An investigation into:

“Parents’ Perceptions of the Influences on their Child’s Stereotypical Toy Choices”

Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Early Years Care and Education

Completed by

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Submitted to Athlone Institute of Technology

Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

March 13th 2017
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Student Number: A00203279
Course Year: 2016/2017
Course Title: BA Early Years Care and Education (Level 8)
Subject: Research Project
Assignment Title: Parents’ Perceptions of the Influences on their Child’s Stereotypical Toy Choices
Name of Lecturer: Vincent O’ Connor
Due date: Friday 24th March 2017

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Student Name: Jacqueline (Jackie) Gleeson
Student Number: A00203279
Course Year: 2016/2017
Course Title: BA Early Years’ Care and Education
Subject: Research Project
Assignment Title: Parents’ Perceptions of the Influences on their Child’s Stereotypical Toy Choices
Signature of Lecturer:
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Declaration

I hereby declare that this research project titled “Parents’ Perceptions of the Influences on their Child’s Stereotypical Toy Choices” submitted to the Department of Lifelong Learning, Athlone Institute of Technology as a requirement for the Bachelor of Arts (Hons) in Early Years Care and Education is a record of original work carried out by me under the guidance of Mr. Vincent O’ Connor. The information and data provided in the project is authentic to the best of my knowledge.

Signature: Jacqueline (Jackie) Gleeson

Date 24th March 2017
Acknowledgment

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Vincent O'Connor my research lecturer and supervisor. The completion of this research study would not have been possible without his help, support and guidance.

I would also like to acknowledge and extend my sincere gratitude to my family, friends and work colleagues for their patience, guidance, support and encouragement while preparing and writing this research project.

To the staff of Goldsmiths Library in Athlone Institute of Technology I would like to thank you for your patience, help and support when contacted in relation to this research process.

Finally I would like to acknowledge and thank the contribution of the respondents whose participation enabled this research.
Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to evaluate Parents’ perceptions of the influences on their child’s stereotypical toy choices. The objectives are to explore parents’ perceptions of gender stereotyped toys; the impact parents have on their child’s stereotypical toy choice and whether colour and packaging have any influence on stereotypical toy choices. The most obvious role models and active social influences in children’s lives are their parents (Zosuls et al., 2011), this project plans to critically analyse the literature surrounding this research topic.

The researcher proposes to use a quantitative research method to collect data which will provide a broad picture of parents’ perceptions and views, the researcher will distribute twenty self-completion questionnaires in pre-schools and leave a sealed box with a slot in each pre-school for participants to return their questionnaire anonymously. Findings from data collected shows how parents ranked a list of toys into masculine, feminine and neutral categories and it also highlighted how parents actually feel about their children playing with particular toys.
Chapter 1 Introduction

In a society which is rife with gender stereotypes, children as they grow and develop are exposed to many factors which influence their behaviours and attitudes regarding gender roles. Such behaviours and attitudes are learned first in the home and thereafter reinforced by society. The strongest influence on the child is that of their parents who pass on their own beliefs and attitudes (Zosuls et al., 2011).

This research project will focus on one factor which is to evaluate parents’ perceptions of the influences on their child’s stereotypical toy choices. Its aim is to examine parents’ perceptions of gender stereotyped toys; the impact parents have on their child’s stereotypical toy choice and finally whether colour and packaging have any influence on stereotypical toy choices.

This project will also critically analyse the literature surrounding this research topic and use a quantitative research method to collect data which will provide a broad picture of parents’ perceptions and views. Twenty self-completion questionnaires will be distributed to parents of pre-school aged children and a small sample of pre-schools services in the midlands region will be used.
2.1 Introduction
This chapter is an evaluation of relevant literature available on ‘Parents’ Perceptions of the Influences on their Child’s Stereotypical Toy Choices’. This chapter will critically analyse the literature surrounding this research topic. The three objectives will also be examined. The objectives include parent’s perceptions of gender stereotyped toys; the impact parents have on their child’s stereotypical toy choice and finally whether colour and packaging have any influence on stereotypical toy choices.

2.2 Background to the topic
Adults, particularly parents, reinforce the physical and social environment in which their children are exposed to (Wood et al., 2002). The most obvious role models and active social influences in children’s lives are their parents (Zosuls et al., 2011). For this reason, this research project will be focusing on the perceptions of parents.

