A feminist poststructuralist analysis of how gender is constructed in a nursery context in Brighton

Presented by

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Abstract

This project aims to contribute to research within geographies of gender and children’s geographies (but also gender studies, early childhood studies and sociology of education) by critically exploring the ways in which gender is constructed in a nursery context in Brighton. This project responds to the ‘new’ social studies of childhood’s calling for a more diverse children’s geography. There is an urgent need to represent the presence of younger children’s voices and experiences within sociological and geographical discourses because they have previously been underrepresented. This study draws on ethnographic data produced through five weeks of participant observation in Rainbow Nursery and four semi-structured interviews with practitioners working at the nursery. In support of my feminist poststructuralist reasoning, I use this data to explore Rainbow Nursery as a specific social and cultural arena for the production and reproduction of gender identities. I argue that young children treat the discourses that they are presented with flexibly and rework them to create different ways of performing gender. Through doing so I challenge the notion that young children passively absorb discursive powers but rather that they actively engage with creating these discourses.

Key Words

Gender, Children, Nursery, Discourse

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Overview of Study

This project is a feminist poststructuralist analysis of the ways in which gender is constituted through discursive practices in a nursery in Brighton. This project contributes to the sub-disciplinary fields of geographies of gender and children’s geographies, but it also contributes to disciplines beyond geography (such as gender studies, early childhood studies and sociology of education). The majority of existing research on this topic focuses on school environments or playgrounds at both primary and secondary level (McNamee and Seymour, 2012). As a result there are large gaps in the literature concerning nursery aged children and gender (ibid). This project contributes to this gap by developing the small, but expanding, body of research queering gender in pre-schools (see Blaise, 2005a; Davis, 1989a; Lyttleton-Smith, 2015; Robinson, 2002).

1.2 Aims of the study

This project aims to contribute to research within geographies of gender and children’s geographies by critically analysing the ways in which gender is constructed in a nursery context in Brighton. The project has the following research objectives:

1. To identify the gender discourses which children are exposed to before they arrive at nursery

2. To examine the nursery’s understanding of gender and explore how this understanding effects institutional practice

3. To critically explore how the nursery children respond to institutional practice given the gender discourses they are exposed to before arriving at nursery
1.3 Summary of Subsequent Chapters

Chapter 2 embeds this study within an extensive body of literature. This chapter identifies the key gaps in knowledge that will be addressed by this investigation. The literature review will discuss a number of key theoretical concepts and perspectives and will address how they provide new ways of understanding gendered identities.

Chapter 3 will then establish and justify the methodological approach that has been implemented for this study. In this chapter I present the qualitative methods used for collecting the data. I describe the methodological implications of the ‘new’ social studies of childhood, explain the methodological implications of working with children, and discuss the role I played as a researcher. I also evaluate the data analysis methods utilised.

Chapter 4 addresses the first research objective - to identify the gender discourses which children are exposed to before they arrive at nursery. This chapter explores how children actively internalise the discursive practices of the male-female dualism. In this chapter I present the idea that the nursery children realise that there are certain desirable and ‘normal’ ways to ‘do’ gender.

Chapter 5 addresses the second research objective - to examine the nursery’s understanding of gender and explore how this understanding affects institutional practice. The chapter considers what a feminist poststructuralist discourse of gender has to offer and how this impacts the nursery’s practices and ways of thinking about teaching.

Chapter 6 addresses the third research objective - to critically explore how the nursery children respond to institutional practice given the gender discourses they
are exposed to before arriving at nursery. This chapter reveals the potential and, indeed, preference of young children to treat the discourses that they are presented with flexibly and rework them to create different ways of performing gender.

Chapter 7 concludes by identifying the overall importance of the study. I synthesise the findings in the analysis chapters whilst reflecting on the above research objectives. The chapter also identifies future research that respond to the limitations of this study.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Chapter Introduction

The aim of this chapter to provide a comprehensive review of existing literature relevant to a study concerned with children, gender and education. Section 2.1 establishes a theoretical framework for this project and outlines three poststructuralist concepts used throughout this study: the 'heterosexual matrix'/heterosexual hegemony and performativity. This section is followed by three overlapping bodies of literature: geographies of gender (2.2.1), children’s geographies (2.2.2) and geographies of education (2.2.3). This section will review this literature and establish its geographical and sociological engagements. This literature has particular methodological implications and will be returned to in Chapter 3.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

2.1.1 Feminist Post-Structuralism and Queer Theory

Feminist poststructuralism involves conceptualising and deconstructing the social processes through which we become gendered by highlighting the discursive nature of gender identities (Blaise, 2005a; 2009; Epstein, 1995; Hall, 2015). A principle aspect of feminist poststructuralism is the deployment of the term discourse (Blaise, 2005a). Discursive practices refer to socially organised frameworks of knowledge and meaning (Davis and Banks, 1995). In other words, discourse is a way of speaking, writing, thinking, feeling or acting that incorporates particular ideas as truths (Blaise, 2005a). Feminist poststructuralism is concerned with how particular discourses (that produce certain regulatory truths about gender) come about and
construct and control particular ways of thinking, feeling and acting as natural (Renold, 2005).

Queer theory builds on feminist poststructuralism and is mainly focused on heterosexual discourses and how heterosexuality is fundamental in the social construction of gender (Hubbard, 2008; Oswin, 2008). Queer theorisations reject the discourse of sexual categorisation because they argue it is a way of encouraging difference based on identity (Sedwick, 1990). Queer theory has opened up the conceptual space from which to contest the hegemony of heterosexuality (Knopp, 2009). As such, queer theory attempts to confront and question the fact that heterosexuality has remained an unexamined and taken for granted norm until relatively recently (Blaise, 2005a).

This section has explained feminist poststructuralism and queer theory which together provide a useful framework for critically theorising gender, sexes and sexualities throughout this study. The next step is to consider two poststructuralist concepts used throughout this study.

2.1.2 ‘Heterosexual matrix’ and Heterosexual Hegemony

Judith Butler’s ‘heterosexual matrix’ (in Gender Trouble) or heterosexual hegemony (as she rewords the concept in Bodies that Matter) is a concept which refers to the assumption of heterosexuality (Butler, 1990; 1993). The first concept has become more frequently applied but both describe the assumption of heterosexuality and the organisation of social relations, and society, based around this assumption (Brown et al., 2007; Hubbard, 2008; Jagger, 2008). The term ‘heterosexual matrix’ is used to foreground the heterosexuality of gender and designates the grid of "cultural intelligibility" (cultural norms) through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalised (Butler, 1990: 151). As such, the term ‘matrix’ should be thought of as a discursive framework that produces femininity, masculinity, and heterosexuality as intelligible (Hall, 2015). The illusion and power of the ‘heterosexual matrix’ is maintained through the policing and shaming of those gender identities that deviate
from normative masculinities and femininities (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009). Hegemonic heterosexuality is reinforced through rewards for appropriate gendered and heterosexual behaviours and through punishments for deviations from the norm (Butler, 1993; Jagger, 2008).

Queer theorists argue that heterosexuality and gender are inherently unstable because they are dependent on the contrasting presence of an ‘Other’ (i.e. homosexuality) for their reference point as normal (Knopp, 1999). Heteronormativity are the set of norms that make heterosexuality seem natural and that organize homosexuality as its “binary opposite” (Brown et al., 2007: 8).

Now that I have outlined the ‘heterosexual matrix’ and heterosexual hegemony it is important to outline another concept used throughout this study: performativity.

**2.1.3 Performativity**

The influence of Judith Butler (1990; 1993) is clear, predominantly with regards to concepts of performance and performativity. Butler’s (1990) notion of performativity challenges the sex/gender distinction in order to argue that there is no sex that is not always already gender. A central concept of performativity is that a person’s gender is constructed through their own repetitive performance of gender (McDowell, 1999; Paechter, 2001; Youdell, 2010). This points towards the understanding that gender is not something that you naturally have but something that you “do” and continually “do” (“re-do”) through everyday social and spatial practices (Renold, 2005: 15). Gender is therefore not understood as a singular act, but instead seen as a performance of gendered expressions which are an imitation of the dominant discourses of gender (Butler, 1990; Evans, 2006; Gregson and Rose, 2000).
As a result, gender can be understood as an illusion of a fixed and stable identity constructed through performance rather than pre-existing behind the performances of gender (Blaise, 2005a; Renold, 2005). Butler (1990) argues that gaps and cracks in performances open up discursive spaces and create opportunities for alternative gendered performances to emerge. These discontinuities do not necessarily result in the subversion of gender norms, but can serve to reproduce and reinforce them, depending upon the social context and the audience (Lloyd, 1999).

Having outlined performativity I will now review three interrelated bodies of literature which span several academic disciplines.

2.2 Geographies of Gender, Children and Education

This section reviews three intersecting bodies of literature concerned with this study: gender, children and education.

2.2.1 Geographical and sociological engagements with gender

There are various conceptualizations of the relationship between sex and gender within geography which range from essentialism, social constructionism to feminist poststructuralism/ queer theory (Blaise, 2005a; Renold, 2005; Warf, 2006). Children’s sex, gender, and sexuality are frequently understood through essentialist or socialization understandings of identity (Blaise, 2009). These discourses aim to keep the male-female dualism intact and often require individuals to express stereotyped, mutually exclusive relationships between genders (Davis and Banks, 1995; MacNaughton, 2000). Essentialist theories provide over simplistic explanations about children’s sex and gender by arguing that male and female behaviour is biologically inevitable (Browne, 2004; Jones and Jacka, 1995). Social constructionists challenge this perspective and argue that gender roles are taught by
culture (Costello and Duncan, 2006). Social constructionism maintains male-female binaries by understanding gendered identities to be mutually defining and mutually exclusive (Kehily, 2002). Social constructionist theories argue that girls and boys passively internalise ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ ‘roles’ with variations understood as deviance or socialisation failure (Renold, 2005). Both of these theories have been heavily criticised because they fail to identify that gender is not inevitable because children are active, can make their own choices, and can resist and challenge gender norms (Davis, 1989b; Jones and Jacka, 1995; McDowell, 1999). The shortcomings of essentialist and socialisation theories are used to justify the use of feminist poststructuralism as a conceptual framework in this study.

Rather than looking at gender as something that is fixed and universal, feminist poststructuralists understand that children are not simply born with or socialised into gender-appropriate behaviours (Blaise, 2005a; Davis, 1989a; Kehily, 2002). Instead, importance is placed on how children take an active role in constructing their gender through talk, actions, and interactions with each other and the social world (Blaise, 2009). Feminist poststructuralists engage with ideas such as subjectivity, discourse, agency, resistance, power and knowledge to investigate gender relations and social exchanges between young children (Blaise, 2009; Youdell, 2010). All of these notions and theoretical tools are central to understanding sex, gender, and sexuality in this study.

The body of work by Blaise (2005a; 2005b; 2009) is key in its sociological engagements with feminist poststructuralist theories to understand gender. Blaise engages with Butler’s concepts (‘heterosexual matrix’ and performativity) to highlight how young children take an active part in ‘doing’ gender by socially constructing meanings about femininities and masculinities from the gender discourses available to them in their everyday worlds.
Gregson and Rose (2000), Thomas (2005; 2008; 2011) and Evans (2006), amongst countless other geographers have all drawn on Butler’s feminist poststructuralist work to understand gender and identity within school settings. Evans used performativity to understand the significance of school girls’ gendered and heterosexual performances in shaping their disaffection with a sports curriculum. For Gregson and Rose, spaces do not pre-exist their performances, instead, specific performances bring these spaces into being. As such, it is not only gender identities that need to be thought of as performative but also the spaces in which they are performed.

