

Doing research in Indonesia and Sweden on the ambivalence of care and masculinity in ECEC; challenging dominant norms through ethnographic methodology ^[1]

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Source: Ethnography and Education

Format: Article

Publication Date: 28 Apr 2021

AVAILABILITY

Access online ^[2]

Excerpted from introduction

The aim of this paper is to explore the concept of care in relation to masculinity in early childhood education (ECEC) by building on long-term ethnographic studies in Sweden and Indonesia. In this study, hegemonic norms about 'real men' in urban west Java, intersected with norms about religion, and in urban west Sweden with norms about gender equality. The fieldnotes emanate from studies in ECEC settings in urban middle-class environments. The purpose is not to compare Indonesia and Sweden as national units, but to use examples from local ECEC settings and pose questions about how positions such as 'normal men' and 'men as role models' are produced in relation to professional care, through different local cultural understandings of education. In Indonesia as well as in Sweden, masculinity is fraught with ambiguities on how to relate to care. Through the data, it became possible to see how this ambivalence was manifested and expressed in different ways by men in Indonesia and Sweden. In the paper, I argue that stereotypes of 'normal men' did not differ in any significant way across the ECEC contexts. All men who were part of the study in Indonesia as well as in Sweden, were expected to take positions as 'role models' and teach discipline or self-control, in relation to local understandings of these positions. At the same time care was seen as ambivalent for all men in the study. However, the way care was negotiated differed as well as how the men handled fear and shame following processes of marginalisation that set them apart from the 'normal men'.

The ambivalence that the notion of caring carries for men in different professions manifests itself across the globe (Brody 2015). As discussed by researchers within the field of ECEC (Einarsdottir et al. 2014) as well as in studies of gender and ethnicity (Hankivsky 2014), there is a need for more research on care, especially on the way care intersects with other situated norms and values. In this article, I will discuss how care intersects with idealised and marginalised masculinity. However, this kind of 'sensitive data' is not easily accessed. My contribution to the field of ethnography and education lies not just in the results of the cross-national study, but also in how this data became possible through ethnographic methodology (Marcus and Fischer 2014). I argue that ethnographic methodology building on long-term relations, situated knowledge and trust, is essential to produce material that otherwise is not only hidden but also non-existent.

Region: International ^[3]

Tags: gender ^[4]

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