

Prejudice isn't what keeps men out of nurseries

1 **I**f one was ever in any doubt that
men have rigid ideas about what
types of employment they're
3 prepared to sully their lily-white
hands for, one only has to think
back to Arnold Schwarzenegger in
Kindergarten Cop: a movie entirely
dedicated to the premise that the
job of nursery teacher was intrinsi-
cally demeaning for a red-blooded
10 male, even if the actor playing him did
resemble Stretch Armstrong nervously
arriving at his first gay disco.

15 Almost 20 years on, and it's not that
guys are just as picky - they're getting
worse. According to the General Teach-
ing Council, there are no young (under
25) males currently working in state-
run-nurseries. Elsewhere in the state
20 sector, female teachers still outnumber
men three to one, and it remains rare for
a man to teach in primary school. One
of the reasons given for this centres on
men saying they find it hard to coun-
25 ter the gender stereotypes inherent in
working with young children - that it
has become such a female stronghold,
males are put off by the thought of being
perceived as 'unmanly', out of place,
30 even 'suspicious'.

Reading this, one might surmise
that there is a barrier unfairly stopping
men from making genuine headway in
such careers. That, in this professional
35 area, it's men who have become the
oppressed minority - quivering in the
corners on parents' evening, holding
placards reading: 'I'm not a paedophile.'
Really? Or could it be that the real rea-
40 son there are so few men in nursery and
primary teaching, arenas where strong
male role models are sorely needed, is
that the money isn't great, while the
work is demanding, but low-status - all
45 hallmarks of that widespread, though
still barely acknowledged, phenom-
enon, 'chick-work'.

50 What is chick-work? It is many
things, but basically it is any field of
employment in which men don't fancy
participating, and therefore allow
women to dominate. In this way, classic
chick-work would be anything low-
paid, gruelling, most probably relat-
55 ing to cleaning, small children or
'the caring professions': hence
the comparative rarity of
'mannies', male nurses, or
guy-cleaners. My brother, a
60 male rarity, has managed
state care facilities for the
elderly and the homeless,
and, by his account, women

willing to work in this twilight sphere
generally outnumber men by at least
five to one.

Isn't this the real reason men shy
away from teaching small children?
That it falls into the category of jobs
they don't feel 'become' them? Nothing
70 to do with some bizarre borderline sci-fi
concern about how their penis-decked
persons are not welcome on Planet of
the Female Nursery Teachers. After all,
since when did that ever bother them?
One of the most screamingly funny
sights of recent years has been the way
men have muscled in on cooking - sorry
chef-ing - since it started to look profit-
80 able and fun. Amazing how, with a few
rings of Gordon and Jamie's cash tills,
scrambling an egg went from something
sissy and domestic your mum and Delia
did, to an act of high-grade machismo.

What happened to worrying about
looking 'unmanly' then? See also the
astonishing number of males prepared
to wriggle their booty on *The X Factor*,
or even enter model shows. Just a few
90 examples of how when men want to
pursue a profession, even change its
'gender', as it were, they're generally
not shy about doing it. And good luck to
them, so long as they don't try to pass
off their lack of interest in areas such as
nursery education with cries of sexist-
'wolf'.

In truth, men in female-dominated
fields have little in common with
women in male-dominated fields. Only
100 last week the Chartered Management
Institute reported that, at the current
rate, women in management posi-
tions should achieve equal pay by 2195.
(Wow. Only 187 years to wait - should
we feel spoiled?) By contrast, education
continues to fall over itself to attract
men. Just a wild guess, but I'm thinking
it was never going to take 187 years to
get men paid equally in the female-
110 dominated profession of teaching.

115 Indeed, maybe *Kindergarten Cop*
said it all. After all, it wasn't the children
raising objections to the new guy, or the
mainly female staff, or the parents, it was
Arnie's character himself who seemed to
fear that his very maleness came
under threat the more he got his
hands dirty with chick-work.
The only difference being that at
120 the end of *Kindergarten Cop*, Arnie
tearfully realised he'd 'learned some-
thing'. In real life, what's the betting
he'd have been tearing open his
wage packet, and sneering: 'Is this
125 all you dopey bitches get paid?'

