

Promoting Gender Equity: A Handbook for Early Educators

by

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DATE: November 17, 2016

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ABSTRACT

Statement of Intent: The intent of this creative project was to develop a practical handbook for early childhood educators that would assist them in the conscious promotion of gender equity in their everyday work with children and families. Although the handbook was targeted to educators specifically, it can be of use to anyone who cares for and works with young children between the ages of 0-8 years in a variety of settings and capacities.

Scope of the Project: The handbook was created to provide a succinct yet comprehensive exploration of gender in early childhood. It offers background information on the origin of young children's gender identities, outlines the typical developmental sequence associated with gender in the first eight years of life, as well as addresses many of the accompanying issues and challenges that frequently arise during this important developmental period. Practical strategies that have proven effective in the active promotion of gender equity are discussed, as is the importance of forming partnerships with families and taking into account the impact of culture as it relates to gender issues. The handbook cites additional resources that are available to readers who may be interested in learning more about the topics presented.

Procedure: I began by conducting an in-depth review of the existing literature, drawing from material found in scholarly peer-reviewed articles, professional journals, academic textbooks, and other published works. I then used this literature review as the basis for writing the handbook, extracting the most fundamental information to inform teacher practice.

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The Story of X by Lois Gould

Once upon a time, a Baby named X was born. It was named X so that nobody could tell whether it was a boy or girl. Its parents could tell, of course, but they couldn't tell anybody else. They couldn't even tell Baby X - at least not until much, much later.

You see, X was a part of a very important Secret Scientific Xperiment known officially as Project Baby X. This Xperiment was going to cost Xactly 23 billion dollars and 72 cents. Which might seem like a lot for one Baby, even if it was an important Secret Scientific Xperiment Baby. But when you remember the cost of strained carrots, stuffed bunnies, booster shots, 28 shiny quarters from the tooth fairy...you begin to see how it adds up.

Long before Baby X was born, the smartest scientists had to work out the secret details of the Xperiment and to write the Official Instruction Manual in secret code for Baby X's parents, whoever they were. These parents had to be selected very carefully. Thousands of people volunteered to take thousands of tests with thousands of tricky questions. Almost everybody failed because it turned out almost everybody wanted a boy or a girl and not a Baby X at all. Also, almost everybody thought a Baby X would be more trouble than a boy or girl. (They were right too!)

There were families with grandparents named Milton and Agatha, who wanted the baby named Milton or Agatha instead of X, even if it was an X. There were aunts who wanted to knit tiny dresses and uncles who wanted to send tiny baseball mitts. Worst of all, there were families with other children who couldn't keep a Secret. Not if they knew the Secret was worth 23 billion dollars and 72 cents - and all you had to do was take one little peek at Baby X in the bathtub to know what it was.

Finally, the scientists found the Joneses, who really wanted to raise an X more than any other kind of baby - no matter how much trouble it was. The Joneses promised to take turns holding X, feeding X, and singing X to sleep. And they promised never to hire any babysitters. The scientists knew that a babysitter would probably peek at X in the bathtub, too.

The day the Joneses brought their baby home, lots of friends and relatives came to see it. And the first thing they asked was, what kind of a baby X was.

When the Joneses said, "It's an X!" nobody knew what to say. They couldn't say, "Look at her cute little dimples!" On the other hand, they couldn't



say, "Look at his husky little biceps!" And they didn't feel right about saying just plain "kitchy-coo". The relatives all felt embarrassed about having an X in the family. "People will think there's something wrong

with it!" they whispered. "Nonsense!" the Joneses said stoutly. "What could possibly be wrong with this perfectly adorable X?"

Clearly, nothing at all was wrong. Nevertheless, the cousins who had sent a tiny football helmet could not come and visit any more. And the neighbors who sent a pink-flowered romper suit pulled their shades down when the Joneses passed their house.

The Official Instruction Manual had warned the new parents that this would happen, so they didn't fret about it. Besides, they were too busy learning how to bring up Baby X. Ms. and Mr. Jones had to be Xtra careful. If they kept bouncing it up in the air and saying how strong and active it was, they'd be treating it more like a boy than an X. But if all they did was cuddle it and kiss it and tell it how sweet and dainty it was, they'd be treating it more like a girl than an X. On page 1654 of the Official Instruction Manual, the scientists prescribed: "Plenty of bouncing and plenty of cuddling, both. X ought to be strong and sweet and active. Forget about dainty altogether".

There were other problems, too. Toys, for instance. And clothes. On his first shopping trip, Mr. Jones told the store clerk, "I need some things for a new baby". The clerk smiled and said, "Well, now, is it a boy or a girl?" "It's an X," Mr. Jones said, smiling back. But the clerk got all red in the face and said huffily, "In that case, I'm afraid I can't help you, sir." Mr. Jones wandered the aisles trying to find what X needed. But everything was in sections marked BOYS or GIRLS: "Boys' Pajamas" and "Girls' Underwear" and "Boys' Fire Engines" and "Girls' Housekeeping Sets". Mr. Jones went home without buying anything for X.

That night he and Ms. Jones consulted page 2326 of the Official Instruction Manual. It said firmly: "Buy plenty of everything!" So they bought all kinds of toys. A boy doll that made pee-pee and cried "Pa-Pa". And a girl doll that talked in three



languages and said, "I am the Pre-i-dent of Gen-er-al Mo-tors". They bought a storybook about a brave princess who rescued a handsome prince from his tower, and another one about a sister and brother who grew up to be a baseball star and a ballet star and you had to guess which.

The head scientists of Project Baby X checked all their purchases and told them to keep up the good work. They also reminded the Joneses to see page 4629 of the Manual where it said, "Never make Baby X feel embarrassed or ashamed about what it wants to play with. And if X gets dirty climbing rocks, never say, "nice little Xes don't get dirty climbing rocks".

Likewise, it said, "if X falls down and cries, never say, "Brave little Xes don't cry. Because, of course, nice little Xes do get dirty, and brave little Xes do cry. No matter how dirty X gets or how hard it cries, don't worry. It's all part of the Xperiment."

Whenever the Joneses pushed Baby X's stroller in the park, smiling strangers would come over and coo: "is that a boy or a girl?" The Joneses would smile back and say, "it's an X". The stringers would stop smiling then and often snarl something nasty - as if the Joneses had said something nasty to them.

Once a little girl grabbed X's shovel in the sandbox and zonked X on the head with it. "Now, now Tracy," the mother began to scold, "little girls mustn't hit little - and she turned to ask X, "Are you a little boy or a little girl, dear?" Mr. Jones, who was sitting near the sandbox, held his breath and crossed his fingers. X smiled politely, even though X's head had never been zonked so hard in its life. "I'm a little X", said X. "You're a what?" the lady exclaimed angrily. "You're a little b-r-a-t, you mean!" "But little girls mustn't hit little Xes either!" said X, retrieving the shovel with another polite smile. "What good's hitting, anyway?" X's father finally X-hailed, uncrossed his fingers, and grinned. And at their next secret Project Baby X meeting, the scientists grinned, too. Baby X was doing fine.

But then it was time for X to start school. The Joneses were really worried about this, because school was even more full of rules for boys and

girls, and there were no rules for Xes. Teachers would tell boys to form a line, and girls to form another line. There would be boys' games and girls' games, and boys' secrets and girls' secrets. The school library would have a list of recommended books for girls and a different list for boys. There would even be a bathroom marked BOYS and another one marked GIRLS. Pretty soon, boys and girls would hardly talk to each other. What would happen to poor little X?

The Joneses spent weeks consulting their Instruction Manual. There were 249 pages of advice under "First Day of School". Then they were all summoned to an Urgent Xtra Special Conference with the smart scientists of Project Baby X.

The scientists had to make sure that X's mother had taught X how to throw and catch a ball properly, and that X's father had been sure to teach X what to serve at a doll's tea party. X had to know how to shoot marbles and jump rope and, most of all, what to say when the other children asked whether X was a boy or a girl.

Finally, X was ready. X's teacher had promised that the class could line up alphabetically, instead of forming separate lines for boys and girls. And X had permission to use the principal's bathroom, because it wasn't marked anything except BATHROOM. But nobody could help X with the biggest problem of all - Other Children.

Nobody in X's class had ever known an X. Nobody had even heard grown-ups say, "Some of my best friends are Xes". What would other children think? Would they make Xist jokes? or Would they make friends? You couldn't tell what X was by its clothes. Overalls don't even button right to left, like girls' clothes, or left to right, like boys' clothes. And did X have a girl's short haircut or a boy's long haircut? As for the games X liked, either X played ball very well for a girl, or else played house very well for a boy.

The children tried to find out by asking X tricky questions, like "who's your favorite sports star?" X had two favorite sports stars: a girl jockey named Robyn Smith and a boy archery champion named Robin Hood. Then they asked, "What's your favorite TV show?" And X said: "Lassie" which stars a girl dog played by a boy dog. When X said its favorite toy was a doll, everyone decided that X must be a girl. But then X said the doll was really a robot and that X had computerized it and it was programmed to bake fudge and then clean up the kitchen. After X told them that, they gave up guessing what X was. All they knew was they'd

like to see X's doll.

After school, X wanted to play with the other children. "How about shooting baskets in the gym?" X asked the girls. But all they did was make faces and giggle behind X's back. "Boy, is he weird," whispered Jim to Joe. "How about weaving some baskets in the arts and crafts room?" X asked the boys. But they all made faces and giggled behind X's back, too. "Boy, is she weird," whispered Susie to Peggy.

That night, Ms. and Mr. Jones asked X how things had gone at school. X tried to smile, but there were two big tears in its eyes. "The lessons are okay," X began, "but...." "But?" said Ms. Jones. "The Other Children hate me," X whispered. "Hate you?" said Mr. Jones. X nodded, which made the two big tears roll down and splash on its overalls. Once more, the Joneses reached for their Instruction Manual. Under "Other Children", it said: "What did you Xpect? Other Children have to obey silly boy-girl rules, because their parents taught them to. Lucky X - you don't have rules at all. All you have to do is be yourself. P.S. We're not saying it'll be easy.

X liked being itself. But X cried a lot that night. So X's father held X tight and cried a little too. X's mother cheered them up with an Xciting story about an enchanted prince called Sleeping Handsome, who woke up when Princess Charming kissed him.

The next morning, they all felt much better, and little X went back to school with a brave smile and a clean pair of red and white checked overalls.

There was a seven-letter word spelling bee in class that day. And a seven-lap boys' relay race in the gym. And a seven-layer-cake baking contest in the girls' kitchen corner. X won the spelling bee. X also won the relay race. And X almost won the baking contest Xcept it forgot to light the oven. (Remember nobody's perfect.)

One of the Other Children noticed something else, too. He said: "X doesn't care about winning. X just thinks it's fun playing boys' stuff and girls' stuff. "Come to think of it," said another one of the Other Children. "X is having twice as much fun as we are!"

After school that day, the girl who beat X in the baking contest gave X a big slice of her winning cake. And the boy X beat in the relay race asked X to race him home. From then on, some really funny things began to happen.

Susie, who sat next to X, refused to wear pink dresses to school any more. She wanted red and white checked overalls - just like X's. Overalls, she

told her parents, were better for climbing monkey bars. Then Jim, the class football nut, started wheeling his little sister's doll carriage around the football field. He'd put on his entire football uniform, except for the helmet. Then he'd put the helmet in the carriage, lovingly tucked under an old set of shoulder pads. Then he'd jog around the field, pushing the carriage and singing "Rockabye Baby" to his helmet. He said X did the same thing, so it must be okay. After all, X was the team's star quarterback.

Susie's parents were horrified by her behavior, and Jim's parents were worried sick about his. But the worst came when the twins, Joe and Peggy, decided to share everything with each other.

Peggy used Joe's hockey skates, and his microscope, and took half his newspaper route. Joe used Peggy's needlepoint kit, and her cookbooks, and took two of her three baby-sitting jobs. Peggy ran the lawn mower, and Joe ran the vacuum cleaner. Their parents weren't one bit pleased with Peggy's science experiments, or with Joe's terrific needlepoint pillows. They didn't care that Peggy mowed the lawn better, and that Joe vacuumed the carpet better. In fact, they were furious. It's all that little X's fault, they agreed. X doesn't know what it



is or what it's supposed to be! So X wants to mix everybody else up, too!

Peggy and Joe were forbidden to play with X any more. So was Susie and then Jim and then all the Other Children. But it was too late. The Other Children stayed mixed up and happy and free and refused to go back to the way they'd been before X.

Finally, the parents held an emergency meeting to discuss "The X Problem". They sent a report to the principal stating that X was a "bad influence" and demanding immediate action. The Joneses, they said, should be forced to tell whether X was a boy or a girl. And X should be force to behave like whichever it was.

If the Joneses refused to tell, the parents said, then X must take an Xamination. An Impartial Team of Xperts would Xtract the secret. Then X would start obeying all the old rules. Or else. And if X turned out to be some kind of mixed-up misfit, then X must be Xpelled from school. Immediately! So that no little Xes would ever come to school again. The principal was very upset. Was X a bad influence? A mixed-up misfit? But X was an Xcellent student! X set a fine Xample! X was

Xtraordinary! X was president of the student council, X had won first prize in the art show, honorable mention in the science fair, and six events on field day, including the potato race.

Nevertheless, insisted the parents, X is a Problem Child. X is the *biggest problem child* we have ever had! So the principal reluctantly notified X's parents and the Joneses reported this to the Project X scientists, who referred them to page 85769 of the Instruction Manual. "Sooner or later," it said, "X will have to be Xamined by an Impartial Team of Xperts." "This may be the only way any of us will know for sure whether X is mixed up - or everyone else is."

At Xactly 9 o'clock the next day, X reported to the school health office. The principal, along with a committee from the Parents' Association, X's teacher, X's classmates, and Ms. and Mr. Jones, waited in the hall outside. Inside, the Xperts had set up their famous testing machine: the Superpsychobiometer. Nobody knew Xactly how the machine worked, but everybody knew that this examination would reveal Xactly what everyone wanted to know about X, but were afraid to ask.

It was terribly quiet in the hall. Almost spooky. They could hear very strange noises from the room. There were buzzes. And a beep or two. And several Bells. An occasional light flashed under the door. Was it an X-ray? Through it all, you could hear the Xperts' voices, asking questions, and X's voice answering answers. I wouldn't like to be in X's overalls right now, the children thought. At last, the door opened. Everyone crowded around to hear the results. X didn't look any different. In fact, X was smiling. But the Impartial Team of Xperts looked terrible. They looked as if they were crying! "What happened?" everyone began shouting. "Sssh," sshed the principal. "The Xperts are trying to speak." Wiping his eyes and clearing his throat, one Xpert began: "In our opinion," he whispered - you could tell he must be very upset - "In our opinion, young X here -" "Yes! Yes!" shouted a parent. "Young X," said the other Xpert, frowning, "is just about the *least* mixed-up child we've ever Xamined!" Xclaimed the two Xperts together. Behind the closed door, the Superpsychamedicosocietymeter made a noise like a contented hum. "Yay for X!" yelled one of the children. And then the others began yelling, too. Clapping and cheering and jumping up and down.

"SSSH!" SSSHed the principal, but nobody did. The Parents' Committee was angry and bewildered. How could X have passed the whole Xamination? Didn't X have an identify problem!

Wasn't X messed up at all! Wasn't X any kind of a misfit? How could it not be, when it didn't even know what it was?

"Don't you see?" asked the Xperts. "X isn't one bit mixed up! As for being a misfit - ridiculous! X knows perfectly well what it is! Don't you, X?" The Xperts winked. X winked back. "But what is X?" shrieked Peggy and Joe's parents. "We still want to know what it is!" "Ah, yes," said the Xperts, winking again. "Well, don't worry. You'll all know one of these days. And you won't need us to tell you."

"What? What do they mean?" Jim's parents grumbled suspiciously. Susie and Peggy and Joe all answered at once. "They mean that by the time it matters which sex X is, it won't be a secret any more!" With that, the Xperts reached out to hug Ms. and Mr. Jones. "If we ever have an X of our own," they whispered, "we sure hope you'll lend us your Instruction Manual."

Needless to say, the Joneses were very happy. The Project Baby X scientists were rather pleased, too. So were Susie, Jim, Peggy, Joe and all the Other Children. Even the parents promised not to make any trouble. Later that day, all X's friends put on their red and white checked overalls and went over to see X. They found X in the backyard, playing with a very tiny baby that none of them had ever seen before. The baby was wearing very tiny red and white checked overalls.

"How do you like our new baby?" X asked the Other Children proudly. "It's got cute dimples," said Jim. "It's got husky biceps, too," said Susie. "What kind of baby is it?" asked Joe and Peggy. X frowned at them. "Can't you tell?" Then, X broke into a big, mischievous grin. "It's a Y!"

Chapter I

Introduction

The human identity is a multi-faceted construct. In answer to the age-old question, *Who am I?*, a person may respond in several different ways. For example, I am a scholar, a teacher, a spouse, a dog mom, a friend, a vegan, a reader, an INFJ personality according to Jung and Briggs Myers' typology (1962), and so on. However, even before the onset of Erik Erikson's famous identity crisis in adolescence (and perhaps more recently in emerging adulthood), when people begin to really grapple with this question, they have already long since been constructing their identities. In fact, one of the earliest components of our identities (and one of the most consequential, as will be discussed throughout this project) can be traced as far back as to the womb, when expectant parents are frequently asked about the sex of their baby. Many parents nowadays are opting to have "gender reveal parties" to disclose this information. From this moment onward, all sorts of assumptions and expectations regarding the baby's behavioral attributes, personality traits, likes, dislikes, and future prospects are manifest (recall *The Story of X*, by Lois Gould, preceding this introduction).

In a classic study conducted by Seavey, Katz, and Zalk (1975), men and women were found to interact with infants differently, based solely upon whether the baby was perceived to be male or female. In general, the adults chose to engage the babies in highly gender-stereotypical activities. A few years later, this study was replicated by Sidorowicz and Lunney (1980), and the original findings were affirmed. In fact, an even greater gender effect was observed this second time around. The authors of both of these studies agree that the gender of an infant (even one as young as three months of age, like the babies in the studies) has a tremendous impact upon the ways in which adults treat and interact with him/her. Such

differential treatment and gendered experience continue throughout a child's life, manifesting in many varied forms, as we will see throughout the literature review in chapter two. The theoretical origins of gender, the typical sequence of gender development that occurs in children from birth to age eight, the widespread consequences of gender stereotypes and inequities, and specific strategies to promote greater equity in early childhood are also explored in the following chapter.

Purpose of the Project

The overall literature points to several key areas where gender is an especially salient issue in early childhood settings; these include: teacher-student interactions, classroom environments, curriculum, the home-school connection, and the shortage of male teachers/role models. More focused attention and concerted efforts are needed in these areas if we wish to ensure truly gender-equitable experiences for the children in our care (and of course we do!). Thus, the ultimate purpose of this creative project is to compose a practical handbook for early childhood educators that can assist them in promoting greater gender equity in their everyday work with young children and families. To this end, the handbook contains important information about early gender development, addresses the aforementioned key areas where inequities frequently occur in early childhood settings, and offers useful strategies to mitigate these inequities so that every child can be allowed to develop to his/her fullest potential. In addition to this overarching purpose, it is my hope that the handbook will broaden teachers' existing knowledge bases, increase their awareness of gender issues, strengthen their abilities to think critically about these issues, and encourage them to venture deeper into the subject of gender by citing supplemental resources for all of the topics that are presented.

Scope of the Project

In its entirety, this creative project is comprised of five chapters. Immediately following this introductory chapter is a systematic review of the existing literature on gender development and related issues in early childhood, which encompasses the period from birth through age eight. Chapter three describes the methodology that was employed in the development of this thesis project. Chapter four contains the teacher handbook, which was created based upon the research that was discussed in the literature review. Chapter five concludes the project with an overall summary, and offers recommendations for the direction of future research and practice within the field of early childhood education.

The handbook itself is organized into eight main sections as follows:

- Introduction
- How do Children Become Gendered Beings?
- “The Myth of Pink and Blue Brains”
- Typical Sequence of Gender Development (0-8yrs.)
- Gender and Early Childhood Education
- Men Working in the Field
- Working with Families
- Knowledge into Practice: Teacher Exercises

The first two sections provide a rationale for the handbook and some background information as to the origin of gender identity. The third section reconciles some of the common misconceptions surrounding gender, offers insight into the differences and similarities between the sexes, and explains how academic gender gaps develop over time. The fourth section outlines the normal course of gender development in young children from birth through age

eight. Section five explores some of the most pertinent gender-related issues that arise during this key period, and offers guidance to the early childhood professional on how to address these issues in a manner that actively serves to promote equity. Section six addresses the importance of welcoming male colleagues, striving to maintain a gender balance among staff, and dispels several harmful myths that target men working in the field. In section seven, the importance of establishing positive relationships with parents is discussed: Emphases are upon the joint effort that is required of teachers and parents working together, cultural considerations, effective communication, and helpful approaches to conflict resolution (in the event that any conflicts emerge).

In addition to being an informative work that shares practical strategies for promoting gender equity with early childhood educators, the handbook was designed to maximize the readers' engagement from start to finish. At the end of every section are discussion questions, which are intended to stimulate critical reflection and foster a deeper understanding of the material presented. Suggestions for related readings are also provided. Furthermore, the entire final section was written to be an interactive experience for the reader and contains several teacher exercises that draw upon all of the content covered in the handbook. It is intended to serve as a comprehensive review; one that encourages readers to take the next important step of applying what has been learned in their everyday work with young children and their families.

Significance of the Project

When I began searching for a topic for the culminating project of my graduate program in early childhood education, it was of vital importance to me that I took advantage of the unique opportunity that was before me – the writing of a master's thesis – in order to do some good. I really sought to contribute, in my own small yet meaningful way, to the field that I am most

passionate about. In keeping to this objective, I wanted to select a topic that I believed could reach the greatest number of people. It took a year of brainstorming before I finally settled on one. During that time, I pondered which sort of problems continue to plague the field as a whole, and early childhood professionals, young children, and their families in particular. I considered what kind of support is needed for children to be able to thrive, and what support is possibly still missing in their lives. I reflected upon my personal experiences growing up, and upon my professional experiences as an early educator who has worked with infants and children ages six weeks to nine years. I also paid close attention in my everyday life to the types of interactions that I observed involving young children.

Then one afternoon, I set out to purchase a baby gift for a friend who was expecting her first child, the sex of whom she had decided to keep a mystery until birth. Excitedly, I browsed a crowded local toy store; as I walked down the middle of two rows of aisles, scanning the shelves on either side of me, I could not help but notice the extreme polarization of merchandise that was marketed specifically to little boys or little girls. To my left was an endless sea of blue, filled with images of brave superheroes and evil villains, adventurous explorers, bright scientists, and mighty athletes. To my right, I found a pink and purple parallel universe filled with beautiful princesses (often portrayed awaiting the rescue of a strong, handsome and gallant prince), kitchen sets, toys for pretend shopping, and baby dolls in need of nurturance. As I paused to consider the possible effects of such narrow representations of masculinity and femininity upon impressionable children, my concentration was ironically interrupted by a father-son exchange a mere few feet away:

A man and two women, approximately in their late-30s to early-40s, are pushing a shopping cart with a small boy inside (the man's son) who looks to be around 6 years of age. The boy's face lights up as he grabs a magenta-colored western

style hat from a nearby shelf and places it atop his head. Pointing to the hat, which he is now proudly wearing, he exclaims with youthful exuberance, “Dad, look!” Immediately the man seizes the hat from his son’s head and holds it out of the boy’s reach. In a seemingly automatic, ridiculing tone he replies, “You don’t want *that* hat! It’s for *girls*! Yuck!” Laughter erupts amongst the man and two women who, instead of coming to the child’s defense, have joined in the teasing. In disbelief at the adults’ overt display of mocking rejection directed at an innocent child, I shift my glance toward the little boy, whose entire demeanor has changed in an instant. His body appears crumpled over in the cart, deflated. His face is sullen and cheeks reddened from either shame or embarrassment (perhaps both). The man and women are too preoccupied with the supposed hilarity of the incident to even notice. They cast the hat aside, steering the cart and its forgotten passenger toward the electronics department.

After witnessing this particular scene, others quite similar have continued to jump out at me in a variety of everyday settings and contexts. Empirically it is evident that both boys and girls alike are susceptible to becoming targets of gender-based stereotyping, discrimination, and ridicule; all that is required to prompt such an attack is for a person to violate social norms (the unwritten rules which dictate “appropriate” male and female verbal or behavioral expression). In the field of early childhood education, it is a concern and responsibility among teachers to ensure that all children are respected, embraced, and valued as unique individuals. Therefore, I decided to pursue the topic of gender development and the promotion of gender equity in early childhood. I had seen a persistent need among caregivers for greater understanding of complex, gender-related issues. I had seen homophobia and sexism that had disguised itself in the gender norms and expectations of society. Certainly I had seen a tremendous amount of love and concern for children everywhere as demonstrated by the adults who care for them, yet I had also seen the unconscious proliferation of gender bias, stereotypes, and inequities many times over.

