The Influence of Gender Bias on Children

in Childcare Settings

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Abstract

To date, Early Childhood Education (ECE) courses and curriculum are primarily focused on a being gender neutral and teaching non-traditional gender practices in childcare settings. Further, many child care providers, specifically ECE teachers, are women. This paper describes how many teachers in childcare settings are teaching boys and girls to take on both gender neutral and non-traditional gender roles with little regard to culture, family background or a child's ability and/or interests in order to counter perceptions of sexism by trying to control, limit, and confine children. Further, for boys to suppress their behaviors, become less aggressive and soften them into what teachers want boys to become and for girls to become more aggressive, provocative and challenge boys in childcare settings. The gender bias, feminist in origin, is teacher-centered and not childcentered which is in direct conflict with best practices in ECE. Further the research shows that the gender bias is having a negative influence on the growth and development on children in child care settings.

Chapter 1 Introduction

Course work in child development, specifically Early Childhood Education (ECE) is geared towards women. It is presumed that childcare providers are women as demonstrated in child development classes, texts and conferences (Goldstein, 1994). In my experience as both a pre-school teacher in the 4 year old classroom at a local YMCA in Atlanta, GA and as a center director in a school age child care setting, for a non profit child care facility in the Mid-Peninsula of the state of California, I have observed the interactions, learning and play of boys and girls. When I first started working at my current position as a center director at a kindergarten through fifth grade (K-5) center, also known as school age, I noticed that there was a bias, that is a preference that hinders impartial judgment, between the boys and girls, while at the same time I heard teachers and directors say, treat all kids fairly (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2002). When it came to expectations and following the rules of the center, the boys were the focus of the behavior challenges and were not happy at the center. Boys being the focus affected their attitudes and behaviors. The subject of boys and how to work with them has been a subject of great interest for me as a child care worker. Boys are different than girls and how to work with boys must also be different, despite the ECE practice of treating boys and girls the same D. Bevett (personal communication, September, 2008).

Boys challenged teachers, interrupted them when they spoke, told jokes about body parts and functions during large group interactions, wrestled and play fought, jumped off chairs, tables, and ran around the center. When they did draw, it was usually pictures of guns or people being shot. They also made knives, bow and arrows out of

Popsicle sticks. Conflict with boys usually involved hitting. The child who did the hitting would automatically get in trouble regardless of what the other person did (usually provoked by a response, i.e. telling them they would not be their friend, taking toys and running away with the toys, not listening to the child when they did something they did not like over and over again). If the interaction was between a girl and boy, boys were blamed, regardless of the girl's behavior, i.e. name calling or interfering in a game, towards the boy, further illustrating the bias.

Statement of the Problem

I believe that childcare providers, from ECE teachers to directors are trying to counter traditional gender roles which are perceived as sexist in childcare settings. Challenging traditions and gender roles of students is done with out regard to a child's interest, culture or family background or examination of a teacher's culture, background and childhood experiences. Teachers are challenging traditional gender roles by trying to control, limit, and confine children.

There are two widely used tools, considered best practice in the ECE field to evaluate child care settings. They are the Accreditation standards of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Environment Rating Scales. Accreditation through the NAEYC no longer includes school age programs, only the kindergarten portion of the program is accredited, according to the 2007 California NAEYC Annual Conference Workshop on new standards. A main reason for no longer accrediting school age programs has to do with another child care professional organization whose focus in on school age programs, called the National Afterschool

Association (NAA). As of 2010, however, the NAA no longer accredits After School Programs (Personal communication from National After-school Association, 2009. Evaluating through school age programs via accreditation is therefore in hiatus.

This brings to attention the Environment Rating Scales, which are divided by age group and childcare setting. For School Age centers, of which this paper is focused, the School Age Care Environment Rating Scales (SACERS) is utilized for assessing classroom and environment and is a requirement for state funded childcare centers in California. The standards contain guidelines for a gender neutral, gender non-specific environment that challenge traditional roles of men and women amongst the children (Harms, Jacobs & White, 2003). This influence is having a negative impact on the growth and development of children. Further, leadership in child care settings is failing to meet the needs of children by not examining, assessing the classroom environment, challenging staff to look at themselves, as well as curriculum guidelines and accreditation standards that continue to perpetuate a hidden curriculum or agenda, feminist, therefore gender bias. Gender expectations are also culturally prescribed (Macionis, 2001). By accepting the gender bias and not acknowledging children's interest, culture, and family background the harm to a child's development is substantial. If ECE teachers fail to look at their own culture, background, experience education and how their own childhood experiences affects their students; teachers fail to ensure quality of care for children and families served. Self-assessment is not part of the SACERS, Accreditation or a current practice in obtaining a teaching credential, specifically a child development permit (according to the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing) in the ECE field, nor

has it been part of any interviewing process as an ECE teacher that I participated in both applying for a position or hiring for a position.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to examine how gender bias is influencing children specifically school age children, grades K-5 in after-school care settings. By looking at the evaluation tools and examining the tools for gender bias and lack of cultural appropriateness related to gender it will reveal the gender bias and the feminist agenda exists in the curriculum. How are children fairing in child care settings? Who is evaluating how children are performing and developing in child care settings? The purpose of the research is also to hear from the children in child care settings and provide an opportunity for the children a chance to evaluate the programs they attend.

