

PERSPECTIVES ON GENDER  
IN EARLY CHILDHOOD



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Edited by Tamar Jacobson

Foreword by Bryan G. Nelson

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## FOREWORD

### Opening Our Minds and Hearts to New Perspectives on Gender

— Bryan G. Nelson —

*“Is it a girl or a boy?”*

This simple question at the announcement of a baby’s birth speaks volumes about the impact of gender in our daily lives. People want to know—they *must* know whether a new human is female or male. This need to know a newborn’s gender occurs even before the child’s birth: parents are asked whether they want a baby boy or girl; they need to choose clothing—pink or blue?

Identity is dramatically shaped by one’s perceived gender. In many cultures and time periods, what one can and cannot do is determined by characteristics called “feminine” and “masculine.” Frederick William, an eighteenth-century Prussian king and father of Frederick the Great, beat his son for wearing gloves in cold weather because it was “an effeminate behavior.” When helmets first showed up on football fields, Pudge Heffelfinger, Yale’s three-time All American from 1889 to 1891, said, “None of that sissy stuff for me.” Helmets are now standard protective gear for football. Further, not until 1875 were women in the United States legally defined as “persons.” Women did not receive the vote in the United States until 1920. In the book *Modern Woman: The Lost Sex* (1946), authors Marynia Famham and Ferdinand Lundberg argued that women who worked sacrificed their essential femininity. Before the

1900s, wristwatches were considered effeminate because men carried only pocket watches. When World War I fighter pilots adopted them for tactical reasons, they became acceptably masculine.

In our society, some styles, conditions, and behaviors for men and women haven't changed. The disparity between wages paid to women and those paid to men persists. In 2004, women's wages in the United States were 76.5 percent of men's wages. The care of young children and housecleaning continue to be done primarily by women. We also continue to see increasing numbers of men injured or dying as a result of their work in dangerous occupations and their participation in contact sports, such as boxing and football. Violence against men whose behavior is perceived as effeminate is also on the rise.

Norms for men's and women's appearance are narrowly defined by most cultures. In a recent court case in Texas, a four-year-old boy who wore his hair long was suspended from his school because his parents would not cut his hair—the length of his hair violated the dress code in his suburban Dallas school district. A girl would not be suspended for having short hair. Gender perceptions and expectations take root at an early age.

To appreciate the need for this book, one only has to visit an early education classroom and watch young children's play. You will see boys running around or predominantly playing in the block areas and girls with dolls in the dress-up or dramatic play areas. Is it considered acceptable for boys to dress-up as women? Sometimes, but not really. Do girls play with trucks or blocks? Not as often as the boys. Early education creates powerful environments that can positively or negatively influence a child's perception, understanding of, and attitude toward gender roles. We need this book to help develop a better understanding of young children and gender identity.

At the same time there are signs that gender expectations of men and women are changing in the United States today. For example, currently there are more women than men graduating from medical and law schools. We see more women joining the military and going into combat zones. There are more female professional athletes. For the first time in history, more women than men will soon be working outside the home and there are more single-parent fathers caring for their children than ever before. While this change (hopefully) will bring increased freedom to both men and women, it also may create an increased confusion regarding what one's roles should be.

Fortunately there is hope, knowledge, and information available in this book you've chosen to read. Tamar Jacobson, editor of *Perspectives on Gender in Early Childhood*, leads the way by sharing a powerful personal story about her emerging understanding of being a woman. The vulnerability modeled by Jacobson pushes us to consider our own path toward self-discovery. I think you'll find the journey rewarding in that it will bring you to new understanding of yourself, others around you, and the world that we live in. To authentically work with young children you must be open to all the possibilities that make up who you are. The new information you discover will be both exciting and challenging. Exciting because you may enjoy an activity that you previously thought of as unavailable due to perceived gender constraints. Challenging because you may need to let go of previously held expectations of children.

Finally, *Perspectives on Gender in Early Childhood* is needed to help expand our knowledge and understanding of gender and its impact on children. We all need guidance and support by reading about new theories, research, and practices that challenge our thinking while offering practical ideas for the classroom. This book will provide you more than self-reflection (which is certainly important); it will also provide practical approaches to making meaningful changes to your work.



# INTRODUCTION

## Understanding Our Gender Identity:

### CONNECTING THE PERSONAL WITH THE PROFESSIONAL

— Tamar Jacobson —

Acquiring gender identity is complex. Many different sources are involved in helping us understand what it means to be male or female—a man or a woman. Young children are strongly influenced by significant adults in their lives: mothers, fathers, siblings, grandparents, extended family members, caregivers, teachers, guardians, and neighbors. They are also shaped by forces in society, and affected by media and cultural mores.

Most of my recent writing explores how feelings and life experiences affect teacher interactions with children in classrooms (Jacobson 2003; 2008). For this book about gender perspectives in early childhood, quite naturally, I have been thinking about the topic of gender quite a bit of late. Specifically, I have been thinking about what it means to a woman or a man and how our gender identity affects our interactions with each other and the children in our care.

My gender identity is a subject that causes me not a small amount of discomfort, for it is directly related to my own feelings of self-worth, self-perception, notions about my sexuality, and, even, fears of intimacy. Indeed, it exposes me to my deepest shadows and vulnerabilities. It is at the very core of my being, the foundation of who I am, and how I interact with the world—personally and professionally. My gender identity

affects my entire worldview and is directly related to feelings of empowerment or powerlessness.

For example, most recently I have been participating in some important meetings at work. Early on in one of them, I realized that when surrounded by scholarly men who appear to be older than I am, I started to feel like an eight-year-old girl and became intimidated to the point of paralyzed silence. Indeed, I felt like an idiot and was terrified to voice any opinion. After the first meeting, I shared these realizations with female colleagues, who, although they expressed dissimilar feelings, were most understanding and accepting of mine. At following meetings in the days ahead, with awareness of my emotional issues attuned and available, I was able to overcome my discomfort and thus participate, making contributions that were professional and productive.

Where do I begin to think about how I developed my identity as a woman? I start with thinking about how significant adults in my life influenced my development in my earliest years and helped me shape my identity as a woman.

