Caught in the crossfire

- A qualitative study of male preschool teaching

Department of Business Administration
BUSN49
Master’s Thesis in Managing People, Knowledge and Change
Spring 2015

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Abstract

Title: Caught in the crossfire – A qualitative study of male preschool teaching

Submission date: 20th of May 2016

Course: BUSN49 Degree Project in Managing People, Knowledge and Change

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Purpose: To investigate how male and female preschool teachers and preschool managers make sense of the inclusion of men in diverse preschools.

Research Question: How do preschool practitioners make sense of the inclusion of men?

Methodology: This thesis is based upon a qualitative research using semi-structured interviews, document analysis and observations as data collection methods. It follows an abductive research approach which allowed us to work simultaneously with theory and our empirical material, making interpretations hindsight from each other.

Findings: Social discourses such as men as “pedophiles” and men as “preschool teachers” which are often conflated are argued to shape the inclusion of men at preschools. Our findings shows that preschool practitioners make sense of the inclusion of men as a matter that is highly influenced by parents. In turn, parent’s behavior is based on the effect of cultural norms in terms of gender roles and media representation. Further preschool employees treat the inclusion of men as a managerial problem which calls for a balance between parents concern and equality treatment.

Contributions: Our study support most of the challenges of male preschool teaching argued in literature and further contribute ‘triangular insights’ on the meanings surrounding male preschool teaching. By highlighting the significance of these insights we provide additional ways for managers to think about, when dealing with this issue.

Keywords: Gender diversity management, inclusion, exclusion, male preschool teaching, social discourses, media, cultural norms
Acknowledgements

Through this paper, we finalize our studies within the Managing People, Knowledge and Change program at Lund University School of Economics and Management. The interest of the gender diversity management area was one of the main reasons why both of us applied to the master’s program and we are happy to have been able to get a deeper understanding about diversity management in reality. The idea of focusing on preschools in Sweden rose since it is a female-dominated workplace. Often, when talking about gender diversity management it is in the sense of the inclusion of female employees at male dominated occupations. Therefore, we thought it would be interesting to discover the inclusion of men at a female-dominated occupation such as preschools.

First and foremost, we would like to show our gratitude to our supervisor Jens Rennstam who has a lot of knowledge within the gender diversity management field and whom has been very helpful for us and given us feedback when needed. Furthermore, we would like to say a big thank you to the preschool teachers and managers that we were honored to meet and interview. Thank you for taking your time and being honest and open about your experiences in preschool.

Last but not least, we would like to thank our friends and our families for supporting us during the process.

Greta Kamberi Rebecka Karlsson

Lund, May 20, 2016
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“I am always careful not to put myself in situations that could be challenged”

(Jacob, male preschool teacher)
Chapter I – Introduction

In this initial chapter we aim to arouse the interest for the studied area. We will start with an overview of the studied area through providing a background description and rationale, following by statement of purpose where we present our research question. Furthermore, we will go through our objectives, delimitations and finally a presentation of the thesis outline.

1.1 Background

Our interest in the experiences of men in female-dominated occupations, particularly in childcare, was sparked during our first term of Master’s studies, when studying gender diversity management. Being an area under intensive research, diversity management is today considered to be an important agenda for most organizations. The basic idea is that a diverse workforce will lead to improved business performance (Chari and Vohra, 2015; Williamson et al., 2008). In most organizations diversity management is approached by activities such as hiring and utilizing the workforce of different cultural and social backgrounds (Kossek et al., 2006). Numerous studies categorize such activities under the umbrella of “business case” referring to the fact that diversity is approached by organizations with the purpose to contribute to business performance (Kossek et al., 2006; Prasad, 2001; Thomas and Ely, 1996). Nevertheless, there is a growing consensus that hiring and utilizing a diverse workforce is not enough (Chari and Vohra, 2015). According to Hays-Thomas and Benedicsk, (2013) a diverse workforce should also promote quality, respect and trust across heterogeneous teams where people feel accepted and are able to contribute to organizational performance. Our attention as researchers is particularly focused on this point of view; especially after witnessing different discussions and perceptions regarding the inclusion of men in female-dominated occupations such as preschool teachers in childcare. A lot of previous research has focused on men experiences in female-dominated occupations but mainly focusing on the advantages that tokenism status brings for them.

According to the national curriculum of preschools in Sweden, teachers for children and pupils of all ages have the responsibility to take a critical stance toward the taken-for-
granted concepts of femininity and masculinity (Hedlin and Åberg, 2013; Skolverket, A 2016). Quite clearly expressed, but it is not problem-free. Historically, gender is been considered as one of the most influential factor on the division of labor (Bariş, 2013). Many of the jobs are labeled according to gender lines; categorizing some occupations “women’s job” and others “men’s job”. Kanter (1977) explains that there should be at least two conditions to claim an occupation gendered. Firstly, a significant “skew” of gender distribution of the employees should be explicit: it means 85 percent are men or women. Secondly, the work itself is embedded on gendered meanings and it defined in gendered terms (Leidner, 1991). With this information it is safe to assert that the preschool teacher occupation in Sweden is gendered, given that a significant “skew” (Kanter, 1977) of gender distribution of employees in preschools in Sweden is explicit; being more than 95 percent of preschool teachers women and considered as “women’s job” (Skolverket, 2010). The lack of male preschool teachers is quite evident when examining preschools in terms of division of labor. Accordingly, our research is conducted with the main aim to add insights into the meanings surrounding male preschool teaching in Sweden.

1.2 Rationale

The belief that both care and education of young children is associated with women has a strong position (Martin and Luth, 2000; Oram, 2007). This notion has a long historical background and is related to the idea that unlike men women are “born with the ability to nurture and take care of the children” (Hedlin and Åberg, 2013, p.150). The so-called necessary qualities for teaching like mother love, kindness and morality are assumed to be natural qualities of women. Similar ideas still remain, usually confusing preschool teachers’ work with mothers’ care and love (Gillberg, 2011). This strong link between care, children and women makes it difficult to identify the occupation preschool teacher with masculinity. This also explains how the teaching is constructed, presenting the men figure in a less nurturing position than women (Hedlin and Åberg, 2013).

Meanwhile, the debate of recruiting more men to preschools focuses on the advantages for children. Recently, many countries are committed to include more men as preschool teachers. It is argued that men are needed in this field so to serve as role models; especially for boys (Fischman, 2000; Martino, 2008). Such argument is aligned to the
measures that Sweden has been taking for a long time to recruit more men to work in preschools. These actions are justified by the references to gender equality. In 2008, the Minister of Education Jan Björklund and the Minister for Gender Equality Nyamko Sabuni made a joint move regarding this issue, claiming that they wanted to invest in measures for gender equality in schools, having more male preschool teachers as one goal. Their decision is based on the claims such as "We need more men in schools as well, male teachers who can act as a role model for boys" (Björklund and Sabuni, 2008). According to the quote, women alone are not able to give the boys the education they need. However, the problem that too few men apply for this occupation still remains. Lärarnas tidning in 2015 reports that approximately three percent of the teachers in preschools in Sweden are men (Jällhage, 2015). Furthermore, different media have recently made us aware of the fact that only ten percent of everyone who starts the preschool education in Sweden is men whereof 50 percent of the men drop out during their studies, compared with only 28 percent of the women (Jällhage, 2015). In the men’s case, it usually is when being at preschools practicing their knowledge during their studies they quit their studies due to exposure and suspicious glances (Sydsvenskan, 2016).

Other reasons why this occupation is labeled as “women job” is due to negative constructs for men being part of this occupation. Commonly, these negative constructs are represented in perceptions such as associating men with child abuse or identify them with homosexuality. Such terms have an immense influence on public interest, often hindering the inclusion of men in female-dominated occupations (Simpson, 2004). Perhaps, these prejudices make it more difficult for men to enter childcare occupations. This also may be a major reason why the goal of having more men working as preschool teachers might meet difficulties. In 2014, a man was convicted of sexual abuse of 14 preschool children in Sweden and in 2015 another man was convicted for sexual abuse of 19 children at preschools (Sundström, 2013; Rankinen, 2015). These and other similar incidents, have affected the work of men in preschools, possibly hindering their inclusion in this particular occupation. Male preschool teachers often need to defend their career choice and their contribution to teaching (Lärarnas tidning, 2013). This is a key problem motivating our research.
Furthermore, what we have observed is similar to what Chari and Vohra (2015) claim, that although institutions might set explicit goals of diversity, implicit biases often affect achieving these goals effectively. This is particularly reflected on the Swedish government’s intention in increasing the participation of men in preschools and the effect of social prejudices in hindering the work of men and their inclusion in this particular occupation (Jällhage, 2015). As Nordberg (2005) points out “writing on men in female-dominated occupations, the Swedish gender equality discourse, with all of its good intentions, carries blind spots and exclusions just like other discourses that aims to better the society” (p. 340). Nevertheless, we do not see this thesis as the time or space to criticize the issue of gender equality in Sweden, given that it is a massive topic and it needs to be carefully outlined. Rather, we focus on examining meanings surrounding male preschool teaching in Sweden, bearing in mind the feminized label of this work. With this background in mind, the gap we identified and intend to fill through this thesis is to provide examples of employees’ experiences in preschools and how it might function as a source of making sense of gender diversity and inclusion in this occupation.

1.3 Statement of purpose

Our aim with this thesis is hence to investigate how both male and female pre-school teachers and preschool managers make sense of the inclusion of men in preschools, given that this occupation is commonly “female-dominated”. We aim to contribute a ‘triangular insight’ on diversity management and inclusion, which incorporate perspectives from three different stakeholders: formal perspectives (managers), perspectives from the majority group in this profession (women) and perspectives from the marginalized group (men), providing answer to the question:

*How do preschool practitioners make sense of the inclusion of men?*

To address this question, we designed a qualitative study, continually working with literature and empirical material. In general, we aim to advance the understanding of the gender relations within childcare education and contribute in understanding the concerns, opinions, and advantages of inclusion of men in this occupation.
1.4 Objectives

In order to achieve the aim of this study, the following research objectives are set:

- Analyse and critically evaluate results drawn from similar studies
- Investigate male and female preschool teachers’ opinions on gender diversity
- Evaluate administrators experience on gender diversity and the inclusion of men in diverse preschools

The above objectives will lead our research towards understanding the surrounding meanings of male preschool teaching in Sweden.

1.5 Delimitations

This thesis is focusing on male preschool teaching in Sweden, which traditionally is a female-dominated occupation. Even though it would have been interesting to study the perspective of all stakeholders at preschools, such as parents, guardians and students studying to become a preschool teacher, we have delimited our research to focus only on the perspective of people who are or have worked at preschools. This is because we think that their experiences and insights are adequate for the scope of our study as well as to fulfill our aim.

We have chosen to delimitate ourselves to conduct interviews at three different preschools in city of Lund, Sweden. The preschools have different numbers of children and preschool teachers and we interviewed both male and female preschool practitioners. Due to the relatively wide range of size of preschools and the fact that our respondents are of various ages, we believe that they reflect preschools in Sweden quite good. It is our choice to focus only on these three preschools in order to be able to conduct a more in-depth qualitative analysis. Focusing on fewer objectives has enabled us to put more time and effort in each objective in order to provide an in-depth analysis to the reader. Yet, this study will help us capture the complexity, which hopefully will contribute to a richer understanding the surrounding meanings of male preschool teaching.
1.6 Thesis outline

For reasons of readability, we have decided to divide this thesis into the following six chapters:

**Chapter 1 → Introduction:** In the first chapter we aim to provide the reader with the ability to get familiar with our research by outlining our aims and goals of our study.

**Chapter 2 → Theory:** The second chapter reviews the existing literature and research on male experiences in female-dominated occupations, particularly in childcare.

**Chapter 3 → Methodology:** The aim of the methodology chapter is to explain to the reader how we have conducted our study to be able to reach our research proposal. The chapter exemplifies our interpretative position as a guide of our research and describes how the empirical data has been collected and analyzed. In the end of the chapter we will reflect about and criticize the methodology chosen.

**Chapter 4 → Empirical Findings:** In this chapter we will be outlining our core findings from our interviews, selecting on different quotes to answer our research question. These data will be interpreted in order to outline how preschool employees make sense of the inclusion of men in this occupation.

**Chapter 5 → Discussion and Analyzing:** In this chapter we will analyze our empirical data drawing on the existing literature and research on men’s experiences in female-dominated occupations, particularly in childcare.

**Chapter 6 → Conclusions:** In the final chapter, we aim to present our theoretical contributions as well as answer our research question. Furthermore, we will propose future research within this area.
Chapter II - Literature review

This chapter summarizes the literature review and existing research on male experiences in female-dominated occupations, mainly in preschools. Little national data is available regarding the gender roles of preschool teaching in Sweden. Figures from national data suggest than in the last years of 20th century the proportion of male preschool teachers remain low; respectively three percent of nation’s preschool teachers are men (Jällhage, 2015).

Research on men’s experiences in preschools is fairly scant. It should be noted that the literature presented in here is part of popular media press around the world that focuses to the work-related experiences of male teachers in preschools. This chapter is divided into five main parts, each of which presents the results related to our research question. It is organized as follows: Firstly, we discuss briefly diversity management and inclusion in the workplace (2.1), construction of masculinity in workplace focusing on explaining childcare as a gendered occupation (2.2). Secondly, we narrow down our discussion to analyze the roles of men and their experiences as teachers in preschools (2.3). We rely on previous research in this field and discuss the benefits of male preschool teachers (2.3.1) and challenges of male preschool teachers (2.3.2). These areas will be discussed on the basis of gender diversity and inclusion in preschools as a female-dominated occupation.

2.1 Diversity management and inclusion

As noted above, our study aims at investigating gender diversity and inclusion in preschools. Therefore, literature review presents a starting point of capturing the big picture of the topic.

