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Saudi Early Childhood Educators' Perceptions of Gender Roles in Children's Dramatic Play

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Saudi Early Childhood Educators' Perceptions of Gender Roles in Children's Dramatic Play

by

Dalal Alanazi

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Curriculum and Instruction with a concentration in Early Childhood Education
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Dedication

To the purest of two hearts in my life ... my dear parents who taught me that difficulties breed ambition.

To my hero in this journey who believed in me, supported me, and made my ambitions embrace the sky.....My faithful husband (Mohammed).

To my greatest sisters (Asma, Amal,& Wafa) ... who taught me that life without bonding, love and cooperation is worth nothing.

To my soul, the apple of my eyes, and the pulse of my heart..... My beautiful children (Talal, Lenna, & Ghaadah).

To her who shared my good and bad times, who was listening to my complaints and thoughts during writing this dissertation..... My best friend (Amani)

My work would not have been completed without your support, thank you, and for your efforts with me. I hope to make you proud.
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Abstract

This study was conducted in a unique time of cultural and social change in Saudi Arabia. The new Saudi Vision 2030 promotes gender equality, and it is within this context that I investigated four Saudi preschool teachers’ perceptions of children’s gender roles in dramatic play. I focused on how the teachers have responded to the current move to think differently about gender roles in the Saudi context and the relevant policy changes. Rogoff’s sociocultural theory, which highlights the significance of cultural contexts on peoples’ perceptions, framed the study. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the four Saudi teachers. As a result of thematic analysis, I constructed the following three major themes: a) teachers privileged families’ perspectives over policy b) teachers' maintained entrenched notions of appropriate gender roles in play and c) teachers' reluctance to apply gender-inclusive play recommendations. The findings revealed that the individual teacher’s education, interactions with children and their parents, and overall, Saudi cultural values, customs, and institutions shaped the teachers’ perceptions. This research contributes to the existing body of literature by filling the gap related to teachers’ perceptions of children’s gender roles in play in Arabic culture in general and particularly in Saudi Arabia. The findings from this study have implications for promoting awareness about gender equity and social justice in the early childhood field.
Chapter One

Introduction

As a Saudi preschool teacher, I live in a culture where male and female gender roles are clearly defined. These gender roles, based on the physical characteristics of each sex, are inherited across generations. Recently, because of changing circumstances and living needs, shifts have been occurring in the ways gender roles are viewed in Saudi culture. Saudi culture is struggling to shed an image of being extremely gender-segregated. This has come to the attention of early childhood educators (ECEs) because there is a feeling that the seeds of these attitudes are planted in early childhood in the way that adult caregivers and teachers transmit notions about children’s genders. Implicit attitudes about gender roles permeate Saudi educational settings and shape educators’ gender perceptions and practices in terms of how they pass on ideas about gender identification to the children that they teach.

As a Saudi preschool teacher, I saw gender as a fixed concept, with gender roles related to our biological sex differences. I thought our gender roles comprised innate characteristics and capabilities; thus, in preschool, I taught boys and girls differently and expected them to behave based on these gender stereotype roles, even in their play. For example, I let only boys participate in activities I identified with masculinity, such as riding a bike and playing soccer, and only allowed girls to play in art or dramatic play centers. However, in 2018, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman introduced relevant policy changes to promote gender equality and empower women in all fields in the Saudi context. These policy changes shifted my understanding of gender roles from a purely biological binary to a view of gender as a social construct. These current gender role moves in Saudi Arabia were prompted because Prince
Mohammed bin Salman believes that the defined gender roles in Saudi culture are the product of radical Islamic thoughts reflected in enacted laws and legislations that reinforce men’s dominance over women, gender segregation, and the narrowing of the role of Saudi women to within the scope of their homes. Therefore, these current moves seek to expand the role of Saudi women by empowering them, supporting their capabilities through rehabilitation, and providing opportunities to make them a true and effective partner in the country’s development. The most prominent initiatives undertaken by Saudi Arabia to empower women are allowing women to drive cars, abolishing the idea of gender segregation in public places, allowing women to join the military corps, creating jobs for women in all sectors (even in those that were reserved for men only), and treating a woman as an independent person who is not dependent on a man (Al-Dakhil, 2019). These new moves have been influencing Saudi society’s view of gender roles positively; people have accepted a more holistic view of gender roles and have begun to see that women should not be limited to a specific role. Saudi society now thinks about the issue of gender differently. In addition, since the new legislation, discussions of ideas about gender roles have become easier – as previously, it was completely unacceptable to talk about such a topic. The rapid change that has occurred in Saudi society regarding the concept of gender roles led me to realize that gender roles are something one does by “making situated behavioral choices in light of prevailing social conceptions of appropriate behavior and activities for one’s sex category” (Volkmann, 2018, p. 30). I realized that cultural expectations create our gender roles, and there is no one way or one truth to be a man or a woman.
Meland and Kalvedt (2019) defined gender roles as a cultural construction that emerges from the raw materials of biological sex. Chapman (2016) also stated that gender is a binary construct of society that characterizes people as either male or female, based on physical attributes, and then assigns them rigid roles depending on their femininity or masculinity. How gender roles are constructed and adopted differs among societies. Both Pradhan and Pelletier (2017) and Ramsey (2016) contended that gender roles are created based on perceived biological differences and cultural traditions, as opposed to the potential of a person. Therefore, in a given culture, individuals are supposed to adhere to and perform their gender roles as socialized (Lynch, 2015). A plethora of works suggests that how people construct their gender roles is imposed on individuals by their social environment (Chapman, 2016; Lynch, 2015; Mayeze, 2018; Meland & Kalvedt, 2019). Several scholars have also noted that the construction and entrenchment of gender roles are primarily done by peers, teachers, and parents, who have a significant social effect (Chapman, 2016; Lynch, 2015; Servos et al., 2016). With this awareness, I came to see the importance of increasing awareness of teachers’ own biases and perceptions of gender roles to avoid reproducing gender stereotype roles and perpetuating inequities related to gender differentiation. Therefore, I decided to investigate their perceptions of gender roles in children’s play.

According to Chapman (2016), the expression of gender roles in children begins at a young age. By the age of three, boys and girls display differing communication styles, activity choices, and preferences of same-sex playmates. Generally, children obtain their perceptions of appropriate gender roles and relate them with their social behaviors, interests, and personalities from different resources (Servos et al., 2016). These sources form children’s character traits, gender-stereotyped roles, behaviors, and the styles of their interaction with others (Lynch, 2015).
Family is the starting point that socializes children based on culturally acceptable gender roles (Chapman, 2016). The impact of cultural gender roles’ perceptions also extends to schools and shapes teachers’ perceptions of and attitudes toward gender roles, which are created by the cultural gender assumptions according to biological sex differences and identify gender roles based on these differences. For example, boys are seen as more active, energetic, and aggressive. However, girls are seen as kind and passive (Lynch, 2015). As a result, teachers pass these stereotypical gender perceptions to their students as they “provide this education through gendered role-modeling, passing along cultural meanings, and cultural objects” (Servos et al., 2016, p. 325).

Young children construct their gender roles from implicit and explicit messages in their environment (Ramsey, 2016). Therefore, they begin to recognize gender and adhere to gender roles in the context of their interactions with others in early childhood classrooms. According to Ramsey (2016), teachers’ gender stereotype perceptions of gender roles enforce children to uphold the same perceptions, even in their play. Previous studies have shown that children contribute to continuing gender stereotype perceptions of gender roles (Aina & Cameron, 2011; Ramsey, 2016; Volkmann, 2018). For example, Dewar et al. (2013) found that boys prefer to play in the construction learning center, play with trucks, and pretend to be masculine characters. However, girls tend to participate in dramatic play, play with dolls, and pretend to be feminine characters.

According to Servos et al. (2016), educators’ perceptions of gender roles influence children’s gender role modeling in dramatic play centers. Teacher perceptions can be described as teachers’ thoughts and mental images of gender roles that have been influenced by their upbringing and life experiences and have an impact on their practice (Chapman, 2016; Lynch,
Such mental image constructions influence how they think and undertake their duties, meaning that they also demonstrate how the teacher has been shaped by cultural and personal experiences (Dewar et al., 2013; Mayeza, 2018). Warin and Adriany (2015) argued that teachers’ perceptions of gender roles are greatly influenced by the political, cultural, and religious environments within which they operate. The description of teacher perceptions not only indicates their thoughts and attitudes toward gender roles but also recognizes the impact of the sources of personal and cultural knowledge in the development of these perceptions. Dramatic play is a type of play where children play different roles and create their own scenarios. Hence, teachers’ perceptions of gender roles become evident in their language and the play roles they have assumed that children need to take. While engaging in dramatic play, children observe or are pressured to conform to the different gender roles expected of them according to their biological differences.

Dramatic play may teach children about gender roles in an unfavorable way (Lynch, 2015). In designing and assigning toys and play roles to children, teachers actively separate female and male toys and roles, creating the notion that “certain toys and roles are for girls, and others are for boys” (Lynch, 2015, p. 16). Lynch (2015) researched the impact of gender practices of kindergarten teachers on children’s play in a dramatic play center. The teachers gave male toys and roles to boys, such as trucks and the superman character; however, they assigned feminine objects and fantasy characters, such as dolls and the Cinderella character, to girls. The teachers tried to foster gender role prejudices about the games and dramatics the children play (Lynch, 2015). Children’s early exposure to these forms of gender bias impacts how they shape their gender attitudes and perceptions of gender roles and influence their interpersonal relationships with others (Aina & Cameron, 2011). This shows that teachers’ gendered attitudes,
perceptions, language, and practices have a significant influence on how children construct their
gender role perceptions. With this awareness, I came to see the importance of heightening
awareness of Saudi teachers’ own perceptions of gender roles and their impact on children’s
gender role identification, especially in light of the Saudi government’s new moves to promote
gender equality in the Saudi context. Therefore, I decided to investigate Saudi teachers’
perceptions of gender roles in children’s dramatic play and how the new moves and relevant
policy changes regarding gender roles in the Saudi context let them think differently about these
roles in children’s dramatic play.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to better understand Saudi preschool teachers’ perceptions
of gender roles in children’s dramatic play. Particular attention was paid to how the teachers have
responded to the current move to think differently about gender roles in the Saudi context and the
policy changes that were related to this shift. In this study, I utilized a qualitative approach
(Creswell, 2013). The following overarching question guided the research: What perceptions do
Saudi ECEs hold about children’s gender roles in dramatic play?

**Definition of Terms**

*Dramatic play*: Children engagement in acting and pretense play. They play and practice
different social roles, such as the reincarnation of adult characters or other people, which makes
them integrate real experiences with fiction.

*Sex*: Biological sex differences and characteristics that people (male and female) are born with.

*Gender*: Social construction–determined behaviors and acts linked with but not determined by
biological sex. People’s cultural traditions and customs make them conceive what can be
considered either feminine or masculine.
**Gender roles:** Cultural beliefs about the appropriate behaviors, interests, and attitudes for males and females created based on their biological sex differences.

**Gender segregation:** The physical separation of females and males and prevention of mixing between them in public places, work, or play. This is part of Saudi culture.

**Gender socialization:** The process of passing adult expectations of the roles of being male and female to children. This includes how they behave and act in ways considered appropriate for males and females, according to cultural expectations.

**Sharia:** Sharia is defined as what God has prescribed to people for the rulings that Prophet Mohammed brought, regardless of these rulings are belief judgments or practical provisions to believe in him.

**Theoretical Framework**

Sociocultural theory provided me with a lens through which to explore ECEs’ perceptions of gender roles in children’s dramatic play. A sociocultural perspective focuses on how people interact with their culture and their social nature embedded in their personal environment (Rogoff, 2003). A teacher’s perception of gender is closely linked to their cultural environment and surroundings (Rogoff, 1995, 2003). The development of an individual must be viewed from the perspective of their social and cultural-historical context (Rogoff, 2003).

In her research, Rogoff (1995) elucidated the sociocultural framework through the eyes of Vygotsky’s understanding. Vygotsky (1978) opined that the objective of the sociocultural approach is to illuminate the interrelation between human perceptions and the context in which the perceptions happen in terms of culture and history. Typically, human beings interact, work, and live in group settings. A large proportion of human beings’ opinions and activities originate from their social interactions with other people and objects. As Rogoff (1995) noted, the aspect
of “involvement” (p. 141) determines how relationships in social and cultural environments are constructed. Typically, human interactions are mainly purposeful and meaningful. The association between people and objects, humans and environments, human actions and events, and so on lead to the development of social norms and perceptions of the subject matter. These are basically the specific ways in which the social behaviors and perceptions of people are socially accepted by a large percentage of people in the group. Rogoff’s (1995, 2003) suggestions are insightful for the process of examining human perceptions and their relation with culture. These insights shed light on the value of people and the environment involved in forming these human perceptions.

The ideas shared by Rogoff (2003) concerning sociocultural theory urge researchers to gather data and information that relate to the personal, interpersonal, and cultural dimensions. I perceived this model to be useful for obtaining a holistic understanding of my study. Hence, I viewed it as appropriate to use the dimensions of sociocultural theory in the current study. To elucidate ideas, Rogoff (2003) employed a range of visual representations. The personal dimensions pay attention to an individual and mainly focus on individual information.

Nevertheless, when exploring personal information such as the surroundings of a teacher, the cultural dimension and interpersonal information must also be assessed to have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the teacher perceptions of the topic of gender roles in children’s dramatic play. If the focus is mainly on the associations between the people surrounding the teachers and the way they perceive gender roles, the critical aspect is primarily to explore the teachers’ interpersonal relationships. However, to obtain a better understanding of the interpersonal dimension, it is crucial to have a clear understanding of culture and individual teachers.
Another critical dimension is the cultural dimension. For this dimension, the main focus of the researcher was on the gender perceptions of the teacher in the context of customs and cultural aspects – for instance, the gender perceptions of the teacher happening in a dramatic play context, considering Saudi Arabia’s culture and heritage. Rogoff’s theory (2003) enabled me to examine the personal, interpersonal, and cultural levels in gathering and assessing data in segments as opposed to evaluating data at the same time.

