

PLAYING IT STRAIGHT:  
KINDERGARTEN CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER IN PLAY MATERIALS

by

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Master of Arts  
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**ABSTRACT**

This study focuses on the perspectives of kindergarten children regarding their perceptions of gender appropriateness of play materials. The theory of gender performativity has been used as a theoretical lens for the study. Six kindergarten children between the ages of four and five were individually interviewed about whether they believed toys to be gender-specific or gender-neutral. Results indicated that children displayed gender-stereotype knowledge as well as an understanding that toys can be gender-neutral, however, they were generally perceived to be gender-specific. Themes found include: perceptions of play materials as gender-neutral, perceptions of play materials as male-appropriate, perceptions of play materials as female-appropriate, notions of gender stereotypes, gender-role flexibility, contingent gender-role flexibility and external knowledge sources. Implications of these results regarding both gender-conforming as well as gender-non conforming children are provided and recommendations for educators are suggested.

**Keywords:** gender performativity; children; masculinity; femininity; heteronormativity; toys; gender stereotypes, gender roles, gender non-conforming behaviour

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## **Introduction**

### **Statement of the Issue**

The process of constructing gender behaviours and roles continues throughout the lifespan. Gender construction in early childhood is significant as this is when children are first coming to understand the notion of themselves as gendered beings, as well as the roles and behaviours that coincide with gender identities (Chick, Heilman-Houser, & Hunter, 2002). The period of early childhood is critical in that children are able to construct notions of gender with which they will identify; differentiating between males and females not only influences the development of gender and sexual identity but also contributes to a child's knowledge of the social world (Banse, Gawronski, Rebetez, Gutt, & Bruce Morton, 2010). Thus, the discourses and resources provided for children can influence their perceptions of gender appropriateness both for themselves and others.

The discourses of gender entail the social characteristics that define masculinity and femininity within a society; these include actions such as dressing, thinking, acting, and being as well as macro social constructions such as family structures, work dynamics, religious ideologies, sexuality, educational institutions and laws, that are established based on gender (MacNaughton, 2000). Children learn what gender roles and attributes of gender identity are believed to be desirable, and those which are less favoured within their cultural and societal contexts (Banse et al., 2010). Children apply this knowledge when making decisions as to what behaviours are (stereotypically) appropriate for their gender; this rationale in thinking may affect their decisions in terms of choices of careers, recreational activities, educational pursuits, peers, and roles within families (Bem, 1981).

More specifically, in regard to play choices, Starr (2010) affirms that as a result of the stereotypical behaviours and roles that society expects children to adhere to when selecting and utilizing toys, they become limited in their own gender role prescriptions which in turn limits their experiences. Arney (2011) demonstrates that this is especially evident in toy stores where the division of gender is obvious as children's toys are categorized based on stereotypical notions of gender; this sends the message to children (and their caregivers) that their toy selections should be associated with their gender. Given what is known regarding the ways in which social factors influence children's gender construction, the purpose of this qualitative study is, through a discussion of play materials, to investigate the perspectives of a sample of kindergarten children regarding notions of gender; specifically gender identification, gender roles and gender stereotypes.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions to be explored in this study are as follows:

- 1) *What awareness and understanding do kindergarten children in a university based child care centre possess regarding notions of gender?*
- 2) *Do they contest notions of gender stereotypes? If so, how?*

A qualitative approach is best suited to investigate these questions as qualitative research allows researchers to understand the perspectives of participants and provides an opportunity for participants to be active in the research process and have their voices heard (Peters, Abu-Saad, Vydelingum, & Murphy, 2002). Through flexible yet rigorous methods, researching participants within their natural environments, and utilizing the researcher as the primary mechanism for data collection, analysis and interpretation, qualitative research can provide an in depth exploration of participants' world and lived experiences (Peters, et al., 2002). Qualitative research permits

increased flexibility and provides opportunities for disclosure of perspectives that may not be attained via a quantitative approach (Peters et. al, 2002).

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

A key approach that informs this study is the “new” sociology of childhood. According to this approach, children are viewed as possessing active minds that are receptive and perceptive of the child’s social and physical surroundings (Matthews, 2007). Children are viewed as social actors who actively construct their social realities based on the information they internalize from their surroundings (Matthews, 2007). This view also recognizes children as knowledgeable, competent and skilled members of society who possess a substantial amount of information on their own lives and who have valuable insights into the world of childhood (Einarsdóttir, 2007). The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989), which this approach is based upon, contends that children must be given opportunities to embrace and express their voices so that their competencies, capabilities and knowledge are thoroughly recognized (Harris & Barnes, 2009). The new sociology of childhood emphasizes the contributions children can make in their accounts and stresses the importance for actively including children and their perspectives in social research; children are to be respected, have their opinions heard, and be provided with opportunities to contribute their knowledge (Harris & Barnes, 2009). This approach urges researchers to encourage children’s participation as they are understood to be significant informants on issues of their own lives (Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin, & Robinson, 2010).

My view of children and childhood has played a significant role in the data collection procedures for this study. The reason for collecting data *with* children is due to the growing literature, particularly within the new sociology of childhood, regarding children as active

participants and creators of their own knowledge. Researchers need to be conscious of and refrain from practicing ‘ethnographic ventriloquism’: the tendency to go beyond speaking *about* another form of life but also to speak from *within* it (James, 2007). Although we may be knowledgeable regarding the concept of childhood, we must remember that as adults we are not children, and must designate children as the primary informants of childhood. Harris and Barnes (2009) have stated that children themselves possess the most genuine form of expression regarding their own knowledge and perceptions, and thus actively inquiring into children’s perspectives is essential in gaining the most detailed accounts of how children experience specific phenomena (Harris & Barnes, 2009). Furthermore, the authors assert that within the past children have been viewed as too immature, too susceptible, and not developmentally or cognitively advanced enough to participate in research endeavours, but in fact children serve as highly competent participants when involved in social research (Harris & Barnes, 2009).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) states that children have the right to express their opinions regarding issues that affect them personally. Understanding children’s notions of gender is essential to increasing competence and awareness into the ways in which both gender-conforming and gender non-conforming children are being limited and even oppressed in terms of gender-diversity. Young children need to be provided with opportunities to voice their own opinions and perspectives and to be recognized as competent and autonomous members of society (Harris & Barnes, 2009). In order to enhance the childhood experiences of young children, we must first seek their perspectives and listen to their voices on the issues that matter most.

Another framework which closely resonates with the scope of this study is that of the theory of *gender performativity*. Butler (1990) suggests that gender is constructed through the

repetitive performance of gendered behaviours. Pervasive notions of masculinity and femininity have been inundated within society as 'appropriate' for males and females, and as a result acts and behaviours associated with these gendered roles are performed and re-performed by individuals (Butler, 1990). A main argument of this theory is that gender itself is not in actuality 'real', but only perceived to be real as a result of its continued performance; the concept of 'gender' cannot exist without actors to fulfill the roles it entails (Butler, 1990). Thus, she argues the concept of gender is socially constructed; binary forms of gender identity are established within society and then internalized by individuals and acted upon. Individuals learn what gendered roles are appropriate and associated with their 'sex' and choose to act on these roles exhibiting perceived stereotypical traits and behaviours. Gender works to substantiate itself through constant performance of sedimented gendered acts which perpetuates its maintenance within society.

The theory of gender performativity views gender as being a construct encompassed by traits that individuals perform but do not intrinsically possess. Hegemonic ideals of heterosexual masculine and feminine gendered identities have been historically pervasive throughout society and are thus limiting to those who do not adhere to their expected gendered roles as well as those who do not resonate with either of these binary identities (Butler, 1990). Individuals with gender identities that do not resonate with society's dualistic normative ideals, become marginalized and thus their subversion is propagated within society (Butler, 1990). According to Butler (1990), heterosexist gender identities and gendered roles that are believed to be normative within society have derived from patriarchal models of power. This presents binary notions of masculine and feminine gendered roles that are limiting and subversive to individuals who do not categorize themselves within these fixed boundaries of gender identities.

## **Literature Review**

This literature review entails a selective review of papers related to the topic of gender identification in children. The articles considered in this review focus on the concept of gender during childhood, and the ways in which the toys and play materials in general work to influence children's perception of 'appropriate' gender identities.

### **Gender Identification in Children**

Al-Shehab (2008) defines a gender role as a set of activities that are considered socially acceptable for one specific gender but not the other. The assumption that gender is binary rather than multifaceted further installs a gender dichotomy within society. Gender identities have been socially constructed to produce binary categorizations of male and female with accompanying traits of masculinity and femininity (Butler, 1988). Binary gendered identities become increasingly entrenched in society through their perpetuation via institutions, laws, and adherence by the public (Butler, 1988). This conceptualization of gender as binary, is thus adapted, performed, repeated and sustained within society (Butler, 1988). This is problematic as conceptualizing gender as binary, places substantial restrictions on gender identity, thereby coercing individuals to categorize themselves as one or the other and stigmatizing individuals who do not adhere to these categorizations. As stated at the outset of this study, children acquire and construct their understandings concerning 'appropriate' gender roles, behaviours and identities in early childhood. Gender stereotypes are said to arise when gendered behaviours or traits are constrained within a specific gender role and are exclusive to one particular gender while being resistant to change (Al-Shehab, 2008). Feminine and masculine gender role stereotypes confine children to rigid gender boundaries and thus limit their ability to express or identify themselves in gender-diverse ways (Al-Shehab, 2008).

When a child's gender identity does not resonate with those of the social norm, she/he may face negative social-emotional and cognitive effects (Luecke, 2011). Notions of gender variance include issues around gender identity, gendered behaviours, ways of dressing, ways of playing, roles, actions, and can result in what is known as gender dissonance. Gender dissonance involves an individual experiencing an inconsistency between their gender identity and their anatomy; a constant presence of gender dissonance is usually indicative of a transgender identity (Luecke, 2011). Children who identify as transgender may face challenges in their gender identity formation as a result of societal gender dichotomy. School environments within our society generally assume that children will adhere to fixed gender identities based on their anatomical properties (Luecke, 2011). Most transgender children demonstrate awareness of their gender identity at a young age, indicating that their gender identity does not adhere to their anatomy (Ehrensaft, 2009).

Additionally, Harris and Barnes (2009) assert that through the construct of gender, children are able to interact in and understand society. They suggest that since children possess an understanding of the concept of gender at a very early age, their experiences throughout early childhood directly influence what gender roles and behaviours they will perceive as gender-appropriate. Robinson (2005) also affirms that conventional gender identities, which are presumed to be borne out of institutions of power, are constraining and oppressive to both male and female children. Children who do not adhere to societal fixed notions of gender identity, are often considered the 'other' and thus not desirable by society. Robinson also notes that there is a fluidity associated with gender construction in children and that gender identification is in fact very versatile (Robinson, 2005).

