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Perceptions of Gender Diversity Among Swedish Preschool Teachers

Understanding the Stagnant Inclusion of Men in a Female Dominated Occupation

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Master's Program in Managing People, Knowledge, and Change

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Abstract

Title	Perceptions of Gender Diversity Among Swedish Preschool Teachers - Understanding the Stagnant Inclusion of Men in a Female Dominated Occupation
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Keywords	Gender Diversity, Preschool Teachers, Gender Stereotypes, Male Homosocial Desire, Female Primacy, Male Role Model, Occupational Sex Segregation, Heightened Visibility.
Thesis Purpose	The purpose of this research is to increase the understanding of occupational gender segregation by exploring how preschool teachers and principals perceive gender diversity, what they consider to be the primary issues that hinder men from entering this profession, and what they think a larger inclusion of men in the profession could lead to.
Theoretical Perspective	We based our research on diversity, the theory of marginalization and occupational sex segregations to gain background knowledge and understanding of general perceptions on people in gender atypical professions, and utilized it as our starting point.
Methodology	Using a qualitative research approach, we conducted 11 semi-structured interviews and interpreted the empirical materials to acquire a broad perspective of perceptions on how teachers and principals view gender diversity in Swedish preschools.
Research Questions	(1) How do teachers and principals perceive gender diversity in their occupation? (2) What are the primary issues that hinder gender diversity in preschools according to teachers and principals? (3) How do teachers and principals perceive the inclusion of male teachers would affect this profession?
Findings	We found that preschool teachers and principals perceive gender diversity as generally positive. However, it is also difficult to achieve in practice due to several issues that discourage men from entering this profession: (1) materialistic motivation concerns; (2) suspicion of molestation and cultural unacceptance; (3) absence of male to male connection. In terms of the inclusion of men, there are positive attitudes towards what they could bring to this profession in general. For instance, male role models and complementary traits which can help to enhance the work efficiency.
Conclusions	Both men and women in the profession make clear distinctions between what each gender represent. Women are considered naturally better at the profession, which inspired us to introduce female primacy as a new concept. Men are expected to fill a stereotypical role connected to their gender, whether or not this is congruent with their personalities. While gender diversity is desired, men are rarely evaluated on equal grounds as women. Instead they experience heightened visibility, obscuring their actual performances. This makes men detach from, rather than emphasize, their masculinity. Both men and women perceive that male teachers in general have a need for other male colleagues, which inspired us to introduce the concept of male homosocial desire.

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1 Introduction

Gender diversity is generally desirable in most professions. Despite this, several professions show no progress within this aspect. One of the clearest examples of this is preschool teaching. This is especially true for Sweden (Peeters, 2007). Even in a country with prevalent currents of feministic rhetoric, it appears that occupational gender segregation is still at large (Williams, 1993). Old gender stereotypes and norms seem to be sluggish to change. With this thesis, we will explore how a branch can be dominated by one gender year after year, despite encouragements of change.

1.1 Background

Preschool teaching is a female dominated occupation all over the world. However, certain steps have been taken to introduce more men in the profession. According to Peeters (2007) in 1996, the European commission network on child care set a target to increase the ratio of male workers in preschools to 20% in European countries by 2006. No European country achieved this target. Though there were improvements in Denmark, Norway and Belgium, the progress was not remarkable in Sweden. In spite of all the efforts to make this profession gender neutral in Sweden, the male preschool workforce only constitutes around 3,5% of the total, which has been a stagnant figure for the last ten years (Fornander, 2014).

Even with the low ratio of men among preschool teachers in Sweden, there have been an exorbitant amount of scandals, accusations and convictions against people belonging to this group. On the 9th of February 2016, *Sydsvenskan* wrote about a 41-year-old male nanny in Kristianstad, who was found guilty in the court of law for four cases of aggravated rape and 19 cases of sexual abuse against kids in preschool between ages one to three (Kihlström, 2016). He caught the attention of the police after molesting a ten-year-old girl at an amusement park. Ironically, the strongest evidence against him was his own video footage of his sexual encroachments, recorded on his cell phone (Granlund, 2015).

Sadly, there are plenty of other recent cases of sexual abuse by men in preschool. An intern at a preschool in Högsby was found guilty on 24 indictments including aggravated child rape and aggravated sexual exploitation of children, as well as child pornography crimes for documenting his crimes on his cellphone and posting it online. Some of the crimes were committed on the very

first day he started his internship (Edsenius and Näslund, 2014). Another intern at a preschool in Borås was also convicted of sexually abusing several different kids during a period of time when he was responsible for opening and closing the preschool (Nilsson, 2014; Sveriges Radio, 2015). This man also documented his crimes via cell phone pictures and had them used against him as evidence in the court of law (Granberg, 2014).

These scandals appear to have ramifications. After what happened in Borås, regulations affecting students studying to become preschool teachers were changed. Interns were from that point on no longer allowed to change diapers or assist the children with their toilet visits. They were also forbidden to be alone with the children (Sveriges Radio, 2015). This has created a discrepancy between the role of the intern and the job they are studying for, in the sense that diaper changing is a natural work task in the profession. Not only that, but it has also made male preschool teacher students worried about their reputation.

While talking to SVT, Swedish national television, several male students of the preschool teaching program in Gothenburg expressed their concerns of being associated with the recent crimes, and thereby restricting them from openly demonstrating pride and joy over their work (Fornander, 2014). In Malmö the situation is similar. There, only ten per cent of the students who enroll in the program are men, and only half of them complete the education. For women, this figure is 72 per cent (Sydsvenskan, 2016). When southern Swedish newspaper Sydsvenskan (2016) went to Malmö University to inquire about possible reasons for this, one preschool teacher student thought that it is harder for men to feel a sense of belonging to the work since it is female-coded. The course administrator of the preschool teacher program was under the impression that men are very visible and experience a lot of distrust against them.

Even though scandals occur from time to time, are men generally under so much suspicion that they refrain from choosing this profession, or are there other subtler reasons why this profession has been female dominated since its inception? If there are other reasons as well, it might add to the discussion of female dominated professions in general, and what makes it difficult to bring more men in to them.

Meanwhile, though the occupation is overall heavily gender segregated, there are also examples of very successful inclusion of men in preschool teaching. At a preschool in Västerås for example,

five out of fourteen teachers are men, and it seems to be appreciated and functioning well. Interestingly, some of the men working there, when interviewed by Swedish national television SVT, feel certain that having men at a preschool attracts other men, stating that they applied to the school for the very same reason (Karlsson, 2014).

1.2 Research Aim and Purpose

Sweden is consistently being rated highly on global gender equality rankings. During 2014 and 2015 it was number four in terms of job opportunities and salary differences on World Economic Forum's report over global gender gap (World Economic Forum 2014; World Economic Forum 2015). Yet, even in one of the world's most progressive countries in terms of gender equality, certain occupations are still almost completely dominated by one gender. This contradiction is what sparked our curiosity.

Scholars like Pringle (1992; 1995; 1998a) have argued that men working with children should be thoroughly scrutinized due to the amount of crimes, both violence and sex related, they perform towards children and women. The amount of crimes associated with men in the profession may very well be a deterrent, but it is unclear how strong it is. After all, many other professions have a heavy gender segregation without such serious crimes connected to the underrepresented groups.

At the same time, other scholars argue strongly for gender diversity in general as a source of creativity and innovation (Bassett-Jones, 2005) as well as bringing additional value and means to reach organizational goals (Zanoni and Janssens, 2003). We want to explore what attitude male preschool teachers are met with, and how preschool teachers in general perceive a larger inclusion of men can affect their workplaces, in an attempt to uncover why men are so rare among preschool teachers. The purpose with this research is to increase the understanding of occupational gender segregation. To do this, we pursue the following research questions:

- How do teachers and principals perceive gender diversity in their occupation?
- What are the primary issues that hinder gender diversity in preschools according to teachers and principals?

- How do teachers and principals perceive the inclusion of male teachers would affect this profession?

We choose a qualitative interpretive method for investigating our research questions. We conducted 11 semi-structured interviews of which 9 respondents were preschool teachers and 2 respondents were principals. Since we were not only interested in learning the men's attitude towards this problem, we instead opted to explore the attitudes present in, and the environments of, preschools generally. As such, we choose two different preschools to perform interviews at. One without men, and one with two male preschool teachers. The initial reason for this was that we wanted to see if the attitudes towards men were different at a workplace without them. But it also turned out to provide us with additional viewpoints, as we got to interview women who had never worked with fulltime employed male colleagues. We also conducted an extra interview with a man working at a third preschool, just to include an extra male voice on the subject. But to clarify once more, the aim with this thesis is not to research men's perception of the matter, but rather preschool teachers' opinions and perceptions in general. Men are actually overrepresented in our interviewee roster with a ratio of 27% compared to the national ratio of 3,5%.

1.3 Thesis Outline

This paragraph will provide the readers with a brief overview of the following chapters. Moving on from this introduction we will present our literature review. This review will cover various theories about gender segregation. These include concepts such as male primacy and gender essentialism which add to the discussion regarding why men and women end up in different professions or positions of power. In conjunction with this, we will explore the discussion around token identity, and what specific attitudes and challenges men in gender atypical professions are met with. We will also bring up diversity as the business case, which discusses how an increased diversity may have both positive and negative impacts on the results of the work carried out.

Next we will cover our research methodology. This chapter goes over how we approached our research questions and how we conducted our empirical data gathering. It also holds sections that clarifies our ontological and epistemological starting points, as well as a discussion around the limitations and possible biases of our research. We will present how we reason regarding these, and why we think our research can add something to the field of occupational gender segregation.

After the methodology section comes the analysis of our empirical material. Here we will go over the different overarching themes we mapped out from our data gathering. These include materialistic motivation, suspicion of molestation and cultural unacceptance, benefits of male inclusion, and male to male connection. This section critically reviews the statements of the respondents, highlighting contradictions and our own interpretations of what can be read between the lines. The intention here is to find both overt and subtle clues to why this business is so gender segregated.

Following the analysis is the discussion segment. This is where we go full circle and connect our findings to the concepts brought up in the literature review. We examine how our analysis compares to previous research to find both what's congruent, and how our findings and analysis bring something new to the discussion about occupational gender segregation within preschools, and hopefully generally as well.

Finally, we end with a conclusion. This chapter summarizes the main contributions of our thesis and what it has added to previous research, as well as what practical and theoretical implications may stem from it. We also share our thoughts about what future research can be directed towards in order to keep adding to the discussion around occupational gender segregation.

2 Literature Review

Diversity has been a popular topic among scholars and organizations in recent years. There have been great debates about advantages and potential conflicts of diversity. In the following section we will discuss definitions of diversity, the business and social case of diversity, and theory of social marginalization. Then we will narrow down our discussion to gender diversity. In order to understand gender diversity in the preschool context, we believe it is important to discuss occupational sex segregation theories since they may be able to explain important causes hindering gender diversity in this profession. We will discuss types of occupational sex segregation, and the concepts of male primacy and gender essentialism. This will lead us to explore perceptions about men and women in gender atypical professions and a discussion about token identity. Then we will narrow down our discussion by describing the attitudes and challenges faced by token men in female dominated professions. Finally, we will explain both negative and positive aspects present in literature about men entering female dominated occupations, particularly men in preschool.

2.1 Definitions of Diversity

Prasad, Pringle and Konrad (2006) defined that diversity is all about matters of inclusion and differences. Meanwhile, Foster and Harris (2009) defined diversity management as the approach which "is informed by notion of recognizing, valuing and harnessing many individual differences in order to achieve competitive advantage" (pp.151). They further described that the individual differences can be categorized into two types: visible (in terms of gender, age and ethnicity) and non-visible (such as religion and abilities et cetera). Another way that diversity can be categorized is to divide it into two types: one in terms of all types of differences such as skill, ability, education and so on, and the other is related to well-established, agreed upon social identities, namely, gender, sex, ethnicity, class, religion et cetera (Prasad, Pringle & Konrad, 2006).

Scholars such as Foster and Harris (2009) believed there are two concepts in the study of diversity management that are noticeable. One is the business case and the other is the social case of diversity. Advocates of the former believe that adapting diversity management will bring business benefits. Diversity is a recognizable source of creativity and innovation which could bring

competitive advantage to the organization (Bassett-Jones, 2005). By further explaining benefits of diversity from the business case perspective, they claimed that a diverse workforce as defined by Latimer (1998, cited in Bassett-Jones, 2005) in terms of ethnicity, gender and educational background is a source of additional value and an effective means to achieve organizational goals (Zanoni and Janssens, 2003). However, despite many of these claims there is a lack of empirical evidence showing a direct link between diversity management and competitive advantage (Mavin and Girling, 2000, cited in Foster and Harris, 2009). Meanwhile, Bassett-Jones (2005) argued that diversity can at the same time be a source of misunderstanding, suspicion and conflict in the workplace which may lead to low morale, poor quality and loss of competitiveness. The other concept, the social case of diversity, is more concerned about justice and equality in the society (Prasad, Pringle & Konrad, 2006). Acker (2006:443) defined inequality in organizations as “systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes; workplace decisions such as how to organize work; opportunities for promotion and interesting work; security in employment and benefits; pay and other monetary rewards; respect; and pleasures in work and work relations.” From the definition, we could infer that the social case is related to how certain groups are being included, excluded and marginalized in certain occupations and organizations (Prasad, Pringle & Konrad, 2006). The authors further clarify that diversity is not just a matter of representation. Rather, it implies valuing and respecting these differences.

