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**An Investigation into children's gender  
stereotypes and the effect they have on  
children's career aspirations**

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**Abstract**

This research project investigates gender stereotypes in primary school aged children. It considers whether gender stereotypes are present, whether age range has an impact on children's gender stereotypes and the impact preconceptions may have on children's career aspirations. This project uses questionnaires and interviews to collect data. The findings of this research suggest that primary school aged children do have gender stereotypes and that gender does play a role in children career aspirations, but children's gender stereotypes are varied and some children may even actively seek to expose gender stereotypes, especially girls. Boys appear to aspire to more physically demanding careers such as football whereas girls ambition lies in the intellectually demanding careers like that of doctors and teachers.

**Research issue**

I wish to observe gendered societal pressures and whether they take hold in children. I wish to know whether these gendered stereotypes affect a child's ambitions and whether the age group of children has an effect these preconceptions. A brief definition of terms used throughout this paper are defined below:  
Sex - Biological differences between Males and Females.

Gender - Social construct formed by the views, opinions, and expectations of a society.

Stereotype – a widely socially adopted thought about an individual or object.

**Justification**

The general topic for this research project is gender stereotypes and in this section the implications on different levels, from personal to international, will be discussed. Personal interest in this topic originates from a deep interest in gender theory and from an interest of myself being a male in a female dominated profession.

Due to the research being carried out in the West Midlands, where studies have shown that only 62% of people believe men and women can follow any career they desire (Vision Critical, 2013), this research would be useful to that local area due to it allowing the research venue and those local to it to see the nature and how widespread stereotypes are; giving the first steps on how to address them.

With the rise of groups like 'HeforShe' and the ideals of feminism in the United Kingdom (UK) (Watson, 2014), this research may expose a small insight to the extent of the gendered stereotypes children possess. Within the UK there is an equality act that makes discrimination on sex and/or gender illegal (Legislation.gov.uk, 2010). The UK has recently attempted to increase the number of male nursery school teachers due to there being such a large gender gap (Hemmings, 2018), research of this type may give an insight into why people choose gendered professions. This research may aid schools in their teaching of the British values recently introduced in the National Curriculum (DfE, 2014).

**Citation**

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As sexism is an international issue (UNWOMEN, 2017), this research may show to what extent children accept these stereotypes into their cognition and behaviour. Not only may this research show the presence of gender stereotypes, but it may also reveal (if any) the specific gender stereotypes children have and could promote an environment where attitudes could change towards them. For example, if a stereotype revealed is that men cannot be nurses, it allows the teacher to expose that stereotype.

On a professional perspective, this research project is very relevant to part two of the teachers' standards (DfE, 2011), which recognises the importance of having respect for everyone and to understand and follow 'British values' (DfE, 2014). Part of British values acknowledges 'individual liberty' and respect for others. As one of the predominant inequalities is that of gender and sex (Chamberlain, 2016), this research is relevant for school teachers, both primary and secondary. With the awareness that this research may provide, it may allow teachers to address these issues more directly and allow the teachers to meet the standards and curriculum more accurately. This research project may also have a positive impact on my own professional development allowing me to meet standard 3b of the teachers' standards as I will be increasing awareness and information in a topic that has a big impact on children and their later lives and sharing this information with other professionals: creating a value for scholarship (DfE, 2011).

### **Literature Review**

The terms gender and sex are used synonymously within today's dialect, however there are fundamental differences between them. Sex is the biological differences between Males and Females due to anatomical, hormonal, reproductive, and other physiological differences and does not consider the psychological aspect of someone's identity (Lindsey *et al.*, 1996; Connell, 2002). Gender on the other hand is a social construct formed by the views, opinions, and expectations of a society (Garrett, 1987; Lindsey *et al.*, 1996; Connell, 2002). Gender is split into two types (male and female) and although disputed, these are then put on opposite ends of a spectrum, this spectrum is becoming increasingly accepted in western society as an alternative to the gender binary (Rahilly, 2014). With gender playing such a fundamental role in societies by the way adults address and imprint on their children (Endendijk *et al.*, 2013), as well as, voting habits also being affected by gender stereotypes (Sanbonmatsu and Dolan, 2009), therefore, it is imperative that research data on gender is observed and reviewed.

