A STUDY OF GENDERING CULTURE OF NEW TAIWANESE CHILDREN IN THEIR KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOMS

A dissertation submitted to the Kent State University College and Graduate School of Education, Health, and Human Services in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

Yu-Hui Chou

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A dissertation written by

Yu-Hui Chou

B. A., Chinese Culture University, Taiwan, 1985
B. A., University of Missouri-Columbia, U.S., 1992
M.A., University of Missouri-Columbia, U.S., 1994
Ph.D., Kent State University, U.S., 2011

Approved by

______________________________, Director, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Janice Kroeger

______________________________, Member, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Alicia R. Crowe

______________________________, Member, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Natasha Levinson

______________________________, Member, Doctoral Dissertation Committee
Huey-Li Li

Accepted by

______________________________, Director, School of Teaching, Learning, and Curriculum Studies
Alexa L. Sandmann

______________________________, Dean, College and Graduate School of Education, Health, and Human Services
Daniel F. Mahony
Current literature suggests that young children can socially construct gender identities when submitting to or resisting dominant discourses. In this study I sought to understand the gendered culture of contemporary Taiwanese kindergartens. I focused on how Taiwanese Children (NTC) and mainstream Taiwanese peers play together as they constructed gender identities in urban and rural classroom settings.

I observed and interviewed five- and six-year-old NTC and their peers as they engaged in critical gender incidents related to male, female, and cross-gender play. The research addressed how NTC and their peers enacted multiple gender performances as daily experiences continually shaped and reshaped children’s gender-doing, and investigated how NTC maintained and resisted gender norms under dominant gender discourse. The research questions asked: What constitutes children’s gendered knowledge and how do children perform gender culture?; and How do children represent gendered social order in class?

NTC’s gender identity often represents multiple levels of gender power, which relates to issues of SES, ethnicity and family culture backgrounds. It is insufficient to examine individual NTC’s gender-doing; only when her or his peer interactions have happened can gender incidents display local children’s specific gender culture. As such, I explored how NTC persistently build gendered knowledge, gendered social orders and gender identities by tracking critical incidents within local school culture and family settings.
This study reveals where NTC’s gender identities intersect with gendered knowledge and classroom gender culture. From these conclusions, I highlighted the importance of classroom gender norms and gender education in early childhood education. The results indicate that the constellation of gendered classroom activities makes it difficult to create the most advantageous learning environment, and that teachers need to be sensitive to different social classes, ethnicity, language and activities so NTC can co-construct gender culture with mainstream peers.
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CHAPTER I

RESEARCH PURPOSES

Interpreting Kindergartners’ Gender Culture

This study focused on interpreting the gendering processes of New Taiwanese Children (NTC) in their classroom activities. NTC are those children whose mothers have come from Southeast Asian countries and China to marry Taiwanese men, bringing with them cross-national and cross-cultural backgrounds. Early childhood educators believe that children are able to resist and reconstitute gender meanings when they position themselves in multiple power relations and gender discourse; therefore, I view NTC’s gender construction and gendered social order in terms of gender identity to determine how they meaningfully construct gender culture. Moreover, I intended to determine how gender power is formed through language and discursive processes when viewed through the Confucian lens of complementary gender relations in the New Taiwanese children’s schooling experiences (Butler, 1990, 2003; Chan, 2003; Weedon, 1997). Concerned with educational equality in schooling, I have turned to feminist poststructuralist theory and postcolonial theory as a lens through which to assess this research. My research focused on the gender culture of NTC enrolled in two Taiwanese kindergartens.

Rationale for the Study

Problems Resulting From Transnational Marriages in Taiwan

Changing demographics. At the time of this writing, approximately 445,113 immigrant female spouses (IFS) live in Taiwan (Ministry of the Interior, 2011). This
number may appear small, representing one tenth of 5% of the 23,162,123 people who populate Taiwan; the influence of transnational families, however, cannot be ignored. For example, statistics collected by the Ministry of the Interior in 2007 showed that: (a) one in eight first-graders was the offspring of an immigrant female spouse; (b) one in seven babies was born to an immigrant mother; and (c) one in four marriages from 2004 to 2006 was a transnational marriage. With the number of babies born to immigrant mothers dramatically increasing, children from transnational families have challenged Taiwanese teachers’ ethnic consciousness and professional ability to practice multicultural education. Thus, transnational marriages have not only changed Taiwan’s demographic structure, but also challenged education policies and practices (Hsia, 2004; Hsieh & Wang, 2005).

Since first arriving in the mid-1990s, 54% of IFS come from Mainland China; and 41% from Southeast Asia (Ministry of Interior, 2006). IFS from mainland China are called “China brides”; those who have come from other countries are “foreign brides.” Two-thirds of foreign brides come from Southeast Asian countries; of this, 70% are from Vietnam and another 23% from Indonesia, the Philippines and Thailand.

In this research, immigrant female spouses (IFS) are defined as those who did not grow up in Taiwan but migrated following an introduction by transnational marriage brokers in Southeast Asia. Because the common term immigrant bride reflects bias against third-world women, I have used the term immigrant female spouses to remind readers that the epithet is ideologically-charged as well as to explain that immigrant
female spouses are long-term residents of Taiwan. Taiwanese sociologists label children born into transnational marriages in Taiwan or other countries in Southeast Asia since the late 1990s New Taiwanese Children (NTC) because many believe that these children could have both positive and negative impact on Taiwanese society (Hsia, 2004; Hsieh & Wang, 2005). However, since about 2005, “NTC” has become a pejorative term.

To address the increase of a diverse student population (e.g., NTC), the need for multicultural education has arisen. Social questions within Taiwanese society need answered. First, how are mainstream Taiwanese concerned about education for NTC who cross class, race/ethnicity and gender/sex boundaries? Next, how can education policy create equal education opportunities for NTC and their mainstream Taiwanese peers? Last, how does education help NTC and their peers to understand the changes?

**Personal reasons.** I chose this topic because of my experience living in a foreign environment. The culture shock I experienced in the United States sparked my interest in NTC’s educational issues. I also chose this topic because I believe that a worthwhile dissertation requires a passionate scholar. I care deeply about the context of my dissertation, which to me is personally and socially meaningful. In Taiwan in 2003, I saw signs reading, “Only US$10,000 betrothal fee. Virgin wife guaranteed. One year guarantee or we will compensate you with a new wife.” As a lecturer at a university teaching classes entitled Marriage and Family, Parenthood Education, and Early Childhood Curricula Design, I became outraged by these signs and wondered how marriage could have become nothing more than commodity swapping. I also wondered
how children of transnational marriages came to terms with knowledge that their mothers had been purchased and how this affected their social status. Further, I was an adopted daughter who grew up in the shadows of the adoption process where kinship was characterized by disequilibrium; my behavior was regulated by physical discipline in my early childhood. As a result, these factors created my concern for New Taiwanese Children’s gender identities.

**Background of the Study**

The influences of parenthood and discipline at school play critical roles in children’s gendering processes. Under Confucianism, parents have the authority to force children to abide by traditional gender expectations. School regulations also shape children’s behavior. Through the practice of effective physical discipline, the curriculum reproduces patriarchal culture.

The study reconstructs how Taiwanese people’s experiences have naturally become closely tied to immigrant female/male figures in the public imagination. Through mixed-ethnic marriages, Taiwanese people reproduce stereotypical gender roles, which are naturally found in family hierarchies and schooling. I have opted to gather patterns of gender roles from Taiwanese immigrant history and classroom experience to interpret NTC’s gender identities.

In the past, the subordinate Taiwanese female gender role has served as a symbol of Taiwan itself (Farris, Lee, & Rubinstein, 2004; Zhuo, 1991). Unable to claim autonomy and surviving only at the mercy of foreign powers, the Taiwanese considered
Taiwan “an adopted child bride” or “an Asian orphan” because of geopolitical factors (Farris, Lee, & Rubinstein, 2004; Zhuo, 1991). Today, Taiwanese have dared to proclaim Taiwan’s national sovereignty.

**East Asian Paradigms for Gender Roles**

Confucian interpretation of gender roles in East Asian society. Confucianism deeply influences gender concepts in East Asian society, and these concepts are a complementary relationship (Chan, 2003). The relationship between males and females corresponds with two different bases for drawing gender distinctions: the Yin-Yang (陰陽) correlation and the inner-outer (內外) distinction. The term *yin* (陰) is associated with the earth and the female; *yang* (陽) refers to the heavens and the male. Under Confucian thought, the Yin-Yang concept directs Taiwanese to believe that both *yin* (female) and *yang* (male) work in a complementary manner to create a balanced, natural environment as well as to build a harmonious family (Chan, 2003, 2004). The concept of *yin* (female) and *yang* (male) presents the complementary relations to support fixed family positions that produce patriarchal clan structures.

**Man is respected and woman is debased.** Patriarchal ideology relates to the gender role and gendered social order where men are qualified to control the public domain and women should oversee the domestic domain (男主外，女主內). Believing that “ignorance is the virtue of the woman” (女子無才便是德), a lack of education opportunities for women restricts their ability to be involved in public affairs. Therefore, gender hierarchies assert that men are respected while women are debased (男尊女卑) in
Chinese society. Following such assertions, written Chinese characters denoting “female” include negative meanings. For example, when three females stay together, the character used is “姦” (jen), which means adultery. However, when few females are present, it is “妙” (miao), which means wonderful. Moreover, when one female and male are together, it is “好” (hao), which is perfect. The written character for women is “婦” (fu); the explanation is one female who holds a broom, indicating that females should undertake domestic affairs, such as sweeping. The written character of men is “男” (nan), meaning field cultivator. The last two words indicate the ideal female’s and male’s gender roles.

Confucianists highly respect family roles: the just father, the kind mother, the courteous brother-sister relationships and the filial descendants (父義, 母慈, 兄友, 弟恭, 子孝). Clearly, this stereotypic family order presented gender role models closely tied to family relationships, which then expanded to social relations and the social order for the monarchy to direct people. By fulfilling gender roles today, parents become good role models, and descendants meet family ethical expectations to become respectable figures in society (Chan, 2004; Lebar, 1998). Ideally, men and women are expected to cooperate and take responsibility for different duties according to gender expectations, thus limiting diversity in gender roles for women and men. The notion that the male belongs outdoors and the female belongs at home has forced women into a subordinate social role at home with no significant social position or title in society, and thus not a major financial contributor. Men are sometimes prohibited from being housekeepers, but their jobs outside the home establish a high social status and make them the main source
of income. The educational practices extend traditional expectations for females and males, and so gender culture is implemented in school.

In traditional Taiwanese society, personal relationships are built not only on gender differences but also on rank, age and virtue (Chan, 2003; Lebar, 1998). For example, a father occupies a high position because he is the main source of income, and he can legitimately dictate orders to his wife. The best means for a wife to gain a respectable rank in the family is to fulfill faithfully the duties of motherhood and domestic obligations. Doing so, a mother retains her position and demands that her son follow her wishes because she has borne hardships as a good mother and wife. In public, the father controls the family’s property, but the mother oversees family life, such as meals and clothing. Thus, traditional Taiwanese women gain gender power through the biological capability to bear children.

**Gendered Culture in Traditional Taiwanese Families**

Traditionally, sons are thought to increase population and promote family position. Taiwanese families do not count girls as family members because they will marry, becoming outsiders (Lee, 2004). Parents still reserve higher education for sons, who in the future will care for aged parents; on the contrary, girls will marry and might not contribute to their parents’ care. In actuality, more daughters than sons now take responsibility for aged parents, so Taiwanese women challenge traditional gender boundaries when fulfilling filial obligations (Farris et al., 2004; Lee).
Different expectations for boys and girls. From traditional perspectives, parents believe boys bring more glory to families than girls, resulting in different methods of parenting for sons and daughters. Traditional folk rhymes reveal how Taiwanese parents in the 19th century anticipated that male babies would become famous scholars and officials to honor the family and produce more descendants (“一生富貴保長壽，明年科甲中舉人”) (Yang, 1998). According to an old lullaby, parents treasure and nurture daughters by highly valuing female virtues, by nine or ten years old, she should learn intricate embroidery, or else she will simply play around (“九歲十歲教針子，驚伊四界去庚絲”) (Yang). Traditional parenthood dictates that children be trained to follow gender roles in a well-disciplined manner.

Gendered Culture in Current Taiwanese Families

As Taiwanese society evolves, many parents would like to provide education for their children. Even educators argued (Cheng, 1998 & Huang, 2006; Cheng, 1998) that most parents provide similar education opportunities for sons and daughters. Still, parents paid different educational concern to higher academic achievement for boys than girls. These findings may suggest the parents still currently prefer boys to girls. In Taiwanese higher education (Ministry of Education, 2009), 49.08% of female students gain bachelor degree, but only 27.32% of female attain a doctoral degree. The most female students study education, the arts and medical care; these subjects reflect parents’ and social expectations and reflect real job markets in Taiwan.
Since widespread ultrasound use emerged in the 1990s, pregnant couples sometimes opted to abort female fetuses because they often prefer to have male children instead, as in most countries with a predominant Confucian culture. Statistics show that Taiwan recently had its highest rate of aborted female fetuses (Ministry of Interior, 2007a). The census shows the current ratio of male to female births is 110:100, but the natural ratio of male to female births is 105:106 (Chen, 2010). Under pressure from traditional family heritage and gender role stereotypes, many pregnant women in Taiwan now demand prenatal sex determination, and many female fetuses are eliminated before birth. Thus, there were more boys than girls when parents choose to have but one child. Estimations indicate that at least 2,000,000 Taiwanese males will be unable to find Taiwanese brides to marry after 2027 (Cheng & Huang, 2007), so transnational marriages will most likely far surpass the current number.

As the crude birth rate decrease as low as 8.3 newborns per 1,000 people puts Taiwan above only Germany, Hong Kong, Italy and Japan (Jennings, 2010). The one-child or no-child family then becomes the norm. Because of fewer children, Taiwanese parents provide each child, no matter the sex, better educational opportunities. Parents create a gendered world for newborns through cultural tradition, and children base self-caretakers’ identification and personalities upon relationships with same-gendered or different-gendered family members and peers. If children are highly valued, they will value themselves highly; otherwise, they lose self-esteem (Lorber, 2001). The way a family values and treats its children will influence children’s gender
identities. Hence, this research examined how school and family affect NTC’s gender culture in class.

**Gender Culture in School**

Gender stereotypes often influence Taiwanese teacher-student interactions (Cahill & Adams, 1997; Wen & Chun, 2005). When classes elect leaders, teachers value most boys higher for their aggressiveness; girls are always cast as boys’ assistants. Many cooperative class activities feature dominating boys and silent girls. In class, boys receive more assistance and support from teachers than girls. Hidden curricula reveal thoroughly entrenched gender stereotypes in teaching activities via the unconscious recognition of patriarchal ideology; as a result, family gender order is then reproduced in class.

Liang (2003) discovered that in drawings, many students depicted stereotypes of gender roles, which they may have learned from textbooks and the visual world. Female figures in textbook pictures generally appear in limited life experiences, such as shopping or engaging in domestic affairs (Chuang, 2003), but male figures are shown managing or coordinating unpredictable situations, such as setting off fireworks. Textbooks commonly depict two traditional family types—middle-income families and two-parent families—ignoring single-parent families, grandparent-led families, transnational families and extremely rare gay/lesbian families in current Taiwanese society, all of which should be acknowledged in the education field (Grieshaber & Ryan, 2006; Kroeger, 2003, 2006).

Liang (2003) observed relationships between boys and girls in a working-class Taiwanese preschool. Children were not segregated by gender during class activities
because teachers encouraged all children to act simply as classmates. In informal class activities, however, cross-gender friendships occurred less because children wanted to avoid accusations of romantic relationships and teasing; in fact, they often concealed cross-gender friendships. Farris (2000) observed Taiwanese preschoolers’ strategies in solving cross-gender conflicts. She found that many middle class girls were going to argue with boys for their gender position by asking for teachers’ support. However, teachers seldom paid attention to their problems. These girls knew the need of equal gender position, but in the transformed Taiwanese society, Confucian thought still influences and ignores middle class girls’ gendered social order. Even so, girls continually challenged gender roles.

**Cultural and historical gender identity in families and schools.** Taiwanese family gender roles entail Confucian philosophy in a hierarchical manner where family order obligates members to fulfill certain rights and responsibilities (Farris et al., 2004; Hadley, 2003). Confucian philosophy also directs Taiwanese school environment (Liang, 2000, 2003; Miller, Wiley, Fung, & Liang, 1997; Hadley, 2003); educational purposes draw on traditional Confucian values when training children to achieve academically and follow the rules, ensuring hierarchical social order (Hadley).

This is not always the case, however. Chao (1994) argued that the concept of authority does not capture the important features of Taiwanese child-rearing, especially school success and harmonious personal relations. Scholars researched child-nurturing in transnational families in Taiwan, finding considerable gender culture differences between
family and school (Lee & Hong, 2006; Moore, 1996). As with Kuo (2009) and Ting (2009), those scholars asserted that ECE teachers need more experience and knowledge if they are to understand immigrant mothers with different expectations of education for their children who keep with culture backgrounds.

Regarding instructional purposes and gender roles, gender identity not only relates with historical backgrounds and local culture but also presents gender role expectations and gender equity, which families and schools intend to build for themselves (Grieshaber, 2004; Kroeger, 2001, 2006; P. J. Miller et al., 1997; Moore, 1996). By practicing curriculum contexts where gender identities are explored, school agency as a political power is socially situated relative to society gender orders, family culture backgrounds and ethnic consciousness (Kroeger, 2003; Kroeger & Lash, 2005; Raffaele & Knoff, 1999; Rogoff & Angelillo, 2002). As such, I interpret gender identities for New Taiwanese Children by examining their gender social order in class, which relates with school culture and family background (Connolly, 1998; Liang, 2000, 2003; McMurray, 2003).

Despite the trend of Taiwanese society moving slowly away from Confucianism, women must continue to acknowledge traditional womanhood; otherwise, they could face family criticism. Similarly, men must fulfill leadership, academic achievement and professional responsibilities; if not, they will be belittled. As this research reveals, these social demands naturally transfer to schools, where teachers require male students to study hard to fulfill traditional male roles. Many parents and teachers convince female
students to pursue majors such as early childhood education, nursing, or home economics so that they can assume the traditional feminine roles of good mothers and qualified wives in the future.

**Significance of the Research**

**History of Immigration in Taiwan**

**Geography and population of Taiwan.** Taiwan covers about 13,900 square miles, making it about one-third the size of Ohio (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Nearly 23 million people inhabit Taiwan (twice that of Ohio), comprised of: (a) early inhabitants, or aborigines, pre-1945 mainland immigrants, and some hybrid residents who arrived before 1945 (86.5% of the population); (b) post-1945 mainland immigrants (12%); and (c) immigrants spouses who have entered Taiwan since the end of the 1990s (1.5 %) (Ministry of Interior in Taiwan, 2007a).

**Immigrant history in Taiwan.** Gender identities have related to the immigrant experience throughout Taiwan’s history. Gender interaction differed from that of Mainland China as several ethnic groups and political powers controlled Taiwan (Rubinstein, 2007; Yin & Chen, 2007): (a) Austronesian indigenous peoples (4000 BCE–present); (b) Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch mariners (14th–17th centuries); (c) Zheng family and Qing Dynasty of Confucian heritage (17th–19th centuries); (d) Japanization during Japanese rule (1895–1945); (e) Chinese nationalists establishment of the Republic of China (1945–2000); (f) Taiwanization and globalization under the
Republic of China (2000–2008); and (g) an increase of favorable relations with the People’s Republic of China (Mainland China or Red China) (2008-present).

This historical summary reveals how Taiwanese positioned themselves and repositioned immigrant spouses and children since 2000. Instead of using the theory of “primordialism” to cite blood and common culture as necessary precursors in ethnic relations (Vermeulen & Govers, 1997), I discuss ethnic relationships from Taiwan’s social contexts to investigate gender roles and consciousness in terms of meaningful ethnic identities and valuable ethnic characteristics. Concerning social construction, instead of focusing on objective blood relations, I emphasize Taiwanese memories of colonization and migration as immigrants “intersect, contrast, reform, and shape each other within the constituted space of relationships” (Kroeger, 2003, p. 24).

**Male and female immigrants.** Some Taiwanese aboriginal cultures were matriarchal societies before the eighteenth century. As Han immigrants brought Confucianism to the family social order, patriarchy became the legitimate basis for gender order, yet most female Taiwanese have owned their own private property since the eighteenth century (Yin & Chen, 2007), which has permitted many women to experience autonomy. Therefore, a popular proverb still holds true: “Women hold up half the sky (女人撐起半邊天)” (Dai & Wang, 2004). Taiwanese males were in charge of cultivating territory, running businesses, or managing public affairs: They were pioneers, explorers and family breadwinners. Females adapted to bearing and educating children, managing domestic affairs and supporting their husbands’ businesses.
Immigration and the social order. Modern Taiwanese history is tightly enmeshed with immigration (Rubinstein, 2007; Yin & Chen, 2007) from Europe and Asia Japanese. In 1949, Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek, the leader of the nationalist Kuomintang (KMT), lost the Chinese Civil War. His army retreated to Taiwan, resulting in about 1.5 million immigrants, most of whom were men. These single males entered Taiwanese society’s upper echelons. Most of them came to marry Taiwanese women during the 1950s and 1960s. A familiar Taiwanese proverb states, “There are mainland grandfathers but no mainland grandmothers (有唐山公無唐山媽),” alluding to Taiwanese immigrant society and popular interethnic marriages (Dai & Wang, 2004; Yang, 1998). Also, a derogatory slang term for these men is taros, and the term for their Taiwanese spouses is yam. “Taros-yam children” grew up in cross-boundary families. Their children are still a sensitive, critical issue in Taiwanese society; consequently, an inquiry into the gender identities of NTC is meaningful and necessary. Taros fathers maintain authority, but yams are still looked upon favorably.

These early immigrants differed in ethnicity and spoke different dialects, developing various ideologies that separated “us” from “them.” Because the earlier immigrants have lived in Taiwan for many generations, eagerly seeking a stable “Taiwanese identity”; as the nationalist identities cannot cohere with Taiwan’s identities, they debate conflicts and want to construct and reconstruct Taiwan’s social order (Yin & Chen, 2007; Chen, 2003). However, the shifting from the above interethnic marriages to
transnational marriages, around the end of 1990s to 2010, increases the concern of new Taiwanese nationalist identities and the quality of Taiwanese society.

**Shift from Interethnic Marriages to Transnational Marriages**

Constable (2005) argued that “the choice [made by IFS] to marry foreign men has not been motivated simply by virtue of the men’s power” (p. 183); instead, these women have “sought advantages” through transnational marriage, enabling them to empower themselves and their families. This is especially true because “gendered geographies of married mobility” (p. 167) involves moving from a poor country to a richer one by getting married; thus, most IFS seek to start new lives in a foreign land. There are several factors why men from Japan, Korea, Taiwan and even China marry South Asian women. Capitalism as well as political and cultural backgrounds can explain this situation.

Factors in Taiwanese transnational marriages are as the follows.

**Internationalized capitalism.** Guided by the internationalized capital system (Hsia, 2004; Wallerstein, 2005), Taiwan’s economy has moved upward from designation as a peripheral country to a semi-peripheral country since the 1980s. In the internationalized capital system, Taiwan looks up to core countries like the United States and Western European nations, which look down upon those on the periphery, such as some Southeast Asian countries (Hsia; Wallerstein); therefore, the duality in international power relations creates conscious and unconscious hierarchies and discrimination because most Taiwanese harbor negative attitudes toward Southeast Asian laborers and immigrant brides. These biases are also caused by historical memory, geographical
location and economic status. When Taiwanese social practice is based on racism, ethnocentrism and socioeconomic position that allow social phenomena such as an influx of immigrant mothers and their children are the direct result.

Realizing the shortage of labor in the 1980s, Taiwanese human resource directors invited workers and housemaids from Southeast Asia to Taiwan. During the 1990s, Taiwan became a popular destination for Southeast Asian brides (Hsia, 2004). The labor relations between Taiwan and Southeast Asian countries has resulted in stereotypes of personal and gender relations among those who are involved in transnational marriages. Transnational matchmakers typically introduced Taiwanese males to brides from Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand and the Philippines (Hsia, 2004), fulfilling the desire of many Taiwanese males to marry and providing particular types of social and economic arrangements for women; matchmaking became illegal in 2007 (Change, 2010). However, various stigmas are still associated with marriages emanating from internationalized capitalism (Constable, 2005; Hsia; Wallerstein, 2005), which some regard as “fake marriage [or] real prostitution” and blamed for the “deteriorating quality of the future generations” (Lin, 2004; Tasi, 2004).

Other factors help explain why transnational marriages occur. One is the need for poor women to elevate their social statuses through marriage. Chen (2010) argued that this is a common reason for IFS to choose to marry in Taiwan. Also, some are Han Chinese seeking to escape ethnic oppression in their old countries. But since 2007, the Taiwan National Immigration Agency has required interviews, legal documentation and
bank statements from married transnational couples (Ministry of Interior, 2007), which caused transnational marriage couples to spend more time to prepare documents in order to prevent the illegal transnational marriages and promote the quality of IFS. The national power intervene the transnational marriages and stop the increase amount of transnational marriage. Because of Taiwan’s poor economy and the government’s more stringent standards on educated immigrants, many South Asian women have changed their minds about going to Taiwan (Change, 2010).

**Political and cultural issues in transnational marriages.** The influx of men in 1949 resulted in an imbalance that continues today as there are still more male than female citizens in Taiwan (Ministry of Interior, 2007b; Ministry of Interior, 2007c). As such, many men will have difficulty finding brides; this dilemma is solved in part with immigrant female spouses (IFS) from low-SES countries.

Traditional Chinese customs dictate that marriage should produce children, so the most important responsibility for men is to reproduce. Under this stern edict, males are obligated to find good wives to conduct domestic affairs. Inequality surrounding gender roles, marital relations and expectations has led many lower socioeconomic status males to use transnational marriage brokers to “buy” Southeast Asian brides to assume responsibility for child bearing, child-rearing and domestic issues (Shin, 2003; Chen, 2003).
The Realities of Marriage for Immigrant Females

According to a formal report from the Ministry of Interior in Taiwan (2006), most husbands who have sought transnational marriages are of low socioeconomic status; and they are older than their wives by 15 to 20 years. Their average age is 38.82 years old, and some are handicapped persons (Ministry of the Interior, 2005). Their wives share the following characteristics: (a) lower education status—41% of them have only a junior high or elementary school diploma; (b) age—72% of Southeast Asian brides are under 24 years old, and 30% of them are under 19 years old; and (c) on average pregnancy occurs during the first 6 months of marriage. A March, 2011 report indicated that the divorce rate for transnational marriages is nearly 23% (Wang, 2011). These statistics alone cannot adequately convey the quality of marriages, nor do these data sufficiently describe the interpersonal relations of IFS or the function of transnational families. Many disparities exist among the women in terms of individual capabilities, age, educational backgrounds and birthplace—either town or country. Some IFS have pursued higher education in their homelands and have lived in large cities; these women present a strong sense of cosmopolitan identity. It is unreasonable and unconscionable to categorize all IFS into one homogeneous group whose members are stereotyped as weak and needy.

The constraints imposed by law and perceptions. In its early stages, a transnational marriage generally exposes severe personal difficulties in adjusting to “a [new] social reality that often bears little resemblance” to what the immigrant bride may have initially imagined (Constable, 2005, p. 167). Moreover, because these immigrant
women, through geographic upward mobility, have sought advancement in marital status (Chen, 2003; Constable), they have demonstrated interest in wealth, occupation and education in a wealthier country; yet laws regarding formal citizenship and legal job status have imposed strict regulations on immigrant female spouses with regard to finding a job (Hsieh & Wang, 2005). Lack of social networks and support systems and deficiency in reading and writing are barriers for these women trying to adapt to transnational marriages. In addition, the more constraints there are to immigrant brides’ adjustment to Taiwanese society, the less capable they are to become involved in and support their children’s growth and education.

Contradictory to the restrictions and social prejudices noted above, these Immigrant Female Spouses are expected to bear healthy offspring and educate capable citizens. Taiwan has a low birth rate; as a result, the government is anxious to increase the population. Several scholars, instead of focusing on gender roles performed by IFS in families and in society, are more concerned with the ability of these women to act as capable mothers (Chang, 2004).

The influence of IFS on Taiwanese public policies. In a transnational marriage in Taiwan, when an IFS gives birth, she holds the gender power to consolidate her position within the transnational marriage because she has demonstrated the ability to bear offspring to carry on the family name (Chen, 2003; Shen, 2003). An Immigrant Female Spouse, however, is required to play many roles, such as (a) a capable wife to serve her husband and family members, (b) an obedient foreign daughter-in-law and
following family rules, (c) a bearer and educator of children, and (d) a breadwinner to support her family in Taiwan and her family in her homeland. So, many IFSs encounter a lengthy struggle in transnational marriages, and they adapt themselves to new circumstances in Taiwan due to different gender role and social expectations.

Transnational marriages are private, but the dramatic increase in the number of transnational couples and offspring has caused many public agencies serious concern over long-term influence and the need for integrated legislation (Hsia, 2004; Hsieh & Wang, 2005). The media have reported that many IFS become involved in domestic violence, turn up missing, or are embroiled in illegal labor (Yeh, 2005) and identity (Ma, 2005, Chen, 2010) issues. With these involvements, Taiwanese attitudes toward IFS actively influence identity (Chen). This issue has played a role in moving Taiwan forward to deal positively with immigrant policies, multicultural education and the adoption of multiculturalism in a society shifting toward globalization (Hsia; Hsieh & Wang).

**Gender Issues in Childhood Socialization**

Socialization is an important process in gendered childhood. Handel (2006) argues that the socialization function includes the expectation that a child becomes an accepted member in her or his environment and forms a personal identity. In the socialization process, we expect that children can meet the needs of individualization (e.g., individual and self-expression) and collectivity (e.g., interdependence of groups and individuals) that address the ability to form personal identities. Also, children are expected to find social networks (Greenfield & Cocking, 1994; Handel, 2006; Zepeda,
Rothstein-Fisch, Gonzalez-Mena, & Trumbull, 2006). By achieving these expectations, they acquire a coherent identity and a feeling of control over their own lives.

**Children’s socialization and parents’ gender-construction.** Conventionally, parents hold authority and have the responsibility to require children to adopt certain gender norms (Durkin, 2005; Rogers, 2000). To protect and nurture their children, parents usually establish powerful emotional bonds with them, which act as influential incentives for children to obey their parents, because for many, the transmission of gendering standards and gendering values from one generation to the next is quite important (Durkin; Gonzalez-Mena, 2006; Rogers). Hence, parents use a variety of techniques to teach gender standards, including tutoring, lecturing, rewards, acting as role models, or placing children’s lives in the hands of surrogates, such as personnel and peers at choice schools, and even television personalities (Handel 2006).

Many complex elements constitute children’s gender processes, such as the interaction between the child and others in the child’s social group. Actually, children are not passive recipients of social input merely because their behaviors cannot be explained by the total social experience or a complex history we provide (Chao, 1994; Durkin, 2005). Sometimes, children resist parental guidance or are unable to live up to set standards despite powerful influences of parents’ guiding gender-doing through dress or toys. In the gender process, children play an active role when choosing gender role models: They often choose idealized figures from cartoon programs, storybooks, or electronic games (Chao; Durkin; Gonzalez-Mena, 2006; Handel 2006), figures distant in
A child’s social participation with persons of his or her own age is recognized as being highly significant in socialization; consequently, many parents have been frustrated by children’s adopting values of popular TV stars or other celebrities completely removed from the family situation, resulting in tension between gender processes and parental authority (Handel).

In sum, the child is by no means a passive recipient of adult stimulation; both parent and child play active parts in determining the course of interactions. The process of influence entails mutual adaptation running through the course of parent-child gender construction. Instead of seeing the parent-child relationship as a never-ending battle, parents can share a common heritage with children, influencing them to avoid relying on current pop culture as the sole source of models for gender-construction (Handel 2006).

**Children’s socialization and gender-construction in school.** A child’s first social system is the family, and the second is school, where learning experiences not only promote intellectual growth but also offer interaction opportunities for socialization (Ceci, Markle & Chae, 2005; Greenfield & Cocking, 1994; Zepeda, Rothstein-Fisch, Gonzalez-Mena, & Trumbull, 2006). Children experience conflict between peer groups and school standards as well as between family and school standards. They adopt parents’ gender-doing experiences, but when they go to school, they negotiate serious inconsistencies between life and learning experiences in areas like nonsexist attitudes (Durkin, 2005; Gonzalez-Mena, 2006). In curriculum practice, students are shown gender
in classroom activities daily so that the gendered social order is continually constructed and reconstructed (Danby, 1998, Danby & Baker, 1998; Thorne, 1993).

Barrett and Buchanan-Barrow (2005) indicated that school regulations include two sets of principles: (a) school rules related with practice, authority, and context learning; and (b) conventional rules constructed for certain social groups within particular cultures. For example, in early childhood education in Taiwan, most school rules are designed to facilitate class interaction, involving politeness, table manners, or dress codes (Liang, 2003). Rules become tools for childhood socialization in forming children’s gender roles when dependent on context, role and, possibly, authority (Chao, 1994). The significant aspects of school socialization follow.

**Behavioral conformity.** Behavioral conformity refers to certain physical requirements imposed upon students in schools practicing strict discipline (Brint, 2006). For example, boys may be allowed to play aggressively while girls may be expected to smile sweetly. Appropriate demonstration of “behavioral conformities” in public reflects the core values of education and indicates school gender culture.

**Moral conformity.** Moral conformity involves the production of an internalized sense of right action with regard to virtues, such as honesty, kindness and fairness (Brint, 2006). However, these virtues are further broken down into justice and bravery for boys and politeness and modesty for girls. Training for behavior and moral conformity overlap in classroom activities, and many different standards exist for males and females, such as legitimate ways to be a good male or female student with regard to knowledge conveyed.
in the curriculum design and materials selected (Chuang, 2004; Grossman & Grossman, 
1994; Peachter, 1998). Instead of emphasizing stereotypes of gender roles and moral 
conformity, this study demonstrates respect for gender hierarchies and cross-cultural 
variations as possibilities to replace moral conformity.

**Cultural conformity.** Through the learning process, schooling reflects cultural 
conformities for approving some curriculum purposes that relate to constructing fluid 
cultural logic with a particular group, time, or place (Kroeger, 2003, 2006). Gender-doing 
is one of the silent signals that contribute to the practice of school culture. Many school 
personnel believe the fixed school gender culture could be the central dynamic to 
promote students’ moral conformity and behavioral conformity (Barrett & 
Buchanan-Barrow, 2005; Brint, 2006). As a result, this study interprets children’s unfixd 
gender-doing, which is continually constructed and reconstructed under various 
discourses.

In short, gender norms in school curriculum are embedded in the daily repeated 
routines. Scholars have debated the importance of gender construction in childhood 
socialization (Danby, 1998; Davies, 2003a, 2003b; Gonzalez-Mena, 2006; Thorne, 1993) 
and believe that schooling purposes include learning gendered knowledge in the 
textbooks and teachers’ gender role models in teacher-student interaction (Cahill & 
Adams, 1997; You, 2005). Thus, I inquire about what NTC’s gender culture is and how 
they resist dominant customs within various discourses, such as gender, ethnicity and 
class as they posit gendered social orders in class.
**Problem Statement**

This study expands the notions of feminism to determine how patriarchal systems influence New Taiwanese Children’s gender characteristics at school. Feminism emphasizes discussing heterosexual issues when criticizing issues of sexism, racism and normative heterosexuality (Lather, 1991); those who understand gender roles in terms of Confucian values emphasize how family members cooperate in building kinship, and then extend this complementary relation into a well-managed society (Farris et al., 2004). Thus, cultural differences are relevant when examining gender issues in pedagogy. Even so, it is important for teachers to redefine students’ learning when gender discourse presents critical values in educational purposes. Gender learning is a central part of childhood education because gendered childhood experiences could extend to adults’ gender relations. Therefore, through the viewpoint of feminist pedagogy, I hope to make positive contributions to Taiwanese early childhood gender education.

**Conceptualizing NTC’s Gender Culture**

In order to convey New Taiwanese Children’s gender culture in class, the researcher deconstructed Taiwanese kindergartners’ gendering processes under the dominant discourse. As mentioned above, Confucian thought views gender relationships symbolized by Yin (female) and Yang (male) as complementary (Chan, 2003). This differs from the Western cultural viewpoint where gender relationships are viewed in terms of heterosexual gender roles (Butler, 1990), which are inevitably patriarchal in nature and lack the complementary component.
Little research is currently available on how young children socially construct gender within Confucian culture in class; therefore, I investigated whether the gendered subjectivity of Taiwanese kindergartners is open to free agency. Confucian social order influences Taiwanese school gender culture as well. In addition to arguments emanating from Confucian social order, I also investigated how NTC’s gender identities are constructed through critical gender incidents surrounding personal, peer and teacher relationships. NTC represent a new segment of the population in Taiwan, having emerged at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

This study also involved the cross-ethnic backgrounds of NTC and the way they interpret the gender roles that their mothers play. Thus, to investigate NTC’s gendered social orders, we need to discuss teacher-student and peer-peer relationships. Following these two issues, NTC’s social skills, cross-ethnic backgrounds and family social status could be the sensitive points that influence how NTC conform to school culture, how NTC practice and resist gender boundaries under various discourses. According to numerous mass media reports, the mothers of NTC have low social status; their “inferior” origin and unequal family relationships may be obstacles when children socially construct gender characteristics. As a researcher, I not only observed NTC’s gender-doing, but also invited children to speak out about their self-identities.

**Exploring Gender Equity in NTC’s Classrooms.**

Children’s gender power in classrooms has been ignored in both theoretical and practical senses. Although educational policymakers attempted to change gender
stereotypes in school gender culture order (Ministry of Education, 2007a), educators cannot ignore the many issues, such as gender, ethnicity and social class status, which the Taiwanese schools yet face in the patriarchal and authoritative gendered culture.

Required legal standards for implementing gender education emerged in Taiwan in the early 2000s. A comparison between United States and Taiwan help to clarify that the practice of gender equity education might be a way to require legal standards for schooling. In 1972, the United States Congress approved Title IX of the Education Amendment Act, which requires teachers to eliminate gender bias and discrimination in educational practices. Moreover, the American Association of University Women (2002) and scholars (Morgan, 1996) still postulate the need for professional gender equity knowledge in teacher training program and curriculum practice.

By comparison, in Taiwan, the Gender Equity Education Law was approved in 2004 and implemented in 2005 (Ministry of Education, 2004a). Gender equity became a concern in educational reform in 2005 (Chuang, 2004; You, 2005). This legislation requires that teacher education programs should include gender equity issues and requires Gender Equity Committees in every school to institute gender equality rules. Since 2006, at least four hours of class time should be devoted to gender equity each semester (Ministry of Education, 2007c). The government implemented gender education teacher certification in 2008. Thus, the issue of gender equity challenges teachers in curriculum design and the purposes of pedagogy (Chuang, 2007; Lather, 1991; You, 2005).
The purposes of practicing gender equity included building a just campus environment and implementing multicultural education (Ministry of Education, 2007c). School provides the social construction of gender culture and limits students’ possibilities to establish gender identities (You, 2005; Chuang, 2004, 2003). Eliminating prejudices and discriminations of racism, sexism and stereotypic socioeconomics through curriculum practice can help students adjust potential prejudices toward the “other” (Chuang, 2004); gender equity education can result in the curing of gender stereotypes.

Because society has shifted dramatically, early childhood teachers must be sensitive to the ways students meaningfully construct gendered social order and the effective education strategies that can help them act appropriately as gendered beings (Davies, 2003a; Farris et al., 2004; Thorne, 1993). To some extent, I also inquired how ECE pedagogy aligns with the Gender Equity Education Law. To create “a society with gender harmony, justice, and fairness” (Chuang, 2004, p. 96), the Gender Equity Education Law (Ministry of Education, 2007c) could support the practice of national education policies. In addition, it helps teachers to think about the educational needs of immigrant spouses’ children in terms of the curriculum practices of gender equity for them and for their peers (Ministry of Education, 2004b).

**Theoretical Framework**

Three theoretical perspectives undergirded this study and provided entry into a discussion of how kindergarten students enact gender characteristics under the dominant discourses.
Feminist Poststructuralist Theory (FPS)

**FPS frames this research with deconstruction.** Feminist poststructuralist theory relates feminism with poststructuralism. More specifically, feminist research concerns “the social construction of gender at the center of one’s inquiry” (Lather, 1991, p.71) and asks how this theory provides a lens through which to interpret children’s gender performances in critical incidents. Feminist researchers encourage research to engage in authentic participation and raise his or her own critical reflection; because of this, feminist methodology is used to emancipate knowledge and empower the research subjects (Gore, 2003; Lather, 1991). As such, considering feminism while self-reflecting was necessary to interpret children’s gender culture in the practice of power.

Poststructuralist researchers seek to understand dynamic relationships among knowledge, meaning, power and identity. Although these issues continuously shift within different linguistic, institutional, cultural and social settings, poststructuralists claim that personal understanding of the world is associated with individual particular experiences; for example, a child’s gender world is formed by personal life experiences. Therefore, scholars have contended that poststructuralism offers a useful conceptual framework for feminist practice to criticize how dominant discourses regulate children’s gender-doing (MacNaughton, 2000; Weedon, 1997).

**The exercise of power in a transformed society.** Feminist poststructuralism is used to explain how social power is exercised and how gender, class, and race are transformed (MacNaughton, 2005; Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005; Tobin, 1995). Concerning
heterosexual power in school, FPS can make a difference in several areas. First, it can employ poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity and institutions to understand existing power relations in social processes (Weedon, 1997), FPS allows individuals to interpret new knowledge when challenging traditional patriarchal knowledge (Capper, 1992, 1998; Weiler, 2003; Weiner, 1994). Second, it proves that children’s gendering processes are constructed, unfixed, created and practiced in children’s daily lives (Alloway, 1995; MacNaughton, 2005; Thorne, 1993), teachers must realize gender and power complexities involved in children’s interactions. Third, FPS re-conceptualizes gender norms by seeing an individual child and his or her world at the same time (Blaise, 1999; Davies, 2003a & 2003b). Doing so, FPS directs us to realize that gender is socially constructed when it is constituted and reconstituted through children’s discursive practices.

**Postcolonial Theory (PCT)**

The primary concerns of postcolonial theory. Challenging imperial and colonial oppression, postcolonial theorists reject subtle invasions by capitalism and consumerism in gendered interactions and educational practice (Cannella & Viruru, 2002, 2004). Because postcolonial theories focus on discarding one group’s creation of values for another’s and recognizes how groups of people are colonized through hidden messages about themselves, I used postcolonial theory to argue that NTC establish gender identities through dominant discourse, agency and historical perspective of representation (Cannella, 2002; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; Viruru & Cannella, 2001).
**Childhood and postcolonial perspectives.** Postcolonial theorists critique both the universal child and unrestrictedly colonized childhood; forms of the “universal child” come from truths that exist to consider the predetermined and progressed child under positivist science surveillance (Viruru & Cannella, 2001). It follows that NTC are under suspicion as an inferior group because of the lack of objective evidence that they will eventually succeed. Thus, from a postcolonial perspective, I criticize how Taiwanese society has misinterpreted NTC’s social position for the following reasons.

First, in terms of progress, Taiwanese fear that NTC might engage in nonconformist behaviors and destroy the Taiwanese social order because of cross-ethnic backgrounds (Lin, 2004), engendering more reasons to practice legitimated checks on schooling. Second, it is dangerous to ignore those on the periphery of mainstream society; therefore, NTC require control under corporate structures to maintain the high quality of Taiwan’s good population (Cannella & Viruru, 2004). Under this notion, NTC forcibly conform to normative models to meet the same developmental levels as their peers. Thus, some people demand educational policies to force children to cultivate the same ways of behaving as ideal Taiwanese citizens. If teachers are aware of postcolonial views, they will understand how colonization marginalizes NTC’s individual educational needs and identities (Blaise, 2006; Gupta, 2006). In this study, postcolonial theory provides alternative angles to analyze NTC’s cross-boundaries in culture, race, class and gender.

**When postcolonialists meet feminists.** Postcolonialism is similar to feminism in challenging gender and sex-role stereotyping and raising questions about what is means
to be a good girl, mother or daughter (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Cannella, 1997; Coffey & Delamont, 2000; Lather, 1991). This study thus aims to re-conceptualize the unequal power structures of NTC, who are marginalized in Taiwanese society, and to critique stereotypical hegemonic knowledge that has dominated classrooms.

Viruru (2005) stated that “postcolonial theory is a particularly valuable resource in looking at some of the forces behind the creation of stereotypes and the damaging effects that stereotypes can have” (p. 16). Stereotypes exist in everyone’s lives and have influenced what teachers teach in classrooms (Derman-Sparks & ABC Task Force, 1989; Peacher, 1998). In a patriarchal society, male control of the female is accepted in the social order (Cannella, 1997), which causes much of the unstated, virtually invisible gender phenomena “naturally” occurring in our society. Even in the twenty-first century, educational needs are still closely tied to gender stereotypes (Cannella, 1997; Coffey & Delamont, 2000; Viruru, 2005).

This researcher critiqued the distorted figures of IFS and NTC from postcolonial perspectives. Mainstream Taiwanese commonly treat IFS as the “other,” but simultaneously, mainstream society requires them to become qualified mothers, housekeepers, laborers and civilized citizens. Linked by blood to IFS, children have been accused of damaging the quality of Taiwanese society; this line of thinking unfortunately has caused the Taiwanese to lose sight of valuing social transformation (Smith, 2006) and opportunities to generate new visions with new knowledge (Viruru & Cannella, 2001).
In sum, postcolonial analysis helps determine whether NTC posit gender identities and construct gender social orders by challenging the concepts of universal children and colonized childhood (Cannella & Viruru, 2004). From the perspective of postcolonial theory, I investigated the socially and historically constructed notion of NTC. In doing so, I show that postcolonial theory as a re-conceptualizing tool can help teachers discover marginalized students’ educational needs. Primarily, I interpreted how NTC enact gender characteristics in classroom activities. This chapter provides a context for the research project, outlining a statement of the problem and the significance of the study.

Reconstructing immigrants from the perspective of Taiwanese immigrant history, postcolonial theory explained how NTC assimilate into mainstream Taiwanese school culture when they and their peers posit gendered social orders in class. Doing so, postcolonial theory becomes a tool to reconceptualize power and knowledge in NTC’s schooling processes.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This literature review summarizes four topics relevant to this study: (a) the education needs of New Taiwanese Children (NTC); (b) theories of gender acquisition; (c) gender equity issues; and (d) curriculum practices of early childhood gender education. The literature review has helped me construct background to interpret how kindergartners perform gender-doing and gender-bending when establishing gender identities by resisting or falling into dominant discourses. Finding explanations in the literature helps me gain information about New Taiwanese Children’s gender culture, and understand how postcolonial and feminist poststructural theories provide alternative views for positively building NTC’s gender identities.

Reinterpreting the Position of New Taiwanese Children

The media has discussed NTC’s challenges with assimilating into mainstream Taiwanese schools because the discrimination against IFS turns NTC into property, placing them in a lower social class or ethnic category. NTC are born under a cloud of potential crises: minority status (Chen, 2010); heterodox social backgrounds (Chen, 2009); blurred identities (Chou, 2007; Ma, 2005); and the nonstandard accent (Chou, 2007) in Taiwanese culture or in their mothers’ culture. Mainstream Taiwanese society wants NTC to become qualified students and well-informed citizens; many studies focus on adapting to schooling, subject learning, or the interrelation of both. Scholars (Chao &
Chung, 2009; Wu, 2004) researched NTC’s personal problems with schooling, reporting difficulty integrating themselves to the class compared to mainstream peers. 

**NTC’s Schooling Adaption**

Since 2004, NTC researchers (Cheng & Song, 2004) applied Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological System Theory, finding that the inseparable relationships of familial, school, community and social backgrounds influence IFS and NTC. Following this pattern, several scholars studied the issues of teacher education and teachers’ observation about NTC’s learning difficulties and classroom adaption. When Wei (2009) analyzed Taiwanese children’s abilities from the broader views of ecological systems theory, she argued that NTC’s cross-cultural background is their future social capital. Scholars (Kou, 2009; Lin & Yu, 2010) asserted that NTC’s schooling should empower IFS and that NTC’s other family members should be involved in their learning (Chen, 2007). Differently, Chang (2009) found that many transnational families have limited social capital to support their education, and thus argued for social support. However, instead of focusing on NTC’s schooling, Ting (2009) concentrated on Taiwanese teacher training to prepare them with knowledge and attitudes to implement multicultural curricula for diverse students. Further, Kou (2009) argued in favor of revising textbooks to fit the diverse students’ learning needs.

These efforts addressed perspectives of how NTC learn differently than mainstream Taiwanese children because of their cultural family background, but most
researchers failed to note NTC’s socially constructed environment. Essentially, these studies see the surface of their learning performance, but fail to provide strategies to help.

Instead, scholars became concerned with NTC’s self-identity. Ma (2005) has found how families influence adaption, proposing that: 1.) NTC’s fathers, rather than immigrant mothers, directly form NTC’s ethnic identity; and 2.) how Taiwanese society treats NTC’s families affects how NTC establish identity. Ma proposed that most teenage NTC seldom think about their own national identities, but many peers bullied them while making pejorative comments about their skin tone, non-standard dialects, or gender stereotypes. According to these findings, Taiwanese schooling and the patriarchal system influence NTC, whereas NTC have little influence over these structures.

The better NTC are at learning, the more they can adjust themselves in peer relations (Chao & Chung, 2009). Good learning experiences come from parenting well. NTC are taught not only as mainstream Taiwanese students, but they are also indoctrinated in “[reaching the normal] ways of viewing, describing, teaching, and representing” Taiwanese society (Cannella & Viruru, 2004, p. 99).

To remedy NTC’s deficiencies, some assumptions currently operate in classrooms. Under dominant discourses, Taiwanese society has placed NTC at lower hierarchical levels as mainstream society creates an environment to judge their behaviors.

Simultaneously, the government legislates learning. Actually, educational regulations control groups with “physical [and] material practice” because these actions recur in daily life (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 27). Under the label of progress, NTC are seen as objects to
survey, so researchers measure how they progress (Burman, 1994; Cannella & Viruru, 2004). Taiwanese have unconsciously built a discourse about normality to produce and regulate NTC wherein society compares NTC’s performance with that of their peers (Cannella & Viruru; MacNaughton, 2005).

NTC must overcome predetermined dysfunctional characteristics if schooling is to help them become a productive part of society. Mainstream society creates and simultaneously fails to recognize the dominant culture formed through power relations, which creates “normal” or “abnormal” students. Scientific truth has always connected with gender to conclude that children’s learning occurs through individual activity, but it often ignores social and cultural interaction (Burman, 1994; Cannella & Viruru, 2002, 2004). Thus, focusing only on cognition distorts NTC’s sense of reasoning as they try to acknowledge ideals and feelings such as pleasure, romance and fantasy (Davies, 2003a, 2003b; Leavitt & Power, 1997; Tobin, 1997). Another issue considers fairness in defining NTC by societal problems found in transnational families (Cannella & Viruru, 2004).

**Taiwan educational policy for NTC.** Current educational policies address the multicultural education that Taiwanese need (Ministry of Education, 2007d). First, the government enacted a lifelong learning policy for IFS and NTC to assimilate to Taiwanese society in 2003. Second, the New Immigrant Culture Policy (Ministry of Education, 2004b) required acknowledgment of non-Taiwanese cultures in schooling and fostered empowerment through schooling to help NTC build bicultural identities. Third, the government provided NTC with prime opportunities to participate in public
kindergarten and after-school care programs (Ministry of Education, 2007b). In addition, both hands-on teacher training and teacher education have led to multicultural education training, and workshops allowed teachers to accumulate pedagogical experiences with NTC (Ministry of Education, 2007d). However, in terms of these policies, educational practices concerning NTC still emphasize the mainstream value of assimilation.

**Criticism of educational policies for NTC.** NTC educational policies fully address the teachers’ conceptions of how to interact with NTC and how to communicate effectively with parents in transnational marriages. Multicultural workshops became popular due to the dramatic increase of NTC in many classrooms, so Taiwan’s government provided funds to support research projects and involve multicultural education (Lin, 2007; Peng, 2008; Ting, 2009). Still, in my opinion, multicultural education concerning NTC is limited to the theory of multicultural education, which reproduces ethnic stereotypes.

Most teachers commonly place themselves in positions of authority and knowledge but posit children as immature and uncivilized. Also, most teachers assert that children need protected, controlled and administered until they progress developmentally and become self-disciplined (Cannella & Viruru, 2004). By categorizing children as subordinates, teachers can easily ignore gender, class and culture issues existing in NTC’s peer interaction, thus denying knowledge of those groups. NTC’s life experiences have challenged mainstream childhood. Simultaneously, the characteristics of resistance and agency are represented in their identities (Cannella & Viruru; Ma, 2005; Yeh, 2009), so
teachers should incorporate race, class and gender culture themes into curricula (Kroeger, 2006; Viruru, 2005). In the end, teachers must understand how curricula reproduce gendered knowledge that influences NTC’s gender construction processes.

Using alternative ways to understand and empower NTC. Mainstream society suspect NTC’s academic performance because of heterogeneous culture and ethnic backgrounds. Through realizing children’s peer culture, there are multiple ways to understand a child’s world. By reconstructing the dominant discourse, teachers can inquire about the NTC’s position as it connects to culture reproduction, ideology, power and knowledge in schooling (Cannella & Viruru, 2002; Gupta, 2006; McLaren, 1998).

Early childhood education concerns how children learn subjects but ignores teaching children to recognize their diverse culture backgrounds (Gupta, 2006; Viruru, 2002, 2005). Teachers must think critically about how their curricula designs and their classroom activities interfere with NTC’s cross-ethnic values in peer culture when teachers need to help NTC understand cross-cultural and ethnic boundaries (Viruru & Cannella, 2001). For example, teachers can pose questions about gender issues in class so that NTC and their peers could discuss what they understand to be ways of being girls or boys. Teachers also can create opportunities for children to discuss family and community experiences so students can understand themselves and their domestic environment in multiple identities (Kroeger, 2006). Kroeger suggested that the more teachers display positive attitudes towards minority students’ diverse backgrounds, the more these students could establish their own and peers’ identities.
The Complexity and Uncertainty of School and NTC’s Family Relations

Scholars have recommended a closer look at the child in the context of family, community and society (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Connolly, 1998; Kroeger, 2003 & 2006; Montgomery, 2005). Regarding children’s schooling, educators have held that the positive development of communications and interactions in home-school relations create a high-quality education (Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2007). However, as teachers approach NTC, whose family cultures are different from that of school, their behaviors might present challenges for teachers to understand and respond effectively (Kroeger, 2006); thus, teachers need to communicate actively with parents or guardians (Chen, 2009). In such a situation, building positive relations with parents becomes a challenging but important prerequisite for increasing children’s self-esteem.

Cultural differences in NTC’s family and school. Culture, including gendering processes, is a framework for people living with specific habits, beliefs and values that relate with their worldview and the various ways parents raise children (Brooker, 2002; Eisenhart, 2001; Kaiser & Rasminsky, 2007). Realizing that children’s gender performances and family gendering culture are dependent on each other, teachers cannot miss chances to support children such as NTC in the processes of “gender identity formation” (Kroeger, 2006, p. 40). In addition to continuous practice and political empowerment, for children to establish gender and ethnic identities, teachers must allow students to discuss and positively address issues of cultural and historical backgrounds in life experiences, allowing them to establish identities at school (Brooker; Eisenhart;
Kaiser & Rasminsky; Kroeger, 2003, 2006). The cultural difference between school and family should provide educational opportunities for NTC since students have the right to a basic education and chance for success.

**Contextual understanding of children gender discourses.** Researchers recognize that seeing children “in context” is important to understanding them. Realizing children’s culture helps teachers to implement the appropriate curricula. Campbell and Smith (2001) reported that children are social beings within a political, cultural and historical context. By contextualizing the interpretations of NTC’s learning, possibilities exist to recognize multiple factors based in socialization processes. Recognizing the contextual view helps researcher accept the interaction between an individual child and his or her environment and how power relationships at the sociocultural levels influence children’s gender concepts. Because adults and children inhabit the same space, children, like adults, need to deal with numerous complex issues simultaneously; as a result, NTC’s gender discourses must be interpreted from the following frameworks to contextualize Taiwanese kindergartners’ gender discourses.

**Theories to Explain Gender Acquisition**

**Do Sex and Gender Mean the Same Thing?**

Scholars have debated sex and gender, asserting that sex is a person’s innately biological maleness or femaleness (Archer & Lloyd, 2002; Delphy, 2002; Devor, 1997; Sears, 1998; Stevenson, 1994). Gender, however, refers to the influences of society and the cultural expectations for femininity and masculinity (Delphy; Devor; Stevenson), so
gender must coincide with the basic attitudes and actions of a person’s sex to correspond with appropriate behaviors involving ideologies that people need to learn and express (Devor). Butler (1990) asserted the impossibility of the concept of gender to separate political and cultural interactions because gender is invariably produced and maintained in our lives; people perform gender-based acts daily. Thus, gender roles are challenged and changed to conform to diverse discourses. Theories of gender acquisition have been discussed for their helpfulness in meeting the needs in education that I list below.

**Biological theories.** Biologically-oriented theorists believe that sex roles are determined by factors such as chromosomes, hormones, genes, brain development and evolutionary effects (Maccoby, 1998; O’Brien, 1992). These factors are widely acknowledged as persistent influences in biological accounts of sex role development; first and foremost, people believe gender-based differences are caused by these unalterable factors (Devor, 1997; Maccoby; O’Brien).

Researchers have critiqued theories of biological determinism, such as the failure to explain why gender roles do not involve “behavioral fixedness” in the rapid pace of social change (Bussey & Bandura, 1999, p. 684). In a discussion of the actual abilities of males and females that leave limited possibilities for gender equity in contemporary Taiwanese society, innate factors of biological determinism provide fixed gender roles.

**Social determinism.** Sociologists believe that children are socially trained to form gender culture (Devor, 1997). They hold that factors of gender acquisition lie in
social participation and learning through imitation, reinforcement and punishment (Bandura, 1977; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). In social theory, gender development is the outcome of multifaceted factors related to cognitive, environmental and biological factors (Durkin, 2005; Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002). I have, therefore, divided social determinism into two categories: social learning theory and cognitive theory.

Mischel (1966), a social learning theorist, emphasized that key factors (e.g., rewards and models) influence gender acts, and that behaviors occur before cognition. Martin et al. (2002) interpreted this learning-based approach as such: “I have been rewarded for doing girls’ things; I must be a girl” (p. 904). Following this, social learning theorists focus on discussing “multifaceted social transmission models” instead of only “a familial transmission model” (Bussey & Bandura, 1999, p. 676). This means that gender concepts and gender behaviors are the results of operating in both family and vast societal systems that children encounter daily. Bussey and Bandura also presented a system of self-regulation to explain how children increase cognitive capabilities through internal processes; they do so through “self-observation, judgmental process, and self-reaction” (p. 690). As a result, learning theorists assert that young children develop a gender category system that helps them to become more aware of stereotypical gender role behaviors.

Seeking external knowledge bases that match their biological sex (Fagot, Rodger, & Leinbach, 2000), children foster identities with the same gender by participating in same-sex activities and developing attributes that reward them (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Crain, 2002). Therefore, social determinists have insisted that the gender category system
marks “the most salient parameter of social categorization for…young child[ren]” (Fagot et al., 2000, p. 65).

Critiques of social learning theory have been raised, however. It has been suggested that this theory is unable to clearly explain the processes of how external gender behaviors become the internalized ideology of personal gender concepts and gender identities (Martin et al., 2002). I discount the notion that the social learning theory fails to interpret why children from the same family or the same classroom act out gender performances so differently. The same kind of reinforcement cannot train children to adopt similar behaviors.

**Cognitive development theory.** The contemporary study of cognitive perspectives of gender development includes cognitive theory and gender schema theory. Theorists in these areas believe that children are motivated to behave in accordance with gender knowledge as a means of defining themselves as a girl or boy (Martin et al., 2002; Signorella, Bigler, & Liben, 1993). But gender schema theory is focused more on discussing “organized networks of mental associations representing information about themselves and the sexes” (Martin et al., p. 911).

By applying a Piagetian analysis of age-related changes, Kohlberg (1966) offered his three-stage theory of gender labeling, gender stability and gender consistency to explain the processes of gender acquisition as a child develops (Martin et al., 2002). The three-stage theory intended to improve how children’s gender development involves the active construction of meaningful strategies within gender categories; it also relates to the
internal cognitive and developmental changes by the children instead of externally by agents of socialization (Martin et al.). During the three stages of gender acquisition, the more children foster cognitive capabilities of gender knowledge, the more they become aware of performing gender role behaviors.

Social theories have disproved the weakness of empiric works of gender-linked conceptions or any gender stereotypes; children must act in accordance with this (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Critics of cognitive theory have also asserted that it fails to account for children’s free choice of gender performance under various dominant discourses (Blaise, 2005b).

Gender schema theorists have suggested that children are intently using silent categories, such as gender, to organize information from life experiences to classify groups of people and identify gender roles (Bem, 1981; Martin et al., 2002; Signorella et al., 1993; Stangor & Ruble, 1987). By doing so, children “organize their own gender schema and categorize information about the characteristics of males or females” (Signorella et al., 1993, p. 149). Gender schema contain knowledge about gender differences, such as which behaviors, appearances and activities are for girls or boys; the schema also influences the child’s sense of self in attitudes and physical attributes (Bem; Martin et al.). Gender schema studies thus intend to predict the positive relationships between children’s learned gender knowledge and gender-linked preferences (Martin et al.; Signorella et al. 1993; Stangor & Ruble, 1987).
Social theorists, however, have found little direct evidence relevant to gender schema theory to explain how information is processed differentially for girls and boys (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Although gender schema can be used to interpret strategies of information processing, which help children effectively adapt learning by classifying and organizing physical differences between members of distinct groups, I doubt that the evidence is strong enough to explain how children mentally represent the link from gender schema to behaviors.

In short, biological determinists have claimed that natural factors cause gender differences, and socialization theorists have suggested that a nurturing environment shapes two genders into a heterosexual role. Nevertheless, feminist poststructuralists criticize both biological and socialization theorists alike in that they have failed to explain “why children can resist and reconstitute dominant meanings in their gendering processes” (Davies, 2003a, p. 138). Moreover, these theories have insufficiently accounted for the fluid, changeable and various meanings of gender performances under dominant discourses (Butler, 1990; Davies, 2003b).

**Interpreting Children’s Gender Culture through the Lens of FPS**

Adults tend to ignore gender culture in childhood because they think of gender play as a natural way for children to learn socialization (MacNaughton, 2001a). But feminist poststructuralists claimed that teachers need to study power relations for changing gender issues in association with language, discourse, subjectivity and power in curriculum practices (Capper, 1992; Foucault, 1980; Weedon, 1997). For my inquiry into
gendered childhood, I used the tenets of feminist poststructuralist theory (FPS) to analyze children’s gender-doing, gender-bending and gender identities.

**Language.** Weedon stated that language is where social meaning, power and subjectivity are formed. Language or discourse practices that produce meaning are always open to challenge, redefinition, rereading and reinterpretation in our lives (Weedon). Language analysis can, therefore, provide teachers with better insight into gender meanings and gender knowledge in curriculum design. Teachers need to consider how language influences children’s gender learning. For example, Davies (2003a) led children in reading and discussing a story called “The Paper Bag Princess” and found that they have their own views and use language to reinterpret the meanings of maleness and femaleness. FPS theorists have debated whether language provides teachers with possibilities to interpret the institutional context and to address power relations within that context. Teachers need to understand that language and reading and writing materials used in class will reproduce dominant gender ideology. Students are thus shaped by curriculum practices; nonetheless, language also simultaneously provides possibilities for students to reread and rethink storylines, giving them opportunities to be agents to change the discourse and challenge existing power relations (Davies).

**Discourse.** Discourse is a way of speaking, writing, thinking, or acting that incorporates particular ideas as given truths (Foucault, 1980). Dominant discourse appears “natural”; it reveals how environment supports existing power relations (Foucault, 1980; Weedon, 1997). In school, the dominant discourse about gender roles includes
language meanings and the interaction between teachers and parents, teacher and students, and student and student, which regulate gender order in daily interaction. Students who accept these truths commonly accept dominant discourses, simultaneously blocking other ways of looking at being gendered (Peachter, 1998). Teachers cannot ignore that they present dominant gender culture in class and shape students’ gender consciousness.

**Subjectivity.** Subjectivity refers to an individual’s conscious and unconscious behaviors, sense of self and image of the world (Blaise, 1999). It is produced in daily discursive practices and represents a constant state of power struggle (Weedon, 1997). Through language, a child comes to realize that his or her individuality is subjective to unique social interactions and political experiences (Peachter, 1998; Weedon), making subjectivity non-unitary and unfixed. Children are usually consciously or unconsciously forced to construct and reconstruct subjectivities in terms of the subject positions that they take up in different discourses.

**Power.** Power is socially constructed through discourses, knowledge and disciplinary practice (Foucault, 1980; Weedon, 1997). Knowledge produces power, yet knowledge and power directly involve one another. As Foucault (1977) relates, “There is no power relation without the correlative construction of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute power relations at the same time” (p. 27). Power could also become a tool to regulate students by normalizing, categorizing and measuring (Weedon, 1997) “children’s ethnic, racial, gendered, and sexualized positions” (Kroeger, 2006, p. 40). If power is a battle for truth, then the characteristics of power involve the
struggle to dominate the meanings in social institutions. As power circulates in social relationships and resides in discourse, it is flexible and fluid when interrelated with discourses, knowledge and regimes of truth (Danby, 1998; Foucault, 1980; MacNaughton, 2005).

Truths about normal children’s gender-doing matter because in kindergarten, students and teachers use them to construct gender roles and gendered social order within institutions around what we see as normal-abnormal gender performance (Davies, 2003a). Placing power on a spectrum from “truth” to “regimes of truth” shows that truths produce institutional governance and regulate our docile bodies with disciplinary power; also, these truths influence pedagogical decisions and school as a system of social control, which regulate the gendered social order (Boldt, 1997; Butler, 1990; Thorne, 1993).

**Contemporary Issues in Social Roles and Gender Norms**

Typically, people assume that gender coincides with the basic attitudes and actions of sex (Devor, 1997); however, differences between gender and sex have been treated as insignificant (Buss, 1995). People invariably produce and maintain gender roles; they perform gender daily through “the body” but also through power structures (Butler, 1990, p. 92). In other words, because “gender is instituted through the stylization of the body” (Butler, 2003, p. 415), when people interact, they must follow the accepted ways of presenting gender acts by means of stylized repetition in gestures, movement, dress, and so on. When people seek appropriate behaviors and strategies to adjust themselves to fit gender norms, they require physical acts to match gender norms.
according to social status, sometimes standing on gender boundaries and engaging in
gender-bending. At the same time, we also need to be concerned with and abide by power
structures to satisfy societal gender norms.

**Gender is Constructed and Reconstructed**

Children automatically engage in gender culture daily through socialization
processes (Arnot, 2002). Butler (1990) stated, “…gender intersects with racial, class,
ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities” (p. 3).
Gender-doing intersects with the social and cultural backgrounds of children’s families,
communities and peer interaction. West and Zimmerman (2002) also argued that
“gender…is constructed through psychological, cultural, and social means” (p. 3). When
children are involved in social interaction, individual gender-doing influences children to
posit themselves and others in “masculine” or “feminine” terms. Hyun and Choi (2004)
stated that “gender is understood as cultural performance: gender is doing” (p. 50).

Children learn to get gender “right” through clothing; it is important for them to
believe fashion choices portray a range of masculinities and femininities (Blaise, 2005a).
Furthermore, by reading books, watching films and playing games, they experience
gender-doing in everyday life as factors that reveal the dominant gender discourse
constitute children’s gender consciousness. Thus, gender-doing should not be seen as
natural in exploring how gender should be portrayed through interaction (Lowe, 1998); in
contrast, I believe that gender is a functional category that can be manipulated, practiced
and reproduced in children’s experiences.
Views on gender-doing influence gender identities. Educators have asserted that the practice of gender-doing is a socialized mechanism in early childhood (Rogers, 2000). From feminist poststructural perspectives, gender is governed by social relations, requiring a set of practices (Butler, 2003; Connell, 2000, 2002; Lorber, 2001) that will “reproduce distinctions among bodies” (Butler, 2003, p. 418) and present differences in gender patterns. Butler believed every kind of gender performance is renewed and consolidated in cultural patterns through specific groups’ gender-doing.

Similarly, Durkin (2005) suggested that children construct gender culture by “acting with emotion, moral judgment, and self-concept as well as feelings about self-identity and group identification” (p. 136). Hence, the confluence of interaction with environment and culture could challenge ways children constitute and reconstitute characteristics of “masculinity” or “femininity.” Following this, gender-doing permits children to establish gender identities when they act as agents to change and challenge existing gender power relations in the institutional regulation processes. Gendered social order is thus formed in these gender-doing processes.

Gender-bending influences children’s gender identities. People usually use biological features to establish two gender categories: male and female (Connell, 2000, 2002; Davies, 2003a, 2003b). As such, parents assigned children gender “based on…biological features pertaining to…genitalia/sex organs” (Yelland & Grieshaber, 1998, p. 2). Those who fail to perform within the socially accepted boundaries of masculinity
and femininity risk marginalization. Thus, children are forced to present gendered behaviors that pertain to a gender category.

Yelland and Grieshaber (1998) discussed ways for children to form gender identities. First, they stated that children act out gender positions in discursive systems that will produce “a multiplicity of discourses for sharing language” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 49). Allowing children to experience life means that they have opportunities to use personal power to posit gender positions. In doing so, children can “actively construct their gender norms” (Rogers, 2000, p. 200) and reposition themselves through resistance in gender-doing under discursive practices (Gallas, 1997; Rogers).

In addition, Yelland and Grieshaber (1998) indicated that gender matters are strongly affected by certain circumstances. Presumably, when adults allow children to negotiate with or resist the dominant discourses, their gender performance could have more possibilities to create and recreate identity. As gender-doing becomes invariably related to children’s life experiences, scholars have argued, gender will become a powerful feature to form individual identity (Butler, 1990; Chen, 2010). Gender identities, therefore, contribute alternative ways for children to reestablish subjectivities (Butler, 1990); at the same time, gender-bending plays a role in pushing children’s gender identities to move between the binary categories of “what girls and boys are supposed to do” and “[evaluating] who hasn’t got their gender quite right” (Yelland & Grieshaber, 1998, p. 3). Based on these two points, gender-bending occurs in children when gendered
behaviors are regarded as suspect by adults and peers. Factors involved in gender-bending are discussed below.

**Social contexts constrain children’s gender-bending.** As children face gendered categorizing, “the binary gender divide is not natural; instead children must follow the social practices and signifying systems in circulation that delineate female and male in order to position themselves and others successfully” (Davies, 2003b, p. 5). In gender dividing processes, children are also forced to choose either girls or boys learning activities. In class, gender-bending is easily regulated under hidden curriculum practice; further, because learning experiences become normalized in children’s classroom activities, educational practices “position children themselves as male or female and of taking up the appropriate subjectivity” (Davies, 2003a, p. 116). This means that children are coerced into adopting characteristics of masculinity or femininity. However, in the critical learning experiences, children could involve more discussion about the diverse identifications in “race, class, age, and physical size” (Boldt, 1997, p. 192); as a result, their knowledge acquisition and gender identities could help them to “accept…a broader range of gender and sexual identities” (Boldt, 1997, p. 200).

**Heterosexist influences on children’s gender-bending.** Society requires children to be either a masculine male or a feminine female and fulfill “normal” gender, “practicing heterosexist gendered behaviors repeatedly” in order to avoid scrutiny (Boldt, 1997, p. 194). Although these repeated acts under heterosexism are not “truth,” heterosexism is still supported in dominant discourses. Teachers need to learn that
heterosexism is reproduced through “bodies as the objects of social power” (Connell, 2002, p. 35) that has been controlled and disciplined into the institutional regulation when “systems of knowledges sort [students’] bodies into categories” (p. 37) based on stereotypical gender characteristics. Teachers should be aware of difficulties when children negotiate their bodies along particular gender boundaries within the group, and should discuss with children what gender-bending feels like, and what it is like to be different from peers (MacNaughton, 2000).

**Children Exercise their Power Structures**

MacNaughton (2001a) and Ryan (1998, 2005) proposed that children do not passively assume feminine or masculine roles offered to them in gender-doing processes. Instead, they actively construct masculinity or femininity by means of resisting gender stereotyping. They also know how to control power structures. Scholars have pointed out that by participating in dramatic play, children are forced to choose to subject themselves to, negotiate with, or resist gender-stereotyped roles; this allows children to position themselves into multiple, diverse gender roles when they exercise gender power (Davies, 2003a; MacNaughton 2001a). Davies and MacNaughton also believe that discussing or acting out story content allows children to compare themselves with story characters. Then, children could realize their gender roles and gender positions in the current gender order to examine gender culture and to make experiences analyzable and changeable (Davies, 2003a; MacNaughton, 2001a). Supposedly, a child can learn through these
experiences how to value her or his own and peers’ gender performance. Gender interaction helps children build gender norms.

**Cultural and Institutional Regulations Influence Children’s Gender-Bending**

Researchers have suggested that gender reflects “values, relationships of power and authority, and maintenance of group boundaries and identities” (Stambach, 1999, p. 441). They have also reminded us that social construction of gender in families and society purposely guides children’s gendered works into family roles, and finally grants children positions as qualified citizens (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Lorber, 2001; Osmond & Thorne, 1993). Presumably, dominant culture influences children’s gender-bending in the family, and school structures a social life that reflects the functions of parenthood and schooling in gendered positions from the perspectives of authority, discipline and knowledge.

In sum, I argue that the discursive systems of children’s gender culture are tied with local cultural backgrounds, historical memories and ethnic consciousness. Because gender-doing is always regulated under dominant discourses, early childhood educators should permit children to practice gender-bending when moving between binary categories. Children will benefit by engaging in gender-bending by breaking heterosexist limitations, having alternative views of doing gender and establishing gender identities.
Gender Equity Issues in Education

Definition of Gender Equity

Gender equity challenges gender stereotypes and concerns itself with equal access to educational opportunities for people of various sexual orientations, race, class and socioeconomic status (American Association of University Women, 2002; Grossman & Grossman, 1994). Researchers have argued that both mechanisms of biological differences and social determinations fail to demonstrate the complexity of children’s gender identities (Davies, 2003a; MacNaughton, 2000; Walkerdine, 1990). The existence of the multiplicity of relations among racism, class bias and heterosexism (Morgan, 1996) are more critical than merely emphasizing sex differences between girls and boys (Browne, 2004). Thus, in these interwoven relations, power systems are structured and circulated in children’s diverse life experiences, so teachers must realize that “gender equity [should] emphasize fairness in both process and outcome” (Browne, p. 2). Scholars believe that the more gender achieves equity, the more possibilities children have to take charge in different societal roles (Browne; Grossman & Grossman, 1994).

Legal requirements in gender equity law. The Taiwanese legislature approved the Gender Equity Education Law in 2004 to create “a society with gender harmony, justice, and fairness” (Chuang, 2004, p. 96). The context included building a just campus environment and requiring professional teacher training program for gender education and multicultural education (Ministry of Education, 2007c). School enables the social construction of gender culture but limits students’ possibilities to establish gender
identities (You, 2005; Chuang, 2004, 2003). Eliminating prejudices and discriminations of racism, sexism and stereotypic socioeconomics through curriculum practice can help students adjust potential prejudices toward the “other” (Chuang, 2004); gender equity education can result in the curing of gender stereotypes. A need exists to enforce the Gender Equity Education Law (Ministry of Education, 2004a), which influences national education policies in Taiwan. Following passage of the law, the Taiwanese gender education process sought to examine school gender culture to fit Taiwanese educational needs. Young (2009) considered how school gender culture affects campus life and education purposes. You (2009) focused on differences in identities when rethinking sex/gender education from multicultural perspectives. Further, the Ministry of Education had a panel of scholars (Hsiao, Wang & Hung, 2011; You & Tsai, 2011) publish gender equity teaching materials to be implemented from the Elementary to High School levels by Fall, 2011. The goals include recognizing differences, accepting multiple gender approaches, and exploring self-gender identities. The content of gender equity curriculum includes issues of LGBT, same-gender families, immigrant families, and adoptive families. It addresses equal educational opportunities for LGBT students, new emigrants, and the children of immigrant spouses. However, conservative legislators and parents initiated strong opposition because of their dislike for deviant sexual approaches. The Ministry of Education (2011) is currently debating diversity, equality, and the needs of human rights within society. Apparently, these diverse positions present the urgent need to address equality education.
The research of Taiwanese early childhood gender equity. Following the enactment of the Gender Equity Education Law (Ministry of Education, 2007c), gender education attracted many Taiwanese researchers’ attention (Huang, 2009; Tsai, 2007). Different from child development perspectives, Chen (2006) criticized how Taiwanese marriage customs enforce children’s stereotyped gender roles in teachers’ direction of dramatic play in class activities. To challenge controversial curriculum designs, Chen (2009) later conducted research for pre-service early childhood teachers to integrate gender equity issues into instructional practices for young children. Chen criticized that most pre-service early childhood teachers lacked self-consciousness about gender equity concepts, making it difficult when directing young children to construct classroom gender equity because curricula implementation is dominated by customary gender culture. Nevertheless, there are several feminist views that have been developed to help remedy these circumstances.

