



‘Boys don’t play with girls!’

**Gender Boundaries in Play: An Analysis of Preschool Children’s
Regulation of Gendered Behaviour Across Three Settings**

being a thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of

Education

in the University of Hull

by

Catherine Kilburn, MA, PGCert, BA(Hons)

July 2023

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my family, you may have at times questioned why I was pursuing a PhD, but you never stopped believing in me and supporting me.

Acknowledgements

I would like to start by expressing my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Jo, Lisa and Julie. I would not have completed this research without your never-ending support and encouragement. You challenged me to produce the work you knew I could and believed in me when I didn't believe in myself.

A huge thank you has to go to my family; I would not have been able to follow my dream and complete a PhD without your support. Jamie, for believing in me and following me to Hull, for your ongoing support and the ongoing coffee delivery and for reading many, many drafts of my thesis. To Mum and Dad, for all your support and for ensuring that I was able to start my PhD even when the practicalities were making it difficult. To Zack, Liam, Chloe and Gina, for believing in me, for asking about my research and for giving me a reason to keep going and to continue to try my best to be a good example.

To my cats, Fiyero and Frodo, even though you made it difficult for me at times by sitting on my paperwork, laptop, and chair, thank you for keeping me company through the good and bad, and providing me with distractions when I needed a break (whether I wanted one or not!).

A massive thank you to my family and friends who took the time to proofread my thesis: Jamie, Mum, Dad, Dan, Chloe, Richard and Oenonie.

I am forever grateful to the nurseries, families and children who welcomed me and allowed me to learn and play alongside you all. This research could not have happened without you.

Words cannot express the support and love I have for the PGR writing group, Sandie Hassan, Lee Stow, Aruni Samarakoon, Kodi Maier, Alex Hendon, Claire Carr, and Michelle Kennedy. Thank you for the support and inspiration that you provided through the online writing groups organised by the marvellous Janine Hatter. I would not have made it through Covid lockdowns without you.

I would be remiss if I did not mention the PhD Owls, who would have thought that an online community of older, wiser learners who have never met would provide so much support. Thank you for the advice and support that you have provided over the past four years.

And finally, Luna, thank you for making me smile, and for making me want to show you that you can do whatever you set your mind to.

Conferences

Kilburn, C. (2022) “I’m a big boy now, and big boys don’t cry!”: Peer reinforcement of gender stereotypes within preschool settings (presentation). *ECSDN 5th Research Conference: The year of the Early Childhood Studies Student*. Online, 28 January 2022.

Kilburn, C. (2022) Inequality of experience: Preschool children’s control of the environment through the use of gender (presentation). *BECERA 2022: Early Childhood Education and Ecological Sustainability conference*. Online, 22-23 February 2022.

Kilburn, C. (2022) Not always innocent: Preschool children’s reinforcement of gender stereotypes during play (poster). *EECERA 2022: Cultures of Play: Actors, Affordances and Arenas*. Glasgow, 23-26 August 2022.

Kilburn, C. (2023) Letting the child’s voice be heard - The role of participatory research techniques to elicit young children's perceptions and experiences of the policing of gendered norms in the preschool years (presentation). *EECERA 2023: Children’s Curiosity, Agency and Participation*. Lisbon, 30 August – 02 September 2023

Kilburn, C. (2023) The challenge of balancing the competing pressures of enabling children’s agency and the practitioner’s role in challenging gender stereotypes (poster). *EECERA 2023: Children’s Curiosity, Agency and Participation*. Lisbon, 30 August – 02 September 2023

Abstract

This thesis contributes to the contemporary discussions around the impact of gender on preschool children's lives. Drawing on theories of young children's gender development and Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological theory, this research examines the role that three and four-year-old children play in policing their peers' gender exploration across three preschool settings.

Drawing on feminist micro-ethnographic methods, this qualitative research explores the lived experiences of preschool participants. Using video-recorded observations, video-stimulated conversations and an image elicitation task, the participants' knowledge and experience of gender stereotypes and policing were illuminated. The data were analysed using critical conversation analysis which combined aspects of conversation analysis and critical discourse analysis, to enable the researcher to analyse how and why children use their communication to reinforce power and discourse.

The findings demonstrate that preschool children use a range of methods to police their peers' gender play, including manipulating their play as a way of excluding or minimising an opposite-gender peer's inclusion. The findings highlight the saliency of gender in the lives of preschool children and the methods preschool children use to police their peers' gender behaviour, ensuring that they adhere to gender norms and stereotypes. Whilst many of the methods used within this research were subtle, the participants were aware of the risk of social exclusion if their gender behaviour did not conform to expectations. Therefore, if early childhood education aims to provide all children with an equitable experience and to challenge societal inequalities, practitioners need to be aware of the role that preschool children take in reinforcing their peers' adherence to gender norms.

This thesis presents the following original contributions to knowledge. Firstly, preschool children's manipulation of their play as a method of controlling their peers' gender exploration. The second contribution to knowledge is the use of video-stimulated conversations to support preschool children's engagement in reflecting on their play and experiences. The final contribution to knowledge is the development and use of critical conversation analysis which analyses how and why preschool children use language to manipulate power.

Contents

Dedication	i
Acknowledgements.....	ii
Conferences	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Contents.....	v
List of Figures	xi
List of Tables	xii
Abbreviations	xiii
Chapter 1 Introduction	1
1.1 Introducing the Study and the Background	1
1.2 Why Preschool Children and Gender?	2
1.2.1 Gender Stereotypes	3
1.2.2 Why do Gender Stereotypes Matter?.....	4
1.3 Positioning the Children as Capable Participants	5
1.4 The Research Aims and Questions.....	7
1.5 Structure of the Study.....	8
1.6 Summary	9
Chapter 2 Theory and Literature Review	10
2.1 What do we Mean by Gender?	10
2.1.1 Gender	10
2.1.2 Gender Identity	11
2.1.3 Gender Roles.....	12
2.1.4 Gender Non-Conforming	12
2.2 Theories of Gender Development	13
2.2.1 Biological Theories	13
2.2.2 Social Theories	14
2.2.3 Cognitive Theories.....	16

2.2.4	Gender Discourses and their Impact on Children's Figured Worlds.....	20
2.3	The Impact of Cultural Capital on Children's Gender Development	21
2.4	What Influences Children's Gender Development?	24
2.4.1	Biological	24
2.4.2	Family	27
2.4.3	Early Childhood Settings	35
2.4.4	Peers.....	43
2.4.5	Interactions Between Nature and Nurture	50
2.5	Chapter Summary	51
Chapter 3 Methodology		53
3.1	Introduction	53
3.2	Ontology and Epistemology	53
3.3	Methodological Design	54
3.4	Researcher Positionality	56
3.5	Feminist Approach	58
3.6	Sampling Strategy	60
3.6.1	Identification of the Maximum Variation Sampling Frame	60
3.6.2	Sample Size	61
3.7	Research Settings.....	61
3.8	Research Design.....	62
3.9	Ethics.....	63
3.9.1	Ensure Informed Consent	64
3.9.2	Assent from Children	65
3.9.3	Protect the Participant.....	69
3.9.4	Researcher Responsibilities and Standards	71
3.10	Methods.....	75
3.10.1	Video-Recorded Observation.....	76
3.10.2	Video-Stimulated Conversation	81
3.10.3	Image Elicitation Activity.....	87

3.10.4	Validity	93
3.10.5	Data Collection Schedule	95
3.11	Transcription	96
3.11.1	Challenges of Multimodal Transcription.....	96
3.11.2	Transcription Process.....	98
3.12	How to Analyse Data from Children	98
3.13	Data Analysis.....	100
3.13.1	Conversation Analysis	101
3.13.2	Critical Discourse Analysis.....	103
3.13.3	Validity of Critical Discourse Analysis	105
3.13.4	Critical Conversation Analysis	106
3.13.5	Critical Conversation Analysis Framework.....	107
3.14	Chapter Summary	112
Chapter 4 Results and Analysis		113
4.1	Introduction	113
4.2	Explanation of the Themes	113
4.2.1	Reinforcement of the Gender Binary.....	114
4.2.2	Coercive Behaviour	114
4.2.3	Influence of Home and Community.....	114
4.2.4	Influence of peers	114
4.2.5	Gendered Environment.....	114
4.2.6	Verbal Control	115
4.2.7	Use of Body Language	115
4.2.8	Manipulating the Play	115
4.3	Summary	115
Chapter 4a The Story of Children’s Experience at the Estate Community Nursery.....		116
4a.1	Setting the Scene	116
4a.2	Reinforcement of the Gender Binary.....	116
4a.3	Use of Body Language.....	119

4a.4	Influence of Home and Community	122
4a.5	Influence of Peers	123
4a.6	Gendered Environment.....	126
4a.7	Manipulating the Play	128
4a.8	Conclusion.....	129
Chapter 4b The Story of Children’s Experience at the University Day Care		131
4b.1	Setting the Scene	131
4b.2	Influence of Peers	131
4b.3	Coercive Behaviour	135
4b.4	Gendered Environment.....	138
4b.5	Verbal Control.....	141
4b.6	Influence of Home & Environment	145
4b.7	Manipulating the Play	147
4b.8	Chapter Summary	150
Chapter 4c The Story of Children’s Experiences at the Small Town Nursery		152
4c.1	Setting the Scene	152
4c.2	Reinforcement of the Gender Binary.....	152
4c.3	Coercive Behaviour	156
4c.4	Gendered Environment.....	159
4c.5	Verbal Control.....	162
4c.6	Use of Body Language.....	165
4c.7	Manipulating the Play	168
4c.8	Chapter Summary	169
Chapter 4d Results and Analysis – Summary of Findings		171
4d.1	Summary of Findings.....	171
4d.1.1	Reinforcement of the Gender Binary.....	171
4d.1.2	Coercive Behaviour	172
4d.1.3	Influence of Home and Community.....	173
4d.1.4	Influence of Peers	174

4d.1.5	Gendered Environment.....	175
4d.1.6	Verbal Control	175
4d.1.7	Use of Body Language	176
4d.1.8	Manipulating the Play	177
4d.1.9	Potential Contributory Factors	177
Chapter 5 Discussion Chapter		181
5.1	Introduction	181
5.2	SQ1 Do Children Police their Peers' Gender Play and Why?	181
5.3	SQ2 What Methods do Children Use to Police their Peers' Gender Play?	182
5.4	SQ3 What Factors Impact Children's Gender Policing Behaviour?.....	184
5.5	SQ4 Does Gender Play a Role in Who Polices Children's Play and Who is Policed?. 186	
5.6	Discussion of Key Findings	187
5.6.1	Manipulating the Play	188
5.6.2	Coercive Behaviour	191
5.6.3	Use of Gender as a Means of Controlling Access.....	194
5.6.4	The Influence of Age on Gender Policing Behaviours.....	198
5.7	Research Question – Do Children Between 3 years old and 4 years old Police their Peers' Gender Exploration During Play?	200
Chapter 6 Conclusion		204
6.1	Introduction	204
6.2	Study Overview	204
6.3	Summary of the Findings	205
6.4	Contributions to Knowledge	207
6.5	Reflections on the Research Design and Analysis.....	209
6.5.1	Reflecting on the theoretical framework.....	212
6.6	Implications for Future Research, Policy, and Practice.....	214
6.6.1	Implications for Future Research.....	214
6.6.2	Implications for Policy	215
6.6.3	Implications and Recommendations for Practice	216

6.7	Limitations of the Research	219
6.7.1	Impact of Covid-19	219
6.8	Summary	220
6.9	Concluding Thoughts	221
	Reference List.....	223
	List of Appendices	262
	Appendix 1 – Ethical Approval	I
	Appendix 2 – Children’s Information Leaflet	II
	Appendix 3 – Participant Assent Form.....	VI
	Appendix 4 – Maximum Variation Sample Data – 2021 Census Data – Socio-Economic Status	VII
	Appendix 5 – Maximum Variation Sample Data – 2021 Census Data – Population Diversity... ..	VIII
	Appendix 6 – Estate Community Nursery.....	IX
	Appendix 7 – Estate Community Nursery Participants.....	XII
	Appendix 8 – University Day Care.....	XIII
	Appendix 9 – University Day Care Participants.....	XV
	Appendix 10 – Small Town Nursery	XVII
	Appendix 11 – Small Town Nursery Participants.....	XIX
	Appendix 12 – Research Schedule	XX
	Appendix 13 – Reflective Journal Entry	XXII
	Appendix 14 – Image Elicitation Activity Images and Vignettes.....	XXIII
	Appendix 15 – Data Collection Schedule	XXVII
	Appendix 16 – Conversation Analysis Transcription Conventions.....	XXVIII
	Appendix 17 – Estate Community Nursery Extracts from Transcripts.....	XXIX
	Appendix 18 – University Day Care Extracts from Transcripts	XXXII
	Appendix 19 – Small Town Nursery Extracts from Transcripts.....	XXXIV

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 – Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model.....	15
Figure 2.2 – Triadic reciprocal determinism	16
Figure 2.3 – Martin & Halverson (1981) Gender schema process.....	18
Figure 2.4 – Sameroff's Biopsychosocial Ecological Model (2010)	51
Figure 3.1 – Example of vignette picture card showing two children playing at a tool bench...	92
Figure 3.2 – Timeline transcription format.....	97
Figure 3.3 – Example of video-recorded observation transcript	108
Figure 3.4 – Example of video-stimulated conversation transcript.....	108
Figure 3.5 – Example of collection building	109
Figure 3.6 – Example of a transcript including conversation analysis conventions.....	110
Figure 3.7 – Example of background and context for a video-recorded observation	111
Figure 3.8 – Example of discourse identification from a transcript.....	111
Figure 4a.1 – Playing in the construction area.....	119
Figure 4a.2 – Alice & Imogen - returning to same-gender peer	121
Figure 4a.3 – 09-06 – Pirate Ship - Observation	126
Figure 4b.1 – Extract from 06-08 - 03 & 07 & 01 & 11 - Magnatiles – Video	135
Figure 4b.2 – Tate attempting to join ice play	137
Figure 4b.3 – 12-08 - No boys allowed - 18 & 09.....	138
Figure 4b.4 – Polly & Jake playing with the letter tiles.....	140
Figure 4b.5 – 02-08 - Climbing frame - 09 & 10.....	144
Figure 4b.6 – The daddies are on holiday.....	148
Figure 4b.7 – 12-08 - Mummy and daddy - 19 & 01	149
Figure 4c.1 – Terry demonstrating how to use the car ramp	153
Figure 4c.2 – Terry's self-portrait.....	156
Figure 4c.3 – Jamie & Terry – Mobilo	157
Figure 4c.4 – Izzy & Terry with the small stones.....	158
Figure 4c.5 – Lady pirates don't exist.....	160
Figure 4c.6 – Bella's construction play.....	161
Figure 4c.7 – Nicola and Grace - Boys play football.....	162
Figure 4c.8 – Bella and Jamie - Boys like football	163
Figure 4c.9 – Izzy, Nicola & Maddy - Leaf fight	164
Figure 4c.10 – Jumping with the boys?.....	165
Figure 4c.11 – Izzy - Body language	167
Figure 4c.12 – Kittens in the playground	168

List of Tables

Table 1.1 – Articles relevant to research within the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989).....	6
Table 1.2 – Thesis structure	8
Table 2.1 – Children’s policing behaviours identified in the literature.....	44
Table 3.1 – Maximum variation frame.....	61
Table 3.2 – Links between sub-questions and the data collection methods.....	75
Table 3.3 – Image elicitation activity Images	91
Table 3.4 – Analytical framework for CCA	107
Table 4.1 – Table showing the links between the themes and the research questions.....	113
Table 5.1 – Themes identified through analysis of policing methods used.....	183

Abbreviations

CA	Conversation Analysis
CCA	Critical Conversation Analysis
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
ECE	Early Childhood Education
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
SES	Social Economic Status
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
VSC	Video-stimulated Conversation

Chapter 1 Introduction

Annie Are you a girl or a boy?

Abigail A girl

Annie But why are you wearing that? Boys wear that, not girls!

This thesis examines how preschool children in three English early childhood settings reinforce gender stereotypes and norms through their play. This research adds to the body of knowledge by focusing on the methods that children use, and the reasons why, they police their peers' behaviour.

This first chapter introduces the study and sets out the background for the research, before examining the importance of this research and positioning preschool children as capable participants. The chapter then presents the research aims and questions and provides an overview of how this thesis is structured.

1.1 Introducing the Study and the Background

This thesis focuses on how preschool children police their peers' gender exploration through play and the potential impact that the socio-economic status of the family has on policing style behaviour. In this context, the term policing is used to describe any types of behaviour and language that are used to restrict or redirect another child's gender play through the reinforcement of gender stereotypes.

Initial interest in this topic developed whilst the author worked within a day nursery where it was noted that the children of one of the families wore counter-stereotypical clothing, for instance, the older brother would wear skirts or tights, and the younger sister would wear masculine-looking trousers and tops. When the eldest child attended preschool, his parents would often speak to the management team in response to other children telling him that the clothes he wore were wrong. However, when the younger child attended the preschool her choice of clothing tended not to be questioned. Nevertheless, when she chose to have the same haircut as her brother, her gender was queried by her peers within the preschool. Alongside these experiences, the researcher's master's dissertation research also drew on topics of gender and power through parents' and practitioners' beliefs about superhero and weapon play.

As a practitioner, the author aimed to provide the children in her care with a gender-equitable experience. Reading around the topic of gender and power raised her awareness of the role that preschool children take in reinforcing or policing their peers' gender behaviour. When looking for research into how children police their peers' gender behaviour, she identified that there was a gap in the literature. Indeed, whilst recent research has commented on the use of felt pressure to control peers' play behaviour (Tobin et al., 2010; Wohlwend, 2012; Mayeza, 2018), there has been no identification of the particular methods that children are using.

Whilst there is increased societal understanding that gender is a spectrum (Hyde et al., 2019), young children's understanding is that of binary gender, male or female (Xiao et al., 2021). Therefore, within the scope of this research, the focus is on binary gender (girl, boy, same-gender and opposite gender).

1.2 Why Preschool Children and Gender?

While adult gender roles may have changed over the last few decades, most children are exposed to a range of stereotyped gender roles from birth: from parents, the media, and peers, and these stereotypes have not changed significantly over time including more recent years. (Morawska, 2020:1)

Young children are exposed to gendered experiences from the moment they are born, and their interactions with their parents and siblings are key to their initial understanding of gender. This forms part of their cultural capital which is the knowledge that the child has about their place in society (Ofsted, 2019). Once children start to interact with other children through nursery or preschool, their peers become an important influence on their beliefs about gender and appropriate play and activities (Hedges, 2015). Research has shown that children's understanding of gender and stereotypical behaviour develops significantly between the ages of three to six years old, before becoming more flexible from 6 years old onwards (Halim et al., 2013). While children's gender expectations may become more flexible as they grow, the impact of children's stereotypes in the preschool years can have an impact on their future academic and career goals. Children as young as 7 years old already begin to limit themselves through their beliefs about what they are able to do based on their gender (OECD, 2019). These gendered beliefs about employment options were found to be just as strong at 14 years old as they were at 7 years old (Rogers et al., 2020), demonstrating the long-term impact preschool children's gender beliefs can have on their aspirations and opportunities as they grow and develop.

The vital role of early childhood education in narrowing the attainment gap between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers and ensuring that all children are provided with the opportunity to gain the cultural capital needed for social mobility has been

highlighted by Ofsted (2019). Therefore, one important area that practitioners should be aware of when thinking about the cultural capital that children are exposed to is the range of stereotyped beliefs about gender that children experience; and their role in intervening to reduce the effect on children's beliefs about themselves and others (Chapman, 2016).

The importance of challenging gender stereotypes and providing an equitable education for all was highlighted by the United Nations as part of the sustainable development goals (United Nations, 2015). The focus of sustainable development goal four is quality education, this aims to ensure that all children are provided with inclusive and equitable educational opportunities. This goal is supported by sustainable development goal five which focuses on achieving gender equality, specifically focusing on empowering women and girls to achieve their potential.

Considering the changes in gender expectations within society, and the goal of reducing gender inequality, it is important to identify how children's understanding of gender norms and the development of stereotypes are influenced by their peers' policing behaviours and the types of policing behaviour that children are employing.

1.2.1 Gender Stereotypes

The term gender is used to describe a person's biological sex, whether they identify as male or female, or in relation to the types of behaviours and roles that society expects from them (Schroeder & Bámaca-Colbert, 2019). In this thesis the term gender is understood to refer to a person's classification of masculinity and femininity regarding their own, and others, identities and their beliefs, and stereotypes about appropriate activities for children of different genders.

Stereotypes are the beliefs that a person or group of people holds about the expected behaviours and characteristics of a social group (The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2014). When considering gender stereotypes, it is the specific characteristics and behaviours that are believed to be desirable or appropriate due to a person's gender that are the focus (Skočajić et al., 2020). Gender stereotypes are linked to society's beliefs about appropriate gender roles (Institute of Physics, 2017) and are therefore used to discourage gender nonconformity.

Gender stereotypes focus on the desirable and non-desirable behaviours associated with a particular gender (Skočajić et al., 2020) and this focus on specific behaviours can perpetuate inequality by reinforcing the differences between genders rather than focusing on equality (Zero Tolerance, 2013). The European Institute for Gender Equality raises concerns that:

Gender stereotyping can limit the development of the natural talents and abilities of girls and boys, women and men, as well as their educational and professional experiences and life opportunities in general. Stereotypes about women both result from, and are the cause of, deeply engrained attitudes, values, norms and prejudices against women. They are used to justify and maintain the historical relations of power of men over women as well as sexist attitudes that hold back the advancement of women. (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020c:1)

According to Martin and Ruble (2010), most children have started to develop early gender stereotypes by the age of three, and these stereotypes are often the first ones that children learn due to the salience of gender for them (Blakemore et al., 2008; Halim et al., 2013). However, while the development of gender stereotypes may help young children learn about gender (Baron & Dunham, 2015), there are negative consequences to stereotypes, both for the individual, but also for their peers. Skočajić et al. (2020) argue that children use their knowledge of gender stereotypes to control or punish the behaviour of their nonconforming peers and that this use of gender stereotype knowledge at a young age may lead to continued gender-based discrimination in adulthood.

1.2.2 Why do Gender Stereotypes Matter?

As previously discussed, concern about the impact of gender stereotypes on children has been raised by many academics and organisations (Zero Tolerance, 2013; Lifting Limits, 2019; Rhodes & Baron, 2019). The negative impact of gender stereotypes includes links to mental health (Lifting Limits, 2019), limiting play experiences (Aina & Cameron, 2011), identity, personal aspirations, and academic achievement (Spinner et al., 2018; Doni, 2021).

According to the Institute of Physics (2017), gender stereotypes affect children's self-perception in terms of how they feel they fit in within their gender group, their well-being, which includes both mental and physical effects, their attitudes to relationships, and their career aspirations. The OECD (2019) found that girls' future career aspirations are limited as early as 7 years old, especially with regard to an interest in careers within science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM). This may be due to the common gender stereotypes that boys are better at maths and science than girls (Rhodes & Baron, 2019). Whilst it is likely that children's career aspirations change as they gain a better understanding of the broader range of opportunities available to them, Rogers et al. (2020) discovered that children's career choices are still as gendered at 14 years old as they are at 7 years old.

As well as having an impact on an individual's self-perception and self-esteem, gender stereotypes can influence how groups of people are treated (Institute of Physics, 2017). Where groups of people are treated as homogenous groups, rather than as individuals with their own skills and preferences, gender stereotypes can be used to reinforce inequality in all areas of

society (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020a). Finally, as Bluiett (2018) points out, children need to be aware of gender equity as they live in a diverse world and need to understand the multiplicity of skills and experiences that other people possess.

1.3 Positioning the Children as Capable Participants

For many years, researchers held the belief that young children were vulnerable individuals who were passive actors within their environment and incapable of engaging in conversations about their feelings and beliefs (Greig et al., 2013). For this reason, research concerning the lives and experiences of young children has focused on the parent or practitioner reporting the children's experiences (Smith, 2011). The move from this perspective of children to one in which children are seen as competent individuals who are actively involved in the social construction of their world (Coyne & Carter, 2018), can be seen as a direct response to the changing of paradigms to include a new sociology of childhood (James & Prout, 1990; 1997).

The new sociology of childhood paradigm sets out an understanding that childhood is a social construction (James & Prout, 2015) and that "childhood and children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right" (James & Prout, 2015:4). When researchers see children as involved in the production of the social world around them rather than as passive onlookers, it raises questions about how children construct their world and how they view the interactions they have (Mason, 2011). As such, Fraser et al. (2014) suggest it is key for researchers to involve children in the research to gain an understanding of their experiences and to demonstrate that their competence and knowledge are respected. By positioning children as active individuals in their lives, they are seen to have agency and to be capable of sharing information about their lives as valuable informants within the research process (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011; Clark et al., 2014).

Within this research, children's agency is taken to mean that children have the ability to make decisions about events and activities that have an impact on their lives. This means that they are capable of deciding whether they wish to participate and to have their voice heard through actions that impact their lives (Kellett, 2014). As a researcher, I have a commitment to take the participants' thoughts and views seriously and position them throughout the research as "the experts of their social behaviours, interactions, and relationships" (Mayeza, 2017a:2). This commitment can be seen through the focus on children's informed assent as discussed in section 3.9.2; as well as through the choice of methods to ensure that children's verbal and non-verbal means of communication are captured, so that the children's meaning can be represented in the research (section 3.10). Additionally, the children who agreed to participate in the research are referred to as participants, rather than as child participants. By using the

term participants, they are presented as competent experts within their own lives, who have individual agency, and who should be afforded the same respect within research as adults.

Whilst agency is understood to mean that children have the ability to make decisions, the right to have their voice heard is understood to mean that children have the right to freely express their views on issues that concern them (Kellett, 2014). The importance of listening to children's voices is not new, for instance, Malaguzzi argued that children are competent communicators who use many different forms of language to make their meaning known (Malaguzzi, 1993); including children's voices in research positions them as experts within their own lives who are "the best source of advice for matters affecting them" (Shaw, 2021:1).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) had an impact on the status of children when it set out the rights that all children have (Kellett, 2014). Three of the articles of the UNCRC are particularly relevant when considering the importance of including the voice of the child in the research. These articles are set out in Table 1.1:

Table 1.1 – Articles relevant to research within the Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989)

Article 12	States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child.
Article 13	The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.
Article 14	States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

As well as establishing the rights of children to have their views heard within the research process, the Office of the High Commission for Human Rights (a department within the United Nations) states that all children:

including the very youngest children, be respected as persons in their own right. Young children should be recognized as active members of families, communities, and societies, with their own concerns, interests and points of view. (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2005:3).

Bucknell (2014) points out that researchers need to remember that as part of respecting a child's choice to be included and heard in the research, they also have to respect the child's right to silence. This could be through a child's decision to withhold assent to the research, either in part or as a whole, or through their decision not to answer a question that they are

not comfortable with. By respecting the participants' right to silence, the researcher is recognising and respecting the child's agency, rather than reinforcing the adult-child social dynamic by exerting their power over the situation (Bucknell, 2014).

Smith (2011) sets out that it is often assumed that very young children are not capable of expressing their own views, however Greig et al. (2013) challenge that belief. They explain that while preschool children's verbal communication abilities are lower when compared to older children, they are competent communicators in other ways. The challenge for researchers is to identify and use methods that capture the many ways that young children communicate and to ensure that the child's entire voice is presented within the analysis and discussion of the research. Further consideration of the challenges of analysing data from children can be found in section 3.12.

By providing children with opportunities to participate in research, researchers acknowledge that "only children can provide or permit the collection of requisite data on their own educational knowledge and experiences" (O'Neill, 2014:220). But more than that, it acknowledges that children are:

Beings rather than becomings, experts on their own lives, competent to share their views and opinions and engaging in a range of social interactions, which are worthy of study. (Dockett et al., 2011:70)

1.4 The Research Aims and Questions

This research aims to identify the methods that preschool children use to control their peers' gender behaviour and to reinforce gender stereotypes during their play. To achieve this aim, the main research question posed by this thesis is:

Do children between 3 years old and 4 years old police their peers' gender exploration during play?

This question is underpinned by the following sub-questions:

- SQ 1. Do children police their peers' gender play and why?
- SQ 2. What methods do children use to police their peers' gender play?
- SQ 3. What factors impact children's gender policing behaviour?
- SQ 4. Does gender play a role in who polices children's play and who is policed?

The research that was undertaken to answer these questions took place within three early childhood settings in diverse areas of England. One of the settings that participated is based in the south of England, whilst the other two settings are based in the north-east of England. The

rationale for choosing the participating settings is set out in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3). Data were collected from two of the settings during the 2020-2021 academic year and from the third setting during the 2021-2022 academic year.

1.5 Structure of the Study

Following on from this introduction chapter, the structure of this thesis is set out in Table 1.2 below.

Table 1.2 – Thesis structure

Chapter 1 – Introduction
Chapter 2 – Theory and Literature Review
Chapter 3 – Methodology
Chapter 4 – Results and Analysis
Chapter 4a – The Story of Children’s Experience at the Estate Community Nursery
Chapter 4b – The Story of Children’s Experience at the University Day Care
Chapter 4c – The Story of Children’s Experiences at the Small Town Nursery
Chapter 4d – Results and Analysis – Summary of Findings
Chapter 5 – Discussion
Chapter 6 – Conclusion and Implications

Chapter 2 presents the theory and literature that both underpins and positions this research within the existing body of knowledge. This chapter presents and discusses existing literature on young children’s gender development, before moving on to discuss the different influences on children’s development, for instance, parents, early childhood settings and peers.

The methodological decisions that underpin this research, along with a justification for the research methods chosen to collect and analyse the data, are presented in Chapter 3. This research has a foundation set within feminist methodologies and draws on an ethnographic approach that is designed to enable the participants’ voices to be heard throughout the data collection and analysis. The data analysis used is described and discussed, and the thesis presents critical conversation analysis as a method, developed from critical discourse analysis and conversation analysis. Critical conversation analysis attempts to identify how children use language to reinforce power and the gender discourse within their context.

As set out in the thesis structure above (Table 1.2), Chapter 4 comprises a short introduction chapter to the results and analysis, which includes an overview of the themes that were identified in the data, and then three sub-chapters that present the stories of the settings, through the children's experiences. The participants' voices are presented through the results section as they explain and discuss their experiences of gender policing and the reasons why it occurs.

Chapter 5 presents a discussion of the findings of this research. This chapter provides answers for the four sub-questions, before moving on to discuss the main findings of the research, focusing on five main findings. The chapter draws to a close by answering the main research question.

Chapter 6 draws this thesis to a close and presents the conclusion of the research. This chapter identifies the original contributions to knowledge that have been identified and presented within this thesis. The chapter then moves on to reflect on the research design and analysis of the data, before presenting the implications and recommendations for future research, policy and current practice. The limitations of the study are identified and discussed before the thesis draws to a close.

1.6 Summary

Having outlined how the research was conceived and the rationale and background of the study, the theoretical standpoint of children as competent individuals are presented. This theory is critical as it underpins the research design. After presenting the background information, the aims of the research and the questions that this thesis answers, this chapter has presented an outline of the thesis structure. The following chapter 2, presents and discusses the theory and literature that positions the study within the existing body of knowledge.

Chapter 2 Theory and Literature Review

Having set the context for this research in the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on the literature surrounding children's gender development.

This theory and literature review explores and discusses five distinct areas of literature around young children's gender development. The chapter starts by identifying what is meant by gender and sets out to define the terminology surrounding gender. It then moves on to the theory underpinning our understanding of gender development and presents a comprehensive range of theoretical perspectives. The third area of literature focuses on the role of cultural capital on gender development, with a particular focus on Bourdieu's theory and links to Moll et al.'s (1992) funds of knowledge theory, before exploring the value of play for children and how children use play to explore the world. The chapter then proceeds to examine the variety of factors that influence children's gender development with a particular focus on their development during early childhood.

2.1 What do we Mean by Gender?

Before starting to consider the literature focusing on children's gender development, it is necessary to understand the terminology surrounding gender that is used within this thesis.

2.1.1 Gender

Gender is perhaps *the* central way in which children and adults carve the social world into categories. (Fast & Olson, 2018)

The terms gender and sex are commonly used interchangeably within society when discussing a person's identity (Blakemore et al., 2008), however, the two terms refer to different aspects of this identity.

The term sex is used to denote the biological identification of male and female which is usually determined by ultrasound scan or at birth (Institute of Physics, 2017). It covers the biological and physiological characteristics, including a person's hormones and chromosomes (Schroeder & Bámaca-Colbert, 2019; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020a), that are used to define whether a baby is male or female. A person's sex is usually fixed at birth, however, due to some rare conditions a child's sex is not always clear at birth and the decision as to which sex to assign is made by the parents and doctors following additional medical testing (Dsd families, 2020).

The term gender refers to the societal expectations for behaviours and characteristics which are used to denote femininity and masculinity within the culture that a person lives (Institute

of Physics, 2017). Due to the social construction of gender, it is not an innate set of behaviours and characteristics that naturally develop over time but is learned through socialisation (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020a). Unlike sex which is binary, a person is either male or female, the concept of gender is fluid and can be identified as a continuum from hegemonic masculinity, which is the ultimate ideal form of masculinity, through to hegemonic femininity (Budgeon, 2014). According to the European Institute for Gender Equality, a person's gender "determines what is expected, allowed and valued" (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020a:1), it is this understanding of gender that early years children are acquiring when theories of gender development are discussed within early childhood education.

2.1.2 Gender Identity

Whilst gender is society's way of identifying the expected behaviours and characteristics that a person will exhibit; a person's gender identity is their understanding of whether they are male or female and how closely they identify with other people of the same gender (Perry et al., 2019; Jones, 2020).

According to Perry et al. (2019), eight aspects of gender identity influence a child's gender identification and how content they are with their gender, these include:

- self-categorisation – I am a girl/boy
- same gender typicality – I am similar to other boys/girls
- other gender typicality – I am more like the other gender child
- gender contentedness – I am happy to be a boy/girl
- felt pressure – I have to do certain activities because I am a boy/girl
- intergroup bias – other girls/boys like me are better
- gender centrality – how important it is to me to be a boy/girl
- gender frustration – I can't do things because I am a girl/boy

The first aspect of gender identity, self-categorisation, is a key aspect of many gender development theories. These theories set out that children need to be able to identify their own gender before they start to develop an understanding of what it means to be masculine or feminine, for instance, gender schema theory (Martin & Halverson, 1981) or Kohlberg's developmental stage theory (1966). These theories of gender development, as well as others, are discussed in section 2.2 below.

Another aspect that is worth mentioning is felt pressure. Felt pressure is described as a child's belief that they will face negative consequences from peers or adults for displaying opposite-

gender behaviour (Perry et al., 2019). This aspect of gender identity could help to explain how children can police their peers' gender play by reinforcing a child's individual feelings of felt pressure to conform to gender expectations and roles. The role that peers play in influencing young children's gender development is discussed further in section 2.4.4 below.

2.1.3 Gender Roles

Gender roles can be described as "Social and behavioural norms which, within a specific culture, are widely considered to be socially appropriate for individuals of a specific sex." (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020b:1). This description makes the cultural nature of gender explicit and explains why differences can be identified in gender expectations and roles in different cultural settings, for instance within matrilineal societies (Hua, 2001) or egalitarian societies (Hewlett, 1993). The pervasiveness of gender roles within cultures can be seen in research by Baker et al. (2016), who identified that children were aware of gender stereotypes from their parents' reactions to their choice of toys and activities when the parents said that they believed in gender equality. The influence of family and cultural expectations on children's gender development are discussed in more detail below (section 2.4.2).

Whilst cultural variations within gender roles can be identified, it is worth considering the dominant cultural expectations within British society, as this is the context in which the research is based. According to Blakemore et al. (2008), the dominant gender roles within a Western culture are based on caring responsibilities which are seen as feminine skills and being a provider, which is seen as a masculine attribute, however, gender roles are also reinforced through expected appearance, clothing, behaviours and activities. The pervasiveness of these culturally accepted gender roles can be seen in the types of toys that are sold for young children, as well as in young children's books and the media (Dinella & Weisgram, 2018; Spinner et al., 2018). Exposure to the concept of gender roles in this way, through children's play experiences, can reinforce gender stereotypes which the children then absorb (section 2.4.2.2).

2.1.4 Gender Non-Conforming

Within the literature surrounding children's gender development is the concept of a gender non-conforming child (Pauletti et al., 2014). Gender non-conforming is a term which is often used to describe a child who chooses gender behaviours and characteristics usually associated with a child of the opposite gender, it does not refer to a child who has gender identity disorder (Farr et al., 2017). These children can experience negative social consequences from their peers (Pauletti et al., 2014; Sullivan et al., 2018), however Kilvington and Wood (2016a)

point out that some children who usually conform to gender expectations are happy to cross gender boundaries and engage in gender non-conforming play if they feel that there is value within the play and that girls are more likely to engage in non-conforming gender play due to the power or value that is placed on masculine activities within society.

According to Farr et al. (2017), it is important to remember that whilst some children who are gender non-conforming within their early years will continue to present cross-gender behaviours throughout their life, most children are likely to have conformed to gender norms by the age of 6.

2.2 Theories of Gender Development

Over time, several different theories have been developed in an attempt to understand and explain children's gender development. Most of the theories can be classified through one of three underlying theoretical perspectives – biological-based theories, social theories and cognitive theories.

2.2.1 Biological Theories

Biological theories behind gender development can be from an evolutionary or essentialist perspective or explain how different aspects of the human body can influence a person's gender.

Evolutionary gender theory, otherwise referred to as gender essentialism, states that a person's gender is innate and linked to their biological sex (Brinkman et al., 2014) and therefore the gendered behaviours that people exhibit have developed for specific reasons (Bluiett, 2018). The primary reason for these behaviours, according to evolutionary gender theory, is to make a person attractive to the opposite gender to attract a partner (Blakemore et al., 2008). The behaviour and characteristics that are valued within society are linked to the adult gender roles, for instance, caring behaviour for women and strength and aggression for the male provider (Lippa, 2010). Due to evolutionary theory's belief about the innateness of gender, there is an understanding that gender does not develop but instead "unfolds over time" (Brinkman et al., 2014:836). However, evolutionary gender theory focuses on identifying behaviours that all men or all women demonstrate and does not consider variations in gender behaviour or gender expectations in different cultures (Blakemore et al., 2008; Brinkman et al., 2014).

Other biological theories of gender development relate to genetic factors, hormonal factors, and brain development (Halim et al., 2013). These theories all attempt to explain how people become gendered by focusing on biological differences between male and female bodies. The

influence of genetics, hormones and the brain on children's gender development is discussed in more detail in section 2.4.1.

2.2.2 Social Theories

Social theories of gender development are based on the belief that children take an active role in developing their gender knowledge and gender identity (Yanik, 2020). According to social theories, young children learn about gender through their interactions with the social world around them (Brinkman et al., 2014) and through watching examples of gendered behaviour (Bluiett, 2018). Whilst there are similarities between Bandura's (1977) social learning theory and Eagly's (1987) social role theory there are some differences.

Bandura's social learning theory states that children learn about gender through imitation and modelling (Bandura, 1977). Children imitate the models of gender behaviour that they observe adults and older peers perform through their daily interactions. With social learning theory children are believed to be passive recipients of gender knowledge who replicate the behaviour without conscious processing (Blakemore et al., 2008). Further work by Bussey and Bandura (1999), has led to social learning theory evolving to consider the role of cognition on children's gender development; their social cognitive theory is discussed in more detail below (section 2.2.3).

The main difference between social learning theory and social role theory is that Eagly's (1987) social role theory focuses mainly on adults and their understanding of appropriate gender behaviour based on the gender roles within society, for instance, homemaker or provider. Eagly explains that people are aware of the agreed societal expectations of roles, behaviour and characteristics deemed appropriate for their gender and they use this knowledge to ensure that their gender behaviour meets society's expectations. However, the power imbalance that can be identified between the male and female roles, reinforces the dominance of male roles within society to the detriment of women (Braun & Davidson, 2017). The male role is to work and provide financially, while the female role is to provide care and rely on the male partner for shelter. Whilst Eagly mainly focused on adults she did consider the role of parents in influencing children's gender development through the provision of toys and activities that reinforce the social roles (Eagly et al., 2000). The role of parents in influencing children's gender development is discussed further in section 2.4.2 below.

The final social theory to consider is Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory. Bronfenbrenner looked at children's social development as a whole and not just their gender development, however, Sameroff (2010) suggests that Bronfenbrenner's theory is relevant when considering children's gender development. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory explores

the role of all outside influences on a child's development not just their family. He believes that children are socialised by their exposure to the wider society and their interactions with others reinforce cultural norms and expectations for appropriate behaviour. According to Bronfenbrenner, there are 4 levels of influence (Figure 2.1), these range from the microsystem which comprises the parents, siblings, peers and teachers of the child up to the macrosystem, which is the attitudes, culture, social class and historical time. The inclusion of historical time in this final layer is useful for explaining why gender expectations and norms have changed over time and will continue to change in the future.

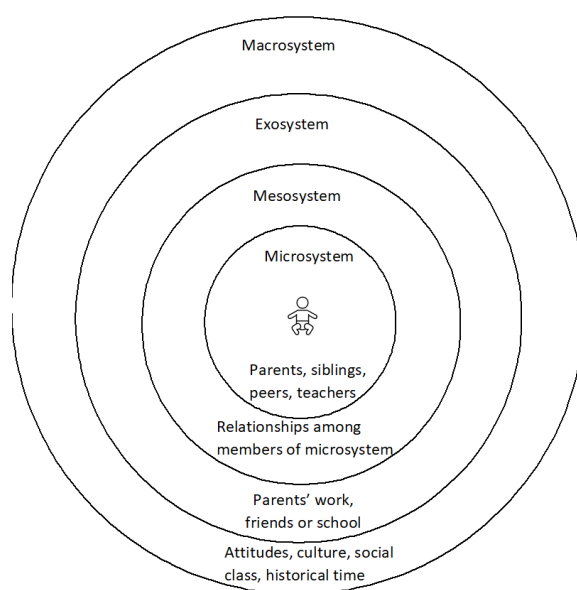


Figure 2.1 – Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model
Figure copied from Blakemore et al. (2008: p189)

Braun and Davidson (2017) emphasise the idea that children's gender development is externally influenced by their parents as well as teachers and the media and that this early understanding of gender norms is then further reinforced by their peers.

Bronfenbrenner revisited and revised his ecological theory in recognition that the child at the centre has agency and takes an active role in shaping their development and beliefs (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). In addition to recognising the child as an active agent in their own development, Bronfenbrenner identified the biological influences on child development leading him to change the name of his model to a bioecological model. Hayes et al. (2017) highlight that by identifying the role that children take in their development, as well as recognising the external influences on the child, Bronfenbrenner identified children as competent individuals who create knowledge about the world around them and where they belong.

2.2.3 Cognitive Theories

The third group of theories to be considered are cognitive theories, these theories assume that a child engages in the process of gender development by developing their own understanding of gender that helps them to decode and learn about gender norms and expectations based on their own experiences and interactions with others (Bluiett, 2018). Due to the cognitive processes that children use, their knowledge of gender develops and changes over time in response to their increased knowledge base (Halim et al., 2013).

As previously discussed, Bussey and Bandura (1999) expanded on Bandura's (1977) social learning theory to reflect their belief that children are not passive recipients of gender knowledge but are actively involved in processing the information they receive. Their revised social cognitive theory places equal importance on the role of the environment and the characteristics of the person. Whilst the imitation and modelling behaviours seen in social learning theory are still important within social cognitive theory, the response the child receives, either positive or negative, is absorbed by the child who uses this additional knowledge to identify whether the behaviour or activity is considered gender appropriate. Rather than being a linear process where each factor affects the child in turn, Bandura describes this process as "triadic reciprocal determinism" (Bandura, 1992:2) where each of the factors influences a child's beliefs. The three factors are behaviour which includes the activities that a child chooses, personal beliefs and understanding which includes a child's self-regulation of gender as well as their gender beliefs, and the environment which includes the social influences on the child. However, the interplay of these factors can be different for each situation a child is in and the significance that each factor carries can also change (Figure 2.2).

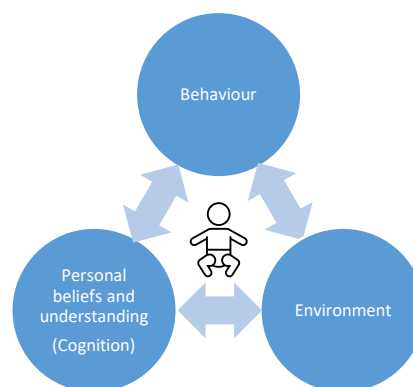


Figure 2.2 – Triadic reciprocal determinism
As described by Bandura (1992)

Bussey and Bandura (1999) believe that children learn about gender in three ways, these are imitation and modelling, direct teaching, and other people's responses to their gendered behaviour. Irrespective of how a child learns about gender behaviour, the triadic reciprocal

determinism, described above, influences the child's own beliefs about gender-appropriate activities and behaviour.

The second cognitive theory of gender development is Kohlberg's (1966) developmental stage theory. Kohlberg identified that children's understanding of gender evolves as they move through developmental stages.

Kohlberg believes that children's understanding of gender evolves through three stages. The first stage is the gender identity stage when children are usually between 2 years and 3 years old. At this point, children know that they are a boy or a girl but do not have a clear understanding of what this means. The second stage is the gender stability stage which children usually reach between 4 years and 5 years old. During this stage, children are able to identify that their gender will not change when they grow up, for instance, if they are a boy, they will grow up to be a man. The final stage is an understanding of gender constancy. Children usually gain an understanding of gender constancy between 6 years and 7 years old, at this stage, they can say that a person's gender has not changed even if they are dressed as the opposite gender, for instance, a boy wearing a dress is still a boy. During children's early years, while they are in the gender identity and gender stability stages, they are actively seeking out information about their gender and what it means. To gain this knowledge, children copy the behaviours and activities that other children of the same gender are engaged in. Additionally, they believe that another child who shares their gender will like the same activities that they do (Kohlberg, 1966). However, this theory is based on an understanding that all children develop in the same way in predictable stages which does not account for the gender development of children whose understanding of gender develops in a non-typical manner (Brinkman et al., 2014).

The final two cognitive theories of development are similar, they are gender schema theory and developmental intergroup theory. The similarities between these two theories are due to children identifying specific characteristics and beliefs that they use to identify whether something is relevant to them. The main difference is that with gender schema theory children identify the specific behaviours and activities that are appropriate to their gender while in developmental intergroup theory, children identify characteristics that they apply to all members of a specific group whether that group is gender-based or a different social category for instance, race or skin colour. According to Jones (2020), it is these characteristics that children use to identify what makes a person a boy or a girl. Bussey and Bandura (1999) discuss the links between social cognitive theory and schema theory, pointing out that the main difference is that only self-gender identification is required for a child to begin to develop a

gender schema. Additionally, they state that gender schema theory is a clear framework which explains how children process gender information and organise it.

Martin and Halverson's (1981) gender schema theory describes the cognitive process that they believe children use to process the information that they receive from their interactions with others. Their process starts when a child is able to identify their own gender and uses the knowledge that they have absorbed from others to help them classify experiences and activities that are gender-appropriate to them and which are not (Figure 2.3).

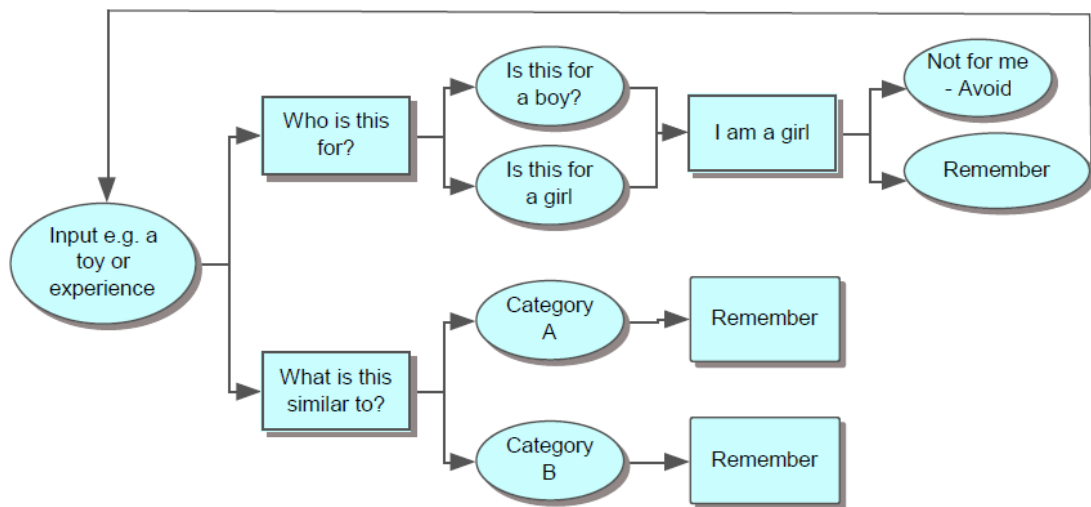


Figure 2.3 – Martin & Halverson (1981) Gender schema process

Martin and Halverson believed that children used gender schema theory to identify what actions and behaviours were appropriate for their gender but also to identify behaviours and activities that were appropriate for a child of the opposite gender (Martin & Halverson, 1981). According to Zahrai (2015), gender schemas provide children with the knowledge that they need to interact within the rules and expectations of society. MacMullin et al. (2020) suggest that children will justify their enjoyment of a counter-stereotypical activity by developing a gender schema where it is acceptable for them even if the activity is not appropriate for other same-gender peers. However, the gender schemas that children develop depend on the child's mental process, their developmental stage and their own prior experiences which could lead to a child developing an ambiguous gender schema (Cherney & Dempsey, 2010).

Some similarities between gender schema theory and Kohlberg's (1966) developmental stage theory can be identified, in particular, the importance of the child knowing what gender they represent in order to process the experiences that they are exposed to and to develop their knowledge of gender. However, Martin and Halverson (1981) do not believe that children's gender development is linked to specific stages of development and instead feel that it is a

continuous developmental process of classification and categorisation which allows children to adjust their beliefs as they develop a deeper understanding of gender.

The final cognitive theory of development that is discussed here is Bigler and Liben's (2007) developmental intergroup theory. The developmental intergroup theory describes the process that children use to identify whether someone is part of a specific group or not through the identification of social categories (Bigler & Liben, 2007). These social categories tend to be differentiated by salient features that make it easy for people to be grouped, for instance, race, skin colour, gender, etc.; therefore, people can belong to more than one social group (Blakemore et al., 2008). However, Zosuls et al. (2009), highlight that whilst gender is a salient feature, young children need to be confident in the identification of their own gender, before they can identify the gender of the children around them. This could explain why in-group bias becomes increasingly prevalent in preschool-aged children, as they are confident in their gender identification.

Similar to Martin and Halverson's (1981) gender schema, Bigler and Liben (2007) believe that children are active participants in processing social stimuli about a person's inclusion in a social group and that it is a continuous developmental process where decisions about whether a person belongs to a specific group are made by comparing the individual's attributes to prior experience and personal knowledge about a specific social group. The development of children's understanding of social groups leads to the development of stereotypes which explain the expected behaviours and attributes of the group, as well as prejudices which are the negative beliefs that a person holds (Cherney & Dempsey, 2010).

The development of stereotypes and prejudices can be seen through the development of in-group bias (Hilliard & Liben, 2010) where children develop a preference for the social groups that they belong to and describe the out-group as less than or in negative terms, for instance, it is not uncommon to hear children say "boys are noisy" or "girls can't run fast". As children develop an in-group bias, they prefer to play with other children who meet the criteria to be included in their preferred social group. This reinforces the behaviours and attitudes that have been deemed to be appropriate for members of that group (Martin et al., 2013). This in-group focus reinforces the stereotypes of the expected behaviour of the children within the group, as well as the negative beliefs about the out-group (Perry et al., 2019). According to Martin and Ruble (2010), children's in-group bias develops over time and becomes stronger as their biases are reinforced through interacting with peers. Negative interactions with out-group peers reinforce young children's belief that their in-group peers are the desired group to interact with (Martin et al., 1990). Research by Xiao et al. (2021) identified that both boys and girls hold

negative beliefs about opposite-gender peers. Within their study, girls were shown to hold more negative beliefs about boys, which may be linked to the types of negative stereotyped behaviours that they associate with opposite-gender group behaviours. As an outcome of children's knowledge of in-group bias, children adapt their behaviour to ensure that they adhere to the gender-expected behaviours so as to be accepted as a member of their in-group (Chase, 2022).

2.2.4 Gender Discourses and their Impact on Children's Figured Worlds

The previously discussed gender development theories highlight the influence that children's social interactions have on their gender development and their knowledge of gender stereotypes and norms. Gee (2014) suggests that individuals use these experiences to develop "simplified, often unconscious and taken-for-granted theories or stories about how the world works" (p95) which he calls figured worlds. Whilst Gee does not limit the development of figured worlds to childhood, within this thesis the focus will be on young children's development of and use of figured worlds.

These socially influenced interpretations of the world can be seen to reflect the social and cultural norms that a child experiences. As discussed in section **Error! Reference source not found.**, Bronfenbrenner (2005) underscores the range of influences to which young children are exposed, all of which contribute to their developing understanding of gender stereotypes and norms. According to Gee (2014), it is these influences and the interactions that children observe, along with the reinforcement of societal norms through books and media, that affect the figured worlds that they develop. However, Gee (2014) stresses that figured worlds are simplifications of society and therefore do not include nuanced details of the complex nature of society. Nevertheless, he explains that the assumptions that are embedded in an individual's figured world represent what they understand to be "appropriate", "typical", and/or "normal" (Gee, 2014:111) behaviours and norms within wider society. Having developed a simplified understanding of the world, Gee (2014) explains how children draw on this knowledge to understand their experiences. He explains that additionally, they will draw on these figured worlds within future interactions and experiences without consciously doing so.

Through social interactions, children are exposed to gender discourses, both through direct verbal comments from their peers and others, and through observing people's actions and behaviours (Bandura, 1977; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Drawing on social and cognitive theories of gender development, discussed in sections **Error! Reference source not found.** and **Error! Reference source not found.**, there are a range of explanations for how children develop an

understanding of gender and how it relates to them. However, according to Gee (2014), it is this exposure to, and reinforcement of, gender discourses that influences the figured worlds that children develop. This aligns with the importance that Bronfenbrenner (1979) places on the role that parents, peers and community play in influencing children's development and their understanding of the world around them.

The detrimental impact of gender stereotypes were discussed previously (section 1.2.2) and it is important to note here that research by Brooker and Ha (2005) and Horvath (2019) has shown that practitioners have an important role in educating children about stereotypes in order to raise children's awareness of their negative effects and to increase children's awareness of gender equity. The role of early childhood education in children's gender development, as well as the impact that practitioners have, is discussed in section 2.4.3 below.

2.3 The Impact of Cultural Capital on Children's Gender Development

The term cultural capital was introduced to early childhood education by Ofsted through the Early Years Inspection Handbook (Ofsted, 2019). They describe cultural capital as:

... the essential knowledge that children need to prepare them for their future success. It is about giving children the best possible start to their early education. As part of making a judgement about the quality of education, inspectors will consider how well leaders use the curriculum to enhance the experience and opportunities available to children, particularly the most disadvantaged. (Ofsted, 2019:31)

It is important to consider what this means for children and early years practitioners and why it is relevant to this thesis, as well as to unpick the theoretical background to this terminology.

Due to its recent introduction to early years education, there is limited current academic literature about the impact of cultural capital on early years children within the United Kingdom. Nonetheless, commentaries and articles have been written by early years experts trying to decode what Ofsted is looking for. Many of the commentaries have focused on discussing the term culture which Williams (1983, cited in Moylett, 2019a) described as "one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (p87). The use of this imprecise term, along with Ofsted's explanation that "Cultural capital is the essential knowledge that children need to be educated citizens" (2019:31), has caused concern that practitioners and settings may understand this to mean that children should be exposed to classical art and music (Mickelburgh, 2019). This belief is accentuated by Major who reported that the Sutton Trust:

recommends that schools' pupil premium money could be used for enrichment vouchers to offer middle class experiences to those who actually need them most. (Major, 2015:1)

Whilst this recommendation is aimed at schools, the link between school pupil premium and the early years pupil premium was made by the Department for Education who reported:

The extension of the pupil premium to early years will give toddlers from the poorest families the support they need to develop and learn at this important early stage. (Department for Education, 2015:1)

Whilst Ofsted's aim appears to be a focus on reducing educational inequalities (Mickelburgh, 2019), Moylett (2019a) raises the concern that it encourages the use of a deficit model where poorer families are seen as 'less than' their middle-class peers. This concern is reflected by many commentators (Freeston, 2019; Mickelburgh, 2019; Moylett, 2019b; 2019a; O'Sullivan, 2019), who linked Ofsted's use of cultural capital to Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital.

Bourdieu originally introduced the term 'cultural capital' in the 1960s as a way of explaining why children from poorer backgrounds did not achieve as well in school as their more advantaged peers. Bourdieu believed that there are three types of capital, these are economic, cultural and social (Bourdieu, 1986). All three types of capital can be interlinked with a person's social or cultural capital being related to the economic capital that they can achieve. Cultural capital is the value that is applied by institutions and society to the knowledge and experiences someone has, and this value is directly linked to social class with higher value being applied to knowledge and experiences that are respected within wider society. Bourdieu described social capital as being power based and it is the people that you know and how much they value you as a person and your place in society. This links to cultural capital as the value of cultural capital that a person holds will directly influence the value that you have for another person's social capital. Bourdieu raised the concern that education systems perpetuate middle-class values and, rather than reducing inequalities among children, continue to replicate them as children who do not hold the desired cultural capital are unable to engage with the dominant social group (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). When considering the role that cultural capital plays in young children's experiences, and specifically in the development of their ideas around gender, O'Connor (2011) points out that a person's cultural capital includes both their knowledge of societal norms as well as "knowing how to behave and what to say in various social situations" (p116). Therefore, a child's cultural capital will include an understanding of the links between gender and social power.

The main reason for this is due to what Bourdieu described as an individual's habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). Habitus is described as the unconscious knowledge of society's values, beliefs, and dispositions that we develop through our interactions with others from birth. This knowledge continues to develop through our experiences and limits people's opportunities as it provides boundaries to what they believe is available to them in terms of both educational and social ambition. Bourdieu explains that social classes, within societies, consist of people with similar habitus' as they have been exposed to comparable societal conditions (Bourdieu, 1990). Whilst a person's habitus will change slowly over time, they will never completely replace the habitus that they started to develop from birth (Bourdieu, 1986), and therefore, according to Bourdieu, they will struggle to achieve social mobility (Webb et al., 2002).

An alternative theory concerning the knowledge that children develop from birth is funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992). Children's funds of knowledge have been described as the knowledge, skills and strategies that enable a family to function as part of society. Moll et al. (1992) set out how a teacher's understanding, and valuing, of children's funds of knowledge can enable them to provide children with an educational experience that includes and builds on this knowledge base. However, researchers have shown that, as with Bourdieu's beliefs about cultural capital, children's funds of knowledge can limit their experiences and their social connections (Hedges et al., 2011; Chesworth, 2016). Chesworth (2016) identified that preschool children's funds of knowledge were important for their inclusion in play with other children and that children whose funds of knowledge were different or less than their peers were often excluded from their peers.

Rios-Aguilar et al. (2011) suggest that rather than considering cultural capital and funds of knowledge as two competing theories, that they should be considered as complementing each other. As previously discussed, there is concern that by focusing on the differences between social classes, Bourdieu's cultural capital theory could be seen to represent a deficit model, rather than a theory that explains the role of cultural capital and habitus on an individual (Hart, 2018), however, funds of knowledge theory highlights the value and importance of family cultural knowledge of all children. By recognizing the value of the knowledge that a child already has, that knowledge is given cultural capital which can be used to raise a child's social capital. This increase in social capital along with culturally and developmentally appropriate activities and experiences can then increase children's educational opportunities by providing them with the aspirations and capital that they need to be able to navigate between different socio-cultural groups (Llopart & Esteban-Guitart, 2018).

The four themes of the early years foundation stage already provide practitioners with information regarding the importance of finding out about a child's family and previous experiences. The themes of 'A Unique Child' and 'Enabling Environments' both set out expectations that early childhood education should start where the child is and that only when these two aspects, along with 'Positive Relationships' are in place, will high-quality learning and development occur (Department for Education, 2021). Taking this into account, an argument could be made that early years providers already identify the essential knowledge that a child needs to learn. This is due to the fact that they do not assume that a child will have a specific level of knowledge before starting and that they plan to meet individual children's learning and development needs. In which case, it could be said that Ofsted is clarifying that they want evidence that settings consider the experiences that children have when they start at a setting as well as providing a range of activities and experiences that provide children with "awe and wonder" (Ofsted, 2019:31). However, a closer look at Ofsted's meaning of cultural capital needs to be taken due to the ambiguity of the term cultural capital and the sociological foundations of the term.

Based on the ideas of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) and funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), an early childhood education setting can be seen as a reflection of the society around it through the actions of the children; Lalvani and Bacon (2019) point out that "they are informed by, and simultaneously perpetuate, hierarchies among groups through language, pedagogies and hidden curricula" (p89). The role that preschool children play in identifying and recreating hierarchies of power and status, through their interactions with peers, has been highlighted by Streib (2011) and Lalvani and Bacon (2019). Children's beliefs and understandings about society and their place in it, their habitus, are reinforced through interactions with their peers and practitioners. This may happen either unconsciously through their experiences of being valued or overlooked for their involvement or explicitly through experiencing exclusion or victimization styles of behaviour.

2.4 What Influences Children's Gender Development?

Perry et al. (2019) state that gender development is a social process that provides children with an understanding of the expectations and norms surrounding what it means to be male or female. However, the role of nature or an individual's biological drives has been a matter of debate for decades (Aldrich, 2014). When considering how children police their peers' gender play, it is important to be aware of the range of influences, including biological, that children are already experiencing and the impact that these influences have in order to identify the specific role that peer policing has on them.

2.4.1 Biological

Due to the saliency of gender within Western society, there is an expectation that children of different genders will behave in different ways, for instance, the idea that 'boys will be boys' (Blakemore et al., 2008). Underlying the theory that children will behave differently due to gender is a belief that certain gender characteristics can be attributed to biological or neurological differences.

In order to unpick whether there are specific differences due to biological gender it is important to start looking at children's development in the womb prior to their exposure to any social cues. Some studies have shown that prenatally boys do move slightly more than girls (Almli et al., 2001; DiPietro et al., 2002), however, Robles de Medina et al. (2003) found no identifiable differences between the number of prenatal movements in a day, although they did report a difference in the number of instances of movement, with boys engaging in more short periods of movement compared to the girls who engaged in fewer periods of movement, however, the duration of each period of movement was longer. Both Eliot (2010a) and DiPietro et al. (2002) discuss links between prenatal activity and children's reported activity levels in the first few years of life. DiPietro et al. (2002) found that there was a positive link between boys' prenatal behaviour and their activity levels at 12 months, whilst girls were less active at 12 months than they had been prenatally, however by 2 years there was no identifiable link between prenatal activity levels and parent reports of activity level. This shows that whilst some differences in children's physical behaviour could be linked to their biological sex prenatally and in the first few years of life, these differences reduce over time.

Physical differences due to gender in newborn children have been widely reported over the past 50 years; Robles de Medina et al. (2003) provide an overview of these differences including newborn boys having larger heads and heavier brains as well as being overall longer and more muscular than girls. Newborn girls conversely have a more developed respiratory system and skeletal system, higher levels of fat and a higher chance of survival. This difference in head and brain size has led to research into whether there are differences in how the brain works due to gender.

Neurological studies into gender differences in brain activity have shown mixed findings with most differences that have been identified as being considered insignificant (Eliot, 2011). However, some studies have shown a difference in the age at which a child starts to demonstrate rudimentary cognitive skills. Hepper et al. (2012) report on their study into foetal habitation, which has been identified as the earliest form of cognitive development and is demonstrated when someone stops responding to a stimulus. This study supported the

outcomes of previous research that identified that female fetuses develop habituation at an earlier gestation than male fetuses' and that they require less exposure to the stimuli to habituate. However, the authors link this difference to the physical maturity of infants' brain development rather than gender differences in how the brain works.

Research by Quinn and Liben (2008), showed differences in cognitive learning skills between 3 and 4-month-old boys and girls, in this case, the boys were shown to be able to identify the symbol that had been rotated whilst girls were not able to. The authors used these results to demonstrate that the development of spatial awareness occurs in boys at an earlier age and therefore shows a gender difference in cognitive skills. Whilst both of these studies demonstrate differences in cognitive development which may be linked to gender, neurologists have not identified any significant differences in how male and female brains work (McCarthy & Arnold, 2011). Additionally, the increased size of a baby boy's head and brain compared to a girl's reflects the difference in body size that can be identified between both children and adults due to gender (Eliot, 2011) and not the cognitive abilities of the brain itself (Hepper et al., 2012).

One aspect of development where many people believe girls excel is language (Marjanovič-Umek & Fekonja-Peklaj, 2017; Adani & Cepanec, 2019). Studies undertaken in utero show that baby girls make more mouth movements and appear to swallow more amniotic fluid, these practice movements then provide the early foundations for the muscle development and mouth movements required for speech (Hepper et al., 2012). Further research has shown that the larynx drops at an earlier age for infant girls which may explain why they are more likely to start talking at an earlier age than boys (Fenson et al., 1994). This earlier development of speaking for girls, alongside the fact that daughters are exposed to more speech from their mothers (Johnson et al., 2014), can possibly explain why girls have larger vocabularies than boys (Daneri et al., 2019) and out-perform boys in language tests between the ages of 2 years old and 6 years old (Bornstein et al., 2004). However, Leaper and Smith (2004) showed that the quantity of boys' speech catches up with girls by 3 years old and they start to narrow the achievement gap.

When considering biological differences, it is important to take into account that whilst the full influence of genes on the development of temperament and behaviour is not yet known, research does show that hormones are responsible for much of the body's development of gender characteristics, at key stages of development including foetal development and puberty. However, these hormone levels are similar for boys and girls from 6 months through

to puberty so cannot explain the gendered differences that develop during this period (Eliot, 2010b).

Recent advances in neurobiology have led to a developing understanding of the impact that the child's environment has on their brain development (Immordino-Yang et al., 2019). From birth, the interactions that a child has with their parent encourages the release of hormones that affect the brain, in particular the pathways for cognition, memory and reasoning. This process is called epigenetics which is the process where hormones interact with the genes to turn them on or off, copy them or delete them (Immordino-Yang et al., 2019). As children grow and develop the interactions that they have with adults and peers continue to influence the skills and knowledge that they develop as well as their understanding of the world around them. When children do not have a reassuring attachment or face ongoing adversity, the hormones that their brain receives are more likely to reinforce the pathways for aggression and anxiety than for learning.

As early childhood practitioners, we need to understand the biological and physiological development processes that influence children's development. While the differences may be small, they do have a gendered impact on children that adults should be aware of. Where practitioners understand the science that underlies the nature debate and the role of epigenetics on children's biological development, they can use it to counteract the gender stereotypes that adults reinforce through their interactions with children (Lewicki et al., 2018)

It is important for early years practitioners to realise that:

Already at preschool age, the two sexes are developing differently – not least because parents and (preschool) teachers, and the culture at large are encouraging gender gaps. (Lewicki et al., 2018:327)

2.4.2 Family

The role that a child's family and home environment has on their knowledge of gender and societal norms has long been identified (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Carter, 2014). In particular, the significant role that parents play in their child's gender socialisation is highlighted by researchers (Morawska, 2020; Antoniucci et al., 2023). Indeed, Morawska points out that:

The first years of life have long been recognised as fundamental to future development, and the role of parents is widely acknowledged as being critical. (Morawska, 2020:2)

Children start to develop an understanding of gender through their observations and interactions within their home environment, and these experiences inform the child's habitus

that will influence their interactions with others as they get older (O'Connor, 2011; Leaper, 2014). The role of the family in children's gender development is crucial, they provide the first experiences of socialisation for a baby and for most children these are highly gendered, whether consciously or unconsciously on the parents' behalf (Mesman & Groeneveld, 2018).

Research shows that children's gender socialising starts before they are born, through their parent's gender-based preparations (Lee, 2022). For instance, the salience of a baby's gender to parents can be seen through the increase in gender reveal parties and the increase in parents who choose to find out their child's gender prior to birth (Gieseler, 2018). According to Eliot (2012), approximately 68% of parents find out the gender of their baby before birth, with the most important reasons being curiosity and because they can (Kooper et al., 2012).

For many families, the gendering of a baby's world starts with parents' decorating the nursery in 'gender appropriate' themes and toys (MacPhee & Prendergast, 2018), choosing gender-appropriate clothing and choosing a name for their child (Pilcher, 2017). Even when parents have equitable gender beliefs, they are still likely to have more gender-conforming toys available than non-conforming gender toys even from early infancy (Boe & Woods, 2018). This thesis will explore each of these areas of early gendering in turn below.

The importance of a child's name to their identity has been identified by many researchers (Blakemore et al., 2008; Peterson et al., 2015; Pilcher, 2017), with Pilcher (2017) raising the fact that despite the increased awareness of the importance of gender equality in today's world, the most commonly used names are still traditionally gendered and there has been no significant increase in gender neutral names. By maintaining the use of gendered names, parents are subconsciously labelling their children in gendered terms which may affect how other children and adults engage with them and the expectations that others have of them (Blakemore et al., 2008). Alongside appearance (Endendijk et al., 2013), a child's name is one of the key ways that others use to categorise a person in terms of expected behaviours and gender-appropriate attitudes (Davies, 2003).

As mentioned above, a child's appearance is one of the salient features that identify a child's gender. The clothes that parents choose for their children are often gendered through the use of colour or style; Cronin (2018) examined the range of clothing available for young children and found significant differences in the types of decoration and colours available depending on gender. Mesman and Groeneveld (2018) discuss the effect of appearance and clothing on adults' interactions with young children as demonstrated by Culp et al. (1983). This experiment was recreated for a BBC programme (Outline Productions, 2017) which found that over 30 years later the same gendered responses were demonstrated by the adults; children who were

dressed as boys were given trucks and robots to play with, while the children dressed in feminine clothes were given dolls and more cuddles. This demonstrates the association between clothing and perceived gender differences in the way that adults respond to children. As discussed previously, the interactions that children have with adults have an epigenetic effect on their genes which may lead to their brains beginning to adapt in diverse ways, so as well as developing ideas about gender norms through socialisation, their genetics are becoming more gendered.

Culp et al. (1983) identified that adults offered children the toys that they perceived the child would be interested in and these toys were always gender-specific, for example, the boys were offered the truck and the girls were offered the doll or duck toy. This research demonstrated that even though most parents said that there were no gender differences in how babies played and that they should be able to play with anything, there was an unconscious gender bias demonstrated. Whilst this research is old, similar findings have been identified by Boe and Woods (2018) in terms of the toys available for an infant to play with. Studies exploring when children start to display gendered toy choices have shown that this can happen from as early as 9 months old (Todd et al., 2017) when infants are still largely socialised by their parents. The availability of toys in a child's environment alongside the time they spend playing with those toys has been shown to have a positive effect on the development of toy preference for young children (Boe & Woods, 2018), therefore where parents are providing a greater quantity of gender-conforming toys children are more likely to develop gender conforming toy preferences. During toy play with parents, young children are likely to receive positive non-verbal feedback when they play with a gender-conforming toy and subtle redirection if they choose a non-conforming toy (Blakemore et al., 2008). This gendering of toy choices has a potential long-term effect on children as these toys develop different skills including knowledge of shape and space or nurturing skills. It also affects the styles of play that children engage in, with girls being more likely to engage in calm cooperative play than boys (Kilvington & Wood, 2016a).