This sub-section has introduced literature concerning the geographies of gender and outlined how this sub-discipline has engaged with feminist poststructuralism. The next section reviews literature on children’s geographies.

2.2.2 Children’s geographies and the ‘new’ social studies of childhood

The notion of childhood is a relatively recent phenomenon in the social sciences (Jenks, 2005). Aries (1962) book the Centuries of childhood has a status as foundational work in the history of childhood and is credited with the notion that childhood is a social construction because it is not a universal constant or natural category but instead an ever shifting concept (Jenks, 2005; Holloway and Valentine, 2000; Wilson, 1980).

A radical shift within childhood studies was the rapid growth of the social approach to studying children from the 1990s onwards (Christensen and James, 2008; Holloway and Valentine, 2000; James et al., 1998). This notion is termed the ‘new’ social studies of childhood and signified a break away from previous sociological work by studying children as social actors, as beings in their own right rather than as pre-adult becomings (Brannen and O’Brien, 1995; Holloway and Valentine, 2000; James et al., 1998). This literature emphasises children’s agency to shape their own worlds as they are not simply considered to be passive subjects of the ‘forces’ of
socialisation (e.g. the family or the school) (Holloway, 2014: 380; Holt, 2006; 2011; James and Prout, 1990). Recognising children as competent social actors requires research with children rather than on children (Darbyshire et al., 2005; Holloway, 2014).

Feminists and poststructuralists have engaged with these ideas to emphasise the importance of incorporating children’s voices and experiences within research (Holloway and Valentine, 2000). For example, the body of work by Epstein (1995; 1997; 1998) recognises that children are active in the construction and determination of their own social lives and therefore highlights that it is important to listen to children’s voices. I include this literature to justify why an ethnographic approach was utilised for this study (see sections 3.2 and 3.3). However, Gagen (2004; 2010), Holt (2006) and Vanderbeck (2008), amongst countless others have all suggested that whilst children have agency, wider social structures also need to be analysed because children’s lives are also formed by forces beyond their control (Prout and James, 1990). Both of these perspectives have particular methodological implications and will be revisited in Chapter 3.

Aitken (1994) has been credited for introducing these interdisciplinary debates to human geography and laid the foundations for critical children’s geographies. Geographical approaches have made an important contribution to the ‘new’ social studies of childhood by including a sense of spatiality (Holloway and Valentine, 2000). Children’s geographers have stressed the importance of place in the construction of childhood and revealed the complexity of spaces in and through which children’s lives are constituted and reconstituted (Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson, 2011). I include this literature to justify why a nursery has been used as the study area for this project (see section 3.1).
Now that I have outlined the key ideas that children’s geographers are currently engaging in I will outline another body of literature concerned with this study: the geographies of education.

### 2.2.3 Geographical and sociological engagements with education

The 2000s saw a growing interest in education amongst geographers (Hall, 2015; Holloway et al., 2010; Kraftl, 2013). Geographies of education, which largely emerged out of children’s geographies, is concerned with accounting for the voices and subjectivities of children’s experiences of, and participation within, everyday schooling spaces (see Collins and Coleman, 2008; Vanderbeck and Dunkley, 2004). Schools play a central role in constituting social identities (Holloway et al., 2010; Holloway and Jöns, 2012). While the design and administration of the curriculum is important, so too are how children experience the informal spaces (Holloway and Valentine, 2000). The informal spaces are the spaces in which children “learn, enforce, reject and rewrite” what they are taught in the formal educational setting (Holloway et al., 2010: 589).

There are a number of sociological and geographical studies exploring the school as a specific social and cultural arena for the production and reproduction of gender and sexual identities (for example, Davis and Banks, 1995; DePalma and Atkinson, 2009; Epstein, 1995; 1998; Renold, 2005). The majority of this research centres on the primary school, which means that older children have been given greater/disproportionate focus (McNamee and Seymour, 2012). The pre-school context remains under-developed and in need of further exploration (Costello and Duncan, 2006). However, there is a small, but expanding body of research using the perspective of feminist poststructuralism to queer gender and sexuality in pre-schools (Blaise, 2005a; Davis, 1989a; Lyttleton-Smith, 2015; Robinson, 2002). This study responds to this research gap by focusing on preschools and foregrounding children as active agents in this institutional setting.
This section has reviewed literature concerning the geographies of education. This next section will summarise the key points of this chapter.

2.3 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has established a theoretical framework for this study and provided a comprehensive review of existing literature relevant to the empirical chapters. The first section (2.1) outlined the theoretical framework for this study. In the first part of this section I outlined feminist poststructuralism and queer theory (2.1.1). Followed by an outline of the specific concepts that I apply throughout this study; heterosexual matrix, heterosexual hegemony and performativity (2.1.2 and 2.1.3). The second section (2.2) reviewed sociological and geographical literature in the geographies of gender, children’s geographies, and geographies of education. This chapter has explained how this study responds to the research gap within geographies of gender, children’s geographies and geographies of education by focusing on the preschool as a specific social and cultural arena for the production and reproduction of gender identities. The body of knowledge that has been reviewed has been significantly influenced by the methodological implications of the ‘new’ social studies of childhood. This chapter has highlighted that certain aspects of this literature have methodological relevance for this study.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Chapter Introduction

In chapter 2 I provided a comprehensive review of existing literature relevant to a study concerned with children, gender and education. In this chapter, the research methods and analytical tools used to collect and analyse data will be outlined. The research objectives for this study have guided the selection of the research site and have informed the qualitative, ethnographic approach outlined in this chapter. This chapter will firstly outline a brief description of the study area (3.1). Secondly, I discuss the rationale for using participant observations and interviews, with a reflection on the limitations faced (3.2 and 3.3). Finally, there will be a brief explanation of how the data was analysed (3.4).

3.1 The study area

Rainbow Nursery (pseudonym) is located in Brighton. Thirty five children attend the nursery, there are fourteen practitioners working full and part-time, thirteen of which are female and one is male. The nursery was selected because the nursery manager had a particular interest in exploring gender and was willing to have a researcher undertake research within the nursery. Gaining access to the study area was achieved by attending the nursery in a voluntary capacity over the summer (2015). During this time a rapport was built up with the manager and I presented and discussed the research proposal of my project (see Appendix E). I gained informed consent from the nursery manager which granted me access to the nursery as an ethnographic researcher. The justification for using a nursery is to respond to the ‘new’ social studies of childhood’s call for a more diverse children’s geography (Jenks, 2005). There is an “urgent” need to represent the presence of younger children’s voices and experiences within sociological and geographical discourses.
because they have previously been underrepresented (Horton, 2001: 164; James, 1990; Valentine, 1997).

This section has provided a brief description of the study area and has justified its use as the site of investigation. The next section will explain and evaluate the use of observations.

3.2 Participant observations

A small-scale ethnography was undertaken at Rainbow Nursery which involved observing children and staff for two hours once a week over a five week period (February- March 2016). The aim of the ethnography was to gain an understanding of how gender is constructed in Rainbow Nursery through the accounts of those who identify as belonging to it (Cook, 2005; Delamount, 2004; Katz, 2002). A problem encountered during the early stages of the ethnography were the “ethical difficulties” associated with research involving children (Holloway and Valentine, 2000: 7; Horton, 2008). For this project it was the lengthy ethical process that created hurdles because it delayed the research process. The literature within the ‘new’ social studies of childhood highlights that researching with children is “urgent” enough to justify tackling the methodological barriers encountered when researching children (Horton, 2001: 164; Epstein, 1998).

Parents/guardians were given an information sheet about the study and were asked to give permission for their children to be observed by a researcher via a standard consent form (see Appendix C and D). An ethical consideration is that literature within the ‘new’ social studies of childhood talks about using child-centered information sheets to allow children to decide whether or not they wish to participate in research (Cutter-Mackenzie et al., 2013; Horton 2008). The issue with child-centered information sheets is that they are usually used for children who are
above four years of age because at this age children can better grasp information (Bell, 2008). For this research, using this approach would have been inappropriate because the children attending Rainbow Nursery range from two to five years of age and as a result the younger children would not have been able to comprehend this information (Cutter-Mackenzie et al., 2013).

Although the children in my study were not suitably verbal to interview, documenting their lives ethnographically presented the opportunity to become aware of their views and experiences (Dockrell et al., 2000; Lyttleton-Smith, 2015). Ethnography involves the researcher “immersing” themselves in a group, for an extended period of time, observing behavior, listening to what is said in conversation and asking questions (Bryman, 2008: 402). However, due to this study being an undergraduate project it was not possible to undertake a full-scale ethnography for an extended period of time. Instead, the participant observations were in line with a form of micro-ethnography which involves spending a short period of time focusing on a particular topic (Wolcott, 1990).

Literature in the ‘new’ social studies of childhood has methodological implications for this study (Holloway and Valentine, 2000; James et al., 1998). The literature review established that children are ‘competent’ in the construction of their own social worlds and therefore research should be with rather than on children (Christensen & James, 2008; see section 2.2.2). This understanding is implemented in this project by adopting a ‘least adult’ role to assist me in learning from the children rather than about the children (Mandell, 1988). On a practical level researching with children involved me engaging, playing and having conversations with the children at the nursery without taking on the discursive position of practitioner as “being in charge” (Randall, 2012: 41). The aim of the ‘least adult’ role is to reduce the “power differential” between the children and the researcher in order for the children to feel comfortable and to allow the researcher to understand things form the children’s point of view (Epstein, 1998: 30) However, I found that during my ethnographic visits embodying the ‘least adult’ role had its limitations (Warming, 2011). The children
often wanted and, indeed, demanded my attention when they were upset, and I was on occasion approached by a child pleading for me to comfort them, a consequence of the children positioning me as “career” (Epstein, 1998: 33). In such instances, I would attempt to find the nearest practitioner so that I could avoid being an ‘adult’ figure. This was not always possible, so inevitably I ended up falling into the adult role of “being in charge” (Randall, 2012: 41). It is clear that despite best attempts to adopt a ‘least adult’ role the children still treated me as an adult which highlights the difficulty to resist adult roles completely (Warming, 2011).

Whilst conducting the ethnography field notes were kept in the form of mental notes (Cook, 2005). Notes about events, people, conversations, my impressions and feelings were noted (Bryman, 2008). This process was done away from the children and practitioners to reduce the chance of them feeling feel self-conscious and altering their behaviour (Lofland and Lofland, 1995). I extended my field notes in a field diary, by reflecting on my 'least adult' role and adding theoretical notes (Bryman, 2004). The field notes and field diary were kept confidential and anonymous through the use of pseudonyms (Bryman, 2008; Sanjek, 1990).

It is important to recognise your positionality and be reflexive when you are undertaking qualitative research (England, 1994; Mohammad, 2001; Valentine, 2010). This is because it is important to think about “who you are” and how your own identity will “shape” the interactions that you have with others (Valentine, 2010: 113). When doing research in an early educational setting gender is an important consideration that heavily influences research relations (Blasie, 2005a). Horton (2001) discusses the anxieties that he faced as a male researcher working within an early education setting. Being a female researcher, I did not experience Horton’s sense of anxiety and instead I was readily accepted by both the nursery children and the practitioners. Upon reflection, I recognise that nurseries are predominately a female setting, and as a result my female gender identity allowed me to feel comfortable and ‘in place’ within the nursery setting (Burgess and Carter, 1992; Horton, 2001; Hutchings et al., 2007).
This section has explained the rationale for using observations with a reflection on the limitations faced. The next section will describe, justify and analyse the use of interviews.