Feminist perspectives and gender equity. Feminist perspectives accommodate different educational purposes and ideologies that have influenced how educators achieve the goals of feminist pedagogy. They seek to develop teaching strategies (Genishi, Ryan, Ochsner, & Yarnall, 2001; Goldstein, 1997; Sumson, 2005), to produce and redefine knowledge (Coffey & Delamont, 2000; Hooks, 2000; Munro, 1998; Weiler, 2001) and to maintain gender equity classrooms for students (Biklen & Pollard, 2001; Browne, 2004). Feminists are concerned with the working of patriarchy, which serves as the theoretical framework for schooling; thus, feminists maintain various perspectives on gender equity
(Grumet & McCoy, 2000; Weiner, 1994). For example, feminist poststructuralists have argued the inequitable power relationships between males and females and emphasized new ways of seeing and knowing in traditional, male-dominated society (Brah, 2000; Carby, 2000; Weedon, 1997).

Curricula implementation is influenced by the concepts of gender equity knowledge and dominant power (Chuang, 2007; MacNaughton, 1997b; Shaffer & Shevitz, 2001). To foster both individual self-critical thinking and collective criticism (MacNaughton, 2000), teachers can realize how dominant discourse controls belief systems and realize that knowledge is presented as “quite gender-classified and…shows different power relations” (Chuang, 2004, p. 95). Teachers are also in charge of the curriculum design and practice (Browne, 2004), so they have the power to form classroom gender culture. Teachers’ personal attitudes and professional knowledge influence how they interpret and intervene in children’s dramatic play. Moreover, teachers need to examine how a child learns gender (MacNaughton, 1997a, 1997b) and performs the roles of femininity, masculinity, or crosses the boundary between them (Blaise, 2005a). These critical attitudes and knowledge help early childhood teachers to implement gender equity in their curricula.

**Controversial Practices and Positions of Gender Construction Issues in ECE**

Teachers have noticed that certain current gender education practices are unfair and should be corrected. Davies (2003a, 2003b) and Gallas (1997) have devoted themselves to promoting gender construction in curriculum practices. Early childhood
educators should pay close attention to children’s gendering strategies to help teachers to implement curricula design (Campbell & Smith, 2001). Besides, existing biases in teaching materials regarding gender and racial discrimination are a concern to many teachers (Morgan, 1996): some textbooks portray male characters outdoors but present stereotypical female figures doing domestic work at home (Shaffer & Shevitz, 2001).

The validated concepts of practice gender equity. Recent of thought how early childhood educators should address concerns about gender role development of children is evident in the publications of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This institution provides standards of nationwide accreditation for early childhood education in the U.S. An essential component of the accreditation criteria for curriculum (NAEYC, 2006) is that teachers should facilitate children’s social competence and ability to learn through interacting with others. According to the criteria for accreditation, one recommendation relating to the issue of gender interaction in the classroom is to teach children know how to build meaningful gender norms and gender order with others.

In the guidebook Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs Serving Children from Birth through Age 8, Bredekamp (1987) pointed out that “Multicultural and nonsexist experiences, material, and equipment should be provided for children of all ages” (p. 7). Bredekamp asserted that multicultural and non-stereotyping activities improve each child’s self-concept and self-esteem. In Derman-Sparks’ (1989) view, an anti-bias approach connects the goal of early childhood education with the social
issues of sexism, racism and handicapping conditions. With regard to the anti-bias curriculum, Derman-Sparks’ purposes for teaching children about gender identity include: “(a) freeing children from stereotypic definitions of gender roles; (b) fostering children’s gender identity and understanding the relationship between biological identity and gender roles; (c) promoting equality of development for both sexes; and (d) developing children’s skills for challenging sexist stereotypes” (p. 49). In addition, Derman-Sparks’ (2010) claimed the need to direct children to recognize diverse family backgrounds and gender approaches that involve children’s gender identities. These concrete strategies provide early childhood teachers with ideals to implement gender equity curriculum.

*The controversy of class interaction.* Many early childhood teachers also believe that classroom interaction is important to form class gender culture. This culture could be present in the environmental arrangement and teaching materials (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Harm, Clifford, & Cryer, 2005). In *Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale*, Harm et al. noted, “Many books, pictures, and materials accessible showing people of different races, cultures, ages, abilities, and gender in nonstereotyped roles” (p. 7), which promote diversity acceptance. In both historical and current images, males and females should be shown performing many different types of work, including traditional and nontraditional roles. Early childhood teachers are required to arrange classroom environments that fully support children’s awareness of cultural diversity, to recognize cultural backgrounds on their own and to build a sense of self (Chen, 2010; Harm et al.).
Critically, feminist poststructuralist theorists have argued that merely rearranging the learning environment (e.g., reorganizing and representing materials in classroom) cannot fully create a world that frees children from gender inequality (Browne, 2004; MacNaughton, 1998; Walkerdine, 1990). MacNaughton (1998) conducted research about challenging sexism and changing gender messages by leading boys and girls to play in areas where they play house and manipulate building blocks together. However, she claims that merely rearranging the learning environment “fails to acknowledge human agency, human resistance, and individual’s ability to re-make dominant practices, meanings and understandings” (p. 155).

The gender curricula praxis. The practice of gender equity curriculum is not only a concept but also a matter of praxis. In developmental approaches, teachers create equal learning opportunities for students to construct knowledge and change behaviors (Hauser & Marrero, 1998). Nevertheless, scholars have noted problems resulting from simply using materials to control children’s gender behaviors because cultural and social backgrounds already exist in many specific categories (Hauser & Marrero; MacNaughton, 1998; Walkerdine, 1990) that gave meaning to understandings of stereotypical gender roles and gender-doing. Regarding gender equity, teachers need critical thinking to create opportunities to maintain dialogue with children about what they think and how they act as gendered beings, and teachers need to know how children learn gender in discursive discourses (Campbell & Smith, 2001).
For establishing how Taiwanese preschoolers’ develop gender roles, Y.C. Chen (2004) found that parent’s and peers’ gender roles influenced gender cognition of gender stereotyped toys, gender roles and job categories. Since the purpose of examining children’s gender roles is to apply it to the curricula, several studies (Y. Z. Chen, 2004; Lo, Yu, Shi, 2006; Huang, 2005) discussed gender curricula for children, such as correct manners for using the bathroom, recognition of girls’ and boy’s biological differences, how to avoid sexual harassment, and so on. In my view, these studies are based on or against appropriate developmental perspectives of how teachers’ gender curricula designs and practices will form ideal classroom gender culture. Curricula practices are based on appropriate developmental perspectives to provide necessary knowledge for being girls or boys of specific age levels who could meet societal expectations. But they disregarded children’s concepts about equal gender roles and enlightened gender equality in class.

Teachers manage classroom gender culture and display classroom teaching materials and classroom design. Their professional training on critical thinking for gender equality is the key point for implementing gender education. Feminist pedagogy provides theoretic and practical viewpoints to support teachers in constructing class gender culture.

**Early Childhood Gender Education**

**Feminist Pedagogy in Schooling**

Feminist pedagogy provides both theoretical and practical bases to criticize patriarchal ideology and its reproduction in education. It also challenges male-dominated power systems. Feminist praxis-oriented early childhood teachers have been criticized
because they routinely engage in maternal care, classroom management and knowledge transmission (Coffey & Delamont, 2000; Goldstein, 1997; Thornton & Goldstein, 2006).

**Importance of feminist pedagogy.** Feminist teachers are concerned with how gender bias is reproduced by patriarchal culture and technology on campus, which cause gender inequity in campus life (Coffey & Delamont, 2000; Weiner, 1994). Feminist pedagogy has impacted educational policies and curriculum concerns about cultural perspectives offered in schools (Biklen & Pollard, 2001). Feminist educators argue that feminist pedagogy could reconstruct and reproduce identities, therefore presenting flexible possibilities in curriculum practices (Ropers-Huilman, 1998; Weiler, 2003). The significance of feminist pedagogy follows.

**Schooling for improving gender equity in classroom interaction.** Feminist pedagogy critiques how teachers treat boys and girls with gender stereotypes or gender inequity (Miller, 1992; Weiner, 1994; Weiler, 2003). Primary school teachers are more likely to assign art projects to girls and computer projects or carpentry tasks to boys; usually, teachers unconsciously base such curriculum decisions on gender stereotypes in daily class activities (Connolly, 1998). When teaching gender-doing, teachers need to allow children ample opportunities to experience a multiple positioning of identities in class activities (Blaise, 1999, 2005a; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; Kroeger, 2003, 2006). By listening to children’s opinions and observing peer interaction, teachers could understand gender culture and improve gender equity in class.
Furthermore, feminist practice has been linked with the issue of equal rights and the division of power and authority in the classroom (Biklen & Pollard, 2001; Ropers-Huilman, 1998). Consequently, teachers need to be aware that gendered powers exist in student-teacher and peer relations. Only when the heterogeneous voices are heard can teachers empower students and build their subjectivities (Gore, 2003).

Supporting heterogeneous students who differ in gender, race and class represents a vital praxis in feminist pedagogy. However, these differences might become heterogeneous in our lives. MacNaughton (2001b) drew upon Foucault’s work on regimes of truth to explain how we think, act and feel about ourselves and others by maintaining set truths. Truth will direct normal thought and influence how we think and what we do. To challenge dominant discourses in class, emancipatory knowledge about the cross-boundaries of gender, race and class helps us to realize how power and privilege manipulate social relationships (Lather, 1991; Chuang, 2004). Given this, feminist teachers should recognize the challenge in creating an environment that balances power and knowledge construction (Coffey & Delamont, 2000; MacNaughton, 2000).

**Praxis-oriented concern for ethical forms of professional and personal practice.** Female teachers’ authority in early childhood education involves maternal care, classroom management and knowledge transmission (Grieshaber & Ryan, 2006; Thornton & Goldstein, 2006). Maternal care is the most common task of early childhood teachers (Goldstein, 1997; Noddings, 1990). Noddings proposed that an ethic of care can guide teaching because “Teachers know their students well enough to be able to make
suggestions fitted to the needs of particular students” (p. 51). She presented caring as a powerful medium by which to fulfill the role of an early childhood teacher. Similarly, Goldstein introduced the concept of teaching with love, based on the feminist moral perspective, to early childhood education. With a loving feminist perspective, teachers can easily build close relationships with children and manage behavioral conflicts. Moreover, teachers should observe and interpret children’s behavior in various contexts instead of seeing behaviors from only a developmental perspective (Cannella, 1997; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2001; MacNaughton, 2000; Walkerdine, 1990).

Classroom management and knowledge transmission have always been entangled in issues surrounding the authority and autonomy of teachers (Coffey & Delamont, 2000; Thornton & Goldstein, 2006). Disjunctions exist between autonomy and power (Coffey & Delamont, 2000); many female teachers struggle to balance the maternal role and nurturing authority in the classroom (Peachter, 1998; Ryan, 1998, 2005). The daily job of teaching requires teachers to control class activities and discipline; teaching often includes responding to unpredictable situations, which demands immediate decision-making and autonomous problem-solving. Therefore, adherents to feminist pedagogy believe that to “adopt classroom space strategies [is] to create feminized spaces” (Coffey & Delamont, 2000, p. 16). Feminists encourage teachers to think critically in curriculum design (Gore, 2003) to implement social justice in pedagogy and cultivate effective classroom management. Resultantly, knowledge transmission could provide more possibilities beyond reproducing patriarchal ideology (Lather, 1991, 2003).
The Practice of FPS Curriculum in Early Childhood Education

**What does ECE entail in FPS?** Feminist poststructuralists have concluded that social power allows a person to articulate an equal position to transform social relations of gender, class and race (Weedon, 1997). In regard to feminist poststructuralist practice in schooling, early childhood gender education can make a difference in several areas.

**Creating new knowledge about how children do gender.** By employing poststructuralist theories of language, subjectivity and institutions, FPS theorists have created new ways of seeing and knowing when challenging dominant discourses (Capper, 1992, 1998; Gore, 2003; Ryan, Ochsner, & Genishi, 2001; Weiner, 1994). Following this, early childhood scholars stated that “development appropriate based observational practices hide gender” (MacNaughton, 2000, p. 73). When teachers merely explain children’s gender-doing through developmental and individual perspectives, they simultaneously ignore the dynamics of socially constructed gender that is based on the interaction from “a child” to “group of children” vis-à-vis families, school and community (Connell, 1998; Kroeger, 2003; Kroeger & Lash, 2005; Ryan & Grieshaber, 2005). Feminist poststructuralists are positioned to understand existing gender power relations and identify areas and strategies for change (Weedon, 1997).

**Reconceptualizing children’s gendering processes.** Gender performances are always constituted and reconstituted through discursive practices. By observing and discussing gender culture with children, teachers can deconstruct children’s gendered processes (Davies, 2003a; Ryan, 1998, 2005) and then determine the proper moments to
help children build gender identities (Kroeger, 2006). Davies argued that the “incorrigibility of [the] male-female binary” (p. xi) unreasonably forces children to learn to engage in maleness or femaleness. In addition, Davies (2003a) stated that if teachers create opportunities for children to become involved in and discuss gender issues during story time or group time, they can constitute and reconstitute themselves as meaningful gender beings through discursive practices. MacNaughton (2000) noted that children’s gendering processes have not followed the “sponge model” to present the “social forces” (p. 20) of gender behaviors. Instead, in the process of building gender identities, children and their social worlds are interdependent and mutually constructing. Thus, from the feminist poststructuralist perspective, scholars have argued that children are active agents who need to interact and practice as gendered beings within discursive discourses (Blaise, 2005a). Also, children’s gender identity formation is thought of as (a) a dialogue that allows children to present voices and experiences and (b) a narrative where children can role play, imagine and discuss by recognizing and repeating experiences (Davies, 2003a; Kroeger, 2006; MacNaughton, 2000).

When combined with gender issues, feminist poststructuralism understands how power relations in classrooms are generated. We can then re-conceptualize complexities of gender norms and power relations in children’s interaction, teacher-student interaction and deconstruction of gendering processes within observational research (Alloway, 1995; Campbell & Smith, 2001; Davies, 2003a; MacNaughton, 2005).
When Early Childhood Curriculum and Pedagogy Meet FPS

FPS theory provides EC educators with both theoretical and practical perspectives for curriculum and pedagogy practice. For inquiring about gender construction in curriculum practice, the following literature review could present new possibilities.

**Disagreement about child-centered curriculum.** Genishi et al. (2001) stated that some ECE studies focused on gender are underpinned with poststructural assumptions about power, knowledge and subjectivity in curriculum practice. Educators proposed that child-centered discourse pedagogy empowers boys, but at the same time renders girls and female teachers’ powerless (Genishi et al., 2001; Ryan, 1998; Walkerdine, 1990). Furthermore, MacNaughton (1997a, 1997b) argued that EC teachers struggle with conflicting conceptions of maintaining gender dualism in EC curricula as they attempt to implement child-centered curriculum.

**Doing gender in multiple positions.** Blaise (1999) conducted FPS research about children’s gender-doing in kindergarten classrooms. She reported (a) multiply-positioned children in gender discourse, (b) children resisting and reconstituting dominant meanings of gender, and (c) that an appropriate curriculum is capable of dismantling gender dualism and encouraging children to position themselves in various gender discourses. By arranging various learning experiences, students can discuss and practice multiple positions, forming subjectivities in relation to power and constantly shifting gender.

Feminist poststructuralist pedagogy has emphasized that teachers, as reflective thinkers, stimulate children’s gendered understandings, challenge stereotypical gender
roles and empower children to establish identity positively (Genishi, et al, 2001; Grieshaber & Ryan, 2006; MacNaughton, 2005; Sumion, 2005). By designing curricula and questioning children’s stories, drawings and actions, feminist poststructuralist pedagogy focuses on stimulating students’ interest in recognizing cultural diversities and defining individual identities and exposing power relationships from class interaction. Children are granted chances to practice and resist traditional feminine or masculine roles or cross boundaries; when permitted to do so, children can learn how to criticize existing inequity group gender order and construct meaningful gender norms.

**Definition of Key Terms**

**Gender**

Connell (2002) asserted that gender is a matter of social relations within which individuals and groups act. As a result, gender not only exists in children’s abstract ideologies, but it is also reproduced in structured behaviors. Through sets of practices, gender characteristics bring reproductive distinctions among bodies into social processes (Davies, 2003a).

**Gender Roles**

Gender roles are the traits, expectations and behaviors associated with men and women and what it means to be “masculine” or “feminine” (Connell, 2002). Bussey and Bandura (1999) have argued that gender roles are learned through gender socialization. For example, boys are traditionally required to demonstrate characteristics such as aggression, dominance and boldness, whereas girls have been forced to act expressively.
Hegemonic Masculinity

The term *hegemonic masculinity* denotes heterosexuality as an explicit expectation that shapes the structural order of gender relations when children play together (Blaise, 2005a). Davies (2003b) commented, “Masculinity is, after all, competitive, and heterosexuality is fundamental to the maintenance of the hierarchical binary” (p. 111).

Gendered Social Order

*Gendered social order* refers to how children “get gender right” when interacting (Davies, 2003a, p. 20). Connell (2002) stated that manhood and womanhood are not fixed by nature, but they are imposed by social norms. People constitute themselves as masculine or feminine to respond to the gender social order in which they are found (Danby, 1998). Moreover, Davies (2003b) stated that in order to maintain the gender order, for example, a boy or girl needs to push him or her self or one’s peers to engage in stereotypes of gender roles, from which they manage the limits of gender identity.

Gender-doing

West and Zimmerman (2002) have defined *gender-doing* as behavior that creates differences between girls and boys and women and men in daily activities. Butler (1990) reported that gender is a social construct always at work and linked to life experiences. Since daily life experiences are continuous and unfixed, so is gender-doing.

Gender-bending

Gender-bending occurs when “children move between the binary categories of what girls and boys are supposed to do” (Yelland & Grieshaber, 1998, p. 3). Hyun and
Choi (2004) believed that gender-bending “provides strategic advantages for young children to move between and adopt different gender positions to further their interests” (p. 51). According to the binary classification of gender, children are forced to categorize themselves and peers as “male” and “female” even when the gender binary is not natural (Davies, 2003a, 2003b), and they need to negotiate within the gender transgression zone (McGuffey & Rich, 2001).

**Gender Identity**

The term *gender identity* refers to people’s feelings about their gender—whether they are males, females, both, or neither (Francis & Skelton, 2001). Lloyd and Duveen (1993) believed gender identity is based upon theories of social representation in group relations. They pointed out that gender identities function on locating individuality and group membership in the representation of social customs. Differently, Davies (2003a) posed that children actively choose different gender positions to interact with different people and to deal with different situations. Thus, gender identities are formed when children need to construct gender position appropriately in a particular context.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Method Design

This study focused on interpreting how Taiwanese kindergartners’ gendering processes occurred within the realms of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and cross-cultural backgrounds when they socially constructed these processes with peers during classroom activities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Holmes, 1998). By conducting observations and interviews with New Taiwanese Children (NTC), immigrant female sponsors (IFS), and teachers at their schools and homes, I investigated how NTC continually negotiated their own gendered actions and circumstances from an individual and cultural perspective.

The remainder of this chapter has been divided into three sections: first, the context of the study, including descriptions of the schools, classrooms, and study participants; second, the types of data collected and methods of collection; and third, data analysis procedures, including the credibility and trustworthiness of this study.

Statement of the Problem

The study concerned how NTC and their peers enacted multiple gender performances when the children’s gender-doing was continually shaped and reshaped in their daily experience. The study also investigated how NTC maintained and resisted gender norms under dominant gender discourse. The individual NT child’s gender identity often represents the multilevel of gender power, which relates to issues of SES, ethnicity and family culture backgrounds. It is not sufficient to examine the individual
New Taiwanese child’s gender-doing; only when her or his peer interactions have happened can gender incidents display the local children’s specific gender culture. As such, I explored how NTC persistently built their gendered knowledge, gendered social orders and gender identities by tracing their critical incidents within local school culture and family backgrounds. The research questions concerned the following:

1. What constitutes the children’s gendered knowledge and how do the children perform their gender culture?
2. How do the children represent gendered social order in their classroom?

Investigating the first question, I observed the children’s behavior and interpreted their own and their peers’ gender-doing. I interviewed teachers and parents about their interpretation of the children’s gender performances. To answer the second question about gendered social order, I considered how the children maintained and resisted gender social order in the dominant culture when the classmates played together. I also questioned how teachers interpreted gender social order in their classrooms and how NTC explained their parents’ gender roles in their families, information I used to interpret how the children learned to be gender beings. By applying the theoretical framework and methods of observation, interview, and analysis of discourse processes to interpret the gendered culture of NTC.

**Theoretical Framework**

The study was framed by poststructuralism, feminist poststructuralism, and postcolonialism, which influenced the choice of paradigm and methodology, affecting the type of knowledge it produced (Hughes, 2001; Tobin, 1995). To interpret the gendered
culture of the children through these theoretical paradigms, I deconstructed their
gendered knowledge and gender norms that were taken for granted, invisible, or highly
controversial (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Hughes, 2001; Rhedding-Jones; 2006). Because
these theories have been used in the study, I briefly discuss these paradigms below as
they relate to three questions: (a) What knowledge does the theoretical paradigm include
that could be used to interpret results? (b) What methodology used in the paradigm is
useful in investigating the phenomena? (c) What criteria of validity in the paradigm can
be applied in the study?

Poststructuralism

**Knowledge in Poststructuralism.** I chose poststructuralism, which focuses on the
inseparability of social linguistics, knowledge, subjectivities, and discourses, as an
approach in this study for several reasons. First, poststructural theorists perceive
knowledge as both reproduced and practiced by social linguistic construction (Kvale,
2002). I have noticed that children’s dialogue does not always have fixed words or
meanings. This causes the words that frame conversation to produce “arbitrary, shifting,
and contradictory” understandings of what the other child means (MacNaughton, 2005, p.
79); when children play together, gender-doing can be shifted and changed continuously
because gendered roles are reorganized, enacted and contested (Genishi et al., 2001).

Second, poststructuralists believe that individual subjectivities are constructed and
reconstructed through the social products of language (Genishi et al., 2001; Hamilton &
McWilliam, 2001). In this research, I contend that children’s language, explanations and
subjectivities are never fixed because gender construction can be constantly (re)produced
by them or others in “discursive practice”; by paying particular attention to their dialogues in play (Davies, 2003a, p. 147), and by collecting the children’s narratives I inquired about the ways NTC resist social regulation and construct social meanings (MacNaughton, 2005; Weedon, 1997).

Third, children’s understanding of the world is associated with particular experiences and connected with social and material circumstances, such as class, gender and race (Blaise, 2005a, 2005c; Coffey & Delamont, 2000; Tobin, 1995); as such, poststructuralists have claimed dynamic relationships between knowledge and identity when children create gender, which shift under different linguistic, institutional, cultural and social backgrounds (Hamilton & McWilliam, 2001; Hughes, 2001). Examining how children meaningfully construct gender knowledge when they play together, I applied poststructuralism to study how NTC adopt gender identities when the dominant discourse abounds and social order regulates learning experiences.

Fourth, poststructuralists propose “a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory, and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourses each time [the children] think or speak” (Weedon, 1997, p. 32). Therefore, I applied poststructural explanations to interpret the children’s comprehension and resistance about the dominant discourse (Hughes, 2001; Tobin, 1995). In addition, the knowledge emanating from this research draws attention to the repressive or emancipatory effects of schooling and the gender issues in which NTC are engaged as contemporary Taiwanese social phenomena.

Briefly, according to poststructuralism, children construct gender culture by multiple meanings and are influenced by various types of power (Genishi et al., 2001;
McNaughton, 2005). Thus, poststructural knowledge provides possibilities to reinterpret children’s gender issues when both children’s subjectivities and power relations are considered.

**Poststructuralist methodology used in this investigation.** I applied poststructuralist methodology to interpret the children’s gender culture under the following criteria: (a) Derrida’s deconstruction of texts to produce meanings in various discourses (Hamilton & McWilliam, 2001; MacNaughton, 2005), (b) Foucault’s assumption that knowledge and power are inseparable (MacNaughton, 2005), and (c) deconstructive undertakings used to discover meanings (Tobin, 1995; Blaise, 2005b).

**Derrida.** In poststructuralist methodology, Derrida deconstructed language, revealing binary oppositions in texts within the complex matrix of difference and sameness in the meaning of words and actions (MacNaughton, 2005) and recognizing oppositions, exclusions, dichotomies and distinctions (Hamilton & McWilliam, 2001). In this study, I deconstructed children’s gender texts, realizing that “the binary oppositional structure of language” provides various interpretations because when the language, meaning and subjectivity are not fixed, openings for recreation among children’s meanings are possible (MacNaughton, p. 93). The meanings of children’s gender identities are, therefore, always open to challenge, redefinition, rereading, and reinterpretation in their lives (Weedon, 1997).

**Foucault.** Foucault connected knowledge and power (Hamilton & McWilliam, 2001; MacNaughton, 2005); thus, to examine children’s gendered knowledge in the classroom is to examine their knowledge of gender norms within existing power
structures. Based on the relations among knowledge, power, and discourse, feminists have found that Foucault’s notions of power and resistance raise objections to the marginalization of children and women and can reverse their subjugation (Luke & Gore, 1992; Weedon, 1997). His knowledge-power theory enables inquiry of education as a socially regulated institution for reproducing gender stereotypes (MacNaughton, 2005).

*Discovering meanings.* Genishi et al. (2001) argue that analyzing the subjectivities, languages and meanings in children’s peer interaction processes could deconstruct stereotyped gender norms in class. Tobin (1995) found that children could make their own meanings when their social and material circumstances interact. I used poststructuralist methodology in this deconstructive study to interpret NTC’s gendered social order and the meaning associated with resistance to teachers’ authority (Blaise, 2005b; Genishi et al., 2001).

In summary, poststructuralists have applied Derrida’s and Foucault’s viewpoints to explain children’s gender culture (MacNaughton, 2005), deconstructing the relationship of language, knowledge, power and culture in school.

*Criteria used to judge validity in Poststructuralist research.* Poststructuralists validate knowledge by seeking the authenticity of research participants’ voices, effects of power, and deconstructed language (Hughes, 2001). The validity of knowledge concerns how participants’ authentic voices can be realized and how knowledge is built into truth (Gore, 2003; Hamilton & McWilliam 2001; Tobin, 1995). Thus, poststructuralists have deconstructed the nexus of power and knowledge (Davies, 2003a; McNaughton, 2005).
Subjectivities, constructs, discourses and practices produce the variant effects of power; as a result, the dominant gender discourse produces gender norms that can be constructed and recognized as legitimate gendered knowledge. Thus, validity construction in this study occurred through an analysis of discourse processes. Discourses about gender were a product of children’s experiences as they exercised power within a larger power-knowledge nexus concerning gender in modern Taiwanese society.

**Feminist Poststructuralism**

**Knowledge in Feminist Poststructuralism.** Feminist poststructuralism (FPS) is part feminism and part poststructuralism. Feminist research puts “the social construction of gender at the center of…inquiry” (Lather, 1991, p. 71), motivating the choice of research strategy, modes of analysis and dialectic theory building about gender issues (Coffey & Delamont, 2000; Lather, 1991). Poststructuralists hold that all knowledge is grounded in human society, is situated, partial, local and historically specific (Cherryholmes, 1988; Tobin, 1995; Weedon, 1997); thus, I inquired into how children’s gender culture relates to family backgrounds, schooling and peer interaction (Ryan, 1998; Weedon).

**Knowledge construction in FPS.** In FPS, feminist research praxis involves methodological framing, the research process and reflection on the research (Coffey & Delamont, 2000; Lather, 2003; Luke & Gore, 1992). This study used FPS to critique the interpretation that children’s gender construction is primarily from males’ viewpoints (Luke & Gore, 1992; MacNaughton, 2005; Weiner) and to explore the strategies children use to resist dominant sexism when constructing gender knowledge (Lather, 1991). FPS
concerns patriarchal reproduction in school (Coffey & Delamont, 2000; Lather, 1991) and how children construct gender knowledge in the cultural transformation process (Blaise, 1999; Weiner, 1994); thus, by applying FPS, I sought alternative strategies that allow educators to create new visions for deconstructing the children’s gender culture and for practicing gender education (Coffey & Delamont, 2000).

Empowerment of multivoices. In FPS theory, empowerment emanates from gender and subjectivity in individual contexts (Blaise, 2001, 2005b). Through conscious and unconscious discursive practices, individual subjectivities are constructed and reconstructed through language. In this study, child informants and I engaged in dialogue about gender issues during classroom activities. They wanted to talk about experiences with gender construction and critical gender incidents. With limited time for me to build close relationships with teachers and parents, however, adult informants had insufficient opportunities to engage in self-disclosure; therefore, the relation between researcher and adult researched was inadequate to establish full trust with each participant, although the researcher and children achieved authentic relationships over time (Coffey & Delamont, 2000; Lather, 1991, 1986; McNaughton, 2005).

FPS methodology used in this investigation. Feminist scholars have stated that the production of knowledge is sequential and constructed and reconstructed through social processes (Coffey & Delamont, 2000; Lather, 2003; Luke & Core, 1992). Because “knowledge is always provisional, open-ended, and relational,” (Luke & Gore, 1992, p. 7), feminist research operates through language to locate itself in historical and cultural
contexts; FPS research as emancipatory research thus demands a continuous negotiation of meanings with the researcher, informants and texts (Lather, 1991).

**Emancipatory research.** FPS researchers value emancipatory knowledge for directing attention to the needs of social transformation in the current social process (Lather, 1991, 1986; Luke & Gore, 1992). During the course of this study, I built friendships and a dialogic relationship with NTC, IFS, and teachers. Even so, as noted above I had limited opportunities to interact with adult informants; however, the study still involved contextualized approaches for connecting with the researcher’s and informants’ concepts of negotiation and reciprocity (Lather, 1991).

To negotiate meaning, I paid attention to the way informants spoke on their own behalf and focused on how they described their own situation. Recycling description and interpretation of the participants’ opinions, I used these opinions to organize my conclusions (Lather, 1991). In the fieldwork process, I used reciprocity to empower both the researched and myself to confront how a transformed society could be achieved (Blaise, 2005a, 2005b; Lather, 1986). I compared the data and theory, remaining sensitive to gender issues because I knew my research questions stimulated IFS, NTC and the teacher to “mutual [negotiation] of meaning and power” in their lives (Lather, 1986, p. 263). The participants’ critical incidents proved that the values and expectations in the study uncovered critical issues of race, gender, class and ethnic stereotypes in daily life (Lather, 1991).

**Criteria used to judge validity in Feminist Poststructuralist research.** FPS researchers have claimed to abandon the neutrality of knowledge, arguing that value-free
knowledge legitimatized privilege based on class, race and gender (Lather, 2003). Thus, the “validity [of the study] is not to support an interpretation” but instead to criticize the researcher’s ability to “formulate self-corrective techniques that check the credibility of data” (Lather, 1986, p. 270). Lather offered the following guidelines to establish data validity in the study.

**Triangulation.** To establish data trustworthiness, triangulated strategies are applied in multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical schemes; in this study I compared multiple theories and multiple data sources as contrary patterns to assure credibility in my interpretations (Lather, 2003). Often, one observation related to a pattern seen in field notes (i.e., in children’s cleanliness rituals or material play culture) would be seen in various ways and arise again in videotapes.

**Construct validity.** Construct validity concerns how the researcher’s self-critical attitude influences research processes during theory formation (Lather, 2003). I used journal entries and field notes emanating from my observations and interviews to build my contextualized theory. Data collection processes helped ensure construct validity.

**Face validity.** Face validity involves recycling categories and emerging analysis (Lather, 2003). This process included having the teachers and my research peers discuss my research findings and my categorization. Here, peers refers to those who tutored me in my university’s writing center as well as Asian friends and family members who are educators or graduate students in education.
Here, FPS theory guided data generation and data interpretation to reflect reality. Hence, the conceptualization of broad gender discourses within the social life of the classroom was important to situate the context and have strong face validity.

**Postcolonialism**

**Knowledge in Postcolonialism.** Postcolonial theorists have critiqued that the influence of colonialism is responsible for subjugating people by creating knowledge through surveillance. In addition, because of the subjugation of people, knowledge (such as gender construction) is accepted as fixed reality (Viruru & Cannella, 2001). But this knowledge is subject to change over time due to factors such as education. Postcolonial theory concerns the impact of imperialist practice in daily life, which creates alternative perspectives through border knowledge for social transformation (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Young, 2000).

Viruru and Cannella (2006) pointed out that practicing postcolonial critique has helped reconceptualize educational goals. By challenging some truth-oriented concepts like patriarchy, capitalism and development theory, postcolonialists have redefined diverse groups of women and children and their educational needs (Cannella & Viruru, 2004, Viruru & Cannella, 2001; Viruru, 2005). Thus, marginalized IFS and NTC have produced boundaries in the binary of gendered or ethnic opposites. Postcolonialists believe the cultural pluralism of IFS and NTC are at the nexus of hybrid discourses, which can support actions and reconcile contradictory points of view as individuals become social beings (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; McLaren, 1994; Viruru, 2005).
Postcolonialists also recognize how dominant discourse influences stereotypes, arguing that dominant discourse has played a vital role in constructing systems of knowledge and normalizing specific populations (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; MacNaughton, 2005). For example, mainstream and alternative social positions have become stereotypes, which are nearly inseparable from the discourses of gender, racism and sexism (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Hooks, 2000; Luke & Gore, 1992). Specifically, in mainstream Taiwanese society, hegemonic Confucianism has dominated gender-doing in Southeast Asia. IFS of Vietnamese origin come from a matriarchal society, but mainstream Taiwanese maintain a traditional patriarchy. Many IFS perform gender-doing differently, causing mainstream Taiwanese to suspect their gender behaviors, and also causing NTC to challenge the gendered social order at school.

Essentially, postcolonialists construct knowledge in terms of decentered power relations, revealing the relationship between power and discourse. These relations are not so easily seen as the dichotomy between oppressor and oppressed because the subverted groups cannot be decolonized simply by being empowered by the oppressor (Viruru & Cannella, 2001). The IFS and NTC own specific values according to location, history, social position and the political agendas when those who are allowed present their voices. Here, I not only wanted to present the meaning of social justice in education but to find the boundaries of Taiwanese multiracial society that can generate new lenses by examining new knowledge discourses.

**Postcolonialist methodology used in this investigation.** Postcolonial research methodology focuses on reconceptualizing new knowledge when the borders of
dominance and power as well as the borders between theory and practice are investigated (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Guba & Lincoln, 2004; Smith, 2006; Viruru & Cannella, 2006). With a different type of controlled research design, postcolonial research has the capacity to reinterpret the margins and to reconstruct silenced cultural voices (Guba & Lincoln; Smith, 2006).

**Reconceptualizing research methodologies.** Postcolonial researchers have accessed marginalized knowledge by applying various research methodologies, such as postcolonial feminism, ethnography, or grounded theory (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). For example, postcolonial feminists concern themselves with Western feminist models, inappropriate for research dealing with women of color or minority children as the other (Olesen, 2000; Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002); so the diverse voices of NTC in this study can be presented as deconstructing the dominant images of gender performances in Taiwanese society (Viruru & Cannella, 2006). In particular, a great deal of attention is given to my cultural background in Confucianism and its importance to children’s gender enactments in this study.

**Selecting the margins in postcolonial research.** The critical truth-reality issue has become the main concern in postcolonial research as researchers deconstruct and reconstruct power structure. For the “inferior other,” this study examined how capitalism and imperialism created the stereotypes of transnational families and their children in the margins (Smith, 2006; Viruru & Cannella, 2006). I also inspected these children’s gendered worlds through cultural pluralism when gender identities were interrelated with the nexus of ethnicity, social class and family situation. By applying postcolonial
methodology, NTC’s silenced gendered voices and gender-doing were examined through the dominant lens of power.

**Criteria used to judge validity in Postcolonial research.** Postcolonial research is concerned with who holds power, who decides who and what to study, and who determines how the voice of the other is presented (Cannella & Viruru, 2004; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The validity of postcolonial research thus lies in representing the informants’ voice.

**Relation between ethnography and postcolonialism.** Viruru and Cannella (2006) cited Denzin and Lincoln’s (2000) belief that “[postcolonial research] was born out of concern to understand the [exotic] other” (p. 2); that is, who comes from a foreign culture is always thought of as a less-civilized person. From the postcolonial viewpoint ethnographic research has been criticized as a methodology embodying colonizing practices because it was used more widely to interpret the meaning of human action (Tedlock, 2003). Postcolonial scholars saw it as a form of research applicable to studying people who have historically been colonized (Denzin & Giardina, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Viruru & Cannella, 2001). In this study, I listened to real life experiences and saw their worlds through their eyes as I interpreted actions and thoughts to avoid creating a fictional version of the lives of the IFS and NTC.

**Interview issues.** The purpose of the ethnographic interview was to collect information from the perspective of the other; however, postcolonial scholars are concerned that the interviews are always incomplete and can be misleading (Fontana, 2002; Viruru & Cannella, 2006). I used language carefully to build trust and not upset my
interviewees so that they could give me authentic responses. I provided neutral questions and created dialectic approaches to listen to the mothers’ gender experiences, focusing on cooperatively working with them in data generating, instead of data gathering (Viruru & Cannella, p. 179). Validity in postcolonial research focuses on deconstructing hegemonic power and in this study representing NTC’s voices, so in my field work, I was concerned about power relations with the researched.

The Research Design

Issues of Trustworthiness and Rapport

Establishing rapport in relationships was a vital factor in my fieldwork with the children, mothers and teachers in this study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Acting as a friend, expressing positive feelings, and treating the NTC and IFS with respect helped build trusting relationships (Eder & Fingerson, 2002).

Ethical issues. In this research design, the ethical issue of informed consent impacted my decision to inform fully mothers, teachers and children about their roles in the study, allowing all to complete the study or decline to be researched (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Janesick, 2003). In the end, only two of the kindergartens that I approached and visited about conducting research participated, in part because I was not permitted to research the sensitive issues surrounding NTC (eight kindergartens) or the schools did not fit my research needs (two kindergartens). Fortunately, this left me with one urban and one rural kindergarten.

I informed all possible focal families of the study prior to the teachers’ recommendation. I chose the NTC and their mothers because of the wonderful stories I
heard from them prior to and during data collection. I obtained teacher (Appendix A), children (Appendix B), parents (Appendix C), and immigrant female spouses (Appendix D) consent after I visited the classes for 2 weeks because the school administrators wanted to make sure that my study would not interfere with curricula and that most of the parents would approve of me staying in the classrooms. The consent from the kindergartners (Appendix E) and the parents (Appendix F) was attained before making audio and video recordings. Most parents who rejected participation came from transnational marriages; they indicated that their children “did not need any research.” To secure others’ permission, teachers convinced them that my research could help their children learn. I also tried to meet the parents when they picked children up after school. In addition, I had difficulty securing some consent forms for the interview with IFS. Four husbands of immigrant female spouses were unwilling to let me interview their wives because they insisted that their wives knew nothing about their children’s schooling. Two immigrant female spouses allowed me to interview them and to take audio record for the interviews, but they did not want to sign their names on the consent forms because they claimed that they could not read the consent form in Chinese or English. Such struggles to secure informed consent and gain access to informants denotes the fragile nature of social relationships of NT spouses with mainstream schooling, husbands and researchers.

The research design was based on a “continuous dialogue” between the research informants and me to “put the social construction of gender at the center of [the] inquiry” (Lather, 1991, p. 71). In addition, I argue that no universal truths exist in a fixed reality,
so through reciprocity I needed to consider how to reframe epistemological, theoretical, and methodological issues (Blaise, 1999; Lather, 1986, 1991; 2003).

**Building reciprocal relations in data collection.** Research designs based on reciprocal principles emphasize the empowerment of both the researcher and informants with the goal of transforming society (Blaise, 1999; Lather, 1991). To act as a participant observer in the classrooms, I saw how the children participated in discursive practice as they created gender roles (e.g., femininity or masculine or neither). Intending to understand children’s gendered culture, I responded to questions seriously and learned to appreciate their culture to increase the possibility that they enjoyed sharing their thoughts with me (Holmes, 1998).

The teachers’ opinions about the New Taiwanese Children and other important key figures in this class provided information about peer interaction and the gender social processes of the class. The teachers contributed to my work by introducing me to the class and IFS as well as allowing me to interview and observe all crucial action necessary to data generation.

**Participants and Setting**

I conducted my field study in two schools, where more than five New Taiwanese Children were enrolled in the classrooms, more than in any other classrooms I visited, matching my research priorities. Most importantly, kindergarten managers and classroom teachers were amenable to my presence in their classrooms; furthermore, the teachers helped me convince parents to allow me to record video in class. Student behavior in the two schools had the potential for comparison because one was located in an urban area,
the other, in a rural area. More nuclear families lived in urban areas, and more extended families in rural areas. My assumption was that most extended families required a strict family gender hierarchy where members fulfilled gender roles in the family.

**WK Kindergarten.** WK Kindergarten is located in a public elementary school in northern Taiwan, home to approximately 200,000 residents and found in Taipei County. The public school was situated in an industrial-residential area with both middle- to low-income earners and new inhabitants with mixed social and ethnic backgrounds. At the time of this study, it had an estimated 2,000 students, making it a mid-sized elementary school in this part of the county. The director of the elementary school counseling program indicated that around 80% of parents were recent migrant workers to this town and earned minimum to average wages. Another 10% of families owned small businesses. School personnel made regular visits to the homes of 6% of the students because their high-risk families experienced economic difficulties, domestic violence, and other problems. The counseling director stated that only 2% of the enrolled NTC, a relatively small number, were at risk. He did not think the NTC in general experienced an exceptional number of learning difficulties, emotional problems, or adaptive problems; therefore, he saw no reason to select NTC for special resources. The counselor indicated that the school did not have enough effective ways to reach the parents of NTC. For example, the school held parent-teacher conferences, but very few parents of NTC attended; consequently, he was inclined to share available resources with all students instead of prioritizing the NTC.
The kindergarten classes and students. WK Kindergarten opened in 2000 to provide early childhood education for families with low socioeconomic status and minority backgrounds. Recruited from specific groups, students came from low-income, single-parent, grandparent-led, and other at-risk families, including transnational marriages families, as well as the children of WK Elementary School staff. The Taipei County Government granted admission to the school.

At the time of the fieldwork, the parents of six families were full-time teachers at the local elementary and high schools. Seven families were considered middle class and led by parents with two incomes who owned their own businesses. The parents of 14 low-SES families were under-employed or did not have jobs.

The students in the two kindergarten classes were mixed 4- to 6-year-olds. The class I chose had 30 students: 17 boys and 13 girls. The class was a culturally and racially diverse student population with approximately 40% from low-SES backgrounds. Ten percent of the students were the offspring of transnational marriages with mothers from Vietnam or China; the rest of the students’ parents were Taiwanese. The three focal boys came from transnational marriages; the remaining 27 children had Taiwanese parents.

I chose the class because of the children’s family backgrounds. The class presented a higher percentage of the children from transnational and at-risk families than the rest of Taiwanese society, meeting my research design needs. The class was comprised of two similarly sized groups: 7 girls and 9 boys in the 6-year-old group and 6 girls and 8 boys in the 5-year-old group, representing both genders equally.
**The teachers and staff.** Teacher Chen was an experienced female early childhood teacher who majored in childhood education as an undergraduate; she has held an early childhood teaching certification for more than 12 years. Teacher Mei-Li Chen espoused teacher-controlled early childhood training and a subject-centered approach, allowing free time for children to learn through new experiences. She had previously learned about gender education and multicultural education, so she valued the opportunity to collaborate with me; however, family emergencies often prevented her coming to school. She nevertheless welcomed me to her class. Teacher Chen explained that all students in her class were the same, and that learning was unrelated with family backgrounds and gender differences. Teacher Fen-Ying Wang, also female, earned her teaching certification one year before this study; she had no formal training programs in multicultural or gender education. She was unsure about assisting me because she thought that kindergartners were unaware of gender issues. One part-time staff member, Teacher Kei-Li Li, took charge of the cafeteria. I volunteered as an assistant teacher, working with Teacher Wang.

**Class curricula and schedule.** WK Kindergarten implemented the National Kindergarten Curriculum Standard (MOE, 2008), which included studies of health, language, mathematics, arts, society and nature with an emphasis on children’s learning needs, age-appropriate development and application of integrated curriculum; furthermore, the curriculum followed the Handbook of Taipei County Kindergarten Curriculum Standards (2008). Its requirements included certified and qualified early
childhood teachers, full support of children’s learning, and cooperative relationships among the school, families and community.

The educational philosophy was based on cultivating young children’s good moral development and readiness to enter elementary education. The classroom schedule followed a weekly routine to teach subjects from textbooks, whose content conveyed Confucian dominance. Monthly themes (e.g., season, religion, or health) allowed the teacher to design class activities to promote children’s academic achievements in reading and arithmetic, but these themes were based on teachers’ viewpoints, not children’s learning needs and interests.

The teachers follow a fixed lesson schedule, divided into large-group time, table time, free-choice time and small-group time. Teachers had absolute authority to make decisions about class arrangements, such as lining up according to gender or requiring girls’ and boys’ groups to compete. Outside class, teachers required children to complete homework every day and to have their parents sign the parent-teacher handbook every week to facilitate parent-teacher communication. The WK Public Kindergarten Classroom Schedule is listed in the Appendix A.

**JB Kindergarten.** JB Private Kindergarten is located in southern Taiwan in an area known for agriculture and high technology. It opened in 1999. Most families were extended families; parents worked on farms or at maintenance jobs in technological or industrial institutes. They came from middle- to low-socioeconomic backgrounds. The 88 children came from families observing traditional Taiwanese customs, but the lifestyle of
the younger generation differed from that of older. The classes in this school were divided classes for toddlers, 3- to 4-year-olds, and 5- to 6-year-olds.

**The kindergarten class and students.** In the 5- to 6-year-old class I chose for this research, approximately 25% of the parents of the 13 boys and 11 girls had lost their jobs, and 30% of them had part-time jobs. Some parents reported that the tuition at JB Kindergarten was less-expensive than that of the public kindergarten. About one-third of children’s parents were in transnational marriages; focal children included two girls and five boys with immigrant mothers from Vietnam and China. The remaining 17 children had Taiwanese parents.

Selected for this study because of family backgrounds, the class presented a higher percentage of children from low-income families than general Taiwanese society. Two similarly sized groups comprised the class: 7 girls and 9 boys in the 6-year-old group and 6 girls and 8 boys in the 5-year-old group, representing both genders equally.

**The teacher and staff.** Teacher Lu-Pei Su majored in childhood education at a vocational high school. She had held an early childhood teaching certificate for 13 years. At the time of the study, she was enrolled in a multicultural education course for her bachelor’s degree; thus, she valued the opportunity to collaborate with me. Teacher Su had been trained in teacher-centered practice; however, both her college class and participation in my study impacted her curriculum philosophy and her appreciation of multicultural and gender education. At JB Kindergarten, she was obligated to implement the subject-centered approach in her curriculum. Although she had absolute power over classroom management, she still needed to take responsibility for the children’s academic
success and follow textbooks to implement her curriculum activities. She believed that “successful education is the best shortcut for these children with low socioeconomic status to become successful citizens in Taiwan society” (IT, 112307). Teacher Su and other two teachers in the school took turns cooking in the cafeteria kitchen and performing maintenance duties in addition to their teaching responsibilities. She required the children to recite the contents of textbooks, practice mathematics, or write Chinese when she needed to cook and clean the classroom. Ms. Mei-Yu Lu, the administrator of the kindergarten, visited occasionally to see how the children progressed. She said that her school sometimes had to provide emergency childcare for immigrant mothers, especially when they were late to pick up children after school or when they faced difficulties in daily life. Ms. Lu pointed out the opening of a free Chinese language program for immigrant mothers at JB Kindergarten the previous year. It lasted only 3 months because the immigrant mothers needed to care their families or they needed to find part-time jobs; furthermore, their husbands did not allow them to go out. Ms. Lu, however, emphasized that JB Kindergarten fully supported these mothers and shared their childcare responsibilities.

**Class curricula and schedule.** The goal of JB Kindergarten was to provide early childhood education by focusing on the “3 Rs”—arithmetic, reading, and writing. The classroom schedule followed a weekly routine, and the children were proficient in reciting classical poetry, abacus practice and mental calculation. The teacher followed textbooks to train students to use an abacus or to mentally perform addition and subtraction. The children were taught to read and write both Chinese and English, but
they had little free time to pursue their own interests. Every day, Teacher Su assigned three to five homework assignments, and their parents were required to sign the assignments (e.g., arithmetic practice books or an abacus practice notebooks). Unless the children handed in their assignments next day, they had to sit in the administrators’ office to complete them. Children who failed to finish their homework or neglected to have their parents sign it endured criticism from their peers. The detailed daily schedule is shown in the Appendix B. The informants’ name list is shown in the Appendix C.

Role of the researcher. To some extent, my own gender, age, ethnic background and class influenced my data collection processes as well as my research positions, which continue to shift and modify my gender concepts.

The identity of the researcher. I am a middle-aged Taiwanese woman and a full-time doctoral candidate. I speak Taiwanese, Mandarin, and English, and my origins are in mainstream Taiwanese society. During my youth, my parents worked hard to become members of the middle class. As the middle child, I was required to act as an obedient daughter and younger and older sister. During my preteen years, I could make friends and talk with girls only. Both in my family and schooling, before I was an undergraduate to make friends with the opposite gender were implicitly forbidden. My early education took place in public elementary, middle and high schools in Taiwan; I attended prominent universities in Taiwan and the United States, pursuing history, museum studies, sociology, early childhood education and curriculum and instruction. My 15-year professional career has included teaching at the kindergarten, elementary, middle- and high-school and university levels as well as in adult education in both Taiwan and United States. In the
past, I have served as an unpaid community volunteer, kindergarten teacher and low-income caregiver program teacher educator in Taiwan for more than 10 years; these experiences prepared and motivated me to work with kindergarten teachers and families and children from diverse backgrounds.

Educated in both Taiwan and America, I have been influenced by Confucian and feminist philosophy. My academic training has crossed the boundaries of Eastern and Western paradigms. As a researcher, I have been concerned not only with who I am in the data collection processes, asking myself, “Have I been biased when explaining class gender norms? Have I ignored Vietnamese and Taiwanese cultural backgrounds when explaining the children’s and mothers’ gender performance? Did I set traps to lure the children to act or say something that fit my research expectation? Did I take distorted views of critical gender incidents, explaining them exclusively from the angle of one or the other paradigms—Eastern or Western?” To avoid colonizing my subjects’ voices, I collected data from multiple sources before I made subjective judgments and reconceptualized the children’s critical gender incidents. I lived near the two schools during the data collection because I wanted to avail myself of additional opportunities to understand the children’s homes, schools and the local culture. During holidays, I participated in community activities; in the evenings, I visited the immigrant mothers’ adult classes and interviewed the families and teachers.

*Power held by the researcher and the researched.* Adult–child relationships proved problematic in this study because of differences from the children in my position as an adult, a classroom visitor, and a researcher, who could possess more or less power
in different roles (Eder & Fingerson, 2002; Viruru & Cannella 2001). The children always tried to figure out my social position as they observed my clothing and my belongings when interacting with me. To help with data collection, I had my hair done in professional salons and wore slightly different clothes when going to WK kindergarten and JB kindergarten to fit the metropolitan or rural styles, respectively. I did so to fulfill teachers’, parents’ and students’ expectations of ideal female gender norms. As I observed them, they simultaneously watched me and how nicely the teachers treated me. Early on, some children asked me which child at their school was mine and how it was that I could speak with them in Mandarin or Taiwanese when they knew that I lived in the United States. Also, they were surprised that I was a student but not a mother. They were curious about why I needed to visit their classrooms to finish my “homework.”

Gradually, most children noticed that classroom visitors neither disciplined them nor represented an authentic authority figure. Some of them even tried to cross the boundaries of the research-participant relationship (Blaise, 1999, 2005c). For example, the children knew I was the adult who had “the power” to write field notes on, take video of, or audio record their behavior. Some children tried to cross the boundaries of researcher-researched, such as when they tried to cling to me as if I were a relative. I told them to return to their play or I would not need to record their behaviors. Some children liked to watch my video screen as I videotaped their peers. I allowed them to do so; afterward, I informally discussed the taped critical gender incident with them. I played the role of researcher-participant, and the children trusted me with their gendered affairs.
When my interview questions focused on gender roles in the classrooms and family, the power relationship between the teachers and me as well as between the mothers and me became vague. These women were married mothers. I am neither married nor a mother; I am a female researcher. Consequently, they thought of me as the “other” because they could not understand my professional training in America. Both my world and my life were unknown to them.

**Outsider and insider in children’s gender culture.** Working with children, I was not the authority figure (Holmes, 1998), but I played the dual roles as the insider or outsider in their playtime. When I sat on the floor to watch their play, they thought of me as an insider. When a child perceived unfair treatment in a game, she or he cried out: “Teacher Chou is watching you! You are a bad child!” Then, they solved their own problem. At the same time, the children knew I was an adult female who did not participate in dramatic play or in their gender culture, so I became an outsider. The classroom discourses and my dual roles helped children understand both my position as a researcher in class and the boundaries as informants during classroom observation. To some degree as an observer, I found the children’s gender culture beyond my ability to connect completely because of differences in our backgrounds and ages. In the interpretation process, therefore, my priority was to use children’s voices to represent their viewpoints.

I met a challenge as the participant-observer when teachers found my research purposes suspect. First, I had difficulty acquiring consent to conduct the study with students from transnational marriages and of low-socioeconomic status. Many
kindergarten administrators and teachers were reluctant to become involved with the students’ family backgrounds. They were concerned that my videotapes and audiotapes could cause parents to object to their curriculum practices. Another controversial issue was that many teachers and parents believed that young children naturally grow up to be gendered beings as a result of biological processes; however, I believe that social construct processes are powerful and often beyond the teacher’s conscious thought. When teachers interpreted my goal as subversive to their own, I paid attention and listened to their questions and maintained a willingness to share in the experiences of the teacher. Instead of directly giving answers to them, I discussed with them the issues of parenthood and children’s learning. As an ethical researcher, I presented my enthusiasm for working with children. Their competencies in matters of individual differences among them and their families were the key factors in data collection from multiple resources (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

**The Data Collection and Generation**

In this study, I focused data generation on the interpretation of individual NTC’s critical gender incidents and their relationship with gender norms in the classroom. I define *critical gender incidents* as “moments in play or interaction in which children construct their role as a girl or boy or neither and try to maintain relationships with classmates as part of their gender social order.”

During my pilot study in an American classroom, several episodes helped me create criteria for critical gender incidents. For example, in the pilot episode entitled “Ricky, Get Out of the Way” (Appendix D), children tried to create multiple dispositions
for gender performances; simultaneously, they challenged the possibilities of sexism. By discussing and negotiating in peer interaction, the children resisted gender power and meaningfully constructed own gender social order to allow both female and male singers to play together. In my selection of critical gender incidents, I emphasized children’s gender power and gender performance strategies.

Another critical gender incident is the pilot episode entitled “Beth’s Family Play” (Appendix E), in which the children negotiated to secure a gendering position incident with the characteristics of heterosexuality, that is, feminine or masculine performances. By entering fictional worlds to reconstruct family relationships in this dramatic play, children reinterpreted understandings of appropriate gender performance by using narration as a way of performing gender. Thus, the critical gender incident focused on carefully reading a story that could reflect the children’s life experiences with a particular gendering, sexuality, class, social and cultural background. In this study, I included the following criteria to select critical gender incidents: (a) enactments of the expression of heterosexuality; (b) expressions of children’s feminine or masculine performances; (c) crossing gender boundaries as children built class gender norms; and (d) moments when children resisted gender power or maintained other children’s gender social order.

**The Researcher’s Role in Data Generation**

In the data generation process I acted as an active member of the research community. In the class activities, I contextualized Taiwanese children’s gendered discourses and cross-culture practices. By involving informants in continuous interaction, all participants produced data. Both the researcher and the researched contributed equally
“[our] behaviors and exceptions of each other [were] part of a dynamic process that continues to grow throughout the research project” (Angrosino & de Perez, p. 683).

**Methods of data generation.** The study focused on illuminating the children’s gender culture by comparing the multiple data resources and multiple perspectives for building data trustworthiness (Lather, 2003). The data generation included (a) participation in and observation of the class’s gender performances, (b) interviews to understand NTC’s gender culture, and (c) documentation of the children’s artifacts about the children’s gender performances.

**Observation.** In this study, I observed interaction among those involved in research collaboration (Angrosino & de Perez, 2000). I maintained the perspective of interpretative practice to engage these kindergartners’ gendering reality. The observation data came from multiple resources: children, teachers, mothers and my observation. The sharing of observed results and back-checking findings promoted validity.

**Classroom observation.** Classroom observation focused on critical gender incidents specifically selected to enhance understanding of children’s methodical construction of gender experiences according to gender, class and ethnicity (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000; Francis & Skelton, 2001). I assumed two roles in class, “simultaneously a participant and an observer” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 274), to observe and speak with the children. As an observer, I studied gendered knowledge and determined how gendered knowledge and gender-power nexus influenced gendered social order. As a
classroom participant, I created opportunities that allowed children to engage in gender
discussion when I interviewed them in observation discussions.

I collected the observations or children’s critical gender incidents when the children freely directed their play, when they reflected with curricula and when they resisted teachers’ discipline. Initially, some video excerpts were not apparent to me as gendered incidences, but upon closer inspection (e.g., comparing video contexts, my field notes, interviews and children’s artifacts), critical gender incidents emerged. To stimulate attention to gender construction while in the classroom, I negotiated with the teachers to read some feminist storybooks during story time, free play, arrival or recess (e.g., The Paper Bag Princess, Olive Is a Sissy, and William’s Doll). Afterward, I discussed the context of the gender stories and daily gender-doing experiences with the children (Angrosino & de Perez, 2000). Doing so motivated the children to trust me and share their stories. With the teachers’ permission I held formal or informal discussions with the children during dismissal time or free playtime in the classroom or in the hallway.

I observed the teachers as they supported or diverted the children’s gendered discourse. Systematically observing the teacher’s pedagogy, I questioned what children were learning about gender construction from curriculum content as well as whether or not the pedagogy reproduced children’s gender identities.

*The researcher in observation.* In contrast with American kindergartens (Holmes, 1998), kindergarten classroom researchers are not welcome in Taiwan. I experienced challenges at the early stage of the fieldwork when parents and teachers grew anxious that I might interfere with the children’s learning. Thus, I told stories during story time,
read storybooks with children, and helped teachers clean the classrooms and care for some children after bed-wetting or if a child had a fever. Gradually, teachers and parents saw my good interactions with their children; they trusted me and allowed the children to participate in my research.

*Observation discussion.* Discussion occurred with the children involved in critical gender incidents after my observation of them; I also discussed with the children whose projects or artifacts (e.g., drawings and sculptures) presented gender identities. When I held observation discussions, I showed the children video clips or their artifacts to facilitate their interpretation about gender issues (Holmes, 1998). I dialogued with, listened to and observed children in the observation discussion, noting that many children used language, body language, or dramatic play to tell me what they knew and how they interpreted their circumstances.

For example, following the music play I observed and recorded, I posed questions to the children about their reasons for engaging in this activity. By questioning, clarifying and summarizing the children’s opinions in our dialogue, I learned they were constructing new understanding as they told me their opinions. For most Taiwanese children, small-group discussion created dynamics to increase their desire to express gender experiences; I found this helpful because they had been uncomfortable expressing their feelings in front of their peers. The children took time to trust me enough to share their gendering experiences with me (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001).

In discussions, the children interpreted and reinterpreted their perspectives, constructing and reconstructing subjectivities through their own descriptions. I co-
constructed gender knowledge with the children as I heard or restated their opinions (Harcourt and Conroy, 2011). With their descriptions, I framed several texts and produced “arbitrary, shifting, and contradictory meaning[s]” (MacNaughton, 2005, p. 79) of the relationship between the children’s gender culture and life experiences. Attending to the relations of these children’s unfixed word meanings and the text, I found diverse perspectives in their gender identities.

**Interviews.** Interviews enabled me to gain empirical knowledge from interviewees relating to their gender, class, age and cultural backgrounds (Eder & Fingerson, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Addressing power dynamics and applying multiple methods were the two interview goals: I paid attention to the potential power inequity between the young person or the immigrant mothers and me (Kvale, 1996; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I used multiple methods, including combining observation and interviews, resulting in more information to interpret interviewees’ opinions in natural contexts (James, 2001; Kvale). I sought to gain the greatest possible amount of information on the NTC and their mothers, but not all family members agreed to participate. Out of 11 transnational families who had 12 NTC, I interviewed seven mothers, two fathers, and four other family members from eight families as well as two school administrators.

**Interviews with teachers.** I conducted formal or informal interviews with the teacher without children present (Eder & Fingerson, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005) to understand (a) the curriculum design, (b) the cultural backgrounds of focal NTC and IFS, (c) how the teacher interprets the NTC’s gender characteristics and the gender social
order in the classes, and (d) explore the level of the teacher’s ethnic consciousness when she interacted with NTC and IFS (Appendix F & G). In these interviews, I discussed the children’s thoughts as expressed in the observation discussions to discover the teacher’s interpretation of the children’s gendering behaviors.

*Interviews with children.* Interviews with children focused on understanding their roles as gendered beings and examining their gendered social order (Eder & Fingerson, 2002; Fontana, 2002; Holmes, 1998). I formally interviewed NTC to understand their gender identities and knowledge about parents’ gender roles (Appendix H & I). The second kind of interview featured a discussion of my observations, where children could explain gender culture through their eyes. Third, I also conducted many informal, spur-of-the-moment interviews while I watched their play and conversations. A few times I received the teachers’ permission to interview two or three students informally in the classroom or hallway. By gathering and analyzing children’s opinions, I could formulate theoretic knowledge of NTC’s gender culture. In formal interviews, they always told me stories, instead of directly answering my questions. Patiently listening to stories and keeping dialogue with them, I redirected their attention to think about and answer my questions. Thus, the children and their close peers could answer questions that fit my research purposes.

*Interviews with mothers.* My interviews with mothers focused on how IFS interpret their children’s gender performances (Appendix J, K & L). In order to understand the various gender expectations for a daughter or son in daily life (e.g., eating, getting dressed, or playing with toys), I made appointments to interview IFS at home with
their families to discover gender construction patterns and gender social orders within the family.

Making appointments with the mothers, however, proved challenging. Difficulties in interviewing the mothers arose because (a) most mothers did not want me to contact their husbands, many of whom disapproved of the interviews, and (b) some of the husbands indicated that their wives knew nothing about their children’s learning and educational requirements in Taiwan. I preferred to conduct interviews in the IFS’s homes so I could observe their families’ interaction patterns as well as the community environment; however, three mothers opted to be interviewed at schools when they picked up their children. The other three mothers preferred interview times when their husbands or other adult family members were not at home. After I invited the IFS to participate in interviews, five of the NTC’s fathers objected to their children’s participation in the research, claiming that they were no different from their mainstream peers and should not be compared to them in research. Hence, I had to build trust with the IFS in order to gain permission to interview the mothers. For example, in order to secure an interview with Qiao-Yu, the NT boy Zhi-Jie’s mother, I ate at the noodle shop where she worked eight times, after which Zhi-Jie’s aunt, Li-Phone, and his Vietnamese mother trusted me sufficiently to grant me an interview.

My interview questions concentrated on their expectation of the children’s gender performance and how the IFS played the roles of mothers and wives in their families. By directing IFS to speak about gender experiences in their hometowns and in Taiwan, I empowered the mothers by encouraging them to seek more learning and job opportunities
to establish own economic independence within Taiwanese society. The mothers and I used both Mandarin and Taiwanese to discuss my interview questions. Since they all had lived in Taiwan 7 to 8 years, most but not all of them could proficiently use Mandarin or Taiwanese to answer my questions; for example, Qiao-Yu’s language ability proved inadequate. I could not fully understand several answers, so I carefully observed her facial express and body language, and I repeated what I could understand to her, which was helpful enough to include her into the study. In addition, I later sought help from another immigrant spouse, who, like Zhi-Jie’s mother, spoke Vietnamese.

**Documents and artifact collection.** I collected the children’s artifacts to interpret children’s gender culture. Their artifacts were not created in a vacuum; they drew upon personal, social and cultural ideals and values from life experiences (Rosenberg & Thurber, 2007). Thompson (2003) also pointed out that kindergartners present their life experiences in their drawings when they intend to document memories of time spent with family and friends and that children’s artifacts “expand as their world expands” (p. 137). Thus, I discussed the artifacts with the children and the teachers about how the children represent their peer interactions when the children meaningfully constructed their gender culture awareness. The generation of data regarding the children’s gendering interactions was based on “[the gendered] social order [that] is accomplished in and through its practice [because] then social worlds and circumstances are self-generating” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2000, p. 491). Thus, data were used to interpret, compare and cross-check the accuracy of collecting from multiple methods.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Audio</th>
<th>Video</th>
<th>Artifact</th>
<th>Interview with teacher</th>
<th>Interview with children</th>
<th>Interview with mothers</th>
<th>Data sources</th>
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| X | X | X | X | X | X | X | 1. What comprises the children’s gendered knowledge and how do the children perform their gender culture?  
a) What do NTC know about their own gender construction that of their classmates? |
| X | X | X | X | | | | b) How does the teacher interpret NTC’s gender construction in school? |
| X | X | | | | | | c) How do IFS interpret the NTC’s gender construction at home? |
| X | X | X | X | X | X | | 2. How do children represent their gender social orders in class?  
a) What is the NTC’s understanding about the gender social order when the class plays together? |
| X | X | | | | | | b) How does the teacher interpret the class’s gender social order in school? |
| X | X | X | X | | X | | c) How do NTC describe their mothers’ gender roles in their families? |

**Methods of documenting the data.** Data documenting methods in the research included two parts: (a) field notes and reflective notes recorded the classroom interactions; and (b) video- and audio-taped observations (Appendix M & N) and interviews as well as children’s artifacts.
Taking field notes. Patton (2002) stressed that a researcher should engage him or herself in the character of the research setting and the needs of the fieldwork; that is, the researcher should write down the participants’ conversations or actions in less-structured activities, remaining sensitive to the research goals. In the field, I followed mixed-gender group, boy-only group, or girl-only group because I expected to generate more data of boyhood, girlhood and mixed gender culture. I wrote down many incidents on small slips of paper, focusing on children’s gender culture (Blaise, 2005a; Thorne, 1993). I also reviewed videotapes and audiotapes to find more details to in write my field notes. Reviewing the field notes before each classroom visit helped me to remember the children’s gender actions and their curricula.

Reflection and reciprocity in the research journal. My research journal focused on how behaviors shifted and attitudes changed during data generation for me and the informants. Two considerations emerged in my research journal. First, the research journal served as my tool for self-reflection, helping me to recognize my preconceptions during the research process (Lather, 1991; Blaise, 1999). Self-reflexivity, the ability to reflect critically on how my attitudes shifted during the entire research process, was important. Second, I discussed the issue of reciprocity (Lather, 1991) when questioning contradictions that may have resulted from my own viewpoints (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I paid attention to the imbalance in power between the researcher and researched. I asked myself: Did my participants become collaborative partners who could co-construct meaning with me? Thus, my research journal reflected on how my role and background have influenced my fieldwork and interpretation of informants’ gender performances.
Audio and video recordings. I recorded a total of 76 hours of children’s conversations to preserve interview data on audiotape. Observing children, I placed a small tape recorder near them to record dialogue. When a critical incident occurred, I wrote down the counter number from the tape in my field notes. I also taped discussions of episodes of video data with the children and teachers.

I transcribed records in a timely manner, so I did not forget how the class and individual NTC interacted with one another. Only critical gender incidents were transcribed verbatim. When transcribing the words and analyzing the texts of the audiotapes, I defined carefully the context that related with their discourse. In doing so, comparing the text of the audiotapes allowed me to analyze children’s gender identities that were constantly (re)produced by them and others in different discourses. Videotapes served as a means to preserve and study the children’s dialogue and physical movement in classroom interactions. I recorded 480 hours of class time, resulting in 120 hours of data. I recorded children’s free play and curriculum practices, but only transcribed episodes labeled as critical gender incidents. The incident analysis included the children’s language meaning, body movements and expression of emotion.

Videotaping provided rich data resources in the study. First, I replayed the videotapes in observation discussion when I interviewed the class and focal NTC so they could recall the incidents as they appeared on the videotapes. Second, the videotape data provided opportunities to discuss curriculum practice and children’s learning with the teacher. Third, by replaying videotapes I checked some details I had missed in the
research setting; doing so helped me find questions to ask my research participants and to write more details in my field notes and reflective journals.

**Data Analysis in this Research**

**Analysis During Fieldwork**

My data analysis was interlaced with the processes of the fieldwork and data collection. In the period of in-research-setting data analysis, when I chose the classroom where I could study the children’s gender performances, I needed to be sensitive about (a) when, where and from whom I could collect data and (b) the kinds of incidents for which I needed to take field notes. For example, when a girl looked for her missing art project and when a boy was proud of his finished block work simultaneously, I needed to know whether to pay attention to both of the situations or to choose only one. Also, during the middle period of my fieldwork, I tried to analyze my data and write down a few categorizes and subcategories. The initial analysis results reminded me to find what I was missing from my research questions: what could I ask my informants while I stayed in the field, and what did I need to pay attention to in my observations?

**Primary Concerns in Data Analysis**

After completing fieldwork, further data analysis elicited more details to clarify the types of domains (Grbich, 2007). My data analysis procedures fell into several phases: (a) organizing and becoming immersed in the data; (b) generating categories and coding the data; and (c) developing interpretations and writing the report. Transcribing raw data aided in organizing categories.
Translation. I completed translations during fieldwork and after completing data collection. Although I eventually figured out the children’s Mandarin or Taiwanese, I initially had difficulty discerning the meaning of certain kids’ speech, behaviors and peer interactions; I replayed recorded tapes or asked teachers to determine the focal children’s backgrounds and levels of peer interaction. I gradually discovered individual characteristics and gender cultures. Second, I needed to understand the NTC’s and IFS’s accents. Most verbalized opinions well in the interview processes; however, some NTC had trouble with pronunciation and vocabulary and could not convey that some things were unfair to them. Some NTC’s mothers could not speak Mandarin or Taiwanese proficiently either, so I replayed audiotapes and invited another Vietnamese immigrant spouse, for example, to help me understand their thick accents.

Accurately translating informants’ opinions from Mandarin and Taiwanese into English was very important, but the linguistic and cultural differences in children’s interactions and the content of curriculum practices complicated the process. When I translated field notes, I also refined them and wrote out the critical gender incidents in chronological order. In the second edition, I combined the content of my Chinese field notes and transcriptions of the audiotapes and videotapes. I also integrated information about every focal child’s educational, family and community backgrounds, interweaving details of each child’s gender, sexual, class, ethnic and socioeconomic status. During this stage, I worked with English-speaking editors by showing them my raw data—audiotapes and children’s artifacts—and discussing the meaning of my writing with them. I also discussed my observations and findings with a primary-grade teacher who taught
previously in both Taiwan and the U.S. Proficient in both English and Chinese, she read my draft for clarity. Two Taiwanese friends, who had previously taught in Taiwanese kindergartens and had both majored in English at the graduate level, read my English drafts and then translated the English into oral Mandarin. These translation activities were designed to ensure translation accuracy.

**Transcription.** To help focus and modify my research content, I transcribed previously-recorded tapes while collecting data. While transcribing the interviews, I supplemented and reorganized my initial observation notes first into Taiwanese and Chinese, but only later into English. The recorded tapes presented only visual pictures or audio information, but as a researcher, I needed to transfer these recorded data into readable and understandable transcriptions. Because the recording provided limited contexts, I had to recreate a more context-rich understandings. Searching for these understandings, I watched the recorded tape several times, afterwards discussing the question with the informants. My then-7-year-old niece was an excellent helper. We discussed the content of the videotapes. At the time of my fieldwork, she was a Taiwanese second-grade student, and she had studied at a Taiwanese kindergarten. She knew the Taiwanese kindergarten gender culture, so I could ask her opinion.

During the period of in-research-setting data collection, I reviewed the recorded tapes and took notes about the tapes at the end of the day of class observation. I logged notes chronologically into my computer to remind myself of the sequencing of certain classroom events. If I had any questions about the content, I asked the informants as soon as I could the next day. At this point, I completed the first round of transcriptions.
Right after the fieldwork, I engaged in the second round of transcriptions, focusing on transcribing the content of critical gender incidents, which were logged under different titles (e.g., gender social order) in my sequential files. To document a critical gender incident, I repeated the tape several times to identify a possible incident, wrote down the dialogue and observed the informants’ facial and body language as well as physical environment details. I repeated the tape again to explore the causations of individual incidents. The well-organized data was based on polished field notes and completed transcriptions, which helped with generating categories and data coding.

All data were divided into the following categories:

1. Field notes (FN): Classroom observation, IFS home-interview and observation, informal conversation with the teachers, parents and children.

2. Audiotapes (AT): Interview with teachers, interview with children, interview with mothers, children’s discussion about the episodes in videotapes and the discussion of children’s artifacts.

3. Videotapes (VT): Children’s dramatic play, free time play and artifacts files.


**Transcription symbols.** I used Danby’s (1998) transcription symbols in my transcribed notes. The following are examples of symbols used Bold for heavy emphasis and / for an interruption.
When inserting these diverse data sources into the text, I used the following notations system, which includes a description of the context (i.e., who, what, when, and where), data sources and data. Explanations of my examples are listed as follows:

1. FN 100807: field notes of October 8, 2007
2. AT 101807: audiotape transcription of October 18, 2007
3. VT 101907: videotape transcription of October 19, 2007
4. CA 102007: a child’s artifact of October 20, 2007
5. JE 102107: my journal entry of October 21, 2007

**Generating Categories and Coding the Data**

To answer the research questions and confirm validity, I applied the following data analysis strategies and contextual connecting strategies (Maxwell, 2005). My first step in analysis focused on making sense of the complex data. Through multiple readings of the well-organized data, I wanted important insights to emerge from different sources and to form analytical triangulation. Second, I used ethnographic FPS with attention to discourse processes as my framework to identify the significant incidents within the children’s gender culture. Third, I coded the data to determine the significant findings in content analysis (Patton, 2002). Finally, I organized categories to note patterns and represent logical relationships among the data. During analysis, I reconceptualized data.

**Analyzing discourse processes.** In the study, gender discourse entailed accepted ways children gesture, dress, speak and even think about how to be a group member. To meet the requirements of dominant gender discourse, children are typically forced to assume the present specific belief systems and form gender identities (Ryan et al., 2001;
Weedon, 1997). The analysis of gender discourse in this study served as an investigation of NTC’s gender performance and an examination of how gender power reproduces or challenges NTC’s gender identities.

In feminist poststructuralist thought, discourse is related to cultural and historical factors, so gender discourse constitutes our social structures by containing specific meanings and emotions in our lives (Lazar, 2005). Paying attention to discourse processes allowed me to investigate how gender discourse and power are manifested in everyday texts (Blaise, 2005a, 2005b; Gavey, 1997; Gee, 2004; MacNaughton, 1998). In postcolonial theory, gender discourse challenges the notions of patriarchy and capitalism as it examines knowledge of childhood and motherhood (Cannella & Viruru, 2004).

By applying the ideas of both feminist poststructuralists and postcolonialists, gender discourse analysis involved the interrelationships of gender, power, knowledge and subjectivity. Because the meanings of discourse and language are always “unstable, fragmented and inconsistent” (Gavey, 1997, p. 57), I understand that my reading of texts could be limited because that gender performance can be viewed as social practice (Davies, 2003a) in which gender social practices always “[interrelate] with gender, power, and ideology in discourse” (Lazar, 2005, p. 5). Thus, in the data analysis, I focused on how the children represent gender subjectivities in how they use language and the behaviors they display in daily life.

My strategies to conduct this qualitative analysis included the following: (a) paying close attention to the children’s language in their gender incidents (Blaise, 1999); and (b) carefully reading, interpreting and analyzing children’s gender performances in
peer interactions (MacNaughton, 1998). I believe when children engage actively in play, more possibilities arise where they can generate their own gendered social order and gender norms. For example, in my pilot study “Beth’s Family Play” (Appendix J), children created fictions in which they engaged themselves as a mother or a father, simultaneously taking such opportunities to practice gendered social order in family play. In their dramatic play, they selected stereotypic narratives for their dialogues; doing so, the children could reinterpret their episodes and criticize traditional gender patterns (Appard, 2005). In deciding whether or not to be reshaped by their dialogues to fit their storylines, children experienced how to multiply locate themselves under various gender identities that provided possibilities allowing them to perform gender constructing or cross gender boundaries.

In this study, qualitative analysis was used to deconstruct the power-knowledge regimes of NTC’s gender culture in kindergarten. Scholars have argued that the ways to present individual gender power are related with body matters (Butler, 1990) and interaction with the opposite gender or cross-gender boundaries (Blaise, 2005a; Connell, 2002; Davies, 2003a; MacNaughton, 2000). Thus, in my data analysis, I inquired how children actively constructed gendered knowledge when acting as a girl or boy or neither, that is, related with their gender power in gender discourses.

**Multiple readings of the data.** Through multiple readings of the data, I became familiar with the data and gained various resources to examine the children’s actual gendered world (Blaise, 2005b). Having more than one person to look at the same set of data helped me to focus my research questions. My strategies for multiple readings of the
data included the following: First, by perceiving emancipatory knowledge as a valid
criterion (Lather, 1991), I listened to informants’ feedback about children’s gender
performances. Second, I invited teachers and academic peers to review my findings at
the end of data generation. These opinions were generated from various viewpoints and
multiple readings of the data for increasing the reliability in the study.

Right after the end of my fieldwork, I read and reread the data dialectically
(Lather, 1991). During analysis, I back-checked the data with the teachers and academic
peers to validate research findings. I also compared the data interpretations with the
theoretical framework while I read and coded the data.

