

The Gender Elephant in the room

Exploring the impact of language on developing self identities.



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Rationale



Being single and owning it

with Yumi Stynes

More people are living the single life than ever before. But what if you don't need a partner to feel whole? In a world that wants you to couple up, is being single the new happily ever after?

27mins 16secs

Tue 5 Jun 2018, 6:00am

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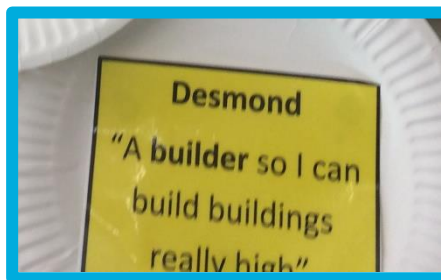


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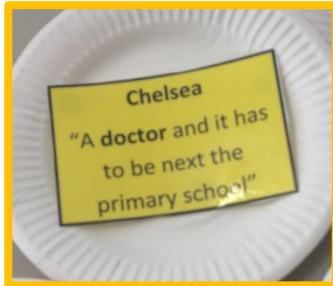
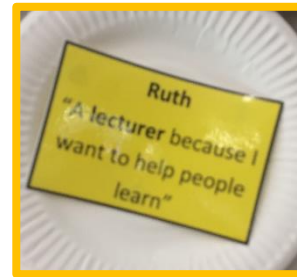
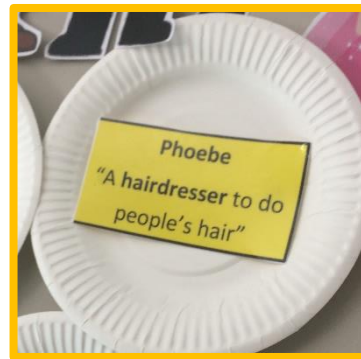
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“No, those are the girl books” 4 year olds, identity and developmental psychology.

Orenstein finds one such enlightening explanation in developmental psychology research showing that until as late as age 7, children are convinced that external signs — clothing, hairstyle, favorite color, choice of toys — determine one's sex. “It makes sense, then, that to ensure you will stay the sex you were born you'd adhere rigidly to the rules as you see them and hope for the best,” she writes. “That's why 4-year-olds, who are in what is called ‘the inflexible stage,’ become the self-appointed chiefs of the gender police. Suddenly the magnetic lure of the Disney Princesses became more clear to me: developmentally speaking, they were genius, dovetailing with the precise moment that girls need to *prove* they are girls, when they will latch on to the most exaggerated images their culture offers in order to stridently shore up their femininity.” For a preschool girl, a Cinderella dress is nothing less than an existential insurance policy, a crinolined bulwark to fortify a still-shaky sense of identity.



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Early Years Learning Framework & National Quality Framework Links

- The concept of being reminds educators to focus on children in the here and now, and of the importance of children's right to be a child and experience the joy of childhood.
- Being involves children developing an awareness of their social and cultural heritage, of gender and their significance in their world.
- Children feel recognised and respected for who they are
- Children explore different identities and points of view in dramatic play
- One of the six key guiding principles of the National Quality Framework is that children's rights and interests are paramount.
- NQS Quality Area 5
Standard 5.1 – Relationships between educators and children - dignity and rights

- By around two years of age, children begin to define themselves as boys or girls. (Kohlberg, 1966; Kohlberg & Ullian, 1974; Sandnabba & Ahlberg, 1999)
- They can have very fixed definitions of how girls and boys should behave by the age of five. This demonstrates the impact of 'culture' on very young children.

(Martin & Ruble, 2004)

- Preschoolers have demonstrated that they can apply gender stereotypes in response to adults and other children's expectations of how they should play (Raag & Rackliffe, 1998)

The Study

Rationale: What power do we hold, as ECEC professionals, in the language we use to further drive or instill these messages?

Longitudinal study across 3 services. N(80) observable greetings of children in the morning.

We were specifically documenting and classifying greetings, and identifying trends or patterns linked to a child's gender.



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Findings- Verb Based Enquiry

Verb based enquiry
Did you have fun at Disney on Ice?
We're going for a bush walk today!
Is that your house (on activity sheet brought from home) What do you do? Drive along here and here and here?
Where are the cars? Should we find them and have a play? Can you find the hot wheels?
What would you like to do this morning, *S*
I'll get you a pink and purple texta so you can draw"
"Have you got a bunny"
Is the lego stuck? You can break it, you have big muscles!
Are you going to take those bikes cross country?
Lovely ladies, are we making cakes?
You love the water don't you?
The trouble twins are here to explore!
It's ok to wrestle but if someone gets hurt we need to check that they're going to be ok.
Would you like to help us feed the babies?
This will make you grow big and strong
You have such good ball skills

*11 boys
5 girls*



Findings- Comments on appearance

Comments on appearance
You look nice and snuggly!
You look so warm with your beanie on!
He's such a cutie patootie
"I need to go to the shops and get some sparkly boots just like yours!"
"are you beautiful girls going to have breakfast?"
"She's so cute"
"That's a cool pattern on your hair!"
Hello gorgeous girl
Miss _ I'm watching you, cutie!
There you go, gorgeous
This one is for you my darling
Look at these big squishy muscles
Hello smiley girl!
You're wearing your pretty jumper!

*11 Girls
3 Boys*



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Findings- Acknowledgement of feelings

Acknowledgement of needs & feelings
You'll help him if he cries, wont you?
Come play with H...You love H.
C- I love P. A- You do love P
"you're here! I've missed you!"
"Where's *F* you're ok, give me a big cuddle.
Are you ok sweetie? Are you alright? _ is over there looking for you.
Are you a bit cranky this morning?
You're happy, happy, happy!

*6 Girls
2 Boys*



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Findings- Greetings using names

Greeting using names
How's Mr F been?
Hello _ whats going on?
Hello _ has the cat got your tongue?
Hello _
Hello _ how are we today?
Hello _ how are ya?
Are you alright Miss _
Morning Miss _, what will we do today?
Hello _ not talking today? That's ok!
Hey Mate!
Miss_ I'm watching you

5 Girls
6 Boys



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Social constructionist theory analysis

Social constructionist theory - the expression of gender differences in behaviour in the moment.

Gender-in-context theory - gender differences in behaviour are most likely to be observed in situations in which gender is critical.

[\(Deaux and Major, 1987\)](#)

Key Findings

Using your muscles

The use of 'Miss and Mr'

Importance of being cute or wearing something pretty- compliment culture in feminism ?

Going to my 'special place' example

Responses to emotional goodbyes- mention of 'brave'.



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Implications for practice

- Given the critical role that gender and vocabulary ability plays in early childhood experiences, children's internalising abilities should not be underestimated.
- Educators need to understand that early childhood is a time when girls and boys begin to become aware of increased social consciousness and social pressures to conform to gender-stereotypical norms.
- Gender-stereotypical beliefs can affect children's emotional and social development.
- Educators should minimise the extent to which they use gender-stereotypical language and behaviour around young children and encourage 'emotion' vocabulary, and articulate often how they are feeling and thinking.

(Bosacki & Moore, 2004)



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Implications for practice

Educators, and the language we use has a significant impact on the way children react and respond to us.

We can encourage our teams to be aware of the language we use and the implications of a deeper message this sends to children (particularly girls) on what is important.

If we view children as agentic and confident learners, as holders of rights and with the capacity to be aware of social justice, we need to challenge these perceptions of 'girliness' and 'boyiness' through our interactions.



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