“You can be anything you want”: An exploration of children’s perceptions of gender-typed occupations using a story-completion method.
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own independent investigation under the supervision of my tutor. The various sources to which I am indebted are clearly indicated. This dissertation has not been accepted in substance for any other degree, and is not being submitted concurrently for any other degree.
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❖

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“You can be anything you want”: An exploration of children’s perceptions of gender-typed occupations using a story-completion method.
ABSTRACT

Occupational segregation recognises that some occupations have a higher percentage of men, whilst others have a higher percentage of women. This has important implications for childhood development, as it reinforces traditional stereotypes and encourages societal expectations of boys and girls, and thereby can compromise an individual’s careers progress. The aim of the current study was to qualitatively explore children’s perceptions of gender-typed occupations. In doing so, a story-completion task was given to children between the ages of 9-10, and a thematic analysis of the completed stories resulted in two core themes: Influential Roles, and Motivating Factors. These findings highlighted that in contrast to popular belief, primary school aged children do not always make choices within occupational opportunities they perceive to be consistent with gender. Directions for future research are also discussed.
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Stereotypes are generalisations about individuals belonging to a particular social group intended to represent the entire group. Gender stereotypes are generalisations about attributes of men and women (Heilman, 2012). Gender continues to be a binary categorisation, in which there is significant comparison of women to men, and men to women, emphasising any differences in terms of the contrast between them (Ellemers, 2018). Although gender stereotypes have been attempted to be explained by biological differences (Ellemers, 2014; Lippert-Rasmussen, 2010), research would suggest otherwise that these differences develop over the life span due to the way boys and girls are raised and educated (Ellemers, 2018; Zosuls, Miller, Ruble, Martin & Fabes, 2011). Within this process, biological differences are shared beliefs concerning the characteristic traits and abilities of men and women. However, societal roles and power positions emphasise and enlarge initial differences greater than biological distinctions (Eagly & Wood, 2013). Children who perceive these differences between men and women are then socialised into what is seen as appropriate gender roles by imitation and reinforcement (Martin, 2014; Tayler & Price, 2016). Gender stereotypes hold both descriptive (what women and men are like) and prescriptive properties (what women and men should be like) (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Eagly & Karau, 2002; López-Sáez & Lisbona, 2009). Consequently both stereotype properties, and the expectations they hold can compromise an individual’s career progress, particularly those of women (Heilman, 2012).

A concept put forth by the socialisation theory suggests that early childhood learning produces the notion of gender differences in the workplace. Thus, males and females choose occupations consistent with society’s interpretations of masculinity and femininity (Carter, 2014; Williams & Dellinger, 2010). These occupational gender stereotypes appear to be based on an individual’s expectations of the percentage of men or women in that chosen occupation, as well as the perceived qualities that are necessary to be successful (Forsman & Barth, 2017). Despite the fact that more media attention is drawn to gender in the workplace, and a greater number of women today are employed in a wider range of roles and occupations than ever before, children still perceive careers to be male or female (Chambers, Kashefpakdel, Rehill & Percy, 2018). From an early age we develop a conscious and unconscious classification system, which can consequently cause young men and women to rule themselves out of careers that they might otherwise successfully pursue (Flouri & Panourgia, 2012). Not only could these stereotypes influence an individual’s perceived
potential when selecting a future occupation, it has been found to impact how others rate and value the performance level of men and women (Ellemers, 2018; MacNell, Driscoll & Hunt, 2015). These outcomes have significant consequences for the career development and income levels of men and women, which over a life span can result in substantial gender inequalities and segregation within the workplace (Ellemers, 2018). These inequalities have been demonstrated frequently in recent years, such as the comparison of wages received by men and women with equal qualifications and employed in similar or same position jobs (Buffington, Cerf, Jones & Weinberg, 2016).

Further to this, the phenomenon labelled as occupational gender segregation recognises that some occupations have a higher percentage of men, whilst others have a higher percentage of women (Alonso-Villar, del Rio & Gradin, 2012; Mintz & Krymkowski, 2010; Wright, Eaton & Skagerberg, 2015). Research would argue there is a clear segregation according to gender in occupational roles. Certain occupations (such as construction workers) are dominated by men, whilst other occupations (such as in the health services) are dominated by women (Jarman, Blackburn & Racko, 2012). This imbalance within occupations, in which men are overrepresented in technical and labouring jobs and women are overrepresented in teaching and service jobs has been evident for over sixty years (Lippa, Preston & Penner, 2014). There is evidence to support a strong decline of occupational gender segregation since the 1970’s, nevertheless, this decline appears to be slowing (Blau, Brummund & Lui, 2013; Gradín, 2017). Although in comparison to previous years, a wider variety of occupations are now open to women, a great deal of jobs remain gender segregated and women continue to fall behind men in terms of pay and authority (Williams, Muller & Kilanski, 2012). The gendered organisation theory was a ground shift in theory on gender and occupation, which was put forward by Acker (1990) to dispute the notion of gender-neutral workplaces. The theory argues that inequality is built into the workplace; organisations have normative gender expectations that disadvantage women and favour men (Williams & Dellinger, 2010; Williams, Muller & Kilanski, 2012), which ultimately leads to the marginalisation of women, and facilitates gender inequality and discrimination (Acker, 1990). Acker’s argument best explains traditional organisations in which jobs offer long-time security, career ladders and dominant managerial positions - these features are not so prominent within the new economy where teamwork, career maps and networking are proving to be necessary characteristics (Williams, Muller & Kilanski, 2012), and may be more compatible with women’s careers (Eisenstein, 2010; Hewlett, 2008). A contrasting argument would propose that gender stereotypes contribute fundamentally to where men and women are placed, or place themselves within gender segregated
occupations (Puchner, Markowitz & Hedley, 2015), because as an individual they make choices within occupational opportunities they perceive to be consistent with their gender (Evans & Diekman, 2009; Oswald, 2008).

