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Exploring preschoolers' conceptions of gender

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EXPLORING PRESCHOOLERS' CONCEPTIONS OF GENDER

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Presented to

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by

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ABSTRACT

EXPLORING PRESCHOOLERS' CONCEPTIONS OF GENDER

by Charlotte M. Wilson

This thesis addresses the issue of preschoolers' conceptions of gender identity and gender-appropriate roles, characteristics, and behaviors. It examines how children talk about gender issues in the context of book discussions focusing on portrayals of males and females.

The study uses data collected from interviews and group discussions to show that, although the four target children were very close in age, they spoke in quite different ways about gender identity, gender constancy, and gender norms. However, each of the children did voice strong stereotypes regarding gender-appropriate appearance, roles, and behaviors. This study also found that the preschoolers were willing to challenge each others' stereotypical beliefs in the context of a group discussion.

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FOREWORD

This thesis examines four preschoolers' levels of understanding of and commitment to socially-accepted gender stereotypes. In my work with young children, I have become increasingly aware of the stereotypes that children already accept and defend in their interactions with each other. I have attended many child development workshops suggesting effective ways to address racial, physical ability, and cultural stereotyping with preschoolers. Gender stereotypes, however, have been largely ignored in these workshops.

My concern with the issue of gender stereotyping has grown as my feminist self has developed. When I began teaching I was what I call a "baby feminist." I spoke out for equal rights for women and against blatantly sexist situations, but I did not see those situations in their social context. As I have sensed increasingly the subtle ways that the broader society has elevated its narrow definition of masculinity and downplayed other identity traits, I have become more vocal in my struggle against stereotyping and sexism. This growing conviction results from my deepening feminism.

Intellectually, the issues surrounding gender concept development and stereotyping intrigue me. How do young children in the nineties think about gender? How do they decide whether a particular trait or behavior is masculine or feminine? Are societal changes in thinking about gender being reflected in preschoolers' development? If so, in what ways? Can educators promote change through their teaching? This study only begins to address these important questions and should be seen as a small part in the continuing conversation about gender concept development in young children.

Chapter One
Overview of the Project

Introduction

The development of gender stereotypes begins in early childhood. Research has shown that three- and four-year-old children are already perceiving and responding to society's stereotyped views of men and women (Martin & Little, 1990). Unaware of societal taboos against voicing gender-based stereotypes, children freely talk about their perceptions of men, women, and the roles they play in society. "Big mans don't cry, but mommas and little girls can cry, can't they?" is a comment many preschool teachers have heard more than once. The children also verbalize gender stereotypical beliefs when assigning roles in dramatic play situations. For example, they might argue over the appropriateness of a boy playing the nurse in the doctor's office or a girl driving a race car. These situations demonstrate the power that society's stereotypes have in determining young children's understanding of gender identity.

From my observations, preschool children aged two through five years old also act out more subtle sex-typing in their play. In a typical preschool classroom, girls often choose to participate in quiet art activities, puzzles, or domestic dramatic play scenes, while boys take over the trucks in the block area. Outside, the girls frequently run screaming from the boys or call for a boy to rescue them. They rarely join a group of boys unless invited, while boys are more likely to enter a female-dominated or mixed-gender play group uninvited, saying, "I'm going to play with you!" In a mixed-gender group, the boys are often the rescuers and villains while the girls play the victim roles over and over again. Thus, preschoolers demonstrate the wider society's view of females as passive and males as active in the world. Clearly, gender stereotypes are not merely the domain of adults.

During the 1970s, a few articles written for teachers about gender stereotypes and young children were published in Young Children, the magazine of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. However, the most influential work on this subject in recent years has been Anti-Bias Curriculum: Tools for Empowering Young Children by Louise Derman-Sparks and the Anti-Bias Curriculum (A.B.C.) Task Force (1989). This curriculum is often introduced in child development courses at the community college level and has been promoted consistently since its publication by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Derman-Sparks and the Task Force clearly promote an activist anti-bias approach to questioning all stereotypes, stating:

> In a society in which institutional structures create and maintain sexism . . . it is not sufficient to be non-biased (and also highly unlikely), nor is it sufficient to be an observer. It is necessary for each individual to actively intervene, to challenge and counter the personal and institutional behaviors that perpetuate oppression.
> (Derman-Sparks et al., 1989, p. 3)

Early childhood educators have tended to address racial and cultural biases more diligently than they have gender biases. At the May, 1994 annual conference of the California Association for the Education of Young Children (CAEYC), 23 workshops were presented as part of the "Maximizing Pro-Diversity" strand. None of the descriptions for these workshops mentioned gender identity or stereotypes, although several were aimed at initiating an anti-bias curriculum in early childhood programs. Instead, the workshops focused on racial and cultural biases exclusively.

Thus, although early childhood educators have begun to address the issue of gender stereotypes and young children, the emphasis continues to be on confronting racial and cultural biases. This present study suggests that an anti-bias approach to gender

issues is equally important. It clearly indicates that preschoolers are aware of and committed to several gender stereotypes. Additionally, this study shows how young children talk about gender issues and justify their stereotypes when questioned about them.

Children's Gender Stereotypes and Literature

Young children are exposed to socially-accepted gender stereotypes through their interactions with other people and through the media. Television advertising and programming pass on gender biases in subtle and overt ways. Popular music also often assumes the truth of traditional stereotypes. In the early childhood classroom, though, television and pop music are usually not as prevalent as is literature. Books are an integral part of most early childhood curricula. Through the use of age-appropriate books, children learn new ways to look at the world. Preschoolers will often take a picture book off the shelf and use the story as the basis of their dramatic play. In this way, children try out roles and practice taking another's perspective. In role-play they also reinforce societal messages present in the book.

Researchers and educators have noted the proliferation of racial, cultural, and gender stereotypes in young children's books. While gender stereotyping in picture books has improved somewhat over the past thirty years, children's literature continues to portray females and males in traditional gender roles (Crabb & Beilawski, 1994; Peterson & Lach, 1990; Purcell & Stewart, 1990; Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993). In light of this fact, educators seem to have three possibilities in response to gender issues in children's books. They may choose to avoid using stereotyped books, they may choose to use the books without discussion of gender stereotypes, or they may intentionally use stereotyped books and instructional conversations in order to provoke children to question the validity of gender stereotypes. The first option, avoiding stereotyped books, is censorship. It is

difficult to implement, and by limiting exposure to gender stereotypes in books, educators are forfeiting an opportunity to provoke children's critical thinking about the issue. The second possibility, using stereotyped books without discussion, perpetuates the gender stereotypes. Educators who choose to ignore gender stereotyping in the books they use with children are actually endorsing the stereotypes. Therefore, I believe that educators are responsible for openly challenging the gender stereotypes presented in books they read with children.

Because storytelling and reading play a central role in the preschool learning environment, I believe educators ought to be sensitive to the stereotypes perpetuated in classroom literature. Trade picture books depicting gender equality are still underrepresented in many libraries and child care centers. Thus, the problem is that young children are being exposed to gender stereotypes in much of the literature they read in and out of school. These stereotypes are shaping preschoolers' conceptions of gender identity and gender roles.

Purpose of this Study and Research Questions

There is a need to address the issue of gender stereotypes in the preschool classroom. While literature is only one means of transmitting stereotypes, it is an important one. The purpose of this study was to explore preschoolers' beliefs about gender identity and gender roles through the use of interviews and an anti-bias approach in book discussions. I followed a case study approach in setting up the project. My major research question was, "How do young children talk about gender-related issues as presented in age-appropriate picture books?" I was also interested in the following sub-questions:

1. How did the children understand gender identity and gender stereotypes prior to the project?

2. How did the children talk about gender issues at the end of the project?

3. To what extent did the children's perceptions of gender concepts and their expression of these beliefs change through the course of this project?

This project was not an intervention. I was interested, however, in whether the children's voiced gender beliefs would remain consistent from the beginning to the end of the project.

Overview of the Methodology

Before the project began I chose a target group of seven of my preschool students whose ages ranged from three to five years old. I contacted their families, informed them of the project, and obtained written permission for the children to participate in the project. Although I began with seven preschoolers, three children left the group during the course of the project due to family circumstances. I was unable to obtain adequate data on these three children, so they will not be discussed in detail in the fifth chapter of this work. Their comments will be included in my presentation of group interactions, however.

Once I received all the permission forms, I interviewed the children individually to assess their gender-related knowledge. I recorded these conversations and transcribed them for comparison at the end of the project.

I met with this group of children twice a week for two months to read a story and discuss the portrayal of males and females in the books. I encouraged pertinent conversation during the reading as well as after the story, so I recorded each meeting from the moment we sat down until the end of the discussion.

One month after the last book discussion, I interviewed the children again, using the same questions I had asked at the beginning of the project, and transcribed these interviews as well. I compared the initial and final interview responses in order to explore

any changes which might have occurred in the children's expressed gender knowledge over the course of the project. I also examined the group meeting transcripts for further keys to understanding the children's beliefs about gender roles. These transcripts provided valuable insight into the children's complex conceptions of gender.

Summary

Young children are exposed to gender stereotypes through many avenues, including parents, television, and movies. Stereotypes are also transmitted through the literature they experience in the classroom and at home. Children demonstrate their belief in those stereotypes through their play and conversations with others. The purpose of this study was to explore four preschoolers' beliefs about gender identity and gender roles through the use of anti-bias instructional conversations about literature.

Overview of this study

In the following chapter I will review relevant research about the development of gender stereotypes in young children and gender stereotyping in books. The third chapter will describe my methodology for this study, and the fourth chapter will present the data I gathered through interviews and book discussions. In the fifth chapter, I will analyze each child's gender-related knowledge using interviews and book discussion transcripts. Finally, in chapter six, I will discuss the study and suggest questions for further research and implications for teaching.

Chapter Two
Review of the Literature

__Introduction__

Young children are exposed to gender stereotypes in books read at school and at home. Such exposure shapes children's understanding of gender identity and roles. My purpose was to explore children's conceptions of gender through the use of interviews and anti-bias book discussions. Several researchers have explored the development of gender-related knowledge in young children and their acquisition of gender stereotypes. Others have examined children's books for evidence of gender stereotyping, believing that children form their conceptions of the world at least in part through books. These studies informed my approach to this current project and enabled me to better understand my findings.

__Survey of the Literature__

In European-American Western cultures, from the moment the birth attendant announces, "It's a boy!" or "It's a girl!", the parent(s) begin to care for their newborn according to gender-typed expectations. They give their child a gender-specific name, they buy gender-typed clothing and toys, and the child's room begins to look like a girl's room or a boy's room. Baseball bats and footballs may adorn a little boy's wallpaper, while a young girl's walls are often papered in flowers and bows. Social treatment is also dependent on the child's gender. Studies have shown that adults behave differently towards a child based on the baby's gender. Boys are described as bigger, firmer, rougher, more aggressive, less easily scared, more alert, more stubborn, and stronger than girls of the same size (Rubin, Provenzano, & Luria, 1974, as cited in Katz, 1983; Segal, 1982). Boys in the first three months are touched by their mothers more than girls are (Lewis, 1972a). Girls are touched less, but their mothers talk to and look at them more often than

boys (Lewis & Cherry, 1977; Lewis & Goldberg, 1969, Moss, 1967). After the first six months of life, these gender-related patterns of responding to infants changes. Girls are touched more frequently by their mothers, and the boys receive less touching (Lewis, 1972b). In their second year of life, boys are believed to be noisier and less cuddly than girls in the same age group (Segal, 1982). Thus, at a very young age children are being socialized in a gender-specific manner.

Gender stereotypes and older children

While research on very young children has focused on adult-initiated socialization, studies of older children have investigated their gender-related knowledge through such data collecting techniques as interviews, toy preference tests, and writing samples. In a recent article, Short (1993) explored six to eleven-year-olds' beliefs about the validity of gender stereotypes through the use of interviews. He reported that the children were willing to justify discrimination on the basis of gender stereotypes, thus demonstrating their belief in the stereotypes. This suggests children's beliefs in gender stereotypes do not necessarily weaken as children get older.

In their study examining children's creative writing for gender stereotyping, Trepanier-Street and Romatowski (1986) found consistent evidence of "male-dominated plots" in young children's writing. The elementary school children wrote plots attributing their male characters with more problem-solving roles and more intense physical action than the female characters. These results were especially strong for male authors of all ages (grades one through six) and younger female authors (grades one through four). Traditional gender stereotyping was observed in the roles and activities of story characters more often than not. Trepanier-Street and Romatowski suggested that "these findings may be partially attributed to the often sex-role stereotypic models and the male dominated perspective seen in literature" (p. 109).

<u>Research focusing on preschoolers</u>

Much of the research that has been done on children's gender-related knowledge has focused on children in the primary grades. However, I found several studies of particular relevance in attempting to understand preschool children's gender knowledge.

Most two-year-olds can accurately identify their own gender (Kuhn, Nash, & Brucken, 1978; Slaby & Frey, 1975). As these toddlers learn about their bodies (and, especially in group care, the bodies of others), they show interest in the physical differences between girls and boys. By two and a half years of age, children are learning to correctly identify their own gender and that of others (Derman-Sparks et. al, 1989). Once able to label the sexes accurately, young children begin to form stereotypes of gender-appropriate roles and behaviors based on society's norms. For example, a three-year-old boy may say he wants to be a "big, strong policeman" when he grows up, while a three-year-old girl may say she wants to be a "nice mommy" when she gets older. This behavior then reflects society's "gender-associated expectations" (Martin & Little, 1990).

In their 1978 study, "Sex role concepts of two and three year olds," Kuhn, Nash, and Brucken presented young preschoolers with 72 statements involving traits (e.g., "I'm strong"), activities (e.g., "I like to play football"), and future roles (e.g., "When I grow up I'm going to be a truck driver"). The subjects were then asked to identify which of two paper dolls (one male and one female) had made the remark. They found that both boys and girls believed that girls like to play with dolls, cook, help mom, talk a lot, say "I need some help," and never hit. Both boys and girls also believed that boys like to play cars, help dad, build things, and say "I can hit you." This study demonstrated that even young children were already forming gender stereotypes consistent with society's gender expectations.