Research Question

In what way is gender bias influencing boys and girls in school age childcare settings? When there are disruptive and aggressive behaviors that persist in the classroom, perpetuated by either sex, what is the reason? Why are so many rules in the classroom, based on curriculum narrowly focused on constraining, controlling or other wise manipulating children?

Theoretical Rationale

According to Senge (1990) organizational culture teaches individuals to not use their hearts, pay attention to intrinsic values and just be part of the system. With regards to building the learning organization, there are several references made about how children learn, specifically infants as learners, learning we are all born with but organizations create a way of unlearning. Further, the relationship between boss and subordinate is the

same as teacher to student. If organizations support a culture of unlearning to just be part of system, not pay attention to intrinsic values, even if the practice, in the center for example is dysfunctional then subordinates, in this case teachers, are taught not observe or evaluate their practices with children. It is relevant because it raises the question, as to why teachers control, confine, limit students and if teachers/ECE teachers themselves feel limited in a similar way by management and organizational culture then perhaps that would explain why they are doing the same to children.

Assumptions

Boys and girls have different needs. Boys are different than girls and how to work with boys must also be different D. Bevett, personal communication, September 2008. The childcare setting is set up with a bias against boys more so than girls in the following ways:

- Zero tolerance to hitting.
- No making, drawing, building or imaginative play of <u>weapons of any kind</u>.
- Kids told to keep their hands and bodies to themselves.
- If hit or attacked, use their words or tell a teacher, setting up a pattern for being a victim of bullying.

The following is also perpetuated in the curriculum according to accreditations' standards (Harms, Jacobs & White, 2003).

- Projects offered are in mostly in one subject area-art
- Posters/teacher supplies used to decorate the classroom have exactly equal number of boys and girls-in non-traditional occupations and in some cases more girls than boys (see attachment 1)
- Children's literature books and series of books, magazines authored by women, have girls as the main characters or show mothers in disproportionate numbers

compared to fathers as caretakers of children i.e.— *Judy Bloome, Ramona series, The Magic Tree House* and books like *Mommies at Work* (Merriam, 1989) see Summary of Themes/Findings. *G*enre wise: story book, fiction (non-informational books)- girls were the main characters in many books

Dee (2006) also states that when a class (the author was specifically referring to school) is headed by a woman, boys are more likely to be seen as disruptive. Further, child development courses which is a requirement for working in a licensed childcare center under Community Care Licensing guidelines (California Child Care Center Licensing Regulation Highlights, 2007) and child development curriculum is focused on a being gender neutral.

The problem with being gender neutral is that –it does not take into consideration the child's values, needs, temperament or personality, not to mention family values and culture. It assumes that children have 'one size fits all' needs.

Within the childcare environment, ECE teachers prefer to deal with mothers because, as one participant stated in a workshop, it is easier (PACCC Staff Development Day Conference, May 2009). Further confirming the commonly held assumption that providing care for children is a woman's domain and men are not as competent in area of caring and educating young children. This exclusion of the father has an influence on the development of children in childcare settings. The childcare environment continues to exclude the needs of boys or at the least continue to be developed and under the control of mostly women teachers who do not feel comfortable with a masculine influence.

Background and Need

As stated earlier, according Dee (2006), many teachers are women and a teacher's gender has a direct affect on students. Further, gender shapes communications between teachers

and students. Across the board and as the above article illustrates, much of the research pertaining to school age children is focused on gender of the teacher, as well children in school settings. Research is limited in scope and does not include quality and type of care of children after school or during school holidays, what the National Institute on Out of School Time-calls Out of School Time (2011).

A need that is over-looked is care for school age children outside of school hours. Many kindergartens have early dismissal times. Some children spend time in before school care and after school care. Overall, school age children spend an average of six hours in school (Jacobs, 2007). That still leaves 3-4 hours, in some cases 6 hours of potential unsupervised time for kids ages 5-10. Therefore the need for quality after school care has increased and there is a gap in the literature in examining the curriculum pertaining to gender bias towards boys in school age settings. In terms of addressing gender bias, much of the literature focuses on male involvement, that is more male teachers in ECE and not on the practice.

In terms of what is taught in ECE, many teachers teach and perpetuate the myth that girls are secretly smarter than boys (Brizendine, 2010). The aforementioned myth is so pervasive that it has become part of a new hidden curriculum that is subtle political and cultural ideas transmitted in ECE (Macionis, 2001). The hidden curriculum of countering gender bias through the feminist agenda is utilized to encourage and push girls, to take on non-traditional roles, whom in turn act in provocative ways towards boys and further teachers dominate, try to suppress and "soften" boys in childcare settings (Friedman, 2010 & Brock-Utne, 1991).

Chapter 2 Review of the Research

Introduction

The focus on much of the literature is the gender inequality women feel, the lack of men/male teachers in ECE and not much emphasis on evaluating the needs of children in terms of gender bias in childcare settings, the teacher's or administration's. According to Macionis, (2001) education which involves schooling has both manifest, that is intended and latent, that is unintended functions. Further, schooling is a social institution where cultural values are transmitted. A latent function of schooling, of which School Age programs are becoming more a part of a child's school experience, is the hidden curriculum, the subtle presentation of political and cultural ideas in the classroom. The hidden curriculum is present in childcare settings. Part of the hidden curriculum is the influence of feminism which perpetuates gender bias in child care settings.