### 3.3 Interviews

Interviews were chosen to complement the ethnography for various reasons. Firstly, it is common practice for participant observers to gather supplementary data through interviews (Bryman, 2008; Silverman, 2011; Valentine, 2010). Secondly, (in response to literature in the ‘new’ social studies of childhood) acknowledging that children are ‘competent’ does not mean that they are all-knowing (Holloway and Valentine, 2000). Therefore, it is also important to listen to parents, educators etc who have the power to shape children’s lives (ibid).

One-to-one interviews were undertaken with four practitioners working at the nursery. The practitioners were given an information sheet about the study and were asked to give informed consent via a standard consent form (Silverman, 2011; see Appendix C and D). Three of the interviewees were female and one was male. The sampling strategy for the interviews was a “theoretically motivated decision” (Valentine, 2010: 112). I anticipated that gender is an important influence on the practitioner’s perception and experience of gender within the nursery context. Based on this assumption I was eager to recruit and interview the only male practitioner to include a male’s perspective in this study. The remaining three interviewees were recruited with the help of the nursery manager, who announced in a staff meeting that I needed three practitioners who were willing to be interviewed as part of my research.

The duration of the interviews were approximately one hour long. Practitioners at Rainbow Nursery were interviewed in a room away from where the main activities
were taking place to facilitate privacy and to maximize the production of good quality audio recordings (Valentine, 2005). After the interview, I noted down non-verbal interactions because these interactions can change the significance of what is being said (Valentine, 2010). The interviews were then transcribed and analysed (Silverman, 2011). The information yielded from the observations and interviews were kept confidential and anonymous through the use of pseudonyms for the name of the nursery, practitioners and children (Valentine, 2010). For data protection reasons the audio recordings were kept secure by storing them on a password protected laptop and deleting them after transcription (ibid).

The relatively flexible nature of the semi-structured interview and its capacity to allow interviewees to construct their own accounts allowed me to gain a deep insight into the practitioners’ thoughts and experiences by revealing “rich detailed answers” (Bryman, 2008: 437). This would have been more difficult to achieve if I had undertaken a structured interview where shorter and less detailed answers are often the outcome (Valentine, 2010). During the interviews an interview schedule (of specific topics to be covered) was followed (see Appendix A). However, there was great “leeway” in how the respondents could reply (Bryman, 2008: 438).

This section has outlined and justified the research methodologies for this project. The next section will explain and justify the analytical approach taken.

3.4 Data Analysis

The “field materials” generated from the research methods are the observation notes and interview transcripts (Crang, 2005: 118). The data was coded by hand and a grounded theory approach was adopted. Grounded theory is appropriate for qualitative data analysis because it is firmly imbedded in the understanding that hypothesis are developed through “the close analysis of data” (Silverman, 2011: 67).
The purpose of grounded theory is “theory construction” (Charmaz and Bryant, 2011: 292). Open coding was used to apply grounded theory, this process involved going through the ‘field materials’ one sentence at a time and noting down the initial ideas that emerged (Rapley, 2011). The benefit of thoroughly reading through the material is to insure that you “get a feel” for the field materials and to insure that “nothing is missed” (Crang, 2005: 222). The codes that I have given the data are not “pre-given” and as a qualitative researcher I am not seeking to be representative or to find one absolute truth (ibid: 222; Pringle et al., 2011). Instead, the aim of analysing the ‘field materials’ is to appreciate and seek to understand how individual people experience and make sense of their own everyday lives (Valentine, 2005).

This section has explained the theoretical position taken within this analysis and justified its use. The next section will summarise the key points presented in this chapter.

3.5 Chapter Conclusion

In summary, the chapter has outlined and justified the use of observations and interviews. I have critically reflected on the research methodology so as to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the research methods utilised in this study. I have demonstrated throughout this chapter the difficulties of doing research with children. The main issues for this study were the lengthy ethical process, the concerns regarding consent, and the difficulty of applying a ‘least adult role’ in practice. The final section (3.4) justified why a grounded theory approach was appropriate. It also addressed that the purpose of the data analysis is not to be find one absolute truth but instead to understand how individuals make sense of their own everyday lives.
Chapter 4: The children’s understanding of gender

4.0 Chapter Introduction

In Chapter 3 I outlined the research methods and analytical tools used to collect and analyse data. In this chapter I address the first research objective – to identify the gender discourses which children are exposed to before they arrive at nursery. Section 4.1 starts by exploring the context within which children learn about gender expectations. The arguments presented in this section inform the analysis of the three subsequent sub-sections. The first two sub-sections examine the ways in which children bring ‘their understanding’ of gender into the nursery setting; through ‘their choice’ of dress and lunchbox (4.1.1 and 4.1.2). Quotation marks are used to encapsulate that children’s understandings and choices are shaped by their parent’s understandings and choices. The final sub-section seeks to access the discourses of gender which children draw upon to categorise each other as boy or girl (4.1.3).

4.1 ‘Gendered society’

The children’s understandings of gender and ‘their choice’ of dress and lunchbox cannot be investigated as pure phenomena, as though they were unaffected by society (Blaise, 2005a). The focus is therefore on the discourse of gender that society imposes on individuals for understanding themselves and others (ibid).

Daniel: “The society we live in is hugely gendered and places a lot of emphasis, importance and value on distinct gender lines and gender roles”.

Interview with nursery practitioner, Rainbow Nursery [23rd October 2016].

I will firstly consider the above extract from Daniel’s interview and his response when asked to explain his understanding of gender. The first part to draw attention to is the way he highlights that society is “hugely gendered”. The word “gendered” is used to describe society on several occasions in two other interviews with Amanda and
Hannah. By describing society as “hugely gendered” Daniel has described a social constructionist understanding of gender. Daniel suggests that society works hard at sustaining the male-female dualism which constructs males and females as opposites with differing gender roles (Francis and Skelton, 2001; see section 2.2.1). The above description of society echoes that of other studies, such as Davis (1982; 1989a), Davis and Banks (1995), and DePalma Atkinson (2009) who all state that society works to reiterate rigid gendered roles. Davis explains that the way gender is constructed in our society means that in learning to be people, children must learn the way masculinity and femininity is done and “they must get it right” (1989a: 2). From this perspective, to be understood as acceptable members of society, children’s task is to learn the gender roles appropriate to their sex (Lyttleton-Smith, 2015; MacNaughton, 2000). I am not arguing that children’s gender identities are social constructions and that their gender identity is a relatively fixed end product of a gendered society (Holloway, and Valentine, 2000). Instead, I am arguing that children who have been brought into the social world via the dominant discourses of gender have internalised these discourses (Davis and Banks, 1995; Grieshaber, 1998).

This section has highlighted that the discourse of gender that society imposes on individuals’ works to keep the male-female dualism intact. In the next section I consider how the children internalise this discourse through ‘their choice’ of dress.
Amanda’s and Daniel’s comments reveal that the nursery children have a “strong” desire to correctly ‘do’ gender through ‘choosing’ to wear appropriately gendered clothing. Blaise (2005a) argues that the clothes the children choose to wear during the nursery day is the most obvious way in which they physically practice gender and identify themselves as distinctly male or female. As discussed in the literature review (see section 2.1.3), gender is constituted through the stylization of the body and, therefore, must be understood as the everyday way in which performances of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self (Butler, 1993). The words “fear” and “criticised” suggest that children understand that by not wearing clothing “assigned to their gender” they are putting the “illusion” of a fixed and stable gender identity at risk (Butler, 1990: 56). The children recognise that to be a non-contradictory person within a discourse of the male-female dualism one must wear correctly gendered clothing (Davis, 1989b; Davis and Banks, 1995). Blaise (2005a; 2005b; 2009), Lyttleton-Smith (2015) and Renold (2005) all make a similar argument; to be considered as having a ‘normal’ and acceptable gender identity children feel compelled to adopt the ‘correct’ clothing for their gender.
Taking oneself up as distinctly male or female, and understanding that to mean opposite to the other, then requires maintenance of the dominant gender discourse which sustains that oppositional difference (Davis and Banks, 1995). This discourse is situated within hegemonic forms of masculinity and femininity (Blaise, 2005a). In this respect, being a ‘proper’ girl or boy involves investing in a heterosexual identity and projecting a coherent and abiding heterosexual self (Hall, 2015; see section 2.1.2). The observation in the nursery (above), which comments on the children’s ‘choice’ of clothes, highlights that there are a number of items of dress which are used by nursery children to mark their sex in order to symbolically maintain the sexes as clearly distinct (Lyttleton-Smith, 2015). The nursery children’s ‘choice’ of dress echoes that of other studies which have also found that skirts, ribbons, clips, and jewellery signify femininity and guns, trousers, and superheroes signify masculinity (Davis, 1989a; Evans, 2006; Paechter, 2007).

Not uncommon, and in line with other studies undertaken in preschool/primary school settings (Blaise, 2005a) my research suggests that the most popular and dominant way of ‘doing girl’ in the nursery was by accessing and embodying heterosexualized femininity (Ali, 2003; Lyttleton-Smith, 2015; Paechter, 2010; Reay, 2001; Renold, 2005). Blaise’s (2005a) study of a kindergarten in the U.S. describes this visible display of femininity as ‘girly girls’. Blaise’s notion of ‘girly girls’ emphasises that occupying this subject position involves wearing “pink, frilly, and

**Observational notes, Rainbow Nursery [1st February, 2016]**

The girls are either wearing leggings, skirts or dresses. Very few are wearing jeans. The majority of the girl's clothes are pink or pastel. A lot of the girls’ clothes are frilly, have flowery prints, princess images or sparkles on them.

The clothes the boys are wearing look very comfortable and many of them are wearing tracksuits, jeans, t-shirts and jumpers. The colours of the boy’s clothes are blues, greens and greys. Common prints on the boy’s clothes are rugby/football images, superheroes and animals.
cute outfits” (2005a: 61). The nursery girls are using ‘their choice’ of dress to physically practice femaleness by self-construction themselves as ‘girly-girls’ (ibid). This construction of ‘girly girls’ is in opposition to notions of masculinity but also against other concepts of femininity thus tightening the definitions of acceptable ways to ‘do girl’ in the nursery (Ali, 2003; Murnen and Byrne, 1991).

Renold’s (2005) and Paechter’s (2010) research in primary schools found that girls either presented themselves as ‘girly girls’ or rejected this by distancing themselves from girly femininities and becoming an “honorary boy” (a tomboy) (Paechter, 2010: 222). Conversely, my research findings did not show that the nursery girls were rejecting the subject position of ‘girly girl’. It is important to acknowledge that the children in my study were much younger than those in Renold’s and Paechter’s study which may help to explain why the girls in my study did not negotiate the discourse of the male-female dualism to become a tomboy.

This section has highlighted that the nursery children are performing and embodying hegemonic conceptions of (hetero) masculinity and femininity (through ‘their choice’ of dress). This next section will explore another way the nursery children maintain the dominant gender discourse.
4.1.2 Lunchboxes

Interviewer: “Tell me about the children’s lunchboxes”

Hannah: “The lunchboxes are an example of what the children bring into the nursery. All you have to do is look at the children’s lunch boxes to see that not many parents feel confident to challenge gender stereotypes”.

Daniel: “[I]nevitably, the majority of children slot into traditional stereotypical gender roles and have lunchboxes that are stereotypical for their gender”.

Amanda: “[Y]eah the girls have the Frozen ones” (Frozen is a 2013 animated Disney film).

