

Peer Relationships in Preschool

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In their 2005 article published in one of the most influential Women's Studies journals, *Preschool Children's Pretend and Physical Play and Sex of Play Partner: Connections to Peer Competence*, Malinda Colwell and Eric Lindsey analyzed the relationship between preschool children's play forms with same, mixed, or other-sex peers and their social competence.

For a period of 2 years, 60 children of varying ethnic origins and primarily middle-class families were observed in their natural environment at the child-care program – particularly the playground. Multiple qualified research assistants observed the children's behavior. Specifically, they coded for the child's social involvement, looked at interactions with peers and their associated sex, identified the activity engaged or lack thereof, and if play was observed – they coded for the form of play. Data was obtained from peers' and teacher's ratings of children's peer acceptance and social competence respectively (Colwell & Lindsey, 2005).

The article discusses major issues including gathering complex and multivariable data. The study investigated individual pretend, exercise, and rough-and-tumble play, as well as their combinations to determine if gender differences played a role in different play forms; additionally, this determined any connections between play forms and children's peer competence. Data was interpreted by averaging teacher and children's scores and having coders evaluate children's behavior through a total of 18 scores to identify play forms involved and minimize confounding variables. Another common issue was variation in child observations conducted. Students would miss class and not be accounted for, so correlations between the number of observations and behaviors monitored were analyzed. No associations were found that could significantly affect the results of the study (Colwell & Lindsey, 2005).

The study found that there is a presence of ingroup bias for children who participate in same-sex pretend play, because they were better liked by their peers and considered socially

competent by their teachers. Higher likeness by peers was seen when same-sex peers engaged in exercise play and rough-and-tumble play for girls and boys respectively. However, when boys engaged in rough-and-tumble play with peers of other-sex, they were less liked by their peers. The study highlighted that a child's gender and the gender of their peers are important factors when understanding the relationship between pretend and rough-and-tumble play forms and children's socialization (Colwell & Lindsey, 2005).

Preschool children are largely characterized by their gender segregated peer interactions. Violations of such gender boundaries makes them disliked by their peers, resulting in limited social interactions. These limitations hold significantly impact in their peer relationships for the future. Gender norms are prominent in preschool peer groups and could account for the lack of other-sex peer interaction. Variable interactions at a young age are important for gaining valuable communication skills. Early social interactions are particularly important when studying human development and hold valuable information about structuring environments that promote social competence.

References

- Colwell, M. J., & Lindsey, E. W. (2005). Preschool Children's Pretend and Physical Play and Sex of Play Partner: Connections to Peer Competence. *Sex Roles*, 52(7–8), 497–509.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-005-3716-8>