**Coding the data.** The coding task focused on “rearranging [data] into categories
that facilitate comparison between things in the same category and that aid in the
development of theoretical concepts” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 96); in doing so, coding served
as a check on my findings. The goal of coding is to “fracture” and “reorganize” data
(Maxwell, 2005, p. 96) and to keep them manageable (Hesse-Biber, 2006). I also wanted
the codes to represent my analytic thinking accurately (Marshall & Rossman, 2006) and
support the development of theoretical concepts (Maxwell, 2005).

I thoroughly marked sections in the data using the codes. I tried to find some
critical gender incidents that could answer my research questions. In addition, I paid
attention to the issues continually mentioned by the children (e.g. “I am a girl”) and
related with their gender knowledge (e.g., girls like to play with dolls). Next, I drew on
literature or abstract ideas to code the data to determine whether or not the coded data
supported or related to the research questions. In addition, writing notes helped me to
create a holistic picture of the research and the strategies for arranging and interpreting critical incidents (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Maxwell, 2005). The notes also helped the in the coding process. I compared the pieces (the individual incidents) with one another, and I also went back to the field notes to look for more specific incidents and went over recorded tapes that I might have otherwise discarded (Hesse-Biber 2006). Doing so, the coding focused on clearly defining my categories.

Strategies I used to code the data included the following: First, I placed colored dots on the key words when the informants frequently mentioned specific terms. For example, I colored-coded “my family,” which the children said often according to my field notes. In addition, I highlighted family narratives and then compared similar episodes when the children tried to construct understandings of the gender roles in families. Third, I abbreviated key words to code my data; for example, when I found some episodes that described the children’s friendships, I coded them as GSO-PI (Gender social order-peer interaction). Finally, I used Microsoft Word to copy and paste the incidents of the same code together. I highlighted the informants’ narratives and conceptualized these episodes, writing down my thoughts and the codes in the margins of each page and in my reflective notes for future categorization. Since I am a non-native speaker of English, I utilized my university’s writing center at this stage to write out critical incidents and my thoughts for each incident clearly despite cultural differences with American tutors. With these notations, I was not only able to examine how the codes linked to clearly defined categories and themes, but also learned about the Anglo-Saxon interpretation of my field data. I conducted many discussions with tutors because of
Taiwanese, Confucian and American culture differences. Further, a few tutors became suspect of my research purposes because the content explores children’s sexuality, which violates their beliefs in innocent children, sometimes making tutoring sessions difficult. Nevertheless, I took advantage of these opportunities for cultural exchange to communicate different views on such topics as LGBT, feminism, Confucianism, gender roles and gender culture in family and society, and so on.

**Developing categories.** I developed categories based on sufficient coded data and reflective notes (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002). These large numbers of codes identify critical incidents that connect with the research topic and the need to interpret research questions. The reflective notes contained my thoughts about categories that emerged when I read or listened to the well-organized data as well as when I considered the research method and research questions (Bogdan, & Biklen, 2007). Discussions with my advisor and writing center tutors as well as reviewing self-reflective notes while I formed codes and categories helped me think analytically about the data (Maxwell, 2005). Because the categorizing analysis organized the data into broader themes, my considerations of categories included the following: First, I established the organizational categories (Maxwell, 2005) that would serve as section headings in presenting the research results. Because my codes resulted from searching the context and the key words of critical incidents that I recognized earlier in my transcribed notes, I could identify and sort the significant meaning of a segment for further category analysis. Second, I built substantive categories (Maxwell, 2005) that focused on describing the patterns of critical incidents and participants’ beliefs. My descriptions of the categories were based on the
participants’ own words and concepts. In the process, I inductively developed the participants’ perspectives. I generated my interpretations by analyzing the informants’ language to establish the “indigenous typologies” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Patton, 2002). Participants expressed these indigenous typologies. By focusing on the informants’ language, subjectivities and their representations of gender meanings on the discourse processes, my interpretation facilitates the development of theoretic concepts. Theorizing children’s gender culture occurred when I repeatedly explained it to different writing centers tutors as I constantly revised my drafts.

I based category processes on two principles: organizational and substantive categories. I used Microsoft Word to copy and paste the critical incidents that had the same codes into the same file. I discussed significant reasons to arrange or rearrange the order of these incidents in my reflective notes. The rearrangements of the file depended on the reasons in my reflective notes. I arranged the incidents in the same or different files depending on the context and the interpretation of critical incidents. In this process, I reviewed the files and tried to identify remarkable reasons in my reflective notes, and then I was able to rearrange the specific incident into another file. I continued to arrange and file data while discussing it or debating with writing center tutors during the writing process because our dialogues could provide alternative viewpoints to interpret and conceptualize data contexts.

In the first step, I established organizational categories for answering my research questions. For further data exploration, I drew a matrix and used the inductive method to uncover classification ideas from the holes in the already-analyzed data. However,
although I included logical and conflictive discourses in the data, I could only fill in the matrices by choosing data unique to my observations, which accessed the informants’ perspectives and which could interpret or represent the theoretical frameworks in the nature of the participants and the setting. To avoid forcing data into categories, I tried to interpret these matrices objectively instead of with bias toward specific critic incidents (Marshall and Rossman, 2006, p. 159). By filling the matrices, the categories and subcategories did not emerge from the classification schemes but depended on the data’s meaning. At the same time, I wrote down the reasons for creating categories and subcategories (Maxwell, 2005; Patton, 2002) because these details aided in generating various viewpoints to challenge research limitations (Bogdan, & Biklen, 2007). For example, by categorizing data, I located the informants’ gender culture to construct my theoretical concepts.

During the analytical process, I reviewed files, finding and writing thoughts in my reflective notes. Doing so, I moved some incidents to different files, rewrote the categories and re-categorized my findings. These processes fed off one another. The resultant data categories resulting included interpretation of individual children’s gender performances and group gender norms; furthermore, I developed them from the participants’ voices and situational identities (Angrosino & de Perez, 2000) instead of fitting into the existing theoretical categories (Maxwell, 2005; Lather, 2003).

**Developing themes.** The emerging themes were concepts elicited from the data to address the research questions and research findings (Bogdan, & Biklen, 2007). By clarifying the characteristics of each category, I carefully read every category and
subcategory and wrote interpretations in my reflective notes. With intense effort, then, the working category system changed. After several sequences of comparison among codes, categories and subcategories, I noticed variations and patterns from the data and the matrices that could be used to develop central themes.

During the complex and multidirectional process, I repeated processes to code data, category data and develop themes. In the every round of codes and categories, I focused intensively on a certain part of the data, selecting certain segments of episodes or critical gender incidents that appropriately showed themes of NTC’s gender childhood in order to produce themes with a high-level of accuracy. For six years, I worked with writing tutors in six appointments per week (including weekends); they were my audience, culture consultants, English writing guides and dissertation writing cheer squad.

The chart below (Table 2) depicts the research timeline and research methods.

**Validity in Research**

**The Criteria for Validity in Research**

Validity in the quantitative research refers to the correctness or credibility of a description, an interpretation and a conclusion (Maxwell, 2005). Kvale (2002) asserted that validated knowledge is based on practicing the social and linguistic construction of realities. Multiple ways of knowing and multiple truths exist in specific local narratives in daily life; therefore, the issues of reliability, validity and generalization do not need to be viewed as one thing (Kvale, 2002). In this study, children’s multiple gender processes were framed by rules constituting and regulating language use in different situations (Davies, 2003a; MacNaughton, 2005).
Table 2

*The Research Timeline and Research Methods*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time frame</th>
<th>Observation</th>
<th>Audio/Video Artifacts</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Video/observation discussion</th>
<th>Data analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Oct.</td>
<td>● 9 hrs. per day ● Select NTC</td>
<td>● Introduced ● Free play/dramatic play ● Collecting artifacts</td>
<td>● Interview teacher, NTC, and IFS</td>
<td>● Discuss video clips/artifacts w/ class &amp; NTC ● Discuss w/ teachers</td>
<td>● Data collection: FN, IV, AD, VD, PJ ● Transcribe ● Write memos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov.</td>
<td>● 9 hrs. per day</td>
<td>● Free play/dramatic play ● Collecting children’s artifacts</td>
<td>● Interview teacher, NTC, and IFS</td>
<td>● Discuss video clips/artifacts w/ class &amp; NTC ● Discuss w/ teachers</td>
<td>● Data collection: FN, IV, AD, VD, PJ ● Transcribing ● Write memos ● Code categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec.</td>
<td>● 9 hrs. per day</td>
<td>● Free play/dramatic play ● Collecting children’s artifacts</td>
<td>● Interview teacher, NTC, and IFS</td>
<td>● Discuss video clips/artifacts w/ class &amp; NTC ● Discuss w/ teachers</td>
<td>● Data collection: FN, IV, AD, VD, PJ ● Transcribing ● Write memos ● Code categories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan.</td>
<td>● 9 hrs. per day</td>
<td>● Free play/dramatic play ● Collecting children’s artifacts</td>
<td>● Member check w/ teacher and IFS ● Sharing voices</td>
<td>● Discuss video clips/artifacts w/ NTC ● Discuss w/ teachers</td>
<td>● Data collection: FN, IV, AD, VD, PJ ● Transcribe ● Write memos ● Code categories</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Validity in this research. The validity in this research derives from the three classical criteria of truth in “correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic utility” (Kvale, 2002, p. 320); that is, I practice validity by involving the following classical criteria of truth: (a) Do my interpretations of children’s performance in gender construction correspond to their understanding of being a boy, a girl, or neither?; (b) Do I or do I not see these children’s gender-bending adhere to the consistency and internal logic of my findings?; and (c) Do I or do I not interpret the children’s gender social order by presenting practical actions that relate to practical consequences? Doing so, I intended not only to require the validity to be located in context (Kvale, 2002) but also that the validity provided alternative views to re-conceptualize my data and theorize my findings.

The methodology produced the findings. This study devotes the next four findings chapters to how kindergartners at both schools constructed gendered childhoods. The first examines this topic in the context of mixed-gender play, involving both NTC and mainstream Taiwanese children. The second addresses the construction of NT boyhood, while the third and fourth explore the construction of NT girlhood. The themes of these four chapters emerged during my observation and interactions that took place between NTC and mainstream peers in suburban WK Kindergarten and rural JB Kindergarten.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS: MIXED GENDER PLAY

Introduction

These chapters display Taiwanese children’s lived experiences, which involved construction of gendered childhood. I investigate how classroom gendered social order shaped NTC’s gendered childhood. This complicated process resulted from interweaving children’s gender culture, school curriculum and respective family backgrounds. Drawing upon my data, I attempted to determine what happened to NTC’s gender position, in the context of their classroom’s gendered social order, as they set out to construct gender identities. To find out, I examined how the NTC co-constructed respective childhoods through persistent peer interaction as well as resistance to hegemonic gender stereotypes. My findings suggest that NTC constructed gendered childhoods by interacting with peers on social, economic, gender-oriented, ethnic and cultural terms.

When interacting with peers, kindergartners adopted masculine and feminine roles as they simultaneously embraced and resisted hegemonic gender culture. NTC and their peers, under the influence of family backgrounds and local culture, reconstructed gender behavior when they challenged the content as well as the curriculum context. Drawing on feminist poststructural and postcolonial theory, I sought to interpret the local children’s gender culture in a way that acknowledged the influence of prevalent family gender roles and school curricula, all of which restrained gender culture practices. Thorne (1993), in her analysis of U.S. children’s gender play at the primary-school level, suggested that
such interaction was informed by dualistic tendencies that created tensions between boys and girls. Therefore, I was not surprised to find that complications in gender relations appeared in the course of mixed-gender play. When the group of children was involved in a particular social context, complicated peer relationships marked a shift in gender power. Such interaction is bound to become still more complex when gender differences intersect with ethnic and/or class differences. As Hooks (2000) and Peachter (1998) observed, gender position is often tightly interwoven with ethnicity, social class and race. In the course of my observations, I found that NTC’s gender-doing did not simply involve the construction of their gender identities amid the dualisms surrounding male and female identity. I also discovered that their gender position was co-constructed with their mainstream Taiwanese peers, in the context of the gendered social order of their classrooms.

Mixed-Gender Play in This Study

Mixed-gender play provided a valuable opportunity to realize how opposite gender peers played together. Instead of focusing on individuals, group life fostered a study of the meanings of social relations and the organizations of peer interaction. In mixed-gender play, the children engaged in masculine and feminine practices. Thorne (1993) proposed that observing children’s gender play reveals how children create and maintain social worlds. Critical gender incidents discussed within this chapter show evidence of how and when girls and boys played together as well as what happened when they constructed gendered social order. In the following sections I have discussed (a)
factors blocking boys and girls from playing together, (b) what girls think about playing with boys, and (c) what boys think about playing with girls, and (d) crossing gender boundaries.

**Factors Blocking Mixed-Gender Play**

This section explored the enormous complexity of girls’ and boys’ play in the context of mixed-gender play. The first part of this finding chapter illuminates mostly factors that hinder children’s mixed-gender play. In these critical incidents when they played together, children joined in the mixed-gender play with those whose peer interaction would relate with gender construction and gendered social order. Findings reveal how by children’s preferences in play material, academic culture, parental expectations and local community custom blocked mixed-gender play. In mixed-gender play, those who crossed over and play with the opposite gender might were often met with derision, but were sometimes accepted by peers. This is because the children were sensitive to pressure when they crossed borders.

**Teachers’ Attitudes toward Children’s Gender Construction**

Teachers revealed their attitudes toward students’ gender construction in classroom management techniques and in how they spoke of boys’ and girls’ play tendencies. For instance, teachers seemed to think that it is innate for boys to play fighting games; however, teachers also divided the class according to gender, and many times teachers were not concerned with the gender equity or mixed gender interactions, but instead focused on classroom management. The following incidents illuminate
teachers’ viewpoints about the meaning of inborn or socially-learned gender roles. Such perspective show barriers toward mixed gender play.

**Who was the first boy in this class to make his sword?** The following interviews discussed what teachers’ viewpoints were for male students’ gender construction. Enculturation begins with the teacher’s acceptance of gendered behavior as illustrated by the unquestioned tendency of boys to play with swords.

We may never know who the first boy in his class was to make a sword. At JB kindergarten, I asked Teacher Su who taught this class for three years, about the first boy to play swords and at what age did he do so. She could not recall specifics, but indicated that the sword fighting and other violent games generally begin around the end of age four. She said she strictly mandated the boys not to hurt each other with swords. Also, she said that almost all of five- and six-year-old boys played fighting games because they have more energy than girls do, especially several NT boys in this class. Teacher Su noted that it was natural for boys to play fighting games (e.g., playing robots, making guns, or making swords) and for girls to play domestic games (e.g., cooking, nurturing babies, or shopping). Although she never stopped boys or girls from playing fighting games, or boys from playing girls’ cooking games or girls from making guns, boys or girls appeared to know how to choose their favorite games that “fit” their gender category. At age five or six, gender differences clearly divided playmates (FN 111507).

Judging from the passages above, Teacher Su believed there was a boyhood inclination to play fighting games. Teacher Chen in WK kindergarten shared this belief.
She said that “boys like to imitate the content of cartoons (e.g., Power Ranger or Voltron) because these figures are boy characters. These figures played fighting games, so boys also played these fighting games in our class because they need to learn how to go with other boys and how to protect themselves” (FD 111607). Both the teachers thought that the boys played these fighting characters based on their physical needs (releasing energy) and as the result of social learning (e.g., the influence of mass media).

However, in observations, several boys from the two classes were rarely or never involved with these types of fighting “boys’ plays.” These boys included Yu-Ren, an NT boy as well as Xian-Ren and Min-Zhe, two mainstream Taiwanese boys. In other words, there were various ways to act their male gender roles. It was unnecessary for every boy to play fighting games. Rather, teachers had normalized fighting games for boys as an appropriate gender behavior. Just as teachers believed fighting play was natural to male gender construction, teaches inadvertently created a type of gendered social order between boys and girls when lining up.

**Lining up.** Teacher Su wanted her class to form a girls’ line and a boys’ line to march downstairs. She told them that the girls’ line would go first on the way down, stating that the boys’ line would go first on the return trip upstairs; however, some boys pushed the girls very hard when they had to follow them downstairs. Girls called out, “Boys, do not push! Do not push!” Some boys continued to push and yelled back: “Hurry! Hurry! You girls are wasting time!” (VT 122807). Such occurrences happened again and
again in daily interaction, and they had already become part of the school culture. The boy did not appear to respect the girls.

I brought up the episode in an informal interview with Teacher Su, who noted differences between how the young boys and young girls behave. Daily, she reminded them, but she believed that the boys’ hyperactivity caused their misbehavior. I also informally interviewed some girls in the class, who thought the boys were rude. Xing-Yan, a 6-year-old NT girl, replied that the boys treated girls so badly because they were mean; if any boy behaved otherwise, he would become a girl. Zhen-Xiu, a 6-year-old mainstream Taiwanese girl, noted that she disliked being pushed by boys when going up or down stairs. She expressed that it was not fair to allow the boys to do so. Both Xing-Yan and Zhen-Xiu agreed that the boys did not behave themselves as girls did when they walked in lines, and even worse, the girls believed that most of the boys were so wild that they could not play with them (FN 122907).

In this episode, the girls identified bad boys and asked for equal rights on the stairs. Teacher Su, Xing-Yan and Zhen-Xiu each noticed the boys’ rude behavior, but Teacher Su believed that the boys adopted masculinity as a result of sex-role socialization and biology. These gender stereotypes and misinterpretation also marred Xing-Yan’s understanding; she explained that the boys acted rudely because they needed to behave like most boys in class and be with other boys. From this incident, I came to understand that if teachers believed that children’s gender performances are merely absorbed through observing or modeling sexist messages in early childhood classrooms, they did nothing to
change the behavior on the stairs. Teachers were oblivious to their role in requiring equal
gender rights or challenge sexism. In this case, sexism would likely hinder the possibility
of girls and boys playing together.

**Riding bicycles.** This example dealt with the influence of the teacher’s classroom
management style and strategies for gender-fairness (MacNaughton, 2006). When
children were out on the playground to ride bicycles, girls struggled to learn how to play
with boys. Min-Hui, Xing-Yan, Yun-Chen, and Yi-Ting, all 6-year-old girls, made angry
faces when they were denied chances to ride bicycles on the playground. They squatted
in a row in the corner, looked upset and remained quiet. When I asked them what the
matter was, they complained to me that the boys used violence to monopolize the
bicycles. I encouraged them to talk with the boys or to report it to their teacher.

Teacher Su created rules requiring every child to have a turn according to her or
his class number; however, after girls took possession of the bicycles, they were upset
once again because the boys took them back after chasing them or loudly nagging the
girls for their turn. Thus, very soon, I saw these girls make ugly faces again when the
boys forced them to give up their bicycles. Eventually, Xing-Yan, Yun-Chen and Yi-Ting
gave up riding bicycles and found other games to play together; Min-Hui convinced a
boy who had a bicycle to pretend to be a taxi driver and give her a ride. I closely followed
Min-Hui and heard her ask her driver to take her wherever she wanted. After the outdoor
play, Min-Hui told me that her taxi travel was absolutely fabulous because of the
excellent driver service (VT 122807).
Here, these girls acted as young girls are expected to under the circumstances. Initially, the male children repeatedly took the females’ bicycles, and the majority of the female children primarily seethed in anger but did not act out. The female children resented the boys’ behavior, but they did not fight directly with the boys. Another further examination, Min-Hui illustrates that the gender roles need not be absolute. She was able to play taxi with a boy; nonetheless, Min-Hui maintained the roles of dominance and specific power distribution in the mixed gender play as she was the passenger and the boy was the driver. Through this incident, I saw Min-Hui’s gender performance vary in response to the situation. For example, gender power was equally distributed when the boys and girls alternated using the bicycles. When the girls were again taunted away from their bicycles, gender power was distinctly unequal, favoring the boys; yet the boy who played taxi was proud to serve as the driver of the young girl.

Significantly, in the above incident, when the boys hindered the girls from riding bicycles, they came to notice the meaning of injustices. But when teacher Su defined the issue as classroom conflicts, instead of gender issue, she only focused on taking care of the discipline issue as she assumed it was due to the unequal distribution of toys (e.g., bicycles). Thus, she did not resolve the gender equity issue in her class. Instead, the conflict was resolved when the teacher redistributed the bicycles and required the children to share them between males and females. She missed opportunities to realize why the girls became angry. If Teacher Su could make sense of this critical learning
moment, she could hold a discussion with the class, which could avoid reproducing negative gendered culture patterns in her class.

**Mixed Gender Behavior from Home**

**The male doctor and female nurse play.** Yu-Qin, a 6-year-old NT girl, and Fu-Chen, a 4-year-old mainstream Taiwan boy, played nurse and doctor at JB kindergarten. Yu-Qin made a bed on a desk for a doll and Fu-Chen used a string for a stethoscope to listen to the doll’s heartbeat. I asked Yu-Qin why she pretended to be the nurse and Fu-Chen played the doctor. She responded: “Because the nurses are girls and the doctors are boys” (VT 010408).

Yu-Qin presented her stereotypical gender role when she was involved in the nurse-doctor play. She told me what gender knowledge she had; thus, she followed this understanding to perform her female gender role. Yu-Qin’s mother was a Vietnamese immigrant spouse, who had been out of the home for more than 3 years because of domestic violence. Yu-Qin lived with her grandmother and father, and her home was an illegal gambling house at the time of this data collection. Teacher Su also told me that Yu-Qin’s family background may have influenced her use of gender stereotypes in dramatic play. All of her toys at home were domestic play sets, nursing sets and dolls, but I cannot draw the simple conclusion that Yu-Qin acted as feminine as she could because she was influenced by her family background. It might also be a reflection of discourses in popular culture and the imagery associated with a young girl’s life experiences. The
The matter of my son’s male peers and my daughter’s female peers. At JB Private Kindergarten, the mothers of Xing-Yan, NT girl and Ming-Yan, NT boy, did not encourage the children to play with opposite gender peers. Xing-Yan’s mother thought that most boys were wild and rude and that it was inappropriate to allow her to play with boys (AT 112307). Ming-Yan’s mother indicated that he should play with same-gender peers because he needed to learn to be a masculine male and know how to interact with male peers (AT 120507). Parents’ opinions influenced children to choose to play with peers of the same gender. At least in my interviews, two immigrant mothers indicated that they preferred their children to invite same-gender neighborhood peers to play.

Gender norms are very important to promote their daughter’s and son’s gender hierarchy in Taiwanese society because NT boys have masculine characteristics and NT girls have feminine, which made more possibilities for them to be accepted into Taiwanese society.

The parents of WK Public Kindergarten held the similar viewpoints. The parents of Jia-Hong, Chen-Quan and Yu-Ren expected sons to learn how to be masculine boys and that playing with male peers was better than playing with female peers. The parents did not encourage children to play with the opposite gender because they also considered that following the appropriate gender norms to be very important when nurturing children. According to these examples, teachers’ attitudes, children’s gender knowledge and the
parents’ expectations constitute factors that influence children’s desire or disinterest in playing with the children of opposite gender.

**Children’s Preferences in Their Play**

**Mixed-gender play as required in the curriculum.** In the two kindergartens, mixed-gender play was relatively uncommon during free play, but it was part of children’s mandated curriculum. Children chose games and toys in terms of who could play these games and with these toys, so if any girl or boy wanted to play girls’ or boys’ games, that child needed to recognize the play culture. Furthermore, to play in a mixed gender group, the child would have to overcome the notoriety associated with crossing the gender boundary because those who played with the opposite-gender peers were highly suspect. Children who crossed gender boundaries performed a risky activity, which others noticed. Crossing gender boundaries did not happen much because doing so violated the gender norms of keeping young boys and young girls segregated, which is common in Taiwan. Violating gender norms and engaging in cross-gender play entailed several risks to the child’s reputation. The risk of notoriety came in several forms. Peers considered these children to be simply acting foolishly, or they may be taunted, or even considered pathetic by their peers.

I informally discussed with Teacher Wang and Teacher Chen the reasons that most children only played with same-gender peers. Teacher Chen explained that in her class, most boys liked to play with toy cars and robots, and most girls like to play with dolls and work on art projects. Gravitating to similar toys and activities in this way
caused children to prefer playing with same-gender groups (AT 103007). Teacher Wang indicated innate differences between girls and boys, which are difficult to change (AT 103007). The curriculum goals, however, focused on the importance of cooperative learning among boys and girls, requiring children to learn together via group projects.

**NT Boys resisted acting like mainstream Taiwanese girls in their dramatic play.** The following incident happened in a group project in the dramatic play area in WK Public Kindergarten. Jia-Hong and Yu-Ren, two NT boys, played with a few mainstream Taiwanese girls. The two boys sneaked out of the dramatic play area and went to the construction area to make tops. Teacher Wang required them to go back to their group and participate in the group project in the dramatic play area. Jia-Hong murmured to himself, and he stood at the entrance of the dramatic play area. I asked him to enter, but he replied that he did not want to because the girls in the dramatic play were going to play house. Besides, he said, they always asked him to do whatever they suggested. Offering to record them in a video as an enticement, I convinced the boys to rejoin the group. I then observed them helping their female peers buy baby food and fix furniture and drive them to the airport when they pretended to travel. Both of them did a fine job at play; however, I noticed the unequal power structure for domestic affairs as presented in the following dialogue.

Researcher: Come in, Jia-Hong and Yu-Ren! [I asked them to enter the dramatic play area.]

Jia-Hong: We. . . [indistinct].
Ru-Yue: He does not like us! **We do not like him either!** The only boy that we liked very much is not here now. He graduated this summer!

[Jia-Hong and Yu-Ren kept quiet. They entered and participated in the play. Ten minutes later, the dialogue presented their conflicts again.]

Researcher: What did you pack in your luggage and where are you going? [I asked Jia-Hong about the items in his luggage].

Jia-Hong: I packed a Coca-Cola, a fork for eating a steak, and [He did not finish his statement].

Ru-Yue: Hi! Coca-Cola and fork cannot . . . if you LOSE them, we will never have it at our home. [As he was saying so, she snatched them out of his hands. Jia-Hong said nothing and did not react to her rude behavior except to throw his luggage on the floor. Later, I asked Jia-Hong where he was going to travel.]

Researcher: Where are you going?

[Before Jia-Hong answered my question, Ru-Yue and Chen-Xi gave the answer to me.]

Ru-Yue: He knew nothing!

Chen-Xi: He followed us!

Then, Ru-Yue told Jia-Hong and Yu-Ren: Listen! You need to closely follow us and carry our luggage.

At the end of the play, I asked Jia-Hong and Yu-Ren what characters they played in the group.
Jia-Hong: I am a—. I do not know! [Yu-Ren shook his head to indicate that he did not know, either. At this moment, Ru-Yue gave me the answer again.]

Ru-Yue: Jia-Hong is our father and Yu-Ren is our brother.

Researcher: Girls, they played hard with you, didn’t they?

Girls: We do not like them. We have no choice. . . .

The girls’ answer was unacceptable to me and embarrassing for Jia-Hong and Yu-Ren. In this family play, Jia-Hong and Yu-Ren hesitantly communicated with the girls in most situations, and the girls asked the boys to do their bidding; otherwise, they would play on their own. The girls complained that they did not actively participate in the play, instead behaving passively. Rather than blaming Jia-Hong and Yu-Ren for their lack of enthusiasm for the play, I thought that their play content reflected what they observed at home between men and women, which in some cases displayed the domination of males in their families. Here, the boys were placed in serving roles, which could be explained as they are or are not used to listening to their mothers at home (more details about the relationships between NT boys and their mothers will be discussed in the “Boyhood” chapter) and they did not like to play with female classmates.

In this mixed-gender group, the group of mainstream Taiwanese girls was not satisfied with the two NT boys’ actions because in this domestic play, the girls took for granted that females (e.g., a mother or wife) should have the power and privilege at home. I guess the reason that the two NT boys wanted to escape this domestic game is because they knew they would lose their power and be forced to support the girls’ agenda. The
girls’ privilege should be used to improve life at home. However, the apparent lack of social skills of the two NT boys made the group of mainstream Taiwanese girls disappointed. The conflict might come from when NT boys learned that although immigrant mothers are used to serving their fathers, mainstream Taiwanese girls have noticed that their mothers share power with their fathers concerning domestic affairs. Thus, the two groups of children, NT boys and mainstream Taiwanese girls, felt unhappy about family role play content because of different family backgrounds. It was no wonder that the two NT boys wanted to escape this trap!

**Children’s Preference for Toys and Games Designed for a Specific Gender**

Children identified specific toys or games as being exclusively designed for girls, e.g., dolls and playing house, or for boys, e.g., plastic guns and playing war games. This sort of stereotypical thinking inhibited the children from participating in mixed-gender play, as they set out to establish masculine or feminine identities. The following incidents displayed how children imbue their significant toys and games with the power to determine gender.

**Morphers are troublesome.** The incidents highlight that the girls were opposed to playing with male gender-specific toys when girls felt uncomfortable with the boys’ toys and when boys claimed that girls should not play with boys’ toys.

Cheng-Quan’s Morpher is a small object based on the Power Rangers television series. Cheng-Quan flaunted his toy in front of mainstream Taiwanese girls, including Cai-Yui. After the girls realized that Cheng-Quan’s intention was to show off his toy, he
became an undesirable person in the girls’ group. Several mainstream Taiwanese girls, including Cai-Yui, ordered him to go away. Later, while Cai-Yui did not stay with a group of girls, she was still curious about the Morpher and how boys play with it. She wanted to see clearly, but Ren-He, a mainstream boy, prevented her from doing so and told her that the Morpher was for boys only. Cai-Yui accepted this and did not ask any more questions about the Morpher. Later, she told me that only boys play with the strange toy and she does not play with boys’ objects (FN 122507).

I asked the girls about the Morpher. The girls did not know what it was, but they claimed to hate it because Cheng-Quan’s behaviors and his toy made noise. However, Cai-Yui still struggled for keeping her feminine identity while she possibly directed boys’ toys. Cai-Yui’s concept about the Morpher being for boys was established after she was prevented from playing with the Morpher. When no girls played Morpher with boys in this classroom, this reaffirmed the boy’s and girl’s belief that the toy or game were for boys only. When girls thought of the Morpher as a masculine toy and playing with it became a masculine activity, feminine girls opted to stay away from these symbols because any girl who played with boys’ items acted against classroom gender norms and was thus less charming. The following incidents describe how the children negotiated, resisted and learned to be different kinds of caregiver, even the role of caregivers used to be the symbols for females only.

**Playing the caregiver.** Several WK kindergartners, Cai-Yui, Yun-Shan and You-Li (three girls) and Li-Hong, Cheng-Quan, and Xian-Ren (three boys), were
assigned to the dramatic corner during group project time. Their play content engaged in a variety of caregiver roles, ranging from grandmothers to nannies to friends. Significantly, these caregivers were not exclusively female. The children skillfully interpreted gender roles as they played babysitter.

First, Cai-Yui played a grandmother with her two grandsons, Li-Hong and Cheng-Quan. Cai-Yui required Cheng-Quan to take care of Li-Hong since he was her eldest grandson. Then, Cheng-Quan told Li-Hong to behave as a loving grandson would.

Second, Yun-Shan and You-Li pretended to be professional caregivers who worked with infants. They said that their professional skills could help many busy mothers, who picked up their babies after work. Third, Xian-Ren, a boy, pretended to feed ice cream to his 2-year-old toddler Pokémon (a toy figure based on a popular video game). When I inquired, he told me that Pokémon was his good friend, not his baby. Then I asked whether his father babysat his young sister at home, and he sharply replied, “Do not compare my role with the girls. I just wanted to feed my Pokémon” (VT 121907).

The children here portrayed various types of caregiving, according to their life experiences. Most WK Kindergarten families were two-income families; thus, certified daycare workers or grandparents raised most children, except Cheng-Quan, whose Vietnamese immigrant mother stayed home to take care of her children. This may be the reason that, in this play, Cheng-Quan acted in a subordinate role to Cai-Yui and pretended to watch over Li-Hong, his younger brother. Cai-Yui played a traditional
grandmother who stayed home to take care of her grandsons because she lived with her extended family.

Instead of pretending to be these babies’ mother, Yun-Shan and You-Li acted as professional nannies. They claimed, “the working mothers need to go to their jobs and, in their home, they need to cook, clean and do laundry. They are busier than fathers at home” (FN 112607). Despite their youth, they asserted that they could work to support themselves financially, establishing their social positions as independent working women. Yun-Shan and You-Li displayed valuable insight into the working mothers’ culture of dependence and independence, using their salaries as they liked. In fact, Yun-Shan’s grandma confirmed that Yun-Shan imitated her nanny’s assertive behavior.

Xian-Ren stressed that he was not babysitting. He nurtured his Pokémon as his pet, a good friend, or in fact his baby in his play. Instead of interacting with other “nannies” or “grandmas,” he played outside of the dramatic play area, located far away with the other two groups, but his teacher sent him back. I suspected that he was trying to prevent himself from being criticized by me and his peers. Because of his emphasis on friendship, I assumed that Xian-Ren’s sensitivity concerning the consistence in his gender role and play content when he deliberately told me not to compare him with the girls.

As this episode suggests, children treat gender categories as an important element of their games. When children believed that a certain role was best-suited for a girl, e.g., caregiver, any boy seeking to take this part was obliged to develop an alternative title, e.g., Xian-Ren’s selection of “best friend.” In this way, games sharply limited the
possibility of mixed-gender play. Children recognized that in order to be perceived as a “good girl” or “good boy,” they needed to play consistent traditional gender roles. It is essential for children to employ strategies in the context of play that reinforce gender identities. The next section discusses how the NTC struggled in classroom games that related to local customs and religion when their families did not provide them these experiences because of being cultural newcomers.

**Gender Co-construction under Local Customs and Religion**

Taiwanese customs and religion play a powerful part in regulating male and female gender roles, which may come to influence and constrain mixed-gender play. In Taiwanese religion, most gods are dauntless, wise and powerful; they control life, wealth, death, medical care, government offices and various professions. To believe in them is to accept them as gender role models. A Taiwanese goddess embodies femininity, specifically kindness, sweetness, forgiveness and quietness; for example, Marz is a goddess, who, like most goddesses, takes care of human beings’ health, family, birth and childcare.

The goddess is a symbol of the pure spirit; however, the Taiwanese female body in the traditional Taiwanese custom is too impure to touch a god’s or goddess’s sedan chair, men’s weapons, or boats. These superstitions derive from the fear and revulsion surrounding women’s menstruation and result in female subordination to the male in Taiwanese culture. Children’s life experiences involve modeling adult beliefs and
behaviors. The children absorb local customs and reconstruct experience as knowledge and then practice it in play.

I was concerned about how children represented religious regulation and local custom in their body knowledge and the way they applied it to gender differences at play. During story time two weeks before the next two incidents occurred, the class read a story about a mother who bore a boy baby. These young children learned the biological aspects of having a baby, including the mother’s pain and gratitude; however, knowledge of science and emotion surrounding childbirth were insufficient to deconstruct myths that the children held, discrediting of the female body. From the biological viewpoint, a female body is the source of pregnancy and motherhood, but when invisible taboos perpetuate in the children’s environment and hovered around them at play, gender roles reflected bans knitted into local custom by religious regulation. The following incidents showed how this local culture influenced the mixed-gender play at JB kindergarten.

**No girl can hold a sedan chair.** I observed Zhen-Xiu warn her friend Ya-Yu that she should not march in the boys’ group during a Marz religious festival. She told Ya-Yu that only men could hold Marz’s sedan chair; women were prohibited from touching the sedan chair because their bodies were not pure enough. Ya-Yu responded that this was just play. She also stated that Marz will favor her because she bathes daily (FN 111407).

When Zhen-Xiu and Ya-Yu spoke about why the female body is defiled or why their bodies should be defended, they valued their bodies and themselves. By bathing, Ya-Yu believed that her devotion to the goddess Marz could make her body holy and
pure. She argued that she was qualified to serve Marz; however, I was surprised that the girls knew that although the male body is valued more than the female’s, they practiced but also powerfully resisted this concept in their interaction.

**No girl can touch my sword.** Zhen-Xiu, a mainstream Taiwanese girl, held and examined a toy sword that Da-Wei, an NT boy, had constructed. She told me that the sword was a boy’s object because they use it to kill monsters, but girls do not. At that moment, Da-Wei saw Zhen-Xiu touch his sword:

Da-Wei (yelling to Zhen-Xiu): Do not touch my sword!

Zhen-Xiu: Do not yell at me! I only touched your sword!

Da-Wei: You **girl** touched my sword! It will harm my sword play. I will lose!

Zhen-Xiu: It is not true! You are so bad!

Da-Wei: You **girl**, go far, far away from my sword! I do not want to lose.

Zhen-Xiu: If you lose, it is because you are so skinny, and that causes you not to have enough energy to fight others. It has nothing to do with me!

At that moment Da-Wei’s face turned bright red, and all of the classmates laughed at him; nevertheless, Da-Wei told me he was angry because Zhen-Xiu touched his sword and that he might lose the sword play (FN 123107).

In this incident, Zhen-Xiu defended her body value to Da-Wei. Zhen-Xiu defied the dominant discourses of the purity of male objects and the myth of universal male strength: She resisted the dominant sexism. Second, Zhen-Xiu protected her dignity when she asserted that her body had nothing to do with Da-Wei’s ineffective sword play. Her
answer resisted dominant male supremacy and did so logically. When she pointed out that Da-Wei had a skinny male body and “does not have enough energy to fight with others,” Da-Wei lost face before his peers. Da-Wei’s male ego suffered an injury. The conflicts in their dialogue derived from the children’s understanding of bans associated with the body, especially after they had been taught to value the male body more than the female body. These incidents also demonstrated that the children built body values on life experiences. The dominant gender culture acted as a very powerful discourse to shape children’s gender roles; but when girls were allowed to make arguments and negotiate with peers as they meaningfully played their gender roles, they could find strategies to resist body values within cultural regulations. Instead of following the prohibitions, they played leading roles in their stories when reconstructing religious beliefs and customs.

Can I play “Twelve Babysitters?” In the foregoing two incidents, I focused on how children reconstructed understandings of the relationships between cultural taboos and the female body. The next story involves several girls and Da-Wei, who played “Twelve Babysitters,” the maidservants of the Goddess of Childbirth, who has the magical power to protect children’s daily needs, emotions and health. These Babysitters help the Goddess of Childbirth by visiting human beings to protect young children. Actresses portray them in the temple festival march, wearing make-up, dressing well and waving pretty umbrellas, handkerchiefs, or fans. During the temple festival march, many parents in the community bring children to let the Twelve Babysitters softly touch the children’s heads in prayers of safety and health.
Min-Hui, Zhen-Xiu, Jia-Jia, Yun-Cheng and Yi-Ting, all mainstream Taiwanese girls, played the Twelve Babysitters. They tried to invite as many girls as they could in their class to play these figures. Xing-Yan, an NT girl, did not know the meaning of the Twelve Babysitters. Zhen-Xiu told her that all of the girls need to carefully dress up, and then they could be a Babysitter in the march. While the girls pretended to make up their faces, Da-Wei asked Ya-Yu: “Hi, can I play?”

The girls rejected him: “No! It is for the girls only,” but Ya-Yu convinced the other girls that she could play Da-Wei’s mother, who brought her son to worship the Twelve Babysitters in the temple festival march (FN122807).

The children incorporated this local custom in “Twelve Babysitters.” Belief in Marz, the Goddess of Childbirth, and the Twelve Babysitters is a part of the local religion in the communities around JB Kindergarten. When parents lead their children to local temples, children recognized these goddesses, such as the babysitters’ gender role. Children also learned their parents’ gender role expectations because they heard their parents’ pray to these goddesses about their future.

However, NTC struggle in these games because of cross-culture backgrounds and various social statuses. Several reasons explain this. First, both Xing-Yan and Da-Wei are NTC who did not know about the Twelve Babysitters. Xing-Yan and Da-Wei told me that they knew about Marz, but they did not recognize the Twelve Babysitters. I guessed that they might not have had this worship experience because the Twelve Babysitters reflected a culture unique to mainstream children.
It was valuable for NTC to play together with mainstream peers because NTC could learn the local culture. The local culture knowledge that mainstream girls shared with NTC could transform NTC’s knowledge. In order to be accepted as mainstream Taiwanese children, the NTC have to assimilate into dominant Taiwanese culture. Doing so, they could join the Taiwanese mainstream group but if they cannot, they will remain an outsider to the play group.

In the Babysitters game, the girls were attracted to the goddesses’ beautiful appearances and their marvelous nursing abilities as the girls pretended to be celestial beings. Thus, these girls enjoyed playing Babysitters to build gender identity and gain peers’ appreciation. Identifying with the gender roles as nursing specialists allowed the girls to reinforce themselves with the female need to manage childcare, especially when they shouted “No” in chorus to Da-Wei. None wanted to allow a boy to play a Babysitter. It showed how girls used gender power to press Da-Wei, who desired to play a Babysitter. The girls’ reaction also could interfere with their understanding the Babysitter’s gender role, gender approach and social status.

**Conclusion.** The above incidents represented children’s understandings about the relationships between stereotyped gender roles and local culture. In the sword contest and sedan parade incidents, only mainstream Taiwanese girls claimed, but also challenged, male hegemony while resisting traditional customs. When compared with the NT boy Da-Wei playing “Twelve Babysitters,” his gender and cross-cultural backgrounds made him powerless against female peers’ opinion, such as the stereotyped role of babysitter
belonging only to females. Their games provided opportunities to reconstruct understandings of necessary correlations between customs and gender expectations.

However, as NTC lacked certain religious beliefs at home, they struggled to be familiar enough with local customs to join local culture games. NTC based their understanding on mainstream Taiwanese children’s practice of local religion. Thus, game play explored the different ethnicity between mainstream Taiwanese children and NTC. To follow mainstream Taiwanese peers’ directions to play together, the peers forced NTC to be familiar with the local customs and contexts so that they could assimilate themselves into the mainstream peers’ play culture. NTC reconstructed unique gender identities by playing within the boundaries of local customs and religion.

**Conclusion on factors preventing mixed-gender play.** The main purpose of this section was to examine how dominant discourses prevented, or facilitated, play involving children of opposite genders. This section examined mixed-gender play content, and the influence of dominant discourses, emphasizing four factors in the children’s learning processes: (1) classroom management; (2) familial influences; (3) the children’s toys and choice of games; and (4) the influence of local customs and religion. Rather than focusing on evident differences in girls’ and boys’ play, I highlighted incidents noting how “crossers” involved in mixed-gender play weakened, or strengthened, classroom gender divisions. This section also showed how local culture factored in determining whether or not opposite-gender children tended to play together. Overall, mixed-gender play revealed how NTC and peers resisted, or submitted to, dominant gender discourses.
First of all, I found that teachers, through classroom management, positioned themselves to construct a unique gender culture for children, especially when teachers and girls both embraced stereotypes about boys that are largely the product of sexist practices, e.g., sex-role socialization, and the biological fact that boys are more likely to be hyperactive. Under these circumstances, girls and boys had fewer opportunities to play together, given that teachers actively discouraged mixed-gender play through disciplinary regulation. Secondly, parents’ attitudes played an important role in preventing or facilitating mixed-gender play. Concerned about maintaining traditional gender differences, many parents actively encourage children to play with same-gender friends. Some parents see it as a personal responsibility to help children select playmates of the same gender, reinforcing traditional gender models.

The subtle factors described above encouraged children to categorize the play world as either female or male. Interestingly, children in this study went beyond embracing traditional female or male gender roles; they also categorized various types of toys and games as male or female. Hence, a third factor that surfaced during my examination of mixed-gender play was the role that peer interaction played in the children’s construction of gender norms and gendered social orders. My observations revealed that specific activities were reserved for girls or for boys. For example, they regarded sword play as an activity for boys, while treating playing with dolls as an appropriate activity for girls. Finally, local customs and religious beliefs shaped children’s socialization processes, given that these were an important part of the
children’s life experiences. Local and religious customs exerted a strong influence on the children’s attitudes toward the human body and tended to reinforce traditional gender roles. During observations, I found that boys often told girls they were unfit to handle the play swords because of the girls’ impurity. Crucially, a local religious practice held a similar prohibition, where women are traditionally prevented from carrying sedan chairs holding sacred images during religious processions. Nevertheless, girls, during mixed-gender play, often resisted such traditional perceptions and evidently developed values regarding their own bodies. Interestingly, while play a desire to reinforce traditional gender models apparently influenced efforts to prevent children from engaging in mixed-gender, this gender-based segregation actually hindered their capacity to identify positions in the gendered social hierarchy.

Given that parents and teachers often discouraged mixed-gender play, it is useful to examine some of the reasons that children occasionally selected an opposite-gender friend. The following sections explore some reasons why the girls and boys I observed opted to ignore restrictions against mixed-gender play.

What Girls Think About Playing with Boys

Girls’ Reasons for Choosing Opposite-Gender Playmates

Choosing a good-looking male playmate could not simply explain why girls participate in mixed-gender play. Below, I present girls’ possible reasons to play in a mixed-gender group from the perspectives of establishing opposite-gender friendship, exploring themselves in boys’ play culture and promoting girls’ power as caregivers to
boys. However, with fathers’ quest for social mobility manifested through parenting concerns for the classroom and their daughters, the fatherly intervention often concealed NT girls’ friendships with boys.

**My playmate is my supporter.** Establishing friendship with the opposite-gender is one socialization process in childhood. Several girls’ prioritized choosing a trustworthy male playmate from whom they could learn new knowledge. Thus, two NT girls at JB Kindergarten made the following statements. Yu-Qin said: “Fu-Cheng helps me...teaches me. He plays with me. I play with him” (FN 103007). Xing-Yan added: “Da-Wei told me the arithmetic answers. When he wants to play with me, I tell him okay” (FN 111007).

The girls focused on the boys’ intelligence, capability and friendliness as criteria for selecting them as playmates. Some girls found a sense of humor important to establish friendship with males. Several girls pointed out that the boys who have a good sense of humor could win girls’ friendship more easily than the boys who did not.

**Sense of humor.** Jokes and humorous expressions proved to be the best bridge to communicate interpersonal relationships. Nevertheless, boys who cracked jokes or made fools of themselves usually broke class rules. On one hand, they became troublemakers, which put them on the teachers’ bad side; on the other, the courage to make fools of themselves and engage in rebellious actions increased classmates’ appreciation, especially certain girls.

At JB Kindergarten, Min-Hui, a mainstream Taiwanese girl, said: “Zi-Yang is a fighter, but he is such a humorous person! He is a monkey boy who walks like a monkey.
He brags about his ability to us when Teacher Su is not looking. He is a mischievous ghost!” (FN 111407). Xin-Li, another mainstream Taiwanese girl from the same class, added that “[The boys] imitate robots walking on the table when Teacher Su goes downstairs. It is lots of fun. They like to make jokes. I wanted to sit with them” (FN 111507). Similarly, Chen-Xi, a Taiwanese girl from WK Kindergarten, said: “Xian-Ren jokes about how two kittens lick his fingers. This kind of thing is very funny. I wanted to draw pictures with him” (FN 122607).

Girls from both kindergartens explored the two sides of their feelings when criticizing favorite male peers. Boys who always made jokes or acted as class clowns in an otherwise orderly class became controversial figures and therefore caught teachers’ and peers’ attention. At JB Kindergarten, Zi-Yang, a 6-year-old NT boy, used his fists to resolve his disagreements with male peers, but he knew how to make jokes to have fun with girls. None of the girls played fighting games with him, but several appreciated his bravery as well as his charming wit and humor. However, Zi-Yang’s violent behavior and his humor polarized relations with many female classmates.

Some girls indicated that they had fun listening to these boys’ jokes. I enjoyed listening to how they talked to some degree, too; but I found that their jokes constantly related to their female peers’ appearances, clothes, or lack of ability and boys’ use of prowess. For example, once Da-Wei told the girls that when the Loch Ness Monsters attacked them, they would only scream and be afraid to die, but he would dare to fight the monsters and save them. The girls alternately despaired, laughed and cheered along with
Da-Wei’s prediction even though he talked nonsense (FN122707). In the kids’ world, girls and boys deserved to enjoy their life experiences when sharing jokes; however, teachers and adults should act as gatekeepers, listening to their jokes and mediating stereotypes. In my fieldwork, children told their jokes all the time when the teachers stepped away, for example, when the children used the restroom.

**Interesting games.** To explore boys’ games, few girls limited themselves within the boundaries of female gender norms. Some girls chose to play with boys because they were more interested in playing specific boys’ games than in considering playmates’ gender; enjoying games was their primary consideration.

At WK Kindergarten, Jie-Jun, a 6-year-old mainstream Taiwanese girl, used to play with boys whose games she liked. She said: “[When you play boys’ games,] if you win, you are the winner; if you fail, you cannot cry and complain to others” (FN 112207). When she played with a top, put puzzles together and cooperatively built cities with boys, she presented herself as a thinker and designer, equal to her male playmates. She negotiated skillfully with her playmates when participating in boys’ games. Once, I suggested that she go draw pictures with a group of girls. She replied that she preferred to play “games” than to draw princesses and beauties. Jie-Jun’s preferences clearly aligned with boys’ games as she focused on games that she enjoyed, regardless of whether participants came from the same gender.

**Making friends makes my freedom.** Experiencing boys’ play culture is another reason to attract girls to participate in boys’ games. The next two examples involve how
teachers and peers make judgments about girls playing with groups of boys. Jia-Jia and Yi-Ting were two 6-year-old mainstream Taiwanese girls from JB kindergarten. Jia-Jia noted that she liked to play with boys because most allowed her to criticize unfair treatment when at play, but she said that she could not do the same with female peers. Jia-Jia perceived that it was not good to complain about the fairness of the games to her female peers because they would become angry with her. She also said she enjoyed play fighting with Min-Shan, a 6-year-old mainstream Taiwanese boy. Min-Shan never became angry with her if she beat him in pretend fighting games. He never told her that she could not play pretend fighting games because of being a girl. These experiences encouraged her to play with boys. She liked Min-Shan and enjoyed playing with him after school. Even though she cited many advantages for playing with boys in class, she supposed that she should choose to play with girls because she was a girl and should play with girls (FN 122007).

The above incident reflects why Jia-Jia enjoyed playing with boys. Min-Shan, her male playmate, even permitted her to participate in the traditionally all-male fighting game. In Jia-Jia’s case, she managed to traverses traditional gender boundaries without losing her identity as a charming and attractive girl, one who gained the attention of many of her male peers. Her overall popularity, along with her amiable relations with male peers, enabled her to transcend strictly enforced gender roles in the classroom.

You are a girl but you played boys’ games. Yi-Ting played baseball with her elder brother at home and played pretend fighting games with boys in class. She indicated
that she was interested in joining the boys’ play groups because when she compared boys
to girls, boys played many games and had new toys, whereas girls focused only on
playing house, putting on make up, or babysitting. Different games were much fun and
contained different elements. In reality, though, girls’ and boys’ groups marginalized her;
even worse, she received many warnings from Teacher Su because of her close
friendships with Da-Wei and Zi-Yang, who engaged in play fighting games together,
severely damaging her reputation as an “appropriate” female.

While Teacher Su often disciplined and marginalized Yi-Ting, Jia-Jia usually
enjoyed the teacher’s positive attention. This begs the question: Why was Jia-Jia
permitted to cross gender boundaries, but Yi-Ting frequently endured criticism for doing
so? The answer can be found in the two girls’ divergent approaches to gender-doing. Jia-
Jia, unlike Yi-Ting, shrewdly recognized the classroom to be an inappropriate venue for
gender-bending behavior. Therefore, she only played with boys after school, adopting the
“sassy” girl role and was willing to argue with them. In class, however, she closely
followed gender norms and dutifully played with other girls. In addition, she
submissively followed all of Teacher Su’s directives, unlike Yi-Ting, who often argued
with Teacher Su. Jia-Jia’s cooperative relationship with Teacher Su, and her capacity to
negotiate with classmates (regardless of gender) contributed to her position as the most
popular girl in class.

Jie-Jun, Jia-Jia and Yi-Ting had more concern about games, toys and play rules
than playmates’ genders. Still, mixed-gender play always caused trouble when peers saw
gender performances as matched with boys’ play culture, causing peers to suspect that their gender approach was that of the tomboy. These girls primarily focused on interest in the game itself, rendering the playmate’s gender unimportant.

**Taking care of the boys.** At JB kindergarten, I observed several girls who played elder sisters, mothers, or caregivers with some boys. Xing-Yan sat beside Jun-Hong, a 6-year-old NT boy, whose mother was a Vietnamese immigrant, before I began my fieldwork. Xing-Yan helped him to voice his opinion when he stammered as he tried to speak with others. She also continually reminded him to wipe his nose and to wash his hands. Xing-Yan played caregiver to Jun-Hong, and he liked to follow her in class, acting as her bodyguard; however, Xing-Yan’s father found out about his daughter’s friendship with Jun-Hong and was firmly opposed to her sitting beside the boy. Her father did not want them to be friends, so Teacher Su changed Xing-Yan’s seat, but I found that Xing-Yan still reminded Jun-Hong to wipe his nose during free playtime. Xing-Yan said that because Jun-Hong was her good friend, she did not allow anyone to humiliate him: Jun-Hong had a mild learning disability and spoke with a lisp (FD 111507).

When Xing-Yan’s father intervened to break up her friendship with Jun-Hong, it might have reflected his concern that Xing-Yan had served as the boy’s subordinate. This role effectively placed her at a lower gender position than Jun-Hong. Although both of these children were NTC, Xing-Yan’s father had taken steps to conceal the fact that his wife came from Vietnam. He seemed determined to facilitate Xing-Yan’s social mobility; for this reason, he encouraged her to develop friendships with students capable of
excelling academically. Jun-Hong, who also had a Vietnamese mother, did not appear to fall into this category. Indeed, Xing-Yan’s father demanded that Teacher Su seat his daughter next to excellent students, an apparent effort to support Xing-Yan’s academic progress. As it turned out, though, Xing-Yan’s tablemates had no interest in discussing either arithmetic or questions related to the abacus with her. Indeed, they appeared to resent her ability to figure out problems. Nonetheless, Xing-Yan’s father continued his efforts to segregate Xing-Yan from other NTC, thereby maintaining ethnic division and establishing gendered social order.

**My daughter cannot play with your son.** In the same class at JB kindergarten, Yu-Qin, a 6-year-old NT girl, always played house with Fu-Cheng, a 4-year-old mainstream Taiwanese boy. Even though Fu-Cheng was two years younger than Yu-Qin, he often led when working on assignments, but Yu-Qin acted as a caregiver to him in their play and daily interaction, such as cleaning his desk, putting his books in his cabinet, or providing a tissue for him to wipe his nose. Yu-Qin cared about Fu-Cheng, yet I never saw him do these things for her. From Yu-Qin’s viewpoint, Fu-Cheng was a very important playmate who always appeared in the pictures she drew. Once, Yu-Qin drew a picture of a wedding present for her and Fu-Cheng; in the picture, she dressed as his bride. The picture aroused the anger of Yu-Qin’s father, who feared that a male peer would contaminate his little daughter.

Yu-Qin’s father went to the school and argued with the school administrator and firmly required Fu-Cheng’s parents to forbid their son to play with his daughter;
otherwise, he would transfer his daughter to another school. When Yu-Qin’s father posed his argument, Teacher Su, who is actually Fu-Cheng’s biological mother as well as his teacher, answered: “Fu-Cheng is my son! I am Fu-Cheng’s mother! What are you saying about my son? What do you think about my husband and me?” Yu-Qin’s father left without apologizing for his prejudgment of Fu-Cheng. It is unclear whether Yu-Qin’s father was concerned about his daughter losing her innocence by learning about marriage or if he was afraid that another male would usurp his authority. In either case, the father could be seen as controlling and overprotective. This incident showed a power struggle between adults and children.

**Conclusion.** Simply because fathers became concerned about their daughters’ interaction with male peers did not mean that this interaction ceased. On the contrary, the girls’ roles in play expanded to include requiring authority with opposite-gender playmate. In my data, several girls at JB Kindergarten performed domestic duties by managing family affairs and family members in domestic play. They required boys to be their sons or their younger brothers; they could take them to shopping, wedding banquets, or attending local temple festivals. Doing so, they symbolically affirmed gendered social positions as mothers or elder sisters who have the right to stroll freely in public. While traditional restrictions on the mobility of Taiwanese women are no longer in place, this role-playing exercise remains important to girls who are seeking to develop gender identity.

According to these incidents, various factors influenced girls’ options to play with a boy or a group of boys. These girls thought how they felt about their male playmates;
for example, these boys made them feel supported, humorous and welcome them to join the males’ game, etc. The primary consideration for the girls was to feel good playing with male. Enjoying the boys’ games was also a factor in attracting girls to participate in mixed-gender play. Differently, girls at JB Kindergarten who played with boys fulfilled caregiver roles that I seldom found at WK Kindergarten. Generally, all of the girls chose male playmates on their own; some of them played with male peers, but opinions also came from teachers and parents.

In the girls’ mixed-gender play, mainstream Taiwanese girls learned to cooperate with opposite-gender playmates, to present individual needs, as well as to claim gendered social positions. They observed male playmates’ behaviors and experienced various gender powers that entwined in their gendered social orders. Thus, learning how to deal skillfully with these power relationships as they defended gender norms helped girls build gender positions in mixed-gender groups. Sometimes, however, when girls felt too troubled to deal with complex issues surrounding gender differences between girls and boys, they rejected playing with boys. A variety of reasons follow.

**Girls’ Resistance to Playing With Boys**

Typically, most girls do not want to play with boys. Scholars (Signorella, Bigler, & Liben, 1993) have also indicated that as girls play with same-gender peers, they find female role models to strengthen their feminine approach and build female identity. I disagree, however, because whether or not girls play with boys, they will still construct gender roles, especially various types of female gender identities. Moreover, no matter
whether the girls in this study played with boys, the young girls expressed many reasons that they rejected playing with boys and were likewise rejected by boys.

**Declining boys’ play fighting.** Many girls refused to accept the boys’ play fighting in class. At WK Kindergarten, several girls expressed why. Yun-Shan noted, “Good guys do not fight with each other; good guys never want to hurt others,” (FN 112307) while Pei-Jun commented, “Only boys play fighting games; I dislike playing with them” (FN 112207).

The two girls stated that only boys played fighting games, which the girls disliked; they hated their male peers because fighting in the classroom might cause them to hurt each other. These girls would not join in the play. In a similar example, Jia-Yu disliked these kinds of boys, and she rejected playing with them to prevent becoming “ugly” — when girls play fighting games, they look less feminine.

Jia-Yu: [When they play fighting games,] they look childish and not smart! My elder brother played with blocks and looks very cultured!

Researcher: Do you mean you dislike boys’ playing fighting games and you do not want to play with them?

Jia-Yu: Yep! Girls should not play fighting games or they will become ugly!

Researcher: Girls cannot play fighting games?

Jia-Yu: Yeah! Only ugly boys and ugly girls play fighting games (FN 112307).

In the second example girls redefined fighting in Little Mermaids play.

Chen-Xi: [Boys played fighting games.] Boys look so wild! I dislike them! Girls look different. We are well-behaved girls because we do not play fighting games.
Researcher: When you played Little Mermaid yesterday, you fought with Ren-He [a boy] didn’t you?

Chen-Xi: He played an evil being in the sea world. We were going to the prince’s party, but he did not allow us to go to there. We challenged him.

Researcher: Were you playing a fighting game with him?

Chen-Xi: No! We are girls; we were not playing fighting games. We were playing Little Mermaids. We were playing Little Mermaid Kung-Fu.

Researcher: So you mean you did not play boys’ fighting game?

Chen-Xi: Yep! ‘Cause we are Little Mermaids. (FN 111907)

Here, Chen-Xi insisted that she and her peers were Little Mermaids even though they battled for their freedom to go to a party, she claimed that they did not playing fighting games with boys. Jia-Yu and Chen-Xi implied that girls could not and should not play fighting games with boys because they wanted to present good female manners in contrast to the boys, who fought and lost manners. They also implied that good children know how to use words to communicate with others, not fight with them.

Do fighting games belong only to boys? In the two classrooms, boys played fighting games as an instrument to protecting self and territory. Why did the girls not acknowledge doing so as boys do? Why did the boys’ fighting game cause female enmity? I questioned the reasons to strip away girls’ natural instincts to fight with others when society required them to be feminine. In early childhood classrooms, boys playing fighting games is more acceptable than girls doing so. The girls found fighting barbaric; I seldom heard the girls say that they wanted to fight with others when angered. Girls
recognized the positive side of fighting games for enjoyment or emotional reflection, but they did not believe in unleashing their physical aggression.

At JB Kindergarten, however, I learned new viewpoints from Xing-Yan and Yi-Ting. In this next example, boys could run, move and yell when playing with swords or fighting, but these girls did not agree with this behavior.

Researcher: I seldom see you playing with boys now.

Xing-Yan: I colored the Barbie bride book. Boys played with swords or fighting games. I cannot play with them.

Researcher: Why do boys like to play these games?

Xing-Yan: I do not know! . . . ‘Cause they are boys! They run, jump, and yell when they play with swords or fight.

Researcher: They do these things.

Xing-Yan: Boys can do these things.

Researcher: Can you run and move here?

Xing-Yan: No. We girls cannot, but boys can do it. (FN 122707)

Xing-Yan had clear ideas about how boys acted when they played with swords or in fighting games, and she recognized that girls are not accustomed to engaging in these behaviors. This classroom culture taught girls the kinds of games reserved for girls or for boys. When I interviewed her mother at her home, she said her daughter did not play with boys because of their boorish behaviors, which she did not want her to imitate (AT 112307). From Xing-Yan’s schooling experiences and her parents’ expectations, she learned that boys engaged in wild behaviors and yelling when they played fighting or
sword games, inappropriate actions for a well-educated girl. Moreover, these stereotypes caused her to think that girls would become masculine if they played such games.

In a fourth example, I interviewed Yen-Ping, Jia-Jia and Yun-Cheng, three mainstream Taiwanese girls. We discussed their defiance of traditional gender norms.

Researcher: Why do I seldom see you girls playing with boys?

Yen-Ping: I dislike them.

Yun-Cheng: I do not want to play with them. Boys play fighting game.

Yen-Ping: They are just playing. They cannot hurt us.

All of girls: They play fighting games!

Researcher: I know!

Yen-Ping: They hurt each other. They hurt us.

Researcher: How did they hurt you before?

Yen-Ping: [She made a face] They fought. . . The winner wanted to cut off the loser’s penis.

Researcher: What?

All of girls yelled out: P-e-n-i-s.

Researcher: What? What are you talking about?

Yen-Ping: I argued with Zi-Yang. He became angry and he said, “I will use my sword to cut off your vagina.”

As a detached researcher, I was horrified at the degree of the violence expressed by the girls and boys. So when I heard that I turned off my recorder because their words were chilling. My heart beat rapidly, and I felt my face turn red. I thought it was
inappropriate for these young girls, but they continued this line of conversation and I listened and thought about their concerns.

All of girls looked scared as they watched Yen-Ping.

Researcher: Wait! What was your reply to him?

Yen-Ping: I told him I would beat him to death and cut his penis off.

All of girls laughed and cheered Yen-Ping’s answer (VT 010908).

The interview context was beyond my understanding for 6-year-old girls, especially Yen-Ping’s answer to Zi-Yang’s threat. I still remember hearing how Zi-Yang threatened her and how shocked I was about the young children’s quarrels. I realized that these young human were conscious of their own sexuality. Initially, they discussed how fighting games hurt people and that fighting is violent. The girls and I knew Zi-Yang and Yen-Ping exaggerated, but the controversial point is that they already knew how to talk about genitals and used this type of language in the tricky relationship between violence and gender. Obviously, human genitalia hold multiple meanings as a source of life, sexual desire, or enjoyment; but when these 6-year-old children used them to quarrel with opposite-gender peers, it was a teachable moment for gender education. The children’s sharing with me such gendered knowledge in their peer interactions was valuable to me as I conducted research on kindergartners’ gender construction. Adults must listen to life experiences to understand how the children construct gender knowledge.

**Unfair gender power and control of space.** Boys commonly used more space than girls. However, using more space created invisible gender inequity. The following incident concerned Zi-Yang and his male peers, who used Yun-Cheng’s table to construct
swords. Yun-Cheng asked Zi-Yang not to occupy her space, but he did not move his items. Then, Yun-Cheng reported to Teacher Su. Teacher Su perfunctorily told boys that they should not bully Yun-Cheng because she was a girl. After Teacher Su left, Zi-Yang told Yun-Cheng that Teacher Su did not punish them because they had not done anything wrong. Later, I saw Yun-Cheng use a ruler to draw a line to divide her and Zi-Yang’s space, warning him not to cross this line; these strategies were useless.

In the following days, I noticed that the boys occupied Yun-Cheng’s table again. Moreover, Zi-Yang stretched his legs and arms into Yun-Cheng’s space. Several times, Yun-Cheng complained about this behavior to Zi-Yang or to Teacher Su, but to no avail. Teacher Su reminded Zi-Yang to avoiding occupying Yun-Cheng’s space, but she convinced Yun-Cheng that boys need more space. Teacher Su liked to keep a harmonious classroom, but her attitude seemed unintentionally sexist and unfair regarding space. As Teacher Su could not effectively maintain fairness, Yun-Cheng resisted gender inequity by countering Zi-Yang, continually complaining to female peers about “adult favoritism toward boys” (FN 120807).

**Boy territory.** Gender space limited girls’ choice to play with boys versus boys’ choice to play with girls. In the study, “boy territory” indicated where girls did not want to play. The following scenarios illustrate the girls’ images about “boy territory.”

At WK Kindergarten, the boys ran, chased one another and wrestled in the reading corner before naptime. Teachers seldom paid attention to the boys in the reading corner, a fairly private place, safe and cozy, with floor mat, soft cushions, seats and bookshelves, where the boys liked to sit, lie down, rough-house and hide when they were
reading, play fighting, or playing tricks on male peers. An environment and play culture like this made girls think of the reading corner as “boy territory.” Few girls entered the reading corner because they thought that the boys’ area would contaminate them. Some girls even told me that they did not want to read books there because the books smelled like boys—their bodies, perspiration and smelly socks (FN 112107).

These qualities prevented many girls from playing with boys there. For example, once Jia-Hong, a 6-year-old NT boy, invited You-Li, a mainstream Taiwanese girl, to play cards in the reading corner. You-Li ran to the girls’ group and said, “I could not enter a boys’ place” (FN 122107). She rejected the invitation to go to the boys’ corner because no girls wanted to play with him, especially not there.

Comparing these examples, no girls except Jie-Jun entered “the boys’ territory” because boys’ play culture flourished there: fighting, wrestling and shooting. Thus, girls made connections concerning the corner, play culture and the boys’ playgroup. When one gender claims a specific space in which to play, either implicitly or explicitly, opposite-gender peers must keep out. Space reserved for children sent a silent message about what gender power and gender stereotype meant.

In these incidents, the use of classroom space reflects gender stereotypes and gender power. Kindergartners who can skillfully invade others’ space and capture others’ resources enjoy supremacy over those who fail to protect their space. The priority in Teacher Su’s classroom is to maintain harmonious peer relationships, keeping a collectivist ideology under such circumstances, nearly preventing children from challenging dominant discourses. As Yun-Cheng’s incident suggests, Zi-Yang played a
hegemonic role in dominating his female classmate. Teacher Su ignored the subtle relationship of gender, power and space, allowing gender stereotypes to become the norm.

Different requirements about appropriate manners for children in public came into play as children negotiated personal space. Ladylike behavior dictates that girls refrain from stretching in their seats, but most adults permit boys to stretch while sitting. In addition, adults encouraged boys, but not girls, to explore unfamiliar and expansive environments. Commonly, adults have different expectations for boys and girls, which not only prevented Teacher Su’s class from understanding appropriate gender performance, but also reinforced gendered social order.

Conclusion. Rejection of fighting game culture and the unequal to use the space were not the only two experiences that caused girls to resist playing with boys. At the end of my classroom observation, as girls were growing up, they would soon enroll in elementary schools. One day, they claimed that big girls needed to learn more girls’ gendering roles before they studied in elementary school.

One of the girls, Ya-Yu, indicated that her older sister mentioned that elementary school girls do not play with boys. She then said, “I will go to elementary school…I do not want to play with Da-Wei” (AT 010708). Learning girls’ manners by opting to play only with girls amounted to one strategy to become “big girls.” Further, as mainstream girls needed to establish female identity, they resisted boys not only because the boys are different from girls but, but primarily because they struggled to become “big girls.” But mixed-gender play findings did not show NT girls’ resistance in relations with mainstream peers due to powerlessness and the need to count on NT boys for support.
What Boys Think About Playing With Girls

Peer Pressure Stopped Boys to Play with Girls

Peer pressure might be the main factor influencing 6-year-old boys to reject playing with girls. Gender stereotyping of girls causes many boys to think that playing with girls diminishes masculinity. When a boy plays with a girl, he could be labeled “in love with a girlfriend,” or called a sissy. The following incidents detail boys’ gender bias toward female peers and how they developed excuses to avoid playing with girls.

Only idiots play with girls! At JB Kindergarten, Zi-Yang, Min-Shan and Min-Cheng disclosed their gender stereotypes to the researcher, which influenced them to reject playing with girls:

Researcher: You seldom play with girls, right?

Min-Cheng: They are old grandmas!

(These boys smiled at one another strangely, and then they started to imitate old women working slowly.)

Researcher: Hey! Guys, what do you mean by “old grandmas?”

Min-Cheng: They like to interfere in the affairs of others.

Min-Shan: If you aggravate them, they will make faces at you!

Researcher: What do you do?

Min-Shan: [Imitated the motions of running]

Researcher: You mean that you will run away?

Min-Shan: [Smiled but said nothing]
Zi-Yang: Do not arouse their anger! [When he said so, he brought his index finger to his lip.]

Min-Cheng: Do not hang around with girls! The more you are with them, the more trouble you have!

[All of them repeated what Min-Cheng said. They laughed uncontrollably.]

Then, Min-Cheng and Zi-Yang jeered at Min-Shan for writing love letters to Jia-Jia, a female classmate. Min-Shan fought back, saying, “Only idiots playing with girls!” As Min-Shan quarreled with them, Min-Cheng and Zi-Yang derisively mocked: “You are a girl! You are a girl! (AT 010407)

This interview exposed the boys’ predisposition about girls (e.g., being an old grandma, having a nasty face and troublesome) and the results of playing with girls (e.g., “Only idiots play with girls”). Moreover, Da-Wei claimed that “If you make mistakes, they (girls) condemn you until you apologize. If you do not follow them, then they harass you to death!” (AT 112307).

Boys often mocked peers who played with girls. They used peer pressure to humiliate apparently un-masculine boys. Some still found an alternative masculinity necessary or important, and they persisted in playing with female peers and resisting peer pressure (Paechter, 1998). Peers misunderstood boys who made friends with girls, and teasing caused children to terminate cross-gender friendships. The main reason was that children at this particular age established gender identities.

The misunderstanding of girls related to boys’ life experiences. The boys’ misconstruction of images about girls could direct them to avoid playing with girls. At JB
Kindergarten, several NT boys supposed that girls did not know how to construct robots. Moreover, the girls, in their eyes, were talkative, timid, and delicate; thus, their character was difficult to communicate. Similarly, at WK Kindergarten, some boys claimed that most girls could not play boys’ games, so they would not play with girls (AT 111607).

Prejudiced views caused boys to avoid playing with girls. Boys chose playmates based on similar game-playing abilities and interests. However, boys’ peer experiences in class and family kinship might create boys’ gender bias toward girls’ images.

Cheng-Quan, an NT boy, indicated that he did not want to play with female classmates, nor did he want to play with his elder sister at home because boys play games differently with girls. Cheng-Quan indicated that he, instead of his sister, could play online games with his father (AT111707). Following his experiences, he noted that the online game should belong to boys and he supposed that girls are inadequate to play online games. In class, he stayed with the boys’ group. His family experiences and his friendships in class could influence his gender stereotyped attitude toward females.

Even Cheng-Quan’s gender construction example could not fully explain the complicit gender roles as they relate to social learning or social construction. But these examples showed that these boys saw that their interests in games differed from those of girls, so they did not want to play with girls and thus did not know how to play with girls.

The girls focused decisions on future identities as first graders who do not expect to play with boys, whereas boys’ concerns focused on reality—playing with same-gender peers who have similar abilities to be protectors and guardians. The boys’ peer pressure
also reinforced themselves in class and family gender norms. In the end, gender stereotypes influenced most boys’ decisions about playing with girls.

Next, boys’ reasons to play with girls include friendships and peer interaction strategies. Boys considered female playmates’ appearances and character, focusing on having fun with female playmates. When games, toys, or role play provided opportunities to create gender norms in their play, boys wanted to play with girls.

The Boys’ Opinions about Playing With Girls

These 5- and 6-year-old boys faced challenges if they played with one or more girls. Peers ridiculed them as romantics or victims of “predatory females.” However, boys who played with girls prioritized “having fun.” Some boys focused on enjoying games, instead of playmates. Boys who played with girls readily explained why.

The importance of appearance versus the importance of personality.

Appreciation a girl’s appearance was quite important and helpful to catch boys’ eyes, especially since boys viewed girls as gentle, soft, tender and sweet. Such characteristics could be enacted “normally” to show femininity. “Proper” girls needed appearance and personality to make friends with boys. Here, boys like to play with Cai-Yui, a mainstream Taiwanese girl, because of her pleasant appearance and amiable personality.

In my interview, Xian-Ren and Yu-Long, mainstream Taiwanese boys, explained their reasons for playing with Cai-Yui. They indicated that she has long hair, and is beautiful, tender and sweet. Further, she helped Yu-Long arrange his book bag.

Female characteristics in the boys’ list of preferable female qualities include both outward appearance and personality. If female students received male students’ favor, the
attention resulted from her appearance, reinforcing female gender role stereotypes. A pleasant personality attracts boys. More importantly, from the boys’ view, a girl’s personality needed to adhere to the female gender role, which is obedient and talented enough to support her male friend. Not only does a good appearance make boys favor playing with girls, but also a gentle personality.

**Playing house with female playmates.** Family play enables children to practice gender roles, such as mother, father, or son. They not only learn what these family members experience, but they also indicate their desire to play specific roles in their real families, such as a younger brother in the case below.

Zhi-Gao, a 5-year-old mainstream Taiwanese boy, always played with a group of 6-year-old mainstream Taiwanese girls. In family play, they played his mother and elder sisters who pretended to feed him and teach him to read the English alphabet. These girls nicknamed him “younger brother” in their play and in class (FN 120607).

Zhi-Gao had no older sister at home, so he enjoyed being a young brother in his dramatic play, even if his female playmates controlled and directed the scenario. Zhi-Gao’s case shows that some children who have few siblings or are only children can temporarily satisfy desires to have siblings though family play at school.

Instead of viewing play from the angle of children’s gender construction, almost every Taiwanese teacher in this study thought that reproducing family relationships in class promoted harmonious peer interaction. Teachers expected students to act as big families where peer relationships resembled kinship (VT 112807). Thus, teachers in this study always reminded their 6-year-old students to behave as older siblings and good role
models for the 5-year-olds. Conversely, the 5-year-olds were to respect their “older
brothers and sisters.” Doing so, older children had authority to direct the younger. Age
proved to be a significant factor in influencing the gendered social order.

In contrast with gender power as the main concern of Western gendered order,
(Danby, 1998), Taiwanese children derived classroom gendered social order from age,
sibling-like peer relations and gender roles in peer interaction. The playmate relationship
is also important in constructing gendered social order. Nevertheless, in the gendering
order processes, boys and girls sometimes disputed gender hierarchies.

**Male quality over female quantity?** The patriarchal system suggests that boys
are innately endowed with male-only powers. Ren-He, a 6-year-old mainstream
Taiwanese boy, played Little Mermaid with a group of 5-year-old mainstream Taiwanese
girls. Unlike the American version of *The Little Mermaid* with a female witch who has
masculine characteristics, the Japanese version to which Taiwanese children are exposed
features a warlock. *The Little Mermaid* is a fictional story that provided children an
opportunity to practice gender roles.

The only boy in the group, Ren-He, played a warlock with magic to dominate
others and engage in fighting games with the Little Mermaids. In their play, he had
authority of life and death. He enjoyed using magic powers when playing with girls. He
said, “I beat you and you are dead because I am a [warlock]” (FN, 113007). I asked him
about the source of his power. He answered, “The [warlock] is more evil, mean and
capable than girls. So I can fight them all” (FN 112607). He claimed, “Unless girl
witches are tougher than [warlocks], no Little Mermaid can beat me” (FN 122007).
Ren-He believed being a warlock made him singularly more powerful than the girls with whom he played despite being outnumbered. His belief concurred with the storyline in *The Little Mermaid*, which reinforces patriarchal power relations between an evil, masculine warlock and little, feminine mermaids. The masculine warlock can control the feminine little mermaids’ desires and freedom. In this critical incident, the conflicts between the warlock and the numerous little mermaids focused on the mermaids’ need for equality (e.g., the freedom to explore themselves in the human world).

**Girls rule!** This incident discusses whether a girl may control a boy. The glass ceiling existed not only in the real adult world, but in children’s mixed-gender play as well. Here, Jie-Jun’s peers selected her, a mainstream girl, to lead a new member, Jia-Hong, a new NT boy, when he sought to participate in the group led by Yi-Xiang, a mainstream boy. Most peers, however, rejected Jia-Hong’s advances because of his recent violent actions and his low academic performance.

Yi-Xiang: You need to follow my rules here.

Jie-Jun: If you join us, you will be the smallest in our group. You also need to follow my command because I am the second boss.

Jia-Hong: Why do I need to listen to both of you?

Jie-Jun: Because you are a new student.

Yi-Xiang: Because I am the big boss here!

Jia-Hong: I do not want to follow a girl’s direction.

Jie-Jun to Jia-Hong: Hey! If you do not follow me, you cannot stay.
Yi-Xiang (authoritatively): **Listen!** Jie-Jun cannot directly order Jia-Hong. Both of you need to follow my rules. I am the only boss over both of you.