Gender stereotyping is evident in gender roles, toys, colour, packaging, clothes and décor (Rheingold & Cook, 1975). Pomerleau (1990) supports this claiming that pink is a traditional colour scheme for girls and blue for boys. Masters (1976) also indicates that adults use traditional gender stereotyped values when they are categorising and sorting children’s toys and accessories.

Children as young as ten months have the ability to sort behaviours, information, attributes and objects into relative male or female categories (Hupp et al., 2010). As child development increases, the child demonstrates preference towards gender appropriate toys and objects as well as preferences towards males and females adults (Hupp et al., 2010). These preferences according to (McHale, et al 2003) are influenced by the social and physical experiences within the home, such as watching the gender role and behaviours of their parents.

2.3 Objective 1: To identify parents’ perceptions of gender stereotyped toys
Toys allow a child to express themselves freely, play in fantasy, explore, construct, learn and develop (Peretti & Sydney, 1984). However, during the early years of the child’s development, parents impose their own preferred purchased toy selection on
their child (Bruner, Martin and Sylva as cited in Peretti and Sydney, 1984). Adults, in particularly parents, classify toys for boys as being masculine while toys for girls are classified as feminine (Peretti & Sydney, 1984). The way in which parents categorize children’s toys into gender types indicates that the adult themselves use traditional gender stereotyped standards when classifying or sorting toys (Campenni, 1991). The preferred toy choice chosen by parents along with the child-parent play interaction with the toys sends clear messages to the child regarding gender-type behaviors and gender identification (Caldera, Huston, & O’Brien, 1989).

Campenni (1991) carried out a gender ranking toy test which showed how parents, both male and female, classified and sorted toys into masculine, feminine and neutral categories. The results found that the most appropriate feminine toys included domestic items such as play kitchen and tea sets, baby dolls, dolls house and beauty items while the toys ranked for boys were sports equipment, action figures, vehicles and construction sets. Neutral toys included sorting puzzles, playdoh and accessories and teddy bears (Campenni, 1991). Although the ranking test clearly identified parent’s sorting choice and ranking preference, Eisenberg (1985) found that parents of boys tend to choose masculine and neutral toys over feminine toys for their sons while toys classified as neutral are chosen more than feminine or masculine toys for their daughters.

2.4 Objective 2: To identify the impact parents have on their child’s stereotypical toy choice

The social and physical environments along with the early influences of toy selection provided by parents strongly influence gender role, gender identification and gender appropriate behaviour in children (Wood et al., 2002). Basow as cited in Campenni (1992) notes that parents of newborns defined them differently, boys are defined by their physical abilities while the girls are defined by their appearance. These findings are further supported by Rheingold (1975) who states parental stereotyping is prevalent in the bedroom of the child: a variety of dolls, dolls houses and domestic items are found in girl’s room while boy’s rooms have an assortment of masculine items such as vehicles, sports equipment, toy animals and military toys. The effects of
gender labelling are very prevalent in gender stereotyped toys and the appropriateness of the toy often matches the choice and preference of the parents (Peretti & Sydney, 1984).

Children also receive toys from other sources other than their parents such as friends and other adults who may or may not have children (Wood et al., 2002). Fisher-Thompson, Sausa, & Wright (1995) cited in Simmons (2010) explored the toy purchase choice of adults leaving a toy store and discovered that most of the toys purchased were stereotypical according to the gender of the child. Campenni (1991) supports this claiming that the focus tends to be on the toy selection rather than the interactive play opportunities of the toy.

2.5 Objective 3: To identify the influences of colour and packaging on toy choices

2.5.1 Colour:
Research shows that boys and girls differ in their toy selection; with girls preferring dolls and domestic items while boys prefer action figures and construction materials (Jadva, Hines, and Golombok, 2010). Children are exposed to environments that are extremely gender specific towards toys and colour Hull et. al (2011). Pennell (1994) indicates that gender toy preferences may be influenced by the colour and packaging of the toy. Pennell (1994) found that toys appropriate for girls tend to be in pastel shades such as pinks and lavender; while toys aimed at boys tend to be presented in intense colour such as reds, black and blue. Freeman (2007) confirms that colours associated with girls include pink, yellow and multi-colors while blues, reds and white are more prominent color’s for boys. Pomerleau (1990) supports these findings claiming that girls’ clothing, motifs, toys and pacifiers were mostly pink and multicolored with yellows and pastel colors found in their bedroom. Blues, reds and whites were the more prevalent colours found in bedrooms of the boys or on their clothing toys and accessories.