The level and type of interactions that parents have with their babies and young children have also been studied and have been shown to differ depending on the sex of the child (Lee, 2022). Research undertaken by Lee (2022) demonstrated that fathers spend more time interacting with their sons than their daughters and that this pattern was identified when children were as young as 12 months old. This reinforces gender differences through the types of activities that fathers have been identified to engage in with their children. During play, fathers are more likely to engage in rough and tumble or active styles of play with children of either gender with mothers engaging in active play with their sons, at the same time parents, of either gender, are

more likely to engage in pretend play with their daughters (Leavell et al., 2012). These two styles of play encourage different types of skills and areas of development, as well as involving different toys and resources which heightens the children's toy and play preferences.

Children's emotional development is also affected by parent interactions, with some evidence showing that parents work harder to support their son's control of emotions and discourage them from showing sadness, the 'boys don't cry' mentality (Blakemore et al., 2008) and by responding to their anger by giving them what they want (Miller-Slough et al., 2018). At the same time, girls are more likely to be comforted when they show fear or sadness which encourages them to display their emotions to others; whilst they are ignored or disciplined for displaying anger (Miller-Slough et al., 2018).

As previously noted, while many parents express beliefs about the importance of gender equality for their children, they may reinforce gender stereotypes unconsciously. These unconscious beliefs may be part of their own habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) that they are not aware of. Halpern and Perry-Jenkins (2016) found that for many parents there is a difference in their gender ideology and their gender behaviours, with their behaviour conforming to society's gender norms. This study showed that children emulate the behaviour of the same-gender parent and it is this behaviour that is important in the child's development of gender equality or gendered beliefs.

The importance of parents' gender ideology and behaviours can be seen in studies with different family structures, for instance, single-parent families, same-sex families and studies involving families from cultures outside of the Western world. Research with single-parent families in America has shown mixed findings as to the impact on children's gender beliefs, however, most of these studies involved older children and adolescents by which time we know that most children are more flexible in their gender beliefs (Trautner et al., 2005). However, the outcomes are mixed, for instance, Boothroyd and Cross (2017) found no link between absent fathers and children's beliefs about masculinity whilst Vargas et al. (2016) found that sons held more egalitarian beliefs about gender. It is important to point out that whilst these studies focused on single mothers, they did not investigate whether the children had relationships with male role models, for instance still seeing their father or another male family member. Even though these studies did not focus on the mother's beliefs about gender, the children will have still been exposed to adult beliefs which can be seen through some of the participants' comments about the role that they believe a father should take within his family. The impact that a non-parental male role model has on the development of a child's gender beliefs can be seen in the lives of the Na in China (Hua, 2001). The Na is a matriarchal

society where the terms husband and father are not known as roles which are recognised within society. Children grow up living in the matrilineal home and only tend to leave in adulthood if the house becomes too full. The position of male role model within the family is held by the child's uncles and great-uncles and they are expected to work outside of the home to support the family. Where families do not have female children to continue the matrilineal line or an adequate number of males to support the family outside of the home then adoption is a common occurrence with families even adopting young adults to fill gaps. Whilst these children are raised in a household dominated by women, the other adult males within the home and community provide male role models for the children who develop strong beliefs about the gender roles in their society.

The mixed outcomes for the impact on children's gender beliefs in single-parent households are also reflected in research focusing on the beliefs of children with same-sex parents. When looking at same-sex families, researchers predicted that young children with same-sex parents would be less gender-stereotyped in their beliefs due to their experiences at home. Goldberg et al. (2012) found that overall children are less gender stereotyped, though there was only a minimal difference for boys whilst Farr et al. (2017) found no differences in children's gender beliefs. Farr et al. (2017) hypothesise that this may be due to the importance of peers and other societal influences, for example, the media, on the development of children's gender beliefs rather than their parent's behaviour.

The role that each parent takes within the household could also impact the development of children's gender beliefs (Farr et al., 2017), however the aspect of behaviour which appears to have the largest influence on a child's gender beliefs is the gender views of the parent regardless of their sexuality and behaviour within the household (Goldberg et al., 2012). This finding is supported by research undertaken by Antoniucci et al. (2023) which examined whether a link could be identified between a parent's gender identity and their same-gender child's gender identity. The research identified a clear association between a parent's feelings of similarity to their own gender and their child also holding strong feelings of similarity to their own gender. Where a parent identified more with opposite gender beliefs, it was identified that daughters' responses would reflect the parents' feelings of increased opposite gender similarity. However, a difference was identified by Antoniucci et al. (2023) when they looked at boy's responses when compared to a parent who identified greater feelings of opposite-gender similarity, in this situation, boys reported greater feelings of same-gender similarity, which Antoniucci et al. posited was due to the children's knowledge of the value and power associated with masculinity.

The socially constructed nature of gender and gender norms can be identified through the impact of children's cultural and ethnic backgrounds on their gender role beliefs (Alanazi et al., 2020). Research by Lee (2022) identified that Asian fathers spend significantly less time with their children than the White or Black fathers who participated in their research due to the cultural beliefs around the role that fathers play in Asian households. Moving further away from Western culture, the impact of societal and cultural experiences can be seen with the Aka foragers and Mbombo farmers in the Democratic Republic of Congo. These two groups of people have different cultural expectations for gender equality and roles; however, they depend on each other for survival (Fouts, 2008). The Aka foragers have an equitable community with all adults being involved in the care of children, gathering of food, and daily activities. As an egalitarian society, they believe that no one has the right to make anyone else do something regardless of age and that respect should be earned and not expected (Hewlett, 1993). Within the Aka community children under 3 years old are held for the majority of the time by either a parent or another member of the community with fathers holding their child or being within arm's reach for more than 50% of the day (Hewlett, 2000). Within Western culture, play, particularly rough-and-tumble play, is an important way for fathers to bond with their children (Leavell et al., 2012), however Aka fathers do not engage in rough-and-tumble play but form close bonds with their children through communication and physical closeness (Hewlett, 2000). Within the Mbombo communities, gender roles are more representative of Western gender roles with men taking on less of the childcare and a greater emphasis on providing food for the family (Fouts, 2008). These two communities work closely with each other as trade partners; however, the distinct cultural beliefs do not affect the Aka children's beliefs about equality. This pattern of foraging communities holding equitable beliefs while their partner farmer communities uphold gender divisions can be seen across many tribes in the Democratic Republic of Congo as well as in other countries such as the Batek community in Malaysia. One important difference that Endicott (1992) raises is the age at which sex segregation occurs within children of the Batek communities in Malaysia. Within Western cultures, children usually start to play in sex-segregated groups by the age of 3 years old (Martin et al., 2013), however in the Batek egalitarian community children play in mixed-sex groups until they are 10 – 12 years old at which point they tend to start spending increased time with same-sex peers and adults (Endicott, 1992). This difference raises a question about western beliefs that sex-segregated play in the preschool years is a natural occurrence and it is important to bear in mind that:

Once one acquires cultural beliefs and practices and utilizes them for some time, there is a tendency to feel that these beliefs are natural and universal. (Hewlett, 2000:60)

2.4.2.1 The Role of Family Socio-Economic Status

Research has demonstrated a link between a family's socio-economic status (SES) and the gender beliefs that are held and reinforced within the home (Coyne et al., 2021a). Hill's (2002) research identified that families who live in areas of lower SES tend to reinforce traditional gender roles within the home, whilst families in areas of high SES are more likely to hold gender equitable beliefs. This finding is supported by Marks et al. (2009) who also identified the link between families living in areas of low SES and the reinforcement of traditional gender norms. However, Hill (2002) identifies that there may be a difference between the gender beliefs that families present within the community and the gender beliefs that are reinforced within the home. Hill identified that where family circumstances have changed and their SES has improved, families tend to continue to reinforce the gender beliefs that were previously expected within their community, whilst presenting increasingly equitable beliefs to their new community. She suggests that this discrepancy is due to parents' awareness that the gender beliefs that they hold may not be accepted within their new SES community and their desire to be accepted. However, Neary (2021) points out that even when parents hold and reinforce gender-equitable beliefs within the home, these beliefs may be challenged if a child chooses to wear gender non-conforming clothing resulting in children receiving mixed messages about gender behaviour. This suggests that, even where parents believe that they hold gender-equitable beliefs, they are still influenced by their habitus and concerned about how others within the community would view them.

The impact of SES on children's development has also been identified through children's ability to demonstrate their agency, with Murris (2022) pointing out that children's agency is influenced by their identity which includes their gender and family SES. Children from families who have low levels of SES have been shown to be less likely to demonstrate their agency verbally, and tend to rely more on non-verbal forms of communication than peers who come from families with higher levels of SES (Calarco, 2011). This finding is consistent with Hill (2002) who identified that families from areas of higher SES encouraged their children, but especially their daughters, to speak out to ensure that their voice was heard and to hold a position of status within their peer group.

The cultural diversity of a population also impacts the gender beliefs and norms held within a community, this is due to the integration of different cultural norms which leads to an adaptation of the community norms (Christ et al., 2014). However, areas of lower SES within the community tend to have relatively stable populations due to a lack of opportunities for mobility (Hiller & Baudin, 2016). This can lead to community norms, including gender norms, becoming stronger through generational re-enactment and reinforcement of them (Hiller &

Baudin, 2016). This may explain why families with lower SES are more likely to hold traditional gender beliefs, regardless of changes within wider society beliefs over the last few decades and demonstrates the impact of family SES on children's gender development.

2.4.2.2 Toys

The influence that parents have on children's exposure to toys, and reinforcing gendered toy preference has been considered earlier (section 2.4.2 above). However, the role that commercial marketing and the media play in reinforcing gender stereotypes through toys is considered by this research to be worth discussing.

The role that toys play in the development of children's knowledge of gender norms has long been identified through research (Blakemore & Centers, 2005; Kollmayer et al., 2018).

Research examining the gendering of toys has identified specific characteristics that can be seen across different types of toys that are identified as either 'for girls' or 'for boys', these include the colours used and the stereotyped behaviours associated with the toy e.g. nurturing skills or aggressive behaviours (Blakemore & Centers, 2005; Auster & Mansbach, 2012). For instance, research has identified that toys aimed at girls are more likely to be pink, purple or pastel coloured and encourage domestic or beauty play, whilst toys that are designed to appeal to boys are more likely to be in bold colours, including black, and encourage risk-taking or action (Auster & Mansbach, 2012; Fawcett Society, 2020).

Research by Todd et al. (2017) identified that children's preference for playing with gender-typed toys starts at a very early age (9mths-17mths). This finding has been supported through a systematic review of the literature which identified that gender differences can be identified in children's toy preferences regardless of the age of the participants (Todd et al., 2018).

Additional research by Davis and Hines (2020) demonstrates that young children's gendered toy preferences have not changed over time. Young children's awareness of gender stereotypes linked to toys has been identified and is reflected in their toy preferences (Doni, 2021). Research by Wang et al. (2023) supports Doni's position concerning children's own toy preference; however, they identified that young children would consider providing a counter-stereotyped toy to a peer who, they had been informed, preferred to play with opposite-gender toys.

Questions have been raised about the potential influences that young children are exposed to that lead to them developing a preference for gender-typed toys and the role that commercial marketing and parents play has been identified (Jones-Bodie, 2016; Dinella & Weisgram, 2018; Fine & Rush, 2018; Weisgram & Bruun, 2018). Research by Jones-Bodie (2016) identified that children were not aware of the use of gender labels and colour by shops and marketing as a

means of reinforcing gender differences and stereotypes. The use of colour in this way has been raised by Fine and Rush (2018), who identified the underpinning beliefs of gender essentialism that drives gendered toy marketing; the belief that boys and girls naturally choose different types of toys due to the nature of gender and that the colours used can be seen as just a marketing strategy. However, research into the impact of colour on children's toy preference has demonstrated that children are more likely to play with an opposite-gender toy if it is presented in gender-appropriate colours, for instance, a pink truck or a blue tea set (Weisgram et al., 2014; Wong & Hines, 2015; Fulcher & Hayes, 2018). The importance of colour on young children's identification of a gender-appropriate toy has been identified by some companies, for instance, Lego, who have utilised colour as a means of encouraging girls to identify Lego as a feminine toy (Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, 2021). Indeed, Weisgram et al. (2014) state that:

Although it is clear that explicitly labelling toys affects children's interests, when children are not provided with explicit labels they may search for features of a toy that would aid in gender classification. (Weisgram et al., 2014:402)

2.4.3 Early Childhood Settings

For many children, early childhood education (ECE) and care settings provide an introduction to the wider society that they are part of (Gansen, 2019). However, the role that gender plays within early childhood education has received less attention than other areas of education (Chapman, 2022). ECE is a highly gendered environment, both from the perspective of practitioner gender (97-98% female), to the use of binary gender by both practitioners and children as a salient characteristic (Jones & Aubrey, 2019; Josephidou, 2020). Indeed, Gelir (2022) highlights the role that ECE plays in providing young children with exposure to:

cultural norms and expectations [that] guide children to take on gender roles that are valued and practised in the community. (Gelir, 2022:302)

Within ECE settings children are exposed to a range of experiences and beliefs that help to shape their understanding and beliefs about the wider world including gender. Indeed, research has demonstrated that children who attend early childcare settings from an early age tend to develop an awareness of gender stereotypes and gender norm behaviours at a younger age than children who do not attend a childcare setting (Blakemore, 2003; Bennet et al., 2020). Whilst the negative impact of gender stereotypes on children's beliefs and future possibilities has been discussed in early childhood education for some time, Wingrave (2018) reinforces that practitioners are still not aware of the impact that they have on the development of children's gender identities and beliefs. Indeed, some practitioners are unaware of young children's awareness and knowledge of gender and therefore do not

identify the role that gender plays in early childhood settings (Breneselović & Krnjaja, 2016). This may be due to a discourse focusing on young children's innocence and the belief that preschool children are too young to understand gender and gender stereotypes (Chapman, 2022). Alternatively, Josephidou (2020) posits that practitioners may ignore the effect of gender in ECE due to an unwillingness to examine the impact gender has on the children and the practitioners' practice. However, due to the role that gender has in shaping young children's experiences, practitioners need to be aware that:

Much play in early childhood settings reproduces the status quo. That is, it reproduces what exists in society in terms of relations of power about 'race'; gender; social, economic and cultural capital; ethnicity; heteronormativity, and proficiency with English. (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010:75)

Alongside the role that play has within early childhood education in reinforcing children's beliefs about gender, practitioners also have a part to play through their interactions with children whether through unconscious behaviours or explicit statements that children respond to (Emilson et al., 2016; Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019; Rantala & Heikkilä, 2020). Due to a lack of awareness or knowledge about the role that gender plays in ECE, practitioners miss opportunities to challenge gender norms and children's gendered beliefs or experiences (Jones & Aubrey, 2019; Prioletta, 2023).

One way in which the importance of gender pervades early years education settings is through the use of gender to categorise, for instance by asking 'the boys' to complete a task or for 'the girls' to come here (Chen et al., 2011; Callahan & Nicholas, 2019). By using gendered language in this way practitioners raise the salience of gender for children as they must know whether they are a boy or girl and also whether their friend is. When children are exposed to language in this way, they are likely to echo it in their play when they either include or exclude children from what they are playing with (Bluiett, 2018). The use of binary gender language also unintentionally reinforces gender norms as children start to recognise patterns in the words associated with each gender (Brito et al., 2021). Callahan and Nicholas (2019) raise a concern that by using gender binary language (boy/girl) children who do not feel that they fit in, either because they do not yet confidently know their gender or if they identify in some other way, can be excluded. The use of gendered language can also be identified when practitioners praise children, for instance 'well done honey' or 'good job guys' or comment on their appearance for instance "don't you look pretty today" and "aren't you a strong boy" (Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019). Whilst this does not initially appear to be harmful it reinforces gender stereotypes about expected behaviour and appearance.

Practitioners' subconscious gender beliefs or perceptions can also impact how they respond to children (Frödén, 2018; Alanazi et al., 2020), Meland and Kaltvedt (2019) found that practitioners tended to respond promptly to boys' requests for attention while girls were expected to wait. This reinforces children's growing understanding of their own importance and adds to their gender schema about the value of boys and girls. Practitioners were also found to respond differently to children's play with girls involved in noisy active play receiving negative feedback from the adults whilst nothing was said to the boys who were involved in the same play (Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019). This finding is supported by research which found that adults, both practitioners and parents, believe that it is acceptable for boys to engage in physically active play and that it is a biological need for them (Lindsey, 2014; Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019). These differences in how practitioners respond to children unintentionally reinforce the children's positive and negative gendered beliefs (Jones & Aubrey, 2019; Timmons & Airton, 2023), and the beliefs which underlie the responses have an impact on the curriculum and activities that are offered to children in early childhood settings.

Research by Bouchard et al. (2020) identified that gender affects practitioners' assessments of children's behaviour, which may lead to them responding differently to the children. The research identified that ECE practitioners perceived that girls demonstrated higher levels of pro-social behaviours than boys, regardless of the girls' use of language to smooth their social interaction (pragmatic language). However, when the same practitioners assessed boys, their assessments were based on the boys' use of pragmatic language, and only those boys who demonstrated high levels of pragmatic language were identified as having high levels of pro-social skills. Whilst this research focuses specifically on practitioners' assessment of pro-social skills, it raises awareness of the impact of gender on practitioners' assessments and expectations for the young children in their care which may unintentionally reinforce gender norms around children's social development.

Chapman (2016) found that although practitioners stated that they planned for the interest of the children in their care, they planned more outdoor and physical activities for the boys in their settings and assumed that girls would be more likely to engage in drawing and structured art activities and this was taken into account in their planning. One outlier for this research is that the practitioners, in two of the settings, identified that both boys and girls took part in role-play both inside and outside which is contrary to much research that identifies role play as a feminine style of play (Kilvington & Wood, 2016a). This difference could be due to the care taken to provide resources that break through gender stereotypes and therefore make the role-play area more attractive to boys (Chapman, 2016). Once practitioners are aware of the gender stereotypes related to different styles and areas of play, they can plan resources and

experiences that open the play to both genders. However, research by Børve and Børve (2017) highlights the challenge that practitioners face in providing a gender-neutral or gender-equitable experience for young children in their care. Their research identified that regardless of whether the preschool environment is designed to provide a gender-neutral experience, the children themselves will gender it and use gender-segregated play to reinforce the gendered environment.

Research into the impact that practitioners can have in changing children's gender stereotypes has had mixed outcomes. Brooker and Ha (2005) reported on research in South Korea where a male preschool practitioner engaged in cooking activities with the children which is contrary to usual Korean gender norms. Whilst this activity did appear to change the children's gender beliefs in the short term, once they were playing with their peers their original gender beliefs returned. However, a recent project in England appears to have made a longer-term difference in changing children's gender beliefs. Gaunt (2020) reported on the Lifting Limits project which has been trialled in five London primary schools. Over a period of a year, children from 3 -11 years old participated in a range of activities and experiences that provided them with an understanding of gender and gender stereotypes in order to raise their awareness. At the end of the year, there was an increase in children's beliefs about gender equality and fewer gender-stereotyped behaviours were observed (Horvath, 2019). There were a couple of major differences between this project and Brooker and Ha's (2005). The first difference is the period of time that children were exposed to the counter-stereotypical behaviours, in the case of Brooker and Ha the children experienced the male teacher cooking on seven occasions whilst the Lifting Limits project lasted for a year. The second difference, and probably the more important one, is the number of adults engaging in the project. For the Lifting Limits program, all staff in the schools received training plus there were information sessions for the parents whereas during Brooker and Ha's research only one practitioner took part. This demonstrates the importance of all the adults who are spending time with the children being aware of the stereotypical behaviour that is happening and understanding how they can challenge it in an appropriate manner. Whilst the research reported above (Brooker & Ha, 2005; Gaunt, 2020) demonstrated an impact on both boys and girls, research undertaken by Doni (2021) in Greece found mixed results. The research used audio-visual resources to expose children to people engaged in counter-stereotypical occupations, however, the findings identified that there was no change to the boys' gendered beliefs around occupations, and limited change to the girls' gendered beliefs. Considered alongside the previous two projects, this difference could be due to the type or length of exposure the children had to counter-stereotypical behaviours and the role that adults played in challenging gender stereotypes. As identified by Brooker and Ha

(2005), Doni (2021) highlights that, following an intervention, changes in children's gender beliefs do not always last and therefore practitioners need to continue to be aware of their role in challenging gender stereotypes.

The work undertaken through the Lifting Limits project reflects Warin and Adriany's (2015) work surrounding a gender-flexible pedagogy. Rather than working on the theory that preschool children are too young to be aware of gender (Prioletta, 2020), Warin and Adriany (2015) state that practitioners need to be aware of both their own beliefs and the children's beliefs about gender if they are going to be in a position to reduce the impact of gender stereotypes on children's development. They explain that once practitioners are able to identify the gendered practices that are being used by the children, they can "confront and disrupt" (Warin & Adriany, 2015:384) this behaviour and raise the children's awareness of gender issues enabling them to become gender-conscious. The role practitioners can play in challenging gendered behaviours is supported by Josephidou (2020) who emphasises that practitioners need to challenge gendered behaviour sensitively. By taking these steps to challenge and change the culture of the setting, practitioners can provide an environment where children feel able to challenge gender stereotypes that they encounter through their play for themselves (Lyttleton-Smith, 2017).

The role that practitioners play in challenging gender stereotypes within ECE settings and providing different perspectives is supported through the literature (Dutton, 2022; Nguyen, 2022). However, Rogošić et al. (2020) highlight that many practitioners within their study found it difficult to identify instances of gender discrimination. They posit that this may be due to practitioners not being aware of experiencing gender discrimination personally, and therefore not drawing a connection between gender and the interactions they observe. It is this lack of awareness about the impact gender has on all aspects of children's lives that leads to early childhood settings becoming sites of gender binary reinforcement (Wingrave, 2018).

2.4.3.1 Early Childhood Education Environment

Early childhood educators have a role in providing an environment that supports children's holistic development and that is accessible to all children within their setting (Wingrave, 2018). Alanazi et al. (2020) take this role further by suggesting that the early childhood environment that is provided for young children should also enable them to explore different gender roles. However, whilst practitioners may intend to provide a gender-neutral environment, studies have identified the unintentional gendering of the preschool environment that occurs (Børve & Børve, 2017; Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019; Prioletta & Davies, 2022).

Lyttleton-Smith (2017) identified that practitioners can unintentionally gender the preschool setting through the layout of the resources and the types of resources that are provided for the children to access. For instance, the provision of pink or pastel items in the role play area, or a preponderance of dresses or other feminine items of clothing in the dressing up area, can convey a message to the children that this is an area for girls. Conversely, the types of resources provided in the construction area, for instance, bold-coloured building resources, builders' hats and tools, convey a message that this area is for boys. Prioletta and Davies (2022) identified that the layout of preschool environments often reinforces gender binary play, with areas traditionally identified as masculine placed close together, with feminine activities positioned away from them. Furthermore, they identified that activities traditionally identified as feminine are often devalued through their position towards the edge of the room, whilst traditionally masculine activities such as construction are more likely to be positioned in the main area.

The gendering of preschool environments is not limited to countries where practitioners' awareness of the impact of gender is limited. Research undertaken in Norway, which has been identified as one of the most equitable countries in the world (World Economic Forum, 2021), identified that practitioners continue to unintentionally provide a gendered environment, even where their curriculum frameworks include a requirement that early childhood education must be gender equitable (Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019). However, Børve and Børve (2017) highlight that even when practitioners do provide a gender-neutral environment, the children gender it through their border work, reinforcing stereotyped norms around who is able to access an area or play with specific resources.

One area of the early childhood environment that Heywood and Adzajlic (2023) believe requires particular attention is the book area. Whilst books are identified as a gender-neutral item (MacPhee & Prendergast, 2018), research by both Meland (2020) and Morgan and Surtees (2022) highlight that the majority of books aimed at preschool children reinforce traditional gender stereotypes. Research by Zero Tolerance (2021) undertaken in Scottish early years settings identified that only 5% of children's books that feature human characters present them in a non-stereotypical role. Where books are provided that do not include specific mention of gender, for instance through the inclusion of non-human characters that are not gendered, research has identified that children use their knowledge of gender and gender stereotypes to allocate a gender to a character in order to make sense of the storyline (Hill & Bartow Jacobs, 2020; Seitz et al., 2020). Consequently, Morgan and Surtees (2022) argue that whilst books can be used to challenge gender norms, practitioners need to be

aware of the messages that are conveyed to children by the images and the text to ensure that they do not miss the opportunity to identify gender-stereotyped beliefs within the books.

For the reasons presented above, Chapman (2022) argues that all spaces are gendered and that practitioners need to be aware of the gendered messages that the children are getting from the environment in order to challenge gender stereotypes and norms. However, she questions whether settings should aim to provide a gender-neutral environment. According to both Chapman (2022) and Warin (2023), the term gender-neutral implies a lack of awareness, or a disregard, of the impact of gender within the setting and the children's experiences. Chapman (2022) suggests that rather than providing a gender-neutral environment, settings should aim to provide a gender-expansive environment that supports children's exploration of gender. This is similar to Warin's (2023) concept of a gender-flexible environment which calls for practitioners to be sensitive to the impact of gender on the children's experiences and to make sensitive choices about how to challenge gender stereotypes and behaviours within the setting.

2.4.3.2 The Value of Play to Facilitate Children's Experience Of Gender

The importance of play in the lives of all children is enshrined in Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989):

Every child has the right to relax, play and take part in a wide range of cultural and artistic activities. (United Nations General Assembly, 1989: Article 31)

When talking about play Yogman et al. (2018) feel that it is important to understand what the literature means by the term play. Their understanding of play is that it is an intrinsically motivated, fun, spontaneous activity which involves active engagement on the part of the child. Conversely, for Diamant-Cohen et al. (2012), play is a process in which young children develop knowledge about the world around them and their place within that world. Both of these descriptions of play can be considered valid when the literature surrounding the benefits of play to young children as well as the ways that children use play are considered. The role of play in supporting children's development is underlined in the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage "Play is essential for children's development, building their confidence as they learn to explore, to think about problems, and relate to others." (Department for Education, 2021:9). Therefore, ECE settings need to provide children with the time and space to be able to explore a range of learning experiences and concepts through play.

2.4.3.2.1 How Does Imaginative and Role Play Help Children Develop Social Skills?

According to Wood (2013), play serves two purposes, the first purpose has immediate value for children and their learning whilst the second purpose is setting the foundations of future learning. Play, in all forms, helps children to develop by providing them with the opportunity to explore concepts and ideas that they are interested in (Jing & Li, 2015). By following their own interests, they learn critical thinking skills and develop creativity (Ortlieb, 2010), as well as the ability to problem solve and to work with their peers in a collaborative manner (Yogman et al., 2018). Yogman et al. (2018) explain that when children engage in play, their brain structure and function are enhanced with the development of executive functioning skills such as memory, mental flexibility and self-control. The self-control, or self-regulation skills, that children develop are the internal mechanisms that allow a person to control their impulses and behaviour (Pyle et al., 2017). Meyers and Berk (2014) suggest that imaginary play provides children with opportunities to learn and practice these self-regulation skills with their peers.

Imaginative and role play help children to develop their social and emotional skills (Hansel, 2015) as well as their understanding of the world around them (Gastaldi et al., 2019). The reason why imaginative and role play supports children's social and emotional development is that they are able to learn social rules and norms from their peers and put them into practice immediately (Canning, 2011; Löfdahl, 2014). For Vygotsky, imaginative play gave children the opportunity to follow the social rules but also to imagine or explore what might happen if they chose not to follow the rules (Meyers & Berk, 2014), he believed that this style of imaginary play advanced their self-regulation in a way that other styles of play did not.

As well as learning social rules and norms, children are developing their social competence (Veiga et al., 2017). Social competence skills overlap with social expectations and norms, for instance, the ability to work with others, to be sensitive to other people's feelings and to avoid aggressive behaviours (Fung & Cheng, 2017); whilst at the same time children can experience control and exert their own agency (Hewes, 2014).

2.4.3.2.2 How do Children Use their Imaginative and Social Play?

Fleer (2011) reminds us that Vygotsky believed that we can only imagine events that we cannot see, hear, experience, or conceptualise and that through imaginative play children are able to experience and conceptualise events in a way that helps them to process and learn from them.

By engaging in imaginative play, young children are able to experience the wide range of roles and characters that exist within the wider world (Canning, 2011; Fleer, 2011), by acting out the adult roles that they have observed within society they are able to gain an understanding of

other people's thoughts and feelings (Yogman et al., 2018) as well as practising for their future roles within society (Wood, 2013). This experience allows children to explore their own identity in terms of how they fit within society and the type of identity they wish to have as they grow up (Adair & Fabienne, 2014; Kilvington & Wood, 2016b).

Imaginative play allows children to imitate other people's behaviour and actions, and to rehearse, practice or repeat experiences that they are processing (Wood, 2013). By re-enacting and reviewing their daily experiences, children are able to gain an understanding and perspective that supports them through similar experiences (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). Hewes (2014) describes how young children use imaginative play to cope with situations that they find stressful whether these are caused by low-level daily stressors, anxieties, or situations of extreme trauma. For instance, Hansel (2015) discusses reports of children re-enacting the 9/11 terror attacks through small world block play, whilst the researcher has personal experience of watching preschool children re-enact the ending to the movie Titanic using the climbing frame (Personal reflective journal, 23rd June 2020). In this way, children use their play to develop an understanding of events that they are aware of and that they find upsetting or stressful and to explore their emotions, for instance, to experience fear in a safe environment when playing monsters or re-enacting an experience when they felt fear (Wood, 2013).

As discussed in section 2.4.3.2.1 above, children learn about cultural and social norms through play with their peers. Through imaginative and other forms of social play, children are able to explore the social rules and norms by testing them out in a safe environment (Fleer, 2011) and, in particular, can consider the effect of these norms on their experiences and the experience of others. Wood (2013) points out that all aspects of children's lives and play are influenced by their wider social and cultural experiences, through their play with others they share the cultural beliefs that they have been exposed to and are exposed to other people's cultural norms and beliefs. In this situation, cultural diversity can include different social class experiences and expectations as well as family cultural background (Streib, 2011; Adair & Fabienne, 2014). Role play allows children to explore these cultural expectations, especially regarding gender. By linking their experiences within the wider world through their play, children are able to share their funds of knowledge and knowledge of social norms and expectations (Canning, 2011; Wood, 2013).

2.4.4 Peers

The role of peers in the development of children's gender identity and beliefs has been linked to developmental theories such as group bias and the resulting sex segregation of peers (Perry

et al., 2019) which starts to develop when children are around 3 years old (Kilvington & Wood, 2016a). This corresponds with children spending an increasing amount of time in early childhood settings with their peers and away from their families (Gansen, 2019).

Young children have an awareness of gender norms and expectations that they have developed through their experiences and interactions within their family prior to joining an early childhood setting. Gelir (2022) explains that when young children join an early childhood setting, they draw on their funds of knowledge, including their gender beliefs, to develop their identity within the setting, and through this process, they present their knowledge of gender to their peers. Paechter (2007) acknowledges that children hold differing levels of gender knowledge when they join an early childhood setting and that to be accepted within the setting young children need to learn and understand the setting gender conventions. She sets out her belief that when children join an early childhood setting, they become part of a community of practice where they are expected to adhere to the community norms concerning play and behaviours if they want to be included in the play. This belief is reflected in work by both Martin (2011) and Hellman et al. (2014) who found that new children in a setting were excluded from the older children's play until they had learned how to be a girl or boy, as understood by the older children, within that setting. This process can also be identified in the adaptation of children's play over time as it subtly changes to reflect the dominant styles of play within a setting (Gastaldi et al., 2019). As play is vital to children's socialisation, they adjust their styles of play and choice of toys, to ensure that they are accepted within their community.

In order to understand how children learn about gender expectations from their peers, we need to identify the methods that young children use to police their peers' behaviour. In this context 'police' is taken to mean the types of behaviour and language that are used to restrict or redirect another child's gender play through the reinforcement of gender stereotypes.

Research by Masters et al. (2021) shows that both boys and girls experience gender policing in school, and Mayeza (2018) discusses the policing behaviours that he observed school-aged children using on the playground to reinforce gender norms through play which included exclusion and name calling. However, there is little current research into the methods used by preschool children. Research undertaken by Lamb and Roopnarine (1979), Lamb et al. (1980) and Roopnarine (1984) identified a range of reinforcement behaviours, both positive and negative, that children use to reinforce their peers' adherence to gender norms (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 – Children’s policing behaviours identified in the literature

Positive Reinforcement Behaviours	Negative Reinforcement Behaviours	
Praise	Criticise	From Lamb and Roopnarine (1979)
Approve	Express disapproval	
Imitate	Abandon play	
Join in Play	Divert	
Attentively observe		
Comply	Disrupt activity	Added by Lamb et al. (1980)
Covet toy		
Laughing & smiling with		Added by Roopnarine (1984)
Giving help either physical or verbal		

From table 2.1, it is clear to see that children employ a wider range of positive reinforcement behaviours when managing their peers' gender behaviour than negative. However, they are not used proportionally by children during play and there is little research that identifies whether gender influences the methods children use (Lansford et al., 2012).

Many researchers have identified that boys are more likely to be sanctioned by their peers for engaging in cross-gender activities and play than girls are and are more likely to take on the role of enforcer (Ewing Lee & Troop-Gordon, 2011a; Braun & Davidson, 2017; Xiao et al., 2019; Skočajić et al., 2020). Contrary to this, Xiao et al. (2019) found that both boys and girls were likely to police their peers' behaviour equally and to have their behaviour policed, although boys only policed other boys' play and girls policed both boys and girls. These findings could mean that boys received more policing than girls since they received the policing behaviours from both boys and girls, however, the study focused on the enforcer’s behaviour rather than how often children were exposed to reinforcement. One possible explanation for the strict reinforcement that boys receive compared to girls could be due to the status afforded to masculine ideals within society (Coyne et al., 2014; Solomon, 2016). Whilst Braun and Davidson (2017) looked at slightly older children, they identified that acceptable activities and games for girls overlapped the activities and games that children identified as acceptable for boys but that the overlap did not go the other way. This supports the idea that masculine activities are seen as important and therefore they are valuable to girls which leads to girls being more accepting of crossing gender boundaries than boys (Coyle et al., 2016). An alternative explanation of the increased policing that boys receive is due to children’s knowledge of gender norms and stereotypes. Research by Uyar and Arnas (2021) identified that preschool girls’ knowledge of gender norms was higher than that of similar-aged boys.

This may explain why boys face higher levels of policing, as they may be more likely to engage in counter-stereotyped behaviour as they are not aware of the gender norm they are breaking or challenging. However, whilst Uyar and Arnas (2021) identified differences in the level of children's gender norm knowledge, it was not a statistically significant difference.

Research into children's awareness of gender-based power dynamics identified that, regardless of cultural background, preschool-aged children associate power with male roles (Charafeddine et al., 2020). This awareness of gender power may explain why some researchers have identified that boys are more likely to be involved in gender policing than girls (Skočajić et al., 2020). Indeed, research conducted by Schroeder and Liben (2021) identified that children who feel more pressure from peers to conform are more likely to accept the policing of others and to be friends with gender-enforcing peers. This could lead to them copying the behaviours of their gender-enforcer peers and engaging in gender policing themselves.

One of the key roles for gender enforcers is that of border maintenance. This is the process where children are allowed access to, or restricted from, accessing resources due to gender. Early years settings are often highly gendered in terms of who plays where, with boys often taking ownership of the construction area while girls claim the mark-making area (Børve & Børve, 2017). Whilst this is often an unspoken arrangement with children learning from their peers by copying, Martin (2011) found that boys often use noise or fast movement to dominate areas both inside and outside. The boys' use of their bodies to dominate the spaces was a demonstration of their power to protect the gender border and their area of play. This power struggle usually occurs during children's free play, and it reinforces gender and power dynamics between children, reinforcing differences between children rather than their similarities (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010; Brito et al., 2021). This leads to children separating along gender lines and having different experiences in the same early childhood setting (Yanik, 2020).

One consequence of children's border work is to reinforce the gendered nature of toys and activities that children may have already experienced at home. Within early years environments girls are more likely to be found in the role play area or mark-making area whilst boys are in the construction or small world areas (Prioletta & Pyle, 2017). This segregation may be due to activity preferences, however, Martin et al. (2013) found that activity choice was only marginally associated with children's preference to play with same-gender peers, and therefore it probably has more to do with children's gender border enforcement work.

Research has shown that the toys that children play with have an impact on the skills that they are developing (Granger et al., 2016). Feminine activities such as role play encourage the development of children's nurturing skills (Li & Wong, 2016) which are then reinforced as they help their peers or undertake 'tasks' within the setting, for instance, handing out snacks (Meland & Kaltvedt, 2019). Other traditionally more feminine activities within an early childhood setting include drawing and other fine motor skills, these also tend to be small group activities where the children develop their social skills through sharing the resources and talking about what they are doing (Lewicki et al., 2018). This contrasts with the traditional male activities such as gross motor play which develops physical abilities and an understanding of risk (Browne, 2004). One other area of an early childhood setting which is traditionally seen as a male domain is the construction area. Through construction play children are developing their understanding of shape and space, a key area of mathematical development where boys are shown to excel (Trawick-Smith et al., 2017). When taken alongside the research showing that infant boys develop an awareness of mental rotation, an early shape and space skill, at an earlier age than girls (Quinn & Liben, 2008), the male domination of the construction area can be seen to increase advantages for boys whilst reducing girls' experiences. One aspect of role-play that challenges the feminine classification is the inclusion of characters that children traditionally identify as male, for instance, pirates, police, or superheroes (Coyne et al., 2014; Groeneveld et al., 2021; Meyer & Conroy, 2022). Research by Coyne et al. (2021b) identified that the inclusion of superhero characters in role play encouraged boys to participate, however, the type of play that the children engaged in within the superhero theme could be differentiated along gender lines with the boys involved in action and risk-taking behaviours while chasing the 'bad guys', whilst girls tended to engage in calmer play, for instance finding lost pets.

Preschool children have been identified to use gender to identify who should be allowed access to toys and other resources (Gülgöz & Gelman, 2017), but also whom they should play with and share their resources with (Engelmann et al., 2013). Research shows that young children are aware that sharing resources with peers is a means of enabling entry into play, but that they are also more likely to share resources with a same-gender peer than with an opposite-gender peer, due to the positive effect that sharing will have on their social acceptance within their gender in-group (Engelmann et al., 2013; Bateman & Church, 2017). By sharing resources with same-gender peers, children are able to reinforce their preference to play with same-gender peers, but also to reinforce that opposite-gender peer play is not appropriate (Gülgöz et al., 2018).

The wide range of influences that children are exposed to in their early years which have an impact on the developing understanding of gender and its relevance to them can be seen through the discussion above. Eliot (2010a) makes the point that while there are small biological differences in children at birth that can be attributed to their sex, it is the influence of society and the experiences that children have that makes the largest difference on their gendered behaviour.

2.4.4.1 Impact of Group or Social Dynamics on Preschool Children

The importance of peer acceptance and inclusion for young children's development has been identified within the literature (Coelho et al., 2017). Young children's desire to be accepted as part of the group can be linked to their in-group bias (Chase, 2022), and social status as an appropriate member of the preschool environment (Martin, 2011).

Research has shown that social status within an early childhood setting is linked more to the self-confidence and pro-social behaviours that a child demonstrates rather than their age (Coelho et al., 2017; Shehu, 2019; Sabato & Kogut, 2021). When considering the respect that gender enforcers receive from their peers, it could be argued that they are considered high status peers due to their level of gender knowledge (Nærland & Martinsen, 2011). This may be one explanation as to why other children accede to gender enforcers' beliefs to strengthen their own social position. However, Cederborg (2021) and Pietraszewski and German (2013) both point out that when a group of children work together, they hold more power than an individual child does. This would suggest that a strong group of peers could influence the accepted behaviours within a setting due to their power as a group, rather than because they are acknowledged as having elevated levels of gender expertise.

Björk-Willén (2012) suggests that preschool children are not just aware of their peers' social status, but also use role-play as a means of reinforcing a peers' status within the setting. Her research found that during role-play, children who were considered to have high social status within the setting would be offered high-status roles within the imaginative play, for instance, mum or dad. Children who were identified by their peers as having low social status or as being too young to play properly would be allocated a role that would have a limited impact on the game, these roles include being a baby or the family pet. By allocating roles in this way, preschool children are able to manipulate who is allowed power and agency within their play (Sheldon, 1996).

2.4.4.2 Children's Responses to Diversity

Children's awareness of differences can be seen through their play and social behaviour from as early as 3 years old (Raabe & Beelmann, 2011; Kreiger & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2013). Whilst

many early years practitioners do not believe that preschool children can be involved in bullying (Storey & Slaby, 2013), research has shown that levels of bullying in early years are similar to those in primary schools (Saracho, 2016). The bullying styles of behaviour that have been identified in early years include both verbal and physical actions including exclusion from play (Saracho, 2016). These types of rejection increase the chances of further peer victimisation and other negative social experiences for children as they lose their social network which will leave them isolated and without peers to model appropriate behaviours (Godleski et al., 2015). The long-term effects on children who have experienced social exclusion, victimisation and bullying can include mental health issues (Reunamo et al., 2014) so it is important that practitioners identify the behaviour and take steps to reduce instances of inappropriate behaviour.

Research by Tay-Lim and Gan (2012) identified two main factors that led to bullying or victimising behaviour, and these are “inappropriate/deviant behaviours and differentness” (p58). This could be due to children’s in-group/out-group schema development (Hilliard & Liben, 2010) where they characterise children who do not fit into their group as ‘less than’ or as having lower status. Children’s awareness of salient features including gender and race are key to their identification of differences which may lead to the victimisation of other children (Park, 2011). Studies have shown that racial segregation and exclusion can be seen in preschool children’s play even if they are not necessarily aware that they are doing it (Park, 2011); whilst Jesuvadian and Wright (2011) showed that even within an ethnically diverse environment that skin tone was a reason that children were excluded from both play and social situations.

The importance of salient features on children’s identification of differences is supported by research into children’s attitudes toward peers with disabilities. Studies have shown that when preschool children are asked to identify peers with a disability, they only identify those who have a visible difference due to either behaviour or physical ability including the use of mobility aids (Hong et al., 2014; Yu et al., 2015). These studies both showed that even within inclusion classrooms, children without disabilities were less likely to play with a disabled peer and if asked why they tended to describe them as being less developed or less able to play (Yu et al., 2015). Children who have been identified as having problems with emotional regulation or social disorders are more likely to experience victimisation than children with other identifiable disabilities (Bear et al., 2015; Godleski et al., 2015), this could be due to children identifying both factors of inappropriate behaviour and difference.

As previously set out, gender is a salient feature for preschool children (King et al., 2021). Research by Nabbijohn et al. (2020) has identified that gender non-conforming children are often excluded by their peers. However, contrary to some of the findings around the exclusion of disabled peers, Sims et al. (2022) found that gender non-conforming peers may be treated differently and that they may be included by the same-gender peers as a means of reinforcing 'correct' behaviour.

The role of early years education in reducing educational disadvantage is an ideal to be aimed for, however, early years educators need to be aware of the variety of experiences and beliefs that children bring with them to the setting. In order to provide children with the best possible outcomes and minimise inequality, we need to work with all children to enable them to explore a wide variety of experiences and possibilities whilst being aware of the influences and habitus that they are exposed to (Alanazi et al., 2020; Dutton, 2022).

2.4.5 Interactions Between Nature and Nurture

The questions about whether nature or nurture is responsible for differences in children's development have been around for years (Blakemore et al., 2008). Whilst some biological differences have been identified between boys and girls as social groups, greater variation has been found between children within a gender group, than across gender groups (Browne, 2004). This finding has been replicated in studies examining adults, where greater variation has been found in brain patterns between members of a gender group, than across gender groups (Hyde et al., 2019).

Studies undertaken with twins, with the aim of identifying whether genetic or environmental influences play a greater role in young children's gender identity development, found that both genetic and environmental factors are valuable in explaining differences in children's gender role behaviour (Iervolino et al., 2005). However, there were differences identified between the impact of genetic and environmental factors between genders. Iervolino et al. (2005) found that environmental factors had a greater impact on the gender development of boys than they did on girls. The researchers posit that this could be due to the response that boys receive from others when they engage in opposite-gender play compared to girls. The role that young children's social experiences have, along with the impact of older role models and peers on children's gender knowledge, has been identified within the literature (Breneselović & Krnjaja, 2016).

Neuroscientists agree that epigenetics, the interaction between hormones and genes, triggers differences in brain development, however, the experiences that an individual has play a greater role in an individual's gender development (Breneselović & Krnjaja, 2016; Immordino-

Yang et al., 2019). The interconnecting roles of both nature and nurture on children's gender development mean that they cannot be separated as neither set of theories can fully explain human development (Sameroff, 2010). The role of an adult's habitus on their unconscious beliefs and actions can be seen to influence children's ideas about gender expectations, and these experiences help to form the child's habitus which they use to understand the world (Bourdieu, 1990). However, an awareness of the minor biological differences in infant children, along with an understanding of the role of epigenetics in children's development, is also vital to understand the links between nature and nurture.

Sameroff (2010) suggests that whilst Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological framework of social influences on children's development demonstrates the importance of both the child's local community and the wider cultural influences on a child, it does not consider the biological processes. Bronfenbrenner (2005) himself identified the role of biology on children's development when he presented his revised bioecological theory. Sameroff (2010) suggests that the addition of psychological processes and a greater range of biological processes to Bronfenbrenner's model provides a more complete representation of the interactions between nature and nurture and provides a clearer model of the influences on children's development (see Figure 2.4)

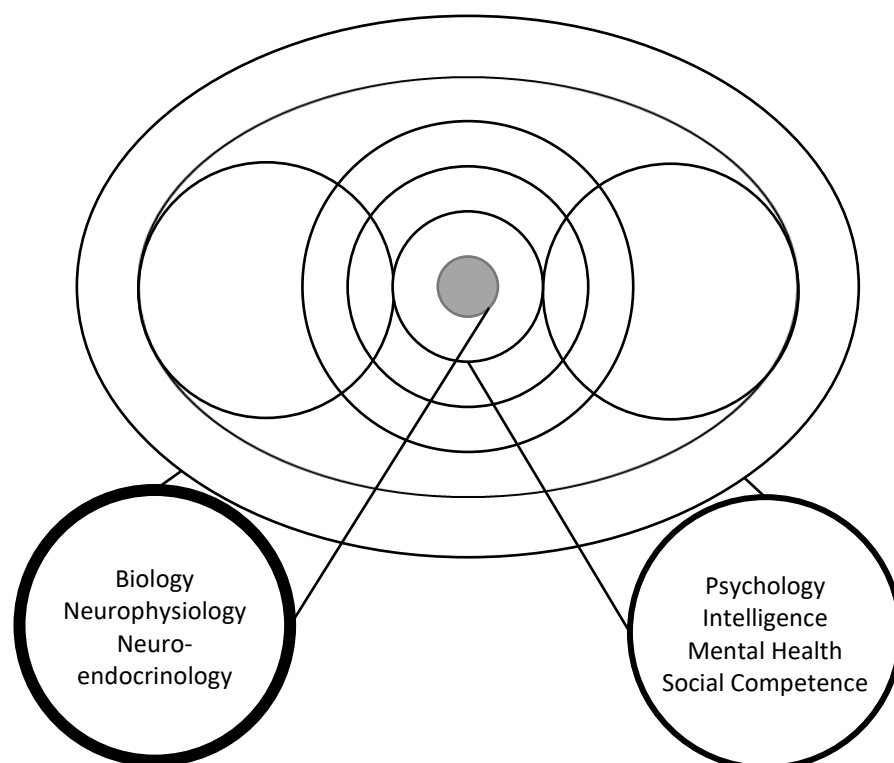


Figure 2.4 – Sameroff's Biopsychosocial Ecological Model (2010)

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided the theory and literature underpinning this thesis. It presented information on a range of theories which explain children's gender development, before moving on to consider a range of experiences and influences that have an impact on children's developing knowledge about gender stereotypes and norms. The role that family and early childhood settings play in reinforcing children's understanding of gender development was presented, demonstrating the impact of both implicit and explicit gender behaviours on young children's experiences of gender. The chapter then moved to examine the role that preschool children play in reinforcing gender stereotypes and norms and policing their peers' gender exploration. There is limited literature that explores preschool children's policing of their peers' gender exploration, and what literature there is, is dated. Having identified a gap in the literature around preschool children's policing of their peers' gender exploration, this thesis intends to provide an answer to the following research question and associated sub-questions:

Do children between 3 years old and 4 years old police their peers' gender exploration during play?

- SQ 1. Do children police their peers' gender play and why?
- SQ 2. What methods do children use to police their peers' gender play?
- SQ 3. What factors impact children's gender policing behaviour?
- SQ 4. Does gender play a role in who polices children's play and who is policed?

The next chapter presents the methodological position of this research, along with an explanation and justification of the chosen methods for data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

Following on from the previous chapter which explored the literature surrounding children's gender development, this chapter focuses on the methodological decisions that underpin the research process. This chapter draws together the research decisions that have been made to ensure the research answers the research question. This includes the theoretical framework, researcher positionality and methods that have been used to both collect the data and to represent and interpret the research. The research decisions set out in this chapter help to illustrate how the different aspects work together to ensure the authenticity and rigour of this research.

The key research question that this research aims to answer is:

- How do children between 3 and 4 years of age police their peers' gender exploration during play?

This is supported by the following sub-questions:

- Do children police their peers' gender play and why?
- What methods do children use to police their peers' gender play?
- What factors impact children's gender policing behaviour?
- Does gender play a role in who polices children's play and who is policed?

This research explores the lived experiences of preschool children aged 3-4 years, who are considered vulnerable participants due to their age. For this reason, care has been taken to set out the ethical considerations and steps that were taken to ensure that their right to protection from harm was ensured, whilst their verbal and non-verbal communication is valued and heard throughout the thesis.

3.2 Ontology and Epistemology

Underlying all decisions that a researcher makes when designing a piece of research, is their ontological and epistemological positionality (Glesne, 2011).

The researcher holds an interpretivist ontology, as she believes that knowledge of the social world is constructed through the interactions of people and that the participants who engaged in this research will have different interpretations of the world around them. For this reason, this research does not offer a hypothesis to be tested but has instead identified research questions which it hopes to answer through the analysis of the data.

According to Hughes:

Interpretivists argue that, rather than simply perceiving our particular social and material circumstances, each person continually makes sense of them within a cultural framework of socially constructed and shared meanings, and that our interpretations of the world influence our behaviour in it. (Hughes, 2010:41)

It is this belief, that participants develop an understanding of wider societal expectations based on their personal interpretations of the world, which supports the design of this research. As an interpretivist researcher, the aim of the research is to explore participants' understanding of the world around them and the social rules that govern their experiences (Greig et al., 2013). However, as people's interpretations of the world around them and the social rules that guide them differ, participants' voices need to be heard throughout the research (Hughes, 2010). To do this, the research methodology needs to capture the participants' thoughts and beliefs in a way in which their voices and interpretations of the wider community in which they live can be seen and heard.

Within the interpretivist paradigm, there are several epistemological perspectives which can be used to identify what counts as knowledge (SAGE Research Methods, 2020). This study holds a constructivist perspective which sets out that knowledge is created or constructed by individuals based on their own experiences and understandings of the social world (Bryman, 2016) and as such this knowledge can change over time due to differences in people's interpretations. Therefore, this research adopts a constructivist approach to attempt to understand the participants' thoughts and beliefs which sub-consciously influence their interpretations and interactions.

These two aspects: ontology and epistemology, affect the research methodology and data collection methods that are used within the research design. The utilisation of traditional ethnographic methods such as observation and interview, albeit adapted to be accessible to the young participants, enables them to share their own experiences and to ensure that their voice was recorded and represented authentically within the research. As this is a qualitative study, concerning people's thoughts, feelings and beliefs, the data, therefore, consists of words and images that represent the multiple voices and experiences of the participants (Denscombe, 2014).

3.3 Methodological Design

According to Pink (2013), ethnography is a methodology which is designed to explore the social context of a setting to identify the shared beliefs and values that the community holds. This research focuses on children's reinforcement of gender norms and stereotypes, which

falls within the remit of feminist ethnography's focus on the role of gender within a community and how gender is used to distribute power (Bailey, 2012). This research utilises a feminist ethnographic approach to the methodology.

Both traditional ethnographic research and feminist ethnography emphasise the importance of the participant's voice and allows the 'story' of the community to be told through the participants' experiences (Fetterman, 2010). However, Gobo (2008) argues that feminist ethnographers differ in their aim when sharing the 'story' of the community, with feminist ethnographers intending to " 'give voice' to marginalized groups [...] adopting a multi-voice approach which lets those who are usually silent speak out." (Gobo, 2008:58). Within this research children are positioned as competent participants who have agency and a right to have their voices heard. The researcher's role is to amplify the participants' voices to ensure that they are heard by the adults who care for them and the wider society in which they live.

Through studying the everyday social interactions and behaviours that participants engage in, the researcher can develop an understanding of the shared beliefs, values and norms within that particular context (Johnson & Christensen, 2012; Fusch et al., 2017). Atkinson (2015) identifies that ethnographic research uses multiple data collection methods which reflect the diverse ways in which participants experience the social world to capture the complexity of the shared beliefs, values, and norms which are enacted. However, certain data collection methods are usually considered to be key when planning an ethnographic study, these include participant observation and interviews (Fetterman, 2010; Powell, 2010; Atkins & Wallace, 2012). The combination of participant observation and interviews enables the ethnographic researcher to be immersed in the culture as a participant, whilst gaining further details and depth of knowledge through interviews with participants (Fetterman, 2010; Atkins & Wallace, 2012). This research uses participant observation and age-appropriate interview techniques (video-stimulated conversations and an image elicitation activity) to allow the researcher to gain an understanding of preschool children's experiences. Further discussion of the methods chosen for use within this research can be found in section 3.10.

According to Fetterman (2010), ethnographers use a cultural lens to interpret the social interactions and behaviours that they have observed. This cultural lens is developed through the researcher's understanding of the setting, which develops through their involvement with the practitioners and the setting (Atkinson, 2015). Alongside their understanding of the setting, the researcher's cultural lens is guided by their theoretical view of the world, this includes their ontological and epistemological position, their positionality, as well as other theoretical concepts or perspectives that the researcher draws on (feminist approach section

3.5 below). The other theoretical concept that affects the methodological design of this research, is an understanding of children as competent individuals who are capable of discussing events and experiences which impact their lives; this is set out in section 1.3.

Ethnographic studies can range in scale from a macro-level study which focuses on an entire population or cultural group, down to a micro-level study where the focus is on an identified aspect of a cultural experience or an individual group for instance an individual classroom within the wider school community (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Micro-level ethnographic studies can also be described as mini-ethnographic or focused ethnographic studies (Gossa et al., 2016; Fusch et al., 2017).

This research is focused on exploring the methods that preschool children aged 3-4 years use to police their peers' gender play and was undertaken in three settings; fitting the description of a micro-ethnographic study, which is focused on developing an understanding of macro-social issues, in this case, gender, through the analysis of daily activities within small sample group (Hamlin, 2013; Silverman, 2016). By collecting data from three different settings, this micro-ethnographic study explores the experiences of participants within three distinct groups. This enables the researcher to identify the similarities and differences in participant experiences, in order to identify shared beliefs, values, norms and practices as well as their divergent experiences (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). According to Johnson and Christensen (2012), micro-ethnographic studies, which compare participant experiences from different cultural settings, can be considered to display higher levels of validity than a micro-ethnographic study which only considers data from one context.

The level of focus that a micro-ethnographic study has tends to produce large quantities of data on a specific phenomenon and for this reason the data tends to be collected over a shorter period (Gibbs et al., 2020; Dobbins et al., 2021). During this research, the researcher spent four weeks in each setting getting to know the participants and collecting the data, the data collection schedule can be found in section 3.10.5 below.

3.4 Researcher Positionality

Due to the interpretive nature of qualitative research, the researchers' prior experience, knowledge and beliefs can have an impact on the research process including the data analysis and conclusions drawn from the data (Johnson et al., 2020). Cohen et al. (2017) discuss the different lenses that researchers use when they interpret the world of participants, these lenses are based on the researcher's prior experiences and biases. For this reason, I believe it is important to situate myself within the research design and to provide the context that

underpins my interest in this topic. To do this, I will set out my positionality through a range of lenses that focus on my prior experiences that may influence the research.

The first lens to consider when examining my positionality is one of privilege. Growing up in a white middle-class household there was an expectation that I would progress through school to university. My parents encouraged both my brother and I to aim high, both educationally and in our chosen careers. As a result of my parents' belief related to the value of education, I attended an all-girls secondary school where the staff challenged pupils to achieve highly. These educational experiences, together with my parents' belief that there were no 'girl's jobs' or 'boy's jobs' around the home, led to me developing an expectation of gender equity.

The next lens that I am aware of, is a parenting lens. On a personal level, as a mother of three children, two boys and a girl, I became very aware of the gendering of toys and experiences within wider society as soon as my first child was born; just walking into a shop to purchase a birthday or Christmas present reinforced the pink and blue gender stereotypes. At home, I ensured that all three of my children had access to a range of toys, from dolls and tea sets, through to trains and building blocks, but I was aware that this was considered unusual by some friends.

This belief in equality of opportunity was reinforced through my career in early childhood education. I worked in early years education for twenty years in a range of different roles, from childminder to nursery manager. Throughout my time working with young children and their families, my underlying objective was to support each child in my care to develop to their full potential. This objective was supported by my principles of equity of opportunity, the resources and activities were available for all children to access, and adaptations were made to enable that access if they were required. From my perspective, as a parent as well as a practitioner, I had a responsibility to the children in my care to challenge gender norms and stereotypes within the setting. However, throughout my professional career in early childhood education, whilst I have seen a rise in awareness of the importance of gender equality, I have also experienced both practitioners and parents reinforcing gender stereotypes through their language and behaviour. For example, "what can you expect, he's a boy" when discussing challenging behaviour, whilst telling girls that they expect "better behaviour".

Over twenty years after I first experienced, what I perceived to be, the gendering of children's play experiences as a parent, and after over a decade of work within education as a whole, I am still aware of the reinforcement of gender norms and stereotypes within early childhood education. I still listen out for "you can't play with that, you are a (insert gender)" from the children as they reinforce their gendered norms and beliefs.

Finally, I need to be aware of my professional lens (Cohen et al., 2017), and reflect on the possible ways that my prior work experience in early childhood education settings may influence the data that I collect, as well as the analysis of the data (Thomas, 2017). With my prior experience of working as a practitioner and as part of a management team, I can be seen as an 'in-between'. I have experience working within an early childhood setting which allows me a certain level of understanding about how a setting may operate, whilst not holding the level of knowledge that a practitioner of a particular setting would have about their context (Brooks et al., 2014).

My professional lens is particularly important to consider when collecting and analysing the data from the University Day Care where I was previously employed. The potential impact of my professional experience within the setting is lessened by changes that have been made within the setting since I left. The setting has had a change of management which has led to a change in curriculum to the Curiosity Approach and cultural change within the nursery. This means that I no longer have the same level of knowledge about the setting that a practitioner has about the context. Additionally, the staff within the preschool room have changed and are predominantly new staff with whom I have not previously worked. Finally, the potential participants did not remember me due to the passage of time and their young ages when I left (1-2 years old). Nevertheless, throughout the research process I endeavoured to take steps to "make the familiar strange" (Mannay, 2015:31). For instance, the use of visual methods which elicited participants' experiences, provided an opportunity to see the social environment from an alternative viewpoint (Mannay, 2015).

My experience of working with children in different settings may also influence how I view children's nursery experiences around gender. Thomas (2017) suggests that when researchers recognise their position within their research, that they are "accepting the centrality of subjectivity" (p112), and by acknowledging their position, researchers become aware of how their "perception, background, values and inductive processes, frames and paradigms shape the research." (Cohen et al., 2017:303). To minimise the potential impact of my prior experiences working within ECE settings, I will take a reflexive approach to my effect on the research process (Powell et al., 2013). It is through understanding and identifying the influences on our own view of the social world around us, that as interpretive researchers we can start to understand the social world that our participants inhabit.

3.5 Feminist Approach

Whilst going through the process of examining my positionality I started to identify threads of feminist beliefs and attitudes. However, as the niece of a strong woman who identified herself

as a feminist, I did not consider myself to be a feminist as my life experiences have been so different. Additionally, apart from the obvious link between feminism and research focusing on gender, I did not see this research as being a piece of feminist research. However, the threads of feminism that were identifiable in my positionality led me to explore the idea of feminist approaches to research, particularly the relevance of feminism to this study involving preschool children.

According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007), there is no specific feminist methodology or approach to research. It is this vagueness, along with a perception that feminist research historically focuses on issues around adult gender inequality, which raises questions about its use when considering research which focuses on young children's experiences. Indeed, Burman and Stacey (2010) explain that feminist research explicitly avoids research involving children in response to "the malestream theory and practice which equated women's interests with those of children" (p228). However, Hawkesworth (2012) highlights that feminist scholarship has changed its focus over the past forty years, developing and adapting to changes in society and framing new areas of research. Indeed, Hesse-Biber explains that:

Feminist researchers seek to connect their research to social transformation and social change on behalf of women and other oppressed groups. (Hesse-Biber, 2012:18)

Whilst young children, as a group, may not immediately spring to mind when oppressed groups are mentioned, the exclusion of their voices from research about their lived experiences silences them (Alldred, 2013). Within this research, young children are understood to be competent individuals who are actively involved in the social construction of their world (Coyne & Carter, 2018). By positioning children as active individuals within their lives, they are seen to have agency and to be capable of sharing information about their lives as valuable informants within the research process (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011; Clark et al., 2014). This aligns with the aim of feminist research to ensure that the voices of silenced or oppressed groups are heard and that the structures or beliefs that oppress them are illuminated (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007; Alldred, 2013).

A feminist approach influences every aspect of research design from the identification of the research question, through the methodological decisions to the analysis and presentation of the data (Bailey, 2012). The methodological approach taken for this research is an ethnographic one (section 3.3) which supports feminist research principles that seek to amplify hidden voices and to explore the lives of marginalised groups (Bailey, 2012).

Reviewing the research design from an outside perspective, parallels can be drawn between the principles of feminist approaches to research, and this study's intention to enable preschool children's voices to be heard through this research, as well as its gender focus. Having considered the parallels, the researcher is confident that this research sits confidently within wider feminist research.

3.6 Sampling Strategy

An exploratory sample was chosen for this research. It is a style of sampling that is often used in qualitative research where there is little or no information on a subject and therefore the researcher is looking to develop a general understanding and new insights about a topic rather than representing the whole population (Denscombe, 2014). This is an appropriate sampling strategy to use within this research due to the scarcity of literature focusing on the topic.

The specific exploratory sampling method chosen for this research was maximum variation sampling, this is a form of purposive sampling where the sample group is chosen for their possession of specific criteria (Cohen et al., 2017). With maximum variation sampling, the inclusion criteria are identified, and settings are chosen which meet the maximum variation, for instance, a setting that has a high level of different nationalities represented and a setting which is predominantly white British (Seale, 2012). By using settings that represent maximum variation, the data can be used to identify variations in the children's behaviour which may be linked to their habitus but also the commonalities that can be seen across the settings (Emmel, 2013; Patton, 2015).

3.6.1 Identification of the Maximum Variation Sampling Frame

When using maximum variation sampling the researcher needed to ensure that the sample comprised settings that represent extremes, for instance, settings that have a very high percentage of families with low-income levels and conversely settings that have a very low percentage of families with low-income levels (Seale, 2012). As there is limited research into preschool children's policing of peers' gender play, the decision was taken to identify settings which represented a breadth of criteria, these are:

- Population diversity compared to the national average.
- Average socio-economic level compared to the national average.

Using data from the 2011 census (Office for National Statistics, 2012), three areas of the country were identified that represented maximum variation, a city in the north-east of the country which rated lower than the national average in both aspects, a city on the south coast which rated higher than the national average in both aspects and a town in the northeast of

England which rated higher than the national average for SES and lower than the national average for population diversity. Data from the 2021 census (Office for National Statistics, 2022) confirms that these areas still fit the previously identified maximum variation frame. These locations and the criteria can be seen in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 – Maximum variation frame

Location	Population Diversity compared to the national average	Average Socio-Economic Level compared to the national average
City - Northeast	Lower	Lower
City – South coast	Higher	Higher
Town – Northeast	Lower	Higher

(Based on data taken from Office for National Statistics (2022): Appendix 4 & Appendix 5)

Davis (2010) points out that data from different settings can be used to compare children's behaviour across settings and areas of the country. Where similar behaviours are identified across the settings, researchers can suggest that there is some generalisability from the research (Davis, 2010). However, Miles et al. (2014) caution against the belief that similar behaviours seen in multiple settings could be considered generalisable and suggest, instead, that it adds confidence and credibility to any emerging theory from the data.

3.6.2 Sample Size

Sample sizes within qualitative research tend to be smaller as they are exploratory rather than trying to represent the whole population (Denscombe, 2014). However, both Johnson and Christensen (2012) and Cohen et al. (2017) point out that whilst small, the sample size has to be big enough to generate rich data. The inclusion of a small number of settings within this research enabled the researcher to devote the time required to gather rich, detailed data (Daniel, 2019), rather than a brief overview from a larger sample of settings (Patton, 2015).

Due to the sample size, the researcher was able to spend time in each setting focusing on building relationships with the participants, before collecting any data. Smith (2011) highlights that young children will not respond openly if they do not feel comfortable or trust the researcher. The importance of building a relationship with the children is discussed further in section 3.9.4.2 below.

3.7 Research Settings

As identified within the literature chapter, gender stereotypes and norms are socially constructed, and these norms can be identified in early childhood settings. Martin (2011) identified that early childhood settings are communities of practice, where children are

expected to learn how to perform gender in a setting appropriate manner. Alongside the agreed socially constructed nature of gender (Budgeon, 2014; Institute of Physics, 2017; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020a), as well as the constructivist paradigm adopted within the research, the importance of understanding the context of the data collection is highlighted (Bryman, 2016). The data for this research was collected from three settings located in different areas of England as set out in section 3.6.1 above. To ensure anonymity for the settings they have been given pseudonyms; a description of each setting can be found in Appendix 6, Appendix 8 and Appendix 10.

3.8 Research Design

The purpose of this research is to examine the role that peers play in preschool children's knowledge of, and adherence to, gender stereotypes and norms. This knowledge adds to the ongoing debate related to the development of young children's understanding of gender. Despite a growing awareness of the implications of gender stereotypes on children's aspirations and future opportunities over the last couple of decades (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020c), and an awareness of the role that education plays in reducing inequalities (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010), research continues to show the impact of gender stereotypes on children's future aspirations from the age of five (Phair, 2021). Over the past two decades, research has focused on the role that early childhood education and the family environment play in the development of young children's knowledge of gender norms; however, there has been little research into the role that is played by young children's peers in the process.

For the reasons set out above, it was identified that a qualitative micro-ethnographic research approach would be the most appropriate approach to collect data about the children's lived experiences with their peers. The use of qualitative research methods allows for the children's thoughts and experiences to be collected and enables their voices to be heard. A micro-ethnographic approach, as described by Fetterman (2010), seeks to focus on smaller scale contexts or shorter periods of intense data collection to gain an understanding of the social world that the participants are active within, their interactions with others within the community and the effect of those interactions on the participants' thoughts and beliefs.

To answer the research questions, the data was generated within this micro-ethnographic study through:

- Video-recorded observations
- Video-stimulated conversations with the participants

- Image elicitation activity

The rationale for each of the data collection methods is explained in section 3.10 below.

A research schedule was devised which encompassed the process from the application for ethical approval, through the creation of research materials, the data collection process, analysis of the data and writing up (Appendix 12). This schedule needed to be revised due to the impact of Covid-19 on the research, and the need to postpone data collection.

The data collection was planned to take place over four weeks in each setting. However, to allow for potential disruption to the data collection periods due to Covid-19, the research schedule was designed to allow for up to two months to be spent within each setting. The four-week period included time prior to starting the data collection to begin developing a relationship with the children in the setting.

A detailed breakdown of the research schedule for the four weeks within each data collection setting was produced and is explained in more detail in section 3.10.5 below.

3.9 Ethics

Undertaking research with young children is universally understood to be ethically more sensitive due to the age of the children involved, and the recognition of their vulnerability within the research process (Brooks et al., 2014; Fassbender, 2020). In addition to general concerns about involving young children in research projects, there are additional issues which are raised when a researcher plans to gather and use video recordings within the research (Heath et al., 2010). For this reason, the researcher needed to be conscious of implications within the research design and ensure that ethical considerations were woven through all stages of the research process (Alderson & Morrow, 2011).

Prior to starting the data collection process, the researcher applied for ethical consent from the University of Hull Faculty of Arts, Culture and Education ethics panel. The application set out the steps the researcher intended to take to ensure that the research was conducted ethically and took into consideration the three main areas of concern identified by the faculty for researchers to consider prior to applying for ethical approval (University of Hull, 2018); these are:

- Ensure informed consent
- Protect the participant
- Researcher responsibilities and standards.

Ethical approval was received prior to any aspects of data collection commenced (Appendix 1).

The ethical decisions that underpin this research, as well as the ethical dilemmas faced during the research, are considered below.

3.9.1 Ensure Informed Consent

Informed voluntary consent is a critical feature of research ethics and must be received before any data collection commences (Alderson, 2014). When undertaking research with young children within an early years setting, the need for consent can be identified at three different levels, these are at the level of the setting gatekeeper, the parents, and the participants.

The settings who participated in this research were initially contacted by email and were provided with an overview of the research, along with a setting information sheet which explained the research in greater detail, and described what would happen during the research. The researcher then arranged to meet the setting gatekeepers to answer any further questions that arose and to ensure that they felt in possession of any relevant information that they required to make an informed decision as to whether to engage in the research (Dockett et al., 2013; Silverman, 2017). Setting gatekeepers who were happy to allow the research to take place in their setting were then asked to complete a setting consent form.

Once setting gatekeepers had provided informed consent for the research to take place within their setting, the next level of informed consent that was required was parental consent. Whilst consent is required from setting gatekeepers to undertake research within an early years setting, they cannot give consent for the children to participate; only a person with parental responsibility for a child can give consent for that child to participate in a research project (Alderson, 2014).

Parents of children who were three and four years old were provided with an information pack that consisted of an information sheet, a parental consent form and an image consent form. The information sheet provided clear information about the research, the potential risks of involvement, and what the participant was expected or required to undertake in terms of activities and time commitment (Alderson, 2014). Within the information provided, the voluntary nature of research participation and the right to withdraw consent at any time were highlighted, so that parents were aware of this right (BERA, 2018).

As this research includes the use of video-recorded observations, parents were provided with a separate image consent form. By providing parents with a separate image consent form, they were able to separate the decision about whether to allow images which included their child

to be used in publications, from the decision as to whether to allow their child to participate in the research. As young children may not appreciate the potential for identification through the use of images, this information was included for parents so that they were able to take this information into account when deciding whether to give parental consent for their child to take part (Alderson & Morrow, 2011).

The information packs were handed out by the researcher directly to the parents, and the researcher was available to speak to any parents who had questions about the research (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011). This ensured parents could be reassured that there was minimal risk to their child and that they had the opportunity to raise any concerns prior to deciding whether to allow their child to participate (Gallagher, 2010). Additionally, by handing the packs directly to the parents, they were able to decide whether to give consent or not, without the setting being involved in handing out the information packs or collecting the returned parent consent forms. This reduced the likelihood that parents may feel pressured to give consent to please the setting gatekeeper or due to worries about how the gatekeeper would view them if they declined (Brooks et al., 2014).

Finally, young children are unable to give legally defined consent to participate in research, however, it is ethically good practice to ensure that all participants understand what the research is about and what they are being asked to take part in (Coady, 2010; BERA, 2018). UNICEF (2002) makes it clear that parental consent is “not an adequate standard in light of the rights of the child” (2002:5) and that children must be provided with appropriate information, that they can understand. The nature of children’s consent and the process that was utilised within this research to gain children’s consent is discussed in detail in section 3.9.2 below.

3.9.2 Assent from Children

Once parental consent had been received for a child to participate, the researcher spoke to the children individually to share an age-appropriate information booklet. Children’s rights to be involved in the research process have been set out in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). These rights, along with other ethical guidelines, for example, BERA’s guidelines for research (BERA, 2018), set out the expectation that any research that children are being invited to take part in is explained clearly to them in a manner that they can understand. This enables children to make an informed decision as to whether to assent to participate (Heath et al., 2010). Whilst children’s assent is not legally required to undertake research with them, it is a process that respects a child’s autonomy to make decisions on a matter which is relevant to them and recognises them as

competent individuals who have the right to decide for themselves (Robson, 2011b; Dockett et al., 2013).

