An old issue in a new era: Early Years Practitioners' perceptions of gender.

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Abstract

This dissertation is an exploration of a group of Early Years Practitioners' perceptions of gender. The current media and educational interest in the gendered brain suggests that children's learning might be differentiated according to their sex. Based on assumed biological differences, approaches to the care and education of children could be established on sex categories rather than on an individual's needs. My focus here is to explore understandings of gender to gain insight into how these might influence practitioners' expectations of children's behaviour and learning in the nursery environment. The study is premised on the belief that practitioners' perceptions of gender could result in self-fulfilling prophecies being (re)produced and (re)created. Binary expectations could limit opportunities for children due to stereotypical assumptions and practices being employed. The dissertation adopts a Foucauldian lens to identify practices and perceptions that foreground children's gender and sex categories and which do not reflect child-centred approaches. A number of themes permeate the dissertation, including the nature of gender, sexuality and play. The research data was collected from a group of eight Early Years Practitioners who took part in five discussion sessions as well as from a toy survey given to that group and a further 92 participants. The findings indicate that there is a belief among practitioners that gender impacts upon learning, behaviour and children's play. In addition, there are clear indications that the participants believe children's, especially boys', early play behaviours predict their future sexual orientation. The conclusions presented suggest that changes to the education and training of Early Years Practitioners are required in order to raise awareness of gender issues in nurseries. I suggest that placing gender back on the training agenda with the use of Dewey's critical thinking and Schon's reflection-on-action may support changes to practice that could, in turn, provide children with more equitable teaching and learning experiences. Finally, areas for further research are proposed that investigate the perceptions of gender as understood by children and their parents.

Contents

Tables

Vignettes

Diagrams

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Certificate of Originality

I certify that this thesis is my original work and that all references to, and quotations from, the work of others contained therein have been clearly identified and fully attributed.

Signature _____

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List of Acronyms Used

BA - Bachelor of Arts

CAH - Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia

CDT- Cognitive Development Theory

DG - Discussion group

DNA - Deoxyribonucleic Acid

DSD - disorders of sex development

EY - Early Years

EYPs - Early Years Practitioners

fMRI - functional magnetic resonance imaging

GST - Gender Schema Theory

IQ - intelligent quotient

MV- multiple voices

NASA - National Aeronautics and Space Administration

PLS - Plain Language Statement

RP - research participant

SLT - Social Learning Theory

SSSC - Scottish Social Service Council

UK - United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

WS - wider survey

Chapter 1 – Introduction and Rationale

1.1 An old issue in a new era

'*All I want is a rich man to take care of me*'
Louise, 23 years old, niece of a friend

Dressed pristinely in pink, Louise is a typical 'girlie girl' who has grown up in a society that offers free education to all and that congratulates itself on providing equal opportunities to both men and women. Yet increasingly women are presented with images that tell them that beauty, appearance and relationships are what women should care about in order to attract a mate who can look after them. In recent years 'equal but different' has become an accepted view of the sexes, where particular and distinct needs, learning styles and roles in society are believed to be innate. Some of the arguments used to support these perceptions emerge from previous discourses about the nature of men and women, whilst others are new and use modern technology to suggest proof of these theories.

One manifestation of theory being used to illuminate a modern observation is the explanation used to justify the current explosion of pink. The use of pink in the media, fashion and toy industries, has increasingly categorised, stereotyped and produced a caricature of the desires of girls and women. In an attempt to explain this phenomenon there has been an effort to prove that women's apparent partiality to pink may be due to a natural predisposition to be drawn to its hues (Hulbert and Ling, 2007). This type of a biological deterministic view of being female has gained popularity and reinforces the belief that biology determines capabilities and desires. In this dissertation I propose that biological deterministic views have the potential to support discriminatory practices where differences are explained and often excused as being natural. This can result in limited views of both girls and boys, where stereotypes and misrepresentations of what it is to be female and male are reinforced and sustained through the media, popular culture and even education. As argued by Sadker and Zittleman (2009:51) 'many of the blatant sexist practices of the past are gone, (but) sexism is not'.

1.2 Gender and education

Following Sadker and Zittleman (2009:51), there are many who would argue that '(g)irls have not only achieved equality, but superiority'. They also highlight claims that equality

has changed directions and that it is now boys who are being discriminated against (Sadker and Zittleman, 2009). Accordingly, there is a current focus on a particular brand of pop-science where it is postulated that established gender stereotypes and inequities are a thing of the past (*ibid*). There are claims, by some like Michael Gurian (Gurian and Stevens, 2010), that many gender stereotypes are created owing to immutable biological differences between male and females. These views have resulted in the adoption of some education and nurturing approaches that target what are claimed to be particular male and female characteristics to support and maximise children's potential. However, I would argue that such biological deterministic views are a retrograde step that continues to reinforce differences rather than celebrate and recognise similarities.

According to Moi, (1999) biological determinism claims that gender differences originate from biological or evolutionary origins. Talbot (2010) suggests that the rise of feminism in the 19th century provided a platform for traditional views of women as deficit models of men could be challenged. By the middle of the 20th century the 'nature versus nurture' arguments became prominent. Some thinkers like Nel Noddings (1983) claimed that for biological and social reasons women have a special role in society: that of having, nurturing and caring for children; whilst others like Judith Butler (1993) claimed that gender is a social construction that results in two worlds being created for human beings. These arguments have continued to be debated and it is claimed by some authors such as Siegel (1997) that the third wave of feminism arguably brought with it apathy towards the issue of gender equality. Further, Siegel (1997) claims that the orthodox view of feminism is outdated and irrelevant in today's society. Such attitudes have possibly contributed to a resurgence of biological deterministic beliefs. Currently, popular culture appears to exploit and accentuate differences, with some researchers like Baron-Cohen (2003) claiming that the recent advances in brain technology explain the observed differences between male and female brains. According to Schmidtz, (2010) this evidence has resulted in the adoption of approaches that could be reinforcing and creating the difference being observed. Schmidtz (2010) explains that as experiences develop particular neurological pathways, different teaching and nurturing approaches may be responsible for what he has suggested are the unsupported definitive claims being made about the gendered brain.

Ironically, the very sector that is charged and trusted with the remedy and responsibility for children's development may, through the adoption of pseudo-scientific practices or

blindness to practices, reproduce the old rhetoric that boys and girls are immutably different and require different educational experiences. Perceptions and theories of *why* differences exist between the sexes can have a powerful effect on those who teach, care and nurture children. Ruble et al. (2007), caution that theories can become truths that can become self-fulfilling prophecies, as over time these truths can become practices that are so embedded that they often go unchallenged. *How* gender is done depends on *how* it is perceived by those who influence and nurture children's development in the world. According to Lipsitz-Bem (1981, 1983, 1993) and Martin and Ruble (2004), children start to develop gender schemas through their interaction and relationships during the first few years of their lives. Research undertaken by Vandenbroeck and Peeters (2008) and Hellman (2011) appears to indicate that children acquire culturally-related gender behaviours not just in the home, but in early social settings such as Early Years (hereafter EY) provision.

1.3 Professional context and aim of the project

It is commonly observed that Early Years is the first environment beyond the home where children are institutionally socialised (Gestwicki and Bertrand, 2011). As such the pre-5 setting and the practitioners who interact and build relationships with the children play a role in developing, reinforcing and consolidating children's concepts of gender. Blaise (2005) suggests that early years practitioners (EYPs) can play a positive lasting role in promoting authentic gender equality for children. As a university teacher, who teaches EYPs, my interest in this area for research emerges from my professional contact with students. My students claim that they respond to *all* children at an individual level and that gendering does not occur in the nursery environment. Despite this, in class and throughout this research, they expressed the belief that boys and girls are different and that children's play naturally conforms to gender stereotypes. The comments made by students also reflect the findings of Condie et al. (2006):

> (I)t is perhaps worth noting that in pre-5 education, where children are allowed to choose their activities, there was a perception amongst teachers that boys (and girls) tended to choose along gender stereotypical lines.
>
> (Condie et al., 2006:3)

Consequently, in this research I wished to engage with practitioners to discover how they understood gender. I did not enter the process to claim to have discovered that EYPs exhibit gendered practices; rather I wanted to explore how and why EYPs, like other groups in society, 'do' gender. It is important to acknowledge that whilst gender is the

focus of this study, I would not want to suggest that it should or could be studied as a 'discrete' issue, separate from other key systems, categories or structures in society. I acknowledge McCall's (2005:1771) caution of the 'limitations of gender as a single analytical category', noting that, of course, gender intersects with other aspects of being for example: class, colour, ability, age, ethnicity and religion. Collins (2000) claims that areas of intersectionality reinforce and overlap with each other resulting in complex interactions and intersections which lead to different experiences and concepts of identity and that it is the intersection of gender with these that can lead to inequalities. Whilst I did not adopt the methodology of intersectionality to study the 'relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations' (Bhattacharya, 2012) in this study, I nonetheless acknowledge its importance. Hence, I return, in the final chapter, to ways in which further research might be undertaken which builds from my focus on gender and takes a more intersectional approach.

What I explore here is how the practitioners perceive gender and how important they viewed it to be: whether they were aware of responding differently or having different expectations for boys and girls. Through the examination of such questions I wished to explore EYPs' contribution to gendering in the pre-5 environment. As educators I believe that there is both a moral and professional duty to challenge opinions and behaviours that discriminate. In order to do this, according to Newton and Williams (2011), it is first necessary to consider practices and reveal and examine what is currently happening before changes can be identified and implemented.

This research emerges from an interpretative paradigm, where, following Burrell and Morgan (1979), the participants' perceptions of gender can only be understood by talking to them and encouraging them to discuss their experiences and give their opinions. To reflect this approach, I have chosen to start each of the chapters presented here with reference to what a range of voices—including those of the participants—say in relation to specific topics investigated. I start my investigations for this research with an examination of past and current theories of gender by considering biological deterministic views which presume that biology and evolution determine desires and abilities.

Chapter 2 – Biological determinism – Defence and critique

2.1 The debate

‘*No, mummy, that’s for boys’*
(Seth, age 3)

Seth, my godson, on the evening before his third birthday party, instructs his mother as to what toys should go in the pink and blue party bags. By the age of three Seth has clearly developed a schema that determines that small bouncy balls are for boys and not for girls. From this type of everyday conversation with young children to debates about why ‘girls are outperforming boys’ in education (see for example: Browne, 2011:217; Burusic et al., 2012:525) it appears that gender does matter. However, the issues that surround gender are contentious and widely debated:

> Men are different from women. They are equal only in their common membership of the same species, humankind. To maintain that they are the same in aptitude, skill or behaviour is to build a society based on a biological and scientific lie.
>
> (Moir and Jessel, 1989:5).

The biological deterministic view expressed here by Moir and Jessel (1989) is reiterated in both popular culture and academia amidst claims that women and men are fundamentally and irrevocably distinct owing to biological differences which also affect and determine thinking, desires, communication and behaviour. These views are still as prevalent today as they were over a hundred years ago, with authors such as Baron-Cohen (2003), Gurian (2002), Sax (2005) and Wolpert (2014) advocating that biological differences separate the sexes. Others, like Eliot (2009) and Fine (2010), have argued that there is a disproportionate emphasis placed on dissimilarities that relate to what are relatively small physical and reproductive physiological differences which determine male and female. Further, it is claimed that the formation of gender is continually ‘reconstructed in light of normative conceptions’ of men and women (West and Zimmerman, 1987:127), resulting in stereotypes being rewritten and perpetuated depending on social and cultural expectations that are continually redefined in an ever-changing society. Debates concerning gender will be presented here over three chapters; the first (Chapter 2) will focus on biological determinism, followed by Chapter 3, which will focus on the social construction of gender, where I will suggest that gender is constructed primarily by our relationships, experiences

and connectedness to the culture and environment in which we live. In Chapter 4 I will consider stereotypes, where I will examine how toys and colour often appear to confirm society's perceptions of gender.

In this chapter, the insights gained from the following discussion will uncover some of the arguments that have shaped the beliefs that biology alone determines and polarises human capabilities. I will focus on arguments over the last hundred and fifty years that have been used to challenge the call for equality between the sexes, with a specific focus on the period associated with the rise of feminism. I do not intend to provide the reader with a full account or history of the rise of feminism. Rather, I will focus on the biological arguments used that justify human beings being defined by their biological physiology. I will also examine and discuss what has been called the 'new determinism' (Walters, 2010:128), which some suggest manifests culturally in an explosion of pink that separates the sexes by colour from the moment of birth (Eliot, 2009; Walters, 2010). Finally, I will discuss the advances in technology that have, according to some, resulted in scientific evidence produced by functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) which establishes that males and females have different capabilities and skills based on brain functions. This return to a biological deterministic understanding of male and female could, as eloquently put by Davies (1998:131), result in society 'knitting back up the unravelled world of the old discourses with every pattern we thought we had just pulled undone' . However, prior to discussing biological determinism, I will initially examine understandings and views that relate to the terms 'gender' and 'sex' as Meyer (2010) claims there is often confusion over the distinction between them.

2.2 Gender and sex

From birth, the sex of a child—which is the identification of the baby as a boy or a girl based on its genitalia or the possession of XX or XY chromosomes—is probably the most socially significant quality that is ascribed to any human being. However, authors such as Canning (2005) and Crawford (2006) note that as society has increasingly become interested in discourses that examine humans in terms of being male or female, feminine or masculine, or biological or social beings, the term sex has become inadequate. Sex and gender, as has been suggested by many including Ryle (2012:92), should be viewed as interconnected but independent terms. The sex classifications of females and males, according to West and Zimmerman (1987:127), define humans based on binary biological

criteria which are thought to be fixed, clearly defined and irrefutable. Biological categorisation allows humans to be discussed in terms of specific elements which relate to physiological and genetic aspects of the body and how it works. This differs from gender, which according to Levy (1989:306) '...refers to the social categorizing of individuals based on social standards and ascriptions' that are determined and created by society. The formation of gender is based on how we see ourselves (and others) as conforming to masculine and feminine types of behaviour (Fausto-Sterling, 1985; Fox, 2001; Andersen et al., 2005; West and Zimmerman, 2009). According to a plethora of authors, for example Rubin (1975), Rider (2005), Crawford (2006), Hyde (2007) and Matlin (2008), gender is a social construction where there are particular cultural norms and proscriptions in terms of what is acceptable and what is unacceptable gender type behaviours and attitudes. As such, gender is socially, culturally and racially bound. Nobelius and Wainer (2004:8) simply state that '(i)f you know that the difference is 100% biological it's a sex difference. Everything else must be considered a gender difference'.

However, categorisation and terminology can of course indicate other politics at work. For example, the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus (1707 -1778) was the first to categorise humans, along with other warm-blooded animals who were suckled at birth, as 'mammals'. The term emerged during the 18th century when there was move by doctors and officials to promote breastfeeding by mothers, rather than wet nurses. This push was, according to Schiebinger, (1993:383), 'in step with political realignments undermining women's public power' where a restructuring of both child care and the role of women in society was being designed. Therefore, the use of the term 'mammalian' helped to validated the place of women in the home 'to suckle and rear their own offspring' by categorising and inculcating the term with gender laden associations (*ibid:*409*)*. It is therefore with caution that even scientific terminology should be used without due consideration of the clear, distinction between sex and gender.

Meyer (2010) warns that the common use of 'sex' and 'gender' interchangeably can result in the undervaluing of the terms as distinct and separate concepts. Additionally, Ryle (2012:195) comments that the link between sex as a biological fact and gender as the social embodiment of attitudes, behaviour and experiences that are socially appropriate to a sex category can be viewed as an over-simplification. This rebuttal is rooted to the assumption that it is possible to distinguish between what is purely biological and what is socially

constructed. Eveline and Bacchi (2010) suggest that the term 'gender' can be understood and performed differently in various societies and cultures. They claim that unlike the term 'sex', 'gender' is not fixed. Connell (2002) and West and Zimmerman (1987) view gender as an interactive societal construction. They argue that often the socialisation view of gender, which will be discussed more fully in the next chapter, depicts children as passive recipients of social norms and expectations, where gender is imposed upon them. Accordingly, West and Zimmerman (*ibid*: 146) consider gender to be accomplished through relationships and interactions in society. Gender is not enforced, rather human beings simultaneously express and create gender, which results in gender norms being continued, replicated, developed and even altered in particular societies (Connell, 2002).

Smith and Watson (1992) suggest that people do have some control over the development of their gender, both at a conscious and subconscious level. Butler (1990:302) further argues that human beings develop their gender as it is an action which is performed. However, how this process will manifest itself will depend on the particular societal expectations, the feedback and understanding of others and how this information is assimilated into the individual's and society's consciousness. Butler (1990, 1993) argues that *both* sex and gender are created and enacted through social interactions and that neither term is fixed. She argues that personality and behaviour result in all humans being gendered and that the norms that relate to physical appearance—girls have long hair, boys do not wear pink—and the sex of the individual are assigned and created through socialisation. The norms associated with a person's physical appearance and their sex category, also change depending on time and culture, resulting in associations relating to sex being socially constructed. As such, Butler (1990) claims that both 'gender' and 'sex' need to be understood as active terms where they are conditional and every changing. The terms are therefore not fixed with clear and distinct constructions and definitions and they should, according to Butler (*ibid),* be used as verbs rather than nouns. This is because, according to Butler (1990, 1993), determining exactly where biological influences end and where behaviours that are influenced by culture or environment begin is not possible. Therefore, what may be determined as a difference attributable to a person's sex may also be influenced by their gender based on their culture, race or ethnicity.

Moi (1999:32) states that 'as soon as opposition to biological determinism has been established, it really does not matter whether one writes sex, gender or sexual difference'.

The following discussion, which focuses on biological determinism, challenges the spectrum of views that biology alone determines how a person thinks, behaves or communicates. Following Moi *(ibid*), it could then be assumed that a definition is not required here. However, for ease of distinction in this dissertation the term 'sex' will be based on biological differences and the term 'gender' will refer to behaviours that relate to the social responses that communicate culturally-bound conventions and social interactions, acknowledging that these change over time and that society continually redefines them (Krieger, 2003; Holmes, 2009). In addition, the term 'gender', following Butler (1990, 1993), will also be used as a verb—to gender—where this will refer to the process of acquiring gender behaviours and associations as part of the socialisation process. Where there is a blurring of the distinctions, these will, where possible, be highlighted and discussed.

Deliberation over the distinctions between the terms 'sex' and 'gender' has not always been afforded such interest, as it was assumed that one's sex determined everything. Le May Sheffield (2004) and Holmes (2009) note that Aristotle advised that the significant biological differences between men and women were founded on their reproductive capabilities, which dictated that women and men had separate and different social roles and zones. Male reproduction was viewed as being a creative force and female reproduction was seen as passive. This approach, by extension and as noted by Classen (1998) and Le May Sheffield, (2004) suggested that men and women had naturally different positions in the social order based on sex distinctions and functions; men were for worldly and political pursuits and women for domestic. The first sustained questioning of sex as a fixed biological and social determining factor was during the Enlightenment period, which provided opportunities for the historical and philosophical questioning of traditional, political and social positions of men and women. According to O'Brien (2009), the discussions that emerged from this period created a structure and a language for understanding the gendered organisations of society and provided a starting point for the first wave of feminism in 19th century.

2.3 Biological determinism and the rise of feminism

Towards the end of the 19th century the United Kingdom, Western Europe and United States were in the midst of the first wave of the feminist movement.[1] This movement sought rights for women that were equal to men, where the focus was on the political empowerment for women; the ownership of property; equality in marriage and divorce, the right to make legal decisions and, according to Offen (1988), the entry of women into what had been traditionally viewed as male professions. Campaigners such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797), Elizabeth Garrett Anderson (1836-1917) and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902), supported by male political writers such as John Stuart Mill (1806-73) and John Ruskin (1819-1900), proposed rights for women in the economic, educational and political spheres of society (Sanders, 1999:29).[2] The demand for women to have rights that were equal to men's in a male-dominated society was met with resistance (see for example: Moi, 1999; Sanders, 1999; Whitehead, 2002). The desire to maintain the status quo found support in the rapidly expanding scientific community, which presented its understandings of the relationships and perceived differences between men and women.

One of the scientific theories of the time that supposedly provided evidence of the natural order between men and women was influenced considerably by the work of Charles Darwin— although it was Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) who not only popularised Darwin's work but also used Darwinian principles to make more radical claims, which formed the basis of 'biological determinism' (Lipsitz-Bem, 1993; Whitehead, 2002). Confer et al. (2010) suggest that this concept attempted to use evolutionary principles to explain and understand human behaviour and promoted the belief that human characteristics and traits are natural, acquired and therefore fixed (see for example: Jaggar, 1983; Fausto-Sterling, 1992; Stone, 2007). Biology, it was claimed, determines that particular roles are assigned to all in society, including gender and social status. The

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[1] The first wave of feminism was the first concerted group who worked for the reform of women's social and legal inequalities in the 19th century (Offen, 1988).

[2] Successes of the first wave of feminism in the UK (UK Parliament, online):

Property rights for married women that allowed them control over property and their finances:

- ✓ Married Women's Property Act of 1870;
- ✓ Women's Property Act 1882.

Introduction of rights to protect married women and their children:

- ✓ 1873 - Infant Custody Act - the needs of children should be considered for custody.
- ✓ 1878 - Matrimonial Causes Act - women experiencing matrimonial violence can apply for divorce.

The right for married women over the age of 30 to be able to vote:

- ✓ Representation of the People Act, 1918.

Allowed women to gain some access to the professions such as medicine (LeGates, 2001:227).

destiny of each individual was believed to be laid down in a biologically destiny. This concept, as discussed by Beauvoir (1949) and Walters (2010), dismissed or minimised both environmental and social influences. It also favoured what was defined as natural roles and behaviours which furthered the survival of the species into the next generation, through natural actions such as 'mother-child bonding and child-rearing' (Løland, 2008:187) and where the position and role of women as discussed by Du Bois (1981) could be defined primarily through childbearing and nurturing activities.

Further justification of biological determinism came from Geddes and Thomson (1890/2012), who proposed that there were biological differences that created distinct and specific roles for men and women. In many respects, it can be claimed that Geddes and Thomson were the heirs of tradition, where there are clear Aristotelian views presented and further reinforced by modern scientific methods of assessment, classification and explanation. Their claim was that the human body has a 'metabolic state' which is responsible for the differences between the sexes. They argued that:

> males are more active, energetic, eager, passionate and variable; the females more passive, conservative, sluggish and stable....Males...are very frequently the leaders in evolutionary progress...females tend rather to preserve the constancy and integrity...(T)he more active males...consequently have a wider range of experience, may have bigger brains and are more intelligent.
>
> (Geddes and Thomson, 1890/2012: 270)

The belief that women were passive in their disposition and that their intelligence could not equal men's would, according to Geddes and Thomson (1890/2012), account for their physical and psychological weaknesses. This belief, they advocated, supported 'deep-seated constitutional differences' (*ibid*: 382) and reinforced the belief that women should have no role in matters of state. This seminal work appeared to confirm the need to preserve the social and political status quo which excluded women, using the justification that the natural order that 'was decided among the prehistoric Protozoa cannot be annulled by an Act of Parliament' (Geddes and Thomson, 1989 cited in Moi, 1999:85). Accordingly, women should not by their nature be interested in political matters.

These various forms of 19th century biological determinism rationalised the view that biological differences between men and women vindicated traditionally different roles in society, resulting in the confirmation, amongst other discriminatory practices, of the

placement of women in a lower status than their male counterparts. However, the central tenets of these forms of biological determinism did not go undisputed. The pioneering feminist anthropologist Margaret Mead (1901-1978) highlighted that other cultures existed and exhibited differences in the distribution of labour and the definitions of the roles for men and women (Greene, 2003). Mead, as noted by Sharpe (1994) and Greene (2003), claimed that cultural conditioning determines human behaviour more than biological factors, and she argued that gender differences were not universal and therefore could not be deemed natural. Mead, along with others such as the philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952), argued that cultural expectations construct and determine how men and women should behave. Sociological discourses that followed claimed that humans are not passive, but are rather actors who 'reflect rather than respond by reflex' (Musolf, 2009:311). Accordingly, it was considered that the different behaviours observed between the sexes could be traced to learning through socialisation, which is influenced by culture, ethnicity and history, rather than being biologically determined. I will return to the discussion about socialisation in the next chapter.

Dispelling, challenging and changing beliefs that promoted 'rigid separation of spheres between men and women, and consequently...gender inequalities' (Hanlon, 2012:186) did not succeed. While the first wave of feminism did make progress on the political front-by the early 20th century women in many western societies could vote and apply in certain cases for divorce and custody of their children, it did not bring about equality or protect women from being subordinated owing to perceived sex differences *(ibid)*.

The equality of women was viewed differently by many in the first wave where there were diverse views about the ultimate aim of female emancipation (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2008). One of two major factions that existed was *relational feminism* (Offen, 1988:137), where women were seen to be 'equal but different' from men and, once suffrage was achieved, could get on with their womanly duties at home as this was their biologically determined role (Offen, 1988). By contrast, *individualist feminism* saw its mission as achieving autonomy for women and reducing the need to see women only in terms of child bearing and rearing (Offen, 1988). *Individualist feminism* wanted to achieve more in terms of 'Protective Legislation' (Lewis and Davies, 1991:title) which according to Banks (1981) would allow women to have equal rights to men both inside and outside the home.

2.4 Wider social emancipation and second wave feminism

In the second part of the 20th century a new wave of feminism sought to challenge the continuing social patriarchal structures. The Second Wave[3] of feminism is a title ascribed to the rise in feminist action, which took place in Britain, across Europe and America from the late 1960s onwards until the late 1980s/ early 1990s (Lober, 2010). The title, according to Kavka (2012), is commonly used but should not imply that there had been no feminist activity between the first and second movement. It is acknowledged that this movement was not one but many associations with many points of focus: women's legal rights, women's entry into occupations and professions that were traditionally the domain of men, elimination of sexual violence, sexual harassment, prostitution, and pornography, including the acceptance of sexual and sexist representations of women (Mazur, 2002). Second wave feminism sought to challenge embedded acceptance of oppression and exploitation, not just those which affected women directly but those derived from racial, social and sexual subjugation (Gilmore, 2008; Lober, 2010). The movement was 'a profusion of visions of women's liberation' (Jaggar, 1983:4) and was less cohesive than first wave feminism.

The second movement aimed to tackle broader issues than the first but common to all the elements was the understanding that the prevailing patriarchal social conditions needed to change (Jaggar, 1983). There was, according to Talbot (2010), a need to address and alter the long-held belief that men were the norm and that they alone had characteristics that were valued and that women by extension, were deficit models, who were prey to their emotions and hormones. This belief, well into the 20th century, was one of the strongest obstacles to women's progression and it underlined the assumption that women were seen as being subjugated to men as part of the natural order. From this perspective it was thought that activities such as bearing and nurturing children were where women excelled. A woman's purpose was to be a mother and this was her predetermined role. Tiger (1971)

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[3] Successes that emerged from the second wave of feminism (UK): (UK Parliament, online)

- ✓ Married Women's Property Act. 1964 - A woman was permitted to keep half the allowance given by her spouse.
- ✓ Equal Pay Act 1970 became law in the United Kingdom, although it did not take effect until 1975

In 1974 contraception become free for every women in the UK

- ✓ Sex Discrimination Act 1975 makes it illegal to discriminate against women in work, education and training. The Employment Protection Act introduces statutory maternity provision and makes it illegal to sack a woman because she is pregnant

The Equal Opportunities Commission 1976 - set up to police the equal pay act and sex discrimination act.
Women can apply for a loan or credit in their own name 1980.

suggests that attempts to join a man's world would result in women being over stretched and neglecting their real duties, of the home and family.

The association of women with their reproductive capability resulted in an underpinning biology which increasingly defined their social capacity. Le May Sheffield (2004) also accuses Judeo-Christian religion of supporting and promoting patriarchal dominance. Religions, she claims, have continued to endorse the belief that it is God's plan for men to dominate over all the creatures of the earth, including women (for example: Clifford, 1992; Gamble, 2001; Gallagher, 2003). Therefore, both religion and science—often advisories—both claimed and supported the governance of women on the basis of biological differences. The feminist movement sought to challenge and correct this view. According to Oakley (1985), sexism could not simply be conquered by giving women the same rights as men; rather, there was a need for a restructuring of society and culture. Gender equality constructed within the existing social parameters, Oakley suggested, would result in women adopting male perspectives and attitudes which would only reproduce further inequalities. She believed that there was a need for a new balance in society where a new perspective would take account of women's lives and experiences.

Oakley (1985) notes that two approaches to addressing this perspective emerged during the second wave of feminism, one of which was to establish the role and impact of socialisation in constructing gender, a theme I will return to in the next chapter. Another was to celebrate feminine qualities, voices and perspectives and to reshape the gendered social order. This later branch of feminism was 'gynocentric', positioning qualities such as nurture, care, child rearing and sensitivity as being the sites of women's strengths and distinguishing them from men (Young 1985:181). It proposed that a women's unique ability to bear children endowed her with a particular distinctive and natural inclination towards care, nurture and bonding. Chodorow (1999), Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (1984), in their different ways, suggest a correlation between gender and particular biological characteristics, where female sex and gender differences result in *care* being women's special realm. Nicholson (1994), however, counters this view and suggests that these perspectives are reflective of white middle class child-rearing practices that are particularly placed in Western society. Other feminists (see for example: Scott, 1999) challenged the view that women are predisposed to particular roles:

> It follows then that gender is the social organization of sexual difference. But this does not mean that gender reflects or implements fixed and natural physical differences between women and men; rather gender is the knowledge that establishes meanings for bodily differences.
>
> Scott (1999:2)

Scott (1999) argued that defining women by their biology, even when these perspectives promote positive and powerful ascriptions to the qualities, would continue to reinforce sexism and biological determinism. Oakley (1985) noted that the second wave of feminism remained split over whether women's sex and gender could be viewed as their unique strength or whether both gender and sex differences as social constructions would continue to limit women's full participation in society.

The second wave did undoubtedly bring about significant political improvements and a move towards a more equitable society with the Equal Pay Act (1970) and Sex Discrimination Act (1975), to name but a few progressive changes. Indeed, as observed by Lotz (2001), for some commentators these developments resulted in a perception by some that feminism was no longer relevant or necessary because its objectives had been obtained. For a new generation, and possibly an older one, the challenge to biological determinism seemed to have no place or importance.

2.5 Third wave feminism and the reclamation of femininity

The 1990s heralded the third wave of feminism, also known as post-feminism, although according to Kavka (2012) the suggestion that the difference is purely semantics is contested. For some the use of 'post' suggested that equality had been achieved and that there was no longer a place for feminism. Others described post-feminism as a movement where 'desire and pleasure as well as anger to fuel struggles for justice' continue to challenge social norms (Heywood and Drake, 1997:4). Faludi (1992) also suggested that the term post-feminism describes an apathy towards the feminist movement. She claims that woman in the post-feminist era do not seem to be interested in the feminist aspirations of equality and justice and there appears to be a wide spread impression, even among women, that feminism is a thing of the past and is no longer relevant.

When being asked by a friend what area I would be researching for my doctorate, the response of gender was met with '*Oh, I thought all that was dead and buried. It is a bit of*

an old chestnut'. This view, Faludi (1992) suggests, is held by many and with feminism being represented in the media as being no longer pertinent it is not particularly surprising. The progress sought and gained by the previous movements has, according to Siegel (1997), arguably resulted in many women viewing their options as being equal to those of their male counterparts and insisting that those who still continue to raise feminism seen as rather passé.

McRobbie (2004) optimistically suggests that this is the result of many feminist aspirations being successfully assimilated into Western society. Sommer (1994) holds that women should aim to achieve equality using the existing societal structures rather than aiming to deconstruct and build a new order since society will eventually absorb and adopt these aspirations. Forde (2007:120) however considers this to be 'anti-feminist' and suggests that this will only benefit those women who are already advantaged by having access to education and economic power. Forde (*ibid*) further argues that Sommer's (1994) approach will result in any progress being conditional on the current patriarchal social structures. In order that real progress is made there is a requirement to 'dismantle the power regimes of patriarchal gender relations' (Forde, 2007:121). Brooks (1997) suggests that post-feminism itself signposts a change in society and in the manner in which women's experiences and opportunities have altered and been assimilated in relation to a progressive societal understanding of feminism. Brooks (*ibid*: 1) claims that post-feminism rather than suggesting the demise of feminism, symbolises a course of ongoing change in the conceptualisation of society and feminism.

One such change of attitude which has emerged in the post-feminist era is that women are no longer condemned for choosing to enjoy and value their bodies:

> girl power (which) conveys an implicit rejection of many of the tenets popularly identified with second wave feminism such as the notion that the beauty and fashion industry contributes to women's objectification and attempts to create alternatives to patriarchal power constructs.
>
> (Gamble, 2001: 212)

The use of 'girl' in a post-feminist society is no longer viewed as a derogatory term; rather it is viewed as promoting femininity and being aligned with confidence and power (Gamble, 2001). Third wave feminism aspires to be a more racial and sexually diverse movement where women can rebel socially using their 'girl power' and their sexuality.

However, authors such as Natalie Walters suggest that along with 'girl power' and female emancipation have come disturbing consequences: the early sexualisation of girls (Walters, 2010:79) and a hypersexual culture which tends to exploit women in society who are the most vulnerable (*ibid*: 120). Walters raises concerns relating to a culture which promotes and celebrates women's success and ambition as being manifested in perfect bodies, generally accompanied with a flourish of pink which is no longer just considered a colour used to distinguish between baby boys and girls. I will return to the use of colour to polarise male and females in Chapter 4.

2.6 A new behaviourism

Many of the behaviours which would have previously been considered chauvinistic and sexist have been re-evaluated in the light of post-feminist trends. Pink, girlieness, Bratz dolls, fairies and princesses all have been assimilated and accepted into modern consumerism culture. Walk into any high street toy shop or clothing store and you will be greeted with a profusion of pink. McRobbie (2004: 47) warns that 'consumer culture' where everything is gendered is prolific in children's worlds. She claims that consumer markets are using post-feminism as a vehicle to create new markets by suggesting that this approach empowers women through appealing to their particular predilections, as well as arguing that pink or feminised products, including feminised versions of existing merchandise (for example: *Lego*, which now comes in 'girlie pink'), are all associated with positive images of girls as being active, creative and adventurous. Kane (2012) notes that retailers claim that this tactic is to persuade girls to enter into a world that was previously considered to be the domain of boys, yet still preserves a powerfully gendered style. These preferences have become so embedded in girls' culture that there is a danger that they can both penalise and limit what girls can become and what they might aspire to. Fine (2010) cautions, that the flood of merchandise can have the effect of providing little choice for girls but to buy into becoming pink princesses where they are interested only in things which are fluffy, pretty and which focus on their physical appearance to the detriment of the development of other aspects of their being.

There is no question about 'what is for girls' and 'what is for boys' in clothing shops, toy shops and even the University of Glasgow's shop, where pink divides the sexes. From the current advertising of 'sexy pink' Dulux paint, which assures young men that if they paint

their rooms pink, they will get all the girls, to the pink lap dancing pole aimed at 7-11 year olds which Tesco was forced to remove from the market in 2006 (Fernandez, 2006), it would appear that pink sells. Not only does pink sell, but the media claim that girls being drawn to pink is part of their natural make up.

2.6.1 Colour preferences

Whilst completing searches for this dissertation I came across claims that science had 'proved' that colour preference is biologically hardwired, with sensational headlines such as '*At last science discovers why blue is for boys and girls really do prefer pink*' (Henderson, 2007). The announcement indicated that there *now* exists concrete evidence which *proves* that women are drawn to pink due to biological determining factors. However, following the sources cited, I found this conclusion to be somewhat inaccurate. A paper written by Hulbert and Ling (2007) '*Biological components of sex differences in color preference*' appears to have been used to give credibility to the claims made. However, the information contained in this piece of research has been inaccurately extrapolated to claim that girls/women are biologically drawn towards pink and all that is 'girlie'.

The research rather indicates that there could be an acquired biological factor involved in male and female colour preferences and speculates that this is based on evolutionary sex-specific behaviours (Hulbert and Ling, 2007). The small study was conducted with 208 participants, 171 British and 37 Chinese. There were equal numbers of males and females and the participants were aged 20-26. The test required the participants to select coloured triangles, which across the test allowed them to compare eight standard colours at least once. The results indicated that both male and female have a partiality for bluish hues. In addition, the test indicated that females show more of a preference for colours of a red and yellow tinge. Hulbert and Ling (2007) also propose 'that this sex difference arose from sex-specific functional specializations in the evolutionary division of labour' (*ibid*: 625). Suggesting that women may have become drawn to yellow and red colours as part of early woman's gathering tasks where they had to learn to identify ripe fruit or berries, Hulbert and Ling (2007:625) also acknowledge that 'cultural context or individual experience' may have affected the results. The Chinese participants, representing 17% of the sample, come from a culture where red is viewed as a lucky colour and this could impact upon the investigation, as the preference could be affected by cultural norms. The study does not

make the sensationalist claim cited in *The Times* (Henderson, 2007) and other websites. Hulbert and Ling (2007) do claim their study suggests colour preference may be innate but they also accept that this preference could signify a cultural preference as a result of socialisation. In addition, as the study was small-scale, further enquiry and replication on a larger scale would have to be made before conclusions can be drawn from it. One thing is, however, clear: the authors do not claim that girls are hardwired to prefer pink.

2.6.2 Brain differences

Interest in the possibility of hardwiring in the brain has become a focus in popular culture in recent years. The market has been saturated with books which seek to resurrect the argument for biological determinist ideas about gender differences. Books in the public domain such as *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* (Gray, 2005) to books aimed at educationalists and parents like *Boys and girls learn differently! A guide for teachers and parents: Revised*, (Guiran and Stevens, 2010) seek to explain the role of biology in shaping the workings of the human brain and the claim that hardwiring is due to evolutionary factors. From whether a woman can read a map to whether a man is capable of providing the same level of care as the child's mother, to why girls are outperforming boys in schools, increasingly there is a belief that all that is done and all that is desired is explained as being hardwired in our brains. Some claim functional magnetic resonance imaging supports what has always been known to folk psychology: that males and females fundamentally differ owing to their contrasting biology.

Functional magnetic resonance imaging, known more commonly as fMRI scanning, produces images of the brain that show the changes in blood oxygen levels relating to brain activity. This imaging, according to Schoning et al. (2007), allows claims to be made about cognitive activity. Results from fMRI do appear to indicate sex differences in the development of the brain that appear to manifest early in childhood (*ibid)*, which could possibly suggest that there are in fact innately fixed differences between male and female brains. These differences, it has been proposed by some researchers such as Baron-Cohen et al. (2004) and Wolpert (2014), have developed over the course of evolution and could have become incorporated into human development either through hormones that babies are exposed to prenatally or through genetic differences. Baron-Cohen (2003) goes so far as to suggest that this variation results in the development of two types of brain: male and female. He claims that each sex develops different neural processes that result in different

systems being developed to synthesise information. According to Sax (2005:28), biology and the brain explain everything: 'girls and boys are so different from birth. Girls and boys behave differently because their brains are wired differently'. It would therefore appear that fMRI scans have provided the proof that many have been looking for to show that males and females are fundamentally different.

It could be argued that social progress has been made in relation to these biological deterministic findings, in which women are viewed as being generally 'equal but different':

> Men and women apparently achieve similar IQ results with different brain regions, suggesting that there is no singular underlying neuroanatomical structure to general intelligence and that different types of brain designs may manifest equivalent intellectual performance.
>
> (Haier, et al., 2005:325)

Lenroot et al. (2007) noted that female and male brains differ is areas such as size, white or grey matter and images produced by fMRI scanning. It has indeed been found that women have smaller brains and there remains debate about the reason for this. However, Kimmel notes that in 'the ratio of brain surface to body surface,...men's brains would 'win' but ...the ratio of brain weight to body weight, women's brains would appear superior' (2000:31). Some attribute men's bigger brains to their generally greater height (Fausto-Sterling, 1992), but Blum claims 'this does not seem to account for the overall differences' (1997:38). Rushton (1996) argues that the differences noted relate to the inferiority of the female brain. This opinion is contested and Blum (1997) claims it is an over-simplification as women and men are able to achieve comparable scores on standardised intelligence tests. Haier et al. (2005) observed that white matter is generally associated with women's aptitude and grey matter relates to men's but exactly why different parts of the brain are used by the sexes remains unanswered. As such, Haier et al. (*ibid.*) advocate caution when drawing conclusions from their work and they state that further research in terms of replication and observations needs to be undertaken before theory relating to why these differences exist can be formulated.