Diversity management in organizations presents an area under intensive research. There are numerous studies suggesting why diversity management today should be an important agenda for most organizations. The basic idea however is almost the same; a diverse workforce will lead to improved business outcomes (Chari and Vohra, 2015; Williamson et al, 2008). In organizational literature, diversity is used to exemplify the composition of groups or workforces (Roberson, 2004). According to McGrath, Berdahl
and Arrow (1995), diversity is considered to be the characteristics of a group that emphasizes the demographic differences among members. In similar vein, Larkey (1996) explain diversity as differences in perspectives and identity among cultural group members in relation to other groups. Thomas and Ely (1996) provide a proader perspective, defining diversity as a representation of “the varied perspectives and approaches to work with members of different identity group bring” (p.80).

Research suggests that the workforce of 21st century is characterized by a significant increase rate of women, minorities, ethnic backgrounds, different sexual identity workers and different lifestyles (Langdon, McMenamin and Krolik, 2002). This certainly implies that diversity has become an important business imperative (Daniels, 2001) where organizations are adopting various approaches to manage it effectively. The business rationale at the core of diversity on focuses on recruitment strategies, education and training, career development and monitoring programs as perspectives to increase and retain heterogeneity in workplace (Cox, 1993; Morrison, 1992). Prasad (2001) takes a critical stance in this issue, explaining that approaching diversity only through activities related to hiring and utilizing the workforce of different identity groups is not enough. The author maintains that the theme of diversity in such approaches largely ignores the dynamics of consequences of exclusion in workplace (Prasad, 2001). This issue highlights the importance of the notion “inclusion” - a topic that little attention has been given within organizational literature. Much of the writings in this issue highlight the fact that often members of different identity groups are excluded from networks of information and opportunity in organizations (Ibarra, 1993; Roberson, 2004). Inclusion thus is a notion used to describe worker participation and empowerment. Mor Barak and Cherin (1998) define inclusion as the extent which individuals can access information, resources, are involved in work groups, and have the ability to influence decision-making processes (Mor Barak and Cherin, 1998 cited in Roberson, 2004, p.6). Accordingly, inclusion refers to an individual’s ability to participate and fully contribute to organizational performance (Miller, 1998; Mor Barak and Cherin, 1998).

There is a growing debate concerning the meaning of diversity and inclusion in organizations. Despite the fact that for some these two terms represent the same thing,
research suggests that there is a slightly distinction between employing diversity and inclusion (Cox, 1991). Put simply, diversity concerns the differences on organizational demography, meanwhile inclusion focuses on removing obstacles and ensuring full participation and contribution of employees in workplace (Roberson, 2004). Prasad (2001) interprets the pairing of diversity and inclusion as “two sides of the same coin”. Whereas, Roberson (2004) argues that while hiring people from different cultural backgrounds can achieve diversity, inclusion is a process that is much more complex and it incorporates changing the mindset of all people in an organization. Thereby, achieving positive diversity management outcomes is considered to be complex and affected by both the interplay of societal context and internal organizational role.

Nevertheless, it may be claimed that an attempt to move from diversity and inclusion is evident in organizations, however we still have a limited understanding whether these actions indeed represent a change in organizational strategies or as Roberson (2004) maintains that they could simply be a change in discourse so to reduce the backlash against same initiatives. This issue particularly triggered our interest as in the context of our research we noticed that within scholarly work on gender there continues to be a gap in representing the role of men in female-dominated professions, particularly in teaching. For instance, a research conducted by Evans (1997) exploring men’s experiences that do “women work” represents the complexities of gender relations and the structure of gender regime in broader society. The study shows that the role of men in such positions challenge the taken for granted dominant men power, masculinities and practices in the workplace (Hearn and Collinson, 2006). Such underlying presumptions and other possible complexities undoubtedly has a major impact on inclusion of men in female-dominated positions.

Before proceeding to examine the dynamics of inclusion in preschools, it will be necessary to provide an overview on complexities of gender relations and the structure of gender regime within this occupation.

2.2. Gender at work - Constructions of masculinity

A substantial body of research on gender and organizations assumed men to be the normative standard case against women (Collinson and Hearn, 1994). However, such
claims have been criticized for being to universal, leading to the emergence of diverse theoretical and conceptual frameworks (e.g. Barrett, 1996; Connell, 1995; Hearn, 1994; and Kerfoot and Knights, 1993). An important aspect highlighted in these frameworks concerns the dynamics of “hegemonic masculinity”, defined by Connell (2000) as the culturally noble aspect of masculinity, guaranteeing the dominant position of men. According to Morgan (1992) such constructions of masculinity often are located in, acted out and negotiated in the context of work and organization. We find this perspective to be a useful beginning in understanding how masculinities are constructed and experienced in workplace.

As Alvesson (1998) points out, theoretical frameworks within masculinity studies remain fragmentary, reflecting the new status of this area. In these approaches the patriarchy – as the main source of women's oppression is however rejected. Instead, such studies suggest that gender relations are multidimensional thereby experienced differently according to specific organizational contexts (e.g. Alvesson, 1998; Alvesson and Due Billing, 1997). In addition, Simpson (2004) explains that ideologies and discourses of gender have a huge impact on promoting and sustaining the sexual division of labor. Specifically, they play a crucial role on the social definition of tasks, labeling them as either “men's work” or “women's work. According to Morgan (1992) these labels of work are central to masculine identities where organizations serve as a source for the construction and reconstruction of “what it means to be a man”. He argues that such notions have consequences for those men and women who choose to move into atypical occupations that challenge the common attitudes and assumptions concerning the male and female work. Bradley (1993) takes issue with the argument, pointing out that it is easier for women to push into male jobs than vice versa. In similar vein Whittock and Leonard (2003) claim that “compromised femininity” does not necessarily affect the female identity given that in most of the cases it involves status enhancement (e.g. increases in pay). This is very interesting to know, given that much of the research on gendered occupation focuses on the difficulty of women in male-dominated occupations. As Simpson (2004) points out, women for a long time have been characterizing the system of bias and discrimination, whereby men always were considered to be the dominant group control within a workplace. However, when it comes to men working in female-dominated occupations, there is a growing consensus
that such act challenges the embedded gender assumptions in that work. Other authors (e.g. Evans, 1997; Williams, 1993; Whittock and Leonard, 2003) maintains that identity is challenged in here, given that men doing the “women work” is not seen as a real ‘man’. According to Evans (1997, p.4) ‘stigmatizing labels imply that men who do women’s work are different from other men; isolating them as ‘deviants’ who are ‘odd’ or ‘homosexual’.

While for some ‘token’ man is disadvantaged by their status of minority (Simpson, 2004) other thoughts claim that positive career benefits accrue from this status (Collinson and Collinson, 1996). Men working in female-dominated occupations have been found to benefit from their token status, given that often they ascend the hierarchy faster than women. Yet, Williams (1993) maintain that men often are rewarded for their difference from women, in terms of higher pay or other benefits.

Nevertheless, Hochschild (1983) points out that some occupations such as teaching may call for special abilities that traditionally women are deemed to possess. The embedded gender assumptions within this occupation are considered a problem for men, indicating a tension between the feminized nature of their job and the need to adapt to the demands of hegemonically masculine gender regime (Lupton, 2000). Before proceeding to examine such tensions, it will be necessary to provide a background of childcare as a gendered occupation.

2.2.1 Child Care as a gendered occupation

According to Acker (1990, p.146):

"To say an organization, or any other analytical unit, is gendered means that advantage and disadvantage, exploitation and control, action and emotion, meaning and identity are patterned through and in terms of a distinction between male and female, masculine and feminine. Gender is not an addition to ongoing processes, conceived as gender neutral. Rather, it is an integral part of those processes, which cannot be properly understood without an analysis of gender."
Claiming an occupation to be “gendered” thus it is not an easy issue. According to Kanter (1977) there should be at least two conditions to understand which occupation is gendered. Firstly, a significant “skew” of gender distribution of the employees should be explicit: it means 85 percent are men or women. Secondly, the work itself is embedded on gendered meanings and it defined in gendered terms (Leidner, 1991). According to Murray (1996) gendered occupations are those occupations constructed on the idea that they will be occupied predominantly by only one sex category. In the context of childcare education, Murray (1996) contends that the development of this occupation is predicted on the assumption that women are the workers. When examining the childcare field, the most prevalent image is “mother-teacher”. Accordingly, Baris (2013) argues that this occupation has a deep embedded message, presenting women in more nurturing way than man. According to Oram (2007) the assumption that childcare is associated with women has a strong historical background dating back to early 19 century where teaching was considered as an extension of domestic duty (e.g Altenbaugh, 1992; Biklen, 1995; Heap and Prentice, 1991; Sugg, 1978). It is embedded on the assumption that women unlike men are considered to be “born with the ability to nurture and take care of the children” (Hedlin and Åberg, 2013, p.150). Therefore, teaching is strongly associated with qualities such as mothering, kindness and morality; qualities strongly associated with femininity. In addition, Teti and Lamb (1986) argue that the lack of men working in early childhood education is not something new or rare. The authors explain that this issue is deeply embedded in socio-cultural perception where traditionally, family work has been divided by sex roles with men being the primary breadwinners of the family. In similar vein Bernard et al., (2000) argues that since Civil War women have been dominated in teaching occupations and in most instances women were hired to this occupation due to less costs associated. The assumption that husband should earn more money than his wife signifies the power of social discourse in constructing education. This also is exemplified in the work of gender dynamics by Connell (2009), where the author explains the institutionalized power of company, the military and political leadership as more associated with masculinity and men being a more dominant image in such occupations. What is deemed thus as “successful” professions is relevant for male gender, whereas a profession such as teaching is considered to be highly “feminized” (Bolton and Muzio, 2008).
Furthermore, Westberg-Wohlgemuth (1996) in their study claims that many traits and qualifications can be gendered being associated with masculinity or femininity. In his study addressing the role of men as teacher, Martino (2008) asserts that in education field commonly tasks are gendered categorizing the work with young children as women job whereas men are associated teaching older pupils mainly in areas of physics or technology.

We concur with such arguments and it is from the standpoint of an analytic construction of gender that we make the claim that childcare is a gendered occupation in Sweden. Provided with the fact that only three percent of all preschool teachers in Sweden are men, consequently it could be claimed that a significant skew of gender distribution of employees is explicit. Although in Swedish families fathers are increasingly engaged in childcare and other family obligations, yet in most childcare settings, education of young children is mainly the responsibility of women. In this perspective thus children hardly meet any men in preschool, but eventually they may do so in elementary school settings.

2.3 Male preschool teaching - Dynamics of inclusion at preschools

So far the review of literature demonstrated that early childhood is a gendered occupation, with women dominating. Now that we discussed the complexities of gender relations and the structure of gender regime in preschools, we follow the second section where dynamics of inclusion in preschools will be discussed in realm of male teachers’ experiences in this occupation.

2.3.1 Importance of male preschool teaching

A repeatedly articulated goal for male preschool teachers is to serve as a role model in general as well as an adult male figure for fatherless children in particular (Wiest et al., 2003; Walling, 1998; Allan, 1993). From a psychological angle MacNaughton and Newman (2001) explains that involvement of men in preschools is not just about providing a role model, rather it contributes to the modern notions of gender roles. It helps children to understand that males are not just brave, strong, crude and resilient but they also have a gentle, caring and understanding side. In line with this Ho and Lam (2013) maintain that participation of men in preschools helps to break the normative conventions of gender roles in work.
In addition, the importance of men in preschools is highlighted by Lin (2004) where in his study concerning non-constructed characteristics of men he found out that due to the innate personality traits of men, their approach to this occupation is more unique especially when designing games and playing with children (Lin, 2004 cited in Ho and Lam, 2013). Results of the study show that when children interact with male preschool teachers they are not only fulfilled with the need for physical exercises but they are also provided with a psychological enjoyment.

There is a growing consensus asserting that male teachers can respond more effectively to boys (Barnard et al., 2000; Jensen, 1998), given that they have a better understanding of their perspectives and experiences (Jensen, 1998). Mancus (1992) on the other hand argues that children taught by male teachers are more likely to demonstrate non-stereotyping attributions. Consequently, children should experience caregivers of both genders so to get a balance between the differences among gender roles and personality traits (Sumson, 2000).

However, much of the research up to now supporting the assertions of the “role model” has been descriptive hardly shedding light on the topic. One reason of this is due to the lack of a clear theoretical basis of child behavior, gender identification and development (Barnard et al., 2000) making it difficult to conduct a proper research on this issue that fully supports these assertions. Various studies for instance try to understand male experiences in early childhood education as a female-dominated occupation, particularly focusing on their relationship and their acceptance by female counterparts (Ranson, 1997; Shaham, 1991). Some evidence show that the inclusion part could be affected by various factors as indicated below.

2.3.2 Challenges of male preschool teaching

Traditionally men who choose to enter the educational field tend to take positions in higher education (Clifford, 1989). Early writings (e.g. Benton-DeCorse and Vogtie, 1997) on this issue explain that this probably stems from the misconceptions that little knowledge is needed in preschools. Results from a study of educators conducted by Patrick et al., (1986) show that many of male teachers consider childcare as a women
occupation, in other words a female virtue of a lack of ambition. Thereby, men choosing a traditionally female career are considered to be taking a step down in status (Seifert, 1984). In line with this Durdy et al., (2005) argues that low social status of this occupation is the main reason why men choose to pursue other career options instead of teaching. According to Ayers (1989) "the low status of teaching is in part result of the fact that it is women's work, which is systematically devalued in our society" (p.135). In this citation Ayers portrays the double passage that male teachers follow; firstly they do women's work and secondly this work is low paid, henceforth failing to fulfill their expected role as a primary breadwinner of the family (Teti and Lamb, 1986). Consequently, some men feel that the salaries are not enough to maintain the standard of living. On the other hand, it is argued that men tend to evaluate their job based on long-term career opportunities (Seifert, 1984). Whatsoever, some research suggests that in education opportunities for advancement are considered to be limited (Barnard et al., 2000).

