

SUSPICION, COMPETENCE, AND COPING IN PRESCHOOL TEACHERS'
IDENTITY WORK

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to explore and analyze the everyday complexities of being a preschool teacher. I spent two years doing ethnographic research in a Montessori preschool and collected twenty-three interviews from the preschool teachers working there. This dissertation analyzes preschool teacher identity work in the context of suspicion, competence, and coping. In a general way, I find gender to be a turning point in preschool teachers' identity. Men preschool teachers are met with a form of suspicion casting them as threats to preschool children. Similarly, competence is different for men and women. Women are granted competence because they are naturalized as caretakers, while men must prove they are competent to work with children. Last, coping is part of preschool teachers' emotional labor and identity work. I find coping with stress in a constructive manner is a major part of preschool teachers' identity work.