Cowen and Hoffman (1986) reported similar findings in their study of two and a half to four and a half year-old children's level of gender stereotyping. They showed their subjects pairs of photos of infants, dogs, and horses. They introduced each character as male or female using names (i.e., "This is Bobby, this is Mary.") Then the interviewer told the child, "One of these is strong. Point to the strong baby/dog/horse. One of these is weak. Point to the weak baby/dog/horse." Cowen and Hoffman used ten pairs of character traits that are socially attributed to one gender or the other: big/little, mad/scared, fast/slow, strong/weak, nice/mean, quiet/loud, smart/dumb, and soft/hard. They found that the youngest children stereotyped as much as the three and a half year-olds, and that children stereotyped animals and infants equally across gender and age. They also reported that the children stereotyped others more than themselves.

In her study, "Preschool children's conceptions of sex-role transgressions," Smetana (1986) examined preschoolers' conceptual basis of sex-role judgments. She found that gender role transgressions (e.g., a boy wearing nail polish or a girl playing football) were judged to be more permissible than moral transgressions(e.g., hitting another child) or conventional transgressions (such as not sitting in one's seat during snack). She also found that the children were more committed to the maintenance of male gender roles than female-typed roles and that they were more committed to maintaining female-typed appearances than activities. Additionally, the boys judged male cross-gender appearances to be more significant transgressions than male cross-gender activities. Male gender-role deviations were seen to be more serious social transgressions than female cross-gender behavior or appearance. Finally, Smetana noted that the children were somewhat flexible in their judgments, but committed to socially-prescribed gender-roles. She suggested that flexibility in gender-role expectations for children ages three through eight might be understood in terms of a U-shaped function. This would mean that three

old children, like seven and eight year-olds, may be more flexible about sex-role transgressions than five and six year-olds. Emmerich (1982) suggested a similar U-shaped graph to illustrate children's understanding of gender identity in this same age span.

In her study, "Children's use of gender-related information in making social judgments," Martin (1989) studied how children use information about others' gender, interests, and pejorative cross-gender labels (such as sissy or tomboy) to make social judgments. She noted that young children tend to ignore individuating information and instead consider members of a gender group as virtually identical. She attributed this tendency to the preschooler's difficulty with processing multiple sources of information and to young children's less differentiated schemas for making social judgments. Martin found that the children she studied showed same-sex preferences and predicted that others would also. She discovered that younger children disregarded all individuating information when predicting a target's masculine or feminine toy choice. Instead, the preschoolers assumed that boys would like masculine toys and girls would like feminine toys. As the age of the children increased, the children used both gender and stated interests in forming judgments. Martin concluded that "young children may ignore all information, regardless of its relevance, in favor of what is perceived to be the best predictor - someone's sex" (p. 87).

Theories of gender-knowledge acquisition

Much research has sought to explore the cognitive prerequisites and social conditions necessary for the acquisition of gender-related knowledge in young children. Three major positions have been advanced by child development and psychology researchers: the cognitive-developmental approach, social learning theory, and the gender schema approach. Additionally, feminist classroom researchers have suggested post-

structuralist analyses of gender and young children. Each approach stresses different factors in the development of gender identity and gender stereotypes.

Cognitive-developmental theory.

The cognitive-developmental theorist, Lawrence Kohlberg (1966), focused his attention on the importance of the child's cognitive attainment of gender constancy. He maintained that, although some awareness of gender stereotypes exists before gender constancy is achieved, only the child who has firmly grasped the concept of his or her unchanging gender identity is driven to form values consistent with that masculine or feminine identity. Thus, the internal cognitive self-categorization must be completed before gender-typing will begin. The completion of this cognitive task occurs concurrently with the attainment of other cognitive concepts such as conservation (of number, size, etc.) at around the age of six years, according to Kohlberg.

In their 1975 study, "Development of gender constancy and selective attention to same-sex models," Slaby and Frey explored the connection between children's understanding of gender identity and constancy and their attention to same-sex models. They found that children with a strong understanding of gender constancy attended to models of their same gender more consistently than did children with less gender constancy. Their results pertaining to boys showed a significant increase at the more advanced levels of gender constancy, while the girls in the study did attend more to female models at the advanced levels, but not significantly. Slaby and Frey suggested that "young children's perception of their own gender similarity to an adult model may develop in stages" which parallel their cognitive understanding of gender constancy (p. 854). Furthermore, they commented that perceived desirable characteristics may also influence a child's attention towards a model. Males have generally been perceived by our society as more competent than females (Kohlberg, 1966), so the girls in this study with advanced

understanding of gender constancy may have faced "contradictory tendencies to attend to the similar (female) model and the powerful model (male)" (Slaby & Frey, p. 855).

Social learning theory.

In contrast to the cognitive-developmental theory, under the social learning theory put forth by Walter Mischel (1966), children's sex role beliefs and behaviors are understood as the product of their experiences in the world as girls and boys. According to this theory, the child "learns to discriminate between sex-typed behavior patterns, then to generalize from these specific learning experiences to new situations, and finally to perform sex-typed behavior" (p. 57). The learning occurs through observation, imitation of same-sex models, reward, punishment, and conditioning. As a basic example, a young girl is rewarded for behaving in a feminine way (e.g., her peers accept her when she screams at the sight of a spider), so she continues to act out gender-typed behavior. A preschool boy, on the other hand, who is rejected by his father because he's wearing high heels may be hesitant to try "dressing up like Mom" again. Social-learning theory places little emphasis on the cognitive development needed for acquiring gender-typed behavior and values. Instead, Mischel suggested that cognitive and value adjustments follow behavior.

Gender schema theories.

Gender schema theories, in contrast, recognize the influence of cognitive and societal factors in the development of gender-role knowledge. These theories "suggest that children's attention and behaviors are guided by an internal motivation to conform to gender-based, sociocultural standards and stereotypes, that is, the *gender schema*" (Levy & Carter, 1989, p. 444). Gender schema theories consider stereotyping and sex-typing a natural cognitive process that enables the child to categorize knowledge and build inferences. Martin and Halverson's (1981) schematic processing model proposed two

types of gender schemas: the "in-group-out-group" schema, which consists of all the information children use to determine whether a trait, behavior, or role is male-appropriate or female-appropriate; and the "own-sex" schema, which consists of the knowledge children possess about traits, behaviors, and roles that are appropriate to their own gender. The authors suggest that these schemas aid the child in regulating behavior, organizing information, and structuring inference and interpretation of gender-ambiguous material. Liabilities of schematic processing mentioned by Martin and Halverson include inappropriate or faulty schemas and the tendency of children to over-apply a sex-typing schema. For instance, many preschoolers will say that girls have long hair and boys have short hair, even though they have seen many exceptions to that rule. Gender schema theorists do not insist, as cognitive developmental researchers do, that the child have a firm grasp of gender constancy before the schematic processing can begin. Instead, they suggest that only an understanding of one's gender identity is needed for sex-typing and stereotyping to occur. Once children are able to accurately place themselves in a gender category, the "in-group-out-group" processing starts. In contrast to the social learning theorists, who maintain that children know how to perform both sex-appropriate and sex-inappropriate behaviors but are shaped by reinforcement of the former (Mischel, 1966), the gender schematic model suggests that children lack the necessary knowledge to perform gender-inappropriate tasks. Martin and Halverson proposed that young children are incapable of becoming more flexible in their gender stereotyping until they are able to process multiple classifications (see also Flavell, 1977).

Feminist post-structuralism.

In addition to the above theories of gender development supported by child development researchers, feminist researchers Davies (1989, 1993), Walkerdine (1989), and Jones (1993) suggested understanding the process of becoming a boy or girl in the

context of post-structuralism. Briefly, the term post-structuralism refers to the working out of cultural shifts in the post-industrial era within academic society (Lather, 1990). Rather than focus strictly on the societal forces which shape a young child's identity, Davies (1993) looks at the way in which "each person actively takes up the discourses through which they and others speak/write the world into existence *as if it were their own*" (p. 13). Davies calls this process subjectification. Thus, children are not merely acted upon by society. Instead, they "take up" for themselves gender positions, choosing from those made available to them (Davies, 1993; Walkerdine, 1989; Jones, 1993). This theory acknowledges the power that individuals have to position themselves. Jones (1993) points out that individuals may enter contradictory positions in their daily lives. For example, a girl may be very shy and withdrawn in some situations, and also be outspoken and in control in other settings.

Feminist teachers have attempted to open up new subjectivities (positions) for girls, but this is not easy. In her work with preschoolers and feminist picture books, Davies (1989) shows that children are more likely to position themselves in socially prevailing subjectivities than they are to take up alternative positions because the alternative position is not seen as desirable (Jones, 1993). For this reason, simply telling girls that "you can be anything" and offering non-sexist curriculum will probably not change girls' positioning. They sense "the positions-including the silences-available to 'normal' women, and usually regulate their own desires and behaviours within those parameters" (Jones, 1993).

Feminist post-structuralism considers gender development, then, as a process involving complex shifts in subjectivities and power. Individuals are seen as powerful agents in their own positioning within the spaces made available to them by society.

Gender stereotypes in children's books

Social learning theory (Mischel, 1966), cognitive-developmental theory (Kohlberg, 1966), feminist post-structuralist theory (Davies, 1989; Walkerdine, 1989; Jones, 1993) and gender schema theories (Levy & Carter, 1989; Martin & Halverson, 1981) all recognize the importance of societal models on young children's development of gender-related knowledge. Children's books are instrumental in presenting such societal models and shaping young children's conceptions of their world, so it makes sense to explore literature's hidden stereotypical messages.

Since the 1960s, many researchers have studied children's literature and its portrayal of gender stereotypes. In 1972, Women on Words and Images analyzed 134 elementary readers to determine the amount of stereotyping in them. This study, *Dick and Jane as Victims*, found that male characters were portrayed significantly more often in the readers. The greatest disparity was found between male and female biographical stories, where "there (we)re 27 stories about only 17 different women, whereas there (we)re 119 stories about 88 men." (Women on Words and Images, 1975, p. 10). Furthermore, women in the stories were found in only 26 occupations, all of them traditionally considered feminine jobs (e.g., baby sitter, cafeteria worker, cook, cleaning woman, ice skater, teacher, witch). In contrast, men appeared in 147 different occupations. The 1972 study also showed males as more active than females, who were usually shown in passive or domestic roles, looking on while boys played cowboys, rode bikes, and built block houses (Women on Words and Images, 1975). Three years later, a study of 83 more readers resulted in similar findings, but with a few signs of change (Women on Words and Images, 1975). Males were still portrayed more often than females and in three times as many occupations as women. However, "some females were found who were clever, competent, and initiating, as well as a few males who did not have to hold back their tears,

and who were able to honestly express emotions." (Women on Words and Images, 1975, p. 66). Other studies done during the 1960s and 1970s also concluded that "males always outnumbered females by a significant proportion . . . (and) males were most likely to be portrayed as positive, active and competent, while females were likely to be portrayed as negative, passive and incompetent" (Peterson & Lach, 1990, p. 185).

Peterson and Lach (1990) noted that most of these studies examined books for older (elementary school-aged) children and that minimal research in the area of children's books and gender stereotypes was done after 1980. In their review of *Horn Book* selections from 1967, 1977, and 1987, the researchers found that the earlier inequities had been at least somewhat corrected. They were hesitant, however, to state that gender stereotyping in children's books had been fully corrected, citing "the lack of statistical significance for these trends, (as well as their own) experiences and those shared by other colleagues" (Peterson & Lach, p. 195).

Purcell and Stewart (1990) also suggested cautious optimism based on their 1989 replication of the *Dick and Jane as Victims* study. They found that female characters appeared more often than in the previous study, but still not as often as males. In addition, female characters were still portrayed in traditional roles (e.g., as mothers, teachers, nurses, etc.) and in a narrower range of occupations than males. They concluded that, "while there have been great strides made in the portrayal of sex roles in children's readers, it is important that this continue to go forward" (Purcell & Stewart, p. 184).

In their recent review of gender-typing in children's picture books, Crabb and Beilawski (1994) also described continued stereotyping. They found no change at all over time in the proportion of females shown using household items (e.g., irons, vacuum cleaners, electric mixers), and males were shown more frequently doing manual labor.

Clearly, children's picture books and readers continue to present traditional stereotypes of male and female behavior and roles.

Effects of stereotyping in children's books

What harmful effects result from gender stereotyping in children's literature? Children form their identity through socialization. The development of gender role identity is strongly influenced by the gender-associated expectations of adults and peers. These expectations are transmitted through personal interaction, modeling, and the visual, aural, and print media (Trepanier-Street & Romatowski, 1986; Peterson & Lach, 1990; Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993). Picture books play a significant role in transmitting gender expectations and stereotypes in our society.

In our society, males are typically considered as competent and achievement-oriented (Deaux, 1976). Women, on the other hand, are considered dependent, submissive, and nurturing. The studies done by Peterson and Lach (1990), Purcell and Stewart (1990), and Crabb and Beilawski (1994) demonstrate that these gender stereotypes are still present in children's literature, and are therefore still being transmitted to young children.

Summary

There has been much research done on the development of gender stereotypes in young children. A review of the literature shows that the teaching of gender stereotypes begins at birth, if not before (Rubin, Provenzano, & Luria, 1974; Lewis, 1972a; Lewis & Cherry, 1977; Lewis & Goldberg, 1969; Moss, 1967; Lewis, 1972b). Toddlers, preschoolers and older children exhibit a strong commitment to societal norms of gender-appropriate appearances, behaviors, and roles (Martin & Little, 1990; Cowen & Hoffman, 1986; Short, 1993; Trepanier-Street & Romatowski, 1986; Martin, 1989; Smetana, 1986). Although theorists do not agree on whether cognitive growth or societal pressures are

most influential in children's gender stereotype development, they do agree that environment plays a large role (Kohlberg, 1966; Slaby & Frey, 1975; Mischel, 1966; Levy & Carter, 1989; Martin & Halverson, 1981; Davies, 1993; Walkerdine, 1989; Jones, 1993).

Children's literature is one major influence on young children's moral and cognitive development, and therefore on their developing gender expectations. Recent studies demonstrate that, although gender stereotyping is less frequent in current children's picture books, it still exists (Peterson & Lach, 1990; Purcell & Stewart, 1990; Crabb & Beilawski, 1994; Kortenhaus & Demarest, 1993). This stereotyping limits the gender subjectivities available to young children as they seek to position themselves as male or female. It also limits their conceptions of the other gender.

