

**“Boys get told they should be tough:
Girls get told they should be skinny”**

(Primary 6 girl)

**Findings from the
‘What’s Gender Got to do With it?’
Primary School Project
Undertaken by Reduce Abuse in
West Dunbartonshire**

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February 2012**



West Dunbartonshire

Community Health & Care Partnership



CONTENTS		PAGE
	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	4
1.	Introduction	8
2.	Project Background: The Local and National Picture	9
3.	Designing 'What's Gender got to do With it?'	11
4.	Project Delivery and Evaluation: Methods and Approach	14
5.	Empirical Findings	18
6.	Evaluating 'What's Gender got to do With it?' Perspectives of the Children, Teachers, Project Workers and Researcher	23
7.	Conclusions and Recommendations	26
	Appendices	28
	References	30

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report reflects analytically on the development, conduct and outcomes of 'What's Gender got to do With it?'; an initiative run by the Reduce Abuse Project in West Dunbartonshire Primary Schools in 2011. The report's objectives are to:

- Elucidate the policy and research context within which the 'What's Gender got to do With it?' initiative has been developed
- Offer an overview of the aims and objectives of the initiative
- Report some of the findings from our work with children in primary schools, with a particular emphasis on the children's views on issues of gender and (in)equality, and the extent to which these views altered as a result of the project delivery
- Evaluate the successes and limitations of the initiative from the perspectives of the children, class teachers, project workers and researcher, and offer recommendations for the Reduce Abuse project's future work with children and young people in West Dunbartonshire

The subsequent paragraphs summarise the report's key aspects, and offer an overview of the findings.

Project Background

Preventing violence against women is a national priority in Scotland. The Domestic Abuse Delivery Plan for Children and Young People (2008) stressed the imperative for multi-agency co-operation to ensure the very best outcomes for all children and young people. A key priority established within the Delivery Plan was that of 'Prevention Through Education'. This priority not only recognised the need for schools to respond optimally to children and young people living with domestic abuse, but also underscored the value of direct engagement with children and young people on issues of domestic abuse. The earlier (2003) Scottish Government policy document 'Preventing Domestic Abuse: a National Strategy' placed the priority of primary prevention at its core. Primary prevention of domestic abuse involves measures and initiatives that are taken before violence and abuse have occurred, through promotion of attitudinal change using anti-violence against women and pro gender equality messages. Delivering such primary prevention work in schools across West Dunbartonshire has been the rationale of the Reduce Abuse project over the past seven years. The Reduce Abuse project workers have engaged with young people across West Dunbartonshire- predominantly within secondary schools- forwarding an important agenda of healthy relationships, gender equality, and anti violence against women messages. The requirement to engage further with younger children has long been recognised by the project workers, and is reinforced by the research literature which has evidenced the pervasiveness of gendered inequality in the attitudes and perceptions of primary school aged children (e.g. Lombard, 2008). In the first half of 2011, the Reduce Abuse workers, alongside the author of this report and workers from Dumbarton District Women's Aid, delivered an initiative in four West Dunbartonshire primary schools to engage directly with younger children on issues

related to gender and gender equality. The rationale for this work was to explore children's perceptions of normative gender roles, encourage critique of gender stereotypes and, more broadly, to contribute to challenging gendered inequalities within future relationships, under Reduce Abuse's founding remit of domestic abuse prevention work.

Delivering 'What's Gender got to do With it': Exploring the Children's Perceptions and Evidencing Attitudinal Change

In advance of delivering the initiative, the project workers and researcher collaborated to establish three principal objectives for 'What's Gender....' These objectives were to:

- Explore children's perceptions of gender, and their view of whether boys and girls should subscribe to particular gender roles
- Heighten children's awareness of gender stereotypes, and encourage them to critique the idea that boys and girls should subscribe to particular toys, books, films, games etc, according to their gender
- More broadly, contribute to challenging gendered inequalities within future relationships, under Reduce Abuse's founding remit of domestic abuse primary prevention work

In the course of planning and delivering the work with the children and young people, these objectives were at the forefront. The delivery of the initiative was structured around three sessions; the first focused on garnering the children's 'baseline' attitudes and perceptions on a range of issues related to gender such as toys, jobs, and behaviours, through worksheets and small group activities. Mindful of the value of enabling the children to offer their views in their own words and from their own frame of reference, the use of prescriptive 'tick box' questions was minimised and the children were encouraged to formulate their own qualitative responses to the questions. The second session saw the project workers deliver a lesson to the children, comprising an engaging variety of activities, classroom discussions and stories. Through the lesson, the project workers sought to explore and challenge the children's awareness of gender stereotypes, encouraging them to critique assumptions of gendered adherences to particular toys, books, films, games etc. The workers' skill in responding to the children's ideas as they emerged was crucial to the project delivery, with the workers encouraging the children to question and critique ideas which upheld sexist notions. The researcher adopted the role of observer during the lesson, noting the children's responses and assertions. The third and final session mirrored the first, with the children being asked to offer written responses to a series of questions related to gender. This enabled the researcher to undertake a qualitative **comparative analysis** of the children's written and spoken assertions before and after the lesson, offering an insight into the impact of the lesson in developing the children's capacity to critique gender norms and stereotypes.

Between March and May of 2011, the 'What's Gender got to do With it' initiative was delivered to a total of 95 children across four primary schools. The total sample comprised a roughly equal split of boys (n=49) and girls (n=46). The initiative was delivered to children in their classroom settings, and involved one class of Primary 5 children, two classes of Primary 6 children, and two classes of primary 7 children¹. The resulting age range was approximately 9-11 years. Each of the four cohorts of children received three visits from the project workers and researcher; the initial visit when we explored the children's baseline views on the series of gender related questions, the lesson, and the final visit where we met again with the children to re-capture their views after the lesson. At most sessions a worker from Women's Aid attended also and provided support.

¹The primary seven classes were located within the same school.

The empirical findings from the 'What's Gender got to do With it' initiative have established that:

- Children's expectations of boys' behaviour are allied with traits of dominance and aggression, while their expectations of girls are associated with gentle play, affection and mothering
- Many children speak a language of equality in terms of toys and games, articulating that girls and boys should be able to play with whichever toys they choose. Simultaneously though, the children are very aware that playing with toys which they perceive as being for the 'other' gender can invoke ridicule. This is particularly the case for boys, and the children explained that some terms of ridicule are underpinned by homophobic name calling such as 'gay boy'
- Although the children strongly defended the notion that men and women should be able to occupy whichever job they chose, the children advised that there are jobs which are carried out predominantly by men and others predominantly by women, underscoring their awareness of gendered divisions in many areas of employment

Our Empirical Findings

Analysis of the children's perspectives after participating in 'What's Gender... ' initiative point to an **enhanced awareness and understanding** of the project's messages. In particular:

- We observed the children's much enhanced capacity to critique messages which prescribe particular toys and games to girls and boys. This was clearly evident in the children's perspectives after the intervention, indicating that the children engaged very positively with the messages conveyed by the project workers
- The children appeared more aware of pervasive media messages which assume that boys should display traits of aggression and violence, and girls should conform to glamorous ideals. After the lesson, the children displayed a very apparent understanding of how these could have a negative impact
- Through a drawing activity, the project workers assisted the children in critiquing the power of popular ideas of how boys and girls should look, underscoring the disproportionate pressure for girls to conform to ideals of glamour. The project workers asked the children to think about how this focus on idealised physical appearance can overshadow girls' values and talents, and we observed the children's strong engagement with the messages which emerged from this exercise

Evaluating Local Perspectives on 'What's Gender... ' Children and Teachers

The approach to evaluating the 'What's Gender got to do With it' project was twofold, and involved firstly noting how and whether the children's perspectives on gender altered over the course of the project delivery; and secondly inviting feedback from children and teachers on the initiative itself. The feedback from class teachers was overwhelmingly positive; with teachers concluding that the project had been very well organised and delivered, at a level appropriate for the age and stage of the children's comprehension. The teachers consulted by the researcher were unanimous in the view that work with children on issues of gender and inequality, and in challenging the negative behaviour of some popular role models, was highly necessary and well timed. The children's feedback was also very favourable, with numerous requests for return visits by the project workers. In observing the project workers' interactions with the children during the initiative, it was evident that the workers had secured a strong engagement with the children, presenting their messages in a way which the children could easily relate to, through a range of enjoyable activities.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Comparison of the children's perspectives before and after the delivery of the initiative, coupled with the written and spoken feedback from the children and their teachers, suggest that the 'What's Gender got to do With it' project has been very well received, making a very positive contribution to children's capacity to critique gender stereotypes within a short space of time.

It is clear that the project workers possess a sound capacity to secure the children's engagement with the topics, and captured the children's attention through a range of activities. Analysis of the children's perspectives before and after the project workers' lesson makes clear that **the children's attitudes have been positively informed** as a result, with evidence of an enhanced capacity to critique gendered inequalities. It is crucial to note however that, for a number of children, adherence to gendered stereotypes is deeply ingrained. Our work within the schools established the pervasiveness of homophobic terms used by children to ridicule others who did not conform with traditional notions of gender ideals. Sustained work is required to ensure that the positive messages of gender equality delivered to the children have the opportunity to take on a more sustained momentum, and can contend with the power of competing messages which prescribe adherence to norms and values which support gender inequality.

1. INTRODUCTION

Preventing violence against women is a national priority in Scotland. Researchers and practitioners have long recognised the imperative for direct work with children and young people as a vital ingredient in the broader challenge to gender inequality in general, and violence against women in particular. Addressing the violence against women prevention priority in West Dunbartonshire, the Reduce Abuse project has engaged with young people in secondary schools for seven years, forwarding an important agenda of healthy relationships, gender equality, and anti violence against women messages. In 2010, the Reduce Abuse project's two workers developed a new initiative entitled 'What's Gender got to do With it?' In the first half of 2011, the workers, alongside the author of this report and workers from Dumbarton District Women's Aid, worked directly with children in four West Dunbartonshire primary schools to further the scope of the Reduce Abuse project by engaging with younger children on issues related to gender and gender equality. The rationale for this work was to explore children's perceptions of normative gender roles, encourage critique of gender stereotypes and, more broadly, contribute to challenging gendered inequalities within future relationships, under Reduce Abuse's founding remit of domestic abuse prevention work. This report reflects critically on the development and operation of 'What's Gender got to do With it?', providing an evaluation of the success of the initiative, but goes further than this by disseminating some empirical findings from our direct work with the children in the primary schools. The report therefore has several key objectives:

- To elucidate the policy and research context within which the 'What's Gender got to do With it?' initiative has been developed
- To offer an overview of the aims and objectives of the 'What's Gender....' initiative
- To report some of the findings from our work with the children, with a particular emphasis on their views on issues of gender and (in)equality, and the extent to which these altered over the course of the project delivery
- To evaluate the successes and limitations of the initiative, and offer recommendations for the Reduce Abuse project's future work with children and young people in West Dunbartonshire

Chapter two of this report contextualises the 'What's Gender....' initiative by setting out the local and national policy and research background and the work of Reduce Abuse. Chapter two also evidences the need for engagement with primary school aged children on issues related to gender equality and domestic abuse. In Chapter three, the scope and objectives of the 'What's Gender....' initiative are conveyed, and an overview is provided on the methods by which the project has been designed, delivered and evaluated. The current report is underpinned by **qualitative** methods, allied with our aim of enabling the children to report their views and perceptions in their own words and from their own frame of reference. The report's principal findings are set out across Chapters four and five. Chapter four reports the empirical findings from our work within the primary schools, and presents data which attests to the success of 'What's Gender....' in enabling the children to critique normative expectations of gender performance, establishing that the children were better placed to offer a challenge to prescriptive ideas about gender by the end of the initiative. In Chapter five an evaluation of the success of the project is offered. The report concludes by reflecting on the outcomes of the 'What's Gender....' initiative in order to provide recommendations for future gender-based violence prevention work with children and young people in West Dunbartonshire and beyond.

2. PROJECT BACKGROUND: THE LOCAL AND NATIONAL PICTURE

The advent of a devolved Scottish Parliament in 1999 saw a turning point in the construction of policy designed to challenge violence against women, with the National Strategy to Address Domestic Abuse in Scotland (2000) representing a landmark development. The Strategy took the crucial step of establishing domestic abuse as a gender-based issue (primarily involving female victims and male perpetrators), drawing upon the findings of three decades of research, activism and support work at grassroots level. This gender-based understanding of domestic abuse embraced a causal link between wider systems of gender inequality throughout society, and women's experiences of violence and abuse within their intimate relationships with male partners. The Strategy also ratified a multi-faceted definition of domestic abuse, including but not limited to physical assault. Emotional and sexual abuse were included within the Strategy's understanding of domestic abuse, along with the varying degrees and manifestations of male power, coercion and control which characterise some intimate relationships. In these respects, the Strategy lent vital credence to the perspectives long held by those working directly with men, women and children. The Strategy also provided impetus for a range of further policy actions on the issue of domestic abuse, identifying the need to prevent violence and abuse through direct work with children and young people.

The Domestic Abuse Delivery Plan for Children and Young People (2008) provided a comprehensive and wide ranging approach to supporting all children and young people, with their needs taking central focus. The Delivery Plan stressed the imperative for multi-agency co-operation to ensure that the very best outcomes for all children and young people in Scotland are secured. A key priority established within the Delivery Plan was that of 'Prevention Through Education'. This priority not only recognised the need for schools to respond optimally to children and young people living with domestic abuse, but also underscored the value of direct engagement with children and young people on issues of domestic abuse. The earlier (2003) Scottish Government policy document 'Preventing Domestic Abuse: a National Strategy' placed the priority of primary prevention at its core. Primary prevention of domestic abuse involves measures and initiatives that are taken before violence and abuse have occurred, through promotion of attitudinal change using anti-violence against women and pro gender equality messages. The 2003 Prevention Strategy outlined the imperative for direct work with children and young people as a means of delivering these messages, with the central aim of preventing violence and abuse in their later intimate relationships. Delivering such primary prevention work in schools across West Dunbartonshire has been the rationale of the Reduce Abuse project over the past seven years.

