

Gender Stereotypes in Early Childhood

A Literature Review



Dr Leah Culhane and Andrew Bazeley

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About us

The Fawcett Society

The Fawcett Society is the UK's leading membership charity campaigning for gender equality and women's rights at work, at home and in public life. Our vision is a society in which women and girls in all their diversity are equal and truly free to fulfil their potential creating a stronger, happier, better future for us all. We publish authoritative research to educate, inform and lead the debate; we bring together politicians, academics, grassroots activists and wider civil society to develop innovative, practical solutions and we campaign with women and men to make change happen.

Executive Summary

This report represents an initial sweep of a diverse body of literature, encompassing neurobiology, psychology, education, and economics, as well as the work of a range of tireless campaigners for change. It seeks to bring together what we know about where and how gender is replicated in each new generation of children: and what can and is being done to change it.

Learning gender

The early years are the most important years of a child's life with regards to learning and development.

- When children are born, they are unaware of gendered expectations and attitudes. But by the age of two, most children are conscious of the social relevance of gender,¹ and by the time children reach the end of infant school, they have already developed a clear sense of what is expected of boys and girls and how they are supposed to behave.²
- The nature versus nurture debate is ongoing, but what can be said is that the extreme “nature” position - that is, the idea that the differences between girls and boys are all biologically predetermined and unalterable – has been discredited.³
- Modern neuroscience suggests that the relationship between the brain and the world is “two-way traffic”, and the environment we are exposed to has a vital role in creating gendered differences.⁴

Education

Education practitioners

- UK school and nursery practitioners report that they often unknowingly treat children differently, segregating both by task and through symbolic gestures such as different colours or groupings.⁵
- Research has shown that boys are often paid more attention than girls in class, even when there are fewer of them.⁶
- Practitioners often reward ‘gender appropriate behaviour’ and use gendered language to refer to boys and girls in stereotypical ways.⁷

Early education environment

- Gender stereotypes in children's literature contribute to children's perceptions. A content-analysis of characters in contemporary US colouring books found that male characters were more active and gender stereotypes were common,⁸ and stereotyping has also been found in the content of educational software for pre-schoolers in the US.⁹

- 1 Martin, C., & Ruble, D. (2004) ‘Children's search for gender cues: Cognitive perspectives on gender development,’ *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 13(2), pp. 67-70.
- 2 Bian, Leslie, and Cimpian, (2017), ‘Gender stereotypes about intellectual ability emerge early and influence children's interests’, *Science* 355(6323), pp 389-391
- 3 Fine, C. (2011). *Delusions of Gender: the real science behind sex differences*, London: Icon Books
- 4 Rippon, G. (2019), *The Gendered Brain*, Bodley Head: London
- 5 The National Unions of Teachers (2013) *Stereotypes stop you doing stuff, challenging stereotypes through primary education*, p.11. <https://www.teachers.org.uk/files/stereotypes-stop.pdf>
- 6 Chick, K., Heilman-Houser, R., & Hunter, M. (2002). ‘The impact of child care on gender role development and gender stereotypes,’ *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 29(3), pp. 149-54. Stromquist, The gender socialization process in schools
- 7 Fagot, B. I. (1977). ‘Consequences of moderate cross-gender behavior in preschool children,’ *Child Development*, 48(3), pp. 902-907; The National Unions of Teachers, *Stereotypes stop you doing stuff* p.11
- 8 Fitzpatrick, M., and McPherson, B. (2010), ‘Coloring within the lines: gender stereotypes in contemporary coloring books’, *Sex Roles*, 62:1-2
- 9 Sheldon, J., (2004), ‘Gender stereotypes in educational software for young children’, *Sex Roles*, 51:7-8, pp. 433-444

- International and UK studies also find that the use of gender subversive materials can actively challenge traditional gender norms and even undo children's previously held perceptions.¹⁰

Gender imbalance in staff

- In the UK, men make up just 2% of pre-primary school teachers.¹¹
- This gender imbalance has been cited as a contributing factor to the development of gender stereotypes and identities,¹² although arguments vary about why increasing the number of men in the profession will be of benefit.¹³

Peers

- Preschool children have the tendency to "police" other children, ridiculing those who show behaviour that does not conform to certain gender norms and rewarding their peers' gender-typical behaviour.¹⁴
- Children are less likely to play with gender-stereotyped toys when playing in mixed-gender groups than when playing just with children of their own gender.¹⁵

Gender and ethnicity

- Children begin to become aware of their ethnic identity at around the same time as they become aware of gender.¹⁶ Researchers in the US have made the case for an active, counter-stereotypical approach to early childhood education.¹⁷ In terms of exposure to formal early education environments, children from BAME backgrounds are disadvantaged, with lower take-up.

Challenging Gender Stereotypes

- Despite some positives, national education policy has largely overlooked this issue.¹⁸ Studies have found that early educators feel helpless about creating change in children's concept of gender, and fatalistic about their ability to intervene.¹⁹
- Proposed solutions have included focusing on gender in practitioners training, and have raised the potential contrast between the dominant child-centred approach to early education and challenging traditional gender inequalities and practices.²⁰

- 10 Nhundu, T. J. (2007) 'Mitigating gender-typed occupational preferences of Zimbabwean primary school children: the use of biographical sketches and portrayals of female role models,' *Sex Role*. 56(9-10), pp. 639-649; Spinner L, Cameron L, Calogero R. Peer Toy Play as a Gateway to Children's Gender Flexibility: The Effect of (Counter)Stereotypic Portrayals of Peers in Children's Magazines. *Sex Roles*. 2018;79(5):314-328.
- 11 OECD (2018) *Education at a Glance 2018* OECD Indicators. OECD Publishing. Paris. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2018_eag-2018-en#page407
- 12 Plan international, *Gender Inequalities in Early Childhood Development; Brody, Men who teach young children*.
- 13 Fatherhood Institute (2017), *How can we attract more men into London's Early Years workforce?*; Skelton, C. (2001). *Schooling the boys: Masculinities and primary education*. Buckingham: Open University Press; Brownhill, S. (2014) " 'Build me a Male Role Model!' A Critical Exploration of the Perceived Qualities/Characteristics of Men in the Early Years (0-8) in England," *Gender and Education* 26 (3), pp. 246-261
- 14 Martin, C. L., Kornienko, O., Schaefer, D. R., Hanish, L. D., Fabes, R. A., & Goble, P. (2013) 'The role of sex of peers and gender-typed activities in young children's peer affiliative networks: A longitudinal analysis of selection and influence,' *Child Development*, 84, 921-937; Stromquist, *The gender socialization process in schools*; Thorne, B. (1993). *Gender play: Boys and girls in school*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press; Olaiya & Petronella, 'Why Does Gender Matter? Counteracting Stereotypes With Young Children,'; Hughes, F. (2003). 'Sensitivity to the social and cultural context of the play of young children.' In J. Isenberg & M. Jalongo (Eds.), *Major trends and issues in early childhood education* (pp. 126-133). New York: Teachers College Press.
- 15 Fabes, R. A., Martin, C. L., & Hanish, L. D. (2003) 'Young children's play qualities in same-, other-, and mixed-sex peer groups,' *Child Development*, 74, pp 921-932.
- 16 Quintana, S. M., & Vera, E. M. (1999). Mexican American children's ethnic identity, understanding of ethnic prejudice, and parental ethnic socialization. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 21(4), 387-404.
- 17 Aboud., F., et al., (2012), 'Interventions to reduce prejudice and enhance inclusion and respect for ethnic differences in early childhood: A systematic review', *Developmental Review* 32:4 307-336
- 18 Ofsted, (2015), *Early years inspection handbook: Handbook for inspecting early years in England under sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006*; Department for Education (2017), *Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage*; Department for Education (2014) *The national curriculum in England: Framework document*
- 19 Ewing & Taylor' The role of child gender and ethnicity in teacher-child relationship quality and children's behavioural adjustment in preschool'
- 20 Warin, J. & Adriany, V. (2017). 'Gender flexible pedagogy in early childhood education', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 26 (4), pp.375-386;

- In Sweden, and other Nordic countries, challenging gender stereotypes is an explicit aim of the pre-school curriculum.²¹ In the UK a range of organisations have created resources for a whole-school approach, and with older children the Institute of Physics' trials have found positive impacts, with the number of girls taking AS-level physics in participating schools trebling over two years.²²

Parenting

Play environment and toys

- Parents create a "gendered world" for their young infants by providing different toys and clothing to boys and girls and by furnishing their rooms in gendered ways.²³
- As early as 4 and 5 months, parents make toys available to their female infants that they do not make available to their male infants (i.e., dolls and pink toys).²⁴

Storytelling

- Parents reproduce gender stereotypes by telling children stories with different themes.²⁵

Child-parent interaction

- Parents have gendered ideas about their children's abilities and expectations for their children,²⁶ and may be uncomfortable with their children engaging in play which is gender atypical. Research has shown that parents encourage girls to engage in feminine-typed play and boys to engage in masculine-typed play.²⁷
- More recently, links have been made in the research literature between different levels of gender bias held by individual parents, and bias held by their children.²⁸
- Parents often have gendered ideas about their children's abilities mothers of 11-month-old infants over-estimate baby boys' crawling abilities, and underestimate girls'.²⁹

Retail and gender

An abundance of research has shown that consumer goods aimed at children continue to be marketed in gender-specific ways. Products are often segregated explicitly through 'boys' and 'girls' packaging or images, or implicitly through the use of colour.³⁰ Children are being constrained and directed in their choices by the advertising and marketing surrounding toys, leading to overall inequalities.³¹

- 21 Skolverket, S. (2011) *Curriculum for the preschool*. Stockholm: Skolverket.p4 https://www.skolverket.se/sitevision/proxy/publikationer/svid12_5dfee44715d35a5cdfa2899/55935574/wtpub/ws/skolbok/wpubext/trycksak/Blob/pdf2704.pdf;jsessionid=F02DE1AB6889CF13381E71504F8B10A7?k=2704
- 22 Institute of Physics (2017), *Improving Gender Balance: Reflections on the impact of interventions in schools*; Improving Gender Balance Scotland (2018), 'Summary of key findings'.
- 23 Etaugh, C. & Liss, M.B (1992). 'Home, school, and playroom: training grounds for adult gender roles,' *Sex Roles*, 26 , pp. 129–47. Pomerleau, A., Bolduc, D., Malcuit, G. & Cossette, L. (1990). 'Pink or blue: Environmental gender stereotypes in the first two years of life,' *Sex Roles*, 22(5-6), pp. 359-68; Rheingold, H. L., & Cook, K. V. (1975) 'The contents of boys' and girls' rooms as an index of parents' behaviour,' *Child Development*, 46, pp. 445-463;
- 24 Boe, & Woods, 'Parents' Influence on Infants' Gender-Typed Toy Preferences'
- 25 ibid
- 26 Our Watch (2018), *Challenging gender stereotypes in the early years: the power of parents* Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch.
- 27 Fagot, B. I. (1978). 'The influence of sex of child on parental reactions to toddler children,' *Child Development*, 49(2), pp. 459-465. Langlois, J. H., & Downs, A. C. (1980). 'Mothers, fathers, and peers as socialization agents of sex-typed play behaviours in young children,' *Child Development*, 51(4), pp. 1237-1247
- 28 Dawson, A., Pike, A., & Bird, L., (2016) 'Associations between parental gendered attitudes and behaviours and children's gender development across middle childhood', *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 13:4, 452-471, DOI: 10.1080/17405629.2015.1109507
- 29 Mondschein, E., Adolph, K., Tamis-LeMonda, C. (2000), 'Gender bias in mothers' expectations about infant crawling', *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 77:4, pp 304-316
- 30 Orenstien, P. (2011) *Cinderella ate my daughter: Dispatches from the front lines of the new girlie-girl culture*. New York: Harper Collins
- 31 Jadva, V., Hines, M. & Golombok, S. (2010), 'Infants' preferences for toys, colors, and shapes: sex differences and similarities', *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 39: 1261. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-010-9618-z>

Marketing

- The *Let Toys Be Toys* campaign has had some successes with their 2016 analysis finding they had reduced the number of segregated toys aisles or filters on the high street and online.³²
- But significant issues remain with segregated or gender specific marketing in toy catalogues and advertisements.³³

Impact

- Research has demonstrated the link between gendered advertising and children's play choices.³⁴ Some evidence suggests that in the US, this may have worsened between the 1970s and 1990s.³⁵
- The Advertising Standards Agency has recognised the importance of this issue in its new rules around harmful gender stereotypes in advertising, including specific rules relating to children.³⁶

Clothing

- Concerns have been raised by campaigners about issues ranging from segregated marketing, to gendered slogans and differences in quality and fit based on gender.³⁷

What are the effects of gender stereotyping?