According to Pyle and Danniels (2016), the term assent is defined as “a clear agreement to participate given by an individual who cannot enter into a legal contract, and not simply as the absence of objections towards participation” (p1439). It has been argued that by using the term assent to signify a child’s agreement to participate, and the term consent to signify adult agreement, that the adult-child power dynamic is reinforced through the language used which minimises the value of the child’s feelings (Gray & Winter, 2011). Nevertheless, within this research, the term assent is used when discussing the children’s agreement to participate, as a way of differentiating between the parent’s agreement that their child can be involved and the child’s agreement to participate.

For the children to provide informed assent it was important that they felt comfortable asking questions about the information that was being shared with them (Pyle & Danniels, 2016). Therefore, the researcher considered how to present the information, so as to minimise the adult-child dynamic through an overly formal or prescriptive manner (Brooks et al., 2014).

As part of the formal ethical approval process, an age-appropriate children’s information leaflet was created (Appendix 2). The leaflet needed to explain clearly what the research was focused on and what was being asked of them as participants if they were to be able to provide informed assent (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). However, BERA (2018) highlights that due to their age, young children may be limited in their understanding of verbal information and therefore researchers need to consider different ways of presenting the information. The information leaflets consisted of clear images and simple language, their design was based on the experience of researchers who have used similar leaflets to share information about projects effectively with early years children (Robson, 2011a; Te One, 2011; Pyle & Danniels, 2016). The children were encouraged to take the leaflets home to share them with their parents, this allowed them to return to the leaflet as often as they wished and acted as a stimulus for them to ask questions about the research (Pyle & Danniels, 2016).

Included within the children’s information leaflet was information explaining that their privacy would be respected and that the researcher would not tell other people what they have said. As an early years educator and researcher, the researcher believes that it is important to let children know what will happen with the information that they share, however, the researcher has a statutory duty to pass on information to an appropriate person if they have concerns about the safety of a child or a child makes a disclosure (BERA, 2018; HM Government, 2018). During the assent conversations with the children, the researcher explained that what the

children say about their play will not be shared with other people in a way which identifies them. However, if the researcher was concerned about the information they shared, then the researcher would need to tell another adult. The researcher reassured the children that she would always let them know first that the information would be passed on (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). Pyle and Danniels (2016) suggest that it can be confusing for young children to understand what the researcher means when they explain the duty to report and suggest that it may be better to avoid telling children that what they say will be kept secret.

Careful consideration was made when designing the information booklet to ensure that it was user-friendly for the children. The information booklet was created to be A5 sized, as this is the size that Dockett et al. (2013) found young children were able to handle and manipulate confidently. Care was taken when choosing the images to help the children to understand the information that was being shared with them to ensure that the images and text communicated the same message (Robson, 2011a; Pyle & Danniels, 2016). Cartoon-style clipart images were chosen to support the text as research undertaken by Dockett et al. (2013) identified that children liked the use of cartoon-style images within information leaflets. These images were chosen from a web-based source which licenses the images for personal use.

The assent process did not start until the second week of the data collection schedule. This allowed the researcher to spend time interacting with the children and to start to develop supportive relationships, prior to introducing the information booklets to the children. This increased the children's confidence to ask questions about the research and their confidence to decline to take part if they did not wish to (Pyle & Danniels, 2016). During these conversations, the children were introduced to the camcorder and the digital voice recorder. This allowed the children to develop a better understanding of what was meant by watching and recording their play, as well as reducing the potential for the tools to distract the children from their play the first time they were used (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011). The use of images taken from the video-recorded observations within this report and other publications was not included in the children's information booklet. However, when the researcher explained to the children that their name would not be used when she spoke to people about their play, the researcher also explained that she would like to share pictures of them when she talked about their play. The children's understanding of this was demonstrated during some of the video-stimulated conversations when children commented that the researcher was going to show people pictures of them playing (Appendix 13).

After discussing the information booklet with the children, they were given time to decide whether they wished to take part. By allowing children time to think about the research, and

to share the information booklet with their parents, they had the time that they required to process the information (Gray & Winter, 2011). The researcher revisited the information about the research with them later in the week to ask whether they were happy to take part in the research. The children who agreed to participate were then provided with a basic participant assent form where they were asked to draw a picture to show whether they were happy to take part (Appendix 3). Whilst there is no requirement for children to provide written assent to take part in the research; Pyle and Danniels (2016) suggest that encouraging children to record their assent is a meaningful way of respecting their autonomy.

Whilst most of the children with parental consent agreed to participate, two of the children did not give assent. One potential participant communicated their disinterest in the research through their body language. The researcher respected this non-verbal communication and gave the child the opportunity to leave the conversation. The second child who did not give assent gave a clear negative response, however, they still wanted to go through the information booklet and asked questions before confirming they did not want to participate. The importance of being aware of the children's body language, and respecting both their verbal and non-verbal communication during the consent process is important due to the adult-child power dynamic that may lead to a child giving consent when they would rather not participate (Pálmadóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2016).

The researcher explained to the children that they have the right to withdraw at any time and suggested some signs they could use to show that they have withdrawn their assent to take part (Hordyk, 2017; Chesworth, 2019). This withdrawal of assent could be for a set period or permanently. If a child decided that they wished to remove their assent permanently, all video recordings of the child would have been deleted to respect their decision (Flewitt, 2012). Whilst allowing children to withdraw consent in this way may be frustrating to the researcher who needs to delete interesting recordings or data, the data that is collected is more likely to reflect the information that the children wish to contribute (Dockett et al., 2013).

The children's assent was considered to be an ongoing process and was checked prior to each data collection activity and those who gave assent chose a coloured band to wear to signify their assent. Furthermore, the researcher was aware of the children's body language during the activities and responded to any body language that communicated that they did not want to participate. An understanding of assent being an ongoing process with young children is being discussed more widely within the literature (Pyle & Danniels, 2016; Rose, 2016). Some researchers suggest verbally checking with the children prior to each data collection activity (Theobald, 2012; Green, 2016), whilst others focus on the children's body language and

whether they are demonstrating their dissent (Gray & Winter, 2011; Cutter-Mackenzie & Edwards, 2013). During the data collection, many of the participants opted in and out of the activities. During the first couple of days of data collection in each setting, the participants appeared to test out whether the researcher would respect their decision as to whether to participate or not. When the researcher demonstrated that she respected their decision, the participants gained confidence in the process.

At times some of the participants who had given assent on the day demonstrated through their body language that they did not want to participate. In the Estate Community Nursery, one of the participants who had given assent to be video-recorded during the session, turned her back on the researcher when she saw her in the garden. The researcher responded to this non-verbal communication by moving away from the participant and did not video record them during that session. Rutanen et al. (2018) highlight that researchers should critically reflect on what a child's assent looks like and, more importantly, how participants may demonstrate withdrawal of assent. In this instance, the participant demonstrated that they were withdrawing assent by changing their behaviour. This is one of the behaviours that Fassbender (2020) identifies children using to communicate their decision to dissent. Fassbender (2020) raises concerns that children's non-verbal communication is often missed by researchers; and stresses the importance of a researcher identifying how a child may convey their assent or withdrawal of assent through their body language. He suggests that researchers should pay attention to children's level of eye contact, guarded body language and withdrawn or uncharacteristic behaviour when reflecting on whether the child is happy to participate in the research or whether the researcher should make the decision not to include them.

3.9.3 Protect the Participant

Protecting participants is vital when undertaking research, especially when the participants are young children who may not understand the focus of the research or the possible implications of involvement (BERA, 2018). Underscoring the importance of protecting young participants is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations General Assembly, 1989), which set out that the best interests of the child should be taken into consideration at all times. BERA (2018) sets out an expectation that researchers have a duty of care to recognise potential risks for involvement and to minimise or manage any distress or discomfort that participants experience as part of the research.

The use of video-recorded observations within this research increases the potential for participants' privacy to be breached (BERA, 2018). According to Alderson (2014), researchers

are increasingly being asked not to use video footage or images that include children's faces to reduce the likelihood of their privacy being breached, and when images are used the participants' faces are often blurred or pixilated. However, the value of visual data in capturing non-verbal communication between children meant that the potential ethical issues needed to be alleviated.

Within this research, the decision was made to use video screenshots so that the participant's non-verbal communication can be seen and is valued in the same manner that their verbal communication is. To preserve both the setting's and the participants' anonymity, the researcher took steps to ensure that they cannot be identified through the inclusion of identifying data or images within the research (Rutanen et al., 2018). These steps included the researcher editing any screenshot which included identifying logos, for instance setting branded clothing, by adding a solid coloured block over the logo.

However, the value of the visual data, in particular capturing non-verbal communications between children, means that it is not always appropriate to blur the participants' identities (Nutbrown, 2010; Robson, 2011a; BERA, 2018). Some researchers have raised concern over the use of anonymising techniques, such as pixelation or blurring, due to the dehumanising effect or objectification of the participants that can result from the process (Rose, 2016; Cohen et al., 2017; Woolhouse, 2019). Indeed, Dockett et al. (2017) suggest that the blurring of images, to reduce the risk of children being identified, can have the unintentional effect of contributing "to the marginalisation of children and their perspectives" (2017:233) which is contrary to feminist beliefs which underpin this research.

Finally, the decision to include the participants' faces and non-verbal communication within the research is supported by Fassbender (2020) who acknowledges that whilst researchers have a duty of care to protect their participants from any potential harm, participants have the right to have their faces seen and their voices heard within research about their lives.

During the assent process, the participants were invited to choose a pseudonym which was used in the transcriptions. This was explained to them by making links to their knowledge about superheroes and their use of an everyday name and their superhero name. This allowed them to gain some power within the research process, however, those children who did not want to choose a pseudonym had one given to them by the researcher. Harcourt and Conroy (2011) recommend that the use of pseudonyms should be discussed with the participants and their views considered as it shows respect to them as participants and passes power to them. In particular, they report that the children in their study wanted their own names to be used so that "it says who we really are" (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011:44).

Whilst the use of pseudonyms is debated due to participants having the right to waive their entitlement to anonymity, along with a desire to take ownership of their views within the research (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011; BERA, 2018); nevertheless, the use of a participant's name increases the risk that other participants may be identifiable within the research (Alderson, 2014). Therefore, the researcher offered a compromise where the participants were able to choose their pseudonyms if they wished (Alderson & Morrow, 2011). This ensured that the risk of possible identification was reduced, whilst the participants were still able to preserve some power (Manassakis, 2020).

When reflecting on the researcher's duty to protect children's confidentiality, the issue of safeguarding is raised as the researcher is required to break the agreement of confidentiality where they believe that a child is at risk of harm (Brooks et al., 2014). According to UK government guidance "safeguarding is everyone's responsibility" (HM Government, 2015:4). This guidance is reinforced by BERA (2018), who state that researchers may have a statutory duty, as well as an ethical duty, to pass information about a safeguarding concern on to the relevant person within the setting. For this reason, information about the researcher's duty to report safeguarding concerns was included in the information provided to the setting, parents and participants prior to consent or assent being gained Coady (2010). As discussed previously (section 3.9.2) the issue of safeguarding was raised with the participants during the assent conversations and included in the information booklet.

The researcher was aware from the beginning of the research that the use of visual data collection methods increased the complexity of protecting the participants in terms of both confidentiality and anonymity, in particular where the inclusion of body language supports the research. Therefore, the researcher minimised the risks to the participants through careful negotiation and reflexivity (BERA, 2018; Liu, 2019).

3.9.4 Researcher Responsibilities and Standards

The third area of concern to be considered is researcher responsibilities and standards. University of Hull (2018) reminds researchers that the responsibility for ensuring that the research meets ethical standards remains with them throughout the research process.

There are two areas of particular concern within researcher responsibility and standards, these are researcher reflexivity and careful management of relationships within the research. These will be considered in turn below.

3.9.4.1 Reflexivity

Researcher reflexivity is defined as:

the capacity of researchers to reflect critically about the impact of their research on participants and their communities, on researchers themselves, and on the body of knowledge under investigation. (Powell et al., 2013:176)

The UNICEF Office Of Research underscores the importance of a reflexive researcher integrating ethics into the research process from the initial design, through the data collection and analysis, to the final publication and dissemination of findings to ensure that participants are protected throughout the process (Powell et al., 2013).

Whilst data collection cannot take place without ethical approval being received, Pink (2013) discusses the ongoing ethical implications of undertaking ethnographic research. She explains that researchers must have a reflexive approach to their own ethical beliefs, as ethical dilemmas occur throughout the research process and that researchers must base their decisions on their personal and professional codes of practice. This view is supported by Alderson and Morrow who state that the formal ethics process:

does not provide clear, agreed solutions. Its main use is as a method for exploring dilemmas in order to understand them more clearly and deeply. (Alderson & Morrow, 2011:19)

Due to the semi-permanent nature of video-recording children's play, it was important for the researcher to be aware of the possible ethical issues which may occur and to reflect on how these would be managed.

During the data collection period, the researcher was very aware of the potential for inadvertently recording a child who did not have parental consent. When a child without consent joined in an activity that was being recorded, the researcher responded in different ways depending on the context. If the child without consent joined the edge of the game, the researcher changed the angle or the zoom of the camcorder so as to not capture them in the recording. When a child joined the play and moved into a position where there was no potential for continuing the recording without including them, the researcher stopped the recording. Once the recording had been stopped, the researcher watched the recorded episode, and if the child without consent had been recorded accidentally, the video recording was deleted. Whilst this meant that some interesting episodes of play were not captured and therefore, could not be included in the research, it is vital that the researcher stops the recording as children without consent or who have not given their assent cannot be included in the observation (Mason, 2011).

Another aspect of reflexivity that the researcher was aware of was the potential that the adult-child power dynamic may lead to participants being included in the research when they did not want to (Greig et al., 2013). During the data collection period at the Small Town Nursery, one of the participants who had given their assent to participate decided that they did not want to be video-recorded. The researcher accepted their choice and ensured that they were not captured in the video recordings. After a couple of days of watching the researcher, the participant joined their friend who was being recorded. The researcher stopped recording as they were not able to continue recording without also capturing the participant who had removed their assent. The participant then walked over to the researcher and asked to see the recording of him and his friend playing. The researcher explained that she had not recorded the activity as he had said that he did not want to be recorded. Later that same day, the participant gave his assent to be included in the recordings.

While this may be frustrating to the researcher who was recording an interesting play session, the data cannot be used within the research for ethical reasons as the participant had verbally confirmed that he did not want to be recorded (Brooks et al., 2014).

However, it is challenges such as the ones examined in this section, that reinforce the ongoing ethical dilemmas that researchers face. As well as the necessity of being a reflexive researcher, to ensure that all appropriate steps are taken to reduce the risks to the participants, and to be an ethical researcher (Greig et al., 2013; Paulus et al., 2014).

3.9.4.2 Relationship with the Research Participants

Within this research, time was identified during the first two weeks in the setting for the researcher to engage in activities with the children and to start to develop supportive relationships. Whilst, for some children, due to their attendance patterns, two weeks may be a short period of time to get to know the researcher. Harcourt and Conroy (2011) explain it is not the length of time that is important when building the initial relationships, but the quality of the time spent that is spent engaged in activities. As an outside researcher, the researcher did not have the additional responsibilities of an employed practitioner within the setting and was able to focus on engaging in activities with the children during this initial period. As discussed previously (section 3.9.2) the researcher needs to develop supportive relationships with the children to reduce the adult-child power dynamic (Pyle & Danniels, 2016). Smith (2011) points out that young children are more likely to participate and respond openly when they feel respected and safe. This can be seen through the participant's initial testing of the assent process, and whether the researcher would respect their decision. For this reason, the

researcher needs to allow time to develop these relationships prior to starting the assent process and data collection with the children (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011).

The researcher positioned themselves as separate from the nursery practitioners by focusing on playing with the children, whilst minimising their adult role by referring the children to a nursery practitioner when asked about nursery-specific issues. At the same time as building relationships with the children, the researcher also built relationships with the practitioners, these were built through conversations so that the practitioners understood the role that the researcher was taking, as well as the researcher helping in an assistant role for basic tasks such as tidying up with the children and doing up coats and shoes. By positioning themselves in this manner, the researcher took on a middle manager role, which is where the researcher establishes relationships with both the adults and children within a setting (Gansen, 2019), rather than taking on a least-adult role. The decision to take on a middle manager role rather than a least adult role was due to the issues that can arise with practitioners when they do not understand the researcher's position (Eckhoff, 2015).

During the active data collection periods, the researcher was responsive to the children if they initiated interaction through questions or comments, however, she did not initiate interactions whilst recording so as not to lead their play (Cederborg, 2020).

Having developed supportive relationships with the participants, the researcher was aware of the need to manage her exit from the setting just as carefully so as not to disrupt or upset the children (Montgomery, 2014). Abebe and Bessell (2014) remind researchers that they have a responsibility to hold an ethics of care and to remember that research takes place in a broader context of social relationships and personal connections. They suggest that researchers give thought to how they can ensure that the children are aware that it is not a permanent relationship, and that the researcher will be leaving the setting. Reflecting on how the exit from the research settings could be managed, the researcher identified a few different steps. The first step was to let the children know from the beginning that the researcher would only be visiting them for a few weeks. The second step was to give the children, who had participated, a thank you card during the last session that they spent with the researcher. This enabled the researcher to say thank you for taking part and to say goodbye to them. The last step was to give the setting a thank you card which could be displayed in the room where the children were based, this functioned as a reminder that the researcher had said goodbye. By taking these steps, the researcher was able to ensure that the participants were aware that the researcher would be leaving (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011), and demonstrated that the relationships built with the children, and their input within the research process was valued

(Brooks et al., 2014). Unfortunately, due to a Covid-19 outbreak within the Estate Community Nursery which led to the preschool room closing for two weeks, the researcher was not able to say goodbye in person to all of the participants. The researcher decided to leave the thank you cards with the practitioners so that they could still be handed to the participants.

As demonstrated within this section of the thesis, there are a range of ethical dilemmas that a researcher may experience whilst undertaking research with children of any age. These dilemmas are increased due to the young age of the children involved in this research and their perceived vulnerability (Fassbender, 2020). However, researchers can only learn about young children's lives and experiences when they are included in the research process and are invited to share their ideas, thoughts and beliefs as competent individuals (Harcourt & Conroy, 2011). Powell et al. believe it is important that researchers are aware that:

the ongoing nature of ethics in qualitative research with children requires continued vigilance well after demonstrating compliance through an ethical review process. (Powell et al., 2016:16)

3.10 Methods

Three different data collection methods were used to gather the data. This ensured that the researcher was able to gain a deeper understanding of the reasons and methods that the children are employing, as well as increasing the validity of the information gathered (Glesne, 2011).

The methods that were used to collect the data for this research, along with the sub-questions that the data helps to answer, are shown in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2 – Links between sub-questions and the data collection methods

Sub-Question	Proposed data collection methods
Do children police their peers' gender play and why?	Video-stimulated conversations Image elicitation activity
What methods do children use to police their peers' gender play?	Video-recorded observation Video-stimulated conversations
What factors impact children's gender policing behaviour?	Video-stimulated conversations Image elicitation activity
Does gender play a role in who polices children's play and who is policed?	Video-recorded observation

3.10.1 Video-Recorded Observation

The first method used within this research is video-recorded observation. Video-recorded observation is not a new method within education having been used since the 1980s (Cutter-Mackenzie et al., 2013), and is increasingly used in research with young children (Robson, 2011a; Fisher & Wood, 2012; Nolan et al., 2018).

It is an accepted principle within early childhood education that observation is an essential tool for practitioners to learn about children's knowledge and abilities (Clark, 2011); Montgomery (2014) points out that observation allows the researcher to learn about children's "worlds, feelings and understandings" (p131) through watching their interactions with others. However, Fetterman points out that observers:

have a fraction of a second to reflect on a person's gesture, position, or gait. Camcorders provide the observer with the ability to stop time. (Fetterman, 2010:80)

Video-recorded observations were identified as an appropriate method for this research due to the ability to capture both verbal and non-verbal communication, and additionally, the ability for the researcher to rewatch the interactions to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences. Flick (2014a) supports the use of video-recorded observations in social settings due to the ability to capture complex social interactions, which can lead to more authentic insights into the interactions than traditional field notes or written observations (Kristensen, 2018).

3.10.1.1 Benefits of Using Video-Recorded Observation

Some of the benefits of using video-recorded observations have already been mentioned above, however, it is worth taking the time to consider both the benefits and issues surrounding the use of video-recorded observations in more depth. This section will identify the benefits of using video-recorded observations within the research.

One of the benefits of using video-recorded observations is the ability to capture, in detail, everything that is said and done within a particular play event without the researcher having to identify which mode of communication is most important at that moment in time (Rusk et al., 2012).

Whilst the researcher focused their observation on a specific interaction, the use of video recording captured other aspects that would have been missed. For instance, while recording two female participants playing in the construction area, the video captured two male participants who were also playing in the area. When the recording was reviewed it opened up

questions, and later, conversations about the lack of interaction between the two groups of participants. During a traditional observation, the behaviour of the male participants would not have been included within the focus of the observation and may not have been noticed by the observer.

Bailliard (2015) highlights that traditional observations are challenging because the researcher has to constantly negotiate where they are focusing in terms of what is most important to capture in the notes and may miss details. The ability to record the context where the play event is taking place, the position of the participants to each other, the verbal and non-verbal language that the participants use, as well as periods of silence, is apparent when compared to traditional pen and paper observations. During pen and paper observations, the researcher is unable to capture all of the information and may not notice the finer details of the interaction due to the subtlety of the movements (Flewitt, 2014).

A secondary benefit of using video-recorded observations can also be identified within this example, the ability to watch video-recorded data repeatedly to gain a deeper understanding of the multiple layers of interaction. Knoblauch and Schnettler (2012) compare the ability of a researcher to focus on the minute details of an interaction, which were captured in the recording, with a microscope. This is because both allow for the close inspection of an action or reaction that would have otherwise been invisible and provides opportunities to observe details that may have been missed during the original observation (Cohen et al., 2017).

Within this research, the researcher used the video-recorded observations as a stimulus for conversation with the participants, to support their reflection on their play, as well as being a data source for analysis in its own right (Tobin, 2019). This enabled the researcher to gain insights into the children's overt behaviours, as well as their covert intentions which may have initially been missed due to an adult perspective being the primary source of analysis (Rosenthal & Gatt, 2010; Gridley et al., 2018).

The ability for video-recorded observations to capture:

details that a one-time observation might miss, ... , or allow for access to non-verbal matters, such as facial expressions, intonation or stance taking (Kristensen, 2018:1)

raises another benefit of using video-recorded observation when undertaking research involving young children. Young children are multimodal communicators (Greig et al., 2013) and given their reliance on non-verbal forms of communication to make their thoughts and

feelings known, Rutanen et al. (2018) argue that video observation is an important approach to including young children's voices in research.

The use of videos can be strongly argued for also in terms of children's rights to be heard and their rights for expression. Videos can offer means to give a voice to children and means for us adults to listen, and to interpret children's experiences, even at a very young age. (Rutanen et al., 2018:5)

Returning to the example from the construction area, the video-recorded observation captured both the female participants' facial expressions which communicated their feelings to each other, as well as the male participants' use of body positioning to communicate that the female participants were not welcome. Colliver (2017) explains that ignoring children's non-verbal communication makes it impossible to fully understand a child's perspective, as their non-verbal communication is often more important than their spoken words to gain a proper understanding of how they think and feel. By ensuring that the camcorder is focused on the children who are involved in the play experience, the children's behaviour, gestures and facial expressions can be recorded as well as any spoken language as a complete sequence of events (Otsuka & Jay, 2017).

The benefits of video-recorded observation make it a particularly powerful tool for data collection (Cohen et al., 2017), Fetterman (2010) goes as far as stating "Digital camcorder equipment is essential to any microethnographic research" (p80). However, researchers must be aware of the limitations of any method that they use, and the next section will focus on a discussion about the concerns and issues raised surrounding the use of video-recorded observations below.

3.10.1.2 Concerns and Issues Raised Surrounding the Use of Video-Recorded Observations
Whilst video-recorded observations have been used in educational research for many years (Heath et al., 2010), there are a range of concerns and issues that have been raised within the literature about its use. The concerns range from the social construction of video-recorded data, to ethical issues surrounding anonymity and confidentiality, and the impact that the camera may have on the participants' behaviour (Nolan et al., 2018). This section will focus on each area of concern in turn and the possible resolutions to the issues.

The ethical concerns surrounding the video recording of children, as well as the steps taken to minimise them, were set out in section 3.9. However, Bailliard (2015) adds to the conversation surrounding the identification of participants by emphasising the portable nature of video-recorded data. She highlights the fact that video-recorded observations are captured on memory cards and that the management of the memory cards and the data they hold is vital

to protect the participants' identity. To mitigate the risk to participants' anonymity through the loss of a memory card, the video recordings were transferred to secure cloud storage each day before leaving the setting, and the files were then deleted from the memory cards.

The second area of concern that is identified through the literature is the socially constructed nature of the data collected and therefore the validity of the data (Nolan et al., 2018). Bailliard (2015) points out that there is no standard protocol for collecting video-recorded data, for instance, questions can be raised about the use of zoom, the type of camera used e.g., fixed or handheld, and where to position the camera, all of which have a bearing on the data collected. The idea that video-recorded observations are impartial is disputed by researchers, who point out that, unless a fixed camera is used, the researcher identifies what activities they wish to record and which to leave out (Robson, 2011a; Knoblauch & Schnettler, 2012; Green, 2016). Cutter-Mackenzie et al. (2013) identify the importance of the researcher being aware of their positionality and its potential impact on the decisions they make on what to record.

Prior to starting data collection, the researcher was aware of the potential for researcher bias to influence what interactions were recorded. The decision was made to record as many playful episodes as possible, as Robson (2011a) suggests this reduces the opportunity for researcher bias to influence the data collected.

However, researchers using video-recorded observation are at risk of tunnel vision, where they are so focused on what they can see through the lens, that they do not notice what is happening just outside of the shot that may be influencing the play episode (Fetterman, 2010). As previously discussed, the context of the play episode is important in helping to understand the play; therefore, researchers suggest that the use of zoom allows for the context to be captured, but then the focus of the recording can shift to highlight the details of the interactions within the play episode (Rusk et al., 2012; Bailliard, 2015; Blikstad-Balas, 2017). To minimise the impact of tunnel vision, the researcher held the camera at waist height and used the side screen to check what was being recorded, whilst still being aware of the wider context. Where relevant, the video recording was zoomed out to include the wider context (Lynch & Stanley, 2018).

Finally, it is important to take into account the potential emotional effect of being included in video recordings on participants (Bailliard, 2015). As a researcher, it is important to be reflexive and responsive to participant concerns, feelings of loss of control are especially important to consider if a negative or distressing event is recorded. The feeling that a singular event which would have been forgotten has been permanently recorded could cause additional distress to a child (Liu, 2019). Whilst recording episodes of play, and during the

video-stimulated conversations, the researcher paid attention to the participant's feelings. If the participants had appeared to be upset by the recording, the researcher would have assessed the value of the recording which may have led to the decision to delete the recorded episode or to exclude it from the edited and transcribed recording. In which case the decision would have been recorded in the researcher's notes (Flewitt, 2012).

The introduction of a camcorder into the nursery setting may also affect the children's behaviour (Gridley et al., 2018). Researchers have raised concerns that children may feel that they need to perform when they are being recorded (Flick, 2014a; Liu, 2019; Fassbender, 2020). Tobin (2019) addressed this concern by explaining that whilst participants do perform for the camera, they are, however, "performing a version of themselves" (Tobin, 2019: p262). The increased use of smartphones by parents to record their children during daily activities (Adair & Kurban, 2019), as well as an increase in digital methods being used within settings to record their learning (Fisher & Wood, 2012; Otsuka & Jay, 2017), may reduce the risk that children will perform. Regardless of children's prior exposure to being recorded, they will be aware of the camcorder within the setting and may react to it (Rusk et al., 2012).

To reduce the impact of the camcorder on the participants' behaviour, it was initially introduced to them during the assent conversations. This allowed them to experience recording from the researcher's position for themselves (Robson, 2011b). Additionally, a children's camcorder was introduced to the settings, to further reduce the novelty of the research camcorder, by allowing the children to have access to their own camcorder for further exploration. By allowing the children to explore the camcorder and to have a go at recording for themselves, they become more comfortable with its presence within the setting (Robson, 2011a).

Once the camcorder had been introduced to the participants, it was then seen around the setting, without recording, to allow the participants to grow accustomed to seeing it before the data collection started. According to both Lynch and Stanley (2018) and Fassbender (2020), by allowing the participants to see the camcorder as an everyday object within the setting they are less likely to be impacted by its presence.

Finally, by recording large quantities of play episodes the 'camera effect' is reduced as people forget they are being recorded and their behaviour becomes less performative (Heath et al., 2010; Robson, 2011a).

Whilst there are concerns about using video-recorded observation as a method within education settings, it is important to take the 'camera effect' into account when considering

the use of video-recorded observations. However, researchers point out that the presence of an adult and any form of observation where the children are aware that they are being observed can have an impact on their behaviour (Clark, 2011; Blikstad-Balas, 2017). The overall benefit of the method is the ability to capture the small details of a play episode and the children's interaction that would be almost impossible to record using traditional observation methods (Rusk et al., 2012).

3.10.2 Video-Stimulated Conversation

Video-stimulated conversation (VSC) is a method which uses selected video clips as a stimulus to prompt a conversation or interview with participants. It allows the participant to talk about what they can see in the video and for the researcher to ask questions which prompt further conversation, enabling the researcher to gain a better understanding of the participants' thoughts and beliefs (Tobin, 2019). Within this research, VSCs were used to support the participants in reflecting on the impact that gender has on their play and interactions with peers.

3.10.2.1 Description of Method

The researcher chose sections of the video-recorded observations which she then watched with the participants who were involved in them. These clips were used as a stimulus to support the participants in reflecting on their play and the effect played by gender on their decisions. These conversations were recorded using a digital voice recorder to ensure that the participants' words were recorded accurately (Cohen et al., 2017), as well as to enable the researcher to focus on the child rather than making notes of their responses.

When undertaking research with children, their voices must be represented in the research and not just the researcher's interpretation of the child's words or actions (Lane et al., 2019). By using VSCs, the participants were able to share their knowledge and understanding of the play, which enabled the researcher to gain an understanding of the play from the child's perspective (Mason, 2011; Chesworth, 2019). In this way, the use of VSCs enabled the researcher to include the voices of a marginalised group, in this case, preschool children, within the research (Adair & Kurban, 2019).

VSC is a method that is increasingly popular within participatory research with children (Fisher & Wood, 2012; Green, 2016) as it enables their voices to be heard within the research process. However, whilst it is a method that has been used with children since the early 2000s (Cutter-Mackenzie et al., 2013), few studies have used it with early years children (Lewis, 2019). The main reason that this method is not often used when undertaking research with early years children is due to concerns about their ability to communicate effectively (Theobald, 2012).

Within this research, the participants are all between the ages of three years old and four years old and were able to communicate their thoughts and engage in reflection on the influence of gender on their play.

The use of video recordings to stimulate the conversations also supports the participants' ability to communicate in non-verbal ways, for instance, they can point to parts of the video recording to support what they are trying to explain. This aspect of VSCs was particularly helpful for some of the quieter participants and those with English as an additional language.

The benefits of using VSCs with early years children are explored in more detail below. This research is adding to the contemporary literature through the use of VSCs to enable young children to reflect on the impact of gender on their play and peer interactions.

3.10.2.2 Benefits

One of the benefits of using video recordings as a stimulus for a conversation or interview is that it overcomes the issue of participants' forgetting what they have done (Cohen et al., 2017; Kim-Bossard et al., 2019). This was particularly valuable on the occasions when the participants were unable to participate in the VSC on the same day that the observations were recorded.

The act of watching the video recordings enables children to watch their play from a different perspective, which may help them to identify why they reacted in a particular way or see how other children reacted to them (Mason, 2011; Nguyen et al., 2013). By watching from an 'outside' perspective, the participants were able to reflect on why they had responded in a particular way within a supportive conversation. Additionally, the use of video footage as a prompt, rather than for instance a photo or verbal prompt, is beneficial as video footage captures "action, body language, and facial expressions that convey additional meaning" (Cutter-Mackenzie & Edwards, 2013:201). Which may prompt the child to discuss ideas that would not necessarily have been identified as significant by the researcher (Green, 2016).

The use of VSCs with young children identifies them as experts in their own lives and as competent individuals who can help adults understand the participants' view of the world around them and the social interactions which occurred during the recorded event (Theobald, 2012; Ólafsdóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2019). Through the conversations around aspects of the recordings, the participants can expose the complexity of their social interactions, their beliefs and understanding of the world around them, as well as the influence of others on their beliefs (Theobald, 2012; Green, 2016). The focus the VSCs can bring to the complexity of the participants' social interactions was identified during several different conversations with participants at the University Day Care. The participants individually discussed how 'The Crew'

interacted with each other, and children who were outside of the group, along with who made decisions and the impact of breaking the group rules. These conversations illuminated the complexity of this social group in a manner that would not have been identified through adult observation.

Additionally, through the VSCs, the participants were able to open up areas of interaction for further analysis, either through their interest and discussion of the activity or through the identification of areas that they did not want to acknowledge (Theobald, 2012).

Robson (2011a) found that children were keen to talk about what they could see in the recording, conversely, it is important to take into account that some children may be more focused on watching the video than talking about what they can see (Cohen et al., 2017), this concern is discussed in more detail in section 3.10.2.3 below. However, the main benefit of viewing the video-recorded observation with the participants is the opportunity the method provides for the children to be included in the research process and to be involved in analysing their own play and social interactions (Theobald et al., 2015).

3.10.2.3 Concerns/Issues

The benefits of using VSCs to gain the participants' perspectives of a play episode can be identified, and the method has been highlighted as particularly effective in gaining an understanding of young participants' lives (Cutter-Mackenzie & Edwards, 2013). This section will consider the concerns or issues that have been raised about VSCs within the wider literature, as well as some possible resolutions.

The first concern, which has already been highlighted in the previous section, is that children may be focused on watching the video recordings, and therefore not take part in the conversation (Cohen et al., 2017). To reduce the risk that children may be too distracted to be able to discuss the video recording, the children were allowed to watch the video all the way through before watching it again and talking about it. This tactic is recommended by James et al. (2010) as it allows the children to get used to watching themselves, and also to enjoy reliving the play episode before they are asked to talk about it. However, the researcher was responsive to the participant's reaction to the video recording and allowed the participants to decide whether to engage in a conversation during the first viewing of the recorded observation.

The researcher was aware of the potential for different power dynamics impacting the participants' confidence in sharing their reflections on their play and behaviour (Meier & Vogt, 2015). Therefore, the participants were allowed to choose whether to watch the video with

other participants or on their own. There are different potential benefits from undertaking individual or group conversations, as well as different limitations to be aware of (Tisdall et al., 2010). When undertaking an individual VSC, the researcher can take the needs of the individual participant into account, in terms of care routines and level of understanding, which may be more complicated if there are multiple participants' needs to consider (Tisdall et al., 2010). However, due to the power dynamic between an adult and a child, individual participants may not be confident talking about what they believe, and may feel some pressure to give the response that they feel the researcher wants (Cohen et al., 2017); this power dynamic can be reduced if the conversation includes two or more participants.

The benefits and challenges of engaging in VSCs with small groups (2-3 participants) were identified during the data collection period. Cutter-Mackenzie et al. (2013) recommend undertaking the VSCs with a small group of children. They identified that when small groups watched the videos together there was a greater level of discussion among the children, and ideas were raised that may not have been if the video-stimulated session had been conducted with the children individually. However, the researcher noticed that the benefits Cutter-Mackenzie and colleagues identified, depended on the group dynamics; some small groups engaged in supportive and open reflections building on their peers' responses, whilst in other groups one or two participants dominated the conversations. Therefore, participants were given the choice as to whether to watch their video on their own or with up to two peers who had been involved in the play. This allowed the participants to have the comfort of taking part with peers, if they wished, whilst keeping the group size small enough to allow all of the children to be heard (Meier & Vogt, 2015).

During the VSCs, the researcher was vigilant to any negative response to another child's words or actions, for instance through name-calling or laughing from a peer. The researcher identified some policing behaviours, for instance challenging a peer's response, these challenges did not cause distress to the participant who was policed. If a participant had been exposed to a negative response such as name-calling, the conversation would have been stopped so that the researcher could ensure that the child who was experiencing the negative response was not exposed to potential emotional harm. The researcher would then have reminded the participants that there are no correct responses to a situation, that different people have different beliefs and feelings about situations, and that it is not kind to make another person feel bad about what they have said or done. The VSC would only resume if all the participants involved in the conversation were happy to continue.

The final issue raised by researchers is the time needed to watch the videos (Tobin et al., 2009; Cutter-Mackenzie et al., 2013), and the impact of delay in watching the videos on the validity of the recollections (Theobald, 2012). Where possible, the VSCs were undertaken towards the end of the session in which the play episodes were recorded. This enabled the researcher to gain the maximum understanding from the children as to their thoughts and beliefs about the play, while the participants were still able to recall the play and discuss it with confidence (Meier & Vogt, 2015; Lane et al., 2019).

However, due to the busy nature of early years settings, and the importance of not letting the research impact the other children and the setting routine, it was not always possible to undertake the VSCs on the same day. In these instances, the VSCs took place the following day. The concern about time delay is due to an understanding that retrospective interviews, that is about events that have taken place in the past, may not provide an accurate recount and discussion about the events, as people's memories of the events change, the event is forgotten or the memory is filtered so that parts are excluded (Fetterman, 2010). However, Kim-Bossard et al. (2019) highlight that the use of video stimuli can overcome the issue of participants' forgetting what they have done. Nevertheless, the researcher took steps to ensure that the period between the video observation being completed and the VSC was kept as short as possible to enable the participants to be able to reflect confidently about what they did during the play episode and why they did it (Clark, 2011; Lewis, 2019).

3.10.2.4 Style of Prompts/Questions

Concern has been raised in the literature about the validity of VSCs, due to the potential for the researcher to unintentionally influence the participants' responses through the use of leading questions (Theobald, 2012). To counter this concern, the researcher developed question protocols and prompts in advance that may help the conversations develop, especially when the participants may be shy or unsure about talking to the researcher (Nguyen et al., 2013). The protocol included the use of general questions and prompts that were open to encourage the participants to engage in reflection without guiding the conversation in a particular direction (Meier & Vogt, 2015).

The use of open-ended prompts or probing questions is recommended to help guide and instigate the discussion (Theobald et al., 2015; Ólafsdóttir & Einarsdóttir, 2019), along with the identification of a few key questions that can be used to probe deeper into specific areas of the play event (Cutter-Mackenzie et al., 2013; Morales & Rumenapp, 2017). Examples of the type of questions that were used to instigate and guide the conversations are:

- Could the boys/girls play with you if they wanted to?
- Would your friends be happy with you if you played with the boys do you think?

Additionally, follow up questions to probe participant's responses such as:

- Is it just boys who play this game or can girls play this game as well?

were used to gain an understanding of whether the participant believed an activity was suitable for a single gender group only, or whether their response reflected the gender of the participants within the activity.

Along with probing questions, for instance:

- Do you know what you did after that?
- I wonder what she said, can you remember?
- What would happen if you played with the girls?

By creating question protocols prior to the VSCs, the researcher was able to reduce the likelihood that they would ask leading questions. Additionally, the question protocol supports the researcher by providing prompts that could be used especially if the participants were shy or not confident speaking (Nguyen et al., 2013).

Due to the age of the participants, the researcher felt that it was important that the questions used to prompt the conversation were clear and that the questions did not sound like the researcher was judging them (Tisdall et al., 2010; Cohen et al., 2017). This would support the participants' understanding of what was being asked of them, whilst also allowing them to feel supported.

3.10.2.5 Final Thoughts on Video-stimulated Conversation

Finally, it is important to remember that this research is exploring a sensitive topic, participants' understanding and beliefs about gender stereotypes (World Health Organisation, 2022). According to Dempsey et al. (2016), sensitive topics are usually personal in nature and researchers need to take additional care when asking participants to discuss them. Gender is a salient feature for preschool children (Perry et al., 2019), and it is important for their acceptance into the community of the setting that they are seen to perform their gender correctly (Martin, 2011). When asking children about their gender beliefs, the researcher took into account that children may be concerned when talking about beliefs that are contra to the beliefs of their parents or others around them, for example, the messages they have received from practitioners within the setting (Pascal & Bertram, 2009). For this reason, as well as for

the comfort and confidence that the child has in the researcher, it was important for the researcher to build relationships with the participants which are open and honest (Smith, 2011).

Nonetheless, within early childhood research, there is a growing recognition that children are experts in their own lives (Lewis, 2019), and VSC is a participatory research method that enables participants' voices to be heard and further upholds the competent child paradigm (Theobald, 2012).

3.10.3 Image Elicitation Activity

The third data collection method that was utilised within this research was an image elicitation activity. By using an image elicitation activity, the researcher was able to gather information about the attitudes and beliefs that a child holds as part of their habitus (Meo, 2010; Cohen et al., 2017). These beliefs are sub-conscious and have developed through the child's own experiences and daily observations of the world around them (Bourdieu, 1990). By asking children to talk about the images used with the activity, the researcher was able to identify the gender stereotypes and beliefs that the child has absorbed from their surroundings and experiences.

Whilst visual methods have been widely used within education (Lipponen et al., 2016), there is limited literature that focuses specifically on the use of pictures as a prompt for visual elicitation. For this reason, this research has drawn on the wider literature surrounding the use of photo-elicitation to explore participants' thoughts and understandings to gain an understanding of their habitus. Photo-elicitation is the introduction of a photograph into an interview or conversation, with the intention that the image will stimulate conversation about the particular image and will trigger the participant to recall memories and responses based on their "attitudes, views, beliefs and meanings" (Meo, 2010:150).

3.10.3.1 Benefits

Photo elicitation, or image elicitation, has a long history within anthropology as a means to mediate discussions about cultural and social understandings (Hurworth, 2012). Indeed, Leonard and McKnight (2015) highlight its use as a lens to explore children's cultural and social knowledge due to the low-pressure nature of the activity.

Whilst interviews are widely used as the predominant means of gaining an understanding of participants' thoughts on a topic (Ford et al., 2017). Shaw (2021) and others (Zartler, 2014; Cohen et al., 2017; Ford et al., 2017) highlight that interviews can be challenging for young children due to the unfamiliar nature of the interaction. By using images as a stimulus for

conversation, image elicitation activities can make the data collection process more enjoyable for children due to their similarity to standard preschool activities (Applebaum et al., 2020; Shaw, 2021).

By providing images as a stimulus for conversation through a playful activity, the adult-child power dynamic, which would have been reinforced through a traditional interview, was reduced as the participants were able to take charge of the activity and made the decision as to whether they wanted to talk about an image (Shaw, 2021). Throughout the activity, the images were the focus of the conversations, which meant that the participants did not feel pressure to look at the researcher while they were talking, as they could look directly at the image (Ford et al., 2017). Additionally, while the researcher did ask questions during the conversations, these were clarifying or exploratory questions that children are used to early childhood practitioners asking, rather than structured interview questions (Leonard & McKnight, 2015).

Research has shown that images provoke a deeper level of consciousness than verbal language which enhances the process of remembering prior experiences and thoughts (Zartler, 2014; Shaw, 2021). This can then “bring to the fore normally unspoken dimensions of experience, meaning and knowing” (Pink, 2013:95) that participants may not otherwise have shared with an adult who is using interview-style questioning (Shaw, 2021; Gube, 2022). Additionally, the use of images as shared reference points, between the participant and the researcher, also helps to reduce confusion or misunderstanding by providing a mental prompt to help the participants understand what they are being asked to talk about (Groot et al., 2020).

The use of images also supports young participants who may be shy or who have English as an additional language (Paulus et al., 2014), as they can point to aspects of the image to support their words (Shaw, 2021) or can express the feelings that an image triggers through their body language (Pyle, 2013).

However, whilst the benefits of using picture elicitation activities to stimulate conversations with early years children about their knowledge and beliefs have been identified, the literature has raised areas of concern surrounding the use of picture elicitation which need further consideration. These will be discussed in the next section.

3.10.3.2 Concerns/Issues

The first issue raised within the literature surrounds the language competency of early years children and their ability to confidently communicate with others. Lynch and Stanley (2018) raise concerns that young children’s language competency may make it difficult for them to

communicate their feelings and beliefs. However, as previously discussed (section 3.10.2.3) the participants are three-year-old and four-year-old children who were able to communicate their thoughts. Nevertheless, those participants who may have been shy or who had English as an additional language would have been supported through the use of images as they would have been able to use non-verbal methods to support their communication, including pointing to the image (Pyle, 2013; Shaw, 2021). The researcher also used careful questioning to help the participants to clarify their meaning and responses where appropriate (Lewis, 2019).

Alongside concerns about children's ability to engage in image elicitation activities due to their language abilities, concerns have been raised that children may not be confident engaging in the activity or that their responses may be impacted by their peers. The image elicitation activity was offered as a picture-matching game, by offering the image activity as a game within the preschool room, the participants were likely to feel more comfortable and less like they were being put on the spot (Cohen et al., 2017). This increased the likelihood that a participant was more likely to be confident about engaging in the activity.

Secondly, whilst there is a possibility that a child's response may be influenced by their peers (Shaw, 2021), during the image elicitation activities the participants listened and responded to other participants' responses. Additionally, Vila (2013) suggests that children who are unsure about engaging in the discussion can be supported by hearing other children's points of view and may feel more confident in responding to a peer than the adult researcher.

The final concern surrounding children's communication connects with concerns about the images used within an image elicitation activity. If the participants are not able to identify the images, or do not see the relevance of the images to the questions they are being asked, the benefit of using visual stimuli to generate conversation is lost (Bates et al., 2017). Therefore, the relevance of the images to the participants' experiences needed to be taken into account (Bates et al., 2017). Within this research careful consideration was given to the identification of appropriate images for use within the activity to ensure that they represented the area of interest (Rowley et al., 2012), and reflected the participants' knowledge base (Gube, 2022). Additionally, six vignettes were created by the researcher which were based on standard preschool activities (Appendix 14). The researcher then checked that the participants were able to identify what was represented in the images and vignettes, before asking them to discuss the image.

Whilst there are issues surrounding the use of image elicitation activities with early years children, the benefits of the technique in allowing children to express their thoughts and

beliefs surrounding particular issues have been identified by many researchers (Meo, 2010; Stuij, 2015; Lewis, 2019; Shaw, 2021).

3.10.3.3 Management of Activity

The initial plan was to set up the image elicitation activity in different play contexts for instance the water tray or small world within the nursery setting over the course of a week to encourage the children to engage with the resources. However, in all three settings, the children were interested in playing matching picture games with the practitioners. By using two sets of image elicitation activity cards, the activity was adapted into a picture-matching game which was available for the children to play. By using the picture cards within a game, the unnaturalness and pressure of an interview were reduced whilst also allowing the children to take the lead in the process (Cohen et al., 2017).

During the activity, the children were encouraged to turn over two picture cards to see if they could find matching pairs. They were then asked to talk about what they could see within the picture and what they thought about the image, for instance, did they think they would play with the toy and if not, who do they think would play with the toy? To ensure that the questions used to prompt the conversation were encouraging and prompting rather than leading, Pyle (2013) recommends using a semi-structured interview protocol to identify the type of questions that may be used to ensure that the research questions are answered, whilst ensuring that the questions do not lead the children's responses in a particular direction.

The children's responses to the images and their conversations were recorded, however as the activity was available for all the children in the preschool to play with, only those children who had consent to take part in the research and had given assent had their conversations recorded. By recording the children's conversations, the researcher was able to focus on the conversation rather than trying to capture the children's comments in writing (Flewitt, 2014).

3.10.3.4 Research Materials

The research materials for this task were a set of images and vignettes that were chosen to help focus the conversations in such a way as to explore the children's habitus (Meo, 2010), and to provide data that answers the research question (Rowley et al., 2012).

The images chosen represent different items that may have gender-stereotyped beliefs attached to them, including toys, jobs and activities that would be familiar to preschool children (Gube, 2022). A list of toys was identified based on research by Dinella et al. (2017) who explored the gendering of toys. The jobs and activities identified for the image elicitation activity were chosen from research by Baker et al. (2016), who explored preschool children's

beliefs about the gender appropriateness of a selection of jobs and activities. The images that were chosen to be included on the picture cards for these categories are listed in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 – Image elicitation activity Images

Toy	Job	Activity
Dinosaur	Doctor	Uses tools
Tool bench	Nurse	Fixes cars
Tea Set	Firefighter	Shops
Doll's buggy	Dancer	Rides a bike
Building Blocks	Athlete	Watches TV
Trike	Chef	

The images for the picture cards were sourced from an online clipart library which allows for personal use of the images. To reduce the impact of researcher bias and the possibility of choosing unintentionally leading images (Rowley et al., 2012; Leonard & McKnight, 2015), a set of criteria was created that was used to identify potential images for the image elicitation activity. The criteria used to identify possible images were based on recommendations from the literature (Hurworth, 2012; Groot et al., 2020; Gube, 2022), and were:

- The image must have a clear, uncluttered background.
- Gender-neutral colours – not specifically pink/blue toys or clothing unless a uniform
- Gender of people in the images – a mix of male/female both represented or gender stereotype challenging or gender stereotype affirming.
- Images that the children will recognise.
- Appropriate for the age of the children – a mix of photos and cartoon style to attract their attention.

Additionally, six vignettes were drawn by the researcher to reflect scenarios that the participants would be familiar with from a preschool setting (Gube, 2022). The vignettes show children involved in different activities and were designed to trigger conversations surrounding the gender of the children involved in the activities. The scenarios chosen for the vignettes were:

- Two children dressing up – one in a princess dress
- Two children playing with cars
- Children playing football
- Children playing at a tool bench
- One child pushing a doll in a buggy
- Children having a tea party.

These images were hand drawn to ensure that the colours, clothing, and hairstyles did not suggest a particular gender for the children depicted, except for the image of a child wearing a princess dress representing children dressing up. An example of the images used is shown in Figure 3.1 below.



Figure 3.1 – Example of vignette picture card showing two children playing at a tool bench

Concerns have been raised about the production of visual vignettes. The creation of visual vignettes is difficult because they need to be closely focused on the aims of the research whilst being appropriate for the participants (Groot et al., 2020). Hurworth (2012) states that vignettes must be based on real-life situations that the participants can relate to and need to include enough detail to be of interest to the participants but also open-ended to allow for discussion. For this research, the researcher created vignettes which represented typical preschool activities so that the participants were able to relate to them.

All of the images and vignettes for the image elicitation activity were chosen based on their relatability to the participants as well as representing the research focus of gender (Rowley et al., 2012). The images and vignettes used for the image elicitation activity can be seen in Appendix 14.

3.10.4 Validity

When considering the data collection methods to use, Denscombe (2014) explains that it is important to consider the validity of the methods due to the impact on the quality of the data collected, as well as the overall validity of the research.

Both Flick (2014a) and Cohen et al. (2017) raise concerns about the validity of video observation as a stand-alone method. Due to the subjectivity caused by the researcher's decision about who and what to record (Chesworth, 2018), along with the possibility that the participants 'put on a show' for the recording, other data collection methods need to be used alongside video observation to increase its validity (Cohen et al., 2017). Pink (2013) and Flewitt (2012) both discuss the subjectivity involved when researchers are identifying what activities or events to video record. The use of a research journal to record these decisions is supported in the literature concerning the use of visual data in research (Heath et al., 2010; Flewitt, 2012; Pink, 2013) as a way of acknowledging the decisions that the researcher makes about who and what to record but also what to leave out. The use of research journals to support qualitative research is highlighted by Lamb (2013) and Annink (2017), especially as a means of capturing observations about the setting that are not recorded in an alternative manner.

During the data collection periods in each setting, the researcher used their research journal to reflect on the process, but also to record observations that could not be captured by video recording due to the risk of including children who did not have consent to participate. Annink (2017) also discusses how the use of a research journal helps the researcher to identify and acknowledge their subjective values and biases which may impact the data collected and helps the researcher to be more reflexive in their decision-making.

However, the issue of subjectivity goes further when considering the ethics of recording and using video footage of children who are involved in a distressing or negative event. Liu (2019) discusses the ethical implications of including footage of an event that a child may find distressing later. If an incident that would otherwise have been forgotten is recorded to be re-watched later, the child may feel shame or embarrassment on multiple occasions. As an ethical researcher, it was important to consider the risk of emotional harm to the participants when deciding whether to record an event or having recorded an event, deciding whether to delete the footage out of concern for the participant's wellbeing. Flewitt (2012) advises that these decisions should be recorded in a research journal as a way of helping the researcher to develop the story of the data collection and to understand the decisions that are taken by the researcher during the process.

The validity of video-recorded observations is increased by the ability of the researcher to re-watch the recording repeatedly to ensure that the transcription is accurate (Heath et al., 2010). However, this does depend on the quality of the picture and the audio in the video recording which can be difficult to judge whilst filming (Cohen et al., 2017). Nevertheless, the ability to re-watch the video did have a positive impact on the quality of the video transcription as the researcher was able to replay the video focusing on different aspects of the interactions.

To increase the validity of video-recorded observations, Flick (2014a) suggests using an additional method such as interviews. Tobin et al. (1989) introduced the concept of multi-vocal video-cued interviews as a technique that was beneficial to researchers who were trying to understand the thoughts and ideas that underpinned adults' actions within education settings. This method has been refined over the past 30 years and has been adapted for use with preschool children (Flewitt, 2012; Chesworth, 2016; Liu, 2019) as a way for researchers to involve children in the research process and to allow them to talk about an event and to make connections to their prior experiences. During the VSCs, the participants were encouraged to reflect on their play in a supportive manner. This enabled them to add an additional layer of information about the actions they took and the impact of gender on the interactions, rather than the researcher assuming the participants' intentions from only viewing the recorded observations.

However, concern has been raised about the reliability of any type of interview data, which would include video-stimulated conversations, collected from preschool children due to the power imbalance between an adult and child, which may cause them to give the perceived 'right' answer rather than the truth (Cohen et al., 2017). This concern was mitigated through the relationships that the researcher developed with the participants prior to the data collection starting. During the VSC phase of the data collection, the conversations took place within a quiet area of the preschool environment so that the participants felt comfortable. These actions allowed the participants to feel more relaxed with the process, which in turn led to them feeling more confident in responding truthfully (Mukherji & Albon, 2018) and therefore increasing the validity of the method.

The validity of the image elicitation activity is dependent on the design of the activity (Cohen et al., 2017) and the care taken to ensure that the content of the images is relevant to the participants. Davis and Hines (2020) identified there are disagreements about the gender categorisation of toys in many studies, and that the reasons behind the categorisation are not identified in the research. This can lead to issues where toys are categorised differently

between studies which may affect the results and concerns about the validity of the results. Within this research, the purpose of the image elicitation activity was to gain an understanding of the participants' gender beliefs rather than exploring links between their toy preference and gender. However, it was still important for the researcher to identify a range of items that are categorised male, female and neutral to ensure that the activity was not biased towards one particular gender. Cultural differences can also have an impact on the suitability of the images for the participants (Cohen et al., 2017; Davis & Hines, 2020). The data within this research was collected within England, nevertheless, the researcher was aware that there may have been slight cultural differences due to the different socio-economic and cultural diversity populations between the settings. During the data analysis, no strong correlation was identified between the settings and the participants' gendering of the images, which tended to be in line with previous research findings.

On their own, each of the data collection methods could raise questions about the trustworthiness of the findings. However, the use of three different methods enabled the researcher to explore the participants' experiences and knowledge of gender in multiple ways. This enabled the researcher to gain a more rounded understanding of a participant's experiences, as well as adding to the validity of the overall research through the triangulation of data. Within quantitative research, triangulation of data is used to demonstrate that the data is accurate (Denscombe, 2014). Mason (2011) points out that due to the multi-faceted nature of society and that people experience it in different ways, triangulation of qualitative data collection methods will not culminate in comparable results. However, it is the range of information that was collected that demonstrates how different aspects of the participant's life experiences interact to inform their experience, and engagement within society and provides validity of the findings (Denscombe, 2014).

3.10.5 Data Collection Schedule

To ensure that time within the research settings was used effectively, the researcher designed a schedule to cover the four weeks that they would be spending in each setting (Appendix 15). This ensured that the time within the setting was used efficiently to enable the maximum amount of data to be collected, whilst minimising the impact of hosting a researcher on the children and the setting.

Whilst the data collection schedule set out the plan for when data collection activities would take place, time was also allowed for the participants to explore the resources and use them in their own way. The data collection schedule can be seen in Appendix 15.

The data collection process at the Estate Community Nursery was interrupted by a Covid-19 outbreak and the setting was closed for 10 days. At this point, the researcher had been in the setting for three weeks and had collected the video-recorded observations and the participants had engaged in the VSCs. The researcher returned to the setting when it reopened and continued with the data collection play with a focus on the image elicitation activities. Whilst Covid-19 did impact the data collection process, the flexibility of the research design meant that the researcher was able to adjust both the data collection schedule and the research schedule with minimal impact on the research.

3.11 Transcription

Flick (2014a) describes transcription as the “transformation of recorded materials into text” (p544) in preparation for analysis. However, as previously discussed, video recordings can be difficult to transcribe due to the quantity of data. According to Cowan (2013), the process of transcribing multimodal or video data is particularly complex due to the need to capture verbal communication, non-verbal communication, movement, and environmental factors in a written format when most systems of transcription are designed to only record spoken language. Within this research, one of the main sources of data is video recordings of children’s play and these needed to be carefully transcribed in order to prepare them for analysis. According to Mondada:

Transcribing video-recordings in a way that captures and documents the multimodal details (such as language, gesture, facial expressions, gaze, body positions, movements, and object manipulations) while preserving their relevant complexity is a challenge that raises conceptual, analytical and technical issues. (Mondada quoted in Hepburn & Bolden, 2017:120)

These issues will be explored below.

3.11.1 Challenges of Multimodal Transcription

The main challenge when transcribing multimodal data is capturing the variety of modes of communication and action that are included in the recorded data. Wohlwend (2011) considers it essential to capture non-verbal communication and to include it in the data analysis process, as young children rely strongly on non-verbal communication methods to make their feelings and understanding known.

Cowan (2013) identified two methods which capture both verbal and non-verbal data. The first of these styles is a tabular format. The tabular transcription format can be used to record verbal communication and non-verbal communication as well as any additional information the researcher considers important (Flewitt et al., 2011). The second style of transcription that

Cowan identified is a timeline (Figure 3.2). According to Cowan (2013), one of the differences between a tabular format and a timeline layout is the inclusion of time stamps which can be used to show the duration of modes of communication, the other difference is the direction in which the transcript is read. With a timeline layout, time is read from left to right with the different modes being recorded in vertical columns.

Time					
Verbal – J					
Verbal – C					
Action – J					
Action – C					

Figure 3.2 – Timeline transcription format

Both the tabular format and timeline format can be used to represent the different modes that are being used in layered formats. However, the timeline format can demonstrate the length of time that an action continues more visually (Cowan, 2013) as well as making overlapping or synchronous activities visible (Hepburn & Bolden, 2017).

A timeline transcript was identified as the most appropriate style for this research as the ability to capture the duration of an action may help to clarify or expose the strength of a child's belief or understanding of gender norms. The transcriptions also include simplified conversation analysis conventions to indicate pauses, overlapping speech and tone of voice. The conversation analysis conventions used within this research, and the process for including them, are set out in section 3.11.2 below.

One of the benefits of using a timeline transcription style is the ease of including images within the transcript which illustrate or add additional detail to the record (Hepburn & Bolden, 2017). The inclusion of screenshots from the video-recorded footage can show the physical relationship between the participants and the environment more clearly than a written description can portray (Bezemer & Mavers, 2011). Screenshots can also be used to show the inclusion of non-verbal participants, either those who are involved in the play but not currently engaging with the conversations or those who may be on the periphery of the play but whose body language or position demonstrates their interest in the activity (Flewitt, 2012).

The inclusion of screenshots from the video-recorded observations can raise ethical concerns due to issues surrounding the anonymity of the participants (Bezemer & Mavers, 2011)

(discussed in section 3.9.3). Digital technologies can be used to disguise participant's identities, however, Nutbrown (2010) raised concerns about the blurring of children's faces within research due to the way that it can be seen to 'other' them rather than value their involvement in the research process.

Within this research, the decision was taken to use unblurred screenshots to support the data analysis. This decision was taken due to the value that this research places on ensuring that children's voices are heard through the research, this includes ensuring that their non-verbal communication is also respected. The use of blurring or other technology would 'silence' a participant's non-verbal communication rather than allow it to be heard and would undermine the feminist principles which underpin this research.

3.11.2 Transcription Process

According to Cohen et al. (2017), the researcher must identify the conventions that they are following during the transcription process, these can include whether pseudonyms are being used, whether pauses, hesitations and silences are recorded as well as whether non-interpretable speech or noises are included. During the transcription of the video and audio-recorded data within this study, pseudonyms were used for all participants and settings to protect their identities. Additionally, simplified conversation analysis (CA) transcription conventions were used to identify specific aspects of the interaction including pauses in the conversation, overlapping speech, intonation and non-verbal cues such as laughter and facial expressions (Toerien, 2013) (shown in Appendix 16).

The speech in this study has been transcribed as accurately as possible with uninterpretable speech noted using the transcription conventions. Whist Cibils (2019) raises the question as to whether the recorded language should be cleaned up to improve the readability of the transcript; Toerien (2013) argues that it is important to include everything that is said, including cut-off words and unclear speech, in order to understand the interaction and to avoid misrepresenting the participants' speech.

3.12 How to Analyse Data from Children

Colliver (2017) argues that there is a difference between listening to young children and understanding them. This is due to both the multi-modal nature of children's communication (Murray, 2019) and the application of adult views and assumptions within the analysis process (Colliver, 2017). In order to move from listening to children to understanding children, Colliver (2017) suggests that researchers need to be open to other interpretations of the data. By being aware of the assumptions that they bring to the research, as well as the assumptions

that the participants hold, she suggests that researchers begin to move from listening to understanding.

Spyrou (2011) states that in order to understand participants' assumptions about the world, it is important to allow time to understand the context the child lives in, and the discourses or experiences that influence them. The value of building a relationship between the researcher and the participants has been discussed previously (section 3.9.4 above), with a particular focus on developing a level of trust and respect so that the young participants feel confident to participate. Additionally, Spyrou (2011) suggests that this relationship, and the time taken to form it, allows the researcher to gain a better understanding of the social context that the participant has experienced. He explains that children's communication is not just multi-modal, but also multi-layered, and in order to understand a child, researchers need to develop an understanding of the different layers of their knowledge. By taking time to get to know a young participant and their social context, they are more likely to share multiple layers of their beliefs and understanding about a topic. This allows the researcher to develop a broader understanding of the participant's thoughts, and the assumptions that they use to understand the world around them.

Yates and Oates (2019) highlight that "listening to children involves more than just verbal expressions" (p495). As highlighted previously (section 3.9.2 & section 3.11), children use many different modes of communication to express their thoughts and feelings. They are competent users of multiple modes of communication including non-verbal communication, for instance through facial expression and body language (Colliver, 2017; Stagg Peterson et al., 2019). Indeed, Păunescu and Indreica (2014) highlight that young children rely on their non-verbal communication methods as their verbal communication skills are still developing. When their spoken language is the focus of analysis, at the expense of the multiplicity of their non-verbal communication, the level of understanding that can be achieved through research is limited (Colliver, 2017). For this reason, within this research, the children's body language was transcribed alongside their verbal communication. This enabled the entirety of their communication to be captured, in preparation for the data analysis (Colliver, 2017). However, even with using a video-recorded method (section 3.10.1 above) to capture the children's non-verbal communication, capturing and understanding children's thoughts and beliefs remains difficult due to their "messy, multi-layered and non-normative character" (Spyrou, 2011:151).

The second cause for difficulty that can limit the move from listening to children to understanding children is the inclusion of adult assumptions and views within the data analysis. Colliver (2017) identifies that researchers need to be aware of applying adult

interpretations to the experience of young children, as this prioritises the beliefs of the adult researcher over the participants' meanings. This can lead to inaccurate analysis and representation of the participant's lived experiences (Murray, 2019).

In order to gain an understanding of the knowledge that the participants hold, Murray (2019) explains that it is important for the researcher to spend time with them to get to know them, and the social experiences that have helped them to form their beliefs. Once the participants' beliefs about their experiences are identified, it opens up a new consideration of children's understanding of the world around them and provides an alternative lens for the data analysis (Colliver, 2017). In order to gain an understanding of the participants' beliefs about gender and its impact on their social interactions, they were encouraged to talk about the recorded play episodes through the video-stimulated recall activity and the image elicitation activity. These activities provide information about the assumptions and beliefs that the participants hold and help to ensure that the data analysis was undertaken through a lens which reflects the children's view of the world (Yates & Oates, 2019).

3.13 Data Analysis

One of the aims of qualitative research is to develop an understanding of people's thoughts, beliefs and understanding of the world around them (Thomas, 2017). Flick (2014b) describes the process of data analysis as:

[..] the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it. (Flick, 2014b:5)

Whereas Glesne (2011) describes the process of data analysis as the organisation process that a researcher uses to tell the story of their research.

There are many different ways that data can be collected and, therefore, there is no one correct method for data analysis (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). However, Cohen et al. (2017) point out that the researcher must identify an appropriate method of data analysis to answer the research question.

The data analysis method that has been developed to answer the research question 'How do children between 3 years old and 4 years old police their peers' gender exploration during play?' is critical conversation analysis (CCA). It draws from the schools of conversation analysis (CA) and critical discourse analysis (CDA), the foci and methods of these styles of data analysis will be examined, before setting out the method that was utilised in the data analysis.

3.13.1 Conversation Analysis

According to Speer and Stokoe (2011), "The goal of Conversation Analysis is to establish the structural frameworks that underpin and organise social regularities in interaction" (p9). To achieve this goal, CA focuses the analysis on the specific features of conversation. This focus on the features of conversations, means that the emphasis is placed on how the message is communicated and situations are produced, rather than the contents (Flick, 2014b).

CA uses transcripts of naturally occurring conversations to explore how the participants use language to achieve their goal, for instance, to gain or share knowledge (Grbich, 2013). One feature of conversation which is examined in CA, is the use of turn-taking and repair. Turn-taking can be described as the statement/question and response pattern of conversation, where an appropriate response is required to continue the conversation. Where a participant does not respond appropriately, this can be considered a deviant response which may reflect that they do not understand or accept the preceding utterance (Sidnell, 2013). In order to continue the conversation, a repair technique has to be used by one of the speakers. This repair could be made by rephrasing the original utterance if the individual believes that the incorrect response was caused by a lack of understanding, or by correcting the language they used if they believed that an incorrect term was used (Silverman, 2014). The use of a repair technique can be identified in line 2 of the following extract:

1. Cathy who is pushing the buggy, is it a boy or a girl?
2. Jaden bo (2) GIRL
3. Cathy a girl pushing the buggy?

(07 & 12 – Image elicitation activity)

Jaden can be seen to self-correct the language that he had used as he believed he was using the wrong word.

A second feature of conversation that is analysed is the use of conversational openings and adjacency pairs. Conversational openings and adjacency pairs are different types of linked turns within a conversation. For instance, during a summons/answer sequence a person's attention is requested, they demonstrate they are paying attention, either verbally or non-verbally and then the original speaker continues with the conversation. Other types of adjacency pairs include linked sequences where there is a requirement for a particular style of response, either the answer to a question or an implied obligation to answer to ensure that the interaction continues (Silverman, 2017). An example of this can be seen in the extract below of Alice and Amber playing:

1. Alice catch it ((laughs))
2. Amber ((laughing))
3. Alice \$I caught it in my dress\$
4. Amber you caught it on your dress?
5. Alice \$YES\$

(11-06 – 05 & 08 – Role Play Shop)

Alice's statement in line 3 "I caught it in my dress" carries the expectation that Amber would respond; Amber responded with a questioning statement "you caught it on your dress?". For the interaction to continue, there was an expectation that Alice would respond, which she did in line 5.

When undertaking CA it is helpful to include the non-verbal communication that was used, as it helps "to maximise a shared understanding between children" (Bateman, 2016: 27) and therefore provides additional information for the analyst. For this reason, the use of video-recorded data is considered to be an important component of CA (Samuelsson & Plejert, 2015). The conventions used to transcribe the data can be found in.

3.13.1.1 Strengths and Weaknesses of Conversation Analysis

Within the literature surrounding CA, one of the main strengths identified is the ability of CA to identify the subtle processes involved in social interaction through the examination of conversational turns (Grbich, 2013). However, this focus has led to concerns that researchers may focus on very short sequences of conversation to identify a pattern (Flick, 2014a).

Additionally, by focusing on the processes involved in a conversation, CA only considers the formal aspects of speech that have been identified as important (Kidwell, 2013), and it looks for the inclusion or exclusion of these aspects to explain the processes used. However, when looking at young children's language development, these processes may not have yet developed and therefore their absence from the conversation may be developmental rather than a conscious decision (Kidwell, 2013).

Another weakness of CA that has been identified in the literature is the limited attention that is paid to the context of the conversation (Flick, 2014a). According to Bateman (2016) within CA the context is understood to be co-produced by the interactions, it is not the physical environment where the interaction takes place. However, the physical context of where the interaction takes place is important, because language use is different in separate contexts (Cowie, 2012). The exclusion of the physical context appears to be contested within the literature with some researchers highlighting that the context of the interaction is very important; as knowledge of the context surrounding the conversation helps to understand the

conversation and what the intended outcome is (Silverman, 2014). When young children are not confident they are less likely to participate in a conversation (Bryant, 2015) or it could lead to a child behaving or speaking in a different manner than they would if they were in a familiar context (Levine & Munsch, 2014). Preschool-aged children are also learning the pragmatics of language (Levine & Munsch, 2014), these are the rules that guide how language is used in different social situations. A knowledge of pragmatics can be used to explain why children speak to their peers differently from how they speak to adults (Hoff, 2010). Examining the context that the interaction took place in, can help to identify if there were other children or adults around that may have impacted the type of language that the children used in the interaction. Additionally, Grbich (2013) suggests that knowing the gender and the social status of the participants is important due to the additional dimensions that this information brings to the conversation. The lack of agreement around the importance of the context of the interaction, both in terms of the physical location and the participants, has led to some CA researchers using various levels of detail to set their conversational extracts in context, for instance, Cederborg (2020) and Theobald (2013).

CA supports the view that young children are competent members of society and are social individuals who are involved in the co-construction of their social environment (Bateman, 2016). As such, whilst the use of CA in early childhood is still “in its infancy” (Sidnell, 2015: 271), it has been used to examine children’s everyday interactions as a way to explore the construction of their social worlds and their role in the co-construction of knowledge (Bateman, 2017; Cederborg, 2021).

3.13.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

According to Gee (2014a), discourse analysis is “the study of language in use” (p.8) and is a way of exploring how people use language to build and sustain the social world around them. This leads to discourse analysis being a term that covers a wide range of analysis foci, from looking at the individual words that a person has chosen to use, to how a sentence has been constructed through to how language is being used and the work that the language is doing (Jaworski & Coupland, 2014).

CDA is concerned about social themes including gender, race and social class (Silverman, 2014) and how they are enacted and reinforced through social interaction (Tonkiss, 2012). Whilst other styles of discourse analysis tend to focus on the verbal or written discourse that is available (Machin & Mayr, 2012); Punch (2014) raises the point that silence is also very important to consider, as it can either reinforce power inequalities or challenge the discourse and it can be considered within CDA. Whilst undertaking critical discourse analysis, the

researcher is examining the discourse for how power is being enacted, and how it is being resisted, as it is this resistance to power that leads to changes within society (Rogers, 2011).

