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B. Murfin
M. Ed.
1996

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CHILDREN'S GENDER RELATIONS IN THE PRESCHOOL SETTING: PARENTS' AND CHILDREN'S PERSPECTIVES AS INDICATORS FOR CHANGE

BY

B. D. Murfin Dip. Teach., B. Ed.

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfilment of the
Requirements for the Award of

Master of Education

at the Faculty of Education, Edith Cowan University

Date of Submission: 18 .03.96

Abstract

This study investigates how 4/5 year old children, from one preschool centre, and their parents perceive gender relations in our gendered society.

By observing children's interactions in a preschool setting, and discussing these interactions with the children involved, the discourses and discursive practices operating in the gender regime of this setting are uncovered. The characteristics of children's gender relations in this setting are that asymmetrical relationships are prevalent; masculine and feminine storylines are common along with shared storylines; masculinist hegemonic discourses are dominant although many girls and boys cross the gender divide; some children see the other sex/gender as 'foreign'; and children's subjectivities fluctuate in interactions. Using a feminist poststructuralist analysis of the discourses dominant in this setting, indicators for change in this preschool setting are uncovered. Although male/female dualism is dominant and obvious, many opportunities for change are available through deconstruction of these discourses with and by the children.

Through the use of a questionnaire and follow up interviews, parents' perspectives on the gender relations in the gender regime of the home setting are established. Parents' perspectives on gender relations in this setting are predominantly associated with subordinate ungendered discourses and discursive practices of our society. However, parents' perspectives on their children's beliefs and attitudes imply that the children themselves have gendered ideas about their relationships with their peers. Through the use of a feminist poststructuralist analysis of the discourses dominant in this setting, indicators for change in the home setting are established. Parental concern with regard to their children's gendered ideas indicates that opportunities for change are available through parent/teacher partnerships.

By combining the findings of both these investigations, a further step toward gender justice for this group of 4/5 year old children may be taken.

Declaration

“I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.”

Signature......

Bev Murfin

Date.....18/03/96.....

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

Gender is a primary structuring principle of all documented societies (Connell, 1995) and as such, is a primary influence on the way we live our lives. Our society, which incorporates discourses associated with language, culture, race/ethnicity, peer group pressure, and the media, is based on value dualisms such as male/female, mind/body, and culture/nature which are seen as antithetical opposites. One of each pair in these dualisms is valued above the other and in the gender order of our society this often results in 'female' being devalued (Jones, 1993; Gunn, 1993; Davies, 1989). Investigating how to change the values of our society to ensure social justice for all is a goal of many social scientists including ecofeminists (Warren, 1994; Plumwood, 1991), deep ecologists (Sessions, 1993; Naess, 1993), social ecologists (Bookchin, 1993; Biehl, 1993), and poststructuralist feminists (Kenway, Willis, Blackmore and Rennie, 1994; Weedon, 1987).

Four/five year old children live their lives influenced by the gender relations in the gender order of our society. They also experience gender relations in the gender regime of educational settings and family settings. Research (for example, Alloway, 1995a; Forgasz, 1994; Davies, 1988, 1989, and 1993; MacNaughton, 1992 and 1994; Lewis, 1991; Butterworth, 1991; Askew & Ross, 1988; Walkerdine, 1981) has shown that both girls and boys are disadvantaged socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually in educational settings because they assume socially endorsed ways of relating that are restricted by their perceptions of gender appropriate behaviours.

Research has also shown that it is in the family setting that children first experience gender as a category of identification. Studies (quoted in Alloway, 1995a and in Streitmatter, 1994) graphically illustrate how the assumed sex/gender of a baby dictates the way adults interact with the child through their physical handling of the child, their tone and volume of voice, and their toy choice for the child. These findings illustrate how parents gender their children from the day they are born.

This research study investigates children's gender relations operating in the educational setting, along with children's perspectives on these relationships. Parents' perspectives on the gender relations that influence the way their children live their lives are also investigated. Thus, the aim of the study is to discover which gender relations exist in the preschool setting (including what children know and understand about the relationships in which they participate), along with what parents know and understand about their four/five year old children's gender relations in the home setting. These insights are used as indicators for possible change. The ultimate goal with this direction of study is gender justice in our society. In such a society, parents, children, and educators would be aware of gendered forms of relating and would therefore be able to choose to resist these discursive practices if they so desire.

1.2 Background to the Study

One of the primary goals of early childhood education is to assist all children to reach their optimal development without socially imposed gender limitations. Gender justice is thus a major concern. Researchers have been investigating various aspects of children's gender relations in the early childhood education area from a sex role socialisation perspective for many years. They have found that children make stereotyped choices in their selection of play activities, play themes, play materials and play friends (MacNaughton, 1992; Dunn and Morgan, 1987; France, 1986; Ebbeck, 1985). Although sex role stereotyping attitudes have been widely documented and some authors

have outlined interventionist strategies that can be implemented (Butterworth, 1991; France, 1986; Huston and Carpenter, 1985; Rogers, 1985; Honig, 1983; Bem, 1983; Serbin, 1978), little seems to have changed in regard to gender justice and gender practices in early childhood education.

Alloway (1995a) states that this is because gender reform has been based on either an equal opportunity model or a gender inclusive model. An equal opportunity framework advocates removing structural obstacles to girls' participation in experiences currently seen as belonging to male domains. A gender inclusive framework focuses on including and revaluing the female. Neither model focuses on disrupting and abandoning gender as a category of identification: a poststructuralist perspective. "From a poststructuralist perspective, gender is viewed as a social construct that can be deconstructed and reconstructed and . . . eventually abandoned" (Alloway, 1995a, p. 33).

'New wave' theorists (MacNaughton, 1995c) have been employing a feminist poststructuralist perspective to investigate children's gender relations in the preschool setting. Walkerdine (1981) initially instigated research in this area with her assertion that children's gender relations were extremely complex and that the positions available to boys and girls exist only within certain limits. Davies (1989) investigated children's play, conversation and responses to feminist stories in an effort to understand the gendered world of childhood and provided new insights into the social construction of gender. More recently, Alloway (1995a) investigated how young children construct gender in early childhood settings and how gender relations play a significant role in the way children gain access to a scarce resource (computer activities) in this setting (Alloway, 1995b). MacNaughton (1995c) researched children's gender relations in home corner play by investigating power relations in the storylines of children's dramatic play. The study described here investigated, from a feminist poststructuralist perspective, children's gender relations in one particular preschool setting by observing children's interactions in free choice play activities and discussing these interactions with the children.

Parents' influence on the way children are gendered in our society has been researched for many years (cited in Alloway, 1995a and Streitmatter, 1994). However, little is known about parents' perspectives on children's gender relations in the home setting. Parents have great influence on their children's attitudes and understandings (Ebbeck, 1991, p. 186) and therefore parents' perspectives need to be taken into consideration when investigating children's gender relations. Bredekamp (1987, p. 57) states that appropriate practice in parent-teacher relations should include teachers working in partnership with parents. Teachers and parents need to communicate regularly to build mutual understanding and greater consistency for children. Consequently, this study also investigates parents' perspectives on children's gender relations in the home setting.

1.3 Significance of the Study

As stated previously, certain aspects of children's gender relations have been researched by 'new wave' theorists. This study, rather than investigating one particular aspect of children's gender relations, investigates children's free choice play activities in a preschool centre in order to gain an overall picture of how the discourses dominant in this setting influence children's gender relations with each other. Although it is acknowledged that the role of early childhood educators is vitally important in gender construction in the early childhood setting, investigating the part educators play is beyond the scope of this study.

Research into gender justice in the area of early childhood education from a poststructuralist perspective is on the agenda (Alloway, 1995a, 1995b; MacNaughton, 1994, 1995b, 1995c; Davies, 1989). The findings of these studies show that preschool and school experiences influence children's attitudes. However, this influence may be limited if the discourses in the home conflict with the discourses in the preschool setting (*A Statement of Principles*, 1994, p. 17). What is espoused at school needs to parallel what is advocated in the home, and vice versa.

Research into parent perceptions of education in general is limited (David, 1980 and 1993) and research into parents' perceptions from a feminist poststructuralist perspective is strictly limited. MacNaughton (1995a) reported in her investigation into parental attitudes to gender equity programs in early childhood that research is almost non-existent. In addition few research studies combine poststructuralist perspectives, parents' perceptions, and early childhood education. This study is designed to address that need.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate children's gender relations from two distinctly different angles. Phase I investigates children's perspectives on the gender relations in which they daily participate in a preschool setting. This involves video tape recording their interactions and then discussing these interactions with the children involved. Using a feminist poststructuralist framework, these transcriptions are analysed to uncover the discourses and the discursive practices which are operating in this setting. Establishing and naming the discourses dominant in children's free play activities in this setting paves the way for educators to deconstruct these discourses to enable the children themselves to understand that their relations with their peers need not be dependant on male/female dualisms and that they can and do cross gender divides on a regular basis.

Phase II of the study investigates parents' perspectives on gender relations in the home setting through the use of a questionnaire and follow up interviews. Using a feminist poststructuralist framework, the discourses and discursive practices dominant in the home setting are uncovered and analysed. Establishing and naming the discourses dominant in parents' interactions with their children in the home setting, paves the way for educators, in partnership with parents, to deconstruct these discourses and challenge male/female dualisms in the home setting.

In developing examples of praxis that enable children and their parents to access different discourses about what it means to be male and female, educators, parents, and the children themselves can work together to achieve gender justice for all children.

1.5 Research Questions

At the present time, the elimination of male/female dualisms from our society is an impossible task. However, by uncovering and deconstructing the discourses and discursive practices that hold male/female dualisms in place, gender relations that restrict or constrict children's development can be challenged. In providing both parents and children with alternative discourses that do not promote the binary nature of children's gender relations, opportunities are made available for children to develop all aspects of their personalities.

This research study was primarily concerned with uncovering the discourses and discursive practices in both the home and preschool settings that influence the way one particular group of 4/5 year old children live their lives. The specific research questions were:

1. What are the characteristics of children's gender relations in the preschool setting?
2. What are parents' perspectives on their children's gender relations in the home setting?

1.6 Glossary of Terms

The following are definitions for the terms used in this study:

Sex/gender: These terms were originally used to distinguish the biological from the social. However, the influences of the poststructuralist perspective has made the

boundary between the two so indistinct that separate definitions are meaningless (Davies, 1993, p. 10).

Gender relations:

Gender relations among people form one of the major structures of all documented societies (Connell, 1995). Gender relations are based on male/female dualisms and are the relations that exist between females and males.

Male/female dualism:

This term encompasses the idea that there are two sexes which are antithetical, bipolar opposites. Male/female dualism shapes the discourse and guides our way of being, seeing and being seen (Kenway, Willis, Blackmore & Rennie, 1994).

Gender order:

The gender order in our society encompasses gender relations at the broad structural level of society and incorporates male/female dualism.

Gender regime:

Gender regimes encompass gender relations at the local level. They are similar to the gender relations in the gender order but are shaped by the local influences of race, class, sexuality and ability (Kenway et al, 1994).

Discourse:

Discourse is the range of practices and social relationships through which an individual's subjectivities are produced and through which power relations are maintained and changed. All discourses within western societies require us to speak and act from a gendered position (Weedon, 1987).

Dominant discourses and discursive practices:

These practices and social relationships are the ways of relating that are currently taken for granted in our society. They are the normal, common sense, gendered ways of relating that operate in social institutions and in individuals.

Power / power relations:

Power relations are subtle, invisible and pervasive (Davies, 1993). Power is not seen as an object to possess; it is an effect which produces powerfulness and powerlessness and is achieved through talk, social practices and social structures. Power relations are both positive and repressive: they are omnipresent, but never fixed or totalising (Carrington, 1993).

Subjectivity:

The ways in which people give meaning to themselves, others, and the world is referred to as an individual's subjectivity (Davies and Banks, 1992). From a poststructuralist perspective, multiple subjectivities and multiple notions of femininity and masculinity are stressed (Weedon, 1987).

Feminist poststructuralist approach:

Based on the philosophical work of Michel Foucault, a feminist poststructuralist approach addresses subjectivity, discourse and power in an attempt to show that established meanings, values and power relations in our society need not be taken for granted (Weedon, 1987).

Deconstruction:

Deconstruction is a form of analysis which exposes the multiplicity of possible meanings, contradictions and assumptions underlying our understandings and ways of knowing. It is through deconstruction that asymmetrical relations of power in the gender regime of the classroom can be made visible (Alloway, 1995a).

Gender justice:

Gender justice entails the promotion and encouragement of a wide variety of ways of being female, the development and promotion of new and non violent ways of being male, and the expectation that students will try out and take risks with new gender identities (Kenway et al., 1994, p. 200).

Chapter 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 Gender Justice

2.1.1 Sex/gender and society

Sex/gender, as a category of identification, is a fundamental element in our society. Connell (1987) states that a social analysis of sex/gender is needed for an understanding of personal life, politics and society as a whole. According to Biklen & Pollard (1993, p.1), in our society

men, women, boys, and girls [are] engaged in both cross-sex and single-sex interactions. How they act, both with each other and across sex boundaries, is constructed not only culturally but also by gender. Gender, as a category of analysis, suggests that to understand female - or male - experience each must be analysed in relationship to the other in order to see how each is shaped by the other.

In addition, Biklen & Pollard (1993, p. 2) suggest that people are not simply neutral men or women. The way sex/gender is experienced is influenced by other aspects of an individual's identity including class, race, age, sexual preference, ethnicity, religious beliefs, and/or disability. "Because gender is a way of structuring social practice in general, not a special type of practice, it is unavoidably involved with other social structures. It is now common to say that gender 'intersects' - better, interacts - with race and class" (Connell, 1995, p. 75).

Social justice for all is a goal of our society. Just what social justice entails is dependent on an individual's perspective. Forgasz (1994, p. 3) claims that, "The social justice model assumes that people are similar in some ways but different in others. People should be treated identically in ways that they are alike and differently in ways that they are dissimilar. Justice is achieved through respect and fair treatment of relevant

differences.” For social justice to be a reality, change is needed and one prominent area of change is gender equity. “Gender equity implies the provision of the appropriate climate to maximise the potential of all” (Forgasz, 1994, p. 87).

Derek Volker quoted in *The Gen* (September 1993, p. 5) states that:

In any area of social change there are three phases. In the first phase, people tend to shrug their shoulders, regarding certain attitudes and practices as the norm. The second stage is where people realise that some behaviours ought to be stopped, and ask how that can be done. . . . The final stage is where things do turn around.

Volker also states that he feels our society is approaching this final stage with regard to gender equity. However, according to Gunn (1993, p. 62), “when people are attempting to change the concepts that have shaped Western industrial society over the last two hundred years the process will be long, slow and bitterly fought by those that are entrenched in, and benefit from, the current social structure.” This is reiterated by Forgasz (1994, p. 81) who claims that, “One of the emerging threats to the attainment of gender equity in society has been identified as ‘the backlash’ (Faludi, 1992), the subtle means by which women’s pursuits of equality are blocked.”

One aspect of ‘the backlash’ in our society is a focus on masculinity. Bly (1991), Bloom (1987) and Gilder (1986) claim that feminism has gone too far and call for a return of hegemonic masculinity (as quoted in Faludi, 1992, Chapter 11). However, other authors who are investigating how masculinities are constructed within our society claim that a focus on masculinities is not an aspect of ‘the backlash’. They claim that this focus is necessary if social justice, in relation to the elimination of male violence and aggression, is to be achieved. For example, Connell (1995) concludes that there is no single masculinity but rather multiple masculinities; Smith (1995) looks into relationships between mothers and their sons within the time frame of the last 50 years; Mac an Ghail (1994) investigates schools as complex gendered and heterosexual arenas where masculine perspectives are dominant; Miedzian’s (1992) thesis is that many masculine values underlie criminal and domestic violence; Forsey (1991) provides guidelines for working with boys to counter the male sex-role; and Askew and Ross (1988) look at the

factors in schools that affect the socialization of boys. At the present time, the debate about the current focus on masculinity is continuing.

According to Forgasz (1994, p. 1), "Predominant social values and expectations are mirrored in the educational system". Wrigley (1992) agrees and goes on to say that the educational system reflects the pervasive social inequalities of gender, class and race because it occupies an important and sensitive juncture between society and the family. "Because schools link public and private worlds, help to form consciousness, and structure inequalities, there are many ways to look at gender and education" (Wrigley, 1992, p. vii).

2.1.2 Gender justice and education

"Many writers have pointed out that schools simply mirror the societies of which they are part. To the extent that inequity remains entrenched in this society, it will be evident in its educational institutions" (Biklen & Pollard, 1993, p. 10). Gunn (1993) endorses this view by stating that, "Education is one of the most important of our social constructs, since it is through education that a society recreates itself by training its young in the paradigms upon which that society is built" (p. 55).

This is reiterated by Mac an Ghaill: "Schools function to prepare students for the sexual division of labour in the home and in the workplace. Furthermore, schools do not merely reflect the dominant sexual ideology of the wider society, but actively produce gender and heterosexual divisions" (1994, p. 8-9). Lahar (1991) quoted in Gunn (1993) continues this argument by stating that the dualisms of male/female, mind/body, and society/nature are the keys to maintaining the interwoven oppressions of sexism, racism, and exploitation of the natural environment.

It is clear that our education system is built upon the foundation of those dualisms and consequently plays a major role in maintaining them. Therefore, if we hope to begin to break down these dichotomies we must look at schooling, the things that are being taught and the method of teaching them. (Gunn, 1993, p. 57)

“Over the last two decades in Australia, there has been continuing recognition that females have been, and continue to be, disadvantaged by the educational system. Despite the efforts expended in attempting to redress the imbalances, only small dents have been made” (Forgasz, 1994, p. 86). One of the reasons for the lack of change is that research has been focused on girls’ disadvantage. That is, girls have been positioned as having oppressive and negative classroom experiences (Jones, 1993). This is seen by some researchers as being a limited perspective because schools can also be sites for resistance. Wrigley (1992) suggests that there are possibilities for change: “There is no simple relation between education and gender equality. As with social class relations, schools both reinforce subordination and create new possibilities for liberation, and these contradictions occur at every level in every aspect of education” (Wrigley, 1992, p. vii). Other advocates of poststructuralism (Davies, 1989 and 1993; Walkerdine, 1981, 1986 and 1990; MacNaughton, 1992 and 1994; Jones, 1993; and Alloway, 1995a) argue that children’s diverse gendered subjectivities develop in families and schools. These researchers:

seek to understand how children are both ‘made subject’ by/within the social order and how they are agents/subjects within/against it. People are seen not as passively shaped by active others, including ‘social structures’; rather they actively take up as their own the discourses through which they are shaped. (Jones, 1993, p. 158-159)

This implies that the ‘victim’ image of girls is an oversimplification and that girls can be powerful in some situations.

Nevertheless, the differing outcomes of the schooling process for girls and for boys has been widely documented (The AAUW Report, 1992; Askew & Ross, 1988; Bruce, 1985; Clark, 1990; Davies, 1988; Forgasz, 1994, Gilbert, 1994; Stanworth, 1983). Much research has been instigated and many changes have been happening in classrooms around the world in order to try to remedy this situation (Weiner, 1990).

2.1.3 Gender justice in early childhood education

Early childhood education is a vital and often under-rated area of education. It is vital

because it is in this area that the basis for the future success in the schooling process is established. According to Bruce (1985), girls' confidence in themselves and in their abilities decreases as they progress through school and this erosion begins to be noticeable in the early years of schooling. Early childhood education is under-rated in so far as it is under-studied because it is not viewed as worthy of study. Alloway (1995a, p. 104) states that, "An early childhood perspective on gender relations has been too often overlooked in national debate and policy making. It is critical to note that, as gender is held in place, so too are early childhood professionals." Consequently it is important for teachers, especially early childhood teachers, to consider and question their beliefs and assumptions so that they can identify limiting practices in their own classrooms.

Butterworth (1990, p. 9) found that, "boys in early childhood centres continue to monopolise the blocks, construction and puzzle areas where opportunities are greatest to develop mathematical and scientific learnings, while girls continue to engage in caring, nurturing, house-keeping play in the home corner." Thus, in our society and in our schools, linguistic and social structures are organised on the basis of the idea of two opposite sexes which reinforces the reality of 'difference' and 'opposition'. According to Thorne (1993, p. 116):

To gain an understanding of gender, analysis should start not with the individual [and] not with a search for sex differences, but with social relationships. Gender should be conceptualised as a system of relationships rather than as an immutable and dichotomous given.

As sex/gender intersects or interacts with race/ethnicity, class, disabilities etc. it cannot be viewed in isolation. It must be analysed within the context of evolving multidirectional relationships within and between families, schooling, and society.

2.1.4 Poststructuralist approach to gender justice in early childhood education

According to Davies (1989, p. 111), there is no necessary relation between genetic, hormonal, genital and behavioural sex and there are more similarities than differences between the sexes, and more differences than similarities among individual members of

each sex grouping. Nevertheless, Davies (1989, p. 68) in her studies found that girls, even when presented with a female hero in a feminist story, could not identify with her bravery and cleverness, as these attributes were not powerful enough to override the romantic theme in which a princess is virtuous and clean and has no rights of her own. "The power of the pre-existing structure of the traditional narrative is ever-present and it prevents a new form of narrative from being heard" (Davies, 1989, p. 69). Thus, sex/gender is constituted through visual representations of male and female children, through the idea of male and female as being opposite, and through the idea that they must position themselves as one or the other.

Jones (1993, p. 161) concurs with this view by stating that:

while the subject positions available to girls in the primary classroom (and elsewhere) are multiple, they are still inevitably inflected with wider gendered power relations as girls take on the 'available' subject positions of mother/teacher/nurturer. In other words, the dominant gender narratives, and the processes of learning 'the usual' gender-differentiated positions, are clearly not interrupted. There is no 'pure' (or non-gendered, or non-patriarchal) space within which girls develop, and become powerful.

"If dualism were rejected and people were free to position themselves as a person in terms of their interests and abilities quite independent of the set of genitals they happen to have, and were free to dress and move through the world without being obliged to mark themselves as male or female" (Davies 1989, p. 135), children would be able to develop relationships that are not gender dominated.

In the past, sex socialisation theory strategies for change have explored how educators can act upon girls to shape them differently, to make them more autonomous, to give them self esteem or to make them want to do maths and science. This places the burden on girls and suggests that girls are inadequate and in need of remedial help (Davies, 1993, p. 2). Alloway (interviewed in *The Gen*, September 1993) states: "But they [current gender equity programs] are still maintaining sex roles and sex socialisation, rather than trying to disrupt the whole notion of gender dualism."

Alloway (1995a) states that educators need to talk through the notion of gender as a political issue with children and to discuss gender relationships with them. By looking at the dynamics operating in classrooms and by seeing and naming the problems themselves, children can collaborate with educators. In an interview in *The West Australian* (Muir, 1993), Alloway urges educators "to contest the status quo . . . ; children's competencies to negotiate on these matters should not be underestimated."

Jones (1993) agrees with Alloway (1995a) and goes on to suggest that children's subjectivities must be prioritised, along with further research in this area, if educators are to successfully engage children in the deconstruction of these discourses. Jones (1993, p. 162) argues that:

Feminist researchers in education have pointed to various possibilities for focus here: for example, when socialisation is complexly understood in terms of girls (and boys) 'taking themselves up' in available gender positionings characterised by uneven and multiple forms of power, we are forced to foreground the subjectivities of the children as much as the impositions of teachers, parents and curriculum in the production of gender. This suggests that researchers take an interest in the processes through which girls [and boys] 'correctly' position themselves in available discourses, including the sanctions against particular positionings and encouragement toward others, which vary considerably across - and within - class and race, culture and discursive contexts.

Another researcher who is working in this area is MacNaughton (1992, 1993, 1994, 1995c). In her study of sex/gender and power in domestic discourses in the early childhood setting, MacNaughton (1994) raises more questions than answers. With reference to these questions, MacNaughton notes that:

In answering these questions we must keep in mind that there will be gains and losses whichever option we choose. Feminist poststructuralist theory challenges us to monitor both the gains and losses carefully. Only by doing so can we improve our ability to work productively for gender equity in early childhood. (MacNaughton, 1994, p. 9)

One of the questions raised by MacNaughton is that, "If being 'mother' is a major way of experiencing power for girls, should we change the home corner in the ways that make it attractive to boys?" (MacNaughton, 1994, p. 9). This is a dilemma currently facing both educators and researchers.

Nevertheless, Davies and Banks (1992) suggest that, if the maintenance and reinforcement of sex/gender differences are to be eliminated, the way forward for children in regard to gender justice in early childhood education, is for children to understand these discourses. "They [all children] need to understand how discourses of resistance work, if they are to begin to engage in any radical personal change which undoes fundamental elements of the male/female dualism" (p. 24).

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives

2.2.1 Sex role socialization theories

Studies of the socialization process with regard to sex role learning have generated a lot of theory and although there is a long history and much research, continual revision and generation of new hypotheses is occurring. Several social construction theories have been advanced to explain the development of sex role behaviour. Three influential theories have come from psychoanalytic, social learning, and cognitive development approaches. Very little empirical work exists to support psychoanalytic theory while social learning theory and cognitive development theory have been the focus of much continuing interest and research in the last decade (Streitmatter, 1994; Jacklin, 1989; France, 1986; Huston, 1985; Honig, 1983). The learning of sex role behaviour as defined by social learning theory describes the child as a passive recipient of culturally transmitted information while cognitive developmental theory suggests that the child is an active processor of this information. Both of these theories on their own are not able to explain all learning of sex role behaviour.

More recent research has focused on merging these two theories. Thus, a variant of cognitive developmental theory and social learning theory is gender schema theory. According to this theory, gender schemas develop from all the diverse information a child acquires that has anything to do with gender (Jacklin, 1989; Huston, 1985; Bem, 1983).

However, Walkerdine (1981), France (1986), Davies (1989), Jones (1993), and Alloway (1995a) criticise sex role socialization theories on the grounds that they tend to reinforce and maintain sex/gender differences. According to Davies (1993, p. xvii), children are not pressed into masculinity and femininity as the sex role socialization theories suggest; but rather they take up their assigned gender in their own ways during the process of becoming competent members of their social worlds. An alternative model to sex role socialisation theory is Walkerdine's (1981) poststructuralist theory which provides a framework for understanding the relation between persons and their social world and for conceptualising social change.

2.2.2 Poststructuralist theory

Poststructuralist theory differs from social construction theory in that it recognises the ongoing nature of how children constitute themselves and it recognises that each child has more than one self. According to Davies (1989, p. 5), Walkerdine initially introduced the application of poststructuralist theory to the production of gender in educational settings with the argument that the focus needs to be shifted away from individual identity to relations of power and to the multiple positionings that are available in our society. Hansot (1993, p. 12-13) states that, "a poststructuralist perspective dissolves the postulate of a stable gender identity and substitutes for it a notion of multiple selves. [This perspective] profoundly challenges the notion of personal gender identity as a coherent and stable construct over time."

Davies (1989) claims that poststructuralist theory provides a radical framework for understanding the relation between persons and their social world and that male-female dualism is embedded in social structures. Male-female dualism refers to the idea that there are two sex/genders which are antithetical opposites. Children in their play position themselves, and/or are positioned, as one or the other. Davies (1989) explores the range of subjective positionings that children take up in their play and has observed that children's gender relations are constantly shifting, making children powerful in some situations and powerless in others. According to Walkerdine (1981), to understand

power and resistance in the play of children, we have to understand children's dynamic positionings during play along with those practices that they are recreating in their play.

Walkerdine and Lucey (1989) state that, "Power does not reside in a person as a possession; but that a person can be rendered powerless by being positioned as an object of another's resistance" (p. 137) and that "to regulate control, one person must exercise power over another" (p. 147). Davies (1989) has observed many 'masculine' and 'feminine' positionings that children take up during play. She found that individual children did not limit themselves to only one of these positionings, but that they presented preferences in different situations. For example, women are relatively powerful in situations in which they signify as mothers and their practices are reproduced by children in their play in the home corner. Girls' power is produced by their setting up the game as domestic in which they, like their mothers, traditionally have power. In order to reassert their power in this play, boys have to struggle to remove the play from the site of the domestic in which they are subservient (MacNaughton, 1994).

Poststructuralist theory portrays children actively taking up their assigned sex/gender as their own. Children attempt to make sense of the world and of themselves through male-female dualism (the bipolar categories of male and female), recognising the need to be identified as one and not the other, and of one being the opposite of the other. Thus, there is a need to understand children, not as being fixed or locked into certain roles, but as dynamic with powerfulness and powerlessness alternating in response to the play situation and those involved in that play situation.

2.3 Family, Society, and Education

2.3.1 Family and society

The family in all its various forms (nuclear, single parent, blended, gay) is a fundamental element of our society and as such influences the values of our society at the same time as it is influenced by societal values. David (1980, p. 1) states that:

My central argument is that the family and the education system are used in concert to sustain and reproduce the social and economic status quo. Specifically, they maintain existing relations within the family and social relations within the economy - what has sometimes been called the sexual and social division of labour.

David (1993, p. 161) continues this argument by quoting Walkerdine and Lucey (1989):

What they [Walkerdine and Lucey, 1989] are particularly concerned to highlight is that, despite the rhetoric of social democracy and expanding opportunities, mothers' roles are still themselves regulated. These roles have crucial implications for the ways in which the mothers 'socialise' their daughters, or educate them to be women and/or mothers themselves in the family.

Smith (1995, p. 157) has contrary evidence: "Most mothers asserted firmly that these [household chores] should be split equally between boys and girls with no sexist division of labour and, indeed, that a deliberate attempt should be made to cross traditional gender lines." Despite these assertions, what actually happens is quite different. "In fact, work was not reallocated between the children. They [mothers] found it simpler to do everything themselves" (Smith, 1995, p. 157). Thus, it would appear that the situation has not changed.

According to Forgasz (1994, p. 87), "The attainment of equity is also largely dependent on communal acceptance and support for change and for women's rights to be included equally in all aspects of life."

2.3.2 Parents and education

Research has shown that parent involvement and participation in their children's education is valuable to the child, to the parents, and to educators (Dwyer, 1989; Powell, 1986; Becher, 1986). Ebbeck (1991), Stone (1987), and Honig (1975) point out the greater efficacy of education for young children when parents are involved. Parent participation and involvement programs

have meant, therefore, far more complex relationships between families and schools. They have entailed, in particular, far more 'educational' activities for parents both in school - as helpers, volunteers, workers, fundraisers, or in decision-making - and at home. This has transformed the nature of the school, from the point of view of both teachers and pupils, and the nature of family life. It has implied both greater school effectiveness and the possibility of educational success through the home. (David, 1993, p. 157)

On the topic of supporting parent participation, The Schools Council (1992, p. 61) states that, "Some of the more effective participation strategies include involving parents in professional development activities for staff members, and providing specialist courses of their own to assist children's learning." If parent programs can assist parents work with children and if these programs have the potential to produce significant changes in the way parents interact with their children (Becher, 1986), parent programs could also feasibly assist in raising parents' consciousness of gender equity issues and gender justice. "The focus [of workshops for parents] has been on raising awareness and opening up discussion on gender equity issues in the wider parent community" (*The Gen*, June/July 1995, p. 6).

2.3.3 Parent perspectives on sex/gender issues

Socialisation theories have given teachers an easy way out by allowing them to blame parents for the stereotypical behaviour of the children in their classroom (Davies, 1988, p. 11). This is reinforced by results of research such as Butterworth (1990, p. 5) who argues that "the research evidence supports the existence of differential treatment of sons and daughters by their parents in all family types" and by David (1993) who discusses the results of Walkerdine and Lucey's (1989) research, "Their [Walkerdine and Lucey (1989)] rather polemical account demonstrates the reproduction of class-based forms of womanhood and motherhood through mothers' relationships with their daughters at the stage of early childhood education" (David, 1993, p. 180).

Conversely, a meta-analysis of 172 studies entitled "Parents' differential socialization of boys and girls" (Lytton and Romney, 1991), concluded with the statement: "We believe that the finding of very few differences in parental treatment of boys and girls represents the best evidence we have on the topic at this time" (p. 289).

Current research on parents' perspectives of sex/gender issues appears strictly limited. One small scale study (Murfin, 1995) concluded that parents reported frustration at being unable to create an equitable sex/gender environment for their children. The factors that

these parents believed were beyond their control and that interfered with their ability to provide an ungendered environment for their children included the patriarchal reactions of a headmaster, the pervasiveness of peer group pressure, and the reactions of other parents.

Nevertheless, "In most of the literature on the relations between families and education, little consideration is given to the gendered notions of parents or children in a family context" (David 1993, p. 6). Recent publications refer to studies done in the early 1970s.

One example is:

Some highly innovative studies conducted in the 1970s have been instrumental in demonstrating how parents' interactions with children can be differentiated according to gender even when the parents express unequivocal, egalitarian attitudes to the upbringing of sons and daughters. Results from a variety of studies consistently demonstrated that adults' behaviour towards a baby differs depending on whether they believe they are interacting with a baby girl or a baby boy. (Alloway, 1995a, p. 68)

Streitmatter (1994, p. 50) also quotes these studies. As this research is now over 20 years old the situation needs to be reassessed. Without current research on parents' perspectives on sex/gender issues, "we only have a partial understanding of the dynamics of family and social changes, and social and educational reform" (David, 1993, p. 221).

2.4 Summary

Biological sex/gender at birth supplies the child with a label. Children then position themselves, and/or are positioned, as one sex or the other in the bipolar system of male-female dualism. Children acquire their identity as they try to make sense of the world and as they experience life they position themselves, and/or are positioned, within the boundaries set for their sex/gender. Davies, Walkerdine and MacNaughton support a poststructuralist theory that describes power and control as being central to children's gendered actions and behaviours. This is supported by the AAUW Report (1992, p. 18):

Although the causes are debated, most research indicates that children aged two to three use the terms "boy" and "girl" as simple labels rather than as conceptual categories. By age four, societal training in seeing the sexes as 'opposite' has taken hold and children begin to think of girls and "girls' things" as the opposite of boys and "boys' things", but they do not yet feel a sense of necessity about what people of each sex must do. At four or five years old, they may try to enforce certain sex roles for other children, but this is usually as much a matter of reaching their own objectives as it is a matter of belief in 'rules'.

Early childhood programmes are currently based on principles of child development; that is, regular observations of the individual child's development, learning based on children's needs and interests, and free choice of activities. MacNaughton (1992) explores the contention that a curriculum based solely on these principles is likely to be sexist; for example, gender relations will not be observed if the focus is solely on the individual child; non-interventionist strategies can lead to sexist play; and child-chosen activities maintain the sexist status quo.

MacNaughton (1992) therefore advocates an early childhood program that is not only based on a knowledge of individual child development but also on a knowledge of the social, moral and political priorities educators have for their development. Children need to be given the opportunity, through a wide range of discursive practices, to see for themselves how the dualistic social system to which they belong operates; to see how limiting it is; and to make changes in their own conceptions NOT about what is appropriate for males and for females - but about what IS appropriate for them as unique individuals.

Alloway (1995b) argues that, for gender justice to be conceivable, "we need to take the opportunity to move from examining only macro-level obstacles to the achievement of equity, to a more fine grained analysis of the micro-politics of everyday life in classrooms" (p. 81). MacNaughton (1995a) agrees with the need to focus on the micro-politics of the classroom. She states that, "identifying the various discourses of masculinity and femininity in circulation in [a preschool] centre" is a necessity if "non-traditional ways of being masculine and feminine [are to] become understood as normal and desirable ways of being - rather than abnormal or marginalized ways of being"

(MacNaughton, 1995a, p. 7). However, in order to achieve this, MacNaughton (1995a, p. 8) states that “parental acceptance of gender equity work with young children” is a necessity.

This study addresses both gender justice work at the micro-politics level and gender justice from the parents’ perspective. It attempts to develop a methodology for identifying praxis to assist deconstructing gendered discourses. The long term goal (beyond the scope of this study) is the expansion of the discursive repertoire of the parents, the children, and the educators to promote the circulation of non-traditional understandings of gender.

Chapter 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Feminist Poststructuralist Framework

This study uses a feminist poststructuralist framework to examine parents' and children's perspectives on children's gender relations in their play interactions in order to uncover the discourses and the discursive practices operating in the home and the preschool setting. By uncovering these discourses, a feminist poststructuralist analysis will give educators the insight to exploit the opportunities currently available. This framework is based on Weedon's (1987) work in this area.

The particular feminist poststructuralist framework outlined in this book addresses subjectivity, discourse and power in an attempt to show that we need not take established meanings, values and power relations for granted. It is possible to demonstrate where they come from, whose interests they support, how they maintain sovereignty and where they are susceptible to specific pressures for change. (Weedon, 1987, p. 174 and p. 175)

Although a poststructuralist framework has been chosen for this study, it must be noted that, as a relatively new application to the area of early childhood education, this framework is still in the process of development and consequently has its limitations. Previous research into gender equity in early childhood education (Bem, 1983; Ebbeck, 1885; Dunn and Morgan, 1987; Butterworth, 1991; and Streitmatter, 1994) was based on a structuralist approach through the application of sex-role socialization theories. These research studies focused on equal opportunity and gender inclusion and do not take into account the relation between children and with their social world which is the basis of feminist poststructuralist theory. Researchers in early childhood education using this approach include Alloway, MacNaughton, Davies, and Kamler et al. (see Ch. 2). Hence, the poststructuralist framework used in this study is a shift towards developing an understanding of how gender is constructed through everyday relations of power.

3.1.1 The child within society (Social Relations)

The way children experience their day to day life is influenced by their sex/gender and the way that sex/gender intersects and/or interacts with the other aspects of identity including class, race/ethnicity, age, culture, socio economic status, religious beliefs and/or disability. Children live their lives through social relations whose characteristics are defined by all aspects of children's identity as well as all aspects of the social situations in which children participate.

Social relations will determine the range of forms of subjectivity immediately open to any individual on the basis of gender, race, class, age and cultural background. Where other positions exist but are exclusive to a particular class, race or gender, the excluded individual will have to fight for access by transforming existing power relations. (Weedon, 1987, p. 95).

Kenway et al (1994, p. 189) describe social relations as being “made up of many different and often contradictory discourses and discursive fields. Some of these are dominant, some subordinate, some peacefully co-existing, some struggling for ascendancy.” That is, how social relations operate is dependent on all aspects of children's identity and the discourses available to the child. Weedon (1987, p. 167) concurs with this by stating: “Feminist poststructuralist approaches deny the central humanist assumption that women and men have essential natures. They insist on the social construction of gender in discourse.”

3.1.2 Sex/gender in our society (Gender Relations)

Using a feminist poststructuralist framework, “gender is understood in terms of relations between female and male, not as unrelated, disconnected, separatist ways of being” (Alloway, 1995a, p. 43). That is, sex/gender is something ‘we do’ (not a personal attribute) and as such “gender relations among people and groups ... , form one of the major structures of all documented societies” (Connell, 1995, p. 71).

Gender relations at the broad structural level (for example, our society) are defined as the gender order and at the local level (for example, the home or the preschool setting), the

gender regime. Gender regimes may follow a similar logic as the broad patterns of the gender order, but take on a different shape. According to Kenway et al (1994, p. 191), gender regimes are “patterns [that] differ along all sorts of axes including race, class, sexuality and ability.” Although patterns will differ in different sites and locations, gender regimes have the common component of hierarchical male/female dualism. “Male/female dualism helps to shape the discourses which we shape and which shape us, and guides our way of being, seeing, and being seen” (Kenway et al, 1994, p. 191). According to Davies (1993, p. 8), the male/female dualism is held in place through discourse.

3.1.3 Discourse and discursive practices

According to Michel Foucault’s theory of discourse (McHoul and Grace, 1993) the concept of discourse is seen as a structuring principle of society and discursive practices operate in social institutions and within the individual. Weedon (1987, p. 98) states that:

The institutional sites of discourse responsible for the socialisation of the child, such as the family, the school, religion, the media, function by the authority of what is ‘natural’ or ‘normal’. The guarantee of the authority of a particular discourse will vary from God to science to common sense.

In social institutions, feminist poststructuralist analysis of discourses and discursive practices explains how power is exercised on behalf of specific interests and where opportunities for resistance are available. At the personal or individual level, this theory explains where an individual’s experience comes from, why it is often contradictory, and why and how it can change (Weedon, 1987, p. 41).

According to Davies (1993, p. 14), “the poststructuralist use of the term ‘discourse’ ... signals an understanding of the person as made subject through discourses that they have available to them.” Kenway et al (1994, p. 189) expand on this definition by stating that, “It is through discourse that meaning and human subjects are produced and through which power relations are maintained and changed.”