Interview with nursery practitioners, Rainbow Nursery [18th; 23rd October; 26th November 2016].

It has emerged through comparing the above interview extracts that the majority of the children keep the male-female dualism intact through ‘choosing’ to have a stereotypically gendered lunchbox. From a feminist poststructuralist perspective, pleasures derive from the relations between power and discourse; and the most dominant discourses in young children’s lives are those that define the ‘normal’ ways to be boys and girls (MacNaughton, 2000). This notion is further exhibited by Julie’s comment that “the girls have the Frozen lunchboxes (Frozen is a 2013 animated Disney film). Frozen lunchboxes, which have an image of Queen Elsa in a princess dress, serves to produce dominant discourses of heteronormative sexual attractiveness by presenting an ideal femininity centered on “prettiness” (Lyttleton-Smith, 2015: 15).

A social constructionist understanding of gender would suggest that children passively embody the gender practices they are presented with (Paechter, 2001). In contrast, a feminist poststructuralist perspective would suggest that the nursery girls are actively choosing to invest in hegemonic conceptions of femininity (through ‘their
choice’ of having a Frozen lunchbox) (Blaise, 2005a; Lyttleton-Smith, 2015). The nursery girls are embodying this discourse because they find pleasure in getting their gender ‘right’ and being ‘normal’ for their specific culture, time and place (Weedon, 1997). This is consistent with the work of MacNaughton, who found that in Australian society having a Barbie lunchbox appears a proper way to perform girl, so girls are likely to have a Barbie lunchbox, because it is more pleasurable for them to “get it right” (2000: 131).

This section has highlighted that those children who ‘choose’ a stereotypical lunchbox remain firmly within dominant constructions of masculinity and femininity. This next section will seek to access the discourses of gender which children draw upon to categorise each other as boy or girl.

4.1.3 Mike’s response to Jamie

Observational notes, Rainbow Nursery [9th February, 2016]

I am with the children during lunch today and I am sitting next to a child called Jamie.

Jamie is wearing an all grey tracksuit, has blonde curly hair tied up in a neat pony tail and is wearing a hair clip. Despite having a Thomas the Tank Engine lunchbox and wearing a tracksuit I assume that Jamie is a girl because Jamie’s friend (Mike) refers to Jamie as ‘she’.

I become unsure of Jamie’s gender identity when I hear a practitioner say to a child “you need to finish your lunch, look he has” (the practitioner says this as she points to Jamie’s empty lunchbox).

As I am about to leave the nursery I have a chat with Daniel to clear up my confusion. He confirms that Jamie is a boy and that it is common for children/practitioners to be unsure of Jamie’s gender identity.
It could be argued that Jamie’s gender identity differs from most children in the nursery because he does not appear to be getting his gender ‘right’. Jamie ‘chooses’ to perform boy in ways which differ from the hegemonic masculine way of styling hair in the nursery (having short hair with no hair accessories). An element to draw attention to is the way Mike categorises Jamie’s gender as female. Butler (1990) argues that gaps and cracks in gendered performance can make the subject’s performance less coherent (see section 2.1.3). It could be argued that Jamie’s gender identity reflects Butler’s (1990) notion of incoherence since Jamie’s choice to adopt practices coded as feminine (deciding to tie his hair up in a distinctly girlish pony tail) has resulted in Mike mistaking Jamie for a girl.

Renold (2004) and Bartholomaeus (2013), among others, have studied the possible ways to live out the category ‘boy’ in non-hegemonic ways in the primary school setting. Renold recounts that when boys engaged in plural gender practices (practices which differ from a discourse of (local) hegemonic masculinity) it can present challenges to practices which relate to discourses of hegemonic masculinity. This reflects Butler (1990), who argues that gaps and cracks in performances can open up discursive spaces and create opportunities for alternative gendered performances to emerge. However, Mike’s response to Jamie emphasises that discontinuities in gendered performance do not necessarily result in gender norms being challenged. Instead, they can serve to reproduce and reinforce them, depending upon the social context and the audience (Lloyd, 1999; see section 2.1.2). The social context in this incidence is Rainbow Nursery and the audience is Mike, who refers to Jamie as a she presumably because Jamie stylises his hair in a distinctly feminine way. By describing Jamie as a she Mike has unconsciously showed that discontinuities in Jamie’s gendered performance do not serve to challenge the gendered norm.

This reflects Browne’s (2004) observation that children draw upon and apply dominant discourses to categorise each other as boy or girl. Children must learn
signifiers such as hair length, dress, and activity which helps them decide whether someone is male or female (*ibid*). Through learning how to identify each other through dominant discourses (signifiers) children are taking the discourse of the male-female dualism on as their own which requires that a boy does not adopt practices coded as feminine, and vice versa (Grieshaber, 1998). The discourse of gender that Mike is accessing to categorise Jamie’s gender identity challenges the feminist poststructuralist notion of there being various ways of being a girl or boy (Blaise, 2005a; Butler, 1990; Gregson and Rose, 2000). Mike’s ability to categorise Jamie as a female serves to reproduce and reinforce that Jamie could not possibly be a boy because he stylises his hair in a distinctly feminine way.

This section has highlighted that nursery children access dominant discourses of gender to categorise each other as boy or girl. This next section will summarise the key arguments made in this chapter.

### 4.3 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the first research objective – to identify the gender discourses which children are exposed to before they arrive at nursery. In 4.1, I highlighted that the discourse of gender that society imposes on individuals’ works to keep the male-female dualism intact. I argue that children who have been brought into the social world via the dominant discourses of gender have internalised those discourses. In 4.1.1 and 4.1.2, I identify two of the most obvious ways that children internalise this discourse; through ‘their choice’ of dress and lunchbox. I argue that nursery children perform and embody dominant gender discourses because they find pleasure in ‘getting it right’ and being ‘normal’ for their specific culture, time and place. Getting your gender ‘right’ understands that to be a boy one must embody practices coded as ‘masculine’ and to be a girl one must adopt practices coded as ‘feminine’. In 4.3, I highlighted that nursery children access dominant discourses of gender to categorise each other as boy or girl. This restricts the definitions of the
acceptable ways to ‘do’ girl and boy in the nursery. In the next chapter I explore the
nursery’s understanding of gender and reveal how this understanding effects
institutional practice.
Chapter 5: Institutional Practice

5.0 Chapter Introduction

In Chapter 4 I established that most children at Rainbow Nursery are exposed to the dominant discourses of gender before they arrive at nursery. At nursery, the children encounter another discourse, which may agree with or contradict the discourse of gender they are exposed to before they enter nursery. In this chapter I address the second research objective – to examine the nursery’s understanding of gender and explore how this understanding effects institutional practice. First, I explore the nursery’s perspective on gender (5.2). Section 5.3 indicates the importance of having a male practitioner working in the nursery. Next, the resources the nursery uses will be examined, in particular the use of feminist books (5.4). The final section highlights the importance of staff discussions, in terms of challenging the staff’s gender stereotypes (5.5).

5.1 The Nursery’s perspective on gender

Interviewer: “Tell me about Rainbow Nursery’s understanding of gender”

Daniel: “[B]ecause if you are only presented with one way of doing something then there is no alternative. And we are not all the same. There are so many different ways of being a boy or girl”.

Interview with nursery practitioner, Rainbow Nursery [23rd October 2016].

In the above extract Daniel’s narrative reflects a feminist poststructuralist perspective of gender. By describing that “there are so many different ways of being a boy or girl”, Daniel recognises that gender categories are not fixed, therefore, gender is a role that children can take up and change at their own will (Davis, 1993). This recognises work from Butler (1990) who theorizes that performative acts come to
constitute gender and hence gender is capable of being enacted in various ways (see sections 2.2.1 and 2.1.2). The above description of gender echoes that of other studies, such as DePalma and Atkinson (2008; 2009), DePalma and Jennett (2010), and Hall (2015) who all argue that a liberating aspect of feminist poststructuralism is that it allows a recognition that multiple discourses can be participated with. What is missing from Daniel’s understanding of gender is the idea that the subject (the child) is not simply free in choosing which gender he or she performs (Blaise, 2005b). Butler (1990) explains that gender is not simply an individual’s choice, instead, the subject’s gendered performances are confined to the terms of gender’s regulatory frame (see section 2.1.2). Similar concepts are used by Gregson and Rose (2000), who engage with Butler’s work to establish that in geography there is a consensus around performativity that gendered performances exist with a constraining script.

Interviewer: “Tell me about Rainbow Nursery’s understanding of gender”

Hannah: “[S]o we do have a responsibility, it’s not necessarily to challenge but to provide options and alternatives. You don’t want to be challenging a child that maybe is very stereotypical for a particular gender. Our responsibility is to provide alternatives, and make them aware that they don’t always have to go down that route”.

Julie: “[Y]ou can be more comfortable with yourself as a person if you’re not restricted by gender stereotypes. Because gender stereotypes can make the children feel uncomfortable about making a choice that they might not really be true to.”

Interview with nursery practitioner, Rainbow Nursery [18th October; 16th November 2016].

With the nursery’s performative understanding of gender having been established another aspect of the nursery’s understanding of gender can now be explored. The second aspect is shown by the above extract from Hannah’s interview whereby she explains that “our responsibility is to provide alternatives, and make them (the
children) aware that they don’t always have to go down that route”. The interpretation of “route” can come to be understood as children’s attachment to exclusively follow the “route” of performing stereotypically “for a particular gender”. Hannah expresses that the practitioners have a “responsibility” to provide “alternatives” to “stereotypical” gender roles. From a feminist poststructuralist perspective, Hannah’s comment can be seen as a way of expressing that children should be free to take up positions which are associated with the opposite sex (Renold, 2000).

Julie elaborates on Hannah’s comment by suggesting that providing alternatives is the nursery’s duty because “gender stereotypes” can “restrict” a child’s choices by making them adopt gender performances that “they might not really be true to”. DePalma and Atkinson (2009), Evans (1998; 2006), and Thomas (2008), among others, argue that children need to be given access to a discourse which gives them freedom to position themselves in multiple ways, some of which will be recognisably ‘feminine’ and some ‘masculine’. I argue that this presentation of discourse contradicts the presentation of discourse most children are exposed to before they enter nursery because it challenges the notion that to be female or male is taken to mean opposite to the other (Davis, 1993).

This section has established that the discourse of gender that the nursery expresses is in line with a feminist poststructuralist understating of gender. It is now worth reflecting on how having a male practitioner working at Rainbow Nursery supports the discourse of gender that the nursery articulates.
5.2 Daniel’s role in the nursery

The above extract highlights the assumption that as a man working in early years education you will serve as a role model (Brownhill, 2015; Hutchings et al., 2007; Martino, 2008). This supports Brownhill (2014), who explains that men who work in untypical occupations are seen as important role models for children. For Daniel, the daily visibility of a male practitioner represents a physical disruption to the conventionally female space of the nursery (Brownhill, 2015) with his own non-female body representing a space in itself – “the geography closest in” (Rich, 1986: 212). What Daniel demonstrates here is that despite childcare being constructed as feminine, childcare is not fixed within the female gender category and therefore “men can do this job” (Burgess and Carter, 1992; Hutchings et al., 2007; Massey, 1994). With this in mind, having a male practitioner working in the nursery supports the discourse of gender that was established in 5.1; that gender roles are not fixed and therefore they can be changed (Blasie, 2005a; 2009; DePalma and Atkinson, 2009).