CDA can include non-verbal communication within the analysis (van Dijk, 1995), as the body language and movements that are used by the participants can change the meaning of the verbal language used. Non-verbal methods of communication do not just provide additional context to young children's spoken language but are essential communication tools for them (Stagg Peterson et al., 2019). Due to young children's competence in using non-verbal communication (Mphahlele, 2019), this research considers the relevance of body language as fundamental in understanding the discourse and knowledge that is being privileged and used to police their peer's play.

In order to undertake CDA, Gee (2014a) set out seven building tasks that he believes discourse undertakes as well as six tools for inquiry. It is by using a combination of these building tasks and tools for inquiry that researchers can interpret the data and undertake CDA.

3.13.2.1 Building Tasks of Language

Gee (2014a) identified seven building tasks that he believes are used to build and describe the world around us, these are:

1. Significance – how is the language being used to make something significant or to reduce its significance.
2. Practices/activities – what practices or activities are being implemented through the language.
3. Identities – how does this language identify a person's identity or the identity of another item.
4. Relationships – how is the language enabling a relationship, what type of relationship is it enabling.
5. Politics – how does this language impact the distribution of social goods, how does it reinforce societal norms.
6. Connections – how is the language connecting items or information, does it increase or decrease the relevance of something
7. Sign systems and knowledge – what sign system (either spoken or written) or knowledge base is being given increased status

3.13.2.2 Tools of Inquiry

Gee describes his tools of inquiry as devices that can be used to analyse the roles or achievements of the building tasks (Gee, 2014b). The six tools of inquiry are:

1. Social languages – the language that we use changes depending on who we are talking to and the purpose of the communication.
2. Discourses – these are Gee’s big ‘D’ discourses - the language, beliefs, values, and recognisable social identity.
3. Intertextuality – referring on one verbal or written text within a second verbal or written text
4. Conversations – big ‘C’ conversations – knowledge of topics, themes or social aspects that are culturally known and the associated debates that people can participate in
5. Figured worlds – the simplified understanding of the world and how it works that people draw on during discourse
6. Situated meanings – the meaning of a word or phrase changes depending on the context it is used in, situated meanings look at the context of the discourse to identify the meaning specific to that context (Gee, 2014a)

Gender is considered a big ‘C’ conversation, and whilst preschool children are unlikely to understand the wider debates around gender, young children do understand “some of the dominant, tacitly agreed-upon ways of ‘doing gender’” (Wohlwend, 2012:11). Therefore, the participants in this study will engage to some extent with the big ‘C’ conversations around gender.

Gee (2014a) describes an ideal CDA as involving all of the building tasks and tools of inquiry. However, he acknowledges that a researcher does not need to use all the tasks and tools in order to undertake a comprehensive analysis as this would produce analysis and arguments which are not relevant to the questions being asked.

3.13.3 Validity of Critical Discourse Analysis

According to Sriwimon and Zilli (2017), concerns have been raised about the validity of CDA as a method of analysis with particular respect to the selection of the texts analysed and the limited length of the texts. To reduce these concerns, they recommend that the methodology used should be clearly set out and that the data must be collected systematically and the process of analysis made clear. Ultimately, Gee (2014a) reminds us that no single piece of data will answer the research question with any confidence, but that by including multiple pieces of data that demonstrate the convergence of ideas and agreement the validity of CDA is increased.

When considering CDA as the specific form of discourse analysis to be used, researchers including Wohlwend (2016) and Nuñez and Palmer (2017), support the utilisation of CDA to explore the use of power displayed by young children, as well as the ways in which they

perform their identity. Wohlwend (2016) used Gee's cultural models and situated identities tools to support the analysis of the gendered power that was identifiable in a playground incident. However, her analysis highlighted the power that she held as the teacher within the conversations that followed the incident, rather than clarifying the power that was held and reinforced by the children through the original incident. This example demonstrates that whilst CDA is a suitable form of data analysis to use when exploring how participants use power to reinforce their position, the inclusion of an adult voice within the data may unbalance the analysis due to the recognised adult-child power dynamic.

3.13.4 Critical Conversation Analysis

The identifiable links between CA and CDA can be seen through their focus on the analysis of language and interactions to identify the techniques that are used by the participants to share socially agreed expectations around behaviour, and the implications of challenging these expectations (Grbich, 2013: 230). Furthermore, the role of CDA in examining the use of language to identify the Discourses that are being drawn on, as well as how language, both verbal and non-verbal, is being used to communicate the desired behaviours and identities, mitigates some of the weaknesses of CA. Having examined both the strengths and weaknesses of these data analysis methods, the researcher identified that by combining the methods a fuller analysis of the data can be achieved. Within this research, the researcher has drawn from the strengths of both CA and CDA to structure a style of data analysis which has been termed critical conversation analysis (CCA).

CCA draws on CA's belief that:

ordinary conversations shed light on the rules of social behaviour and indicate what is acceptable and what happens when these rules are broken or bent.
(Grbich, 2013:230)

Through analysis of the participants' conversations, including their use of turn-taking and question/answer sequences, the systematic process that the participants use to share knowledge and power can be identified (Bateman, 2016). This aspect of CCA helps to answer the questions around *how* children use language within their social context to share knowledge about societal norms and rules, and additionally how language is used to penalise or sanction incorrect behaviours. As this research is focused on identifying the methods that children use to police their peers' gender exploration, the value that CA brings to the data analysis in terms of identifying how children use verbal and non-verbal communication to reinforce gender beliefs can be identified; but CA does not explain why children are using language in this way.

In order to answer the questions about *why* children use particular language techniques and what they are reinforcing through their interactions, it is important in the context of this thesis to examine the circumstances in which the interactions were performed, along with the Discourses that they draw upon. Three of Gee's (2014a) tools of inquiry underpin this aspect of CCA, that of social languages, Discourses and figured worlds. By exploring and identifying the intentions and knowledge that underlie the participant's interactions, it is possible to add detail to the analysis of the conversations and determine the source of the power that is being exploited or the social norm that is being reinforced. Including details of the circumstances that surrounded the interaction provides support for the analysis and the identification of the discourses that the children are drawing on. Young children adjust their language and behaviour depending on the situation they are in (Hoff, 2010), and the inclusion of contextual clues enables the identification of the external influences that are reflected in the children's choice of discourses.

3.13.5 Critical Conversation Analysis Framework

The researcher drew on the seven stage framework that Mullet (2018) produced to support the use of CDA when developing a framework for using CCA to analyse data. The eight steps that were used to analyse the data within this research are set out below (Table 3.4).

Table 3.4 – Analytical framework for CCA

Step	Description
1	Select the data sources and prepare them for analysis
2	Code the transcripts and identify general themes
3	Collection building – gather the instances of the form of interaction to be analysed
4	Individual case analysis – examine each case focusing on how the interaction was created
5	Pattern identification – look for patterns between the cases
6	Explore the background of the interaction – what is the context, do the cases have similar backgrounds
7	Analyse the discourse that has influenced the interaction
8	Interpret the data – explore and examine the outcomes of stages 4-7 accounting for or evaluating patterns

3.13.5.1 Step 1 – Select the Data Sources and Prepare them for Analysis

The first step in the process used to analyse the data was to select the data sources and prepare them for analysis. The data sources for this research are the transcripts of the video-recorded observations, along with the transcripts and notes from the video-stimulated conversations and image elicitation activity. CCA is being used to analyse both written and

verbal communication as well as non-verbal communication, therefore it was important to ensure that the transcripts of the video-recorded observations included details about the non-verbal communication used (Wohlwend, 2011). Details about the transcription format used can be found in section 3.11.1, but examples of the transcription formats are below (Figure 3.3 and Figure 3.4).

12-08 – 24 & 02 – Garden – Walking and Sand - Video Transcription




			
Time	00:00 - 00:10	00:10 - 00:20	00:20 - 00:30
Verbal – Mary	Um, um, um, Conor's all covered in sand Conor's all covered in sand	He's my friend but he was in there.	He was sitting and they weren't sharing with him.
Verbal – Conor			
Action – Mary	Mary is holding Conor's hand and walks over to an adult. As she speaks to the adult she lets go of Conor's hand and brushes him down. She then holds his hand again.	Mary lets go of Conor's hand and walks over to the climbing frame while pointing to the sand pit under the shelter.	Mary turns around and walks back to Conor, she puts her arms around him and turns him around. She then keeps one hand on the back of his neck.
Action – Conor	Conor is holding Mary's hand and is walking with her. When she stops and lets go of his hand, Conor stands still. When Mary reaches for his hand again he takes hers.	Conor walks behind Mary towards the climbing frame.	Conor turns around when Mary encourages him, he then stands there

Figure 3.3 – Example of video-recorded observation transcript

Transcription

13-08 - 08 & 20 - Conversation.mp3

Speaker	Non-verbal	Spoken
Cathy		Yara, there is Yusef in the sand and Yara is doing building Can you see you building?
Yara	Nods	
Cathy		Yeah? Let's move it on so that we can see Yara's building There you go Yara, is M (adult) helping you to do building?
Yara	Looks around	
Cathy		Yara, was M (adult) helping you do building?
Yara	Nods	
Cathy		Yeah? Is anyone else helping you do building Yara?
Yara		(unclear speech)
Cathy		Is anyone else helping you?
Yara		I wearing hat!
Cathy		You are wearing your hat aren't you?
Yara		(unclear speech) is me hat!
Cathy		It's your hat What colour is your hat?
Yara		Ummm, Peppa Pig

Figure 3.4 – Example of video-stimulated conversation transcript

3.13.5.2 Step 2 - Code the Transcripts and Identify General Themes

At step two a general coding process was undertaken to code the text and identify the general themes within the data. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was used to code the texts and identify the general themes. This coding method can be used to analyse data from a range of sources and is identified as an appropriate initial coding method for a variety of data analysis methods (Grbich, 2013; Flick, 2014a).

3.13.5.3 Step 3 - Collection Building

During the third step, the transcripts that support a particular theme were collated and checked so that all instances of interaction that reinforce the theme were identified (Figure 3.5).

Aware of own or others gender

Setting	Name	Type
Setting 1	11-06 – 08 - Shop	Conversation
Setting 1	11-06 – 11 – Log jumping and boat	Conversation
Setting 3	11-11 – 06	Conversation
Setting 3	09-11 – 01	Conversation
Setting 2	13-08 – 08 & 20	Conversation
Setting 2	06-08 – 15	Conversation
Setting 2	10-08 – 11	Conversation

Figure 3.5 – Example of collection building

This process was repeated for each of the themes identified in step two and created the collections of interactions which represent the theme.

3.13.5.4 Step 4 - Individual Case Analysis

Once the collections had been created, the next step was to examine each of the cases within a collection and identify the transcripts that exemplified the theme and the features that could be recognised within the conversations. To examine the conversational features within these interactions, a detailed CA transcript was produced for each of the interactions using simplified CA transcription conventions (Bateman, 2017; Cederborg, 2020) (shown in Figure 3.6). As discussed in section 3.11.2 above, CA transcription conventions attempt to provide information about how the language was said, for instance, the volume of the voice, where there was overlapping speech or pauses in the speech. The simplified transcription conventions that have been used in this research can be found in Appendix 16.



7		8	
7a - Imogen	^xxx^	8a - Imogen	^xxx^
7b - Alice	((head goes lower as she looks down))	8b - Alice	((looks up))
Time stamp	2:17		2:18
9		10	
9a - Imogen	^xxx^	10a - Alice	((nods))

Figure 3.6 – Example of a transcript including conversation analysis conventions

The format of the video-recorded observation transcript was kept in the timeline format to show the passing of time, however, the description of the participants' actions was not included as more screenshots were included to demonstrate their body positions and non-verbal facial cues (Bateman, 2017).

3.13.5.5 Step 5 - Pattern Identification – Look for Patterns Between the Cases

As the interactions were being examined at step four, patterns that could be identified between the cases began to be seen. Identifying patterns between the cases enabled the researcher to build up an understanding of how children were making their intentions clear, and which conversational features can be identified across the cases within a theme.

3.13.5.6 Step 6 - Explore the Background of the Interaction

Gee (2014a) describes in both his social languages and situated meanings tools of inquiry, that language usage and meanings change depending on the context they are used in, and the people who are communicating. At step six of this framework, the importance of understanding the wider context that the text or data were collected became the focus so that the influence of the location, participants and other outside influences on the communication (Mullet, 2018) were taken into account (Figure 3.7).

Background & Context

This interaction is taken from a video recorded observation of Imogen and Alice are playing in the construction area. They are at the edge of the construction area with Alice standing outside the area facing inwards. The area is bounded by a wall at the back, low units forming the dies of the area with the fourth side open for access. At the back of the area there are two boys playing, the boys are sat with their backs to the girls and do not acknowledge them. Other than the researcher, there is no adult close by.

Figure 3.7 – Example of background and context for a video-recorded observation

3.13.5.7 Step 7 - Analyse the Discourse that has Influenced the Interaction

At step seven in the framework, the researcher returned to the transcriptions and looked for patterns in word usage that reinforce or disrupt the discourse and power relations. The importance of identifying how silence and body language had been used alongside spoken language needed to be considered at this point (Tonkiss, 2012). This step is described by Harding (2013) as identifying the language that is used to construct each discourse. By examining the transcripts for examples of how the discourse has been characterised as normal or where participants have shown their own agency to disrupt the discourse, the researcher is able to gain a greater understanding of how the participants use language to reinforce or legitimise the discourse (Tonkiss, 2012). As the data for this research involves video-recorded observations, the transcripts were examined to identify if any other discourse had been, or could be, identified within the data and how they interact (Figure 3.8).

Discourse

At line 2a Imogen uses Alice's name to get her attention and to draw her back to where they were playing. The language and tone used does not suggest that she is expecting a verbal response. When Alice returns to the counter, she looks up at Imogen (line 5) for a reaction before continuing to play. At line 6, Imogen looks at what Alice is going, before leaning in (line 7) and speaking to her in a very quiet voice. In response to what she is being told, Alice looks down and sad (line 7 & 7b). This interaction suggests that Imogen holds the power in this interaction and is using this to reinforce the expected behaviour. When she uses Alice's name at line 2a, she is recalling her to an appropriate area/person to play with. This could be due to Alice moving close to where the boys were sitting and Imogen wanting to reinforce the gender discourse that children play with their same gender peers.

Alice's response to Imogen suggests that she is aware of the power that Imogen has in the situation and that she is also aware of the gender discourse that is being drawn on.

Figure 3.8 – Example of discourse identification from a transcript

3.13.5.8 Step 8 - Interpret the Data

Finally, at step eight the researcher drew together the analysis that they had undertaken to identify the meanings of the major themes, how they are represented within the data, the patterns of language that were utilised by the children, and the discourses that the children were drawing on and reinforcing through these interactions.

This research is adding to the contemporary literature through the use of critical conversation analysis as a method of analysing data from young participants.

3.14 Chapter Summary

This chapter has set out the approach that underpins this research. It has presented the methodological foundations and set out the feminist nature of this thesis. The chapter then highlighted the ethical concerns that are raised when undertaking research with young children and identified the steps that were taken to reduce these concerns. It then moved on to present the methods used to collect and analyse the data. The appropriateness of the methods chosen and their implementation was articulated to reduce potential concerns around the authenticity and rigour of the research process.

Having presented the methodological decisions that guided this research, the following chapter moves the thesis through the presentation and analysis of the data collected. The themes that were identified through the analysis of the data are presented and illustrated through the inclusion of extracts from the transcripts and images taken from the video-recorded observations to illustrate the findings.

Chapter 4 Results and Analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the themes that were identified within the literature which was presented in chapter two and were used during the thematic analysis of the data, along with a theme that was developed through the analysis of the data only. These themes are then used, within the following three sub-chapters, to present the stories of the three settings, illustrating how children experience gender and gender policing.

4.2 Explanation of the Themes

The themes that were identified in the literature and the sub-questions that they relate to are set out in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1 – Table showing the links between the themes and the research questions

Theme	Sub-questions Answered
Reinforcement of the gender binary	Does gender play a role in who polices children's play and who is policed? What methods do children use to police their peers' gender play?
Coercive behaviour	Does gender play a role in who polices children's play and who is policed? What factors impact children's behaviour?
Influence of home and community	Do children police their peers' gender play and why?
Influence of peers	Do children police their peers' gender play and why?
Gendered environment	What factors impact children's behaviour?
Verbal control	What methods do children use to police their peers' gender play?
Use of body language	What methods do children use to police their peers' gender play?
Manipulating the play	What methods do children use to police their peers' gender play?

These themes were developed through a thematic analysis of the literature examined and presented in the literature review chapter. The initial coding of the literature identified 125 initial codes which were followed by an examination of the codes which identified 14 themes. Further examination of the themes identified the seven themes that are set out in Table 4.1 as being relevant to the research questions. These themes were then defined, and an explanation of the themes follows.

4.2.1 Reinforcement of the Gender Binary

This theme focuses on children's use of gendered language as a means of identifying who they play with and who is able to play with specific toys. Halim et al. (2013) state that gender is a salient feature for children as it is easy for them to identify. However, children must develop an understanding of gender before they are able to identify both their own gender and the gender of others (Zosuls et al., 2009).

4.2.2 Coercive Behaviour

This theme draws on children's desire to be accepted by their peers and therefore, their response to the feedback they receive from their peers. This leads to them conforming to expected behaviours in order to be accepted or included in the play, even when they would prefer to do something different (Nabbijohn et al., 2020). Chase (2022) highlights children's desire to be similar to their peers as a means to being accepted within their social group. Therefore, by modifying their behaviour to be accepted, their response can be identified as a reaction to the coercive behaviours which are used to control their social acceptance.

4.2.3 Influence of Home and Community

This theme focuses on the role that parents, siblings and the community have in children's knowledge of gender and gender stereotypes. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979) identifies that parents, siblings, peers and community have key roles in influencing children's development. Within the home environment, children develop an understanding of gender through their observations and experiences from their earliest interactions, these experiences inform their habitus that they draw on in their interactions with others (O'Connor, 2011).

4.2.4 Influence of peers

Following on from the previous theme looking at the influence of parents, siblings and the wider community on children's development, Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified that children's peers have the same level of influence as their parents and siblings. Research by Xiao et al. (2019) supports Bronfenbrenner's identification of peers being a main influence on children's development and identifies that some children may take on the role of gender enforcer to encourage their peers to adhere to gender norms within the setting.

4.2.5 Gendered Environment

This theme considers the role of gender within the preschool environment, this includes the control that children wield through controlling access to areas or resources based on gender, and children feeling that they cannot play with resources because they are 'more appropriate' for an opposite gender child. Additionally, the practitioners' use of gendered language, or

acceptance of gendered statements from the children, can be seen as reinforcing gendered beliefs (Hilliard & Liben, 2010).

4.2.6 Verbal Control

This theme focuses on children's use of their verbal language to tell their peers what they should or should not be doing. Xiao et al. (2019) highlight how children use language as a method of controlling their peers' behaviour and as a means of including or excluding others, either through directly correcting their behaviour or through teasing.

4.2.7 Use of Body Language

This theme recognises that young children are experienced users of non-verbal communication (Colliver, 2017) and use it to reinforce behaviour expectations. Studies suggest that young children use more non-verbal communication methods than verbal methods as their ability to use verbal communication is still developing (Păunescu & Indreica, 2014; Stagg Peterson et al., 2019).

4.2.8 Manipulating the Play

This theme was identified through the analysis of the data and focuses on children's use of manipulation within their play to exclude other children. This could be through identifying that specific characters can only be a certain gender, or through minimising an opposite gender child's involvement through the character that they are allowed to play. Research by Björk-Willén (2012) identifies how children manipulate their peers' position in role play as a means of reinforcing social standing; this theme develops this idea through examining the manipulation of play with a focus on gender.

4.3 Summary

This short chapter has provided an overview of the themes that were identified within the literature that were used within the analysis of the data, and the theme that was identified through the data analysis only.

The following three sub-chapters present the stories of the three participating settings and the children's experiences of gender and gender policing through selected themes.

Chapter 4a The Story of Children's Experience at the Estate Community Nursery

4a.1 Setting the Scene

The Estate Community Nursery is a community-based nursery school based in a city in the northeast of England. The nursery offers 64 places per session (three hours AM or PM plus an optional lunch session of 45 minutes) for children aged two years to five years old and is open for thirty-nine term time weeks a year. The setting caters for the children of local residents, and priority is given to children who are not claiming their funded hours at an alternative setting.

According to the 2021 census (Office for National Statistics, 2022), the setting is based in an area below the national average socio-economic status (Appendix 4). The local population has an above average British born population, with the 2021 census indicating that 91% of the population was British (based on 2021 census data on country of birth Appendix 5). However, the nursery does reflect a more diverse population with approximately 15% of the children attending the setting originating from families that identify as non-British. The nursery, therefore, fits within the maximum variation selection criteria of low socio-economic status and low cultural diversity (see section 3.6 for more information on the selection criteria used). This is important due to the differences that both Hill (2002) and Marks et al. (2009) found when exploring parents' gender norm beliefs when linked to their socio-economic status. The inclusion of cultural diversity within the selection criteria, is due to the socially constructed nature of gender (Institute of Physics, 2017).

Thirteen children were awarded parental consent and contributed their assent in principle, although their ongoing assent was additionally checked prior to any data collection activities taking place. The cultural diversity of the participants was slightly higher than the setting as a whole, with 25% of the participants families identifying as non-British. Details about the participants' self-identified gender and ages can be found in Appendix 7.

Extended sections from the transcripts that the extracts in this chapter were taken from can be found in Appendix 17.

4a.2 Reinforcement of the Gender Binary

According to King et al. (2021), young children use gender as a means of categorising others as it is an easy characteristic for them to identify.

Within the Estate Community Nursery, the children used their knowledge of binary gender when they identified their friends, who they could play with and who should or should not be included in certain activities.

According to Zosuls et al. (2009), children first need to be confident in the identification of their own gender before they are able to confidently identify the gender of other children around them. During an image elicitation game with Rachel (3yrs 6mths) and Henry (3yrs 9mths), this development can be seen. Early in the game, Rachel identified her own gender confidently in response to looking at a picture.

Rachel - ME girl ((pointing at herself))

On occasions during the game, Rachel appeared uncertain about the gender of the people in the image and changed the gender of the children during the conversation about them.

1. *Cathy is this one a boy or a girl? ((pointing to image of the child sitting down))*
2. *Rachel Boy*
3. *Cathy what about this one?*
4. *Rachel Yes*
5. *Cathy boy or girl?*
6. *Rachel boy..girl*

Conversely, Henry who is a couple of months older appeared more certain in his identification of children's gender.

7. *Cathy are they boys or girls?*
8. *Rachel ME girl (pointing at herself))*
9. *Henry and a BOY*
10. *Cathy there's a boy and a girl?*
11. *Henry YES, that's a boy ((pointing to the child on the right)) and that's a girl ((pointing to the child on the left))*

(Extracts from 28-06 – 12 – Picture Task)

These extracts from the image elicitation activity, suggest that Rachel and Henry are at different stages of their gender knowledge development. Martin and Ruble (2010) suggest that children start to use gendered language to label groups from 24 months and that girls tend to develop this ability slightly earlier than boys. This is slightly younger than Kohlberg's (1966) theory where he argues that children are able to identify their own gender between the ages of 24 months and 36 months. Henry and Rachel are older than Kohlberg's identified age criteria, yet Rachel's response suggests that whilst she is confident in her own gender, she may not be confident about identifying other children's gender. Perry et al. (2019) explain that once children are able to identify their own gender, they then move on to identifying the gender of

other people. Henry (45mths) confidently identifies the gender of the children dressed as doctors (lines 9 & 11); however, Rachel's (42mths) response suggests that she is not confident in her identification of the gender of the children as she changes her response during the conversation (lines 6). This may suggest that Rachel's confidence in identifying the gender of another person is lower than Henry's, either due to the stage of her gender development or her previous experiences.

Analysis of the data collected at the Estate Community Nursery shows that gendered language and knowledge of gender stereotypes were used to justify the reinforcement of gender boundaries by all of the children who participated in the research. During a video-stimulated conversation, Abigail (4yrs 3mths) explained that boys can only play with the girls if they want to play 'girls' things'. When she was asked what she meant by 'girly things' she replied:

1. *Cathy* *what sort of girly things do girls like*
2. *Abigail* *nails done and (2) bags like (2) girl bags and girl stories*
(Extract from 11-06 – 11 – Log Jumping – Conversation)

Examining Abigail's response, it can be suggested that she is using her knowledge of gender stereotypes to identify activities that are usually considered appropriate for girls only. This links to work by Jones (2020), who identified that children draw on their knowledge of stereotypes when identifying what makes a person a girl or a boy. In Abigail's opinion, girls like having their nails painted, playing, or using bags and stories about girls. During play, Abigail may draw on this belief to control who can play and the roles that they can take in the play.

The use of gender stereotypes can also be seen in this extract from a video-stimulated conversation with Karl (4yrs) about a game he had been playing on the climbing frame:

1. *Karl* *IT'S A BOYS GAME*
2. *Cathy* *what happens if girls want to play*
3. *Karl* *uhh, they will go*
4. *Karl* *oh, eek ((shrill tone)) ((waved arms))*
(Extract from 11-06 – 02 – Climbing Frame – Conversation)

In this extract, Karl is drawing on a stereotype that girls find risky play scary and that they react in a specific way.

According to Halim et al. (2013), gender is a key feature that children use to identify whether others are similar to them or different. Once they have identified a child as similar or different to them, children can then use the gender schemas or knowledge that they have developed to identify whether they would be likely to play with the other child and therefore whether to include them in their social group (Bigler & Liben, 2007). Research by Uyar and Arnas (2021),

found that girls' knowledge of gender norms is higher than boys, however, there was not a significant difference identified in their research which supports the findings of this research.

The importance that the participants place on using and reinforcing the gender binary with their peers, may be due to the expectations of the community they live in. The Estate Community Nursery is in an area of below-average SES. Research by both Hill (2002) and Marks et al. (2009), found that families from lower SES backgrounds are more likely to hold “more traditional” (Marks et al., 2009: 9) gender beliefs; therefore, the children are more likely to have had these stereotypes reinforced by family members and the community in which they live. The influence that the family and community have had on the participants' beliefs is examined in section Chapter 5a.4 below.

4a.3 Use of Body Language

Observing the children at the Estate Community Nursery, the children's use of body language to communicate their behaviour was understood in different ways.

In the first image (Figure 4a.1), taken from a video-recorded observation in the construction area, Karl (4yrs 8mths) and Jay (4yrs 4mths) are playing in the back corner of the area, while Alice (4yrs 5mths) and Imogen (4yrs 5mths) are playing at the front of the area. During the observation, there was little interaction between the two groups.



Figure 4a.1 – Playing in the construction area
(Image taken from 08-06 - 05 & 06 - Construction – Video)

Throughout the time the girls were in the construction area, the boys stayed in the corner with their backs to the girls. During a video-stimulated conversation with Karl (4yrs 8mths), he was asked about this play episode and what was happening.

1. *Cathy* *so you're over there and you're playing with the Lego with Jay*
2. *Karl* *Yeah*
3. *Cathy* *did you want to play with (1) the girls?*
4. *Karl* *^yeah^ but Jay said NO DON'T PLAY WITH THEM but I wanted to play with them ((sad tone))*
5. *Cathy* *so you wanted to play with the girls with the Lego?*
6. *Karl* *yeah, but Jay said nooo ((sounded sad))*
7. *Cathy* *ohh, so you just played with Jay did you?*
8. *Karl* *Yeah*

(Extract from 09-06 – 02 – Water play – Conversation Transcript)

This abstract demonstrates children's use of verbal control as Karl is reporting how Jay (4yrs 4mths) made his feelings about including the girls in their play known. However, it also supports the assumption that the boys were aware of the girl's presence in the construction area but purposely excluded them from playing through their body positioning.

Lundström et al. (2022) suggest that body language is a key skill that children utilise to demonstrate whether a peer is welcome to join in an activity, with the boy's closed body language indicating that other children are not welcome to join the play.

The age range of the children in the construction area is small with only four months separating the oldest child (Karl) and the youngest (Jay). Research suggests that children develop an understanding of gender stereotypes and norms at a similar pace (Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016), although girls develop an awareness of gender stereotypes around appearance earlier than boys (Baker et al., 2016). Therefore, the literature would suggest that all four children would be expected to have a similar understanding of the gender stereotypes and norms of the community they live in.

All of the children had attended the setting for three terms and would have been exposed to the setting norms surrounding gender (Martin, 2011). Therefore, Martin, drawing on Paechter's ideas around communities of practice, would argue that the children have developed an understanding of whether it is acceptable for boys and girls to play together. This links to the idea of developmental intergroup bias (Bigler & Liben, 2007) which sets out that children develop a preference for playing with peers they share a salient characteristic with, and exclude children who do not share that characteristic, in this case, gender. By keeping their backs to the girls, the boys were able to exclude them from the play and reinforce their presence as unwelcome.

However, from the conversation with Karl, it is clear that he wanted to go against the gender norms and include the girls in the boys' play (line 4). He then experienced verbal policing from a younger peer.

Alice attempted to engage the boys in conversation by identifying herself in the photo the boys were looking at, however, they did not respond to her.

Alice (4yrs 5mths) and Imogen (4yrs 5mths)



Figure 4a.2 – Alice & Imogen - returning to same-gender peer
(Image taken from 08-06 - 05 & 06 - Construction – Video)

During Alice's attempt at engaging the boys, Imogen ignored Alice and the boys and focused instead on picking items up from the floor. However, as Alice returned to Imogen, looking sad (Figure 4a.2), Imogen's body language opened up and she faced Alice, demonstrating non-verbally that Alice had made the right decision to return to playing with her, a same-gender peer. According to Hilliard and Liben (2010), the two experiences that Alice had during this interaction, excluded by the boys and included by a girl, may reinforce her knowledge of gender norm behaviours and stereotypes. This may additionally reinforce any in-group bias that she holds, as she experienced exclusion and unwelcoming behaviour from children who she identifies as members of the out-group (Martin et al., 2013).

Looking at the gender of the children within this interaction provides what may be an interesting dynamic. According to Prioletta and Pyle (2017), the construction area within settings is usually identified as a male-dominated space, and when girls enter the space their play tends to be restricted to a small part of the area. In this observation the opposite can be seen; the boys restrict their play to a small corner at the back of the construction area, whilst the girls explore the majority of the construction area looking for resources to enhance their

games. In this interaction, the girls' dominance of the construction area may be due to the boys' decision to turn their backs on the girls to exclude them from the play.

4a.4 Influence of Home and Community

The role that a child's home environment has on their knowledge of stereotypes and cultural norms has long been known (Carter, 2014).

During two separate conversations with children, one during an image elicitation activity and one video-stimulated conversation, the children referred to home experiences that influenced their beliefs.

During a video-stimulated conversation with Jason (4yrs), he talked about playing football with his grandad and brother. He then explained that his brother is older than him and goes to school, where:

1. Jason *he plays, he plays football with the BOYS*
 2. Cathy *just with the boys does he?*
 3. Jason *yeah, and then I play with the boys too*
- (Extract from 09-06 – 01 – Sandpit & Football – Conversation)

From this extract, it is clear that Jason views football as an activity for boys and that this belief is supported by his knowledge and experience from home, where he plays football with two male family members, at least one of whom only plays football with boys.

However, the second conversation with Rachel (3yrs 6mths) challenges Jason's belief that football is only for boys. During an image elicitation game with Rachel, she explained that she plays football at home.

1. Cathy *who do you play football with?*
 2. Rachel *I play with "sibling"*
 3. Cathy *is "sibling" your brother?*
 4. Rachel *Yeah*
- (Extract from 28-06 – 12 – Picture Task)

Taking these two extracts separately, Jason's experience and beliefs affirm stereotypical norms that football is only for boys (Baker et al., 2016), however, Rachel's experience challenges this.

Gender schema theory (Martin & Halverson, 1981) sets out that children categorise activities by identifying whether they are for a girl or boy, and therefore whether it is an activity that is appropriate for them. However, MacMullin et al. (2020), suggest that when a child enjoys an activity that does not fit their gender schema, that they make an exception, for instance, girls don't play football, but I like playing football, therefore it is ok for me. Examining the conversation with Jason, it is clear that his gender schema confirms that football is for boys,

this is built on his experience of playing football with his grandad and older brother, as well as his older brother only playing football with boys. Conversely, Rachel has experience of playing football with her brother and enjoying it. This could lead Rachel to reframe the gender stereotypes that she is exposed to at nursery about football, to include a sub-category that says, 'I like football; therefore, it is ok for me to play football'. According to MacMullin et al. (2020), this is a variation of Bigler and Liben's developmental intergroup theory (2007) where children create sub-categories for non-conforming beliefs and ideas. However, when looking at Rachel's conversation she says that she plays football at home and does not mention playing football at nursery. This could mean that she is developing an understanding that different behaviours are accepted in different contexts and therefore her sub-category may be more specific to her situation 'I like football; therefore, it is ok for me to play football at home'. This would support Bronfenbrenner's (1979) identification of family and peers exerting a similar level of influence on a child's development.

Both children who referred to home experiences when explaining who they played with or the activities they enjoyed were among the younger participants in the setting (42mths and 48mths). Prior to starting preschool, young children's early gender beliefs are mainly influenced by their experiences within the home and family (Leaper, 2014) and, whilst these beliefs can be challenged by their peers, continued reinforcement at home is likely to ensure that their early understanding of gender norms will persevere (Morawska, 2020).

The participants did not refer to any experiences or knowledge they had gained from their engagement with the wider community where they live. However, the catchment area of the nursery has low levels of mobility within the population (J. G. Consulting, 2016), leading to generations of families living in the same area. According to Hiller and Baudin (2016), population stability usually leads to the reinforcement of community norms due to the low level of new families moving to the area and challenging the community norms. These community norms are then reinforced within the home environment and are conveyed into the nursery environment through the children, which in turn reinforces the settings community of practice (Paechter, 2007; Martin, 2011).

4a.5 Influence of Peers

Within the Estate Community Nursery, one participant (Jason 4yrs) stood out as being involved in multiple occurrences of gender policing and therefore holding a position of power with regard to gender expectations and norms.

Jason (4yrs) participated in many instances of gender policing within the setting. However, it is his role in influencing others that is the focus of this theme. During a conversation with Karl (4yrs 8mths) about a game he had been playing with Jason, he was asked whether he thought Jason would allow a girl to join the activity:

1. Karl NOOO
2. Cathy why do you think Jason would say no
3. Karl Cause (2)

(Extract from 11-06 – 02 – Climbing Frame & Lego - Conversation Transcript)

As can be seen in the extract above, Karl responded loudly “NOOO”, but he was unable or unwilling to explain why. Research shows that children’s adherence to gender norms and in-group biases develop over time (Martin & Ruble, 2010) and this would imply that it could be expected that the older child within a friendship pair would display stronger beliefs regarding who should be allowed to join a game. However, in this example, it is Jason who is 8 months younger than Karl, who has the power to control the situation. This poses the question as to why Karl defers to the younger child in this situation. Jason’s apparent dominance in the setting with regard to gender may be due to the social standing, and therefore power, that he has developed within the nursery. Shehu (2019) explains that age does not necessarily play a role in determining the social status of a child, and therefore the power that they hold within a setting. Rather than age, the self-confidence that a child has along with their pro-social behaviours determines the power within the setting that they hold (Coelho et al., 2017; Sabato & Kogut, 2021).

From this extract, it can be argued that Karl has experienced a reinforcement of hegemonic masculine ideas that it is not appropriate for boys to play with girls (Theimer et al., 2001). Researchers have investigated the social impact of boys playing with girls and found that it impacted their social standing within the setting, specifically with the boys (Coyle et al., 2016; Braun & Davidson, 2017). Alongside the risk to his social standing through playing with girls, in-group bias may also have an impact through a desire to behave in what the other boys deem ‘appropriate’ behaviour for a boy within the setting (Perry et al., 2019). Both the risk to social status within the setting and a desire to be accepted within a child’s gender group can lead to gender segregation within a setting, which produces an environment where children spend more time with their same-gender peers and therefore the gender norms are reinforced.

However, whilst Jason’s power as a gender guardian within the setting was observed through different examples within the data, the female participants were also aware of their peers’ beliefs regarding mixed-gender play.

During a video-stimulated conversation with Amber (4yrs 4mths), she responded that she did not think her friends would be happy if she played with boys.

1. *Cathy* would your (2) would your friends be happy with you if you played with the boys do you think

2. *Amber* ((shook head))

(Extract from 11-06 – 08 – Shop – Conversation Transcript)

Within the extract from the video-stimulated conversation above, Amber was talking about who she played with and who she could play with. The researcher asked Amber how she thought her friends would feel if Amber played with boys, and Amber responded with a quick shake of her head rather than a verbal response. Within this conversation, Amber did not report any specific experiences where other girls had made it clear to her that she should not play with boys, however, she did not have to take time to think before responding.

Amber's experience above is supported by the literature on the role of gender in policing behaviours. Studies have shown that both boys and girls experience gender policing through the reinforcement of gender norms (Ruble et al., 2007; Masters et al., 2021). However, the gender of the child being policed may impact who is policing them. Xiao et al. (2019) found that boys tend to experience more policing and that their behaviour is 'corrected' by both boys and girls, whereas girls tend to only experience policing from other girls. This may be linked to the differing levels of social status and power that are afforded to gender, where girls who engage in masculine behaviours and activities are not judged as harshly, due to the positive connotations of the masculine behaviours (Coyle et al., 2016).

Amber's confident response to the question may be linked to her understanding of the setting norms which she will have developed over her time attending. The impact of time spent in early childhood settings has been shown to raise children's knowledge of gender norms and stereotypes by increasing the time they spend with children of a similar age (Blakemore, 2003). According to Gastaldi et al. (2019), this growth in gender norm knowledge, may be linked to an increase in children's "propensity to imitate" (p518) their peers' behaviour as they get older in order to ensure that they are accepted within the peer group.

As with the analysis of Karl's experience above, the SES of the area may be evident in Amber's knowledge of what the other girls in the setting consider 'acceptable' behaviour. In this case, Amber is clear that it is not acceptable for her to play with boys. However, examining the children's responses to the question, Amber responded non-verbally whilst Karl appeared confident in his verbal response. Amber's non-verbal response to the question raises questions

about whether she felt comfortable answering the question or was unsure how her response would be received. Research by Calarco (2011), found that children from lower SES backgrounds were less likely to demonstrate their agency verbally and more likely to use non-verbal forms of communication when they felt vulnerable in the classroom. This research is supported by the work of Murris (2022), who states that children's agency is influenced by their identity including their gender and social economic status. Returning to the extracts, Murris' work raises the question as to whether Karl felt more able to respond verbally as he has more confidence that his answer will be listened to, compared to Amber, due to his gender.

4a.6 Gendered Environment

Research by Børve and Børve (2017), demonstrates that even when the setting environment is designed to be gender-neutral, children can be observed using it in a gender-segregated way. Some areas can be observed being predominantly used by one gender only and other areas being used by all children but in diverse ways depending on gender. Within the Estate Community Nursery, both boys and girls were observed playing in all of the areas of the indoor and outdoor environment, but usually in single-gender groups. Amber's experience in the observation below (Figure 4a.3), demonstrates the use of gender as a means to control the nursery environment.

Amber (4yrs 4mths) wanted to play in the boat that is set in the garden. There were 3 boys playing in the boat (including Henry 3yrs 9mths) and Amber stood at the entry point looking upset but not stepping into the boat. An adult asked Amber if she was ok and Amber replied that "they won't let me in". As she said this, she pointed to the boys on the boat. Henry responded straight away (before the adult could ask why Amber couldn't get on the boat) "this is for boys only, we are pirates".

The adult replied that everyone can play with the nursery toys and told Amber that she could play - the boys were stood at the bow end of the boat while Amber was stood outside the stern end, the boys were not physically blocking access to the boat.

Amber continued to stand at the stern of the boat and watched the boys playing for a couple of minutes without trying to climb on board. The boys did not acknowledge Amber during this time and continued to play. After watching for a short time, Amber then walked away from the boat looking sad.

Figure 4a.3 – 09-06 – Pirate Ship - Observation

Analysing this interaction, it is important to note that Amber is older than the boys who were playing in the boat, for instance, Henry is 7 months younger than Amber and the boys he was playing with were a similar age to him. Children's in-group gender bias would be expected to get stronger through age and time spent in the setting (Martin et al., 2013; Perry et al., 2019) and this would suggest that Amber would not want to play within close proximity to boys. However, in this case, it appears that Amber is happy to play in the same area as the boys and does not consider their presence to be problematic. It appears, however, to be an issue for the

boys which may be due to them wanting to conform to gender norms so that their behaviour is accepted by other male peers (MacMullin et al., 2020).

An alternative analysis of this observation may be that whilst the boys are younger than Amber, and therefore potentially have less individual power and control over the environment, as a group they are able to dominate the play area (Pietraszewski & German, 2013).

An initial analysis of the interaction may identify that Amber was experiencing policing behaviour and access to the environment was being controlled through the manipulation of play themes to exclude children due to their gender. This form of policing and control behaviour will be examined in section Chapter 54a.7 below.

An alternative analysis of this interaction could be that Henry is engaging in border protection work (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). By stating that “this is for boys only,” Henry was not only telling the practitioner why Amber could not play, he was also reinforcing that only boys could play on the boat to his male peers. Research by Xiao et al. (2019) shows that whilst boys do police girls' behaviour, they are more likely to police other boys ensuring that their male peers learn the ‘correct’ way to be a boy within the setting and what the behaviour expectations are.

During the interaction, Amber appealed to an adult for help in accessing the boat. The adult reminded the children of the nursery policy that the resources were available for all of the children to play with before leaving the children, however, she did not challenge the boy's assertion that:

"this is for boys only, we are pirates"

By not specifically challenging the boys' unspoken claim that only boys can be pirates, the practitioner unintentionally reinforced this gendered belief (Jones & Aubrey, 2019). Frödén (2018), found that practitioners unintentionally reinforce gendered beliefs through their responses to children's behaviour. This may be due to a belief that children are not conscious of gender and therefore do not identify gender as a cause of disputes (Breneselović & Krnjaja, 2016), or it may be due to their own sub-conscious beliefs which are connected to their habitus (Emilson et al., 2016). As well as reinforcing the boys' claim that only boys can be pirates, the practitioner's response may reinforce the message that Amber is receiving about who should be allowed to play in the boat.

During the data collection children were also observed using gender to control access to resources within the environment. Alice (4yrs 5mths) and Annie (3yrs 6mths) were playing with the same resources as two boys:

1. Alice -> Annie ^don't let the boys see^
2. Annie -> Alice ^I won't^
3. Alice -> Annie ^If you do they will take it^

(Extract from 11-06 – Lego Tray – Observation)

Even though the boys were not paying any attention to the girls, Alice appears to take on a teaching role to inform Annie what would happen if the boys saw what they were playing with. This could be explained by the age difference between Alice and Annie which is nearly a year. This age difference could suggest that Alice believes it is her responsibility to explain the gender rules within the setting. This concurs with Martin's (2011) ideas about every early childhood setting being a community of practice where there is specific knowledge that younger children need to learn in order to behave in a gender-appropriate way. In this example, Alice is teaching Annie that boys will take the Lego away from the girls, however, she does not explain why the boys would take the Lego which may be for a variety of reasons.

Observing the play, it was apparent that the children at the Lego table had separated into two groups. The boys are playing at one end of the tray and the girls are at the other end, leaving a gap between them where no one is playing. The distance between the groups of children could be explained through children's in-group bias which leads to gender segregation as children identify that they should not play with children outside of their group (Martin et al., 2013). However, the gap may also be a form of policing if one group believes that it is inappropriate for the other group to be playing due to gender. Research by Blakemore and Centers (2005) identified that Lego was considered a gender-neutral toy by women, but a masculine toy by men. This finding was supported by Fulcher and Hayes (2018), who found that while girls would engage with Lego, boys were more likely to play with it. This could lead to the boys believing that it was not appropriate for the girls to be playing, and therefore left a gap between the two groups so that they did not interact.

4a.7 Manipulating the Play

Research has identified that preschool children reinforce a peer's social status or power within play through the identification of the role they are allowed to take (Sheldon, 1996; Björk-Willén, 2012). For instance, the role of mum is considered to be a high-status role, whilst the role of baby or a pet is considered low-status would be given to a peer that the group does not want to include or who is considered to be too young to participate fully (Björk-Willén, 2012).

This can lead to children manipulating the role-play through the inclusion of characters that do not have any power within the activity.

Whilst previous research has identified the manipulation of roles as a means of reinforcing the power that a peer has in the play, the participants at the Estate Community Nursery could be observed to manipulate their activities to exclude children due to their gender. Returning to Amber's attempts to access the boat in the garden (Figure 4a.3), Henry's statement "*this is for boys only, we are pirates*" can be seen as an attempt to manipulate the boy's role-play to ensure that Amber cannot be included.

Prior to Amber requesting adult help to access the boat, the boys had not identified that they were pretending to be pirates, and it was only when the adult arrived that Henry made the declaration.

Research by Groeneveld et al. (2021) identified that preschool children usually identify pirates as being male and that it is inappropriate for a girl to be a pirate. This belief was evident within the Estate Community Nursery with children being aware of the gender stereotype that only boys can be pirates:

Abigail – "[...] boys are pirates [...]"

The knowledge of this gender stereotype, along with the sequence of events discussed above, supports the view that Henry manipulated the play to ensure that Amber was excluded due to her gender, rather than her status within the setting.

4a.8 Conclusion

Within this chapter, some of the gender experiences of the children at the Estate Community Nursery have been presented through the themes of:

- Reinforcement of the gender binary
- Use of body language
- Influence of family and community
- Influence of peers, and
- Gendered environment
- Manipulating the play

However, the children experienced the reinforcement of gender stereotypes and gender norms on a daily basis, far beyond what could be presented in this chapter. The level of gender policing that the children experienced may be linked to the area where the nursery is based,

and the children live. As discussed earlier, Hiller and Baudin (2016) identified that a stable population can lead to stronger community norms through generational re-enactment and reinforcement of them. The Estate Community Nursery catchment is an area of low SES and a very stable population. A link between SES and family gender beliefs has shown that families in areas of lower SES are more likely to reinforce traditional gender roles (Marks et al., 2009). Therefore, a combination of low SES and population stability in the nursery catchment area, means that the children are more likely to be expected to adhere to traditional gender stereotypes and roles within the community. This was apparent in the children's experiences of gender policing which continue to reinforce the gender norms and gender segregation within the nursery.

Examining the age of the children who were undertaking most of the policing behaviours, there is not a clear picture. Whilst the older children tended to take more of a lead in reinforcing gender stereotypes and norms, this was not seen across all of the data. This may be due to the impact of Covid-19 and the associated nursery closure. Due to lockdown measures, the majority of the participants had a delayed start to their time in the setting and did not have an older cohort of peers to reinforce the setting norms for them. All but the two youngest participants (Rachel and Annie), had attended the setting for three terms and would have developed an understanding of the setting's gender norms together rather than learning from their older peers as they joined.

Finally, it is clear from the extracts shared, that the male participants undertook the majority of the policing behaviours. However, the girls were aware of gender norms and did share this knowledge with each other.

The next sub-chapter will set out the story of the children's experiences at the University Daycare setting.

Chapter 4b The Story of Children's Experience at the University Day Care

4b.1 Setting the Scene

The University Daycare is a large day nursery which is based on a university campus in the south of England. The nursery offers 108 places, per session (five hours AM or PM), split across four age groups from birth to five years, and is open 50 weeks a year. The setting mainly caters for children of staff and students at the university, but also offers places for local residents where sessions are available.

According to the 2021 census (Office for National Statistics, 2022), the nursery is based in an area of above average socio-economic status (Appendix 4), and the majority of children attending the setting, who are not the children of students, have two working parents. As previously stated, the nursery is based on a university campus, the university is ranked within the top 100 universities in the world and attracts students from around the world. This leads to a highly diverse local population (Appendix 5 for 2021 census data on country of birth) which is reflected in the nursery attendance. In 2021, 30 different languages were represented within the families attending the nursery. Christ et al. (2014) states that an increased level of ethnic diversity within a population may have an impact on the beliefs and norms of that population, due to the difference in cultural beliefs that are integrated. Details about the setting environment and a sketch of the preschool environment can be seen in Appendix 8.

Twenty-four children were given consent to participate, and 23 children gave assent. Eight of the participants came from families who identified their ethnicity as 'other than British'. These eight participants were from families who identified as:

- Other European – four participants
- Asian – two participants
- Arab – one participant
- Caribbean – one participant

Details about the participants' ages and self-identified gender can be seen in Appendix 9.

Extended sections from the transcripts that the extracts in this chapter were taken from can be found in Appendix 18.

4b.2 Influence of Peers

Bronfenbrenner (1979) states that children's peers exert a similar level of influence on a child's social development as their family and home environment do. This underlines the important

role that preschool children play in reinforcing gender stereotypes and norms through their interactions with each other. Within the University Day Care nursery, the influence that peers exert on each other was identified in different contexts.

During early observations of the children playing within the preschool, it was observed that there was a mixed-gender friendship group, comprising nine children, that held a level of social status within the preschool environment. During a video-stimulated conversation, one of the members of this group referred to them “*two of the crew*” and then discussed her role within the group.

1.	Orla		<i>And I’m the leader and Boy V’s part of the crew and Boy R’s part of the crew and Boy E’s part of the crew</i>
2.	Cathy		<i>Any other girls who are part of the crew?</i>
3.	Orla		<i>Umm,</i>
4.	Megan	<i>Looking at Orla</i>	<i>Girl O?</i>
5.	Orla		<i>Megan,</i>
6.	Megan		<i>The other Girl O</i>
7.	Cathy		<i>The other Girl O?</i>
8.	Orla	<i>Spoke at</i>	<i>Yeah, the other Girl O</i>
9.	Megan	<i>the same time</i>	<i>Yeah</i>
10.	Orla		<i>And Ethan, Scott, Gareth</i>

(Extract from 05-08 – 09 & 10 – Conversation transcript)

In this first extract, Orla (4yrs 10mths) explained that she was the leader of “*the crew*”, and she went on to identify some of the other members of the group which included other girls and some boys. Megan (4yrs 10mths) is one of the group members that Orla identified, however, she looked to Orla for confirmation when she suggested a member of the group (line 4). This could suggest that Orla holds a high level of social power within the group, as her knowledge is deferred to by other children. This concurs with Nærland & Martinsen’s (2011) findings that preschool children accede to peers who are viewed as more knowledgeable, as a means of strengthening their own social status within the group.

Later in the conversation with Orla and Megan, the influence that Orla exerts on the members of ‘the crew’ was raised.

11. Orla	<i>Well, yeah, but if a boy asked to play in my crew, with a different bit of the crew, I think the crew would say I don't know ask the leader</i>
12. Cathy	<i>Ok</i>
13. Orla	<i>But I don't know what the leader was called so,</i>
14. Megan	<i>You're the Leader!</i>
15. Orla	<i>So they would say Orla's the leader</i>
16. Cathy	<i>Oh, ok so you think they would ask you to see if somebody else could play? And would you let another boy play?</i>
17. Orla	<i>Yeah (slowly)</i>
18. Cathy	<i>Or does it depend on the boy?</i>
19. Orla	<i>It depends on the boy!</i>

(Extract from 05-08 – 09 & 10 – Conversation transcript)

In line 11, Orla identifies that if someone from outside of the crew wished to play with a member of the group, she believes that the others would check with the leader. This would then enable her to reinforce or control who she believes it is appropriate for them to play with (lines 16-19). Research has identified that boys are more likely to take on the role of gender enforcer than girls (Xiao et al., 2019; Skočajić et al., 2020). Therefore, it could be considered unusual for Orla (female) to hold the role of gender enforcer, especially in a mixed-gender friendship group. This difference could be due to the SES of the population that attends the setting. Research by Hill (2002) identified that higher SES families are more likely to hold gender-equitable beliefs and to encourage their daughters to be assertive when they are outside of the home.

Orla's role in policing which members of the group played with, was also highlighted in a video-stimulated conversation with Gareth (4yrs 6mths).

1. Gareth	<i>Orla doesn't want the boys to play with girls</i>
2. Cathy	<i>Ok, is Orla your friend?</i>
3. Gareth	<i>NO</i>
4. Gareth	<i>She's Boy R and Boy E's friend</i>
5. Cathy	<i>What would Orla do if you played with a girl?</i>
6. Gareth	<i>She wouldn't talk to me</i>

(Extract from 10-08 – 18 – Conversation transcript)

Within this extract, Gareth explains that Orla does not want boys and girls to play together and that she would reinforce the inappropriateness of the action by refusing to speak to the children concerned. This concurs with research Mayeza (2018), who identified that primary-aged children use different forms of exclusion to reinforce their peers' gender-appropriate behaviour.

The three children included in the extracts presented above are of similar ages. Whilst Gareth is 4 months younger than Orla and Megan, they have all spent over a year in the preschool room and according to Martin (2011) will have learnt how to perform gender within the setting, but will have also influenced the culture of gender within the setting.

The extract above, from the conversation with Gareth, suggests that Orla holds a high status within the setting and uses the power that her status provides to reinforce the gender norms and behaviours that she deems appropriate. However, it could also illustrate that other children within the preschool are aware of the power that Orla holds and her views on who is an appropriate peer to play with based on their gender.

During an image elicitation game with Scott (4yrs 11mths), Gareth (4yrs 6mths) and Jared (3yrs 2mths), the influence of older peers was observed.

- | | | |
|----|--------|-------------------------------------|
| 1. | Cathy | Is it a man or lady fixing the car? |
| 2. | Gareth | MAN |
| 3. | Cathy | Can ladies fix cars? |
| 4. | Gareth | NO |
| 5. | Scott | NO |
| 6. | Jared | (looks at Scott & Gareth) (3) ^no^ |

(Extract from 18 & 23 & 06 – Picture Task)

Throughout the game, Gareth responded firmly if it was suggested that a non-stereotypical person could undertake a role. When the image of a mechanic fixing a car was turned over, Gareth responded loudly that mechanics are men. When there was a pause for Jared to respond, he looked at Gareth and Scott while he responded that women could not be mechanics. However, whilst his answer was the same as Gareth and Scott's, his tone was quiet and tentative which could imply that he is not confident in his response or does not fully accept that he has given the right answer. Jared's observation of Gareth and Scott prior to answering links to Bussey and Bandura's (1999) social cognitive theory of gender development. Bussey and Bandura's theory sets out that children learn by observing their older peers and watching how people respond to them; if their peer receives a positive response the younger child will imitate the older child and if the older child receives a negative response, then the younger child will assume that the behaviour was inappropriate.

In this extract there is a significant age gap between the youngest participant (3yrs 2mths) and the oldest (4yrs 11mths), additionally, Jared was new to the preschool room and had only been attending the setting for 2 months. Martin (2011) might identify Jared as a child who still needs to learn the setting norms and what it means to be a boy within the University Day Care

setting. This could explain why he was closely watching the older, more experienced preschool children so that he could provide a 'setting appropriate' answer to the question.

4b.3 Coercive Behaviour

The importance of peer acceptance and inclusion for young children, both socially and developmentally, has long been identified by researchers (Coelho et al., 2017; Shehu, 2019). This desire leads to preschool children adjusting their behaviour in response to the coercive behaviours and reactions that they experience. Within the University Day Care setting, the children's desire for peer acceptance and inclusion within the play was observed on many occasions. The examples set out in this section focus on two instances where children were perceived to use different methods to try and gain inclusion or entrance into ongoing play activities.

In this first example Polly (3yrs 10mths) was playing with the Magnatiles and Jake (4yrs 5mths) was trying to join in.

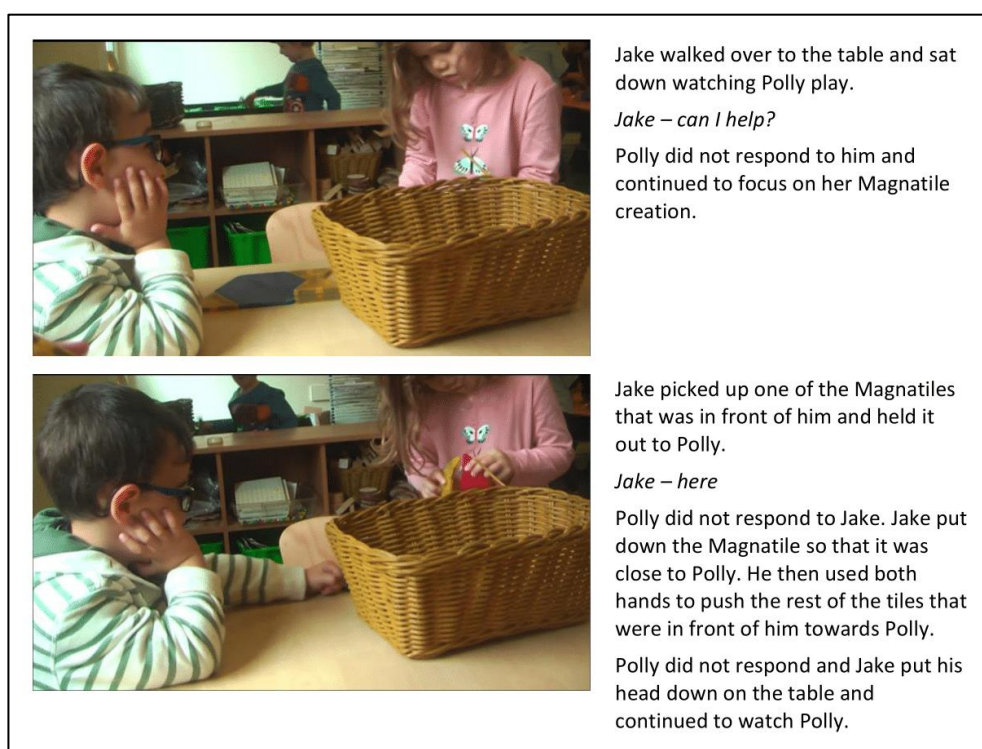


Figure 4b.1 – Extract from 06-08 - 03 & 07 & 01 & 11 - Magnatiles – Video

Jake initially attempted to be included in the play by asking to join in. When this did not work, he tried to join in by passing a Magnatile piece to Polly. When this approach did not aid his inclusion, Jake pushed all the resources away from himself then put his head down and watched (Figure 4b.1).

Jake's use of an offering as an aid to inclusion is supported by Bateman and Church (2017) who identified that children use objects as a "gift" to smooth their inclusion into play or to initiate play. However, this method did not work for Jake. His frustration at not being allowed to join the play can be seen through his actions, pushing away the Magnatiles and putting his head on the table, rather than choosing to play with the Magnatiles on his own.

During a video-stimulated conversation with Polly about this observation, she initially only identified a female peer as playing alongside her with the Magnatiles, even though Jake was visible on the screen.

1.	Cathy	Who else was playing with the Magnatiles with you?
2.	Polly	Chloe!
3.	Cathy	Chloe was playing with you was she? Was anyone else playing with you?
4.	Polly	Pointing at the screen Look
5.	Cathy	Yes, that is Chloe playing with you isn't it She made some pyramids
6.	Cathy	So Chloe was playing with you, was anyone else playing with the Magnatiles with you?
7.	Polly	Umm, me!

(Extract from 09-08 – 03 – Conversation transcript)

It was only when Polly was asked directly, if there were any boys playing as well, that she identified the two boys who were sitting at the table. The researcher then asked Polly who she was sharing the Magnatiles with.

1.	Cathy	who were you sharing them with?
2.	Polly	Chloe
3.	Cathy	you were sharing them with Chloe were you?
4.	Cathy	why weren't you sharing with the boys?
5.	Polly	cos, cos, they SNATCH THEM

(Extract from 09-08 – 03 – Conversation transcript)

Polly explained that she was sharing them with Chloe (3yrs 4mths), but that she did not share them with the boys because "they SNATCH THEM". This extract could support the analysis that whilst Jake was trying to gain access to the play, his desire for inclusion was ignored by Polly due to her belief that he would take the pieces that she was using. As previously discussed, Jake's use of an object as a means of gaining inclusion is a common method that children draw on; however, the effectiveness of this method depends on the openness of the approached peer to accepting the gift giver into the play, and this may depend on their beliefs about the value the child brings to the activity (Bateman & Church, 2017).

Polly's statement, "they SNATCH THEM", could be seen to demonstrate gendered beliefs about how boys play. Her raised tone when she says 'SNATCH THEM' suggests that this is a firmly held belief. Research by Bennet et al. (2020) suggests that children who attend an early childhood setting from an early age, tend to develop strong stereotyped beliefs from a younger age than their peers who did not attend an early childhood setting until over the age of three. Polly has attended the University Day Care setting since she was approximately 1 year old, so her intense stereotyped beliefs are in line with Bennet et al.'s (2020) findings.

In the second example of children demonstrating a desire to be included, Tate (3yrs 7mths) was attempting to gain acceptance from a group of boys who were playing at a sensory tray (Figure 4b.2).

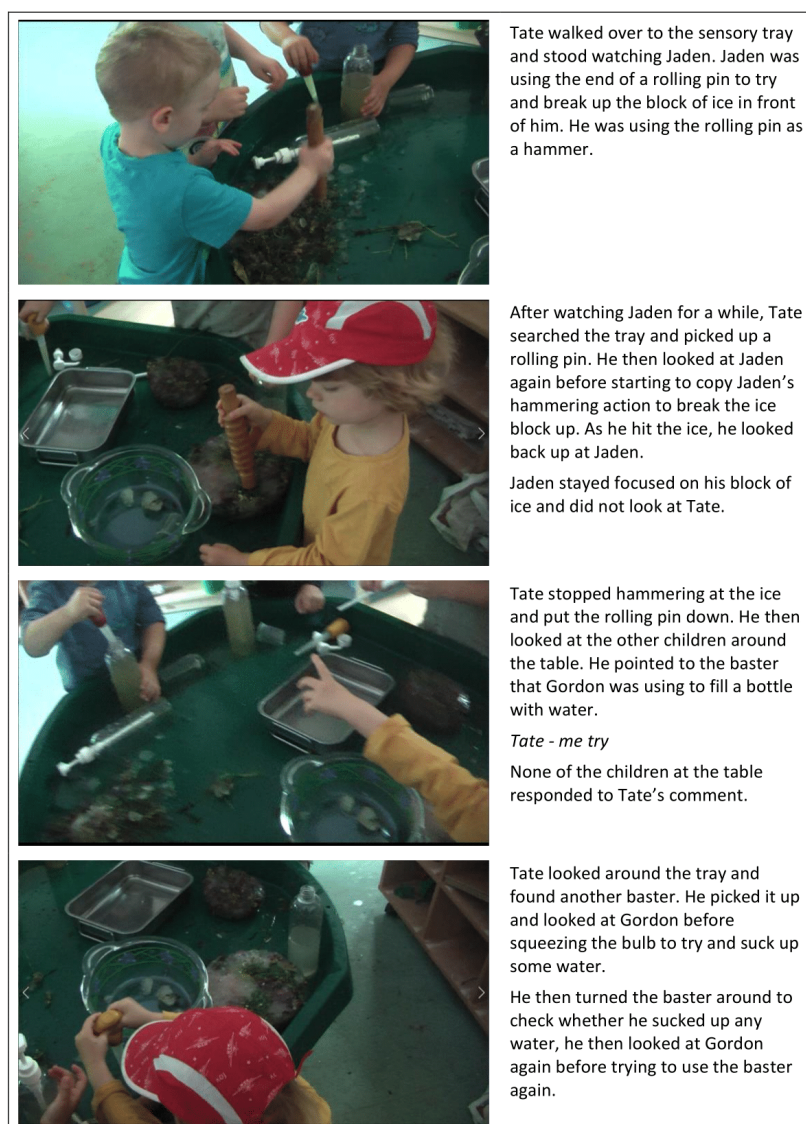


Figure 4b.2 – Tate attempting to join ice play
(Extract from 11-08 – 12 & 04 & 20 – Ice Play – Video Transcript)

During this observation, Tate was observing the other children's play and imitating it as a means of making a connection. This method has been described by Gastaldi et al. (2019), as a method that is more often used by boys as a means of presenting themselves as similar to the peer they are imitating.

While watching the video-recorded observation with Tate, he explained that:

I wanted play with the boys, I'm boy

Tate is relatively new to the University Day Care nursery and has not yet developed a friendship group. During this activity, Tate appears to use imitation as a means of presenting himself as part of the 'boys' group' in an attempt to be accepted as a boy within the setting. The desire to be seen as a preschool boy within the setting is supported by Hellman et al. (2014) who set out that children are required by their peers to adapt their behaviour and to learn what is expected before they are accepted into their gender group.

Drawing on work by Paechter (2007), Martin (2011) sets out how new children in a setting are often not included in gendered groups until they have learnt how to behave in an appropriately gendered way, based on the setting norms. She explains that these can include whether the new child is able to identify their own gender, whether they choose appropriate activities and peers to play with and demonstrates an understanding that an opposite gender child cannot join in their play. Observing Tate within the setting, whilst he demonstrates a desire to be included as a boy within the setting, it could appear that the other boys have not yet determined that he knows how to be a boy within the culture of the setting.

4b.4 Gendered Environment

The impact that practitioners have on children's gender experiences within an early childhood setting has been highlighted by Hilliard and Liben (2010), who found that practitioners unintentionally reinforce gendered beliefs and behaviours through their verbal and non-verbal actions. While playing in the garden, Gareth experienced gender being used as a means to control access to an area of the setting environment and turned to an adult for support (Figure 4b.3).

Gareth (4yrs 6mths) walked over to an adult with a sad look on his face. After getting her attention, Gareth pointed over to the sand tray where there were three girls playing on the floor and said "Orla (4yrs 10mths) said no boys allowed". The member of staff double checked with him what he had just said and then turned her attention away from him without responding.

Figure 4b.3 – 12-08 - No boys allowed - 18 & 09

Examining this interaction, Gareth had attempted to play in the sand tray where there was a group of three girls, including Orla, playing, and when he was blocked from playing he attempted to gain adult support.

As previously presented (section 4b.2), Orla holds a strong position as a gender enforcer within the setting. In this interaction, she was playing with two female peers, and her claim that the sand tray was just for girls may have served two aims. The first aim could be to reinforce her role of gender enforcer with her peers, whilst the second aim could be to remind both the other girls and Gareth, that it was not appropriate to play with opposite-gender peers. Xiao et al. (2019) identified that children who spent more time around gender-enforcer peers, held stronger gender beliefs and therefore tended to interact more with same-gender peers. They posited that this occurs due to the gender enforcers acting as strong role models or as holding a higher social status.

Research by Skočajić et al. (2020), identified that boys are more likely to undertake the role of gender enforcer than girls, so it is interesting to note that within the University Day Care setting, one of the strongest gender enforcers is female. Drawing on links between Orla's role of gender enforcer, and her social position within the preschool environment; it could be posited that Orla's high social status within the University Day Care positions her as an appropriate role model for gender behaviour, and therefore, her role of gender enforcer is accepted.

During the data collection at the University Day Care, the use of gender to control access to resources was also identified. The following extract was taken from a video-recorded observation of Polly and Jake playing with the letter tiles in the garden (Figure 4b.4). Jake (4yrs 5mths) and Polly (3yrs 10mths) were sat on a mat playing with the letter tiles, identifying the letters they recognised.



Figure 4b.4 – Polly & Jake playing with the letter tiles
(Extract from 05-08 – 03 & 05 – Garden – Video Transcript)

After a few minutes of playing independently with the letter shapes, Polly turned towards Jake and put her hands onto the letter tile he was looking at to stop him. She then told him that the tile was “mine” before returning to the tile she had been playing with. Jake took this opportunity to slide the tile closer to him, however, Polly noticed and turned back to Jake with a cross look on her face and took the tile from him. Jake continued to watch Polly but did not touch the tiles, for a few about 30 seconds, before leaving the activity.

An initial analysis of this incident could suggest that Polly does not want to share the resources with Jake because she is playing with them (Engelmann et al., 2013). However, during a video-stimulated conversation with Polly which included this video observation, Polly explained why she had taken the letter tiles from Jake.

- | | |
|----------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Cathy | what's happening here? |
| 2. Polly | he can't have them |
| 3. Cathy | why can't Jake have them? |
| 4. Polly | HE'S a boy and BOYS DON'T DO LETTERS |

(Extract from 09-08 – 03 – Conversation Transcript)

The video-stimulated conversation with Polly enabled a more accurate analysis of the incident as Polly was able to explain what had occurred from her perspective as a participant.

From Polly's explanation, the role that gender played can be identified, as Polly felt that the letter tiles were only appropriate for girls to play with. Therefore, when Jake continued to attempt to play with them, it could be inferred that Polly felt that he was disregarding gender norms and that he needed to be made aware that he could not play with the tiles. Engelmann et al. (2013), who examined children's sharing behaviour, identified that preschool children use gender to identify who they should share resources with as they are more likely to share resources with an in-group peer than an out-group peer.

Looking at the ages of the children involved in this interaction, Jake (4yrs 5mths) is older than Polly (3yrs 10mths), however, this does not appear to be a factor in who is policed or who is undertaking the policing behaviour. Indeed, Jake only appears to instigate a subtle challenge to Polly stopping him from playing with the letter tiles, and when that attempt fails, he leaves the activity rather than try to continue to gain access. Due to the impact of Covid-19 on the setting, both Jake and Polly have been members of the preschool room for the same period of time, this could explain why Polly is able to control Jake's access to the resources, even though she is 7 months younger than him. As they have both attended for the same length of time, their knowledge of community norms could be expected to be at a similar level. Therefore, Jake may accept Polly as a similar-age peer, with the same level of standing in terms of responsibility for reinforcing community gender norms (Paechter, 2007).

4b.5 Verbal Control

Preschool children are competent users of verbal language to communicate their thoughts and feelings (Jug & Vilar, 2015). Additionally, Xiao et al. (2019) highlight children's use of language to control their peers' behaviour. During the image elicitation activity, the participants' use of verbal control was demonstrated on several occasions.

During an image elicitation game with Megan (4yrs 10mths) and Orla (4yrs 10mths), an image of a firefighter was turned over and the girls were asked whether they thought it was a girl or a boy.

1.	Megan	Girl
2.	Orla	BOY!

In response to Megan’s identification of the firefighter as a girl, Orla raised her tone to reinforce her belief that the firefighter was male. When Orla was asked why she thought the firefighter was a boy, she replied:

cos firefighters, FIREMAN ARE BOYS

Orla’s raised tone, in both her original response and her explanation, suggests the strength of her belief that firefighters are male. By raising her tone, she was also ensuring that Megan was clear about the appropriate answer without specifically saying that Megan’s response was wrong. This analysis is supported by Dahl and Tran (2016), who identified preschool children’s ability to understand the meaning attached to the use of tone by others, to reinforce the meaning of a verbal message.

However, rather than relying on the tone of voice or the force of their response to correct a peer, some participants told their peers that their response was wrong. In the following example, Gareth (4yrs 6mths), Scott (4yrs 11mths) and Jared (3yrs 2mths) were playing the image elicitation game, when the researcher turned over an image of a nurse and asked them to identify the nurse’s gender.

1.	Scott	boy nurse
2.	Gareth	NO, it’s a GIRL!

When Scott responded that the image was of a boy, Gareth quickly responded that he was wrong and that it was a girl. Gareth went on to explain that he knows that it is an image of a girl, because:

only girls are nurses and boys are the doctors

During this interaction, it is possible that Gareth is drawing on his knowledge of gender stereotypes to support his identification of the gender of the person shown. He is also explaining, to Scott, why Scott’s answer was wrong; Baker et al. (2016) state that children use their knowledge of gender stereotypes to help them identify a person’s gender based on their occupation or the activity that the person is engaging in.

Taking the age of the participants in this game into account, Gareth may also have been trying to ensure that Jared, who is one of the youngest children in the preschool room, is exposed to

prevalent gender norms; so that he can develop into a ‘proper preschool boy’ as suggested by Martin (2011).

A different form of verbal control was used by Ethan in the following extract. During an image elicitation game with Ethan (4yrs 6mths) and Tate (3yrs 7mths), Ethan provided a verbal prompt to encourage Tate to provide a specific response. During the game, an image of a chef was uncovered, and the boys were asked whether the chef was male or female.