Stereotypes limit children by presenting them with a specific set of acceptable behaviours and children's experiences of early gender bias have long-term effects that need to be addressed.

Development

- Play is crucial to young children's development, but because play with 'masculine toys' allow children to develop skills that 'feminine toys' do not, and vice versa, stereotypes may restrict development.³⁸

The gender pay gap

- Occupational and subject segregation is one of the key contributing factors to the gender pay gap, including through differential school subject choices.³⁹ A UK survey which explored the career aspirations of children between the ages of 7 and 11 found that over four times the number of boys wanted to become engineers compared to girls and nearly double the number of boys wanted to become scientists.⁴⁰

The 'gender gap' in achievement

- Debates on education and gender in the UK have also increasingly focused on boys' underperformance in comparison to girls. A 2009 Government report found that "the 'gender gap in achievement' can be removed by challenging notions of gender itself."⁴¹

32 Let Toys Be Toys (2016), 'Girls and Boys toy labels on the way out – survey results <http://lettoysbetoys.org.uk/girls-and-boys-toy-labels-on-the-way-out-survey-results/>

33 <http://lettoysbetoys.org.uk/toy-catalogues-2017/>; Johnson, FL, and Young, K, (2002) 'Gendered voices in children's television advertising', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 19:4, pp 461-480

34 Jennifer J. Pike & Nancy A. Jennings (2005) 'The Effects of Commercials on Children's Perceptions of Gender Appropriate Toy Use', *Sex Roles*, 52(1), pp. 83-91

35 <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/23/opinion/sunday/gender-based-toy-marketing-returns.html>

36 Committee of Advertising Practice (2018), *Advertising guidance on depicting gender stereotypes likely to cause harm or serious or widespread offence*, <https://www.asa.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/f39a881f-d8c9-4534-95f180d1bfe7b953.pdf>

37 <https://www.letclothesbeclothes.co.uk>, Department for Education (2011), *Letting Children be Children: Report of an Independent Review of the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood by Reg Bailey*; Cronin, M. (2018, 3 December). Dinosaurs vs. Unicorns [Blog post]. Retrieved from: <https://blog.bham.ac.uk/glareproject/2018/12/03/dinosaurs-vs-unicorns/>

38 Eliot, L. (2018) 'Impact of gender-typed toys on children's neurological development' in Weisgram, E. & Dinella, L. [eds] *Gender typing of children's toys: How early play experiences impact development*. Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association. (pp. 167-187);

39 <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/education/articles-reports/2018/09/04/which-school-subjects-do-boys-and-girls-enjoy-more>

40 Chambers, N., Kashefpakdel, E., Rehill, J., and Percy, C. (2018). *Drawing the Future survey*. Education for Employers.

41 The Department of Children, Schools and Families (June 2009) *The Gender Agenda Final Report*

Wellbeing

- Gender stereotypes are not only limiting, but can be harmful. Research by the Children's Society has found that children whose friendship groups emphasise traditional gender stereotypes had lower overall wellbeing,⁴² and research in Australia has found that exposing 8-9 year olds to counter-stereotypical stories has a significant impact on self-esteem.⁴³

Violence against women and girls (VAWG)

- Research has shown that holding rigid gender stereotyped beliefs means that young men and boys are more likely to perpetrate partner violence.⁴⁴ International development literature increasingly supports an approach to tackling VAWG that focuses on transforming gender stereotypes.⁴⁵

42 The Children's Society (2018), *The Good Childhood Report 2018*, Children's Society: London

43 Ochman, J.M. (1996), 'The effects of nongender-role stereotyped, same-sex role models in storybooks on the self-esteem of children in grade three', *Sex Roles*, Vol. 35:11-12, pp711-735

44 Reyes, H., et al., (2016), 'Gender role attitudes and male adolescent dating violence perpetration: Normative beliefs as moderators', *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 45(2); Lacasse, A. and Mendelson, MJ (2007), 'Sexual coercion among adolescents: victims and perpetrators', *Journal on Interpersonal Violence* 22(4), 424-437

45 Fulu, Kerr-Wilson, and Lang J, (2014) *What works to prevent violence against women and girls? Evidence review of interventions to prevent violence against women and girls*

Introduction

This report represents an initial sweep of a diverse body of literature, encompassing neurobiology, psychology, education, and economics, as well as the work of a range of tireless campaigners for change. We are certain that over the course of Fawcett's future work in this area our evidence base will be enlarged with the contributions of academics, researchers and practitioners working across the different fields we explore, and others, and we welcome any contributions and corrections.

The literature that we have explored has its limitations – in line with much work in the field, some of the studies cited draw samples from non-diverse populations,⁴⁶ and the replication crisis in psychology raises questions about the validity of results across the field.⁴⁷ Despite these limitations, we hope it provides a useful compilation of available evidence and supports enquiry into how and where gender stereotypes are reproduced in early childhood, and what can and is being done to challenge them.

46 Henrich, J., Heine, S., and Norenzayan, A., (2010), 'The weirdest people in the world?', *Behavioural and Brain Sciences*, 33:2-3, pp61-83

47 Open Science Collaboration, (2015), 'Estimating the reproducibility of psychological science', *Science*, 349: 6251

Learning gender

The early years are the most important years of a child's life for learning and development. During the first three years, as much as 90 per cent of the brain's structures and circuits, which are key for thinking, feeling, moving, communicating and interacting, are established.⁴⁸ This is also the crucial period when children learn the gendered norms, attitudes and expectations of their community and society. Very early on children begin to learn, through interaction with parents, other caregivers and the world around them, the messages that we convey about how girls and boys, and women and men, should behave.

When children are born, they are unaware of these expectations and attitudes. By the age of 18 months, children begin to label based on gender, predicting changes in the way they play.⁴⁹ By the age of two, most children are conscious of the social relevance of gender and gender norms and most children know if they are a boy or a girl by the age of three.⁵⁰

At this age, boys and girls begin to show different communicative styles, participate in different play activities, play more with same-sex peers and avoid peers of the opposite sex,⁵¹ a finding which holds across different ethnic backgrounds.⁵² By the time children reach the end of infant school, they have already developed a clear sense of what is expected of boys and girls and how they are supposed to behave.⁵³

The role of nature versus nurture is an ongoing debate within the literature on gender development. What can be said is that the extreme "nature" position - that is, the idea that the differences between girls and boys are all biologically predetermined and unalterable - has been discredited.⁵⁴ As Cordelia Fine argues: "our minds, society and neurosexism create difference. Together they wire gender. But the wiring is soft, not hard. It is flexible, malleable and changeable."⁵⁵ Modern neuroscience suggests that the relationship between the brain and the world is "two-way traffic", and that the environment we are exposed to has a vital role in creating gendered differences.⁵⁶

Gender stereotypes play a key role in creating this difference by transmitting gendered expectations and attitudes to children within these early years. A gender stereotype is a generalised preconception about the attributes, or characteristics that are or ought to be possessed by women and men or about the roles that are or should be performed by men and women,⁵⁷ separate to biological sex differences. Gender is complex. Feminists have sought to understand gender in many ways, including as a social construct, a power structure, and a performance. Gender is not the same as sex. Biological sex is key to how gender has been constructed, but gender stereotypes are not only aimed at women and girls, or boys and men, with particular biological features.

48 Plan international (2017) *Gender Inequalities in Early Childhood Development*. <https://plan-international.org/publication/2017-06-08-gender-inequality-and-early-childhood-development#download-options>

49 Zosuls, K. M., Ruble, D. N., Tamis-LeMonda, C. S., Shrout, P. E., Bornstein, M. H., & Greulich, F. K. (2009). 'The acquisition of gender labels in infancy: Implications for gender-typed play. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(3), 688-701.

50 Martin, C., & Ruble, D. (2004) 'Children's search for gender cues: Cognitive perspectives on gender development,' *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 13(2), pp. 67-70.

51 Cherney, I. 'Characteristics of masculine and feminine toys and gender-differentiated play' (2018) in, Weisgram, E. & Dinella, L. [eds] *Gender typing of children's toys: How early play experiences impact development*. Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.

52 Halim, M., Ruble, D., Tamis-LeMonda, C., and Shrout, P., (2013), 'Rigidity in Gender-Typed Behaviors in Early Childhood: A Longitudinal Study of Ethnic Minority Children', *Child Development* 84:4

53 Bian, Leslie, and Cimpian, (2017), 'Gender stereotypes about intellectual ability emerge early and influence children's interests', *Science* 355(6323), pp 389-391

54 Fine, C. (2011). *Delusions of Gender: the real science behind sex differences*, London: Icon Books

55 Fine, *Delusions of Gender: the real science behind sex differences*

56 Rippon, G. (2019), *The Gendered Brain*, Bodley Head: London

57 Cusack, S. (2013) *Gender Stereotyping as a Human Rights Violation: Research Report*. Prepared for the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/2013-Gender-Stereotyping-as-HR-Violation.docx>

“Gender stereotyping” is the practice of ascribing to an individual woman or man specific attributes, characteristics, or roles solely because of their membership in the social group of women or men.⁵⁸ Gender stereotypes limit children’s potential by prescribing acceptable and unacceptable behaviour to girls and boys. Gender stereotypes can be harmful insofar as they negatively restrict how children and indeed adults see themselves and others. These assumptions restrict opportunities, constrain choices, and can lead to unequal gender outcomes. This literature review looks at how gender stereotypes are transmitted to children in the years of early childhood (0-7), and to what effect, focusing largely on the role of early and Key Stage 1 primary education, parenting and retail.