Significance of the Study

Pradhan and Pelletier (2017) indicated that there is a lack of research on teachers’ perceptions of gender roles and their impact on children’s play. According to Lynch (2015), teachers’ gender perceptions of gender roles play a critical role in how children construct their gender – which, as a result, shapes their gender perceptions and expectations. Therefore, teachers’ awareness of the impact of their gender perceptions on children’s gender perception construction of gender roles could create a platform where boys and girls can compete fairly and interact freely, thus enhancing good understanding and healthy competition among children (Mayeza, 2018).

This study investigated the following aspects: (1) gender perceptions of Saudi ECEs about gender roles in children’s dramatic play and (2) how the teachers have responded to the current move in Saudi policies to think differently about gender in the Saudi context and relevant policy changes. This study sought to fill the gap in the literature related to teachers’ gender perceptions and children’s gender roles in play in Arabic culture and particularly in Saudi culture.

Saudi culture was enhancing the sex segregation concept between females and males through separation practices in schools, work, hospitals, and other things. Although Saudi
Arabia’s new legislation toward gender roles has eliminated gender segregation practices in public facilities, these practices have widened the gender gaps and still promote gender role expectations. This is because of the already established social norms that are being transferred from one generation to the other in this society. Children are still being taught these gender roles and are expected to practice their gender roles at a young age, even in their play. This study is unique because it is one of the first studies that seeks to understand teachers’ gender perceptions and children’s gender roles in play context in Arabic culture and particularly in Saudi culture. This study is exceedingly significant because it was conducted in a unique time of cultural and social change in Saudi Arabia as a result of the Saudi new vision 2030. Thus, it is one of the first studies to capture changes in Saudi teachers’ perceptions toward gender roles in the Saudi context and children’s play.

In addition, this study utilized a sociocultural lens and three planes of analysis: the personal, interpersonal, and cultural dimensions. Using these three planes of analysis allowed the researcher to put society and cultural practices surrounding gender in perspective and explore their relevance in a modern societal context, as they permeate educational settings and shape the way educators pass on ideas about gender roles to the children that they teach (Riley, 2014). The findings of this study provide a new research path for those interested in searching for these topics in the field of early childhood in some cultures (such as Arab culture) with little research about this topic, which may have a positive impact on children’s learning and development.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I detailed the purpose and significance of the study. I described the sociocultural perspective that informs my understanding of teachers’ gender perceptions of gender roles in children’s dramatic play context. Furthermore, I offer a review of the existing
literature on gender perceptions of ECEs, the impact of culture on ECEs’ perceptions of gender roles as a potential reason behind these perceptions, and the cultural and ecological aspects of early childhood education in Saudi Arabia.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

The previous chapter discussed how children construct their gender perceptions, gender stereotypes in children's play, the significance of this study, teachers' perceptions of children's gender roles in the play, which indicated the need to investigate their influence on children's gender construction. In this chapter, I will discuss the following points. First, I will give an overview of the definition of dramatic play and the relationship between dramatic play and child development in general and social-emotional development in particular. Next, I will present the impact of children's gender on their dramatic play. Then, I will discuss early childhood teachers' gender perceptions in overview and its effect on children's gender perceptions and dramatic play roles. Also, the impact of culture on ECEs' perceptions will be discussed. Lastly, I will provide an overview of the cultural and ecology of early childhood education in Saudi Arabia, which will include the impact of Saudi culture and Islamic religion on Saudi teachers' gender perceptions.

I conducted my literature review search by using electronic and bibliographic as main two phases to my search by using the following databases: ERIC, EBSCO, Google Scholar, and ProQuest. I used the following to find the articles: Dramatic play, Gender in dramatic play, gender differences in play, gender roles in play, preschool gender play, teachers' gender beliefs in play, gender in dramatic play, and gender socialization in play, gender in Islam, gender in Saudi Arabia, gender roles in Islam, gender in Saudi education.

Dramatic Play

Dramatic play is one of the significant play types which also known as a make-believe play, fantasy and pretend play. Vygotsky (1978) described pretend play as one of the significant
features of early childhood and window for many aspects of a child's development Howe and his colleagues (1993) defined dramatic play as "children's active engagement" when they play roles, transform and substitute the situations and objects in a nonliteral way (p.236). Lillard and his partners (2013) agreed with the definition by stating that dramatic play is a kind of play activities that characterized by "as-if" stance, this means children's substitution of an object to another in their pretense (p. 2). For example, children's use a plastic banana as a telephone in their scenario or a toy as if it is a baby. In these cases, children's actions toward these objects do not have a real effect on it because it occurs within a context of pretend world, which is separate from the reality (Weisberg, 2015). Thus, in dramatic play, children create an imaginary situation and transfer the meanings from one object or situation to another besides their adoption and enacting for different roles. Robertson, Yim & Paatsch (2018) mentioned in their study that dramatic play includes six behaviors: (1) children's substitution the meanings of the objects or actions; (2) children's' role-playing when they act like someone else; (3) children's creation for complex themes and pretend the actions and situations that are driven by that theme; (4) rich discussion and narration in children's planning for play or telling a story; (5) children's collaboration with their peers; and (6) children's continues for playing the scenario for several hours. These different definitions agreed that when children engage in pretend play, they adopt many roles and assume these roles' responsibilities in scenarios that mimic their real-world and performing tasks that relate to these roles.

Themes of children's dramatic play vary based on their mental development (Howe et al., 1993). First, children's pretend play involves familiar home scenarios, such as mealtime. Second, they act out rescue situations, like a sick baby. Then, their themes improve to include unexpected threats, such as monsters (Howe et al., 1993). Ashiabi (2007) identified three categories for the
themes of children's dramatic play: family, character, and functional roles. Family roles include children act as one of the family members, such as a father, mother, or so on. Character roles are when children pretend to be a stereotyped or fictional characters, such as Superman, Princess, or Ninja Turtle. Family and character roles do not need specific action plans to be expressed according to them. However, functional roles are always identified based on concrete action plans. For example, children's play as a doctor or policeman, so they have specific roles to play with them.

Besides the development of the themes in children's pretend play, children's tendencies to pretend play also develops. Children begin the early stages of pretense from one year and a half to three years old, as observed in children's play (Bredikyte, Brandisauskiene, & Sujetaite-Volungeviciene, 2015). Children's in this age play with real objects, and they rarely take a role and follow the rules of this role.

When children's age turned to four years, the level of their pretend play becomes higher. So, they start to play “with substitute objects, and sometimes with imaginary objects, they might create a role but not always follow the rules of their roles” (Bredikyte et al., 2015, p. 183). In this age, peers also can play in role positions with them, and their play becomes on the level of play actions and events; however, the long episodes and adventurous plots are still rare (Bredikyte et al., 2015).

Children in the age of six to seven years old become more engaged with elaborated forms of dramatic play (Bredikyte et al., 2015; Weisberg, 2015). They play equally “with substitute and imaginary objects, assume roles, and follow their rules and change the rules based on their interests” (Bredikyte et al., 2015, p.183). They also play with real or imagined partners in roles. Their pretend play becomes more complex and plays adventures and long episodes
(Bredikyte et al., 2015). These forms of pretend play development show that children's fantasy play reaches its highest level between the age of four to seven years old, which called a "high season" of pretend play (Weisberg, 2015, p.250).

**Dramatic Play and Child Development**

Vygotsky described pretend play as the "leading activity" in child development and learning through the early years of his/ her life (Johnson et al., 2012). Children in dramatic play use their imagination to develop creative re-working of situations and events from their real-life to make meaning from them (Robertson, 2016). Bodrova & Leong (2007) stated that children engage in a high level of cognitive processes which associate with higher-order thinking, such as “problem-solving, reflective thinking, self-regulation, and perspectives taking when they construct their understanding of the world through play” (Robertson, 2016, p.25). Dramatic play also provides a crucial opportunity for preschool children's development and learning, which include children's' obtaining of executive functions, language and literacy, and social skills (Robertson, 2016).

**Dramatic Play and Socio-Emotional Development**

Children's emotions which are presenting children's reactions to situations while social development defines as children's interaction with peers and their formulation the relationships. The reason behind the relation between social and emotional development is because the children's social interactions are emotionally charged (Ashabi, 2007). Chapman (2015) emphasized that successful social interactions need children to experience and express their emotions appropriately, understand peers' feelings, and regulate their emotions.

Social-emotional development not just influences children's emotions and relationships; it also impacts children's "school readiness, school adjusting, and functioning in groups in school
settings” (Goldstein & Lerner, 2017, p. 2). Several studies show that “children who come from low social-emotional skills (SES) household are at risk of starting the school with social-emotional skills and self-regulation delays” (Goldstein & Learner, 2017, p. 2). The delay of SES is almost often related to negative social and academic achievement outcomes, such as aggression, bullying, behavioral problems, and low achievement (Ashiabi, 2007).

Dramatic play is considered as one of the significant activities which enhance children's social-emotional abilities. Through dramatic play child engage in non-real action, pretend characters, emotions, or behavior, which train their attentional control and increase their executive function skills, which enhance their emotional understanding and control and develop their social interactions (Weisberg, 2015). Through dramatic play, children are required to assume roles, communicate with peers to discuss these roles, resolve the conflicts linked with peers' interactions, think about peers' feelings and the appropriate way to respond to these feelings, and follow the rules of their roles and the play setting. All these experiences lead the children to become more aware of other children and themselves relationships. Pretend play allows the children to realize that their interests and desires may not match peers' desires. Such understanding builds children's self-awareness and develops their empathy and social knowledge and relationships (Ashiabi, 2007).

Since pretend play build critical social-emotional skills, it also develops children's self-regulation. Johnson and his colleagues (2012) defined the self-regulation as and a process of executive function that is practicing control of one's desires, motivations, emotions, and cognitions. According to Vygotsky (1978), pretend play allows children to develop self-regulation as they assume imaginary events, act different roles, and follow the rules which implicit in the play scene. Thus, pretend play provides a significant play environment for
children to exercise their overcoming impulses and manage their behavior. Also, children's interaction with play partners in dramatic play enhances the rich and private speech dialogue (Ashiabi, 2007). So, more play partners impact the private speech of the preschoolers as the child discuss the instructions of their action roles. Self-regulation also helps children learning about how to work with groups, how to share, discuss, resolve the conflicts that happen during play, and become emotionally stronger (Weisberg, 2015).

Moreover, pretend play can promote the self-regulation of children's own learning. During play, children put their challenges and identify their interests and plans. These cognitive mechanisms can help children to use their imagination and creativity to solve the problems. In this situation, "children create their own zone of proximal development and are self-scaffolded in play" (Johnson et al., 2012, p.267). This shows dramatic play provides children with opportunities and appropriate environment to follow their desires and passions of explorations and inventions, which, as a result, impact the school achievement. Therefore, children's rich experiences in pretend play that promoted by adults are the most effective ways to make sure that children obtain self-regulation skills, which essential to their school's success in both academically and socially aspects.

Dramatic Play and Children's Gender

According to Meland & Kalvedt (2019), gender identity has a significant impact on children's lives. It constructs their beliefs and behaviors according to what it means to be a boy and a girl. There are two dominant perspectives on gender definition. The first perspective views gender as biological conditioning (Meland & Kalvedt, 2019). This view of gender makes it as a synonym for sex. Researchers who hold these perspectives argued that the girls and boys have different brains “as a result of the characteristics that our ancestors needed to survive” (Meland&
Kalvedt, 2019, p.95). Therefore, boys prefer aggressive play, and girls prefer family role-playing games. The other perspective which I agree with is gender is social construction in which language plays a majored role in how children learn their gender codes (Davis, 2003).

Butler (1990) argued that how children and adult doing gender "is a performance that socially and culturally constructed, and mediated by other" (p. 6). Cultures create their gender assumptions according to the biological sex differences and identify gender roles based on these differences. These gender stereotyping perceptions about “how boys and girls should behave and play transferred to children” (Meland & Kalvedt, 2019, p.100). Boys are expected to be more active, strong, and aggression. However, girls are seen as kind and passive (Davis, 2003; Lynch, 2015). These gender stereotypes beliefs and attitudes toward gender force children to upholding the same gender stereotypes perceptions even in their play. For example, in plays relating to social context, boys and girls appear to have similar frequency and type of play is similar across the two genders (Goble, Martin, Harnish & Fables, 2012). When selecting roles during plays, often the children will opt for roles that are more conversant with their genders (Martin & Halverson, 1981). Boys assume fatherly roles while girls adopt motherly roles or those that they associate with women.

Early childhood teachers play an essential role in children's gender construction (Mayeza, 2018). Therefore, their observation for children's play in a dramatic play center is critical to discover children's gender practices and language. Since children in dramatic play different roles and create their own scenarios, their gender beliefs and perceptions become evident in their language and the roles they assumed. This exploration enhances the teacher's understanding of how they can interact with children and change their gender stereotypes beliefs by helping them to reconstruct their gender understanding. Although, change the gendered materials in dramatic
play can limit gender stereotypes in children's dramatic play, it not a beneficial way in common cases because children's gender beliefs will not change. Therefore, reconstruct children's gender beliefs is the best way to eliminate gender stereotype roles and to create an inclusive classroom where boys and girls are equal, and they have equal learning opportunities.