Ethan quickly responded that the chef in the image was male, however, Tate was slower to respond. Ethan prompted Tate, by saying:

1.	Ethan	<i>b b b b</i>
2.	Tate	<i>ummmm, b is for ball</i>

Tate provided an inappropriate, but understandable, response to Ethan’s prompting. However, when he was asked again about the gender of the chef, he replied

ummmm boy (looking at Ethan)

His tone of voice for this response was uncertain, and he looked at Ethan for confirmation that his answer was acceptable.

The use of prompting as a means of controlling a peer’s response draws on participants’ prior experience of adults isolating the initial sound in words as a phonics teaching strategy (Brown, 2014). This can be identified through Tate’s initial response to Ethan:

ummmm, b is for ball

This suggests that prompting is a technique that children learn is effective in encouraging the ‘correct’ answer to a question and Ethan’s use of prompting was to encourage Tate to respond in an appropriate manner to the question. By encouraging Tate to respond that the image showed a male figure, Ethan was reinforcing a gendered belief that chefs are male. Tate’s deference to Ethan, demonstrated by looking at Ethan for confirmation, suggests that he may believe that Ethan holds a higher level of knowledge about this topic than Tate does. This positions Ethan as a gender role model for Tate to emulate. Blakemore et al. (2008) explains how younger children within a setting are drawn to older peers who act as role models for appropriate behaviour.

Whilst the three extracts, presented above, demonstrate the use of different verbal methods to control peer responses, they all involved same-gender peer groups. The literature suggests

that girls are more likely to be policed by other girls, whilst boys experience policing from both boys and girls (Skočajić et al., 2020). The final example of verbal control presented in this section occurred in the garden and included both girls and a boy (Figure 4b.5).

Orla (4yrs 10mths) and Megan (4yrs 10mths) were stood at the slide end of the climbing frame. Aaron (3yrs 5mths) climbed up the ramp and started to walk towards them. Orla spotted him and said "No Boys!" She then looked at Megan and said "look, it's a boy, no boys allowed!" Megan replied "yeah, no boys". Orla then said "boys are smelly and silly." Orla and Megan turned their backs on Aaron and continued their conversation. Aaron stood on the bridge watching the girls for a moment, when the girls turned their backs on him, he turned around and went back down the ramp.

Figure 4b.5 – 02-08 - Climbing frame - 09 & 10

In this observation, Orla directed her feelings about Aaron joining the girls on the climbing frame to Megan. However, by looking at Aaron when she made her comment, she ensured that he also heard that his presence on the climbing frame with the girls was not allowed. Hilliard and Liben (2010) state that children often apply negative characteristics to children who are not included within their in-group bias, in this case, Orla describes boys (out-group) as "smelly and silly". By using this language, she reinforces the belief that children who are not part of her in-group, are different in a negative way. This choice of language is designed to separate Orla and Megan into one group that has positive implications, and Aaron into a second, lower-status group.

Orla and Megan's comments lead to Aaron standing still on the climbing frame, rather than continuing forward towards the slide. However, from this observation, it appears that it was a combination of verbal and non-verbal communication, that caused Aaron to turn around and leave the climbing frame and not just the verbal comments. However, Orla's comments will have reinforced the in-group and out-group biases that the other children may hold.

As previously stated, the literature suggests that generally girls only police other girls (Skočajić et al., 2020). In this observation, the policing was undertaken by Orla (female) and was specifically aimed at Aaron (male) in order to stop him from playing on the climbing frame. A few studies have identified that, in general, boys experience more policing and therefore will experience policing from girls (Ruble et al., 2007; Xiao et al., 2019) which could explain Orla policing Aaron. However, the age difference between Orla (4yrs 10mths) and Aaron (3yrs 5mths) may explain Aaron's response to the policing, and therefore reinforce that it is appropriate for Orla to use verbal language to control her peers' behaviour and access to the environment. The age gap of 17 months, could mean that Orla sees her role as one of the older preschool children, as teaching the younger preschool children about community gender norms and helping them to become proper preschool children (Martin, 2011). Whilst Aaron, as one of the younger members of the preschool room, may accept the policing behaviour from

Orla, as she holds a higher status within the preschool room due to her age (Nærlund & Martinsen, 2011).

4b.6 Influence of Home & Environment

Preschool children's earliest exposure to ideas about gender norms occurs within their home environment (Mesman & Groeneveld, 2018). From their earliest experiences, young children encounter gendered beliefs and language which shape their habitus, the sub-conscious beliefs that they hold about the world around them and their place within it.

Drawing on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological model, whilst parents and siblings have the strongest influence on a child's gender development, the community in which the child lives also exerts a degree of influence on their development. This is through the child's observations and interactions with other members of the community which reinforce community gender norms and beliefs.

The impact that children's experiences have on their beliefs about gender norms was identifiable in discussions that took place during the image elicitation activity. During one of the image elicitation games involving Megan and Orla, Megan drew on her experience outside of the setting to justify her response to an image. When asked whether the firefighter in the image was a boy or girl, Megan responded "girl" and Orla responded "boy". The researcher then asked Orla why she thought the firefighter was a boy and then reworded Orla's answer to check her understanding. Before Orla was able to respond to the researcher, Megan replied:

no, I've seen a firefighter that's a girl!

(Extract from 09 & 10 – Picture Task)

In this conversation, Megan drew on a prior experience of seeing a female firefighter to justify her response to both Orla and the researcher. Whilst Orla was confident in her belief that firefighters are always male (gender norm), Megan has developed a counter-stereotypical belief that girls can be firefighters through her previous experience of meeting a female firefighter. This may be explained by Martin and Halverson's (1981) explanation of gender schema which states that children develop gender beliefs based on their experience of gender. They go on to explain that children refine or adjust their gender beliefs as they develop greater knowledge about gender norms and possibilities through further experiences.

The role that children's home experience plays in their identification of gender was also demonstrated during an image elicitation game with Aisha (3yrs 8mths) and Jake (4yrs 5mths). During the game, an image of an athlete was turned over and Aisha and Jake were asked

whether the person running was male or female. Aisha identified that the athlete was a lady and when she was asked why she thought it was a lady, Aisha said:

“cos she’s got that hair (pointing to the runner’s hair)”

The researcher confirmed that the athlete had very short hair, and Aisha explained:

“my mummy’s got very short hair and she’s still my mummy”

Many of the participants at the University Day Care identified that girls have long hair and that boys have short hair:

Polly – “that one’s a boy, cos, he’s got short hair”

Jake – “girl, she’s got long hair.”

However, Aisha’s mum chooses to keep her hair very short, therefore when Aisha looked at the athlete, she noticed that the athlete’s hair was the same as her mum’s. This difference may be due to Aisha’s heritage as her family’s ethnic background is Caribbean. As the only participant whose family identifies as Caribbean, or other black ethnicity, Aisha has been exposed to different hairstyles and hair norms through her home experiences. The European Institute for Gender Equality (2020b) highlights that gender, and therefore gender norms, are a social construct which varies according to the cultural environment. Whilst Aisha is attending a British nursery and is exposed to the gender norms within the area that she lives in, her home environment will reflect her parents’ cultural upbringing and the gender beliefs that they developed as children within a different cultural environment.

During a video-stimulated conversation with Orla (4yrs 10mths) and Megan (4yrs 10mths), where they had watched a recording of Megan pretending to make nail polish in the sand tray, the question of who wears nail polish was posed.

- | | | |
|----|-------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. | Cathy | do boys wear fingernail polish? |
| 2. | Megan | yeah (laughs) |
| 3. | Orla | boy F does! (Boy F is Orla’s brother) |
| 4. | Cathy | boy F doesn’t does he? |
| 5. | Cathy | what colour does Boy F like? |
| 6. | Orla | he just likes pale |

(Extract from 13-08 – 09 & 10 – Conversation transcript)

Megan responded to the question with a laugh which suggests that while she is happy with the idea of boys wearing nail polish, she finds the idea funny. Conversely, Orla answers that her brother wears nail polish (line 3) and that he likes pale nail polish colours (line 6). In this

interaction, Orla uses her brother as an example to confirm that boys are allowed to wear nail polish. However later in the conversation when the girls are asked whether Ethan (4yrs 6mths) who appeared in the video observation with Megan could wear nail polish, Orla did not respond.

The difference in Orla's responses, that it is ok for her brother to wear nail polish, but no response when asked about Ethan, suggests that it is possible that the age of the boy concerned may affect whether she believes it is acceptable for a boy to wear nail polish. This analysis is supported by a comment from Scott (4yrs 11mths) who explained that his younger sister was visiting preschool and that:

"she doesn't know how to be a preschool girl"

Hellman et al. (2014) set out that preschool children have different expectations for the behaviour of their peers compared to younger children. This leads to the children drawing a distinction between 'babies' and 'big preschoolers', with younger children not being expected to understand what it means to be a preschool boy or girl in terms of gender-appropriate behaviour. From this perspective, it is possible that Orla believes it is acceptable for her brother who is under 3yrs old to wear nail polish, whilst Ethan who is older would be expected to understand the gender norms around who wears nail polish.

4b.7 Manipulating the Play

There is little research that specifically explores children's use of manipulation as a means of controlling access to play. Björk-Willén (2012) identified how preschool children reinforce social standing through the allocation of roles within their role play, with different roles being considered higher status than others. Within this research, the theme of manipulating play examines children's use of play manipulation as a means of excluding children from play due to their gender.

Within the University Day Care setting, the use of manipulation was identified on two occasions. The first occasion that was identified was during a video-recorded observation of Chloe (3yrs 4mths) playing in role play kitchen in the preschool room with Ami (3yrs 3mths) and Mary (3yrs 1mth) (Figure 4b.6). During the observation, Chloe and her friends prepared some pretend food and talked to each other. At one point early on in the observation, Zack (3yrs 11mths) joined the girls in the role play kitchen and picked up the teapot.

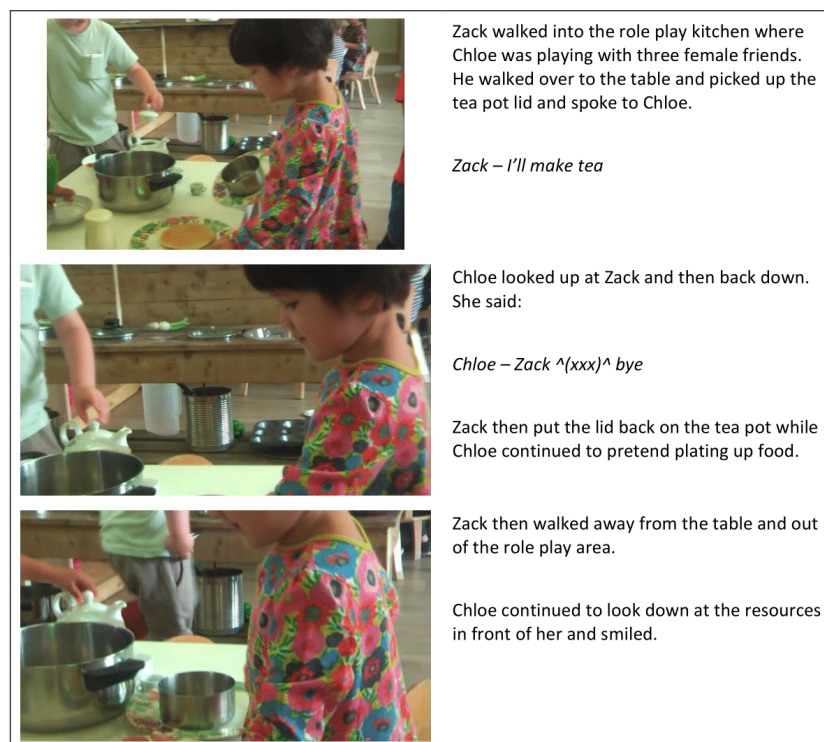


Figure 4b.6 – The daddies are on holiday
(Extract from 09-08 – 11 – Role Play – Video transcript)

During a follow-up video-stimulated conversation with Chloe, she identified that the other girls in the role play kitchen were being:

mummy, mummy, mummy, mummy

Chloe pointed to each girl that she could see, or that she knew was involved, as she said “mummy”. The researcher then asked whether there were any daddies, and Chloe replied:

ummm on holiday

Later in the conversation when Zack had entered the play, Chloe explained:

- | | |
|-----------|--|
| 1. Cathy | <i>is he playing with you or did he do something else?</i> |
| 2. Chloe | <i>he's a DADDY</i> |
| 3. Cathy | <i>is he a daddy, is he?</i> |
| 4. Cathy | <i>is he playing with you or did he do something else?</i> |
| 5. Chloe | <i>all the daddies on holiday</i> |
| 6. Cathy | <i>all the daddies are on holiday?</i> |
| 7. Cathy | <i>so should he be in the role-play house?</i> |
| 8. Chloe | <i>NO</i> |
| 9. Cathy | <i>no? (2) where should he be?</i> |
| 10. Chloe | <i>ON HOLIDAY</i> |

(Extract from 10-08 – 11 – Conversation transcript)

By positioning Zack in the role of a daddy in the play, Chloe was able to exclude him from the role play area under the guise that he was supposed to be on holiday and therefore he should not be in the house. In this example of children manipulating the play, the role of daddy was

used as a means of justifying the exclusion of a child from the role play area based on their gender.

The allocation of a traditional male role as a means of excluding an opposite-gender peer from the play was also identified in the second example of children manipulating the play.

Aisha (3yrs 8mths) and Ethan (4yrs 6mths) were playing with another girl on the climbing frame. Ethan was daddy, the other girl was mummy and Aisha was their little girl. Mummy told Aisha to do her homework and then turned to Ethan and said "Darling, can you go to work?" Ethan said "yes" and climbed down the ramp. Aisha looked up and said "mum makes me do all the work!" Aisha then focused back on her drawing while Ethan said "I'm going to work", he climbed onto a bike and rode off.

Ethan continued to ride his bike around the garden before stopping to play with some other friends and did not return to the climbing frame.

Figure 4b.7 – 12-08 - Mummy and daddy - 19 & 01

During this observation, Ethan had been allocated the role of dad, whilst Aisha was the daughter and a female peer had taken on the role of mum. Once the roles were established and the three children were playing, Ethan was asked whether he could go to work. He agreed and left the climbing frame before climbing onto a bike and riding off. Aisha and her friend continued their game of mother and child on the climbing frame for about 10 minutes before moving over to play elsewhere in the garden (Figure 4b.7).

Within this play interaction, Ethan was initially included in the role play and was allocated the role of dad. According to Björk-Willén (2012), the adult roles of mum and dad are considered to be higher status roles than that of a child, however, in this instance, the role of dad was used as a means to exclude Ethan from the role play. Once he had accepted the role of dad, Ethan was asked to go to work, thus encouraging him to leave the climbing frame where Aisha and her friend were playing. Ethan then climbed down from the climbing frame and confirmed that he was doing as asked, before riding away on the bike.

As with the previous instance of manipulation, the male role was allocated to a boy and used by the girls as a means of excluding the boy from the role play game without directly telling them that they could not play.

Examining both instances of manipulation, the children who manipulated the play were younger than the child who they managed to exclude. In both instances the excluded child was allocated the role of a male parent, as previously discussed, the parental roles are usually considered to hold a higher status than that of a child within role play. Positioning a peer in a lower-status role, for instance, a child or pet would enable the child who takes a parental role the ability to control the play. However, children are less likely to desire a lower-status role within the game. This may be why, in the two instances of manipulation, the unwanted peer

has been given a traditional male role and the play has then been manipulated so that they are excluded based on their role. As the parental figures are high-status roles, the child who is identified as 'dad' is unlikely to refuse the role and therefore in these two instances, the younger child is then able to manipulate their older, more experienced peer.

4b.8 Chapter Summary

Within this chapter, some of the gender experiences of the children at the University Day Care have been presented through the themes of:

- Influence of peers
- Coercive behaviour
- Gendered environment
- Verbal control
- Influence of home and environment, and
- Manipulating the play

Examining the children's experiences of gender policing and knowledge of gender norms, it is clear that the children have a wealth of knowledge about the gender stereotypes and norms that they are exposed to within the community.

However, at times the children challenged gender stereotypes drawing on their experiences from home and the community. This may be in part due to the ethnic diversity of the setting and the communities that the children live in. As the European Institute for Gender Equality (2020b) sets out, gender norms and beliefs are culturally constructed, therefore where families come from diverse ethnic populations, the gender beliefs that the children bring into the setting will reflect their home environment. Over time, the diversity of beliefs will have an impact on the setting gender norms and beliefs, and these will be adjusted by the children attending the setting (Paechter, 2007).

Analysing the extracts included within this chapter, it is clear that the main gender enforcer within the preschool is a girl. This is unusual as the role of gender enforcer is more likely to be filled by a boy (Xiao et al., 2019), and may partially explain why so many of the extracts within this chapter focus on girls who are controlling or policing both female and male peers. One potential explanation for the high number of policing behaviours demonstrated by the girls at the University Day Care is that the majority of the families who attend the setting come from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Research by Hill (2002) found that families from higher socio-economic areas tend to hold more equitable gender beliefs and encourage their daughters to be assertive when they are outside the family home.

Within the extracts shared in this chapter, there is no clear pattern to the age of the children who are policing their peers. Whilst much of the policing reported within this chapter was undertaken by some of the older children within the setting, the younger children also took a role in policing others, including at times policing children who are significantly older than them. For instance, the researcher found it interesting that the two instances where the play was manipulated to exclude an opposite-gender peer, were led by younger children and the child who was excluded was an older peer.

The following sub-chapter sets out the story of the children's experiences at the Small Town Nursery.

Chapter 4c The Story of Children's Experiences at the Small Town Nursery

4c.1 Setting the Scene

The Small-Town Nursery is a community-based nursery school in a town in the northeast of England. The nursery currently provides places for 46 families across the week. Children attend a variety of sessions (three hours AM or PM plus an optional lunch session of 45 minutes) from their third birthday. The setting caters for the children of local residents and priority is given to children who are looked after by the Local Authority or who live in the catchment area.

According to the 2021 census (Office for National Statistics, 2022), the setting is based in an area of higher than national average socio-economic status (Appendix 4). The local population has an above average British born population, with the 2021 census showing that 95% of the population was born in Britain (based on 2021 census data on country of birth Appendix 5). This is reflected in the nursery attendance where they only have two children on role whose families do not identify as British-born. Research by Hill (2002), suggests that families who live in areas of above average socio-economic status tend to use a more democratic and gender-equitable style of parenting. As a result of this style of parenting, girls are encouraged to be assertive when interacting with others outside of the home environment. When the SES of the population is considered alongside the very low levels of diversity within the population, the children are more likely to have their home experiences reinforced through interactions outside of the home. This is due to a lack of cultural diversity within the population of the setting, which would provide a range of different gender beliefs to challenge the children's home experiences.

Thirteen children were given parental consent to participate, and 12 of the children gave assent in principle. The participants' ongoing assent was checked prior to any data collection activities taking place. Details about the participants' self-reported gender and ages can be found in Appendix 11.

Extended sections from the transcripts that the extracts in this chapter were taken from can be found in Appendix 19.

4c.2 Reinforcement of the Gender Binary

Children's desire to be accepted by their same-gender peers has been identified by Xiao et al. (2019) as one of the main driving forces behind children's reinforcement of the gender binary. By identifying the characteristics that are associated with their own gender and the opposite gender, children can validate their in-group membership (Martin et al., 2013).

Within the Small Town Nursery, the participants drew on the gender binary to justify their thoughts and beliefs about who was better at playing with specific toys and who was able to play with them.

During a video-stimulated conversation with Terry (4yrs 1mth) where Terry and the researcher watched a recording of Terry playing cars with Evie (3yrs 4mths), the conversation turned to who plays with the cars and who is better at playing with the cars.

1.	Cathy	<i>who is better at doing the cars, girls or boys?</i>
2.	Terry	<i>umm, I think boys!</i>
3.	Cathy	<i>you think boys?</i>
4.	Terry	<i>umhm ((positive sound))</i>
5.	Cathy	<i>are you a boy or a girl?</i>
6.	Terry	<i>a boy</i>
7.	Cathy	<i>a boy (3) and you think boys are better at doing the cars than girls?</i>
8.	Terry	<i>yeah</i>

(Extract 09-11 – 01 – Conversation)

Terry replied that he thinks that boys are better than girls when it comes to playing with cars and that he is a boy. During the observation, Terry could be seen to take the lead and show Evie how to put the cars onto the toy garage so that they rolled down the ramp (Figure 4c.1).



Figure 4c.1 – Terry demonstrating how to use the car ramp
(Image from 08-11 – 01 & 04 – Garden – Cars)

Research by Skočajić et al. (2020), found that children were aware of the gender stereotypes around who usually plays with toys and that vehicles, and their accessories, would be considered male toys. This could suggest that, based on Terry's statement that boys are better than girls at playing cars, he could believe that Evie would not know how to play with the car ramp because she is a girl, and therefore that it was his responsibility to show her.

Later in the video-stimulated conversation, Terry was asked whether there were any toys that either the girls or boys could not play with in the setting. Terry responded:

uhhh I don't know ((said slowly))

before identifying that the boys do play with the outdoor musical wall. This response, along with Terry's previous comments, suggests that while he believes that certain gender children may be better at playing with some toys than others, he doesn't think that gender stops anyone from playing with whoever or whatever they want. Terry's belief that there are no restrictions to who plays with what toys, is contrary to the findings in the literature. Many researchers have identified the impact of gender on who is able to access the physical environment and toys within preschool settings (Børve & Børve, 2017; Todd et al., 2017; Dinella & Weisgram, 2018).

In line with the literature and contrary to Terry's belief that gender should not stop anyone from playing with who or what they want, Evie (3yrs 4mths) felt differently. During a video-stimulated conversation with Evie, she started talking about who she plays with.

1.	Cathy		are any of your friends boys that you like to play with?
2.	Evie	Shook head	
3.	Cathy		no? (3) what would happen if the boys wanted to play with you?
4.	Cathy		would you say yes or would you say no?
5.	Evie	Looks around & wiggles	no

(Extract from 09-11 – 04 – Conversation transcript)

When Evie was asked whether she played with any boys, she responded non-verbally by shaking her head. When she was asked what she would say if a boy wanted to play with her, she appeared to check her surroundings before responding verbally. Looking at Evie's body language and her non-verbal communication, it appears that Evie felt unsure about responding verbally that she would not play with any boys. Gender beliefs can be a sensitive topic for people to talk about (Dempsey et al., 2016), especially when a person believes that they may be judged for sharing them. This is especially true for young children who may hold gender beliefs that are contrary to the message that they have received from parents or practitioners (Pascal & Bertram, 2009). This may explain Evie's reluctance to verbalise that she would not want to play with boys, as the practitioners challenge the exclusion of others from play activities.

Whilst the majority of the participants (including Terry) reinforced the gender binary through their play, Terry did challenge the binary nature of gender through his appearance and in conversations.

During the image elicitation game, the image of two children playing dressing up was turned over. Terry started by identifying the gender of the children based on the appearance of their hair, stating:

13. Cathy	<i>why do you think the one in the dress is a girl?</i>
14. Terry	<i>cos I can tell!</i>
15. Cathy	<i>how can you tell?</i>
16. Terry	<i>she's got long hair</i>
17. Cathy	<i>you think she's got long hair?</i>
18. Terry	<i>she's got long hair down her back, all the way down to there ((points to midway down back of child in the picture))</i>
19. Cathy	<i>you think she's got long hair down her back?</i>
20. Terry	<i>yeah, the boy's hair is like mine</i>

(Extract from 01 – Picture Task)

Even though the two children in the image had similar length hair, Terry used this aspect of their appearance to identify their gender, explaining that the girl had long hair whilst the boy's hair was short like his. During image elicitation games with the other participants, aspects of the image's appearance, for instance, the length of their hair, was often commented on as a justification for how they knew that the person was male or female. This concurs with Martin et al. (1990) who found that children associated short hair with a man. Whilst this research is dated and societal norms have changed in the past 30 years, the gender appearance beliefs of the participants at the Small Town Nursery appear to be in line with Martin et al.'s findings.

However, Terry then went on to challenge the binary gender norms about who can wear a dress.

21. Cathy	<i>is it ok for boys to wear dresses?</i>
22. Terry	<i>yeah</i>
23. Cathy	<i>ok</i>
24. Terry	<i>it could be a boy wearing that dress ((pointing to the picture))</i>

(Extract from 01 – Picture Task)

Slightly later in the image elicitation game, Terry returned to the topic of who wears a dress, explaining:

27. Terry	<i>I'm a boy and I can wear, umm, dresses</i>
28. Cathy	<i>you can wear dresses, you do wear dresses to nursery sometimes, don't you.</i>
29. Terry	<i>yeah</i>
30. Cathy	<i>cos we had that conversation last week when I thought you were wearing a nice top and you said, "no, it's my dress"</i>
31. Terry	<i>yeah</i>

(Extract from 01 – Picture Task)

Terry (4yrs 1mth) is one of the older children within the Small Town Nursery, and the literature suggests that he would be expected to have developed knowledge of gender stereotypes and norms and to adhere to these as a means of being accepted as a member of the setting community. However, Fast and Olson (2018), suggest that some children start to explore the binary nature of gender from a very young age, as a means of understanding their own gender identity and where they fit in.

Terry's exploration of the gender binary and his own gender identity can be seen in the following observation when he chose to draw a self-portrait (Figure 4c.2).

Terry (4yrs 1mth) walked over to the drawing table where I was sat supporting a child who was drawing a self-portrait.

Terry said that he wanted to draw a picture of himself as well. Terry looked at the colour pencils in the box and choose a pink pencil. He drew a picture of himself in all pink. When I asked the child I was working with if they wanted a different colour pencil for their picture, Terry looked up. He put down the pink pencil and looked in the box. Terry picked up an orange pencil and added an orange patch to the paper next to his self-portrait. He then put the orange pencil back into the box and picked the pink pencil up again. He commented when he added "lipstick" and "high heels" to his person.

I asked what the pink section was that he had drawn under his head, Terry said that it was his body and neck wearing a pink dress. Terry also commented that he had used pink because pink is his favourite colour.

Figure 4c.2 – Terry's self-portrait
(09 – 11 – Self-Portrait – 01 – Written observation)

In this observation, Terry can be seen to include aspects of appearance that are stereotypically female, for instance, high heels, lipstick and a dress (Martin et al., 1990), as well as using a colour that children traditionally identify as a female colour (Weisgram et al., 2014).

Research by Nabbijohn et al. (2020) found that children who challenge the gender binary norms within a setting are often excluded by their peers. However, within the Small Town Nursery, Terry is included by both male and female peers without comment. This may be due to the practitioners acting as role models to the children, and their acceptance of Terry's appearance without comment (Timmons & Airton, 2023).

4c.3 Coercive Behaviour

Preschool children adapt their behaviour to be accepted by their peers. This can be seen as a response to their peers using coercive methods to reinforce accepted behaviours. Preschool children's desire for acceptance or inclusion by their peers can be demonstrated in different ways. At the Small Town Nursery, the participants were observed attempting to gain inclusion in play activities with same-gender peers, and also excluding opposite-gender peers who demonstrated a desire to be included in the play.

During the first example (Figure 4c.3), Jamie (3yrs 7mths) was playing at the Mobilo table and was keeping an eye on who was nearby to play with.

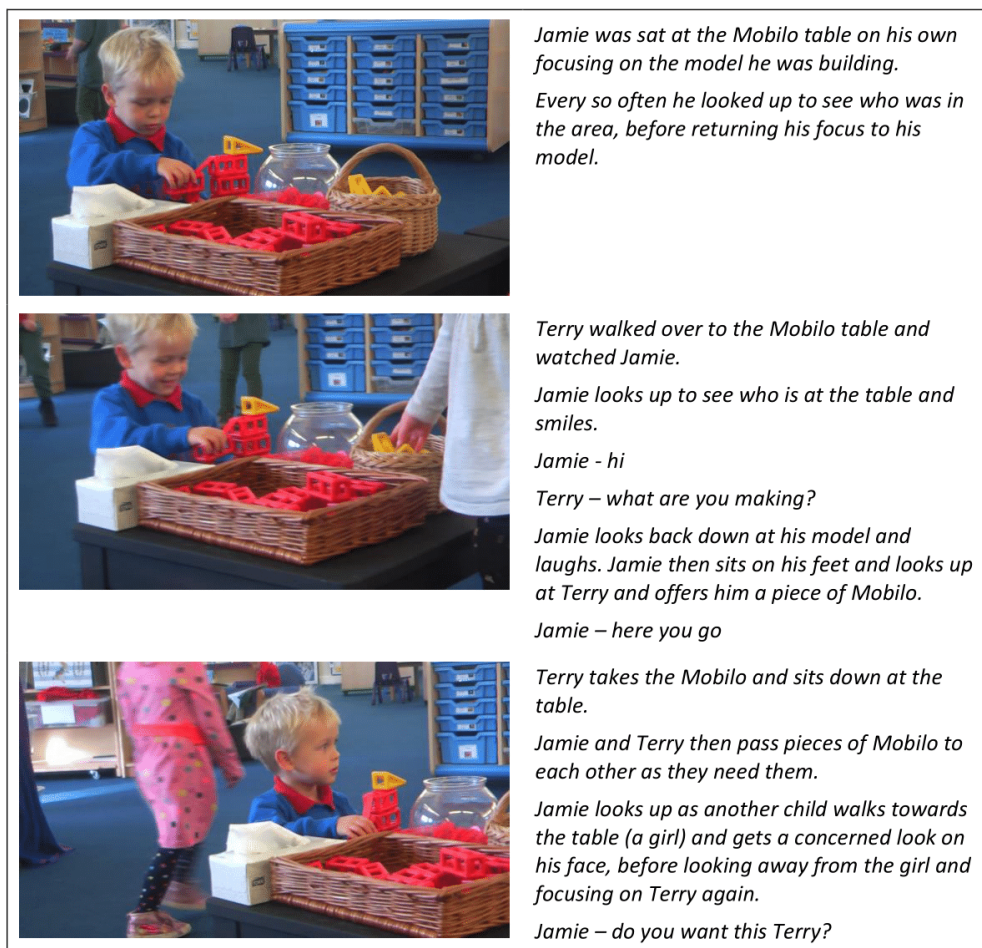


Figure 4c.3 – Jamie & Terry – Mobilo
(Extract from 11-11 – 12 & 06 – Indoor – Mobilo – Video)

When Jamie spotted Terry (4yrs 1mth), a same-gender peer, he spoke to him to gain his attention. Once Terry was looking at Jamie, Jamie held out a piece of Mobilo to encourage Terry to join his play. According to Bateman and Church (2017), preschool children often use gifts to initiate entry into an episode of play, however, in this case, Jamie used the gift to encourage a peer to join him.

As Jamie and Terry continued to play together, Jamie stopped looking around and focused on playing with Terry. After a short while an opposite-gender peer walked towards the Mobilo table, this time rather than attempt to engage the new child, Jamie had an unhappy look on his face and turned away to focus on Terry. This suggests that Jamie did not want the girl to join the boys at the Mobilo table. Research shows that children identify construction activities as suitable for boys, but not girls (Børve & Børve, 2017) which may explain Jamie's response to seeing the girl approaching them. This analysis of the interaction is supported by a comment that Jamie made during a video-stimulated conversation when he explained:

girls don't do building games because they aren't boys

Examining the age of the boys who were involved in the observation, Terry (4yrs 1mth) is six months older than Jamie (3yrs 7mths). Based on the ages of the children, it would be expected that Terry would take the lead in enforcing gender boundaries as he has more experience within the setting (Xiao et al., 2019); despite this, Jamie took the lead in this instance. Whilst Jamie is the younger child, and it would be expected that his understanding of gender stereotypes is lower, Terry's appearance challenges gender norms for the setting and Jamie may feel that it is his responsibility to act as a role model. Sims et al. (2022) found that some same-gender peers of gender non-conforming children were aware of the negative consequences that a non-conforming child may face and would therefore attempt to reinforce appropriate behaviours through inclusion.

Whilst Jamie's attempt to be included by a same-gender peer was accepted, the participants also ignored peers' attempts to be included. In the following observation, two different children ignored Izzy's attempts to be accepted into the play (Figure 4c.4).

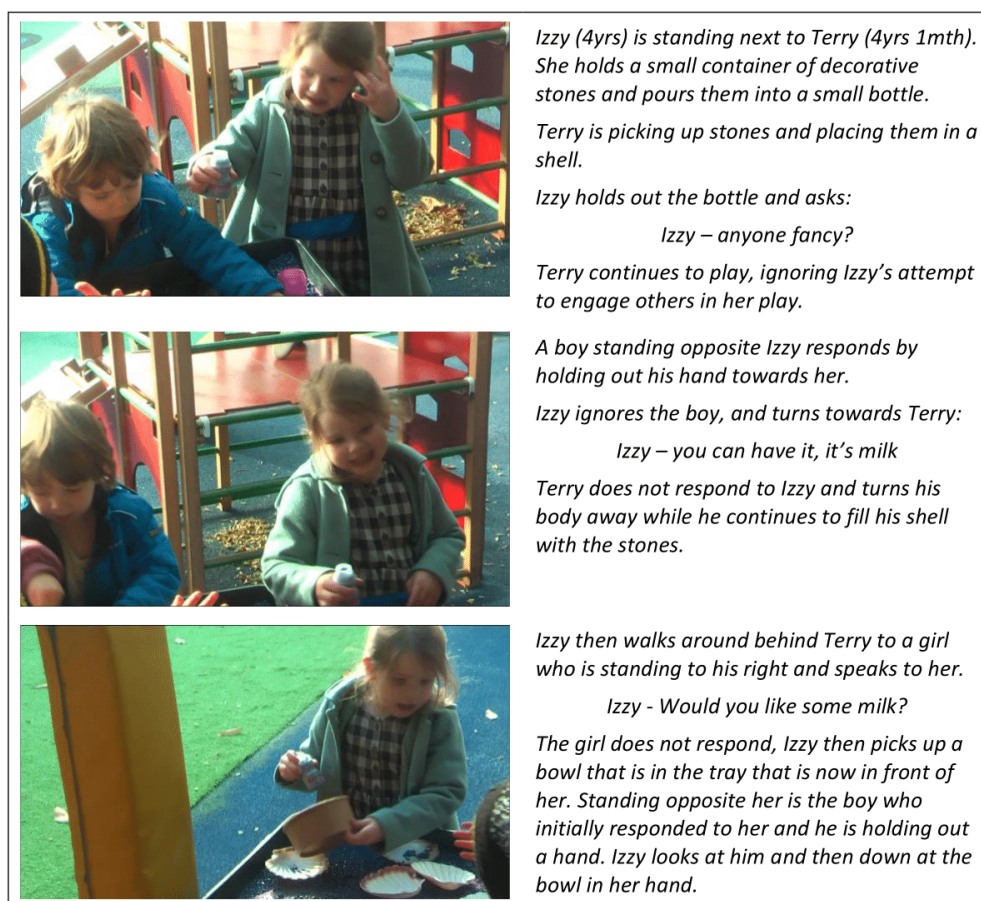


Figure 4c.4 – Izzy & Terry with the small stones
 (Extract from 09-11 – 03 & 01 – Garden – Shells & Stones – Video Transcription)

In the first instance, Izzy (4yrs) tries to engage Terry (4yrs 1mth) in her game. Having filled a small bottle with the coloured stones, Izzy held it out and whilst looking directly at Terry, asked

if anyone would like the bottle. Terry did not respond to Izzy's comments, so she tried again and told him:

Izzy – you can have it, its milk

Terry responded non-verbally by turning away from Izzy so that his back was to her. Izzy looked around but did not acknowledge the opposite-gender peer who was standing on the opposite side of the table, holding his hand out towards her. Instead, she walked around Terry to the end of the table and tried to engage a same-gender peer. When her approach was ignored by the same-gender peer, Izzy started to play next to her, rather than return to where she had originally been playing.

During this observation, Izzy tried to gain acceptance from two different peers. Initially, she attempted to engage an opposite-gender peer, and when that did not work, she tried to engage a same-gender peer. Examining the gender of the children engaged in this interaction, Izzy (female) originally approached Terry (male) before approaching a female peer. Whilst the literature would suggest that Izzy would be more likely to engage a same-gender peer in her play (Xiao et al., 2019) and that children who challenge gender stereotypes tend to be excluded by their peers (Sims et al., 2022). Research by Gülgöz et al. (2018) found whilst children prefer to play with same-gender peers over opposite-gender peers, that opposite-gender peers who appear to be same-gender peers are preferred over other opposite-gender peers. Meaning that due to Terry's stereotypically feminine clothing, he is accepted as a more appropriate peer for Izzy to engage with, than the boy that she ignored.

Once Izzy had been excluded by both of the peers she approached, she attempted a different method to gain acceptance, by playing alongside the same-gender peer who had excluded her. By positioning herself beside the same gender peer and engaging in similar play to the peer, Izzy was presenting herself as a member of their gender group and an appropriate playmate (Martin et al., 2013).

4c.4 Gendered Environment

Prioletta (2020) explains that the gendered ideas that underpin preschool children's interactions are often missed by practitioners due to their belief that the children are too young to be aware of gender. Therefore, the children's use of gender to control their environment is not recognised or challenged, and this leads to the children's gender beliefs being reinforced.

During observations, participants were observed using gender as a means of identifying who could play in different areas of the environment. During a video-recorded observation, Izzy was seen to draw on her gender beliefs about pirates; initially to explain why she was trying to hide all of the gems that had been added to the sand tray and then to exclude an opposite-gender peer from the area (Figure 4c.5).

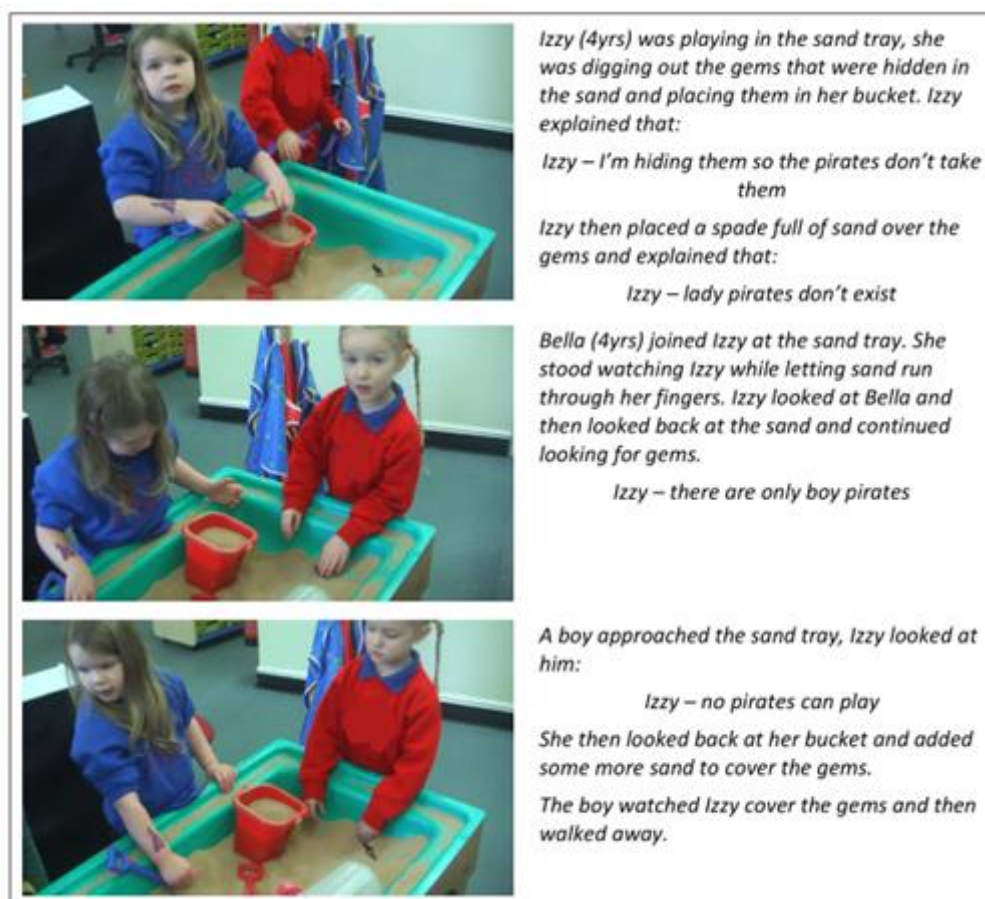


Figure 4c.5 – Lady pirates don't exist
 (Extract from 10-11 – 03 – Indoor – Sand – Video transcription)

Izzy used her knowledge of pirates as she explained that pirates would want to take the gems, however, she then added a gendered aspect to her play when she explained to Bella that only boys can be pirates. Groeneveld et al. (2021) report that preschool children tend to categorise pirates as male, as evidenced by Izzy’s comments. This gendered belief about pirates is strengthened by the reaction of the male peer who had attempted to play in the sand pit. Izzy did not say that boys were not allowed to play, instead, she stated “no pirates can play” as she looked at him. The boy understood the unspoken meaning of this statement and did not try to play.

Examining the gender of the children involved in this interaction, Izzy reinforced the gender stereotype of pirates being male to her female peer, and this was accepted by Bella without challenge. The girls play then continued until a male peer attempted to join them at the sand

tray. The sand tray is usually considered to be a gender-neutral area of the preschool environment which is accessible to boys and girls (Børve & Børve, 2017). Nevertheless, in this observation, Izzy claimed the sand tray was for girls only and this claim was accepted by the opposite-gender peer who then left. According to Cederborg (2021), this may be due to the girls' presentation of a partnership through their body position or facial expressions. This would endow the girls with a higher level of social power and places the opposite gender peer in a subordinate position.

The Small Town Nursery outdoor provision included a construction shed with a range of different large-scale construction resources. Whilst these resources were accessed by all children, the area was usually dominated by boys and the girls' play was side-lined. The boys' dominance of the construction area corresponds with the literature, which identifies a widely held stereotypical belief that the construction area is a male zone within early childhood settings (Cherney & Dempsey, 2010; Børve & Børve, 2017). However, during a video-recorded observation of Bella (3yrs 9mths), it was noted that whilst she was playing in the garden construction area, the only other children playing in the area were also girls (Figure 4c.6).



Figure 4c.6 – Bella's construction play
(extract from 09-11 – 06 – Garden – Bricks – Video Transcription)

Bella, and the other girls, continued to play in the construction area for a further 10 minutes and were not joined by any boys. During a video-stimulated conversation around this observation, Bella was asked whom she was playing with. She initially identified that she was playing with girls and then named them. Bella was then asked if any boys could have come and played with the girls, she quickly responded, both verbally and non-verbally:

Bella – ((shook head)) NO

Bella was then asked why boys could not come and play in the construction area with the girls, and she explained:

Bella – ((pointing at the screen)) cos this was the girls building area

By claiming the construction area for the girls, Bella was challenging the gender stereotypes that exist around the appropriateness of construction activities for girls, however, this does not explain why the boys did not attempt to reclaim their usual dominance of the construction area. Examining the children involved in the play, although Bella only identified two female peers in the construction area, there were a total of five girls playing close together. Literature focusing on group dynamics identifies that a group of children usually holds more power than an individual child or pair of children (Cederborg, 2021). Therefore, the number of girls present in the construction area may have deterred any boys from attempting to access the resources; allowing the girls to engage in construction activities fully, whilst excluding the boys from the area.

4c.5 Verbal Control

Drawing on Xiao et al.'s (2019) work on gender enforcers, children's use of language to influence and control their peers' behaviour is well documented. Within the Small Town Nursery environment, verbal control was identified during image elicitation activities, as well as during the participants' play.

During an image elicitation activity with Nicola (4yrs 1mth) and Grace (3yrs 8ths), Nicola and Grace were asked about the gender of the children playing football (Figure 4c.7).

1. Cathy	<i>you got a different one, what are they playing?</i>
2. Nicola	<i>they are in the sea</i>
3. Cathy	<i>they aren't in the sea, they are playing football on the grass (2) are they boys or girls playing football?</i>
4. Nicola	<i>boys</i>
5. Cathy	<i>boys (3) do girls play football?</i>
6. Nicola	<i>no</i>
7. Cathy	<i>what do you think Grace?</i>
8. Grace	<i>girls and boys</i>
9. Cathy	<i>girls and boys?</i>
10. Grace	<i>(nods)</i>
11. Nicola	<i>NO (2) BOYS</i>
12. Grace	<i>((looks at Nicola))</i>
13. Nicola	<i>boys play football, NOT GIRLS</i>
14. Grace	<i>it's boys playing</i>



Figure 4c.7 – Nicola and Grace - Boys play football
(Extract from 05 & 10 – Picture Task)

Nicola identified the children as boys (line 4) and was then asked whether girls play football. Nicola replied that girls do not play football (line 6). Grace was then asked about the gender of the children in the image, and she identified them as a boy and a girl (line 8). Nicola responded loudly to Grace's identification and told her that the answer was wrong (line 11). After receiving a further response about who plays football from Nicola (line 13), Grace changed her answer to say that it was a picture of boys playing (line 14). Within this extract, Nicola's use of

verbal control can be seen through her response to Grace and the additional information she provided to ‘teach’ Grace the correct information.

Examining the age of the children involved, there is a nearly 6-month age gap between the participants, with Nicola being the older peer; this may have an impact on Nicola’s reaction to Grace. Martin (2011) identifies the role that older preschool children take in ensuring that younger peers learn and understand the setting’s gender norms. As Grace is younger than Nicola, it is possible that Nicola could feel that she has a responsibility to ensure that Grace knows the correct information about who plays football, in order to ensure that Grace is accepted properly into the girls’ in-group. However, it may also be that Grace’s response, that it was a boy and a girl, challenged Nicola’s gender schema knowledge, and therefore Nicola reacted to reinforce her gender beliefs to ensure that she holds or maintains the role of older expert (Xiao et al., 2019).

Whilst the participants in this interaction are both girls, the belief that football is just for boys was reported by other participants during image elicitation games (Figure 4c.8).

- | | | |
|----|--------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. | <i>Bella</i> | <i>boys, boys like football</i> |
| 2. | <i>Jamie</i> | <i>yeah, only boys play football</i> |

Figure 4c.8 – Bella and Jamie - Boys like football
(Extract from 12 & 06 – Picture Task)

This would support the identification of a setting gender norm around the gender appropriateness of football, and therefore who can play it.

Whilst, during the interaction presented above, Nicola was successful in her use of verbal control to reinforce the ‘right’ answer that Grace should give. The participants’ use of verbal control was not always effective.

During a video-recorded observation of Izzy (4yrs), Nicola (4yrs 1mth) and Maddy (3yrs 11mths) who had made a den under the climbing frame, Maddy can be seen attempting to use verbal control to reinforce gender-appropriate behaviour (Figure 4c.9).

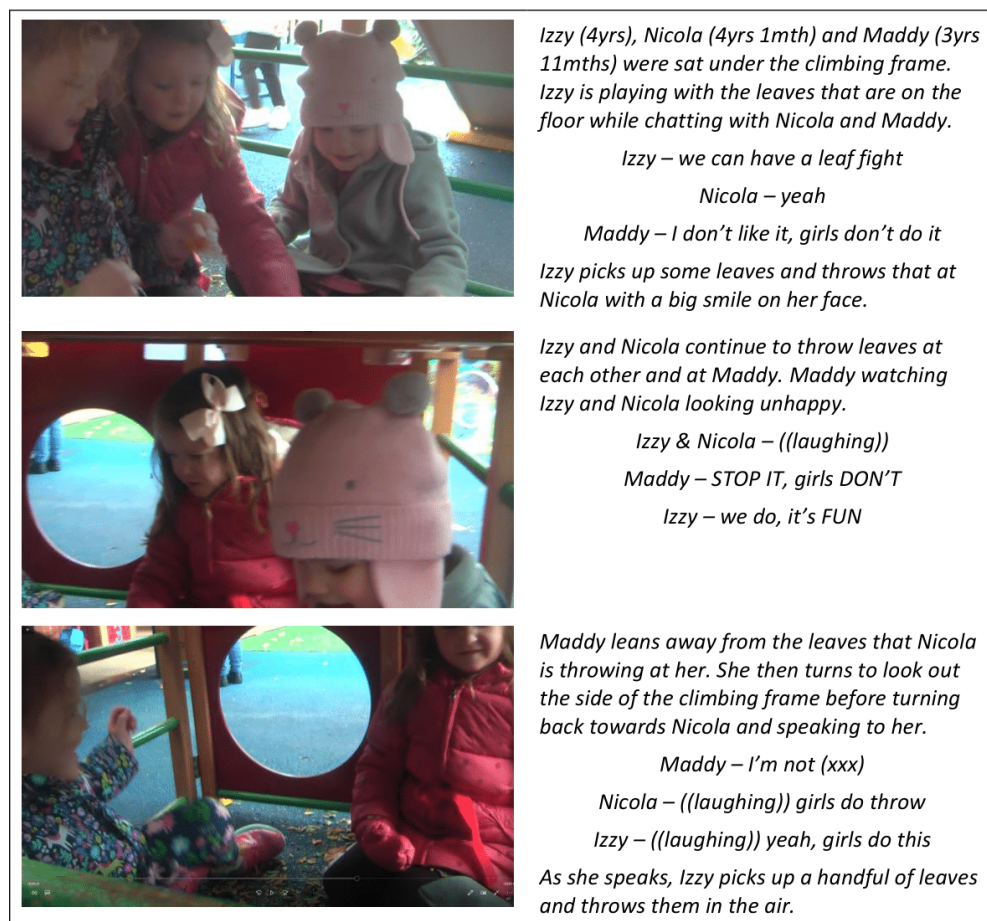


Figure 4c.9 – Izzy, Nicola & Maddy - Leaf fight
(Extract from 12-11 – 03 & 05 & 08 – Garden – Den – Video Transcription)

Izzy, Nicola and Maddy were sitting in the den they had made underneath the climbing frame talking when Izzy spotted the leaves on the floor and suggested that they have a leaf fight.

While Nicola was happy to participate in a leaf fight, Maddy said:

I don't like it, girls don't do it

Izzy and Nicola ignored Maddy's comment and started to throw the leaves around. Maddy attempted to gain control of the activity again by repeating that girls don't behave in that way:

STOP IT, girls DON'T

When her attempts to stop her friends throwing the leaves around, Maddy attempted to move away from the leaves that were being thrown. She had one last attempt to stop her friends from throwing the leaves around, however, they responded by laughing and saying that girls do throw leaves around.

Analysing this interaction, the participants are all very similar in age, there is only a three-month age gap between Nicola (4yrs 1mth), who is the oldest, and Maddy (3yrs 11mths), the

youngest of the group. During the interaction, it was Maddy, the youngest, who tried to take on the role of gender enforcer through the use of verbal reinforcement of gender beliefs. However, her two slightly older peers ignored her comments. As the age gap is small, it is unlikely that this played a role in why Maddy was unsuccessful as the three girls have similar experiences within the setting (Bennet et al., 2020). It is more likely, that Maddy's attempts were unsuccessful due to the influence of group dynamics. During the interaction, Maddy was trying to control the behaviour of two other peers at the same time. As Cederborg (2021) explains, a group of children will have more power or control within a situation than a single child, which would make it challenging for an individual to impact the behaviour of the group.

Examining both of the occurrences of verbal control presented within this chapter, it can be observed that all of the participants involved are female. This is representative of the instances of verbal control that were observed within the Small Town Nursery. Lansford et al. (2012) suggest that girls are more likely to engage in indirect methods of controlling their peers' behaviour such as verbal means, than boys. This may be due to differences in boys' and girls' communication skills development, where girls have been shown to acquire language and communication skills at a faster rate than boys (Adani & Cepanec, 2019).

4c.6 Use of Body Language

Children use body language to support their verbal communication, but also to communicate with others subtly (Stagg Peterson et al., 2019). During the data collection period at the Small Town Nursery, the children were observed using their body language in different ways to reinforce their peers' behaviour.

During the first example presented in this chapter, Jamie (3yrs 7mths) was playing in the gravel area of the outdoor environment with three male peers when Bella (4yrs) walked over to join their play (Figure 4c.10).

Jamie was playing in the stone digging area with 3 other boys. Jamie was climbing on the tyres around the outside and then jumping onto the stones. The other boys were doing the same thing. Jamie had been playing with the boys for about 3 minutes when Bella walked over to the stone area. Bella stopped and watched Jamie and the boys, she then walked over to them and stepped up onto a tyre next to them. Jamie stopped jumping and turned to watch what Bella was going to do. Bella jumped off the tyre onto the stones, Jamie then turned to look at the boys. Jamie did not speak to the boys or Bella.

Bella stepped back up onto the tyres, Jamie then pulled a slight face to the boys and stepped down from the tyre at the same time. Jamie and the boys then walked away from the stone digging area and started to run around the garden.

Figure 4c.10 – Jumping with the boys?
(Extract from 10-11 – Stone Digging – 12 & 06)

When Bella joined in with the boys jumping, Jamie stopped what he was doing and watched her. After watching Bella jump a couple of times, Jamie pulled a face to show that he wasn't happy with her joining in before moving away from the tyres where they had been playing. Jamie did not communicate verbally with the other boys who were involved in the game, however, when Jamie left the area, the other boys followed him leaving Bella on her own.

During this interaction, Jamie used three different forms of non-verbal communication, firstly he stopped what he was doing, then his facial expression changed to show displeasure, and finally, he left the area. The combination of these non-verbal messages meant that the other boys he was playing with, also left the area.

Looking at the ages of the participants involved in this observation, Jamie is about 5 months younger than Bella. This would imply that Bella would be expected to have a more developed understanding of gender norms, as well as holding a stronger in-group bias for playing with same-gender peers rather than opposite-gender peers than Jamie (Perry et al., 2019; Skočajić et al., 2020). However, in this interaction, it was Jamie who reinforced gender norms about the inappropriateness of playing with an opposite-gender peer. The age of the other boys who were playing with Jamie is not known, however, it may be that Jamie identified the importance of acting as a gender enforcer, by reinforcing the gender norm, to demonstrate his suitability for being included in the boys' group. This analysis is in line with Xiao et al.'s (2019) finding, that children take on gender enforcer roles to ensure that they are seen as being a 'proper' boy or girl within their peer group.

Examining the gender of the children involved, it can be seen that Jamie (male) took on the role of gender enforcer when Bella (female) tried to join the play. According to Xiao et al. (2019), the mantle of gender enforcer is usually assumed to be a male role; this is due to the increased pressure that is applied to boys to adhere to masculine stereotypical behaviour which is linked in societal views of power (Braun & Davidson, 2017). By taking on the role of gender enforcer, Jamie was affirming his position both as a boy, but also as someone who is able to influence others, to wield power within the preschool setting.

Returning to the observation of Izzy (4yrs) playing with small stones that was presented in section 4c.3, Izzy reinforced her exclusion of the opposite gender peer who responded to her comment of "anyone fancy?" through her body language.



Figure 4c.11 – Izzy - Body language
(Extract from 09-11 – 03 & 01 – Garden – Shells & Stones – Video Transcription)

Izzy's body position changed from an open position with her arms held away from her body to a closed position where she pulled the bottle she had been offering in towards her (Figure 4c.11). By pulling the bottle in towards her body, Izzy was communicating to the opposite gender peer that he was not included in her meaning of "anyone". Additionally, Izzy's head position and expression changed from looking up with a smile to a tilted head position with a less welcoming expression which reinforced her non-verbal communication that the opposite gender peer was not being included.

The area of the garden where the interaction occurred was usually set up as an area to practice fine motor skills, and it was considered by the children to be a place that was accessible to both genders. During this interaction, there were a total of five children playing with the small stones, two boys and three girls. Izzy's body language was open when she offered the small bottle to the group, however, it is clear from her body language that she did not expect or intend for a boy to take the bottle. This supports the belief that Izzy felt it was inappropriate for an opposite-gender peer to engage in her pretend play activity "it's milk". Pretend play or role play, is usually identified by children to be a feminine activity (Børve & Børve, 2017), therefore it would not be considered appropriate for a boy to join the play.

Furthermore, Izzy is one of the older children within the setting (4yrs) and this would position her as an experienced member of the nursery who would be expected to know and reinforce the community norms to ensure that younger children learn the setting norms (Martin, 2011). The role of older peers in inducting new members of the community into the setting norms was originally set out by Paechter (2007), who stated that knowledge and adherence to the community norms was a vital aspect of being considered an appropriate member of the preschool community. When Izzy responded non-verbally to the boy who held her hand out, she could be reinforcing the setting norms that girls and boys don't play together, and also that boys should not try to join in girls' pretend play.

4c.7 Manipulating the Play

During the data collection period at the Small Town Nursery, children's use of manipulation to exclude opposite-gender peers from the play was observed in the outdoor environment.

During the observation, Nicola (4yrs 1mth) and Maddy (3yrs 11mths) were playing near the construction shed and were crawling on the floor pretending to be kittens when a boy approached them and asked to play with them (Figure 4c.12).

Nicola (4yrs 1mth) and Maddy (3yrs 11mths) were playing in the garden, they were crawling on the floor pretending to be kittens. Boy S walked over to them and asked to play.

Nicola said "no, this is girls only"

Maddy said "yeah, only girls"

Boy S did not look happy and looked at an adult for support. The adult asked the girls why Boy S couldn't play and Nicola told her that they were kittens and that he was a boy.

The adult suggested that Boy S could be a boy kitten, the girls appeared to think about it and then said that he could play that side of the cones (pointing to where he was standing) but that their side of the cones was just for girls.

Boy S looked at the girls and where they were pointing, he then turned away from them and walked to where some boys were playing and asked to join their game.

Figure 4c.12 – Kittens in the playground
(Extract from 10-11 – Kittens – 05 & 08)

Nicola and Maddy informed the boy that only girls could join their game, so he turned to a practitioner for support in joining the game. Nicola explained to the practitioner that they were kittens and that he was a boy, implying that only girls can be kittens. This response was countered by the practitioner who suggested that the boy could be a male kitten. This challenged the girls' belief that only girls could be kittens. In an attempt to ensure that the boy was not able to interfere with their game, whilst still allowing him to join, Nicola introduced a rule that boy kittens could only play on one side of a dividing line, while girl kittens played on the other side. This was not an invisible line; it was a set of cones that had been set out on the playground to provide a boundary for the construction area resources. As the girls were playing just outside of this area, by stating that boy kittens could only play on the other side of the line, Nicola positioned the boy in the enclosed construction area. This limited the area in which he would be able to play.

Björk-Willén (2012) states that boys and younger peers are usually allocated the role of baby or pet within children's role play, as these are characters with little power or agency within the play. However, in this instance, as the girls were already pretending to be animals, the role of kitten had been allocated a high status by the girls, and there was not an identifiable low power or status role that the boy could be allocated. Nicola's decision to allow a boy kitten, but in a limited area, allowed for a boy to join the game, but limited his agency and power

within the game, as the girls were able to move around the whole playground whilst restricting the male kitten to a small area. This analysis is supported by Gülgöz and Gelman (2017) who demonstrated that from preschool onwards children are able to identify the social power that an individual has in a situation based on the allocation of resources, which would include access.

4c.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented a sample of the gender experiences that the children at the Small Town Nursery experience, through the themes of:

- Reinforcement of the gender binary
- Coercive behaviour
- Gendered environment
- Verbal control
- Use of body language, and
- Manipulating the play.

Examining the children's experience of gender within the nursery, it is clear that the children have already developed a wide range of gender beliefs and stereotypes, that they draw on in their interactions with others.

However, whilst children experienced gender reinforcement for their behaviour, the children were generally accepting of peers whose appearance challenged gender norms. Positive reinforcement interactions between a gender non-conforming boy and both male and female peers have been presented in this chapter, supporting this analysis. This may be, in part, due to the practitioners' response to the participant, and their unconditional acceptance of his appearance.

The setting is based in an area of higher-than-average socio-economic status and low ethnic diversity. This leads to a population that, according to Hill (2002), is likely to hold more gender-equitable beliefs. However, whilst families are likely to reinforce gender equitable beliefs with their children, their beliefs about whether children should be allowed to wear gender non-conforming clothing are complicated and children may receive mixed messages (Neary, 2021).

The majority of the extracts presented in this chapter, focus on female gender enforcers. This is due to the gender breakdown of the participants, of the twelve participants, only three were male. Nevertheless, it is clear that the female participants were actively engaged in policing

both male and female peers' behaviour, and that they used a range of different methods to reinforce gender norms.

Finally, there is no clear age demarcation as to who is policing and who is being policed. In part, this may be due to the limited age range of the participants within the setting, there are only nine months between the oldest and youngest participants. Examining the extracts presented, policing behaviours were used by all participants and the younger participants were confident in policing their older peers.

This sub-chapter, along with the previous two, have presented the experiences of the children who attended the three research settings. The influence of age, gender and socio-economic status have been identified through the analysis of the interactions that were presented. These will be elaborated on in the next chapter.

Chapter 4d Results and Analysis – Summary of Findings

4d.1 Summary of Findings

During the data analysis process, eight themes were identified within the data. These themes were defined in Chapter 4 and are:

- Reinforcement of the gender binary
- Coercive behaviour
- Influence of home and community
- Influence of peers
- Gendered environment
- Verbal control
- Use of body language
- Manipulating the play

This section will draw together the key findings from the study that were presented in the three results and analysis sub-chapters, providing a summary of the themes and the participant's experiences.

4d.1.1 Reinforcement of the Gender Binary

The first theme presented in the research report was the reinforcement of the gender binary. This theme focused on the children's use of gendered language as a means of identifying who they can play with and who is able to play with specific toys. Research has identified that gender is a salient feature for preschool children, as it is a feature that is easy for them to identify (Halim et al., 2013). Once children can identify their own gender and that of others, they are able to identify the characteristics associated with each group and use this information to validate their own gender group membership (Martin et al., 2013). Within this research, participants drew on their knowledge of the gender binary and stereotypes to explain and justify whom they would or would not play with and the gendered activities of their peers. For example, Abigail's explanation that girls play with 'girly things' such as "nails done and (2) bags like (2) girl bags and girl stories" (Section 4a.2), whilst Terry identified his belief that boys are better at playing with cars than girls (Section 4c.2). This supports Skočajić et al.'s (2019) finding that children are aware of gender stereotypes around toys, and they use this knowledge within their interactions with peers.

Additionally, the participants considered the gender of the peers that they played with. According to Martin et al. (2013), preschool children demonstrate a preference for playing with same-gender peers. This preference is explained by children's desire to be accepted as

members of their gender in-group, in addition to their in-group bias which identifies their gender group as being better than the alternative group (Hilliard & Liben, 2010; Xiao et al., 2019). From the data presented, it can be seen that the majority of the participants identified that they would not play with opposite-gender peers, with Evie reporting that none of her friends are boys and that she would say “no” to any boy who asked to play with her (Section 4c.2). Wingrave (2018) highlights that ECE settings are sites of gender binary reinforcement, and the participants’ use of binary language when discussing their peers often reinforces gender differences and binary norms (Brito et al., 2021).

4d.1.2 Coercive Behaviour

The second theme identified was coercive behaviour, which caused participants to conform to expected behaviours, even if they would rather not (Nabbijohn et al., 2020).

The importance of peer acceptance and inclusion for young children’s development has been identified within the literature (Coelho et al., 2017; Shehu, 2019). Preschool children’s desire to be accepted by their peers leads to them adapting their behaviour to what they believe is expected (Hellman et al., 2014; Chase, 2022). Coercive behaviour was recognised as a method that the children used to manipulate their peers’ behaviour in order to ensure that they adhered to gender norms. Some instances were identified within the research of participants manipulating their own behaviour to ensure they were accepted by their peers. This concurs with Gastaldi et al.’s (2019) finding that young children imitate other children’s play as a means of presenting themselves as similar to their peers, and therefore worthy to play.

The children’s response to experiencing coercive behaviour was demonstrated in different ways and identified through the observations and video-stimulated conversations. However, the researcher considers that it is worth highlighting Schroeder and Liben’s (2021) finding, that children who experience pressure to conform from their peers are more likely to accept the policing of other children and to be friends with gender-enforcing peers. This may lead to them using coercive behaviours on other peers.

The use of gifts, as described by Bateman and Church (2017), was observed being used by several participants in an attempt to persuade a peer to let them join a game. This is illustrated in one example from the data where Jake offered a toy Polly demonstrating his desire to be included in the game (Section 4b.3). However, within this research whilst this form of coercion was used successfully between participants of the same gender, it was rarely successful between opposite gender participants. This may be because the value that the child brings to the game or activity does not compensate for the undesirability of their gender or negative beliefs about how an opposite-gender child plays “they SNATCH THEM” (Polly, Section 4b.3).

4d.1.3 Influence of Home and Community

The third theme presented was the influence of home and community which was seen through children's use of experiences from outside the setting when justifying their beliefs.

Preschool children's earliest exposure to gender stereotypes and norms is within their home environment (Carter, 2014; Mesman & Groeneveld, 2018), and these experiences impact the development of a child's habitus (O'Connor, 2011). This links to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological model which identified the key role that families, peers and the community have in children's development. The influence that the participant's home and community experiences had on their gender knowledge and beliefs was established through their reference to these events when explaining their beliefs. For instance, when discussing who could play football, Jason explained that his older brother "plays football with the BOYS" and that "then I play with the boys too" (Section 4a.4). The participants' references to their personal experiences within their family and community, highlight the significant influence these aspects have on their development of gender knowledge. This aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological theory, which not only emphasizes the role of family and community experiences in children's development but also acknowledges that interactions between these groups can further strengthen the child's experiences.

Parents reinforce gendered beliefs and knowledge both explicitly and implicitly. One of the implicit ways that children learn about gender norms at home is through the toys and other resources that their parents provide (Boe & Woods, 2018). Toys provide gendered messages about the type of activities that are gender-appropriate. Research has identified that even when parents hold gender-equitable beliefs, their children will have more gender-appropriate toys, than opposite-gender toys (MacPhee & Prendergast, 2018). This may be due to friends and extended family members buying toys, or other influences such as implicit toy marketing which the parents are not conscious of.

The participants also shared knowledge of counter-stereotypical experiences from either their home or community encounters with their peers for instance, "no, I've seen a firefighter that's a girl!" (Megan, Section 4b.6). Morawska (2020) identified that whilst children's gender beliefs can be challenged by their peers, the ongoing reinforcement of family gender beliefs means that it is unlikely that a child's habitus will change significantly. Indeed, Bourdieu (1986) believed that whilst a person's habitus will change slowly over time, they will never completely replace the habitus that they started to develop from birth due to the ongoing reinforcement of familial beliefs and norms during their childhood. This means that where young children's peers reinforce the gender norms and behaviours that are similar to the children's familial

beliefs, that these gender beliefs are reinforced, and the child's adherence is likely to be stauncher.

4d.1.4 Influence of Peers

Following on from the previous theme, the next theme identified was the influence of peers. Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified that children's peers exert the same level of influence as their parents and siblings. This theme focused on the participants' influence on their peers and the influence that other children have on the participant's gender beliefs. The role that peers play in the development of preschool children's gender development can be seen in the growth in their gender awareness when compared to similar-aged peers who have not attended an early childhood setting (Gastaldi et al., 2019). Within this research, the participants were aware of their peers' feelings around the unsuitability of opposite-gender play partners and adhered to the expected behaviour, even when a gender-enforcing peer was not in the vicinity.

Research has shown the negative social implications for preschool children of playing with an opposite-gender peer (Coyle et al., 2016; Braun & Davidson, 2017), the participant's awareness of this was identified through the analysis of the data. For instance, during a conversation with Amber, she confirmed that her friends would not be happy with her for playing with an opposite-gender peer (Section 4a.5). The picture was less straightforward at the University Day Care, where the main gender enforcer (Orla) deemed some mixed-gender play was acceptable. However, outside of this mixed-gender friendship group, the participants believed that opposite-gender peers should not play together and that they would be penalised by other children if they played with an opposite-gender peer. Gareth explained that Orla "wouldn't talk to me" if he played with a girl (Section 4b.2). Mayeza (2017b) concurs with this finding, suggesting that children are aware that playing with an opposite-gender peer would not be acceptable to other children and that they may experience exclusion.

Across the settings, all the participants were identified as being involved in and experiencing gender policing. This reflects the findings of previous research which identified that both boys and girls experience policing from their peers (Ruble et al., 2007; Masters et al., 2021). Xiao et al. (2019) concur, highlighting that girls tend to experience policing by other girls and boys experiencing policing from both male and female peers. Whilst all participants engaged in policing their peers, some children took on the role of gender enforcer within their peer group. These children were seen by the other preschool children as more knowledgeable about gender, and therefore acted as role models and encouraged their peers' adherence to gender norms (Nærland & Martinsen, 2011; Xiao et al., 2019).

4d.1.5 Gendered Environment

Børve and Børve (2017) identified that preschool children gender the preschool environment through their use of gender to control access to resources and areas of the setting; as well as the participant's beliefs around what areas or resources were considered 'inappropriate' for them due to their gender. The participants drew on gendered beliefs to justify their control of the environment, for instance, Henry explained that the boat was for boys only as they were pirates (Section 4a.6), and Orla stated "no boys allowed" when Gareth attempted to play at the sand tray (Section 4b.4). By drawing on gendered beliefs to control access to the environment in this way, the participants were engaging in border protection work and reinforcing gender expectations and norms (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). This border protection work leads to the gendering of the physical environment and children believing that they should play in specific areas; for instance, the construction area is usually identified as male, whilst the role play area is a female area (Cherney & Dempsey, 2010). This was reflected in Jason's firm response "NOO" when asked if he played in the role play area, as well as Karl and Jay's response to the girls playing in the construction area (Section 4a.3).

As well as controlling access to areas of the environment through border work, preschool children also control access to resources to reinforce the gender appropriateness of different toys and resources (Blakemore & Centers, 2005). The participants' use of gender to control access to resources impacted their peers' opportunities to access a balanced range of experiences. This was initially observed when Polly stopped Jake from accessing the letter shapes and later confirmed when she explained that "he can't have them ... HE'S a boy and BOYS DON'T DO LETTERS" (Section 4b.4). This concurs with Gülgöz and Gelman (2017) who identify that children use gender to identify who should play with toys and other resources. However, whilst the participants controlled their peers' access to resources due to the gender of their peers, they were happy to share resources with same-gender peers. This is supported by work by Engelmann et al. (2013) who identified that children are more likely to share resources with a same-gender peer.

4d.1.6 Verbal Control

Xiao et al. (2019) highlight how children use language as a means of controlling their peers' behaviour and this theme focuses on how preschool children use different verbal techniques to tell their peers what they should or should not be responding or doing. Preschool children are competent users of verbal language to communicate their thoughts and beliefs, they are also able to understand the meaning attached to a tone of voice (Jug & Vilar, 2015; Dahl & Tran, 2016). Within the data, the participants were observed using verbal control in different ways. At times, the participants can be identified to use direct forms of verbal control when

they ‘corrected’ their peers’ response, “NO, it’s a GIRL!” (Section 4b.5) or “boys play football, NOT GIRLS!” (Section 4c.5).

However, the participants were also observed using language to explain gender beliefs or to prompt their peer’s responses. The literature suggests that language can be used to reinforce negative stereotypes about opposite-gender peers (Hilliard & Liben, 2010) and this was identified within the data. This can be seen in Orla’s explanation “look, it’s a boy, no boys allowed! ... boys are smelly and silly” (Section 4b.5). Preschool children also use verbal language to ensure that younger children learn both setting and cultural gender norms (Martin, 2011). This was seen with Ethan’s prompting “b b b b” to encourage Tate to respond in the way that Ethan deemed correct (Section 4b.5).

The literature suggests that girls are more likely to use indirect methods of controlling their peers’ behaviour, such as using verbal language to reinforce a negative stereotype (Lansford et al., 2012). This may be due to the earlier development of girls’ pragmatic language development (Adani & Ceganec, 2019); however, it may also be due to girls identifying subtle techniques that challenge the dominance of their male peers within the preschool environment.