## UNDERSTANDING THE MALE INFLUENCES IN MY LIFE

My father was fifty-five when I was born. Growing up I experienced him as an old man, a grandfather-type figure. He was quiet and gentle and laughed nervously. He has been dead for over twenty-five years and yet on Father's Day I often think about him. My parents divorced when I was four and from then on until I left home at eighteen, I lived with my mother and stepfather, visiting my father on weekends and sometimes taking a short trip or vacation together. My stepfather communicated with me mainly through teasing and joking. His relationship with my mother was volatile and passionate. I did not think of him as a father figure, but rather was afraid to bother him with my presence. For example, he would constantly tease me about how much I ate or talked. I felt trivialized and small with him. Neither man was a role model or father figure for me.

And so, I chose my brother. Although he was only six years older than I was, my mother adored him, and I decided, very early on, that it was wise to adore whatever or whomever she adored. It just made life easier somehow, or so I thought. He became for me the epitome of

manhood. His beliefs became mine. Indeed, his entire way of thinking about life was imported into my brain, poured into my veins. He was my greatest influence. I spent all my life longing for him to notice and acknowledge me. My brother was as unaware as I was that I gave him that role. What a disaster for our relationship. There I was with all sorts of wild and needy expectations, and there he was with his life, plodding along unaware. Not a good recipe for the survival of a healthy sibling relationship!

Father's Day is always complicated for me. I feel as if it is split into three men from my childhood, each influencing me in different ways. In fact, I do not remember experiencing the warm, supportive love of a father, and if I yearn for it, as of course I do from time to time, I do not really know what I am actually yearning for. Most likely, it is a movie- or television-type father figure or a character from a novel that I long for. As a result, relationships with men have been complicated for me throughout my life. At first I saw men as either Prince Charming or the devil. I learned very early on to be coquettish and cute, flirtatious and playful, and to sacrifice my needs for a man to like me. In addition I transferred the adoration of my brother to all other men. They must all be superior to me in every way, especially in intelligence, but also by being more rational and more vulnerable. A trilogy of men appeared in my childhood psyche: one, old and gentle with large wrinkled hands, somewhat unapproachable, who seemed startled, even physically jumping back if I tried to hug or kiss him; another, teasing and distant; and the third, intelligent and rational. I was unable to feel belonging or emotionally safe with any of them. Today I am orphaned of two of them—my father and stepfather have died. Many of my relationships with men in my life were illusions concocted in my brain to help me survive.

During the women's liberation movement, a world of complexity and emotional choices opened up to me. I wandered through the feminist door in wonder and relief as I began to shed the requirements I had set for myself and relearn the world of human relationships. Men became whole and complex, human and approachable, as I struggled with being authentic without fear. There were, of course, years of confusion as I transitioned out of the old and into the new ways of perceiving my emotional psycho-socialization process. I explored my identity, sexuality, and spirituality—in short, the entire concept of my self. The search and struggle is not nearly over. There is still so much relearning to do because I came to this stage late in my life. It feels promising and

hopeful to me, though, because I know that I still have much more to discover and uncover about my self.

## TRANSFORMATION THROUGH READING

I became a feminist late in my life. Up until that time I had believed that a woman's place was to settle behind her man, taking care of children and hearth, and sacrificing career and education so that the man could better himself first. Indeed, I had practiced that fervently, doing everything in my power to get it right. For example, I remember when I was twenty-three, back in the early seventies, sitting in my brother's living room one evening after dinner. His friends, all seeming so much more scholarly and intelligent than I was, were discussing current issues of the time. When one of them spoke from a feminist perspective I became indignant and waxed prolific about the joys and delights, the duties and obligations of a dedicated wife being able, nay privileged even, to wash the floors, making them clean for her husband's well-being. I blush to remember it. I had always been an avid activist, believing in social justice and equal rights for all—*all* that is, except women, but way more personally—*except me*.

A few years later when I returned to Africa with my two-year-old son to visit my aging father, I spent the day with the mother of my best friend, Nan Partridge, a woman who had tremendously influenced the way I thought about social justice when I was an older teenager (Jacobson 2003). During our visit, Nan gave me a book to read called *Meet Me in the Middle* (Clinebell 1973). Back then I was struck by Clinebell's description of interdependence—a true *equality* of the sexes.

Certainly it means that both sexes will have to give up some things. Men will have to give up dependence on women as an automatic servant class and will have to move over to make room for women in public life. Women will have to give up their helplessness and dependence for identity on men. . . . it means hanging loose about sex roles—what Maslow describes as a “desexualizing of the statuses of strength and weakness, and of leadership so that either man or woman can be, without anxiety and degradation, either weak or strong, as the situation demands. Either must be capable of both leadership and surrender.” (Clinebell 1973, 31–32)

I felt the stirrings of feminism as I read the book at the time. It felt more than comfortable to read about women and men being interdependent. It was enlightening. I did not realize then that I would first have to emancipate my own mind toward the notion of me deserving equality in order to come even vaguely close to the idea of *interdependence*. The journey ahead would be long indeed.

It would be almost twenty years after reading Clinebell's book before I would embrace feminism and start the journey of self-emancipation and liberating my mind of our patriarchal system that had been hammered so deeply into my consciousness growing up. I discovered that the male-privileged and -dominant system was deeply ingrained in me, and, even now at the ripe old age of sixty I still have to work very hard at shedding those self-destructive beliefs. Lately, I notice all kinds of complicated and complex feelings. For example, how my self-worth was always tied up in looking pretty or being attractive or sexy—whatever all these things mean. In other words, a dominant male view was the one I sought out or felt was all-important and meaningful.

I tried to match my self-worth against all of those preconceived notions and found myself lacking. I was unable to take myself seriously. The belief that I must constantly sacrifice my *self* for one *him* or another, seemed honorable and was all-consuming. Later on, in my own book, *Confronting Our Discomfort: Clearing the Way for Anti-Bias in Early Childhood*, I wrote about bell hooks describing the “strongest patriarchal voice” in her life as that of her own mother (Jacobson 2003). “When I began to resist male domination, to rebel against patriarchal thinking (and to oppose the strongest patriarchal voice in my life—my mother's voice), I was still a teenager” (hooks 2000, x). I identified very much with hooks's description, as it was true for me, too, except that I started to rebel when I was in my thirties—two decades *after* being a teenager! I have often thought that my mother tried to protect me so that I could succeed in our society, by teaching me that men were more important, vulnerable, and needy, and should be taken care of more seriously than women. Indeed, to this day I am uncomfortable when my life partner makes dinner after he and I return home from work. I can still hear my mother's voice in my mind expressing concern that men are tired after a hard day at work. Somehow, I learned to expect that it is a woman's duty to continue working in the home even if she returns from a long, hard day outside of it.