Bandura (1977) stated that children learn through observational learning, prominent figures within a child's life become their models and are mimicked. As children, generally do not start official schooling until the age of five in the UK, a vast amount of their knowledge is obtained by observing their parents and guardians; parents and guardians who can transfer a lot of gender stereotypes (Bem, 1981; Kenway, 1998; Endendijk *et al.*, 2013). However, this does depend on the parents' own beliefs and behaviours and if the parents have a very open and positive attitude towards gender, then stereotypes almost become 'pre-exposed' (Kenway, 1998; Endendijk *et al.*, 2013). Media and merchandise also have an impact of children's gendered stereotypes (Gunter, Oates and Blades, 2004; Coyne, *et al.*, 2016). Advertising has seen a great reduction of gender stereotypes when directed at adults (Grau and Zotos, 2016). However, advertisements and merchandise directed towards children are still heavily stereotyped, with girls playing with dolls, clothing, and household roleplay; whereas boys have cars, superhero toys and new gadgets (Peck, 2015), which can reinforce stereotypes in later life (Cherney *et al.*, 2010). This abundance of stereotyped advertising towards children leads to a self-restriction to certain colours or characteristic of toys (Cherney *et al.*, 2010). However, this merchandise 'programming' of children can differ greatly for girls depending on popular trends, with the release and popularity of Disney's animated movie 'Frozen' the 'girls section' of toy stores exploded with the colour blue (Appelbaum, 2014) instead of the typical myriad of pink of previous years (Walter, 2010). Leaving many young girls dressing in blue instead of their familiar pink (Appelbaum, 2014). A cross-sectional study by LoBue and DeLoache (2011) showed that

children's colour preferences can begin at the age of 2 and increases as children get older, in the study, boys showed an increased avoidance of the colour pink and girls a greater attraction towards it. Danovitch and Mills (2017) claims that this attraction is purely because of exposure to characters and colours, and not a pre-programmed favourite or attraction to a better-quality object. As exposure to certain colours and objects plays an important role in children's preferences, it is suggested that parents expose their child to a greater variety of objects. It is not just the barrage of gender divided advertising that children are exposed to (Peck, 2015). the increased rise in video game popularity and stereotypes concerning gender has led to recent criticisms. Miller and Summers (2007, pg. 1) explain that in video games "Males were more likely to be heroes and main characters [...] and were more muscular and powerful." Whereas females were "supplemental characters, more attractive, sexy, and innocent". It is clear to see how these depictions of gender could affect children, especially when considering previously discussed social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), in which children learn by observing. This restriction of toys and colours and consistent gendered stereotype depictions of gender could result in children restricting themselves to 'gender appropriate' professions in later life (Guy and Newman, 2004).

Children enter a classroom with very different conceptions of gender (Bem, 1981) due to greater family diversities and parents with differing views and opinions (Jenkins, Pereira and Evans, 2008), that influence children (Bem, 1981). Teachers awareness and knowledge of gender stereotypes has increased substantially over the past decade (Carr, Thomas and Mednick 1985; Burchell and Millman, 1989; Skelton, *et al*, 2009), allowing teachers to enlighten children and allow them to break out of a gender binary state of mind. British Council (2016) suggest that women and young girls are currently the most empowered they have ever been in the history of the UK. NUT (2013) believe this can be achieved simply by the way the teacher talks and acts towards their colleagues as well as their reaction to situations that break the stereotype. The manner in which colleagues interact with each other will also have an impact upon children's gendered expectations (NUT, 2013). Incidences such as 'mansplaining' should be avoided. 'Mansplaining' is a word that started on internet forums but found its way to political interactions in the UK, is a way in which a man explains to a woman in a patronising simplistic manner compared to his male peers; formed from a subconscious belief that women somehow need more explanation than men (Husson, 2013). Part of children's out of classroom experiences may include religion. Religion has an impact on children's gender stereotypes, their patriarchal nature and the teaching of the inferiority of women in most religions, combined with the prevalence of 'mansplaining' could lead to stronger gender stereotypes in children's cognition (Crandall, 2011; Imperatori-Lee, 2015). It is clear that the vocabulary used in the presence of children regarding gender is also something teachers should be consciously aware of, like gender-titled professions (Bearne, 2016). This increased care on gender issues could possibly have led to an increase in workplace ratio of females especially in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics professions (WISE, 2015). Alas, even in professions where women make up a majority of the workforce, such as teaching, they are still underrepresented in the leadership of their career (Fuller, Harford and Coleman, 2016). Burn and Pratt-Adams (2015) claim the reason that men are destined for a faster rate of promotion is due to residual Victorian and patriarchal stereotypes that the father had a managerial role of the household and the mother used her 'natural' caring instinct to raise the children.