For the small number of men who choose to enter and remain in preschools however, the particular challenge is to be accepted in this occupation (Berger et al., 1995). As most studies suggest, men in female-dominated occupations fear the fact that they are perceived as “unmanly” and excluded (Barkley and Kohler, 1992; Chusmir, 1990). This because entering in a female-dominated occupation falls into the line of a gender-aberrant act. In support of this statement Holloran and Welton (1994) argue that the fear of being perceived “unmanly” is a reflection of the cultural intolerance of social behaviors toward these acts. The authors maintain that such structural impediments may affect more men than women. As Bradley (1993) suggests, in most instances it is fine for women to act as “tomboys” however it is unacceptable for men to compromise the notions of masculinities and be “sissies”. Yet, Epstein (1977) adds that being a man it is also as much as being a particular type: muscular, self-reliant, assertive and engaged in “real-men's activities” (cited in Evans and Frank, 2003, p. 279).

In addition, sexed-relations are considered another major challenge for men in different female-dominated occupations. Historically, men working in nontraditional occupations have been targeted by numerous stereotypes and suspicions. Consequently, Evans and Frank (2003) explain that men entering in this occupation “face the risk of
being unsupported, devalued, viewed as anomalies and gay - a negative stigmatizing label” (p. 279). When it comes to men in childcare Murray (1996) claims that the idea alone of taking care of children calls into question their sexuality. Men’s actions become suspicious and tagged with a sexualized identity due to their choice to do something that is deemed to be a woman’s job. This certainly affects their inclusion in this occupation given that when it comes to childcare setting anything related to adult sexuality is off-limits. According to Murray (1996) sexualized identities many times can put into question a person’s competencies as a teacher/caregiver. In his study Cohen (1992) found out that the fear of child abuse is the main concern with men teaching young children. The study shows that for many people it is unacceptable for men to establish physical contact with young children and show affection. In Murray’s work he revealed that men are subject to unwritten rules regarding to their physical access to children, often “being restricted into their freedom to touch, cuddle, nap and change diapers for children”(Murray, 1996, p.378). In many instances parents are the ones being hesitant to accept men within this occupation. Nevertheless, it seems that the suspicion factor is linked more with child abuse allegations however the aspects of homosexuality and pedophile are sometimes conflated.

Meanwhile, it is argued that the decision of administrations to recruit men often is affected by the fear of child abuse allegations. Certainly, being subjected to these suspicions and stereotypes may make the male teachers to believe that they are always under investigation. Accordingly, they may feel under an ongoing pressure to prove their capabilities to parents and even to colleagues (Galley, 2000). In most of the studies, men elementary teachers speak of the “fear factor” (Wiest et al, 2010) referring to the fact of not being able to act the same way as their female colleagues toward children, especially in certain situations when they are alone with kids or when they need to change diapers (e.g. Bernard, 2000; Hill, 1996, Shaham, 1991). In a study conducted by Ranson (1997) terms such as “misunderstood, mistrusted, unwelcomed, lonely” were used by male teachers to express their experiences in this occupation. As Cohen (1990) notes “no one wants to take a job where they feel they are being scrutinized carefully because of gender” (cited in Barnard et al., 2000, p.12).
Another possible reason explaining the scarcity of men in early childhood education relates to research claiming that men working in childcare settings report an awkward relationship with their female colleagues, commonly feeling isolated and uncomfortable (Barnard et al., 2000). For authors such as Lyndia et al., (2010) this occurs due to the fact that women often feel threatened by men entering to a so called “women's zone”. In most instances tasks tend to be gendered with men performing heavy male duties such as acting as the disciplinarian. A similar argument was made by Murray (1996), who concluded that men working in childcare settings are exposed to a hierarchical structure that promotes their interests. Often men who work in this occupation are part of higher positions encountering what Williams (1992) distinguished as the glass escalator, which means moving up faster in occupational hierarchy. The benefits provided by token status for men create frustration to female counterparts.

2.4 Theoretical framework

In this study we are analyzing childcare as an occupation commonly categorized as female-dominated. Through these lenses and the reviewed theory, we have built a theoretical framework (figure 1) that would guide us in constructing a proper literature discussion for our research question “How do preschool practitioners make sense of the inclusion of men?” As exemplified, this framework follows the logic of “funnel effect” capturing the topic from a general perspective and narrowing it down to our main focus. This approach proved to be very helpful especially in connectedness of the ideas of the literature chapter but also providing an easy flow of reading and understanding.

As exemplified in the framework, we start with preschools as the main topic. Having both male and female preschool teachers employed at preschools in Sweden is represented by the word ‘diverse preschools’. As our main topic within preschools is the
experience of inclusion and exclusion, it is representing an important role in our framework. This framework symbolizes how we are entering the empirical study and we will go back to the framework in the end of the discussion chapter.

2.5 Chapter summary

The research concerning work-related experiences of preschool male teachers showed that men often face variety of concerns and stereotypes in this occupation. For the small number of men who choose this occupation, the stigma of working in a feminized work is considered a major barrier to enter/remain in this field. Such and other sexed-related prejudices could be damaging to men's self-esteem and job satisfaction - hindering their inclusion in this particular occupation.

The literature review that we performed in this study provided us with a general picture of the topic, helping us to determine key issues affecting inclusion of men in childcare field. All of the sources referred above and in general most of the writings regarding men's experiences in early childhood education highlights a diversity of views on gender roles, drawing upon a social/critical perspective on gender construction. We share the anchoring in social perspective and we use an interpretative approach to understand gender roles in the context of male teachers in relationship with colleagues, parents and children. This will help us to determine the surrounding meanings and complexities of male preschool teaching, which is our aim of the research. It should be noted that little research on male experiences in childcare in Sweden is provided but we intend to use and work with the above academic thoughts continuously with our empirical material.
Chapter III - Research methodology

In this chapter we explain how we address our research question. Through this chapter the reader will be able to understand our research approach, which relates to an interpretative research design. In order to make it easier for the readers to understand our study, initially we provide details on our philosophical grounding and paradigms that we have used for constructing and guiding our research. In this chapter, we further describe our qualitative research design elaborating as well on data collection methods and analysis. We conclude by highlighting the significance of reflexivity and how we worked with it for quality considerations.

3.1 Metatheoretical starting point

The primary aim of this study was to investigate how both male and female preschool teachers and administrators make sense of gender diversity and dynamics of inclusion in childcare, bearing in mind the feminized label of this work. Accordingly it posed the following question:

- How do preschool practitioners make sense of the inclusion of men?

Against this background, this research is primarily grounded in interpretivist tradition, which recognizes personal experiences, prioritizes the understandings that individuals give to their experiences and holds that reality is a construction of the human mind. We have chosen the interpretative approach as we aim to gain a deeper insight of the research problem. As Neuman (2000) explains, an interpretive researcher is keen to learn the meaningful or relevant issues to the people being studied or how they experience daily life; and in here we as researchers have an active role in production and analysis of gathered data (Merriam, 2002).

In addition, as we explained above our research field confronts many stereotypical challenges. The interpretive approach helps us to address these challenges, by allowing us the opportunity to examine and understand how the subjects make sense of dynamics of inclusion in the workplace based on their interaction with their social world. What we
thus take from this approach is an in-depth understanding of the issue through giving voice to the research participants. By listening to our research participants, we as a researcher become the central instrument throughout the process of research as well as after it. Accordingly, we acknowledge the fact that the research process is highly value-laden by our subjectivity (Prasad, 2005). Further, our study will follow an abductive approach, which allows us to switch focus between our pre-understandings from theory and our own understandings from the empirical material and make reinterpretations hindsight from each other (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009).

3.2 Data collection method

Taking into account the aim and the objectives of this study, we decided to use a qualitative approach. We aimed to uncover the interviewees’ understandings and experiences of gender diversity and inclusion in workplace through semi-structured interviews, as the main data collection method. We further engaged in document analysis as well as observations.

3.2.1 Sampling and scene

This study draws on a sample of three preschool centers in Lund - a city in Skåne, southern Sweden. We have chosen these sites based on a purposive sampling approach. Our logic of site selection followed two criteria. Firstly, the preschools were chosen based on the express of interest and willingness of various stakeholders, including both preschool managers and teachers from both genders to take part on the research. Secondly, we approached preschools that have or recently have had at least one male employed. This because as stated above we aimed to contribute on a ‘triangular insight’ on the meaning of inclusion and capturing perspectives from different stakeholders: managers, female teachers, male teachers was crucial. Furthermore, we got in contact with a former preschool teacher.

3.2.2 Document analysis

As Merriam (1998) maintains ‘Documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem’ (p.118). In enhancing the understanding of the phenomena we study, we
found it very important to initially explore the wider context of the issue; for instance, current discourses of diversity and inclusion in the society and contemporary work on these concepts. More specifically, we wanted to understand what does inclusion of men at preschools means in Sweden. In practice this means that our research design corresponded to a document analysis, particularly focusing on Swedish government policies associated with diversity concept in preschools. We hence used document analysis as supplementary research data to gain background information for preschools and their relevant activities to diversity and inclusion (Bowen, 2009). This was our starting point for developing our empirical knowledge.

As pointed out in introductory chapter, the rationale for using document analysis as a research approach lies in its methodological role and data triangulation (Bowen, 2009). In order to do so we focused on a relevant sample of documents, which we believe were very important to shed light to our understandings of the issue and contribute to our study aims. Firstly, Swedish government policies have been used extensively for a long time to address the issue of gender equality in early childhood education. Reading such plans allowed us to comprehend the wider context of the issue; providing us with a big picture of locally meanings of gender diversity and inclusion in early childhood education context. More importantly, we arrived at the same conclusion with Bowen (2009) that these documents helped us as a researcher to understand the historical roots of this specific problem.

Guided by the questions: *What does it mean to commit to gender diversity and inclusion of men at an institution like preschool? and How preschools work with people to create or foster diversity in this occupation?* we continued our document analysis focusing on preschool policies that highlighted the relevant activities to diversity and inclusion. By doing so, we aimed to understand the connection between explicit goals set by Swedish government to increase the number of male preschool teachers and how preschools were coping with such responsibility. We conducted a brief quantitative analysis of statistical information on how the rate of male preschool teachers changed during the years. We found it important to create a “big picture” on the documents analyzed so to distance ourselves from preconceptions. It should be noted that after months of reading, analyzing, writing, it was quite evident the gap between gender distribution in
Caught in the crossfire

preschools with women dominating. This certainly affected our perceptions demanding the fact that a change is needed. But even so, we found it important to stay objective, rather distance ourselves from accusations and convince ourselves that these perceptions were fruit of our own biases. However, along with Bowen (2009) we used such documents in finding supplementary research data. Given that our study concerns a recent issue with immense public interest, we were able to find numerous articles in local newspapers treating this issue. Such articles were used in our investigation of social perceptions regarding inclusion of men in preschools. They were also used to supplement the data from other sources and data gained through interviews.

3.2.3 Interviews with preschool teachers and managers

Following an interpretive point of view we intend to account for the perspectives and experiences of employees working in preschools. Therefore we engaged in qualitative research through semi-structured interviews as defined by Kvale (1996) as “an interview whose purpose is to obtain description of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena (p.6). Although, semi-structured interviews often follow a pre-guide, they still allow free discussions and possibility to adapt to unexpected circumstances (Bryman, 2012). This was in line with our aims, making semi-structured interviews an adequate tool for unfolding and gaining a deeper understanding of our respondents’ experiences. Through interviews we positioned ourselves in “travelers metaphor” (Kvale, 1996) embarking in a journey that would allow us to wander together with respondents, exploring their own experiences of there lived world. Accordingly, we engaged in the conversation by listening how our respondents projected their meanings and experiences of gender diversity and inclusion of men in this workplace.

In addition, as most writings suggest, finding the right respondents it is crucial for conducting a successfully study (Bryman, 2012). Practically, we have chosen our participants in a causal way approaching three different preschool managers in Lund, Sweden by first sending an email and then contacting them through the telephone. As a result both of the preschool managers agreed to put a notice requesting help from other employees to participate in our research. This yielded on 11 interviews, where three of them were preschool managers, three male preschool teachers and five female
preschool teachers (Appendix A). Another interview came forward with a former male preschool teacher who no longer was practicing this profession. This interview was drawn on a personal contact from an anonymous source that provided us with contact information. All interviews were conducted at the preschools, except for the former preschool teacher, which was conducted at his home.

The interview questions were formulated following Kvale's (1996) advice using mostly open-ended questions beginning with “How?”, “What?” or “Why?” (Appendix B and C). Such questions followed a set of themes concerning background information for each of the respondents, issues relating to gender diversity and inclusion and issues regarding challenges that this topic brings forward, particularly for men as under-represented group in this occupation. Although, we followed a fix guide during interviews asking the same questions we still agreed to let room for spontaneity and ask follow up questions that would arise from the conversation. Yet, for in average 30 minutes, respondents were asked to express their opinions, concerns or any general thoughts regarding the matter in question. All the interviews were held in Swedish with a request from respondents, as expressing in their mother language was perceived to be easier. For us, the process of interview was also a way of conducting observations given that only one of the group members is a native Swedish speaker. Nevertheless, we decided that both of us would be present at all interviews, assigning the roles for one to be the interview leader asking the questions and the other one to observe people’s body language as a way of communication that signals hidden feelings and intentions. This enriched our analysis as it enabled us to better understand the reactions of people toward certain discussions regarding gender diversity and inclusion. Further, all the interviews were recorded and we promised participants that their identity will remain anonymous - thus all the names used in this thesis are pseudonyms.

