The realities of being “The Man”: managing the tensions and dilemmas of ‘male presence’ in early years settings

National Men in Early Years Conference
City College Southampton
Dr. Simon Brownhill
• It is a **privilege** to work with young children
• It is a very **satisfying** and **rewarding** job
• You directly **impact** on the lives of ‘the future’
• There is the possibility that you will be **remembered**!
• The **memories** will live with you for years
• The EY is an **incredible profession** to work in
National
Local
Setting
Individual
Individual level

• ‘Well why do you want to do that?’ (Interview J, nursery nurse, private day nursery)
• The perceived/actual challenge to one’s masculinity (Connell, 1995)
• Being a ‘rarity’ in a female dominated environment
• **Status** and **financial** gain/loss (Baker, 2012)
• ‘It’s hard work!’ (‘Ben’, focus group, KS co-ord)
### Setting level

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<th>Colleagues</th>
<th>Senior Management</th>
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<td>• ‘Staff would say to me “Could you get something heavy down off the top shelf?” and “You’ll be doing the football team then!”’…and suddenly you’re sort of pigeon holed…’ (‘Ben’, FGI)</td>
<td>• ‘A gender balance WAS important. However, our last two male appointees were disappointing and now it is simply the best person for the job.’ (50-year-old male principal from Decile 4 school, (Cushman, 2006)</td>
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Local level

• **Men drives** (The Fatherhood Institution, 2015)

• *Change my child’s nappy? NO WAY!* Recognising cultural, religious or social considerations (Francis, 2012)

• Community pressures to employ **male role models** for those children living in sole-parent (female) families (Cushman, 2006)

• **Gay, paedophiles or managers in the making** (Cameron *et al.* 1999)
National level

1. ‘Restoring...the gender balance and diversity reflected in the wider society’ (Montecinos and Nielsen, 1997: 47)

2. Counteract the feminisation of practices in the early years and primary schooling (Skelton, 2003)

3. ‘Raising academic motivation, behaviour, engagement and attainment levels of boys’ (Brownhill, 2015: 19)
Activity break

• Please have an unused piece of paper to hand! You also need to close your eyes!
• Please follow my instructions BUT PLEASE DO NOT OPEN YOUR EYES!
• Ready...?
• DO NOT OPEN YOUR EYES!
• Now...open your eyes!
Suggestions

• You have to have a “strong character and self-belief to succeed in childcare as a man” (Francis, 2012)

• Establish professional links with other men in the profession – think Men’s groups, online communities, conferences, FE/HE institutions

• Be true to yourself – remember you are there for the children

• Promote a ‘team approach’ to EY practices
Suggestions

• Resist ‘buying into’ assertions about the benefits of your presence
• Be sensitive to local beliefs and practices
• Appreciate that it will take time for attitudes and practices to change (slowly but surely…)
• Remain mindful of the fact that it is not ‘always about the money’
• Be the very best that you can be!
‘I don’t know of any other job that is so stimulating, varied, rewarding and exhausting! When I die I want my tombstone to read:

Here lies Simon Brownhill – he taught ninety children to read and write as a Reception teacher

That, for me, is my greatest achievement. I miss being called ‘Mr. B’. I still have my planning and assessment records – they are too precious to throw away.’
Dear Canyon

I am so sorry that I smacked you in the privets.

Be a good boy.

Thank you!
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