3.1.4 Power relations and subjectivity

According to McHoul and Grace (1993, p. 39), “discourses always function in relation to power relations in Foucault’s sense.” That is, power is not an object which some people possess and some people do not. Rather, it is an effect which is exercised through the control of knowledge. Its exercise can be positive as well as repressive. Power relations are therefore omnipresent, but never fixed or totalising (Carrington, 1993, p. XV). Davies (1993, p. 144) states that, “positions of power and powerlessness are achieved through talk, through social practices, and through social and architectural structures.” These power relations are subtle, invisible, and pervasive (Davies, 1993, p. 8).

Subjectivity also is not a semi-fixed essence. It constantly is achieved through relations with others and is made possible through discourses. Thus, subjectivity is a set of relationships rather than an essence (Davies, 1993, p. 9 and p. 10). According to Weedon (1987, p. 99):

Gendered subject positions are constituted in various ways by the images of how one is expected to look and behave, by rules of behaviour to which one should conform, reinforced by approval or punishment, through particular definitions of pleasure which are offered as natural and imply ways of being a girl or woman [boy or man] and by the absence within particular discourses of any possibility of negotiating the nature of femininity and masculinity. For poststructuralism, femininity and masculinity are constantly in process, and subjectivity ... is constantly subject to dispersal.

That is, according to a feminist poststructuralist perspective, multiple subjectivities and multiple notions of femininity and masculinity are stressed. “Instead of a stable self, people have ‘subjectivities’ which fluctuate according to positioning in a network of social relations and access to particular discourses” (Acker, 1994, p. 20).

According to Weedon (1987, p. 92), “different discourses provide a range of modes of subjectivity and the way in which particular discourses constitute subjectivity have implications for the process of reproducing or contesting power relations.”

3.1.5 Summary

To sum up, discourse, power (and power relations), and subjectivity are all interrelated, each one influencing the other, and at the same time each one being influenced by the others. That is, discourses are produced both by, and in, social and gender relations; power is exercised through discourse and discourse influences how power is exercised; subjectivity is achieved through the exercising of power and power is exercised through subjectivity; and subjectivity is achieved through discourse and discourse influences how subjectivity is achieved. Foucault (cited in McHoul and Grace, 1993, p. 11 and p. 12), states that, “since these things have been made, they can be unmade, as long as we know how it was that they were made” and this is what feminist poststructuralist analysis attempts to achieve through deconstruction.

3.2 Feminist Poststructuralist Analysis (Deconstruction of discourses)

A feminist poststructuralist analysis, through deconstruction of discourses, “looks to the historically and socially specific discursive production of conflicting and competing meanings” (Weedon, 1987, p. 86). Davies (1993, p. 8) discusses deconstruction as a political act which puts a concept or word under erasure in order to “discover the mainsprings of power that have held women and other marginalised groups in place.”

3.2.1 Deconstruction and gender inequity

From a feminist poststructuralist perspective, sex/gender is seen as a social construct that can be deconstructed. In an effort to understand children’s relationships and the inequities in these relationships, Alloway (1995b) closely examined children’s relations to uncover the discourses operating at the classroom level. She then deconstructed these discourses and discovered that asymmetries of power underpin gender relations. According to Alloway (1995b, p. 93), “At the micro-level it is possible to see how

asymmetries of power are established, maintained, resisted, and contested through the micro-politics of everyday life.”

“Deconstruction is a form of analysis which exposes the multiplicity of possible meanings, contradictions and assumptions underlying our understandings and ways of knowing” (Alloway, 1995a, p. 106). That is, through the deconstruction of discourses and discursive practices of gender relations, asymmetrical relations of power in the gender regime of the classroom can be made visible.

3.2.2 Gender regimes in the school setting

Sex/gender, through gender regimes, is a major organising principle in schools (Acker, 1994, p. 93). In order to deconstruct the discourses in a classroom according to feminist poststructuralist analysis, it is necessary to examine the gender regime of the school or preschool. Clark (1990, p. 54) states that, although the gender regime of each classroom varies because of regional, cultural and class differences, they can be characterised by:

- unequal power relationships
- narrow and actively enforced definitions of masculinity as the negation of femininity
- negative valuation of femininity
- highly gendered forms of sexual harassment
- particular forms of romance
- narrow and unrealistic views about girls’ futures as adult women.

“One of the more obvious consequences of this dynamic is that the boys and girls barely know each other and learn to see each other as different species” (Clark, 1990, p. 54). MacNaughton (1995c) discusses this contention by stating that children see “the other gender as ‘the enemy’. In the words of three children of the nineties: ‘girls are yuk’; ‘boys hurt you’; and ‘girls and boys are on different teams’” (MacNaughton, 1995c, p. 1).

Similarly, Alloway (1995b, p. 89) states that in her study, she was able to identify dominant gendered forms of relating which she defines as the ways in which females and

males assume socially endorsed ways of interacting according to gender. She describes boys' ways of interacting as involving the use of brute force, aggressive displays, and resistance to notions of fair play; and girls' ways of interacting as involving the use of emotional manipulations (consisting of bribery and emotional blackmail) and as an unwillingness to do combat with the boys. Alloway's descriptions of boys' ways of interacting, aligns with what Connell (1995) describes as hegemonic masculinity.

Connell states that:

The concept of hegemony ... refers to the cultural dynamic position by which a group claims and sustains a leading position in social life. At any given time, one form of masculinity rather than others is culturally exalted. Hegemonic masculinity can be defined as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. (Connell, 1995, p. 77)

Frank (1995, p. 2) concurs with Connell by stating that:

By hegemonic masculinity I mean those actual and perceived practices of men that give them power, authority and privilege over others. As a collective process, gender obedience by men to hegemonic masculinity expresses themes of competition with other men, subordination of women and other men, violence toward women and other men, and heterosexism and homophobia.

An example of an enactment of hegemonic masculinity in everyday life in the school setting is the intrusion by boys on girls' games in the playground (Connell, 1995, p. 232).

Davies (1993, p. 200) states that, "Boys will continue to achieve themselves as masculine through patterns of harassment and assault as long as hegemonic discourses constitute masculinity in opposition to and superior to femininity." In this way, feminine discourses are constituted in relation to, as a compliment to, and/or as opposed to masculinist hegemonic discourses. That is, girls need to be virtuous, passive, vulnerable (the opposite of boys) to maintain their right to be 'feminine'.

Walkerdine (1986, p. 71 and 72) describes discourses on femininity which require girls in the classroom to be hard working, quiet, rule following, kind, helpful and nurturing,

and to have nice personalities. If a girl operates outside this discourse, she is labelled as 'domineering' or as 'a madam'. The only assertive power girls have access to is "through their operation as sub-teachers" (Walkerdine, 1986, p. 72). Acker (1994, p. 21) discusses other discourses that limit the way girls see the world. These discourses can create storylines for girls concerning marriage, motherhood, boyfriends, and romance. Davies (1993, p. 81 and 83) alludes to girls' discourses which give them power to remove boys from the site of domestic play; while MacNaughton (1995c) discusses "The Power of Mum" in children's dramatic play.

However, according to Alloway (1995b), if analysis ends with the establishment of dominant discourses, the interpretation would have to be severely limited.

The focus on difference serves to consolidate our understandings of gender as categorical groups of opposites. Within this framework, the temptation is to understand all girls and boys in terms of gender differences, to naturalise these differences and to see such differences as essential aspects of existence as gendered beings. ... To look at only the dominant gender modes of interacting is to miss the multiple and different ways that girls and boys relate. The deviations from the dominant forms are critical in challenging naturalism and essentialism as interpretations of differences between the genders. (Alloway, 1995b, p. 89 and 90)

Davies and Banks (1992, p. 5) articulate this alternative framework in the following way: "We were interested in the multiple forms that masculinity and femininity can take and wish, in our study, to emphasize the differences within genders rather than between them, as is generally the case in more traditional studies of sex roles and sex role socialization." Clark (1990, p 29 and 30) agrees with this by stating that to highlight the categories 'male' and 'female' can lead to assumptions of innate differences. She states that 'making sense' of the behaviour of girls and boys in terms of their experiences, social and cultural situation, and their access to power is necessary if naturalism and essentialism are to be avoided.

Alloway (1995b) extended her analysis beyond dominant gendered ways of relating, found many inconsistencies, and consequently reported that:

There appeared to be no essential ways for girls and boys to interact and that no way remained the exclusive province of the one as opposed to the other. Ways of being female and male were more fluid and contextually

determined than the descriptions of the dominant forms of relating would suggest. Gender was manifest in much more complex ways than binary thinking would allow. (Alloway, 1995b, p. 90)

This conclusion was also reached by Kamler, Maclean, Reid & Simpson (1994, p. 227) who state that:

Our findings show it would be wrong to talk about 'two cultures', one for girls and one for boys. Many of the behaviours that we are attributing to 'girls' or 'boys' were exhibited by only a small group. Other children's behaviour was much less clearly gendered. And even those children who engaged in what appeared to be typical gendered behaviour in one context would often act quite differently with other teachers in other contexts.

Connell (1995, p. 72) states that, from a poststructuralist perspective, "gender identities are fractured and shifting, because multiple discourses intersect in any individual life." That is, it is the overlapping or criss-crossing of discourses (Carrington, 1993) that produces gendered ways of being and according to Weedon (1987) this is where they can be challenged.

Kenway et al (1994, p. 192), states that discourses "in schools are associated with the school's culture and subcultures. ... Those out of school will include the discourses of family and local community and those associated with students' ethnic/racial/class culture."

3.2.3 Gender regimes in the home setting

Weedon (1987) states that parental concern about bringing up children is associated with socially defined 'normality'. She describes 'normality' as what parents believe to be necessary for their children's future success in life, in particular, success in family relationships and success in employment. This concern with socially defined normality "leads most parents to accept dominant definitions of the necessity, and meaning of gender difference" (Weedon, 1987, p. 76). That is, parents accept socially defined femininity and masculinity as 'normal' and consequently see gender appropriate child-rearing and behaviour as a matter of common sense. Sources of parental common-sense assumptions include: books on child development, sexuality or the family; general

education; the media; and relatives and friends. These intersecting discourses privilege one set of child rearing practices over others and parents may not see that discourses of common sense can limit their children's futures.

Alloway (1995a, p. 71), contends that, "Gendered parenting practices are endemic and [will] remain invisible for as long as they are permitted to remain uncontested, taken-for-granted ways of communicating with sons and daughters. It seems that both parents are implicated in laying the foundation stones for girls and boys to recognise themselves as separate, different and distinctly gendered."

Nevertheless, parents can challenge sex/gendered discourses if their understandings of 'normality' go beyond those of hierarchical male/female dualism discourses. However, "in order to be effective and powerful, a [nongendered] discourse needs a material base in established social institutions and practices" (Weedon, 1987, p. 100). One possible way this 'material base' can be established is if the discursive practices of home setting and school setting intersect and interact in ungendered ways.

Finally, the challenging by parents and educators of dominant gendered discourses can be resisted because "common sense, the media, and peer-group pressure are just some of the social forces which work against the realization of nonsexist discourses in education [and in the family]" (Weedon, 1987, p. 100).

3.3 Application of Feminist Poststructuralist Framework

"The principles of feminist poststructuralism can be applied to all discursive practices as a way of analysing how they are structured, what power relations they produce and reproduce, where there are resistances, and where we might look for weak points more open to challenge and transformation" (Weedon, 1987, p. 136).

3.3.1 Phase I

Foucault (cited in McHoul and Grace, 1993, p. 49) asserts: "Seek in the discourse ... its conditions of existence" and "Refer the discourse ... to the practical field in which it is deployed." To this end, the study reported here investigates the operation of male/female dualisms in children's interactions in order to establish the characteristics of children's gender relations in the gender regime of a preschool setting.

By examining children's interactions (and by discussing these interactions with the children involved), a feminist poststructuralist framework is used to expose the discourses and the discursive practices available and operating in this setting. For the purposes of this study, the application of this framework entails identifying the dominant gendered ways of relating in our society and labelling them masculinist hegemonic discourses and prevailing feminine discourses. The criteria for the selection of the discursive practices associated with each discourse is dominance in the gender order of our society and applicability to the gender regime of this preschool setting (see 3.2.2, Gender regimes in the school setting).

For the purposes of this study, masculinist hegemonic discourses include the discursive practices of:

- masculinity in opposition to and superior to femininity
- dualistic hierarchical definition of maleness
- excluding the feminine
- storylines concerned with heroism, conquering, war, aggression, and/or deaths
- active play needing lots of space
- rules of fair play do not apply to males
- violence/aggression toward other males
- violence/aggression toward females
- heterosexuality and homophobia

For the purposes of this study, prevailing feminine discourses include the discursive practices of:

- passive, vulnerable, invisible
- females being in any way less than males
- unwillingness to do combat
- operation as a sub-teacher
- storylines concerned with motherhood and/or the domestic realm
- storylines concerned with romantic love, marriage, and/or boyfriends
- hard working and/or model pupils
- use of emotional manipulations including bribery and emotional blackmail
- awareness of the gaze of others including looking nice and/or not getting dirty
- excluding the masculine for fear of disruption and/or aggression

3.3.2 Phase II

For Phase II of this study, Foucault's conditions of existence are again 'male/female dualism'; and the practical field in which it is deployed is the 'gender regime of the home'. That is, this study is concerned with investigating parents' perspectives on the operation of male/female dualisms in gender relations in their home settings.

According to Weedon (1987), the way parents bring up their children (their child rearing practices) will be dictated by the discourses and the discursive practices dominant in the home setting and these practices will influence children's gender relations in this setting. What parents see as socially defined 'normality' will influence the discourses and discursive practices parents adopt in the home setting and according to Weedon (1987), normality is concerned with what parents believe to be necessary for children's future success in family relationships and in employment. What parents see as 'normality' will be influenced by their own upbringing along with their beliefs and attitudes about our society at the present time.

By examining parents' perceptions, a feminist poststructuralist framework involves uncovering or exposing the discourses and the discursive practices operating / available in the home setting. The application of this framework entails identifying the dominant discourses and discursive practices concerning child rearing practices in our society that can be applied to the home setting. These are labelled prevailing gendered discourses and subordinate ungendered discourses.

Prevailing gendered discourses include the discursive practices of:

- the necessity of gender difference - concerned with 'normality'
- the meaning of gender difference - concerned with 'common sense'
- gender appropriate behaviour - what girls and boys should and shouldn't do
- socially defined masculinity and femininity - girls and boys, men and women, recognise themselves as separate, different and distinctly gendered
- gender appropriate child rearing practices.

Subordinate ungendered discourses include the discursive practices of:

- gender difference not necessary insofar as 'normality' is concerned
- beyond male/female dualism - 'common sense' implies that gender differences have no meaning
- ungendered behaviour - girls and boys can do anything and everything
- girls and boys, men and women, recognise themselves as individuals whose definition is not reliant on their biological sex
- ungendered child rearing practices
- reject 'the feminist movement'; but nevertheless uphold feminist ideas, beliefs and attitudes concerning ungendered child rearing practices
- ungendered play at this age.

How this theoretical framework is applied to the analysis of the data is discussed in Chapter 4, Data Analysis Methods.

3.4 Gender Justice

Kenway et al (1994, p. 197) states that poststructuralism is of practical use to people working for gender justice in and through schools. A feminist poststructuralist analysis “draws on theories of discourse to explore the way in which socio-cultural hegemonies of the dominant grouping are acquired and challenged’ (Kenway et al, 1994, p. 190).

Connell (1995, p. 74) theorises that, although power relations are the main axis of power in the contemporary European/American gender order and although these power relations entail the overall subordination of women and the dominance of men, “the dominance of any group of men may be challenged by women. Hegemony then is a historical mobile relation” (Connell, 1995, p. 77). To do this, Connell (1995, p. 232 and p. 233) advocates degendering and recomposing masculinities in order to allow a ‘re-embodiment’ for men; that is, a search for different ways of using, feeling, and showing male bodies, and by changing division of labour in early child care. By recomposing the cultural elements of gender, a type of ‘gender multiculturalism’ may be possible (Connell, 1995, p. 234). In the conclusion to his book on masculinities, Connell states that he finds it surprising that there has been little discussion of the role of education in the transformation of masculinity (Connell, 1995, p. 238) because “education is a key site of alliance politics” (Connell, 1995, p. 239).

Children in their day to day life in classrooms are attempting to attend to the culturally prevailing discourses of the classroom gender regime by ‘getting it right’ (Davies, 1993, p. 9). This does not mean children are behaving as everyone else behaves; but that they are practising the culture in identifiable individual ways by knowing the ways in which cultural practices can be varied. That is, girls and boys take up offerings as materials for their own practice by reproducing them, resisting them, and/or transforming them (Connell, 1994, p. 15). For example, girls can be “exciting authors of girls’ cultures ... in vital respect different to boys. Just because many of these cultural activities are less

visible does not necessarily mean they are more or less exciting [and/or] more or less oppressive" (Carrington, 1993, p. 104).

Hence gender justice entails the promotion and encouragement of a wide variety of ways of being female, the development and promotion of new and non violent ways of being male, and the expectation that children will try out and take risks with new gender identities (Kenway et al, 1994, p. 200). One feminist poststructuralist approach to working toward gender justice in the preschool setting is outlined by Alloway (1995b). She labels it as a 'Critical Deconstructive Model'. "The focus [of the critical deconstructive approach] is on having children come to understand how they themselves are deeply implicated in the processes of production of gender as they know it and live it" (Alloway, 1995b, p. 92). By using this approach with children, "possibilities will arise for working toward a critical deconstruction of the asymmetries of power that underpin gender relations" (Alloway, 1995b, p. 93).

Alloway (1995b) also states that this approach or model is not just effective when working with children, but can also be applied to work with parents. "Within a critical deconstructive approach ... the possibility is for curriculum writers, educators (including parents) and children themselves to be empowered by understanding how gender is constructed within socio-historical contexts and moments" (Alloway, 1995b, p. 81).

3.5 Summary of this Chapter

"Gender is not a natural arrangement but rather a social and cultural construction made and changed by people and ... gender relations in labour force, home, school and elsewhere arise from relationships of power and struggle and therefore can be changed -- but of course not easily" (Kenway et al, 1994, p. 201). This has been described as the 'politics of gender' and according to many researchers it needs to be taught to children of all ages.

As a theoretical or conceptual framework, feminist poststructuralist theory looks at the constitutive forces of society in general (language, race/ethnicity, class, socio economic status, religious beliefs, culture, media, peer group pressure) as well as the individual person and sees both of these in their social and historical contexts (Davies, 1993, p. xviii). Feminist poststructuralist theory seeks to question the gender order itself. The framework for this theory involves working with boys and girls by discussing with them the relationships through which gendered persons are constituted, and by enabling them to see how society produces gendered persons.

Feminist poststructuralism encourages educators “to identify the discourses that are making gendered subjects, the meanings that are being made from them by members of the school community and how these are remade through school members” (Kenway et al, 1994, p. 199). Teachers and students interact through intersecting discourses and during this process of interacting, current discourses are negotiated and possibly even transformed in the process. Kenway et al (1994, p. 192) states that this can also be the case when gender reformers undertake work with parents.

This study focuses on the child within society (in the home setting and the preschool setting). Parents’ perspectives and children’s perspectives are investigated to discover, through the deconstruction of the discourses and discursive practices in both these settings, the characteristics of children’s gender relations.

Chapter 4

METHOD

4.1 Design

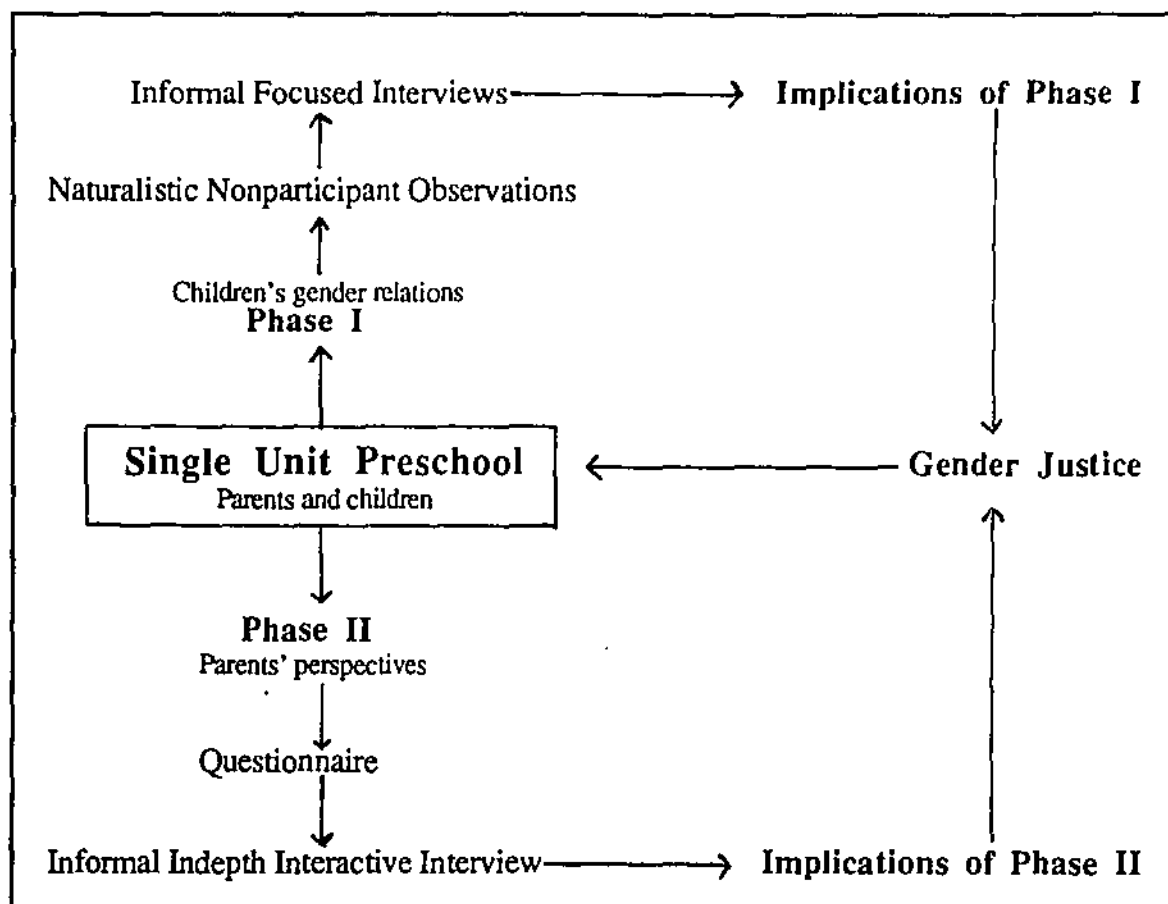
This research is primarily a qualitative study. One aspect of qualitative research that is relevant to this study is “to describe the essential qualities of events, to interpret the meanings and relationships among those events, and to appraise the significance of these events in the larger picture of social and educational concerns” (Kincheloe, 1991 p. 145).

This research also includes an element of the quantitative research paradigm in that some data from one source (parent questionnaire) is analysed for frequency of response. Reichardt and Cook (*Beyond Qualitative Versus Quantitative Methods*) assert that “there is no need for a dichotomy between the method-types and that there is every reason . . . to use them together to satisfy the demands of research in the most efficacious manner possible (cited in Borg and Gall, 1989, p. 382). Thus, through the use of multiple data collection and indepth analysis of data, new knowledge and insights may be obtained in an area of early childhood education that is under-researched.

A study of parents’ and children’s perceptions of children’s interactions, in terms of gender relationships, is the focus of this research study. The study entails an indepth investigation of one preschool centre in order to discover the extent and characteristics of the children’s gender relations with their peers as well as the parents’ perspectives on their children’s gender relations. Demographic background information on the parents is also obtained to provide a profile of this group of parents.

The study is in two phases (see Figure 1). Phase I investigates the extent and characteristics, as well as the children’s perceptions, of gender relations. Phase II investigates the parents’ background and perspectives on children’s gender relations.

Figure 1: Research design



4.1.1 Phase I: Children's gender relations

The children attending the centre will be observed during indoor and outdoor play activities and will then be questioned about their interactions with their peers. The observations of children's relationships will be naturalistic and nonparticipatory. To accomplish this, the children will be video tape recorded during indoor and outdoor activity time at the preschool. Informal focused interviews will then be conducted with either individual children or small groups of children. In order to accomplish this the children will be shown small segments of the video tape recording illustrating them taking part in interactions and they will be asked to talk about the situation. Hatch (1990, p. 251) outlines strategies for improving interviews with young children and these strategies will be implemented during the informal focused interviews.

4.1.2 Phase II: Parents' perspectives

The parents of children attending the preschool centre will be questioned about their beliefs, knowledge and understandings of their children's gender relations and the dynamics of their children's relationships with their peers through the use of a questionnaire and interviews (see Appendix I and II). The questionnaire is in three sections: Section A seeks demographic information about the parents' socio-cultural background; Section B consists of structured items (question and a list of alternative responses) and unstructured items (question with no possible response indicated) concerning parents' perspectives on children's gender relations; and Section C invites parents to take part in the interviews. The interview is an informal indepth interactive interview with the interview schedule consisting of semistructured and unstructured questions to elicit more detailed and specific information on parents' perspectives.

4.1.3 Gender justice

Data collected in Phase I of this study will provide possible alternative discursive practices for the preschool educators to implement in the centre; the information obtained from the informal focused interviews with children providing the basis for the selection of these practices. Implications will be drawn from information collected in Phase II for the possible formation of teacher/parent partnerships. Classroom discursive practices and strategies for future use in forging partnerships with parents in furthering the provision of gender justice in this preschool setting, will be suggested.

4.2 Informants

The informants for this study are the children, and the parents of the children, attending a single unit preschool centre in the Northern Territory. Except for the preschool educators, the study sets out to encompass the entire population of the preschool centre. The centre was chosen because of its location (the researcher is a resident of the Northern

Territory) and because of the willingness of the primary school principal, the preschool educators, and the parents to be involved in the study.

25 children enrolled in the Morning Group and 23 children enrolled in the Afternoon Group, making a total of 48 children, were invited to take part in the study. However, 45 children compromise the sample for Phase I of the study due to the non-return of 3 video and audio taping permission slips.

The informants for Phase II of the study consist of 47 families (one set of twins attended the preschool). Of this number 45 families (96%) returned the video and audio taping permission slips; 35 family groups completed the questionnaire; and 20 family groups took part in the interviews. Because the number of informants as family groups who took part in the interviews was encompassed in the numbers of informants as family groups who returned the questionnaires, 74% of the families of children attending the preschool are represented in the study (see Table 1).

Table 1
Informants as family groups

Informants	Families	%
Parent population	47	100%
Video and audio permission	45	96%
Completed questionnaire	35	74%
Took part in interviews	20	43%
Took part in the study	35	74%

4.3 Data Collection Methods

4.3.1 Naturalistic nonparticipant observations (children)

The children from both preschool groups were video tape recorded while they took part in

indoor and outdoor preschool activities over a period of four weeks. The aim of these observations was to record children's interactions with their peers during free choice play activities.

Prior to the commencement of the study, the video camera recorded the children's interactions and relationships during indoor and outdoor activity time over a period of 2 weeks. Initially it was envisaged that this would give the children sufficient time to ignore the camera's presence during the observations for the study. This was not the case. (This is discussed in 5.1.1 Observations, p. 49.)

4.3.2 Informal focused interviews (children)

Informal focused interviews were conducted with either individual children or small groups of children. The children were shown small segments of the video tape recording illustrating them taking part in interactions with their peers and they were asked to talk about the play situation. These interviews were audio tape recorded.

Prior to the commencement of the study, segments of the video taped recordings were replayed to the children and discussions about the play interactions were conducted. It was envisaged that this would encourage the children to talk freely when discussing the observations for the study. This was not the case. (This also is discussed in 5.1.2 Interviews, p. 52.)

4.3.3 Questionnaire (parents)

Section A: Demographic information

Background information pertaining to the parents as individuals was sought. Each parent was asked to complete structured questions about sex, age, place of birth, cultural background, educational background, occupation, annual income, and the size and composition of family (see Appendix I, p. 196 and 197). Anonymity was maintained.

Section B: Parents' perspectives

Information concerning parents' beliefs, knowledge and understandings of their children's play interactions and the dynamics of their children's relationships with their

peers was requested. Both structured and unstructured questions were included (see Appendix I, p. 198 to 204). All information remained confidential.

Section C: Invitation

In this section, the parents were given the choice of being involved in an indepth interview to discuss their responses to Section B (see Appendix I, p. 205).

Content validity was established by piloting the questionnaire. The questionnaire was trialled with a group of parents at another preschool in order to ensure that the questions were unambiguous and easy to understand, and that all areas were covered. The questionnaire was also trialled with a group of Bachelor of Education students. Comments concerning the content of the questions, the wording of the questions, and the length of the questionnaire were sought and adjustments made accordingly.

4.3.4 Informal indepth interactive interviews (parents)

The questions were formulated carefully to ensure that the researcher did not dominate the interview and/or intimidate parents with her own views and concerns. The questions were phrased in such a way that parents would feel that they were 'the expert' with insider knowledge; while the researcher, as the inquirer and as a non-parent, did not have this knowledge. At the beginning of each interview the parents were encouraged to speak freely and explicitly. With the permission of each parent, these interviews were audio tape recorded.

Section I

This section of the Interview Schedule was based on Section B of the questionnaire and was intended to expand on the information already acquired (see Appendix II, p. 208 to 215). In order to probe deeper and further, the parents were encouraged to tell more, explain in greater detail, or give other examples related to their initial responses.

Section II

Several quotations from a recent magazine article on gender equity were read to the parents and they were asked to respond to these quotes (see Appendix II, p. 216).

Section III

The findings from current research (*Gender equity: Hands up for everyone*, 1993) were presented to parents and they were asked to respond to these findings by agreeing or disagreeing, and/or by making comments (see Appendix II, p. 217 to 220).

The interview schedule was piloted on parent volunteers. Comments were requested on the length of the interview and the appropriateness of Section II and Section III. Comments were also requested about how the participants felt during the interview. (For example, did they feel comfortable, relaxed, and able to talk freely?) Adjustments to the interview schedule were made according to feedback received.

4.4 Data Analysis Methods

Analysing the data from Phase I of the study using a feminist poststructuralist framework consisted of deconstructing the discursive practices operating in the gender regime of the preschool setting. That is, the discursive practices involved in each interaction were deconstructed to reveal how asymmetrical relations of power were created and maintained and/or how they were resisted and transformed at the institutional level (gender regime of the preschool) and at the personal level (within the individual).

A feminist poststructuralist analysis of Phase II consisted of applying the framework outlined in Chapter 3 to uncover the discourses and discursive practices concerned with gender relations operating in the gender regime of the home setting. That is, the discursive practices of the home setting (as obtained from the parents' perceptions) were compared with the dominant parental discursive practices operating in the gender order of our society. How this analysis was implemented is discussed in Chapter 5.

4.5 Limitations

This study is an investigation of parents' and children's perspectives on gender relations. Although it is acknowledged that the role that early childhood educators play in gender construction in the preschool setting is vitally important, an investigation of that role is beyond the scope of this study.

This is a qualitative study of one setting and as such, the results are not generalizable to the whole population. Nevertheless, this preschool setting is typical of other urban preschool centres throughout the Northern Territory and the study has yielded important new insights into the understanding of children's interactions and relationships. In addition, recommendations have been made for developing partnerships with parents to encourage egalitarian relationships for all children.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

4.6.1 Informed consent

Informed consent from parents was obtained by the informants signing the Statement of Disclosure and Informed Consent on the first page of the questionnaire (see Appendix I, p. 194). Informed consent for video tape recording children taking part in preschool activities, for talking with the children and for audio tape recording these discussions, was obtained from parents by the signing of the Informed Consent form on the second page of the questionnaire (see Appendix I, p. 195).

4.6.2 Anonymity

Anonymity of parent informants was ensured by removing the signed Statement of Disclosure and Consent from the remainder of the questionnaire. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the children in this study.

4.6.3 Confidentiality

Confidentiality was ensured by removing Section A from the remainder of the questionnaire. All data collected have been stored in a locked filing cabinet to which only the researcher has access for the period of the study and for a subsequent five year period. Questionnaires and notes of interviews will be burnt at the completion of the 5 year period. Audio tapes and video tapes will be wiped at the completion of the five year period.

4.6.4 Feedback to parent informants

At the conclusion of the data collection phase of the study, an informal meeting was held with parents to thank them for their cooperation and assistance. Initial findings of the study were reported to these parents along with preliminary implications and recommendations of the study. A copy of the completed thesis will be forwarded to the preschool for loan to parents.

Chapter 5

PROCEDURES

5.1 Data Collection Procedures

5.1.1 Observations (children)

Prior to the commencement of data collection for the study, naturalistic nonparticipant observations were piloted for a period of two weeks in the preschool. Although this was originally considered to be sufficient time for the children to become used to the researcher and the video camera being in the preschool setting, this was not the case. From the commencement of the pilot study up to the last day of data collection (Day 15) some young children were unable to ignore the presence of the researcher and the video camera in their environment. This conflicts with what Hatch (1990, p. 254) found: "Children seem to understand at some level that I am in their classroom to 'find out what goes on there' and they quickly learn to ignore the videotape camera, my note taking, and me." The informants for Hatch's study were "under 7 years of age" (Hatch, 1990, p. 252) and this could be the reason for the difference in children's reactions to the researcher.

The children's awareness of the researcher was illustrated by children's interactions with the researcher as a person (for example, one child explained to the researcher that this was her birthday and that she was now five); as an adult in a predominantly child environment (for example, children asked for help with writing their name or for help with peers who were not sharing or taking turns); and as the video camera operator (for example, children often asked if they could look through the camera). At times, the children also performed for the video camera. For example, one child, as he walked by the camera, bent down and said 'hello' into the lens; and on his return journey, he said 'boo' in the direction of the camera. On three separate occasions the researcher stopped

recording for a period of one to three minutes because the presence of the video camera was interfering with one or two children's naturalistic play patterns.

As well as child initiated interactions, there were times when the researcher initiated interactions with the children. This was usually done for safety reasons (for example, one child throwing a wooden block at another child) and/or because non-intervention would be tantamount to sanctioning the behaviour/actions witnessed by the researcher. Another form of intervention from the researcher was associated with the actual recording process. For example, the researcher at times had to ask children to sit down or move away from the camera lens because they were blocking the view of the camera of an interaction which the researcher was recording; and the researcher had to ask children squirting water at each other to avoid wetting the camera lens.

Some of the children were also fascinated by the video camera itself. For example, one child in particular would almost daily ask about the camera. His questions included: What is this button for? Why is this turning around (video spool inside the camera)? What is this handle for? Is the camera yours? What are these for (clips on the camera stand)? Who are you taking pictures of today? Why is this moving around (automatic focusing lens)?

Prior to the commencement of the study it was envisaged that the researcher would set up the video camera to record child interactions at certain activities. The researcher would then place herself in close proximity to the activity (but outside camera range) to record her interpretations of what was occurring. The video camera would be unattended. This was trialled but proved to be unsuccessful as the children found the camera too inviting and/or interesting to resist even though they had been asked not to touch it. For example, one child turned the video camera off; on another occasion a child put the lens cap on the camera while it was recording; and on a third occasion the camera was swivelled to record the researcher writing notes rather than recording the children interacting at the activity. The children's curiosity about the video camera was

characteristic of Piaget's pre-operations stage of cognitive development. Consequently, it was necessary for the researcher to be seated beside the video camera at all times.

The pilot study was also used to assess various video camera locations. Initially it was conceived that the researcher would observe one activity per day. This was not successful as the children moved from activity to activity too quickly and quite often the chosen activity had no participants for certain periods of time. Consequently, camera locations were chosen that would allow the researcher to observe three or four activities at the one time. By swivelling the camera, the researcher could zero in on interesting interactions occurring at any one of these activities. The actual location of the video camera each day depended on the activities planned by the educators for that day.

During indoor activity sessions, lighting had also to be taken into account when choosing camera locations because a strong back light would cause the foreground to darken. Blinds needed to be closed and lights turned on for certain locations. Other difficulties were faced during outdoor sessions. These included: difficulty in tracking the children as they tended to move quickly outdoors; the distance from one activity to another often resulted in the sound being lost; noise interference from the wind and/or bird calls also resulted in the loss of sound; and games were often played in several sites and it was not always possible to observe or record all these sites from the one camera location.

The naturalistic nonparticipant observations were carried out four days a week for four weeks (save one day when the researcher was ill); that is, for a total of 15 days. Both indoor and outdoor activities were video tape recorded for approximately one hour each morning and approximately three quarters of an hour each afternoon. The difference in the duration of these video tape recorded sessions resulted from the fact that the children who attend preschool in the morning are the older children (4 and a half years to 5 and a half years old) and attend preschool for 3 hours each day. The children in the afternoon group are 4 to 4 and a half years old and attend preschool for 2 and a half hours each day.

Events which occurred during the four week period which prevented video tape recording of interactions included: a Garden Party to which parents were invited (both groups); a visit to the Life Education Centre (afternoon group only); and an attendance at an Arts Council performance (morning group only). Consequently, the observations provided approximately 50 hours of video tape recordings of children's play interactions. While video tape recording the children at play, the researcher completed a "Video Taping Record" sheet (see Appendix III, p. 222) to record the day, the date, the camera location, the group, the session, the activity, and the children involved in the activity. From these recordings, segments of children's interactions were selected for discussion in informal focused interviews.

5.1.2 Interviews (children)

Informal focused interviews took place on the same day as the observations. Selected segments of the video tape recordings were played back to the children involved in the interactions and they were asked to tell the researcher what was happening in their play. Certain children were involved in interactions more frequently than others. It became obvious during the pilot study that discussions on a regular basis with these children appeared to be reinforcing some of these behaviours. Consequently, instead of interviewing these same children on a regular basis, other children involved in the interaction were interviewed. A checklist of the names of the children in both preschool groups was kept and the date of each interview was recorded beside each child's name.

Before conducting each interview, the researcher commenced an "Interview Record" sheet (see Appendix III, p. 223) to record the day, the date, the group, the session, the time, the activity, the interaction, the children involved in the interview, the conversation, and the physical interaction that had taken place. While conducting the interview, the researcher completed these sheets by making notes on the discussion with the children and by writing concluding comments. The interviews were also audio tape recorded for later analysis. For the morning group, two sessions (approximately 30 minutes each) were held to talk about interactions that occurred during indoor activities and outdoor

activities and for the afternoon group, the two sessions were approximately 15 minutes in duration. The difference in duration was again due to the afternoon group attending preschool for a shorter time each day than the morning group.

Although the study was piloted for 2 weeks and data were collected for 4 weeks, it was not until well into the data collection period that children began expressing their feelings about and/or responses to the video taped segments in a clear way. For example, initially many positive responses were given to what appeared to be negative interactions.

Through discussion with the preschool educators, three possible reasons evolved. These were:

- The children may have been concerned about 'getting into trouble' from the preschool educators;
- the time lapse (although only 30 to 50 minutes) may have meant that the children couldn't remember what had happened or why; or
- the children may have experienced difficulty distinguishing between fact and fantasy as parents are often cited as explaining to children that what they see on television is 'not real'.

Another possible explanation could be what Hatch (1990, p. 259) describes as the "Self-as-social-object problem" which he explains by stating that, "when children are interviewed concerning events observed in classroom contexts and asked to analyze their own behaviour or reflect on their own motives or attitudes, they may not be able to step outside the immediate experience of being themselves and respond as we would hope."

Despite these shortcomings, the researcher gradually developed a rapport with the children which enabled the children and the researcher to discuss the events in a free and open manner. However, by developing this rapport with the children for the purposes of the interviews, tensions developed regarding the non-participant observations. The researcher found it increasingly difficult to remain uninvolved while video tape recording children's interactions during play as the children wanted to include her in their play as a

person, as an adult in a predominantly child environment, and as the video camera operator as outlined in 5.1.1 of this chapter. This tension was partially resolved by the researcher taking a strong stance of non-involvement while video tape recording and by the researcher initiating interactions with the children at other times during the preschool day. Most children accepted this definition of the researcher's role in the preschool setting.

5.1.3 Questionnaire (parents)

The data collection phase of the study commenced with a parent meeting. At this meeting the study was outlined, the general aims discussed, and any questions the parents had were answered. Copies of the questionnaire were handed out to all parents and they were encouraged to complete the questionnaire at that time.

The parents were provided with an envelope in which to seal their completed responses. Those who did not wish to complete the questionnaire at the meeting were asked to return the completed questionnaire to the preschool as soon as possible. Those parents who did not attend the meeting were contacted through the preschool (at arrival or home time) or by telephone and invited to participate in the study.