2.2 Theory of Social Marginalization

Speaking of diversity on the basis of certain social identities, we found different studies about marginalization of certain social groups in the context of organizational challenges. One specific example is the exclusion of certain social groups from certain institutions and professions (Prasad, D' Abate and Prasad, 2007). According to the authors, it is believed that marginality comes through the continual and ongoing circulation of negative images in textbooks, corporate actions and policies, cultural practices, as well as hiring and promotion guidelines. They further explained that marginality is often produced through the notion of "otherness", which means those "others" are viewed as having fundamentally different characteristics, attitudes, practices and orientations from a certain group (Goldberg, 1992; Prasad and Prasad, 2002 cited in Prasad et al 2007). Those “others”

or marginalized groups face some kind of reluctance or trouble from the dominant groups, which makes it difficult for the former to mingle with the latter. One thing worth noting is that the social marginality should be understood within historical contexts and reference to specific local circumstances (Prasad et al, 2007).

Moreover, decades of sex and race segregation in certain professions have contributed to build a firm perception that specific genders and ethnicities are more appropriate for specific occupations (Prasad et al, 2007). This stigmatization even causes prevention of the marginalized group from entering relevant applicant pools. Prasad et al (2007) further stated that this is a kind of discrimination that can also take place during the recruitment process, because the dominant groups usually prefer to hire people from their own social identity groups. In other words, the hiring authorities show a high preference to hire individuals similar to themselves due to the belief that differences may create uncertainty and unfamiliarity, thus result in the loss of social comfort (Kanter, 1977).

2.3 Occupational Sex Segregation Theory

Occupational sex segregation theory describes the "uneven distribution" of genders across occupations, and can be further divided into horizontal and vertical segregation (Charles, 2003). Charles (2003) described that **horizontal segregation** depicts the reality that in certain occupations there are more men while in others more women. She further explained that horizontal segregation refers to segregation across the manual–non-manual divide, specifically women’s underrepresentation in manual occupations (for example, manufacturing and craft) and their overrepresentation in non-manual occupations (for example, semi-professional, clerical, sales, service). Horizontal segregation can be explained with “**Gender essentialism**”, which represents the notion that consider women as more competent than men in service, nurturance and social interaction (Epstein, 1999; Gerson, 2002 cited in Charles, 2003). **Vertical segregation** refers to hierarchical inequality, specifically men’s domination of the highest status positions in both traditionally male and female occupations (Charles, 2003). This kind of segregation can be commonly seen in the form of difference in wages as well. In female dominated professions wages are relatively lower in comparison to male dominated professions (Brynin & Perales, 2015).

Moreover, Charles (2003) connected vertical segregation with "**Male primacy**", which views men as more status worthy than women, and therefore more appropriate for positions of authority and domination (Ridgeway, 1997; Bourdieu, 2001 cited in Charles, 2003).

This occupational sex segregation can be linked to certain perceptions associated with both genders. Gender is defined by Lorber and Farrell (1991, cited in Cameron 2001), as a phenomenon of difference between men and women that is socially produced. Aligned with this gender definition, Grandey, Cordeiro and Crouter (2005) discussed the "**gender role theory**", in which they claim that men and women are expected to behave in accordance with their gender roles because they are socialized into feminine and masculine values respectively. Feminine values refer to qualities such as interdependence, nurturance, emotion, empathy, affection and sensitivity, while masculine values refer to independence, control, self-reliance and autonomy (Grandey, Cordeiro & Crouter et al, 2005). This gender role theory aims to explain the sex segregation between different occupations.

On the basis of the theories mentioned above, it can be seen that men and women are divided into certain groups of occupations based on their respective gender, and most jobs are clearly divided into men's work and women's work (Williams, 1993). According to Williams (1993), occupations are not gender neutral. Certain occupations are created and designed with a particular image of who could be part of this specific occupation. Moreover, Williams (1995) argued that cultural assumptions about gender are also presented in different work structures and have strong effects on these professions. She explained that certain occupations like teaching, secretarial work, nursing and cabin crew, depict a combination of particular qualities which are usually associated with women.

On the one hand, there is a considerable number of women in male dominated professions such as medicine, law and business management, which shows that women adapt to male careers because they offer more positive things like prestige, higher pay and more opportunities for progress (Williams, 1993). On the other hand, men are less inspired than women to work in jobs that are atypical for their gender, and one of the reasons can be that men in traditionally female occupations have less to gain and more to lose (ibid). They may have to make sacrifices in terms of pay and

status, as well as receive skepticism from others towards their masculinity and suitability (Simpson, 2005). This statement is aligned with what Williams (1993) has claimed, that men who get into female dominated occupations often get their masculinity questioned, and consequently they try to respond by emphasizing their masculine attributes.

Even though there are some disadvantages as we discussed above, Simpson (2004) explained that many men recognize that sometimes they might have certain career advantages due to their minority status, which is called "the career effect". For instance, these advantages are particularly visible in teaching and nursing professions, where men feel welcomed into the profession by the hiring authorities. In the teaching profession, hiring authorities are usually perceived to seek male applicants more eagerly in order to provide male role models for kids (ibid). In spite of these benefits, men adopting non-traditional occupations such as preschool teacher, generally do not stay long and tend to transition to other occupations that are perceived as more prestigious and more attractive in terms of higher salary and status (Williams, 1993). One of the reasons could be the structural factor which is attached to different genders, such as the different employment expectations between men and women (Cameron, 2001). Cameron (2001) further explained that it is a general perception that men have normative male expectations about their careers so that they might expect higher salaries or be more ambitious than women. Therefore, salary and status play important roles under these circumstances. However, other scholars argued that there are other reasons as well, and salary is not the major one for men to leave atypical occupations (Peeters, 2007; Williams, 1993).

Peeters (2007) further criticized other reasons considered to be important causes of occupational segregation in early childhood education taken for granted (such as "professionalism") by giving examples of different countries like New Zealand, Denmark and Sweden, where despite high levels of professionalism, the workforce is still highly gendered (Farquhar, 2006; Cameron, 2006 cited in Peeters, 2007). Thus he concluded that a high level of professionalism does not automatically lead to a mixed-gender workforce. Williams (1993) also pointed out that in Sweden the work is extremely segregated, even though the country has the highest rate of women's paid labor force participation in the world. Early education is a clear example of this gender segregation. According to Cameron, Moss and Owen (1999; Cameron 2001), the main reason why the

workforce in early education is female dominated is that it is viewed as "women's work" historically. Cameron (2001) further explains that since the work is female gendered, most of the recruiters are women, which in turn cements the profession's status as gendered. This creates a spiral pattern of reproduction in hiring and training that is difficult to break.

2.4 Debate about "Token" Identity

Kanter's (1977) seminal theory of tokenism provided a base for studies about men in nontraditional fields. She concluded that minorities (specifically female executives in her research, as it concerned women in a major company) experience different attitudes and perceptions from the majority group. Further explaining this she wrote that these groups are viewed, interacted with and treated differently. According to Kanter (1977), three factors, namely heightened visibility, challenges with assimilation and role encapsulation limits advancement opportunities for these groups. In her research, the first factor, heightened visibility, relates to how this female minority was quite visible in the workplace on the basis of being physically different. This visibility obscured their qualifications, capabilities and skills. Personal aspects of tokens' lives such as appearance and general bearing were also under high scrutiny, even though these personal traits did not have any relation to their work life. Dominant group members (men) viewed these most successful women as too arrogant and assertive and sometimes their success was attributed to their gender and not to their performance. Moreover, as minority Kanter (1977) argued that these women faced excessive pressure and scrutiny of their work and that their performance would be viewed as an indicator of women's potential to succeed. The second factor was challenges with assimilation faced by these women. It was quite hard for the minority to adapt to the majority group's norms, patterns and tacit social expectations and mix with them. One of the important reasons for this difficulty was that men highlighted the difference between them and the women. These women were often reminded of their outsider status. This relates to that dominant group members often perceived them in a stereotypical way and viewed them as emotional, flighty, interdependent and unsuitable for corporate work. This led towards the third factor, role encapsulation, which means that gender stereotypes were emphasized and those women were seen as wives, secretaries and other gendered roles. There was more focus on their status as women rather than on their job position in the organization.

As discussed above, women in this research faced challenges with assimilation, heightened visibility and role encapsulation because of their minority status. Kanter (1977) argued that the numerical minority status is the lone cause of these effects. She further argued that any groups with numerical minority status would experience the same process and they are not specific to women in any way.

According to Kanter's (1977) argument, men employed in female dominated occupations such as nursing and teaching experience similar perceptual tendencies to those discussed above. However, Williams (1995) research proved that the situation is more complicated and that male tokens sometimes take hidden advantages on the basis of their gender. Men as token did not face such kind of severe social pressure to leave the industry, marginalization and social isolation. Rather, the main focus was on their masculinity and male stereotypes (Williams, 1995).

Simpson (2004) claimed that men and women moving into gender atypical areas usually face certain problems as tokens because they challenge conventional attitudes and existing assumptions. Comparing both men and women in non-traditional occupations, Bradley (1993) suggested that women in male dominated professions are usually in more favorable positions, because in such context, "compromised femininity" as a female identity might also involve status enhancement and potential increase in pay. While men who move into women's work are often upset by the gender assumptions attached to that work, and in most cases they would not be considered as "real men", or they would be perceived as lazy, or incapable of doing something in mainstream male occupations (Williams, 1993). This skepticism also hinders men from entering female dominated occupations. However, it is also interesting that although women have a somewhat better position in terms of identity, while men have severe identity crises, women who enter typical male professions are being marginalized in a negative way in terms of promotions. Simpson (2004) explained it in the way that "token women" can be severely disadvantaged by their minority status, whereas "token men" could enjoy positive career outcomes under certain circumstances. She further elaborated that these men can have benefits based on the assumptions attached to their social identity and be viewed as more ambitious and more career oriented, and

more suitable for leadership positions. Men therefore get higher pay and rewards, and are able to enjoy near monopoly on power and senior positions (Williams, 1993).

However, this is not the case in all professions. For example, in specific occupations like teaching and nursing which require certain emotional labor and special abilities associated with women (Hochschild, 1983 cited in Cameron 2001), it is difficult for men to enter and thus results in high gender segregation. Cameron (2001) criticized that most of the studies relating to men in the preschool profession are restricted to token representatives of their gender, since this is the unusual rather than the usual case.

2.5 Scholarly Themes about Men in Female Dominated Occupations

There are two particular themes relating to perceptions about men entering women's work. Initially, men entering women's work are not aware that they are exceptional or token representatives of their gender, but they expect to get promoted more quickly than their female colleagues (Williams, 1995). So the first theme is that men want to reach the top of the hierarchy in high velocity by adapting a female profession. And this is what Williams (1995) named the "glass escalator" effect. According to her, as a result of this effect men in female dominated occupations have better wages and opportunities of being pushed upwards in their careers. However, Cameron (2001) argued that preschool organizational structure is relatively flat. Staff of both genders have relatively few promotion opportunities compared to many other occupations, which makes the profession unattractive, especially for men. For Swedish preschools, there are normally two hierarchical levels, teachers and principals. One principal is responsible for more than one preschool depending on the scale of the schools. This phenomenon also makes chances of career development fewer in the preschool teacher profession. The second theme is about the perceptions associated with men in different cultural contexts. Cameron (2001) described that different cultural contexts play an important role in this regard. Most commonly men who enter women's work are considered homosexual, feminine and are represented in an extremely stereotypical way (Williams, 1995). Sometimes they are considered as potentially dangerous, risky and abusive (Cameron, 2001). This is in aligned with what Williams (1992) mentioned, that men are being discriminated by outsiders. Further explaining it, she wrote that such men face public discrimination and it is even harder for

men who work with kids as they are suspected of being pedophiles. However, according to her, sometimes these negative public reactions may result in men's relocation where they are assigned to jobs with less public interaction.

2.6 Two Camps about the Value of Male Inclusion in Preschool

There are two camps about the value of including men in the preschool teacher profession. One of them argues for inclusion of men in the preschools and early child care. The camp advocating gender diversity in the preschool profession have different arguments. Some of these are expressed by Cameron (2001). The first one is disappearing fathers: this relates to that children who have single mothers miss a father figure in their family. The purpose of having male staff in preschools or early childhood may be to provide a positive male presence for those kids especially who have little or no contact with men in their lives (Jensen,1996). The second one is the gender difference argument which describes that inclusion of men is important for kids in order to have male role models, especially for boys to have someone to look up to that shares the same interests (Cameron, 2001). Further the author argues that this inclusion challenges the different attributes such as caring and nurturance attached to each gender and shows that men can also be good caretakers and nurturers. The third argument is that a mix of men and women can bring a balance of different experiences to the children. On the basis of these arguments, initiatives have been taken by the European Union to promote equality in the profession through an equal opportunity program, in order to get both men and women to attend the kids. One way of doing so is to hire a balanced workforce among child caretakers and preschool teachers (ibid).