Gender divides are present in individual subjects like physical education, which is one of the most divided subject in the modern education system (Apple, 2013). The gender divide leads children to believe that some sports are more appropriate to their gender than others (Chalabaev *et al.*, 2013; Plaza *et al.*, 2016). However, in practical physical education lessons this could be justified as boys' and girls' performance is greater when they are gender separated (Best, Pearson and Webb, 2010). PSHE is where teachers address many stereotypes, misconception and other issues children may face due to societal structures (Gillian, Smith and Boycott, 2013). PSHE is not a statutory subject (DfE, 2013), meaning children may have very

different experiences resulting in differing knowledge on gendered stereotypes, especially those in single gendered lessons or schools.

Although the trend is not consistent (DCFS, 2009), girls do tend to have higher grades in test compared to boys (OECD, 2015). This data has led to many professionals recommending gendered lessons (Jackson, 2002), however, the ideology that girls are smarter than boys is not true (DCFS, 2009) and does not warrant so called 'boy-friendly' resources and lessons (Roberta and Hammett, 2008). Differentiation is considered good practise but should be on an individual basis and tailored to children's learning styles and not gender (Sprenger, 2008; DfE, 2011). The consistent misconception that boys are not smart enough to learn with girls is not going to close the gender gap and is instead going to cause self-limitation within children (Lee, Marks and Byrd, 1994) and would be a disaster for boys (Wilshaw, 2014). Boys are stereotyped to be better at one characteristic, bullying and physical aggression are two traits that are associated almost exclusively with masculinity, while girls are associated with indirect aggression (Rivers and Duncan, 2013). Boys are especially more likely to show aggressive or negative behaviour towards other boys who show more 'feminine trait' (Rivers and Duncan, 2013).

### **Research Questions**

The research questions are open ended and opinion based to achieve good quality qualitative data (Johnson, and Christensen, 2013) but also offer the opportunity to collect qualitative data. It is important to consider research questions as it allows reflection and keeps the research appropriate (Tashakkori, and Teddlie, 1998; Monsen, and van Horn, 2007). The research questions chosen are as follows:

1. What (if any) gender stereotypes do children have?
2. To what extent does a child's age affect their gender stereotypes?
3. To what degree do children fit into the gender stereotype when considering career aspirations?

### **Methodology**

The venue for this research project was a primary school and involved children across all year groups. As the research is very socially oriented: the focus being on children's views and opinions; this project collected a majority of qualitative data (Lambert, 2012). Two methods were used for this, due to method triangulation strengthening the validity of the research results (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, and Liao, 2004), questions in the questionnaires were also designed to collect both qualitative and quantitative data allowing for further triangulation of results.

Questionnaires were the primary research instrument for this research project. A small focus group of five children were selected semi-randomly to allow for an equal number of boys and girls, from each class, without biases to which boys and girls were selected. As the research venue was a two-form entry it allowed for ten children from each year group. Children were given the questionnaires for 30 minutes to answer; It was assured to the children that the questionnaire is optional, and they could go back to class if they wished. Two children did return back to class from separate year groups which gives the indication that children did feel like they had a choice and the research was not forced upon them. Originally, every child in the classroom was going to be given the option to complete a questionnaire in years 1, 3 and 6 to give an overview of 90 children. However, upon further reflection a smaller focus group across all of the year groups appeared to be the less disruptive to the research venue as well as giving a greater overview of the research matter across year groups. This newer dispersion of questionnaires still gave a response rate of 64 children out of 66. A benefit to questionnaires is the ability to ask many participants the same questions relatively easily (Cargen, 2007). Upon piloting the questionnaires first draft and discussing with a research tutor, it was decided that more options needed to be available in the multiple-choice questions,

this led to an increase in multiple-choice variety of answers. These questions were not considered to be intrusive and did not ask children specifics of their lives but asked open-ended and self-administered questions encourages openness on the topic (Cargen, 2007). For example, children were asked to draw an image in first section of the questionnaire, answering the question 'what a nurse looks like?' rather than asking 'do you think a nurse should be a woman?', this reduces biases influencing the results on the topic.