Another chief reason that I chose gender development and the promotion of gender equity as my focus has to do with the limited training and resources currently available to early childhood educators on these subjects. In fact, upon initially selecting my topic, my chairperson

and I conducted a broad Internet search and visited several popular sites that cater directly to caregivers and educators of young children, but we found no resources that were similar to what we were envisioning for my target audience. Surprisingly, since gender is such a salient topic in a child's first eight years of life, no such teacher handbook seemed to exist – yet. Instead, we found excerpts on gender in a book by Derman-Sparks, LeeKeenan, and Nimmo (2015) called *Leading Anti-Bias Early Childhood Programs*. We also found some academic texts that are most likely targeted to college students enrolled in gender studies programs, since the literature reveals that aspiring teachers receive minimal to no preparation whatsoever regarding gender issues, or the unique role of early educators in promoting equity (Langford, 2006; Sadker, et al., 2007; Sandholtz & Sandholtz, 2010 as cited in Aina and Cameron, 2011). It seemed as though I had uncovered a need within the field, and so I eagerly set out to address this need via my thesis project.

Limitations of the Project

There are several limitations to this project. Time was perhaps the greatest limitation I faced. Conceivably, I could have devoted many more years to this endeavor. There are books that I could have read from cover-to-cover and journal articles I could have incorporated that did not make it into my literature review. I could have conducted first-hand research (i.e. teacher surveys, interviews, etc.) in addition to the library-based research, which could have informed the teacher handbook that I wrote. I could have also conducted a follow-up study on the effectiveness of my handbook in fulfilling its intended purposes within the field. However, time was the principal obstacle that prevented me from doing all of the above.

Another important limitation that must be mentioned is the astonishingly sparse amount of literature that exists on the impact of culture/ethnicity in relation to gender development in

early childhood. If, however, I had broadened my search to include research on culture/ethnicity and its relation to gender beyond the period of early childhood, I would have found much more literature that I could have incorporated into my review and possibly into the teacher handbook. This brings me to yet another limitation to my thesis project: it does not examine gender development or gender issues with regards to older children or adults. This limitation is quite intentional, since the focus of my master's program is early childhood education, but it is nonetheless worthy of acknowledgement.

Finally, the last major limitation that comes to mind is the fact that I did not venture into the impact of religious beliefs upon gender development and equity issues. Similar to the dilemma that I encountered regarding my pursuit of research relating to culture/ethnicity, I found the literature lacking in this particular area. Yet once again, had I extended my research focus beyond early childhood, I might have come across literature on the relationship between religion and gender that I could have possibly included in my project. In an attempt to compensate for these limitations (at least in part), I listed additional resources within the teacher handbook that provide further information on the topics of culture and religion as they relate to gender, though not directly in reference to early childhood.

Chapter II

Literature Review

Introduction

Early childhood, consisting of the period from birth through age eight, is a time of tremendous developmental changes. During this period, young children are growing at incredible rates. They are beginning to learn about themselves and the complex world in which they live. A key aspect of identity that is learned very early in life (within the first couple of years) is whether one is a boy or a girl. The much more complicated and challenging task, however, is to construct an understanding of what it actually *means* to be male or female living within a particular society and cultural context. Sadly, children must undertake this important task amidst an abundance of socially prescribed gender roles and stereotypes, which are deeply ingrained in most societies (Williams & Best, 1982/1990a; Williams, Best, & Satterwhite, 1999). Societal pressure for gender conformity polarizes the sexes and restricts their potentials in many fundamental ways. Interpersonal dynamics, modes of behavioral and affective expression, selection of activities, academic performance, educational pursuits, and occupational aspirations are all significantly impacted by children's gender from the time they are born.

In light of the stereotypes and inequities that permeate society and continue to cast a shadow upon the developmental potential of our species, further investigation into the issues surrounding gender is warranted should any hope for change exist. As we will see in the coming sections, early childhood is a crucial period for gendered learning and the construction of children's gender identities. As such, early educators are in a prime position to support children in these complex processes. With the necessary knowledge and tools, we can empower early educators to do so in a conscientious manner that is nurturing, unbiased, and that optimizes the

opportunities available to all children. Therefore, my intent in conducting this literature review is to explore, in considerable depth, the following key questions: How do humans become gendered beings and what does typical gender development look like over the course of a child's first eight years of life? What are the principal concerns related to gender equity in the field of early childhood education? And finally, what strategies are successful in the promotion of gender equity and children's optimal development that can be used among professionals working within the field?

Although there are conflicting theories as to the precise origin of gender identity formation and differentiation in children, a typical developmental sequence has been well researched and documented. While competing interests embedded within each of the investigations into the topic yield different approaches to counteracting inequities, there is much that the overall literature has in common. Recurrent themes include recognition of the important social and cultural dimensions associated with gender issues, a concern for the general welfare of all children, as well as an interest in expanding opportunities for boys and girls alike so that both sexes may be empowered to reach their full potential, undeterred by biased societal prescriptions. I argue that by expanding the collective understanding of gender development, establishing a critical lens with which to examine gender-related issues, and adopting a proactive stance in the promotion of equity, the entire early childhood community can band together to improve the lives of children by honoring each child's uniqueness and supporting his/her optimal growth and development, free of discrimination and bias.

We will begin with a review of the existing theories on the origin of gender, and the predictable course of gender development observed in early childhood. Next we will explore the various factors of influence that contribute to children's gendered knowledge and experience.

We will then discuss specific gender-related concerns, including stereotypes and inequities, and the broad range of negative consequences they produce. To counteract these concerns, we will examine several different strategies for promoting gender equity in the lives of young children. Finally, this review will conclude with suggestions for future research in the field to advance our understanding of gender dynamics in early childhood, as well as constructive uses for the cumulative knowledge that has been generated by the literature thus far.

Theories and Patterns of Development

Psychoanalytic Theory. Pioneered by Sigmund Freud in the early 1900s, psychoanalytic theory has long since fallen out of favor among experts in the human sciences due to the lack of empirical evidence to support its claims (Hetherington, 1967; Kaga, 1964; Payne & Mussen, 1956; as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999). However, the theory remains noteworthy for its historical relevance and the significant – albeit controversial – impact it has had in the field of psychology. Freud accounts for gender differentiation between the sexes as a by-product of two psychological crises, referred to as the Oedipus and Electra complexes, experienced by boys and girls respectively (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). The complexes presume that young children are simultaneously attracted to their opposite-sex parent and envious of their same-sex parent. The theory alleges that in order for children to resolve these psychological crises, they begin to curb their jealousy between the ages of three to five when they come to identify with their same-sex parent (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). It is through this process of self-identification, presumably, that boys and girls ultimately adopt the masculine and feminine traits of their parents. Interesting though it may be, due to the lack of evidentiary support this explanation of gender put forth by psychoanalytic theory is no longer satisfactory. Thus inquiry

into the origin of gender identity is not over: There is a great deal to be learned from more recent research. Let us venture next to cognitive developmental theory.

Cognitive Developmental Theory. Lawrence Kohlberg is the theorist credited with devising a cognitive developmental account of gender in the mid-1960s. From this theoretical perspective, the achievement of *gender constancy* in young children – the understanding that one’s identity as either male or female is fixed – is what drives gendered learning and persistent differentiation across all future development (Kohlberg, 1966 as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Once children acquire constancy (usually between the ages of four and six) they experience tremendous delight in their newly solidified identities as boys and girls. As a result, children actively strive to behave in a manner that affirms and rewards these identities based upon the stereotypical images they have been exposed to since birth (Kohlberg, 1966 as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

Kohlberg’s theory garnered a great deal of positive attention when it was initially put forth. It introduced the important developmental milestone of gender constancy in early childhood. It also touched upon the influential impact of stereotyping, which is a key concept to be addressed in greater detail within another subtopic of this literature review. Yet despite its early popularity, Kohlberg’s perspective has fallen under hefty scrutiny over the years. Like Freud’s theory, there has proven little in the way of empirical evidence to back many of its claims (Huston, 1983 as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Attributing constancy as the impetus of gender development has been an especially problematic tenet to uphold, for many toddlers as young as two have been known to successfully sort items into masculine and feminine categories, indicating that differentiation along gender lines begins long before children reach the realization that gender is fixed (Thompson, 1975 as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

Gender Schema Theory. Throughout the 1980s and '90s, several researchers have contributed to the overarching argument postulated by gender schema theory, which essentially states that *gender identity* – the ability to label oneself and others as “a boy” or “a girl” – *not* gender constancy, is the only essential prerequisite for gender development to commence (Martin & Halverson, 1981 as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Once children are able to identify people by gender, they begin to construct *gender schema* (mental representations of masculinity and femininity) through interactions with their environments. Developing schema include the types of activities, dress, patterns of speech, behavioral styles, aspects of personality, etc. that are deemed acceptable for males and females within one’s cultural context (Levy & Fivush, 1993; Martin, 1995; Martin & Halverson, 1981; as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

One of the key contributions of gender schema theory is the insight it yields into the gender biases that manifest in individuals’ information processing once schema are formed (Carter & Levy, 1988; Ruble & Martin, 1998; as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Information processing refers to a theory of cognitive development that utilizes the metaphor of a computer to understand the inner workings of the brain. Although no computer system matches the level of complexity and sophistication of the human brain, the comparison offers a useful framework for conceptualizing thinking processes: First there is an intake of sensory information from the external environment, triggering reactions and neural connections within the brain, and the access of stored memories, which then results in some form of information output on the part of the person (Berger, 2003). Gender schema theory expands upon this idea by discussing the impact of gendered learning, specifically, upon how information is attended to or interpreted by the brain (please see Figure 1, below). Although gender schema research has successfully demonstrated the formation of biases in the human thought process, it has not been able to find

an unequivocal link between either knowledge of or belief in gender stereotypes and human beings' behavioral expressions of gender (Bem, 1981; Carter & Levy, 1988; Edwards & Spence, 1987; Signorella, 1987; as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

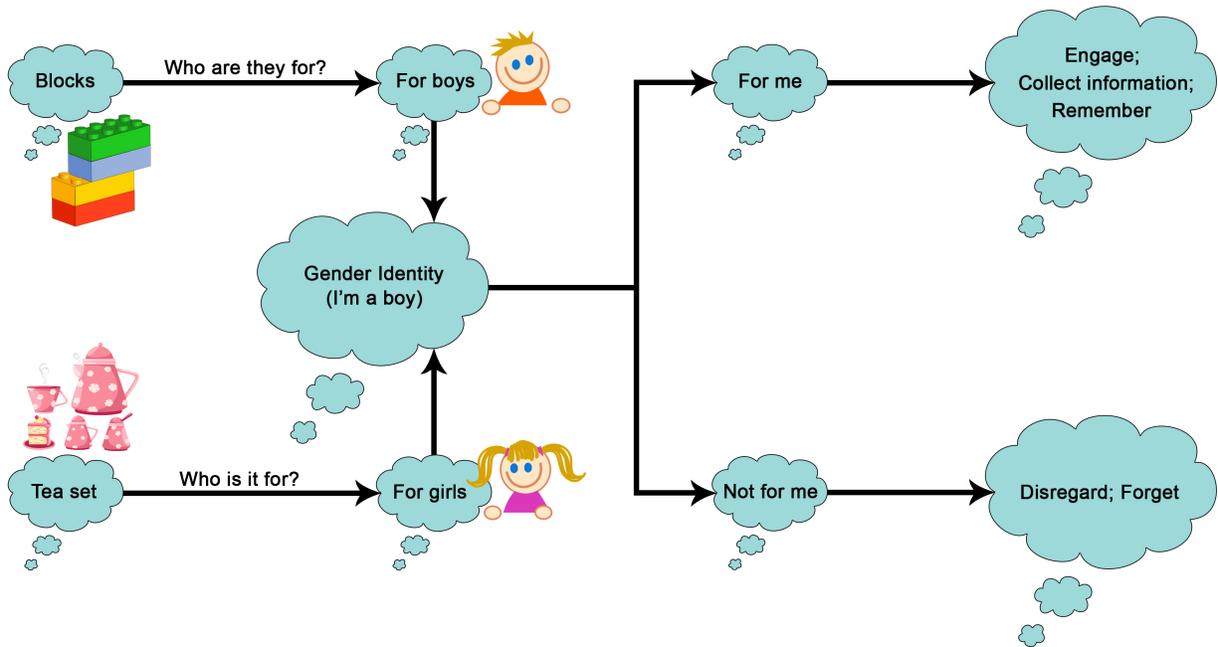


Figure 1. Gender Schematic Processing

Biological Theories. The biological explanation of gender development, as posited by many psychological and biological evolutionary theorists, essentially attributes modern gender variation to our species' ancestral mating habits that evolved from the contrasting demands experienced by ancient men and women (Archer, 1996; Buss, 1995; Simpson & Kenwick, 1997; as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Men, advantaged in their strength and stature relative to women, exerted dominance over them to maintain reproductive prowess by controlling female sexuality while at the same time mating with multiple partners themselves (Smuts, 1992, 1995 as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Unable to rely on paternal involvement and support, women had to assume the primary caretaking role for dependent offspring; men, on the other hand, continued to evolve in their role as aggressors seeking to gain social advantages that would

increase their chances of reproducing with attractive young women (Trivers, 1972 as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

This account is not as Darwinian as it may appear to be at first blush. The strategic supposition of early man's mating practices does not adhere to a fundamental principle of natural selection: That is, the process operates to maximize a species' ability to flourish within a highly localized and immediate context. Natural selection does *not* operate for any future purpose, as is alleged by biological theories of gender differentiation (Gould, 1987 as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Biological theories also fail to account for the developmental changes that children undergo pertaining to gender-linked knowledge and conduct (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Additionally, the methods of data collection employed by researchers of this perspective comprise mainly of self-report surveys measuring preferences in mating partners among men and women (Caporael, 1989; Dickemann, 1989; as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999). The trouble with this approach is that reported preferences do not necessarily reflect mating practices, nor does it reveal anything about presumed differences in men and women's genetic composition implicit in the biological perspective (Buss, 1989 as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Archeological and/or molecular evidence (i.e. human fossils) would be much more in line with the strong scientific tradition of evolutionary studies, and would certainly serve to build a far more compelling case (Fausto-Sterling, 1997; Latour & Strum, 1986; as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

Finally, the gradual adaptations to human behavior that are brought about by biological selection cannot possibly explain the drastic shift in reproductive habits and accompanying lifestyles found in contemporary society: As Bussey and Bandura (1999) state so well, "Given the prevalence of contraceptive sexuality, the claim that male preference for multiple physically

attractive females is evolutionarily driven to maximize paternity sounds more like social justification for male philandering” (p. 8). In sum, biological/psychological evolutionary theory depicts a bleak portrayal of half of the entire species which seems not only unreasonable and unfair, but which fails to account for historical change or cultural diversity and relies upon research methods that lack the necessary scientific rigor to create a persuasive argument. However, this critical evaluation may actually be in the best interests of humanity. The lack of hardened proof that gender differences reside in human nature contributes greatly to the argument against discrimination; using biology as a pretext for the perpetration of gender prejudice is rendered entirely nonsensical and thus unjustified.

Sociological Theories. In direct opposition to biological theories, *sociological theories* view gendered behavior as an absolute product of social construction. Based upon the limited knowledge I had when starting this literature review, I would have initially positioned myself as a member of the sociological camp most likely. (Now I consider myself a staunch subscriber to social cognitive theory and queer theory, which I will eagerly delve into in the sections immediately following this one.) Sociological theories *have* in fact contributed tremendously to the existing knowledge base of gender issues. Collectively, the sociological perspective emphasizes a cyclical relationship of cause-and-effect in which socially fabricated stereotypes mold societal views and treatment of men and women, which in turn produces the precise gender-typed behavioral patterns that affirm the imposed stereotypes (Geis, 1993 as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Much of this perpetuation is said to occur as a result of a segregated labor force that reflects unequal power and status between the sexes (Eagly, 1987a as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Empirically, these claims have been well established through credible research. For example, there are significantly fewer women in top, high-power

positions professionally than there are men (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015 as cited in AAUW, 2015). In addition, the relatively few women who do occupy such positions earn substantially lower wages than their male counterparts of comparable experience and qualifications (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015 as cited in AAUW, 2015).

Although the aforementioned examples illustrate a negative impact upon females, it is important to reiterate that they are not the only ones who suffer social injustices because of existent gender biases. Males are just as likely to be victims, though in different ways. No one gender's suffering is more important than the other's, nor is any gender bias justified. This is one of the most important messages I hope to impart in writing this literature review. To ensure this point is aptly communicated, I will be devoting an entire subtopic to the closer examination of the ill effects of gender bias upon *both* sexes in early childhood. For now, let us continue our quest to uncover the origin of gender by considering the compelling argument put forward by Albert Bandura's social cognitive theory (1986).

Social Cognitive Theory. Unlike the biological perspective that holds nature accountable for gender differentiation, the cognitive developmental and gender schema theories that favor internal mental processes of the individual, or the sociological view that assigns total responsibility to social and institutional customs, *social cognitive theory* points to three interactive determinants (personal, behavioral, and environmental factors) that coincide to initiate and influence gender development across the lifespan (Bandura, 1986 as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999). This holistic approach recognizes the contribution of evolution in adaptive changes to human behavior, but discards the singular focus of evolutionism that fails to acknowledge the impact of societal and technological advances (Bandura, 1999).

Let us look now at each of the three interactive determinants of social cognitive theory: *Personal factors* include an individual's notions of gender, gendered judgments/standards, and self-regulation capacity; *behavioral factors* include gender-typed activities; and finally, *environmental factors* include the vast array of societal influences related to gender that are experienced in daily living (Bandura, 1999). Another unique and key component of this theory is the fact that there is no universal pattern of interactions among determinants (Bandura, 1999). For example, in cultures with minimal environmental pressures gender development is largely shaped by personal factors associated with the individual; in societies that operate under strict prescriptions of gender norms, however, environmental factors are dominant and less developmental influence is attributed to personal factors (Bandura, 1999). This conceptualization of gender development and differentiation convincingly reconciles the omnipresent dual forces of nature and nurture that intricately intermingle to account for life as we know it.

In addition to the aforementioned determinants, social cognitive theory identifies three distinct mechanisms through which developmental trajectories are promoted. These include modeling, enactive experience, and direct tuition (Bandura, 1999). Once again, there is no singular formula for gender development: The relative significance of each mechanism varies according to individual developmental states, social contexts, and unique experiences (Bandura, 1999). The first mechanism, *modeling*, has a range of applications for development. It aids in the attainment of gender-related ideas and abilities, affects motivation by producing incentives/disincentives for certain gender-typed behaviors, and can also transmit gendered values and emotional proclivities (Bandura, 1992; Berger, 1962; Duncker, 1938 as cited in Bandura, 1999). The second mechanism, *enactive experience*, recognizes the fact that people are

liable to respond differently to the same gendered behavior exhibited by children, and that various settings/circumstances can also influence people's responses to behavior. Therefore, children are faced with the complicated task of constructing codes of gender-appropriate conduct by extracting, evaluating, and assimilating diverse information encountered within their environments (Bandura, 1999). The final mechanism, *direct tuition*, is precisely what it sounds like; it refers to the instruction children receive from others about anything pertaining to gender. Direct tuition is most effective if it occurs within the context of mutual values, and if the information communicated is widely accepted by the broader society (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Conversely, the effects of direct tuition are undermined if what is taught is contradicted by the actions of the teacher (Hildebrandt, Feldman, & Ditrachs, 1973; McManis & Liebert, 1968; Rosenhan, et al., 1968 as cited in Bussey & Bandura, 1999).

I appreciate and attribute great credibility to the strong critical analyses, holistic considerations, and thorough research evident in Bandura's social cognitive view of gender. That being said, I spent a considerable amount of time in the process of conducting this literature review feeling as though something very important was missing (seemingly disregarded altogether) until I came across a wonderfully insightful journal article from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) describing a new perspective on gender called *queer theory* (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). I have long suspected that homophobic underpinnings are responsible in some key ways for much of the gender bias and discrimination that transpires in the world. To illustrate, let us revisit the observation that was described in chapter 1 (with the father and son in the toy store). To briefly recap: the little boy displayed a liking for a magenta-colored hat, which he decided to try on and show his father. The father responded by ridiculing his son, calling it a "girl's hat", and refusing to let him have it.

Intuitively, such an irrational response on the part of a grown man seemed deeper to me than was insinuated by his weak and erroneous rationale about a hat that only girls could wear. Such a hat does not exist, and so clearly this man's reaction was prompted by something else.

The intensity of emotion that the man displayed during this interaction with his son over a hat is also quite telling (if you recall, he and the two accompanying women could not contain their laughter). Why was the father so opposed to his son's taste in hats? What was the source of humor that blinded him to the little boy's feelings and point of view? If I had to guess, I would speculate subconscious homophobia was the driving force for the adults' peculiar response in this scenario. To the father, wearing a pink hat is an expression of femininity that threatens his son's identity as a male. Yet since a hat is incapable of altering one's maleness (or femaleness for that matter), the father is likely confusing biological sex with misconstrued gender-typed notions of sexual orientation. And based upon his negative reaction to his son's innocent interest in the hat (which is in no way indicative of future sexual preferences), it seems as though the father has some homophobic tendencies to overcome. As can be seen in the next section, queer theory contributes much to our understanding of these types of issues, which unfortunately appear deeply ingrained within our culture and can have a profound impact upon young children.

Queer Theory. This relatively new theory connects gender stereotypes to heterosexual norms (to clarify, it has nothing to do with gay/lesbian identity). The term *queer* is appropriate because it challenges the conjecture that any "normal" manifestation of gender exists (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). The fundamental argument of queer theory insists that it is these heterosexual norms, as opposed to biology or socialization, which have the greatest influence upon gender identity development. In addition to discussing the inextricable link between common gender

discourses and heterosexual discourses, queer theory introduces the important added layer of power dynamics to the overall debate – another key element I was missing from the literature until I came across this article.

An observation of four preschoolers playing (two boys and two girls) helps to set the stage for the discussion of queer theory (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). Below, I have included a condensed version of the observation to be used as a reference in this review:

Harry and Alan are busy in the home corner. Alan makes a campfire on the floor and cooks chops for breakfast while Harry fixes the sluggish sink. Then Harry moves the four small chairs outside and places them in neat formation. He has made a car and the boys decide to go camping. Kathy and Ruth arrive and ask to come along. They are greeted with disdain. “Only boys go camping. Girls go shopping,” accuses Alan. The girls complain and Harry succumbs to their persistent protests but only if the girls agree to pack the car and sit quietly in the back seat...The adventure begins. Harry drives the car while Alan reads the road map. Kathy and Ruth sit quietly in the back seat...Ruth gets the cell phone out and starts to make a call. “Don’t use the phone ‘til we get there,” demands Alan. “We haven’t fixed it yet!” (Taylor & Richardson, 2005, as cited in Blaise & Taylor, 2012, 88).

To illustrate the main tenants of queer theory by utilizing this play episode, we can see that the children are attempting to not only master gender norms, but heterosexual norms as well, and in so doing there can be found evidence of unequal power relations between the boys and girls. For instance, traditional female submissiveness and compliance (which Ruth and Kathy mostly adhered to) is a heterosexual norm that complements the male heterosexual norm of dominant masculinity (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). It is precisely these heterosexual norms that limit the play opportunities for all of the children involved. The girls know that they must abide by the behavioral expectations placed upon them if they wish to play with Harry and Alan. Likewise, the boys’ narrow conceptualization of what it means to be male greatly restricts their repertoire of sanctioned behaviors and means of self-expression (Blaise & Taylor, 2012).

Three fundamental terms often arise in the literature on queer theory: *heteronormativity*, *gender performativity*, and *heterosexual matrix*. The first term is a combination of the words *heterosexual* and *normative*, and it describes the dominant societal assumption that everyone is – or ought to be – heterosexual (Warner, 1993 as cited in Blaise & Taylor, 2012). The second term, *gender performativity*, communicates the idea that gender is a type of performance – a way to “act out” one’s identity as either a male or female (Blaise & Taylor, 2012). The third and final key concept, *heterosexual matrix*, refers to the way in which gender stereotypical behaviors occur within the interrelated contexts of gender (masculinity and femininity) and sexuality (heterosexuality and homosexuality) (Butler, [1990] 1999 as cited in Blaise & Taylor, 2012). Through the lens of queer theory, we see that heterosexuality itself is not the source of gender-related social injustices, but rather the trouble lies with heteronormativity, which expects all people to conform to a certain way of life based upon traditional values of heterosexuality, male masculinity, and female femininity (Blaise & Taylor, 2012).