The Reduce Abuse Project

The Reduce Abuse project is located within the West Dunbartonshire Violence Against Women Partnership (WDVAWP), a multi agency collaboration situated within West Dunbartonshire Council. The remit of the WDVAWP is to work in partnership with local agencies to challenge, respond to and prevent violence against women, and provide direct support to women and children. Within the WDVAWP, the Reduce Abuse project takes the lead on the delivery of primary prevention work with children and young people, and this has been a central aspect of the project's work since 2004. Through primary prevention work, the project has sought to prevent violence and abuse from occurring within young people's later intimate relationships. Most of the prevention work undertaken during the life of the Reduce Abuse project has been within local secondary schools, and the project workers have developed excellent co-operative relationships with schools and voluntary agencies across West Dunbartonshire.

In November 2005 the work of the Reduce Abuse project was evaluated (Maguire, 2005). Findings from the evaluation established that very positive outcomes were being achieved in relation to the work undertaken in secondary schools. Both young people and teachers were responsive to the messages conveyed by the project worker and there was evidence of a growing awareness of the issues of gender inequality, sexual bullying, and the unacceptability of intimate partner violence and abuse. Importantly, this evaluation recommended that the project's focus be extended towards primary schools, in order to deliver domestic abuse primary prevention work to younger children. Work on respectful behaviour was carried out by Reduce Abuse and partner agencies in four primary schools, and Baldy Bane's 'Gold Stars and Dragon Marks' performance on bullying and domestic abuse was arranged across twelve local primary schools. The recruitment of an additional project worker to the Reduce Abuse project in 2010 provided the capacity to begin planning an initiative for delivery within primary schools, entitled 'What's Gender got to do With it?'

The rationale behind the 'What's Gender got to do With it Project'

The need for domestic abuse primary prevention work with children and young people is evidenced extensively. Research with young people across the UK has long established some children and young people's ongoing acceptance of men's right to perpetrate violence and abuse against their partners (Burton et al., 1998; NSPCC, 2005; Macnab, 2010). In Scotland, primary school aged children have voiced acceptance for men's violence against women in circumstances such as 'dinner not being ready when men come home', and where women have had an affair (Lombard, 2008). Young people have also reported ambivalence to the notion that men should control and dominate their partners through non violent means, and have suggested that this is a 'normal' and anticipated aspect of a heterosexual intimate relationship (Macnab, 2010). These attitudes attest to the need for engagement with young people to challenge these perceptions before they begin to form intimate relationships of their own. Intimate partner violence against women is perpetuated by adherence to gender roles which assume male power and female subordination (Dobash and Dobash, 1979; Mullender, 1996; McMillan, 2007). That children and young people 'perform' normative models of gender from a very young age is also well established in the research literature, and is observed anecdotally by many parents, teachers and children themselves. Through almost six years of working in secondary schools, and extensive networking with others in the domestic abuse prevention field, the Reduce Abuse project workers have found that young people's subscription to normalised gender roles, and roles within intimate relationships, are clearly established. Echoing the findings of the research literature (e.g. Lombard, 2008), both the Reduce Abuse workers and the researcher have noted with concern some young people's acquiescence with ideas which support male dominance, and men's right to use violent and controlling tactics in their intimate relationships with women partners. These observations provided a clear basis for the Reduce Abuse project's engagement with primary school aged children, delivering messages of gender equality, and exploring children's existing attitudes and perceptions of gender norms. This involved careful planning of an initiative, appropriate to their maturity and stage of comprehension. While designing this project, the WDVAWP recruited an independent researcher (the author of this report) and in December 2010 the project workers and researcher began working collaboratively on developing an integrated programme of project delivery and evaluation. The subsequent chapter offers a detailed discussion of that process.

²This recommendation dovetailed with anecdotal comments from local primary school teachers, who in discussion with the Reduce Abuse workers had been highlighting the requirement for domestic abuse prevention work with primary school aged children for some time.

3. DESIGNING 'WHAT'S GENDER GOT TO DO WITH IT?'

This chapter outlines the design and development of the 'What's Gender Got to do With it?' initiative. Early in the process of formulating a programme of delivery for primary school aged children, the researcher and project workers collaborated to set some guiding objectives. These objectives assisted in maintaining a clear focus and sense of purpose throughout the design, delivery and evaluation of the project. We took cognisance of the evidence from the literature which attests to the need to disrupt acceptance of gender norms which place men higher than women on scales of power, control and dominance. We also considered the project workers' observations from their extensive work with older children in secondary schools, which indicated many young people's continued adherence to gender expectations which reinforce gender inequality. Furthermore, we took into account the 'bigger picture' aim of challenging the wider structures which maintain gender inequality, and agreed that the project should contribute to this challenge. Through careful consideration, three principal objectives for the 'What's Gender.....' initiative were established. These were to:

- Explore children's perceptions of gender, and their view of whether boys and girls should subscribe to particular gender roles
- Heighten children's awareness of gender stereotypes, and encourage them to critique the idea that boys and girls should subscribe to particular toys, books, films, games etc, according to their gender
- More broadly, contribute to challenging gendered inequalities within future relationships, under Reduce Abuse's founding remit of domestic abuse primary prevention work

In the course of planning and delivering the work with the children and young people, these objectives were at the forefront. We also considered some further 'sub-themes' which were secondary but still very important strands of the initiative, and incorporated these into our work where we could. These are discussed in more detail in later areas of this report, but examples included; exploring which people the children cited as role models, and considering the impact of media messages on their understanding of gender roles and expectations. With these objectives agreed, we then began the process of negotiating access to local primary schools, and planning a number of activities and lessons which could assist in shaping the programme of delivery around our objectives.

Project Preparation

In preparing to deliver 'What's Gender...', an important starting point was to make a decision on the age of the children who would participate, before securing agreement with a sufficient number of local schools which would be willing to enable access to suitable classrooms. Primary school aged children were deemed an appropriate audience. Consultation with some local primary school teachers suggested that children in Primaries 5-7 (approximately aged 9-11) would be a suitable audience for the initiative, as it was felt that 'What's Gender...' could dovetail with other messages of equality, respect and healthy relationships that were already being delivered to that cohort of children.

The strong local awareness of the Reduce Abuse project's work in secondary schools was most valuable in securing the co-operation of local primary school Head Teachers. In January 2011, Reduce Abuse's lead project worker and the researcher attended a joint meeting with the Head Teachers (HTs) of four West Dunbartonshire primary schools. At this meeting, the objectives of 'What's Gender...' were discussed, and all four HTs agreed to allow the 'What's Gender...' initiative to run within their schools. Approximate time scales for the delivery of

the initiative were approved and each HT agreed to select one class of children from their Primary 5-7 cohorts for participation in the initiative. We agreed that 'What's Gender...' would be delivered to each class of children over three half day sessions in one week (for example, Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons), and the delivery of the project was timetabled to the convenience of the schools, avoiding the school holidays and end of term. Arrangements were made with the HTs to undertake the initiative in their respective schools between March and May 2011, completing one school before moving on to the next.