Skelton, Carrington, Francis, Hutchings, Read, and Hall (2009) assert that gender identification in children is an active process. Children learn what roles are accepted and which are not considered appropriate within their current societal and cultural contexts and actively apply this knowledge in constructing gender identities of themselves as well as understanding the gendered roles of others (Robinson, 2005). Thus, notions of gender should be flexible and relatable to a diverse range of individuals; the process and roles are not to be rigid but rather, varying and non-conforming to stereotypical traits (Skelton et al., 2009). Children do not absorb knowledge regarding notions of gendered roles in a passive manner, but rather maintain an active position in constructing their perceptions of gender imposed by society and act upon these conceptions (Robinson, 2005).

Research has indicated that children as young as 3 years of age demonstrate knowledge of gender and its accompanying stereotypical traits and behaviours (Sapiro, 1994). Risman (2004) has also supported the view in contesting that gender is a culturally constructed structure that is variable across societies, and cultures and that is learned. Hughes (2009) states that children learn through methods of reinforcement to perform in a gender-appropriate manner, such as engaging with sex-typed toys and participating in sex-typed activities. Martin, Eisenbud, and Rose (1995) found that when making decisions regarding toy desirability, most children use gender labels. In their study, children were introduced to unfamiliar toys and were explicitly told that they were either male-appropriate or female-appropriate. Children used these labels to guide their own desirability in the toys as well as those of their peers; they exhibited less interest in toys that were explicitly labelled for the other sex, and expected other children to be uninterested in toys labelled for the opposing sex as well (Martin, Eisenbud, & Rose, 1995).

### **Gender Stereotyping and Gender Stereotype Flexibility**

As stated, gender stereotype knowledge is acquired as early as the age of 3; distinguishing between males and females does not only influence the development of sexual identity, but also largely impacts one's understanding of the social world (Banse, Gawronsky, Rebetez, Gutt, and Bruce-Morton, 2010). Knowledge of gender stereotypes entails more than simply the roles that individuals assume in society, but also involves distinguishable behaviours and variance in utilization of objects by males and females (Banse et al., 2010). Based on their study, Banse et al. (2010) suggest that spontaneous gender stereotyping in children results from stereotyped knowledge they acquire through their everyday experiences; this knowledge is derived from the resources and discourses that children are exposed to on a daily basis. Their study investigated the development of spontaneous gender stereotyping among children between the ages of 5 and 11. Child responses were measured using the 'Action Interference Paradigm' (AIP) on the basis of spontaneous gender stereotyping, stereotype knowledge and stereotype flexibility. To measure spontaneous gender stereotyping, children were asked to indicate whether gender-stereotypical toys were more appropriate for boys or girls as quickly as possible. To measure stereotype knowledge and stereotype flexibility children were asked to indicate whether certain toys were appropriate for boys, girls or both by showing them a picture card with a toy image on it and asking them to place it in a box with the respective gender options.

The results indicated there was a positive correlation between stereotype flexibility and the age of the child, while stereotype knowledge and spontaneous stereotyping remained constant despite the children's ages. Knowledge of gender stereotypes was present and significantly high across all age groups. Stereotype flexibility increased with age across the three age groups of children (5-year-olds, 8-year-olds, and 11-year-olds). Older children demonstrated significantly more stereotype flexibility than their younger counterparts. In terms

of stereotype flexibility regarding common objects there was an increase from 33.8% in 5-year-olds to 87.8% in 11-year-olds; flexibility regarding toys increased from 14.3% in 5-year-olds to 77.83% in 11-year-olds (Banse et al., 2010). Thus, they found that although children have a concrete awareness of gender stereotyping, as Robinson (2005) asserts, the children did possess the ability to counter these notions during the stereotype flexibility phase, which is typically between the ages of 5 and 11 (Banse et al., 2010). This study indicates that despite children having an awareness of gender stereotypes, they are still able to demonstrate fluidity and flexibility in their employment of this knowledge. However results based on spontaneous stereotyping have indicated that despite exhibiting gender stereotype flexibility, children nonetheless displayed significantly high levels of spontaneous stereotyping when asked to quickly categorize toys according to gender labels; suggesting that stereotype flexibility is best applied when children have opportunities for critical thought rather than instant cognitive processing (Banse et al., 2010).

### **Toys and Gendered Behaviour**

Lam and Leman (2003) suggest that children make toy choices based on toys that are perceived to be gender-congruent with their gender identities. Children respond differently to the implicit and explicit gender labels associated with toys and make presumptions about toys that indicate a solid awareness of gender appropriateness (Lam and Leman, 2003). Starr (2010) also indicates that the portrayal and presentation of toys send a message to children regarding their gender roles in society. Campenni (1999) has asserted that boys are generally encouraged to partake in combatant-type roles while girls are encouraged to be more passive and nurturing; girls' toys emphasize physical appearance, whereas boys' toys are more geared towards their physical abilities.

Ferguson (2010) suggests that children select their play materials as a result of a combination of play preferences and perception of gender appropriateness by adults. This can be problematic if the child's interest in toy does not align with expectations of gender appropriateness for the selected toy as it may inhibit children from engaging with certain play materials if they perceive it to not be appropriate for their gender. A toy is generally believed to be gender appropriate if children from a specific sex choose to engage with it while other children do not, or if adults assert that the toy is more appropriate for children of a particular sex (Ferguson, 2010). This may be especially troublesome for children who identify as transgender as they may already be facing issues in understanding their own gender identity.

### **Pilot Study**

I conducted a pilot study in a recent graduate course which involved eliciting children's perspectives regarding non-traditional gender roles. A total of five participants; three preschool children (between 2-3 years of age) and two kindergarten children (ages 4 and 5) were each individually read the book entitled *My Princess Boy*. This book presents a non-traditional male gender identity of a boy who is a princess. The children were then individually interviewed regarding their perspectives on the book as well as non-conforming gender roles in general.

Four main themes were drawn from the data which included: assumptions of the Princess Boy as a female, acceptance of non-conforming gender roles, dismissal of non-conforming gender roles, and awareness of gender in relation to society. Children perceived the gender of the Princess Boy to be female regardless of his explicit classification as a *boy*; on numerous accounts children referred to the princess boy as "she". This indicated that there appeared to be an implicit perception of the role of a princess generally being associated with the place of a female child, even when being explicitly told that the princess in was indeed a male. All children who

had been asked if it was acceptable for a boy wear a princess dress, agreed that it was indeed acceptable. However, only some children in the study indicated that it was appropriate for a boy to take on the role of a princess. When asked if it was appropriate for a girl to take on the role of a prince, all but one of the children interviewed felt that this was appropriate. Children also demonstrated an understanding of gender non-conformity (with regards to the Princess Boy) as being undesirable within the larger societal context by stating that people, in general, do not desire boys to wear dresses. This pilot study influenced me to further investigate the perceptions young children possess regarding gender roles and gender stereotyping in this Major Research Paper (MRP).

## **Methodology**

### **Sample**

The participants in this study were four male children and two female children; kindergarten students between the ages of 4 and 5. Participants were recruited by the means of convenience sampling. The specific social and cultural demographics of the children were not sought however, from observation it is apparent that the children comprise a variety of cultural, religious, racial and ethnic orientations. All children who obtained parental consent were included in the sample, however only those who gave assent were selected and included in the study. All but one child provided assent to participate, and thus this child did not partake in the study.

### **Setting**

Children remained in their school environment during the study as the interviews as the interviews were conducted within the kindergarten classroom. Providing an environment which is well known and comfortable to the children is conducive to exhibiting genial feelings in

expressing their opinions in the presence of those who they are unfamiliar with and may decrease feelings of apprehension, intimidation and uncertainty (Rodriguez, Schwartz, Lahman, & Geist, 2011). Establishing rapport is essential when conducting interviews with children as children may be hesitant to discuss topics of a personal nature with an unfamiliar adult. Building rapport with children beforehand may relieve feelings of inhibition and allow them to feel more comfortable with a researcher prior to engaging in discussion (Teoh & Lamb, 2010). Furthermore, feeling intimidated or uncomfortable in the presence of a researcher can increase children's suggestibility during an interview; building rapport serves to alleviate these feelings and establish a bond of trust and comfort between the child and researcher (Teoh & Lamb, 2010). Given these recommendations, I visited the children in the ELC prior to data collection in the hopes that my future presence as a researcher would be less threatening.

### **Data Collection Process**

In keeping with the "new" sociology of childhood, I sought to provide opportunities for children's agency and autonomy to be fostered through the use of informal interviews. After assenting, children were asked to select a play material of their choice to play with or read. This process was conducted with the children on an individual basis; six separate sessions were employed. The interviews served the purpose of obtaining the preferences and perspectives of the children regarding the materials they chose. Individual interviews were selected (as opposed to using focus groups) as some participants may be uncomfortable discussing issues within a group dynamic (Roulston, 2011). Even though this is a childcare setting where research takes place, some of the children may have never participated in a research study and may not be accustomed to speaking with a researcher in an interview format. Individual interviews allow participants to disclose their thoughts with the researcher free from the presence of others; which

is especially beneficial for participants who are more reserved, introverted or apprehensive when speaking in front of others (Roulston, 2011).

An initial draft of the questions to be used in the interview was created, however depending on the interview, questions were altered by removing and adding alternative questions to ensure that the interview was relevant to and reflective of the specific discussion that each child was engaged in. As well, prompts were used to ensure that the interview maintained cohesiveness and was coherent with respect to the proposed research question. This is in keeping with an emergent design often employed in qualitative studies.

Emergent design in qualitative research refers to an approach to research design that is not confirmed at the onset but rather allows for data collection methods that are flexible and contextual (Suter, 2012). Researchers nonetheless formulate an interest and guiding question(s), however these are malleable and may change as the course of the study progresses (Suter, 2012). As interviewing participants may be straightforward in certain cases but sporadic in others, emergent design in qualitative interviews allows for dexterity and opportunities for improvising while conducting interviews with participants (Watt, 2007). Roulston (2011) suggests that interviews in qualitative studies are often carried out as anticipated by the researcher; challenges often arise during the interview process that must be addressed instantaneously. Participants may resist, perceive or respond to questions in ways that the interviewer did not intend. In these instances, interviewers must be able to improvise to ensure that participants are perceiving questions as intended, and to encourage participants to provide alternative details where necessary (Roulston, 2011). Based on participant attendance at the center, the first four initial interviews took place on one day, and the remaining participants were interviewed on a separate day. Interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 5 and 20 minutes in length.

As stated previously, prior to conducting the interviews, consent was obtained from the parents (see Appendix A). Once children were selected to participate, a description of the study was verbalised to the children and assent was obtained from the children themselves to ensure that they were interested and willing to participate (see Appendix B). Dockett, Einarsdottir, and Perry (2009) state that children are entitled to a comprehensive understanding of the studies in which they will be involved. Assent is not simply assumed but must be granted. Without explicitly providing substantial information to participants, assent cannot be established (Dockett, Einarsdottir, & Perry, 2009).