Chapter Three
Research Methodology

Introduction

This study sought to explore preschoolers' gender-related knowledge through the use of anti-bias literature conversations and interviews. I took a case study approach as I studied four target children. This chapter describes the methodology I used to implement the study.

Description of Methodology

Selection of students

I initially chose a target group of seven preschoolers between three- and five-years-old. Because of changing family circumstances, the final group included four of these seven. My primary considerations in selecting the students were:

1. The children's schedules. I chose children who were consistently scheduled for late afternoon care at Little Friends Children's Center (not the school's real name) on Mondays and Wednesdays. Because of my prior teaching commitments and the preschool routine, this was the only time available for the group to meet. I also chose children with a previous history of regular attendance because I wanted to ensure consistent attendance as much as possible.

2. The children's comfort with speaking in small groups. Because I wanted the group times to be pleasant experiences for the participants, I chose children who enjoyed interacting in small group discussions. They were already friends with each other and very comfortable together. They were children with whom I had worked in small and large groups for several months, so our relationships were also well-established.

3. The children's interest in books. I chose children who often read and listened to stories throughout the day and participated in small group conversations about stories. I determined that the target children should be able to follow the reading of a medium-

length picture book (15 pages or more) with minimal comprehension difficulties. I did not want the children to be confused by the text, and thus unable to participate in the discussions.

4. Parental permission. I notified each child's parent(s) of my project's intent and my desire to include their child. The parents gave written consent for their child's participation in the project and informed me of any planned vacations or schedule changes for the summer. I used these forms to decide the exact days and time for the group meetings.

Preliminary data collection

In order to determine the children's understanding of gender-related issues before the project, I conducted initial interviews. I invited each child to come with me to a quiet area of the classroom. After a short demonstration of how the tape recorder worked, I asked a series of questions aimed at determining the child's gender-related knowledge. These questions were intended to reveal the child's understanding of gender identity (Are you a boy or a girl? How do you know? What makes you a boy/girl? What's the difference between girls and boys? Can you think of another difference?), gender constancy (Will you be a man or a woman when you grow up? What will you do?), their gender-role knowledge (Are there things that only women can do? Are there things that only men can do?), and their positive or negative feelings about their gender (Would you rather be a girl or a boy? Why?). In addition to these questions, I asked follow-up questions aimed at understanding the child's reasoning behind his or her answers. For example, when Annie told me she knew she was a girl because she was wearing "girl clothes," I asked her, "What makes your clothes girl clothes?" I tried to elicit as many explanations as possible from each child. In this way I hoped to gain a clear picture of

each child's understanding of gender identity and gender roles before we began meeting and discussing gender issues as a group.

The group sessions

I began the project two weeks later than I had planned because of an outbreak of chicken pox. Three of the target children spent those two weeks at home, and I wanted to start the project with the whole group. I began talking with the children about our "special group time" early in the afternoon on the first day, so by five o'clock they were prepared to meet. We tried to meet every Monday and Wednesday for twenty minutes to half an hour.

I began each group time by telling the children the title, author, and illustrator of the book I was to read. Then I instructed them to watch for specific issues I wanted to discuss at the end of the story. For example, in the case of William's Doll (Zolotow, 1972), I asked the children to pay attention to the girls and boys in the story and how they felt. After we finished reading the story, I repeated my prompt and let the children respond. I found that the children had a lot to say and frequently disagreed openly with each other. I interjected some clarifying questions when necessary, such as "What do you mean by that?" or "Does that mean that . . . ?" Otherwise, I tried to promote the discussion between the students by reflecting back to the group one individual's statement and inviting them to respond. For example, I'd say, "Devin says girls can't be firefighters. What do the rest of you think?" I occasionally offered my opinion about specific gender stereotypes when I thought it appropriate. For example, in the discussion of Curious George at the Fire Station (Rey, 1985), the children had argued extensively over the possibility of women being firefighters. I wanted to point out the message that the book gave regarding this issue so I said, "I don't like the fact that this book shows only boy firefighters. That tells me that maybe girls can't be firefighters. What do you think?"

Mark and Kelli reiterated their confident "Yes, they can," while Devin and Annie continued to argue against the appropriateness of female firefighters. By this time in the conversation, the children had all voiced their opinions and argued about them. I viewed my role as primarily listener and reflector, but I was also a participant in the discussions and did state my position at times. When I did make such an assertion, I was careful to frame it as an opinion followed by an invitation to others to comment. I recorded and transcribed each book discussion. The project continued for six weeks, allowing us to meet ten times.

Final interviews

One month later, I once again used interviews to explore the children's understanding of gender. These interviews included the same questions as the initial assessment interviews because I was looking for consistencies and inconsistencies in the children's responses. When I asked for examples as a follow-up to my question, "Are there things that women can do that men can't do? Or are there things that men can do that women can't do?" three of the four said, "I can't think." For that reason, I provided suggestions of jobs and asked, "Who can do that?"

Data analysis

Because I was primarily interested in how the children talked about gender roles before, during, and after the project, I relied on my transcripts of the initial and final interviews and the group meetings. I first read through the discussion transcripts several times and coded each child's utterance for the amount of commitment to and types of gender stereotypes it revealed. I devised five categories based on my reading of the transcripts:

1. <u>Anti-Bias Comments</u>. These were statements which reflected a deliberate disagreement with traditionally-accepted gender norms. Examples would be, "Girls can too be firefighters," and "Boys can play with dolls if they want to. It's okay."

2. <u>No Stereotype</u>. These comments showed a child's willingness to individuate characteristics or roles. Examples would be, "Some girls have short hair, some girls have long hair. Some boys have short hair, some boys have long hair," and "Girls can be doctors and boys can be doctors."

3. <u>Unrelated to Gender</u>. These comments were mainly story clarification remarks. An example would be, "William was sad because he wanted a doll."

4. <u>Limited Stereotype</u>. These remarks demonstrated the speaker's willingness to allow a transgression, within clearly defined limits, of traditionally accepted gender stereotypes. Examples would be, "Boys can play with dolls, only with the Ken dolls if they want to" and "Only Indian boys can wear flowers in their hair."

5. <u>Strong Stereotype</u>. These statements reflected traditional gender-associated expectations regarding roles, appearance, or behaviors. Examples might include, "Boys cannot be teachers," and "Girls cannot play with trucks."

In order to establish reliability, another person also coded all of the transcribed data. This person is a friend of mine who works outside the field of education, and he has limited familiarity with child development. I gave him several examples of each type of comment before he began coding. These examples were not direct quotes from the children, nor were they similar to any transcribed remarks. After comparing our individual results, I found that we had coded 86.5% of the responses consistently. We then discussed our reasoning for those remarks on which we disagreed and reached a consensus.

Finally, I examined each individual's initial and final interview responses for consistencies and changes in thinking. I also noted any references in the final interview to book discussions we had had. I studied the accumulated interview and discussion data for each individual and sought to place my findings within the context of previous gender-knowledge research on preschoolers. In this way I tried to better understand the cognitive and social processes the target children were undergoing.

Summary

I was concerned about young children's exposure to gender stereotypes through literature. I decided to explore their thinking about gender issues through the use of an intentional anti-bias approach to story conversations. After collecting initial data on each target group member's gender knowledge, I met twice weekly with the small group to discuss gender stereotypes in picture books. I recorded and transcribed these discussions and used them in future sessions when applicable. One month following the end of the six-week project, I interviewed the children again, looking for consistencies and inconsistencies with their previous responses. The next chapter describes the small group interactions in depth in order to examine the children's gender conceptions.

Chapter Four
Findings from Interviews and Group Discussions

Introduction

In this chapter I will discuss findings from the interviews and group meetings. After briefly describing the setting of this project, I will introduce the target children. I will present the data gathered from initial interviews, group discussions, and final interviews in chronological order. In addition, I will discuss the group dynamics, gender stereotypes raised, and my role in the conversations. I will also discuss the effect of absences, time of day, and choice of book on the level of critical questioning of stereotypes in each meeting.

The Setting of this Study

Little Friends Children's Center is a partially corporate-sponsored child care center which also serves children of the surrounding San Francisco Bay area. Opened in April, 1993, it offers flexible scheduling and day, evening, weekend, and overnight care for children aged three months through five years. Little Friends Children's Center currently serves close to two hundred families. About thirty percent of Little Friends Children's Center's income comes from sources other than tuition.

The administration at Little Friends Children's Center has attempted to hire highly qualified professional child care providers. The center's requirements for staff applicants are much stricter than state regulations. All supervising lead teachers have completed a Bachelor of Arts degree and non-supervising teachers must have a Children's Center Permit, demonstrating completion of 24 semester units in Child Development. California state regulations require just 12 semester units to qualify as a teacher. Active participation in local, state-wide, and national professional organizations is encouraged and ongoing education is required. In addition, salaries and benefit packages for Little Friends Children's Center employees are far above the industry average for the Bay Area. The

center has begun the process of NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) accreditation, which requires a rigorous program-wide self-study. This self-study calls for program assessment to be completed by staff, parents, and the board. Following the self-study, trained evaluators will determine whether or not to approve Little Friends Children's Center's application for accreditation. The entire process empowers child care providers to act as professionals in evaluating and changing the program from within.

Little Friends Children's Center's families, as well as its administrative and teaching staff members, represent diverse cultures, family structures, socio-economic status, and ages. Almost half of the staff members are of non-European descent, and discussion in the lounge is often in Spanish or Chinese. With such diversity in a professional child care environment, an anti-bias curriculum has become a major priority for the teaching staff. As in the broader context of the early childhood education profession, however, the focus has been on challenging racial and cultural stereotypes. I have observed that in the preschool classrooms discussions of skin color and "funny hair" are frequent, and teachers appear comfortable handling such conversations. In fact, the teachers directly confront racial and cultural stereotypes in books, music, and videos quite effectively. While I am deeply concerned about confronting racial and cultural stereotypes in my teaching, I am also aware of the subtle gender stereotypes perpetuated through the curriculum. In program-wide staff meetings, teachers have revealed much confusion over language and expectations that are free of gender bias. For example, two preschool teachers seemed surprised that their comments, "I like having more girls in my class because they aren't wild like boys" and "My room was so hectic today, but then, you know how boys are," might reflect gender stereotypes. There is a need for gender awareness training at Little

Friends Children's Center. I have advocated the use of peer observations to increase the teaching staff's awareness of gender, racial, and cultural stereotypes.

The children

It may be helpful to know a little about the target children before beginning to read about the group meetings. I have replaced their real names with aliases in order to protect their privacy.

Mark

Mark is a four-and-a-half-year-old Caucasian boy who lives with his mother. He has never known his father and is emotionally very close to his maternal grandparents. He is at Little Friends Children's Center for nine hours Monday through Friday and has formed strong attachments to many of the teachers and several children (mostly boys). His mother was quite willing for him to participate in the research project and was careful to ensure his presence at group discussions. She planned family vacations around our schedule and occasionally brought Mark in only for the book discussion. However, she never asked me about the content of our discussions or the purpose of my study.

Mark usually arrives at Little Friends Children's Center wearing clothing depicting television superhero characters and scenes. Many of the preschool boys wear similar clothing at Little Friends Children's Center, but Mark seems to have on some superhero shirt, belt, socks, or underwear almost daily. These clothes and accessories help to stimulate aggressive play among a certain group of children, with boys and girls choosing characters from a superhero T-shirt and acting out those parts. This usually leads to children chasing, kicking, and punching at each other. Mark is often a leader in this superhero play, assigning roles and narrating the script (e.g., "Now Carl, you kick Jason like this and say, 'I got you!'"). Most of the other children simply follow his direction or offer their own ideas, letting Mark have the final word. Because of his leadership in this

type of play, Mark is often the child blamed for injuries that occur. His teachers frequently hear a child say, "But Mark told me to kick him because he's a bad guy!" Parents and some teachers talk about him as a "difficult boy," seeing him as an instigator of classroom brawls. But most of his teachers know that this is only one side of Mark.

While Mark enjoys this aggressive play, he also has a soft, nurturing personality. He enjoys sharing hugs with his teachers and is very affectionate with his mother. He also writes "get well" cards for his friends and teachers who are sick. When he plays inside the classroom, Mark regularly chooses to play with the baby dolls in the play house. He will feed and diaper them, rock them gently to sleep, and tell them bedtime stories. If other children are playing house, Mark usually asks to be the baby or the mother. He volunteers to help the younger children in the group change clothes, clean up spills, and read stories. Other activities he often chooses include building with Legos and blocks, playing with toy cars and trucks, and assembling puzzles. In his non-superhero play, Mark continues to be a leader by nurturing others and working cooperatively with his friends.

Annie

Annie is a four-and-a-half-year-old Caucasian girl. She lives with her mother, father, and baby sister. She seems to enjoy playing the role of "big sister" to their baby, cuddling her and carrying her around. She frequently reports on the baby's newest accomplishments, telling us what "her baby" can do. Annie spends four to five afternoons (from noon until 7:00 p.m.) at Little Friends Children's Center and has formed strong friendships with several three- and four-year-old girls in her class. Like Mark's mom, Annie's parents never asked me about the project's content after they gave me written consent. They did, however, try to schedule family vacations around the meetings.

Annie's most frequent activities include writing and drawing stories with her friends, painting, gluing and decorating 3D constructions, putting together difficult puzzles

with friends, and reading books to the other children. Her friends respond to her as their leader in dramatic and cooperative play. She has recently begun "playing teacher" quite often. For example, she coaches younger children as they clean up spills ("Squeeze the sponge in the sink, then wipe up the milk."). She also pretends to be the teacher while reading stories to her friends. Annie befriends new children entering the class and watches out for them throughout their first few weeks. She does not participate in Mark's superhero games and rarely needs adult intervention in her play with others. She enjoys a close attachment with several of the teachers and observes, imitates, and participates in social conflict resolution and teaching interactions throughout the day. The part of her day which most upsets her is having to go home in the evening, when she'll often angrily refuse to leave. Unlike Mark, Annie is widely enjoyed by the teachers and parents at Little Friends.

Leah

Leah is a four-year-old Caucasian girl. She lives with her mother, father, and baby brother and spends five afternoons and evenings at Little Friends Children's Center (from 2:00 p.m. until 12:30 a.m.). Her parents work swing and night shifts, so Leah and her brother stay at Little Friends Children's Center until after midnight each night. Like Annie, Leah regularly reports on her brother's new skills. Both parents have regularly expressed their concern with the male-dominated themes in children's literature and the media, and they voiced strong support for Leah's participation in our project group. In parent-teacher conferences they have related that they consciously avoid using gender-specific terms for occupations and deliberately alter the language in stories they read to Leah to reflect their anti-sexist values.