Designing the Initiative

With access agreed with the Head Teachers by mid January of 2011, we prepared to commence the project work in March. The intervening weeks were used to develop a 'lesson plan' to be used as a framework for the delivery of the project. The project workers capitalised on their experience of domestic abuse primary prevention work in local secondary schools to develop materials which could effectively convey the desired messages to the children, while also capturing their attention and interest. Consideration was given to the age range of the participating children, who would be some years younger than those in the secondary schools. In this vein, the project workers sought to gear their messages of gender equality in ways that were age appropriate for 9-12 year old children. A range of suitable project materials, games and books were developed and identified.

Meanwhile, the researcher developed some qualitative questionnaires for completion by the children just before and just after their participation in the 'What's Gender...' activities and lessons. These were compiled with a view to capturing the children's attitudes and opinions on gendered toys, jobs and role models, enabling some indication of the effect of the intervention to be observed through comparison of the 'before' and 'after' responses. This involved encouraging and enabling the children to speak freely; using open ended qualitative questions within worksheets, and stimulating classroom discussions. In line with their work in secondary schools, the Reduce Abuse workers also prepared an evaluation sheet for completion by the children at the end of the initiative, wherein their views on the various aspects of the project were invited.

Collaborative Working

In advance of commencing the project work within the primary schools, the researcher and project workers met on several occasions and discussed the division of tasks during the delivery of the initiative. Rather than setting rigid boundaries which would keep the project workers at a distance from the evaluation research, and the researcher removed from the project delivery, we agreed that the best outcomes could be secured through working collaboratively, sharing input and pooling our knowledge and expertise. In practice, this involved both of the project workers and the researcher attending every session within every school; the researcher assisting with the delivery of the initiative; and the project workers contributing to the design and conduct of the research objectives and evaluation. In addition, the Reduce Abuse project workers invited workers from Dumbarton and District Women's Aid (located in close proximity to the primary schools) to participate in the delivery of the 'What's Gender...' initiative. The Women's Aid workers agreed, and provided valuable assistance in the classrooms at three of the four primary schools. This partnership working also provided a valuable opportunity for the Reduce Abuse and Women's Aid workers to work together, and offered the Women's Aid workers a first-hand insight into the project.

³These worksheets are included as appendices to this report.

Getting Started

With access agreed, project materials prepared and a philosophy towards working collaboratively in place, the 'What's Gender... ' initiative was delivered in the first primary school in March 2011. The subsequent chapter outlines the process of delivering 'What's Gender... ' across the four primary schools, reflecting on the methods of project delivery and evaluation.

4. PROJECT DELIVERY AND EVALUATION: METHODS AND APPROACH

In this chapter, the process of delivering and evaluating the 'What's Gender Got to do With it?' primary schools initiative is outlined in detail. The chapter provides an overview of the main methods of project delivery, and reflects on our experiences of undertaking domestic abuse primary prevention work in the schools. In the following paragraphs, the activities and exercises undertaken with the children are outlined, alongside the processes involved in garnering the children's perspectives; in their own terms and from their own frame of reference. As this chapter will establish, seeking the children's perspectives on gender before and after the project workers' lesson, enabled us to make qualitative observations of how the children's attitudes and perceptions shifted as a result of the initiative.

Explaining the Initiative to the Children

In advance of our visit to each school, the respective Head Teachers had selected which cohort of children would participate, for example; Primary 5, 6, or 7. Class Teachers⁴ had been made aware of the initiative and were expecting our visits. Upon arriving in each classroom, the Reduce Abuse project workers introduced themselves, the researcher, and the Women's Aid worker to the assembled children and their teacher and offered an overview of our roles. The researcher's role in writing down some of the children's answers to the questions was explained, and the children were made aware that the researcher would write up a report of the work we were doing together, afterwards. The workers explained that we would all be present, alongside their teacher, in their classroom for three sessions over the course of the week. The workers also explained that we were keen to hear their views on 'what it's like to be a boy or a girl', and that they would have the opportunity to have their say through a variety of activities, lessons and worksheets over the coming sessions. The workers stressed that the children's opinions would be very valuable, and informed the children that that the next time they saw us we would run some activities and a lesson, where toys, games and jobs would be discussed. At the final session⁵, the children would complete another worksheet, where they could offer feedback on the sessions and reflect on whether they had any new thoughts on the toys and jobs question.

Session One: Garnering the Children's Views

During the first of the three visits to each school the Reduce Abuse workers informed the children that the session would be quite short; just under an hour. After explaining the initiative to the children, the workers asked them to complete a worksheet, answering some questions on their views of whether girls and boys are expected to behave differently, whether there are particular toys that are suitable for girls and others for boys, and particular jobs for men and others for women⁶. The rationale in asking the children's views on these issues before the delivery of the lessons was to provide a 'baseline' measure of their perceptions. The Reduce Abuse workers, researcher and Women's Aid worker⁷ engaged with the children in small groups, providing help with completing the sheet to those who required it.

⁴The researcher spoke with class teachers at convenient points during and after the delivery of the initiative to explore their perceptions of the need for the project, and their observations of how the children were engaging with the messages. The teachers' perspectives are presented in the next chapter.

⁵The project workers left leaflets on West Dunbartonshire Violence Against Women Partnership services such as Cedar and CARA and details of local Women's Aid services with teachers and office staff at each school.

⁶See Appendices

⁷A Women's Aid worker assisted with the project delivery in three of the four primary schools.

At the first session, the children were invited to choose a name that they would use instead of their 'real' name when writing on the project worksheets. The workers explained the concept of 'confidentiality' to the children, and informed them that choosing a different name would mean that their real name would not appear in any reports that were written about the project later on. The researcher and project workers maintained a confidential 'check list' which cross matched the children's identities against their chosen pseudonyms. This ensured that, if necessary, individual children could be identified by their written responses in certain circumstances, for example; where a written disclosure of harm or risk to wellbeing was made, or a request for support. Although no such scenarios arose, it was important to be mindful of such possibilities.

A further aspect of the first session in all of the schools was to ask children to group together a series of photographs of toys and games, according to whether they believed the toys were designed for girls, boys, or both girls and boys. The rationale for this exercise was to explore whether or not the children associated the toys and games, listed below, with a particular gender.

Baby Doll	Buzz Lightyear	Barbie Doll
Sword	Football	Action Man
"Girl's World" brand Hairstyling Head	Toy Dressing Table	Light Sabre
Etch-a-Sketch	Crayons	Computer Game Controller
Toy Kitchen	Remote Control Car	Lego



In small groups, the children were shown each photograph in turn, and were asked to agree quickly on whether the toy was mainly played with by: boys, girls, or both boys and girls. Often the children were unanimous in their decisions, but in the event of disagreement they were asked to take a vote, facilitated by the worker/researcher, on which of the three options they felt was most accurate. This was followed by similar exercises featuring cards which set out a variety different jobs (for example; doctor, nurse) and behaviour traits (for example; "loves puppies and kittens", "never cries"). The children were asked to group these in accordance with whether they associated the jobs/traits to girls, boys or both. The project workers and researcher recorded the answers, and commentary on the results is set out in the following chapter of this report.