It is unethical for researchers to simply state their research agendas and assume that children want to participate in their study. Rather, researchers should give children options and inquire as to whether or not they want to participate; participants have to *want* to participate, not just agree to participate (Harris & Barnes, 2009). Discretion was used regarding the children's willingness and interest in participating in the interviews. During instances where children appeared to become weary or uninterested in the interview, I asked them if they would like to stop and continue with their classroom activities. If a child did not appear to want to answer a question, this child was not coerced into doing so, I simply moved on to another topic of discussion.

With regard to confidentiality, children were assured that the information they provided would be completely confidential excluding an event in which information disclosed suggested that the child's life was in danger in which case I would be obligated to report it. As a result, this introduced a potential ethical concern; the fact that children may have felt anxious about confidentiality if they had been presented with a situation in which they were familiar with the other participants (i.e. if another child was present at the time of the interview). As a result,

children were informed that they possessed the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence (Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell & Britten, 2002).

At the outset of each interview, each participant was approached, on an individual basis and asked to select her/his favourite play material to play with and speak about. The children were informed that this could be anything in the centre ranging from books, toys, to dress-up props. The children were then taken to a quiet area of the classroom to participate in the interview. Children were encouraged to engage and interact with their play materials while speaking with me in a further attempt to make the interview session less intimidating for the child. Indeed, using prompts and materials during interviews has been suggested by some researchers to help facilitate discussion and encourage children's responses (Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin, and Robinson, 2010). Once engaged with the participant, I conducted an informal, semi-structured interview inquiring about reasons for selecting the desired play materials, what the children liked about them, and what their perceptions of gender were in relation to the use of their respective materials. My objective was to learn as much as possible regarding the children's perspectives on gender appropriateness with regard to toys.

### **Data Analysis Approach**

The data were analyzed via thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis is a flexible and ideal method for eliciting themes within qualitative data. A drawback of this method is that without proper guidelines as to how thematic analysis should be conducted, it may be difficult to distinguish specifically how a researcher has used this strategy when analysing their data, which creates difficulty in evaluating research and synthesizing a particular study with other studies on a similar topic (Braun & Clark, 2006). Thematic analysis allows researchers to develop and describe common themes across their qualitative data.

Themes are significant patterns that pertain to the research question and scope of the study (Braun & Clark, 2006). Through thematic analysis researchers are able to derive meaning from their qualitative data in order to understand the essence of the phenomena they are investigating.

Data were transcribed and manually coded for common and overarching themes regarding children's perspectives; discrepant codes were also noted based on their significance in relation to the research questions. I began by reading the transcripts initially to recall the events that occurred during the interviews. Following this, I read and coded the transcripts once, and then again a second time to ensure that no information was missed, and that the themes that have been developed were accurate. Analytic coding was used to code the transcripts.

Analytic coding is used when the objective is to develop themes from data. Once themes have been established, researchers are able to select portions of the data that are applicable (or not) to the generated themes (Richards & Morse, 2007). To ensure thoroughness of data as well as validity of the potential results, multiple coding techniques were also utilized. Multiple coding entails cross checking coding strategies and the interpretation of data by additional researchers (Barbour, 2001). In this case, I discussed the developed codes in conjunction with my supervisor and second reader before solidifying any major themes so as to determine if the coded themes were appropriate and refine the codes and terminology where necessary.

The themes that emerged indicated the participants' preferences regarding materials in the classroom, their rationales for choosing these materials, as well as their perceptions of gender in relation to these materials. Most themes were consistent across participants; however there were discrepant cases within the analysis as well, which have also been documented where relevant. Waite (2011) suggests that a researcher should not disregard data in the case where they do not resonate with established themes; all variations of data must be acknowledged within

the data analysis procedure. Researchers should recognize discrepant cases, and decipher as to how they relate to the remaining data; in many instances discrepant cases may illuminate and further clarify existing data sets (Waite, 2011).

As Dockett, Einarsdóttir and Perry (2009) have stated, interpreting and understanding children's perspectives requires co-construction; involvement is needed from both the participants as well as the researcher. This view has also been mirrored by Barbour (2001) who states that respondent validation is essential, as well as Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell and Britten (2002) who emphasize the importance of clarifying to check that young children are responding to questions and comprehending them in the same way as the researcher. Thus, each time a child gave a response to a question I posed during the course of the interview, I repeated the child's response and asked for validation as to whether or not this was what the child intended to communicate to the researcher. This was done every time the child stated their opinion; questions believed to be more abstract in nature were posed more than once to ensure that the child understood what was being asked and was consistent in her/his response.

Researchers have suggested that coding categories reflect the content of data collected rather than the questions of the interview guide and often use concepts or terminology derived from participants (Barbour, 2001). A limitation of establishing emerging themes from data is that many researchers produce a synthetic explanation that is descriptive rather than analytical and which works against formulating a comprehensive analysis (Barbour, 2001). As well, Barbour (2001) states that the production of a list of 'themes' that are said to have emerged from the data sometimes lack detailed explanation of how the themes have been deduced (Barbour, 2001). Thus, in this study I have taken the themes directly from participant accounts (i.e. quotes)

and given an explicit explanation as to how conclusions were drawn based on the selected quotes. The coding schemes and coding guide can be found in Appendix C.

## **Findings**

The findings of this study are illustrative of a one-time perspective of children's perceptions on gender related to play materials. It is important to note that their perspectives may or may not change. After having interviewed the six children regarding their perspectives on gender in relation to their selected play materials, seven overall themes emerged. These seven themes include: perceptions of play materials as gender-neutral, perceptions of play materials as male-appropriate, perceptions of play materials as female-appropriate, notions of gender stereotypes, gender role flexibility, contingent gender role flexibility and external knowledge sources. Children generally perceived toys to be gender neutral, however they did communicate that certain toys were more appropriate for specific genders. While children noted that certain toys may be targeted towards one gender as opposed to another, children still demonstrated that it was still acceptable for children of any gender to play with these materials; although this sometimes appeared to be conditional. Not all quotes from participant interviews have been utilized within this section as many appear out of context without the inclusion of the entire conversation from the interview.

### **Perceptions of Play Materials as Gender-Neutral**

When asked to which gender toys in general are targeted, all children shared the belief that toys are generally gender-neutral. Children were asked if they believed toys to be appropriate for all children regardless of their gender orientation or if they felt that certain toys

were more appropriate for boys and others more appropriate for girls. The children's responses to this question can be seen in the following quotes:

“All toys are for everybody” (female, age 4).

“Everything is for everyone” (female, age 5).

“Everything is for everyone” (male, age 4) .

“Girls and boys” (male, age 5).

According to these children, there were no explicit gender divisions in terms of gender appropriateness regarding toys in a general sense. However, a varying perception of gender appropriateness about toys is elicited when children are asked about specific toys as is seen within the other established themes. When asked about the gender appropriateness of specific (and sometimes stereotypical) toys, children perceived certain toys to be either male-appropriate or female-appropriate.

### **Perceptions of Play Materials as Male-Appropriate or Female-Appropriate**

Toys such as LEGO, K'NEX, puzzles, trucks, superhero costumes and cars were generally believed to be more appropriate for males. The following quotes are typical of what some children had to say:

“Only boys play with LEGO” (male, age 5).

“[...] most boys play with the puzzles” (female, 5).

Dolls and princess costumes were believed by most children to be targeted towards girls.

“Cause they're [dolls] for girls” (male, age 6).

“[...] princesses are for girls” (male, age 6).

## **Notions of Gender Stereotypes**

Boys did not perceive girls as enjoying engaging with play materials such as LEGO, K’NEX and puzzles, but instead suggested that they prefer dressing up as princesses. Girls identified boys as showing an increased desire for playing with toys such as LEGO, K’NEX and puzzles. Girls also did not identify other girls as enjoying playing with stereotypical male toys such as trucks, and boys did not consider other boys as enjoying playing with stereotypical female toys such as dolls, and princess costumes. The following quotes are examples of these findings:

“I don’t think they [girls] really like the puzzle area” (male, age 6).

“Girls can play with LEGO because they want girl LEGO” (male, age 5).

“I don’t know why they just like the LEGO and the K’NEX” (female, age 5).

“[...] girls don’t really like trucks” (female, age 5).

“[...] girls like princesses [...] ‘cause they like pink” (male, age 5).

“Boys don’t even like to be princesses” (male, age 5).

“[...] girls don’t like cars, they like girl cars” (male, age 5).

## **Gender Role Flexibility**

As stated, materials such as K’NEX, puzzles, LEGO, trucks, princess costumes, and superhero costumes were believed to be more appropriate for one gender than the other, however when asked if it would be acceptable for children of the other gender to play with these materials, participants agreed that it would.

“[...] it’s okay if boys play with them [K’NEX], then why not girls?” (male, age 6).

“It’s okay if girls play with those [LEGO, K’NEX] because I like to play with them sometimes too” (female, age 5).

### **Contingent Gender Role Flexibility**

Some children demonstrated that it was acceptable for children to use certain play materials under specific conditions. One child stated that it was acceptable for a girl to dress up in a superhero costume “’cause there’s even a Batgirl” (male, age six). Another child indicated that if a male child wanted to be a princess, he this child is “not the guy on the bad guy’s team,” and even indicated that this child would be “a sucker” (male, age five). As well, it was indicated that if a girl wanted to be a superhero, she must be “on the bad guy’s team” (male, age five).

### **External Knowledge Sources**

Children appeared to have acquired their knowledge about gender from various sources. These sources include peers, television, and films. When asked where his gender knowledge regarding the appropriateness of children dressing up as princesses derived from, one child indicated “one of my classmates.” When asked about where he learned about the gender appropriateness regarding children dressing up as superheroes, one child stated “[...] that’s the game that I watched on TV.”

All children indicated that their rationales for selecting their desired play materials were based on personal interest. Children also demonstrated that their understandings of gender appropriateness came from direct observation. For instance, when asked why she felt that drawing was appropriate for both girls and boys, a participant indicated “because I know some boys in my class that [...] like to draw” (female, age five). When asked why she indicated that

boys like to play with certain play materials, she stated “I don’t know why they just like the LEGOs and the K’NEX”. The most common answer that children provided in response to questions regarding their beliefs about certain toys to as being more appropriate for certain genders was “I don’t know”.

### **Children’s Rationales for Choices**

When asked the rationale for choosing their preferred play materials, most children suggested reasons indicating that they ‘liked’ these items. Specific responses included:

“Cause I like to do origami” (male, age 5).

“Cause it’s one of my favourite things” (male, age 5).

“Because it’s my favourite” (female, age 4).