After establishing order, Jia-Hong watched them, then left. I asked his reasons. He replied that if he was “a new person,” he would never be treated fairly, so he left since he rejected group norms (FN 122407).

Does gender matter for children when they consider who should lead a group? Leadership was so complicated here that it became entangled with gender, time in the culture, ability to cooperate with peers and game knowledge. From the gendered social order perspective, when Jie-Jun claimed that she was “second boss,” Yi-Xiang and Jia-Hong directly challenged and denied her position, discrediting her. Besides gender hierarchy, social status also was a criterion for deciding “proper” roles. Yi-Xiang and Jie-Jun regarded Jia-Hong as “a newcomer,” or “the other” who did not yet have any legitimate position. Thus, when he asked to participate, Yi-Xiang exercised his leadership role, making it difficult for Jia-Hong to remain. Yi-Xiang and Jie-Jun studied in this class for two years, so even though Yi-Xiang and Jia-Hong were both boys, they had different masculine positions because of seniority, peer relationships and Jia-Hong’s NT status.

Jia-Hong had a hard time adapting himself and making new friends. Teachers revealed that he transferred two months earlier from another kindergarten where he often conflicted with classmates. His inflammatory behavior continued at WK Kindergarten. Teachers there thought Jia-Hong’s problematic behavior resulted from his immigrant mother spoiling him and his own uniquely egotistic personality. My conclusions as to why Jia-Hong did not always directly obey teachers had more to do with Jia-Hong’s NT
status. Jia-Hong had a hard time reconciling divergences between class rules and family culture. Perhaps cross-cultural problems far overshadowed character deficits that may have curtailed his ability to make friends (FD112807).

As Jia-Hong became increasingly desperate for playmates, he became less concerned about playing with opposite-gender peers. His behavior led me to become more attentive to the activities and concerns of gender “crossers,” and to examine how these “crossers” helped me interpret power structures within various play cultures.

**Crossing Gender Boundaries and Establishing Friendships**

Crossing gender boundaries is a critical issue in mixed-gender play. I was particularly interested in how crossers constructed gender roles, and how they resisted dominant gender discourses. Also important is the extent to which peers criticize or accept gender performances, and how peers interpret gender positions in the group. This section examines two issues: how peers viewed crossers; and how children formulated strategies to make opposite-gender friends.

**Crossing Gender Boundaries in Play Groups**

Adopting play culture is a key factor in mixed-gender play. The play culture in a mixed-gender group needs to allow for crossing gender boundaries and challenging gender norms. Similarities in toys and games of children from similar backgrounds (e.g., socioeconomic status, class, cultural background, etc.) allow them to play in mixed-gender groups. In their play process, these peers can co-create a specific play culture. If not, the group might reject those who prefer different toys and games. This group marginalizes children considered outsiders. Particularly, because kindergartners worked
hard to construct gendered knowledge, they are sensitive about how to present gender behaviors according to gender norms. When mixed-gender play allows girls and boys to play together, they must challenge gender norm and reconstruct gendered social order.

**Being familiar with play culture is important.** In mixed-gender play processes, children must deliberately transform thinking and action so they can possess agency to resist or accept the dominant gendered social order. Below, children crossed playgroup and playmate gender boundaries, handling toys and participating in opposite-gender play.

Jie-Jun, an NT girl, joined the boys’ play. Boys played tops, giving them different names like Super III, Long-Life Dinosaur, Unbeatable Spirit, or Incomparable Elf. Jie-Jun brought her top, named Matchless Giant, to the game. I asked Jie-Jun why she could play with them. She told me: “Because I know how to make tops and how to beat them. If you are going to play with them, you need to yell out your top’s name” (FN 110607).

The boys developed social skills and friendships when playing tops. In this mixed-gender play culture, members created a dynamic name for their tops. The names needed not only to contrast with others, but had to be powerful and aggressive. It is essential for boys to give their tops unique and commanding names because the top is a symbol of masculine gender identity; the most ferociously-named top is another way of competing to be the most masculine.

In addition, the group reconstructed social order because the game winner could become the authority figure. Except for Jie-Jun, girls there did not play tops. She became familiar with the top play culture while observing the game when her male friends, Min-Zhe and several other boys, played tops.
Effeminate boys and mannish girls. Min-Zhe, a boy, and Jie-Jun, a girl, both of whom were 5-year-olds mainstream Taiwanese children, were good friends and always played together; nevertheless, Min-Zhe often cried because Jie-Jun would not play with him. The more Min-Zhe begged Jie-Jun, the more she rejected him. She was far more independent than Min-Zhe, skilled in making friends and willing to play with other boys. When I saw Min-Zhe cry for fear of losing Jie-Jun, teachers required him to stop. Teacher Wong said to him, “You’re a crybaby and behave like a girl... You are crying. Your eyes will get red, and you will look like a rabbit!” However, he wanted only to play with Jie-Jun, but even Min-Zhe’s peers recognized that he depended on her, although her feelings were not mutual (FN 121907).

Here, the relationship was more critical to Min-Zhe than Jie-Jun. She could play with several boys, but Min-Zhe played only with Jie-Jun. Min-Zhe’s personality contrasted Jie-Jun’s aggressiveness and competitiveness. In fact, their gender performances differed from traditional notions of femininity and masculinity.

Jie-Jun’s parents purposely chose to dress her in stereotypical pink, rose, or lavender clothing, but she was nevertheless aggressive and autonomous compared to Min-Zhe, sweet with friends and concerned with details. I rode the same Taipei City bus with Min-Zhe and his mother, returning home after school. He insisted on manually swiping the card (bus ticket) by himself and said “thank you” and “good-bye” in Chinese to bus drivers and me. He became upset when he could not formally finish these routines. Once Min-Zhe’s mother told him to give up these procedures one by one or he would be
like an old grandma. Min-Zhe answered: “I must do all of them. It is who I am…If I do not do all of them, Min-Zhe is not Min-Zhe. Min-Zhe will not be your son!” (FN 111007).

It surprised Min-Zhe’s mother and me to hear the way he interpreted his behaviors and his “gender identity.” Min-Zhe’s mother, an elementary school teacher, discussed her concerns about gender performance. She noticed Min-Zhe’s sentimentality and meekness. She was anxious about her son’s personality, which was so circumspect that he appeared feminine, not masculine, especially when comparing Min-Zhe’s characteristics to his best friend’s, Jie-Jun, who exhibited a stereotypical boy’s personality. Their parents compelled them to change their dress and behavior to conform to traditional gender roles because gender dichotomies always place children into basic social categories. Clearly, both sets of parents, who were elementary school teachers, understood that children’s appearances could be an important factor in gender-doing.

**I know I am a boy even though I always play with girls.** Young children were very sensitive about gender categories because they could use the gender category to posit themselves and their peers. Here, Xian-Ren is a mainstream Taiwanese boy who played with mainstream Taiwanese girls. He clarified his gender position and why he played with girls.

Researcher: “Why do you always play with girls, instead of boys?”

Xian-Ren: “I always play with girls, but it does not mean that I am a girl. I know I am a boy. I like to play with the girls because they are beautiful and more peaceful than most of the boys are” (AT 112007).
Xian-Ren claimed his gender type and asserted his opinion with peers, but peers jeered at his behaviors. Sometimes, Xian-Ren failed to defend himself because he was overwhelmed by too many peers. Once, when Jia-Hong saw Xian-Ren drawing a picture with a group of girls, he criticized him: “Sickening! Xian-Ren played with a group of girls! He is a sissy! Xian-Ren is a girl!” (FN 112007)

Though Xian-Ren felt upset about his peers’ criticism, he still claimed that he had his own choice to play with whomever he liked (FD 121907). He knew how to choose between performing his gender role and being dominated by dominant discourses. As Teacher Chen did not appear when Jia-Hong criticized Xian-Ren, I did not see her reaction. But I still could see that teachers never wanted to pay attention to this kind of “verbal attack.”

A “verbal attack” could damage classroom gendered social order, and it showed biased toward children who crossed gender boundaries. Jia-Hong severely criticized Xian-Ren by calling attention to his choice of opposite-gender playmates. Significantly, he posed a serious social threat to Xian-Ren, even though Xian-Ren, as a mainstream Taiwanese boy, enjoyed numerous advantages. However, now Jia-Hong could use gender as a weapon in this rare chance to fight back against a mainstream Taiwanese boy.

When I told Teacher Chen about Jia-Hong’s derogatory remarks, she laughed and said: “It is because he envies Xian-Ren’s ability to make many female friends, but he has none!” She added: “Xian-Ren is skilled in attracting female friends. He is a troublemaker because he has made many female friends, and now the girls are jealous of his attention!”
We cannot allow him to act as a ‘playboy’ in class even though his parents are both teachers in our elementary school” (FN 112007).

She is abnormal. Mannish factors made Jie-Jun’s peers dispute her approach to gender. Playing with boys became a controversial issue in the following dialogue:

Ru-Yue, a mainstream Taiwanese girl: Jie-Jun, likes to play with boys; she likes to be a boy. [All children cry out!]

Ren-He, a mainstream Taiwanese boy: She is abnormal!

Jia-Yu, a mainstream Taiwanese girl: Jie-Jun is a monster!

Researcher: Why? Saying that is unfair to her!

All children: She likes to play with boys...because she acts like a boy. (FN 11907)

During fieldwork, I never directly asked Jie-Jun’s opinion about her choosing to be a boy or a girl, but I noticed that these criticisms bothered her. Instead of blaming peers’ criticisms, I would like to see how these children were concerned with gender norms and what reaction made them defend what it means to be a girl or a boy. After the others noticed that Jie-Jun’s gender performances differed from what they knew, they devalued her behavior and underestimated her. For example, Ru-Yue, Jia-Yu and other mainstream Taiwanese girls created a family dramatic play. They said that Jie-Jun can only to be their pet (e.g., a guard dog) instead of being a sister because she disliked this role. Jie-Jun left the girls’ group and instead found Yi-Xiang, a mainstream Taiwanese boy who pretended to be a work dog. She walked the dog in the classroom (FN 122107).

Even though her mother always dressed her in a pink T-shirt, female peers judged her because of her male playmates, toys and games. Evidently, her clothes could not fully
prove her “femininity.” Many male classmates “dared” to play with her because she had already became their playmate. By allowing her to play with them, these boys had allowed Jie-Jun to cross gender boundaries.

**What could the crossers teach their peers and teachers?** In the incident involving Xian-Ren, Teacher Chen interpreted his gender-crossing behavior as a reflection of his romantic interests, rejecting his claim that he preferred female friends’ milder temperament. Teacher Chen could not believe that Xian-Ren had interest in anything less than securing girlfriends. Yet, there evidence showed that Xian-Ren genuinely appreciated the girls’ more-pacified nature, and he clearly enjoyed joking and talking with them. Though Teacher Chen did not sanction heterosexuality in her class, still she demonized the intimate friendships between Xian-Ren and his “girlfriends.” I thought she countered young children’s heterosexual friendships because she wanted young children’s minds to be “pure”; therefore, innocent children may not display sexuality. These attitudes may have discouraged the class’s two teachers from becoming actively involved in Xian-Ren’s conflict with his male peers, despite their awareness of the students’ complicated heterosexual friendships. Ironically, Teacher Chen’s playboy characterization of Xian-Ren framed the children’s heterosexual peer interaction in sexual terms, whereas they should have been interpreted as pure and innocent. Further, I assert that Jia-Hong’s commentary allowed the heterosexual position of male traditional dominance to prevail among his classmates.

During observation, Teacher Chen took no time in class to discuss how Jia-Hong and his peers criticized Xian-Ren, ignoring opportunities for dialogue. While Teacher
Chen dismissed Jia-Hong’s verbal attacks on Xian-Ren as the product of “jealousy,” I remained concerned about how Jia-Hong presented mixed-gender friendships as frivolous. To me, both Jie-Jun and Xian-Ren created toys and paintings, made friends and played in mixed-gender groups. But by examining gender behavior, peers found Jie-Jun and Xian-Ren odd, monstrous and nauseating.

I wondered why these children casually criticized Jie-Jun and Xian-Ren’s gender behavior. They noticed “odd behaviors” quite often, a valuable opportunity to recognize diverse gender performances. Jie-Jun and Xian-Ren often resisted the reinforced classroom gender stereotypes. Their responses amounted to strategies for reconstructing classroom gender norms, dependent on how classroom gender culture allowed children’s individuality and construction of gendered social positions.

As Thorne (1993) argues, crossers can teach peers important lessons about the opposite sex. Allowing individual children to present their gender characteristics and pursue their own approaches to gender promotes gender equity and acceptance of classroom diversity. Thus, teachers should support students who struggle with mixed-gender play. Even so, I seldom saw teachers paying attention to the children’s resistance to gender norms during peer interaction.

Establishing Friendships with Opposite-Gender Peers

Mixed-gender play provides opportunities for children to find opposite-gender playmates. Instead of focusing on the conflict of gender power in children’s peer interaction, children shared their experiences to get along with each other.
**Encouraging Interaction between Boys and Girls**

Several boys in the two kindergartens indicated that they favored playing with and becoming friends with girls who assisted them. Several girls sweetly helped and cared for male peers. Their kindness and cordial attitudes established friendships. Differently, girls considered male peers as supporters and approachable friends with humorous characteristics. These reasons indicated possibilities for boys and girls to establish amicable friendships.

Building cross-gender friendships presented more obstacles than same-gender friendships. Xian-Ren found most girls to be more polite than most boys (AT 112607), so he begged Teacher Wang to allow him to sit with girls, causing the class to mock him as a lover. Teacher Wang replied that students could not choose seats because only teachers could assign seats (FN 112207). This response shows that she did not realize his negotiation about the need to find a peaceful and friendly learning environment (group table), though he did not protest his teachers’ authority.

In mixed-gender play, children commonly negotiate, practice and cross the boundaries of masculinity or femininity when resisting classroom gender norms. Several boys practiced respect and honesty when they considered befriending girls.

Jia-Hong complained that Xian-Ren constantly played with girls (FN 121907), such as when Xian-Ren occasionally invited Cai-Yui, a mainstream Taiwanese girl, to play cards with him. I asked Jia-Hong about how to bring boys and girls together to play. He replied they need to fulfill expected gender roles and respect one another and each other’s toys, then they could play together (FN 122007). Yu-Long noted that children
need to be honest and take care of each other’s belongings; moreover, he emphasized that disobeying rules and playing tricks on girls will make them resist boys (FN 121907).

These boys shared their gender-doing experiences on how to build mixed-gender playgroups and cross-gender friendships. Besides, in mixed-gender play, children conform as free agents or accept gender stereotypes when they act as “proper” girls or boys. These experiences could meet further resistance when children play with same- or opposite-gender peers. After engaging in gender experiences, children define and construct consciousness about what kind of peer interactions, activities and spaces are available to them. These play experiences make girls and boys feeling stable with their gender identities, thus “reinforcing their play preferences and further supporting the boundaries between them” (Paechter, 2007, p. 62).

**Chapter Summary**

The chapter began with a discussion of the importance of the mixed-gender play that individual children could engage in that contain masculine and feminine practices, which are meaningfully co-created in their social worlds. In mixed-gender play, children handled various gender discourses when needing to adapt themselves in their unique play culture. In mixed-gender groups, individual children were forced to deal with dominant gender hierarchies relating to gendered social order. By theorizing these above critical incidents, findings displayed possible alternatives when the intertwining of gender hierarchies and gender power opposed gender norms (such as Jia-Hong’s verbal attacks on Xian-Ren’s gender approach).
This chapter discussed four complex factors obstructing children from participating in mixed-gender play. In classroom gender culture, peer interaction experiences reinforced teachers’ and students’ beliefs that children should adopt dominant gender roles as a result of gender role socialization and biology. First, I discussed the children’s schooling experiences. Teachers’ attitudes must be recognized because their concepts and attitudes influenced classroom management strategies, which then created classroom gender culture. Teachers often divided the females and males into two groups, pitting them against each other and fostering gender competition. However, teachers did not show students how to cooperate. Even teachers and several female students recognized that boys’ rudeness caused uneven educational resource distribution. Still, teachers allowed unchecked male domination. Resultantly, girls sometimes felt inferior, lacking skills necessary to participate in the same activities as male counterparts due to injustices. Moreover, classroom rules forced children to adopt female and male gender roles. If teachers believe that children’s gender performances are merely observed through model sexist messages in classroom, then teachers might be powerless to require equal gender rights or challenge sexism, which would likely hinder the possibility of girls and boys playing together.

The second factor, family life experiences, actively influenced children’s mixed-gender play content. Parental authority influenced children’s choice of playmates. Parents selected items for children that often shaped the children’s concepts of femininity and masculinity. The data show that children thought that family dramatic play should portray males and females in typical gender roles. Also, parents control children when at home,
an authority that continued at school. Specifically, NT fathers’ opinions influenced teachers’ curricula practices as they instruct teachers to manage children. Thus, children learned gender behavior from their families’ experiences when they identified items and games belonging to relatives of one gender or the other, which sometimes caused difficulty when participating in mixed-gender play since children may have preconceived notions of what items belong to each gender. Gender culture could be related to how parents and teachers support children. Compared with mainstream peers, NTC’s parents pressured them further because they believed in shaping feminine daughters and masculine sons to help them attain a higher gender position in Taiwanese society.

The third factor, the children’s preference for specific toys and games, was related to the socially constructed gender culture for a specific gender. Many boys played with the Morpher, but few girls recognized it and would be excluded from participating in the Power Rangers game. Hence, no mixed-gender play ensued when boys played Power Rangers. In mixed-gender play, playing with opposite-gender peers could form invisible hierarchies. Peer relations, resource sharing and rule building during play are critical power competencies not always visible but nonetheless important for children to develop play culture. As such, in mixed-gender play, children tend to deal skillfully with these power relationships as they learn to construct gender roles or alter behaviors to avoid defending gender norms. Exclusion becomes part of how boys and girls interact with each other. They know whether they should be allowed to participate in games that are usually only played by the opposite gender. This helps shape the play culture of the classroom, but still creates a barrier to mixed-gender play.
The fourth factor, local culture and religion, influenced the ways children displayed an understanding of female social status and body value in mixed-gender play. Nevertheless, these children did not passively accept these role models; rather, specific NTC struggled to reconstruct gender identities in peer interaction. They resisted, reconstructed and claimed hegemony—whether female or male. Gender taboos present in local customs and religion appeared as an apparent factor in my observation. Several girls defended female gender roles and claimed that only females babysit. Compared with mainstream peers, NTC struggled to familiarize themselves with local customs and religion due to cross-culture backgrounds, which they learned at home. We can thus gather that gender construction is a multidimensional process that cannot be oversimplified by looking at only dimension.

These factors reflected children’s gendered social order in mixed-gender play. However, for play rules, children created new stories according to needs and thoughts. Further, NTC’s and mainstream Taiwanese children’s lifestyles are dissimilar; their experiences cause them to have different outlooks on mixed-gender play. By voicing reasons and concerns, some children resisted dominant discourses when negotiating play rules with opposite-gender peers. In forming mixed-gender play processes, teachers’ and parents’ attitudes are the main influences upon children’s choice of playmates.

Next, the second and third sections of this chapter compared the reasons that girls and boys played with opposite-gender peers. The children’s selection strategies when choosing opposite-gender playmates correlated with their gender types, characteristics and capabilities. Children had opposing reasons to play with mixed-gender peers. Girls
focused on the boys’ characteristics, e.g., humor or the capability to do favors, while boys preferred to choose female peers who are good-looking, sweet and submissive.

Nevertheless, some children also expressed why they disliked playing with the opposite gender. Exclusion was the most common instance that prohibited children from participating in mixed-gender groups. Some girls resisted playing with boys because they disliked the boys’ competitive games, controlled spaces and rude manners; boys’ likewise objected to playing with girls because of peer pressure and concern for and disdain of girls’ seemingly-endless complaints. These stereotypes caused many of them to avert participating in mixed-gender play. Peer relations, resource sharing and game rules could become critical knowledge for young children involved in mixed-gender play. Though power competencies are always invisible, they are important for children to build a gendered social order. The positive experiences in mixed-gender play helped these children to know how to cooperate with opposite-gender peers. In mixed-gender play, children could learn how to construct gender roles or to alter behaviors to avoid contradicting gender norms.

The last section of this chapter examined how children, the crossers, acted in mixed-gender play. This chapter not only emphasized the role of “crossers” in mixed-gender play, but also investigated how when gender roles crossed gender boundaries, gender divisions became weakened or strengthened. Gender performances forced their peers, teachers and parents to pay attention to diverse gender constructions. Effeminate boys and mannish girls appearing in class caused many children to discuss the meaning of being a “nan sheng (男生, male), “nu sheng (女生, female)”, or the possibilities to
choose one’s gender role according to one’s preference. Because the two crossers in WK Kindergarten often performed gender-bending while peers observed them, they discussed and suspected whether or not the gender dichotomies could be the only way to place boys or girls into social categories. However, curiosity concerning socially constructed gender roles were only discussed among themselves, and I never heard teachers respond to such questions during mixed-gender play.

Moreover, as teachers opted not to have classroom discussions and failed to answer children’s questions, gender-crossing issues could be interpreted by students as sexist, homophobic or both. Thus, children, including crossers and non-crossers, were forced to construct gender norms according to gender stereotypes in mainstream families.

Finally, the complexities of mixed-gender plays were interwoven with several external factors in the children’s daily lives, e.g., parenthood, schooling experiences, community culture and so on. Still, children did not passively soak up this information or role models that came from daily experiences. Children carefully manipulate gender power under various discourses—such as class or ethnicity. They often had chances to present individual gender construction and continually build gendered social orders.

The following three chapters will discuss how NT boys and NT girls constructed their gendered childhood.
CHAPTER V

FINDINGS: BOYHOOD

Introduction

This chapter explores gender construction and gendered social order in NT boyhood, concentrating on characteristics of NT boyhood, particularly NT boys’ blurred identities and social hierarchies. First, I describe how NT boys cultivated friendships, struggling with academic and social challenges that sharply limited a capacity to befriend mainstream peers. Second, I provide examples of NT boys’ games, generally informed by popular culture and enabling them to engage in masculine performances involving protecting the earth or females, and how this contributes to boyhood construction. NT boys were generally unfamiliar with many aspects of mainstream peers’ play culture, an omission that reflected low SES. Third, I share NT boys’ primary challenges in meeting teachers’ disciplinary and academic requirements. Last, I show how household and classroom experiences combined to shape NT boys’ gender construction.

The NT Boys in This Study

Eight NT boys participated in the study. Six had Vietnamese mothers, including Cheng-Quan and Yu-Ren, who studied at WK Kindergarten, and Da-Wei, Ming-Yan, Zhi-Jie, and Yi-Hong, who studied at JB Kindergarten. The remaining two NT boys, Jia-Hong and Zi-Yang, from WK Kindergarten and JB Kindergarten, respectively, had Chinese mothers. Although they were the products of transnational marriages, individual differences became apparent when comparing characteristics in terms of family
background and parental expectations. “NT boys” cannot be interpreted as a gender-stereotypical group because differences played a substantial role in shaping individual understandings of being a boy.

Blurred Self-Identities

Observing NT boys and how they interacted with their environments defined NT boys. They clearly stated that they differed from girls and toddlers; in particular, they noted that they had unique abilities to protect girls and the earth. Their views did not differ much from mainstream male Taiwanese peers. However, various factors pushed mainstream Taiwanese boys into leadership roles; typically, NT boys were not tasked with leading, instead being chosen as class helpers. Presumably, this pattern created inferior positions in the gendered social hierarchy that typically placed NT boys below mainstream Taiwanese peers.

At the same time, NT boys presented blurred self-identities. Cross-cultural backgrounds and low socioeconomic status obstructed adaptation to the middle-class cultural atmosphere of the class. Overall, they lacked common social skills required to interact with teachers and peers. Determined to be good students, NT boys often presented masculine characteristics as social capital in peer interaction. Parents compounded these challenges by occasional failure to support academic pursuits, while teachers often inadvertently ignored them.

Notably, blurred gender and cultural identities could give NT boys reason to struggle against low status in classroom gender hierarchies, surfacing as they struggled to assert themselves and tried to perfect strategies to interact with others. These blurred
identities may have limited the capacity to position themselves in peer relationships. Indeed, one can imagine that in daily interaction with teachers and mainstream peers, NT boys asked themselves, “Who am I?” Further, they might have been inclined to question whether they aligned themselves closer with the country and culture of one parent as opposed to the other. Given that they lived in bilingual households, language most likely deepened their confusion. These tensions may have been compounded when conflicts erupted between parents. Indeed, the possibility that mothers could return permanently to their native countries was a fear unique to NT boys’ early-childhood experiences.

**The Struggle with Social Hierarchies**

It is difficult for NT boys to change gendered social hierarchy, which places mainstream Taiwanese boys first, followed by mainstream Taiwanese girls, then NT boys with NT girls on the bottom. Gendered social hierarchy gaps among NT boys and mainstream peers resulted from NT boys’ lower SES instead of unsubstantiated inferior biological characteristics (e.g., mothers from under-developed countries). NT boys struggled with normative communication processes, which either created or reinforced low self-esteem when interacting with mainstream Taiwanese children. Lacking skills needed for social communication with others caused complicated relationships when communicating with girls. NT boys felt particularly compelled to obey social customs to reinforce masculinity. Thus, concerns on gender bending and poor language proficiency blocked friendships between NT boys and mainstream Taiwanese girls.
Social Construction of NT Boyhood

This research framed the main concerns of race, class, and gender in the social construction of the boys’ identities. Moreover, many factors, such as body construction and the role models found in local and popular culture, collectivism, and individuality, allow the boys to shape, resist and recognize their identities. This influence was occasionally profound enough to construct the male body.

The role of local culture in boys’ masculinity. Boys formed male gender identities by popular and traditional animated figures, signs of which appeared daily on their possessions (e.g., clothes, backpacks, shoes, notebooks). Family religious beliefs and community backgrounds were part of NT boys’ life experiences represented in play.

NT boys played the local cultural game, “Eight Generals” (八家將出巡) in JB Kindergarten. By replicating masculine values from classic local tales, they identified certain characteristics (loyalty, justice and protection) for idealized male position. NT boys could promote positions in the gendered social hierarchy when playing these games.

When four NT boys played “Eight Generals” (八家將出巡), they pretended to protect people, arrest evildoers and judge the guilty. This play represented traditional Taiwanese masculine, which is part of the official social status. NT boys adopted the context of local culture in dramatic play to reconstruct masculinity.

The play began when NT boys fashioned accessories. After this, they decorated their faces with traditional colors representing peace, swift justice and benevolence. Face decoration is a way that children learn to use bodies to define gender roles. During play,
boys employed a traditional seven-star step where they effectively swept across the room, using their bodies to announce the magnitude of their presence. The seven-star step pattern concluded in the formation of a circle around an evildoer. To complement the heroic team work, some mainstream Taiwanese boys threw some plastic pieces on the floor to resemble lighting a fire when the Eight Generals passed by (FN 120407).

Four NT boys were very proud of their professional capacities at play because they acted with sanctioned masculinity and peers viewed them as successfully fulfilling charismatic gender roles. In dramatic play, NT boys tried professional positions that are socially expected of men above the working class. In this drama, males are specialists and therefore must work cooperatively to restore peace. This local game is one way young NT boys such as Da-Wei learned that traditional society is collectivist and understand the social benefits that come from doing their share of work and trusting others to do the same. The boys recreated the traditional storylines that represent one aspect of the ideology of Taiwanese male role modeling and collectivist mentality. “Eight Generals” provided them with a traditional Taiwanese folk custom and Taiwanese local culture; however, the context of Transformers or Voltron conveys a popular cultural image that leads boys to act like globalized males.

**The role of popular culture in boys’ masculinity.** Popular culture has come to Taiwan from the globalized entertainment industries of Japan and America, colonizing, to varying success, local ideologies through marketing campaigns and product branding. Transformers from America and Goraion from Japan are particularly successful popular images. Representations of the characters are bought in Taiwan. Products marketed with
these characters included clothes, activity books, games, tableware, backpacks, action figures and costumes, and are infused throughout the NT boys’ world and carry a male ideology supported by the global media. Significantly, these characters’ storylines and ideologies have become part of NT boys’ lives to the extent that they shape gendered identity. As these products infiltrated society, they became indicative of class, economic and social statuses of children and families who purchased them.

NT boys acquired global cultural masculine capital from symbols of popular culture and therefore fought over opportunities to represent themselves in popular icons. For example, they competed for images of the most esteemed superhero on their clothing or to enjoy other access points to popular commercial goods. Thus, the objects and portrayals came to represent ideologies to form gender culture.

Cartoon characters in *Transformers* and *Goraion* played significant roles in Yi-Hong’s and Zhi-Gao’s daily lives and play. They quarreled about what iconic character would likely win a fight (FN 111406). They identified so closely with their respective heroes and imagined a contest that would determine which superhero would be the most masculine, even though the two storylines never aligned in fiction. The two animated characters provided the two dissimilar playmates with similar ideologies; they shared a common enjoyment. The elements from popular culture influenced NT boys’ gendered identity, which was constantly exposed to animated characters while internalizing the individualist values the elements symbolize.

**Collectivism and striving in NT boyhood culture.** Both local and popular culture influenced NT boys’ identities, so when NT boys adapted to the purposes of play,
they could rehearse superheroes’ masculine gender roles. Becoming a hero who could protect the earth, the boys’ goal, is the collectivist essence of masculinity. Both local and popular cultures suggested different concepts of what it means to be a good NT male. In local culture, NT boys recognized that an appropriate male is strong, protects women and children, brings order and justice and yet is secure enough to welcome their mothers’ culture of with generosity and respect. A male in this ideal is a collectivist and uses his strengths to serve his family and immediate community.

In contrast, the idealized male from popular culture is still strong and protective, yet significantly more individualistic. He protects his family and the whole earth. NT boys learn an impersonal form of multiculturalism from these popular influences that negates how they see their mothers treated. For example, when NT boys played fighting games, they claimed that they could protect the earth, wanting to protect Taiwanese and Vietnamese women indiscriminately (FN 111407). They could be heroes to the whole world. Because the storylines came from popular and local culture, superhero play provided NT boys a venue where they could interact with mainstream children with equal footing; a globalized male identity influenced NT boys to see their difference as an individual asset. To be a superhero, a boy must lead and convene a group of peers. Leadership occurs only when peers play together, so the capability to lead others is a practice of collectivism.

NT boys passively established collectivism or individuality according to peer relationships, which were determined by whether or not they could assimilate into the mainstream classroom gender culture. The following incident shows male peers coming
into physical contact. When mainstream males hugged NT boys, physical contact provided the opportunity for the NT boys to befriend mainstream Taiwanese boys and to assimilate themselves into male classroom culture.

*My rear will make good friends with your chest.* Bodily intimacy in class made boys’ friendships possible. At WK Kindergarten, boys used their bodies to enact friendships with one another. Critical incidents show how all boys, regardless of ethnic status, enjoyed using bodies to initiate and maintain feelings toward male peers. Bodily interaction confirmed boys’ gender culture and established protective kinship.

After lunch, the boys washed their hands on a small balcony unseen by teachers. While waiting in line, boys liked to touch one another’s bodies. On one occasion, I saw them call a new boy over. They said, “Hi, boss!” Calling him “boss” created close relationships that allowed boys to hug or to hold hands. While hugging, one boy would say: “My rear will make good friends with your chest”; then the two of them hugged tightly. Following this pattern, boys might say: “My fingers will make good friends with your toes” or “My belly will make friends with your head.” They enjoyed this kind of strange communication and hugging. These actions resembled a secret handshake that let the boys know they were in the “club” of comrades. The behavior allowed all boys to become part of the informal brotherhood with the attendant bodily privileges.

Upper middle-class mainstream Taiwanese boys initiated these behaviors, using this procedure to organize a private culture. NT boys participated in but never initiated this ritualized bonding. To the participants, physical touch was a collective male identity. After NT boys joined the mainstream boys’ group, rather than being excluded as the
minority and continually striving for acceptance into the mainstream culture, NT boys might develop a new identity as one of the members of the class (e.g., collective) through taking part in these actions.

The body contact and intimate speech happened only when these boys gathered in a line to wash their hands. This incident reflects the dominant social hierarchies between NT boys and mainstream Taiwanese boys when the leadership fell to the mainstream Taiwanese boys. The ritual was the mainstream Taiwanese boys’ moment when they stood privately, away from the judging eyes of teachers and female peers who might see friendly behavior as “sissy” or effeminate. I hypothesized that this intimate, gentle bonding among boys is often overlooked in characterizing masculinity. The point was that these mainstream Taiwanese boys, when alone, did not revert to fighting but instead developed a harmonious pattern of interaction. It was unique boys’ culture because I never saw such body contact occur in girls’ groups or in mixed-gender groups.

Body contact between mainstream and NT boys allowed them to establish a familiarity with one another so that when one of their bodies noticeably changed, the boys had to reconfigure friendships yet again to account for changes. The change happened when both NT boys and peers experienced the same male gender culture where the social context might change NT boys’ identities as Taiwanese boys. However, after that moment, for the long term, they still could not stay together, such as at recess.
The Body as a Socially Constructed Site of NT Boyhood

In this study, the social construction of gender identity occurred in context and was influenced by Confucian philosophy. The following incident presented how a boy should believe that parents have the right to determine children’s body rights.

Confucian philosophy guides body construction. Da-Wei, an NT boy, got a radical new haircut; however, the incident went beyond a personal decision and illustrates how Da-Wei got into trouble when his peers and teachers did not support his personal freedom to change his appearance. As classroom gender culture is based on Confucian philosophy, it involves the collective control of body ownership, contrary to the Western ideal of individuality. Confucianists hold that all people must value and protect their bodies for their parents, who feel sadness and pain if offspring hurt themselves. The body belongs to the parents, not the individual child. In the West, the body belongs to the individual. Bodily rights are basic human rights.

The boys’ looks and clothing made gender identity visible to others. Boys, like girls, concerned themselves with appearance because through this visual information, they could present individual meanings of being a boy. Body mattered for the boys because with personal style, a boy could display emotions and preferences. Defending one’s body is a basic human right, but it causes conflict when peers tease about appearance. When Da-Wei’s hair style differed from his peers, he defended his choice.

Da-Wei’s bald head provided a significant transgression against class norms, which increased peer conflicts. Da-Wei tried to resist his peers’ teasing when many classmates asked why he had shaved his head. Da-Wei looked very upset as he tried to
explain how he used scissors to cut his hair. Because he had cut off too much of his own hair, his immigrant mother took him to the barbershop. The next morning, he wore a hat to cover his shaved head. Many of his peers laughed at Da-Wei’s new hairstyle, but he pretended not to care. When Zi-Yang, another NT boy, grabbed his hat, Da-Wei beat Zi-Yang and retrieved it. At that point, the students laughed at Da-Wei’s bare head again. Teacher Su noticed the teasing and the fighting between the two boys and instructed the class to pay attention to their arithmetic questions instead of looking at Da-Wei’s head. She said: “Da-Wei must take responsibility for his bad behavior. He cut his hair and did not protect himself. That is why he is now bald. He brought this upon himself! In this class you are not allowed to willfully attack him again! Go and practice your assignment!”

During the day, classmates tried to steal Da-Wei’s hat several times and Da-Wei used one hand to keep the hat on his head when the other hand to strike whomever intended to take it (FN 111007). Teacher Su’s comment and Da-Wei’s peers’ behaviors presented unfriendly reactions, so I interviewed Teacher Su for clarify her position.

Teacher Su answered: “He did not know how to properly groom himself” (FN 112007), indicating that she thought that Da-Wei should not have cut his hair by himself, and that cutting hair was best left to his parents. She reproved Da-Wei because he did not understand the social convention that other Taiwanese accept to be true, namely, “Our bodies are given by our parents, and we should protect our bodies in order to respect our parents” (“身體髮膚受之父母，不敢毀傷，孝之始也”). Her philosophy prevented her
from supporting Da-Wei. The way to be a traditionally acceptable boy is to follow parents’ and teachers’ philosophy about bodily care.

This is the moment for teachers to enforce gender norms of Confucian culture. Teacher Su taught the class Confucius’s idea that the body belongs to parents, not children. She also focused only on maintaining order by forbidding children to disturb Da-Wei. She stopped students from disturbing Da-Wei based on classroom management, not bodily rights. She was unable to clarify the relationship among classroom order (e.g., collectivism), the personal body and personal right (e.g., individuality). She was unconcerned that Da-Wei was a 6-year-old boy interested in experimenting with his hair and scissors, trying to change his hairstyle. Thus, she interpreted Da-Wei’s action as bad behavior when she devalued his attempt to experiment with his body.

The body is the medium of gender construction. NT boys’ physical experiences can become a medium for gender construction, and the body can be controlled by others. NT boy’s bodies are a site for them to perform gender roles and to claim bodily rights. By using bodies as manner to experience various situations, they could construct gender roles under discursive practices. Body construction, however, depended how peers and teachers allowed them to resist dominant discourses and how boys decided to resist them.

Characteristics of NT Boyhood

NT boyhood characteristics are in accord and discord with both the dominant gendered social hierarchy and their associated discourses. NT boys’ life experiences shaped characteristics and subsequent behavior, and represented the social construction
of NT boyhood. Thus, NT boys’ characteristics remained invisible, but they dominated NT boys’ gender-doing concerning what it means to be “good boys.”

On a personal level, NT boyhood characteristics influenced an understanding of who boys were and their place in society, but they also provided strategies for NT boys to posit gender position when choosing friends. NT boy characteristics affected more than just NT boys since they could influence peers. The interaction among NT boyhood characteristics and other characteristics circulating in class combined to establish this generation’s gendered norms and social order. NT boys’ characteristics are (a) bravery and physical prowess, (b) difficulty with schoolwork and reasoning, (c) recognition of lower SES, (d) less fluency with language and positioning with others with poor social skills, and (e) harmonious classroom relations. These characteristics played a part in the NT boys’ struggle for power in the gendered social hierarchy of the class. The next section explains each characteristic and discusses how they either subvert or support gendered norms in the NT boys’ kindergartens.

**Bravery and physical prowess.** Bravery in NT boyhood related to boys’ life experiences (e.g., travel by plane), so these experiences could help NT boys to redefine and reinterpret bravery (Weedon, 1997). Opportunities to play together provided NT boys chances to explain bravery to their peers, in turn displaying an aspect of NT boy gender construction. For these NT boys, bravery involved overcoming fears and was sometimes paired with what appeared to be a lack of social and intellectual knowledge within a classroom of mostly mainstream Taiwanese peers. These shortcomings frightened NT boys, who seemed to know that certain missteps in the classroom would hamper their
ability to demonstrate competence. Overcoming this fear required NT boys to be brave. Knowing that some participation was beyond control, they predominantly perceived abilities in terms of physical prowess and emotional resources: When NT boys could not control emotions, they acted out physically, so brave NT boys were not randomly violent, but ones who could think through their behavior and control emotions even when challenged or threatened by the dominant discourse in which they could not fully join.

**Difficulty with schoolwork and intelligence.** Next, although NT boys were as intelligent as mainstream Taiwanese, they had difficulty in the behavioral and intellectual aspects of school. As a result, schooling practices shaped NT boys; at the same time, they lacked enough power to challenge dominant discourse existing in power relations with mainstream Taiwanese peers. They displayed intelligence in areas not measured by the curriculum. For example, knowledge may be identified with increased spatial reasoning and creative language adaptation; however, parents, especially Immigrant Female Spouses, lacked understanding of school practice, could not help NT sons adjust. NT boys were less able to follow class rules and behave compared to mainstream peers. They struggled with formal education despite their intelligence because their mothers lacked the ability or desire to teach their sons the curriculum as expected in Taiwanese society. NT boys did not lack intelligence, but they seemed often to be mistaken because of an inability to obtain necessary help to learn content and meet school requirements. Therefore, despite an apparent elevated status as males, social hierarchy designated them stupid boys. With a lack of social power to fight against designating kindergarten conventions, they remained in a lower position.
Recognition of lower SES. NT boys recognized their low SES, and this economic status limited their short tenures as kindergarteners; further experiences distinguished them from wealthier peers. An NT boy likely chose to interact with friends of low SES because such peers were familiar with social norms and aware of sensitivity to economic differences. This type of equality among low-SES boys might have mitigated some cultural differences between peers; however, because others saw low SES as limiting, NT boys’ poor self-concept lined up directly with gendered social hierarchy expectations. In this vicious cycle, NT boys were labeled low SES, congregated consequently as a group and then had negative behavioral expectations layered upon them because of hierarchy. Society expected NT boys to be “good boys,” but this expectation was impossible to meet because good boys are usually the ones who have financial resources to help them be good boys.

Less fluency with language and poor social skills. Observing the weakness of poor language fluency as a characteristic of NT boys was troubling but unavoidable. The operational definition of being less fluent with language was confirmed when language dysfluencies disrupted social skills and academic learning. Because NT boys did not typically communicate effectively with peers, they became less powerful socially because they could not act like the most of the mainstream boys who used language to orchestrate peer play. Moreover, NT boys’ poor fluency in class discussion and inability to complete homework gave them a bad reputation. Teachers and mainstream Taiwanese peers thought they did not learn. NT boys knew when to use different languages to speak to
different peers, but doing so effectively required NT boys to understand social situations. Because they were a cross-cultural group, NT boys showed confusion about differences among family culture, school culture and peer culture.

**Harmonious classroom relations.** The final value of NT boyhood was the strong emphasis those boys placed on maintaining classroom harmony. In order to maintain this, NT boys exhibited loyalty and bravery because they noted that teachers and peers praised these behaviors. They wanted to enact gender performance as normal boys did. The emphasis on classroom harmony motivated NT boys to be more gentlemanly, holding themselves with a sense of being “big boys.” NT boys served the needs of all women, so they often exercised manners. They produced gender identities in daily discursive practices. NT boys recognized that the ability to maintain classroom harmony could improve their status in the gender hierarchy.

Classroom harmony was predicated on maintaining gendered social hierarchy. NT boys showed loyalty and bravery to those whom they viewed in an inferior social position (especially NT girls). Promoting harmony was an honor and a resource; being capable of establishing harmony in difficult situations fostered NT boy pride. They most directly emphasized harmony when their teacher alerted NT boys to what was disharmonious. Acting on orders to create harmony was another way to appear as a good boy. Doing so simultaneously maintained their role in the gender hierarchy and served it as well. As teachers worked to create classroom harmony, gender roles and gendered social orders within the classroom categorized NT boys as disciplined within dominant discourses.
Boyhood characteristics represented NT boys’ core beliefs and directed masculine behaviors. They co-constructed characteristics within peer relationships and gendered social orders. All these characteristics helped them to navigate the class gendered social order. Because of frequent gendered social order bias against NT boys, some characteristics were defensive, while some did align with the existing gendered social order. The next section shows how NT boys’ characteristics manifest themselves in friendship, play, school and families, displaying how the characteristics surfaced in friendships.

The Role of Boyhood Characteristics in NT Boys’ Friendships

Friendship is a vital part of NT boys’ socialization processes, and NT boys’ peer culture is easily observed. Connolly (1998) argued that boys’ friendships combine gender, race and class, each within specific contexts. NT boys shaped, modified and constructed complicated friendships with each other and peers. This section addresses how NT boys enacted boyhood values among themselves and the others in the gender hierarchy. It also shows how the values that made good NT boys were found in various friendships. The story reveals how NT boys’ friendships among themselves reinforced bravery and the reality of sharing academic difficulties.

Friendships between NT boys. NT boys experienced similar transnational family backgrounds, which produced unique boyhoods. Their similar life experiences easily created friendships and caused them to stay together. The following incident suggests how friendship among NT boys at WK Kindergarten and their shared specific cultural patterns of travel shaped an understanding of bravery.
**Brave boys.** At WK Kindergarten, a group of boys—Cheng-Quan and Yu-Ren, two NT boys, along with two mainstream Taiwanese boys—constructed army planes and catapults with Legos. They discussed understandings of bravery, peace, fighting and dying. NT children had travelled by air and understood the possibility of death from an unexpected crash, whereas the mainstream Taiwanese had not. Understandably then, NT boys hesitated to pretend to employ deadly force against an airplane because they imagined the possible devastation. They wanted to be brave, however, so they suggested fighting with toy remote-controlled aircraft. The NT boys felt that their bravery was undiminished by the use of technology and fighting for the same purpose. The mainstream boys, who had not flown, associated bravery with fearlessness about death and direct bodily risk without technological interference. NT boys equated bravery with the purpose of fighting and a possible loss of life. For them, recognizing that life is fragile solidified notions of bravery and friendship.

Another cultural fact that tended to unify NT boys’ experience was the difficulty they typically faced with school work. Building friendships among NT boys occurred when they used shared culture to overcome academic difficulties. For example, NT boys at WK Kindergarten with similar backgrounds, Jia-Hong, Cheng-Quan and Yu-Ren, had similar hobbies and played together. But, shared academic difficulties, caused in part by their mothers’ inability or unwillingness to help them learn, often forced them into the same situation: needing additional help when not finishing homework. They quickly recognized the shared circumstance and did what was needed to work together to overcome the scholastic obstacles caused by transnational status. The need to work
together did not turn into serious friendships, but instead motivated them to collaborate.

Next is a discussion of how NT boys’ and mainstream Taiwanese boys’ friendly activities influenced NT boyhood.

**Friendships between NT Boys and Mainstream Taiwanese Boys:**

*Similar Socioeconomic Status and Hobbies*

Similar hobbies or socioeconomic family backgrounds created more possibilities for NT boys and mainstream Taiwanese boys to begin friendships. One mark of NT boyhood was having parents of low socioeconomic status (SES). These parents could not buy extra toys or offer opportunities outside school to develop talents like those of higher SES, so NT boys’ ability to bond through life experiences with wealthier mainstream Taiwanese boys was limited, yet possible. Therefore, NT boys tended to select mainstream Taiwanese boys of lower SES because they had more in common with each other. Clearly, NT boys’ socioeconomic status and family backgrounds influenced which mainstream Taiwanese boys they befriended. Sometimes, NT boys used intelligence to cancel out criticism of their low SES to upper-middle class mainstream Taiwanese. When NT boys could convince or negotiate with peers, they could win their friendship.

Boys cared about how they presented themselves and the objects they used at school. Having the same commodities (tableware, clothes, toys, etc.) as each other was important. Conforming was important to fitting in; however, NT boys struggled to do so because of their mothers’ unfamiliarity with kindergarten customs. Consequently, mainstream Taiwanese boys critiqued NT boys about their appearance and possessions.
The following incident portrays how a mainstream Taiwanese boy tried to become friends with NT boys despite them not knowing about class activities.

**Forgetting to dress for Halloween.** WK Kindergarten held a popular Halloween celebration. Teachers and students dressed up and went trick-or-treating. Most boys dressed as knights, Batman, vampires, or Spiderman. Many children’s costumes were homemade, rented, or store-bought. Thus, Halloween costumes represented parental involvement in children’s class activities. In this Halloween activity, the three NT boys—Jia-Hong, Cheng-Quan and Yu-Ren—had no costumes because the mothers were unaware of this custom; they could not read Teacher Chen’s notes written in traditional Mandarin that she had sent home about the event.

In order to spare the NT boys further embarrassment, Teacher Chen made masks for them, and in doing so she held up the whole class. The NT boys felt ashamed about delaying their peers’ fun. In a friendly manner, several mainstream Taiwanese boys said to the NT boys: “Why did you forget to dress for Halloween?” Mainstream Taiwanese boys were less concerned with why their friends had not dressed up and more concerned with going trick or treating, so they lent parts of their costumes to the NT boys. For example, Yu-Long lent his robot’s sword to Yu-Ren, who promised to dress up next year on his own. They had a good time trick or treating and shared their candy (FD 103107).

From this, we can see that being NT boys did not prevent them from making friends with mainstream boys because they were all more interested in maintaining an equitable peace in the classroom so they might enjoy Halloween. Yu-Long may have been particularly inclined to help because of his similarly low SES and he felt empathy
for those who lacked costumes. The friendship between Yu-Long and Yu-Ren was very important. Yu-Ren had the benefit of social support from a mainstream Taiwanese boy, and Yu-Long had a friend who looked up to him, regardless of his SES, and was concerned for his happiness; therefore, the friendship was mutually beneficial.

**Different bowls.** Here, Cheng-Quan, an NT boy, used his wits to deflect potentially rude comments by mainstream Taiwanese boys while still maintaining a potential for friendship. Lunch at WK Kindergarten was heavily structured. Children learned to eat properly, using standardized mess kits; however, Cheng-Quan’s parents were unable to afford a kit, so he had noticeably different lunch ware than his peers. Others harassed him for not having the same items.

Cheng-Quan smartly provided reasons (e.g., saving money to buy airplane tickets to visit his foreign grandmother instead of school supplies) and the need for peers to respect superficial differences. Moreover, Cheng-Quan noted that they still can be friends even if their bowls were different. Even so, it was difficult for Cheng-Quan, to be confident when revealing family finances. After he explained these financial difficulties, no one discussed his bowl again (FD 122007).

The apparent unity among classmates is typically thought to go further than individual friendships between NT and mainstream Taiwanese boys. Because they studied in the same class, they understood the need to take care of one another.

As a result, the teacher did not see how NT boys struggled to fit into the classroom culture and made no special attempts to integrate them, but mainstream Taiwanese boys with low SES seemed to know their circumstances and made extra
efforts to befriend NT boys. Thus, in classroom peer culture, NT and mainstream Taiwanese boys co-constructed boyhood. This contributed to a struggle in the power hierarchy between NT boys and mainstream Taiwanese girls.

**Friendships between NT Boys and Mainstream Taiwanese Girls: Challenges of Gender Hierarchy and Social Skill**

The relationship between NT boys and mainstream Taiwanese girls challenged the standard social hierarchy because boys are typically given more power than girls, although NT children are typically given less power than mainstream peers. This hierarchical confusion could result in an even distribution of social power. NT boys are not cognitively delayed or biologically less able, but because they are typically less fluid with language and less skilled socially than NT girls, they have not mastered expected social skills. Consequently, NT boys are usually accorded less (or lower) social power than mainstream Taiwanese girls, making the importance of language and social skills evident. Occasionally, an NT boy may display a skill or capability a mainstream Taiwanese girl finds attractive; however, this admiration often ends when the NT boy fails to respond in the way she would expect to foster friendship.

**The boy who wouldn’t answer.** I asked Yu-Ren, an NT boy, what he learned in Vietnam the past summer. He said nothing, remaining silent while he thought whether or not it was appropriate to share something personal. Then, two mainstream Taiwanese girls suggested that Yu-Ren was mute because “he could not able to answer any teachers’ questions.” I knew this was not so because I had heard him speak with other boys. I replied that Yu-Ren perhaps needed more time to think about how he was going to
respond to my question. The girls insisted that Yu-Ren did not know how to say “Hi” to girls because he never even said “Hello” to them when they ate together, so they did not want to talk with him either (FD 111907).

Yu-Ren’s lack of ability to converse with mainstream Taiwanese girls caused some misunderstanding and blocked opportunities to build friendships. The more Yu-Ren hesitated to communicate with them, the more these girls could not understand him, thus rejecting him. Yu-Ren felt increasingly uncomfortable and removed; this further withdrawal prevented him from becoming familiar enough with them to adequately explain why he behaved differently. He recognized the potential for friendship between himself and his teammates (the two girls), but he was unable to share sufficiently his experiences verbally with them to initiate a friendship.

Friendship was further hampered because NT boys lacked social skills that mainstream Taiwanese girls expected of all boys. The girls claimed that they played different games and made different good friends. Because of proprietary concerns, they were unwilling to verbally acknowledge the difference in SES between themselves and Yu-Ren; however, they noted that Yu-Ren almost always wore a yellow vest and a tan T-shirt, causing a mainstream Taiwanese girl to note: “Yu-Ren likes to wear the same clothes, but we like to wear different clothes” (FD 111907). These middle-class girls wore well-matched, clean clothes. They also claimed that they would not play with him because he did not know how to draw pictures. These discrepancies kept Yu-Ren away from these mainstream Taiwanese girls despite the abundant shared experiences that may have fostered a friendship.
Even when an NT boy displayed a particularly remarkable male capability that had the potential to make a positive impression on mainstream Taiwanese girls, the NT boy did not have the social skills to develop friendships. For example, Jia-Yu, a mainstream Taiwanese girl, noticed that Yu-Ren could build Lego cars and airplanes rather well, so she praised him as a good engineer and tried to be friendly with him; he did not respond. Jia-Yu was disappointed at his apparent lack of interest in her feelings.

The incidents show how NT boys may have trouble building friendships with mainstream Taiwanese girls; however, social skills are tie-breakers in the NT boys-mainstream Taiwanese girls’ power struggle. Because of the equal and opposite power situation between NTC and mainstream Taiwanese children as well as males and females, the whole power dynamic is too complicated for the young children involved in the potential friendship to grasp. Thus, NT boys and mainstream Taiwanese girls failed to negotiate the power differentials usually managed while building friendships.

The larger power issues at stake here are revealed in the many boundaries the children noticed in their environment. For example, mainstream Taiwanese girls did not understand why Yu-Ren might be nervous about responding to a question about his trip to Vietnam. Even if Yu-Ren spoke exceptionally, he would still have been uncomfortable because of the information shared with others. Moreover, had Yu-Ren been willing to defend his ordinary clothing, it still would have been socially taboo for him to comment on the upscale girls’ clothing; doing so would have brought improper attention to SES differences. The next section exemplifies this how an NT boy addressed this concern.
Friendships between NT Boys and NT Girls: A Search for Positive Relationships

Although NT boys often did not commit to the normative culture, they wanted to enjoy positive relationships. One way NT gender constructions enabled positive relationships was by valuing loyal friendships. NT female classmates placed lower on the social hierarchy than NT boys; therefore, NT boys found themselves in a social position to be loyal protectors. Hence, building friendships with NT girls became an important way to express NT boyhood. The next incident shows how two NT boys enacted the NT boyhood quality of protectiveness in a situation involving a NT girl.

Protecting a female neighbor. At JB Kindergarten, a group of neighborhood children took the school bus home together, creating special relationships. The bus ride increased familiarity and added a closeness that would not have otherwise been present. Yu-Qin was a disabled NT girl in this group whose gait made getting on the school bus difficult. Recognizing her difficulty, Zhi-Jie and Da-Wei acted as little gentlemen, holding her book bag while she stepped up on to the bus. Meanwhile, several others rudely imitated Yu-Qin’s awkward steps when lining up for the bus.

On one occasion, Jun-Qing, a mainstream Taiwanese boy, imitated Yu-Qin’s lurching gait and instigated a group of young boys to do the same. At first, Da-Wei simply observed, but he soon noticed that Yu-Qin wept when these peers made fun of her disability. Not willing to let Yu-Qin be upset, Da-Wei shouted loudly to them: “Yu-Qin is crying! I will tell the teachers that you were mean to her. You are making fun of her!” Because of his warning, the children stopped teasing Yu-Qin, and she eventually stopped crying. Shortly thereafter, some boys asked Da-Wei why he yelled at the boys who
mocked Yu-Qin. Da-Wei responded, “Because I am a boy, I have a duty to protect my female next-door neighbor” (FD 111007). Da-Wei felt sympathy for Yu-Qin because he often needed to fight in order to protect his own pride; therefore, using his strength to protect another made Da-Wei feel like a hero. He satisfied this protective characteristic by offering Yu-Qin his services as a bodyguard.

Since the nature of NT boyhood is to have positive classroom relationships, it makes sense that NT boys seek friendships with NT girls because the girls are most receptive and responsive to this service. This makes the classroom a more positive place for the students. However, the reciprocity need not always come from a girl, as in the case of Yu-Qin since Da-Wei’s own protective behavior gave him a more masculine status regardless of her behavior. Da-Wei’s elevation in status did not come from the actions of a grateful girl, but from the recognition by his male peers that he acted masculine by protecting a female.

Conclusion. From the above examples, we may conclude that NT boys co-construct friendships with peers by gender constructions and are embedded in the gender hierarchy. In sum, friendships and problems associated with performing friendship are attributable to NT boys’ characteristics that are responses to power imbalances. NT boys formed a gendered social order based on SES. In the section between NT boys and mainstream Taiwanese boys, low SES, a characteristic of NT boys, is also a characteristic of some mainstream Taiwanese boys. Because these boys share a low SES, they often bond since their families are not as well-to-do as their peers.
The friendship between NT boys and mainstream Taiwanese girls had the most potential to upset the gendered order, but this was not often the case. Instead, although NT boys caught mainstream Taiwanese girls’ attention, they did not usually retain it, causing them to stay in the lower position of the gendered order. Finally, as they are the lowest in the gender hierarchy, NT girls may see the NT boys’ willingness to befriend them as an opportunity to increase status by associating with them. Essentially, NT boys’ friendships display multi-levels of power hierarchy when gender-doings and gendered social order are constructed by and within friendships. Multi-levels power hierarchies evident in NT boys’ friendships are also evident in their play. The next section will define how play is related to, but differs from, friendship and will exemplify the kinds of play that typically occur among NT boys and others in the gendered social order.

**Role of Boyhood Values in NT Boys’ Play**

NT boys’ friendships with mainstream peers are always limited by gender identities, low SES and cultural background, so it is hard for NT boys to build long-term friendships with peers, but it may be easier for NT boys to find temporary playmates. It was often necessary for NT boys to start friendships based on attractive toys instead of shared life experiences. Play is important because NT boys socialize with peers and mutually co-construct local masculine gender roles. It sharpens boys’ identities by giving them chances to choose specific toys and games. Interaction between NT boys and chosen playmates, toys and games cause problems as boys identify why they are boys.

This section discusses how boyhood values are portrayed by NT boys. It also discusses the influence of popular culture, SES, physical prowess and knowledge in
gender construction through the mediating technology of toys as well as a few stories about the body as an invaluable toy.

**Play among NT Boys**

The play among NT boys relates to similar life experiences and SES; they also reflect a more-general masculinity that exceeds and sometimes subsumes specific liabilities of being an NT boy. Thus, NT boys are eager to claim masculine gender positions. NT boyhood play presents an understanding of play culture. For example, possessing a large frame, bravery, intelligence and ability enable them to be playmates.

**The large-frame boy will not be a boss.** Yi-Hong and Zhi-Jie, two NT boys, were sumo wrestling during which they engaged in a debate between brains and brawn. Their competition resulted in an effort to establish the role of a masculine leader.

Of the two boys, one had a larger frame. Yi-Hong said, “I could spin you around the earth.” Zhi-Jie retorted, “I can make a missile and send you to the moon.” Yi-Hong replied that he was stronger because of a larger frame but Zhi-Jie noted that he knows arithmetic whereas Yi-Hong does not, so he concluded, “I am boss here” (FN 111407).

NT boys knew of several ways to establish power, but were unsure whether strength or intelligence would be superior. Their conversation revealed that Zhi-Jie considered knowledge superior, yet we should note that he evoked the idea of himself as a missile and so was not entirely willing to put his social power in intelligence alone. The next story exemplifies protecting others as a desirable masculine trait for NT boys.
When little boys become Transformers. Several boys stood around Ming-Yan to look at his picture book, *Transformers* (變型金剛), and they discussed how brave these robots are to fight aliens. Some of them imitated the gestures of Transformers and described how interesting the story was (FN 010309).

During the conversation, they organized their culture, which focused on protecting others. The content of *Transformers* (變型金剛) showed these boys the masculine way to be “men.” It was not necessary for NT boys to know the content of *Transformers*, but it was necessary for them to join talks about *Transformers* to become a member of a masculine group. The *Transformers* (變型金剛) picture book was Ming-Yan’s birthday gift from his mother, showing that she was encouraging him to present this masculine behavior. Ming-Yan and other boys took quite seriously discussions of how human beings would protect the earth when evil robots invade. While Ming-Yan suggested that the computer remote-controlled operation would be more efficient to destroy the invaders, Yi-Hong imitated an earth robot to roar and attack to Decepticons, the enemies in the *Transformers*. Zhi-Jie indicated that he would build a fatal weapon to fight the mechanical monsters.

These boys enthusiastically posed opinions and all played characters in the *Transformers* to brainstorm on how to save the earth. They displayed important collective behavior for the boys to be boys when developing a plan to protect the other inhabitants of the earth because to do so, NT boys had to imagine themselves as capable fighters.
Play between NT Boys and Mainstream Taiwanese Boys

The play between NT boys and mainstream Taiwanese boys connected with disparities of SES, causing them to play with different games and toys. Because NT boys have fewer opportunities to play the same games as mainstream Taiwanese boys, NT boys have different knowledge from their counterparts. Thus, NT boys liked to play the same games as mainstream Taiwanese boys to promote themselves as group members. When these boys played together, they constructed peer culture, accounting for SES differences and familiarity with iconic mainstream toys. First, I discuss how the lower SES of NT boys influenced game choices and ability to assemble toys. Then, I present examples that illustrate the roles of bravery and physical prowess in NT boys’ games.

The knowledge to play games and assemble toys. Knowledge of popular culture and lower SES challenged NT boys’ ability to play with mainstream Taiwanese boys. Jia-Hong, an NT boy, was challenged this way when he tried to play with a complicated toy, a Rescue Morpher, which required assembly and several peers to play with it. He did not yet have the social skills needed to help him fit in with mainstream Taiwanese boys.

Yi-Xiang and Ren-He, two mainstream Taiwanese boys, helped Jia-Hong to assemble his Rescue Morpher, but they required Jia-Hong to let them each wear this Rescue Morpher first. Yi-Xiang requested that Jia-Hong could not lose his bad temper and treat them poorly. Jia-Hong agreed. The three boys figured out the instructions, which included pictures and assembly details written in both English and Japanese. They spent more than an hour in assembly. But after assembling, Jia-Hong regretted allowing his peers to wear his Morpher first and asked to get his toy back, causing the boys to
leave angrily. No other boys would play with Jia-Hong because he would not share. Consequently, Jia-Hong became frustrated at his inability to find playmates (AT 122507).

The Rescue Morpher attracted these boys to play together. By playing with a toy used by mainstream Taiwanese boys, Jia-Hong intended to create a similar identity with boys of a higher social standing, thereby elevating his own social position. Still, not honoring mainstream social protocols, such as turn-taking, caused Jia-Hong to alienate mainstream boys despite his desire for playmates. The next incident concerns NT boys’ performance of bravery and physical prowess while playing the Voltron fighting game.

**Defender of the universe in the galaxy.** In both kindergartens, boys loved to play the role of the Voltron Lion. They often imagined themselves as the “Defender of the universe in the galaxy,” a title from the cartoon story, the *Voltron Lion*. Boys who played this game claimed to save human beings, especially female classmates, whom they considered another representation of human beings. The following incident described how five boys from JB Kindergarten made swords to fight monsters, simultaneously co-construction ideas of boyhood along the lines of bravery and physical prowess, using the Voltron Lion scenario for background.

Zi-Yang, an NT boy, and four mainstream Taiwanese boys (MTB 1-4) acted out swordplay with one another and imitated the Voltron Lions’ iconic swordplay. They held the following dialogue with each other:

**MTB 1:** Monsters will invade our town tomorrow. We are going to cut monsters.

**Zi-Yang and MTB 2 answered:** We need sharp swords to cut them.
MTB 2: When we have our own swords in our hands, then we dare to fight the monsters. We are black, red, blue, and yellow Voltron Lions! (Their swords are these colors. As this boy spoke, he pointed to each of them.)

MTB 2: My sword is very sharp! Monsters will die if I cut them!

MTB 1: We are going to protect girls. Girls can only hide at home.

Zi-Yang: When monsters come here tomorrow, all the girls will hide under the tables. (The boys all laughed!)

MTB 1: Yes! They will...will be frightened and shiver.

Zi-Yang stood up and walked in front of the group, then pretended to fight with a monster as if he were on stage. He said: “Hey! Monsters, you cannot hurt these girls! I am going to...” (it could not be heard; the incident was a very over-dramatized moment all of the boys laughed again) (FN 120507).

As this scenario illustrates, the boys brainstormed about how to support each other when fighting alien robots, expressing opinions and using their bodies to show each other how to play this fighting game. It was a way for them to identify collectively desirable masculine traits under the umbrella of popular culture without direct confrontation with each other. They concluded that sharing duties as professional defenders by fighting with monsters and protecting females is a masculine characteristic. Their discussions consolidated boys’ understanding of masculinity.

Here, Zi-Yang established his bravery by pretending to fight monsters. He acted out his heroism (e.g., pretend fighting) in the male group where he could promote his position. This is notable because even in a non-competitive environment, the NT boy felt
the need to act aggressively to display his masculine status despite the fact that other boys were content with simple discussion. While here an NT boy felt safe acting aggressively, in most situations, it behooved them to follow the gendered social hierarchy, keeping classroom harmony. This next critical incident exemplifies such a moment when a mainstream Taiwanese boy defends his bodily autonomy when losing a game an NT boy.

**The weak are the prey of the strong.** Cheng-Quan, Yu-Long and several mainstream Taiwanese boys played fighting games. The winner expected the loser to do whatever the winner wanted to embarrass him. Here, Yu-Long lost. Cheng-Quan suggested punishing him by removing his pants. Cheng-Quan tried to corner Yu-Long to do so while the other boys taunted him. Cheng-Quan was clearly over-the-top with his aggression, so the other boys watched appreciatively. Cheng-Quan acted as the main bully. Yu-Long prevented them from pulling down his pants by warning: “You cannot take my pants. Teacher Chou is there!” The other boys saw me and fled. Later, Yu-Long declined to speak about defending his pants and ran away; it may have been especially awkward for him since I am female (FN111607).

Boys competed for the right to maintain bodily autonomy, and if the loser did not willingly accept punishment, he would be excluded from future play. Since boys valued physical prowess, they enjoyed this kind of game. Physical punishment varied but the primary component was a loss of bodily autonomy. Here, boys permitted whatever needed to establish masculine hierarchies. The victor (an NT boy) gained legitimate authority over the loser’s body (a mainstream Taiwanese boy). However, the winner
feared that the teacher would condemn them for the illegitimate play of taking away a peer’s body rights.

Depriving losers’ bodily autonomy was one aspect of boys’ play culture and gender norms. Winners took advantage of the immediate capital gained to demonstrate strength and establish power over losers in the minds of other children. The ability to go along peacefully with playmates is important when losers must accept unequal requirements. Yet NT and mainstream Taiwanese boys enjoyed these physical games, which allowed them to take turns exercising power. The following incidents discussed how NT boys played with mainstream Taiwanese girls.

**Play between NT Boys and Mainstream Taiwanese Girls**

Gendered worlds and choice of play are the main difference between NT boys and mainstream Taiwanese girls. The next incident focused on conflicting gender roles between these two groups as revealed by choice of play. Ming-Yan, an NT boy, thought boys capable of fighting monsters, but that girls lacked the same skills, whereas girls disliked playing imaginary fighting games since those games did not prepare them for what life would actually be like. Boys’ and girls’ gendered worlds differed so as to be seen as largely incompatible. This meant that NT boys rarely established and developed social skills needed to interact harmoniously with mainstream Taiwanese girls.

If you cannot make your sword, you are not a boy. Boys in this study recognized differences in age and gender concerning play content. Informally interviewing Min-Yan revealed how boys felt about their play culture. He informed me that only boys can fight monsters, but that three- and four-year-old boys are merely
“kids” who are unable to make swords, so they cannot fight. Further, he stressed that girls are likewise unskilled at making swords and flying spaceships, making them unable to fight monsters as well (AT 123007).

In fact, few mainstream Taiwanese girls enjoyed fighting games; most found fighting games uncivilized, noting that NT boys are not only uncivilized, but also too much in the realm of fantasy to be impressive. They criticized Cheng-Quan, an NT boy, and his peers by saying, “Why do they like to play fighting game? They do not look smart” (FD 112107). Two mainstream Taiwanese girls told me that they appreciated smart boys and disliked dirty boys who played fighting games “because they looked repulsive and retarded.” They then parodied how NT boys fight and laughed moronically. They indicated that boys who played fighting games look funny and not within reality because they always mentioned figures who do not exist in the real world (FD 112207).

NT boys enjoyed enacting heroic, legendary tales. These tales provided universal, masculine gender norms that NT boys followed. Fighting games shaped gender norms and collective opinions, and games reconstructed local male gender culture. Girls found enactment of these fantastic tales unrealistic and unskilled. NT boys saw this as a benefit to themselves because in this game, they could create endless stages of bravery for NT boys to promote gender position. Moreover, NT boys could not moderate SES, race, or other identity characteristics as easily as they could gender identities. These identities (and their overall social standing) amounted to a response to means of acting in a masculine manner in fighting games. Therefore, NT boys chose this strategy to overcome non-fluency and poor social skills, in turn raising social status by promoting a type of
personal masculine image. The NT boys discussed above resisted the fixed gender hierarchy by acting out masculine characteristics in front of mainstream Taiwanese girls.

NT boys’ play with NT girls related to material needs. Since NT girls and NT boys both typically have a low SES, possession and superiority of toys was quite important in altering one’s place on the gendered social hierarchy. The following incident discusses how recognizing one’s own lower SES affected identity.

**Play between NT Boys and NT Girls**

Although NT boys and NT girls both typically have a lower socioeconomic status than mainstream Taiwanese children, both are aware of gender hierarchy in the larger, communal society. During play, gender power and money sometimes conflict.

**Recognition of lower SES.** Da-Wei, an NT boy, wanted to play with a toy that Xing-Yan, an NT girl, acquired. She wants to use the toy’s feminine status to avoid sharing it with Da-Wei, but he is sure that when he has access to money, he can acquire any toy he wants, whether for girls or boys, so he was unconcerned with Xing-Yan’s possessiveness (FN 100207).

Da-Wei and Xing-Yan knew the toys’ importance for them to claim peer group gender position, even though they understood that their toys could not compare to mainstream Taiwanese peers’ (i.e., fewer toys or those of lower quality). However, Da-Wei recognized that if he could have money to buy more toys, he could have more power to dominate peers, especially Xing-Yan. Da-Wei wisely used his economic power to overcome Xing-Yan’s gender power.
Conclusion. These examples describe how play in NT boyhood, along with its five identified characteristics noted at the outset of this chapter, presents conflicts, the possibilities for NT boys to socialize and how toys are useful in finding playmates and building friendships. The conflicts arose under two circumstances. The first occurred when NT boys’ peers thought that they lacked social skills that would qualify them for equal play with mainstream Taiwanese peers. The second occurred when NT boys did not have popular, middle-class game knowledge. These two circumstances recurred often enough to solidify the gap between NT boys and mainstream Taiwanese children in the gendered social hierarchy. Jia-Hong’s effort to be playmates with two mainstream Taiwanese boys is sadly illustrative of how difficult it is for NT boys to enlist playmates in an unequal social hierarchy. These circumstances also widened the chasm between NT boys and mainstream Taiwanese girls as the girls expected good male playmates to be smart, well-socialized and adept with conventional culture behavior, but they did not see the same value in fighting games as NT boys.

The conflicts, however, do not mitigate the potential for gender equity. In an attempt to stifle conflicts that cause the gap in gendered social hierarchy, NT boys used toys as a medium to attract playmates. Thus, toys remain important in NT boyhood play. Toys and play, in general, created opportunities for NT boys to work with mainstream Taiwanese peers as they co-construct the male gendered social order.

NT Boyhood in the Classroom

NT boys’ gender identities at school developed from interplay between two major influences: boys’ perceptions of approved gender behaviors at home; and female teacher-
male student relations. NT boys depended on the latter to set the tone for young males’ appropriate behavior.

**Teacher as a Role Model for NT Boys to Learn Gender-Doing**

Since most early childhood teachers in Taiwan are female, they act as care givers, knowledge transporters, or classroom managers. Their work attitudes influenced boys to construct female teachers’ professional position and gender roles. In this study, boys interacted with female teachers daily; they communicated with their “second mothers” in school. Especially, female teachers’ classroom management influenced teacher-male student relationship and formatted male students’ identities. This section reveals female teachers’ gender attitudes toward boys’ gender-doing.

WK Kindergarten had a Hero List containing all the boys’ names. The Hero List featured a place after their names for boys to proudly affix reward stickers. Each sticker made them a hero among the other boys. The Hero List tabulated one’s masculinity. The title “Hero List” established a clear ideology about appropriate masculine behavior and academic performance in class (FN 102607). The title of the list suggests that boys should grow to become heroes. These words serve to instill them at a very young age with gendered behavior.

In this class, children liked to compare reward stickers. Many children noticed that the three NT boys, Jia-Hong, Cheng-Quan and Yu-Ren, did not have as many as stickers as their peers because they rarely finished homework. Teacher Chen attempted to give NT boys remedial strategies to earn stickers, such as telling them “finish homework, and I will give you the sticker” (FN 102707). Only “good boys” could fit gender norms.
To embody the mother’s role helps teachers manage classrooms. However, NT boys may have different motherly expectations from mainstream peers, so success may be limited. The teachers at both kindergartens duplicated the traditional role of respected mother and expected that male students likewise respect each as a mother. But some NT boys resisted female authority because of the negligible role their immigrant mother played at home. To NT boys, immigrant mothers did not have power like mainstream Taiwanese boys’ mothers; thus, since mother-son roles differed from most mainstream Taiwanese boys, the relationship between mainstream teachers and NT boys presented more tension and conflicts than relationships of other mainstream Taiwanese boys.

Despite the rare exceptions demonstrated by some NT boys, the mother-son relationship replayed in class often favored boys over girls. Specifically, teachers expected boys to grow more through additional food, extra vitamins and forced milk. Boys ate more food and consumed more vitamins than girls because teachers, like mothers, hoped that boys would become bigger and stronger. Surprisingly, during nap time, seven children required milk in a bottle; four were NT boys, two were mainstream Taiwanese boys and the last was an NT girl.

The needs of strong physical growth forced teachers to give more food to NT boys. NTC’s physical growth emerges from their mothers having higher expectations than mainstream Taiwanese mothers; thus, NTC’s parents required them to grow stronger than mainstream Taiwanese children. NT boys’ mothers benefit socially from their sons’ growth and development into men who can fit into Taiwanese society to compensate for social disadvantages.
NT Boys’ School Experiences

Education in Taiwan focuses equally on the behavioral and intellectual development of the boys and both of these aspects of development carry with them traditional gender patterns. In Taiwan, parents frown upon the exclusion of behavioral teaching, but expect teachers and well-mannered peers to impart proper customs around many common behaviors, such as appropriate interaction with peers.

Children learn these customs in addition to academic skills in subjects such as Mathematics and English. These customary behaviors and academic skills both contribute to gender norms set for the boys by the teachers. Families and teachers together have a responsibility to make sure academic work gives boys appropriate gender identities. If parents are dissatisfied with male students’ gender behavior, they may call the teacher and insist that the norms of boyhood be reinforced. Doing so, teachers and parents act in concert to build an appropriate gender norm for the boys. In the case of the immigrant mothers, however, we have a situation where the responsibility cannot be shared between the teacher and NT boys’ parents.

We do not understand what he is saying! Teachers worked hard to normalize NT boys’ language, as seen below. NT boys had difficulty speaking well, and poor communication skills threatened their ability to join the classroom community. As a result, the teacher criticized the NT boy’s problems with Mandarin.

Pronunciation and diction impeded some NT children’s speech, even those who were born and raised in Taiwan. Teachers would exclaim, “We don’t understand what he is saying!” when communication between themselves and NT boys failed, noting that
some NT boys had trouble with inaccurate pronunciation and spoke with accents.

Additionally, many of the NT boy’s classroom vocabularies for self-expression were extremely limited, often causing teachers to help them express their opinions.

At WK Kindergarten, Teacher Chen complained that Cheng-Quan and Yu-Ren had difficulty with correct word pronunciation and taking turns during class discussion. Their mothers are Vietnamese, whose use of language at home had inadequately prepared them for the standard Mandarin spoken in class. For example, Yu-Ren used more body language to communicate with peers. I tried to ask Yu-Ren questions several times, but he did not answer (FD 111807). Teacher Chen confided that she suggested Yu-Ren’s father take him to a language therapy institution to assess his language development. However, his father totally disbelieved that his son had any language problems because Yu-Ren was such a chatterbox at home. But I had observed several times that Yu-Ren did not know how to follow his teachers’ rules, his peers led him in making choices. On open house day, I observed that his Vietnamese mother spoke Vietnamese to him and he answered in Taiwanese. Actually, I discerned that he could speak fluent Taiwanese at home because I had noticed several times when his father spoke Taiwanese with him when his father picked up him after class (FD 111807). I interpreted this to mean that he could understand his mother’s Vietnamese and his father’s Taiwanese. However, Yu-Ren had difficulty adapting to Mandarin spoken at school.

To help children learn language, teachers had to accept that the culture gap between schooling and the children’s family backgrounds had an influence on scholastic achievement. In this study, the teachers and parents, including Vietnamese mothers, tried
to teach the children to become citizens in mainstream Taiwanese society. They ignored maintaining culture identities, which played a notable role in students’ academic success. Next, Yi-Hong similarly had difficulty communicating with his teacher, who embarrassed him out about his inept Mandarin and his Vietnamese mother in front of the classmates.

**Whose mother came from Vietnam?** Being a boy is difficult, but being a six-year-old boy whose teacher created a classroom cultural division using language is even harder. The exchange between Teacher Su and Yi-Hong shows how poor understanding of linguistic and cultural diversity increases shame students feel about hybrid backgrounds, and how teacher insensitivity may cause NT students’ classmates to judge them based on non-Taiwanese backgrounds. Teacher’s cultural insensitivity causes other students to assess non-native speaking peers disparagingly.

The following episode occurred between Yi-Hong and Teacher Su.

Yi-Hong: Teacher, I… (He babbled.)

Teacher: This is Taiwan, but you are babbling. You need to speak UNDERSTANDABLE Mandarin.

Yi-Hong: I-I-I… (He stuttered.)

Teacher: Please SPEAK CLEARLY! (She spoke slowly and loudly.)

Yi-Hong: (He peered at the teacher but could not say any words.)