3.2.4 Observations at preschools

The flow of interviewing process guided further our research in performing observations as an additional method of data collection for our research. As most of the interviews were conducted in preschools, we had the chance to visit and observe these centers internally. In all three preschools, we got the opportunity to walk around and
observe their working environment, which provided us with an insight of working atmosphere among employees and how they interacted with each other.

In addition, one of the preschools was kind enough to provide us with the chance to engage in observation process for two days between conducting interviews. In here we decided to conduct what Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte (1999) define as participant observation “the process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day to day or routine activities of participants in the researcher setting (p.91). More specifically, we recorded what we saw; taking extensive field notes that would be analyzed later on. This process enabled us to get a wholly accurate picture of occurrences within preschool e.g how employees were interacting with each other, with managers, with kids or how would they perform their daily chores and so on. For us, this resulted in generating new ideas on how the working atmosphere of this preschool could be interpreted in data analysis. More importantly, this experience provided us access to the “backstage culture” (DeMunck and Sobo, 1998 p.43) improving our quality of data and interpretations.

Nevertheless, we were aware about the difficulties engaged in observation. As Kawulich (2005) pointed out, participant observation is conducted by a biased human, and the quality of the participant observation lies on the ability of a researcher to be objective. For us the challenge was thus to be reflexive from the beginning and try to not let our biases interfere the correct interpretations of what we observed. In addition we adhere to the claims of Merriam (1998) who pointed out that the group of participants are the ones who control the level of information given. Bearing that in mind, we followed Whyte (1979) advice to view our informants as collaborators, letting them know that they were a team working for a common good. Moreover, as explained earlier we engaged in observation during the interview process as well. Particular attention was given reading body language signs and gestures of respondents. This enabled us to witness changes on the mood parallel to the questions asked. Such reactions in turn suggested the hidden feelings of the respondents toward certain discussion regarding inclusion, which will be discussed in detail in subsequent section.
3.3 Data analysis

We embarked on the journey of analyzing our data, bearing in mind that a research is a “development recursive task” (Marshall and Rossman, 1999, p.24). Accordingly, we concur with the claims of Marshall and Rossman (1999) who describe a real research as often “confusing, messy, intensely frustrating and fundamentally non-linear” (p.21). Our own process of analysis has been a process of reading literature review along with the statements of respondents, while remaining reflexive through the whole time.

It should be noted that before starting to analyze the interviews we decided to analyze the documents namely the Swedish government preschool curriculum, preschool policies and newspapers that addressed the male preschool teaching. Our main aim was to identify salient themes related to gender diversity and inclusion in this occupation. The information in these documents was rather limited in terms of providing detailed information regarding inclusion in this occupation. However, they provided us with very important insights on the meanings surrounding gender diversity in this occupation.

We continued our data analysis process focusing on interviews. As we were subjected to a large amount of data, we decided to follow the cutting and sorting technique so to analyze and codify the data (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). For us it was easier to view this process in line with Rennstam and Wästerfors (2011) explanation that the process of qualitative analysis consists techniques such as sorting, reducing and arguing. Consequently, to be able to describe, compare and explain the collected data from theory, interviews and observations, we started with discovering and structuring out general themes. This was done by breaking the text down into smaller parts, in the context of identifying key words and phrases that were important for our research study (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Our abductive approach allowed us to go back and forth between theory and empirical data to identify themes. Yet, we read our collected data several times, since repetition is said to be one of the easiest ways of identifying themes (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). We looked for repetition, unfamiliar local terms, metaphors, transitions, similarities and differences. When having discovered the themes, we decided upon important themes that would contribute in answering our research question. The whole process was accompanied with adding comments, using different
colors for coding and creating tables. More specifically, our logic of data analysis followed several steps as a way to analyze codify and interpret our interview data, explained in the following.

**Step 1. Transcribing and Translating:** The first step on data analysis concerned transcribing the interviews and translating them into English. Unfortunately, in this process only one of us was able to do this due to language requirements. But even so, we decided that in the meantime the other person would focus on arranging the field notes from observations. We arranged the field notes, based on the themes that explained the experiences of employees within preschool.

**Step 2. Initial and selective coding:** For the process of initial coding we decided to engage in this process independently so to avoid the influence of each other biases in the process of analyzing. During this process, each of us was assigned with the role to read the interviews, identify important themes, look for possible repetitions, metaphors, similarities and differences. As a way of sorting data we would use different colors and comments. Certainly, we were aware that we needed labels when sorting data (Rennstam and Wästerfors, 2011) and this would be each’s responsibility to come up with three labels associated with our research question. After that, we engaged together in the selective coding process, deciding the labels based on our previous work and executing a more in depth color-coding. In this phase thus we engaged in an in-depth categorization of themes based on our prior agreement upon salient themes. The fact that we started this process individually enriched our analysis given that we continuously were working from two different angles, yet it helped us a lot to remain reflexive through the whole process.

**Step 3. Sorting quotes through tables:** To make it more clearly for us we created a summary table for all the interviews. This table had three columns indicating our three main labels that we categorized from our coding. Under of each label we put the important quotes from our interviewees that would support the label. This made it easier for us to be aware of differences among quotes toward a particular issue and also would enrich our data interpretation. Besides, sorting all the quotes according to the
labels was also done with the intention to ease our process of finding and selecting most powerful quotes when representing our empirical material.

**Step 4. Putting all together - Constructing the arguments:** After we arranged all the datas we decided on our key findings from our empirical material. We would then start constructing our arguments regarding these findings through engaging in creative processes such as creating mind-maps. The process was very challenging, as we needed to ensure that our arguments would be solid and trustworthy. We further decided on the most powerful quotes that would best support our argument.

In conclusion, for us this experience was very challenging but rewarding at the same time. Despite the fact that we had a plan on how to analyze our data still the process was not linear. We constantly found ourselves going back and forth to our data so to ensure that we are making the right interpretations.

**3.4 Research reflexivity**

As we are looking for an understanding of the study phenomenon, we will apply the hermeneutic approach (Bryman & Bell, 2013; Merriam, 2002). According to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009), a main theme in the hermeneutics approach is “the meaning of a part can only be understood if it is related to the whole” (p.92). In practice this will allow us to locate our phenomenon of study in a wider context. As such, we will alternate between understanding individual's point of view and how these empirical data might be connected to scientific explanation of diversity and inclusion concepts.

Throughout the process of our research we have had a critical awareness of our own interpretations of the conducted material, trying to be objective and open-minded. We have taken into account and reflected about that we as researchers are affected by different factors such as underlying beliefs that address our interpretations of the conducted material into a certain way (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009). Being aware of these factors and able to maintain a critical awareness, we have been able to study the material in a reflexive way and to create meaning and understanding of our interviews. For instance, we have been able to find salient themes by breaking the pattern to see what the conducted material does not say, which prevented us from being controlled of influencing factors when interpreting. (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009)
We have tried to present our study as fair as possible, even though we have both studied gender diversity management before, which means that we have some background knowledge into the studied area. During our semi-structured interviews we used our interview schedule with open-ended questions in order not to steer the respondents too much but to let them create their own answers based on their own view of the studied area (Merriam, 2002). We have read through and coded the empirical material individually before going through it together in order to avoid influencing each other. Then, we discussed our interpretations together to decide how to move forward with the conducted material. Being aware of our previous experiences and preconceptions into the studied area makes us understand why we interpret certain things in a certain way which makes us able to be critical to our interpretations and to present a more neutral view of the research material. (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009)

3.5 Research limitations

When it comes to preschool teachers and managers we have delimited ourselves to study six factors, which are inclusion, gender expectations, cultural effects, trust and media representation. These areas we have chosen since they reflect the thoughts of both male and female preschool teachers on the issues that they have to deal with while working at preschools, proving thus a deeper understanding on the meanings of male pre-school teaching.
Chapter IV - Empirical Material

In this chapter we are going to present our empirical findings from interviews conducted with preschool employees. The chapter is divided into three main parts; first we represent the profile of the interviewees, then we briefly discuss on the system of Swedish preschools and finally we emphasize on “How do preschool practitioners make sense of the inclusion of men?” by drawing on selected quotes from interview participants.

4.1 Preschools in Sweden

By giving a short introduction of preschools in Sweden we aim to give a deeper understanding of the preschool environment and to arouse an interest of the field we have studied. We believe that this will help the reader to get a deeper understanding of the empirical material presented in this chapter.

Before starting primary school, parents or guardians in Sweden can choose to have their children at preschool. Therefore, the age of the children attending pre-school normally are one to five years old. The purpose of preschools in Sweden is to help parents take care of their children when working or studying. Except from childcare, preschools are also supposed to help the children to develop. Preschool teachers are asked to create activities based on each child’s needs in a fun, meaningful, secure and instructive way. As helping hand preschools have a curriculum to follow with requirements from the Swedish government, stating preschools values, mission, goals and guidelines. This curriculum was created in 1998 and is to ensure the quality of the Swedish preschools. (NE Nationalencyklopedin, 2016)

There are both municipal and independent preschools in Sweden (Skolverket A, 2016). The preschools we conducted our interviews at where all municipal preschools. At preschools in Sweden there is a distinction between preschool teachers and child carers. Preschool teachers have studied to become a preschool teacher specifically or worked at a preschool a certain number of years and have the overall responsibility to follow the goals in the curriculum (Skolverket A, 2016). According to Skolverket (A, 2016) a
preschool is obliged to have at least one preschool teacher at every department; the ones who are not employed as preschool teachers are called child carers. However, in our thesis we do not focus on the differences between preschool teachers and child carers. Thereby, we will use the word preschool teacher in its broader terms including both the teachers and child carers.

According to Skolverket (B, 2016), the amount of children in each group at preschool has been between 16.7 to 17.2 and the number of children per preschool teacher between 5.1 and 5.4 for at least the ten last years. This means that three preschool teachers normally work together, which was the case at the preschools where we conducted our interviews. As mentioned earlier most preschool teachers are female, only about three percent of the employees at preschools are men (Jällhage, 2015). According to our calculations, this means that if there in general are three preschool teachers per child group and if we suppose that there is at maximum one man per team, only nine percent of the teaching teams are compounded by a man and two women while the other ninety-one percent of the teaching teams consist only women. Although, men are in general characterized as an underrepresented group at preschools they still are part of it. For those preschools that employ both genders then it could be claimed that they aim on gender diversity. In our case all the preschools that we studied have at least one man working there. From this context we will use the discourse “diverse preschools” so to refer to a working environment where both men and women are part.

4.2 Profile of the interviewees

By giving a short introduction of the respondents we aim to give a deeper understanding of the empirical material and how it has contributed to our study. With respect to the respondents’ anonymity, we will limit the personal description at the same time. We have divided our respondents into preschool managers, male preschool teachers and female preschool teachers. The names represented below are pseudonyms.

Gunnar is a male preschool manager about 60 years old and has worked within preschools and schools for about his entire work life. He worked as a preschool teacher and teacher in school before starting as a preschool manager. Gunnar has about 40
employees at the two preschools that he is managing. Out of these 40 employees, two are male preschool teachers.

**Olof** is a male preschool manager, about 65 years old. Except from working with people within the psychology field, he has worked at preschools for about entire his life. Olof is managing a preschool that consists of about 30 employees.

**Eva** is a female preschool manager, about 45 years old and has worked at preschools for her entire work life as preschool teacher, preschool manager and principal. Eva is in charge of three preschools with about 35 employees. Out of these 35 employees, there is only one man working as a preschool teacher.

**Spencer** is a male preschool teacher about 35 years old and has worked as a preschool teacher for 12 years. He has been working as a preschool teacher for his entire work life at the same preschool except from the first year when he worked as a substitute preschool teacher at different preschools.

**Jacob** is a male preschool teacher about 35 years old and has worked as a preschool teacher for his entire work life, which is for about 7 years. He has worked at the same preschool for the entire time but have some earlier experience while working as a substitute preschool teacher while studying to become a preschool teacher.

**Oscar** is a male preschool teacher about 30 years old and has only experience from working at one preschool where he has stayed for about five years now. Before starting at the preschool he worked in a completely different industry but was inspired by a friend to start working at preschool.

**Bengt** is about 65 years old and is a former preschool teacher. He worked as a preschool teacher at different preschools for almost entire work life but had to quit when he was accused for not acting in the correct way at work. Even though he was acquitted, it was hard for him to continue working with children since the suspicious from some parents remained.
Anna is a female preschool teacher, about 35 years old and has worked as a preschool teacher for six years at the same preschool. Before starting at the preschool, she worked in school.

Katarina is a female preschool teacher, about 45 years old and has been working as a preschool teacher for 12 years at different preschools. She has experience of working with children in different ages at the preschool.

Mona is a female preschool teacher, about 45 years old and has about ten years of experience from working at different preschools. Mona does not have any male colleagues at the moment but have worked with different men during her years at preschools.

Louise is a female preschool teacher, about 30 years old and has worked as a preschool teacher at the same preschool for six years. Louise has worked both with only male and with only female colleagues in her team, and with children in different ages.

Amelie is a female preschool teacher, about 35 years old and has worked within preschool for 5 years. She is working with the youngest children at the preschool and does not have any male colleagues at the moment. However, she has worked with male colleagues before when working as a substitute teacher.

4.3 The desire for more male preschool teachers

Preschools are argued before as a female-dominated occupation. However, all of the preschool teachers and managers we interviewed, both male and female, expressed their desire for more men in preschools; both for the sake of the children to have a male role model at preschool and for their own sake since as they argued “it makes a better team if it is mixed with both genders [men and women]”. For instance, Gunnar who is one of the male preschool managers also agrees on the fact that gender mix contributes to the well functioning of preschools and all workplaces in general.
We should be just as many men as women. It would have been amazing. I think that all workplaces would do well [of having a diverse workforce], also in the male world.