Another factor which needs consideration, according to Schmidtz (2010), is the brain's plasticity[4] and malleability, as it appears that experiences in terms of the relationships and environments in which a child is nurtured play a significant role in the changes that occur

[4] Plasticity refers to the brain's ability to change as a result of experiences.

in the brain's neurological pathways over time. Schmidtz (*ibid*: 70) claims that experiences have profound effects on the brain, which can affect how it continues to develop:

- experiences create particular constructions and purposes in the brain.
- people who have similar experiences show similar pathways in the brain.
- brain plasticity is 'highly dynamic' in humans until puberty and there remains evidence of plasticity throughout adulthood.

These factors suggest that experiences result in particular pathways being formed in the brain. If, as Millett (1971) famously argued, experiences are fundamentally different for girls and boys it is not surprising that males and females show different brain patterns. Many theorists, such as Baron-Cohen (2003), Gurian (2002) Sax (2005) and Wolpert (2014), claim that the observed differences in the brain provide proof that the differences are solely the result of inherited biological factors or as a result of evolutionary changes. However, as observed by Eliot (2009), nurture in the form of life experiences can become nature, where biological or physiological changes occur in the brain and can be seen by fMRI scans. I would therefore argue that the differences boys and girls experience in their socialisation may have a significant impact on what is observed in terms of brain activity. fMRI scans do appear to show that the brain continues to change in terms of its structures and functions into adulthood (*ibid*:70). This suggests that neurological pathways are not fixed and that with exposure to new and different experiences the brain can change, with the possibility that if new experiences are introduced then new pathways can be created.

Lehrer (2008) cautions that fMRI scans only allow the brain to be viewed in terms of biological synaptic activity, and this could be restrictive in terms of interpreting what is being seen. He observes that since synaptic activity alone is not how the individual experiences the world, fMRI scans do not show the whole picture of the brain's activity. Lehrer (2008) argues that what is seen and the significance attached to the image may be over-inflated or misinterpreted. An illustration of this point can be found in the work of some researchers who scanned a dead Atlantic salmon (Bennet et al., 2009). The subject—the dead salmon—was shown photographs depicting people exhibiting various emotions and 'asked to determine what emotion the individual in the photo must have been experiencing' (*ibid*:2) The subsequent fMRI results found that two distinct areas were

observed to respond in the salmon's central nervous system during the empathising task. The researchers deduced that either the salmon was capable of post-mortem empathising, or that there was a need to further develop the analysis of fMRI scan results. These reflections resonate with Lehrer's (2008) concerns about what exactly is being observed during fMRI scans and their associated interpretations.

It is therefore only with prudence that conclusive results should be drawn from fMRI scans. Recent claims made by some (Gurian, 2002; Baron-Cohen, 2003; Sax, 2005: Wolpert, 2014) state that fMRI scanning provides definitive proof that the differences observed in the male and female brain not only confirm that differences are innate but also recommend different teaching and nurturing approaches for boys and girls. This advice may in fact be creating and reinforcing many of the observed differences.

Despite a continual revisiting of biological determinism to justify and explain differences between males and females, there appears to be no firm evidence that the differences observed in male and female behaviours, cognition or preferences are due wholly to biology. In addition it has been suggested that '...there is a far greater range of differences among males and among females than there is between males and females' (Kimmel, 2000:33). In the next chapter, I will discuss several theoretical perspectives that relate to and impact on how children acquire gender identity through the process of social construction. Schmidtz's (2010:70) findings, suggesting that experiences impact on the development of neurological pathways in the brain, give credence to the argument that socialisation plays a significant role in brain formation. This interpretation may explain some of the biological differences recorded in brain scans. Thus, where fMRI scans show differences in male and female brains and similarities in brains of those of the same gender, these could be the result of gendered practices that reinforce particular behaviours and preferences. In the next chapter I will focus on theories which suggest how girls learn to understand what it is to be a girl and boys learn to understand what it is to be a boy.

Chapter 3 – The Social Construction of Gender

3.1 Introduction to social construction

> *'Ask a female her favourite color, whatever age she might be, a kid, a girl, a teen, a woman or even a granny. The immediate answer would be "pink"'.*
>
> (Hubpages, online)

The profusion of pink in our society conditions some people to believe the above statement is true. If told often enough that pink is the preferred colour for girls and is the epitome of femininity, then for some this becomes 'a self-fulfilling prophecy' (see for example: Tauber 1995:43, Eliot, 2009:15), and for them, it is true...girls prefer pink. To learn to associate beliefs, behaviours and patterns with schemas of thinking and then subsequently assume that these are normal is social conditioning. Societal norms, customs and ideologies are understood and learned in order that 'social and cultural continuity is attained' (Pandit, 2009:37). According to Durkin (1995), individuals learn what behaviours, beliefs and skills are socially acceptable and necessary to appropriately contribute to and interact with others in their particular society. Harkness and Super (1995:26) suggest that 'children are shaped by the physical and social settings within which they live, culturally regulated customs....and culturally based belief systems'. Human beings are not born with preferences or values, rather they learn to accept and reject behaviours, beliefs and skills as they view and categorise reactions and responses to their behaviour, all of which result in socialisation. According to Kimmel (2000:87), 'our gendered identities are both voluntary...and coerced...we neither make up the rules as we go along, nor do we glide perfectly and effortlessly into pre-assigned roles'. As children absorb and internally create frameworks that signpost socially acceptable responses, behaviours can appear to be biologically or genetically pre-determined rather than learned (Freed, 2003).

How exactly children internalise and learn what it is to be a girl or what it is to be a boy is viewed differently by many theorists. In this chapter I will examine three major theories that suggest how children *learn* gender. These theories will provide an insight into the impact and influence of social conditioning, which can lead to the creation, perpetuation and re-writing of stereotypes, thus providing children with social cues about what it is to be a girl or boy in western society. Thus 'self-fulfilling prophec(ies)' (Tauber, 1995; Jussim

et al., 2000; Eliot, 2009) relating to gender can be created that promote the belief that men and women are fundamentally different and therefore have different prospects and roles in society. However, before the examination of theory that suggests how children learn gender, I will begin by discussing the role of sex in the gender socialisation process, as no discussion about gender can be undertaken without the consideration of the ascription of a child's sex as this is where gendering begins.

3.2 Sex and gender

Determining if a child is male or female is based on the identification of specific biological, physiological and genetic features in or of the child. The ascription of male or female will generally result in the life-long process of shaping and reifying masculine and feminine type behaviours in the society and culture to which the child belongs. However, whilst most children are born without any sex ambiguity, for some, sex identification is not straightforward. Identification of a child as female or male depends on many criteria: genital structures, hormones and deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA), which encodes genetic instructions for living creatures' development and functioning (Eliot, 2009). For a small section of the world population, 2%-4% (Fausto-Sterling, 2000), there can be inconsistencies that make this process difficult. Despite initially viewing this percentage as affecting relatively few people, I became aware of the extent of how significant it is when I realised that it is as common as Down Syndrome (Preves, 2003:3) or red hair (Ryle, 2012:123). Therefore *disorders of sex development* (DSD), whilst not common, affect many children. For instance in a nursery of 400 children, it can potentially affect as many as 16 children. This highlighted for me that not all children I have encountered or will encounter fall nicely into one of the binary categories society assigns and assumes.
DSD can be defined as any congenital condition where the development of chromosomal or anatomical sex is atypical (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Children born with DSD were in the past often assigned a gender based primarily on aesthetic criteria ((Hughes et al., 2006; Eliot, 2009). Meyer-Bahlburg (1998) describes the assigning of gender to children with DSD as generally following one of three approaches. The first approach is that of *true sex*, which requires sex to be assigned based on particular genetic criteria. However, even this approach is not always straightforward as some children do not fall neatly into the binary classification of XX or XY chromosomes. Dalke (2003) indicates the presence or absence of the Y chromosome will identify a child as male or female. A child born with XXY chromosomes, *Klinefelter Syndrome*, is a male, despite the XX owing to the presence of

the Y chromosome (Kamischke, et al., 2003). Children born with, for example, *Turner Syndrome*—which results in the identification of XO chromosomes—will therefore be classified as female due to the absence of a Y chromosome (Ryle, 2012). However, there are certain conditions that even with the identification of chromosomes do not allow for clear binary classification (Dalke, 2003). The second approach identified by Meyer-Bahlburg (1998) is *third gender,* in which no initial gender is ascribed. For the child, third gender could be problematic in a world which exclusively divides itself into two categories. The final option is *optimal gender,* which Meyer-Bahlburg (1998) advocates as he claims this ascription is best for the child. This selection relates to the potential future reproductive functioning of the child and considers aspects such as appearance and level of surgical intervention. It is suggested that any surgical procedures should involve consideration of the child's opinion and consent. Meyer-Bahlburg (2010:466) acknowledges that 'gender identity development is a psychological process, not just an outcome determined by biological factors'. However, most children with DSD do consider themselves to be completely male or female (Wisniewski et al, 2012). For DSD children in particular, the role of socialisation is significant as their ability to conform to the assigned sex cannot be easily attributed to biology.

Discussion of DSD highlights the importance of social influences on what it is to be male or female and masculine or feminine (Kessler and McKenna, 1978; Hird, 2004; Holmes, 2007; Ryle, 2012). Millett suggests that once a sex has been given to child this will result in different life experience for the individual:

> (s)ince patriarchy's biological foundations appear to be so very insecure one has some cause to admire the strength of socialisation which can continue a universal condition...(where) male and female are really two cultures and their life experiences are utterly different.
>
> (1971:31-32)

Doing or performing gender according to Millett (1971), Butler (1993) and Gatens (1996) constructs for the individual a particular view of the world that is not only based on, but also re-creates, the binary sex categories which divide the human race. Kimmel (2000:45) claims 'biological differences provide the raw materials from which we begin to create our identities within culture, within society'. However, Ryle (2012) advises caution in assuming that a normal or typical socialisation of children exists. If a child's behaviour fails to conform to gender-social expectations or norms it could be falsely attributed to an error in how the child has learned what it is to be a boy or a girl. Musgrave (1967) explains

that the socialisation processes—which can be influenced by many factors including; time, place, race, religion, people—offers individuals multiple alternative pathways for development. The influences and choices made will then result in a limiting of the possible outcomes open to the individual in the future. Thus, there can be no *normal* as selections will result in the outcomes being dependant on the choices made. The impact of socialisation on how each individual does gender is therefore particular to them, as are the circumstances that will affect how gender is performed. According to Martin and Halverson (1981), the process of socialisation begins at birth with the identification of the child as a boy or a girl. This ascription relies on normative social information which determines how each sex should behave, look, respond and be treated.

3.3 It's a boy! It's a girl!

Gendering begins at birth and continues throughout life. Each child is taught the gender *script* that reifies their sex. Initially, adults will pass on to the child their particular societal knowledge about gender. This is done through the adults' behaviours and actions towards the child which reflect the adults' own expectations and views of what it is to be a boy or a girl. The complexity of social norms, where opinions vary about how boys or girls are treated—some may encourage their girls to be 'girlie girls' whilst others do not—results in variations of expectations and responses. However, societal trends still have an influence that result in some gendered practices being perpetuated whilst other practices change and shift over time.

Children's behaviours are thus confirmed or negated by the adults as being that of a boy or of a girl (Eckert and McConnell, 2013). How often has it been heard that an adult will say, in particular to a boy who has hurt himself, '*oh stop being such a girl'*? I recently observed a father on a bus proudly telling those around him '*Connor is a real wee boy...you don't like dolls, do you? They're for girls. We don't like girls, do we*?' Since engaging in this dissertation I have observed this type of interaction so often that I wonder why I had never noticed it before. It appears to go on all around and yet it is often not questioned or recognised. Gender socialisation, as noted by Eckert and McConnell (2013), results in children learning social expectations that are different for both sexes and that are supported by obvious and oblique, intentional and unintentional influences from families, friends, schools and the media.

The adult role in the early gendering of children was observed by Smith and Lloyd (1978). Their study found that adults responded to babies differently if the gender of the baby was known. Mothers were asked to play with babies of a similar age to their own babies. The babies were dressed arbitrarily in stereotypical clothes and named as boys or girls. Smith and Lloyd observed that the mothers responded, both physically and verbally, differently depending on the believed gender of the child. The children who appeared to be boys received more physical interaction and those who appeared to be girls were soothed and comforted. As observed by Snow, Jacklin and Maccoby in 1983, fathers similarly responded in a gendered manner. They found that fathers tend to be more boisterous and engaged in rough-and-tumble play with their sons. However, their play was more sedate and calm when playing with their daughters. They also found that by the time of the child's first birthday, fathers encouraged their children, both boys and girls, to play with toys which were considered to be gender appropriate. In addition, they tended to eschew play which involved activities with toys of 'the opposite sex' (Snow et al., 1983:32). These studies would suggest that the adults induct children into their gender roles through social interaction. However, exactly how this learning takes place is widely debated.

3.4 Socialisation theories of gender

In this section I will focus on how children learn gender by initially by considering two prominent theories: Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977), and Cognitive Learning Theory (Kohlberg, 1966), which according to Harrison (2009) are grounded in positivist traditions where gender is considered as an external reality. This will then be followed by a consideration of childhood as a social construct where an interpretivist understanding of gender, Gender Schema Theory (Martin and Halverston, 1981; Lipsitz-Bem, 1993) proposes that the individual's unique experiences and cognition determines how gender is acquired. It should be noted that these theories are not presented as solutions or as neat categories that clearly signpost how gender is learned. Rather, the theories discussed demonstrate not only insights into how gender is acquired but also how ideas often overlap and blend with each other, providing possible appreciation of how concepts have originated, built upon previous theories and shifted over time. For this research project, these theories are useful in examining, interpreting and providing possible explanations of reported behaviours of children that demonstrate what it is to be a boy or a girl.

3.4.1 Social Learning Theory

In a world that is divided into two discrete classifications, perceptions of gender are critical to how communication with others occur. More often than not, the first thing we observe about someone we meet is whether they are male or female. However, many claim (see for example: Leblanc, 2002; Holmes, 2007; Silverstein and Brooks, 2010) that it was not until the second wave of feminism in the 1970s that the discussions about the possible impact of socialisation on the construction of gender began, in which women challenged the traditionally held views that the differences between men and women were biologically determined.

Social Learning Theory (SLT) was one concept that was proposed to explain how children learned gender. Not all aspects of SLT were new. SLT built upon the operant conditioning[5] approaches proposed by Skinner (1904-1990) and Watson (1878-1958), who, according to Bolles (1979), argued that particular behaviours could be learned through reinforcement. Bandura (1977) claimed that children learn by observing the behaviours of others, retaining what has been seen, experimenting and trying these behaviours out and being motivated to reproduce such actions. Lott and Maluso (1993) identified the process as observing, modelling, labelling and reproducing. Behaviourism claimed that rewards and punishments were crucial to the socialisation process, as they produce the motivation required to repeat the desired behaviour. Bandura (1986) suggested that when positive and negative reinforcement of behaviours occur, children will start to assume similar type behaviours that relate to their sex category. Repetition and replication of this process in a wide variety of situations allows socialisation to take place. For example, if a child puts on a fairy costume; the response from an adult will influence whether an action is repeated: whether the response is '*Oh...don't you look pretty'* or '*Get that off*! *Only girls wear fairy costumes'* will reinforce whether the behaviour is acceptable. On the basis of this type of experience and that of Connor, who was told that boys '*don't play with dolls*', Mischel (1970) claims learning what the correct action should be will lead to an understanding of the social consequences of behaviour. This, Bandura (1986) suggests, leads to new patterns of behavioural expression and eventually to self-regulated behaviours.

[5] Operant conditioning was first termed as such by Skinner in 1953. He proposed that an individual's behaviour could be modified by using rewards and punishments. Operant conditioning is the modification of voluntary behaviours—as opposed to reflexive reactions such as salivation—that which can result in the individual eventually self-regulating the behaviour (Shaffer and Kipp, 2010).

Learning associated with gender confirms and reifies behaviours associated with the child's sex. Reinforcement and motivation to repeat behaviours is dependent on the reaction of those around the child (Snow et al., 1983; Eliot, 2009; Holmes, 2009; Ryles, 2012). A significant feature of SLT is the understanding that it 'is not confined to the early years but continues throughout life' (Lott and Maluso, 1993:99). Social learning inducts children into *rules* of what it is to be male/female and masculine/feminine. Observations allow children to learn social and cultural behaviours that relate to gender and 'because other social categories interact with gender, it follows that individual definitions of gender change and evolve as a function of experience' (Lott and Maluso, 1993:105). According to Bandura (1986), as the child grows, observes, absorbs and reproduces gender behaviour, it becomes embedded and forms part of their identity. Identity then becomes 'forged, expressed, maintained, and modified in the crucible of social life, as its contents undergo the continual process of actual or imagined observation, judgment, and reaction by audiences' (Schlenker, 1985:68).

One of the major criticisms of SLT comes from West and Zimmerman (1987) who argue that the child is viewed as passive in this socialisation process. There appears to be a lack of consideration for the child's ability to evaluate and categorise what they observed and for the child to act autonomously. SLT considers the child solely as a recipient of societal expectations. The theory suggests that the child does not choose or modify what is observed but rather that being rewarded or punished will result in the behaviour being reproduced or not. The child's cognition plays little or no role. Whilst observation and feedback do convey information to the child, SLT does not reflect the complexity or inconsistencies of the messages the child will receive from the world around them. If, as SLT suggests, children develop their understanding of gender from the environment, it fails to explain the variations in gendered attitudes of those in the same society. It would therefore appear that the environment cannot be solely responsible for children's development of gender. Rather, the child's ability to process, evaluate and attach meaning to the information needs to be considered. Kohlberg (1966) acknowledged the role of the child's ability to make sense out what they observe in the development of gender with the proposal of his Cognitive Development Theory.

3.4.2 Cognitive Development Theory

Kohlberg (1966) built upon Piaget's staged[6] models of child development to explain his theory of how children acquired gender. According to Kohlberg's Cognitive Development Theory (CDT), children learn to gender type and understand their own gender identity through a sequence of progressive, distinct, fixed stages of development. CDT defines three distinct stages to gender role acquisition: labelling, stability, and constancy. Gender acquisition, according to Kohlberg (1966), starts with gender labelling and occurs approximately at aged two to three years old. This is followed by gender stability, from approximately three to seven years of age, where the child understands that their sex and that of others remains the same. This stability is generally based on superficial and external appearances; boys have short hair and girls wear pink. Ryle (2012) notes that it is at this stage children actively seek and select from their environment the behaviours, toys and other artefacts consistent with their sex category. It is at this age

> children are gender detectives who search out clues about gender...who should or should not engage in a particular activity, who can play with whom and why boys and girls are different.
>
> (Martin and Ruble, 2004:67)

Archer and Lloyd (2002) noted that CDT gender constancy does not occur until the child is around seven, when children become aware that sex does not change, even if the outward appearance or the behaviour is incongruent with the person's sex. Kohlberg claims that children self-socialise after gender consistency is reached (Shaffer and Kipp, 2010).

There are several criticisms of CDT. Shaffer (2009) argues that children place controls and appreciate their sex—and that of others—long before Kohlberg suggests. Children as young as three are able to make gendered choices about toys, games and behaviours *before* children reach gender constancy as described by Kohlberg (Unger and Crawford, 1992; Ryle, 2012). The reality of children exhibiting gender awareness is exemplified by Seth in Chapter 2, who at the age of three was not only aware of his own sex but had categorised bouncy balls as toys played with by boys but not by girls. In addition, Kohlberg's (1966)

[6] Jean Piaget (1896 - 1980) proposed that children go through particular stages in the same order. All stages need to be gone through; no stage can be missed out - although some children may never accomplish the later ones. Piaget did accept that there were differences in when and for how long it can take for children to progress through the stages. Piaget claimed that the stages are universal regardless of culture or environment: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, formal operational (Shaffer and Kipp, 2010).

theory gives primacy to the child's cognition and their concepts of their world, which suggests that the individual has exclusive control in the shaping of their conduct and choices, and excludes external influences, such as people, religion, or culture. A major critique of Kohlberg's work came from his colleague Carol Gilligan (1982), who in her book *A different voice* claims that Kohlberg's work was androcentric. She argues that Kohlberg's theory derived from studying solely male subjects, thus endorsing the view that men are the norm. Gilligan claims that Kohlberg's research on CDT and moral development omits aspects that reflect how girls, through socialisation, learn gender and their sense of morality. This restriction, she claims, results in his work being one dimensional and not representative of all. These omissions in his work–from the pronouns used to the examples he selected to explain his theories—also led others, for example Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1981), to ask if CDT could be equally applied to both sexes to explain how all children acquire gender awareness.

SLT and CDT attribute the acquisition of gender to specific influences: environment and cognition. Both theories emerge from a positivist approach to research, which is a deductive process that aims to test theory (Holloway and Wheeler, 2013). The danger of taking a positivist approach to examining issues such as how gender is *learned* lies in the assumption that the social world can be seen objectively. Rather, each child exists in a specific culture and is exposed to a variety of beliefs and values. As such, gender socialisation requires an examination of the creation of meaning in particular cultures. Gaskins et al. (1992:7) suggest that:

> the verbs acquire and learn, which we used earlier, are misleading, for they convey a unilateral transmission to the child, when, in fact, children not only select from and creatively use cultural resources but also contribute to the production of culture.

Consequently, an interpretive approach is more congruent, as it stresses the reality that humans vary, are distinct from the physical world and that enquiries should focus on the meaning of actions in cultural contexts (Holloway and Wheeler, 2013). Therefore whilst SLT and CDT offer some insights into how children *learn* gender, neither theory fully addresses the complexity of the influences of social factors nor do they express the understandings and meanings that children themselves attach to these.

My research project involves the exploration of EYPs' understandings and perceptions of gender and as such it sits in the interpretative paradigm—this will be discussed in Chapter

5—as I wish to explore with them their understanding of, and the meanings they attach to, gender. This approach acknowledges that children, society and the environment play roles in the manner in which gender is constructed and reconstructed. The lack of universality perceived in the experiences of children demonstrates both diversity in the understanding of childhood and the contributions that children themselves make to its construction and purpose. As such '(c)hildren are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes' (James and Prout 1997a:8). In order to understand gender from this perspective I will first examine how childhood is perceived generally, as it, like gender, has been rewritten and modified.

3.5 An interpretivist understanding of childhood and gender

James and James (2004) note that childhood as a social phenomenon is separate from the biological examination of child development. A biological perspective on childhood tends to come from a positivist position from which it is possible to identify universal and general findings that can be applied to aspects such as when *most* children will walk or get their teeth. In contrast to this, a social construct is not necessarily true in nature. It is created and understood by society and has specific rules and expectations that can be modified or developed depending on how society changes and evolves over time. The social concept of childhood can be viewed as being changeable: elements such as gender, ethnicity and class will provide different experiences (see for example: James and James, 2004; Ryan, 2008; West et al., 2008).

Children are born into society, which has existing practices and traditions. As the child grows, it learns to participate, reproduce and contribute to these. As such, childhood is constantly changing and there have been claims that there has been a paradigmatic shift in society's understanding of the nature of childhood (Ryan, 2008). For example, John Locke (1632-1704) proposed that children enter the world as *tabula rasa*—blank slates—and are born without innate ideas, and that who and what they become is determined solely through their experiences (Baird and Kaufmann, 2008). This understanding of childhood is closely aligned with SLT as John Locke strongly advocated rewards and punishments to reinforce desired behaviours. These views are in contrast to more contemporary perspectives where children are viewed as autonomous agents, who not only derive meaning but also contribute to the creation of meaning in their society (James and Prout,

1997b; James and James, 2004). Such developments have fostered the belief that 'children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, and not just in respect to their social construction by adults' (James and Prout, 1997b:4). This ongoing shift in society's view of childhood has resulted in research involving children to elicit an emic or insider perspective, thus allowing a deeper view of childhood to be understood.

Childhood as a social construct can be seen as a ubiquitous concept its structure, potential and recognised period—when it starts and finishes—changing according to the societies that both create and recreate it. Montgomery, (2009) comments that childhood has been conceptualised in a variety of ways across time and in societies. There appear to be many inconsistencies in how children's roles and status have been understood. Human children are unique in the amount of time they take to become physically independent in relation to other animals, as they are hyper-dependent on adults for nurture and care (Montgomery, 2009). Human children also have the capacity to learn to adapt to the values and cultures of the environment into which they are born. However, this dependency upon adults also results in the acceptance that children are excluded from full participation in the adult world (*ibid)*. James and James (2004) argue that childhood is a cultural component of many societies but it is not a universal one: '(c)omparative and cross-cultural analysis reveals a variety of childhoods rather than a single and universal phenomenon' (James and Prout, 1997a:8). Viewing childhood as a social construct therefore offers an opportunity for an interpretive examination of children's lives to understand the complexity and role of children in its construction. However, it should be noted that children's participation in the construction of their own world takes place with the recognition of their subordination to adults and where the child's understanding of what it is to be a child is impacted upon by their interaction with adults who also have preconceived ideas about what it is to be a child (Brannen and O'Brien, 1995). Lipsitz-Bem's (1981,1983,1993) and Martin and Halverston (1981) gender schema theory (GST), attempts to contribute to this examination and understanding by describing how gender development not only takes account of the uniqueness and complexity of childhood, but also the role of the child in its construction.

3.5.1 Gender Schema Theory

Gender Schema Theory (GST) contains some features of both the CDT and SLT approaches and seeks to explain gender acquisition as the internal organisation and clustering of information that relates to gender (Lipsitz-Bem, 1983). The theory suggests how children *learn to gender* in the society and culture in which they live through the development of cognitive 'schemas'. Siann (1994) discusses how these schemas help the child to rationalise both their cognitive understanding of the world and how it is represented externally. Schemas can be understood as 'mental structures children use to encode and process information' (Siann, 1994*:* 73). Lipsitz-Bem (1983) claims that children of two to three years old will start to relate to binary categorisations of male and female. Additionally, Martin and Halverson (1981) suggest it is at this stage children organise and attach meaning to the information observed. This gendering process is assumed to start when the child is able to classify her/himself as one of the binary categories. Weinraub et al. (1984) observed that as children advance in mobility and cognition their awareness of gender increases through observation and the modelling of actions of those of their own sex. The child being able to recognise her/his sex allows her/him to develop an awareness of the gender stereotypes that exist in the surroundings. Leinbach and Fagot (1993) suggest that the development of gender schemas can begin as early as one year old, which is much earlier than suggested by Kohlberg.

Schemas provide the child with various *scripts* about their world. The child makes links to past experiences to make sense and predict the present and the future. For example, the last time Beth took a biscuit without asking, mum got cross. Beth is then able based on past experience, to predict that if she takes a biscuit now without asking she will get told off when mum finds out. Therefore the schemas or scripts provide information about the world and offer a reference point to how things should be and how to behave. In particular relation to the creation of gender schemas, the child will assimilate information about masculine or feminine behaviours, which according to Lipsitz-Bem (1983) are specific to the environment and culture in which the child lives. Levy and Fivush (1993) suggest that the constructed gender schemas include information, such as what it means to be a man/boy and woman/girl, as well as behavioural rules for particular situations. GST acknowledges cognitive, social and environmental factors in children's acquisition of

gender. Lipsitz-Bem (1981) asserts that sex categorisation is a product of society's resolve to maintain 'gender dichotomy and gender-related behaviours' (*ibid:* 355). Learning gender, according to Lipsitz-Bem (*ibid*), is based on the sex-related associations that children attach meaning to and learn. As in SLT, behaviours will be responded to positively or negatively by others, resulting in the child determining if the behaviour should be avoided or repeated. However, Lipsitz-Bem (1983) proposes that children will not always conform to gender environmental norms due to the creation of *self-schemas* that relate to how individuals perceive themselves. Together the self-schemas and the constructed gender schemas can result in the child deviating from the environmental norms, or society's rules, and the child evaluating situations or behaviours based on their own cognitive reasoning (Siann, 1994). For example, a boy may observe that it is girls who tend to dress up and that it is they who receive positive feedback from adults for this activity. However, based on his self-schema, which tells him that he enjoys and has fun dressing up, he may continue to play dress up despite the lack of positive feedback or in some cases negative feedback. The evaluation of an activity by the child explains why some children do not always conform to the norms expected by the adults. This inconsistency will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Martin and Halverson (1981) also sought to understand how children acquire their understanding of gender. Their work resonates with that of Lipsitz-Bem's (1981,1983) as they proposed that gender schemas created by children divide the world into either 'in-group or out-group' (Martin and Halverson, 1981:1121). They claimed that these schemas will determine children's selection of toys, behaviour and choices of friends through the classification of information based on the 'in-group', their own sex group, or the 'out-group', the other group. Martin and Halverson's (*ibid*) theory of 'in-group/out-group' is similar in many ways to Lipsitz-Bem's (1981) GST, as they suggest that children make 'in-group' choices based on the gathering of information from their environment, ascribing meaning to it and using their own individual evaluations to determine what works for them. According to Martin and Halverson (1981), children can also control and create not only their own gender identity but are also able to regulate and construct rules about the 'other' gender. Shaffer (2009:20) argues that this could explain why some children acquire very different views, interests and skills as they develop; it also explains why some children—and adults—have flexible views towards gender roles and behaviours whilst others have very fixed views. The construction of rules may also provide some insight into

why some people who live in the same society will defy gender stereotypes and are critical of sexism whilst others continue to reinforce and perpetuate the status quo (Swim and Hyers, 2009).

It is also important to note that schemas are learned, modified and reproduced in all areas of children's lives as a result of gender specificity existing in all institutions. Chappell, (2011) notes that there is no setting that is a wholly neutral space, including the nursery environment. In all social interactions there are active gender spaces and institutional habits where gender grammars and perceptions are (re)produced and (re)created (*ibid).* Whilst GST does go further than either SLT or CDT in suggesting how gender is acquired and why there are differences in how gender is understood or expressed, there remain questions unanswered that none of these theories fully address.

3.5.2 Socialisation theories, gender and society - limitations

It is widely documented that children can, through cognitive processes and interaction with their environment, search for, make sense of, attach meaning to and create gender rules in their social worlds (for example, Frosh et al., 2003; Martin and Ruble, 2004; Montgomery, 2005). In addition it is possible to appreciate that children can regulate and construct not only their own gender identity but are also able to create rules about the other gender (Martin and Halverson, 1981). GST recognises internal, external and children's own individual factors in the creation of their understanding of gender. However, Lipsitz-Bem (1983, 1993) asks why children—and subsequently adults—categorise themselves around gender rather than other organising features such as religion or skin or eye colour. Additionally, Haralambos and Holborn (2004) also ask the related question of why masculinity and femininity are valued differently by society.

One explanation is given by Lipsitz-Bem (1983) herself, who suggests that society at a collective level constructs the organisational systems evident in the world at any time. This rationalisation resonates with Talcott Parsons's theory of 'structural functionalism'. Parsons proposed this theory in opposition to biological determinism in the 1950s (Stainton Rogers and Stainton Rogers, 2001). Further, he suggested the differences between men's and women's social practices and traditions developed primarily because 'these differences are manifestations of humankind's capacity to co-operate for the common good' (*ibid*:42) and reflect the needs of society at a given time. This interpretation

possibly provides some explanation for the perpetuation of male supremacy, as the formation of specific and different social roles for men and women in the past supported the survival of the species. Kimmel (2000:96) argues that the structure of society produced '(d)ifferent structured experiences', which in turn has 'produce(d) the gender differences which we often attribute to people'. Thus the structured social roles for the survival of the species have created the perceived differences between men and women. As these differences are no longer required for survival, and in order to create a fair and just society, stereotypes that attribute outdated gender differences need to be understood with the intention of breaking them down to provide equal opportunities for all.

In the next section I will discuss the creation of and impact of stereotypes on gender acquisition in order that in Chapter 4 I am able to examine specific stereotypes—colour and toys—to consider the messages that they convey and how they might contribute to the development of gender identity.

3.6 Stereotypes

Stereotypes, according to Cardwell (1996), are beliefs about a group or category of people that are predetermined and over-simplified in the social world. The origin of the word stereotype comes from *stereos*, a Greek word meaning 'hard' or 'firm'. It was adopted by the print industry to distinguish between movable, lino type, individual letters and characters and the introduction in the 18th century of a letter press plate (Stirling, 1906). The stereotype plate was developed for newspaper printing by setting the letter type into columns, to create a frame. This allowed multiple, identical copies to be created, and could be used on the printing press for long periods of time and for extensive print runs such as the Bible or textbooks (Robertson, 2012).

The term stereotype is thought to have been first applied in a social science context by Walter Lippman in his book *Public Opinion*, when he suggests that a stereotype was a 'picture in the head' (1922:31) which is 'acquired from earlier experiences and carried over into judgement of later ones' (1922:157). According to Lippman, the social environment is complex yet 'we have to act in that environment, we have to reconstruct it on a simpler model before we can mange with it' (*ibid*:20). Thus, a perceived social reality that tends to be simplistic is created from a mixture of the real world and from personal

ideas which are influenced by the individual's experiences and values. Lippman (1922) suggested that stereotypes are typically expressions of reality about particular groups—women, Jews, blacks. The stereotypical representation created by society can, through society's acceptance of it, imprint itself onto reality as a type of shorthand, a simplification of attributes or behaviours. Lippman (1922) suggests that acceptance of these oversimplifications transforms society to fit the stereotype, much like the stereotype plate printing onto the paper.

However, whilst Lippman's analogy conveys the relative reciprocity of reality and beliefs, it fails to acknowledge that whilst some stereotypes are fixed, like the print plate, other stereotypes can be modified, changed or recreated to form new stereotypes. For instance in the case of gender, in the 1960/1970s most adverts on television depicted mothers waving the family off in the morning as she returned to her housework. Nowadays mothers are stereotypically portrayed as having to both work and have ultimate responsibility for the family and home where they know best: from the choice of nappies to where mum has gone to shop. Both these types of adverts portray women in particular roles but the stereotypical image of motherhood conveyed and the roles allocated have changed, suggesting that stereotypes are not fixed and can be modified over time. Contemporary stereotypes often tend to depict men and women as 'equal but different'; however, Branisa et al. (2010) argue that this consequently attempts to hide the asymmetry of stereotypes, which reflect a binary world that is differentiated by power. The 'equal but different' myth suggests a balance between male and female where the picture of supremacy of males is balanced by females being the bedrock of society. Works such as *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* (Wallace, 1865) suggest that women are the underlying unsurpassed force that supports men's opportunities for world change. This view is also reflected in the phrase popularised during the second wave of feminism in America—*behind every good man there is a good woman*—that could be argued patronisingly suggests that women's social contribution is achieved through supporting the exploits of men. These principles and *scripts* create an asymmetry of gender that is not complementary or balanced and is arguably unfairly constructed. According to Branyard, (2010) this asymmetry results in the perpetuation of stereotypes that depict men as active and ambitious and women as decorative and supportive, thus legitimising society's inequality. Whilst it is recognised that there are social practices that disfavour boys, there are larger and more persistent narratives in which girls are seen as playing minor social roles (*ibid).*

3.6.1 Stereotypes and gender

Stereotypes do persist and gender stereotypes, in particular, reflect and create beliefs about what it is to be male or female. Associated with these stereotypes are physical and psychological attributes; for example, physically women could be linked with having long hair, being small, and wearing makeup, whilst psychologically she could be associated with being emotional, weak, and nurturing. These traits stereotypically predict particular activities and interests (Golombok and Fivush, 2001). Fitting into the stereotype is a process that starts from birth, with many adults treating children differently from the outset (this will be discussed further in Chapter 4), due to the assumed nature associated with the gender of the child (Golombok and Fivush, 2001).

3.6.2 How children learn gender stereotypes

Children's recognition of gender stereotypes appears to develop around the time that children recognise that humans are classified into two categories, which according to many theorists is around two years old (see for example: Bandura, 1977; Martin and Halverson, 1983; Lipsitz-Bem, 1983, 1993; Golombok and Fivush, 2001). Martin and Halverson (1983) suggest that children are inclined, through the creation of schemas, to recall information that is reliable and consistent with stereotypes. Martin (1993) suggests that children appear to recognise different elements that contribute to stereotypes over a period of time: they first learn about how boys and girls look—boys have short hair and girls have long hair—followed by learning about gender associated roles and behaviours: women care, men fix things. Golombok and Fivush (2001:27) claim that children between the ages of three and six are more inclined to stereotype others and Levy et al. (2000) state that by the age of six children have clear fixed ideas about what traits are associated with the sexes. Children first create distinctions which are associated with the behaviour for the 'in-group', their own sex, before learning the 'out-group' stereotypes (Martin, 1993:185). According to Martin and Halverson (1983), this order provides children with a sense of belonging and security, where, as part of the 'in-group', the child is able to associate with those who are like him/her. Plotnik and Kouyoumjian (2010) suggest that children understand and anticipate the world in which they live by simplifying it through the creation of schemas, which contain stereotypical information about each gender.

It has also been argued that stereotypes support socially shared meanings that justify and legitimise particular practices and socially significant structures (Jost and Banaji, 1994). Further, Rudman and Glick (2008) propose that there are explicit and implicit ways to learn stereotypes. Implicitly, stereotypes can be learned through continuous exposure to gendered practices where associations are unconsciously absorbed through social interactions. However, children can also be exposed to explicit and open endorsement of traditional beliefs about men and women (*ibid).* If girls are told they as a collective are not good at maths, or that boys' lack of communication is a natural expression of their sex category, then these stereotypes become *truths* which, as Lippman's (1922) analogy suggests, imprint themselves on society as reality.

Gender stereotypes not only provide information about what males and females are like, they also provide a set of rules about social expectations and prescribe the ideal behaviours for each gender. However, insofar as most stereotypes create distinct groups with boundaries and disconnections, leading to aversions between sectors in societies and cultures, gender stereotypes uniquely do not wholly seek to do this.

3.6.3 Uniqueness of gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes can create 'artificial boundaries for behaviour and personality, including expression of sexuality and portrayal of sex roles' (Newton and Williams, 2011:199). As Talbot (2010) comments, females have often been considered as the 'other', as a deficit model to maleness in patriarchal societies. Maleness is often upheld as the 'cultural ideal', from the use of 'man' when discussing all humans, to the default assumption that those in authority will be male (Johnson, 2005:6). However, whilst gender stereotypes do create scripts that divide and separate the sexes, there is also a unique aspect of connectivity that is fostered between the sexes which does not exist in other forms of stereotyping. This connectivity is where the others' attributes are not entirely devalued. Connectivity is fostered at a social level: despite contrary messages about the nature of males and females, interdependence is encouraged. Children often engage in shared activities where they 'play houses' and 'mummies and daddies', featuring opposite but complimentary roles. These behaviours are often reinforced explicitly and implicitly by adults as they promote future expectations and heteronormative models of behaviour. It is therefore feasible that this pairing of the sexes as opposite and complementary could

suggest a rehearsal for later life. Arguably, as suggested by Kellett (2010), this type of play situates childhood in the paradigm of adult in waiting. As argued by Thorne (1993), what the child will become is controlled by adult gate-keepers, who through their responses to children's particular behaviours seek to determine the final product. Children are encouraged by adults to learn socially expected norms whereby opposite traits are found to be attractive in the other but are not similarly valued in the same gender and are in fact often viewed as unacceptable. Failing to conform to these norms can often be the source of many adults' concerns and focus; behaviours that do not conform to the model may cause anxiety for some, in particular fathers (for example: Lobel and Menashri, 1993; Archer and Lloyd, 2002).