Parents who did not wish to take part in the study by completing the questionnaire were approached for permission to include their children in the study and were asked to sign the video and audio taping permission slip (see Appendix I, p. 195).

5.1.4 Interviews (parents)

Those parents who accepted the invitation to take part in the informal indepth interactive interviews were contacted and suitable times and venues were arranged. Although 25 parents took part in the interviews, only 20 interviews were actually conducted. This resulted from the fact that 5 mothers and fathers chose to be interviewed as a couple (see Table 2). Only one couple chose to be interviewed separately. 4 out of the 8 sole parents also chose to be interviewed (see Table 2).

Table 2
Composition of interviews

Informants	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers and Fathers	Total
Number of interviews	13	2	5	20
Number of participants	18 (13+5)	7 (2+5)		25
Sole parents	3	1		4

The length of these interviews varied from 45 minutes to 2 hours in duration (see Table 3). The majority of the interviews were conducted in the parents' home. However, some parents preferred to take part in the interviews in the preschool setting, away from interruptions and distractions (see Table 4).

Table 3
Length of interviews

Duration of interview	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers and Fathers	Total
45 minutes	3	1	0	4
1 hour	4	1	0	5
1 hour 30 minutes	3	0	2	5
2 hours	2	0	4	6

The interviews were guided conversations in which the parents and the researcher shared information. Before each interview the parents were told that they were 'the expert' and as such were encouraged to share their knowledge and understandings of their children's gender relationships as people and as parents.

Table 4
Setting of the interview

Setting	Mothers	Fathers	Mothers and Fathers	Total
Parent's home	10	0	5	15
Preschool setting	2	2	1	5

5.2 Data Analysis Procedures

Data collected from Section A of the questionnaire were used to establish a demographic profile of the preschool. Information was coded into most frequently given categories and presented in charts and tables as percentages.

Data collected from the nonparticipant naturalistic observations and from the informal focused interviews (children) were analysed according to the Research Question 1 using a feminist poststructuralist perspective. Data from Section B of the questionnaire and from the informal indepth interactive interviews (parents) were analysed according to the Research Question 2 using descriptive statistics and a feminist poststructuralist perspective.

5.2.1 Research question 1

What are the characteristics of children's gender relations in this preschool setting?

The study was not concerned with capturing every interaction that occurred in this preschool setting as this would have been an impossible task without a team of research assistants trained as observers and a plethora of video and audio recording equipment set up to cover every activity location in the preschool. Rather, this study is a "snapshot" of the various types of interactions and relationships that took place in this setting over a

period of four weeks. Any interactions in which the researcher became involved (as outlined in 5.1.1 of this chapter) were not used as part of the study.

Examples of children's play interactions which appeared to involve some aspect of male/female dualism were selected from the video taped recordings of naturalistic nonparticipant observations. These interactions were transcribed using the "Interview Transcription" outline (Appendix III, p. 224). The transcription process involved detailing the circumstances of the interaction, the conversation taking place during the interaction, any physical interaction taking place, and any initial comments made by the researcher. The audio taped recordings of children talking about these interactions (informal focused interviews) were also transcribed. This transcription process involved detailing the conversation between the researcher and the children and recording any initial comments.

5.2.1.1 Implementation of a feminist poststructuralist framework

Each interaction was analysed according to criteria established by a feminist poststructuralist framework. The criteria used for initial analysis were: "who has power, how did they get it, how did they maintain it, what impact has it had on them, what impact has it had on other children, and who benefited" (MacNaughton, 1995d, p. 5). Each interaction was then examined to uncover the gendered discourses available to the children involved. These discourses were labelled masculinist hegemonic discourses and prevailing feminine discourses. The gendered discursive practices (listed in Chapter 3) that were accessed by all the children involved in the interaction were identified and listed.

5.2.1.2 Implementation of a feminist poststructuralist analysis

According to Weedon (1987, p. 98), discursive practices operate in social institutions and within the individual. Once each interaction's discourses and discursive practices were identified, children's interactions were grouped into two categories: those in which discourses and discursive practices were operating at the institutional level (the gender

regime of the preschool) and those in which discourses and discursive practices were operating at the personal level (within the individual).

In order to establish the characteristics of children's gender relations at the institutional level, children's interactions were analysed to discover what was considered 'normal/natural', how power was exercised on behalf of specific interests, and where opportunities for resistance were available. Children's interactions were then grouped into overt power relations (that is, the discursive practices contained an aspect of asymmetrical power) and covert power relations (that is, discursive practices involved covert expressions of power established through storylines). Overt power relations were subsequently grouped into asymmetrical relationships which were created and maintained, rejected and abandoned, and those that were transformed.

In order to establish the characteristics of children's gender relations at the personal or individual level, children's interactions were analysed to discover where an individual's experience came from, why it was often contradictory, and how it could be changed. Therefore, the gendered discursive practices operating in children's interactions were grouped into those interactions pertaining to children's perceptions about individual members of the other sex/gender and/or the other sex/gender as a group, and those interactions pertaining to how individual children's subjectivities varied.

Because discourse, power (and power relations), and subjectivity are all interrelated (see Chapter 3), examples of children's interactions cannot be categorised into exclusive groups. Thus, some examples are cited in more than one category.

Another source of raw data was interactions that were caught on video, but no interviews with the children took place. The interviews did not take place either because of the time constraints in the preschool setting or because the incident was not discovered until the video tape was viewed for transcription. Consequently these anecdotes have not been discussed with the children and the children's perceptions of these interactions have not been obtained. Nevertheless, these interactions were also transcribed from the video tape

recordings (see “Observed Interactions Transcription” outline, Appendix III, p. 225) and analysed according to the criteria established by the feminist poststructuralist perspective as previously described. The results of this analysis are reported in Chapter 6.

5.2.2 Research question 2

What are parents’ perspectives on children’s gender relations in the home setting?

The parents’ perceptions of their children’s play interactions in the gender regime of the home setting were ascertained by means of a questionnaire and interviews. Only those sections of the questionnaire and the interviews pertaining to children’s gender relations in this setting are reported in Chapter 6.

5.2.2.1 Implementation of a feminist poststructuralist framework

A feminist poststructuralist framework (as outlined in Chapter 3) uncovered the dominant discourses concerning child rearing practices operating in gender relations in the home setting and the discursive practices associated with these. Parents’ perceptions (obtained from the questionnaire and the interviews) were analysed according to the criteria established by a feminist poststructuralist framework and involved categorising parent informant responses into three groups: gender relations in the family; gender relations pertaining to children’s futures; and gender relations and gender equity.

5.2.2.2 Implementation of a feminist poststructuralist analysis

According to Weedon (1987, p. 98), discursive practices operate in social institutions and within the individual. The discourses and discursive practices operating at the institutional level (gender regime of the home setting) were listed in Chapter 3. In order to establish parents’ perspectives on gender relations at the institutional level, parent responses were analysed to discover how these discourses and discursive practices were structured; what power relations they produced and reproduced; and where there were resistances and/or weak points through which the discourses could be challenged and transformed.

The discourses and discursive practices operating at the personal level (within the individual) were labelled discourses of parents discussing discourses of child rearing practices and discourses of parents discussing children's discursive practices. For the purposes of this study, discourses of parents discussing child rearing discourses included the discursive practices of:

- need for societal values to change
- societal values are changing
- societal values have changed (thing of the past)
- gender not an influence at this age
- power of peer group pressure

For the purposes of this study, discourses of parents discussing their children's discourses included the discursive practices of:

- nongendered play
- gendered play
- gendered toys
- necessity of gender difference
- socially defined masculinity and femininity

In order to establish parents' perspectives on children's gender relations in the home setting at the personal or individual level, parent responses were analysed to discover where the discourses and the discursive practices came from; whose interests they support and how they maintain sovereignty; and where they are susceptible to specific pressures for change.

Parent informants' responses were then categorised into three groups as outlined in 5.2.2.1 above. Gender relations in the family were further categorised into parents' perceptions of the personal qualities they felt were important to encourage in their 4/5 year old child; their perceptions of children's need for affection; their perceptions of their

children's friends and friendships; their perceptions of their children's games and activities; and their perceptions of the influence of peer group pressure on their children's gender relations.

Gender relations pertaining to children's futures were further categorised into parents' perceptions of girls' passivity; parents' perceptions of boys' aggressiveness; parents' perceptions of boys' futures; parents' perceptions of girls' futures; and parents' perceptions of reducing conflict between the sexes in our society. Gender relations and gender equity were further categorised into parents' perceptions of the term gender equity and parents' perceptions of gender equity programs. The results of this analysis are reported in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the results of this study: 6.1 gives a demographic profile of the preschool parent informants; 6.2 presents the results of Phase I along with a discussion of these results; and 6.3 presents the results and discussion of Phase II of the study.

6.1 Demographic Profile of Preschool Parents

Data collected from Section A of the questionnaire have been used to establish a demographic profile of the preschool parents. The information has been coded into categories and presented as tables and charts in percentages. The information has also been compared with current census data on the general population.

6.1.1 Age, sex/gender

The age range of informants was from 20 years to 45 years with no female informant over 40 years of age and no male informant under 25 years of age. The highest percentage of female informants (41.2%) was found in the 26 to 30 year age range and the highest percentage of male informants (36.4%) was found in the 36 to 40 year age range. Table 5 shows the sex/gender of the informants along with the range of their ages.

According to current census data on the general population, females in the 25-29 years age range comprise 24.9% (compared with 41.2% of female informants) of the female population between 20 and 39 years; and males in the 35-39 years age range comprise 24.4% (compared with 36.4% of male informants) of the male population between 26 and 45 years (ABS, 1993, p. 14). The variations in the percentages in age by sex/gender between the informants and the general population can be explained by the fact that the

informants are a subset of the general population in that they are all parents of a 4/5 year old child and by the fact that the Northern Territory has a young population.

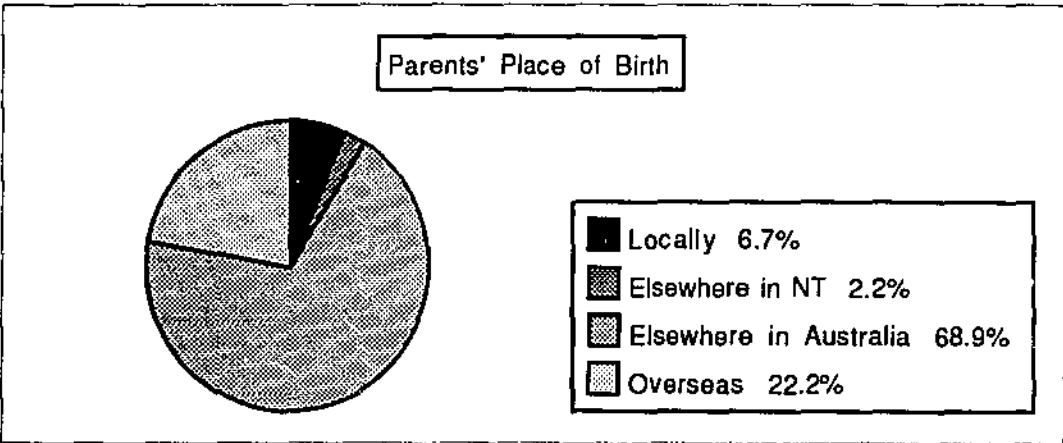
Table 5
Sex /gender by age

	20-25 %	26-30 %	31-35 %	36-40 %	41-45 %	
Female	17.6	41.2	29.4	11.8	0.0	100%
Male	0.0	27.3	18.2	36.4	18.2	100%
TOTAL	13.3	37.8	26.7	17.8	4.4	100%

6.1.2 Birthplace, cultural background, languages

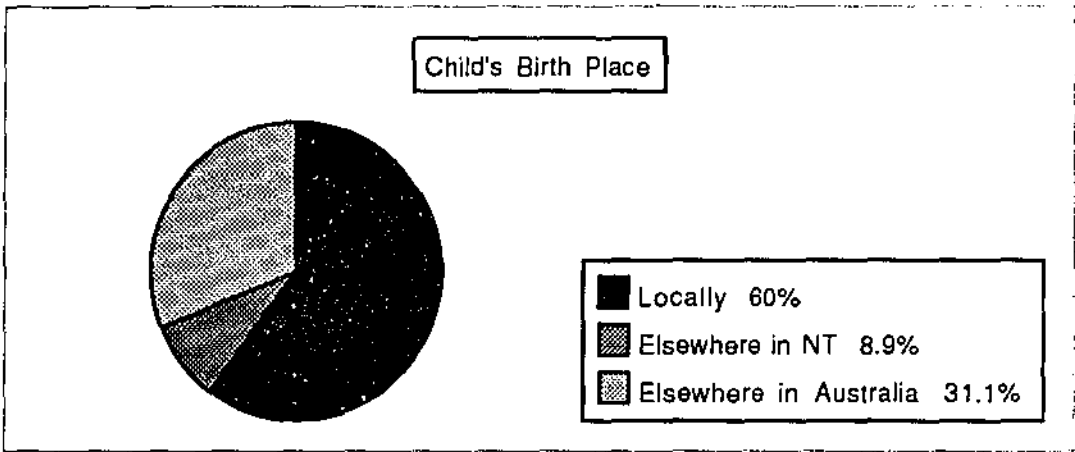
77.8% of the informants were Australian born which is congruent with the population at large where 75.5% are Australian born (ABS, 1993, p. 17). However, the majority of the parent informants (68.9%) were born in parts of Australia other than the Northern Territory, thus indicating the migratory nature of the Northern Territory population. The parent informants' place of birth is illustrated by Chart 1.

Chart 1



All the 4/5 year old children of the informants were Australian born, with 60% of these children being born locally. No children were born overseas. The place of birth of the 4/5 year old children of the informants is illustrated by Chart 2.

Chart 2

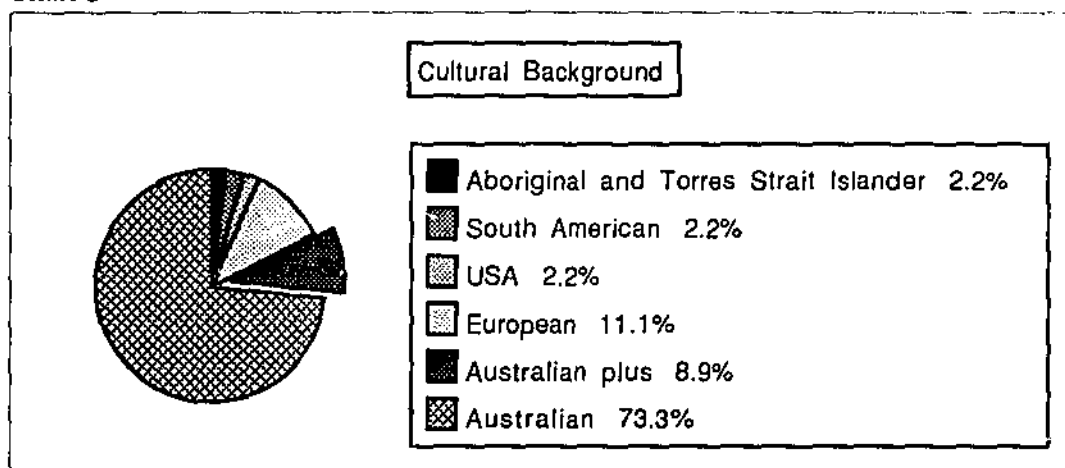


Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people represent 1.6% of the total general population (ABS, 1994, p. 95). This compares favourably with the 2.2% of informants of this study who listed themselves as having an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural background (see Chart 3).

However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people “comprised only a small proportion of the population in all States and Territories, except the Northern Territory, where more than one in five people were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin” (ABS, 1994, p. 95). That is, 22.7% of total population of the Northern Territory is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (ABS, 1994, p. 96). This is not the case for the informants of this study. The difference can be explained by the fact that this study took place in a large urban city in the Northern Territory whereas “a large proportion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was counted in localities and communities with a total population between 200 and 999 people. In the Northern Territory over 26% were counted in such localities” (ABS, 1994, 96). Therefore, the percentage of the informants who listed themselves as having an Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander cultural background is in line with the total general population of Australia but not the total general population of the Northern Territory.

Chart 3



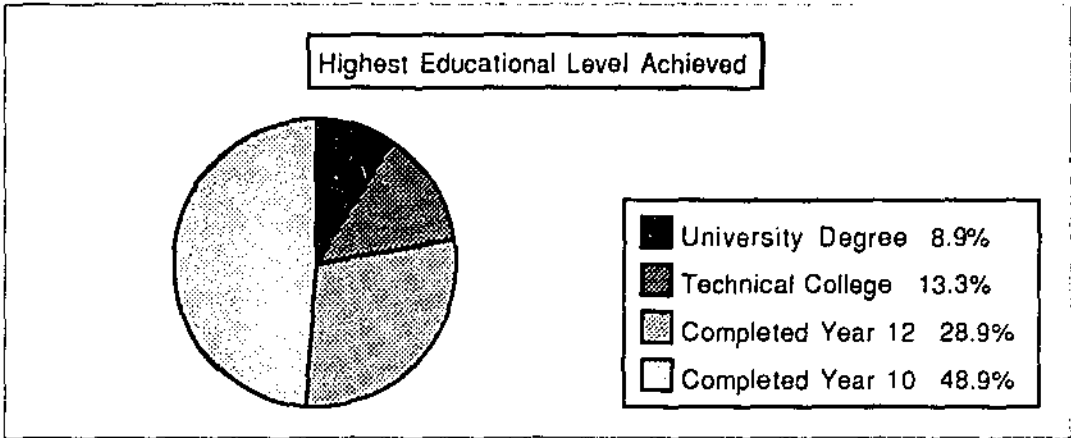
Of the informants, 82.2% (Australian 73.3% and Australian plus 8.9%) considered their cultural background to be Australian. Of these 8.9% considered their cultural background to be Australian plus either Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, New Zealand, European, or British. The cultural background of those who listed themselves as 'European' (11.1%) included British, Polish, and Swiss. Chart 3 illustrates the informants' cultural background.

With regard to the language spoken at home, 95.6% of the informants speak English only. This compares with 82.6% in the general population (ABS, 1993, p. 16). The two languages other than English that were spoken in the homes of the informants were listed as French and Maori. No Aboriginal languages were listed.

6.1.3 Education, employment, income

All informants were educated to at least Year 10 level and 8.9% had completed a university degree with 13.3% possessing technical college qualifications (See Chart 4).

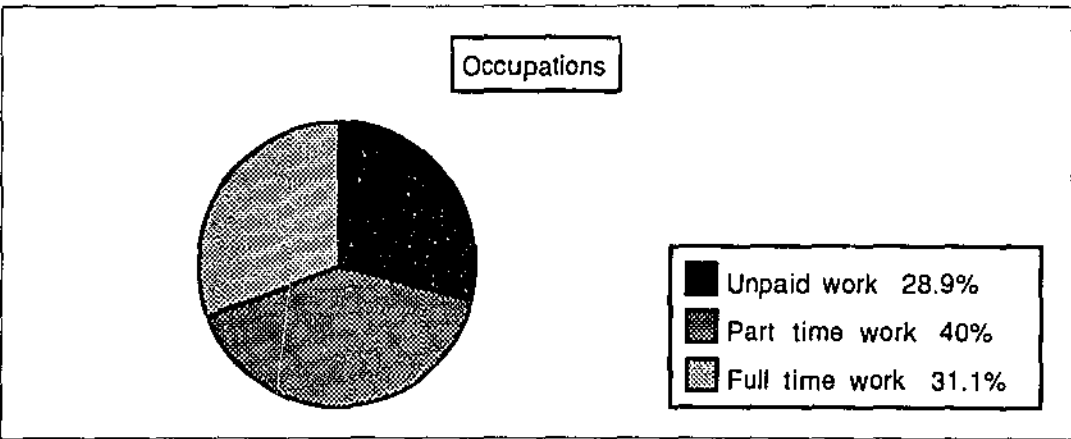
Chart 4



The educational level of the parent informants was slightly above the 7.6% of the general population who have completed a university degree and 5.2% who have completed an undergraduate diploma or an associate diploma (ABS, 1993, p. 22).

28.9% of informants (all female) listed their employment as home duties / home maker / domestic engineer / mother / on maternity leave; that is, as unpaid workers in the home (see Chart 5). This is directly comparable to the 28.4% of the general female population between the ages of 20 and 39 years who are not in the labour force (ABS, 1993, p. 32).

Chart 5



A further 40% of informants were involved in part-time work (for example: nursing, bookkeeping, secretarial and teaching) which is considerably higher than the 16.9% of

the general population between the ages of 20 and 44 years employed in part time work (ABS, 1993, p. 33). In particular, 47.1% of the female informants (see Table 6) were included in this group in comparison with only 23.1% of the female general population between the ages of 20 and 39 years in part time employment (ABS, 1993, p. 32).

Table 6
Sex/gender by employment

	Unpaid work %	Unemployed %	Part time %	Full time %	
Female	38.2	0.0	47.1	14.7	100%
Male	0.0	0.0	18.2	81.8	100%
TOTAL	28.9	0.0	40.0	31.1	100%

81.8% of male and 14.7% of female informants listed full time occupations of prison officers, home based carers, teachers, baker's assistant, restaurant supervisor, hospitality industry, self employed, computer systems officer, medical receptionist, and cleaning supervisor. No informant was unemployed, compared with 9.1% in the general population (ABS, 1993, p. 33).

In line with the population at large, there was a wide range in the socio-economic status of the informants. The annual income of informants ranged from Nil to \$60 000 with 37.8% of informants in the Nil to \$10 000 bracket (see Chart 6). This is similar to the 31.1% of this age range in the general population (ABS, 1993, p. 25). A larger percentage of the informants (6.7%) earned between \$50 000 and \$60 000 in comparison to the 1.9% in the general population (ABS, 1993, p. 25). It was interesting to note that no male informants received an income under \$20 000 compared with 32.6% in the general population. No female informants received an income between \$50 000 and

\$60 000 (see Table 7) which is similar to the general population where only 0.4% of this age range are in this income bracket (ABS, 1993, p. 24).

Chart 6

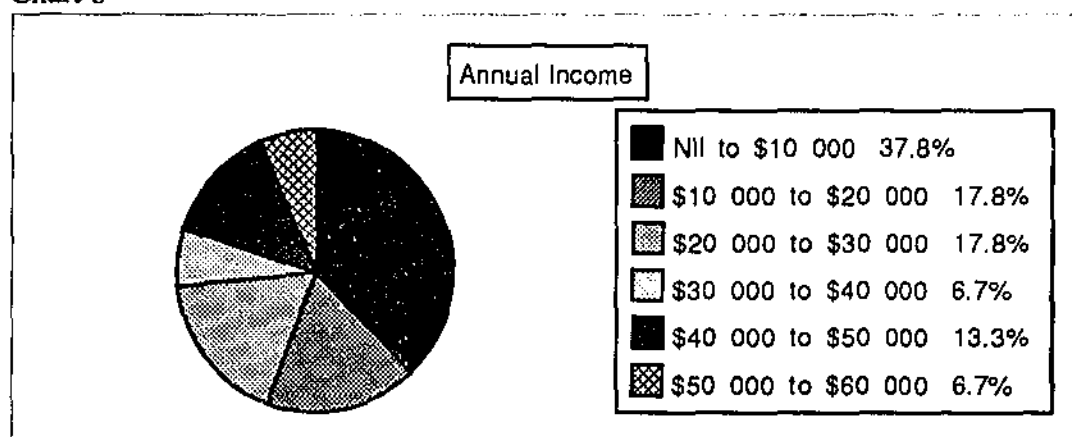


Table 7

Sex /gender by income

(\$1 000)	Nil to 10	10 to 20	20 to 30	30 to 40	40 to 50	50 to 60	
	%	%	%	%	%	%	
Female	50.0	23.5	14.7	5.9	5.9	0.0	100%
Male	0.0	0.0	27.3	9.1	36.4	27.3	100%
TOTAL	37.8	17.8	17.8	6.7	13.3	6.7	100%

6.1.4 Families

The large majority of the informants (86.7%) lived in nuclear families while 13.3% of informants lived in single parent families which is in line with the dominant pattern of family types found in Australia where "single parent families comprise 13.0% of total families" (ABS, 1994, p. 100).

The number of dependent children in single parent families (50% and 50%) is also similar to single parent families in the general population where 54.6% of single parent families have 1 child and 45.4% have 2 or more children (ABS, 1994, p. 101). However, 94.9% of informants (see Table 8) living in nuclear families have 2 or more children compared with only 66.0% in the general population (ABS, 1994, p. 101).

Table 8

Family type by number of dependent children

	1 dependent child %	2 or more dependent children %	
Nuclear family (86.7%)	5.1	94.9	100%
Single parent family (13.3%)	50.0	50.0	100%
TOTAL	11.1	88.9	100%

6.1.5 Summary

To summarise, the preschool family informants in this study exhibited characteristics similar to those of parents of 4/5 year old children in the general Australian population. They were mainly in the 26-30 years age range; Australian born but outside the Northern territory; non Aboriginal; and English speaking with an educational level slightly above that found in the general population. A wide socio economic range was featured but no informant was unemployed. Family type mirrored the Australian population at large and most nuclear families had 2 or more dependent children. Thus, in conclusion, this group (with the exception of the unemployment factor) would be similar to that to be found in any urban Australian environment.

6.2 Results and Discussion of Phase I

Children's play interactions were video tape recorded over a 4 week period as detailed in Chapter 5. During the data collection phase of this study, examples of children's interactions were selected from the naturalistic nonparticipant observations on a daily basis. The selected video tape recordings of these interactions were replayed to the children involved in these interactions and discussed. These discussions were audio tape recorded. During the data analysis phase of this study both the video tape recordings and the audio tape recordings were transcribed. The audio tape recordings of children talking about their interactions (informal focused interviews) provided the raw data for analysis of the children's perspectives on these interactions. These, along with interactions that were not discovered until the video tape was viewed for transcription, were analysed using a feminist poststructuralist framework.

A feminist poststructuralist framework for investigating children's gender relations in this preschool centre entailed examining the transcriptions of each interaction to expose the gendered discourses available to the children involved. The dominant discourses and discursive practices, with regard to gender relations in a preschool setting, were listed in Chapter 3 and are reproduced here.

Masculinist hegemonic discourses included the discursive practices of:

- masculinity in opposition to and superior to femininity
- dualistic hierarchical definition of maleness
- excluding the feminine
- storylines concerned with heroism, competition, conquering, war, aggression, and/or deaths
- active play needing lots of space
- rules of fair play do not apply to males
- violence/aggression toward other males
- violence/aggression toward females

- heterosexuality and homophobia
- *avoidance of educators*

Prevailing feminine discourses included the discursive practices of:

- passive, vulnerable, invisible
- females being in any way less than males
- unwillingness to do combat
- operation as a sub-teacher - power of the female in the preschool setting
- storylines concerned with motherhood and/or the domestic realm
- the Power of Mum
- storylines concerned with romantic love, marriage, and/or boyfriends
- hard working and/or model pupils
- applying the rules of fair play - rule following
- use of emotional manipulations including bribery and emotional blackmail
- awareness of the gaze of others including looking nice, not getting dirty
- excluding the masculine for fear of disruption, aggression
- *group power - power in numbers*
- *reliance on adult intervention*

Gendered discursive practices found in the following examples, but not found in research literature, were added to these lists and are differentiated by italics.

A feminist poststructuralist analysis of children's interactions entailed coding each interaction according to criteria set out in Chapter 5. The first step in this process was to group the interactions into two categories: Gender relations at the institutional level (6.2.1) and Gender relations at the personal or individual level (6.2.2).

6.2.1 Gender Relations at the Institutional Level - Gender Regime

Those interactions which illustrated gender relations of the gender regime in this preschool setting were grouped into Overt Power Relations and Covert Expressions of Power. Overt power relations are direct ways in which children express power in their play interactions and involve physical force, intimidation, harassment and result in asymmetrical power relationships (MacNaughton, 1995c, p. 3). Alloway (1995b) contends that asymmetries of power involve not only physical aggression, but also the use of emotional manipulations including bribery and emotional blackmail. Covert expressions of power are the indirect ways in which children express power in their play interactions and involve children's use of storylines in their fantasy play (MacNaughton, 1995c, p. 4).

6.2.1.1 Overt power relations: Asymmetrical power relationships

The interactions that were assessed to be asymmetrical power relations were subsequently subdivided into three groups: those in which asymmetrical power relations were created and maintained; and those in which asymmetrical power relationships were rejected and abandoned; and those in which asymmetrical power relationships were transformed.

Group 1: Asymmetrical relationships: Created and maintained

The examples of asymmetrical power relationships in this group illustrate how both girls and boys in various contexts employed both masculinist hegemonic and prevailing feminine discourses and discursive practices. In order to achieve their own ends children created asymmetrical power relationships which were maintained by all children involved in the interactions through non-resistance and/or insufficient resistance. Each of the following examples illustrates a different facet of these interactions.

Example 1(a)

Tracey, Kimberley and Rachel are drawing with chalk on the bike track. Shouting and calling out, Colin, Andrew and Joseph run over to where the girls are playing. Using chalk, all three boys begin to draw over, mess up or rub out the girls' drawings. They

also rub at the drawings with their feet. The boys stop, stand up, and appear to be waiting for a reaction from the girls. The girls move out of their way; the boys continue what they were doing; and the girls watch them. Shortly, the girls walk back to the pool area and the boys (now without an audience) run over to the climbing frame. This interaction was discussed with Colin and Rachel.

Bev: What are you drawing Rachel?
Rachel: Houses and gardens. ... They're drawing on our pictures.
Bev: What are you doing Colin?
Colin: I'm drawing on their pictures and mucking them up.
Bev: Why?
Colin: Because I was being a picture-muck-up.
Bev: Did you like him mucking up your pictures?
Rachel: No
Bev: Did you tell him that?
Rachel: Colin, how about you go and mess some one else's up?
Colin: I already messed everyone's up.
Bev: Why Colin?
Colin: Cause! ... I wanted to.
Bev: Do you think people will want to play with you if you mess up their games?
Colin: Yeah
Rachel: We think that you're a baddie Colin.
Colin: I called Andrew to help me.
Bev: Colin, did you have a reason for messing up the drawings?
Colin: We just wanted to.
Rachel: You are just bad.
Bev: Rachel, why didn't you stop them?
Rachel: Dunno.
Bev: Colin, what would you do if Rachel messed up your drawing?
Colin: I wouldn't let her.

This interaction took place in approximately 60 seconds. The sequence of events: the boys interrupted the girls' drawing game; they looked for a reaction from the girls; the girls simply waited; the boys continued messing up the drawings; the girls left; and the boys left. The boys, through the use of physical intimidation, disrupted the girls' play for no reason other than their own enjoyment.

An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of masculinist hegemony and the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices which the boys employed were masculinity in opposition to and superior to femininity; storylines concerned with conquering and aggression; rules of fair play do not apply to males; and aggression toward females. By accepting the boys' behaviour (by not resisting), the girls entered this discourse and enabled the boys to reproduce a hegemonic masculinity. The girls' discursive practices consisted of passivity; and the unwillingness to do combat. Both the boys and the girls were creating and maintaining an asymmetrical power relationship; the

girls through nonresistance and the boys through intimidation and domination. These intersecting and interacting discursive practices produced powerful subjectivities for the boys and powerless subjectivities for the girls. They were created and maintained by the behaviour of both groups of children.

The following example, although reliant on different discourses and discursive practices, illustrates the production of similar powerful and powerless subjectivities. However in this example, it is the girls who experience powerful subjectivities.

Example 1(b)

Denise, Sally and Julie are playing at the dough table. Julie and Denise have been there since they arrived at preschool, and Sally has recently joined them. Sam approaches. He stands beside the table and begins to play with the play dough. Sally looks up and stares at him. Julie reaches out, grabs the spare ball of dough from Sam and puts it on her side of the table.

Julie: No! You're not playing with us!
 Denise: Only girls allowed!
 Julie: Only girls!
 Sam: No, I'm not a girl (shaking his head).
 Julie: You're not ... You're not a girl, are you?
 Sam: (shakes his head)
 Julie: Only girls!
 Sally: Yeah.

Sam looks at each girl in turn, gives up, and leaves the dough table. This interaction was discussed with Denise, Sally and Julie.

Bev: Who's this?
 Denise: Sam
 Bev: What's Sam doing?
 Denise: Taking the play dough away ... and going to put it in the bin.
 Bev: Is there enough room for Sam to play at the table?
 Sally: No
 Bev: Why not? ... How many people can play at the play dough table?
 Julie: Three!
 Bev: Try again!
 Denise: Four
 Bev: So why won't you let Sam play?
 Sally: Cause he's a boy (softly).
 Julie: (loudly) Cause ... boys are allowed at ... only girls!
 Bev: I haven't heard that before! ... What if I asked (teacher) what would she say?

SILENCE

Bev: Why didn't you want Sam to play?

SILENCE

Julie: He would have wrecked it.
 Bev: How would he have wrecked it?
 Julie: He would have squashed it up.
 Bev: But that's okay. That's what play dough is for.
 Julie: Because I didn't!
 Bev: Why didn't you want him to play Denise?

Denise: Because ... he ... take my play dough ...
 Bev: Why didn't you want him there Sally?
 Sally: I don't know.

Julie was the instigator of disallowing Sam to play at the dough table. Denise joined in straight away and Sally followed a little later. The girls eventually admitted that they did not want Sam to play at the table with them but could not come up with any reasons why this was the case. The girls used oral force to prevent Sam having access to the activity. Sam did not resist.

An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of prevailing feminine discourses and the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices which the girls employed were excluding the masculine for fear of disruption; and group power. By accepting the girls' behaviour (by not resisting), Sam entered this discourse and enabled the girls to reproduce a prevailing feminine discourse. Sam's discursive practices consisted of passivity and the unwillingness to do combat. Both Sam and the girls were creating and maintaining an asymmetrical power relationship; Sam through nonresistance and the girls through intimidation and domination. These intersecting and interacting discursive practices produced powerful subjectivities for the girls and a powerless subjectivity for the boy. They were created and maintained by the behaviour of all the children involved in the interaction.

The following example was not discussed with the children involved as it was only discovered during the transcription process.

Example 1(c)

Andrew and Colin are playing at the dough table. Toni approaches the table and goes to sit down.

Colin: Hello Wee Wee Bum.
 Andrew: (Mimicking Colin) Hello Wee Wee Bum. Hello Wee Wee Bum.
 Toni: (Looks from one to the other, pulls out chair in order to sit down)
 Colin: You're just a Wee Wee Bum. (Laughs)
 Andrew: (Laughs) Wee Wee Bum, Wee Wee Bum
 Toni: (Walks away)

Two to three minutes later Andrew and Colin leave the dough table and almost immediately Toni goes over and sits down.

This is an example of verbal abuse and ridicule by Colin and Andrew to prevent Toni having access to the activity. Toni accepted this behaviour because she did not retaliate either orally or physically, and she did not report the incident to either of the preschool educators. The boys used power in a negative way to successfully achieve their own ends; that is, to exclude a girl from their activity.

An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of masculinist hegemony and the multiple intersecting discourses which the boys employed were dualistic hierarchical definition of masculinity, exclusion of the feminine; rules of fair play not applying to boys, and aggression toward females. Although Toni resisted momentarily (by looking at each boy and by pulling out the chair), she nevertheless accepted the boys' behaviour and entered these discourses, hence enabling the boys to reproduce a hegemonic masculinity. Toni's discursive practices consisted of passivity; the unwillingness to do combat; and females being in any way less than males. Both the boys and the girl were creating and maintaining an asymmetrical power relationship; the girl through nonresistance and the boys through intimidation and domination. These interacting and intersecting discursive practices produced powerful subjectivities for the boys and a powerless subjectivity for the girl. They were created and maintained by the behaviour of all three children involved in the interaction.

In the next example it is the girl who is exercising power with little or no resistance from the boys.

Example 1(d)

Terry is playing with the computer. Robert, Simon and Lyle are watching the monitor. Rodney and Cathy come to join them.

Rodney: Can I have a turn?
Cathy: Can I have a turn after you two?
Simon: I'm having a turn after him (points to Terry).
Lyle: Then me.
Robert: Then me.

Rodney gives up and leaves. He goes into the quiet room and picks up a pair of cymbals which he starts banging loudly.

Cathy: Stop!

Rodney stops and moves a little closer to watch what is happening on the monitor of the computer. He moves a little distance away and bangs the cymbals again, looking for a reaction from Cathy. Cathy gives him a 'look' and he goes to play elsewhere. Terry is still at the computer. Lyle moves closer to the computer and says

Lyle: Put him in the picture (pointing at the monitor).

He then takes over the use of the mouse.

Terry: Don't!

Lyle finishes what he wanted to do and gives control of the mouse back to Terry.

Cathy: Naughty! (Pointing at Lyle) Naughty boy! It's his turn!

Justin arrives on the scene.

Cathy: After it's my turn. Do you want to be after me?

This interaction was discussed with Cathy and Justin.

Bev: Cathy, why did you tell Rodney to stop?

Cathy: It was too loud.

Bev: Who is playing on the computer?

Cathy: I know who it was. Terry.

Justin: I'm waiting to have a turn but it was pack up.

Bev: Who else was waiting for a turn on the computer?

Cathy: Lyle. ... And Simon, and Robert.

Bev: But I can't see Robert. Where is he?

Cathy: Look! Look! There he is.

Bev: Whose turn was it going to be after Terry? Who's next?

Justin: Lyle

Cathy: No! Simon and then Lyle and then Robert then it was me. But it was pack up so I have to have a turn tomorrow.

Cathy was the chief organiser and police officer. She stopped Rodney making a noise with the cymbals and she made sure everyone knew whose turn it was when! Any time anyone tried to jump the cue, she ensured they did not. Cathy used oral force to disrupt Rodney's play and oral manipulation to regulate the play at the computer. She was successful in both these power plays. The only boy to offer resistance was Rodney and his resistance was minimal.

An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of prevailing feminine discourses and the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices which the girl employed were operating as a sub-teacher; and applying the rules of fair play. By accepting the girl's behaviour (by not resisting), Simon, Lyle and Robert entered this discourse and enabled the girl to reproduce a prevailing feminine discourse. The boys' discursive practices consisted of passivity; and the unwillingness to do combat. Rodney did try to employ the discursive practice of rules of fair play do not apply to males; but was

unsuccessful. Both the boys and the girl were creating and maintaining an asymmetrical power relationship; the boys through nonresistance and the girl through intimidation and domination. This discourse produced a powerful subjectivity for the girl and not entirely powerless subjectivities for the boys. There were created and maintained by the behaviour of all children involved in the interaction.

The following interaction is an example of girls resisting a masculinist hegemonic discourse. However, the boys persist with their behaviour till the girls give up and leave the activity.

Example 1(e)

Toni, Peta and Penny are playing a table game. Jimmy and Craig are walking around the room playing musical instruments. As they pass by the table, Toni says, "Go away". Jimmy and Craig continue to walk around the room playing their instruments. When they pass by the table this time, they begin to hit their instruments (a drum and a cymbal) more loudly. This time all three girls call out, "Stop it". The boys stop walking but continue playing loudly. Peta raises her hand as if to strike and the boys disappear into the quiet room. The girls continue their game. Shortly, Jimmy dives around the corner banging loudly on the drum and then disappears again. Then Craig copies Jimmy's actions using a drum stick on the cymbal. The girls express their annoyance by calling out, "Don't!". Jimmy and Craig continue their actions till the girls give up and move away from the table. Jimmy and Craig go over to the table and look at the game the girls were playing. They look at each other and go back into the quiet room.

The boys did not originally set out to annoy the girls. However, they discovered their actions gave them power to disrupt the girls. The satisfaction they received from wielding this power to annoy prompted them to continue these actions until the girls gave up and moved away. The boys were successful in their attempts to disrupt the play of the girls through the use of physical intimidation. Although the girls resisted with oral force and physical intimidation, the boys would not cease their actions.

An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of masculinist hegemony and the multiple intersecting and interacting discourses which the boys employed were storylines concerned with conquering and aggression; active play needing lots of space; and aggression towards girls. The girl's resistant discourse consisted of the employment of the intersecting and interacting discursive practices of group power; and excluding the masculine. However, although they initially resisted, their unwillingness to extend the combat beyond shouting enabled the boys to reproduce hegemonic masculinity. Both the

boys and the girls were creating and maintaining an asymmetrical power relationship; the girls through unsuccessful resistance and the boys through intimidation and domination. This discourse produced powerful subjectivities for the boys and powerless subjectivities for the girls. They were created and maintained by the behaviour of both groups of children.

In the following example, the girl is resisting prevailing feminine discourses, not by resisting the boy's employment of masculinist hegemony, but by employing some discursive practices related to masculinist hegemonic discourse on her own behalf.