4d.1.7 Use of Body Language

This theme illustrated children’s competence in using their bodies to communicate their beliefs and feelings about their peers’ behaviour and activities. Children are experienced users of non-verbal communication as it supports their developing verbal skills (Păunescu & Indreica, 2014; Colliver, 2017; Stagg Peterson et al., 2019). As identified by Lundström et al. (2022), body language was identified as a subtle way that the participants expressed their approval or disapproval of their peer’s behaviour on gender grounds. Whilst facial expression was an easily recognisable sign of approval or disapproval, for instance, Jamie’s reaction when a girl attempted to join him and his friends, “Jamie then pulled a slight face to the boys and stepped down at the same time.” (Section 4c.6). The participants also used their body position to include or exclude their peers. This is illustrated by Karl and Jay positioning themselves in the corner of the construction area with their backs to the girls (Section 4a.3), as well as Imogen turning her body towards Alice later in the observation to demonstrate that Alice was welcome (Section 4a.3). Through the children’s subtle use of body position, they were engaging in border work and reinforcing gender norms as to who should play in an area and whom they should play with (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010).

Literature suggests that children from lower SES families are more likely to rely on non-verbal forms of communication than their peers from higher SES families (Calarco, 2011). This may be

due to the children's experiences within their family as Hill (2002) identified families who have higher levels of SES encourage their children to make their thoughts and beliefs known verbally. Bourdieu (1977) discusses the cultural and social reproduction of norms, highlighting the significance of children's initial encounters in shaping their habitus. This includes their approach and interaction with others, the language they use, and their subconscious understanding of social norms. Consequently, participants are more likely to use the communication style, whether verbal or non-verbal, dominant in their household setting. The use of body language, as a form of non-verbal communication, may be used by girls as a subtle method to control their peers' behaviour without challenging the perceived dominance of their male peers (Lansford et al., 2012).

4d.1.8 Manipulating the Play

The final theme that was presented in the results sub-chapters was that of manipulating the play. This theme draws on Björk-Willén's (2012) work around children's manipulation of play as a means of reinforcing social standing within a setting and focuses on how preschool children manipulate play to exclude opposite-gender peers. In one of the examples presented within the results sub-chapters, the role of dad was allocated to a boy who wanted to join their game; once he had accepted the role, he was excluded from the play by the girls when they encouraged dad to "go to work" (Section 4b.7). During another observation, the female participants manipulated the play by providing boundaries that could not be crossed, which resulted in the male participant being restricted whilst the girls were able to move their game away from him (Section 4c.7).

This method was identified through the analysis as mainly being used by female participants, and three of the four instances occurred within the garden environment. This could be due to girls using an indirect method to control their peers' behaviour and to gain some power or space within the outdoor environment (Lansford et al., 2012). Lansford et al. (2012) described indirect methods as being subtle, this could be through the use of facial expression or by verbally influencing another peer's behaviour, for instance, Orla to Megan "boys are smelly and silly" (Section 4b.5). In comparison, a direct method would include physical behaviour or direct verbal interaction with the non-conforming peer, for instance, Henry to Amber "this is for boys only" (Section 4a.6).

4d.1.9 Potential Contributory Factors

In addition to the eight themes presented, four contributory factors were identified during the analysis of the findings, these are age, gender, cultural background, and socio-economic status.

4d.1.9.1 Age

The literature states that children's knowledge of gender stereotypes and adherence to gender norms continues to strengthen and develop between the ages of 3 years and 6 years (Kohlberg, 1966; Martin & Halverson, 1981). Indeed, research shows that children's awareness of gender stereotypes and norms develops significantly the longer that they attend ECE settings with similar-aged peers (Blakemore, 2003). As a result of this, Perry et al. (2019) suggest that the level of policing that children are involved in would increase as their adherence to gender norms develops.

Drawing on Paechter's (2007) work on communities of practice, Martin (2011) sets out that older preschool children are expected to teach younger children the accepted gender norms within the setting. This supports the work on the characteristics of gender enforcers undertaken by Xiao et al. (2019) who identified that older children are more likely to police younger peers' behaviour. However, within this sample, there was no clear correlation between the age of the children involved in policing their peers or experiencing policing themselves.

4d.1.9.2 Gender

The literature sets out that both boys and girls are likely to experience gender policing from their peers (Ruble et al., 2007; Masters et al., 2021). However, differences in the level of policing that children experience have been highlighted by different researchers, for instance, both Ewing Lee and Troop-Gordon (2011b) and Braun and Davidson (2017), identified that boys are more likely to experience gender policing from their peers. Skočajić et al. (2020) identified that boys are more likely to experience policing as they experience policing from both gender peers, whilst girls usually only experience policing from same-gender peers.

Looking at the role that gender plays in identifying who is likely to engage in policing their peers, Skočajić et al. (2020) explain that boys are more likely to be involved in policing their peers' gender behaviour than girls. This may be due to feminine behaviours and activities being identified as holding less prestige than masculine activities, and therefore boys reinforcing conventional male activities. This finding is bolstered by Xiao et al.'s (2019) identification of male gender as a defining characteristic of gender enforcers. However, within the sample involved in this research, both male and female participants were identified to be involved in policing opposite-gender peers, and girls experienced similar levels of policing as the boys. Slight differences could be identified in the methods that children use, however, there is not enough data to identify whether this is due to the child's gender or their temperament.

4d.1.9.3 Cultural Diversity

The cultural diversity of the catchment area of the setting was one of the criteria used within the maximum variation sampling strategy used (Section 3.6.1). This is due to the cultural construction of gender and therefore gender norms and stereotypes (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2020b). The cultural diversity of a population impacts the gender beliefs of a community due to the blending of diverse cultural norms (Christ et al., 2014). For instance, Martin et al. (1990) set out that cultural norms can include, for example, expectations about the length of a person's hair in relation to their presumed gender. Whilst long hair is generally considered appropriate for women and men are expected to have short hair, some cultural norms include a wide range of hairstyles for both genders and include very short hair being considered appropriate for women and long hair being appropriate for men.

Examining a wider understanding of cultural diversity, the term can also be understood to include differences in community culture or SES between groups of the population (Moawad & El Shoura, 2017). Some differences were identified between the participants' experiences that may be explained due to the level of multicultural diversity, or lack of diversity, within the setting which will be discussed further below. However, there was not enough data to identify whether the differences identified are strongly linked to the multicultural diversity within the settings, differences in the culture of the community where the participants reside, or the culture of the ECE setting. For this reason, this is an area which requires further research.

4d.1.9.4 Socio-Economic Status (SES)

Hill (2002) suggests that family SES has an impact on children's gender beliefs and that families who identify as having higher SES tend to hold gender equality beliefs and encourage girls to be assertive and to have their voices heard when outside the home. For this reason, the SES of the setting catchment area was identified within the maximum variation sampling strategy (Section 3.6.1) to identify whether it impacted the behaviour of the children in the settings.

The SES of the family and community may affect the gendered beliefs that a child is exposed to outside of an ECE setting. Research has identified that families with lower SES are more likely to hold traditional gender beliefs (Marks et al., 2009; Coyne et al., 2021a) which may be reflected in the gendered behaviour of the participants. Additionally, families with lower SES are more likely to live in areas with low population mobility, which leads to stronger community gender norms, due to a low number of new residents to challenge community beliefs (Hiller & Baudin, 2016).

From the data presented in the results sub-chapters, it can be identified that the participants at the Estate Community Nursery (low SES) hold very traditional gender beliefs, and the

participants at the University Day Care (high SES) and Small Town Nursery (high SES) being open to more diverse perspectives around gender equity for instance, girls can be firefighters and boys can be nurses. However, whilst some differences were identified between the settings in terms of the gender beliefs held, the participants in all three settings were aware of, and reinforced, traditional gender stereotypes within their play.

Whilst these four distinct factors may contribute to participants' experiences, there was not adequate data to draw persuasive conclusions and further research is recommended.

However, where appropriate, the evidence of these contributing factors has been included within the discussions related to the research questions.

Chapter 5 Discussion Chapter

5.1 Introduction

In Chapter 5, the thesis progresses by consolidating and analysing the research findings discussed in the previous sub-chapters of Chapter 4. The chapter commences by addressing the sub-questions that form the foundation of the main research question and guide the research process. The sub-questions posed by this thesis are as follows:

- SQ 1. Do children police their peers' gender play and why?
- SQ 2. What methods do children use to police their peers' gender play?
- SQ 3. What factors impact children's gender policing behaviour?
- SQ 4. Does gender play a role in who polices children's play and who is policed?

Following this, the chapter presents an in-depth examination centred around five key findings identified during the data analysis phase of the research. Lastly, the chapter concludes by addressing the primary research question: "Do children aged between 3 and 4 years old engage in the monitoring and regulation of their peers' exploration of gender during play?" by drawing together the threads that run through the discussion presented in this chapter.

5.2 SQ1 Do Children Police their Peers' Gender Play and Why?

This research identified that preschool children do police their peers' gender play. This was established through both the analysis of the data and the participants sharing their own experiences and knowledge.

The feminist approach taken with this research enabled the participants' voices and lived experiences to be centred within the results and discussion. Although the researcher analysed the data to gain a deeper understanding of how and why the participants reinforced gender norms through their interactions. The methods used supported the feminist approach by challenging the traditional power dynamics between the researcher and participants, by supporting the children in reflecting on their lived experiences and empowering them to engage in analysing their own interactions (Caretta & Riaño, 2016). The inclusion of the participants' analysis of their interactions, adds confidence to the findings as they draw from the participants' analysis as well as the researcher's analysis of the data.

During conversations with the participants, they shared their awareness of the potential implications of playing with an opposite-gender peer, or for breaking a setting gender norm, for instance, the risk of social exclusion. For instance, when Gareth explained that Orla would not talk to him if he played with a girl (section 4b.2). Additionally, the participants talked about

how they would react to a peer crossing gender lines to play with an opposite-gender peer. The participants' explanations were supported through the analysis of observation data where they were identified as policing opposite-gender peers in an attempt to ensure the peers adhered to setting gender norms.

This finding is consistent with Mayeza's (2017b) research with primary school children. Mayeza identified that children police their peers' behaviour to ensure their adherence to gender norms. In doing so, children not only reinforce the gender binary, with its associated stereotypes and norms, but also position themselves as a member of their gender group, who understands how to behave (Martin et al., 2013). The participants shared their desire to be accepted within their gender peer group, with Tate explaining "I wanted to play with the boys, I'm boy" (section 4b.3).

In addition to supporting the finding that preschool children police their peers' gender play, this also provides a potential explanation for why preschool children police their peers. Gender is a salient feature for young children as it is an easy characteristic for them to identify (Halim et al., 2013). As such, it is one of the characteristics that children use when they are developing an in-group bias, that is, that other members of their group are similar to them and have the same likes and behaviours. Through policing their peers, preschool children are ensuring that their same-gender peers behave in a manner that they deem is appropriate for their gender (Skočajić et al., 2020). This was demonstrated by the participants through their comments focusing on what other same-gender peers would like or how they thought a same-gender peer would behave, with Abigail explaining that girls like to play with 'girly things' (section 4a.2).

The role that family and the wider community play in children's developing knowledge of gender stereotypes and norms was highlighted by a few of the participants when they explained how they were aware of specific gender stereotypes. For instance, Jason explained that his older brother only plays football with boys, so Jason plays football with boys (section 4a.4). This is supported by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological model which sets out the differing influences on a child's development, with a child's family and community providing a high level of influence on their experiences and development.

5.3 SQ2 What Methods do Children Use to Police their Peers' Gender Play?

This research identified a range of methods that the participants used to police their peers' gender play. Analysis of the methods used by the participants led to them being categorised

into five themes (Table 5.1). Through the use of these different methods, the participants reinforced the gender binary and their peers' adherence to conventional gender norms.

Table 5.1 – Themes identified through analysis of policing methods used.

Manipulating the play
Coercive behaviour
Verbal control
Use of body language
Control of resources/access to activities

By identifying the discourses that the participants were drawing on in their interactions, the data analysis identified that the participants used different methods to reinforce and manipulate who holds the power in a situation in order to police their peers' behaviour. This analysis is supported by Gülgöz and Gelman (2017) who demonstrated that preschool children are able to identify the power that an individual has in a situation, and therefore the participants would be aware of whether they held a position of power in an interaction or not.

The methods identified within this research were used by the participants as both positive and negative forms of reinforcement. This is broadly consistent with the original research presented by Lamb and Roopnarine (1979), Lamb et al. (1980) and Roopnarine (1984) which identified that children used a range of positive and negative methods to reinforce their peers' gender play. However, in contrast to the previous findings, which identified specific methods that were used as a form of positive reinforcement whilst others were only used negatively, the methods identified within this research were all used to both positively and negatively police behaviour. For instance, whilst playing with the Magnatiles, Polly ignored Jake's attempt to join her play through the offer of resources. Polly then turned to a same-gender peer and offered her tiles as a means of including her in the activity (section 4b.3).

In addition, the participants also appeared to adapt how they used some of the methods to use them subtly at times, in particular, the participants did this with the use of verbal control and control of the resources/access to activities. The subtle use of the methods was identified through conversations with the participants where they reflected on their interactions and discussed what had occurred and why. As an example of a technique being used subtly, Polly was observed to slide resources away from Jake when he was not looking, while there could be many reasons for this behaviour, she explained that "HE'S a boy and BOYS DON'T DO LETTERS" (section 4b.4).

Analysis of the data suggested that one possible explanation for the subtle use of the methods might be the proximity of a practitioner. Through the use of CCA, the context of the interactions was considered, alongside the other aspects of the interaction, and through this, it was identified that the subtle methods tended to be used when there was an increased chance that a practitioner would be close, for instance inside the preschool setting, or at an activity with a practitioner. This may be due to the participant's prior experience and personal beliefs that a practitioner would challenge their exclusion of others from an activity.

The participants also discussed changing their behaviour in response to either a peer's comment or because they are aware of the social implications of challenging setting gender norms. These coercive behaviours could be in the moment and used as a method of manipulation, but they could also have a long-term subtle impact when participants made decisions about their behaviour based on knowledge of how a peer would react. This demonstrates the level of impact that peers have on a child's development as set out by Bronfenbrenner (1979).

Due to the subtle nature of coercive behaviours, and their long-term impact, this method of policing may not have been identified had the research taken a different methodological position. By taking a feminist approach and valuing the participants' contributions, the methods were chosen to enable participants to share their lived experiences, whilst also exposing the way that power is used within society to reinforce inequality (Harcourt, 2022).

5.4 SQ3 What Factors Impact Children's Gender Policing Behaviour?

Analysing the data identified a range of different factors which impacted children's gender policing behaviour.

The first factor identified was the influence of others. This includes the impact that parents have on children's gender knowledge and policing behaviours. Preschool children's earliest exposure to gender stereotypes and norms is within their home environment (Carter, 2014; Mesman & Groeneveld, 2018), and these experiences impact the development of a child's habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Bourdieu argued that an individual's habitus starts to develop from their earliest observations of family and community interactions and described a person's habitus as the intrinsic knowledge that they have learnt, which they are not conscious of learning. This was demonstrated through some of the participants explaining that they did not know how they knew a person was a specific gender - "I just know" (Terry).

Additionally, the participants commented on the impact of community experiences and peers on their gender knowledge. This links to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological model which

identified the key role that families, peers and the community have in children's development. The influence that the participant's home and community experiences had on their gender knowledge and beliefs was established through their reference to these events when explaining their beliefs. For instance, when discussing who could play football, Jason explained that his older brother "plays football with the BOYS" and that "then I play with the boys too" (section 4a.4). However, whilst some of the participants referred to their experiences within the wider community when explaining their knowledge or gender beliefs, many of the participants did not. This may suggest that the participants' knowledge of gender stereotypes and norms is not influenced by the community that they are growing up in, however, this may also suggest that the participants are not aware of the impact of the community on their gender knowledge. Whilst Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological theory explains the different influences on a child's development, he considers the interactions that occur within the wider systems, and how these influence the individual. For instance, the behaviour and gender beliefs of the adults within a child's life will have been influenced by the interactions that they have experienced within the community in which they live. It is these behaviours and beliefs that their child observes them using within their daily lives, which influence the child's gender knowledge and the child's habitus. Therefore, the participants may not be aware of how the community they are growing up in has influenced their own gender beliefs and knowledge.

The settings that participated in this research were based in areas with diverse levels of SES, for instance, the Estate Community Nursery was based in an area of below-average SES, whilst the other two settings were based in areas of above-average SES. Analysis of the data identified differences between the participants' experience of gender policing at the Estate Community Nursery and the University Day Care. At the Estate Community Nursery, gender policing tended to occur within gender groups, whilst at the University Day Care policing occurred within, and across, gender groups. Additionally, the main gender enforcer at the Estate Community Nursery was male, whilst the main gender enforcer at the University Day Care was female. This finding may be explained by differences in family gender beliefs, as research by Hill (2002) and Hiller and Baudin (2016) suggests a link between family SES and children's gender knowledge, with families with higher levels of SES encouraging more equitable gender beliefs. This finding, and the potential implications, are discussed further in section **Error! Reference source not found..**

Another potential factor that was identified within the literature was the age of the participants (Kohlberg, 1966; Martin & Halverson, 1981; Perry et al., 2019). However, the findings of this research contradict previous studies, when analysing the data, the age of the

participants was not identified as playing a role in who polices peers and who is policed. Indeed, at times the youngest participants in the research were identified as policing older, opposite-gender peers. This was identified through the analysis of an observation where Chloe (3yrs 4mths) was identified excluding Zack (3yrs 11mths) from the role play area (section 4b.7). This finding, and potential reasons for the difference, are discussed further in section 5.6.4 below.

5.5 SQ4 Does Gender Play a Role in Who Polices Children's Play and Who is Policed?

The data presented in this research demonstrates a mixed picture concerning whether gender plays a role in whom polices their peers play and who is policed and raises additional questions regarding the cause of the different experiences.

Analysis of the data collected from the Estate Community Nursery identified that gender does play a significant role in who polices children's play and who is policed. Within this setting, the main gender enforcer was male, which concurs with Skočajić et al. (2020) who identified that boys are more likely to be involved in gender-enforcing roles. Additionally, within the Estate Community Nursery, gender policing tended to occur within gender groups, with limited cross-gender policing experienced by girls when they attempted to join male participants' play. This finding is contrary to that of Braun and Davidson (2017) who identified that some activities that children identified as appropriate for girls, were also considered appropriate for boys. However, Braun and Davidson's research took place with older children whose gender beliefs were likely to have become more flexible due to their age and development compared to the beliefs of preschool-aged children (Halim et al., 2013) and therefore the participants' strict adherence to gender separation is not unexpected.

However, the data collected at the University Day Care illustrated that the participants experiences were different. The main gender enforcer identified at the University Day Care was female which Xiao et al. (2019) suggest is unusual. Furthermore, gender policing was observed, and identified, occurring both within and across gender groups with even the youngest female participants being identified as policing older male participants. This finding is unexpected as whilst the literature suggests that some cross-gender group policing would not be unexpected, it is unusual that younger children are policing older children. Xiao et al. (2019) identified that older children are more likely to engage in gender-enforcing behaviours due to their stricter adherence to gender norms, therefore Jason's policing of Karl (section 4a.5) challenges the previous research.

The experiences of the participants in these two settings could be influenced by the SES of the catchment areas that the settings recruit children from. Hill (2002) identified that there is a link between family SES and the gender beliefs held and reinforced by the family, for instance, families with lower levels of SES are more likely to hold traditional gender beliefs, whereas families with higher levels of SES tend to hold more equitable gender beliefs. This finding may explain the difference in participants' experiences between these two settings, as the Estate Community Nursery draws from an area of below-average SES, while the University Day Care population comes from an area of above-average SES. In addition, the different SES and social experiences that the participants have experienced would lead to differences in their habitus and the cultural capital that they bring to the setting (Bourdieu, 1977).

Whilst analysis of the data from these two settings suggests that there may be a link between SES and the participants' experience of policing, the analysis of the participants' experiences at the Small Town Nursery, which also draws from an area of above average SES, does not confirm this finding. Analysis of the data gathered at the Small Town Nursery, paired with participants' reflections on their experiences in the setting, revealed that there was no dominant gender enforcer identified. Nevertheless, even without a dominant gender enforcer, it was identified that all participants engaged in gender policing to a certain extent. Additionally, whilst gender policing was identified across gender groups in a similar manner to the University Day Care, more instances of gender policing occurred within gender groups, reflecting the experiences of the participants at the Estate Community Nursery.

The complexities of these findings suggest that the context where the setting is located, along with the population who attends, may have an impact on children's experiences. However, this research has not been able to identify the reasons for the diverse experiences encountered by the participants across the three settings, and therefore further research into the potential impact of SES on young children's gender experiences is recommended.

5.6 Discussion of Key Findings

The previous sections of this chapter have focused on providing answers for the four sub-questions. Before moving on to answer the main research question, this section focuses on the key findings identified within the research. The discussion is presented across five sections, each of which focuses on one of the key findings. The findings identified in this research demonstrate how and why preschool children manipulate power to reinforce and control their peers' gender exploration.

The key findings identified through the data analysis are:

- The participants' manipulation of their play as a method of excluding or minimising the inclusion of opposite-gender peers.
- The participants' use of coercive behaviours to ensure that they and their peers adhere to the setting gender norms.
- The participant's use of gender as a method for controlling access to resources and activities within the setting.
- The potential link between SES and the participants' experiences of gender policing.
- The influence of age on gender policing behaviours.

5.6.1 Manipulating the Play

One unanticipated method that was identified in all three settings was the participant's use of manipulating the play as a means of excluding, restricting, or otherwise marginalising an opposite-gender peer who wished to join the play.

Within this research, it was identified that some of the participants manipulated their play as a means of reinforcing gender segregation within the preschool environment, thereby policing their peers' behaviour. This was managed through the participants designing, and redesigning, their play, depending on who wished to join. The manipulation of play themes was clearly illustrated when Nicola initially stated that a boy was unable to join their game because they were kittens, and when her arguments were disproved, she agreed that the boy could be a kitten. However, once she had agreed he could play, she then stated that boy kittens could only play in a restricted area (section 4c.7). During this interaction, Nicola used gender as a reason to physically restrict a male peer to a small area of the outside area. The implications for this action include limiting his access to resources, as well as marginalising his participation in the game (Björk-Willén, 2012).

There is limited literature surrounding young children's use of manipulation within their play to reinforce inequality of opportunity. For instance, research by Björk-Willén (2012) identified that young children use the allocation of roles within their role play to reinforce the social ranking of the children involved, and as a means of identifying the children who would lead the play. However, within this study, the participants manipulated their play as a means of excluding, restricting or marginalising peers due to their gender, and therefore it was used as a method of gender policing.

Analysis of the data using CCA identified how participants used play manipulation as a method of controlling who held power within an interaction. The participants were able to exert control and establish same-gender peers in positions of power within the play, whilst changing

the play theme so that power and the ability to influence the play was removed from opposite-gender peers. Once an opposite-gender peer was assigned to a role that held limited authority, those in positions of control were capable of marginalising or excluding them, and the opposite-gender peer was not in a position to challenge the marginalisation. This resulted in participants being marginalised and excluded from games and activities due to their gender and limited their interactions with peers. This method could have been utilised by the participants to exclude a peer for a variety of reasons, not just due to their gender. However, the research applied a methodological approach that allowed the participants to express their thoughts and insights regarding their interactions. It was through these conversations that the participants articulated their reasons for marginalizing the role of peers of the opposite gender in their play, and therefore confirmed the use of this technique as a method for policing opposite-gender peers.

In all but one of the examples presented within this thesis, the play was manipulated by female participants in order to exclude a male peer. In one of the examples presented in the results sub-chapters, a male peer was allocated the role of dad, which according to Björk-Willén (2012) is a high-status role. It could be posited that he was offered this role as he would be unlikely to refuse it, due to the status that is attached to a parental role within young children's imaginative play. However, once the role had been accepted, the character of Dad was sent out to work, which effectively excluded him from the game, and left the girls to continue playing without him. This can be perceived as an effective method to exclude an opposite-gender peer from a game without having to articulate that the opposite-gender peer is not welcome.

By appearing to accept the inclusion of an opposite-gender peer, and then manipulating the game to effectively exclude them, the female participants were able to subtly exclude a peer without drawing adult attention to what they had done. This could suggest that the participants believed, based on prior experiences, that practitioners would expect them to include a peer (regardless of gender) who wished to join their play. Lansford et al. (2012) identified that girls are more likely to use indirect or subtle methods to control their peers' behaviour. This may be linked to the gender discourse that positions girls in a lower power position than boys, rather than as a person who has the power and agency to be able to control or lead a situation (Blakemore et al., 2008).

This method was also employed effectively by younger children as a means of excluding an older, opposite-gender peer from joining their play. It could be conjectured that it is an effective strategy for younger children, with lower social standing within the setting, to use as

they do not need to say that the older child cannot join. By manipulating the play, for instance by explaining that “the daddies on holiday” or that “this is for boys only, we are pirates”, the opposite-gender peer is placed in a position where their desire to join is marginalised, and it is difficult for them to push for inclusion. In these particular cases, the established power dynamics which typically favour older children (Gülgöz & Gelman, 2017), become disrupted which results in a shift of power towards the younger children who are then in a position to assert control over who is involved in the play.

Across the data, this method was identified as being mainly used within the outside environment. Literature suggests that the outside environment is often dominated by boys, who use loud noise and/or fast movements to control the space (Martin, 2011), or as described by one participant “boys go crazy, girls do not go crazy”. Therefore, the use of play manipulation by the female participants may have been an attempt to challenge the power and control that they perceive their male peers hold within the outside environment. By manipulating their play, the participants were affecting the power dynamic by challenging who has power and agency within their play and positioning the mainly female participants as powerful and the male participants as lacking agency. This is supported by Sheldon (1996) whose study examined the power negotiations that preschool girls engaged in when engaging in role-play with same-gender peers.

Whilst the participants demonstrated their competence in utilising this method, the subtlety of this method has implications for preschool providers. If the aim of preschool provision is to reduce inequality, it is important for practitioners to challenge the reinforcement of gender inequality, gender stereotypes and gender norms. However, the subtle nature of play manipulation makes it harder for practitioners to identify, which challenges practitioners' ability to counteract the gendered messages that preschool children are receiving from their peers. Within this research, the participants' manipulation of their play as a form of gender policing was identified through the methods chosen, the ability to rewatch the interactions alongside the participants, meant that they were able to explain the interaction from their perspective. While it may not be feasible for practitioners to recreate the exact circumstances that allowed this research to uncover the play manipulation, the methodology emphasizes the significance for practitioners to observe children's play with a gender-aware perspective (Warin & Adrian, 2015) and engage in supportive, reflective conversations with the children (Josephidou, 2020).

This method has not previously been identified, within the published literature, as a form of policing that preschool children use to reinforce gender-appropriate behaviour. This finding

can therefore be identified as an original contribution to the body of knowledge within this field.

5.6.2 Coercive Behaviour

Coercive behaviour was observed as a strategy employed by the children to influence their peers' behaviour and ensure conformity to gender norms. Several examples were found where participants modified their behaviour in order to gain acceptance from their peers.

The participants explained that they had adapted their behaviour as they were aware that they would experience policing behaviours if they played with an opposite-gender peer. This demonstrated their awareness of setting gender norms, as well as their desire to be accepted within their gender group. Whilst the analysis of the data identified the participants' adaptation of their behaviour from an adult perspective, the reasons that drove the participants to make these changes would not have been highlighted had a different methodological position been taken. The inclusion of participant voices throughout the data collection process, and their participation in reflecting on, and analysing, their own interactions, enabled the participants to verify the findings identified through the use of CCA.

The participants shared their awareness that they would experience consequences from their peers if they played with opposite-gender peers. This suggests that the participants were aware of the potential for being penalised socially for transgressing agreed setting gender norms as identified by Godleski et al. (2015). In response to this, instances within the data were identified that support the belief that some of the participants changed their behaviour in response to policing from a same-gender peer, to ensure that they were not excluded. The coercive nature of the policing they have experienced may explain why the participants reported they felt pressure to conform to setting behaviours, even when gender-enforcing peers were not around.

The use of coercive behaviours as a means of ensuring children conform to gender behaviour norms has been demonstrated to lead to children changing their behaviour, even if they would prefer not to (Perry et al., 2019; Nabbijohn et al., 2020) to avoid being excluded by their peers. One participant discussed two different occasions where he felt that he was being policed and that he had changed his behaviour and excluded a female peer when he would have been happy to include them (section 4a.3).

The analysis of the data identified the participants' awareness of the coercive behaviours they use or have experienced. This was explained by the participants through their descriptions of how their same-gender peers would respond to them playing with an opposite-gender peer or

engaging in a cross-gender activity. Participants also shared how they would respond to opposite-gender peers in order to ensure their adherence to gender norms.

The participants' apparent acceptance of the coercive behaviours could be explained by their desire to be accepted within their gender group. As discussed above, the coercive behaviours that were used by gender-enforcing peers, led to children adapting their behaviour to emulate peers who they deemed to act gender-appropriately (Blakemore et al., 2008). The participants' desire to be included by their peers was identified within the data. This included the participants explaining that they had policed peers' behaviour because a same-gender peer had told them not to include an opposite-gender peer (section 4a.3). This example is evidenced in an incident between Karl and Jay, Jay policed Karl who then, in turn, policed opposite-gender peers. By acting as a gender enforcer, a child is able to demonstrate that they know how to be a boy or girl within the setting, regardless of whether they want to police their peer. This concurs with Xiao et al. (2019) who highlight that one reason that children police their peers' gender play is due to their desire to be accepted by same-gender peers. This can be seen in the coercive behaviour identified in this research that is used by gender-enforcing peers, leading to children adapting their behaviour to emulate peers who are deemed to act gender-appropriately.

The example presented above of Karl and Jay, where Karl experienced policing behaviour from Jay and in turn then policed the girls, demonstrates the impact of coercive behaviours beyond the child who is initially policed. This concurs with Schroeder and Liben's (2021) finding, that children who experience pressure to conform from their peers are more likely to accept the policing of other children and to be friends with gender-enforcing peers, leading to them use coercive behaviours on other peers.

The importance of peer acceptance and inclusion for young children's development has been identified within the literature (Coelho et al., 2017; Shehu, 2019) and within this research, participants were identified using gifts in an attempt to gain inclusion in a game. Bateman and Church (2017) identify young children's use of objects, or gifts, as a form of currency to persuade peers to include them in a game, for instance, Jake's desire to be included in Polly's game (section 4b.3). However, this form of coercion was often unsuccessful. This may be because the value that the child brings to the game or activity did not compensate for the undesirability of their gender or negative beliefs about how an opposite-gender child plays, illustrated by the comment "they SNATCH THEM" (section 4b.3).

The analysis of the data demonstrated the participants used their power to police their peers' behaviour through the reinforcement of gendered discourses. This enabled them to coerce

children into adhering to conventional gender norms through the risk to their social inclusion. The participants explained their response to this risk, for instance, Karl explained that whilst he wanted to play with the girls in the construction area, he didn't because a male told him not to (section 4a.3). The participants included in this study demonstrated through their behaviour and language that they wanted to be accepted as members of their setting community, and that there were specific rules about behaviour that they need to adhere to. This desire for acceptance has been identified as leading children to change or adapt their behaviour to reflect the behaviour of peers' (Chase, 2022).

This aligns with Paechter's (2007) work, which identified early years settings as communities of practice that hold an agreed set of norms regarding gender-appropriate behaviour which children are expected to adhere to if they want to be accepted by their peers. Children's awareness of the importance of being accepted by their peers may be linked to Hilliard and Liben's (2010) identification of their in-group/out-group schema. This sets out young children's desire to be seen as a member of a group that is similar to them. Through children's in-group behaviours, they identify their own group in positive terms, and children who belong to the opposite group are associated with negative characteristics (Hilliard & Liben, 2010). Being identified positively by their peers was important to the participants in this research, due to their desire to be included or accepted as a full member of the community within the setting. As part of imitating a gender-enforcing peer, participants can be seen to engage in policing behaviours in order to present themselves as a conventional boy or girl, in terms of setting expectations, for a same-gender peer. For example, the example where Karl joined Jay in policing the girls' activity in the construction area, even though he wanted to include them (section 4a.3). This finding aligns with the research conducted by Gastaldi et al. (2019), which revealed that young children imitate the play of their peers as a way to establish a sense of similarity, thus earning the opportunity to participate. This interaction also demonstrates how Jay was able to manipulate the power dynamic between himself and Karl to reinforce the gender discourse that identifies the activities and roles that are suitable for different genders.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological model identifies that peers' have a similar level of influence on a child's development as their family. Within the results presented in this thesis, the impact that peers had on the participants was identified in numerous diverse ways, including the identification of peers' behaviour or potential behaviour, which led the participants to police other children's behaviour. This was identified in the data through conversations with the participants, where they discussed how a gender-enforcing peer would respond if a child engaged in non-conforming behaviour, for instance, played with an opposite-gender peer. The participants' awareness that a non-conforming peer would be ignored or

socially isolated concurs with Mayeza (2018), who identified the risk of social exclusion for gender non-conforming primary-aged children.

The significance of children's coercive behaviours lies in their potential long-term influence on children's gender interactions. As discussed above, participants shared their awareness of the potential policing they would experience, and the implications for their social inclusion if they challenged the setting gender norms as justification for not playing with an opposite-gender peer. One possible inference that can be made, based on the participants' explanations, is that the participants would not risk challenging the setting gender norms, even if a gender-enforcing peer was not in attendance. This would lead to participants spending an increasing amount of time with same-gender peers, which would further reinforce their adherence to gender-appropriate behaviours and minimise their interactions with opposite-gender peers (Martin et al., 2013).

Due to the insidious impact of coercive behaviours, it is unlikely that practitioners will be able to identify one specific moment in which to intervene. This underlines the importance of practitioners being aware of the impact of gender on preschool children's experiences within the early childhood setting and sensitively challenging any instance of gender policing that they are aware of.

5.6.3 Use of Gender as a Means of Controlling Access

Analysis of the data identified that the participants reinforced the gender binary through their play and interactions and used gender to control access to both resources and areas of the environment.

The participants' use of gender to control access to resources was identified through the analysis of the data from all three settings. The methodological design of this research enabled the participants' engagement in reflecting on their play and identifying the reasons for their actions. By including the participants' voices within the analysis and discussion, the participants' explanations provide additional support to the data analysis and confirm the participants' use of gender as a criterion for enabling or denying access to the resources, which concurs with Gülgöz and Gelman (2017) who suggest that children use the gender binary to identify who should play with different toys.

Participants shared their beliefs about the appropriateness of activities for opposite-gender peers during the video-stimulated conversations. For instance, Polly's explanation that Jake shouldn't have the letter tiles because "BOYS DON'T DO LETTERS" (section 4b.4). Analysis of this interaction using CCA, identified how gender discourses were used to manipulate who had

control and whose power was diminished during the activity. This analysis was confirmed through Polly's justification of her removal of the resources from Jake due to his gender and her beliefs about gender-appropriate activities.

At the same time, the participants also shared resources with same-gender peers to encourage them to engage in an activity, such as when Jamie offered Terry some pieces of Mobilo in an attempt to encourage him to play (section 4c.3). Instances of this were identified in all three settings through the video-stimulated conversations, where the participants explained why they had taken the actions they had. The reasons why participants shared resources with same-gender peers and not with opposite-gender peers could be diverse. However, during video-stimulated conversations, participants explained many reasons why they did not share the resources linked to the gender of the peer. The participants' reluctance to share resources with opposite-gender peers aligns with the findings discussed by Engelmann et al. (2013), who identified that children are more likely to share resources with a same-gender peer due to the importance of being accepted within their in-group. Within the research, it was identified that another reason that the participants did not share resources with an opposite-gender peer was due to the gender appropriateness, or inappropriateness, of the activity for the peer. This potentially adds to Engelmann et al.'s findings and provides an additional reason for children's in-group sharing preference, as there could be an element of gender policing taking place. By restricting an opposite-gender peer's access to resources, a child may be policing an opposite-gender peer's behaviour due to it contravening their understanding of gender norms and the appropriateness of an activity for an opposite-gender peer.

Analysis of the data suggests that the participants drew on gender discourses when identifying who should be allowed to play with resources or access areas of the environment. During these interactions, the participants manipulated who held power and who was marginalised, with those holding the power being in control and able to restrict access. While gendered power dynamics typically associate power with masculinity and position women as having less power and less ability to influence others (Kilvington & Wood, 2016a), this pattern was not found in the data analysis. Both male and female participants were observed to exert power and influence over their peers' experiences and access to resources and activities.

Participants who were engaged in controlling access to resources shared similar reasoning for denying access to activities and resources with the researcher, that of the appropriateness for an opposite-gender peer. However, analysis of the data identified that they explained their reasoning to peers in a less direct manner, for instance by reinforcing negative stereotypes

about opposite-gender peers, such as when Alice told Annie “If you do they will take it” when talking about hiding the Lego from the boys who were playing near them (section 4a.6).

This concurs with research by Martin et al. (2013) who highlight that children tend to identify positive characteristics with their own gender group, at the same time as identifying negative characteristics with opposite-gender peers. The participants were then able to use their knowledge of expected behaviours and characteristics to confirm their own gender group membership, whilst emphasising the negative behaviours and characteristics of the opposite-gender group to their same-gender peers. This illustrates the influence exerted by the participants on their peers and the resulting effect on their peers' understanding of gender, this correlates with learnings from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological model. According to this model, individuals within their immediate environment (microsystem) significantly contribute to an individual's early social learning and serve as a framework for future knowledge acquisition, with both family and peers exerting similar levels of influence.

In addition to controlling access to resources, the participants were identified using gender to control access to areas of the environment. Whilst an understanding that preschool children's gendering of the ECE environment is not a new phenomenon (Pietraszewski & German, 2013; Cederborg, 2021), the participants within this study explained their reasons for excluding opposite-gender peers from areas. This confirms the findings of previous research as well as underlining the benefits of the methodological design of this research.

The preschool environments within the settings were set up to encourage gender-equitable access with a variety of images used to challenge stereotypical norms. As an example, the construction area within the Estate Community Nursery included pictures of both male and female preschool children engaged in activities. In an attempt to interact with two male peers in the construction area, Alice pointed to a picture of herself building a tower on the wall of the construction area, however, the boys failed to respond to her attempts to join their play (section 4a.3). In this example the participants used gender as a criterion for excluding opposite-gender peers from specific areas, which concurs with Prioletta and Pyle's (2017) findings that regardless of the provision of a gender equitable provision, children gender the preschool environment by identifying areas that are, in their opinion, appropriate for single-gender groups.

The analysis of the findings revealed that the participants tended to conform to traditional gender stereotypes when it came to various areas. Specifically, areas like the construction area or small world vehicles were commonly associated with the male participants, whereas the role play area and creative areas were generally associated with female participants. However,

the sand tray was perceived as a space that was accessible to both genders, which is consistent with the findings reported by Børve and Børve (2017).

Nonetheless, the data analysis identified that at times the participants challenged the traditional gendering of areas and claimed a traditionally opposite-gendered space for themselves. These instances were identified in both the University Day Care and the Small Town Nursery and involved female participants claiming traditionally male, or gender-neutral spaces, for themselves and excluding male peers. In doing so, the female participants challenged gender discourses around the appropriateness of traditionally 'male' activities for girls. The reason these instances were identified within these two settings raises questions about why this behaviour was not observed in the Estate Community Nursery. As previously described, the children who attend the Estate Community Nursery come from an area of below-average SES, which may imply that the SES of the families within a setting impacts the participant's behaviour. This would concur with the findings reported by Hill (2002) which identified links between family SES and the gender values they hold. The potential effect that SES has on children's experiences of gender policing within ECE environments will be discussed further in section **Error! Reference source not found.**

However, there were instances when participants challenged the traditional gendering of spaces. One such example occurred when Bella and a small group of same-gender peers took over the outdoor construction area (section 4c.4), however, these occurrences were exceptions rather than the norm. Participants in this research usually claimed gender-neutral spaces, rather than subverting the norm by claiming a gendered space for opposite-gender play. The participants gendering of the preschool environment can be seen as a form of border protection work, used to reinforce gender-appropriate behaviours and activities, in addition to reinforcing gender discourses that highlight differences between gender groups rather than similarities (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010).

The research participants were observed manipulating the power dynamics to either allow or restrict access to resources and the environment both directly and subtly. The inclusion of the context where the interactions took place within CCA, identified that participants were more likely to subtly control access to the resources and areas of the environment when practitioners were more likely to be in close proximity. This was identified, for instance, when Polly slid the resources away from Jake and used both body language and her facial expression to convey her feelings (section 4b.4). This may suggest that the participants are aware that practitioners would not accept the exclusion of peers from an area due to their gender (Chapman, 2016; Børve & Børve, 2017) and are therefore attempting to be inconspicuous.

Participants' use of gender as a criterion to control access to both resources and areas of the environment, led to preschool children having different experiences within the setting. Their opportunities for play and development were guided by their gender and their same-gender peer group which reinforces gender inequalities and stereotypical beliefs about gender-appropriate activities. One of the possible implications of these findings is the importance of practitioners being aware of how the preschool children within their setting have gendered their environment and taking steps to challenge it. The data presented supports an argument that attempting to combat gendered beliefs about the appropriateness of activities for a specific gender group through strategies such as displaying images of opposite-gender peers playing in the area, does not solve the issue. However, it may be a first step and the images could be used as potential prompts for conversations with, and between, the children around gender stereotypes in a similar manner to the image elicitation activity used in this research.

5.6.4 The Influence of Age on Gender Policing Behaviours

Literature focusing on children's gender development suggests that children's gender beliefs develop over time, becoming increasingly rigid between the ages of 3 years and 5 years old before children start to become more flexible in their beliefs and adherence to gender norms (Halim et al., 2013; Sims et al., 2022). Running concurrently with this development is an understanding within the literature that children's gender policing behaviours increase over time, as their adherence to gender norms intensifies (Perry et al., 2019). In contrast to previous studies, no strong correlation was identified between the age of the participants and their engagement in policing behaviours within this research, as all participants were at differing times involved in policing their peers' gender behaviour.

The majority of the observed policing behaviour took place among participants who were of a similar age. This finding suggests that most of the participants preferred to play with peers of a similar age, rather than those who were significantly older or younger (6 months+). For this reason, most of the participants who experienced policing were being policed by a similar-age peer. Taking Halim et al.'s. (2013) findings around the rigidity of children's gender norms, and Martin et al.'s. (2013) findings that children confirm their in-group membership by identifying and reproducing the characteristics associated with their own gender together, it would be expected that children were more likely to be involved in policing their peers' play as they get older. There were challenges to this expectation, for instance within the Estate Community Nursery, the main gender enforcer, Jason (4yrs), confidently policed peers' who were older than him. This behaviour is illustrated in the example where Karl (4yrs 8mths) deferred to Jason's policing and explained that Jason would not let him play with a girl (section 4b.5). This

is further evidenced in the example that takes place at the University Day Care, where Polly (3yrs 10mths), confidently used different methods to police older children (section 4a.3).

One possible explanation for this finding is the impact that Covid-19 lockdowns had on the participants' attendance at an ECE setting. Research by Bennet et al. (2020) identified that children who attend ECE settings develop knowledge of gender stereotypes at an earlier age than children who do not attend. However, due to Covid-19 lockdowns and the associated closure of ECE settings, many of the participants encountered a delay in starting their ECE experience, or, in the case of the University Day Care participants, had their ECE experience interrupted. This may have resulted in the effect of reducing the impact that older peers would usually have on children's gender norm development, as due to the closure, these older peers had moved on to school and the cohort that participated in the research had not experienced older gender role models within their settings. In addition to decreasing the role that older peers play in influencing children's gender behaviours, the increased time that participants spent at home may have amplified the influence of their family on their gender beliefs (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In the longer term, the increased exposure to family gender norms without experience of community or peer knowledge to challenge these beliefs, the participants' habitus, in particular in relation to gender norms, may be stronger. Consequently, it may be more challenging for these perspectives to evolve as children mature (Bourdieu, 1977).

Whilst the data analysis did not identify a strong link between the age of the participants and their engagement in policing behaviours, it did highlight a potential correlation between the age of the participants and the methods that they used to police their peers' behaviour. The younger participants who engaged in policing older peers tended to use subtler methods. For instance, they were identified as manipulating the play, controlling access to resources, or using their body language to demonstrate that an older opposite-gender peer was not welcome within the play (Lundström et al., 2022). A possible explanation for the use of subtle methods could be linked to the power that the participant felt that they held within the interaction. In an ECE setting, there is typically a recognised social structure where older children assume a position of authority or power due to their perceived higher level of knowledge and experience, while younger children have limited influence or power (Gülgöz & Gelman, 2017). The use of subtle policing methods means that it is harder for ECE practitioners to distinguish when children are using them, but additionally, it may also be more difficult for children who are being policed to identify why they do not appear to have any influence or power within an activity.

Therefore, whilst the findings of this research did not identify a strong link between the age of the participants and their involvement in policing behaviour, the link between participant age and the methods they use is potentially more significant and would benefit from further research.

5.7 Research Question – Do Children Between 3 years old and 4 years old Police their Peers' Gender Exploration During Play?

Based on the data presented in this thesis, along with the answers to the sub-questions presented in this chapter, the short answer to the question “Do children between 3 years old and 4 years old police their peers' gender exploration during play?” is yes. However, the long answer is more complex as there are a range of factors to be considered which may influence whether preschool children police their peers' gender exploration or not.

The data presented in this thesis demonstrates that gender policing behaviours were identified in all three settings and the feminist approach adopted in the thesis enabled the participants to describe and explain their lived experiences (Bailey, 2012).

Analysis of the data identified that participants in all three settings were involved in both policing their peers' gender behaviour and knowledge, and experienced policing behaviours. Mayeza (2018) demonstrated that primary school-aged children police their peers' gender behaviour and this finding has been replicated, within this study, with preschool-aged children. Despite the changes in societal gender norms since the late 1970s and early 1980s, these findings concur with the research presented by Lamb and Roopnarine (1979), Lamb et al. (1980) and Roopnarine (1984) who examined preschool children's experiences of gender policing. This raises questions about why preschool children police their peers' gender exploration and what influences the gender knowledge that they hold.

Contrary to previous research which identified that gender enforcement is usually undertaken by boys (Braun & Davidson, 2017; Skočajić et al., 2020). Within this study, the gender of a child does not seem to correlate with whether they are likely to take on the role of gender enforcer. For instance, within one of the settings, the main gender enforcer was male, whilst in a different setting the main enforcer was female, and indeed, a significant proportion of the participants took on the role of gender enforcer at some point when interacting with their peers. As this research collected data from three different settings, this finding may be due to the characteristics of the settings, for instance, the SES or cultural diversity of the setting. However, within this research, there is insufficient data to confidently make such links, and therefore more research would be recommended to collaborate these findings.

Following on from the role that gender plays, or in this study, does not play in who undertakes the policing behaviour, is whether gender plays a role in who experiences policing. Within this research, most gender policing occurred within a gender group, i.e. male participants policed or were policed by their male peers, and female participants policed or were policed by their female peers. This concurs with Xiao et al. (2019) who identified that most gender policing occurs within gender groups, with the exception that girls may, to a lesser extent, also be involved in policing non-conforming boys. Whilst in one setting there were examples of gender policing crossing these gender boundaries, with a female participant policing both female and male peers, these examples were limited. Taken together, these two findings suggest that gender may not influence who undertakes policing behaviours, but it does influence who experiences gender policing due to policing behaviours usually remaining within gender groups.

Analysis of the findings identified a range of methods that preschool children use to police their peers' gender experiences. The key findings identified children's manipulation of their play, the use of coercive behaviours to change peers' behaviours and the use of gender to control access to resources and the environment.

This research identified the utilisation of an unusual method by the participants, one not previously reported within the literature. The participants' use of manipulating the play to exclude a peer due to gender was an unexpected finding. This subtle method minimised the potential for peers to complain to an adult. Along with the participant's sophisticated use of non-verbal methods, the researcher posits that preschool children are aware that the practitioners within the setting would challenge explicit attempts to exclude a peer. By including the context and location of the participants' interactions within the analysis, the link between context and the methods used by the participants to police their peers' gender behaviour is supported. The participants were identified to use verbal control as a method when they were in conversation with the researcher and within the outdoor environment.

The researcher had spent time building a relationship of trust with the participants and had not been involved in any behaviour management, therefore the participants potentially believed that their views were less likely to be challenged. Furthermore, within the outdoor environments, the participants were often at some distance from a practitioner, due to the size of the gardens and were therefore unlikely to be overheard compared to when they were inside the settings. The impact of the environment in this context has previously remained unexplored within the literature and is worthy of further research to identify whether

preschool children are aware of practitioner beliefs and whether they make conscious decisions about their gender behaviour reliant on the environment they are in.

This research argues that it is important to note that the methods identified within this study could, at times, have been employed by the participants for reasons other than gender. However, the methodological stance and related methods employed to include the participants' voices, enabled the participants to explain what they had done and why. It is therefore confidently argued herein that the policing methods identified in the three settings participating in this study were used by the participants to police their peers' gender exploration.

Throughout the findings, the participants' knowledge and reinforcement of gender discourses were identified as participants used their power to reinforce and recreate gender norms and behaviours. Gee (2014a) identifies that discourses focus on who has power and how their power is used to recreate inequality, with gender discourses focusing on how power is used to reinforce gender differences and inequality. Whilst the participants were identified as using their power to reinforce gender norms, some of the participants were identified to be using their power to challenge and disrupt gender norms. This was particularly identifiable in the analysis of the data collected at the University Day Care and Small Town Nursery, both of which were in areas of above-average SES. This may be linked to the participants' experiences within their home environment and the cultural capital they have developed which is a result of their family's SES.

The analysis identified differences in the participants' experiences across the settings. The participants who attended the Estate Community Nursery experienced higher levels of policing than the participants in the other settings. The significant distinction between the Estate Community Nursery and the other two settings is the SES of the catchment population, with the Estate Community Nursery being based in an area of below-average SES. There is limited current research on the impact of SES on children's experiences of gender, however, research by Hill (2002) found that families who identified as having a lower SES were more likely to reinforce traditional gender stereotypes which reinforce a division between male and female activities and the power that it usually associated with masculine behaviours. It could therefore be suggested that, alongside the participants' exposure to stronger adherence to traditional gender beliefs, their drive to reinforce their peers' gender behaviours could be linked to the high status that is given to masculine behaviours over feminine behaviours (Coyne et al., 2014).

The findings from this research highlight that preschool children experience gender policing within the early childhood setting for several different reasons. However, what is clear from the findings is that such policing reinforces children's adherence to gender norms and stereotypes in addition to gender discourses around power and inequality. For this reason, ECE settings need to be aware of the messages that children are receiving from their peers and the roles that preschool children take in the ongoing reproduction of gender norms and beliefs and the associated imbalance of power within society.

Chapter 6 Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This closing chapter will provide an overview of the research presented within this thesis before returning to the research questions posed and presenting a summary of the findings. The chapter will then move on to state the contribution this research has made to the early childhood sector's understanding of how children understand gender and how they use their play to enforce and support their understanding of gender norms, before presenting a reflection on the research design and analysis. The implications and recommendations for future research, policy, and practice are then presented, before the limitations of the research, including the impact of Covid-19, are considered. Finally, the thesis draws to a close with a concluding reflection on the active role that preschool children play in their developing understanding of gender.

6.2 Study Overview

This research project set out to answer the question:

Do children between 3 years old and 4 years old police their peers' gender exploration during play?

In order to do this, four sub-questions were identified:

- SQ 1. Do children police their peers' gender play and why?
- SQ 2. What methods do children use to police their peers' gender play?
- SQ 3. What factors impact children's gender policing behaviour?
- SQ 4. Does gender play a role in who polices children's play and who is policed?

Chapter one introduces the research. It presents the social context for the project and identifies the underpinning values and assumptions of the research which views preschool children as competent individuals who are capable of making their own decisions and talking about their life experiences.

Chapter two presents the theoretical and literature basis that focuses on children's gender development, examining some of the factors that impact young children's knowledge and understanding of gender stereotypes (linked to SQ 2). Within this chapter, research that examines techniques that children use to police their peers' gender behaviour is presented (linked to SQ 4). Furthermore, a lack of research that investigates preschool children's experience of gender policing is identified as a gap in the existing literature.

Chapter three sets out the methodological stance taken within the research, initially setting out the researcher's positionality and the feminist beliefs that underpin all aspects of the project. The chapter moves on to present the decisions that structured the approach to the design of the data collection and analysis, justifying decisions with reference to literature. A new form of data analysis, critical conversation analysis, is proposed. This combines aspects of critical discourse analysis and conversation analysis, to develop an approach to analysis that can be employed to identify how children use language, including tone of voice and body language, to reinforce and share knowledge about discourses, even where there is a power disparity between participants in a conversation.

The results and associated analysis are presented across chapter four and the associated sub-chapters. Chapter four introduces the results section and provides an overview of the themes that were identified within the data. This is followed by three sub-chapters, each of which focuses on telling the story of the participants' experiences within the settings. These stories are presented through themes. The analysis of these results, identified four contributing factors, age, gender, socio-economic status, and cultural diversity. The findings identified across the three settings are then drawn together and presented through the themes and contributing factors.

Chapter five begins by addressing the sub-questions posed in the thesis. It subsequently proceeds to examine the key findings derived from the study. The discussion presented focuses on five key findings. Ultimately, the chapter concludes by addressing the main research question, "Do children between 3 years old and 4 years old police their peers' gender exploration during play?"

6.3 Summary of the Findings

This study sets out to provide an answer to the question: do three- and four-year-old children police their peers' gender exploration? The sub-questions that supported the main question focus on whether preschool children police their peers' gender behaviour and, if they do, why do they, what techniques they use, what factors influence children's behaviour and whether gender plays a role in who engages in policing or who is policed.

The findings presented in this thesis demonstrate that preschool-aged children are knowledgeable about societal gender norms and stereotypes and use this knowledge to identify what it means to be a girl or boy within their community. This finding challenges the belief held by some practitioners that children in early years settings are too young to understand the concept of gender or to have any knowledge about gender stereotypes

(Priolella, 2020). Throughout their play and interactions, the participants reinforced their understanding of traditional gender discourses through the manipulation of play and the identification of whose voice was elevated and who was marginalised. In this study, gender was identified as a salient feature that preschool children used to describe themselves and to identify the peers that could or could not play with them. When asked to identify the gender of an unknown person, the participants used their knowledge of gender stereotypes to justify their beliefs, demonstrating the level of certainty that they had in their gender norm knowledge and the expectation they held that it would be accepted as correct by others. The expectation that their gender beliefs would be accepted by others can be seen through their responses when peers challenged their beliefs during the video-stimulated conversations and image-elicitation conversations.

In addition to using their knowledge of gender stereotypes and norms as a means for identifying the gender of an unknown individual, the participants also used this knowledge to justify the policing of peers who engaged in non-conforming behaviour. The intention that underpinned the policing behaviours was a desire to reinforce gender stereotypical behaviours and expectations, as a means of ensuring that non-conforming peers understood that their gender behaviour was not appropriate. The data suggests that preschool children are capable of manipulating their peers as a way of policing their gender behaviour. They do this through excluding peers who do not conform to expected gender behaviours. It seems that the participants were aware of the potential of being policed by their peers if they did not adhere to the gender norms of their peers within the nurseries. Due to their desire to be accepted within their gender peer group, it appears that the participants adapted their behaviour to ensure that they were seen as proper member of their gender group. This finding supports the assertion that preschool children manipulate their own behaviour in order to ensure that their own behaviour aligns with their experience of acceptable societal gender norms.

This research identified a range of methods that the participants used to police their peers' gender behaviour including the use of body language, verbal control and manipulating the play. The use of play theme manipulation was identified across all three settings, with the participants using this strategy to exclude, or restrict, an opposite-gender peer who wishes to join their play, an approach to policing children's gender play, previously unidentified within the literature. Whilst both genders of participants were observed using manipulation as a technique for policing their peers, it was identified that female participants used the technique more than male participants. The research did not identify reasons why this technique was used more by the female participants. However, due to the status and power that society attaches to masculinity, it could be argued that the girls utilised this method due to the fact it

is subtle and reduces the likelihood of conflict with opposite-gender peers or adult practitioners.

The participants were also identified to use different methods inside the settings and in the outside environment. The methods that the participants used inside the preschool rooms were subtle, for instance, adapting body language and position or exclusion from the play. Conversely, the participants tended to use more identifiable methods of control within the outside area such as telling opposite-gender peers that they cannot play. The use of verbal control when the participants are outside but not inside raises questions about why the participants do not use verbal control when they are in an indoor environment. It could be argued that participants' proximity to the practitioners in this environment, could be influential in this behaviour. When the participants are inside the setting, there is a greater chance that a practitioner will be in close enough proximity to overhear their conversations, compared to when the participants are in the more expansive outdoor environment. This would suggest that the participants may be aware that their gender policing may not be accepted by the practitioners, therefore, children adapt the behaviours that they use depending on the proximity of the practitioners.

Drawing the threads of these findings together, it can be argued that the preschool children in this study are aware of social norms around gender stereotypes. Participants in this study further used a range of methods that included manipulating both their play and the play of their peers as a means of reinforcing gender stereotypes. The findings also demonstrate that preschool children are aware that their policing behaviours may not be accepted by the adults around them. Children, therefore, adapt their behaviour and the techniques they use to police their peers' gender behaviour, depending on the environment they are in. This indicates how preschool children are aware of the subtleties of acceptable social interaction and the steps they can take to ensure they are able to police their peers' behaviour without consequences.

6.4 Contributions to Knowledge

This research has made the following contributions to knowledge:

- The identification of a strategy used by the children to police their peers – manipulating the play.
- The use of video-stimulated conversations with 3- and 4-year-olds to enable them to reflect on their play and to consider the role of gender in influencing their decisions.

- The development of critical conversation analysis (CCA) as a tool for analysing children's peer interactions to understand how and why they exert influence on their peers.

Each of these contributions to knowledge has been previously noted and explained. Therefore, rather than repeat the previous information about these contributions, this section will discuss these contributions from a practical or methodological perspective.

The first contribution to knowledge that this thesis makes, is the identification of the participants' use of manipulation of play themes to exclude an opposite-gender peer. Practitioners usually react to verbal gender exclusions, for instance, "you can't play because you're a boy". However, the participants' manipulation of the play as a means of excluding an opposite-gender peer was a significantly subtler method. Due to the subtle nature of this method, it would be challenging for practitioners to observe or identify its occurrence. To the observer, it may appear that the opposite-gender peer has chosen to leave the play, rather than being excluded due to their position in the game being minimised or restricted.

From a practical viewpoint, the identification of this policing behaviour highlights a strategy that preschool children may use to police their peers' behaviour and to exclude opposite-gender peers from their play. This is a subtle technique that, practitioners may be unaware of, and therefore be less likely to appropriately challenge children's gender beliefs. This strategy has not been previously highlighted within the existing literature. It is hoped therefore that identifying how children are competent in exhibiting this policing behaviour in this research, will encourage future research and practice decisions.

The second contribution to knowledge made by this thesis is the effective use of video-stimulated conversations to investigate children's gender beliefs and behaviours with 3 and 4-year-old children. As previously discussed, whilst this method has been used with young children, it is an unusual method to use to encourage preschool-aged children to reflect on their interactions and the gender discourse that influences the behaviour. This is due to a widely held belief that children of this age are unable to communicate their thoughts and beliefs clearly (Theobald, 2012). However, this research demonstrates that even the youngest participant (3yrs 1mth) was able to communicate their thoughts related to gender and to discuss what had occurred in the video recording.

From a feminist methodological perspective, the desire to amplify the voices of those who are usually excluded from research has an impact on the methods chosen due to the desire to position the participants as the experts in their own lives and to allow their views to be heard.

This research argues that this is particularly important when the participants are young children who have traditionally been understood as less than competent (Greig et al., 2013). By using video stimulated conversations alongside supportive questioning, the participants are able to share their reflections, thoughts and views on the recorded observations and position themselves as experts in their own lives. This is a key contribution to methodological knowledge, contributing a method that amplifies young children's voices to the toolbox of appropriate methods to use with preschool children.

The third contribution to knowledge that this thesis makes is the development and use of critical conversation analysis (CCA), as a method of data analysis. CCA was developed from aspects of both critical discourse analysis (CDA) and conversation analysis (CA). It was designed to analyse how the participants use their verbal language and non-verbal communication as a way of reinforcing and sharing their knowledge of social discourses. In this thesis, the social discourse that was focused on was gender.

From a research perspective, CCA enables the researcher to focus on how young children use different communication techniques to reinforce the power associated with different discourses. It includes a focus on language techniques, such as self-repair (correction of what they believe is an incorrect response) or agency pairs, where a specific response is required, but also on the tone of voice and non-verbal communication that aids the children in reinforcing behaviour. The final aspect of CCA is the value that is placed on the context of the interaction. This element considers the wider context that may affect how the children are using language to reinforce a discourse.

Finally, this thesis has updated the literature on a topic which has received little research focus in three decades and includes the voice of the participants. Previous research conducted and reported by Lamb and Roopnarine (1979), Lamb et al. (1980) and Roopnarine (1984) was a quantitative design with children's policing behaviours observed and documented by the adult researchers. The qualitative approach taken by this research has added to the literature through the feminist perspective taken which enabled the participants' voices to be centred within the discussion. The combination of methods used supported the participants in reflecting on their awareness of gender stereotypes and norms, as well as the impact that gender has on their peer interactions and experiences.

6.5 Reflections on the Research Design and Analysis

When gathering data, the value that the data collection methods brought to the research was immeasurable. The first data collection method was video-recorded observation. Whilst video

recording children's play has ethical implications, these were managed to ensure that the recording did not cause any risk to the participants or their peers within the setting. The benefit of using video-recorded observations was highlighted upon rewatching the recordings when subtle actions by the participants were identified that would have otherwise been missed. During the transcription process, the ability to rewatch the recordings meant that detailed transcriptions could be made to support the analysis of the children's behaviour and activities.

In addition to utilising the observations as a source of data, the video-recorded observations were also used as a stimulus for conversation and to support the participants in engaging with reflection. Video-stimulated conversations is a method that is rarely used with preschool children to encourage them to reflect on their beliefs and intentions, due to a belief that participants would not be able to discuss the recording due to limited language abilities (Theobald, 2012). During this research project, the participants responded well to participating in the video-stimulated conversations, engaging with watching the recordings and talking about what they could see, reflecting on the impact of gender on their behaviour and interactions. The participants were given the opportunity to choose whether to watch the video recording on their own with the researcher or with the researcher and up to two peers'. The majority of the participants chose to watch the recording on their own with the researcher. During the conversations, the participants were able to explain their thinking and reflect on the reasons why certain things had happened in the play or what would change if a different gender peer had joined them. These conversations added to the researcher's analysis of the video-recorded play as the participants provided their own voices to the analysis. Reflecting on why the participants chose to watch the video-recorded observation on their own, this research contends that the participants felt comfortable that their responses would not be judged by the researcher but were unsure whether their peers would necessarily accept their comments. During the video-stimulated conversations where the participants included a peer, some of them engaged in watching the video recordings but did not engage verbally, whereas when they watched a video observation on their own, the same participant would talk to the researcher. This supports the importance of allowing young participants to decide how they want to engage in the research process.

The third data collection method developed was an image elicitation activity. Shaw (2021) identified the benefits of using images as a stimulus to encourage young participants to share their thoughts and this underpinned the decision to use images as a means of gaining an understanding of the participant's knowledge of gender stereotypes. The original plan was to use the image cards within the setting's continuous provision, for instance, the sand tray,

sensory tray, or small construction. However, during the first two weeks of the data collection period at the Estate Community Nursery, it was identified that many of the participants did not engage in these areas of continuous provision, but they all enjoyed playing picture-matching games. By changing the image elicitation game to a picture matching game, the participants and their peers were more inclined to engage in the data collection activity. This may be due to the familiarity of the participants with picture matching games which meant that they were more confident engaging with the activity, than they may have been with a more formal data collection activity. The importance of young children being comfortable during data collection activities has been highlighted by Shaw (2021), prompting the more informal approach of image elicitation games, as opposed to the originally planned interview-style conversations.

The original data analysis plan was to use Gee's critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Gee, 2014a), however, when examining the data, the researcher identified that CDA was an inappropriate approach for this research as it does not differentiate between how the participants utilise their power within their interactions and the power that is held by the researcher. As two of the data collection methods included conversations between the participants and the researcher, the researcher identified that the data analysis method needed to be adapted to focus on the language that participants used to reinforce gender knowledge. This reflection led to the development of critical conversation analysis (CCA) which draws on both CDA and conversation analysis (CA). By adding the focus on how children use language from CA, to CDA's focus on how children reinforce power through their interaction, CCA was able to consider the various aspects of the participants' interactions with each other to provide a holistic analysis of the data. The inclusion of details about the context of the interactions meant that CCA was able to consider the wider influences on the participants, for instance, the proximity of peers or practitioners which may affect the participants' reactions. CCA was an effective method of analysis for the data that was collected within this research, as it was able to identify some of the methods that the participants used, along with the discourses that influenced them. These findings may have been missed through other methods of analysis which did not consider the wider circumstances that influenced the participants.

Reflecting on the research as a whole, this thesis has contributed to the literature in two methodological aspects. The first is through the successful use of video-stimulated conversations to enable preschool-aged children to engage in reflection which demonstrated how participants as young as 3 years 1 month old were able to participate in video-stimulated conversations to reflect on the impact of gender on their play, behaviour, and interactions with peers. The second methodological aspect that adds to the literature is the development and use of CCA as a means of analysing young children's conversations to identify how the

language, both verbal and non-verbal, that they use shares knowledge and reinforces power and inequality.

6.5.1 Reflecting on the theoretical framework

This study uses Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological framework, along with the different theories of gender development and Gee's (2014) figured worlds, to provide the theoretical framework which grounds the research. Reflecting on how the distinct aspects of the theoretical framework connect with each other, links can be made between Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological theory, Gee's figured worlds and the participant's exposure and awareness of gendered discourse.

Participants made limited reference to the role that family and their wider community experiences play in their knowledge of gender stereotypes and norms. For instance, Jason referred to his brother only playing football with boys, so Jason only played football with boys, and Megan justified her identification of a firefighter as a woman because she had seen a female firefighter. However, whilst the participants may not have referred to the influence of others when talking about their knowledge and experiences of gender, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological theory explains that children's development is impacted by their personal interactions with others. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the beliefs and behaviours of people within a child's microsystem will be influenced by their own mesosystem interactions with others, which will then have an impact on the behaviours and attitudes that the individual at the centre of Bronfenbrenner's model experiences. Therefore, whilst the participants may not have been consciously aware of the role that family and community play in their understanding of gender, their behaviour and beliefs will have been affected by their observations and interactions with their family and the wider community.

This unconscious understanding of the world can be described as their habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). However, it also links to Gee's (2014) figured worlds, which are an individual's simplistic model of the world which they use to understand the world around them and to make quick decisions about how to respond to their peers and other interactions. The participant's use of these figured worlds can be seen through Terry's statement, "I just know" when he was asked about his identification of an individual's gender. It can be posited that he was drawing on the figured world, or unconscious knowledge, that he had developed through his interactions with others which convey gender knowledge. He is then able to use this information to inform his decision-making without being consciously aware of it.

The examples presented in this section support this study's position that Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-ecological model and Gee's (2014) figured worlds, work together to explain how

preschool children's experiences influence their understanding of gender norms and stereotypes. The inclusion of Bronfenbrenner's model explains how the participants' beliefs are affected by their peers, families, and the wider community, even when the participants are not aware of how their experiences have influenced them. The participants draw on these experiences to develop their figured worlds, which they then utilise during their individual interactions with their peers as a means of guiding their own behaviour.

Having discussed the links between Bronfenbrenner's (1979) socio-economic model and Gee's (2014) figured worlds, this research additionally identified that links can be made between these two aspects of the theoretical framework and the participants' exposure and awareness of gendered discourses. Through their interactions with others, including peers, family and the wider community, the participants were exposed to gendered discourses. Gendered discourses are frequently reflected in the gender stereotypes that children are exposed to (Grieshaber & McArdle, 2010). These discourses also encompass more abstract gender beliefs, such as the notion that men possess higher levels of power within society (Braun & Davidson, 2017). Whilst this research has demonstrated how children reinforce gender stereotypes and norms with their interactions with their peers, this does not explain how young children start to develop an understanding of the more abstract aspects of gender discourse.

Children's use of figured worlds may supply a potential explanation as to how they start to develop an understanding of more abstract gender discourses. As previously explained, Gee (2014) suggests that people develop figured worlds which are a simplified model of the world as they understand it. These models are based on how an individual interprets their experiences; however, our thoughts and behaviours are influenced by the social and cultural groups we are a part of, which means that an individual's figured world is culturally situated. Whilst children may not be directly taught that men hold more power within a situation, they will be exposed to this gender discourse through their experiences, whether these are in person experiences or exposure via media such as books or television programmes (Braun & Davidson, 2017; Meyer & Conroy, 2022). An example of this may be when children see men in positions of power within stories, or a male police officer or fire fighter, alternatively women may be portrayed in caring positions. These experiences influence the children's beliefs about gender and their figured worlds adjust to reflect the gendered messages that they have been exposed to. These initial beliefs are then reinforced through their observations within the wider community. This again links to Bronfenbrenner's model, particularly the influence of the exosystem (wide community) and macrosystem (culture and social influences) on an individual.

Based on the reflection provided in this section of the thesis, this study suggests that there are significant connections between Bronfenbrenner's socio-ecological model, Gee's figured worlds, and children's awareness of gender discourses. These three elements work together to establish a robust theoretical lens in which to view the research findings, helping to illuminate how children engage with their experiences to construct a comprehensive understanding of the world and its workings.

6.6 Implications for Future Research, Policy, and Practice

In addition to contributing to the literature concerning preschool children's reinforcement of gender knowledge, together with the methodological tools that are effective for research involving very young participants, this research has also highlighted implications for future research, policy and practice.

6.6.1 Implications for Future Research

This research has identified areas that would benefit from further research, this is either because there is limited research into the topic, or the existing literature is dated. These areas are:

- The potential impact of socio-economic status on children and families' gender beliefs.

This research identified a possible link between family SES and young children's experience of gender within their early childhood setting. However, there is limited literature that examines the potential links between family SES and the gender beliefs that the parents and children hold. The literature that is available focuses on parents' views and does not consider children's gender beliefs. In order to attempt to understand differences in children's gender experiences, this thesis recommends that it would be beneficial to identify the role that SES has on family beliefs and experiences. This supports the understanding of the role that family plays in children's developing funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), their cultural capital, and habitus (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Drawing on work by Rios-Aguilar et al. (2011), by recognising the knowledge that a child holds, their cultural capital is recognised as valid, rather than minimised where it differs from wider societal beliefs and norms.

- Practitioners' awareness or knowledge of the impact that gender has on young children's experiences within early childhood education.

There has been an increase in societal awareness of the impact that gender stereotypes have on society. However, whilst there is previous literature examining gender in early

childhood education, there is little contemporary literature that examines early childhood practitioners' knowledge and awareness of the impact that gender has on young children's experiences. Based on the findings of this research which highlight the impact of gender on preschool children's experience within ECE, this thesis emphasises the role that early childhood education has in reducing inequalities linked to gender. Therefore, this thesis recommends that it is important to identify practitioners existing knowledge and awareness of gender issues, in order to identify gaps and misconceptions that need to be responded to.

- Preschool children's views on gender non-conforming peers.

The literature surrounding children's views of gender non-conforming peers tends to focus on primary and secondary school children's views. This research has demonstrated that preschool children hold firm beliefs about gender-appropriate behaviour and appearance and engage in policing behaviours to control their peers' gender exploration. However, there is still a gap in the literature concerning preschool children's views on gender non-conforming peers. This thesis recommends that research into this area would add detail to researchers' understanding of preschool children's gender experiences and attitudes.

6.6.2 Implications for Policy

All early childhood provision in England is required to meet the standards as set out by the government through the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (Department for Education, 2021), and is regulated by Ofsted. Therefore, when considering the policy implications that are raised by this research, these are the principal areas of focus.

- Identification within the EYFS of the key role providers have in providing gender-equitable provision.

The Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (Department for Education, 2021) sets out its aims to provide "equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice, ensuring that every child is included and supported" (p5).