“Because I like kitty cats” (female, age 5).

“Because I like them” (male, age 4).

“Because they’re so cool” (male, 4).

“Cause it’s my favourite toy” (male, age 5).

“Because you could break it apart and build other stuff” (male, age 5).

“LEGO is my favourite toy...” (male, age 5).

Additionally, while discussing what children like to play with, one child (male, age four) indicated that he had wanted to get married to one of his classmates but explained that he was not going to pursue this as someone advised him against it. This can be seen in the following excerpt:

Child: They wanna play with it because they like it. [speaking about a toy]

Researcher: Because they like it? Who? Who likes it?

Child: [name of child]

Researcher: [name of child] like's it? So...

Child: We're gonna get married.

Researcher: You're gonna get married? I'm happy for you.

Child: But we're not getting married. [parent] said we're not getting married and only big boys can get married but, [parent] said it's bad to get married.

Researcher: Why?

Child: (shrugs), [parent] said that.

Although this was not in context of what was being studied, it does illuminate the influence that others may have on a child's decisions; in this case, to get 'married'. The child was not aware of the reasoning behind why his parent advised him not to get married however it appears that he had processed and internalized this information and actively altered his decision to marry his classmate as a result of this advice. The mention of the assumption that 'only big boys can get married' indicates that this was not a matter of personal opinion, but the parent giving him this information had implied that this was based on a 'rule'. This serves as an example of how social injunctions work to influence individual actions and thought processes.

## **Discussion**

### **Stereotype Knowledge and Stereotype Flexibility**

Similar to the findings of Banse et al. (2010), the children I interviewed seemed to demonstrate gender stereotype flexibility, however, this flexibility was attenuated in relation to their application of gender stereotype knowledge when evaluating the gender-appropriateness of toys. Children had expressed that toys, in the collective sense, are generally geared towards both boys and girls; hence, demonstrating a sense of gender flexibility in that all toys were able to be utilized by all genders. However, interestingly when asked to consider specific play materials, there was an evident switch in perception as most children indicated that certain toys were

mainly appropriate for one specific gender. Most children designated LEGO and K'NEX as being appropriate for boys, and dolls and princesses for girls. Although children felt that certain toys were sex-typed, they did indicate that it was not *inappropriate* for other children to play with them as well. Banse et. al (2010) have affirmed that there may be inconsistencies between gender stereotype knowledge and actual beliefs in gender stereotypes in that stereotype knowledge is triggered automatically, however acceptance or dissonance of this knowledge entails controlled cognitive processes.

Children also demonstrated that with certain toys, gender role flexibility was possible, albeit conditional. As previously indicated, one child suggested that girls could play with LEGO if they had 'girl' LEGO; this child also stated that girls do not desire playing with car figurines (in the general sense), but instead prefer 'girl' cars. Another child stated that it would not be appropriate for a girl to wear a Batman costume, due to the fact that there was a Batgirl costume designated for girls. Another child declared that if a girl wanted to take on the role of a superhero, she must be on the 'bad guy's' team. Similarly if a boy desired to take on the role of a princess, he was expected not to be on the 'bad guy's' team. It is through this theme that it becomes apparent that the children appeared to have a very precise implicit conception of hegemonic gender roles and gender-appropriateness of toys. This is striking as children demonstrated that there are limits as to what roles boys and girls may fulfill during play. There seemed not to be a sense of fluidity with gender; children expressed the belief that there are rigid rules that they must abide by when engaging with play materials, and demonstrated the conception that there are limitations on what children can or cannot play with based on their gender.

As children develop, they generally show a significant increase in gender stereotype flexibility and understanding that gender stereotypes can be erroneous, for example (as seen in my study) indicating that certain toys are considered to be more appropriate with one specific gender (Banse et al., 2010). The extent to which gender stereotype knowledge can influence behaviour may be reflective of the process of stereotype knowledge attainment (Banse et al., 2010). In other words, in instances where children possess the ability to disregard gender stereotypes, via stereotype flexibility, this flexibility may be redundant if stereotype knowledge is deeply engrained in the child's cognition.

When asked the reasoning behind their perceptions of gender appropriateness and gender stereotypes, children were unable to provide a specific response for their reasoning. Observation was the most common response as children indicated that they had learned about gender via peer interaction, and through exposure to the media. Interestingly, when asked *why* gender roles were the way children described them to be, all children indicated that they were unaware of why gender roles existed. This is significant as it suggests that children internalize the 'rules' without necessarily understanding the rationale behind these rules.

### **Children's Formation of Toy Preferences**

When asked to explain their objectives for selecting their desired play materials, children stated that they liked these items and hence chose them out of personal interest. What personal interest entails in these cases is unknown as participants did not elaborate on this. Martin, Eisenbud and Rose (1995) suggest that children use gender to foster their personal preferences as well as their anticipations for other individuals. In studies of children's play, children typically show a decreased fondness for toys that have been labelled as gender-non congruent and are more partial to playing with toys prescribed as gender-congruent (Martin et al., 1995). As

discussed before, the study by Martin et al. (1995) regarding children's toy preferences indicated that children actively used gender labels when indicating their toy preferences. Children's liking of toys altered based on their recollection of the gender labels ascribed to these toys (Martin et al., 1995). It is interesting to note, however, that no children mentioned reasons relating to ability, skill, or talent. Based on their demonstrated knowledge of gender stereotypes it is plausible that these children were basing their preferences for toys on perceived gender labels.

### **Gender-Centric Thinking**

When I inquired into children's perspectives as to why they believed other children did or did not like certain toys, it was evident that these perceptions were generalized and attributed towards children as a whole rather than to specific children that the participants knew. Children verbalised their beliefs that 'girls don't like trucks', 'girls like princesses', 'boy's don't like to be princesses' in a collective manner; assuming that all girls or boys in general perceive toys using a similar approach. One child indicated that it was appropriate for girls to play with LEGO because *she* played with LEGO. This illustrates children's tendency to display patterns of gender-centric thinking as well as ego-centric thinking when evaluating the toy preferences of others. Children not only base their own toy choice reasoning on gender knowledge but anticipate that their peers do as well (Martin et al., 1995).

Martin et al. (1995) have suggested that when making predictions as to what toys their peers will like, children project their gender-based inference onto others as well. Children anticipate that children of the same sex will exhibit a liking of the same toys that they themselves like, while children of the other sex will be demonstrate aversion to these toys, forming a gender-centric pattern of cognition (Martin et al., 1995). This type of association is projected onto members of the same sex, even where children are physically, behaviourally, emotionally or

attitudinally disparate (Martin et al., 1995). The assumption is that all members of one gender group share similar traits irrespective of physical features or mannerisms. This pattern further homogenises children belonging to a certain sex and perpetuates a restrictive way of perceiving others.

### **Influences on Gender Perception and Behaviour**

The 'external knowledge' theme demonstrated that children generally acquired their perceptions on gender appropriateness through secondary knowledge sources. Children mentioned knowledge sources such as peers, television and films, which emphasize the influence that social interactions as well as the media have on a child's gender construction process. In the case where one participant wanted to 'marry' one of his classmates, it was indicated that he refrained from this due to the fact that one of his parents deemed it inappropriate for his age. This, although in the context of sexuality rather than gender, nonetheless reveals the impact that parental agendas may have on their children's actions. Research indicates that parental expectations have a significant influence on a child's gendered behaviours. Freeman (2007) suggests that most children exhibit a preference for sex-typed toys as early as 2 years of age, and that most 3-year old children are able to distinguish between stereotypical male and stereotypical female toys, and have an implicit understanding of which their parents would prefer. Witt (1997) also argues that the socialization of children by their parents -- through behaviours, language and action -- encourages sex-typed play with gender-stereotypical play materials. Servin et al. (1999) also demonstrate that family members and even educators respond in a more positive manner to sex-stereotyped play as opposed to cross-stereotyped play in children. Children base their gendered motives on the reactions they expect to receive from parents, educators and peers (Martin, 1995). This is evident from a young age as preschoolers have been

found to anticipate judgments from parents, teachers, peers and siblings on gender in terms of play, and engage in play behaviours that are believed to be acceptable by these individuals (Keddie, 2003).

### **Gender Versatility: Masculinity versus Femininity**

When establishing the gender-appropriateness of toys, many children communicated that although certain toys were perceived to be either female-appropriate or male-appropriate; females possessed an advantage in that they were perceived to have more opportunities for fluidity with regards to toy choice. This is evident as when one particular child was asked about the appropriateness of K'NEX for girls stated: "It's okay if boys play with them, why not girls?" but when asked about the appropriateness of dolls and princesses indicated that these were strictly for girls. Another child, when asked about the appropriateness of a male assuming the role of a princess indicated that he would be a "sucker." This finding is striking as children clearly conveyed the perception that not only are there restrictions on play choices based on a child's gender, but they also obliquely insinuated that these restrictions are more robust for males than females.

Research has indicated that gender-versatility is more common and acceptable for females than males. Campenni (1999) has found 'feminine' toys to be more sex-typed than 'masculine' toys, and suggests that boys are more dissuaded from engaging with toys that have are believed to be 'feminine', while girls may not receive as much discouragement for engaging with 'masculine' toys. A study by Stagnitti et al. (2010) also supports this view as they have discovered that girls were found to be less sex-typed than boys in regard to toy choice. Females generally have greater leniency compared to males with regards to displaying gender non-conforming behaviours (Gerouki, 2010). A boy's engagement with 'female' toys is associated

with an instant stigmatization, however this is not the case when girls interact with ‘male’ toys (Gerouki, 2010).

Keddie (2003) found that male children as young as 6 to 8 years of age showed keenness towards sports, bravado and toughness and viewed these as indicators of the epitome of masculinity. This study also found that male children engaged in acts of self-legitimation at the detriment of others; boys employed verbal condemnation and degradation to other males who did not adhere to masculine gender traits and positioned this child as ‘other’ (Keddie, 2003). This may not be completely analogous to the participant who deemed a male dressed as a princess a “sucker,” however it does share a striking comparability in terms of verbally identifying a child as different and inferior based on their non-conforming gendered behaviour. Keddie (2003) further contests that society’s delineation of what constitutes femininity has progressed in recent years however the designation of masculinity has remained stagnant. Thus males who do not adhere to fixed notions of gender continue to be vulnerable to discrimination and criticism by parents, educators and classmates (Keddie, 2003).

### **Gendered Marketing of Toys**

Market research has indicated that gendered marketing is significantly more prevalent in recent years than in the past (Keddie, 2003). Does this indicate that toy manufacturers are to blame for producing gender-constraining and gender-stereotypical toys for children? Keddie (2003) suggests that toy companies have been condemned for propagating gender typecasts, however, research has found that consumers actually demonstrate an increased desire for gender-stereotypical toys. Sales indicate that the majority of consumers tend to purchase gender-typed materials even when gender-neutral variations are available. This creates a vicious circle as child preferences for toys seemed to be based on their perceptions of what has been deemed appropriate for them to play with by peers, caregivers and educators; thus, if parents and teachers

are providing children with gender-constricting materials in the first place, this further inhibits children from being able to explore gender-neutrality when utilizing toys.