Henshaw, Kelly & Gratton (1992) found that the role of colour can override the physical appearance of characters, example when children of preschool age were asked to decide if a picture of a cat wearing pink, yellow or blue bows were boys or
girls, every child asked identified the cat with the blue bow as that of a boy, the cat wearing the pink bow as girls and almost three-quarters of the children thought the cat wearing the yellow bow was a girl.

2.5.2 Packaging:
A study by Hull (2011) on preschoolers’ toy preferences found that the packaging on the toy influences the child’s choice. The results found that children themselves categorized the toys based on the gender of the child associated with the toy. For example, if a girl was featured on the packaging then the child associated that toy with the female gender, and toys for boys were identified by the appearance of an action figure or by bold colors present on the packaging.

In 2012, a Swedish Top - Toy Licensee of Toys “R” Us, published the first ever gender neutral Christmas toy catalogue (Benjamin, 2012). Their premise is that if children are exposed to visuals of gender play with stereotypical toys as per previous catalogues they are limiting their choice of play and how they play. Top-Toys decision to produce a gender natural toy catalogue echoes a larger debate in Sweden on gender roles in society and on gender traditional serotypes (Day 2012).

This catalogue displays images of boys playing with dolls and domestic items such as play kitchens and girls playing guns and cars. Nyberg (as cited in Day 2012) suggests that toys are for children; the toy is not a toy for a boy or a girl, Nyberg also suggests the next step needed to remove gender segregation in relation to toy choices and selection is to create a gender neutral toy shop.

2.6 Conclusion
This research chapter focused on the perceptions’ of parents in relation to the influences of toy choice and selection for their child. The evidence highlights how parents impose their own views and preference on their child and that gender stereotyping is very apparent in gender roles, toys, behaviour, clothing and all sorts of accessories.
Clearly highlighted was how social interactions and the physical environment in which the child is exposed to, influence the choices and behaviour of the child. There is compelling evidence that the traditional colour theory “pink for girls and blue for boys” is foisted on the child by parents and that toys are generally labelled as boy toys (masculine) or girl toys (feminine). The overall appearance of the toy and its packaging determines whether that toy is for a boy or a girl. This research didn’t explore whether stereotypical toys and the way they are played with, limits choices for the child as suggested by Top-Toy who published the first ever gender neutral toy catalogue.

Having reviewed the literature available on the topic of ‘Parents’ Perceptions of the Influences on their Child’s Stereotypical Toy Choices’, it is evident that there is a shortage of Irish research on this topic and most of the research articles were over ten years. For this reason, this research aims to provide an insight on the influences on stereotypical toy choices in an Irish context.
Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.1 Method
In order to collect data needed the researcher will utilise a quantitative research method, which allows the researcher to answer the research questions most effectively. Punch (2005, p.28) claims that ‘Quantitative researchers collect facts and study the relationship of one set of facts to another’. Quantitative research allows the researcher to use a large sample size. The research topic is outlined in the research aims and objectives.

The researcher proposes to use a quantitative research method to collect data. The parents’ perceptions will be examined using questionnaires designed by the researcher. The collected data will provide a broad picture of parents’ perceptions and views and it will ‘make it possible to draw comparisons between responses’ (Robert-Holmes, 2011, p.165). The researcher will distribute twenty self-completion questionnaires in pre-schools and leave a sealed box with a slot in each pre-school for participants to return their questionnaire anonymously.

3.2 Participants
The researcher will use a convenience sample of three preschools from the midlands region of Ireland. The participants will be a mix of male and female parents of different ages. The participant’s child will be both pre-school aged and attending a pre-school in the midlands region.

3.3 Process - Pilot Study
A pilot study (Appendix 1) was conducted on three colleagues from teaching backgrounds; the aim of this study was to identify any problems with content or structure, to ensure that the questionnaire was easy to understand and the instructions were clear and relevant to the objectives outlined in the research project. Some alterations were advised to question structure and to the layout of the questionnaire, this advice was greatly appreciated and changes made.
3.4 Procedure
The researcher will distribute the self-completion questionnaires (Appendix 1) to parents of a pre-school aged child from the 23rd – 28th January 2017, because of tight time constraints these will be collected after the pre-school session on Friday 4th February.