Patterns of Gender Development. As has just been demonstrated by the preceding sections, a robust debate exists among academics from different disciplinary perspectives regarding the origin of gender identity formation. However, there is no such debate concerning the typical sequence of gender development that occurs across various ages and stages of childhood. In addition, there is a general consensus as to the common similarities and differences that can be found between boys and girls, collectively. To conveniently organize and communicate this information in an intelligible manner, I have presented it in the form of two

data tables below. Table 1 outlines the normal course of gender development among children, aged 0-8 years old. Table 2 presents key similarities and differences between the sexes.

Table 1

Typical Gender Development

Developmental Characteristics by Age Group
<p>Infants/Toddlers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop attitudes about own body • Develop male or female identity and learn expected behaviors by gender • At ~3-4 mos.: Infants can distinguish between male/female faces (Quinn et al. 2002 as cited in Martin & Ruble, 2010) • At ~6 mos.: Infants can distinguish between male/female faces and voices (Fagan & Singer 1979, Miller 1983, Younger & Fearing 1999 as cited in Martin & Ruble, 2010) • At ~10 mos.: Infants have rudimentary ability to form stereotypical associations between faces and gender-typed objects (Levy & Haaf 1994 as cited in Martin & Ruble, 2010) • At ~18-24 mos.: Toddlers recognize and accurately use gender labels in their speech; once this occurs, they are more likely to play with highly stereotyped toys (Zosuls et al. 2009 as cited in Martin & Ruble, 2010) • At ~24-36 mos.: Early stereotypes become more solidified; Toddlers display an understanding of sex-linked differences in adults' possessions, physical attributes, roles, activities, and toys (Leinbach et al. 1997, Weinraub et al. 1984, as cited in Martin & Ruble, 2010)
<p>Preschoolers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aware of and curious about gender differences and establish firm beliefs that they are male or female • Feel positively about their own sex identity (Yee & Brown 1994 as cited in Martin & Ruble, 2010) • Favor same-sex playmates and the distribution of resources to members of their own sex (Martin & Ruble, 2010) • React negatively to gender norm violations (Martin & Ruble, 2010) • From preschool-4th/5th grade: Children view girls as “nice, wearing dresses, and liking dolls”; boys are viewed as “having short hair, playing active games, and being rough” (Miller et al. 2009, as cited in Martin & Ruble, 2010, p. 3)

Kindergarten/Primary Age:

- Strong same-sex friendships
- Strong interest in stereotyped gender roles
- Choose gender-stereotyped activities
- Stereotypes in young children reveal that they associate power with males and helplessness with females (Ruble et al. 2006 as cited in Martin & Ruble, 2010)
- **By age 6:** Children have well-established ideas (and prejudices) and believe their sex is “better” while the other sex is “stupid” (Martin & Ruble, 1998 as cited in Berger, 2003, p. 316)
- Children **as young as 6** have some limited knowledge of differential status between the sexes (i.e. men are more likely to have certain kinds of jobs which are higher in status than the ones traditionally held by women) (Liben et al. 2001 as cited in Martin & Ruble, 2010)
- **At ~5-6 yrs.:** Children show a peak in rigid adherence to gender stereotypes (Singnorella et al. 1993 as cited in Martin & Ruble, 2010)
- **At ~7-8 yrs.:** Children show increased flexibility in their adherence to stereotypes (Singnorella et al. 1993 as cited in Martin & Ruble, 2010); they can now understand that variations in masculinity/femininity exist (Santrock, 2011)

Note. Additional sources (not derived from the original table) are cited within Table 1. Adapted from “Healthy Sexuality Development and Gender Roles in Early Childhood,” by D.

Couchenour and K. Chrisman as cited in *Perspectives on Gender in Early Childhood* (p. 196-197), by T. Jacobson, 2011, St. Paul, MN: Red Leaf Press.

Table 2

Similarities and Differences Between the Sexes

Physical	Cognitive	Socioemotional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women have 2x more body fat (concentrated mostly around breasts/hips) • Fat in men is most likely concentrated in the abdomen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General intelligence is the same between the sexes • Females have stronger verbal skills • National assessments show girls score better in 	<p>1) Aggression:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boys are more physically aggressive (in all cultures; appears early in development) (Brendgen, 2009)

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Men are 10% taller (male androgens promote long bone growth while female estrogens stop growth at puberty) • Females have longer life expectancies • Males are more likely to develop physical/mental disorders • Females are more resistant to infection and their blood vessels are more elastic • Males have higher stress-hormone levels, causing faster clotting/higher blood pressure • Male brains are larger (Luders & others, 2004) • Female brains have more folds, called <i>convolutions</i>, allowing for more surface brain tissue (Luders & others, 2004) • Part of the hypothalamus involved in sexual behavior is larger in men (Swaab & others, 2001) • Part of the parietal lobe involved in visuospatial skills is larger in males (Frederikse & others, 2000) • Regions of the brain involved in 	<p>reading/writing (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2005, 2007)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A U.S. study of over 7 million students (grades 2-11) showed no differences in math scores between the sexes (Hyde & others, 2008) • Males have stronger visuospatial skills, which are important in subjects such as geometry/geography (Halpern & others, 2007) • Females earn higher grades and graduate high school at a higher rate (Halpern, 2006) • Males are more likely to be placed in special ed./remedial classes • Females are more studious, attentive in class, and participate more (DeZolt & Hull, 2001) • Despite evidence of comparable skills in math, technology, and science between the sexes and legislative attempts to promote gender equity, these disciplines continue to favor males (Watt, 2008; Watt & 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal aggression is comparable between the sexes (Eagly & Steffen, 1986) • Relational aggression comprises a greater percentage of girls' overall aggression (Putallaz & others, 2007); adolescent girls use more relational aggression than boys (Smith, Rose, & Schwartz-Mette, 2010) <p>2) Relationship Communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Rapport talk</i> – Talk that fosters connections, negotiations, and is relationship oriented; females enjoy rapport talk more than boys • <i>Report talk</i> – Talk that provides information; males have a proclivity for this type of speech, including joking, lecturing and storytelling • Boys play in large, hierarchical groups, often with a leader telling others what to do/how to do it; games have winners/losers, and often spawn arguments; they boast and debate over skills • Girls play in pairs/small groups;
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<p>emotional expression show more metabolic activity in females (Gur & others, 1995)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are far more similarities in brains between the sexes than there are differences, and any observed differences may be due to individual biology, experience, or both 	<p>Eccles, 2008)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Toward the end of high school, girls are less likely to take advanced math courses or consider a career in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics fields) 	<p>have best friends; are very intimate; games include more turn-taking; friends like to sit and talk; they are more concerned with being liked than competing for status</p> <p>3) Emotion/Regulation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Girls are more inclined to express emotion openly and intensely, especially sadness/fear (Blakemore, Berenbaum, & Liben, 2009) • Girls are better at reading emotions; displaying empathy (Blakemore, Berenbaum, & Liben, 2009) • Males demonstrate less emotional self-regulation; this lack of self-control can lead to behavioral problems (Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Smith, 2004) <p>4) Prosocial Behavior:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Across childhood/adolescence, girls show more prosocial behavior (especially kindness/consideration) (Hastings, Utendale, & Sullivan, 2007)
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Note. The information provided is reflective of averages and does not apply to all males/females.

Even when differences are found, there is notable overlap between the sexes. Differences may

be due to biological factors, social/cultural factors, or a combination of both. *Source:* Adapted from Santrock, J. (2011). *Child development (13th ed.)*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

At this point we have critically examined many of the popular theories on the origin of gender, and reviewed the typical course of gender development across childhood. Before moving on, let us take a brief moment to revisit the primary argument of this review, and consider the implications of the existing literature thus far. I argue that by expanding the collective understanding of gender development, establishing a critical lens with which to examine gender-related issues, and adopting a proactive stance in the promotion of equity, the entire early childhood community can band together to improve the lives of children by honoring each child's uniqueness and supporting his/her optimal growth and development, free of discrimination and bias. So then, how can knowledge of theory and typical development be of service to those who care for and work with young children? In essence, it removes the burden of guesswork. It empowers early childhood professionals to be more intentional, supportive, and efficacious in working with children. With a solid grasp of theory and development we can understand the root causes of children's behavior, and determine how to respond appropriately so that we are meeting their needs and guiding them toward success. We can see the world from their perspective and be empathic in our interactions with them, which helps to create a warm, responsive context in which children are able to learn and thrive. Finally, when we know what the future holds (i.e. when we can anticipate the next stage in a child's development) we can prepare for it. We can become proactive and adapt our teaching/care giving to ease the transition, help children meet important milestones, and successfully address the unique challenges that arise with each new stage. Moving on, let us continue now by looking at some of the key factors that affect children's conceptualizations and enactment of gender.

Children's Gendered Knowledge & Experience: Factors of Influence

Family and Peers. Families, especially parents, have an enormous influence upon a child's conceptualizations of gender, developmental trajectory, and his/her identity formation. Parents serve as a child's primary role models and regulators of behavior. They continually encourage or deter specific gendered behaviors in children, often without consciously realizing it. In a study conducted by Leaper (2000), mothers were more inclined than fathers to reinforce collaborative play with children, regardless of their sex; mothers also demonstrated a preference for affiliative play (characterized by responsive, supportive, warm interactions), particularly with their daughters; and fathers were found to be more disapproving of cross-gender play than mothers, responding negatively to it, particularly with sons (Aina & Cameron, 2011). This last finding is consistent with widespread research, which has established that males must adhere to more rigid societal expectations of gender than females, who are granted more latitude to deviate from social norms.

In another study, conducted by Fiese and Skillman (2000), storytelling was examined as a way of communicating gender ideals and attitudes within families. The researchers found the following interesting trends: sons were told stories with themes of achievement and autonomy, whereas daughters were frequently told stories about relationships and support; fathers tended to tell stories involving mastery or success, and mothers told stories involving emotional expression (Aina & Cameron, 2011). Once again we are seeing rather narrow representations of masculinity and femininity, as has been the case in much of the empirical evidence and research cited throughout this review. It is important to remember that parents' words have great power over a child. By being selective of story themes in this manner (inadvertently or otherwise) a parent runs the risk of sending the message that some values, attributes, and endeavors are appropriate

for one sex but not the other. The ways that children are allowed to express themselves and the options available to them are perceived as dependent upon whether they are male or female, as opposed to *human*. Individuality is compromised as a result, and imposed identities that fail to honor the multifaceted quality of the human condition are thrust upon them.

More information on the significance of storytelling and children's literature is provided in the section on popular culture/media (below). For now, let us consider the unique role of peers in children's acquisition of gendered knowledge and behavioral traits. By interacting with friends, children actively construct aspects of their gender identities (Thorne, 1993 as cited in Aina & Cameron, 2011). Boys, especially, are susceptible to peer pressure to conform to stereotypes, as they have a habit of self-policing – shaming members of their group who demonstrate feminine qualities (Morrow, 2006 as cited in Aina & Cameron, 2011). Friendships that are segregated by sex also contribute to the transference of gendered standards of conduct. In accordance, children's predilection for gender-typed activities and toys is more often displayed in the presence of peers who would find them gender-appropriate (Hughes, 2003 as cited in Aina & Cameron, 2011).

Cultural/Ethnic Considerations. Urie Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory (1979; 2001) greatly advanced our understanding of the fact that human development does not transpire within a vacuum. Accordingly, development cannot be separated from the context in which it occurs, nor can it be fully understood apart from its context (which entails not only the immediate setting, but environmental influences within a particular culture and society beyond this setting, between settings, and across time). Another notable theorist accredited with deepening our appreciation for the profound impact that culture has upon human development is Lev Vygotsky. His sociocultural theory (1962) describes how children learn and grow in the

context of close social interactions with adults and more advanced peers, as well as through the direct use of language and other cultural tools, which aid in children's construction of knowledge and development of skills and abilities.

Given that the role culture plays in development is very well established, and that the overall literature on gender is so robust, it is somewhat surprising that research into the relationship between culture and gender (especially in early childhood) is actually rather sparse. To date, there appears to be just a handful of studies that have specifically examined the relationship between culture, gender development, and gender-related issues in early childhood. One such study appeared in *British Educational Research Journal* and was conducted by Hansen and Jones (2011) from the University of London, UK. These researchers carried out a longitudinal investigation of ethnic variations in gender gaps among a sample of 8,397 English preschoolers whose ethnic backgrounds included White, African American, Indian, and Pakistani/Bangladeshi. They used data derived from cognitive assessments (the British Ability Scales/BAS) that were administered when the children were three and five years of age. Their findings reveal differences in performance between ethnic groups, which are typically concealed by the overall trends based upon gender alone. The specifics of these findings are presented below.

Looking at the mean distribution of scores, girls outperformed boys in every group, however the gender gap differed across ethnicities as follows: .15 of a standard deviation among White children, .16 among Indian children, .25 among African American children, and .30 among Pakistani/Bangladeshi children. Likewise, the total variance of scores differed according to ethnicity. For African American and White children the variance was higher among males than females, while the opposite was true among Indian children. For Pakistani/Bangladeshi

children, the variance was relatively equal between males and females. Finally, in looking at the top and bottom of the distributions, Hansen and Jones found ethnic variations as well. At the top, there are more females than males within the Indian and Pakistani/Bangladeshi groups, more males than females within the African American group, and a relatively equal proportion of males and females within the White group. At the bottom, there are 1.6 males for every female in the White group, 1.4 males for every female in the Pakistani/Bangladeshi group, and 3.5 males for every female in the African American group. Taken as a whole, the results from this study indicate that the children to be most concerned about in terms of the academic achievement gap are African American and Pakistani/Bangladeshi boys. Not only do these children show the greatest gap at the mean, they also have an increased likelihood to perform at the bottom of the distribution relative to girls within their respective ethnic groups, and tend to receive lower scores than their female counterparts at the bottom.

Another study, conducted by Halim, Ruble, Tamis-LeMonda, and Shrout (2013), appeared in *Child Development*. The focus for these researchers was upon discovering if any ethnic variations exist in the rigidity of gender-typed behaviors exhibited in young children. Like the previous study, this one was longitudinal in design: It followed a group of preschoolers annually from the ages of three to five years. The sample was comprised of 229 children whose ethnic backgrounds included African American, Dominican American, and Mexican American. The children's general appearance, costume play, toy play, and sex segregation behaviors were examined. As in the case of the first study, it was revealed that within overall gender-based trends there exist ethnicity-based variations. The specifics of the researchers' findings are described below.

Overall, the children experienced similar trajectories when they were three and four years of age, which involved a steady increase in gender-stereotypical behaviors. This finding is particularly interesting in light of previous research that was conducted with White middle-class children that suggests boys can lag behind girls in developmental trends (La Freniere, Strayer & Gauthier, 1984; Signorella et al., 1993; Zosuls et al., 2009 as cited in Halim, Ruble, Tamis-LeMonda & Shrout, 2013). To account for such a discrepancy, DeSouza et al. (2004) and Rowan, Pernell and Akers, (1996) postulate that the strong cultural emphasis placed upon traditional masculinity within African American and Latino populations may instigate the onset of gender-stereotypical behaviors among boys sooner, paralleling the onset observed among girls (as cited in Halim, Ruble, Tamis-LeMonda & Shrout, 2013). However, once the children from the present study reached the ages of four and five years, ethnic differences among these sample participants became more pronounced. In some cases, the timing and rigidity of their gendered behaviors varied, as will be discussed next.

From among the three ethnic groups, Mexican American children's trajectories diverged the most, with their peaks in rigidity often occurring earlier. Patterns observed among African American and Dominican American children appeared quite similar on the other hand. The authors speculate this similarity may be attributed to common demographics, such as educational attainment of mothers, cohabitation with fathers, and residing within an urban setting. Another hypothesis is that because Dominican Americans are sometimes perceived as African Americans, because some choose to identify as such, and because of the impact that African American hip hop culture has upon many young Dominican American people, greater cross-cultural influences produce the similar trajectories that are observed between these two groups (Duany, 2008; Torres-Saillant & Hernandez, 1998 as cited in Halim, Ruble, Tamis-LeMonda & Shrout, 2013).

Conversely, the authors propose that perhaps the Mexican American children in their study had experienced less acculturation, resulting in their comparatively different trajectories.

Early Childhood Education. The number of children under five years of age who attend preschool and childcare settings is substantial, making the role of early childhood education (ECE) an important consideration in the discussion on gender (Sales, Spjeldnes, & Koesche, 2010 as cited in Aina & Cameron, 2011). Many young children occupy these settings for up to ten hours a day (Grafwallner, Fontaine, Torre, & Underhill, 2006 as cited in Aina & Cameron, 2011). Undoubtedly the amount of time children spend, the experiences they have, and the relationships they make in ECE environments influence them greatly. As Gee and Gee (2005) have identified, there are two primary components of early childhood education which affect children's gendered learning and development: 1) classroom materials, and 2) teachers' instructional practices (Aina & Cameron, 2011).

Gender inequities of some sort are likely to be found in any given ECE setting upon close examination. This is because gender issues are so deeply ingrained within our society that they often go unnoticed, and what is truly an inequity gets dismissed as simply "normal." To illustrate, recall the play scene that was described earlier involving the four preschoolers who were going on a pretend camping trip. The boys insisted upon driving the "car", while the girls were forced to sit subserviently in the backseat. At first glance this could seem perfectly normal. Yet if the situation was reversed and the boys had to sit in the back while the girls drove, suddenly it might strike the teacher (or other onlooker) as odd.

Chick, Heilman-Houser, and Hunter (2002) discovered several inequities at a preschool where they conducted research. The most apparent inequity was the vast array of gender-typed toys within the classrooms. Further inspection uncovered multiple incidents of gender bias

within a large number of the children's library books as well. From the classroom environment, children learn about critical social issues, like those related to gender (Aina & Cameron, 2011). They learn about themselves, as well as others. Therefore, it is imperative that ECE teachers and other caregivers evaluate children's environments, looking for overt and hidden messages alike, then reflect upon whether what they intend to teach is actually what the children are learning (we will revisit this idea a little later in the section on promoting equity in early childhood).

Instructional practices and teacher-child interactions also greatly influence children's conceptualizations of gender, and their developmental experiences. Returning to the previous study by Chick, Heilman-Houser, and Hunter (2002), teachers were frequently observed reinforcing stereotyped traits in children. They complimented the girls on such things as appearance, cleanliness and helpfulness; and complimented the boys on such things as strength, physical abilities, and achievement. Additionally, they used terms of endearment with the girls (referring to them as "sweetie" or "cuddle bug") but not the boys, and they would always say "you guys" when addressing the class as a whole. Teachers' gender biases (though likely unintentional) can result in the proliferation of stereotypes and discrimination within the classroom, creating an inequitable learning environment that can impede children's sense of competence (Ebach, et al., 2009 as cited in Aina & Cameron, 2011).

Popular Culture and the Media. Gender-typing merchandise is a common marketing strategy (recall the opening scene at the popular toy store with the blue and pink aisles). All sorts of items are marketed specifically to boys or girls including toys, clothing, towels, bedding, furniture, bandages, school supplies, and much more (Freeman, 2007 as cited in Aina & Cameron, 2011). Stereotyped messages of both sexes are frequently conveyed in media advertisements as well. For example, McNair, Kirova-Petrova, and Bhargava (2001) found that

computer ads most often portrayed males as proficient users who were actively engaged with the technology. Ads featuring females, on the other hand, usually had them posed near the computer, sometimes passively observing it in use, while looking attractive or provocative (Aina & Cameron, 2011). Although both advertisements are aimed at selling computers, they rely on very different strategies depending upon the sex of the models. Subsequently, males and females receive different messages about their prescribed gender roles and characteristics (i.e. men are competent and professional; women are dependent and valued for their appearance/sex-appeal).

Movies and literature that are targeted at a young audience often reinforce sexual stereotypes as well, and have a particularly powerful influence upon children's conceptualizations of gender norms (Derman-Sparks, 2001; Jackson, 2007 as cited in Aina & Cameron, 2011). In a research study of twenty-five award-winning children's books honored by the Association for Library Service to Children, Narahara (1998) made some rather astonishing findings. Males were three times more likely to be the leading character, for instance, and 84% of the stories featured pictures of women wearing aprons (Aina & Cameron, 2011). The messages children derive from these media become even more influential when popular tales and characters become widely branded in the marketplace, as with the inundation of Disney merchandise (Aina & Cameron, 2011). Not only do children learn about traditional masculinity, femininity, and gender conformity through popular culture and the media, they also develop notions of "appropriate" male-female interactions and relationships. To use the popular Disney princess collection as an example, young children are consistently given unrealistic and concerning messages about romance, some of which include the following: 1) People fall deeply and hopelessly in love at first sight (i.e. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*) and/or against all of the odds (i.e. *The Princess and the Frog* and *Aladdin*); 2) It is acceptable to be victimized in the

context of a romantic relationship (i.e. *Beauty and the Beast*); 3) Heterosexuality is the expectation; and 4) One is rewarded with love and marriage by conforming to traditional gender norms (England, Descartes, & Collier-Meek, 2011).

In the present section we looked at the role of family and peers, early education, and popular culture/media in young children's acquisition of gendered knowledge and experiences. Why is this information important and why must it be made available to early childhood educators? As has been discussed, everyday gender bias is often invisible, or mistakenly considered to be the natural way of life. With greater awareness and understanding of the issues discussed in this section, ECE professionals become empowered as potential agents of change in the lives of children and families. They are likely to develop a deeper appreciation for the many ways in which they have influence, and can be more reflective in their work in order to help promote positive gender development among the children in their care. This expanded understanding also brings with it the critical tasks of introspection and self-evaluation on the part of ECE professionals who must uncover, assess, and possibly alter their personal ideas about gender in order to ensure the provision of equitable opportunities for children, and to prevent the possible perpetuation of stereotypes. More information about promoting equity will be discussed later on. Let us now examine, in greater detail than we have thus far, some of the key gender-related concerns in early childhood.

Gender-Related Concerns: The Consequences of Stereotypes and Inequities

At this point we have reviewed the major theories on the origin of gender, the typical course of gender development, and key sources of influence in the lives of children, but what exactly are the implications of gender within our society – and in particular, within early childhood? While there is innately nothing wrong with being male or female, masculine or

feminine, gender stereotyping is highly prevalent and inequities are often the result. If society's goal is merely to raise masculine boys and feminine girls, then we are limiting the potential of the whole population. Instead, the goal ought to be to raise *competent* boys and *competent* girls, recognizing that there is an entire spectrum of masculinity and femininity that exists. We must accept children for who they are, and not allow a singular aspect of their identity to dictate their life paths or the opportunities available to them. The first step toward greater equity is to generate awareness and to facilitate a deeper understanding of the central issues involved. So, let us next delve into some of the common gender-related concerns that frequently arise in early childhood.

Social-Emotional/Relational Consequences. According to the preschool study conducted by Chick, Heilman-Houser, and Hunter (2002), boys in every classroom (ranging in age from eight months to five years) were awarded more attention than girls. This was true even when the boys were significantly outnumbered. In the infant room, boy babies were held and spoken to more frequently. They would scoot and crawl to the researchers who were sitting on the floor and attempt to grab their pens, paper, and equipment. The girl babies, on the other hand, observed this activity but made no effort to approach. As a whole, male infants were more active and fussy, while female infants were more likely to quietly entertain themselves. In the toddler room, all of the children enjoyed going down a slide, and some liked to crawl over its side. While caregivers never cautioned or prohibited the boys from doing so, the girls were often instructed to cease this behavior so as not to "hurt their bellies" (p. 151). In general, boys were expected to be more boisterous, assertive, and active than girls, who were expected to be calm and compliant.

When girls displayed high levels of activity, caregivers were likely to attribute it to some external factor, as is evidenced when one teacher asked a preschool girl if she had been drinking coffee (a question that was never posed to the boys). In addition, boys were observed making shocking statements and resorting to inappropriate behavior to demand the attention of caregivers. “Boys will be boys” is a popular myth in our culture that has a substantial impact upon how males are viewed, and treated, from the time they are born (Pollock, 1998 as cited in Chick, Heilman-Houser & Hunter, 2002). However, it is important to remember that gender biases like this one can yield unintended consequences for children. For example, boys in elementary school are more vulnerable than girls to being labeled “socially disturbed,” suspended or expelled, referred to remedial or special education classes, or held back a grade (McCormick, 1994 as cited in Frawley, 2005). This is because boys’ conditioned habit of responding to challenges by acting out does not align with schools’ standards of conduct, the way that girls’ less disruptive responses do (Frawley, 2005).