3.6.4 Stereotypes: crossing the boundaries

In general, society overtly discourages effeminate or *sissy* type behaviour in boys. Conversely, as noted by Archer and Lloyd (2002), whilst not necessarily encouraged, a girl being classified as a 'tomboy' is tolerated. Maccoby (2002) observed that boys use derogatory terms against other boys as early as preschool, if it is deemed that their choice of play is too *girlie,* yet girls' 'tomboy' behaviour is not so closely regulated. This contrast suggests that boys' behaviour is more clearly defined, fixed and gender exclusive: 'clearly an essential element in becoming masculine is becoming not-feminine, whilst girls can be feminine without having to prove that they are not masculine' (*ibid*, 2002:52). Antill (1987) established that adults, parents in particular, assumed that cross-gender play in boys, more than in girls, was an indicator of homosexuality. I have found that whilst it is not uncommon for women to openly claim that they were tomboys growing up, I have yet to meet a heterosexual man who would readily define his early behaviour as being that of a *sissy*. It is suggested by Connell (2002) that, as boys are more likely to be subjected to overt and stronger peer pressure to conform to gender appropriate behaviours than girls are, boys from an early age consider other boys exhibiting feminised behaviour to be aberrant.

According to Karniol (2011), adults will use and reinforce specific types of gender play in order to distinguish between male and female appropriate social cues. It is claimed that '(d)olls, especially fashion dolls, and action figures are probably the most gender-stereotyped of all children's toys' (Karniol, 2011:122). McNiff (1982) notes that girls are

often reported as preferring Barbie and Bratz type dolls whilst boys will happily play with superhero figures. Nevertheless, according to March (1999), it is important that these toys for boys are not called dolls. These figures are often viewed as being associated with violence, which is a male characteristic, whilst dolls are generally associated with girls and demonstrate nurturing attributes (Blakemore and Centres, 2005).

Further, Skodol (2005: 52) observed that 'parents seem more concerned about appropriate gender role behavior with boys than with girls' and parents will actively prohibit some behaviours in order to get boys to conform to what they consider to be gender appropriate behaviour (Skodol, 2005.). By the time children reach early preschool—age three—there is evidence of avoidance of toys, children and clothes of the *wrong* gender; however, as noted by Eliot (2009), the children are still relatively tolerant of other children's gender behaviour. It could be argued that children of this age are more focused on their own world than the behaviour of others. By four, Elliot (2009) claims, there are signs of rigidity and early policing of mainly boys' gender play by other boys, but it is not until about six that teasing related to sexuality is used by children to challenge cross-gender behaviours. Renold (2001) noted that boys who exhibit feminised behaviours are often teased and incur derisive comments such as *sissy* or *poof*. In contrast, girls who do not adhere to the gender norms do not tend to be subjected to the same derogatory homophobic taunts. Renold further observed that children of primary school age often target males who appear to exhibit behaviours that are identified with female qualities where it can 'throw into doubt a boy's heterosexuality thereby creating the potential for these behaviour and practices to be "homosexualized"' (2001:376). According to Martin and Halverston (1981) these heteronormative associations appear to emerge and develop as children become more aware of the binary sex categories and begin to identify with their own sex type. These features and behaviours are carried out and practised in their interactions with others. As children learn to associate with their own sex they become motivated by same-sex (in-group) and rejected opposite-sex (out-group) stereotypes and expectations.

Martin and Ruble (2009) suggest that it is at the pre-school age that children start to imitate observed adult roles. Children's imaginative play anticipates adult relationships, which often reflect stories and programmes, and where there is an expectation of two people of the opposite sex being *mum* and *dad*. Orenstein (2006) claims that play behaviours will also reflect media trends; for example, many girls currently conform to the *princess* culture

where girls are encouraged to await their *prince*. Kimmel (2005) argues that there are many who suggest that early nonconformity to these gender roles, especially in boys, will produce homosexuality, but it has been found that 'most boys who report such behavior turn out to be heterosexual' (Kimmel, 2005:17). Despite this, misperceptions persist, where assumptions are made that centre on particular associated behaviours. This can result in particular masculine and feminine behaviours being valued and promoted, and where exaggerated, almost caricatured gender behaviours can be observed (*ibid*). One such example of this could be the current trend for all things pink being associated with exaggerated femininity.

This study seeks to examine how adults interpret their own and the children's interactions, to determine if gender is a salient factor in children's behaviours in the pre-5 environment. The investigation includes the examination of whether the practitioners are aware of children creating, strengthening or resisting stereotypes. To understand why these stereotypes persist and result in social divisions, it is necessary to examine research into some of the social practices that continue to perpetuate them. In the next chapter I will examine and discuss previous pertinent research into toys and colour preferences that often appear to confirm and endorse gender stereotypes. The examination of colour, in particular pink, comes from the current commercial focus on pink and toys, as these are often the main sources for promoting early child development, as well as being a particular focus that emerged during the research discussions. The examination of these two areas will help identify key aspects of gender stereotypes that possibly reproduce and perpetuate beliefs and behaviours associated with gender.

Chapter 4 – Stereotypes: Toys, Colour and Early Years

> *My wee girl has just turned three and she knows by the colour of toys. She will say that it is a boys' toy or if it is clothes, if it is blue, she'll say that's boys' clothes there. And she's been saying that for a wee while.*
>
> (RP3DG3)

4.1 Perceptions of toys and colour

Visit any toy store and it is obvious that toys are clearly labelled for girls and boys: dolls are for girls and construction toys are designed for boys. Many parents, as evidenced by RP3's comment, report that children learn early in life what colours and what toys are associated with what sex. It is even suggested (for example, Alexander and Hines, 2002) that the gender differences in toys and colours choices made by children can be seen in non-human primates. In this chapter, I will suggest that the acquisition of toy and colour preferences, which some believed to be inherently different for boys and girls because of their early emergence in children's development, can be understood in relation to the socialisation theories previously discussed in Chapter 3.

Socialisation theories speculate that gender role behaviours in children are learned (see Chapter 3). The following discussion of children's play and colour choices suggests that not only are stereotypes evident in children's preference of toys and colours but there appears to be evidence that adults influence and at times control the choices made.
In this chapter I will discuss the pre-5 environment through a Foucauldian lens, considering the role of practitioners in the gender socialisation of children as the nursery is the first environment beyond the home where children encounter society. I will argue that EYPs play an important and significant role in how children learn and develop male and female qualities. In addition, I will suggest that EYPs' attitudes towards gender contribute to how children learn to be a boy or a girl, which is the premise for this research project.

4.2 Children and toys

In undertaking the reading for this dissertation, I found a plethora of research that consistently reports that boys have a strong preference for masculine toys and girls generally have a preference for feminine toys, although it has been found that girls are more inclined to play across the gender categories (for example, Hassett et al., 2008;

Williams and Pleil, 2008; Servin, et al., 1999; Jadva, et al., 2010). A range of studies found that girls tend to be less rigid in their preferences and are more inclined to select toys that transcend the intended gendering by manufacturers (for example, Maccoby and Jacklin, 1987; Singer and Singer, 1990; Raag and Rackliff, 1998). Martin (1995) suggests that the girls' toys and activities can develop a stigma for boys, but boys' toys and games are not similarly stigmatised for girls. Thus boys are often discouraged from playing with toys designed for girls and any breach will be more readily noted by others. In keeping with these findings, Bradbard and Endsley (1983) noted that boys' avoidance of girls' toys increases with age and also appears to become more prevalent when they are aware that they are being observed. Pasterski et al. (2005) found that in regards to cross-gender toy play, boys specifically get given much clearer and more frequent redirection by parents and by other boys. Singer and Singer (1990) observed that boys were also more inclined to choose toys consistent with gender stereotypes.

Research by Martin et al. (1995:1453) asked pre-school children to rate whether they and others would like and classify 'unfamiliar, non-sex-typed' toys. They noted that the children were able to indicate their own preferences and apply gender labels to the toys to suggest how others would respond to the toys. It appeared that if a toy was labelled for the other gender, this would reduce the appeal of the toy *(ibid).* It has been previously noted that children tend to classify toys that they like as toys that would engage others of their sex (for example, Martin and Halverson, 1981; Caldera et al., 1989; Schor, 2004). Martin et al. (1995) observed that children draw on stereotypes to explain the toy choices made by other children for instance: it is pink, so only girls play with it or if it is noisy, it is for boys. Therefore the attribution of specific stereotypical gender features aids the identification of the toy as being for a boy or a girl.

Blakemore and Centres (2005) conducted a study with undergraduate students who were asked to classify toys as for boys, girls or both. From this they were able to establish five groups: 'strongly feminine, moderately feminine, neutral, moderately masculine, strongly masculine' (*ibid*: 621). After the toys had been categorised by the students, the features of the toys selected were subsequently identified under particular headings. The results appear to indicate that the masculine type toys are more 'violent, competitive, exciting and dangerous' whilst girls' toys tend to have qualities such as 'physical attractiveness, nurturance and domestic' (Blakemore and Centres, 2005:626). It was found that the toys

that were viewed as extremely gendered contributed less to the children's 'optimal development' and that toys that were deemed to encourage a variety of developmental skills were neutral or for boys (Blakemore and Centres, 2005:619*).* It is important to note that it was adults and not children in this study who categorised the toys. Often adults will select and, in many cases, control the toys that children are given. This control can lead to a perpetuation of particular categories, such as domestic and nurturing toys for females and action toys for boys. I would suggest that the maintenance of particular stereotypes limits play and developmental experiences for both boys and girls.

It is plausible that children, as suggested by Lipsitz-Bem (1983), learn and develop gender schemas based, at least in part, on the toys they are given and those labelled for their gender. These schemas then explain and rationalise the gender choices that they and others make. However, there are research findings into children's gender type play that appear to confirm the belief that gender toy choices are natural and may have evolutionary origins. There are some who have claimed that specific toy features appeal differently to the sexes (for example, Alexander and Hines, 2002; Hassett et al., 2008; Williams and Pleil, 2008). Biological or hormonal origins for toy preference, some argue, are supported by studies that show that girls who have a condition called Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH), in which the female baby (CAH also affects male babies but there is no evidence that it impacts on their play behaviour) has been given an overexposure to pre-natal male hormones in the womb, show tendencies to play with what are considered to be boys' toys (for example, Frisen et al., 2002; Pasterski et al., 2005; Eliot, 2009). Frisen et al. (2002) investigated the exposure and impact of prenatal male hormone on the development of the female human brain and they claim that it did develop male-typed behaviour. However, they also acknowledged that the severity of CAH did not always correlate with the level of male-type behaviour observed and that it was possible that other factors such as the child's social circumstances could influence the levels of behaviour. Thus, while girls with CAH do show indications that gender-type behaviour could be influenced by pre-natal androgen exposure, Hassett et al. (2008) state that it is not possible to completely rule out other factors, such as socialisation.

In addition to this research, Alexander and Hines (2002) claim that evolution has resulted in the male and female brains developing differently so that they are attracted to different features. They assert that 'there is evidence that the primate brain has evolved specialized

recognition systems for categories' (*ibid*:474) and that these systems are different for males and females. Alexander and Hines (2002) gave vervet monkeys a car, a cuddly dog, a book, a ball, a doll and pot. The amount of time that the monkeys were seen to play with the toys, it is claimed, reflected similar gender play preferences in boys and girls. The male monkeys appeared to prefer the car and the ball and the female vervets the pot and the doll. It was noted that both males and female monkeys played with 'gender neutral' items (a cuddly dog and a book with pictures) for the same proportion of time. Alexander and Hines (*ibid:*467*)* suggest that these variations in toy choice

> may have evolved from differential selection pressures based on the different behavioral roles of males and females, and that evolved object feature preferences may contribute to present day sexually dimorphic toy preferences in children.

This and other such studies (Hassett et al., 2008; Williams and Pleil, 2008) appear to support the influences of sex on gender-typed toy preferences: 'toy choice may reflect evolved sex differences in activity preferences not primarily resulting from socialization processes' (Hassett et al., 2008:362). Such conclusions have led to suggestions that there are innate factors that draw each of the sexes to particular but different features of toys. The main criticism of this type of research with primates is that the car, ball, doll and pot are understood from a human social construction viewpoint, with gender associations having been ascribed by humans. As such, there can be no guarantee that the primates share a similar understanding of these objects; primates, whether male or female, do not cook food and so the association of a pot with a female domestic role therefore is incongruent. In addition, since the motor car has in evolutionary terms been a recent invention, it is unclear why a car should be associated with males rather than females. Hines did subsequently publish further work on gender and, in 2010 along with Jadva and Golombok, published research that acknowledges the possible role of socialisation in the choices that children make:

> ...the sex similarities in infants' preferences for colors and shapes suggest that any subsequent sex differences in these preferences may arise from socialization or cognitive gender development rather than inborn factors.
> (Jadva et al., 2010:1261)

The claims that children choose and play with particular gendered toys is not disputed here, rather, I question the reason for the choices of toys. Whilst, as outlined above, it has been argued that evolution and biology determine that children are drawn to particular

features, I argue that the environment that is created for and surrounds the child plays a significant role in determining what toys the child will be attracted to, and subsequently will consistently play with. Lipsitz-Bem's (1983) gender schema theory—as discussed in Chapter 3—would suggest that by exposing children to particular experiences they are able to create categories and schemas that will help determine how they respond and behave. According to Freed (2003), the environment and exposure to particular norms will provide children with information to construct and recreate behaviours and preferences, often resulting in these appearing to be natural rather than learned.

4.3 The gendered environment

The environment that surrounds the child, according to Andersen and Taylor (2007), conveys messages about norms and expectations; it also can provide a sense of security, familiarity and predictability. Pomerleau et al. (1990) observed the environment created for 120 girls and boys: the children were aged 5, 13 and 25 months, and each group had 20 boys and 20 girls. They noted that girls and boys had very different rooms: boys had 'sports equipment, tools and large and small vehicles...girls had more dolls, fictional characters, child's furniture and other toys for manipulation' (*ibid:* 359). Both sexes also had *soothers* that were gender co-ordinated. Everything familiar to the child appears to involve gender differences, resulting in the creation of two different gendered environments in terms of colours, toys and pictures, thus setting the scene for future divisions. Additionally, it was noted that clothing differentiated the sexes, with girls wearing pink and multicoloured clothes and boys tending to wear blue, red and white clothing. Other studies also confirm that parents provide children with toys according to their sex. Snow et al.'s (1983) study found that fathers would give a doll to their daughters but were unlikely to give it to their sons. Snow et al.'s (1983) and Smith and Lloyd's (1978) research into parental behaviour—as discussed in Chapter 3—indicates that the most significant and important feature which determines adults' initial responses to any child is their sex. This environmental socialisation is possibly the first step towards the creation of two worlds and it could be argued, sets the scene for two very different life experiences and, as Millett (1971) suggested, creates two distinct cultures.

4.3.1 The environment and socialisation

Socialisation of children occurs on all fronts, from the environment in which they live and sleep, to what they wear and what they play with, to how adults respond and treat them. Following the socialisation theories discussed in Chapter 3, observations, reinforcement and modelling of gender behaviours from the moment of the birth will result in the creation of schemas (Martin and Havelson, 1981; Lipsitz-Bem, 1983) that dictate choices, preferences and stereotypes to which the child will attach meaning. Subsequently, children will conform to societal norms and expectations, including the toys they play with and colours they prefer. For instance, if a girl is constantly exposed to pink, this becomes familiar and normal through the experience she is given; from the toys she plays with to the profusion of pink that she faces in toy shops, clothes shops and in the media.

4.4 The significance of colour

Toys are designed for boys and girls in many different ways. Perhaps the most obvious and exploited feature currently is colour (for example, LoBue and DeLoache, 2011). Auster and Mansbach (2012) found that in the Disney Store colours such as red, black, brown and grey are used in the design of action figures, construction toys, vehicles and weapons which are marketed and targeted at boys. In contrast, purple and pink toys are targeted at girls, and tend to fall into nurturing, appearance, creative or domestic categories. This research had some findings that were similar to Blakemore and Centres' (2005) work which found that toys that claimed to be gender neutral were generally designed to appeal to boys and appeared to have been coloured in *boys'* colours. This marketing is perhaps due to consistent findings that suggest that boys are more likely to be stigmatized for cross-gender play than girls, who are less troubled about playing across the gender divide (for example : Martin et al.,1990; Hassett et al., 2008; Williams and Pleil, 2008; Jadva, et al., 2010). Thus the use of *boys'* colours to sell toys may appeal to a wider market. However, as will be discussed in more detail later, despite this, toys which are often considered to be for boys—construction and science toys—have recently become *pinkified*: for example *Lego* has become pink apparently to attract girls, which based on the above research is not necessary. So perhaps cynically this could be viewed as a commercial endeavour to sell more products by perpetuating the belief that there is a natural predilection by boys and

girls to be attracted to particular features and colours in order to generate more profit through more sales.

The use of colour has always had significance for society to create or indicate a gender divide or make a social statement. The cost and difficulty in acquiring or fixing particular colours to fabrics or materials in the past often resulted in the wearing or use of colours by those with power or money (Gardener and Kleiner, 2010). Until relatively recently, the dyeing process was particularly difficult. According to Brunello (1973), the status of sporting particular colours related more to the rarity and the difficulty of the production of the dye rather than the colour itself. Whilst there were many available pigments that could create colours, the problem was that fabrics would not retain the colour or they would fade after washing or exposure to sunlight. Consequently, this resulted in dyes being costly and scarce (*ibid*). Some colours gained significance and in particular, colours such as purple and red were associated with wealth and power. Gardener and Kleiner (2010) discuss the historical significance of purple as it was often associated with royalty and was expensive to produce. Another dye which was also prized was the colour red whose first recorded use, according to Robinson (1969:25), was in 1727 BC. Burulyanov (2009) noted that the Romans in particular prized red and purple dyes. It was not until the third century that it was possible to make blue dyes and by then it was even possible to produce inexpensive purples or reds (*ibid*). Brunello (1973) noted that in the Middle Ages colour continued to emphasise a contrast between the rich and the poor: the bright coloured clothes were worn by those in power and the drabber colours were the colours worn by the lower classes whose clothes tended to be dyed in yellow, green and russet. It was not until the creation of synthetic dyes in the mid 19th century that it was possible to produce more versatile low cost dyes that produced a wider variety of colours of clothing (*ibid).*

Throughout this extensive period of history, there appears to be no assumption that either sex had a predisposition to be drawn to a particular colour—as discussed in Chapter 2. Although colours such as red and blue were often associated with hot and cold respectively, according to Classen (1998:65), men had a positive association with heat, which in turn, 'made men intelligent, courageous, and forthright'. These associations were in contrast to women, who were viewed as cold, which 'made women unintelligent, timid, and deceitful' (Classen, 1998:65). Colour, and its association with gender, in pre-modernity, related to masculine and feminine qualities and the assumed nature and

temperature of men and women (*ibid*). These conjectures about the disposition of women assumed that the physical differences between men and women were mirrored in psychological differences. This view, as discussed in Chapter 2, has contributed to many stereotypes being perpetuated and to the belief that there are fundamental diametric differences between men and women, which even today suggest that women and men have different nurturing roles and approaches to learning (see for example: Noddings, 1984; Baron-Cohen, 2003). These have in turn helped contributed to the creation of new stereotypes and beliefs (see Chapter 2); for example, the belief that women are naturally drawn to colours, in particular pink, because of evolutionary factors.

4.5 Pinkification

Girls do prefer pink and boys will choose blue, so it appears that children do prefer colours that conform to adult stereotypical categories. Chiu et al. (2006) asked boys and girls who were aged from three to 12 years old to select their 'three favourite colours' from a colour chart created in a stereotypical manner. They found that boys selected blue to pink whereas girls chose pink to blue. Picariello et al. (1990) also noted that when preschoolers were asked to choose their preferred coloured felt pig from a choice of six coloured pigs, which were coloured either stereotypically masculine (navy blue, brown, maroon) or feminine colours (light pink, bright pink, lavender), the children chose in a predictable gendered stereotypical fashion. However, this contrasts with studies of pre-verbal children which found that children as young as two months showed no notable gender variation in their preference to stare at colours (see for example: Franklin et al., 2010; Jadva et al., 2010). It is possible that the plethora of research (Picariello et al., 1990; Chiu et al., 2006; LoBue and DeLoache, 2011; Auster and Mansbach, 2012) which suggests the absence of sex difference in babies' and toddlers' preferences for colours, considered with the findings that older children exhibit gendered colour selections, indicates that children learn these colour preferences.

Gender colour inclinations appear to emerge as early as two years of age, which is consistent with socialisation theories that acknowledge that children start to see themselves as either male or female around this age (Lipsitz-Bem, 1983). This parallel suggests that the ability to categorise objects and colours develops at the same time as children learn to create gender schemas and stereotypes, rather than being innately present. In addition, as

discussed previously, cultural and historical explanations for preferences for colours such as red and purple were linked more to adult power and wealth rather than having any biological or evolutionary basis. This supports the belief that colour preferences are socially acquired.

4.5.1 Pink and clothes

One of the many decisions to be made on learning that a baby has been born is what colour of clothes to buy. In terms of the association between colour and clothing, Paoletti (2012) states that in the 19th century young children's clothing was generally neutral and sex differences were not emphasised. Her studies indicate that both boys and girls were dressed in dresses or skirts until approximately five or six years of age. The only difference noted was that the dresses buttoned up differently; boys buttoned up the front and girls up the back. It was not until I discovered this that I recalled a favourite phrase of my Gran's when she thought I was up to something. She would say '*do you think I button up the back?*' evidently asking '*do you think I am stupid*?' This had been a common phrase in her childhood and denoted gendered attitudes of which I am sure she was unaware.

Paoletti (1987) proposes various reasons for the historical lack of distinction between girls' and boys' clothing. One possibility was that children were viewed more as a homogenous group, where their gender was not considered a defining factor until the child reached the age of six. Another suggestion was that young children were often viewed as less important than adults and that the clothing worn by infants was more noteworthy of their age rather than their gender (Paoletti, 2012). According to Postman (1962), the philosopher Erasmus, at the end of the 16th century, suggested that children should be dressed and treated differently from adults. It is possible that during the post-enlightenment era, when a more romantic view of childhood was adopted, and when young children were viewed as innocent beings (James and James, 2004; Ryan, 2008), that white was adopted to reflect their purity. However, it is also possible that there was a more practical rather than philosophical dimension to dressing boys and girls in the same clothes. Clothes were homemade and expensive for many families, it was therefore expedient for clothes to be of a standard colour, white, which allowed them to be bleached and be used again without fading, regardless of the number or sex of the children.

The combination of mass manufacturing of clothing in the mid-19th century, which allowed people to buy readymade clothes, and the invention of aniline dyes, which provided a wider choice of coloured materials, led to a change in attitudes towards clothing and emerging trends. However, whilst colour differences were often associated with male and female adults, it was not until later that they became associated with children. As noted above, Classen (1998) explains that the colours were often linked to the perceived *nature* of adult males and females rather than having any association with children. Therefore at this time, red and its derivatives such as pink were more associated with males rather than females. During the Regency period the term 'pink of the ton' was used to denote a gentleman of good hygiene habits (Riley, online); the term appears to come from the French indicating a man of fashion (*ibid).* In addition, blue was often associated with the Virgin Mary, thus traditionally connecting females with the colour blue (Classen, 1998). Paoletti (2012) suggests that there was no agreed consensus or particular gender significance applied to pink and blue for babies until just before the First World War. She suggests that it was not until the 1920s that the 'modern "tradition" of dressing infant boys in blue and girls in pink had just begun to be popular' (Paoletti, 1987:143). In addition, the advice offered was not consistent and was generally the reverse of today's trend, with pink being the colour often advocated for boys rather than girls: '(i)f you like the color note on the little one's garments, use pink for the boy and blue for the girl' (Frassanito and Pettorini, 2008:881). Maglaty, (2011, online) notes that in 1927 *Time* magazine published the colours being promoted by American stores for boys and girls. She claims that many of the large department stores across America advised pink for boys. Paoletti (2012) maintains that it was not until the 1940s that pink and blue were consistently assigned to girls and boys. Maglaty (2011, online) suggests that this was due to retailers responding to the trend set by the customers.

This trend continued until the 1960s and 1970s when, during the second wave of feminism, pink fell out of fashion. As part of the call for equality between men and women, parents attempted to bring children up in a gender neutral environment by dressing children in similar, unisex clothes (Daily Mail Reporter, 2013). Paoletti (2012) also notes that in the 1970s the *Sears, Roebuck and Company* catalogue pictured no pink toddler clothing. It was not until the mid-1980s, with the third wave of feminism, that pink was 'reclaimed' as part of the focus on *Girl Power* and consumerism (Chapter 2). This created a paradox between pink depicting the innocence of childhood with princess and tiaras and pink representing

adult feminine empowerment, often closely related to sexualisation (Abrams, 2010; Walters, 2010).

4.6 Is there a problem with pink?

Pink is only a colour, so can it truly be damaging to encourage the current trend for girls to grow up in a pink world? As Walters (2010:129) observes, '(w)hat should be the freedom to choose a bit of pink often feels more like an imperative to drown in a sea of pink'. It is not pink itself that it is the problem, but rather it is the amount of it and what it represents, specifically the type of claim at the opening of Chapter 3 where there is the belief that half of the world's population fits nicely under a pink umbrella. Kimmel (2000) questions why there is an insistence by some to define all females in the same way since there are fewer differences between the sexes than amongst them. As discussed in the previous chapter, there is a current tendency to socialise girls in the belief that pink, princesses, girlieness, appearance, caring and relationships are the limits of being female. What can be endearing and harmless for a little girl dressing up as a princess with all the pink trappings can become more harmful when she sees this continually around her and starts to believe that this is what she should want and it is all she can aspire to be. The profusion of pink, compounded with the images of princesses and combined with other factors, can lead girls to feel that they have the choice of being pretty and feminine, needing to be taken care of—an aspiration of Louise in Chapter 1—or they can be independent, intelligent and ambitious. My concern in today's society is that these beliefs are seen as mutually exclusive and therefore limiting.

Perhaps more worrying there is an insidious aspect of pink in which it is associated with the early sexualisation of children. The United Kingdom (UK) Government report *Letting children be children: Independent review of the commercialisation and sexualisation of childhood* (Bailey, 2011) addresses four main themes to help support parents in reducing the promotion of early sexualisation of children. The report discusses concerns relating to clothes that are targeted at children and are inappropriate such as 'bras (padded or not), bikinis, short skirts, high-heeled shoes, garments with suggestive slogans, or the use of fabrics and designs that have connotations of adult sexuality' (*ibid:42)*. The report also raises the issue of stereotyping, specifically by the commercial world, noting that that there are very specific and restricted images of what it is to be a girl or a boy. The report highlights concerns about the messages that are conveyed about what children 'need in

order to fulfil those gender roles' (Bailey, 2011:42). Specific reference is made to the persistent gendered colouring of accessories for children. It is acknowledged that emphasis is placed on the use of largely pink for girls whilst boys are offered a wider selection although they too are often limited to blue/camouflage colours. Toys and games are also discussed, recognising that there is an active commercial encouragement to aim particular gender stereotypes at girls and boys: make up, dolls, fashion design for girls: and cars, guns, action-figures targeted at boys (*ibid:*42).

The report focuses mainly on the early sexualisation of girls and, disappointingly, it at times appears to dismiss or underestimate the concerns relating to the effects of stereotyping for both girls and boys. I would argue that these issues are often related and that narrow definitions of femininity and masculinity are created through stereotypical clothes and products. As discussed by Fine (2010) and Orenstein (2011), this trend can result in some children either spending their lives constantly trying to live up to impossible idealised images or failing to achieve these and thus living with constant feelings of failure and alienation.

4.6.1 The pink effect

Despite the plethora of research into the effects of gender stereotyping, including gender and colour, toys, and environment, the full extent of these practices still needs further investigation. Walters (2010:145) asks if '(w)e surround girls with pink, we buy them pink clothes, we give them pink bedrooms, can we be surprised if they are readier to say they like pink?' In addition, as discussed in Chapter 2, there appears to be a media drive to *prove* that the perceived preference for pink by girls (Hulbert and Ling, 2007) is biological; often the coverage of this issue is sensationalised and overstated (Henderson, 2007; Wrenn, 2012). The reporting in the popular media results in this information entering into popular culture and becoming *true.* Media interest and the current social obsession with pink have resulted in the 'exaggerated femininity (which) often goes unquestioned...seen as purely natural...(where) women are often assumed to have very different talents and skills from the men around them' (Walters, 2010:229) . The colour coding of children is not harmless as it can, along with other factors such as culture and expectations, create self-fulfilling prophecies that can limit what girls and boys are and can be.

Socialisation theories suggest that the absorption of gendered stereotypical behaviours and customs can result in children conforming to the pink or blue template created for them by the social environment, culture and by those in their immediate surroundings. Behaviours that do not conform to stereotypes can on occasion be viewed as abnormal or socially punished through exclusion. Petersen and Hyde (2010) warn that these behaviours can also be invisible or deliberately ignored, making stereotypes difficult to destroy. Pringle (1986: 16) argues that 'the gender role is psychologically determined first by parental and then by wider society's expectations'. Alarmed by media stereotypes, concerned parents Emma and Abi Moore in 2008 started the *Pink Stinks* (online) campaign to counteract and challenge the overwhelming influence of pink.

4.6.2 Challenge to pink

The objective of the *Pink Stinks* movement is to highlight and control the overwhelming emphasis on pink products that are marketed for girls. The campaign's focus is to stress and challenge imposed stereotypes associated with pink, as they claim it places limits on girls. In December 2011, *Hamleys* became one of the first stores to stop classifying their departments by colour: blue and pink for boys and girls. However, what is perhaps less well publicised is that whilst the floors may no longer be colour co-ordinated, the products still come in blue and pink (William, 2011). Another campaign set up by concerned parents is the *Let toys be toys campaign* (online), who announced that they had made progress with *Boots* and *Morrisons* agreeing to take down the boys and girls toys signs in their stores. *Next* also agreed not to have 'boys stuff' on their packaging and likewise *Tesco* said that it would remove the label 'boys' toy' from a chemistry set. *Argos,* in May 2013, also took down their gendered webpages for toys and replaced them with the categorising of toys by age and topics for play: for instance science and creativity. However, a closer inspection of the science category shows that it contains toys such as a bright pink *Perfume Lab* (Argos (a), online). It could be argued that this in itself is not problematic, but it becomes perhaps more concerning when all the pink products in this category relate to appearance and conversely toys like *Science is Magic* or the microscope, which come in blue, promote investigation and exploration. Thus, the gendered packaging of the products promotes different types of activities. In a similar pattern, *Argos'* creative toys such as *Blingles Bling* and *Creation Studio* come in purple, pink and lavender, whilst *Disney Pixar Cars 2* and *Klip Kitz Mini Kitz Assortment* come in dark red and blue and are

evidently for boys. Whilst all of these stores have taken steps in the right direction to adjust the obvious gendering of products, it is clear more changes are necessary.

At the empirical stage of this research, when the discussion focused on toys, *Friends* by *Lego* (a new line launched in 2012) was used as a specific talking point. The product has many themes, one of which announces:

> Join Olivia, Stephanie, Emma, Mia and Andrea as best friends in Heartlake City. Hang out in the cool City Park Cafe, explore in Stephanie's car or take care of your pets at the Heartlake Vet. With the five girls and an exciting world waiting for you, every day is filled with fun, adventure and friendship!
>
> Argos (b, online)

Lego is widely acclaimed as the most successful toy worldwide and traditionally has been viewed as a creative construction toy. However, the latest addition to its range, *Friends* appears to have a very narrow focus where gender stereotypes of appearance, friendship and pets—which could be associated with nurturance—are being promoted. The various play environments offered are set in the beauty parlour, the vets and the bakery. The toys' promoters claim the environments will develop girls' imagination by tapping into their interests. This view could suggest that manufacturers consider girls' imaginations to be limited to these types of key themes.

The *Friends* figures also reinforce connections to female appearance, as these *Lego* figures have small waists and breast shapes, which suggest female sexualisation. Cartoon and toy representations of women as sexual beings are not new. *Lara Croft* was promoted as an action figure and was clearly a heroine character, but nonetheless was visually sexualised and mainly targeted at a male audience. A recent controversy over *Brave* (Iger, online) has become an online campaign in response to Disney's redrawing of Merida, the female character. The red hair rebel has been included in what Orenstein (2006, online) in the *New York Times* describes as their 'Disney Princess line up'. In the film Merida is portrayed as a young woman who objects to being *married off*, is disinterested in her appearance and prefers adventure and freedom to marriage and domesticity. However, she has been redesigned visually to fit with the more glamorous traditional view of a Disney Princess. Merida has gone from being defiant, independent and strong to coquettish and alluring. The campaign questions why Merida's appearance has changed. Her dress is now low cut and off the shoulder, and she has a more defined womanly figure with a small

waist. Her face has lost its child-like quality with the addition of high cheek bones, and her unruly hair, which reflected her character, has been tamed and tidied. The need to change the character demonstrates the continued limited and idealised view of what it is to be a girl. This can result in a cluster of metaphorical assumptions about what women can be, where colour is a contributing feature. However, such changes also relate to other themes that promote particular connotations where female potential is restricted and then replicated, limiting the acceptable images of women and the spectrum of what it is to be female.

This pattern is replicated in many commercial outlets. In *WHSmith*'s children's section, there is a specific section for girls, where the books tend to be in pink with many sparkly covers. The topics of these stories appear to be limited to fairies, princesses, creativity, and themes of care and friendships. Once again there is a reinforcement of traditional stereotypes where communication, creativity and pink are really what girls are innately drawn towards. Likewise, children's television, according to Chorley (2011), lacks strong female characters. He cites a study in 2007 that found that approximately two-thirds of the main characters on children's TV in the UK were male. He reports that such trends by TV producers tend to reiterate the mantra that they are only responding to market forces and choices made by children.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the explanation often given for the pink phenomena is that girls are biologically predisposed to desire *girlie* pink things. The disturbing aspect of such casual acceptance of these assumptions is that the belief that they are natural, thus making them resistant to change. To question these assumptions requires that the notion of *girlieness* to be examined. What does *girlieness* consist of? The term to most people does not immediately bring to mind neurological scientists or a potential astronaut for the NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) programme; it is rarely associated with high academic qualifications or an independent and self-reliant woman. Rather, it tends to imply a female who is subordinate to others and often taken care of, as represented in the opening comment of this dissertation's rationale, where Louisa's aspiration is to find *'a man to take care of her'*. These perceptions have become part of modern day culture and are often assumed to be natural, which can lead to blindness toward the need for change or a complacency that accepts that nothing should—or can—be done.

In Chapter 3, I highlighted the fact that children respond to and learn from their environment. If, as theories of socialisation suggest, children develop schemas which reflect what is familiar and consistent, I would argue that if girls and boys are given consistent images that present them in particular ways, they will learn to accept these as normal. The question that Fines (2010:209) asks is how can 'children ignore gender when they continually watch it, hear it, see it, are clothed in it, sleep in it, eat off it?' Everything around the child reinforces the great divide of the sexes and this confirms in children's minds—and adults' minds—that this division is important. For things to change it is necessary that children are exposed to and encouraged to interact with different types of toys, books and characters to encourage distinctly different types of play and learning.

To change these perceptions there is a need to challenge the culture where feminine stereotypes result in fixed gender boundaries for girls and subsequently women. This does not mean that there is a need or even a desire for an androgynous society, where femininity is restricted or dismissed; rather, it is the misrepresentation of women's interests, appearance, potential and capabilities that needs to be changed. It is important to note that as boys and girls are often viewed as the antithesis of each other, these restrictions on females where girls and women are presented as solely one dimensional also result in corresponding restrictions on how boys should also be viewed. The qualities that are often stereotypically viewed as being particular to women—care and empathy—should be promoted across all of society so that 'we enter a world with more freedom, not less, because then those behaviours traditionally associated with masculinity and femininity could become real choices for each individual' (Walters, 2010:230). This world would present positive images of maleness, as well as femaleness.

If, as noted by Muller and Goldberg (1980), children by the age of five expect adults to behave differently towards them depending on whether they are boys and girls, it is necessary for adults to consider how they respond to the youngest children in our society. As discussed in Chapter 2, if nurture can become nature (Eliot, 2009) it is important that children are exposed as early as possible to experiences that are not restricted to the stereotypes discussed above. One such area of society that should consider how adults respond to and treat children is the pre-5 sector. However, prior to this consideration, it is necessary to examine the structure and place of the nursery as a society that exerts a power on the development of gender.

4.7 Biopolitics in the nursery

The nursery is an environment that is subject to and reflects the norms of society at any given time and place. In addition, the nursery exists as a space in its own right with clearly defined grammars and customs. Gendered societal norms are (re)produced and (re)created in the nursery. In order to analyse and uncover the interplay of the gender dynamics evident in the nursery, a Foucauldian framework helps to provide an understanding of the politics, including the power relationships that operate there and will be used in the framework detailed in Chapter 6 and 7 to analyse and present the data collected. Initially, here, I outline why a Foucauldian framework was employed, with particular reference to issues of power and its operation.

Attention to Foucault was motivated by his attention to the body and to sexuality as cultural constructs and to what he offered by way of attention to power, including the way in which 'modern power operates in a capillary fashion throughout the social body' and, so, 'is best grasped in its concrete and local effects and in the everyday practices which sustain and reproduce power relations' (Armstrong, 2005: Section 3). Taking, as I do, a socially constructed view of gender, Foucault's anti-essentialist approach to the body resonated with my views on sex and gender as did his notion of disciplinary power. Whilst reluctant to accept that the participants in my study, and the children they refer to, could be reduced to 'docile bodies', I was taken by the idea that they and we, all of us, are or think we are under surveillance and that our behaviours and attitudes may be regulated, controlled and disciplined in subtle, almost invisible, and frequently unconscious ways that result in a sense of what is and is not 'normal' and desirable. For Foucault, 'a key struggle in the present is against the tendency of normalizing-disciplinary power to tie individuals to their identities in constraining ways' (Armstrong, 2005, Section 4). For this study, I wanted to explore ways in which the participants might have become 'docile' in the face of such normalizing disciplinary power with particular respect to gender. I was also interested to see if the participants, or the children they discussed, did or could subvert the 'normal' and resist the regimes of power of gender, stereotyping and attitudes that could restrict and define identity according to sex. Butler draws on the Foucauldian concept of 'the constituted character of identity', suggests Armstrong (2005:Section 4), 'to politicize the processes through which stereotypical forms of masculine and feminine identity are

produced' and to demonstrate 'the role played by cultural norms in regulating how we embody or perform our gender identities'.

Importantly for my study, Foucault's (2003) biopolitics, offers a post-structural approach to understanding why and how society, as a means for maintaining its survival, exerts power to produce, regulate, govern and create controls where people are both self-regulated and perpetrate universal norms. Key to this process is the cyclical nature of culture, in which societal rules are taught to populations who will learn and create self-governance of the models and, subsequently, teach these to others. As alluded to above, Foucault (2003) proposed that in order to understand and challenge injustices there is a need to examine bodies of knowledge and truths since these are not permanent or stable and can be changed. Adopting a Foucauldian biopolitical lens to examine practitioners' perceptions of gender may reveal dimorphic gender norms that are (re)produced and (re)created in the participants' nurseries. Through this lens it may be possible to determine if care and education, through the particular grammars and norms of the setting, expose children to gender partitioning by the promotion and self-regulation of truths or Foucault's regime of truth, 'the types of discourse it accepts and makes function as true' (Foucault, 2000:131).

