

## **LAB EXERCISE #8 GENDER ROLES**

In this activity, we will examine how young children deal with issues of gender. It is during these early years of life that children begin to understand what it means to be a boy or a girl and that their gender is unchanging. They begin to acquire the gender roles of their culture and to create their own sense of what it means to be male or female.

The issue of gender is also a good one for looking at the differences that occur in children developmentally. There are some very big differences in how 24-month-old children view gender and gender roles and how 3 and 4 year old view the issues. There are also differences in how older children view gender. There are additional differences in how boys and girls approach these issues of gender.

The issue of gender is a complex one. Even the terminology can be confusing. Sex refers to the biological aspects of being male and female, including physiology and genes. Gender refers to the sociocultural aspects of being male and female. One component of gender is gender identity which is the psychological and emotional sense of being male or female. This usually corresponds to biological sex. Gender roles are the cultural rules and expectations attached to being male or female. These vary greatly with ethnicity, history and socioeconomic status.

Gender identity develops over the first years of life. It takes several years, often until age four or five, before children understand what it means to be a boy or a girl and that their sex is unchanging. Children are also prone to stereotyping when it comes to gender issues.

There are several theories about how children's gender identities develop. One current theory is social learning which says that children learn their gender identity by watching and imitating those around them. Models include parents, peers and media.

Other theories including cognitive developmental and gender schema theory discuss the importance of cognitive development in the development of gender identity. These theories relate back to Piaget's theory of cognitive development. Language is an important element of these theories as are sociocultural standards. And since gender understanding is linked to overall cognitive development, this activity allows us to also glimpse some of the child's cognitive development. Refer back to last week's lab (#7) on cognitive development for a review of the issues related to cognitive development.

In this activity you will be observing children of a variety of ages and genders. You will also do some interviews that will allow you to draw some conclusions about young children and gender. Again, if your center's clients do not fit these categories, see me for some modifications.

The first part of this lab exercise requires you to observe children at play. You should not be a part of the play. It is important that you just observe. Play gives us as adults, a glimpse into the child's world. Children often play freely without worrying about what they look like to others. They often play without regard for adult constrictions. Their imaginations allow them to play unfettered by "shoulds and oughts." Their play tells us a great deal about what they are thinking and feeling. In lab # 10 we will examine play in more detail. In this activity we are using play as a means to observing gender.

For this activity we will return to the sort of observation that we did in the first week's lab. You will watch 6 different children during this first part of the activity. You will watch each one for 3-4 minutes total. Watch each child for a minute, record, rest and repeat the cycle. You should choose children who are mobile and independent to some degree. You will watch one boy and one girl of 1) approximately 2 years old, 2) of 3 1/2 years old and 3) of 5 years old or older. These ages are those at which some developmental changes in how children view gender, gender roles and gender stereotypes that might give some indication of gender attitudes. Pay attention to the gender of playmates, toys chosen and activity levels.

Remember, however, that the principle of individual variation is paramount importance and not all children follow a cookie cutter path of development. Additionally, try not to go into the observation with preset ideas of what you will find. Remember how that can skew your observation.

Watch each child for one minute. Record your observation. Rest your eyes for a few seconds and repeat the process. Write down only what you see. Your analysis will occur later. Notice in what areas of the center the child plays and with what toys. With whom does the child play?

Boy Age 24 months. \_\_\_\_\_

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Girl Age 24 months. \_\_\_\_\_

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Boy Age 3 1/2 yrs. \_\_\_\_\_

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Girl Age 3 1/2 yrs. \_\_\_\_\_

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Boy Age 5 yrs and older \_\_\_\_\_

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Girl Age 5 years and older \_\_\_\_\_

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In part 2 of this activity, you will interview 4 children. Two will be under 3 years of age and two will be over 5 years of age. Again, you will do a boy and girl of each age. You will conduct the interviews out of earshot of the other children. This is to avoid peer pressure or parroting of answers. Again, record only what the child answers. Do not paraphrase or fill in. Try to avoid prompting the child. Ask for clarification only if you cannot understand what they say.

You will ask each child the following questions.

1. What does it mean to be a boy?
2. What does it mean to be a girl?
3. What jobs can a girl do?
4. What jobs can a boy do?
5. What are the differences between boys and girls?

#### Boy Under Three

1. What does it mean to be a boy? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What does it mean to be a girl? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What jobs can a boy do? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What jobs can a girl do? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What are the differences between boys and girls? \_\_\_\_\_

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Girl Under Three

1. What does it mean to be a boy? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What does it mean to be a girl? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What jobs can a boy do? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What jobs can a girl do? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What are the differences between boys and girls? \_\_\_\_\_

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Boy Over Five

1. What does it mean to be a boy? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What does it mean to be a girl? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What jobs can a boy do? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What jobs can a girl do? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What are the differences between boys and girls? \_\_\_\_\_

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Girl Over Five

1. What does it mean to be a boy? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What does it mean to be a girl? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What jobs can a boy do? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. What jobs can a girl do? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. What are the differences between boys and girls? \_\_\_\_\_

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## **LAB REPORT PART B QUESTIONS**

Answer each of the following in 2-3 paragraphs.

1. What general conclusions would you draw about the developmental sequence of children's understanding of gender and gender roles?
2. Discuss any gender differences you noticed. From what did these differences emerge? Who was more stereotyped in behavior and attitudes? Why do you think this is?
3. What age differences did you notice?