training than locksmiths. Care workers employed at the level of group leader, the second highest level of childcare center hierarchies, just below the center director, received a monthly gross income of 2,174 Euros, while a locksmith with a journeyman's license (just below the *Meister* level) earned 2,121 Euros.¹¹ This is not much difference, especially if we consider that in most special education facilities group leaders are required to have a supplementary qualification in special education, going beyond the normal vocational qualification sketched above. The lowest income category of care workers in this center earned a much lower monthly wage of just 1,895 Euros (gross pay). The main complaint of the male care workers was in fact their low income. For the men interviewed, the ideal of the "male breadwinner" continued to be a highly relevant expectation. Two of the men interviewed made the main income contribution to their families. Nonetheless, several of the male care workers indicated their willingness to take parental leave to contribute to the care of their own children. Yet the reflections of one such male care worker in the course of the interview proved quite contradictory:

A teacher once told me not to become a care worker, that I would not be able to support a family with this occupation. That made a big impression on me, really until today. That was the statement that made the biggest impression on me, and it follows me still. Because his wife was also a childcare worker and so he knows of course what a childcare worker earns, and what sort of advancement chances there are, and so he told me if I wanted to have my own family, then I should not do this. (Male care worker, childcare center)

One of the male care workers interviewed had taken a side-job in order to earn more money and fit better into the role of the "male breadwinner" in his family. Such a solution seemed

¹¹ The income levels presented here were based on the following assumptions: an employee age 30, single, with five years work experience. The income of the care worker corresponds to the German public sector rates, with the relevant geographical and job-based pay supplements. The income of a locksmith is based on the basic wage plus a job-based supplement typical to this occupation.

quite common, since even the female care workers reported other cases of male staff who tried to supplement their income in this way.

16 As also noted in this last interview passage, the advancement chances for care workers are relatively limited. Pre-schools have just three levels of hierarchy: sub-group leader, group leader, and director. The interviews showed that female care workers tended to aspire to advancement within this hierarchy less than their male colleagues, who clearly considered moving up into managing the centers. In fact most of the male care workers were employed at the first level of sub-group leader within the childcare facilities. This alone does *not* demonstrate, however, that male care workers have fewer chances of advancement than their female colleagues. Male care workers in fact tended to profit from their "go-between" gender status, as the following interview passage about recruitment practices the childcare field confirms:

I know. In my first job for the municipality I experienced a lot of recruitments. Because I was a recruitment coordinator for them, and I led a lot of job interviews with the applicants to all the municipal centers. And it was here and there the case that male applicants had an advantage because of being a man. If a woman got the job, then it was because she could offer a lot more than the man [. . .] and even if a personnel office or other instance tries to claim that such things don't happen, well I would still see it this way [. . .]. (Male director, childcare center)

As this male childcare center director illustrates, the minority status of men can be an advantage in situations where men and women are competing against each other for jobs. Despite the obvious potential for conflict, the interviews with female childcare workers did not reveal any suspicions or criticisms toward the career aspirations of male colleagues. Instead, many of the female staff seemed to accept and understand that men in childcare wanted to be the main earners in their partnerships and to move up in their careers, just like in other fields of work. Yet while all the male care workers interviewed had in fact been offered a further promotion, most of them had declined since, in contrast to their female colleagues, a great number of the men planned to leave the occupation for another soon. Only one man interviewed indicated that he would stay in the job on the condition that he would eventually be promoted into the role of group leader. Two other male care workers felt their age meant they were no longer physically able to remain in pre-school work, and another male interviewee left the occupation altogether shortly after this research was completed. Female care workers at first did not indicate any intention to leave the occupation. Several of the female interviewees could imagine taking a longer leave of absence should they have children themselves. But a complete exit from the occupation in the near future was not considered by

any of the women care workers in this study. At the same time however, almost none of the interviewees intended to stay in care work until retirement age.