The discourse of the nursery means that children are simultaneously divided and united as a population. The population in any nursery is subject to the same curriculum - although differentiations will be evident - and the children are also segregated and supported in the learning and recognition of their own sex. As described by Martin and Ruble (2009), this occurs when the child's own sex is recognised as the in-group and where the others in the population are seen as the out-group. Children learn that two worlds exist and that these are immutable: there is a prohibitive acknowledgement that variance is understood and responded to as aberrant. Foucault's (1977) 'panopticon', in which individuals learn to self-regulate their behaviours to conform to societal controls and expectations, was adapted from the social utilitarian theorist Jeremy Bentham's (1748-1832) approach to discipline based on the Panopticon prison design. Foucault applied these principles to all societies and suggested that such restrictions operated in order to maintain social order and control. The concept was based on the panoptican prisoners' *belief* that they were being observed - even if they were not - which resulted in them conforming to and internalising particular disciplinary behaviours in order to avoid punishment. The perceived control over the

subjects resulted in them beginning to self-regulate their behaviour. In applying this analogy to the nursery environment, the assumption is that the EYPs in the nursery communicate to the children particular gendered values and practices and then the children will adopt these and reproduce these. In order to explore this influence further, it is necessary to consider the role of the nursery and its practitioners in supporting the development of gender in the pre-5 environment.

4.8 The role of early years education and care

Having explored the possible sources of gender acquisition and factors that influence how gender is learned, I now intend to discuss the role of pre-5 practitioners in contributing to the gendering of children. As noted by O'Brien et al. (2000), girls and boys learn and think about being male and female differently in response to the ways in which these qualities are presented to them in social contexts. Gestwicki and Bertrand (2011) claim that the nursery environment is the first sustained encounter, beyond the home, where children experience society's expectations about gender. As such, EYPs play an important role in the schemas and stereotypes that children develop (Browne, 2004; Robson, 2012). Fundamental in this process, according to Erden and Wolfgang (2004), is the practitioners' own beliefs and attitudes about gender because these, along with other factors as discussed above, play a significant role in what children learn. Hilliard and Liben (2010) suggest that children quickly absorb and replicate the gendered opinions of the adults around them and they then start to organise themselves according to these gender defined categories. Thus, practices and resources in the playroom can lead to gender stereotypes and divisions that produce two distinct cultures for boys and girls. This can, after even short exposure, strengthen gender beliefs and subsequently lead to segregation and a variance of expectations (Hilliard and Liben, 2010).

Children's entry into the education and care system, according to Laevers and Verboven (2000), results in gender differences extending and being more openly expressed. They observed that play quickly conforms to widely held gender stereotypes, with girls playing with creative activities whilst boys tend to play with physical activities. It was noted that girls generally had 'lower self-esteem, (were) more dependent, calmer, but verbally more fluent...(m)ost boys...(were) noisier, more aggressive, and...take more initiatives and like to play the boss'(*ibid:*27*)*. Laevers and Verboven (2000:28) further note that the physical

materials that are used to support learning and play often continue to depict traditional stereotypes. They conclude that all materials used should be selected with care and caution to avoid re-emphasising these. Another site of gendering is the structure and organisation of the setting. Early Years, internationally, is a profession which is predominately female, often as a result of care being viewed as the domain of women and the pay and conditions often not rewarding enough to attract male practitioners (see for example :Ailwood, 2006; Davis, 2011: Peeters, 2013). Moss (2003) notes that it is predominantly women who provide professional childcare and that in education more broadly the age of the child correlates to the percentage of women in that area, with early years being staffed by 97.5% women compared to 55% in the secondary sector. However, Moss makes the case for the inclusion of males in early years by stating:

> The fact that boys and girls are different in some ways and choose different games and activities gives different challenges to those employed – both female and male. The daily pedagogic work must take these differences into account if the needs of both boys and girls are to be covered.
>
> (Moss, 2003: slide 9)

I would argue that this view of equality in Early Years in fact perpetuates the belief that boys and girls have different and separate needs. Whilst it is not in the scope of this dissertation to discuss the role of men in childcare more fully, I would suggest that regardless of the sex of staff, it is more important that children are treated at an individual level rather than their sex dictating how their development and behaviours are considered.

A significant area of interest for me is the interactions between adults and children, specifically interactions where adults treat and respond to children differently because of their sex. According to Laevers and Verboven (2000:28), adults respond to boys more often and tend to present them with more challenging activities than they do girls (*ibid).* Dobbs et al. (2004) observed that those who worked in EYs often value girls' behaviour more highly than boys' behaviour. This suggests that the adults in the pre-5 sector treat boys and girls as distinct homogenous groups where there are different expectations and norms based on the children's sex category. If this is the case, it would appear that those who work in the pre-5 settings could be contributing to the reinforcement of traditional stereotypes.

A study by Ärlemalm-Hagsér (2010) of the pre-school environment identifies relations and interactions as the most important factors in reinforcing and supporting the development of gender schemas. The study identifies four themes of gendered interactions:

- 'distinctions'- it is claimed that children realise that masculinity is viewed by adults as superior, with boys getting more attention from staff than girls.
- 'stability' - this is where gender stereotypes of masculine and feminine are reinforced through children/staff interactions.
- 'fellowship' - children and staff help and care for each other. This, it is claimed, is often the site for reinforcing traditional stereotypes where *care* is done by women.
- 'behaviours' - children observe other children's and adults' behaviours, often trying them out, practising them, challenging and resisting them. These behaviours—see Chapter 3—can result in the reformulation, replication and modification of gender stereotypes.

(adapted from Ärlemalm-Hagsér; 2010:519)

It would appear from this research, and others, that the relationships in the playroom result in the adults' understanding and consideration of gender being conveyed to the children, who can quickly absorb and recreate them (see for example: Laevers and Verboven, 2000; Browne, 2004; Dobbs et al., 2004; Ärlemalm-Hagsér, 2010; Hilliard and Lisben, 2010; Robson, 2012). It has been found that often the messages conveyed by adults to children conform to many of the stereotypes about gender. This input can, along with other external factors, result in the perpetuations and replication of gendered expectations and behaviours. These highlight that the sex of a child is not only an important factor, but in fact one that will shape their treatment and place in society's order.

In 2005, a gender study by Blaise found that practitioners can bring about changes to gender stereotypes and norms through proactive interventions. She proposed that EYPs should actively challenge stereotypes and encourage unconventional dialogues, where stories or play themes present non-traditional roles, allowing discussions to follow. This approach, she claims, creates opportunities where the children are able to view themselves as members of the human race and not solely as male or female. Providing alternatives to stereotypes could offer a variety of scripts for children to learn and choose from. If, as suggested by Paechter (2007), practitioners provide environments that encourage all children to be involved in all activities, free from stereotypical definitions of gender roles,

this will support children's development outwith gender constraints. However, as Erden and Wolfgang (2004) suggest, the beliefs and attitudes of practitioners play an important role in what children learn about gender. If gender stereotypes are to be rewritten, it will require more than the provision of non-stereotypical resources. A starting point for any change is to heighten awareness with those involved with children so that they become aware of their own beliefs and behaviours, which may be limiting opportunities and be determining specific play behaviours. It is from these understandings and concerns that this study was initiated. In the next chapter, I will discuss the methodology and methods used to explore a group of EYPs' understanding and attitudes towards gender.

Chapter 5 – Methodology and Methods

5.1 Positioning the research

'..... but asking people what they think, isn't really real research'

Anne, my sister[7] Ph.D. in Microbiology.

There are many types of research and all researchers have their own attitudes and beliefs about how to undertake it. Often, researchers come from different perspectives and, as indicated in the comment above, commonly view research differently. Positivist researchers like my sister whose words provide this Chapter's epigraph, often come from the field of science and believe that findings from research should be impartial with data regarded as valid only if it can be discerned from external and apparently objective observations (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). In contrast, my research project did not rely on such observations and neither did it seek to establish causal relationships. Rather, following Holloway and Wheeler (2013), I sought to explore the experiences and perception of EYPs in relation to gender where meanings and understandings could be attached to these in order to illuminate views of gender from their practices.

In this Chapter I will present the methods employed to investigate a group of EYPs' views of gender and include details of the selection process of the participants, the discussion group protocols applied, the methods of analysis and ethical considerations relating to the research. However, prior to engaging in this study it was necessary to ensure that the conceptual and methodological approaches adopted were congruent with the circumstances and reason for the research undertaken (Weaver and Olson, 2006) and so, initially, I shall outline these methodological decisions which required a framework, often referred to as a paradigm, to be identified.

5.2 The paradigm

According to Hairston (1982), no one paradigm is better than another. Weaver and Olson (2006) propose that the selected framework is dependent on the research being undertaken and the philosophical positioning of the project will depend on the specific question being

[7] in conversation.

investigated. Following Naslund (2002), the choice of a paradigm also helps to support the selection of compatible methods and in turn suggests approaches for project design. It will also, according to Mackenzie and Knipe (2006), indicate how the data can be collected, analysed, and how the results can be presented. In order to identify a suitable paradigm, it was necessary to first consider the study at the levels of ontology, epistemology and axiology, as suggested by Burrell and Morgan (1979) and Oates (2006). This consideration allowed me to articulate my own assumptions about the project prior to its commencement, as paradigms not only frame the theories and principles of the research but, also, embed and bring to consciousness the researcher's assumptions and principles in relation to the project (Weaver and Olson, 2006). For example, I did not expect to uncover one universal view of gender held by the practitioners involved. The views expressed would depend on the participants' experiences and they would have different views affected by various factors (Wand and Weber, 1993).Thus ontologically in this project I assumed that the practitioners' reality of gender would not be fixed and that their individual experiences, and the meanings they attached to these, would determine 'truths' for them. Accordingly, and epistemologically, it would be possible, through interactions and discussions, to construct knowledge which would help to understand how the participants perceived gender. Participants' experience of practice, their circumstances and their relationships, would all impact on their perceptions and opinions.

Following Krueger and Casey (2000) and Fern (2001), I also recognised that the views offered by the participants would be the views they would be willing to share or contribute to the discussion and that the opinions presented could contradict, change or be modified during the research period. From these understandings, the ontology and epistemology of the research were identified and I concluded that there would be no universal opinion offered, but rather 'a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood' (Guba, 1990:33) would emerge. I was not only prepared for multiple perspectives which would produce numerous truths (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Schultz and Hatch, 1996) but I also recognised that a diverse group of individuals would provide disparate data. Following Somekh and Lewin (2005), my axiological position held that the participants' experiences would be valued and any presentation of their opinions or experiences would be honourably reported in order to provide a fair representation of what was said. This also conforms to the ethical considerations of this project, which will be further discussed below.

From these understandings, the project locates in an interpretative reality, which acknowledges that the explanations and analysis given by the participants, and by me as the researcher, are based in particular situations and come from individual experiences and perceptions (Putman, 1983; Schutz and Luckmann, 1983). A similar project, even adopting the same paradigm, method and topic, would not necessarily replicate the findings presented owing to individual emphasis and different directions taken. Rather, the project represents issues, opinions, and observations and experience of the EYPs and neither seeks, nor claims representativeness or generalisability. In the next section, I present how the interpretative paradigm applies specifically to my own research project in which discussion groups were used as the primary tool for investigation and, following Holloway and Wheeler (2013), the data produced and interpreted were used to 'uncover' understandings of gender.

5.2.1 The interpretative paradigm

In the interpretative paradigm I adopted, the participants' understanding of gender could best be gained and understood by talking to them, 'by obtaining first-hand knowledge of the subject under investigation' (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:6) in order to discern what they think, what they have experienced and how they interpret these experiences. A noteworthy aspect of this paradigm is that the project could change and evolve as features surface that the preliminary proposal did not anticipate (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994; Schultz and Hatch, 1996; Holloway and Wheeler, 2013). As will be discussed in the methods section of this chapter (5.3), this did happen, as the discussion often took new directions. For example, a toy survey had not been originally anticipated but was introduced as a result of the discussion. At the outset of this project, it was expected that only qualitative data would be collected and analysed and, as described by Cane and Kritzer (2010), words rather than numbers would be used to describe the outcomes. However, as indicated above, the introduction of a toy survey contributed a new dimension which involved the use of basic quantitative data with, as suggested by Johnson and Christensen (2011), numbers and basic frequencies used to illustrate trends. This will be further discussed in the methods section below. In keeping with this paradigm, the findings and subsequent discussion which will be presented in Chapter 6 and 7 are open to alternative interpretations and re-interpretation by others (Holloway and Wheeler, 2013).

5.3 Methods

The interpretative paradigm is often associated with providing opportunities for voices, views, experiences and practices to be heard in research (Cole, 2006; Weaver and Olson, 2006). The intention was to adopt a 'critical sensibility' which, according to Denzin and Lincoln (2005:5), would not silence the voices of the participants but allow their contributions to be heard and valued as reflections of their experiences in ways that contributed to an understanding of gender . The decision to use a discussion group offered a method of generating qualitative data which encouraged the participants to share their views and perceptions. It additionally provided a platform for the participants to benefit from a group synergy (Barbour, 2005), in which they were able to respond to and build from others' contributions. Cole (2006:26) states that the interpretative paradigm allows voices and experiences to be heard and it is 'concerned about uncovering knowledge about how people feel and think in the circumstances in which they find themselves' rather than in 'making judgements about whether those thoughts and feelings are valid'. I will return to the issue of validity later in this chapter, but it is important to note that the aim of this research was to consider what EYPs think about gender: the aim was not to determine if they are right or if what they say is deemed to be reasonable by someone else's standard.

5.3.1 Discussion groups

As previously stated, discussion groups (DGs) were used as the main method of collecting data for this project. As a research method discussion groups have both strengths and limitations which will be discussed below. DGs could be seen as a group interview which, according to Barbour (2005), benefits from the creation of synergy from the group dynamics. As suggested by Holloway and Wheeler (2013), the data that was produced was created through social interaction and the data collected and analysed benefitted from an iterative approach in which , following Hsieh and Shannon (2005), the questions, the methods employed and the data were excavated time and time again, allowing changes to the original planning to take place. Having four DGs and a feedback session provided opportunities for the participants to discuss issues, share thoughts, and question the data and its analysis. This resulted in clarifications, reiterations, contradictions and modification of what had previously been thought and planned (Kitzinger, 2005). As outlined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), these practices allowed the creation of new ideas, revisions and

improvements. Thus, the project was data-driven. The questions for the first session (Appendix 1) were created by me to elicit responses from the participants about their understandings of gender in the nursery but thereafter the questions depended on the themes which emerged during the sessions. In the following section I will discuss how the participants were selected and outline the protocols adopted in order that the conditions and settings of this research are transparent.

5.3.2 The discussion group and protocols

The participants selected for the project were BA students studying for an undergraduate qualification in Childhood Practice (QAA, 2007)[8]. I asked the First Year students on the programme to opt in to the research project by posting a message on the University's virtual learning environment along with the Plain Language Statement (PLS) (Appendix 2) I had written when applying for ethical approval for this project (see the ethics section below). I selected this year group as I had not yet taught them and I would not be responsible for the marking of their current course: this has ethical implications which will be considered later in this chapter. My message requested that participants should come from the EY sector of Childhood Practice and I selected the first class group in which eight students responded to the posting. This decision followed advice from Holloway and Wheeler (2013) who suggest that although there is no optimum or definitive number of participants in a discussion group, six to eight individuals would be adequate if those involved come from a similar sphere. Here the similar sphere was the individuals' membership of a learning cohort on the BA in Childhood Practice. The discussion group consisted of eight participants and included individuals in their 20s, 30s, 40s and 50s. This was accidental and had not been part of the selection process, but it did provide a breadth of age and experience of participants working in the EY sectors. The demographic of the group, beyond their shared BA class membership, was not entirely homogenous.
I was aware that the participants who would respond would be women as this reflects not only the demographic of those who study on the programme but, as discussed in Chapter 4, would reflect the profile of practitioners in the field in which 97.5% of practitioners are women (Moss, 2003;Young, 2006). I have already noted that, whilst aware of the importance of intersectionality, my study focussed on gender and sex. Whilst no specific

[1] Childhood Practice consists of students who work in non-compulsory children services; this includes those who work in Early Years, Residential Children's Homes, Women's Refuges and Out of School Services.

information was collected about the individual group participants with respect to social class or socio-economic status (see Rubin et al, 2014[9]), some tentative similarities and differences can be suggested. With regard to aspirations, some of the participants viewed their position on the degree programme as the fulfilment of their earlier potential but some considered degree study to be something that would be normally undertaken by others, not them. Based on my understanding and knowledge of the BA cohorts overall, it is likely that fewer than five per cent were from families in which parents or siblings had a university degree (see Rubin, 2012a,b) Additionally, each group member was white and Scottish, although one wore a hijab, denoting her faith.

Over the five group sessions, attendance was not as consistent as I had envisaged, with sessions varying from four to eight participants because, owing to professional and personal issues, some participants were unable to attend all the sessions. As all the participants received the annotated discussion transcript after each session there was an opportunity for them to know and to reflect on what had been discussed, and to provide feedback or raise questions on the topics discussed when they attended the next session.

In total there were five group sessions, four of which involved discussions of the topics which emerged from the previous meetings. The fifth session was the presentation of the findings from all the discussions and, in that final session, participants were asked to respond to a PowerPoint presentation of themes and analysis discussed in the previous sessions (Appendix 5). In addition, the participants were asked to complete an anonymous evaluation of the research to determine if they thought the discussions had been in any way beneficial to them or their practice (Appendix 4).

5.3.3 The setting.

The discussion groups were held in the University of Glasgow. The participants were informed by email of the dates, times and rooms in which the discussions would be held.

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[2]Rubin et al (2014: 196) take socio-economic status (SES) as 'one's current social and economic situation … relatively mutable, especially in countries that provide opportunities for economic advancement' whereas social class 'refers to one's sociocultural background', a more stable construct likely to be static across generations.

The room was set up with a video recorder and a microphone and the discussions lasted approximately an hour. At the first meeting the participants read and signed the PLS (Appendix 2-see ethics section below). The participants were informed that I would record the sessions with both an audio and video recorder. I clarified that the video was for my benefit to identify participants talking (Hennink, 2007) and was not for the purpose of examining non-verbal communication. There was also a need to reinforce discussion protocols, as discussed by Wisker (2008), in order that the recording could contain as many of the participants' voices and opinions as possible and so, for example, everyone had to guard against talking over each other.

At the first session, after the PLS (Appendix 2) was read, I asked the participants to consider if they still wished to participate and assured them that they could withdraw from the research at any time (Holloway and Wheeler, 2013). I also explained that once I had transcribed the recordings and analysed the transcription, providing notes indicating the codes and themes I had identified along with comments, I would send a copy to each of the participants by email. In keeping with a data-driven approach, the participants could, if they wished, suggest new topics for discussion or contest any of my assumptions. Hence the next iteration was based upon the themes from the previous discussion and, as suggested by Hsieh and Shannon (2005), the participants could raise any issues. The attempt to engage the participants in the construction of the themes and explanations was to allow the information gathered to be plausible, realistic and believable to them (Guba and Lincoln, 2005b; Silverman, 2006). It also provided an opportunity for the participants to reconsider their previous contributions and it demonstrated my commitment to them being valued in the research process (Kezar and Dee, 2011). Following Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007), in the interest of being ethical (see below) I wanted to provide opportunities for the participants to challenge and respond to the data collected and analysed. Whilst no-one did suggest additional topics, some participants did clarify previous contributions. The next section details the processes involved in producing the transcripts sent to the participants.

5.4 Transcribing and analysis of the data

After the first session, the transcription process started with the allocation of an identifier to each participant in order to provide them with anonymity (research participant [RP] and a number, for example: RP1).The data was also coded showing the DG in which the

comment had been made, for example DG1 indicates discussion group one and so a comment made during discussion group one by participant one is coded as DG1RP1. Following Corden and Sainsbury (2006), who indicate that the identity of the participants should be protected, only the group and I know to whom the identifier referred in keeping with the ethical considerations which I will discuss later. Each recording produced qualitative data that allowed the discussion to be analysed following transcription and, as suggested by Hennink (2007), transcribing the data was not a passive activity. The preparation of the transcript allowed a comparison to be made between what I remembered being said and what was actually said. This helped to ensure the accuracy of the content of the data (Halcomb and Davidson, 2006). It also helped with analysis as, during the session, I had made inevitable mental notes which were confirmed, or not, by the transcript thereby allowing the initial recognition and identification of patterns and themes. Vaughan et al. (1996) recommend re-listening to the transcription for data analysis as this allows the identification of themes, contradictions and things missed at the time. For example, my impression after the first session was that the participants did not think that gendering occurred in the baby room and this was confirmed when I re-listened to the recording. However, I had believed that the participants had also acknowledged gendering in the pre-5 room but I found that, generally, they did not state this and in reality it was more my probing that challenged their view that gendering did not occur at all in the nursery.

5.4.1 Transcription analysis during the research process

The data analysis started as soon as the research process began and was supported by the reading and annotation of the transcript, during which it was possible to identify recurring themes or categories and to make notes about remarks which supported or contradicted previous comments. This helped to organise the data into manageable parts (Holloway and Wheeler, 2013). I also looked at word occurrence in the transcript and noted, for example, how often the words ‘boy’, ‘girl’, ‘pink’, or ‘blue’ occurred. I did not always find this particularly useful in interpreting the transcript as the words required a context to help me interpret what was said. I did, however, following Holloway and Wheeler (2013), look closely at the types of anecdotes told as these were accounts of experiences and could therefore be considered important as they provided specific examples from the participants’ practices that illustrated their points of view or understandings. For example,

the participants reported that it tends to be boys who play with construction materials and it is only when something is added to the area that girls will play in it.[10]

Vignette 5.1: Participants comment on play in the construction area (DG3)

> *Maybe 'cause they're not in the construction area as much as the boys are...the girls in my place will maybe be in the construction area if the doll's house is out but they wouldn't choose to go in...*RP5
> *so it's the doll's house they're playing with..*RP3
> *yes...they wouldn't choose to go in and build with the Lego or the Stickle Bricks or whatever...*RP5
> *...or build a doll's house* RP4

From the initial analysis, themes such as colour, play and stereotypes emerged as the participants discussion focused on these topics. I also isolated particular questions or statements that I wished to clarify during the next DG. The process of analysis was inductive, with explanations shifting from explicit interpretation of what was said to broader generalisations (Hollinshead, 1996; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) and, by its nature, it was open-ended and tentative: I was not seeking nor expecting definitive 'answers'. Issues which had resonated with my academic reading or were of interest to me were also pursued. For instance, as can be seen from the comment below, RP8 appears to suggest that practitioners needed to teach boys to be boys and girls to be girls. Presenting the data for clarification allowed me to take this to the next session to check my interpretation and to seek some clarification of what was meant. This approach, revisiting what has been said, as recommended by Baikie (2009), afforded me the opportunity to build or (re)consider suggestions that emerged. For example I noted during DG1 that there appear to be many stories (seven out of eight) about boys breaking the gender norm by dressing up, playing with dolls, being described as boys getting:

> *...in touch with their feminine side*.
> DG1RP6

I therefore asked:

[10] Please note vignettes will include conversations where more than one participant's voice is evident. Where a view or comment is made by only one person, the quote will appear on its own in italics.

Do you think people respond more strongly to boys breaking with stereotypes? Is there less of a reaction/response when girls break the stereotypical mould?
Researcher DG1

The identified themes and areas for further investigation produced from what was said opened up new areas for investigation in which the analysis of the data provided me with a platform from which to plan the subsequent sessions. In addition, I could pose questions based on the transcript analysis, by identifying particular comments and quotes which could be pursued. This also meant that the participants were given time to think about how they would like to respond. As recommended by Corden and Sainsbury (2006: 98), the examination of the data and involvement of the participants helped to 'clarify the links between data, interpretation and conclusions'. The specific inclusion of the participants' voices demonstrated that their words were 'valued ... heard and represented' (Holloway and Wheeler, 2013:326). For example, as mentioned above, the following question was raised after DG1:

Question: *How do you feel about this comment? Do you agree?*
I do think children need to know if they are a boy or a girl...and I know we try to give them opportunities for everything but I don't think there is anything wrong in letting a boy be a boy and a girl be a girl. It's what we are doing.
DG1RP8 (Transcript sent to the participants)

This comment appeared to imply that children should know what it is to be a boy or a girl and that it is the practitioner's role to help teach children how to know this. Taking this specific comment back to the next discussion session allowed the participants to refute or to confirm my understanding or to modify what they had said. At the next session it was confirmed, not just by RP8, that the group believed that it was their job to help children know about being a boy or a girl and I will return to this in Chapter 6.

Once the group had received the transcript from the first discussion group, the topics and the questions discussed became more open and were based on the participants' responses and interests rather than being directed by me. This flexibility provided opportunities for the flow of conversation to go in directions not planned (Kreuger and Casey, 2000) and gave time and scope for individuals to discuss their perception and knowledge (Morse and Richards, 2002). In addition, there was some evidence from the participants' feedback that that the discussion had provoked feelings and thoughts about gender that they had not previously considered. For example, during the initial directed discussion, every

participant when asked expressed the belief they did not treat children differently based upon their gender. However, during open discussions participants appeared to have reflected on what had been said.

Vignette 5.2: Participants reflect on the DGs (DG3)

> *Well I suppose when you think about parents coming to visit the nursery for the first time then...when I think about it...I probably do...respond differently by saying things like 'oh she's so petite, she's lovely', whereas a wee boy I'd go 'oh he's a big boy for his age'.* RP3
> *I think subconsciously we maybe do or say certain things that we don't realise.* RP6

Thematic analysis, which is a data-driven approach described by Braun and Clarke (2006), was used to examine the discussion group data after the research process was completed. This allowed an in-depth examination to identify themes generated by the participants' explanations and ideas about gender. Whilst the data guided the presentation of the themes that I will discuss in the following chapters, theory also underpinned the examination and explanations of what was said, with the ideas and concepts from reading providing me with a starting point for the questions initially posed to the participant. Reading also gave direction to the identification of codes, categories and themes of transcripts. Braun and Clarke (2006:89) suggest that 'engagement with the literature can enhance your analysis', allowing the researcher to be more perceptive and cognisant in the examination of the data. The resulting themes make it possible to create links to existing theory and research to suggest strengths, weaknesses, and confirmation or alternative interpretations of what was said. This will be discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7.

5.4.2 Transcription analysis after the discussion groups

Following Miles and Huberman (1994), coding the data formed part of the analysis and involved sorting the transcripts to identify key ideas. It was necessary to continuously refer back to what was said so that the context for the comments was not lost (*ibid)*. It was therefore necessary to read and then re-read the transcripts a few times to fully acquaint myself with their content. From these readings I identified codes (Diagram 6.1-brown) which were based on topics that emerged across the transcripts. Initially, I colour coded by

highlighting the transcript but eventually found this to be unmanageable and so resorted to cutting up the transcript and sorting it under the headings I had identified when I typed up the recordings. For instance, initially I identified themes such as play, colour and stereotypes as being present in the data. As I progressed through the sorting of the transcripts I added to the codes as new ones emerged; such as, heteronormativity and changes to stereotypes emerged as codes which I had not previously noted. Once the transcripts had been sorted I merged the codes into categories (Diagram 6.1- purple) where commonalities in the codes where considered, for instance 'boys' behaviour', 'girls' behaviour' and 'behaviours exhibited by both sexes' with toys, which had been identified as separate codes, were put under the category of play behaviours with toys . From this, the categories were then amalgamated to identify three overarching themes (Diagram 6.1- orange) the nature of gender, stereotypes and play which allowed all codes and categories to be included. Once the themes were identified, further analysis of the data allowed possible explanations for what has been said to be considered (Appendix 6, 7, 8: extracts of data analysis under themes). The findings provide a platform to formulate recommendations to improve EYPs' awareness and practice relating to gender. Further to this analysis of the transcripts, the toy survey results were collated and analysed as will be discussed in the next section.

5.4.3 Toy Survey

In keeping with the iterative data-driven nature of the research, the participants introduced a focus on gender, as it relates to play and toys. It appeared that the participants believed that the nursery staff played no role in the children's choices of toys and play, as children's interests were believed to lead their learning from play. In response to this, I introduced a Toy Survey (Appendix 3). I hoped that this survey would provide an opportunity for the participants to consider whether they thought boys and girls would play with specific toys. Ärlemalm-Hagsér (2010) suggest that practitioners reinforce and support the development of gender schemas through their selection of toys and Erden and Wolfgang (2004) propose that practitioners' attitudes towards toys have a significant effect on children's choices of toys. I wanted to see if the practitioners' beliefs about toy preference for the sexes, as expressed during the DG sessions, would reflect the choices they made in the survey. In addition, I believed the survey could provide me with an insight into whether the participants' choices of toys in the nursery setting were based on the sex of the children.

The survey was based on research conducted by Blakemore and Centers (2005), who asked university students to categorise a selection of toys. I did make some changes to the toy survey in response to the content of the discussions. For example, one participant had suggested the colour of a vacuum cleaner would determine the sex of the user. I also updated some of the toys to reflect the current toy market. The survey asked the participants to note who they thought would play with the particular toys. The survey was left open to interpretation to allow the participants to decide if this was based on their perceptions of the toys purposed or if they had actually seen children play with the specific toys. The categories for analysis were based on the original survey but amended to show toys which came under the following adjacent headings where there was a response of 80% (Chapter 7):

- always girls/generally girls
- generally girls/both boys and girls
- both boys and girls
- generally boys/ both boys and girls
- generally boys/always boys.

Once the toy survey data was collated and analysed, the results were then additionally categorised by colour under the following identified by Blakemore and Centres (2005:627).

Table 5:1 Coding categories and colours:

Musical	
Scientific	
Domestic	
Attractive	
Aggression	
Construction	
Occupational	
Arts/crafts	
Nurturing	
Activity	
Creative/superheroes	
Physical	

The results from the survey were sent to the participants after DG3 along with the transcript so that the findings could be discussed during the subsequent session, in which

participants commented on whether there were any surprises or any issues they wished to raise.

5.4.4 Extending the toy survey

After the results from the toy survey had been collated and examined, I wanted to ascertain if the responses were particular to this group, who had been discussing the significance of play and gender, or whether the views were more representative of those who worked in EY. After applying to University's College Ethics Committee for further approval, I asked those who worked in EYs and were undertaking a BA in Childhood Practice at the University of Glasgow to complete the survey. I received 92 responses. An analysis of the extended survey and the group discussion survey was undertaken in order that the information could be comprehensively presented and commonalities and differences identified. The results are presented and discussed in Chapter 7 where, apart from a few anomalies, the wider survey and the DG survey appeared to concur with each other and previous research.

The use of this survey does raise methodological issues. In some ways the survey is not congruent with the interpretative paradigm used overall. I used the Toy Survey not because I thought my qualitative data was inadequate but because my interviewees had talked about toys and, aware that the Toy Survey existed, I thought it might allow me to probe further and to see, tentatively, if a wider group had similar reactions to my participant group. I was not, however, using the Toy Survey to formally triangulate my qualitative, interview data. Neither was I using the Toy Survey to establish convergence or to seek confirmation with the interpretative, qualitative interview data. I was using it to allow participants to elaborate further and to initiate further areas for consideration, by asking a bigger group of participants about gender and toys in a search for 'the provocative' (Rossman and Wilson, 1985:633). Whilst some people might suggest that my use of the Toy Survey renders my study 'mixed method', I follow Howe and Eisenhart (1990) in using it as part of a "whatever works" approach, here as a post-positivist research instrument used alongside, but ultimately as part of, my overall interpretative approach in the belief that qualitative and quantitative approaches are not, necessarily, mutually exclusive (Sandelowski, 2000). However, there were flaws in the Toy Survey and I return to these in the final Chapter (8.3.2) when I discuss the limitations of my study.

Overall, the methods employed for this research were effective for collecting data relating to my guiding research question on the views and perceptions of gender by EYPs. However, as with all methods, there are strengths and weakness. In the next section, I will discuss these and clarify how I attempted to address any limitations.

5.5. Strengths and limitations of the methods

One of the strengths of undertaking research using group discussions, as highlighted by Morgan (1997), is that they are relatively straightforward to conduct. Rather than organising multiple single interviews with each participant, it was possible to plan for five group meetings with eight people. Participants were able to build, refute, question, reflect and modify what they and others contributed to the discussion (Morgan, 1997). These interactions encourage individuals to recall thoughts, stories and feelings from their practice and their personal experiences, which produced more ideas than would be possibly collected from individual interviews (Holloway and Wheeler, 2013). However, there are also limitations to this approach, as indicated by Reid (2004), which I will now seek to highlight and discuss.

5.5.1 Participants and their responses

The participants involved in the project were generally forthcoming and willing to contribute opinions and views. However, as Barbour (2001) points out, one of the drawbacks of group discussion is that dominant participants can take over the conversations resulting in the data not providing an in-depth account of everyone's individual opinions and experiences. This did occur at the first meeting, with RP3 and RP5 tending to speak more often than anyone else, but it did not continue and in the subsequent sessions all participants contributed, although not always equally. Morgan (1997) cautions that the artificial nature of the discussion group environment can lead to the suggestion that the data collected is not fully representative of the opinions of the group, as individuals may choose to not contribute their views. This, he claims, is because the discussion does not emerge from the participants' natural environment, in which they would perhaps be more likely to express their true or natural thoughts or feelings. Discussing issues and topics in an artificially created group, not initiated or directed by the participants, could potentially result in individuals feeling compelled to offer opinions

which they believe the moderator wants to hear rather than expressing their true opinion. Similarly, participants may contribute opinions they think are appropriate to help support the discussion, and the researcher, and those views may not always reflect what they truly believe (Barbour, 2005). The desire to help the researcher might also be amplified if, as in this case, that researcher is a tutor, indeed the Programme Leader, of the participants' course. This raises ethical issues, which will be discussed later in the ethics section of this chapter and, in order to minimise the effects of such ethically focussed influences, I make no claim that these issues were or could have been completely eradicated. However, having a series of sessions allowed the participants to get to know each other better and start to relax. Also sending everyone a copy of what had been discussed gave time for individuals to consider what had been said, providing them with an opportunity to cogitate on their own and others' contributions and allowing time and space to consider what they might want to discuss or challenge next time. Moreover, selecting individuals who were in the same class cohort, where they were used to providing their opinions, including managing different opinions during class debates, afforded the opportunity for them to get to know each other beyond the discussion group setting. This appeared to help the participants to get used to talking in front of each other and the increase in contributions by all participants during the sessions could be indicative of them relaxing into the discussion group arena. At the end of the process, I wanted to check this and asked the participants to anonymously complete a feedback response on the sessions (Appendix 4) and evaluation sheet (Appendix 5) which allowed them to respond to the PowerPoint presentation of the initial findings. I decided to make the responses anonymous so that the individuals did not have to respond to me face to face, increasing the likelihood of them responding honestly to the questions. The evaluation (Appendix 5) also gave them a final chance to comment on the themes and analysis and also provide feedback on the research process as a whole. The following comment is indicative of the responses given by those who made a comment in this section:

> *I really enjoyed the discussions, in particular how you might start out with a certain train of thought and how this could be altered through other peoples' thoughts and opinions. It made me look at the practices within my establishment.*
>
> (Anon – end evaluation: Appendix 5)

5.5.2 The discussion group environment

As noted above, creating an environment which allowed the participants the opportunity to relax during the sessions was important as it enabled them to make contributions to the discussions. I endeavoured to promote a reciprocal environment in which all opinions were welcomed (Glazer and Strauss, 1967; Morgan, 1997), with questioning and building on what had been said encouraged as exemplified below.

Vignette 5.3: Participants build the discussion to clarify explanations (DG2)

I think you can just tell the difference between a boys' and a girls' top - girls' tops have flowers and there's maybe wee ribbons on it or something. RP8
Yes...the details. RP4
*If it is a boys' it is straight and I've seen boys' tops maybe with footballs on them...*RP6
right Researcher
*pictures of cars...*RP3
*emblems and things....*RP5
*so... just different.*RP7
*they are made different....*RP5
*they have what maybe you would consider.....what a boys' thing on it..... maybe a car or a football...*RP8

However, creating 'open and undistorted communication', as recommended by Holstein and Gubrium (1997:116) in order to obtain 'authentic accounts of subjective experience' (Silverman, 2006:123), initially required a discussion with the participants to encourage them to interact with each other and not just to respond to me as the moderator (Kitzinger, 1994). As noted by Wellings et al. (2000) and Wilkinson (2004), as the participants became more relaxed in the group, which can be seen in the extract above, they seemed more willing to share their experiences by providing personal accounts which illustrated an understanding of gender with the recounting of stories to illustrate the points being made.

> *I have a really good example...I was in shopping yesterday with my son and we were getting a card for a birthday party for next week for a wee girl called xxxx and right away I took him to the section and I've went through all the pink cards and he picked up the Mario card and I says no XXXX put that back it's for a boy and he said mummy she's a girl but she does boy things. And I said, can you explain that to me and he says she likes football and she likes doing all the things the boys do at playtime. And I was still drawing him towards the pink cards 'cause I'm thinking I don't want that mother thinking I bought a wee*

girl a boy's card but he could tell me himself she is a girl but she likes boys' things.
DG1RP5

Whilst it can be seen from the extract above that the participants appeared happy to engage in discussion with me, my relationship with them as their tutor was an area that required examination.

5.5.3 Relationships

As the Programme Leader of the BA in Childhood Practice, a power relationship existed between me and the individuals involved, since they were 'my' students. As mentioned previously, I had selected a group that I had not taught but it was still necessary to address the issue of being a tutor at the first session. It was made clear, as there were ethical implications, through both discussion and the PLS (Appendix 2), that any involvement would be considered separately from their role as my student; it would not positively or negatively affect their grades.

My relationship as the researcher and moderator of the group was another area for consideration. My role was to ask questions and at times prompt and probe for clarification, as any group member could do, in order to produce ideas. As Holloway and Wheeler (2013) note, it was important to listen to the voices of the participants and allow them to talk and so it was, at times, necessary for me not to intervene with my questions and I had to let the group dynamics evolve so that the participants could express their ideas experiences and opinions (Morgan, 1997). I also had to let the group take the discussion in ways I might not have chosen (Kirby et al., 2006). My fears of not collecting sufficient and worthwhile data for my dissertation had to be put to one side. As noted earlier, this approach allowed topics and areas for discussion to emerge that I had not planned (Kitzinger, 1994) and so, for example, there ensued a greater focus on the relationship between boys' play and their sexuality and a discussion relating to fathers' responses to cross gender play. This resulted in data being generated and collected that I had not anticipated, but it was data that, nonetheless, reflected the views of the participants.

In addition, providing the participants with the opportunity to be involved in the future planning of topics provided 'a forum for the expression of the experiences and thoughts of

the participants' (Kirby et al., 2006:243). I therefore, following Somekh and Lewin (2005), encouraged relationships in which the central tenets were trust and the valuing of others' opinions and that the principles fitted with the axiology of the project. Involving the participants in creating and analysing the data reflected the conditions and values of those involved (Kezar and Dee, 2011:268) and being sensitive to the power relationships that existed helped me ensure an ethical response to the research process. This method followed Groundwater-Smith and Mockler's (2007) approach to practitioner research, in which individuals are encouraged to question, reframe, moderate or extend what had previously been said, thereby making the data more credible and valid than had the researcher forced and controlled the discourse. In the next section, I present the ethical considerations of the project as a requirement to protect the participants and to work critically in a research project in which ethics go beyond 'boxes to be ticked as a set of procedural conditions, usually demanded by university human research ethics committees' (*ibid*:205).

5.6 Ethics

Undertaking academic research at the University of Glasgow requires the submission of an application to the University's Ethics Committee. However, as will be discussed, ethics go beyond that sort of compliance as they are 'informed by values which assemble into a values system' (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2007:204). In the next two sections I will present the process of ethical approval required by the University of Glasgow, highlighting the values that underpin the approval process. A set of criteria, suggested by Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007), will be used to examine the ethical integrity of this project. This will be followed by a consideration of 'goodness' versus 'validity and reliability', in which the quality of the research situates ethics, based on the concept of goodness, alongside considerations of the trustworthiness and authenticity of the research.

5.6.1 Ethics approval – compliance and considerations

There should be ethical considerations evident in all research studies since there can be a conflict between the intention of research and the need to protect the participants. Ethics therefore relates to goodness (Tobin and Begley, 2004). Harm can be prevented or reduced through the application of appropriate ethical principles and the protection of participants in any research study is imperative. Following Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007),

the five criteria suggested to ensure a study is ethical are not limited specifically to an ethics section of an ethical approval form-filling process, rather they relate to the project as a whole and throughout this Chapter the reader has been alerted to particular ethical considerations. The criteria suggested here afford adherence to descriptions of 'goodness' (Tobin and Bezely, 2004), in which due consideration for the protection and wellbeing of the participants is evident. Accordingly, the following criteria drove this research study. Where the research should:

- observe ethical protocols and processes
- be transparent in its processes
- be collaborative in nature
- be able to justify itself to its community of practice
- be transformative in its intent and actions
- and be able to justify itself to its community of practice.

