



Canadian Early Childhood Educators Perceptions of Children's Gendered Shy, Aggressive, and Prosocial Behaviours

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Background

- Ecological systems theory posits that children's development is influenced by those around them, and their own culture (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). Early Childhood Educators (ECE) perceptions of gender roles may contribute to the development of children's own gender role identity.
- **Shyness**
 - Kindergarten teachers reported no gender differences regarding shyness (Arbeau & Coplan, 2007)
 - There is little evidence to suggest there are gender differences in relation to shyness (Rubin, Coplan, & Bowker, 2009)
 - Shyness has been associated with more negative consequences for boys than for girls (Rubin et al., 2009).

Background

- **Aggression & Prosocial Behaviours**
 - Kindergarten teachers report that aggression has a strong negative impact within the classroom, and is contrasted by the positive outcomes of prosocial behaviour (Arbeau & Coplan, 2007).
 - Prosocial behaviours have been found to be attributed to internal sources, whereas aggression is often attributed to situational factors (Arbeau & Coplan, 2007).
 - Physical aggression has been associated more frequently to males, whereas relational aggression has been associated with females (Underwood, 2003).

Current Study

Methods

- The current study was part of a large mixed-methods research project (Dewar, Servos, Bosacki, & Coplan, 2013), participants completed an online questionnaire and a semi-structured phone interview.
- Participants were asked to review their transcripts prior to analyses.
- Following grounded analysis (Freeman, 1998), the coding process of the interviews compared and contrasted created codes for meaning and content.

Participants

- Participants were 40 Female Canadian ECEs from both rural and urban early child care centres.
- Participants ranged in age from 22 to 62 years old ($M = 43.18$, $SD = 9.86$), and had 2 to 37 years of experience ($M = 19.08$, $SD = 9.83$).

Interview

- The current study focused on the interview questions regarding ECE's beliefs regarding how gender related to shyness, aggression, and prosocial behaviours.

Findings

1. Shyness is due to an individual's personality, not gender.

- "I think it just depends on their personality and their upbringing, but a lot to do with their personality because you can have very outgoing girls and outgoing boys, but you can also have shy girls and shy boys so I think it's even between the two of them." (ppt. #11)

2. Boys and girls are equally prosocial.

- "It [prosocial behaviours] all depends on the child... their developmental level, their age." (ppt. #8)

3. There is variability in the beliefs ECE's have about gender and aggression.

- "I think that boys are more aggressive in a physical nature than girls, although girls are more aggressive in a social/emotional way." (ppt. #9)