58 ibid

Education in early childhood and gender

The education young children receive is a particularly important location for the perpetuation of gender stereotypes between boys and girls. As a key early childhood setting, pre-schools⁵⁹ and primary schools are spaces where gender is learned and where gender inequalities are reproduced. The existing evidence, while not specific to the UK, suggests that gender stereotypes are reproduced in early education through a number of means including teachers' attitudes and expectations of children,⁶⁰ gendered materials,⁶¹ peer interaction⁶² and gender imbalance in staff.⁶³

Education practitioners

Education practitioners can have a significant impact on the proliferation of gendered stereotypes in the early years of a child's education.⁶⁴ Existing research suggests that practitioners interact differently with boys and girls in pre-school and primary settings, largely due to their own implicit beliefs and subconscious understandings of gender. We explore some of the mechanisms by which those interactions can reflect stereotypes in this section.

Separating boys and girls

In 2013, The National Union of Teachers⁶⁵ (NUT, now part of the National Education Union) worked with five primary schools to see how and if gender stereotypes could be challenged in nursery and primary classrooms. The project report, *Stereotypes stop you doing stuff*, showed how UK school and nursery staff had unthinkingly treated boys and girls differently. For example, practitioners said they often unknowingly asked children to do different tasks (boys to move furniture and girls to clear up), distributed pink stickers and pencils to girls and blue ones to boys, and lined children up in separate gender groups.⁶⁶

Attention

Other research has shown that even when early educators actively profess a desire to challenge gender norms, their everyday language and interactions with children can contradict this.⁶⁷ However implicit, these biases can reproduce unfair stereotypes and can manifest in discriminatory classroom practices.⁶⁸ For example, a study examining pre-school settings in the US found that boys are given more attention than girls, even when there are fewer of them.⁶⁹ This finding also applies to older school settings, showing a long-term trend in gendered education practices.⁷⁰

59 Encompassing state, private, and independent nurseries, pre-schools, and childminding settings.

60 Warin, J. & Adriany, V. (2017). 'Gender flexible pedagogy in early childhood education', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 26 (4), pp.375-386; Olaiya, A. & Petronella, C. (2011). 'Why Does Gender Matter? Counteracting Stereotypes With Young Children', *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, 39 (3), pp. 11-19; Kamler, B. (1999) *Constructing Gender and Difference. Critical Research Perspective on Early Childhood*. New Jersey: Hampton Press Inc.

61 *ibid*

62 Stromquist, NP. (2007) *The gender socialization process in schools: A cross-national comparison*. Paper commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2008, Education for All by 2015: Will We Make It? New York: UNESCO.

63 Brody, D. (2014). *Men who teach young children: An international perspective*. London: Trentham Books, Institute of Education Press.

64 Warin & Adriany, 'Gender flexible pedagogy in early childhood education,'; Kamler, *Constructing Gender and Difference* Stromquist, *The gender socialization process in schools: A cross-national comparison*; Olaiya & Petronella, 'Why Does Gender Matter? Counteracting Stereotypes With Young Children'.

65 Now part of the National Education Union

66 The National Unions of Teachers (2013) *Stereotypes stop you doing stuff, challenging stereotypes through primary education*, p.11. <https://www.teachers.org.uk/files/stereotypes-stop.pdf>

67 Kamler, *Constructing Gender and Difference*.

68 *ibid*

69 Chick, K., Heilman-Houser, R., & Hunter, M. (2002). 'The impact of child care on gender role development and gender stereotypes,' *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 29(3), pp. 149-54.

70 Stromquist, *The gender socialization process in schools*

Rewarding “appropriate” behaviour

Gender stereotypes also contribute to the encouragement of “gender-appropriate” behaviour within infants and children. Research has shown that early educators have gender-typed expectations for children’s behaviour and differently sanction and reward boys’ and girls’ behaviours in accordance with these expectations.⁷¹ Other studies on interactions between early childcare practitioners and preschool children found that girls were reinforced for their dress, hairstyles, and helping behaviours, while boys received more comments on their size and their physical skills.⁷² Practitioners can also influence children’s play preferences, which are central to development and learning. The toys that are presented to children may be gender-stereotyped,⁷³ or children may be encouraged to engage with certain types of play activities. Early research carried out on pre-school classrooms in the US, for example, found that practitioners frequently praised boys for engaging in typically masculinised activities, such as playing with building blocks, and tended to criticise them for doing stereotypically feminine activities such as engaging in dress-up.⁷⁴

Gendered language

Language is another gendered aspect with regards to the interaction between early childcare practitioners and children. An early study on gender stereotypes in the preschool setting showed that caregivers often show linguistic bias while communicating with children, referring to male and female children differently. Female children were commonly referred to using terms of endearment such as “sweetie” or “honey” while male students were more likely to be spoken to by name or a stereotypically masculine word such as “Bud”.⁷⁵ School and nursery staff in the NUT study also reported using gendered terms when asking children to do activities, for example asking for the help of “strong boys” and “helpful girls.”⁷⁶

Beyond the early years, research by the National Education Union and UK Feminista in 2017 showed that gender stereotyping is a typical feature of primary and secondary school culture and is reproduced through mundane “everyday” actions.⁷⁷ The study, which surveyed 1,508 secondary school students in England and Wales and 1,634 secondary and primary schools teachers, found that over a third (34%) of primary school teachers witnessed gender stereotyping in their school on at least a weekly basis and over half (54%) witnessed it on at least a termly basis.⁷⁸ Furthermore, 36% of female students in mixed-sex schools said they have been treated differently due to their gender, compared to only 15% of male students, while 52% of female students, and a quarter of male students, said they had witnessed someone else at their school being treated differently because of their gender. Less than a quarter (22%) of female students at mixed-sex schools thought their school took sexism seriously enough and half (50%) of female secondary school students said they would like more opportunities to discuss sexism in school.⁷⁹

71 Ewing, A. R., & Taylor, A. R. (2009). ‘The role of child gender and ethnicity in teacher-child relationship quality and children’s behavioural adjustment in preschool,’ *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 24(1), pp. 92-105.

72 Chick, Heilman-Houser & Hunter, ‘The impact of child care on gender role development and gender stereotypes’

73 *ibid*

74 Fagot, B. I. (1977). ‘Consequences of moderate cross-gender behavior in preschool children,’ *Child Development*, 48(3), pp. 902–907.

75 *ibid*

76 The National Unions of Teachers, *Stereotypes stop you doing stuff* p.11

77 National Education Union and UK Feminista (2017) “ ‘It’s just everywhere’ A study on sexism in schools – and how we tackle it.” <https://ukfeminista.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Report-Its-just-everywhere.pdf>

78 The report gives a total figure for stereotyping behaviour coming from both students and staff.

79 *ibid*

Early education environment and materials

The pre-school environment is often referred to as the ‘third teacher’ in early years education.⁸⁰ Children’s surroundings are central in transmitting messages about how the world works and their place in that world. Existing good practice guides suggest that early education settings need to be full of direct and indirect meaningful references to all areas of diversity.⁸¹ Research has, however, pointed to the ways in which gender stereotypes are reproduced through education materials and resources.

Children’s Literature

Young children’s literature is one place where gender stereotypes are encountered and learned. Picture books provide role models for children. For example, a recent review of representations of professors in children’s literature found that they are “overwhelmingly white and male”.⁸²

They also provide visual and textual representations of what it is to be a man and a woman. A content analysis of representations of parenting in young children’s picture books in the UK, for example, found that fathers were significantly under-represented.⁸³ When they were present, fathers were half as likely as mothers to be pictured touching their children, they were eight times less likely to be shown undertaking domestic chores, and less likely to be depicted displaying any form of recognisable emotion. Similar studies in the US demonstrated that fathers are largely absent or are portrayed as withdrawn or ineffectual parents.⁸⁴

Taking a wider view than standard “literature”, a content-analysis of characters in contemporary US colouring books has also found that male characters were more active and gender stereotypes were common,⁸⁵ and stereotyping has also been found in the content of educational software for pre-schoolers in the US.⁸⁶

Gender stereotypes in early schoolbooks can contribute to children’s perceptions of what is and is not appropriate for men and women. In their study of two first grade classrooms (5 year olds) in Israel, Karniol and Gal-Disegni provided one class with “gender-stereotyped” readers and the other with “gender-fair” readers and then showed the children a mix of activities and asked if they were appropriate for males or females. The study found that children using the gender-fair reader indicated that more activities were appropriate for both males and females than did children using the gender-stereotyped reader.⁸⁷ These results are reflected in other research that strongly suggests gender bias in picture books and schoolbooks impacts on children’s perceptions. Early research carried out by Schau and Scott, for example, reviewed 21 studies on the effects of sexist versus non-sexist children’s instructional materials and found a tendency for sexist materials to strengthen children’s biases.⁸⁸

80 Rae, L. (2017). *Celebrating difference and challenging gender stereotypes in the early years foundation*. Stonewall. https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/getting_started_early_years.pdf

81 *ibid*; Zero Tolerance (2013) *Just like a child: Respect gender equality in the early years. A guide for childcare professionals*. <https://www.zerotolerance.org.uk/resources/Just-Like-a-Child.pdf>

82 Terras, M., (2018), ‘Picture-Book Professors: Academia and Children’s Literature’, *Cambridge Elements*, DOI: 10.1017/9781108529501

83 Adams, M., Walker, C. & O’Connell, P. (2011). ‘Invisible or Involved Fathers? A Content Analysis of Representations of Parenting in Young Children’s Picturebooks in the UK,’ *Sex Roles*, 65(4), pp. 259-270

84 Anderson, D. A., & Hamilton, M. (2005). ‘Gender role stereotyping of parents in children’s picture books: The invisible father,’ *Sex Roles*, 52(2-3), pp. 145–151.

85 Fitzpatrick, M., and McPherson, B. (2010), ‘Coloring within the lines: gender stereotypes in contemporary coloring books’, *Sex Roles*, 62:1-2

86 Sheldon, J., (2004), ‘Gender stereotypes in educational software for young children’, *Sex Roles*, 51:7-8, pp. 433-444

87 Karniol, R., & Gal-Disegni, M. (2009). ‘The impact of gender-fair versus gender-stereotyped basal readers on 1st-grade children’s gender stereotypes: A natural experiment,’ *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 23(4), pp. 411–420.

88 Schau, C. G., & Scott, K. P. (1984). ‘Review of 21 cause and effect studies,’ *Psychological Documents*, 76, pp. 183–193

Challenging stereotypes through stories

While these studies have shown that education and play materials are crucial in transmitting gender norms to children, they also find that the use of gender neutral⁸⁹ or gender subversive materials can actively challenge traditional gender norms and even undo children's previously held perceptions. Further to this, international research has also shown that storybooks can challenge children's perceptions of stereotypical occupations.⁹⁰ In a study of 74 4-6 year-olds in the US, children were read stories where characters were involved in atypical gender activities and occupations. This positively influenced gender attitudes and resulted in more flexible attitudes about occupational roles.⁹¹ Similar results have been found using magazines, in a UK setting.⁹²

The *Breaking the Mould Project*, carried out by the NUT in 2013 similarly concluded that literature was a useful tool to actively challenge gender stereotypes in UK schools and nurseries.⁹³ Children's literature which displays gender-atypical characters and behaviours also has potential to alter children's play.⁹⁴ In a study of pre-school children in Australia, eight "highly gender-typed" boys and girls were exposed to two storybooks in which characters displayed gender-atypical toy play. This resulted in significant changes in play behaviour amongst some children, who increased their play with gender-atypical toys and decreased play with gender stereotypical toys, although this was more likely among girls.⁹⁵

Gender imbalance in education staff

The gender imbalance of staff has also been cited as a contributing factor to the development of gender stereotypes and identities.⁹⁶ Men continue to be a very small minority within the field of early childhood education (ECE), covering the 0-5 age range, comprising less than 3% of practitioners worldwide.⁹⁷ In the UK, men make up just 2% of pre-primary school teachers.⁹⁸ Low pay in the sector, which is a challenge for recruitment, reflects its position as a job traditionally done by women, a status which too often results in particular careers being under-valued. Looking at both state-funded nursery and primary schools, which includes Key Stage 2, men make up 15.4% of all teachers, and 13.9% of classroom teachers. This imbalance reduces significantly in secondary education.⁹⁹

The recruitment of a greater number of men into ECE in particular has become a popular policy narrative and in some countries there have been concerted attempts to increase the number of male staff working in early education through recruitment strategies.¹⁰⁰ It is also a specific policy concern in the UK,¹⁰¹ with a Department for Education taskforce on the issue due to report shortly.