So far in this section the term ‘role model’ has been used to define male presence in early years education (Brownhill, 2015). However, a critique of this definition is that it does not specify what sort of behaviour is required of a man to be a role model (Hutchings et al., 2007). In other words, just being a male within an early years
setting is sufficient enough (ibid). This critique is addressed by Daniel when he explains that he is “relatively good” at his job. Daniel suggests that he is not just an important role model because he is a man present in an early years setting (Brownhill, 2014). Instead, he is also a role model because of his behaviour (his competent skill within childcare) (Hutchings et al., 2007). With this established, the additional ways that Daniel acts as a role model for the nursery children can be investigated further.

Amanda: “Yesterday a girl looked at my earrings and said “only girls can have earrings” and I said “no Daniel at the nursery has so many earrings”. She said “oh is that because he is a girl?” and I said “no he is a boy, it is ok for boys to have earrings”.

Interview with nursery practitioner, Rainbow Nursery [26th November 2016].

According to Francis and Skelton’s (2001) male teachers may have motivations to draw on and exaggerate behaviours which are more in line with conventional hegemonic masculinity given the perception of early years teaching as feminine. Francis and Skelton argue that male teachers seek to establish themselves as “properly masculine” by constructing their masculinity in opposition to femininity (2001: 10). It is argued that Daniel does not construct his masculinity in opposition to femininity because he chooses to adopt practices coded as ‘feminine’ (by wearing “so many earrings”). This reflects Connell’s (2002) term ‘counter-hegemonic masculinity’ which refers to practices which challenge or reject the concept of ‘hegemonic masculinity’. Daniel’s behaviour indicates to the children that hegemonic constructions of masculinity and femininity are not fixed because men can adopt practices coded as feminine (highlighted in the above extract when Amanda explains that “it’s ok for boys to have earrings”) (Connell, 1987; Mac an Ghaill, 1994; Renold, 2004; 2009). From a Butlerian standpoint, Daniel is providing the nursery children with alternative performances of masculinity which can create opportunities for alternative gendered performances to emerge (Butler, 1990; see 2.1.2). This supports the discourse of gender established in 5.1; that one should have access to
a discourse in which one’s sex does not limit one to ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ social roles (Blaise, 2005b; Connell, 1995; Lyttleton-Smith, 2015). Despite Daniel role modelling that “it is ok for boys to have earrings” I did not observe any nursery boys with their ears pierced. This is presumably because most nursery children (and their parents) embody and perform the gender discourse which keeps the male-female dualism intact. This discourse understands that to perform gender in the ‘right’ way requires that a boy does not adopt practices coded as feminine, and vice versa (Grieshaber, 1998).

This section has highlighted that Daniel acts as a male role within the nursery because he offers the nursery children less rigid views of masculinity. The subsequent section will show how the nursery uses feminist resources to reinforce their perspective on gender.

5.3 Feminist tales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewer: “Tell me about the resources you use”</th>
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<tr>
<td>Daniel: “[T]here are certain books that we particularly like and will return to quite a lot. Our core books. For example, The Paper Bag Princess, Amazing Grace, Toby’s Doll House and Princess Smartypants.”</td>
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<tr>
<th>Interviewer: “Why are these your core books?”</th>
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<tr>
<td>Daniel: “[W]e deliberately choose resources that challenge traditional gender stereotypes. We don’t just present a ‘Disneyfication’ of childhood, we haven’t just got one role for females and one role for males and with clear gender lines.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Interview with nursery practitioner, Rainbow Nursery [23rd October 2016].
Anti-sexist teaching practices aim to promote gender equity by eliminating gender stereotypes within schools (Blaise, 2005a; Blumberg, 2008; Browne and France, 1986). This section will focus on how the nursery uses feminist books to support their perspective on gender equality. The first element to draw attention to is the way that Daniel highlights that the nursery’s “core books” contain feminist stories (“The Paper Bag Princess, Amazing Grace, Toby's Doll House and Princess Smartypants”). Feminist books contain stories which break from conventional gender subject positions (Evans, 1998).

Take for example the story of The Paper Bag Princess (Munsch, 1980) which is one such unconventional narrative where the classical fairy tale story is shifted so that “traditional gender stereotypes” are reversed (Evans, 1998; Søndergaard, 2002). In contrast to ‘traditional' fairy tales Elizabeth is not constructed as a passive princess, simply waiting to be rescued by her ‘heroic prince’ (Dale et al., 2016; Epstein, 2000; Hall, 2015). Instead, Elizabeth takes on a non-traditional female role, the subject position of a hero (Davis, 1989a). By positioning Elizabeth as a hero she has taken on a masculine position of being active and dominant (Søndergaard, 2002; Wartenberg, 2013). Daniel's comment, “we deliberately choose resources that challenge traditional gender stereotypes”, highlights that feminist books are an important resource for the discursive construction of subject positions outside of traditional gendered relations (Dale et al., 2016; Wohlwend, 2009). This, I argue, is a result of the nursery assuming that discursive change (reading feminist stories to the children) will produce more flexible understandings of gender roles. This agrees with Davis (1989a), Evans (1998), and Hall, (2015), among others, who have found that feminist stories can be used to challenge the discourses through which children have come to understand being male or female in order to make a new narrative of multiple subjectiveness possible.

This section has established that feminist tales support the nursery’s perspective on gender by undercutting assumptions about the appropriate social roles for men and women. This next section will address the importance of staff discussions.
5.4 Staff discussions

Hannah: “I think as practitioners the messages that we put across and the language we use is hugely important. And we have these huge discussions about what messages we give to the children. It is quite nice when we all get together and talk it through. Because without even being aware we can all come in with our own ideas and stereotypes and it’s just about challenging each other. And that’s part of being a very comfortable team. We can do that. And we do often. It’s not always comfortable but we will do and we get to the other end”.

Daniel: “Language becomes such a difficult area because it becomes so ingrained. We would try and insure any language we use was not gendered and was opened up for discussion”.

Interview with nursery practitioner, Rainbow Nursery [18th; 23rd October 2016].

What Hannah and Daniel demonstrate here is that the practitioners at Rainbow Nursery are confident in gently supporting and provoking each other in areas of exploring and challenging the language they use and the ideas and stereotypes that they bring with them. Various scholars (such as Cahill and Adams, 1997; MacNaughton, 2000; and Surtees, 2005) have found that early education practitioners occasionally use language which reinforce gender stereotypes. Hannah and Daniel point out that challenging each other is an important process because the staff may give out “gendered” messages which they themselves may not be aware of. This echoes work of Kawai and Taylor (2011), who recognise the importance for teachers to have reflective discussion to address oppressive social structures.
The above observation extract, which describes the comment I made about Emily’s hair, reaffirms Hannah and Daniel’s interview extract in that it explains that staff are not afraid to challenge each other when “gendered language” and “stereotypes” are used. It appears that as a researcher within the nursery I was not except from being challenged. This is further shown by the above observation extract, whereby Maria challenges my appearance-focused comment by saying “that’s some gendered stuff right there”.

Lyttleton-Smith’s (2015) research, on how gender is produced in a preschool, uncovered a very similar incident to the one described above. Lyttleton-Smith commented that two girls at the nursery looked ‘very pretty’ in their summer dresses. Upon reflection she was in “despair” over the conventional gender messages that her comment would have promoted to the girls (2015: 173). With Lyttleton-Smith’s (2015) research in mind I can begin to reflect on the gendered messages that I presented to Emily. By saying “very pretty”, I have positioned Emily as an object of heterosexual desire because I have acknowledged that performing girl in this particular “heterofeminine” makes Emily attractive (Blasie, 2005a: 25; Renold, 2005). Emily might learn that she gets a good reaction from people if she performs femininity in this particular way and therefore she might choose to reproduce these practices. It is indicated that “without even being aware” I have promoted conventional gender roles through my language. The promotion of conventional gender norms, works to keep the male-female dualism in-tact, which disagrees with

**Observational notes, Rainbow Nursery [11th March 2016]**

Emily comes over, greeting me with a big smile and then twirls her hair to show me that she is wearing her hair in a plait today. Without thinking I smile and comment that she looks “very pretty” before I have time to stop myself.

I instantly regret making such an appearance-focused comment.

As soon as I have made the comment a practitioner (Maria) responds to my comment by saying “that’s some gendered stuff right there”.

Lyttleton-Smith’s (2015) research, on how gender is produced in a preschool, uncovered a very similar incident to the one described above. Lyttleton-Smith commented that two girls at the nursery looked ‘very pretty’ in their summer dresses. Upon reflection she was in “despair” over the conventional gender messages that her comment would have promoted to the girls (2015: 173). With Lyttleton-Smith’s (2015) research in mind I can begin to reflect on the gendered messages that I presented to Emily. By saying “very pretty”, I have positioned Emily as an object of heterosexual desire because I have acknowledged that performing girl in this particular “heterofeminine” makes Emily attractive (Blasie, 2005a: 25; Renold, 2005). Emily might learn that she gets a good reaction from people if she performs femininity in this particular way and therefore she might choose to reproduce these practices. It is indicated that “without even being aware” I have promoted conventional gender roles through my language. The promotion of conventional gender norms, works to keep the male-female dualism in-tact, which disagrees with
the nursery’s perspective on gender (MacNaughton, 2000; see section 5.1). It is this train of thought that has led staff to challenge each other when gendered language, ideas and stereotypes are used in order to reflect on the messages they present to the children.

This section has established that staff at Rainbow Nursery reflect on the gendered messages they give to the children so they can learn and develop from these. This next section will summarise the key points in this chapter.

5.5 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the second research objective – to examine the nursery’s understanding of gender and explore how this understanding effects institutional practice. The chapter considers what a feminist poststructuralism discourse of gender has to offer and how this impacts the nursery’s practices and ways of thinking about teaching. In 5.1 I established that the nursery understands gender from a feminist poststructuralist perspective. The second section (5.2), identified that Daniel acts as an important male role model within Rainbow Nursery because his gendered performance supports the discourse of gender established in 5.1. In 5.3 I established that the nursery uses feminist tales to support their perspective on gender. This, I argue, is a result of the nursery assuming that discursive change will produce more flexible understandings of gender roles. In 5.4 I indicated a limitation of Rainbow Nursery’s efforts to challenge the male-female dualism. Staff at Rainbow Nursery come in with their own “gendered” ideas, stereotypes and language which can serve to keep the male-female dualism intact. This limitation is addressed by staff when they challenge each other and reflect on the messages they promote to the children. In the next chapter I explore how the nursery children negotiate multiple gender discourses within the nursery setting.
Chapter 6: The ‘outcome’ of the merging of two gender discourses

6.0 Chapter Introduction

In chapter 5 I established that the presentation of discourse that the children encounter at Rainbow Nursery contradicts with the discourse that most children have been exposed to before entering the nursery. In this chapter I address the third research objective – to critically explore how the nursery children respond to institutional practice given the gender discourses they are exposed to before arriving at nursery. Section 6.1 seeks to identify how the nursery children respond to the feminist messages presented to them within *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch, 1980). 6.2 identifies the gender discourses which the children are drawing on to make choices within the dressing-up corner. 6.2.1 identifies whether the children’s clothing choices beyond the dressing-up corner differ from the choices they make within the dressing-up corner.

6.1 Children’s responses to feminist tales

The most prominent and influential study of preschool children’s reaction to *The Paper Bag Princess* (Munsch, 1980) was implemented by Davies (1989a). Davis’s study found that, in hearing the story, most children thought Elizabeth was ‘out of line’ for not marrying her prince. Davis and Banks (1995), Epstein (2000), and Hall (2015), among others, support this finding and explain that many children respond to the story by re-establishing Elizabeth as a conventional princess by explaining that it’s disgusting that Elizabeth did not wash and dress properly and if she cleans up then the prince would perhaps have married her anyway.
Interviewer: “How do the children respond to The Paper Bag Princess?”