Two other books helped transform me into a feminist. The first, *Mother Daughter Revolution: From Betrayal to Power* (Debold, Wilson,

and Malavé 1993), discusses in depth mothers who try to protect their teenage daughters by preparing them for a male-dominated society in a similar way as my mother did with me. I read the second book for a qualitative research course in graduate school. *Educated in Romance: Women, Achievement, and College Culture* (Holland and Eisenhart 1990) pretty much solidified my becoming a full-fledged feminist.

As I was reading *Educated in Romance* I realized the authors were describing my life, from the decisions I made to the way I viewed my place in the world. The authors describe how young women start out college with ambitions and dreams to become architects, political scientists, anthropologists, and so forth. Then, they quickly change course toward nurturing professions like teaching or nursing to make it easy to follow their romantic partners wherever they might go, sacrificing their own careers for those of the men they have fallen in love with. Some of the things the women say in their interviews might have come directly from my own lips. The book spoke to me deeply because at the time I was experiencing much guilt for having left country and husband, and dragged my teenage son with me across the world so that, finally, I could give myself the education I had always dreamed of. I remember gasping as I read, tears streaming down my cheeks, feeling validated and supported, with fear and guilt pushed aside for a few moments.

Of course, I understand that it was not the books per se that changed me. Rather, the words reached me at a point in my life's journey that was the culmination of events, my therapy, and psychological development. It became a revelation, a huge "aha" period in my life, and I have never been the same since. Indeed, books have often been the catalyst in changing my life in most significant ways.

## FEMINISM FOR ME

For me, being a feminist means being free from the patriarchal system, choosing *against* dominance, elitism, and exclusion, but opting *for* empathy and compassion for *all* human beings. It also means realizing that women are often their own worst enemies. Because socialization in childhood is so powerful, women have bought into the patriarchal system to survive and succeed. Rebelling against the system often calls for drastic external acting-out for men and women alike to counteract that societal teaching in our early years. After all, it is less than a

hundred years since women achieved the right to vote. There is still a lot of relearning for all of us to do.

Dominance and privilege cause everyone pain, including boys and men. What a burden it must be for men to feel like they must repress emotions or hide their vulnerabilities and human frailty. How challenging to feel that they must always be the breadwinners and carry the burden of their family alone. Interdependence makes so much more sense for both men and women. Interdependence encourages a relationship between the sexes where each depends on the other and each is open and helpful to the other, emotionally and physically—supporting, encouraging, and sometimes taking over when the other is feeling weak or unable. My mother used to say that men have to go to war, therefore women must be strong in the home. Today, women are also able to go to war, and men find themselves taking care of home and children.

We can never know what it is like to walk in the shoes of another person—or a whole people—but we can listen to all our stories in the hope of better understanding one another. And, thus, become interdependent as Clinebell (1973) suggested over thirty years ago. Or as bell hooks says in *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* (2000, x): “Imagine living in a world where there is no domination, where females and males are not alike or even always equal, but where a vision of mutuality is the ethos shaping our interaction. . . . Feminist revolution alone will not create such a world. . . . But it will make it possible for us to be fully self-actualized females and males able to create beloved community, to live together, realizing our dreams of freedom and justice, living the truth that we are all ‘created equal.’”

No matter how we think about the genders or the “isms,” if we are intentional in our self-exploration, we are bound to discover that our beliefs, prejudices, and attitudes affect how we interact with the boys and girls in our classrooms.

## GENDER IDENTITY AFFECTS OUR INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

I have been writing about how early childhood experiences, emotional memories, and biases affect my interactions with people I teach, whether they are young children or college students (Jacobson 2003, 2008). In my books I talk about the connections I make between personal and professional behaviors. One of the examples I describe relates to my

early childhood experiences and memories of ballet dancing. When I was eighteen months old, growing up in Africa, my mother and grandmother took me to learn ballet dancing (Jacobson 2008). From then on until I was ten years old, I attended classes and even appeared in public performances in our town. My mother would tell me about how I would become famous and how she would sit in the special audience box and watch me dance. Thus, it became a childhood dream to one day perform on world stages.

When I was ten, ballet dancing was suddenly taken away from me. I remember being told that I was becoming anemic and did not have time to play with friends like other children did. Forty years later memories of my childhood dancing years revisited me during one of my classes when an undergraduate student described how, after having an accident, she gave up a career in dance to become a teacher. I wrote about it in my journal:

As I write this I have just realized why I was so emphatic with one of my students recently. She had described in class that until she had been involved in a car accident she had studied ballet and jazz dance. Now she was going into the teaching profession. I asked her if she was well enough to dance and she nodded her head vigorously, but said that she did not have the confidence any longer. I became quite excited and exclaimed vehemently that she must return to dancing and follow her heart. I went as far as to say that I hoped I could talk her out of teaching during the semester and get her back into dancing. I wonder . . . was I really talking about myself? (Jacobson 2008, 116–17)

Writing in my journal after the class I realized how passionate I had become as I advised my student to return to dancing instead of becoming a teacher. Reading back what I had written, I realized a connection between my own childhood relationship with ballet and what I was telling my student. As one of my dissertation advisors used to say to me, “*Take my advice, I don’t use it!*” My words of advice came from my own life experience and probably did not have much to do with my student’s life choices or what was good for her at the time. Sometimes we are as unaware as I was before I wrote in my journal about the dancing student in my class. It is crucial for us to uncover these feelings and biases so that we can become more intentional in our behaviors and more authentic in our guidance with young children.

I have no doubt that the ways in which teachers interact with girls and boys are connected to their own experiences of gender identity. For example, when I was starting out as a first-year teacher over thirty years ago, long before I began a psychological exploration of my self, I found that I was unsympathetic to little girls in my preschool class. In fact, I found that they got on my nerves! They always seemed preoccupied with silliness and prettiness, and I was often impatient with their stories and needs. On the other hand, I found myself more inclined to like the boys in my class. They seemed more interesting, and I certainly took them more seriously.

I started psychotherapy when I was a young adult, and as I began exploring early emotional memories and experiences and unpacking the mystery of my childhood, I realized how complex the influences of the significant women in my life (mother, sisters, stepmother, and grandmother) were on my development. Indeed, I began to make connections between how I perceived my own femininity and the girls in my classroom. As I look back, I now understand that at some level I have always been unsure of what it means to be a woman. I have been affected by my earliest relationships with the significant adults—both men and women—in my life, and, thus, my interactions with young children are often based on those influences.