89 Throughout this review we tend to avoid this term unless citing a work using it: recent discussion has flagged a risk that 'gender neutral' can mean defaulting to traditionally masculine representations (see Criado Perez, C., (2019), *Invisible Women*)

90 Nhundu, T. J. (2007) 'Mitigating gender-typed occupational preferences of Zimbabwean primary school children: the use of biographical sketches and portrayals of female role models,' *Sex Role*. 56(9-10), pp. 639-649.

Trepanier-Street, M.L. & Romatowski, J.A. (1999) 'The Influence of Children's Literature on Gender Role Perceptions: A Re-examination,' *Early Childhood Education Journal* 26(3), pp. 155-159

91 Trepanier-Street & Romatowski, 'The Influence of Children's Literature on Gender Role Perceptions'

92 Spinner L, Cameron L, Calogero R. Peer Toy Play as a Gateway to Children's Gender Flexibility: The Effect of (Counter) Stereotypic Portrayals of Peers in Children's Magazines. *Sex Roles*. 2018;79(5):314-328.

93 The National Unions of Teachers, *Stereotypes stop you doing stuff*

94 Green, V. A., Bigler, R., and Catherwood, D. (2004) 'The variability and flexibility of gender-typed toy play: a close look at children's behavioral responses to counterstereotypic models,' *Sex Role*, 51, 371-386.

95 Green, Bigler, and Catherwood (2004), 'The Variability and Flexibility of Gender-Typed Toy Play: A close look at children's behavioural responses to counterstereotypic models, *Sex Roles* 51:7-8, pp 371-386

96 Plan international, *Gender Inequalities in Early Childhood Development*; Brody, *Men who teach young children*.

97 *ibid*

98 OECD (2018) *Education at a Glance 2018 OECD Indicators*. OECD Publishing. Paris. https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/education-at-a-glance-2018_eag-2018-en#page407

99 Department for Education, (2018), *School Workforce in England: November 2017*

100 Warin & Adriany, 'Gender flexible pedagogy in early childhood education,' 375

101 McCormack, O., & Brownhill, S. (2014). 'Moving away from the caring': exploring the views of in-service and pre-service male teachers about the concept of the male teachers as a role model at an early childhood and post-primary level,' *International Journal of Academic Research in Education and Review*, 2(4), pp. 82-96.

The arguments made for this focus are varied, ranging from the benefits of presenting men in a counter-stereotypical career, to widening the talent pool in an expanding sector.¹⁰² The rationale behind increasing men in the discipline has also sometimes relied upon idea that male teachers can be positive role models for young boys, particularly in the growing absence of father figures in households around the UK.¹⁰³

Feminist critiques have questioned this particular line of argument, with scholars highlighting the risk that such thinking reinforces essentialist ideas about men and women's behaviour.¹⁰⁴ Feminists have stated that solely the presence of men in ECE is not sufficient to disrupt gender stereotypes, rather, "what men actually do within their preschool teaching and how they perform gender is a critical consideration for the realization of this potential."¹⁰⁵ Research on male ECE practitioners in Sweden, for example, found that men were "keen to describe the ways they performed non-traditional" practices in front of the children through their appearance and activities.¹⁰⁶ However, these practitioners were very aware of their responsibility to actively challenge gender stereotypes in ECE, something which is enshrined in the Swedish preschool curriculum. As the Fatherhood Institute note, a more gender equal workforce could make the sector "better equipped to counter gender stereotypical expectations",¹⁰⁷ but to realise those potential benefits, change in the way early education approaches gender stereotypes is also needed. A similar critique has also been applied around the 'role model' argument in relation to ethnic minority teachers.¹⁰⁸

Peers

Peers also affect the socialisation of other children in educational settings, often playing a 'gate-keeping role' in reproducing gendered expectations and behaviours.¹⁰⁹ There is a recognition that children are not just passive in receiving gender norms but are also active in reproducing them through their interactions with each other and the world around them.¹¹⁰ Preschool children have the tendency to "police" other children, ridiculing those who show behaviour that does not conform to certain gender norms and rewarding their peers' gender-typical behaviour.¹¹¹ Children's gender-typed toy preferences are also more likely to be displayed when around peers who approve of the gender-stereotyped choices.¹¹² Research has also shown that children are less likely to play with gender-stereotyped toys when playing in mixed-gender groups than when playing just with children of their own gender.¹¹³

102 Fatherhood Institute (2017), *How can we attract more men into London's Early Years workforce?*

103 *ibid*

104 Skelton, C. (2001). *Schooling the boys: Masculinities and primary education*. Buckingham: Open University Press

Brownhill, S. (2014) " 'Build me a Male Role Model!' A Critical Exploration of the Perceived Qualities/Characteristics of Men in the Early Years (0–8) in England," *Gender and Education* 26 (3), pp. 246–261;
Warin & Adriany, 'Gender flexible pedagogy in early childhood education,'

105 *ibid*

106 *ibid*

107 Fatherhood Institute (2017), *ibid*.

108 Carrington, B., and Skelton, C., (2003), 'Re-thinking 'role models': equal opportunities in teacher recruitment in England and Wales', *Journal of Education Policy*, 18:3

109 Martin, C. L., Kornienko, O., Schaefer, D. R., Hanish, L. D., Fabes, R. A., & Goble, P. (2013) 'The role of sex of peers and gender-typed activities in young children's peer affiliative networks: A longitudinal analysis of selection and influence,' *Child Development*, 84, 921–937;

Stromquist, *The gender socialization process in schools*

110 Thorne, B. (1993). *Gender play: Boys and girls in school*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

111 Olaiya & Petronella, 'Why Does Gender Matter? Counteracting Stereotypes With Young Children,'; Hughes, F. (2003). 'Sensitivity to the social and cultural context of the play of young children.' In J. Isenberg & M. Jalongo (Eds.), *Major trends and issues in early childhood education* (pp. 126–133). New York: Teachers College Press.

112 Olaiya & Petronella, 'Why Does Gender Matter? Counteracting Stereotypes With Young Children'

113 Fabes, R. A., Martin, C. L., & Hanish, L. D. (2003) 'Young children's play qualities in same-, other-, and mixed-sex peer groups,' *Child Development*, 74, pp 921–932.

Gender and ethnicity

Children begin to become aware of their ethnic identity at around the same time as they become aware of gender.¹¹⁴ Unlike the literature around gender stereotyping and early childhood education, a focus of analysis on ‘race’¹¹⁵ is around the impact of ethnic mixing in early childhood and racial stereotyping. Research in the UK has found that children aged 3-5 in ethnically mixed areas were less likely to show discrimination in favour of white children, supporting the idea that contact with children from different ethnicities can reduce racial bias.¹¹⁶ Research has found evidence of racial bias amongst adults who work with children in the US,¹¹⁷ and in the UK evidence of differences between teacher assessments and anonymous standardised testing at the end of primary education supports the presence of bias in our teaching workforce,¹¹⁸ although evidence on UK early childhood educators appears to be limited. Researchers in the US have made the case for an active, counter-stereotypical approach to early childhood education,¹¹⁹ Studies there with slightly older children (8-10) suggest that actively talking about race, rather than avoiding it, may have an impact in terms of reducing biases,¹²⁰ and there is a sizeable evidence base in support of the effectiveness of interventions to reduce racial prejudice in children, including through counter-stereotypical media.¹²¹

In terms of exposure to formal early education environments, children from BAME backgrounds are disadvantaged, with lower take-up of the Government’s free 15 hours of care for 3-year-olds amongst Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Gypsy/Roma/Traveller, and Black African backgrounds. Children with English as an additional language are nearly three times as likely as children with English as their first language not to take up their full entitlement to state-funded pre-school.¹²²

Our review of available evidence unearthed few examples of genuinely intersectional work which explored the interactions of gender stereotyping and other forms of stereotyping in early education. Some US evidence suggests that BME 2-year-olds are underrepresented in “special education” (SEN in the UK) settings, suggesting a negative impact on educational support for disabled black children.¹²³

Challenging gender stereotypes in ECE

Despite an increased interest and deeper understanding of the role of early education in producing gendered expectations and norms, national educational policies have largely overlooked this issue. We identified some positives: the Ofsted *Early years inspection handbook* requires active challenge of gender (and cultural and racial) stereotyping, but only at “Outstanding” level,¹²⁴ and the 2011 *Development matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)*’ non-statutory guidance broadly advocates avoiding

114 Quintana, S. M., & Vera, E. M. (1999). Mexican American children’s ethnic identity, understanding of ethnic prejudice, and parental ethnic socialization. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences*, 21(4), 387–404.

115 ‘Race’ is used here as a discredited concept, but one on which negative stereotypes are based, and which is used in the literature.