Gender bias was also evident in the ways that boys and girls were referred to and praised differently by their caregivers. As stated earlier, terms of endearment such as “cuddle bug” and “sweetie” were reserved primarily for little girls, while the boys were referred to simply by name (or sometimes “bud”). When girls were complimented, the praise most often revolved around physical appearance (clothing, hairstyles, etc.) or nurturing and helping behaviors. In fact, Sadker and Sadker (1994) point out that appearance is the sole area in which girls receive more recognition than boys (as cited in Chick, Heilman-Houser & Hunter, 2002). Conversely when the boys were praised, it was usually about their physical or academic competencies.

Finally, another key finding from this study is that boys exercised more power relative to girls. In the preschool classroom, for example, a boy who was bowling would holler for the

teacher to rearrange the pins each time he knocked them over. Although he could not successfully engage the teacher in this task, he ended up recruiting a girl to do the job for him. It has been found that boys often rely on control as a means of maintaining gender separation when playing with girls. In fact, rather than being subject to male dominance, many girls prefer to avoid cross-gender play altogether (Sims, Hutchins, & Taylor, 1998; Walkerdine, 1998 as cited in Chick, Heilman-Houser & Hunter, 2002).

Other researchers have found that young boys receive less nurturing behavior than girls, in general, from their teachers (Zaman, 2007 as cited in Aina & Cameron, 2011). Kindlon and Thompson (2002) and Sommers (2000) argue that boys have long been neglected emotionally, and are now badly in need of attention (as cited in Frawley, 2005). The stereotype that boys must be dominant, tough, and stoic inhibits many of their natural behaviors and puts them at risk of being ridiculed if they do not adhere to this restrictive macho image. As a result, boys are often apprehensive or unwilling to be open with their feelings for fear of being considered “feminine” and mocked. They also have fewer close friendships as they get older, and are more susceptible to alienation and loneliness (Frawley, 2005).

Selection of Activities and Toys. Returning once again to the Chick, Heilman-Houser and Hunter study (2002), gender inequities were discovered concerning children’s toys and activities, including an abundance of gender-typed materials and sex-segregation that was fixed by three years of age. In a toddler classroom comprised of all girls, for example, there were no blocks, erector sets, vehicles, or tools to play with, only kitchen and laundry room sets, dolls, dress-up clothing, shopping carts, and the like. In addition, the girls were often encouraged by teachers to use toy telephones and have pretend conversations with each other. In the infant room, a baby girl took an interest in a particular toy and started playing with it, but her caregiver

immediately commented that it was too difficult for her and that she would not be successful in taking it apart because she “didn’t have muscles” (p. 152). Very early in life, boys and girls are given different toys and encouraged to engage in different types of play. Eventually, children come to routinely select gender-typed materials and activities on their own (Pidgeon, 1994 as cited in Heilman-Houser & Hunter, 2002). This was certainly apparent in the 2-3 year-olds’ room where children had established segregated peer groups, and perpetually opted for gender-typed toys and activities that are deemed “appropriate” for their sex.

This trend was corroborated in another study conducted by Unger (1981) who found that preschoolers’ time spent playing with blocks and in the housekeeping area varied considerably by sex. Boys spent 25% of their time playing with the blocks, whereas girls spent only 2% of their time engaged in block play. On the other hand, girls spent 10% of their time playing house, compared to boys who only spent 2% of their time in the housekeeping area (Aina & Cameron, 2011). However, by simply blending these two distinct play spaces and making it more gender-neutral, the researchers reported an 8% increase in boys’ house play and 9% increase in girls’ block play.

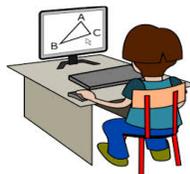
Educational Experiences and Outcomes. The gender bias that exists in the realm of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) dampens girls’ interest in those fields and discourages them from pursuing the subjects in school (Ebach, et al. 2009 as cited in Aina & Cameron, 2011). The stereotype that girls are not suited for the male-dominated STEM subjects can have a powerful impact on academic achievement. Neuville and Croizet (2007) conducted a study involving elementary schoolchildren and found that by simply raising awareness of gender identity before a standardized math test, girls’ performance was weakened

and boys' strengthened. However, in the control group, when gender was not referenced, girls performed just as well as – or better than – the boys on the same exam.

There is a comparable gender bias against boys in the subjects of reading and writing. Data from the National Assessment of Academic Progress (NAEP) from as far back as the year 1971 do, in fact, reflect higher scores for girls in reading and higher scores for boys in math. However, this is *not* indicative of key differences in the hardwiring of male and female brains, which according to biased opinion supposedly account for these trends. Upon closer examination of the data, it is revealed that gender gaps fluctuate quite dramatically based upon several factors including age, nationality, and ethnicity (Eliot, 2010). Data derived from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), which reflect discrepancies between the sexes similar to the NAEP, demonstrate that higher female scores in math correlate with greater gender equity in individual countries (Eliot, 2010). This evidence suggests that environmental influences are of great significance in the creation of gender gaps and that no ability, or difference therein, is “hardwired” within the brain (as illustrated in Figure 2 below). The development of human abilities is an *epigenetic* phenomenon, meaning that each individual's biological potential is subject to environmental factors that ultimately affect genetic expression, neural function, and behavior (Champagne & Curley, 2005 as cited in Eliot, 2010).



Small differences have grown to become significant:
Verbal skills, important in phonological awareness, reading, & writing, have been reinforced since birth & are well developed; girls pull ahead of boys in these subjects



Small differences have grown to become significant:
Visual-spatial skills, important in higher math, science & mechanical work, have been reinforced since birth & are well developed; boys pull ahead of girls in these subjects



Play patterns impact cognitive & emotional function:

- Children develop the skills they will bring into the classroom through early play
- Spend more time talking, drawing, & role-playing in relational ways



Play patterns impact cognitive & emotional function:

- Children develop the skills they will bring into the classroom through early play
- Spend more time moving, targeting, building, & role-playing action heroes



Care giving magnifies differences:

- Engaged in more conversations (Leaper, Anderson, & Sanders, 1998)
- Discouraged from “gender-inappropriate” play (Lytton & Romney, 1991)



Care giving magnifies differences:

- Encouraged in more physical risk-taking (Morrongiello & Dawber, 2000)
- *Especially* discouraged from “gender-inappropriate” play (Lytton & Romney, 1991)



By age 2:

- Small, early bias contributes to toy preferences
- Prefer verbal/relational toys, especially dolls



By age 2:

- Small, early biases contribute to toy preferences
- Prefer more active toys (i.e. trucks & balls)

Small, early bias (due to prenatal hormone exposure/sex-specific gene expression):

- Talk one month earlier (Fenson et al., 1994).

Small, early biases (due to prenatal hormone exposure/sex-specific gene expression):

- Slightly more physically active (Campbell & Eaton, 1999)
- Appear more spatially aware (Quinn & Liben, 2008)



Figure 2. Explaining the Academic Gender Gap

Created based on information from the source: Eliot, L. (2010). The myth of pink and blue brains. *Educational Leadership*. 32-36.

Internalized Occupational Biases. In a study conducted by Care, Denas, and Brown (2007), a group of preschoolers were asked what it was they wanted to be when they grew up, and the careers they chose were assigned a label (*male, female, or neutral*), according to the nation's statistics for each occupation (Aina & Cameron, 2011). Parental occupations were also taken into consideration in the study. Several interesting findings emerged from the collected data: 1) children were biased in identifying with their same-gender parent; 2) boys rigidly aspired for male-dominated work, whereas girls' choices reflected all three of the career categories evenly; and 3) when asked which careers they would not wish to have, both boys and girls rejected traditionally female work more than they did male/neutral work. From these results the researchers posited that the children were aware of the lower status traditionally assigned to women's work, and that preschool girls had already accepted the view that men's work was more valuable and desirable by society's standards.

Promoting Equity in Early Childhood

Historical Context of Gender in ECE. The gender-differentiated education and care of young children has been documented in the literature as far back as ancient times. Hinitz and Hewes (2011) cite Plato as an example, who argued for segregated schooling of all boys and girls aged six years and older. In the medieval period through the late sixteenth century, Jewish children underwent gender-segregated schooling that was intended to prepare them for future, gender-differentiated work (Hinitz & Hewes, 2011). In the seventeenth century, the famous political and educational philosopher, John Locke, also advocated for gendered instruction and discipline of children. Further differentiation between the sexes was brought about during the United States' Victorian era, in which The Rational Dress Society was founded in 1881 and clothing became highly gender-typed (Hinitz & Hewes, 2011).

Colonial America instituted mixed-gender primary schooling that was available to all children, yet the education of boys and girls still differed, once again in the effort to prepare future men and women for distinct areas of work (Hinitz & Hewes, 2011). In the early 1900s, Margaret and Rachel McMillan of England, and Maria Montessori of Italy, spawned the movement for group programs serving younger children with their introduction of the first nursery schools in Europe (Hinitz & Hewes, 2011). These programs did not emphasize any differentiation along gender lines whatsoever; boys and girls shared equal access to materials and participated in the same sorts of activities (Hinitz & Hewes, 2011). When these early programs eventually made their way to the United States, children of both sexes continued to share equally in all parts of the curriculum (Hewes, 1998). In fact, until the 1960s, literature on the developing field of early care and education in the United States focuses primarily upon philosophy and issues surrounding curriculum, teacher preparation, materials, and facilities – with minimal references to gender (Hinitz & Hewes, 2011).

The decades of the 1960s and '70s brought about the feminist movement in the United States, during which time concerns about gender equality and the relevance of educational experiences resurfaced. Advocates for reform argued that schools used gender as a basis for tracking students and providing discrepant opportunities to boys and girls. The roles of women *and* men in society were changing, and discriminating based upon sex “limits the optimal growth of *all* children,” critics argued (McCune & Mathews 1976, 179-80, as cited in Hinitz & Hewes 2011). Change, especially when it involves deeply ingrained beliefs, attitudes, and cultural traditions, often takes a long time to be fully realized. In the following sections, we will examine some of our nation’s early strides toward gender equity in ECE; we will look at the Swedish National Curriculum, which is renowned for its gender-progressiveness; and finally, we will also

explore some of the key areas in which further advancements need to be made, and how to go about improving gender equity in the field.

Early strides toward equity. In 1974, many stereotypical beliefs regarding presumed differences between the sexes were debunked by research put forth by Maccoby and Jacklin (Hinitz & Hewes, 2011). Shortly thereafter, *Childhood Education* released an issue devoted to this topic: It was entitled, “Overcoming Sex-Role Stereotypes” (1976). The issue examined some of the ways in which schools perpetuate traditional sex roles, and offered suggestions for promoting non-stereotypical education by implementing changes in the physical environment, curricular content, as well as teaching and administrative practices (Cohen 1976, as cited in Hinitz & Hewes, 2011). Later that same year, key figures in the field (including Barbara Bowman, Monroe Cohen, and Selma Greenberg, among others) convened nationally for the first time at the Conference for Non-Sexist Early Childhood Education to discuss some of the important work that had been going on around the country in pursuit of greater equity within our nation’s schools (Hinitz & Hewes, 2011).

Directly following the conference proceedings and throughout the remainder of the 1970s, concerns about sex-role stereotyping continued to interest early childhood educators. A few more research initiatives were undertaken in further attempts to understand gender and promote equity between the sexes. Despite all of the child development literature that has been generated on these issues to-date, many barriers to equity have persisted into the present day. No longer restricted to the professional discourse, however, these issues have captured the attention of the broader culture and made their way into popular media (Hinitz & Hewes, 2011). Yet awareness alone is not enough to bring about real equity. By age two, toddlers have already internalized the gender stereotypes that are proliferated within their society. As they continue to

get older, children tend to imitate the gendered patterns of their given sex. Therefore, we must actively strive to broaden our existing definitions of gender, both individually and collectively. In so doing, we can empower boys and girls, men and women, to choose to adopt the best attributes of both sexes (Tyson, as cited in Hinitz & Hewes, 2011).

Role of Early Childhood Professionals. The literature points to four primary areas where early childhood educators can actively combat gender bias, stereotypes, and inequities in their everyday work. These areas include: teacher-student interactions, classroom materials, curriculum, and partnering with families. Each of these professional domains is described in greater detail below, and several practical strategies for promoting gender equity are discussed within the context of each domain.

Teacher-student interactions and instructional styles. Frawley (2005) proposes five strategies to combat gender bias in the classroom by improving teacher-student interactions. The first strategy has to do with teachers becoming mindful of their own behaviors. As has been discussed, biases can be subtle and frequently go unnoticed. The “hidden curriculum” refers to the biased teachings children receive in a variety of ways beyond direct instruction. Setting up a video camera in the classroom and then critically reviewing the footage in search of hidden curriculum can help teachers become aware of any inequitable practices and harmful attitudes that need to be addressed.

The second strategy has to do with the manner in which teachers provide feedback to students. As has been discussed, boys receive more overall attention in the classroom (both positive and negative) than do girls. When it comes to feedback, boys also receive more thoughtful, constructive, and encouraging responses from teachers, which enhances their self-confidence and overall performance. The girls, conversely, tend to receive cursory, less

academically useful feedback and often become invisible members of the classroom. To counter this trend, Frawley (2005) recommends that teachers increase their level of sensitivity and neutrality in providing feedback to students, so as to offer equal affirmation, encouragement, and assistance to both sexes.

The third strategy addresses how time is managed and distributed within the classroom. Sadker and Sadker (1994) found that teachers' average wait time after posing a question to the class is a mere nine-tenths of a second. Because boys are more likely to shout out answers and immediately raise their hands they end up monopolizing the class time. Girls require a longer wait period to mentally craft their responses before speaking, and so by simply waiting a few more seconds (i.e. three to five) teachers can greatly increase participation among female students, making the distribution of classroom time more equitable.

The fourth strategy involves language monitoring within the classroom. Words can have a powerful impact, especially upon impressionable children. Teachers' use of language is influential in the transmission of gendered expectations, and biases are often communicated through words and phrases. Examples include: *all men are created equal*, *freshmen*, *mother tongue*, and *ladylike*. It can be difficult to recognize biased language initially, since it is so deeply embedded within our society. Yet with a critical ear and enough practice teachers will grow comfortable in this task and can begin to replace biased speech with gender-neutral alternatives, such as (in reference to the previous examples): *we are all created equal*, *first-year student*, *native language*, and *courteous*.

The fifth and final strategy proposed by Frawley (2005) is appropriate role modeling. As Bandura's social cognitive theory acknowledges, role modeling is a prime mechanism through which children learn about "acceptable" behavior and emotional expression, and through which

they formulate key ideas and attitudes regarding gender. Teachers can therefore promote equity by exhibiting unbiased behavior in their day-to-day actions and use of appropriate language. For instance, teachers can serve as valuable role models by remaining gender-neutral in their evaluations of students' performances. They can challenge sexism openly, and have discussions with children about what constitutes fair or unfair treatment. Teachers can also help students reflect upon their own behaviors. In short, they must set a positive example.

Chick, Heilman-Houser, and Hunter (2002) propose a couple of supplementary strategies to add to the compilation thus far. They recommend maintaining a gender balance within the classroom, so that ample opportunities exist for boys and girls to engage with one another. Such a balance would also likely provide teachers with increased opportunities to openly challenge stereotypes with the children. In addition, teachers can positively reinforce students for venturing beyond the rigid traditional gender norms (i.e. when they engage in unconventional activities, select non-gender-typed toys to play with, and display a breadth of emotions and behaviors).

Frawley (2005) proposes three useful strategies for promoting gender equity that pertain to instructional styles as well. These revolve around working with others, student assessment, and sex-segregation. The first strategy entails catering to dominant male/female educational preferences while at the same time challenging all students to broaden the ways through which they engage in class. Girls have a proclivity for collaborative experiences, whereas boys often learn well in situations in which their peers challenge them. It is important to remember that all children benefit from many different approaches to learning, however, and teachers must facilitate this within their classrooms. By placing female students in leadership positions, for example, teachers can increase girls' confidence and reduce gender bias.

The second strategy makes assessment a key focus in promoting equity. In various curricular areas, males and females score differently. Boys excel in STEM subjects, do better on high-stakes exams, are scrutinized more in their academic performance, and experience more pressure to succeed than girls (AAUW, 1999; Grayson & Martin, 1984 as cited in Frawley 2005). Frawley (2005) reminds teachers of the importance of creating and utilizing assessment measures that pay equal attention to gender-role subjects. Furthermore, teachers must be objective and rely on the same benchmarks for boys and girls when evaluating student achievement, as opposed to making judgments based upon gender expectations. Boys and girls, in order to reach their full potential, must be held to the same set of high, attainable standards. For instance, teachers should not expect boys to outperform girls in STEM; nor should they expect girls to outperform boys in reading and writing.

The third and final strategy related to instructional styles concerns the propensity of young children to segregate themselves according to gender. Separating boys and girls in class (or allowing them to separate on their own) inadvertently sends the message that a significant educational discrepancy exists between the sexes. It would not be appropriate to separate children by other characteristics like physical appearance, ethnicity, or religion, after all. To promote gender equity, teachers should create mixed seating arrangements and assign boys and girls to be on the same team for class projects, contests, etc. Children may be given the freedom to form their own teams if they wish, but with the stipulation that all groups must include both genders. Changing groups often can also help desegregate children. By moving around the classroom and monitoring teamwork as it happens, teachers will be able to assist in any conflicts that might arise and facilitate equal participation among students.

Examining classroom materials. It is imperative that teachers become accustomed to critically evaluating classroom materials for gender bias and sexism, which can limit children's growth and development. Frawley (2005) offers helpful recommendations for promoting equity through the appropriate selection of books and use of computers, in particular. In regard to children's literature, teachers can look for books featuring characters and themes that venture beyond restrictive, traditional gender norms. For example, they can fill the library/reading area with stories about girls showing great courage, strength, and adventurous spirits, as well as stories about boys displaying sensitivity, cooperation, and nurturance. Such literature is empowering to children and can help them develop positive self-concepts and anti-bias attitudes (Derman-Sparks, 2001 as cited in Aina & Cameron, 2011). Additionally, whenever books are read that portray stereotypical characters and behaviors, teachers can mitigate the potentially harmful effects by pointing out any incidents of gender bias to their students, and facilitating an age-appropriate discussion of the issues so that children's understanding of gender is not limited by what they see or hear in biased stories.

In regard to classroom computer use, teachers can promote equity by first taking into consideration children's differing experiences, attitudes, and knowledge pertaining to technology. For the most part, boys have greater opportunities to use computers, develop more positive attitudes about them, and are generally more comfortable with the technology than are girls (AAUW, 1999; Murphy & Gipps, 1996). To counteract this gender gap, teachers should be careful to avoid sexist software that is either highly combative or targeted specifically to boys. They should also monitor the time children spend on computers, making sure that boys do not monopolize the technology and that girls are actively encouraged to develop computer skills.

Books and computers are not the only materials teachers need to be mindful about, however. As stated earlier, all sorts of toys and other items are gender-typed and often marketed using sexist or biased tactics. For this reason, teachers also need to critically evaluate the rest of the materials provided within the classroom environment. Toys are especially important to evaluate, since children in early childhood settings spend a large part of their days playing. Teachers may want to carefully consider the potential impact of toys, such as Barbie dolls and Hot Wheels, which are specifically marketed in a manner that promotes single-gender play. Such toys can either be removed from the classroom, in order to foster gender-neutrality and a welcoming environment for all children, or teachers can explicitly discuss these gender-typed toys with their students, making certain they understand that both boys and girls are able to play with all of the available toys.

Selecting and implementing curriculum. There are many different strategies to implement anti-bias curriculum that promotes gender equity in early childhood. One way is for teachers to practice self-evaluation and invite fellow staff to observe in their classrooms, so as to ensure that curriculum is in fact equitable (Evans, 1998 as cited in Chick, Heilman-Houser & Hunter, 2002). Another curriculum-based strategy is to facilitate mixed-gender play and opportunities for mixed-gender teamwork (Henkin, 1998 as cited in Chick, Heilman-Houser & Hunter, 2002). Providing girls with teacher-directed time in block/building centers and boys with teacher-directed time in housekeeping/cooking areas are other useful strategies for promoting equity. Teachers can also create positive changes by engaging boys in more one-on-one conversations, singing with them, reading stories and other texts together, etc., in order to foster a love of language and literacy that will allow them to develop important skills in these areas. To address the gender gap in writing, teachers can promote the rudimentary skills of boys

by encouraging them to create marks on paper or other surfaces using crayons, markers, charcoal, paint, etc., which assists in the formation of symbolic thought and provides them with fine-motor practice (Eliot, 2010).

A strategy that could benefit all children is the foundational instruction of spatial awareness and mechanical skills in preschool. These areas are significant for future learning, especially in mathematics and science, but are often overlooked (Eliot, 2010). Instruction would need to be developmentally appropriate for preschoolers, but this could be achieved by making learning play-based, through the use of puzzles, target games, building projects, and the like, which would help children to begin thinking in three-dimensional terms (Eliot, 2010). Finally, if we want children to develop positive attitudes about school and learning (and of course we do!), then we must remember the important contribution of Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences (1993; 2006) and appreciate the entire range of skills and abilities exhibited by students. Unfortunately, some important domains for growth and learning, like the creative arts and kinesthetic functioning, have fallen by the wayside. However, by expanding the scope of abilities that are taught and affirmed by teachers, we can empower more children to feel successful and optimistic in school (Eliot, 2010).

Case Study: The Swedish National Curriculum. Sweden is a nation that is renowned for its gender-progressive ideals and educational initiatives. The Swedish National Curriculum for the Preschool (referring to early childhood settings of all kinds serving young children ages 1-5 years) put forth by the Ministry of Education and Science, a government agency that is responsible for the nation's entire preschool- to university-level education system, is founded on key democratic values such as personal freedom and integrity, the equal worth of all people, gender equity, and solidarity with vulnerable populations (Sandberg & Arlemalm-Hagser, 2011).

In fact, gender equity is one of the three core values (along with children's rights and education for sustainable development) that are explicitly affirmed in the Preschool Curriculum. *Equity* indicates that boys and girls are to be afforded "the same opportunities to develop and explore their abilities and interests without limitations imposed by stereotyped gender roles and patterns" (Sandberg & Arlemalm-Hagser, 2011, p. 46). The Curriculum also stipulates early childhood professionals' responsibility regarding the enactment of equity within their settings; specifically, they must "counteract traditional gender patterns and gender roles" (Sandberg & Arlemalm-Hagser, 2011, p. 46). As can be inferred by the Curriculum's guiding values, a great emphasis is placed upon respect for the child. Children are perceived as active, competent, knowledgeable, and skilled individuals equipped with unique experiences and interests that ought to inform daily activities within the ECE setting (Sandberg & Arlemalm-Hagser, 2011).

In addition to having a national framework that is based upon progressive values, a respectful and positive attitude toward children, and a concern for equity, the field of early childhood education in general is very much professionalized in Sweden. There is a high level of responsibility on the part of the local government for the care and education of young children. In terms of professional qualifications, preschool staff members fall into one of two distinct categories: 1) preschool teachers, who possess university degrees, or 2) day care attendants, who possess high school diplomas (Sandberg & Arlemalm-Hagser, 2011). The Swedish National Curriculum indeed makes a great case study for the promotion of gender equity in ECE because of the commendable framework it offers, the local/national interest and investments it generates, as well as the level of professionalism associated with it. However, the Curriculum is also an important case study because research into its gender-progressive

initiatives reveals precisely how challenging it is to actually *promote* and *achieve* equity in everyday practice, as we will explore next.

In the late 1990s, the Swedish Government discovered that rather than *promoting gender equity*, early childhood professionals were in fact *reinforcing traditional gender norms* in a variety of ways when working with young children; thus it was proven much more difficult than expected to live up to the values prescribed within the National Curriculum (Sandberg & Arlemalm-Hagser, 2011). In response, the Government launched a special teacher education program in 2002 devoted entirely to issues pertaining to gender and equity. The program was designed to equip preschool teachers with specific knowledge about the different theories of gender development, as well as a variety of strategies to improve the level of quality within the field. In the following year, the Government went a step further, constituting the “Delegation for Equality in Preschool,” which provided funding for an array of equality projects in ECE settings throughout Sweden (Sandberg & Arlemalm-Hagser, 2011, p. 46). During this time, the National Agency for Education (2004) conducted the first evaluation of the Preschool Curriculum, which revealed that work towards gender equity was rarely reported among ECE teachers and preschool directors. This finding, in turn, prompted an official debate: The “General Guidelines and Comments on Quality in Preschool,” which made explicit “the need for a gender perspective in the everyday work of the preschools... ‘It is important that preschool staffs are actively working for equality between girls and boys.’” (National Agency for Education, 2005, p. 29, as cited in Sandberg & Arlemalm-Hagser, 2011, p. 46).