Leah is less outgoing than either Mark or Annie. While she is actually only a few months younger then they are, Leah seems much younger socially. She carries a blanket

around the school for comfort and collapses on the floor in tears when classmates or teachers interfere with her plans. For example, she recently slid under the table sobbing when her teacher removed her cookies while saying, "Leah, you must eat your sandwich first. Then I'll give you these." While this behavior is not atypical of preschoolers, Leah exhibits it much more frequently than the other children in this study. She appears most comfortable in one-on-one play with her peers, and has two or three female best friends in preschool. If none of her best friends is at Little Friends Children's Center, she will tag along beside other children, but Leah's most active play participation occurs with her best friends. Her most frequently chosen activities include drawing and writing stories, building zoos and farms with blocks and animals, reading books, and playing house. She rarely enters play that involves more than two or three other children and almost always allows another child to direct the play. Teacher-initiated and supervised activities such as story time, group floor games, and singing seem to be the most effective way to attract her to large group participation. Leah has not formed any strong attachments to her teachers, and some of the teachers find her outbursts difficult to handle.

Peter

Peter is a four-and-a-half-year-old Asian-American boy who lives with his father. Two years ago, his parents separated and his mother has refused contact with him since then. His teachers and father have been helping Peter work through his feelings about his mother's absence during this past year, and he continues to deal with sudden bursts of anger or hurt at levels which seem inappropriate to the situation. Peter is emotionally expressive with his father, teachers, and friends, sharing intense affection as well as anger toward others. Peter often spontaneously hugs a teacher or friend and says, "I just love you today!" At other times, he will walk into the room and shout, "Charlotte! I was hoping you'd be here! I missed you at night!" His lack of restraint in expressing intense

affection is unusual in my experience with four-year-old boys. Peter's father was very interested in the process of this project because he is beginning a graduate degree program requiring a thesis, but he did not ask me about the content of the group meetings.

Peter has formed close friendships with a few four-year-old boys and plays comfortably with most of the other four- and five-year-old children. He and Mark play Legos and read books together, although Peter shows little interest in Mark's superhero play. Peter often chooses to build zoos and farms with Leah or read books with Annie, but his major interest is in paper airplanes and rocket ships. He spends a few hours every day building airplanes out of blocks, paper, Legos, boxes, or anything else he can find. He has become the class expert on airplanes. His leadership qualities are quite apparent when he is showing other children how to build something. Peter usually enjoys participating in teacher-initiated and supervised small group activities. At times, however, he may make a point of telling the group right away that he's not going to talk. This seems to happen when he's feeling grumpy or tired.

Initial Interview Data

As stated previously, before we began to meet for group discussions I interviewed each of the children individually. The interviews took place in an empty classroom during the late afternoon playtime. The responses from those interviews gave a brief glimpse of each child's understanding of gender identity, gender constancy, and gender roles.

Mark

Mark appeared to have no problem categorizing himself as male, nor did he show any confusion over gender constancy. When I asked how he knows he is a boy, he answered, "Because I was born when I was a boy." I asked him how he would be different if he were a girl, and Mark's response was, "I'd have to be born as a girl." He was certain he'd be a boy when he grew up, and the only difference he stated between

boys and girls was "Girls have babies and boys don't. Because boys have penises and girls have vaginas."

In the initial interview I also asked whether there were things that only men could do or things that only women could do. Without hesitating, Mark told me that "Just men can drive rocket ships" because "They (women) don't know how. My mommy doesn't know how." I asked him how men learn to fly rockets, and he replied, " Because they're just men, just men can drive rocket ships." I asked if there were other things only men could do or only women could do, and he said, "No, nothing else."

Annie

Like Mark, Annie had no difficulty telling me that she's a girl. When I asked how she knows that, Annie responded, "I have long hair." She also cited her girl clothing (a "Happy Birthday" T-shirt and jeans). When I asked her, "What makes your clothes girl clothes?" she said simply, "They just are." Further on in the conversation I asked, "What is the difference between girls and boys?" She responded:

Annie:	The boys sometimes cut their hair. I'm not going to cut my hair.
Charlotte:	What else is a difference between boys and girls?
Annie:	I don't know.
Charlotte:	Do some boys have long hair?
Annie:	I don't like boys with long hair.
Charlotte:	Are they still boys?
Annie:	Yeah.
Charlotte:	What makes them still boys?
Annie:	They grew like a boy.
Charlotte:	What do you mean by that?
Annie:	I don't know.

Annie was willing to acknowledge that boys could have long hair, but she was unable to define what made them male. She relied on appearance to justify her self-categorization (long hair and girl clothes), but maintained that even with short hair or no hair she would still be a girl. She acknowledged that boys with long hair were still boys because "they

grew like that" and seemed confident that she would always be a girl. Annie didn't voice any role stereotypes in the initial interview.

<u>Leah</u>

In her initial interview, Leah, like the other children, was able to immediately categorize herself as a girl. She also understood that she would continue to be a girl as she grew older. Like Annie, Leah cited hair length as a way of knowing whether one was male or female. However, unlike Annie, she seemed unsure of her "rule" (Girls have long hair, boys have short hair). Leah demonstrated some confusion regarding this assumption in her initial interview:

Charlotte: Leah, are you a girl or a boy?
Leah: A girl.
Charlotte: How do you know?
Leah: Because I have short hair.
Charlotte: What would you have if you were a boy?
Leah: Long hair.
Charlotte: Oh, so do all boys have long hair?
Leah: No.
Charlotte: Do all girls have short hair?
Leah: No.
Charlotte: What would you be if you had long hair?
Leah: A boy. No, I mean a girl.
Charlotte: What would make you still a girl?
Leah: I have short hair.

Later in the same interview, Leah returned to the same theme, but discussed it differently:

Charlotte: How are you different from your daddy? He's a boy and you're a girl.
Leah: He has short hair and I have long hair.
Charlotte: Is there anything else different?
Leah: No.
Charlotte: What if your daddy grew long hair?
Leah: He'd be a girl.
Charlotte: He would?
Leah: No, he'd still be a boy.
Charlotte: What about you? If you got your hair cut?
Leah: I'd be a boy with short hair.

In the first part of the interview, Leah cited her short hair as an indicator that she is a girl. Later, though, she appeared to assume that her <u>long</u> hair made her a girl. In fact, Leah's hair is shoulder-length. She showed some confusion over this contradiction, changing her mind when I questioned her about her assertions, but she was unable to consider any other personal attributes that might be more reliable gender markers. She also seemed uncertain of the concept of gender constancy: Would a person's gender change as a result of a change in hair length? Leah voiced no role typing when I asked whether or not there are things that only girls can do or things that only boys can do.

<u>Peter</u>

Like the others, Peter demonstrated no confusion over his own gender identity. In his initial interview he also told me that he will be a daddy when he grows up, so he seemed certain of the constancy of his own gender identity. He showed a hint of ambivalence regarding gender constancy, however, when he was discussing hair length. In response to the question, "How do you know you're a boy?" Peter's first reply was, "Because my daddy knows I'm a boy." Then I asked him how his dad knew:

> Peter: Because my hair's like a boy's hairs. I don't have long hair.
> Charlotte: What else makes you a boy?
> Peter: Because, ummm. (pause) Because I don't know.
> *(Later)*
> Charlotte: What's the difference between boys and girls?
> Peter: Because girls have long hairs.
> Charlotte: Is there any other difference?
> Peter: No.
> Charlotte: What about girls with short hair? Barbara's hair is pretty short. *(Barbara is a teacher)*
> Peter: She's still a girl. Pretty soon Barbara's hair is going to get bigger and longer and longer, like a girl.

Peter showed some confusion when I suggested Barbara as an example. Like Leah, he believed that hair length was a reliable gender indicator, so an exception to his rule caused

Peter:	Yeah.
Kelli:	Maybe they put hats on.
Annie:	They do.
Leah:	When I grow up, I'm going to be a fireman.
Peter:	Fire<u>man</u>?
Mark:	Fire<u>lady</u>! I'm going to be a fire<u>man</u>.

In this exchange Mark revealed his assumption that women have long hair, even though he had not even mentioned hair length at all in my initial interview with him! It is notable that no one argued with Mark that a girl or woman might have short hair. Instead, Peter, Kelli, and Annie created an explanation for how women could be firefighters even though they have long hair--they wear hats. Peter and Mark demonstrated their awareness of gender-bound language when they corrected Leah's stated desire to be a fireman when she grows up.

At this point in the discussion I wanted to rephrase the issue of women as firefighters. I said, "I don't like the fact that this book shows only boy firefighters. That tells me that maybe girls can't be firefighters. What do you think?" This brought an adamant response from the children:

Mark:	Yeah, they can.
Devin:	No, they can't. Only boys.
Charlotte:	Why?
Devin:	Because.
Annie:	Girls can't.
Charlotte:	Why?
Annie:	Because they just can't.
Kelli:	Well, I think it's okay for girls and boys. Firemans and fireladies and fireboys and firegirls.
Mark:	They can.

Annie and Devin seemed unwilling or unable to support their assertion that girls could not be firefighters, but they were also unwilling to change their position. Mark and Kelli maintained that females could be firefighters, and Kelli even suggested gender and age-specific job titles.

The conversations I had with the preschoolers revealed their diverse and often self-contradicting understandings of gender. I have included several significant exchanges in this section in order to show that the children voiced gender stereotypes quite frequently throughout the project and discussed their beliefs among themselves. They challenged each other quite readily, and they seemed to change their position as a result of the conversations occasionally.

Session one: Curious George at the Fire Station (1985)

The first story we read was Curious George at the Fire Station, by Margret Rey (1985). I chose this book because I had noticed that there were no females in the story or in the illustrations except for the mother dog. It also seemed to be the favorite book of many preschoolers. Our discussion revealed the children's assumptions about gender-appropriate roles as well as gender-specific appearances and how they might affect one's ability to perform a job.

Before I opened the book, I told the children, "Look at the girls and boys in the story, and at the end we can talk about what you see." Upon finishing the book, Mark immediately said, "There are no girls in that book." Peter replied, "Yes, there are. The mommy dog is a girl." I invited the others to comment on why the author might have chosen to use only men, and Devin answered, "Because girls don't go on fire trucks." I directed his statement to the rest of the group and asked them if they agreed or disagreed with Devin. They responded:

Peter: Some girls do.
Leah: I'm going to go on a fire truck when I grow up.
Peter: I did see a girl go on a fire truck.
Mark: But what do they do with their long hair?
Peter: If there's a fire, and they, you know what? They put something over their long hair. *(With his hands, he pretends to sweep his hair up on top of his head.)*
Mark: Like a mask?

Peter:	Yeah.
Kelli:	Maybe they put hats on.
Annie:	They do.
Leah:	When I grow up, I'm going to be a fireman.
Peter:	Fire_man_?
Mark:	Fire_lady_! I'm going to be a fire_man_.

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Mark:	They can.

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This first group meeting was remarkable in the amount of participation and questioning that took place. The book was extreme in its all-male illustrations, and the topic of women as firefighters was simple to discuss. Immediately, Devin was outspoken in his belief that women could not be firefighters. Peter was just as impassioned in his disagreement. This conflict sparked everyone's interest and drew comments from each child. I needed only to listen and reflect back to the group in order to provoke questioning of the stereotype.

Session two: **William's Doll (1972)**

For the second group meeting I read Charlotte Zolotow's William's Doll (1972). This book is a small picture book about a boy who wants a doll to nurture. His father doesn't want to give him the doll, so he buys him a basketball and a train and a workbench (traditionally masculine toys). His brother calls him a sissy, but William still wants a doll. When his grandmother comes to visit, he tells her his problem. She buys him a doll and tells the father that William needs the doll so he can take care of it. She says that with the doll, William will grow up to be a loving father who will give his son a doll when he asks for it.

I chose this book because I was interested in the students' beliefs about gender-appropriate toys, and our discussion revealed many strong stereotypes against boys playing with traditionally-accepted feminine toys.

I introduced this story by telling the children to pay attention to the girls and boys in the book and how they feel. It provoked a great deal of conversation about boys and doll play, with children making adamant assertions supporting and refuting the traditional stereotype. After a short conversation reviewing the plot of William's Doll, Leah said that the father got mad at the grandmother because "The doll's supposed to be a girl toy." When I asked the group what they thought about that, Devin immediately said that dolls

are for girls. Leah, Annie, Peter, and Kelli all disagreed with him, saying, "They're for girls _and_ boys." But Devin would not change his position. I asked him why he thought that dolls are just for girls, and his reason was, "Because dolls are girls." I suggested boy dolls. He responded, "They're for boys and girl dolls are for girls." The rest of the group continued to maintain that dolls were for everybody and I wondered out loud if there were other toys that some people thought were just for girls or just for boys. I suggested trucks, but everyone told me, "Trucks are for everyone." So I asked again, "Are there toys that are just for boys or just for girls?" The children responded as follows:

Peter:	Barbie dolls are just for girls.
Charlotte:	Oh, why do you think those are just for girls?
Peter:	Because they are. I just know it.
Charlotte:	But what about William? He wanted a doll. What if he had wanted a Barbie doll?
Peter:	No, he wouldn't.
Charlotte:	Why? Why wouldn't he want one?
Peter:	Because he just doesn't.
Charlotte:	But if he wanted one, couldn't he have one?
Peter:	If it's a boy Barbie then he can have one.
Charlotte:	What if he wants a girl Barbie?
Kelli:	That's okay.
Annie:	No, I let my boy friends play with my boy Barbie. I let my friends who are boys play with my boy Barbies.

Peter, Devin, and Annie seemed to believe that if a boy played with a doll (not a female Barbie doll) or a male Barbie doll, it was okay. It was not acceptable, though, for a boy to play with a girl Barbie doll. Apparently they consider female Barbie dolls exclusively feminine toys. Kelli did not make the same distinction. She was willing to allow a boy to play with either a male or female Barbie.