The researcher will call to pre-schools in person seeking permission from the owners to hand out the questionnaires to the parents of their service. With permission twenty questionnaires across different pre-schools will be distributed in person in hope of receiving a good response rate. To ensure the data is protected the researcher will leave a sealed box with a slot to post the questionnaires on the pre-school premises. The researcher will return to collect them on Friday 4th February – this will gave the participants a clear timeframe to complete the questionnaires. Questions one to four of the questionnaire (Appendix 2) will gather general demographic information about the respondents and the child’s age and gender. Questions five and six will relate to Objective One of the research project which identifies parents’ perceptions of gender stereotypical toys, while questions seven to nine identify the impact parents have on their child’s stereotypical toy choice which is Objective Two and finally questions ten to thirteen are specific to the final objective which is to identify the if colour and packaging influence toy choices.

The consent form (Appendix 3) will outline what is expected from the participants. If they agreed to participate, completing the questionnaire should take no more than ten minutes, they will be assured that no names will appear in any documents and that the results of the study will be published.

3.4 Ethics
The researcher will seek informed consent from pre-school owners in order to collect data from parents. An outline of the research study and its purpose will be verbalised to the participants and they will be asked to give their informed consent by signing the consent form. Participants will be informed that they can withdraw from the project at any time no names or signatures will be required. As part of the informed consent
process under the Irish Data Protection Acts the researcher will explain to the participants what will happen to the data they provided.

3.5 Limitations
This is a small scale research project conducted over a short period of time. The findings will be predominantly based on parents of pre-school going children in the midlands region only. The researcher believes a larger sample of participants would give a more generalised reading of parents’ perceptions on the influences of stereotypical toy choices. The researcher found no recent Irish studies on the topic and some of the research found was over ten years old, hence the reason for researching this topic. This project will be influenced by time constraints and the sample size and age.

3.6 Proposed method of data
The data results will be analysed and presented in the form of graphs and charts in the results chapter.
Chapter 4 – Presentation of Results

4.1 Introduction
In this chapter the results of the data are presented, the data were collected and processed in response to the perceptions of parents in relation to the influences of toy choice and selection for their child.

Twenty questionnaires were distributed to a mix of male and female parents of children attending three different pre-school services in the midland region of Ireland.

Twenty questionnaires were needed to complete this research, with twenty returned the response rate was 100%.

Question one to four of the questionnaire identified the vast majority of respondents (60%) were between the age of 35 - 45, 25% fell under the 26-35 age bracket with 15% of parents in the 46+ age bracket, no parents were under 25 years of age. The greater part of respondents (by just 10%) were females with a response rate of 55% while the male respondents accounted for 45%.

The gender of the child highlighted in the questionnaire comprised of 70% males and 30% females and the upper age bracket of the child aged 3 ½ - 5 years was 55% while 45% of the children fell under the younger age bracket of 2 ½ - 3 ½ years of age.

The data in Table 1 illustrates parents’ perceptions of what are gender stereotypical toys. Parents were given a list of toys to sort into gender categories. The table below highlights
how parents ranked the listed toys according to the gender of the child. Data shows that 100% of respondents rated action toys, guns and swords as masculine toys while Barbie dolls (100%) were perceived as a feminine toy closely followed by Baby dolls (80%), toys such as the telephone, puzzles, playdough and sports equipment were categorised as neutral toys.

**Table 1 Toys sorted into categories according to parents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toy Type</th>
<th>Masculine (%)</th>
<th>Feminine (%)</th>
<th>Neutral (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barbie dolls</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby dolls, e.g. baby born-</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen/tea sets</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play house</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model cars</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trains, e.g. Thomas the Tank</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool bench and tool sets</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction, e.g. building blocks</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playdough and accessories</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lego</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puzzles</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guns and Swords</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action figures</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctor's set</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports equipment</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not at all aware</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly aware</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately aware</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very aware</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely aware</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 Identifying parents awareness of their own influence on the stereotypical choice of toy they themselves give to their child, 50% of respondents (5 male and 5 female parents) are very aware while 10% (male parents) are just slightly aware.

**Table 2 Identifying parents awareness**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness Level</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not at all aware</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly aware</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately aware</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very aware</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely aware</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data contained in Table 3 and 4 is relevant to the researcher’s second objective which is to identify the impact parents have on their child’s stereotypical toy choice. The participants
were given a list of toys and asked if they had previously purchased any of them for their child. The data shows the most purchased toys classified as masculine, feminine or neutral toys in Table 1.