Gender identity is also tied up with a person's sexuality and comfort with intimacy in general. However, this is not the place or time for me to examine or share what effect my gender identity has had in my personal life and intimate relationships. But it is certainly appropriate to discuss how my professional behaviors are influenced. I must admit it is quite a challenge to unlearn some of the gender biases I acquired as a young child. For example, while I definitely welcome, accept, and rejoice in the fact that women can join any profession they choose, I often find myself in awe of women who become architects, astrologers, mathematicians, doctors, lawyers, politicians, engineers, pilots, bus drivers, and construction workers, as well as those who serve in the military.

If I had completely embraced gender equality in my heart and soul, I would not be in awe of those women. Rather, their occupations would seem natural to me. I would take them for granted, just as I do when men enter those professions. By the same token, I find myself appreciating men who become nurses or child care teachers, whereas it is unremarkable for me when women enter those professions. Therefore, I wonder whether I convey that ambiguity to young children in subtle, unconscious ways. For example, am I really comfortable with

girls playing in the hollow block corner, wearing hard hats and shouting out raucously? Or do I feel the need to shush them or even to redirect their play to something quieter, more demure, and, dare I say it, more feminine? Do I feel comfortable when little boys cry or need support, or do I subtly encourage them to hold back their emotional expression?

I am always proud of myself when I take out my toolbox and fix a faucet or do something as simple as hammer a nail into the wall! I never take it for granted. How can I? I bought my first toolbox when I was forty-five years old. I had just gotten divorced and had moved into an apartment on my own. During that year, I built myself a desk and learned to fix all manner of things in my home. I realized just how much helplessness I had learned as a girl. I felt empowered and more confident each time I was able to take responsibility for the tasks I used to think belonged only to men. I wonder, when I was a young teacher of preschool girls back in the seventies and early eighties, if I encouraged them to fix things or become curious about math and science. I doubt it, because at that time I did not feel capable of such manly tasks myself. I am sure that in subtle and even intentional ways, I directed girls to domestic and nurturing types of play. I shudder to think of it now!

Now, I find that I become agitated when I hear adults commenting about little girls' appearance with statements like "How pretty you look," or "What a pretty dress . . . ribbon . . . shoes . . ." I would prefer to encourage and support girls about how intelligent, curious, or strong they are, or about their ability to solve problems. This has become a new bias. Yet I am sure that girls also like to know how they look to others, since society still puts a strong emphasis on appearances, clothes, and body shapes.

I still have much work to do to find a balance between my biases, learned and unlearned, old and new. But one thing is for sure: education and self-reflection have given me numerous, different options about how I think about and understand gender identity. In my book *"Don't Get So Upset!" Help Young Children Manage Their Feelings by Understanding Your Own* (2008), I describe specific actions to take when we decide to research our own self, especially when making connections between our earliest emotional memories and our interactions with the young children we care for and educate. Here are some questions to help you learn about how you acquired your gender identity:

- How did I learn about becoming a woman or a man?
- What are my earliest memories?
- What was fun or painful for me as I learned about these aspects of my identity?
- How do I agree or disagree with my parents' ideas about gender?
- If I disagree, how did I develop my own ideas?
- What and who were significant influences on me?
- As a parent, what would I want to teach my children about gender identity?
- What stereotypes would I want to avoid?
- Which aspects of stereotypes would I want to embrace?

When teachers enter the classroom, we bring our self with us. We do not get to leave our self outside the door. Our personal feelings, early childhood memories, prejudices, values, beliefs, and attitudes accompany us as we struggle to guide young children to become future citizens of a world that is developing more rapidly than we can imagine. All around the country, I have heard from teachers about how they try to leave their personal self outside the door of their classrooms. In other words, they believe that to be professional, they must separate out or compartmentalize their personal lives.

Can we be authentic and intentional in our relationships and behaviors if we leave such an important part of our self at the door in order to separate the personal from the professional? Instead, I think we need to embrace our personal life, our inner self. We must constantly work to make valuable connections between our earliest memories, experiences, biases, and values learned, and how we interact with children. Then we might be able to offer children numerous, different options about how they think about and understand gender identity and the choice to change their worldview.

## GENDER PERSPECTIVES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

The authors included in this volume have come from different parts of the United States (Arizona, Texas, and Hawaii) and the world (Finland). All talk about gender from different perspectives. All have done some type of research to explore and understand more clearly how children learn about their gender identity from the teachers who teach them. There is no one prescription for how the authors do this. Rather,

an assortment of ideas, reflections, and suggestions have come out of caring for and educating young children in an ever-changing and evolving world.

We start out with an in-depth examination of the history of gender education in our field. The chapters that follow discuss ways teachers talk or behave with children that either reinforce gender stereotypes or try to change traditional modes of communication about gender; explore how girls and their teachers relate to learning mathematics; examine the portrayal of gender through children's books and how picture books and literacy activities influence the development of gender identity; and talk about gender roles and healthy sexual development. In addition, the authors give concrete suggestions to help us become more aware of how and why we shape children's understanding of their gender identity.

From Plato to Vivian Gussin Paley, Blythe Hinitz and Dorothy Hewes describe the history of gender in early childhood beginning with Spartan and Roman education and continuing to the current debate about the different physical needs of boys and girls ("Practical Applications from the History of Gender and Early Childhood Education"). This chapter provides a foundation for the complexity of gender perspectives in early childhood. Hinitz and Hewes show us that through the ages societal influences were powerful in shaping our expectations about gender roles and gender identity. As I read the in-depth account of gender history in this chapter, I am in awe of our profession and the important task we have in caring for and educating young children. I am even more convinced that teachers' self-reflection about their relationships and interactions with children together with acquiring knowledge about girls' and boys' developmental needs are key to unlearning biases or stereotypes from a very early age.

Eila Estola discusses gender with early childhood teachers from two different child care centers ("Discussing Gender"). Estola hails from Finland, and in the introduction to her chapter, she describes the early childhood policies of her country. It is thought provoking to compare the differences between early childhood education systems and policies in the United States with those of another country and especially interesting to note the similarities between us when it comes to gender stereotyping. Estola explores different aspects of gender bias through descriptions of discussions with teachers of young children. She asks readers to reflect on many different questions that arise. For example, how do we support the individual development of both masculine and feminine qualities in children when most of the care and education of

young children is predominantly the responsibility of women? Estola identifies gender-based rules among the children and teachers, and discusses teachers as role models who should, therefore, examine their own behaviors.