I decided to continue this conversation at the next group meeting because Mark had been absent for <u>William's Doll</u> and he frequently plays with dolls in child care. So I

began the next group time asking the children again what they thought about boys and girls and dolls:

> Charlotte: Remember what we talked about last time? I wonder if you've thought any more about boys and girls and Barbie dolls?
>
> Mark: Boys can play with Barbie dolls too, only the Ken one, only if Ken comes with the girl.
>
> Charlotte: What about girls? Is it okay for girls to play with girl and boy Barbies?
>
> Everyone: Yeah.
>
> Charlotte: What about boys playing with girl Barbies and boy Barbies?
>
> Peter: No, because I don't like playing with girl Barbie dolls.
>
> Charlotte: You don't like playing with girl Barbies. But if Mark wanted to play with a girl Barbie doll, what would you think?
>
> Peter: That's okay for him but not for me. I just want to play with boy Barbies.
>
> Charlotte: What do the rest of you think?
>
> Kelli: I did have the Aladdin doll but now I don't know where it is. Then I had the Ken doll.
>
> Annie: I have lots of dolls and I have three boy Barbies and Jasmine.
>
> Leah: My mommy only plays with girl dolls and I only play with girl dolls but not my daddy.
>
> Charlotte: Why doesn't Daddy play?
>
> Leah: Because he doesn't have one.
>
> Charlotte: Do you think your dad would like to have a doll?
>
> Leah: Yes. I'm going to buy him one for a surprise.

Even though Mark had been absent from the previous discussion, he immediately echoed Peter, Annie, and Devin's determination that boys could play with male Barbie dolls. These discussions revealed Mark's, Peter's, Devin's, and Annie's disapproval of boys playing with girl Barbie dolls. Peter did allow that it might be okay for Mark to play with a girl doll, but it wouldn't be okay for Peter himself to do so. Clearly, dolls, and Barbie dolls in particular, are seen as "girl toys." It is also worth noting that Kelli and Leah saw nothing wrong with boys playing with dolls.

Session three: **Will I have a Friend? (1967)**

The story I had chosen for the third group meeting was Will I Have a Friend? by Miriam Cohen (1967). It is a short book about a little boy going to nursery school or kindergarten for the first time. I chose it because I had noticed some stereotyping involving the characters' actions in the classroom. The boys were "wild" and noisy, while the girls engaged in quiet activities such as painting and doll play. The children in my group had heard this story before and seemed to identify strongly with the boy and his classmates. Our discussion time was short because of the extended conversation about dolls, a continuation of the previous session, but we did talk briefly about the book. Before reading, I encouraged the children to look at the girls and the boys in the story. Mark noted immediately that "The girls were doing quiet stuff and the boys are doing louder stuff." So I asked, "Do boys do louder things than girls?" and Mark answered, "Yeah, because boys have louder voices and girls have quiet voices." Annie, Leah, and Kelli all disagreed with that statement and argued that they played just as noisily as the boys. Unfortunately, we had to end the conversation there because two parents arrived early to pick-up their children.

Session four: **The Paper Bag Princess (1980)**

For our fourth meeting I brought Robert Munsch's The Paper Bag Princess (1980). This book is an "upside-down" fairy tale about a princess who sets out to rescue her friend, Prince Ronald, from the dragon. When she finally incapacitates the dragon and frees Ronald, he tells her to go home, get cleaned up, and come back when she looks like a princess. Elizabeth calls Ronald a bum and decides not to marry him after all.

The children enjoyed this story because of the dragon, but the discussion did not flow easily. The boys sympathized with Ronald in his anger at Elizabeth, saying he was mad at her because she was all dirty. I asked why that made Ronald angry. Devin replied,

"Because he didn't want to get his clothes all dirty." Peter continued, "Yeah, and then she'd get mad at him!" It did not seem that the boys shared or even understood Ronald's implied assumption that Elizabeth should be clean and neat because she's a princess. Instead, they were concerned that Ronald might get himself dirty and Elizabeth would then get angry with him. Kelli agreed with Elizabeth that Ronald was a bum "Because he got mad at her when she was dirty," and the children began to talk about "bum" being a bad word, one she shouldn't say at school. In order to get the discussion back to gender issues, I interjected with "I think Ronald got mad because he wanted Elizabeth to look nice for him. But she'd come all that way to rescue him and he told her to go away until she was cleaned up. How would that make you feel if you were her?" Mark said he'd feel sad. Kelli, Mark, and Leah all agreed that girls could be dirty if they wanted to, but Annie announced, "I can't stay dirty. It's not okay." Kelli and Mark said it wasn't fair for boys to get to be dirty if girls couldn't be dirty, too. This was the first time in our meetings that the issue of fairness had surfaced.

In her work with preschoolers and feminist stories, Bronwyn Davies recounts interesting responses to this book among some girls (1989). They were unwilling to see Elizabeth as heroic, describing her instead as unattractive and unfortunate. They could not conceive of her as a real princess because her appearance and behavior did not conform to accepted norms. Her independence and non-conformity, then, were seen as "unavailable" positions for these girls.

While our discussion only hinted at how the children perceived Elizabeth's autonomy, their responses to her behavior and appearance were not completely positive. Peter's concern that Elizabeth might be angry with Ronald for getting dirty (by being with her), Annie's remark about dirtiness being unacceptable, and the group's condemnation of

Elizabeth's use of the word "bum" suggest their ambivalence regarding the princess' hero status.

<u>Session five: The Girl who Was a Cowboy (1965)</u>

In the fifth group meeting I read an old book called <u>The Girl who Was a Cowboy</u> (Krasilovsky, 1965). This is a story about a girl who likes to wear her cowboy hat and play cowboy with her friend, Michael. She loses the hat at her grandmother's house, and her mother makes her wear a flowered bonnet instead. I chose the book because of some strong stereotypes stated explicitly in the text. I wanted to hear how my students would react to such statements.

As I read the title of the story, Annie corrected me. "Cow<u>girl</u>!" she said. As I continued reading, Annie consistently changed every "cowboy" to "cowgirl." She was clearly aware of the significance of gender in language. Instead of reading the story straight through and then discussing it, I stopped periodically to talk about particular statements in the text. I asked the children what they thought about these two lines: "Most little girls like to wear fluffy petticoats . . . Most little girls like to dress like ladies." They implicitly agreed with the author:

Annie:	My mommy doesn't like to dress up, she doesn't like to dress up at all.
Kelli:	I like dresses.
Katie:	I like wearing my big flower dress.
Mark:	I like to wear shorts and T-shirts.
Leah:	I like my kitty dress.
Annie:	I like all my dresses.

The children demonstrated the high value they place on gender-appropriate clothing, even though Annie, Kelli, and Katie rarely wear dresses or skirts to school. In fact, they usually wear T-shirts and jeans. When the little girl in the story received a flowered hat as a gift, the narrator called it a "girl's hat." I wondered out loud what made it a girl's hat, and Mark noted the flowers on it. I asked if boys could wear flowers on their hats, to which

Leah, Devin, Katie, and Kelli responded, "No, it'd look funny." Mark argued, "Yeah, they could. Only if they're like Indians. Indians put flowers in their hats." I decided not to address the racial stereotype except to say, "Some Indians put feathers in their headdresses for celebrations. I don't know about flowers." But Mark's comment certainly showed a limited gender stereotype as well. Only boys "like Indians" could wear flowers in their hats.

The children seemed satisfied when the main character was able to play cowboy with Michael while wearing her flowered hat. Katie laughed and said, "Now she can be a cowgirl because she has flowers in her hat!" and Annie said that she could still do the same things as a cowboy could do. This session clearly showed that the children value gender-appropriate clothing and appearances and accept these expectations without question.

Session six: **Mothers Can Do Anything (1972)**

For the sixth group meeting we read Joe Lasker's Mothers Can Do Anything (1972). I like this book because it shows women and men in traditional and non-traditional roles. For our reading, though, I changed the original text from "Mothers can do anything" to "Mothers and fathers can do anything" because in previous readings with preschoolers, the children had often noted that fathers could do the same things mothers could. The book provoked a great deal of discussion about professions. For the most part, the children seemed to agree that women and men can follow any career path. For example, one of the illustrations showed a woman in a hospital. The illustration doesn't show what job that woman might perform. I asked the students, "What can moms do in a hospital?" and they replied:

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Annie:      Fix people.
Mark:       Nurses.
Charlotte:  Can they be doctors?
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Peter:	Yeah, and they can clean.
Mark:	So can daddies.

We talked about things the children would like to do when they grow up, and everyone but Devin had several ideas ready. I asked Devin if he would like to be anything we'd seen in the book and suggested teaching. Annie stated emphatically, "No boys are teachers!" Devin replied, "Some boys teach in kindergartens," and I mentioned that men could teach in child care centers, too. Devin and Mark began naming men who work at Little Friends Children's Center (the men are responsible for facility maintenance, not teaching), but Annie answered, "Boy teachers are icky!" When I asked her why she felt that way, she said, "They just are," so I couldn't probe any deeper into her reasoning at that time.

Session seven: No, No, Rosina (1964)

Kelli's mother brought in our seventh book, No, No, Rosina, by Patricia Miles Martin (1964). She had been asking me about our discussions throughout the project and thought this story might provoke interesting conversation. It is a San Francisco-based story about a girl whose father is a fisherman. He often takes her two brothers out on the boat, but he won't take Rosina. He believes that females bring bad luck to a fishing expedition. Rosina sneaks on board for a very successful crabbing trip, and her father eventually allows her to join him on later fishing excursions.

The first time the narrator mentioned that Rosina was not allowed on the boat because of her gender, Mark interjected, "It's not fair that she can't come because she's a girl." I stopped reading and asked the group what they thought of Mark's comment. Annie thought that perhaps the father was worried about Rosina falling out of the boat. Mark agreed that maybe she might fall down out of the boat, and Kelli mentioned that the girl would get all wet. I suggested that "If she were going to be unsafe, it may make sense to tell Rosina she can't come. But just because she's a girl?" Annie said, "No, that's not fair."

Kelli responded, "Some girls can go on boats." The rest of the discussion concerned the morality of Rosina sneaking on board the boat without her father's permission. The group was so focused on Rosina's disobedience that I was unable to bring the conversation back to gender issues.

Session eight: Let's Play House (1944)

At our eighth group meeting I read Lois Lenski's Let's Play House (1944). It is a simple story about two girls and a boy playing house together. In my reading of the book, I was struck by the limited role the boy played in the story. The girls served him supper. Then he disappeared while they put away the dishes, ironed, and dressed up in fancy clothes. The next illustration of Peter is as the doctor. I wanted to talk with the children about their understanding of gender-appropriate play. Our conversation after the story, though, concerned gender-appropriate clothing more than it did play.

As I read the story to the children, I kept asking them where Peter might be, and why he wasn't putting away dishes, ironing, or dressing up. When I asked why he wasn't ironing, Annie said, "Because boys don't iron." Kelli and Peter both retorted, "My daddy irons his clothes!" My next question started a heated debate:

Charlotte: "Molly and Polly dress up like a lady." But where's Peter? Do you think he's dressed like a lady over here?

Mark: No way, Peter wouldn't dress like a lady.

Kelli: Nah, he'd look funny.

Annie: Boys can't wear dresses.

Mark: Yeah, boys can wear girls' clothes. Girls wear boys' clothes like pants and shorts and stuff.

Kelli: It'd look silly if a boy wear a dress.

Peter: I think it's fine.

Mark: But girls don't wear dresses all the time.

Charlotte: Sometimes boys dress up in high heels and dresses at Little Friends Children's Center.

Kelli: It's okay if they're disguising themselves. I think it's funny and okay.

Charlotte: What about if they're not pretending?

Mark: Yeah, if he wants it.

Kelli: Nah, he'd look silly.
Mark: It's okay if I wear a dress.
Kelli: I think it's funny and okay.
Peter: It's fine.
Annie: No, it's not okay for boys to wear dresses.

This time, Mark and Peter seemed to be supporting a non-stereotyped view of acceptable dress. Annie, though, upheld the taboo against boys wearing dresses. Mark supported his claim that "Boys can wear girls' clothes" by noting that girls sometimes wear "boys' clothes," and that they certainly don't wear dresses all the time.

Session nine: Master of all Masters (1972)

Our ninth group meeting was quite uneventful. Leah and Mark were the only two children present. They rarely talk with each other outside of the group and they are not very comfortable together. I had brought a folk tale to read: Master of all Masters, by Marcia Sewall (1972). It is about an eccentric man and his hired servant girl who outwits him in the end. I had been intrigued by the man's oddities and the girl's willingness to accept his version of truth (he renames every common object in his house and expects her to use his words for them). Unfortunately, Mark and Leah seemed to have difficulty following the story and did not discuss it very deeply.

We did talk a little about the eccentric man. Leah noted that he was the boss (the servant girl had to call him "Master of all Masters"), but that the lady would make a good boss. Mark agreed that the lady would make a better boss because "The man seems kind of strange. He smokes." However, the story did not provoke much conversation at all.

Session ten: Machines at Work (1987)

Our tenth group meeting involved Leah, Mark, and Peter. We read Byron Barton's Machines at Work (1987). I used this book because Barton illustrates his works with characters that are difficult to identify as male or female. I told the children at the beginning, "Look at the pictures and the people in the pictures. Tell me if you see men or

women and how you know." I was interested in what factors the children relied upon to make their judgments of gender.

Immediately the three children began labeling boys and girls, and for the most part, they agreed with each other. However, Leah labeled one character a boy, but Peter disagreed. He said, "That's a girl because she has long hair sticking out right there." We began the hair length discussion again:

Charlotte: Do some boys have long hair?
Mark: Yes, and some girls have short hair.
Charlotte: So some of these might be women even though they have short hair?
Mark: No, because I can see their short hair there. Because all the boys in this school have
Peter: short hair.
(We talk about girls that have short hair and boys with longer hair in the school)
Charlotte: So some of these could be girls with short hair?
Mark: No, they're boys with short hair.
Peter: If they take their hat off then you can see their hair better and you can know it's a girl or a boy.
Charlotte: But not all girls have long hair and not all boys have short hair. This is kind of a problem. How do you tell?
Mark: Maybe because some girls were born with long hair.
Charlotte: What else is different?
Peter: Their clothes.
Mark: And their bodies, because some are brown and some are white. (Noting the skin color differences in the illustrations)

This conversation revealed again how deeply committed Mark and Peter are to hair length as a gender indicator. Leah pointed out a long-haired character and labeled it a boy, "Just because." But even though Mark acknowledged that some boys have long hair, he was still unwilling to allow that Leah might be justified in her label. My attempts to encourage the children to think of other differences between girls and boys ("How do you tell?" and "What else is different?") were unsuccessful. Peter mentioned clothing and was pointing to the characters' overalls, pants and T-shirts, and jackets. It is notable, though, that he did not use the clothing to justify his determination of the characters' gender. He

was simply showing differences between the characters. Likewise, Mark remarked that the people had different skin colors. Again, he was not trying to tell me the difference between boys and girls. He was just noticing how the characters differed from one another.