116 Rutland, A., Cameron, L., Bennett, L., and Ferrell, J., (2005), ‘Interracial contact and racial constancy: a multi-site study of racial intergroup bias in 3-5 year old Anglo-British children’ *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 20:6

117 Priest, N., et al. (2018) ‘Stereotyping across intersections of race and age: Racial stereotyping among White adults working with children’, *PLOS ONE* (2018). DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0201696

118 Burgess, S., and Greaves, E., (2009), ‘Test scores, subjective assessment and stereotyping of ethnic minorities’, *Working Paper No 09/221*, Centre for Market and Public Organisation, Bristol

119 Boutte, G., Lopez-Robertson, J., Powers-Costello, E., (2011), ‘Moving beyond colorblindness in early childhood classrooms’, *Day Care and Early Education*, DOI 10.1007/s10643-011-0457-x

120 Aboud, F., and Doyle, A., (1996), ‘Does talk of race foster prejudice or tolerance in children?’, *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 28(3), pp161-170

121 Aboud, F., et al., (2012), ‘Interventions to reduce prejudice and enhance inclusion and respect for ethnic differences in early childhood: A systematic review’, *Developmental Review* 32:4 307-336

122 Albakri, M., et al. (2018), *Take-up of free early education entitlements: Research Report*, Government Social Research

123 Morgan, P., Farkas, G., and Hillemeier, M., (2012), ‘Are minority children disproportionately represented in early intervention and early childhood special education?’, *Educational Researcher*

124 Ofsted, (2015), *Early years inspection handbook: Handbook for inspecting early years in England under sections 49 and 50 of the Childcare Act 2006*

stereotyping.¹²⁵ However, the EYFS itself makes no mention of gender or stereotyping, and the KS1 curriculum is largely silent on the matter.¹²⁶

The research suggests that not enough is being done within public pre-school and primary programmes to challenge – rather than reproduce – the way children are taught gendered norms and expectations. A number of solutions have been proposed to challenge the limiting stereotypes that are formed and internalised in early childhood education settings. Primarily, solutions have suggested focusing on gender issues in practitioners' training. Where teachers' own gender biases are implicit, it has been suggested that early childhood educators must develop an explicit gender consciousness before they can deliver a 'gender conscious' approach to teaching.¹²⁷

What this training should involve and what specific approach to gender it should adopt is open to debate and the agenda is potentially extensive. However, it has been argued that gender training is needed to ensure that practitioners: engage in critical reflection of their teaching and care, reflect on their own gendered behaviours and biases, practice 'gender flexible teaching' which focuses on playful and experimental approaches to the performance of gender and understand alternative ways to define one's gender identity.¹²⁸ Without this training, the issue of gender stereotyping and gender bias may be proliferated. It has also been argued that the dominant child-centred approach to ECE has meant that facilitating the child's 'natural' interests, motivations and behaviours are prioritised over challenging traditional gender inequalities and practices.¹²⁹

However, teacher training on gender issues is not commonplace and there is an ongoing debate about the appropriate level or need for intervention with regards to gender roles and stereotyping in ECE and primary education. There have been a number of studies conducted on early practitioners' approach to gender in early education. Research conducted in Australia has shown that many pre-school teachers believe that gender matters are not important in the early years, while others argue that children within this age bracket are too young to be introduced to complex issues such as gender.¹³⁰ Arguments also continue to be levelled against equality initiatives which frame interventions as contrary to nature, multiculturalism and parental wishes.¹³¹ Further studies which have looked at early educators' understanding of and commitment to gender equity in a pre-school setting found that educators felt helpless towards creating change in children's concept of gender and fatalistic about their ability to intervene.¹³² The NUT study on UK primary schools and nurseries reported that a number of educational practitioners often did not feel sufficiently comfortable or knowledgeable about challenging gender stereotypes.¹³³

Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence in Schools 2016, a report of the Women and Equalities Select Committee, heard that more general training on gender stereotypes in school is needed.¹³⁴ The inquiry received evidence which suggested that the way in which the UK approaches teacher training should be reformed to include a large element on gender and sexism.¹³⁵ Evidence submitted by The Department for Education (DfE) reported that initial teacher training (ITT) courses do not have to deal specifically with how

125 Early Education (2011), *Development Matters in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)*

126 Department for Education (2017), *Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage*; Department for Education (2014) *The national curriculum in England: Framework document*

127 Warin & Adriany, 'Gender flexible pedagogy in early childhood education'

128 Plan international, *Gender Inequalities in Early Childhood Development*

129 Warin & Adriany, 'Gender flexible pedagogy in early childhood education'

130 MacNaughton, G. (2000) *Rethinking gender in early childhood education*. London: Paul Chapman.

131 *ibid*

132 Ewing & Taylor 'The role of child gender and ethnicity in teacher-child relationship quality and children's behavioural adjustment in preschool'

133 The National Unions of Teachers, *Stereotypes stop you doing stuff* p.10

134 Women and Equalities Committee (September 2016) *Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence in Schools, Third Report of Session 2016-17*. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmwomeq/91/91.pdf>

135 Women and Equalities Committee, paragraph 156

to tackle sexual harassment, sexual violence or gender stereotypes.¹³⁶ In their submission to the Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence in Schools 2016, UK Feminista recommended that tackling sexism should become a core and compulsory element of all Initial Teacher Training courses, including PGCE, Schools Direct and Teach First courses.¹³⁷ Research by the National Education Union and UK Feminista in 2017 reported that over half (58%) of primary and secondary school teachers have never received any training to recognise and tackle sexism.¹³⁸ It also found that 62% of primary and secondary school teachers want to receive such training.¹³⁹

Although initiatives remain scarce, there have been attempts to make reforms in education systems in other countries. Within the Nordic countries, where gender equality is prioritised, a number of promising practices exist that aim to promote gender equality within schools and kindergartens. These include gender mainstreaming in education, (both in teaching and learning); the requirement of gender equality planning at schools; recruiting gender equality educators to municipalities; creating a gender-equality certificate for educational institutions to acquire; promoting gender balance and diversity among educational staff; and gender equality work with the parents of students.¹⁴⁰ As previously mentioned, in Sweden challenging gender stereotypes is also an explicit aim, with the curriculum stating ‘the preschool should counteract traditional gender patterns and gender roles.’¹⁴¹

A small-scale study of a time-limited intervention teaching five to ten-year-olds to use particular retorts when their peers used gender stereotyped phrases (e.g. “you can’t say that girls can’t play”) found that the children were more likely to challenge remarks at the end of the study, and that at follow-up girls (but not boys) held more egalitarian beliefs: this suggests a potential element of future work.¹⁴²

Gender initiatives which aim to tackle gender stereotyping in early education have also been initiated and implemented by private donors and NGOs, in countries in the global South. For example, gender-sensitive teacher training has been implemented in Bangladesh, Botswana, Indonesia, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Swaziland and Zambia.¹⁴³ However, inadequate resourcing, and poor implementation, supervision and evaluation have frequently limited the effectiveness of the training.¹⁴⁴

UK Initiatives

Within the UK, efforts have been made by civil society and actors within the education profession to challenge gender stereotypes in education. A number of organisations such as Let Toys Be Toys, Stonewall, the NUT, and Zero Tolerance have developed guides for early years practitioners and schools which give advice and ideas for practice on how to challenge restrictive stereotyping in the early years.¹⁴⁵ These include thinking about how you speak to children, using inclusive language, talking about gender roles, providing a variety of role models for children, using ‘unisex’ toys, games and activities, using pictures and stories which depict men and women in non-traditional roles, encouraging children to use all toys and play area, thinking about rewards and sanctions supporting staff and having conversations with families.

136 Women and Equalities Committee, paragraph 157

137 Women and Equalities Committee, paragraph 158

138 National Education Union and UK Feminista, *It’s just everywhere*

139 *ibid*

140 Heikkinen, M. (ed) (2016) *Promising Nordic practices in gender equality promotion in basic education and kindergartens*. <http://jultika.oulu.fi/files/isbn9789526211558.pdf>

141 Skolverket, S. (2011) *Curriculum for the preschool*. Stockholm: Skolverket.p4 https://www.skolverket.se/sitevision/proxy/publikationer/svid12_5dfee44715d35a5cdfa2899/55935574/wtpub/ws/skolbok/wpubext/trycksak/Blob/pdf2704.pdf;jsessionid=F02DE1AB6889CF13381E71504F8B10A7?k=2704

142 Lamb, L. M., Bigler, R. S., Liben, L. S., & Green, V. A. (2009). Teaching children to confront peers’ sexist remarks: Implications for theories of gender development and educational practice. *Sex Roles*, 61, 361-382.

143 Plan international, *Gender Inequalities in Early Childhood Development*

144 *ibid*

145 Rae, L. (2017). *ibid.*; NUT, (2013), *Boys’ Things and Girls’ Things?*; Zero Tolerance, *Just like a child*; Let Toys Be Toys, ‘Ten ways to challenge gender stereotypes in the classroom’ <http://lettoysbetoys.org.uk/ten-ways-to-challenge-gender-stereotypes-in-the-classroom/>

The Institute of Physics' *Improving Gender Balance* project, reporting in 2017, sought to address the fact that girls' participation in physics A-Levels had not increased from 20% despite 30 years of interventions. Their latest government-funded interventions focussed on whole-school work to tackle gender stereotyping, marking a shift away from approaches solely focussed on the gender-imbalanced subject itself. In England they piloted the approach with students in Key Stage 3 and above, and in Scotland they worked with clusters of settings, including nurseries. Their evaluation of the project in England found initial positive impacts, with the number of girls taking AS-level physics in participating schools trebling over two years.¹⁴⁶

Drawing on these positive findings, in addition to wider research, a consortium including the IoP, King's College London, University College London, and the University Council of Modern Languages have founded the "Gender Action" award programme to promote a whole-school approach across settings from nursery level upwards. The award launched in 2019 and is initially open to schools in London, funded by the Mayor of London's office.¹⁴⁷

Other non-governmental organisations have also piloted schemes which have sought to understand and tackle gender stereotypes in UK education. In 2013, The National Union of Teachers worked for two years with five primary schools to consider how 'traditional' gender stereotypes could be challenged in nursery and primary classrooms. The 'Breaking the Mould' project provided teachers with support and resources so that they could challenge stereotypes in the classroom, with those who took part in the project suggesting that it made them reflect on how they had interacted with children and caused them to alter their behaviour.¹⁴⁸

'Lifting Limits', a Camden-based social enterprise has recently piloted a gender equality scheme in five schools which aims to tackle gender stereotypes in education. The organisation conducts a 'gender audit' and then provides, training for staff, lesson plans and school wide resources to aid in the schools gender mainstreaming. The findings of the pilot will be published in summer 2019.¹⁴⁹ While these initiatives and guides are welcome, they are isolated. The UK still lacks an overall comprehensive strategy for promoting gender equality in education, in both the early years and beyond. Consequently, many schools and nurseries do not have gender equality as a key part of their agenda and practitioner training courses are not obliged to include training on tackling gender stereotyping and sexism in education.

146 Institute of Physics (2017), *Improving Gender Balance: Reflections on the impact of interventions in schools*; Improving Gender Balance Scotland (2018), 'Summary of key findings'.

147 <https://www.genderaction.co.uk/>

148 The National Unions of Teachers, *Stereotypes stop you doing stuff* p.10

149 <http://www.liftinglimits.org.uk/>

Parenting and gender

While educational settings are vital, especially in the early years of childhood parents or another caregiver are most children's main teachers. As a result, the ways that parents and caregivers interact with children are key to the way in which children learn about gender. Gender socialisation may differ from family to family, however, parents, much like early education practitioners often pass on their own implicit and explicit views about gender to their children.¹⁵⁰ One early study indicates that parents have different expectations of sons and daughters as early as 24 hours after they are born,¹⁵¹ while more recent research shows that mothers of 11-month-old infants over-estimate baby boys' crawling abilities, and underestimate girls'.¹⁵² At this very early stage, children are yet to recognise the relevance of gender or self-identify as any given gender. However, starting at a young age, parents create a "gendered world" for their young infants through the provision of different toys, clothing and furnishing.¹⁵³

Play environment and toys

The provision of gendered toys has been given much attention in the existing literature. While research has shown that gender differences in children's toy preferences emerge from the age of two on, it has also been highlighted that adults are the gatekeepers of toys and that even before children can express a preference, parents encourage children to engage in specific gendered play activities and behaviours through the creation of gendered environments. It is these differential environments which impact on the development of specific abilities and preferential activities in children later on in life.¹⁵⁴ In 1975, Rheingold and Cook analysed the content of the rooms of 45 girls and 48 boys from one to six years of age in the United States and found that the rooms of preschool boys contained more vehicles, sports equipment, educational and art materials, toy animals, machines, and military toys.¹⁵⁵ The rooms of preschool girls, by contrast, contained more dolls, doll houses, and domestic toys. In 2018, replicas of this study, such as MacPhee and Prendergast's show that despite a general trend towards more gender-equal attitudes, the stereotyping of children's playthings remains strong.¹⁵⁶

Boe and Woods also found that as early as 4 and 5 months, parents make toys available to their female infants that they do not make available to their male infants (i.e., dolls and pink toys).¹⁵⁷ In their analysis of the physical environment of 120 girls and boy infants Pomerleau and his colleagues found that girls had more dolls, fictional characters, child's furniture, and other toys for manipulation whereas boys were provided with more sports equipment, tools, and large and small vehicles.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, they evidenced that girl infants were still more often dressed in pink or multi-coloured clothes whereas boys wore more blue, red and white clothing. These gendered colour schemes were also reflected in the decor of male and female infants' bedrooms.