While Estola's chapter is based on observing the discussions with teachers from different child care centers, Jeanne Marie Iorio and Hema Visweswaraiiah contribute a chapter that analyzes how conversations between children and teachers construct understanding about gender ("Do Daddies Wear Lipstick? and Other Child-Teacher Conversations Exploring Constructions of Gender"). The authors suggest that disrupting the social construct of gender is crucial for helping children develop different ways of looking at traditional gender roles. To help us understand what they mean, Iorio and Visweswaraiiah describe detailed conversations where the teacher deliberately provokes discussion that might change children's ideas by offering other realities that children have not yet seen. The authors identify a number of items for teachers' self-reflection, including documenting and examining one's own practice and encouraging conversations about gender-related topics to occur in a trusting environment.

"Most of us, gender-bending and gender-conforming alike, experience the confines of gender identity as both positive and negative," concludes Gail Masuchika Boldt ("One Hundred Hotdogs or Performing Gender in the Elementary Classroom"). She arrives at this supposition after asking numerous questions upon observing what children were saying and doing about gender in her classroom. The larger question Boldt's conclusion asks is "Why . . . in spite of my critical attention to stereotypes in literature and daily life, did the children continue to express preferences, attitudes, and behaviors that seemed so clearly delineated by gender?" (p. 90). This chapter first offers a narrative about a kindergarten class at group time where the author shows us that gender is ever-present in the classroom. Dr. Boldt discusses the notion that children and adults perform gender norms in behavior, desires, and gestures and that the reasons we are compelled to perform gender norms constantly are complex and enforced from birth. An interesting discussion follows showing how our gender performance is constantly nurtured through rewards and punishments. It is up to the teacher to create a safe environment for children to converse and explore their gender identity through authentic interactions with teachers who admit to their own struggles with performing gender—through experiences both positive and negative.

Josh Thompson and Stephen Garretson observe that our directors and principals, mentors, and coteachers—mostly women—helped us find our places in the profession (“Encouraging Men in Their Conversations with Children”). “Our parents, particularly our moms, and our wives supported the development of our voices and our lives among children. Our fathers contributed to our construction of our gendered identity—what it means to be male, even in a world of female early childhood educators” (p. 102). Thompson and Garretson invite us to encourage men in their conversations with children. They discuss the different ways men converse with young children, share their experiences as male teachers in our predominantly female profession, and talk about how they acquired their gender identity. As I read this chapter, I am reminded of my own many biases about male teachers in early childhood classrooms, including how I used to have to confront my discomfort when I witnessed rough-and-tumble play. I am most grateful for Thompson’s and Garretson’s suggestion that their female counterparts might have to think outside the box and find out more about the language of men in the lives of children.

Two of the chapters in this book take a look at how children’s books and literary experiences determine gender roles or help boys and girls specifically learn literacy and socio-emotional skills. Clarissa M. Uttley and Cynthia A. Roberts detail how gender identity is portrayed in children’s books by analyzing the roles of the heroes in the stories as well as the types of roles taken by the characters (“Gender Portrayal in Early Childhood Children’s Books”). For example, they show how the male characters in children’s books are more adventurous and independent than the female characters, who are nurturing and dependent. This is particularly interesting to me because a few years ago I wrote about the same type of stereotypical gender roles in Shel Silverstein’s *The Giving Tree* in my own book *Confronting Our Discomfort: Clearing the Way for Anti-Bias in Early Childhood* (2003). Because books can affect gender role socialization, Uttley and Roberts suggest a list of books that can support children in developing healthy gender identities.

In contrast, Debby Zambo uses picture books as a way of helping boys and girls develop not only literacy intelligence but socio-emotional skills as well (“Using Picture Books and Literary Experiences to Help Boys and Girls Develop Literacy and Socio-Emotional Skills”). Using the illustrations to describe different feelings, Zambo gives the reader strategies to help young children self-regulate their emotions, while at the same time nurturing their love of reading. The ideas and strategies

that Zambo offers are based on knowledge about how children develop emotional intelligence and how emotional memory and brain development affect children's identity. In addition, the author shares a wealth of information about how girls and boys process and express emotions differently.

The next two chapters explore why boys seem to do better in math and science than girls. Sylvia Bulgar opens her chapter ("The Role of Early Childhood in Gender Differences in Mathematics") with a historical perspective on gender inequity in mathematics, including roles and position statements from national organizations like the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), and the effects of No Child Left Behind legislation and testing procedures. This information serves as a strong basis for her report of the research she conducted in primary grade classrooms in New Jersey. Her conclusions are powerful and important, and they reinforce for all of us the need for concrete "experiences that will help all children develop abstract notions of the mathematics in which they are engaged" (p. 173). In other words, it is in early childhood classrooms that we can build a strong foundation for girls, as well as for boys, to succeed in mathematics when they enter higher grades, where the gap between girls and boys widens.

Debra Dyer, on the other hand, gives us a specific tool to help us teach concrete mathematical concepts to young children in early childhood classrooms—block building ("Block Building in the Primary Classroom as a Gender Equalizer in Math and Science"). Dyer offers practical strategies and ideas about how to use the blocks, including suggestions for making the block center "female friendly." She writes, "Using block building as both a preinstructional strategy and as a way to consolidate new knowledge can be highly motivating and interesting to all students" (p. 184). Both Dyer and Bulgar talk about the importance of creating equal opportunities in math and science for boys and girls.

"Sexuality is, at its essence, about relationships. Children who have a healthy sense of themselves . . . have a good start at developing relationships with others," (p. 202) write Donna Couchenour and Kent Chrisman ("Healthy Sexuality Development and Gender Roles in Early Childhood"). They believe that gender identity and healthy sexuality development are inextricably linked. They go on to explain that while the prominent observable differences between the sexes at infancy are biological, environmental and socially constructed influences begin once the baby has been identified as a boy or a girl. In a

discussion about how children construct meaning about gender identity, the authors suggest that teachers can inspire gender-balanced experiences with the types of projects they assign as well as by avoiding sexist comments and providing critical responses to the influences of media and commercialism.

