

Choomide one element of contemporary childhood and reflect on changes: Gender

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This paper aims to talk about a contemporary issue within childhood, it will look at the damaging effect gender inequality within education has on young girls. When looking at today's education system, it would like to be assumed that children are given equal opportunity to progress in today's society. Within the paper it will discuss the history of young girl's education in Britain and how it has been transformed over the years. It will look at how literature helps children develop and if there has been a bias when educating children through literature. This paper will discuss issues such as gender and gender bias towards young girls in society and if socialisation is influencing children's opportunities when growing up. Gender and sex are two different forms of a person's identity, the Cambridge dictionary (2020) state gender is seen as a social construct, expressed by an individual's behaviour of masculinity or femininity. There's many different gender's and where someone place's themselves on the gender scale is personal, whereas an individual's sex is the biological form determined at birth. Their sex is given to them based on their chromosomes and hormones (Cambridge dictionary, 2020). Due to there being different genders over the years there has been gender inequality where one group of individuals have been favoured over another (Bonvillain, 2007). This paper will investigate the inequality given to girls in education.

It is believed that children develop by observing their primary caregivers (Carter, 2014). By doing so children learn several personal traits such as values, beliefs and social norms and gender roles. learning these traits helps children become competent members of the society they live in (Emolu, 2014). Mead (1999) concluded to develop self-image individuals must interact with other people and see themselves within that person and take on that individual's image. Like Mead, Cooley also determined individuals form their image through the interaction of other people (Burke, 2004). Individuals are shaped by the opinions of others but, mainly shaped by one significant other. He believed this significant other can change through the individual's lifetime, for children the significant other could be a parent or a caregiver, and as they get older a sibling, friends, teacher's or their spouse will have an influence on that individuals' opinions and values, such as gender roles within a society (Burke, 2004).

Developing on these theories Smidth, (2006) believes childhood today is seen as a social construct where adults have created the idea of children, influencing their values and beliefs and having a say on what childhood should look like (Smidt, 2006). However, this concept is ever evolving as in the 18th

century children would work and be treated like adults, working in factories and earning money for their families. This however was deemed child labour as 'children' started to be looked upon as slaves by the adults. It was at this period where adults believed children should be educated up to the age of 10, and it was at this time where society changed the social norms and how people viewed children. Due to this a new social construct was established (Smidt, 2013).

As said, it was not until the 18th century where children were put into fulltime education, however it was not until 1918 where The Education Act, made education compulsory for all boys and girls to attend school until the age of fourteen (Newham College, 2020). Before this if girls were in education they would normally be of a high social class and education was designed to teach them basic literacy and social skills such as domestic duties, to allow them to be a good housewife and mother (Purvis, 2008). In the mid 1980's there were only twelve schools for young girls in England and Wales, and it was at this time where an investigation into girl's education called the Taunton Commission established boys and girls had the same mental capacity (Pendersen, 1979) Purvis argued this did little for the way society looked upon young girls. They were still taught social skills, and basic literacy and numeracy skills were taught as this was seen to be an important part of a girl's development to make sure they were fit to bring up a child and be a domestic servant to their household (Purvis, 2008). The teaching of this in schools solidified the power and control society had over the gender divide (Purvis, 2008). If we fast forward one hundred years, we now have the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The UNCRC was created to protect children and make sure every child no matter their race, religion, abilities or gender get equal rights. It is a legally binding international agreement that has 54 articles that set out civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights of every child (UNICEF, 2020). The UNCRC was created in 1989 and the UK joined in 1990, the document states that under article 28, every child has the right to an equal education (Children's commissioner for Wales, 2020). However, around the world young girls are still not being educated due to, religion, cultural norms, funding, domestic labour, disabilities and because they are girl's but the United Nations pledge to have inclusive and equal education for all by 2030, but they say to achieve gender equality it does not mean just education, there has to be a shift in attitudes and societal norms and how girls and boys are valued and treated (United Nation, 2020).