Example 1(f)

Simon and Justin are doing puzzles on the mat. Julie joins Simon with his puzzle. A dispute begins over possession of puzzle pieces. Julie ends up with the last two pieces and Simon says

Simon: I got it! I got it! I got it! ... Don't!

Simon turns his back on Julie in a huff. Justin has been watching this interaction. Julie then finishes the puzzle, takes the pieces out, and begins the puzzle again. Simon turns around and watches Julie. Simon moves a little away from Julie and begins another puzzle. Julie finishes the first puzzle and goes over to Simon. Again she takes a couple of puzzle pieces away from him. This time Simon protects the remaining pieces by covering them with his hands. Simon continues to work on the puzzle with Julie and Justin watching. Julie goes to put one of her pieces in the puzzle.

Simon: Don't do that!

Julie: These pieces don't go in there.

Simon: It does!

Julie: This one goes there. I'll show you where it goes.

Julie puts the two pieces in the puzzle and sits back on her heels with her arms folded and says,

Julie: Ah ha!

Simon gets up and goes over to a father who is visiting that day. Julie quickly leaves the mat area. What Simon says to the father is inaudible but he replies, "Go and do it again. Tip it out and do it again." Simon goes back to the puzzle and does just that, and for a short while keeps an eye out for Julie's return. He then does the first puzzle that Julie took over from him. These interactions were discussed with Julie, Justin and Simon.

Bev: What are you doing Simon?

Simon: I ... I'm just doing a puzzle.

Bev: What are you doing Julie?

Julie: Playing

Bev: What are you doing now, Julie and Simon?

Simon: What are you doing, Julie?

Julie: I was only playing with you!

Bev: What happened there?

Simon: Julie wanted to do it.

Bev: To do what? ... What happened Simon? ... Why did she take it away from you?
 Simon: Cause ... cause she didn't want me to do it.
 Bev: Why was that Julie?
 Justin: Cause Simon was playing with it first!
 Bev: So what happened? ... Who did it, Julie or Simon?
 Simon: Me ... I ... I ... I was doing it but she ... snatched it off me.
 Bev: Is that right Julie? Did you snatch it off Simon?
 Julie: Yes
 Bev: Why did you snatch it Julie?
 Julie: Cause I did.
 Bev: Did you give it back to him?
 Justin: She didn't.
 Bev: What are you doing now Julie? ... Are you going to do the puzzle all over again?
 Julie: Yep
 Bev: Are you going to let Simon have a turn?
 Simon: I um ... then I was gone ... um and I telled um ... I telled Shane's dad, "Julie snatched it off me" and ... but then she was gone so I did it again.

Not once, but twice, Julie took over Simon's puzzle. She realised this was wrong but could not give any explanation. Julie's social skills appear to be lacking in that she does not know how to approach children and play with them in a non-competitive manner. Julie was regulating Simon's play (for her own ends) through the use of physical intimidation. Even though Simon resisted many times, Julie was successful in her power plays.

An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of masculinist hegemony as employed by a girl. The multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices employed by Julie where rules of fair play do not apply; and avoidance of educators (adults). Simon resisted Julie's domination (but passively) and enabled Julie to reproduce a powerful discourse similar to masculinist hegemony. Simon's discursive practices consisted of an unwillingness to do combat. Both the boy and the girl were creating and maintaining an asymmetrical power relationship; the boy through unsuccessful resistance and the girl through intimidation and domination. These discursive practices produced a powerful subjectivity for the girl and a powerless subjectivity for the boy and were created and maintained by the behaviour of both children. According to Reid et al (1994, p. 20), "aggressive behaviour among girls is so noticeable that it is quickly moulded into caring, nurturing 'girl' behaviours."

The following example illustrates boys employing masculinist hegemony to achieve their own ends. However, they are not exercising power over girls; rather they are exercising power over a group of boys.

Example 1(g)

Colin is on the verandah of the wooden cubby. He has a plastic cricket bat in his hand and a hoop over his shoulder. Joseph is at the base of the sloping ladder with 2 sets of plastic cricket stumps and a metal trolley and is attempting to carry these up the ladder. Larry and Darren arrive on bikes. Colin swings at them with the bat. He actually taps Darren on the head with the bat. Jimmy arrives on another bike. Larry hops off his bike and helps Joseph get the stumps up the ladder and then rides off. Colin points one set of stumps like a gun and says, "shoo, shoo". The two boys ride away. Together Colin and Joseph store all their 'weapons' inside the cubby. Colin comes down the ladder and checks around at ground level. He then disappears. A minute or so later he arrives back with Joseph's hat in his hand. The two boys play inside the cubby with Colin checking for intruders at regular intervals. Joseph dons a plastic police helmet over his hat. Colin leaves. Joseph picks up the cricket stumps and rests them on the window ledge. Colin arrives back with two construction workers' hard hats (plastic play hats). The pair of boys continue their play inside the cubby.

Darren and Larry arrive back at the cubby on their bikes. Colin comes out of the cubby onto the verandah with a set of plastic cricket stumps and points them at the boys below. He then swings them at Darren's head saying,

Colin: Get out of here. Get out of here. This is our place. Get! Get! Get!

Colin continues to bang the stumps on the cubby wall just above Darren's head. Then he hits Darren on the head with the stumps. Although Darren is wearing a bike helmet, he begins to cry. Colin pulls the stumps up but continues to point them at Darren like a gun. Joseph comes out on the verandah. Jimmy arrives on a bike. Colin goes inside and returns wearing his hat and a construction helmet. Colin picks up the stumps and 'shoots' at all three boys down below. The three boys ride away on their bikes. Colin and Joseph go back inside the cubby. Much banging and crashing is heard and it appears that they are dropping the metal trolley repeatedly on the floor and banging the cricket stumps against the walls. They both emerge on the opposite verandah carrying a set of cricket stumps each. Joseph throws his down the climbing net and then climbs down after them. He picks up the stumps and runs into the bushes. Colin 'shoots' his stumps off into the distance then falls down as if he has been shot. He then goes back inside the cubby and makes the crashing sound again.

Colin: Hey Joseph, give me a hand. Give me a hand Joseph. (Joseph returns and climbs up the climbing net.)

Colin and Joseph are using oral intimidation, oral force, physical intimidation and physical force to prevent other children having access to the cubby. They are successful because no children (all boys) resist their power plays.

An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of masculinist hegemony and the multiple intersecting discursive practices employed by Colin and Joseph were storylines

concerned with heroism, conquering, war; active play needing lots of space; rules of fair play do not apply to males; and violence and aggression towards other males. The discursive practices employed by Larry, Darren and Jimmy were passivity; and the unwillingness to do combat. This power play was not resisted by any of the boys and therefore produced very powerful subjectivities for both Colin and Joseph and powerless subjectivities for Larry, Darren and Jimmy. Both groups of boys were creating and maintaining an asymmetrical power relationship; one group through domination and intimidation and the other through nonresistance.

In the next example, two girls are similarly involved in an asymmetrical relationship. The difference in this example is that oral manipulation is used rather than physical dominance as in the previous example.

Example 1(h)

Robyn, Toni and Rachel are playing in the cubby. They are arguing about the possession of a doll. Robyn has the doll and Rachel wants it.

Rachel: I'll tell.
 Robyn: I won't invite you to my birthday if you won't let me have it!
 Rachel: I won't let you come to my Power Ranger birthday.
 Robyn: I'm having a Power Ranger birthday too!
 Rachel: You're not coming and I'm having a great big cake.
 Robyn: Anyway I'm going to ask my mum if I can ... if she can make me a Power Ranger Birthday cake.
 Rachel: I'll ask my mum ... to put honey on my ... I'll ask my mum to have lots of lollies and you're not having ...
 Damian: Arhhhhhhhhh! Yrrrrrrrrrrrrrr!

Robyn is distracted by Damian's growling and Rachel grabs for the doll.

Robyn: Don't!!! I'm telling!! Toni you've got to tell!

Rachel wins possession of the doll

Robyn: I'm not sharing my shaker anymore!

Robyn leaves the cubby with her arms crossed. Damian was growling at the window while this interaction was taking place. The girls ignored him. He then poked a toy broom through the window and waved it around while he growled. Toni took the broom from him and began to sweep the floor.

Rachel used many forms of oral manipulation in order to get Robyn to let her have the doll. Robyn rejected her power plays with oral manipulative power plays of her own.

However, Rachel was successful in her use of physical intimidation (grabbing) to gain possession of the doll.

An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of prevailing feminine discourses and the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices which both girls employed were the use of emotional manipulation including bribery and emotional blackmail. Although Robyn resisted Rachel's power plays, Rachel was successful largely through the distraction Damian provided with his growling at the window. By snatching the doll from Robyn, Rachel also employed the discursive practice of rules of fair play so not apply to her behaviour. Robyn responded by threatening to enlist the educators' support, but eventually gave up. An examination of the interaction between Toni and Damian has led to another reading of prevailing feminine discourses. Damian was attempting to construct a masculinist hegemonic discourse through an aggressive storyline (growling); and aggression towards girls (waving the broom through the window). This was unsuccessful as Toni employed the discursive practice of the power of mum (removing the broom from him and beginning to sweep the floor).

To sum up, examples 1(a) and 1(b) illustrate respectively boys and girls exercising power with no resistance; examples 1(c) and 1(d) illustrate boys and girls exercising power with little resistance; examples 1(e) and 1(f) illustrate girls and boys resisting again and again but nevertheless being unsuccessful in disrupting the asymmetries of power in the interaction; and examples 1(g) and 1(h) illustrate boys and girls creating and maintaining asymmetrical power relationships with members of the same sex/gender. These examples illustrate the characteristics of asymmetrical power relationships that are created and maintained by the children in their interactions with their peers.

Group 2 Asymmetrical relationships: Rejected and abandoned

In the following examples, intersecting and interacting discursive practices were employed through masculinist hegemonic discourses or prevailing feminine discourses. However, the children involved rejected these discursive practices and the asymmetrical relationship ceased to function and was consequently abandoned.

Example 2(a)

Sally is in the pool. She is filling bottles with water and lining them up along the edge. Sam and Alan come over to where she is playing and stand side by side at the edge of the pool. Sally looks up and sees them. She grabs hold of two of the bottles standing on the edge of the pool. Alan kicks at one of the bottles Sally is holding. Sally stands it up again. Sam kicks one of the bottles she is not holding into the pool. Sally picks up the two bottles she is holding and throws the water at Sam and Alan. They take a few steps backwards but keep watching Sally. Sally throws some more water at them and they eventually leave. Sally fills up the bottles and lines them up again.

Although Sam and Alan only stood at the edge of the pool, they stood side by side and looked down on Sally. Their stance was intimidating. When Sally threw water at them, they did not laugh and run away. They took a few steps back and continued the intimidating stance. The boys were unsuccessful in their attempt to disrupt Sally's play through physical intimidation as Sally resisted with her own form of physical intimidation.

An examination of this interaction has led to an initial reading of masculinist hegemony as the boys attempted to create an asymmetrical power relationship. The intersecting and interacting discursive practices which Sam and Alan employed were masculinities in opposition to and superior to femininity; rules of fair play do not apply to boys; and aggression to females. Sally did not accept this behaviour and did not enter this discourse. She resisted the discursive practices by employing the interacting and intersecting discursive practices of excluding the masculine; and applying rules of fair play. She rejected their intimidation and thus contested the asymmetry of power. In this way she did not maintain the asymmetrical power relationship and it was abandoned.

The following example illustrates a boy who rejected an asymmetrical power relationship instigated by a girl.

Example 2(b)

Simon is playing on the computer. Alan is sitting on the other chair beside him because it is his turn next. Denise is standing beside Simon. Alan is distracted by the game happening at the table next to the computer. He gets up and goes to have a closer look. Denise immediately sits in his chair. Alan turns around to find Denise in his place. They appear to be discussing this situation (the conversation is inaudible). Then Alan leans on the chair and pushes at Denise. Denise calls out to one of the educators:

Denise: (Teacher's name)
Teacher: Yes
Denise: He's annoying me!

Alan: And I was sitting there!
Teacher: I think he was sitting there. So you are annoying him. Can you go and ...
(the remainder of the instruction is inaudible). Denise follows the teacher's directions by getting off the chair and Alan sits down.

Denise was using physical intimidation (sitting in the chair) to prevent Alan's access to the computer activity. This was unsuccessful in that Alan resisted with oral manipulation and physical intimidation, and was supported by the educator's intervention.

An examination of this interaction has led to an initial reading of prevailing feminine and masculinist hegemonic discourses. The multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices employed by Denise were excluding the masculine; and rules of fair play did not apply to her. Initially, Denise produced a powerful subjectivity for herself and a powerless subjectivity for Alan. However, Alan did not accept this discourse and rejected it through the use of physical intimidation in an attempt to remove Denise from the chair. Denise then employed the discursive practice of enlisting adult intervention. Again, Alan did not accept Denise's behaviour and resisted by applying rules of fair play (explaining to the educator that he was there first). With the assistance of the educator, the asymmetrical power relationship was abandoned.

The following example is an illustration of boys rejecting prevailing feminine discourses and discursive practices several times before they were abandoned by the girls.

Example 2(c)

Christine, Cathy, Julie, and Heidi have been playing in the cubby. They are about to leave with their babies when Robert approaches the cubby door.

Julie: No! ... No boys allowed! (shouting at boys) ... No boys, hey Heidi?
Heidi: What?
Robert: I am so allowed too!

The girls have left and Robert goes into the cubby. Robert is tidying up and putting things away. He puts some food on a tray and puts it in the oven. Sam comes into the cubby.

Sam: No body here. ... I need somebody here.

Sam goes to the phone and makes a call. Robert has sat down at the table. Denise comes into the cubby. Sam hangs up the phone and wanders around the cubby. Robert watches him. Denise picks up the phone and makes a call. Sam gets some dishes out of the cupboard. Denise hangs up the phone. Denise leaves the cubby. Sam carries a doll over to the high chair and sits the doll in it. Robert is watching him.

Sam: Bugger. ... Who done that? (Referring to the things on the floor near the table) ... Who done this mess there? (Robert has come over to have a look.) I want coffee please?
Robert: Okay. Pretend I cook coffee for you always.

Sam is picking up some bananas from the floor. Christine arrives in the doorway and shouts

Christine: HEY! Yous get out of my .. our house!
Robert and Sam: (inaudible)

Julie arrives at the door pushing the pram.

Julie: HEY! Yous get out of our house!
Robert: WELL, we're allowed to ...
Julie: Yous get out of our house!
Robert: Well, we're allowed to...

Julie comes inside pulling the pram after her.

Julie: Come on. GET OUT! ... Get out young boy! Get out Sam.

The boys do not leave. Denise comes into the cubby and starts picking up the plastic fruit from the floor. Julie picks up a carrot and pretends to eat it; Christine picks up an orange and pretends to eat it. They collect other fruit and put it in the pram. Denise leaves the cubby. Sam is now putting plates on the table and Robert is getting something out of the fridge.

Sam: Do you want to have a dinner for our party?
Julie: Yeah.
Robert: Yeah.

Julie and Christine have left the cubby. Sam and Robert are putting dishes, plates and plastic food on the table.

Sam: Want a carrot?
Robert: Pardon?
Sam: What?
Robert: Pardon?
Sam: You can have a carrot.
Robert: I need to cook it.

He takes the carrot over to the stove. He brings back a dish with an apple in it.

Sam: Is it hot?
Robert: Yeah
Sam: Ah ha ha ha! Hot! I need to cook the eggs. I need a ... plate for it.

Both Robert and Sam continue to cook food and put it on the table. Robert leaves the cubby and Sam begins to cook a hamburger on top of the stove. He then goes and gets the ironing board and irons some dolls' clothes. He then begins to clear the table, taking the plates and food to the sink. Occasionally he talks to himself but this is inaudible. The teacher arrives on the scene to say that it is pack away time.

The girls were asserting their exclusive right to play in the cubby house by firstly trying to bar the boys' entry and later by trying to disrupt the boys' play through the use of oral force. Because Robert resisted their demands, the girls left the cubby to play elsewhere. The boys' play is domestic and appropriate for the cubby.

An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of prevailing feminine discourses and the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices which the girls employed were storylines concerned with motherhood and the domestic realm; use of emotional manipulations; excluding the masculine; group power; and the power of mum. The boys' discursive practices consisted of storylines concerned with the domestic realm; and applying rules of fair play (discursive practices associated with prevailing feminine discourses). Although the girls tried to create an asymmetrical power relationship through expulsion of the boys from the home play cubby, Robert rejected these discursive practices and Sam simply ignored them. The girls eventually gave up and the asymmetrical power relationship was abandoned.

The following example is an illustration of two boys rejecting masculinist hegemonic discourses by trying to stop a fight amongst a group of boys.

Example 2(d)

Seven boys are playing in the Quiet Room. Some are playing with match box cars and the road map mat, some are playing with the musical instruments, and some are playing with both. Their game involves storylines about the Power Rangers and about Transformers. There is a lot of pushing, pulling, shoving, and taking toys. The play escalates into a fight and Lawrie and Rodney try to stop it. Lawrie leaves to tell one of the educators about the fighting. This interaction was discussed with Rodney, Lawrie and James.

Rodney:	This when they was fighting.
Bev:	Who was fighting?
Rodney:	The other people
Bev:	Why were they fighting?
Lawrie:	Because
Bev:	Were you fighting James?
SILENCE	
Bev:	Where you fighting Rodney?
Rodney:	Nah ... I didn't ... I was just playing. ... and I just made tracks ...
	HEY! You dumbs! (In response to an interaction on the video tape recording)
Bev:	What's happening there James?
SILENCE	

Bev: Is it a real fight or a play fight?
 Lawrie: Um ... a play fight
 Bev: James, what do you think?
 SILENCE
 Bev: What do you think, Rodney?
 Rodney: Um ... that was a real real fight.
 Bev: Do you fight Rodney?
 Rodney: Nah
 Bev: What about you Lawrie, do you fight?
 Lawrie: No
 Bev: Who does the fighting?
 Rodney: They was.
 Bev: What are their names?
 Lawrie: Alan
 Rodney: Shane and Alan and Sam and who else ...
 Lawrie: and Martin
 Rodney: No he wasn't.
 Bev: Are you a real fighter James, or just a play fighter?
 James: Play fighter
 Bev: What's happening here?
 Lawrie: Really fighting
 Bev: What are you saying to them Rodney?
 Rodney: I saying loud to them "STOP FIGHTING"
 Lawrie: (Inaudible) and I tell (teacher) on them.
 Rodney: Yeah!
 Bev: What are you doing now, Lawrie?
 Lawrie: I was going to lift Sam up. ... I was just going to get Sam off Alan!
 Bev: And what did you say Lawrie?
 Lawrie: Stop fighting!
 Rodney: And I shout loud to them.
 Bev: Did they listen to you?
 Lawrie: No, they didn't listen to me!
 Rodney: They ... they ran away. But they listened to me!
 Bev: What are they fighting over?
 Lawrie: The bells. I'm telling him to give them back ... and he didn't!
 Bev: Who are you telling?
 Lawrie: Alan ... to give them back to Shane.
 Bev: Why?
 Lawrie: Cause he wanted them.
 Bev: But Alan wanted them as well. Why couldn't Alan have them?
 Lawrie: Because ... Shane wouldn't let him.
 Bev: Is Shane the boss is he?
 Lawrie: I don't know (softly)
 Rodney: Yes he is!
 Lawrie: (teacher) is the boss.
 Bev: Did Shane have the bells first or Alan?
 Rodney: Yep ... Shane had the bells first.

The play starts with egalitarian relationships. However as the number of boys playing in this area increases, Sam, Alan and Shane begin to contend for the available space and for possession of toys. This particular interaction revolved around the possession of a set of

musical bells. James joined in occasionally; Martin stayed out of the interaction; Rodney felt 'shouting loud' would stop them; and Lawrie tried physical intervention and then reported the incident to an educator.

An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of a masculinist hegemonic discourse and the multiple and interacting discursive practices which one group of boys employed were storylines concerned with conquering, war and aggression; active play needing lots of space; rules of fair play do not apply to males; violence and aggression toward other males; and avoidance of educators. However, Rodney and Lawrie rejected this discourse through the employment of the interacting and intersecting discursive practices of applying rules of fair play; operating as a sub-teacher; and reliance on adult intervention. Nevertheless, the asymmetrical power relationship was only abandoned when an educator arrived on the scene.

To sum up, examples 2(a) and 2(b) illustrate a girl and a boy rejecting discourses and discursive practices employed by children of the other sex/gender. Examples 2(c) and 2(d) illustrate boys rejecting asymmetrical power relationships through the use of prevailing feminine discourses; the latter rejecting masculinist hegemonic discourses and the former rejecting a conflicting prevailing feminine discourse. In all the examples the asymmetrical power relationship was eventually abandoned. It is interesting to note that in two of the four examples, educator intervention was part of this process.

Group 3: Asymmetrical relationships: Created and transformed

In the following examples, intersecting and interacting discursive practices were employed through masculinist hegemonic discourses or prevailing feminine discourses. However, the asymmetrical relationships were created and then transformed.

In the following interaction, the feminine discourse is not rejected by the boys involved in the interaction. Nevertheless, the asymmetrical power relationship is transformed when the girl discovers that the boys are not going to disrupt her play.

Example 3(a)

Many children are playing in the sand pit. They are playing individually, in pairs and in small groups. Some conversation is occurring across the groups. Play is quiet and sedate. Joseph arrives on the scene wearing a police hat and making a lot of noise. He picks up the shovel Kimberley has been using. Kimberley snatches it back. Joseph joins in the quiet play. He is looking for buried treasure. Many children leave the sand pit because, over on the verandah, the educators are unpacking a new toy. Colin and Darren arrive with shovels and trucks. Colin approaches where Kimberley is playing.

Kimberley: Go away!
Colin: What?
Kimberley: Go away!

Colin moves back a little and begins shovelling sand. Colin attempts to talk to Kimberley.

Colin: Who made all this sand wet? Eh?

Kimberley continues with her game and ignores Colin. Tracey begins a conversation with Colin and eventually Kimberley joins in. This interaction was discussed with Tracey and Kimberley.

Bev: What are you doing Kimberley?
Kimberley: I'm playing. This is when Tracey is going to be eleven.
Bev: Oh!
Tracey: But it wasn't really. Just pretend. We're just playing in the sand pit.
It's not real.
Bev: What's in the bucket, Kimberley?
Kimberley: Water.
Bev: And who is that?
Kimberley: Joseph
Bev: Why did you take that shovel off Joseph, Kimberley?
Kimberley: Because he was nearly messing up the party. He nearly stepped on my sand castle I made.
Bev: Where has everyone gone?
Tracey: Only I'm in the sand pit!
Bev: Here comes somebody else!
Tracey: Kimberley's back. And Colin! And Darren!
Bev: What's Colin doing?
Tracey: I don't know.
Bev: Kimberley, what did you say to Colin?
Kimberley: I told him to get away.
Bev: Why was that?
Kimberley: He was spoiling our game.
Bev: What did he do?
Kimberley: He was too close.
Bev: Did he do anything to spoil your game?
Kimberley: (silence) No.

Kimberley anticipated both Joseph and Colin spoiling her game and got in first. She took the shovel away from Joseph and she let Colin know that she did not want him playing near her. However, when it became apparent that Colin was willing to join in quiet play,

she began to talk with him. Kimberley was not successful in preventing Joseph and Colin access to this activity; though she was successful in that they did not spoil her game as she had anticipated. Kimberley used physical intimidation and oral manipulation to which neither of the boys resisted.

An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of prevailing feminine discourses and the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices which Kimberley employed were excluding the masculine for fear of disruption; and storylines connected with the domestic realm. By accepting Kimberley's behaviour (by not resisting), Colin and Joseph entered this discourse and enabled Kimberley to reproduce prevailing feminine discourses. The boys' discursive practices consisted of passivity; and the unwillingness to do combat. Both the boys and Kimberley were creating and maintaining an asymmetrical power relationship. However, when it became apparent that the boys were not themselves going to employ any discursive practices associated with masculinist hegemony, Kimberley relented and included Colin in her conversation. Therefore, an asymmetrical power relationship was transformed when the boys did not use masculinist hegemonic discursive practices.

The following interaction is aggressive but nevertheless illustrates how an asymmetrical power relation was transformed because the girl did not employ prevailing feminine discourses.

Example 3(b)

Roger and Damian are building with the wooden blocks. Penny comes over and hits Damian on the back. Damian gets up and wrestles with Penny. Both children are pushing at each other by holding opposite hands. Eventually Damian gives an extra hard push, releases Penny's hands, and runs away. Roger says, "Go Damian!". Penny goes over to where Roger is building and hits him on the back. Roger wrestles with Penny in the same way Damian did. Damian stands and watches and then goes back to building. Penny is laughing. Roger releases her hands and walks away.

Penny runs after him. On the way past Damian she hits him on the back. Damian gets up and begins wrestling with Penny again. Roger goes back to block building, occasionally watching Damian and Penny. Damian runs away and Roger gets up and starts to wrestle with Penny. Damian has gone back to block building and Roger and Penny wrestle around and around. Penny pins Roger up against the wall, releases him and walks away.

Roger swings his arms around and they begin wrestling again. Penny walks over near Damian and Damian gets up and begins wrestling with Penny. This time Damian kicks at Penny with his knee and Penny retaliates by kicking Damian in the shin. They twist around a few more times and Damian pushes Penny on to the floor. By the look on Penny's face, she has hurt her foot; but she says nothing. Damian goes back to the block building.

Penny gets up and hits Roger on the back. He ignores her. She hits him again and he gets up and begins wrestling with her again. This time he pushes her and pins her in the corner of the room. Penny kicks out with her foot twice and succeeds in kicking Roger in the stomach. Roger retaliates by putting his thigh on Penny's stomach and pushing her with his leg. Roger releases her and walks away.

Penny follows for a bit and when near the building moves one of the blocks with her foot. She then runs into the puppet theatre. Damian comes back to the building from collecting blocks from the shelf and Penny comes out from the puppet theatre. She goes over to Damian. Damian holds up both hands in front of him and Penny hits at them with her hands. Roger returns with a block and Penny goes back into the puppet theatre.

Roger follows her and uses the block to block her way out of the puppet theatre. Penny comes out from behind the puppet theatre with the cockatoo puppet on one hand pushing Roger and his block with both hands. Roger drops the block and wrestles Penny with both hands as before. This time he swings her around and grabs her around the throat and squeezes. He releases her and Penny walks away.

Next thing Penny is back hitting Roger on the back with the puppet. Roger punches at her twice and Penny retreats. She then goes over to Damian and pretends to talk to him with the puppet. Damian punches in the direction of the puppet. Penny squawks for the puppet and runs off.

This interaction was discussed with Penny, Damian, and Roger.

Penny: We were fighting.
Bev: Why were you fighting?
Penny: Cause I was hitting them and they didn't like it.
Bev: Was it a real fight or was it a pretend fight?
Roger: A real fight.
Penny: A pretend fight.
Damian: A real fight.
Bev: Did any one get hurt?
Roger: Nuh
Damian: Nuh
Penny: Damian got hurt.
David: Nuh
Bev: What are you fighting about?
Penny: Cause I didn't like that.
Bev: You didn't like their building?
Penny: Um.
Bev: What did you say to them?
Penny: Nothing.
Bev: How did they know you didn't like it?
Penny: Cause
Roger: She told us.

Bev: Why did you just hit Damian, Penny?
Penny: Because ... I ... cause I didn't like that block. ... And Roger was taking it.

Bev: Were you angry when she hit you Damian?
 Damian: Yes, very angry!
 Penny: But I love it! (laughs)
 Damian: Watch me!
 Penny: I pushed him very hard.
 Bev: What do you call that game you are playing?
 Roger: Boxing! No, pushing.
 Bev: What would you call it Penny.
 Penny: I was playing a fight.
 Bev: And what do you call it Damian?
 Roger: (whispering to Damian) Say pushing!
 Damian: Punching
 Bev: What would (teacher) say if she saw you doing that?
 Roger: She didn't!!!
 Bev: You are pushing here. Is anyone getting upset?
 Roger: Nuh
 Penny: Nuh
 Bev: What are you saying to Roger there, Penny?
 Penny: I said ... ah ... I was strong.
 Bev: And are you stronger than Roger?
 Roger: Nuh ... Cause I went like this to her.
 Penny: I really stronger and I can go like that.
 Bev: Who is stronger, Penny. You or Roger?
 Roger: Me!
 Damian: Me! I'm the very strongest.
 Penny: So can I be the strongest! We all strongest.
 Bev: What sort of fighting is that?
 Roger: "Hacuna matata!"
 Bev: "A" what?
 Roger: "Hacuna matata". It means 'no worries'.
 Bev: Where did you learn that from Roger?
 Roger: From my video.
 Damian: NO! From my video.
 Bev: Which video is that from?
 Roger: Lion King
 Bev: Who says it in the 'Lion King'?
 Roger: Ahhhh ... Simba
 Penny: No, Pumba.

 Penny: I very strong. I pushed him.
 Damian: I pushed her down.
 Bev: Did he hurt you then Penny?
 Penny: Nuh ... Look, I kicked him!
 Bev: Why have you gone inside the puppet theatre?
 Penny: To find a puppet.
 Bev: What are you doing now Roger?
 Roger: Trapping her.
 Bev: Why are you trapping her?
 Roger: (silence) ... not get out.
 Penny: And I could.
 Bev: How did you get out Penny?
 Roger: She went under.
 Penny: No, I did not! I pushed very hard with the cocky. The cocky helped me to push it.

 Bev: Oh! Did that hurt Penny? (In the video Roger has just grabbed Penny's throat)
 Penny: Yeah.

Bev: What did Roger do?
 Roger: I grabbed her by the neck.
 Bev: Did that hurt Penny?
 Penny: Yep, this part.
 Bev: Why is that dangerous Roger?
 Roger: (silence)
 Bev: Well, it hasn't stopped you playing with them Penny?
 Penny: Nuh
 Bev: Why did you knock that block down, Roger?
 Roger: My leg did it - I couldn't help it!

Penny started the game and kept it going. She may have been hurt twice during this interaction; but this did not stop her continuing the game and she did not report her injuries to either of the educators. Penny was quite happy with the game she initiated with the boys; Damian was very excited when watching his play interactions on the video; and Roger's reactions varied as he made excuses for some of his behaviours.

An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of masculinist hegemonic discourses and the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices which Penny employed were storylines concerned with conquering and aggression; not showing emotions when hurt; and active play needing lots of space - all discursive practices associated with masculinist hegemonic discourses. The discursive practices employed by the boys were masculinity in opposition to and superior to femininity; storylines concerned with conquering and aggression; active play needing lots of space; avoidance of educators; and rules of fair play do not apply to males. Powerfulness and powerlessness alternates between the children as they take part in this wrestling match. It is interesting to note that Damian and Penny wrestle without purposefully hurting each other; Roger however, gets frustrated and knowingly hurts Penny physically. It is also noteworthy that Penny felt that boys and girls are equal in strength and that she outwitted Roger on at least one occasion.

To sum up, examples 3(a) and 3(b) illustrate how children's gender relations do not maintain asymmetrical power relationships when the children involved are operating in accordance with the same discourses.

According to MacNaughton (1995c, p. 11), “If we believe in gender equity ... we can challenge overt expressions of power as they happen between children.” However, this can only be done if an educator witnesses the overt power relationship. Most of the interactions reported here were not witnessed by an educator. This is discussed in Chapter 7. MacNaughton also contends that children, in particular girls, develop ‘no go areas’ and ‘no go friends’ as a result of asymmetrical power relationships. Although one of the most dominant discursive practices associated with prevailing feminine discourses was “excluding the masculine for fear of disruption and/or aggression”, ‘no go areas’ and ‘no go friends’ were not evident in this preschool setting. This is discussed in the section ‘Individual children’s subjectivities’, p. 114.

In conclusion to this section on asymmetrical power relationships, the analysis of children’s gender relations indicates that, although the dominant forms of relating in the gender order of our society are reproduced in the gender regime of this preschool setting, children can and do relate to each other through the discourses and the discursive practices usually associated with the other sex/gender.

6.2.1.2 Covert expressions of power: Storylines

According to MacNaughton (1995c), storylines are central to how children construct gender relations. By exploring children’s storylines, it is possible to discover how subtle and complex power relations are built and practiced by the children and thus evaluate the gender consequence of these power relations. “Storylines often develop from the ways in which children understand and practice masculinity and femininity, and how they understand normal boys’ behaviours and normal girls’ behaviours” (MacNaughton, 1995c, p. 10).

The following two examples of female and male storylines illustrate MacNaughton’s contentions. The first is an illustration of a masculine storyline.

Illustration 4(a)

Simon and Shane are building with the Mobilo. They are playing independently but occasionally comparing constructions. Alan arrives on the scene and shouts out "Transformers!". The boys continue their building of Transformers and their playing with these constructions. Simon leaves the area and Alan and Shane have the mat area to themselves. Their play becomes rougher and rougher as the Transformers are 'flown' around the mat area. Shane karate kicks in Alan's direction (it does not appear that Shane actually wants to kick Alan) accompanied by "Yee haa". Alan makes a gun with his hands and shoots in Shane's direction. The kicking and shooting continues in an almost slow motion dance. Alan then starts to run and Shane chases him. They run back and forth, keeping a close eye on both the educators and slowing or stopping when they hear either voice. After one such pause, Shane goes to cross the pile of Mobile in the centre of the mat to catch up to Alan. However, Shane steps on a set of wheels, skates, and falls on his side and back. There is a crash and both educators look at Shane. Shane picks himself up and indicates that he is okay. He goes and sits down and continues to build onto his Transformer. Alan goes to join him.

This interaction was discussed with Shane and Alan.

Bev: What are you making?
Shane: A Transformer like Simon's ... transformer aeroplane.
Bev: What are you doing now Shane?
Shane: I'm trying to stand up and get it to fly.
Alan: There's me!
Bev: What are you making Alan?
Alan: I'm making a transformer. ... I'm making it fly with a gun.
Bev: Has it!
Shane: Mine has bullets.
Alan: So's mine.
Bev: What are the bullets for?
Shane: For baddies.
Bev: Are you goodies or baddies?
Shane: Baddie.
Bev: And what about you Alan? Were you a goodie or a baddie?
Alan: A baddie.
Shane: Two baddies! (Laughs)
Bev: What's happening here? ... Are you really fighting or are you playing?
Shane: Just playing.
Alan: Yeah.
Bev: What are you trying to do Shane.
Alan: (laughs) You was trying to kick me.
Shane: No I wasn't. I was just playing ... I was trying to koooh ... and my foot got a bullet ... and it shot a bullet ... and I kicked again to Alan.
Bev: And what are you doing Alan?
Alan: I'm trying to shoot him.
Bev: What does (teacher) think about you playing like this?
SILENCE
Bev: Oh, what happened Shane?
Shane: I fell over.
Bev: Do you know what made you fall over?
SILENCE
Bev: So what's happening now?
Alan: Um
Shane: I'm not trying to fight! I'm making a transformer. And when it shoots ... when something shoots it it turns over ... and its got wheels on the other side.

Play fighting is banned during indoor time at the preschool. This is probably why the game did not get as exuberant as it may have. The boys moved about in almost slow motion but nevertheless always kept an eye (and an ear) on the two educators. The play did not stop because of the accident; it just became less active. Shane's storyline was very involved, but also very aggressive. Alan was attracted by this aggressive storyline and both Shane and Alan gained a sense of power when acting it out.

An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of masculinist hegemonic discourses and the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices which the boys employed were storylines concerned with heroism, conquering, war and aggression; active play needing lots of space; violence and aggression toward other males; not showing emotion when hurt; and avoidance of educators.

The following is an illustration of a feminine storyline.

Example 4(b)

Rachel and Toni are playing at the workshop. Kerry comes to join them. Toni is using the hammer; Rachel is using the screw driver; and Kerry is talking on the phone. Davina comes to join them. They are playing independently though there is some conversation. However much of this cannot be heard.

Rachel: (Pointing to Kerry) No, that's the Mum.

Toni: Inaudible

Rachel: No, that's the Mum.

Toni: Ask Mum something.

Kerry continues talking on the phone. Rachel is still using the screw driver and Toni the hammer. The talk is again inaudible.

Rachel goes around to the other side of the workshop and says to Kerry:

Rachel: Kerry, you said ... you said ... it's my boyfriend!

Kerry passes the phone to Rachel.

Rachel: Hello boyfriend. (Inaudible)

Kerry and Toni watch Rachel talking on the phone. Rachel passes the phone back to Kerry who continues her conversation. Kerry talks for a bit and gives the phone back to Rachel. Rachel says a couple of words and hangs the phone up with a slam! The girls move around the workshop. Toni picks up the phone, presses some numbers and talks into it. Shortly she calls out to Rachel:

Toni: Here Mum! Mum! The phone! (She hands the phone to Rachel)

The teacher calls out 'Pack up time' and the girls tidy away the workshop toys. This interaction was discussed with Kerry and Rachel.

Bev: What were you playing outside today?
Kerry: We're playing a game. There's Toni!
Bev: What was the game about?
Rachel: Mothers
Bev: Who was the mother?
Rachel: Me. We been playing ugly sisters!
Kerry: No!
Rachel: Yes we have! You're the Mum.
Bev: Kerry was the Mum was she? ... Who was Toni?
Rachel: I know where Toni is! There!
Kerry: Rachel ...
Rachel: I see your boy.
Kerry: Rachel said "Do you want a kiss!"
Bev: Who did she say that to?
Kerry: Her boyfriend on the phone. ... I gave it her and she hanged it back up again and I got it again.
Bev: So who was giving their boyfriend a kiss? You or Rachel? ... Kerry was the mother. Were you a sister Rachel?
Rachel: Ugly sister.
Bev: Why were you an ugly sister?
Rachel: Cause we were playing Cinderella.
Bev: And who was Cinderella?
Kerry: Me
Bev: You were the mother and Cinderella.
Rachel: And I was ugly.
Bev: And what about Toni? Was she part of your game?
Rachel: She was an ugly sister too.
Bev: Who were you talking to on the phone just then Rachel?
Rachel: My boyfriend.
Bev: What was your boyfriend's name?
Rachel: I didn't have a boyfriend. I was just pretending.

It was not till the interview that it was discovered that the storyline of this play was domestic. The girls were playing at the workshop and, because the conversation could not be heard, it was assumed that their play was to do with the workshop and the tools they were using. However, this was not the case. The girls had a domestic storyline which included 'Cinderella' and 'boyfriends on the phone'. During the interview, it was not clearly established exactly who was who and both Kerry and Rachel were confused as to the role they were playing.

An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of prevailing feminine discourses and the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices which the girls employed were storylines concerned with motherhood and the domestic role and storylines concerned with romantic love and boyfriends.

The following example is an illustration of two children playing together; but with different storylines. It also illustrates how children can incorporate masculine and feminine storylines in their play together.

Example 4(c)

Many children are playing in the pool. Alice is barking occasionally. Shane is filling containers with water and tipping them over children. Alice is now standing on the edge of the pool barking loudly. She calls out to Shane and barks again. Alice gets into the pool continuing to bark; then she gets out again still barking. She moves away from the pool and then returns barking and with her hand held up like claws. She barks and shows her claws to Shane who has a container filled with water in his hands. Shane throws the water in Alice's direction and Alice retreats, still barking. Alice returns to the edge of the pool (barking) and looks for Shane. She gets into the water and heads in Shane's direction, barking. Shane gets up out of the water and retreats. Alice follows him barking. The teacher calls out "pack away time" and the game ends. Both Alice and Shane begin to get the toys out of the water.

This interaction was discussed with Alice and Shane.

- Bev: What are you doing Alice?
Alice: Rhuffus.
Bev: Who's Rhuffus?
Alice: My dog.
Bev: Is he a big dog or a little dog?
Alice: A big dog. A white one!
Bev: So you were Rhuffus, Alice and who were you Shane?
Shane: I was a transformer.
Alice: I pretending to be Rhuffus.
Bev: Who are you barking at?
Alice: I barking at a transformer. ... and when I put my hand up ...
Shane: It's me! I'm the transformer.
Bev: What are you doing Shane?
Shane: I was ... somebody was ... killed me so I couldn't shoot.
Bev: But Alice was barking at you.
Shane: I ... I was ... I was going ... trying to get ... someone to get ...
Alice shot my gun. That's why I couldn't shoot any more. Because I
only had ... had ...
Bev: So did you run away from Alice?
Shane: Yep.
Bev: Why are you running away from Alice?
Shane: Because ... she shot my gun.
Bev: What did she do to your gun?
Shane: She shot it!
Bev: Did you do that Alice?