**Gender Perceptions of Early Childhood Educators**

Currently, there is a concern about the impact of gender and teachers' gender perceptions on educational opportunities, including early childhood education (Pradhan & Pelletier, 2017). So, examining gender perspectives of early childhood teachers is essential to gain more understanding about their classrooms' decisions and practices. However, this topic only have been investigated in few studies in contexts like the UK, Canada, Australia, Sweden, Indonesia, and Pakistan (Browne 2004; Dewar et al., 2013; Lynch, 2015, Pradhan & Pelletier, 2017; Servos et al., 2016; Warin & Adriany, 2015). In these all studies, teachers have not gained any professional development training about gender issues. Also, their own experiences are the major influences on their gender understanding and perceptions. Generally, when teachers' have been asked about the differences in children's gender, their answers were based on observable sex differences (Browne, 2004; Lynch, 2015; Servos et al., 2016; Warin & Adriany, 2015). They also reflected the gender gap in their differential views of boys and girls when they described the characteristics of the gender as opposites (Dewar et al., 2013; Lynch, 2015). So, teachers' descriptions of boys' characteristics involved boys' constructivists' beliefs, active practices in learning, and deviating thinking. For example, they looked at boys as active (Dewar et al., 2013), builders, strong, less-teachable (Servos et al., 2016), risk-takers (Lynch, 2015), and problem solver. On the other hand, they viewed girls as passive, quiet (Browne, 2004), artistic (Lynch, 2015), more teachable, complaint, and motherly (Servos et al., 2016).
Teachers' views about the origin of gender differences are influenced by the discourses that associate gender formation and behaviors with the biological sex differences between males and females (Chapman, 2016; Pradhan & Pelletier, 2017). In that view, teachers simply look at girls' and boys' differences as 'being born with.' Furthermore, teachers may refer to gender as a social construction and aware of gender issues in classrooms. However, they use biological differences interpretations to handle or discuss these gender issues (Dewar et al., 2013). For example, in Lynch (2015) study teachers who perceived gender as a social construction at the beginning of interview, they tended to explain it from biological differences' view at the end, especially when they described how children's preferred to play with traditional gender toys rather than neutral toys that are available in play centers. In Meland and Kaltvedt (2019) study which aims “to explore the gender patterns in the student kindergarten teachers' observations during their work experience” (p.95). They observed 40 teachers “in connection with three weeks' work experience across 20 kindergartens in Canada” (p.95). The results of their study found that staff contributes to upholding traditional gender patterns by identifying children's gender based on how they look, what they do, sex characteristics, and play types that appropriate to their sex.

Teachers' beliefs about the origin of gender differences have a significant impact on their perceptions in children's play. Most of the teachers in the studies that have been taken place in Western contexts viewed the gender boundaries in children's play as a natural difference between boys and girls. In Mayeza's (2018) study, one of the teachers stated that boys and girls like different things because they are different. For example, boys like to play with rough play and in the construction area because they are naturally rough and good thinkers. In contrast, girls prefer to play with dolls and family themes because of their empathy higher than boys. In the same
study, when the researcher asked teachers about how they encourage children to push gender boundaries in their play, teachers became wonder why boys want to play with the dollhouse, and they have many boys' toys in the construction area. Teachers in Chapman's (2016) study agreed with the previous teachers' views in children's play, so they mentioned that boys and girls have different types of play that appropriate for the sex differences capabilities. As boys have higher energy levels they like to play aggressively; however, girls should play in what is appropriate with their cultural, social characteristics. Thus, girls were viewed as less daring and more concerned about others' views for them if they try non-cultural feminine activities. Boys were perceived to hesitate to enter the home and kitchen area and try 'girls things,' from teachers' view (Pradhan & Pelletier, 2017).

Furthermore, these studies showed that there is a difference between teachers' interaction with boys and girls play. Also, many teachers' pointed out that they stop or redirect boys' play if they choose to play in dramatic play (Lynch, 2015). According to Granger and his colleagues (2016) study, teachers reward and give positive feedback to children's who play with traditional gender-stereotyped activities: boys for engaging to masculine activities, such as play in construction area or play with bikes; girls for engaging in feminine activities, such as house area and play with dolls. In the same study, Granger and his partners found that teachers use many types of punishment, such as "criticism, diversion, and disruption" to direct children's engagement with non-traditional gender stereotypes activities (p.500). Thus, these studies showed that teachers tend to reinforce traditional gender stereotypes activities in children's play, particularly for boys.
The Impact of Culture on Teachers' Perceptions

Teachers' gender perceptions vary according to the gender discourses that are available in their culture. Chapman (2016) stated that every teacher has individual experiences and beliefs about the gender concept. So, the difference in their responses and perceptions about gender is a result of deep-rooted gender values and stereotypes they gain from their surroundings. Warin and Adriany (2015) made a comparative study between teachers' perceptions about gender differences in Indonesia and Sweden. Most of the Indonesian preschool teachers' referred to gender as biological sex differences and related their argument with religion (Islam) discourse. Teachers mentioned that gender differences are "innate" characteristics, so they are essential and non-changeable. Therefore, we need to protect these characteristics and don't disrupt them.

On the other hand, Swedish preschool teachers perceived gender differences from the social construction view. It is essential to mention that in the Muslim context of Indonesia, gender quality is recently begun to associate it with education, and policymakers started to create a policy for gender equity in education. Sweden, in contrast, has a well-established policy for gender equity in childcare and education for many years. Thus, such this study emphasizes that teachers shape their gender beliefs and attitudes from “the cultural, political, and religious contexts of their countries” (Pradhan & Pelletier, 2017, p.75).

Culture of Early Childhood Education in Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Before starting a discussion about early childhood education in Saudi Arabia, I would provide you with an overview of Saudi Arabia. Then, I will discuss Islam and Saudi cultural views about gender. Lastly, I will discuss how these views impact Saudi education, including early childhood. This will help you to understand how Saudi culture, which is influenced by Islam, shapes the vision of early childhood education in Saudi Arabia.
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is located in South West of Asia in the Arabian Peninsula and covers an area of 2,149,6901 square kilometers. It is thus the third-largest country in terms of its land area. The state borders Jordan and Iraq to the north, Kuwait to the northeast, and Bahrain to Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, the south to Yemen, Oman to the southeast, and the eastern to the Arabian Gulf and the Red Sea (Alsadan, 2000). Arabic is the official language in Saudi Arabia, and English has become widely spoken in recent years.

Saudi Arabia is the birthplace of Islam and home for the two holiest places in Islam (Latif, 2015). So, people's habitat and the way of life in Saudi Arabia is influenced by Islamic Sharia (moral laws of Islam) (Alsadan, 2000). Saudi people reflected Sharia in their characters, customs, and traditions. Thus, Islam is dominant and influence every part in Saudi people life (Alsadan, 2000). Furthermore, all Saudi gender policies are created based on Sharia and go around a sex-segregated society (Latif, 2015). According to these laws, men and women are treated differently, with unequal rights.

Islam, Gender, and Saudi Culture

There is a popular point of view that Islam is the primary reason for gender stereotypes, particularly in women's rights in Islamic countries, like Saudi Arabia. Islam calls for equality between men and women. However, the conservative interpretations of Islam that created by men have given men power over women (Moaddel, 2007). According to Kucinskas (2010), the complex and "multifaceted nature of religious texts, identity, beliefs, and practices" are the reasons for the Islam interpretations' mistake (p. 761). Therefore, religious scholars used Islam as a cover to justify and protest women's rights.
The patriarchal interpretations of Islam have made Saudi society more conservative, especially regarding women's issues (Alsadan, 2000). Saudi Arabia has its culturally own gender ideology, which related to a strongly patriarchal discourse in the views of gender and the expectations of gender norms. This gender ideology forms men's and women's gender roles and power relations. Thus, Saudi men and women are expected to follow, act, and behave based on these culturally appropriate roles. Women's roles are created according to women's duties as mothers and wives, so girls socialized to take care of others and prepare them to be good wives and mothers in the future. In contrast, men are ready to be fathers, community builders, and leaders. So, these gender stereotypes roles limited men's and women's knowledge in specific fields that fit with Saudi cultural expectations for gender characteristics.

**Gender and Education in Saudi Arabia**

Saudi government practices have supported Saudi cultural expectations for gender roles. Alswaida (2016) stated that the Saudi government performs gender-specific goals in its institutions, including education. For example, the purposes of women's education emphasize through the curriculum, the nurturing, and reproductive roles for women (Moaddel, 2007). Beside the gender segregation in schools, Saudi education curriculums are different between girls and boys. For example, subjects of sports, engineering, and archaeology are offered just for boys. Gender stereotypes in textbooks and unequal access of girls and boys to certain subjects are examples of how the Saudi educational system enhances gender binary and division between boys and girls.

**Early Childhood Education in Saudi Arabia**

Although education is gender-segregated in all levels in Saudi Arabia, early childhood education is a mixed-gender. Early childhood education in Saudi Arabia involves the age of 3 to
8 years old. All the early childhood teachers are females because this study major is offered just in women universities, as this field is considered culturally appropriate for them. The reason behind making early childhood education is mixed gender because of the stakeholders' beliefs that early childhood education level is an extension of 'mothering' (Pradhan, 2011). Thus, it is beneficial for children at this age to study with female teachers because they understand children's needs than men.

**Gender Practices in Saudi Preschools**

According to Abo Baker (2005), Arab culture, "including Saudi Arabia," is very obsessed with the separation of children by gender and assigning expected roles for each gender. Girls are provided with toys that help them prepare for caretaker roles while boys' toys generally prepare them for higher cognitive and respected careers. These messages bombard children from a young age in both the home and school environments. According to Servos et al. (2016), children are first exposed to gender dynamics in the home setting, which follows the cultural expectations of gender roles, and it shapes their attitudes and beliefs about gender later in life.

The resistance that gender inclusivity of play faces can be traced to rigid perceptions in the culture about what masculinity and femininity are. Introducing alternative ideas is, therefore, taboo in many societies, with connotations of homophobia emerging (Pradhan & Pelletier, 2017). Masculinity is particularly a very safe asset, and this explains the backlash boys face for experimenting with feminine items. Masculinity is propped in many cultures in a rigid code of behavior that demands courage, physicality, adventurousness, and competitiveness (Fine, 2011). Anything nuance to this construct of masculinity is considered homosexuality. Boys who fail to meet the threshold of "hegemonic masculinity" are therefore perceived to be homosexual (Mayeza, 2018). In Saudi Arabia, these notions are much more pronounced owing to the
conservative nature of society and the rigid application of gender expectations. The highly masculine-obsessed tendencies of society also impose strict codes of conduct and being on girls, aimed at providing exclusive privileges to men and boys as a reward for their masculinity. It is, therefore, conceivable that the Saudi system would be much more resistant to changes in the conditioning of preschool children in their process of gender identification.

Although children at this level are mixed gender in Saudi Arabia, they perceive and act gender stereotype roles in the classrooms. According to Riley (2014), teachers have a substantial bearing on children's perception of gender differences. Many teachers introduce children to the awareness of gender of variance by offering children materials and equipment that facilitate same-sex play or by involving them in roles which encourage gender boundaries thus inhibiting interaction (Chapman, 2016; Dewar, Servos et al., 2016; Geraldo & Colyar, 2012). Teachers also may encourage gender segregation through school work, which may further facilitate stereotyped behaviors (Chapman, 2016; Lynch, 2015). In Alswaida (2016), the lonely study conducted in Saudi kindergarten classrooms' context, she observed that teachers allow just for boys to play soccer and let just for girls to play in dramatic play because it is the appropriate kind of play for their gender. Even in the classrooms' jobs, teachers often assign boys for leading jobs, such as door holders and assign girls with roles that need to take care of someone or something, such as helping other peers to open a sandwich. Thus, Saudi children from a young age are groomed to follow the traditional gender roles and power relations created by culture.

**Chapter Summary**

The use of categorization is an important tool that the human brain uses to conceptualize the world but often leads to over-generalizations in the way we perceive and interact with others. As such, biases based on gender, race and, religion, among others, are used to attribute outcomes
such as academic achievement and character. In the educational setting, teachers' observation and recommendations of student progress and placement can be affected by bias created by cultural assumptions and personal values, and this often becomes the first step in identification. As such, students' interaction with gender subjects is subject to the teachers' perceptions and teaching. This goes some way in explaining the underrepresentation of certain groups in higher-tracked classes (Riley, 2014). Over the course of a child’s life, the teachers’ perception of the learner in relation to gender influence learners' gender perceptions constructions and their social-emotional development (Riley, 2014).

The division of gender “emerges and develops in early childhood, so that can affect both children’s choice of play materials and gender roles during pretend play, and their social interactions with their peers and environment” (Jing & Hui Li, 2014, p.261). According to Ramsey (2015), children in early childhood “actively look for gender-related cues and find an abundance of them in highly sex-differentiated and stereotyped media images and consumer products” (p.66). Ramsey (2014) warns that teachers who use the gendered stereotypes forms restrict children from expressing divergent behavior even where it may be beneficial.

In this chapter, I highlighted in more depth the issue of the impact of teachers' gender perceptions about children's gender roles in the play and their impact on children's gendered perceptions and practices. I provided an overview of Saudi Arabia and Saudi early childhood education. I also summarized the impact of religion and Saudi culture on the Saudi education system and teachers' gender perceptions and practices in Saudi preschools.

In chapter three, I outlined this study's research design. The chapter highlighted the steps I took for gaining access to the settings, and the participants who took part in this research. I also addressed the methods used to collect the data, and a brief discussion on the procedures.
implemented to collect the data. I then discussed the trustworthiness of this study and its ethical considerations.
Chapter Three

Methods

The purpose of this study was to better understand Saudi ECEs’ perceptions of gender roles in children’s dramatic play, with a focus on how the teachers have responded to the current move in Saudi policies to think differently about gender. I posed the following question: What perceptions do Saudi ECEs hold about children’s gender roles in dramatic play? In this chapter, I discuss the methodological approach, the context, data sources, and the data analysis process. I also discuss trustworthiness and the ethical considerations involved in this study, along with the timeline for the interview process.