**Table 3** Toys parents purchased for their child

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toy Type</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barbie doll</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal post</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model cars</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby dolls</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball ring</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurl and Slicer</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea sets</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play Kitchen</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool bench</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play house</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4** identifies how parents feel about their child playing with the same toys listed as in Table 3. Two separate respondents said they would be very unhappy with their child playing with the Barbie dolls (5%) or Baby dolls (5%); the data contained in the questionnaire identifies these parents as of male gender. While another 10% of respondents said they would not be happy with their child playing with the same mentioned toys also the response from male parents.

**Table 4** identifies how parents feel about their child playing with some toys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toy Type</th>
<th>Very unhappy</th>
<th>Not Happy</th>
<th>Don't mind</th>
<th>Happy</th>
<th>Very happy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barbie dolls</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal post</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model cars</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby dolls</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball ring</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurl and Slicer</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tea set</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play Kitchen</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tool Bench</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play House</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The last objective was to investigate the factors influencing the buying choice of toys such as colour and packaging. Research showed that the traditional colour for boys is blue and girls are pink, the table below shows the response of parents when asked if they agreed or disagreed with that research. The vast majority of respondents (45%) agreed with the traditional colour suggestion while only 10% disagreed.

**Table 5 Do parents agree with the traditional gender colour schemes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Colour</strong></td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Packaging</strong></td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: shows that the vast majority of parents do agree that the colour (55%) and packaging (60%) of toys influences them when buying. They also agree (45%) that their child does choose stereotypical coloured toys as for their own sex.

**Table 6 Does colour and packaging influence buying power**

The next chapter will discuss the results of the research carried out, the results will be critically evaluated and reference will be made to the research objectives.
Chapter 5 – Discussion

5.1 Introduction
The present study was unique in that it directly investigated parents’ perceptions of the influences on their child’s stereotypical toy choices under three objectives: (1) it identified parents’ perceptions of gender stereotyped toys, (2) it identified the impact parents have on their child’s stereotypical toy choice and finally (3) the study identified the influences of colour and packaging on toy choices.

The results of the study highlighted that gender stereotyping in relation to toy choices continues to be one of the most domains in which parents play an important role for their children.

This chapter will discuss the new research findings from the twenty respondents (a balance of 40% male and 60% female parents) within the context of the objectives provided in the literature review chapter; it will explore how the new findings link to research already provided. These findings will be discussed under the three main objectives headings:
5.2 **Objective 1: To identify parents’ perceptions of gender stereotyped toys.**

According to Campenni (1991) parents use traditional gender stereotyped standards when classifying toys into masculine, feminine or neutral. Some differences emerged between the findings within the present study and research conducted by Campenni (1991). Parents support findings from Campenni (1991) that dolls are classified as feminine toys by 100% however they disagree with Campenni (1991) by majority of 80% that play kitchens and tea sets are neutral toys rather than toys of feminine classification. This finding is significant as it indicates that current parents recognize a change in gender roles.

Some differences also emerge in the classification of masculine toys, with Campenni (1991) suggesting that sports equipment, action figures and construction toys are toys of a masculine nature. Results in the present study highlights that there is a shift in what is traditionally seen as masculine toys, with 100% of parents classifying sports equipment as neutral instead of masculine, and in addition a further 65% of parents indicated that constructions toys were neutral rather that masculine toys. This suggests that parent’s attitudes on such stereotyping toys have changed; in return this allows the child to explore toys and their benefits without them falling into the traditional domain of gender appropriateness. However parents in this research decided that action figures are toys for boys, with the majority 100% consistent with previous research on gender stereotypical by Campenni (1991). Findings was also 100% consistent with the research of Campenni (1991) in relation to playdough and puzzles been classified as toys for both boys and girls.

Caldera, Huston, & O’Brien, (1989) suggests that the parent-child play interaction along with toy choice sends clear messages to the child regarding gender type behaviour, gender identification and gender role attitudes, they future suggest that behaviour is first learned in the home. This current study indicates that half of respondents 50% (5 male and 5 female parents) are very aware that their own toy choice contributes to the gender stereotyping of their child. However the data does not identify if the parents model their own stereotypical expectations on their child, or even if they encourage or discourage cross gender stereotyped toy variation play for their child.
5.3 **Objective 2: To identify the impact parents have on their child stereotypical toy choice.**

The current research identifies that the most purchased toys to date for children of both sexes, are categorised as neutral toys from the list provided in table 4.2. Dolls remain to be classified as feminine toys and only purchased for girls; these findings support the findings of Rheingold (1975) in relation to the dolls, the domestic items such as the tea sets and play house/kitchens however are classified in the new data as neutral toys rather than feminine as Rheingold (1975) suggests. Considering that 70% of the pre-school children within this research are of male sex this result could be attributed to parents being more open-minded when it comes to toy selection.