This commonly held perception of gender consistent occupations has been the focus of research investigating the development of children’s occupational aspirations (Porfeli, Hartung & Vondracek, 2008; Schuette, Ponton & Charlton, 2012). Research suggests that occupational preferences and interests in children have shown to predict actual occupations in adulthood (Alm & Bäckman, 2015). Therefore, gender differences in occupational aspirations during childhood may be lasting and consequential (Hayes, Bigler & Weisgram, 2017). As research has suggested that stereotypes are embedded at a young age and difficult to shift (Bates, 2015), it highlights the importance of understanding children’s occupational aspirations, and encouraging children to engage with the world of work at a younger age (Chambers et al., 2018). Despite gender differences in occupational aspirations changing, there is evidence that boys and girls still tend to have an interest in different occupations according to gender composition (Huvva, 2015). A growing body of literature relates to men pursuing female-dominated occupations (Forsman & Barth, 2017; Limiñana-Gras, Sánchez-López, Saavedra-San Román & Corbenalán-Berná, 2013), and women pursuing male-dominated occupations (Eccles & Wang, 2015; Oswald, 2008). Recent media attention has focused on the position of men in nursing (Miller & Fremson, 2018), and women in the fire service (Foster, 2018), because of the gender stereotypes of these professions. These gendered assumptions have lead to research investigating how stereotypes can be detrimental to those aspiring to purse their chosen occupation (Chambers et al., 2018; Hayes et al., 2017).

Generally, health care is considered to be a female activity, therefore, it is often thought that women are expected to work in a caring profession (Limiñana-Gras et al., 2013; O’Lynn, 2007). Men in such a profession are viewed as out of the ordinary for choosing a lower status, female-based profession (Battice, 2010). However, men have contributed to nursing through a large part of history (Limiñana-Gras, et al., 2013; O’Connor, 2015), and understanding the role male nurses have had in the past contextualises recent efforts in modern day to encourage more men to consider the profession (Edwards, Hawker, Carrier & Rees, 2015). This encouragement of interest challenges children’s stereotypes and detrimental gendered assumptions about who we believe to be suitable to work with and care for patients (Kouta & Kaite, 2011). Nevertheless, the obstacle to men choosing to nurse is recognised and there seems to be an apparent lack of encouragement for men and
younger boys to enter the profession (LaRocco, 2008; O’Connor, 2015; Stott, 2007). The minority of men within nursing face a number of disadvantages as their chosen occupation is commonly associated with women and femininity (O’Connor, 2015). Consistent research findings suggest primary motivating factors in the decision to become a nurse is the desire to care and nurture others; altruism; and fulfilment of childhood aspirations (McLaughlin, Muldoon & Moutray, 2010; Newton et al., 2009; Shah, Parpio, Zuhaid & Zeb, 2017). These concepts are often linked with femininity, thus presenting a significant barrier for men in choosing to be nurses (O’Connor, 2015). Consequently, for those men who have chosen to nurse there is an attempt to distance themselves from attributes such as nurturance and altruism (O’Connor, 2015). This has implications for both the recruitment and retention of men in the profession, highlighting the need to investigate the relationship of nursing to gendered concepts.

Research suggests that men identify their reasons for nursing as the career prospects and job security, influence of family members, and the technical elements of the job (Chou & Lee, 2007; Ierardi, Fitzgerald & Holland, 2010; Kulakac, Özkan, Sucu & O’Lynn, 2009; LaRocco, 2008). However, it is postulated that men are equally motivated by an aspiration to work with and care for patients as women (Ierardi et al., 2010), but societal expectations of masculinity and the female perceptions of nursing prevent them from expressing this (O’Connor, 2015). This may then influence the occupational aspirations of children. If children become more aware of, or witness men in a caring role, then they may feel freer to explore their own gender and its possibilities and lessen the stigma attached to men in nursing due to perceived stereotypes (Tayler & Price, 2016). Seeing men in a caring role is an advancement in gendered assumptions as it challenges the view that men can only act in a certain way and women in another. Research has highlighted the key factors preventing men choosing nursing as a lack of male nurse role models and the general failure of career guidance in schools to promote boys’ interest in nursing (LaRocco, 2008).

There has been a marked increase in women joining the fire service over the past few decades (Woodfield, 2015). However, firefighting is still identified as a predominantly male dominated profession (Sinden et al., 2013). The perception of firefighter’s masculinity has been constructed on the proposition that it is an occupation only available to men who associate themselves with an occupational identity based around heroic, blue-collar skills (labour and physical work) (Baigent, 2001). However, recent debate in the media over the use of the terms fireman and firefighter would suggest that the contribution of women within the fire service is being recognised more (Topping,
Dany Cotton, the first female commissioner of London Fire Brigade stated the necessary importance of shaking off outdated language preventing young girls and women from considering firefighting as a professional career (Farmer, 2017). Supporting research has highlighted the significance of introducing gender neutral language when referring to professions in the attempt to minimise the acceptance and usage of stigmatised language (Hodel, Formanowicz, Sczesny, Valdrova & van Stockhausen, 2017; Hord, 2016; Sendén, Bäck & Lindqvist, 2015). The use of stigmatised terms such as fireman contributes to the idea of fixed masculinity, whereby images of men in a position of dominance reaffirms sex differences and continues to prevent women from joining the fire service (Baigent, 2001; Perrott, 2015). Limited research has investigated the primary reasons for women joining the fire service, suggesting that childhood aspirations, attraction to the physical and active nature of the job, and the feeling of doing something useful and helping people, are motivating factors (Wright, 2008). Whilst fulfilling childhood aspirations, being useful and helping people are general career motivations for women (Martin & Barnard, 2013), the attraction to the physicality of the job is less researched. Understanding the physical demands on female firefighters offers a new perspective on the barriers females face in a complex and male-dominated environment (Sinden et al., 2013).

Research has identified the importance of close personal and family relationships in the recruitment of women into the fire service, as family and friends with ties to the profession are often a first introduction (Russo, Neal, Phillips, Mendez & Mix, 2015). Firefighting represents an intergenerational profession for men (being passed from father to son) which may help an occupational aspiration to develop early on. Interestingly, findings have shown some women to be inadvertently recruited along with their husbands or brothers, (Hulett, Bendick, Thomas & Moccio, 2008). This could identify a need for introducing appropriate role models to girls at a younger age to educate and encourage interest in the area.