A justification as to the choosing of questionnaires as one of the research methods is the ability to easily compare the answers of children throughout year groups and because children are generally very willing to complete questionnaires (Lambert, 2012) giving a higher return. Something that was apparent on this research project as only two children did not answer a questionnaire, compared to adults who would have given a lower return rate (Cassell and Symon, 2004; Cargen, 2007). A majority of the data collected from the questionnaires was qualitative as it collected children's views and opinions. The questionnaires were also self-administering, as it makes the results more reliable (Bryman, 2015), meaning questions were read by the participants and not read aloud or interpreted by the researcher. This was not always possible however as children in reception were unable to read the questions, a factor that was not considered, this led to the questions having to be read to the child and transcribed on the paper for them in a different coloured ink. To ensure that these responses were accurate to the child's views and biases of the administrator were not affecting the results, no paraphrasing took place and all transcriptions are direct quotations. The interpretation of this data was complex due to the questionnaires mix of qualitative and quantitative. The qualitative questions such as "what do you want to be when you are older?" were interpreted through trends of answers, whereas the more quantitative questions where the answers multiple choice were recorded through charts and tables giving an overview of children's answers and consequently trends of the topic.

Interviews were the secondary research instrument for this project. Initially, focus groups of children were selected for this project, however, there was the possibility of children being put into embarrassing situations with their peers. Using focus groups could also have caused a lack of reliability in results as more vocal children could have overwhelmed the opinions of those less so (Tayie, 2005). This led to the idea that ten randomly selected children from each year group could have been interviewed in years 1, 3 and 6, again this was not feasible due to disruption it would cause to the class and time constraints. Upon reflection, it was settled that one boy and one girl from years 6, 5, 2 and reception would be selected to take part in the interview. Although it was ensured that a boy and a girl from each year group was selected, the actual selection was random; children being randomly selected ensures personal biases are not interfering with the results and ensures a range of children (Seidman, 2006).

The two children from each year group were interviewed together, this was to gain additional data on how the children reacted towards each other's answers in the interview. Initially, a more structured approach was taken towards interviews, however, when this interview was piloted with peers it did not allow for much discussion on questions and was difficult to incorporate both interviewees opinions into one form. It also restricted the use of probing questions; the probing the took place in the interview led to the unpicking of children's conceptions and to clarify answers (Kaar, 2012). This led to a more traditional note taking approach to interviews. However, paraphrasing was also not applied here as personal biases could influence the results, children's responses were written down as direct quotes and they had a chance to agree upon their meaning. The Hawthorne effect shows that children may change their behaviour if they are aware they are being observed, such was the case in the interviews, therefore, it was essential the children who participated felt comfortable in expressing their opinions (Ohio State University, 1967; McCambridge, Witton, and Elbourne, 2013). For this reason, the interviews were

informal and were more comparable to a 'chat' to increase the comfort of the participants. Again, the children were told that they do not have to participate, and they could leave if they wish, the final participant in reception did leave before the interview started due to the interview taking place in her outdoor play time. The interviews were based around the questionnaires that the children had already completed, this allowed the reflection on their answers but also a more accurate way of triangulating their answers, resulting in the research results becoming more reliable (Kaar, 2012).

### **Validity, Reliability and Ethics**

This research project followed the British Educational Research Association's (2011) guidelines on ethical practice. Informing children that they have a gender stereotype can be an uncomfortable experience for them, therefore, all findings were kept secure and password protected, and an open-minded attitude was taken towards the results. It was insured that participants did not feel victimised for expressing a point of view and a 'safe place' mentality towards other's views was taken. Anonymity and confidentiality was ensured to the participants and names were not written on their questionnaires or interview notes, this ensured trust, a higher participant turn around and honesty due to the 'no judgment' attitude that accompanies this practice (Wiles, 2006). The educational institute also needed to grant ethical approval which was passed stating there was a 'thorough consideration' of ethical implications. As the research entirely involves children who are considered vulnerable members of society, a letter was sent to parents and guardians which informed them of what the research aims were, a basic overview of what was to happen and a reassurance of anonymity and confidentiality. The letter was based on presumed consent which gave a higher participation for the research project (Johnson, and Christensen, 2008). Consent from the head teacher was achieved through email communications and the completion of consent documentation. To strengthen the validity of the research, some of the questions the children answered in the interviews and the questionnaires were similar, this allowed for them to be triangulated which increases the validity of the research (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, and Liao, 2004). For example, if most children drew a female for a nurse and in the interviews the same response is given, it shows that the results from the questionnaire are more reliable. This reliability gained from methodology triangulation also allows a more accurate interpretation of the results, which is especially important when handling qualitative data (Gibbs, 2008). As discussed previously, a personal interest in this subject is present, therefore the questionnaires are self-administered to ensure my own biases are not interfering with the results obtained. Impartiality will be ensured throughout the interview process to prevent biases interfering with the research results. For example, as a majority of pupils answered that men were more aggressive in the questionnaires, a question was asked in the interview about how children would react to a threatening scenario.