With the children's views garnered through the exercises, this first session was brought to a conclusion by thanking the children for their participation, and informing them of when our next visit would be, later that same week. The work done with the children in this exercise provided a measure of the children's perceptions- in their own words rather than within the confines of selecting from our pre-determined answers. Collecting these perceptions from the children at the first session would enable us to make a comparison with their later assertions after the project workers' delivery.

Session Two: Lessons and Activities

Session two was the longest of the three sessions (approximately two hours) and involved the delivery of the key messages of gender equality allied with the project aims. The project workers ran a range of activities, discussions, and stories which encouraged the children's critique of normative assumptions of the toys and behaviours associated with girls and with boys. In a 'whole class' activity, representatives from each of the small groups were invited to come to the front of the class to show the other children how they had allocated the various pictures of toy and job cards into the categories of 'girl' 'boy' or 'both', in the previous

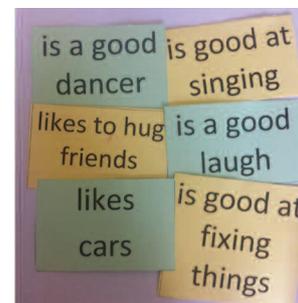
session. This was facilitated through cartoon pictures of 'girl', 'boy' and 'both' mounted onto the wall. As the children grouped the pictures, the project workers ran a discussion where they encouraged the children to critique whether or not there should be particular toys that are out of bounds for girls and boys because they do not 'fit' with their gender. Further discussion with the children asked them to cite their role models, and the project workers encouraged the children to critique the behaviour of their role models, in instances where the children pointed out that their role model used bad language, aggression, violence, and/or smoked.

In a further activity, the children worked in small groups. Each group was provided with an 'outline' drawing of either a boy or a girl; without a face, clothes, etc. The children were asked to use coloured pencils and crayons to depict how they wanted their respective boy or girl to look. The project workers explained that each group should work together to choose how the girl or boy should appear, and draw onto the graphic accordingly, adding clothes, hair, facial features etc. The project worker and researcher visited the small groups to ensure that the children understood the activity, and after around 20 minutes one representative from each group was invited to the front of the class to present their picture to the other children.

The activities described above promoted much discussion and a significant volume of data was collected- presented in the subsequent chapter. In winding down the session, the project workers distributed small cardboard stars and asked the children to write onto the card an aspect of themselves that made them a good role model. It was not assumed that the children would understand the meaning of a role model, so the project workers and researcher suggested that the children thought about some of their personal strengths such as; sports, writing, drawing, music, times when they had been kind or helpful, or other positive features. The rationale here was to wind down what had been a very active session of discussion and activity through a self-reflective task that the children could complete alone. It was hoped that consideration of their positive aspects could be a helpful exercise in reinforcing the children's self esteem, and the project workers suggested to the children that these positive aspects could mean that younger children saw them as role models. Closing the session, one of the project workers read the children a story. The books *Princess Smarty Pants*, *Prince Cinders* and *Bill's New Frock* were selected as tales which the children would likely enjoy and engage with, but which could also subvert more traditional fairytales which centre around patriarchal notions of men as powerful saviours and women as helpless and in need of rescue.

Session Three: The Children's Concluding Views

The third and final session in the 'What's Gender...!' delivery mirrored the first: the children completed a worksheet which asked them to reflect on the gendered nature of toys, jobs and behaviour in a way that could allow us to make comparisons between their initial and subsequent responses. Again, the work sheets invited the children's perspectives in their own words, and the project workers, researcher and Women's Aid worker were available to assist children who required extra help with writing down their opinions. The 'boy'/'girl' or 'both' exercises were also repeated and the children's responses recorded. The final aspect of the delivery at the last session was to circulate evaluation forms to the children, within which their opinions on the various aspects of the delivery were invited. Lastly, the children were thanked for their participation and we said goodbye.



The Sample

In total, ninety five children⁸ across four schools participated in the 'What's Gender...'
initiative, a roughly equal split of boys (n=49) and girls (n=46). One class of children from
each school was selected to participate , as per the table below:

School 1	Primary 5	6 Boys 10 Girls	School Total 16
School 2	Primary 6	11 Boys 11 Girls	School Total 22
School 3	Primary 6	7 Boys 7 Girls	School Total 14
School 4	Primary 7	25 Boys 18 Girls	School Total 43
Total Sample			95 children

Reflective Practice

With a view to continually improving the 'What's Gender...'
initiative and reflecting on the experience of delivering it, we took care to participate in regular sessions of reflection, after almost every visit to the primary schools. This was an intensive process and one which took up a lot of time, but the outcome was valuable. At those meetings we discussed what had worked particularly well, the findings from the children's worksheets and the discussion in the classroom. We took note of the project's strengths in encouraging the children to critique and challenge stereotypes and sexist norms, while also amending some aspects of the delivery in order to heighten the children's engagement. Additionally, we used the month of April (when the project was on hiatus for the school holiday) to consider the next phase of the project delivery. Some new working practices were implemented. For example, the practice of asking the children to vote on which pile the toys or jobs belonged in stemmed from our observation that the children could not always reach consensus; some children were dominating the responses and making it difficult for less forthcoming children to be heard. Working closely as a team was central to highlighting issues such as this, and to developing a solution.

A wealth of empirical findings emerged from our work on the 'What's Gender...'
project, providing a clear insight into the children's attitudes and perceptions on issues of gender. These are established in the following chapter.

⁸This was the maximum number of children; the number fluctuated slightly on some days, as some children were absent from school for part of the week.

5. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The previous chapter set out the methods by which the 'What's Gender Got to do With it?' project was delivered to children in four West Dunbartonshire primary schools. This current chapter details the findings which emerged from that work by reporting on the children's perceptions and attitudes, and indicating how these changed over the course of the three sessions within each school. The chapter begins by offering an overview of the children's 'baseline' views and perceptions, gathered from both their written responses before the project workers' delivery, and our observations of the children's comments during classroom discussions in the early part of the initiative. The chapter then compares these with the children's later articulations, in written worksheet responses and later classroom discussion, enabling conclusions to be made on the 'What's Gender...' initiative's success in enabling the children to critique prescriptive norms about gender roles.