## **Implications**

### **Gender Stereotypes and Performance**

This study suggests that children exhibited a definite awareness of gender stereotypes with regard to toy choice and play behaviours. What may be seen as a positive finding of my research is that although children possess gender stereotypes, they also exhibit tendencies of gender flexibility. However, an important point to take into consideration is that while children demonstrated a sense of gender role flexibility with regard to sex-typed toys, initial conceptions of these toys are sex-typed. Gender labels have also been found to influence children's performance with respect to the materials they use and the activities in which they participate (Martin, 1995). Martin (1995) found that when an unfamiliar game has explicitly been labeled as congruent with a child's sex, that child performs better as opposed to when a game has been explicitly prescribed for the other sex. Children also demonstrate an increased ability to recall names of objects regarded as being congruent with their respective sexes (Martin, 1995). It appears that children inadvertently alter their behaviour to adhere to their gendered-expectations, much like a self-fulfilling prophecy.

### **Gender Stereotypes as Limiting to Children**

It is evident that most children select toys that they believe are gender-appropriate for them. A consequence of this action is that engaging solely with sex-typed toys limits a child's experiences and potential skills as different toys may foster alternate types of play and knowledge (Martin, 1995). Blakemore and Centres (2005) argue that stereotypical male toys promote fantasy play that is not generally associated with domestic living, while stereotypical female toys predominantly incite fantasy play focused on domestic life. Stereotypical male toys

were also conducive to group play, competition, aggression while stereotypical female toys foster solitary play, compliance, nurturance and physical appearance (Blakemore & Centres, 2005). By complying with societal expectations of gender-appropriate play behaviours and choices, children become increasingly limited to the roles and scripts that play materials encompass and as a result, gender role stereotypes become further entrenched in children's actions.

### **Gender-Non Conforming Children**

Children expressed that traditional gender-stereotyped toys, such as LEGO and dolls, were typically more (or only) suitable for one gender as opposed to the other. Through this, children in this study demonstrated evidence of knowledge of gender dichotomy within society. A troubling aspect of this finding is that children exhibited the conception that there are solely two gender identities; either male or female. This is problematic as children whose gender identities are non-conforming to binary, hegemonic forms of gender (for example: transgendered children) may find it difficult to resonate with these restrictive forms of gender identities. Non-conforming behaviour is often stigmatised and children who do not behave in 'gender-appropriate' ways are teased; this is especially disheartening as gender-variance can be evident at a very young age (Gerouki, 2010). More specifically, gender-variant and transgender children are often the victims of teasing and bullying (Leucke, 2011). If this occurs in a school environment, the child will not be able to feel emotionally or physically secure and may experience barriers to learning and social interaction (Leucke, 2011). Research indicates that school-age individuals experience difficulties in conceiving, acknowledging and accepting gender non-conforming behaviour (Gerouki, 2010). Transgender children require supportive networks through peers, parents, and educators, however research indicates that these children experience harassment from both peers and school personnel, and are placed in vulnerable

positions due to sex-based policies and practices (Leucke, 2011). Research also suggests that schooling is considered a traumatic experience for many transgendered individuals, and further indicates that these individuals are at an increased risk for dropping out of school in later years (Leucke, 2011). Research on adolescents suggests that youth who categorize as gender minorities experience increased levels of mental health issues, engage in self-destructive behaviour and are at an increased risk of developing substance addictions (Gerouki, 2010). Prevalence of victimisation of these children increases when children proceed to lower and upper secondary schools (Gerouki, 2010). This indicates the need for early intervention and for individuals to undertake preventative measures well before children have entered their adolescent years.

Several studies have acknowledged schools as being substantial institutions for the production and reproduction of discourses surrounding sexuality and gender (Gerouki, 2010). Educators' personal experiences and beliefs are often indicative of the ways in which they handle issues of gender discriminatory and abusive behaviour within the school environment (Gerouki, 2010). It was discovered that in most instances of verbal homophobic and gender discriminatory abuse, teachers did not address the issue and excused the behaviour (Gerouki, 2010). Teachers justified this action in stating that they perceived children to be oblivious to this type of abusive behaviour and classified children as being too young to understand the implications of this (Gerouki, 2010). Thus, necessary measures should be taken to ensure that educators are equipped with the essential training, competence and efficiency in dealing with and supporting gender and sexual minorities within school contexts.

### **Early Childhood Settings**

McNair, Kirova-Petrova, and Bhargava (2001) emphasize that educators should utilize classroom resources that equally portray male and female gender roles and encourage children to

push the boundaries of existing gendered limitations. Classroom and child care settings should foster opportunities for autonomy and agency through gender exploration and create an environment that is gender-diverse, limits gender-bias, and counters stereotypical notions of traditional gender roles. It has been suggested that knowledge of gender stereotypes occurs in groups; information that is learned within a group can also be *unlearned* within a similar dynamic (Keddie, 2003). Children are equipped with the potential to actively construct and reconstruct notions of gender and engage in this process based on societal expectations (Morrow, 2006). Educators should provide gender-diverse materials within classroom environments to support and accommodate to gender variances. Morrow (2006) also suggests that children's perspectives need to be attended to as children are not homogenous in nature and that their gender identities vary substantially.

The Toronto District School Board's document *Challenging Homophobia and Heterosexism: A K-12 Curriculum Resource Guide* (2011) also recognizes the importance of providing children with images and resources that are gender-diverse for gender non-conforming children to identify with through curriculum, instruction and play. The versatility in gender formation within the early childhood years creates incentives for actively engaging with children in investigating, examining and deconstructing limiting notions of gender (Keddie, 2003). Although young children demonstrate an obvious awareness of gender stereotypes and possess a substantial level of gender knowledge, they have still not yet acquired a static notion of gender; internalized gender knowledge becomes more stable as children develop (Keddie, 2003).

### **Educational Resources: Picture Books, Educational Software and Films**

Evans and Davies (2000) attest that books are significantly influential in contributing to the formation of children's perceptions of social phenomena during their early years and thus it is essential that the content of children's books be evaluated to obtain an understanding of the

types of messages that are being disseminated to children through their implementation. They further affirm that educational reading materials (such as textbooks) provide children with more than just information surrounding academic affairs; these materials also present children with implicit messages that influence their perceptions of social phenomena (Evans & Davies, 2000). Jackson and Gee (2005) have also suggested that children's books are mechanisms through which children build their understandings of cultural and social notions of gender identity. Jackson (2007) supports this claim by suggesting that children's literature is a pervasive source of social knowledge construction for children. Before children learn to read, they focus on the images in books in order to comprehend what the story entails; through the exposure to images, children are able to grasp the concept of the book as well as apply the implicit messages to more macro contexts of everyday life (Jackson, 2007).

In more recent times, the implementation of technology has been continually expanding and as a result, children have become increasingly exposed to technological forms of education (Sheldon, 2004). Sheldon (2004) suggests as children become increasingly presented with unimpeded forms of gender discourses, the more probable it is that their own internalized perceptions will resonate with those that are being conveyed which is essential to expected conceptions of gender roles that children may relate to with regards to their own identity development.

Ajayi (2011) has also stated that mainstream films (such as Disney movies) are commonly utilized as a mechanism for instruction in language arts and literacy programs within elementary schools. These films portray highly stereotypical representations of gender roles and may work to exacerbate a child's preconceived notions of gender. Children derive meaning from these videos not only by internalizing the explicit message that the film aims to convey, but also

through adopting implicit meanings by using the “specificity of their gender, social-cultural experiences and available multimodal resources” to interpret the meanings of these films (Ajayi, 2011, p. 396). As practitioners continue to implement varying mechanisms of instruction, these resources must be thoroughly assessed to determine if the types of messages that are being conveyed to children are propagating or countering hegemonic notions of specific phenomena. Educators should implement materials into their classrooms that are unrestrictive and accommodating to varying gendered identities. Cohen (2011) advocates for creating an environment that is gender-neutral and promotes equity and equality amongst children.

In addition to exposure to technological forms of education in the school environment, Mikkola (2011) contests that many children are exposed to various media structures within the home including television, videos, computer games as well as the internet which have a substantial influence on the messages they internalize through these mechanisms. Many of these sources of information encompass traditional and stereotypical notions of gender identities that children will come to internalize and display as their own (Mikkola, 2011). As noted throughout this paper, it is important to note the flexibility children have in their ways of seeing gender roles and that gender role construction is a fluid process. However, exposure to gender-biased language and stereotypical representations contravenes children’s thinking of individuals as ‘people’ and in turn further perpetuates dichotomous properties regarding notions of gender roles and compels children to understand gender as binary, and inflexible (Evans & Davies, 2000).

### **Re-conceptualizing Children as Gender Knowing and Critical Thinkers**

From the results of this study as well as the literature reviewed, it can be deduced that to aid in refuting children’s acquisition of gender stereotype knowledge would be to recognize that children are indeed active constructors of their own gendered subjectivities. Rather than dismissing children as passive and submissive beings who simply subconsciously configure

gender formation, children should be regarded as active, social actors who dynamically structure their own gendered identities.

Butler's concept of performativity is essential in understanding how children construct notions of gender and 'perform' these gendered embodiments. The ways in which masculinity and femininity are culturally established are prognostic of the ways they are inaugurated and executed by individuals within that society; reverberation of these social roles is what serves to perpetuate their domination within society (Butler, 1994). Gendered identities are generated based on the performances of individuals and the performances of others as a response to them (Butler, 1994). Through this cycle of performance and reiteration, hegemonic notions of gender become installed. Butler (1994) emphasizes that what constitutes as masculinity or femininity is highly contextual and dependant on the sociocultural nature of that particular society.

Keddie (2003) emphasizes that reconceptualising children as active agents in gender formation processes begins with characterizing children as gender-knowing as opposed to gender-innocent. By conceptualizing children as active agents in constructing gender, this can serve to empower educators to be critical of their instructional methods and allow them to modify gendered fabrications and discourses to promote gender diversity and awareness of gender variance (Keddie, 2003). Incorporating non-traditional and gender-diverse representations and discourses, all children will be provided with opportunities to expand their gender knowledge and evade inflexible and limiting notions of gender that have historically been inundated within mainstream society.