150 Witt, S. D. (1997) 'Parental influence on children's socialization to gender roles' *Adolescence*, 32(126), pp. 253-259.

151 Rubin, J., Provenzano, F., & Luria, Z. (1974) 'The eye of the beholder: Parents' views on sex of newborns,' *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 44, pp. 512-519.

152 Mondschein, E., Adolph, K., Tamis-LeMonda, C. (2000), 'Gender bias in mothers' expectations about infant crawling', *Journal of Experimental Child Psychology*, 77:4, pp 304-316

153 Etaugh, C. & Liss, M.B (1992). 'Home, school, and playroom: training grounds for adult gender roles,' *Sex Roles*, 26 , pp. 129-47 Pomerleau, A., Bolduc, D., Malcuit, G. & Cossette, L. (1990). 'Pink or blue: Environmental gender stereotypes in the first two years of life,' *Sex Roles*, 22(5-6), pp. 359-68; Rheingold, H. L., & Cook, K. V. (1975) 'The contents of boys' and girls' rooms as an index of parents' behaviour,' *Child Development*, 46, pp. 445-463;

154 Boe & Woods 'Parents' Influence on Infants' Gender-Typed Toy Preferences,'358 Pomerleau, Bolduc & Cossette. 'Pink or blue: Environmental gender stereotypes in the first two years of life,' 359

155 Rheingold & Cook 'The contents of boys' and girls' rooms as an index of parents' behavior,'

156 MacPhee, D. & Prendergast, S. (2018). 'Room for Improvement: Girls' and Boys' Home Environments are Still Gendered,' *Sex Roles*, pp1-15 Boe, J. & Woods, R. (2018). 'Parents' Influence on Infants' Gender-Typed Toy Preferences,' *Sex Roles*, 79(5-6), pp. 358-373

157 Boe, & Woods, 'Parents' Influence on Infants' Gender-Typed Toy Preferences'

158 Pomerleau, Bolduc & Cossette 'Pink or blue: Environmental gender stereotypes in the first two years of life' Rheingold & Cook, 'The contents of boys' and girls' rooms as an index of parents' behavior'

Research has also found differences in the educational value of the different toys that children, influenced by gender stereotypes, prefer to play with. Francis finds that this “didactic information” which can help develop construction and literacy skills is present in toys for boys, but lacking in those for girls.¹⁵⁹ A recent meta-analysis of 16 studies looking at observational studies of gendered toy preferences found that gendered toy preferences were present over time,¹⁶⁰ but that the incidence of boys choosing more “male-typed” toys, and girls choosing more “female-typed” toys, had reduced in more recent studies, suggesting that wider social moves towards gender equality are having an impact. They also found that when “gender neutral” toys are provided, gendered toy preferences were reduced.¹⁶¹

Storytelling

Gender stereotypes can also be transmitted to children in the home through storytelling.¹⁶² Storytelling often reinforces traditional gender roles and values by evidencing acceptable behaviour for girls and boys. In their study of family storytelling, Fiese and Skillman¹⁶³ examined the gender differences in the thematic content of stories told to four-year-old sons and daughters by their parents in the US. They found that fathers told stories with stronger autonomy themes than did mothers, and sons were more likely to hear stories with themes of autonomy than were daughters.

Child-parent interaction

Parents also reinforce gender norms through interactive play with their children. During the early years, parents, like education practitioners, tend to reward and punish gender-typical and gender-atypical play in their children, encouraging girls to play with typically ‘feminine’ toys and boys to play with toys associated with masculinity.¹⁶⁴ For example, in a study from the late 1970s Fagot observed 24 toddler children and their parents in their homes using an observation checklist of 46 child behaviours and 19 reactions by parents. It was found that parents gave girls significantly more negative responses when they engaged in active, large motor activities and more positive responses when they engaged in adult-oriented, dependent behaviour.¹⁶⁵ Similarly, in their observation of parent and child (3-5 years) interaction during play, Langlois and Downs found that parents rewarded their daughters for playing with the doll houses and domestic toys provided, and punished them for playing with military toys and vehicles.¹⁶⁶ Fathers, however, rewarded their sons for playing with military toys and vehicles and punished them for playing with dollhouses and domestic toys.

More recently, links have been made in the research literature between different levels of gender bias held by individual parents, and bias held by their children. A longitudinal study of with parents and their children aged 5-7 found that “traditional” parental gender-role attitude (particularly those held by fathers), and family division of housework, predicted gendered attitudes of children at a later date.¹⁶⁷ The identity of parents can be a mediating factor in this impact: a study comparing the gender-typed play of two- to

159 Francis, B. (2010), ‘Gender, toys and learning’, *Oxford Review of Education*, 36:3 pp 325-344

160 The paper suggests that, given this was a consistent finding, an innate influence is likely; we suggest that this does not sit well with the paper’s other finding, that gendered preferences have reduced over time.

161 Todd, B., Fischer, A.R., Di Costa, S., and Roestorf, A., (2017), ‘Sex differences in children’s toy preferences: A systematic review, meta-regression, and meta-analysis’, *Infant and Child Development*

162 Fiese, B. & Skillman, G. (2000) ‘Gender differences in family stories,’ *Sex Roles*, 43(5-6), pp. 267-83.

163 *ibid*

164 Etaugh & Liss, ‘Home, school, and playroom: training grounds for adult gender roles’

165 Fagot, B. I. (1978). ‘The influence of sex of child on parental reactions to toddler children,’ *Child Development*, 49(2), pp. 459-465.

166 Langlois, J. H., & Downs, A. C. (1980). ‘Mothers, fathers, and peers as socialization agents of sex-typed play behaviours in young children,’ *Child Development*, 51(4), pp. 1237-1247

167 Dawson, A., Pike, A., & Bird, L., (2016) ‘Associations between parental gendered attitudes and behaviours and children’s gender development across middle childhood’, *European Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 13:4, 452-471, DOI: 10.1080/17405629.2015.1109507

four-year-olds in the US with lesbian or gay, or heterosexual parents, found that play behaviours were less gender-stereotyped in the same-sex couple families.¹⁶⁸

Research has also shown that parents have gendered ideas about their children's abilities. Although outside of the early years, Mintel's report on the Lifestyles of Children and Teens in the UK, showed that parents of children aged 7-15 are less confident in their sons' ability to carry out domestic chores. 65% of parents with girls said they were confident in their daughter baking without adult help or supervision, but only 46 % of parents with boys said the same. 34% also said they would be confident in their daughter's ability to wash clothes, while only 25 % of parents with boys responded like this.¹⁶⁹ Similar polling in Australia identified the impact of gender stereotypes on the preferences of parents of 0-3 year-olds, who were uncomfortable with young boys engaging in feminine-typed play; and that fathers were less comfortable than mothers with the idea of their young sons crying when feeling sad.¹⁷⁰

There is some research on parental attitudes worldwide. The Future is FeMale, a survey of more than 12,000 men and women in 32 countries commissioned by Havas showed that 61% of women and 46% of men believe children should be raised in as gender-neutral a way as possible to guard against rigid gender restrictions.¹⁷¹

Parenting and ethnicity

Parent's presentations of race and ethnicity also impact on the development of racial stereotypes, which intersect with gender stereotypes. US evidence finds that white parents often adopt a "colourblind" approach to race, avoiding discussion of race rather than actively discussing societal biases,¹⁷² in contrast to African American parents who are more likely to prepare their children to encounter bias.¹⁷³ In the UK research finds differences by ethnicity in parental responses to ethnic-racial bias, qualitative studies finding that British Pakistani families are more likely to use preparation for bias (or "bias socialisation"), while white and British Indian families were more likely to use "egalitarian" messages emphasising the importance of individual qualities as opposed to membership of their ethnic group.¹⁷⁴

Research gaps

The large literature on gender stereotyping by parents is predominantly quantitative and often based on experiments, closed-ended surveys, and/or counting the frequency of various parental behaviours. This literature is valuable in documenting the role that parents play in gendering their children. However, as Kane argues, "it does less to explore the nuances of how parents make meaning around gender, to document in detail what kinds of attributes and behaviours are accepted and sanctioned by parents of young children, to reveal what motivates parents as they participate in the social construction of their

168 Goldberg AE, Kashy DA, Smith JZ. (2012), 'Gender-Typed Play Behavior in Early Childhood: Adopted Children with Lesbian, Gay, and Heterosexual Parents'. *Sex Roles*.67(9-10):503-515.

169 Mintel (July 2017) *UK Lifestyles of Children and Teens*. <https://store.mintel.com/uk-lifestyles-of-children-and-teens-market-report>

170 Our Watch (2018), *Challenging gender stereotypes in the early years: the power of parents* Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch.

171 <https://www.fastcompany.com/40470182/61-of-women-and-46-of-men-think-children-should-be-guarded-against-gender-stereotypes>

172 Pahlke, E., Bigler, R., and Suizzo, M., (2012), 'Relations between colorblind socialization and children's racial bias: evidence from European American mothers and their preschool children', *Child Development* 83:4; Vittrup, B. (2016), 'Color blind or color conscious? White American mothers' approaches to racial socialization', *Journal of Family Issues*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X16676858>

173 Davidson, K, (2016) 'Divergence or Convergence of Home and School Ethnic-Racial Socialization: Effects on Preschool Children's Self-Regulation' (2016). Syracuse University: Surface, Dissertations - ALL. 636

174 Iqbal, H, (2013), 'Ethnic-Racial Socialisation in the UK: The Use of Egalitarianism Parenting in Explaining Meanings of Race and Ethnicity in Non-Immigrant White and British South Asian Families', *Global Perspectives on Well-Being in Immigrant Families* pp135-150; Iqbal H. (2014), 'Multicultural parenting: Preparation for bias socialisation in British South Asian and White families in the UK', *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 43:B, pp215-226

children's gender, or to illuminate how aware parents are of their role in these processes."¹⁷⁵ Future research could employ qualitative methods to understand how aware parents are in this process and why they do so.

175 Kane, E. W. (2006) "'No way my boys are going to be like that!': Parents' responses to children's gender nonconformity,' *Gender & Society*, 20(2) , pp. 149–176.