Alice: Just was a pretend.
 Bev: Was it a good game?
 Alice: Yeah
 Shane: Wasn't too good. Like that old ...
 Bev: Oh, what happened?
 Alice: Because we had to put everything inside the pool.
 Shane: That's sad!

It appeared as if Alice was in control of the game. She instigated the game by barking and by calling out Shane's name. Shane joined in the game, first by throwing water at Alice, then by chasing her, and finally by running away from her. Alice's storyline involved a dog called Rhuffus who was chasing Shane. During the interview Alice agreed with Shane insofar as he was a transformer and that she shot him ('though only pretend!'). Shane's storyline involved him being a transformer and included shooting, guns, bullets etc. Shane adapted his storyline to include Rhuffus.

An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of both masculinist hegemonic discourses and prevailing feminine discourses. Shane employed the discursive practices of storylines concerned with heroism, conquering, war, and aggression; while Alice employed a discursive practice of a storyline concerned with the domestic realm (the dog being a family pet). It is an illustration of two children playing together with completely different storylines.

The following is an example of girls and a boy sharing a storyline associated with masculinist hegemony.

Example 4(d)

Kimberley, Penny, Andrew and Peta are playing with hoops. They are swinging them around and then letting them go. Some of the hoops fly through the air, some spin along the ground, and some roll along the ground.

Most of the conversation is inaudible because of the distance between the camera and the children and because of the wind noise. However, the words 'Power Rangers' can be heard quite frequently.

Peta: Let's catch a baddie!

Peta, Kimberley and Andrew raise their hoops above their heads. Kimberley and Peta appear to be aiming for Andrew. Andrew backs off.

Andrew: I'm a goodie!
Peta: I know but ... (inaudible)

They go back to rolling, spinning, flinging and throwing the hoops. This interaction was discussed with Kimberley, Andrew, Peta and Penny.

Bev: What are you playing with Kimberley?
Kimberley: A hoop
Bev: How many hoops did you have?
Kimberley: Four
Bev: And who did you give the hoops to?
Kimberley: Peta, Penny and Andrew.
Bev: And what game were you playing?
Peta: Power Rangers
Andrew: Power Rangers
Bev: Which Power Ranger were you Kimberley?
Kimberley: The pink one
Peta: So were I!!
Penny: I was the yellow one.
Andrew: I was the red one.
Bev: Why are you throwing the hoops around?
Penny: Because we feel liked it.
Bev: Is that part of the power Ranger game?
Penny: Yep
Peta: Yes
Bev: What happens if they hit somebody?
Peta: Penny hit somebody and said sorry!
Bev: Who did you hit Penny?
Penny: Kimberley
Bev: Is that right Kimberley?
Kimberley: Yes
Bev: Did she say sorry?
Kimberley: Yes
Bev: Did it hurt?
Kimberley: No
Bev: Are the Power Rangers goodies or baddies?
All: Goodies
Peta: Yeah, because they have to fight the baddies.
Bev: Oh.
Peta: Because god ... the girl god ... she tries to kill the Power Rangers that's ...
Bev: Is she the baddie?
Peta: Uh huh.
Bev: And who were you pretending to fight?
Peta: No one.
Bev: Who were the baddies?
Peta: No baddies!
Bev: What are you doing with the hoops here?
Andrew: Playing power rangers
Bev: It looks like Kimberley and Peta are fighting with Andrew there?
Kimberley: No
Peta: Just playing

The interaction initially looked aggressive; but the children insisted they were just playing. The throwing of hoops appeared a little dangerous in that the children did not really have much control over where the hoops would land. However they were in a relatively open space in the playground and no child was hurt. The boy and the girls are sharing a storyline.

An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of masculinist hegemonic discourses. The multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices which both the boy and the girls employed are storylines concerning heroism and conquering; and active play needing lots of space. The children all appear to be experiencing powerful subjectivities in this interaction.

The following is an example of girls and a boy sharing a dramatic play storyline associated with prevailing feminine discourses and discursive practices.

Example 4(e)

A large group of children, both boys and girls, are playing in and around the cubby. There is a lot of coming and going. Joseph arrives at the door of the cubby making a sound like a trumpet.

Rachel: My baby is going swimming. Our babies are going for swimming lessons.

Joseph: I will be the swimming teacher?

Rachel: But ... you have to go near the swimming pool.

Joseph leaves the cubby. Rachel continues to dress her baby. Annette is doing the ironing. Joseph returns to the cubby.

Joseph: I'm taking Baby for a walk. ... I'm taking Baby for a walk.

Rachel: But you're the swimming teacher!

Joseph: Yeah, but I take Baby for swimming.

Joseph leaves with his baby and Andrew arrives in the cubby with a cup in his hand. Joseph returns to the cubby without his baby.

Andrew: Uhhh man! Is there any Mums here?

Joseph: Yep, there's Mum.

Andrew: And I'm a Dad. ... We both dads.

Joseph: No dads! No dads!

Although the children were playing in the same physical space from time to time it was difficult to ascertain if they were actually playing together. Although it was Joseph's idea that he be the swimming teacher, Rachel may have used this as a way of removing him from the cubby. Joseph's insistence on "No dads" is unexplained.

An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of prevailing feminine discourses. The multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices which both the boys and the girls employed were storylines concerned with motherhood and the domestic realm.

According to MacNaughton, (1995c, p. 5), "The girls were involved in domestic storylines without exception. In most instances, the boys were actively involved in adventure storylines." Although this was the case in some examples, it was by no means applicable to all storylines.

To sum up, examples 4(a) and (b) illustrate what MacNaughton (1995c) discusses as children practising masculinity and femininity in accordance with masculinist hegemonic discourses and prevailing feminine discourses. However, in example 4(c) the two children are playing together (with no asymmetrical power relations) with different storylines and with different discursive practices. Examples 4(d) and (e) respectively illustrate children of both sex/genders sharing masculine storylines and feminine storylines.

Therefore, the analysis of children's gender relations again indicates that, although the dominant forms of relating in the gender order of our society are reproduced in the gender regime of this preschool setting, children can and do relate to each other through the discourses and the discursive practices usually associated with the other sex/gender.

In conclusion to this section on gender relations at the institutional level, what the children in this setting see as 'normal/natural' includes discourses and discursive practices associated with both dominant gendered discourses for both boys and girls; power is

exercised through a range of discourses by both girls and boys; and opportunities for resistance are available through children's reliance on both discourses.

6.2.2 Gender Relations at the Personal or Individual Level

Those interactions which illustrate gender relations at the personal or individual level in this preschool setting were grouped into those pertaining to children's perceptions of the other sex/gender and those interactions pertaining to how individual children's subjectivities varied.

6.2.2.1 Children's Perceptions

The following examples illustrate boys and girls discussing their perceptions about individual members of the other sex/gender and/or the other sex/gender as a group.

Example 5(a)

Martin, Heidi, Julie, Christine and Denise are playing with the play dough. They are singing 'Who stole the bicky from the bicky jar?' while they are rolling and manipulating the dough. After approximately 5 minutes, Martin leaves the table. A couple of minutes later Michael brings over a chair so that he can sit in the empty space.

Heidi: No boys allowed!

Michael goes to sit down. Denise leans across his chair to physically prevent him from sitting. Michael looks from one girl to the other.

Denise: No boys! No boys! (Michael sits down.)

Julie: Michael's allowed to! ... Michael's allowed to ... aren't you Michael?

Michael nods. The children continue their dough manipulating and chatting. Shortly, Denise reaches across and tries to take some of Michael's play dough. Michael takes his play dough off the table and holds it out of Denise's reach. Denise gets up and goes to Michael's outstretched hand. Michael puts the dough on his lap and Denise tries to get it there.

Michael: Noooo! ... (teacher) she wants to pinch one of my play dough!

Teacher: She what?

Michael: She wants to pinch one of my play dough!

Teacher: She was what?

Michael: She wants to take that. (Michael breaks off a piece of play dough and holds it up for the teacher to see.)

Denise: I'm taking only a little bit!

Teacher: I think you should ask instead of just taking.

Denise appears to think about what the teacher has said and they all go back to playing with their dough and chatting. Rodney approaches the table.

Denise: No boys! ... Because we got somebody all around us so Michael's here; Heidi's here; Julie's here; and Christine's here.

Meanwhile Rodney has left. The children continue their play. Simon and Martin come over to the table. They watch for a while and leave. There is nothing said about 'no boys allowed'. Michael leaves the table and goes to play elsewhere. Denise, Heidi and Julie are left at the table. Simon comes over and sits down. Julie and Heidi take the dough that is in that spot before he actually gets to sit down. Simon sits and waits.

Denise: Give a bit to him now.

All three girls give Simon small pieces of dough until he has his share of the dough. This series of interactions was discussed with Christine, Julie and Heidi.

Bev: How many people are working at the dough table? Can you count them?
All: One, two, three, four, five.
Bev: Who has just left?
Heidi: Martin.
Julie: Here's Michael.
Heidi: We said, 'no boys allowed'.
Bev: Who said that?
Heidi: Me!
Bev: Why did you say that Heidi?
Heidi: Cause ... we don't like boys.
Bev: Why not?
Heidi: Um ... because ... I don't like them because they fight very much.
Bev: What about you Julie, do you like boys?
Julie: No
Bev: Why not?
Julie: Because ... when ... when I was at my friend's house um ... and Simon was there ... he fought with me.
Bev: And Christine, do you like boys?
Bev: Why not?
Christine: Because ... when I was in my home and my brother was fighting with me and he scratched me and he was going to hit me with a shoe and he hit me on the knee.
Bev: Don't girls fight?
Heidi: No
Julie: No
Bev: Did Michael fight when he was playing play dough with you?
Heidi: No
Bev: Why didn't you want him to play?
Christine: Because there were no boys in there was there, Heidi?
Bev: But Martin was there before. Isn't he a boy?
All: Yes
Heidi: Yes, but we (inaudible) ... friends with Rodney and Sam and Lawrie.
Bev: But why not Michael?
Heidi: I am!
Bev: Well, why did you tell him he couldn't play?
Heidi: Because there was no boys there before.

The girls were using physical intimidation and oral force to prevent some boys access to the dough table. Even though the exclusion sometimes appeared to be more of a game than a gendered interaction, the girls were nevertheless exercising power over the boys. They felt it was their right to dictate who could and who couldn't play. Both Michael and Simon were able to resist these discursive practices, while Rodney was not. Michael resisted with the help of Julie and Simon simply waited till the girls were ready to share the dough with him.

An examination of this interview has led to a reading of prevailing feminine discourses and the intersecting and interacting discursive practices which the girls employed were operation as a sub-teacher; use of emotional manipulations; group power; and excluding the masculine.

Example 5(b)

Annette, Kerry, Kimberley and Robyn are playing at the dough table. They are either squashing the dough flat with their hands and using biscuit cutters to press out shapes, or they are rolling and squeezing the dough into objects. Annette rolls her dough into a ball and leaves the table. A few minutes later Tracey comes and joins the table.

This interaction was discussed with Kerry, Robyn and Kimberley.

- Bev: How come there are no boys at that table?
 Kerry: Cause.
 Kimberley: We're all wearing dresses.
 Robyn: Cause the boys didn't want to come over.
 Bev: Why do you think the boys didn't want to come over?
 Kimberley: They were all in the quiet room.
 Robyn: Probably cause they thought "Nah" cause they probably run out of time to finish off their making things.
 Bev: Do you like playing with the boys?
 Kimberley: No.
 Bev: Why not Kimberley?
 Kimberley: Colin always pushes me when he is here.
 Bev: What about the other boys?
 Kimberley: ... They're nice.
 Bev: What about you Robyn?
 Robyn: Ummmmm ... um. Sometimes Colin is mean and sometimes he's not.
 Bev: Are there any boys who are nice all the time?
 Kerry: No!
 Kimberley: No.
 Robyn: No.
 Bev: What about you. Are you mean or nice to them?
 Robyn: Nice to them.
 Bev: All the time?
 Robyn: Yeah.
 Kimberley: I am.

Bev: Robyn, who is your best friend?
 Robyn: Colin.
 Bev: What games do you like to play with Colin?
 Robyn: Power Rangers all the time. I know who is the first boss in Power Rangers! The white Power Ranger and I have seen it at the pictures.
 Bev: Which one do you like to pretend to be?
 Robyn: The pink one.
 Bev: Why do you like playing Power Rangers?
 Robyn: With Colin
 Bev: Any other games you like to play with him
 Robyn: No, just Power Rangers. ... Cause his favourite game is Power Rangers so I keep playing it with him.
 Bev: What's your favourite game at preschool Kimberley?
 Kimberley: (silence) Um.... everything.
 Bev: Who is your best friend?
 Kimberley: Tracey.
 Bev: What games do you play with Tracey?
 Kimberley: Cars and um ... on the swings.
 Kerry: On which swings?
 Kimberley: The swings at my house and the swings at school.
 Bev: Do you have any friends who are boys at preschool, Kimberley?
 Kimberley: No
 Bev: Why don't you like playing with the boys?
 Kimberley: Because they always ... don't play with me.
 Bev: Have you asked them to play with you?
 Kimberley: Yes
 Bev: Do you know why they have said 'no'?
 Kimberley: Why?
 Bev: I have no idea. I'm asking you!
 Kimberley: I have no idea either!
 Bev: And what about you Kerry? What do you like to play?
 Kerry: Playing Power Rangers.
 Bev: And who do you play Power Rangers with?
 Kerry: Colin and Andrew
 Bev: Are you missing Colin being away?
 Kerry: Where is Colin?
 Bev: He's on holidays. Is he more rough or is he more nice? Which one is he more of?
 Kerry: He's more rough cause he fights inside, eh!
 Kimberley: Yeah! Sometimes he kicks inside.
 Kerry: No! He kicks inside the cubby, eh!
 Kimberley: Yeah.
 Bev: Does he really kick you or is it pretend?
 Kerry: Yeah, he kicks up the cubby and he throws all the fruit around on the ground, eh!
 Bev: Have you ever asked him why?
 Kerry: No we didn't ask him to but he just does it.
 Bev: Did you ask him why he was doing it?
 Kimberley: Yeah.
 Kerry: "No, we still want to do it", hey!
 Bev: Does he muck up your game when he does that?
 Kimberley: Yes.
 Kerry: Yeah, he's ...
 Robyn: Because when we get fruit and when we are walking along with it then he snatches it off us and throws it somewhere. Hey, Kimberley?
 Bev: Do you like that game or not?
 Kimberley: No
 Kerry: He ... he kicks inside the cubby, eh?
 Robyn: Yeah, and he kicks out the cubby.

Bev: Does he hurt you when he kicks?
 Kerry: Yeah, when he kicks, sometimes he kicks us out, eh!
 Robyn: Sometimes he pushes us.
 Bev: And yet he is still your best friend, Robyn?
 Robyn: Yeah.
 Bev: Does anyone else play that game?
 Kimberley: No
 Bev: Do any of the girls play like that?
 Kerry: No

Kimberley gave an explanation as to why she does not have any friends who are boys, but she could not explain why boys don't play with her. She responded to one of the researcher's questions as if the researcher had the answer she did not have. She was clearly disappointed when the researcher stated that she did not know. Nevertheless, Kimberley did come up with a reason for not liking Colin. She stated that he was aggressive; but that some boys were nice. Significantly, all these girls agreed that no boys were nice all the time. Kerry and Robyn contradicted themselves when discussing Colin and his behaviours. They both claimed Colin for a friend; then listed his misdoings. Kimberley joined in this part of the discussion as well. An aspect worth noting was that although Colin could be very aggressive, he was still liked by many of the children. This was discussed with the educators who felt that Colin was popular because he found exciting games to play and because he was a likable character.

An examination of this interview has led to a reading of prevailing feminine discourses and the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices which the girls employed were excluding the masculine for fear of disruption and/or aggression; and group power.

Illustration 5(c)

Julie, Simon, Denise and Heidi are playing at the dough table. Sally comes over and stands at the table, talking to Heidi and Denise. Eventually Sally gets a chair and sits down at the table. Denise says she will share her scissors with Sally. It was impossible to see who gave Sally some dough.

Sam comes over to the table. He watches everyone and then begins to talk to Simon. Alan comes over as well. Julie joins in the conversation. Sam and Alan stand and watch. Julie gives some dough to Alan but NOT to Sam. Something happening over the other side of the room attracts all the children's attention. Sam decides to leave and so does Alan. Julie takes her dough back. This interaction was discussed with Simon, Heidi and Sally.

Bev: Sally, you've just arrived at the table. Did somebody give you some play dough?
 Sally: Yes

Bev: Who gave you some dough?
 Sally: Um ... um ... Denise and Julie
 Bev: Simon, what is Sam doing?
 Simon: He wanted to play but there was no chairs left.
 Bev: And who is this?
 Simon: Alan.
 Bev: What is happening?
 Simon: Alan can play but not Sam.
 Bev: Why couldn't Sam play?
 Simon: Cause there was not enough chairs cause ... cause Julie didn't let ... Sam.
 Heidi: And Alan couldn't play cause there wasn't enough chairs, there wasn't enough scissors, there wasn't enough ... play dough.
 Sally: Yeah, there wasn't much room.
 Bev: So what happened?
 Simon: Alan could play then. He just stood up and played.
 Bev: And who gave Alan some play dough?
 Simon: Julie
 Bev: And what about Sam? Did he get some play dough?
 Heidi: No!!
 Sally: No
 Simon: No
 Heidi: Cause we ... I not his friend!
 Sally: Not me either.
 Bev: Why not? Why aren't you friends with Sam?
 Heidi: Because I don't like him.
 Bev: Why not?
 Heidi: Cause I don't like boys. I like Alan and Terry and Sally and Cathy and Simon and Justin and Lawrie and Julie and (teacher).
 Bev: There are lots of girls and lots of boys there Heidi.
 Sally: And I like Heidi.
 Bev: How can you say you don't like boys if you like Justin, and Lawrie and Simon?
 Heidi: Ummmm ... I like Sam (and laughs).
 Bev: I think you may have changed your mind!

This was an interesting discussion about why Alan could play with the dough and why Sam could not. Simon initially stated that Julie had made this decision; and Heidi and Sally gave reasons such as the lack of space, equipment, materials etc. However, eventually, all three children stated that they didn't like Sam. Heidi was the only child who came up with a reason for this dislike, and that reason was that she didn't like any boys. She then proceeded to list her friends and included the names of many boys. When challenged on this point, she stated that she did like Sam.

An examination of this interview has led to a reading of prevailing feminine discourses and the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices which the girls employed were excluding the masculine for fear of disruption; group power; and use of emotional manipulations.

Illustration 5(d)

Peta: It's a hard life isn't it.
 Rachel: Robyn is dumb!
 Annette: Robyn she likes Colin.
 Peta: Robyn and me like Colin but ... (inaudible)
 Rachel: Colin is bad. He picks on us.
 Peta: Yeah, sure, sure. Not all the boys in the world are bad. Some are friends if you ... some of my friends are boys ... (inaudible)

This interaction took place in the cubby during outdoor time. It was recorded on video tape but was not discovered until the tapes were transcribed. The girls were discussing girls' relationships with boys and Colin was the focus of the discussion. Rachel and Annette agreed that Colin was bad and that they felt Robyn was silly to like him. Peta partially agrees with them but also states that Colin, and some boys, are her friends.

An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of prevailing feminine discourses and the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices which the girls employed were excluding the masculine for fear of aggression; storylines concerned with romantic love; and group power. However, Peta was not in total agreement with these discursive practices as she was not convinced that 'all boys are bad'.

Example 5(e)

Sally and Denise are on the seesaw. Heidi is standing beside them, talking to them. Rodney comes over to the seesaw, says something, and then leaves again. This interaction was discussed with Sally, Denise and Heidi.

Bev: Rodney is talking to you. What is he talking about?
 Sally: He wants a go on the seesaw.
 Denise: We don't want no boys on the seesaw.
 Bev: No boys! Why is that?
 Denise: Because we're not their friends!
 Bev: With any boys? Why not?
 Denise: My little sister is not a boy and I always play with her!
 Bev: You play with some of the boys here at preschool don't you?
 Sally: No
 Heidi: No
 Denise: No
 Bev: Don't you like boys?
 All: Nuh!
 Bev: Why not? ... Why not?
 Denise: Because I never had a brother!
 Bev: Have you got a brother Heidi?
 Heidi: No, I got a half sister.
 Bev: Sally, you've got a brother. Do you play with him?
 Sally: Nuh

The girls could not explain why they did not like or want to play with boys. It appeared as if each child was reinforcing what the others had said. An examination of this interview has led to a reading of prevailing feminine discourses and the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices which the girls employed were excluding the masculine for fear of disruption; and group power.

Example 5(f)

It is fruit time and the children are sitting around the edge of the mat eating shared fruit. Julie is sitting amongst a group of boys who are talking about Power Rangers. She is listening rather than joining in the conversation. Denise is sitting with a group of girls on the other side of the mat.

Denise: Julie, are you a boy? Come and sit here. (Julie doesn't move.)

This interaction would appear to indicate that Denise did not approve of Julie sitting with the boys and implies that boys and girls are so different that sitting with them is a social error. An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of prevailing feminine discourses and the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices which Denise employed were excluding the masculine; and group power.

Example 5(g)

The children are sitting around the mat for fruit: Sally, Alice, Denise, Julie, and Heidi are in one corner chatting. Martin, Robert, Lawrie and Rodney are in the opposite corner talking, laughing and chatting. The other children are spread around the mat.

Lawrie: Look girls. You are bullies. Girls. You are bullies. Girls. Excuse me you girls? Girls. ... Excuse me you girls? You bullies!
Martin: Girls! You're bullies.
Lawrie: Girls watch this! (Lawrie bangs his hands on his head several times.)

Laughter from the 4 boys in this group.

Julie, Alice and Denise have stopped talking and are watching Lawrie during this performance. One of the educators calls out to Robert to go and get something to eat and the interaction ceases.

It is difficult to understand what is going on in this interaction. Through the use of oral force, Lawrie was either trying to disrupt the girls' conversation or he was trying to initiate conversation with them. He was successful in disrupting the conversation but he was unsuccessful in initiating conversation or play. Nevertheless, Lawrie appeared to be intimidating the girls by calling them names and Martin joined in this activity. The

remainder of the boys in the group were enjoying the interaction. The girls did not resisted this harassment and appeared confused by Lawrie's behaviour.

An examination of this interaction has led to a reading of masculinist hegemonic discourses and the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices employed by the boys include masculinity in opposition to and superior to femininity.

Example 5(h)

Craig and Andrew are building with the large Waffle blocks on the verandah. Larry comes to join them. He helps Craig join his blocks together by showing Craig that he has to turn the block around to make it fit into the other blocks. Jimmy rides past on a two wheel bike wearing a helmet. Larry says to Jimmy:

Larry: You look like a girl!

Larry then goes back to his building activity. This interaction was discussed with Larry and Craig.

Bev: What did you just say to Jimmy, Larry?
Larry: "You look like a girl".
Bev: Why did you say that?
Larry: Felt like it.
Bev: What did Jimmy say?
Larry: Nothing
Bev: Was he wearing a dress? Was that why he looked like a girl?
Larry: Helmet.
Bev: The helmet made him look like a girl.
SILENCE
Bev: How do you tell a girls' helmet from a boys' helmet?
Larry: Cause its got a mermaid on it.
Bev: Do you wear that one sometimes?
Larry: No
Bev: Why not?
Larry: I'm a boy. Don't want to.
Bev: Do you wear the one with the mermaid on it Craig?
Craig: Nuh
Bev: Which helmet do you wear?
Craig: I watched the girls' helmet ... the girls' mermaid helmet ... Ariel ...
Ariel is on TV.
Bev: Would you wear that helmet?
Craig: Nuh. Cause I hate girls' helmets.
Bev: Why?
Larry: So do I!
Craig: I only like riding the big bike!
Bev: And what helmet do you wear when you ride the big bike?
Larry: Sometimes I wear Genie of the Aladdan and I wear Mickey Mouse one sometimes.

Both Larry and Craig believed that the "Ariel" helmet was a girls' helmet and that consequently neither of them could or would wear it. This belief is located in a

masculinist hegemonic discourse which encompasses the discursive practices of heterosexuality and homophobia. Hence, the boys' own definition of their masculinity would not allow them to wear a female helmet. They also perceive that Jimmy 'has got it wrong' by wearing this helmet.

To sum up, examples 5(a) to 5(f) are illustrations of girls talking about their gender relations with boys. An examination of these examples has led to a reading of prevailing feminine discourses and the multiple interacting and intersecting discursive practices were primarily concerned with excluding the masculine; and group power. Examples 5(a), (b), (c) and (d) indicate that the girls felt that some boys were okay some of the time; while 5 (e) and (f) indicate that these girls felt that no boys were okay and that playing with them or being near them was a problem. A noteworthy point here is that the girls' perceptions of one boy, Colin, were many and varied. He is feared by some girls (Kimberley, Rachel, Annette) and feared and liked by others (Peta, Robyn, Kerry). Colin and his subjectivities are discussed in the next section.

Examples 5(g) and (h) are illustrations of boys' reactions to girls and girls' things. An examination of these examples has led to a reading of masculinist hegemonic discourses and the multiple interacting and intersecting discursive practices were masculinity in opposition to and superior to femininity; and heterosexuality and homophobia. Example 5(g) indicates that the boys felt that the girls were different in some way and this is illustrated by the fact that Lawrie calls them 'Girls' and does not use their names. Example 5(c) illustrates that some boys believe that certain items are girls' things and that this excludes the boys from using them.

In conclusion to this subsection on children's perspectives on the other sex/gender, it was interesting to note that there were many more examples of girls discussing boys than vice versa. This concurs with Block's (1983) findings that four to five year old girls are more concerned with social relationships and friendships than are four to five year old boys. All the above examples illustrate the contentions of MacNaughton (1995c) and Clark

(1990) that boys and girls consider themselves to be on different teams, though there are some indications that not all the children feel this way. This is discussed in Chapter 7.

6.2.2.2 Individual children's subjectivities

According to Alloway (1995b), children experience power and powerlessness depending on the context of the interaction and the relationship between the individuals involved in the interaction. The following illustrations show how six children's subjectivities varied according to the activity and/or the children who were involved in the interaction.

Toni

Toni is 5.3 years old. She has been at preschool for 15 months. In the following example she is experiencing a powerful subjectivity.

Example 6(a)

Rachel, Craig, Peta and Robyn have been happily playing at the dough table for quite a while. Peta is asked to go to the library to change her library book. Rachel offers to look after her dough for her while she is gone. Rachel pulls her ball of play dough toward her as if to guard it. The children continue their play, making ostrich eggs and crocodile eggs. Meanwhile, Toni returns from the library and puts her library book in its bag in her school bag. She confidently comes over to the dough table, takes Peta's dough from Rachel and sits down. Rachel says

Rachel: Toni!
Craig: That's Peta's.
Rachel: Yeah, she was playing with it!

The conversation continues but is inaudible. Peta returns from the library.

Rachel: Peta! (Rachel points to Toni playing with her dough)
Peta: That's alright. (Peta goes to another activity.)

Toni wanted to play at the dough table and that was what she did, despite Rachel's and Craig's objections. It is interesting to compare this confident behaviour with Toni's reactions to her interaction with Colin and Andrew at the dough table the week before (see Example 1(c), page 75 of this chapter). The difference was not the context, as both interactions occurred at the dough table, but rather the relationship of the individuals. When faced with two boys using oral force, Toni retreated. When faced with two girls and one boy, Toni confidently proceeded to do what she wanted; that is, play at the

dough table. Other examples of the differing subjectivities experienced by Toni in the preschool setting include: example 1(e) on page 78 illustrates Toni and a group of girls attempting to reject the masculinist hegemonic discursive practices of Craig and Jimmy; example 1(h) on page 82 illustrates Toni confidently rejecting Damian's masculinist hegemonic discursive practices; and example 4(b) on page 97 illustrates her taking part in prevailing feminine discursive practices. The above examples demonstrate how Toni is powerful in some circumstances and powerless in others.

Rodney

Rodney is 4.4 years old. He has been at preschool for approximately 3 months. In the following two examples he is experiencing powerful subjectivities, each resulting from different discursive practices.

Example 6(b)

It is fruit time. During indoor activity time, some of the children made jelly. The teacher is now serving the jelly and ice cream. Denise and Rodney have been sitting together for most of fruit time. They have been talking on and off during this session. Denise turns to Rodney and puts one hand on each side of his face and talks to him gently. She withdraws one hand but leaves the other resting on his neck. They are both distracted by something the teacher says and Denise withdraws her hand.

The two children were enjoying each other's company and conversation and experiencing powerful subjectivities through mutual friendship. The following example occurs approximately 5 minutes later.

Example 6(c)

The children were eating jelly and ice cream. Shane and Rodney catch each other's glances. Rodney waves his spoon at Shane; Shane shoots Rodney with his hand; Rodney uses his spoon and cup as a sword; Shane pretend kicks in Rodney's direction. This continues for three or four goes each.

Neither child touched the other and both boys appeared to be enjoying the game. Both boys were experiencing powerful subjectivities due to the masculinist hegemonic discursive practices of storylines concerned with competition.

These powerful subjectivities can be compared with the powerless subjectivities Rodney experiences in examples 1(d) on page 76, 5(a) on page 104, and 5(e) on page 110. While

example 6(c) above illustrates Rodney experiencing a powerful subjectivity while taking part in masculinist hegemonic discursive practices, example 2(d) on page 87 illustrates him rejecting these discursive practices. Rodney's subjectivities depend on the context and the children involved in each context.

Penny

Penny is 5.1 years old. She has been at preschool for 10 months. Penny experiences powerful subjectivities through masculinist hegemonic discourses and discursive practices as illustrated in example 3(b) on page 91 and example 4 (d) on page 100. However, she experiences powerless subjectivities in example 1(e) on page 78 and in example 6(d) below.

Example 6(d)

A group of children are playing at the new workshop. This toy is very popular because it has only been available for a short period of time.

- Penny: Annette, can you please let me have a turn!!! (Penny thumps her hand on the bench)
Jamie: (Gently pushes Penny aside and talks to Annette.) Have you found a blue screw?
Penny: (Shouting) Annette, I want a turn of that!
Jamie: (To Penny) Thank you!
Penny: (To Jamie) It wasn't me!
(To Annette) I need it!!!! You have to share! If you don't let me have a turn, I won't be your friend!

Penny continues to talk to Annette who is not listening. Kerry arrives on the scene and Annette gives her the toy Penny has been asking for. Penny is astounded. She tries to push Kerry away, but has no success. She stands back and folds her arms and pulls a face. She then takes a (gentle) swipe at Kerry which Kerry does not notice. Penny wanders around the other side of the toy bench and looks in the drawers. She goes back to the original side to find Kerry has left. She picks up the toy she has been trying to get for quite a while and begins to play with it.

Penny used oral manipulation, oral force and physical intimidation to try to secure the possession of a toy. Although she was not resisted (other than being ignored) she was not successful in gaining possession of the toy. However, patience worked and she eventually got what she wanted.

An examination of this example leads to a reading of prevailing feminine discourse and discursive practices which included the interacting and intersecting discursive practices of

applying the rules of fair play and use of emotional manipulations including emotional blackmail. Thus, it would appear that Penny experiences powerful subjectivities through masculinist hegemonic discursive practices and powerless subjectivities through prevailing feminine discursive practices.

Colin

Colin is 5.2 years old. He has been at preschool for 10 months. Example 1(a) on page 72 and example 1(c) on page 75 illustrate Colin employing masculinist hegemonic discursive practices to produce powerful subjectives for himself and powerless subjectivities for the girls involved in these interactions; while example 1(g) on page 81 illustrates him employing these same discursive practices to produce powerless subjectivities for a group of boys. However, example 3(a) on page 90 illustrates Colin not taking part in masculinist hegemonic discourses and examples 5(d) and 5(e) on page 110 both illustrate what some girls think about Colin, his behaviours and his actions.

Colin experienced powerful subjectivities most of the time he was at preschool. During the four week data collection period he was away on holidays for two weeks and his presence was missed by many of the children. Although he was rough, boisterous, and aggressive he was nevertheless popular with many of the boys and girls in his preschool group.

Kimberley

Kimberley is 5.2 years old and has been at preschool for 10 months. She experiences a powerless subjectivity in example 1(a) on page 72 due to some boys exercising power through masculinist hegemonic discursive practices. However, she experiences a powerful subjectivity in example 3(a) on page 90 when she exercises power through prevailing feminine discursive practices. It is worth noting that Colin and Joseph were involved in both these interactions. In example 5(b) on page 106 Kimberley discusses her feelings about Colin and his behaviours. Kimberley also experiences a powerful subjectivity in example 4(d) on page 100 in which she was taking part in masculinist hegemonic discursive practices.

Sam

Sam is 4.3 years old. He has been at preschool for 2 months. He experiences powerful subjectivities through discursive practices associated with masculinist hegemonic discourses as in example 2(a) on page 84 and example 4(a) on page 96. He experiences powerless subjectivities due to prevailing feminine discursive practices in example 1(b) on page 74 and in example 5(c) on page 108. Conversely, in example 2(c) on page 85 Sam rejects feminine discursive practices (by not allowing the girls to exclude him from dramatic play in the cubby) and at the same time he employs prevailing feminine discursive practices in his play.

In conclusion, children's subjectivities and the way they experience gender relations in the preschool setting vary according to the play situation and the children's involvement in that situation. MacNaughton (1995c, p. 3) states that children develop 'no go areas' and 'no go friends' because of previous gender relationships which involved physical force, intimidation or harassment. "Girls may avoid areas where the boys are, or avoid playing with boys because they have learnt to associate boys with aggressive or violent behaviours" (MacNaughton, 1995c, p. 3). Observations of children's interactions in this preschool setting failed to provide support for MacNaughton's contention.

6.2.3 Conclusion

Gender relations discourses dominant in the gender order of our society are also dominant in the gender regime of this preschool setting. From the examples cited in this section, a common feature of children's gender relations was that many boys do construct their gender relations by exercising power established through masculinist hegemonic discourses. The web of discursive practices that dominate boys' ways of relating in this preschool setting were storylines concerned with heroism, competition, conquering, war, aggression and/or deaths; rules of fair play do not apply to males; violence and

aggression towards females; and active play needing lots of space. The remainder of the masculinist hegemonic discursive practices listed at the beginning of this section were also prevalent in this setting, though not to the same degree. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

Many of the girls in this study also constructed their gender relations by exercising power established through the prevailing feminine discourses dominant in the gender order of our society. The web of discursive practices that dominated the girls' ways of relating in the gender regime of this preschool setting were excluding boys through fear of disruption and/or aggression; storylines concerned with motherhood and the domestic realm; group power; and applying rules of fair play or rule following. The two of the prevailing feminine discursive practices that were not cited in the examples of interactions were hard working and/or model pupils and awareness of the gaze of others. Nevertheless, it was common to find in the transcripts of the video tape recordings a predominance of girls at table activities which would indicate that this discursive practice was part of the girls' ways of being. With regard to 'awareness of the gaze of others', some of the girls came to preschool dressed in very feminine clothing while the majority were dressed in clothing that was practical and suitable for this setting. Since, over the four week period, the researcher did not observe or record any instance of girls not taking part in activities because of the restrictiveness of their clothing or for fear of getting dirty, it has been concluded that this discursive practice is not part of the girls' discourses in this setting.

The remaining prevailing feminine discursive practices listed at the beginning of this section were dominant in this setting, though not to the same degree as those listed above. The implications of this are discussed in Chapter 7.

Identifying the dominant gendered ways of relating is only the first step in the deconstruction of the gender regime of a particular setting (Alloway, 1995b; Kamler et al, 1994; Davies and Banks, 1992; Clark, 1990). It is the deviations from the dominant forms that are critical in challenging male/female dualism discourses. That is, the

emphasis needs to be placed on the differences within the genders (rather than between them) and on the inconsistencies in children's gendered ways of relating.

Some of the girls in this study crossed the gender divide by employing discursive practices from masculinist hegemonic discourses. These discursive practices were storylines concerned with heroism and aggression; active play needing lots of space; and rules of fair play not applying to them. Some of the boys in this study also crossed the gender divide by employing discursive practices associated with dominant feminine discourses. They were unwillingness to do combat; passivity; and applying rules of fair play and rule following. The implications of these crossings of the gender divide are discussed in Chapter 7.

The context and the individuals involved in a particular context play a vital role in the way children relate to each other. This was clearly demonstrated in the subsections titled 'Perspectives' and 'Subjectivities'. Gender identities are fractured and shifting because of the multiple discourses intersecting in any individual life (Connell, 1995). Overlapping or criss crossing of discourses produce gendered ways of being and this is where these gendered ways of being can be challenged (Weedon, 1987). The implications of these assertions for this study are also discussed in Chapter 7.

The next section of this study deals with the analysis of the parents' perspectives.

6.3 Results and Discussion of Phase II

This section reports parents' perspectives on their children's gender relations collected by means of a questionnaire and follow up interviews. The data from structured questions were analysed for frequency of responses using the *Statistical Package for Social Sciences* (SPSS). The data from unstructured questions were used to illustrate and to give examples of parent informants' responses. Those segments relating to parents' perspectives on their children's gender relations in the gender regime of the home setting only are discussed here.

At the institutional level, the discourses currently dominant in the gender order of our society and which can be applied to parents' perspectives on children's gender relations were labelled prevailing gendered discourses and subordinate ungendered discourses (see Chapter 3).

Prevailing gendered discourses included the discursive practices of:

- the necessity of gender difference - concerned with 'normality'
- the meaning of gender difference - concerned with 'common sense'
- gender appropriate behaviour - what girls and boys should and shouldn't do
- socially defined masculinity and femininity - girls and boys, men and women, recognise themselves as separate, different and distinctly gendered
- gender appropriate child rearing practices

Subordinate ungendered discourses included the discursive practices of:

- gender difference not necessary insofar as 'normality' is concerned
- beyond male/female dualism - 'common sense' implies that gender differences have no meaning
- ungendered behaviour - girls and boys can do anything and everything
- girls and boys, men and women, recognise themselves as individuals whose definition is not reliant on their biological sex

- ungendered child rearing practices
- reject 'the feminist movement'; but nevertheless uphold feminist ideas, beliefs and attitudes
- ungendered play at this age

At the personal level, the discourses currently dominant in the gender order of our society and which can be applied to parents' perspectives on children's gender relations in the gender regime of the home setting were labelled discourses of parents discussing discourses of child rearing practices and discourses of parents discussing children's discursive practices (see Chapter 5). Parental discussions of child rearing discourses included the discursive practices of:

- need for societal values to change
- societal values are changing
- societal values have changed (thing of the past)
- gender not an influence at this age
- power of peer group pressure

Discourses of parents discussing their children's discourses included the discursive practices of:

- nongendered play
- gendered play
- gendered toys
- necessity of gender difference
- socially defined masculinity and femininity

A feminist poststructuralist analysis was applied to the parental discourses uncovered in this study (at both the institutional and personal level) by deconstructing them to discover how they are structured, which power relations they produce and reproduce, and to discover weak points through which the discourses can be challenged. The parental responses to the questionnaire and the interview schedule which addressed these

discursive practices were selected for analysis. These included parents' perceptions of gender relations in the family, gender relations pertaining to children's futures, and gender relations and gender equity. The discursive practices operating and/or available in the gender regimes of the home setting were then analysed according to the dominant discursive practices operating in the gender order of our society.

6.3.1 Parent informant response rate

Chart 7 illustrates the parent informants' response rate to the questionnaire according to the sex/gender relationship between parent informants and their 4/5 year old children. The largest group of informants was 'mother of boy' with 42.2% and the smallest was 'father of girl' with 8.9%. There were more parents of boys (57.8%) as informants than parents of girls as informants (42.2%). This reflects the fact that, of the population of 4/5 year old children attending the preschool, 58.3% are boys and 41.7% are girls.