(Gunnar, male preschool manager)

Katarina stated that preschools are a workplace that would benefit of having both male and female employees. According to her, it is not always necessary to compare the rate of men or women in gender occupations. She explains that some occupation may be benefitting for both genders more than other. For instance, she argues that preschools may benefit even more of having both female and male employees for the sake of the children’s development, while other workplaces, such as a garage, does not have the same need of a diverse workforce:

A car may not need both a male and a female technician, but at preschools, I think both [men and women] are needed. We are role models and we are different. Often we have different views on how to be with the children.

(Katarina, female preschool teacher)

What is interesting in her claim is that she signifies the need for men in preschools to exemplify to children that men are not always tough and powerful referring to some of general assumptions for masculinity, but men can also be caring. In a sense, the participation of men in childcare in her explanation can contribute in better understanding of gender roles. It also suggests that male preschool teaching serve as well as a role model for children, an argument that most of our respondents seems to agree upon.

4.4 Feeling included versus being included

All of our interviewees stated that they are feeling included at their workplace, meanwhile arguing the importance of inclusion in their performance. For instance, Spincer, one of the male preschool teachers argues that: “You must feel included, otherwise I would not be working here. So I do.” In addition, it seems that all respondents agree upon the idea that it is everyone's responsibility to make them and their
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colleagues feel included, yet, emphasizing managers being ultimately responsible for shaping an inclusive work environment.

What it means to be included from our respondent’s perspective is portrayed in the discourse of “equal treatment” where they argue that regardless of sex, education, ethnicity or sexual orientation, everyone should be treated the same. For Louise, one of the female preschool teachers, inclusion means that you should stand united behind each other. She contextualizes the discourse inclusion as a way to show support to male preschool teachers being the underrepresented group in this occupation and usually subjected to many challenges.

If you have a male colleague, we should stand united behind him and show the parents that this is the way it is and if it does not fit you, it is free choice. Then take your child away from here. Now they have the option to choose preschool. If we do not support our male colleagues than who is going to do that? Not many people are willing to take this fight.

(Louise, female preschool teacher)

In similar vein, Gunnar, one of the preschool managers, refers to the importance of providing support for male preschool teachers in creating an inclusive work environment. When we asked him how he would deal with a situation where parents would refuse male preschool teaching, he responds that:

Then I would have to tell the parent that this is how it is in this pre-school. If you do not want it this way, you can come here and change the diaper on your child yourself (...). Or we try to say that we have women [working here] too, but there is closure situations and opening situations where there are only men [working].

(Gunnar, male preschool manager)

Both of the comments show rather a “take it or leave it attitude” to parents in regards of supporting men working in this occupation. Perhaps this attitude would be ideal in creating an inclusive environment for men. The respondents explained that it was very
important for them to feel the support of managers. However, managers often were portrayed being in between of different pressures such as parents or political issues, which made it difficult for them to claim an ideal or decisive attitude such as “this is the preschool - take it or leave it”.

The overall response to the question whether men should work in this occupation was positive. It seems that the idea of male preschool teaching is welcomed by managers and other colleagues within preschool centers, arguing it in the discourse of "equality" no matter what sex category you belong to. This ideal thinking that everyone should be treated the same is exemplified in statements such as “I feel included” particularly when we asked our respondents to represent their thoughts regarding gender diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Nonetheless, their discussion about inclusion takes a different path later on when almost all of them start discussing about daily chores that they are responsible for. What we see in here, is that they highlight the fact that these tasks differ based on the situations. For instance Olof stated that:

When it comes to nudity one can see it being very much linked to men, the difference between men and women. Treating men and women differently.

(Olof, male preschool manager)

Although, all of our respondents seem to think it is very important that everyone should feel included and treated equally no matter if you are a man or a woman in preschool, this does not always seem to be the case. Anna is more explicit in this issue where she answers to the question whether male and female preschool teachers are treated the same by stating with determination that "no, I do not". On the following up question from whom they are not treated equally she answers:

In this particular case, I think I would probably say that it actually comes from the top. I do not know how much I can say but it is what we do with the children, how we work with the children and what our duties are. It could be situations where diapers are included and toilet situations and so on.

(Anna, female preschool teacher)
The complexity of this issue brings out questions about what ‘inclusion’ actually means in this occupation. ‘Equality treatment’ to what our respondent cherish on calls also for the same responsibilities despite the gender differences. But exposed to such facts, what the preschools preach for inclusion is far from the ideal assumption of "equality treatment". As a matter of fact, what they argue to be the meaning of being included is not always about these situations where men are not allowed to perform these “physical tasks” it also relates to how they are being treated by manager and their feelings regarding to how much they are allowed to contribute efficiently and effectively in their performance. This tension is also evident in Jacobs’s argument that clearly expresses his frustration regarding different treatment among men and women at the preschool he is part of.

*We are here because we are preschool teachers and educators in preschools. We do what needs to be done, not because we are men or women, but because it needs to be done. Whoever makes the best should do it, or someone else to be able to learn how to do it.*

(Jacob, male preschool teacher)

Here we rather experience a competing discourses of ‘equality treatment’ and ‘inclusion’ and what this mean when it comes to gender differences, particularly for men. The complexity of this issue lies on the contradictory tensions that both preschool and employees are exposed to. On the one hand these tensions were argued to be a result of parents’ demands for men not to change diapers or be alone with their children. On the other hand, our respondents argue that managers often fulfill parents wish and exclude men performing these certain tasks, so to avoid getting in conflict with the parents. But, due to this challenging situation men were also argued to take a step back by themselves and wish not to be part of tasks such as changing a diaper so to avoid being suspected. All these tensions suggests that equality treatment for what was preached as the main discourse of inclusion of men in childcare is affected by the interplay of different actors making these two discourses rather contradictory with each other. This of course is highly affected by social perceptions that childcare is a female-dominated occupation. But without putting much emphasis on this known fact, we rather decided to focus on more detailed issue, which were highlighted by our respondents to be the most
important ones in affecting inclusion of men in this occupation. These issues will be discussed in the following subsection.

4.5 Being a suspect

Today you have to be very strong in your role [as a male preschool teacher]. With everything written about things happening I can understand; it is no wonder that there are so few male preschool teachers. It has changed from when I started working; there were more preschool teachers before. When I started working we showered together with the children. We had gymnastics and then we showered with the children. If one had told that one had done that today, that person had not been able to stay at his job long time after that. It has changed a lot.

(Gunnar, male preschool manager)

In this occupation, suspicion often characterizes the discourse around male preschool teaching. Perceptions about what a man is capable of doing are filtered through normative assumptions of “child abuser” image, which unfortunately many times symbolizes male preschool teaching. We did not bring up media’s involvement in making people suspicious of male preschool teachers during the interviews but almost every respondent emphasized media as a very important aspect in contributing to the challenges of male preschool teaching. In a sense, media was blamed for enforcing this “male abuser” image, which certainly affects the society perceptions. Louise, a female preschool teacher, commented:

In recent years there have been some situations that have got a lot of attention in the media about male employees in preschool who have committed atrocities against children. Then it is easy to pull everyone together in some way even though one thing does not mean the other.

(Amelie, female preschool teacher)
Mona, another female preschool teacher characterizes the role of media in a similar way:

> Unfortunately things have happened and they have received a lot of attention in media, and then suddenly it does not feel like it is only two or three cases, but hundred. You do not know how many, you just know that it happened and then you get scared [as a parent].

(Mona, female preschool teacher)

In this perspective it is thus media to be hold responsible in representing this issue in a more negative light, as it seems to be. We see that male preschool teachers doing inappropriate things at work and the exposure in media have contributed a lot in creating suspicion for men working in this occupation. When referring to these “happenings” our respondents talk about sexual abuse incidents in Sweden during 2014 and 2015, where the guilty party was always a man. The role of media in representing such incidents becomes even more influential where such a sensitive topic is in question, considering the fact that child abuse allegations are zero tolerance in society eyes. For our respondents, media commonly “exaggerates” these incidents, which end up in challenging men’s individual respect and autonomy presuming always to be a gullible mass in this occupation. Whether this is the issue we do not know, but as Gunnar, a male preschool manager argues:

> Men who do the absolutely wrong things with kids are getting a lot of space in all the media. A hint is sufficiently. It does not need to be anything at all. Then you are screwed as a preschool teacher or as a man at the preschool. Today it just needs to be a hint, I think. Therefore, concerns like “Am I allowed taking a child in my arms?” “Am I allowed to hug a child?” and “Am I allowed to change a diaper?” arises.

(Gunnar, male preschool manager)

This comment adds more to the influential power of media. More specifically, it shows that Gunnar perceives media representation of sexual abuse incidents as leading to unfair stereotyping for men working in this occupation, more specifically contributing to negative representations of men as preschool teachers. It is thus these negative
connotations that have a major behavioral influence particularly for parents. Being exposed to these representations, it however seems difficult to lean back from stereotypes or making rational choices about what to see and believe. This was evident in Mona’s argument regarding the impact of media representation in generating suspicious for parents.

*It is the parents that I think of in the first place that can be a bit suspicious when they suddenly see men among the kids; it feels a bit weird many times [for the parents to meet male teachers at their child’s preschool]. But that is because they are afraid of their child and they have read a lot [about male preschool teachers in media]. You do not know how many times it happened, you just know that it happened and then you become a bit scared. “Can I trust these men”, “are they keeping an eye on that guy”, and so on.*

(Mona, female preschool teacher)

Nevertheless, not only does media seem to make parents suspicious of male preschool teachers; yet today’s media have a huge impact on how comfortable men feel while working at preschools. Jacob, a male preschool teacher emphasized such issue and explained to us what he feels when he is exposed to such media representations.

*I am always careful not to put myself in situations that could be challenged. I think it was in northern Skåne or Blekinge a year ago, a year and a half, this giant thing when media went completely bananas. It was of course correct of them to write about it but it was somewhat exaggerated and slightly too many hard angled leaders. Then it was really hard for me the first time. Not that I was accused of something, not because I was accused in any way. I am completely convinced about that the parents at my preschool truly trust me. But I thought that if they were reading these articles they would probably think that "we trust Jacob" but at the same time there may be something growing in their heads. I thought that was really tough (...) It was terrible what happened [in northern Skåne or Blekinge], there is nothing else to say about that, and all forms of mismanagement and exploitation of children in various ways are terrible and it affects everyone working as a teacher, especially male teachers. At that time, I...*
think it derailed in a way I have not experienced before, especially in the media.

It was really tough. (...) I understood that in this situation it is inevitable for parents not to have thoughts about me and that was tough for me.

(Jacob, male preschool teacher)

Through this story Jacob helps us understand that media representation also affected his behavior at work. Being the vulnerable party in this issue, male preschool teachers often find themselves judged by others although they did not do something wrong. It seems that such representations puts them in a position where they often change their behavior and how they act in the workplace such as avoiding challenging situations as exemplified in Jacob’s case. In a way it suggests that men find themselves in a position where they need to defend their career choice or more specifically justify it because they perceive that due to these negative assumptions they are often mistrusted. And again we see claims such as “I am always careful not to put myself in situations that could be challenged” exemplifying the fact that media plays an important role in shaping public opinion. In the context of male preschool teaching this opinion is highly based on prejudices and suspicion. By trying to avoid “challenging situations”, which from our interviewee’s perspectives are explained to be things like “changing a diaper” or “staying alone with a child”, men thus are not being fully included in this occupation. Nonetheless, there are many forces pushing men to act in a certain direction. As discussed above often tasks are changed due to parents’ demand and the manager’s’ decision to fulfill these wishes. But, sometimes men themselves choose not to perform these tasks. That being so, they are as well contributing to being excluded from this occupation. This suggests that media is very important in constructing social perception regarding the meanings of male preschool teaching.

4.6 Managing parents

When men choose to enter in childcare occupation their motives usually are being questioned due to negative occasions. As explained earlier this suspicion feeling is contributed by media representation. In our study both male and female employees talked about how men often are subjected to many restrictions when it comes to physical access to children, sometimes restricted in performing the same tasks as women when it comes to changing diapers or being alone with a kid in the toilets.
It seems that this issue is strongly associated with parents’ trust, embodying them as the main challenge simultaneously highly influential in shaping male preschool teaching. “Problem” is the word what our respondents used to describe the role of parents and their decision power in influencing the work of men working in this occupation. As Louise, one of the female preschool teachers that we interviewed stated: “(...) it is really hard to go against a parent when a parent is looking you in the eye and say to you, ‘I do not want you to help my child at the toilet’.” It seems that such perception is what makes parents hesitant to trust their children to men. But more importantly it shows that in society eyes men are the first ones to be accused when something bad happens in preschools, taking for granted that the abuser is always a man. In one example we noticed the effect of such negative representations. Spincer, a male preschool teacher talked about his experience of being a preschool teacher and a man. As he explains there was a time when he felt that he was treated differently because he was a man. He narrates a story where he was subjected to an accusation after a child complained to his parents that a “SPIRIT” 1 pinched him. The parents became suspicious requiring thus responsibility from the preschool. In response the manager would call Spincer and question him about this case. Although in the end it was confirmed that Spincer was not guilty, for him this story meant a lot of things. First and foremost, he felt that he was being blamed because he was a man. As he claimed:

They began to question me, “did you have a nickname, what did they called you”.

(...) And then it was about this ”male thing” [that Spincer was blamed just because he was a man].