The 'Baseline' Data

It was important to obtain a measure of the children's 'baseline' views and perceptions on issues related to gender prior to the delivery of the initiative, so that these could be compared with their perspectives afterwards. The first session conducted in each primary school sought to garner the children's existing perspectives on gender in relation to behaviour, jobs and toys. The children completed a worksheet, wherein they were asked to write short sentences in answer to the following questions:

- Do you think there are different toys for girls and boys?
- (If yes) Why do you think there are different toys for girls and boys?
- Do you think that girls and boys behave differently?
- (If yes) In what ways do they behave differently?
- Are there men's jobs and women's jobs?
- (If yes) Give an example of a man's job and a woman's job

Some noteworthy findings emerged from this exercise. In responding to the question "do you think there are different toys for girls and boys?" around half of the children- mostly boys- answered 'yes', and provided their views on why they felt this was the case:

- "Girls like nice pretty things, on the other hand boys like rough things"
- "Boys like cars and girls play with dolls"
- "Boys like harder things like playing football and boxing and girls like softer baby things"

These quotations underline the tendency for some children, and particularly boys, to associate the toys used by boys with traits of aggression, while girls' toys were associated with gentle play, affection and mothering. The remaining proportion of children (approximately half of the sample and mostly girls) answered 'no', and instead argued that girls and boys are allowed to play with whatever they choose:

- "You can play with whatever you want because it's not the law to play with certain things."
- "Barbies are girls' toys and action men are boys' toys, but girls can play with boys toys and boys can play with girls' toys."

These comments, which defend all children's right to play with whichever toys they choose, reveal a strong awareness of equality among the children, and an apparent desire to resist notions which would seek to ensure that boys and girls use particular toys in accordance

"Girls like nice pretty things, on the other hand boys like rough things"

"You can play with whatever you want because it's not the law to play with certain things."

with their gender. It is important to note though that such comments were concentrated within the girls' responses; boys appeared much less concerned with gender equality in respect of toys and were more likely to say that they saw toys as being segregated by gender. Girls reported a range of occasions where they had played with 'boys' toys, but similar perspectives from boys who had played with 'girls' toys were less forthcoming. We asked the children whether, in practice, girls and boys really do play with whatever toys they chose. There was an acknowledgement by the children that this could be problematic. Several children pointed out that some children, especially boys, may play with certain toys in secret (or not at all) to avoid being ridiculed by other children:

"Boys fight, they don't talk"

- "Boys that are seen playing with girls toys could get called 'gay'"
- "People would call him 'gay boy'"
- "If a boy had a vanity set he would get teased"
- "Boys would be too embarrassed to like pink because people would laugh"

This use of the term 'gay' as a form of belittlement or chastisement arose repeatedly through the project delivery. A number of children pointed out that girls who chose to play with toys such as action men and racing cars are 'tom boys'. In all four schools we observed consistently the relative ease with which girls reported that they enjoyed playing with 'boys' toys and games such as action figures and football, and the dearth of boys' narratives on playing games traditionally associated with girls. It was interesting to note that the label of 'tom boy' appeared to be without the intent of ridicule that accompanied the term 'gay boy' to describe boys who chose to play with toys such as dolls and kitchens:

- "It's OK for girls to play with boys' toys, but people will call her a tom boy, but that's OK because tom boy is a cool name"

While there was an apparent acceptance of some girls' preference for toys and games traditionally associated with boys: the same was not found for boys. This discrepancy suggests a disproportionate pressure on boys to conform with normative expectations of masculinity, which suggest that boys should not 'do' girls' activities, or face ridicule as a consequence.

A further question on the children's worksheet asked 'do you think boys and girls behave differently?' In contrast to the divergent opinion on the issue of toys, the children were virtually unanimous in their view that boys and girls do behave very differently:

- "Because boys are rougher than girls"
- "Boys are bad all the time and girls are just bad sometimes"
- "Boys fight, they don't talk"
- "Boys play football or fighting and girls play nice together"
- "Boys like violence and girls like being friendly"
- "Boys act tough and hard and brave while on the other hand girls are shy and giggly and chatty"

Again, the children's assumptions about boys' preferences for aggression and 'rough' play are evident, and stand in contrast to their view that girls are naturally quieter, friendlier and more delicate. There was an apparent belief that these character traits are inevitable; that boys should always be tough and are expected to be rough and brave, while girls are expected to be much quieter and more accommodating. During the project delivery, as

these perspectives emerged, the project workers responded by asking the children to think about where these different expectations of girls and boys come from. At every appropriate opportunity, the children were encouraged to think carefully about these ideas as 'stereotypes', with the workers explaining that boys and girls can be encouraged to behave differently according to their gender.

Encouragingly the children's responses to the question about gendered jobs were much more equality driven, with most children selecting 'no' in answer to the question of whether there are 'jobs for men and jobs for women':

- "There is no job someone can't do"
- "Women and men can both do all jobs"
- "A woman can do a man's job and a man can do a woman's job"

As the last quotation demonstrates, many of the children stressed that gendered categories of jobs remain, but these can be disrupted and women and men can take on jobs not traditionally aligned with their gender.

Shifts in the Children's Perceptions

During the initiative's final session, the children were asked to complete a further worksheet, wherein they could reflect on their initial thoughts on the gendered nature of toys, games and jobs, having participated in the project worker's delivery of the 'What's Gender' initiative. This second worksheet asked:

- What do you think of the idea that there are 'boys' toys and 'girls' toys?
- Do you think that girls and boys get different messages?
- What about the idea that girls and boys should behave differently- do you agree?
- Some people think that there are jobs that are for men and other jobs for women. What do you think?
- What kind of job would you like to do one day?

Qualitative analysis of the children's written responses after the project workers' lesson delivery has evidenced a much deeper awareness and more critical approach to gender stereotypes in the minds of the children. Encouragingly, in undertaking this analysis of the children's reflections after the lesson delivery, it is very apparent that the key messages of the 'What's Gender...' initiative have impacted positively upon the children's perceptions. This was particularly the case in the children's perceptions of gender in relation to toys:

- "I think you should be able to play with whatever toy you want. The only thing that matters is if you like it"
- "Girls and boys should be able to play with whatever they like"
- "I think that you should be able to play with any toy you want but boys would usually get teased if they played with girls' toys"

It is interesting to note the word 'able' in all of the above quotations. These children appear to be making a statement on how free children should be to play with any toy, rather than reflecting on how free children are. The last quotation, by a primary six boy, conveys very thoughtfully the complexity for children in choosing to play with toys that 'break the rules' of gender. This was a key facet of the project workers' discussion with the children, which has clearly been considered and retained in their minds.



A most significant impact arising from the project's work with the children is evident in the children's responses to the question of whether girls and boys are targeted with different messages on behaviour, toys etc. During the lesson, the project workers' engaged with the children on the impact of media messages, such as which toys are targeted at girls and boys, and which public figures act as role models for girls and boys. It was clear across the children's responses that the project workers' lesson had enabled the children to understand how these media messages could impact upon them, and how this impact could prove negative:

- "Barbie might give girls the impression to be very skinny, and Action Man may give boys the impression to be violent"
- "Boys get told they should be tough, girls get told they should be skinny"
- "Boys get messages to be violent and girls are to be motherly and kind"
- "Boys get violent messages and girls get pressure messages about being glamorous"

It is most encouraging to note that the children had managed to make distinctions between the messages directed at boys and girls, and were aware of how some of these messages can support negative ideals, particularly in respect of young men and violence. **This strengthened capacity to identify and name the gendered pressures that young people are exposed to is a key success of the initiative.** Furthermore, the children's enhanced understanding of how popular messages could make young women feel pressured to conform to expectations of how women should look is a very positive finding to arise as a result of the project delivery.