Chart 7

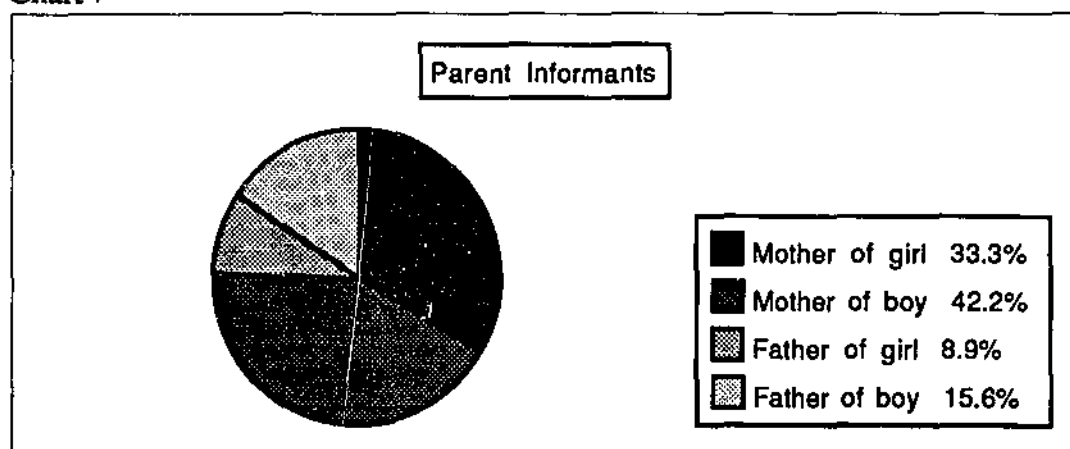


Chart 7 also illustrates that 'mothers' who took part in the study (75.5% of the informants) far outnumbered 'fathers' (24.5%). Lewis, in her 1991 study, also found that, "The vast majority of returns of parent questionnaires were completed by the female parent" (Lewis, 1991, p. 6). Both these response rates illustrate how, in our society at the present time, "mothers" are seen as the carers and nurturers who are largely

responsible for young children. This was exemplified by the following father's response to the invitation to take part in the interviews: "Not really. My wife can speak for the both of us" (father of girl). MacNaughton's (1995a) case study, which included discussions with parents, illustrates mothers' greater involvement in discussions about their children and gender equity programs, with a ratio of 2 mothers to 1 father. This is comparable with this study where the ratio was 3 mothers to 1 father. Lytton and Romney (1991, p. 267) also found that fathers were underrepresented in the studies they surveyed.

6.3.2 Gender Relations in the Family

Parents' perspectives on gender relations in the family were examined by looking at children's gender relations in five different areas. These areas were parents' perceptions of the personal qualities they felt were important to encourage in their 4/5 year old child; their perceptions of children's need for affection; their perceptions of their children's friends and friendships; their perceptions of their children's games and activities; and their perceptions of the influence of peer group pressure on their children's gender relations.

6.3.2.1 Parents' perceptions of personal qualities

Table I (Appendix IV, p. 227 displays the parent informants' responses to the question, "Do you encourage your child to be independent, competitive, achieving, caring, sharing, and/or nurturing?". All parent informants considered sharing and caring important personal qualities that should be encouraged in their children while only 40% of parent informants thought that competitiveness was an important quality.

It may be seen from Table I that parents of girls, in comparison to parents of boys, considered all qualities (except caring and sharing which were the same) more important than parents of boys. For example, with respect to achieving, parents of girls (73.3% of

mothers and 100% of fathers) considered achieving an important quality while fewer parents of boys (68.4% of mothers and 85.7% of fathers) considered this to be an important personal quality.

Mothers did not appear to distinguish between the value of these qualities on the basis of the sex/gender of the child (for example, independence was important to 93.3% of mothers of girls and to 94.7% of mothers of boys) save in respect to nurturing where 86.7% of mothers of girls felt it was an important quality and only 63.7% of mothers of boys felt it was an important quality (see Table I). However, it would appear that fathers do take the sex/gender of the child into account when considering personality qualities. For example, only 57.1% of fathers of boys considered nurturing an important quality while 100% of fathers of girls thought this was an important quality for their child.

These six personality qualities were included in the questionnaire and interview schedule because firstly, parents of girls have been traditionally reported to encourage caring, sharing and nurturing; and secondly, parents of boys have been reported to encourage independence, competitiveness, and achieving (Streitmatter, 1994; Miedzian, 1992; Lewis, 1991). This was not the case in this study.

Comments, as to why these are important qualities, were associated with children's all round growth and development and included:

- I would like my son to grow up being a well rounded child and not the boy stereotype that my brother grew up to be. I feel that for my son to participate in society when he grows up he must possess all of these things. (mother of boy)
- So she can learn, be confident, care about others, and be able to share. (mother of girl)
- All round development, and development of self esteem. (father of girl)
- Will help him, in the future years of his life, to become a decent person. (father of boy)

Some other interesting comments included:

- These are all important attributes to us - but that doesn't necessarily mean we are succeeding in any!!! (mother of boy)
- I think it is important children have these qualities taught as they are not born with them; and they need a genuine love of mankind. (mother of boy)

- So we can get on together as a family. (mother of boy)
- We try to teach our children that if they do their best no-one can ask for better. (mother of boy)
- So she is able to cope well in the future without being taken advantage of; but not to the extent of walking all over others. (mother of girl)
- Want her to think for herself and realise her actions affect others. (mother of girl)
- So one day, should he have a partner or family, he will consider all his responsibilities and act accordingly. (father of boy)

Interestingly, all parent informants believed that caring and sharing were important personal qualities for both boys and girls and that many parent informants have higher expectations for girls than for boys (that is, parents of girls consider achieving a more important quality than parents of boys).

Informant responses pertaining to prevailing gendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of socially defined femininity ('nurturing' more important for girls than for boys). Informant responses pertaining to subordinate ungendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of gender differences not necessary insofar as 'normality' is concerned (all round development); beyond male/female dualism - 'common sense' implies that gender differences have no meaning (caring and sharing important for girls and boys); and ungendered child rearing practices (family cooperation).

6.3.2.2 Parents' perceptions of their 4/5 year old child's need for affection

In response to the question, "What is your reaction to this quote: 'Some mothers are genuinely convinced that it is innately male to need less affection than females' (Legge, 1995, p. 25)?" , all parent informants disagreed strongly. Their comments included:

- No, the more you can give the better. (father of boy)
- This is bullshit. Little boys need hugs and kisses. They hurt as well, don't they? No, I don't agree with that. (mother of girl)
- No, I don't think so. They all need the same, just as much. I think they should just be treated equally. Give them both as much cuddles and hugs and kisses. And we do here. As much as they will allow. (mother of boy)

It was interesting to note that one mother of a boy included in her comment, "as much as they will allow." Other parent informants' comments which indicated that they felt that boys had a limit on the amount of affection they needed and/or would allow, included:

- He needs reassurance. He's not a cuddly child. We need to talk to him more about what's happening to him. (mother of boy)
- If you don't reach out for him he doesn't ... you have to force yourself on him sometimes. I think it is something we have to work on. He doesn't come to us often enough. (father of boy)

Along a similar line, there were two converse comments about public show of affection:

- I think it is becoming more socially acceptable for men to express emotions in public; as far as showing compassion, caring and all that. I have seen a 17 year old son give his dad a hug. (mother of girl)
- I disagree with it. Males don't need less affection than females. You wouldn't be as open about it perhaps, you know, in public. (mother of boy)

Many parent informants (all mothers) indicated that they believed that, while all children needed lots of affection, boys sometimes needed more because of our society.

Comments included:

- I don't agree with that. They both need equal amounts and probably boys need more in today's society so that, you know, they don't go the other way. (mother of boy)
- No, I think that's just a stereotype. You turn boys into that if you don't give them enough love. They will eventually come to accept that as part of life. (mother of girl)

Some parent informants commented that they felt little boys were sometimes more affectionate than little girls.

- All the boys I've had (day care children) seem more affectionate than the girls. The boys have been a lot more affectionate. (mother of boy)
- Actually I would say that's almost an opposite answer for little boys. Little boys are much more affectionate than girls. (father of girl)
- I find (son) is more affectionate than (daughter). He needs his cuddles more than (daughter) does. (mother of girl)
- I feel it is the opposite. Boys always cling to their mothers. They need more affection. They all need affection and love and I can't see why being a male or female should change anything. Thing of the past. Why some men nowadays can't cry and express emotions. Thing of the past. Not today. (mother of girl)

Another parent informant did not think that this was a thing of the past. She believed that it was something that needed to be changed:

- How could a mother say that!! Honestly a mother who knows her child. They all need it. Probably ten times more than we can give them; but they need equal amounts of love, for goodness sake. The thing is, if they don't learn or feel comfortable doing that as a child how do they come to it in adulthood when they get married? We want the next generation of male adults to be a little bit more gentle. It's the way they have been brought up and all that needs to change. (mother of boy)

One father commented that he had difficulty in expressing his feelings:

- I don't agree; but then again myself I probably wouldn't show as much to a boy as to a girl. But I don't think that's the way it should be. Boys don't need less. But I think girls are more parent dependent. They go to their parents more often. In my family, my parents listened to the girls but not to us boys. We used to say to the girls, 'You tell them. They'll listen to you.' (father of boy)

Another father discussed his relationship with his own father:

- I would consider it fairly natural for a mother and son to be affectionate towards each other. I guess boys don't need as much as girls but it depends on the personality of the person. Boys probably have more problems with their fathers than with their mothers in the area of affection. Fathers who do not show any emotions to their sons at all, well, it is quite hurtful. (father of boy)

Two other interesting comments were:

- My mother used to always say to me, 'A son is a son till he gets a wife, but a daughter is a daughter for the rest of your life'. But that has changed. But then every situation is different. (mother of boy)
- From an early age if males are taught to ... are exposed to expressing their feelings, things will change. But it shouldn't be that way, a distance between mothers and sons. (mother of boy)

This question was included in the interview schedule to gauge parent informants' beliefs about the relationships that exist between parents and their children. In general, most parent informants understood that the relationships they had with their children would have lasting effects on their children's lives. In addition, there was a definite lack of stereotypical responses to this question.

Informant responses pertaining to the prevailing gendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of meaning of gender difference - concerned with 'normality' (father's differences in expectations); gender appropriate behaviour (emotion not shown publicly); and socially defined masculinity and femininity (as much affection as boys will allow). Informant responses pertaining to the subordinate

ungendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of gender difference not necessary (they need the same); ungendered child rearing practices (treated equally); and ungendered behaviour (depends on personality). At the personal or individual level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing child rearing discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of societal values have changed (express emotions in public); societal values are changing (taught from an early age); and need for societal values to change (next generation of male adults).

6.3.2.3 Parents' perceptions of their 4/5 year old children's friends and friendships

In response to the question, "Who does your child prefer to play with?", 95.6% of parent informants felt that their child preferred to play with children of both sexes, 4.4% felt that their child preferred to play with children of the same sex, and none felt that their child preferred to play with children of the other sex (see Table II, Appendix IV, page 227). An aspect worth noting was that all mothers of boys and all fathers of girls felt that their child preferred to play with children of both sex/genders. According to Howes (1988, p. 36), children with cross-sex friends initiated more games ... [and] appeared more socially skilled than the others." This would appear to be the case according to parent responses relating to children's friends and friendships in the home setting.

The majority of informant responses were pertaining to the subordinate ungendered discourses and included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of gender difference not necessary insofar as 'normality' is concerned; and beyond male/female dualism - 'common sense' implies that gender differences have no meaning.

In response to the questions, "How would you describe your child's relationships with children of the same sex?" and "How would you describe your child's relationships with children of the other sex?", most parent informants replied with the same comments for

each question. These comments included: friendly, fair, good, normal behaviour, no different, cooperative, okay, very good, relates well, and no problems. More detailed responses included: "Sex doesn't seem important - more so the response of playmate" (father of boy); "After getting to know them, no problem" (father of boy); "She treats everyone equal, no matter what sex" (mother of girl); and "We are an all boy family and he tends to treat girls like the boys with fights etc" (mother of boy).

From other parent informants' comments, it would appear that some parent informants felt that boys are less active and/or boisterous when playing with girls than with boys. This was illustrated by the differences in the comments for same sex/gender and other sex/gender relationships and included (comment about relationships with children of the same sex/gender; followed by comment about relationships with children of the other sex/gender):

- Active, boisterous role play games; more modified, not so rough. (mother of boy)
- Friendly and a bit rough; friendly and a bit gentler. (mother of boy)
- Generally good but a bit rough and competitive; a bit timid, can show off a bit. (father of boy)
- Good but boys play 'rough'; excellent. (father of boy)

It was worth noting that these comments were all made by parents of boys; no parents of girls commented that their children's play behaviour differed when playing with boys.

Informant responses pertaining to the prevailing gendered discourse included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of gender appropriate behaviour (boys play boisterously with boys); and socially defined masculinity and femininity (boys modify play with girls). Informant responses pertaining to the subordinate ungendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of gender difference not necessary insofar as 'normality' is concerned; and beyond male female dualism.

In response to the question, "Do you think it is important for your child to have friends of both sexes?", all parent informants replied positively. Reasons given were associated with the child's social development now and/or in the future and included:

- People should be comfortable with friends, colleagues of both genders. (father of boy)
- All through life we have contact with both sexes. (father of girl)
- Because it's good to respect both sexes the same. (mother of girl)
- Children need to experience both sexes to be well adjusted - they need to role play both sexes and have fun doing different activities and games. It gives grounding for future development into an adult. (mother of boy)

Another group of responses indicated that parent informants felt that, although it was important for children to have friends of both sex/genders, boys and girls play differently. Comments included:

- Because he needs to know that boys and girls are the same; but girls can be different and be more gentle; and so he can socialize well with both sexes when he gets to school. (mother of boy)
- Having girls as friends often play activities are less aggressive. (father of boy)
- Boys and girls seem to play differently. It gives her a wider perspective on activities she can do. (mother of girl)

These comments compare favourably with the comments made by parent informants about boys' play relationships with girls (see above). Interestingly, three parents (all mothers) specifically included race/ethnicity, along with sex/gender, in their responses.

They included:

- Nobody should be raised with any sort of prejudice against sex or race. (mother of girl)
- Because he should learn to play with everyone equally regardless of sex, colour etc. (mother of boy)
- To encourage friendships with different types of people - sex and race. (mother of boy)

Howes (1988, P. 36) states that, "Children who have cross sex friendships may have been socialised in nontraditional sex roles within their families." From the information collected from the parent informants, this appears to be the case in this study.

Informant responses pertaining to the prevailing gendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of the meaning of gender difference - concerned with 'normality' (boys more aggressive); gender appropriate

behaviour (boys and girls play differently); and socially defined masculinity and femininity (girls less boisterous). Informant responses pertaining to the subordinate ungended discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of gender difference not necessary insofar as 'normality' is concerned (girls and boys are the same); and ungended behaviour (role play both sexes).

In response to the question, "Have you ever heard your child say to another child: 'You can't play because you're a girl' or 'You can't play because you're a boy'?", 91.1% of parent informants ticked the 'no' box for both questions (see Table III and Table IV, Appendix IV, page 227). However it was interesting to note that fathers, in comparison to mothers, felt their children discriminated against children of the other sex/gender in this way with 14.3% of fathers of boys agreeing that their sons have said, 'You can't play because you are a girl' (compared with 5.3% of mothers of boys) and 25% of fathers of girls (compared with 6.7% of mothers of girls) agreeing that their daughters have said, 'You can't play cause you're a boy' (see Tables III and IV). Explanations for these 'yes' responses (only 6.7% and 4.4%) included:

- She shrugs off (boy) by involving play with (girl) and ignoring (boy). (mother of girl)
- My son didn't want girls to play trucks with him. (mother of boy)
- He's heard others say it or because he wanted what she (little sister) was playing with. (mother of boy)
- If it's a toy he wants. (father of boy)
- To get rid of her little brother. (father of girl)

These explanations appear to indicate that sex/gender is not the sole barrier to play; but that other factors (such as age of playmate, ownership of the toy/activity, or simply a tactic to get own way) impinge on the play.

Explanations for negative responses included:

- She knows I don't think that's right, so I encourage her the same way. (mother of girl)
- No, not at this age. (mother of boy)
- No, but he has said, 'that's a girl's game' or 'that's a girl's toy' or 'that's what girls wear'. But doesn't stop him playing them. Not a major trait. (father of a boy)

- He has probably had more girls than boys to play with at home, so he seems to have a fairly balanced attitude to playing with girls. (father of boy)
- Plays happily with both. (father of boy)

It would appear as though parents of 4/5 year old children do not see sex/gender as a barrier to play for children in the home setting. One parent commented, "I was surprised to see this question on your list. I don't think they use that until they are older, say 7 or 8" (mother of boy).

Informant responses pertaining to the prevailing gendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of gender appropriate behaviours; the necessity of gender difference; and socially defined masculinity and femininity. Informant responses pertaining to the subordinate ungendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of beyond male/female dualism; ungendered behaviour; and ungendered play at this age.

At the personal or individual level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing child rearing discourses included the multiple interacting and intersecting discursive practices of peer group pressure; and gender not an influence at this age. Also at this level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing their children's discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of gendered play; and gendered toys.

In summary, parents' perceptions of their 4/5 year old children's friends and friendships indicated that not only was cross sex/gender play seen as important, but that the majority of parent informants believed that their children were involved in cross sex/gender play in the home setting. This conflicts strongly with Maccoby's 1990 summary of what she believes the existing body of research shows. For example, "Tendencies to prefer same-sex playmates can be seen among three year olds and at even earlier ages under some conditions. But the preferences increase in strength between preschool and school and are maintained at a high level between the ages of 6 and at least age 11" (Maccoby, 1990,

p. 514). However, this conflict may be explained by another of Maccoby's points. "Gender segregation is a widespread phenomenon. It is found in all the cultural settings in which children are in *social groups large enough to permit choice*" (Maccoby, 1990, p. 514, italics added). It could be that the social groups in which parent informants observe their children playing with cross sex/gender playmates are small and that choice is therefore not permitted. Additionally, there may be some shift in attitudes towards cross sex/gender play, at least prior to school attendance.

Informant responses pertaining to the prevailing gendered discourses in relation to friends and friendships (in order of frequency) included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of socially defined masculinity and femininity; gender appropriate behaviour; the meaning of gender difference; and the necessity of gender difference. Informant responses pertaining to the subordinate ungendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of beyond male/female dualism; gender difference not necessary; ungendered behaviour; and ungendered play at this age.

At the personal or individual level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing child rearing discourses included the multiple intersecting and intersecting discursive practices of peer group pressure; and gender not an influence at this age. Also at this level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing their children's discourses included the multiple intersecting and intersecting discursive practices of gendered play; and gendered toys.

6.3.2.4 Parents' perceptions of their 4/5 year old children's adherence to sex/gender stereotypical girls' and boys' games/activities and behaviours

In response to the question, "Does YOUR CHILD hold traditional beliefs about what girls and boys should do?", 75.6% of parent informants ticked the 'no' box, 20.0% ticked the 'yes' box, and 4.4% did not respond to the question (see Table V, Appendix IV, page 228). These percentages were reflected across the sex/gender groups of the

parent informants and across the sex/gender of the child, except for fathers of girls. All fathers of girls felt that their daughters did not hold traditional beliefs (see Table V). McGuire (1988, p. 234), maintains that, "Fathers are more concerned than mothers about gender appropriate behaviour in their child ... and may indeed perceive them in a more stereotypical way." However, Fagot and Hagan (1991, p. 617) failed to confirm "the suggestion in the literature that fathers would be more involved in sex typing than mothers." Certainly, the parent informants' responses to the question in this study would support the findings of Fagot and Hagan and perhaps indicate a change towards more egalitarian child rearing practices on the part of fathers.

Explanations for 'yes' responses included:

- I believe he does, but only because of child interaction. I don't think he is really concerned about gender roles to such an extent. (mother of boy)
- He feels its okay for his female friends to play with trucks, Power Rangers, etc.; but he himself is not keen on playing with what he classes as girls' stuff. (mother of boy)
- Because I don't let her play with guns and she knows dolls are for girls. (mother of girl)
- She thinks girls play with dolls and boys play with trucks and cars. (mother of girl)
- My son has always had a boys' attitude - he likes boys' toys and has never shown any interest in dolls etc. It is only since he has been going to preschool that I have actually heard him say that a certain activity was for girls. (father of boy)
- I consider this to be normal. (father of boy)

Explanations for 'no' responses included:

- He thinks dolls are girl toys and cars are boy toys; but its okay to play with either. (mother of boy)
- He likes dolls but won't play with them if anyone's watching. Before he went to preschool he played with them openly. (mother of boy)
- He enjoys all activities - if he's with boys he plays more aggressively; with girls he may like dolls and make-up - fits in with peers. (father of boy)
- It is important to explore. (father of boy)
- Why? She is her own person and will and can do as she wishes within boundaries of 'our' choosing; mainly that she should not impose her will on others. (father of girl)
- I think she is still too young to hold traditional beliefs about male/female 'roles'. This may change as she grows older. (father of girl)
- Well - 'mummy' works at home, drives a car, goes fishing (hooks worms, live prawns etc) mows lawns etc. 'Daddy' cooks tea, does the washing, baths the baby, helps put toys away. She is being shown role modelling as a team effort of sharing tasks and hobbies that are fun for both mummys and daddys. She likes playing with cars, trains, trucks etc. as well as ponies and barbies. (mother of girl)
- There are dolls for girls and boys today. (mother of girl)

Both ends of the spectrum are represented in the parent informants' answers to this question. It is interesting to note that some parent informants (included in those who answered 'yes' and those who answered 'no') again mention that the person with whom their child is playing influences their play patterns and that 'preschool' has had an influence on their child's beliefs.

Informant responses pertaining to the prevailing gendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of the necessity of gender difference (normality); and the meaning of gender difference. Informant responses pertaining to the subordinate ungendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of beyond male/female dualism (fits in with peers); gender difference not necessary (dolls for girls and boys); ungendered behaviour (play with anything); and children recognise themselves as individuals whose definition is not reliant on biological sex (own person).

At the personal or individual level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing child rearing discourses included the multiple interacting and intersecting discursive practices of peer group pressure (anyone watching); and gender not an influence at this age (not concerned with gender roles). Also at this level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing their children's discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of nongendered play (girls play with trucks; fits in with peers); gendered play (not keen on girls' stuff); and gendered toys (labelling of toys as gendered).

In response to the question, "Do you encourage nontraditional behaviours such as boys verbalising feelings and expressing emotions and girls taking risks?", 82.2% of the parent informants responded positively, 11.1% responded negatively, and 6.7% did not answer the question (see Table VI, Appendix IV, page 228). Mothers' responses compared favourably with the percentage for parents as a whole, but fathers' responses

did not. Only 71.4% of fathers of boys responded positively while 100% of fathers of girls responded positively (see Table VI).

Explanations for 'yes' responses included:

- Encouraging her to have a go and praising the result no matter what. (mother of girl)
- I make a point of telling him what I feel and he now does the same. (father of boy)
- By showing a great deal of affection for him and having him openly express his affection for us. (mother of boy)
- By showing her that there are no boundaries between boys and girls. (father of girl)

Explanations for the 'no' responses included:

- I don't encourage either way. I leave them to do it themselves. (mother of boy)
- Not really encourage but do not have negative reactions to these things. (mother of boy)
- I don't have to encourage any of these because (son) does express his feelings and emotions and the girls do take risks and vice versa. (mother of boy)

These comments appear to indicate that the parent informants have egalitarian ideas about what types of behaviours are appropriate for their children in that girls can and should take risks, and that boys can and should express emotions.

Informant responses pertaining to the subordinate ungended discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of gender differences not necessary (no boundaries); beyond male/female dualism (encourage her to have a go); ungended behaviour; and ungended child rearing practices.

In summary, parents' perceptions of their 4/5 year old children's adherence to sex/gender stereotypical girls' and boys' games, activities, and behaviours indicate that the parents' views again do not align with what they perceive to be their children's views. That is, the parent informants consider their children's behaviours more stereotypical than they would like them to be.

Informant responses pertaining to the prevailing gendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of the necessity of gender

difference; the meaning of gender difference; and gender appropriate child rearing practices. Informant responses pertaining to the subordinate ungended discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of beyond male/female dualism; gender difference not necessary; ungended behaviour; ungended child rearing practices; recognise self as individual whose definition is not reliant on biological sex; and ungended play at this age.

At the personal or individual level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing child rearing discourses included the multiple interacting and intersecting discursive practices of peer group pressure; and gender not an influence at this age. Also at this level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing their children's discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of nongendered play; and gendered toys.

6.3.2.5 Parents' perceptions of the influence of peer group pressure on their 4/5 year old children

In response to the question, "Do you find peer group pressure a problem?", 57.8% of parent informants answered negatively, 40.0% answered positively, and 2.2% did not answer the question. According to the parent informants, peer group pressure is more a problem for boys than it is for girls, with 42.1% of mothers of boys agreeing and only 33.3% of mothers of girls agreeing. In relation to fathers, the differences are even more extreme, with only 25.0% of fathers considering it a problem for girls and more than double (57.1%) considering it a problem for boys (see Table VII, Appendix IV, page 228). Miedzian (1992) concurs with this finding. She states that: "Peer pressure is important. Concerns with dominance and proving manhood through fighting can lead boys in groups to commit acts of violence that they would not commit on their own" (Miedzian, 1992, p. 74).

Comments associated with the 'yes' responses included:

- Everyone wants to 'belong' but when someone feels pressured to go along with something they don't feel comfortable with, I think it is wrong. We need to teach our children that it's okay to be autonomous and speak up appropriately. (mother of girl)
- She likes to have the same toys as her friend (girl) and be allowed to do what she does. She kicks up a fuss if I don't let her. She also listens to talk and brings it home and tries it on me. However she does tell kids off if they are doing the wrong thing. (mother of girl)
- Older neighbours. (father of girl)
- My son can be easily led at times into activities that are not very good. (father of boy)
- It's starting to be a problem. For example, if my son is playing with dolls and another child says, "That's girls' stuff", my son looks bewildered. (mother of boy)
- Sometimes, especially if the pressure is for an inappropriate activity. Other times it can be beneficial if controlled. (mother of boy)
- With the older children in our street he seems to be lead into doing things he wouldn't necessarily do. (mother of boy)
- I ticked 'no' first because it's not a big problem. But then on second thoughts, it is because this is only the start of it and it is, unfortunately, going to get worse with each year. If peer pressure could be squashed in the beginning, everyone would be a lot happier. (mother of boy)
- I dislike the fact that other male friends play Power Rangers and the 'girls germs' thing; but there is only so much influence I have on my child. The peer group problem is at his age very obvious and is very influential. (mother of boy)
- Older brothers are starting to tell him girls are yuky and so are girls' games. (mother of boy)

Comments associated with the 'no' responses were:

- Not at preschool age. (mother of girl)
- Not yet, but expect it as he gets older. (mother of boy)
- I feel peer group pressure has made a great difference to his behavioural problems. It helps him to control himself. (mother of boy)
- My son seems to have a mind of his own, at this stage. (mother of boy)
- If anything it has been good for him, as prior to going to preschool it was hard to get him to sit down and do anything constructive. Now he loves to be involved in activities and I think this comes from seeing what other kids are doing and wanting to do what they are doing. (father of boy)
- She is quite independent. (father of girl)

For those parent informants who responded negatively, the comments indicated that they felt peer group pressure was not YET a problem or that their child was too independent to be influenced by peer group pressure. Significantly, three parents of boys commented that they felt that peer group pressure has had a positive influence on their sons.

The parent informants as a group were reasonably evenly divided on this question. The views concerning peer group pressure vary from being insignificant at this stage, to peer group pressure being very influential on 4/5 year old children's life experiences. Not only was this evidenced by the parents' responses and comments to this question, but by various comments made in relation to other questions. For example, one mother of a boy commented twice in her questionnaire that her son had liked to play with dolls before he went to preschool, but that he now does not and will not play with them. Although she did not mention peer group pressure as the cause of this change in attitude, this explanation is very probable. An aspect worth noting is that for those who answered positively, the comments indicated that older children, along with preschool friends of the same sex/gender, were responsible.

Informant responses pertaining to the subordinate ungendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of ungendered child rearing practices. At the personal or individual level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing child rearing discourses included the multiple interacting and intersecting discursive practices of need for societal values to change; and gender not an influence at this age. Also at this level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing their children's discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of gendered play; necessity of gender difference; and socially defined masculinity and femininity.

6.3.2.6 Summary of gender relations in families

Informant responses pertaining to the prevailing gendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of socially defined masculinity and femininity; the meaning of gender difference; the necessity of gender difference; gender appropriate behaviour; and gender appropriate child rearing practices.

Informant responses pertaining to the subordinate ungendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of ungendered child rearing practices; gender difference not necessary; beyond male/female dualism; ungendered behaviour; ungendered play at this age; and self recognition not reliant on biological sex.

At the personal or individual level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing child rearing discourses included the multiple interacting and intersecting discursive practices of need for societal values to change; gender not an influence at this age; peer group pressure; societal values are changing; and societal values have changed.

Also at this level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing their children's discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of nongendered play; gendered play; gendered toys; necessity of gender difference; and socially defined masculinity and femininity.

Gender relations in the institution of the family were analysed using a feminist poststructuralist framework. The parent informant responses to the questionnaire and the interview schedule were analysed according to whether prevailing gendered discourses or subordinate ungendered discourses were operating / available in the home setting. From the examples cited, the majority of these parents' beliefs originate in subordinate ungendered discourses with the two most frequently found discursive practices being 'gender difference not necessary insofar as normality is concerned'; and 'ungendered child rearing practices'. However, this does not imply that the prevailing gendered discourses in the gender order of our society are not present in gender relations in the gender regime of the home setting.

Gender relations at the personal level were analysed using a feminist poststructuralist framework. The result of this analysis was that the discursive practices of 'societal values need to change' and 'gender not an influence at this age' were common in parental discussions of child rearing discourses. With regard to discourses of parents discussing

children's discourses, the discursive practices were distinctly gendered with 'gendered play'; 'gendered toys'; and 'necessity of gender difference' common in parents' responses. 'Nongendered play' was also a common discursive practice; but not to the extent of the gendered discourses.

The following section discusses gender relations in the gender regime of the home setting through an analysis of the discourses that influence children's futures.

6.3.3 Gender Relations: Influences on Children's Futures

This section deals with parents' perspectives on how gender relations may or may not influence their children's future lives. It includes parents' perceptions of girls' passivity and of boys' aggressiveness; parents' perceptions of boys' and girls' futures; and parents' perceptions of conflict between the sexes.

6.3.3.1 Parents' perceptions of girls' passivity

Parent informants were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "Girls who believe they should be passive and quiet miss out on many valuable parts of their education because they are afraid to ask teachers for help or express their opinions in class" (*Gender Equity - Hands Up For Everyone: Guidelines for Parents*, 1993).

Of the parent informants, 80% agreed with this statement, 12.0% disagreed, and 8.0% were undecided. A noteworthy point here is that all parents of girls agreed with this statement (see Table VIII, Appendix IV, page 228). Comments included:

- That was me at school. (mother of boy)
- It does happen. Teachers spend so much time redirecting boys' rowdy behaviour that the girls can get forgotten. (mother of girl)
- That was me. I was terrified of being brought up front. (mother of boy)
- I agree that that does happen. (mother of boy)

One interesting result of discussing this statement with parent informants was that many of the parent informants who agreed with this statement also felt that 'quiet boys' were similarly disadvantaged. For example:

- But I would include boys as well. (mother of boy)
- Agree but that is valid for boys as well. (mother of boy)
- I'd say girls and boys. Not just girls. I've got a quiet boy (mother of boy)
- Boys are quiet too. (father of boy)
- But all kids who are passive and quiet miss out; though I suppose it is more so for females. (father of boy)
- Yes, more likely to be a girl but there are many boys who are quiet as well. (father of boy)
- Boys as well. (mother of girl)
- All kids - but more so for females I guess. (father of girl).

Comments from parent informants who disagreed with this statement included:

- I was afraid, shy, lacking confidence in school. I did not talk in class. I was too embarrassed. I really don't think it has anything to do with gender. Just who we are. (father of boy)
- I don't think girls are taught to be passive and quiet. (father of boy)
- I don't really agree with that. You get boys that are quiet too. (mother of boy)
- I don't think girls or boys are taught to be quiet and passive. They just are. (mother of boy)
- The ones who are afraid to ask teachers for help, I don't think that is anything to do with being passive and quiet because they believe they should be. I think that you either have shy people or you have cocky people; and it doesn't matter what, the shy ones are not going to talk up in class anyway. I don't think they believe they should be passive and quiet; but they may be afraid of asking something in case they embarrass themselves. But I don't think that that has anything to do with gender. Because there are a lot of boys who do the same. (mother of boy)

Although these comments would appear to indicate that the parents hold egalitarian views, the fact that they are unaware of gendered discourses in our society that do compel some girls to be passive and quiet, illustrates a lack of understanding on the part of these parent informants.

Informant responses pertaining to the prevailing gendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of the meaning of gender difference (boys rowdy; girls not taught); and gender appropriate behaviour (me at school). Informant responses pertaining to the subordinate ungendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of gender difference

not necessary (boys as well); beyond male/female dualism; ungendered behaviour; and not reliant on biological sex.

6.3.3.2 Parents' perceptions of boys' aggression

Parent informants were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "Boys are sometimes taught that being aggressive is the way to communicate, solve their problems and get what they want. Boys need to learn that this sort of behaviour is not acceptable in our community. They need to learn other ways of making their point" (*Gender Equity - Hands Up For Everyone: Guidelines for Parents*, 1993).

Of the parent informants, 84.0% agreed with this statement, 8.0% disagreed, and 8.0% were undecided. Comments from parent informants who agreed included:

- Yes, it is a problem in our community. I am concerned how (son) will get along in primary school next year. (father of boy)
- I mean, boys shouldn't be wimps. But they should be able to sort things out orally rather than physically with fisticuffs, hitting etc. (mother of girl)
- I agree, definitely. But then I suppose it has a lot to do with the parents. (mother of boy)
- Yeah, that's true. Boys need to learn alternatives. (mother of boy)
- Isn't that awful. It sounds even worse when you read it. But it is exactly right. (mother of boy)
- Yes, they absolutely do need to. (mother of boy)
- I agree with that. Aggressiveness and fighting doesn't get you anywhere. It might in the short term, but not in the long term. (mother of boy)

It was worth noting that 50.0% of fathers of girls agreed with this statement and 50.0% disagreed (see Table IX, Appendix IV, page 229). Comments by parent informants who disagreed included:

- But the way things are today, boys need to stand up for themselves or they will get branded a 'wimp' and then it would be even worse for them! (father of girl).
- Sometimes but not always. (father of boy)
- Boys tend to be aggressive as in "I want", and then thump, thump. But are they 'taught' that? I certainly haven't taught him that and he hasn't got that from (husband). So I don't know if 'taught' is the right word. Maybe that's genes as well? Comes from the cavemen. Handed down from generation to generation. (mother of boy)
- It is more acceptable for boys to be aggressive, I guess. But (mother of boy)

A noteworthy point here is that none of the parents of boys disagreed with this statement although 10.0% of mothers of boys were undecided and 20.0% of fathers were undecided (see Table IX). Comments from those who were undecided included:

- I don't feel (son) is aggressive though he will stand up for himself. He is very competitive though and this is usually when he gets into fights. When he is not winning. So I guess I agree and disagree at the same time! (mother of boy)
- I do teach him to stand up for himself; but don't want him to get aggro. But I guess he does sometimes. (father of boy).

Informant responses pertaining to the prevailing gendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of gender appropriate child rearing; the necessity of gender difference; socially defined masculinity and femininity; the meaning of gender difference; and gender appropriate behaviour. Informant responses pertaining to the subordinate ungended discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of ungended child rearing practices; beyond male/female dualism; and ungended behaviours.

6.3.3.3 Parents' perceptions of boys' futures

Parent informants were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "Current research shows that boys have a wider choice of job opportunities; but can be excluded from home life and from developing values of caring for others" (*Gender Equity - Hands Up For Everyone: Guidelines for Parents*, 1993).

The majority of parents (88%) agreed with this statement whilst only 12% disagreed. Interestingly, all those who disagreed were mothers (25.0% mothers of girls and 10.0% mothers of boys: see Table X, Appendix IV, page 229). However, comments from the parent informants who disagreed revealed very different reasons for disagreement. For example, in the words of one mother with older children:

- I disagree on that one. They may have a wider choice of job opportunities but speaking personally I mean, just because (husband) works outside the home doesn't mean he doesn't have to help as far as working as a team is concerned. He still helps vacuuming, mowing the lawns, or hanging the washing out and I just put it down to everyone working as a team. (mother of girl)

Other reasons cited for disagreement were work and societal constraints:

- Disagree. Any parent who is working is effectively excluded from home life by just being out of the home for so many hours a day. (mother of boy)
- Disagree. It is our society as well. Not necessarily the individual's attitudes, but society's. (Male friend - teacher) wanted to take 6 year maternal leave option rather than his wife (also teacher) when their second child was born. But it is not yet available in our education system. Infrastructure is not set up. (mother of girl)

Of the parent informants who agreed with this statement many stated that things were changing, but that the change was very slow.

- Mothers can sometimes exclude fathers from being part of the caring and nurturing in the home by wanting things done just right; fathers work all day, come home tired, and can be excluded and left out of sharing the good times with the kids. Little girls need to see that men can do things in the home. (mother of girl)
- I think that is probably true. We are all trying to change it; but it is very true. My husband is hopeless only because his mother did everything for him. (mother of boy)
- I agree; but it is definitely not how we are bringing up our son. But it does exist. The true Australian male has not changed, has he? Yes, they are excluded, and they also exclude themselves, from a large part of home life. (mother of boy)
- Men's wages are often higher and so the man tends to stay at work because he is earning more than the woman. So he's excluded from home life not perhaps because he wants to, but because there is only one of them working and the one who is earning the most goes to work and that would be him. Financial reasons, rather than personal choice. I'm only looking at this from a middle class point of view though. (mother of girl)

Among parent informants who both agreed and disagreed with this statement, some held very strong views about the first part of this quote. That is, some parent informants believed job opportunities for boys were not wider than for girls at the present time; others believed strongly that equality in this area of our society had been achieved; and other parent informants believed that things were changing. For example:

- Very much so. Men have much better paid jobs and obtain advancement much more quickly than women. (father of boy)
- No, girls can do anything these days. Both my doctor and dentist are women. (mother of girl)
- I don't know. I have no idea at all. My husband wanted to be a midwife when he was training to be a nurse and he could not do it. But now things have changed and males can become midwives. But even though girls and boys can now do these other jobs, they are made fun of, or jokes are made about them. And then some men still refuse to take orders from women. If you take a general picture, I would have to agree. (mother of girl)
- It's changing these days. (mother of boy)
- Agree but job opportunities for girls are changing. (mother of girl)
- Probably true. But it is changing. (father of girl)
- Job opportunities are changing - slowly. (father of girl)

The majority of the parent informants believed that in our society, men are still excluded from home and family life. However, many parent informants believed that this was changing and they expressed the hope that it would be different for their sons and daughters.

Informant responses pertaining to the prevailing gendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of socially defined masculinity and femininity. Informant responses pertaining to the subordinate ungended discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of ungended behaviour; ungended child rearing practices; and beyond male/female dualism.

At the personal or individual level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing child rearing discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of societal values are changing; need for societal values to change; societal values have changed; and peer group pressure.

6.3.3.4 Parents' perceptions of girls' futures

Parent informants were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "Today's preschool and school aged girls will spend most of their adult lives in the workforce. We must therefore help them plan for a future career in the workforce as well as for the roles of wife, mother and family carer" (*Gender Equity - Hands Up For Everyone: Guidelines for Parents*, 1993).

Of the parent informants, 96.0% agreed with this statement and 4.0% disagreed. Comments from parent informants who agreed included:

- Preparing for adulthood. (father of girl)
- Yes, I agree but boys should be encouraged as well. (father of boy)
- I don't know. Yeah, I suppose. (mother of boy)
- That's me. I work, I look after the family. (mother of boy)

A noteworthy point here is that many parent informants (all mothers) were disappointed and annoyed that the role of 'mother' in our society is undervalued. Comments included:

- Unfortunately in our society, the role of mother is devalued; psychological - pressure from society. (mother of boy)
- Yes, unfortunately. I say unfortunately because the role of mother and wife is going down the toilet. Or has gone down the toilet. So many mums I see are trying so hard to give their children quality time; but they're frazzled. I think it is really sad. They are not enjoying their children. You don't get parenting classes. You get taught how to be a waiter or even a garbage man or a porter, but we don't get taught how to be a parent. And you don't get told how valuable your job as a parent is. I think it should be part of the curriculum at school. I think if you stay home you are somehow considered second class. (mother of boy - family day carer)

Another group of parent informants (again mothers) believed that financial reasons would result in their daughters not being unpaid workers in the home. Their comments included:

- I think it is a shame if girls are financially forced to go out and work. (mother of boy)
- These days two incomes are needed to support a family. (mother of boy)
- Agree, but I think it is a shame if girls are forced to go to work, whether they want to or not because of financial commitments, rather than be a wife and mother. (mother of boy)

Another parent informant put both these reasons in her response.