Research Design

Creswell (2013) stated that qualitative interviews are an appropriate approach when attempting “to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4). Qualitative interviewing is a research method that allows researchers “to talk to those who have knowledge of or experience with the problem of interest” (Creswell, 2013, p. 3). According to Punch (2009), researchers use interviews to explore the realities of their participants and delve into their experiences. Interviews provide a description of the participants’ meaning making of the subject matter (Flick, 2014) and can help in the collection of detailed information on the perceptions of participants regarding their knowledge and skills (Turner, 2010). In essence, qualitative interview research aims to investigate people’s experiences, perceptions, emotions, and how they think (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015).

In this study, I utilized qualitative interviews to examine Saudi teachers’ perceptions of gender roles in children’s dramatic play. Qualitative interviewing was an appropriate method for
this study because interviews helped me to understand the participants’ experiences, thoughts, and perceptions in rich detail (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interviews also helped me understand the subject matter from the participants’ perspectives and from multiple angles. Moreover, qualitative interviewing helped me to explore the ongoing social practices and processes and capture the changes about gender roles in the Saudi early childhood context (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

In this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews emphasize personal language as a source of data. Semi-structured interviews are crucial when the researcher seeks to get a deep understanding of people’s perceptions of a phenomenon to gain greater insight into the subject (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Semi-structured interviews were valuable for this study because an in-depth understanding of the participants’ perceptions of gender roles in the dramatic play context was sought.

As noted by Rubin and Rubin (2012), some research procedures lead to the development of rifts and boundaries between the researcher and the interviewees. Semi-structured interviews solve such a problem by reducing the gap between the interviewer and interviewee, hence creating a mutually respectful interaction (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). By using semi-structured interviews, the researcher can understand various phenomena in the lives of the participants. Researchers seek to understand the meaning of what the interviewee says (Ackerly & True, 2010; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Therefore, the articulation of ideas and language used by the participants is essential in understanding their perceptions, attitudes, and opinions. To identify the perspective and meanings of the interviewees, it is important to understand their relationships with others and the context (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Semi-structured interviews could significantly help to shed light on the intricate details of an individual’s experiences.
Study Context

I conducted my research with preschool teachers in Arar, Saudi Arabia. Arar is the capital of the Northern Borders Province in Saudi Arabia. The reason for choosing this city because it is the city where I grew up, and is the city in which I completed my teaching internships in one of its preschools. Thus, I am familiar with its preschools and most of its teachers. What’s more, I work at the Northern Border University and it is located in Arar. In fact, the communication between the university and the ministry of education in Arar facilitated my research and connected me with preschool teachers. The relationship between the university and the ministry of education has also made it easy for me to receive a letter of support which was required to contact the preschool teachers in Arar (A letter of support in Appendix A). This letter was also a requirement before I proceeded with interviewing preschool teachers in Arar, Saudi Arabia.

Arar is known for its fertile pasture lands which lends itself well to its principal occupation of sheep and camel herding. Therefore, most of the people who live in Arar city of the original Saudis who descended from the Bedouin tribes living in the Arabian Peninsula "Badawi." The nature of Bedouin life has made specific and strict roles for men and women. The woman is the one in charge of household matters, and the man works outside the home and provides provisions for his family. People in Arar are still firmly attached to the customs, traditions, and values that predecessor generations have inherited to present generations about these gender roles.
Table 1. Arar Preschools Table, school year 2019-2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Public pre-schools</th>
<th>Private pre-schools</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preschools</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>575</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-service teachers</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant teachers</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These data were provided by the General Authority for Statistics in Saudi Arabia.

Participants

Qualitative research aims to derive detailed insights from the lives and experiences of people (Flick, 2014). Indeed, data quality in qualitative research is determined by its depth and not by the sample size, as is the case for quantitative data (Creswell, 2013). Regarding the appropriate sample size for the research, Marshall (1996) stated that the research questions determine such a decision.

Four in-service preschool teachers in Arar, Saudi Arabia, participated in this study. Since the study of early childhood education major and preschool teaching jobs are offered to and occupied by only women in Saudi Arabia, all the participants in this study were females (23–35 years old). The reason behind choosing participants from this age range was to get fresh thinking in tune with the new moves that have occurred in Saudi policies. All the participants have a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education. The teachers were from different public preschools in Arar, Saudi Arabia.

Teachers’ involvement in this study was voluntary; hence, I chose the participants based on their interests to participate in this study. To recruit the participants for the study, I sent a recruitment email in Arabic to the preschool principals and teachers in Arar, Saudi Arabia. The recruitment email included the purpose of the study, the study criteria, and my contact information,
as well as my Institutional Review Board (IRB) documentation to provide the participants with full details about the study. When the volunteer teachers agreed to participate and gave me their verbal consent, we identified the preferred date and time for the interviews, depending on the teachers’ schedules.

Data Collection

As a qualitative researcher, my objective was to gather sufficient data to provide answers to my research question. I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews as my main data source. According to Creswell (2013), there are a range of recommendations to establish the number of interviews required per participant. Creswell (2013) suggested 12 interviews for phenomenology research. Kuzel (1992) proposed six to eight interviews for a homogenous population.

In this study, I interviewed each teacher two times for a total of eight (twenty to sixty minutes) interviews, which is suitable for a “homogenous group” of teachers (Kuzel, 1992). Eight interviews were viewed as a reasonable number in assessing general preschool teachers’ perceptions of the role of gender in dramatic play (Bryman, 2006). Each interviewee was interviewed two times since the quality of the interview was “largely determined by the acquisition of information produced by each interview” (Alahmari, 2018, p. 32). The interviews were conducted over a period of eight weeks—one interview per week, with approximately 20 to 60 minutes spent by each teacher for the interview.

After receiving IRB approval, I emailed the preschool in-service teachers I knew, inviting them to participate in the study if they were interested in it. The email included information about the study and the researcher to allow the participants to become familiar with the study topic and establish rapport. For the other participants, I emailed the preschool principals in Arar, Saudi Arabia, and asked them for assistance in suggesting names of preschool in-service teachers.
who may be interested in participating in this study. I also asked them to provide me with the teacher’s contact information. After receiving the names and contact information, I contacted these preschool teachers via email and invited them to participate in the study.

**Setting the Interview Stage**

After obtaining verbal consent from all the participants, the participants identified a convenient time and date for the interviews based on their preferences and schedules. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, there was a risk of spreading the virus to the teachers during in-person interviews. While precautions were to be taken, I could not guarantee that the participants would not be exposed to the virus. Therefore, the participants and I agreed to conduct the interviews via video conferences by using Zoom. The video calls were recorded after obtaining the participants’ permission for analysis purposes.

Following Fontana and Frey’s (1994) suggestions, I took the first few minutes of the interview to converse with the teachers to establish rapport. In other words, I discussed the details of the study with the participants and addressed their questions and concerns about the study in our first interview. This helped to establish trust and rapport between the participants and myself (Creswell, 2013). By showing concern and care to them, the participants were more likely to feel valued and could participate freely in the interviews. To be more specific, I intentionally used an icebreaker and ensured that the teachers felt valued and willing to share their general experiences, thoughts, and perceptions as Saudi women. I then transitioned to asking short and less specific questions about their personal experiences, such as what they liked the most about teaching preschool age. We also talked about their gender perceptions and how they constructed these perceptions as Saudi women. Because I am also a Saudi woman, I shared
my own experiences with the teachers, an aspect that enabled me to establish a personal connection with the teachers.

**The Interview Protocol**

Brinkman and Kvale’s (2015) interview methods place emphasis on the knowledge and competence of the researcher. Based on their suggested interview methods, the interviewer is expected to familiarize the interviewee with the procedure by elucidating the objective of the interview and its length. The authors also highlighted the need for the interviewer to only ask questions related to the interview questions and pointed to the fact that the interview questions should be precise and easy to read and understand. Additionally, the interviewer is expected to be attentive throughout the interview process and allow the interviewee to respond and comprehensively elaborate on each question. Next, the interviewer must show empathy to the interviewees and be quick to note any emotional connotations and attempt to assess the reason behind these emotions. Moreover, the interviewer must take control of the interview process to generate specific and intended information, particularly in situations where the interviewees can go off-topic. In this regard, the interviewer has to constantly remind the interviewee about the purpose and focus of the interview. Nevertheless, the interview must be analytical of the responses of the participants. This implies that the researcher must feel free to ask additional questions to assess whether the participants provide similar responses. In addition, the interviewer should note down the previous responses provided by the participants to request them to explain their thoughts. Lastly, the interviewer must decipher the responses of the participants and request them to clarify what they mean (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015).

In accordance with the purpose of this study, I asked the interviewees about their perceptions of gender roles in children’s dramatic play. In fact, a major element of a
sociocultural framework for research is that cultural and social practices emerge as a unit of analysis. Therefore, the interviews included questions to examine the social and contextual practices and elicit responses that reflect tools of culture and society within the Saudi context about ECEs’ creation of gender perceptions (Rogoff, 1995). In this investigation, I asked teachers to talk about the social and contextual factors that shaped their perceptions of gender roles.

The first interview was about the teachers’ life experiences and perceptions of gender roles on a general and personal level and included a discussion of cultural factors that influenced how they constructed their gender perceptions. The protocol for the first interview is available in Appendix B. In the first interview protocol, I used broad, open-ended interview questions aligned with the research question, and the semi-structured nature of the interview aided in crafting more questions to be asked for elaboration and clarification. The protocol of the first interview was formulated in such a way that the teachers would share their perceptions related to gender roles of men and women in general and their personal histories, including the culturally and contextually situated nature of their perceptions. For example, I asked them questions such as the following:

- What does the word “gender” mean to you? Why did you describe it like that?
- What are your societal perceptions of men’s and women’s gender roles?
- How do you see Saudi culture-defining gender roles?

The first interview had a more structured protocol in comparison to the second interview. The first interview included open-ended questions that I formulated in the first interview protocol (see Appendix B). After finishing this interview, I transcribed it manually and performed an in-field analysis that involved recording my initial interpretations. Then I used
these interpretations to generate new questions for the second interview. I had guiding questions that I crafted in advance for the second interview, but I generated more specific questions in greater detail based on the participants’ responses from the first interview.

The second interview aimed to investigate teachers’ perceptions of gender roles in children’s dramatic play. Thus, the interview protocol was meant to encourage the participants to further express their gender perceptions of children’s gender roles in dramatic play (see Appendix C). Teachers were asked to describe how gender may influence children’s dramatic play and share their classroom experiences, perceptions of gender roles that children may play in dramatic play, and the social norms and traditions they consider when they identify the appropriate gender roles for children in dramatic play. In essence, I used questions such as the following:

- From your experience, how does gender impact children’s play? How does gender impact children’s dramatic play?
- From your perspective, how do you believe children’s roles in dramatic play are related to gender?
- What social traditions and norms do you consider when conceptualizing appropriate gender roles in children’s play?

The second interview was used to expand the answers to the research question. The interview questions included open-ended questions I prepared in advance in the interview protocol (see Appendix C), along with follow-up questions, expansion questions, and clarification questions. The questions of the second semi-structured interview were designed to be responsive to the experiences and stories that the participants shared in the first semi-
structured interview. After finishing the second interview, I did the same process I used for the first interview: transcribing the interview manually, followed by writing my field analysis. Interviews can be defined as discussions and engagements between interviewers and interviewees (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003) whose outcome greatly relies on the ability of the researcher to establish a quality interaction (Clough & Nutbrown, 2007). Such abilities may include creating well-designed questions, establishing a comfortable space where interviewees can freely discuss their responses, prompting respondents to expand on their answers, making appropriate pauses, and paying attention when interviewees are speaking (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), semi-structured interviews encourage interviewees to provide in-depth and detailed responses. In a semi-structured interview, the researcher prepares a set of questions in advance and leaves room for flexibility and for the use of probes and follow-up questions that may arise organically in the interview process.

During my semi-structured interviews, I gave room for respondents to discuss their gender perceptions and provide descriptions or examples. I probed the information given and identified the new insights that emerged between the two interviews. Such an undertaking would not be possible using research approaches such as structured interviews or questionnaires because these do not allow the researcher to probe further, follow up, or seek clarifications on the new insights that have been given. In this particular process, my primary objective was to understand the perceptions of the teachers. Hence, during these interviews, I asked follow-up questions with the objective of clarifying what they meant. I also restated these questions to ensure they were correctly understood. This process allowed me to ensure that what I understood aligned with what the participants actually meant. By asking follow-up questions and restating their statements, reliability and validity of the interview content were ensured (Brinkman &
Kvale, 2015). In addition, I used digital recording and took notes during the interviews to transcribe later, all of which was conducted with the consent of the participants.