Some of the classmates: Teacher, his mother is an immigrant from Vietnam!

Yi-Hong: (He looked at these peers, but he still did not say any words.)

Teacher: Yi-Hong, why do you not ask your mother to come to our classroom to teach me Vietnamese, then I could try to understand what you are telling me.
Yi-Hong: No! (Crestfallen, he bent his head and used a low voice.)

Suddenly, the whole class erupted with laughter. Some of children laughed again and again! Then, some children said, “Ming-Yan’s mother, too. Da-Wei, Xing-Yan, and Zhi-Jie—they all have mothers who…”

Teacher: YES, all of THEM are. (She spoke slowly and loudly, again.)

The whole class roared with laughter again!

Teacher: Kids! Stop! It is not bad to learn Vietnamese in case we are traveling there or opening our businesses there one day. You can speak Vietnamese by yourselves, and then you do not need to hire translators to help you.

Some children then imitated speaking Vietnamese with each other (AT120407).

The conversation between Teacher Su and Yi-Hong originated because Yi-Hong dared not give his opinion confidently in his broken Mandarin. When Teacher Su mentioned Taiwan, the children became quite sensitive about geography and ethnicity. The change of topic from language to location quickly turned to a conversation about diversity, and they lost many fine distinctions. The teacher mentioning that Yi-Hong’s mother is Vietnamese and that several classmates’ mothers are also immigrants made racism and nationalism unavoidable. The mainstream teacher pushed these New Taiwanese Children into a minority group in class. At the same time, children also associated this minority group with Vietnam’s underdevelopment. Thus, children of female Vietnamese immigrants suffered a negative social stigma. The way teachers talked about Vietnam and their mothers sensitized the children. The next sections will
discuss how NT boys’ families expect kindergarten teachers to prepare boys for future academic and professional success as men who meet or exceed gender standards.

**The importance of establishing boys’ academic skills.** From the parents’ viewpoint, the role of boyhood is centered on behavior and moral development as practice for adulthood. *Classical Rules for Children* (弟子規) is a book that has provided many children high standards for behavior and social development since the 1700s. Parents and teachers believe that the values in the book provide a good opportunity to impart traditional behavioral norms and introduce young boys to classical literacy. Moreover, many parents and teachers expect that children will modify behavior in response to being routinely exposed to the text’s wisdom. Thus, teachers often instruct students to memorize and recite this text in order to ingrain a codified moral standard.

Accordingly, Teacher Su made the children stand in the hallway to recite *Classical Rules for Children*. To explain, Teacher Su said that one NT boy’s aunt, Zhi-Jie, “was angry because of his inability to remember all of sentences in that book.” His aunt worried that his immigrant mother’s inability to teach him each sentence in that book threatened future academic success. The aunt played the motherly role by supervising Zhi-Jie’s learning because his mother could not read Chinese (FD120707).

Families expected the school to impart traditional knowledge to NT boys in order to enable future success, though this was but one part of shaping NT boys’ gender identity. Another part was that NT boys were expected to be more knowledgeable than girls, even if they experienced the same curriculum.
The other primary purposes of teaching *Classical Rules for Children* declared the importance of obedience in the brotherhood, thus extending family brotherhood to classrooms. Such content dictated: “If I am the older sibling, I will befriend the younger ones. If I am the younger sibling, I will respect the older ones” (兄道友，弟道恭), which stressed rules for boyhood and gendered family hierarchy. This familial relationship also applied to classmate relationship: “Treat all males just like your brothers at home” (事諸兄，如事兄). As a result, teachers always reminded the boys to treat each other as siblings and that the older should be good role models for the younger. The next incident examines how older boys applied this idea when they set a good example for the way boys should behave when eating.

**Good boys have good table manners.** The lunch table was an important setting for older boys to display good table manners for young children. During lunch time at WK Kindergarten, teachers disciplined individual students’ table manners to cultivate group cooperation. Hence, most students decided to take seriously the teachers’ direction and the necessity of presenting acceptable table manners in front of peers. Nevertheless, Yu-Ren, Jia-Hong and Cheng-Quan, three NT boys, lacked an understanding of table manners, and teachers and, subsequently, their peers criticized unacceptable behavior.

Before eating lunch, Teacher Wang required students to sit in assigned seats, and to put their dining utensils on the table. As soon as the whole table could sit quietly and
gain the teachers’ praise, teachers allowed them to bring their bowls in line to get food. The NT boys, however, did not comply with teachers’ rules:

Teacher Chen: Yu-Ren, I have already called your name twice. Please do not touch your bowl and do not use your bowl to knock the table.

(Yu-Ren ceased his actions when the teacher commented.)

Teacher Chen: Who is still playing with a spoon and knocking the table now?
The class: It is Jia-Hong! (They looked at Jia-Hong, who then stopped.)

Teacher Chen: Don’t touch your bowl and spoon! You are in your seats and must sit quietly to prepare to eat... (Cheng-Quan completely ignored the command and used spoon to knock his bowl, which made noise.)

Teacher Chen: Cheng-Quan! Your table is last because of you!

The others looked angrily at him because of his non-cooperation (FD 113007).

At lunch time, the teacher observed all six tables and compared students’ behavior. The teacher praised well-behaved students and shamed unruly students. She noted that children refused to sit still in assigned seats with hands in their laps, played with utensils, or made noise as they should have been seated quietly in preparation to eat. When the teacher noticed the unruly children, she announced their inappropriate manner and explained to the class that their table could not yet eat because of a specific boy’s misbehavior.

Here, Teacher Chen intended to create the classroom culture. However, the NT boys, Yu-Ren, Jia-Hong and Cheng-Quan, were unaware of this culture, which made them difficult to teach. They resisted class rules not because of biological or cognitive
factors, but because they lacked mutual respect in the teacher-student relationship. Further, they saw limited benefit for themselves in joining the mainstream culture compared to the prized status as male children of an IFS at home. The NT boys felt that their difference, although painful, released them from some the expectations of mainstream Taiwanese boys. Consequently, they were sometimes so careless that the teacher considered them unruly.

Being picked last meant dishonor, causing children who sat at that table felt shame as a group because of this public humiliation. Since the three NT boys often misbehaved and thus brought embarrassment and dishonor to their table, NTC were not welcomed by tablemates. The named boys were shamed by peers because their poor behavior had diminished the reputation of the whole table, which therefore would not be served food until they were the last table. Mainstream children concluded that they wanted those boys’ mothers to teach them good table manners (FD 113007).

Learning to be a group member is an essential component in a child’s early education. When teachers failed to teach NT boys to be responsible male group members, the other children used peer pressure to force NT boys to follow the gendered rules. Both teachers and peers were willing to help NT boys, but a general consensus was that that their families spoiled them.

**Forming identities through English.** The next incident demonstrated a popular principle that as NT boys learned more, they could be superior to girls by having more academic mastery. Here, Da-Wei’s academic achievement in English cancelled his troubled identity as Da-Wei. He became a different, successful and powerful male
identity: “Davie.” Learning English well gave Da-Wei social authority and power to
direct less-adept male and female peers. The following instance reveals that Da-Wei
successfully used social power earned from mastering English to dominate female peers.

Every child took an English name in English class at JB Kindergarten, Da-Wei
became Davie and Yen-Ping became Elle. During class, Da-Wei told Yen-Ping: “My
name is Davie now. You should follow me and do whatever I tell you.”

Yen-Ping: “What? What do I need to FOLLOW you for?”

Da-Wei: “Look! Your nametag is up side down. You need to fix it!”

Yen-Ping: “I did it the right way!”

Da-Wei: “Hi, I am smart Davie now. You need to do whatever I tell you.”

When Yen-Ping asked me if her nametag was right side up, I assured her that it was, and suggested that she tell Da-Wei that it faced the right way (FD 112207).

When Da-Wei used “Davie,” he positioned himself as a better boy because good
boys speak English well. When Da-Wei played as Davie, he capitalized on his mother’s
expectations that speaking English will help him achieve success; Da-Wei interpreted
that the name then entitled him to dominate his peers. Because the English teacher
praised Da-Wei for his English usage, he felt proud of his English language skills. In
English class, he was one of the top students, but he still had a reputation as a
troublemaker in this and other classes.

Despite his outstanding English performance, Yen-Ping still thought that Da-Wei
possessed a horrible reputation because he behaved poorly. Thus, Yen-Ping could not
fully trust him or follow him. This distrust made it necessary for Da-Wei to resort to his
greater English ability to make arguments with Yen-Ping, but to no avail. Because Da-Wei spoke English better and because he is a male, she hesitated about her nametag. Yen-Ping was not sure about her own English knowledge. Since she seldom gained any teacher’s praise in English class, his language skills became a colonial tool for Da-Wei to reconstruct his identities and his judgment about his superior capabilities and, by extension, his identity as a male.

Young Taiwanese males prized being a good boy, which meant being both an intellectual and behavioral model. Da-Wei’s success in English class gave him half the skills necessary to be a “good boy.” Da-Wei knew this, but it did not stop him from acting superior to other children. He tried to parlay his intelligence into full social-control, but Yen-Ping was not convinced he was a good boy because of his misbehavior.

**Conclusion.** There were further instances where the NT boys’ SES could not provide them with a good learning environment. For example, the teacher did not permit them to carry the class flag, and when there were not enough girls to perform a traditional dance, the teacher placed them in the girls’ section. Also, they had difficulty adapting to the school culture; therefore, in the teachers’ eyes, since are not good role models in class, neither can they be good leaders.

In actuality, teachers powerfully managed classroom gender culture and partially shape boys’ identities through classroom practice. They skillfully replicated the gendered hierarchy that denied NT children leadership roles in their classroom. In one way, this was a teacher’s task, and something expected by parents, the institution and society at large because in emphasizing standards for leadership, they teach children how to
conform to Taiwanese society. Further, this standardization forced students to lose autonomy and passively participate in prearranged hierarchies, offering little chance for upward social mobility. The next sections discuss NT boyhood at home, which influenced gender performance in schooling.

**NT Boys’ Gender Behaviors at Home and School**

Transnational families’ experiences mediate primarily to influence NT boys’ gender behaviors in school, which they also represent in the classroom. Essentially, a boy from a transnational marriage may have several different expectations from the multiplicity of his background in order for him to be a “good boy.”

NT Boys’ transnational backgrounds necessitated broader views than mainstream Taiwanese boys when they began making friends by sharing popular culture instead of home life experiences. So, power relations between boyhood, school and cultural status are complex and intertwined. The next section illustrates how NT parents’ social statuses affect academic expectations for their sons and how expectations contribute to identities.

**Academic Success as a Good Boy at Home**

The first example focuses on Da-Wei’s busy boyhood and the excessive studying his mother requires to fulfill familial ideals of a good Taiwanese boy. She wondered about the quality of education and the attitude toward NTC that her son’s teacher would impart. Therefore, she carefully selected a kindergarten with a good reputation that can teach her son effectively and be friendly to immigrant mothers. To enhance her son’s learning, she also hired a private teacher to tutor De-Wei in English, arithmetic and the kindergarten curriculum. If Da-Wei meets his mother’s academic expectations, his
cultural standing as a learned boy would improve his mother’s already-low status as an immigrant mother.

Da-Wei could use success at school as a bargaining chip with his mother. She rewarded his perfect score on a math test by taking him to a distant McDonald’s to eat or giving him more pocket money. Da-Wei learned from his mother’s example that being an exceptional student is socially valuable and rewarding. He eagerly positioned himself as a boy so smart that his mother frequently rewarded his achievements. Da-Wei showed off his McDonald’s toy to me, explaining that he earned it by studying hard. The small Spiderman figurine represented popular culture capital, which Da-Wei could use to impress his peers even beyond the academic achievement that allowed for its acquisition in the first place. Even though Da-Wei preferred playing outdoors, he indicated that he liked the benefits that studying earned him.

However, the boy noticed his mother’s illiteracy in English and Chinese, so she could not help him complete his homework (FD 010908). Still, Da-Wei understood that his mother expected him to be a good boy who should achieve academic success regardless of his status as an NT boy. He said: “My mother wanted me to be able to compete with others. She wanted me to learn English, so I can speak English in Taiwan, Vietnam and America” (FD 122707).

In sum, Da-Wei’s academic achievements created a succession of three primary benefits for him. First, he pleased his parents, and second, from this he gained toys and praise that would elevate him among his teachers and playmates. Finally, the esteem he received from his peers and teachers increased his social power in school and at home.
The more social esteem Da-Wei brought to his immigrant mother, the more privileges she was inclined to give him. Da-Wei correctly interpreted these privileges as a sign that he was a “good boy,” and so he looked for opportunities to repeat his academic success and gain more of the coveted “good boy” status.

A Good Boy Follows Parents’ and Teacher’s Directions

The second example explains how being an NT boy may heighten moral expectations for young boys. Being a “good boy” means following directions. Ming-Yan, an NT boy at JB Kindergarten, has a family intent on teaching him to respect teachers. For example, Ming-Yan gave Teacher Su a New Year’s Day card. He and his father cooperatively wrote the card. Ming-Yan’s father expected Ming-Yan to be a good student who can respect the teacher and obey the teacher’s direction (FD 123107). Ming-Yan’s father explained that even though Ming-Yan’s mother comes from Vietnam, their family is qualified enough to train Ming-Yan to be a well-behaved boy.

Due to Ming-Yan’s family influences, he acted righteously and properly. He criticized peers who acted unjustly. He insisted that other boys be well-behaved, which caused him to quarrel with his peers (e.g., when he found that they cheated others). From Ming-Yan’s perspective, fully obeying parents’ and teacher’s directions is the standard for being a good boy, forming his moral standard. However, many peers would not accept his viewpoint, especially Da-Wei. Instead, they enjoyed playing tricks on each other and generally doing things that Ming-Yan had been taught and believed were disrespectful. So he often “corrected” the boys’ behavior even more forcefully than did Teacher Su. As a result, Ming-Yan was frequently an unwelcome playmate.
Ming-Yan’s family felt it important to teach their son to follow established boyhood roles because the family was already under suspicion because it was a transnational marriage. For many mainstream Taiwanese families, transnational marriages polluted cultural quality, so Ming-Yan’s parents felt enormous social pressure to live up to the standard set by the mainstream Taiwanese society. This pressure directed his moral compass. Ming-Yan understood that by being an example of civility, he raised his and his families’ social position. His good behavior in class won his teacher’s attention, earning a better reputation for both Ming-Yan and his parents.

The Only Boy in His Class

Some NT boys did not care about reputation because they were unaware of social stigmas that parents and adults around them took for granted. This was the case for Jia-Hong, the only son of a Taiwanese male and a Chinese immigrant mother. Couples in this type of transnational marriage are often criticized for having a marriage of convenience and financial expediency, so the marriage may be at risk if a son is not quickly produced. Jia-Hong stabilized his parent’s marriage. Although he did not understand the social implication, it caused Jia-Hong’s mother, father and whole extended family dote upon him, spoiling him and causing him to not share his toys. Jia-Hong did have an elder sister, but because parents value males more than females, he did not have to share anything, especially his parent’s attention, with her. Additionally, Jia-Hong was premature, and his parents did not know if he would survive, so his entire family considered his continued health a miracle. Because Jia-Hong was the only male child, grandson and miracle baby, this exceptional pampering led to little discipline.
Jia-Hong’s position in his family makes him ill-adapted for the communal classroom and the standard roles of boyhood, especially sharing toys. For example, one day during free play time, Jia-Hong played with a jigsaw puzzle and his classmates asked if they could play with Jia-Hong. Jia-Hong rejected them because he claimed he had the puzzle first, so he should not have to share. Similar situations happened frequently, causing Jia-Hong to gain a bad reputation. Other children consequently excluded him from group games (e.g., hide and seek). They marginalized Jia-Hong because of his selfishness and non-cooperation.

Teachers noticed Jia-Hong’s isolated situation, but they thought that he deserved to be alone because they could not motivate him to get along with others. Jia-Hong’s family background did not provide him social skills that would make him appealing to other boys. Teacher Chen characterized Jia-Hong’s behavior as an innate personality flaw that could not be corrected. Sharing helped Jia-Hong learn how to claim and protect individual property. However, neither his parents nor teachers taught Jia-Hong this lesson.

Children’s family affairs were private, but it could be these events that influence children’s gender concepts. The reproduction of gender roles in childhood experiences in their families brought misunderstandings in children’s peer interactions. Children are active thinkers, deserving to discuss gender issues with parents, teachers and peers. Teachers’ understanding and observation about the boys’ families were an important resource to realize what and how the boyhoods were constructed at home. Once teachers realize how children learn gender roles in daily life, they can help children learn at school.
The following incidents show how female teachers disciplined boys by threatening to tell their fathers about their bad behavior.

**Fear of Father’s Authority**

Two NT boys, Zi-Yang and Da-Wei, fought each other “to the death.” Teacher Su told them that if they persisted, she would notify their fathers, who would surely punish them. She told them about how their mothers would be hurt when they gave them a bath and saw the bruises. Also, Teacher Su informed them that hurting their bodies meant they were not showing filial obedience to parents. This advice was quite effective; they stopped quarreling immediately upon hearing it (FN 010408).

In another instance, Cheng-Quan had difficulties adapting to the classroom. Cheng-Quan skipped class to wander the playground and outside the school. Teacher Chen found him; she told him that she would write this down in his family communication handbook, so his father would know of his bad behavior. Cheng-Quan shook his head, indicating that he did not want his father know this. He had fear in his face when Teacher Chen said that she would “only” notify his father. If he stopped skipping class, she told him, she would only tell his mother when she picked him up from school (FN 111607).

Although these two critical incidents happened at different schools, teachers revealed that these NT boys feared their fathers, who used physical punishment, whereas their immigrant mothers spoiled them. In typical Taiwanese fashion, instead of telling children that they should take responsibility for their behavior, teachers focused on reminding them to think about their parents’ lost hope. They supposed that the familial power structure likely caused the boys to stop fighting or to stop skipping classes. The
teachers understood NTC’s family backgrounds and the gender roles attached to them, and the boys knew their mothers would protect them. The teacher used this advantage to convince boys to avoid their fathers’ verbal and physical discipline.

Teachers at both kindergartens applied similar strategies to remind boys to think about their parents; the threat of patriarchal authority commonly appeared. This technique proved effective for female teachers to discipline boys. In a patriarchal society, men have more power than most women, even though most mothers spend more time than fathers caring for children. Still, patriarchal authority was an invisible ideology for classroom management if and when female teachers felt powerless disciplining male students. In fact, boys noticed that even their teachers understood how fathers possessed more power than mothers and female teachers.

**Conclusion**

This chapter began with an outline of local and global cultures, what makes NT boys’ peer culture and the idea that NT boys’ body images are socially constructed. Considering these factors, I developed five characteristics or values that affected NT boys’ lives. Drawing on both these advantages and disadvantages, several stories illustrated how these values are at work in hierarchical relationships that NT boys had with peers. Through these instances, NT boyhood is socially constructed to interweave with other characteristics such as SES, ethnicity and local and mass media culture.

NT boys’ friendships connected critically with low SES and different life experiences. These differences could not be overcome by gender similarities as evidenced by the troubled relationships between NT boys and mainstream Taiwanese boys.
Moreover, NT boys’ poor social skills undermined NT boys’ friendship with mainstream Taiwanese girls. Further, NT children had more possibilities to develop friendships because of similar cross-cultural backgrounds. Still, gender differences complicated friendships forged in unequal power dynamics.

Again, in NT boys’ schooling experiences, teachers intended to shape the NT boys’ male gender norm for them to become “a good boy.” A good boy needed to achieve intellectually and behave well. It seemed that NT boys had difficulty building long-term friendships with mainstream Taiwanese children, but playing games helped them make short term playmates that might (or might not) later become friends. This may be because NT boys lacked social skills that would make them equal with mainstream Taiwanese children. Moreover, when NT boys did not have the middle-class knowledge of popular toys, the toys, coupled with naïveté, could become a medium to attract mainstream Taiwanese peers to play with them as long as NTC permitted mainstream Taiwanese peers to teach them the middle-class knowledge that a toy calls for, however rarely that pattern might occur.

Moreover, in both schooling and family hierarchies, Confucian traditions directed NT boys’ gender identity. NT boys, like mainstream Taiwanese peers, had limited ability to resist teachers’ authority and the dominant discourses of Taiwanese customs. If an NT boy wanted to become “a good boy” Taiwan, he needed to reach the pinnacle of academic success to gain social capital. Even though NT boys and mainstream Taiwanese children study in the same classroom, schooling experiences differed because of diverse life experiences and cross-cultural backgrounds. The research classroom privileged
academic achievement and conventional good behavior, which Confucian authority implicitly structured. Together, society considered these two qualities, or academic and social skills, to be the marks of a leader. Further, parents and teachers believed in pushing NT boys towards these outcomes, although in some ways teacher’s attitudes and behaviors hindered NT boys from attaining the goals. NT boys also seemed to want these goals for themselves, although they occasionally did not act in accordance with them.

The NT boys in this study represented the local culture and the current generation of the Taiwanese children. Although this sample is too small to generalize all NT boys, it does detail much grounded data available for future comparison. In the next chapter, I will discuss NT girls and their schooling experiences and be able to see how NT girls are both similar to and distinct from NT boys.
CHAPTER VI
FINDINGS: THE FRIENDSHIP AND PLAY OF NT GIRLHOOD

Introduction

This chapter focuses on the social construction of NT girls’ characteristics in which they persistently resisted or passively constructed friendships and play culture. Here, the social construction of NT girlhood presented a complicated social situation at school. NT girls’ gender hierarchies concerned issues such as gender, SES and family background differences. Girls negotiated their role at the bottom of the gender hierarchy within teacher-student and peer relationships. They consistently presented themselves as well-behaved and docile girls in front of teachers. Alternatively, in order to develop good peer relationships and impress peers, they sometimes acted out behind teachers’ backs.

NT Girls in This Study

There were only three NT girls in these classes, Xing-Yan, Yu-Qin and Mei-Jia. Xing-Yan and Yu-Qin studied at JB Kindergarten while Mei-Jia studied at WK Kindergarten. A fourth NT girl, Lin-Hui, appeared incidentally. Lin-Hui used to study at WK Kindergarten and was a first grade student who joined Mei-Jia in after-school care a few days each week. Both Mei-Jia and Lin-Hui only made limited appearances in the fieldwork, but they contributed several notable critical incidents. Mei-Jia discontinued her schooling due to her parent’s financial difficulties and domestic issues; her teachers told me that she was sent back to Vietnam. Lin-Hui disliked staying at after school care, especially after Mei-Jia left. Additionally, because of the NT Girls’ invisible behaviors,
which did not appear until the latter stages of analysis, I was able to identify specific
gendered social behaviors as distinct from and a response to their context.

**The Extreme Differences of NT Girls’ Temperament**

NT girls knew well their low position in the social hierarchy and generally
followed teachers’ authority. NT girls wanted to become “virtuous and intelligent girls”
by presenting themselves as invisible, submissive, intelligent, attentive and strategic girls.
They experienced dissonance in their girlhood culture, so there were rarely standards to
demonstrate these NT girls’ diverse characteristics. I interpreted NT girlhood by
observing and speaking with each NT girl, peers, parents and teachers. In doing so, I
developed a tentative characterization of NT girlhood.

**Social Construction of New Taiwanese Girlhood**

NT girls’ gender identities could be understood as a “set of effects produced in
bodies, behaviors, and social relations” (Foucault, 1978, p. 127). Thus, NT girlhood is the
product of gender power when they continually conform to dominant discourses in
teacher-student and peer relationships. Below, NT girls followed classroom gender
culture when struggling in gender construction. Adapting with mainstream peers, they
had to interpret the knowledge of local customs and popular culture. As a result, the
social construction of NT girls’ girlhood could be found in the following: collective and
individual peer relationships; the socially constructed bodies in class; and the need to
assimilate to both local and popular culture in the play context.

**Complicating the idea of collectivism and individuality in NT girlhood culture.** The small group of girls spending time together presented collectivism in Xing-
Yan’s classroom, constructing the girls’ gender norm. If any girl, especially an NT girl, chose to act individually, she opposed the girls’ gender culture. The next incident describes how Xing-Yan grappled with the tension between the norm of collectivism and the pull of individuality.

Like other Taiwanese mainstream girls, NT girls liked to go with a small group of female friends to the bathroom. Xing-Yan, honoring the collective nature of girlhood, would often silently accompany her peers to the restroom although she was not actually invited. She was merely someone the other girls tolerated or ignored as she tagged along on the periphery of their collective.

In other cases, the group of girls overtly excluded Xing-Yan. These actions were principally forceful when shared activities might be seen as competitive, as in the case of academics or males’ attention. Being excluded forced Xing-Yan into a counterculture of individuality that clearly made her uncomfortable. In one especially powerful example, the three girls from above and Xing-Yan sat together in Math class. They suspected that Xing-Yan copied answers, thus excluding her from their Math discussion group by loudly reminding to each other that “We do not allow Xing-Yan to see our answers” and “All of us could not teach Xing-Yan because all she does is copy our answers exactly!” The mainstream Taiwanese girls consistently made such announcements in front of her with the aim of garnering social support for excluding her from their Math group. These offensive comments pushed Xing-Yan to become individualistic in her peer relationship, a position she seemed to find distasteful as her silence showed her hurt and powerlessness.
Becoming an individual or peripheral member is painful for anyone, but it could have also provided the impetus for making new playmates. Yu-Qin had initially tried to play with Fu-Cheng, Teacher Su’s son mentioned in Chapter 4. But as Fu-Cheng gradually learned classroom gender roles, he told Yu-Qin that he needed to play with other boys. Subsequently, Yu-Qin performed whatever role a group allowed her to be, such as a background dancer or playing a master’s pet.

Generally, NT girls highly valued collectivism, although differences in SES and family background often pushed them toward individualism because being NT girls interfered with making playmates. Individualism in NT girlhood complicated an already complex and interconnected culture in their classroom.

The body is a socially constructed site in NT girlhood culture. The body is an important site for NT girls to claim gender identity as female students; however, NT girls mutually co-constructed gender identities with peers. Thus, NT girls’ bodies, as implements, are social constructions that impact how NT girls managed peer relationships. Different from NT boys’ strategies to strongly protect body rights or to work hard to extend personal space, NT girls chose to avoid conflicts and found alternative resolutions to claim their spaces. It seemed as if their bodies held a different power than boys and mainstream girls. Others frequently invaded their spaces, but NT girls typically did not fight to reclaim their space as females. The following incident describes how Xing-Yan managed her space while her peers occupied her space by using her assigned seat (this instance is not the same as the one mentioned in Chapter 4).
She yielded her seat. Male classmates liked to put belongings or play games on Xing-Yan’s seat. Even though class rules allowed students to play at another’s seat during free time, most children prohibited others from using their seats, and the owner of the seat always argued with the new invader, but I never saw Xing-Yan drive her classmates away. For example, when boys constructed swords at her desk, she found another vacant seat at which to sit and play. Still, she diligently watched her seat. As soon has the student using her seat moved, she quickly went occupied her own seat. She seldom complained about the inconvenient situation of other people taking her space. Xing-Yan seemed to violate the rule that where someone sat was his or her priority play space unless offered to someone else. Why did she endure this inconvenience? There was no direct inclusion or invitation to prove whether or not Xing-Yan’s sharing was to gain stature or become part of the group; nevertheless, she always acted quietly in class. I never saw her protest. However, other instances caused her to lose her temper.

Don’t follow me and don’t disturb me, okay? Xing-Yan warned Yi-Hong, an NT boy, to stop following her as she went into the bathroom. She felt irate toward him when he asked her to play a game while she in there. Yi-Hong stood outside the bathroom, continually knocked the door and tried to open it (FD 010408). Going to the bathroom in a private and safe space is an important individual moment wherein Xing-Yan developed a sense of agency over her body. However, the girl’s and boy’s bathrooms at JB Kindergarten are located in the same small space. Children seldom closed the doors while using the bathroom. Xing-Yan was one girl who closed her bathroom door. Here, she took it seriously to warn Yi-Hong that he was not allowed to peek at her body while there.
Differently from Xing-Yan, Yu-Qin kept the bathroom door open while she was using the bathroom and talked with Yi-Hong and others (FD 010708). The two NT girls’ ideas about personal body rights differed greatly. It is little wonder that Xing-Yan criticized Yu-Qin by saying: “She does not know to say ‘no’ to bad boys [who] pulled her long hair” (FD 122708).

Compared to when Xing-Yan yielded her seat, Xing-Yan scolded Yi-Hong about the inappropriateness of invading her personal space—the bathroom. With classroom space, Xing-Yan allowed peers to sit in her seat when she intended to act as a submissive female student in a harmonious class. Compared to the bathroom body space issue, the bathroom allows her to claim her bodily right to prevent a boy from seeing her body, which is very important to be “a good girl generally.” On both issues, Xing-Yan followed the gender norm rather than the social expectation of being an “excellent” girl. Doing so, Xing-Yan could gain more social capital, consequently requiring necessary respect from peers and establish her gendered social position in a harmonious classroom. Being a submissive girl became her strategy to establish gender identity. The next incident shows how another girl also had to protect girls’ personal bodily privacy.

*Don’t peek at girls as they change into their Halloween costumes*. Recognizing the body’s value helps kindergartners to respect another’s privacy. At the Halloween party, several WK Kindergarten girls chose the dramatic area to change into costumes because they said that was a best place to prevent boys from watching them. Yet, two mainstream Taiwanese boys, Min-Zhe and Ming-Xian, spied on the girls who were changing. Mei-Jia, a six-year-old NT girl, found them standing outside the dramatic area
watching the girls change. She immediately reported the intrusion to Teacher Chen, asking her to severely punish the boys. Teacher Chen gave them a verbal warning and merely required the boys to do something else. For the rest of the day, Mei-Jia followed Min-Zhe and Ming-Xian, continually calling them “abnormal.” Mei-Jia’s public condemnation made both of the boys feel upset and Min-Zhe cried in class (FD 102807).

Mei-Jia did not have a pretty costume for the Halloween parade, but she protected her peers as they changed. She ridiculed the boys for violating the girls’ bodily privacy thinking everyone is entitled to it. Though she did not have any fantastic material to attract other’s attention, she acted as a protector. Doing so, she presented her gender power, thereby demanding gender equality.

The influence of local and popular culture. Local and popular cultures were part of NT girls’ life experiences, combining family background and classroom learning when forming gender identities. NT girls needed to be familiar with local and fashion culture when playing with mainstream peers. The local culture in this study included religion and local customs, and its context often involves how society approves gender norms. Popular culture includes popular movies, TV cartoons, songs and fashion figures. Trademarks and famous figures in these media appear in the children’s daily commodities, therefore shaping children’s and parents’ conscious choice of gender-appropriate articles to coincide with children’s genders. Both local and popular cultures possess abundant symbols to present gender consciousness, which became kindergarten gender culture, and children represented these dominant discourses in peer interaction.
The following incident shows how NT girls adapted themselves in the context of local cultures when playing with mainstream Taiwanese girls.

_I want to be one of the Twelve Babysitters_. When several mainstream Taiwanese girls began playing “Twelve Babysitters,” Xing-Yan was not invited to play early on because she did not know the social significance of a local story. Instead, she saw the mainstream Taiwanese girls playing dolls and used her own jacket as a doll. She played alone near them, imitating them. She overheard one say, “All twelve babysitters should be dressed well and should be professional care givers.” Hearing this, Xing-Yan argued that they did not have enough to play the game, so she could add to their numbers. The mainstream Taiwanese girls considered her argument and provisionally let her play with them, but she “could not” share toys that they used to decorate their dolls (FD 120507).

Playing Twelve Babysitters with peers provided Xing-Yan an opportunity to assimilate with mainstream Taiwanese girls and become a member in their group. Recognizing this play custom, they included her in play from which she may have otherwise been excluded. As a result, she claimed her position as a local Taiwanese girl because she acted out the same play as the mainstream Taiwanese girls.

_The Barbie doll_. Another example illustrates how popular culture directed NT and mainstream Taiwanese girls to play together. Popular culture allows NT girls to limit the differences between the social classes by having similar toys and play content with mainstream girls.

At JB Kindergarten, Toy Sharing Day was a Saturday when children could bring their own toys to school. One Saturday, Yu-Qin brought a Barbie doll. It embodied
elegance, wearing a flowing blue ball gown and having long hair that flowed delicately over its slim figure. Its ornate jewelry sparkled, and its makeup was the perfect example of a poised, aristocratic woman. Yu-Qin also had flowing long hair and an ornate barrette. She repeatedly told Teacher Su that she liked the doll and she hoped to dress similarly.

She held the Barbie tightly, especially as the mainstream Taiwanese girls came to touch it. Yu-Qin smiled brightly while others admired her doll and her. She appeared very proud to be in the spotlight with her beautiful doll. Chi-Wei, an admiring popular mainstream Taiwanese girl, proposed that if Yu-Qin allowed her to hold her Barbie, she would draw pictures with Yu-Qin. The doll allowed the two girls to become temporary playmates, but throughout that day, I never saw Chi-Wei draw with Yu-Qin (FD 010508).

Yu-Qin and Chi-Wei longed to live like they imagined Barbie living, and playing with the doll allowed them to vicariously experience what they imagined mainstream, middle-class life to be. This was not unique to NT girls, but still more important, because the varied professional roles offered by Barbie and her accessories gave the young girls a chance to express unique dreams. Barbie’s fashionable dressing, good life, and feminine figure are distant fantasies for NT girls, but Yu-Qin was able to leverage Barbie’s ability to make each girl’s dream into an opportunity to play with a mainstream girl. Chi-Wei, in the end, only had a few minutes to play with the doll before the teacher told them to clean up, so Yu-Qin never got to color with Chi-Wei. However, the story plainly illustrates how Barbie can shape girls’ imagination and bring two unlikely playmates together, and where a lower status child can temporarily gain power over or with a mainstream peer.
NT girls and mainstream peers had pink Hello Kitty, Snow White, Little Mermaid and Winnie the Pooh accessories. These animated figures and fascinating stories shaped NT girls’ gender norms. NT girls were particularly susceptible to these figures’ typically feminine characteristics, such as specific gender roles and concepts of heterosexual and romantic love. Physical attributes included a slim and attractive stature, an oval-shaped face featuring almond-shaped eyes and a petite nose, stylish attire and a pleasing, delicate voice. Content embodied in girls’ items associated with these figures were romantic fairy tales intended to convey a universalized femininity to which all girls could easily relate. In the end, they used knowledge of pop culture to become globalized young girls.

The tension between the collective and individuality of peer relationships, socially constructed bodies in class and the need to assimilate to both local and popular culture in play context culminated in three interrelated aspects within which NT girls constructed girlhood. Understanding these three tensions helps to understand how Xing-Yan, Yu-Qin and Mei-Jia constructed girlhood through the critical incidents of peer interaction. These generalized characteristics thus provide a basis to understand routine patterns appearing in other critical incidents.

**The Five Characteristics of New Taiwanese Girlhood within These Contexts**

Comparing NT girls’ characteristics with NT boys’, NT girls’ patterns focus on how they get any foothold of power. NT boys genuinely competed for power with mainstream Taiwanese girls, so they had a gendered dominance to maintain, unlike NT girls. Instead of competing for identity, they looked for available roles that complimented that of their mainstream peers. They skillful scraped here and there, enacting various
roles, for identity recognition. In the most positive light, NT girls’ flexibility with identity allows them to find a way to interact harmoniously in almost any social situation. Framed critically, NT girls prohibited themselves from developing more stabilized visions. These critical social roles in the gendered hierarchy unified NT girls. Consistent themes among the very diverse NT girls emphasized sensitivity to others’ needs and honed abilities to observe and attend to details. They could choose to be visible or invisible in class. When placing themselves in the margins of the social world, they were not removed from what gave them social capital. They embraced the distinctly feminine helper role, and finally, they had dreams and samples of middle-class life. Each issue is discussed in turn below.

**Observing the social details of classroom life.** NT girls respected their environment and peers’ and teachers’ moods. They seemed to measure how they might interact in a way that gave recognition and affirmation needed to be situated positively among peers. NT girls valued their ability to utilize available resources for themselves without upsetting class or peer-group harmony. Sections below will illustrate how NT girls with an eye for detail searched for chances to resist or submit to their environments.

**Choosing to be visible or invisible.** NT girls typically acted as invisible girls in peer groups. Usually, they deferred their own desires to those of the group and became invisible by blending in like a chameleon. If they could not present themselves as beneficial group members, they tended to withdraw into the background by becoming invisible. However, they became selectively visible when thinking they could present themselves in their best light. Using insightful analysis described in the first value, NT girls opted to become visible when they saw a desirable role available for them to play.
Using social capital to move from the margins. NT girls who chose visibility then had a choice of staying at the social group’s center or periphery. They rarely chose the center, except for few notable exceptions. More often, they placed themselves at the margins of the activity where their role was well-established and they gained social capital, usually as reciprocity, simply for going along. Thus, they entitled themselves for reciprocation, as called for by the standard social rules in Taiwanese society. This gaining of reciprocity enabled them to be protected by peers; gradually, they could, within limits, construct desired positions. Secondly, while building social capital from the margins, they did not risk becoming drawing any negative attention because they could accumulate social capital and still minimize the potential hazard of being corrected. Reciprocal peer relationships came mostly from boys and few mainstream Taiwanese girls.

**Leading others and being helpful.** When NT girls opted for the center, they often chose to be helpers because whoever involves themselves in service to public affairs is viewed as respectable, so long as they serve the public good. NT girls, with their ability to select the right moment and role, were skilled at becoming helpers. There were few opportunities for teachers to allow NT girls to be helpers, which was usually the most effective strategy for NT girls to attain noticeable positions. NT girls might not be terribly successful here, but they knew how to take advantage of these situations. Commonly, the meaning of being a helper differed from that of mainstream Taiwanese female helpers because mainstream were offered more opportunities to learn mainstream social skills, which then promoted the gendered social order.
**Dreaming of material aspects of middle class.** While the previous themes dealt with strategies for getting social capital, this fifth value expresses how NT girls acted when they had experiences that furthered dreams of middle class life. The four NT girls found material examples of beauty alluring; they kept beauty accessories (e.g., nail files) as toys in a kind of perpetual dramatic play where they dreamed of themselves as middle class, acting just like mainstream peers. For them, a better life may be brought about by being pretty. Moreover, the hidden curriculum at school encouraged them to obtain middle-class mannerisms, permitting NT girls to be praised as good girls. In order to acquire these social goods, they desired to play with beautiful things and listen to the teachers’ directions regarding decorum.

These five socially constructed characteristics paint a picture of the NT girls. Within these characteristics, NT girls negotiated the opportunities and power in class. By means of struggling for social capital, NT girls intended to raise their position in the gendered social hierarchy. Ideally, when being sensitive to other’s needs, they could successfully interact with peers and become watchful in class; however, this was not always the case. But as visible or invisible helpers, NT girls gained some social capital when they struggled to solidify their gender position in the classroom.

**Conclusion.** These characteristics represent a complex series of choices the girls think through as they interact with peers and teachers. Chasing a middle-class life represents the impact of gendered social hierarchy on NT girls’ personal dreams. The first describes a skill they co-constructed to interact successfully with their peers. They became watchful. The next three values represent a complex series of choices girls must
think through as they interact. The fifth represents the impact that the gendered social hierarchy has had on their dreams of themselves. They smartly realize that beauty is power and that it can help them compete with mainstream Taiwanese girls regarding gendered status in the eyes of boys.

NT girlhood is complicated, and there is further confusion about what a girl is. NT and mainstream Taiwanese girls cannot co-construct gender together because they have two quite different positions in the gendered social hierarchy. There is not one “girl” or “girlhood” but rather several “girls” and “girlhoods.” NT girls’ values allow them to be several people in different environments, but as the next section shows, this proves difficult as they attempt to establish a gendered identity.

Role of Girlhood Characteristics in NT Girls’ Friendships

This section discusses how NT girls start friendships. First, I will discuss how sisterhood emerges. Although many of these behaviors are primarily aimed at aiding assimilation, there are still times when, despite their best efforts, they do not yet possess the middle-class mannerisms that mainstream Taiwanese girls expect of other girls. Occasionally, despite sensitivity to their circumstances, family cultural background led their interaction to be viewed by mainstream Taiwanese girls as awkward or clumsy, casting them back down the gendered social hierarchy. This section illustrates how friendships displayed gender hierarchies when NT girls interacted with each other and among mainstream Taiwanese girls and boys, as well as NT boys.

Friendships among NT girls were often complicated to define. As they searched for harmonious peer relationships, NT girls made themselves visible or invisible,
depending on the circumstances. As they developed either harmonious or conflict-ridden peer relationships, the relationships depended heavily upon various power struggles. NT girls struggled to climb from the bottom of the gender hierarchy to a loftier position. They were often tense, given that they needed to be alert to changes within the environment. Moreover, they felt a special need to be aware of mainstream Taiwanese girls’, mainstream Taiwanese boys’ and NT boys’ characteristics. While seeking friends, NT girls were under intense pressure to persuade peers to play with them. In various situations, they submitted to, hid from, negotiated with, or resisted the dominant gender norms as they constructed gender identities.

**Sisterhood Relationships Reflect Girls’ Gendered Social Orders**

Here, sisterhood is defined as strategies that groups of girls use to construct female gender identities. Sisterhood relationships developed within the girls’ peer culture and presented the following characteristics in small groups: (1) the existence of girls’ groups in which members referred to each other as older or younger sisters, often to secure fixed gender order; (2) the presence of social arrangements where older girls decided to care for younger girls, often serving as mediators while teaching their juniors how to play games and share toys; and (3) the maintenance of a system of etiquette when younger girls respect the elders’ social orders.

They followed these patterns, establishing fundamental requirements for close relationships. These sisterhood relationships bound the girls in a manner informed by mutual obligations creating a trust atmosphere where secrets could be shared, which paralleled Taiwanese family hierarchy positions. Apparently, NT girls were less involved
in the sisterhood circles of mainstream Taiwanese girls. The following incident illustrated some differences in sisterhood relationships found with NT and mainstream girls.

**Will you be my background dancer?** Jia-Jia and Yi-Ting, two mainstream girls, played with Yu-Qin, an NT girl in the “Three Shining Sisters” singing group game. Jia-Jia negotiated with Yi-Ting and Yu-Qin about their pseudonyms, that is, if they agreed to be her background dancers. “I will call you ‘Mi-Mi,’” Jia-Jia said, gesturing to Yi-Ting. Yi-Ting disliked this name, however. “No,” she said, “I prefer ‘Ling-Ling.’” Then, Yi-Ting made another request of Jia-Jia: “I also want to sing a song with you.” Jia-Jia shrugged, “Okay, it’s your choice.” At that point, Jia-Jia turned to Yu-Qin. “You will be my sister,” she said. “I will call you ‘Hua-Hua.’” In response, Yu-Qin merely smiled. Interpreting this as a sign of agreement, Jia-Jia began to order Yu-Qin about. “Okay, you are Hua-Hua now,” she said. “You need to pay attention to what I tell you.” But after a few minutes, Jia-Jia began to reprimand Yu-Qin. “If you do not learn—you seem so stupid—I will not allow you to stay with me anymore,” she shouted.

This conversation shows that Yi-Ting was fully able to express her opinion when talking to Jia-Jia, whereas Yu-Qin did not seem to know how to voice her opinion. She expressed her views in a few words uttered under her breath, which could barely be heard. Yu-Qin’s substandard communication skills, submissive attitude and evidently limited ability contributed to her low gender position in the group. These characteristics caused female peers to exclude her from a “sister” position. Yu-Qin’s failure to participate competently in the girls’ play culture ensured that she would become the “other,” a figure relegated to the margins of the group.
As noted, the construction of sisterhood relationships among Taiwanese girls is deeply influenced by family kinship, the values of which are upheld from Confucianism. These Taiwanese girls largely adhered to imparted knowledge concerning the relationship between an older sister and younger sister at home; they applied this knowledge when establishing gendered social order within female peer culture. This suggests that the girls’ family gender roles were essentially transplanted into the classroom as part of a gender hierarchy. What NT girls knew about family gendered position and gendered social order at could have various influences on NT girls’ gender consciousness when interacting with peers. Under this Confucian umbrella of sisterhood, NT girls’ gendered social order positions were determined according to gender, ethnicity and capacity to conform to classroom standards. But there are many possibilities; NT girls could resist dominant discourses if pedagogy could support NT girls and mainstream peers negotiating equality. Then, NT girls could help themselves within a power-laden classroom.

During my observation, I rarely encountered a deep sisterhood attachment established between an NT girl and a mainstream Taiwanese girl. Overall, NT girls had fewer chances to develop close friendships, e.g., sisterhood relationships, because of the difficulties they faced in overcoming discrepancies between their household culture and that of mainstream peers. Therefore, intimacy between members of the two groups seemed almost impossible to achieve, despite the fact that these classmates played similar games. As a result of cross-cultural backgrounds, NT girls struggled almost continually to gain familiarity with knowledge considered fundamental within their peer culture and for
assimilation into mainstream culture. The following sections more closely examine friendships between NT girls.

**Friendships between NT Girls: Reciprocal or Ambiguous Relationships**

Although one might assume that NT girls’ common transnational family backgrounds foster friendship, I discovered that their comparatively substandard social skills and relatively low SES (compared to their mainstream peers) instead combined to prevent friendships. Relationships among NT girls presented various characteristics, even though their mothers had emigrated from Vietnam. But a common heritage did not necessarily mean a strong friendship.

**Social class and parenthood create two different types of NT girls.** Xing-Yan and Yu-Qin, NT girls, studied with Teacher Su; they had little else in common. Xing-Yan’s father drove a truck, and her mother worked full-time in a factory. Her middle-class parents instilled within her, and her younger sister, respect for discipline, hard work and education. Conversely, domestic violence rocked Yu-Qin’s family. Her Vietnamese mother had fled from the family home a year before I commenced my observation. However, the mother returned briefly, only to leave again. Yu-Qin lived with her father and grandmother in a house that her father turned into an illegal gambling casino. As a result, the two girls had almost no basis for friendship.

Even both girls dressed femininely, their clothing differed in nearly every other respect. Xing-Yan’s mother indicated the importance to dress Xing-Yan in a way that seemed contemporary and cosmopolitan. She wanted mainstream Taiwanese to treat her daughter as an equal, so Xing-Yan always wore fashionable, high-quality, well-
coordinated clothing. The articles bore elegant colors such as white, black, gold and lavender. Her mother usually avoided dressing her in bright red, a more traditional Taiwanese girl’s color that designated her as old-fashioned. In addition, Xing-Yan’s hair accessories, shoes and bag always matched her clothing, giving to her a feminine and refined appearance. She carried a pink “Hello Kitty” knapsack and a “Little Mermaid” pencil, which matched her outfits. In my view, Xing-Yan’s attractive appearance set her apart from most female classmates at WK Kindergarten.

Contrasting Xing-Yan’s exceptional attire, Yu-Qin’s clothing used traditional Taiwanese colors, including bright red and mauve. She wore elaborately-tied bows, making her appear old-fashioned and provincial. Her clothing was similar to that sold regularly at Taiwan’s night markets or discount stores. In addition, Yu-Qin wore her grandmother’s perfume, extremely inappropriate for a girl of her age. Further detracting from her appearance was that she was bow-legged, for which Teacher Su recommended corrective surgery. This condition created practical problems, beyond obvious cosmetic ones. She often lost her balance and tumbled to the ground, inspiring her peers to laugh and refer to her as “that drunken girl.” Given the sharp differences between Xing-Yan’s and Yu-Qin’s demeanor and background, it was unsurprising that they failed to develop a strong friendship. Still other factors estranged them from each other, however.

At one point, Xing-Yan complained to me that Yu-Qin was a very different kind of girl than she was, because she preferred to play with boys. Once I asked Xing-Yan, “What do you think of Yu-Qin?” Without hesitation, Xing-Yan replied that Teacher Su often praised Yu-Qin’s drawings. “I like her pretty pictures,” she added. “Excellent,” I
said. “And what did you see when you ride home with her on the bus?” This time, Xing-Yan’s response was less positive. “Boys like to pull her pigtails and touch her neck,” she complained. “But she doesn’t stop them. She always plays ‘hug-hug,’ ‘kiss-kiss’ games with them.” I was surprised by her negativity, given her earlier positive response. “Why does she like to play with them?” I asked. “Did she tell the boys to stop when they bothered her?” Xing-Yan hesitated before answering. “I do not know,” Xing-Yan said. “When she felt upset, she only cried.” Evidently, Xing-Yan was extremely upset about Yu-Qin’s behavior. “Will these boys treat you or other girls in this way?” I asked. Xing-Yan responded by pointing out that she avoided sitting near them on the bus. “Most girls sit together,” she explained. “Some girls will report her to the school bus instructor.” I recommended that Xing-Yan could advise Yu-Qin to report these incidents to the teacher. “She is not my good friend,” Xing-Yan said. “But I will tell her.” I then asked Xing-Yan if she would consider befriending Yu-Qin. “But she hugs boys,” Xing-Yan said quietly. “I do not want…” Her voice trailed off, and I could not make out her response.

In this exchange, Xing-Yan noted that Yu-Qin did not prevent the boys’ actions on the bus. But when at school, they almost never played together, sitting in different sections of the room and having separate friends. Xing-Yan socialized exclusively with girls, and she showed signs of independence by practicing math questions alone. Yu-Qin, however, constantly sought help from others (e.g., Fu-Cheng, peers, or Teacher Su). This shows that family background likely affects socialization and the social hierarchy.

**Being distant may ensure a higher status for some NT girls.** Given their lower social levels within the class, NT girls anticipated a need to protect themselves, or seek
help from others. Nevertheless, Yu-Qin and Xing-Yan showed different characteristics during peer interaction where they constructed respective girlhoods. From critical feminist power perspectives, however, they failed to establish a friendship that would likely improve social status, given their slight Vietnamese accents and lower academic abilities. Therefore, it seemed reasonable for them to forge friendships with mainstream peers. These peers’ better position might help them adapt to social realities in mainstream Taiwanese culture. While reviewing videotapes, I observed several occasions when Yu-Qin and Xing-Yan chose to stand on opposite sides of Teacher Su. They both clearly sought Teacher Su’s support, but it was also evident that they did so separately because of their differences in characteristics, SES and capabilities.

Identifying and appreciating each other’s advantages could have led the girls to deeper personal understandings. Even Xing-Yan admitted that she and Yu-Qin employed different strategies to make friends. The next passage describes a case where the two NT girls cooperated to help the teacher administer class.

**With the teacher’s help, NT girls gain equal status.** During English class, Teacher Su asked for helpers to distribute five books to each student. Xing-Yan immediately volunteered. She counted the stacks of five books and passed them on to the first recipient, Yu-Qin. Yu-Qin then volunteered to distribute other stacks as Xing-Yan directed. Doing so, both girls earned their classmates’ gratitude. Teacher Su complimented Xing-Yan for devising a plan to work quickly and efficiently.

Students considered it an honor to assist a teacher in passing out books at JB Kindergarten. Teacher Su often charged an “honor student” with this task, and the task’s
prestige did not end there. Helpers had authority to distribute and retrieve books, and they could ask classmates to assist them. On this occasion, Teacher Su gave the honor to Xing-Yan. By cooperating, Xing-Yan and Yu-Qin briefly assumed comparable positions of authority. Serving as helpers improved their gender position since most classmates appreciated their help, and both gained confidence and upgraded gender identities. Nonetheless, this supportiveness did not translate to further compatibility in class. Next, when two other NT girls played in class, similar family background, language and characteristics helped establish a sisterhood-like friendship, and they did not want anyone, including the observer, to disturb them.

**Keeping the Vietnamese language a secret and maintaining invisibility.** At WK Kindergarten, I noted strong similarities between two female NT classmates, Mei-Jia and Lin-Hua, whose mothers emigrated from Vietnam. Lin-Hua studied in the first grade and was enrolled in Teacher Chen’s afterschool care program, as was Mei-Jia. An incident occurred when they used their secret speech to converse. When entering class, they would sit shoulder-to-shoulder in the play area, placing themselves in a small corner. They walked to where I could not watch, for they did not want anyone to interrupt their private conversation. In addition, most peers failed to achieve this level of intimacy. Evidently, their maturity demanded privacy when sharing confidential information.

Teacher Chen noted that Lin-Hua treated Mei-Jia as a younger sister. They used Vietnamese when speaking with each other so that peers could not understand them. Building on a common language background, they often engaged in this secret speech. Although older, Lin-Hua’s shortness in stature did not interfere with their friendship.
Mei-Jia, an aggressive, even combative, NT girl, played the dominant role. Practically invisible to her peers, Lin-Hua acted reservedly and quietly. Previously, when Lin-Hua passed kindergarten, Mei-Jia had difficulty finding another close friend.

In an effort to maintain friendship with mainstream girls, the two girls concealed their association. Mei-Jia recognized the need to avoid conflict with mainstream peers who could not speak Vietnamese, understanding that such actions might demote her in the gendered hierarchy and make it difficult to befriend mainstream Taiwanese girls. She pretended to have the same language background. While Mei-Jia and Lin-Hua pursued their friendship, they sought to avoid any overt violation of gender norms or established social standards. Controversially, Vietnamese could help them to keep secrets because no teacher or mainstream Taiwanese could understand their dialogue. Through conversations and close friendship, they supported each other as they set out to construct a unique NT girlhood in their sisterhood relationship.

NT girls characterized friendships by similarities in family background and socio-economic status. But their individual characteristics, family function and SES were primary factors that influenced gender identity. These factors enabled NT girls to identify with each other. Overall, NT girls did not establish friendships based on common gender or transnational background. But in the case of Mei-Jai and Lin-Hua, this exclusive friendship was a powerful moment where they secured and kept a shared Vietnamese identity intact. They bravely claimed identity as the children of new Taiwanese mothers.
Friendships between NT Girls and Mainstream Taiwanese Girls

This research found friendships between NT and mainstream Taiwanese girls to be rare. Such friendships, however, did occur occasionally among girls who shared family backgrounds, feminine characteristics, or comparable abilities (e.g., academic aptitude). Two characteristics of NT girlhood are a capacity to recognize the needs of others and a flexibility to interact with others, depending on the circumstances. These factors influenced NT girls’ decisions to befriend peers.

Even though NT and mainstream Taiwanese girls shared a common gender, various SES backgrounds presented different concepts of girlhood. In accordance, the girls were categorized (by themselves and their peers) within various gendered hierarchies. Because NT girls’ gendered hierarchy closely followed that of NT boys, NT girls formed close friendships with NT boys, but not with mainstream Taiwanese girls. Although many NT girls anticipated establishing supportive friendships with mainstream Taiwanese girls in the gendered hierarchy; the disparity in SES background among NT and mainstream Taiwanese girls was a more influential factor in relationships between them than was common gender. These differences and conflicts place sharp limitations on friendships between mainstream and NT girls. The next incident reveals that material capital did not always ensure that an NT girl and her mainstream Taiwanese friends would assume positions of equality within the gendered hierarchy.

Unequal sharing of commodities and jealousy. Sharing commodities (stickers, candy, toys, etc.) is regarded as an important aspect of friendship among girls. They recognize that ownership implies a right to distribute belongings, or to use it as capital for
developing new friendships. Therefore, sharing something shows that the owner is preparing for a trusting and reciprocal relationship. Moreover, sharing commodities with peers indicates that sharing items establishes good standing within her circle. When peers accept private commodities, they must also resist efforts by those seeking to enter their “secret group.” If, however, the owner of the commodity fails to satisfy her peers, conflict will arise and limit the possibility of friendship.

In both kindergartens, teachers informed students that they were only to bring toys to school on days dedicated to toy sharing. Girls who brought personal commodities to class were careful not to violate this policy. One morning, Teacher Su angrily announced that the classroom toilet was clogged because Zhen-Xiu and Hui-Jan had thrown Xing-Yan’s reward card in it. The highly-prized reward card contained Xing-Yan’s honor stamps from Teacher Su over the entire school year. Teacher Su ordered them to sweep the class floor during naptime for punishment. As it turned out, the two girls had asked Xing-Yan to share her stickers, a personal commodity, to which Xing-Yan replied that she had no stickers left. The girls, however, did not believe Xing-Yan, and they destroyed her reward card as an act of revenge.

Even after this, however, I observed Xing-Yan sharing stickers and cookies with them. Indeed, on that same morning, I noted that several other mainstream Taiwanese girls asked Xing-Yan to share her favorite commodities as she entered class. On another occasion, I watched as these girls casually peeled stickers from Xing-Yan’s sticker book. She offered no resistance as the mainstream Taiwanese girls pulled remove stickers from her sticker book and her pencil box.
When I reported these incidents to Teacher Su, she told the students that they should not ask others for free gifts without having some appropriate reason. She also ordered the girls to return Xing-Yan’s property and asked them to make a public apology to Xing-Yan. Simultaneously, she restated the policy that no child was permitted to bring personal commodities into the school, unless otherwise specified.

Here, by allowing other girls to have her stickers, Xing-Yan made temporary friends but also gained some status among them. Teacher Su interrupted an event that pushed the NT girls further away. Increasingly, Xing-Yan had difficult maintaining friendships with her mainstream Taiwanese peers despite playing an invisible member. Scenes captured on videotape indicated that Xing-Yan had been excluded from the mainstream Taiwanese girls’ “circle of trust.”

**Establishing girl power but being denied friendship: You need to return my fish.** Xing-Yan sat near four mainstream Taiwanese girls, Zhen-Xiu, Jia-Jia, Yun-Cheng and Yi-Ting, who pretend to be a team of chefs preparing an elaborate wedding banquet. Xing-Yan devised her own game, pretending to be a fisherman by placing paper fish on the table. Zhen-Xiu and Jia-Jia indicated that they would buy some of Xing-Yan’s fish. When they asked her to sell all she had, she replied that she could only “pretend” to sell the fish if her peers returned them after pretending to cook them because she needed them to play her fish game. The mainstream Taiwanese girls rejected this compromise. Finally, they said: “If you cannot sell your fish to us, you can’t play here!” In response, Xing-Yan quietly packed her paper fish and left (FD 010409).
The four mainstream Taiwanese girls believed that “buying” the fish entitled them to keep the fish. Conversely, Xing-Yan realized that she needed the paper fish to play her game. During negotiations, Xing-Yan and the mainstream Taiwanese girls could not reach a mutually beneficial agreement. Furthermore, the incident further damaged already antagonistic relationships. Xing-Yan would not want to endure her rude and unfriendly mainstream Taiwanese peers, so she left. She assumed an impassive expression that reflected a maturity beyond her age.

Like her mainstream peers, Xing-Yan found playing with others generally more enjoyable than playing alone. Given that they could not negotiate from positions of equality, however, it became increasingly difficult for her to maintain friendships. Nevertheless, in the videotapes, Xing-Yan usually remained on the margins of this group. At a glance, it appeared as though she was a member of this group, but upon closer observation, this was hardly the case. A close examination of the video showed that mainstream Taiwanese girls had a complex relationship with Xing-Yan with few factors associated with friendship. Refusing to be pushed into a submissive category may have cost her possible friendships, as the next incident concerning prohibited behavior reveals.

**Imitating forbidden roles to gain power: When we smoked together.** On one occasion, when Teacher Su left the classroom temporarily, Xing-Yan shared a box of candy cigarettes with six mainstream Taiwanese girls. They gathered together in a corner of the room and stood in a small semicircle holding the candy cigarettes between their fingers, pretending to smoke like adults. When I approached the semicircle, the girls screamed aloud, ran away and hid their candy cigarettes. Later, when I approached Xing-
Yan and asked her why the girls did not want me to see them “smoking,” she indicated that smoking was only for males (FD 112307).

These girls shared privately these materials as they pretended to smoke like adults, and it was clear from their facial expressions that they understood that they challenged established gender boundaries. This was confirmed when several mainstream Taiwanese girls agreed with Xing-Yan by saying, “Only men can smoke; women cannot smoke” (FD 112307). Xing-Yan obviously knew about this societal rule, and she was likely concerned that her candy cigarettes would cause her problems. Initially, she did not even admit that she owned the candy cigarettes. I was not interested in whether she violated a class rule; however, I was curious about how the candy cigarettes attracted several mainstream Taiwanese girls, who formed a group and pretended to smoke. I rarely saw Xing-Yan in the company of her female classmates, but I noticed that, on those rare occasions when she had items to share with them, her peers immediately encircled her. On the contrary, I rarely saw any of Xing-Yan’s female peers share items with her. During observations, Xing-Yan became increasingly bothered by her peers’ insensitivity and unfriendliness. In some cases, she slipped into the bathroom, or she would read to herself while others played near her. In fact, other girls often excluded Xing-Yan when they shared their property, even though Xing-Yan was generous with her own.

**Being ignored: Sharing lipstick with everyone else.** Xing-Yan and her tablemate Hui-Jan often socialized in a decidedly unequal friendship. Xing-Yan shared most possessions, but Hui-Jan rarely reciprocated. Once, Hui-Jan allowed several classmates to use her lipstick. At the time, Xing-Yan sat right next to her, quietly reading
a storybook. I was surprised to find that Hui-Jan did not share any lipstick with Xing-Yan. Meanwhile, Xing-Yan kept an impassive expression and continued to read (FD 010208).

Later, I questioned Hui-Jan and her group about opting not to invite Xing-Yan to join them. They offered several answers: Xing-Yan would not share her arithmetic answers; she refused to share her perfume; and she spoke with a thick, barely-understandable Vietnamese accent (FD 010308). Notably, Xing-Yan and her mainstream Taiwanese peers had other disparities. She dressed differently and deceivingly showed limited quantitative skills. Nevertheless, I wondered why these girls concluded these differences as sound reasons to exclude her. Despite rude treatment, Xing-Yan never confronted them. I concluded that this behavior reflected her desire to have friends, like her mainstream peers. Xing-Yan brought prohibited personal property to class as capital to establish friendships, even if these blatantly one-sided “friendships” lacked reciprocity and the trust circle of sisterhood.

Invisibility was not an option for NT girls, however. In the following incident, one NT girl drew her mainstream Taiwanese female classmates’ criticism when she developed a close friendship with the most popular mainstream Taiwanese boy.

**Girls’ jealousy arises from masculine protection.** A group of mainstream Taiwanese girls complained to me about Yu-Qin. This NT girl had developed a close friendship with Fu-Cheng, and they felt like vomiting whenever they saw Yu-Qin kiss Fu-Cheng on his cheek. As noted above, Fu-Cheng was the most popular boy in class because his mother was Teacher Su while Yu-Qin remained a marginalized figure. The
mainstream girls did not direct their anger solely at Yu-Qin; they also felt that their champion had abandoned them. Clearly, the girls’ hostility resulted from jealousy.

Teacher Su, aware of Yu-Qin’s delayed development and learning challenges, placed Ya-Yu, a mainstream Taiwanese girl, next to Fu-Cheng. Yu-Qin and Fu-Cheng shared a table with Ya-Yu, whom Teacher Su described to me as the top female student. This move was designed to help Yu-Qin, but it became evident that the two girls’ gender offered no guarantee of friendship. As a result, Yu-Qin’s limitations prevented her from playing with Fu-Cheng and Ya-Yu simultaneously.

**Three is a crowd when one can’t keep up.** Yu-Qin and Fu-Cheng randomly toyed with a math puzzle. Neither could assemble the pieces in any kind of recognizable order. At some point, Ya-Yu showed them how to put the puzzle together properly. Despite repeated explanations, Yu-Qin could not understand. She watched as Fu-Cheng, who immediately grasped the instructions, put together the puzzle independently. Naturally, Yu-Qin became frustrated and left. Despite Fu-Cheng being only four years old, he had learned how to perform this task. Yet, Yu-Qin, who was six, consistently failed to follow Ya-Yu’s directions. Yu-Qin appeared frustrated over her inability to keep up with other children, and in time, she became less confident about her capacity to overcome these challenges. In the above incident, it appeared that Yu-Qin lacked abilities and communication skills that permitted her to establish an equal gender position with Ya-Yu. In the next incident, we see that criticism did not raise a gender social position, but could instead undermine existing friendships.
Verbal combat: You are not a real princess. Mei-Jia did not come prepared with an impressive costume for the annual Halloween parade. Her mother gave her an inexpensive handkerchief as her primary accessory. Mei-Jia compared her modest costume to those of middle-class girls, many of whom dressed as princesses. She was particularly attentive to Cai-Yui’s costume, a purple, silky gown that featured a pair of angel wings. At one point, she approached Cai-Yui and said: “You are not a real princess. Your clothes cannot make you a princess.” Cai-Yui, a five-year-old mainstream Taiwanese girl, did not reply, but clearly she was angry and hurt. Mei-Jia’s comment may have been a reflection of her insecurity about her own less-impressive costume. During the day, Mei-Jia wore a mask fashioned by Teacher Chen. The mask was fastened to her face with the cheap handkerchief.

This incident calls attention to the divergent SES backgrounds of Mei-Jia and Cai-Yui. Among children, clothing instantly indicates one’s socio-economic status. Attire also provides a means of constructing gender identity. Halloween is a Western custom unfamiliar with Mei-Jia’s family. Mei-Jia, recognized that her costume lacked impressiveness. She attempted to bring Cai-Yui down to her own level on the gendered hierarchy by criticizing her. In the end, however, Mei-Jia’s criticism of Cai-Yui caused peers to avoid befriending her.

Conclusion. As these incidents suggest, competition within the female power structure was far stronger than any ties of gender. As a result, NT girls had tremendous difficulty overcoming differences in their SES and family backgrounds.
**Is Xing-Yan the most successful of the three NT girls?** Xing-Yan maintained friendships with NT and mainstream Taiwanese girls. Forming her own opinions, she made choices that empowered her. Xing-Yan closely observed her peers and struggled to make choices based on her own needs, and her likes and dislikes. Mostly, she remained an invisible girl at the margins of her peer group. She chose to play alone when mainstream Taiwanese peers belittled her. Even Xing-Yan could not to alter the dominant discourses reflected in these unequal friendships. At the same time, she always seemed to sense when to drift to the margins, or to take center stage, when dealings with peers. In addition, Xing-Yan tenaciously defended her position as an NT girl when peers resented the fact that she had gained certain advantages. Doing so, she faced many challenges. Her relationship with her mainstream female peers was often troublesome, making it difficult for her to find a safe way to be an NT girl.

In the incident involving the candy cigarettes, Xing-Yan challenged traditional gender boundaries. She and her peers adopted the role of a male adult smoker, an action that violated of class policy. Her response to the unequal negotiations over the paper fish showed that she was willing to defend her rights when dealing with female peers. She also showed no emotion when facing rejection. When her tablemates failed to invite her to use lipstick, for instance, Xing-Yan continued to read as though indifferent. She established an impressive degree of independence, especially when compared to Yu-Qin.

**Is Yu-Qin sensitive about her limited aptitude?** Yu-Qin sought flexibility when choosing friends. Given her limited abilities, she needed peers’ help and attention, and even established friendships with mainstream Taiwanese boys. Her closeness with Fu-
Cheng drew female classmates’ angry criticism, making it difficult to establish friendships. When she had difficulty playing with the math puzzle, she simply moved on to another game. Because of her academic capabilities and verbal abilities, she asked for the teachers’ help to develop better social skills so she could play with peers.

*Do Mei-Jia’s personal characteristics make it difficult for her to befriend mainstream peers?* Mei-Jia did not care how she appeared in public, so she became marginalized due to her deficiencies and social status. She was alone, except when Lin-Hui attended afterschool care. She used her social power to argue with mainstream Taiwanese children. Once, Mei-Jia sought to advance her status by criticizing Cai-Yui. She intended to argue that Cai-Yui’s princess dress is a status symbol, not her actual social position. Though aware that dresses could only be a symbol of one’s feminine appearance or gender hierarchy, Mei-Jia still wanted to convey her opinion. Instead of feeling inferior for lacking a Halloween costume, she criticized her peer. However, Mei-Jia lacked appropriate social skills to do so in order to advance her status. Ultimately, her unfriendly behavior failed to elevate her status but instead undermined her relationship with her peers.

NT and mainstream Taiwanese girls’ social backgrounds proved to be a stronger connection than a common gender. Both groups of girls struggled to deal with peers’ diverse backgrounds. As the incidents suggest, even material goods empowered NT girls to make friends with mainstream Taiwanese girls; the contest to be feminine, intelligent and capable was stronger than the gender tie within the two populations.
A Tug-of-war for Gender Hierarchy: Friendships between NT girls and Mainstream Taiwanese Boys

Friendship between NT girls and mainstream Taiwanese boys can be viewed within the context of two divergent social standards: the leadership hierarchy and social expectations based on disparities inherent in gender hierarchy. Most NT girls are granted fewer social resources and develop weaker social leadership skills than most mainstream Taiwanese boys and mainstream Taiwanese girls. When NT girls showed traditional feminine characteristics, and mainstream Taiwanese boys reciprocated by showing traditional masculine characteristics, the two groups established a complementary relationship. Only where NT girls were more inclined than mainstream Taiwanese girls to present femininity—and only when they encountered mainstream Taiwanese boys who presented masculine characteristics—did NT girls win NT boys’ support. Otherwise, NT boys severely pressured them.

Gender stereotypes of NT girls derive from their socially-constructed bias and unfamiliarity with classroom regulations. It is assumed that NT girls suffer from inherent weaknesses, and that relatively low levels of academic achievement reflect a natural lack of aptitude when compared with mainstream Taiwanese.

These differences emerge because NT girls, who are from transnational families, are forced to negotiate the distance between two very different cultures. As a rule, they face greater challenges adapting to social norms and adjusting to school regulations. Consequently, NT girls are typically afforded less social power than mainstream Taiwanese boys. While NT girls’ social status is located at the bottom of the class,
mainstream Taiwanese boys’ position is at the top of the social hierarchy. Given the disparity in the social status of these two groups, interactions could be confrontational or complementary. When NT girls sought gender equality with mainstream Taiwanese boys, their relationships tended to be confrontational. Next, an NT girl called attention to her awkward situation as she sought support from a mainstream Taiwanese boy.

**Being feminine and weak means finding friendship with a boy.** Teachers regarded Yu-Qin as a rather vulnerable NT girl, considering that she showed delayed development and weak communication skills. Fu-Cheng sat beside Yu-Qin in class. They established a strong friendship because Yu-Qin desired to learn with Fu-Cheng, and while their ages differed, Yu-Qin enjoyed Fu-Cheng’s company. He protected her from the hostility of some of classmates and assisted her in overcoming learning difficulties.

Over time, however, external pressures began to alter their relationship. As noted above, when Fu-Cheng grew older, he enjoyed playing with other NT boys. Once, Yu-Qin followed Fu-Cheng as he joined a group of boys who were making play swords. The other boys soon excluded Yu-Qin; they claimed that she was not qualified to participate in fighting games because of her gender (FD 112207).

Yu-Qin enjoyed few opportunities to familiarize herself with boys’ play culture. Her inability to comprehend boys’ play culture ensured that Yu-Qin would become an outsider in the fighting game. Moreover, older NT boys openly rejected Yu-Qin, and Fu-Cheng failed to protect her because of his young age. As a result, Yu-Qin confronted challenges in her friendship with Fu-Cheng while at the same time struggling with gender identity issues as they appeared in boys’ play activities.
Yu-Qin, like many mainstream girls, needed friends for support and recreation. In order to establish friendships, she adapted herself to her friends’ needs. Fu-Cheng showed masculinity as he helped and protected her and solved problems. When playing together, she adopted a traditional feminine role and submitted to his protection.

Soon, Fu-Cheng spent more time with other boys, and Yu-Qin began to find new playmates. Notably, she adopted the role of an NT boy’s pet, and she began to play with two mainstream Taiwanese girls, in servant and background dancer roles. Yu-Qin sensed that these playmates could protect her. She became skilled at the invisible role, one that gave her flexibility needed to make new friends. These friendships could offer her a stable gendered social hierarchy. Compared to Yu-Qin’s mild-mannered approach, Mei-Jia’s strategy is assertive when interacting with others.

**An older girl, protecting girl spaces: You are not in our group; go away!!** At WK Kindergarten, Teacher Wang assigned students to two groups, instructing them to use separate multi-person sinks to wash their hands. Unsurprisingly, some took the opportunity to play with water, such as Han-Ji, a five-year-old mainstream Taiwanese boy. After he finished washing his hands, he slipped over to the adjacent sink and began to splash water when his peers and Teacher Wang were not looking. Placing his hands beneath the faucet, he managed to drench himself and some of his peers standing nearby. Mei-Jia, a six-year-old NT girl waiting in line, observed that Han-Ji took an unusual amount of time washing his hands at the sink; she began to complain about the long wait. Finally, she forced Han-Ji to stop, shouting: “Hey! You are not in our group. Go away!!” Mei-Jia threatened to report him to the teacher for playing in the water. At that moment,
Mei-Jia imposed authority over Han-Ji, forcing him to flee. Initially, several mainstream Taiwanese girls approved of her action. They agreed with Mei-Jia that boys should avoid monopolizing the faucets. After several mainstream Taiwanese boys complained that the girls were merely chattering, however, all the girls fell silent. Ultimately, Mei-Jia was the only girl who threatened to report the incident to Teacher Wang (FD, 113007).

Here, Mei-Jia acted as an assertive defender of the group’s rights and argued for equal opportunity. Mei-Jia’s influence was short-lived, and worse yet, it earned her the mainstream Taiwanese boys’ explicit disapproval. Thus, Mei-Jia and the boys failed to communicate with each other. Masculine gender power ensured that friendships between mainstream Taiwanese boys and girls were possible only if NT girls behaved in a manner that was traditionally feminine, i.e., quiet and submissive.

Mei-Jia’s courageous act of defiance could have improved her gender position within the girls’ group. But it proved dangerous to seek agreement and support from the boys, given that many of them were involved in the same behavior in which Han-Ji engaged. Mei-Jia’s status was further weakened by her past behavior. During the previous semester, her behavior irritated the boys, and she even went so far as to physically challenge them. Her actions guaranteed that she was would be widely viewed by most of her classmates as “an unwelcome girl.”

Mei-Jia seldom attended class because her family situation. She and her Vietnamese mother moved several times to avoid the aforementioned domestic violence. I strongly suspected that Me-Jia’s unstable transnational family background influenced her behavior, which apparently fostered an acute sensitivity to gender equity and justice
issues. Her response to certain situations reflected an early maturity, and she willingly argued with her male classmates, who were weakened by poor social skills. But her aggressive posture and impatient outbursts rarely won her allies. Teacher Wang indicated that Mei-Jia engaged in acts of violence during the previous semester, prompting many children to fear and avoid her. Many mainstream Taiwanese boys disliked her because she argued with them when she believed something unfair. One morning, as she entered class, Xian-Ren and Yi-Xiang, two mainstream Taiwanese boys, said: “She is coming! A bad day!” (FD 111807).

Although Mei-Jia complained about boys’ rude behavior, she did not gain peers’ support on this issue. Her sharp tongue certainly turned mainstream Taiwanese boys against her, and mainstream Taiwanese girls alienated her. From the mainstream Taiwanese boys’ perspective, she was an unreasonable girl, given her actions that threatened Han-Ji’s reputation. Moreover, her complaint countered the gendered social order. Mainstream Taiwanese boys failed to view the conflict as a social issue, though Han-Ji inconvenienced others by cutting in line. Instead, the incident resulted in a gender issue, considering that a girl had challenged the boys. Nor did Mei-Jia gain support from mainstream Taiwanese girls; from their perspective, Mei-Jia was an NT girl, a minority and an aggressor within the classroom, which rendered her simply “an outsider.”

Given that she lacked social power to win support, she inevitably experienced oppression based on her position as an NT girl. Even though Mei-Jia studied with many mainstream Taiwanese boys in the classroom, continual gender power conflicts pitted her against them. In various situations, issues such as gendered hierarchy, gender equality
and traditional gender roles prevented friendships between NT girls and mainstream Taiwanese boys. The next incident involves several mainstream Taiwanese boys who played a joke on an NT girl.

**Gender hierarchy makes reclaiming a stolen book impossible.** One day, shortly before English class, Fu-Cheng snatched Xing-Yan’s English book. Xing-Yan chased him, but she could not recover her book. Fu-Cheng passed her book to Jun-Qing and Min-Shan, and the three boys began to pass the book among each other. They teased and ridiculed her as she stood helpless. Initially, she requested my help, so I advised her to ask them to stop. Her first attempt was ineffective, because of her extremely weak voice. The boys laughed in response, ridiculing her trembling voice and pathetic demeanor. Then, Xing-Yan turned to me again. I encouraged her: “TELL them to stop!” When Xing-Yan demanded this, she finally retrieved her book (FD122707).

Xing-Yan appeared weak before she took steps to reclaim her property. Another revealing incident occurred the next day, when several boys used violence to occupy toy cars used by several girls during a recreational break. Xing-Yan was among the victims of this incident who choose to find other game (FD 122807). This critical incident was previously discussed in Chapter Four, Mixed-Gender Play.

Xing-Yan seldom spoke with mainstream Taiwanese boys, though some sent her candy and appeared to enjoy teasing her. Indeed, several appeared to take pleasure in her frustration. Many mainstream Taiwanese boys noticed her unusual quietness; they also wanted to befriend her, but it was clear that she did not want to reply (FD, 112307).
Overall, the more Xing-Yan avoided interaction with mischievous boys, the more they teased and ridiculed her. She seemed serious and cautious, usual characteristics of maturity. For example, while other girls listened to the boys’ jokes and laughed aloud, Xing-Yan remained distant, seldom participating. However, she closely observed her mainstream Taiwanese female peers’ interaction with the boys. She regarded mainstream Taiwanese female tablemates as unfriendly, and kept a safe distance from mainstream Taiwanese boys. In cases where traditional gender differences restricted her, Xing-Yan concealed any signs of friendship with mainstream Taiwanese boys. They needed to learn to interact with each other.

Interviews with family members and Teacher Su revealed that Xing-Yan’s parents were highly protective of Xing-Yan, forbidding her from establishing friendships with boys. This was primarily why her seat was positioned in a corner, where no boys sat near her. Her father also reinforced gender separation, preventing her from establishing friendships with boys. These factors converged to sharply reduce the chances that Xing-Yan would befriend any mainstream Taiwanese boys. Traditions overcame gender equity.