(Spincer, male preschool teacher)

Spincer explains the reaction of the managers by stating that:

I was not at work, the day the managers called me. And said that “we need to talk to you, it is a child here who has said that someone has pinched him, a spirit. (...) Then it was me and another [man], and the other man did not begin with the

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1 SPIRIT refers to the fact that is closely associated with the name of SPINCER. It portrays the resemblance of the word with the name.
letter “S” so they took for granted that it was I (...) Also it was this about being labeled. I was suspected because I am a man. I was exposed. But nothing happened because I had not done anything and the mother apologized.

(Spincer, male preschool teacher)

The reaction of the manager to call Spincer immediately would further reinforce the child abuse allegations where men are usually presented as the guilty party, as such being the first one suspected. Nonetheless many things could be argued within this story. As seen, Spincer claimed the accusations were taken away with the justification that the parents were religious and maybe the prejudices were affected because of the similarity among names given that “SPIRIT” is closely related to the name “Spincer”. However, an important aspect of the story lies in the idea to call him immediately and make the first one being a suspect. Further, this challenged Spincer’s identity and shows that the “pedophile” discourse does really affect the inclusion of men in this occupation. His sex was probably the main variable to classify him as a “suspect” and thereby making him to be held accountable due to his gender. For Spincer this incident was the reason to change his occupation and decide to work in older children department.

A similar story was told by Bengt, a former male preschool teacher who experienced being the one suspected because of his gender. Bengt was a preschool teacher for more than 20 years making him a well-respected teacher by managers, female counterparts as well as parents. Nonetheless, Bengt’s career as a preschool teacher was detriment as his engagement with some school activities were perceived inappropriate from preschool managers and parents. Bengt uses these words as a starting point on confessing his story:

The disadvantage [of being a male preschool teacher] is that you can become a suspect in this way and I was simply on suspicion of child pornography crimes.

(Bengt, former male preschool teacher)

For him this suspicion started when he took some pictures of children during gymnastic hours where the lens of the camera also caught some children in the shower. As Bengt
explains, these pictures were taken due to requirements of the preschool to document all the activities that children engage in.

_I was doing my job. [As a preschool teacher] I am obliged to document all preschool activities and that includes gymnastics and outdoors activities and so on. I took some pictures when they [the children] were in the shower. I did not take pictures inside the shower but one could see the doorway with the girls on one side and boys on the other._

(Bengt, former male preschool teacher)

For various reasons these pictures were considered to be inappropriate by managers where they decided to take care of the issue by suspended Bengt, promising the parents that he would not come back. As Bengt explains the words they have used were like:

_I had to go home right away, I was suspended which I did not really understand._

(Bengt, former male preschool teacher)

His confusion was due to the rushed decision of the managers to promise the parents who were described as being completely terrified from this act that Bengt would not continue to work. So, he was fired and was never able to be a preschool teacher again at that preschool, due to the manager’s promise to the parents, even though Bengt was claimed to innocent by the investigation.

_What do we do now; he [the manager] has already promised the parents where some parents are completely terrified which I understand when there is such a big thing. The problem was that he said I would not be allowed to continue working there._

What both of the examples show is the sensitivity and complexity that characterizes this topic. The complexity of this issue is rather like “a chain” involving several factors, acting interconnected and affecting each other. For us it was interesting to notice that a large part of the conversation with our interviewees was focused on these dilemmas where managers were argued to be central. As both of the above examples showed it seems
that misconceptions of parents often put managers in a dilemma position where they struggle with their responsibility to support their staff and make the parents happy. But what is more interesting here is that the acts of managers in both of these cases were not in line with “equality treatment”, which they are claiming for. Instead, in interpreting their acts, they would rather be considered to be swiftly, violently, forcefully sort to speak. Considering Bengt’s example, firing him probably could be considered as an act triggered by the fear from media exposure. With all these media claims around sexual child abuse incidents, it seems that such negative representations have strong consequences in terms of management as well. In common sense, managers’ acts would not be the same for an ordinary person in an ordinary occupation. We do not hear often that a person is for instance promised not to come back without having the investigation done. But in these cases it was rather very vague evidence. More specifically, these examples show the contradictory discourses. For instance the act of taking pictures for documentation purposes in preschools is a normal practice, but when a man does this and especially in a sensitive settings like in a dressing room or shower it becomes problematic due to two different discourses – one being men as “pedophiles” and the other men as “preschool teachers” and sometimes they are conflated. In here it is evident a clash between discourses. In our empirical material “pedophile” is described to be part of the discourse of male preschool teaching. However these two discourses are contradictory, because male preschool teaching should be about child development, a faraway intention from being a pedophile. A recurrent theme in the interviews was a sense amongst interviewees that media contribute in enforcing the discourse of “pedophilila” often by over covering the past sexual abuse incidents. This certainly is argued to affect parent’s trust, which often is reluctant to enable men to perform certain activities. It seems that the discourse of “pedophilia” is more powerful in shaping the behavior of parents, often forgetting the fact that male preschool teaching is argued to be also very important for child development. These conflicting discourses thus contribute in shaping the meaning of male preschool teaching.

For some employees however, managers’ behavior certainly hinders the inclusion of men in this occupation. The majority of our respondents concur with the argument that in any occasions where men are asked to modify their care tasks falls into the line of
division of labor and it represents unequal treatment. As Louise, a female preschool teacher comments on the inclusion of men in this occupation:

\[
\text{No, they are of course not [included]. No, I would not say that, because we change tasks when it comes to be physical with the children.}
\]

(Louise, female preschool teacher)

This established routine where men were excluded from performing these “physical” tasks often was interpreted as an act of manager to avoid parental accusations. This was evident in Louise’s argument regarding the differences in the tasks. Amelie agrees upon this:

\[
\text{But then there are some cases (...) I have seen it coming from parents who say they do not want a man who change diapers on their children. But it has also come from the managers saying “they should not”. And they express it more as “we should not put the men in this situation”. So there is a difference between certain tasks.}
\]

(Amelie, female preschool teacher)

In cases like this it is not that managers were questioning the capabilities of men performing these tasks, rather their acts were more likely based on concerns what parents might think or how they would interpret the fact that a man would change a diaper or be alone with their child. Perhaps the intention of managers was to protect males not to be prey of these misconceptions, however by doing so they indeed contributed in excluding males being part of this occupation. It could thus be argued that parents’ demands often intrude the “equality treatment” to what most of the preschools aim for. Building trusts means thus preaching parents requests. For male preschool teachers it seems that to feel included in this occupation they often feel the need to get the approval of parents and society in general.

How our respondents talk about parents is not just to characterize them as a problem but also they talk about them in terms of economic resources. The dilemmas that managers were exposed, it seems that are part of a conflict of interest given that parents
are considered to be the “customers” of preschools. To what extent these suspicions are governed could also affect the business, which in this case means losing customers (parents). This issue is more explicit in Oscar’s argument where he argued on gender equality by claiming that:

*Then, what I said about equal treatment by managers, you might think that managers should stand up for us in the workforce and talk to the parents. But at the same time they must also have money for the children, it is often a lack of children. So if the parents are threatening to change to another preschool.*

(Oscar, male preschool teacher)

Nevertheless, it all comes down to the main issue where the division of labor due to factors such as suspicion, media representation are further evidence of a gendered structure of this occupation.

4.7 Cultural norms – Do they matter?

The discussion upon gender diversity and inclusion of men in childcare brought up another issue, which is found to be very important in hindering the inclusion of men in this occupation. Almost all of our respondents argued that culture adds up a lot to the chain of complexities, which characterizes this matter. In our observations of preschools we noticed the multicultural environment of these centers. Our respondents also brought up this aspect when they were asked to give general information about their workplace. As mentioned earlier women are traditionally seen as caring and nurturing and being a preschool teacher is in general associated to be a women’s role. At least this is the ideology that our respondents claim to be used in portraying the childcare occupation in most of the countries. Further one of our respondents Louise argues that Sweden is a country which is quite far ahead in the dialogue regarding gender equality, making it different from certain cultures.

*In Sweden we talk about the equality in both directions; men who work in female-dominated professions and women working in male-dominated professions and we have the dialogue in a different way than in many other cultures.*
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The point that Louise makes is that parents from different cultures are sometimes having different opinions regarding male preschool teaching.

When we have had disagreements towards our male staff it has been from families where there are of other cultures.

(Louise, female preschool teacher)

She further argues that when there have been disagreements towards what a male teacher can or cannot do it has mostly been affected from parents’ demand that have a different cultural background. Louise’s argument regarding cultural differences focuses more on how certain norms and values can affect people to concur with the fact that a man can be preschool teacher as well. We more interpreted that she was talking for a certain norm where “changing diapers” or “being alone with a child” is not a tradition as such is considered inappropriate, without generalizing culture of a country in general.

Also Bengt, the former preschool teacher, is describing parents coming from other countries than Sweden has being harder to convince and get used to the idea of male preschool teaching, due to the fact that they are not always used for a man to engage in such occupation. Oscar shares the same anchoring claiming that the fact that he has never been exposed to any prejudices is because he works in a department with almost only Swedish children.

There is quite a lot [people] coming from abroad where they have other values. It is often those who say that you cannot help their children at the toilet. This department I am working in, parents must apply for in a special way and we have actually only Swedish children here except from two. Maybe that is why it has not happened to me.

(Oscar, male preschool teacher)

How our respondents talk about parents as a problem is also related to different cultural backgrounds, explaining that often those parents are the ones that are not comfortable
with men taking care of their children in preschools that they attend. Jacob, a male preschool teacher, told us that he was exposed to such hesitation from parents who did not want him to change the diaper at their child. These parents, he recounted, were not comfortable with the idea of a man to perform such tasks due to religious matters. For them thus, it was not normal having a man taking care of their child like that. Jacob argued that he first questioned the request since changing diapers is one of his daily chores and something that has to be done. However he realized that it did not have to do with him as a person but that he is a man; he argued it to be a reasonable choice.

What we see in here is an ongoing culture clash, especially if someone comes from a different culture with different norms where it is tradition for men not to engage with children in a sense of “changing a diaper”. Under these circumstances it is understandable for these group of people to be hesitant for a man to work as a preschool teacher because as Louise explains it goes against their norm and values that they are used to. Our respondents represented that this culture clash is reflected particularly from families moving to Sweden, which may have different perspectives on gender roles where men are not always as involved in taking care of the children as women. Having thus their children at a Swedish preschool which from our respondents perspective the Swedish norm regarding gender roles is developed in another way with men working at preschools - may go against with the values and norms that they grew up with, making them feel uncomfortable with men at preschools. Louise, a female preschool teacher who maintains that, states this:

But I understand that what if you, for example, come from Iran, where a father would never change a diaper on his son or daughter. They leave a yearling on a toddlers department where there are working two men; it is against everything that person has learned since he or she was small.

(Louise, female preschool teacher)

It seems that these cultural norms hinder inclusion of male teachers. A very interesting comment was made by Louise who continues her argument on such cultural norms stating that men are in a larger extent more resistant about male preschool teachers
being involved in physical contact with children and perform tasks such as changing diapers and helping children at the toilet in comparison to women. As Louise states:

*Father’s actually. Swedish fathers as well. The men react more strongly to men who work at preschools, I would say overall, than women.*

(Louise, female preschool teacher)

In here again the importance of two discourses that mentioned above – man being a “pedophile” and man being a “male preschool teacher” as discourses surrounding male preschool teaching. We interpreted our respondent’s perspective that when it comes to people from different cultural background the reaction has nothing to do with the discourse of “pedophilia” as they are not concerned from this fact; rather it comes as an effect of belief, value or a norm to which a certain group of individual belong to. On the other hand, the concern of Swedish fathers is very interesting to know considering that Swedish norm is constructed on our empirical material as superior when it comes to gender equality. As this is assumed to be very common for Swedish people resisting male preschool teaching suggests a culture clash. Perhaps, media is what is affecting Swedish parents to act that way because they are assumed to be more sensitive to such representations. When it comes to these “pedophilia” stories of course it affects them but yet it does not have anything to do with religion issues. In contrast, these representations raises questions and suspicions due to past incidents discussed in media but not because of a religion belief. This shows that parents as the main actors in this issue are afraid for male preschool teaching but for different reasons. So no matter what cultural differences are, what actually hampers the inclusion of males in this occupation is the interplay of cultural norms concerning the gender roles. One norm is linked to the traditions where for a man it is not common to be a preschool teacher and engage in physical activities such “changing a diaper”. Parents thus hesitate male preschool teaching due to these reasons not because they are afraid of pedophilia. The other norm is advocated in the “pedophile panic” discourse, when it comes to parents who otherwise have no problems with overlapping gendered roles.
Chapter V - Discussion

In this chapter we will delve more in depth on our findings, answering to our research question. This analysis will be according to theory presented in the literature review chapter. The discussion will particularly focus on our two core findings from our empirical material - media representation and cultural pressures; that we argue to be very important insights into the meanings surrounding male preschool teaching in a diverse preschool environment. In the end of the chapter we will present our extended theoretical framework.

This study has shown that inclusion from preschool practitioners perspective is highlighted in the discourse of equality treatment, regardless demographic differences, gender, sexuality orientation and so on. However, results of the study show that the ideal of equality treatment was rather affected by certain pressures - parents, managers, cultural norms, political, implying that often female and male preschool teachers were not treated the same. This particularly was emphasized in changing the daily chores, where men were excluded from performing certain physical tasks such as “changing a diaper” or “helping a child at the toilet”.