17 The intended career courses of the care workers in this study are also illustrated in occupational trend data collected by the German Statistical Office. The data breaks down employment by age cohorts, an excerpt from which is presented in the following table¹²:

Table 1: Number of Employees in Childcare Occupations by Age Cohorts								
Age	<20	20-25	25-30	30-35	35-40	40-45	45-50	50-55
Women	9,716	28,548	27,049	23,132	29,233	32,541	30,784	16,198
Men	565	808	471	450	409	332	174	96

Fig. 1.

These figures not only make clear the thorough gender segmentation of this occupation, but also how these differences are carried over into employment trends between age cohorts. These are cross-sectional and not longitudinal data, but in the context of the fact that the numbers of male childcare workers has remained very low since the 1990s (Kasiske et al 17), these data illustrate several important gender-based differences. While up until the age of 25 the numbers of men and women in childcare work increases, the drop in male employment thereafter is drastic, from 808 for 20-25 year olds, down to 471 for 25-30 years. This decline of 58% suggests that work in childcare for men seems to have a tentative character, or perhaps represents a transitional phase in their work biographies. There may also be an association between the decline in male childcare workers for the 25-30 age cohort and the reported lack of career and earnings potential or further training in this occupation. The importance of the cultural ideal of the "male breadwinner" for male care workers should not be underestimated, which, together with the other factors, may motivate many male care workers to leave the occupation.

18 Shifting attention to the employment of female care workers, a significant decline in employment levels is evident between the 20-25 age cohort (28,548) and the 30-35 group

¹² The occupations covered in these employment statistics are not just childcare workers in pre-schools, but also assistants in childcare centers, special education workers, etc. Only regular employees (including group leaders but not childcare center or pre-school supervisors or directors), are included in these statistics. (see Statistik der Kinder- und Jugendhilfe Teil III.1 [2002], Tabellenblatt 9, Tätige Personen in Tageseinrichtungen nach Geschlecht und Arbeitsbereich sowie Altersgruppen).

(23,132). Thereafter there is an increase again in employment, to 29,233 employees, suggesting that many women leave work when they reach childrearing age, but then re-enter employment later, for example in part-time employment. This may be an indication of an orientation on the part of working mothers towards balancing paid and unpaid labor in the context of the "part-time career model of the male breadwinner marriage" (*Vereinbarkeitsmodell der männlichen Vorsorgerehe*) (Pfau-Effinger, "Paths" 383; see also Pfau-Effinger, *Frauenerwerbstätigkeit*).

19 Both the numbers of male and female care workers noticeably declines among the older cohorts. While in the 40-45 age group female care workers number 32,541, there are only 16,198 in the 50-55 cohort. Male care workers in these cohorts number 332 in the 40-45 cohort, and just 96 men are childcare workers in the 50-55 cohort. Thus for both men and women, there is a tendency to leave childcare work as they progress in age.

Conclusion

20 While the movement of men into female-dominated occupations can be seen as an important form of "de-traditionalizing" patriarchal gender relations (see Meuser, "Geschlechterverhältnisse" 233), for most men in childcare facilities the occupation represents a transitory phase in their work biographies. In my estimation, this is due to the tensions which arise in relation to reproducing versus undoing masculinity in the context of work in the field of early childhood education. As a result, the depiction of men in care work oscillates between the extremes of symbolic feminisation and hypermasculinity with all the respective negative connotations. Such depictions do not originate in the collegial working relationship, but rather in the men's circle of friends and acquaintances or from parents of the children they care for. These findings confirm that in the interactive construction of gender "third parties," like customers and clients, play a role in "doing gender" and reproducing traditional gender relations (Wetterer 136; see Hochschild). This finding about the role of "third parties" in interactive work situations should inform further studies of the analysis of gendered work relations, for example in interactive service work occupations.

21 Not only the way men are depicted, but also their own actions and practices within the occupational field of childcare is ridden with contradictions. The question of whether male care workers are a case of "new men" cannot be answered clearly nor conclusively on the basis of the evidence presented here. Despite the fact that all the male "go-betweens" analyzed in this study made the decision to work in a traditionally female occupation quite consciously in relation to their work biographies, and although they were quite aware of having breached

the conventions governing male career choices, daily work practice was nonetheless characterized by "doing masculinity" and an emphasis on difference in relation to their female colleagues. Further, these differences were brought forth cooperatively between male and female colleagues in interaction with each other.