**Conclusion.** Friendships between NT girls and mainstream Taiwanese boys were either complementary or antagonistic, depending on NT girls recognition of gendered positions and how skillfully they negotiated with mainstream Taiwanese boys. Given that most NT boys were at the top of the gender hierarchy in class—with most NT girls at the bottom—friendships between the two groups highlighted many differences. In the above incidents, friendships changed frequently, but NT girls mostly struggled to find new friends. Likewise, efforts to fight for group rights and champion gender equity were
unsuccessful. Ultimately, an aggressive demeanor prevented one NT girl from befriending mainstream Taiwanese boys.

Though NT girls possessed many characteristics, all of them had difficulties—though for different reasons—when seeking to improve gender status. Xing Yan, for instance, faced obstacles related to parental guidelines. Meanwhile, sub-average social skills sharply limited Yu-Qin’s ability to be friends with mainstream peers. Last, Mei-Jia’s family background and home life misguided her social skills, restricting her from establishing friendly relationship with peers.

**Demonstrations of Power and Submission: Friendships between NT Girls and NT Boys**

Promoting the gender hierarchy and pursuing harmonious relationships with classmates were the important goals for NT girls to improve their gender status. They searched for opportunities to create harmonious relations with peers, discovering that establishing friendships with NT boys served as a shortcut in climbing the gender hierarchy. NT girls and boys had similar transnational family backgrounds, enabling the girls to act as friends, playmates and helpers of the boys, all the while establishing harmonious relationships. Gender power conflicts, however, always factored into friendships between NT girls and boys. While NT girls earned more social credit than NT boys, the girls frequently threatened the boys’ gender position. This imbalance in gender power created tension in friendships between the two. The following incident involves an NT girl who was a detail-oriented observer who required male NT friends to follow her.
**Suggesting boys have better behavior: Mei-Jia bends the boundaries like no one else.** Mei-Jia, an NT girl, looked for opportunities to clean up the block area. Teacher Wong appreciated her willingness to volunteer, resulting in many reward stickers. Several times, she compared her stickers favorably to those of two NT boys, Jia-Hong and Cheng-Quan, who had the fewest number of stickers among the boys. She recommended that they volunteer to gain stickers. Jia-Hong covered his ears while Mei-Jia spoke, expressing no interest in performing class services. Similarly, Cheng-Quan stared up and down and then withdrew. When Mei-Jia realized they ignored her, she said: “Nobody can help you! You are helpless!” (FD 112607).

Mei-Jia’s comparison of her own accomplishments to those of the NT boys transcended the female and male gender boundary. Jia-Hong and Cheng-Quan perceived Mei-Jia behavior as overbearing, and her actions injured their self-image. Mei-Jia aggressively promoted her own strategies for winning stickers to them, practically insisting that they modify their behavior to win teacher recognition. The boys were perhaps concerned about a lack of credit (e.g., stickers), and she forced them to confront the reality that their behavior failed to meet teacher expectations. Therefore, Mei-Jia’s suggestion increased discomfort about their poor performance, and made them extremely sensitive about the issue of gender power. Therefore, though Mei-Jia possessed superior social influence, she failed to convince them to act politely. Consequently, Mei-Jia’s neglect of traditional feminine behavior caused the boys to avoid conversation, and they strongly opposed Mei-Jia’s female gender position. The next incident noticeably contrasts Mei-Jia’s behavior.
A bathroom dispute over identity: Boys are such pigs! Different from Mei-Jia’s aggressiveness, Xing-Yan projected a submissive persona when dealing with NT male peers. She engaged in debate with Chi-Wei, a mainstream Taiwanese girl, and Zi-Yang, an NT boy. During naptime, Teacher Su granted Xing-Yan and Chi-Wei permission to use the bathroom. They entered the bathroom first, speaking privately and sharply criticizing boys. Soon, Teacher Su also permitted Zi-Yang to go; he found himself arguing with them over whether boys are pigs or girls are crybabies:

Chi-Wei: I don’t like Da-Wei [an NT boy] because he uses his fingers to eat greasy food. His fingers are always so greasy!

Xing-Yan: Boys are such pigs!

Chi-Wei: I don’t like dirty boys! Boys are dirty!

Xing-Yan: I agree with you! I don’t like boys, either.

The two girls failed to notice that Zi-Yang had entered the bathroom and overheard their conversation. Suddenly, Zi-Yang screamed: “Hey, YOU GIRLS! Girls are such crybabies! I hate girls!”

The girls shockingly realized that Zi-Yang had eavesdropped; they were angered by his provocative comments. Almost immediately, Chi-Wei and Zi-Yang argued bitterly. Chi-Wei claimed that all boys had dirty fingernails, a characteristic that made her physically ill. Zi-Yang retorted that girls did little more than cry loudly, and for no reason.

While they argued, Xing-Yan stood by silently, making no effort to participate, although Chi-Wei was her friend. Therefore, when Teacher Su entered the bathroom to resolve the dispute, she gave the two children a “time out,” but not Xing-Yan. Later, I
asked the girls why they dislike boys, and to express their feelings about Zi-Yang’s comments. Chi-Wei described his words as “rude,” indicating his behavior as consistent with the majority of their male classmates. Both girls suggested that, as a rule, girls were more polite than boys (FD 111407). Here, however, Xing-Yan did little more than respond to Chi-Wei’s answers. Interestingly, Xing-Yan refrained from offering an opinion, either in her conversation with Chi-Wei or during the argument that took place between Chi-Wei and Zi-Yang. This docile behavior was a pattern, for on several occasions, Xing-Yan quietly endured unfair treatment. While her facial expressions reflected unhappiness, she remained silent, and when mischievous male classmates grabbed her personal items, she rarely defended her property.

It would be inappropriate to suggest that Xing-Yan’s behavior fully represented NT girls, but it was obvious that her choices were shaped by standards reflected in the gender culture of her class and family. Significantly, Teacher Su and several classmates considered Xing-Yan to have archetypical “good” female qualities: quietness and obedience. This image, however, brought certain disadvantages. For instance, she depended on teacher guidance and hesitated to defend her rights. Xing-Yan presented an extremely feminine persona, although she tended to step back from challenges. At home, her mother dominated her and reinforced traditional gender stereotypes by compelling her to wear stylish clothing and to focus on maintaining an attractive appearance. Her father further enforced stereotypical behavior when he forbade her from establishing friendships with boys in an effort to protect her from anything that would diminish her
“purity.” As a result, Xing-Yan showed no interest in befriending either NT or mainstream Taiwanese boys.

**Conclusion on NT girls’ and NT boys’ friendship.** Under the influence of various gender power relationships, friendships between NT girls and NT boys proved complicated and closely connected to gender cultures prevailing in class and at home. Despite similar transnational family backgrounds, gender construction experiences and social gender expectations ensured that girls and boys behaved differently. Above, Xing-Yan behaved submissively toward NT boys. However, Mei-Jia, who worked hard to promote herself within the gender hierarchy by serving as a classroom helper, failed to establish friendships with NT boys. They were not interested in befriending her because she openly compared her stickers to theirs. Even though NT girls and NT boys differed in gender experiences, there were many possibilities for them to support each other; they studied in the same classrooms, and their common home and school experiences could have facilitated friendships.

**Conclusion about NT girls’ befriending peers.** These incidents suggest that NT girls found it difficult establishing friendships with peers—intimate relationships that might have enabled them to co-construct girlhood in a process of gender construction. When establishing friendships, NT girls chose to modify their attitudes in response to peer pressure. Only when NT girls sensed an imbalance of gender power in peer interactions were they inclined to launch a struggle for gender equity at the bottom of the gender hierarchy. In sum, if NT girls could learn social skills and become independent, they might assert themselves and stand up for their rights. Thus, it is necessary to modify
NT girls’ attitudes through schooling experiences, which could then encourage NT girls to develop friendships with peers.

**Role of Girlhood Characteristics in NT Girls’ Play**

The imbalance of power within the low gender hierarchy manifested in NT girls’ friendships was also evident in their play. Thus, it is important to discuss the types of play characteristic of NT girls in the gendered social order. Certain factors restricted NT girls, including inadequate social skills and low SES backgrounds, which severely limited opportunities to interact with mainstream classmates. Unlike boys, most Taiwanese girls only played with close friends, so NT girls often had difficulty interacting with temporary playmates. The way NT girls chose playmates, games and toys highlighted their struggle to identify the meaning of being a girl. The range of choices for playmates clearly reflected gendered social order within the classroom. To attract mainstream Taiwanese female peers as playmates, a small minority of NT girls used eye-catching toys. Sometimes effective, these toys had obvious limitations. Peer relationships revolving around toys and games did not always develop into friendships. The following incidents show how NT girls constructed values in the course of play.

**Play and Group Identity among NT Girls**

Play involving NT girls reflected personal differences, even though participants often shared similar life experiences. Although personal values influenced individual choice of games, they embraced a feminine model that tended to support a common identity. In addition, they appeared eager to claim feminine gender positions in the
context of play culture. Indeed, playing helped them learn to be sensitive to the needs of their friends, share secrets and cultivate middle-class values.

**Yu-Qin at the center of the circle.** Xing-Yan and Yu-Qin offered no guarantee of comfort when playing together despite a common identity as NT girls. On one occasion, Yu-Qin entered the classroom last during story time. While she generally sat beside Fu-Cheng, it so happened that no seats were available that day. Several children noticed that Yu-Qin stood at the center of the circle formed by the seated students. She could not sit near Fu-Cheng, and she failed to find a seat anywhere within the circle. Several children took an opportunity to tease her about her “close relationship” with him; they shouted, “Yu-Qin has no seat with Fu-Cheng, no seat with Fu-Cheng!” Then, Xing-Yan waved to Yu-Qin, calling attention to an available seat next to her. Xing-Yan did not initially bother to invite Yu-Qin to sit down, but as the teasing became more intense, Xing-Yan intervened, waving to Yu-Qin and pointing to the empty seat. As a result, Yu-Qin sat down and escaped her peers’ ridicule (FD 120707). However, the girls did not interact much. Xing-Yan worked on a drawing project, while Yu-Qin chatted casually with other students, neglecting her project. They only drew together by circumstances.

NT girls often faced challenges when seeking playmates, considering that they constituted a classroom minority. Xing-Yan’s decision to assist Yu-Qin did not imply necessarily that she viewed Yu-Qin favorably. Xing-Yan may have been motivated by a natural impulse to help a victim. It was also possible that Xing-Yan’s decision to intervene stemmed from her recognition that they both, as NT girls, had limited
playmates. In many ways, their relationship could not have been more different than that of two other NT girls.

**Two girls’ middle-class dreams.** Mei-Jia and Lin-Hua, former classmates at WK Kindergarten, were unusually close friends and constant companions. During the afterschool daycare program, they sat down in a corner of the classroom and arranged several cards on the floor featuring images of well-known Taiwanese singers and movie stars. They discussed the celebrities’ fashionable clothing, attractive hair styles and elegant jewelry. As they spoke, they gradually became aware that I was observing them. They glanced at me, smiled politely, whispered to each other and before long, picked up their cards and retreated to another corner of the classroom (FD 111607).

Comparing their play activities to mainstream peers, who mostly played with “Hello Kitty” and “Snow White” cards, I found significant differences. First, Lin-Hua and Mei-Jia’s decision to play with cards featuring celebrities exposed them to attractive and talented figures from the “real world” as opposed to fictional characters from a fantasy world. Second, mainstream peers played contently with “Hello Kitty” cards, exemplifying values common among young, middle-class girls. The values on the cards featuring celebrities, conversely, seemed better-suited to teenaged girls or even young ladies. The cards belonged to Lin-Hua, who brought them from her first-grade classroom. Mei-Jia’s relative maturity might have been why she was able to secure the cards. In any event, the cards provided them with real-life stories about adults who achieved material success and social status. Hence, the context of this play encouraged the girls to actively dream about reaching a higher social status.
Mei-Jia and Lin-Hua were deeply concerned about my observation. Their facial expressions and body language suggested an apparent distrust. I also suspected they were concerned that the cards would provoke the program supervisor’s anger, who could ban them from the classroom. As I observed them, they also closely observed me. They were extremely sensitive to their environment, and alert to a newcomer’s arrival. Moreover, they made it clear that they valued their privacy when playing this particular game.

**Conclusion.** The degree of interaction between the two pairs of NT girls at JB and WK Kindergartens was remarkably different. Xing-Yan and Yu-Qin, from JB Kindergarten, appeared to have little in common and rarely interacted. Conversely, Mei-Jia and Lin-Hua, in the afterschool program at WK Kindergarten, seemed to be close friends and engaged in similar play. Overall, the girls, like their mainstream counterparts, were more concerned about their choice of playmates than they were about the games themselves. The next section illustrates the play between NT and mainstream Taiwanese girls. Both groups of girls were accustomed to playing similar games, but differences in their play cultures made it difficult for NT girls to find playmates. These differences also sharply limited the possibility that they would play with mainstream Taiwanese girls.

**Play between NT Girls and Mainstream Taiwanese Girls:**
**The Tie of Gender Hierarchies**

Even though NT and mainstream Taiwanese girls studied in the same classroom, it was apparently difficult for them to construct harmoniously a common play culture. When playing with mainstream girls, NT girls focused on two critical issues: (1) adapting to a different play culture and (2) requesting equal access to toys. My data suggest that
both groups played similar games, but there were many disparities that NT girls had to overcome. These challenges arose not because they had less inherent ability but because they had no choice except to negotiate between two cultures. NT girls’ play culture reflected the need to adopt stereotypical female gender roles under certain conditions. The following incidents exemplify the values that my research identified among NT girls.

**The dilemma of exploitative “friendships.”** Xing-Yan requested equal opportunities to play house with mainstream peers. She was coloring when two mainstream Taiwanese girls requested two pages of her coloring book, which featured drawings of elegant brides. Xing-Yan quickly replied, “My mother doesn’t allow me to tear out any pages for anyone.” The two girls persisted, saying, “If you give us two pages, we can color these brides together, and then you can become our friend.” After seeming to give the matter some thought, Xing-Yan tore out two pages of the coloring book and handed them to the girls, who began to color. Xing-Yan did not appear to be conversing with them, but the mainstream girls whispered to each other (FD 110807).

Ultimately, Xing-Yan failed to secure the friendship here by surrendering pages from her coloring books. While her decision to share her property may have earned her temporary companions, it did nothing to improve her status among her mainstream peers. The two mainstream Taiwanese girls deceitfully made their offer, and they conspired to trick Xing-Yan into giving away her property. Xing-Yan, meanwhile, attempted to secure fair treatment (unsuccessfully, in this case) from her mainstream female peers. Her subordinate position as a member of a “minority” group may have contributed to her understated demeanor.
Xing-Yan’s coloring book portrayed traditional female values and attracted mainstream peers. The book stimulated their dreams about beautiful brides who enjoyed romantic and happy marriages. Indeed, the coloring book reinforced stereotypical gender roles, implying that only attractive and obedient women in fashionable clothing are likely to find happiness. Nevertheless, Xing-Yan’s portrayal of herself as a traditional girl with middle-class values did not gain her acceptance among her mainstream Taiwanese peers, who treated themselves to her property and continued to exclude her. As the following incident shows, however, Xing-Yan learned from her experience.

Girls possess the best opportunity to construct gendered knowledge and act out different gender roles when playing house. In their play, they chose to play wives or mothers with authority to direct male classmates as sons or young brothers in family affairs. However, when NT girls and mainstream Taiwanese girls played house together, disparities of power and ethnic hierarchies existed in the following incidents.

**Enforcing the following of orders within gender and ethnic hierarchies.** Xing-Yan and Zhen-Xiu, a mainstream Taiwanese girl, cared for two dolls. When I asked Xing-Yan what she was doing, Xing-Yan answered that these two dolls were two loving sisters and were asleep. Zhen-Xiu denied her answer and told me that the dolls were her two daughters. When I videotaped their dolls, Zhen-Xiu moved Xing-Yan’s princess coloring book away and told her not to have her book there to be recorded (FD 120607).

In this incident, Zhen-Xiu did not allow Xing-Yan to have an opinion. Xing-Yan did not command respect, she gradually lost interest in playing with NT girls. Because of this, she started to choose her playmates carefully.
No fairness, no participation. While Xing-Yan colored her book, Zhen-Xiu and Jia-Jia invited her to have “a princesses’ party” with them, but Xing-Yan declined to join and continued to color. After this, the girls decided to play alone. I asked Xing-Yan why she did not want to play with them. Xing-Yan replied that even if she played with them, she never could play with the dolls because there were only two dolls in this classroom, and they did not want to share raw materials to make her personal ornaments. So, she chose not to play with them (FD 123007).

Xing-Yan recognized that she did not have equal gender status in their house play, even though they were each six years old. She could consider playing with them. From Xing-Yan’s lack of wanting to participate, she struggled within the confines of grouping with (collectivism) or separation from (individuality) peers. These negotiation experiences proved important as they allowed her to become stronger and reject unfairness. However, when Xing-Yan asked for equity from her playmates, she risked exclusion from the group. Whereas she struggled with equal gender status, another NT girl struggled to find playmates due to her family background.

Representing her family experiences: Being a daughter or a grandma in the cooking game. Yu-Qin’s favorite game involved cooking and serving others food, which often represented her family experiences. Due to her unique family background, her domestic play content sometimes prevented finding playmates. Yu-Qin disclosed her family experiences in following two cooking game episodes.

On a special day, Yu-Qin pretended to make orange juice by throwing orange-colored paper into a “blender” and make blender sounds, and then she pretended to serve
orange juice to everyone. Her tablemate and neighbor Yi-Ting held Yu-Qin and said: “See I can hold you! Don’t worry! We can pretend that I am your mom and you are my daughter” (FD 120607). Yi-Ting knew Yu-Qin’s mother had left the home; she sweetly suggested that they pretend to be mother and daughter. But many of Yu-Qin’s classmates did not know her family background when she implemented her family experiences into play contexts. For example, once Yu-Qin acted as a grandma who cooked for her family. Several mainstream female peers argued against this claim (FD 122807).

Through play cooking, Yu-Qin practiced a gender role and established gender identity by serving food. She and her playmates co-constructed play culture based on life experiences. However, Yu-Qin’s family experiences differed from most mainstream female peers, making it difficult for them to play together. Moreover, Yu-Qin described herself as a grandma who served the family. Thus, this stereotypical female play content also deterred playmates.

The play between NT and mainstream Taiwanese girls related to play contents, playmate choice and the equal right to participate. NT girls need to learn how to negotiate with mainstream Taiwanese girls for equal status. The following section discusses the play among NT girls and mainstream Taiwanese boys, which will reveal disparities in game and playmate choice between the two populations.

**Play between NT Girls and Mainstream Taiwanese Boys: To Constrain Her Conflicting Gender Roles to Become a Good Playmate**

The following incident examines conflicting gender roles between NT girls and mainstream Taiwanese boys as reflected in their play cultures. The two groups chose to
play games differently, and the female and male gender positions were situated at the bottom and the top of gender hierarchies, respectively. These disparities created tension within playmate relationships. The first incident shows how peer pressure concealed NT girl’s and mainstream Taiwanese boys’ play relations.

Yu-Qin’s playmate and game choice. Yu-Qin mostly followed Fu-Cheng, but many girls in class criticized their playmate relationship because of Yu-Qin’s age, gender and capabilities. Once, she observed how Fu-Cheng did number puzzles, and then she did it. However, Fu-Cheng gradually became irritated with being Yu-Qin’s playmate because peers jeered him. And when Fu-Cheng folded a paper plane, Yu-Qin reached for the same kind of paper. He yelled to Yu-Qin: “Don’t do the same thing as me!” Yu-Qin explained: “I make girl paper planes…[inaudible]…you make boy paper planes.” After this, she gave Fu-Cheng some paper to fold paper planes. He then stopped complaining about her because she gave him paper (FD 110207).

Yu-Qin acted as “a good helper and a sensitive observer” to find a playmate. Clearly, in this playmate relationship, Yu-Qin did not have equal position with Fu-Cheng. However, when she failed to find possible female playmates, any boy remained a playmate. Further, this unequal playmate pattern showed in Yu-Qin’s pet games that she accepted being a cat or pony. Even when she played an invisible girl, she continued to play pet games in more remote corners of the classroom.

Her behavior debased the girls’ roles. Once, Yu-Qin pretended to be a horse or kitty-cat when Fu-Cheng and Yi-Hong played with her. And when Teacher Su paid little attention during story time, Yu-Qin and Yi-Hong played in the corner. Yu-Qin acted like
a pony while Yi-Hong rode on her back and belly (FD 112706). The second time, Yu-Qin played a feline. She spread herself out on the carpet, and Fu-Cheng and Yi-Hong tickled her. The two boys took turns holding her as a pet. She laughed loudly at having the boys look at her and enjoy the physical contact. At one point, Yu-Qin’s laughter caused astonished and disapproving looks from two mainstream Taiwanese girls, Zhen-Xiu and Min-Hui, who exclaimed: “…Oops! He touched her,… hugged her! They hugged! Shame on her!” (FD 123107).

Given that Yu-Qin skillfully turned her feminine gender role into capital, boys gradually accepted her. But her playmate relationship irritated several girls. Both mainstream Taiwan girls and NT girl objected to her questionable behavior because no girls acted like Yu-Qin, who became a toy for the boys. A lack of moral conformity caused tension between Yu-Qin her female peers. They censured Yu-Qin’s pet games because she should not “be hugged by boys” in front of the class. This brought shame to each girl. Interestingly, no girls criticized the boys in this instance.

During this pet game incident, Teacher Su disregarded the girls’ criticism of Yu-Qin, because the loving young kids’ pet game caused no harm (FD 111507). Teacher Su, like most teachers, often treated young children as asexual beings; they seldom found anything wrong when boys and girls made physical contact. Different from Teacher Su’s view, physical touching concerned several young girls, though Teacher Su chose not to discuss gender issues posed by female students. Obviously, mainstream female students became more sensitive about gender norms than teachers.
Conclusion. Play between NT girls and mainstream Taiwanese boys involved complicated playmate relationships. Gendered social order depended on how NT girls displayed gender roles when interacting with mainstream Taiwanese boys. Above, Teacher Su could have spoken with children about why they felt so uncomfortable about physical touching in the pet game as it relates to personal comfort. Only then could teachers direct children to construct meaningfully proper classroom etiquette. Although NT girls had limited power to change the class gendered social hierarchy, attitudes could influence how mainstream Taiwanese male peers think and act toward NT female peers.

Play between NT Girls and NT Boys: Does Gender Role Differences Create Different Gendered Social Orders?

NT girls and boys had similar transnational family backgrounds, but it did not mean that they could be good playmates. NT girls’ peer interactions demonstrated strategies for constructing girlhood. In their games, different gender roles between NT girls and boys always displayed gendered social order, even though NT girls often tried to resist the dominant gender hierarchy. The first incident described how several boys criticized an NT girl’s car, which related to the driver’s gender and Chinese-language license plate when NT boys drew pictures of their favorite cars.

Xing-Yan’s car could not run with a Chinese license plate. Teacher Hai-Li Yang, a female teacher, announced that the topic in Fine Art class would be “my favorite car”; most boys greeted this topic with a yell, but most girls complained. They said that boys are skilled at driving cars, whereas girls are not. Teacher Yang told the class that they should follow her assigned topic because everyone needs a car for daily use.
A group of children, Xing-Yan, an NT girl, Ming-Yan, Zi-Yang and Da-Wei, NT boys, drew pictures at Teacher Yang’s direction. As they drew their cars, they discussed the meanings of gender representation in female and male cars, and they also criticized the car owners’ gender, cultural backgrounds and SES.

In one such instance, they criticized Ming-Yan’s license plate. When children created pictures, Da-Wei found that Ming-Yan’s license plate had some symbols (e.g., # or *). Ming-Yan indicated that he would send his car to his Vietnamese grandfather because his grandfather is poor and does not one. So, the license plate was written in Vietnamese. After Ming-Yan noted this, Zi-Yang claimed that his race car’s license plate was written in English. A race car with an English license plate could run faster than those with non-English license plates.

After Da-Wei looked at Zi-Yang’s license plate, he approached Teacher Yang and pointed it out to her. He insisted that Taiwanese license plates should include several English letters as well as other characters. Teacher Yang praised Da-Wei’s nice observation ability. Continuously, Teacher Yang wrote a standard Taiwanese license plate on the board to remind the class to have the correct one on their cars. Because of this, many children, including Ming-Yan and Zi-Yang, hurriedly changed to new license plates. At the end of art class, Da-Wei and Zi-Yang saw that Xing-Yan had written: “沁言” (Xing-Yan). The two NT boys joked that her car could not drive because its license plate was written in Chinese characters. Xing-Yan answered wittily: “This has nothing to
do with you! It is my future car! I designed it and its license plate.” The boys laughed, relating that Xing-Yan’s car could not drive as policemen would arrest her (FD 010408).

The boys’ reasons represented their concepts about Xing-Yan’s Chinese name on her car’s license plate when they compared it with English, and with its legality. Thus, Xing-Yan’s gender position and Chinese culture influenced criticism. NT boys’ views related to life experiences and cross-cultural backgrounds; thus, they became sensitive of nationality when different languages appeared on license plates. However, Teacher Yang ignored that her students showed diverse backgrounds (e.g., transnational family backgrounds) through unique plate designs.

Allowing NTC to present family backgrounds in pictures helped them to establish identities and create opportunities for mainstream classmates to realize NT girls’ cross-culture experiences. For example, allowing these children to write Chinese, English, or Vietnamese on license plants celebrated their various family backgrounds. Further, teachers should have taken seriously why boys jeered that Xing-Yan’s car had problems to run behind gender and nationality issues. Listening to children’s opinions about how they categorize car owners’ gender type and different languages amounted to a teachable moment for the class to respect diversity. The next incident discusses how NTC think about their mothers’ roles and jobs when their drawing displayed with their mothers’ jobs.

**NTC discuss a mother’s work roles within play.** NT girls and boys competed when learning; they could also share knowledge about their mothers’ abilities. Their faces radiated with pride when they shared their mothers’ job experiences:
Xing-Yan said (to me): Teacher Chou, my mother works at an orchid garden. She can cultivate beautiful orchids. She has money to call my grandma in Vietnam.

Researcher: It is marvelous! Have you visited your mother’s orchid garden?

Xing-Yan: I and my sister just visited last weekend! We… (inaudible)

Da-Wei: I visited my mother’s cruise ship factory; I saw lots of huge cruisers. I only can fold small paper boats, but my mother’s factory can build big ships.

Xing-Yan: I can draw orchids, too.

Researcher (to both): How you feel about honor for your mothers’ abilities?

Da-Wei: I feel happy when my mother gets her paycheck and she promised to buy me toys. (FD 123107).

When the two NTC proudly told me what they knew about their mothers’ jobs, they also disclosed why Xing-Yan always liked to draw a well-dressed girl watering beautiful flowers and why Da-Wei enjoyed sketching cruise ships. Though not necessarily related to their mothers’ jobs, the pictures still presented pride in their mothers. The mothers’ presence resulted in children feeling confident and safe. One time, Yu-Qin defended her mother and herself when Da-Wei inquired about her mother.

Da-Wei told Yu-Qin about his bravery and that he could defeat the water monster. At first, Yu-Qin listened but had no reply. Finally, Yu-Qin said, “My mother picked me up to eat at McDonald’s and the water monster did not hurt us.”

Da-Wei: No! I heard that you did not have mother, your mother ran back to Vietnam… (inaudible)
Yu-Qin (in a low voice): I have a mom! She just disappeared…she will come back… (FD 010408).

Children must feel safe when their mothers are around. When Da-Wei bragged himself as a brave fighter in his unreal water monster story, Yu-Qin just wanted someone powerful enough to give her a sense of security. Her mother made her feel safe. She told stories about her mother to Da-Wei. Naturally, her mother was the most important figure to her. Although both Yu-Qin and Da-Wei were young, the two NTC knew their mothers came from Vietnam. Despite this, their similar transnational family backgrounds could not offer the same positive and parallel life experiences.

Traditional gender roles and gendered social order caused the play between NT girls and boys to reveal much discord. Above, when Xing-Yan met Da-Wei, she became more confident about herself, daring to pose her wish (i.e., the license plate) and her pride (i.e., her mother’s job). While Yu-Qin chatted with Da-Wei, she revealed her thoughts about her mother, even though her mother could not be with her.

These incidents indicated that NT girls could speak confidently with NT boys, but also that they acted differently when interacting with mainstream Taiwanese children. I suppose that this might be because of similar backgrounds and position within gender hierarchies. These factors made NT girls feel free enough to play with NT boys.

**Conclusion of NT girls’ play.** NT girls’ play culture presented gendered social orders in peer interaction. When playing with peers, they demonstrated more femininity than mainstream Taiwanese girls when claiming female gender roles. NT girls accepted female stereotypes to promote gender hierarchies in play culture. Having popular toys
also made peers want to play with them. If necessary, they acted as visible or invisible playmate depending on peers’ needs. In this study, the minority NT girls struggled to explore gender identities as NT girls when playing with mainstream Taiwanese children. Specifically, they often claimed blurred identities when they playing with NT boys.

Moreover, although NT girls could not co-construct girlhood with mainstream Taiwanese girls at play, they still bravely asked for gender equality in playmate relationships. Play was a socialization process for NT girls where they learned to interact with peers.

Choosing toys and playmates helped NT girls integrate with mainstream peers.

**Chapter Conclusions**

This chapter opened with an introduction to the various backgrounds of four individual NT girls. Given that they showed different characteristics, the term “NT girls” does not refer to a specific type of girl. Rather, the term describes four very different girls whose mothers emigrated from Vietnam. That said, each girl was forced to negotiate from a position at the bottom of the social hierarchy. To climb to a position of equality within the gendered hierarchy, they resisted dominant discourses regarding gender roles, SES, ethnicity and family backgrounds.

Nevertheless, girlhood experiences were deeply entangled with the above issues, especially when NT girls dealt with mainstream peers. As they studied in the classroom with mainstream peers, NT girls struggled to absorb local and popular culture to become mainstream children themselves. Despite NT girls belonging to a marginalized minority, they closely followed mainstream peers, even pretending to be among them, as they constructed NT girlhood. Overall, their class behavior followed the principle of
collectivism. In sum, NT girls: (1) were at the margins of group; (2) were sensitive to the needs of others; (3) could choose to be visible or invisible; (4) represented the feminine role as a helper; and (5) had dreams and samples of the middle class life. These values constructed individual characteristics, environments and peer relationships. Examining NT girls from the perspective of these values, several revealed how these values appeared within their power structures. These descriptions helped identify how NT girlhood is textured by peer relationships, parental influence, romantic dreams and appearances.

Friendships among NT girls closely correlated with female gender roles as well as their lower status within the gendered social order. For instance, mainstream Taiwanese girls excluded NT girls from sisterhood circles, most likely because of divergent life experiences. Moreover, in friendships among NT girls, even NT girls’ similar backgrounds could not overcome individual differences. Xing-Yan, for instance, indicated she could not become Yu-Qin’s friend because she disapproved of Yu-Qin’s habit of socializing with boys. Conversely, Mei-Jia and Lin-Hua formed a strong bond and often secretly conversed in Vietnamese. Here, background and culture similarities enabled NT girls to become close friends. Meanwhile, friendships between NT and mainstream Taiwanese girls usually ended soon, given the significant gaps between respective academic aptitudes and an unequal capacity to share material goods. As a rule, most peers relegated NT girls to the class’s social margins, where they struggled to assimilate to mainstream culture. In jealousy, mainstream Taiwanese girls sharply criticized Yu-Qin since she socialized with Fu-Cheng, Teacher Su’s popular son.
NT girls’ marginalized status also factored in dealings with mainstream Taiwanese boys. In relationships between NT girls and mainstream Taiwanese boys, gender inequity mostly became a decisive factor, given that males generally led females. Hence, mainstream Taiwanese boys treated NT girls with kindness only where the boys assumed roles as protectors or directors. While friendships between NT girls and boys were usually more tenable, given a common ethnicity, they often argued over issues of gender inequity, especially when discussing similar life experiences. Hence, gender differences hindered the capacity to form friendships as NT boys and girls struggled within unequal power relationships.

NT girls, like most mainstream Taiwanese girls, played with fashionable toys, enjoyed romantic fairy tales and participated in role-playing games. These activities reflected a desire to conform to perceived gender norms. By claiming popular cultural knowledge as capital, local NT girls constructed a universal femininity, enabling them to become globalized girls. These activities, however, did not facilitate efforts to find playmates. While claimed toys and cultural images like the “Little Mermaid” might have been universal, NT girls’ strategies and methods did not always enable them to become popular because of the influences of SES and transnational background as well as limits imposed by school culture.

While playing, NT girls’ choice of playmates, games and toys highlighted their struggle to identify the meaning of being a mainstream Taiwanese girl. NT girls also had difficulty establishing long-term friendships. Mainstream peers largely excluded NT girls from their circles, often treating them unfairly. As NT girls struggled with low status with
the class gendered social order of the, they often behaved in a traditionally feminine manner, an apparent effort to claim feminine identity. They played games revolving around imaginary child care and romantic fairy tales more often than mainstream Taiwanese children. Further, when NT girls played with mainstream Taiwanese girls, the play content reflected family experiences, which might have differed from those of mainstream peers. For example, when Yu-Qin engaged in dramatic play, the content reflected that her grandmother led her family, a situation that separated her from most peers. Unfairness regularly emerged when NT girls played with mainstream Taiwanese counterparts. Xing-Yan, for instance, stopped playing a babysitting game with her mainstream Taiwanese peers because she realized that she would never receive her own baby doll to nurture. A third issue emerged from play when mainstream Taiwanese girls’ tended to criticize how some NT girls deviated from traditional gender norms. Especially evident in Yu-Qin’s case, she failed to adhere to traditional female rules of etiquette when she allowed boys to engage in touching games with her.

Meanwhile, when NT girls played with mainstream Taiwanese boys, their games reflected power struggles related to gender. Mainstream Taiwanese boys, for instance, preferred that NT girls behave submissively, thereby accentuating femininity. Tellingly, mainstream Taiwanese boys enjoyed playing Yu-Qin’s pet game because she adopted the role of a well-behaved pet. Throughout the study, interactions involving NT girls and mainstream Taiwanese boys stressed that the former were situated at the bottom of the gendered social hierarchy, while the latter found themselves at the top. While it was possible for NT girls and NT boys to become playmates, the tendency of the two groups
to compete with each other was exemplified in a game of one-upmanship between Xing-Yan and Da-Wei; Da-Wei asserted that his mother had a better job.

The following chapter examines school and family gender culture that culminated in NT girls’ gendering processes and what transpired when they resisted dominant gender discourses.
CHAPTER VII

FINDINGS: NT GIRLHOOD’S SCHOOLING
AND FAMILY EXPERIENCES

Introduction

This chapter discusses the socialization of NT girls in the contexts of curriculum, textbooks and interaction with teachers. Girls faced steeper and more complicated challenges than boys as they struggled to construct gender identities in class. The school assimilated NT girls into the mainstream and exposed them to middle-class family values. It is important to determine whether NT girls’ needs (as they seek to construct gender identity) are being met by modern-day Taiwan’s models of classroom management and curricula design. Thus, this study focuses on gender-related incidents in which NT girls became involved in, reflected on and responded to the dominant gender culture when interacting with peers; thus, this research explored challenges inherent to NT girlhood.

This chapter examines gender learning as it occurred in class. Here, several critical incidents highlighted the degree to which NT girls’ learning experiences conformed with—or stood in opposition to—home experiences. Consequently, this chapter focuses on the following: (1) the nature of teacher-student interactions relating to classroom gender culture; (2) the ideologies reflected in textbook representations of gender roles; and (3) the gender discourses observed in NT girls’ classroom interaction.

The Teacher’s Role in Shaping NT Girls’ Gender Identities

In the class context, teacher-student relations, girls’ outward appearances and classroom gender culture shaped NT girls’ gender identities, which were generally
co-conditioned at home and in school. The section focuses on teacher-student interaction and the meaning of the NT girls’ outward appearances that fit classroom gender norms. Directly, NT girls depended especially on the teacher-student relationship to set the tone for appropriate behavior among young females.

**The Teacher as NT Girls’ Role Model**

Most early childhood teachers in Taiwan are female; they serve as female models, and also offer a substitute mother-daughter relationship. Given that female teachers manage classes, we cannot ignore the implications of how female teachers transmit gender identities to female students, or how their professional position could influence, or even format, female students’ gender roles in the future. The following incident reveals the extent to which teachers emphasized courtesy when dealing with the girls.

Teachers acted as class “mothers,” whereas girls in both kindergartens often surrounded teachers. It appeared as though girls were more likely than boys to follow the teachers’ recommendations, to look attentively at them, and to respond sensitively to body language. In addition, female teachers often held the girls’ hands, huddled with them and whispered to them as they aided the girls with their appearance.

The female teacher-female student relationship presented how girls volunteered to establish close relationships. At WK Kindergarten, most volunteers were girls who actively asked to help straighten the classroom. Teachers assigned girls to help the class, but assigned boys to help outside. Teacher Chen indicated that girls were more attentive to teachers’ opinions than boys and therefore better suited to help indoors (FD 112507). For example, Mei-Jia, an NT girl, arranged toys to keep the classroom in order during
group time. After she left class, other mainstream Taiwanese girls took over her helper position, but I seldom saw any boy join girls to arrange toys (FD 122507).

In short, female teachers often functioned as caregivers and mothers, as opposed to teachers because the teacher-student relationship closely resembled the relationship between a mother and her daughter. Teachers needed to help girls arrange their clothes and comb their hair due to parental and school expectations. Next, teachers used “The Beautiful Ladies’ List” to mold girls’ gender norms at WK Kindergarten.

**Classroom Management and Classroom Gender Conformity**

At WK Kindergarten, the most effective way to gain a teacher’s positive attention was to help because teachers often publicly praised helpers, as noted in Chapters 5 and 6. Teachers routinely rewarded students by giving them candy, stickers, or certain privileges such as permission to play particular games. Girls commonly placed stickers on a classroom poster that read, “The Beautiful Ladies’ List” (美少女榜). As they put stickers on the poster, they screamed, “Yeah! [I am] a beautiful lady again!” (FD 102707). These scenarios revealed the existence of a system of gender norms, one designed to reward obedient girls for helpful behavior and maintaining an attractive appearance.

Under this reward system, teachers established female gender norms in accordance with their expectations. The default position here was that female students were best suited to domestic duties; thus, they received rewards for their demeanor and submissive behavior, which followed classroom gender norms. In order to be “good girls,” obedient students had to pay close attention to both behavior and appearance, and these two factors needed to fulfill teacher’s gender expectations.
In addition to classroom management, teachers also cooperated with parents to socialize girls’ gender roles. In the following incident, which occurred at JB Kindergarten, a teacher cooperated with one girl’s parents to pressure her to behave in a “dignified” manner when in a certain predicament.

**Catching my school bus is a higher priority than arranging my hair.** Chi-Wei, a 6-year-old mainstream Taiwanese girl, rejected her mother’s help with arranging her hair when she realized that the kindergarten bus arrived. She argued with her mother and purposefully untied her hair band after boarding the bus. When Chi-Wei arrived at school, Teacher Su asked why she had unfastened her hair band. Chi-Wei failed to respond. At that point, Teacher Su criticized her for messing up her hair, a move that wasted her mother’s time and inconvenienced the bus driver. Chi-Wei still had no reply, and she began to cry. Impatiently, Teacher Su encouraged her to stop and instructed her to write a short apology note to the bus driver, the school bus assistant teacher and her mother. Teacher Su noted that Chi-Wei’s family had slept in, and she had hurried to catch bus. Her mother had insisted that she needed to be presentable at school (FD 120407).

This situation revealed many misunderstandings about how mothers’ feminine expectations are supported by the school. Neither Chi-Wei’s mother nor Teacher Su understood that Chi-Wei planned to be presentable while also boarding the kindergarten bus on time. The power of adults over children was fluid, as reflected in different discourses. The mother felt responsible for her daughter’s appearance. Chi-Wei, however, intended to manage her appearance while also living up to her responsibilities to peers.
Teacher Su’s authority, however, enabled her to adopt the role of Chi-Wei’s parent. She wept as she felt powerless against adults’ authority.

Both classes’ teachers reinforced the standard “good girl” model, anticipating that female students would embrace it. Xing-Yan’s mother was especially concerned about her daughter’s appearance; she required Xing-Yan to get up at least an hour early in order to dress and style her hair (FD 112307). This reveals the extent to which NT girls, and their families, felt pressured to conform to mainstream norms.

**Teachers’ Responsibility for Girls’ Gender Identities**

For girls, Taiwanese early childhood education focuses on their ability to maintain appearance, although there is an effort to develop their capacity to read, write and practice arithmetic. Not surprisingly, managing one’s appearance and mastering academic subjects are equally important aspects of the traditional female development pattern. Therefore, Taiwanese parents expect teachers to be positive role models and assist parents in molding children’s behavior. Overall, the teacher’s behavior in class is expected to reinforce female gender norms. These norms are reflected in social skills developed during peer interaction. Thus, girls primarily construct gender norms through peer interaction; also, their social skills may play a role in determining gender hierarchy.

**Taking away aspects of a young girl’s agency.** Because girl’s development is regarded as shared between teachers and parents, they often cooperate closely to ensure that middle-class girls present themselves in a traditionally feminine manner. As such, school and home are both venues where energy is directed towards preparing girls for academic and social success. Taiwanese parents hold that academic training and
cultivating social skills are equally essential aspects of female gender identity. When parents became concerned about their daughters’ gender behavior, they asked teachers to reinforce the girls’ gender norms in class. At JB Kindergarten, this trend was evident. Parents had serious discussions with teachers about reinforcing feminine gender construction. When parents and teachers did this, in some ways they removed aspects of girls’ feminine agency and independence. Boys, however, did not experience this. As the next incident reveals, enculturation heavily influenced girls’ gender identities.

*We are pretty cute girls because of popular and global culture.* One day, Ting-Jun, a five-year-old mainstream Taiwanese girl, asked Xing-Yan to trade playing cards, featuring characters from the popular Japanese cartoons, *We Are Pretty Cute* (光之美少女) and *Mermaid Melody Pichi Pichi Pitch* (珍珠美人魚). They discussed the cards’ images and considered how to exchange them. Other mainstream Taiwanese girls gathered around the pair to see the cards (FD 111407).

Xing-Yan, like most mainstream girls, enjoyed collecting these cards because the girls’ popular stationary, clothing and school knapsacks featured these animated characters. Knowing these cartoon icons enabled female students to find common conversation topics. Parents supported purchasing these cards because they convey an appropriate feminine image to their daughters. In the two kindergartens, girls collected cards and acted as characters in animated films and TV shows. The aforementioned Japanese cartoons enjoyed wide distribution throughout Northeast and Southeast Asia. Many female kindergartners, along with early elementary school students, liked these cartoons because they depicted friendships between attractive female classmates,
celebrated teenage infatuations with members of the opposite sex and featured catchy songs. Here, Xing-Yan and Ting-Jun’s fashion culture provided a few shared topics of conversation (FD 111407). This situation called attention to the profound role that popular culture played in reinforcing current gender norms, even though teachers generally regarded popular culture as irrelevant.

**Constraining girls with similar gender norms.** Playing cards served as gender construction tools for girls. These cards might also serve to constrain the expansion of that role among certain children. For example, Teacher Su informed me that Ting-Jun’s mother had concerns about Ting-Jun’s gender identity during the previous school year because her daughter disliked wearing dresses and refused to play with dolls as well as other toys designed for girls. The mother also worried that Ting-Jun behaved too aggressively and showed a young boy’s disposition. As a result, she asked Teacher Su to convince Ting-Jun to play with female peers, and to praise her whenever she wore a skirt to school. Her mother encouraged her to watch animated programs that idealized friendships among young girls, especially the feminine Japanese cartoons.

Ting-Jun’s mother also gave her the novelty playing cards that featured images of these popular female animated figures. Her mother strongly believed that playing with these cards would help influence her daughter to become more feminine. She further reasoned that Ting-Jun could develop basic arithmetic skills when playing cards with female peers. This situation reflected the fact that Ting-Jun’s mother treated these cards as emblems of a fashionable female youth culture. Overall, Ting-Jun’s situation exemplifies how mothers and teachers often cooperated to mold female students into
feminine and academically-proficient young ladies. These incidents shed light on NT girls and mainstream Taiwanese girls’ gender norms. In the following incident, a group of mainstream Taiwanese girls referred to each other as elder and younger sisters because of their similarity when playing together.

**We are girls singing together.** At WK kindergarten, five mainstream Taiwanese girls claimed to be the five characters in *Mermaid Melody Pichi Pichi Pitch* (真珠美人魚). They negotiated with each other over who would play which character. Each chose her own style. Then, they sang and danced at the bottom of the sea (FD 120407), learning how to project their own personalities as imaginary figures. Significantly, those unfamiliar with the cartoon could not participate. The girls treated the cartoon as symbolic representations of female roles, feeling safe to develop their own personas and peer relationships, reflecting on their own personalities and examining their friends’ personalities. Drawing on the *Mermaid Melody* play, the girls told me that they enjoyed singing together, while boys preferred engaging in fighting games.

At WK Kindergarten, Teacher Chen noted that it was particularly popular among young girls to model their play on shows like *Mermaid Melody Pichi Pichi Pitch* because it—unlike other animated shows such as *Cinderella*—featured more than one attractive female character. Each year, a new group of girls enjoyed playing *Mermaid Melody* because they learned how to develop social skills and interact with peers (FD 121907). Teacher Chen also indicated that girls of similar academic ability and SES background generally found it easier to co-recreate these imaginary games as well as befrend and
support each other. Many participated in imaginary games based on popular TV shows, enabling them to dress up, attend imaginary balls and find princes (FD 103007).

**We are little mermaids, but she is not like us.** While girls commonly took part in these games to develop peer relationships, one NT girl, Mei-Jia, had no role in the *Mermaid Melody* group. I once spotted her dancing alone, holding two bowls to her chest and humming the *Mermaid Melody* theme. She swayed to the music and smiled, telling me she was a little mermaid (FD 102707). Mei-Jia most likely would have enjoyed being a little mermaid with the mainstream Taiwanese girls, but I never saw her attempt to participate. In a similar instance, Mei-Jia drew a Halloween picture depicting herself with an unhappy expression because no one invited her to the Halloween party (FD 110607).

Mei-Jia dreamed of dancing with her mainstream peers. I failed to understand why Mei-Jia could not do so, but Ru-Yue, a mainstream Taiwanese girl and member of the exclusive mermaid group, eventually pointed out that only girls who assimilated, and whom they regarded as younger or older sisters, could join them (FD 121907).

But Mei-Jia did not participate in mainstream girls’ culture, and had no place in sisterhood circles. For Mei-Jia, *Mermaid Melody* activities were not merely games, but an exclusion from enjoying equal learning and playing opportunities. Exclusiveness could be undermined by encouraging girls to play together, opening opportunities for non-mainstream girls. Teacher Chen should have directed students in such a way that they enjoyed equal opportunities to participate in the *Mermaid Melody* game. The differences between NT and mainstream Taiwanese girls’ play culture reveals exclusion based on SES and a child’s behavior. But some girls excluded females for other reasons.
She dislikes being a girl. Yi-Ting, a mainstream Taiwanese girl at JB Kindergarten, talked back to her teacher, who then excluded from her gender category. She protested Teacher Su when the instructor criticized her outspokenness and poor table manners. Once, Teacher Su encouraged students to eat snacks quickly so they could play an exciting game. Some asked, “What game will we play?” Teacher Su responded: “Unless all of the class has finished the snack, I won’t start the game. I’m not going to tell you which game yet.” Most children sighed disappointedly. Yi-Ting, was the only girl who spoke up. “Sooner or later, we will know after we played it,” Yi-Ting said. While her classmates cheered, Teacher Su became angry with Yi-Ting. She yelled: “Pipe down, Yi-Ting! If I don’t allow you to participate, you’ll never know what my game is! You dared to talk back to me! More and more, your bad behaviors are just like Da-Wei’s!” Teacher Su’s response frightened the children, and they sat quietly for the remainder of snack time (FD 121907).

At this point, Zhen-Xiu, another mainstream Taiwanese girl, snickered as Teacher Su reprimanded at Yi-Ting. I asked why she found the teacher’s outburst amusing. She responded that Yi-Ting deserved to be scolded because she acted like a boy and even challenged them to physical fights. She added that Yi-Ting often talked back to Teacher Su. I soon asked Teacher Su why she had compared Yi-Ting’s behavior to that of Da-Wei, a disruptive NT boy. Teacher Su noted that Yi-Ting dropped her rice during snack time and failed to clean it up. She added her concern that Yi-Ting had lost her table manners, possibly because of Da-Wei, with whom she talked incessantly during snack time.
Teacher Su also complained that Yi-Ting’s appearance had become increasingly unkempt, and her behavior was no longer ladylike (FD 121907).

Teacher Su’s criticism of Yi-Ting influenced students’ definition of “a good girl.” In line with teachers’ responses, students learned acceptable and unacceptable female behavior. Girls exhibiting cross-gender behavior are unacceptable; teachers and peers know differences in male and female child culture. Moreover, as gender hierarchy allowed mainstream Taiwanese girls to have more agency than NT girls, it is little wonder that Xing-Yan and Yu-Qin, two NT girls, showed submissive behavior in class.

**Challenges of an inter-cultural background.** NT students’ subordinate position was occasionally reinforced by teacher-student interaction and peers’ attitudes toward each other. The following incident showed how one NT girl felt inferior because of her teacher and classmates’ scornful attitudes about learning Vietnamese.

In Chapter 5, Teacher Su cautioned Yi-Hong, an NT boy, to speak Chinese clearly enough to be understood, which caused several classmates to tease him about his Vietnamese immigrant mother with sarcastic invitations to speak Vietnamese. Classmates then recognized Xing-Yan’s Vietnamese mother. In a strange contrast, Teacher Su then asked Xing-Yan if her mother would be willing to teach the class Vietnamese. The next day, Xing-Yan informed Teacher Su that her mother would be unable to teach Vietnamese. Her voice was weak and uncertain (FD 010408).

During this incident, Xing-Yan’s tone and body language reflected a lack of confidence, and she felt that her classmates held a negative view of her mother’s ethnicity. At first, she often bribed peers with candy and stickers to play with her, but her
classmates still looked down on her (in chapter 6). Teacher Su noted Xing-Yan’s introversion to me. She added that Xing-Yan’s insecurity appeared to stem from difficulty with her studies as her Vietnamese mother could not help her with her homework. Teacher Su believed that Xing-Yan’s poor academic performance caused her to be bullied by peers (FD 120407). Xing-Yan’s tendency to be obedient might have reflected her personality. Nevertheless, she clearly faced discrimination as a member of a minority group when interacting with teachers and peers; her passive personality was amplified because she felt oppressed.

In class culture, students focused on maintaining familial social relations, such as sisterhood, and on authoritarian roles inspired by teacher models. This caused NT girls to be excluded from peer groups because of cross-cultural backgrounds and low SES. This common hegemonic model of femininity established female gender norms, thus marginalizing NT girls and excluding them from sisterhood.

Conclusion

This study analyzes gender incidents where NT girls modeled female teachers’ gender roles in reconstructing gender identities. Teacher models on authoritarian roles thus established class culture. Parents expected early childhood female teachers to serve as caregivers, so girls naturally modeled female teachers’ behavior, especially to form a submissive, demure and well-behaved class gender culture.

As teachers navigated boundaries between roles as teachers and caregivers, they were required to partner with parents (especially mothers) to force girls’ gender roles to conform to classroom gender norms. Parents reinforced daughters’ femininity by
providing some common items connected to feminine popular culture. Parents hoped that these commodities would shape their daughters’ demure behaviors and help them conform to classroom gender norms. NT girls’ parents or guardians forced girls to dress femininely, believing that submission, femininity and beauty could be the social capital needed to lift their daughters’ social statuses.

While female students enjoyed closer interaction in class with female teachers than did male students, NT girls also depended on teachers more heavily than mainstream peers did, such as standing closer to female teachers than mainstream Taiwanese counterparts. How NT girls reconstructed gender identities in the context of the classroom depended heavily on the teacher-student relationship and classroom gender culture. In this study, middle class expectations, the girls’ feminized gender approach, mainstream Taiwanese female culture and submissive characteristics constrained classroom gender norms. To adapt themselves to mainstream Taiwanese classrooms, NT girls thus reacted to classroom gender norms. The next section examines this hegemonic model of femininity and discusses its reflection in standards of fashion and behavior.

A Focus on Outward Appearance

In Taiwan, a girl’s outward appearance is significant because it functions as a symbol of femininity. Furthermore, appearance causes observers to estimate her family’s socioeconomic level. Poorly-dressed girls were suspected of having incompetent parents, which caused their peers to marginalize them. Therefore, teachers and administrators charged female teachers with paying attention to female students’ appearance.
When parents and teachers groom girls, outward appearance is reinforced in girls’ gender roles. My research showed that parents and teachers have a deep concern for how female students appear. When educational purposes focused on establishing girls’ middle class manners, parents also made an effort to meet this goal by reinforcing daughters’ gender norms as they dressed daughters femininely and purchased feminine school accessories. Parents believed that these commodities would help girls build gender identity, since these items appeared daily. Moreover, clothing and school accessories offered overwhelming evidence of a families’ social and economic status.

At JB Kindergarten, girls generally carried Hello Kitty school bags, while boys’ bags featured images of *Doraemon*, a popular animated Japanese cartoon. At WK Kindergarten, girls’ T-shirts and accessories displayed flowers, images of Hello Kitty, female characters from various Disney cartoons, *MashiMaro* (an animated Korean figure), and *Mermaid Melody Pichi Pichi Pitch*. Meanwhile, images on boys’ T-shirts frequently showed *Star Wars*, *Transformers*, *Rocket Man*, *Pikachu* and several male characters from animated Disney productions (FD 112807). Parents and teachers chose different animated or popular figures to mold a child’s approach to gender, but the retail industry also reinforced traditional gender role, as shown by product design.

**Confucian Thought’s Effect on Clothing and Classroom Management**

Promoting appropriate dress can be an effective way to encourage etiquette among girls. Textbooks featured instructions on dress that conformed to traditional Confucian standards. For example, the ancient text *Classical Rules for Children* (弟子規) features advice for children to manage clothing. Students memorized and recited the
following sentence: “Place your clothes and hat in the proper place, do not throw them everywhere; otherwise, the clothes will become soiled” (置冠服，有定位，勿亂頓，致汙穢). Teachers discouraged students from leaving articles of clothing around their rooms, warning that this would render clothes dirty and wrinkled. Teachers also reminded students to put school accessories in proper places. Thus, students learned to use space efficiently, and teachers could effectively manage limited classroom space.

Managing personal property was an educational goal, so early childhood teachers instructed children to put clothes away properly and make efficient use of assigned personal, door-less, non-locking closets. These patterns highlighted the fact that the ethos of the Taiwanese classroom is deeply influenced by collectivist values.

Further, *Classical Rules for Children* (弟子規) states: “Your clothes reflect your social status and fit your gender roles at home. You should be unconcerned about expensive clothes and instead focus on keeping them clean” (上循分，下稱家，衣貴潔，不貴華). Wearing appropriate clothing often applied to specific situations that kept with traditions and family customs regarding gender hierarchy. Standards on appropriate clothing took into consideration age, identity, social position and family background. Confucianism directly influenced such standards for socially-acceptable dress. In line with the above traditional values, teachers and parents used to encourage children to wear clean and gender-appropriate clothing, de-emphasizing style. However, outdated concepts usually no longer fit current circumstances as poor and wealthy children may in fact wear the same brand of clothing to school.
The role of tradition in molding children’s dress. In class, teachers showed students how to put away coats, hats and scarves. They also had specific rules to organize closets. These life skills were an integral part of the educational process because *Reading Classical Rules for Children* (弟子規) emphasized them. While teachers reinforced these concepts when dealing with students, they invariably spent more time instructing girls on selecting and maintaining clothing. At WK Kindergarten, for example, Teacher Chen helped several girls arrange their clothing before returning home, as did Teacher Su at JB Kindergarten. Moreover, both teachers combed each girl’s hair before they left. Teachers were concerned that the girls be clean and presentable before meeting parents. Interestingly, several girls mirrored this behavior when dealing with male peers. They criticized unkempt male classmates, offering specific recommendations to improve appearance (FD 110607).

The children’s attitudes toward clothing were reinforced when they recited passages from *Reading Classical Rules for Children* (弟子規). This constant exposure to Confucian values helped to mold children’s dressing habits. When teachers used such classical instructional manuals, however, they needed to translate the intricate classical, or traditional, Chinese characters into modern, or simplified, Chinese. Many of the book’s passages are too complex, and antiquated, to be relevant to kindergartners. Not surprisingly, its illustrations also reinforce traditional gender stereotypes: Females arrange clothes and conduct domestic chores; males wear dirty clothes. These depictions are consistent with common gender stereotypes. Yet, teachers’ and students’ concerns about clothing differed dramatically. And while teachers saw that appropriate clothing
influenced good manners and reinforced gender identity, many students expressed more practical concerns about their clothing.

While parents and teachers rarely discussed connections between the relationship concerning clothing and gender hierarchy, children had concerns about the safety of wearing certain articles of clothing to school, as the next incident shows.

*Skirt trouble.* At WK Kindergarten, Teacher Chen said, “Last semester, wearing beautiful skirts was the most popular habit for girls. Girls used to compete with each other for the most attractive skirt” (FD 110507). Yet, I seldom saw any girls wearing skirts, and I became increasingly curious and decided to question some girls. I encountered Rue-Yue and Yun-Shan, two mainstream Taiwanese girls, discussing skirts. I asked them why they were not wearing skirts. Without hesitating, Yun-Shan replied that she considered wearing skirts because of their attractiveness. But her mother convinced her to wear pants to school because of safety when playing outdoors. But she disliked wearing pants and was afraid to do so because it was possible to soil them while using the bathroom. Rue-Yue then noted that her mother also suggested that she wear pants at school, though she looked more attractive in a skirt. She disliked being bitten by mosquitoes when wearing a skirt, so she often wore leggings along with it (FD113007).

It was evident that both girls recognized that wearing a skirt made them appear more feminine and attractive. However, potential considerations arose when wearing skirts, such as safety, appropriateness and mosquitoes. While just six years old, they understood that wearing skirts led to certain personal inconveniences. These young girls did not simply want to be “cute” or “charming”; they showed caution about wearing
appropriate clothes, and they thought independently about this issue, despite gender hierarchy influences. Nevertheless, I remained curious why most girls avoided skirts, and guessed at reasons they refused to discuss. Several mainstream Taiwanese girls’ conversation confirmed these suspicions. I asked them directly if many girls refused to wear skirts because they were bullied by boys.

**Skirt nightmare.** These girls described some experiences and indicated that wearing a skirt required a female-friendly environment. They did not believe their environment did so, despite knowing that attractive clothing increased chances of developing friendships with boys. Ru-Yue admitted that she disliked playing with boys because they preferred violent games and occasionally struck her. Yun-Shan agreed that boys often bullied them. When I asked them about bullying, the girls fell silent.

I then asked, “If you can’t share any examples of how the boys bully you, how can you say that boys are bullying the girls?” Yun-Shan looked at her doll and replied that Xian-Ren (a boy) had kissed her several times when she refused to pay attention to him. She added that Xian-Ren was a “pervert” and claimed that, when he kissed her cheeks, she “felt like vomiting.” In response, I asked the girls, “Would you kiss a boy’s cheek if you loved him?” Again, the girls fell silent for a moment. Then, Ru-Yue noted that boys were not allowed to kiss girls, because girls disliked this, especially when they feel threatened. She added that girls resented being touched by boys, or having personal space invaded by any “pervert.”

At that point, Ru-Yue revealed that some boys enjoyed lifting the girls’ skirts because they wanted to know the color of their panties. When I asked them why they
failed to mention these incidents to the teacher, the girls began to giggle. They told me that such incidents were too shameful to report, so it was better to avoid wearing skirts to school. Girls who did wear skirts were advised to stay away from boys (FD 121907).

These six-year-old girls already understood that they had a right to protect their bodies and resist unwanted touching. Furthermore, their experiences taught them that a “female-friendly environment” was required if girls were to wear skirts. I should mention that when the girls and boys played together, they often established friendly relations. Xian-Ren and Yun-Shan, for instance, often drew pictures together, and teachers regarded them as good friends, even speculating that they might one day be a couple. When Yun-Shan received Xian-Ren’s unwanted kisses, however, she found it difficult to tell Teacher Chen, even though the teacher favored her. Notably, Yun-Shan and her friend, Ru-Yue, impressed me as two of the brightest and most popular girls in class. They were relatively mature and appeared to have little trouble eliciting support from teachers and female peers. Nevertheless, they had difficulty dealing with male hostility.

*Female resistance was rare.* Meanwhile, Mei-Jia, an NT girl enrolled at WK Kindergarten, took a more direct and assertive approach to male aggression. Ignoring potential risks, she declined to wear bloomers or tights beneath her skirt. When a boy attempted to lift her skirt, Mei-Jia reacted angrily, yelling at him and eventually driving him away. She never hesitated to speak to a boy with poor behavior (FD 110507). Her response contrasted sharply with the mainstream Taiwanese girls. Significantly, Mei-Jia’s resistance enabled her to defend her right to wear a skirt to school.
I quickly discovered that Mei-Jia’s behavior was uncommon. At JB Kindergarten, most every girl wore bloomers or leggings beneath their skirts. Once, I asked some girls why they did so. They told me that when climbing the steps of the slide, wearing bloomers provided security when boys lifted their skirts (FD 112407).

As these incidents suggest, both NT and mainstream Taiwanese girls knew of the dilemmas involved in wearing skirts. They had significant concerns, given that helping children learn to deal with daily problems is important in early childhood education. The children needed a safe environment as well as freedom to wear appropriate clothing. As such, I recommend that teachers stress the need for students to dress appropriately, while also encouraging them to respect another’s personal space. Given that teachers apparently had no knowledge of the girls’ dilemmas, they could not impose measures to help resolve students’ gender-oriented conflicts. Last, children would have benefited from a deeper understanding of appropriate attire, while also appreciating—and respecting—peers’ dress habits.

**Dressing as a tool of gender construction.** Xing-Yan’s mother told me that many Taiwanese people looked down on immigrant spouses and their children. Hence, she considered it her responsibility to train her two daughters to dress well. She believed this move would improve their status within the class and turn her daughters into attractive ladies. Their clothing was unusually stylish when compared to clothes worn by most other girls at JB Kindergarten. One day, Xing-Yan wore a black-and-white striped suit with a wide collar that was turned down. She fastened her ponytail with a pair of black-and-white hair clips depicting images of Mickey Mouse and Minnie Mouse. Her
dark red leggings and shoes had them as well (FD 111507). For being relatively simple, Xing-Yan’s clothing was well-coordinated and fashionable. It bore a striking image and defied stereotypes characterizing NT students as backward and unsophisticated. The following incident demonstrates how one older female relative’s emphasis on sophistication influenced one girl’s classroom behavior, which caused this relative to intervene against the teacher’s discipline.

*Cleanliness is next to godliness.* Different models of girlhood, even among NT girls, existed in class. Compared with Xing-Yan, Yu-Qin, another NT girl, was not so fashionable. Her grandmother, who raised her, believed that girls should be clean, demure young ladies. Yu-Qin wept when another student spilled juice on her skirt. While Teacher Su took time to help clean her skirt, she nevertheless received an angry phone call from Yu-Qin’s grandmother, complaining that such incidents could be avoided if teachers were more attentive (FD 111007).

This obsession with cleanliness seems unreasonable, given that children’s clothes are bound to become soiled in the course of the day. Furthermore, the cleanliness upon which Yu-Qin’s grandmother insisted is not uniquely feminine. Parents and guardians who insisted that girls present this clean image helped reinforce female stereotypes while inadvertently preventing children from participating in some class activities. Given that early childhood teachers spent a high amount of time caring for certain students’ clothing, they cannot be blamed for prohibiting children from joining in certain outdoor activities. In actuality, the system manipulated female teachers into playing a maternal role, often to the detriment of their professional responsibilities.
Conclusion. Taiwanese teachers tend to follow Confucian clothing guidelines to teach students to dress appropriately. But, children might have personal ideas about attire, based on daily incidents relating to gendering experiences. In this study, early childhood female teachers found it necessary to transmit the Confucian thought and applied the rules on dress in class activities. However, they also needed to deal with divergent opinions of parents and grandparents (especially mothers and grandmothers) when discussing female students’ dressing habits. It is unclear whether teachers grasped the different pressures placed on NT girls when compared to mainstream counterparts. There is little doubt, though, that teachers’ efforts to teach students about dress codes, while caring for clothing, placed them in gender power struggles.

These issues placed an additional burden on teachers. Their attitudes concerning gender roles, and gender identity, likely influenced them to encourage girls to be passive and demure, which affected the differing agendas of both boys and girls. Given that mainstream girls already possessed social capital needed to challenge boys, they internalized traditional gender values promoted in class less often. Mainstream girls appeared primarily concerned about creating a female-friendly atmosphere where boys respected their rights. But NT girls focused more on achieving equality with mainstream counterparts. They were also more inclined to accept traditional female gender roles, which they hoped to turn into social capital. Clothing was not the only fashion-oriented issue that arose in the classroom, however.
Hair Styling Helped Girls Conform to Gender

Girls seeking to construct gender identity found hair arrangement important. Given that this was an important factor in every girl’s outward appearance, teachers needed to address this issue when arranging the girls’ hair at school, especially those with longer hair. Teachers created ponytails, pigtails and buns for every girl. On occasion, teachers fastened girls’ hair with elegant hair clips and barrettes, enabling them to create fashionable hairdos. Surprisingly, teachers had access to a wide range of styling tools, including brushes, curling irons and hair dryers.

When it came time to style the girls’ hair, both kindergartens became sharply divided along gender lines. Boys would take advantage of this period to visit with peers, play with toys, read storybooks, or do homework. Meanwhile, the girls sat in one corner of the classroom while teachers fixed their hair, one by one.

While awaiting their turn, girls engaged in lively conversations with peers and teachers, learning much about peers’ private lives during these gossip sessions. They also gained knowledge about issues and conflicts that arose within their peer group. Teachers frequently conversed with the girls, encouraging them to discuss learning difficulties, conflicts with peers, romantic interests and anything else they wished to share. Hence, conversation presented an excellent opportunity for female teachers to bond with female students. Teachers became aware to the girls’ secrets, and they took advantage of chances to offer general advice. These seemingly innocent moments allowed girls to socialize only with other girls. Yet, these periods were sometimes unpleasant for students and teachers in conflict, so tension arose occasionally during hair-dressing sessions.
Hairdressing time as a chance to address behavioral problems. Once, Teacher Su angrily debated Yi-Ting, a mainstream Taiwanese girl, as she combed the girl’s hair. Teacher Su told Yi-Ting that she had “long and beautiful hair,” but added that “you are not at all lady-like.” Yi-Ting irritably replied that she would rather keep her hair short. “Boys catch me because of my long hair, and then I lose when I play fight with boys,” Yi-Ting said. “I will cut my long hair tomorrow.” This comment angered Teacher Su, who said, “To force you to be demure, I will call your mother and require her to never have your hair cut” (FD 120407). Teacher Su knew that Yi-Ting strongly disliked keeping her hair long and wearing dresses. She also knew that her parents would persuade her to dress and behave in a traditionally feminine manner. Wearing long hair was among the many strategies, such as paying for and requiring her to take optional piano lessons at school, that Yi-Ting’s parents employed to shape her gender identity. Sadly, Yi-Ting, unlike most girls, did not view long hair as an asset. In addition, she disliked hairdressing sessions with Teacher Su whereas many other girls did, and Teacher Su used this period to scold Yi-Ting for deviating from traditional gender norms.

Girls share secrets with the teacher. As Teacher Su combed the girls’ hair, she whispered in their ears, apparently seeking information about developments in the classroom. Through sharing secrets, she built close relationships with them, thus positioning herself to provide individual assistance to girls with problems. One day, the girls gossiped about Jun-Qing, a mainstream Taiwanese boy who had allegedly written a love letter to Xing-Yan. While combing her hair, Teacher Su asked if she could see the
“love letter.” Teacher Su later told me that the note actually read, “Please eat your snack quickly, or the whole class will need to wait on you” (FD 111407).

While the note remained a secret between the two, Teacher Su continued to gather information about each student’s private affairs. She knew which students were friends and enemies, and she appeared to know each child’s secrets. Teacher Su revealed that listening to the girls’ secrets was important because it led her to view them as daughters. Doing this, Teacher Su reproduced a mother’s role in class, often negatively affecting professional obligations. Her female students might have been puzzled because classroom gender culture became similar to family gender hierarchies, which had been presented as a patriarchal power structure even in female-led classrooms.

The hairdressing period served as a “gender construction” moment for students, who became conscious of gender differences. Sessions enabled teachers to outline privileges and restraints involved in developing one’s public appearance. One advantage is that female students have time for one-on-one conversations with teachers on issues including studies, clothing and hair accessories. The drawback is reflected in the teacher’s insistence that girls maintain a feminine appearance and be lady-like. Students’ appearances reveal much about their educational background and school quality. Thus, teachers involved themselves in helping girls maintain appearance. Learning to dress appropriately and style hair well were important aspects of early childhood education.

Confucian thought became part of classroom management. But while teachers required students to recite from Classical Rules for Children (弟子規), some content differed from girls’ concerns about when they wore certain clothing. Girls reconstructed
female gender identities when practicing gender roles when styling hair. Furthermore, this obsession with cleanliness seems unreasonable, given that children’s clothes are bound to become soiled in the course of the day.

Conclusion

This section focused on the construction of female outward appearance. Female teachers coordinated with parents to influence girls’ perceptions of approved gender behaviors. Teachers made suggestions on girls’ clothing according to Confucian thought, making it part of classroom management. But while teachers required students to recite from *Classical Rules for Children* (弟子規), some content differed from girls’ concerns about the conditions under which they wore certain clothing. Girls reconstructed female gender identities when practicing gender roles in the course of hair-styling time.

Classroom gender conformity prevented heterogeneous girls from assimilating. Teachers and mainstream Taiwanese girls collaborated to enforce rules excluding girls with unladylike behavior. This included girls with poor manners, the demeanor of “tomboys,” a low SES, or cross-culture backgrounds. Teacher’s and girls’ tendency to categorize peers reflected a commitment to preserve strictly constructed gender boundaries. In critical incidents, teachers missed opportunities to listen, intervene, dialogue and participate in girls’ gender construction processes, neglecting to recognize that children often constructed and reconstructed gendered social orders through peer interaction. Also, teachers regularly suppressed girls who resisted dominant gender norms. Given this essentially hostile classroom environment, NT girls received little positive
affirmation for cross-cultural gender identities. Last, gender norms enforced in class emphasized girls’ outward appearances.

In any event, teachers could have created more opportunities for NT girls and mainstream peers to cooperate in constructing girlhood if they had encouraged girls to recognize the different ways to be a girl. Teachers could have encouraged female students to be confident in individual talents and personalities rather than imposing upon them a traditional idea of femininity. Evidently, teachers failed to criticize traditional curricula practices, so they did not even consider alternative approaches to forming girls’ gender identities. The next section focuses on the curriculum and NT girlhood.

**The Learning Comes from Curricula**

Any examination of classroom learning should be attentive to a teacher’s curriculum design, pedagogy and classroom environment. In both classrooms, entire textbooks contained several subjects, such as reading, writing, arithmetic and classical rules of etiquette for young children. Children read from them, and teachers’ pedagogy adhered closely to content. This clearly influenced how gender was handled in class. As Sadker et al. (1998) note, gender biases are evident in certain kinds of textbooks; they are reflected in the absence of gender-inclusive language, reinforcement of gender stereotypes and invisibility of either gender.

This study is concerned primarily with textbook content that reflects gender biases and reinforces gender stereotypes, while examining how this content shapes girls’ knowledge and influences gender construction. This section discusses aspects of the curriculum that influenced girls’ gender consciousness, and the extent to which girls had
concerns about their and their parents’ gender roles. Textbook content narrows the scope of “gender identity and gendered social order” issues connected to the children’s romantic affairs. The girls’ education connected closely to curricula, preparing girls to assume women’s roles. In short, I was concerned about how books presented female gender stereotypes, and how children responded to teachers’ and peers’ opinions regarding how texts showed these issues. The incidents described below reflect how students responded to romance and marriage in textbooks.

**Romantic Love in Girlhood**

One day at WK Kindergarten, Teacher Wang called on Yun-Shan, a mainstream Taiwanese girl, to read from her textbook: “Two innocent children, a boy and a girl, form a caring, honest and mutually supportive relationship. In the process, they build an agreeable life together” (“兩小無猜，感情好，互助互愛，甜蜜好生活。”). As Yun-Shan read aloud, several girls giggled. Yu-Jun, another mainstream Taiwanese girl, then exclaimed that Xian-Ren, a mainstream Taiwanese boy, loved Yun-Shan. As she began to reveal other’s romantic affairs, the entire class erupted in laughter. Before long, Teacher Wang ordered Yu-Jun to stop talking and advised the others to “be quiet and listen,” but several children giggled again. Teacher Wang pretended to ignore them and began to teach them how to write sentences featured in the textbook. After class, I approached Ru-Yue, a mainstream Taiwanese girl, to ask about Yu-Jun’s comments. She answered that Yu-Jun made a habit of talking about other children’s romantic affairs, so many classmates disliked her (FD 112107).
The children already knew of certain aspects of romantic and married life; however, Teacher Wang opted not to take advantage of a critical moment where she could engage in a direct dialogue with students. Conversely, she ordered them to be silent and, inadvertently, deepened their curiosity about boy-girl friendships and romance. Ironically, the text from which she taught showed children how to assume gender roles and how to live harmoniously. But early childhood teachers treat children as asexual and too young to become romantically involved; therefore, when the children posed questions related to this text, Teacher Wang avoided the issue of cross-gender relationships. She later said that she did not consider this a suitable topic for children their age.

Her comments reflected other teachers’ opinions; they seemed intent on denying children knowledge of “adult affairs,” even though revealing such knowledge could strengthen authority as they advised children on gender construction. They disregarded children’s curiosity, and deep confusion, when cultivating friendships with opposite-sex peers. Cross-gender relationships always captured children’s attention, so they routinely teased peers in relationships; teachers also suppressed any discussion of the topic. This enforced silence ensured that cross-gender relationships would become more subversive and thus more exciting to children. The absence of dialogue on this subject also encouraged children, especially girls, to harbor unrealistic expectations of romantic love.

Ultimately, Teacher Wang’s refusal to address cross-gender relationships in class influenced children’s attitudes; they sensed its inappropriateness. Even Ru-Yue attempted to avoid discussing Yu-Jun’s statements. Instead, she focused on Yu-Yun’s talkative nature and her supposed unpopularity. Unsurprisingly, Ru-Yue unknowingly internalized
Teacher Wong’s attitude toward cross-gender friendships, given that she chose to suppress the topic with me. Sadker et. al. (1998) point out those curricula generally avoided contact with the children’s reality. At WK Kindergarten, textbook content encouraged children to embrace idyllic and ultimately unrealistic images of romance, and the absence of discussion reinforced cross-gender relationships in class. I found a different scenario at JB Kindergarten, where Teacher Su’s attitude toward cross-gender friendships influenced how children made friends.

**The love letter as a public secret.** At JB Kindergarten, boys wrote love letters to female classmates to use phonemic symbols they had just learned. They recorded thoughts and conveyed feelings of affection in letters directed at love interests. Moreover, after learning how to write numbers, several males recorded their “girlfriends”’ telephone numbers in notebooks. Young boys employed love letters and phone calls to secure girlfriends. Letters to popular girls created peer conflicts that went beyond most adults’ imagination. Many children cared greatly about who “loved” whom and who had recently changed sweethearts. Teacher Su indicated that she needed to accept that children’s feelings were remarkably similar to adults’.

Teacher Su also noted that experienced teachers recognized that as students learned to use phonemic symbols, they wrote love letters. Then, secret love affairs would become classroom gossip. Teacher Su described romantic affairs spreading just like blooming flowers in spring, and the girls’ and boys’ hearts fluttered everywhere like butterflies (AT 122907).
One widely-discussed incident involved Min-Shan, a six-year-old mainstream Taiwanese boy, who wrote a letter to Zhen-Xiu, a six-year-old mainstream Taiwanese girl. The class knew of an alleged love letter, and in interviews, some children shared details of this “public secret.” Teacher Su confirmed that Min-Shan wrote a series of brief notes to Zhen-Xiu. A month earlier, he conveyed his best wishes in a letter to her, who was absent due to an illness. Zhen-Xiu, evidently moved by his expression of concern, began to respond to Min-Shan with brief notes of her own. Then, Min-Shan gave Zhen-Xiu candy, along with a note indicating that the sweets be given to her younger brother. When I asked Zhen-Xiu how she felt about Min-Shan’s notes, she blushed, looked away from me and smiled. She thought that Min-Shan was very nice to write her letters, adding her appreciation that he sent a gift to her younger brother (FN112807).