Janis Strasser and Lisa Mufson Koeppel share detailed and specific ways that teachers can organize their activity centers to promote gender equity (“Creating Preschool Classroom Environments That Promote Gender Equity”). After discussing the different ways boys and girls play in the preschool years, the authors describe what to do and what to place in each center, whether it is in the art area or dramatic or outdoor play. They include types of pictures to hang on the walls and resources, such as books or prop boxes, needed for each center. In each section Strasser and Koeppel suggest specific questions for teachers to ask themselves as they organize their preschool environment. Some of the questions deal with ways in which we talk to children; for example, “Are high-level answers to questions probed for in girls as well as boys? (that is, Why do you think that happened? How else could we solve that problem?)”, or “Are children commended on their courage and bravery not just for their physical achievements but for their emotional accomplishments as well?” (p. 214). One of the questions Strasser and Koeppel suggest teachers ask themselves—“Are girls given as much wait time as boys?”—relates directly to the next chapter.

In intriguing descriptions of anecdotes and analysis, Sonja de Groot Kim shares observations made over an extended period of time in a suburban child development center (“Lessons Learned Early: Girls Wait”). Describing in detail toddlers and their teachers, de Groot Kim shows how over and over girls are subtly taught to wait for the boys. Her observations and analysis emerge as she focuses specifically on the teachers’ interactions with the children because, as she says, “their interactions seemed to set the tone for what transpired in the classroom” (p. 239). We are asked to look at the evidence the author provides through her thorough descriptions of what happened, her own comments, and questions that she asked herself throughout her research. De Groot Kim asks us to determine from the evidence she shares whether the teachers might be sending messages to the children that could be construed as gendered messages. This chapter is powerful because it shows that even when teachers are competent, caring, and conscientious, they still might unconsciously expose very young, impressionable children to gender-related messages. Dr. de Groot Kim’s hope is that we will

become more aware of our own differentiated responses to the young children in our care.

In the final chapter, Shaun Johnson wonders, “how can the counsel of educators be taken seriously that children can grow up to be whomever they want to be if the educators’ own profession is marred by an ongoing adherence to traditional and conservative gender values?” (p. 249) (“Men in Education: Reframing the Gender Issue”). Johnson asks a number of provocative questions throughout his chapter as he explores the broader issue of gender disparity in teaching, including discussions about status and prestige, salary and benefits, and physical contact with children. Johnson calls on us to rethink the gender issue in education, saying, “It is now for us to decide: Is there something inherent about teaching that makes it more attractive to women or are we as its professionals defining teaching so narrowly that only a slim sliver of the male population joins it?” (p. 252). As I read this chapter, I find myself questioning much of what I thought I knew about gender stereotypes, feminist theory, and, especially, reasons for the scarcity of men in early childhood settings. In fact, I find myself thinking about ways I might change my teacher education courses and “refocus on the cultural conditions that leave [men] out of the classroom in the first place,” as he suggests, instead of focusing “simply on so-called boy- or girl-friendly teaching strategies” (p. 263).

## CONCLUSION

Gender identity is at the core of our being, the source of expectations for ourselves and those that society has of us. Societal forces and cultural norms, as well as the way our family members guided and taught us our beliefs, values, biases, and attitudes, have all gone toward shaping our gender identity. We learned to fit in and acknowledge the expectations of our gender roles in order to survive and succeed in society. Some of our most beloved role models taught us these expectations.

Each time I read the chapters in this book, I reconfirm the importance of the work that teachers and caregivers of young children do for such long hours every day of the week, year in and year out. The pay more often than not does not support a family, and many of you are doing all you can to keep body and soul together as you devote your energy, knowledge, and emotions to the young children in your care. And now, here we come, my colleagues and I, to tell you that some of

what we all have learned since our own early childhood is no longer useful—indeed, is even harmful! We ask you to rethink, relearn, reflect, and change the way you feel and believe for the good of us all. The very fact that you are reading this book makes me hopeful that you will try to make these changes for the good of those young children you care for and educate so diligently. I am most grateful for your tireless efforts and dedication. Thank you!

Being a teacher is an awesome profession and an awesome responsibility because we are the people who can give our students different options about how they think about and understand gender identity, and we can influence the all-important choice to change their worldview. In the words of William Ayers (1998, xvii):

The fundamental message of the teacher is this: You can change your life. Whoever you are, wherever you've been, whatever you've done, the teacher invites you to a second chance, another round, perhaps a different conclusion. . . . To teach consciously for social justice, to teach for social change, adds a complicating element to that fundamental message, making it more layered, more dense, more excruciatingly difficult to enact, and at the same time sturdier, more engaging, more powerful and joyful much of the time. . . . And so the fundamental message of the teacher for social justice is: You can change the world.

I am grateful for my colleagues' contributions to our different perspectives on gender and early childhood. It is my hope that this collection of chapters will shed some light and insight, as well as stimulate discussion and reflection about how young children learn about their gender identity. No matter what the subject—mathematics instruction, literacy, dramatic play, or social studies—teachers' interactions set the tone for what happens in classrooms, and they decide which messages are transmitted to children unconsciously or intentionally. We have the power to reinforce gender stereotypes or we can choose to abandon those stereotypes and develop more humane, just, and fulfilling ways of relating to one another. Whether our scholarship is qualitative and descriptive or quantitative and accounted, the way in which we reflect and synthesize our findings will be determined by our biases, early emotional memories, or life experiences, as well as by knowledge gained. Self-reflection, therefore, is key to unlearning systems and traditions that are no longer useful for us and that cause discrimination, social inequality, and injustice.

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# ONE

## Practical Applications from the History of Gender and Early Childhood Education

— Blythe F. Hinitz and Dorothy W. Hewes —

The history of gender studies in early childhood education foreshadows many of the chapters in this book. From ancient days to the present time there has been gender-differentiated dress, child rearing, play, and education.

Gender differences in Spartan, Athenian, and Roman education have been discussed in the literature. Plato, for example, recommended spontaneous play, under careful supervision, with boys and girls together up to the age of six years. Separate education was to begin at that time. The artwork of the Middle Ages depicted children as “small figures in adult dress,” leading to the controversial writing of Ariès, disputed by Shahar and deMause (see Lascarides and Hinitz 2000). Jewish children of the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period attended gender-segregated schools. Boys were educated to become part of the prayer community, while girls’ learning and skill development prepared them to assume traditional women’s roles. Later, during the 1600s and 1700s, boys and girls in Europe and the New World were dressed in identical white gowns, which were long in their earliest years and shorter as they reached the age when they were learning to walk. In the eighteenth century, or later in some places, boys were not given “breeches” (trousers) to wear until they were five to seven years old. In paintings of the period,

boys sometimes had dogs and girls had dolls. In his letters, Locke was quite specific about the differentiated discipline and education of boys and girls.