In sum, the complex task of promoting gender equity is an ongoing one in the field of early childhood education, even in regions of the world where the issue itself is much more visible and explicitly pursued. True equity requires an unyielding commitment to the cause that

is shared by many and who actively works together to promote it: ECE teachers, administrators, and families – at the very least – must join forces. Next, we will explore the early childhood educator's role in working with families, as well as how the ECE field can better prepare its teachers, and the unique role of ECE administrators.

Working with families. Early childhood educators have a unique opportunity to build meaningful relationships with families and to work with parents, in particular, toward the mutual goal of supporting children's optimal growth and development. It is important to remember that gendered learning and identity formation begins for young children within their home environments. Teachers must also bear in mind that family dynamics, including roles and relationships, are often heavily influenced by gender norms (Morrow, 2006 as cited in Aina & Cameron, 2011). In partnering with families, there are several ways that ECE teachers can raise awareness of gender issues and assist in establishing a joint effort to promote equity. For example, teachers can serve as excellent role models for anti-bias in their behavior and speech; they can offer direct coaching and support to parents; and they can conduct ongoing workshops to provide further education and support for families about key gender-related issues. It is important that teachers are aware of cultural differences that might relate to gender issues, however, and that they maintain respect for every family at all times, while simultaneously striving to promote equity between the sexes.

The need for increased teacher education. In a previous section, the fact that ECE is prevalent in the lives of children five years of age and younger was established. It has also been established that early educators are highly influential in a variety of different ways, including the nature of interactions they have with their students, pedagogical practices, personal attitudes and beliefs, the type of assessment measures they use, the expectations they have for their students,

the specific materials they provide, the manner in which they design their classroom environments, and so on. Undoubtedly, ECE teachers play an invaluable role in their service to children and families every single day. Therefore, it is vital that we equip these invaluable professionals with sufficient education and training to be able to promote equitable teaching and learning. In short, we must invest in those who invest in children!

Surprisingly, data from a United States national survey reveals that aspiring teachers receive minimal to no preparation whatsoever regarding gender issues, or the unique role of early educators in promoting equity (Langford, 2006; Sadker, et al., 2007; Sandholtz & Sandholtz, 2010 as cited in Aina & Cameron, 2011). As a result, novice teachers often do not realize that the materials they provide or the language and behaviors they exhibit can inhibit equitable learning among their students (Aina & Cameron, 2011). A lack of adequate preparation means that we are failing our teachers, and thereby failing the young children in their care. We must empower early educators by helping them to become aware of gender issues and to develop the skills they need in order to make positive changes in four central domains: use of materials, curriculum, interaction patterns, and pedagogical practices (Aina & Cameron, 2011). The sooner we can elevate new teachers by giving them the necessary information and tools, the sooner they can help all children develop to their full potential.

The need for greater male involvement. Historically, there has been a considerable need for greater male involvement in the ECE profession – a need that has persisted into the present. In fact, the number of men teaching in elementary schools has steadily declined even over the last thirty-five years (Eliot, 2010). Both boys and girls stand to benefit from positive and nurturing male role models. Just as we want to maintain a gender balance among the children in every classroom, ideally there would be a greater gender balance among ECE

teachers and staff as well. Another way to increase male involvement within preschool and elementary classrooms is by having more fathers and other male role models visit. This would encourage men to engage with the students directly, and to take an active role in supporting the children's development and learning.

It is important to discuss some of the factors that contribute to the shortage of men in the field of early childhood education, which include low wages, lack of professional prestige, gender stereotypes, homophobia, and the fear of being subjected to suspicion and false accusations of abuse (Johnson, 2011 as cited in Jacobson, 2011). Clearly there needs to be a shift in the cultural paradigm that has propagated these deterrents for over a century in our country. Transforming the dominant society's view of early education is one important step. The ECE field needs to be recognized as a legitimate profession, and its teachers as skilled intellectuals who play a vital role in the growth and welfare of our nation's children. Accordingly, there needs to be greater compensation for this vital role. Harmful myths against men who choose to work with young children must also be dispelled, which demands more education for ECE professionals, the families they serve, and the public at large. Finally, workers in the ECE field must actively confront and combat both sexism and homophobia, which contribute in large part to the gender bias that exists, and are sadly still rampant in many regions of our country and the rest of the world. By standing against prejudice and discrimination, modeling respect and acceptance for all kinds of people, broadening our definitions of masculinity and femininity, and professionalizing careers in early childhood, we will ultimately be paving the way for more men to enter the field, in addition to promoting positive values in our everyday work with young children and families.

Administrators as agents of change. Administrators are in a unique position to assist in the promotion of gender equity in several key ways. In regard to the aforementioned goal of increased male involvement in ECE, administrators can help by recruiting and hiring more men to be teachers at their sites. They can work to maintain the desired gender balance among children who are enrolled in their programs, and ideally to maintain a gender balance in each classroom as well. Administrators can also coordinate ongoing staff trainings and family seminars to empower those who work with and care for young children to be able to neutralize gender stereotypes and implement an anti-bias curriculum (Aina & Cameron, 2011). Finally, administrators can facilitate an ongoing process of reflection and evaluation that takes gender issues into consideration by encouraging teachers to think about the possible ways they might relate to boys and girls differently. This level of awareness and introspection can help teachers to monitor their own behavior, language, and beliefs concerning gender, which in turn can help them to eliminate any unintended biases that can create barriers to equity (Aina & Cameron, 2011).

A Final Reflection and Next Steps

Our exploration into the topic of gender development and equity in early childhood is nearing the end. Together we have reviewed gender's theoretical origins and critiqued each contrasting viewpoint. We have examined the typical developmental sequence that young children, ages 0-8 years, undergo in the construction of their gender identities. We have explored the various factors that influence children's gendered knowledge and experiences. We have delved into the specific gender-related concerns resulting from stereotypes and inequities that often appear in early childhood. Finally, we have looked into many of the different strategies that early childhood professionals can implement to promote gender equity in their

work with young children and families. The common themes that emerged from among the literature include a recognition of the important social and cultural dimensions associated with gender issues, a concern for the welfare of all children, and a desire to expand opportunities for boys and girls alike, so that no child is limited in his/her potential simply because of the sex they were assigned at birth.

Gaps within the existing literature, and potential areas for future research, include a relatively sparse amount of information that focuses upon different cultural dynamics pertaining to gender development and related issues during the period of early childhood. Another major gap, which was revealed by the literature, is the insufficient education and training that early childhood professionals receive on the topic of gender in teacher preparation programs. It is this latter gap, in particular, that I aim to address in my own “next steps.” The overarching argument I set out to make in this review is that by expanding the collective understanding of gender development, establishing a critical lens with which to examine gender-related issues, and adopting a proactive stance in the promotion of equity, the entire early childhood community can band together to improve the lives of children by honoring each child’s uniqueness and supporting his/her optimal growth and development. Therefore, in order to bridge the gap and hopefully fulfill the ambition embedded within my argument, I will be using what I have learned over the course of writing this review to create a handbook that is targeted for early childhood professionals and will provide them with the necessary information and tools to become proactive agents in the pursuit of greater gender equity within the field.

Chapter III

Procedure

Bringing the idea of my project into fruition was an intensive process that required many critical steps, all of which can be divided into three distinct parts: (1) reviewing the literature, (2) creating the handbook, and (3) writing this thesis project paper. The details involved in each part of the process are discussed below.

Part I: Reviewing the Literature

In order to create a handbook that could assist early educators in promoting greater gender equity in their everyday work with young children and families, it was necessary that I first conduct an extensive review of the existing literature on gender issues during the early childhood years, which encompasses the ages of 0-8. I devoted the better part of a year to this initial task of researching and composing the literature review. First, I sought to accumulate as many scholarly peer reviewed journal articles I could locate, using the EBSCO and ERIC databases from Sonoma State University's online library and research guides. I used key terms such as *gender development*, *gender issues*, *gender equity*, *gender gaps*, *early childhood*, *early education*, *culture and gender*, *ethnicity and gender*, etc., to narrow my search results so that they would align as closely as possible with the scope of my project.

Once I had amassed an abundance of articles related to my topic, I printed out each one and proceeded to read, highlight, and annotate them. I created a form that I would fill out and attach to the articles after having reviewed them (please see Appendix A). This form enabled me to quickly recall the gist of each article that I had read, including its purpose, central inquiries, methodology/procedure, main findings, credibility, limitations, applicability to my project, and so on, which proved to be quite useful when it was time to write the literature review. I then

compiled all of the articles into a four-inch binder and organized them by subtopics (i.e. gender theories, developmental patterns, children's perceptions of gender-related issues, ethnic considerations, and professional development for early childhood educators). I also composed a table of contents for the binder so that I could readily locate every article that I needed to revisit while writing the review.

In addition to online articles, I reviewed several academic texts that had previously broached the subject of gender in early childhood, including excerpts from: *The Developing Person through Childhood and Adolescence* (Berger, 2003), *Discovering Child Development* (Martin & Fabes, 2006), *Leading Anti-Bias Early Childhood Programs* (Derman-Sparks, LeeKeenan, & Nimmo, 2015), *Perspectives on Gender in Early Childhood* (Jacobson, 2011), and *Rethinking Gender in Early Childhood Education* (MacNaughton, 2000). Although the majority of my literature review was devoted to the plethora of articles I had found, the books were of special interest to me since the ultimate goal of my project was to produce an informative yet practical handbook for early educators. (More information about how these books informed my project is provided in Part II: Creating the Handbook.)

Part II: Creating the Handbook

Upon conducting a thorough literature review on my topic, I was ready to begin developing the actual project itself: a print resource for teachers that I entitled, *Promoting Gender Equity: A Handbook for Early Educators*. As stated above, the books that I had reviewed were especially useful to me in this phase of the thesis project. One of the ways they helped me was in determining how I wanted to structure the handbook. Having seen what was previously done, I knew I wanted to create something substantially different. The majority of the existing print resources, which I compared to each other as well as my own growing vision, were

comprised of college textbooks and books that were written in a style similar to many novels. It became apparent to me that I did not wish to follow either of these formats, which felt too academic and impractical for my target audience. However, I liked the structure and flow of *Leading Anti-Bias Early Childhood Programs* (Derman-Sparks, LeeKeenan, & Nimmo, 2015) – perhaps because this book is a guide, which is what I was endeavoring to create. I specifically drew upon its interactive nature as well as its use of bulleted sections and charts, all of which aid in the guide’s practicality and readability. In an effort to make my own handbook even more practical and easy to digest, I differentiated it from the aforementioned guide by consistently concluding each section with a set of discussion questions and suggestions for further reading. This stimulates readers to grapple with the material as they progress through the handbook (part of its interactive nature), and points them in the right direction to find additional information that can expand their evolving knowledge base.

After achieving a general sense of the desired nature and structure of my handbook, I set about to clarify my precise objectives in writing it. I referred to my rather robust literature review and asked myself the following key questions: *What are the nuts-and-bolts embedded within that early educators ought to know about gender? What information could best support them in their everyday work to promote equitable classrooms and learning experiences for children?* Through this reflection, I honed in on my central objectives for the handbook, which were as follows: to inform teachers on the theoretical origins of gender; to dispel the popular myth that boys and girls are fundamentally different in nature; to deepen teachers’ understanding of normal gender development in young children, ages 0-8; to identify some of the common gender-related issues of early childhood, encourage teachers to think critically about these issues, and discuss specific strategies for addressing them in ECE settings; and finally, to assist teachers

in fostering strong relationships and partnerships with the parents of their students, so that home and school can work together in supporting children's gender development and formation of positive gender identities. It was these main objectives that ultimately determined the different sections to be included within the handbook. Since it was also of high import to me that readers retain and make use of the information presented, I included a section at the end containing teacher exercises that draw upon all of the material covered. The purpose of these exercises, and the discussion questions throughout, is threefold: (1) they serve as a cumulative review of the handbook, (2) they stimulate critical thinking around complex gender issues, and (3) they encourage teachers to apply their newfound knowledge into their everyday work, while allowing them to first practice this important application within the no-stakes context of hypothetical scenarios. I rounded out the handbook with an introductory section at the beginning, and a glossary of terms and compilation of supplemental resources at the end.

Part III: Writing my Thesis Project Paper

I wrote my entire thesis project paper over the course of three semesters in the Early Childhood Education Master's Program at Sonoma State University. I first began writing the paper during the Fall 2015 term in the course EDUC 571: Research Paradigms. At the time, I had just settled upon my topic and was eager to dive into the literature review. I spent this semester accumulating most of the research articles and books that I used, annotating them, and writing the initial draft of my review (Chapter II). After familiarizing myself with the existing literature and before I began to write, I created an initial outline for the review in order to organize my own thoughts as well as the material that I needed to cover (please see Appendix B). I used the Purdue OWL website (<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/>), an online writing lab, as a resource to assist me in writing a systematic and comprehensive literature review. Dr. Edward

Lyon, my professor for EDUC 571, provided me with some helpful feedback and suggestions for ways in which I could strengthen my initial draft. In August and September of 2016, when I returned to this part of my paper, I made the edits Dr. Lyon suggested, which primarily entailed tightening my overall argument, and removing myself from the writing to make it less personal and more objective.

During the Spring 2016 semester, I took EDCT 586: Teaching and Learning in the Classroom, with Dr. Karen Grady. The final assignment in this class was to write a literature review based upon either an education-based study that I conducted, or alternatively, upon extensive library-based research. I opted for the latter and was granted permission to continue building upon my literature review for my culminating thesis project in the master's program. I seized the opportunity to write the section on promoting gender equity in early childhood (which at that time was grossly underdeveloped). At the end of the semester I received notes from Dr. Grady on this particular section, which I edited in August and September of 2016 along with the rest of my paper.

During the Fall 2016 semester I finalized my entire thesis project paper while simultaneously enrolled in EDUC 598: Developing a Thesis Project, and EDUC 599: Supervised Research for the Thesis Project. In the former course, I received instruction on how to compose each chapter of the paper. Week by week, I wrote the introduction (chapter I), procedure (chapter III), results (chapter IV), and conclusion (chapter V). After initially writing a section I would submit it to my professor, Dr. Charles Elster, who also happened to be one of my thesis committee members (which made the course even more helpful for me). While I began writing the next chapter, he would be critiquing the one I had just submitted and return it to me in a prompt fashion so that I could make any necessary changes to it. At the very same time, I was

working closely alongside my committee chairperson, Dr. Johanna Filp-Hanke, in EDUC 599. I submitted each chapter of the paper to her as well, going back and revising them according to the thoughtful feedback she provided. Together, both professors gave me the guidance, encouragement, and support I needed to complete a quality thesis project paper.

In addition to the human scaffolding that I received, Dr. Elster introduced the School of Education Master of Arts Degree Handbook and official SSU Thesis Guidelines in EDUC 598 on the first day of class, which he affectionately and humorously referred to as my “Old and New Testaments” for writing the thesis! I faithfully consulted both of these guides throughout the Fall 2016 semester as I finalized my paper. The APA Manual was another trusty resource that I consulted to ensure my thesis adhered to proper APA format. Finally, one of the earliest assignments in EDUC 598 was to visit the SSU library and check out several published theses that had been authored by previous graduate students. I often referred to these completed theses for inspiration and clarification as I wrote my own project paper, especially the two I had found that included teacher handbooks. Although they were different from the handbook I created, they were nonetheless useful in helping me to structure and write my paper, particularly chapter IV (the results section).

Chapter IV

Results

The resource I created, *Promoting Gender Equity: A Handbook for Early Educators*, constitutes my “results” for the thesis project and can be found in Appendix C; what follows here is simply an overview. The handbook is seventy pages in length and is divided into eight chapters. It begins with a brief introduction and some background information on gender theory (chapters I and II) so that readers can achieve a fundamental understanding of how children become gendered beings. While in the process of writing, I revisited my literature review, which discusses a total of seven different theoretical perspectives, and made the decision to include three of these in the handbook based upon their validity and perceived usefulness to early educators. The perspectives that were included are social cognitive theory, queer theory, and gender schema theory. Social cognitive theory offers a comprehensive explanation of gender, including its origin and developmental mechanisms; queer theory adds an important social justice dimension to the subject by emphasizing the relationship between traditional gender norms, homophobia, and sexism; finally, gender schema theory explains the formation of gender biases in human thought processes that begins in early childhood. Presented together in the handbook, these theories provide teachers with a well-rounded picture of how male and female infants become gendered as they grow, and explicitly identify the often-subconscious influences that shape society’s expectations for “appropriate” gender conduct.

The next section (chapter III) debunks the myth that male and female brains are “wired” differently from birth, and explains how academic gender gaps that manifest in adolescence actually grow over the course of early- to- middle childhood, largely as a product of socialization and the contrasting experiences of boys and girls. Chapter IV outlines the typical sequence of

gender development that young children undergo in the first eight years of life. Combined, these two sections of the handbook assist teachers in teasing apart fact from fiction and the dual forces of nature and nurture as they relate to gender in early childhood. They also enable teachers to anticipate impending stages in their students' gender development. By knowing what to expect in advance, teachers may be better prepared to help children navigate the different stages and transitional periods more effectively.

The second half of the handbook focuses specifically upon gender issues in the field of early childhood education. Chapter V begins with a discussion of the consequences of gender stereotypes and bias in relation to young children's social-emotional development, behavior, selection of toys and activities, as well as their educational experiences and outcomes. What comes next is a proactive discussion about how teachers can learn to recognize and address human bias head on, limiting these negative consequences in the lives of the children they teach. A gender bias self-check tool is provided to help elevate teachers' level of personal awareness, and to assist them in evaluating their current attitudes and beliefs about gender, which (for better or worse) underlie their professional practices. The next section identifies some of the most common gender-related issues in the field, and offers practical strategies for teachers to confront these issues in a manner that promotes greater gender equity among children. The issues are grouped into the following categories: (1) Teaching, Assessment, and Socialization in School, (2) Examining Classroom Materials, and (3) Curriculum and Environmental Set-Up. Finally, this chapter concludes with another tool for teachers, the Equitable Classroom Checklist, so that teachers can take an inventory of how equitable their classrooms currently are with respect to the aforementioned domains, as well as identify the specific areas that are in need of improvement.

Chapter VI is devoted to the topic of men working in early childhood education. It addresses the longstanding shortage of male teachers and caregivers, the unique deterrents and obstacles faced by men who are interested in these professions, as well as some key changes that can be made in a much-needed effort to recruit, hire, and retain more men in the field. Special attention is paid to the needs, wishes, and concerns of male colleagues about their experiences in a non-traditional, female-dominated line of work. There is also a section called “Myth vs. Reality,” in which five of the most common (and prejudiced) myths about men who work with young children are debunked. In this section fiction is replaced with facts, which female teachers and administrators can use to educate others while advocating on behalf of their male counterparts.

The focus of chapter VII is on early educators working in conjunction with families to support the positive development of young children’s gender identities and to resolve gender issues constructively as they arise. The chapter begins by underscoring the importance of establishing warm, productive partnerships with families, and offers teachers a few suggestions on how they can about this vital task. Since families are highly diverse and gender is, to a large extent, a social construct that is subject to cultural variations, a discussion of culture and its impact upon gender comes next. Finally, in anticipation of the possible disputes that can occur between teachers and families as a result of contrasting views on gender, the chapter ends with a section on conflict management. Derman-Sparks’ (2013a) approach to conflict resolution, the *acknowledge, ask, and adapt* method, is recommended and summarized. Recognizing when teachers should seek outside support during a dispute with a particular family, and where they can turn for it, is also discussed.

The end of the handbook, chapter VIII, contains a total of six teacher exercises (one for each of the chapters II-VII). The exercises are varied and include a fill in the blank activity on gender theory, an activity for teachers to design their own gender equitable early learning environment, a gender-neutral language activity, a teacher goals chart, a pop-quiz about men in ECE, and a curriculum activity that gets families involved in the study of gender issues in early childhood. This final chapter is followed by a glossary of terms and a compilation of resources for children, teachers, and families. The resources include a list of children's books relating to the subject of gender (i.e. gender as a spectrum, psychological androgyny, stereotypes/biases, etc.) and a list of websites for teachers/caregivers that address developmental differences between boys and girls, culture and diversity, anti-bias education, and how to select gender-conscious literature for children.

Chapter V

Conclusion

This thesis project began with a personal interest in gender development and the wish that all children be encouraged to express themselves wholly, develop to their fullest potentials, feel proud of who they are as unique individuals, and to respect the uniqueness of others. Empirical evidence that gender bias, stereotypes, and inequities exist within early childhood settings abounds, and findings from an array of scientific research studies corroborate the empirical data (Sommers, 2000; Chick, Heilman-Houser, & Hunter, 2002; Kindlon & Thompson, 2002; Frawley, 2005; Zaman, 2007; Ebach, et al., 2009; Eliot, 2010; Aina & Cameron, 2011; Hinitz & Hewes, 2011). Sadly, this troubling reality makes it more difficult for early educators to support children in their optimal growth and development, as the effects of gender are far-reaching. Gender, in a manner similar to culture, plays a large role in children's physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development.

When it comes to gender, most teachers have had a lifetime of exposure to the status quo (the binary system of masculinity and femininity that is the norm among Western societies) and little to no education or professional training on the social and cultural origins of gender, the entire spectrum of gender identities that exists, psychological androgyny, and so on. Further complicating the problem is the fact that during the early years, children quite naturally opt to play with gender-typed toys, engage in gender-typed activities, and segregate themselves according to gender. However just because something is considered to be a "natural" (i.e. developmental) phenomenon, does not necessarily mean that it ought to be dismissed or encouraged by adults. Biting also occurs quite naturally in early childhood, for example, but caregivers do not allow a toddler to gnaw on a playmate's arm because s/he is teething, curious,

or unable to emotionally self-regulate in the moment. Young children need caregivers who can understand the roots of their behaviors, their developmental strengths and liabilities, and who can provide them with the appropriate structure, support, and loving guidance necessary for them to be able to thrive.

To address the need for increased teacher education and training on the subject of gender in early childhood, I created a handbook specifically for ECE teachers. Some of the topics presented within the handbook include: gender theory and development, cultural differences, the negative consequences of gender bias and stereotyping, and working with families. Common gender issues in ECE settings are also identified, and specific strategies are provided that will enable teachers to constructively confront these issues in the pursuit of greater gender equity within their classrooms. The entire handbook was designed to be an interactive resource for teachers. Each chapter is followed by a set of discussion questions, which is meant to encourage readers to grapple with the information presented, stimulate their critical thinking, and offer opportunities for them to practice applying key concepts to their work with young children. The final chapter is devoted to six teacher exercises that draw upon all of the material covered. It is my sincere hope that the handbook I created can serve to enrich teachers' understanding of "normal" gender development in young children, broaden their existing conceptions of gender, and equip them with the necessary tools to think critically about gender issues and to promote equitable learning experiences for their students.

There are several important limitations to my project that warrant attention. Firstly, it focuses primarily upon gender development and gender issues that are typical among dominant Western societies, with the section on cultural variations being relatively small. Secondly, my project completely omits any sort of discussion about religion and its impact upon gendered

beliefs, values, and behavioral standards. Thirdly, a detailed description of the physical, cognitive, and social-emotional similarities and differences between the sexes was included in my thesis project paper, but was left out of the teacher handbook due to the limited space and time available to complete my project. Regarding future directions for this project, I would love to one day return to it and address the aforementioned limitations by: (1) further researching the cultural and religious influences upon gender; (2) strengthening the section on cultural variations in my handbook, and adding a section on the impact of religion; and (3) incorporating information about the similarities and differences between young boys and girls into the handbook. In terms of disseminating my project in the future, I would love to submit it to NAEYC in the hopes of getting *Promoting Gender Equity: A Handbook for Early Educators* published. In the more immediate future, I plan to submit a proposal to the Sonoma County Early Learners Conference planning committee requesting to present my work at the next Early Learners Conference, which is held annually for local ECE professionals and students of child development and early education.

From start to finish, my journey in developing this thesis project and writing the teacher handbook has challenged me in ways that facilitated my professional growth. Researching a topic in great length, searching for some larger meaning and application for all of the knowledge pooled, and creating a resource for early childhood educators that can serve to promote their ongoing growth within the field has been at times painstaking, as well as deeply rewarding. The experience has given me a great deal of confidence in my abilities and sense of determination. Yet it has also taught me the importance of remaining humble and open about the fact that there will always be a wealth of knowledge within my chosen discipline that I do not possess, and which no degree can ever change. Appreciating this fact on a much deeper level has helped me

to understand what expertise truly means. Far from being a fixed state, or merely some prestigious word associated with those who possess advanced degrees, expertise is the continuous pursuit of knowledge and experience that ensures a person remains a relevant source of authority within his/her respective discipline. Moving forward in my professional life, I will strive to maintain this rather curious balance of confidence and humility that the thesis project has instilled in me.