Research has highlighted children’s awareness of gender-typed occupations and the tendency to aspire to an occupation consistent with societal expectations (Carter, 2014; Porfeli, Hartung & Vondracek, 2008; Schuette et al., 2012; Williams & Dellinger, 2010). A growing body of literature is consequently examining the influential factors of children’s occupational aspirations (Alm & Bäckman, 2015; Fulcher, Sutton & Patterson, 2008; Schuette et al., 2012), thus broadening our understanding of children’s perceptions and ideas about gender-typed occupations (Chambers et al., 2018).
Research identifies the significant influence parents have on children’s occupational aspirations (Chambers et al., 2018; Watt, 2008), and the importance of considering the impact of parental occupations (Huvva, 2015; Schuette et al., 2012). A significant association has been identified between male adolescents’ career aspirations and those of their male adult parents’ (Schuette et al., 2012). Generally there is an avoidance of male working adults mirrored in stereotypically female jobs and by children’s future aspirations (Schuette et al., 2012). This avoidance of female jobs could reflect women generally holding jobs of a lower status (Barth, Guadagno, Rice, Eno & Minney, 2015; Battice, 2010), and not having a gender-consistent job is regarded as unacceptable for boys and men (Hartung, Porfeli & Vondracek, 2005; Schuette & Killen, 2009). Contrary findings about female career aspirations have shown no significant relationship between female adolescents career aspirations and those of working female adults (Schuette et al., 2012). Whilst a high percentage of working female adults hold stereotypically female jobs (55%), 45% of female adolescents career aspirations were for stereotypically male jobs (Schuette et al., 2012), thus the gender typicality is less pronounced among girls (Teig & Susskind, 2008). This evidence suggests the impact of parental stereotypes may be lessening for girls (Hartung, Porfeli & Vondracek, 2008), as women tend to be more open-minded regarding gender diversity and nonconformity than men (Fulcher et al., 2008). Whereas, parental stereotypes among boys is still prevalent and influences their preferences of future occupations (Schuette et al., 2012).

Previous research into occupational preference has largely focused on factors related to primary socialisation, such as, circumstances in the childhood family (Fulcher, Sutfin & Patterson, 2008). However, researchers are becoming increasingly aware of the influence peer groups and school have on children’s development (Lansford, Killeya-Jones, Miller & Costanzo, 2009), particularly, peer influence on children’s educational choice and occupational preference (Kiuru et al., 2012). This could be explained by the ubiquitous pattern of children tending to interact with other children of the same sex, and therefore, spending much of their social time in gender-segregated groups (Bohn-Gettler et al., 2010; Martin et al., 2013). As a result, characteristics such as, social comparison and a great need for conformity are often developed in early childhood (Kiefer & Ryan, 2011), which could help explain why children may perceive the importance of having a gender-consistent job in the future. There is limited research on the role of peers in children’s career development; some findings have suggested that children choose their friends based on similar occupational-related characteristics (Kiuru, Koivisto, Mutanen, Vuori & Nurmi, 2011). Contrasting
findings suggest that children’s occupational choices are influenced by peers’ opinions and attitudes towards gender-typed professions (Cook, Deng & Morgano, 2007).

Due to the increasing importance of popular culture in the lives of children, recent research has focused on the influence media has had on children’s perceptions of stereotypes in the workplace (Puchner, Markowitz & Hedley, 2015; Richardson & Wearing, 2014). It is estimated that children experience approximately seven hours of media exposure daily (Rideout, Foehr & Roberts, 2010), with media representations of gender often depicting stereotypical images of men and women (Gainer, 2010). It is suggested these media portrayals influence children’s expectations about appropriate gender behaviours (Chambers et al., 2018). The media often portrays men as the main focus, as the financial providers, and in occupations related to STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) (Gainer, 2010). This influences young boys to conform to a specific type of masculinity in order to be successful (Kiefer & Ryan, 2011; Richardson & Wearing, 2014). Women are commonly portrayed as stay at home wives or mothers, or working in occupations perceived to be nurturing such as, teachers, nurses or social workers (Gainer, 2010). These representations are considered to be sexist and promote gender prejudices, which influences children and reinforces the perceived notion that gender segregation is typical within the workplace (Richardson & Wearing, 2014).

This study aims to explore children’s perceptions of gender-typed occupations, with the hope of extending the current research and further investigating the belief that children are socialised in to what is seen as appropriate gender roles (Tayler & Price, 2016), leading them to ultimately choose an occupation deemed to be consistent with society’s interpretations of masculinity and femininity (Carter, 2014; Williams & Dellinger, 2010). A qualitative story-completion task (Clarke, Hayfield, Moller & Tischner, 2017) will be utilised. Participants will be presented with a story stem which includes a hypothetical scenario and character, and instructed to complete the story by describing what happens next. Story-completion tasks aim to give access to a wider range of responses, including socially undesirable ones (Clarke et al., 2017). This method is appropriate when the researched topic relates to controversial social norms. In line with this data collection method, thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) will be employed, which will provide a thorough, systematic and accessible approach to the qualitative exploration of children’s perceptions regarding gender-typed occupations.
Design

A qualitative story-completion task (Clarke et al., 2017) was implemented for this study. The use of a story-completion task allowed subjective data to be collected giving a wide range of responses, including social undesirable ones (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which is not typically possible through a quantitative approach. Story-completion is deemed an appropriate method to use with children as the story stems are specific enough to guide the research, but open enough so there is plenty of scope to fully explore the participants’ responses (Clarke et al., 2017). Additionally, the method is useful for researching social categories such as gender, and whether there is variation in the participant’s responses of the scenario and character’s gender (Clarke et al., 2017).