During the Victorian Age in the United States, doctors who emphasized that both boys and girls needed vigorous exercise that led to deep breathing recommended clothing reform. The Rational Dress Society was established in 1881. They recommended shorter dresses that would not hinder infant development (Smith-Rosenberg 1986). An article in the *Cincinnati Enquirer* of November 27, 1880, describes the Music Hall performance of a group of children from the Kindergarten Association. They marched, sang songs, played traditional kindergarten activity games, and used rhythm instruments to accompany an adult orchestra. The article states that as they marched in “the sight was both a novel and a pretty one. The little girls, whose ages ranged from three to six years, were attired, some in pure white, others in indigo blue, and others in plaid. Another sweet little costume was set forth by the addition of a tiny lace collar. The boys one and all, excepting the little toddlers who hadn’t graduated from frocks into pants, all wore large white collars in true naval style.”

## GENDER DIVISIONS IN SCHOOLS

Descriptions of the colonial period in the United States note that both boys and girls attended “Dame schools” and church-sponsored elementary schools. Although primary schools were open to children of both genders in all of the colonies, the curriculum taught to boys and girls differed, because their education was considered preparation for their adult roles and duties. The literature about Froebel’s schools differs in its descriptions of whether boys and girls attended his elementary-level school together. However, there is no dispute that, from its inception, the kindergarten enrolled students of both genders. Nor is there differentiated discussion of the children’s play with the Gifts, or their engagement with the Occupations.

The movement toward group programs for younger children included the nursery school begun by the McMillan sisters in England and the Casa dei Bambini founded by Montessori in Italy. In both instances, the children had undifferentiated involvement with the materials and participation in the activities. When these three programs (kindergarten, nursery school, and the Montessori Method) were brought to

the United States, boys and girls continued to participate equally in all aspects of the curriculum (Hewes 1998). Histories of the development of kindergartens, nursery schools, and child care centers in the United States from the 1800s into the 1960s focus primarily on philosophy, curriculum, facilities, and materials—or teacher education—with little attention paid to gender issues.

The decade of the 1960s saw criticism of the equality and relevance of school experiences. “In defining sources and manifestations of inequality, we have come to recognize sex as one basis for ‘sorting’ children and for providing differential opportunities. As we become aware of changes in the roles of women and men, we see that such sorting on the basis of sex limits the optimal growth of *all* children. . . . As the roles and lives of women have changed, so have those of men. With women’s increased entry into the labor force, many men have assumed new responsibilities in maintaining home and family” (McCune and Matthews 1976, 179–80).

## DEALING WITH SEX ROLE STEREOTYPES

Research completed by Maccoby and Jacklin in 1974 concluded that a number of traditional beliefs about nonreproductive sex differences were myths. Among these were the views that girls are more “social” and “suggestible” and have lower self-esteem than boys; additionally, that girls lack motivation to achieve, differ from boys in learning processes, and are less analytical than boys. However, Maccoby and Jacklin (as cited in McCune and Matthews 1976, 180) did find evidence that

- males are more aggressive than females
- girls have greater verbal ability than boys
- boys excel in visual–spatial and mathematical ability

The February 1976 issue of *Childhood Education*, titled *Overcoming Sex-Role Stereotypes*, endeavored to assist schools in changing the organization of their physical environment and curriculum and their administrative and personnel practices. It looked at how schools transmit sex roles, presented space ideas for what teachers can do, and suggested resources to support nonstereotypical education (Cohen 1976).

In October 1976, a group of leaders came together at the Conference on Non-Sexist Early Childhood Education. For the first time, work

that had been going on all over the country was shared on a national scale. Barbara Bowman, Monroe Cohen, Lilian Katz, Selma Greenberg, Letty Cottin Pogrebin, and many others shared their research that supported ideas about sex differences in the use of space; the political, cultural, and psychological aspects of the topic; play; and parenting. The edited volume of the conference proceedings provided a blueprint for the action that followed (Sprung 1978).

During the 1970s, early childhood educators began to look at sex-role stereotyping, and a few research projects were initiated. Among the first was a study done by the Women's Action Alliance, begun in 1973, as a result of women's concern that their children were being forced into rigidly stereotyped roles, even in preschool. The goals of the Non-Sexist Child Development Project were

- to present men and women in a nurturing role so that children understand parenting as a shared responsibility.
- to show women and men performing a wide variety of jobs so that children understand that people are free to choose their work from an enormous variety of options unhampered by sex typing.
- to encourage girls as well as boys to engage in active play and to encourage boys as well as girls to enjoy quiet play.
- to help boys and girls respect each other so that they can be friends throughout childhood and into adulthood. (The authors continue, "We do not mean that children of opposite sexes will always play together. Girls will want to be with girls and boys with boys much of the time. However, we feel that our social mores encourage this separation of the sexes rather than minimize it. We also feel that the way girls are presented in children's materials as passive, fearful creatures who strive constantly for adults' approval helps to create the derisive attitudes boys have towards girls.")
- to encourage the full physical development of all children.
- to encourage boys and girls to develop and be able to express a full range of emotions. It is mostly boys who are shortchanged in this area.

(Sprung 1975, 1-2)

The child development literature is replete with statements such as the following: "By the age of two, girls are becoming slightly smaller

and lighter than boys, a difference that continues until puberty. Tests of motor and perceptual development show no significant differences between boys and girls until after they reach the elementary school age of six” (Santrock 1988, 260). However, historically and currently, these statements tend to be ignored by those with gender-specific political or educational agendas. Recent brain research has been cited by several practitioners to bolster their interpretations of “the mismatch between boys and conventional education” (Gurian and Stevens 2006, 87). Many genetic and socialized differences between the male and female brain have been identified in the literature, including the following:

- verbal/spatial differences (boys generally have more cortical areas dedicated to spatial-mechanical functioning)
- different chromosome markers
- different types of ganglion cells space (causing boys to rely more on pictures and moving objects when they write)
- differences in development of the prefrontal cortex and the frontal lobe (causing girls to be less impulsive than boys)
- boys’ brains go into neural rest states many more times each day than girls’ brains do (boys’ brains go into a less active mode that “negates learning and performance”)
- boys’ brains tend to lateralize and compartmentalize brain activity, causing less cross-talk between hemispheres (causing many boys to have a single-task focus, to concentrate best when they follow a step-by-step sequence, and to take more time than girls to transition between tasks)
- the male physiological system has less oxytocin (causing boys to tend toward greater impulsivity, more competitiveness and aggression, and to have “less desire than girls to comply to please others, including teachers”) (see King and Gurian 2006, 59; Gurian 2006; Gurian and Stevens 2004; Gurian and Henley 2001; Gurian and Stevens, 2005)

The debate and discussion is not limited to the professional literature, having found its way into popular print and online media. For example, the Sesame Workshop Web site includes a discussion of gender stereotyping, divided by chronological age group. In the discussion of the development of two- to five-year-olds, Flatter states that children have absorbed gender stereotyping by the time they are two years old because the clothing and toys a baby is given are chosen by

adults “with an eye toward gender.” Among the cultural factors Flatter (n.d., 1) describes in this article is the tendency of boys to choose a toy gun over other playthings by the time they are two or three years old. Tyson (n.d., 1–2) describes the ages six to eleven years as a time when gender identity is consolidated. She maintains that children, consciously or unconsciously, may “pattern themselves more closely after one sex or the other.” Tyson concludes that “when people allow their thinking about gender definitions to expand, women and men can then choose the best qualities of both sexes.”

## GENDER-APPROPRIATE PLAY OPPORTUNITIES

Play is an area where the differentiation between boys and girls can be blatantly apparent. A number of authors, including Baker and Ehrhart (1973) and Erikson (1950) have described dissimilarities between males and females. It has been said that males engage in rougher types of play and are more intrusive, and females are more passive and engage in calmer, more passive play.

In *You Can't Say You Can't Play*, Vivian Gussin Paley (1992) recounts her discussion with kindergarten through grade five students after she initiated the above rule in her kindergarten classroom. Some children felt that everyone should be able to play together, while some thought it was fair that boys or girls could play in single-sex groups. However, as Penny Holland (2003) discovered, the zero-tolerance policy about war, weapon, and superhero play can cause difficulties in the early childhood classroom, particularly for boys (see also Carlsson-Paige and Levin 1990).

During the late 1970s and the 1980s adult male violence figured into the nature-versus-nurture debate. It caused child care and kindergarten teachers to ban superhero and conflict play from their classrooms because of the unsubstantiated belief about a connection between these types of play and aggressive behavior. Holland's (2003) review of the literature found little research to corroborate a causal link between toy gun play, for example, and aggression. In fact, her own research into the relaxation of the zero-tolerance policy found that children are empowered both to deepen their own thoughtful play and encouraged to say “no” when they do not like what is happening. The exposure of teachers' distorted perceptions of the number of play incidents, and the identity of those involved in war, weapon, and superhero play in their own classrooms, led to extensive

reflection and discussion among the practitioners involved. In the majority of the child care centers studied, when the zero-tolerance policy was relaxed, there was more free play among boys, leading to enhanced social skills, inclusion, more imaginative play, and friendships.

Some of the author Hinitz's graduate students have made the following points in debating the issue of young children's superhero play:

### **Pro**

- Children may use superhero play to express themselves.
- Children can develop language skills by creating sequential stories.
- Children can develop cognitive skills through cooperation.
- Children can develop gross motor skills when they run, jump, tumble, and climb to act out a story.
- Children can develop affective skills when they gain power over their fears.

### **Con**

- Superhero play excludes children.
- Danger and safety issues exist, possibly due to lack of adult supervision.
- Teacher intervention is often necessary.
- It may lead to children becoming scared, out of control, or even hurt.
- Children may engage in the same violent play day after day without bringing in new or creative ideas of their own.
- Children's self-esteem and trust are affected.

## **EFFECTS OF SCHOOL POLICIES AND PROGRAMS ON CHILDREN**

Holland (2003, 99) reminds us that “zero-tolerance relies on the use of adult power in the real world to enforce a moral and behavioral imperative against powerless children operating in a fantasy world.” She echoes Montessori who, in a 1932 address to a convention at the International Office of Education in Geneva, Switzerland (later published as *Education and Peace*), said that “in the child, we can find the natural human characteristics before they are spoiled by the harmful influences of society” (Wolf 1989).

Montessori maintained that adults attempt to mold children to societal patterns by forcing them to develop different characteristics and behaviors, which causes conflicts between parents or teachers and children. In this struggle (for example, the execution of a zero-tolerance policy), the adult usually triumphs over the child, “and when that child becomes an adult, he bears, graven forever, the marks of that infamous peace that follows war, which is, in reality, a painful adaptation” (Wolf 1989).

Montessori believed that if education recognizes the intrinsic value of the child’s personality and provides an environment suited to spiritual growth, a new child emerges “whose astonishing characteristics can eventually contribute to the betterment of the world” (Wolf 1989). She asserted that an education that is merely a blind struggle between the strong and the weak produces inefficient adults, and therefore, school conditions that foster strife and conquest between persons of unequal status should be replaced with more nourishing and supportive ones. She further stated that “the child who has never learned to act alone, to direct his own actions, to govern her own will, grows into an adult who is easily lead and must always lean upon others” (Wolf 1989). Montessori, in this address delivered between two world wars, elaborated on her philosophy, contending that “the cause of war does not lie in armaments, but in the adults who make use of them. . . . Docile citizens engage in warfare, not because of hatred, but because they have been ordered to do so” (Wolf 1989). Approximately seventy-five years later, Gartrell concurred, stating, “Some children, especially high-energy boys, face increasingly inappropriate programs, which offer lots of seat-work and little movement. It is as if some teachers are rehearsing their young students for the sit-down academic world to come. Children who are *kinetic* or total-body learners suffer. They need active classrooms that affirm and accept them” (Gartrell 2006b, 1; see also King and Gartrell 2003, 106–24). Gartrell believes that “programs are developmentally appropriate only if they support *all* [emphasis added] children, not some or even most” (2006b, 2). He echoes Kessler and Swadener (1992, xxi) who state that the debate

between those advocating what the NAEYC calls “appropriate” versus “inappropriate” practices . . . can be viewed as a debate between two or more different interest groups lobbying for a particular set of values, taking different political positions, and representing different philosophical schools of thought. What appears to be a debate between those who are well informed by current