Rheingold (1975) suggests that toys such as vehicles and sports equipment are of a masculine nature and are more relevant for boys. The findings in this study agree with Rheingold (1975) in relation to model cars but disagree in relation to the sports equipment where there are classified as equipment for both genders by a staggering 100% of parents. This is a significant find as it clearly shows that there is a change in parental attitudes.

Simmons (2010) suggests that toys are purchased in accordance to the gender of the child; Campenni (1991) supports this claiming that the focus tends to be on the toy selection rather than the interactive play opportunities of the toy. In support of their findings this research identified male parents (20%) would either be very unhappy or not happy if their male child was to play with either Barbie dolls or Baby dolls. This figure is important because it identifies that four male parents are uncomfortable with their sons playing with what is perceived to be feminine toys and because of their own perceptions may be limiting the playing experience of their children.

5.4 **Objective 3: To identify the influences of colour and packaging on toy choices.**

It was found that the majority of parents (45%) agreed that the traditional colour for boys is blue while the traditional colour for girls remains pink, a further 55% of parents agree that the colour of the toy does in fact influence their buying power. This confirms Henshaw, Kelly and Gratton (1992) where they found that the colour of the toy can override the physical appearance of the object. In support of their findings
This research data shows that parents also agree that the packaging of the toy greatly influences (60%) their decision when buying toys for their child.

This present study identifies that 45% of parents believe that their own child does choose toys as for their own sex while 15% disagree that the child is influenced by the stereotypical toy choice, this finding supports Hull (2011) who claims that the child is influenced by the gender of the child associated with the toy.

5.5 Evaluation of Method
A quantitative method of research was used for data fathering. This method provided information that could be counted, and later analysed using statically methods. This method of research was very effective, consistent and reliable in gathering the data needed to satisfy the objectives; however this method did not allow respondents further explain their answer other than using a tick method of response, but nevertheless the data is valid.

5.6 Limitations of Method
The sample group for this research was limited to twenty respondents. The researcher believes a larger sample of participants would have given a more generalised reading of parents’ perceptions on the influences of stereotypical toy choices. The sample group was also confined to the midlands region only and there was constraints on the age profile of the child involved. The researcher can only evaluate data returned and is aware that some questions may not have been answered honestly which leads to inadequate findings.
5.7 Future Research

This project identifies that there is a long history in relation to gender stereotypical toys and there is a divide in what is classified as masculine and feminine toys. More up-to-date research is needed to identify if gender specific toys are having a negative impact on the overall development of children. Toys are toys, should the choice be based on the personal interest of the child or on their gender?

5.8 Conclusion

The main aim of this research project was to evaluate parents’ perceptions of the influences on their child’s stereotypical toy choice. The purpose of the research was to find out from the parents what they themselves perceived as gender stereotypical toys and did they feel that their own perceptions on toy choices had any impact on their child’s own toy choice, and finally to investigate if in fact the colour and packaging of toys had any influence on the buying power of the parents.

In the Literature Review chapter, research by others in this area was investigated which proved that during the early years of development, parents reinforce the physical and social environment in which their child is exposed to.

Findings from this research project highlighted that some toys are currently still been classified as masculine and feminine, there is however a major shift in the classifying of some traditionally masculine and feminine toys into a gender neutral category which suggests that the role of toys within our current society are being reinterpreted.

5.9 Recommendations

Following on from this research project the researcher would make the following recommendations:

Limits should not be put on play – in order to promote independent exploring and thinking children should have access to lots of toys.
Manufactures are ideally positioned to make changes to the colour and packaging of toys so as to make them appealing to both genders, toys should organise toys by function rather than gender.
Toy stores need to strive for gender neutral aisles instead of dividing the store into boys and girls sections. If certain toys are not offered or explored due to gender stereotype, a child may never find out if they enjoy a certain type of play. Finally Clear messages need to be sent to parents on the importance of play rather than the object of play.
Appendix 1

Analysis of Pilot questionnaire

What does the researcher want to find out?