This study demonstrated that two discourses rules this occupation - men as “pedophiles” and men as “preschool teachers” which we represent them as two extreme sides of the same continuum. The interplay of these discourses is affected by numerous factors with media representation and cultural norms being the most emphasized. Results show that cultural norms concerning gender roles have a huge influence on parents’ trust as the main stakeholders of this occupation. Parents’ trust is found to be affected by two different norms - one being linked to the traditions where preschool teaching is traditionally linked with women’s role, thus men being part of this occupation is considered to be inappropriate. The other norm is advocated on the media representation and their effect on “pedophilia-panic” discourse which concerns parents who do not have problems with overlapping gendered roles. Despite these two factors, results show that all preschool practitioners in different ways are contributing in the exclusion of men from this occupation.
5.1 Disantangeling the meanings of male preschool teaching

Our argument about inclusion of the men at preschools is based on the fact that women are being the norm at preschools in Sweden, since 97 percent of all preschool teachers are women (Jällhage, 2015). This explicit significant skew of gender distribution of employees correspond to what Kanter’s (1977) argues to be one of the main conditions to claim that this occupation is gendered in Sweden. Various reasons were discussed to influence the experiences of inclusion of men in preschools. Much of the writings in this issue, claim that challenges that men are exposed in childcare are deeply rooted in the society-cultural perception that teaching is a women’s work (Murray, 1996). In society eyes men working as preschool teachers have rather low ambitions, failing to fulfill the expected role as the primary breadwinner of the family (Teti and Lamb, 1986). As our reviewed literature show, more than 30 years have been passed from this assumption of gender roles but it seems that not many things have changed.

As shown in empirical material, we were subjected to a perspective that within preschools part of our study, both female and male employees’ claimed to feel included in their workplace. However, according to the literature, it seems that male preschool teachers are not included at this occupation. Referring to Mor Barak and Cherin’s (1998) definition of inclusion, the authors explain inclusion as the ability of one to be involved in work groups and be able to influence decision making. Our empirical analysis shows that often men were exposed to a situation where their tasks differed from their female counterparts. What caught mostly our attention was that most of the respondents argued that men are particularly excluded in performing physical tasks such as changing diapers, helping children at the toilet or even being alone with a child due to parents’ demands. In here thus we do not see an alignment to what theory preaches and what is actually happening in real life. As our findings suggest the term inclusion is understood in terms of the discourse of “equality treatment” but as Muzio and Tomlinson (2012) claims equality treatment in the workplace calls also for both men and women to be able to share the work responsibilities equally.

The point is that preschool teaching is about ‘caring’ and when it comes to showing such affection, men feel excluded because being able to be caring they need to perform the same tasks as women, even change diapers. We are not stating that the tasks are divided
purposefully, but when analyzing this issue we see two discourses that rule this occupation; men as a “sex category” and men as “preschool teachers”. The discourse men as a “sex category” is illuminated primary by the roles that men are expected to fill in society. These roles rely on the general assumptions that female-dominated occupations are low paid and that men should earn more money than women given that they are expected to be the primary breadwinner of the family. But besides of this, men are not expected to be caring, rather their acts should correspond to the particular type of being tough, in control and generally be engaged in so called “real man activities”. Whereas, the discourse of men as “preschool teachers” is the opposite where caring is one of the core attributes. In here, men are rather expected to show affection and be engaged in feminized tasks making the same contribution as women. Consequently, we argue that the exclusion of men is due to their sex category, neglecting to take into account the fact that they are preschool teachers as well. How male preschool teaching is perceived from the society is argued also by Barnard et al (2000) stating that men working in this occupation mean that they are challenging the general assumptions engaging in a gender-aberrant act.

We agree with the literature that suggests that such perceptions often affect men seeking this occupation as well as their inclusion in childcare. Nonetheless, our diverse stakeholders interviewed gave us different perspectives upon the inclusion of men at preschools. These insights add further to our understanding on how preschool practitioners make sense of the inclusion of men. The male preschool teachers as the marginalized group did not consider themselves as “victims” of any occasions, however they expressed their concern about male preschool teaching and the fact that male teachers are often being exposed to prejudices and exclusion from certain chores. Three out of four male preschool teachers we interviewed had one example each, showing that they have experienced being treated differently because they are men. The managers as the formal group talk about inclusion more in terms of dilemmas that this issue exposes to them. Their insight to inclusion of men in this occupation show a tension between the need to respond to parents demands on one hand and supporting male staff on the other. Further, some female preschool teachers as the majority group argues that it was the managers who were not explicit in their approach towards the inclusion of men when it comes to diapers and toilet situations, consequently this made them and the
male teachers insecure of the manager’s position in the question. Their insight to inclusion of men in this occupation is rather vague. This ambiguity in making sense of inclusion of men in this occupation seems to be in line with our reviewed literature which shows that men entering a traditional female occupation may “face the risk of being unsupported” (Evans and Frank, 2003 p.279) and as Murray (1996) states men may often face unwritten rules regarding to what extent they should take care of the children, for instance restricting them from changing diapers on the children. In a sense, it could not be argued that men are totally excluded from this occupation since physically they are present. However as Roberson (2004) argues inclusion means removing all the obstacles in the workplace and ensuring full participation and contribution of employees; which contradicts our empirical findings.

From our interviewees we noticed that suspicion, prejudices and lack of trust from parents, were mentioned as major challenges affecting male preschool teaching. Our interviewees’ experiences are in accordance with what Wiest et al., (2010) explained that the main concerns about male preschool teaching are due to parent’s fear of child abuse allegations. Because of these challenges it seems that men as explained by Galley (2000) often find themselves in a situation where they feel that they are being under investigation. This ongoing pressure due to prejudices was evident in claims such as “If it would happen to me, I would not stay working as a preschool teacher”. This is in line to what Barış (2013) argues that prejudices are making it harder for male preschool teachers to perform their profession. In literature this is described as “the fear factor” exemplifying the frustration of men for not being able to perform in the same way as female counterparts (Wiest et al., 2010), which in turn Galley (2000) argues that it generates the feeling of a constant need for men to prove themselves and their capabilities towards parents. This “fear factor” was also quite expressed in our findings, making it a central emotion of the study. It seems that parents were highly affected by this emotion as they often were represented as stakeholders that fear the most male preschool teaching. Some parents fear male preschool teaching due to child abuse allegations where men was always portrayed as the suspect party. While other fear male preschool teaching because this is considered to be against their values and norms that they are accustomed to. Meanwhile, the fear factor was shown among managers as well
given that male preschool teaching was often portrayed to bring complex managerial problems.

Sometimes we got the feeling that often male preschool teachers are by themselves taking a step back and requesting to not perform these duties; an act explained by Murray (1996) as avoidance of challenge situations that would lead to suspicion. A possible consequence of acting this way would be that they are actually contributing in reproducing this image of “male abuser” by themselves. Interestingly enough, this behavior was often argued to be driven and supported by managers with the argument to protect male preschool teachers from any accusations. We however believe that managers acted this way due to their concern regarding what parents would think or how they would interpret the fact that a male preschool teacher is engaging in these “physical tasks”. The reaction of managers to not let men performing certain tasks was argued to be grounded on protection reasons so to help men not be prey of misconceptions. But, by doing so they are also reinforcing the exclusion of men from this occupation. Hence, all of our respondents agree that managers were ultimately responsible for creating an inclusive environment, highlighting that their support is essential in making them feel included particularly for men. Nonetheless, we do not interpret this situation as equal treatment between male and female preschool teachers because it shows that men are not always being trusted in the same extent as women to do certain chores.

Painting the landscape of men working in this occupation in line with literature we argue that the complexity of this issue is like a chain where it is affected by a lot of actors, sometimes pushing even men to exclude themselves from this occupation. It all starts with social discourses - one being men as “pedophiles” and the other one men as “preschool teachers” often being conflated. It continues on generating suspicion, which frequently is a label for male workers in this occupation and further is affected by different stakeholders such as parents, managers and society in general. We concur with all the challenges mentioned by literature review that are important in affecting the inclusion of men. However, we draw to a conclusion from our study that media representation and cultural norms are two important insights into the meanings surrounding male preschool teaching in diverse preschools.
5.2 Shaping inclusion through media representation and cultural norms

The interplay of media representation and cultural pressures in shaping male preschool teaching were particularly emphasized by our respondents, making them very stimulating to be further analyzed.

As we know in today’s fast paced environment media has great power in affecting and shaping people’s minds and thoughts. In our study, the power of media contributes to what actually was suggested in Ranson (1977) study that men in this occupation often feel mistrusted and misunderstood. The role of media thus is associated with society perceptions regarding child abuse allegations where men usually are guilty party. As our empirical material shows this is highlighted in Sweden due to media representation of sexual abuse incidents during 2014 and 2015 in preschools where in all cases men were guilty and convicted. It seems that negative representation of the male preschool teaching role by far is considered as the main source for strengthening the suspicion on men at preschools thereby affecting their inclusion in this occupation.

Teti and Lamb (1986) argue that the lack of preschool teachers is not something new. Neither is the discussion about men at preschools. But, in early ages this conversation has been understood differently in comparison to now. We concur with the argument of most of our respondents explaining that media influences this difference, becoming an important factor in shaping the meaning of male preschool teaching in diverse preschools. Our respondents take a critical stance on media representations claiming that they often “exaggerate” this issue. It seems that media have a tendency to over-cover these sensational stories. But as Hemingway (2015) argues it is impossible for an individual to remain completely objective regarding these topics with immense public interest. Such representation certainly plays an important role into a person’s interpretation of a real life incident. Putting this in the context of male preschool teaching, thus for parents as the most important stakeholders it is hard to make reasonable decisions on what to believe or not. We highlight the importance of media by further arguing that these representations contributed to the construction of social discourse as men being the “pedophile” often neglecting the significance of male preschool teaching as very important in child development. The discourse of men as “pedophiles” is the opposite of the discourse of men as “preschool teachers”. The
contradictory effect is even more resembled when it comes to childcare occupation. We are aware that there is nothing in the world that states that you can be a pedophile and be less than a preschool teacher. However, being a pedophile and performing a sales occupation it does not affect selling so much. But being a pedophile and working with children, certainly has a huge impact especially because this issue is very sensitive in general. On the other hand, avoiding male preschool teaching would not be the perfect solution either, because no one can guarantee that women are not capable to act in the same way.

In addition, there is a tendency of over representation of men by media when it comes to the “pedophilia” discourse. This makes them first suspects when it comes to any misconceptions in preschools. Further, this might be related with what we argued before that in most of child abuse incidents the guilty party was always a man. This over representation however tend to contribute in reproducing the image and the feeling among men to be “pedophiles”. Nonetheless, all this discussion is tricky with no right solution, because if we consider media role it is understandable that they need to represent child abuse incidents as they represent a major public concern as such they need to be communicated.

Furthermore, it is not only media that contributes to the reproduction of such image for men. Our empirical analysis shows that managers, parents, female colleagues and men themselves contribute as well. This is particularly evident for instance in one of the examples where a manager fired a male preschool teacher due to these misconceptions. Women also participate in this when they change their tasks with men. Or, when a man is saying that they do not want to change a diaper because it may create suspicion, it suggests that they are participating in reproducing this image by themselves. In slightly different terms, but yet it could be argued that everybody is part of this.

The significance of the role of media becomes even more interesting given that we are talking about these diverse preschools where gender equality is central. However, media power in reproducing the discourse of men as “pedophiles” show that it enforces the parents fear and uncertainty which leads to demands on preschools on not letting men
perform certain tasks such as changing a diaper or accompanying a child at the toilet. For preschools this becomes a big challenge in creating an inclusive environment.

Another insight surrounding the male preschool teaching phenomenon links to cultural norms. As argued in empirical material, preschool employees talk about inclusion of men in terms of cultural pressures as well. The discussion of culture takes light in the interplay of cultural norms regarding gender roles. It seems that the inclusion of men in this occupation is affected by two different norms – one being linked with traditions and the other one with media representation. As our respondents argue, sometimes people when coming from different cultures are more hesitant to male preschool teaching. This because they have certain norms and values where men engaging in activities such as “changing a diaper” is considered to be inappropriate behavior. We believe that this has a lot to do with the general assumption that childcare is a women’s work. This difference in cultural perceptions we also see in Murray (1996) argument that the prevalent image of this occupation is “mother-teacher” where in most of the cultures the women is the one who takes care of the children. We are not thus generalizing our argument for all the cultures, but we argue that these cultural differences are very important, especially because they account for men to not fully perform their responsibilities as preschool teachers. Thus, among other factors contributing to the division of tasks in preschools is also culture especially due to certain norms. It adds up to the understanding of inclusion of men in preschools from a different perspectives, where men are excluded due to a certain norm where male preschool teaching is not a common phenomenon and not necessarily from suspicion factors. We believe that this matters for consideration particularly because recent developments in Sweden where according to national data in 2015 Sweden grew by 103,662 people a record mainly concerning people with different cultural background (About Sweden, 2016). For these people, male preschool teaching may take different meaning and understanding. Nevertheless, cultural norms can be embodied on the discourse of “pedophile- panic”, which comes from parents who otherwise have no problem with overlapping gender roles.

Insights of preschool practitioners surrounding the meaning of inclusion of men in this occupation could be organized in a continuum with parents being the most important stakeholders. At one hand it seems that media representation, cultural norms and
society perceptions in general is what affects the behavior of parents often refusing for men to take care of their child. On the other hand we put manager's role in responding to these dilemmas, whom acts tend to contribute to such restrictions for full participation. Examining the dynamics of inclusion in childcare is rather an ambiguous topic where a lot of factors play a significant role in shaping the meaning of inclusion of men in this occupation. There are still many unanswered questions about what does male preschool teaching mean, but how it is interpreted among employees has a lot to do with manager's role in shaping an inclusive environment for men in this occupation. Our findings suggests high expectations for managers to solve things. However, we also saw that managers often find themselves in a very difficult position where different actors such as parents, colleagues, and political pressures expose them to different pressures. Thereby, we argue that they cannot be the perfect solution. Indeed, they often become the cause of the problem of inclusion by seeking a shortcut path in dealing with this issue. This would refer to their acts to often decide to fulfill parents wish and decide for men not to perform a certain task such as “changing a diaper”. With this in mind we believe that it is worth considering the implications of media representation and cultural norms as insights into the meanings surrounding male preschool teaching in a diverse environment. As well as we believe that further research should be undertaken to investigate the role of managers as being a very important stakeholder in the inclusion of men in this occupation.