**Table 2. Study Timeline**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Task</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| Week 1 | • Got the participants verbal consent.  
• Called the participants to discuss the study details, covered their questions and concerns about it, and identified their preference time and date for the interview. |
| Week 2 | • First semi-structured interviews with one participant (first participant).  
• Transcribed the interview in the Arabic language.  
• Translated the interview to the English language.  
• Saved the transcripts for the participant in a file on my laptop.  
• Created the analytic memos for the interview transcript.  
• Generated new questions for interview 2 and for member checking purposes. |
| Week 3 | • First semi-structured interviews with one participant (second participant).  
• Transcribed the interview in the Arabic language.  
• Translated the interview to the English language.  
• Saved the transcripts for the participant in a file on my laptop.  
• Created the analytic memos for the interview transcript.  
• Generated new questions for interview 2 and for member checking purposes. |
| Week 4 | • First semi-structured interviews with one participant (third participant).  
• Transcribed the interview in the Arabic language.  
• Translated the interview to the English language.  
• Saved the transcripts for the participant in a file on my laptop.  
• Created the analytic memos for the interview transcript.  
• Generated new questions for interview 2 and for member checking purposes. |
| Week 5                                      | • First semi-structured interview with one participant (fourth participant).  
|                                            | • Transcribed the interview in the Arabic language.  
|                                            | • Translated the interview to the English language.  
|                                            | • Saved the transcripts for the participant in a file on my laptop.  
|                                            | • Created the analytic memos for the interview transcript.  
|                                            | • Generated new questions for interview 2 and for member checking purposes.  |
| Week 6                                     | • Second semi-structured interview with one participant (first participant).  
|                                            | • Transcribed the interview in the Arabic language.  
|                                            | • Translated the interview to the English language.  
|                                            | • Saved the transcripts for the participant in a file on my laptop.  
|                                            | • Created analytic memos for the interview transcript.  |
| Week 7                                     | • Second semi-structured interviews with one participant (second participant).  
|                                            | • Transcribed the interview in the Arabic language.  
|                                            | • Translated the interview to the English language.  
|                                            | • Saved the transcripts for the participant in a file on my laptop.  
|                                            | • Created the analytic memos for the interview transcript.  |
| Week 8                                     | • Second semi-structured interview with one participant (third participant).  
|                                            | • Transcribed the interview in the Arabic language.  
|                                            | • Translated the interview to the English language.  
|                                            | • Saved the transcripts for the participant in a file on my laptop.  
|                                            | • Created analytic memos for the interview transcript.  |
| Week 9                                     | • Second semi-structured interview with one participant (fourth participant).  
|                                            | • Transcribed the interview in the Arabic language.  
|                                            | • Translated the interview to the English language.  
|                                            | • Saved the transcript for the participant in a file on my laptop.  
|                                            | • Created the analytic memos for the interview transcript.  |
| Week 10                                    | • Coded and categorize the codes in the whole data set.  
|                                            | • Identified general themes.  |
After completing each interview, I transcribed the interview manually from spoken Arabic to written Arabic. The purpose of transcribing “is to allow the detailed to-and-from reading in the analysis of the qualitative data” (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 142). In fact, data transcription allows the interviewer to obtain focused and relevant data, data features, and a data analytic focus (Gibson & Brown, 2009). In other words, focused transcription allows the interviewer to generate notes on what was said or done by the interviewee; such notes tend to emphasize certain behaviors or responses from the interviewee (Gibson & Brown, 2009, p. 113).

Next, I translated each interview transcription manually from Arabic to the English language. After the preliminary translation, I listened to the audio recordings again to review and make the corrections to the transcript translations and then checked the transcripts with the Arabic transcripts of the interviews. After finishing translation of the transcriptions, the translations were checked by a third party who is bilingual and knowledgeable about the research topic to ensure translation accuracy. Then I collected the Arabic and English transcriptions, as well as notes taken during the interviews of each participant, and gathered them in one electronic file on my laptop to analyze them later. These separate files took place inside one document for the aggregate data on my laptop, and a protective document’s password only known by me was used. To protect the participants’ confidentiality, I used pseudonyms in the study. I put the participants’ real names and their assigned pseudonyms in a password-protected log for my records in Dropbox. Finally, the collected data was ready for analysis.

**Data Analysis**

I used the thematic analysis approach to analyze the interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79).
Using this analysis method facilitates the organization and description of the data information in rich detail. To guide my focus and decision-making during the data analysis, I kept the purpose of study, research question, and theoretical framework at hand (Saldana, 2009). To code the data, I applied an inductive approach (Saldana, 2009). The first purpose of the inductive approach was to establish clear links between my research question and the summary findings derived from the data and “ensure these links are both able to be demonstrated to others and defensible” (Thomas, 2003, p. 2). The second purpose was to understand teachers’ perceptions; I wanted to generate codes from the interviews rather than bring preestablished codes to the data from an external source. I followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-stage recursive process of analysis. Table 3 shows how I used the six stages of Braun & Clarke (2006) in the analysis.

**Table 3. Phases of thematic analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Brief description of the process</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Becoming familiar with the data</td>
<td>I transcribed and translated the interviews, wrote down my field notes, and then read and re-read the data multiple times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Generating initial codes</td>
<td>I coded the important patterns within the data, systematically, across the entire set of data and collated each code with the relevant data.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Searching for themes</td>
<td>This phase involved the collation of codes into potential themes and gathering all relevant data with each potential theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reviewing themes</td>
<td>I checked whether the themes fit in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the whole entire data set (Level 2).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Defining and naming themes</td>
<td>I refined the themes until they presented teachers’ perceptions clearly. I also produced a clear definition and name for each theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Writing up findings</td>
<td>In this phase, I related the analysis to the research question and literature, and selected the exemplary quotes, and produced it in chapter 4 to tell the overall story of the data.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Details of these six phases are provided below:
Phase One: Becoming Familiar with the Data

As the purpose of this study was to understand teachers’ gender perceptions and how they may think differently about gender roles in the Saudi context, it was essential to me to see them as individuals. Therefore, I analyzed each participant’s interviews separately, and then I combined them to find the common themes and subthemes. To facilitate my coding process, I compiled each participant’s interview transcripts in one electronic document. I started my analysis by familiarizing myself with the data, so I read and re-read the participants’ transcripts and field notes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this process, I started my analysis memos to document my thoughts and reflections about possible patterns and their meanings. During these initial readings, I wrote down the potential patterns and themes and I began to write the initial codes of the data.

Phase Two: Generating Initial Codes

The second step was about creating the potential list of codes from the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). After familiarizing myself with the data, I started my coding process by creating my initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). According to Saldana (2009), a code is a word or short phrase that summarizes and captures “a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 3). Because coding should be considered a cyclical process, my coding process in this phase consisted of two cycles. I created my coding book by using a Word document for each participant’s interviews by following Saldana’s (2009) suggestions about dividing the coding table into three columns. I put the data itself in the first column, initial codes in the second column, and the final codes in the last column. For the initial codes, I used the participants’ exact words or phrases to sort the participants’ perceptions. Then I revised and recoded some of the initial codes and wrote the new
codes in the last column as the final codes. Table 3 shows how I created my coding book by using these three columns. In the example, the teacher shared her perceptions of the reasons for the difference in play between boys and girls.

Table 4. Example of Data Coding Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Data</th>
<th>Initial Codes</th>
<th>Final Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q/ why do you think boys and girls play differently?</td>
<td>“grow up as a man”</td>
<td>“different play preferences”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A/ “Because a boy, from his young age of two or three years old grows up as a man. Even his interests and preferences for play are different from the girl. From a young age, he is inclined to violent play and cars, and he does not like games that include fashion and cosmetics. This is certain because of his upbringing by the family and society.”</td>
<td>“different preferences and interests”</td>
<td>“Upbringing roles”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As coding implies a deeper level of analysis, I was cautious during my coding process of the cultural and bilingual considerations. After I finished coding, I compared my codes with their meanings in the transcripts to ensure they represented what the teachers meant. In addition, I checked my codes with a bilingual Saudi friend who possesses knowledge of my topic and Saudi culture and discussed if they well represented my data.

Phase Three: Searching for Themes

This stage is defined as sorting the codes into themes (Saldana, 2009). After completing the coding process, I made a code list for the codes and a brief description of the meaning of each transcript into a separate document and categorized them to find broad themes. I also
determined how codes could be combined to form themes. During the coding and categorization process, I started my analysis memos to document my thoughts and reflections about these codes and their relationships. Saldana (2009) stated, “Coding and analytic memo writing are concurrent qualitative data analytic activities” (p. 42). These memos included the code meanings to the research question, reflection questions, and participants’ perceptions. During this process, the general study themes emerged, and I saw the patterns within each teacher’s perceptions of gender roles in children’s dramatic play: how the teacher described gender roles, how she described children’s roles in dramatic play, how she perceived gender-inclusive play, etc. As these themes emerged, it became clearer the influence of personal, interpersonal, and cultural-contextual factors on teachers’ perceptions. In this phase, it was useful for me to use the visual presentation to organize the codes and I began to introductory organize the relationship between the themes that emerged. The relationships between themes showed how these themes relate to each other and if these themes were major themes or sub-themes. As some potential themes looked large and complex, I broke them down into sub-themes by sorting the codes I identified in the previous phase into groups of codes that shared similar meanings and concepts. After combining each code with the relative codes, I then combined each group of codes with relative groups to form the sub-theme which was given a name. Then, I combined the sub-themes to analyze the major themes. I used tables to sort the codes into sub-themes and themes. Table 5 is an example of this process.
**Table 5.** Hierarchical development of themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Sub-theme</th>
<th>Main Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender play interests</td>
<td>Biological differences</td>
<td>There is no significant difference in teachers' perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys play violent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls play smooth roles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Phase Four: Reviewing Themes**

In this phase, I reviewed the codes, sub-themes, and themes to ensure they are aligned with their meanings by re-reading all data and re-checking the relevant texts. I merged the similar codes to avoid redundancy (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and to form the broad themes. Moreover, the themes and sub-themes that not having sufficient data to present were eliminated in this step because they lack sufficient support. Also, the themes that were similar in the content have been combined in this phase. As the thematic analysis is a cycled process, I went through the entire data set and codes, multiple times until I felt no further modifications were needed to ensure the connection of codes to the data and themes and sub-themes consistency and their good representation for the data. Rereading the data in this phase helped me to recognize important aspects of the data that were not presented sufficiently and if any of the themes were over-represented.

**Phase Five: Defining and Naming Themes**

This phase was about defining and naming the themes. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), “a theme captures something important about the data about the research question and
represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the data set” (p. 10). In this phase, I reviewed that data and classified few codes more clearly for consistency. I also re-labeled the sub-themes as necessary to reflect teachers’ perceptions. Braun and Clarke (2006) pointed out that at this stage, researchers may consider how each theme fits the entire data set concerning the research question. For applying this, I wrote a detailed analysis for each theme and identified the content that each theme has while considering how it fits with the entire data set and its relation to the research question to ensure they represented teachers’ perceptions clearly. I also organized the examples from the data that illustrate each theme into their correct positions. I narrowed these examples down and kept only the examples that describe the themes and associated sub-themes clearly and accurately. To ensure the credibility of the findings, the themes were not considered final until I re-read through the whole data and scrutinized coding multiple times. Finally, I revisited the theme's names and revised some of them to show the participants’ perception clearly.

**Phase Six: Writing up Findings**

In this phase, the results of the data analysis, finally, were shown in a structured form which was the result of careful choices of data, recycled coding, and the resultant general themes and associated sub-themes. “Qualitative researchers build their codes, categories, and themes from the bottom up,’ by organizing the data inductively into increasingly more abstract units of information” (Creswell, 2013, p. 45). Written descriptions for teachers’ perceptions under each main theme and associated sub-themes with the exemplar quotes were presented in the findings chapter in a readable and organized format. For a demonstration that all the participants were presented across that data, all the quotes were accompanied by the participants' pseudonyms.
“Data analysis in qualitative research consists of preparing and organizing the data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or discussion” (Creswell, 2013, p. 180). Figure 1 shows the identified main themes, and how these are connected to provide an account of Saudi preschool perceptions of gender roles in children’s dramatic play. The three main themes are used to organize the discussion of findings in chapter 4.

![Diagram of major themes]

**Figure 1.** Major themes

**Trustworthiness**

The following aspects were included in this study for parallel quality criteria: credibility, reflexivity, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 2007). I achieved credibility by using a member check feature (Lincoln & Guba, 2007). Punch (2009) described credibility as the reflection and representation of findings to the topic studied. Therefore, I achieved this by using
cross-check data to find consistencies and inconsistencies in the participants’ answers by asking follow-up and interpretation questions related to the main questions (Lincoln & Guba, 2007). Reflexivity was achieved by showing awareness of my own perspectives and providing a fair description of the values and beliefs that influenced me to identify the effects I have on my study (see the “Reflexivity” section; Lincoln & Guba, 2007). Confirmability and dependability were achieved in this study by creating an audit trail to keep a systematic and detailed record of my data generation process (Lincoln & Guba, 2007).

**Ethical Considerations**

As this study included human participants, I treated all the participants using the ethical guidelines of the IRB. Participation in this study was voluntary, allowing the participants to withdraw their participation at any time without adverse consequences. A consent form was sent to the participants via email three weeks before the data collection began to provide the participants with sufficient time to complete it. The consent form included the topic and purpose of the study and their rights as participants. According to Matsumoto and Jones (2009), the participants should be given a clear and detailed study procedure, along with a discussion of the study’s possible risks, benefits, and possible influences on their welfare. As the sole researcher, I also obtained oral consent from the participants at the beginning of the first interview and allowed some room for questions before starting the interview.