In making a connection to how feminism shows up in childcare settings Parker Palmer's work is an example. In the publication *The Courage to Teach* (2007) Palmer looked at teachers' lack of knowing themselves and their influences in the classroom. The movement of the "courage to teach" is specifically designed for school teachers grades K-12 and has expanded to be of use to other professionals in many fields outside of school age education such as clergy, healthcare, doctors, lawyers, administration, non-profit executives and community executives in a program called The Courage to Lead. According to Palmer (2007), the process of teaching is not about tools and techniques, but an approach that calls into question the individual, facing themselves, and taking a look at both the good and bad in their approaches to teaching and/or work habits. A process Palmer calls confronting one's shadow (Palmer, 2007). According to Palmer if a

teacher does not deal with his or her own shadow; that is fears, insecurities, and deep seated anger, he or she can project onto others, and it can show up in the workplace (2007).

Reverse Discrimination: Feminism and its influence on Gender Bias in ECE

"What's Love Got to Do with It?" by Goldstein (1994) states that feminism and feminist thinking can make a positive contribution to ECE. ECE, which the author cites the NAEYC as the source, is defined as custodial care and education of young children 0-8, of which both cannot be separated in providing care for young children. The paper assumes that caring and educating young children is a woman's domain, i.e. 84% of elementary teachers are women and 99% are pre-school or kindergarten. Further that the values of care, concern and connection of feminism can relate to ECE settings, as if caring for children is feminine, which is a biased belief. The paper reviews literature on feminism, feminist theory, feminist research and feminist methodologies and overview of ECE theories, as well. The article goes into some explanation and justification for why feminism should be embraced in ECE based on western knowledge being male and from a male perspective.

According to Goldstein (1994) feminists are trying to balance this perspective of western knowledge being from a male perspective by embracing feminism. How this historic debate and discussion of the origins of western knowledge fits into childcare is not really explained. Except that, "in dealing with commonly held assumptions, feminism calls for critical examination and re-evaluation of all our paradigms" (p. 6). How a paradigm which, according to the *American Heritage Dictionary* (2004) is a set of

assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that constitutes a way of viewing reality for the community that shares them, especially in an intellectual discipline, will be evaluated is a large shift that requires much more beyond the scope of the author's paper. It further illustrates Birkett's (2000) argument that feminism has a tendency to exaggerate its importance and embellish past history.

According to Goldstein (1994) the definition of feminism is a social movement to call attention to the oppression of women and put an end to it. Further, feminism has two primary core goals: for women to have careers on the same terms as men and the breakdown of traditional marriage, which is characterized as equal rights of women (Birkett, 2000). Even feminists are divided on the definition of feminism:

There is little disagreement among feminist that many kinds of feminist thought exists but feminist have offered widely different accounts of the way in which they are divided and whether or not these divisions are important (Birkett, 2000, p. 55).

Birkett (2000) asks, what is feminism? Is it to want equal relationships with men? Separate realms as men? Have power over men? Or do away with men? Further, do feminist groups really care about children or women due to not supporting fathers or encouraging marriage? ECE's effort to support feminism in order to correct past gender bias is having a latent consequence, is that it is unintended, in the ECE curriculum. An interesting connecting point is feminism's history of advocating women's economic independence and challenging the traditional roles of men and women which is what ECE also embraces in its practices (Birkett, 2000 & D. Bevett, personal communication September 2011).

Historical Context

The history of childcare dates back to the industrial revolution when families started becoming more nuclear and less extended (Macionis, 2001). For many generations of Americans, both native and immigrant, child care was provided by family members or those related to the children. Native Americans and African-Americans experienced the breakdown of the extended and nuclear family before the industrial revolution (D. Bevett, personal communication, September 2010 & Red-Horse, Russo & Hurd, 2002). It has been reported that with the industrial revolution came a number of women who entered the workforce, especially during World War II (Macionis, 2001). However the number of women compared to men who entered the workforce has been greatly exaggerated (Birkett, 2000). Poor working class men and women worked in factories in great numbers. The change in family dynamics, that is change from communal and extended families to nuclear, has arguably created a need of continued care of children.

Professionalization of childcare as a field also has a history. The largest recognized professional body of child care standards in the US is the NAEYC. Its focus is on children from birth to eight years old. "Founded in 1926, NAEYC is the world's largest organization working on behalf of young children with nearly 80,000 members, a national network of over 300 local, state, and regional Affiliates, and a growing global alliance of like-minded organizations" NAEYC (n.d.).

There has been more attention paid to school-age children, who attend school during the day and are in need of care after-school, due to the increase of dual-family income homes and single parent homes Afterschool Alliance (n.d.). After-school care came about when kids, also known as Latchkey kids were going home to empty houses

after school. According to Executive Director of the Afterschool Alliance, Judy Samuelson, there is an increase of juvenile crime, teen pregnancy between the hours of 3-6 (Reno, 2000). Further that academic problems result for children who are unsupervised during this time and may need help with homework and academic support.

Review of the Previous Research

There is a need of further study because research is limited on the topic of gender bias, feminism and child care amongst the school age group.