- Yes, I agree with that. I enjoy staying home but we find it very hard to do this. We just have to go without. I sew a lot of the kids' clothes and it's going to get harder as they get older and peer group pressure comes along. The time will come when I have all four children at school and I will have to go back into the workforce. I did go back to work when (first son) was 10 months old and I went back when (second son) was 12 months old. I did shift work; only part time. But I felt so guilty when one of them would say, 'Why can't you come to school and do reading?', and 'Why can't you come to sports day?' So I did change my shifts so I could get there. But I love being home. And the kids love it too. (mother of boy)

The one parent informant who disagreed with this statement was also a mother of a boy (see Table XI Appendix IV, page 229). In her words, "Husbands need housekeeping skills too. I mean look at my husband. I think he should have been taught house cleaning skills at school. I would agree with it if it said girls and boys" (mother of boy).

Of particular interest was the number of mothers who felt that the role of 'mother' is devalued in our society; that it is financially necessary to have two wages; and that our society is based on materialistic values.

Informant responses pertaining to the prevailing gendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of socially defined masculinity and femininity. Informant responses pertaining to the subordinate ungendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of gender difference not necessary; and beyond male/female dualism. At the personal or individual level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing child rearing discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of the need for societal values to change.

6.3.3.5 Parents' perceptions of conflict between the sexes

Parent informants were asked if they agreed or disagreed with the following statement:

"By breaking down old-fashioned attitudes and helping girls and boys become aware of a wider range of ways of behaving, feeling and learning, we can help our children reduce violence and conflict between the sexes in our community" (*Gender Equity - Hands Up For Everyone: Guidelines for Parents*, 1993).

Of the parent informants, 72.0% agreed with this statement, 16.0% disagreed, and 12.0% were undecided. Comments from parents who agreed included:

- Absolutely, especially if men are a lot more aware of women. And if we can help them to understand why PMT happens and that it really is real. And all sorts of issues. (Husband) is so appreciative of the fact that I actually gave birth to the children and that he didn't. I made sure he was appreciative too! (mother of boy)
- Definitely agree there. Violence and conflict is the only way out for a lot of people to express their feelings. (mother of boy)

It was interesting to note that, whereas parents of boys had similar views on this finding, the views of parents of girls were dissimilar. That is, no mothers of girls disagreed with this statement; while 50.0% of fathers of girls disagreed (see Table XII, Appendix IV,

page 229). Some strongly held views were given by parent informants who disagreed with this finding. They included:

- We are reducing the differences between boys and girls but I feel this is leading to more violence. We are in a transition phase. Some men feel totally inadequate or pressured and they are fighting against what they feel is unfair. My husband is the carer. He is the one raising our son while I go out to work. What he does makes people feel uncomfortable. They think he has lost his manhood. (mother of boy)
- I would disagree. I think that reducing the differences between boys and girls has led to a lot of the violence and conflict that we've got now. Because we are in a transition stage between the old fashioned and where we are going to, an awful lot of men can feel totally inadequate and pressured. So I think a lot of what is going on (violence etc.) is them fighting back because of something they don't understand. (mother of boy)
- Men are losing their jobs to women. Their aggression is being increased by their loss of everything, along with their loss of their job. (father of girl)

Those parents who were undecided held similar views to those who disagreed, although they were less dogmatic. For example:

- I'm not so sure. In one way it may reduce violence; but in another way we are in an inbetween phase. There are power plays going on - competition. Some men are fighting back! (mother of girl)
- Yes, but I can't say it would. It would have a little bit to do with it. I mean society in general is like that - it all starts at home. (mother of boy)
- For our children who are growing up, breaking down the old fashioned attitudes would probably help - yes. But! Whether it is because domestic violence has come out a lot more (for example, advertised on TV) - I don't know whether there is more of it or what. A lot of males seem to think that women are starting to take over so they might think they need power plays over women - competition. We're right in the middle of it. For example, the number of couples going out to work and putting their children into childcare. (mother of girl)
- The openness may solve it; but, 'What is the cause of the violence?' is more the question. I don't think that by breaking down old fashioned attitudes this will stop the violence. I don't think old fashioned attitudes leads to violence. I think those people were always going to act violently in that situation. (father of girl)

This was a controversial question to which many parent informants' responses expressed strongly held views. An aspect worth noting was the number of parent informants who related domestic violence to changes that they believe are now happening in our society, in relation to the social definition of masculinity and femininity.

Informant responses pertaining to the subordinate ungendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of children recognise themselves as individuals whose definition is not reliant on their biological sex. At the personal or individual level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing child

rearing discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of the need for societal values to change; and societal values are changing.

6.3.3.6 Summary of gender relations: Influences on children's futures

It would appear from the parent informants' responses to these questions pertaining to gender issues concerning their children's futures, that the majority were aware of problems and believed that things need to be changed. However, there were some parent informants whose beliefs align with what Faludi (1992) calls "The Backlash". These parent informants believed that change has already occurred.

Informant responses pertaining to the prevailing gendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of the necessity of gender difference; the meaning of gender difference; gender appropriate behaviour; socially defined masculinity and femininity; and gender appropriate child rearing practices. Significantly, all these discursive practices were associated with boys' aggression. Informant responses pertaining to the subordinate ungended discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of beyond male/female dualism; ungended behaviour; ungended child rearing practices; self recognition not reliant on biological sex; and gender difference not necessary.

At the personal or individual level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing child rearing discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of the need for societal values to change; societal values are changing; societal values have changed; and peer group pressure.

Gender relations influences on children's futures in the institution of the family were analysed using a feminist poststructuralist framework. The parent informant responses were analysed according to prevailing gendered discourses or subordinate ungended discourses. From the examples cited, the majority of these parents' beliefs again

originate in subordinate ungended discourses; but are closely followed by prevailing gendered discourses. The three most frequently found discursive practices were 'beyond male/female dualism'; 'ungendered behaviour'; and 'ungendered child rearing practices'. The most frequently found discursive practices associated with prevailing gendered discourses were 'socially defined masculinity and femininity'. All discursive practices were associated with parents' perceptions of boys' aggression and this appears to indicate that parents would agree that boys are aggressive, but disagree about the reason for and/or cause of this behaviour.

Gender relations at the personal level were analysed using a feminist poststructuralist framework. The result of this analysis was that the discursive practices of 'societal values need to change' were common in parental discussions of child rearing discourses. 'Societal values are changing' was also common; but was usually followed by the word, "slowly".

The following section discusses gender relations in the gender regime of the home setting through an analysis of the discourses that relate to gender equity and gender equity programs.

6.3.4 Gender Relations and Gender Equity

This section looks at parents' perceptions of the term 'gender equity' and parents' perceptions of gender equity programs.

6.3.4.1 Parents' perceptions of gender equity in our society

The parent informant responses to the question, "What do you understand by the term 'gender equity'?", have been categorised into four groups: those parent informants who either left the question blank or stated outright that they did not know and/or understand the term (Nil); those parents who had limited understanding / awareness of the term

(Limited); those parents who appeared to possess a sound understanding of the term (Sound); and those parents who reacted negatively and/or misunderstand the term (Negative). See Table XIII, Appendix IV, page 230.

Comments from parent informants who stated outright that they did not know and/or understand the term (28.9%) included:

- This is the first time I've heard of the term, so I wouldn't have a clue. (mother of girl)
- At first glance I have no idea. At second well, I'll guess gender means sex (male/female) and equity means equal. I have now looked it up in a dictionary - class (social, economic) impartiality. (mother of boy)
- Very little. father of girl)
- No idea. (father of boy)

Parent informants who had limited understanding of the term (48.9%) commented:

- I believe men and women are equal; we just have different roles to play. (mother of boy)
- To make the male and female equal? To give them the same set of rules. (mother of boy)
- Gender: boy/girl; equity: equal, equality. (father of boy)
- Treat boys and girls the same way. (father of boy)
- No restrictions on male/female. (father of girl)
- Having equality between both sexes. (father of girl)
- Non discrimination between the sexes - equality - equal rights etc. (mother of girl)
- Equal opportunity for both sexes. (mother of girl)

Parent informants who appeared to have a sound awareness of the term (17.8%: all parents of boys) commented:

- Males and females being treated as equals whether it be in education, workplace or domestic duties. (mother of boy)
- Fairness to both sexes, not being prejudged on the basis of gender. The ableness to fulfil predetermined 'traditional' male/female occupations. (mother of boy)
- That both sexes are treated equally without any bias or discrimination. (mother of boy)
- Boys and girls being treated equally and encouraged to participate in all activities. (mother of boy)
- All people treated equally or given same chances. (father of boy)
- Boys and girls are to be treated equally and given the same opportunities. (father of boy)

Comments from parent informants who reacted negatively to and/or misunderstand the term (4.4%: notably, both were fathers) included:

- Load of crap. Do not believe the current 'gender equity' philosophy is gender equity but rather girls/women come out; to the detriment of boys/men. I personally feel that each individual should be treated on their ability not their gender. (father of girl)
- Making boys do things they don't want to do. Getting girls jobs they want. (father of boy)

Parents' perceptions of gender equity in our society are many and varied. They range from a very limited understanding of the term 'gender equity' to a sound understanding. Although the majority had a limited knowledge of the actual term, understandings of the idea of gender equity are clearly found in the comments made by the parent informants. A good example of this was the father of a girl who reacted negatively to the term 'gender equity' and then followed this with a sound definition of just what gender equity entails.

Informant responses pertaining to the prevailing gendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of socially defined masculinity and femininity. Informant responses pertaining to the subordinate ungended discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of gender difference not necessary ; beyond male/female dualism; ungended behaviour; children recognise themselves as individuals; ungended child rearing practices; and reject 'the feminist movement', but nevertheless uphold feminist ideas, beliefs, and attitudes. At the personal or individual level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing child rearing discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of societal values have changed (for the worse).

MacNaughton (1995a) suggests that, "We need to recognise ... the complexity, diversity and conflict that may constitute parental attitudes to gender equity" (p. 8). She goes on to say that, "Conflicts, differences and parental uncertainties ... [are] an inevitable consequence of the existence of different discourses of masculinity and femininity. Such differences will ... make conflict and uncertainty about what is normal and correct inevitable" (MacNaughton, 1995a, p. 6). From the parent informants' responses to the above question, the finding of this study concurs with MacNaughton's finding.

6.3.4.2 Parents' perspectives of gender equity programs

Parent informants were asked for their response to the following quotation concerning parental opposition to gender equity programs: "The biggest concern was always about the boys. There was ... fear about the boys taking on feminine characteristics. There are parents who are terrified that somehow we're going to turn these boys into homosexuals" (Legge, 1995, p. 24).

Of the parent informants, only one, a mother of a boy, (see Table XIV, Appendix IV, page 230) was undecided in her reply and she talked about her views in the following manner:

- It is a concern. I hope that my encouraging my son to be more gentle isn't going to turn him into a homosexual. I am concerned that if boys do take on feminine characteristics they may turn into homosexuals. But I also think that it is important that they are treated as equal because I think, as they get older it would be great if they were SNAGS; and for girls not to be repressed as much. If it turned out that way it would be great. But still there is this nagging doubt. (mother of boy)

All other parent informants (96.0%) disagreed with this quote. Most parent informants felt that homosexuality was linked to 'the way the child was', and that sexual orientation was not influenced by environmental factors such as gender equity programs. Their comments included:

- Crap. I think the feminine characteristics in males are in them. I've even heard they've done research. Apparently it's something to do with some chromosome. No, it's within the chromosomes - a chromosomal link. (mother of girl)
- Not really, it's in the genes. What they are going to be, they're going to be. (mother of girl)
- (Laughs) No I don't agree with that. No, if anything it would teach them to be more nurturing. You know SNAGS - sensitive new age guys. (mother of girl)
- No, boys are that way they are naturally. (father of boy)
- Rubbish - no relationship. (father of boy)
- I wouldn't agree. I think it is more boys are the way they are because ... it's biological. It's something you can't change. It's not taught. (father of boy)
- Load of rubbish. Who cares. Kids are going to be what they are going to be. (father of girl)
- No, I don't think that makes any difference, I don't know what makes a homosexual. It just happens. (mother of boy)
- (Laughs) No, I definitely disagree. That's not going to turn them into homosexuals. If boys were to learn to talk about feelings there would not be so many men dying of heart attacks when they reach middle age. (mother of boy)

Two fathers of boys (who disagreed with this quote) nevertheless expressed an indication of homophobic fear. They commented:

- I can understand how people could be worried about that sort of thing. The last thing you want is for your kid to turn into a homosexual. Most parents I think would be pretty horrified by it. (father of boy)
- I don't think any parent wants their child to be a homosexual. It's not the norm. But I really don't think gender equity programs will cause any problems. (father of boy)

Conversely, two mothers of boys commented that, although they did not have homophobic fears, friends and/or acquaintances did:

- You know, like that's the thing isn't it? I have had so many comments about the way I dress (sons). I just can't believe it. A friend said the other day, 'You've bought him girl's sandals again!' I mean, what makes them girl's sandals? (mother of boy).
- I've been told that. A couple of people have said, 'Aren't you worried about him?' And then it did worry me for awhile but then I thought well, hopefully when he is older and gets married his wife might be glad that he was brought up to help with the housework, cook, and clean. You know, I'd like a man like that! (mother of boy)

This question was included in the interview schedule because homophobia "may be one of the deepest psychological barriers to the acceptance of major male involvement in child rearing" (Miedzian, 1992, p. 108). The majority of the parent informants did not believe that gender equity programs would affect children's sexual orientation, even though two fathers of boys did express some anxieties. This is in line with Miedzian (1992, p. 109) who states that, "Studies indicate that fathers are much more concerned with their sons' masculinity than are mothers."

It was interesting to note that two parent informants perceived homophobic fears in relation to gender equity programs as a thing of the past and not relevant to today's society. According to one mother of a boy, "Absolutely no, that's not my experience at all. That sounds like another generation talking"; and in the words of one father of a girl, "That's an absolutely ridiculous statement for the '90s."

Informant responses pertaining to the prevailing gendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of the necessity of gender difference (normality); and socially defined masculinity and femininity. Informant

responses pertaining to the subordinate ungended discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of beyond male/female dualism; ungended behaviour; ungended child rearing practices; and not reliant on biological sex. At the personal or individual level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing child rearing discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of societal values have changed.

6.3.4.3 Summary of gender relations and gender equity

In summary, it may be seen that parents' perceptions of gender equity in our society and gender equity programs in schools are many and varied. According to MacNaughton (1995a, p. 2), "Whilst research has explored how parental attitudes to gender equity can influence children's gender development, ... research about parental attitudes to gender equity programs in early childhood is almost nonexistent."

Informant responses pertaining to the prevailing gendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of socially defined masculinity and femininity; and the necessity of gender difference. Informant responses pertaining to the subordinate ungended discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of gender difference not necessary; beyond male/female dualism; ungended behaviour; self recognition not reliant on biological sex; ungended child rearing practices; and reject 'the feminist movement'. At the personal or individual level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing child rearing discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of societal values have changed.

"Feminist poststructuralism suggests that promoting positive attitudes to nontraditional ways of being male and female will be critical to achieving greater parental acceptance of gender equity work with young children" (MacNaughton, 1995a, p. 8). This was graphically illustrated by the comment of one mother who said, "My son has an excellent

non-traditional role model in his father. I go out to work all day and my husband is the home-maker in charge of all domestic duties" (mother of boy).

Gender relations and gender equity in the institution of the family were analysed using a feminist poststructuralist framework. The parent informant responses to the questionnaire and the interview schedule were analysed according to prevailing gendered discourses or subordinate ungendered discourses. From the examples cited, the majority of parents' beliefs again originate in subordinate ungendered discourses, with the most frequently found discursive practices being 'beyond male/female dualism'; 'ungendered behaviour'; 'children recognise themselves as individuals whose definition is not reliant on their biological sex'; and 'ungendered child rearing practices'. However, prevailing gendered discourses with the associated discursive practices of 'socially defined masculinity and femininity' were also common.

Gender relations at the personal level were analysed using a feminist poststructuralist framework. The result of this analysis was that the discursive practices of 'societal values have changed' was common. Two perspectives of this change were: for the worse, with women gaining ground at the expense of boys and men; and homophobic fears no longer common.

6.3.5 Conclusion

From a feminist poststructuralist perspective, the width, breadth, and depth of the parent informants' comments concerning the gender relations of their children in our society and in the home setting indicates that the discourses relate to their own childhood experiences along with their adulthood experiences.

It is interesting to note that the majority of parent informants strongly denied being feminists, yet at the same time gave general feminist's viewpoints to the questions asked

regarding gender equity issues for their children. For example, one parent informant commented:

- I personally disagree with the feminist movement. I don't think there is anything wrong with a female being a female and a male being a male. I mean there is nothing wrong with a female having doors opened for her and you know, being given flowers. I mean basically biologically we are born different so in that respect we don't have to be totally equal all the way down the board. ... I haven't experienced male domination or violence. We've got an equal relationship where no person is more dominant. But as far as being a female goes, I like being treated like one. (mother of boy)

Although the discourses revealed that most informants were not aware of feminist ideas and/or literature, they nevertheless expressed feminist sentiments. Whenever discussing their children's lives and their children's futures, all parent informants displayed feminist ideas about what they saw as 'gender justice' as well as what they saw as discrimination or oppression.

This sentiment was expressed by one informant in the following manner:

- I'm just glad that something is being done about it [referring to this research]. It's nice to talk about this to somebody who thinks the same way and, you know, not being ridiculed. I have doubts at times. "Am I doing the right thing?" I know I am doing the right thing by me and him but he's got to live in this world the way it is and I wonder if I am making it harder for him. I never had those fears with the girls though. But I want him to have the chance to pick for himself. To make his own choices. Not have them made for him. It is not right, it is not the way it should be. (mother of boy)

To conclude, informant responses pertaining to the prevailing gendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of 'socially defined masculinity and femininity' (boys and girls, women and men, recognise themselves as separate, different and distinctly gendered); 'the necessity of gender difference' (concerned with 'normality'); 'the meaning of gender difference' (concerned with "common sense"); and 'gender appropriate behaviour' (what girls and boys should and shouldn't do). The implication of this finding is discussed in Chapter 7.

Informant responses pertaining to the subordinate ungendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of 'gender difference not necessary insofar as "normality" is concerned'; 'beyond male/female dualism' ("common

sense" implies that gender differences have no meaning); 'ungendered behaviour' (girls and boys can do anything and everything); 'ungendered child rearing practices'; and 'reject "the feminist movement"' (but nevertheless uphold feminist ideas, beliefs and attitudes). The implication of this finding is discussed in Chapter 7.

At the personal or individual level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing child rearing discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of 'the need for societal values to change'; 'societal values have changed' (thing of the past); and 'societal values are slowly changing'. The implication of this finding is also discussed in Chapter 7.

Also at the personal level, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing children's discourses included the the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of 'nongendered play'; 'gendered play'; 'gendered toys'; 'necessity of gender difference'; and 'socially defined masculinity and femininity'. A discussion of the implications of this finding follows in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7

IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Feminist Poststructuralist Framework

The feminist poststructuralist framework used in this study portrays gender relations in the gender order of our society as being unstable, contradictory, flexible, and constantly changing due to the many and varied discourses and discursive practices that impinge on the context and the relationships through which gender relations operate. This study has found that the gender relations in the gender regimes of the home setting and the preschool setting, at both the institutional and the personal level, are also unstable, contradictory, flexible, and constantly changing.

According to Weedon (1987), established meaning, values and power relations (which comprise gender relations) do not need to be taken for granted. Foucault (cited in McHoul and Grace, 1993), states that once the way in which meaning gains its authority is established (that is, how it is made), it can be deconstructed (unmade) and transformed (remade). This study has attempted to do this by deconstructing the discourses and the discursive practices of the parents and children associated with this preschool environment.

Phase I of the study established the discourses and the discursive practices dominant in the gender relations in the gender regime of the preschool setting at both the institutional level and the personal level and the implications of these findings are reported here (7.2). Phase II of the study established the discourses and the discursive practices dominant in the gender relations in the gender regime of the home setting at both the institutional level and the personal level and the implications of these findings are also reported here (7.3).

7.2 Phase I

Research question 1: "What are the characteristics of children's gender relations in this preschool setting?"

7.2.1 Discourses and Discursive Practices at the Institutional Level

The data collected from children's interactions were categorised into overt power relations and covert expressions of power. The results obtained from the analysis of overt power relationships (labelled asymmetrical relationships) indicated that, although this is not a quantitative study, asymmetrical relationships that were created and maintained were much more common and wide ranging than those that were rejected and abandoned; and that these asymmetrical relationships were more common than asymmetrical relationships that were created and then abandoned. Other findings of the analysis of this section were that relationships which were abandoned involved educator intervention in some circumstances; and that the children, involved in asymmetrical relationships which were transformed, were operating within the same discourses. Because asymmetrical relationships were common in this setting and because they were, in the main, not observed by the educators, the implication is that educators need to be aware of these relationships, need to be able to observe these relationships, and need to intervene when and where necessary. However, Alloway (1995b) states that if ungendered relationships are dependent on educator intervention, constant vigilance is difficult for the educators and that the cause of the problem is not addressed. Asymmetrical relationships will simply surface in another context at another time. Alloway (1995b) advocates deconstructing the discourses and the discursive practices that hold asymmetrical relationships in place. Educator praxis for deconstruction is discussed in Chapter 8.

The results obtained from the analysis of covert expressions of power (labelled storylines) indicated that, although the storylines of some children's dramatic play do follow what MacNaughton (1995c) discusses as masculine and feminine storylines, there were also divergent storylines. This was illustrated by the example in which two children

were playing together with completely different storylines, and the examples in which both girls and boys shared masculine and feminine storylines in their play. By deconstructing the divergent storylines educators can provide children with a wider range of ungendered discourses. This is discussed in Chapter 8.

Thus, in order to establish children's gender relations at the institutional level, children's interactions were analysed to discover what was considered 'normal/natural' by the children; how power was exercised on behalf of special interests; and where opportunities for resistance were available.

The discourses and discursive practices employed by children in their interactions in this setting were masculinist hegemonic discourses, prevailing feminine discourses, and discourses which allowed some children to cross the gender divide.

7.2.1.1 Masculinist hegemonic discourses dominant in this setting

As outlined in Chapter 6, discourses dominant in gender relations in the gender order of our society are also dominant in the gender regime of this preschool setting. Many boys (and some girls) constructed gender relations through exercising power provided by the masculinist hegemonic discourses and discursive practices of 'storylines concerned with heroism, competition, conquering, war, aggression and/or deaths'; 'rules of fair play do not apply to males'; 'violence and aggression towards females'; and 'active play needing lots of space'.

Therefore, what is considered 'natural/normal' by the children in this setting is reliant on the existence of male/female dualism and the specific interests on behalf of which power is exercised, is male dominance. Opportunities for resistance are available through the fact that some girls also employ masculinist hegemonic discourses. The implications of this finding are that these discourses need to be deconstructed with and by the children so that they can see for themselves how their actions and behaviours affect others and so that they can understand why they behave in the way they do. Recommendations for praxis for preschool educators are outlined in Chapter 8.

7.2.1.2 Prevailing feminine discourses dominant in this setting

As stated in Chapter 6, many girls (and some boys) constructed their gender relations by exercising power established through the prevailing feminine discourses dominant in the gender order of our society. The web of discursive practices that dominated the girls' ways of relating in the gender regime of this preschool setting were 'excluding boys through fear of disruption and/or aggression'; 'storylines concerned with motherhood and the domestic realm'; 'group power'; and 'applying rules of fair play or rule following'.

Hence, what is considered 'natural/normal' by the children in this setting is reliant on the existence of male/female dualism and the specific interests on behalf of which power is exercised, is reaction to and/or rejection of male dominance. Opportunities for resistance are available through the fact that some boys also employ prevailing feminine discourses. The implications of this finding are that these discourses need to be deconstructed with and by the children so that they can see for themselves how their actions and behaviours affect others and why they behave in the way they do. Recommendations for praxis for preschool educators are outlined in Chapter 8.

7.2.1.3 Crossing the gender divide

As stated in Chapter 6, identifying the dominant gendered ways of relating is only the first step in the deconstruction of the gender regime of a particular setting. It is the deviations from the dominant forms that are critical in challenging male/female dualism discourses. That is, the emphasis needs to be placed on the differences within the genders (rather than between them) and on the inconsistencies in children's gendered ways of relating.

Some girls crossed the gender divide by employing discursive practices from masculinist hegemonic discourses. These discursive practices were 'storylines concerned with heroism and aggression'; 'active play needing lots of space'; and 'rules of fair play not applying to them'. Some of the boys in this study also crossed the gender divide by

employing discursive practices associated with prevailing feminine discourses. These were 'unwillingness to do combat'; 'passivity'; and 'applying rules of fair play and rule following'.

Thus, what is considered 'natural/normal' by some of the children in this setting is not reliant on male/female dualism in some contexts and the specific interests on behalf of which power is exercised is reaction to and/or rejection of either male or female dominance. Opportunities for resistance are available through these inconsistencies or deviations. It is the deviations from the dominant forms of relating that are the nexus for educators to begin challenging male/female dualism discourses. The implications are that educators need to be aware of these discourses and discursive practices, and be willing and capable of challenging them when they are observed. Recommendations for praxis for preschool educators are outlined in Chapter 8.

7.2.2 Discourses and Discursive Practices at the Individual Level

The data collected from children's interactions at this level were categorised into children's perceptions of the other sex/gender and interactions pertaining to how individual children's subjectivities varied. In order to establish children's gender relations at the personal/individual level, children's interactions were analysed to discover where individual's experience comes from; why it is often contradictory; and how it can be changed. The context and the individuals involved in a particular context play a vital role in the way children relate to each other. According to Connell (1995), gender identities are fractured and shifting because of the multiple discourses intersecting in any individual life. It is the overlapping or criss crossing of discourses that produce gendered ways of being and this is also where these gendered ways of being can be challenged (Weedon, 1987).

7.2.2.1 Children's perspectives on the other sex/gender

Girls' perceptions of boys illustrated that some girls were convinced that no boys were

“okay” and that they did not want to play with them. This aligns with what MacNaughton (1995c) and Clark (1990) refer to as children seeing each other as belonging to different teams. However, many girls believed that some boys were “okay” some of the time and this implies that this is where opportunities for change exist. Boys’ reactions to the girls as a group were very different. They did consider girls were a different species; but did not exclude them orally (as some girls did on several occasions). It would appear that it was not something the boys thought about; just the way things were. ‘Girls’ things’ were seen as foreign and not suitable for boys to play with. The implications are that, because not all girls believed boys were “bad” and not all boys believed that girls were “foreign”, opportunities for change are available. Examples of praxis are outlined in Chapter 8.

7.2.2.2 Individual children’s subjectivities

The findings in relation to children’s fluctuating subjectivities clearly indicate how children’s powerfulness and powerlessness varied according to the context and the relationships operating within that context. All children exemplified, save Colin, experienced power and powerlessness to varying degrees in varying situations. Because Colin was absent for half the data collection period, it was not fully established that he was powerful in every circumstance. The remaining five children’s fluctuating subjectivities indicate where opportunities for change are available. Examples of praxis are outlined in Chapter 8.

7.2.3 Summary

The characteristics of children’s gender relations in the gender regime of this preschool setting are asymmetrical relationships are prevalent; masculine and feminine storylines are prevalent along with shared storylines; masculinist hegemonic discourses are dominant although many girls and boys cross the gender divide; some children see the other sex/gender as “foreign”; and children’s subjectivities fluctuate in interactions.

Although male/female dualism is dominant and obvious, many opportunities for change are available.

The next section of this study deals with the implications of the findings concerning parents' perspectives on children's gender relations.

7.3 Phase II

Research question 2: "What are parents' perspectives on children's gender relations in the home setting?"

7.3.1 Discourses and Discursive Practices at the Institutional Level

The data collected from parent questionnaires and interviews were categorised into gender relations in the family, gender relations pertaining to children's futures, and gender relations pertaining to gender equity. The results obtained from the analysis of gender relations in the family at the institutional level indicated that the majority of parents' beliefs originated in subordinate ungendered discourses. The implication of this finding is that the topics in this section (children's personal qualities, children's need for affection, friends and friendships, games and behaviours, and peer group pressure) would make good starting points for parental discussions on children's gender relations. This is discussed further in Chapter 8.

The results obtained from the analysis of gender relations pertaining to children's futures indicated that the majority of parents' beliefs again originated in subordinate ungendered discourses. Another finding of this analysis was that parents' perceptions of boys' aggression indicated that they would agree that many boys are aggressive, but disagree about the reason for and/or the cause of this behaviour. This would imply that the topic of boys' aggression would not be a desirable topic to start any parent program. This is discussed further in Chapter 8.

The results obtained from an analysis of gender relations pertaining to gender equity indicated that the majority of parents' beliefs originated in subordinate ungendered discourses. However, because of parental lack of understanding of the term 'gender equity', it would be advisable to leave topics related to this section to later in a parent program. This is discussed further in Chapter 8.

Hence, in order to establish parents' perspectives on children's gender relations at the institutional level, the discourses and discursive practices uncovered in parental responses were analysed to discover how they are structured; what power relations they produce and reproduce; and where there are resistances and weak points through which the discourses can be challenged and transformed. The discourses and discursive practices available and/or operating in the home setting were subordinate ungendered discourses and prevailing gendered discourses.

7.3.1.1 Subordinate ungendered discourses dominant in this setting

Although these discourses and discursive practices are subordinate in the gender order of our society at the present time, they were, according to the parent informants for this study, dominant in the gender regimes of the home setting. By highlighting these differences and by having parents discuss their respective beliefs and attitudes, weak points and resistances to masculinist hegemonic discourses dominant in our society (but not in this setting) will be brought out in the open to be challenged directly. As stated in Chapter 6, informant responses pertaining to the subordinate ungendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of 'gender difference not necessary insofar as "normality" is concerned; 'beyond male/female dualism' ("common sense" implies that gender differences have no meaning); 'ungendered behaviour' (girls and boys can do anything and everything); 'ungendered child rearing practices'; 'reject the "feminist movement" (but nevertheless uphold feminist ideas, beliefs and attitudes)'. These discursive practices imply that many parents are aware, at some level, that gendered discourses are restrictive to their children's development.

However, parents do not appear to be aware of the extent of these limitations and this is where parent/teacher partnerships could play a role. This is discussed in Chapter 8.

7.3.1.2 Prevailing gendered discourses found in this setting

As outlined in Chapter 6, informant responses pertaining to the prevailing gendered discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of 'socially defined masculinity and femininity' (boys and girls, women and men, recognise themselves as separate, different and distinctly gendered); 'the necessity of gender difference' (concerned with "normality"); 'the meaning of gender difference' (concerned with "common sense"); and 'gender appropriate behaviour' (what girls and boys should and shouldn't do). Although these discourses are dominant in the gender order of our society they were not dominant in the gender regime of this setting. However, they were present to some degree. These discursive practices imply that some parents are not aware that gendered discourses can restrict their children's development. Through discussion with parents who can see these restrictions, there is an opportunity to challenge these attitudes and beliefs. This could lead to increased understandings and possible transformation. Examples of opportunities for challenging discourses through parent/teacher partnerships are outlined in Chapter 8.

7.3.2 Discourses and Discursive Practices at the Personal Level

At the personal or individual level, the data collected from parent questionnaires and interviews were also categorised into gender relations in the family, gender relations pertaining to children's futures, and gender relations pertaining to gender equity. The results obtained from the analysis of gender relations in the family at this level indicated that the discursive practices of 'social values need to change' and 'gender not an influence at this age' were common in parents' discourses on child rearing discourses. However, the results obtained from the analysis of the discourses of parents discussing children's discourses were distinctly gendered with 'gendered play', 'gendered toys' and 'the necessity of gender difference' common in parents' responses. That is, the majority of

the parents believed that their children were more sexist than they would like them to be. The implication of this finding is that again, this would be a good starting point for a parent program. This is discussed further in Chapter 8.

The results obtained from the analysis of gender relations pertaining to children's futures indicated that the discourse of parents discussing child rearing practices included the discursive practices of 'societal values need to change', along with 'societal values are changing'. Again this would appear to indicate that topics related to this section would be better presented later, rather than early in a parent program. A discussion of this follows in Chapter 8.

The results obtained from an analysis of gender relations pertaining to gender equity indicated that the majority of parents' discourses of parents discussing child rearing discourses indicated that 'societal values have changed'. However, there were two perspectives to this change: for the worse (women gaining at the expense of boys and men) and homophobic fears no longer common. Again this would appear to imply that the topics associated with this section would be better presented later in a parent program. This is also discussed in Chapter 8.

Therefore, in order to establish parents' perspectives on children's gender relations at the personal level, the discourses and discursive practices uncovered in parental responses were analysed to discover where they come from; whose interests they support and how they maintain sovereignty; and where they are susceptible to specific pressures for change. The discourses and discursive practices available and/or operating in the home setting were discourses of parents discussing discourses of child rearing practices and discourses of parents discussing children's discursive practices.

7.3.2.1 Discourses of parents discussing child rearing discourses

As stated in Chapter 6, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing child rearing discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of 'the need for societal values to change'; 'societal values have

changed' (thing of the past); and 'societal values are slowly changing'. The data would appear to indicate that many parents have changed their beliefs (from what they themselves were brought up with) and feel that society in general needs to 'catch up'. They also believed that the role of 'mother' as an unpaid worker in the home was devalued because of the materialistic nature of our society at the present time. This implies that the discussion of these beliefs and attitudes would encourage parents to present alternative discourses to their children.

7.3.2.2 Discourses of parents discussing children's discursive practices

Some children were more sexist than some parents would like them to be. As stated in Chapter 6, informant responses pertaining to discourses of parents discussing children's discourses included the multiple intersecting and interacting discursive practices of 'nongendered play'; 'gendered play'; 'gendered toys'; 'necessity of gender difference'; and 'socially defined masculinity and femininity'. From their observations of their own children and their children's friends, parents generally believed that children's play interactions were gendered. However they related this gendering of activities to the age and social development of the children insofar as 'gendering' was used as a tactic to enable children to get their own way in play. This implies that, through discussion with other parents, parents may be able to find techniques to challenge these attitudes with their children.

7.3.3 Summary

Parents' perspectives on gender relations in the gender regime of the home setting are predominantly associated with subordinate ungendered discourses and discursive practices of our society. However, parents' perspectives on their children's beliefs and attitudes imply that the children themselves do have gendered ideas about what they should and should not do. Parental concern was noted in regard to this finding and this implies that this would be a good starting point for parent workshops.

7.4 Conclusion

Two researchers currently investigating children's gender relations in the preschool setting are MacNaughton and Alloway. MacNaughton has focused much of her research on investigating gender relations in dramatic play (MacNaughton, 1994, 1995c, 1995d) and found that girls predominantly exercised power in play in this area of the preschool. Alloway has focused much of her research on gender relations in computer activities (Alloway, 1995b) and found boys predominantly exercised power in this activity. This study has attempted to portray a 'snapshot' of children's gender relations in all activities in the preschool setting and has found similarities and differences with both these researchers. As well, activities which would not appear to be gender dominated (for example, play dough) were found to be male and female dominated on different occasions. This study found that both girls and boys exercised power in their gender relations in most preschool activities. The implication of this is that educators need to be aware of how and why children exercise power and be prepared to intervene when necessary.

The parents of these preschool children are concerned with preparing their children for successful futures in both the world of work and in their family lives. Although their views differed greatly, there was an underlying interest in how and why their children's gender would affect their children's futures. The implication of this finding is that educators can capitalise on this interest by promoting the discussion of gender issues in their relationships with parents at all levels.

Chapter 8

RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

This research study has, as its fundamental goal, the empowerment of educators, parents, and the children themselves, to undertake gender equity work in the arena of the elimination of male/female dualism in discourses pertaining to gender relations that are dominant in the preschool and home settings. According to Gore (1992,p. 69),

Foucault's rejection of conceptions of power as property points to a rethinking of empowerment as the exercising of power in an attempt to help others to exercise power. And, in the emphasis on power as action, Foucault's work demands greater attention to the contexts in which empowerment is advocated and/or attempted.

In relation to the recommendations arising from this study, the implication of this statement is that any work done by educators with parents and/or with children has to take into account the contexts, and any changes in those contexts over time. Therefore, the following recommendations are based on the findings of this research study, keeping in mind that contexts are not stable and that they are constantly changing.

8.2 Phase I

8.2.1 Critical Deconstructive Model

According to Alloway (1995b), for gender justice to be possible, educators and children have to work together "to reveal how gender is produced and maintained within asymmetries of power in context-specific situations" (p. 91). That is, educators need to discuss with children how their beliefs about gender appropriate behaviours and activities limit their play repertoire. For example, educators need to discuss with children how and

why mechanics/machinery is socially constructed and understood to be male; and how and why domestic labour is constructed and identified as female. With educator guidance, children can challenge the social construction of gender divides both as it places limits on their behaviours and as they use it to limit the behaviour of their peers. By uncovering how asymmetrical relations of power are established between them, children can gain an understanding of how asymmetries of power underpin their gender relations.

If children can understand that sex/gender is a social construct and not a biological given, the way will be open for educators and the children themselves to promote ungendered and nontraditional ways of being female and male through personal empowerment. That is, masculinities need to be reconstructed in ways that are not oppressive to others' lives and femininities need to be reconstructed to give powerfulness in areas other than the domestic. Alloway (1995b) advocates that, at the micropolitics level (the classroom level) children and educators need to see how asymmetries of power are established, maintained, resisted and contested through the micropolitics of every day life.

MacNaughton (1995d, p. 6) concurs with this view. She advocates analysing children's play to see how asymmetrical power relationships are being created and maintained; to understand who is benefiting from these relationships; and to work to ensure that boys and girls share storylines that give them power without domination. Children can be encouraged to share exciting storylines, based both inside and outside of 'home' life, which "emphasise fun, excitement and adventure [and] which are not based on violence, aggression and physical prowess" (MacNaughton, 1995c, p. 12).

8.2.2 Recommendations for this Preschool Setting

Feminist poststructuralist theory portrays children actively taking up their assigned genders in their own way. The findings of this study concluded that masculinist hegemonic discourses were dominant in this preschool setting and that some boys dominated play through what they saw as culturally sanctioned ways of being. The

implication of this finding is that boys need to be provided with alternative masculinities that will broaden their options and enable them to express their masculinity in a range of ways (*The Gen*, April 1995, p. 4). The findings of this study also concluded that prevailing feminine discourses were dominant in this setting and that some girls dominated play through what they saw as culturally sanctioned ways of being. Therefore, girls need to be provided with alternative femininities that will broaden their options and enable them to express their femininity in a range of ways.

However, a focus on difference serves to consolidate our understandings of gender as categorical groups of opposites. By understanding all girls and all boys in terms of gender differences, the differences between them are naturalised and the multiple and different ways that girls and boys relate are missed. Deviations from the dominant forms are critical in challenging naturalism and essentialism as interpretations of the differences between the genders. Inconsistencies in the ways of being male and female are more fluid and contextually determined than the descriptions of dominant forms of relating would suggest. The findings of this study concluded that children can and do cross the gender divide and if these inconsistencies are recognised by educators, male/female dualism may be challenged.

Thus, the recommendations for this preschool setting involve deconstructing male/female dualism in asymmetrical relationships, in children's storylines, in children's perspectives and in children's subjectivities.

8.2.2.1 Deconstructing male/female dualism in asymmetrical relationships

Alloway (1995a) advocates that the gender dynamics of any activity need to be assessed by identifying the dominant gendered forms of relating. The ways in which females and males assume socially endorsed ways of interacting according to gender can construct inequitable relations of power - asymmetrical power relationships. The taking up or the refusal of combat as a means of conflict resolution, determines domination or

subordination of interests. Educators need to be aware of how and why children dominate activities and intercede by challenging children.

Educator praxis for deconstructing masculinist hegemonic discourses in asymmetrical relationships involves educators being aware of these discourses and challenging them when they are observed. This can be done at the level of the individual child, the group involved in the interaction, or the whole preschool group. Discussing actions and behaviours relating to 'rules of fair play not applying to male', 'violence and aggression towards females', and 'active play needing lots of space' are the relevant masculinist hegemonic discourses needing deconstruction in this preschool setting. This could involve educators increasing the number of adult males in the preschool setting (*The Gen*, March 1994, p. 5), not as role models, but as a means of providing alternative masculinities. These males could be teachers from the primary school who would be willing to work with preschool children or they could be from the community (fathers, brothers, uncles, school/community police officers). The vital ingredient would be that they provide a range of masculinities when they interact with the children.

Educator praxis for deconstructing prevailing feminine discourses also involves educators being aware of the discourses and challenging them appropriately. In the setting where this study took place, discussions of actions and behaviours relating to 'excluding boys through fear of disruption and/or aggression' and 'group power' are the relevant prevailing feminine discourses in need of deconstruction. This would involve educators discussing with girls how to reject masculinist hegemonic discourses, but not by simply rejecting boys.