## **Recommendations**

### **Pedagogical Suggestions**

Educators can begin to reconceptualise gender-limiting pedagogies to be more inclusive of gender-diversity and gender-variance by seeking to establish gender equity with children

(Keddie, 2003). This entails expanding discursive and instructional methods by building on their own knowledge of how gender influences children's development as well as providing opportunities for varying gendered identities to be represented within the pedagogical practices of the school environment (Keddie, 2003). Children should be encouraged to express themselves in ways that are reflective of their interests, rather than sustaining binary forms of gendered being; they should be free to engage in same-sex and cross-gender interactions and activities proposed for children by practitioners should be based on children's abilities and interests as opposed to stereotyped conjectures based on socially constructed traits.

### **Negating Gender Stereotype Acquisition in Children**

Androgyny, the presence of both 'masculine' and 'feminine' attributes and behaviors, that is found to be prevalent in home and school (by means of modelled traits and behaviours) has been found to result in decreased levels of gender typing in children (Hupp et al., 2010). Bem (1983) also proposes that parents and educators can postpone young children's acquisition of gender stereotyped information by providing opportunities for alternative and unconventional representations of gender identities to be observed which can contribute to a child's gender stereotype flexibility as well as their disputing of traditional, hegemonic notions of gender (Hupp et al., 2010).

### **Enabling Children to Actively Construct Notions of Gender**

Robinson (2005) contends that adults have historically inhibited children from acquiring the relevant and necessary resources, discourses and agency to be autonomous and competent beings with regards to gender knowledge. Keddie (2003) concurs that encouraging children to be critical in their judgements and develop higher-order cognitive proficiencies can enable children to be assertive in their construction of social phenomena (in this case the concept of gender). Deconstructing the basis of gender knowledge will allow children to comprehensively

deconstruct and reconstruct their understandings of sociocultural patterns and ideologies, and further permit children to understand how these historical constructs have developed, sustained themselves and work to coerce individuals into adhering to limiting and restrictive subjectivities (Keddie, 2003). By critically analyzing the process of gender knowledge acquisition, children will be empowered to reflect on the ways in which these structures work to stigmatize, ostracize, exclude and discriminate against certain individuals.

### **Trustworthiness**

Dockett, Einarsdóttir and Perry (2009) have stated that interpreting and understanding children's perspectives requires co-construction; involvement is needed from both the participants as well as the researcher in order to obtain a genuine understanding of the discussion. Any interpretations made regarding the findings of this study are strictly based on the researcher's assumptions and any clarification by participants that occurred during the interviews.

As opposed to quantitative research, qualitative research does not directly address concepts of validity and reliability, which in turn may create speculation regarding how credible a qualitative study is found to be. Several concepts have emerged to allow qualitative researchers to evaluate the trustworthiness of their studies; these concepts are as follows: credibility (which refers to internal validity), transferability (which refers to external validity/generalizability), dependability (which refers to reliability), and confirmability (which refers to objectivity) (Shenton, 2004). These concepts and their relation to my study will be examined as follows.

### **Credibility**

Credibility in qualitative research, which is similar to internal validity in quantitative research, has been argued to have the most significant influence on a study's trustworthiness

(Shenton, 2004). Discussing specific questioning procedures during interviews and reflecting on challenges that arose during the duration of the study have been suggested techniques for ensuring the credibility of a qualitative study (Shenton, 2004). In order to ensure that individuals are not coerced into participating in a qualitative study, appropriate measures should be taken so that participants are aware that they are under no obligation to partake in the study and should be informed that they have the right to withdraw their participation without penalty (Shenton, 2004). It has been explicitly stated that I directly communicated to the participants of my study that their participation in my study was not mandatory and that they could withdraw at any time; children were additionally asked to sign an assent agreement. Shenton (2004) also discusses that building a connection and sense of trust with participants prior to collecting data is also crucial to credibility in qualitative research. As stated, I visited the site before conducting my research in an attempt to familiarize myself with the children and minimize any feelings of discomfort by building rapport with them.

“Frequent debriefing sessions” between the researcher and an authoritative figure have been understood to aid in ensuring credibility as the researcher is able to build insight through the experiences and perspectives of those who have conducted qualitative research; this also allows the researcher to remain objective and limits any biases he or she may have (Shenton, 2004, p 67). I have worked in conjunction with my supervisor as well as second reader to seek guidance before conducting my study, during the data analysis stage, as well as during the write up of this paper. Their guidance has allowed me to gain insights into my own biases, become receptive to alternative views, as well as learning from the experience they possess in the field of qualitative research.

Shenton (2004) suggests that providing a description of the issue being explored as well as discussing previous research findings that aid in understanding the topic of investigation also aids in establishing credibility by providing information the contextual nature of the phenomena, hence creating a clearer image of the study's significance. Throughout both my introduction and literature review I have introduced the issue being investigated while providing empirically derived information regarding the phenomenon I am investigating. This has also been done within the discussion and implication sections to substantiate my findings. Throughout this paper, I have provided a "reflective commentary" describing the benefits and limitations of methods, procedures and techniques helps to evaluate the effectiveness of the research process which in turn builds credibility of my study (Shenton, 2004, p 68).

### **Transferability**

Establishing that results of a qualitative study are generalizable to a larger population is not necessarily possible in qualitative research, especially when only representative of a small sample (Shenton, 2004). It is also stated that qualitative research findings may be relatable to populations of similar demographics to those of the sample within the study; however for individuals to find qualitative findings contextually relevant to them, the researcher must provide adequate contextual information regarding the details of the study (Shenton, 2004). It is imperative to remember that the researcher remains dissociated from this process and that any transferring of results or conclusions to real life contexts is solely done by the individuals themselves as researchers and readers may have different conceptualizations of the same study (Shenton, 2004).

Shenton (2004) also affirms that in order to establish the magnitude to which a study's implications may be generalizable to those in other settings, replication of the study in varying

contexts using similar methods would facilitate this (Shenton, 2004). However, the aim of this study is not to necessarily generalize that the results are applicable in other settings, but rather to understand the perceptions of children in this particular study. Indeed, a major point to consider is that quantitative research seeks to ‘explain’ a specific phenomenon while qualitative research seeks to ‘understand’ it (Golafshani, 2003).

### **Dependability**

Ensuring dependability of a qualitative study is similar to the concept of reliability in quantitative research, meaning if the study was replicated using the same methods, participants and environment, the study would yield comparable results. Shenton (2004) suggests that in order to essentially reproduce a study, sufficient details must be provided so that similar measures may be taken to carry out the study as closely as possible. Although I have provided a detailed account of all actions taken throughout this research endeavour, it cannot be guaranteed that if replicated, a study would generate similar results.

It is important to consider that in my study, the participants comprise a specific demographic in terms of age and location; children belonging to an alternative childcare centre may differ significantly from the participants in my study. Further, replicating my study an additional time with the same participants, location, and methods would not necessarily produce similar results as perceptions change with experience, time, and context. Factors such as comfort, hunger, mental state, may influence participants’ responses and quality of interaction. This study solely describes the perceptions of my participants within a specific context and time.

### **Confirmability**

Maintaining objectivity in qualitative research is often challenging as data collection materials such as interview guides and questionnaires are often designed with even minimal bias,

as each researcher drives their study based on their own theoretical lens (Shenton, 2004). It has been stated that triangulation, which entails employing various methods in the data collection process, may help to ensure confirmability of a qualitative study. Shenton (2004) attests that researchers must justify the rationale behind choosing each method they use so that their reasons for selecting certain methods over others as well as limitations of each individual method may be elicited. Although I did not use triangulation within my study, I have provided a rationale as to why I chose to use semi-structured individual interviews as a data collection method. My rationale was further justified by my theoretical framework of the new sociology of childhood, advocating that children deserve to have their perspectives heard. While I attempted to remain objective as possible in all areas of my study, it is fundamentally impossible for a researcher to maintain complete objectivity in qualitative research as their perceptions and theoretical lenses are what guide their studies (Shenton, 2004). This may not necessarily be a downfall of qualitative research, as subjectivity can sometimes allow researchers to elicit data from a study that may have not been accounted for by a researcher with a different theoretical lens.

### **Limitations**

Interviewing children, or anyone for that matter, is never a straightforward endeavour. I experienced a few challenges in getting children to maintain the topic of discussion as well as in ensuring that my questions were thoroughly understood by them. Lundy, McEvoy and Byrne (2011) suggest that a challenge that some researchers may encounter when using interviews with children involves young children's difficulties when attempting to think beyond their personal immediate views and experiences. The researcher should present questions in a manner that is tangible for children and less abstract. Throughout the interview session I attempted to pose and

rephrase questions in a simple yet precise manner to elicit children's genuine responses as best I could.

Another point to take into consideration is that interview transcripts do not necessarily represent the participant's implied inferences, but are a deduced account of the researcher's interpretation of the discussion which is sometimes influenced by the participants' expectations of the experience, the researcher's theoretical perspective, the framing of questions, as well as the researcher's interpretations of the data (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). Hill (2006) has suggested that children may feel uncomfortable during an interview if the topic of conversation is intrusive to their privacy, or if they are not confident in speaking to an unfamiliar individual (Einarsdóttir, 2007). Some children are uncomfortable or unable to verbally express themselves which must be taken into consideration when conducting an interview. Implementing a flexible approach when conducting an interview and altering the phrasing of questions to accommodate to the demographic(s) of the participant is essential when interviewing young children (Morgan, Gibbs, Maxwell & Britten, 2002).

An important point to keep in mind, however, is that although providing a research environment that is familiar to participants to engage in may increase feelings of comfort for some children, others may feel an invasion of privacy and personal space and may be uncomfortable with allowing researchers to invade this space (Burke, 2005). Thus while ensuring that children are comfortable in the research environment, researchers must also ensure that they do not cross the 'boundary' between accommodation and invasiveness. This was evident as the one child who did not provide assent to participate in the interview did not want to be disturbed and appeared to feel apprehensive and anxious once I entered her space.

## **Future Research**

Through this research study I have been able to obtain an understanding of where some children stand on issues relating to gender acquisition. Speaking directly with children provided me with the opportunity to gain an in depth comprehension regarding their perspectives. By using a qualitative approach, my research seeks to provide an account of children's perspectives on issues of gender and provides insights into participant awareness of stereotype knowledge as well as where this knowledge has originated. More research is needed to obtain a clearer conception of children's perspectives as to *why* their perceptions are the way they are and if they are aware of the deeper implications of gender-based thought processes. In future research I would like to investigate school aged gender-non conforming and gender-variant children's critical perspectives on hegemonic binary gender identities through individual interviews and inquire as to how these notions of gender have affected their personal gender identity development, educational experiences, as well as life choices. I believe this would provide the opportunity for the perspectives of this particular marginalized demographic of children to be heard and taken into account. The implications of my study have also influenced my interest in investigating how notions of gender are presented within elementary education systems through curriculum, discourse, as well as socialization and instructional practices. I may choose to attempt this via document analyses, individual interviews with children and educators, or direct observations.