Participants

31 participants were recruited for this study between the ages of 9-10 (Year 5 of Key Stage 2), 17 of which were female, and 14 of which were male. Participants were recruited from a primary school in the South Wales area, where permission was granted by the Head Teacher to take part in the study. Participants of these ages were recruited specifically, as the study aims to investigate children’s perceptions of gender-typed occupations. Research has suggested that by the age eight children have developed gendered ideas about occupations, with long term implications (Chambers et al., 2018), as well as not being aware of when and how stereotypes are impacting on their choices, which otherwise could be present in older children (Renold, 2005). Additionally, this age range would ensure the participants could complete and engage with the task well within the allotted time. Although participants of this age range were purposefully chosen for this study, all participants remained anonymous, only revealing their gender and age.

Ethical Issues

Prior to the commencement of the data collection process, ethical approval was granted by the Psychology Ethics Panel at Cardiff Metropolitan University (ethics reference number: 9789). As participants were under 18 years of age, the Head Teacher provided consent in loco parentis. Obtaining consent in this form was deemed suitable given the nature of the research was not
sensitive, and participant were only asked to confirm their age and gender (British Psychological Society, 2014). Completion of the task was within the range of normal classroom activities, and participants were asked to write about a fictional character, not on their own experiences or personal views.

Materials

Prior to data collection, the Head Teacher was given an information sheet which would inform them of the purpose and procedure of the study. Initial consent was given by the Head Teacher over email informing the researcher that they had permission to conduct the research. After receiving ethical approval the consent form was signed by the Head Teacher to allow the research proceed. Each participant received the story completion-task on paper, which was completed by hand. All data was stored in a locked filling cabinet to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the data.

A story-completion task was implemented, which included two story stems for the participants to complete. The first story stem scenario (see Appendix 1.) includes a female character who is told by her friends that a firefighter is not a job for girls. The second story stem scenario (see Appendix 2.) includes a male character who is told by his friends that a nurse is not a job for boys. Both male and female characters were incorporated in the task, as children have expressed greater happiness at the idea of having a gender-typed consistent occupation (Levy, Sadovksy & Troseth, 2000; Liben, Bigler & Krogh, 2001), this will offer a further insight into perceptions of gender differences in children. The story stems described the opinion of the character’s friend, as research has suggested the significant influence peers have on children’s beliefs and attitudes, especially towards gender-typed activities (Martin et al., 2013). As well as stating their age and gender, an additional question of “What do you want to be when you’re older?” was asked, and although it was not analysed in a systematic way, it will, however, be used at part of the description when providing quotes.

Procedure

Within a classroom teaching session, a story-completion task was handed out by the teacher, and participants were instructed to spend 30 minutes completing both story stem by hand, using pen and paper. Participants were informed to be as creative as they would like, and that there was no right or wrong way to complete their story. After the task was completed, all data was collected in a sealed
envelope to maximise anonymity and confidentiality, by the Head Teacher and given to the Lead Researcher for analysis.

Analysis

A series of practical steps developed by Braun & Clarke (2006) were used to conduct the six-phase thematic analysis on the story-completion tasks. These steps included generating initial codes for all story-completion tasks, which consisted of coding interesting and significant features of the data. Codes were then collated into possible themes, assembling all data relevant to each potential theme. Main themes were created as a way to collapse and merge appropriate sub-themes, generating clear names and definitions for each theme. The resulting themes were then reviewed to ensure they relate to and have not become distant from the initial coded extracts of the data. Thematic analysis attempts to make sense of what is meant in the dataset by creating, emerging and defining themes.
CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

The following section discusses the two core themes and eight sub-themes derived from the data during thematic analysis. Both core themes and sub-themes can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Overview of core themes and sub-themes.

Each of the themes displayed in Figure 1. will be discussed in turn with supporting quotes derived from the data.
Influential Roles

Peer Influence

As both story stem scenarios discussed the reaction of the characters’s friends, across the data, the stories were heavily influenced by the friend’s opinion on gender-typed occupations. This finding was commonly seen in stories written by both female and male participants, and was a theme often running from beginning to end in individual stories. The stories described how the friend’s opinion influenced the character to reconsider what job they would like when they grow up, which was seen in the following quote:

1. Jacob said My friend’s david and Jayden think it’s only for girls well I don’t want to be a nurse anymore I just think I won’t fit in corey later Jacob said you will fit in I promise corey.

(Story 20, Male, Age 9, Footballer)

The way in which participants often detailed about a change of mind or reconsideration of a future job suggests the negative influence peers might have on children’s opinions and attitudes towards stereotypes, particularly in the workplace. Participants often detailed how peers would suggest an alternative job which would be more suited for the appropriate gender, which is demonstrated in the following quote:

2. "Well usually it is for a girl you could be a doctor. I want to be a doctor who saves people. "Doctors save people" said his friend’s. "Ohhhhh said Jacob I want to be a doctor then saving people like superman “Pow” “bang” ”

(Story 6, Female, Age 9, Model or Beautician)

1 “Jacob said my friend’s david and Jayden said It’s only for girl’s well I don’t think I want to be a nurse any more I just think I wont fit in corey.”
2 “Well usually it is for a girl you could be a doctor thats a good job to” said his friend’s. “but I want to be a saver who saves people” “doctors save people to” said his friend’s. “Ohhhhh said Jacob I want to be a doctor then saving people like superman “Pow” “bang” ”
On the other hand, a number of participants demonstrated how the characters were eager to ignore their friend’s judgements and pursue their occupational aspirations. This highlights an alternative reaction to the influence of their peers, and a stronger attitude in a hope to make a point and prove them wrong. This was seen in the following quote:

3

(Story 17, Male, Age 9, Footballer)

Whether the character was negatively or positively influenced by their friends, peers stood as a consistent influential role across the dataset and ultimately had a significant impact on the outcome of the characters future occupation choice.