5.3 Extended theoretical framework

By concluding our discussion and as promised in the literature review we will now present our extended theoretical framework (figure 3). As you can see, the left side of the framework is the same as in figure 1 in the literature review. However, in the extended version we see how the interaction of parents, managers, media and cultural norms are affecting the diverse preschools and the inclusion of male preschool teachers. We will come back to this interaction in the next chapter, which is our conclusion.
Caught in the crossfire
6 Conclusion

In this final chapter our aim is to answer our research question and in that way fulfil the purpose of this paper. Furthermore, we will present our theoretical contribution, suggestions to preschool practitioners and finally suggestions for further research.

• *How do preschool practitioners make sense of the inclusion of men?*

The purpose of this research has been to conduct a 'triangular insight' and in that way find out how employees at preschools, both male and female, and preschool managers, make sense of the inclusion of men in diverse preschools. We have realized that parents, who in turn are affected by media and cultural norms, affect the inclusion of male preschool teachers. We have identified examples of where the inclusion of male preschool teachers is challenged and how the employees at preschools interpret managers as being the ones outermost responsible for the inclusion of male preschool teachers - which puts them in a difficult situation when also being pressured by parents.

Men are clearly an underrepresented group in preschools and our research shows that male preschool teachers are argued to be exposed at workplace but at the same time argued to be well needed. The government's work on having more male preschool teachers and the prejudices about male preschool teachers are contradictory to each other. It takes time for a male preschool teacher to be trusted at workplace, especially by the parents. Inclusion of men in this occupation is often shaped by parent's suspicion, making them unable to fully participate and perform the responsibilities that this occupation requires. On the other hand managers seems to be shattered in what direction to go and whom to support; parent's demand to not let men perform certain tasks such as changing a diaper or accompanying a child to the toilet, or the male preschool teachers in order to shape the meaning of equality treatment given that changing diapers are a job related responsibility that both female and male preschool teachers are asked to perform. Neither does female or male preschool teachers know what stand to take, due to manager's ambiguity.
In answering our research question thus it could be claimed that preschool practitioners make sense of the inclusion of men as an issue that is highly influenced by parents. They make sense of the behavior of parents in this issue by relying on the effect that cultural norms and media exposure have on this matter. More specifically, cultural norms were argued in terms of gender roles where our study shows that male preschool teaching is shaped by two different norms. One norm is advocated in traditions where for some parents men engaging in caring occupations is considered to be something outside the norms and values that they are accustomed to. The other norm is advocated on the discourse of “pedophile-panic” which is reproduced by media representation and concerns those parents who do not have a problem with overlapping gender roles. Further, they make sense of the inclusion of men as a managerial problem, which is characterized by the need to balance parents concerns regarding male preschool teaching, which often lead to exclude them from certain tasks and the need of including men in this occupation.

Our interpretation of this matter however is constructed based on two social discourses that rule this occupation: one being men as “pedophiles” and the other men as “preschool teachers”. As discussed, these two discourses are often conflated. We concur with our respondent’s argument that media representation contributes a lot to the reproduction of the image “male abuser”. Or that inclusion of male teachers may clash with cultural norms. However, what we argue to be important is the behavior of preschool practitioners toward this issue. It seems that parents, managers, female colleagues and men themselves contribute in reproducing this image. We argue that when a manager decides to fulfill parents wish and change the task for male preschool teachers, they are excluding men from this occupation. Or when a female colleague accepts to switch the tasks with a man, they are also contributing on excluding men from this occupation. Furthermore, when a man take a step back to avoid to engage in doing certain tasks so to avoid suspicion, they are as well contributing to reproduce this negative image and be excluded from this occupation. So, in a sense inclusion of men is not just affected by external pressures, but by internal actions as well. We argue that by following the short path to settle down tensions preschools is just confirming the negative connotations regarding roles of men in this occupation, forgetting thus the importance of their participation in child development.
6.1 Managerial implications

Although, our aim in this study was not to focus on manager’s role in shaping an inclusive environment for male preschool teachers, their behavior toward this issue was highly emphasized among employees. The main complication for managers seems to be how to handle the situation with the inclusion of male preschool teachers at the same time as encountering parents questioning male preschool teachers to perform certain tasks - which is to exclude the men. Managers are an important aspect in the question since their decision may impact the image of male preschool teachers. To try to have every stakeholder's interest in mind may create exclusion and a problem instead of inclusion. The managers have an important role and are the ones setting the norms and standards for the inclusion of their employees and if the managers argues that the parents are the ones who decides about their children at the preschool, this excludes the male preschool teachers.

However, we are not arguing that it is the managers that are the ones who solely can solve the exclusion problem since media and cultural norms are hard to decide about. Perhaps it takes quite competence to deal with this issue since managers are in a middle of different pressures - media, cultural norms, parents, political pressures, which is not an easy situation. Rather by outlining these pressures we believe that it could be very helpful for them to be aware of other insights or options on how they could think when they are dealing with this issue. Understanding the effect of these pressures is not limited to managers only. It could be helpful for parents and female preschool teachers as well due to the fact that they are also argued to be contributing in creating exclusion rather than inclusion in one way or another.

6.2 Theoretical contributions

Our theoretical contribution is within the area of the inclusion of men at a female-dominated occupation such as preschools. We have within this paper described what external factors are impacting the inclusion of male preschool teachers - media and cultural norms. From our reviewed literature we argue that research on men’s experiences in female-dominated occupations is fairly scant and we believe that the interplay of media and cultural norms deserve further theoretical consideration. It
should be noted that much of the focus in the reviewed literature is on occupations such as “nursing” as a female-dominated occupation. Furthermore, theory within the area regarding men working in a female-dominated occupation was limited and not up to date. Most of the writings focus on the advantages that tokenism status brings for men being part of this occupation. The issue of tokenism in our study however was scarcely present. Rather our study shows that the meaning of being a man in a female-dominated occupation is contextual and insights regarding the role of parents, managers, media representation and cultural norms are part of this context – it seems as they are caught in the crossfire.

6.3 Suggestions for preschool practitioners

We are aware that male preschool teaching is a complex issue and having a definite solution is a difficult option. Therefore it is difficult for preschool practitioners to please each actor being part of this occupation. Our suggestion to preschool practitioners is that when they find themselves exposed to different tensions, they should keep in mind that inclusion calls for equality treatment. This particularly refers when they take decisions regarding parents asking for certain treatment for their children. Making an exception for some parents and promising them to not have male preschool teachers perform certain tasks may contribute to negative implications on the inclusion of men. First and foremost, such acts reinforce the negative image of “male abuser” which is part of the “pedophile” discourse that rules this occupation. By doing so, in a sense they confirm the suspicion of parents making them reluctant to accept male preschool teaching. On the other hand, providing support to male employees is considered very important for them to feel included in this occupation. For them not being able to participate in particular tasks may suggest that they are not being trusted among colleagues as well. As the employees argue equal treatment to be a main factor for inclusion, we argue that this is an important area to work with.

In order to reach inclusion of male preschool teachers, we suggest managers and employees to create and implement a guideline that provides information about who are supposed to do what, which the preschools interviewed stated that they did not have today. This could help both the preschool teachers, managers and parents to have a pronounced picture of the preschools standards and the reasons why, since at least

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preschool teachers argued that they did not really know what side the managers are taking of parent's and male preschool teachers. Furthermore, it would help the managers to have something to lean back on when being in situations where their employees are being questioned due to their gender. Media and norms are hard for preschool managers to control, but their own visions are not.

6.4 Suggestions for future research

We think that this problem area is really important to emphasize since no matter how much money the government is spending on having more male preschool teachers we do not think this will happen if male preschool teachers continues to be excluded at workplace - who wants to work at a workplace where you feel suspected just because of your sex? From the statistic numbers regarding men starting and dropping out of preschool teaching education programs one can tell that more men than are working, as preschool teachers are interested in the careers. However, reality seems to be too scary with exclusion at workplace, why many men studying to become a preschool teacher's do not complete their education. This dilemma provides many approaches for future research:

- Examine the perspective of other parents, who is another stakeholder at preschools
- Examine cultural pressures in a diverse environment and how they affect inclusion of men as preschool teachers.
- Examine internal tensions that male preschool teaching exposes.
- Examine society discourses that shape male preschool teaching

Our respondents agreed upon the fact that it is always parents who are the ones questioning to what degree male preschool teachers are allowed to perform their profession. It would be interesting to know about the parent’s point of view to have a wider picture of the problem with the inclusion of male preschool teachers. What is the parent's view of the situation? What do the parents who requests male preschool teachers not to perform certain tasks have in mind when making this request? Furthermore, it could be very interesting to examine cultural pressures in a diverse preschool and what consequences the interplay of cultural norms have in inclusion of

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men in this occupation. We also believe that internal tensions that male preschool teaching brings to a preschool deserve an attention to be studied. Perhaps this study could be in the scope of understanding the role of managers and how they cope with this issue. Last but not least we strongly suggest that a further research is needed on the society discourse and its effect on constructing the meanings of male preschool teaching. It would be interesting to further know the consequences that these discourses expose to inclusion of men in this occupation.
7 References


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## 8 Appendix

### 8.1 Appendix A – Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years in preschool</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Length of interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>About 45</td>
<td>About 20 y</td>
<td>Preschool Manager</td>
<td>47 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gunnar</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>About 60</td>
<td>More than 20 years</td>
<td>Preschool Manager</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olof</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>About 65</td>
<td>More than 20 years</td>
<td>Preschool Manager</td>
<td>41 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mona</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>About 45</td>
<td>About 10 years</td>
<td>Preschool Teacher</td>
<td>29 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>About 35</td>
<td>About 7 years</td>
<td>Preschool Teacher</td>
<td>37 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>About 35</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Preschool Teacher</td>
<td>28 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katarina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>About 45</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>Preschool Teacher</td>
<td>20 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louise</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>About 30</td>
<td>6 years</td>
<td>Preschool Teacher</td>
<td>29 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amelie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>About 35</td>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>Preschool Teacher</td>
<td>21 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spincer</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>About 35</td>
<td>12 years</td>
<td>Preschool Teacher</td>
<td>17 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscar</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>About 30</td>
<td>About 5 years</td>
<td>Preschool Teacher</td>
<td>19 minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bengt</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>About 65</td>
<td>More than 20 years</td>
<td>Former Preschool Teacher</td>
<td>50 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8.2 Appendix B - Interview schedule preschool managers

1. Before we start: Can you introduce yourself?
   a) How long have you been working as a preschool manager?
   b) Why did you choose this profession?
   c) What did you do before starting as a preschool manager?
   d) Have you studied anything that concerns what you are currently working with?

2. Can you inform us about the preschools you are managing?
   a) How many employees do you have?
   b) How many men and how many women?

3. What are your daily chores?

4. What do you think regarding the fact that in general, only about three percent of the Swedish preschool teachers are male?
   a) Is this something you are working with when making decisions regarding recruitment, and in that case how? Is this something you have in mind?

5. What comes into your mind when you think about the term “gender diversity” at workplace?
   a) Do you have any policies that concerns gender diversity and inclusion in this occupation?
   b) In your opinion, are male and female preschool teachers treated the same?
   c) Does male and female preschool teachers have the same daily chores? Anything that deviates?
   d) How important do you think working for gender diversity among preschool teachers at preschools is?

6. What comes into your mind when you think about the term “inclusion” at workplace?
   a) From your point of view, whose responsibility is it to shape an inclusive environment at a workplace?

7. In your experience, what are the challenges faced by members of underrepresented group in the workplace?
   a) What strategies have you used to address these challenges and how successful were those strategies?

8) What is your vision of gender diversity at an institution like preschool?
   a) What does it mean for you to have a commitment to gender diversity? How have you demonstrated that commitment here?
   b) Tell us how you work with people to create or foster diversity in the workplace?
8.3 Appendix C - Interview schedule preschool teachers

1. Before we start: Can you introduce yourself?
   a) How long have you been working as a preschool teacher?
   b) Why did you choose this profession?
   c) What did you do before?
   d) Have you studied anything that concerns what you are currently working with?

2. Can you inform us more about the preschool?

3. What are your daily chores?
   a) Does your tasks differ from any of your colleagues?

4. What do you think regarding the fact that in general, only about three percent of the Swedish preschool teachers are male?
   a) MALE: How do you think about your gender linked to your choice of career?
   b) How do you think about preschool and its links to a traditional woman’s role?

5. What comes into your mind when you think about the term “gender diversity” at workplace?
   a) In your opinion, are male and female preschool teachers treated the same?
   b) Does male and female preschool teachers have the same daily chores?
   c) How important do you think working for gender diversity among preschool teachers at preschools is?

6. What comes into your mind when you think about the term “inclusion” at workplace?
   a) From your point of view, whose responsibility is it to shape an inclusive environment at your preschool?
   b) Do you feel as included as everyone else of your co-workers? Is there something you would like to change?

7. As said, men are an underrepresented group in preschools? In your experience, what are the challenges faced by men at preschools?
   a) What could be the advantages or disadvantages of being male / female preschool teacher compared to the other sex?
   b) From your point of view, are there any disadvantages of being a man and working in a female dominated position in Sweden?
   c) MALE: Have you ever felt that you were treated differently because you are a male preschool teacher?
   d) Is there anything that hampers you in your work?

8. What is your vision of gender diversity at an institution like preschool?