Adapted from Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007:205-206).

The ethical approval procedures require that those involved should give their consent to be part of the project. This means that there needs to be a clear description of what will be involved and what will happen to them if they agree to take part. The over-riding philosophy of research should be 'do no harm' and as part of the University of Glasgow's requirements I applied to the Ethics Committee for approval. This process involved providing an outline of the dissertation proposal with a proposed methodology and attention to the analysis of data. Additionally, the application required information about how the data would be stored, used and destroyed once the research project had been concluded. Before ethical approval could be granted it was necessary to establish that the project would not subject participants to unprincipled practices or would violate their privacy and so what was said should not be attributable to identifiable individuals. The PLS (Appendix 2), included in the application and given to the participants to read before the project could commence, outlined what commitment would be required and why they had been selected and provided a clear indication that participation or non-participation would be voluntary and would not affect their progress in BA programme. A consent form was also included to be signed to indicate agreement to be involved and to have the discussions audio and video recorded. The voluntary nature of being involved was highlighted in the opening welcome (DG1) in which it was emphasised that participants could withdraw from the research at anytime and that they would be given a code to

protect their identity in the transcript. These procedures provided the participants with choice and made transparent what would be involved, including the level of contribution expected in the production and analysis of the data.

The methods adopted allowed the participants 'to share, discuss and debate aspects of their practice' (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007:205). From the discussions, the individuals reflected on and consider their practice in relation to gender. This offered opportunities 'to create actionable, actioned outcomes' (*ibid:*205) that might, I hoped, have implications for the individual's practice communities as exemplified below:

> *I have discussed this briefly with my staff team and they also found it an interesting topic. We also discussed the things we may subconsciously do to gender children. I would be keen to look more closely on this topic.*
>
> *This has certainly made me question and reflect on my practice and that of my colleagues. I found this very interesting and a useful basis for reflection in my personal and professional practice.*
>
> (Anonymous feedback/evaluations-Appendix 5)

The examination of ethics leads to the consideration of the value of the research being presented. Lincoln (1995:287) argues that 'the standards for quality in interpretive social science are also standards for ethics' and so, in the next section, I will consider if the project has consistently conformed to the standards anticipated in an ethical interpretative study.

5.6.2 Ethics and 'goodness'

As discussed above, goodness in an interpretative paradigm needs to be an encompassing standard and should be evident throughout the project. However, before proceeding to examine the project by this standard, it is important to note that there exists much debate about how to assess the worthiness of research in an interpretative paradigm. Traditionally, the terms validity and reliability have been associated with positivist research, which seeks, often, to establish cause and effect. By contrast, studies in the interpretative paradigm, in which qualitative research values voices and experiences, cannot be assessed using tests for reliability and validity according to Whittemore et al. (2001). Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007:233) assert: 'to date, no one definition of validity represents a hegemony in

qualitative research'. It is argued that quantitative and qualitative research should not be evaluated by the same criteria as positivist, often quantitative research, and it is suggested that qualitative validity should be tested by criteria specifically created for that since the data produced often serves a distinctive purpose and offers a significance quite distinct from quantitative research (Koro-Ljungberg, 2008). However, Morse (1999) argues that the rejection of validity and reliability could result in the criticism that qualitative research is not thorough and does not genuinely contribute to the development of knowledge. To guard against such criticism, Van Maanen (2011:xv) argues that qualitative research should consider the 'underrated criteria of apparency and verisimilitude', in which there is a requirement that research reporting offers an accurate representation of what happened and that the research is conducted in an ethical manner.

Whilst debate continues with regard to validity and reliability in interpretative research, I nonetheless 'embrace a more illuminative approach when offering evidence of goodness' (Tobin and Begley, 2004:390). Following Guba and Lincoln (2005b), the research presented here does not lend itself to validity in the traditional sense shown by cause and effect or generalisable findings that reflect a single, unassailable 'truth'. Rather the ethical connection, in terms of 'goodness', between me as the researcher and my participants, requires that I ensure that the accounts presented are authentic and accurate. Similarly, and according to Silverman (2006:202), asking people what they think and feel provides 'authenticity' if there is evidence of the voices of the participants being presented accurately. Asking the participants to read, challenge, modify or clarify what had been recorded provided opportunities for them to validate their contributions. Thus, as far as possible, this project adhered to the tenets of 'goodness' with every attempt made to guarantee that all ethical requirements were followed, including the verification of the transcripts to ensure that the processes were transparent and confirmed that the project was collaborative (Groundwater-Smith and Mockler, 2007).

5.7 The way forward

Over the next two chapters, the data will be presented and discussed, allowing tentative conclusions to be drawn, from a process in which the 'data, and the ideas generated from the data, are required to build an argument that establishes the point or points you wish to make' (Bazeley, 2009:7). The process will go further than theme identification or

establishing that patterns exist in the data collected. It will, therefore, be necessary to make links to theory and demonstrate that the conclusions reached emerge from findings in the context of other research and literature in order to make connections and draw useful conclusions.

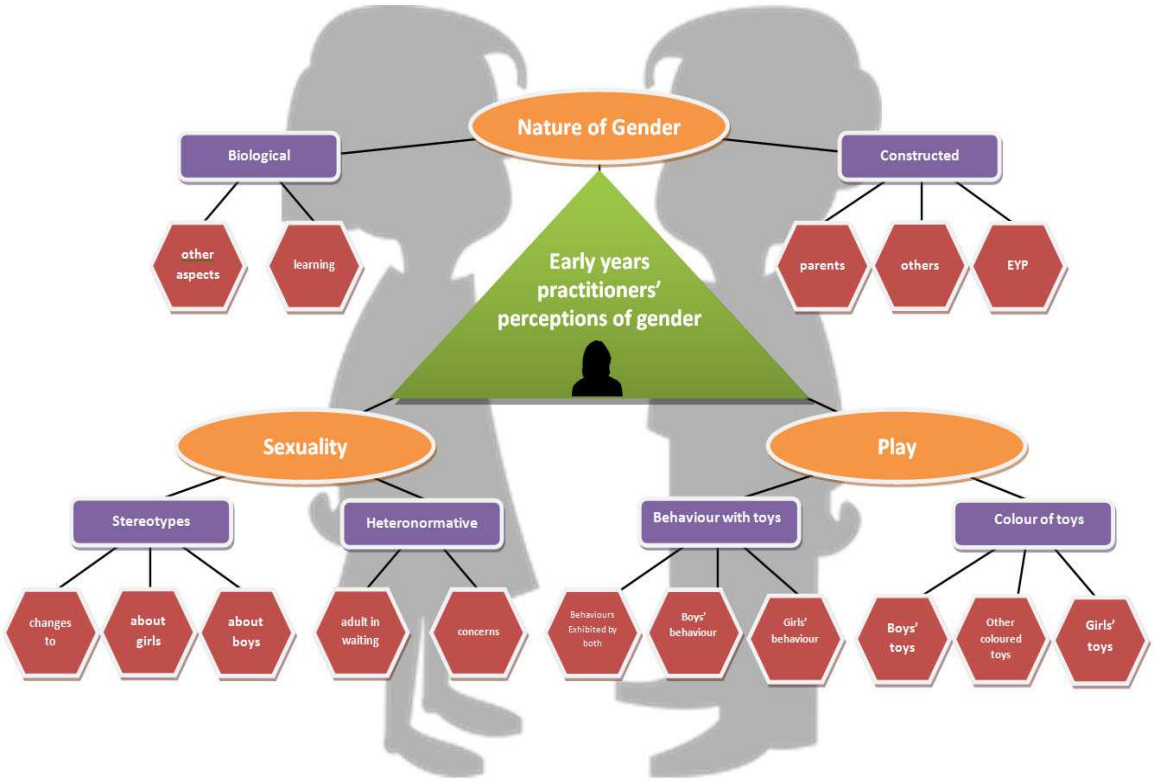
Chapter 6 – The Nature of Gender[11]

They've grown up with mixture of toys and mixture of things and allowed to do all sorts of things...so....but there are still definitely differences.

RP3DG1

6.1 Introduction

Diagram 6.1 Thematic analyses of the data from the DGs



In the following two chapters the analysis, presentation and discussion of the data collected, as described in Chapter 5 (section 5.4), will provide a platform from which to develop an account which illuminates my research investigation: *An old issue in a new era:*

[11] The appendices referred to are typical extracts from the transcripts and toy surveys. Full versions are available.

Early year practitioners' understanding of gender. The discussion group data which is discussed here is, following Holliday (2007), rich in the sense that relevant aspects and issues identified allow arguments to be presented which provide further explanation, modification and further confirmation of existing theories which relate to gender.

The four discussion groups provided a plethora of data and in order to derive meaning and explanations from it, the data were sorted by adopting a thematic analytical approach. As noted by Braun and Clarke (2006), this method was flexible and allowed key features to be considered and summarised, allowing connections to be made. Thus, an explanation of and, an association with what was said by the participants and the explanations offered by me will be credible (*ibid*). The analysis of the data provided codes and categories which in turn suggested three overarching themes being present: the nature of gender, sexuality and play (see Diagram 6.1, above). As recommended by Robert-Holmes (2003), the categories associated with each theme, will also be presented and discussed as they relate to the arguments and issues which further my investigations. The diagram 6.1 above illustrates that there is a hierarchy of themes, where the nature of gender is the principal theme because it permeated all the DGs and predicated the participants' understanding of children's gender behaviour in the nursery. By this I mean the nature of gender and its features were fundamental to how the participants understood the reported gender behaviours as can be seen from the typical comment that opened this chapter. This resulted in the nature of gender dominating the participants' understanding of the other elements discussed. Therefore, the analysis, presentation and discussions will be presented over two chapters: Chapter 6 which will consider the theme focusing on the nature of gender (Appendix 6–Extract from analysis) followed by Chapter 7 which will examine the two subordinate themes of sexuality and play (Appendix 7 and 8–Extracts from analysis). The toy survey data from both the DG and from the wider survey (WS) group, which were analysed using categories adapted from Blakemore and Centres (2005), will be discussed under the theme of play (Appendix 9- toy survey analysis). Finally, issues for further consideration will be highlighted for discussion in Chapter 8.

6.1.1 Analysis as an iterative process

In this research project the data analysis is descriptive and exploratory and as such adopts an iterative approach in order to seek meaning and develop interpretive explanations.

Berkowitz (1997) emphasises the examination and re-examination of the data to allow new connections to be revealed and more complex constructions to be developed. Thus, a deeper understanding of the information is assembled. This includes adopting techniques to interrogate what is uncovered and to apply theory to explain and unravel content. As discussed in Chapter 5, Braun and Clarke (2006), advocate the use of literature to provide depth to the examination of data. This allows a more insightful and cognisant investigation. As part of this process, the analysis of the data revealed aspects I had anticipated and which related to the literature and discussions pertinent to the construction of gender. However, there were some unexpected findings which related to the nursery environment and, as will be discussed in this chapter they appear to add to the (re)production and (re)creation of binary expectations. In addition, as discussed by Foucault (2003), these contribute to and are sustained in an environment where practices that work with other practices, beyond the nursery, constitute a societal definition of gender.

6.2 Nature of gender

This chapter focuses on the nature of gender as discussed by the participants. At the start of the research everyone was asked to consider if they believed gender to be innate or whether they considered it to be created, although this topic was both explicitly and implicitly referred to throughout the DG meetings. The participants appeared to oscillate between a number of positions: explaining gendered behaviours, physical features, learning and attitudes to gender as being either biological or created by others. All the participants expressed unfounded biological deterministic views, which reflect traditional folk wisdom, and which were institution based. Yet there was an acknowledgement that gender could be influenced and created by those beyond the nursery environment. Mixtures of beliefs, where ideas existed within other ideas or beliefs, presented a multi-layered understanding of gender which, at times, appeared to be muddled or contradictory. As discussed in Chapters 2-4, this mirrors much of the research which as noted by Butler (1990, 1993) indicates that it is not always possible to clearly make claims that attribute all gender characteristics to solely innate or environmental factors. This is because determining exactly where biological influences ends and where behaviours which are influenced by culture or environment begin is not possible. Here I present and examine two categories as discussed by the participants and where theory is used to develop a deeper understanding of what was said.

6.2.1 Gender viewed as biological phenomena

In response to the initial question of whether the participants believed gender to be innate or learned, everyone said they thought that there were fundamental immutable aspects of gender, such as the comment that opens this chapter and the following:

> *Boys have a more logical brain and...they say boys have a more logical brain which can accept maths and numbers more easily than girls can.*
>
> DG1RP1

> *...baby boys have a different shape of head than baby girls.*
>
> DG1RP3

> *I think from a young age wee boys and girls have a different manner in the way they come across*
>
> DG1RP8

These comments suggest that the participants believed that there are physical, biological and psychological differences which mark boys and girls out as being different. The comments made show a tendency to interchangeably use the terms sex and gender. This is similarly noted by Meyer (2010), who says that often the sex differences; male/female, boy/girl, are confused with socially acquired notions of masculine and feminine. It is possible that this confusion has added to, or has led to, assumptions that biological differences explain observed dissimilarities in learning and other aspects such as behaviours.

All the participants reported that there were particular attitudes and areas of learning they believed were natural and specific to the sexes. Table 6:1 illustrates reported gender preferences that girls and boys show towards particular learning. The participants all confirmed that boys take more time to settle to activities and that their concentration tends to be fleeting. Conversely, girls were associated with language and creative activities where they were reported as exhibiting more passive behaviours and the ability to focus for periods of time. Whilst it was generally proposed that the children display gender differences in their choices for where and what they learned, a few participants acknowledged that some children showed preferences which were opposite to the manner associated with their sex. However, these accounts were often presented as exceptions. The

information presented below illustrates the areas that the participants indicated that the sexes prefer. It should be noted that this table does not record the frequency of how often the sites were mentioned but rather records that reference to these locations were made and were not challenged by the other participants.

Table 6:1 Reported preferred sites of learning

Subjects	Girls	Boys
Art	√	
Climbing frames (big physical equipment etc)		√
Computers		√
Construction toys: Building blocks etc		√
Dancing	√	
Language	√	
Maths		√
Outdoor	√	√
Reading	√	
Role play	√	
Sand		√
Singing	√	
Water		√
Writing	√	

The participants reported that the sexes showed particular aptitudes: girls demonstrate higher levels of verbal competences and empathy, and boys show strengths in the performance of mathematical tasks and show higher levels of physical activity (Chapter 3). Both boys and girls were reported as enjoying the outdoor learning environment. However, as will be discussed under the theme of play (Chapter 7.3), the participants expressed the belief that how children learn and play in the same settings, and with particular toys, is conceived of differently due to gender differences.

The assignment of specific gender behaviours as described by the participants reflects biological deterministic traditions and the current popular literature—Baron-Cohen (2003), Gurian (2002) and Sax (2005)—which has been the focus of media attention and may have influenced the opinions offered. The view that girls and boys learn differently, and through different media, illustrates the theory of the male and female brain (see Chapter 2). Baron-Cohen (2003) claims that the different sex hormones children are exposed to, both before

and after birth, will result in males and females exhibiting different learning styles attendant upon different brain development. Gurian (2002:31) suggests that boys are hard-wired to have enhanced auditory recall, tend to be more inclined to have 'three-dimensional reasoning' and are generally drawn to exploration, because of the makeup of their brain chemistry and hormones. These particular behaviours echo those described in Baron-Cohen's (2003) theory of *systemizing*, where he claims that boys have a natural instinct to understand and create systems, from their inclination to use computers to their ability to follow maps. Baron-Cohen (*ibid*) contrasts this with the ability to empathise which he claims is a female characteristic resulting in them being less able to systemise. Women, he argues, have larger language and organising areas in their brains which allow them to empathise and use language to form relationships and seek communications. He claims that these traits result in men and women displaying distinct aptitudes towards particular recreational and occupational pursuits. The participants' comments, with regards to how girls and boys learn, lies between folklore and the media literatures which converge to promote stereotypical understandings:

> *I think it is because girls tend to have more concentration that they pick it up and I think because girls can be...use more things like babies and stories but boys are always physical and doing things like that. So it is obviously going take a bit longer to build their concentration if you think about it that way.*
> DG1RP8

The participants acknowledged and confirmed that nursery education practices are adopted to accommodate these perceived differences between the sexes, in order to meet the children's individual needs. Typically, an area underused by one of the sexes will be incentivised with the incorporation of a toy which is reported to be of interest to that sex:

> *I would say...for example we did tend to have a lot of boys playing in it* (construction) *so we put a castle in it...with some ponies so now the girls will build bridges for their ponies...and doing different things like that.*
> DG1RP8

The reported behaviours are related to what popular research appears to shows. The following short vignette demonstrates the confirmation and affirmation that the participants give to each other to support commonly held opinions which give credence to and corroboration of biological differences requiring differentiated practices and approaches to the children's learning based on their sex:

Vignette 6.1 :Participants confirm and give credence to biological differences (DG1)

> *I mean they do say that research says that boys are slower than girls.* RP5
> *Do boys' and girls' brains not develop differently? Or did I make that up?* RP7
> *No I was at a course at Experiential Play and they had a speaker who said that there was a difference.* RP4

Despite the popularity and appeal of theories which suggest and influence beliefs that there are fixed binary characteristics attributable to female and male learning, there is no categorical verification that there are particular neural process which are inherently unique to boys or girls in the way they learn (for example, Lehrer, 2008; Eliot, 2009). As discussed by both Kimmel (2005) and Hyde (2005), the range of differences between the sexes is relatively small compared to the similarities which exist. The assumption that nature is the only cause of these differences will result in other possibilities, for instance, behaviours and preference being learned, being ignored or dismissed. This can result in fatalistic expectations where practices are based on presumed hard-wiring which cannot be altered. The participants' acknowledgement and confirmation of these supposed attributes for each sex, and their intentions to accommodate them to meet the needs of the children, could imply that the children are being taught to self-regulate their learning in an inherently gendered manner. This would accord with Foucault's (2003) biopolitical model where self-regulated gender competencies are taught and reinforced through practices which construct, direct and create controls which result in different and separate experiences for each sex. Hence as described by Martin and Ruble (2009), behaviours and practices become inculcated and normalised for both in-groups and out-groups. This helps to signpost for the children which behaviours are appropriate for them. This in turn results in gendered practices and expectations, furthering the belief that the features of learning are natural, dependable and cannot be changed. The implications for EYPs' practice will be discussed in Chapter 8.

6.2.2 Other reported differences: behaviour and physical development

Across the DGs the participants also reported specific and different social and physical behaviours for boys and girls which are believed to be innate due to their consistent nature.

The differences reported tended to focus on how the sexes settle into the nursery environment and the manner in which they exhibit social behaviours.

Table 6:2 Reported features relating to boys and girls: physical and social behaviours

Behaviours	girls	boys
active		√
attentive	√	
boisterous		√
conforming	√	
disobedient		√
gentle	√	
get dirty		√
have fine motor skills	√	
have gross motor skills		√
mature	√	
polite	√	
quiet	√	
resilient		√
rough		√
settle easily	√	
seek comfort	√	

The participants all confirmed the claim that girls are emotionally more mature, are able to express their feelings and needs, and are calmer and have more developed fine-motor skills. Positive expectations were expressed in relation to girls' behaviours and their emotional development. In addition, the participants recount that boys were more physically active and exhibit better gross-motor development. The reported behaviours tended to conform to generally held stereotypes which depict girls as being more compliant than boys, who are livelier and who require more redirection (for example, Jones and Myhill, 2004). These observations divide the sexes into two distinct groups where the exhibited behaviours could be viewed as the antithesis of each other and where their consistency is attributed to innate factors:

> *I know there's always a few exceptions but I think in general....I think girls come across a bit softer and a bit less rough than boys.*
>
> DG1RP8

The participants proposed that these types of differences between the sexes are natural and consistent across time. During DG1 the participants tended to preface their comments with

an indication of how long they had worked in EYs to demonstrate that particular gendered behaviours had been observed throughout their practice:

> *I have probably worked with children longer than any of you...because I have been in the profession for 40 years now.*
>
> DG1RP3

There was a consensus that the observed differences between the sexes inform teaching and learning and that these are sometimes exploited to optimise learning and development for boys and girls.

> *For boys who are always at the dinosaurs or always at the blocks and if you have a certain thing you have got to teach...you have to improvise and maybe use that area to do the teaching in. If they wanted to learn...you're going to improvise and do something...in the areas that they like.*
>
> DG3RP5

Adopting sites of learning and approaches consistent with the sex of the child can result in the child experiencing a specific environment where they learn particular behaviours, attitudes and proficiencies. This can result in a very focused and limited environment for learning where the child develops *scripts* (Chapter 3) which allow them to operate in and interact appropriately with that environment. This it could be argued maintains and creates specific expectations and norms of behaviours and aptitudes. Freed (2003) cautions that children can develop schemas of socially acceptable behaviours, which can be interpreted as being the result of biological qualities rather than learned because they appear to be consistent in how they manifest themselves. This suggests that what adults do could be responsible for the reinforcement of behaviours, learning and attitudes resulting in them appearing to be innate. The practitioners' responses, concerns and attention can therefore highlight behaviours which are consequentially reinforced. Across the four DG there were consistently more stories which related to boys' behaviours and attributes than there were about girls. There were 42 stories which illustrated behaviours exhibited by boys; which was in contrast to 13 stories relating to girls' behaviours.

I would suggest that the practitioners' preparedness and readiness for boys' behaviour being naturally more difficult and their expectation that girls would be compliant reinforces what is being observed.

> *When that group of boys are having another one of their Jack Sparrow type times the girls are either probably sitting in the house corner quietly or they are in the book corner or something like that...they're not being disruptive...*
> DG3RP4

As discussed by Martin (1995), behaviour expectations for a particular group will encourage a resonance with the behaviour resulting in the reinforcement of belonging to the in-group and a disassociation with the out-group. This relationship will encourage and reinforce behaviours which are socially expected and normal to both groups. Bolles (1979) suggests that particular behaviours can be both learned and strengthened in the light of expectations, implicit and explicit, conveyed and where, according to Eckert and McConnell (2013), these behaviours are confirmed or negated by others as representative of that of a boy or a girl. Thus, as Foucault's (2003) biopolitical model suggests, children can learn to adhere to societal expectations and norms through conventions which regulate their environment. It is possible to suggest that the process of self-regulation is learned through association with the in-group and rejection of the out-group. Practices and responses which anticipate differences arising from the sex of the individual could reinforce these differences through particular expectations conveyed to the child. This could explain why boys are continually viewed as more difficult and are the focus for practitioners' attention. In contrast girls learn not to attract attention and are perceived as more compliant. It is possible to suggest that both males and females learn that being male or female is viewed differently. If as discussed above, male traits, qualities and activities are given prominence and are the focus for adult attention, then females learn that being male is often viewed as having more value or at least attracts more attention than being female. From these findings there are implications for EYPs' practice which will be considered in Chapter 8.

However, as previously signposted, the participants do not view all behaviours as innate. There is recognition that some aptitudes and preferences are the result of the influence of parents and others, although the participants expressed the belief that EYPs do not generally contribute to this development. The next section focuses on the construction of gender as described by the practitioners and evident in the DGs transcripts.

6.3 Constructed

This theme is divided into distinct categories (see diagram 6.1) which relate to those who, according to the participants, influence the development of gender: parents and others. Despite the claim by the participants that EYPs do not influence the development of gender, their narrative suggested otherwise and as such, it helped to illuminate their understanding of gender in the Pre-5 environment. These three influences will be discussed below, initially focusing on the participants' perceptions of how parents in general, and mothers and fathers separately have their own particular approaches to reinforcing and teaching gender differences.

6.3.1 Parents' influence on the creation of gender

Practitioners express the belief that children come to the nursery with previously acquired gendered behaviours:

Vignette 6.2: Participants view the role of parents in the development of gender (DG1)

> *But they have those when they come in*...RP3
> *yes.* RP6
> *the children come in with these ideas....you know?* RP3
> *that's what I'm saying these are established at home*...RP4
> *from their parents or families*...RP5
> *I think it is done by parents....as well you know*...RP4
> *parents steer them*...RP6
> *parents want their children to behave in a certain way and they do shape that and encourage them to do particular things you know maybe like activities like football for a boy and*...RP2

There is an acceptance by all the participants that children respond to and learn particular behaviours at a young age at home, and that these behaviours are subsequently evident when they enter the nursery. Participants report frequently hearing parents reinforce the belief that boys and girls adhere to particular expectations. One participant suggests that parents above all others influence the development of gender traits:

> *I mean in my opinion children aren't aware* (of society's influence) *and...it's all unique to their own family set up...how they are.*
>
> DG1RP2

The participants suggest that often parents exhibit fatalistic attitudes towards their son's behaviours and when they are very small some parents appear to positively reinforce boisterous and active behaviour in boys. When discussing parents' comments and behaviours little is said about girls, as the discussion focused primarily on boys and their behaviours:

> *...whereas mums of boys tend not to care because that is what boys do.*
> DG3RP7

Participants' comments also illuminate different attitudes of mothers and fathers towards the sexes. Once again the results presented here do not represent frequency counts, rather they are comments made and agreed or developed by the participants. From the descriptions two distinct worlds are created:

Table 6.3 Practitioners report parents' response and attitudes towards their children

	Girls	Boys
Mothers	Good manners	Get away with things
	Feminine	Boisterous
	Pink	Blue
	Compliant	Boys will be boys
Fathers	Gentle	Not feminine
	Given cuddles	Resilient
	Quiet	Boisterous
	Caring	Strong
	Need protected	Protect girls

The world of a girl is depicted as a quiet clean haven where she is protected by men while she looks after the needs of others. The views of mothers as reported by the participants focus on how girls should appear to the world. This is in contrast to the fathers' views which depict their daughters as being decorative and fragile, in need of protection. However, boys distinctly appear to inhabit a world where they are active and motivated and engaged. The mothers' views presented by the participants depict boys whose behaviour is endorsed as masculine. The fathers' are reported as encouraging masculine behaviours and there are indications that the boys should be protective of females. The vignette now presented represents a snapshot of the different perceptions of how boys and girls are treated by their parents:

Vignette 6.3: Participants discuss parental attitudes to boys and girls (DG2)

> *Boys often get off with things more...than girls I would say...*RP1
> *fathers can be quite protective of girls...boys get that much more leeway...*RP6
> *even when they are younger...boys get away with a lot more...than girls will...even the mums will let the boys...managing the boys' behaviour is not so much a priority than managing the girls' behaviour...the boundaries.*RP4
> *yes, and presenting themselves...girls presenting themselves...the girls have to speak a certain way...*RP6
> *it isn't even just that it is...some of the wee boys in our establishment...there are no boundaries there for them...*RP4

The worlds created here conform to well establish documented beliefs about females being passive and males being active (for example, Rubin, 1975). However, whilst the reporting of these attributes depict inherently stereotypical attitudes displayed by the parents, it is important to emphasise that these are assigned by the participants to the parents. The stereotypical views presented by the participants perhaps may be more representative of the participants' opinions and perceptions of the parents' behaviours and parenting habits rather than truly reflecting the parents' opinions and attitudes. Thus, it is perhaps possible to suggest that the participants are transferring their stereotypical views of parents to interpret the parents' behaviours. The reported actions and behaviours of the parents are understood as an accurate representation of how they actually respond to their children is to be viewed with caution. However, this information does convey that the participants' believe that parents encourage gender behaviours in the children, which then possibly provides EYPs with both an alibi and the conviction that they are innocent of contributing to the children's development of gendered behaviours.

The participants also reveal evidence of the children self-regulating and conforming to societal norms as described by Foucault (2003). For example, it is reported that the mothers regulate and monitor girls' manners and behaviours. Often the girls are reported as not getting dirty:

> *Whereas a lot of the wee girls without it being told to them from the mums are a bit...'I don't want to get dirty'.*
> DG3RP7

Whilst the participants explain that this is evidence of girls' natural inclination to be compliant and clean, I would propose that the girls' ability to adhere to the dictum of remaining clean suggests evidence of self-regulation (Foucault, 2003) and the reinforcement of schemas as described by Lipsitz-Bern (1993). This is in contrast to the reported endorsement of boys' behaviour which is treated more permissively, and where there is an expectation that boys will get dirty through their rough-and-tumble activities, which also simultaneously appear to confirm their masculinity. Thus, distinct and different regulations are taught to the sexes, which produce, normalise and control gendered behaviours.

6.3.2 Others that influence gender

The participants reported that in addition to parents influencing children's development of particular gender behaviours which are not innate, there are other general societal influences which support different gendered qualities evident in the children's behaviour. It should be noted that the comments offered in this section did not receive the same level of attention, interest or consensus:

Vignette 6.4 :Participants discuss other influences of gender development (DG1)

> *Society...yes society is determining gender.*RP6
> *I don't think society determines whether you are born a boy or a girl, you are born a boy or a girl...*RP4
> *it is embedded...it is the way we were brought up and treated when we were young so on and so on...*RP7

The comments above represent a variety of opinions of gender influences and, as indicated by Meyer (2010), they also suggest that the participants view gender and sex as interchangeable terms. The participants as illustrated in Vignette 6.4, do at times disagree about the most significant influences on children's gender development but there is an acknowledgement that:

> *...they* (children) *respond to people's expectations yes?*
> DG3RP4

because

> *...children are quite intelligent they can see people's reactions...by their facial expressions.*
>
> DG3RP6.

The comments further suggest that society's or people's expectations impact on both boys and girls. From colour to clothes to the toys which are played with—this will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7—to behavioural expectations, there are acknowledged influences from society. Faceless society, which is never clearly defined by the participants, and the media, are often blamed for many of the controls and expectations put upon parents who in turn are required to enforce these norms with their children.

> *...but when it is boys for some reason society expects that boys will be tough and bruisers (laughter)...and particularly for the parents...well some parents...they want their boys to be manly so they don't want them to be girlie...so they teach them to do boys' things.*
>
> DG2RP7

The observations made suggested that society not only influences expectations of children's gender but that it also manipulates parents' gender expectations for their children. As such, parents, as part of society, mirror a particular understanding of specific and binary gender qualities and characteristics, which have been taught to them and which they impart to their children. The participants appear to suggest that this results in controls and constraints being placed upon children by parents and by society for boys and girls to meet these gender expectations. One aspect of this is made evident during the DGs where it is clear that there is a need for boys and girls to be physically distinguishable and different from the earliest days of a child's life:

> *If you dress a baby boy in pink then take a photo it looks like a baby girl doesn't it? Looking in a pram if a baby is dressed in pink then you go...oh she is pretty or if it's blue...he's a big boy you know...but another colour you might not tell whether it was a boy or a girl.*
>
> DG1 RP3

There is also the recognition that the media present and encourage gendered products; toys, clothes and cartoons characters which are all aimed at parents—and children—and reinforce the need to distinguish between the sexes and the spending and consumption patterns associated with them:

...if you had a boy and a girl you would need to go out and buy a boy's set and a girl's set.
DG4RP1

Throughout the DGs the participants portray society as imposing more rigid expectations on boys, who they present as being subject to specific restrictions. This aspect will be discussed more fully in Chapter 7 under the theme of sexuality.

The views offered by the participants attribute the non-innate aspects of children's gender development to parents—mothers and fathers—and abstract society—people, others and the media. One component that I had anticipated but is omitted by the participants throughout the DGs is the role of children themselves in influencing the development of gender in others. In an era where the voice and agency of children is not only recognised in educational institutions but actively encouraged (James and James, 2004) I would have thought that children would be cited as contributing and supporting other children's gender behaviours. As this did not occur, I would suggest that the participants view the adult as the predominant and perhaps the more significant influence on the child. This marks an important area for practice and will be discussed in Chapter 8.

The participants present an understanding of the children's learning of gender that resonates with SLT (Bandura, 1983) where environmental factors determine how gender is learned. This is in contrast to Lipsitz-Bem's (1983) GST and Martin and Halveston (1981), who suggest that children learn gender from their environment and also from their evaluation and association with particular gender behaviours and choices associated with the in-group—their sex group (generally)—and to disassociate with those linked to the out-group (Chapter 3). However, there is evidence of adult controls being exerted, as noted by Foucault (2003), where domination and power are applied through the passing on from one generation to another of social truths. The participants believe that the elements of gender which can be learned are conveyed and reinforced by attitudes and behaviours exhibited by parents and society. The truths taught to the children about the world are entwined with social discourses that promote modes of gender normativity which determine how each sex should think, operate and feel in society. As expressed by Foucault (*ibid)*, institutions produce and sanction truths which then govern and

regulate gender associated performance. I suggest that the views offered by the participants of both parents and society are a combination of the participants' observations and reflections which are intermingled with societal truths which they too have absorbed and conform to as part of their own socialisation. However, as discussed in the opening section of this chapter, the participants as EYPs absent themselves from having a role in this process and in fact pride themselves in their gender blindness. I therefore now turn to an examination of their views and opinions which relate to gender development in the nursery.

6.3.3 EYPs' influence on gender development

This section will examine aspects of EYPs' influence on the development of gender. All the participants, as discussed above, indicated that there were aspects of gender they believe to be innate and other qualities which children learned and which are developed by their parents and society. All the participants maintain that they do not see the children as boys or girls; rather they view them as individuals. As with other elements of the discussions, there are contradictions and inconsistencies. As discussed by Morgan (1997), this was to be expected in this method of gathering data as the participants' reflected upon their ideas and thoughts during the DGs. The main areas of contention are illustrated in the table below and each area will be examined in this section:

Table 6.4 Practitioners report practices which relate to gender

Participants say:	But also say:
They do not gender.	Children need to be taught that they are different.
They give equal choice.	Children choices reflect their gender and these are often used to promote the children's learning.
Nursery children are too young to be treated in a gendered manner.	Knowing if it is a boy or a girl helps participants to respond appropriately.
Staff are trained so treat all children the same.	Staff respond differently to children on an individual basis.

Participants typically express the view that whilst children are treated equally, there is a requirement that the sex differences which exist should be highlighted as part of the children's education:

I do think children need to know if they are a boy or a girl...and I know we try to give them opportunities for everything but I don't think there is anything wrong in letting a boy be a boy and a girl be a girl. It's what we're doing....
DG1RP8

In addition to this, the paricipants acknowldge that there are times when they the respond to the sexes differently and that knowing if a child is a boy or a girl will allow them to respond to the child appropriately. The language in this vignette illustrates that there is a dimorphic element which relates to femininity and masculinity where girls are seen as being appreciated for their attractiveness and boys are seen as being big:

Vignette 6.5 : Participants discuss gendered responses to babies (DG3)

But as babies it is...'cause it distinguishes them...so that it is pink for a girl and blue for a boy. RP6
...especially for a very small baby...I think as they are coming on ...then that wouldn't surprise me as much but when they are tiny... RP4
*well I suppose when you think about parents coming to visit the nursery for the first time then...when I think about it...I probably do...respond differently by saying things like - oh she's so petite she's lovely, whereas a wee boy I'd go...oh he's a big boy for his age.*RP3
*...it's the terminology for a girl that's different than a boy.*RP5

Despite this, the participants do not believe that they create a gendered environment and as professionals they do not gender. The off loading of gendered behaviours as the responsibility of others, and the mitigating factor of the children's ages—*they are small*—alongside the training the participants receive, all help to reconcile the power of gender with their own individual professional agency. The participants do not believe they are influential nor do they believe they contribute to gender as they consistently reported that children are not treated differently from each other in the nursery. Citation of the individual child and responding to the needs of the child are used to explain that there is no intention to encourage or discourage gendered type behaviours or learning:

Vignette 6.6 : Participants discuss gendered staff behaviours (DG3)

> *...see I don't know maybe 'cause we work with the under 5s...*RP4
> *...it is just automatic...you just kiss them...*RP6
> *I think in early years it is different 'cause they are small...to be honest*
> *...maybe if it was school...I think they do...*RP8

As discussed by Chappell (2011), no institution is gender free and as such the opinions offered throughout the DGs reveal that stereotypical views are as prevalent in the EYs settings as they are in any other area or institutions in society. The DGs were held in the period approaching Christmas and here I present one case which exemplifies a way in which the children are noted as being treated differently and based on their gender:

> *...it is the Living Doll* (show) *and the girls have the silver sequence skirt and it is always great fun and they're learning...but the boys wanted to join in...and we've never involved the boys...but we've let them join in the rehearsals but they've never been on the stage for it....*
>
> DG3RP5

The reason given for this difference in treatment was that the boys, despite enjoying the rehearsals, were restricted owing to past experiences when parents expressed the view that they did not want their boys getting dressed up. The participant also admitted that the type of dancing was perhaps viewed as being for girls.

During DG3 the participants did appear to be open to behaviours and practices reinforcing gender stereotypes:

> *I'm only going with the Birth to 3* (curriculum) *because what they are saying about brain development and they're saying it's the connections that are made...so if we are finding that girls are getting treated differently, then the boys are not getting exposed to as much...then those connections are getting left...and if they don't get used then they die basically so...*
>
> DG3RP6

There appeared to be some acknowledgement here that the sexes have different experiences in the nursery and as such it is recognised that this can affect how children develop as a result of their treatment. The participant appeared to indicate a link between practice and the documentation which guides and supports practice, specifically in relation to the *Pre-birth to three* (Education Scotland, online) document. This is where

practitioners are advised that the brain's plasticity and how children are treated can result in contrasting experiences and the development of varying neurological brain pathways (see Chapter 2). This acknowledgement initially appeared to reveal some reflection on and insight into the ways in which different experiences could lead to different gender development; however, this did not generally reflect the views of all the participants. During the last DG when practices were discussed, the participants revealed that they still held the view that notwithstanding a few exceptions, staff did not respond to children based on the child's sex category in EYs:

Vignette 6.7: Participants discuss the treatment of children based on their gender (DG4)

> *...Well I work with the under 3s and I would say that they are both treated the same 'cause they are all so young you know?* RP1
> *I haven't noticed...I haven't noticed a difference and I work in the 3 to 5s and I haven't noticed them getting treated differently...* RP5
> *I kind of noticed it on an individual basis it depended on how that child reacted.* RP8

The final views and opinions offered during this last session reflected the oscillation and contradictions evident throughout the DGs. However, across the DGs there was a general resistance to the possibility of gender being a facet of the care and education of the children. Finally, the data revealed a philosophical resignation towards taking any steps to counter gendering where other factors were viewed as exerting more of an influence upon the children than the nursery environment:

> *early years couldn't change it...I mean media...I mean from the now to Christmas it is all the toys and then you've got the parents, families, grandparents so it extends...I think all that has an impact on what we're trying to do...*
> DG4RP6

One further category emerged from the examination of the data which related to other EYPs. It appeared that where gendered practices were noted or observed these were often attributed to other less trained or dedicated practitioners. Throughout the DGs no detailed acknowledgement of personal gendered practices was offered by the participants. Rather gendered practices were discussed at an institutional level, as described above in relation to the Christmas show, or connected to some other EYPs' practice:

> *I observe the staff in the baby area they reacted the same to the baby boy as to the baby girl...but I found that the older the areas there was definitely a reaction...which was quite...it took me back a wee bit...if it was a boy that hurt himself...it was 'alright up you get'...and the girls would get a hug.*
>
> DG4RP4.

The discussions with the participants revealed beliefs which suggested a spectrum of practice. At its best this creates a nursery with practitioners who establish an environment which is gender free and where children's individuality is the priority—or at worst, an environment which reflects those societal norms which children bring with them into the setting. My expectation was that the participants would acknowledge their role in aspects of gender development in the nursery, where differences were recognised, explained, accepted and even acknowledged as requiring modification or redirection. This did not emerge and in fact all the participants expressed the view that the nursery and the staff provided a haven, exempt from playing any role in the children's development of gender. It is not until DG3 that some acceptance and recognition of their potential role in the gendering process emerged, but this was not sustained and by DG4 it was evident that the participants held the belief that the nursery uniquely provided a gender free environment:

> *I think a nursery it is always a totally different environment because we have the training and we understand...*
>
> DG4RP8

The general feeling expressed by all the participants was that as they were trained professionals, they were in some way immunised against transference of gendered messages and that they could protect the children by insulating and redressing these malignant influences through their non-gendered practices.