Family Influence

There was less mention of family influence compared to that of peers influence, which could be due to the story stems describing the friends opinion. Nevertheless, more female than male participants detailed how the character would look for an alternative opinion from their parents after disagreement from their friends. As seen in the following quote, the parent is assuring the character not to listen to their friend’s opinions and ignore the negative influences, as their occupational aspiration is more important:

4

(Story 8, Female, Age 10, Hairdresser and Cake maker)

Additionally, the family influence tended to be positive and from the parents of the character. Not only was there support from the parent about the character’s preferred occupational choice, the participant detailed how a boy can do a “girls” job, and a girl can do a “boys” job. Although the

3 “Remember when you said I couldn’t be a nurse well I proved you wrong” ”

4 “When Jacob got home he told his Mum about what happend in school His mother disagreed with his friend and told Jacob to just follow his dreams”
parent is supporting the idea of pursuing a job not consistent with gender, there is, however, acknowledgement of the perception that there are jobs for girls and jobs for boys, evidence by the following quote:

(Story 25, Female, Age 10, Vet)

However, one participant detailed the opinion and influence of the character’s older brother. Not only does the brother have a negative outlook towards gender-typed occupations, it seems a significant enough influence to alter the characters own opinion and aspiration of becoming a nurse. This was seen in the following quote:

(Story 11, Female, Age 10, Model or Popstar)

Seeking family advice became a priority across the dataset after disagreement with peers over choice of future occupation for the characters.

5 “Yes there are Girls at the firestation and boys can do Girls Jobs and Girls can do Boy Jobs”

6 “Jacob and his friends askeds Jacobs big brother if being a nurse a girl job his oler brother saide “yes it was?but you could be a doctur insted saide his brother. Jacob thoget he had been dreaming to be a doctur for so long but maybe it could not be so bad being a doctur. jacob thoget about this for a long time and decisded he would like to be a doctur.”
Support

Participants detail how the characters look for support from others to assure that their choice of future occupation isn’t out of the ordinary just because it is deemed appropriate for one gender only. The majority of the support is given by older adults in the stories, and in the case of the quote below, the character’s teacher. Not only is the teacher offering support to the student concerning their future occupation choice, the story detailed how that support had a beneficial influence on the character, both emotionally and with influencing them to follow their dream:

7 “says to the teacher “can I be a Fire Fighter if I want to be” the teacher said “yes you can be anything you want to be.” So the teacher boosted her energy more than ever! She became a Fire Fighter and told her friends

(Story 12, Female, Age 10, Teacher)

The character would often look for support from a parent after disagreement with their peers. In the case of the following quote, the character’s friends do not believe that she once met a female firefighter, so looks for reassurance from her mother that she is telling the truth. The mother accuses the friends of being in the wrong, without actually saying that firefighting is a suitable occupation for girls, but does, however, offer the support that the character is looking for.

8 “Amy asked her mum “Did a girl firefighter really come to our house?” “Yes one did and her name was Stacey.” said mum. “Because my friends told me that it’s a boy job to be a Firefighter.” said Amy. “Well they’re clearly wrong.” said mum.

(Story 7, Male, Age 9, Video game programmer for Nintendo)

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7 “says to the teacher “can I be a Fire Fighter if I want to be” the teacher said “yes you can be anything you want to be”. So the teacher boosted her energy more then ever!”

8 “Amy asked her mum “Did a girl firefighter really come to our house?” “Yes one did and her name was Stacey.” said mum. “Because my friends told me that it’s a boy job to be a firefighter.” said Amy. “Well they’re clearly wrong.” said mum.
There were fewer stories detailing the support from peers, which could be expected as the story stems included the non-supportive opinion of the character’s friend. However, in the few cases where peers did offer support, it was often through a change of heart or realisation that they were in the wrong. As evidenced in the following quote, the friends realise that occupations can be for both genders, and not limited to only one as they had previously thought:

9 “after that her friends realised then that all jobs can be for girls or boys SO then they had no problem with her and let her be what she wants to be”

Support was not as prominent as peer influence and parent influence across the dataset, nevertheless, receiving the correct support from others had the same positive effect on the character’s decision to pursue their chosen occupation.

Role Models

The appearance of a working adult in the stories was seen as a role model for the characters, which acted as a significant influence in supporting their decision to achieve their future occupation aspirations. The incorporation of a role model in the story allowed the character to develop interest in the occupation, as well as, view a working professional as a real life influence of what they could potentially achieve in the future. This was seen as a juxtaposition to negative peer influence in the following quote:
Influence of a role model was also commonly shown through the character’s own experience and interaction with a professional of their occupation choice. Real life experience with a working adult supports the character’s beliefs and occupational aspirations, additionally, it is a significant influence in attempting to break down gender-typed occupations. This was evidenced in the following quote:

(Story 7, Male, Age 9, Video game programmer for Nintendo)

The desire to achieve their occupational aspiration was supported and highly influenced by the role of working adults, especially of the same gender as the character.

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10 “The next day a fire man come in their school and explained what to do in a fire but her friends was not listening and just messing about amy thought it was amazing learning about what to do in a fire.”

11 “there he met Dr Smith. Dr Smith was one of the best nurses at the ward and to Jacob’s delight he was a man!”
2. Motivating Factors

Aspirations

The use of the term *dream* was used repeatedly across the whole dataset, both female and male participants addressed this as a motive for their character to pursue their occupation of choice, whether it be gender-typed or not. This was often seen in the stories where the character needed to justify ignoring their friends opinions and attitudes towards their vocation. Additionally, the characters were shown to pursue their dream successfully, as well as proving that occupations are not exclusive to one gender only, this can be seen in the following quotes:

12 "Amy ignores them and follows her dream to be a firefighter. Later on in life, Amy became one of the best fire fighters in her time, then she wrote a call to no"

(Story 1, Male, Age 9, Play for Liverpool)

13 "She don't listen to her friends and done her dream to show that being a fire fighter is not just for boys it is for girls too"

(Story 5, Male, Age 9, Boxer)

Saving lives or helping others was a prominent theme across the data set, but was only found in stories written by female participants. The character described their desire to pursue their chosen occupation purely because of their aspiration to help others and save lives. This motivating factor came across as significant and of great importance to the character, as generally there was no

12 “Amy ignores them and follows her dream to be a firefighter. Later on in life, Amy became one of the best fire fighters in her time.”