As for the ethical and cultural considerations, and since gender is associated with Islamic values in Saudi culture, I formulated my interview questions in a way that does not offend Islam or the Saudi culture. In addition, I discussed the study findings without providing any judgments or generalizing my research findings to all Saudi teachers. Discussing teachers’ gender perceptions led me to face difficulties during the data collection process. Many teachers felt
uncomfortable about participating in this study and discussing their gender perceptions. Therefore, when I contacted possible candidates, I informed them of the study scope and the study’s confidentiality and privacy policies. All communications between me and the participants were conducted in the Arabic language since it is the official language in Saudi Arabia. To protect the participants’ confidentiality during the data collection, I assigned them numbers instead of using their names, and access to the data was limited to the researcher at all times (University of South Florida, 2016). Furthermore, I gave the participants pseudonyms for the final dissertation to protect their privacy and ensure that readers cannot identify them. As for data storage, the data were stored in the Dropbox, requiring an access password.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I presented this study’s research design. I began the chapter by outlining the steps I took for recruiting and introducing the participants to this study. I then discussed the study’s methodology and the methods I utilized to collect the data. I ended the chapter with a discussion on how I implemented the data collection method and a description of how I situated myself in the research, followed by how I achieved the reliability and validity of the study. Lastly, I outlined the steps I took to ensure the ethical approval of this study.
Chapter 4

Findings

This study explored the following question: What perceptions do Saudi early childhood teachers hold about children’s gender roles in dramatic play? The study focused on how the teachers have responded to the current policy changes to promote a different thinking about gender roles in the Saudi context. To contextualize the teachers’ perceptions, this chapter begins by providing insight into cultural traditions in Saudi Arabia and describing how the concept of gender roles is impacted by the future development plan of Saudi Arabia (Vision 2030). The purpose is to gain a deeper understanding of how these traditions and the subsequent changes under the development plan have shaped the participants’ perceptions of gender roles in children’s dramatic play. This context is followed by an introduction to the four Saudi teachers who participated in this study, along with a description of the dramatic play areas in their preschool classrooms. After introducing the four Saudi preschool teachers and describing the contexts of their work, the findings of a thematic analysis of interviews with the teachers are presented. The themes I constructed from the analysis are as follows: a) teachers privileged families’ perspectives over policy b) teachers' maintained entrenched notions of appropriate gender roles in play and c) teachers' reluctance to apply gender-inclusive play recommendations. Each theme is conceptualized and contextualized using the diverse perspectives presented by the four study participants.
Cultural Traditions Prevailing in the Society of Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia is a prominent country in the Middle East. The culture of this land is distinguished from other Arabian countries due to the presence of both religious and modern aspects followed by local people (Al-Khateeb, 2014). As Islamic traits are strongly embedded in the Saudi culture, there is a unique uniformity noted among all Saudi citizens, irrespective of their social or financial status. Islam is considered the pivotal point in the culture prevailing here, on which all the social and religious practices are based. All privileges enjoyed by Saudi men and women are also defined in the Islamic scriptures. Normally, the people of Saudi Arabia are used to the conservative culture as per Muslim religious norms. The love for Islamic traditions is reflected in the dress, food habits, health care, and the overall lifestyle of all Saudi citizens. Islamic culture is also strictly maintained in the economic and legal aspects of this country (Kucinskas, 2010).

This strict conservativeness in Saudi Arabia opposes the social changes that may now be noticed in many other parts of the modern world (Moaddel, 2006). As Islam recommends a patriarch society, Saudi women face much more restrictions compared to the males of their families (Moaddel, 2006). These women are mostly forbidden to go out of the home without being escorted by male relatives. They are restricted to the safe corners of their homes and are not allowed to step out without covering their heads in typical Saudi veils (Kucinskas, 2010). Thus, there is a wide difference between the social statuses and privileges enjoyed by men and women in Saudi Arabia. Cultural guardians of this land argue that there are distinct differences in the physical and psychological conditions of men and women, for which they should be treated differently in society. However, this does not mean that women are maltreated here or that they
live a miserable life in this country (Al-Khateeb, 2014). Both male and female students in Saudi Arabia are taught the importance of following religious traditions from an early age. Due to this education imparted to children, they become aware of the social differences existing between the men and women living here (Alswaida, 2016).

Saudi women are supposed to do all types of household chores, including women who are employed in responsible positions in their professional fields. Thus, all working women are expected to rush home as early as possible in the evening to complete their domestic jobs. They also need to take care of their children and elders of their families. Normally, Saudi society entitles men to dominate over their wives, sisters, and/or daughters. Men only need to earn money and fulfill the financial needs of their families. According to Islamic scriptures, a man should bear the financial responsibilities, while a woman should take care of all household work to maintain perfect equilibrium in the family (Kucinskas, 2010). The holy scripture of Islam directs women to be obedient and loyal to their husbands, while men are instructed to pay due respect to their wives and support them (Abu-Baker, 2005). However, the social directions of Islamic scriptures have been misinterpreted and preached by different people over the ages, providing wrong information to men and women of Saudi society.

Generally, Saudi men find it embarrassing to do household chores in most families. They are taught to do the shopping and other outdoor jobs for their family members, while women are taught cooking, cleaning, and other domestic jobs from an early age. The roles of both men and women are specifically defined in Saudi society. However, this traditional trend has now changed in many Saudi families where boys and girls are taught to do all household jobs alike. Still, many Saudi families prefer their girls to be trained for turning into good housewives later.
The Future Development Plan of Saudi Society (Vision 2030)

Presently, Prince Mohammad bin Salman, the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, has declared a future plan of social development, which is named “Vision 2030.” This strategic development plan was launched in April 2018, and it intends to improve the lifestyle of Saudi women by providing them more legal rights and economic freedom. With this new vision of the future, the Saudi government aims to offer the same opportunities enjoyed only by men to women. Saudi Arabia is now promoting gender equality for the sake of achieving a more peaceful and prosperous atmosphere in the land. Thus, the government is now working hard to provide equality to men and women in the matters of education, employment, health care, and other aspects of regular life. The progress of women in Saudi society is expected to bring positive development to the economic and political scenarios of the country. Hence, Saudi policymakers want to increase the number of professional women taking different roles in the development of this country (Al-Dakhil, 2019).

Vision 2030 sets the goal of equally expanding job opportunities for both men and women in the public sector of Saudi Arabia. Thus, a notable improvement in the social status of Saudi women is visible due to the successful implementation of this elaborate development program. More women are now stepping out of their homes to achieve higher education and work alongside men in various fields (Saudi Press Agency, 2019). The government has stopped discrimination based on sex at all workplaces to make professional life easier for women. Hence, Saudi women need not stay hidden at home any longer because of this new development program launched in the country.
However, the conservative social outlook still hinders the freedom of women in Saudi Arabia. Many families still do not allow their female members to go out without being accompanied by a male member. Thus, women cannot venture into challenging job fields like men, as they are not allowed to work night shifts or have late working hours. Despite government efforts, many offices still deny gender equalities, and women do not get the same privileges as their male colleagues. Hence, the financial independence of Saudi women is still limited to only a few who dare to defy the strict social rules. Women cannot appear in person to seek legal justice or financial aid offered by the government, as they are usually represented by a male family member at places offering such services. Therefore, it seems that there is still a long way for Saudi women to achieve freedom in academic and professional areas like women of the Western world.

**Introduction to the Participants**

The four participants in this study are in-service preschool teachers in Arar City. Amal, Norah, Sarah, and Leena are relatively new to the teaching profession, with their experience spanning between three and five years, and all four were in their late 20s or early 30s (age range: 28–31 years). All the participants earned their bachelor’s degrees from universities in different cities within Saudi Arabia, and Norah was undertaking a postgraduate course at the time of the interview. The preschool teachers had some background in gender-related topics – as they studied the course of psychology of play, which includes a unit about gender issues in children play and is a core at bachelor studies in the major of early childhood in some Saudi universities. All the participants are females, which means that their perceptions on the different issues addressed in this study will be considered dominated by a female lens. Despite this limitation, the participants have a rich and diverse cultural background – having been brought up in
different families, originating from different cities, and performing different roles as Saudi women, all of which may enrich the meaning making of their sentiments. An interpretive epithet for the participants and their home cities in Saudi Arabia was created to help capture the sociological and cultural nuances presented in their responses to the interviews and the influence these perceptions will have on the interpretation of their sentiments using the lens of sociocultural theory.

**Participants’ Home Cities in Saudi Arabia**

In the literature review, I described the context of Saudi Arabia, in general, to help the reader visualize the culture of the study participants. However, in this section, I provide a brief description of the participants’ home cities to help the readers better understand the background of the participants’ perceptions. Saudi Arabia is divided into 13 administrative regions, and each region is divided into several cities (about 6,000; Alsadan, 2000). Customs and traditions differ among the inhabitants of each region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. There is great diversity in Saudi Arabia at the social level. The customs of the people of the eastern or central region, for example, do not in any way resemble the customs of the westerners. The same applies to the customs of the people of the south, which are different from those of the people of the north and the other regions. Yusef al-Shariah, an expert in the customs of Saudi society, pointed out that tolerance in customs and traditions flourishes in the middle and coastal regions as a result of the presence of foreign companies and institutions, communication with other countries, and the exchange of commercial benefits with them. However, the residents of the northern and southern regions are dominated by fanaticism and adherence to Saudi customs and traditions (Al-Arabiya Newspaper, 2019). Therefore, the societies in the middle and coastal regions (such as Riyadh, Dammam, Jeddah, and Makkah) are more flexible in gender roles, as they are mixed with
Western people who work there. The regions accept gender-mixing in the facilities, women work in different fields, and the regions consider that women and men have equal household responsibilities. However, the societies of the northern and southern regions (such as Arar, Aljouf, and Abha) are strict regarding gender roles, as they consider that the main role of a woman is to take care of her home and family and the role of a man is to spend on his family. These regions also fully encourage gender segregation in all facilities and prefer the field of education for women’s work because it is the only field that is completely separate from men in Saudi Arabia. Taking all this into account, the four participants of this study came from different societies and cities: Riyadh, Aljouf, Arar, and Makkah.

**Amal**

Amal is a 29-year-old preschool teacher who hails from Riyadh, the capital city of Saudi Arabia. Riyadh is the political and economic front of Saudi Arabia and the home of sovereign and commercial institutions in the country. For this reason, people in Riyadh are more open to other cultures and less adherent to Saudi customs and traditions.

Amal has five years of teaching experience. She studied in Riyadh for her undergraduate degree and moved to Arar for work. When I discussed the difference between gender and sex with Amal, she indicated that gender is related to society’s concept of the characteristics of men and women, while sex is related to the physical attributes of each. Amal described gender roles as “the actions and behaviors of men and women that are acquired by them from their environment and upbringing.” She said that she learned from her family “that men and women have some restrictions they must stick with them.” Although she described her family as being committed to Saudi customs and traditions, she noted that her family was not religiously conservative. She stated,
Committing to customs and traditions means adherence to the cultural heritage that has been passed down through generations, being in agreement with its validity and obligation and working with its limits. Customs and traditions become a constant and a reference to society in arbitrating between the rejected and accepted. However, religious conservatism is the exaggeration in denying ordinary matters and interpreting legislation taken from the Qur’an in an extreme manner.

Consequently, she has embraced the gender roles ascribed by Saudi society and culture and argues that the recent Saudi government policies had not influenced her opinion on the roles of Saudi men and women. Amal’s convictions about the maintenance of the traditional and customary assignment of gender roles are reflective of the extent to which cultural and sociological values are deeply held in Saudi society, which is likely to be transmitted to children during dramatic play in the classroom.

Norah

Norah is a 29-year-old preschool teacher with four years of professional experience. She hails from Aljouf, which is a conservative city in the north-central region of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Aljouf is an agricultural region, so most of its residents are farmers and livestock owners. Because of the nature of their lives, the residents are closed off from other cultures and adhere to ancient Saudi customs and traditions.

Norah earned her undergraduate degree from Aljouf as well. She is currently completing her master’s degree in early childhood education in Riyadh. Norah described gender roles as determined by “society according to our sex and not according to our preferences and interests.” She also said,
There are no specific roles for men or women from my point of view, even if society or the family specified specific roles for them. I believe that the woman or the man is only responsible for determining their roles in proportion to their preferences and desires, because the ideas of society and the family may change with the development of time, and their perception about these roles for men and women may change, and the previously unacceptable role becomes now acceptable.

She explained that she hailed from a religiously conservative family in which her father was an authoritative figure and her mother a passive follower well embedded in her traditional roles. Norah is a wife with one baby girl and is repulsed by Saudi traditions and its assignment of gender roles, causing her to declare that she would not socialize her child into these gender traditions. She recognizes the generational shift between her parents and her child and holds strong opinions about the importance of considering personal desires and experiences rather than adherence to traditional stereotypes when performing the different roles. However, Norah claims to continue practicing her stereotypical role to please her parents, which indicates the robustness of parents in the socialization process of their children. In turn, Norah is less restrictive to the gender roles enacted by children in her class during dramatic play.

**Sarah**

Sarah is the least experienced teacher and one of the youngest of the four participants. She is 28 years old and has three years of teaching experience in Arar City, where she grew up and studied. Arar is a conservative city in the north of Saudi Arabia. As I stated in the “Methods” section, Arar is a desert city, so most of its residents are Bedouins and livestock keepers. Therefore, they are among the strongest Saudi societies to preserve the old Saudi customs and traditions.
Sarah has rudimentary exposure to gender-related topics despite earning a bachelor’s degree. Coming from a religiously conservative family, Sarah feels that her family had a significant influence on her perceptions of gender and gender roles. Sarah described herself as a devoted Muslim and a traditional Saudi woman who embraces Saudi traditions and customs wholeheartedly. She sees that “men and women are born with different capabilities, and Saudi culture and Islamic rules defined their roles according to these capabilities. So we (men and women) must adhere to these gender roles.” She abhors the ongoing societal transformation instigated by Saudi government policies and maintains that the role of women remains as raising children and caring for the family. In this respect, she socializes her students to take up the roles prescribed traditionally during dramatic play and will not tolerate the interchanging of roles between boys and girls. Her strong opinions about the cultural and sociological influences of the Saudi gender role traditions and practice will help create a robust discussion about her perspectives from a sociocultural theoretical lens.

Leena

Leena is the oldest of the four participants (31 years old) and has five years of experience in teaching preschool students. She hails from Makkah, where she also acquired her undergraduate degree. Makkah is located in the western region of Saudi Arabia and is the holy city for Muslims – as it is the home of the Holy Kaaba, Islam’s holiest site, and the direction of Muslim prayer. Muslims from all over the world come to Makkah to perform the duties of the Islamic religion. The mixing of the people who live in Makkah with Muslims of different races and cultures has made them more open than other societies in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and less bound by customs and traditions.
Leena described herself as a traditional woman from a traditional family that holds a traditional perception of gender roles. Leena mentioned that she developed strong opinions about the roles of men and women from her family, as her parents raised her (as a woman) differently from her brothers (as men). Leena explained gender as follows: “Naturally as a biological division, the man possesses masculine traits and the woman the feminine traits, and their roles are assigned based on their physical attributes.” Leena believes that men and women have different physical attributes and traits that should guide the gender roles assigned to them by society. Thus, she has a biological perception of gender roles. Additionally, although she supports the sociological and cultural transformation being championed by the Saudi government, her agreement is conditional, in that the new roles being promoted should not cause any physical and psychological harm to current and future Saudi generations. Leena’s greatest influence on her perceptions is the traditional family background regarding gender roles. In this regard, this background plays a critical role in providing meaning to her sentiments about gender roles enacted by children during dramatic play from a sociocultural theoretical lens.