Because of social norms it is hard for children to understand themselves, children sometimes battle with themselves to fit into the correct setting. Within Gender children learn as they grown up, learning through their caregivers they learn their roles and place in society but sometimes this can be difficult. Erikson's development theory tries to explain this by identifying the different strengths and weaknesses at each point of an individual's life, this theory allows for growth at each stage of development (Todes, 1993). However, he identifies that in each of the eight stages of his theory the individual is presented

with a crisis to help them progress and develop on to the next stage (Todes, 1993). At the fifth stage of his development theory, identity versus role confusion, an individual is normally between the ages of thirteen to twenty-one, this is where the individual starts to understand themselves and figure out who they are (Magnusson, 1996) and it is at this stage where the individual is presented with the crisis of conflict. An individual at this point in its life will be conflicted and confused due to the pressures of society (Erickson, 1968, cited in Todes, 1993). Erikson states that the individual can be worried about their own pressures of how they perceived adulthood should look but also how they should be as an adult by other people's standards. The individual is pushed to believe they need to be who society wants them to be (Erickson, 1975) and the social structure of how they were brought up can influence this causing the individual to be pushed towards identity confusion, (Carter, 2014). If this conflict is not resolved the individual will never reach identity achievement and will battle themselves to fit into a social setting, they think is acceptable by their societal norms (Magnusson, 1996) Failure to overcome this crisis will cause the individual to experience stress and anxiety stunting their development onto the next stage. Luckily Erikson states, if an individual is unable to resolve their crisis by the time, they enter the next stage of their development they can resolve it at a different time in their life, but it will be more challenging to overcome at a later date (Rageliene, 2016).

We can see this happening throughout society over time, as this paper suggests in the early 90's woman went to school only to be taught how to be good housewives and mothers society did not see the importance of educating young woman to go to work and earn money for themselves and their family, woman would conform to what society wanted them to be (housewives and mothers) even if they had bigger aspirations for themselves.

The social construct of gender is a theory presented by feminists and sociologists about the gender differences in society. Like socialisation this theory strengthens the fact that as a culture, gender roles are created and when created individuals are to conform to the appropriate behaviour of their sex, their biological form to fit in with society. Through school we socially construct how children should grow through different media like books (Bonvillian, 2020). Books are at the forefront of teaching and developing children social skills, language skills as well as transmitting society's culture to children (Manjari, 1998). Everything children read or have read to them at a young age helps shape a child's identity (Fox, 1993). Through reading books children start to understand the social norms of the culture they live in and the gender roles that are important to their society (Manjari, 1998). Turner-Bowder (1996) found that by the age of five children form inflexible stereotypes. This affects how children perceive themselves, if children see themselves fitting into only one box and have not developed a strong sense of identity, they are vulnerable and can attain traits such as low self-esteem (Ochman, 1996). This strengthens Erikson's theory of identity versus role confusion that was earlier presented in

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paper.

Turner-Bowder (1996) argue through illustrations and language, books also define standards for masculine and feminine behaviour by providing children with roles models they can attach themselves to. Children learn to develop emotions and feelings by observing the illustrations in books and relating themselves to the characters within these books and if these role models are not represented by all types of gender for all children, individuals are left feeling underrepresented (Spring, 1979). before the 1960's children's books were representing families lives, with the father being the bread winner and mother being the housewife and carer to their children. However, during the 1960's and 1970's a woman's role in society was changing due to The Woman's Rights Movement, seeing woman start to get equal rights, more opportunities and more freedom to make their own decisions, it was at this point individuals started to acknowledge gender stereotyping throughout children's literature (Rudman, 1995). Jett-Simpson and Masland (1993) found that gender bias did exist within children's literature with books largely being dominated with leading male characters, whilst Ernst (1995) found male names were represented nearly twice as much as female names on the front cover of the books, he also found that books with gender neutral names predominantly referred to a male character. These books cemented the social structure of their time period, where the personality of the characters strengthened the social structure of men and woman with woman being portrayed as sweet, naïve, conforming and dependent characters whereas boys were portrayed as strong, adventures, independent capable individuals (Fox, 1993). With children identifying themselves with a character in books, gender bias and stereotyping gives children less opportunity later in life. With the lack of woman or girls in children's book it limits girls expectations and allows them to conform to the societal norms and not push for a better job or position in society as they only see men in this role within the material being read to them In schools (Temple, 1993)