1. The first few questions will identify the gender and age of the adult and the child.
2. Throughout the literature review, researchers identified specific toys for boys and girls; these toys were sorted by parents into masculine, feminine and neutral categories.
   2.a The researcher wants to find out how parents in the chosen location categorizes some of the listed toys.
3. The researcher wants to find out from parents what factors they think influences toy choices.
   3.a Do they influence toy choice?
4. Once the gender is identified, what toys have the parents bought and what toys would they consider buying for their child from the list. Example, the questionnaire will identify the child as boy or girl, did any parent buy a Barbie doll for a boy or a tool set for a girl? If not are they happy for their son to play with a Barbie doll or daughter to play with a tool set?
5. Do parents agree with the traditional colours associated with boys and girls?
6. Does colour and packaging influence their decision when buying toys for their child?

The researcher wants the questionnaire to:
- Be completed in ten minutes
- Easy to follow with clear instruction
- Provide relevant information
- In your opinion are any of the questions:
  - Vague or confusing?
  - Neglecting the main topic?
  - Were there any hesitations in answering any of the questions?
  - What changes can be made?
  - Any additional comments
Objective 1: To identify parents’ perceptions of gender stereotyped toys

1. Your Gender
   Male □ Female □

2. Your Age group
   Under 25 □ 26-35 □ 36-45 □ 46+ □

3. Child’s gender
   Male □ Female □

4. Child’s age group
   2 years 6 months -3 years 6 months □ 3 years 7 months – 5 years □

5. In your own opinion, how would you sort the following list of toys? Please tick the relevant box. M = Masculine F= Feminine N= Neutral

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toy</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barbie dolls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby dolls e.g. baby born, Annabel</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen/tea set</td>
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<td>Telephone</td>
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<tr>
<td>Play house</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model cars</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trains e.g. Thomas the Tank Engine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools bench and tool set</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction e.g. building blocks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Lego

Puzzles

Playdough and accessories e.g. stencils/rollers, cutters.

Guns and swords

Action figures

Doctor sets

Sports e.g. football, goal post, Basketball, basketball ring, soft balls, bouncy balls, hurl and slitor

6. In your opinion, do the following factors influence the choice of toy your child plays with?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child’s age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Their gender</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social interactions with siblings &amp; peers</td>
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<td>Social interactions with you and other adults</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical environment at home, in pre-school etc.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. How aware are you, of your influence on the stereotypical choice of toy you give to your child?

- Strongly aware □
- Somewhat aware □
- Unaware until now □
- Unsure □

Objective 2: To identify the impact parents have on their child's stereotypical toy choice

8. Have you previously purchased any of the following toys for your child? (Please tick all that applies).

- Barbie dolls □
- Goal post □
- Model cars □
- Baby dolls □
- Basketball ring □
- Hurl and sliotar □
- Tea sets □
- Play kitchen □
- Tool bench □
- Play house □

9. Please indicate using the scale below, how you feel about your child playing with the following?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Very unhappy</th>
<th>Not happy</th>
<th>Don’t mind</th>
<th>Happy</th>
<th>Very happy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Barbie dolls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal post/football</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model cars</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby dolls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball ring</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hurl and sliotar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tea sets</td>
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<tr>
<td>Play kitchen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tool bench</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Play house</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Objective 3: To identify the influences of colour and packaging on toy choices

Researchers, Wood, Desmarais and Gugula (2002) suggest that pink is a traditional colour scheme for girls and blue is a traditional colour scheme for boys.

10. Do you agree or disagree with the above opinion
   Agree □    Disagree □

11. In your opinion does the stereotypical colour of a toy influence you when buying toys for your child?
   Agree □    Disagree □    Unsure □

12. Do you agree that the stereotypical packaging of a toy influences you when buying toys for your child?
   Agree □    Disagree □    Unsure □

13. In your opinion, does your child choose stereotypical coloured toys as for their own sex?
   Agree □    Disagree □    Unsure □

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS SURVEY.
**Appendix 2**

**Questionnaire**

*Please answer all questions.*

1. **Gender**
   - Male □
   - Female □

2. **Age**
   - Under 25 □
   - 26-35 □
   - 36-45 □
   - 46+ □

3. **Child’s gender**
   - Male □
   - Female □

4. **Child’s age**
   - 2 years 6 months -3 years 6 months □
   - 3 years 7 months – 5 years □