However, there are certain skeptical views about inclusion of men in the profession which are discussed by Pringle (1995, 1998 a, 1998 b) who exemplifies the criticism and challenges connected to men's entry in the preschool teaching occupation. Pringle (1995) states that generally men are responsible for violence and abuse towards women and children. Although Pringle acknowledges that women commit some abuse of children, he argues that men commit the vast majority of these acts (Pringle,1995). Furthermore, he points out that the ratio of such kind of incidents are quite high among male child caretakers, which means that male participation leads

towards more risk for kids in preschools. Pringle (1998a) is not concerned about the number of men in the profession, but rather about strategies that can ensure the safety of children.

3 Methodology

In this chapter we will clarify our metatheoretical starting point. Among different types of methodologies for qualitative research, we chose the most suitable one for our research, namely a hermeneutic approach. In the following sections, we will illustrate how the hermeneutic approach guided us to interpret and reflect empirical materials (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009), and how we thought about hermeneutic circles during interpretation and data analysis. Since certain interpretations are always limited by researchers' *repertoire of interpretation* (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009), we tried to keep critical and reflexive during the whole research process, attempting to see new and interesting aspects to answer our research questions, rather than letting preexisting theories and preunderstanding guide us to find answers. Through empirical data collection and analysis, our goal was to interpret and broaden what we knew about how people perceive gender diversity in preschools, and to weave our analysis with theories in order to gain in-depth understanding about this social phenomenon (Swedberg,2012).

3.1 Philosophical Grounding

Our research method can be best described as qualitative and abductive. We use a hermeneutic approach and aim at exploring the perceptions on gender diversity in Swedish preschools. Ontologically, we will assume a subjectivist view, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and produced through individual cognition (Burrell and Morgan, 1979, cited in Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009). In line with the interpretive tradition we will therefore treat knowledge as subjective. Thus, the opinions and responses from interviewees will not be treated as something enhancing our understanding of an objective reality, but rather our understanding of a socially constructed reality.

According to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009), the circle of alethic hermeneutics illustrates the relationship between preunderstanding and understanding. Preunderstanding facilitates understanding of the phenomena, and the latter helps us judge our preunderstanding. At times, preunderstanding might also hinder our further understanding and become an obstacle for us to get in-depth knowledge about the phenomena. For instance, before we did our interviews, we had certain background information about gender diversity in preschools from all sorts of media,

particularly from cultural and social perspectives. However, when conducting interviews and analyzing the transcriptions, we tried to not let those pre-perceptions guide us and affect the empirical material analysis.

The processual and dialectic relationship between the part and the whole is the original hermeneutic circle (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009), which illustrates that the part can only be understood from the whole, and vice versa. Thereby, when we codified and labelled our empirical material into groups according to different themes, we analyzed each text under the context of external social and cultural weave of connections. In other words, we related each text as a single part and the context as a whole, attempting to make sense and interpret between the parts and the whole. The different parts add to our understanding of the whole phenomenon, and our understanding of the whole helps us to critically review the individual parts. In our research, the entire preschool context makes up the whole, and the different parts represent various information from our background research such as media coverage, theories from our literature review, as well as our different findings from the interviews we conducted.

During the interpretive process, we not only imagined a dialogue with the reader of our interpretation, but also linked to empathy with the situation of the acting/speaking person (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). With the help of empathy, we tried to put ourselves into the agents' positions, in an effort to understand the meanings more clearly. For instance, when the interviewees gave us examples or told stories, we did our best to imagine ourselves in the roles of preschool teachers, principals, parents and even the kids. The aim with this was to better understand the perceptions on gender diversity from their own sides, such as why they believed the kids need male role models? Why they thought the working atmosphere would be enhanced by including male preschool teachers? And so on.

We then combined our empirical data with preexisting theories to make up our own analysis (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009). However, in order to stay open, we also intended to be critical and reflexive, because the empirical material cannot be regarded as the whole truth, and only limited aspects can be illustrated in a particular research (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009).

3.2 Research Process

When we were taking the Strategic Human Resource Management (SHRM) course in our master program, we understood that being one of the SHRM challenges, diversity management has grabbed the attention of both scholars and practitioners in organizations (Prasad, Prasad and Mir, 2010). There are considerable researches and debates on gender diversity, in terms of both business case and social case (Foster and Harris, 2009). Our inspiration for the thesis, on the one hand, came from one of the cases of the SHRM seminars, namely, “Theorizing Inequality in the Dutch Police Force through Structure and Agency” (Boogaard and Roggeband. 2010), in which they studied how the masculine norms affected the marginalization of women in the male dominated profession of the Dutch Police Force. On the other hand, it came from personal experience that preschool teaching seemed to be a female dominated profession in Sweden, and upon briefly investigating we found that men have been greatly underrepresented in this field for decades. After doing some initial research on-line, we found out that in Sweden, male preschool teachers only represent around 3,5% of the total and this figure has been static for over ten years (Fornander, 2014). Therefore, we began thinking about gender diversity from the other way around (men in female dominated professions), and wanted to learn why there was no progress within this field.

As Zanoni, Janssens, Benschop, and Nkomo (2010) claimed, in order to gain more insight, we need to understand how diversity is made sense of, and experienced by a diverse workforce itself. Based on this, once we had decided on our thesis topic and research direction, we decided to explore the phenomenon from the perspectives of principals and preschool teachers (both male and female). Through personal contact, we got access to one preschool in Malmö having male teachers, and another one in Lund having no male teachers.

During the interview process with preschool F [all female], one of the preschools in Lund, we noticed certain patterns common for the reasonings of all four female interviewees towards the inclusion of male teachers in preschool. In order to avoid the possibility of unilateral opinions, we interviewed four preschool teachers in preschool M [mixed men and women] in Malmö, including two male teachers, and one male preschool teacher through a Skype interview. By that time, we had got a considerable amount of information. In other words, we found many key words and similar situations through the interviewees' narratives, which along with the relevant literature

review, became our starting points for the future analysis. To gain a rich understanding and a broad analytical perspective, especially from strategic thinking about gender diversity, we interviewed the principals of each preschool respectively. Our aim was to critically review the responses we had received, and make sense of potentially contradictory opinions and beliefs.

With our research proposal as a guidance and following the instructions by both Research Methods lecturer Katie Sullivan and thesis supervisor Jens Rennstam, through a hermeneutical approach, we mainly focused on the interviews and used it as our core method to gather empirical materials.

3.3 Empirical Data Collection

After our research proposal was approved, the first thing we needed to decide was how to select our interviewees. Since we intended to have a broad perspective on how the preschool teachers and principals perceive gender diversity in this field, it accordingly should include both women and men who work as preschool teachers. Due to the time limit, our research was finally based on 11 in-depth interviews, conducted at two preschools located in Lund and Malmö respectively as well as a skype interview with a teacher in Karlskrona, with 3 male teachers, 6 female teachers, and 2 principals (both female) in total. We chose a preschool with no male teachers at all on purpose, because we wished to see whether people would have different opinions about gender diversity at a workplace where no men were present. The table below provides an overview of our interviewees' position and gender. In respect of their anonymity, we have used pseudonyms for all of our interviewees.

Name	Position	Gender	Name	Position	Gender	Name	Position	Gender
Anna	Teacher	Female	Erika*	Teacher	Female	Ingrid	Principal	Female
Berit	Teacher	Female	Fiona	Teacher	Female	Johan*	Teacher	Male
Carl	Teacher	Male	Greta	Principal	Female	Kristina	Teacher	Female
Diana	Teacher	Female	Hans	Teacher	Male	-	-	-

Table 1: Overview on interviewees' position and gender

**: Erika is the mother of Johan. Both work as preschool teachers.*

We conducted semi-structured interviews, by designing certain questions but leaving them open for the interviewees to elaborate on more deeply. The topics we mainly focused on concerned: 1)

perceptions of including male teachers in preschools; 2) difference in reactions from parents and kids towards male contra female teachers; 3) differences between male and female teachers working in preschool; 4) perceptions from both teachers and principals, and how they perceive parents` views on the potential risks of including male teachers; and 5) how preschool teachers and principals reason regarding why there are so few men in this profession. All the topics were related to our research questions as follows:

- How do teachers and principals perceive gender diversity in their occupation?
- What are the primary issues that hinder gender diversity in preschools according to teachers and principals?
- How do teachers and principals perceive the inclusion of male teachers would affect this profession?

Bearing the research questions and the five topics in mind, we designed our interview questions. Before the interview started, we emphasized that all the personal information would be anonymous in order to encourage them to speak freely about their opinions. When conducting the interviews, we began with background information of each participant and asked why he/she chose preschool teaching as a profession. It was helpful for them in order to feel at ease and relax. Then, all the participants were asked a set of questions based on the five topics above, and were encouraged to explain further through storytelling to support their own arguments. We also asked follow-up questions to let them elaborate deeper, and developed new questions when we found something new that came up during the previous interview. Additionally, we prepared several interview questions specially for the principals, intending to understand how their perceptions on gender diversity would affect the practice, for example, their attitude and action when recruiting teachers.

During the above process, we used our pre-understanding as a bridge to connect theories with the empirical materials. However, we also kept alert that we should not let our pre-perception dominate the analysis from the information we received during the interviews. We also avoided to show the interviewees our own perceptions concerning the interview questions. Especially when we asked for their opinions on the reason why there are so few male teachers in preschool, we were not letting them answer our research questions. But still, we intended to know their own perceptions

on the phenomenon. However, due to the sensitivity of this topic, we felt that some of the interviewees were a bit cautious when answering certain questions. Therefore, we utilized a hermeneutic approach to move back and forth between pre-understanding and understanding, as well as parts and holistic information to discover hidden meanings (Alvesson and Sköldbberg, 2009).

As mentioned above, we conducted 11 interviews in total, with an average duration of 45 minutes. Two male teachers were interviewed through Skype call, according to their preference and convenience. Other interviews were all face-to-face and conducted in preschool offices or meeting rooms. All the interviews were taken in English, except one senior female teacher who could only speak Swedish. We used both computer software and cell phone to record the whole interviews under the permission of our participants.

3.4 Interpretation and Analysis

When we had accomplished all the interviews within one and a half week, we began the interpretation and analysis process in the following two weeks. By transcribing all the audio recordings from the interviews, we kept track of all information highly related to our research questions and themes, trying to make sense from the answers and narratives. We used a series of techniques to identify themes, paying special attention to repetitions, similarities and differences, stories and narratives, critical incidents and theory related data (Ryan and Bernard, 2003). With all the transcriptions in hand, we wanted to make all the empirical data tangible and visual. For the first round, we read the transcriptions thoroughly and got some key words (which were repeated several times) in mind. For example, “salary”, “diaper changing”, “low status”, “women’s job” and “male role model” came up in nearly every interview transcription. Before the second round started, we categorized some salient themes related to our research questions, and gave each category a label and assigned them different colors. Then we began a color coding process according to the categories we had decided. During this process, we always tried to connect each coding to relevant research questions, and took necessary notes in the margins. At the same time, we related each category to the literature and theories we had found in our research proposal. This helped us gain a deeper understanding on gender diversity in preschools and occupational sex segregation theory. For the last round of reading, we kept distance from those salient narratives while reading line by line, and aimed to find unspoken meanings underneath. We critically

reviewed the responses from our interviewees regarding the inclusion of male teachers in order to find inconsistencies between the lines. Given the sensitive nature of our research topic, this helped us uncover subtler perceptions and reasonings, rather than just accepting everything we were told without reflecting further upon it. An example of inconsistency in our research is that female interviewee Kristina told us that the 'hunt' on men became exaggerated and that she did not think of male preschool teachers in a negative way. Later on in the interviewee however, she stated that she was vigilant when male teachers were close to young girls.

During the interpretation and analysis process, the concepts of reflection and reflexivity helped us consider a broad range of aspects for our research (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009). We thought about perceptions on men in female dominated professions on several levels, regarding theoretical, cultural and social contexts, and their interaction with those perceptions. According to Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009), reflexivity means not letting any one of the aspects dominate, and avoiding empiricism. Among all the categories we had sorted, several key words were frequently repeated and aligned with existing theories and previous researches (such as “low salary”, “women’s job”, and “risk of molestation”). Despite this, we tried not to perceive them as the main or dominating aspects when understanding the phenomena. On the contrary, we interpreted them in the preschool context, and sought for something new and interesting at the same time. We introduced new concepts of male homosocial desire, female primacy, and detachment from masculinity, while also adding to the theory of heightened visibility by Kanter (1977). To sum up, the handling of empirical material in a reflexive way aims at generating more interesting, innovative and well-judged interpretations and qualified results. It is not an end, but a means to improve our research (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009).

3.5 Limitations and Credibility

As Tracy (2010) pointed out eight criteria for excellent qualitative research, we attempted to make our research achieve these goals, namely, *worthy topic, rich rigor, sincerity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethical, and meaningful coherence*. The main purpose of our research is to increase the understanding of occupational gender segregation in the preschool context, rather than solving problems and finding out how to improve efficacy. Here we discuss the limitations and credibility of our research in the last part of methodology.

Firstly, due to the time limit, we only conducted interviews at two preschools, consisting of 11 interviewees. Ideally, it would be even better to include three or more preschools with both female and male teachers, since we intended to know how they perceive gender diversity from different perspectives. As we mentioned that male preschool teachers only constitute about 3,5% in Sweden, we could only find two male interviewees at these two preschools. Besides, one of the male teachers was going to resign from the job due to negative personal experiences with parents, which made his opinion much stronger than the others'. The third male interviewee was found at a separate preschool to include an additional male voice on the subject.