Throughout the 1950's Literature in school's were portraying young girls as sweet and conforming individuals but there was one book that influenced little girls and still in today's culture and that book is Pippi Longstocking. Soderberg (2001) review this book as it promoted a little girl being a role model for young girls. This book broke the norm of society's conventional ideas of how a young girl should act. Within the book, the literature pokes fun at gender roles and shows a young girl being brave, rebellious, adventurous and defiant, something that had not been seen, it gives them the opportunity to have fun in a new way (Soderberg, 2011). However, this book has had its criticisms as this book is obviously fictional and does not show a true representation of how young girls can live their life like Pipi Longstocking, it is unrealistic for children to ride motorcycles, and have a never ending flow of Gold. It does not represent girls growing up to have good grades, being independent or how to live in the real world. (Erol, 1991).

Evans and Davies (2002) also noticed that within literature woman started to be represented more and were given more masculine traits such as being more adventurous and outspoken, but men were not shown to possess feminine traits, they concluded that society was not becoming more unbiased as the focus was only on woman and not men. Within literature boys have also been portrayed through one image because of society. Lehr (1991) considered the fact that boys have been portrayed as strong, tough, rebellious and the bread winners of the family in literature. Boys are rarely characterised as nurses, dancers or stay at home dads, they are deprived of having role models that have feminine traits, or show their emotions (Lehr, 1991). Society is having a large influence on how boys grow up, and with literature showing boys as tough and emotionless, society is trapping them in an emotional prison where they are not able to express feeling throughout life (Fox, 1993). With literature using more gender-neutral characters, children can build on their imagination skills and become that character and personalise it to themselves (Crisp and Hiller, 2011). With more gender-neutral characters, it could be a way of helping to change the social norms children grow into, it can help them envision themselves being whoever they want to be in society and in the workplace.

In the last two decades woman entering the workplace has increased, British social attitudes are changing. In 2019 only thirty three percent of people think a woman should stay at home with children compared to sixty-four percent in 1989 (British Social Attitude, 2019) and in 1989 forty two percent of people expressed the view that family life suffers if a woman is in full time work to only twenty seven percent in 2012. When we look at more recent times in 2017 seventy two percent of the British public disagreed with the view that a man's job is to earn money and be the bread winner and a woman job is to look after the household (The National Centre for Social Research, 2018). These ever-changing attitudes to woman being able to work is leading the way for young girls to aspire to be more than a housewife. In 1989 fifty eight percent of people agreed to the statement that working mothers can establish a warm and secure bond with her children just as much as a mother who does not work, but twenty eight percent disagreed, however in 2012 seventy two percent agreed that working mothers can establish a strong bond with their children if they are in full time work and only eleven percent disagreed with this statement and in 1989 forty two percent of people expressed the view that family life suffers if a woman is in full time work to only twenty seven percent in 2012. In 2017 The Welsh Government also helped woman in the workplace with offering thirty hours of free childcare to allow them to get back into work before full time education (Welsh Government, 2019). These subtle changes in government are showing the change in societal attitudes and the climb to a more equal household (Crompton, 2015) According to the British Social Attitude (2019) survey it says that men now take part in eight hours a week of domestic chores whereas woman spend on average thirteen hours a week,

woman are doing the majority of housework as well as having a job, although woman are entering paid work, their continued responsibility to domestic labour continues (Crompton, 2015).