Glossary

Affiliative play: Play that is characterized by responsive, supportive, and warm interactions. Mothers often engage in this type of play with their children.

Bioecological systems theory: Urie Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development that takes into account the biological organism's influence upon its own development, as well as the influence of various external environments, interactions between these environments, cultural and historical contexts, and the influence of chronological time across the lifespan.

Biological theories: Theories that explain gender primarily in terms of human nature/genetics.

Cognitive developmental theory: Lawrence Kohlberg's theory that explains gender in terms of children's achievement of gender constancy, subsequent delight in their firmly established gender identities, and concerted efforts to behave in ways that affirm and reward these identities.

Electra complex: A Freudian idea that young girls are attracted to their fathers and feel jealousy/hostility toward their mothers.

Gender: 1) The state of being male or female, usually in regards to social and cultural prescriptions as opposed to biological differences; 2) A person's biological sex.

Gender constancy: The understanding that one's identity as male or female is fixed, which usually develops between the ages of four and six years.

Gender identity: The ability to label oneself and others as male or female, which usually develops between 18-24 months of age.

Gender performativity: The idea that gender-typed behavior is a performance of sorts – a way in which to “act out” one's identity as male or female. (Derived from queer theory.)

Gender role: A set of personal and behavioral attributes, endorsed and reinforced by the dominant society, which is prescribed to people based upon their sex.

Gender schema theory: Theory that explains gender in terms of the mental representations children form, based upon interactions with their environments, about what is appropriate (or not) for their biological sex. Once children form their gender identities they immediately begin to develop biases, and seek to behave in ways that they believe are deemed appropriate for them.

Gender schematic processing: Similar to information processing, gender schematic processing uses a computer metaphor to explain the inner workings of the brain including human thought processes. In this case, it speaks specifically to the input and output of gender-related information. Example: A child comes across a toy, draws upon his/her pre-existing knowledge, experiences, and beliefs to determine whether this is a “boy toy” or “girl toy”, and responds by either playing with the toy or rejecting it based upon its perceived appropriateness for his/her biological sex. Gender stereotypes and biases are implicit.

Gender stereotype: An overgeneralization about the personal and behavioral attributes of males and females. Gender stereotypes are common in everyday life, and are heavily prevalent in the mass media. Gender stereotypes restrict the sorts of opportunities that are available to each sex, and can impede individual development.

Heteronormativity: The dominant societal assumption that everyone is – or ought to be – heterosexual. (Derived from queer theory.)

Heterosexual matrix: Concept that refers to the way in which gender stereotypical behaviors occur within the interrelated contexts of gender (masculinity and femininity) and sexuality (heterosexuality and homosexuality). (Derived from queer theory.)

Hidden curriculum: The biased teachings that children receive in a variety of ways other than through direct instruction.

Information processing: Theory that uses a computer metaphor to explain human brain functioning from sensory intake, through neural connections, reactions, and the retrieval of stored memories, to information output.

Multiple intelligences theory: Howard Gardner’s theory that human intelligence exists in many different forms, each of which is universal, associated with specific regions of the brain, and contributes to our abilities to either solve problems or create products of cultural significance. These distinct intelligences include *musical, bodily-kinesthetic, logical-mathematical, linguistic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist intelligence*. Gardner asserts that all people possess every intelligence in varying degrees and combinations that are unique to the individual.

Oedipus complex: A Freudian idea that young boys are attracted to their mothers and feel jealousy/hostility toward their fathers.

Psychoanalytic theory: Sigmund Freud’s theory that explains gender in terms of children adopting the masculine and feminine traits of their parents as a way of reconciling psychological crises (Oedipus/Electra complexes).

Queer theory: An emergent theory that explains gender primarily in terms of socially prescribed heterosexual norms, expectations, and standards. It asserts that no “normal” expression of gender exists, and that gender is simply a way of “performing”/acting out one’s maleness/femaleness.

Rapport talk: Speech that fosters connections, negotiations, and is relationship oriented. Females tend to possess an affinity for this type of speech.

Report talk: Speech that serves the explicit purpose of transmitting information. Males tend to possess an affinity for this type of speech.

Social cognitive theory: Albert Bandura's theory that explains gender in terms of the complex, synergistic effects of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences upon the individual.

Sociocultural theory: Lev Vygotsky's theory of human development that emphasizes the roles of culture, language, auxiliary tools, and social interaction in the learning process.

Sociological theories: Theories that explain gender primarily in terms of socialization processes/nurture.

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Appendix A
Article Review Form

ARTICLE:

APA REFERENCE:

PURPOSE OF STUDY / ARTICLE (including research questions):

MAIN FINDINGS / CONCLUSIONS / RECOMMENDATIONS:

Appendix B

Literature Review Outline

1. Introduction Paragraph

a. See OWL guidelines

b. Ideas to include:

- i. Creative & compelling way to hook the reader (anecdotes?)
- ii. Why care about gender issues in EC?
- iii. Biological differences/similarities between sexes (more diversity within each group than between)
- iv. Historical overview of perspectives on gender leading up to present day
- v. Make my argument/thesis explicit!!!!

2. Body Sections

a. See OWL guidelines

b. Subtopics:

i. Gender dev theories & Patterns of dev

1. Psychoanalytic
2. Cognitive Developmental
3. Gender Schema
4. Biological
5. Sociological
6. Social Cognitive
7. Queer

8. Describe the typical developmental sequence of gender identity/differentiation

a. Include differences/similarities between boys & girls

- ii. Factors that influence gender identity & biases/ stereotypes (media, family, peers, environment, etc.)
- iii. Impact on boys vs. Impact on girls
- iv. Ethnicity and gender
- v. Promoting gender equity in early childhood (role of teachers, admin, parents & other caregivers)

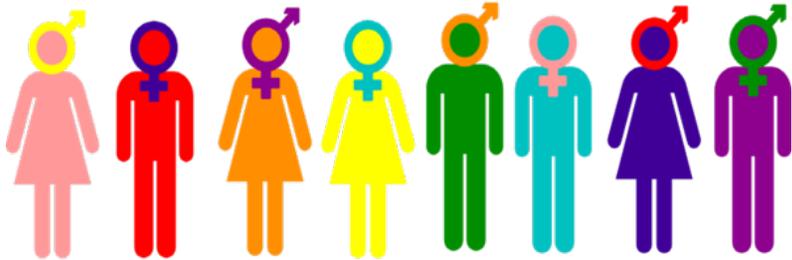
3. Conclusion

- a. **See OWL guidelines**
 - b. Summarize
 - c. Future directions for research, policy, practice
 - d. Connect LIT REV to my FINAL THESIS (how will I use this info/review to assist me with my final thesis?)
- 4. References page (APA)**
- a. **See APA manual for formatting**
 - b. Go through entire paper & cross-reference each citation w/the References page to make sure all are accounted for accurately
 - c. Edit highlighted entries (specify book chapters/page #s, etc.)

Appendix C

Project Results

Promoting Gender Equity: A Handbook for Early Educators



Promoting Gender Equity
A Handbook for Early Educators

Promoting Gender Equity

A Handbook for Early Educators

Chelsi Ann Schulz

Promoting Gender Equity

A Handbook for Early Educators

This book is dedicated with admiration and respect to everyone who has had the courage to challenge gender norms in pursuit of their true selves, and/or in an act of solidarity with another. Standing up against gender bias and discrimination elevates us all, encourages each of us to reach our full potential as human beings, and paves the way for a kinder, more welcoming world for future generations. You inspire me.

Chelsi Ann Schulz

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Acknowledgments

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Chapter I: Introduction

All children deserve the opportunity to develop to their fullest potentials, to pursue their own interests, to be encouraged to express themselves freely, and to be embraced as the unique individuals they are. Yet sadly, many children receive messages to the contrary. Everyone who works with young children knows that they are highly attuned to their surroundings. As such, children are capable of picking up on even the subtlest forms of bias, and learn quickly to conform to society's unwritten rules for "appropriate" gender conduct. Consequently (though perhaps unintentionally) children often learn to squander certain potentials, to ignore particular interests, to conceal, inhibit, or deny specific feelings and modes of expression, and to only show the world the parts of themselves that they believe will win them acceptance and approval from others.

Early childhood, which encompasses the first eight years of a child's life, is a key period for gender development. As we will soon discuss, a great deal of gendered learning and behavior takes place during this time. Early educators work closely with young children and their families on a daily basis; therefore, they are in a unique position to monitor their students' growth and to help foster their healthy development. This handbook is intended to be a practical resource for early childhood professionals, working in a variety of different settings, who wish to make equitable learning environments a priority for the youngsters in their care. Armed with a clear understanding of gender development, the opportunities and challenges accompanying it, and effective strategies for

promoting equity, professionals in the field can assist every child to develop a positive gender identity.

Rather than being confined by traditional expectations of masculinity and femininity, positive gender identities empower each of us to be fully ourselves. At the very least this implies honoring the entire spectrum of human emotion that exists within us all, not limiting our pursuits in life based upon our biological sex, and finding true self-acceptance, which brings with it a sense of inner peace, joy, and confidence. Supporting young children in their development of positive gender identities is a gift that will serve them well throughout their lives, and which can also help put an end to unfair gender bias, discrimination, and prejudice for future generations.



I DON'T SEE LIKING DOLLS AS A GIRL THING
I SEE IT AS A LIKING-DOLLS THING

– Lindsey Schulz

Chapter II: How do Children Become Gendered Beings?



First, let's begin with a definition of the term *gender*: *Gender* refers to the state of being male or female, usually in regards to social and cultural differences as opposed to biological ones. Three theories in particular have yielded important insights on the topic of gender that can assist early educators in their work with young children: *social cognitive theory*, *queer theory*, and *gender schema theory*. In this section we will briefly examine each theory individually, and consider how it may be of service to the early childhood professional.

Social Cognitive Theory

This theory offers a thorough explanation as to how children become gendered beings over time. It informs us that there are several factors working together to initiate and shape the course of gender development. These factors include: *children's conceptions of gender, gendered judgments and/or standards, self-regulation, engagement in gender-typed activities, and the vast array of societal influences that children encounter in daily living.*

In addition to the aforementioned determinants, there are three distinct ways in which children's developmental trajectories are promoted: (1) modeling, (2) enactive experience, and (3) direct tuition. Let's look at some key points related to all three of these concepts below...

(1) Modeling:

- Children are keen observers who are constantly looking to role models to help them make sense of the world.
- Whether or not it is a desired responsibility, all adults serve as potential role models in a child's life, and so it is important for grown-ups to remain mindful of this fact (this is especially true when they are in the presence of young children).
- Children can also act as role models for other children, however this sort of modeling typically occurs without any conscious realization on either the part of the child model or child observer.
- Specifically in terms of gender development, modeling: aids in children's attainment of gender-related ideas and abilities; affects children's motivation by creating incentives and disincentives for certain gender-typed behaviors; and can transmit gendered values and emotional proclivities.

(2) Enactive experience:

- Different people are likely to respond in different ways to the same gendered behavior observed in children.
- Particular settings and circumstances are also likely to influence people's responses to children's gendered behavior.

- Because of the first two points, children face the complicated task of constructing codes of “gender-appropriate” conduct.
- Children form these codes by extracting, evaluating, and assimilating the diverse gender-related information that they encounter within their environments (based upon their various experiences).

(3) Direct tuition:

- This refers to the explicit instruction children receive from others about anything that is related to gender.
- Direct tuition is *most effective* at influencing gender development if the following conditions are satisfied:
 - If it occurs within the context of mutual values, and/or
 - If the information communicated is widely accepted by the broader society
- Direct tuition is *least effective* if the teacher’s own actions contradict what he/she explicitly teaches the child.

Queer Theory

This theory identifies the strong (yet often hidden) parallel that exists between common gender discourses and common heterosexual discourses. To be clear, it is *not* a theory about gay or lesbian identity. Instead, it simply challenges the idea that there is any “normal” expression of gender (hence the term *queer*), and asserts that traditional heterosexual expectations have a tremendous impact upon the development of our gender identities. This theory addresses the important issues of homophobia and sexism as they relate to gender by critically examining gender stereotypes and traditional power

dynamics between the sexes. Three major concepts associated with queer theory include: (1) heteronormativity, (2) gender performativity, and (3) the heterosexual matrix. Let’s look at some key points related to all three of these concepts below...

(1) Heteronormativity:

- This term is a combination of the words *heterosexual* and *normative*.
- It describes the dominant assumption within society that every person is (or ought to be) heterosexual.
- It is this idea of heteronormativity, not heterosexuality, which is problematic.
- It is the source of gender-related social injustices.
- It expects all people to conform to a particular way of life based upon traditional values of heterosexuality, male masculinity, and female femininity.

(2) Gender performativity:

- This term compares gender to a type of performance.
- It communicates the idea that gender is a way to “act out” one’s identity as either male or female.
- In reality, there is no “right” or “wrong” way to be a boy or a girl.

(3) Heterosexual matrix:

- This is a construct that is used to account for gender stereotypical behaviors.
- It explains how stereotypical behaviors occur within the interrelated contexts of *gender* (masculinity and femininity) and *sexuality* (heterosexuality and homosexuality).
- It combines the ideas of heteronormativity and gender performativity.

Gender Schema Theory

This theory emphasizes the importance of *gender schema* (mental representations of masculinity and femininity) in gender development. As soon as toddlers are able to label themselves and others as male or female, which typically happens around 18-24 months of age, they begin forming gender schema through interactions with their environments. Developing schema include the types of activities, dress, patterns of speech, behaviors, personality traits, etc. that are deemed acceptable for members of each sex within a given culture or society.

A key contribution of this theory is the insight that it yields into the biases that manifest within our thinking once these schema have formed. It describes the impact of gendered learning upon how information is attended to and interpreted by the brain through a process referred to as *gender schematic processing*. Below is a model of this process (Figure 1):

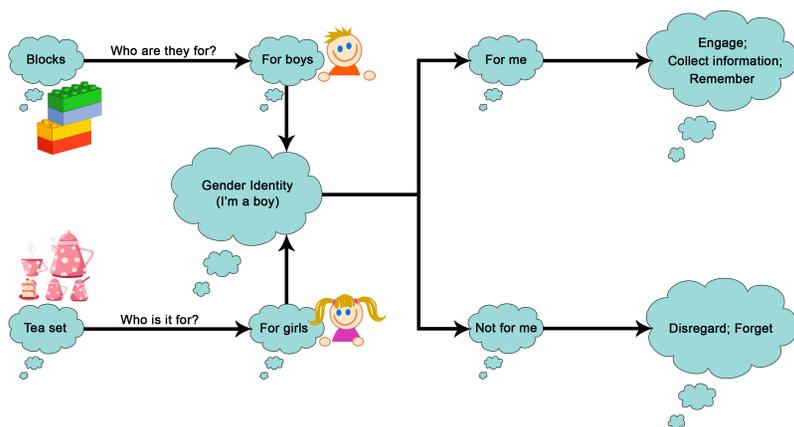


Figure 1. Gender Schematic Processing

When comparing social cognitive theory, queer theory, and gender schema theory, it is evident that gender is a highly social construct and that children's gender development is greatly influenced by their socialization experiences. It is also apparent that gendered learning begins very early in life, and that it occurs in several different ways (i.e. via modeling, enactive experience, direct tuition, and gender schematic processing). The strong social and cultural components of gender compel all of us working with children to reflect critically upon the underlying values, beliefs, and potential prejudices or biases that are embedded – and often hidden – within our culture/society.

Early educators can assist children in forming positive gender identities and help eradicate harmful influences such as gender bias, sexism, and homophobia that obstruct healthy development. Specific strategies about *how* teachers can do so will be discussed later in this handbook (see chapter V). But for now, let's conclude the present section with the following professional objective that will be of service to all of the children in our care: Rather than striving to raise *masculine* boys and *feminine* girls, the goal ought to be to raise *competent* boys and *competent* girls. Children of both sexes stand to benefit from qualities that are traditionally masculine *and* from qualities that are traditionally feminine. Such psychological androgyny is associated with a vast array of positive outcomes, including: behavioral and cognitive flexibility, creativity, high levels of self-esteem, moral behavior, motivation for achievement, a sense of competence, increased satisfaction in life, and an overall feeling of wellbeing.

Discussion Questions

1. How might a parent respond to his/her five-year-old son wanting to wear a dress at:
 - a. Home?
 - b. A friend's house?
 - c. School/day care?
 - d. The grocery store?

Why is the setting likely to influence the parent's response? How might the parent's varied responses impact the son's conceptions of gender and gender-appropriate conduct? How does this relate to social cognitive theory?

2. A dad ridicules his four-year-old son when the boy sees a magenta-colored hat and excitedly places it atop his head. Without hesitation, the dad laughs and says to him: "You look like a sissy! You don't want *that* hat! That's a girl's hat!" How would you explain the father's behavior while examining this incident through the lens of queer theory? What effect might the father's teasing and comments have on his son?
3. As an infant and toddler, Emily loved playing with building blocks and toy trucks, yet ever since she entered the three-year-olds' room at day care she's been spending all of her time having imaginary tea parties, pretending to be a princess, and rocking the baby dolls. When the teacher asks her if she wants to help build a castle out of cardboard bricks, Emily refuses and says that Daniel should help. How would you explain the shift in Emily's interests and thinking using gender schema theory?

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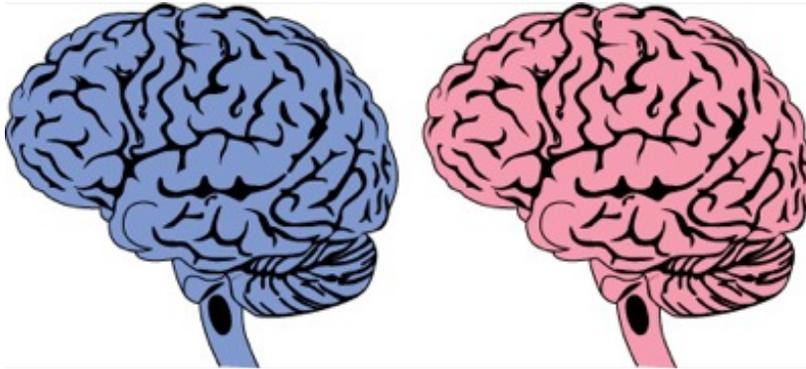
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Chapter III: “The Myth of Pink and Blue Brains”



A common gender myth is that boys and girls are two fundamentally dissimilar creatures – that biologically speaking, they are simply “wired” differently from one another. Given what we have just learned in the previous section about the strong social and cultural origins of gender, however, this biological argument is altogether unfounded. The reality is that there exists much more variation *among girls* as a group and *among boys* as a group than there actually exists *between the two sexes*. In fact, the field of neuroscience has demonstrated that there are only three minor differences between the brains of male and female infants, which are manifested in the following ways: male infants tend to be slightly more physically active and appear more spatially aware, whereas female infants tend to show a slight linguistic advantage by articulating their first words about one month earlier on average.

Gender Gaps

Even though gender differences are negligible in infancy, substantial gaps in particular academic domains are likely to emerge by the time male and female babies reach adolescence. During this period, boys often pull ahead of girls in the STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics), while girls tend to show an advantage over boys in reading, writing, and language. General intelligence is actually the same for the sexes, however, and we have already established that these academic gender gaps *are not* due to innate differences in the brain’s hardwiring. So then, what is to account for them? The gaps certainly do not appear overnight: Numerous factors coincide to produce them quite gradually over time.

The three small disparities that are present at birth become greatly exacerbated by boys’ and girls’ repeated exposure to different toys, activities, and environments, as well as the differential treatment they tend to receive by both their caregivers and the rest of society. Of course, individual differences in children’s temperament and genetic composition can also play a role in their gender development (just as they can in every other developmental domain). But by and large it is *nurture* – not *nature* – that shapes children’s gendered trajectories and ultimately results in the academic gaps observed in adolescence. The following two pages offer illustrations of how these gaps often develop over the course of early-middle childhood. The first example follows a typical boy from birth to adolescence, and the second example follows a typical girl across the same time period.



Small, early biases (due to prenatal hormone exposure and sex-specific gene expression):

- Slightly more physically active (Campell & Eaton, 1999)
- Appear more spatially aware (Quinn & Liben, 2008)



By age 2:

- Small, early biases contribute to toy preferences
- Prefer more active toys (i.e. trucks and balls)



Care giving magnifies differences:

- Encouraged in more physical risk-taking (Morrongiello & Dawber, 2000)
- *Especially* discouraged from “gender-inappropriate” play (Lytton & Romney, 1991)



Play patterns impact cognitive and emotional function:

- Children develop the skills they will bring into the classroom through early play
- Spend more time moving, targeting, building, and role-playing action heroes



Small differences at birth have grown to become significant in adolescence:

- Visual-spatial skills, important in higher math, science, and mechanical work, have been reinforced since birth and are well developed
- Boys pull ahead of girls in these subjects



Small, early bias (due to prenatal hormone exposure and sex-specific gene expression):

- Begin talking one month earlier (Fenson et al., 1994)



By age 2:

- Small, early bias contributes to toy preferences
- Prefer verbal/relational toys, especially dolls



Care giving magnifies differences:

- Engaged in more conversations (Leaper, Anderson, & Sanders, 1998)
- Discouraged from “gender-inappropriate” play (Lytton & Romney, 1991)



CONTINUED...



Play patterns impact cognitive and emotional function:

- Children develop the skills they will bring into the classroom through early play
- Spend more time talking, drawing, and role-playing in relational ways



Small differences at birth have grown to become significant in adolescence:

- Verbal skills, important in phonological awareness, reading, and writing have been reinforced since birth and are well-developed
- Girls pull ahead of boys in these subjects

Discussion Questions

1. As an early childhood educator, what can you do to help narrow the academic gender gaps that typically appear in adolescence? Consider the following:
 - a. Curriculum
 - b. Classroom environment
 - c. Teacher-student interactions
 - d. Working with parents
2. What would you say to parents who don't want their sons playing with dolls or their daughters engaging in rough-and-tumble play?
3. How might you encourage more cross-gender play and peer interactions amongst your students?

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Chapter IV: Typical Sequence of Gender Development (Ages 0 – 8 years)

The course of young children's gendered learning and behavior is a predictable one. This section outlines the typical sequence of gender development that occurs during the first eight years of a child's life. With a grasp of theory (see chapter II) and development, we can understand the root causes of our students' behavior and determine how to respond appropriately so as to ensure that we are meeting their needs and guiding them toward success. We also can see the world experienced by children and be more empathic in our interactions with them, which helps to create a warm, responsive context for children to be able to learn and thrive. Finally, when we know what the future holds (when we can anticipate the next stage in a child's development) we can prepare for it. We can become proactive and adapt our teaching/caregiving to ease the transition, help children meet important milestones, and successfully address the unique challenges that arise with each new stage.

What follows is a description of the developmental characteristics of infants and toddlers, preschoolers, kindergarten, and primary age children *as influenced by the dominant culture in the United States*. It is important to keep in mind that these characteristics are not attributable to all children, since gender is in large part dependent upon a child's cultural background. (More information about the cultural variations of gender will be discussed in chapter VII: *Working with Families*.)

Developmental Characteristics by Age Group

Infants and Toddlers:

- Develop attitudes about own body
- Develop male or female identity and learn expected behaviors by gender
- At about 3-4 months, infants can distinguish between male and female faces
- At about 6 months, infants can distinguish between male and female voices
- At about 10 months, infants have a rudimentary ability to form stereotypical associations between faces and gender-typed objects
- At about 18-24 months, toddlers recognize and accurately use gender labels in their speech; once this occurs, they are more likely to play with highly stereotyped toys
- At about 24-36 months, early stereotypes become more solidified; toddlers display an understanding of sex-linked differences in adults' possessions, physical attributes, roles, activities, and toys

Preschoolers:

- Aware of and curious about gender differences and establish firm beliefs that they are male or female
- Feel positively about their own sex identity
- Favor same-sex playmates and the members of their own sex
- React negatively to gender norm violations
- From preschool until about 4th or 5th grade, children view girls as "nice, wearing dresses, and liking dolls" and view boys as "having short hair, playing active games, and being rough"

Kindergarten/Primary Age:

- Strong same-sex friendships
- Strong interest in stereotyped gender roles
- Choose gender-stereotyped activities
- Stereotypes in young children reveal that they associate power with males and helplessness with females
- By age 6, children have well-established ideas (as well as prejudices) and believe their sex is “better” while the other sex is “stupid”
- Children as young as 6 have some limited knowledge of differential status between the sexes (i.e. men are more likely to have certain kinds of jobs which are higher in status than the ones traditionally held by women)
- At about 5-6 years, children show a peak in rigid adherence to gender stereotypes
- At about 7-8 years, children show increased flexibility in their adherence to stereotypes; they now understand that variations in masculinity and femininity exist

Discussion Questions

1. Specifically for infant/toddler teachers:
How can you encourage your students to play with a wide range of materials that nurture all areas of development (social-emotional, cognitive, and physical)? Why might this be more difficult to do when toddlers are between the ages of 18-36 months?
2. Specifically for preschool teachers:
How can you help your students to be more accepting of gender norm violations and to broaden their understanding of what it means to be male or female?