Observational Findings

The researcher's attendance throughout the project's delivery within the four primary schools enabled a wealth of observational data to be collected from our contact with the children in the classrooms. The observational findings were discussed at our regular reflection meetings and are reported subsequently.

Peer Pressure

During the toy photo cards activity in the first session, it was interesting to note how some particularly vocal children could direct the responses of the rest of the group to what that child perceived to be the 'correct' answer. This usually involved re-allocating all of the pictures into the 'both' category, indicating that all of the toys were played with equally by boys and girls. This was a challenging aspect of the delivery, as the other group members were initially allocating the toys into gender categories, but revising their answers on the instruction of particular children. The project workers and researcher strove to ensure that all of the children were having a say, and organised a vote where necessary, but this occurrence did illustrate some children's high awareness of the discourse of gender equality and consequent attempts to come up with the answer they felt the project workers would approve of.

Drawing Exercise

The activity in which the children were asked to illustrate clothes, hair and facial features onto outline drawings of girls and boys was particularly revealing. We also asked the children to write some words and phrases next to their picture to describe the person they had drawn. The 'boy' pictures almost exclusively featured sports clothes such as football strips and boots, and words and phrases used to describe those pictures included: sporty, happy, brilliant, rough, violent, brave, awesome. The 'girl' pictures were invariably highly decorated



"Barbie might give girls the impression to be very skinny, and Action Man may give boys the impression to be violent"

"Boys get violent messages and girls get pressure messages about being glamorous"

with full make up, high heels and voluminous hair. In one school, the children drew the girl in just a bra and skirt, with a large cleavage and false eyelashes, and explained that the girl was a teenager or a belly-dancer. The phrases listed alongside that picture were: cute, nice, hot, not violent, and friendly. In a second school, the children were decorating their 'girl' picture in a similar fashion, but their teacher asked the children to change the drawing.

The very different approach taken to illustrating the girls and boys was highlighted to the children by the project workers, and the children were asked to notice how much more 'appearance focused' the girl pictures were. This prompted a useful discussion of the pressures girls may feel to appear in particular ways, and the power of popular ideas in shaping girls' understanding of what they should wear in order to look pretty. The project workers asked the children to think about how this focus can overshadow girls' values and talents, in a way that was not the case for the footballer 'boy' pictures.

In the following chapter, an evaluation of 'What's Gender...' is offered, with reference to the perspectives of the children, teachers, the project workers and researcher.



6. EVALUATING 'WHAT'S GENDER GOT TO DO WITH IT?' PERSPECTIVES FROM THE CHILDREN, TEACHERS, PROJECT WORKERS AND RESEARCHER

As previous discussion has established, the project workers and researcher strove to continually improve and develop the initiative over the course of the delivery, and in that sense, evaluation was an ongoing and integral aspect of the work. This chapter provides analysis of the effectiveness and outcomes of the 'What's Gender Got to do With it?' initiative, drawing upon the children's written and spoken perspectives on the initiative, the researcher and project worker's observations of the project's outcomes and limitations, and the views of the teachers consulted over the course of the project work. Through analysis of these perspectives, a measure of the impact of the 'What's Gender...!' is ascertained, and are recommendations made for the project's development and future direction.

Class Teachers

During the project delivery, the researcher spoke with a number of class teachers to garner their perspectives on the need for the 'What's Gender...!' initiative, and the success of the project in promoting the children's awareness of gender inequalities and stereotyping. Discussions with the teachers were carried out at convenient times; at points during the project workers' delivery of the lessons, and also during breaks and after school. All of the staff who were consulted felt that there was a need for work which engaged children in thinking critically about gender roles, and there was a particular concern among the teachers about the nature of the role models that some children adhered to. Teachers welcomed the fact that the 'What's Gender...!' initiative discussed children's role models and encouraged the children to consider whether their role models represented themselves in a positive and responsible way:

"The media puts out some worrying messages and there are some figures who the children really admire- boys, for example, see no wrong in footballers. The project was really good at pulling out those nuances about the problematic aspects of some role models."

Also in respect of role models, several teachers noted with concern the tendency for some girls to dress in clothes which were perceived to be for older age groups, particularly at school discos and Christmas parties. The teachers felt that certain role models, such as pop singer Rihanna, had a negative influence in this regard as they were regularly featured in very revealing clothes, with a highly sexualised appearance. Programmes such as X Factor were cited as being key channels through which girls would see these representations of pop stars, potentially encouraging them to emulate their style. As a result of this concern, the 'What's Gender...!' project's discussion of role models and the ideas of positive and negative influences was praised and deemed highly necessary.

It was encouraging to hear two teachers report that the children continued to discuss the project messages after the project workers and researchers had left. After the initial visit and the lesson on the second visit, these teachers noted much discussion among the children in her class (primary six), about the fact that all jobs and all toys should be accessible to everyone. Cementing the work undertaken through the 'What's Gender...!' initiative, the primary six teacher engaged her class in a discussion about the jobs they might choose to do when they are older. A number of children stressed the fact that all jobs are open to them, as men and women do not have to be limited to particular professions. This anecdote is a very positive sign, suggesting that positive learning outcomes have been retained by the children after the project delivery concluded.

As well as providing their perspectives on the initiative and the requirement for such work with children, there were a number of occasions where class teachers acted as very valuable co-partners in the delivery of the initiative. This was particularly the case in the school which

combined both primary seven classes together for the purposes of the project; with some 34 children working in six small groups, the support of the teachers in assisting the children in completing their worksheets and in facilitating small group discussion was invaluable.

Children's Perspectives

The children's anecdotal comments and their written feedback in the evaluation sheets suggest that the 'What's Gender...' project has been well received and very enjoyable. At the conclusion of the initiative in each school, the children were asked to provide a rating of the project's various different aspects using an evaluation sheet. By highlighting their choice of a happy, sad, or neutral face, the children were asked to rate their views on the various exercises, stories, and discussion of role models. The following quotations are representative of the comments made by the children:

- "I liked talking about role models"
- "It was awesome"
- "I like this, will you come back and see us again?"
- "I enjoyed the workshops and everything else and I learned a lot"
- "I really enjoyed the whole week learning about gender and the different toys"

"It was awesome"

Indeed, these comments are reinforced by our observations of the children's engagement during the sessions. The project workers and researcher were encouraged to find that the children across all four schools engaged enthusiastically with the activities. The variety and relevance of the activities- a result of careful planning- would seem to have been central to capturing the children's attention so successfully, affording the opportunity for the children to speak out, work in small groups, draw, hear a story and provide their written responses in worksheets.

"I enjoyed the workshop and everything else and I learned a lot"

The project workers read a story to the children at the conclusion of the work in their respective classes, and the feedback on these was somewhat mixed. While only four children awarded a 'sad face' on their evaluation sheet, there were markedly less 'smiley face' responses to this element of the delivery:

- "Bill's New Frock was so strange and weird!"
- "(The story) was too young for us, probably best for P6"

The first of the two comments above is particularly interesting, as the story is described as 'weird': the participant who offered that comment is correct inasmuch as the story Bill's New Frock presents an alternative view to the traditional narrative of stories that the children may be used to. Although the stories were evaluated less positively by some children, there can be no doubt that during the sessions they had some success in subverting the traditional gendered understandings found in other stories, and the children appeared to be listening very intently while the stories were read aloud.