Even with our ever-evolving society, there are still some cultures that have an old-fashioned view of woman in education in the United Kingdom (UK). The gypsy traveller community in the UK have officially been recognised as one of the most disadvantaged minority groups (Lloyd and McCluskey, 2008). Casey (2014) suggests that one of the reasons the Gypsy travellers are disadvantaged is due to the community wanting their culture to survive. Woman especially are conflicted by this concept, as they are unable to challenge the ever-evolving views of the society around them whilst living in a community trying to hold onto an old fashion culture (Casey, 2014). Gypsy travellers are a community of people within society who hold specific values and beliefs about life. Some individuals live in caravans and travel up and down the country others live in caravans that I've on a site all year round and more modern travellers live in a house but hold a strong commitment to maintaining the culture (Lloyd and McCluskey, 2008). The gypsy traveller community do believe that boys acquire more rights than girls (Levinson and Sparkes, 2006). Save the children (2001) have stated that within the UK ten thousand gypsy traveller's children are not attending schools and councils in the UK have stated in a report by the child's commissioner that authorities have a right into home where children are being home schooled but 28% of households refuse to let them in, this means local authorities are not able to reach children who are missing out on an education (Parliament, 2019).

Parents of these girls who are home schooled have established that there are clear divisions between girls and boys. These young girls should be learning of their elders on how to be an efficient housewife, subordinate to their husbands and should learn to aspire to be a good mother. All this will make them desirable to a potential husband (Levinson and Sparkes, 2006). This is not to say that gypsy traveller parents are not aspirational for their children, but have different views on what's important (Parliament, 2019). Derrington and Kendall (2003) determined parents express concern about integrating children into a typical school as it can lead the child to adopt the values of that school and the community it is in, this will consequently lower the values of their own gypsy traveller culture. Another issues is schools not taking the needs of the gypsy traveller community seriously (Parliament, 2019) and rather than schools and parents coming to an agreement of what their children can learn and working together it is more common for the parents to remove the child from school stopping their education (The National Strategies, 2008). Ofsted (2014) produced a report supporting this idea, with local authorities in England visiting three school that had a large increase in traveller children staying in school. The report showed the school gaining the parents trust by holding weekly meeting to talk about any concerns the parents had. The school made sure the parents were listened to and felt included and supported in their children's education. The schools also hired a Roma speaking teacher this had a

considerable impact on raising attendance as children felt a sense of inclusion with the school community (Ofsted, 2014). Bhopal (2004) believes the gypsy culture must be recognised within schools, their culture must be acknowledged within the curriculum and through inclusion of this minority group children especially young girls will be able to go onto further education and employment and start to become a part of their ever evolving society.

Throughout Australia gender inequality is a topic learned within their curriculum, a topic called the respectful relationships education is an area where children are taught to look and tackle at social attitudes on schools becoming more gender inclusive. The school approach is to use this topic as a whole school approach and look at advance children's respect for one another (Seddon, 2001). Wales is developing a new curriculum called successful futures which features an area of learning named health and well-being. This are is one of six new areas of learning and will interlink with all (Donaldson, 2015). Teachers have been given more freedom to teach and hopefully within this are of learning we can look to see gender inequality being taught to children to promote the awareness of different social attitudes within society.

This paper has shown how education is a contemporary issue young girl's are facing in today education system. Within the UK children have a right to education and a fair education. The paper has demonstrated how a society socially constructs children's lives. With children being influenced by their parents or caregiver they pass on thier values and beliefs down through generations. With literature and schools adopting a new view on gender it is helping to change a woman's place in society. Children are learning new social norms in schools and with that there is a change in the dynamic of family home life as they are growing up. Woman are attending work and men picking up more of the domestic housework, even if woman are still doing more of the domestic choirs it is definitely a change in the right way. It is still easy to see some attitudes are not as easy to change through the demonstration of the gypsy traveller community. Even though their traditions are old fashioned there is a change starting to happen with more inclusive education happening in the UK for gypsy traveller children we can see them being kept in school for longer hopefully to further their education and become a part of society.

3,601 Words.

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