### **Findings**

In the acquisition of these findings, my primary research instrument was questionnaires, and these were given to children regarding their ideas on gender, this gave a high turnout rate, with only two questionnaires not being completed resulting in a response from 64 children across the school. Questionnaires were supplemented by a secondary instrument that was interviews, this again was with children about their views on gender. Comparing the answers from these two instruments allowed me to triangulate the findings to become a more accurate representation of the views of those involved. Some questions were also answered by multiple questions in the same instrument.

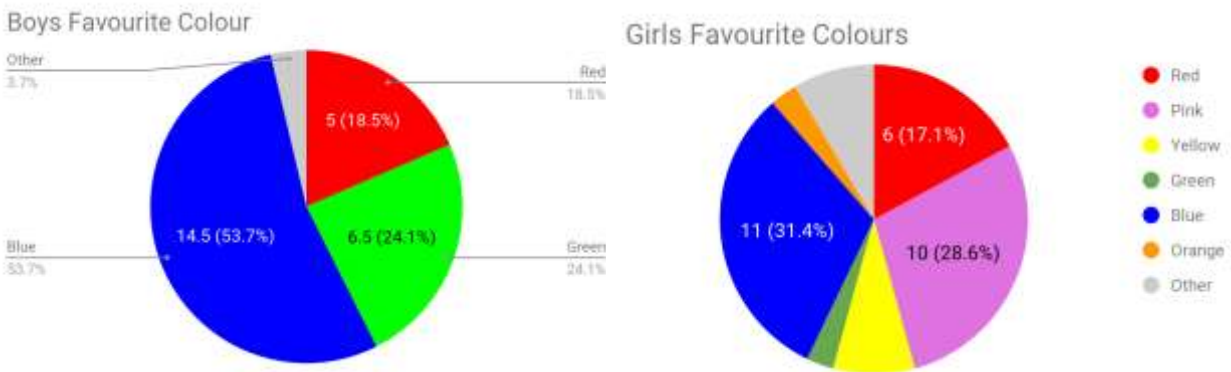
#### *What (if any) gender stereotypes do children have?*

Questionnaires that the children answered will be triangulated with questions answered in interviews to answer this research question. This research suggested that primary school aged children do have gender stereotypes, however there is a distinction between the gender stereotypes of boys and those of

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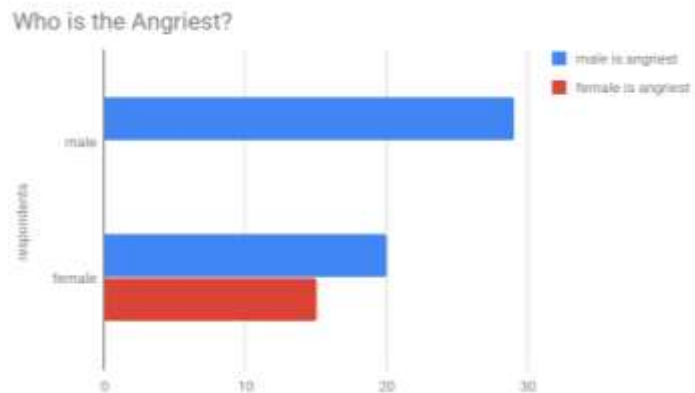
girls. For example, girls showed a preconception of a nurse being female in 80% of those surveyed compared to boys whose drawings were 51% female. This suggested that girl's perception of nurses as the majority female, however, when interviewed it was boys who appeared to be gendered in their career aspirations. Two out of four boys opted to be firefighters, the children did not use the gendered term 'fireman', with justifications such as "I like fire". The other two boys chose artistic orientated careers. Girls on the other hand suggested a variety of careers in their questionnaires including becoming a teacher, pilot and doctor. When interviewed, two of the three justifications included a statement to help others, such as "to help people get places and not suffer" and "to help others" and only one that suggested the general desire to upskill herself because she simply wanted "to know how to fly helicopters and aeroplanes" a trend that the British Council (2016) claims to be increasing.