The first study: Raising boys to become what their moms want-while excluding the dads One study noted is the Brock-Unte (1991) study who interviewed 40 mothers, 20 traditional and 20 feminist mothers in. Brock-Unte refers to a Swedish study conducted between 1986-1988 called "sons" in gender issues and peace education. It should be noted that Sweden is considered a feminine society whose culture embraces peace and being gentile over a warrior tradition D. Bevett (personal communication, September 2011). While the study focus was not on ECE teachers or childcare settings, the method is similar to the method in this paper. Interviews were conducted with 40 mothers total, 20 feminists (that is full time career women who felt connected the women's liberation movement) and 20 traditional (stay at home mothers who were the primary care takers) who wanted to raise a non-sexist son, a "gentle, non-violent boy" (Brock-Unte, 1991, p. 4). The study was conducted within the context of the following research question: Do we educate girls for peace and boys for war? Some methods used to educate boys for peace were giving their sons dolls to play with and deploring sports teams, which fostered a competitive and "rough spirit". The idea was to prevent boys, in this case, sons from being tough and insensitive.

The study focused on mothers and not fathers. The language used refers to the sons being the mother's only, i.e. their son (absent of a father). Further, the mothers interviewed felt their efforts were not successful because their sons developed into "typical" males and saw their son's father and his father's friends as the main obstacle as well as the strengths of environmental pressures. Also, son's peers in school influenced them to be more aggressive, play outside and be competitive. More feminist mothers, that is three fourths of them utilized sons playing with dolls than one quarter of traditional mothers. Traditional mothers in the study blamed the genes, i.e. biological influences when sons became more masculine and tough, while feminists mothers blamed themselves. The mothers' ideal son was not to be tough, dominate, did not get into fights, talk loudly and hopefully be married to strong independent women who stand on their own. In other words, raise boys to be subordinate to women and get them away from "the cult of toughness" (Brock-Unte, 1991, p. 4). The fathers gave more attention to their careers, the mothers thought, but when they did make contributions, they conflicted with the mother's values. A solution to raising "gentle boys" was to divorce the child's father (and some did and wished they had done so sooner), because of conflicting values in raising the son. The study is relevant because it demonstrates an agenda many women have that perhaps has influenced child care providers. Culturally Sweden differs from the US. Further, the United States has a complicated history involving war and is hard to define. The US is certainly, not considered a feminine country. Traditional American culture has a warrior tradition, particularly amongst its native population and amongst some of the immigrants in the United States D. Bevett (personal communication, 2011). It is interesting to note that much of what is described in the study-from a feminine

country also takes place in child care settings within the United States. The study concludes that single parenthood and divorce is better than having a strong influence of fathers in raising their sons.

A second contrasting study: Accepting and guiding boys as they are

As a contrast to the aforementioned is a book based on case studies of a clinical psychologist Pollack (1998). Pollack explains that at a young age boys are introduced into a code, a boy code. The code is a process that parents, teachers and other kids participate. Over time, it appears he is okay, yet he is emotionally distant and masking real his feelings. Boys have learned to mask how they feel. So what they say and what they feel are two different things, hence behaviors that are misunderstood, especially by women.

Pollack's point is to find a way to listen, teach and guide boys into becoming their genuine selves. Pollack makes it a point in his book to advocate for young boys. The goal of Pollack's book is help parents, teachers and others, i.e. coaches help young boys become themselves, to grow into manhood in their own individual way-"to be the 'real boy' we know he is" (p. 19). This above statement is consistent with being child centered which is considered best practice in ECE. However, there is a shift within ECE moving towards influencing children to become what teachers want, especially women teachers, less aggressive and conforming to non-traditional roles also known as gender neutral.

Missing in Action: Studies of ECE publications free of both gender bias and teacher directed practices

In conducting the literature review for the topic gender bias influences on children in child care settings, particularly the school age population publications for ECE professionals were reviewed. Two publications of the NAEYC include YC (Young Children) and Teaching Young Children were reviewed. Further, the Afterschool Alliance, which focuses on advocacy and policy and is an alliance of public, private, and nonprofit groups committed to raising awareness and expanding resources for afterschool programs Afterschool Alliance ND publications were also reviewed. Much of the literature's focus either was on toddler and pre-school education or the lack of men in ECE and on young children. Afterschool Matters, which is a publication available through the Afterschool Alliance is the exception. See special collections section.

In looking at ECE publications, the senior editor of *Young Children* sets the tone for the May 2010 issue about Men in Early Childhood Teaching careers. Freidman explains why the cover of the magazine features a young boy playing with a doll (2010). It was chosen to reflect a number of themes from the articles. The idea was to teach boys to be loving, nurturing and kind. Perhaps in the hopes that- that young boy may become a teacher. Relevance: it is not that values of care, love and nurturing are bad values, its how they are imposed on boys- being taught to boys without consideration of gender and cultural appropriateness. The tone of the editorial suggests, teaching a boy the same way one would teach a girl.

Statistical Information

The need for childcare has increased as many families now have two parents working outside the home. Two parents working outside the home has more than doubled since the 1960s (Davis, 2001). Specifically a need that is over looked is care for school age

children outside of school hours. As stated earlier, many kindergartens have early dismissal times and overall, school age children spend an average of six hours in school (Jacobs, 2007). That still leaves 3-4 hours, in some cases 6 hours of potential unsupervised time for kids ages 5-10. Therefore the need for quality after school care has increased. According to the articles "Out of School and Out of Trouble" and "Where do Your Employees' Kids Go After School?" the benefits of after school care are plentiful (Annala, 2001; Davis, 2001). They include:

- Increase of children's safety while parents are working
- Children are less likely to engage in high risk behavior
- Children are less likely to be a victim of a violent crime
- Encourages children's reading, science, math skills, enrichment and cultural activities, homework help, computer and technology skills
- Encourages children to develop socially, emotionally, physically, and build conflict resolution & life skills.