Secondly, when we got access to the preschools, the interviewees were randomly arranged. That means the interviewees had no preparation nor pre-thinking about our interview questions. On the one hand, it was beneficial for us in order to gather empirical data because all the answers we got came directly from the interviewees without too much thinking. On the other hand, some of the interviewees might have been cautious about certain questions, such as "Have you noticed any difference from parents in their contact with male teachers versus with female teachers?", and "Do you think there are potential risks involving male teachers?". On every "if-question", we asked the interviewees to elaborate on their answers, to get a more nuanced picture of their perceptions. Although we emphasized that all the interviewees' personal information would be kept confidential, some might still not have felt comfortable answering "sensitive questions" and may have had a tendency to remain conservative.

Last but not the least, since gender diversity is something trendy and fancy in today's society, some opinions from interviewees might not be fully agreed upon by themselves. We realized this through the process of coding and sorting, when we found out there were inconsistencies between the lines. This could be attributed to the impact of public discourse, so that some interviewees just expressed what would sound appropriate rather than their actual views for the sake of safety.

In general, we believed that we had built a mutual trust relationship with all the interviewees, and explained to them not only that we would keep their names anonymous, but also that we would share the final approved thesis if they would like to see our research findings.

4 Analysis

In this chapter we will present our findings based on four different themes that we mapped out from our interviews. These themes are: materialistic motivations, suspicion of molestation and cultural unacceptance, benefits of male inclusion, and male to male connection. We will demonstrate examples of our findings through quotes of our interviewees, and provide our own interpretations and reflections relating to them.

4.1 Materialistic Motivations

Among all the 11 interviews, 10 out of 11 participants mentioned it as a fact that the salary for preschool teachers in Sweden is low. In order to become an official preschool teacher, they need to take formal education for three and a half years, and must pass all their exams to gain the qualification. When comparing how much they could earn after entering the preschool to how much time and money they have invested in their education, interviewees (mainly female) thought that men tend to be more rational and pragmatic, in the sense that they would generally be less likely to choose professions with low return on educational investments. Almost every interviewee believed that the salary they got did not correspond to the amount of time they had spent in the preschool teaching education.

“You study for such a long time and don't get enough pay.” (Erika, female, 2016)

“It's quite a long education, and... the salary is too low.” (Kristina, female, 2016)

The concerns on gains and losses are not only based on investment in time and money they have spent, but also based on the norm that men are the providers in families. As one male interviewee indicated, although men and women have equal family status right now, historically men are still perceived as the primary salary earner in the family. Thus they have to consider the salary issue more than women do. At the beginning of their profession as preschool teachers, they might not regard the low salary as a big issue, but when they start thinking about marriage, raising their own kids, affording a real estate and paying a mortgage loan, salary becomes a lot more important.

“Sometimes they [men] do so [value a good salary higher than women] for their future. They are going to get married, and have kids. They need to earn more money for their kids and house and stuff.” (Fiona, female, 2016)

Facing these pressures, it is understandable why our interviewees perceived salary as one factor that hinders men from entering preschool profession.

The low salary may also hinder men who have completed their formal education from applying for preschool teacher jobs, as the same education authorizes them for teaching the younger classes in elementary schools, where the salary is higher. One of our female interviewees Berit mentioned this fact.

“My classmates, two men, they want to work with elementary school because you earn more money in elementary school... We have the same education. Most men want to work in elementary school because they earn more money there.” (Berit, female, 2016)

The salary tends to be lower in female-dominated professions, compared to the pay in male dominated professions (Rabelo, 2013). Therefore, preschool teaching has never been perceived as a profession that earns well. Many potential male teachers finally choose to work with older kids in elementary schools after they finish their education, because they can earn more money from that. Others would rather take traditional jobs for men, even those that are not seen as fancy, since they could still offer better pay than preschool teaching. One male interviewee specifically gave us an example that he earned more when he was taking care of garbage. He sounded noticeably disappointed with this fact.

“The payment is pretty low compared to what you do. I mean I worked at a dump and I got higher paid for taking care of garbage than taking care of kids. That's quite sad.” (Hans, male, 2016).

Companies that aim at gaining profit usually have a well-established compensation and benefit system. Employees are usually paid according to this system, and have the opportunity to get their salaries increased annually. Unlike such companies, preschools in Sweden are generally not as profit oriented, and preschool teachers do not get reasonable salary increment year by year. Many interviewees implied that although the salary is higher nowadays than in the past, it has been at the

same level for several years now. The only chance people get to negotiate their salary is when they get a job offer from the preschools. Besides, since there is no remarkable salary difference between senior and young preschool teachers, many of them feel unfairly treated and discouraged. As one female interviewee Ingrid pointed out:

“I think people are disappointed about the salary, most, and it’s not a well-paying job [...] Men think it’s too bad salary, and you don’t get that much salary development every year because they [preschools] don’t have the money. So I think you don’t have the development you want in the salary. The only time you can argue for a better salary is when you start, otherwise you have to change [to another preschool or county].”
(Ingrid, female, 2016)

Two other interviewees claimed that low salary could be a problem for both male and female teachers, because both genders do not get enough pay compared to their long time education. One of the principals we interviewed, elaborated that the low salary does not just hurt male teachers, it affects women too. This is the reason that nowadays the preschool teachers are in a shortage in general, and is aligned with one interviewee’s comment:

“Right now I think they’re hiring the first they can find because there are so few of us. I don’t think they have that high criteria. ‘Oh wait, there’s someone unemployed! We need to hire him/her quickly before someone else does!’” (Hans, male, 2016)

However, most interviewees agreed that the salary affects men more than women. Female preschool teachers need money as well, but since they are not considered the “providers” in their families, they do not care about the salary as much as men do. One male interviewee further illustrated by pointing out that women have to leave work when they’re pregnant anyway, which also makes them less attractive to employers and consequently often less career oriented:

“They[women] are fine with the salary, because they’ll be home with their kids, and the men can work.” (Hans, male, 2016)

The traditional perception that men are providers and women are caretakers still has a strong impact on how both genders consider the salary issue, thus men think about it more when they choose education paths and working options. As mentioned above, preschool teachers do not get

their salaries increased much annually. Consequently, this profession is viewed merely as a job rather than a career.

“If you are clever in your studies and you are a career oriented person, I don’t think that you will choose preschool teaching as career. You will go to some other career where wages are high, working environment is better, and you have more chances to grow.” (Greta, female, 2016)

“Men seem to want better paid jobs, but we don’t get that much pay as a preschool teacher.” (Ingrid, female, 2016)

Since salary is usually closely related to career development, our interviewees also implied that the lack of a career ladder combined with low pay made preschool teaching less attractive. In preschools, the organizational structure is quite flat. Due to the human resource shortage, it is not unusual that one principal can be in charge of three or four preschools at the same time. This situation implies a lack of career promotion chances in preschools, and may also be one of the reasons that discourages male teachers from taking up this occupation.

Another aspect related to low salary is low status, and they are often intersected with each other. Teachers who work with older children in “real schools” [elementary school] were perceived by several of our interviewees as having a higher status. Combined with the relatively higher salary in those schools, it could be a significant cause for men when making decisions on career options.

“I think it isn’t popular to be a preschool teacher. Much more men in the real school [such as primary school, high school and so on].” (Anna, female, 2016)

Generally speaking, preschool teachers, especially male teachers feel they receive less respect, compared to real school teachers.

The answer to why people have such perceptions may perhaps be found in the historical and cultural norm that preschool teachers are mostly associated with nurturing and babysitting. Among those curriculums, there are considerable work tasks related to diaper changing, helping kids with their toilet visits, play with them, and get them ready for their lunch and afternoon nap. Even

though there are also activities such as mathematics, drawing, language, and physical education, preschool teaching is still perceived as a “women’s job”. Both male and female interviewees perceived this profession as a women's job as follows:

“The women are more creative. They want to draw, sew and weave. At [name of preschool she worked at previously] we did many such things [...] and I love that. But men are not so fond of it” (Anna, female, 2016)

“It feels girly to choose to become a preschool teacher. That stops men from applying for this job as well.” (Johan, male, 2016)

According to our interviewees, when men perform the job of preschool teacher, it is difficult for them to avoid being emotionally affected by how their friends’ circle perceive their job. One male interviewee, Hans, pointed out, that when people find out he is a preschool teacher, they do not understand why he chose such a tough job with bad payment and low status. Another female interviewee, Ingrid, mentioned that quite a few people think that preschool teaching is not a profession which needs sophisticated skills and formal education. The public perception and attitude towards preschool teachers could be a source of invisible pressure, which to some extent also discourages men and affects their career options.

“If you look at what the society says [about a certain occupation], and it’s very female...there are many females working, then often those jobs aren’t very attractive.” (Ingrid, female, 2016)

“I think the status of the job is also not so high. ‘Preschool teacher, do you really need to have an education for that?’ you still hear a lot of people say. I think it’s a low status job as well. I have people telling me this. Especially when I started, they said ‘oh do you really need to study for that?’” (Ingrid, female, 2016)

In terms of all the factors relating to materialistic motivations, most of the interviewees believe low salary is one of the main reasons that hinders the inclusion of men in preschool teaching. However, low salary jobs are often perceived as low status, which makes them even less attractive. Other factors we found in this topic are that preschool teaching in particular is associated with nurturing and babysitting, thus deemed as women’s job historically. Furthermore, men working in

this profession have little chance for career development, and receive less respect from the society. All the interwoven factors above appear to make male preschool teachers pressured and even become doubtful about their choice of profession.

One interesting thing to note is that although many interviewees mentioned salary as the main reason why there are so few men in the profession, when asked if they think men value a higher salary more than women, most of them appeared somewhat confused or hesitant to answer, even though this would have to follow logically from their answer. We believe this shows that men are perceived at a somewhat subconscious level to value a higher salary more than women, but that many people have likely not really reflected upon it. Rather, they seem to have taken it for granted that it is a natural aspect of men to pursue higher salary more intensely than women.

4.2 Suspicion of Molestation and Cultural Unacceptance

During our research for background information, it became clear that it was not uncommon to see news of male preschool teachers in Sweden having been apprehended for committing sex crimes against children. Though the criminals appear to only represent a small fraction of men in the business, the media coverage of these news has been large. As mentioned in the introduction, male aspiring preschool teachers have expressed their concerns about being associated with these crimes. Thus, one of the main objectives we set for ourselves entering the interviews was to examine how strong impact these scandals have had. Both on how the teachers felt themselves, how it affected parents, and if this could have generally led to more suspicion against men in the business.

In order to not guide them too much in their answers, we avoided to ask them directly about it in most cases. Instead we began by asking them questions such as "Have you noticed any difference in reactions from parents to male versus female teachers?". Even though we never brought up the sex crimes ourselves, the interviewees did it themselves during all of the interviews. The majority of them did so in response to the question above about parents' reactions to female versus male preschool teachers. Others brought it up when asked even more open questions such as "Have you ever worked with male colleagues?". In just a couple of interviews did the respondents not bring it up when asked these questions. In those cases, we asked them a little bit more directly, if they could perceive any potential negative effects or risks involved having more men among preschool teachers, to which they then too brought up the sex crimes themselves. Though their answers varied

slightly, it was evident that they were all very much aware of the media coverage of male sex perpetrators in preschool, and most of them had experienced suspicion or intervention by parents who were worried about leaving their children with men. Male teacher Hans put it this way:

"Usually the first time parents meet me, as a man, in the job, they're quite suspicious due to the media coverage of "all the males working are pedophiles" and things like that. So it takes a little while for them to start to understand that I don't do those things." (Hans, male, 2016)

One of the female interviewees who opened up about the history of male preschool teachers molesting children when simply asked if she had ever worked with men, described when the phenomenon became known.

"Men? Yes. When I began I worked with a man from former Yugoslavia. We worked for two years together. [...] But there in the beginning and the middle of the 80's there was a hunting of men who worked in preschool. Every man was under suspicion. And we had one man who was under suspicion, and he quit." (Anna, female, 2016)

This interviewee believed the current situation has been shaped by the dark history from the 80's. She described that men had sexuality associated with them. Parents became suspicious of men, and only men, in preschool. Consequently, she thought it was only natural that there are so few men in preschool, since they are according to her still hunted and suspected, in combination with having a lower salary. Another female interviewee Kristina, stated that the "witch hunt", as many of them referred it to, began in the 90's. According to her, it was exaggerated in proportion to the actual crimes committed.

"I guess it was in the early 90's when it was so exaggerated with men and... I think it was then that many of them quit and they didn't want to study to become preschool teachers. Because it all felt like a hunt. Then of course, things happen. [...] It was a real witch-hunt on men for a while." (Kristina, female, 2016)

A problem mentioned by Kristina is that kids at a young age may make up stories that they tell their parents. It is very hard to validate these stories. But according to several of our interviewees, it is often enough with a doubtful statement by a child to trigger heavy suspicion from parents.