Educator praxis will also include valuing and positively reinforcing actions and behaviours through which children cross the gender divide and which lead to symmetrical power relations. Discourses applicable in this setting were 'unwillingness to do combat' and 'applying rules of fair play'. Conversely, educators will need to challenge and discuss with children interactions in which crossing the gender divide leads to asymmetrical power relations. Discourses that apply in this setting were 'storylines

concerned with aggression', 'active play needing lots of space', 'passivity', and 'rules of fair play not applying'. Therefore, assessing whether a gender relation is asymmetrical will depend on the context of the interaction; and the key to deconstruction is awareness on the part of educators.

8.2.2.2 Deconstructing male/female dualism in children's storylines

MacNaughton contests that in home corner play, the role of 'mum' is all powerful and that in the main this play activity is one of the few where girls experience power. Most boys are unsuccessful in their attempts at this role, for if they choose to play in this area, they are usually allocated the role of 'dad' (an almost nonexistent role) or the role of a pet (a subservient role). Consequently, in order to gain power, boys tend to disrupt the play or leave the home corner. This was evident in some play interactions observed in the current study, but by no means in all interactions observed in the home corner. MacNaughton (1994) goes on to question whether educators should be advocating and encouraging boys into this area of play because it is one of the few sites of power for girls. However, power in the form of gendered relationships, needs to be challenged and whether it is boys or girls who display the power is inconsequential. Children can not conceive of equitable power relationships in their home settings in the future if they are not encouraged to have equitable relationships in their domestic play in the present. Consequently, even though domestic play in the home corner is one of the few places in the preschool setting that girls experience power, the asymmetrical power relationships occurring must be addressed by the preschool educator.

Hence, educator praxis for deconstructing storylines involving prevailing feminine discourses includes encouraging children to expand female storylines beyond motherhood and the realm of the domestic by making them adventurous and exciting. Educator praxis for deconstructing storylines involving masculinist hegemonic discourses include discouraging the elements of death, war, violence, and aggression in male storylines while at the same time encouraging exciting storylines concerned with fatherhood and the

care of children. MacNaughton (1995c, p. 12 and 13) outlines some ways in which educators can extend both female and male storylines.

Many children crossed the gender divide in relation to storylines. Educators need to encourage the discourses and discursive practices in this play, while at the same time being aware of the possibility of the development of covert relations of power that may restrict the play of others.

8.2.2.3 Deconstructing male/female dualism in children's perspectives

The children in the study setting do appear to have relatively strong views on the other sex/gender. However, these views do not extend to all children in all contexts and this is where educators can begin to challenge these dualisms. Children's perspectives will be evidenced in both asymmetrical relationships and in covert relations of power and can be addressed as previously outlined.

Another example of educator praxis is bibliotherapy. This would involve reading stories to children that depict girls and boys playing together and enjoying each other's company and that depict children crossing the gender divide. Although Davies (1989) found that children often reject these storylines, by exposing children to a range of ways of being a girl and being a boy through literature, discussion of what children may see as gender inappropriate behaviour could be a starting point for deconstructing gendered ideas. Persona dolls or puppet plays could be used to present similar storylines and to facilitate discussion. Ungendered storylines could then be transferred, with the educators' assistance, to the children's own dramatic play.

8.2.2.4 Deconstructing male/female dualism in children's subjectivities

For most of the children in this study, subjectivities fluctuated according to the context and the individuals involved in the context. However, some children experienced similar powerless subjectivities when involved with a particular group of children. One example is Rodney who experienced powerlessness at the hands of Julie and Denise quite regularly. Educators need to be aware of which children use power in which contexts

and this can only be achieved through awareness and observation of these situations. Educator praxis would need to include regular observations not only of individual children, but also of children's relationships with their peers.

To sum up, educator praxis is dependant on educator awareness, observation, and assessment of the gender relations involved in children's interactions.

8.3 Phase II

8.3.1 Framework for Parent/Teacher Partnerships

According to Blackmore (1994), parent participation in education in the 1990s should not be limited to a fundraising function. Parents need to play an active role in the education of their children across a broad spectrum. Nolan (1995) states that one of the positive effects of the devolution of schools has been increased parental participation in all areas of education and that this provides an "opportunity to form a school/parent partnership to promote gender equity" (p. 408). As an activist with the Tasmanian Council of State Schools Parents and Friends, Nolan (1995) states that parents are aware of the changes that are happening in our society with regards to gender equity and that parents are keen to talk about gender matters. "The community is asking the questions and would like some help answering them" (Nolan, 1995, p. 408). This was reflected in parent responses in the study reported here.

Hence, Nolan (1995) believes that school/parent partnerships are not only timely, but also a necessity. "The promotion of gender equity through schooling without enlisting parents is akin to trying to fill a bath with the plug out" (Nolan, 1995, p. 407). However, Nolan (1995) also issues a warning that discussions of gender matters are controversial. "The discussion of gender issues has the potential to inflame the passions of almost any parent, which is reason enough to ensure that the process must be sensitive, enjoyable and nonconfrontational" (p. 408).

Nolan (1995) also advocates that it is “crucial that parents are helped to examine practices within the home that may influence how children interact with the school” (p. 411). She states that parental rationale is based on the need to equip children for the future in regards to work and to the family. Parents need to know about the probable future of work and how the lives of women in particular are changing; to know how the construction of gender affects children’s learning; to understand the nature of stereotyping and sexual harassment and their effects; and to be able to analyse the things they say, as parent language is a gendered domain (Nolan, 1995, p. 411).

Finally, Nolan (1995) advocates that parents need to govern the process of parent/teacher partnerships and that access for all community to participate (for example, single parents, parents in the workforce, and parents with younger children) needs to be taken into account with realistic times for meetings and with child care provided.

8.3.2 Recommendations for Parent/Teacher Partnerships

“Parent participation in gender equity is an emerging theme in Tasmanian schools” (*The Gen*, June/July 1995, p. 6). The following framework is based on information obtained from “Involving Parents in Gender Equity” (Sally Milbourne, Senior Curriculum Officer - Gender, personal communication, August 1995), suggestions advocated by MacNaughton (1995a), and the findings of this study. This framework involves workshops for parents on gender issues, forming a parental gender equity team, and ways and means of publicising gender issues in the preschool setting.

8.3.2.1 Workshops for parents

Workshops for parents would need to be scheduled at a time convenient to all parents’ needs. Child care would need to be considered essential to allow as many parents as possible to participate. Educators at the preschool may be prepared to undertake the preparation and delivery of these workshops themselves (depending on their own expertise in the area of gender relations and/or their willingness) or they may enlist the aid

of a gender equity consultant. At the present time, many texts are being published which would be helpful for educators (and later parents) to use as starting points for these workshops (see Appendix V, "Gender Equity Resources for Workshops").

The following is a list of suggested workshop topics in a sequence that was prescribed by the results of this study. A time frame has not been included as some topics may be dealt with in one session, and some topics may need many sessions to cover adequately. However, as stated in the Introduction of this chapter, the context is important and if any aspect of the context has changed, changes in the program will be needed.

One consistent finding of this study was that all parents want what they see as "the best" for their children and their children's futures. However, the definition of what was "the best" varied as parents' perspectives were related either to gendered discourses dominant in our society or to subordinated ungendered discourses. Therefore, in all discussion topics it would be important to deconstruct with the parents the discourses dominant in their beliefs. Words such as 'normal' and 'common sense' would be pointers for the introduction of possible alternative ungendered discourses. As many of the parent informants do have ungendered discourses available to them, it would be ideal if the discussion leader (educator or gender equity consultant) were able to encourage the parents themselves to put forward these ideas. Each topic would be introduced by sharing with the workshop participants the results of this study. Suggested topics include:

- **Gender Relations in the Family**

Points for discussion under this topic heading could include the personal qualities that parents believe are important to be encouraged; children's need for affection; children's friends and friendships; children's games and behaviours; and the influence of peer group pressure. The results of this study indicated that the parents' perspectives on gender relations in the family included discourses and discursive practices of 'societal values need to change' and 'gender not an influence at this age'. However, parent responses also indicated that they believed that their children's discourses were distinctly

gendered and that their children's behaviours were more sexist than they would like them to be. This would provide an opening for discussion of alternative ways for children to practice their masculinities and femininities. The underlying themes of these workshops would be the construction of gender in our society; how the construction of gender affects children's learning; and the gendered nature of language.

- **Gender Equity Programs**

Points for discussion under this topic heading could include the term 'gender equity' along with an outline of the actual gender equity program that the educators were implementing in the centre. The results of this study indicated that, although parents did not have a sound understanding of the term 'gender equity', many parents felt that societal values had changed. The topic has the potential for disagreement and controversy and needs to be handled carefully. It should not be addressed until a rapport has been developed between and amongst the parent participants and the workshop presenters through discussions related to the first topic. The underlying themes of these workshops would be the nature and effects of stereotyping and sexual harassment.

- **Children's Futures**

Points for discussion under this topic heading could include girls' passivity, boys' aggression, children's futures in the worlds of home and work, and the ways in which violence and conflict between the sexes could be reduced. This topic also has the potential for controversy and disagreement, especially if certain parents were held accountable and/or blamed for their children's aggressive behaviours. The study indicated that parents of aggressive boys were defensive as far as their child rearing practices were concerned and are in need of reassurance and advice rather than criticism. The study also indicated that many parents believe societal values need to change or are changing slowly. This would provide an opening for discussion of ways in which parents can prepare their children for a changing world. The underlying themes of these workshops would be the nature and value of both paid and unpaid work and the ways in which women's and men's lives are changing.

8.3.2.2 Forming a parental gender equity team

Subsequent to the successful progress of the workshops, it could be suggested that a small group of parents may like to take responsibility for implementing the recommended changes. This would give parents ownership of the program which according to Nolan (1995) is a necessity. The areas that parents may like to promote could be communicating with other parents and encouraging them to join the group; choosing topics for subsequent workshops; finding ways of increasing male participation in the preschool setting by involving fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and brothers in the preschool program; arranging child care for workshops through the use of older siblings (both girls and boys); and by establishing new avenues to promote and publicise gender issues.

8.3.2.3 Ways and means of publicising and promoting gender issues

This initially would be the responsibility of the preschool educators. However, as parents become more confident with gender issues, the responsibility could be handed over to them. One initial way would be to provide a noticeboard on which educators and parents could place magazine or newspaper articles on gender issues. This noticeboard could also be used to display photographs of preschool children taking part in non-traditional roles, crossing the gender divide, and/or of cooperative activity between the genders. Other ways of promoting gender issues would be the establishment of a section in the parent library of gender materials for borrowing by parents (including a subscription to *The Gen*); small articles or items in the preschool newsletter including cartoons from resources such as Alloway's (1995a) "Foundation Stones"; and making time to discuss with parents informally ungendered or nontraditional behaviours of their children by pointing out the positives for the children and their learning (MacNaughton, 1995a).

8.3.2.4 Involving parents in projects

These projects could be either parent or teacher initiated and would involve parents observing and recording children's gendered participation in various play areas (for example, home corner, computer, blocks etc). It would be advisable to provide these

parents with some initial assistance in observation and recording techniques. MacNaughton (1995a, p. 8) found that parents, after monitoring children's use of different play areas became strong advocates for the educator's gender equity program.

8.4 Recommendations for Further Research

This study has illuminated a small segment of children's gender relations in their day to day lives. However, more research is needed if gender as a category of identification, which restricts and/or limits the potential of children, is to be abandoned. Although the elimination of male/female dualism in our society is not likely in the foreseeable future, inroads are being made in society's views on the fluidity of an individual's sex/gender. By promoting positive attitudes to ungendered and/or nontraditional ways of being female and male in the preschool setting, educators, parents and children will be opening up options for progress towards gender justice. The following are recommendations for further research in order to investigate and promote alternative ways for children to experience their sex/gender.

- An investigation of children's gender relations in social situations such as Kanga Cricket, Kindergym, calisthenics etc.
- A quantitative study to establish the extent and prevalence of overt asymmetrical relationships in a preschool setting.
- An investigation of the relationship between children's level of cognition and their ability to understand gender relations.
- An evaluation of the implementation of Alloway's (1995b) Critical Deconstructive Model in a preschool setting.
- An investigation of the part early childhood educators play in gender construction in the preschool setting.

- A qualitative study into the subjectivities of individual children in the preschool setting to establish how and why they experience power and powerlessness.
- An indepth investigation into gender relations in the home setting to establish the ways in which parents gender their children from birth.
- An indepth analysis of parental attitudes to gender equity programs in preschools.
- An evaluation of parent/teacher partnership programs in relation to the promotion of gender justice.

8.5 Conclusion

According to Alloway (1995c, p. 20), "Early childhood education has often been overlooked in the national debate and research on gender. Early childhood educators have had little guidance as to how they might begin to work with children to achieve gender reform." This study, using a feminist poststructuralist framework and analysis, has attempted to uncover inequitable gender relations in both the preschool and home settings as a starting point for educators, parents, and the children themselves to work towards gender justice through gender reform.

It is timely to recognise the situation wherein early childhood education has existed as an unequal partner in educational dialogue about gender. The voices of early childhood educators need to be supported and heard at the centre of national debate. Eight's simply too late to begin working on gender reform. (Alloway, 1995c, p. 26)

Nolan (1995) would agree with Alloway as to the importance of gender equity reform but would add that parent involvement in this reform, through parent gender education, is vital.

Parent Gender Education is not only timely, it is essential to the promotion and wider understanding of gender equity in the community. As our children's first teachers we [parents] can model cultural stereotypes or we can choose to be whole people. We can leave the promotion of learning to the school or our partners, or we can choose to be fully involved. We can parent as our parents did for a world that has gone or we can prepare our boys and girls for the future. (Nolan, 1995, p. 413)

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

Questionnaire

STATEMENT OF DISCLOSURE AND INFORMED CONSENT

This research is a descriptive study of one preschool centre. I am investigating how gender influences children's play interactions. I am interested in what you as a parent think and believe about the way children play together. I believe this study is important because I feel that, in some areas of educational research, parents' views are not sufficiently taken into account.

I would like you to assist me in carrying out this study by completing a simple questionnaire. The questionnaire will take no more than a maximum of one hour to complete.

All information collected will be confidential. No names will be recorded on the data collected and all individual information will remain anonymous. Only general information will be used in the study.

The questionnaire is in three sections. Section A contains questions about background factors such as your sex, age, educational background, the composition of your family etc. This demographic information will be used to describe the clientele of this preschool. When you return the questionnaire to me, I will separate Section A from the remainder of the questionnaire so that this information remains anonymous. Section B contains questions about your thoughts and beliefs of your four year old child's play interactions with her/his friends.

In addition, I would be grateful if you can spare the time to talk with me for approximately an hour about your child's relationships with his/her friends. This will assist me in developing a greater understanding of children's play interactions. Section C of the questionnaire gives you the choice of taking part in these talks.

I believe the time you take to complete the questionnaire and talk with me will be time well spent. You will be contributing to information that will help your child's teacher cater for children's social needs. The results of this study will be increased knowledge and understanding of children's relationships by both educators and parents.

I realise that I am asking a lot of you; but it is necessary if we are to understand the way children interact with each other.

Any questions concerning this study may be directed to Bev Murfin (Principal Investigator) of [name of preschool] on [preschool phone number].

I (the participant) have read the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising I may withdraw at any time. I agree that the research data gathered for this study may be published provided I am not identifiable.

.....
Participant

.....
Date

.....
Investigator

.....
Date

{This sheet will be removed from the questionnaire so that your identity remains anonymous.}

As well as collecting information on your perspectives, I will be observing the children's play interactions as they take part in normal preschool activities. These activities will be video tape recorded so that I can talk with the children about their play. These talks will be audio tape recorded so that I gain accurate information. Both the video tape recordings and the audio tape recordings will ONLY be used for research purposes. They will NOT be publicly aired.

I (the parent) have read the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to my child being video tape recorded while taking part in preschool activities and audio tape recorded while taking part in discussions, realizing that I may withdraw my permission at any time. I also realize that all information collected will be treated with utmost confidentiality and destroyed at the completion of the study.

.....
Parent Date

.....
Investigator Date

{This sheet will be removed from the questionnaire so that your identity remains anonymous.}

Questionnaire

Parents' perspectives on children's play relationships

The following information provided by you will be treated with the strictest confidentiality.

Please answer ALL questions.

Please make any changes, alterations or additions to this questionnaire to give an accurate picture of you and your family.

SECTION A

1) Your sex ☐ female ☐ male

2) Your age ☐ under 20 ☐ 20-25 ☐ 26-30 ☐ 31-35
☐ 36-40 ☐ 41-45 ☐ 46-50 ☐ over 50

3) Your place of birth

☐ Alice Springs ☐ elsewhere in NT ☐ elsewhere in Australia
☐ overseas(country)

4) Your four year old child's place of birth

☐ Alice Springs ☐ elsewhere in NT ☐ elsewhere in Australia
☐ overseas(country)

5) What do you consider to be your cultural background? (Tick more than one box of necessary)

☐ Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander ☐ Australian
☐ United States of America ☐ European(country)
☐ Asian(country) ☐ Other(country)

6) Languages other than English spoken in the home

☐ No ☐ Yes(name of language)

7) Your educational background - please mark the highest level reached

☐ Completed Year 10 ☐ Completed Year 12
☐ Technical college qualification
☐ University degree
☐ Other qualifications

8) Your occupation

.....

9) Your annual income (Not your spouse's or partner's)

☐ Nil to \$10 000 ☐ \$10 000 to \$20 000 ☐ \$20 000 to \$30 000
☐ \$30 000 to \$40 000 ☐ \$40 000 to \$50 000 ☐ \$50 000 to \$60 000
☐ over \$60 000

10) Size and composition of your family (Tick all appropriate boxes)

☐ adult female (mother) ☐ adult male (father)
☐ 4 year old female child ☐ 4 year old male child
☐ other female children aged
☐ other male children aged
☐ other family members living in the family home
.....
.....

{Section A will be removed from Section B and C so that your identity remains anonymous and this information remains confidential.}

SECTION B

This section is asking questions about your 4 year old child's interactions with her/his peers.

I am the child's ☐ mother. My child is ☐ a girl.
☐ father. ☐ a boy.

- 1) Write a list or series of words that describe your child.

.....

.....

.....

- 2) What are your child's favourite play activities?

.....

.....

.....

- 3) What types of activities does your child NOT enjoy?

- 4) What is your child's favourite toy?

- 5) Are there any toys you do not allow your child to play with?

☐ YES ☐ NO If yes, what are they?

.....

Why do you not allow these toys?

.....

.....

.....

6) Do YOU believe some games are not appropriate for a girl to play?
☐ YES ☐ NO If yes, what are they?

.....
.....

Why are they not appropriate?
.....
.....

7) Do YOU believe some games are not appropriate for a boy to play?
☐ YES ☐ NO If yes, what are they?

.....
.....

Why are they not appropriate?
.....
.....

8) If YES to question 6 and/or 7, does your child play any of these inappropriate games? ☐ YES ☐ NO If yes, what games are played?

.....

9) Does YOUR CHILD consider certain toys/activities are “girls' stuff” or “boys' stuff”? ☐ YES ☐ NO. If yes, please list.

“girls' stuff”
.....

“boys' stuff”
.....

10) Do you and your child have disagreements / conflicts about certain toys / games / activities? ☐ YES ☐ NO Please explain.

.....
.....
.....

11) Who does your child prefer to play with?

☐ a child of the same sex ☐ a child of the other sex ☐ both

12) How would you describe your child’s relationships with:

children of the same sex

children of the other sex

13) Do you think it is important for your child to have friends of both sexes?

☐ YES ☐ NO Why/why not?

.....
.....

14) Does your child have disagreements / conflicts with his/her friends?

☐ YES ☐ NO What are these disagreements usually about?

.....
.....

15) Does your child put pressure on her/his friends to play or NOT to play certain games? ☐ YES ☐ NO Please explain.

.....
.....

16) Have you ever heard your child say to another child:

“You can’t play cause you’re a girl!”? ☐ YES ☐ NO

“You can’t play cause you’re a boy!”? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Please explain.

.....
.....

17) How does your child go about convincing another child to play the way she/he wants them to?

.....
.....

18) What do you understand about your child from this behaviour?

.....
.....
.....
.....

19) Does your child play “mothers and fathers” or “families”? ☐ YES ☐ NO

If yes, what roles does your child like to play?

☐ mum ☐ dad ☐ family pet ☐ brother ☐ sister ☐ baby

☐ other (please specify)

20) What does your child do if he/she is unable to play the role she/he wants to?

☐ leaves the game ☐ changes the game ☐ disrupts the game

☐ is able to convince playmates to allow him/her that role

☐ other

21) Does your child play “school” or “preschool”? ☐ YES ☐ NO If yes,

what roles does your child like to play? ☐ teacher ☐ child ☐ pet

☐ other

22) At times, does your child take on roles of the other sex in pretend play?

☐ YES ☐ NO Please explain.

.....
.....

23) What TV programs does your child watch?

.....
.....
.....

24) Are there TV programs you don't allow your child to watch?

☐ YES ☐ NO If yes, what are they?

.....

Why do you think these programs are not suitable for young children?
.....
.....

25) Do you discuss TV advertisements with your child? ☐ YES ☐ NO

If yes, why?
.....
.....

26) Do you encourage your child to be:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> independent | <input type="checkbox"/> competitive | <input type="checkbox"/> achieving |
| <input type="checkbox"/> caring | <input type="checkbox"/> sharing | <input type="checkbox"/> nurturing |

Why are these important?
.....
.....

27) Do you encourage your child to play:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> dress-ups | <input type="checkbox"/> with blocks and building materials |
| <input type="checkbox"/> climbing, running, jumping | <input type="checkbox"/> with drawing/paint materials |
| <input type="checkbox"/> the computer | <input type="checkbox"/> video games |

28) Does YOUR CHILD hold traditional beliefs about what girls and boys should do? (That is, only girls should play with dolls; only boys should play with cars.)

☐ YES ☐ NO Please explain.
.....
.....
.....

29) If YES, do you discourage these traditional beliefs? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Please explain
.....
.....
.....

30) Do you encourage non-traditional behaviours such as: boys verbalising feelings and expressing emotions; girls taking risks? ☐ YES ☐ NO

How do you encourage these behaviours?
.....
.....
.....
.....

31 Do you encourage your child to take part in all preschool activities?
☐ YES ☐ NO Why /why not?

.....
.....
.....
.....

32) Do you find peer group pressure a problem? ☐ YES ☐ N O

Please explain.
.....
.....
.....
.....

33) What jobs / chores around the house does your child do?

.....
.....
.....

34) Is your child ever mistaken for a girl / boy (the other sex)? ☐ YES ☐ NO

If yes, how do you feel about this?
.....
.....
.....

35) What do you understand by the term “gender equity”?
.....
.....
.....
.....

36) Do you believe there are gender differences in the behaviour of young children? ☐ YES ☐ NO If yes, where do these differences come from?
☐ environmental ☐ biological ☐ interaction of the two
☐ other Please explain.
.....
.....
.....

37) Would your expectations of your child’s behaviour be different if she/he were the other sex? ☐ YES ☐ NO Please explain.
.....
.....
.....
.....

38) Do you have any further comments about your child’s play mates, play activities, toys etc?
.....
.....
.....
.....

39) Is there anything else you would like to add?
.....
.....
.....

SECTION C

1) Are you interested in taking part in an interview to discuss your responses to SECTION B? ☐ YES ☐ NO

2) If no,

*Thank you for your time in filling out this questionnaire.
Please return it to the preschool as soon as possible.*

3) If yes, where would you like this interview to take place?
☐ in your home(your address)
☐ at the preschool
☐ other

4) This interview will take approximately one hour. When would be a suitable time for us to get together?
.....

5) My name is
My phone number is

*Thank you for your time in filling out this questionnaire.
Please return it to the preschool as soon as possible.*

APPENDIX II

Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

Parents' perspectives on children's play relationships

Interviewer: Bev Murfin **Informant:** _____ **Date:** _____

Child's sex: ☐ boy **Informant's sex:** ☐ female
 ☐ girl ☐ male

Introduction

This interview is a semi structured interactive interview where I will be asking you open ended questions about your child's relationships with her/his peers. You are 'the expert'.

I want to know what activities your child enjoys; what activities your child does not enjoy; whether your child considers some activities "girls' stuff" and other activities 'boys' stuff'; and whether your child puts pressure on other children to conform to his/her beliefs.

I want to know about your knowledge, understandings, interpretations, and feelings about these issues; their importance or lack of importance in your child's life now; and how they could influence your child's future life.

I want to encourage you to share with me your experiences of gender equity issues as a person and as a parent; and I will share with you my experiences of gender equity issues as a teacher and a researcher.

PARENT INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

SECTION I

The questions in this interview schedule correspond with the question numbers in Section B of the questionnaire.

1) Write a list or series of words that describe your child.

Why did you describe your child as

2) What are your child's favourite play activities?

Which is your child's most favourite activity and why?

3) What types of activities does your child NOT enjoy?

Which activity does your child dislike the most and why?

4) What is your child's favourite toy?

Why is this toy so popular?

5) Are there any toys you do not allow your child to play with?

☐ YES ☐ NO If yes, what are they?

Why do you not allow these toys?

Can you tell me more?

6) Do YOU believe some games are not appropriate for a girl to play? What are they? Why are they not appropriate?

Can you tell me more?

7) Do YOU believe some games are not appropriate for a boy to play? What are they? Why are they not appropriate?

Can you tell me more?

8) If YES to questions 6 and/or 7, does your child play any of these in appropriate games? ☐ YES ☐ NO If yes, what games are played?

Why do you consider these games inappropriate for your child?

9) Does YOUR CHILD consider certain toys/activities are “girls’ stuff” or “boys’ stuff”? ☐ YES ☐ NO. If yes, please list.

“girls’ stuff”

“boys’ stuff”

Why do you think your child thinks this way?

10) Do you and your child have disagreements / conflicts about certain toys / games / activities? ☐ YES ☐ NO Please explain.

Can you tell me more?

11) Who does your child prefer to play with?

☐ a child of the same sex ☐ a child of the other sex ☐ both

Does your child have a best friend? Why are they friends?

12) How would you describe your child's relationships with:

children of the same sex

children of the other sex

Why do you think this is the case?

13) Do you think it is important for your child to have friends of both sexes?

☐ YES ☐ NO Why/why not?

Can you tell me more?

14) Does your child have disagreements / conflicts with his/her friends?

☐ YES ☐ NO What are these disagreements usually about?

Can you tell me more?

15) Does your child put pressure on her/his friends to play or NOT to play certain games? ☐ YES ☐ NO Please explain.

Can you tell me more?

16) Have you ever heard your child say to another child:

"You can't play cause you're a girl!"? ☐ YES ☐ NO

"You can't play cause you're a boy!"? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Please explain.

Can you tell me more?

17) How does your child go about convincing another child to play the way she/he wants them to?

Can you tell me more?

18) What do you understand about your child from this behaviour?

Why do you believe this?

19) Does your child play "mothers and fathers" or "families"? ☐ YES ☐ NO

If yes, what roles does your child like to play?

☐ mum ☐ dad ☐ family pet ☐ brother ☐ sister ☐ baby

☐ other (please specify)

Why do you think this is the case?

20) What does your child do if he/she is unable to play the role she/he wants to?

☐ leaves the game ☐ changes the game ☐ disrupts the game

☐ is able to convince playmates to allow him/her that role

☐ other

Why do you think this is the case?

21) Does your child play "school" or "preschool"? ☐ YES ☐ NO If yes, what roles does your child like to play? ☐ teacher ☐ child ☐ pet ☐ other

Why do you think this is the case?

22) At times, does your child take on roles of the other sex in pretend play? ☐ YES ☐ NO Please explain.

Can you tell me more?

23) What TV programs does your child watch?

Which is your child's favourite program?

Why is this a favourite?

24) Are there TV programs you don't allow your child to watch?

☐ YES ☐ NO If yes, what are they?

Why do you think these programs are not suitable for young children?

Can you tell me more?

25) Do you discuss TV advertisements with your child? ☐ YES ☐ NO

If yes, why?

Can you tell me more?

26) Do you encourage your child to be:

☐ independent

☐ competitive

☐ achieving

☐ caring

☐ sharing

☐ nurturing

Why are these important?

Which is the most important? Why?

27) Do you encourage your child to play:

☐ dress-ups

☐ with blocks and building materials

☐ climbing, running, jumping

☐ drawing/paint materials

☐ the computer

☐ video games

Why / why not?

28) Does YOUR CHILD hold traditional beliefs about what girls and boys should do? (That is, only girls should play with dolls; only boys should play with cars.)

☐ YES ☐ NO Please explain.

Can you tell me more?

29) If YES, do you discourage these traditional beliefs? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Please explain.

Can you tell me more?

30) Do you encourage non-traditional behaviours such as: boys verbalising feelings and expressing emotions; girls taking risks? ☐ YES ☐ NO

How do you encourage these behaviour?

Can you tell me why?

31) Do you encourage your child to take part in all preschool activities?

☐ YES ☐ NO Why /why not?

Can you tell me more?

32) Do you find peer group pressure a problem? ☐ YES ☐ NO

Please explain.

Can you tell me more?

33) What jobs / chores around the house does your child do?

Why these chores? Please explain.

34) Is your child ever mistaken for a girl / boy (the other sex)? ☐ YES ☐ NO

If yes, how do you feel about this?

Can you tell me more?

35) What do you understand by the term “gender equity”?

Please explain.

36) Do you believe there are gender differences in the behaviour of young children? ☐ YES ☐ NO If yes, where do these differences come from?

☐ environmental

☐ biological

☐ interaction of the two

☐ other

Please explain.

37) Would your expectations of your child's behaviour be different if she/he were the other sex? ☐ YES ☐ NO Please explain.

Can you tell me more?

38) Do you have any further comments about your child's play mates, play activities, toys etc?

Please explain.

39) Is there anything else you would like to add?

Please explain.

SECTION II

1 What is your response to the following quotation concerning parental opposition to gender equity programs:

“The biggest concern was always about the boys. There was . . . fear about the boys taking on feminine characteristics. There are parents who are terrified that somehow we’re going to turn these boys into homosexuals.” (Legge, 1995, p.24)

2 What is your reaction to this quote:

“Few mothers understand how the demands of masculinity in Western society close down boys’ capacity for empathy and legitimise a distancing (between mother and son) which is often hurtful to both parties. Some mothers are genuinely convinced that it is innately male to need less affection than females.” (Legge, 1995, p.25)

SECTION III

1 Do you agree or disagree with the following research findings concerning gender issues for children? Do you have any comments?

- Fixed ideas about how girls and boys should behave, act and think influence their ability to achieve success in the world of work and home.
☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Undecided

- Current research shows that boys have a wider choice of job opportunities; but can be excluded from home life and from developing values of caring for others.
☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Undecided

- Even though it is not true that peoples sex determines their capabilities, the attitudes which preschool and school aged girls and boys develop about women and men can affect their career choices and the way they develop as people.
☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Undecided

- By breaking down old-fashioned attitudes and helping girls and boys become aware of a wider range of ways of behaving, feeling and learning, we can help our children:

- * develop all aspects of their personality;

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Undecided

- * fully express their creativity and individuality;

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Undecided

- * have a wider range of employment opportunities;

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Undecided

- * contribute more to their families and the community as they grow up;

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Undecided

- * reduce violence and conflict between the sexes in our community.

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Undecided

2 Do you agree or disagree with the following research findings concerning limitations placed on children's activities? Do you have any comments?

- Girls sometimes limit their physical activity, their fitness and their enjoyment of life because of suggestions that girls are not meant to be physically active or strong.

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Undecided

- Boys are sometimes taught that being aggressive is the way to communicate, solve their problems and get what they want. Boys need to learn that this sort of behaviour is not acceptable in our community. They need to learn other ways of making their point.

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Undecided

- Girls who believe they should be passive and quiet miss out on many valuable parts of their education because they are afraid to ask teachers for help or express their opinions in class.

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Undecided

- Boys can believe it is not 'manly' to show their feelings. This has been shown to make it difficult for some men to sustain relationships and recover from stressful situations.

☐ Agree

☐ Disagree

☐ Undecided

3 Do you agree with:

- Girls are born with the same ability as boys to manipulate objects and learn technical skills.

☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Undecided

- Boys are not born aggressive and competitive.

☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Undecided

- Girls and boys enjoy the same activities if they do not feel constrained by fixed ideas about how girls and boys should play.

☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Undecided

- Boys brought up to play a wide variety of roles, including caring roles, have a better chance of having stable family relationships and a satisfying job.

☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Undecided

- Today's preschool and school aged girls will spend most of their adult lives in the workforce. We must therefore help them plan for a future career in the workforce as well as for the roles of wife, mother and family carer.

☐ Agree ☐ Disagree ☐ Undecided

4 Do you have any further comments?

APPENDIX III

Data Collection and Data Analysis Instruments

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“Interview Record” sheet	223
Data Analysis Instruments	
“Interview Transcription” outline	224
“Observed Interaction Transcription” outline	225

Day: VIDEO TAPING RECORD Date:

Camera Location: Group: Indoor/Outdoor

Time Activity Children

Camera Location: Group: Indoor/Outdoor

Time Activity Children

Camera Location: Group: Indoor/Outdoor

Time Activity Children

INTERVIEW RECORD

Day Date Group Indoor/Outdoor

Time: Activity: Interaction:

Children:

Conservation:

Physical Interaction:

Discussion with children:

Comments:

Time: Activity: Interaction:

Children:

Conservation:

Physical Interaction:

Discussion with children:

Comments:

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION

Day **Date** **Group** **Indoor/Outdoor**

Time: **Activity:** **Interaction:**

Children:

Circumstances:

Conservation:

Physical Interaction:

Comments:

Discussion: (from Audio)

Comments:

WHO HAS POWER?

HOW DID THEY GET IT?

HOW DID THEY MAINTAIN IT?

WHAT IMPACT HAS IT HAD ON THEM?

WHAT IMPACT HAS IT HAD ON OTHER CHILDREN?

WHO BENEFITED?

OBSERVED INTERACTION TRANSCRIPTION

Day **Date** **Group** **Indoor/Outdoor**

Time: **Activity:** **Interaction:**

Children:

Circumstances:

Conservation:

Physical Interaction:

Comments:

WHO HAS POWER?

HOW DID THEY GET IT?

HOW DID THEY MAINTAIN IT?

WHAT IMPACT HAS IT HAD ON THEM?

WHAT IMPACT HAS IT HAD ON OTHER CHILDREN?

WHO BENEFITED?

APPENDIX IV

Phase II: List of Tables

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Table I *Personal qualities encouraged*

	I %	Com %	A %	C %	S %	N %
Mother of girl	93.3	40.0	73.3	100.0	100.0	86.7
Mother of boy	94.7	31.6	68.4	100.0	100.0	63.2
Father of girl	100.0	75.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Father of boy	71.4	42.9	85.7	100.0	100.0	57.1
% of cases	91.1	40.0	75.6	100.0	100.0	73.3

I = Independence; Com = Competitive; A = Achieving; C = Caring; S = Sharing; N = Nurturing

Table II *Sex/gender of playmates*

	Same sex %	Other sex %	Both %	
Mother of girl	6.7	0.0	93.3	100%
Mother of boy	0.0	0.0	100.0	100%
Father of girl	0.0	0.0	100.0	100%
Father of boy	14.3	0.0	85.7	100%
TOTAL	4.4	0.0	95.6	100%

Table III *Excluding girls*

	Yes %	No %	No answer %	
Mother of girl	6.7	86.7	6.7	100%
Mother of boy	5.3	94.7	0.0	100%
Father of girl	0.0	100.0	0.0	100%
Father of boy	14.3	85.7	0.0	100%
TOTAL	6.7	91.1	2.2	100%

Table IV *Excluding boys*

	Yes %	No %	No answer %	
Mother of girl	6.7	93.3	0.0	100%
Mother of boy	0.0	94.7	5.3	100%
Father of girl	25.0	75.0	0.0	100%
Father of boy	0.0	85.7	14.3	100%
TOTAL	4.4	91.1	4.4	100%

Table V *Traditional beliefs*

	Yes %	No %	No answer %	
Mother of girl	26.7	73.3	0.0	100%
Mother of boy	15.8	73.7	10.5	100%
Father of girl	0.0	100.0	0.0	100%
Father of boy	28.6	71.4	0.0	100%
TOTAL	20.0	75.6	4.4	100%

Table VI *Nontraditional behaviours*

	Yes %	No %	No answer %	
Mother of girl	80.0	13.3	6.7	100%
Mother of boy	84.2	10.5	5.3	100%
Father of girl	100.0	0.0	0.0	100%
Father of boy	71.4	14.3	14.3	100%
TOTAL	82.2	11.1	6.7	100%

Table VII *Peer group pressure*

	Yes %	No %	No answer %	
Mother of girl	33.3	66.7	0.0	100%
Mother of boy	42.1	57.9	0.0	100%
Father of girl	25.0	75.0	0.0	100%
Father of boy	57.1	28.6	14.3	100%
TOTAL	40.0	57.8	2.2	100%

Table VIII *Girls' passivity*

	Agreed %	Disagreed %	Undecided %	
Mother of girl	100.0	0.0	0.0	100%
Mother of boy	60.0	20.0	20.0	100%
Father of girl	100.0	0.0	0.0	100%
Father of boy	80.0	20.0	0.0	100%
TOTAL	80.0	12.0	8.0	100%

Table IX *Boys' aggression*

	Agreed %	Disagreed %	Undecided %	
Mother of girl	87.5	12.5	0.0	100%
Mother of boy	90.0	0.0	10.0	100%
Father of girl	50.0	50.0	0.0	100%
Father of boy	80.0	0.0	20.0	100%
TOTAL	84.0	8.0	8.0	100%

Table X *Boys' futures*

	Agreed %	Disagreed %	
Mother of girl	75.0	25.0	100%
Mother of boy	90.0	10.0	100%
Father of girl	100.0	0.0	100%
Father of boy	100.0	0.0	100%
TOTAL	88.0	12.0	100%

Table XI *Girls' futures*

	Agreed %	Disagreed %	
Mother of girl	100.0	0.0	100%
Mother of boy	90.0	10.0	100%
Father of girl	100.0	0.0	100%
Father of boy	100.0	0.0	100%
TOTAL	96.0	4.0	100%

Table XII *Conflict between the sexes*

	Agreed %	Disagreed %	Undecided %	
Mother of girl	87.5	0.0	12.5	100%
Mother of boy	70.0	20.0	10.0	100%
Father of girl	50.0	50.0	0.0	100%
Father of boy	60.0	20.0	20.0	100%
TOTAL	72.0	16.0	12.0	100%

Table XIII *Gender equity*

	Nil %	Limited %	Sound %	Negative %	
Mother of girl	35.7	64.3	0.0	0.0	100%
Mother of boy	26.3	42.1	31.6	0.0	100%
Father of girl	20.0	60.0	0.0	20.0	100%
Father of boy	28.6	28.6	28.6	14.2	100%
TOTAL	28.9	48.9	17.8	4.4	100%

Table XIV *Gender equity programs*

	Disagreed %	Agreed %	Undecided %	
Mother of girl	100.0	0.0	0.0	100%
Mother of boy	90.0	0.0	10.0	100%
Father of girl	100.0	0.0	0.0	100%
Father of boy	100.0	0.0	0.0	100%
TOTAL	96.0	Nil	4.0	100%

APPENDIX V

Gender Equity Resources for Workshops

“Equal Play, Equal Work: An Early Childhood Gender Equity Resource Booklet” written by Glenda MacNaughton and published by Office of Preschool and Child Care, Victoria.

Section 5, entitled ‘Working with Parents’, outlines some general principles for informing parents about gender issues, ideas on how to demonstrate to parents how the preschool curriculum addresses gender equity issues, suggestions about raising parent awareness of gender equity issues, and how language and gender equity are entwined.

“Stages: Steps Toward Addressing Gender in Educational Settings” written by A. Allard, M. Cooper, G. Hildebrand, and E. Wealands.

Although this text is aimed at inservicing teachers in the area of gender equity, there is no reason why sections of this book would not be appropriate for working with parents. In particular, some of the tasks detailed in Chapter 2, ‘The Construction of Gender’, may be useful in introducing parents to the idea that sex/gender is a social construct and not an all encompassing label. Because the aggressiveness of some boys was an issue for many parents, some of the tasks in Chapter 5, ‘Power and the Construction of Gender’, would be suitable for introducing parents to the terms ‘aggression’, ‘assertion’, and ‘submission’.