Two of the largest issues with afterschool care are cost and availability of quality afterschool care programs. Another conflicting point of view, which has long been debated, is extending the school day. This scope is limited and would have to be addressed by specific school districts. It also limits choice for families. Afterschool care is not needed by all children in a particular school. Extending the school day affects all. It may address an academic need, but not necessarily the need for care in the evening or on school holidays.

The need for quality after school care is growing, given the increased number of children attending after school care programs, according to Reno (2000). 6.5 million children attend after-school programs. Further 11% are in after school programs and

25% care for themselves. There has long been research and discussion around the importance of after school care for school age children.

There are many programs locally, within school districts and nationally that provide care for children ages 6-16 before school, after school, during school holidays and summer (Annala, 2001). Many communities, cities, schools, parents, and the U.S. Department of Education recognize the importance of after school care. Formed in the mid 2000's an advocacy policy known as "Afterschool for All" was introduced and its main goal was for all kids to have access to afterschool programs by 2010. The legislation did not pass, however, advocacy continues to grow around the need for quality after school programs as more and more children are left home alone to care for themselves for 3-6 hours a day.

According to Janairo et al. (2010) men make up only 5% of childcare workforce with 2.2% being pre-school and kinder teachers, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Four authors looked at gender diversity in the state of Massachusetts to identify policy gaps such as why their state legislature did not include gender in defining a diverse workforce within ECE. Change needs to begin with leadership. The article touches on possible effects on the lack of male role models on children, such as the influence on young children's school readiness.

Administrative Records

Upon further review of the research, the 2010 US Census Bureau child care section issues a Current Population Report under the Household Economic Studies subsection. In the subsection there is a description of demographics of children and child care arrangements

displayed by the year. The report called "Who's Minding the Kids? Child Care

Arrangements: Spring 2005/2006" (Laughlin, 2010), shows patterns and use of child care
arrangements for preschool and grade school aged children ages 5-14 for the years of
2005 and 2006 as the title states. Consequently, the definition of school age is directly
related to children attending school. The children in this report include children not only
enrolled in school but in enrichment activities including sports, lessons, clubs, before and
after school programs. Most studies focus on much younger children as the needs for
child care change as children get older. Further:

Grade school-aged children were less likely to be cared for by nonrelatives, such as organized care facilities or other nonrelatives in the child's home or the provider's home, than by relatives other than their mother. Half of grade schoolaged children were in a child care arrangement on a regular basis other than only in school or in self-care. (Laughlin, 2010, p 10).

Interesting to note is that fathers are included in providing care under "other relatives" category. The reporting of fathers providing care for children is in the same category as relatives, i.e. extended family such as grandparents and aunts and uncles further illustrates how mothers are viewed as the primary care taker of children. The article does not discuss evaluation of childcare programs or practices, but does illustrate the commonly held belief that the care of children are under the woman's domain.

Special Collections: Afterschool Alliance

As mentioned in an earlier section, the Afterschool Alliance is an advocacy nonprofit organization that strives to ensure affordable quality afterschool programs for all Afterschool Alliance n.d. Most publications on its website are focused on the needs for effective afterschool programs. *Afterschool Matters* journal of *National Institute on Out*

of School Time is a national journal developed to promote professionalism, scholarship, and consciousness in the field of afterschool education and is made available by the Afterschool Alliance, but is not published by them.

From 2004 to 2010, the articles that were about gender bias covered girls and girls' programs only. The front covers of the publication, eight issues features girls on the front, six issues featured art, five featured boys, two featured both boys and girls on the front covers. Inside the issues were articles related to girls in education and single sex education, i.e. preparing young girls for college. Of the articles related to boys, one was about boys of color participation in a training addressing boys not to be sexist and homophobic, called "Boyz 2 Men: Responsible Empowerment for Inner-City Adolescent Males" (Gilgoff, 2007). The article states that it is a support program that helps young males of color escape from "the man box." According to the author, addressing pervasive sexist and homophobic expressions and attitudes can help free young men for fuller self-expression, though the process is never easy (Gilgoff, 2007). The article further illustrates the influence of counter sexism. The article quotes boys name calling and using homosexual name calling to make fun or call out perceived weakness. Instead of taking a deeper look, and not focusing on the young boys' needs, i.e. the need to be strong and not perceived as weak, the trainer takes a teacher directed approach. Further by the above quote getting out the "man box" further illustrates ECE teachers' practice of challenging traditional gender roles, gender role reversing and neutral practices. What was missing from all publications were the practices of teachers in After School child care settings. It is also interesting to note that the publication is affiliated with Wessely College, which is a woman's college in Massachusetts.

Interview with an Expert: Professor John Mark Miller*, M.Ed.

Conducted Feb. 13, 2011

I met with Professor J. Mark Miller who is an adjunct professor at a Junior College in the Mid-Peninsula of California, amongst other things. He has been teaching for over ten years and has also started and been the Executive Director of a 24 hour childcare facility. He has been an ECE teacher's aide, teacher, head teacher, director and executive director. More recently, he's been a consultant, HR Director and has co-designed a course specifically directed at addressing gender bias in the ECE field. He is in his mid to late 50's and a Euro-American, an American with European heritage; specifically English, German, and French background, three generations removed. His parents were involved in civil rights movement, lived in poor people's camps and marched in Selma, Alabama where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. lived, worked and launched the civil rights movement. Miller's parents were very influential and he did his own rebellion while being in ECE. e liked to be against the grain.