To gain insight into Min-Shan’s perspective on his friendship with Zhen-Xiu, I interviewed him in the hall while the other children drew pictures in the classroom. When I asked whether he had ever given candy to Zhen-Xiu, Min-Shan became evasive. “I don’t know,” he answered. He then looked at the floor and began to murmur. I persisted gently, and before long, Min-Shan confirmed that he had indeed done so, though he stressed that the candy was intended for her little brother. As he spoke, Min-Shan continued to look down at the floor, his tone was barely audible. Still, I could sense he was trying to defend himself. “Do you know her brother?” I asked. Min-Shan indicated he had once seen the boy. “I saw her grandma take her hand and her young brother’s hand before,” he said. “I hope her brother will like my candy.”
Suddenly, Chi-Wei, a six-year-old mainstream Taiwanese girl, interrupted our interview by slapping Min-Shan on the back and shouting, “Min-Shan loves Zhen-Xiu.” When I attempted to silence her, Chi-Wei deliberately looked into my video camera and again shouted, “Min-Shan loves Zhen-Xiu!” I asked Chi-Wei, “How can you be sure of this?” The girl responded by pointing out that Min-Shan blushed. “His face tells his secret,” she replied. I indicated that I was not entirely convinced and asked her once again, “But how do you know that he loves Zhen-Xiu?” “Guess!” Chi-Wei said. “He not only loves Zhen-Xiu, but also Jia-Jia and Min-Hui.”

談戀愛: Ten Lian Ai. At that point, Zhi-Gao, a five-year-old mainstream Taiwanese boy, overheard our conversation screamed the word “love” (in English) three times. Simultaneously, Chi-Wei also shouted a mixture of Chinese and English: “談戀愛” (ten lian ai) and “love, love, love…” Evidently embarrassed, Min-Shan fled (AT112807). Children became excited when they discovered others’ love interests, and this excitement was compounded when they learned of supposed love letters.

Many children suggested that Min-Shan and Zhen-Xiu were falling in love (談戀愛: ten lian ai). They used Chinese and English to describe what little they knew about romantic love (i.e., 談戀愛 in Chinese: “ten lian ai” means to fall in love with someone). The children were surprisingly motivated to learn new vocabulary to describe their feelings, especially foreign terms and phrases like “love” and “I love you.” This was the first time I had ever heard the children speak English during everyday conversations, and “love” became a common topic of discussion.
When I asked the children what they meant by “ten lian ai,” their understandings of love included: (1) when a boy and a girl know how to sing a love song to each other; (2) when they liked to watch each other; (3) when a boy and a girl kissed and hugged one another; and (4) when the boy and girl desired to have a baby together (AT 122707). As children struggled to identify what they knew about “being in love with someone,” they focused on the processes of affecting or being affected and behaviors such as “kissing and hugging” to symbolize the meaning of love between heterosexuals. Also, when they suggested that couples in love wanted “to have a baby,” they meant that these couples desired to start a family together.

Overall, this lengthy incident showed how children struggled to explain feelings to one another, and how they routinely meddled in peers personal affairs. This critical moment taught children to respect each other’s privacy, discuss ways to show peers proper consideration and to help the children understand that there are various ways to be a girl or boy and have opposite-gender friends.

Who is Whose Girlfriend?

This section addresses what made girls’ gendered social order different after becoming someone’s girlfriend. The girls in both classes, as young as five or six years old, eagerly speculated about relationships between girlfriends and boyfriends, as well as ways to secure boyfriends. The following interviews display what children revealed about who could be in love with whom.

**Because they were five years old.** A variety of factors, such as stature, age, appearance and characteristics, matched two children to become boyfriend and girlfriend.
Two five-year-olds at WK Kindergarten informed me that a similar height and age were important prerequisites for a boyfriend and girlfriend. The children said: “Cause they are all five years old” and “because both are the same—they’re short” (FD 113007).

Appearance was one reason children agreed that a handsome boy is a good match for a beautiful girl. Most children found appearance (e.g., physical size and attractiveness) extremely important when attempting to match a couple. These opinions clearly reflected children’s values and perspectives regarding cross-gender friendships. The title of “girlfriend” gave girls a feeling of confidence and also improved their status among peers. The following incident indicated how two girls conspired to keep their boyfriends.

**We are smart enough to know how to keep boyfriends.** Many girls used popularity to attract male peers. They did not focus exclusively attractive appearances; they also negotiated with each other in effective ways to secure targeted boyfriends. Zhen-Xiu and Jia-Jia, two mainstream Taiwanese girls, discreetly discussed strategies to secure boyfriends, repeatedly mentioning two mainstream Taïwanese boys, Zhi-Gao and Min-Shan. Zhen-Xiu questioned Jia-Jia about why she “loved” Zhi-Gao, and she encouraged her to be certain that Zhi-Gao was her primary choice. In return, Zhen-Xiu expected advice about her prospective boyfriend, Min-Shan. She wanted to be certain that Min-Shan would love her in return. “Only when I make Zhi-Gao my boyfriend will Min-Shan know that I love Zhi-Gao,” Jia-Jia responded. “Min-Shan will turn to you, and he will love only you. Otherwise, he will not love any girl.” When Jia-Jia finished talking, Zhen-Xiu laughed, saying, “Wow, you’re so smart” (FD 010308). I was impressed by the sophisticated manner in which the two girls made “deals” as they discussed how they
would select boyfriends. As I listened to them bargain, and even discuss psychological strategies, I found it hard to believe that they were only six years old.

Clearly, this incident displayed the two girls’ serious tactics to prevent targeted boyfriends from falling in love with other girls. Their places in the gendered social order changed after gaining the title of “girlfriend.” Some girls admired Zhen-Xiu and Jia-Jia when they received “love letters” from their boyfriends, but others resented girls who received special attention, such as extra assistance, from boyfriends. The title promoted gendered social orders in class, but hurt friendships with other unpopular female peers.

In the next incident, a mainstream girl sophisticatedly negotiated with two boys and claimed her position. As a result of this, boys also aspirations about who would become their brides.

**She is an angel in my life.** Zhi-Jie and Yi-Hong, two six-year-old NT boys, engaged in a spirited debate about who should marry Min-Hui, a six-year-old mainstream Taiwanese girl and a mutual friend. While citing why he would be Min-Hui’s groom, Zhi-Jie explained, “Because she is beautiful, and she treats me nicely.” Yi-Hong objected to Zhi-Jie’s contentions, however. “No, no, no,” he said. “She is mine. She always lends her pencils to me. She is mine.” Before long, Min-Hui, who was standing nearby, interrupted them. “Both of you be quiet, please,” she said. “I don’t want to make any decision to get married with either of you right now, so please don’t make your arguments here over and over again” (FN 123107).

The friendship among them developed because they sat together at the same table. Daily, Min-Hui reminded her tablemates to complete their assignments for class. The
boys liked the idea of having an “angel” to assist them, and they appreciated this gesture. Zhi-Jie and Yi-Hong liked her charming appearance and kind disposition. Consequently, they often argued about who would marry Min-Hui. Interestingly, Min-Hui, an intelligent girl, became skilled at manipulating her would-be suitors’ behavior in a positive direction. She clearly wanted Zhi-Jie and Yi-Hong to treat each other kindly.

Indeed, children singing love songs and writing letters that reflected their desire to express feelings of friendship and “love.” When teachers discussed children’s “romantic” interests, they positioned themselves to create a gender-friendly environment. As children constructed gender identities and established gendered social order, romantic experiences helped develop self-esteem and adopt caring attitudes toward peers.

**Conclusion.** As this incident suggests, children learned to use different reasons to match peers to heterosexual partners. Under the dominant gender discourse, no children mentioned same-gender partners. Moreover, for mainstream Taiwanese girls, securing a boyfriend signified one’s popularity and ability to attract boys. The girls struggled to promote gender status by befriending boys and dressing attractively. They might gain social capital through being someone’s girlfriend. Under the dominant discourse, romance prevented young girls from paying more attention to education and life skills. They should not have worried about gaining social capital from being girlfriends.

The three NT girls in this study, however, were neither popular nor attractive enough to inspire mainstream Taiwanese boys them to actively pursue them. Xing-Yan, the one exception, showed absolutely no desire for a boyfriend. In both classrooms, the three NT girls played a largely invisible role, and female peers usually ignored them,
considering NT girls irrelevant. Despite NT and mainstream Taiwanese girls studying in the same classes, their interaction with most peers revealed numerous conflicts. NT girls’ behavior disqualified them from participating with mainstream Taiwanese children in a homogenous peer interaction. Because most mainstream Taiwanese children treated them as heterogeneous individuals, NT girls had little chance of gaining popularity, or becoming mainstream Taiwanese boys’ girlfriends. Further, NT girls stood at the margins of social life each class, which may have caused most mainstream Taiwanese children not to bother to spread rumors of NT girls’ “love affairs” with mainstream Taiwanese boys.

Children’s Understanding of Marriages and Family Life

While writing love letters affected children’s romantic affairs, Taiwanese folk customs featured in one textbook also shaped children’s attitudes toward romantic love. Like many folk stories, it had a community of talking animals. For example, both classes read a story about male and female mice who marry during the Lunar New Year. Learning activities such as these stimulated the children’s interest in marriage and inspired them to discuss its overall meaning. References to traditional wedding customs in a textbook influenced children’s understanding of a bride’s gender role.

**The bashful bride’s wedding.** The mouse tale dealt with a bashful bride at a mouse wedding, a familiar story to some students since it is traditionally told at midnight during the Lunar New Year celebration. At JB Kindergarten, Teacher Su led students in reading the story aloud. In sum, the mouse bride is bashful and the mouse groom is happy as they participate in the wedding. (老鼠新娘羞答答，坐上花轎要出嫁，敲鑼打鼓吹喇叭，歡歡喜喜娶新娘。)
Significantly, while the story emphasizes the joy experienced by all participants in the wedding, the bride is described as having a bashful demeanor and is concealed within the wedding sedan, where she also experiences joy. The groom, conversely, rides a horse and leads the wedding party to the ceremony. He is presented as a robust, powerful figure, while his bride is not permitted to display her face in public and must be protected, since her vulnerability guarantees her the “privilege” of riding in the wedding sedan. The story reinforces traditional stereotypes of the bride as feminine and reserved, and the groom as active and masculine. The feminine bride, who is helpless, depends upon her husband, to whom she is expected to be submissive. Thus, she expresses her love in a bashful, rather than overt, manner.

*Only the pretty and capable girl can be a bride.* Teacher Su led a discussion about the mouse wedding, and she also shared photographs of her own wedding. In one photograph, the newlyweds shared an affectionate kiss. Jia-Jia, a mainstream Taiwanese girl, pointed to the picture and said: “Oops. Why did you allow that man to kiss your cheek?” Teacher Su responded that the groom was her husband and therefore allowed to kiss her. Yu-Qin, an NT girl, then said she wanted to be a bride someday, because the bride always looked attractive. Her comment sparked a discussion on the prerequisites of an ideal bride. Several students argued that the bride should be pretty, intelligent and capable of performing certain tasks, including cooking and childbearing (FD 010208). Interestingly, no one in the classroom, including Teacher Su, outlined any prerequisites that should be required of the groom. Apparently, the teacher and students expected much more of the bride than they did of the groom.
As part of Teacher Su’s exploration, she encouraged the students to stage a mock wedding ceremony. Individual students adopted the roles of bride, groom, matchmaker, or wedding guest. As the students selected cast members for the mock wedding, Yu-Qin, the NT girl, boldly asked if she could play the matchmaker since her classmates rejected her as a bride candidate. (During the class discussion described earlier, her classmates firmly concluded that Yu-Qin would not be an ideal bride.) Overall, NTC ended up in support roles. For example, the class selected Da-Wei, an NT boy, to play the driver of the wedding car. Nevertheless, students appeared to enjoy participating in the activity, which gave them an opportunity to act out a variety of traditional Taiwanese wedding customs. As the student playing the bride was about to climb into her make-believe wedding car, she tossed a fan in the direction of her play relatives, a symbolic act indicating that she had abandoned her old habits as a daughter. Meanwhile, students who played the bride’s siblings began to pour water from a bucket, an act symbolizing the fact that the bride had become part of the groom’s family and no longer had a relationship with her biological parents. From there, Teacher Su led the children through the wedding ceremony. They laughed as the bride and groom grabbed the sides of a large paper box representing their wedding car, which Da-Wei pretended to drive (FD 010208).

Teacher Su acknowledged, however, that traditional Taiwanese wedding customs discussed in class might differ somewhat from those known by certain students, particularly those with transnational backgrounds. Therefore, she required students to ask their parents about traditional wedding ceremonies. The next day, several NT boys—Da-Wei, Ming-Yan, Zhi-Jie and Yi-Hong—indicated their parents had been married in
Vietnam. After the weddings, they noted, their mothers left Vietnam and immigrated to Taiwan. Da-Wei and Ming-Yan shared photographs from both Taiwan and Vietnam, explaining that the latter featured visits from Vietnamese relatives. The boys taped the pictures to the blackboard, and Da-Wei drew a line to divide Taiwanese and Vietnamese pictures. He placed his mother’s picture on the Vietnamese side of the boundary, noting that she had been Vietnamese before she married his Taiwanese father, thus exposing his knowledge of geographic, cultural and national differences. He described his parents’ wedding ceremony in a large hotel, and that his father had presented a ring to his mother.

**Xing-Yan’s family pictures.** Xing-Yan, an NT girl, also shared family photographs. However, she only brought along pictures of herself, her younger sister, and her father, but none of her mother or any that had been taken in Vietnam. When I asked Xing-Yan about this, she told me that her father had expressly forbidden her from bringing such pictures (FD 010408). Later, Teacher Su told me that Xing-Yan’s father did not want non-family members to know about his transnational marriage (FD 010708). I could not tell what Xing-Yan actually knew of her parents’ marriage, but Xing-Yan’s comments made it evident that she associated her mother with the kitchen, the bathroom and the laundry room, where her mother undertook domestic chores. Meanwhile, Xing-Yan associated her father with the sofa, the computer desk and the bed, as he spent much of his time at home watching television, playing computer games, or sleeping (FD 120607). This suggests that Xing-Yan knew of her parents’ different gender roles.

Because of her sensitivity to classroom conflict, I wondered about Xing-Yan’s exposure to her parents’ disagreements. She revealed that her parents’ endless quarrels
made her feel that her ears would fall off. During her parents’ constant arguments, Xing-Yan and her younger sister hid in their bedroom (FD 120607). She explained her own duties as an elder sister, noting her and her mother’s responsibility to keep the house clean and orderly, adding “it is not good when my home is dirty.” Hence, Xing-Yan knew of her own position in the family, just as she knew of her parents’ different gender roles. I suspected that Xing-Yan also recognized the stark differences between her home life and her textbook’s descriptions of an ideal married life. In most mainstream Taiwanese households, women hold dominant positions. In Xing-Yan’s household, however, her mother seemed like a domestic worker while her father made final decisions. Since the gender relationships were extraordinarily unequal, she could observe her parents’ interaction, which might increase her desire to reject dominant models. Because of the disparity between the Taiwanese ideal of married life and the realities of her own household, her mother’s lack of power at home may have troubled Xing-Yan.

**What students think their wedding pictures represent.** Although the reality of married life proved difficult for Xing-Yan, she still liked to draw pictures of brides. Girls’ drawings routinely reflected traditional female gender roles around the theme, “My Future Wedding.” Xing-Yan, for instance, depicted herself as a traditional bride wearing makeup, several pieces of jewelry and a white wedding dress. In the drawing, bouquets of flowers surrounded her, which had been presented at the wedding banquet. Her imagined groom, Jun-Qing, a mainstream Taiwanese boy, wore simple brown clothes and stood at a reserved distance from his bride. A lush field of grass filled the drawing’s background, and musical notes encircled the bride and groom. Yu-Qin’s wedding picture sharply
contrast Xing-Yan’s drawing; she presented herself with long hair and wearing a beautiful dress. Yu-Qin’s imagined groom was Fu-Cheng, a mainstream Taiwanese boy. In the drawing, the newlyweds held hands and walked beneath an arch composed of musical notes. The drawing also included a large firecracker and a flower, which were evidently meant to symbolize the wedding celebration (FD 010208).

When compared to these drawings, NT boys’ pictures included renderings based in reality. Da-Wei, for instance, drew the guests’ smiling faces as well as the bride’s and groom’s. Zi-Yang’s drawing included a banquet filled with balloons, and the background showed a blazing sun against a deep blue sky (FD 010208). Similarly, Ming-Yan’s drawing included detailed renderings of wedding banquet tea sets and desserts.

While girls and boys focused on different details, however, their drawings displayed certain similarities. They evidently shared views on the nature of the wedding ceremony. First, the ceremony was to involve a heterosexual couple. Next, the event would feature traditional Taiwanese customs, including setting off fireworks and staging a banquet. Last, the bride would adhere to certain stereotypical gender roles. General knowledge about wedding ceremonies provided children with basic concepts that they used to construct gender norms. Nevertheless, despite discussions and examples here, gender education still lacks a firm explanation of gender differences, and teachers might not see the problems with gender stereotypes in the children’s pictures.

**Conclusion.** This section examines how the mouse wedding gave the children a detailed idea of a fantasy world, one where qualities like bashfulness or dependence become important “good girl” characteristics. Certain realities of Taiwanese society
supported these ideas, and the girls had every reason to conclude that a heterosexual marriage would provide them with a legal gender position in society.

The children’s curricula ensured that teachers would consistently miss opportunities to offer children ways to discussion how to befriend the opposite sex; instead, discussions led the class to conclude that only the pretty and capable girl could marry. Teachers neglected to inform students that most every adult would eventually marry, regardless of appearance or measure of success. Aside from this, not all marriages contain co-equality, nor do all couples live happily ever after, as evidenced by the status of immigrant mothers within the marriage. In turn, a mother’s status could affect how NT girls think about their mothers as well as themselves. Next, there is another component of the curriculum, the textbook, where teachers appear to have failed to distinguish differences between an idealized concept and an adverse reality.

**Textbooks Influence Gendered Knowledge**

Textbooks, which stressed teachers’ opinions, encouraged girls to embrace traditional gender roles and to prepare to assume maternal roles. Textbook gendered knowledge influenced children to conclude that obeying dominant gender norms was the only way to be a female. This knowledge could limit the girls’ ability to formulate conclusions about what it means to be a woman, while narrowing their choice of academic subjects and influencing behaviors. This research contends that this knowledge will not help girls recognize that they have many options available, that is, apart from the traditional roles of wife and mother. Increased educational and employment opportunities, in particular, enable women to own knowledge, to participate in public affairs and to
become financially independent. Hence, textbook content shields girls from contemporary social realities and reinforces traditional gender stereotypes. This study shows that while textbooks may help children learn to read and write, it also influences perceptions of parents’ gender roles as well as their gender roles in the domestic context.

**Parents’ and Children’s Gender Roles on the Textbook**

At JB Kindergarten, Teacher Su taught the children to read the following sentence: “My father reads the newspaper, my mother buys facial tissues, and I fold some colored paper” (爸爸看報紙，媽媽買面紙，我玩小色紙) (FD 111207). Since the curriculum focused on word recognition and reading comprehension, the teacher ignored the effect of the textbook describing different gender roles in the family. The content associates the father with reading a newspaper (i.e., learning new knowledge), and connects the mother to daily tasks (e.g., shopping for family). This kind of learning about parents’ gender roles could become gendered knowledge and make it a standardized image of a father, mother and a young child. In reflecting upon what the children learned in class, the content did not resemble Xing-Yan description of her family situation.

My father is a problem solver, but my mother knows nothing. Xing-Yan indicated that her father knew how to use a computer and also had the capacity to solve problems, while her mother could not use the computer and often needed to request her father’s help. Based upon her observations of her parents’ interaction as well as her own experiences, Xing-Yan saw her father as more capable than her mother (FD, 111407). Also, the textbook reinforced her conclusion that her father’s superior capability equipped him to assume a dominant position at home. Importantly, Xing-Yan’s mother
struggled language and was still in the process of adapting to Taiwanese society. Her deficiencies in speaking Mandarin and Taiwanese, along with being an immigrant, ensured that Xing-Yan would view her mother as a person of limited ability.

Xing-Yan’s perspective on her mother resembled attitudes of Da-Wei and Ming-Yan, two NT boys at JB Kindergarten. Da-Wei indicated that his mother could not read his storybooks, but he often read these books to his mother. Similarly, Ming-Yan noted that whenever he needed help with something, he would often ask his father since he thought him better equipped to help. All three NTC expressed similar attitudes about their immigrant mothers, suggesting a pattern. The children insisted that their fathers had superior abilities, despite that their mothers had skills and abilities clearly not possessed by their fathers. As a result, NTC respected their fathers more than their mothers.

Significantly, the reading exercise content also touched upon children’s gender roles at home. In the textbook exercise, a child (“I”) folds some colored paper. This description does not present the child’s individual characteristics, refraining even from referencing gender. Nevertheless, the exercise indicates that young children should be left to playing with paper. From the perspective of many adults (including the teachers here), children need of adult protection; they cannot understand family relationships, and are not yet sophisticated enough to understand local culture. Such images, in fact, underestimate many children in both classrooms.

Even adults thought that young children needed nurturing; in part, Taiwanese parents forced older children to become good role models and to take care of their
younger siblings. Xing-Yan, for instance, was well aware of her responsibilities as the first-born child and eldest daughter.

**Being the first-born child and eldest daughter.** Once, I asked Xing-Yan about what she enjoyed most about being at home. She responded that she enjoyed sharing toys with her younger sister and teaching her how to play games (FD, 111407). When I interviewed Xing-Yan’s mother at her home, I observed that Xing-Yan showed a caring and nurturing attitude toward her younger sister (FD 112307). She reflected this attitude in a classroom assignment, when Xing-Yan drew a picture of herself praying to the gods to protect her younger sister from recurring health problems (FD 010508). These observations indicate Xing-Yan’s sensitivity and conscientious daughter and older sister even though she was then only six-year-old.

Xing-Yan was not alone. Yu-Qin, an only child, appeared sensitive to the importance of family relationships. Despite the fact that Yu-Qin could not communicate effectively with her peers due to delayed development, she did express anxiousness about her dysfunctional family. A picture she drew in class featured a large mansion with several windows. Yu-Qin placed her window between her father’s and mother’s, while the window of her grandmother’s room was located above her father’s. When I asked why her parents had separate rooms, she indicated that they did not get along and, therefore, could not stay together. I went on to ask Yu-Qin why a ladder was located near her mother’s window. She replied that the ladder would help her mother escape quickly, if necessary. When I questioned her as to why her grandmother’s room was located directly below her father’s room, she explained that they often joined forces against her
mother (FD 112407). Overall, Yu-Qin’s drawing revealed her awareness of her parents’ troublesome marriage. Despite Teacher Su’s assurance that the girl’s youth prevented her from knowing about domestic violence, the research suggests that Yu-Qin knew many family secrets.

Both NT girls’ awareness of their families’ situations helped them construct gendered social orders. This enabled them to develop gender identities, closely observing their parents’ and grandparents’ relationships, while also taking note of family conflicts. Also, I rarely observed Xing-Yan or Yu-Qin resisting dominant discourses that supported the idea that fathers are stronger than mothers. Indeed, Teacher Su disclosed that they constantly played the role of submissive daughters to win their fathers’ affection. In short, Xing-Yan and Yu-Qin, despite obvious differences, were largely confined to their gender roles as feminine daughters.

Besides parents’ attitudes, teachers’ attitudes also played an important role in this education process. I discussed with Teacher Su how she interpreted familial, gender and social roles presented in textbooks. Teacher Su explained that reading and writing are necessary skills; thus, she seldom questioned the books’ presentation of these issues, nor did she discuss them with students. Besides, she found nothing wrong with how these topics because it was commonplace to expose children to parental gender roles in traditional, middle-class families. Teacher Su’s opinion indicated that she had no concern about the textbook’s disconnect between the students’ gendering and schooling.

Traditional content in Taiwanese textbooks promotes high moral standards in personal relationships, encourages filial piety and upholds images of women as figures
who essentially sacrifice themselves for family welfare. Teacher Su held that these values should be an essential part of the curriculum, and during my observation, she followed the content religiously. She did not appear to grasp that traditional female gender roles fell considerably short of the gender equity becoming commonplace in Taiwanese society. Moreover, traditional gender roles permeated most textbooks that I examined. In the following section, I discuss a passage from one of these textbooks that portrays the traditional parental roles in the family from the economic/financial perspectives.

**My father is a breadwinner and my mother is a supporter.** At WK Kindergarten, students read exercises such as the following: “I draw a smiley face for my young brother. He likes to have fun with us. I draw an apple for my father. It will give him energy when he works at his job. I draw a sweetheart for my mom. I want to tell my mom that I love her” (畫一個笑臉給弟弟，他最愛逗大家笑，畫一個蘋果給爸爸，讓他上班更有勁，畫一個愛心給媽媽，告訴媽媽我愛她). The above passage not only describes various family members’ gender roles, it also instructs children on appropriate ways to express appreciation for different family members (FD 113007). Given that filial piety is a paramount value in Taiwanese society, I was not surprised that Teacher Wang, in her discussion of this passage, emphasized children’s need to express gratitude to parents. She noted that even in a harmonious family, members should love and support each other. Teacher Wang highlighted the importance of the father’s contribution to the family while asserting that mothers play an indispensable role when caring for the family. But she still noted that a father’s role enabled the family to survive.
After the discussion, Teacher Wang called on several children to draw symbols of gratitude to their parents on the chalkboard. Under the teacher’s direction, most children indicated they appreciated their fathers more than mothers because their fathers work hard to make money for the family, so they wanted to present their fathers with a model car, remote control airplane, or a motorcycle helmet, for example. (FD 113007). Other students noted their mothers’ beauty and thus wished to express appreciation with red hearts, boxes of candy and elaborately-wrapped gifts. This shows how the children value maternal image of mothers. These drawings revealed that concepts of parents differed: mothers are feminine care givers and fathers are masculine breadwinners. Children overlooked that both parents could be caregivers and breadwinners in a double-income family. Crucially, most mothers held full-time jobs while assuming household duties. Nevertheless, textbooks never raised the possibility that mothers, like fathers, could contribute to household income. Strangely, Teacher Wang, a working mother, took no steps to discuss this oversight; she made little effort to note that many working mothers have overwhelming responsibilities both inside and outside the home.

Because of the disconnect that exists between textbook content and real-life, there is an urgent need to revise learning materials so that they reflect women’s changing gender roles in modern Taiwan. These textbooks fail to provide usable information to readers. They no longer live in a society where they can depend exclusively on male support and protection. Indeed, women are now expected to develop professional skills required to survive in a competitive society. However, the following incident presents
how parents and teachers cooperated to reinforce a girl’s gender role by having her recite from *Reading Classical Rules for Children* (弟子規).

**Learning to be a good girl in the context of the family.** As noted in Chapter 5, the aunt of Zhi-Jie, an NT boy in Teacher Su’s class at JB Kindergarten, pressured him to learn *Reading Classical Rules for Children* (弟子規) to increase literacy and academic competitiveness. Teacher Su and students’ families concur on the educational purpose of reading the ancient text. Similar to Zhi-Jie, several students’ parents and guardians complained that Teacher Su had not properly outlined the content of the traditional textbook since these reading sessions had done little to improve manners at home, or give them a strong sense of familial responsibility. Specifically, her displeasure involved Min-Hui, a six-year-old mainstream Taiwanese girl, whose grandmother became upset because Min-Hui did not care for her two-year-old cousin. Interestingly, Min-Hui’s grandmother hoped that reading from the classic children’s textbook would help her granddaughter become a submissive, family-oriented female (FD120707).

Some family complaints struck Teacher Su as unreasonable, but she could not ignore that Taiwanese teachers are responsible for training students to be respectful at home and in class. Under pressure from students’ extended family members, the teacher placed greater emphasis on the moral content of *Reading Classic Rules for Children* (弟子規), requiring her students to adhere to the middle class Taiwanese family’s gendered hierarchy. Parents and teachers expected children to engage in gender-appropriate behavior, as outlined in the textbook, and to make an effort to meet parental expectations. Once again, however, the expectations of the students’ relatives were scarcely uniform,
and they depended heavily upon the gender of the child. Whereas Zhi-Jie’s aunt desired academic improvement, Min-Hui’s grandmother expected her to draw a deeper understanding of a traditional Taiwanese daughter’s responsibilities. This discrepancy confirms that adults expect girls and boys to meet very different educational goals.

In another example, Xing-Yan’s mother required her to recite passages from *Reading Classical Rules for Children* (*弟子規*) every day. Despite Xing-Yan’s immigrant mother’s inability to read the text herself (indeed, she could not even recognize individual words in the text), she followed her husband’s order to supervise Xing-Yan’s homework, which included recitations from the aged text. Xing-Yan quickly learned that reading fluently won her praise from her father as well as extended family. By performing competently, she demonstrated intelligence, perseverance and awareness of her responsibilities as a daughter and elder sister. In addition, Xing-Yan’s ability to read aloud from this traditional text promoted her mother’s status within the hierarchy of her father’s extended family.

In sum, the book presents parental expectations and creates a feeling of relief for family members to believe in their daughter were intelligence, etiquette and obedience. Also, teachers considered the book a convenient tool to provide evidence for their teaching and students’ capability; in doing so, however, it perpetuates gender stereotypes that no longer fit modern society. Nevertheless, girls still need to accept adult authority when the book influences gender identity.
Conclusion

Throughout this section, I examined textbook content and how children presented what they learned from textbooks. First, I discussed how books presented children traditional gender stereotypes, whose biases were reflected in linguistics, invisibility, unreality and fragmentation. Then, I examined how girls in both kindergartens represented and reconstructed girlhood, which included semi-romantic relations in class as well as gender roles evident in their own families. In analyzing critical gender incidents, I observed that these two topics appear in textbooks. Moreover, these representations influenced girls’ gendered knowledge and shaped gender performance.

As the research shows, girls interpreted, reproduced and resisted these dominant gender norms as part of their learning process. Even as girls countered traditional hierarchal gender roles, however, textbook content established gendered knowledge—knowledge that would guide them in their efforts to become proper girls. Significantly, the textbook content occurred before the children’s critical gender incidents were accepted by them as new knowledge. In my observation, textbook content largely directed teachers’ instruction as well as students’ learning. As children absorbed textbook knowledge, they built upon, or resisted, dominant gender experiences characteristic of their respective gender culture. The girls were especially sensitive to issues related to romantic relationships and those connected to gendered social order within their families. Their teachers and their attitudes toward textbook content profoundly influenced them.

In my examination of critical incidents related to “romantic love,” I found that when children absorbed textbook knowledge regarding a “sweet couple” who cooperated
to build a good life together, they immediately posed questions to Teacher Wang about classmates whom they regarded as potential boyfriends or girlfriends. In response, however, Teacher Wang usually dismissed these questions; doing so, she compelled her students to suppress their feelings in the classroom. In addition, her refusal to discuss children’s feelings about romance precluded her from taking advantage of many potentially teachable moments. Conversely, Teacher Su did not care that her students write “love letters” in class. Love letters exchanged by her students enabled them to record their thoughts and feelings about someone they liked. This experience helped students to develop caring relationships with opposite-gender peers, while also giving them a chance to develop written communication skills. Ultimately, Teacher Su’s support for this activity facilitated the children’s efforts to establish opposite-gender friendships.

Just as children set out to find “significant others,” they formed ideas of love and romantic relationships. They also formed strong opinions about the suitability of prospective “couples,” based on respective ages, appearances, intelligence and personalities. Notably, the tendency of children to gossip about potential “class couples” called attention to the gap separating NTC from mainstream Taiwanese children. As the incidents described here suggest, peers seldom mentioned NT girls as partners in these prospective class couples, which instead featured extremely popular mainstream Taiwanese girls. NT girls, as members of a minority group, found themselves at the social margins of the class; they generally took roles rendering them socially invisible. Hence, mainstream Taiwanese male peers rarely acknowledged NT girls.
As noted, in developing attitudes about romantic love, children were deeply influenced by textbook content. A good example is the story of the bashful bride’s wedding. The story’s description of traditional wedding customs helped shape children’s understanding of the bride’s gender role as well as female position in the gendered social order of marriage. In discussing the story, children represented knowledge about gender roles in a future marriage. Moreover, girls directed attention to how mothers conformed to traditional gender roles; as part of the learning focus, they discussed how they might live up to responsibilities as daughters and sisters. The knowledge that girls absorbed from textbooks and classroom discussions reinforced traditional gender norms, which shaped understandings of how to behave as “good girls” when interacting with family members and peers. This knowledge enabled girls to position themselves, and their peers, within the class gendered social order, which they reconstructed continuously.

Almost without exception, class reading materials reinforced gender stereotypes, in the context of both romantic and familial relationships. Importantly, the scenarios described in textbooks opposed the realities of modern Taiwanese society. This was especially true of the popular textbook, *Reading Classical Rules for Children* (弟子規), which offered guidance in the children’s daily lives that reflected, and reinforced, traditional gender biases.

Analyzed from a poststructuralist perspective, the processes by which children constructed identities were ongoing, and thus never complete. Persistent gender stereotypes restricted children’s concepts of gender, and educational experiences could have provided them with opportunities to challenge and reconstruct common biases.
Reading materials were an especially important part of children’s learning experiences. When teachers interpreted reading material content, they influenced the students’ capacity to identify perceptions and inform actions. On the contrary, class activities that directed the children to continually constitute and reconstitute themselves in the context of critical gender incidents provided both teachers and students an opportunity to engage in practice and dialogue, but teachers did not always take advantage of this.

**Chapter Conclusion**

The chapter opened with a discussion of NT girl’s schooling experience, which involved a continual struggle to establish gender identities. Since NT girlhood is informed by such struggles, I set out to examine how the gender discourses of four different NT girls reflected dominant ideologies of classroom gender culture as well as their relationship with teachers. The data indicate that female teachers often assumed the role of maternal care giver. This is not altogether surprising, seeing that NT girls tended to experience learning difficulties and insecurities compelled them to establish close relationships with teachers to ensure necessary guidance. As such, dominant gender discourses greatly influenced gender roles. The data also show that NT girls tended to act like submissive females in an apparent hope that they would gain teachers’ approval by meeting their expectations. Unlike mainstream counterparts, who frequently demanded gender equity with male classmates, NT girls typically adopted traditional feminine roles in class, often serving as helpers while paying close attention to outward appearance, an evident bid for some degree of social capital.
Significantly, the classroom gender culture examined in this study was built on Confucianism values, which were disseminated through classroom texts. This patriarchal ideological perspective not only regulated teacher-student relationships, but it appeared to reinforce traditional female gender hierarchies in mainstream Taiwanese households. In sum, teachers and students replicated familial gender roles in class. Notably, teaching materials pertained to middle-class Taiwanese family life. As this research indicates, teaching materials did not necessarily reflect NT girls’ family experience, which were typically low-socioeconomic in status and cross-cultural in composition. The apparent disconnect between teaching materials and family environment created challenges for NT girls as they struggled to establish gender identities.

My findings also suggested that, in the classroom context, teachers and parents cooperated in a joint effort to reinforce traditional gender roles among NT girls. Invariably, female teachers became NT girls’ feminine role models, which led the girls to seek roles as docile subjects, while at the same, encouraging them to cultivate attractive appearances. These behaviors kept with traditional gender norms that continued to permeate Taiwanese society. Moreover, educational goals established in class sought to acculturate NT girls and transform them into demure, middle-class young ladies. Popular textbooks such as *Reading Classical Rules for Children* (弟子規) reflected these goals and standards. A powerful incentive for girls, as they modeled mainstream female gender norms, was the positive feedback they inevitably received from teachers and peers; they conformed to Confucian models of the submissive daughter, nurturing sister and demure female student. Fulfilling these models assured NT girls that they would receive positive
attention, which mitigated feelings of shame experienced due to relatively low academic aptitude. The following chapter outlines the conclusions of this study and describes potential implications for practice and future research.
CHAPTER VIII
CONCLUSION

Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of NTC’s gendered childhood in two Taiwanese kindergarten classrooms. Then, I present several implications for future exploration in this area. In doing this, I first summarize characteristics particular to this study, the theoretical perspective, the research questions and the research design. Three perspectives for NTC’s gendered childhood—mixed gender play, masculine boyhood and feminine girlhood—from NTC’s everyday peer relationships and classroom interaction are reviewed with consideration of the research questions. Simultaneously, I discuss the meanings from the findings of the study in relation to the multiple broader contexts mentioned in the research methodology. Possible future implications for gender education practices and future research follow. Finally, I suggest the implications of listening to children’s voices and concerns on gender, race and class issues in early childhood education.

The Meaning of Gendered Childhood of NTC in This Study

For interpreting the value of this study, I discuss the important meanings of NTC and their gendered childhood.

The Image of NTC

This study inquired about the gender identities of New Taiwanese Children in kindergartens who have cross-cultural backgrounds. Similar to children throughout the world, NTC base their outlooks on historical and geographical backgrounds. In
my findings, I offer several key phrases as descriptors for NT boys: vigorous, unbridled, creative and defiant to teachers’ authority. For NT girls, I likewise suggest several phrases to describe them: obedient, constrained, invisible, conforming and restricted by gender norms. Essentially, NTC, enabled by power relations, will be in mostly subservient roles. However, NTC’s images are interrelated with how mainstream society interprets their social backgrounds, and this image then emerges in class to influence how they mutually posit themselves with mainstream Taiwanese peers. As such, it is necessary to realize NTC’s multiple identities presented through peer relationships, play culture and schooling experiences. To understand the diversity of NT boys’ gendering processes in their schooling, these various discourses provide the multiple power dynamics for them to resist or conform to school gender culture.

**What is the meaning of NTC gendered childhood?** In this study, NTC connected constructions of their childhood with the specific Taiwanese classroom contexts. NTC always needed to negotiate ways of being children acceptable within their peer culture. NTC constructed and reconstructed childhood in gender hierarchies when they negotiated with mainstream Taiwanese children at school. Thus, NTC’s childhood is not as simple as that of their mainstream peers. As a result, gender, race, class and cross-cultural backgrounds intertwined with their gender identities.

Within the classroom gender culture, NTC learned gendered knowledge and constructed a unique gender culture. It is essential to realize how gender, family SES and the community environment intertwined within NTC’s gendered childhood.
Because of these factors, although NTC share the same environment with mainstream Taiwanese peers, it cannot be taken for granted that NTC have the same type of childhood. By discussing their gendered childhood, this study strongly suggests that NTC always need to negotiate with the dominant discourses in order to be gendered beings in school. To clearly distinguish between the gendering of boyhood and girlhood, the study could not discuss simply one because gendered childhood only happens when complex gender powers are displayed within gendered social orders. Moreover, the study inquired how schooling teaches students gendered knowledge, which then becomes the school gender culture. Clearly, in learning processes, NTC and their mainstream peers co-construct classroom gender culture, although this occurs with difficulty.

**An Overview of the Theoretical Frameworks**

Feminist poststructural theory (FPS) and postcolonial theory (PCL) have provided direction to discuss the application for this study as theoretical framework. In the literature review, I discussed the earlier theories of gender acquisition and children’s gender construction through the lens of FPS and PCL. FPS and PCL provided perspectives from social construction to pose the research questions. These theories have evolved into research methodology as interpretive methods to analyze data. Under these theoretical frameworks, this study inquires how NTC construct gender identities and what the gendered social orders were.
Interpretation Through the Lens of FPS

Applying FPS, I discuss how the three constructs of language, discourse and subjectivities creates NTC’s beliefs of how to be a boy or girl in their schooling. Poststructuralist theory asserts that gender identity is socially constituted and shaped by the interplay between children’s experiences and cultural context (Weedon, 1997). Because this theory could provide interpretation for me to understand how some beliefs may become a truth for the children, I could see how these beliefs shape children’s gender consciousness.

The definitions of FPS provide the following constructs in this study. First, language means that when children play together, they say something to describe or to interpret meanings as girls or boys. For example, in my findings, one girl said, “We girls play dolls, only boys play robots” (FN 110507). The second construct is discourses. Discourses are the way of speaking, writing, thinking or acting the ideals of boys or girls, or neither (or both). So, discourses help children affect their peer interaction as gendered beings. For example, a young girl in my fieldwork declared, “No boys are allowed to wear skirts in the little mermaids’ play” (FN121907). Finally, subjectivities, the third construct, refer to how children establish gendered social order according to their understandings of their gender role in their groups. For example, an NT boy noted, “I do not want to go to the girls’ line. I am a boy. Boys should stand in boys’ line and girls should stand in girls’ line” (FN 110507). This NT boy’s opinion presented how he resisted or accepted the dominant gender discourses.
to construct his subjectivities under different discourses. In sum, taking these three constructs together helped me identify children’s gendered knowledge.

**The Interpretation Through the Lens of PCL**

Here, PCL theory provides theoretical frameworks to re-conceptualize childhood and empower NTC by presenting the values of their cross-ethnic backgrounds in gender identities and gendered knowledge in mainstream Taiwanese classrooms (Cannella & Viruru, 2004). PCL challenges mainstream ideologies of dualism, progress and reason in early childhood. Thus, this study observed and reinterpreted NTC’s gendered childhood by the PCL perspectives. The two focuses on NTC’s gender identities and gendered knowledge are PCL’s main arguments.

**Postcolonial theory provides alternative views to discuss NTC’s childhood.**

The first issue concerned how teachers and classmates make judgments to the social hierarchy of NTC. In my findings, NTC’s gendered childhood showed complicity because NTC’s childhood is intertwined with gender, SES, ethnicity and cross-cultural backgrounds. Their diverse, social, and historical backgrounds showed that they constantly need to negotiate with classroom gender norms. For example, a good female or male student should conform to teacher’s expectations. NTC needed to be familiar with and present themselves within the mainstream children’s gender culture. Doing so, they could have similar gendered identities as their mainstream peers (Viruru & Cannella, 2001). However, some NTC traveled or lived briefly in their mother’s or father’s country. These experiences gave them rich life experiences,
which could give them different social skills to befriend mainstream peers because of cross-ethnic, class or cultural backgrounds.

One implication of this study is that instead of suspecting NTC inferiority, teachers’ attitudes toward NTC’s multicultural backgrounds are the impetus in directing NTC to feel self-confidence. From a postcolonial perspective, the representation of NTC’s childhood has been challenged within the image of mainstream Taiwanese children. Educators must realize NTC life experiences and allow students to represent them in their learning processes.

The next set of issues to interpret NTC’s childhood is to sense the power imbalance between adults and young children, the NTC minority and the mainstream majority and the disparities between male and female gender hierarchies. For NTC’s schooling experiences, teachers created classroom gender culture, and their attitudes toward NTC influenced how the majority mainstream peers treated minority NTC. Thus, NTC’s childhood could be influenced by teachers’ pedagogy.

Post-colonialists critique the dominant discourses in childhood where teachers place themselves in positions of authority, power and knowledge as they teach (Cannella & Viruru, 2004). In my findings, Teacher Wang stopped her students from discussing opposite friendships and the reality of marriage because she is an adult and a teacher who has authority to control what kind of knowledge to which her students are exposed. By not answering children’s questions on marriage, she limited children’s discussion of marriage and opposite-gender friendship in her classroom.
From PCL perspectives, the dichotomous labeling of children and adults creates a privileged position and representation of the dualistic discourses in which adults function (Cannella and Viruru, 2004). Colonialists suppose the child is deficient, innocent and uncivilized compared to the mature, knowledgeable and intelligent adult. When students are positioned opposite teachers and are presented as needing to be protected and administered, students, who are simply young children, are not allowed to cross the adult-child boundaries. For power issues, teachers must understand the unequal power that circulates between children and adults as well as NTC and their peers. By categorizing subordinate groups, such as NTC, teachers easily ignore gender, class and culture issues present during NTC’s class interaction. As a result, teachers denied imparting this knowledge to those groups.

**NTC’s gender identities.** Postcolonial theory discards one group’s creation of values for another group’s values. PCL also recognizes how groups are colonized through hidden messages about themselves. In my findings, NTC established gender identities through negotiating with and resisting dominant discourses, but they lacked enough power to oppose dominant discourses fully. Thus, they frequently displayed blurred gender identities in their critical incidents.

Popular and local culture can create opportunities for NTC to become familiar with mainstream peers’ play culture. Doing so is a source of popular games or toys, where NTC could find provisional playmates or enter mainstream play culture to interact with peers. They strategize to assimilate with the majority of mainstream peers. However, popular and local culture also provides young children many
feminine or masculine figures and related symbolic toys by which NTC learn to be
globalized children, but lose individual gender identities.

Postcolonial theory provides alternative angles to analyze how and when NTC
cross boundaries in culture, race, class and gender. These boundaries could present
new visions for us to rethink the images and diversities of NTC, NT girls and NT
boys. This challenges the stereotypes that have influenced our lives and educational
practices.

PCL theory provides alternative views on NTC’s educational needs by
offering criticism. PCL theory provides reasons for teachers to think critically about
legitimate knowledge, as well as reasons to determine knowledge. Therefore, this
study applies PCL theory to incorporate themes such as race, class and gender culture
into curricula (Viruru, 2005). By utilizing a PCL frame, I found alternatives ways to
interpret NTC’s educational needs in contemporary Taiwanese classrooms.

Post-colonialists have debated the reasons to control and manage New
Taiwanese Children because they are related to mainstream society’s assumptions of
their quality, abilities or achievement, especially when they are thought of as part of a
heterogeneous culture, ethnicity and class. Thus, mainstream discourses position NTC
as atypical children who need to be regulated to become normal. Differently,
educational purposes must allow children to have positive identities about themselves.
By applying postcolonial frameworks in seeking identities from cross-cultural and
ethnic boundaries, teachers can investigate the effects of colonization on students’
gender and racial or cultural identities.
One research example of the larger nature of colonization involved teachers at WK Kindergarten who did not take the initiative to discuss with students the meaning of Halloween from a cultural perspective. In Chapters 5 and 6, as the Halloween parade became part of WK Kindergarten’s class activity, I noticed that girls’ and boys’ costumes presented their understandings of how to dress up as a boy or girl. In this incident, NTC did not dress for Halloween at school, causing teachers to think that their families did not pay attention to their children’s educational needs. My opinion is that celebrating Halloween is a popular Western custom in Taiwan, and has become part of the curriculum at the Taiwanese school. Immigrant mothers’ unfamiliarity with Taiwanese school culture caused them not to know how to dress children for Halloween. The Halloween custom colonizes Taiwanese kindergarten curriculum, which in turn colonizes NTC’s families. Even so, WK Kindergarten teachers still fully support enabling both mainstream Taiwanese children and NTC to enjoy the Halloween activities.

**Conclusion.** By criticizing how adults treat children as the colonized other, teachers need to deconstruct NTC’s gendered childhood as it relates to schooling experiences. The boundaries of children and adults, NTC and mainstream Taiwanese children, and female and male provided many possibilities for educators to reinterpret the value of diversity.

**The Findings in This Study**

By observing NTC’s gender construction and gendered social orders in schooling, this study interpreted NTC’s gender identities in mixed-gender play and
the construction of boyhood and girlhood. The girlhood content is more than twice that of boyhood due to the number of conflicts concerning patriarchal hegemony and mainstream culture conflicts in constructing NT girlhood. NT girlhood content indicated that most NT girls experienced more challenges in identifying themselves as NT girls. Also, the ideologies surrounding NTC’s critical incidents could be repeated in any similar classroom, which showed how the dominant groups repeatedly use similar mainstream ideologies to reproduce the legitimacy of the dominant culture. Thus, tensions occur consistently between the dominant and the dominated.

**Mixed-Gender Play in This Study**

Feminist poststructuralists believed that only when children befriend opposite gender peers could they establish unique gender identities. However, interaction with the opposite gender used to be discouraged by adults as well as same gender peers, blocking acceptable opposite-gender friendship. The chapter began by discussing the importance of mixed-gender play where individual children could engage in masculine and feminine practices. Examining children who posit themselves in cross-gender ways during play provides evidence to realize how children construct gender identities.

Comparing same-gender peers in mixed-gender play, children handled various gender discourses when they needed to adapt to unique play cultures. This study found many patterns of how NTC and mainstream Taiwanese children construct gender roles and gendered social orders in mixed-gender interaction. By theorizing on
the critical incidents, my findings indicated that individual children dealt with
dominant gender hierarchies that related to gendered social order; for example,
children often followed a specific gender norm in mixed-gender groups.

Chapter 4 discussed four complex factors that prevented children from
participating in mixed-gender play. Both teachers and students believed that girls and
boys should adopt dominant gender roles. As a result, gender role socialization and
biology reinforced peer interaction experiences.

First, I discussed children’s schooling experiences. Teachers’ attitudes must
be recognized because their concepts and attitudes influenced strategies used in
classroom management, which then created classroom gender culture. Teachers often
divided female and male students into two groups, which pitted them against each
other and fostered gender competition. Nevertheless, teachers did not show students
how to cooperate. Even teachers and several female students recognized that boys’
rude behaviors caused an injustice in educational resource distribution. Still, teachers
allowed male domination that went unchecked. Resultantly, this reinforced girls’
inferiority in that they did not possess the skills necessary to participate in the same
activities as male counterparts, such as riding bicycles. Moreover, these classroom
rules forced girls and boys to adopt female and male gender roles as a result of sex-
role socialization because children needed to socialize with mainstream peers. If
teachers believe that children’s gender performances are absorbed merely through
observing model sexist messages in class, then teachers might be powerless to require
equal gender rights or challenge sexism. If that is the case, sexism would hinder the possibility of girls and boys playing together.

The second factor, family life experiences, played an important role in influencing children’s mixed-gender play content. For example, parent’s authority influenced their children’s choice of playmates, and parents selected clothes, toys and accessories that often shaped children’s concepts of femininity and masculinity. The data showed that children thought that dramatic play should portray males and females in typical gender roles, reflecting family experiences. Also, parents control children when at home, and this authority is continued at school. Specifically, NT fathers’ opinions influenced teachers’ curricula practices as they instructed teachers on how to manage children while in the classroom. For example, two NT girls’ fathers expected same-gender peers for their daughters, so that their friendships could fit gender norms and build same-gender role models. As a result, children learned gender behavior from their families’ experiences when they identified items and games that belong to relatives of one gender or the other. This sometimes caused difficulty when participating in mixed-gender play as the children began to have notions of play items for each gender. This form of gender culture could be related to how children gained support from parents and teachers. Compared with mainstream peers, parents of NTC pressured children further because they believed that shaping feminine daughters and masculine sons could help them attain a higher gender position in Taiwanese society.
The third factor, the children’s preference for specific toys and games, was related to the socially-constructed gender culture for boys or girls. For example, many boys played with the Morpher, but few girls recognized it and would be excluded from participating in the Power Rangers game. Hence, there were no mixed-gender playmates when boys played this game. In mixed-gender play, playing with opposite-gender peers could cause invisible hierarchies. Peer relations, resource sharing and rule building during play are critical power competencies that are not always visible, but are still important for a group of children to develop play culture. Whoever did not have specific opportunities to become familiar with the opposite gender’s group culture (e.g., most girls were not familiar with boys’ game rules) could not join the group. Thus, in mixed-gender play, children tend to deal skillfully with these power relationships when they learn to construct gender roles, or they alter behaviors to avoid disrupting the class’s gender norms. Exclusion becomes part of how boys and girls interact with each other. They know whether they should be allowed to participate in games that are usually only played by the opposite gender. This helps shape the play culture of the classroom, but this is a barrier to mixed-gender play.

The fourth factor, local culture and religion influenced how children displayed understandings of female social status, body value and parenting strategies in mixed-gender play. Even so, children did not passively accept these role models; I saw that specific NTC struggled to reconstruct gender identities in peer interactions when they participated in mixed-gender plays. They resisted, reconstructed and claimed hegemony—whether female or male. The gender taboo in the local customs and
religion was an apparent factor that appeared in my observations. Several girls defended female gender roles and claimed that babysitting is only for females. Compared with mainstream peers, NTC struggled to become familiar with local customs and religion due to cross-culture backgrounds. We can thus gather that gender construction is a multidimensional process that cannot be oversimplified by looking at one dimension alone.

These above factors reflected the children’s gendered social order in mixed-gender play. However, for play rules, children used to create new storylines according to needs and thoughts. Further, NTC’s and mainstream Taiwanese children’s lifestyles are not exactly the same; experiences have caused them to have different outlooks on mixed-gender play. By voicing reasons and concerns, some children resisted dominant discourses when negotiating play rules with opposite-gender peers.

Next, the second and third sections of this chapter compared why girls and boys played or did not play with opposite-gender peers. Children’s selection strategies for choosing opposite-gender playmates correlated with gender type, characteristics and capabilities. Girls and boys had opposing reasons to play with mixed-gender peers. For example, girls focused on the boys’ characteristics, e.g., humor or capability to do favors for girls when playing various games, while boys preferred female peers whom they found good-looking, possessed sweet personalities and were submissive to boys.

Nonetheless, some children also expressed why they disliked playing with opposite-gender playmates. Exclusion from opposite-gender peers was the most
common instance that prohibited children from participating in a mixed-gender group. Some girls resisted playing with boys because they disliked boys’ competitive games, controlled spaces and rude manners; boys objected to playing with girls because of peer pressure and concern and disdain of girls’ endless complaints. These stereotypes caused many children to avert participating in mixed-gender play. Peer relations, resource sharing and game rules could become critical knowledge for young children involved in mixed-gender play. Though power competencies are always invisible, they are important for children to build gendered social order. The positive experiences in mixed-gender play helped children to know how to cooperate with opposite-gender peers. In mixed-gender play, children could learn how to construct gender roles or to alter behaviors to avoid contradicting gender norms.

The last section of this chapter concerned how some children, the crossers, acted in mixed-gender plays. This chapter not only examined the role of “crossers” in mixed-gender play, but was also concerned that how and when gender roles crossed gender boundaries, gender divisions strengthened or weakened. Gender performances forced peers, teachers and parents to pay attention to diverse gender constructions. Opportunities to have effeminate boys and mannish girls appear in class caused many children to discuss the meaning of being a “nan sheng” (男生, male student), “nu sheng” (女生, female student), or the possibility of choosing one’s gender role according to preference. Because the two crossers at WK Kindergarten often involved themselves in gender-bending issues, as their peers observed them, they discussed
and suspected whether or not gender dichotomies could be the only way to posit boys or girls in social categories. However, curiosity concerning socially-constructed gender roles were only discussed by themselves while chatting, and I never saw teachers respond to such questions in mixed-gender play. Moreover, in classroom discussion, the teachers avoided answering the children’s questions about gender-crossing issues. As a result of force, children, including the crossers and non-crossers, constructed gender norms according to gender stereotypes in classroom gender culture.

Finally (for the above four sections), the complexities of mixed-gender plays were intertwined by several external factors in the children’s daily lives, e.g., parenthood, schooling experiences, community culture and so on. Still, children did not passively absorb this information or role models that came from daily experiences. Children skillfully manipulate gender power under various discourses, which interconnect with factors of gender, class, SES and cross-culture experiences among NTC and mainstream Taiwanese children. There were often chances to present individual gender construction and continually build gendered social orders.

In brief, mixed-gender play shows how peer interaction created opportunities for the children to find gender identities when identities were woven with the relationships of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexuality and local culture. In mixed-gender play, NT boys tended to lack appropriate social skills compared to mainstream Taiwanese boys. Many mainstream Taiwanese boys could skillfully deal with these power relationships, but NT boys could not. At WK Kindergarten, a number of NTC
could not learn some important social skills from their families to present themselves well in peer interaction, so they were not able to participate effectively in mixed-gender groups.

It is necessary to realize the children’s opinions when they consider whether or not to play with opposite-gender peers. To recognize children’s mixed-gender play, teachers can craftily design practical gendered knowledge in curriculum activities to increase children’s critical thinking about cross-gender friendships. In my findings, I rarely saw teachers intervening in the children’s discussion about gender issues, nor did teachers question or criticize gender stereotypes. In reality, teachers could play important roles in reproducing or criticizing gender stereotypes to help students and parents to be aware of dominant discourses.

**Masculine Boyhood in This Study**

I have asserted that NT boyhood is developed in interactions with others. I have also given a brief summary of NT boys’ social and physical circumstances. From my observations, I illustrated the many different roles of NT boys in both kindergartens, explaining characteristics found in NT boys. These characteristics further explained gendered knowledge and gendered social order of the NT boys through several other contexts including friendship, play, school and family.

The two issues of NT boyhood in my findings included the blurred identities within gendered knowledge and the ambiguous gendered social order in classroom gender culture. The obstacles in NT boys’ gender construction processes closely influenced difficulties and struggles of boyhood. NT boyhood related to NT boys’
gender, race and class status in Taiwanese society. The interconnection of the above factors directly contributed to NT boys’ gender culture in school.

**The core characteristics influencing the construction of NT boyhood.** I discovered that the core characteristics of NT boyhood in my analysis were bravery, difficulty with the institutional norms of schooling, adaptation to low SES, poor language and social skills as well as a desire for classroom harmony. These characteristics are related to the formation of NT boyhood, which is a complicated process because young NT boys strive to be a “good boy” according to many different and sometimes conflicting standards in schooling. To meet these conflicting standards, NT boys needed to cross at least three boundaries: a bilingual (or trilingual) environment, the differences of family culture and school culture and the impact of low SES. The complicated issues of language, ethnicity, racism and culture differences were the NT boys’ daily schooling experiences where both NTC and mainstream students learned. However, my findings indicated that teachers did not recognize the urgent need to incorporate the above issues in class activities.

**The gendering experiences in NT boys’ friendship.** The processes of developing friendship with peers helped NT boys to construct gender roles that met school gender norms. Gendering experiences in NT boys’ friendship could have become part of the gendered knowledge that NT boys used to construct gender culture.

In my findings, friendships among NT boys happened when they shared cross-culture experiences to overcome classroom learning difficulties. NT boys’ friendships
with mainstream boys were often blocked by the different play culture due to diverse socioeconomic status and family backgrounds. The challenges of gender hierarchies and social skills caused difficulties when NT boys and mainstream Taiwanese girls tried to befriend one another. As classmates, NT boys and NT girls searched for positive relationships because of the circumstances of their environment. Generally, NT boys’ friendships were influenced by the multi-levels of power in the gendered social order. These gendered social orders interconnected with SES, which my findings presented in the above critical incidents.

The construction of local and globalized masculinity in NT boys’ gender play. Play provided opportunities for NT boys to realize and become socialized within mainstream peers’ play culture. Because differences of play culture caused difficulties and provided few opportunities for NT boys and mainstream peers to play together, NT boys had less capital to ask for equal position as the playmates of mainstream peers. However, play could create chances for NT boys and mainstream peers to occasionally co-construct local and globalized masculine gender roles when playing together.

NT boys observed and learned the mainstream peers’ games; then, they re-practiced the games that related to the context of local customs. Doing so, they learned how to be local Taiwanese boys. Simultaneously, the various toys involved in NT boys’ play were primarily material mediators of gendered identity. The toys they used connected with popular culture (e.g., animation, movie, or popular TV cartoon), which helped NT boys become familiar with popular cultures that boys of the same
generation across the world liked. Thus, they are not only local boys but globalized boys.

The play culture also explored NT boys’ SES, which inadequate when compared to mainstream peers. For example, a child receiving a specific toy indicates the children’s family financial circumstances. My research found that it is common that high-tech toys that come from commercial products are expensive (e.g., Power Ranger’s Rescue Morpher) and therefore purchased almost exclusively by families who are of the middle-class or higher. Lower-class boys are more inclined to see their bodies as available toys. Through playing physical games with playmates, NT boys gained more opportunities to interact with each other than mainstream peers. Therefore, NT boys constructed gender culture through learning both local and popular culture.

The schooling experiences in NT boys’ substandard academic skills. The most important part of NT boys’ schooling experiences was the issue of learning behavioral and intellectual development that met teachers’ requirements. Because NT boys were characteristically used to being out of class, some dared to resist dominant discourses (e.g., female teachers’ authority) when they realized their immigrant mothers’ inadequate family position at home.

Therefore, NT boys’ conforming behaviors in class often caused conflicts within the teacher-student relationship. For example, several NT boys failed to hand in homework. Such behavior caused teachers to suspect inferior family functions, which led to inferior academic performances, causing NTC’s gender hierarchies to be
behind mainstream peers. As NT boys could not follow classroom academic performance, they lost not only self-esteem but also classmates’ respect.

Generally, NT boys’ academic skills could become the impetus for peers to posit classroom gender hierarchy positions. There were complicated reasons to interpret NT boys’ classroom performances for the above, such as dysfunctional families, inadequate SES and cross-cultural backgrounds, which could make gender performances different from classroom gender norms. Of these complicated reasons, the divergences between NT boys’ family culture and school culture are the most relevant factors. Thus, there is an urgent need to reconsider how NT boys are currently represented and what teachers can do to address curriculum. For example, there is the incident where Teacher Su ordered students to memory recite *Classical Rules for Children*. These similar incidents presented both the behavioral and intellectual development and the NT boys’ concurrent gender identity, which are the shared responsibility of between the school teacher and the parent.

**Conclusion of this section.** Compared with mainstream peers, who have only lived in Taiwan, NT boys noticed language and food from their mothers’ foreign hometowns. From classroom observation, some NT boys, Da-Wei and Ming-Yan, were proud of their travel pictures that they took in both Vietnam and Taiwan (FN 12/31/07). However, my findings revealed different challenges for NT boys to become part of Taiwanese society when they learned to adjust themselves to be good boys in class. In general, NT boys’ desire to belong to the gendered social order overwhelmed their ability to become more active agents and change gender social
norms. As a result, their gender constructions tended to obey gender norms within dominant discourses. However, NT boys were never quite fully skilled in the normative behaviors to fit in perfectly, so tension sometimes erupted. When these conflicts occurred, teachers did not step in to overtly discuss issues of race, class, or gender. Rather, they acted as if each interruption were a matter of individual difference. Thus, teachers ignored several opportunities recognize and change NT boyhood status.

Despite the challenges they faced, NT boys still took advantage of their status as males, making it easier for them, as opposed to NT girls, to become part of mainstream Taiwanese patriarchal culture.

**Feminine Girlhood in This Study**

I spent two chapters interpreting NT girlhood, which is more than I afforded to boyhood. The main issues of NT girlhood discussed the imbalanced gender power influencing NT girls’ gendered social orders in peer relationships. This study also illuminated NT girls’ gendered knowledge and gender culture in class. My findings indicated that NT girls, as gendered beings, actively constructed gender identities under various discourses, such as under the themes of friendships, play culture, schooling experiences and school-family relationships.

**The various images of NT girls.** Even though NT girls had few friends in class, they eagerly represented themselves as they imagined mainstream girls to be. Like these other girls, they made an effort to maintain good classroom relationships, yet they had additional struggles. They did not “own” their roles in the same way as
mainstream Taiwanese girls. They lacked the power to make choices about which mainstream Taiwanese children they played with. They did not own the roles of leadership or have enough power to make decision about when they played with mainstream Taiwanese peers. They were not provoking opportunities for friendship and play; instead, they intensely looked for pre-existing social roles into which they could slide.

NT girls have individual characteristics, thus, the term “NT girls” does not mean one kind of gender stereotype. Rather, there are various kinds of characteristics of NT girls. For example, Xing-Yan and Yu-Qin, two NT girls who studied at the same kindergarten, seldom played together due to different characteristics. Additionally, some NT girls conformed more easily to tradition gender roles than others. In one instance, Xing-Yan powerlessly argued with boys who snatched her books, but Mei-Jia used the defense of gender equity in similar incidents.

The social construction of NT girlhood. Through the various contexts of critical incidents, NT girls constructed girlhood by negotiating dominant gender discourses in peer interaction. Based on my findings, I have generalized NT girlhood from the routine patterns in critical incidents as follows. First, NT girls’ bodies were socially-constructed sites when constructing gender identities as females. Different from NT boys’ strategies to protect strongly body rights or to work hard to extend space, NT girls choose to avoid conflicts and found alternative resolutions and strategies for claiming their body rights. It was as if their bodies held a different sort of power than boys. Their spaces were invaded frequently, but NT girls did not fight
back to reclaim spaces. For example, Xing-Yan allowed other peers to leave items on her assigned seat. Doing so, she acted as a dignified and quiet female student who kept her classroom harmonious. NT girls’ bodies are important sites to claim gender identities as female students in class; moreover, NT girls are not alone in constructing gender identities through their bodies, but their bodies are mutually co-constructed by peers in class.

Second, in order to adapt themselves as mainstream Taiwanese peers, it was necessary for NT girls to learn the local and popular culture in girlhood culture. Local culture in this study included religion and customs, enacted in daily life and presented in the children’s environment. The context of local culture often involved how society approves gender norms in the gendered social order. Popular culture includes popular movies, TV cartoons, songs and fashion figures. The trademarks and famous figures in these mediums appear in girls’ daily commodities, therefore shaping parents’ and children’s conscious choice of gender-appropriate articles to coincide with girls’ gender types. For girls to become friends, popular culture content allows NT girls to have similar play content with mainstream children, limiting differences between social classes. Both local culture and popular culture present abundant symbols and ideologies to determine gender consciousness, which dominates NT girls’ gender discourses in gender culture. However, NT girls represented these contexts as gender discourses in peer interactions. In my findings, when Xing-Yan played “Twelve Babysitters” with mainstream peers, she adapted herself in the context of local culture as a female babysitter. Another example was when Yu-Qin played with her Barbie
doll; her attractive doll was a symbol of feminized popular culture. The toy mediated her provisional playmates’ relationship with mainstream female peers. These incidents illustrate the NT girls’ images and represent NT girls’ friendships.

**Imbalances in gender power influence NT girls’ friendships.** As this study reveals, any imbalance in gender power tends to influence gendered social order, and this applies to cases involving both girls and boys. Significantly, NT girls formed a gendered social order, one shaped by common marginalized status (in relation to mainstream Taiwanese girls) as well as disparities among respective life experiences. At the same time, powerful obstacles prevented the formation of friendships between NT girls and mainstream Taiwanese girls (i.e., sharp differences in SES and levels of academic achievement). Although NT girls shared a relatively low SES, they also displayed unique individual characteristics, and some occasionally resisted low gender position—moves that tended to irritate mainstream Taiwanese counterparts.

Relationships between NT girls and mainstream Taiwanese boys were either complementary or antagonistic. When NT girls presented themselves as feminine and mainstream Taiwanese boys presented themselves as masculine, they established and maintained complementary relationships. However, NT girls demanded a gender position equal to that of mainstream Taiwanese boys, which tended to anger mainstream NT boys. Finally, while both NT girls and NT boys shared similar transnational family experiences and low SES, they also had divergent gender experiences. In short, NT girls’ friendships often shed light on the imbalance of power within the classroom’s low gender hierarchy. The phenomenon of the NT
girls’ low gender hierarchy was apparent when NT girls had difficulty finding playmates in the classroom.

**The struggle with different play cultures in girls’ play.** Play created opportunities for NT girls to become familiar with mainstream peers’ play culture. My data revealed many conflicts when NT girls played with mainstream Taiwanese girls because of the different play culture. NT girls’ cross-cultural life experiences differed from mainstream peers; as such, NT girls needed to learn mainstream peers’ play culture. Due to the different play cultures, it was a challenge for NT girls to find playmates. In order to play with mainstream female peers, NT girls made concessions or negotiations. However, each figured out that they deserved to have equal opportunities to share toys, and they struggled to use limited social skills to negotiate with mainstream Taiwanese for equal rights. In Xing-Yan’s incident, coloring books became a material mediator to attract other mainstream Taiwanese girls, but it could only help her to find provisional playmates. While she discovered that she needed to consider her real playmates and share equally in her games, she made her decision to not play with female mainstream peers who treated her unequally. Even though NT girls had difficulty finding playmates, they were still trying to take challenges finding new playmates or learning to play alone.

Given the above case, Teacher Su had the power to direct curricula, so she might have designed class curriculum in a way that helped NT girls and peers to recognize differences, while taking into account individual strengths and weaknesses.
The struggling of imbalanced gender power in the NT girls’ play culture.

The play culture of NT girls and mainstream Taiwanese boys presented complicated ties on issues of gender difference, game disparities and gender hierarchy’s discrepancies. In my data, NT girls chose mainstream Taiwanese boys for protection (e.g., Yu-Qin’s pet games) or to obey the dominant gender hierarchy (e.g., Xing-Yan’s paper bag princess legend). In peer interaction, rare possibilities arose for NT girls and mainstream Taiwanese boys to play the same kind of games. However, while mainstream Taiwanese boys’ liked to present masculine traits to protect feminine NT girls, the play culture between NT girls and mainstream Taiwanese boys was an extremely important chance for NT girls to find playmates and promote gender equality.

Conversely, while NT girls played with mainstream Taiwanese boys, NT girls were encouraged to claim gender equality when playing with mainstream Taiwanese boys, though sometimes NT boys intended to present roles as protectors. Similar transnational family backgrounds might be the main reason for NT girls to debate with NT boys while playing together. In my data, Xing-Yan dared to present her unique license plate that she designed. Moreover, she felt proud to discuss her mother’s ability to find a job in Taiwanese society. The two incidents showed that Xing-Yan was encouraged to express her opinions. Similarly, Yu-Qin also had reasons to defend herself against Da-Wei’s accusation that her mother could be with her even though it was not true. Here, NT girls had the courage to resist submissive roles in front of NT boys when they played with NT boys.
The different play culture reflected the needs for teachers to help NT girls to be familiar with mainstream peers’ play culture, which could empower NT girls to play with them. Moreover, it is also important for teachers to discourage imbalanced gender power, to move dominant gender discourses and to critique what the meaningful gender construction is in the students’ play culture. While the above cases show that teachers could create classroom gender culture, schooling experiences became the priority to inquire how NT girls learned gendered knowledge in class.

**NT girls constructed gendered knowledge through schooling experiences.**

NT girls learned gender knowledge from classroom gender culture and textbook content. The challenges I observed owed much to the fact that school dominant gender discourses upheld female gender stereotypes that effectively deprived girls of the agency to resist patriarchy. It also became apparent that the classroom environment placed a specific burden on NT girls. NT girls in this study came from cross-cultural households and all had modest socioeconomic backgrounds. This situation ensured that NT girls would depend more heavily than mainstream counterparts on the formative influence of the classroom, especially when seeking to establish gender identities. Regarding this situation, NT girls always hoped to get teachers’ approval. NT girls recognized that teachers’ authority could add legitimacy to their positions. However, they rarely gained teachers’ approval and support for NT girls to resist dominant gender discourses. Female teachers enforced NT girls’ female gender roles by reminding them of their appearances and self-images more than mainstream peers.
The classrooms’ gender culture. The data showed that the learning environment of the two kindergartens was deeply influenced by patriarchal values, which pervaded the school curriculum. My research indicated that NT girls’ and mainstream peers’ behavior was routinely influenced, and regulated, by the gender hierarchy promoted by Confucianism. This ideology was disseminated through textbooks and implemented in daily classroom activities.

The gender incidents related with classroom management and curriculum. From the findings, classroom management and curriculum practices play roles transplanting students’ gender knowledge. So, according to what NT girls have learned, they could conform to classroom gender culture. When female peers criticized Yu-Qin’s pet game, Teacher Su could have discussed why they felt Yu-Qin’s behavior did not fit with ideas of an appropriate girl. She ignored an opportunity for herself and her students to co-construct classroom gender norms. From the viewpoint of behavior conformity, teachers could discipline students’ behavior through classroom management, such as asking students to conduct appropriate touching. Therefore, it is the teachers’ responsibility to direct and discipline students about peer interaction in their play. From the cultural conformity viewpoint, teachers could discuss with children about why they felt so uncomfortable to see Yu-Qin and two boys touching physically. Teachers also could suggest that students have a right to personal body space. Through these discussions, teachers could direct students to construct meaningful gender norms and gendered social orders in classrooms.
Teachers also transported female stereotypes about the issues of romance and marriage from the content of textbooks. Instead of discussing the gender norm of being girls and being professional women, children’s textbooks focus on the topics of romance, marriage and motherhood. The textbooks also present gender knowledge for NT girls learning to be a good daughter in their families. Thus, there are ideologies present in textbooks about the meaning of being normal and successful female gender beings, such as heterosexual romance, marriage, motherhood and the middle class. Essentially, school gender culture is one of the extensions of family gender culture. Teachers and parents cooperated to reinforce female gender roles through learning how to arrange outward appearances (e.g., hair styles and dressing).

**Conclusion for NT girlhood culture.** The findings herein focused on how individuals co-construct identity through shared interactions under various discourses. NT girls, who have disparities with mainstream peers, were left isolated or to take on submissive roles due to position in the patriarchal gender hierarchy. The findings showed that NT girls weakly resisted the dominant gender discourses when they were learning to establish equal gendered social orders in peer groups. Like NT boys, NT girls failed to exercise agency, thus causing an inability to change gender social norms. This is how social relations maintain themselves in class without teacher intervention or support. Various discourses provided alterative possibilities for NT girls to find gender identities because exercising gender power is contested and infixed, but negotiable.
As a result, NT girls realize that they have become empowered. Making these power differentials visible allows for the opportunity to address the unevenness present in peer culture when NT girls meet mainstream Taiwanese children. Concerned that most women whose role has been traditionally ignored in society, this goes doubly so for NT girls who are disempowered by youth, ethnicity and gender. NT girls’ cross-cultural backgrounds further limit them. It was initially difficult to identify where NT girls were allowed or capable of co-construing girlhood with their peers because, in my data, mainstream Taiwanese children made decisions and directed initial stages of their interactions. Only after this occurred did NT girls make small modifications, intervene, or resist events that other people had started. NT girls only had limited power to correct the dominant situation, but also minimal power to generate a context for co-construction. Instead, by being sensitive observers, they found and took advantage of opportunities. Although they could prevent something from happening, they had little power to selectively intercede in any event within the gendered social order. Thus, NT females constructed NT girlhood within the patriarchal order as they struggled with low social status. Changes in co-construcing girlhood culture with mainstream Taiwanese girls happened slowly but firmly.

**Answering This Study’s Research Questions**

The two research questions that structured this study are reiterated here. From my findings, I interpreted and summarized answers to these research questions regarding gendered knowledge, gender culture and gendered social order.
Question 1: What Constitutes Children’s Gendered Knowledge and How Do Children Perform Their Gender Culture?

Learning content shapes children’s gendered knowledge. NTC’s gendered knowledge is based primarily on daily experiences in schooling and family life, which in turn reflect community culture. In class, NTC constructed gendered knowledge by interacting with peers and teachers, as well as from how they reacted to classroom gender culture. Instead of simply imitating other gender roles, NTC submitted to, resisted or negotiated with the dominant discourses.

The social construction of gendered knowledge happens during both teacher-student interaction and peer interaction. From the teacher-student interaction perspective, teachers’ gender attitudes, classroom management and textbook content are the main impetuses that create classroom gender culture. When specific classroom gender culture became given truths, the way students acted, thought and felt about both themselves and others became gendered knowledge. Specific gendered knowledge varies from classroom to classroom, depending on what the teachers’ concept about the gender equity is. In peer interaction experiences, kindergartners could resist practicing gender knowledge when playing with peers. In my findings, speaking with peers and taking different gender roles in dramatic play could provide opportunities for children to restate understanding of being a girl or boy and to reinterpret meaningful gender roles under various discourses. Doing so, they could establish gender subjectivities. Gendered knowledge can be altered because children’s
peer interaction experiences could provide more possibilities to construct gendered knowledge.

**Classroom gendered knowledge as an invisible ideology.** Classroom gendered knowledge for both boys and girls can mutually reshape classroom gender norms and create the possibility of establishing NTC’s gender identities. However, teachers’ ability to criticize gendered knowledge never became the focus of gender education. First, teachers of NTC might not value NTC’s diverse backgrounds, thus preventing students from discussing the meaning of different gender identities. Second, textbooks still presented gender stereotypes. Students often lost opportunities to realize how dominant gender discourses influences classroom gender culture. Therefore, gendered knowledge had little chance to help both NTC and mainstream students to construct gender identities.

**Gender culture.** Young children are quite sensitive to different gender cultures when they learn to be boys or girls. School gender culture is influenced by what educators believe are appropriate gender norms in society. As educators strive to achieve educational gender purposes, teachers’ gender ideologies exist in teaching materials, classroom management and classroom environment. School gender culture created a hidden ideology about the social hierarchies in the complicated relationships among gender, sex roles, ethnicity, SES and cross-cultural backgrounds. Clearly, these factors surrounding gender culture are the students’ learning experiences that shape gendered childhood. Thus, NTC and their peers re-produced gender roles and represented gender hierarchies in their relationships.
NTC, like mainstream peers, were quite sensitive to gender culture because they wanted to learn to be like mainstream children and to avoid violating gender norms in classrooms. The gendered knowledge that they learned provided important resources for NTC to repeat, represent and re-practice, which then became a type of gendered discourse during peer interaction. Sometimes, peers raised conflicts because NTC violated gender norms or tried to cross boundaries that teachers or these peers set for the gendered social order. As such, NTC co-constructed gender culture through how they interacted with both peers and teachers.

The strategies of acting as masculine males and feminine females seemed to be the priority for NTC. Such work enabled NTC to find the social capital to return from the outskirts of the group and be more socially accepted. The study found several phenomena in NTC’s gender culture: NTC struggle over male-female hierarchies, SES hierarchy and learning difficulties.

**The struggle over gender hierarchies.** Gender hierarchy in this research was presented with mostly the male’s position being higher than the female’s. Moreover, when compared to most mainstream peers, NTC with lower SES found themselves ranked below mainstream peers, while NT girls often fell below NT boys. The finding chapters discussed such ordering of gender hierarchies.

Differences in home culture and school culture allowed NTC to adapt and to develop mainstream Taiwanese children’s social skills. Boundaries also occurred in the classroom when NTC’s parents had difficulty in helping them learn. Being left
behind made it difficult for them to attain better gender hierarchy within the peer group.

The school culture also displayed teachers as role models, teacher-student relationships and the Confucian gendered social order of the family. Teacher-student interaction drew boundaries, including the authority of teachers (adults) and the obedience of students (children) as well as the motherhood of female teachers and the needs of nurturing young children. Female teachers, in my study, were more like caregivers than professional teachers. Thus, this role model enforced stereotypic gender roles for students and set the tone for classroom gender norms.

NTC’s classroom gender culture is more complicated than mainstream peers’ because of NTC’s marginal positions. Stereotypical gender roles offered powerful gender capital for NTC to gain stable gender positions. NTC’s gender culture can be found in peer and teacher interaction relating to gender hierarchies, which related with the gendered knowledge that students learned. NTC represented and practiced these gendered discourse in schooling processes.