## **Final Thoughts**

As stated throughout this paper, individuals are not predestined to adhere to one specific gender identity, but rather that gender is generated through a process of implicit and explicit reiteration of socially constructed parameters which work to impose obstinate rules and

directives. The repetitive employment of these rules within society further perpetuates hegemonic forms of gender identities to which individuals are coerced to adhere (Butler, 1999). Risman (2004) asserts that to understand gender inequality individuals must consider gender as a social structure and examine it in a comprehensive manner, focusing on how gender itself operates within various elements of society. It is important to consider gender as more than just a property of identity, but also as a social construction that regulates society through various mechanisms (Risman, 2004). Gender projects itself into a multitude of societal functions including social roles, institutions, interactions which further contribute to societal operation based on gendered relations (Risman, 2004). The notion of gender validates certain performances while denouncing others which propel gender hierarchies that marginalize and constrain certain individuals (Hupp et al., 2010). This study demonstrates the need for children to be exposed to gender-diverse resources and discourses that can work to encourage them to extend their own gender boundaries and perceptions of others beyond the rigid categorizations society currently imposes.

## Appendices

### Appendix A: Parental Consent Agreement

The logo for Ryerson University, featuring the text "RYERSON UNIVERSITY" in white capital letters on a blue rectangular background, with a yellow vertical bar to the right.

#### Parent Consent Agreement

##### *MA Early Childhood Studies Major Research Paper*

Your child(ren) are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent for your child to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what it is you or your child will be asked to do.

**Investigators:** Ameera Ali, B.A.

**Supervisor:** Dr. Rachel Berman, School of Early Childhood Studies, Ryerson University  
rcberman@ryerson.ca 416-979-5000 x7695

**Purpose of the Study:** To elicit the perspectives of children concerning their understanding of gender.

**Description of the Study:** The child will be asked to select and play with their favourite play materials (i.e. books, toys, dress up clothing). The investigator will then engage in an informal interview with the child asking him/her why they have chosen these toy materials, what characteristics they like about them, and if it is appropriate for children of both genders to play with their selected play materials. Expected time for the session is 10 to 15 minutes. The interview will be recorded via audio-tape.

**What is Experimental in this Study:** None of the procedures used in this study are experimental in nature. The only experimental aspect of this study is the gathering of information for the purpose of analysis.

**Risks or Discomforts:** It is possible that your child may be uncomfortable or wish to stop the participating in the interview, but be unsure of how to say no to the researcher. Therefore, prior to commencing the study, your child will be reminded that she/he can say “no” or “stop now” or “I don’t want to answer that question.” Additionally, the researcher will be alert to non-verbal signs of discomfort and/or fatigue on the part of the child and will stop the interview. If your

child does not nod their head or provide a sign of assenting or actively dissents to participate, the researcher will not involve your child in the research.

**Benefits of the Study:** This study will allow a graduate student to further her skills in conducting research in an early learning laboratory setting, which will be of use to her in her present and future work with children and families. It is hoped that your child will benefit by having her/his views and ideas validated in the context of a research study and will contribute to useful knowledge in the field of early childhood. We cannot guarantee, however, that you or your child will receive any benefits from participating in this study.

**Confidentiality:** Audio-tapes and transcriptions will be stored in Professor Berman's office in a locked filing cabinet in her office for one year at which time the data will be destroyed. Any information that may be used for publication or in conference presentations will not identify your child or your family individually.

**Voluntary Nature of Participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to have you or your child participate will not influence you or your child's future relations with Ryerson University, the School of Early Childhood Studies, and the Early Learning Centre. If you decide that your child may participate, know that you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your child's participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

At any particular point in the study, your child may refuse to answer any particular question or stop participation altogether. Your child may communicate refusal verbally and/or non-verbally. In the event that you or your child wishes to discontinue participation in this study, data will be discarded and not included in the dissemination.

### **Dissemination**

The researcher will be using the data from this study to complete a Major Research Paper. The researcher may also choose to report her findings to parents and/or to children and possibly use it for publication.

**Questions about the Study:** If you have any questions about the research, please ask.

You may contact the researcher, Ameera Ali at [a26ali@ryerson.ca](mailto:a26ali@ryerson.ca).

You may also contact the course instructor and supervisor of the research, Dr. Rachel Berman [rcberman@ryerson.ca](mailto:rcberman@ryerson.ca) 416-979-5000 x7695

If you have questions regarding your rights or your child's rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information.

Research Ethics Board  
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation  
Ryerson University  
350 Victoria Street  
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3 416-979-5042

**Contact Information:**

In the event that your child is selected to participate in the study, the researcher will contact you to declare this information. Please select your preferred method of communication.

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Agreement:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree that your child may participate in the study and that you have been told that your child can change your or her/his mind and withdraw consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement to keep.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Child (please print)

---

Signature of Investigator

---

Date

You agree to have the study audio-recorded

---

Signature of Parent/Guardian

---

Name of Child (please print)

For your privacy and confidentiality, a drop box for agreement forms has been provided at the entrance of the Kindergarten room of the centre. Please place your signed agreement form in the drop box by June 15th.

Your participation in this study is highly appreciated.

## Appendix B: Child Assent Agreement



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### Assent agreement

TITLE OF PROJECT: Children's Notions of Gender

I am ok with playing with toys and reading a book, and talking about the toys and books that I and other girls and boys like to play with, with Ameera Ali.

It's OK by me that:

1. No one else will know what we talk about;
2. What we talk about will be taped with a tape recorder;
3. Only Ameera and her teacher, Rachel, will listen to the tapes. The teacher will protect the tapes by keeping them safe.
4. I can stop playing, or talking at any time. To do this I can just say "stop now" or I can say "next question."
5. I can stop at any time without anyone being upset or angry at me.
6. Ameera might talk to someone in charge if they are worried about my safety.
7. My mom or dad have said it's OK for me to do this but if I don't want to, it's OK for me to just say so.

My name: \_\_\_\_\_

My signature or special mark: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Coding Guide and Coding Schemes

Coding Guide	
Red	Perceptions of Toys/Play Materials as Gender-Neutral
Blue	Perceptions of Toys/Play Materials as Male-Appropriate
Pink	Perceptions of Toys/Play Materials as Female-Appropriate
Yellow	Notions of Gender Stereotypes
Green	Gender Role Flexibility
Purple	Contingent Gender Role Flexibility
Brown	External Knowledge Source

Perception of Gender Appropriateness Regarding Chosen Toys/Play Materials					
#	Gender	Age	Toy/Activity	Reason for Selecting Toy	Perceived Appropriate Gender(s) for Use of Item
1	Male	Five	Origami	1: "Cause I like to do origami." 1: "Cause it's one of my favourite things."	1: "Both." 1: "Whoever you are, whatever you wanna do." 1: "Whatever you wanna do it's just folding paper."
2	Female	Four	Puzzle (plane)	2: "Because my favourite." 2: "Because it's a airplane and I ride airplanes to China all the time."	2: "Both." 2: "Because they like it." 2: "Well because it's for everybody." R: "How do you know?" 2: "I just know."
3	Female	Five	Drawing (cat)	3: "Because I wanna finish drawing my kitty cat." 3: "Because I like kitty cats"	3: "Both." R: "Both, how come?" 3: "Because I know some boys in my class that know how, that like to draw."
4	Male	Four	Cup, Phone, Fan	4: "Because I like them" 4: "Because they're so cool."	R: "Do both boys and girls play with that, or?" [fan] 4: "Only me." R: "And what about the phone?" 4: "Everybody can use it." R: "Oh okay. And what about the cup?" 4: They wanna play with it because they like it.
5	Male	Six	K'NEX	5: "Cause it's my favourite toy." 5: "Because you could	5: "Boys." 5: "Because lots... the girls don't usually go in the... the dramatics... uhh.. the... puzzle area."

				break it apart and build other stuff.”	<p>R: “How come?”</p> <p>5: “I don’t think they really like the puzzle area.”</p> <p>R: “Why do you think that?”</p> <p>5: “Maybe because they... there’s mostly building toys and puzzles.”</p> <p>R: “But do, do girls... is it okay if girls play with these toys?”</p> <p>5: “Yeah.”</p> <p>R: “It’s okay? How come?”</p> <p>5: “Because it’s okay if boys play with them, then why not girls?”</p>
6	Male	Five	Cookies/LEGO	<p>6: “Because my favourite toy is not here.”</p> <p>6: “LEGO is my favourite toy but it’s gone forever.”</p>	<p>6: “Only boys play with LEGO.”</p> <p>6: “Girls can play with LEGO because they want a girl LEGO.”</p>
#	Age	Toy/Play Material	Dialogue		General Perception of Gender Appropriateness
1	Five	General	<p>R: “Do you think the toys in the class are made for everyone to play with or do you think some are for boys to play with or some are for girls to play with?”</p> <p>1: “All for.. all for the other..”</p> <p>R: “All toys are for everyone to play with?”</p> <p>1: “Yeah.”</p>		No gender differentiation regarding appropriateness/preferences of toys/play materials in general
2	Four	General	<p>R: “What about the other toys in the room? Do you think that some toys are for only girls and some are for only boys or do you think that all toys are for everybody to play with?”</p> <p>2: “All toys are for everybody.”</p> <p>R: “Yeah? How come?”</p> <p>2: “I just know that.”</p> <p>R: “You just know that? (laughs) How do you know?”</p> <p>2: “I just know that.”</p>		No gender differentiation regarding appropriateness/preferences of toys/play materials in general