"I also believe a little bit that it's enough if one parent plants a seed, then it can spread and they begin to talk between each other. And it could be things that aren't true at all, but just rumors." (Kristina, female, 2016)

However, as the particular interview with Kristina proceeded, we noticed something. Even though she claimed that the witch hunt was out of proportion, and that even though these crimes happen, she did not think of men in that way, she was not completely relaxed with male colleagues either. If the man would have been a substitute, she said she would keep more of an eye on them.

"It depends a little bit. If it would be a substitute, I would keep more of an eye on them. If it would've been a longer substitute, I would probably feel safer with them." (Kristina, female, 2016)

A possible explanation to this may be that some of the crimes mentioned in the introduction of this thesis were committed by substitutes, and may as such have plagued the image of those men especially much. Another thing mentioned by Kristina was that some of the girls could become dangerously attached to the men.

"There are some girls that are really... ooh, they pull them [men] towards themselves. Then you have to be a bit vigilant for that as well of course. How is it between them, the kids and the substitute?" (Kristina, female, 2016)

It seems Kristina is a bit concerned that there is a risk that some men are not able to handle such a situation, and be tempted to do something inappropriate. This illustrates that men are sometimes viewed very differently than women. It appears that both the male teachers and the young girls are sexualized, in a sense. It is implied here that men being close to the young girls is something abnormal and potentially dangerous.

4.2.1 The Diaper Predicament

One of the most recurring themes we found in our interviews was the diaper changing situation. All of the interviewees brought it up. In most cases it was discussed that some parents were not thrilled that men were changing the diapers of their kids. In fact, none of our respondents ever mentioned it as a problem internally. In other words, colleagues never had a problem with men

doing this activity according to them. But some of the stories about interventions from parents were quite remarkable.

Male interviewee Carl recalled that at a previous preschool and former workplace in Malmö, he was specifically asked not to change diapers because of the large ratio of Muslim parents to the kids present at the preschool. He was told that in their culture men do not attend any bathroom activities with kids. Despite this, he continued to perform this work task. In response to this, the parents made a name collection to stop it. It went to the point where one parent took his children away to another preschool.

That was not the end of it for Carl, however. Later on, the parents directed their suspicion and deprecation against him personally. He found Facebook groups created by parents that were directly aimed at seeing him removed from their children's preschool. Naturally, it was noticeable that it had affected him and his views on what it means to be a male preschool teacher.

He proceeded to inform us about a situation with a male preschool teacher at his current workplace about two years earlier. He was accused of molesting a child, but was freed at an early stage in the investigation. Even so, Carl expressed that it destroyed the life of this man, due to the suspicion and shame he had to feel during the process.

Following his own experiences, and that of other male colleagues, Carl stated not only his desire to leave the field of preschool teaching, but also that he discouraged other men from entering the field as well. He told them about how incidents like the ones described above would nag them for the rest of their lives:

"...in fact it is not just fun and playing with kids. It is also dealing with sleepless nights and news on TV and facing Facebook groups against you and people who don't want you to change the diapers and you being a bad person." (Carl, male, 2016)

While the stories presented by Carl made the biggest impression on us, other interviewees told us about other examples of parental intervention that also captivated our interest. As part of the preschool teacher education program, students are required to fulfill internships at preschools. Male interviewee Hans recalls an incident from his internship during the education.

"There was actually one parent there, when I was changing the diaper, she just came in screaming at me that men shouldn't change diapers and things like that and just took the kid away while the kid was laying there. The sad thing is that the kid liked me a lot before that and wanted to play with me and things like that. But after the incident, where the parent just... I don't know what went wrong with the parent, but after that the kid never talked to me again." (Hans, male, 2016)

According to Hans, men have always been trash talked in the business in statements such as that they are not supposed to work with kids. Moreover, Hans describes the environment in preschools in conjunction to media coverage of scandals. He described the parents as becoming extra suspicious, even crazy, at these times. During these periods, he stated that he feels like being watched. Unlike Carl, he did not think it affected him too much at an emotional level, but rather on a practical level. In practice, it made him act more passive around parents until the media storm subsided.

"I usually think about it [the situation stated above when a parent interrupted him while changing diapers] when media brings something up again, because then all the parents are crazy again and they're extra suspicious again, because it's a hot topic again. [...] I feel like being watched. [...] Yeah, it affects me. I get a little more passive. I don't talk that much to parents that are suspicious. I notice sometimes some parents talk a little less to me than they usually do. And then I get a little more passive again and back off. And when they are ready again they can start doing the normal thing again. That's usually how I react to it." (Hans, male, 2016)

Three things are interesting to note here. Regardless whether or not suspicion from parents affects Hans personally at an emotional level, occurrences of parents openly disapproving male preschool teachers changing diapers on the kids, do not appear to be uncommon, as instances of this were brought up by female interviewees Erika, Greta, Diana and Ingrid, as well as all male interviewees (Carl, Hans and Johan). Secondly, since Hans used the word 'sad' to describe the event, it appears that, depending on the magnitude, it actually can have an emotional impact on mentally strong teachers as well. This impact can vary all the way from experiencing sadness to feeling nagged for the rest of their lives as expressed by Carl, depending on the level of accusations directed at them

as well as their own personalities. Thirdly, it can have practical effects on teachers, such as making them more passive.

However, Hans also provided us with a more balanced view on situations like the one he experienced himself. According to him, after the incident his colleagues gave him a lot of support. Not only the school where he had his internship, but other local schools as well joined up in an effort to commonly discuss how to handle this kind of situations. In that sense, the incident actually led to something good that could make other preschool teachers more secure in their profession. Apart from the fact that Hans' situation was a lot less severe than those described by Carl, the large amount of support Hans received may well have affected his ability to be at peace at work.

The third male interviewee, Johan, appeared at first to be less concerned with these issues. However, later on in the interview he let us know of an occurrence that took place three years ago. Once again it was parents who disapproved of men assisting the children with toilet activities. Johan appeared to be mostly frustrated with the principal and the greater organization, since they allegedly gave in to the demands of parents based on cultural and religious grounds. According to Johan, they simply explained to the parents that sometimes only men are present at the school, and if they don't change diapers the kids will have to walk around with defecation in them. After this dialogue, the parents never raised the issue again. Even so, he did mention that some parents might be conscious about risk for molestation. Interestingly though, we had heard this story from female interviewee Erika, his mother, beforehand, and the nuance was quite different. Johan presented his version in a calm demeanor, but according to Erika, this incident made him "really sad, angry and disappointed" to the level where he considered to leave the field of preschool teaching entirely. As such, it may very well be that he had forgotten how tough it was for him at the time or that he wanted to present the story in a way that would be less critical of the profession. Another possibility is that he did not want to expose his true feelings about the incident for us, because of its sensitive nature.

Erika was also under the impression that parents do react differently to men in the field, and in particular when it comes to changing diapers. Her view might have been influenced by the story of her son, Johan. But even if that is the case, the other female interviewees backed up this perception.

These kinds of situations appear to make this job more stressful for male teachers than female because they have to convince not only the parents but their female colleagues as well. One of our female interviewees, Fiona, showed her concerns about these situations, and elaborated on why it is stressful but important for men to convince all the stakeholders that they are trustworthy.

"I am thinking now about what is happening in the society. It is tough being a man and work with kids. They have to convince the people around them much more - the colleagues, parents, kids... that I am also the man you can trust. There are so many men, I am sorry, who abuse children today. And that is the difficult question. May be many [men] want to work with small kids but they don't dare because they are so scared to get a stamp that you are not someone to trust." (Fiona, female, 2016)

Important to note with this quote is that though she seems to have empathy and understanding for the hardships men suffer because of the crimes they are associated with. But it also shows that Fiona herself is under the impression that there are a lot of men who abuse children. Fiona believes male preschool teachers might be anxious about diaper changing because of how people around them can view it. But it is also clear from the interview that she thinks it is important to screen men harder than women in the beginning especially, as it is their responsibility towards the kids to do everything in their power to prevent these crimes from occurring. While this is a strong argument given that the potential harm to a child being sexually abused clearly outweighs the burden for male preschool teachers being screened, it could still be something that makes men entering the profession more uncomfortable than their female counterparts. This factor may thus be a potential contributor to the lack of men among preschool teachers.

This is supported by Diana who was under the impression that men in the business often felt like having a watching eye fixed on them, affecting their mood. Women on the other hand could both hug and even kiss the children on the cheek without any reaction or suspicion being cast against them.

"From what I've seen and heard, some men feel like they have a watching eye on them because there are debates around what might happen with men in preschool. Many men feel like they are being watched. That affects their moods at work. Women can do

whatever they want, they're more relaxed. They don't have those thoughts in their head. They can hug the child, or kiss them on the cheek." (Diana, female, 2016)

This notion was supported by male interviewee Hans as well,

"Sometimes it feels like they're kind of looking for those things because they can make a report on you. They're being extra careful, and they're watching you with an extra eye just because you're a man." (Hans, male, 2016)

Other interviewees also perceived having male preschool teachers as a potential risk.

"Of course it is a risk to have man. Because you've heard it too, the rumor about things going on with children. It's always a risk, you never know when it's going to happen. But it can also happen with women too. We have to trust them." (Berit, female, 2016)

Compared to Fiona, Berit's statement leans less towards advocating a tougher screening, while still claiming it as a risk to employ men in the field. She also believed that men are scared of working with small children because of the risk of getting accused of crimes, and saw it as a reason why male teachers are more common in elementary school. Principal Ingrid on the other hand thought that everybody would be as thrilled as herself when she finally found men to employ, but had to realize like all the other interviewees that some parents are still suspicious.

"I am so happy when I get a male teacher. I think everyone will be but apparently not. And that's because of what everyone reads today about male teachers...such horrible things." (Ingrid, female, 2016)

4.2.2 Women Viewed as Better Suited for the Job

The suspicion of molestation was not the only negative theme about men brought up. Not only do the men appear to be under pressure of being suspected, but often times they were also viewed as less suitable for the profession. Female interviewee Berit added this to the discussion of male teachers changing diapers.

"They [men] don't really like do that. First of all, they have never done that. We always have to show them how we do that. Most of them don't have kids. Sometimes maybe they're afraid to..." (Berit, female, 2016)

In her experience with male substitutes and interns, most men do not like to change diapers, and they do not even know how to do it. If this is true it would mean that men are lacking competence for the preschool teaching profession in comparison to women. Either way, it could imply the view that men are generally worse with kids because of genetics and their natural qualities.

These thoughts, indicating that women are overall better suited for the profession, were not uncommon to find among our interviewee roster. Female interviewee Anna claimed that "Women are more caring about children". Male interviewee Hans stated that men often asked him how he could manage fifteen kids because they had problems taking care of their own kids at home. When asked if men are generally worse with kids he answered:

"Yeah. Because it doesn't come natural. It's usually more natural with the women because they give birth." (Hans, male, 2016)

However, when asked if he would recommend the job to other men he said:

"Yeah. Because otherwise it will sadly be the way it is now, where it's not a man's job, if you say it like that." (Hans, male, 2016)

This highlights the complexity of how preschool teachers themselves can reason around gender issues within their profession. On the one hand, many seem to welcome a larger inclusion of men and the move away towards a female dominated profession. On the other hand, we encountered these statements that women are naturally better equipped for the job.

Another male teacher, Johan, added another point which would indicate that women have a natural advantage in the profession, making it harder for men to execute the same work tasks in certain situations.

"Sometimes I feel like very young children, like 2 year olds for example, have a hard time connecting with male teachers, like seeking comfort or things like that. And sometimes they are more afraid of the male voice for example." (Johan, male, 2016)

Others like Diana pointed to sluggish norms and historical contexts as to why women are still dominating the profession so clearly. Since women have always been doing this work, then it is viewed in society as the way it has to be.

"It's about norms, and about culture, and about what has been before. And it takes a while to wipe that part. Women have always been doing this kind of work, and then the society will think that's how it has to be." (Diana, female, 2016)

4.3 Benefits of Male Inclusion

When interviewees were asked about how they think inclusion of men can affect the profession and what this male addition can contribute with for kids in the preschool, they all generally had positive views about what they could add. We grouped the positive aspects of male inclusion, which were found in our interviews, in two main themes. The first one is about having male role models and the second one is about how men and women are perceived to have different traits that complement each other to improve the efficiency and work environment.

In the following sections we will discuss these themes in detail.

4.3.1 Male Role Model

In our 11 interviews, one of the most common things was that they all perceived that inclusion of men can be good for kids, especially for boys, in order to have male role models in the preschool. They mentioned that men and women both have different perspectives and it is better for kids if they have both genders in school to get a broader view. Some interviewees said that at home most of the kids have both genders around them, so why should they be missing one gender in the school? They further described that male teachers are good because they can do more manly sports and physical activities with the kids which they usually lack when they are just with female teachers. About role model images, one female interviewee expressed that,

"It's good to have men. Definitely it is good to have men on the workplace and especially boys need some man to look up to as a role model. And also for some typical games which men like to play with kids, and not all the women can do so." (Erika, female, 2016)

According to our interviewees, gender diversity was often considered good since including male teachers in this profession can help the kids to get broader perspectives. In Sweden where most of the families are dual earners, around 80% of the kids from one to five years old attend preschools

(Sweden.se, 2016). They spend most of the time of their days in school, mainly with female teachers, which means they probably lack male presence and male perspectives in their lives during their early school education. Our female interviewee Fiona expressed this in these words,

"It is a pity [not having male teachers] not just for the staff but for the kids as well. They need both genders as they spend long hours here and they need both here. It is time to change this." (Fiona, female, 2016)

Fiona further utters that men and women are different and have different perspectives,

"Kids need both. They have both since their beginning. I think men are men and women are women. And every gender must represent its part. As a woman I can't express myself as a man." (Fiona, female, 2016).