Stereotypes were also suggested with children's colour preference. Boys showed a very clear preference for the colour blue supporting Cherney *et al.* (2010) as well as LoBue and DeLoache (2011), with 53% choosing it out of other colours (left), girls being more varied in their colour preference (right) in contradiction to Cherney *et al.* (2010). However, it may be explained by (LoBue and DeLoache, 2011) due to girl's extra exposure of the colour blue in animated movies and by extension merchandise, supporting Appelbaum (2011).



When children were asked to compare genders for who was the angriest, 76% of all respondents claimed that men were the angriest. Breaking this data down further (right) revealed that all of the boy's responses stated that men where the angriest, with girls showing a slight preference for men at 62.1%, overall, appearing more equal compared to boy's perception of the angrier of the genders. 74% of all children also described boys as angry compared to girls.

This suggests a stereotype in children, especially boys, that men tend to be angrier than women. Upon interviewing the children, there was an apparent separation between boys and girls in how they would handle a threatening situation on the playground. Boys responded with statements such as "hit them back" or even going as far as "knock them out", interestingly, older boys were the only ones to express this attitude, younger boys would handle the matter in a different way in line with girls claiming they would "tell





the teacher” or “Tell my friend so me and my friend can tell the teacher”. This suggestion that boys are more likely to act in a violent manner in a threatening situation could be explained by boy’s possible preconception that men are naturally angry supporting Rivers and Duncan (2013).

When children were asked to define males and females using a given selection of words, the top three words to describe boys were footballers, angry and strong, whereas girls were described as pretty, kind and dancers, which supports Burn and Pratt-Adams (2015) concerning descriptions of genders. Chalabaev, *et al.* (2013) and Plaza, *et al.* (2016) also claimed that children have stereotypes in which sports each gender should participate in, these findings would agree with them. Children's gender stereotypes were varied, leading to the suggestion that gender stereotypes may be influenced through the environment and raising of the child, this supports Endendijk *et al.* (2013). Interestingly, girls seem more aware of gender stereotypes and appear to be more likely to bring attention to them. As the interviews consisted of paired boys and girls, two girls interrupted boys when they were expressing gender stereotypes, exclaiming “yes they can” when a boy called into question girls’ ability to play football. Another girl informed a boy that “not every girl is your sister” when he used his sister as an example as to why every girl plays with Barbie dolls in their free time, this could possibly be due to young girl’s recent sense of empowerment when tackling gender stereotypes, supporting British Council (2016). One girl even used her religion to call into question gender biases, stating that “God gave both knowledge” when asked which gender was better at maths in direct contradiction with Crandall, (2011) and Imperatori-Lee (2015). Boys however, appeared not to participate in this kind of questioning of male gender stereotypes as they did not interrupt a girl’s answer once, even when a stereotype was being expressed. For example, when a girl stated that “[boys] annoy girls” and that “boys [cry more] because their friends hit them”, this could possibly be due to girls becoming more empowered to speak about such things and boys lacking the ability.

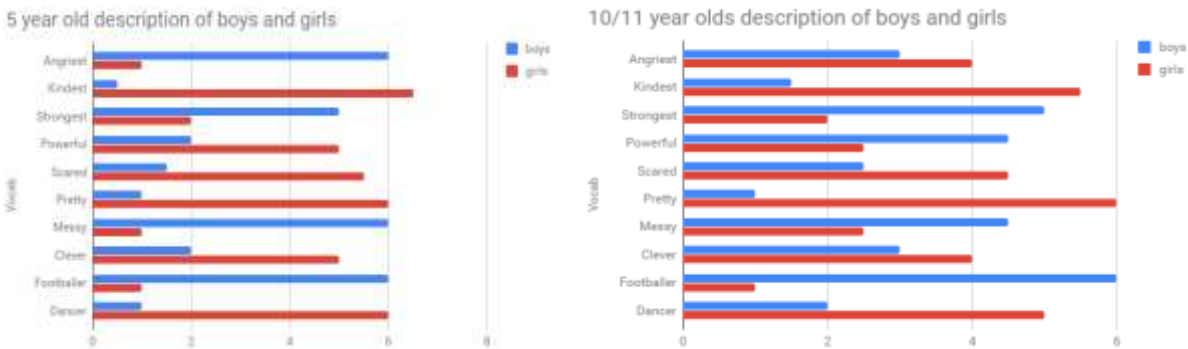
Children do appear to still have preconception ideas about gender, from colour preferences to emotions that each gender appear more likely to feel. However, girls may be more likely to question gender stereotypes when confronted with them about their own gender but not that of others. The impact of religion on gender stereotypes may also be called into question dependent on teaching within the religion.