When describing his background, he stated that he taught "Male Involvement in ECE". Further, there are a lot of women working in ECE settings and not a lot of men.

When asked why, Miller stated that

The easy answer is pay. But that is disputable. Pay is not the answer. ECE is a female dominated and nurturing environment and men don't think they belong there. Society believes it. We believe that children need to be cared for one way and that's the feminine nurturing stereotype. Face the fact that men are different.

Further he stated that men do nurture, "they just do it different[ly]". Men and women are different and children need to experience both and not just one nurturing mold. Male teachers in ECE combat many stereotypes, perceptions and myths that parents/clients

have about men teaching kids, i.e. "they are weak, molesters, homosexual..." but are "...statistically unproven, but are honored by parents".

When asked "What do you note about attitudes you have come across in your classroom about how adults feel about the issue of gender bias in childcare settings?" his response was a class he developed and taught- a 1 unit course called "Male Involvement in ECE" along with the department chair. Miller later took the course over. Gender bias comes out in this class, but focus is supposed to be on why males are not in ECE rather than gender bias practices in childcare settings. The women in the class have "aha" moments. They talk about women being the "gate keepers of children," in particular mothers because they bare them and {think they are} part of their bodies. They see their role not only as encouragers of men being involved but may be the barrier of men being involved with the care of children. Female students realize "I'm part of the problem," which further perpetuates gender bias.

In examining a teacher's background, education, gender and culture and its effects on students in childcare settings, Miller states that in some way a teacher's background tremendously and positively, consciously or unconsciously has an influence on their practice. Further that ECE teachers tend to go to their comfort zone. Men have a much more narrow comfort zone because of socialization of working with children. A teacher's background sends a message to kids that people are different, but adults have to be aware of their background and their narrow view. There is often a culture clash. It can be great opportunity or limiting. For example, he recalls some Asian colleagues told him about asserting their feelings-helping kids assert their feelings with adults. His colleagues told him that teachers working with the Asian children needed to take into

consideration that {some} Asian culture{s} does not allow for children to be assertive to elders. Further, adjustments needed to be made.

Miller himself has experienced sexism and gender stereotyping in his career as an ECE teacher. When he started a 24 hour Child Care Center for airport employees, he hired the teachers, was very involved but was treated as if he did not know as much because he was a man. When he first started teaching, it was expected that he would move the furniture. It has evolved, but male students now tell him that men are not allowed to "diaper" or take kids to the toilet, kids are not allowed to sit on men's laps in many child care centers' policies. Miller states that it comes from false assumptions. Those policies are based on unfounded fears. However, his male students tell him that they want the policies in place for protection. Miller stated that it was tragic. The effect is that it sends a strange message to children (boy children) in terms of role model identity: tells them "don't be nurturing, don't touch. Cause the guys I look up to don't touch so I better not touch".

In his course work his goal is to not just have students look at the surface, the obvious, as he puts it. There are non-obvious characteristics of working with children, their family structure, where they live, not just race and gender, deeper ones. He asks his students to look at what motivates the kids. What are their strengths (meaning teachers)? He wants students to understand the differences. Not figuring out how to be alike. He has not experienced female teachers and male teachers interacting with kids differently, based on their gender, per se. It is based on each teacher's skill set.

He would like teachers to get out of the martyrdom of ECE and find some pride in the profession, for teachers to find a way to make a difference for children, families, society. Hard to do when pay is so low. He likes his student to think, reflect, not just comply. He strives to have his students get a new view of learning. In his response to the cover of the May 2010 Publication of *YC* of a young boy playing with a doll, Miller stated that it is okay for boys to play with dolls but it should not be celebrated, "it's too much". He found it surprising that the editor praised the young boy for playing with a doll and further states that boys are wired differently. Miller states, there is some biological information about aggression in boys. That does not mean that it should not be tempered, but there is a certain amount of wiring that comes out of gender. Lastly, he agreed that while the feminist movement started out as a political movement, for all the right reasons, as Miller put it, there is a certain amount of bias that has developed as a result and that it is not good for the profession.

Chapter 3 Method

Description of Method

Focus Group Interview:

I met with 10 of the 4th and 5th graders on two Tuesdays, one for 20 minutes during a Junior Staff meeting and the other Tuesday during an allocated lunch time but made provisions with their school teachers allowing them to stay longer than their lunch hour. The children would not have to give up their whole lunch hour and miss the recess part of lunch. When I mentioned that they would be able to go to back to class late after lunch, they were more than happy to participate.

After discussing the order of business I described the focus group and getting their consent to participate. All present said they would participate except one 5th grade girl declined and decided she wanted to play with her friends for the lunch hour, despite it being a meeting she agreed to attend as a member of the Jr. Staff. I told them it would confidential and that need to not use their real names. They created new names. I heard a few 4th and 5th graders talk about their fake names for three days (after the first meeting). They showed enthusiasm.

Focus Group: of 10 boys and girls ages 9-11 4th and 5th graders.