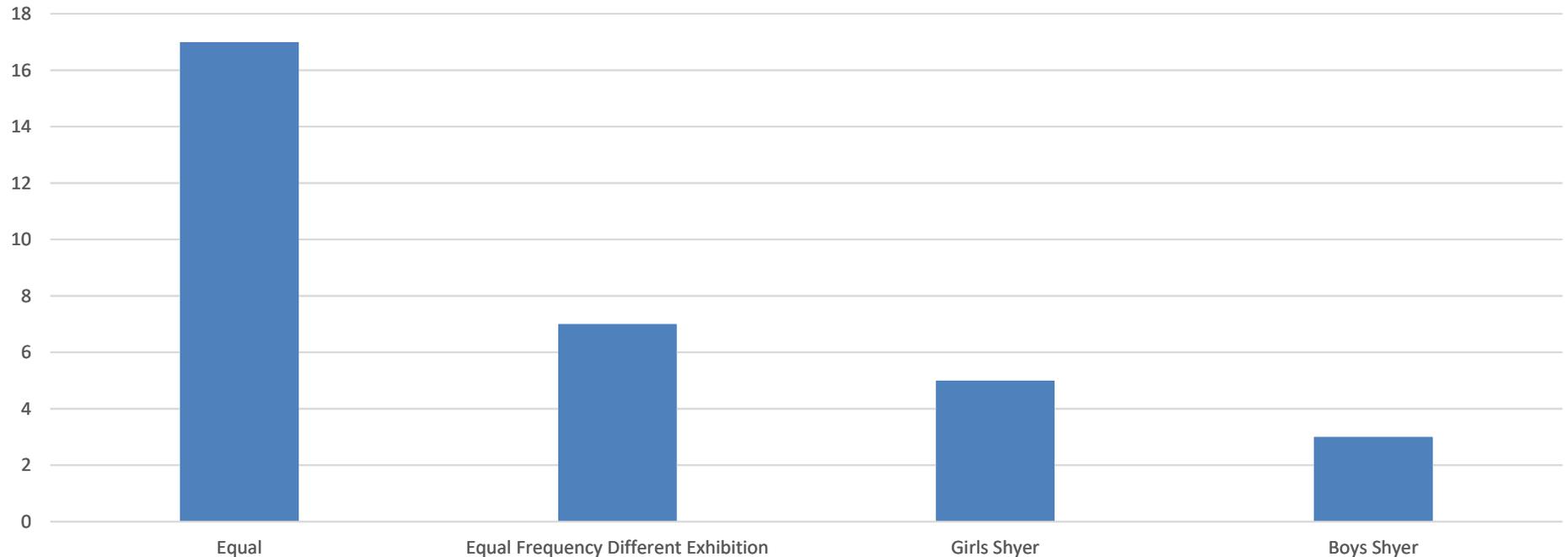
Findings

4. **Behaviours are influenced by social acceptability. That is, they are potentially reinforced by stereotypes.**
 - "I think that it's often perceived as okay and it's expected that if you're a little girl you might be shy, but if a boy is shy you may think something is wrong with him because boys aren't typically shy." (ppt. #13)
5. **Teacher's goals and role in addressing these behaviours within the classroom.**
 - "Finding out the kids' feelings. I think a lot of things come through feeling such as sadness, finding out what the sadness and happiness is about. [...] And to also bring in books to help them see other tips. [...] The teacher can be a mediator by demonstrating these behaviours" (ppt. #4)



Gendered Shyness

Early Childhood Educator's Beliefs about Gendered Shyness



- Participants reported that shyness was equal between genders, and was due to personality rather than genetics. A Chi-square test shows a significant difference between the reported categories [$\chi^2 (3, N = 32) = 14.50, p = .002$].

Gendered Shyness

- The second highest rated category is that both boys and girls display shyness equally as often, but in different ways.
 - Girls, in general, are quieter, but quietness is much more indicative of shyness for boys.
 - Boys and girls tend to pull away from the group. However, shy girls seem more interested in participating with others, whereas shy boys seem indifferent to participate.
 - ECE's felt that girls would be more apt to seek help to work through their anxiousness, whereas boys would try to work through it on their own.
 - Girls would express their shyness verbally, whereas boys may turn physical due to their anxiety.

Shyness

Influences

- Stereotypes
 - Girls as children and as adults tend to be shy.
 - Could be due to girls overanalyzing what others might think of them.
 - Girls being shy is often seen as more acceptable, cute even, than a boy being shy.
 - When boys are shy and quiet there must be something wrong.
- Family
 - Social experiences (e.g., having siblings).
 - Being labeled as shy at a young age may lead to parents being more overprotective and the child taking less social risks (for a review see Rubin et al., 2009).

Consequences

- ECEs fear that shy children may be forgotten or overlooked because they are quieter.
- Shy children suffer from stress due to their shyness.

Teacher's Role in Addressing Shyness

As a group

- Focus on an inclusive atmosphere
- Work collaboratively as a group
- Routines may help shy children feel more at ease
- Do not highlight the shy child as different, as this may lead to more exclusion

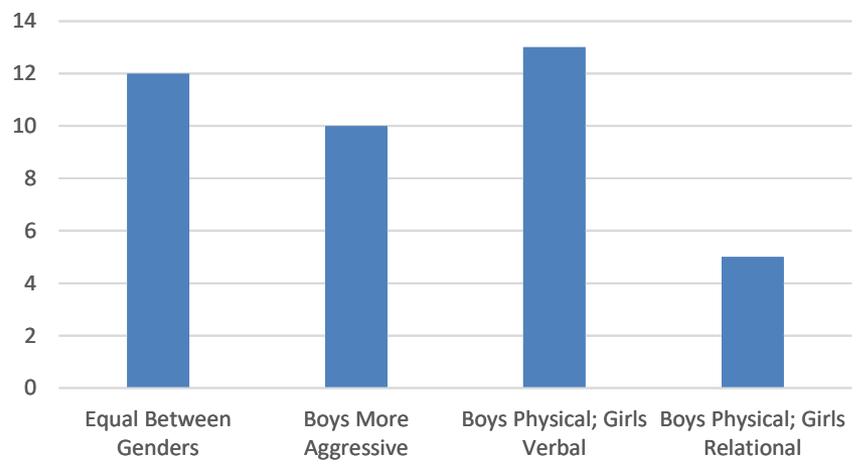
On an individual level

- Try to understand why the child may be shy
- Help them work through their anxious feelings
- Facilitate interactions and activities with others
- Build a sense of trust
- Build the shy child's confidence
- Allow shy children time to rejoin the group
- Help them develop an unshy personality