### **To what extent does a child’s age affect their gender stereotypes?**

Questionnaires that the children answered will be triangulated with questioned answered in interviews to answer this research question. Some of children’s gender ideas appear to equalise as children get older, seven randomly chosen questionnaires of 10 and 11-year-olds were compared to the same number of questionnaires from 7-year-olds. The results compared their description of the two genders; here younger children appear to be more exclusive in their description of boy and girls (bottom left), a good example of this is 5-year-olds association with ‘angriest’. Six out of seven 5-year-olds said boys were angrier than girls but four out of seven 11-year-olds (bottom right) disagreed saying girls were actually angrier. This is curious considering younger boys stated that they would “tell a teacher” when confronted with a violent situation, in contrast with older boys in which one boy claimed he would “knock them out”.

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This coincides with Rivers and Duncan (2013) who claimed that men being more



aggressive is a wide spread stereotype. However, some divides remained consistent, especially in children's idea of whether a footballer was male or female; supporting Plaza *et al.* (2016).

In older children there appears to be a conception of sexism, with one child stating, "I am not trying to be racist [meaning sexist] because girls can do boy things", although this does show ideas of feminism, the statement does also claim that there is such a thing as 'boy's things' the same respondent previously stated that "tomboys can play football". This apparent trait of calling out sexism also appears in girls discussed in the question previously.

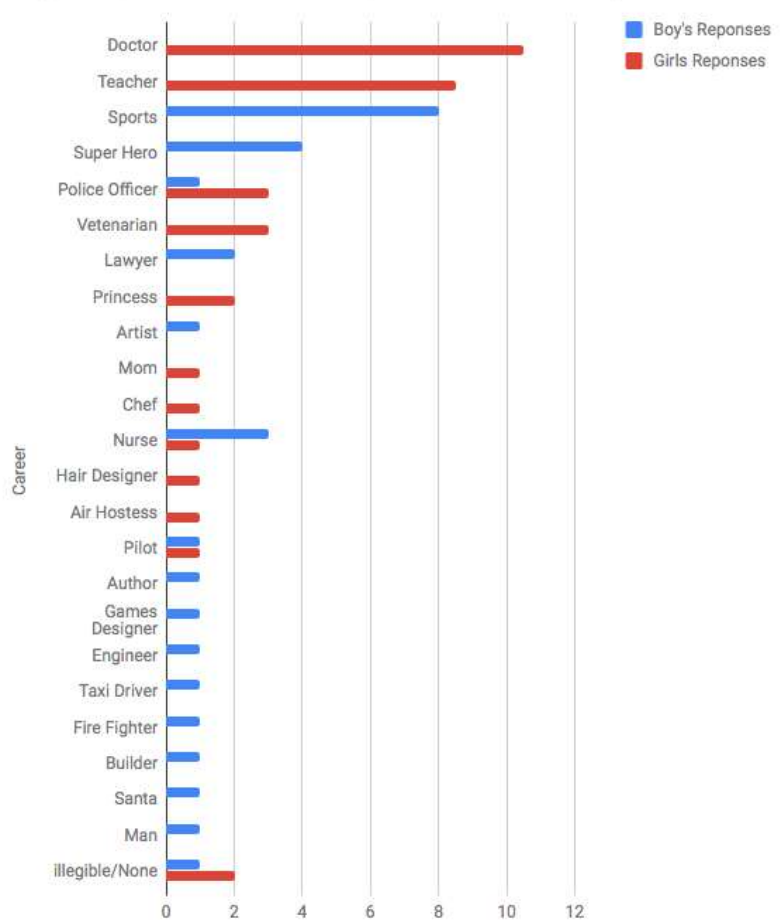
When children were asked if men and women are the same, younger children, regardless of gender, claimed that the genders are different with one boy stating "no they are not the same, boys are not the same", when younger children were asked why they thought this, they appear to point out physical differences they believe in the different genders like "girls have shoes" and that boys "don't have the same eye colour and face". Older children, 11 and 12-year-olds, would simply state "yes" they are the same, "women are the same", however, they would not give a reason for this. There was a sense of transition between the two forms of thinking between the ages, with a 10-year-old boy mentioning sexism and the fact that some "tomboys" can play football. One 9-year-old changed her response to the question from "[they] could be if they like" to "no" with the justification similar to that seen in younger years of "girls wear makeup, boys get dirty", this may be showing the advancements of children's ideas of gender as they experience more of the world, from distinctly categorising genders to having a more spectrum ideology of the social construct.