Compilation of discussion data

I have presented a description of each group meeting and the gender stereotype issues that arose. I have discussed briefly my role in the conversations and the effects of absences and book choice on the level of critical thinking and discussion in the group times.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of each type of remark (Anti-Bias, No Stereotype , Limited Stereotype, Strong Stereotype, and Unrelated to Gender) at all of the group meetings. Clearly, the greatest number of comments throughout the project were unrelated to gender issues (74, or 53% of the total number of remarks). As I stated above, most of these statements involved story clarification. Children cannot discuss a book unless they understand its basic plot, so I asked several questions at each meeting aimed at determining the children's comprehension level before I introduced discussion on gender stereotypes.

Figure 1 also illustrates the variance in amount of interaction across discussions. The amount of discussion appears to have decreased through the course of the project, with the first three sessions generating 20, 27, and 19 comments respectively, while the final three sessions prompted 15, 4, and 13 remarks. At the same time, the number of absences increased over the course of the six weeks. Additionally, the general mood of the group affected the level of discussion during the project. It seemed that the children's excitement at the beginning of the project waned over the summer as the novelty wore off, causing their participation in group discussions to decrease. In particular, Peter and Kelli

began saying, "I don't want to talk today," as we sat down to read the story after the third or fourth session. I tried to handle their assertions as nonchalantly as possible, telling them, "Okay, you can just listen today. But if you want to talk, we'd love to listen to you." Kelli usually got involved in the discussion quite quickly, but Peter was more persistent in his "just listening." In the session discussing Mothers can do Anything, Peter only spoke once, and in the following session about No. No. Rosina, he kept quiet the whole time. Although the other children did not imitate Peter's and Kelli's silence, they seemed less enthusiastic about discussing books when Peter or Kelli was "just listening." Clearly, the children's mood affected the quality of discussion we were able to have.

Certain books seemed to provoke quite involved conversations of gender issues, while other stories did not. Figure 1 shows that discussions about Curious George at the Fire Station, William's Doll, No. No. Rosina, and Let's Play House prompted as many or more remarks related to gender stereotypes (Anti-Bias, Limited Stereotype, and Strong Stereotype) as they did remarks completely unrelated to gender. Specifically, Curious George generated six anti-bias and three strong stereotyping remarks compared with nine comments unrelated to gender; William's Doll prompted ten anti-bias, two limited stereotyping, and four strong stereotyping remarks compared with eleven statements unrelated to gender; No. No. Rosina prompted three anti-bias comments and two statements unrelated to gender; and Let's Play House generated five each of anti-bias and strong stereotyping comments compared with five statements unrelated to gender. In contrast, The Paper Bag Princess only generated two comments regarding gender issues while drawing eleven responses unrelated to gender. The story, Master of all Masters, generated only four comments, none of them related to gender. It appears that book choice affected the amount of conversation in general, and the degree to which conversation focused on gender-related issues in particular.

There was a great deal of variation in the types of remarks made by each child over the course of the project. Figure 2 shows the distribution of these comments for the four children. Peter and Annie voiced an almost equal number of comments during the project (Peter made 37 remarks, Annie made 35), and they showed the highest percentage of strongly stereotyped remarks. Of Peter's 37 statements, 23% fit this category, while 20% of Annie's comments voiced strong stereotypes. Both of these children, however, balanced those stereotyping remarks with an almost equal number of strong anti-bias statements. Mark, who was the most vocal of the four children, made slightly more anti-bias comments than he did stereotyping remarks. Anti-bias comments accounted for 22% of his total statements, 4% reflected limited stereotyping, and 14% reflected strong stereotyping. In contrast, Leah stereotyped in only 5% of her comments, while 35% of her statements reflected strong anti-bias beliefs. She voiced significantly more anti-bias statements than she did stereotypes.

Final interview responses

At the end of the six-week project, I interviewed the four target children individually again. I asked the same questions I had used in the previous interviews in order to compare responses. Unlike the initial interview procedure, however, I also suggested possible "things that only women/men can do" because their responses seemed vague. The children gave at times very different answers than they had in the first interviews.

Mark

In his closing interview, Mark's first response to, "How do you know you're a boy?" was quite simply, "Because I don't wear dresses." When I asked, "How else?" he answered, "Because I have short hair" and "Because I talk like a boy." This was the first

reference to voice that any child had given, so I asked Mark, "How does a boy talk?" He answered:

> Mark: Like I'm talking right now.
> Charlotte: How does a girl talk?
> Mark: Like you're talking right now, like my mommy talks.
> Charlotte: What's different? Are the words different or the sound is different?
> Mark: The sound is different.
> Charlotte: How is the sound different?
> Mark: Because sometimes they're English or they're American.
> Charlotte: Different languages or sounds?
> Mark: Yeah. They sound different.

It appears that Mark had noticed a difference (in pitch or tone) between how men and women sound, but he was unable to describe that difference. In any case, it was an intriguing new contribution to the discussion. Again I asked, "What else is different between a girl and a boy?" He responded, "Because some girls have long hair, but when they get haircuts they have short hair a little bit." When I asked Mark once more, "What else is different between a boy and a girl?" he began to speak passionately about his mother's eye color:

> Mark: Sometimes your mom's hair and eyes are different. My mom and my grandma's eyes are both different. They're brown eyes. My mom thought I'd have brown eyes but I have blue eyes and my Mom doesn't have blue eyes. But whoever got the brown eyes, that's the mom's, she goes to have the baby and it got to have brown eyes, but I got blue eyes and my mom doesn't have blue eyes.

Mark was noticing a difference between individuals and not a defining difference between genders. He did not seem to be applying his mother's brown eye color to all mothers (or all females), nor was he stating that all boys had blue eyes. When I then asked, "Is there anything on your body that only boys have, or anything on a girl's body that only girls have?" Mark answered, "If you took off all your clothes you'd look different from girls because the girls, like, all their hair would be straight and long, see." It is noteworthy

that in Mark's first interview he never mentioned hair length at all. In the final interview, though, he talked about hair three times and didn't refer to penises or vaginas at all, as he had in our initial conversation.

I also asked about gender roles: "Are there jobs that men can do that women can't do? Or are there jobs that women can do that men can't do?" He responded as follows:

Mark: Like on most of the trains the driver is a man and the conductor is usually a lady.
Charlotte: Does that mean that a woman can't drive the train?
Mark: No.
Charlotte: What if you wanted to be a conductor?
Mark: That'd be okay.
Charlotte: What if I wanted to drive the train?
Mark: No! Only girls can be conductors.
Charlotte: Really? I ride on the train every day and I've seen many conductors that are men. Are there other jobs that men can't do or women can't do?
Mark: A woman can't drive a crane because there isn't two seats.
Charlotte: What if the man doesn't ride?
Mark: What if the woman rides in the back and the man can ride in the front to drive?
Charlotte: Are there other jobs like that?
Mark: No.

In this final interview, Mark cited two gender-specific roles with no prompting from me. According to him, women cannot drive trains or cranes.

Annie

In her final interview, Annie told me that she's a girl because she wears "girl shirts." I asked her how she knew they were girl shirts, and her response was, "Some don't fit boys . . . they're maybe too small or too big." When I asked, "Okay, so what else is different between boys and girls?" it became apparent that my question was not clear: .

Annie: 'Cuz some have glasses and some doesn't have glasses.
Charlotte: Some boys? Some girls? Some who?
Annie: Oh, and Olivia wears girl clothes.

Charlotte: What else is different between a boy and a girl?
Annie: The skin is different.
Charlotte: How is the skin different?
Annie: Because some people come from Africa and America and Switzerland. The skin is different colors.
Charlotte: Tell me something that all girls have or all boys have.
Annie: Some girls have long hair and some boys have long hair. Some girls have short hair and some boys have short hair.
Charlotte: Is there anything on your body that makes you a girl, or anything on a boy's body that makes him a boy?
Annie: Sometimes there's clean skin and sometimes there's dirty skin. Sometimes I have clean skin and sometimes I have dirty skin.
Charlotte: So you're noticing that people are all different.
Annie: Yeah.

I saw that Annie was focusing on differences between all people, and not on differences between the categories of girl and boy. Unfortunately, I was unable to find a way during the interview to get her back to my intended meaning.

In the final interview I also asked Annie whether or not there were jobs meant only for women or only for men. Her first response was, "Girls can work at Apple computers, so can boys." As I suggested being a police officer, a firefighter, a truck driver, a construction worker, and a teacher, Annie repeatedly said, "Girls and boys can do that, too."

Leah

In her final interview Leah seemed to be less confused about the consistency of gender across changing hair length. When I asked Leah how she knows she's a girl, she replied, "Because I have short hair." The interview continued:

Charlotte: Your short hair makes you a girl?
Leah: Yeah.
Charlotte: So does that mean that boys have long hair?
Leah: Some boys.
Charlotte: And what kind of hair do other boys have?
Leah: Short hair.
Charlotte: How else do you know that you're a girl?

Leah: I don't know.
Charlotte: How are girls different from boys?
Leah: Some boys have long hair and some have short hair. Some girls have
             long hair and some have short hair.
Charlotte: So what's different between boys and girls?
Leah: I don't know. Nothing else.

In this final interview, as in the initial interview, Leah was still unable to name any

gender indicator more reliable than hair length. She seemed certain of her own gender

identity even though, as she said, "Some boys have long hair and some have short hair.

Some girls have long hair and some girls have short hair."

Leah had strong ideas about gender-appropriate roles when I interviewed her the

final time:

Charlotte: Are there jobs that women can do that men can't do, or jobs that men
             can do that women can't do?
Leah: Yeah.
Charlotte: Like what?
Leah: I don't know, I can't think.
Charlotte: An airplane pilot?
Leah: Daddas can do that.
Charlotte: How about women? Can women be airplane pilots?
Leah: Yeah.
Charlotte: Fire fighter?
Leah: Only men can do it.
Charlotte: But you told me before that you wanted to be a fire fighter.
Leah: No, I don't.
Charlotte: But can women be fire fighters?
Leah: Yeah.
Charlotte: How about police officers?
Leah: Only men can be police officers.
Charlotte: Do you think so? How come?
Leah: I don't know.
Charlotte: Okay, how about a teacher?
Leah: Everybody can be a teacher when they grow up.
Charlotte: How about a dentist?
Leah: Everybody can do that too.
Charlotte: How about a doctor?
Leah: Not everybody can be a doctor.

Charlotte: No?
Leah: Some boys can do (sic) a doctor and some girls can.

In this interchange, Leah stated that fighting fires and policing were men-only jobs,

although she did allow that women could be fire fighters when I questioned her further. It

is possible that she changed her assertion because she thought I wanted her to do so.

Later in the conversation, Leah asserted that only men could be zookeepers.

Peter

In his final interview, when I asked Peter how he knows he's a boy, he answered

that he knows because he looks in the mirror. This led me to ask, "What do you see in the

mirror?" He stated, "My hair is short." I wondered out loud what else makes him a boy.

This time he said:

Peter: I talk like a boy.
Charlotte: How does a boy talk?
Peter: I use my mouth.
Charlotte: I use my mouth, too. How does your mouth make you a boy?
Peter: I just am.
Charlotte: Is there anything else that makes you a boy?
Peter: I don't know!

Peter was frustrated with my questioning, so I changed the topic quickly. Later I asked

again if there were differences between boys and girls. He said emphatically, "Girls have

long hair, boys have short hair. Boys talk like boys and girls talk like girls. That's it." He

was unwilling to explain his assertions further for me.

Further on in the interview I asked Peter about gender roles:

Charlotte: Are there jobs that men can do that women can't do or only women can
           do?
Peter: Maybe both.
Charlotte: What do you mean?
Peter: (After a brief silence) Both can do the same things. Sometimes they
           can guess what they are doing.

He was unwilling or unable to explain "Sometimes they can guess what they are doing" to me, but I understand "Both can do the same things" as meaning that both men and women can do the same jobs.

Summary

In this project, I observed how preschoolers talk about gender issues when discussing them as they are presented in story books. I found that my choice of book played a major role in determining the level of discussion, and children's absences and attitudes also affected their level of engagement in the conversation. I also found that the four target children presented levels of understanding of gender identity and commitment to gender stereotypes that varied not only from child to child but also between situations within the same individual. I will explore these differences as well as the children's specific statements in light of researchers' theories of gender concept development in the following chapter.

Chapter Five
Sketches of Children

Introduction

In the previous chapters I have described the context of this project, reviewed related literature, outlined the methodology, and presented the collected data from the interviews and group sessions. I will now examine the data gained from the interviews and discussions within the context of previous research in order to better understand each child's conception of gender. Specifically, I will explore their understanding of gender identity and stereotypes as presented in the interviews, their talk about gender-related issues as presented in picture books, and any change over time in their perception of gender concepts and their expression of these beliefs. Because this was such a short-term project, I did not expect to see clear changes in expressed gender knowledge. Indeed, I discovered no pattern in individuals' interview responses or discussion contributions. I did, however, find some differences (even some inconsistencies) in how children talked about gender from one situation to the next. These are described in this chapter.

Mark

Throughout the course of the project, I saw no indication that Mark considered gender a changeable trait across time or situation either for himself or for others. He easily labeled himself male and acknowledged that he would continue to be a boy as he grows. He also recognized that his mother had been born a girl. In this way, Mark demonstrated that he understood gender to be constant across time for himself and for others.

Role, behavior, and appearance stereotyping

He voiced several role, appearance, and trait stereotypes during the interviews and book discussions. In both the initial and closing interviews, I found Mark voiced more role-typing comments than the other children did.