Brainstorm and list as many strategies as you can come up with, along with your reasoning for each.

3. Specifically for kindergarten/primary teachers:
How can you counteract prejudice among your students in a sensitive manner that demonstrates understanding, compassion, and respect for all? How can you help children feel positively about their own gender identities while simultaneously showing support for their opposite-sex peers?

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Chapter V: Gender and Early Childhood Education

Now that we have familiarized ourselves with the theoretical origins of gender, dispelled the troublesome myth of “pink and blue brains”, and outlined the “normal” sequence of gender development in early childhood, it is prudent for us to take a closer look at the negative consequences that gender bias and stereotyping have upon young children and what we can do to help mitigate them. This section begins with an examination of the negative consequences, then moves forward with constructive approaches for increasing gender equity in the lives of children. Information on how to recognize and address human bias is discussed, and a teacher self-check tool is provided to assist in the identification of any potential gender biases that may inadvertently have a negative impact upon teacher practice. Next, some of the most common gender-related issues in several key areas of teaching and learning are identified, and practical strategies for early educators to address these issues are provided. Finally, the section concludes with a checklist for teachers to assess the current level of equity within their classrooms and determine which areas of practice, or the learning environment, suggest a need for improvement.

The Consequences of Gender Stereotypes and Bias

Both sexes are affected by gender stereotyping and bias, although boys and girls experience these concerns in different ways. Research shows that boy babies receive more overall attention from their caregivers than do girl babies (even when the boys are significantly outnumbered). As toddlers, it

is normal for both sexes to branch out and become active explorers of their environments, yet girls are much more likely than boys to be discouraged – or prohibited – by caregivers from taking any sort of physical risks during play. For example, research in one toddler classroom found that teachers permitted boys to topple over the side of a slide for fun uncontested, but told the girls to cease this activity so as not to “hurt their bellies.”

In general, young boys are expected to be more assertive and active than girls, who are expected to be calm and compliant. During the preschool years, many boys will make shocking statements and engage in inappropriate behavior to demand the attention of caregivers, who frequently fall back upon the popular myth that “boys will be boys” as a justification for dismissing such behavior as an inexorable fact of nature. However, gender bias like this can yield unintended and harmful consequences: By the time they reach elementary school, boys are far more likely than girls to be labeled as “socially disturbed”, suspended or expelled, referred to remedial or special education classes, or held back a grade. This gender discrepancy is largely attributable to the fact that boys’ conditioned habit of responding to challenges by acting out *does not* align with schools’ standards of conduct the way that girls’ less disruptive responses do.

The ways in which caregivers refer to and praise children also differs according to gender. Terms of endearment such as “cuddle bug” and “sweetie” are reserved primarily for girls, while boys are typically referred to simply by their names (or occasionally “bud”). Praise targeted at young girls most often revolves around their physical appearances and nurturing or helping behaviors. (In fact, research shows that appearance

is the sole area in which girls receive more recognition than boys.) Conversely, when caregivers praise young boys it is typically in regards to their physical or academic competencies.

Boys in general receive less nurturing behavior from their caregivers than girls, have long been neglected emotionally, and are now badly in need of attention in this regard. From an early age, boys pick up on the stereotype that they must be stoic, dominant, and tough. This stereotype requires boys to inhibit many of their natural behaviors, and puts them at risk of being ridiculed if they do not adhere to a highly restrictive macho image. Consequently, boys are often apprehensive or unwilling to be open with their feelings, have fewer close friendships as they get older, and are more susceptible to alienation and loneliness.

Play is a primary vehicle through which young children develop and learn; therefore, it is an extremely important component of the early childhood years. It is also a key area in which gender stereotyping and bias frequently occur. Very early in life, boys and girls are given different toys and are encouraged to partake in different types of play by their caregivers. Eventually, young children come to routinely select gender-typed toys and activities on their own. Preschoolers as young as two years of age establish gender-segregated peer groups, and perpetually opt for gender-typed toys and activities that are deemed “appropriate” for their sex. As a result, boys and girls alike are limited in the types of skills and abilities they are able to develop, and in the lessons they learn about how to be an acceptable member of their respective groups.

Finally, regarding educational experiences and outcomes specifically, there is considerable gender bias against girls in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) and against boys in language arts, reading and writing. Girls’ interest in and pursuit of STEM subjects in school are consequently dampened, while the same is true for boys in the subjects of reading and writing. However, as we have already discussed in chapter III, academic gender gaps are not indicative of key differences in the hardwiring of male and female brains, which according to biased opinion supposedly account for these trends. In fact, evidence derived from international test scores reveals that gender gaps fluctuate rather dramatically based upon several different factors including age, nationality, and ethnicity. Furthermore, it was shown that higher scores in math among girls correlate with greater gender equity in individual countries. Alas, environmental influences are of great significance in the creation of gender gaps and no ability – or difference – is “hardwired” into the brain. Rather the development of human abilities is an epigenetic phenomenon, which means that each individual’s biological potential is subject to environmental factors that ultimately affect genetic expression, neural function, and behavior.

Recognizing and Addressing Human Bias

As we discovered in our discussion of gender schema theory (see chapter II), it is completely normal for human beings to develop biased thinking through the naturally occurring neurological phenomenon of gender schematic processing (see Figure 1). This does not mean, however, that we must succumb to biased behavior: We have the capability to override biased thinking by scrutinizing and analyzing our

personal ideas, beliefs, and values related to gender. By honing and continuing to develop our critical thinking skills we can conduct sound evaluations of important gender issues as they arise, which will empower us to make well-informed, conscious decisions that support the formation of positive gender identities in children and optimizes their developmental potentials.

The following questions will help stimulate critical thinking and can be applied to all sorts of gender issues in an effort to override human bias:

- Why do I think/believe/feel a certain way?
- What information am I basing my thoughts/beliefs/feelings upon?
- How credible is this source of information?
- What evidence is there to support its claims?
- Does a particular thought/belief/feeling make sense in light of gender theory and developmental research?
- Is a particular thought/belief/feeling discriminatory? Does it cause harm to others and/or infringe upon others' rights?

Early educators have a shared responsibility of recognizing and directly confronting gender bias in their everyday work so as to ensure the provision of equitable learning opportunities for the children in their care. In addition to the aforementioned guiding questions, teachers can use the following tool to help identify any subconscious biases they may have that would consequently interfere with this responsibility.



Teachers' Tool: Gender Bias Self-Check

1. Do I treat boys and girls differently? If so, in what way(s)? What are the possible implications of such differential treatment?
2. Do I maintain the same set of high-yet-attainable standards for boys and girls, or do I subconsciously enforce double standards between the sexes?
3. Do I expect boys to be boisterous and rowdy? Why or why not? Which attributes do I tend to associate with boys, specifically, and why?
4. Do I expect girls to be calm and compliant? Why or why not? Which attributes do I tend to associate with girls, specifically, and why?
5. How do I feel about the concept of “psychological androgyny” (see chapter II), and why?
6. Do I prefer to teach/care for one sex over the other? What are the advantages and disadvantages of working with each sex?
7. How comfortable am I with my own gender identity? How might this impact my teaching practices and interactions with others (children as well as adults)?

8. How comfortable/uncomfortable am I when I observe young children “violating” gender norms, and why? Do I feel differently when older children or adults do so? Why or why not?
9. How do I respond to cross-gender/non-traditional behavior in children? What motivates and informs my responses?
10. How does my cultural/religious background influence my views and values concerning gender? How do these views and values impact my teaching practices and interactions with others (children as well as adults)?
11. What are the developmental goals (social-emotional, physical, and cognitive) that I have for:
 - a.) boys specifically?
 - b.) girls specifically?
 - c.) all of my students in general?
12. In what area(s) do I notice a potential need for improvement in order to make my teaching/caregiving more gender equitable? How aware am I of my own biases, and do I view them:
 - a) as innocuous?
 - b) as shameful?
 - c) in a self-compassionate and constructive light? (i.e. by recognizing that bias is a normal part of the human experience, and that it can also yield important opportunities for both personal and professional growth)

Common Issues and Practical Strategies for Promoting Gender Equity

This section addresses some of the most common gender-related issues in early childhood education and equips teachers with practical, research-based strategies for promoting gender equity in their day-to-day work. The first cluster of issues and strategies are concerned with teaching, assessment, and young children’s socialization experiences in school. The next set pertains to classroom materials specifically. Finally, the last grouping revolves around the selection and implementation of early curriculum, as well as the environmental set-up. This section concludes with a checklist for teachers that can be used to evaluate the current level of gender equity within their classrooms, and/or as a reference tool for making positive changes in the promotion of greater equity.

Teaching, Assessment, and Socialization in School

COMMON ISSUES	PRACTICAL STRATEGIES
Gender bias in the “hidden curriculum”, which “refers to the unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives that children learn in school.” (edglossary.org)	Set up a video camera in the classroom and then critically review the footage in search of hidden curriculum. This can help teachers become aware of any inequitable practices and harmful attitudes that need to be addressed.
Boys receive more overall attention (positive and	Teachers can work on increasing their levels of

negative) in addition to more thoughtful, constructive, and encouraging responses from teachers; girls receive cursory, less academically useful feedback and often become invisible members within the classroom.	sensitivity and neutrality in providing feedback to students in order to give equal affirmation, encouragement, and assistance to both sexes.
Girls require extra time to mentally craft their responses to questions posed in class, whereas boys are more likely to shout out answers and immediately raise their hands; consequently boys end up monopolizing class time.	By waiting at least 3-5 seconds before calling upon a raised hand, teachers can greatly increase the level of participation among female students, which will make the distribution of class time more equitable.
Teachers' use of language is influential in the transmission of gendered expectations, and biases are often communicated through words and phrases (i.e. <i>all men are created equal, freshmen, and ladylike</i>).	It can be difficult to recognize biased language since it is so deeply ingrained within our society, yet with a critical ear and enough practice teachers will grow comfortable in this task and can begin to replace biased speech with gender-neutral alternatives (i.e. <i>we are all created equal, first-year student, and courteous</i>).
Role modeling is a prime mechanism through which young children learn about "acceptable" behavior and emotional expression, and through which they formulate	Teachers can serve as positive role models by exhibiting unbiased behavior in their day-to-day actions and use of language. (Examples include remaining gender-neutral in

key ideas and attitudes regarding gender (recall our discussion of social cognitive theory in chapter II).	their evaluations of students' performances, openly challenging sexism, having discussions with children about what constitutes fair and unfair treatment, as well as helping children to reflect upon their behaviors.)
One sex greatly outnumbers the other within individual classrooms and/or the larger learning community.	Maintain a gender balance among students enrolled in each class and the program/school at large. Such a balance offers ample opportunities for boys and girls to interact, teachers to challenge stereotypes, and students to be positively reinforced for venturing beyond rigid gender norms.
Girls have a proclivity for collaborative experiences while boys tend to learn well in situations where they are challenged by their peers. However, all children benefit from many different approaches to learning.	Teachers can facilitate diverse learning experiences that cater to both types of preferences for all students. Teachers can also challenge children to learn in new ways (i.e. placing girls in leadership positions, which can increase their confidence and reduce gender bias).
In various curricular areas and on various types of assessments, boys and girls tend to score differently.	Teachers can create and utilize assessment measures that pay equal attention to gender-role subjects.

Gender bias can be embedded within student evaluations, academic standards, and performance expectations.	Teachers can be objective by relying upon the same benchmarks for boys and girls to evaluate student achievements, as opposed to making judgments based on gender expectations. In order to reach their full potential, both sexes must be held to the same set of high, attainable standards.
Young children have a propensity to segregate themselves according to gender.	Teachers can create mixed seating arrangements and can assign boys and girls to be on the same team for class projects, contests, etc. Children may be allowed to form their own teams, but with the stipulation that all groups include both genders. Changing groups often can also help desegregate children.

Examining Classroom Materials

COMMON ISSUES	PRACTICAL STRATEGIES
The children's library/reading area is full of books that convey gender stereotypes and biases. For example, it	Teachers can look for books featuring characters and themes that venture beyond restrictive, traditional gender norms. Such literature is empowering to

contains stories that depict images of females wearing aprons and/or males who display a limited range of emotions.	children and can help them develop positive self-concepts and anti-bias attitudes. Teachers may also choose to remove biased literature altogether.
Books are read to children that portray stereotypical characters and behaviors.	Teachers can point out the incidents of gender bias to their students and facilitate an age-appropriate discussion of the issues so that children's understanding of gender is not limited by what they see/hear in books.
For the most part, boys have greater opportunities to use computers, develop more positive attitudes about them, and are generally more comfortable with the technology than are girls.	Teachers can be careful to avoid sexist software that is either highly combative or targeted specifically to boys. They can also monitor the time children spend on computers, making sure boys do not monopolize the technology and girls are encouraged to develop their computer skills.
In addition to books and computers, all sorts of other toys and materials can be gender-typed and marketed using sexist/biased tactics.	Teachers can critically evaluate all toys and materials provided in the classroom/environment for children.
Toys such as Barbie dolls and Hot Wheels are specifically marketed in a manner that promotes	Teachers may choose to remove these toys from the setting in order to foster gender-neutrality and a welcoming environment for

single-gender play.	all, or they can explicitly discuss these toys with their students to make certain it is understood that both girls and boys are able to play with all of the available toys.
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Curriculum and Environmental Set-Up

COMMON ISSUES	PRACTICAL STRATEGIES
The class curriculum and/or its implementation exhibit gender bias.	Teachers can invite fellow staff to observe in their classrooms in order to ensure that the curriculum and implementation are equitable.
Young children have a propensity to segregate themselves according to gender.	Teachers can facilitate mixed-gender play and opportunities for mixed-gender teamwork. By moving around the classroom and monitoring teamwork, teachers can assist in conflicts that arise and ensure equal participation among students.
Boys spend more time engaging in construction play than do girls.	Girls can be provided with teacher-directed time in the block/building area.
Girls spend more time playing “house” than do boys.	Boys can be provided with teacher-directed time in the housekeeping/cooking area.
The block/building area and housekeeping/cooking area are far apart from each other	Teachers can arrange the classroom so that these areas are next to one another and

and are clearly segregated by gender.	are not clearly divided, thus inviting cross-gender play to occur more often on its own (without teacher direction).
Foundational instruction of spatial awareness and mechanical skills, which are important for future learning in mathematics and science, are often overlooked in the curriculum.	Teachers can implement developmentally appropriate instruction in these areas by making learning play-based through the use of puzzles, target games, building projects, etc., which would help children begin thinking in three-dimensional terms.
From an early age, boys are not as engaged in language and literacy activities as are girls; consequently, they do not have the same opportunity to develop important skills in these subjects.	Teachers can sing with boys, engage them in more one-on-one conversations, and read with them. Boys can be encouraged to create marks on paper/other surfaces with crayons, paint, markers, etc., which assists in the formation of symbolic thought and gives them fine-motor practice.

The checklist that follows is a compilation of the aforementioned practical strategies for promoting gender equity in early childhood education. Teachers may copy/reproduce the checklist (and distribute it to others) for use in their everyday work with young children. It can serve as a professional tool to assist in evaluating/enhancing teaching practices and early learning environments.



Equitable Classroom Checklist

Teaching, Assessment, and Socialization:

- Teachers regularly reflect upon their practice and examine the classroom for hidden curriculum that may perpetuate gender stereotypes, biases, and inequities.
- Teachers are sensitive and neutral in the type of feedback they provide their students. Boys and girls receive equal encouragement, affirmation, and assistance from teachers.
- After posing a question to the class, teachers allow at least 3-5 seconds to pass before calling on a student. Boys and girls are given equal opportunities to participate in class discussions.
- Teachers develop a critical ear for biased language, using gender-neutral words and phrases in their day-to-day speech.
- Teachers openly challenge sexism, discuss fair/unfair treatment with students, exhibit unbiased behaviors/attitudes, and generally serve as positive role models for children.
- As much as possible, there is a gender balance maintained among the students enrolled in the class.
- Teachers positively reinforce children for venturing

beyond traditional, restrictive gender norms.

- Teachers cater to the dominant learning styles of both male and female students by incorporating opportunities in which peers are allowed to challenge one another as well as collaborative experiences into the classroom routine. Children are encouraged to stretch beyond their comfort zones and are supported in their efforts to do so.
 - Student assessment measures are screened for bias and pay equal attention to gender-role subjects (for example, STEM and reading/writing/language).
 - The same objective benchmarks are used to evaluate the achievements of boys and girls. All children are held to high, attainable expectations and judgements about their abilities are not made based upon gender.
 - Teachers create mixed seating arrangements in order to desegregate children.
 - Teachers assign boys and girls to be on the same team for class projects, competitions, etc. If teachers allow children to form their own groups, they stimulate that all teams must contain both genders.
- #### ***Examining Classroom Materials:***
- The children's library/reading area is stocked with books that venture beyond traditional, restrictive gender norms. The literature included is interesting and empowering to boys and girls alike.

If bias is encountered in children's literature, teachers take the time to point it out to their students and facilitate an age-appropriate discussion about it; that way, children's conceptions of gender are not limited by what they see/hear in biased stories.

Computer use is monitored to ensure that boys and girls have equal access to, and experience with, the technology.

Teachers avoid sexist software that is either highly combative or targeted specifically to boys, and girls are encouraged to develop their computer skills.

All of the toys and classroom materials made available to children are screened by teachers for gender bias.

Highly gender-typed colors and toys are either removed from the setting to foster gender neutrality and a welcoming environment for all, or they are discussed with the children so it is clearly understood that both boys and girls are allowed to play with all of the materials provided.

Curriculum and Environmental Set-Up:

Teachers invite fellow staff members into their classrooms to observe and help evaluate the curriculum and/or its implementation for any inadvertent gender bias.

Teachers facilitate mixed-gender play and opportunities for mixed-gender teamwork.

Teachers move around the classroom and monitor teamwork as it happens, assisting in any conflicts that may arise and ensuring equal participation among students.

Girls are provided with teacher-directed time in the block/building areas.

Boys receive teacher-directed time in the cooking/house-keeping areas.

The classroom environment is arranged to encourage cross-gender play, desegregation between the sexes, and a high level of engagement among all children in key learning experiences.

Foundational instruction of spatial awareness and mechanical skills are implemented into the curriculum in a developmentally appropriate manner. For example, teachers use puzzles, target games, construction projects, etc., to help young children begin thinking in three-dimensional terms.

Teachers sing and read with boys often, and engage them in frequent one-on-one conversations.

Teachers encourage boys to create marks on paper or other surfaces using crayons, markers, paint, etc., to aid in the development of symbolic thought and provide them with fine motor practice.

Discussion Questions

1. How does gender bias/stereotyping affect young boys and girls differently from infancy through the elementary school years? (Consider the possible ramifications in all three domains of development: social-emotional, cognitive, and physical.)
2. In what ways is gender an important consideration (or not) in student assessment? What makes an assessment measure fair for both sexes?
3. What skills can boys develop by playing “house” that they might not get the chance to develop in more gender-stereotypical forms of play? What skills can girls develop by playing with blocks/erector sets that they might not get the chance to develop in more gender-stereotypical forms of play?

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Chapter VI: Men Working in the Field

It is important that the early childhood community strives to achieve – and sustain – a gender balance among its workforce. As we have discussed throughout this handbook, the first eight years of a child’s life is a prime time for gender development and learning. All children benefit from having both positive female *and* male role models in their lives. Modern changes in composition and high divorce rates make today’s families very diverse, and with the vast majority of early childhood workers being female, many youngsters nowadays lack regular contact with men. When children miss out on this important interaction, they are left to form stereotypical assumptions about what it means to be male from the limited representations of masculinity that are depicted in the media. Gender stereotypes and biases are problematic for everybody since they impede important democratic values like equality and social justice. This section addresses the gender imbalance that persists in the field of early childhood education by offering suggestions on how to make the workplace more welcoming to men, as well as by dispelling some of the harmful myths that continue to contribute to the shortage of male teachers and caregivers.

Welcoming Our Male Colleagues

How can we welcome men into the profession and help them to feel that they are respected, valued, and important participants in the care and education of young children? Perhaps the best way is by listening and responding to their unique needs, wishes, and reservations as described from their own perspectives. What follows is a summary of what men in the field would like in order to feel more welcome. It is

derived from the research of Fagan (1996), Cunningham (1998; 1999), Neugebauer (1999), Sanders (2002), and Wardle (2003).

- Men do not want their motives questioned for wanting to work with young children. They do not want to be subjected to biased scrutiny by coworkers, administrators, or families. They do not want to be suspected of being child predators.
- Men want to be treated equally to women within the work setting – in all aspects of their jobs.
- Men want to work and be alongside other men (they do not wish to be token employees).
- Men want to be able to share their thoughts and beliefs without being labeled as antagonistic or opinionated, and without being suspected of wanting to take over.
- Men want professional training to include positive messages about the importance of male figures in children’s lives, and do not want to be portrayed as oppressive or “the enemy.”
- Men want to be able to pursue a career in teaching/ caregiving if that is their preferred line of work.
- Men do not want to be expected to do all of the heavy lifting or other gender-stereotypical work, such as taking out the trash.
- Ultimately, men want to feel as though they belong in the field and in the programs where they work. They want to work somewhere that provides a professional approach to early care and education, a positive working environment, and good benefits.

All of the aforementioned needs and desires expressed by our male colleagues are completely reasonable and within reach. Although it will take the entire early childhood community

banding together to make the profession truly gender-equitable, the majority of accommodations requested by men can be made at the level of individual programs. We must remember that we can all do our part to create a more welcoming and supportive work environment for one another – especially for our male colleagues, who often face unjust discouragement and discrimination. It is up to every professional to actively challenge biases against men as caregivers and educators of young children. The following section can be a useful source of information for teachers and families to assist in the de-stigmatization of men working in the field.

Myth vs. Reality

 **MYTH #1:** No man would choose to enter a profession that offers such little compensation and prestige, like early education, *unless* he wants ready access to children. He must be a pedophile/child abuser.

 **REALITY:** Statistically speaking, children are safer at school or in a childcare program than they are at home. When child abuse does occur, it is most likely to take place within the home, and in 90% of reported cases the perpetrator is a parent/other relative of the victim. Also, men occupy many other low-paying, low-status jobs in which they feel more accepted (i.e. food preparation and service, public transportation, and telemarketing to name a few).

 **MYTH #2:** Teaching, particularly of young children, is quite simply “women’s work”. It always has been, and so it should remain this way.

 **REALITY:** Up until the mid-1800s, the majority of

teachers in the United States were men. Eventually this trend completely reversed itself, and for a long time now there has been a great need for increased male involvement within the field. However many European countries (such as Belgium, Denmark, Norway and Sweden) appear more accepting of male teachers/caregivers than the U.S., having launched several successful initiatives and campaigns since the mid-1990s in a concerted effort to make the early education profession more gender-equitable.

 **MYTH #3:** Men are not suited to work with young children – women are the nurturers.

 **REALITY:** Both men and women have the capacity to nurture and care for children. Men have been doing so already for generations – as fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers, and so on. Studies of male teachers reveal they exercise both patience and nurturance similar to their female counterparts (Robinson, 1981; Seifert, 1992).

 **MYTH #4:** Men who teach young children must be homosexual; heterosexual men do not want to teach young children.

 **REALITY:** Male teachers (just like female teachers) can be straight, gay, or bisexual. Men and women who choose to work in fields that are traditionally dominated by the opposite sex often encounter suspicion from others that there must be something “different” about them. It is important to keep in mind that sexual orientation has nothing to do with whether a person is a suitable teacher or caregiver for young children.

 **MYTH #5:** Men do not apply for jobs to teach or care for young children; if they do, it is simply a steppingstone to

some other position or line of work for them.

✓ **REALITY:** Men *do* apply for these types of jobs but are usually overlooked and not hired. A national survey of NAEYC administrators shows 80% receive applications from men wanting to teach in their programs, but according to one early childhood program owner, “Many women administrators will not hire men” (Nelson, 2002). As far as early education being a steppingstone for men, most want to remain in their teaching positions but they encounter a great deal of pressure to move into administration. When men (and women) leave their jobs, it is often because they do not make livable wages.