22 In relation to their work expectations, the ideal of the male breadwinner continued to be of great importance to the male care workers, despite the fact that structural disadvantages of care work jobs prevented them from fulfilling this ideal. The gendered expectations by parents and others on male care workers, as well as the construction of their own male identity and career expectations demonstrate clearly the normative orientation provided by a notion of "hegemonial masculinity" for work practice and relations of men in a traditional female professions. This study clearly shows that male care workers position themselves in relation to hegemonial masculinity (Connell/Messerschmidt 832; see Meuser, "Hegemoniale Männlichkeit" 162), but are also positioned there by the persons with whom they interact in their daily work practice.

Works Cited

Becker-Textor, Ingeborg. "Eltern als Auftraggeber und Kunden. Konstruktive Irritationen für die klassische Elternarbeit." *Kindergartenpädagogik. Online-Handbuch* (1999). 12 Jan 2006. <<http://www.kindergartenpaedagogik.de/54.html>>.

Carrigan, Tim, Connell, Robert W., and John Lee. "Towards a New Sociology of Masculinity." *Theory and Society* 5 (1985): 551-604.

Connell, Robert W. *Masculinities: Knowledge, Power and Social Change*. Berkeley: U of California P, 2000.

Connell, Robert W., and James W. Messerschmidt. "Hegemonic Masculinity. Rethinking the Concept." *Gender & Society* 19,6 (2005): 829-859.

Döge, Peter. *Geschlechterdemokratie als Männlichkeitspolitik. Blockaden und Perspektiven einer Neugestaltung des Geschlechterverhältnisses*. Bielefeld: Kleine Verlag, 2001.

_____. "Männerbildung als Beitrag zur Geschlechterdemokratie (1): Erwerbs(Arbeits-)Mann und MachtMann als Blockaden." *DIE* 4 (2000): 28-30. 19 July 2007. <<http://www.die-bonn.de/doks/doege0001.pdf>>.

Gieß-Stüber, Petra, Voss, Anja, and Karen Petry. "Gender Kids. Geschlechteralltag der frühkindlichen Bewegungsförderung." *Soziale Konstruktion von Geschlecht im Sport*. Ed. Ilse Hartmann-Tews et al. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2003. 69-108.

Gottschall, Karin. "Doing Gender While Doing Work? Erkenntnispotentiale konstruktivistischer Perspektiven für die Analyse des Zusammenhangs von Arbeitsmarkt, Beruf und Geschlecht." *FrauenArbeitsMarkt. Der Beitrag der Frauenforschung zur sozio-ökonomischen Theorieentwicklung*. Ed. Birgit Geissler, Friederike Maier, and Birgit Pfau-Effinger. Berlin: edition sigma, 1998. 63-94.

Hall, Elaine J. "Waitering/Waitressing: Engendering the Work of Table Servers." *Gender & Society* 7,3 (1993): 329-346.

Heintz, Bettina et al. *Ungleich unter Gleichen. Studien zur geschlechtsspezifischen Segregation des Arbeitsmarktes*. Frankfurt a. M.: Campus, 1997.

Heintz, Bettina, and Eva Nadai. "Geschlecht und Kontext. De-Institutionalisierungsprozesse und geschlechtliche Differenzierung." *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 27,2 (1998): 75-93.

Hirschauer, Stefan. "Die soziale Fortpflanzung der Zweigeschlechtlichkeit." *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 46,4 (1994): 668-692.

Hochschild, Arlie Russel. *Das gekaufte Herz. Zur Kommerzialisierung der Gefühle*. Frankfurt a. M.: Campus, 1990.

Kanter, Rosabeth Moss. "Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women." *American Journal of Sociology* 82,5 (1977): 965-990.