Amanda: “[A]t the end Elizabeth rescues the prince and the prince is displeased with her because she looks messy. And she doesn’t marry him in the end. And we have talked about it and sometimes children will say “oh but she marries him later”. And then I ask “what happens when she marries him later”. Then the children say “they will live in a big castle”.

But then I say “what happens when she doesn’t marry him?” And they don’t have any answer for it. And I say “well she doesn’t marry him and she lives in her own big castle”. And they kind of don’t get that. And they do challenge it”

Interview with nursery practitioner, Rainbow Nursery [26th November 2016].

A similar response was reflected in the current study where Amanda explains that the children “kind of don’t get” that Elizabeth chooses not to marry the prince. The children rework the story and re-establish Elizabeth as a conventional princess by “challenging” the fact that Elizabeth does not marry the prince by explaining that “she marries him later”. Amanda’s extract highlights that the nursery children are not engaging with the feminist discourses in *The Paper Bag Princess* - that Elizabeth’s is a genuine hero and her choice to be independent of the prince is legitimate and positive (Änggård, 2005, Epstein, 2000).

The reason why most nursery children do not necessarily understand feminist stories is because they are living out the discourse of the male-female dualism (Davis and Banks, 1995; Evans, 1998; Jackson, 2007). It is the power of dominant discourses that constrain the children within conventional understandings of gender (Davis and Banks, 1995). This helps to explain why the children in this study tended to hear the feminist stories not as feminist stories, but as traditional stories in which the counter-stereotypical princess had done something wrong (Davis, 1989b; Epstein, 2000; Evans, 1998). The children in this study dismissed the princesses’ actions because they are drawing on dominant gender discourses that understand (heterosexual)
romance and beauty to be the primary aspirations for female characters in fairy tales (Änggård, 2005; Wohlwend, 2009; Yeoman, 1999). With this in mind, the children’s preferred storyline is one in which the princess and the prince marry “later” and live ‘happily-ever-after’ (Jackson, 2007; Hall, 2015). This response is not unexpected, as studies which have used critical literacy to engage children with storybooks have found that many children enforce heteronormative discourses with which they are familiar (see Änggård, 2005; Davis, 1989a; Epstein, 2000; Hall, 2015; Jackson, 2007; Wohlwend, 2009). From a Butlerian perspective, the nursery children’s attachment to ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ can be explained by the ‘heterosexual matrix’ and its limits of what is acceptable for each gender (Butler, 1990; see section 2.1.3).

It is indicated that the nursery children are not passively soaking up the nursery’s perspective on gender equality (see section 5.1). Instead, they are actively resisting it through being critical readers and rejecting the alternative messages presented to them in feminist tales (Jackson, 2007; Lyttleton-Smith, 2015). This notion emphasises that “children are active in the making of their own meanings (therefore) anti-sexist intentions do not always succeed, in part because of the very complexity of social relations and in part because of the inherent difficulty of challenging dominant discourses” (Epstein, 1995: 57). I argue that Rainbow Nursery cannot solely rely on non-sexist resources to disrupt dominant discourses of gender (Davis, 1989a; Epstein; 1995; Evans, 1998; Hall, 2015). I also argue that it is not enough to expose children to feminist tales without teaching them deconstructive skills to help them understand how discourses of resistance work as a means of disrupting storylines which uphold inequitable social structures (Davies, 1993; 2004). What is needed, according to Epstein (1995), is the implementation of classroom materials and curriculum content which necessitate activities that offer children alternative and oppositional discourses and discursive practices which undermine heterosexist gendered stereotypes (see Kraftl, 2013; Hall, 2015).
This section has established that the nursery children have internalised the discourse of the male-female dualism, therefore, they actively resist the non-sexist messages presented to them within feminist tales. The next section unpacks how the children’s play choices (within the dressing-up corner) can resist gender norms but also how they can work to maintain them.

6.2 The Dressing-up corner

Interviewer: “Tell me about the dressing-up corner”

Daniel: “So dressing-up, we have a range of dressing-up options. Some very princesses dresses some very ‘male’ dressing. And no child would be discouraged by what they chose to dress up in. If a child was laughed at or poked fun at by another child for dressing in a way that wasn’t deemed to fit into those stereotypes we would then challenge the accuser and support and open up those discussions and to support everybody’s right to be free to explore dressing-up”.

Interviewer: “I have noticed that you have high heels in the dressing-up box, do you see boys trying them on?”

Daniel: “Often. And often because this is one of the few opportunities they have to. And often it’s the only safe opportunity they have to”.

Interview with nursery practitioner, Rainbow Nursery [23rd October 2016].

It is indicated by Daniel that the practitioners support the children’s “right to be free to explore dressing-up” choices which “do not fit into conventional gender stereotypes”. Daniel expresses that the nursery boys “often” wear high heels which reveals that they are capable of performing in ways which are typically associated with the opposite sex (Ånggård, 2005). Not only does the wearing of high heels indicate that the nursery boys are comfortable with adopting feminine practices, but it also shows that the nursery children are actively reworking the dominant discourses.
of masculinity and thus the male-female dualism (Davis, 1989a; 2004). With this in mind, it is considered that the nursery boys respond positively to the nursery’s perspective on gender; that children should be free to take up positions that are associated with the opposite sex (see section 5.1). Lyttleton-Smith’s (2015) research uncovered a similar incident to the one described above. She experienced two nursery boys actively ‘gender-bending’ in the nursery as she watched them enjoy a game of hairdressing.

Interviewer: “Are all the boys comfortable with dressing-up in girls dress-up?”

Julie: “No, because we do have some boys that would avoid that. Sometimes they really want to and you put the dress on them and they wear it and enjoy it but take it (the dress) off as if that’s not allowed or accepted. And they know that they shouldn’t really wear it but they would love to wear that dress”.

Interview with nursery practitioner, Rainbow Nursery [16th November 2016].

However, it is important to note that not all nursery children are comfortable with embodying the gender discourse that the nursery present to them. According to Davies (2004) children actively engage in ‘category-maintenance work’ when constructing their own gender identities. This notion is reflected in the current study where nursery boys are rejecting feminine practices in order to maintain a coherent masculine self (ibid). Amanda explains that some nursery boys “would avoid” dressing-up in clothes which “do not fit into conventional gender stereotypes”.

Amanda recognises that by choosing to “take it (the dress) off” the nursery boys are indicating that wearing a dress is not appropriate or ‘correct’ masculine behaviour (McCreary, 1994; Lyttleton-Smith, 2015). This, I argue, is a result of the boys internalising the male-female dualism which involves the active maintenance of a rigid divide between the sexes (Davis and Banks, 1995; Francis and Skelton, 2001). As such, these boys are limited in their capacity to embrace more flexible gender role behaviours because they have embodied a discourse which adopts a rigid definition of masculinity (Sirin et al., 2004).
This section has established that when accessing the dressing-up corner nursery children embody multiple discourses, some which keep the male-female dualism intact and some which works to resist and subvert it. This next section will identify how the children’s clothing choices beyond the dressing-up corner differ from the choices they make within the dressing-up corner.
6.2.1 Beyond the dressing-up corner

Interviewer: “I have noticed that you have high heels in the dressing-up box, do you see boys trying them on?”

Daniel: “Often. And often because this is one of the few opportunities they have to. And often it’s the only safe opportunity they have to”.

Interviewer: […] “Tell me about the boys’ clothes preferences in the dressing up corner”

Daniel: “[B]ut then you get into value judgement so boys wearing girls stuff will garner more comments from parents then vice versa. And they will certainly get more negative comments. Girls can wear boy’s clothes and can be tom boys. Boys the equivalent would be sissy, which has an immediate value judgement put on it. We would never use either of those words with children, but, some parents inevitably do.

So with boys it gets back to the fact that far fewer avenues are open to boys. With boys there is within society as whole still homophobia and fear of gayness around boys might grow up to be gay. Well actually some of them will, lots of them won’t, and actually if they wear a dress when they are two it is no indicator of any of that”.

I did not observe any nursery boys entering the nursery wearing ‘feminine’ shoes or clothes. This is presumably because beyond the dressing-up corner it is not seen as ‘appropriate’ for boys to adopt practices coded as ‘feminine’. Daniel recognises this argument by explaining that for most boys the nursery is one of the “few” “safe” opportunities they have to wear ‘feminine’ clothes and shoes. This, I argue, is a result of some parents discouraging their sons to transgress gender roles. This is exhibited in Daniel’s interview extract (above) when he explains that “boys dressing-up in girls stuff will […] certainly get […] negative comments”. Additionally, Daniel explains that some people assume that if a boy wears a “dress when they are two” they might “grow up to be gay”. Many scholars have highlighted that the reason why
nursery boys are likely to receive “negative comments” is because of the assumption parents make between boys’ non-conventional gender roles and homosexuality (see Antill, 1987; Cahill and Adams, 1997; Lloyd and Duveen, 1992; Martin, 1990; O’Neil et al., 1995; Pharr, 1998). The consequence of this assumption is that if a boy participates in non-conventional gender behaviours then he might be subjected to name-calling (Cahill and Adams, 1997; McCreary, 1994). I argue that the discourse of ‘gay panic’ (fear and intolerance of homosexuality) (Cahill and Adams, 1997) is situated within the parent’s name-calling practices (Blaise, 2013). Daniel explains that “some parents” express their disapproval of their sons’ gender-bending behaviour by using insults such as “sissy”. The act of name-calling highlights that it is not “safe” for boys to wear ‘feminine’ clothes and shoes beyond the dressing-up box. On this note, the above extract can be seen to highlight Butler’s (1990) ‘heterosexual matrix’. It is clear that insults such as “sissy” constitute the power of heterosexuality by shaming those gender identities that deviate from normative masculinities (Blaise, 2013; Brown et al., 2007; DePalma and Atkinson, 2009; see section 2.1.2).

This section has established that there is a large discrepancy between institutional practice and the attitudes that some parents profess. This indicates that some nursery children have to negotiate multiple lifeworlds as they move between sites within and outside of nursery, invested with contradictory and complementary discourses of gender (Cope and Kalantzis, 1995; Davis, 1989a; Hall, 2015; Lyttleton-Smith, 2015; Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1996; 1999). The next section will summarise the key arguments made in this chapter.

6.3 Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the second research objective – to critically explore how the nursery children respond to institutional practice given the gender discourses they are exposed to before arriving at nursery. I have argued that the nursery
children are exposed to contradictory gender discourses as they move between sites within and outside of nursery. This results in the children negotiating multiple gender discourses, some of which are in line with the nursery’s gender discourse, and some of which challenge this discourse. In 6.1 I established that the nursery children are actively resisting the feminist messages presented to them because they are drawing on heteronormative discourses with which they are familiar. The second section (6.2) identified that within the dressing-up corner the children are encouraged to explore clothes and shoes which “do not fit into conventional gender stereotypes”. Some nursery children respond well to this, others however, are engaging in ‘category-maintenance work’ which demands the active maintenance of a rigid divide between the sexes (Davis, 2004). Beyond the dressing-up corner the children are exposed to a discourse which suggests that to get gender ‘right’ a boy cannot adopt practices coded as feminine and vice versa (Grieshaber, 1998). This, I argue is a consequence of the children’s ‘choice’ of clothing (beyond the dressing-up box) being shaped by a discourse of ‘gay panic’ and ‘compulsory heterosexuality’. The next chapter will synthesise the key findings of this study.
Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.0 Chapter Introduction

This project responds to the ‘new’ social studies of childhood’s calling for a more diverse children’s geography (Jenks, 2005). This study used an ethnographic approach (combining observations with interviews) in order to supply a critical account of how gender is constructed in a nursery context in Brighton. This methodological approach has allowed me to explore how individuals within the nursery (both practitioners and children) “experience and make sense of their own lives” (Valentine, 2005: 111). This study has made an important contribution to knowledge in the sub-fields of geographies of gender, children’s geographies, gender studies, early childhood studies and sociology of education. The findings from this study can help to educate nursery practitioners of the importance (and complexities) of integrating a feminist poststructuralist understanding of gender into institutional practice.