I also asked them to fill out a brief survey asking the following questions:

- 1. Who do you live with at home? (If between two homes, describe both home arrangements).
- 2. How many brothers and sisters do you have? Are you the oldest, youngest, or in the middle.
- 3. What is your favorite thing to do afterschool? In the summer?

4. List all the child care centers and day camps you've attended (include pre-school if you remember).

The questions asked in the focus group were:

- 1. What have you seen (observed) boys doing at child care centers?
- 2. What have you seen (observed) girls doing at child care centers?
- 3. Who gets into the most trouble, boys or girls? Why do you think so?
- 4. Do you think boys and girls are treated the same or different?
- 5. Do you think boys and girls are treated fairly by teachers in child care settings? Why or Why not?

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Participant Observation 1:

Sample and Site: Recorded observations of Kindergarteners and First Graders during story time about a book a child chose and I read to them as a small group. It was a spontaneous discussion and not planned.

Participant Observation 2:

Sample and Size: Recorded observation of interaction with two male staff, one Euro-American male ECE teacher in his 20's and the other Filipino of mixed Latino heritage male, ECE aide, single father in his 20's. A student brought a toy martial arts' weapon, called nun chucks, which are a pair of hardwood sticks joined by a chain originating from Okinawan Japan for a talent show.

Ethical Standards

This study adheres to the principles for protection of human subjects as described by the American Psychological Association (2009). Additionally, the proposal was reviewed by Dominican University of California Internal Review Board for the protection of human subjects, approved and assigned number IRB 8269.

Access and Permissions

E-mails were sent to inform participants of the focus of the research. Permission was granted from Program Coordinator of child care center where I serve as a center director. Parents were informed via e-mail contact group of 5th grade parents and "Junior Staff" parents (not one in the same category)

Principal of the school was informed of research

Teachers of students notified via e-mail and in person about research and allowed students to come during lunch hour (not during the after school program time to allow for uninterrupted time, privacy and be consistent with Junior Staff weekly meetings that take place during this time).

Students: Met with 4th and 5th grade students face to face and ask if they would participate.

Data Gathering Strategies

Methodology included using qualitative methods of a survey, focus group of 10 students and participant observation of students at a school age child care center where I am a center director.

Analysis Approach

The plan was to compare findings in focus group to the "review of previous research" and "interview with an expert" sections.

Chapter 4 Findings

Description of Site, Individuals, Data

Site:

The focus group was held in the second classroom/portable of the child care center. The Child Care Center is a separate building and organization and part of a non- profit child care organization of 22 childcare centers, including infant, toddler, preschool and school age programs. The child care center is located on the same grounds as an elementary school all the kids attend.

Individuals:

Ten children showed up, eight girls and two boys pages 9 to 11. All students indicated a range of 3 to 10 years participation in pre-school and child care settings in 3 or more day care settings and/or summer camps. One participant indicated that he has been in day care since he was 1 year old making him the participant with the most years in day care. Students were asked to identify their race and ethnicity. Of the pre-survey, three were Caucasian and five were Asian, one was Bi-Racial, Euro-Asian. One student present did not fill out the survey, however she has communicated in the focus group that she is from Hawaii. In terms of their ethnicities: One student was Latina, another Iranian. Of the remaining students two were Chinese, two Indian, one Vietnamese, one claimed both Vietnamese and Chinese and lastly one was Japanese and Austrian (mother from Japan and father from Austria). When asked their religion, two stated Hindu, one Bahai, three Christians, one Catholic, and three said they were atheists, did not have a religion or declined to say. I did not find it appropriate to ask about household income since they are

children and may not be aware of home much their families make. The location of the child care center is in an affluent area of the Bay Area where the average household income is \$168, 165 annually according to the US Census Bureau, 2011).

Data:

<u>Focus Group</u>: of 10 boys and girls ages 9-11 (4th and 5th graders). I also asked them to fill out a <u>brief survey</u> (see section 3).

Summary of Themes/Findings

Findings:

There were four major themes that emerged from the focus group.

- 1. Boys and girls play differently than each other. Boys were described as more aggressive, active in their play. Girls were described as being more involved in arts and crafts. When boys draw, it is usually pictures of weapons, violent things or pictures of bodily fluids, i.e. babies "poohing, barfing" described as inappropriate by the children.
- 2. Boys indicated that they are treated badly by girls. The girls in the group agreed. Girls are allowed to get away with treating boys badly, i.e.name calling, hitting, being mean, pushy, intimidating, sassy and corroborating with other girls as a group. The boys in the group described it as girls being sexist towards boys. One participant said for example, "When a boy comes around a group of girls, the girls in the group will say "eww, a boy." Some girls agreed and there were no objections stated in the group. It was said that older girls especially hang out with

their own peers in groups, are especially sassy {defiant} and want things "their way."

- 3. Unanimously, all the kids said boys get into more trouble than girls in childcare settings. Boys were described as being loud, wild and disruptive by the group. They do things that are considered impolite like laughing at bodily functions, i.e. barfing, farting.
- 4. The last major theme was that girls are favored by teachers and boys are not treated fairly not only in child care, but in school, as well. All the kids agreed that favoritism was a big problem at the child care center. Stated reasons for favoritism were that there were (1)-more "girl teachers" than "boy teachers"; further that (2)- "boy teachers" were **below** girl teachers. A 4th grade girl, Olivia, stated (3)-when girl teachers think of girls they think of someone who is cute, and innocent, and think that they (girl teachers) used to be a girl and don't want to get another girl in trouble. Finally the last reason stated as to why girls are favored was that (4)-people have been sexist towards girls in the past, that now they second guess girls' motives, they let girls off the hook. One 5th boy-Joel said, "Teachers might be thinking, 'Well, she didn't mean to do it.' But if a boy did something wrong teachers go right after him, no doubt about it".