Our male interviewee Johan described what the presence of both genders can add in these words, by also highlighting the absence of male role models in early ten years for most kids in school life.

"And that will give the children some idea of one way of being a man...That's kind of what I think kids are missing. When they don't have male teachers it's easy to get a one sided view of men. You only have your father as a male influence in your first like 10 years or something... If there are more men in preschool, the kids will have a larger spectrum of male influences." (Johan, male, 2016).

Our male interviewee Carl described that differences in attitudes and behaviors of men and women can help to give the kids a broader perspective. According to his point of view, these differences in attitudes and behavior come from that men and women are brought up in different ways.

"In reality men and women are different because we are brought up in different ways and that is what can be seen in the attitudes and behaviors of men and women." (Carl, male, 2016)

Our interviewees described that kids appreciate men and often seem to have more fun with them than women. When we further inquired about the reason, they described that there are so few men in the business and kids feel more excitement when they see a man among the teachers in the

school. In our preschool F where there was no male teacher, but a man was working in the kitchen. One female teacher, Kristina, said the following about that male presence in these words,

"They [the kids] love it. They do. They look up to the men. Maybe that it's fun. They (men) are exciting, more interesting. We have a man in the kitchen. I notice that the kids love to go out to him." (Kristina, female, 2016).

One of our male interviewees, Hans, described the fact that men are more attractive for kids because of how uncommon it is to see a man in the preschool staff. Therefore, when kids see a man among them, they like it.

"A lot of the kids, they actually like and look forward to see a man because, I shouldn't say it's feminine, but there are so many females working there." (Hans, male, 2016)

Another female interviewee, Ingrid, also added her views and said that kids like male teachers and want to get closer to them. She said,

"But the common thing is that they [kids] tend to love having a male teacher. They cling on to him. They are very much around him." (Ingrid, female, 2016)

There were two interviewees, Kristina and Berit (both female), who said that girls especially tend to like male teachers more, have more fun and more enjoyed being with them. This was a new thing that we came to know because it goes against the general assumption to some extent that boys in particular need male teachers as role models. According to our interviewees, it is good for both boys and girls to have male teachers in the school and, according to Kristina and Berit, especially the girls are more excited for male teachers. Berit, a female teacher mentioned the fact in this way,

"It's positive. It's very positive. I see especially the girls they want to be with the male teachers. They want to hug him, sit on his lap... The boys see the male teacher like a friend more." (Berit, female, 2016)

Though Berit expressed this in a positive sense, it is somewhat unclear what relation she thought the girls had with the male teacher, since she considered it less as a friend relation than between the boys and the man. Moreover, we felt through the interviews that in reality, men are sometimes

mainly associated with more physical activities and administrative work, and they are included in this profession for specific purposes such as providing male role models to the kids. In other words, these men are not fully included and in a way they are marginalized. As a result, male preschool teachers are facing certain expectations from the stakeholders, while their female colleagues rarely have such kind of specific expectations on them. Both our male and female interviewees mentioned these facts in their interviews. Carl, a male interviewee, said about these expectations,

"I experience many times that men are viewed as playing uncles, playing dudes... And if someone looks upon you like this you start behaving in the same way." (Carl, male, 2016)

One female teacher, Erika, related such expectations to the administrative work which according to her is generally assigned to male colleagues in the school.

"When they [men] work in preschool they are often asked to do some type of administrative work [work on computer]. I don't know why, but even I ask them to do so as well." (Erika, female, 2016)

Another female interviewee Berit explained that male teachers are expected to do more physical activities, as it is something taken for granted that men will do and are interested in:

"I notice that the children like male teachers. They consider them more like a male friend, you know, kick football, playing games." (Berit, female, 2016)

Generally speaking, many interviewees said that kids like men because they can play more physical games with them. To a large extent, it seems that male teachers are expected to be physical sports conductors, even if some of them do not like such activities. Some of our male interviewees were unhappy with this, and claimed that men are expected to fill stereotypical roles in this profession. Male interviewee Johan said:

"Maybe it would be like they are more inclined to ask me to play football, or to do carpentry with them or something like that. At least at first, then they realize I'm not that interested in playing football, you know. But I think there are at least some of that when it comes to children reacting to male teachers." (Johan, male, 2016)

This indicates that it is not only the female colleagues who expect men to fill a certain role, but the kids do so as well.

4.3.2 Complementary Traits

In terms of what male teachers could bring to this profession, and what their impacts on the working environment could be, our interviewees all showed generally positive attitudes towards it. Most interviewees were sure that the presence of both genders in preschool teaching staff improves the overall working environment. They attributed various positive effects to male teachers' contribution, such as lifting moods, having a more direct approach and taking quick decisions, and performing the work in a more professional way. One female interviewee Fiona explained different factors regarding inclusion of men in the profession by saying,

"I think men take decisions immediately but women take longer time to decide, which is not good in certain situations. It is very good to have a combination of both at the work place. You behave in a better way when you have both genders at work. It is easy to feel bored, left out and insulted sometimes when there are just women at the workplace. Men have a more direct way to do the things, to express themselves in many situations." (Fiona, female, 2016)

Concerning the perception that men have a more direct approach, and better decision-making ability, the interviewees believe that presence of men in preschools helps to make things more defined and clear. According to them, this is based on their impressions that women usually think more about small issues and make big things out of them, whereas men do not overthink and overreact about issues. Therefore, it is important to have both genders present in order to have a balanced and pleasant working environment, which could enhance the work efficiency, as well as the quality. One of our interviewees' comments implied the perception of such kind of differences between the two genders:

"Women discuss about what to do instead of just doing it. Men get faster to the decisions." (Diana, female, 2016)

Another male interviewee, Hans, also described how the difference in men and women's attitude has a great impact on the work environment. While explaining this, Hans gave us an example of the decision making ability of both genders. He said,

"This will probably sound very... Just to put it direct, when there are many women, small, small, small things can be the biggest problem. And a man usually just ignores it. It's no problem. Let's fix it and go on. But they hang up on those small, small things, and they can't let it go. And it grows and grows and grows. And another thing I've noticed is that a lot of female colleagues don't address the problem. If a colleague did something and you want to give criticism or something like that, they don't go to the source. Instead they just go to another colleague, and another colleague and they just talk around the person instead of talking to the source. That's the main two things I've noticed." (Hans, male, 2016)

From the above mentioned quotes it seems that our interviewees tend to generalize men and women by assigning them stereotypical characteristics. Men are perceived to solve problems in a direct, efficient and practical way. Women on the other hand are considered indecisive, sentimental, conflict afraid and getting stuck on details. The interviewees may very well have experiences that point in this direction. Even so, their experiences working with male colleagues are very limited. As such, it is likely that their perceptions are largely based on other sources, such as the way genders are being portrayed in society, or within their friend circles. Therefore, we think it is important to remain somewhat skeptical of these utterances. Furthermore, if women really had all these negative characteristics, workplaces without men, such as preschool F in our study, would likely not function very well.

Both male and female teachers also criticized the link between parenthood and profession. On the one hand, many female teachers said in a positive way that they joined this profession when they got their own kids. Some female interviewees also attributed work satisfaction with the feeling of being at home. One female interviewee described,

"I feel at home and I am satisfied with my situation." (Fiona, female, 2016)

On the other hand, some considered that this constituted a distinction between men and women, since women relate this profession more to parenthood whereas men act more from a professional perspective.

"I think women relate more to motherhood and their own experience of motherhood at work. But men refer more to professionalism and what science says and what they have learned through education. I think both have a different point of view." (Greta, female, 2016)

One of our male interviewees, Carl, seemed really upset about the approach of treating the school in the same way as the home. He considered preschool as a place where kids learn values and become more disciplined.

"I experience that another problem in this department is that people start feeling their work place as their home place which is not good in my opinion. People start doing the same things here as they do at home. I believe it is a place where kids must learn democratic values. There should be discipline and if kids will not learn values from school they will not get it from their home either." (Carl, male, 2016)

Though Carl did not specifically mention this in the context that women have this approach more often, it is a criticism towards the approach that several of our interviewees connected with women.

In contrast to the positive characteristics and attitudes ascribed to men, such as a higher level of professionalism and decision making ability, some of our interviewees showed certain reservations about having male teachers in preschool on the basis of generalized male traits. As one female interviewee, Berit said:

"And then it's always someone in every preschool who doesn't want to work with men because they (women) have some bad experience." (Berit, female, 2016)

According to our information and Berit's statement, she had never worked with full time employed male colleagues, yet had still shown a positive attitude about male inclusion throughout her interview, seemingly based on her experiences with male substitutes at her preschool and stories she had been told from her friends working at other preschools. This made us curious to hear her elaboration on what these "bad experiences" consisted of. She explained that sometimes women

do not want to work with men because they perceive men as being more controlling in nature. Berit referred to a statement by one of her colleagues, who was on maternity leave at the time the interview was conducted. She had worked with men before and said that these men were very tough and controlling. According to her, if there are men in the workforce, they tend to dominate.

This is quite an interesting comment which describes that men are usually more keen on assuming controlling positions, and want to acquire more authority at work compared to women. If such perceptions are prevalent, it could be an important reason why a majority group discourages the inclusion of a minority group and considers it as potential risk for their dominance and authority. This also shows how even the women who do not have any major working experience with men are being affected by these stories and how that can shape their thoughts and behaviors regarding a particular issue. In absence of firsthand experience, these secondary sources of information become more influential. We think it can be problematic if members of a majority group base their opinions on minorities in the profession through stories told from their friends in the business, as these stories may easily suffer from communication distortions.

It is also interesting that we found some discrepancies between the lines when we transcribed the interviews. It seemed that the benefits of gender diversity were sometimes being discussed artificially and superficially. All interviewees agreed to some extent that it is good to have male teachers in the preschool, but they often gave ambiguous explanations to us regarding the positive effects of gender diversity in preschool. They could not always give clear and strong arguments on how and to what extent men can contribute to this profession. Some interviewees mentioned gender diversity as a basic source for having different behaviors and attitudes, but said afterwards that personalities matter more than gender. One female interviewee Greta pointed out that sometimes gender makes no difference at work:

"No, it depends on personality. I think it is a hard question to answer. Everyone is different, not on the basis of gender, but on the basis of the experiences which one has. So it is more than a gender thing." (Greta, female, 2016)

Another female interviewee Erika expressed her opinion as follows,

"But sometimes men act like women and sometimes women are strong too." (Erika, female, 2016)

As we can see from the above statements, sometimes our interviewees believed that it is personality rather than gender that makes the difference. Under this assumption, it is difficult to say what gender diversity actually means to this profession, if men and women are no different in preschool teaching.

However, we are a bit skeptical to whether these statements really express their true opinions. Though Erika claimed that personality is not necessarily linked to gender, the way she phrased it still implies that women being strong is an exception, rather than a normal occurrence. It is also unclear what exactly she referred to with men acting like women, but according to this remark, it seems that her general perception is that men are usually mentally stronger than women. Furthermore, the statement by Greta contradicts her other statement earlier in this chapter, that women relate to motherhood and men to science and professionalism, which implies that gender does influence personality.

4.4 Male to Male Connection

When our interviewees elaborated on the reasons, according to their perceptions, why there are so few men in the field, something new and interesting was brought up. We named this theme male homosocial desire, referring to the perception that men can connect with other men in a way they cannot with women, and therefore desire male colleagues. Three main factors related to this theme were brought up by our interviewees. Firstly, some claimed that the lack of men in this profession might also hinder other men from entering the business. Secondly, men already working in preschool could attract other men when they try to hire male teachers. Thirdly, as a result, some believed that if they intended to include men, there should be more than one man in the work place.

Our initial inspiration for the concept of male homosocial desire arose during the interview with male preschool teacher Johan. When we asked him about the workplace differences between the places with and without men, he described something he called "male connection" and emphasized the benefit of having male colleagues. He further explained the fact that,

"I guess you could call it male connection. I mean like a male friend you can talk about certain kinds of things that you maybe would not generally talk about with the female colleagues." (Johan, male, 2016)

When we further inquired about this male to male connection, Johan replied that as he came into this profession because of circumstances rather than planning, he did not initially think too much about having male colleagues in the work place, but at some point he realized its value. He explained that the presence of more men can motivate prospective male teachers to join the profession.

"Maybe I would have felt more attached to the world of preschool education or education at a general level if there would be more men." (Johan, male, 2016)

Another female interviewee Erika also described that the presence of too many women in relation to men, can hinder other men from entering the field.