13 “She don’t listen to her friends and done her dream to show that being a fire fighter is not just for boys it is for girls too”
mention of other motivating factors when stating this as the reason for pursuing their aspiration. This was evidenced in the following quote:

14

I want to be a nurse because I want to save people’s lives.
I want to save people’s lives.

and I want to look after people.

(Story 26, Female, Age 10, Film maker)

The desire to fulfil an aspiration was a significant motivating factor for the character. Whether it was a personal motive such as fulfilment of a dream, or a public motive such as a service to others, the characters expressed their aspirations for pursuing their chosen occupation.

Achievement

Achievements attained by the characters was a salient feature across the dataset, especially when describing their occupational aspirations. This finding was mostly prevalent in stories written by the female participants. Achievements regarding gender were certainly noticeable, as seen in the following quote, the character and other females have achieved a certain occupation which was thought of as a job for men. In some cases, it may be true that to achieve a job position in a gender-typed occupation is a highly motivating factor to pursue that career choice.

15

Yes, you can be anything you want to be.

The runner boasted her energy more than ever, she became a Fire Fighter and told her friends there is so much girls in the fire station and they all love her there. so she told everyone her story.

(Story 12, Female, Age 10, Teacher)

14 “I want to be a nurse because I want to save people’s live’s and I want to look after people.”

15 “She became a Fire Fighter and told her friends there is so much girls in the fire station and they all love her there. so she told everyone her story”
Although achievement was mostly recognised as a personal motivating factor for the character, occasionally, the character felt a sense of achievement at getting an occupation said to be unsuitable by their friends. As seen in the following quote, this would suggest that at times proving their friends wrong was more motivating than actually achieving an occupation thought only appropriate for the opposite gender.

30 years later Jacob becomes a nurse and when his old friends come to his hospital he says “I told you I can be a nurse.”

(Story 17, Male, Age 9, Footballer)

Additionally, there is the recognition of the achievements in school that are necessary to succeed in that specific occupation. There seems to be an understanding that if you do well in your academic studies you are more likely to achieve within your career, therefore, school achievement could be seen as a motivating factor. This was evidenced in the following quote:

Gym to be strong. She needs to work hard at school because if she doesn’t go to school she doesn’t learn and she needs to learn to get the job. Amy would

(Story 22, Male, Age 9, Tennis player)

Not only did the stories include the character’s actual achievements, the prospect of achieving also seemed enough to motivate the character to pursue their chosen occupation, sometimes regardless of the fact they wished to pursue a gender-typed career.

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16 “30 years later Jacob becomes a nurse and when his friends come to his hospital he says “I told you I can be a nurse” ”

17 “She needs to work hard at school because if her doesn’t go to school her doesn’t learn and her needs to learn to get the job.”
**Success**

Achieving an aspiration was shown to produce success in some stories. This end goal of success, whether it be occupational, financial or family success, could have been an initial motivating factor for the characters. Nevertheless, the significance of ending up in a successful career was an important factor within some stories, as seen in the quote below, it does, however, seem to be mostly materialistic possessions that mark the character’s success.

18

> He takes no notice to them and does what he wants to be. After that he be a nurse and gets a nice house a car and a lovely family an children and plenty of money to live him and his familys life carys on there jobs

(Story 5, Male, Age 9, Boxer)

Although personal success was detailed as an important outcome for the characters, success was also used as a way to prove they friends wrong. Success within their career was certainly apparent and significant to the character, however, success regarding gender was not noticeable. The character did not relate back to the disagreement over gender-typed occupations when speaking of their success, as seen in the following quote:

19

> thing that he thought. So now Jacob is working hard to be a nurse and forgot what his friends said and now 10 year on that day he is living a good life being a nurse all his friends and family were proven wrong.

(Story 12, Female, Age 10, Teacher)

18 “He takes no notice to them and does what he wants to be. After that he be a nurse and gets a nice house a car and a lovely family an children and plenty of money to live him and his familys life carys on there jobs”

19 “So now Jacob is working hard to be a nurse and forgot what his friends said and now 10 year on that day he is living a good life being a nurse and all his friends were proven wrong.”
Whether or not success was an initial motivating factor, it does however, seem to motivate the character at a later stage to prove a point to their peers that their argument of gender-typed occupations was weak.

*Emotional Reward*

Across the dataset participants described the emotional rewards the character would obtain from achieving their chosen occupation. This finding was highlighted by the pride one female character felt from completing a good deed, as evidence in the following quote. However, there is no sense of pride at achieving an occupation thought of as a job for men, which may suggest that gender was not a motivational factor for this character.

20

![Handwritten note: Amy rescued her friends that used to be mean to her. She saved their lives and Amy has never been so proud.]

(Story 31, Female, Age 9, Air hostess)

Additionally, the recognition of the character’s happiness was evident across the dataset. Happiness was both described at the prospect of fulfilling an occupational aspiration, as well as successfully fulfilling that aspiration. As seen in the quote below, the story expresses the character’s happiness at practicing nursing, which seems to be a significant motivating factor for the character as they ultimately end up in that profession.

21

![Handwritten note: Jacob would beg his mam to buy him a nursing kit but she would never buy him one but one night he did and he was so happy so every night he would practise. 18 years later Jacob is a nurse and his friends are too.]

(Story 4, Female, Age 10, Model or Stewardess)

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20 “Amy rescued her friends that used to be mean to her. She saved their lives and Amy has never been so proud.”

21 “Jacob would beg his mam to buy him a nursing kit but she would never buy him one but one night she did and he was so happy so every night he would practise. 18 years later Jacob is a nurse and his friends are too.”
Across the dataset, the idea that both men and women are capable of doing any job, particularly those thought of as only suitable for the opposite sex, was a salient feature in stories written by both male and female participants. An optimistic tone was given to the stories where characters were motivated to prove that any job is attainable, regardless of gender, as evidenced in the following quotes:

22 “Girls can do boys job and Boys can do Girl jobs” said Grace The motto of the story is there is no right or rong jobs for anyone

Whilst in the above quote there is acceptance that any individual can hold a gender-typed occupation, there is nevertheless, still an acknowledgement towards certain occupations being for men and certain occupations being for women. Other stories did however, support the idea that occupations should not be categorised by gender, but did so without mentioning that some are “boys jobs” and “girls jobs”. This was seen in the following quotes:

23 “you can be anything you want”

(Story 25, Female, Age 10, Vet)

(Story 12, Female, Age 10, Teacher)
As can be seen, there is a consciousness that jobs do not need to be referred to as ‘male’ or ‘female’, and ideally there should be acceptance that every gender is capable of every occupation.