6.4 Findings and areas for further discussion

The gender-blindness claimed by the participants, where they presented their impartiality and neutrality, surprised me. In addition to this discovery, the participants throughout the data actually foreground the children's gendered behaviours, in particular when the children demonstrate non-conformity. This focus appeared to be at the expense of the individual child's personhood. It conflicted with my expected interventionist approach which would assume that there were many ways of being a girl or a boy. Despite the

participants' beliefs, the analysis and presentation of the data would suggest that the nursery is a unique environment which through adult organisation creates a space which does more than merely reflect society. The nursery is a particular space in its own right with its own grammars and expectations. The children learn gender through controls and powers being exerted, not necessarily at a deliberative level, by the adults. This involves a relationship where the EYPs adopt and create particular gender expectations and where the children are taught that their behaviour is classified in accordance with their sex.

Foucault's (1977) theory of panopticism offers one perspective of this relationship because it focuses on the systematic instruction and governing of populations through controls which are unseen. Panopticism applied to the nursery suggests that children are always the focus for practice but as subordinate individuals they are not the authors and they are controlled and observed by those who have agency, the EYPs. As part of the practitioners' duty of care, the children are placed under constant scrutiny and observation. Application of Foucault's (*ibid*) panoptican discloses that the child will be aware of being observed, so in order to avoid any form of reprimand, the child will self-regulate and restrict his or her behaviour to reflect the rules, norms and expectations of the institution. The reality of the nursery is that whilst there is the potential for constant observation, this does not in fact happen, so the effectiveness of control is maximized through the child's avoidance of being caught and chastised for breaking the gender rules. Hence expectations, self-regulation and reflection all contribute to observed behaviours being controlled by those who direct and create the environment, even where control is a concept far removed from their motivation. It is in this respect that the panopticon functions, as it operates below the awareness of those who employ it and those who are being subject to it. It is therefore not surprising that the practitioners show little awareness of their own role in this process, which results in truths being passed on and being self-regulated by the children. The examination of the nature of gender as expressed by the practitioners revealed that they consider some gendered qualities to be innate and others to be learned. The recorded gender blindness of the participants provided an insight into the belief that these messages are conveyed by others and not them. However, the analysis illustrates that EYPs are no more and thereby no less gendered than any practitioners in any other institutions or professions (Chappell, 2011). This has implications for the expectations and norms conveyed to the children as these consequently impact upon the children's development

and acceptance of the nursery's gendered practices. This matter will be discussed further in Chapter 8 when reflection will be discussed as a tool for examination of practice.

As indicated at the start of this chapter, the nature of gender was the dominant theme, with sexuality and play emerging as subordinate themes, which appear to be informed and predicated by the participants' understanding of the nature of gender. In the next chapter, these two themes will be analysed, presented and discussed as they provide further insight into how the participants perceived gender in the EYs.

Chapter 7 - Sexuality and play

I think it is just a fear some parents have got...the minute they see that type of behaviour...they have an association with it....
DG2RP4

7.1 Introduction: sexuality and play

Sexuality and play were the two themes which were discussed by the participants in relation to both their understanding and the children's expression of gender. The participants' understanding of the nature of gender, who influences it and whether it was innate, appeared to impact on how the children's behaviours and learning are understood. In this chapter I will first discuss the participants' understanding of the children's gendered behaviour, chiefly as a concern for the individual children's future sexual orientation. As indicated by the comment above where stereotypes appear to confirm or negate behaviours as being appropriate or causing concern. I will then focus on children's play behaviours which have implications for children's learning and development and where particular toys may contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes. Finally, I will present the findings of the toys survey, completed by the participants and by other EYPs.

7.2 Sexuality

The consideration of children's sexuality is not an area I had originally considered to be a topic relevant or pertinent to the EYs. However, in the context of gender this area received much discussion and related specifically to particular modes of behaviour exhibited by the children and the gender expectations articulated by the participants. In an era when government documentation teleologically prepares children for their future and where 'learning and achievement which will prepare them for next stages in life' (Education Scotland, online: 4) are the focus for the development of the child, it could be argued that children being viewed as 'adults in waiting' (James and James 2004:47) is not so strange. In keeping with this, where the children are considered for their future roles, it is perhaps to be expected that the theme of sexuality emerges in the data.

7.2.1 Heteronormative expectations (mummies and daddies)

As discussed in Chapter 3.6.3, adults often encourage children to take part in play activities where expected future roles are supported, for example, mummies and daddies and

nurturing and work activities. These types of gender stereotypical behaviours appear to be associated with future expectations of heteronormativity. The children's successful depiction of gendered behaviours is then, through positive feedback, reinforced—with Kellet (2010) viewing this—as preparing children for their future adult roles. Butler (1990) claims that these heteronormative expectations are artificial as they only exist because gender has been constructed as the cultural parallel of sex. Archer and Lloyd (2002) suggest that play, where children display contrary heteronormative behaviours, can cause anxiety to parents in general and fathers in particular (this will be discussed below). These beliefs about gender play behaviours are linked to the children's future sexuality, which then results in particular expectations being imposed upon very young children, in particular boys towards their future normative adult sexual destiny.

7.2.2 Adult in waiting

Throughout the DGs, reference was made to the necessity of making children aware of their gender, as it was believed that they needed to know what would happen to their bodies:

> *No, I agree that the boys...I agree that there are differences...and their sense of genitalia...you do need to teach...they need to know what will happen.*
>
> DG2RP6

All the participants express the view that teaching children about their bodies was an important part of the *Health and Well Being* agenda, promoted through *Curriculum for Excellence* (Education Scotland, online). There was an acknowledgement that there was a need to prepare children for their adult roles and part of this involved making the children aware of sex differences:

Vignette 7.1 : Participants' views of children's need to be aware of gender differences (DG2)

I feel that they should know RP8
*so do I...*RP5
*...just because obviously boys and girls are different we wouldn't say - oh if it is a dog and a cat...we would say it is a dog and a cat...so if it is a boy and a girl...*RP8
...that's right! RP6
that's a good way....of putting it. RP5
[laughter]
Do you think that boys and girls are as different as dogs and cats? Researcher
*Well that was just an example...they've got to know...it's Mr and Mrs...there's differences...it's mum and dad you know.*RP8
*They have also got to know am a male....'cause you have then got to think about their reproduction...*RP5
...and the things that are going to happen to their bodies.RP4

This vignette is typical of conversations across the four DG sessions where there is a consensus of opinions about the need to prepare children for their future heteronormative reproductive roles. The dialogue about reproduction by the participants assumed that the children will all mature sexually in a heterosexual manner in accordance with their sex category. RP8's comparison of boys and girls to '*cats and dogs'* suggested that the sexes are viewed as being diametrically different and further reference to '*it's mum and dad you know'* assumes the sexual destiny of the children. These views appear to not only confirm the children as adults in waiting but also to support Butler's (1990) claim that sex is normalised as heterosexual where a heteronormative culture is promoted and expected. Martin and Ruble's (2009) observations also indicate that adults anticipate that children's imaginative play will replicate various forms of media where two people of the opposite sex are shown to become mum and dad. Foucault's (2003) theory of biopolitics would suggest that mechanisms such as stories and TV programmes are employed to normalise heteronormative attitudes, qualities and behaviours and promote (self)regulation of norms which are learned through observation and feedback from adults.

Staff attitudes and responses cannot fully determine future heteronormative behaviours. I would suggest however that adult reactions, which view non-conformity to heteronormative behaviours as aberrant, could inculcate negative and punitive attitudes towards qualities and traits which do not comply with these conventions. The information,

as reported by the participants, is conveyed to children at a time in their lives when according to Renold (2001) awareness of their own gender emerges. Kimmel (2005) also notes that this is a crucial period when children start to recognise that particular masculine and feminine traits and behaviours are valued and promoted differently. Children then learn what is expected not just for the here and now but also for the future and this provides key information about prospective reproductive roles. How adults communicate their expectations can affect the manner in which the children anticipate their own and others' gender and sex roles. Consequently, particular masculine and feminine behaviours are endorsed and appreciated differently. According to Kimmel (2005), this can result in overstated characteristics being emphasised and where conjecture and concerns are raised when particular behaviours do not conform to these particular expectations. These concerns about children's future sexuality appear to emerge and be subject to control in the pre-5 setting. The participants reported that it is generally the parents, fathers in particular, who prohibit and control behaviours, of boys especially, which did not to conform to heteronormative expectations.

7.2.3 Concerns expressed

The messages that are conveyed to children about their gendered behaviours are very powerful and may have lasting personal and social effects which can perpetuate gender bias and prejudice. As presented in the comment below, it is perhaps as much to do with the fear that the children might not have what is perceived to be by many heterosexual adults' standards, a 'normal' life.

> *...people are perceiving that if they are wearing pink that they're...and...they're doing feminine thoughts....then they are going to be gay, which is about their sexuality...isn't it which is and ...they're no going to be the boy...the boy going out with the girl like everybody thinks...so...*
>
> DG2RP6

For others it could be that the boys' effeminate behaviour could be seen as the male of the species emulating females, who have, according to authors such as Talbot (2010), been viewed as a deficit model:

> *but people don't want to see a wee boy doing as they see it wee girlie things.....or being effeminate....they find it harder to cope with....*
>
> DG3RP4

Whatever the source of the concerns, society presents heteronormative expectations through many media and as such they are viewed as deterministic. As discussed by Renold (2001), when behaviours exhibited by the children, boys in particular, do not present opposite and complementary qualities the behaviours are viewed with suspicion resulting in concerns over the child's future sexuality (Chapter 3). When children display cross-gender behaviours the participants reported these as unexpected and undesired because it appeared that the rehearsal for later life had gone awry, and the child's behaviour did not reflect standard gendered expectations:

> *...everything he did even at such a very young age he was three...four...he was so camp or he was over the top with everything I mean he didn't do any of the boisterous stuff that all the boys did. I mean...he was always wanting to put his-self around the girls*
>
> DG1RP1

The participants reported that some boys would choose, despite redirection, particular activities which were viewed as inappropriate for their sex. This evidence of choice of behaviours is in keeping with Lipsitz-Bem's (1993) and Martin et al. (2002), who suggested that the child evaluates the worthiness of an activity, along with other messages, to decide if they wish to repeat it. The child above, who exhibited what was viewed as atypical gender behaviour, appeared to evaluate the pleasure derived from the prohibited activity and appeared to choose to ignore the adults' feedback. However, the participants consistently expressed concerns during the DGs about children, especially boys, who demonstrated behaviours which they considered effeminate and which did not conform to heteronormative expectations. The participants reported that parents cited bullying as the main reason for expressing concern about atypical gendered behaviours. The following vignette illustrates typical concerns raised in response to non-conformity of gendered behaviours as reported by the participants:

Vignette 7.2 : Participants report concerns about children being bullied (DG2)

> *I think it is just a fear some parents have got...the minute they see that type of behaviour...they have an association with it...*RP4
> [Multiple voices (MV) of agreement]
> *I think they think I don't want my child to be gay....'cause they don't want their child to be different...or be bullied...*RP3
> *...and they see other wee boys who don't dress up and...they want their wee boy to be like that wee boy...*RP6

Adult intervention which proscribes particular behaviours was justified by the participants as '*they see other wee boys who don't dress up and...they want their wee boy to be like that wee boy'*, to fit in and not be bullied. The findings of the DG also reflected concerns as discussed by Renold (2001), Martin et al. (2002) and Jadva, et al. (2010) who found that boys who exhibited feminine behaviour or cross-gender play were more likely to be stigmatized. Garner et al. (1997) argue that rigid conformity to social conventions, where diametric gender roles are promoted, limits what boys and girls will be and stigmatises other types of behaviour. The concerns evident throughout the DGs where boys' behaviours which did not conform to male stereotypes were discussed more, and concerns about homosexual traits were raised more often than they were in relation to girls. This disquiet was also observed by Feinman, (1981) and Green (1987) who both found that adults exhibited more concerns about behaviours in boys which were atypical of the accepted masculine stereotype. They claim that departure from masculine stereotypes is given more negative attention than when girls are seen as not conforming.

The theory of biopolitics (Foucault, 2003) is premised on the need for society to ensure its continuation and its distribution of power. It does this through exerting and teaching particular truths and norms. Thus, Foucault's (*ibid*) theory would predict that reproduction and self-regulation will result in the children eventually applying rules, which have been taught to them by the adults, not only to their own behaviour through self-regulation, but to other children's behaviours insofar as these relate to particular stereotypical parameters. This information helps children categorise and identify suitable or appealing behaviours associated with being either a boy or girl. It allows particular heteronormative stereotypes to be (re)created and transmitted. However, at no point across the DGs did the participants report or even suggest that other children noticed, commented on or were the perpetrators of the prohibition of atypical gender behaviours. Whilst not evident, if the children continue to be exposed to these 'truths', where social conventions enforced particular

norms, it can be assumed that the children will learn that gender nonconformity is viewed as aberrant and should be avoided. Of course, it is possible that the children do proscribe behaviours and that the participants do not recognise this as being significant, owing to the age of the children (Chapter 6). Hence, the bullying that the participants report that the parents fear could be the result of adult prejudices towards any breaches of gender expectation that are taught to and replicated by the children.

It was reported that parents reacted to the children's nonconformity to perceived appropriate gendered behaviours. The participants reported across the DGs 37 accounts of redirection of atypical gender behaviour:

- Redirection of boys by fathers – 32 accounts
- Redirection of boys by parents – 4 accounts
- Redirection of girls by parents – 1 account

The comment below is typical of the accounts reported by the participants of fathers redirecting behaviour:

> *We had one dad that came in and shouted...his wee boy was playin' with a pram and a doll...and shouted across the playroom...'what the **** is he doing playing with that? Get that off him!' And the dad went ballistic 'cause the wee fella was playing with a pram and a doll.*
>
> DG2RP5

The data resonates with the findings found by Skodol (2008) who observed that parents actively prohibit actions in order to get boys to conform to what they consider to be gender appropriate behaviour.

In addition to the parents' concerns about children being bullied, an examination of the responses given by the participants to the reporting of parents' reactions to non-gender conformity revealed further feedback given to the children. Throughout the DGs the participants claimed to be indifferent to atypical gender behaviours and the child's possible future sexual development. However, the frequency of disclosure about this type of behaviour, across all the DGs, suggested that it was not just the parents who had concerns:

> *It's a terrible thing to say but I wouldn't be surprised if that wee boy turned out to be gay. Because everything he did even at such a very*

> *young age, he was 3/4...he was so camp or he was over the top with everything...I mean he didn't do any of the boisterous stuff that all the boys did.*
>
> DG1RP1

The concern raised in this comment was evident across the DGs and established that masculine behaviour, where boys were depicted as boisterous, determined the stereotypical expectation for the male child's future heterosexuality. Conversely, boys who exhibited effeminate behaviours or appeared to prefer girls' company raised a concern. Whether it was '*a terrible thing to say'* that the child would be gay or that the participant was making the assumption that he would be gay is not clear, but it is possible to establish that being gay was not viewed impassively by the participant. Despite the claim that it was only the parents who responded to children's behaviours, there were various comments throughout the DGs which suggested otherwise:

> *I mean I've been in the profession for 24 years...but there is still part of me when the wee boy puts the hat on, the dress, the high heels and the beads where you see the staff going 'oh here check out XXXX' and you have a wee giggle but you let them get on with it.*
>
> DG1RP5

> *Staff who give it nudge nudge, wink wink, when they see a wee one putting on a dress and high heels...you still have people having those attitudes...*
>
> DG2RP4

> *...he's running about and skipping about in his wee pink skirt and wiggling and...don't get me wrong I'm standing there wiggling back to him and joining in...yes it's great fun, 'let's skip' so we're both skipping around.*
>
> DG2RP6

This selection of comments illustrates that not only were the participants not as gender blind as they reported, but that they also provided feedback to the boys—in all reported incidents—and that their responses were not neutral. It is evident that both parents and participants have concerns about atypical gendered behaviours being an indicator of the child's future sexuality. Adults redirect particular behaviours as a means of conveying to the child that appropriate gender type play is more acceptable.

One solution offered by the participants, to rebalance the gender behaviours of boys was to introduce more males into the EYs settings. Whilst it is not in the scope of this dissertation

to examine this issue in more detail, I would suggest that the belief that boys need to be socialised by their own sex is an example of the participants foregrounding gender behaviours as the focus for children's development rather than the child's individual needs. The data also highlighted that the participants related particular stereotypes to future sexual orientation. The following section examines stereotypes which emerged from the data which appeared to determine how children's appropriate feminine and masculine behaviours confirm what it is to be a boy or a girl.

7. 4 Stereotypes

Stereotypes about gender, according to Golombok and Fivush (2001), provide information about what it is to be male or female. According to Martin and Ruble (2009), children are exposed to, and learn to correlate, both physical and emotional stereotypes to their own sex, the in-group and the other (the out-group's sex). This social learning establishes gender, since these traits are specifically associated with the child's binary sex category (*ibid).* Successful conformity to stereotypes allows positive feedback to be given to the behaviour exhibited in order for adults to be reassured that the child's conduct is on the correct path. As discussed in Chapter 4, adapting to stereotypes starts at birth with adults responding to and creating environments for children which confirm and help to produce norms which are assumed to be appropriate to the sex of the child (*ibid).*

The DGs indicated that the pre-5 environment does, like other areas in society, promote and establish particular gender stereotypes. The observed actions of the children and their ability to conform to these gender stereotypes, as discussed above, appear to be associated with the children's predicted future sexual orientation. As will be discussed below, the stereotype for each sex appears to provide a script or a template by which the children can identify key features of being a boy or a girl (Chapter 3). During the DGs the participants described two distinct stereotypes, '*girlie girls'* and '*real wee boys'*.

The term 'girlie girl', was used 40 times across the DGs and a 'real wee boy' was used a total of 67 times. Whilst the participants reported that they responded to the children based on the child's individual needs and requirements, there appeared to be a common and shared stereotypical understanding of both these terms. The two terms occurred so frequently that the participants were asked to specifically define their meanings:

Vignette 7.3: Participants define a 'girlie girl' (DG3)

Everything is girlie girls you know it is princess...it's the role play with the mummy with the baby...you'd never see them in the blocks, you'd never see them in the cars. RP5
What is a girlie girl? Researcher
[pink/pink princess' – MV]
I know we do say that...we do say that a lot about girlie girls RP5
...she doesn't want to take part in the physical RP6
...or get messy RP7
...get their knees dirty RP3
*Everybody knows what we mean...I mean one of the wee girls that am chatting about she's always in trousers but she is still a girlie girl by the things chooses to do...*RP5
So it is her behaviour that defines her not just her appearance? Researcher
No I would say it is...behaviour. RP6
...behaviour RP5
...then you kind of know what...what areas specifically to teach her in RP6

This definition of a 'girlie girl' suggested a particular way of being a girl. This is where there was an association with a girl who plays at being a princess dressed in pink, who is tidy, clean and passive. The participants' claimed that it is a 'girlie girl's' behaviour rather than her appearance, that defined her, yet pink and being a princess were closely related. The participants indicated that staff made choices about a girlie girl's learning based on these traits. Thus, where children's interests guide the learning, these girls' interests will continue to reinforce particular types of behaviours and interests. This aspect will be discussed further below in the toy section. This description is in stark contrast to 'a real wee boy', who was defined as:

Vignette 7.4 :Participants define a 'real wee boy' (DG3)

What about a 'real wee boy' how would you define 'a real wee boy'? Researcher
*Rough-and-tumble...doesn't want to sit down...*RP6
...Bob the builder RP7
...runs RP6
Has a belt with tools in it. Asking do you have things for me to do? He's definitely a wee man...manly who needs to fix... he's a boy, he wouldn't touch a doll or a pram or anything like that...he's got this instilled in his mind that he's you know...Bob the builder.RP3
*He'll just change something else into a tool...*RP5
...yes...into something else RP3
...into swords Rp6
...a bit of Lego will be made into a screw driver...or something...or a hammer RP3
[Agreement – MV]
...they make everything into swords or super heroes RP6
*...in construction they are not allowed a gun and they'll say it's an aeroplane...*RP5.
[laughter /that's right – MV]
*yes...like that...I would say the boys in our place...*RP5
*...so they are creative....*RP6
...oh yes! RP3
*Aye the wrong way...*RP6

A real wee boy also appeared to conform to particular male stereotypes, where there was association with being a superhero, who liked rough-and-tumble play. This type of boy was portrayed as '*definitely a wee man...manly'* who was active, helpful and avoided nurturing activities; he was therefore presented as definitely not being feminine. There was also an undertone of male aggression, with reference to swords and guns, although the participants reported that they discourage this type of play.

The two stereotypes presented paint a diametrically contrasting picture where boys and girls appear to exist in two separate, distinct and different worlds. These worlds predict different roles and futures since they reinforce many of the traditional characteristics of male and female stereotypes: girls nurture, are domestic and are decorative whilst boys help women, are boisterous and fix things. Many of the comments concur with much of the research in this area where according to Maccoby (1998) adults give clear fixed messages about what it is to be masculine and feminine. Male behaviour is often presented and defined as being the antithesis of female behaviour. Maccoby (2002) observed that boys are more inclined to select friends of the same sex, which he claims results in high levels of

social pressure being exerted upon them to adhere to male gender stereotypes. The following comment where the male child chose to play with girls appears to suggest that playing with the girls is not desirable behaviour:

I mean he was always wanting to put his-self around the girls
DG1RP1

Martin et al. (2002) suggest that gender schemas result in boys' behaviours tending to be more rough-and-tumble, active and at times more physically aggressive than girls' play. Further, they claim that girls communicate more with each other and demonstrate stronger nurturing tendencies than boys do (*ibid*). These differences result in the two sexes exhibiting and developing different interests, where different stereotypes are associated with their actions, interests and play choices resulting in boys and girls tending to play with their own sex.

Karniol (2011) observed that adults apply controls and reinforce specific types of gender play in order to classify typical male and female play behaviours. Thus, self-fulfilling prophecies are established and it is evident in the data that the participants believe that girls and boys have different interests and needs which determine different sites for play and learning. The participants acknowledged that children's interests are encouraged and used to enhance learning and teaching. Consequently, applying particular gender stereotypes may reinforces the differences observed. This can result in a limitation of the children's experiences and appears to confirm the belief that the sexes exhibit innately different play learning styles (Chapter 6.1). Further implications for practice will be discussed in Chapter 8. However, the participants do acknowledged that some gender play stereotypes have altered over the years. This is where what was once deemed to be stereotypically female or male type play is now viewed to be acceptable to both sexes.

7.2.4 Stereotypes which have changed

The participants reported that it is now generally acceptable for boys to engage in domestic play activities and wear the colour pink. These acts were until relatively recently both linked to traditional female stereotypes. It was reported that boys' engagement in domestic type play is now viewed more positively today than would have been the case 20 years ago, where it would have been seen as unusual or aberrant. The reason given for the

change in attitude was that fathers and mothers both have to work and fathers have had to take on some of these tasks:

> *I think...if you have a working family where two parents are working then they'll take on the roles in the house corner. You see the difference or the other way if it is just mum and the dad's out working then you will see the wee boy taking on that role.*
>
> DG1RP6

In addition to changing societal roles impacting on play, the participants also acknowledged that despite pink being almost universally associated with girls and princesses, there was an acceptance that boys too could wear it. This approval however is based on boys conforming to particular constraints where the sporting of this colour is dependent on brand, shade and motives:

Vignette 7.5 :Participants agree that boys can wear pink (DG2)

pictures of cars...RP3 *emblems and things*...RP5 *so just different*...RP8 *they are made different...their shape* RP5 *they have what maybe you would consider...what a boys' thing on it...maybe a car or a football*...RP8

In addition to pink and domestic toys being suitably adopted by boys, dancing and cooking, which the participants deemed to be traditionally female activities, were also considered to be more acceptable to both genders. It was reported that TV programmes such as *Master Chef* and the *X-Factor* have promoted both dancing and cooking as commonplace activities for both sexes. There was a general acknowledgement that social mores drive the absorption of particular activities resulting in new stereotypes being associated with the sexes. The following comment illustrates this point:

> *I think if it was told today that a doll was a boys' toy and a car was a girls' and we brought every child up telling them that...then that is the way it would be.*
>
> DG2RP8

Despite the changes in the stereotypes noted, there were still particular gender associations which remained. The types of dancing which were permissible for boys, the limitations on shade, shape and motives when boys wear pink and the requirement that domestic toys be

of particular colours to allow them to be acceptable for boys' play—this will be discussed below—result in conditions being attached to the changes. These stipulations continued to illuminate perceived differences between the sexes. For instance, whilst it is acceptable for boys to be involved in the kitchen, girls were generally considered to be cooks, while boys were chefs.

> *Yes, 'cause of the mummies...girls will say I am being the mummy I am doing the cooking...I haven't seen boys doing that...no...I have seen them being chefs but not cooks.*
>
> DG1RP2

Although some stereotypes have changed, there are still distinct elements which allow separate features to be associated with the sexes. The qualities attached to stereotypes signify differences and reinforce dissimilarities. Thus, stereotypes help to support the establishment of understandings, truths and norms (Foucault, 2003). Subsequently, these are then (re)produced and as discussed recreated, based on modifications attributable to societal changes.

The participants' discussions illuminate how their input contributes to the (re)creation and (re)production of gender in the pre-5 environment. Many of the stereotypes discussed during the DGs were contextualised in terms of the conventions and breaches of stereotypical play behaviours, often by boys. The medium of play and the toys used by the children provides a framework for the participants' perceptions of gender in the pre-5 environment as it appears to determine whether behaviours are appropriate or not. In the section below I will present the observations, comments and differences in play as described by the participants during the DGs.

7.3 Play

Gender as a social construct (James and James, 2004) is open to modification over time and is not fixed (Chapter 3). Likewise play, which is also socially constructed (Chapter 4), provides opportunities for children to recognise 'their capacity to act and to recognise that actions have consequences' (*ibid*:24). One outcome of children developing stereotyped gendered play preferences is, according to Martin et al. (1995) that it may result in a restriction of children's learning in the light of the different proficiencies and learning that toys support and develop. Play enhances children's ability to role-play, think before acting

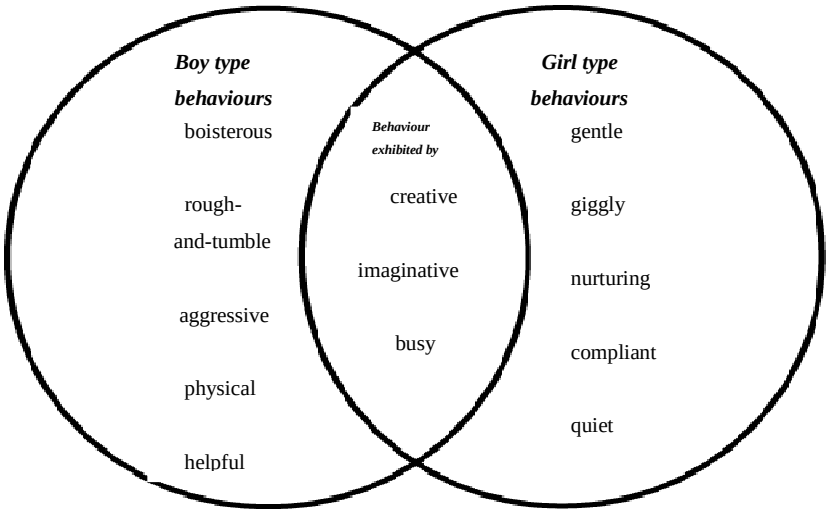
and self-regulate their emotional understanding of their surrounding society. Singer and Singer (1990) observed that boys were more inclined to choose toys consistent with gender stereotypes and Pasterski et al. (2005) found that boys were often redirected to conform to male stereotype. This may explain why boys' development in non-traditional male proficiencies—communication, empathy, nurturing—is diminished. Perry and Bussey (1979) claim that parents tend to be responsible for conveying what is considered to be appropriate boys' play choices; however, as will be discussed below, EYPs also appear to have a role in the redirection of play.

Across the DGs, the participants described particular toys and types of play as being associated with boys and girls, with play interests used to support what is taught in the nursery. As play conveys information about gender norms, the nursery environment establishes and reinforces areas for learning for boys and girls. In the following section, I highlight play behaviours, where the toys which are associated with the sexes will be discussed. This will be followed by a consideration of the role that colour plays in the choice of toys. Finally, the toys survey given to both the participants and other EYPs, as described in Chapter 5.4.3 will be presented. However, prior to this, the type and manner of play which is described and presented by the participants will be discussed.

7.3.1 Play behaviours

The children's behaviours as reported by the participants divide the sexes. Girls were presented as being easier to manage and it was reported that play redirection is rarely required. Conversely, boys were described as presenting more challenging behaviours which often necessitated interventions. Diagram 7.1 illustrates the children's reported play in the nursery. The behaviours described appeared to relate to established stereotypes, which according to Singer and Singer (1990) is where boys are seen as being active, boisterous and at times aggressive whereas girls are compliant and nurturing.

Diagram 7.1 Participants reported play behaviours



The overlap of conduct initially appeared to indicate that there were some similarities in the sexes' behaviours. However, as indicated by RP7, behaviours such as imaginative play should be viewed as manifesting themselves differently and arising from contrasting inclinations:

> *Like if they have a specific toy...like an aeroplane a boy might be playing with it is in a different manner or he might be flying it to go and get his wee army figures but a girl might be flying to get her to a beach or something.*
>
> DG3RP7

This comment was confirmed by all the participants during DG4 as resonating with their experiences. It was acknowledged that despite the play appearing to be similar, the source of the play was conceptualised differently by the sexes. Maccoby (1987) and Newland et al. (2008) suggest the differences between boys' and girls' play, are the result of early experiences (Chapter 4). It was observed that fathers tended to engage in physical types of play exchanges with their sons that were in contrast to how they respond to girls (Maccoby and Jacklin, 1987; Newland and Coyle, 2010). Smith and Lloyd (1978) and Snow et al. (1983), also noted that girls were consistently responded to in styles which seek to calm and quieten them. These different early play experiences appear to lay the foundations for future gendered behaviours. This results in boys and girls, even if they are playing with the same toys or playing in the same space—outdoor play (Table 6.1) doing so differently.

The participants' reporting of boys and girls behaviours is consistent with other previous research. Girls were reported by Bulotsky-Shearer et al. (2010), as tending to display less problematic play behaviours and demonstrate superior language skills and have more positive interactions with their peers than boys do. However, Pellegrini (2008:467) suggests that boys' rough-and-tumble play should be understood as 'affiliative' rather than aggressive as it contributes to boys' social development and is how they conceptualise interactive play. According to Pomerleau et al. (1990), different environments fashioned on gender lines will encourage different experiences and outcomes. Consequently, different toys support particular types of play and encourage different skills, traits and qualities. As indicated below, in Vignette 7.6 the comments presented by the participants indicated that girls and boys appear to prefer feminine and masculine toys respectively and that it is difficult to get children to play in areas traditionally associated with the other sex:

Vignette 7.6 : Difficulties experienced when children to play in a non-traditional area (DG 3)

*Maybe 'cause they're not in the construction area as much as the boys are...the girls in our place will maybe be in the construction area if the doll's house is out but they wouldn't choose to go in...*RP5
So it's the doll's house they're playing with? RP3
*Yes..they wouldn't choose to go in and build with the Lego or the Stickle Bricks or whatever...*RP5
...or build a doll's house RP3
If you gave them pink Lego do you think they would be more inclined to play with it? Researcher
*I've tried that...I bought the princess castle or whatever it was called...but it didn't go down very well...*RP3
...so it didn't make any difference? Researcher
No...no RP3
So you still had difficulty get girls into the block area?
Researcher
[Yes - MV]

These findings resonated with other researchers, who found that children tend to prefer toys which manufacturers have designed for their sex and which are clearly defined as masculine or feminine (see for example: Hassett et al., 2008; Williams and Pleil, 2008; Jadva, et al., 2010). Martin (1995) found that boys are often embarrassed if they are associated with female toys, yet boys' toys do not similarly cause shame for girls. However, Vignette 7.6 suggests that some girls will not play in an area associated with boys even if toys they like and usually play with are added to the play locale. Thus specific

play associations can result in girls and boys being discouraged from playing with toys designed for the opposite sex (Martin, 1995). Two unique and separate environments for boys and girls are evident in the nursery where particular truths are normalised and reinforced in respect to particular gendered behaviours and play. The participants during the DGs described different activities, responses and expectations for girls and boys in the nursery. These results in the creation of different forms of socialisation for the children depending on their sex (see Chapters 3 and 4). These play choices have significance for what the children learn based on their sex category and have implications for practice which will be discussed in Chapter 8.

A significant feature which defines and determines who plays with particular toys appears to be colour (Auster and Mansbach, 2012). In the next section of this Chapter, toys and their association with colour as described by the participants will be discussed as a factor which contributes to the determining of the two distinct worlds boys and girls grow up in. Finally, the results of the toy survey as discussed in Chapter 5.4.3, will be analysed, presented and discussed.

7.3.2 Colour of toys

Across all the DGs the participants reported that boys' and girls' toys are categorised according to their colour. Table 7.1 illustrates that girls do not tend to play with vehicles and aggressive toys and that generally pink toys are avoided by boys and were considered to be for girls. The only reported exception is that boys would probably accept pink if:

> *You could give them* (boys) *a pink car...and I think they'd maybe ok with that...because you get different colours of cars...and it is a car*
> DG3RP6

Table 7.1 Boys' and girls' toys categorised by colour

Pink toys	Blue toys	other colours - green/silver/grey/red
•domestic- girl •attractive - girl •appearance -girl •nurture -girl •construction- girl •cars- both	•domestic - both •nurturing - both •motion toys- boys	•domestic- both •agressive toys- boys •construction- boys •vehicles- boys

Domestic toys, as discussed in 7.2.4, were considered to be played with by both boys and girls. However, as Vignette 7.7 illustrates, for these toys to be considered suitable for boys to play with, they need to be in blue or a colour that is not directly associated with being feminine:

Vignette 7.7 :Domestic toys, as long as they are not pink, are unisex DG1

*I mean I bought all the Hoovers and kitchens because they were sort of unisex...well they were blue and like that girl was saying...about how things are pink and blue...I felt ok about that because the Hoover was blue, I bought a blue cooker, a blue iron,... a blue everything and the kitchen was grey and it was silver you know...*RP5
...right the colour seems to have significance...yes? Researcher
Oh yes! I wouldn't have got him a pink Hoover RP5
[general laughter – MV]
Ok, tell me a little bit more about this...what is the difference between a pink Hoover and a blue Hoover? Researcher
*Well...because a blue Hoover is for boys.*RP5

Toys which are specifically blue or pink result in the boys and girls having to make a choice:

> *if you give them a choice between pink and blue the girls will choose pink and the boys will choose blue.*
> RP8 DG4

Girls' toys which are pink generally highlight attractive features. This results in particular toys being specifically targeted at girls and avoided by the boys:

> *They're gearing it towards a market for the girls and it is all pink and sparkly and pretty and then there is the market for the boys...*
> DG4RP5

Girls are reported to be drawn to pinks and the attractive features of toys; how sparkly and pretty they are. Likewise for boys specific features of toys along with the colour will determine if they will play with them. For example motion toys: cars, trucks planes—which come in a mixture of colours—are deemed suitable. Yet aggressive toys such as guns and swords can be any colour, as long as they are not pink. These reported colour

associations appear to support the belief that gender colour preferences as described by Hulbert and Ling, (2007) are a natural biological phenomenon (see Chapter 2). However, there are social explanations for the observed choices the children make. Gender schema theories (Chapter 3) and Foucault's (2003) theory of biopolitics may help to explain why children learn to choose colours associated with their sex.

Research into children's partiality for particular colours, by for example, LoBue and DeLoache (2011) and Auster and Mansbach (2012), suggest that children are not born with colour preferences as these do not appear to emerge until the child is approximately two years of age. Children's play and colour choices are guided and supported by their socialisation, where gender schemas (for example, Lipsitz-Bem, 1993: Martin et al., 2002) are learned through interaction with their environment. This learning, according to Liben and Bigler (2002) will contain information about gender appropriate choices and where children will begin as described as Martin and Ruble (2009) to identify with their in-group. The values and principles associated with that group will guide such aspects as colour preference, toy choices and types of play. From a biopolitical (Foucault, 2003) perspective, the adults in the nursery will contribute to and strengthen these choices through the play experiences offered and their behavioural responses to what they consider to be appropriate or inappropriate gender conduct. Through these responses children learn what is expected of them as a boy or a girl and will learn to replicate these choices. GST (Lipsitz-Bem, 1993: Martin et al., 2002) perhaps helps to explains why boys are less inclined to continue behaviours which do not conform to adults' expectations of gender norm:

> *I says 'what are you hoping Santa will bring you for Christmas?' He says a castle...we were looking at castles at that page...but he says 'I can't look at the pink castle, it has to be a grey one because my dad says that's for boys'.*
>
> DG1RP5

The reported influence of the father on the child's colour choice resulted in the boy responding to conform to the information given by his dad. This is in contrast to girls' behaviour which from the DGs appeared to cause little or no response from the adults. This perhaps could explain why the girls are able to engage in cross-gender play, as they do not receive the same level of prohibitive feedback to their play as the boys do. This suggests that girls may have more opportunities to engage in a wider variety of play experiences which help to support their development. This could perhaps explain some of the observed developmental differences between boys and girls at this age, as reported by Baron-Cohen

(2002) and Sax (2005). These differences may also indicate why it is often assumed that girls are more mature than boys and appear to be outperforming boys: their opportunities for learning are from a wider range. In addition, the constant reinforced aversion towards anything associated with being 'girlie' may explain why many males grow up to devalue traits and preoccupations that are associated with being female. The toy survey discussed below provides further insights into the types of toys the sexes are associated with and the skills that are promote through them.

7.4 Toy survey results

The discussion of toys during the first two DGs provided the impetus to introduce a toy survey (Chapter 5.4.3). The results from the DG toy survey encouraged further investigation where a wider survey (WS) was introduced to allow comparisons to be made. Results which returned scores greater than 80% for each category were assumed to show a general consensus of opinion. Whilst no statistical claims are being suggested here, trends which reflect other research into adults' perceptions of children's toy preferences are clearly evident. Overall, it would seem that nurture, appearance and domestic toys, tended to be associated with girls, whilst violence, physical, construction and activity toys were related to male activities. This resonates with a plethora of research which widely acknowledges that girls and boys display different toy preferences based on a variety of features, such as colour and purpose (for example, Peretti and Sydney, 1985; Blakemore and Centres, 2005; Blakemore et al., 2009).

The toy survey results were collated and analysed and the initial findings appeared to fall into the following adjacent groups—with two exceptions, which are discussed and shown below:

- always girls/generally girls
- generally girls/both boys and girls
- both boys and girls
- generally boys/ both boys and girls
- generally boys /always boys

Once the results were categorised and analysed according to who would play with them, the toys were then further considered (Appendix 9) under headings which were based on Blakemore and Centres' (2005) labels which helped to determined the type of play the toys

encouraged (Chapter 5.4.3). Table 7.2 illustrates the allocation of toys to boys and girls by both the DG and the WS.