**Teachers Privileged Families’ Perspectives Over Policy**

This theme reflects the ways Amal, Norah, Sarah, and Leena perceived the traditional views generally held about gender roles in the Saudi context and, as educators, how they have related those ideas to gender roles enacted by children during dramatic play. The subthemes that helped to identify these perceptions include (1) expectations of gender roles and (2) family and societal values.

**Expectations of Gender Roles**

According to Al-Arabiya Newspaper (2015), people entrenched in Saudi culture see the major role of women as taking care of their home and raising children, with other roles as
secondary interests. As for the men, they have the right of guardianship over women, and they are financially responsible for their family because spending on women is one of the duties of men in Saudi culture.

The responses of the preschool educators, who are all women, had deeply entrenched views about the traditional roles of men and women. Notably, some participants’ perceptions were anchored in the longstanding tradition in Saudi society about the traditional roles of men and women. Based on the participants’ responses in this study, it can be inferred that Saudi men and women have traditionally and culturally defined roles, which were broadly embraced by the preschool teachers.

Despite the different regions where the teachers are (and the inherent biases in those regions), the teachers themselves do not do very much that is different in their perceptions of the roles of men and women in the Saudi context. All the participants collectively viewed men as the heads of their families charged with the responsibility of earning, protecting, and being guardians of their families. The educators also seemed to embrace the understanding that men carried more responsibilities than women, were financially responsible for the families, and therefore, spent their income on the collective needs of their families. For instance, Amal explained, “The man is responsible for the financial side of the house and the children’s expenses. A woman spends her money on her comfort and the things she wants, but the basic needs are provided by the man.” She further added, “Even when I worked in Arar, my father was responsible for paying my house rent and bills, while my monthly salary was a special thing for me, and I fulfill only my minor needs with it.” Norah expressed similar sentiments: “My father is in charge of the financial side and [is] the decision-maker in all matters.” Sarah expressed the roles played by men when she stated,
I believe that a man is responsible for the finances of his family. Therefore, the man must have a monthly income that he can spend on his family. Meaning, in certain age the man needs to have a job to get his own income and support himself, not like a woman. Leena agreed, “The man is responsible for the family and the provision of financial needs.”

The underlying justification of these perceptions, based on the views of the preschool educators, was that men are stronger physically and mentally and have more stamina than women and therefore perform the more physically and mentally demanding jobs in society. This perception is well-elucidated by Leena, who argued, “The first and most important person in the house is the man who is the head of a family because he has the physical structure that enables him to do difficult tasks that need stamina.” Another comment further explains the men’s physical and mental strength. Sarah stated,

It is true that women are forced by circumstances that they work in roles related to men, but whatever, their physical capabilities based on their biological nature are weaker than the physical capabilities of the men, and therefore they will not have the physical strength and endurance as men.

Interestingly, three of the participants emphasized that despite the fact that gender roles are still specified, Saudi society is undergoing some fundamental transformations in its traditional gender role perceptions. They indicated that they had witnessed some fundamental shifts in gender roles, with men and women embracing some opposite gender roles as indicated in their family practices and professional occupations. For instance, Amal explained,

Yes, of course, our [Saudi people] thinking changed a lot. In the past, Saudi women had certain and very limited roles because the scope of work was limited for them, whereas now, with the opening of the field of work for women, even the society’s view has
changed a lot regarding the roles of the men and women in general and the role of women in particular, and society has begun to look at jobs that criticize and reject the entry of women into them previously, as they are acceptable to women now.

Similarly, Norah provided a snippet into the changing perceptions among the Saudi educators:

With my current thinking about gender roles, I have multiple roles, and my role is not limited to being a mother or wife. I have come to think that men and women have the same abilities and skills, so all of them are able to play any role.

The influence of Saudi policies on the perceptions of preschool teachers is evident – as was revealed by the sentiments of Leena, who indicated,

Yes, of course, these current moves in Saudi policies have changed my thinking about gender roles. The closest example is a woman driving a car. I thought that this role was specific to men and it was impossible for women to take this role. When I lived in Kuwait, I used to view women who drive cars with criticism. Now, with the new vision and policies in Saudi Arabia, I have come to see that driving a car is one of the important roles for women and is appropriate for both men and women. In the past, I thought that some areas of work did not suit women and that they only fit men; however, now I see those areas of work as appropriate for both of them.

Although Amal and Sarah were optimistic about current changes in gender roles in the Saudi context, it was evident from their perceptions that they believed that despite the ongoing transformations in the mindsets of Saudi society, which had been facilitated by education and government policies, many gender roles of men and women had not changed much from their traditional orientation. Specifically, the participants revealed that they still believed that men were the financial source of their families and therefore were charged with the financial
responsibilities and that gender segregation was still widely practiced in the country as an indication of the deeply entrenched Saudi culture. For example, Amal noted,

> I was impressed that my perceptions about the role of men - as responsible for women, especially from the financial side - and women do not share this role with him. I still see that my role as a woman is not responsible for the financial side of the family, even if I have a job.

Sarah also mentioned the same perception: “The man’s role in my perception remains providing money for the family, even if the woman is working.”

**Family and Society Values**

The participants felt that the traditional gender roles were passed down to the next generation by parents to their children and reinforced by Saudi society. Servos et al. (2011) noted that parents aim to “socialize their children in culturally and socially acceptable gender roles” (p. 325). In this regard, children are socialized in the traditionally accepted roles of men and women in Saudi society, particularly by fathers and mothers in the family. Parents train girls as their mothers were trained and socialized to be household ladies, be responsible for doing the household chores, take care of the children and men, and avoid participation in the public sphere. The boys are socialized to become the head of the family and the breadwinner for the family and to participate in all public spheres. This is similar to what Al-Khateeb (2014) found in his study:

> Saudi families were [sic] assumed that men were physically and mentally superior to women, who were assumed to be weak and emotional. Thus, women should be controlled and protected, remain at home to raise their children, obey their husbands, and perform domestic work. (p. 203).
These perceptions are well espoused in Sarah’s sentiments:

I learned from my family and society that woman’s role must be in line with her feminine nature. This includes the jobs she could work with, her manners, and the way she looks and talks. For example, a woman cannot work in the army because her biological characteristics do not allow that, and so is the man. For raising children, through what I learned from my family and my society, I see that the responsibility of raising kids is the part of the woman.

Similarly, Leena explained how family and society impact her gender perceptions:

Our family and Saudi society in general raise boys and girls differently based on the he concept “men and women have different capabilities”. They raise boys as (men) who are stronger and can handle the challenges more than women and have leadership skills, so the hard responsibilities and leadership are upon to them. However, they raise us as (women) who are by nature sensitive and emotional and tend to care and concern for others from a young age, that is why our primary role revolves around raising children and caring for the family.

The sentiments above show that Sarah and Leena had developed personal perceptions of the specific gender roles of men and women that conformed to the Saudi culture and traditions. These perceptions had been reinforced by the preschool teachers’ interaction with their families and other community members, which reflects the interpersonal lens of their convictions about gender roles (S. Edwards, 2006). The participatory appropriation process outlined in sociocultural theory provides an appropriate lens for interpreting and giving meaning to the participants’ nuances about their perceptions of traditional gender roles. According to the concept of participatory appropriation, individuals undergo a personal process by engaging in
sociocultural activity, after which their perceptions become part of their being rather than a product of acquisition (Murphy et al., 2012).

In explaining why the preschoolers displayed their enactment of gender roles during dramatic play, the participants held strong perceptions that children construct their perceptions of gender roles of the family and societal values. These perceptions are aligned with what Rogoff (2003) pointed out, “Children learn about their cultural expectations from a very young age, situating themselves in their society” (p. 2). For instance, the teachers believe that gender roles are clearly demarcated between those of the men and those of the women, and these perceptions are passed over to children during dramatic play through observation and verbal guidance. The preschool teachers also believe that the family and society are significant influencers of the role perceptions acquired and displayed by the children during dramatic play in the classroom. This is demonstrated by the insinuations unearthed in Sarah’s sentiments:

I think that the nature of the family's life and the society in which the child lives is the reason. For example, a girl who used to see her mom at home who cooked gets to take on this role in the dramatic play. Whereas the boy takes the role of a doctor because he always goes to the hospital, and he is often examined by a male doctor in our society. The children mimic [roles] by playing what they see and what they learn in their family and society.

Similarly, Norah described children’s imitation of their family roles in dramatic play as follows: Children in dramatic play present what they got from their family. The girl always likes to play the role of the mother, and the boy always loves to play the role of the father – for example, the boy sits in the living room and drinks coffee like his father does at home.
Leena added her voice when she narrated how children copy their family roles in dramatic play in her classroom:

One day, the children were playing the role of the family. One of the boys was playing the role of the father, and one of the girls was playing the role of the mother and another girl was playing the role of their daughter. The boy who was playing the father role pretended he came from outside and called the girl who was playing the daughter role and said, “Take this yogurt and bread that your mother ordered. I’ll take a nap until your mom gets the food ready.” He imitates what his father does at home. I see that the boys always assume the role of the father, and this is the most common role they play during dramatic play.

Despite the current moves and policy changes regarding gender roles in the Saudi context, Amal revealed that some societies still had a gender bias and specified gender roles for both girls and boys that significantly influence the gender roles displayed by children during dramatic play:

Arar is a conservative city, so people haven’t changed their minds about gender roles yet. In Arar, children have a severe bias for their gender. Even in the morning line, they are still divided into girls’ and boys’ lines, and in play, they still only play with their peers of the same sex and always play the role of an adult man for boys or adult woman for girls. I remember one time, we had turned the accompanying corner into a pizza restaurant. One of the boys came wanting to play the role of a pizza maker, and the other boys shouted, “You are a man, you don’t cook.” However, in other societies, in large cities such as Riyadh, you see the exact opposite. The new moves in Saudi Arabia regarding gender roles make society accept all roles for men and women, and that is reflected in children’s
play in our classrooms. Girls and boys don’t have a gender bias, and they play together in all games. You don’t see the concept of “this is a boy and this is a girl” anymore.

These sentiments were reinforced by the perceptions of Leena, who noted the following to explain why some children still play gender roles strictly and others do not during dramatic play:

In Makkah, we have a perception that housework and caring for children are the roles of both men and women and not only for women, while in Arar, these roles are still only for women. In Arar, it is very shameful for a man to play such a role, and if he does, it he will be met with rejection and violent criticism from his society. Even at the level of children, children in Makkah are treated only as children, without focusing on their gender. While in Arar, a boy, from childhood, is still treated as a man and a girl as a woman, and they like to take these roles from childhood.

Norah explained that this stereotyping of the role of girls and boys by the family and society is nothing but the consolidation of a historical vision that is repeated at all times for the image of men and women roles in the minds of children, especially girls, so that they accept their roles later with conviction and without resistance. She further added that the roles of women in preserving continuity through childbearing, raising children, cooking, knitting, and doing household chores hold women hostage in the family space. She also argued,

The new moves in the Saudi context regarding women’s roles, which imposed the education of women and their exit into the labor market in various fields and participating with the man in what was a monopoly for him, have necessitated changing our children’s perceptions of these traditional gender roles. If the mentality of the families and society about these stereotypical roles in the general community does not change permanently by
establishing a culture of equality between the gender roles, then the matter becomes a formality and pointless.

From a sociocultural perspective, the construction of gender roles by preschoolers, from the perceptions of the teachers, indicates participatory appropriation. In this regard, preschool children construct their gender roles by actively engaging in play activities, which involves their interaction with their families, peers, and society (Rogoff, 1995).

**Teachers' Maintained Entrenched Notions of Appropriate Gender Roles in Play**

This theme is a reflection of the perceptions held by the Saudi preschool educators in this study regarding children’s play roles they observed in children during dramatic play. The subthemes that helped to identify these perceptions are (1) biological differences, (2) cross-gender play roles, and (3) professional roles and dramatic play.

Before discussing the subthemes, I want to briefly describe the structure of classrooms in Arar preschools and dramatic play centers to give the reader a picture of how Saudi children may play in dramatic play centers.

Arar public preschools have the same design. The participants of this study are from two different preschools, which have five preschool classrooms. Each classroom has one teacher and around 19 children aged between three and four years old. The classroom includes a place in the middle for circle time and seven learning centers located around the classroom. The dramatic play center is the biggest learning center in the classroom because it has two corners, and therefore, it receives a larger number of children (five to six children) at the same time.

The dramatic play center consists of two corners: a fixed corner and an accompanying corner. A fixed corner represents the natural environment in the house (kitchen, bedroom, and living room). However, the accompanying corner changes according to the unit that teachers
teach per week; it may be grocery store, beach, salon, tailor shop, clothes shop, or laundromat. The furniture and tools of the fixed corner are provided by the Ministry of Education, while the tools for each unit of the accompanying corner are brought by the teachers. Generally, ideas for the accompanying corner of the unit that can be implemented in the classroom are distributed to teachers by the Ministry of Education, although the teachers are certainly free to create and work out other ideas. For example, in the “Hands” unit, the teacher can make the accompanying corner in the dramatic play center in the form of a café, and the child can play different roles, such as a coffee and juice maker, a visitor to drink coffee or juice, and others. In addition, in the “My Health and Safety” unit, the teacher can transform the accompanying corner in the dramatic play center to a medical clinic where there is a bed covered with a white sheet, a small desk at which the doctor sits, a chair on which the patient sits, and a small pharmacy with empty medicine cartons, clothes, and doctor tools. Children can play several roles in this corner: a doctor, a nurse, a pharmacist, a patient, and other roles that simulate what they see when they go to the medical clinic (Ministry of Education, 2020).