7.1 Empirical findings

*Research objective one: to identify the gender discourses which children are exposed to before they arrive at nursery*

This study found that before children arrive at nursery they are exposed to (and internalise) a gender discourse which emphasises the male-female dualism. I argue that it is the power of dominant gender discourses that constrain the children within conventional meanings and modes of being male or female (Davis and Banks, 1995). The male-female dualism places great importance on getting your gender ‘right’ (Davis, 1989a; Epstein, 2000). I argue that children internalise this discourse
because they find pleasure in ‘getting it right’ and being ‘normal’ for their specific culture, time and place (Evans, 1998; Weedon, 1997).

I also argue that the children recognise that to be a non-contradictory person (within a discourse of the male-female dualism) one must have a recognisable gender identity; a boy must perform practices coded as masculine and a girl must perform practices coded as feminine (Lyttleton-Smith, 2015; MacNaughton, 2000). The children have learned to interpret not just their own lives, but the lives of others within the terms of those dominant discourses (Browne, 2004; Davis, 1989a). This is apparent in section 4.4 of chapter 4 where Jamie’s incoherent gender performance resulted in Mike mistaking Jamie for a female. This incident reflects Butler’s notion that gender non-conformity can put the “illusion” of a fixed and stable gender identity at risk (1990: 56). This incident also highlights that ‘discontinuities’ in gender performance do not necessarily result in gender norms being challenged, instead, they can serve to reproduce and reinforce them depending on the social context and the audience (Lloyd, 1999).

Research objective two: to examine the nursery’s understanding of gender and explore how this understanding effects institutional practice

This study found that the gender discourse the children encounter at nursery contradicts the gender discourse that many children are exposed to before they enter the nursery. I established that the nursery understands gender from a feminist poststructuralist perspective. The nursery recognises that there are various ways of ‘doing’ boy and girl, therefore they argue that one should have access to a discourse in which one’s sex does not limit one to ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ social roles. The nursery’s understanding of gender is subsequently incorporated into institutional practice by teaching the children that hegemonic constructions of masculinity and femininity are not fixed (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1987; Renold, 2004; 2009). What is missing from the nursery’s articulation of gender is the idea that gender is not simply
an individual’s choice, instead, the subject’s gendered performances are confined to the terms of gender’s regulatory frame (Butler, 1990).

Research objective three: to critically explore how the nursery children respond to institutional practice given the gender discourses they are exposed to before arriving at nursery

In examining children’s responses to the nursery’s institutional practice I acknowledged that children negotiate gender discourses in the context of everyday nursery life. Of critical importance here is the understanding that children have access to many forms of discursive practice and many possible ways of positioning themselves (Paechter, 2001; 2007; Evans, 1998). The findings for this study have challenged the notion that young children are absorbent “sponges”, passively soaking up information on gender (Lyttleton-Smith, 2015: 31). The study has revealed the potential and, indeed, preference of young children to treat the discourses that they are presented with flexibly and rework them to create different ways of performing gender (Paechter, 2007).

This study found that the gender discourse that children have internalised cannot simply be undone by providing access to a discourse which claims that girls and boys can position themselves in multiple ways. I argue that when these two discourses merge within the nursery setting the dominant discourse of the male-female dualism is the one that persists despite the nursery’s attempt to provide alternatives to rigid gender roles. This, I argue, is a result of the “inherent difficulty” of teaching against the dominant gender discourses (Epstein, 1995: 57; Blaise, 2005a).

The study has appreciated that children are members of multiple lifeworlds as they move between sites within and outside of nursery (Cope and Kalantzis, 1995). This
is apparent in section 6.2.1 of chapter 6 where the parents’ disapproving comments shape the children’s gendered and sexual subjectiveness in ways which contradict values of the nursery’s institutional practice (Hall, 2015).

In the next section I will propose some recommendations for future research.
7.2 Future research

In recognising the limitations of this study I suggest the following as recommendations for future research.

A limitation of this study was the limited scope of my ethnography. In future research a full-scale ethnography would present a more accurate awareness of the children’s views and experiences (Dockrell et al., 2000). One suggestion would be to carry out a yearlong study in the same nursery. A more longitudinal study would expectantly generate more opportunities to talk, research and work with the children. This in turn would lead to more in-depth interpretations of the ways gender is constructed and internalised in the children’s everyday lives. It was beyond the remit of this study to appreciate how children’s gender identities change over time. In terms of other possible future research, it would be interesting to return to the same nursery in one years’ time to explore how these children’s gender identities continue to be constituted and reconstituted. Through such a return I might better understand gendering as “a non-linear, flexible phenomena of emergent subjectivity” (Lyttleton-Smith, 2015: 245). Whatever future direction this project takes, it would always aim to stress the importance of researching the less researched voices of young children within the geographies of gender, children’s geographies, gender studies, early childhood studies and sociology of education.
References


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Jackson, S. (2007). ‘She might not have the right tools... and he does’: Children’s sense-making of gender, work and abilities in early school readers. Gender and Education 19(1), pp. 61–77.


Appendices

Appendix A- Copy of Interview Schedule
Appendix B- Thematic Coding Table
Appendix C- Copy of Participant Information Sheet
Appendix D- Copy of Consent Form
Appendix E- Project Registration Form
Appendix F- Ethics Checklist
Appendix G- Risk Assessment Form
Appendix A- Copy of Interview Schedule

Tell me about why you started working in the early years
Tell me about your thoughts on gender
Tell me about the nursery's understanding of gender
Tell me about the daily nursery routines
Tell me about the play preferences of the children
Tell me about the dressing-up corner
Tell me about the children’s choice of clothes
Tell me about the toys available for the children
Tell me about the children’s friendships
## Appendix B- Thematic Coding Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The children</th>
<th>The institution</th>
<th>The outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clothes</td>
<td>Nursery rhymes</td>
<td>Parent's response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-conformity</td>
<td>Books</td>
<td>Child's response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair</td>
<td>Puzzles</td>
<td>Play (stereotypical)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>Posters</td>
<td>Play (unrestricted)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lunch boxes</td>
<td>Resources</td>
<td>Discussions (children)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender messages</td>
<td>Limitations with efforts</td>
<td>Discussion (parents)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Super hero policy</td>
<td>Conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>Role models (staff)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>Male practitioner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie's cousin</td>
<td>Challenge (each other)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender stance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Established staff team</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C- Copy of Participant Information Sheet

Introduction

My name is Moa Eriksson and I am a Human Geography student in my third year at the University of Brighton. I am undertaking my final year dissertation (research project) at Rainbow Nursery (pseudonym)

Study title

A study of the construction of gender in a nursery in Brighton.

Invitation paragraph

You are being asked to give consent on behalf of your child to being part of Moa Eriksson’s university project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

Please take time to read the following information carefully. Please contact Moa Eriksson if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to give consent on behalf of your child.

What is the purpose of the study?

The aim of the study is to determine whether there are clear differences in the behaviour of boys and girls in the nursery. Secondly to understand how the nursery constructs gender, through the types of toys made available to the children, the books read to the children, the nursery rhymes sung at the nursery and through employees influence.

The study involves the Rainbow Nursery and therefore all the parents with children attending the nursery have been asked if they want their child to participate.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to give consent for your child to be involved. You are still free to withdraw at any time throughout the duration of the research and without giving a reason.

If you do not wish for your child to be part of this research then you do not need to sign the consent form and your child will not be observed and will not be part of the study. The observations will be undertaken whilst the children are involved in group work. Observations of a group will only take place if consent has been received from all the children in any given group.

What does the study involve?
The research will involve Moa Eriksson spending 2 hours once a week for a duration of 4 weeks at the nursery. During this time Moa will act as any other employee at the nursery. Playing with the children and assisting them. Moa is DBS checked.

The children do not have any responsibilities and nothing is expected of them as part of this study.

While there Moa will be observing however no notes will be taken whilst at the nursery. Furthermore, no photographs will be taken of the children.

I understand that if I consent for on behalf of my child then Moa will verbally introduce herself in child friendly language. By explaining that she is a student at the University of Brighton who is observing them while they play because she is interested in the ways that girls and boys play.

Will the study be confidential?

The data will be collected through what Moa observes (what she sees and hears).

Sections from Moa’s observations will be used for the write up of her project.

Relevant (anonymous) sections of any of data collected during the study, may be looked at by Moa Eriksson’s supervisor (Joseph Hall) of this dissertation for teaching and research purposes.

The data will be stored on Moa’s password protected laptop and only Moa will have access to this laptop/information. The data will be stored until the report is handed in (4th May 2016). After this point all primary data will be deleted. Furthermore fake names, for the nursery, the staff and the children will be used throughout the documentation of primary data and the write up of the project to protect the anonymity of everyone involved in the research.

Contact Details:

If you require any further information or have any questions about the study then please contact Moa or Moa’s supervisor by email.

Moa Eriksson: m.eriksson1@uni.brighton.ac.uk

Joseph Hall (Moa’s dissertation supervisor): J.J.Hall@brighton.ac.uk
Appendix D- Copy of Consent Form

Title of Project: A study of the construction of gender in a nursery in Brighton.

Name of Researcher: Moa Eriksson

1. I agree to give consent for my child to be involved in this research which investigates how Rainbow Nursery constructs gender. I give my permission for Moa Eriksson to use selections from her observations as part of her data collection for her dissertation (research project).

2. Moa Eriksson has explained to my satisfaction the purpose of the study. I have been informed of the nature and purposes of the study and have read the information sheet. I understand the processes of the study.

3. I am aware that my child does not have any responsibilities within the study except being observed.

4. I understand that my child’s personal details will remain confidential. I understand that relevant (anonymous) sections of any of data collected during the study, may be looked at by Moa Eriksson’s supervisor of this dissertation for teaching and research purposes.

5. I understand that my child’s participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw them at any time without giving any reason.

6. I understand that the data collected will be used as part of a dissertation project which will be held in the School of the Environment & Technology University of Brighton. I understand that only anonymous sections from the research will be used in this write up.

7. I understand that I am consenting on behalf of my child.

Signed:

Date:

Contact Details:

If you require any further information or have any questions about the study then please contact Moa or Moa’s supervisor by email.

Moa Eriksson: m.eriksson1@uni.brighton.ac.uk

Joseph Hall (Moa’s dissertation supervisor): J.J.Hall@brighton.ac.uk
Appendix E- Project Registration Form

University of Brighton

GY390 Independent Project
Outline Project Registration Form

School of Environment & Technology

Name: Moa Eriksson
Course: BA Geography
Handbook: I have received a copy of the GY390 Project Handbook (double click box)

Please give the names of all academic staff to whom you have spoken about your project idea.