However, it does not specifically identify that early childhood providers need to provide a gender-equitable environment and to challenge gender stereotypes. Indeed, the only mention of gender, within the document, is concerning providers' responsibility under the Equality Act 2010 to ensure that staff receive "fair and equal treatment" (p26).

If, as a society, the goal is to enable all children to achieve their full potential and to ensure equality of opportunity at all levels, early childhood education has a role to play in

challenging stereotypes and providing equality of opportunity for all children. Whilst this thesis focused on preschool children's experiences, early childhood practitioners shared their belief with the researcher that preschool children are not aware of gender norms. This thesis recommends that with the inclusion of a specific focus on gender equity within the EYFS statutory guidance, providers and practitioners would be aware of the role that they have in reducing the impact of gender stereotypes on young children's development.

- Need for gender-equity policies

Following on from the previous recommendation that highlights the importance of providing gender-equitable early childhood provision, the second policy recommendation made by this thesis is that early childhood providers should develop a gender-equity policy that guides their work with the young people in their care.

Gender-equitable provision involves more than solely challenging the children's use of gender stereotypes, it requires practitioners to consider the language that is used with children, the activities that are encouraged and the books that are provided, as well as the wider message that the environment provides as to who should or should not play. By developing a gender-equitable policy for a childcare setting, practitioners' awareness of the messages that children are exposed to will be raised and the policy can be used as the starting point for conversations about how the setting can best respond to issues of gender inequality.

6.6.3 Implications and Recommendations for Practice

This research has highlighted the knowledge that preschool children hold about gender stereotypes and norms within society. In order to reduce the impact that gender stereotypes have on children and adults, it is vital that gender stereotypes are challenged and that young children are exposed to counter-stereotypical beliefs and are supported in developing gender-equitable beliefs. In order to achieve this, the early childhood education sector has an important role to play and there are implications for practice.

- Practitioners need to be aware of the impact of gender stereotypes on young children.

Research has shown that there is a belief among some early childhood practitioners that young children are not aware of gender (Priolella, 2020). This belief was expressed by some practitioners within the participating settings. If early childhood settings are going to be able to challenge gender stereotypes and to support children in developing gender-equitable beliefs, practitioners must be provided with information and training about

young children's gender knowledge development. Including the inequalities that gender behaviour reinforces for the individuals' development and future opportunities for education and employment.

Raising practitioner awareness of the impact of gender on young children's development is a key step that needs to be taken if early childhood education providers are going to meet the underlying goal of the EYFS, to provide equality of opportunity for all young children.

- Staff need the training to raise their knowledge and understanding of how children police their peers.

Following on from the previous implication for practice around raising practitioners' knowledge of the impact of gender stereotypes and young children's knowledge of them, practitioners need the training to raise their knowledge of the role that preschool children play in reinforcing their peers' gendered behaviours and stereotypes. Many of the techniques that the participants were observed using are subtle and could be used for different reasons, for instance, a child could be excluded from play for a reason other than gender. By providing training for practitioners that includes information on what techniques young children use to reinforce gendered behaviour, practitioners would be aware of the potential motivation of the child who is using one of the identified techniques. This would enable the practitioner to appropriately challenge a gender stereotype that is being reinforced, even if gender reinforcement was not the main intention of the children involved.

The provision of training that focuses on young children's knowledge of gender stereotypes and the use of policing behaviours would also provide practitioners with support in identifying how to respond to young children's use of gendered language or gender policing behaviour in an appropriate manner.

- Information shared with parents about the impact of gender stereotypes and gendered practices.

Early childhood settings play a role in supporting families and providing information to families on child development. As part of this role, this research recommends that settings share information with parents on young children's gender knowledge development, and the potential long-term impact of gender stereotypes. The role that families play in young children's gender knowledge development has been highlighted within this thesis, and in

order to reduce the societal impact of gender stereotypes, all stakeholders need to take steps to challenge inequalities linked to gender.

This thesis is not asserting that parents do not know or care about the impact of gender stereotypes on their children. It is, however, recommending that parents receive similar information to that of practitioners. This would raise parental awareness of potential subconscious biases or beliefs that may influence how they parent their child and the messages that they unintentionally reinforce through their daily interactions.

- Settings need to audit their resources to ensure that they are not unintentionally reinforcing gender stereotypes.

As part of the wider steps that early childhood settings can take towards providing gender-equitable provision, this research recommends that there is a need for wider awareness of the messages that children receive from the resources that are made available to them within the setting. The role that books, toy marketing, and the media have on young children's gender knowledge development has been widely discussed within the literature (Blakemore et al., 2008; Let Toys be Toys, 2021), as has the gendering of children's environments (MacPhee & Prendergast, 2018). However, unless early childhood settings are aware of the messages that are conveyed by the resources they provide, they are unable to ensure that gender-stereotyped beliefs are not being reinforced (Morgan & Surtees, 2022).

Settings would be able to identify where gendered cues are presented within their provision by undertaking an audit of the resources provided. By undertaking an audit in this manner, settings are able to identify where they are able to develop their provision to challenge gender stereotypes or to highlight counter-stereotypical resources, such as books where the hero is female (Zero Tolerance, 2021; Morgan & Surtees, 2022).

- Settings need to be aware of the role the environment plays in reinforcing gender beliefs.

Following the review of the resources that early childhood settings provide, this thesis recommends that early childhood providers need to consider the role that the environment plays in reinforcing gender beliefs. The research findings presented appear to suggest that preschool children gender the preschool environment as a means of reinforcing gender stereotypes. This finding is supported by Børve and Børve (2017) who identified that young children engage in gendering areas of the preschool environment.

For early childhood settings to provide gender-equitable provision, the environment that they provide needs to challenge stereotypical beliefs and invite all children to access the full range of areas and resources. To understand children's awareness of gendered areas of a setting, it would be important to include the children's voices within a review of the setting. This information could then be used to support the redevelopment or reorganisation of the environment to increase children's engagement within all areas.

6.7 Limitations of the Research

Whilst this research project has made original contributions to the body of knowledge within this field, it is considered important herein to identify the limitations of the study. These are summarised below:

- The first limitation identified is due to the size of the study. Whilst a total of 49 participants contributed to this research, they were recruited from only three settings. Whilst these settings met the maximum diversity criteria, as set out in the methodology chapter, the generalisability of the findings is limited as local cultural contexts may influence preschool children's use of policing techniques.
- The identification of socio-economic status was based on the census results (2011 and 2021 data) for the catchment area of each setting rather than the SES of the families participating. Information from the parents regarding their identification of the family's SES would strengthen the findings related to the impact of SES on the participant's behaviours.
- The researcher had previously been employed as a member of the management team at the University Day Care setting. This has been identified as a limitation due to the researcher's awareness of the potential issues of power related to their previous employment and the practitioners' response to the researcher. For this reason, the researcher took steps to minimise any power imbalance between themselves and the practitioners. This included the researcher minimising their interactions with the management team and following the practitioner's lead, rather than acting independently within the setting. There was an additional possibility that the participants would remember the researcher which may have influenced their behaviour, however, none of the participants in the preschool room appeared to remember the researcher.

6.7.1 Impact of Covid-19

- It would be disingenuous not to mention the potential limitations of the research caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. All the participants' experience of preschool had been impacted by Covid-19 and the associated lockdowns. This had delayed or impacted their

preschool attendance and their community interactions and therefore may have affected their gender knowledge development through a reduction in interactions with others. However, the impact of the lockdown may also have reinforced home experiences of gender, causing participants to develop a stronger belief about the generalisability of their home experiences.

- Data collection was undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic. Data collection was initially delayed due to challenges in arranging access to settings during the pandemic. Data collection was delayed due to the Covid-19 lockdown at the beginning of January, and then a further data collection was interrupted by a Covid-19 outbreak at one setting which necessitated a 10-day closure. However, the impact of the pandemic on this research may go beyond the delays. The participants were living through a time of unprecedented change due to the global pandemic and the countrywide lockdowns. Due to these circumstances, the participants had missed out on opportunities to interact socially with people outside of their immediate families and their opportunities to attend ECE setting had been delayed. Therefore, the findings that illustrate the role that family, community and peers play in influencing children's gender behaviour may be skewed due to the experiences that the participants were able to draw on.
- Data collection at the Estate Community Nursery was also impacted by Covid-19. This was due to the setting having to close for ten days due to staff testing positive for Covid-19. There is a possibility that this may have affected the researcher's relationship with the participants, however, the participants appeared to be happy to re-engage with the researcher when they returned to the setting.

Notwithstanding the limitations presented in this section, this research argues that the identification of similar policing methods being used by participants across all three settings means that the findings are likely to be representative of the techniques used by preschool children within the English context during this post-Covid-19 time period.

6.8 Summary

This thesis builds on the existing body of knowledge which has focused on the development of young children's gender norm knowledge, and how they reinforce their peers' adherence to these norms. The findings indicate that preschool children are experienced users of policing techniques and use these techniques to control their peers' exploration of gender through play.

This research has illuminated young children's use of an array of methods which range from verbal control, to manipulating their peers' behaviour, or the play itself, to exclude opposite-

gender peers. The identification of children manipulating their play themes as a means of policing opposite-gender peers, and of excluding or limiting their involvement due to gender, is a significant contribution of this thesis and a consideration not previously identified within the literature.

Examining the methods that preschool children use, it is apparent that many of these techniques are subtle, for instance, the use of body language or manipulating the theme of the play to exclude others. This makes it harder for a casual observer to identify what message the children are communicating to their peers, and how or why they are utilising power related to gender discourses. The policing techniques identified within this study appeared to be used in different contexts; for instance, direct verbal control which is relatively straightforward to identify, was more likely to be used in the outdoor environment, whereas body positioning, which is harder to identify, was frequently observed in the indoor environment. The use of different techniques depending on the context strongly suggests that preschool children are aware that their policing behaviours may not be acceptable to adults within an early childhood setting. Therefore, the participants choose to use subtle methods in situations where there exists a higher risk that they could be overheard. An alternative explanation for the participants' use of subtle methods in certain contexts could be due to the power dynamics in play, with children choosing to use subtle methods where there is a power issue due to the gender discourses around masculine power.

Throughout this thesis, young children have shared their knowledge of social norms and expectations and have demonstrated how their knowledge of gender norms impacts their play and interactions with peers. Through sharing their thoughts and beliefs, this thesis has achieved its aim to provide a platform for early years children to explain their lived experiences, as experts in their own lives.

6.9 Concluding Thoughts

Undertaking this research provided me with a rare opportunity to be allowed into preschool children's lives and to explore their understanding of a complex social construct. I feel truly honoured that the participants were so open in sharing their lived experience of both policing their peers' gender play and being policed themselves. This study has identified that preschool children are a lot more aware of social norms and expectations than many people may expect, and this knowledge has an impact on their social lives.

It is this understanding that brings me back to the argument put forward by James and Prout:

Children must be seen as actively involved in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. They can no longer be regarded as simply the passive subjects of structural determinations. (James & Prout, 2015:4)

The participants within this research can be seen, through the data presented, as being truly active in the construction of their own lived experiences and influencing the lives of those around them. Preschool children have not, and do not, absorb knowledge about gender and gender stereotypes passively, they actively construct and reinforce it.

Reference List

- Abebe, T. & Bessell, S. (2014) Advancing ethical research with children: Critical reflections on ethical guidelines. *Children's Geographies*, 12(1), 126-133.
- Adair, J. K. & Fabienne, D. (2014) The impact of race and culture on play in early childhood classrooms, in Brooker, L., Blaise, M. & Edwards, S. (eds), *The SAGE handbook of play and learning in early childhood*. London: SAGE Publications, 354-365.
- Adair, J. K. & Kurban, F. (2019) Video-cued ethnography in educational settings. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 50(3), 245-254.
- Adani, S. & Cepanec, M. (2019) Sex differences in early communication development: behavioral and neurobiological indicators of more vulnerable communication system development in boys. *Croatian Medical Journal*, 60(2), 141-149.
- Aina, O. E. & Cameron, P. A. (2011) Why does gender matter? Counteracting stereotypes with young children. *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, 39(3), 11.
- Alanazi, D., Alghamdi, R. & Alghamdi, A. (2020) Teacher perceptions of gender roles, socialization, and culture during children's physical play. *International Journal of the Whole Child*, 5(1), 28-38.
- Alderson, P. (2014) Ethics, in Clark, A., Flewitt, R., Hammersley, M. & Robb, M. (eds), *Understanding research with children and young people*. London: SAGE Publications, 85-102.
- Alderson, P. & Morrow, V. (2011) *The ethics of research with children and young people: A practical handbook*, 2nd edition. London: SAGE Publications.
- Aldrich, R. (2014) Nature, nurture and neuroscience: Some future directions for historians of education. *Paedagogica Historica*, 50(6), 852-860.
- Allred, P. (2013) Ethnography and discourse analysis: Dilemmas in representing the voices of children, in Ribbens, J. & Edwards, R. (eds), *Feminist dilemmas in qualitative research: Public knowledge and private lives*. London: SAGE Publications, 147-170.
- Almli, C. R., Ball, R. H. & Wheeler, M. E. (2001) Human fetal and neonatal movement patterns: Gender differences and fetal-to-neonatal continuity. *Developmental Psychobiology*, 38(4), 252-273.
- Annink, A. (2017) Using the research journal during qualitative data collection in a cross-cultural context. *Entrepreneurship Research Journal*, 7(1), 223-17.

Antoniucci, C., Portengen, C. & Endendijk, J. J. (2023) Like parent, like child: General and specific associations between parents' and children's binary gender identity in a gender egalitarian context. *Sex Roles*, 88(5-6), 225-239.

Applebaum, L., Hartman, A. & Zakai, S. (2020) A little bit more far than Mexico: How 3- and 4-year old Jewish children understand Israel. *Journal of Jewish Education*, 87(1), 4-34.

Atkins, L. D. & Wallace, S. (2012) *Qualitative research in education*. London: SAGE Publications.

Atkinson, P. (2015) *For ethnography*. London: SAGE Publications.

Auster, C. J. & Mansbach, C. S. (2012) The gender marketing of toys: An analysis of color and type of toy on the Disney store website. *Sex Roles*, 67(7-8), 375-388.

Bailey, L. E. (2012) Feminist research, in Lapan, S. D., Quartaroli, M. T. & Riemer, F. J. (eds), *Qualitative research: An introduction to methods and designs*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 391-422.

Bailliard, A. L. (2015) Video methodologies in research: Unlocking the complexities of occupation. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 82(1), 35-43.

Baker, E. R., Tisak, M. S. & Tisak, J. (2016) What can boys and girls do? Preschoolers' perspectives regarding gender roles across domains of behavior. *Social Psychology of Education*, 19(1), 23-39.

Bandura, A. (1977) *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall.

Bandura, A. (1992) Social cognitive theory, in Vasta, R. (ed), *Six theories of child development: Revised formulations and current issues*. London: Jessica Kingsley, 1-60.

Baron, A. S. & Dunham, Y. (2015) Representing 'us' and 'them': Building blocks of intergroup cognition. *Journal of Cognition and Development*, 16(5), 780-801.

Bateman, A. (2016) *Conversation analysis and early childhood education: The co-production of knowledge and relationships*. London: Routledge.

Bateman, A. (2017) Hearing children's voices through a conversation analysis approach. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 25(3), 241-256.

Bateman, A. & Church, A. (2017) Children's use of objects in an early years playground. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 25(1), 55-71.

- Bates, E. A., McCann, J. J., Kaye, L. K. & Taylor, J. C. (2017) "Beyond words": A researcher's guide to using photo elicitation in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 14(4), 459-481.
- Bear, G. G., Mantz, L. S., Glutting, J. J., Yang, C. & Boyer, D. E. (2015) Differences in bullying victimization between students with and without disabilities. *School Psychology Review*, 44(1), 98-116.
- Bennet, A., Kuchirko, Y., Halim, M. L., Costanzo, P. R. & Ruble, D. (2020) The influence of center-based care on young children's gender development. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 69, 1-12.
- BERA (2018) *Ethical guidelines for educational research*, 4th edition. London: British Educational Research Association.
- Bezemer, J. & Mavers, D. (2011) Multimodal transcription as academic practice: A social semiotic perspective. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 14(3), 191-206.
- Bigler, R. S. & Liben, L. S. (2007) Developmental intergroup theory: Explaining and reducing children's social stereotyping and prejudice. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 16(3), 162-166.
- Björk-Willén, P. (2012) Being doggy: Disputes embedded in preschoolers' family role-play, in Danby, S. & Theobald, M. (eds), *Disputes in everyday life: Social and moral orders of children and young people*. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Ltd, 119-140.
- Blakemore, J. E. O. (2003) Children's beliefs about violating gender norms: Boys shouldn't look like girls, and girls shouldn't act like boys. *Sex Roles*, 48(9), 411-419.
- Blakemore, J. E. O., Berenbaum, S. A. & Liben, L. S. (2008) *Gender development*. New York: Psychology Press.
- Blakemore, J. E. O. & Centers, R. E. (2005) Characteristics of boys' and girls' toys. *Sex Roles*, 53(9), 619-633.
- Blikstad-Balas, M. (2017) Key challenges of using video when investigating social practices in education: Contextualization, magnification, and representation. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 40(5), 511-523.
- Bluiett, T. E. (2018) The language of play and gender-role stereotypes. *Education*, 139(1), 38-42.

Boe, J. L. & Woods, R. J. (2018) Parents' influence on infants' gender-typed toy preferences. *Sex Roles*, 79(5), 358-373.

Boothroyd, L. G. & Cross, C. P. (2017) Father absence and gendered traits in sons and daughters. *PloS ONE*, 12(7), 1-19.

Bornstein, M. H., Hahn, C.-S. & Haynes, O. M. (2004) Specific and general language performance across early childhood: Stability and gender considerations. *First Language*, 24(3), 267-304.

Børve, H. E. & Børve, E. (2017) Rooms with gender: Physical environment and play culture in kindergarten. *Early Child Development and Care*, 187(5-6), 1069-1081.

Bouchard, C., Sylvestre, A. & Forget-Dubois, N. (2020) Why are boys perceived as less prosocial than girls by their early childhood educators? The role of pragmatic skills in preschool and kindergarten children. *Educational Psychology*, 40(10), 1190-1210.

Bourdieu, P. (1977) Cultural reproduction and social reproduction, in Karabel, J. & Halsey, A. H. (eds), *Power and ideology in education*. New York: Oxford University Press, 487-511.

Bourdieu, P. (1986) The forms of capital, in Richardson, J. G. (ed), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 241-258.

Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The logic of practice*. Translated from French by Nice, R. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J. C. (1977) *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. Translated from French by Nice, R. London: SAGE Publications.

Braun, S. S. & Davidson, A. J. (2017) Gender (non)conformity in middle childhood: A mixed methods approach to understanding gender-typed behavior, friendship, and peer preference. *Sex Roles*, 77(1-2), 16-29.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

Breneselović, D. P. & Krnjaja, Ž. (2016) Discourses on gender in early childhood education and care (ECEC) setting: Equally discriminated against. *Journal of Pedagogy*, 7(2), 51-77.

Brinkman, B. G., Rabenstein, K. L., Rosén, L. A. & Zimmerman, T. S. (2014) Children's gender identity development: The dynamic negotiation process between conformity and authenticity. *Youth & Society*, 46(6), 835-852.

Brito, S., Carneiro, N. S. & Nogueira, C. (2021) Playing gender(s): The re/construction of a suspect 'gender identity' through play. *Ethnography and Education*, 16(4), 384-401.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. London: Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005) *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development*. London: SAGE Publications.

Brooker, L. & Ha, S.-J. (2005) The cooking teacher: Investigating gender stereotypes in a Korean kindergarten. *Early Years*, 25(1), 17-30.

Brooks, A. & Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2007) An invitation to feminist research, in Hesse-Biber, S. N. & Leavy, P. L. (eds), *Feminist research practice: A primer*. London: SAGE Publications, 1-24.

Brooks, R., Te Riele, K. & Maguire, M. (2014) *Ethics and education research*. London: SAGE Publications.

Brown, C. S. (2014) Language and literacy development in the early years: Foundational skills that support emergent readers. *Language and Literacy Spectrum*, 24(1), 35-49.

Browne, N. (2004) *Gender equity in the early years*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Bryant, J. B. (2015) Pragmatic development, in Bavin, E. L. & Naigles, L. R. (eds), *The Cambridge handbook of child language*, 2nd edition. Cambridge Handbooks in Language and Linguistics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 438-457.

Bryman, A. (2016) *Social research methods*, 5th edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bucknell, S. (2014) Doing qualitative research with children and young people, in Clark, A., Flewitt, R., Hammersley, M. & Robb, M. (eds), *Understanding research with children and young people*. London: SAGE Publications, 69-84.

Budgeon, S. (2014) The dynamics of gender hegemony: Femininities, masculinities and social change. *Sociology*, 48(2), 317-334.

Burman, E. & Stacey, J. (2010) The child and childhood in feminist theory. *Feminist Theory*, 11(3), 227-240.

Bussey, K. & Bandura, A. (1999) Social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation. *Psychological Review*, 106(4), 676-713.

Calarco, J. M. (2011) "I need help!" Social class and children's help-seeking in elementary school. *American Sociological Review*, 76(6), 862-882.

Callahan, S. & Nicholas, L. (2019) Dragon wings and butterfly wings: Implicit gender binarism in early childhood. *Gender and Education*, 31(6), 705-723.

Canning, N. (2011) *Play and practice in the early years foundation stage* [eBook]. London: SAGE.

Caretta, M. A. & Riaño, Y. (2016) Feminist participatory methodologies in geography: creating spaces of inclusion. *Qualitative Research*, 16(3), 258-266.

Carter, M. (2014) Gender socialization and identity theory. *Social Sciences*, 3(2), 242-263.

Cederborg, A.-C. (2020) Young children's play: A matter of advanced strategies among peers. *Early Child Development and Care*, 190(5), 778-790.

Cederborg, A.-C. (2021) Power relations in pre-school children's play. *Early Child Development and Care*, 191(4), 612-623.

Chapman, R. (2016) A case study of gendered play in preschools: How early childhood educators' perceptions of gender influence children's play. *Early Child Development and Care*, 186(8), 1271-1284.

Chapman, R. (2022) Moving beyond 'gender-neutral': Creating gender expansive environments in early childhood education. *Gender and Education*, 34(1), 1-16.

Charafeddine, R., Zambrana, I. M., Triniol, B., Mercier, H., Clément, F., Kaufmann, L., Reboul, A., Pons, F. & Van der Henst, J.-B. (2020) How preschoolers associate power with gender in male-female interactions: A cross-cultural investigation. *Sex Roles*, 83(7-8), 453-473.

Chase, T. (2022) The issue of the stereotypical confines of gender in the lives of children. *Canadian Journal of Family and Youth*, 14(2), 252-259.

Chen, E. S. L., Chen, E. S. L., Rao, N. & Rao, N. (2011) Gender socialization in Chinese kindergartens: Teachers' contributions. *Sex Roles*, 64(1), 103-116.

Cherney, I. D. & Dempsey, J. (2010) Young children's classification, stereotyping and play behaviour for gender neutral and ambiguous toys. *Educational Psychology*, 30(6), 651-669.

Chesworth, L. (2016) A funds of knowledge approach to examining play interests: Listening to children's and parents' perspectives. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 24(3), 294-308.

Chesworth, L. (2018) Embracing uncertainty in research with young children. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 31(9), 851-862.

Chesworth, L. (2019) Theorising young children's interests: Making connections and in-the-moment happenings. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 23(1), 1-9.

Christ, O., Schmid, K., Lolliot, S., Swart, H., Stolle, D., Tausch, N., Al Ramiah, A., Wagner, U., Vertovec, S. & Hewstone, M. (2014) Contextual effect of positive intergroup contact on outgroup prejudice. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 111(11), 3996-4000.

Cibils, L. (2019) The underreported significance of transcription decisions: Perspectives gained from two different vantage points. *The Qualitative Report*, 24(5), 1133-1146.

Clark, A., Flewitt, R., Hammersley, M. & Robb, M. (2014) *Understanding research with children and young people*. London: SAGE Publications.

Clark, C. D. (2011) *In a younger voice: Doing child-centered qualitative research*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Coady, M. (2010) Ethics in early childhood research, in MacNaughton, G., Rolfe, S. A. & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (eds), *Doing early childhood research: international perspectives on theory & practice*, 2nd edition. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Open University Press, 73-84.

Coelho, L., Torres, N., Fernandes, C. & Santos, A. J. (2017) Quality of play, social acceptance and reciprocal friendship in preschool children. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 25(6), 812-823.

Cohen, L., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2017) *Research methods in education*, 8th edition [eBook]. Abingdon: Routledge.

Colliver, Y. (2017) From listening to understanding: Interpreting young children's perspectives. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 25(6), 854-865.

Cowan, K. (2013) Multimodal transcription of video: examining interaction in Early Years classrooms. *Classroom Discourse*, 5(1), 6-21.

Cowie, H. (2012) *From birth to sixteen: Children's health, social, emotional and linguistic development*. London: Routledge.

Coyle, E. F., Fulcher, M. & Trübutschek, D. (2016) Sissies, mama's boys, and tomboys: Is children's gender nonconformity more acceptable when nonconforming traits are positive? *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 45(7), 1827-1838.

Coyne, I. & Carter, B. (2018) Participatory research in the past, present and future, in Coyne, I. & Carter, B. (eds), *Being participatory: Researching with children and young people: Co-constructing knowledge using creative techniques* [eBook]. Cham: Springer, 1-14.

Coyne, S. M., Linder, J. R., Booth, M., Keenan-Kroff, S., Shawcroft, J. E. & Yang, C. (2021a) Princess power: Longitudinal associations between engagement with princess culture in preschool and gender stereotypical behavior, body esteem, and hegemonic masculinity in early adolescence. *Child Development*, 92(6), 2413-2430.

Coyne, S. M., Linder, J. R., Rasmussen, E. E., Nelson, D. A. & Collier, K. M. (2014) It's a bird! It's a plane! It's a gender stereotype!: Longitudinal associations between superhero viewing and gender stereotyped play. *Sex Roles*, 70(9-10), 416-430.

Coyne, S. M., Rogers, A., Shawcroft, J. & Hurst, J. L. (2021b) Dressing up with Disney and make-believe with Marvel: The impact of gendered costumes on gender typing, prosocial behavior, and perseverance during early childhood. *Sex Roles*, 85(5-6), 301-312.

Cronin, M. (2018) Dinosaurs vs. unicorns, *GLARE Project Blog*. 3 December 2018. Available online: <https://blog.bham.ac.uk/glareproject/2018/12/03/dinosaurs-vs-unicorns/>.

Culp, R. E., Cook, A. S. & Housley, P. C. (1983) A comparison of observed and reported adult-infant interactions: Effects of perceived sex. *Sex Roles*, 9(4), 475-479.

Cutter-Mackenzie, A. & Edwards, S. (2013) Toward a model for early childhood environmental education: Foregrounding, developing, and connecting knowledge through play-based learning. *The Journal of Environmental Education*, 44(3), 195-213.

Cutter-Mackenzie, A., Edwards, S. & Quinton, H. W. (2013) Child-framed video research methodologies: Issues, possibilities and challenges for researching with children. *Children's Geographies*, 13(3), 343-356.

Dahl, A. & Tran, A. Q. (2016) Vocal tones influence young children's responses to prohibitions. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 152, 71-91.

Daneri, M. P., Blair, C., Kuhn, L. J., Vernon-Feagans, L., Greenberg, M., Cox, M., Burchinal, P., Willoughby, M., Garrett-Peters, P., Mills-Koonce, R. & Investigators, F. L. P. K. (2019) Maternal language and child vocabulary mediate relations between socioeconomic status and executive function during early childhood. *Child Development*, 90(6), 2001-2018.

Daniel, B. K. (2019) Student experience of the maximum variation framework for determining sample size in qualitative research, *18th European Conference on Research Methodology for Business and Management Studies*. Johannesburg, 20-21 June 2019. Kidmore End: Academic Conferences International Limited.

Davies, B. (2003) *Frogs and snails and feminist tales: Preschool children and gender*, Revised edition. Cresskill: Hampton Press.

Davis, J. M. (2010) Involving children, in Tisdall, E. K. M., Davis, J. M. & Gallagher, M. (eds), *Researching with children and young people: Research design, methods and analysis*. London: SAGE Publications, 154-193.

Davis, J. T. M. & Hines, M. (2020) How large are gender differences in toy preferences? A systematic review and meta-analysis of toy preference research. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 49(2), 373-394.

Dempsey, L., Dowling, M., Larkin, P. & Murphy, K. (2016) Sensitive interviewing in qualitative research: Sensitive interviewing. *Research in Nursing & Health*, 39(6), 480-490.

Denscombe, M. (2014) *The good research guide: For small-scale social research projects*, 5th edition. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Department for Education (2015) *Extra funding to prepare for the early years pupil premium*. Available online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/extra-funding-to-prepare-for-the-early-years-pupil-premium> [Accessed 11/12/2019].

Department for Education (2021) *Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage*. London: Department for Education.

Diamant-Cohen, B., Prendergast, T., Estrovitz, C., Banks, C. & Kim Van Der, V. (2012) We play here. *Children & libraries*, 10(1), 3-11.

Dinella, L. M. & Weisgram, E. S. (2018) Gender-typing of children's toys: Causes, consequences, and correlates. *Sex Roles*, 79(5), 253-259.

Dinella, L. M., Weisgram, E. S. & Fulcher, M. (2017) Children's gender-typed toy interests: Does propulsion matter? *Archives of sexual behavior*, 46(5), 1295-1305.

DiPietro, J. A., Bornstein, M. H., Costigan, K. A., Pressman, E. K., Hahn, C. S., Painter, K., Smith, B. A. & Yi, L. J. (2002) What does fetal movement predict about behavior during the first two years of life? *Developmental Psychobiology*, 40(4), 358-371.

- Dobbins, C. E., Edgar, L. D. & Dooley, K. E. (2021) Facilitating the scholarship of discovery: Using the mini-ethnographic case study design. *The Journal of Experiential Education*, 44(4), 1-14.
- Dockett, S., Einarsdóttir, J. & Perry, B. (2011) Balancing methodologies and methods in researching with young children, in Harcourt, D., Perry, B. & Waller, T. (eds), *Researching young children's perspectives: Debating the ethics and dilemmas of educational research with children*. London: Routledge, 68-81.
- Dockett, S., Einarsdóttir, J. & Perry, B. (2017) Photo elicitation: Reflecting on multiple sites of meaning. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 25(3), 225-240.
- Dockett, S., Perry, B. & Kearney, E. (2013) Promoting children's informed assent in research participation. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 26(7), 802-828.
- Doni, E. (2021) Exposing preschool children to counterstereotypical professional role models using audiovisual means: A small study in a preschool in Greece. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 49(2), 295-302.
- Dsdfamilies (2020) *Timeline*. Available online: <https://dsdfamilies.org/new-parents/early-days/timeline> [Accessed 10/06/2020].
- Dutton, A. (2022) Gender exploration in preschool: A director's story. *Voices of Practitioners: Teacher Research in Early Childhood Education*, 17(1), 1-7.
- Eagly, A. H. (1987) *Sex differences in social behavior: A social-role interpretation*. Hillsdale: L. Erlbaum Associates.
- Eagly, A. H., Wood, W. & Diekmann, A. B. (2000) Social role theory of sex differences and similarities: A current appraisal, in Eckes, T. & Trautner, H. M. (eds), *The developmental social psychology of gender*. Mahwah, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 123-174.
- Eckhoff, A. (2015) Ethical considerations of children's digital image-making and image-audiancing in early childhood environments. *Early Child Development and Care*, 185(10), 1617-1628.
- Eliot, L. (2010a) The myth of pink & blue brains. *Educational Leadership*, 68(3), 32-36.
- Eliot, L. (2010b) The truth about boys and girls. *Scientific American Mind*, 21(2), 22-29.
- Eliot, L. (2011) The trouble with sex differences. *Neuron*, 72(6), 895-898.

- Eliot, L. (2012) *Pink brain, blue brain: How small differences grow into troublesome gaps - and what we can do about it*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications.
- Emilson, A., Folkesson, A.-M. & Lindberg, I. M. (2016) Gender beliefs and embedded gendered values in preschool. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 48(2), 225-240.
- Emmel, N. (2013) *Sampling and choosing cases in qualitative research: A realist approach* [eBook]. London: SAGE Publications.
- Endendijk, J. J., Groeneveld, M. G., van Berkel, S. R., Hallers-Haalboom, E. T., Mesman, J. & Bakermans-Kranenburg, M. J. (2013) Gender stereotypes in the family context: Mothers, fathers, and siblings. *Sex Roles*, 68(9-10), 577-590.
- Endicott, K. (1992) Fathering in an egalitarian society, in Hewlett, B. S. (ed), *Father-child relations: Cultural and biosocial contexts*. New York: Aldine Gruyter, 281-295.
- Engelmann, J. M., Over, H., Herrmann, E. & Tomasello, M. (2013) Young children care more about their reputation with ingroup members and potential reciprocators. *Developmental Science*, 16(6), 952-958.
- European Institute for Gender Equality (2020a) *Gender*. Available online: <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1141> [Accessed 10/06/2020].
- European Institute for Gender Equality (2020b) *Gender roles*. Available online: <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1209> [Accessed 10/06/2020].
- European Institute for Gender Equality (2020c) *Gender stereotypes*. Available online: <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1222> [Accessed 10/06/2020].
- Ewing Lee, E. A. & Troop-Gordon, W. (2011a) Peer processes and gender role development: Changes in gender atypicality related to negative peer treatment and children's friendships. *Sex Roles*, 64(1), 90-102.
- Ewing Lee, E. A. & Troop-Gordon, W. (2011b) Peer socialization of masculinity and femininity: Differential effects of overt and relational forms of peer victimization. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 29(2), 197-213.
- Farr, R. H., Bruun, S. T., Doss, K. M. & Patterson, C. J. (2017) Children's gender-typed behavior from early to middle childhood in adoptive families with lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parents. *Sex Roles*, 78(7-8), 528-541.
- Fassbender, W. J. (2020) The potential for (more-than-)representational video in education research. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 44(3), 241-256.

Fast, A. A. & Olson, K. R. (2018) Gender development in transgender preschool children. *Child Development*, 89(2), 620-637.

Fawcett Society (2020) *Unlimited potential: Report of the commission on gender stereotypes in early childhood*. London: Available online: <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/unlimited-potential-the-final-report-of-the-commission-on-gender-stereotypes-in-early-childhood> [Accessed 26/01/2022].

Fenson, L., Dale, P. S., Reznick, J. S., Bates, E., Thal, D. J., Pethick, S. J., Tomasello, M., Mervis, C. B. & Stiles, J. (1994) Variability in early communicative development. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 59(5), 1-185.

Fetterman, D. M. (2010) *Ethnography: Step-by-step*, 3rd edition. Los Angeles: SAGE Publications.

Fine, C. & Rush, E. (2018) "Why does all the girls have to buy pink stuff?" The ethics and science of the gendered toy marketing debate. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 149(4), 769-784.

Fisher, J. & Wood, E. (2012) Changing educational practice in the early years through practitioner-led action research: An adult-child interaction project. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 20(2), 114-129.

Fleer, M. (2011) 'Conceptual play': Foregrounding imagination and cognition during concept formation in early years education. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 12(3), 224-240.

Flewitt, R. (2012) Using video to investigate preschool classroom interaction: Education research assumptions and methodological practices. *Visual Communication*, 5(1), 25-50.

Flewitt, R. (2014) Interviews, in Clark, A., Flewitt, R., Hammersley, M. & Robb, M. (eds), *Understanding research with children and young people*. London: SAGE Publications, 136-153.

Flewitt, R., Hampel, R., Hauck, M. & Lancaster, L. (2011) What are multimodal data and transcription?, in Jewitt, C. (ed), *The Routledge handbook of multimodal analysis*. London: Routledge, 40-53.

Flick, U. (2014a) *An introduction to qualitative research*, 5th edition. London: SAGE Publications.

Flick, U. (2014b) Mapping the field, in Flick, U. (ed), *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis* [eBook]. London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 3-18.

Ford, K., Bray, L., Water, T., Dickinson, A., Arnott, J. & Carter, B. (2017) Auto-driven photo elicitation interviews in research with children: Ethical and practical considerations. *Comprehensive Child and Adolescent Nursing*, 40(2), 111-125.

Fouts, H. N. (2008) Father involvement with young children among the Aka and Bofi foragers. *Cross-Cultural Research*, 42(3), 290-312.

Fraser, S., Flewitt, R. & Hammersley, M. (2014) What is research with children and young people?, in Clark, A., Flewitt, R., Hammersley, M. & Robb, M. (eds), *Understanding research with children and young people*. London: SAGE Publications, 34-50.

Freeston, M. (2019) *Cultural capital in the EIF: What you need to know*. Available online: <https://www.eyalliance.org.uk/cultural-capital-eif-what-you-need-know> [Accessed 12/11/2019].

Frödén, S. (2018) Situated decoding of gender in a Swedish preschool practice. *Ethnography and Education*, 14(2), 121-135.

Fulcher, M. & Hayes, A. R. (2018) Building a pink dinosaur: The effects of gendered construction toys on girls' and boys' play. *Sex Roles*, 79(5-6), 273-284.

Fung, W.-K. & Cheng, R. W.-Y. (2017) Effect of school pretend play on preschoolers' social competence in peer interactions: Gender as a potential moderator. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 45(1), 35-42.

Fusch, P. I., Fusch, G. E. & Ness, L. R. (2017) How to conduct a mini-ethnographic case study: A guide for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 22(3), 923-941.

Gallagher, M. (2010) Ethics, in Tisdall, E. K. M., Davis, J. M. & Gallagher, M. (eds), *Researching with children and young people: Research design, methods and analysis*. London: SAGE Publications, 11-28.

Gansen, H. M. (2019) Push-ups versus clean-up: Preschool teachers' gendered beliefs, expectations for behavior, and disciplinary practices. *Sex Roles*, 80(7-8), 393-408.

Gastaldi, F. G. M., Longobardi, C., Pasta, T. & Prino, L. E. (2019) Pre-k children's play: Different forms of imitation and exploration behaviours. *Early Child Development and Care*, 189(3), 513-521.

Gaunt, C. (2020) Pilot successful in changing young children's views on gender. *Nursery World*, 06 January 2020.

Gee, J. P. (2014a) *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Gee, J. P. (2014b) Tools of inquiry and discourses, in Jaworski, A. & Coupland, N. (eds), *The discourse reader*, 3rd edition. London: Routledge, 142-153.

Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (2021) *Lego group creativity study*. Available online: <https://seejane.org/research-informs-empowers/lego-creativity-study/> [Accessed 21/02/2023].

Gelir, I. (2022) Becoming a girl and boy: Preschool children's construction of gender roles in the community and nursery. *Early Child Development and Care*, 192(2), 302-312.

Gibbs, L., Press, F., Wong, S. & Cumming, T. (2020) Innovative methods for researching leadership emergence. *The Qualitative Report*, 25(8), 2026-2043.

Gieseler, C. (2018) Gender-reveal parties: Performing community identity in pink and blue. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 27(6), 661-671.

Glesne, C. (2011) *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*, 4th edition. London: Pearson Education.

Gobo, G. (2008) *Doing ethnography*. London: SAGE.

Godleski, S. A., Kamper, K. E., Ostrov, J. M., Hart, E. J. & Blakely-McClure, S. J. (2015) Peer victimization and peer rejection during early childhood. *Journal of Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychology*, 44(3), 380-92.

Goldberg, A. E., Kashy, D. A. & Smith, J. Z. (2012) Gender-typed play behavior in early childhood: Adopted children with lesbian, gay, and heterosexual parents. *Sex Roles*, 67(9-10), 503-515.

Gossa, W., Wondimagegn, D., Mekonnen, D., Eshetu, W., Abebe, Z. & Feters, M. D. (2016) Key informants' perspectives on development of family medicine training programs in Ethiopia. *Advances in Medical Education and Practice*, 7(1), 261-269.

Granger, K. L., Hanish, L. D., Kornienko, O. & Bradley, R. H. (2016) Preschool teachers' facilitation of gender-typed and gender-neutral activities during free play. *Sex Roles*, 76(7-8), 498-510.

Gray, C. & Winter, Eileen (2011) The ethics of participatory research involving young children with special needs, in Harcourt, D., Perry, B. & Waller, T. (eds), *Researching young children's*

perspectives: Debating the ethics and dilemmas of educational research with children. London: Routledge, 26-37.

Grbich, C. (2013) *Qualitative data analysis: An introduction*, 2nd edition. London: SAGE Publications.

Green, C. (2016) Sensory tours as a method for engaging children as active researchers: Exploring the use of wearable cameras in early childhood research. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 48(3), 277-294.

Greig, A., Taylor, J. & MacKay, T. (2013) *Doing research with children: A practical guide*, 3rd edition. London: SAGE Publications.

Gridley, N., Bywater, T. J. & Hutchings, J. M. (2018) Comparing live and video observation to assess early parent-child interactions in the home. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 27(6), 1818-1829.

Grieshaber, S. & McArdle, F. (2010) *The trouble with play*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

Groeneveld, M. G., van der Pol, L. D., de Vries, E. E. & Mesman, J. (2021) Triadic family conversations about gender: Children as driving forces and messiness in messages they receive. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 36(7), 1183-1193.

Groot, T. d., Jacquet, W., Backer, F. D., Peters, R. & Meurs, P. (2020) Using visual vignettes to explore sensitive topics: A research note on exploring attitudes towards people with albinism in Tanzania. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 23(6), 749-755.

Gube, J. (2022) Photo-eliciting technique as an integrated meaning-making practice: An introspective look at diversity, identities, and voice-giving. *Visual Studies*, 37(1-2), 116-127.

Gülgöz, S. & Gelman, S. A. (2017) Who's the boss? Concepts of social power across development. *Child Development*, 88(3), 946-963.

Gülgöz, S., Gomez, E. M., DeMeules, M. R. & Olson, K. R. (2018) Children's evaluation and categorization of transgender children. *Journal of Cognition and Development*, 19(4), 325-344.

Halim, M. L., Ruble, D., Tamis-LeMonda, C. & Shrout, P. E. (2013) Rigidity in gender-typed behaviors in early childhood: A longitudinal study of ethnic minority children. *Child Development*, 84(4), 1269-1284.

Halpern, H. P. & Perry-Jenkins, M. (2016) Parents' gender ideology and gendered behavior as predictors of children's gender-role attitudes: A longitudinal exploration. *Sex Roles*, 74(11), 527-542.

- Hamlin, M. L. (2013) "Yo soy indígena": Identifying and using traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) to make the teaching of science culturally responsive for Maya girls. *Cultural Studies of Science Education*, 8(4), 759-776.
- Hansel, R. R. (2015) Kindergarten: Bringing blocks back to the kindergarten classroom. *Young Children*, 70(1), 44-51.
- Harcourt, D. & Conroy, H. (2011) Informed consent: Processes and procedures seeking research partnerships with young children, in Harcourt, D., Perry, B. & Waller, T. (eds), *Researching young children's perspectives: Debating the ethics and dilemmas of educational research with children*. London: Routledge, 38-51.
- Harcourt, W. (2022) Preface, in Harcourt, W., van den Berg, K., Dupuis, C. & Gaybor, J. (eds), *Feminist methodologies* [eBook]. Cham: Springer Nature, v-viii.
- Harding, J. (2013) *Qualitative data analysis from start to finish*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Hart, C. S. (2018) Education, inequality and social justice: A critical analysis applying the Sen-Bourdieu analytical framework. *Policy Futures in Education*, 17(5), 582-598.
- Hawkesworth, M. (2012) Truth and truths in feminist knowledge production, in Sharlene, H.-B. (ed), *Handbook of feminist research: Theory and praxis*, 2nd edition. London: SAGE Publications, 92-118.
- Hayes, N., O'Toole, L. & Halpenny, A. M. (2017) *Introducing Bronfenbrenner: A guide for practitioners and students in early years education*. London: Routledge.
- Heath, C., Hindmarsh, J. & Luff, P. (2010) *Video in qualitative research: Analysing social interaction in everyday life*. London: SAGE Publications.
- Hedges, H. (2015) Sophia's funds of knowledge: theoretical and pedagogical insights, possibilities and dilemmas. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 23(1), 83-96.
- Hedges, H., Cullen, J. & Jordan, B. (2011) Early years curriculum: Funds of knowledge as a conceptual framework for children's interests. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 43(2), 185-205.
- Hellman, A., Heikkilä, M. & Sundhall, J. (2014) 'Don't be such a baby!' Competence and age as intersectional co-markers on children's gender. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 46(3), 327-344.
- Hepburn, A. & Bolden, G. B. (2017) *Transcribing for social research* [eBook]. London: SAGE Publications.

Hepper, P. G., Dornan, J. C. & Lynch, C. (2012) Sex differences in fetal habituation. *Developmental Science*, 15(3), 373-383.

Hesse-Biber, S. N. (2012) Feminist research: Exploring, interrogating, and transforming the interconnections of epistemology, methodology, and method, in Sharlene, H.-B. (ed), *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, 2nd edition. London: SAGE Publications, 2-26.

Hesse-Biber, S. N. & Leavy, P. L. (2007) Preface, in Hesse-Biber, S. N. & Leavy, P. L. (eds), *Feminist research practice: A primer*. London: SAGE Publications, ix-x.

Hewes, J. (2014) Seeking balance in motion: The role of spontaneous free play in promoting social and emotional health in early childhood care and education. *Children*, 1(3), 280-301.

Hewlett, B. (1993) *Intimate fathers: The nature and context of Aka Pygmy paternal infant care*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Hewlett, B. S. (2000) Culture, history, and sex: Anthropological contributions to conceptualizing father involvement. *Marriage & Family Review*, 29(2-3), 59-73.

Heywood, S. & Adzajlic, B. (eds) (2023) *Challenging gender stereotypes in the early years: Changing the narrative*. London: Taylor & Francis.

Hill, S. A. (2002) Teaching and doing gender in Africa American families. *Sex Roles*, 47(11), 493-506.

Hill, T. M. & Bartow Jacobs, K. (2020) "The mouse looks like a boy": Young children's talk about gender across human and nonhuman characters in picture books. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 48(1), 93-102.

Hiller, V. & Baudin, T. (2016) Cultural transmission and the evolution of gender roles. *Mathematical Social Sciences*, 84, 8-23.

Hilliard, L. J. & Liben, L. S. (2010) Differing levels of gender salience in preschool classrooms: Effects on children's gender attitudes and intergroup bias. *Child Development*, 81(6), 1787-1798.

HM Government (2015) *What to do if you're worried a child is being abused*. Available online: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/419604/What_to_do_if_you_re_worried_a_child_is_being_abused.pdf [Accessed 18/02/2021].

HM Government (2018) *Working together to safeguard children*. Available online: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/942454/Working_together_to_safeguard_children_inter_agency_guidance.pdf [Accessed 18/02/2021].

Hoff, E. (2010) Context effects on young children's language use: The influence of conversational setting and partner. *First Language*, 30(3-4), 461-472.

Hong, S.-Y., Kwon, K.-A. & Jeon, H.-J. (2014) Children's attitudes towards peers with disabilities: Associations with personal and parental factors. *Infant and Child Development*, 23(2), 170-193.

Hordyk, S. R. (2017) "This feels like school!" Revisiting assent and motivation in research with child participants. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 34(6), 583-595.

Horvath, T. (2019) *Lifting Limits impact evaluation report*. Available online: <https://www.liftinglimits.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Impact-Evaluation-Report-final-for-website.pdf> [Accessed 07/01/2020].

Hua, C. (2001) *A society without fathers or husbands: The Na of China*. Translated from Chinese by Hustvedt, A. London: The MIT Press.

Hughes, P. (2010) Paradigms, methods and knowledge, in MacNaughton, G., Rolfe, S. A. & Siraj-Blatchford, I. (eds), *Doing early childhood research: international perspectives on theory & practice*, 2nd edition. Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Open University Press, 35-62.

Hurworth, R. (2012) Techniques to assist with interviewing, in Coe, R. (ed), *Research methods and methodologies in education*. London: SAGE Publications, 177-185.

Hyde, J. S., Bigler, R. S., Joel, D., Tate, C. C. & van Anders, S. M. (2019) The future of sex and gender in psychology: Five challenges to the gender binary. *The American Psychologist*, 74(2), 171-193.

Iervolino, A. C., Hines, M., Golombok, S. E., Rust, J. & Plomin, R. (2005) Genetic and environmental influences on sex-typed behavior during the preschool years. *Child Development*, 76(4), 826-840.

Immordino-Yang, M. H., Darling-Hammond, L. & Krone, C. R. (2019) Nurturing nature: How brain development is inherently social and emotional, and what this means for education. *Educational Psychologist*, 54(3), 185-204.

Institute of Physics (2017) *Gender stereotypes: An introduction for practitioners in schools and early learning centres*. Available online: http://www.iop.org/education/teacher/support/girls_physics/resources/file_70035.pdf [Accessed 10/06/2020].

J. G. Consulting (2016) *Hull and East Riding joint housing needs study*. Available online: <https://www.eastriding.gov.uk/EasySiteWeb/GatewayLink.aspx?allId=654743> [Accessed 17/08/2022].

James, A. & Prout, A. (1990) *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood*. London: Falmer.

James, A. & Prout, A. (1997) *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood*, 2nd edition. London: Falmer.

James, A. & Prout, A. (2015) Introduction, in James, A., Prout, A. & Boyden, J. (eds), *Constructing and reconstructing childhood: Contemporary issues in the sociological study of childhood*, Classic edition. London: Routledge, 1-5.

James, M., Wise, K. & Rink, J. (2010) Exploring creativity in musical performance through lesson observation with video-recall interviews. *Scientia Paedagogica Experimentalis*, 47(2), 219-250.

Jaworski, A. & Coupland, N. (2014) Introduction: Perspectives on discourse analysis, in Jaworski, A. & Coupland, N. (eds), *The discourse reader*, 3rd edition. London: Routledge, 1-35.

Jesuvadian, M. K. & Wright, S. (2011) Doll tales: Foregrounding children's voices in research. *Early Child Development and Care*, 181(3), 277-285.

Jing, M. & Li, H. (2015) Effect of partner's gender on early pretend play: A preliminary study of Singapore Chinese preschoolers. *Early Child Development & Care*, 185(8), 1216-1237.

Johnson, B. & Christensen, L. (2012) *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches*, 4th edition. London: SAGE Publications.

Johnson, J. L., Adkins, D. & Chauvin, S. (2020) A review of the quality indicators of rigor in qualitative research. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 84(1), 138-146.

Johnson, K., Caskey, M., Rand, K., Tucker, R. & Vohr, B. (2014) Gender differences in adult-infant communication in the first months of life. *Pediatrics*, 134(6), e1603-e1610.

Jones-Bodie, A. (2016) Let's go toy shopping! Exploring early anticipatory socialization for careers and gender expectations. *Communication Teacher*, 30(2), 57-61.

Jones, C. & Aubrey, C. (2019) How gender is constructed and experienced in the social world of the nursery school. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 27(2), 153-169.

Jones, K. (2020) The formation of gender identity and gender stereotypes, in Jones, K. (ed), *Challenging gender stereotypes in education*. London: Learning Matters, 5-18.

Josephidou, J. (2020) A gendered contribution to play? Perceptions of early childhood education and care (ECEC) practitioners in England on how their gender influences their approaches to play. *Early Years*, 40(1), 95-108.

Jug, T. & Vilar, P. (2015) Focus group interview through storytelling: Researching pre-school children's attitudes towards books and reading. *Journal of Documentation*, 71(6), 1300-1316.

Kellett, M. (2014) Images of childhood and their influence on research, in Clark, A., Flewitt, R., Hammersley, M. & Robb, M. (eds), *Understanding research with children and young people*. London: SAGE Publications, 15-33.

Kidwell, M. (2013) Interaction among children, in Sidnell, J. & Stivers, T. (eds), *The handbook of conversation analysis*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 511-532.

Kilvington, J. & Wood, A. (2016a) Boys and girls playing: Same or different?, in Kilvington, J. & Wood, A. (eds), *Gender, sex and children's play* [eBook]. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 35-58.

Kilvington, J. & Wood, A. (2016b) Gender and sex: The play perspective, in Kilvington, J. & Wood, A. (eds), *Gender, sex and children's play* [eBook]. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 3-18.

Kim-Bossard, M., Choi, J. & Meneses, A. (2019) Navigating different cultural beliefs and practices to support immigrant preschoolers and their families: A Bakhtinian textual analysis on preschool teacher and administrator perspectives. *Early Child Development and Care*, 189(14), 2347-2359.

King, T. L., Scovelle, A. J., Meehl, A., Milner, A. J. & Priest, N. (2021) Gender stereotypes and biases in early childhood: a systematic review. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 46(2), 112-125.

Knoblauch, H. & Schnettler, B. (2012) Videography: Analysing video data as a 'focused' ethnographic and hermeneutical exercise. *Qualitative Research*, 12(3), 334-356.

Kohlberg, L. (1966) A cognitive developmental analysis of children's sex role concepts and attitudes, in Maccoby, E. E. (ed), *The development of sex differences*. London: Tavistock, 82-172.

Kollmayer, M., Schultes, M.-T., Schober, B., Hodosi, T. & Spiel, C. (2018) Parents' judgments about the desirability of toys for their children: Associations with gender role attitudes, gender-typing of toys, and demographics. *Sex Roles*, 79(5), 329-341.

Kooper, A. J. A., Pieters, J. J. P. M., Eggink, A. J., Feuth, T. B., Feenstra, I., Wijnberger, L. D. E., Rijnders, R. J. P., Quartero, R. W. P., Boekkooi, P. F., van Vugt, J. M. G. & Smits, A. P. T. (2012) Why do parents prefer to know the fetal sex as part of invasive prenatal testing? *International Scholarly Research Network Obstetrics and Gynecology*, 2012, 1-7.

Kreiger, T. C. & Kochenderfer-Ladd, B. (2013) Gender behaviors as predictors of peer acceptance and victimization. *Personal Relationships*, 20(4), 619-634.

Kristensen, L. K. (2018) "Peeling an onion": Layering as a methodology to promote embodied perspectives in video analysis. *Video Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, 3(1), 1-21.

Lalvani, P. & Bacon, J. K. (2019) Rethinking "we are all special": Anti-ableism curricula in early childhood classrooms. *Young Exceptional Children*, 22(2), 87-100.

Lamb, D. (2013) Promoting the case for using a research journal to document and reflect on the research experience. *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, 11(2), 84-92.

Lamb, M. E., Easterbrooks, M. A. & Holden, G. W. (1980) Reinforcement and punishment among preschoolers: Characteristics, effects, and correlates. *Child Development*, 51(4), 1230-1236.

Lamb, M. E. & Roopnarine, J. L. (1979) Peer influences on sex-role development in preschoolers. *Child Development*, 50(4), 1219-1222.

Lane, D., Blank, J. & Jones, P. (2019) Research with children: Context, power, and representation. *The Qualitative Report*, 24(4), 693-704.

Lansford, J. E., Skinner, A. T., Sorbring, E., Giunta, L. D., Deater-Deckard, K., Dodge, K. A., Malone, P. S., Oburu, P., Pastorelli, C., Tapanya, S., Uribe Tirado, L. M., Zelli, A., Al-Hassan, S. M., Peña Alampay, L., Bacchini, D., Bombi, A. S., Bornstein, M. H. & Chang, L. (2012) Boys' and girls' relational and physical aggression in nine countries. *Aggressive Behavior*, 38(4), 298-308.

Leaper, C. (2014) Parents' socialization of gender in children, in Tremblay, R. E., Boivin, M. & Peters, R. D. (eds), *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development* [eBook]. Gender: Early Socialization. online. Available online: <http://www.child-encyclopedia.com/sites/default/files/dossiers-complets/en/gender-early-socialization.pdf> [Accessed 07/11/ 2019].

Leaper, C. & Smith, T. E. (2004) A meta-analytic review of gender variations in children's language use: Talkativeness, affiliative speech, and assertive speech. *Developmental Psychology*, 40(6), 993-1027.

Leavell, A. S., Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., Ruble, D. N., Zosuls, K. M. & Cabrera, N. J. (2012) African American, White and Latino fathers' activities with their sons and daughters in early childhood. *Sex Roles*, 66(1), 53-65.

Lee, J. (2022) Child gender, ethnic difference, and the development of father engagement during early childhood. *Early Child Development and Care*, 192(6), 993-1006.

Leonard, M. & McKnight, M. (2015) Look and tell: Using photo-elicitation methods with teenagers. *Children's Geographies*, 13(6), 629-642.

Let Toys be Toys (2021) *Who gets to play now? What do UK TV toy ads tell children about boys' and girls' play in 2021?* Available online: <https://www.lettoysbetoys.org.uk/tvads2021/> [Accessed 18/12/2021].

Levine, L. E. & Munsch, J. (2014) *Child development: An active learning approach*, 2nd edition. London: SAGE Publications.

Lewicki, K., Franze, M., Gottschling-Lang, A. & Hoffmann, W. (2018) Developmental differences between preschool boys and girls in Northeastern Germany. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 26(3), 316-333.

Lewis, H. (2019) Supporting the development of young children's metacognition through the use of video-stimulated reflective dialogue. *Early Child Development and Care*, 189(11), 1842-1858.

Li, R. Y. H. & Wong, W. I. (2016) Gender-typed play and social abilities in boys and girls: Are they related? *Sex Roles*, 74(9-10), 399-410.

Lifting Limits (2019) *Why it matters*. Available online: <https://www.liftinglimits.org.uk/why-it-matters/> [Accessed 07/01/2020].

Lindsey, E. W. (2014) Physical activity play and preschool children's peer acceptance: Distinctions between rough-and-tumble and exercise play. *Early Education & Development*, 25(3), 277-294.

Lippa, R. A. (2010) Sex differences in personality traits and gender-related occupational preferences across 53 nations: Testing evolutionary and social-environmental theories. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 39(3), 619-636.

Lipponen, L., Rajala, A., Hilppö, J. & Paananen, M. (2016) Exploring the foundations of visual methods used in research with children. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 24(6), 936-946.

- Liu, C. (2019) An emic approach to ethics: Doing video-cued ethnography with children in a Chinese preschool. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 50(3), 361-366.
- Llopart, M. & Esteban-Guitart, M. (2018) Funds of knowledge in 21st century societies: Inclusive educational practices for under-represented students. A literature review. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 50(2), 145-161.
- Löfdahl, A. (2014) Play in peer cultures, in Brooker, L., Blaise, M. & Edwards, S. (eds), *The SAGE handbook of play and learning in early childhood* [eBook]. London: SAGE Publications, 342-353.
- Lundström, S., Donner, P. & Heikkilä, M. (2022) Children excluding other children from play through passive resistance. *Journal of Early Childhood Education Research*, 11(2), 223-242.
- Lynch, H. & Stanley, M. (2018) Beyond words: Using qualitative video methods for researching occupation with young children. *OTJR: Occupational Therapy Journal of Research*, 38(1), 56-66.
- Lyttleton-Smith, J. (2017) Objects of conflict: (re) configuring early childhood experiences of gender in the preschool classroom. *Gender and Education*, 31(6), 655-672.
- Machin, D. & Mayr, A. (2012) *How to do critical discourse analysis: A multimodal introduction*. London: SAGE Publications.
- MacMullin, L. N., Nabbijohn, A. N., Kwan, K. M. W., Santarossa, A., Peragine, D. E., James, H. J., Wong, W. I. & VanderLaan, D. P. (2020) Testing an intergroup relations intervention strategy to improve children's appraisals of gender-nonconforming peers. *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality*, 29(2), 167-181.
- MacPhee, D. & Prendergast, S. (2018) Room for improvement: Girls' and boys' home environments are still gendered. *Sex Roles*, 80(5-6), 332-346.
- Major, L. E. (2015) *Creating cultural capital*. Available online: <https://www.suttontrust.com/newsarchive/creating-cultural-capital/> [Accessed 12/11/2019].
- Malaguzzi, L. (1993) For an education based on relationships. *Young Children*, 49(1), 9-12. Available online: <https://www.reggioalliance.org/downloads/malaguzziyoungchildren.pdf> [Accessed 04/08/2020].
- Manassakis, E. S. (2020) Children's participation in the organisation of a kindergarten classroom. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 18(1), 18-28.
- Mannay, D. (2015) *Visual, narrative and creative research methods: application, reflection and ethics*. London: Routledge.

- Marjanovič-Umek, L. & Fekonja-Peklaj, U. (2017) Gender differences in children's language: A meta-analysis of Slovenian studies. *Centre for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 7(2), 97-111.
- Marks, J., Bun, L. C. & McHale, S. M. (2009) Family patterns of gender role attitudes. *Sex Roles*, 61(3-4), 221-234.
- Martin, B. (2011) *Children at play: Learning gender in the early years*. Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham.
- Martin, C. L. & Halverson, C. F. (1981) A schematic processing model of sex typing and stereotyping in children. *Child Development*, 52(4), 1119-1134.
- Martin, C. L., Kornienko, O., Schaefer, D. R., Hanish, L. D., Fabes, R. A. & Goble, P. (2013) The role of sex of peers and gender-typed activities in young children's peer affiliative networks: A longitudinal analysis of selection and influence. *Child Development*, 84(3), 921-37.
- Martin, C. L. & Ruble, D. N. (2010) Patterns of gender development. *Annual Review of Psychology* 61, 353-381.
- Martin, C. L., Wood, C. H. & Little, J. K. (1990) The development of gender stereotype components. *Child Development*, 61(6), 1891-1904.
- Mason, J. (2011) *Qualitative researching*, 2nd edition. London: SAGE Publications.
- Masters, S. L., Hixson, K. & Hayes, A. R. (2021) Perceptions of gender norm violations among middle school students: An experimental study of the effects of violation type on exclusion expectations. *The Journal of Early Adolescence*, 41(4), 527-549.
- Mayeza, E. (2017a) Doing child-centered ethnography: Unravelling the complexities of reducing the perceptions of adult male power during fieldwork. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1), 1-10.
- Mayeza, E. (2017b) 'Girls don't play soccer': Children policing gender on the playground in a township primary school in South Africa. *Gender and Education*, 29(4), 476-494.
- Mayeza, E. (2018) 'It's not right for boys to play with dolls': Young children constructing and policing gender during 'free play' in a South African classroom. *Discourse*, 39(4), 590-602.
- McCarthy, M. M. & Arnold, A. P. (2011) Reframing sexual differentiation of the brain. *Nature Neuroscience*, 14(6), 677-683.

- Meier, A. M. & Vogt, F. (2015) The potential of stimulated recall for investigating self-regulation processes in inquiry learning with primary school students. *Perspectives in Science*, 5, 45-53.
- Meland, A. T. (2020) Challenging gender stereotypes through a transformation of a fairy tale. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 28(6), 911-922.
- Meland, A. T. & Kaltvedt, E. H. (2019) Tracking gender in kindergarten. *Early Child Development and Care*, 189(1), 94-103.
- Meo, A. I. (2010) Picturing students' habitus: The advantages and limitations of photo-elicitation interviewing in a qualitative study in the city of Buenos Aires. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 9(2), 149-171.
- Mesman, J. & Groeneveld, M. G. (2018) Gendered parenting in early childhood: Subtle but unmistakable if you know where to look. *Child Development Perspectives*, 12(1), 22-27.
- Meyer, M. & Conroy, M. (2022) *See it be it: What children are seeing on TV*. The Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media: Available online: <https://seejane.org/research-informs-empowers/see-jane-2022-tv-see-it-be-it-what-families-are-seeing-on-tv/> [Accessed 21/02/2023].
- Meyers, A. B. & Berk, L. E. (2014) Make-believe play and self-regulation, in Brooker, L., Blaise, M. & Edwards, S. (eds), *The SAGE handbook of play and learning in early childhood* [eBook]. London: SAGE Publications, 43-55.
- Mickelburgh, J. (2019) *The theories behind cultural capital*. Available online: <https://eyfs.info/articles.html/leadership-and-management/the-theories-behind-cultural-capital-r253/> [Accessed 12/11/2019].
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M. & Saldaña, J. (2014) *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*, 3rd edition. London: SAGE Publications.
- Miller-Slough, R. L., Dunsmore, J. C., Zeman, J. L., Sanders, W. M. & Poon, J. A. (2018) Maternal and paternal reactions to child sadness predict children's psychosocial outcomes: A family-centered approach. *Social Development*, 27(3), 495-509.
- Moawad, N. M. I. & El Shoura, S. M. (2017) Toward a richer definition of multiculturalism. *International Journal of Advanced Research*, 5(7), 802-806.
- Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D. & Gonzalez, N. (1992) Funds of knowledge for teaching: Using a qualitative approach to connect homes and classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 132-141.

Montgomery, H. (2014) Participant Observation, in Clark, A., Flewitt, R., Hammersley, M. & Robb, M. (eds), *Understanding research with children and young people*. London: SAGE Publications, 122-135.

Morales, P. Z. & Rumenapp, J. C. (2017) Talking about language in pre-school: The use of video-stimulated recall with emergent bilingual children. *Journal of Multilingual Education Research*, 7(1), 19-42.

Morawska, A. (2020) The effects of gendered parenting on child development outcomes: A systematic review. *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review*, 23(4), 553-576.

Morgan, K. & Surtees, N. (2022) 'I can be a girl if I want to': Supporting or silencing children's working theories during counter-heteronormative picturebook sessions in early childhood education. *Waikato Journal of Education*, 27(1), 133-146.

Moylett, H. (2019a) *Guest blog from Helen Moylett: Ofsted's thinking on cultural capital - some concerns and question*. Available online: <https://www.early-education.org.uk/news/guest-blog-helen-moylett-ofsted%E2%80%99s-thinking-cultural-capital-some-concerns-and-questions> [Accessed 12/11/2019].

Moylett, H. (2019b) *Ofsted: Cultural capital - a capital idea?* Available online: <https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/Features/article/ofsted-cultural-capital-a-capital-idea> [Accessed 12/11/2019].

Mphahlele, R. S. S. (2019) Exploring the role of Malaguzzi's 'Hundred Languages of Children' in early childhood education. *South African Journal of Childhood Education*, 9(1), 1-10.

Mukherji, P. & Albon, D. (2018) *Research methods in early childhood: An introductory guide*, 3rd edition. London: SAGE Publications.

Mullet, D. R. (2018) A general critical discourse analysis framework for educational research. *Journal of Advanced Academics*, 29(2), 116-142.

Murray, J. (2019) Hearing young children's voices. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 27(1), 1-5.

Murris, K. (2022) Reconfiguring child agency in digital play, *EECERA 30th Annual Conference*. Glasgow, 23-26 August 2022.

Nabbijohn, A. N., MacMullin, L. N., Kwan, K. M. W., Santarossa, A., Peragine, D. E., Wong, W. I. & VanderLaan, D. P. (2020) Children's bias in appraisals of gender-variant peers. *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 196, 1-10.

Nærland, T. & Martinsen, H. (2011) Child-child interactions and positive social focus among preschool children. *Early Child Development and Care*, 181(3), 361-370.

Neary, A. (2021) Complicating constructions: Middle-class parents of transgender and gender-diverse children. *Journal of Family Studies*, 27(4), 506-522.

Nguyen, A. (2022) "Children have the fairest things to say": Young children's engagement with anti-bias picture books. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 50(5), 743-759.

Nguyen, N. T., McFadden, A., Tangen, D. & Beutel, D. (2013) Video-Stimulated Recall Interviews in Qualitative Research, *Annual Meeting of the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE)*. Adelaide, 1-5 December 2013. Australian Association for Research in Education, 1-10.

Nolan, A., Paatsch, L. & Scull, J. (2018) Video-based methodologies: The affordances of different viewpoints in understanding teachers' tacit knowledge of practice that supports young children's oral language. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 41(5), 536-547.

Núñez, I. & Palmer, D. (2017) Who will be bilingual? A Critical Discourse Analysis of a Spanish-English Bilingual Pair. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 14(4), 294-319.

Nutbrown, C. (2010) Naked by the pool? Blurring the image? Ethical issues in the portrayal of young children in arts-based educational research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 17(1), 3-14.

O'Connor, J. (2011) Applying Bourdieu's concepts of social and cultural capital and habitus to early years research, in Waller, T., Whitmarsh, J. & Clarke, K. (eds), *Making sense of theory and practice in early childhood: The power of ideas*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, 115-127.

O'Neill, J. (2014) Voice and the ethics of children's agency in educational research. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 49(2), 219-232.

O'Sullivan, J. (2019) *What is 'cultural capital', and why do you need to know?* Available online: <https://www.teachearlyyears.com/a-unique-child/view/what-is-cultural-capital-and-why-do-you-need-to-know> [Accessed 12/11/2019].

OECD (2019) *Envisioning the future of education and jobs*. Paris: OECD Publishing. Available online: <http://www.oecd.org/education/Envisioning-the-future-of-education-and-jobs.pdf> [Accessed 25/01/2022].

Office for National Statistics (2012) *2011 Census data on Nomis*. Available online: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011> [Accessed 07/04/2020].

Office for National Statistics (2022) *2021 Census data on Nomis*. Available online: https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census_2021 [Accessed 09/12/2023].

Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2005) *General comment no 7: Implementing child rights in early childhood*. Available online: https://www.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/WopiFrame.aspx?sourcedoc=/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/Health/GC7.pdf&action=default&DefaultItemOpen=1 [Accessed 31/03/2021].

Ofsted (2019) *Early years inspection handbook for Ofsted registered provision*. Manchester: Ofsted. Available online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-years-inspection-handbook-eif> [Accessed 13/11/2019].

Ólafsdóttir, S. M. & Einarsdóttir, J. (2019) 'Drawing and playing are not the same': Children's views on their activities in Icelandic preschools. *Early Years*, 39(1), 51-63.

Ortlieb, E. T. (2010) The pursuit of play within the curriculum. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 37(3), 241-246.

Otsuka, K. & Jay, T. (2017) Understanding and supporting block play: Video observation research on preschoolers' block play to identify features associated with the development of abstract thinking. *Early Child Development and Care*, 187(5-6), 990-1003.

Outline Productions (2017) No more boys and girls: Can our kids go gender free? [TV Programme]. BBC Two, 16 August, 21:00.

Paechter, C. (2007) *Being boys, being girls: Learning masculinities and femininities*. Maidenhead: McGraw Hill/Open University Press.

Pálmadóttir, H. & Einarsdóttir, J. (2016) Video observations of children's perspectives on their lived experiences: Challenges in the relations between the researcher and children. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 24(5), 721-733.

Park, C. C. (2011) Young children making sense of racial and ethnic differences. *American Educational Research Journal*, 48(2), 387-420.

Pascal, C. & Bertram, T. (2009) Listening to young citizens: the struggle to make real a participatory paradigm in research with young children. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 17(2), 249-262.

Patton, M. Q. (2015) *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice*, 4th edition [eBook]. London: SAGE Publications.

Pauletti, R. E., Cooper, P. J. & Perry, D. G. (2014) Influences of gender identity on children's maltreatment of gender-nonconforming peers: A person \times target analysis of aggression. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 106(5), 843-866.

Paulus, T., Lester, J. N. & Dempster, P. G. (2014) *Digital tools for qualitative research*. London: SAGE Publications.

Păunescu, A. & Indreica, E.-S. (2014) Use of non-verbal communication in preschoolers emotional development. *Journal Plus Education*, 10(2), 283-292.

Perry, D. G., Pauletti, R. E. & Cooper, P. J. (2019) Gender identity in childhood: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 43(4), 289-304.

Peterson, B., Gunn, A., Brice, A. & Alley, K. (2015) Exploring names and identity through multicultural literature in K-8 classrooms. *Multicultural Perspectives*, 17(1), 39-45.

Phair, R. (2021) Gender norms are clearly evident at five years of age, *OECD Education and Skills* Available online: <https://oecdeditoday.com/gender-norms-clearly-evident-at-five-years-of-age/> [Accessed 2021].

Pietraszewski, D. & German, T. C. (2013) Coalitional psychology on the playground: Reasoning about indirect social consequences in preschoolers and adults. *Cognition*, 126(3), 352-363.

Pilcher, J. (2017) Names and "doing gender": How forenames and surnames contribute to gender identities, difference, and inequalities. *Sex Roles*, 77(11), 812-822.

Pink, S. (2013) *Doing visual ethnography*, 3rd edition. London: SAGE Publications.