Question 2: How Do Children Represent Gendered Social Order in Their Classrooms?

Gendered social order in NTC’s classroom appeared similar to the Taiwanese family’s: the elder is the role model for the younger and parents have different expectations of male and female gender roles for sons and daughters. These stable gender roles created a patriarchal school gender culture even though class teachers were both female. Still, a male primary authority figure was central to familial and
school organization. Most male figures in textbooks and school culture hold authority over women, children and property. The children’s critical incidents reflected these contexts, and many implied that masculinity is rule and privilege, and femininity should be subordinate to this.

Masculinity and femininity are social capitals to conform to the school gender norm. The gendered social order of NT girls and boys connected with their hybrid backgrounds, such as cross-cultural background, language, SES and ethnicity. The findings indicated that NTC struggled to remedy these social disadvantages, especially NT boys, whose parents fed them more vitamins to grow a strong physical stature. To be attractive girls, NT girls’ parents dressed them well and forbade them to befriend boys. These incidents show that parents believed that by displaying masculinity and femininity, children gained the social capital needed to conform to school gender norms. Instead of educating parents about conforming to stereotypical gender roles, teachers cooperated with parents to force NTC to be good boys and dignified girls, leaving NTC with little power to resist dominant gender discourses.

Children realized the gendered social order in peer interaction. The good role model child, the academic achievement child and the creative child enjoyed being class leaders. NT boys and mainstream Taiwanese boys contested, negotiated and cooperated to construct toys, build transport systems, conduct fighting games and play robots, firemen, truck drivers and so on. NT girls and female peers preferred domestic games and claimed roles as mothers, elder sisters, caregivers, female singers, fairies, pets, nurses, or servants, for example. Instead of exploring themselves in the
big group, girls favored small-group sisterhood relationships. Comparing girls’ and boys’ gendered social orders, boys were allowed to experiment with multiple roles in their games and enjoyed more freedom to play in small groups or a big group of boys. However, girls played assistants, housekeepers or helpers. These gender roles offered security for both girls and boys. They tried hard to practice gender roles through dramatic play. Also, they observed, imitated, created and established gendered positions for themselves in the classroom learning processes and in peer relationships, such as gaining teachers’ praises for academic achievement, service or special talents.

In sum, most NTC had lower gendered social orders than peers. The open space of classroom gender culture and the teachers’ classroom management could create opportunities for NTC to promote gendered social orders.

**The Limitations of This Study**

This study produced several complex and unforeseen limitations. The two initial, intertwined limitations of my research are completely understanding and expressing the boundary and power hierarchies present in this study. There are complex limitations to interpreting NTC’s gender culture because of the difficulty in clearly defining boundaries between adults and children and the majority and minority, collecting data and interpreting power and knowledge relationships that were observed, but not experienced. Further, after conducting the study, I realized the dangers of assuming that most NTC came from low-SES families, and that their actions involved in the critical incidents were typical, or even stereotypical, of how all NTC behaved.
First, there were limitations to interpreting the complicity of caring, discipline, power and knowledge relationships during teacher-student interaction. NTC’s gender culture was difficult to construct by only observing schooling experiences. How NTC adapted to or resisted dominant discourses depended on how teachers practiced care and authority. Female teachers displayed mother-like and common gender roles when instructing and disciplining young children. Even young children could reconstruct gendered social order under various discourses; nevertheless, teachers’ classroom management and attitudes supported or discouraged students’ claims to meaningful gender identities. As teachers focused on instructing students academically, students had little power to refuse dominant discourses present in textbooks. As a result, NTC’s gender culture connected closely with classroom gender culture influence.

A second limitation resulted from children-adults and informants-researcher hierarchies. Power hierarchies within children-adult relationships influenced how children claimed gender-doing in front of teachers and me. For example, girls intended to prevent adults from seeing that they pretended to smoke and apply lipstick. They were sensitive to adults’ power that could intervene in gender plays; thus, power hierarchies caused difficulty in collecting data. Further, how to interpret the children’s voices was also a concern. Many young children used body language to communicate with peers and to answer my questions. Clearly decoding their meanings required questioning these children or their friends. Besides, several NTC became rather sensitive about my interview questions concerning their mothers. I collected information about their families from pictures and teachers’ descriptions.
As a side issue, the informants-researcher trust issue limited this research. Many teachers rejected classroom observation because they did not want classroom management and perhaps-shabby classrooms to be explored through audio- and video-taping. Several NTC’s parents also precluded children from participating in this study at the early stage because they claimed that there were no differences between their children and mainstream Taiwanese children. Moreover, some children complained that my classroom observation revealed their secrets when I videotaped interviews with them concerning critical incidents. Only after winning their confidence, then, were they likely to share secrets with me. Building trusting relationships with teachers, children and parents are challenging but necessary to answer my research questions.

Another limitation also came from data collection. Before entering the classrooms, I reminded myself to avoid focusing too much information on the hegemony of male students, mainstream Taiwanese students, smart students, good-looking students, or whatever. When in class, I observed the whole class and NTC. However, my data indicated that NTC still appeared less frequently on video than mainstream peers because of common performances. Moreover, I acquired more video data on boys than girls, perhaps because boys used greater space and spoke more than girls. Moreover, I collected more data about smart children than average or sub-average children. For example, the smart NT boy, Da-Wei, often intrigued me. He was cunning enough to manipulate his peers, and my camera recorded his actions towards them when they both wanted to be filmed. During data collection, I was
sensitive to the bias and power imbalance between me and the informants; still, the above results indicated that the imbalance in gender power influenced data acquisition.

A fourth limitation emerged from interpreting the complex boundaries of gendered childhoods, cross-cultural backgrounds, SES, language and ethnicity in the culture between mainstream Taiwanese children-NTC, children-adults and informants-researcher. Since there are diverse gendered childhoods for individual mainstream Taiwanese and NT children, there are no specific patterns that could interpret gender power constructs in their gendered childhoods.

The last two limitations are also related. I presumed that since NTC’s mothers came from countries other than Taiwan that they would mostly come from families possessing low socio-economic statuses; this was not the case. There are various ways NTC displayed themselves, such as Xing-Yan’s clothing being of higher quality and more fashionable than that of mainstream girls, or when Da-Wei enjoyed speaking English as a globalized child because of his confidence and superior skills in the language.

Although both children lived in a rural, agrarian village, they still had globalized and internationalized attitudes. With this knowledge and outlook, their behavior sometimes exceeded my interpretation of immigrant families with low SESs. I started the study thinking that the children would be indifferent and unknowledgeable about their environment and the world, but the opposite turned out to be true.
Through the limitations of the research, I see more hidden information in the power hierarchies between adult-child, majority-minority and informants-researcher. These boundaries not only reminded me to avoid using hegemonic viewpoints to interpret peripheral groups, but also to let me notice that power could appear under various discourses. The limited number of NTC, four NT girls and eight NT boys, is not the main restriction for this study; rather, I am quite proud of their critical incidents that fully inspired their gendered childhoods. The concern I still have about my research is the inability to visit NT parents and observe these children at home.

**Implications of This Study**

This study proposes that teachers need to play a more active role as practitioners at the intersections of gender and class when implementing gender education. In addition, the study contributes to an Eastern version of sisterhood and young girlhood studies in early childhood. Research findings indicated that the NTC’s gender culture depended on how teachers created classroom gender culture. The teachers displayed gender attitudes in the formal curricula (e.g., textbook pedagogy) and in hidden curricula (e.g., the strategies to discipline students and the practice of classroom management). By discussing these patterns, I hope these new perspectives could contribute valuable teaching and curriculum design implications for future Taiwanese teachers and teachers throughout the world.

**Teachers’ Gender Attitudes Displayed in the Formal Curricula**

Teachers’ gender attitudes exhibited how they teach and interpret the teaching materials (e.g., textbooks). According to their gender attitudes and gender knowledge,
teachers need to judge whether or not the teaching content could meet the needs of current children’s gender construction. Particularly, some materials are outdated, no longer supporting children’s construction of gendered knowledge and attitudes.

Teachers’ gender attitudes reflected how they exposed students to gendered knowledge. When teachers agreed with out-of-date teaching materials, they disregarded that it was old knowledge. Out-of-date gendered knowledge includes stereotypical gender roles for family members, and it presents only standard, middle-class family culture. When teachers taught this content, they did not discuss diverse family types, but instead focused on a middle-class, mainstream families with one boy and one girl. Thus, gendered knowledge came from textbooks, so these family types did not help students, especially NTC, to adapt to unique gender construction experiences in family life. However, each kindergarten teacher indicated that their teaching materials present valuable mainstream viewpoints so students can learn about family types and gender roles. Obviously, future teacher training programs should reveal different types families and promote acceptance of diverse gender roles.

The teachers’ gender attitudes reflected gendered knowledge when they taught young children romantic love stories. They did not teach adequate social skills for current children to befriend same- and opposite-gender peers. Textbooks in the two kindergartens taught love stories: *The Mouse’s New Year Wedding* (老鼠娶親) and *A Young Couple’s Harmonious Relationship* (兩小無猜). In these stories, reality is different than the children’s current situations. In *The Mouse’s New Year Wedding*,
the contexts presented an arranged marriage, feminine female gender roles (i.e., a bashful bride who becomes a submissive wife) and masculine male gender roles (i.e., a horse-riding groom who turns into a bread-winning husband). Teachers need to provide more explanations for children to discuss various gender images in their current lives; the stories usually no longer apply in modern life. Updating teachers’ gender knowledge could teach current children to establish gender roles during peer interaction.

The stories’ contexts differed from the current children’s friendships because these classical, romantic stories are outdated. Children urgently need to learn how to befriend peers of both genders. For example, in one incident, Yun-Shan, a girl, was upset when Xian-Ren, a boy, kissed her while drawing pictures together. This incident could remind teachers that children need the social skills to befriend opposite-gender peers, instead of teaching them to be innocent angels conforming to love stories.

Teachers did not recognize children’s needs (e.g., making opposite-gender friends). Teachers’ gender attitudes influenced the direction or consultation of young children’s friendships. For example, in the love letter incident, several young children struggled with, or conversely, made fun of peers’ romantic love letters. Teachers’ attitudes influenced how the young children positively or negatively established friendships. Moreover, while teachers said that students were non-sexual and pure in childhood, they presented ambiguous attitudes toward children’s opposite-gender friendship. Actually, if children lacked opportunities to befriend opposite-gender
peers, they lost chances to know the opposite gender’s play culture, as well as opportunities to realize some strategies to establish various identities of gendered childhood.

**Teachers’ Gender Attitudes Displayed in the Hidden Curricula**

Teachers’ gender attitudes created hidden curricula and influenced students’ gender culture. These attitudes showed favoritism during student-teacher interaction, which directed boys and girls to comply within different gender roles in school. In my findings, teachers’ gender attitudes presented in class both managed and disciplined students.

**Classroom management is a collective control for the classroom gender norm.** Managing students’ individual behavior, as a good boy or girl, is often connected with how teachers use strategies to manage classrooms. Teacher Chen assessed her students with stickers that they could place on hero and beautiful girl posters. Respectively, doing so, she set gender-appropriate lines for her students. Teachers took for granted the ability to shape girls’ and boys’ gender identities during classroom management. In another example, Teacher Chen skillfully admonished the table manners of an NT boy, Jia-Hong, by telling the whole class that he failed to present an elder brother role model in the classroom because of his bad table etiquette. According to the above findings, shaping children’s gender roles is one strategy to manage classrooms well.

**Disciplined good girls should care about their gender performances and appearances.** Disciplining students is usually related to how teachers apply gender
attitudes when measuring students’ gender performances in class. For example, when Teacher Su criticized Yi-Ting about her tomboy behaviors, the teacher’s gender attitude directly informed students what her gender approach does for a demure girl. Furthermore, taking care of girls’ hair when at school is the teachers’ daily job, which followed parents’ requirements in shaping girls’ appearance, showing girls that maintaining appearance is a necessary virtue for a female (婦容); this is a Confucian requirement of the demure female gender role.

Teachers need opportunities to consider gender attitudes and gendered knowledge. Teachers’ gender attitudes set the behavior standards by which female and male students need to comply within class gender norm. To avoid violating classroom gender culture, students, especially NTC, followed the teachers’ gender norms as social capital in their gender performances. Critically, as teachers are shaped by gender stereotypes, there were rarely opportunities where teachers recognized that classroom management influenced children’s gender construction.

Can gender education help teachers to create a gender-equal classroom? First, teachers need to realize that the early childhood classroom is a gender socialization institute for children, and that the gendered knowledge is conveyed in class activities. Early childhood teachers must recognize that children’s gendering processes are socially constructed, different from the attitudes of both teachers at WK and JB Kindergartens, who claimed that children’s gendering processes only happen within families.
Second, gender education content should match students’ life experiences. Teachers have to be aware that people are individual in gender approaches, SES and ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Thus, teachers must observe class gender culture. In NTC’s classrooms, specifically, the purposes of gender education is not only to teach young kids to avoid being sexual harassed, but to discuss openly the opportunities for children to realize meanings of gender fairness in friendship, in addition to the roles of gender diversity. Daily peer conflicts are often entwined with the bias of gender, SES or ethnic stereotypes in children’s peer relationships. As a result, teachers should be sensitive to the critical issues surrounding students’ peer interaction.

The Direction of Future Work

If I choose to conduct further research in this area, I will address the relationships between knowledge, power and discipline for teachers concerning Taiwanese gender culture in the classroom. Complementing my findings, future research should address the following issues: understanding children’s culture; and children’s educational needs as they relate to gender, race and class issues.

The Need to Listen Taiwanese Children’s Voices

Future research should pay more attention to children’s culture. Its value relates to how we build images for young children. Images of childhood used to connect to needs, weaknesses and innocence, so children would find themselves on the periphery of social concern. Different from past eras, educators need to recognize authentic children’s childhood culture and children’s voices when designing and practicing curricula. Children’s unique childhood culture relates to nourishing
experiences, local and popular culture and consumer and material culture. Children’s cultures differ from adults’, so it is mandatory to listen to children to understand the individual child and the group’s childhood culture from peer interactions.

**Gender, Race and Class Issues in Early Childhood Education**

By benefiting from reconstructing NTC’s gender culture, future research will investigate how early childhood educators practice multicultural education for diverse student populations. The synthesis of social constructionism found within critical race and feminist studies offered a set of frameworks for examining how gender, race and social class intertwine and constitute social competition. Specifically, gender hierarchies in relation to race and social class affect NTC in two ways: their immigrant mothers give them the cross-culture backgrounds; and they possess a low SES. Educators must observe children’s gender construction as a social practice in daily life (e.g., interaction with peers and teachers). Only then can teachers deconstruct classroom gender culture by drawing on children’s gender, race and class discourses.

Although there is increasing recognition of the importance of gender equality issues in kindergarten, the practicing issues of gender, race and social class remain under-theorized in discussions of gendered childhood. By considering these external factors, teachers will accomplish the tasks of helping New Taiwanese Children to establish their identities and gain acceptance from the mainstream Taiwanese society.
**Recommendations of the Study**

By itself, multi-cultural education cannot reverse gender and race discrimination currently occurring in NTC’s classrooms. Teachers’ gender and the gender culture in early childhood classrooms have become invisible to most teachers and parents. If this can be remedied, Taiwanese society will benefit from the hybridity of transnational marriages because various rich South Asian cultures’ perspectives on gender can contribute to an already-appreciated mainstream Taiwanese culture.

Actually, the power relations intertwine with gender and ethnicity that exist in dominant discourses still influence gender norms, which turns into the truth present in traditional school culture. Within this culture, teachers are more comfortable with patriarchal hegemony than reconceptualizing dominant gender discourses. Therefore, teachers’ gender bias hinders their own sense of gender awareness. As teachers lack knowledge of how to criticize dominant gender culture, they also lack awareness to conceptualize children’s complex gender culture. Thus, I recommend the following.

**Important challenges for ECE teachers.** Female teachers almost fully populate kindergartens, creating a gender-stereotype environment. In the education system, I need to help both novice and experienced teachers become explicitly aware of their position in and gender power within gender culture. To start necessary changes, several strategies would make teachers realize gender consciousnesses and gender awareness.
In early childhood classrooms, teachers need to question their beliefs about children’s agency (e.g., how children view learning to be a girl or a boy). In doing so, teachers might treat young humans more equally when administering authority and conveying gendered knowledge. This occurs, for example, when class work is displayed publicly, a common American tradition where children and teachers openly discuss topics; implementation will be challenging for most Taiwanese teachers. They must carefully consider how to make Western classroom practices applicable in Taiwanese classrooms when effectuating gendered curricula.

Since I and my student teachers are both part of this structure as it was created, recognition and understanding are necessary before it can be fixed. Instead of imparting knowledge that we must move beyond multi-cultural education, I thought it necessary to re-conceptualize gender discourse as it relates to specific power issues. It is important, but challenging, for most all Taiwanese teachers to find the delicate balance between exercising authority and imparting knowledge to students. Although it is discouraged, thinking critically might help teachers to achieve this goal.

**How teachers implement gendered curricula.** To make classrooms more gender-friendly, pre-service teachers should also train to understand children’s gendered actions through conducting projects, holding workshops and establishing study groups to observe, videotape and discuss and reflect on children’s peer interaction. Moreover, they can keep journal entries and read gender studies articles.

Instead of separating gender education from daily curricula, reflection of gendered knowledge should become an integral part of classroom culture. First, early
childhood teachers could use storybooks containing gender issues. Teachers can also have children discuss or hold dramatic plays about these stories. Second, reflective teachers could criticize textbook content that might reinforce gender stereotypes and hierarchies. Explaining biases to children will prevent confusion as they learn gender. Third, teachers could arrange a culturally-aware learning environment. For example, the dramatic play area could provide male and female dolls of various skin tones and ethnicities. When children play with these toys, they will become familiar with different cultures and learn from cultural discourses.

If teachers are to educate students about differences in ethnicity and SES, they could instruct the class about how they could avoid reproducing negative gendered culture patterns. For instance, teachers can limit or eliminate gender power imbalances that occur between select NTC and the majority of mainstream Taiwanese children to promote cultural awareness.

In conclusion, teachers need professional training to better implement gender education. These recommendations should achieve the goal of no bias toward gender. They can permit students of either gender to advance in a friendly environment. Even so, further gender education practices must address the relationships between knowledge, power and discipline in classroom gender culture management.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

WK KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM SCHEDULE
## Appendix A

### WK Kindergarten Classroom Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Arrival, Classroom-corner time 角落操作時間</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:40 a.m.</td>
<td>Large-group time / Nursery rhymes / Snack 早點</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:40 a.m.</td>
<td>5- or 6-year-old small-group time</td>
<td>Story Reading Time 閱讀時間</td>
<td>Math 數學</td>
<td>Pronunciation practice ㄅㄆㄇ</td>
<td>Math 數學</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Monthly theme 主題 (table time, or small-group time)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:40 a.m.</td>
<td>Lunch time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:20 a.m.</td>
<td>Free-choice time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:40 a.m.</td>
<td>Nap time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Preparing time, wake up, movement time</td>
<td>Dancing with nursery rhymes 律動</td>
<td>Math and games 數的遊戲</td>
<td>Physical exercise 體能活動</td>
<td>Story Reading Time 閱讀時間</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14:20 p.m.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:10 p.m.</td>
<td>Snack time 點心時間</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15:40 p.m.</td>
<td>Group discussion, clear up 綜合時間</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>16:00–18:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Extended time for parents to pick up children. Go home 平安回家去!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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APPENDIX B

JB PRIVATE KINDERGARTEN CLASSROOM SCHEDULE
## Appendix B

### JB Private Kindergarten Classroom Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:00-8:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Arrival, Classroom-corner time 角落操作時間</td>
<td>Writing practice 寫字練習/Abacus practice 珠算練習</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00 a.m.</td>
<td>Writing practice 寫字練習/Abacus practice 珠算練習</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:20 a.m.</td>
<td>Snack 点心</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:40 a.m.</td>
<td>Math數學</td>
<td>Math數學</td>
<td>Chinese pronunciation practiceㄅㄆㄇ</td>
<td>Absuas practice 珠算練習</td>
<td>Chinese pronunciation practiceㄅㄆㄇ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:50 a.m.</td>
<td>Writing practice 運筆練習</td>
<td>Writing characters寫字練習</td>
<td>Painting 繪畫</td>
<td>English 英文</td>
<td>Physical exercise 體能活動</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:40 a.m.</td>
<td>Lunch time / free choice time/ clean up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:40 a.m.</td>
<td>Classical poetry recitation 唐詩時間/learning remanding time/ Nap time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>14:10 p.m.</td>
<td>Preparing time, wake up, Snack time點心時間</td>
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<tr>
<td>14:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Math and games 數的遊戲</td>
<td>Reading time 閱讀時間</td>
<td>nursery rhymes 律動遊戲</td>
<td>Story time 故事閱讀</td>
<td>Classical poetry recitation 唐詩時間</td>
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<tr>
<td>15:40 p.m.</td>
<td>Lesson review 複習時間/Homework assessment time 發回家作業</td>
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<tr>
<td>16:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Bus to go home and child-care arrangements 平安回家去！</td>
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<tr>
<td>17:00–18:00 p.m.</td>
<td>Extended time for parents to pick up children. Go home.</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX C

THE INFORMANTS “NAME LIST”
Appendix C

The Informants” Name List

The table is the children’s name and teachers’ name. The entire name is pseudonym. The shading columns mean the NT girls or NT boys.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WK kindergarten (city area)</th>
<th>The teachers</th>
<th>Teacher Chen</th>
<th>Teacher Wang</th>
<th>Ru-Yue (如月)/6</th>
<th>Yun-Shan (昀珊)/6</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female student /age/</td>
<td>Mei-Jia (美佳)/6 / NTG</td>
<td>Lin-Hua (玲华)/7 / NTG</td>
<td>Jia-Yu (佳育)/6</td>
<td>Jie-Jun (潔君)/5</td>
<td>Cai-Yui (彩玉)/5</td>
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<td>Pei- Yu (佩玉)/6</td>
<td>You-Li (友莉)/5</td>
<td>Lin-Hua (玲華)/7</td>
<td>Yun-Shan (昀珊)/6</td>
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<td>Chen-Xi (辰嬉)/5</td>
<td>Jia-Yu (佳育)/6</td>
<td>Jie-Jun (潔君)/5</td>
<td>Cai-Yui (彩玉)/5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male student /age/NTC</td>
<td>Jia-Hong (加宏)/6/NT B</td>
<td>Cheng-Quan (承銓)/6/NT B</td>
<td>Yu-Ren (育仁)/6/NT B</td>
<td>Xian-Ren (賢仁)/6</td>
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<td>Ren-He (仁和)/6</td>
<td>Yi-Xiang (怡祥)/6</td>
<td>Min-Zhe (敏哲)/5</td>
<td>Yi- Fang (義豐)/5</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Li-Hong (理弘)/5</td>
<td>Ming-Xian (明憲)/5</td>
<td>Yu-Long (宇龍)/5</td>
<td>Han-Ji(漢基)/5</td>
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<tr>
<td>JB kindergarten (rural area)</td>
<td>The teacher</td>
<td>Teacher Su</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Yu-Qin (玉琴)/6/NTG</td>
<td>Min-Hui (敏惠)/6</td>
<td>Zhen-Xiu (珍秀)/6</td>
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<td>Yun- Cheng (芸辰)/6</td>
<td>Jia-Jia (佳佳)/6</td>
<td>Yi-Ting (赤亭)/6</td>
<td>Ya-Yu (雅玉)/6</td>
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<td>Chi-Wei (琦紋)/6</td>
<td>Xin-Li (欣莉)/5</td>
<td>Ting-Jun (亭君)/5</td>
<td>Yen-Ping (嫺萍)/5</td>
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<td>Hui-Jan (惠真)/6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Male students/age/NTC</td>
<td>Da-Wei (大瑋)/6/NTB</td>
<td>Ming-Yan (銘彥)/6/NTB</td>
<td>Zhi-Jie (志傑)/6/NTB</td>
<td>Yi-Hong (一弘)/6/NTB</td>
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<td>Zi-Yang (子楊)/6/NTB</td>
<td>Jun-Qing (郡清)/6</td>
<td>Min-Shan (敏善)/6</td>
<td>Min-Cheng (敏成)/6</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Zhi-Gao (智高)/5</td>
<td>Fu-Cheng (福成)/4</td>
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</table>

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APPENDIX D

RICKY, GET OUT OF THE WAY!

DESCRIPTION OF CONTEXT
Appendix D

Ricky, Get out of the Way!

Description of Context

Music play. Performance negotiators—Children, four girls (two White: Lisa, age 5; Marianne, age 7; Asia American: Sasha, age 7; African American: Leah, age 7) two boys (White: Ricky and James, both age 8). In this episode Ricky called to a group of four girls, several times inviting them over, while at the same time, putting many chairs in front of the block area, intending to use the space as his band shell (lines 6–84; 20 minutes later, line 85–87; 25 minutes later, lines 88–89).

1. Ricky: Leah, I have a good idea! Since your charity…you are a homeless pet and mine is homeless people….. (Ricky states his ideas to convince Leah to join his play when Leah works on a clay projects with a group of girls and one boy.)
2. Sasha: Are you working? Ricky?
3. Ricky: No!
4. Ricky: Yes! The homeless people, the homeless pet, and homeless together….
5. Leah: Homeless? ........... (Leah remains seated playing with the clay. She does not join Ricky’s dramatic play. Ricky goes to the block area alone. He shakes boxes of his commodities when he calls out).
6. Ricky: “All my ….. gets careful two dollars,… get one of three dollars,…get pizza five dollars,… show will be one dollar every hour!
7. Sasha: Every hour?
8. Ricky: This show will be… more than lemonade! ….Little lamb….
9. Ricky: This show …. Leah, and little lambs, Lisa, and…..Sasha, and Marianne, … (Inaudible on the videotape but I hear it in fieldwork. Leah leaves her seat to approach Ricky. I cannot hear what they say. But I hear the teacher stop Leah from touching Ricky; then Leah becomes angry and comes back to her seat to go with a group of girls to work with her clay.)
10. Ricky: …but except for Sasha, it is Leah! (Ricky approaches Leah when he calls the girls’ names again. Leah and Lisa look tentatively at Ricky; simultaneously he confronts the girls’ table and calls them out again.)
11. Ricky: Next show will be in 10 minutes…..
12. Leah: I am not in the show!
13. Sasha: Me either! And please be quiet!
14. Leah: Yet! Please!
15. Ricky: Are you sure you do not want to….
16. Girls: No! No! (All of the girls say “no” together.)
17. Ricky: Leah has a little lamb! (Ricky sings the song. All girls laugh!)
18. Leah: Ricky! You always humiliate me! One more time, I am going to get you! … (Leah jumps from her seat and stomps over to Ricky)
19. Leah: …it is not what I want to make! And stop calling my name!
20. Ricky: I am not calling your name!
21. Leah: Now, stop calling me name…in front of girls and boys! (Video plays on; episode continues 2 minutes later.)
22. Ricky: This is my schedule! ……You want to watch our three shows today! (Ricky brings his schedule to stand in front of Leah and sing a song, but the girls are busy with their clay project.)
23. Leah: What it is?
24. Ricky: Song!
25. Leah: What song?
26. Ricky: Today, the song will be……be……hi, what I try to remember is …. (Ricky is trying to answer this question.)
27. Leah: What is Ricky? Ricky will be ….. Ricky, get out the way! Here, Ricky, get out the way! Ricky, get out the way! Ricky, get out the way! Ricky is the name—O! (Leah is singing the song: Live only to BINGO).
28. Ricky: ….or I have is cheeseburger…..
29. Leah: Cheeseburger?!
30. Ricky: OK! I make it …10 o’clock!…11o’clock! (Ricky continues to negotiate with Leah about the appropriate time and price for the concert) …. 
31. Ricky: …I will make it fifty cents?
32. Leah: Lower!
33. Ricky: Ok! I make it three….
34. Leah: Free!
35. Ricky: …. (What he says cannot be heard and he returns to the block area).
36. Sasha: Hi! I have one idea. Whoever… buys what we have…we… friendly with them! (Girls discuss whether Ricky wants to buy one).
37. Leah: …what about Ricky, the one who want, to buy one? …what if… Ricky, want to buy one…
38. Lisa: Ricky is right there! Ricky He-He-He, Ricky Hea-Hea-Hea... (Lisa is singing the song. Ricky comes back and uses his paper to stop Lisa).
39. Leah: ….. Ricky, Ricky will be ….. Ricky, get out the way! Ricky, He-He- He- ….
   (Leah is singing the song.).
40. Ricky: I say s::t::o::p! (Male teacher stops both Ricky and Leah. After the male teacher leaves, Lisa continues to sing the song).
41. Lisa: Ricky, get out the way! Ricky, get out the way! (Lisa sings the song).
42. Ricky: …five minutes…till up the first concert of day ………
43. Girls: Ricky, get out the way! Ricky, get out the way! (Girls sings the song).
44. Leah: Ricky!..... Ricky, if you do not listen, you will be in trouble… (Leah sang the song).
45. Lisa: Ok! Ricky, we will not go to see it! Ricky! We don’t want to be Ricky ……Ricky had a little lamb, little lamb…(Lisa sings the song).
46. Girls: Ricky had little lamb, little lamb; Ricky had baby lamb, baby lamb… (Girls sang the song).
47. Ricky: S::t::o::p! Please!
48. Leah: If you do not bother me!
49. Ricky: The show will be …hour. Every thing will be moved out in an hour! Every thing will be moved out in an hour! Next show will be at 11:00! (Ricky approaches the girls’ table again and calls out his announcement, but girls enjoy sing songs and working on their clay projects.) (The video plays on; episode continues 3 minutes later)
50. Leah : Ricky, you do remember the song about little…
51. Ricky: I am not doing it today… the song about the cheeseburger, remember?
52. Girls: Cheeseburger!
53. Ricky: Never heard before?!
54. Leah : Never heard…
55. Ricky: It is a love song about the man who loves cheeseburgers
56. Girls: A love song …. (big laugh)
57. Ricky: I think…
58. Leah : …..(Sings a song)
59. Ricky: No! It is a different song….because it is only a cheeseburger!
60. Lisa: I never eat cheeseburgers….
61. Ricky: N::o!
62. Leah : Ricky love cheeseburgers!
63. Ricky: …the singer…his name is Mason.
64. Leah : …. (It cannot be heard).
65. Lisa : ….. (It cannot be heard).
66. Ricky: I am a singer. I suppose…
67. Lisa : Ricky, your voice is horrible! The singer’s voice should like Binger.
68. Leah: Yet you should like that!
69. Girls: Ricky loves cheeseburgers! (Girls sing the song together.)
70. Teacher: Girls, your voice … (Girls stop singing the song.)
71. Lisa : Ricky, I heard..........I h::a::t::e you! (Lisa stands in front of Ricky and imitates his singing performance and says some things to him. Ricky stares at Lisa but says nothing and leaves.)
72. Leah: Ricky loves cheeseburgers! Ricky loves cheeseburgers! (Leah sings the song.)
73. Ricky: S::t::o::p!
74. Leah: ….. (It cannot be heard).
75. Ricky: …not many people like him and only one girl love him!
76. Leah: One girl love him??
77. Ricky: You are getting the girl in the story … A boy who loves cheeseburger very much...
78. Girls: Ricky loves cheeseburgers! Ricky loves cheeseburgers! (Girls sing the song together.)
79. Ricky: Stop! You don’t know … but cheeseburger is not my favorite food
80. Marianne: … is one of loving…
81. Leah: Then, what is your favorite food?
82. Ricky: Pizza! But do not think about that! Today is cheeseburger!
83. Girls: Ricky loves cheeseburgers! (Girls sing the song together.)
84. Ricky: Stop! I said this is about cheeseburgers, and I might put L::i::s::a in a cheeseburger!
85. Girls: O::O::O! (all scream)
86. Ricky: You better stop!
87. Leah: Lisa, what do you… Do we stop?
88. Lisa: (nods her head).

(video plays on; episode continues 20 minutes later)
89. Leah: Your voice is better than Ricky! You will replace Ricky. (Girls speak to James).
90. Girls: To replace Ricky….
91. Female teacher: Girls! That is not nice….. (Girls keep on mentioning this idea, but they use very low voices to avoid being heard by the female teacher.)
92. Ricky: Who will be the backup singer?
93. Girls: You and James. (Girls intend to use Ricky and James as their backup singers.)

Video Replay Summary and Interpretation

Arguing with Ricky, Sasha and Leah refused to allow him to use female classmates; they did not want to be the singers in Ricky’s show despite his invitations.

The girls protested his invitations. The girls discussed what kind of concert they could hold in this class and who the singers could be. The children—girls and girls, girls and boys—negotiated with one another as they prepared their music play; eventually they excluded Ricky (lines 89–90).

When I reviewed the videotape of this episode, I saw Ricky exercising power over
the girls when he suggested holding “his” show. In addition, I saw the girls’ sensitivity in
the construction of power relationships between girls and boys when they discussed
holding a specific kind of concert in this class. Sasha and James showed how they played
musical instruments for their peers while Marianne practiced to be a best female singer in
this process.

Lisa, Leah, and Marianne thought Ricky was too domineering to be a best singer
at this concert, but they masked their opinions by saying, “Ricky’s voice is not good
enough to be the male singer in our concert; we want to put James in his place.” The girls
challenged Ricky’s appropriation of the “famous singer” position in their class when they
negotiated with the boys about equal opportunities for everybody in their country music
play.

Ricky played multiple roles as a homeless person, seller, show manager, singer,
and negotiator; the reasons for changing his roles depended on his purposes in the
patriarchal posturing under various discourses. In order to attract peers to participate in
his show, he made noises, used his voice, and built a superb showplace. During these
processes, he exercised power by using girls’ names in the show announcement, teasing
Leah, and inventing reasons (e.g., to announce the need to clean up clay projects) to
recruit girls to participate in his show; however, he met resistance from the girls. Even so,
this group of children demonstrated negotiation skills when they intended to engage in
nonsexist peer interaction and built their own gender social order.

Leah was the first one to warn Ricky not to call her names even though Ricky and
Leah generally had a good friendship, sometime playing Game Boy together. Leah often crossed gender boundaries in friendships; however, in this episode, Leah not only positioned herself as “an opposed gender “with Ricky, but she also disapproved of Ricky’s show. This behavior marked a sharp contrast to the way she usually played with Ricky: She usually played the role of his show partner.

Sarah was very sensitive about how Ricky had interfered with their projects when she questioned Ricky: “Are you working? Ricky!” (line 2). She also readily asserted that she would not want to join in Ricky’s show the first time when girls indicated they dislikes Ricky’s methods (lines 8–16). More than only to exclude Ricky, she knew how to create possibilities to plan for a good ending for their clay projects (e.g., sell their clay artifacts to concert participants) as well as to plan a public concert for everybody (e.g., create roles for singers, background singers, drummers, and the band for their concert).

Lisa also reacted strongly to Ricky by challenging his position. She is youngest and defied Ricky. She said, “Ricky, your voice is horrible!” (line 67) and “I hate you” (line 71). Lisa challenged Ricky’s talents (e.g., singing songs and making the arrangements for the show) by telling him that she disliked his performances. Ricky’s talents rarely earned Lisa’s approval.

The teachers intervened in this episode but lacked an understanding of how children acted out their gender power. Ricky’s use of space around the classroom and his loud voice intimidated girls and other boys in this class (lines 11, 42, and 49); however, I saw both a female teacher and a male teacher trying several times to stop girls’ from
teasing Ricky (lines 9, 3-39, and 90). They called his name only once (line 40), ignoring how Ricky attempted numerous times to disrupt the girls’ clay project. I suggest that teachers work with Ricky, encouraging him to use a less aggressive manner in his invitation. Providing alternative strategies for Ricky to perform as a masculine character will help learn how to interact better with peers.

In this episode, I also saw Sarah and Leah keep negotiating with Ricky about the playing schedules while they worked with their clay projects, simultaneously discussing and envisioning a future concert to suit their requirements. As a researcher, I found that repeated viewing of the videotape and careful analysis of the children’s dialogue provided me with the tools necessary to reinterpret how these children manipulated gender power (line 8–93) and the issues associated with romantic love (line 75–77) in their daily activities. I intended to find out what strategies the children used to resist their gender power under dominant discourse (e.g., classroom management). Unfortunately, some dialogue remains ambiguous with indeterminate meaning; for example, Ricky’s talk about putting Lisa in a cheeseburger, causing the girls to scream (lines 84–85). Even so, I intended to reflect carefully the children’s multiple dispositions of their gender performances and their challenges to the possibilities of sexism among Leah, Sarah, Lisa, Marianne, and Ricky.

Questions I would ask the children in a video discussion include the following:
1. Why did the girls laugh when Ricky said, “It is a love song about the man who loves cheeseburgers” (line 55)? What is “a love song” (line 56)? And what does it mean when “a girl loves a boy” (line 75–76)?

2. What did Ricky mean when he said, “Ricky will put Lisa in a cheeseburger” (line 84) and why did all the girls scream when Ricky said it (line 85)?

3. Why didn’t Ricky invite any male classmates to participate in his show? Why did the girls invite James to join in their music play (line 89)?
APPENDIX E

BETH'S FAMILY PLAY

DESCRIPTION OF CONTEXT
Appendix E

Beth’s Family Play

Description of Context

A dramatic play about parent–child interaction. An obedient baby, an obedient mother, children: two girls (Beth, 4 years old; and Mary, 5 years old), one boy (Frank, 6 years old). In this episode, Mary played a heterosexual married mother with her daughter and her husband. Mary was the mother–queen, who was busy with phone calls and took turns with her daughter’s language learning. Frank played the role of father–king, who required Beth, his baby princess; to follow his direction (lines 1 to 26; 1 minute later, line 27 to 33; 2 minutes later, lines 34 to 45).

1. Frank: There is your cradle. Sit in the middle of it. (Frank and Mary use a table as a cradle.)
2. Mary: Beth, get into here!
3. Frank: You go back in there! (Frank asks Mary to sit on a rocker, which is located opposite his rocker. After Mary sits on their rocking chair, Frank puts his foot on Mary’s rocker, whereby he can control it.)
4. Beth: (Sits down inside of the cradle) Goo---Goo-----Da---Daddy….
5. Frank: …Put that on your head! ….. (Frank asks Beth to put a white scarf on her head, but Beth does not want to follow his direction.)
6. Beth: Goo-Goo----(Beth waves her scarf and uses baby talk…)
7. Mary: ( Watches their interaction when she pretends to speak on her telephone.)
8. Frank: Don’t throw things ..... at your play!
9. Beth: Daddy—Da—Da
10. Frank: No! No! You throw things like …
11. Beth: Goo, Goo, Goo …(Beth waves her scarf and shakes her head.)
12. Frank: (Frank throws a shoes into the cradle) … Pretend it is the dinner that you got at your plate…
13. Beth: This …is my play! (She is sucking her thumb, smiling, and making a face at Frank, Mary, me, and my video camera. Then she throws the shoe at Frank.)
14. Frank: … Throw the other one (Frank throws a shoe into Beth’s cradle).
15. Beth: **G::oo** -- (Beth waves her scarf and sticks her tongue out at Frank)
16. Frank: **Don’t do that!**
17. Beth: (Sticks her tongue out at Frank and makes a face at him)
18. Mary: (facing Beth) … say “No, no”…… (Inaudible on the videotape)
19. Beth: I do not know how to say no…..but I know how to suck my thumb … I know how to say **Ga--aaa--Ga---** sometimes……
20. Mary: (She keeps silent and ignores Beth’s opinion.)
21. Frank: You do not understand me, but ….in this game…
22. Beth: Goo-Goo-Ga-Ga Goo-Goo-Ga-Ga (Beth waves her scarf to Frank.)
23. Frank: I will watch you… you cannot…
24. Beth: Goo-Goo-Ga-Ga (She waves her scarf to Frank again.)
25. Mary: I don’t have lines to say this part… I will come back…(she leaves her seat)
26. Frank: I will watch her (When Frank tells what he is going to do, Beth climbs from her cradle to the floor…).
(The video plays on; episode continues 1 minute later.)
27. Beth: (Beth sits in her cradle again and talks with Mary) I know how to say **cookies, cool--kee**
28. Mary: You say **cookies**.
29. Beth: Gookie, car key, car key, cookies, co-co-ka-ka… (Beth pretends to crawl from her cradle and sits at Frank’s rocker when Frank stands up.)……
30. Observer: You are a baby, right? A baby? Or a doggie? (Observer asks Beth.)
31. Beth: A baby!
32. Observer: OK! So, you are a mother, right? Is he a father? (Observer asks Mary.)
33. Mary: I am queen, he is King, and she is baby princess,………, and her big brother over there is a knight…. (The video plays on; episode continues 2 minutes later.)
34. Beth: **Mom-Ma! …. Goo-Goo-Ga-Ga Goo-Goo-Goo---**(Beth sits behind Mary’s rocker and faces her.)
35. Mary: (Makes eye contacts with Beth and smiles at her)
36. Beth: Goo-Goo-Ga-Ga Goo-Goo (She pushes Mary’s rocker.)
37. Mary: (Watches her and smiles at Beth)
38. Beth: **Goo---- Ga-, Goo---Ga---** (Vigorously pushes Mary’s rocker)
39. Mary: (Smiles into my video camera…)
40. Beth: **Ga... Ga..., Wui..., Wui...** (She uses baby talk and pushes Mary’s rocker.)
41. Mary: … You against me… (She speaks to Beth after her rocker is strongly pushed by Beth.)
42. Beth: **Wui... Wui... Wa.... Wa....** (Forcibly pushes Mary’s rocker again)
43. Frank: (Frank gets up from his seat, goes to Beth’s place, and takes over pushing Mary’s rocker)…. You get back in your play place; I …..it (Frank requires Beth to follow his direction.)
44. Beth: N::o!
45. Frank: Yes, in this game…. You’re not…, it supposed … follow I tell… You cannot ……

Video Play Summary and Interpretation

These children defined their positions through their gender behaviors when they built relationships with one another (lines 1–33). In this family play children presented their gender performances as hegemonic masculinity and emphasized feminism when they imagined themselves as a father–king, a mother–queen, and a baby princess in this storyline (line 33). I intended to shift my observation from the behavior of individual children to the individual gendered child in relationships. Thus, in heterosexual dramatic play like this, I can center on analyzing their narratives to identify the discourse through which they make sense of their world. I can interpret, for example, how Frank, Mary, and Beth exercise power through their positioning within this discourse and how they invest within these positions.

In this dramatic play, the family patriarchy was presented by Frank, the strongest in this group (line 21), who always used power as an authority father and husband (lines 1–45). Frank asserted his authority by requesting that Beth abide by his orders. He dominated Mary such as’ expanded his space to invade Mary’s rocking (line 3 and 43). Frank put his life experiences into this episode, reflected by his gendering consciousness as “a king father,” even though he knew they were playing a “game” (lines 21 and 45).

Beth was the youngest, but she worked hard to resist the dominant discourse when she was positioned as “a baby,” “a princess,” and “a little sister” by peers. She used baby talk, body language, and facial expression to present her opinion (lines 4–44) and to resist Frank’s regulation (lines 5–44); moreover, she knew how to interact and even invade Mary’s family hierarchy (lines 36–44). By making her announcement—“This …is my play” (line 13)—Beth showed peers with her gender subjectivity when she resisted Frank’s requirements (lines 19 and 44) and actively posed her opinions to Mary (lines 36 and 42). She also knew how to use her power to negotiate with Frank, such as using body
language (e.g., waving her scarf, sucking her thumb, making a face) and baby talk (e.g., Goo-Goo-Ga-Ga) to voice her opinion to Frank and Mary (Line 6–44).

In this performance, while Frank exemplified the characteristics of hegemonic and patriarchal masculinity, Mary simultaneously used strategies to portray a subjugated mother, playing a role submissively. She powerlessly dealt with the conflict between Beth and Frank (line 20). She portrayed a silenced mother when she pretended to be busy with phone calls. In this episode, she played the role of a mother asking her husband to “help” her to arrange a nursery environment (cradle) for their baby. She was the mentor who taught her baby to speak (lines 27–9). In her world, she constructed her family out of fiction (line 33). Her narratives may have been borrowed from fairytales, mess media, and experiences of peer interaction, in which the reinterpreting of these narratives provided her with opportunities to explore gender positions in a playful way; but simultaneously her roles simply presented a traditional submissive wife and mother when Beth played “child’s power” (line 38–44) and Frank intruded upon her mother position (lines 3 and 43).

The children played hard to construct their gendering position. In this episode, I intended to see how Beth, Frank, and Mary made sense of their gender performances in each of their life experiences and the lives of other children (lines 4 and 34). Mary positioned her fictional world when she explained that the context in their family and their relationship was based on specific gendering, sexuality, class, social, and cultural background (e.g., a mother–queen, a father–king, and baby–princess) in the episode (line 33). The children used narration as a way of doing their gender.

Questions I would ask Beth, Mary, and Frank in a video discussion would include the following:

1. What happened after Beth got into her cradle?

2. The next time the three of you play together, would you like to change your role as a child, mother, and father? Why? Why not?
3. Should the child (Beth) and mother (Mary) follow the orders of the father (Frank) in your play? Why? Why not?
APPENDIX F

CONSENT LETTER TO THE TEACHER
Appendix F

Consent Letter to the Teacher

Dear Teacher:

I want to conduct research for my dissertation about the process of children’s gendering culture from September to December 2007. My research will focus on interpreting how children socially construct their gender identities in their learning processes. I want to share my finding with other early childhood teachers through presentation and articles.

I would like: 1) to hold participant observation, to audio and video tape children’s activities, and to interview children; 2) to interview you about the children’s gender performances; 3) to interview the mothers who are immigrants.

I would like to get your permission to sit in your classroom for approximately 8 hours per week. I will not interrupt the class routine. Taking part in this project, I will share resources (such as books on diversity) and share my findings that may benefit your curriculum in teaching children who have diverse cultural backgrounds. Taking part in this project is entirely up to you, and no one will hold it against you if you decide not to do it. Your decision to participant or not will not affect the classroom instruction or experiences for your students. If you do take part, you may stop at any time.

If you want to know more about this research project, please call me at phone: 0021-330-677-6920 (U.S.) or 011-886-7-345-1411(Taiwan). My advisor, Dr. Janice Kroeger can be reached at: 0021-330-672-0617(U.S.). This project has been approved by Kent State University, Ohio, U.S. If you have questions about Kent State University’s rules for research, please call Dr. Peter C. Tandy, Acting Vice President and Dean, Division of Research and Graduate Studies: 0021- 330- 672-2704 (U.S.).

You will get a copy of this consent form.

Sincerely,
Yu-Hui Chou
Ph.D. candidate,
The Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Kent State University, Ohio, U.S.A.
977 Allerton, St.
Kent, Ohio 44242

CONSENT STATEMENT(S)
I agree to take part and let my class to take part in this project. I know what I will have to do and that I can stop at any time.

__________________________________________________________
Signature                   Date
老師同意書

親愛的 老師:

您好！
我想請您允許我即日起到明年一月期間到您的教室去做觀察與訪談。我的研究將著重於了解新女性移民孩子的社會性別認同學習過程，我希望日後能將此研究成果發表分享於幼教界。

我希望能到貴班：1) 觀察: 錄音與錄影孩子們的活動與訪談孩子關於錄影帶中的內容; 2) 訪談新台灣之子 關於他們對自己性別，種族，和社經地位的看法;以及3) 訪談新台灣之子的媽媽，談新台灣之子的性別與跨文化經驗。

在此，我請求您簽署同意書。我將在研究期間每週約花十六小時隨班級活動進行參與觀察。我將不會干擾任何班級課程。而且為此研究我會捐贈貴班一些多元文化類的童話書籍。以及日後分享我的研究心得。如此將能利益於您在教導多元文化背景的孩子。

我將尊重您個人允許我到您教室進行研究的自由意願。
您決定允許與否並不會影響這班級的教學和學生們的學習經驗。
即使您現在同意開放我進行您教室內的研究，您有權力隨時終止這同意契約。

若是你有需要進一步了解這研究計畫歡迎洽詢，我在美國的電話是0021-330-677-6920
在台灣的電話是011-886-7-345-1411 我的指導教授是Dr. Janice Kroeger 洽詢電話是: 0021-330-672-0617(U.S.)。本研究計畫已被Kent State University, Ohio, U.S. 認可通過。

若是你有任何疑問請洽詢Kent State University 研究規範辦法 負責人是Kent State University 的研究中心副總裁及教務長Dr. Peter C. Tandy 洽詢電話是: 0021-330-672-2704(U.S.)

一式二份的同意書 請你於簽署後收下
感謝你！

周裕惠 敬上

周裕惠 現為 Kent State University, Ohio, U.S.A. 課程與教學系 博士候選人
聯絡現址為: 977 Allerton, St. Kent, Ohio 44242 USA

同意聲明

本人同意我及我的班級參與這個研究。
我了解我在這研究中該配合的各項以及我有權隨時要求退出這項參與。

簽署人簽名

日
APPENDIX G

INTERVIEWS WITH THE TEACHERS
Appendix G

Interviews with the Teachers

Interview date: ________
Name (optional): ______________ Male ____ Female _____
Years of teaching in early childhood education: ___________
Degree: ____________________ Major: ______________________
Special training in gender education: Yes _____ No_____
   If, yes, then the context was ____________________________________
   (e.g., workshop, conference, on job-training program, formal credit hours)
Special training in multicultural education: Yes ____ No_____
   If, yes, then the context was ____________________________________
   (e.g., workshop, conference, on job-training program, formal credit hours)

The formal interviews will take place for the following purposes: (a) to understand how the teacher interprets the New Taiwanese Children’s gender, class, ethnic characteristics, (b) the children’s social order, and (c) to understand the curriculum of gender education. In order to investigate the gender role prescriptions of the children in class, the following questions will address how the teacher interprets the students enacting their gender performances in children’s activities.

A. Questions about students’ behaviors and interaction
1. In your mind, what is the purpose of the Gender Equity Education Law? What is your opinion of the need for the Gender Equity Education Law in your school?
2. What is your opinion of the need for gender education in early childhood education? What is your understanding of the context of gender education in early childhood education? Have you implemented themes of gender education in your class activities?
3. How many male students and female students in your class?
   Male _____ Female ______
   In what types of groups do they play?
   Male only _____ Female only _____ Mixed _____
   Do they always play in the same group? Yes ____ No ____

4. According your observations, please describe your students’ behaviors:
(marking “X” if the behavior occurs in 50% of your students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Example:</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active</td>
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<tr>
<td>Artistic</td>
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<td>Challenging</td>
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<td>Concerned (for others)</td>
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<td>Want to please others</td>
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<td>Aggressive</td>
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<td>Attention seeker</td>
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<td>Noisy</td>
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<td>Quiet</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

B. Observation of classroom activities:
1. What are the boys’ preferences during the classroom activities? What are the girls’ preferences during the classroom activities?
2. What are the boys’ preferences during the outdoor activities? What are the girls’ preferences during the outdoor activities?
3. Does any girl like to play the role of boy in free-time activities? Does any boy like to play the role of girl in free-time activities?
4. What kinds of behavior do you observe in children’s free-time activities when girls and boys play together? Turn taking _____ Cooperation _____ Sharing _____ Argument _____ Physical aggression _____ Verbal aggression _____ Other _____
5. Do boys or girls play a leadership role when they play together?
6. After viewing the videotapes and discussion with the children, [Mary] joined this discussion and posted her opinion about __________________. Would you like to state your opinion about her concern?

C. Observation of children with immigrant mothers
1. Do differences exist between children with immigrant mothers and their classmates who have Taiwanese mothers in the areas of:
Social behaviors  For example: _______________________________________
Social skills      For example: __________________________________________
Academic performance   For example: ___________________________
Parents’ cooperation     For example: ____________________________________

2. In his or her family (the child’s name: ___________), who plays the most important role in the child’s/children’s care? Please describe how the members of this family interact? By outwards appearances, who seems to be “in charge?”
3. In his or her family (the child’s name: ___________) who spends more time helping the child with schoolwork? Father or mother? Both?
4. Do all the girls (daughters of immigrant mothers) play with female classmates?
5. Do all the boys (sons of immigrant mothers) play with male classmates?
6. Do the children of immigrant mothers have self-confidence as a girl (or a boy) when they interact with their classmates?

訪談老師

教師性別:

幼兒教育教學年資:

學歷: __________________________ 科系: __________________________

_____ 是 _______ 否曾接受性別教育訓練

(若“是”，請勾選: _____ 工作坊 _____ 研討會 _____ 在職訓練 ______ 正式學程)

_____ 是 _______ 否曾接受多元文化教育訓練

(若“是”，請勾選: _____ 工作坊 _____ 研討會 _____ 在職訓練 ______ 正式學程)

以下訪談著眼於下列目的: 一 為了解老師如何解釋新台灣之子的性別階層和種族背景 二 老師所看到的這群幼兒所顯現出來的社會秩序
三 了解課程中如何老師如何進行性別教育。為了解貴班孩子的性別角色意識，下列問題將針對老師如何解釋學生在課程活動中形成他們的性別 社會階層和種族意識。

一 學生行為觀察

1. 據你所知 性別教育平等法的目的有哪些?

你的學校需要運用到性別平等法的哪些內容?

2. 幼兒教育中哪些方面需要性別教育?

據你所知幼兒教育中的性別教育的內容是哪些?
你的課程單元中如何將這些主題設計在你的課程活動中?

3. 現有 ____ 位男生 ____ 位女生在貴班上？他們玩耍時的型態是:
   ______ 絕大多數男女生各自有各自的群聚 ______ 混和性別的群聚
   他們 ____ 會 ______ 不會常是同一群人玩在一起

4. 據你所觀察，請描述學生之行為:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>超過半數學生有此情況即可打V</th>
<th>男生</th>
<th>女生</th>
<th>例如:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active 活動性高</td>
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<td>Artistic 藝術氣息濃厚</td>
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<td>Challenging 願接受挑戰</td>
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<td>Comical 搞笑</td>
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<td>Creative 創意</td>
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<td>Concerned (for others) 關心他人</td>
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<td>Want to please others 取悅他人</td>
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<td>Energetic 精力充沛</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aggressive 具攻擊性</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agitator 擾亂他人</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attention seeker 尋求被注意</td>
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<tr>
<td>Noisy 吵鬧</td>
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<td>Quiet 安靜</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other 其他</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
二.教室內的活動觀察:
1. 男生們在室內活動中喜歡做哪些活動？女生們在室內活動中喜歡做哪些活動？
2. 男生們在室外活動中喜歡做哪些活動？女生們在室外活動中喜歡做哪些活動？
3. 貴班有任何女生在自由活動時喜歡扮演男生嗎？貴班有任何男生在自由活動時喜歡扮演女生嗎？
4. 哪些行為是你曾觀察到當男生與女生一起玩時他們會表現出來的行為？
   輪流 ____ 合作 ____ 分享 ____ 爭執 ____ 肢體性的攻擊他人 ____
   言語式的攻擊他人 ____ 其他 ____
5. 貴班，當男生跟女生在一起玩時，是男生們還是女生們扮演主導的角色？
6. 在與孩子們觀看及討論錄影帶後，瑪莉提出她的意見如下：_______________
   而你對這件事的看法是：__________________

三.關於對新台灣之子的觀察
1. 新台灣之子跟他的同學在以下領域有差別嗎
   社會性行為，例如：_____________________________________
   社會技巧，例如：_____________________________________
   學科表現，例如：_____________________________________
   家長參與，例如：_____________________________________
2. 茉莉家中，誰才是最主要照顧孩子的人？在她家，大人之間的互動關係怎樣？
   就外表來看誰是做主的決定孩子教養的人
3. 誰花較多的時間在教導茉莉的學校作業？是爸爸還是媽媽？還是兩個都有？
4. 所有的女孩都只跟女生玩嗎？
5. 所有的男孩都只跟男生玩嗎？
6. 當他們跟班上同學一起玩時，班上的新台灣之子都覺得很有信心做為一位女孩（或男孩）嗎？
7. 這群孩子知道自己是新移民媽媽的小孩嗎？他們曾向老師表示過什麼想法嗎？
   他們在跟同學相處時曾表現出些什麼做法和想法來展現自己的地位？
   他們的繪畫或美勞作品中曾透露出哪些他們對自己的定位認知？
8. 貴班同學知道他們是新移民媽媽的小孩嗎？
對於他們，其他同學有向老師表示過什麼想法嗎？
同學們在跟他們相處時曾表現出些什麼做法和想法來界定他們的身分嗎？
他們的繪畫或美勞作品中曾透露出哪些對他們的定位認知？
APPENDIX H

CONSENT FORM TO THE CHILDREN
Appendix H

Consent Form to the Children

Hi, (The children’s name):

My name is Yu-Hui. I would like to learn more about girls’ and boys’ learning when you play together in your kindergarten classroom.

I would like to sit in your classroom and see you play. I will take audio and video tapes when you play together and discuss with you about your play in the video tapes. I also like to see your drawing, writing, and block projects. If I visit your class, I will not disturb your class and your play.

Do you agree to let me visit your class? Do you have any questions before we start? If you want to stop at any time just tell me.

If you want me to sit in your classroom, please make “X”.
Yes, I do!  ____________

If you do not want me to sit in your classroom, please make “X”.
No, I do not want!  ________________

Witness Statement

I have witnessed the consent process and believe that the students listed above have been fully informed, understand the project and their role, and have voluntarily agreed to participate.

______________________________
Witness’s Signature  Date
小朋友同意書

親愛的小朋友：

您好！我是裕惠老師。

我正想了解小朋友們在學校中怎麼跟你的好朋友們玩在一起，所以我想請到你們班上來看你們，並且會用錄音機錄下你們的講的話；也會用錄影機錄下你們玩遊戲的樣子和你們的畫畫。我會陪你們在班上，但是絕不會干擾你們玩哦！然後我也會把我拍到你們玩在一起的影片播放出來請你們一起來觀賞討論哦！

你認為我可以來你們班跟你們在一起嗎？想想看有沒有什麼問題現在要問我的？

還有就算打了V以後也可以隨時要求不要被錄音或錄影。

如果你贊成我到你們班來看你們，就請你在____________打V。

如果你不贊成我到你們班來看你們，就請你在______打V。

見證人見證聲明書

我在此見證以下同意書簽署經過。

我確信學生們有被詳細告知研究人將隨班錄音和錄影討論，學生同意參與被研究。

________________________________________________________

簽署人簽名

日期
APPENDIX I

INTERVIEWS WITH THE CHILDREN
Appendix I

Interviews with the Children

Interview date: ________
The children in this interview group: _______________________________

Name: _______________ Age: ________
Months of studying in this class: ___________ Birthplace: ___________
Father’s birth place: ___________ Mother’s birthplace: ___________

Interviews with children (including the New Taiwanese Children) will focus on representing children’s understanding of meaningful ways to be gendered beings and examining their gendered social orders. My interview questions will focus on children’s current gender experiences in video episodes.

A. About gender performances

1. Who is your best friend in class? Is [Mary]/[John] a [girl]/[boy]? Does [she]/[he] look different from most [girls]/[boys] in this class?
2. Do you play with another girl or boy? What makes her (or him) special?
3. What group of girls/boys do you like to play with? Why?
   Because they are ____________________________________________________
   (e.g., nice, handsome, pretty, smart, helpful, talkative, loud, physically aggressive, do not follow play rules, etc.)
4. Your favorite toys are: _____________ play alone____ with my friends ____
   Your favorite TV programs (e.g., cartoons) are: __________________________
   Your favorite stories (books) are: __________________________
5. Do you like being a girl (boy)? Are there times when it is difficult to be a girl (or a boy)? What can girls do? What can boys do? What can both of girls and boys do?
6. Are you an elder (or younger) sister/brother in your family? Are there times when it is difficult to be an elder (or younger) sister (or a brother)? What sisters can do? What brothers can do?
7. Do you want to be a mother (a father) when you grow up? Why and why not?
8. What do you know about the tasks your mother (father) do in your home?

B. About videotape review and discussion
(For researcher only: the episode is about ________________________________)

1. What was happening in this video?
2. What were you doing in this video?
3. What did girls (boys) do in video? Do you like the things that happened in this video? Why?
   Because they were __________________________________________________
4. How do you feel about your self now after you watched this video? Anything you’d change in your play?
Other children’s play?
This is a translated copy of the Chinese version for the children.

Appendix H: 孩子的訪談記錄

訪談日期: ________
這一組被採訪的孩子的姓名: __________________________

姓名: ______________ 年齡: ________
已在這班級就讀幾個月: __________ 出生年月日: __________
父親的出生地: __________ 母親的出生地: __________

訪談對象將包括新台灣之子或他們的同學，訪談重點包括了解孩子們如何認為成為女生或男生的觀點還有他們所知的性別的社會次序。我的訪談問題將會針對他們在錄影帶中所錄到的性別的事件來提問。

A 項. 關於性別表現
1. 你得最好的朋友是誰?是哪個男生? 還是哪個女生?
2. 你還有沒有跟哪個女生或男生玩? 你的朋友有什麼特別吸引你的地方?
3. 你會喜歡跟哪些小朋友玩? 為什麼? 是因為: 漂亮?
5. 你最喜愛的玩具是什麼? 你通常自己玩? 還是喜歡跟朋友一起玩?
6. 你最喜歡的電視節目(卡通) 是哪些? 你最喜歡讀哪些故事書?
7. 你喜歡做女生(男生)? 哪些時候你覺得做女生(男生) 好困難? 你認為哪些事是女生能做的?
8. 哪些事是男生能做的? 哪些事是女生和男生都能做的?
9. 你是家裡的大姐姐(大哥哥) 嗎? 哪些時候你覺得做大姐姐(大哥哥) 好困難?
10. 哪些事是小妹妹(小弟弟) 能做的?
11. 你長大後想成為一位媽媽(或爸爸) 嗎? 為什麼? 或為什麼不?
12. 你知道你媽媽(或爸爸) 在家的時候都做些什麼事嗎?

B. 關於錄影的訪談和討論
(用於研究本題目: 這個故事是關於____________________)

1. 這段錄影記錄了些什麼?
2. 你在這段影片中做了些什麼?
3. 女生們(男生們) 在這影片中做了些什麼? 你為什麼喜歡? 為什麼不喜歡?
4. 你看了這段影片以後你現在覺得怎樣? 你會改變你遊戲的方式嗎?
5. 那你想其他小朋友會有所改變嗎?
APPENDIX J

CONSENT FORM TO THE PARENTS
Appendix J

Consent Form to the Parents

Dear Parents:

I want to learn more about how 5 and 6 years old boys and girls interact with each other, and how these interactions help them to learn more about who they are. Knowing more about 5 and 6 years olds will help teachers and parents be better able to meet these children’s learning needs. I would like you to let your child take part in this project. If you decide to do this, your child will be observed and interviewed. I will sit in their classroom for a 4 month period. I will not interrupt the class routine.

If your child takes part in this project, this study may benefit your child in her/his peer interaction. Taking part in this project is entirely up to you, and no one will hold it against your child if your child decides not to do it. Your decision to participant or not will not affect the classroom instruction or experiences for your child. If your child does take part, he or she may stop at any time.

If you want to know more about this research project, please call me at phone: 0021-330-677-6920 (U.S.) or 011-886-7-345-1411(Taiwan). My advisor, Dr. Janice Kroeger can be reached at: 0021-330-672-0617(U.S.). This project has been approved by Kent State University, Ohio, U.S. If you have questions about Kent State University's rules for research, please call Dr. Peter C. Tandy, Acting Vice President and Dean, Division of Research and Graduate Studies: 0021- 330- 672-2704 (U.S.).

You will get a copy of this consent form.

Sincerely,

Yu-Hui Chou
Ph.D. candidate,
The Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Kent State University, Ohio, U.S.A.
977 Allerton St.
Kent, Ohio 44242
330-677-6920

CONSENT STATEMENT(S)
I agree to let my child take part in this project. I know what he or she will have to do and that he or she can stop at any time.

__________________________________________  ________________
Signature                               Date

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家長同意書

親愛的家長

您好！我邀請您的孩子隨班參與我的研究。我將於今年九月到十二月期間到您孩子幼稚園的教室去做觀察與訪談。我的研究將著重於了解五到六歲大男孩與女孩的社會性別文化學習過程。我希望藉此助益於孩子學習多元文化及以及如何與同儕做朋友。並於日後將此研究成果發表分享台灣與國際幼教界。

我將要做的事會包括：1) 課室參訪：錄音與錄影孩子們的活動與事後訪談孩子關於錄影帶中的內容；2) 訪談班上小朋友關於他們對性別表現的看法；3) 以及邀請訪談幾位小朋友的媽媽談孩子的性別文化。

本研究將有助於孩子的學習、老師的教學與您對孩子的了解。因此請您簽署此同意書。我將在研究期間每週約花八小時隨班級活動進行參與觀察。此项教室參訪將不會干擾任何班級課程。您的決定是否允許您的孩子被觀察與訪談也將無損於您孩子的學習及整個班級的教學。此外，教室參訪期間你有權力隨時終止這同意契約。若是你有需要進一步了解這研究計畫，歡迎洽詢我在美國的電話是0021-330-677-6920，或是在台灣的電話是011-886-7-345-1411。我的指導教授是Dr. Janice Kroeger，洽詢電話是：0021-330-672-0617(U.S.)。研究計畫已被Kent State University, Ohio, U.S. 認可通過。

若是你有任何疑問請洽詢Kent State University研究規範辦法負責人是Kent State University的副校長及兼教務長及學術研究中心: Dr. Peter C. Tandy，洽詢電話是: 0021-330-672-2704(U.S.)。

一式二份的同意書請你於簽署後收下，感謝你！

周裕惠 敬上

周裕惠：現為Kent State University, Ohio, U.S.A. 課程與教學系博士候選人
聯絡現址為: 977 Allerton, St. Kent, Ohio 44242 USA

家長同意聲明

本人同意我的孩子隨班參與這個研究。我了解我在這研究中該配合的事項以及我有權隨時要求退出這項參與。

簽署人簽名 日期
APPENDIX K

CONSENT FORM TO THE MOTHER
Appendix K

Consent Form to the Mother

Dear Mothers:

I want to learn more about how 5 and 6 years old boys and girls interact with each other, and how these interactions help them to learn more about who they are. Knowing more about 5 and 6 years olds will help teachers and parents be better able to meet these children’s learning needs. I would like you to take part in this project. If you decide to do this, you will be interviewed about the learning needs of your son or your daughter. The interviews will be held three times in your home from September to November, 2007. The interviews will be around forty minutes. Your opinion is valued and confidential in this research.

If you take part in this project, I would like to know your expectation about your son or daughter’s performances in school and in the home. I also like to know your opinion about the differences and similarities of girls’ and boys’ learning in your homeland and in Taiwan. By discussing these topics, we can better understand your child’s learning needs. Taking part in this project is entirely up to you, and no one will hold it against if you decide not to do it. Your decision to participate or not will not affect the classroom instruction or the learning experience for your child. If you take part, you may stop at any time.

If you want to know more about this research project, please call me at phone: 0021-330-677-6920 (U.S.) or 011-886-7-345-1411(Taiwan). My advisor, Dr. Janice Kroeger can be reached at: 0021-330-672-0617 (U.S.). This project has been approved by Kent State University, Ohio, U.S. If you have questions about Kent State University’s rules for research, please call Dr. Peter C. Tandy, Acting Vice President and Dean, Division of Research and Graduate Studies: 0021-330-672-2704 (U.S.).

You will get a copy of this consent form.

Sincerely,
Yu-Hui Chou
Ph.D. candidate,
The Department of Curriculum and Instruction
Kent State University, Ohio, U.S.A.
977 Allerton, St.,Kent, Ohio 44242
330-677-6920

CONSENT STATEMENT(S)
I agree to let my child take part in this project. I know what he or she will have to do and that he or she can stop at any time.

________________________________________________________________________
Signature Date
親愛的媽媽：

您好！我將於今年九月到十二月期間到您孩子幼稚園的教室去做觀察與訪談。我的研究將著重於了解五到六歲大男孩與女孩的性別文化學習過程。我希望藉此助益於孩子學習多元文化及以及如何與同儕做朋友。並於日後將此研究成果發表於台灣與國際幼教界。

在此，我誠摯邀請您成為我研究中的訪談媽媽。我將會正式訪談您三次，每次約五十分鐘以內。訪談目的為了解更多您對您女兒或兒子的學習期待、日常生活的應對以及您對在此與您家鄉的生活經驗的看法。

參與本訪談將有助於您對孩子的了解，因此請您簽署此同意書。

我將在研究期間每週約花八小時隨班級活動進行參與觀察。此項教室參訪將不會干擾任何班級課程。您的決定是否參加本訪談也將無損於您孩子的學習及整個班級的教學。此外在訪談期間您有權力隨時終止這同意契約。

若是你有需要進一步了解這研究計畫，歡迎洽詢。我在美國的電話是0021-330-677-6920。或是在台灣的電話是011-886-7-345-1411。我的指導教授是Dr. Janice Kroeger。洽詢電話是: 0021-330-672-0617(U.S.)。本研究計畫已被Kent State University, Ohio, U.S. 認可通過。

若是你有任何疑問請洽詢Kent State University研究規範辦法，負責人是Kent State University的副校長及兼教務長及學術研究中心：Dr. Peter C. Tandy。洽詢電話是: 0021-330-672-2704(U.S.)。

一式二份的同意書請你於簽署後收下，感謝你！

周裕惠 敬上

周裕惠：現為Kent State University, Ohio, U.S.A.課程與教學系博士候選人。聯絡現址為: 977 Allerton St. Kent, Ohio 44242 USA。

家長同意聲明

本人同意被訪談，我了解我在這研究中該配合的事項以及我有權隨時要求退出。
APPENDIX L

INTERVIEWS WITH THE MOTHERS
Appendix L

Interviews with the Mothers

Interview date: ________    The mother’s name (optional) _____________
Birthplace: _________  Age: ___   How many months you have been in Taiwan: ______

Interviews with mothers will focus on understanding what immigrant female spouses expect and how they interpret their children’s gender, which include to understand the various gender expectations for a daughter or son and in daily life (e.g., eating, dressing, playing with toys) and the gender-doing patterns and gender social orders at the New Taiwanese Children’s homes.

Questions

1. Are females and males treated equally in your family (Southeast Asian countries) and in your hometown? Explain your answer.
   
   Educational opportunities ______________ Job Hunting _______________
   Salary _______________ Household duties _______________

2. What kind of female role did you play in your family and hometown?

3. What kind of expectations for girls and boys were in place in your family and hometown?

4. How do you perceive the types of game playing your child (daughter or son) engages in, in Taiwan? What are the differences when compared to your hometown?

5. Do you buy clothes for your daughter that is like what other girls wear? How are they the same? Do you buy different clothes for your sons? How are they different? Why do you buy different clothes?

6. Do you like your daughter to play sports with boys? Do you like your son to play sports with girls? How about in school, do you like your son to play with girls in his class? Do you like your daughter to play with boys in her class?

7. Do you want your daughter to pursue higher education in the future? What are your expectations for your daughter in the future?

8. Do you want your son to pursue higher education in the future? What are your expectations for your son in the future?
APPENDIX M

AUDIO/VIDEO TAPE CONSENT FORM TO THE KINDERGARTEN
Appendix M

Audio/Video Tape Consent Form to the Kindergarten

I agree to hold audio and video taping at Sea Star Kindergarten. Audiotapes will be used when interviewing the teacher, interviewing children, and interviewing mothers. Videotapes will be used when observing children’s dramatic play, free play, and artifacts files. My decision to participate Audio/Video tapes recording or not will affect the classroom instruction or experiences for the students.

The video/audio tapes are allowed to be used for:
1. This research (dissertation) ------- Yes _____ No _____
2. Academic conferences-------------- Yes _____ No _____
3. Educational purposes-------------- Yes_____ No _____

The participators own right to watch and to listen to the context of video/audio tapes, as well as own right to protect their privacy

____________________________________________
Signature                                             Date

I have been told that I have the right to hear the audio and video tapes before they are used. I have decided that I:

_____want to hear the audio tapes       _____do not want to hear the audio tapes
_____want to watch the video tapes       _____do not want to watch the video tapes

Sign now below if you do not want to watch/hear the audio/video tapes. If you want to watch/hear the audio/video, you will be asked to sign after watching/hearing them.

The original tapes or copies may be used for study in Yu-Hui Chou’s dissertation research, academic conferences, and educational purposes.

____________________________________________
Signature                                             Date

Address:
幼稚園錄音及錄影同意書

信華幼稚園同意周裕惠於研究參訪期間在本園錄音錄影，錄音用於訪問老師、小朋友及媽媽；錄影用於觀察小朋友的戲劇性遊戲、自由遊戲時間和繪畫等工藝作品。園所准予錄音及錄影與否都不會影響老師的教學與學生的學習。

本園允許此錄音及錄影帶使用於:
博士論文……………………… 是 ____ 否 ____
學術研討會 ………………… 是 ____ 否 ____
教育教學 ………………… 是 ____ 否 ____

本園擁有權利觀看與播放此錄音及錄影帶內容以及有權利保護幼兒的隱私。

____________________________

簽署人簽名

____________________________

日期

本園已被告知擁有權利於研究者使用此錄音及錄影帶內容之前可先行觀看與播放此錄音及錄影帶內容，我在此決定

要聽錄音帶內容 ______ 不要聽錄音帶內容 ______

要看錄影帶內容 ______ 不要看錄影帶內容 ______

若您決定不要聽錄音帶(不看錄影帶)內容，請簽署以下表格

本園允許將此原版資料使用於周裕惠的博士論文研究、學術會議和教育教學用途

____________________________

簽署人簽名

____________________________

日期

地址:

若您決定要聽錄音帶(看錄影帶)內容，請於觀聽候簽署以下表格

本園允許將此原版資料使用於周裕惠的博士論文研究、學術會議和教育教學用途

____________________________

簽署人簽名

____________________________

日期

地址:
APPENDIX N

AUDIO/VIDEO TAPE CONSENT FORM TO THE PARENTS
Appendix N

Audio/Video Tape Consent Form to Parents

I agree to let my child be audio and video taped for this project at Sea Star Kindergarten. Audiotapes will be used when interviewing my child. Videotapes will be used when observing my child’s dramatic play, free play, and artifacts files. Your decision to participate or not will not affect the classroom instruction or experiences for your child.

The video/audio tapes are allowed to be used for:
1. This research (dissertation) ------ Yes _____ No _____
2. Academic conferences----------- Yes _____ No _____
3. Educational purposes---------- Yes_____ No _____

The participators own right to watch and to listen to the context of video/audio tapes, as well as own right to protect their privacy.

______________________________________________  __________________
Signature                                          Date

I have been told that I have the right to hear the audio and video tapes before they are used. I have decided that I:

_____want to hear the audio tapes   _____do not want to hear the audio tapes
_____want to watch the video tapes   _____do not want to watch the video tapes

Sign now below if you do not want to watch/hear the audio/video tapes. If you want to watch/hear the audio/video, you will be asked to sign after watching/hearing them.

The original tapes or copies may be used for study in Yu-Hui Chou’s dissertation research, academic conferences, and educational purposes.

______________________________________________________________
Signature                                          Date
Address:
家長的錄音及錄影同意書（_______________的家長）

本人同意我的孩子被周裕惠在信華幼稚園研究參訪期間被錄音錄影。錄音用於訪問小朋友，錄影用於觀察小朋友的戲劇性遊戲、自由遊戲時間和繪畫等工藝作品。本人准予錄音及錄影與否都不會影響我孩子的學習。

本人同意此錄音及錄影帶使用於：
博士論文………………………是 _____ 否 _____
學術研討會……………………是 _____ 否 _____
教育教學 ………………………是 _____ 否 _____

本人擁有權利觀看與播放此錄音及錄影帶內容以及有權利保護我孩子的隱私。

______________________________
簽署人簽名

日期

本人已被告知擁有權利於研究者使用此錄音及錄影帶內容之前可先行觀看與播放此錄音及錄影帶內容。我在此決定：

要聽錄音帶內容 ______ 不要聽錄音帶內容 ______
要聽錄影帶內容 ______ 不要聽錄影帶內容 ______

若您決定不要聽錄音帶（不看錄影帶）內容，請簽署以下表格

本人允許將此原版資料使用於周裕惠的博士論文研究、學術會議和教育教學用途。

______________________________
簽署人簽名

日期

地址：

若您決定要聽錄音帶（看錄影帶）內容，請於觀聽後簽署以下表格

本人允許將此原版資料使用於周裕惠的博士論文研究、學術會議和教育教學用途。

______________________________
簽署人簽名

日期

地址：
APPENDIX O

IRB APPROVAL LETTER
Appendix O

IRB Approval Letter

Study: A Study of Gendering Culture of New Taiwanese Children in their Kindergarten Classrooms

September 12, 2007

Mr. Yu-Hsiu Chou
977 Allerton Street
Kent, OH 44240

Re: 08-30 – “A Study about Gendering Culture of Kindergarteners”

Dear Mr. Chou:

I am pleased to inform you that the Kent State University Institutional Review Board has given final approval for your Application for Approval to Use Human Research Participants as Level III research. This application was approved on September 4, 2007 and is good for one year.

HHS regulations and Kent State University Institutional Review Board guidelines require that any changes in research methodology, protocol design or principal investigator have the prior approval of the IRB before implementation and continuation of the protocol. The IRB further requests an annual report and a final report at the conclusion of the study.

A periodic review form will be sent following the marked end date of your protocol or within a year of the original date of approval of the application. Please complete the form and return it. If the project is expected to extend beyond the marked end date, please insert the new expected end date on the periodic review form. If the project is complete and all data analysis has concluded, please mark the appropriate box on the form. If data analysis is continuing, research is considered to be continuing.

Kent State University has a Federal Wide Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), FWA Number 00001853.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 330.672.2704, klight@kent.edu.

Sincerely,

Katherine Light
IRB Administrator

cc: Dr. Janice Kroeger
REFERENCES
REFERENCES


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