		Barbies	<p>R: "Um so like.. do you.. so all toys are for both boys and girls?"</p> <p>2: "Yeah."</p> <p>R: "What about Barbie's?"</p> <p>2: "Yeah."</p> <p>R: "Yeah? Girls and boys?"</p> <p>2: (nods)</p>	No gender differentiation regarding appropriateness/preferences of Barbies
		LEGO	<p>R: "Who plays with LEGO?"</p> <p>2: "All of us."</p> <p>R: "All of you? Do you think boys and girls build different things or they build the same things?"</p> <p>2: "They build the same things."</p>	No gender differentiation regarding appropriateness/preferences of LEGO
		Trucks	<p>R: "Who plays with the trucks in the room?"</p> <p>2: "Boys and girls."</p>	No gender differentiation regarding appropriateness/preferences of trucks
		Dolls	<p>R: "Who plays with the dolls in the room?"</p> <p>2: "Boys and girls."</p>	No gender differentiation regarding appropriateness/preferences of dolls
3	Five	General	<p>R: "Yeah? Are there, do you think, are there any toys in here that only girls play with or only boys or is everything for everyone?"</p> <p>3: "Everything is for everyone."</p>	No gender differentiation regarding appropriateness/preferences of toys/play materials in general
		Playdough	<p>R: "So, who plays with playdough?"</p> <p>3: "My friend (male name) and (female name) like to play with playdough. And my friends they're twins her name is (female name) and (female name)."</p> <p>R: "Ohh okay. So boys and girls both or..."</p> <p>C: "Yeah."</p>	No gender differentiation regarding appropriateness/preferences of playdough
		Puzzles, LEGO, K'NEX	<p>3: "Yeah but most boys play with the puzzles."</p> <p>R: "Yeah how come?"</p> <p>3: "I don't know why they just like the LEGOs and the K'NEX."</p> <p>R: "Oh they like the LEGO and the K'NEX."</p> <p>3: "Yeah."</p> <p>R: "But it's okay if girls play with those or no?"</p> <p>3: "It's okay if girls play with those because I like to play with them sometimes too."</p>	<p>Perception that puzzles, LEGO and K'NEX are predominantly desired by males</p> <p>Assumption that boys like LEGO and K'NEX</p> <p>Understanding that it is acceptable for the opposing gender (female) to</p>

				play with these items as well
		Dolls	R: "Who plays with the dolls?" 3: "Dolls? Um everybody."	No gender differentiation regarding appropriateness/preferences of dolls
		Trucks	R: "Ohh, who plays with them? Everyone or boys or girls or?" 3: "Boys." R: "Boys play with the trucks? Girls don't play with them?" 3: "No." R: "No? How come?" 3: "Because girls don't really like trucks like me I don't really like trucks." R: "How come you don't like trucks?" 3: "Because I don't like playing with trucks but I like learning about trucks." R: "Yeah? What about the other girls, do they like to play with trucks?" 3: "Um, no." R: "No? Wow I wonder why. But is it okay if girls play with trucks?" 3: "Yes."	Perception that trucks are predominantly desired by males  Assumption that females do not desire to play with trucks  Understanding that it is acceptable for the opposing gender (females) to play with these items as well
		Superhero Costumes	R: "Who dresses up in that?" 3: "Um, I don't know boys do." R: "Do you think girls dress up as superheroes?" 3: "Um, no I don't think so." R: "How come?" 3: "I don't know." R: "Do you think boys dress up as superheroes?" 3: "Yes."	Perception that superhero costumes are utilized predominantly by males.  Assumption that females do not dress up in superhero costumes.
		Witch Costumes	R: "What about the witch? Who dresses up as the witch?" 3: "Everybody."	No gender differentiation regarding appropriateness/preferences of witch costumes
4	Four	General	R: "Are there any toys in here that are just for girls or just for boys or is everything for everyone?" 4: "Everything is for everyone."	No gender differentiation regarding appropriateness/preferences of toys/play materials in general
		Cars	R: "Do boys or girls like to play with cars or both?" 4: "Both."	No gender differentiation regarding appropriateness/preferences of cars

		LEGO	<p>R: "You have LEGO, who plays with LEGO?"</p> <p>4: "Me and (male name)."</p> <p>R: "Oh yeah? And the girls too?"</p> <p>4: "No."</p>	Perception that LEGO is utilized predominantly by males.
5	Six	General	<p>R: "So, who plays with everything else?"</p> <p>5: "Uh, girls and boys."</p> <p>R: "Girls and boys? Do you think that there are toys in general that are for only boys or only girls or..."</p> <p>5: "No."</p> <p>R: "No? You think that all toys are for everyone?"</p> <p>5: "Yeah."</p> <p>R: "How come?"</p> <p>5: "Because everyone can have their own things."</p>	No gender differentiation regarding appropriateness/preferences of toys/play materials in general
		Dolls	<p>R: "What about like dolls? Who plays with dolls?"</p> <p>5: "Girls."</p> <p>R: "Girls? What about boys?"</p> <p>5: "No."</p> <p>R: "No? How come?"</p> <p>5: "Because they don't usually have..."</p> <p>R: "They don't usually have what?"</p> <p>5: "Uh, dolls."</p> <p>R: "They don't usually... how come they don't usually have dolls?"</p> <p>5: "Cause they're for girls."</p>	<p>Perception that dolls are predominantly desired by females</p> <p>Assumption that males do not use dolls</p>
		Princess Costumes	<p>R: "What about like a princess, who dresses up as a princess?"</p> <p>R: "Boys and girls?"</p> <p>5: "No."</p> <p>R: "No? So who dresses up as princesses then?"</p> <p>5: "Girls."</p> <p>R: "Girls? Why only girls?"</p> <p>5: "Because girls have... princesses are for girls."</p> <p>R: "Princesses are girls? How do you know that?"</p> <p>5: "Someone told me."</p> <p>R: "Someone told you? Who told you?"</p> <p>5: "One of my classmates."</p> <p>R: "One of your classmates? Oh okay. So is it,</p>	<p>Perception that princesses are predominantly female</p> <p>Indicates information was obtained from outside source (peer)</p> <p>Understanding that it is acceptable for the opposing gender (male) to dress up as a princess as well</p>

			<p>what if a boy wanted to dress up as a princess?"</p> <p>5: "That would be fine."</p>	
		Batman Costumes	<p>R: "And what about Batman? Who dresses up as Batman?"</p> <p>5: "Boys."</p> <p>R: "Boys? But can girls dress up as Batman?"</p> <p>5: "Yeah."</p> <p>R: "How come?"</p> <p>5: "Cause there's even a Batgirl."</p>	<p>Perception that Batman costumes are predominantly utilized by males.</p> <p>Understanding that it is acceptable for the opposing gender (female) to dress up as a Batman (as long as she is 'Batgirl')</p>
		Superhero Costumes	<p>R: "Who dresses up as the superhero?"</p> <p>5: "Boys and girls."</p> <p>R: "Boys and girls? That..."</p> <p>5: "Cause there's girl superheroes and [...] superhero boys."</p>	<p>No gender differentiation regarding appropriateness/preferences of superhero costumes</p>
		LEGO	<p>R: "So who plays with the LEGO?"</p> <p>5: "Boys and girls... sometimes."</p>	<p>No gender differentiation regarding appropriateness/preferences of LEGO</p>
		Puzzles	<p>R: "Puzzles? Who plays with those?"</p> <p>5: "Boys and girls."</p> <p>R: "Do they have different kinds of puzzles for boys and girls or is all the puzzles for everyone or how does that work?"</p> <p>5: "All the puzzles... all the puzzles are for everybody."</p>	<p>No gender differentiation regarding appropriateness/preferences of puzzles</p>
6	Five	LEGO	<p>R: "So who plays with LEGO, girls or boys?"</p> <p>6: "Only boys play with LEGO."</p> <p>6: "Girls can play with LEGO because they want a girl LEGO."</p> <p>R: "Oh they want the girl LEGO, but what is girl LEGO?"</p> <p>6: "Ah hah, you didn't watch the movie LEGO?"</p> <p>R: "No I didn't, what is it about?"</p> <p>6: "I saw one, I saw it."</p> <p>R: "Um, so why don't girls like to play with boy LEGO?"</p> <p>6: "I don't know."</p> <p>R: "You don't know? So there's two sets types of LEGO? There's boy LEGO and then there's girl LEGO?"</p> <p>6: "Yeah cause only on the TV."</p> <p>R: "Only on the TV?"</p>	<p>Perception that LEGO is predominantly utilized by males.</p> <p>Assumption that females do not like (boy) LEGO</p> <p>Indicates information was obtained from outside source (television)</p>

		<p>R: "Oh okay. Um, but how come girls don't play with LEGO?"</p> <p>6: "Oh, cause they need girl LEGO."</p>	
	Dolls	<p>R: "Um, but who plays with dolls? Who can play with dolls?"</p> <p>6: "Um, (male name)."</p> <p>R: "Like not names, I mean like can girls play with them? Are dolls for boys?"</p> <p>6: "Everybody."</p>	No gender differentiation regarding appropriateness/preferences of dolls.
	Princess Costumes	<p>R: "What about, do you ever dress up as a princess?"</p> <p>6: "We don't have princess stuff."</p> <p>R: "Oh you don't? But if you had princess stuff who do you think would dress up as a princess? Everyone? Or just boys? Or just girls?"</p> <p>6: "Just girls."</p> <p>R: "Just girls? How come?"</p> <p>6: "Cause girls like princesses."</p> <p>R: "So how come girls like princesses?"</p> <p>6: "Cause they like pink."</p> <p>6: "Boys don't even like to be princesses. I'll show you something."</p> <p>R: "Okay. Come here and show me..."</p> <p>6: (goes to dress up area) "There's no boy ones." [talking about costumes]</p> <p>R: "So I still don't understand though, how come um boys don't like to be princesses? And how come girls..."</p> <p>6: "Um boys... if boys want to be prince... if boys want to be princesses they need to be the (inaudible)."</p> <p>R: "They need to be the what?"</p> <p>6: "The (inaudible)."</p> <p>R: "What does that mean?"</p> <p>6: "Um, it's not the guy on the bad guy's team."</p> <p>R: "Oh it's a good person?"</p> <p>6: "No, it's a... it's a sucker."</p> <p>R: "A sucker?"</p> <p>6: "Yeah. He's no... he's a cheeseman. He's a stinky cheeseman. Nobody can see him, only the superhero. And that's the guy who's the stinky cheeseman."</p>	<p>Perception that princess costumes are predominantly utilized by females.</p> <p>Assumption that females like princess costumes because they like the colour pink.</p> <p>Assumption that males do not like to dress up as princesses.</p> <p>Understanding that it is acceptable for the opposing gender (male) to dress up as a princess under certain conditions.</p>

	Superhero Costumes	<p>R: "Wait what did you say? The girls have to be what if they want to be a superhero?"</p> <p>6: "(inaudible) on the bad guy's team."</p> <p>R: "Oh so if a girl wants to be a superhero she has to be on the bad guy's team?"</p> <p>6: "Yeah."</p> <p>R: "Like she has to be a bad superhero you mean?"</p> <p>6: "Yeah."</p> <p>R: "How come?"</p> <p>6: "Cause, that's the game that I watched on TV."</p>	<p>Understanding that it is acceptable for the opposing gender (female) to dress up as a superhero under certain conditions.</p> <p>Indicates information was obtained from outside source (television)</p>
	Cars (film)	<p>R: "Who plays with those toys, girls or boys or both?"</p> <p>6: "Boys, girls don't like cars they like girl cars."</p> <p>R: "Girls like 'girl' cars?"</p> <p>R: "What are girl cars?"</p> <p>6: "You don't know?"</p> <p>R: "No. What.. what's the difference..."</p> <p>6: "They have red hair on their cars."</p> <p>6: "On the top, on the bottom, even on the wheels!"</p> <p>R: "But I... how come girls don't play with those cars on your shirt?"</p> <p>6: "Cause we don't have a girl car."</p>	<p>Perception that toys from the film Cars are predominantly utilized by males.</p> <p>Assumption that females do not like (boy) Cars</p>

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