Discussion Questions

1. A parent in your toddler classroom requests that your male coworker not be permitted to change her child’s diapers. To concede would be discriminatory practice and a violation of your co-worker’s right to carry out one of his basic job duties. However it is also important that families feel safe, and that they can trust their concerns to be understood and taken seriously. How would you handle this situation?
2. Why is it important that more men be recruited into the early childhood education field? (Cite at least three different reasons.)
3. A male teacher was hired just two months ago at your program but is already being pressured to move out of the preschool classroom (where he loves to work) and into the vacant assistant director position. Employees who have taught at the program for years and who are actually interested in administrative work are not even

being considered for the job. You suspect this is because the director believes that the majority of parents would feel more comfortable if all of the classroom teachers were women. How would you handle this situation?

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Chapter VII: Working with Families

In this section we will explore the home-school connection and the importance of partnering with families, key cultural considerations that teachers must take into account when working with diverse families, and how to approach conflict in a constructive manner – including when to seek outside support.

Establishing Partnerships

It is the responsibility of the early childhood educator to foster positive working relationships with families. Inclusivity is paramount: We must help *all* families to feel welcomed, respected, and valued within the classroom setting as well as in the larger climate of the school/program. There are many ways in which teachers can reach out to families, build a bridge between children's home lives and school lives, and establish mutually supportive partnerships with individual family members. Through the facilitation of ongoing open communication that includes active listening, respectful dialogue, and teacher responsiveness to the needs, wants, and concerns of each child's family, key relationships will blossom and the home-school connection will be greatly enhanced.

It is important to keep in mind that building strong partnerships with family members does not happen overnight. Also, families differ in their abilities and willingness to participate in their children's school lives, as well as in how comfortable they feel doing so (some cultures believe it is not the family's place to interject themselves into their child's education). Teachers must remember that helping families feel

welcomed, important, and appreciated is a continuous process. Taking a few moments to greet and check-in with family members at drop-off and pick-up times is one simple step. Teachers can also display photographs of each child's family within the classroom in order to help them feel visible and connected. If home visits are a possibility, periodically conducting them can help teachers learn more about each family's culture, values, childrearing styles, and so on, which can be a beneficial experience that aids in teachers' ability to support families in more meaningful ways at school. Teachers should also provide families with various opportunities to engage within the classroom/program throughout the year, although families should not be expected to partake in everything that is offered. Holding regular family-staff meetings or instituting a parent panel are two possible ways of engaging families, building partnerships with (and among) them, and encouraging them to exchange ideas, concerns, and opinions regarding their children's school lives.

By prioritizing the inclusion of all different types of families and nurturing individual relationships, teachers will be able to partner with families in the overall care and education of their students. This includes young children's gender development and the promotion of gender equity in their lives. Teachers and families can discuss children's developmental progress throughout the year, including the attainment of gender milestones and the potential liabilities that accompany particular stages, as well as constructive ways to foster positive development and address these liabilities. Teachers can explicitly state their goals concerning gender equity within the classroom, and invite families to share their own gender-related goals for their children. Teachers can also help families to better understand the important role they play in their

children's acquisition of gendered beliefs, expectations, and behaviors, as well as the role of the school and other key settings in a child's life, and the role of popular culture/the media. Sharing valuable resources and discussing gender issues with families via periodic classroom newsletters, emails, and postings on a communal bulletin board are other means of engaging families in this aspect of their children's development and education.

Cultural Considerations

Although male and female gender roles exist universally, cultures can vary quite dramatically in the nature of these roles, in their conceptions of gender, in the specific gender stereotypes and biases they have, and in their rigidity of gender norms. Individual variations can – and do – exist within specific cultures as well. Consequently, it is important that teachers do not make assumptions about a particular family's beliefs, values, or expectations concerning gender. The following examples are intended to highlight the importance of cultural influences upon gender; they *do not* represent all of the cultural variations that exist, of course!

- *Mashoga*: A Swahili term in Kenya and Tanzania that refers to an entire range of identities on the gender spectrum, including gay men and biological males who assume a female gender from a young age. These individuals wear women *and* men's attire, but in a fashion that is unique to mashoga. They serve an integral role in wedding ceremonies and frequently adopt female gender roles in society.

- *Guevedoche*: In the Dominican Republic, a third sex has developed as a result of a genetic pseudo-hermaphroditic trait. Ethnographers first encountered children who had inherited this trait in the 1970s, and ended up following them over several generations. Most of these children were reared as girls, having undifferentiated genitalia at birth; during puberty, however, they started to develop male traits. Rather than suddenly assuming a male identity, most of the children decided to live as a third gender, *guevedoche*, which loosely translates to “testicles at twelve”. It is also referred to as *machi-embra*, meaning “man-woman”. The third gender has been legitimized within this society (as opposed to most Western societies that have a binary male/female gender system), and distinct roles have been constructed for the *guevedoche*.
- *Alyha* and *Hwame*: The Mohave tribe’s creation myth describes a time when people were not differentiated by their sex or gender. Their culture acknowledges four genders that include *alyha* (female-identified males), *hwame* (male-identified females), women, and men.
- *Ninauposkitzipxpe*: In the North Peigan tribe (part of the Blackfoot society in Montana and Alberta, Canada), the *ninauposkitzipxpe* (which loosely translates to “manly-hearted woman”) were women who did not necessarily appear masculine in their attire, but were unconfined by the social restrictions that were put upon other women, and were honored as a third gender.

Although the aforementioned examples describe cultures that are gender-diverse, others are much more rigid in their

definitions and expectations for gender. As stated earlier, most Western societies have a strict binary gender system that reinforces masculine males and feminine females. Sadly, deviations from these restrictive norms are frequently met with discomfort, suspicion, and aversion from people who have been socially conditioned to avoid violating gender norms themselves, and to reject those who do. Yet such a system fails to accommodate the rich spectrum of emotion, behavior, and qualities that make each of us who we are as unique individuals and complete human beings. As we have seen throughout this handbook, the consequences of this failure are far-reaching in nature and impact us all. However the status quo does not have to remain the status quo, as we have also discussed ways of empowering all of the children within our care to be fully themselves – unlimited by gender norms, stereotypes, or bias.

When Conflicts Arise

Prioritizing and working to promote gender equity is not always an easy task for early childhood educators. Especially considering how deeply-rooted the cultural influences are, it is possible that conflicts will arise from time to time in a teacher’s quest to ensure gender equity for his/her students. Therefore, this next section is intended to assist teachers in situations where conflicts with families do arise in relation to children’s experiences at school.

Seeking Collaborative Solutions

Derman-Sparks (2013a) recommends the following strategy of *acknowledge, ask, and adapt* for managing conflict in a constructive manner that can lead to a satisfactory resolution for all of the parties involved:

Step 1: Acknowledge.

- Acknowledge that a conflict does in fact exist
- Reflect upon your personal feelings and how the family members involved in the conflict are likely to feel
- Communicate to the family that you realize a conflict exists and needs your attention
- Do not blame the child or his/her family (keep in mind that children are often unfairly stuck in the middle of adult conflicts)
- Resist becoming defensive or making snap judgments

Step 2: Ask.

- Inform yourself about the conflict at hand, seeking to understand its root causes
 - Consult with the family and anyone else who you believe could offer additional insights into the matter
 - Find out how the family interprets the conflict, what it means to them, and what they wish to be done about it
- Ask yourself what kinds of experiences the child has at home vs. at school
- Clarify all of the priorities that are involved (those belonging to the teacher, school/program, and family)
- Ask what changes you can make as a teacher, and whether you would want to make any of those changes
- Be open to learning from others and to the need for professional growth as part of the conflict resolution

Step 3: Adapt.

- Based upon the insights gathered in the first two steps, consider how you can adapt your teaching practices (or

possibly the school/program policies) to suit the needs and desires of the family

- Look for common ground between you and the family, and think about other alternatives that may be available
- The goal is to be as responsive as possible to diverse cultural practices while at the same time striving to promote gender equity within the classroom and early childhood setting
- Partner with the family to search for a resolution that best supports their child's growth while also considering the needs of the entire class, the responsibilities of the school/program, and the complex factors of culture, diversity, and bias that bear upon the situation

Seeking Outside Support

Navigating conflict in a constructive manner so as to reach a mutually satisfactory resolution for you and the family can be quite a tall order. Some people, in particular, have a habit of shying away from conflict and might even feel overwhelmed at the prospect of engaging in the *acknowledge*, *ask*, and *adapt* process. In cases like these, it may be best to seek the support of an administrator at your setting. The administrator can act as a moderator in the resolution of the conflict, helping both teacher and family to share their respective thoughts, feelings, and opinions on the matter, and to come together to resolve it amicably.

The good news is that most conflicts concerning cultural differences in the care and education of children *do* have attainable solutions. This does not mean, however, that teachers or families are always going to feel completely happy

about the solutions that are reached. It is likely that both parties will have to make certain concessions now and then. Some outcomes might favor the teacher, while others might favor the family. Yet regardless of the nature of the outcome, and whether or not the conflict even gets resolved, engaging in the *acknowledge*, *ask*, and *adapt* process contributes to meaningful discoveries for all of the parties involved, since it entails the in-depth exploration of diverse viewpoints. In many cases this experience builds a deeper sense of trust and authenticity in the relationships between teachers and family members.

Discussion Questions

1. A parent tells you he does not want his son to be allowed in your classroom's dramatic play area. He explains that type of play undermines his culture's beliefs about the role of men. You believe the son should be allowed to play there if he so chooses, and are uncomfortable prohibiting the child from doing so. How would you apply the *acknowledge*, *ask*, and *adapt* process in this situation to resolve the conflict?
2. An Afghan mother requests that her daughter serves all of the boys in the class first when helping out at snack time, since it is common practice within their home for males to be served before females. How would you respond in this situation? Apply the *acknowledge*, *ask*, and *adapt* method.
3. In your opinion, do constructive conflict resolution and cultural sensitivity imply that every belief, value, and custom is acceptable? Why or why not? What are your

nonnegotiable values? Is one of them gender equity? Do any of them otherwise relate to gender issues?

Suggestions for Further Reading

- Lesser, L.K., Burt, T., & Gelnaw, A. (2005). *Making room in the circle: Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender families in early childhood settings*. San Rafael, CA: Parent Services Project.
- Lynch, E.W., & Hanson, M.J. (2011). *Developing cross-cultural competence: A guide for working with children and their families* (4th ed.). Baltimore, MD: Brookes.
- deMelendez, W.R., & Ostertag, V. (2012). *Teaching young children in multicultural classrooms: Issues, concepts and strategies* (4th ed.). Albany, NY: Delmar Publishers.
- Rogoff, B. (2003). *The cultural nature of child development*. New York: Oxford University Press.

References

- Derman-Sparks, L., LeeKeenan, D., & Nimmo, J. (2015). *Leading anti-bias early childhood programs*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Independent Lens. (2015). A map of gender diverse cultures. Retrieved from http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/content/two-spirits_map-html/

Chapter VIII: Knowledge into Practice: Teacher Exercises

Congratulations! Now that you have familiarized yourself with the subject of gender in early childhood, you can begin putting into practice all that you have learned! To get you started, this final chapter is devoted to six assorted teacher exercises that are designed to test your knowledge, stimulate critical thinking, support you in your professional goals to increase gender equity in your everyday work, and help you engage families in the conversation on gender with a fun take-home activity that they can complete with their children and share with the rest of the class. Remember that the pursuit of gender equity is an ongoing endeavor. I hope that you keep at it and are proud of yourself for every effort you make – no matter how big or small!

Activity #1: Fill in the Blanks (Chapter II)

1. Social cognitive theory posits there are five distinct factors that coincide to initiate and shape the course of children's gender development. These factors include _____, _____, _____, _____, and _____.
2. In social cognitive theory, _____, _____, and _____, are the three mechanisms promote gender development.
3. According to social cognitive theory, children construct codes of "gender appropriate" conduct based on their experiences by _____, _____,

and _____ the diverse gender-related information they encounter within their environments.

4. _____ identifies the strong (yet often hidden) parallel that exists between common gender discourses and common heterosexual discourses: It is *not* a theory about gay/lesbian identity.
5. According to queer theory, the source of gender-related social injustices is _____, which describes the dominant assumption that everyone is (or ought to be) heterosexual and should conform to a particular way of life based upon traditional values of heterosexuality, male masculinity, and female femininity.
6. _____ implies that gender is a way for people to "act out" their identities as male or female, while the _____ explains how gender stereotypical behaviors occur in the interrelated contexts of gender (masculinity and femininity) and sexuality (heterosexuality and homosexuality).
7. One of the major contributions of _____ is the insight it yields into the biases that manifest in our thinking once gender schema are formed.
8. _____ are the mental representations of masculinity and femininity that humans create through interactions with their environment; they typically begin to develop once toddlers are able to label themselves and others as male or female, which is around 18-24 months of age.

9. Gendered learning impacts the way our brains attend to and interpret specific information in a process called _____.

**Answers to this activity can be found on page 68.*

Activity #2: Design your own Gender-Conscious Early Learning Environment (Chapter III)

Chapter III explored how the academic gender gaps of adolescence begin with three small sex differences in infancy, which are reinforced and grow larger over the course of early-to- middle childhood. Taking into account the differences between boys and girls, including their proclivities, interests, and typical experiences, design an early learning environment that could help to even-up these differences and promote every child’s optimal development. Think about what types of toys and materials you would supply, the layout of the overall room/outdoor space, the furniture, selection of available activities, the curricula you would choose to implement, and the specific developmental/learning objectives you would have for the children in this hypothetical environment. You can create a drawing, collage, diorama, or use some other form of creative representation to display your ideas.

Activity #3: Gender-Neutral Speech (Chapter IV)

Although younger infants (under 10 months) have not yet begun to form stereotypical associations, and older children (around 7-8 years) show increased flexibility in their adherence

to stereotypes, the period in between – that is, most of the early childhood years – is greatly impacted by gender stereotyping: It influences children’s thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, behaviors, as well as their selection of toys and activities. Consequently, it is important for teachers to be aware of the kinds of messages they are sending their students regarding gender. The following terms have gendered (biased) connotations, which can send the wrong messages to impressionable children about what it means to be male or female. Review the list of terms, compiled by Service-Growth Consultants Inc. (2003), and see if you can find gender-neutral substitutes for each one.

1. **Policeman:** substitute with _____
2. **Repairman:** substitute with _____
3. **Waitress:** substitute with _____
4. **Cleaning lady:** substitute with _____
5. **Career girl/woman:** substitute with _____
6. **Corporate wife:** substitute with _____
7. **Freshman:** substitute with _____
8. **Middleman:** substitute with _____
9. **Hostess:** substitute with _____
10. **Housewife/househusband:** substitute with _____
11. **Brotherhood:** substitute with _____
12. **Man/mankind:** substitute with _____
13. **Forefathers:** substitute with _____
14. **Mother tongue:** substitute with _____
15. **Ladylike:** substitute with _____
16. **Motherly:** substitute with _____
17. **Manly:** substitute with _____
18. **Man enough:** substitute with _____

19. **All men are created equal:** substitute with _____

20. **Boys will be boys:** substitute with _____

**Answers to this activity can be found on page 68.*

Activity #4: Teacher Goals Chart (Chapter V)

This activity is derived from the book, *Leading Anti-Bias Early Childhood Programs*, by Louise Derman-Sparks, Debbie LeeKeenan, and John Nimmo (2015).

Instructions: Please fill in the following chart (located right) with specific goals that you would like to pursue in your work with children and families that has to do with promoting gender equity. Begin with goals that you believe will be fairly easy to attain, then list some loftier goals that are more challenging, but still possible to fulfill. Specify how you will work towards these goals, as well as what kind of support you would like from your supervisor. Then get started on them!

Gender Equity Goal	What I will Do to Accomplish the Goal	Support I Need from my Supervisor
<i>Beginning Teacher Goal #1:</i>		
<i>Beginning Teacher Goal #2:</i>		
<i>Advanced Teacher Goal #1:</i>		
<i>Advanced Teacher Goal #2:</i>		

Activity #5: T/F Pop-Quiz! (Chapter VI)

1. People should be skeptical of men who want to work with young children because they might be pedophiles or child abusers.

TRUE FALSE

2. Most families are not comfortable with male teachers/caregivers, and since it is important to help families feel safe and to accommodate their wishes, male teachers/caregivers should not be hired.

TRUE FALSE

3. Men in the early childhood education field want to be treated equally to women in the workplace; they want to be allowed to speak their minds without being labeled as aggressive or opinionated, and without being accused of wanting to seize control from their female colleagues; men do not want to be expected to do all of the heavy lifting, always take out the trash, or always be the one to perform other traditionally masculine jobs.

TRUE FALSE

4. Men do not have an innate capacity to be as nurturing or patient as women, and therefore they do not make as good of teachers/caregivers for young children.

TRUE FALSE

5. It is important for young children to interact with positive male role models, and to be nurtured and educated by them. In modern society, many children are missing out on these kinds of key experiences with men, which is all the more reason that the early childhood education field needs to recruit and employ more male teachers/caregivers.

TRUE FALSE

6. Whenever a person pursues an occupation that is traditionally performed by the opposite sex, others will often suspect that something must be “different” about him/her, but men who work with children do so because they enjoy their jobs, and just like women they can be straight, gay, or bisexual. Furthermore, a person’s sexual orientation has nothing to do with whether or not s/he is an appropriate candidate to work with young children.

TRUE FALSE

**Answers to this activity can be found on page 69.*

Activity #6: Family Book Bag (Chapter VII)

This activity is derived from the book, *Leading Anti-Bias Early Childhood Programs*, by Louise Derman-Sparks, Debbie LeeKeenan, and John Nimmo (2015).

Instructions: Select a children’s book that somehow relates to the topic of gender and/or gender equity. It should be a good

book to inspire anti-bias conversations. Place the book in a bag along with a journal (you can also include various writing instruments if you wish). Send the book bag home each night with a different child. Also be sure to send instructions home with the family: request that they first read the book together, then draw a picture and/or write something about it in the journal provided. The families should be encouraged to read and comment on previous journal entries as well. The teacher can model this process by responding to entries in respectful and age-appropriate ways for the children and families to see.

Answers to Activity #1, #3, and #5

Activity #1: Fill in the Blanks (Chapter II)

1. Children's conceptions of gender; gendered judgments and/or beliefs; self-regulation; engagement in gender-typed activities; the vast array of societal influences that children encounter in daily living
2. Modeling; enactive experience; direct tuition
3. Extracting; evaluating; assimilating
4. Queer theory
5. Heteronormativity
6. Gender performativity; heterosexual matrix
7. Gender schema theory
8. Gender schema

Activity #3: Gender-Neutral Speech (Chapter IV)

1. Police officer
2. Repairer or technician
3. Waiter or server
4. Cleaner
5. Professional, manager, or executive
6. Corporate spouse
7. First-year student
8. Go-between
9. Host
10. Homemaker
11. Kinship or community
12. Humankind, humanity, or humans
13. Ancestors or forebears
14. Native language

15. Courteous, cultured
16. Loving, warm, or nurturing
17. Strong or mature
18. Strong enough
19. We are all created equal
20. Kids will be kids

Activity #5: T/F Pop-Quiz! (Chapter VI)

1. FALSE
2. FALSE
3. TRUE
4. FALSE
5. TRUE
6. TRUE

Glossary

Alyha: In Mohave culture, this word refers to female-identified males.

Gender: 1) The state of being male or female, usually in regards to social and cultural prescriptions as opposed to biological differences; 2) A person's biological sex.

Gender constancy: The understanding that one's identity as male or female is fixed, which usually develops between the ages of four and six years.

Gender identity: The ability to label oneself and others as male or female, which usually develops between 18-24 months of age.

Gender performativity: The idea that gender-typed behavior is a performance of sorts – a way in which to “act out” one's identity as male or female. (Derived from queer theory.)

Gender schema theory: Theory that explains gender in terms of the mental representations children form, based upon interactions with their environments, about what is appropriate (or not) for their biological sex. Once children form their gender identities they immediately begin to develop biases, and seek to behave in ways that they believe are deemed to be appropriate for them.

Gender schematic processing: Similar to information processing, gender schematic processing uses a computer metaphor to explain the inner workings of the brain including

human thought processes. In this case, it speaks specifically to the input and output of gender-related information. Example: A child comes across a toy, draws upon his/her pre-existing knowledge, experiences, and beliefs to determine whether this is a “boy toy” or “girl toy”, and responds by either playing with the toy or rejecting it based upon its perceived appropriateness for his/her biological sex. Gender stereotypes and biases are implicit.

Guevedoche: In the Dominican Republic, this word loosely translates to “testicles at twelve” and is regarded as a third gender. It describes children who were born with undifferentiated genitalia and who were usually raised as girls, but developed male traits at puberty and decided to live not as male or female, but as a third gender. This third gender has been accommodated into the larger society, and unique roles have been constructed for the guevedoche.

Heteronormativity: The dominant societal assumption that everyone is – or ought to be – heterosexual. (Derived from queer theory.)

Heterosexual matrix: Concept that refers to the way in which gender stereotypical behaviors occur within the interrelated contexts of gender (masculinity and femininity) and sexuality (heterosexuality and homosexuality). (Derived from queer theory.)

Hidden curriculum: The biased teachings that children receive in a variety of ways other than through direct instruction.

Hwame: In Mohave culture, this word refers to male-identified females.

Information processing: Theory that uses a computer metaphor to explain human brain functioning from sensory intake, through neural connections, reactions, and the retrieval of stored memories, to information output.

Mashoga: A Swahili term that refers to an entire range of identities on the gender spectrum, including gay men and biological males who assume a female gender from a young age. Mashoga play an integral role in wedding ceremonies.

Ninauposkitzipxpe: In the North Peigan tribe, this word loosely translates to “manly-hearted woman” and is regarded as a third gender describing women who are unconfined by the social conventions that are traditionally put upon them.

Psychological androgyny: When an individual possesses and exhibits traditionally masculine as well as traditionally feminine characteristics. For example, a person who is both nurturing (feminine) and strong (masculine).

Queer theory: An emergent theory that explains gender primarily in terms of socially prescribed heterosexual norms, expectations, and standards. It asserts that no “normal” expression of gender exists, and that gender is simply a way of “performing”/acting out one’s maleness/femaleness.

Social cognitive theory: Albert Bandura’s theory that explains gender in terms of the complex, synergistic effects of personal, behavioral, and environmental influences upon the individual.

Resources

***Print Resources for Children:**

It's Okay to Be Different by Todd Parr

Play Free by McNall Mason and Max Suarez

My Princess Boy by Cheryl Kilodavis, illustrated by Suzanne DeSimone

Rosie Revere, Engineer by Andrea Beaty

Clothesline Clues to Jobs People Do by Kathryn Heling and Deborah Hembrook

All I Want to Be is Me by Phyllis Rothblatt

I am Jazz by Jessica Herthel and Jazz Jennings, illustrated by Shelagh McNicholas

Backwards Day by S. Bear Bergman, illustrated by KD Diamond

Red: A Crayon's Story by Michael Hall

Be Who You Are by Jennifer Carr

***Print resources for teachers can be found throughout the handbook under the heading “Suggestions for Further Reading”, which is located at the end of chapters II-VII.**

Online Resources for Teachers and Caregivers:

Child Development: The Difference Between Boys and Girls
<http://www.first5la.org/articles/child-development-101-the-differences-between-boys-and-girls>

Cultural Competency: What It Is and Why It Matters
<http://www.californiatomorrow.org/media/ccompetecy.pdf>

Quality Benchmark for Cultural Competence Tool
<http://www.naeyc.org/files/naeyc/file/policy/state/QBBC%20Tool%20FINAL%20609.pdf>

Creating a Learning Environment that Respects Diversity
<http://www.adl.org/asstes/pdf/education-outreach/How-Can-You-Create-a-Learning-Environment-That-Respects-Diversity.pdf>

Empty Seats: Addressing the Problem of Unfair School Discipline for Boys of Color
http://www.clasp.org/resources-and-publications/publication-1/EmptySeats_final.pdf

Diversity and Discipline
<http://www.pakeys.org/docs/DIdoc6.pdf>

The Peace Education Project
<http://www.childpeacebooks.org/cpb/Protect/ourProject.php>

Guide for Selecting Anti-Bias Children's Books
<http://www.tfcbooks.org/guide-anti-bias-childrens-books>

Anti-Bias Education: Children's Books for Every Topic
<http://www.childpeacebooks.org/cpb/Protect/antiBias.php#race>

Gender Expansive and Trans-Gender Children: Books for Students
<http://www.welcomingschools.org/pages/looking-at-gender-identity-with-childrens-books/>

Books to Teach Gender Fluidity and Acceptance to Children
<http://www.readbrightly.com/8-books-that-teach-kids-about-the-fluidity-of-gender-and-the-importance-of-acceptance/>

Picture Books that Counteract Gender Stereotypes
<http://www.readbrightly.com/8-books-that-teach-kids-about-the-fluidity-of-gender-and-the-importance-of-acceptance/>