Summary of Results

Overall, the results of the analysis have highlighted the ways in which the character was detailed by both male and female participants to be aware of influential roles and motivating factors in pursuing a gender-typed occupation. Influential roles was a salient theme in the way that participants descriptions of positive and negative influence peers and family had on the character, the support they received from others, and the positive effect of role models. Additionally, motivating factors were salient across the dataset, as was seen in the character’s aspirations, achievements and success, as well as the emotional rewards of pursuing a gender-typed occupation. Through the consideration of the two core themes and eight sub-themes, the analysis suggests that regardless of gender stereotypes associated with certain occupations, the character was often determined to fulfil their occupational aspiration.

24 “all jobs can be for girls or boys”

25 “it not just for girls it for boys and grils. so any peaple can be it to.”
CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

The aim of the current study was to explore children’s perceptions of gender-typed occupations using a story completion method. This attempted to further investigate the belief that children are socialised into what is seen as appropriate gender roles, thus reinforcing gender stereotypes (Carter, 2014; Tayler & Price, 2016; Williams & Dellinger, 2010), leading males and females to choose occupations that are perceived to be consistent with society’s interpretations of masculinity and femininity (Carter, 2014; Porfeli et al., 2008; Schuette et al., 2012; Williams & Dellinger, 2010). The current research would support the notion that children are generally aware of occupational gender stereotypes. However, findings have highlighted the importance of influential roles and motivating factors in choosing an occupation not in line with societal expectations. The importance of influential roles was evident from the way participants described the character’s reaction to peer and family opinions, support from others, and the influence of role models. Furthermore, the significance of motivating factors in choosing an occupation was evident from the way participants described the character to have aspirations, success, achievements, and emotional rewards.

The findings have important implications for the future of gender-typed occupations. For instance, these findings have highlighted how in contrast to popular belief, primary school aged children do not always make choices within occupational opportunities they perceive to be consistent with gender. Surprisingly, compared to other themes derived from the data, gender itself was not as apparent or consistent as may have been expected from a task concerning gender-typed occupations. The influence of other characters in the stories, as well as personal motivating factors for the characters were more apparent across the dataset. These findings draw attention to how children perceive gender within certain occupations; suggesting gender itself is not so much a barrier to pursuing or achieving a certain occupation, rather, the opinion of others and individual motivation has a significant influence on the decision to pursue a gender-typed occupation or not.

These findings emphasise the significance of other people’s opinions on children making an occupational decision, particularly when that decision is thought of as out of the ordinary. The story stem scenarios included the controversial opinion of the character’s friend, as it had been presumed that peer influence would have a significant role on the outcome of the character’s decision. The data indicated peers negatively influence occupational choices as the friend’s opinion was
significant enough to cause the character to reconsider their occupation choice. This finding is in line with the idea that during childhood, social comparison and a need for conformity are often developed (Kiefer & Ryan, 2011). Supporting the finding that children’s occupational choices are highly influenced by peers’ opinions towards gender-typed occupations (Cook et al., 2007). Therefore, whether the individual agrees with the peers’ opinion or not, their influence was significant enough for the individual to reconsider their own opinion. This finding was prevalent across the dataset. After disagreement with peers over occupation choice, seeking family advice became a priority for the character across the dataset. Family influence was found most often in stories written by female participants, which is interesting as previous research has failed to demonstrate a significant relationship between girls’ occupational aspiration and their female parents’ career aspiration (Schuette et al., 2012), suggesting the impact of parental stereotypes may be lessening for girls (Hartung et al., 2008). The present findings suggest that family influences are relevant to both male and female children’s perceptions of gender-typed occupations, suggesting that future research should aim to explore the relationship between gender and family influences further.

Support was seen to have a positive effect on the character’s perception of gender-typed occupations. This finding suggests the growing importance of offering affirmative support to children’s occupational aspirations, as supporting gender differences during childhood may have a detrimental effect which could be lasting and consequential for future generations’ occupational aspirations (Hayes et al., 2017). Whereas, the desire to achieve an occupational aspiration was supported and influenced by the appearance of working role models, which attempted to break down stereotypes and gender-typed occupations. The present findings support the significance of a role models in children’s perceptions of gender-typed occupations, and reinforces previous findings that role models are able to challenge gendered assumptions and perceived stereotypes within the workplace (Tayler & Price, 2016). This finding has highlighted the importance of introducing appropriate role models at a young age to encourage them to enter the profession, especially for men who attempt to distance themselves from feminine attributes associated with certain occupations such as nursing (O’Connor, 2015). Future research should aim to investigate the beneficial effects of support and role models in the media, as previous findings regarding the media have only shown to emphasise the negative representations of gender in the workplace (Chambers et al., 2018; Gainer, 2010; Richardson & Wearing, 2014).
Findings of the current research have highlighted the motivation of fulfilling an occupational aspiration for children. Previous research has stated fulfilling a childhood aspiration is generally a career motivation for women (Martin & Barnard, 2013; Wright, 2008), nevertheless, this motivational factor was featured in stories written by both male and female participants. Saving lives or helping others was a significant motivation for some of the characters. Previous findings would suggest these motivating factors tend to be associated with women (Wright, 2008), therefore, societal expectations prevent men from expressing these motivations (O’Connor, 2015). However, these findings were not supported by the findings of the current research as roughly an equal amount of male and female participants described their aspiration to help others or save lives as a motivation to pursue their occupation. Achievements attained by the characters was a salient theme across the dataset, however, this was mostly prevalent in female participant’s stories. Achievements regarding gender were certainly noticeable which would suggest that achieving a job position in a gender-typed occupation may be a highly motivating factor to pursue that career choice. Nevertheless, there is limited research investigating achievement as a personal motivating factor for pursuing a gender-typed occupation. Future research should explore if this is a factor limited to women only, as findings of the current research would suggest.