5. **In your own opinion, how would you sort the following list of toys? Please tick the relevant box. M = Masculine F= Feminine N= Neutral**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toy</th>
<th>M</th>
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<th>N</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Play house</td>
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<tr>
<td>Model cars</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Trains e.g. Thomas the Tank Engine</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tools bench and tool set</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction e.g. building blocks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lego</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Toy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puzzles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playdough and accessories e.g. stencils/rollers, cutters.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following factors influence the choice of toy your child plays with?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
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<tr>
<td>Social interactions with siblings &amp; peers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical environment at home, in pre-school etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. How aware are you, of your influence on the stereotypical choice of toy you give to your child?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Awareness Level</th>
<th>Not at all aware</th>
<th>Slightly aware</th>
<th>Moderately aware</th>
<th>Very aware</th>
<th>Extremely aware</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. Have you previously purchases any of the following toys for your child? (Please tick all that applies).

- Barbie dolls □
- Goal post □
- Model cars □
- Baby dolls □
- Basketball ring □
- Hurl and sliotar □
- Tea sets □
- Play kitchen □
- Tool bench □
- Play house □

9. Please indicate using the scale below, how you feel about your child playing with the following?

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 Very unhappy</th>
<th>2 Not happy</th>
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<th>4 Happy</th>
<th>5 Very happy</th>
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<tr>
<td>Barbie dolls</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal post/football</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Vehicles</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Baby dolls</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basketball ring</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hurl and sliotar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Play house</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
10. Researchers, Wood, Desmarais and Gugula (2002) suggest that pink is a traditional colour scheme for girls and blue is a traditional colour scheme for boys. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the above opinion?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

11. Do you agree that the stereotypical colour of a toy influences you when buying toys for your child?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

12. Do you agree that the stereotypical packaging of a toy influences you when buying toys for your child?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

13. In your opinion, does your child choose stereotypical coloured toys as for their own sex?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree or disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO COMPLETE THIS SURVEY.
Appendix 3

Information and Consent Form

Dear Parent,

My name is Jacqueline Gleeson. I am a final year student at Athlone Institute of Technology completing an Honours Degree in Early Years’ Care and Education. As part of my course I must complete an empirical research project. I have chosen to examine Parents’ Perceptions of the Influences on their Child’s Stereotypical Toy Choices. This research is being supervised by Mr. Vincent O’ Connor a lecturer in the Department of Humanities at the college.

I will distribute a short questionnaire to parents of children attending pre-schools from 23rd - 28th January 2016 and will collect them the week ending 4th February. No names are required on the questionnaire. Questionnaires should only take 10 minutes or less to complete. To ensure the data is protected a sealed box with an opening slot will be left on the pre- school premises so participants can drop in their questionnaire.

I would be extremely grateful if you would complete the questionnaire which will provide me with important information to complete this research project. Participation is entirely voluntary and participants may withdraw from the process at any point, if they wish.

As part of the informed consent process under the Irish Data Protection Acts, data collected from the research will be stored on a personal laptop which is safely secured by a password. Hardcopies of data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. The researcher has sole custody and access to the data and the data will be stored for three years after publication.

If you have any questions or queries please contact me on 0872153253.

Thank you very much for your time and assistance.

______________

Jacqueline Gleeson
**Consent Form**

I agree to participate in this research project - Parents’ Perceptions of the Influences on their Child’s Stereotypical Toy Choices.

I understand that the information provided will be used solely for this purpose and that my name and no other identifying characteristics will be used in this research.

I understand that it is entirely confidential and I can withdraw from the process at any point, if I wish.

______________________    ______________________
Signed       Date
Appendix 4

Recent findings on the colour and packaging of Lego sets aimed at children aged 6+.

This photo was taken on Friday 24th February 2017 in a local shop, it clearly identifies that the colour and packaging of these Lego sets are manufactured and packed in line with stereotypical attitudes. As suggested changes to the colour and packaging of toys is needed.

In your opinion do these toys in the photo put limits on the purchasing power of the parent or the child?
REFERENCE LIST


Pomerleau, A, Bolduc, D, Malcuit, G, & Cossette, L . (1990), 'Pink or Blue: Environmental Gender Stereotypes in the First Two Years of Life', Sex Roles, 22, 5-6, pp. 359-367, SocINDEX with Full Text, EBSCOhost.


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