"But I feel one of the reasons may be that when there are many women in the workplace it would be difficult for a man to come to that place." (Erika, female, 2016)

Many interviewees implied the importance of having more than one man in preschool, and considered that it would be better not only for the organization and working environment, but also for male teachers themselves. They specifically referred to this in relation to situations in which men might face resistance from parents and other female staff, and pointed out that if some unpleasant things happened, male teachers could support each other as well. They would not feel lonely and isolated. Erika remarked,

"There should be more than one, I must say, to support each other in some situations." (Erika, female, 2016)

It was also interesting that both principals mentioned the importance of what we refer to as homosocial desire, and they brought this up as one aspect of why it is so difficult to hire and retain lone male teachers. Though they would like to include more men, it seems that they would prefer a "conditional inclusion". By this we mean that principals seemed more concerned about having a permanent work force rather than to take initiatives for diversifying the work force. They were more eager to hire men if certain conditions were met. For instance, when hiring men in the preschool, there should be more than one. Even the principal of the preschool with teachers of both genders said she would prefer to hire another woman, even if she had no men working there, unless

the male applicant explicitly explained that absence of men would not affect him. Greta, this female principal, further clarified her statements above by claiming:

"I know from experience that men search for other men for work and that a single man will not stay for a long time in that situation. I will go to hire a woman if he does not clearly say that he does not care about having other men at the work." (Greta, female, 2016)

"It is better to hire a woman if there are no men because it would be hard to survive for a single man in this team." (Greta, female, 2016)

Ingrid, the other principal we interviewed, mentioned that she experienced that men attract other men and when they have one male teacher in the school, there are considerably better chances to have more. She said,

"I also think because there are not many males, they are afraid of being lonely. They want to work with other men of course. It's not sure you will do that. That's why when we get one male we often get more. Because they come together." (Ingrid, female, 2016)

As mentioned above, on one hand, both principals expressed that if there was no man working at a particular preschool, then they thought it would often be better to hire female candidates. They seemed to consider this as a simple way to avoid having male staff that do not feel satisfied, and to have a work force that they could more easily retain. On the other hand, this move might make the situation more complicated, leading to a dead end. As we can see from the quotes above, male teachers are sometimes less inclined to work at places where there are no other men, while hiring authorities sometimes also work in the same direction by hiring female teachers, which generates an even wider gender gap in preschools. In other words, these actions make the gender diversity in preschools even lower, as this creates a downward spiral away from gender diversity. Therefore, we believe that certain strategies and policies are required from the higher ups, in order to promote male inclusion in the profession.

Summary of Findings

During the analysis, we discerned four main themes from our findings. First of all, nearly all of the interviewees were under the impression that men valued high salary and status more than women. Consequently, since preschool teaching has low salary and status, they seemed to think that this profession is even less attractive for men than women.

Secondly, all of our interviewees mentioned instances of parents being suspicious of male preschool teachers due to the dark history of molestations by men in preschool. In line with this, all of our male interviewees had experienced direct confrontations with parents who strongly opposed letting them change diapers on their kids. However, we also found that many female colleagues screened men harder as well, and viewed it as their responsibility, in order to safeguard the kids. Because of this, male teachers often felt like being watched and had to prove themselves to both parents and colleagues, in order to convince them that they were reliable and trustworthy. We believe this suspicion of men can create discomfort among men in the profession, and can ultimately result in driving men away from preschool teaching.

Thirdly, our interviewees had generally positive opinions about what a larger inclusion of men could bring to the profession. They emphasized the importance of providing kids with male role models, and they considered men to have complementary traits to women that could contribute to a better work environment and increased efficiency. What was interesting here was that most of our interviews made very clear distinctions between men and women, and often presented each gender in a stereotypical way.

Finally, both men and women among our interviewees stressed the importance for men to have male colleagues. This even affected the recruitment decisions of both principals we interviewed, as men without male colleagues were considered more likely to leave the workplace after a short period of time. The absence of men in preschools therefore seems to discourage other men from entering, and at the same time discourage principals from hiring them.

5 Discussion

Following the literature review and empirical data analysis, in this chapter we are going to relate what we have found to the theories we discussed previously in chapter two. Generally, all of our interviewees showed positive attitudes towards gender diversity in preschool. However, some of them showed certain reservations. Our interviewees brought up several issues that we believe can hinder men from entering this profession, even though the inclusion of men does seem perceived to have certain positive effects. We will now compare our findings to the theories presented in our literature review, in order to highlight both similarities to, and deviations from, previous research, in order to enhance the understanding of our research questions.

5.1 Male Primacy and the Importance of Materialistic Motivations

Reviewing the theories about occupational sex segregation, Charles (2003) related vertical segregation to male primacy. Male primacy is defined as the perception that men are more status worthy than women, thus more appropriate for authoritative and dominant positions with higher status. We believe that male primacy theory could still explain people's perceptions to some extent. Here we will illustrate what we have found from our empirical material related to this theory.

Firstly, the findings that male preschool teachers are perceived to value salary and status more is consistent with the norm that men should be providers for the family. If men do not live up to the expectation of being a good provider for their current or future family, they risk being viewed as failures, more so than women. Therefore, according to our interviewees, men tend to be more pragmatic when they choose their career and negotiate about their salary. However, most preschools do not have much funding to provide an attractive pay for all the teachers, nor are they able to offer many opportunities for career development due to the flat organizational structure. Under these circumstances, preschool teaching is perceived as responsibility and compassion driven, rather than a well-paid profession.

Secondly, our literature review and our interviews are in alignment regarding both that preschool teaching is considered a low status job, and that men give more value to job status than women. In preschools, teachers, especially male teachers, feel less respected compared to the "real school" teachers. As we mentioned in the previous chapter, this could be traced back to the historical and cultural norms that preschool teaching is still mostly associated with babysitting activities. This especially affects male preschool teachers since they are perceived as girly. This lack of self-esteem relates to male primacy as well, because most people still take it for granted that men should have a decent job with a high status position.

Thirdly, the friend circle also seems to play a significant role on people's perceptions more or less. Interviewee Hans mentioned in his story that when people around him get to know he is a preschool teacher, the first image they get is that it is tough and low status. Both interviewee Hans and Ingrid's experiences imply that there are still negative views towards this profession in their respective friend circles. It appears that it is not uncommon for people to become surprised that a formal educational background is required for the job. Those perceptions may not necessarily impact our interviewees, but they are likely to affect some people, especially men, when they face their career choices.

In our literature review chapter, "pay" is stated as "not the main reason" why there are so few men in occupations not typically associated with their gender, like preschool teaching (Peeters, 2007; Williams, 1993). Nevertheless, most respondents in our interviews, excluding both principals, did state it as the main reason that hinder men from entering this profession. From our analysis, we think the reason why it is perceived as the main reason could connect to the flat organizational structure as well. The flat structure results in fewer promotion chances and career ladders. In this case, where men do not have many opportunities to go higher up, the salary becomes a more important consideration.

Though the majority of our interviewees believed that salary and status were the main components leading to gender segregation in preschools, we found other reasons on a deeper level that may be just as or even more important.

5.2 Gender Essentialism and Stereotypical Gender Images

In the literature review chapter, we discussed horizontal sex segregation theories (Charles, 2003) which described that occupations are divided or segregated among genders. Women are considered more suitable for certain jobs such as nurturance, caring and social interaction. This is one of the primary reasons why preschool teaching is perceived as a “women’s job”. It is also related to what can be seen in our findings, the cultural and historical perception that since women have been doing it for a long time, as well as possessing natural motherhood qualities, women are viewed as more suitable for this profession.

The horizontal segregation is similar to some aspects of marginalization theory as well (Prasad et al, 2007). As Prasad et al (2007) described, certain social groups are excluded from certain job pools. Therefore, for example, when one gender group gets the chance to enter a profession that is not perceived as associated with their gender characters, they may face marginalization from the majority group. The authors discussed social marginalization in the context of how women and minorities are being marginalized and excluded from certain jobs. However, we applied this theory to the context where men represent the minority group. Because of extensive gender segregation in preschools, men in this profession are usually associated with certain stereotype images. We found in our research that the stereotypification of men in preschool caused them to be assigned certain work tasks due to their masculinity. For instance, they are supposed to be male role models for the kids (especially boys), and play football or other activities which need considerable physical energy, as well as do additional work tasks that women are perceived as not that good at, such as work with computers, documentation, and analysis.

Moreover, skepticism towards the inclusion of men is present among some of the preschool teachers themselves. On the basis of pre-established assumptions, women are thought to be more suitable for this profession overall. Female interviewee Kristina claimed that women are more caring about children. And male interviewee Hans said that women are naturally better with kids because they give birth. Another female interviewee Berit shared her bad experience with a male substitute by saying that he preferred to do work in front of the desk, rather than looking at the children. This inspired us to introduce a new concept, "**female primacy**". Whereas according to male primacy, men are viewed as better suited for authoritative and high status positions, female

primacy represents the view that women are naturally better equipped for care taking and nurturing. During our research, we found that "female primacy" in the preschool context dominates our interviewees' perceptions to a large extent. Another example where we noticed this was in the interview with male teacher Johan, when he explained that kids under 2 years old sometimes have a hard time connecting with male teachers and even find their voices frightening.

In relation to "female primacy", we want to introduce another new concept, "**detachment from masculinity**". In the literature review, we found that men often emphasize their masculinity because of it being scrutinized while working in female dominated occupations. In our research however, we found that it may just as well be the other way around. We found that in the preschool context, men faced certain expectations both from parents and female teachers to show their masculine values and fill certain stereotypical roles. These expectations relate to gender role theory (Grandey, Cordeiro and Crouter, 2005) explored in the literature review. The authors discussed that men and women are expected to behave according to their genders. However, male interviewees in our discussion seemed to be upset by how they were associated with a stereotypical male identity, and how they were expected to do more physical activities and computer work. In those situations, these men tried to communicate that they have their individual interests which might be different from these general masculine traits. If these men were to overemphasize their masculinity, they could just have pretended to enjoy these activities anyway, but they opted not to. We could see this detachment from a stereotypical male identity in how male interviewee Johan openly showed that he did not enjoy activities like playing football, and male interviewee Carl's frustration over how men were commonly viewed as playing uncles instead of serious professionals.

We argue that due to the dominant perception of female primacy in preschool and how the male gender is often associated with images of potential sexual abusers, male teachers are reluctant to emphasize their masculinity. When we consider the dominance of female primacy as a possible cause for men not to emphasize their masculinity in the preschool profession, we find support in some of the literature (Cameron, 2001) discussed in the literature review chapter, since they claim that certain occupations, for example teaching and nursing, require a caring and nurturing attitude, and women are considered naturally better in this aspect. In this case traditional masculine values

such as being restrictive with emotions and less interactive clash with the qualities that are the most sought after in the profession, such as emotional intelligence and caring.

The other aspect is that male presence is associated with the risk of sexual molestation. In the literature review, we mentioned that opponents of male inclusion such as Pringle (1992, 1995, and 1998a) showed certain reservations about male child care takers. According to him, men are generally considered to have bad attitude with kids. Moreover, incidents of sexual abuse in society strengthen this view point that men have a higher tendency to molest young kids. The sexualization of men can be seen in our findings as well in how female interviewee Kristina thought it necessary to be vigilant over men when young girls wanted to be close to them. It was also pointed out by female interviewee Diana that for women it is considered normal to hug or kiss children, but if a man does it, it raises suspicion. On the basis of these factors, being preschool teachers, men do not want themselves to be sexualized and judged according to perceptions attached to their gender.

Due to these two factors, female primacy and the risk of molestation, we believe that masculinity is considered a two-sided resource in the preschool context. It is sometimes sought after to provide something different from the women, but at the same time considered subpar relative to female qualities in most aspects of the profession and even a potential hazard.

5.3 Stress of Heightened Visibility

As preschool teachers and principals, they implied that the gender diversity in practice is full of difficulties. Whenever there is negative news about male preschool teachers from the public media, all the innocent male colleagues are placed in the eye of the storm. Pringle's (1992, 1995, and 1998a) views that men should be scrutinized more thoroughly in the child caretaker profession than women seem to be supported by our female interviewees. Although male interviewee Hans noted that his female counterparts were quite supportive of him when he experienced his most unpleasant incident, the most common reaction was to relocate male teachers to positions that had less interaction with the public. Another reaction was to keep an extra eye on male teachers, and exclude them from certain work tasks such as changing diapers and assisting with toilet visits. We believe that this extreme stereotype image of male preschool teachers could have a remarkable

emotional impact on them. Furthermore, relocating these men sends a signal to them that they are not supported by the school management.

We relate this to Kanter's (1977) concept of heightened visibility. Her study described how a female minority was excessively visible in the workplace on the basis of being physically different. This visibility obscured their qualifications, capabilities and skills. Moreover, as minority, Kanter (1977) argued that these women faced excessive pressure and scrutiny of their work and that their performance would be viewed as an indicator of women's potential to succeed. However, we argue that our research can add something new to Kanter's theory. In our study, not only were the men's performance under scrutiny. But the crimes committed by a small number of male preschool teachers were seen as an indicator of "**men's potential to devastate**". The heightened visibility appeared to be a constant factor, based on how several female teachers monitored men more carefully in general, but the intensity seemed to raise notably in conjunction with media reports of new molestations in preschool.

Williams (1992) remarked that men who face negative public reactions in female dominated occupations may sometimes be promoted as a result of relocation. However, in the case of preschools with flat structure and few diversified career roles, this is seldom the outcome. As a result, negative public reactions may strike men harder in preschool than men in other female dominated occupations. From our empirical material, we learned that several of those who fell under suspicion, even if they were not asked to relocate, left or seriously considered to leave the profession entirely. This suggests that negative reactions from the public, and the discriminating added vigilance men face from their female colleagues strike many of them quite hard.