Researcher's Observations

The project workers and researcher worked in a reflective fashion which undoubtedly contributed much to the ongoing monitoring and improvement of the delivery. The preparation and delivery was well organised, with all appointments with the schools taking place as planned, and the teachers' preferences to assist with the delivery of the project or leave the project workers to deliver alone, accommodated. The experience of the project workers in working directly with children and young people was evident, and their capacity to convey the messages to the children at a level appropriate for their age and stage of learning was very strong.

It was very encouraging to observe the children's enthusiasm for the topics, and to see them voice their opinions on issues that appeared to have been long taken for granted. By the final session, it was very clear that children were at least more mindful of the issue of gender as it relates to how children choose the toys they play with and the jobs they may choose to do in the future. Importantly, the children were equipped with a dialogue through which role models may be critiqued, with the project workers reminding children that a person could be very talented- and admired on that basis- while still making choices that are negative and hurtful to others, and so not to be copied. This seemed to make sense to the children, and represented a salient outcome from the project delivery.

This subsequent chapter concludes this report by offering some conclusions on the 'What's Gender...?' initiative, and recommendations for future work.



7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The perspectives of the participating children, teachers, and Reduce Project workers all suggest that the 'What's Gender...!' initiative has been very well received. The project has proven to be a sound means through which primary school aged children can be engaged on issues of gender equality in a way that is suitable and sensitive to their age and stage of comprehension. The project workers are clearly experienced, knowledgeable and passionate about the project and the cause of gender based violence. It is also evident that the 'What's Gender...!' Initiative has proven thought provoking for teachers, and a welcome addition to the work on healthy respect already being delivered to children in the primary schools.

Performance Against Objectives

In advance of designing and delivering the 'What's Gender...!' initiative, several salient objectives were agreed. In evaluating the initiative's progress against these objectives, it is clear that excellent progress has been made. The first objective was to explore children's perceptions of gender, and their views on whether boys and girls should subscribe to particular gender roles. It is very clear that the project has made significant progress in exploring children's perceptions of gender, through a range of very effective and engaging activities and stories. Not only has the project heard the children's perspectives on gender roles, but clear messages which promote gender equality have been delivered.

The project's second objective was to heighten the children's awareness of gender inequality, and gender stereotypes, and encourage them to critique the idea that boys and girls should adhere to particular toys, books, films, games etc, according to their gender. The project has also made significant progress against this objective, and the children's responses both written and spoken, suggested a burgeoning capacity to name and challenge gender inequality. This sets a sound platform for further and ongoing work in this regard.

The final objective was to contribute to challenging gendered inequality with a view to preventing violence and abuse in the children's later intimate relationships. Only longitudinal research can establish the success of school based domestic abuse primary prevention programmes in this respect; in the case of the 'What's Gender...!' initiative, it will be some years before the participating children enter intimate relationships of their own. However, there are some very positive indications that the 'What's Gender...!' initiative has provided a sound starting place for children to (re)consider some taken-for-granted assumptions about gender, which contribute to normative ideas about how girls and boys should appear. Challenging children and young people to re-consider prescriptive ideas about gender- particularly ideas which champion male aggression and control, and female compliance- are absolutely central to preventing later relationships with asymmetrical balances of power and control.

Recommendations

- **Partnership Working**

The involvement of local Women's Aid workers in co-delivering the initiative in the schools was an excellent example of local partnership working. This provided an opportunity for the Reduce Abuse and Women's Aid workers to work together, and also had the effect of developing both agencies' relationships with the local primary schools. There would be much value in continuing to nurture this relationship through co-delivery of future work with children and young people across West Dunbartonshire.

"People would call him 'gay boy'"

- **Developing and Refining the Initiative**

The 'What's Gender...' initiative was a pilot project delivered to children aged 9-11. The project workers and the researcher observed differences in the responses and levels of understanding between children in the younger (Primary 5) cohort and those in Primary 7 who would soon go on to secondary schools. We worked on an 'ad-hoc' basis to tailor the delivery of the initiative to the older children, but there could now be scope to develop different strands of the project according to the age range of the pupils. The project workers could, for example, consider developing a more nuanced version of the project for children in primary seven, which could explore more explicitly the influence that the children's role models may have upon their understandings of gender equality and healthy relationships. Given how prevalent footballers were in the boys' accounts of their role models, and the extent of the current media coverage of footballers' relationships, there may be a particular need to provide a counter message to media depictions which convey footballers as rich and successful, and their female partners (or 'WAGs') as no more than glamorous assistants. Such representations may have a cost to young women's understandings of ideal relationships with men, and the project workers could engage in a valuable dialogue on some of these issues with young people as they approach secondary school.

"Boys get messages to be violent and girls are to be motherly and kind"

- **Challenging Homophobia**

A particular concern, conveyed by all of the class teachers from the primary six and seven cohorts, was some children's use of homophobic language. Children's use of the word 'gay' as an insult was reported as commonplace; particularly among boys. Some boys may choose to resist this pressure to greater degrees than others, however our contact with the children through the 'What's Gender...' initiative clearly established the operation of this pressure upon boys and the need to work consistently with children to mediate its influence. Although the Reduce Abuse project's work within secondary schools has valuably confronted this issue through engagement with young people, our work within the primary schools has underscored a pressing requirement for earlier intervention, and there would undoubtedly be much value in taking consideration of this when designing future initiatives for delivery to primary school aged children. While the initiative has certainly been successful in encouraging children to critique the 'rules' of gender in terms of their choices of toys, behaviour and jobs, there is further work to be done to support children in being able to think and act independently of very powerful gender norms, which the media and peer group currently enforce. The Reduce Abuse project workers are ideally placed to continue this endeavour.

Dr Morven Macnab
February 2012

APPENDIX 1: WORKSHEET COMPLETED BY CHILDREN IN FIRST SESSION

Jobs and Toys for Girls and Boys

Choose a name for yourself for this topic (it could be a pop star, movie star, character, or just a name that you like)

.....

Do you think there are different toys for girls and boys? (Please tick)

Yes No

Why do you think there different toys for girls and boys?

.....

.....

.....

Do you think girls and boys behave differently?

Yes No

In what ways do they behave differently?

.....

.....

.....

Are there men's jobs and women's jobs?

Yes No

Give an example of a man's job and a woman's job.

.....

.....

.....

Do you have someone you admire that is your role model?

Yes No

Can you tell us who it is?

.....

.....

Thanks for answering the questions!

Jobs and Toys for Girls and Boys

Hello again!

Last time you chose the name

.....

What do you think of the idea that there are 'boys' toys and 'girls' toys?

.....

.....

.....

.....

What do you think about the idea that boys and girls get different messages?

.....

.....

.....

.....

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