Achievement of an aspiration lead to success in some stories. The evidence of this finding among male participants is unusual as research has highlighted the pressure that young boys must conform to societal expectations of masculinity in order to be successful (Richardson & Wearing, 2014). Previous findings, and findings of the current research highlight the need to show young boys that success is attainable in all occupations, even those deemed to be suitable for only women. Along with success, other emotional rewards were described by participants across the dataset including pride and happiness, although the most salient was the idea that both men and women are capable of doing any job. An extensive amount of research suggests that children are aware of gender differences within occupations (Carter, 2014; Chambers et al., 2018; Huvva, 2015; Williams & Dellinger, 2010), which consequently supports the notion to be successful you must attain a gender-typed occupation (Flouri & Panourgia, 2012; Forsman & Barth, 2017). Therefore, these findings offer a promising future for children’s perceptions of gender within the workplace, as they suggest that children remain determined to fulfil occupational aspirations despite negative influences such as peers’ opinions, subsequently such behaviours will begin to break down stereotypes and encourage mixed-gendered occupations.
The current study was the first of its kind to employ a story-completion task in a non-therapeutic way to explore children’s perceptions of gender-typed occupations. Future research should aim to explore these findings further. For instance, a drawing task could be implemented to further investigate children’s perceptions of gender. Previous research has supported the utilisation of drawing tasks to explore children’s perceptions, and has suggested it to be a method with a valuable contribution to research, providing a more complex and multi-layered picture of the topic under study (Eldén, 2012). Further more, whilst the current study made the participants aware of the character’s gender beforehand, future research could consider not making the gender a key component of the task at hand. The children could be instructed to draw a character representing a certain occupation with no mention as to what gender they could be. However, the chosen occupations could represent a stereotypically male job, stereotypically female job and a gender-neutral job, in order to compare the children perceptions of gender in occupations. The children will then be able to discuss the character they have drawn with reference to their characteristics, abilities, and gender, with an explanation as to why these traits best fit that certain occupation.

A limitation of using a story-completion task is the concern that using more than one story stem may cause order effects, the participants may spend more time and write their longest story for the first story stem (Clarke et al., 2017). Future research should allocate a certain amount of time for the completion of each story stem to assure that stories will be of similar length. Moreover, the data was analysed by one researcher only which could have led to blind spots in the data being missed due to the lack of another perspective and point of view. Nevertheless, Braun & Clarke’s (2006) six-phase thematic analysis was strictly adhered to, therefore, the consequences this could have had on the quality of the analysis was reduced. A further limitation to the present study is despite the fact that stereotypes have a significant input on the debate of gender issues, there is difficulty with its measurements, therefore, there is limited literature exploring how much they impact children’s lives (Chambers et al., 2018). Further to this, it is unclear at precisely what age children develop occupational aspirations. Whilst research has suggested aspirations develop between the ages of ten and fourteen, alternative research has found that occupational choices made at fourteen years old are strikingly similar to those made at four years old (Chambers et al., 2018). Therefore, future research could use participants of varying ages to further investigate perceptions of gender-typed occupations throughout childhood.
To conclude, findings of the current study have drawn attention to children’s perceptions of gender-typed occupations, highlighting the concept that children do not always make choices within occupational opportunities they perceive to be consistent with gender. Occupational outcomes were seen to be significantly effected by influential roles, as well as motivational factors. Gender did not appear to be a significant concern for the children when it came to occupations, therefore, the notion of stereotypes within the workplace in unwarranted and dated. The current findings will offer a way forward for future research, in particular these findings could promote an end to gender-typed occupations, which has shown to have detrimental effects on occupational preferences displayed in childhood. In line with this, it has explored alternative explanations behind children’s perceptions of gender, specifically in the workplace, which will allow future research to compare these findings with arguments that have previously encouraged gendered occupations.

Reflective Analysis

Throughout this current research project, my role as a researcher was influenced by my interest in childhood development. I was keen to make my contribution to this topic area as relatable and up-to-date as possible, which I hoped to have achieved through my choice of research question. This influenced my decision to work with children for this project, and to explore a potentially damaging belief regarding gender-typed occupations. As a firm believer in gender equality, as well as being aware of the media coverage equality and gender segregation has gain globally, I felt it to be a suitable and appropriate topic of discussion and encouraged me to work on a project I felt potential to increase gender equality. Whilst it could be argued that these influences could have potentially provided me with a certain level of bias, I believe they allowed me to engage with the data on a deeper level. Finally, I feel as though these interests allowed for the children who participated in this study to have their stories and perceptions recognised and heard, keeping in line to the relevance of the study.
REFERENCES


Appendix 1. Story-completion Task Form Scenario A

STORY COMPLETION TASK (A)

Gender:

Age:

What do you want to be when you’re older? .................................................................

You will be given an opening of a story and we want you to write what happens next. There is no right or wrong answer, and you can be as creative as you want. Your story can happen over hours, days, week, months, or even years, and can include new characters if you want.

Please spend the next 15 minutes completing the following story:

“Amy tells her friends she wants to be a firefighter when she grows up. Amy’s friends say that’s not a job for girls…What happens next?”
Appendix 2. Story-completion Task Form Scenario B

STORY COMPLETION TASK (B)

Gender:

Age:

What do you want to be when you’re older? .........................................................

You will be given an opening of a story and we want you to write what happens next. There is no right or wrong answer, and you can be as creative as you want. Your story can happen over hours, days, week, months, or even years, and can include new characters if you want.

Please spend the next 15 minutes completing the following story:

“Jacob tells his friends he wants to be a nurse when he grows up. Jacob’s friends say that’s not a job for boys...What happens next?”
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Signed:

Date: 20/04/2018