Advisor(s): Joseph Hall

1. Aims and objectives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aim(s):</th>
<th>The overall aim of this research project is to determine if a gender divide within a nursery exists and if so how a nursery in Moulsecoomb contributes to the construction of gender. These aims contribute to the research field of gendered geographies and children’s geographies. Gender is a social construction which refers to the discourse that the social norms of femininity and masculinity are socially constructed as supposedly being founded by the obvious opposition of sexed bodies (Costello and Duncan, 2006). This project draws on these key geographical concepts to address the construction of gender in a nursery and whether these gendered discourses are challenged (Holloway, 2014).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
The majority of the research and literature on this topic focuses on school environments or playgrounds (Holloway and Valentine, 2000). As a result there is a heavy focus on children above the age of five and younger children are not focused on. This leaves a gap for the less researched spaces of childhood care spaces. This project will develop this research by focusing on a nursery in Brighton children which range from 2-5 years.

| Objective 1: | Determine whether a gender divide exists in the nursery. |
| Objective 2: | Understand how the nursery space constructs gender; spatially, types of toys, types of clothes, employees influence. |
| Objective 3: | Interpret how gender norms are resisted. |
| Objective 4: | Analyse how gender non-conformity is viewed. |

2. Methodology (including sources of data)

| Research method(s): | For this study a qualitative approach will be taken. The methods utilised will be participant observation and one on one interviews with the employees. |
| Primary data: | The area of study is a nursery in Brighton. Participant observation of the children will be carried out two hours a week, over a four week period which will start once ethical approval has been received. Parents will be given consent forms on behalf of their children. The ‘opt out’ consent form approach has been chosen. If parents object and don’t want their child/children to be part of the study then they can contact me. If this is the case than data from these children will not be included in the study and they will not be observed. During the observations I will act as any other employee at the nursery. Playing with the children and assisting them. One on one Interviews will be conducted with between three to six staff at the nursery. Once the data has been collected, coding will be used to help organise the data and analyse the findings. The coding of the observations and interview transcripts will help discover patterns in the data. Open-coding will be used to group topical data into themes in order to analyse these in depth. Open coding is useful |
### 3. Risk assessment and ethics

#### Risks:
A potential risk is that I might trip over a child at the nursery. To control this I need to be aware of where I am walking and the position of children. Another risk is the potential conflict of interest with parents of observing their children. To control this a consent form will be distributed to ensure that only the children whose parents have consented are included in the study. That the study doesn’t adhered to the nursery’s policies. To overcome this the nursery’s risk, health and safety regulations are being adhered to.

#### Ethical Issues:
There are ethical concerns associated with researching children because they are a vulnerable group. A DBS check has been completed and is clear. The research will not be able to start until an ethics approval has been granted. It will be necessary to have the consent of the parents on behalf of their children and the nursery staff involved in the researcher. Everyone who will potentially be involved in the research will be issued an information sheet and a consent form. If all consent forms are returned signed then a mass observation of all the children at the nursery will take place. If only some of the consent forms returned signed I will work with the nursery’s group system. The nursery puts the children in groups of around six when they are undertaking certain activities. There are roughly 6 groups at the nursery. If I receive the signed consent form of all children in any particular group I will observe these children and not the others. These group activities are in separate rooms to where the other children are playing. If any one member of any group has not consented this group will then not be observed. If I don’t receive signed consent form all children in one group then the observations will not take place.

A further ethical issue is that the research requires the co-operation of an individual to gain access to the participants. I was at the nursery in a voluntary capacity in the summer and whilst I was there I had a meeting discussing my research ideas with the nursery manager. In the summer it was agreed that I could undertake my research in the nursery. Written consent from the nursery manger has been received.
Full ethics and risk assessments has been discussed with the nursery manager to ensure that the project adheres to the nursery’s policies.

5. Outline structure and timetable of activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month:</th>
<th>Activity:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Organise a meeting with the manager of the nursery to discuss the details of my research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>Reading around research topic for the literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>Reading around research topic for the literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Reading around research topic for the literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October semester 1</td>
<td>Submit full ethics check list and wait for approval.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>Complete introduction and methodology section.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>Finalise the literature review draft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Undertake the interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transcribe and analyse the interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February semester 2</td>
<td>Observations begin once ethical approval has been granted (2 hours once a week for 5 weeks)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Transcribe and analyse interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Continue observations if not completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Submit a draft to my assignment tutor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>submission</td>
<td>Submit the project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F- Ethics Checklist

UNIVERSITY OF BRIGHTON
SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

RESEARCH ETHICS CHECKLISTS FOR UNDERGRADUATE AND MASTERS LEVEL RESEARCH PROJECTS

This Ethics Checklist is designed to help you quickly and easily identify how you should approach any ethical issues raised by your project or dissertation. If you have any concerns about completing the checklists, please see your supervisor.

An Ethics Checklist should be completed for ALL research projects and dissertations prior to the commencement of the project. Please do not approach any participants involved in the research until these checklists have been completed. The Ethics Checklist will help you identify whether you need to complete an ethics approval form to be considered by the School of Environment and Technology Research Ethics and Governance Committee.

The Student Ethics Checklist must be completed by the project student. Once completed, you should discuss it with your project or dissertation supervisor to ensure that you take the right follow-up actions.

If you answer ‘no’ to all questions in Section B of the Student Checklist you will NOT need to complete an ethics approval form. Please note that in signing the Student Checklist you accept that it is still your responsibility for your project or dissertation module to follow the University’s Guidance on Good Practice in Research Ethics and Governance, available on the StudentCentral pages. Any significant change in the question, design or conduct of your project or dissertation that would alter your answers to the checklist questions must be notified to your supervisor who will advise you on whether you need to complete an ethics approval form.

If you have answered ‘yes’ to any of the questions in Section B of the Student Checklist you will need to complete an ethics approval form prior to the commencement of research. This does not mean that you will not be able to do the
research, but it will need to be approved by the School Research Ethics and Governance Committee.

Ethics approval forms and supporting guidance are available on StudentCentral pages for your project or dissertation module. Please discuss completing the ethics approval form with your supervisor.

Signed copies of the completed Ethics Checklist must be submitted with your project or dissertation, (the project or dissertation will not be marked if the completed checklist is not included). Further guidance on ethical issues along with Risk Assessment Forms and examples of consent and information forms for research participants are available on the StudentCentral pages for your project or dissertation module.

Ethics Checklist

Section A Project details - to be completed by the project student

1. Name of student/s: Moa Eriksson

2. Name of supervisor: Joseph Hall

3. Title of project: A study of how gender is constructed in a nursery in Brighton

4. Outline of the research: The overall aim of this research project is to determine if a gender divide within a nursery exists and if so how a nursery in Moulsecombe contributes to the construction of gender.


6. Location of research: A nursery in Brighton.

7. Course module code for which research is undertaken: GY390

8. Email address: m.eriksson1@uni.brighton.ac.uk

9. Contact address: 36 New market Road Bn2 3QF

10. Telephone number: 07780009619
### Section B Ethics Checklist questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Is this research likely to have significant negative impacts on the environment? (For example, the release of dangerous substances or damaging intrusions into protected habitats.)</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Does the study involve participants who might be considered vulnerable due to age or to a social, psychological or medical condition? (Examples include children, people with learning disabilities or mental health problems, but participants who may be considered vulnerable are not confined to these groups.)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Does the study require the co-operation of an individual to gain access to the participants? (e.g. a teacher at a school or a manager of sheltered housing)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Will the participants be asked to discuss what might be perceived as sensitive topics? (e.g. sexual behaviour, drug use, religious belief, detailed financial matters)</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Will individual participants be involved in repetitive or prolonged testing?</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Could participants experience psychological stress, anxiety or other negative consequences (beyond what would be expected to be encountered in normal life)?</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Will any participants be likely to undergo vigorous physical activity, pain, or exposure to dangerous situations, environments or materials as part of the research?</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Will photographic or video recordings of research participants be collected as part of the research?</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Will any participants receive financial reimbursement for their time? (excluding reasonable expenses to cover travel and other costs)</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Will members of the public be indirectly involved in the research without their knowledge at the time? (e.g. covert observation of people in non-public places, the use of methods that will affect privacy)</td>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11. Does this research include secondary data that may carry personal or sensitive organisational information? *(Secondary data refers to any data you plan to use that you did not collect yourself. Examples of sensitive secondary data include datasets held by organisations, patient records, confidential minutes of meetings, personal diary entries. These are only examples and not an exhaustive list).*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does this research include secondary data that may carry personal or</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sensitive organisational information? (Secondary data refers to any data</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you plan to use that you did not collect yourself. Examples of sensitive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>secondary data include datasets held by organisations, patient records,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>confidential minutes of meetings, personal diary entries. These are only</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>examples and not an exhaustive list).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

12. Are there any other ethical concerns associated with the research that
    are not covered in the questions above?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are there any other ethical concerns associated with the research that</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are not covered in the questions above?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**All Undergraduate and Masters level projects or dissertations in the School of Environment and Technology must adhere to the following procedures on data storage and confidentiality:**

Once a mark for the project or dissertation has been published, all data must be removed from personal computers, and original questionnaires and consent forms should be destroyed unless the research is likely to be published or data re-used.

Please sign below to confirm that you have completed the Ethics Checklist and will adhere to these procedures on data storage and confidentiality. *Then give this form to your supervisor to complete their checklist.*

Signed (Student): Moa Eriksson

Date: 28/5/15
**Supervisor Checklist: Project approval - to be completed by the project supervisor**

If the student answered **YES** to any of the questions in the Student Checklist then he/she is required to complete an **ethics approval form** (please circle as appropriate)

| Form required | Form not required |

If required, please advise the student on completing the **ethics approval form**

If the student answered **NO** to all Student Checklist questions, please complete the following table. The project should not begin until all boxes are ticked (use N/A if appropriate):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(If applicable) A risk assessment form has been completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This is a practicable and worthwhile research project?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The student has the skills necessary to carry out the research effectively</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(If applicable) A participant information sheet or leaflet has been completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(If applicable) The procedures for participant recruitment and obtaining informed consent are appropriate (e.g. consent form or questionnaire introduction)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**If the student answered ‘no’ to all checklist questions**, please remind them that they must notify you of any significant change in the structure, design or conduct of the project or dissertation that would alter their answers to the Ethics Checklist questions.

Any further comments from supervisor:

Supervisor name: Joseph Hall

Signed: Joseph Hall

Date: 9/10/15
If any of the questions in the checklist have been answered ‘YES’, then please submit the Ethics Checklist along with an Ethics Approval Form to the Chair of the School Research Ethics and Governance Committee.

If all of the questions in the Ethics Checklist have been answered ‘NO’, then please submit a copy of this checklist to the School office for filing.

Students must keep a copy of the Ethics Checklist and submit it as part of their project or dissertation. If the project changes significantly, a new checklist must be completed and included.
Appendix G- Risk Assessment Form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>What are the hazards?</th>
<th>Who might be harmed and how?</th>
<th>What controls do you already have in place?</th>
<th>Risk (H/M/L)</th>
<th>What further action is necessary to reduce the risk to Low?</th>
<th>Action by whom?</th>
<th>Action by when?</th>
<th>Done</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Trip over a child at the nursery.</td>
<td>Children and the researcher (Moa)</td>
<td>To control this I need to be aware of where I am walking and the position of children.</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Potential conflict of interest with parents of observing their children.</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>To control this risk a consent form will be distributed to ensure that only the children whose parents haven’t ‘opted out’ of the study will be included in the study.</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Vulnerability of children.</td>
<td>Children at the nursery</td>
<td>There are concerns associated with researching children because they are a vulnerable group.</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>