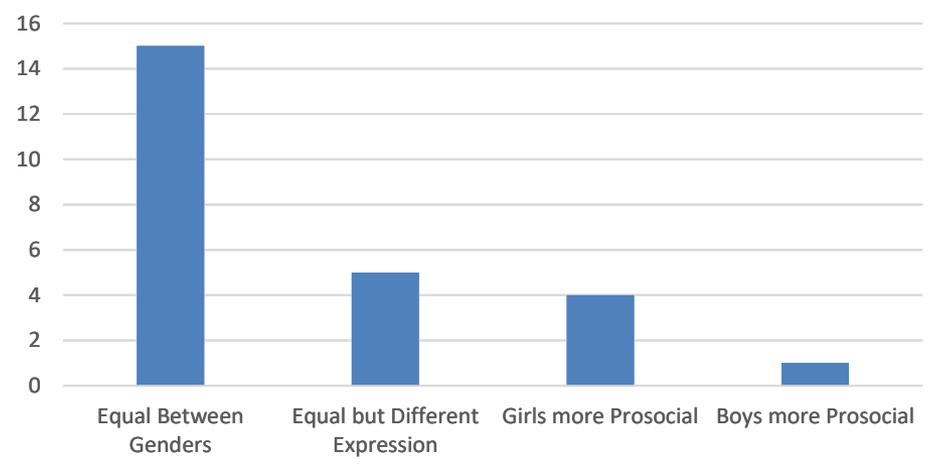


Gendered Aggression and Prosocial Behaviours

Gendered Aggression



Gendered Prosocial Behaviours



Gendered Aggression

- No ECEs expressed the belief that girls were more aggressive than boys. The most common belief was that boys were more physically aggressive, while girls were more verbally aggressive. Chi-square results were not significant [$\chi^2 (3, N = 40) = 3.80, p = .284$].

Gendered Prosocial Behaviours

- Many of the ECEs felt that prosocial behaviours were equal between genders [$\chi^2 (3, N = 25) = 17.72, p = .001$].

Gendered Aggression

Behaviours

- Girls reported as more verbally or relationally aggressive
 - Language skills are more developed
 - Don't want to get in trouble, so they are "sneakier" about aggression
 - More emotional
 - Take longer to get over acts of aggression
 - Red flag if girls are physically aggressive
- Boys reported to be more physically aggressive
 - More direct
 - More active
 - Lack impulse control
 - Get over acts of aggression quicker
 - Aggressive play and rough and tumble play are seen as acceptable by some teachers

Influences

- Differences in emotional and chemical biology
- Media normalizes physical aggression for boys
- Societal influences (e.g., poverty, home life)

Gendered Prosocial Behaviours

Behaviours

- Both genders are inclusive, collaborative, and cooperative in their play.
- Girls tend to be more selective of friends
- Boys tend to be more competitive, but maintain their friendships longer
- Girls are prosocial to get attention, or positive reinforcement, while boys are driven by interests or activities.

Influences

- Developmental level
- Group settings are more prosocial
- Lack of socialization can lead to less prosocial behaviours

Teacher Role in Addressing Prosocial Behaviours and Aggression

- Lead by example
- Encourage and acknowledge prosocial behaviours
- Discuss positive and negative feelings and actions
 - Use aides such as books
- Create a respectful atmosphere
- Intervene in all aggressive situations (i.e., verbal, relational, and physical)

Implications

- Further research is needed to understand how teachers understand shyness as compared with unsociability. The current study found teachers referred to unsocial behaviours when describing “shy” boys.
- While shyness is related to poor social satisfaction (Kingsbury et al., 2013), stress and isolation, ECE’s may be able to help teach children appropriate problem-solving and coping skills to help manage and regulate their emotions and social behaviours.
- Due to the negative outcomes aggressive behaviours (Smith et al., 2010), ECEs may benefit from training on how to recognize and effectively intervene in all types of aggression.
- Many of the participants spoke of intervening in physical aggression situations, but few mentioned intervening in relational or verbal.
- Future research needs to continue to explore educators’ perceptions of young children’s shy, aggressive, and unsocial behaviours and methods of intervention.

Acknowledgements

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THANK-YOU FOR LISTENING

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