Retail and gender

Marketing and advertising

The role of marketing and advertising in enforcing gender stereotyping has also gained significant attention from the media, politicians and parents in recent years. Empirically, an abundance of research has shown that consumer goods aimed at children continue to be marketed in gender-specific ways. Children's products are often explicitly packaged with labels that determine that they are for boys or girls or use images of children playing to convey the same message. Gender messages are also reinforced implicitly through the use of colour. For example, the increased 'pinkification' of toys aimed at young girls has illustrated that often the marketing world has whole-heartedly embraced gender stereotypes.¹⁷⁶

It is important to emphasize that these concerns relate to the marketing of toys, not the toys themselves. The problem is not individual boys playing with construction toys, or with individual girls playing with dolls; it is children being constrained and directed in their choices by the advertising and marketing surrounding those toys, leading to overall inequalities.¹⁷⁷ Research by the *Let Toys Be Toys* campaign has also demonstrated some positive change: in their 2012 survey of a selection of high street toy stores, 50% had 'boys' and 'girls' aisles, but by 2016, following their focussed campaigning, they report that this had fallen to none – although this requires ongoing monitoring to ensure it doesn't creep back in. Online retailers' gender filters had also fallen from 76% in 2012 to 21% in 2016.¹⁷⁸

Significant issues remain, however. Research carried out in 2017 by *Let Toys be Toys* which reviewed Christmas toy catalogues from Argos, Toys R Us, Tesco, Entertainer, Early Learning Centre and Smyths Toys concluded that the Early Learning Centre's catalogue was the only one where children were shown in a balanced way.¹⁷⁹ Girls were nearly twice as likely to be shown with kitchens or other "domestic" play, twice as likely to be shown with art and craft toys, seven times as likely to be shown in caring/nurturing play and twelve times as likely to be shown playing with baby dolls (rising to 50 times, excluding the ELC catalogue). Boys on the other hand were almost twice as likely to be shown with construction toys and four times as likely to be shown playing with cars. Moreover, 97% of children shown with guns and war toys were boys.¹⁸⁰

These findings were also reflected in their 2017 research into how boys and girls are represented in TV advertisements for toys in the UK. They found that boys were shown as active and aggressive, and the language used in adverts targeted at them emphasises control, power and conflict. Girls, on the other hand were generally shown as passive, unless they were dancing while the language used in the ads focused on fantasy, beauty and relationships.¹⁸¹ Similar findings have been observed across televised toy ads in the US, where voiceovers were almost exclusively same-gender and content strongly reflected stereotypes,¹⁸² reflecting other findings of prevalent gender stereotyping in advertising content.¹⁸³

176 Orenstein, P. (2011) *Cinderella ate my daughter: Dispatches from the front lines of the new girlie-girl culture*. New York: Harper Collins

177 Jadv, V., Hines, M. & Golombok, S. (2010), 'Infants' preferences for toys, colors, and shapes: sex differences and similarities', *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 39: 1261. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-010-9618-z>

178 Let Toys Be Toys (2016), 'Girls and Boys toy labels on the way out – survey results <http://lettoysbetoys.org.uk/girls-and-boys-toy-labels-on-the-way-out-survey-results/>

179 <http://lettoysbetoys.org.uk/toy-catalogues-2017/>

180 <http://lettoysbetoys.org.uk/toy-catalogues-2017/>

181 <http://lettoysbetoys.org.uk/tvads/>

182 Johnson, FL, and Young, K, (2002) 'Gendered voices in children's television advertising', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 19:4, pp 461-480

183 Ganahl, D., Prinsen, T., and Baker Netzley, S., (2003), 'A content analysis of prime time commercials: A contextual framework of gender representation', *Sex Roles*, 49:9-10

The impact of advertising

Research has demonstrated the link between gendered advertising and children's play and toy choices. In their study, Pike and Jennings¹⁸⁴ exposed 62 first and second grade students in the US to commercial videotapes in which either all-boys or all-girls were playing with a toy. After exposure to one of these tapes, participants performed a toy sort where they were asked if six toys, were "for boys, girls, or both boys and girls." Children who saw non-traditional commercials (all females) were more likely to indicate that the toys were for both girls and boys rather than for just one sex.

Some evidence suggests that this phenomenon is one that has become more potent over time. Elizabeth Sweet's analysis of the role of gender in the US Sears catalogue toy advertisements over the 20th century, found that in the 1970s, very few toys were explicitly marketed according to gender and often even defied gender stereotypes by showing girls building and playing airplane captain, and boys cooking in the kitchen. However, by the 1990s, she found that the gendered advertising of toys had crept back to mid-century levels.¹⁸⁵ It remains to be seen whether the recent successes in relation to "girls" and "boys" aisles has impacted in this realm too.

Within the UK, gender stereotyping in advertisements has been challenged in recent years. In 2017, The UK Advertising Standards Agency (ASA) published a report -*Depictions, Perceptions and Harm*¹⁸⁶ - which provided an evidence-based case for stronger regulations of ads that feature certain kinds of harmful gender stereotypes. This led to The Committee of Advertising Practice (CAP) initiating a consultation process on the introduction of a new rule aimed at tackling gender stereotyping in advertising.

With regards to children's advertising, it sought consultation on the proposal that: "Ads can be targeted at and feature a specific gender but should take care not to explicitly convey that a particular children's product, pursuit, activity, including choice of play or career, is inappropriate for one or another gender." While campaigns such as *Let Toys be Toys* welcomed this, they also suggested the reform go further given that much of the gendered work done through children's advertising is implicit. They suggested adding that care should be taken to 'avoid implicitly excluding boys or girls by only using such colours, language etc, or by including only girls or boys in a group of more than 3 or 4 children, without good reason.'¹⁸⁷

The rules arising from the process come into effect in June 2019. The rules in relation to advertising to children¹⁸⁸ focus on explicit not implicit depictions, stating that advertisements are likely to be unacceptable if they "explicitly depict children of a specific gender being excluded from or dismissive of an activity", or if they explicitly label children with contrasting stereotypical characteristics "in a way that reinforces perceptions of what children can or cannot be, because of their gender".¹⁸⁹

Clothing

Concerns have also been raised by campaigners, including *Let Clothes Be Clothes* about gender stereotyping in clothing, ranging from unnecessary division of stores or websites into girls' and boys' clothing, to gendered slogans on clothing, division by stereotyped colours, and gender differences in the

184 Jennifer J. Pike & Nancy A. Jennings (2005) 'The Effects of Commercials on Children's Perceptions of Gender Appropriate Toy Use', *Sex Roles*, 52(1), pp. 83-91

185 <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/23/opinion/sunday/gender-based-toy-marketing-returns.html>

186 Advertising Standards Authority (July 2017) *Depictions, Perceptions and Harm. A report on gender stereotypes in advertising*. <https://www.asa.org.uk/asset/2DF6E028-9C47-4944-850D00DAC5ECB45B.C3A4D948-B739-4AE4-9F17CA2110264347/>

187 <http://lettoysbetoys.org.uk/could-a-new-rule-make-advertisers-dump-stereotypes/#more-7744>

188 Other new guidelines address advertising to and using adults.

189 Committee of Advertising Practice (2018), *Advertising guidance on depicting gender stereotypes likely to cause harm or serious or widespread offence*, <https://www.asa.org.uk/uploads/assets/uploaded/f39a881f-d8c9-4534-95f180d1bfe7b953.pdf>

quality and fit of the clothing itself.¹⁹⁰ As with toys, research has found gendered differences in whether clothing has instructional or scientific content, with clothing which is categorised by retailers as “for boys” much more likely to feature such content.¹⁹¹

190 <https://www.letclothesbeclothes.co.uk>, Department for Education (2011), *Letting Children be Children: Report of an Independent Review of the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood* by Reg Bailey

191 Cronin, M. (2018, 3 December). *Dinosaurs vs. Unicorns* [Blog post]. Retrieved from: <https://blog.bham.ac.uk/glareproject/2018/12/03/dinosaurs-vs-unicorns/>

What are the effects of gender stereotyping?

While evidence has shown that gender stereotyping begins from birth onwards, there is still a widely held view that gender stereotyping is not important, or that the effects are trivial. However, stereotypes limit children by presenting them with a specific set of acceptable behaviours and the experiences of early gender bias by children have long-term effects that need to be addressed.

Development

Play and more specifically toys are crucial to young children's development and play an important role in aiding their social, physical and cognitive development.¹⁹² It is widely acknowledged that children need to partake in a range of play activities in order to develop the broad range of skills needed in later school and adult life.¹⁹³ The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework specifies seven areas of development for children in the early years: Personal Social and Emotional Development (PSED), Physical Development, Language development, Literacy, Maths, Understanding the World and Expressive Arts and Design. Play with 'masculine toys' allow children to develop skills that 'feminine toys' do not and vice versa. For example, the home corner, which includes kitchen and cookery toys, aid in developing the PSED elements while construction and building play can hone physical development and fine motor skills, in addition to mathematical skills such as problem-solving.¹⁹⁴ Given that repeated play with specific objects can aid the development of specific skills, gendered toys and play may limit optimal development and contribute to gender differences in later life.¹⁹⁵

Occupation segregation and the gender pay gap

In 2006, the Women and Work Commission reported that occupational segregation starts at an early age due to stereotypes about what girls and boys can do. They specifically identified the need to challenge gender stereotypes in education stating that this has significant implications for the career choices that young men and women make and, in the longer term, for their future earnings.¹⁹⁶ Occupational and subject segregation is one of the key contributing factors to the gender pay gap, which in the UK nationally stands at 13.7 per cent for the mean average for full-time workers.¹⁹⁷ Many girls and young women are still following traditional routes in education and training and being paid less than men as a result.¹⁹⁸

Existing research shows that from an early age, children's career aspirations are shaped and restricted by gender stereotyping. The 2018 *Drawing the Future* survey, an international survey which explored the career aspirations of primary-age children between the ages of 7-11, emphasised that the perceptions children have about certain jobs and careers are formed and sometimes cemented at a very young

192 Eliot, L. (2018) 'Impact of gender-typed toys on children's neurological development' in Weisgram, E. & Dinella, L. [eds] *Gender typing of children's toys: How early play experiences impact development*. Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association. (pp. 167-187); Murnen, S. (2018) 'Fashion or action? Gender-stereotyped toys and social behavior' in Weisgram, E. & Dinella, L. [eds] *Gender typing of children's toys: How early play experiences impact development*. (pp. 189-211). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association; Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R. M., Berk, L. E., & Singer, D. G. (2008). *A mandate for playful learning in preschool: Presenting the evidence*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press

193 <http://lettoysbetoys.org.uk/toys-and-learning/>

194 *ibid*

195 Weisgram, E. & Dinella, L. [eds] (2018) *Gender typing of children's toys: How early play experiences impact development*. Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association;

Boe & Woods 'Parents' Influence on Infants' Gender-Typed Toy Preferences'

196 *ibid*

197 Fawcett Society (2018), 'Gender pay gap and causes briefing', <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/gender-pay-gap-and-causes-briefing-equal-pay-day-2018>

198 Women and Work Commission (2006) *Shaping a Fairer Future*. DTI. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/27_02_06_wwc_paygap.pdf (accessed 22 October 2018).

age.¹⁹⁹ The UK-specific findings showed that boys overwhelmingly aspired to take on roles in traditionally male-dominated sectors and professions and these patterns were particularly noticeable in STEM-related professions. Over four times the number of boys wanted to become engineers compared to girls and nearly double the number of boys wanted to become scientists.²⁰⁰ These imbalances are underwritten by differences in the traits attributed to women and men by young children, with US research finding that children as young as six view traits like “intelligence” or “genius” as male, and “niceness” as female.²⁰¹

In 2017, research carried out by Mintel with children aged 7-15 in the UK showed that 44% of children said that being a plumber/builder/electrician is “for boys” and a mere 5% said that it was “for girls.”²⁰² With regards to teaching, 19% of children viewed teaching as a job “for girls”, compared to 16% who considered it “for boys.” Being a doctor was equally likely to be associated with being both boys and girls.²⁰³ It has been argued that the gender stereotypes portrayed in advertisements are contrary to increasing the number of women in traditionally “masculinised” professions. It has also been argued that gender-stereotyped toys and parent’s provision of these toys may contribute to this. For example, the Institution of Engineering and Technology found that boys are almost three times more likely to receive a STEM toy for Christmas than girls.²⁰⁴

The mirror image of this problem also exists in the lack of young men in Britain taking up traditionally “feminised” professions, which the German Institute of Labour Economics (IZA) has evidenced as even more of a quagmire than the slow progress on bringing women into fields previously dominated by men.²⁰⁵ This is a concern given both the social importance of these jobs, and the fact that many are shortage professions.