Table 7.2 Categorisation of toys by DG and WS: who plays with types of toys

		always girls or nearly always girls		generally girls and both		Both :boys and girls		both or generally boys		always boys or nearly always boys	
		DG	WS	DG	WS	DG	WS	DG	WS	DG	WS
Musical						**3**	**3**	**1**	**1**		
Scientific								**2**	**2**		
Domestic				**5**	**8**	**5**	**1**		**1**		
Attractive		**7**	**7**	**1**	**1**						
Aggressive								**2**		**3**	**5**
Construction					**1**	**1**		**4**	**4**		
Occupational						**2**	**2**	**5**	**5**		
Arts/crafts					**1**	**5**	**4**				
Nurturing		**1**	**1**	**3**	**4**	**1**		**1**	**1**		
Activity						**3**	**3**	**4**	**4**		
Creative/ superheroes						**1**		**2**	**2**	**1**	**2**
Physical				**2**	**2**	**3**	**3**	**2**	**2**		

The following results will be presented and discussed under each of the category headings. The first category of '*always girls or nearly always girls'* showed that over 80% of the respondents selected toys which focus on features which are deemed to be pretty and are specifically marketed at girls. These findings resonate with Miller (1987) and Blakemore and Centres (2005) who found that adults tend to assume that girls prefer toys that provide opportunities for nurture and focus on appearance and attractiveness.

Under the '*nearly always girls and both*' heading, nurturing, appearance and domesticity appear to be predominant features of the toys allocated. In addition colour, where pink is a factor, appears to increase the respondents' tendency to assign these toys to girls. This resonates with Pennell (1994) and Auster and Mansbach (2012) who observed that media adverts aimed at girls used pinks and purples. According to Leaper (2000), toys which encourage collaborative or imaginative play for example houses and tea-sets, are expected to attractive girls to play with them. Karniol (2011:128) found that 95% of children associated pink with being a girls' colour. 'Colors and objects are gender-stereotyped and hence, choosing colors is an expression of one's gender identity'. It would also appear that

the adults who completed the survey also view colour as an expression of a child's sex category, particularly in relation to girls. However, as noted in the discussions throughout this dissertation, children's exposure to particular colours and practices may influence their choices, as these become the norms to which the children learn to respond to. As such, whether the girls' toys selected by the respondents are due to their experiences of girls choosing pink or if they have selected pink because they believe that pink toys are for girls is not clear. The WS results differ very slightly from the DG's as the WS group suggested that domestic toys are for girls, whilst the DG participants show more of an inclination to consider these to be neutral. However, as will be discussed below, these choices do not always reflect the contents of the DG narrative.

The toys selected in the category by all those who responded as suitable for '*both boys and girls*' generally appear to have mixed gender qualities. The toys identified by both groups—DG and WS—do not appear to have strong gender features. This resonates with Cherney and Dempsey (2010), who claim that toys which are neutral do not exhibit qualities that are significant to one gender or the other. However, the toys that are additionally allocated to the category by the DG participants include: domestic (kitchen, blue Hoover, pink vacuum, easy bake oven), nurture (stuffed Elmo) and colour related features (pink Lego, blue Hoover, pink vacuum). Initial examination suggests that the DG group participants viewed these toys differently from the WS group, where toys which generally are traditionally associated with female play, were viewed as neutral. However, as illustrated below, this allocation was not entirely consistent with the content of the discussions during the DGs:

> *You know we said that if a girl...obviously does play with a blue pram or a blue Hoover it's no really something we notice but if boys are really restricted ...you notice it more...so they are going be more of a topic.*
>
> DG4RP8

This could suggest that boys playing with these toys are not viewed neutrally. Even when it is reported that these toys are played with by boys, the colour determines that they should not be feminine, thus allowing them to be acceptable to boys:

> *I felt ok about that because the Hoover was blue, I bought a blue cooker a blue iron a blue everything and the kitchen was grey... it was silver you know?*
>
> DG1RP5

In the category of '*both or generally boys'* the toys selected had particular characteristics which could be identified as being typically attractive or suitable to boys', where as observed by Pasterski et al. (2005), and Miller (1987) vehicles, super heroes and construction toys appear to be the focus for boys' play behaviour. Previous research appears to indicate that these types of toys will encourage skills such as investigation, planning, design and building (for example, Bradbard and Endsley, 1983; O'Brien et al., 2000). According to Blakemore et al. (2009), boys enjoy playing with toys that have clear functions: things to press, light up, or devices that will cause another object to move. Occupational toys for example, police officer, builder, fall into this group which resonates with research carried out by Blakemore and Centres, (2005) and Parson and Howe (2006).The results from the survey appear to confirm the belief that boys like construction and superhero play. It should be noted that I have categorised *Buzz* and *Woody* under creative/superheroes toys. Whilst these are not traditional superheroes, they are the main characters in *Toy Story* and can be engaged with in creative or superhero type play. The allocation of the toys in this group is consistent with previous research findings.

The final category '*generally or always boys'* contained toys where the main focus is on aggression. According to Hart (2013), this is where many macho messages about what it is to be a boy are conveyed and which promote the belief that boys have to adopt this conduct in order to be viewed as manly. This category can be compared with its opposite category: '*generally or always girls',* where the toys allocated to each category show diametrically different qualities. Thus the survey would indicate that toy categories which target the sexes reflect both research and traditionally held beliefs about what toys are suited to what children: girls: appearance and attractiveness and boys: aggression and boisterous play. Attention should be drawn to the challenges of these assumptions discussed above.

The analysis of the survey data did show two toys which did not fit neatly into any of the above groups. The Barbie Jeep was an unusual toy to classify as it was both a motion toy, which is according to Pasterski et al. (2005) traditionally associated with boys but which as a consequence of pink Barbie logo, was designed to appeal to girls. In line with the findings of Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) and Pennell (1994), this feminine feature heightened its appeal to girls which resulted in the respondents allocating it to the girls. The other category anomaly was *Jessie,* the female character in *Toy Story*. This toy uniquely appeared across all the categories and there was no consensus of opinion as to

who would be likely to play with her. As a female toy she would generally be less likely to be classified under the predominately male category of superheroes but as she played with *Buzz* and *Woody* in the film, it appeared that some of the respondents believed her to hold some appeal for boys. As a female toy character she could be considered to be attractive to girls because she could be classified as a doll. This toy was unusual as no other toy in the survey crossed all the categories and there was no consensus in her allocation.

Table 7.2 shows consistencies with previous research findings—with only a few anomalies—where the respondents assumed that girls prefer toys which promoted nurture, domesticity and appearance whilst violence, motion, construction and occupations were suited to boys. The neutral toys identified by both the DG and WS group were also consistent with research, as Cherney and Dempsey (2010) found toys which are classified as being neither male or female. For example, musical toys or play-doh tend to have neutral features. However, the DG participants additionally include some domestic, construction and nurturing toys in this category. This could have been as a result of the DG heightening awareness of gendering, or it may suggest that this is the response they believe they should provide, given the focus of the DG.

The allocation of the blue Hoover and the pink vacuum also show some variation. The DG results indicate that these are played with by both boys and girls making them essentially neutral however the WS allocate the blue one to boys and the pink one to girls. The WS results are more consistent with other research findings which suggest that colour will encourage and discourage children's play engagement (Pennell, 1994). Also as discussed above, the DG dialogue did not always reflect the selections made by the DG participants. This is shown most strongly in the results which related to the play activity dressing up, as the choices were completely contrary to the content of the DG. The results, as can be seen from Table 7.3, show that only eight respondents out of all those who completed the survey—from both the DG and the WS—said that dresses could be played with by '*both/nearly always boys'* and it should be noted that these were responses given by WS respondents and not the DG participants.

Table 7.3 Children who play dress up

DG results						WS group				
Always girls	Nearly always girls	Both	Nearly always boys	Always boys		Always girls	Nearly always girls	Both	Nearly always boys	Always boys
12.5%	87.5%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%		42.39%	48.91%	7.68%	1.00%	0.00%

The DG responses to the survey as shown in table 7.3 indicated that only girls play in the dresses yet as can be seen from the extracts below the DG participants discuss boys playing dress up, although this play activity was not seen in a positive light. It is clear that this type of play was reported as a frequent occurrence in the nursery setting:

> *Yes...so when dad comes in and sees his son in a dress he thinks 'oh no' and that's when he doesn't want him to wear it. It's not necessarily that he doesn't want him to have fun in the dress but he doesn't want it to lead to...*
>
> DG1RP8

> *There's still part of me when the wee boy puts the hat on, the dress, the high heels and the beads where you see the staff going 'oh here check out XXXX' and you have a wee giggle but you let them get on with it.*
>
> DG1RP5

Despite these differences the DG responses in the survey generally reflect those of the WS and both sets of findings are consistent with other research findings into toy preferences (for example, Fagot, 1974: Bradbard, 1985, Peretti and Sydney, 1985; Leaper, 2000; Pasterski et al., 2005; Hines and Alexander, 2008). However, some of the toy survey inconsistencies could signpost that the adults prefer or associate children playing with particular toys, rather than being representative of the toys they had seen children choosing to play with. This following Foucault (2003) suggests that adults' own preferences could influence the choices children's make as they control and establish the norms and truths in the pre-5 environment.

7.5 Findings and conclusions

The analysis, presentation and discussion of the DG data would suggest that despite policies for example, Equality Act (UK Gov, 2010) and Codes of Practice (SSSC, 2009: online)[12] which promote practices which encourage children to explore and engage in a variety of activities and for practitioners to promote 'equal opportunities for service users'. It is possible that not enough practical information is given to support practitioners in the avoidance of the (re)creation and (re)production of gender in the nursery. Foucault's (2003) biopolitical and panoptican theories (*ibid:*1977) suggest that children are taught gender expectations and truths through controls being exerted upon them, resulting in children self-regulating and reproducing gender behaviours. Whilst the participants acknowledge that there are some practices which could impact on the development of the children's gender awareness, the general belief presented by the participants is that they are gender blind and that the children are responded to equally and on an individual basis. There is also a conviction expressed by all the participants that they are in some way immune to contributing to the gendering of children, owing to the training they receive and the age of the children. Participants express beliefs which reflected the view that children can be seen as adults in waiting (James and James, 2004). This was where it was assumed that the children's ability and willingness to conform and adhere to particular gender behaviours would verify their future sexuality. Generally, it appeared that the child's success—or failure—to conform to particular stereotypes about what it is to be masculine or feminine would be the prime indicator of their heteronormative destiny. There were indications that the children's toy and play preferences were key to this and the children's compliance to particular stereotypical behaviours was expected. Toys and play preferences contributed, through adult feedback, to the information the children received about gender expectations. These preferences highlighted to the children their appropriate in-group (Martin and Ruble, 2009) thereby validating the appropriate male or female script. From this research there is evidence that there is still work to be done to ensure that children are not subjected to gender stereotypes and discriminations which can limit and subject children, of both genders, to unfair practices. In Chapter 8, the implications for practice will be considered along with consideration of the strengths and limitations of this project and where potential areas for future enquiry are identified.

[12] In Scotland all EYP must adhere to the Codes of Practice as a condition of their registration (SSSC, 2009).

Chapter 8 – Conclusions and the Way Forward

> *This has certainly made me question and reflect on my practice and that of my colleagues. I found this very interesting and a useful basis for reflection in my personal and professional practice.*
>
> Anon (evaluation - Appendix 5)

8.1 Introduction

This study of *An old issue in a new era: early years practitioners' perceptions of gender,* which has been presented and discussed in the preceding chapters, will now be summarised. Following this, a consideration and discussion of the study's possible limitations will be presented. Finally, reflection on the findings, which highlight areas for improvement in practice and possible research opportunities, will conclude this dissertation.

8.2 The dissertation

Gender is so ubiquitous that often it is assumed that it is innate. However, Lober (1994:54) observes that 'gender is constantly created and re-created through human interaction'. Like the creation of cultures, gendering necessitates that society contributes to and creates the rules that determine how it is done (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Gender is an integral and identifiable feature of being; its occurrence is so commonplace that it is usually only when it is performed differently or it is disrupted that attention is drawn to *how* it is being done (*ibid*). On planning my investigation into EYPs' perceptions of gender, I therefore did not seek to discover if EYPs created a gendered setting. Rather, I wanted to investigate the mixed messages that my students appear to hold about gender. EYPs proposed that they foregrounded the individual child rather than the child's sex; however, the frequency of comments such as '*what do you expect, he's a boy*' or '*I know but girls are easier'* intrigued me as there appeared to simultaneously present homogenous yet different expectations for boys and for girls in the nursery.

In a time when, according to Roulston and Misawa (2011), studies into gender are often viewed as outdated and irrelevant, there nonetheless exists a plethora of journal articles,

and books that appear to highlight and advocate different approaches to education and care (Gurian, 2003, Baron-Cohen, 2004, Sax, 2005). However, as Halpern (2011: xvii) cautions, '(t)he literature on sex differences in cognitive abilities is filled with inconsistent findings, contradictory theories, and emotional claims that are unsupported by the research'. Further, she claims contemporary literature that promotes biological deterministic views, as discussed in Chapter 2, can result in an acceptance of gender variations which have little or no foundation (*ibid).* The acceptance of biology as solely determining *all* gender differences as natural and innate can perpetuate and recreate many of the gender dissimilarities and practices. Kimmel (2000) suggests that the inclination to see differences between the sexes, in contrast to the similarities, results in blindness to the production and creation of the disparities and inequalities between males and females (Chapter 2).

The creation of many of the observable differences between the sexes starts at birth, when girls and boys are made aesthetically and visibly dissimilar to one another. From the way a child's hair is worn, to the environments in which they live, to the toys that are associated with their sex category (see Sections 4.2 and 5.4), there are created differences that indicate what it is to be a boy or a girl. Beliefs about boys and girls—including norms and truths about children's physical appearance, behaviour, psychological or cognitive strengths and weaknesses—can affect the treatment and responses they receive. These beliefs can ultimately restrict and limit expectations about a child's capabilities based on their sex category.

At the outset of this project, it was necessary for me to consider the major themes that articulate the ways in which gender was understood. I started with investigating the 'nature versus nurture argument' as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. The literature confirmed that attributing particular characteristics to solely innate or created influences was too simplistic. For instance, as argued by Eliot (2009), socialisation can produce physical manifestations such as the development of particular neurological pathways (Chapter 2). These observed differences can in turn result in the assumption that the dissimilarities between the sexes' brains are innate and are solely due to biological sex differences (Gurian and Stevens, 2010). The consideration of the influences of socialisation led me to examine the effects of stereotypes on the development of gender (Chapter 4). I found that stereotypes (re)created and (re)produced particular typical behaviours and characteristics associated with each gender, often resulting in confirmation of these features as being

inherent in a particular sex. The literature accessed, reviewed and critiqued establishes that gendering is a life-long process that starts as soon as the sex of the baby is ascribed, and masculinity and femininity are conveyed through accepted societal truths and norms that can change over time.

According to Vandenbroeck and Peeters (2008) and Hellman (2011), the first social space beyond the home where gendering occurs is generally the nursery, which is where children are exposed to the influence of institutional socialisation. Gunderson et al. (2012) propose that the views and attitudes of those who work in EYs contributes to the messages children receive about what it is to be a boy or a girl. As such the empirical component of this research sought to explore the perceptions of gender as understood by experienced practitioners who work in nurseries. In order to investigate practitioners' perceptions of gender, discussion groups (DGs) were set up as described in Chapter 5. The DG sessions allowed qualitative data to be collected and also signposted the benefits of introducing a Toy Survey—which was subsequently extended to other EYPs undertaking the BA in Childhood Practice—as being useful in understanding more fully the participants' perception of children's toys.

Issues such as whether the participants believed gender to be innate or created were discussed during the DG sessions. Each participant in this research brought their own unique experiences and understanding of gender to the project. After each session the typed transcripts as well as my identification of themes and further areas for discussion were sent to the participants. This process provided an opportunity for each individual participant to further explore and re-consider topics, or request the inclusion of a new topic during the next session. Although no-one made such a request, some participants did further elucidate comments made at previous sessions. After the four main DGs, a fifth session provided an opportunity for everyone to comment on my initial findings. This consisted of the presentation of a PowerPoint, during which the participants completed an anonymous feedback sheet where they recorded their responses to the conclusions presented (Appendix 5).

The identification of the themes was, however, not the end of the research process. Whilst the investigation into the literature and theory that underpinned the research was challenging in terms of unravelling key themes, debates and theory, for me analysing and interpreting the data and making it coherent for presentation was one of the most

challenging aspects of the project. Holloway and Wheeler (2013) highlight the iterative nature of interpretative research and state that it is necessary to move backwards and forwards with the data in order to make sense of it and to present comprehensible findings. Undertaking this particular aspect of the process provided me with new insights to possible approaches I could adopt with my own research students, who might need support when working with their data. As such this has implications for my professional practice and will be discussed below.

Finally, the results from this project were analysed, presented and discussed in Chapter 6 and 7; the iterative nature of interpretative research continued throughout, as the process of managing the findings resulted in the themes being revisited and compared with each other. The findings from the project indicated areas for future practice and related research possibilities, which will be presented below. However, prior to this, it is necessary to consider the limitations of the project that could influence the findings.

8.3 Limitations of this study

In this section, I present and discuss some areas that may limit the findings of this project. One of the first considerations in this section is whether I have presented the trustworthy account of the project—as I promised in Chapter 5—as this issue relates to the integrity of the data presented. Silverman (2006) argues that the strength of qualitative research data comes from the accuracy of the presentation of the voices of the participants. Throughout this study, I have endeavoured to present an honourable and transparent account of what the participants selected to divulge to me and to the group. Stanley and Wise (1993:150) express the opinion that errors and uncertainties in qualitative research data are in fact 'at the heart of the research process. In effect these aren't confusions or mistakes, but are an inevitable aspect of research'. Sending copies of the transcripts to the participants provided opportunities for the data to be refuted, modified or supplemented, thus allowing them the opportunity to question my explanations of what was said. Further, there was an opportunity for the participants to view my initial interpretations where they could anonymously comment on and evaluate what had been said and contribute any final thoughts to the topic (Appendix 5). Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007) confirm that where participants are involved in the verification of data and where procedures are visible, it is then possible to claim that the project adheres to the principles of integrity both in

fulfilling ethical requirements and presenting an authentic account of the participants' voices.

8.3.1 Voice

Another area where a possible limitation may exist is the *voice* of others in data. This is where behaviours, attitudes and the role of others are reported by the participants as influencing the development of gender. The 'second order' representations of parents' attitudes and behaviours cannot be viewed as accurate depictions of the views of the parents, since their behaviours and attitudes are only as and what the participants understand them to signify. However, the views offered do illustrate the participants' interpretation and judgments of the parents. It is evident that the participants judge the parents to have gendered attitudes towards their children and that it is the parents, along with society, who encourage and teach children to be gendered. In addition, there is a significant lack of report of the *children's voice* and responses to gender behaviour in the data. This could indicate that either the children in nursery do not play a role in gendering or, perhaps more likely, that the participants are oblivious to or underestimate the role that children have in regulating and contributing to gender in the nursery. This may possibly be explained by the claim that the children are '*too young'* (Section 6.3.3) but it could be explained by the supposition that gender is either innate or created by parents and society (see Chapter 6). The issue of voice offers other avenues for further related research but there is a further limitation with regard to 'voice' that should be noted. A more extensive and deeper analysis of issues of power and the language of professional power, following the Foucauldian framework adopted here, might have provided further insights and, certainly, more work could fruitfully follow. For Butler (1990:33) gender identity is 'a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' and in the interviews there are indications that participants take gender identity to be just such a 'natural' occurrence. The concept of Foucault's (1980: 39) 'capillary power', the 'point where power reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, discourses, learning processes and everyday lives', deserves further attention than it has received here. I might have extended my analysis in this way and used a Foucauldian framework to provide a deeper analysis of professional power in the nursery, delving deeper into my data but also asking more power related questions of the

participants. Further work could now allow further exploration of the issues of power which exist amongst EYPs and observation and discussion with children could ask how and when gender, for them, becomes 'normalized' and how, by contrast, children themselves might subvert the regimes of gendered truths that others might seek to impose upon them. This issue of voice will be discussed below as it offers other avenues for further related research.

8.3.2 Toy Survey

The survey responses neither convey why the participants selected the particular toys nor the criteria used to make their choices. However, in broad terms, the survey does identify the toys the respondents associate with boys and girls. These findings are useful for this research as, according to Garrick et al. (2010), it is generally adults who select toys for the nursery. The survey links the respondents' replies, whether based on what is assumed or what has been observed, to the sex of the child they consider will play with them. Hence if, as the findings in this study indicate, the toy choices made follow traditional gendered lines, then the toys available in the nursery that are chosen by adults may reinforce particular norms and prescriptions about what toys are played with by boys and girls. This, alongside the data collected during the DGs, signpost findings that have implications for practice, as EYPs may not be aware of either making these choices or the implications of them. However, there are important methodological issues with the survey instrument itself and until these are addressed it is not possible to make any confident or particularly useful claims about the data that survey yielded. The questions were both leading and insufficiently nuanced. Items set up a series of binary oppositions for example, a 'blue hoover' and a 'pink vacuum' and therefore were almost destined to receive gendered responses. Response items, too, failed to include categories such as 'boys and girls play together with this toy' that would have added a more nuanced, almost inevitably more complicated but realistic, set of data. What were of interest were the responses to the 'neutral' items and interviewee explanations of their responses to the survey rather than the survey results *per se.* If I were to use a similar survey in future research I would make significant changes to it and, perhaps, use it only as a preliminary to discussion and in conjunction with observations of children at play with the toys in the survey.

Whilst the limitations of this project highlight other possible avenues for research, which will be discussed below, the project's findings suggest some areas that, if addressed, may improve outcomes for boys and for girls.

Inevitably, as this is a small scale project, the results are limited by the sample size of those involved in the study; nonetheless, this sample of EYPs is a typical cross section of staff from this sector. The results presented here confirm previous research findings and possibly in some small way extend what has previously been found. I therefore add my voice to the wider debate by suggesting that gender is an area that requires further attention in EYs. I now present my findings, which have implications for practice, and suggest changes that may support more gender inclusive approaches and indicate possible areas for improvements in practice.

8.4 Findings of project and significance for practice

This research project used DGs to investigate the participants' perceptions of gender in terms of how truths and norms are (re)created and (re)produced in the particular relational, social and cultural environment of the nursery. The DGs allowed interactive, meaning-making sessions to produce qualitative data, in which comments provided insights into the participants' understanding of gender. In this section I now summarise these findings, followed by a discussion that considers the possible significance for practice both in terms of EYP training and my own practice as their teacher and as an early career researcher.

8.4.1 The findings

The participants' perceptions of gender, as discussed in Chapter 6, suggested that 'nature versus nurture' arguments about gender are prevalent and contribute to the practitioners' understanding of boys and girls in the nursery. With regard to the attribution of particular qualities—physical, intellectual and psychological—there were features that the participants identified as being innate (Section 6.3). It appears that often little or no specific theory underpinned the views offered. Some beliefs—such as: '*boys are better... more logical'*, '*have bigger heads'* and '*have a different manner'* (Section 6.3.2) tend to be based on what had been observed or learned from practice, as well as wider tacit cultural assumptions. As will be discussed below, these experienced practitioners support and induct new practitioners into the profession, so the understanding of gender they convey to

new practitioners is important as it will impact on how children's gender behaviour is interpreted, understood and continues to be transmitted.

There is also an acknowledgement by participants that there are societal influences that determine how gender develops and manifests itself in the behaviour of children. The data indicates that the participants are aware that gendered expectations can result in the limiting of what children can become based on beliefs about the nature of boys and girls (Section 6.3.2). Parents and society—including the media—are identified by the participants as playing a significant role in how children develop many of their gendered behaviours. The belief that parents and society determine the children's gendered behaviours before they enter the nursery environment appears to result in a resignation that there is little the nursery staff can do about reversing these more pervasive influences. The project also found that the focus on parents and society by the participants appeared to absolve nursery staff from any culpability in the development of gendered behaviours exhibited by the children. This lack of a significant role is coupled with the participants' claim of gender blindness: nursery practitioners express the opinion that, owing to their training, they do not in fact contribute to the children's development of gender (Section 6.3.3).

The participants believe that, because the children were young, the staff generally responded to each child as an individual rather than as a boy or a girl. However, the data suggests that EYs, as do other areas of society, inculcate inherently gendered practices and attitudes (Section 6.3.3). This characteristic results in the nursery creating a gendered space with its own grammar and set of expectations around how gender should be performed. These perceptions have particular ramifications for the experiences offered to the children and the expectations communicated to them, which are based on gender. The application of Foucault's (2003) biopolitical model would suggest that the norms and truths conveyed to the children will influence their development, acceptance and replication of the nursery's gendered practices. The implication that gendering is something that happens elsewhere, and is done by others, but not by EY staff, has implications for practice that will be discussed below.

As highlighted in Chapter 7, sexuality was not an area I would have previously considered as relevant in the EY. However, the view of what a child is, in the here and now, as being

indicative of what they will become, can be understood as the perception of the child as an adult in waiting (Section 3.6.1). From the data, there is a suggestion that many adults—both parents and the participants—assume that the child's sexual destiny is based on their ability to conform to particular gender stereotypes at a young age. Play behaviours in the nursery show signs of being (re)created and (re)produced, where expectations support the belief that boys are active and boisterous, while girls are compliant and communicative (Section 7.2.2). The participants report that redirection of actions and activities by the parents is often used to communicate to children, and in particular to boys, that specific behaviours are considered to be unsuitable to their sex category.

The participants claim that breaches to stereotypical behaviour are viewed as causing concern to parents. Fathers in particular are reported as enforcing expected gender play norms in boys, where colour is seen as significant and femininity and girlieness are discouraged (Section 7.2.3). This is in contrast to girls' behaviour, which, according to the participants, appears to cause little concern or require redirection from the adults. It is perhaps the lack of prohibitive feedback from adults towards girls that results in them being able to engage in cross-gender play, consequently they can access a wider variety of sites for learning and where the label of 'tom-boy' is not viewed as oppressive as, for example, 'sissy'. It may also be possible to suggest that the constant encouragement by adults for boys to become averse to all that is feminine may contribute, in the long term, to what Rudman and Glick (2008) discuss as the devaluation of femininity and female traits.

The parents, however, are not the exclusive directors of behaviours, since the stories recounted by the participants reveal that they too respond to cross-gendered behaviours. These reactions occur despite the claim that they are happy for all children to access all activities (Section 7.2.3). Bullying was cited as the motive for redirections by both parents and EYPs. Despite this, it was noted that the participants did not report the children as being the perpetrators of any prohibition of cross-gender behaviours. This view may be indicative of the children not yet having learned to respond negatively to behaviours that are different; in other words, they have not yet learned to actively police the behaviour of others. Conversely, as the participants view the children to be *too young* to be treated according to their gender, they may be oblivious to the children proscribing other children's cross-gender behaviours. This issue highlights an area for further research which will be discussed below.

The nursery environment can, from a Foucauldian (1997) viewpoint, be seen as a panopticon, where benevolent surveillance exerts an invisible level of discipline that can influence the children's behaviour so that they conform to the particular gendered expectations of the setting. The data shows that stereotypes are not fixed and they do change (Section 7.4), since the participants reported modifications to behaviours, toys and clothes over time. However, each reported item appeared to have a caveat attached that still identified it as being for a boy or a girl: pink shirts for boys required a masculine type motif—for example a football or a car—to make it distinct from a pink shirt worn by a girl (Section 7.4.2). Alterations to stereotypes, as discussed by Golombok and Fivush (2001), appear to be incremental and reflect societal changes. Norms and truths can be modified, resulting in them being remodelled where there is an acceptance of different and new behaviours, which then become absorbed and accepted as new truths and norms (Foucault, 2003). There is however a need to challenge gender stereotypes, as adherence to them can foster particular views, skills and expectations of self and others resulting in the sexes developing often diametric and asymmetrical proficiencies and interests. These reported differences in the data in terms of expectations of behaviours and preferences appear to confirm Millett's (1970) description of parallel but different worlds. The dichotomy creates in-groups and out-groups (Martin et al., 2004) resulting in children having different gendered experiences depending on their sex category.

Finally, the participants' discussion of play and toys suggest that particular characteristics define and separate the sexes' play in the nursery. The descriptions acknowledge that particular toys foster particular features: nurture, appearance, and attractiveness or aggression, motion, and construction (Section 7.3.1). As the participants tend to select the toys for the nursery (Garrick et al., 2010), the children in turn choose from a collection of toys that has been selected for them. If, as discussed below, these choices are made based upon stereotypical gendered features, this can affect the children's play behaviours through reinforcement of associated gender characteristics. Such reinforcement creates, or adds to, gender separation and antithesis for the sexes. Additionally, the lack of reported proscription of girls' behaviours (Section 7.3) may suggest that they have more occasions to engage with a wider selection of learning opportunities. It is possible to then suggest that male gender stereotyping may be reducing the learning opportunities available to boys, as for them the repertoire for sites of learning is reduced due to the associated stigmas.

Further, as Macintyre and McVitty (2013) indicate, children's interests are often used to inform and plan learning and teaching activities in the nursery; gendered interests already established beyond the nursery are also used to support the children's development, thus consolidating previously acquired gendered perceptions. Consequently, the blending of adults' choices of gendered toys and the use of children's interests can result in self-fulfilling prophecies as different spaces, equipment for play and learning and skills facilitate the children's education based on their sex category. Accordingly, gendered toys and sites of play experiences can result in the reinforcement of behaviours that are essentially different for each of the sexes.

From the data analysis, it appears that the reported behaviours and expectations create an environment in the nursery where particular gendered attitudes and behaviour are legitimatised, reinforced and normalised. The findings of this project reflect previous research (Chapters 3 and 4) in that the influence of socialisation, which adults promote through the environment they create, reinforcement of behaviours, toys and play expectations, can result in different experiences for children based on their sex category. This research additionally questions the promotion of children's choices being used to determine learning in the nursery as these choices are based on selections made by adults that may add to the creation and perpetuation of gender stereotypes. The next section will focus on areas of practice that promote a more equitable environment for the youngest children to explore and learn in.

8.5 Professional knowledge, understanding and practice

The following section will be divided into three main discussions. The first will focus on the significance of this project for supporting EYPs in promoting gender equality, where consideration will be given to possible education and training approaches that heighten gender awareness in practice. This will be followed by an examination of two aspects of my own practice, which I believe have benefitted from undertaking this project. The first aspect focuses on my role as the tutor to EYP students and what I can do to support the development of gender awareness and equality through my teaching. The second aspect focuses on what I have learned from the research process and how I can use this to support my Masters students undertaking research projects. Finally, in the third section, I highlight

areas that I, as an early career researcher, consider may further contribute to this area of research.

8.5.1 EYPs' training

This small-scale study, which looked at EYPs' perceptions of gender, has highlighted for me potential areas for development in terms of possible approaches that would make issues of gender visible and relevant to EYPs. Where there are practices which do not promote gender equality it is necessary to bring about change. This can be done through the questioning of everyday approaches and through the challenging of stereotypes leading to more equitable experiences for both girls and boys. However, in order that practice can change, there is a need for those who are entering the profession, during their training, to examine gender as a discrete concern.

Despite the plethora of research that examines gender bias, there is an attitude, highlighted by Peterson and Lach (1993:196), which recognises that gender is often seen as 'a historical problem...(which is) no longer an issue in contemporary society'. Often gender is viewed as a relic from the past: the issues have been resolved and gender discrimination no longer occurs. Sadler and Zittleman (2009) observe that issues of gender are pervasive yet they are often seen as being outdated, unworthy of distinct deliberation or as an issue for practitioner training. They argue that '(g)ender equality is neither a competition nor is only about females', rather it is about individuality; gender labels should neither define nor limit what children can become (*ibid:*2009:2). For those entering the EYs profession, guidance, support and learning comes from vocational programmes, from national and local policies, Codes of Practice (SSSC, 2009) and through practice based learning supported by those already in practice. For example, in Scotland, many EYPs undertake vocational qualifications such as Higher National Certificates (HNC) or Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ). However, neither curriculum addresses gender specifically or treats it as a separate and discrete area for examination (SQA, online). As many practitioners do not progress to undertaking the BA in Childhood Practice—because it is a qualification for leaders/managers—consideration for practitioners' training will be presented here as initial training, policies and learning from other practitioners often determines how issues such as gender are viewed.

Forde (2012) notes that policy advice in relation to gender can *see-saw* between approaches and practices advocated by those in authority. Some policies advise educators to teach to children's gender strengths in order to mitigate particular gender weaknesses, such as boys' lack of communication skills and girls' lack of aptitude for maths (*ibid).* Other policies focus on and emphasise equality, calling for every child to be treated equally and given identical opportunities. This conflicting guidance creates a dichotomy that has incongruent aims; gender is seen as a vital characteristic of each individual and yet there is a need to provide the same opportunities for all. Forde (2012) suggests that gender policies frequently view the requirements of one gender differently and in opposition to the needs of the other. Sinnes and Løken's (2012) critique of educational gender policies argue that, too often, these are simplistic and present contradictory perceptions. Further, they claim that policies are often vague and in recent times have been subsumed into inclusion policies (*ibid*). For example, Education Scotland (online) currently does not specifically focus on gender equality but they do have a site with the generic title *Inclusion and equality*. Further, this site's only reference to gender is: *Supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender young people* (Education Scotland, online). This resource provides important and worthwhile information for those who support young people who face these issues, but the site fails to provide specific information on gender equality for either pupils or practitioners. The Scottish tool kit for gender in education (Scottish Government, 2007:1) states that 'it was rare to find schools with written policies on gender equality' and notes that most institutions tend to establish inclusion policies that generically blend aspects of race, class, religion and gender. The implementation of generic policies can result in an assumption that gendered practices are easily identifiable and understood. According to Forde (2012), policy makers are often more concerned that the policies can be enacted and delivered, rather than with ensuring that the complex realities that relate to gender issues are represented. The focus for practitioners and managers is often on proving that local policies are in place and being performed (*ibid).* Subrahmanian (2002:41) states that:

> ...policy discourse needs to shift away from the dominant framing arguments of efficiency, and develop on the basis of understanding how gender ideologies and differentiation perpetuate varied patterns of education.

It would appear that current policies rely on a directive approach to gender equality where those in practice must *show* that gender equality is promoted yet there appears to be insufficient support and advice on the practical implementation which specifically relates to understandings of gender equality. Erden and Wolfgang (2004) and Ärlemalm-Hagsér

(2010) argue that unless practitioners understand the issues and have attitudes that support true equality, then it is unlikely that any equality policies will be successful.

In order to support EYPs' understanding of gender in their initial training, the development of critical thinking skills could be incorporated so that issues of gender can be specifically explored. John Dewey (1933:9) identified critical thinking as being the 'active, persistent and careful consideration of a belief or supposed form of knowledge in light of the grounds that support it'. Students who are new to the profession spend time in practice, along with time at college; this training offers the opportunity to blend theory with practice where students can consider their own beliefs, values and understanding of gender, including bias. Part of this process would require students to bring their thoughts to a conscious level allowing them to examine their own thinking. This examination can be facilitated through discussion, where ideas are challenged and where awareness of principles and theory can be blended to provide information that can improve reflection. Lyons (2010) suggests that theory can be applied to practice, which would support the development of new and more considered approaches. As part of this process, it would be necessary for the students to identify the significance of their reflections in order to (re)evaluate beliefs and action. Thus practices can become informed, and this mitigates the reproduction of gendered attitudes and behaviours that are observed and learned through others. For example, if gender aware practitioners were to make toy choices based on the skills the toys promote rather than on particular characteristics or where it is simply viewed that the children *like* them, then it might be possible to offer children play opportunities that would have less of a gender bias. Thus, the development of EYPs' critical thinking could support the development of independent thought (Lyons, 2010), which could in turn encourage new EYPs to challenge and reveal established gender practices.

8.5.2 EYPs in BA Childhood Practice

As indicated in the comment that opens this final chapter, the practitioners involved in this project found that through discussion and reflection-on-practice their awareness of gender

was more considered. This section focuses on those EYPs who have been in practice for a considerable time and who are required to complete the BA in Childhood Practice[13]. The perceptions of gender revealed during the DGs demonstrate and confirm other research, which cautions against experienced educators' complacency as it may result in them 'succumbing to "gender-blindness"' (Roulston and Misawa, 2011:3-4). Like other institutions, EYs settings not only contribute to the (re)production of gendered messages but also help to (re)create them. It is therefore important that gender as a discrete issue be considered, rather than be buried in an excess of advice in policies about generic discriminatory practices. In order to do this, it is necessary that EYPs recognise that stereotypical beliefs can often operate at a subconscious level and that these can impact on values and practice. Critical reflection, along with the consideration of the panopticon as described by Foucault (1977), could provide opportunities for practitioners to consider their attitudes towards gender which goes beyond directive advice. This approach, I believe, can be incorporated into my own teaching practices.

In the following two sections I will discuss and present the impact of this project on areas of my practice. I will examine my practice as it relates to the development of my BA students' awareness of gendering in their nurseries. In addition, I will consider the support I am now able to offer to my Masters research students who are undertaking the dissertation element of the Childhood Practice programme and who may need support with their data analysis.

8.5.3 Improving gender awareness among EYPs

As a teacher who, as a university academic, has a role in the education of experienced EYPs, I now consider how my practice can play a role in raising awareness of gender, based on the findings from this study. Through encouraging reflection and discussion, it is possible to bring about change. By adopting an approach such as Schön's (1983) reflection-on-action—where practitioners examine events in the context of practice—my students would be required to view their practice at a responsive level, as a reflex-action (*ibid)* where practice is examined to uncover realities previously not recognised.

[13] A level 9 qualification (Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework) is the equivalent of an ordinary degree (SCQF, 2012) and is a registration requirement (QAA, 2007) for leaders and managers in Childhood Practice.

Brookfield (1995:8) cautions that 'reflection is not by definition reflective' and that more is required than mere mirror gazing, which can be contemplative. He (*ibid)* advocates that it is possible to critically reflect on practice with the aid of various 'lenses' that help identify areas which require change.

Brookfield's (1995:30) lenses, includes the use of critical friends, literature and a consideration of society and political circumstances to give an objective perspective. Reflection allows 'those actions and assumptions that either confirm or challenge existing power relationships' to become visible. The reflective activities that are currently used throughout the BA in Childhood Practice could be adopted more widely so that the EYPs can consider why particular behaviours are associated with the sexes. Following Brookfield (1995), literature that illuminates various perspectives could support this approach, as it will provide the opportunity for the students to consider the various debates and deliberations. As part of this course of study, students would be encouraged to inspect and respond to their own practice in order to improve it. Reflection can then be seen as part of the learning process because it allows new meanings and contextualisation of responses and actions (Dewey, 1933).

In addition, adopting Schon's (1983) reflection-on-action approach could encourage EYPs to examine the behaviours and responses they give to children. Activities such as the filming of practice could be used to allow EYPs to reflect on behaviours and responses that encourage or discourage gender behaviour to help identify how practice can be improved. For example, practitioners could examine the voices and role of children in the gendering process, as these appear to have been omitted from the consideration of gender during the DGs. This examination could help illuminate the proscription of non-conforming behaviours by children or, on the other hand, it may reveal that it is the adults who police gender behaviours in the EYs setting (see Chapter 7).

It is necessary that staff are gender aware so that they are able to discuss and challenge children's choices and attitudes as well as their own, which conform to particular stereotypes. It is clear that, by the time children enter the nursery, they already have associations with their gender in-group (Martin et al., 2002) and exhibit disassociation with the out-group. It is necessary to confront stereotypes and avoid tokenism; approaches have

to be more sophisticated than putting the pink castle into the construction area (Section: 6.2.1) if children are to be offered experiences which do not conform to gender bias.

Encouragement of discussion, reflection and consideration of gender issues and practice may promote change that will improve learning outcomes for both boys and girls and improve EYPs' practice, knowledge and understanding of gender. The final anonymous evaluation (Appendix 5) during the fifth session of this research illustrated that the participants had started to acknowledge the gendered opinions they had:

> *I agree that we all initially said we didn't gender but agreed...that we all did in some aspects.*
>
> Anon- end evaluation

Through approaches which highlight gender awareness, both in theory and in practice, EYPs would be provided with the opportunity to question the taken-for-granted practices and responses that can occur on a daily basis: *good morning boys and girls... can all the boys go and get their coats*. These actions convey and support lifelong divisions, which create separate and parallel experiences and spaces for the sexes. Allowing experienced EYPs to explore these messages through the process of reflection may help raise awareness of gendered practices and support change.