Powell, K. (2010) Viewing places: Students as visual ethnographers. *Art Education*, 63(6), 45.

Powell, M. A., Graham, A. & Truscott, J. (2016) Ethical research involving children: Facilitating reflexive engagement. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 16(2), 1-24.

Powell, M. A., Taylor, N., Fitzgerald, R., Graham, A. & Anderson, D. (2013) *Ethical research involving children*. Florence: UNICEF Office of Research - Innocenti. Available online: <https://childethics.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/ERIC-compendium-approved-digital-web.pdf> [Accessed 06/02/2020].

Prioletta, J. (2020) Patriarchy in the preschool classroom: Examining the effects of developmental ideologies on teachers' perspectives and practices around play and gender. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 21(3), 242-252.

- Prioletta, J. (2023) Learning through play or learning sexism through play? Why critical gender literacy matters in kindergarten education. *Early Years*, 1-14.
- Prioletta, J. & Davies, A. W. (2022) Femmephobia in kindergarten education: Play environments as key sites for the early devaluation of femininity and care. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 0(0), 1-15. Available online: <https://doi.org/10.1177/14639491221137902> [Accessed 01/12/2022].
- Prioletta, J. & Pyle, A. (2017) Play and gender in Ontario kindergarten classrooms: Implications for literacy learning. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 25(4), 393-408.
- Punch, K. F. (2014) *Introduction to social research: Quantitative and qualitative approaches*, 3rd edition. London: SAGE Publications.
- Pyle, A. (2013) Engaging young children in research through photo elicitation. *Early Child Development and Care*, 183(11), 1544-1558.
- Pyle, A. & Danniels, E. (2016) Using a picture book to gain assent in research with young children. *Early Child Development and Care*, 186(9), 1438-1452.
- Pyle, A., DeLuca, C. & Danniels, E. (2017) A scoping review of research on play-based pedagogies in kindergarten education. *Review of Education*, 5(3), 311-351.
- Quinn, P. C. & Liben, L. S. (2008) A sex difference in mental rotation in young infants. *Psychological Science*, 19(11), 1067-1070.
- Raabe, T. & Beelmann, A. (2011) Development of ethnic, racial, and national prejudice in childhood and adolescence: A multinational meta-analysis of age differences. *Child Development*, 82(6), 1715-37.
- Rantala, A. & Heikkilä, M. (2020) Agency, guidance and gender - interrelated aspects of early childhood education settings. *Education 3-13*, 48(4), 483-493.
- Reunamo, J., Kallioma, M., Repo, L., Salminen, E., Lee, H.-C. & Wang, L.-C. (2014) Children's strategies in addressing bullying situations in day care and preschool. *Early Child Development and Care*, 185(6), 952-967.
- Rhodes, M. & Baron, A. (2019) The development of social categorization. *Annual Review of Developmental Psychology*, 1(1), 359-386.
- Rios-Aguilar, C., Kiyama, J. M., Gravitt, M. & Moll, L. C. (2011) Funds of knowledge for the poor and forms of capital for the rich? A capital approach to examining funds of knowledge. *Theory and Research in Education*, 9(2), 163-184.

Robles de Medina, P. G., Visser, G. H. A., Huizink, A. C., Buitelaar, J. K. & Mulder, E. J. H. (2003) Fetal behaviour does not differ between boys and girls. *Early Human Development*, 73(1), 17-26.

Robson, S. (2011a) Producing and using video data in the early years: Ethical questions and practical consequences in research with young children. *Children & Society*, 25(3), 179-189.

Robson, S. (2011b) Producing and using video data with young children: A case study of ethical questions and practical consequences, in Harcourt, D., Perry, B. & Waller, T. (eds), *Researching young children's perspectives: Debating the ethics and dilemmas of educational research with children*. London: Routledge, 178-192.

Rogers, M., Chambers, N. & Percy, C. (2020) *Disconnected: Career aspirations and jobs in the UK*. Available online: <https://www.educationandemployers.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Disconnected-Career-aspirations-and-jobs-in-the-UK-1.pdf> [Accessed 03/02/2020].

Rogers, R. (2011) Critical approaches to discourse analysis in educational research, in Rogers, R. (ed), *An introduction to critical discourse analysis in education*, 2nd edition. London: Routledge, 1-20.

Rogošić, S., Maskalan, A. & Krznar, T. (2020) Preschool teachers' attitudes towards children's gender roles: the effects of socio-demographic characteristics and personal experiences of gender discrimination. *Problems of Education in the 21st Century*, 78(3), 410-422.

Roopnarine, J. L. (1984) Sex-typed socialization in mixed-age preschool classrooms. *Child Development*, 55(3), 1078-1084.

Rose, G. (2016) *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials*, 4th edition. London: SAGE Publications.

Rosenthal, M. K. & Gatt, L. (2010) 'Learning to live together': Training early childhood educators to promote socio-emotional competence of toddlers and pre-school children. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 18(3), 373-390.

Rowley, J., Jones, R., Vassiliou, M. & Hanna, S. (2012) Using card-based games to enhance the value of semi-structured interviews. *International Journal of Market Research*, 54(1), 93-110.

Ruble, D. N., Taylor, L. J., Cyphers, L., Greulich, F. K., Lurye, L. E. & Shrout, P. E. (2007) The role of gender constancy in early gender development. *Child Development*, 78(4), 1121-1136.

Rusk, F., Pörn, M., Sahlström, F. & Slotte-Lüttge, A. (2012) Everything, everywhere, all the time: Advantages and challenges in the use of extensive video recordings of children, in Salo, P. (ed),

Responsible research: Papers from the Fourth Qualitative Research Conference. Vaasa: Åbo Akademi University, Faculty of Educational Sciences, 67-78.

Rutanen, N., Amorim, K. d. S., Marwick, H. & White, J. (2018) Tensions and challenges concerning ethics on video research with young children - experiences from an international collaboration among seven countries. *Video Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, 3(1), 1-14.

Sabato, H. & Kogut, T. (2021) Sharing and belonging: Children's social status and their sharing behavior with in-group and out-group members. *Developmental Psychology*, 57(12), 2082-2092.

SAGE Research Methods (2020) *Methods map*. Available online: <https://methods.sagepub.com/methods-map/epistemology> [Accessed 02/02/2020].

Sameroff, A. (2010) A unified theory of development: A dialectic integration of nature and nurture. *Child Development*, 81(1), 6-22.

Samuelsson, C. & Plejert, C. (2015) On the use of Conversation Analysis and retrospection in intervention for children with language impairment. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 31(1), 19-36.

Saracho, O. N. (2016) Bullying: Young children's roles, social status, and prevention programmes. *Early Child Development and Care*, 187(1), 68-79.

Schroeder, K. M. & Bámaca-Colbert, M. Y. (2019) Cultural underpinnings of gender development: Studying gender among children of immigrants. *Child Development*, 90(4), 1005-1015.

Schroeder, K. M. & Liben, L. S. (2021) Felt pressure to conform to cultural gender roles: Correlates and consequences. *Sex Roles*, 84(3-4), 125-138.

Seale, C. (2012) Sampling, in Seale, C. (ed), *Researching society and culture*, 3rd edition. London: SAGE Publications, 134-152.

Seitz, M., Lenhart, J. & Rübsam, N. (2020) The effects of gendered information in stories on preschool children's development of gender stereotypes. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 38(3), 363-390.

Shaw, P. A. (2021) Photo-elicitation and photo-voice: Using visual methodological tools to engage with younger children's voices about inclusion in education. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 44(4), 337-351.

Shehu, B. P. (2019) Peer acceptance in early childhood: Links to socio-economic status and social competence. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 10(4), 176-200.

Sheldon, A. (1996) You can be the baby brother, but you aren't born yet: Preschool girls's negotiation for power and access in pretend play. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 29(1), 57-80.

Sheldon, A. (2015) *Constituting gender through talk in childhood: Conversations in parent-child, peer, and sibling relationships a special issue of research on language and social interaction* [eBook]. New York: Psychology Press.

Sidnell, J. (2013) Basic conversation analytic methods, in Sidnell, J. & Stivers, T. (eds), *The handbook of conversation analysis* [eBook]. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 77-99.

Sidnell, J. (2015) A conversation analytic approach to research on early childhood, in Farrell, A., Kagan, S. L. & Tisdall, E. K. M. (eds), *The SAGE handbook of early childhood research*. London: SAGE Publications, 255-276.

Silverman, D. (2014) *Interpreting qualitative data*, 5th edition. London: SAGE Publications.

Silverman, D. (2017) *Doing qualitative research*, 5th edition. London: SAGE Publications.

Silverman, M. (2016) Filming in the home: A reflexive account of microethnographic data collection with family caregivers of older adults. *Qualitative Social Work*, 15(4), 570-584.

Sims, R. N., Rizzo, M. T., Mulvey, K. L. & Killen, M. (2022) Desire to play with counterstereotypical peers is related to gender stereotypes and playmate experiences. *Developmental Psychology*, 58(3), 510-521.

Skočajić, M. M., Radosavljević, J. G., Okičić, M. G., Janković, I. O. & Žeželj, I. L. (2020) Boys just don't! Gender stereotyping and sanctioning of counter-stereotypical behavior in preschoolers. *Sex Roles*, 82(3-4), 163-172.

Smith, A. B. (2011) Respecting children's rights and agency: Theoretical insights into ethical research procedures, in Harcourt, D., Perry, B. & Waller, T. (eds), *Researching young children's perspectives: Debating the ethics and dilemmas of educational research with children*. London: Routledge, 11-25.

Solomon, J. (2016) Gender identity and expression in the early childhood classroom: Influences on development within sociocultural contexts. *Young Children*, 71(3), 61-72.

Speer, S. A. & Stokoe, E. (2011) An introduction to conversation and gender, in Speer, S. A. & Stokoe, E. (eds), *Conversation and gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1-27.

Spinner, L., Cameron, L. & Calogero, R. (2018) Peer toy play as a gateway to children's gender flexibility: The effect of (counter)stereotypic portrayals of peers in children's magazines. *Sex Roles*, 79(5), 314-328.

Spyrou, S. (2011) The limits of children's voices: From authenticity to critical, reflexive representation. *Childhood*, 18(2), 151-165.

Sriwimon, L. & Zilli, P. J. (2017) Applying critical discourse analysis as a conceptual framework for investigating gender stereotypes in political media discourse. *Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences*, 38(2), 136-142.

Stagg Peterson, S., Rajendram, S. & Eisazadeh, N. (2019) Multimodal meaning-making during play in two Northern Canadian Indigenous kindergarten classrooms. *Early Years*, 39(4), 392-407.

Storey, K. & Slaby, R. (2013) *Eyes on bullying in early childhood* [eBook]. Waltham: Education Development Centre.

Streib, J. (2011) Class reproduction by four year olds. *Qualitative Sociology*, 34(2), 337-352.

Stuij, M. (2015) Habitus and social class: A case study on socialisation into sports and exercise. *Sport, Education and Society*, 20(6), 780-798.

Sullivan, J., Moss-Racusin, C., Lopez, M. & Williams, K. (2018) Backlash against gender stereotype-violating preschool children. *PLoS ONE*, 13(4), e0195503.

Tay-Lim, J. & Gan, L. (2012) Peer rejection in preschool: Foregrounding children's voices. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 11(1), 45-62.

Te One, S. (2011) Supporting children's participation rights: Curriculum and research approaches, in Harcourt, D., Perry, B. & Waller, T. (eds), *Researching young children's perspectives: Debating the ethics and dilemmas of educational research with children*. London: Routledge, 85-99.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2014) *Gender stereotypes and stereotyping and woman's rights*. Available online: https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/OnePagars/Gender_stereotyping.pdf [Accessed 12/03/2023].

Theimer, C. E., Killen, M. & Stangor, C. (2001) Young children's evaluations of exclusion in gender-stereotypic peer contexts. *Developmental Psychology*, 37(1), 18-27.

Theobald, M. (2012) Video-stimulated accounts: Young children accounting for interactional matters in front of peers. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 10(1), 32-50.

Theobald, M. (2013) Ideas as “possessitives”: Claims and counter claims in a playground dispute. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 45(1), 1-12.

Theobald, M., Danby, S., Einarsdóttir, J., Bourne, J., Jones, D., Ross, S., Knaggs, H. & Carter-Jones, C. (2015) Children’s perspectives of play and learning for educational practice. *Education Sciences*, 5(4), 345-362.

Thomas, G. (2017) *How to do your research project: A guide for students*, 3rd edition. London: SAGE Publications.

Timmons, K. & Airton, L. (2023) Welcoming gender diversity in the early years: Interpreting professional guiding documents for gender-expansive practice. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 24(1), 32-45.

Tisdall, E. K. M., Davis, J. M. & Gallagher, M. (2010) *Researching with children and young people: Research design, methods and analysis*. London: SAGE Publications.

Tobin, D. D., Menon, M., Menon, M., Spatta, B. C., Hodges, E. V. E. & Perry, D. G. (2010) The intrapsychics of gender: A model of self-socialization. *Psychological Review*, 117(2), 601-622.

Tobin, J. (2019) The Origins of the Video-Cued Multivocal Ethnographic Method. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 50(3), 255-269.

Tobin, J., Hsueh, Y. & Karasawa, M. (2009) *Preschool in three cultures revisited: China, Japan, and the United States* [eBook]. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Tobin, J. J., Wu, D. Y. H. & Davidson, D. H. (1989) *Preschool in three cultures: Japan, China, and the United States*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Todd, B. K., Barry, J. A. & Thommessen, S. A. O. (2017) Preferences for 'gender-typed' toys in boys and girls aged 9 to 32 months. *Infant and Child Development*, 26(3), 1-14.

Todd, B. K., Fischer, R. A., Di Costa, S., Roestorf, A., Harbour, K., Hardiman, P. & Barry, J. A. (2018) Sex differences in children's toy preferences: A systematic review, meta-regression, and meta-analysis. *Infant and Child Development*, 27(2), e2064.

Toerien, M. (2013) Conversations and conversation analysis, in Flick, U. (ed), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data analysis* [eBook]. London: SAGE Publications, 327-340. Available online: <https://go.exlibris.link/B50qd5qY> [Accessed 24/01/2022].

Tonkiss, F. (2012) Discourse Analysis, in Seale, C. (ed), *Researching society and culture*, 3rd edition. London: SAGE Publications, 405-423.

Trautner, H. M., Ruble, D. N., Cyphers, L., Kirsten, B., Behrendt, R. & Hartmann, P. (2005) Rigidity and flexibility of gender stereotypes in childhood: Developmental or differential? *Infant and Child Development*, 14(4), 365-381.

Trawick-Smith, J., Swaminathan, S., Baton, B., Danieluk, C., Marsh, S. & Szarwacki, M. (2017) Block play and mathematics learning in preschool: The effects of building complexity, peer and teacher interactions in the block area, and replica play materials. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 15(4), 433-448.

UNICEF (2002) *Evaluation Technical Notes. Children participating in research, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) - Ethics and your responsibilities as a manager*. Available online: https://www.unicef.org/spanish/evaluation/files/TechNote1_Ethics.pdf [Accessed 23/02/2021].

United Nations (2015) *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development*. New York: UN Publishing. Available online: <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda> [Accessed 02/12/2022].

United Nations General Assembly (1989) *The United Nations convention on the rights of the child* (Resolution 44/25). London: UNICEF. Available online: https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf?_ga=2.186114985.1624957654.1583770683-909196559.1583770683 [Accessed 09/03/2020].

University of Hull (2018) *FACE Ethics booklet 2018/19*. University of Hull. Available online: <https://canvas.hull.ac.uk/courses/31645/files/folder/Ethical%20Procedures> [Accessed 02/12/2019].

Uyar, R. O. & Arnas, Y. A. (2021) 4-6-8 Age group children's knowledge of gender norms and flexibility of reasoning. *Education and Science*, 46(206), 281-301.

van Dijk, T. A. (1995) Aims of critical discourse analysis. *Japanese Discourse*, 1(1), 17-27.

Vargas, A. P., Park-Taylor, J., Harris, A. M. & Ponterotto, J. G. (2016) The identity development of urban minority young men in single-mother households. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 94(4), 473-482.

Veiga, G., de Leng, W., Cachucho, R., Ketelaar, L., Kok, J. N., Knobbe, A., Neto, C. & Rieffe, C. (2017) Social competence at the playground: Preschoolers during recess: Social competence at the playground. *Infant and Child Development*, 26(1), 1-15.

Vila, P. (2013) The importance of photo-interviewing as a research method in the study of identity construction processes: An illustration from the U.S.-Mexico border. *Visual Anthropology*, 26(1), 51-68.

Wang, M. Z., Ng, V. & Gleason, T. R. (2023) Toy stories: Children's use of gender stereotypes in making social judgments. *Acta Psychologica*, 235(1), 1-11.

Warin, J. (2023) *Gender in early childhood education: Implementing a gender flexible pedagogy*. London: SAGE Publications.

Warin, J. & Adriany, V. (2015) Gender flexible pedagogy in early childhood education. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 26(4), 375-386.

Webb, J., Schirato, T. & Danaher, G. (2002) *Understanding Bourdieu*. London: SAGE Publications.

Weisgram, E. S. & Bruun, S. T. (2018) Predictors of gender-typed toy purchases by prospective parents and mothers: The roles of childhood experiences and gender attitudes. *Sex Roles*, 79(5-6), 342-357.

Weisgram, E. S., Fulcher, M. & Dinella, L. M. (2014) Pink gives girls permission: Exploring the roles of explicit gender labels and gender-typed colors on preschool children's toy preferences. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 35(5), 401-409.

Wingrave, M. (2018) Perceptions of gender in early years. *Gender and Education*, 30(5), 587-606.

Wohlwend, K. E. (2011) Mapping modes in children's play and design: An action-oriented approach to critical multimodal analysis, in Rogers, R. (ed), *An introduction to critical discourse analysis in education*, 2nd edition. London: Routledge, 242-266.

Wohlwend, K. E. (2012) 'Are you guys girls?': Boys, identity texts, and Disney princess play. *Journal of Early Childhood Literacy*, 12(1), 3-23.

Wohlwend, K. E. (2016) Friendship meeting or blocking circle? Identities in the laminated spaces of a playground conflict. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 8(1), 73-88.

Wong, W. I. & Hines, M. (2015) Effects of gender color-coding on toddlers' gender-typical toy play. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 44(5), 1233-1242.

Wood, E. (2013) *Play, learning and the early childhood curriculum*, 3rd edition [eBook]. Los Angeles: SAGE.

Woolhouse, C. (2019) Conducting photo methodologies with children: Framing ethical concerns relating to representation, voice and data analysis when exploring educational inclusion with children. *International Journal of Research & Method in Education*, 42(1), 3-18.

World Economic Forum (2021) *Global gender gap report 2021: Insight report*. Geneva: World Economic Forum. Available online: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2021.pdf [Accessed 22/03/2023].

World Health Organisation (2022) *Gender and health*. Available online: https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender#tab=tab_1 [Accessed 21/12/2022].

Xiao, S. X., Cook, R. E., Martin, C. L. & Nielson, M. G. (2019) Characteristics of preschool gender enforcers and peers who associate with them. *Sex Roles*, 81(11-12), 671-685.

Xiao, S. X., Martin, C. L., DeLay, D. & Cook, R. E. (2021) A double-edged sword: Children's intergroup gender attitudes have social consequences for the beholder. *Developmental Psychology*, 57(9), 1510-1524.

Yanik, B. (2020) Children's relationships with the opposite sex inside peer culture: The case of rural children in Turkey. *Early Child Development and Care*, 190(7), 1080-1092.

Yates, E. & Oates, R. (2019) Young children's views on play provision in two local parks: A research project by early childhood studies students and staff. *Childhood*, 26(4), 491-508.

Yogman, M., Garner, A., Hutchinson, J., Hirsh-Pasek, K. & Golinkoff, R. M. (2018) The power of play: A pediatric role in enhancing development in young children. *Pediatrics*, 142(3), 1-18.

Yu, S., Ostrosky, M. M. & Fowler, S. A. (2015) The relationship between preschoolers' attitudes and play behaviors toward classmates with disabilities. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 35(1), 40-51.

Zahrai, L. (2015) An individual's gender experience: Socio-cultural context. *Journal of Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University*, 1(4), 115-122.

Zartler, U. (2014) Photo interviews with children: Relating the visual and the verbal from a participation perspective. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 5(4.1), 629-648.

Zero Tolerance (2013) *Just like a child: Respect gender equality in the early years*. Available online: <https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/Just-Like-a-Child.pdf> [Accessed 05/11/2018].

Zero Tolerance (2021) *Children's book audit results 2021*. Available online: [https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/news/news-events/childrens-book-audit-results-2021-/](https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/news/news-events/childrens-book-audit-results-2021/) [Accessed 23/03/2023].

Zosuls, K. M., Ruble, D. N., Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., Shrout, P. E., Bornstein, M. H. & Greulich, F. K. (2009) The acquisition of gender labels in infancy: Implications for gender-typed play. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(3), 688-701.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1	Ethical approval	I
Appendix 2	Children's information leaflet	II
Appendix 3	Participant assent form	VI
Appendix 4	Maximum Variation Sample Data – 2021 Census Data – Socio-economic status	VII
Appendix 5	Maximum Variation Sample Data – 2021 Census Data – Population diversity	VIII
Appendix 6	Estate Community Nursery	IX
Appendix 7	Estate Community Nursery Participants	XII
Appendix 8	University Day Care	XIII
Appendix 9	University Day Care Participants	XV
Appendix 10	Small Town Nursery	XVII
Appendix 11	Small Town Nursery Participants	XIX
Appendix 12	Research schedule	XX
Appendix 13	Reflective journal entry	XXII
Appendix 14	Image elicitation activity images and vignettes	XXIII
Appendix 15	Data collection schedule	XXVII
Appendix 16	Conversation analysis transcription conventions	XXVIII
Appendix 17	Estate Community Nursery extracts from transcripts	XXIX
Appendix 18	University Day Care extracts from transcripts	XXXII
Appendix 19	Small Town Nursery extracts from transcripts	XXXIV

Appendix 1 – Ethical Approval

From: FACE Ethics
Sent: 06 September 2020 22:57
To: CATHERINE KILBURN
Subject: Ethics application - Confirmation of Approval
Attachments: C_Kilburn Comments on Application.docx

Dear Catherine,

Project title:	Pre-school children's policing of their peers' gender exploration play
Ref No:	1920PGR26
Date:	06/09/2020

I am pleased to inform you the ethics committee has approved your ethics application.

Your reviewer has left comments for your application which are written in the attached document. These are not mandatory amendments, however you can resubmit to make the corrections if you so choose.

You are now authorised to carry out the research as outlined in your application.

Best wishes,

Chris Preston

FACE Ethics Administrator

Pronoun: He/Him

Please note my working hours are Mon-Weds 9-5pm. Outside of these hours please contact FACE-PGR@hull.ac.uk

Faculty of Arts, Cultures and Education

University of Hull

Hull, HU6 7RX, UK

www.hull.ac.uk

C.Preston@hull.ac.uk | 01482 464026



[@UniofHull](#)



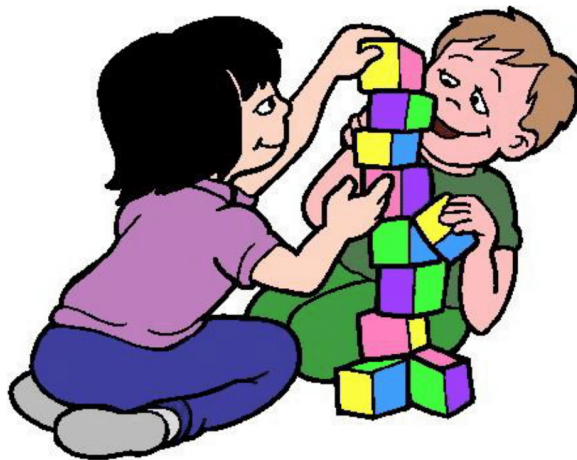
[/UniversityOfHull](#)



[universityofhull](#)

Appendix 2 – Children’s Information Leaflet

Information Book



This book belongs to:

.....

My name is Cathy
and I am doing a
project about
children’s play.



I would like to learn
more about how you
play with other
children.

Sometimes I might
video record you
playing with your
friends.



I would also like to
look at some
pictures with you
and ask you to tell
me about them.



If I do video record
your play, I would
like to watch it with
you and ask you
questions about
what is happening.

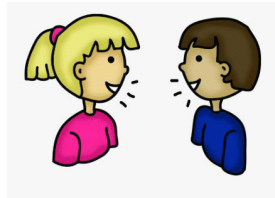


If you don't want me
to video record you
playing, you can tell
me to stop or show
me a thumbs down.

I won't tell anyone
what you have told
me about your play
and your friends and
I won't use your real
name when I tell
people about your
play.



You can ask me any
questions you have
about my project.



But if you tell me
something that
makes me worried
about you, I have to
tell one of your
nursery grown-ups
and I will let you
know if I have to do
that.



Thank you for helping me.





Images from www.clipart-library.com


V1.1

Appendix 3 – Participant Assent Form

Child Consent Form

My name is: _____

I understand what Cathy has told me:		
I know that I can ask Cathy any questions about what she is doing:		

 I am happy to take part in Cathy’s project and I have drawn a picture for her to keep:

Appendix 4 – Maximum Variation Sample Data – 2021 Census Data – Socio-Economic Status

TS062 - NS-SeC

ONS Crown Copyright Reserved [from
Nomis on 9 December 2022]

SES from 2021 census

population All usual residents aged 16 years and over
units Persons
date 2021

National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC)	Southampton: Portswood	%	Hull: University	%	Beverley	%	Country: Engalnd	%
1. Higher managerial, administrative and professional occupations	3,676	41	2,686	15	11,771	42	15,265,163	36
2. Intermediate occupations	1,859	21	2,813	16	6,329	23	10,128,735	24
3. Routine and manual occupations	2,478	28	8,922	51	7,985	29	13,166,587	31
Never worked and long-term unemployed	851	10	3,080	18	1,759	6	3,915,482	9
Total	8,864	100	17,501	100	27,844	100	42,475,967	100
	Higher than average		Lower than average		Higher than average		Country Average	

In order to protect against disclosure of personal information, records have been swapped between different geographic areas and counts perturbed by small amounts. Small counts at the lowest geographies will be most affected.

Appendix 5 – Maximum Variation Sample Data – 2021 Census Data – Population Diversity

TS004 - Country of birth

ONS Crown Copyright Reserved [from Nomis on 11 November 2022]

population All usual residents
units Persons
date 2021

Country of birth	Iacu2021: Kingston upon Hull, City of		Iacu2021: Southampton		Isoa2021: East Riding of Yorkshire Beverley areas		country:England	
		%		%		%		%
Europe: United Kingdom	232,051	87	188,823	76	25,699	95	46,687,506	83
All categories: Country of birth (non-UK)	34,962	13	60,098	24	1,456	5	9,802,543	17
Total	267,013	100	248,921	100	27,155	100	56,490,049	100
	Lower than average diversity		Higher than average diversity		Lower than average diversity		Country Average	

In order to protect against disclosure of personal information, records have been swapped between different geographic areas and counts perturbed by small amounts. Small counts at the lowest geographies will be most affected.

Appendix 6 – Estate Community Nursery

The Estate Community Nursery is a community-based nursery school based in a city in the northeast of England. The nursery offers 64 places per session (3 hours AM or PM plus an optional lunch session of 45 minutes) for children aged 2 years to 5 years old and is open for thirty-nine term time weeks a year. The setting mainly caters for the children of local residents, although they accept applications from anywhere within the city, and priority is given to children who are not claiming their funded hours at an alternative setting. The last Ofsted inspection rated the nursery as good.

According to the 2021 census (Office for National Statistics, 2022), the setting is based in an area of below national average socio-economic status (Appendix 4). The local population has an above average British born population, with the 2021 census showing that 87% of the population was born in Britain (based on 2021 census data on country of birth - Appendix 5). However, the nursery does reflect a more diverse population with approximately 25% of the children coming from families that identify as non-British.

Approximately 50% of the children registered at the nursery attend for 15 hours a week, with an even split between those attending for five half day sessions and those attending for two and half days a week. The rest of the children attend four or five days a week depending on their family care needs.

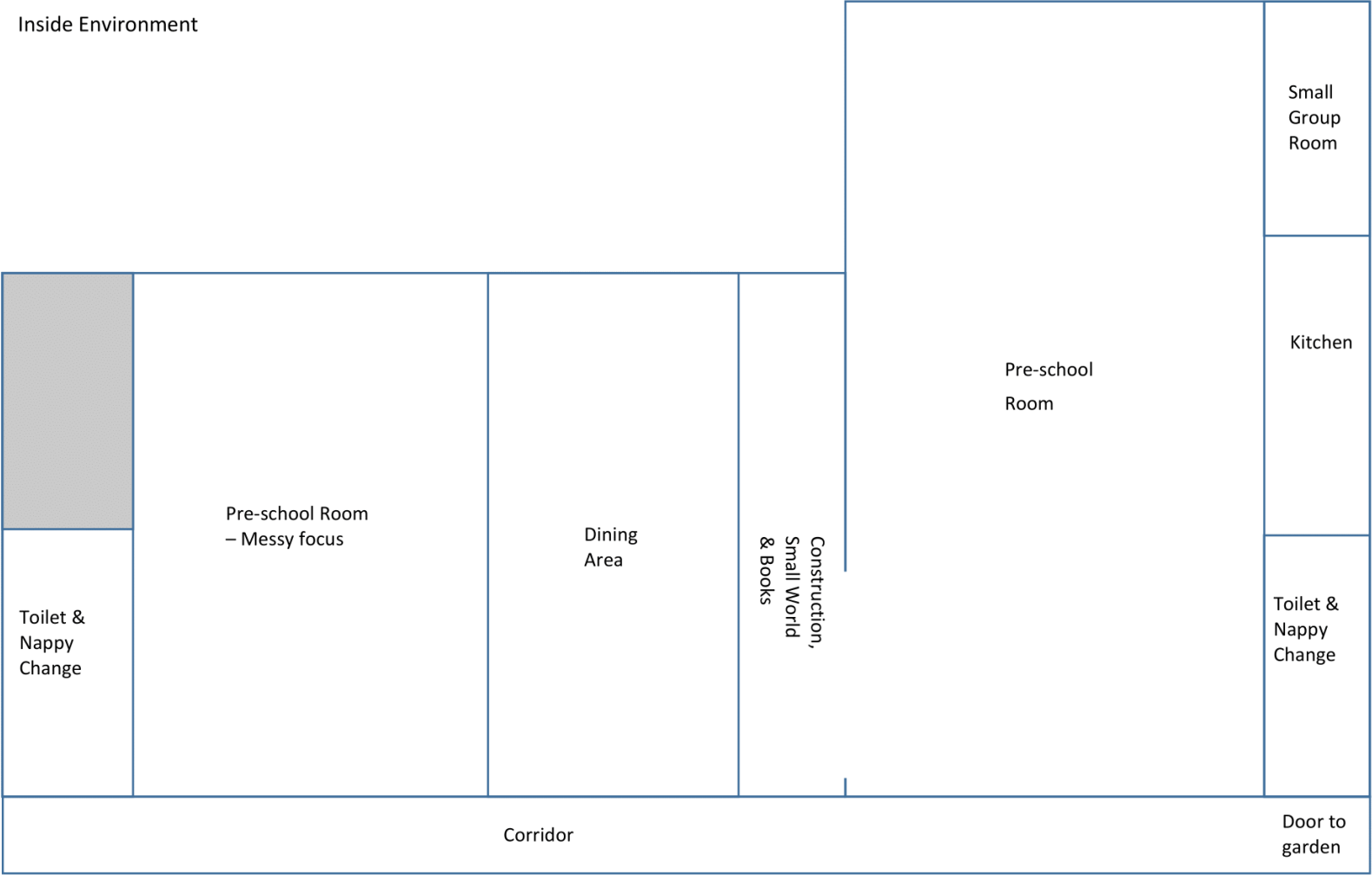
The preschool environment consists of a large room which is divided up using furniture, low level barriers, and gates, as well as two garden play areas. The large room has previously been set up for two separate preschool classes, however currently all of the children are combined in one class. The large indoor environment allows for a wide range of continuous provision which includes clay, water, and an indoor sand pit, as well as specific areas for role play, construction and small world, and creative. The children also have free flow access to a large outside play area which has recently been updated to provide them with a range of activities and challenges.

The setting originally opened in the area in 1938, and historically many of the participants parents and grandparents also attended the setting which suggests that there is limited social mobility within the area.

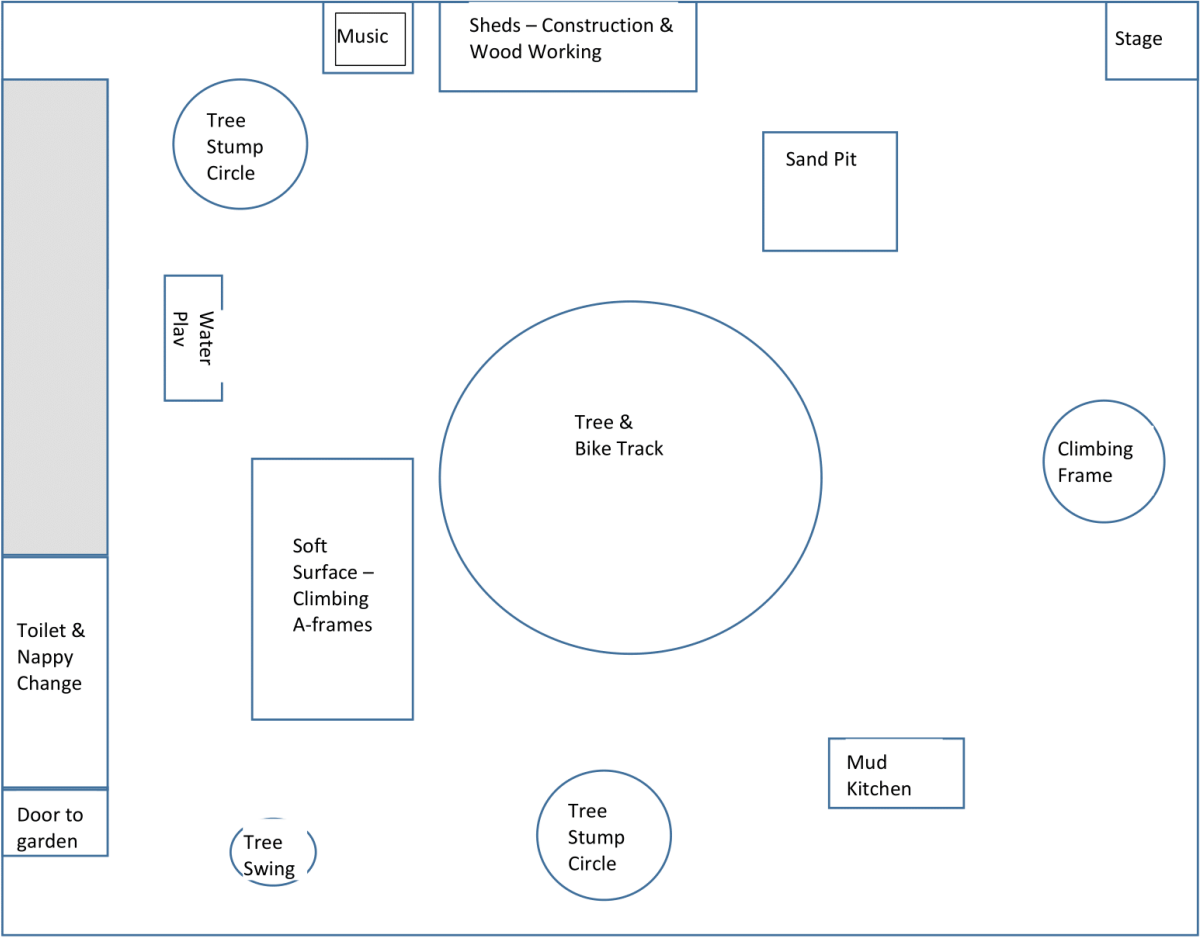
The data collection was completed during four weeks in the summer term of 2021. The data collection was interrupted due to a 10-day closure caused by Covid-19, however the after the break the children responded with excitement when the researcher returned to the setting.

Floor Plan

Inside Environment



Garden



Appendix 7 – Estate Community Nursery Participants

This group of participants was comprised of eight girls and five boys, one of the children had attended the toddler room of the nursery and had only recently joined the pre-school room (Rachel), whilst the rest had started at the nursery the term after the third birthday. Ten of the children were due to start school in September 2021, whilst two children (Annie and Rachel) would have another three terms at nursery before starting school.

The participants pseudonyms, identified gender, age and terms attended the setting as set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1 - Estate Community Nursery Participants

Pseudonym	Self-Identified Gender	Age (yrs & mths)	Terms attended pre-school ¹
Abigail	F	4yrs 3mths	3
Alice	F	4yrs 5mths	3
Amber	F	4yrs 4mths	3
Annie	F	3yrs 6mths	2
Faye	F	4yrs 3mths	3
Harvey	M	4yrs 3mths	3
Henry	M	3yrs 8mths	3
Imogen	F	4yrs 5mths	3
Jason	M	4yrs	3
Jay	M	4yrs 4mths	3
Karl	M	4yrs 8mths	3
Megan	F	4yrs 4mths	3
Rachel	F	3yrs 6mths	1

¹ The setting was closed to all but keyworker children and at-risk children during 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions, this impacted the number of terms that the children were able to attend the setting. In usual circumstances children can attend pre-school for a maximum of 5 terms.

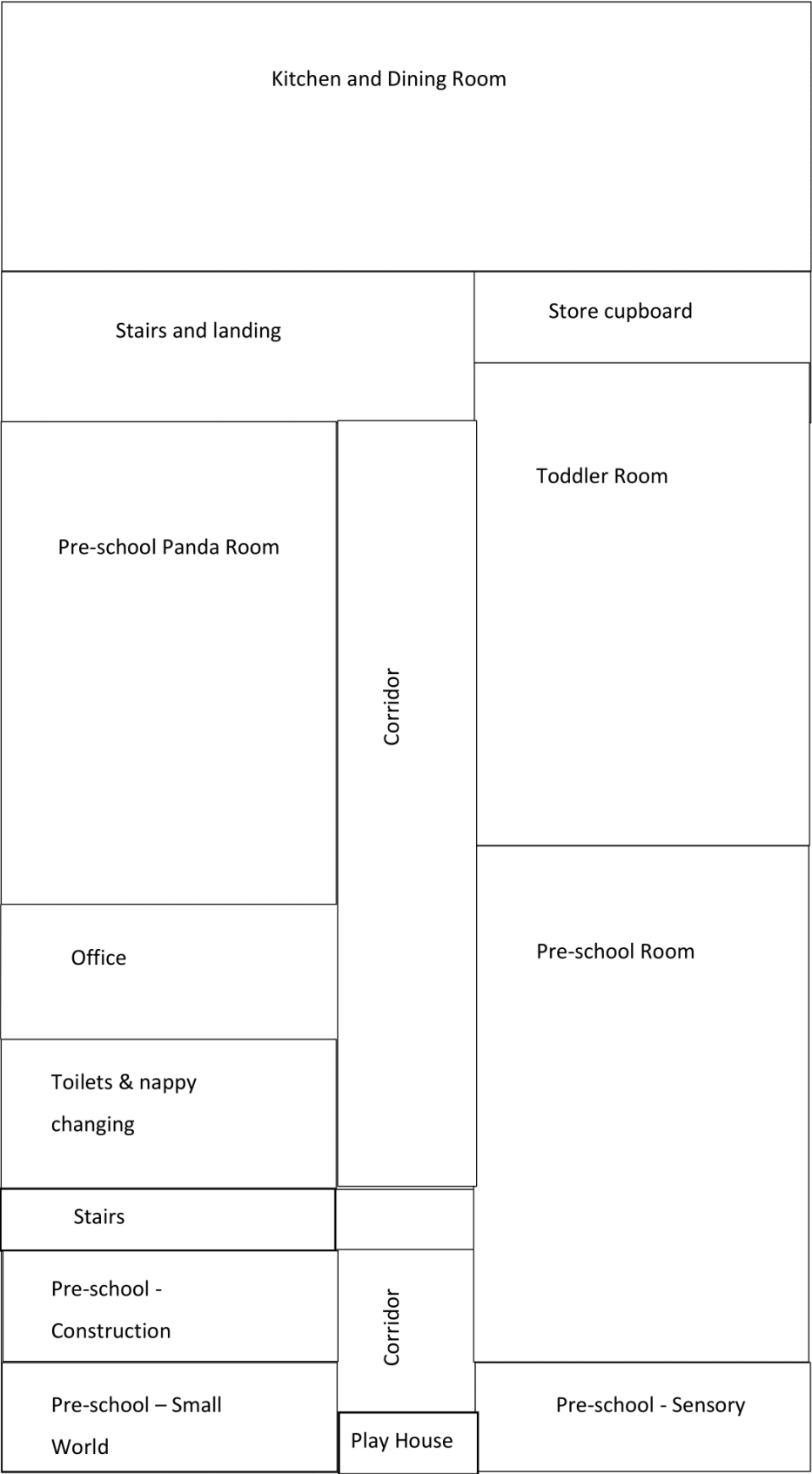
Appendix 8 – University Day Care

The University Daycare is a large day nursery which is based on a university campus in the south of England. The nursery offers 108 places, per session (5 hours AM or PM), split across four age groups from birth to 5 years, and is open 50 weeks a year. The setting mainly caters for children of staff and students at the university, but also offers places for local residents where sessions are available. The last Ofsted inspection rated the setting as good with aspects of outstanding practice.

According to the 2021 census (Office for National Statistics, 2022), the nursery is based in an area of above average socio-economic status (Appendix 4), and the majority of children attending the setting, who are not the children of students, have two working parents. As previously stated, the nursery is based on a university campus, the university is ranked within the top 100 universities in the world and therefore attracts students from around the world. This leads to a highly diverse local population (Appendix 5 for 2021 census data on country of birth) which is reflected in the nursery attendance. In 2017, 34 different languages were represented within the families attending the nursery.

The preschool room offers places for up to 40 children per session, for 10 sessions a week (5 hours per session). Approximately 60% of the preschool children attend for at least 40 hours a week, while the other 40% attend for between 15 and 30 hours a week. Their environment consists of two large baserooms, along with three smaller rooms which the children can free flow between, on the first floor of the nursery building. The two larger baserooms are equipped to allow the children to access all areas of the early years foundation stage curriculum, with each room having a larger area devoted to either sand and water play or creative play. The smaller rooms are designed to support different types of play: role play, sensory play, and construction and small world play. These rooms allow the children to develop their play over a longer period. The preschool children also have access to a large outside play area which they share with the toddler room (2-3yrs).

Floor Plan



Appendix 9 – University Day Care Participants

This group of participants was comprised of nine girls and fifteen boys, all but three of the children (Tate, Yusef & Yara) had attended the setting since they were 12 months old. Ten of the children were due to start school in September 2021.

8 of the children had a nationality other than British, and of these 4 were of other European nationality, 2 were Asian, 1 was of middle eastern nationality and 1 was Caribbean.

The participants pseudonyms, identified gender, age and terms attended the setting as set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – University Daycare Participants

Pseudonym	Self-Identified Gender	Age (yrs & mths)	Terms attended preschool ¹
Ami	F	3yrs 3mths	1
Alan	M	3yrs 10mths	4
Aaron	M	3yrs 5mths	2
Aisha	F	3yrs 8mths	4
Chloe	F	3yrs 4mths	1
Conor	M	3yrs 3mths	1
Ethan	M	4yrs 6mths	4
Gareth	M	4yrs 6mths	4
Gordon	M	4yrs 5mths	4
Joe	M	4yrs 11mths	5 ²
Jaden	M	3yrs 11mths	4
Jared	M	3yrs 2mths	New to PS
Jake	M	4yrs 5mths	4
Kaitlin	F	4yrs 3mths	4
Mary	F	3yrs 1mth	New to PS
Megan	F	4yrs 10mths	5
Noel	M	3yrs 4mths	1
Orla	F	4yrs 10mths	5

¹ The setting was closed to all but keyworker children and at-risk children during 2020 due to Covid-19 restrictions, this impacted the number of terms that the children were able to attend the setting. In usual circumstances children can attend pre-school for a maximum of 8 terms, with each year consisting of 3 school terms plus the summer holiday counting as a term.

² Children who attended for 5 terms started in PS before the covid lockdowns of 2020.

Polly	F	3yrs 10mths	4
Scott	M	4yrs 11mths	5
Tate	M	3yrs 7mths	1
Yusef	M	4yrs 7mths	3
Yara	F	3yrs 8mths	3
Zack	M	3yrs 11mths	4

Appendix 10 – Small Town Nursery

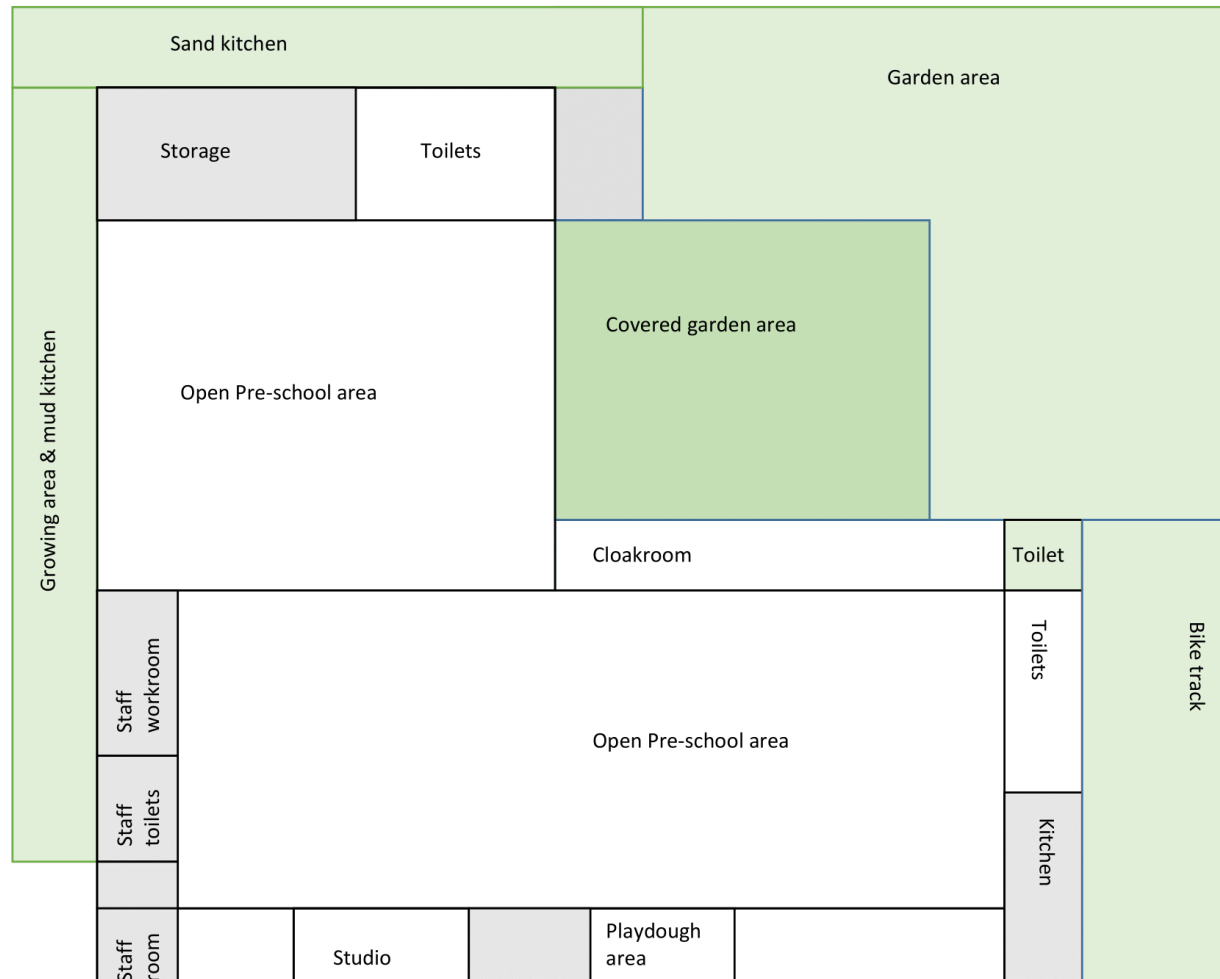
The Small-Town Nursery is a community-based nursery school in a town in the northeast of England. The nursery currently provides places for 46 families across the week. Children attend a variety of sessions (3 hours AM or PM plus an optional lunch session of 45 minutes) from their third birthday. The setting caters for the children of local residents and priority is given to children who are looked after by the Local Authority or who live in the catchment area. The last Ofsted inspection rated the setting as Outstanding.

According to the 2021 census (Office for National Statistics, 2022), the setting is based in an area of higher than national average socio-economic status (Appendix 4). The local population has an above average British born population, with the 2021 census showing that 95% of the population was born in Britain (based on 2021 census data on country of birth - Appendix 5). This is reflected in the nursery attendance where they only have two children on role whose families do not identify as British-born.

The majority of children who are registered at the nursery school attend for at least four days a week, with only a small group (approximately 10 children) attending for mornings only.

The Small-Town Nursery is based in a purpose-built environment, the main room is a large area which is divided into smaller areas of focus through the use of furniture. Additionally, the nursery has a separate studio which is used for calm physical activities, such as yoga, and as a sensory room. The large indoor environment enables children to experience a wide range of continuous provision including an interactive whiteboard, sand, water, and playdough, as well as specific areas for creative, role play, mathematics, literacy and construction and small world. The children experience a mix of adult led and child-initiated play during the session, and during child initiated play they have free flow access to the main garden area. The outside environment is comprised of three areas which wrap around the outside of the building. These are the main garden, a sand kitchen and the growing and mud kitchen areas.

Floor Plan



Appendix 11 – Small Town Nursery Participants

This group of participants was comprised of nine girls and three boys. All of the participants had started attending the nursery after their third birthday once the setting reopened after the Covid-19 restrictions had lifted. All of the participants were from families who identified as white British.

The participants pseudonyms, identified gender, age and terms attended the setting as set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1 – Small Town Nursery Participants

Pseudonym	Self-Identified Gender	Age (yrs & mths)	Terms attended preschool ¹
Adele	F	3yrs 7mths	2
Barney	M	4yrs 1mth	3
Bella	F	4yrs	3
Bette	F	3yrs 9mths	2
Evie	F	3yrs 4mths	1
Grace	F	3yrs 8mths	2
Izzy	F	4yrs	3
Jamie	M	3yrs 7mths	2
Maddy	F	3yrs 11mths	2
Mia	F	4yrs	3
Nicola	F	4yrs 1mth	3
Terry	M	4yrs 1mth	3

¹ The setting was closed to all but keyworker children and at-risk children during 202 due to Covid-19 restrictions, this impacted the number of terms that the children were able to attend the setting. In usual circumstances, children can attend the pre-school for a maximum of 6 terms.

Appendix 12 – Research Schedule

Task	Action	Resources	Date	Revised Date
Apply for ethical approval	Create documents for ethical approval process. Complete ethical approval application form	Ethics application form Information leaflets for setting & parents Consent forms for setting & parents Information booklet for children Assent document for children	May 2020	-
Ethical approval	Submit documentation and ethical approval application form to faculty ethics committee		June 2020	-
Identification of Settings	Contact settings to introduce the research and to request a meeting	Introduction email with approved setting information leaflets	September 2020	Due to Covid some settings not agreed until April 2021
Data collection University Daycare	4 week data collection period		January - February 2021	August 2021
Transcription and initial analysis	Transcription of setting 1 data		February – March 2021	September – October 2021
Data collection Estate Community Nursery	4 week data collection period		March – April 2021	May – June 2021
Transcription and initial analysis	Transcription of setting 2 data		April – May 2021	June – July 2021
Data collection Small-Town Nursery	4 week data collection period		May – June 2021	October – November 2021
Transcription and initial analysis	Transcription of setting 3 data		June – July 2021	November – December 2021
Data analysis 1	Analysis of video recorded observation transcripts		August 2021	January – February 2022

Data analysis 2	Analysis of video stimulated		August 2021	January – February 2022
	conversation transcripts			
Data analysis 3	Analysis of image elicitation activity transcripts		August 2021	January – February 2022
Writing	Writing up analysis and discussion chapter		November 2021	March – April 2022
Submission	Thesis completed for submission		Late summer 2022	Winter 2022

Appendix 13 – Reflective Journal Entry

06-11 - You can share my photo

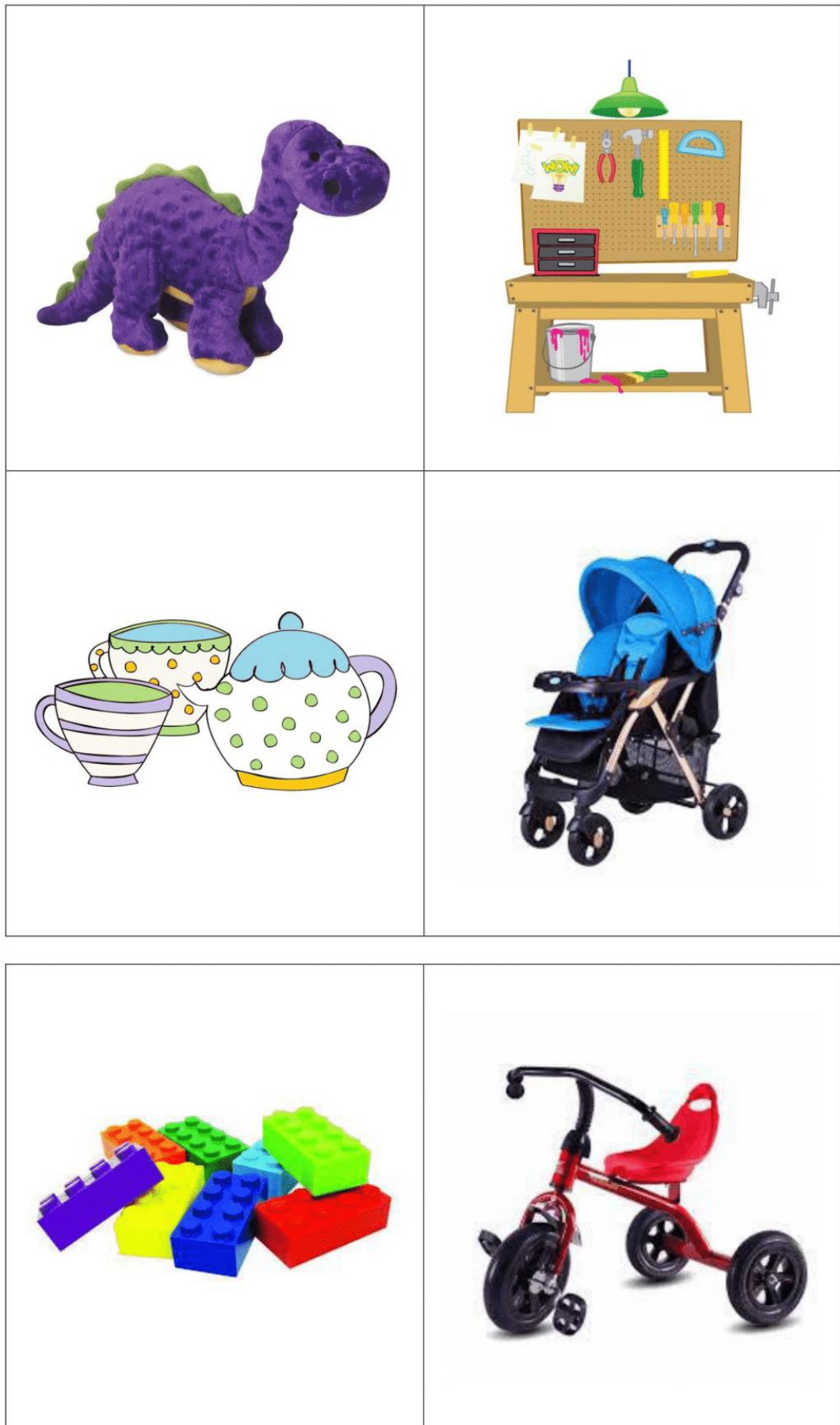
During the initial assent conversations I explained to the children that I would not use their real name when I told people about their play. I also explained to the children that when I was telling people about their play, that I might show people photos of them playing. During these assent conversations the children said this was ok, but reflecting on those conversations I did wonder whether the children really understood what I had explained. During a conversation with one of the children today, this question was answered.

Early in the afternoon session I had video recorded Karl and Jason playing together on the A-frame climbing frame. Later in the session, I was sat with Karl and we had just finished watching the video recording for the video stimulated conversation and I had stopped the digital voice recorder. The video was still showing on the laptop, although it was not playing, and Karl suddenly pointed at the screen and looked at me. I asked him what he had seen and he said "is that what you'll show people?" I said that I might show that picture to people and asked him if that was ok. He replied, "yes, you can show people pictures of me".

This unprompted comment from Karl reassured me that my explanation about how I might use photos of them playing had been clear during the assent conversations. However, I will double check with the other children during the video stimulated conversations to check in with the rest of the participants.

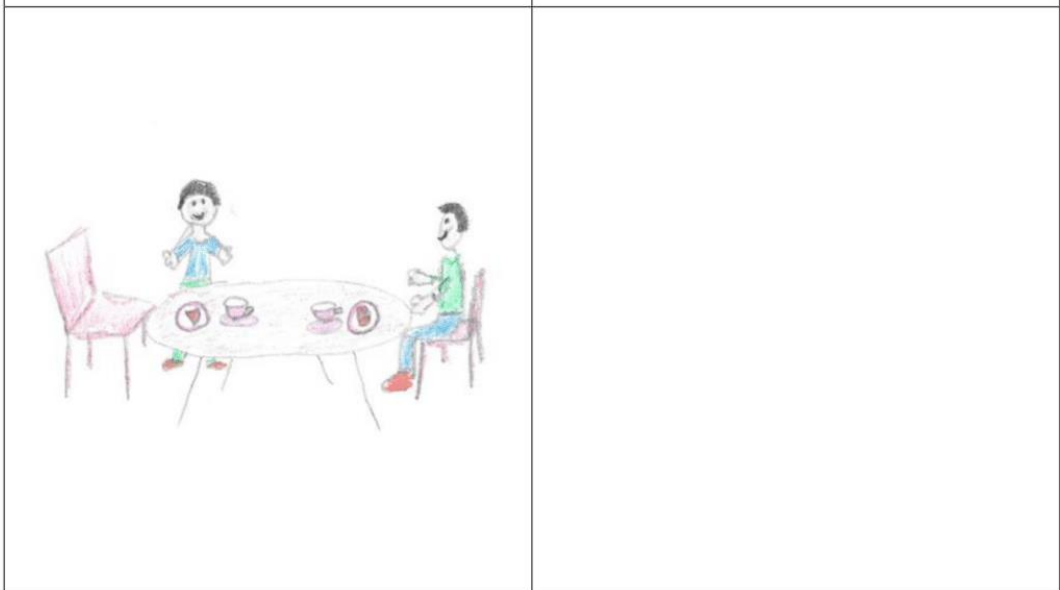
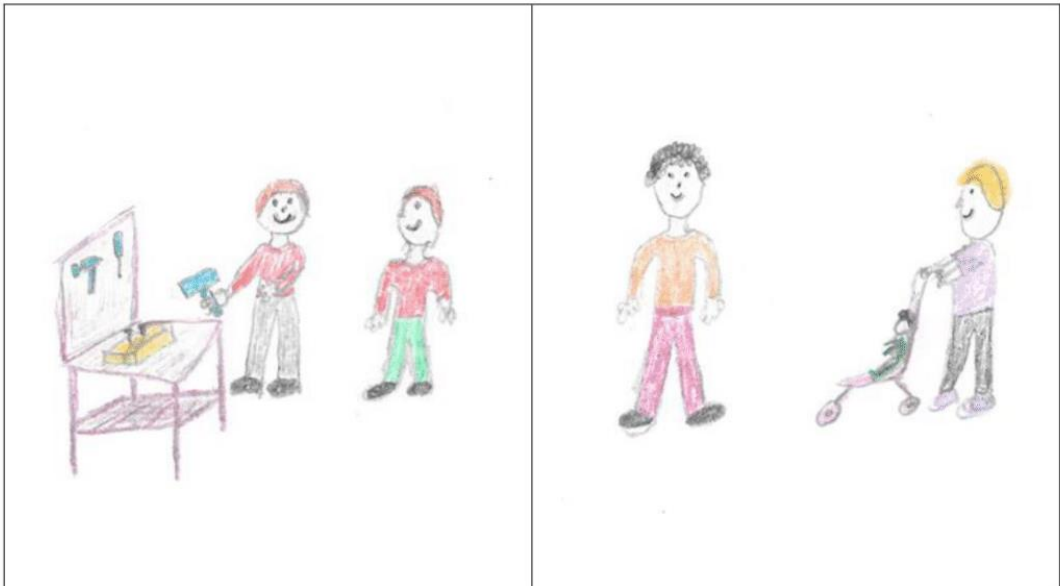
Research journal date format – the date format used was month-day so that the entries were sorted by month and then day to keep journal entries in date order.

Appendix 14 – Image Elicitation Activity Images and Vignettes









Appendix 15 – Data Collection Schedule

Week	Task	Involved	Location(s)	Resources
1	Information packs handed to parents	Researcher Parents	Parent drop off/collection area	Information Packs Pens
	Starting to build relationships with children	Researcher Children	Pre-school room Garden	
	Building relationships with staff	Researcher Practitioners	Pre-school room Garden Staff room	
2	Speak to children with parental consent to explain the research to them. If children are able then ask them if they consent to being a participant using a child appropriate activity.	Researcher Children	Pre-school quiet room	Assent booklets Child consent forms Colouring pencils Sports bands
	Introduce video camera to children	Researcher Children	Pre-school room Garden	Video camera Children's video camera
	Towards end of week - Begin video recording children's play	Researcher Children	Pre-school room Role-Play room Garden	Video camera Sports bands
3	Video record children's play	Researcher Children	Pre-school room Role-Play room Garden	Video camera Sports bands
	End of each day – video stimulated conversations with the children - watch video back with children	Researcher Children	Pre-school quiet room	Computer Digital voice recorder
4	Image elicitation activity – set up activity with the picture cards	Researcher Children	Pre-school room Garden	Digital voice recorder Sports bands Picture cards

Appendix 16 – Conversation Analysis Transcription Conventions


Simplified CA transcription conventions:


- (.) Number in single parenthesis indicates the length of a pause in seconds.
- ((.)) Description of non-verbal cues e.g. gestures and movements
- ././ Overlapping speech
- (x) Inaudible word
- (xxx) Inaudible words
- HI Capitals represent an increase in volume
- ^.^ Utterance between symbols spoken very quietly
- >.< Utterance between symbols spoken quickly
- \$. \$ Utterance between symbols spoken in a happy tone of voice

Transcription conventions developed from simplified transcription conventions used by Bateman (2017) and Cederborg (2020).

Appendix 17 – Estate Community Nursery Extracts from Transcripts

Extract from 28-06 – 12 – Picture Task

1.	Cathy	is this one a boy or a girl? ((pointing to image of the child sitting down))	
2.	Rachel	Boy	
3.	Cathy	what about this one?	
4.	Rachel	Yes	
5.	Cathy	boy or girl?	
6.	Rachel	boy..girl	
7.	Cathy	how do you know this one is a boy? ((pointing to child sitting down))	
8.	Rachel	that one a (1) girl ((points at the image of child sitting down))	
9.	Cathy	you think that one's a girl?	
10.	Cathy	why do you think she's a girl	
11.	Rachel	cos >a boy<	

12.	Cathy	are they boys or girls?	
13.	Rachel	ME girl (pointing at herself)	
14.	Henry	and a BOY	
15.	Cathy	there's a boy and a girl?	
16.	Henry	YES, that's a boy ((pointing to the child on the right)) and that's a girl ((pointing to the child on the left))	

(extracts from 28-06 – 12 – Picture Task)

Extracts from 11-06 – 11 – Log Jumping - Conversation & 11-06 – 02 – Climbing Frame - Conversation

Abigail (4yrs 3mths)

1.	Cathy	girls like girly things do they
2.	Abigail	Syeah\$
3.	Cathy	what sort of girly things do girls like
4.	Abigail	nails done and (2) bags like (2) girl bags and girl stories

(extract from 11-06 – 11 – Log Jumping – Conversation)

Karl (4yrs)

1.	Cathy	do girls play this game
2.	Karl	mhhhh (2)
3.	Cathy	or is it a boys game
4.	Karl	IT'S A BOYS GAME
5.	Cathy	what happens if girls want to play
6.	Karl	uhh, they will go
7.	Karl	oh, eek ((shrill tone)) ((waved arms))

(extract from 11-06 – 02 – Climbing Frame – Conversation)

Extracts from 28-06 – 12 – Picture Task & 09-06 – 01 – Sandpit & Football

- Conversation

Rachel (3yrs 6mths)

1.	Cathy	do you play football?
2.	Henry	I do
3.	Rachel	Yeah
4.	Cathy	you play football do you?
5.	Rachel	yeah, I got a ball at home
6.	Cathy	you've got a ball at home do you?
7.	Cathy	who do you play football with?
8.	Rachel	I play with "sibling"
9.	Cathy	is "sibling your brother?
10.	Rachel	Yeah
11.	Cathy	is he bigger than you or smaller than you?
12.	Rachel	Bigger

(Extract from 28-06 – 12 – Picture Task)

Jason (4yrs)

1.	Cathy		ahh, so if Karl came to play football with you, you'd play football with him?
2.	Jason		yeah
3.	Jason		I ALWAYS play with my grandad
4.	Cathy		Ok
5.	Jason		and my older bruver and my bruver's real old and can't come to my nursery
6.	Cathy		I was about to say is your brother bigger or smaller than you, so he's bigger than you so he doesn't come to nursery
7.	Jason		no, he just comes to big school
8.	Cathy		ahh, ok. So your brother goes to big school, does he play football with the boys or with the girls?
9.	Jason		he plays, he plays football with the BOYS
10.	Cathy		just with the boys does he?
11.	Jason		yeah, and then I play with the boys too

(Extract from 09-06 – 01 – Sandpit & Football – Conversation)

Extract from 11-06 – 02 – Climbing Frame & Lego - Conversation

Karl (4yrs 8mths)

1.	Cathy	what do you think Jason would say if a girl wanted to play toilet game
2.	Karl	NOOO
3.	Cathy	why do you think Jason would say no
4.	Karl	Cause (2) I'm gonna flush Jason really far in the water

(Extract from 11-06 – 02 – Climbing Frame & Lego - Conversation Transcript)

Extract from 11-06 – 08 – Shop - Conversation

Amber (4yrs 4mths)		
1.	Cathy	would your (2) would your friends be happy with you if you played with the boys do you think
2.	Amber	((shook head))
3.	Cathy	No (2)
4.	Amber	((shrugged))
(Extract from 11-06 – 08 – Shop – Conversation Transcript)		

Appendix 18 – University Day Care Extracts from Transcripts

Extract from 09 & 10 – Picture Task

1. Cathy *is it a girl firefighter or a boy firefighter?*
2. Megan *girl*
3. Orla *BOY!*
4. Megan *GIRL*
5. Cathy *why do you think it's a boy firefighter Orla?*
6. Orla *cos firefighters, fireman are boys*
7. Cathy *so you think firefighters are boys?*
8. Megan *no, I've seen a firefighter that's a girl!*
9. Cathy *so you've seen a girl firefighter have Megan?*
so you think this is a girl firefighter and Orla thinks this is a boy firefighter because she says only boys are firefighters
10. Orla *BOY*



Extract from 18 & 23 & 06 – Picture Task

1. Cathy *I'm going turn over this one, what picture have I found?*
2. Gareth *Doctor!*
3. Cathy *it's not a doctor, it's a nurse. it's similar to a doctor though. is it a girl nurse or a boy nurse?*
4. Scott *boy nurse*
5. Gareth *NO, it's a GIRL!*
6. Cathy *why do you think it's a girl Gareth?*
7. Gareth *because they're a nurse*
8. Cathy *are nurses girls? (5) can boys be nurses Gareth?*
9. Gareth *NO!*
10. Cathy *no?*
11. Gareth *only girls are nurses and boys are the doctors*
12. Scott *Is it my turn?*



Extract from 01 & 20 – Picture Task

1. Cathy *now I'm going to turn over another one, what have I got in this picture?*
2. Ethan *a chef*
3. Cathy *a chef, do you know what a chef does Tate?*
4. Tate *I don't know*
5. Cathy *cooking, a chef does cooking. Is this a boy chef or girl chef do you think?*
6. Ethan *boy chef*
7. Cathy *what do you think Tate?*
8. Ethan *b b b b*
9. Tate *ummmm, b is for ball*
10. Cathy *yes b is for ball, do you think this is a boy chef or a girl chef Tate?*
11. Tate *ummmm boy (looking at Ethan)*
12. Cathy *you think it's a boy chef to you?*
13. Tate *^yeah^*



Extract from 19 & 05 – Picture Task


1. Cathy I've got a person running a race, is this person a man or a lady?
2. Aisha a lady
3. Cathy why do you think this person is a lady?
4. Aisha cos she's got that hair (pointing to the runner's hair)
5. Cathy she's got very short hair hasn't she, and you think that's a lady
6. Aisha my mummy's got very short hair and she's still mummy
7. Cathy your mummy has got very short hair and she's still a mummy?
8. Aisha yeah



Appendix 19 – Small Town Nursery Extracts from Transcripts

Extract from 01 – Picture Task

01 – Picture Task

1. Cathy	what did you find?	
2. Terry	a man and a lady	
3. Cathy	that is two children playing dressing up	
4. Terry	yep	
5. Cathy	are they boys or girls?	
6. Terry	boys and girls	
7. Cathy	which one do you think is the girl?	
8. Terry	this one here ((pointing to the card))	
9. Cathy	the girl in the dress?	
10. Terry	yeah	
11. Cathy	and what about the trousers, is that one a boy or a girl?	
12. Terry	boy	
13. Cathy	why do you think the one in the dress is a girl?	
14. Terry	cos i can tell!	
15. Cathy	how can you tell?	
16. Terry	she's got long hair	
17. Cathy	you think she's got long hair?	
18. Terry	she's got long hair down her back, all the way down to there ((points to midway down back of child in the picture))	
19. Cathy	you think she's got long hair down her back?	
20. Terry	yeah, the boy's hair is like mine	
21. Cathy	and the boy's hairs like yours?	
	is it ok for boys to wear dresses?	
22. Terry	Yeah	
23. Cathy	Ok	
24. Terry	it could be a boy wearing that dress ((pointing to the picture))	
25. Cathy	so it could be a boy wearing that dress?	
26. Terry	yeah and that one could be a girl wearing trousers ((pointing to the picture))	
27. Terry	I'm a boy and I can wear, umm, dresses	
28. Cathy	you can wear dresses, you do wear dresses to nursery sometimes, don't you?	
29. Terry	yeah	
30. Cathy	cos we had that conversation last week when I thought you were wearing a nice top and you said, "no, it's my dress"	
31. Terry	yeah	

Extract from 11-11 – 06 – Conversation

1.	Cathy		who were you playing with in the bricks?
2.	Bella	((pointing at the screen))	ummm
3.	Cathy		were you playing on your own or were you playing with friends?
4.	Bella		friends
5.	Cathy		were those friends girls or boys?
6.	Bella		girls
7.	Cathy		girls (3) do you remember who they were
8.	Bella		girl G and girl E
9.	Cathy		you think it was girl G and girl E do you?
10.	Bella		girl G and girl E!
11.	Cathy		could any of the boys come and played with you?
12.	Bella	((shook head))	NO
13.	Cathy		why not?
14.	Bella	((pointing at the screen))	cos this was the girls building area

Bandura, A. (1977) *Social learning theory*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979) *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. London: Harvard University Press.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (2005) *Making human beings human: Bioecological perspectives on human development*. London: SAGE Publications.

Gee, J. P. (2014) *An introduction to discourse analysis: Theory and method*. Abingdon: Routledge.