### **To what degree do children fit into the gender stereotype when considering career aspirations?**

To answer this research question, children's answers in questionnaires and interviews were considered and triangulated. Children were given the open question "What do you want to be when you are older?" and were able to answer what they wish, which resulted in some illegitimate career options such as 'Princess' and 'Santa'. When all children were given the task of drawing a nurse, 67.2% drew a female and only 18.8% of children drew a male. 15 of these female nurse drawing was drawn by boys and 28 drawn by girls. Two respondents did state that they wished to be a nurse when they were older, these were not girls but were instead boys. Career restriction appeared to be evident in the interviews which were carried out with children, with two boys claiming they wanted to be firefighters and the other two interviewed being art related. The results also suggested that children have strong stereotypes in sports related activities, and by extension careers, and is one of the stereotypes that appears not to dissipate when children experience more of the world as discussed in the finding for question 2. It would appear that boys relate more to careers in sports and, interestingly, super heroes. Eight boys out of twenty-nine expressed interest in sport as a career option, four boys also expressed an ambition to become a

superhero. Boys female peers did not appear to share this interest of superheros with none of the female participants picking this as an option, this could be due to merchandise options suggested by Peck (2015) and multimedia influences (Cherney *et al.*, 2010). Girls careers aspirations were concentrated between two professions (above), girl's top choice appears to be a doctor with only one girl claiming she wanted to be nurse, interestingly no boys appear to be interested in a career as a doctor. Boys appeared to prefer the 'physical intelligence' professions contrary to girl's suggested attraction to the 'academic' professions. This could possibly be due to boys being disengaged in traditional academic subjects due to the consistent stereotype that girls are naturally more talented in academics and therefore encouraged to proceed in it; this supports Lee, Marks and Byrd (1994). Boys also selected a higher quantity of careers with 16 legible job titles, some may be called into question such as 'Santa', 'man' and 'super hero' however

Boy's Reponses and Girls Reponses to Career aspirations



compared to girls who expressed interest in 12 with a question over whether 'princess' is a career. It does appear that children gender stereotypes are being overcome when considering these findings, three girls chose to become a police officer compared to just one boy; three boys expressed interest in becoming nurses in comparison to just one girl. As well as, ten girl respondents who chose doctor as their career preference with no boys interested in the career.

**Conclusion and recommendations**

This is a small-scale study, the findings attain must not be generalised to the entire UK, however, an attempt will be made to conclude the findings and recommend what may be done concerning them. Although every attempt has been made to make these findings reliable and valid, they are not representative of every child due to children's various experiences with views and opinions. The findings suggest that children do have stereotypes related to gender and that these stereotypes may reflect children future career aspirations. However, it is an indication of the impact of the recent movement to make children more aware of gender stereotypes as young girls can be seen questioning boys about their beliefs. This type of criticality that seems to be appearing in girls would be useful if the same thought processes were also encouraged in boys to allow them to be critical of what stereotypes they allow to define their behaviour and beliefs. An interesting finding within this research was a comment by a young

girl on religion and how it can be taught in such a way that encourages equality. Boys' suggested aversion to 'academically intelligent' careers is worrying and is reflected by the avoidance of 'physically intelligent' careers by girls.

A recommendation to professionals working with children would be to encourage a 'critical eye' when viewing societal traits and behaviour across both genders and to further incorporate PSHE and Sociology into the primary national curriculum to give children the time to question what they and how they act in daily life. An encouragement to teachers to show a wider variety of careers to children and to show that all genders can participate in those careers, this could be introduced early into children's education as this appears to be where they are most influenced by teachers.

This research project has had an impact upon me personally, I find myself questioning views and opinions on people and whether they are accurate and just. It will impact upon my professional practice by making me more aware of my speech and actions in the presence of children and to encourage children's own, critical thinking on the topic.

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