School subject choices

The perception of certain activities and school subjects as masculine or feminine can influence subject choice, which can consequently influence occupational choice. Again, this is particularly problematic for girls as ‘feminised jobs’ are often lower paid/low status. Recent polls in the UK suggest that gender divisions remain with regard to subject choices and preferences. A 2018 survey by YouGov, which asked more than 4,000 children aged 6 to 15 how much they enjoyed a list of subjects showed that boys favour maths and science, while girls continue to favour arts and humanities.²⁰⁶

Girls were much more likely than boys to say they enjoyed English (42% vs 25% of boys), music (48% vs 34%) and languages (28% vs 18%). By contrast, a much higher percentage of boys said they really enjoyed maths (42% vs 32%), computing (64% vs 46% of girls), and were more likely to enjoy science (48% vs 39%) and physical education (51% vs 42%).²⁰⁷ These preferences are reflected in stark gender differences in public exam entries. 66.8% of UK entries for art and design GCSEs in 2018 were from girls, whereas 79.8 % of UK entries for computing were from boys.²⁰⁸ Differences in subject preference have been attributed to how gender and gender differences are constructed, particularly in schools. Research on attitudes towards mathematics and English amongst 9-13 year olds in England has shown that stereotypes do prevail among pupils, with most believing that maths is a boys’ subject that boys excel

199 Chambers, N., Kashefpakdel, E., Rehill, J., and Percy, C. (2018). *Drawing the Future survey*. Education for Employers. <https://www.educationandemployers.org/wpcontent/uploads/2018/01/DrawingTheFuture.pdf>

200 ibid

201 Bian, Leslie, and Cimpian, ‘Gender stereotypes about intellectual ability emerge early and influence children’s interests’

202 Mintel, *UK Lifestyles of Children and Teens*

203 ibid

204 Nareissa, S. (2015) ‘Built for Boyhood?: A Proposal for Reducing the Amount of Gender Bias in the Advertising of Children’s Toys on Television’, *Vanderbilt Journal of Entertainment & Technology Law*, 17(4), pp. 999

205 Lekfuangfu, W., and Lordan, G., (2018), ‘Cross cohort evidence on gendered sorting patterns in the UK: The importance of societal movements versus childhood variables’, IZA Discussion Paper no. 11872

206 <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/education/articles-reports/2018/09/04/which-school-subjects-do-boys-and-girls-enjoy-more>

207 <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/education/articles-reports/2018/09/04/which-school-subjects-do-boys-and-girls-enjoy-more>

208 <https://www.tes.com/news/stark-gender-gap-pupils-favourite-subjects>

in whereas English is a girls' subject where girls do better.²⁰⁹ Further findings showed that where 'gifted girls' perform as well as 'gifted boys', their confidence in the subject is lower.²¹⁰

International evidence also suggests that these gender biases can impact negatively on actual academic achievement, as well as perceived "appropriate" behaviour. In China, Eble and Hu have demonstrated a causal link between the levels of gender bias of parents in relation to maths performance, and consequent gains to performance by boys and losses to girls at middle school level.²¹¹

The 'gender gap' in achievement

Debates on education and gender in the UK have also increasingly focused on the gender gap in achievement and, more specifically, boys' underperformance in comparison to girls. A number of reasons have been put forward to explain disparities in educational achievement. It has been argued that boys and girls are naturally different, boys and girls have different learning styles which teaching does not match, schools (staff and curriculum) are 'feminised' which disadvantages boys and assessment procedures are biased towards girls and pupils. Each of these explanations have been discredited by counter-evidence,²¹² however a number of studies have pointed to the construction of gender and gender stereotyping as a key factor.²¹³ The Gender Agenda, a 2009 report by the Department of Children, Schools and Families found that "constructions of gender difference by teachers and pupils produce different behaviours which impact on achievement. The 'gender gap in achievement' can be removed by challenging notions of gender itself."²¹⁴

Physical and psychological well-being

Early gender stereotyping can also affect children's physical and psychological well-being. Gender stereotypes are not only limiting, but can be extremely harmful for those who do not conform to them. Research in Australia found that exposing slightly older primary-age children (8-9 year olds) to nongender-role stereotyped stories over 4 weeks had a significant impact on both boys' and girls' self-esteem.²¹⁵ Recent research by the Children's Society has found that 22% of girls and 9% of boys have self-harmed, rising to 46% of children who had experienced same-gender attraction. That same report found that children whose friendship groups emphasise traditional gender stereotypes had lower overall wellbeing.²¹⁶

As previously mentioned peers play a large role in policing gender and it is in these early years that children learn the gender stereotypes and begin to develop prejudices and gender bias. From a young age, children who do not conform to gender stereotypes often experience bullying by their fellow peers. As the National Union of Teachers²¹⁷ state: "sexual bullying and bullying in relation to sexual orientation

209 Hargreaves, M., Homer, M. & Swinnerton, B. (2008) 'A comparison of performance and attitudes in mathematics amongst the 'gifted.' Are boys better at mathematics or do they just think they are?' *Assessment in Education: Principles, Policy & Practice*, 15(1), pp. 19-38

210 *ibid*

211 Eble A., and Hu, F., (2018), 'The sins of the parents: Persistence of gender bias across generations and the gender gap in math performance', CDEP-CGEG Working Paper No. 53

212 Department of Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Gender and education: 'Mythbusters' – Addressing gender and achievement: myths and realities.*; Skelton C, Francis, B. and Valkanova, Y. (2007) *Breaking Down the Stereotypes: Gender and Achievement in Schools*. Manchester, Equal Opportunities Commission. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/4156138.pdf> The Department of Children, Schools and Families (June 2009) *The Gender Agenda Final Report*. http://universityofhullscitts.org.uk/scitts/site/pt/downloads/gender_agenda.pdf

213 DCSF, *The Gender Agenda*; Department of Children, Schools and Families (2009) *Gender issues in school – What works to improve achievement for boys and girls*. <https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/9094/1/00601-2009BKT-EN.pdf> DCSF (2009) *Gender and education: Mythbusters*; Skelton et al., *Breaking Down the Stereotypes*; Francis, B. (2000) *Boys' and Girls' Achievement: Addressing the Classroom Issues*. London: Routledge

214 DCSF, *The Gender Agenda*

215 Ochman, J.M. (1996), 'The effects of nongender-role stereotyped, same-sex role models in storybooks on the self-esteem of children in grade three', *Sex Roles*, Vol. 35:11-12, pp711-735

216 The Children's Society (2018), *The Good Childhood Report 2018*, Children's Society: London

217 NUT, *Stereotypes Stop You Doing Stuff*

and gender identity remain widespread and are closely linked to ideas of how women and men – and boys and girls – are expected to look and behave.” Research has shown that many pupils who are LGBT face prejudice and bullying and that young people who don’t conform to gender stereotypes are more likely to be bullied at school for being LGBT, regardless of whether they are LGBT or not.²¹⁸ This can have a significant and long-lasting impact on their emotional wellbeing and their access to learning.²¹⁹

Violence against women and girls

Gender stereotypes can lead to gender inequality more broadly, including violence against women and girls (VAWG). The Women and Equalities Committee report on sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools heard that tackling gender stereotyping in schools is also important in order to combat sexual violence. Evidence submitted by writer and researcher Rebecca Asher to the Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence in Schools inquiry found, drawing on research by Lacasse and Mendelson, that amongst adolescents “the more rigidly gendered the beliefs of male adolescents, the more likely they are to practise sexual coercion.”²²⁰ In the US, research with adolescents has found that the degree of traditional gender role attitudes held by eighth or ninth graders predicted dating violence over an 18 month period.²²¹

Other international evidence supports this link, with work in Pakistan linking patriarchal attitudes amongst slightly older children to peer violence,²²² and a World Health Organisation multi-country study concluding that addressing childhood experiences and tackling gender norms are key to reducing VAWG.²²³ This is reflected in the adoption of comprehensive sexuality education as part of the toolkit of responses to VAWG within international development circles,²²⁴ and in the findings of a recent governmental “What Works” review, which concluded that the research supports gender-transformative approaches at an international development level.²²⁵

218 Rae, *Celebrating difference and challenging gender stereotypes in the early years*

219 *ibid*

220 Women and Equalities Committee (September 2016) *Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence in Schools, Third Report of Session 2016–17*, paragraph 156. <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmwomeq/826/826.pdf>; Lacasse, A. and Mendelson, MJ (2007), ‘Sexual coercion among adolescents: victims and perpetrators’, *Journal on Interpersonal Violence* 22(4), 424–437

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Conclusion

Our society teaches children expectations and rules about gender that restrict their opportunities and cause real harm. Those rules damage the self-esteem and wellbeing of each generation, and they lie behind the gender pay gap, the harm caused to men by toxic masculinity, and violence against women and girls. Many teachers and parents feel helpless to change this picture.

But as this report shows, there is reason for hope. Research shows that the way gender is wired in the brain is “soft”, not fixed, discrediting the “nature” side of the nature vs nurture debate.

What this research suggests is that removing the constraints and repairing the harms that gender stereotypes in early childhood can do requires more than just a “gender neutral” approach – terminology that is often unfairly used to depict the preferred outcomes of campaigners on this issue as the creation of a characterless or “beige” world. The evidence cited in this report involves interventions that instead are actively counter-stereotypical, such as changing the books children read can change the way they see the world, and the promising whole-school approaches described.

That approach reflects some of the good practice we see in Nordic countries, such as Sweden, which warrants more exploration. Importantly, actively countering stereotypes means opening up the full spectrum of human experiences, from scientific accomplishment to the emotional fulfilment of time spent caring for others, to both girls and boys. It means saying that neither women, nor men, should be restricted from exploring all that the world has to offer by limiting messages in their childhoods. Our society and economy pay a high price for gender stereotyping in terms of lost productivity, the cost of the harm caused by toxic masculinity and violence against women and girls and the negative impact on individual wellbeing. If we challenge and change it then individuals, families, our society and economy will all gain. What's stopping us?