Kasiske, Jan et al. "Zur Situation von Männern in 'Frauen-Berufen' der Pflege und Erziehung in Deutschland. Eine Überblicksstudie." *Männer in "Frauen-Berufen" der Pflege und Erziehung*. Ed. Jens Krabel, and Olaf Stuve. Opladen: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2006. 11-111.

Kaupinnen-Toropainen, Kaisa, and Johanna Lammi. "Men in Female-Dominated Occupations. A Cross-Cultural Comparison." *Doing "Women's Work": Men in Nontraditional Occupations*. London: Sage Publications, 1993. 128-151.

Krüger, Helga. "Ungleichheit und Lebenslauf. Wege aus den Sackgassen empirischer Traditionen." *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* Sonderheft 41, (2001): 512-537.

Krabel, Jens, and Olaf Stuve, eds. *Männer in "Frauen-Berufen" der Pflege und Erziehung*. Opladen: Verlag Barbara Budrich, 2006.

Leidner, Robin. "Serving Hamburgers and Selling Insurance: Gender, Work and Identity in Interactive Service Jobs." *Gender & Society* 5,2 (1991): 154-177.

Lorber, Judith, and Susan A. Farrell, ed. *The Social Construction of Gender*. London: Sage, 1991.

Meuser, Michael. "Entgrenzte Geschlechterverhältnisse? Entraditionalisierung und habituelle Rahmen." *Identitäten in der modernen Welt*. Ed. Robert Hettlage and Ludgera Vogt. Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1999. 217-238.

_____. "'Ganze Kerle', 'Anti-Helden' und andere Typen. Zum Männlichkeitsdiskurs in neuen Männerzeitschriften." *Männlichkeit und soziale Ordnung*. Ed. Peter Döge and Michael Meuser. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2001. 219-236.

_____. *Geschlecht und Männlichkeit. Soziologische Theorie und kulturelle Deutungsmuster*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1998.

_____. "Hegemoniale Männlichkeit. Überlegungen zur Leitkategorie der Men's Studies." *FrauenMännerGeschlechterforschung. State of the Art*. Ed. Birgit Aulenbacher et al. Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2006. 160-174.

Pfau-Effinger, Birgit. *Kultur und Frauenerwerbstätigkeit in Europa. Theorie und Empirie des internationalen Vergleichs*. Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2000.

_____. "Socio-historical Paths of the Male Breadwinner Model: An Explanation of Cross-National Differences." *The British Journal of Sociology* 55,3 (2004): 377-399.

Rabe-Kleberg, Ursula. *Gender Mainstreaming und Kindergarten*. Weinheim: Beltz Votum Verlag, 2003.

Rubin, Gayle. "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." *Towards an Anthropology of Women*. Ed. Rayna Reiter. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975. 157-210.

Scharfenorth, Karin. "Aufwertung von Frauenarbeitsplätzen im Bereich sozialer und personenbezogener Dienstleistungen." *Projektbericht des IAT 1997*, No 09. Gelsenkirchen: Institut für Arbeit und Technik, 1997. 1-52.

Teubner, Ulrike. *Neue Berufe für Frauen. Modelle zur Überwindung der Geschlechterhierarchie im Erwerbsbereich*. Frankfurt a. M.: Campus Verlag, 1989.

West, Candace and, Don H. Zimmermann. "Doing Gender." *Gender & Society* 1,1 (1987): 125-151.

Wetterer, Angelika. *Arbeitsteilung und Geschlechterkonstruktionen. "Gender at work" in theoretischer und historischer Perspektive*. Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 2002.

Williams, Christine L. *Gender Differences at Work: Women and Men in Nontraditional Occupations*. Berkley: U of California P, 1989.

_____. *Still a Man's World: Men Who Do "Women's Work."* London: U of California P, 1995.

Zulehner, Paul M., and, Rainer Volz. *Männer im Aufbruch. Wie Deutschlands Männer sich selbst und wie Frauen sie sehen: Ein Forschungsbericht*. Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag, 1998.