Findings for Participant Observation 1:

Story time 15 boys and girls ages 5-8 (Kindergarten and first graders). April 18, 2011. While setting up for homework time/quiet time I sat in front of the class to read to the Kinders and 1st graders while the 2nd graders read books on their own. Some kids handed

books to me to read. One young boy (Southeast Asian – both parents were Bengali) handed me a book called *Mommies at Work* (Merriam, 1989). When I showed the book to the children some of them became disgruntle about the book. I heard moaning and the words, "oh no, not that book." Two kids asked me not to read it, a boy and a girl. I mentioned that books are chosen by different kids and we should respect their choices.

As I looked at it I wondered if the book was going to show favor towards girls and women. I continued to read it out loud showing each page. The kids were quiet and there was not much audience participation or enthusiasm from them, which is not usual. The book described how a mom loves, nurtures and takes care of the two kids at home, a boy and a girl. She feeds them, gets them ready for school, gives hugs and kisses. Further, that this mom goes to work, as well. The book show her at work and other mommies at range of jobs including traditionally male dominated jobs and some women dominated jobs-a total of 20 jobs mentioned. Mothers of various races and ethnicities who are "doctors, teachers, dancers, TV directors, bankers, truck drivers, bridge building mommies, mommies with telescopes and train ticket collecting mommies and factory car building mommies", to name few (Merriam, 1989). What job couldn't a mommy do?

There were no men mentioned in text of the book, and very few illustrations of men in the book. Men illustrated in this book were in background. The end of the book describes that "mommy" comes home from work to the most important job, "...and that's coming home to you." There are pictures of mothers hugging the kids who all look happy. There was a silence at the end of the story. I then asked the group, "What's missing from this picture?" Two children, a Kindergarten girl said "The daddy" the other child, a Kindergarten boy, said the "Yea, the daddy's not there helping the mommy." I

agreed and closed the book. Then a first grade boy, said "maybe the daddy's at work." Lastly, a first grade girl said "maybe he was abducted by aliens" and the kids laughed.

Findings for Participant Observation 2:

Right after school, a 3rd grade boy, Jason, took out his pair of nun chucks, which were made of clear plastic with two neon lights encased inside held together by string, instead of a chain, as mentioned earlier. He asked if he could use them to practice his Kata (a martial arts form) for the talent show going on that night. I was concerned that there would not be enough room for him to practice and other kids would gather around and may get hit by them. I told him to wait until outside was available. Later, he took them out and began to practice in the field. The ECE aid objected. I said it was okay because he was practicing for the talent show. He said "but it's a weapon." I then told the student he had 10 minutes to practice and stay in the area. There was a younger boy, in Kindergarten who seemed fascinated and watched closely. I told him to leave the area and let Jason practice. I explained the modifications to the staff, another male staff, ECE teacher also objected. He said he did not think Jason should have the nun chucks out at all because he did not want the younger kids to immolate the violence. I responded by saying we had a difference in philosophy but that Jason go ahead and put the nun chucks away. I was reluctant to have the child put the nun chucks away and felt disappointed.

Chapter 5 Discussion

"You have to be really, really strong to not favor and do the right thing."

–Joel 5th grader

Summary of Major Findings

The children indicated that boys and girls play differently. What came out of the focus group was overall, the tone of the girls describing boys play and art as negative and they were very judgmental. As a response, the boys in the group said they also saw boys play games, but boys were awesome. What was clear was how both boys and agreed that girls mistreated boys, bullied them, and that girls were allowed to "get away with it." Boys' self-esteem and sense of self is being negatively affected by the perceptions of what do and how their behavior is viewed as wrong or inappropriate. In terms of the observations, both with the reading of the book to the small group and objections of boys playing with weapons of any kind (the student brought out his nun chucks much like that of a prop for a talent show, not to fight others) confirmed ECE practices of leaving boys and men out and favoring girls' interests and behaviors over boys. A practice so pervasive, not even my job position as a supervisor, explanations and modifications did not stop the objections of staff, both male.

Limitations of the Study

There were a total of 15 4th and 5th graders at the center. Only 10 participated in the focus group. The group was 80% female and 20% male. The sample size is not representative of the population of school age centers. The affluence of the child care center may not also be generalizable to the population. The children in the study were also my students and they may not have felt comfortable telling me how they felt about the center, since I

am one of center's directors. As the case with the focus group and participant observation 1, group think could also affect the responses. Participant Observations 1 and 2 addressed the limitations of male participation in the focus group.

Implications for Future Research

There needs to be further study in the area of assessing child care practices related to gender bias and self-assessment of ECE teachers. Further study needs to include children's feedback. The children in the study spent several years in childcare and perceived large amounts of favoritism from both their ECE teachers and school teachers, from both sexes. Further, ECE teachers, directors and those in charge of the curriculum should spend time self-assessing not only their practices with children, but look at their own child hood experiences. ECE coursework should include prospective teachers own childhood assessment.

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