8.5.4 Supporting research students

In this section, I present the second area for my development of practice that has been informed by this project. The analysis of the data in this project provided me with one of the biggest challenges. I initially found the amount of information I had collected overwhelming, and I was unsure where to begin identifying themes as so many were evidently present. Many research methods books provide a wealth of information about how to do research, but analysis for qualitative research data tends to merit a few lines on sorting the data into themes and codes. Phrases like '(t)he researcher begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998:12) suggest that themes would magically appear. Braun and Clarke (2006:6) argue that this type of comment denies the *active* role the researcher plays.

For me, the solution to the challenge of themes came in an unexpected way when I was in conversation with a colleague who asked me what I had found out from my research.

During the discussion, I realised that I was trying to simultaneously unpick all the themes that were present in the data. Rather it was necessary for me to select the ones that I felt best illuminated my investigation into the perceptions of gender as understood by the EYPs. This I realised could be the themes that resonated with my reading, occurred most frequently or simply that I wished to pursue in order to develop my understanding of the research issue. By undertaking the process of managing the abundance of data into manageable themes, I found that I had more empathy for the confusion reported by some of my Masters students. As a consequence of this, a class has been organised for students undertaking the M.Ed. in Childhood Practice to allow them to consider various approaches to analysing data sets. This will involve presenting students with data that can be discussed and analysed. Advice and support from tutors and other students can also be offered. It is intended that the students will be able to transfer this learning to their own projects. Having presented the learning from this project, I will now consider how I, as an early career researcher, can add further to this area of research to understand gendered practice in EYs.

8.6 Ways forward

This research project has illuminated various aspects of ways in which EYPs perceive gender in EY settings. However, and inevitably, there are several related strands of enquiry that would benefit from further investigation. I now present some possible areas for further research, with a particular view to developing insights into gender in the EYs.

8.6.1 Intersectionality

Having examined the role of EYP in the construction of gender in the nursery I now suggest further research that explicitly factors-in intersectionality to enhance and enrich future study. The need for consideration of wider issues is reflected in Shields' (2008:311) comment: '(t)he facts of our lives reveal that there is no single identity category that satisfactorily describes how we respond to our social environment or are responded to by others'. This study has illuminated areas of concern relating to gender in the nursery but consideration of factors such as class, ethnicity and religion would clarify the interplay of other social factors which, along with gender, perpetuate stereotypes that can restrict expectations of both boys and girls. Further research could consider not only the EYPs' own views on the impact of additional socially and culturally related factors on children's

development of gender but would involve a consideration of the EYPs' perceptions of these factors as they relate to themselves and their expectations for the children.

8.6.2 Further research with EYPs

Further research could also involve the EYPs' observing their own practice. By doing this, it would be possible to work with practitioners applying Schön's (1983) reflection-on-practice to reflect on recorded observations. It would be possible for the participants to identify behaviours and responses that could reinforce gender stereotypes. Further reflection could help identify approaches that would support more equitable practices.

8.6.3 Research with parents

As previously noted, the behaviours and responses of parents in this project are understood from the participants' perspectives. As such, whilst these illuminate the EYPs' own biases, and their expectations of the parents, they do not fully provide an accurate insight into the opinions and attitudes of the parents towards their children's gender behaviours. In order to develop this topic further, it would be beneficial to investigate how parents view and respond to their children's gendered behaviours. Further insights could be gleaned through discussion groups, in which parents would be encouraged to discuss their experiences and expectations of their children's behaviours. Play and toys could be the initial focus of discussion, as the participants report these to be sites of particular gendering.

8.6.4 Research with children

Children in this project at times appear to have been omitted from the DGs, with little mention of how they respond to perceived gender differences and non-conformity. Observations of and DGs with the children may reveal sources and regulation of gender attitudes and behaviours. In addition, these observations may help to illuminate the children's play choices, friendships and preferences which may, in turn, provide an insight into whether their understandings of gender are reflected in the behaviours they exhibit and vice versa. Arguably, children may subvert the 'normalized' regimes of truth. Further, research with the children may also reveal how adult responses are perceived in relation to gendered play behaviours and indicate if children have any awareness of and reactions to

the gender stereotypes being conveyed. Research with children might also help clarify the role of agency and authorship in the construction of the gender roles acquired (see Chapter 3.5) and may provide valuable information about how children understand the role of gender in their lives. Observations and discussions may also reveal ways in which children disrupt and subvert adults' expectations of what it is to be a boy or a girl. This may relate to the panoptican (Foucault, 1977): children may reveal that they believe there to be specific expectations of their behaviour although they may opt not to conform to, or even to disrupt, those. Discussions with the children may expose how adaptations of behaviours allow engagement to take place in which the children focus on the satisfaction of the activity, as understood by Lipsitz-Bem's (1983) *self-schema theory* rather than gender as a motivating factor. Finally, by undertaking further research it may be possible to identify gender regimes that continue to influence and perpetuate gendering (Connell et al., 1982) in EYs.

8.7 Challenges for the EYs profession

This study has considered the perceptions of gender as understood by EYPs. I have explore gender blindness and suggested that 'equal but different' can result in the promotion of inequality based on innate gender differences or gendering done by others. As I have indicated these beliefs can result in the (re)creation and (re)production of stereotypes associated with what it is to be male and female. Consequently, parallel experiences based on the sex of the children may be constructed. In order that transformative change can take place in nurseries, I have argued that EYPs should consider both gender theory and practice. In enabling, effecting and supporting a defamiliarisation of gender, it is necessary to eliminate the damaging acceptance of stereotypes and folklore assumptions along with essentialist principles that continue to produce and reinforce polarized and gendered dichotomies.

Reflective EYPs, researchers, further education colleges, universities and those who are involved in the creation of policies can all support alternative ways of conceptualizing and defining practice by challenging and re-directing gendering. Branisa et al. (2010) caution that a world that accepts asymmetrical stereotypes will (re)produces parallel worlds which are differentiated by power. Unless we can disrupt these stereotypes, boys and girls, and men and women, will continue to see each other as opposites. An acceptance of 'equal but different' fails to recognise individuals as, primarily, human beings rather than boys or

girls, men or women. For as long as those who work with young children continue to view boys and girls as immutably different, rather than as individuals who enjoy a spectrum of interests and behaviours, then children will experience and continue to replicate social norms in two different and two gendered worlds.

8.8 Envisioning a different future for EYPs?

This dissertation set out to explore EYPs' perceptions of gender and I conclude by suggesting training approaches that will lead to more informed practices. EYPs, through their practice, should, I have argued here, be able to present children with experiences that can offer multiple and fluid understandings of what it is to be a boy or a girl in the nursery. Such understandings could mean that girls are no longer positioned as the inferior 'other' or the compliant, quieter, cleaner version of males. Such understandings could mean that boys are not defined by limited understandings of masculinity that presume their sexual destiny. Rather, an acceptance of a variety of play behaviours for both boys and girls would be seen as a healthy expression of exploration and learning. Putting gender firmly back onto the education and training agenda for EYPs, could help to enable this workforce in the provision of a socially just, stimulating and creative learning space for all children.

Appendix 1: Questions for discussion group

Ref MW/ Dissertation

Do you believe that gender differences are innate?

What role does socialisation play in determining beliefs about gender?

Do you think gender affects behaviour?

Do you consider it to affect what is expected and what role one has in society?

Do you think you influence how boys or girls view themselves?

Appendix 2: Plain Language Statement

Plain Language Statement

Researcher:

Mary Wingrave m.wingrave.1@research.gla.ac.uk

Supervisors:

Prof. Robert Davis Robert.Davis@glasgow.ac.uk

Dr Nicki Hedge Nicki.Hedge@glasgow.ac.uk

Degree Programme Title:

Education Doctorate

School / Subject Area:

School of Education

Project Title:

Does gender matter?: Early year practitioners' attitudes of gender

Invitation Paragraph:

You are being invited to take part in a Doctoral research study. Before you decide to take part, it is important that you understand the nature of the research, why it is being carried out and your role, if you choose to participate. In order for you to gain a clear understanding of this research project, please take some time to read the following information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before you make any decision regarding your participation. You can contact me, Mary Wingrave, or my supervisors, Prof. Robert Davis and Dr Nicki Hedge, via the contact details above.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of the study is to explore Early Years Practitioners' views and attitudes about gender stereotyping for the purpose of my doctoral thesis.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to take part in this study because you are a BA student and you are an Early Years professional. Your involvement in this study will help give you an opportunity to explore your responses and interactions with children based on their gender. Please note there are no right or wrong answers.

Do I have to take part?

You do not need to take part in this study and during the course of the research project you may withdraw at any time without giving a reason. Participation, non participation or withdrawal from the research will not affect your progress or any assessment grades awarded to you.

What will happen to me if I take part?

Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?

Applicants taking part will sign a consent form. Any data collected will be kept strictly confidential. Anything that can identify you will be removed from any writing arising from this project. Any written or recorded data collected from the recordings will be kept in a locked filing cabinet and any files stored on the computer will only be accessible using a password. At the end of the research period, December 2015, any paper documents and any voice or video recordings will be erased and any files containing any data collected will be deleted.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research study will be used in my submission for my Ed.D. dissertation and may be used for a journal article or a book chapter.

Who has reviewed the study?

The research study has been reviewed by the College of Social Science Ethics Committee.

Contact for further information

For any further information regarding the conduct of this research study, please feel free to contact

Mary Wingrave m.wingrave.1@research.gla.ac.uk
or
Prof. R. Davis: Robert.Davis@glasgow.ac.uk
or
An independent contact:
Valentina Bold: Valentina.Bold@glasgow.ac.uk

Thank you for taking time to read the above information.

Appendix 3: Toy Survey

Read the list below and indicate who you think would play with this toy.

adapted from: Blakemore, J. E. O. and Centers, R. E. (2005) 'Characteristics of boys' and girls' toys' *Sex Roles*, 53:9/10, pp. 619-633.

Toy	**Always or nearly always girls**	**Generally girls**	**Both girls and boys**	**Generally boys**	**Always or nearly always boys**
aeroplane					
airport					
baby doll					
ballerina costume					
Barbie bicycle					
Barbie clothes					
Barbie doll					
Barbie jeep					
beach ball					
beads					
Beanie Baby bear					
Ben 10					
blue Hoover					
Bratz doll					
brush/mop set					
bus					
cash register					
castle tent					
crayons					
dinosaur					
doctor kit					
dollhouse					
drum					
easy bake oven					
Etch-a-Sketch					

Toy	Always or nearly always girls	Generally girls	Both girls and boys	Generally boys	Always or nearly always boys
fire fighter gear					
football					
G.I Joe					
garage					
gardening tools					
guitar					
helicopter					
hoops					
horses					
iron and ironing board					
jewellery					
jigsaw					
karaoke machine					
Leap pad					
Lego set					
lipstick and play makeup					
Matchbox cars					
microscope					
Mr. Potato Head					
Mrs. Potato Head					
My Little Pony					
pink vacuum					
pink Lego					
Play-Doh					
police officer gear					
police station					
Power Wheels car					
pram					
princess costume					
remote-control car					
scooter					

Toy	Always or nearly always girls	Generally girls	Both girls and boys	Generally boys	Always or nearly always boys
Slinky					
slot car racetrack					
soft balls					
Sponge Bob Square Pants					
stuffed dinosaur					
stuffed Elmo					
superhero costume					
tea set					
tool bench					
tool kit					
toy kitchen					
toy soldiers					
Toy Story – Buzz					
Toy Story - Woody					
Toy Story- Jessie					
train set					
trampoline					
transformer					
tricycle					
wheelbarrow					
Winnie-the-Pooh					
wooden blocks					
xylophone					

Appendix 4: Evaluation at end of DG

Discussion group evaluation 4th Dec 2012

Have you enjoyed attending the discussion group yes no

- Enjoyed – 8/8

What do you think you have learned (if anything)?

- Lots. To hear other people's views.
- That we are promoting a culture that makes differences between boys/girls.
- That there is a lot more focus on gender for children than I realised.
- There are more factors to how we treat children and these appear to be more deep-set than I initially thought.
- That people can unconsciously treat children differently because of their gender.
- Society still plays a big impact on boys/girls and discriminate against sex (gender).
- Made me think about my everyday practice and about my attitudes in everyday life regarding boys and girls.
- I never thought about this stuff and about boys and girls.

Do you think you have changed any of your practice as a result of the discussions?

- Said no to pink Lego.
- Made me look at things differently and try out little experiments within my establishment.
- Yes, I look at the resources I have in my setting and also the way staff respond to children and their needs.
- Yes, I will be more aware and make my staff team more aware.
- I am more aware of the way I speak/treat children or that I may make assumptions in regards to children's likes/dislikes and learning without realising it.
- My own practice and been able to look at/indentify situations where I may have reacted differently towards someone because of their gender.
- It has alerted me more to my own actions when responding to boys/girls and think before I act (speak) in certain ways. The discussion group has opened my mind up to things/issues that I have not focussed on before.

Have you shared with any colleagues the content of the discussion group? If yes, what elements have you shared? Yes No

8/8

How did others respond?

- Very interested
- Have different opinions

Appendix 5: End evaluation participants' responses to PowerPoint[14]

21st January 2013

Dear Participants,

Below are the initial codes that I have identified from what you have said during the discussion groups. As I go through the results could you note your initial responses to what is being said and please feel free to add anything. (Please feel free to disagree with my analysis—I want your responses. I freely admit that I may have misinterpreted things said so I would like you to indicate where you agree and where you disagree with my analysis).

Where no comment has been made then the space has been left blank. 7 of the 8 participants responded to the feedback.

A girlie girl is defined as: (in addition to the analysis quotes from transcripts were also presented to the participants)

> Being defined as a girly girl relates primarily to behaviour and choices of play but you do mention pink, despite saying this is not specifically relevant. This appears to link to choices staff make in relation to activities to target. You provide a definite definition of a *girlie girl*.

- I agree that we often provide specific experiences for girls based on their gender.
- I would agree that clothes/colour can impact the association of a girlie girl.
- Agree- dress does not necessarily make a girlie girl.
- I agree with statements relating to girlie girl. It was more difficult to define a girlie girl than a boy as boys' behaviour was more noticeable where they act feminine.
- I agree with the statement and I would add feminine – how this is traditionally portrayed. Their manner being genteel.
- I agree with this statement.
- I agree with the analysis.

[14] The PowerPoint is available on request: the boxed statements presented here contain the initial analysis that was presented to the participants.

A real wee boy

A *real wee boy* is shown to avoid things that are feminine and is assumed to want to '*help*' fix things for the staff. There is an expectation that the boys are active and noisy. There also seems to be an association with '*real wee boys'* not being gay and being stereotypically male. Whilst there is general talk about individuals, there appears to be stereotypical understanding of both the terms girly girls and real wee boys. Both definitions appear to firmly reinforce social stereotypes.

- Enjoys more active play often boisterous with other boys.
- Agree with statement.
- Agree
- Also agree
- I agree with the statement
- Agree with statement.
- Agree.

Behaviour relating to boys and girls

The comments from the DG acknowledge that as a society we make generalisation about what it is to be a boy or a girl. Society appears to create the rules for boys' and girls' behaviours. The opinions expressed confirmed throughout by all participants that – girls do not generally behave in the same manner as boys. The theme that girls' behaviour is not as difficult to manage, they are more mature and that they are generally quieter than boys. There is a confirmation of the stereotypical opinion that boys are rougher, noisier and more active than girls. There is a belief that boys and girls learn in different places and that these can be used to promote learning.

- Agree
- Agree
- Behaviour influences play
- Girls do not play with messy things.
- Agree
- Agree with the statement that girls are generally easier to manage than boys.
- I agree with the statement

Play behaviour related to boys

- I agree with statements.
- Agree – role play aspects about swords, guns etc.
- Behaviour influences play

- The majority of boys tend to play with the same type of toy – eg. blocks, construction.
- Agree
- Agree
- Boys will react to behaviour watched on TV such as Power Rangers.

Play behaviour for girls :

- Girls can appear calmer due to programs watched.
- Agree
- Agree
- Girls are calmer in their play than boys.
- Agree
- I agree with the statement
- Girls' play is different from boys

Behaviour – what might influence behaviour?

> The opinions offered appear to confirm much of what 'folklore' says about behaviours and this justifies the focus on boys. The programmes that girls watch tend to be calmer and therefore the girls tend to be calmer. There are assumptions that some of the behaviour is innate – girls are naturally quieter and more mature. Boys are naturally more boisterous and more difficult to settle. Boys' programmes appear to result in boys '*bouncing off the walls'*. Of course this suggests the question: which comes first the boys' desire to watch this type of programme or is the behaviour influenced by what they watch? Is this just another form of conditioning boys?

- I agree with statement. Behaviour does influence the play – girls playing outdoors will have to be careful of their dress etc. not to get dirty.
- Agree
- Agree
- Parents/carers – male influences – e.g. dads and their sons.
- Agree
- Agree
- Agree with statement

Different expectations of boys and girls.

The DG data suggests that girls are believed to get 'away' with more in play but there are particular expectations of behaviour: girls need to have manners and conform to the rules. Boys on the other hand are more controlled and restricted in their play. This appears to change as the children get older where there are fewer constraints placed upon boys and girls are more restricted in their behaviour. Although some comments appear to indicate that there are fewer expectations put upon boys about behaviour – even in the early years, where some parents almost excuse the boys' behaviours as being inevitable – *'what do you expect he's a boy'*.

- Boys get much harder time than girls as ok for girls to be tomboy but the boys acting feminine is more of an uproar.
- Agree
- Agree
- Boys are expected to be tough, butch, able to stand up for themselves. I couldn't really say honestly what is expected of girls – is to be pretty?
- Agree
- Agree
- I agree

Gender / sexuality

During the DG there are many occasions when it is reported that boys do not conform to the social stereotypical behaviour relating to what is expected of boys in our society. This seemed to raise concerns about the boys' future sexuality. It raises the question of whether children are sexual beings? For instance: the boy's non conformity where '*he didn't do any of the boisterous stuff that all the boys did'*. This appears to imply that there is a '*normal'* behaviour that is assumed for boys (and girls). If the boys do not conform to this norm there seems to be an issue. There is throughout the DGs far more concern about boys being gay than about girls who do not conform to female stereotypes. This raises the question of whether we encourage male stereotypes – boys being rough, able to look after themselves, being interested in construction etc in order to '*protect them'* whereas with girls they get more lee-way (another theme) as less concern is expressed.

- Agree
- Agree
- I agree
- It appears that dads seem to worry more about sexuality with regards to their sons than mums do with either their son or daughter.
- Agree

- Agree
- Boys are more associated with being gay due to behaviour.

Girls have more lee-way than boys

Awareness is expressed during the DGs that boys and girls are treated differently and that there are different expectations. The views expressed appear to indicate that girls have it all. Girls are seen as being able to break the gender norms and allowed more freedom than boys. All present appeared to agree that girls can do anything in play but there are more specific limits on what the boys do. The comment '*....it has been poor old women for all our lives...but actually we are probably better off than the boys because we are allowed to do an awful lot more than you know than we are allowing a young boy to do...aren't we?*' appears to be extrapolate by some in society to believe that women are better off than the 'boys'

- Boys quicker to stereotype girls. Can have more freedom to explore. Boys' stereotypes are linked to sexuality. Girls' stereotypes linked to behaviour.
- Not always but most of the time.
- Agree
- With regards to their sexuality I think as young children girls do have more lee-way than boys, it's not as obvious in girls being gay.
- I agree
- I agree
- agree

Pinks and blues

There is an acceptance that colour does relate to the genders. There is an opinion that children need to know what gender they are because '*they have different functions as they grow up'*. Children appear to know by the age of 3 what belongs to girls/boys and have quite definite ideas about girls' and boys' things. There is evidence that the adult often rely on colour coding in order to know how to respond.

- Agree
- Agree totally
- I agree
- Children are taught from an early age that pink things are for girls and blue are for boys.
- Agree

- Agree
- At young age children associate colour to girl/boy. Boys will wear pink if it is branded

Staff responses

All of the participants claimed that they did not gender. Stories that recounted gendering appears to have be done by others or are the norms – the Christmas plays- and not the responsibility of one individual. The belief that EYs is different, that the training EY staff get protects them and the age of the children supports the claim that gendering does not occur in EYs. The DG transcripts indicate that participants may have reconsidered the view that they '*don't gender*' across the DGs. The idea that as professionals gender behaviours are exhibited by anyone does not sit comfortably with participants.

- Don't realise we do gender. Stereotype – subconsciously. I am not surprised that we gender as it has been happening for years. Long as it don't target children.
- Agree
- Agree
- I agree we said this.
- I agree that we all initially said we didn't gender but agreed when in discussion that we all did in some aspects.
- Agree
- Agree

Belief that EY settings don't contribute to or cannot control gendering

- I believe that we cannot control gendering.
- I agree
- Even though we think we don't gender or stereotype in our establishments we actually do so without realising it.
- Agree
- Agree
- Agree with analysis
- Agree

Toys

There appear to be many stories/ discussion about boys, mainly about them breaking the gender norm by dressing up, playing with dolls, being '*in touch with their feminine side*'. Throughout the DGs there is a strong message that there are gender rules that are socially appropriate for both boys and girls. This appears to be evident in the nursery and practitioners do reflect these. There is also an acceptance that things can change- but would only change if they reflect the social norm (influenced by manufacturers/media).The comments about children playing with the same toys but in different ways would support the suggestion that children may view toys differently. This does suggest that gender influences how children play.

- Could give boys/girls a cardboard box they would display different play behaviours- this would be with any toy.
- Agree
- Agree
- Media has a huge impact on which toys boys and girls play with or request – e.g. cartoons and advertisements.
- Agree
- Agree
- I agree that children can conceptualise toys differently although I don't believe this is due to gender and more related to children engaging in different types of play-

Toy survey - initial analysis of the DG survey

Toys which you ALL believe are played with by both girls and boys:

- Beach ball, Blue Hoover, Cash register, Castle tent, Crayons, Doctor kit, Easy bake oven, Etch-a –sketch, Gardening tools, Guitar, Jigsaw, Karaoke machine, Leap Pad, Mr. Potato Head, Mrs. Potato head, Pink vacuum, Pink Lego, Play-Doh Scooter Slinky, Sponge Bob, stuffed Elmo, Toy kitchen, Trampoline, Tricycle, Xylophone.

Played with ONLY by girls:

- Barbie clothes, Lipstick make up, Princess costume.

Played with ONLY by boys:

- Ben 10, G. I. Joe, Toy soldiers.

Surprises with toys

- Gardening tools – 8 neutral
- Wheelbarrow – 7 neutral 1 boys
- Pink Lego – 8 neutral
- Lego – 6 neutral 2 boys

Surprises as the survey relates to the discussion

- Princess costume – survey indicates only girls but discussion indicated that boys do play with these although fathers in particular do not like this.
- Blue/pink Hoover – whilst the survey indicates these to be neutral the discussion indicates that the blue one is primarily seen as for the boys or is neutral whereas the pink one is viewed as being for a girl.
- Lego/wooden blocks – discussion indicates that the boys generally play with these.

- Agree
- Agree
- Agree with this.
- Agree- surprised about the contradictions with the discussions
- Agree
- Boys do play with princess costumes. Agree with statement.
- Agree

Fathers' responses

It would appear from the discussions that fathers more than mothers appear to react to boys breaking the gender norms.
Fathers appear to have a concern that boys engaging in stereotypically girls' activities will result in the '*boys acting' feminine'*.

- Agree
- I agree although many of my mums comment negatively if boys are 'caught' playing in dresses.
- Can have a negative impact on their sons' behaviour – worry about their sexuality.
- Agree
- Agree – fathers come forward more when they don't like boys in dresses etc. Some fathers have fears and put this on to their children. Fathers' attitudes can have negative impact on their sons' behaviours
- Agree
- Agree

Further response from RP8 sent by email:

In my experience boys tend to just either take the dressing up off or would put the pink Hoover down and not really say much about why, they would be too embarrassed. Through doing this I think boys think it is wrong to play with pink toys or things that are made for girls. They then grow up with this perception which I feel makes it stronger in society.

General Feedback/Impact

- Agree. I have discussed this briefly with my staff team and they also found it an interesting topic. We also discussed the things we may subconsciously do to gender children. I would be keen to look more closely on this topic.
- This has certainly made me question and reflect on my practice and that of my colleagues. I found this very interesting and a useful basis for reflection in my personal and professional practice.
- I really enjoyed the discussions, in particular how you might start out with a certain train of thought and how this could be altered through other peoples' thoughts and opinions. It made me look at the practices within my establishment.
- Feel I am more knowledgeable about the social impact on gender.
- Agree – was a really interesting topic. You wonder how you can change perceptions/ideas of people. It looks like it's a whole society's view point that would need to change.
- Very interesting- has made me think.
- RP8 (responded by email): Am glad I took part in the group have a lot more knowledge of the social perception of gender.

Appendix 6: Extract of transcript analysis – Nature of gender

Extracts from the transcripts illustrating analysis – Chapter 6: Nature of gender

Nature of Gender										
Created								Biological		
EYP influence		Parents		Others				Affect learning		Other effects	
EYP participants	Other EYP	Mothers	Fathers	Society	Media	Others		Girls	Boys	Behaviour	Physical
There is still part of me when the wee boy puts the hat on, the dress, the high heels and the beads where you see the staff going 'oh here check out XXXX' and you have a wee giggle but you let them get on with it DG1RP5 I do think children need to know if they are a boy or a girl...and I know we try to give them opportunities for everything but I don't think there is anything wrong in letting a boy be a boy and a girl be a girl. It's what we are doing.... DG1RP8 I'm only going with the Birth to 3 because what they are saying about brain development and they're saying it's the connections that are made....so if we are finding that girls are getting treated differently then the boys are not getting		Probably messages from dad that that wasn't the type of thing boys did...you know boys play at rough-and-tumble you know they play with cars and action men or whatever. DG1RP2 The parents can influence at that age. DG1RP5 I think it is done by parents....as well you know..... DG1RP4 parents steer them.... RP6 I don't know am kind of swayed because when they are younger they can be quite similar. Their wee traits and		Society...yes society is determining gender DG1RP6 If you had a boy and a girl you would need to go out and buy a boy's set and a girl's set. DG4RP1 I do think it is society... DG1RP7 [MV] it seems to be more ok for girls to do almost anything they want...isn't it...? RP3 [MV agreement] but boys you're saying well it's ok for boys to do that... you know or we're leaning towards that...why is that? Why? Why at such an early age do we determine..... RP3				Boys have a more logical brain and...they say boys have a more logical brain which can accept maths and numbers more easily than girls can. DG1RP1 I would say...for example we did tend to have a lot of boys playing in it (construction) so we put a castle in it...with some ponies so now the girls will build bridges for their ponies...and doing different things like that DG1RP8 ...I mean they do say that research says that boys are slower than girls.		Baby boys have a different shape of head than baby girls. DG1RP3 I think in general and I am generalising I think girls come across a bit softer and a bit less rough than boys in general if you look at that. If that makes sense? DG1RP8 They've grown up with mixture of toys and mixture of things and allowed to do all sorts of things...so...but there are still definitely differences. RP3DG1 I don't know am kind of swayed because when they are younger they can be quite similar. Their wee traits and things. I think it can depend on	

exposed to as much then those connections are getting left....and if they don't get used then they die basically so...DG3RP6 See I don't know maybe 'cause we work with the under 5s....DG3RP4 it is just automatic...you just kiss them...RP6 I think in early years it is different 'cause they are small...to be honest...maybe if it was a school....I think they do... RP8 but as babies it is...'cause it distinguishes them.....so that it is pink for a girl and blue for a boy- DG3RP6 I think a nursery it is always a totally different environment because we have the training and we understand. DG4RP8 Well I suppose when you think about parents coming to visit the nursery for the first time then...when I think about it...I probably do...respond differently by saying things like-'*oh she's so petite she's lovely*', whereas a wee boy I'd go '*oh he's a big boy for his age'* DG3RP3	things. I think it can depend on lots of things, their upbringing. DG1RP6 Fathers can be quite protective of girls boys get that much more leeway. DG2RP6 Early years couldn't change it...I mean media...I mean from the now to Christmas it is all the toys and then you've got the parents families grandparents so it extends...I think all that has an impact on what we're trying to do.. DG4RP6	I don't think society determines whether you are born a boy or a girl, you are born a boy or a girl. DG1RP4 You go with society's expectations...and you behave you fit in... DG2RP4 It is society...'cause I think within our profession...we don't go down that road...you know...this is the girls' things or the boys' things...I think our parents...I mean as a parent...I do. DG2 RP5 It has a lot to do with society...you know? The generations going back you know....it's what you were taught then... DG2RP1	DG1RP5 Do boys' and girls' brains not develop differently? Or did I make that up? DG1 RP7 No I was at a course at Experiential Play and they had a speaker who said that there was a difference. DG1 RP4 For boys who are always at the dinosaurs or always at the blocks and if you have a certain thing you have got to teach...you have to improvise and maybe use that area to do the teaching in. If they wanted to learn....you're going to improvise and do something...in the areas that they like. DG3RP5	lots of things, their upbringing. DG1RP6 I think it is because girls tend to have more concentration that they pick it up and I think because girls can be...used to more things like babies and stories but boys are always physical and doing things like that. So it is obviously going take a bit longer to build their concentration if you think about it that way DG1RP8 When that group of boys are having another one of their Jack Sparrow type times the girls are either probably sitting in the house corner quietly or they are in the book corner or something like that...they're not being disruptive. DG3RP4

Appendix 7: Extract of transcript analysis - Sexuality

Extracts from the transcripts illustrating analysis–Chapter 7:Sexuality

Sexuality										
Stereotypes							Heteronormativity			
Responses to girls who do not conform		Responses to boys who do not conform		Stereotypes that have changed			Adult in waiting		Concerns expressed	
Parents	Staff	Parents	Staff	Nurturing	Dancing	Domestic	Becoming mum and dad	Need to know	Gay	Bullied
DG3 So what is a 'girlie girl'? Researcher [MV- pink/pink princess] I know we do say that...we do say that a lot about girlie girls RP5 she doesn't want to take part in the physical RP6 or get messy RP7 usually that's the kind of girls isn't it? They don't want to... RP6 get their knees dirty. RP3 [laughter- MV] everybody knows what we mean RP4 ...one of the wee girls that		**DG3** What about a 'real wee boy' how would you define 'a real wee boy'? Researcher rough-and-tumble doesn't want to sit down...RP6 Bob the builder RP7 Runs. RP6 ...a belt with tools in it. Asking do you have things for me to do? He's definitely a wee man...manly who needs to fix...he's a boy he wouldn't touch a doll or a pram or anything like that...he's got this instilled in his mind that he's you know Bob the builder...RP3 he'll just change something else into a tool ...RP5 yes into something else RP3 into swords Rp6 a bit of Lego will be made into a screw		I think...If you have a working family where 2 parents are working then they'll take on the roles in the house corner. You see the difference or the other way if it is just mum and the dad's out working then you will see the wee boy taking on that role. DG1RP6 Pictures of cars...DG2RP3 Emblems and things...RP5 So just different...RP8 they are made different...their shape RP5 They have what maybe you would consider...what a boys' thing on it...maybe a car or a football...RP8			No, I agree that the boys...I agree that there are differences...and their sense of genitalia...you do need to teach...they need to know what will happen. DG2RP6 **DG2** I feel that they should know RP8 so do I RP5 **DG2** Just because obviously boys and girls are different we wouldn't say - oh if it is a dog and a cat we would		Everything he did even at such a very young age he was three...four...he was so camp or he was over the top with everything I mean he didn't do any of the boisterous stuff that all the boys did. I mean he was always wanting to put his-self around the girls DG1RP1 It's a terrible thing to say but I wouldn't be surprised if that wee boy turned out to be gay. Because everything he did even at such a very young age he was 3/4...he was so camp or he was over the top with	

I'm chatting about she's always in trousers but she is still a girlie girl by the things chooses to do...RP so it is her behaviour that defines her not just her appearance. Researcher no I would say it is ...behaviour RP6 behaviour- RP5 ok behaviour that defines her as a girlie girl...ok- Researcher I think it comes back to that again...obviously if a girl is acting feminine then that's ok if a girl is acting a bit boisterous it's ah she's a wee tomboy...and it seems to be acceptable...but when it is a boy it is less acceptable in some people...most people's eyes...for them to act feminine...DG3RP8	driver...or something...or a hammer RP3 agreement MV they make everything into swords or super heroes RP6 in construction they are not allowed a gun and they'll say it's an aeroplane..RP5. [laughter /that's right...MV] Yes...like that...I would say the boys in our place...RP5 so they are creative...RP6 oh yes RP3 aye the wrong way...RP6 As their mums came in and their dads as well it was *'get they dresses off*! What are they doing?' DG1RP1 But his dad went crazy DG1RP4 Yes...so when dad comes in and sees his son in a dress he thinks oh no and that's when he doesn't want him to wear it. It's not necessarily that he doesn't want him to have fun in the dress but he doesn't want it to lead to DG1RP8 I mean that's your child...his dad is like...come on you're not a girl come on. DG2R	I think if it was told today that a doll was a boys' toy and a car was a girls' and we brought every child up tellin' them that...then that is the way it would be. DG2RP8	say it is a dog and a cat...so it is a boy and a girl...Rp8 that's right Rp6 that's a good way....of putting it Rp5 [general laughter] do you think that boys and girls are as different as dogs and cats? Researcher well that was just an example... they've got to know..it's Mr and Mrs...there is differences.....it's mum and dad you know..RP8 they have also got to know am a male....cause you have then got to think about their reproduction...RP5 and the things that are going to happen to their bodies..RP4	everything I mean he didn't do any of the boisterous stuff that all the boys did DG1RP1 I think it is just a fear some parents have got...the minute they see that type of behaviour...they have an association with it.... DG2RP4 **DG2** I think it is just a fear some parents have got...the minute they see that type of behaviour...they have an association with it....RP4 [MV- of agreement] I think they think I don't want my child to be gay....'cause they don't want their child to be different...or be bullied... RP3 and they see other wee boys who don't dress up and...they want their wee boy to be like RP6

Appendix 8: Extract of transcript analysis – **Play**

Extracts from the transcripts illustrating analysis–Chapter 7: Play

<table>
<tr><td colspan="7">Play</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Play behaviours with toys</td><td colspan="4">Colour of toys</td></tr>
<tr><td>Boys' behaviour</td><td>Girls' behaviours</td><td>Behaviours exhibited by both</td><td>Pink toys</td><td colspan="2">Blue toys</td><td colspan="2">Other colours</td></tr>
<tr><td>rough and tumble
noisy
aggressive
helpful
physical
boisterous</td><td>compliant
nurture
gentle
giggly
quieter</td><td>imaginative
creative
busy</td><td>girlie
pretty
(girl) domestic
attractive
nurturing</td><td>domestic</td><td>other</td><td>Grey/silver</td><td>other</td></tr>
<tr><td>It is amazing boys will go for something with wheels on it and I've watched for years it's...it's...you know ....you can have 5 or 6 dolls and 1 car and sure enough there could be 6 boys there but they will all want the one car.
DG1RP3

I have girls' toys and</td><td>If a girl is acting a bit boisterous it's...she's a wee tomboy...and it seems to be acceptable
DG2RP8

Everything is girlie girls you know it is princess...it's the role play with the mummy with the baby....you'd never see them in the blocks, you'd never see them in the cars
DG3RP5</td><td>Even in the likes of the writing corner boys will roll a bit of paper up and have it as (demonstrates a telescope) whereas the girls are drawing nice wee pictures...or whatever.
DG3RP3

Even in the house they're playing it is</td><td>'Cause you know there's no unisex toys as such. Toys are predominately for boys or girls...babies' toys are pink and blue even all the pre-tech things...
DG1RP7

We shouldn't do it but you know you can't help but put pink on a</td><td colspan="2">DG1
I felt ok about that because the Hoover was blue, I bought a blue cooker a blue iron a blue everything and the kitchen was grey it was silver you know but still I didn't want my son to feel uncomfortable with</td><td colspan="2">I have a 7 year old son and when he was 2 he wanted the kitchen and the Hoover and whatever and my husband really was against him getting them all but I went against my husband and I bought it all for him but on the same hand my son at 2 and 3 and even at 7 says mummy I want to wear a</td></tr>
</table>

boys' toy in my own house never mind their own homes and the youngest in particular who is 3 will always go for the boys' toys not the girls toys...you know? DG1RP3 before they're stereotyped I mean at 6 months old you're not really buying cars for boys are they you know but you know but in the playroom in the nursery playroom they go for, for the engine the car. DG1RP1 DG1RP4 you know boys play at rough and tumble you know....	A lot of the girls will play with the cuddly teddies but I don't see the boys so much...no matter what colour the teddies are it is the girls who seem to take to the teddies. DG3RP6 DG3 Maybe 'cause they're not in the construction area as much as the boys are...the girls in place will maybe in the construction area if the doll's house is out but they wouldn't choose to go in...RP5 so it's the doll's house they're playing with...RP3 yes...huh they wouldn't choose to go in and build with the Lego or the Stickle Bricks or whatever...RP5 or build a doll's house RP4	always I'll be the mummy and I'll make the dinner you can be the baby and the man will take on the role of fixing things you know?...am going out to work...they take they roles upon themselves so they are thinking that. DG3 RP6	wee girl can't you no... DG2RP5 You buy a wee girl a blue pram but you wouldn't buy a wee boy a pink tractor They're gearing it towards a market for the girls and it is all pink and sparkly and pretty and then there is the market for the boys. DG4RP5 You know Barbie's sit and ride car is pink so you wouldn't go and buy a wee boy that but you would let a wee girl be on a Thomas the Tank engine sit and ride. DG4RP3	resources and that's what he got to play with .. RP5 right the colour seems to have significance...yes? Researcher oh yes I wouldn't have got him a pink Hoover RP5 [general laughter – MV] ...obviously does play with a blue pram or a blue Hoover it's no really something we notice. And like we said girls being tom-boys are - it's no really an issue but when boys DG4RP8	dress and high heels I wouldn't let him DG1RP5 The kitchen was grey it was silver you know DG1RP5 I says 'what are you hoping Santa will bring you for Christmas?' He says a castle and at that page we were looking at castles but he says I can't look at the pink castle it has to be a grey one because my dad says that's for boys DG1RP5 There they will play with them if you give them a choice between pink and blue the girls will choose pink and the boys will choose blue. DG4RP8

Appendix 9: Toy survey analysis

Frequency	<80%	Consensus of toys under each category	Differences between DG and WS
Always or nearly always girls	**<80%**	Barbie bicycle, clothes, doll, Bratz doll, jewellery, my little pony princess costume.	None
Generally girls or both	**<80%**	Baby doll, beads, Beanie baby bear, brush and mop, doll house, hoops, horses, iron and ironing board, pram, tea set, Winnie-the-pooh.	WS added these to this category Easy bake oven, pink Lego, pink vacuum, play-doh, stuffed Elmo, toy kitchen.
both	**<90%**	cash register, castle tent, crayons, doctor kit, etch-a-sketch, gardening, guitar, jigsaw, karaoke, Leap pad, Mr and Mrs Potato Head, scooter, trampoline, tricycle, xylophone.	The DG added these toys : Easy bake oven, pink vacuum, pink Lego, sponge Bob, stuffed Elmo, toy kitchen, blue Hoover, play-doh
Both or generally boys	**<80%**	Aeroplane, airport, bus, dinosaur, drum, football, helicopter, Lego, cars, microscope, police officer, police station, car track, stuffed dinosaur, tool bench, tool kit, Toy Story Buzz and Woody, train set wheelbarrow, wooden blocks	DG – power wheel cars. Toy soldiers WS blue Hoover
Generally boys or nearly always boys	**<80%**	Ben 10, G.I. Joe, Super Hero costumes, transformers	Wider group – power wheel cars, toy soldiers. sponge Bob
Across 3 categories : both/ generally girls/ always girls	**<80%**	Barbie Jeep – girls, generally girls and both	
Across: 3 categories generally girls/ both/ generally boys	**<80%**	Toy story Jessie – crosses both categories	

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