In his initial interview, Mark stated that women could not drive rockets. In the final interview, Mark cited two roles he thought gender-specific. He considered women unable to drive rocket ships, trains, or cranes. Mark stated that men could perform all of these jobs, thereby showing his acquisition of societal gender roles which attribute greater power and competence to males than to females. Kohlberg (1966) notes that:

> basic sex-role stereotypes . . . in general award superior prestige-competence
> values to the male role . . . . As awareness of these prestige values and stereotypes
> develops in the years four to eight, there is a tendency for both sexes to attribute
> greater power and prestige to the male role. (p. 165)

Mark's commitment to some appearance or trait stereotypes can be seen in many of his remarks throughout the project. Although he did not mention hair length as a gender indicator in his initial interview, he did demonstrate his assumption that girls have long hair and boys have short hair in the Curious George and Machines at Work discussions as well as in his closing interview. During the Machines at Work discussion, Mark acknowledged that some boys have long hair and some girls have short hair, but he continued to use his over-generalized rule (that all girls have long hair and all boys have short hair) to determine the gender of the characters. It seems that even though he was able to allow for hair length differences between individual men and women, when asked to label a character, he based his judgment on this stereotyped belief. Martin (1989) observed similar responses among preschoolers when she asked them to make social judgments. She noted that "essentially, young children seem to assume that members of

each gender group are virtually interchangeable" within the group (p. 87). Consistent with Martin and Halverson's (1981) description of the "in-group-out-group" schema, Mark appeared to be using his schema to make inferences about gender-ambiguous characters and was over-applying his rule.

Another example of Mark using his "in-group-out-group" schema to draw an inference occurred in the discussion of Let's Play House. During that conversation, I asked the children if Peter might be dressing up as a woman with the two girls. Mark immediately responded, "No, Peter wouldn't dress up like a girl!" This comment lends additional support to Martin's assertion that:

> young children appear to be "gender-centric" in their failure to differentiate within
> gender groups (Martin, 1985). They seem to have blanket rules such as "all boys
> like trucks" rather than the rule that "most (or some) boys like trucks" (Martin,
> 1989, p. 86).

Mark's comments throughout the project indicated some flexibility in his thinking about gender stereotypes. Figure 3 illustrates the number of each type of statement he made during the story sessions. It shows that he made 11 strongly anti-bias remarks, representing 22% of his utterances in the course of the project. He argued repeatedly with Devin and Annie over the issue of whether women could be firefighters (he said they could) in the Curious George discussion. In later conversations, Mark brought up the issue of fairness when we discussed whether girls should be allowed to get dirty and again when Rosina's father wouldn't let her ride in the boat because she was a girl. Finally, he commented that boys could wear girl clothes if they wanted to in the Let's Play House discussion. While Mark demonstrated some ability to question gender stereotypes in discussion, when he was called upon to form judgments about characters he relied on those same stereotypes to make his determinations. Figure 3 shows that he made two

statement reflecting limited stereotyping ("Boys can play Barbie dolls too, only the Ken one if the Ken comes with the girl."), representing 4% of his total utterances, and seven strongly stereotyped comments (e.g., "Boys have louder voices and girls have quiet voices."), or 14% of all of his comments. Cognitively, it appears that Mark was able to process cross-gender behavior and appearances to a degree (hair length, gender roles, and clothing). However, he seemed unable to apply that knowledge when inferring or predicting behavior and appearances of others.

I have shown that Mark voiced specific gender role stereotypes in both the initial and the final interviews. Furthermore, in the initial interview he cited primary sex differences as certain proof of his gender identity. In the final interview, Mark focused on secondary sex characteristics and culturally-defined sex-specific characteristics, including voice quality, clothing, and hair length. Although none of the book discussions generated any comments about male and female voice characteristics, clothing and hair length came up frequently. Perhaps this is why Mark used these qualities to explain his certainty of his gender identity. This was the only major change in Mark's expression of gender perceptions over the course of the project.

Annie

Much like Mark, Annie revealed no confusion over her gender identity throughout the project. Annie was willing to acknowledge that boys could have long hair, but she was unable to define what made them male. She relied on appearance to justify her self-categorization (long hair and girl clothes), but maintained that even with short hair or no hair she would still be a girl. She acknowledged that boys with long hair were still boys because "they grew like that" and seemed confident that she would always be a girl. In her initial interview, Annie remarked that girls have long hair and wear girl clothes.

Gender constancy, then, did not seem to be a point of confusion either during the interviews or the book discussions.

Role, behavior, and appearance stereotyping

Like Mark, Annie voiced several gender stereotypes in the discussions. Twenty percent of her comments throughout the sessions reflected strong stereotypes (see figure 4). Most of these were related to gender roles and behaviors: "Girls can't be firefighters," "I let my boy friends play with my boy Barbie (not her girl Barbies)," "I can't stay dirty" (in response to Mark's assertion that girls can get dirty if they want to), "No boys are teachers. Boy teachers are icky," "Boys don't iron," and "It's not okay for boys to wear dresses." Four of these six comments (66%) limit boys to performing gender-appropriate behavior. Like the children in Smetana's study (1986), it seems that Annie judged male cross-gender behavior more seriously than she did female cross-gender behavior, since only two of her stereotyping judgments limited female behavior. She also voiced appearance stereotypes. In her initial interview, Annie remarked that girls have long hair and wear girl clothes. She did allow that boys could have long hair, but followed that comment with, "I don't like boys with long hair." In a later book discussion she seemed committed to the inappropriateness of girls being dirty.

Smetana's finding that children were more committed to the maintenance of female sex-typed appearances than activities is affirmed both in the stereotypes Annie voiced and in the gender-typing flexibility she showed. During the interviews and book discussions, Annie remarked that "Dolls are for girls and boys," "Trucks are for everyone," "I have a loud voice sometimes" (in response to Mark's assertion that boys are loud and girls are quiet), "It's not okay for me to be dirty (because she's a girl)," and, "Some girls have long hair and some boys have long hair. Some girls have short hair and some boys have short hair," "Girls and boys can be firefighters," "If a boy wanted to be a teacher at

Little Friends Children's Center it'd be okay," and "Daniel can play with my toys if he wants to." So Annie demonstrated little concern about girls' sex-typed behavioral transgressions, but did make one statement about the importance of girls' appearance.

In the final interview I asked Annie whether or not there were jobs meant only for women or only for men. Her first response was, "Girls can work at Apple computers, so can boys." As I suggested being a police officer, a firefighter, a truck driver, a construction worker, and a teacher, Annie repeatedly said, "Girls and boys can do that, too." This is interesting, since in the group meetings she had maintained that girls could not be firefighters and boys could not be teachers. It seems that over the course of the project, Annie's conception of gender-appropriate roles became more flexible. Perhaps the challenges to her stereotypes that she faced in the book discussions caused her to reconsider her assertions, or perhaps she was merely "trying out" new views. In any case, Annie demonstrated in her final interview that her gender schema was changing, possibly becoming more differentiated. A more complex gender schema would allow for greater freedom within each gender category. Thus, women as fire fighters, police officers, and truck drivers are acceptable.

Figure 4 shows the number of each type of statement Annie made during the story sessions. It shows that Annie was slightly more likely to make limited or strong stereotyping comments than anti-bias comments. She voiced six (17%) anti-bias statements (e.g., "Dolls are for girls and boys."), and eight remarks demonstrating limited stereotyping(1 comment) or strong stereotypes (7 comments), representing 23% of all of her comments over the course of the project. Four of her six anti-bias statements, or 66%, were voiced in the second and third session, while five of her stereotyping remarks (63%) were made in the last three sessions she attended. These stereotyping remarks limited male roles ("No boys can be teachers") and appearance ("Boys can't wear dresses!")

instead of limiting female roles. This data, along with the initial and final interview data discussed above, further suggests that Annie was most concerned with the continuance of male-appropriate appearances and behaviors. While she began the project opposed to females carrying out traditionally male roles (e.g., fighting fires), she became less committed to those stereotypes over the course of the project.

Leah

In her initial interview, Leah, like the others, was able to categorize herself as a girl immediately. She also understood that she would continue to be a girl as she grew older. Of the four children, Leah alone gave hair length as a way of defending her gender certainty. Leah was the only child to exhibit any confusion regarding gender constancy across situations (if her hair changed length, would she change gender?). This confusion may be explained by Kohlberg's claim that young children do not firmly understand the concept of gender constancy before the age of five or six years (Kohlberg, 1966).

Role, behavior, and appearance stereotyping

Figure 5 shows the types of statements Leah made in the book discussions. In general, Leah remained a quiet participant throughout the book discussions. Still, she seemed to undergo some changes in her gender-related knowledge during the summer. At the beginning of the project, Leah voiced no gender stereotypes other than her confused version of the "hair length" rule (during the initial interview). In fact, she offered herself repeatedly as proof contradicting others' stereotypes in discussions, making seven anti-bias comments during the first three sessions (figure 5). For example, when Devin stated that girls could not be firefighters in the Curious George discussion, Leah said, "I'm going to go on a fire truck when I grow up." Later in that conversation she said, "When I grow up I'm going to be a fireman." During the Will I have a Friend? discussion, Mark said, "Boys have louder voices and girls have quiet voices." Leah and Annie both replied, "I have a

loud voice sometimes." Finally, when Annie maintained that she couldn't stay dirty because she's a girl, Leah said, "Sometimes I can be dirty." Interestingly, Leah made no other anti-bias comments after the third session. Because she spoke relatively little during the discussions, these seven anti-bias statements represented 35% of her utterances over the course of the project. In the fifth session, Leah made her only statement reflecting a strong stereotype in group discussions. This was in the conversation about The Girl who was a Cowboy, when she laughed after I asked if boys could wear flowers in their hats. "No," she said, "it'd look funny!" It is difficult to draw any conclusions about Leah's level of commitment to gender stereotypes based on her participation in group discussions because she voiced so few comments of any type. It does seem, however, that at the beginning of the project she was willing to argue against role stereotypes limiting females.

In her final interview, Leah stated emphatically that only men could be fire fighters, police officers, and zookeepers. Several weeks earlier (in the Curious George discussion) she had told the group that she wanted to be a "fireman" when she grew up! When I asked her about that inconsistency, she seemed to back down from her assertion. The reason for her retreat is not clear, however. I suspect that she thought I wanted her to back down, although I was conscious only of trying to understand and respect each child's views.

Curiously, in her final interview Leah seemed to be less confused about the consistency of gender across changing hair length. As in the initial interview, Leah was still unable to name any gender indicator more reliable than hair length. Still, she seemed certain of the constancy of her own gender identity even though, as she said, "Some boys have long hair and some have short hair. Some girls have long hair and some girls have short hair." Based on this interview data, it appears possible that as she became more certain of her gender identity and specifically its constancy, Leah began to verbalize some

stereotypes that she'd learned. Kohlberg (1966) has noted the importance of gender identity and constancy in the development of gender stereotyping and gender-typing, and this may explain Leah's voiced stereotypes. Alternatively, Leah may have begun to identify herself more strongly with the other girls in the group who held firm gender stereotypes. This would explain the resistance to girls being firefighters and boys wearing flowers. More broadly, perhaps Leah had begun to identify herself more strongly as a girl not only with other girls in the group, but also with female models in her environment (Mischel, 1966). As in the Slaby and Frey study (1975), Leah may have been attending to female models more consistently as her conception of gender identity strengthened. Perhaps the women and girls with whom she was identifying conformed to traditional stereotypes in their behavior or appearance.

Peter

In his initial and final interviews, Peter labeled himself a boy without hesitation. His "proof" in the first interview was that his "daddy knows I'm a boy" and that he has short hair. Peter was alone in referring to someone else's knowledge when supporting his assertion of gender identity. His mother does not live with him and has a very strong bond with his father. His father's knowledge of him probably helps Peter know himself. In his final interview, however, Peter also told me he knows he's a boy because he talks like one. Like Mark, it seems that Peter may have been noticing the difference between men and women's voices and was identifying himself with male adults. Alternately, he may have been talking about words or syntax. His frustration with my questioning prompted me to finish that part of the interview without finding out precisely what he meant.

Role, behavior, and appearance stereotyping

Figure 6 shows the frequency of occurrences of each type of statement Peter made throughout the story discussions. Peter showed very little role and behavior stereotyping

throughout the interviews and book discussions. Instead, most of his strong and limited stereotyping remarks involved appearance (i.e., hair length and gender-appropriate clothing).

In fact, the only strongly stereotyped belief concerning behavior that he voiced was that Barbie dolls were just for girls (Session 2). When I asked if William might want a Barbie doll, Peter replied, "No, he wouldn't." I asked, "Why wouldn't he want one?" and Peter said, "Because he just doesn't." Later in the same discussion he stated that, "If it's a boy Barbie he can have one," and when I suggested, "What if Mark wanted to play with a girl Barbie doll, what would you think?" Peter answered, "That's okay for him but not for me. I just want to play with boy Barbies." His assumption that William would not want to play with Barbie dolls even though the story is about William's desire for a doll is an example of Martin's finding that preschoolers assumed boys would choose masculine toys (1989). Peter was willing to allow Mark to break his rule, but he himself was firmly committed to avoiding playing with girl Barbie dolls.

While he verbalized very little role and behavior stereotyping, Peter did demonstrate some firmly held appearance and trait stereotypes. In his initial interview, he justified his self-categorization as a boy on the basis of his short hair. The hair length rule continued to appear in the book discussions (e.g., Peter explained that girls could be fire fighters because they put something over their long hair) and in his final interview. Also in the final interview, Peter cited the fact that he talks like a boy as a gender indicator. It seems likely that he had noticed differences in the way adult men and women's voices sound and was identifying himself with the males in his environment (Slaby and Frey, 1975).

Peter made an almost equal number of stereotyping and anti-bias remarks during the book discussions. Out of 37 utterances, Peter voiced 19 (52%) gender-stereotype-

related comments (see figure 6). Nine of those were strongly anti-bias (e.g., "Girls can too be firefighters. I saw a girl firefighter!"). The remaining ten utterances reflected strong (8 comments) or limited gender stereotyping (e.g., "Barbie dolls are just for girls. I just know it."). Some of his anti-bias assertions included, "Some girls are firefighters," "Dolls [not Barbie dolls] are for girls and boys" (in response to Devin), "My daddy irons shirts" (in response to Annie), "It's fine if boys wear dresses," and "Boys and girls can do the same things." In his final interview he reiterated that "boys and girls can do the same things" when I asked if there were jobs that only men could do or only women could do. He seemed to exhibit equal flexibility regarding male and female cross-gender behavior and traits except for the Barbie doll issue. I noted no change over time in his expressed commitment to gender stereotypes as reflected in the interviews and book discussions.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined each child's understanding of gender concepts prior to the project, after the project, and during the six weeks of book discussions. I have shown that even though these four children were roughly the same age (around four years-old), their grasp of gender concepts as well as their commitment to gender stereotypes varied significantly between individuals. Mark was often willing to argue against stereotypes, but would rely on them when called upon to make inferences about characters. Annie and Leah seemed to shift in their commitments to stereotypes over the course of the project, with Annie becoming less rigid (e.g., allowing that women could be firefighters) and Leah becoming more so (e.g., stating that only men could be firefighters and police officers). Peter, on the other hand, continued throughout the project to voice anti-bias statements regarding gender-typed behavior and role transgressions and appearance-based stereotypes. In spite of their differences, however, all four children accepted without question hair length as a reliable indicator of gender.