Relocating men to the commune office, or asking them to stop changing diapers on the kids seem to be a way for the preschools to avoid conflicts with the parents, and to safeguard both the kids and the school's reputation. Based on this, we argue that the heightened visibility can lead to two things. Firstly, even the men who act in accordance with laws and rules represent potential problems for the preschool, as conflicts and suspicion connected to the man may arise regardless. This can be a discouraging factor for preschools considering to hire men. Secondly, the men themselves are also discouraged from preschool teaching, since they cannot even count on trust from their colleagues. As our female interviewee Fiona described, men have to prove themselves

and convince everyone that they are capable and trustworthy, in a way that is not required by women. We believe this is likely contributing to the low number of men desiring to be part of this business.

5.4 Male Homosocial Desire

According to Kanter, (1977) one of the challenges faced by minority groups is assimilation, which refers to the difficulty for them to adapt to the majority groups' norms, patterns and tacit social expectations and mix with them. In our research, we also found that men as a minority group face these social challenges and isolation, and they are considered different by highlighting the stereotypical images associated with them in the preschool context. This could explain why they appear to have “male homosocial desire”. By bringing in this concept, we conceptualize the tendency that male preschool teachers desire the presence of other male colleagues, and to establish a connection with them at work.

We could relate statements from four of our interviewees to this concept. It is based on the idea that men can connect with other men in a way they cannot with women. Our interviewees specifically mentioned that there were some things men would not feel comfortable discussing with women, and that men could receive better support from other men than women during hard times and conflicts with parents.

Since there are so few men in this profession, it could be lonely for a single man working in preschool with only female colleagues. Thus, it is also hard to retain this male teacher. Both principals in our interviews also mentioned that according to their personal experiences, in many cases, if there is already one man working in the preschool, hiring more men tend to be easier because his presence attracts other male applicants. To sum up, the male homosocial desire is not only important for attracting and retaining male teachers, but also necessary for men because they feel more comfortable and supported when working in the preschool.

In reality, according to our interviewees, the male homosocial desire is not easy to fulfil in practice. Firstly, it could be attributed to the reluctance of hiring men to some extent. In our analysis chapter, we also mentioned that some female teachers had or had heard of bad experiences with male colleagues. One of the examples is female interviewee Berit, who told us that her female colleague

would rather not hire male teachers because she had worked with men who were stubborn and controlling. This is also in alignment with one of the arguments presented by Prasad et al (2007) that elite groups in organizations tend to hire people from their own social group in order to avoid conflicts and get social comfort.

Secondly, hiring male preschool teachers is hard because there are few male applicants. And even if they find a male applicant, just as our principal interviewees mentioned, they prefer to hire multiple males at the same time, since they perceive that it is more difficult to retain a single man. Thus, the hiring authorities prefer to recruit female teachers instead, since it requires less effort and time.

5.5 Advantages of Including Male Teachers

In our literature review we found many arguments for having a diversified work force, including increased efficiency, creativity and added value (Bassett-Jones, 2005). We found strong support for these arguments in our research. Many positive attributes were associated with men, and they were generally perceived to add something different than women. Though men were often generalized in a stereotypical way that was not always congruent with their individual personalities, many of these generalizations suggested that male inclusion would be beneficial.

Men were perceived to have a more direct approach, addressing the root of the problems without talking around the situation or person they had an issue with. This was said to reduce gossip, and reach solutions faster. As such, the argument about increased efficiency seems to be supported by our interviewees.

Increased creativity can also be connected to how the men were perceived to do other activities with the kids than the women did. Though the men we interviewed did not always like the activities that their gender was associated with, such as football, they mostly seemed to agree that men exercised physical activities to a larger extent than women.

Most importantly, according to the interviewees, was that men provided the children with male role models. It was commonly mentioned that the kids loved being with male teachers. Some

attributed their popularity to their rarity. On the same line, several interviewees mentioned that kids have a mother and father at home, but then go to school and find themselves in an environment without adult males. Male teachers were said to enable the kids, especially the boys, to have an adult of their own gender to teach them good values and behavior, provide an additional father figure, and even give kids a more nuanced picture of what grown men can be like. Thus, it seems that diversity in the case of preschools is perceived to add value to the organization in many ways, both for the colleagues, and for the kids. And as also mentioned in the interviews, as long as the kids were happy, so were their parents. In other words, principals and teachers seemed to consider gender diversity as something that can improve relations both internally and externally.

6 Conclusion

In this final chapter we will summarize the process of reaching our research aim and objectives. This is followed by a conclusion of our findings, and what practical and theoretical implications they have. Lastly we will share our thoughts regarding what future research can be directed upon, before we round off with a few final words.

6.1 Research Aim and Objectives

The main purpose of this research has been to add to the understanding of occupational gender segregation. While searching for heavily gender segregated professions we finally settled for preschool teaching, as the approximate male ratio was staggering low at 3,5%. In the background research we conducted, we noted that men were greatly underrepresented in the preschool teaching programs, and also that a large ratio of them never finished their education. This means that gender segregation in this profession is unlikely to change notably in the coming years. In order to understand why this profession is so unattractive to men, we decided to conduct in-depth interviews with both male and female preschool teachers, as well as principals, to learn about their perceptions regarding gender diversity in the profession.

Upon a direct question why they thought the ratio of men was so low in preschools, most of them referred to the low salary and status, implying directly or indirectly that men seem to value these aspects more when considering their choice of career. But through critically reviewing our interviews, we found several other interesting aspects that were not very obvious.

Overall, the majority of both the men and women we interviewed had very distinct perceptions of general differences between each gender, despite the fact that some of these women had never worked with fulltime employed men in this profession. This had several important implications. The men were expected by both their female colleagues and the kids to fill a specific role connected to their gender, even though it did not always match with the individual personality of themselves. Rather than emphasizing their masculinity, they had it imposed upon them. They were considered

able to provide kids with male role models and playing partners, as well as contributing to a better working environment and efficient decision-making, but overall naturally worse with children than women. Having studied the concept of male primacy before, we decided to introduce a new concept for describing this phenomenon. We call it "**female primacy**", and it represents how women are considered naturally better at skills related to nurturing and care-taking on the basis of their gender alone.

Furthermore, we could see a connection with Kanter's (1977) theory of heightened visibility, but added something new to it. Because of scandals of male preschool teachers sexually abusing kids, and the prevalence of **female primacy**, men faced noticeably tougher screening than women. Instead of having only their performances being viewed as their gender's potential to succeed, men who had committed crimes within preschools set indicators of **men's potential to devastate**. As these crimes do happen from time to time, there is no given answer to what the appropriate amount of screening should be, as this is a balance between the safety of the children and the discomfort of the male teachers. However, it does complicate the situation of hiring men, as they will have to convince both parents and colleagues to a much larger extent than women before they can earn the necessary trust to feel comfortable at work.

We argue that due to female primacy and heightened visibility, men have less benefits than disadvantages from emphasizing their masculinity, which can help to explain why the men we interviewed did not do so. We also decided to conceptualize this distancing from their stereotypical gender role as **detachment from masculinity**. The men seemed to prefer being considered preschool teachers on the same grounds as women, rather than being identified as male preschool teachers. At the same time, the men themselves also generalized both genders and their respective strengths and weaknesses, which suggests that stereotypical gender roles are being enforced by both men and women in the profession.

Finally, both men and women emphasized that men can connect with other men in a way they are unable to do with women. Thus, they are much more likely to apply for and stay at workplaces where they can have male colleagues. We conceptualized this as **male homosocial desire**.

The perceptions of principals and teachers in preschool draws a complicated picture. Almost all of our interviewees explicitly wished to have (additional) male colleagues. At the same time, they were rarely considered equals. Due to the lack of experience in working with male preschool teachers, some of the generalizations seem at least partly based on generic gender myths, or stories not experienced first-hand. Even so, the perception of gendered roles seems to reign supreme. Or as female interviewee Fiona described it:

"Men are men and women are women." (Fiona, female, 2016)

Revisiting our research questions, their answers seem to be partly interrelated. Though male primacy could explain gender segregation in this field due to men being more concerned with salary and status, we argue that this is only part of the answer, as the perceptions of gender diversity in the profession may also discourage men from preschool teaching in several ways. Female primacy (being viewed as inferior) and heightened visibility (tough screening and distrust from their environment) might drive men out of the business. As preschool teacher students are required to perform internships to fulfill their education, many of them are likely to encounter these attitudes and perceptions already before graduating. This could explain the vast ratio of male dropouts, as our findings indicated that the heightened visibility is extra severe for substitutes, interns and newly employed personnel. Bad experiences for the preschool teacher students will likely be presented to their classmates through their stories, potentially deterring other male teacher aspirants as well. Unless male teachers are receiving the same level of trust as women, and are evaluated based on their performance rather than on their gender, the job will likely be tougher on them, which could explain their disinterest in the profession. Furthermore, since principals are more interested in hiring men in pairs, and men desire to work with other men, it becomes difficult to turn the situation around when the work pool of men is so limited.

6.2 Theoretical Contributions and Practical Implications

Gender diversity in the preschool context may be regarded as an extraordinary situation. Other heavily gender segregated occupations may not have stigmas attached to one gender as severe as those regarding sexual abuse of children. However, we do think that our theoretical contributions can be relevant in other female dominated occupations. We introduced female primacy as one of

our new concepts. Female primacy describes a well-established perception within a profession that women are better suited for it due to innate traits linked to their gender. In our study, these traits made them better at nurturing and care-taking. We believe it is not unlikely that these perceptions can be prevalent in other female dominated occupations related to nurturing and care-taking as well. Female primacy might therefore also help to explain occupational gender segregation in these instances. There might also be further skills that women are perceived as naturally better at related to the core of other female dominated professions that can be explained through this theoretical framework.

We also believe that male homosocial desire can help to explain why it is so difficult to introduce more men, not only in preschool teaching, but in female dominated occupations or workplaces, in general. If employers perceive that several men must be hired simultaneously, when they represent such a small ratio in a profession, the opportunities for successful recruitments are few and far between.

We have also made contributions to Kanter's theory of heightened visibility in that not only are a gender or minority group's performance being generalized to represent all members of said group, but so can the scandals, crimes or destructive actions taken by an individual member of this group. We have labeled this as potential to devastate, in contrast to Kanter's terminology of potential to succeed. Furthermore, we have contributed to Williams' (1993) research. While Williams (1993) claimed that men in female dominated occupations tend to emphasize their masculinity, we argue that this is only the case if traditional male qualities have predominantly positive connotations in any given context. Otherwise, a detachment from masculinity is just as likely.

Our study might have practical implications as well. We suggest that management of preschools looking to hire and retain men should bear the concept of heightened visibility in mind. Men who fall under suspicion but are proven innocent must receive clear support from both colleagues and management. Simply relocating these men is a basic way of avoiding a tarnished reputation for the school, but sends a signal of distrust towards the falsely accused man. As we saw in our findings, not only will that discourage those affected directly, but they may also, like male interviewee Carl, spread the word about the incident, effectively discouraging other men from entering the business.

Preschools will also have to find a way to balance between supervising and trusting new recruits. One option would be to make sure newly recruited men and women are examined equally, not just during the application process, but in the everyday work as well. This could be a way to reduce the men's feeling of being discriminated upon on the basis of their gender. By providing appropriate support and reducing discrimination, we argue that preschools can increase their possibilities of retaining male teachers for a longer period of time.

Finally, despite all the negative aspects associated with men in the business, most interviewees wanted more men to enter the business. It is possible that the campaigns for attracting new men into the field of preschool teaching have not done enough to highlight positive aspects of the profession, and how a lot of men, despite all these difficulties, are much appreciated and sought after as preschool teachers. Perhaps this could also balance out the negative image that people are receiving through reports of child molestations, and help to attract new men to the profession.

6.3 Future Research Opportunities

Due to the time limit of this research, it was necessary to limit the number of interviews to a manageable number. We settled for eleven interviews. Though we reached many interesting findings, the credibility of our arguments would be even stronger if our interviewee sample had been larger. We also think that future research can be directed at further exploring the concepts of heightened visibility and male homosocial desire. It would be interesting to see if these two concepts correlate. Freely speculating, we think that the male homosocial desire might be increasingly prevalent when men experience a higher visibility. This would likely require a large sample of interviews from across different female dominated professions, but the results would be interesting to review.

We would also like to see future research examine if female primacy can explain gender segregation in other female dominated professions. There might be other professions which require skills that women are perceived to have a naturally higher proficiency in. If that is the case, we believe it is likely that men have to work harder to prove themselves and earn trust in these professions as well, making them potentially less attractive for men.

Through this thesis we have tried to gain a broad perspective on our research questions. We hope that our findings may inspire future researchers and become their starting points.

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8 Appendix

DECLARATION

Here we, Amara Azeem, Sebastian Berglund, and Yuting Zhu, declare that this Master's thesis illustrates our original study and is written by our ourselves. All contributions from the organizations and previous researches in this thesis are clearly stated and referenced. This thesis has been written by us under the supervision of Jens Rennstam, at Lund University School of Economics and Management.

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