I have also shown that individuals' commitment to gender stereotyping shifted between situations. Six weeks is not enough time to look for progressive change in any child's development. However, feminist post-structuralist theory suggests that children's understanding of gender leads them to take up often contradictory positions in differing situations (Jones, 1993). Children's gender knowledge, then, is not static, nor is it steadily progressing towards a fixed point. Instead, these children are constantly trying to redefine themselves as male or female using the complex new information they encounter each day, and what they see as masculine in one setting may seem "feminine" to them in another situation. Thus, a child's inconsistencies and the lack of any general pattern in responses may be indicative of their shifting conceptions of gender across situations.

I have addressed the differing conceptions of gender constancy, gender-appropriate roles and behaviors, gender-typed appearances and traits, and the children's flexibility concerning these concepts. Existing research has provided a basic framework within which one can better understand these children's gender-related knowledge, but certainly much remains to be discovered. The following chapter details some suggestions for further research as well as implications for teaching to be drawn from this current work.

Chapter Six
Suggestions for further research and
Implications for teaching

Introduction

This short-term project sought to study the gender-related knowledge of four

preschoolers using picture book discussions about gender concepts. I discovered much

about their understanding of gender identity, gender constancy across situations, and

gender-appropriate appearances, behaviors, and roles. Still, many questions remain. This

chapter will describe some suggestions for further research into preschoolers' conceptions

of gender and will detail several implications I have drawn from my research for working

with young children.

Suggestions for further research

As in all research, this project has invited several questions that remain

unanswerable without further study. My work was limited in scope by the small number

of children I was able to study and by the short amount of time I had to gather data.

Given more time and more children, I would consider investigating several related issues.

One major question that merits further study is the effect of an anti-bias approach

to gender stereotypes in children's books in changing preschoolers' talk. I had initially

sought to answer this question but was limited by time constraints. A longitudinal study

similar to mine but conducted with a larger target group could yield significant data and

support or negate the effectiveness of anti-bias teaching methods. This is important

because currently such anti-bias curricula are being widely encouraged without solid

research to indicate whether they change preschoolers' conceptions over time.

Another potential research question is the influence of socio-economic status,

culture, a parent's level of commitment to stereotyping, and family composition on

children's understanding of gender. Are the results of current sex-role research replicated

within the context of non-dominant cultures and within the context of single-parent or homosexual two-parent families? Most of the research I read while researching this project did not even mention these factors when discussing their subjects. It seems, though, that children's environments might have an impact on their understanding of gender. Certainly cultures differ in their accepted stereotypes. Additionally, family structure would affect the child's exposure to same-sex and opposite-sex role models. This may, in turn, influence the child's willingness to commit to gender stereotypes.

In this study, all of the children relied on hair length to justify their self-categorization. What other bases for gender identification are named by preschoolers and early elementary students? Again, do these indicators vary across class and cultural lines? I would never have known how important hair length was in preschoolers' gender knowledge if I had not asked. I wonder what other indicators preschoolers accept almost universally.

This study supports previous research suggesting that preschoolers have definite stereotypes regarding gender-appropriate behavior, appearance, and roles. It would be interesting to discover what character traits preschoolers view as desirable. Do they ascribe these traits equally to both genders, or do they differentiate? If they do differentiate, do they ascribe these positive traits to same-sex models? Do they attribute these traits to themselves? Closely related to these questions are issues of self-esteem. Is there a correlation between a child's level of commitment to gender stereotyping and high or low self-esteem?

Finally, this project showed that even young children are willing to challenge each other's stereotypical beliefs in discussion. What is the effect of social relationships on preschoolers' resistance to gender stereotyping and sex-typing over time? Are children strongly committed to gender stereotypes more widely accepted by peers than those who

show less stereotyping? Any of these issues would require more time and more subjects than I had available to me, but all would yield intriguing data.

Implications for teaching

As a teacher of young children, I am deeply concerned about the gender stereotypes portrayed in our society. I see their destructive effects and look forward to a gender-equal society. I undertook this research project in order to better understand my students' conceptions of gender identity and gender roles. While my study has prompted me to ask several more questions, this work has also suggested several clear implications for teachers of preschoolers.

First, teachers need to be aware of the subtle and overt gender stereotypes which permeate children's literature, music, film, and television. Although it is not impossible, it is unlikely that anyone ever sat down with Devin and Annie and told them, "Women cannot be firefighters. Only men can perform that job." They probably simply acquired that stereotype through observation of their environment. For this reason, teachers need to make providing a non-sexist classroom experience a top priority. Books, posters, music, toys, and language used in the classroom should promote gender equality. When gender stereotypes are displayed or voiced, teachers must address them openly.

Second, teachers need to be aware of their own gender biases. Most were raised in a society which awards power, competence, and prestige to males. Young girls were taught to be polite and to defer to others, especially to males. As a result, women teachers often allow boys to be noisy and disruptive in the classroom, but reward girls for being quiet and calm. These and other gender biases may only be visible to us through peer observation or through videotaping ourselves in the classroom. In my case, the taping required by this study gave me an opportunity to reflect on the gender-typing I allow in my teaching. In the book discussions, I found that the boys were much more

assertive in interrupting and voicing their opinions, while the girls usually waited to speak until there was a pause in the conversation or they were invited to do so. I had been allowing the boys to control the discussions. Teachers need to concentrate on encouraging the female students to confidently speak their minds in mixed gender groups by providing an atmosphere of respect for whomever is talking. It seems that peer observation and coaching would be of great benefit in identifying and challenging teachers' hidden gender stereotypes.

Third, teachers need to invite their students to talk seriously about their understanding of gender. I found my preschoolers very willing to discuss and even argue about their conceptions of gender-appropriate roles, behavior, appearances, and traits. Although those disagreements never resulted in a child changing his or her position at that moment, Annie's final interview demonstrated that she was no longer committed to her previously held stereotypes regarding female firefighters, male teachers, and boys playing with girl Barbie dolls. This project suggests that an openly anti-bias approach may provoke some change in young children's questioning of gender stereotypes.

Finally, my background literature research revealed the necessary cognitive processing role gender stereotypes play in the development of the young child. Because some gender stereotyping seems to be a natural cognitive function for preschoolers, teachers should avoid placing moral or social judgments on their students. For example, when a student says, "Girls can't drive rocket ships. Only boys can," the sensitive teacher could ask, "Why do you say that?" and invite other children to comment. Concern over the unfairness of such stereotyping should not lead the caregiver to say immediately, "Well, that's a silly thing to say! Of course girls can drive rockets!" By encouraging the child to justify his or her remark and inviting others to contribute, the sensitive teacher is allowing cognitive conflict to take place within a respectful environment.

Conclusion

My data support previous research showing that gender stereotyping is a process that begins early in the life of a child. While theorists disagree on the exact cognitive processes involved and abilities required, they all ascribe some influence to children's social environment. Stereotyped images of women as "dumb blondes," "old witches," "sensible housewives," and "nagging mothers-in-law" (the list could go on) continue to permeate American films, television shows, newspapers, books, and music. These are the images which our children are learning to equate with femininity. My study was only a starting point towards discovering how young children understand gender. It is my hope that researchers will continue to explore the effects of current societal gender stereotyping on children as well as effective teaching and parenting approaches to countering these stereotypes.

Figure 1:
Distribution of comments made in book discussions

Session	Book	Children Present	A.B.	No	L.S.	S.S.	Un.	Total
1	Curious George at the Fire Station	7	6 (30%)	2 (10%)	0	3 (15%)	9 (45%)	20
2	William's Doll	6	10 (37%)	0	2 (7%)	4 (14%)	11 (42%)	27
3	Will I Have a Friend?	5	5 (27%)	1 (5%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	10 53%)	19
4	The Paper Bag Princess	6	2 (15%)	0	0	0	11 (85%)	13
5	The Girl who Was a Cowboy	6	1 (8%)	0	1 (8%)	2 (15%)	9 (69%)	13
6	Mothers Can Do Anything	6	1 (9%)	0	0	3 (27%)	7 (64%)	11
7	No, No, Rosina	5	3 (60%)	0	0	0	2 (40%)	5
8	Let's Play House	4	5 (33%)	0	0	5 (33%)	5 (33%)	15
9	Master of all Masters	2	0	0	0	0	4 (100%)	4
10	Machines at Work	3	0	2 (15%)	0	5 (39%)	6 (46%)	13
	Totals (% of all comments)		33 (23%)	5 (4%)	5 (4%)	23 (16%)	74 (53%)	140

Key: A.B. = Anti-Bias
No = No Stereotype
L.S. = Limited Stereotyping
S.S. = Strong Stereotyping
Un. = Unrelated to Gender

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Figure 2:
Types of remarks made by each child

Child's Name	Anti-Bias Comments	No Stereotype	Limited Stereotype	Strong Stereotype	Unrelated to Gender	Total Number of Comments
Peter	9 (24%)	3 (8%)	2 (5%)	8 (23%)	15 (40%)	37
Mark	11 (22%)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)	7 (14%)	28 (56%)	50
Annie	6 (17%)	0	1 (3%)	7 (20%)	21 (60%)	35
Leah	7 (35%)	0	0	1 (5%)	12 (60%)	20

Figure 3:
Distribution of Mark's Comments in Book Discussions

Book	Anti-Bias Comments	No Stereotype	Limited Stereotype	Strong Stereotype	Unrelated to Gender	Total Comments
Curious George at the Fire Station	3	0	0	1	5	9
William's Doll	ABSENT					0
Will I Have a Friend?	1	0	1	1	1	4
The Paper Bag Princess	2	0	0	0	4	6
The Girl who Was a Cowboy	0	0	1	1	3	5
Mothers Can Do Anything	0	0	0	1	4	5
No, No, Rosina	2	0	0	0	1	3
Let's Play House	3	0	0	1	4	8
Master of all Masters	0	0	0	0	4	4
Machines at Work	0	2	0	2	2	6
Totals	11 (22%)	2 (4%)	2 (4%)	7 (14%)	28 (56%)	50

Figure 4:
Distribution of Annie's Comments in Book Discussions

Book	Anti-Bias Comments	No Stereotype	Limited Stereotype	Strong Stereotype	Unrelated to Gender	Total Comments
Curious George at the Fire Station	0	0	0	2	1	3
William's Doll	3	0	1	0	5	9
Will I Have a Friend?	1	0	0	0	4	5
The Paper Bag Princess	0	0	0	0	2	2
The Girl who Was a Cowboy	1	0	0	0	5	6
Mothers Can Do Anything	0	0	0	2	3	5
No, No, Rosina	1	0	0	0	1	2
Let's Play House	0	0	0	3	0	3
Master of all Masters	ABSENT					0
Machines at Work	ABSENT					0
Totals	6 (17%)	0	1 (3%)	7 (20%)	21 (60%)	35

Figure 5:
Distribution of Leah's Comments in Book Discussions

Book	Anti-Bias Comments	No Stereotype	Limited Stereotype	Strong Stereotype	Unrelated to Gender	Total Comments
<u>Curious George at the Fire Station</u>	2	0	0	0	0	2
<u>William's Doll</u>	3	0	0	0	2	5
<u>Will I Have a Friend?</u>	2	0	0	0	4	6
<u>The Paper Bag Princess</u>	0	0	0	0	1	1
<u>The Girl who Was a Cowboy</u>	0	0	0	1	1	2
<u>Mothers Can Do Anything</u>	ABSENT					0
<u>No, No, Rosina</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Let's Play House</u>	ABSENT					0
<u>Master of all Masters</u>	0	0	0	0	2	2
<u>Machines at Work</u>	0	0	0	0	2	2
Totals	**7 (35%)**	**0**	**0**	**1 (5%)**	**12 (60%)**	**20**

Figure 6:
Distribution of Peter's Comments in Book Discussions

Book	Anti-Bias Comments	No Stereotype	Limited Stereotype	Strong Stereotype	Unrelated to Gender	Total Comments
<u>Curious George at the Fire Station</u>	1	2	0	0	3	6
<u>William's Doll</u>	4	0	1	4	4	13
<u>Will I Have a Friend?</u>	1	1	1	0	1	4
<u>The Paper Bag Princess</u>	0	0	0	0	4	4
<u>The Girl who as a Cowboy</u>	ABSENT					0
<u>Mothers Can Do Anything</u>	1	0	0	0	0	1
<u>No, No Rosina</u>	0	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Let's Play House</u>	2	0	0	1	1	4
<u>Master of all Masters</u>	ABSENT					0
<u>Machines at Work</u>	0	0	0	3	2	5
Totals	**9 (24%)**	**3 (8%)**	**2 (5%)**	**8 (23%)**	**15 (40%)**	**37**

Appendix:
Picture Books Used in this Project

Session #1	**Curious George at the Fire Station**	Margret Rey Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985
Session #2	**William's Doll**	Charlotte Zolotow New York: Harper & Row, 1972
Session #3	**Will I Have a Friend?**	Miriam Cohen New York: Macmillan, 1967
Session #4	**The Paper Bag Princess**	Robert Munsch Toronto: Annick Press, 1980
Session #5	**The Girl who Was a Cowboy**	Phyllis Krasilovsky New York: Doubleday, 1965
Session #6	**Mothers Can Do Anything**	Joe Lasker Chicago: A. Whitman, 1972
Session #7	**No, No, Rosina**	Patricia Miles Martin New York: Putnam, 1964
Session #8	**Let's Play House**	Lois Lenski Walck, 1944
Session #9	**Master of all Masters**	Marcia Sewall Boston: Little Brown, 1972
Session #10	**Machines at Work**	Byron Barton New York: Crowell, 1987

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