The Ministry of Education defines teacher roles in dramatic play centers as observers of the development of children and supervisors to ensure their safety in the learning center. The regulations indicate that teachers can intervene as a stimulus for dramatic play or as a participant in play (asking open questions, helping to extend the play, making it more complicated, describing children’s work, and introducing new vocabulary) without defining certain roles for children to play or interfering with the degree of control over children’s dramatic play (Ministry of Education, 2020).
Biological Differences

The analysis revealed that three of the participants considered that children’s play role differences were compatible with their gender roles, which are associated with biological distinctions and capabilities between males and females. Al-Khateeb (2014) explained gender differences in Saudi norms as “the innate, essential and unchangeable characteristics, and these should not be disturbed or forced” (p. 64). Participants agreed that these perceptions were deeply entrenched in Saudi society and indicated that the children’s play differences strived to adhere to these longstanding norms in their dramatic play roles. In this regard, Sarah and Leena indicated that boys’ and girls’ roles in dramatic play were dictated by their appropriateness and conformity to the physical and mental characteristics of males and females, respectively. The preschool teachers’ perceptions were projected to the children through the supervision of activities during dramatic play in the classroom. For instance, Leena opined,

In general, girls tend to play roles that emulate their feminine nature and interests, such as mother, hairdresser, or beauty roles, while boys tend to have roles that show their strength and leadership roles, such as playing the role of a policeman or a firefighter; they like to play these two roles a lot.

She also explained that there are some roles that girls and boys have different desires to play, and there are roles they both have the same desire to play:

With regard to children’s play in the medical clinic, there was no difference in girls and boys playing the role of doctor, patient, nurse, and pharmacist. They all love these roles and play them equally. I did not notice a difference in their tendencies and their desire to play these roles. However, in the food unit, when I made the accompanying corner in the
dramatic play center a pizzeria, the girls liked to play the role of chef and caterer more than the boys, and the girls were very happy when playing these roles, while the boys were often playing the role of pizzeria visitors. On the contrary, in the national unit, when the accompanying corner in the dramatic play center was transformed into an airport, boys tended to play the role of the pilot, and the girls only played the role of passengers. Even from the beginning of this unit to the end of the unit, for two weeks, I did not see any girl who played the role of the pilot because in real life they have not seen any woman piloting a plane. All the pilots are men. Therefore, the girls think that this role is limited to boys only.

Sarah reflected a different point of view about children’s role preferences in the medical clinic play when she described children’s dramatic play in her classroom. She pointed out,

If they are playing roles in a medical clinic, the child who plays the role of a doctor wears a doctor and a stethoscope. The second child plays the patient. They play as if the doctor examines the sick child and gives him medicine. In general, boys in my class tended to play a doctor more than girls, whereas when we worked in the bakery corner, girls liked to play the role of the baker more. The majority of those who played the baker role were girls, as it touched them more than boys. In general, girls tend to play roles that emulate their feminine nature and interests, such as the role of mother, hairdresser, or beauty roles, while boys tend to have roles that show their strength and leadership roles, such as playing the role of a policeman or a firefighter. They like to play these two roles a lot.

When I discussed how gender influences children’s role preferences in dramatic play with Leena, she pointed out that boys do not like to play with dolls, and girls do not like to play
roles associated with boys, such as barber, because it is meant for the other gender from their point of view.

The only role that boys never take is the role of caring for the dolls, such as feeding the doll. This role is impossible for boys to play; most girls play this role, even when I put in the dramatic play center a women’s salon section that contains cosmetics, a hair dryer, a mirror, and hair accessories, as well as a barber section that contains combs, scissors, and a mirror. Even though they are next to each other, the boys never entered the salon section “because it is the girls’ section” from their point of view; they also didn’t think to play the role of a beautician who puts on cosmetics for the girls. Most of the two roles that boys never play in dramatic play are feeding dolls and makeup. Girls also did not enter the barber [section] “because it is a place for boys only.”

This indicates that Sarah and Leena perceived that the play roles of boys are distinctly different from those of girls because of their biological differences and equally agreed with the Saudi cultural tradition.

Norah indicated that children define their roles in dramatic play based on what they have observed in their context and learning from Saudi culture. Davies and Kasama (2004) stated, “In much of the same way that soldiers learn to obey their superiors, children learn to assent to the dictates of their culture” (p. 137). Therefore, when girls prefer to play roles such as taking care of others or as cooks and boys prefer leadership and strength roles, they imitate what they have observed at home and in society, and that is the predominant dynamic in Saudi culture.

Although the teachers are from different regions, they agree that the difference in children’s play is due to their biological differences. Although some teachers viewed the differences in children’s play roles as based on what they construct from Saudi culture and
traditions at the beginning of the interview, they tended to explain it from a biological view at the end. This was clear in Norah’s response when she was talking about the difference between girls’ and boys’ role-play in a dramatic play center:

The play of a boy is very different from that of a girl by his biological nature and his upbringing as a boy; even his affection and feelings are less than that of a girl. The girl is emotional and sensitive even with her play.

This perception aligns with Chapman’s (2016) argument that the discourses that naturalize and normalize gender role differences in biological differences between boys and girls are largely influenced by teachers’ perceptions of gender role differences and preferences in play.

*Cross-Gender Play Roles*

Teachers’ responses about their perceptions of cross-gender play further reinforced the notion of the strongly held perception that gender roles must be consistent with the biological nature of men and women. From their responses, it was clear that children’s engagement in playing cross-gender roles is not consistent with teachers’ perceptions of the appropriate play roles for boys and girls. They described this type of play as unacceptable. Nonacceptance of cross-gender play roles was well captured in the sentiments of Amal, who noted,

When children’s dramatic play is about the medical clinic, the boy cannot play the role of a pregnant woman, or when they play as a family, he cannot play the role of a mother who breastfeeds her child or wears clothes for girls because this is considered as copying women. And the girl is also not suitable to play the role of a father, wear a man’s clothes, or imitate a man’s voice. It is something not acceptable in our culture.
Leena echoed a similar sentiment: “Gender roles are the actions, behaviors, and appearances that must be consistent with their biological nature as male or female.” Similarly, Sarah argued,

I prefer that the boy and the girl play roles that do not conflict with their biological characteristics, and the male side of the boy and the female side of the girl must be strengthened. This is related to Saudi culture too.

Nevertheless, teachers’ perceptions reflected that they were uncertain about cross-gender play roles and revealed that they experienced some dilemmas in dramatic play supervision when children tried to enact roles that were opposite to their gender. On such occasions, the educators tended to discourage children from playing opposite gender roles and referred these tendencies to the children’s parents to avoid violating the family philosophy, which was taken to be more important and superior over the preschool teachers’ education philosophy. Glasser and Smith (2008) observed that many ECEs who make efforts toward giving children the freedom to play different roles in their classrooms face resistance from multiple sources, especially children’s parents. As parents have much more power over how their child is educated, teachers are apprehensive of the reactions they might receive from parents by giving the children a chance to try cross-gender roles in dramatic play. For example, Norah argued,

I do not encourage playing such roles in my classroom because I do not know the educational philosophy of the child’s family. I will direct the child to play in another learning center or explain to him options for other roles that he can play.

She also revealed that when confronted by children who have extensively enacted cross-gender roles or met by several requests to enact such roles by the children during dramatic play, she often referred the issue to parents.
If the children play the cross-gender roles more than two times, I will discuss their behavior with their parents and find out their viewpoint on these kinds of play and make controls for the children that are commensurate with their parents’ view. If the parents support such play roles, I will allow their children to play the roles they want without directing them. However, if the parents do not agree with these play roles, I will guide their children according to their views.

Sarah mentioned the same point when she discussed how she would act if a child came to her and asked to play a role that is generally associated with the opposite gender:

If a boy came to me and asked to play the role of the mother, I would try to direct him at the beginning to play another role, such as playing the role of the old man or the driver, and if he insisted on playing this role, I would allow him to play the role after I got his family’s permission.

When met with a similar dilemma, Leena explained,

I still refuse the playing of roles in which they [boys or girls] are similar in appearance to the opposite sex, such as playing the role of the mother and the daughter for boys or the father for girls, because it is inconsistent with their biological characteristics and it may not be acceptable in their families.

In Saudi Arabia, many parents hold the misconception that if children are allowed to play with toys perceived to be of the opposite sex, it may impact their gender identity. Glasser and Smith (2008) pointed out that there is a lack of clarity on whose role it is, between the teachers and the family, to teach ideas about gender roles in children. Some believe that that role should be left to the family alone and that the teacher should stay neutral on the topic. From the teachers’ interviews in this study, the role of parents appears to supersede all other
considerations in how teachers actually supervise the role of gender in children’s dramatic play. Therefore, it seems that the teachers prefer to avoid this confusion and adhere to the children’s family conception about gender roles.

Moreover, the educators justified their nonacceptance of cross-gender roles in children’s dramatic play in their concern that children may experience gender ambiguity and even lose their identity if they enacted such roles in dramatic play. Amal argued,

As a teacher, I will guide the child in a specific way to take a play role commensurate with their biological nature as a male or a female in a way that makes them convinced and, at the same time, preserves their role as a male or a female because playing some roles may have an effect on the formation of their gender identity in the future.

Likewise, Norah mentioned,

If you see that the child’s interest in playing this role and assuming it in an exaggerated manner means, for example, a boy putting on cosmetics and wearing a dress or skirt to play the role of a mother or girl, then I absolutely reject this thing because it may affect the child’s gender identity and make him tend to such female roles in the future, especially in makeup and appearance.

Sarah explained her point of view about why she does not accept playing cross-gender roles in her classroom by stating,

It is necessary to enhance their gender identity as a boy or a girl because I think that role-playing related to the opposite gender may confuse their ideas about their gender identity while they are in the process of forming this identity.

Leena also stated the same argument when she indicated, “Such acts may have an impact on their gender identity if they are not directed.” Norah, Amal, and Sarah justified their fears of allowing
children to play cross-gender roles in dramatic play because of what they studied in the unit on gender issues in the Psychology of Play course that they took in their undergraduate studies. All of them mentioned the same study when they talked about how children playing opposite gender roles may influence their gender identity. This study is from the Psychology department at Mutah University in 2012 (Ktattenh, 2013). The study reported that children who adopt opposite gender roles in childhood are 44% more likely to suffer from psychological disorders and gender identity disorders than other children. It advised parents who notice that a boy or a girl continues, for long periods of their childhood, to perform behaviors and roles that are not compatible at all with the behaviors and roles of their gender or that they tend to play games related to the opposite gender, such as playing with makeup tools for boys, to refer them to a specialist doctor to correct their behavior. It was also mentioned that the symptoms of boys with gender identity disorder could include a preference for playing with girls’ clothes and playing with dolls. As for signs of gender identity disorder for girls, they may include a preference for boys’ clothes and a refusal to use decorative accessories on the head or costumes (Ktattenh, 2013).

Teachers in some points associate their rejection for cross-gender roles in children’s dramatic play to the religion of Islam. They described opposite-gender roles as imitation of the other gender and said that this kind of act is prohibited in Islam. These perceptions are aligned with what Alsadan (2000) and Alswaida (2016) stated about Islam. Alswaida (2016) stated that Islam has recognized the differences between males and females in terms of creation and nature, and that this results in a difference in societal roles – which, in Islam, is a mental division – that corresponds with common sense. Alswaida (2016) further added that there are roles specific to men that women cannot perform because they are incompatible with their nature and vice versa. However, there are joint roles that women can play as a man does, and these common roles come
under the domain of choice, not compulsion (Alswaida, 2016). Alsadan (2000) noted that in Islam, there is a stern warning about men imitating women and women imitating men because it contradicts instinct. This imitation includes many forms, such as imitating speech, clothing, behavior, or appearance. This attitude is reflected in Sarah’s response when she stated, 

I will not give children any opportunity to try such opposite gender roles because in our religion, it is forbidden for men to imitate women and it is forbidden for women to imitate men. Therefore, children must be taught these rules and limits from a young age.

Amal indicated, “The values of our Islamic religion reject the roles that mimic the opposite gender in its fashion and appearance.” Leena elaborated the same snippet when she stated, “Our Islamic religion rejects some roles that are contrary to the biological nature of males and females and are usually linked to the opposite gender.”

Again, although the teachers interviewed in this study were from different origins, there is general agreement that a child’s appearance should match their traditional gender appearance as a boy or a girl even, in their dramatic play roles. The preschool teachers’ responses indicated that the religion of Islam, children’s family philosophies, and Saudi culture have influenced the way the educators direct children’s dramatic play roles in their classrooms. Specifically, the educators used the dramatic play centers to direct socially, religiously, and culturally appropriate play and enact widely accepted gender roles. This conforms to the notion advanced by Rogoff (1995) about participatory appropriation, in which educators participate actively in transmitting and confirming the gender roles that children enact in dramatic play (Shutts et al., 2017). Therefore, the educators’ direction for children’s roles in dramatic play was indicated by the level of interconnectedness with their gender role perceptions and personal interpretation of these gender roles (Rogoff, 1995).
Professions Roles and Dramatic Play

The perceptions of strictly segregated gender roles held by the teachers changed when dealing with professional roles and how they were enacted by children during dramatic play. The participants indicated that they did not associate all professional roles with gender and therefore would allow boys and girls in their classes to enact these roles during dramatic play without directing them about which roles were suitable to their gender or physical characteristics. For instance, Amal argued,

Regarding professions (careers), I think that all roles are appropriate for both boys and girls because the occupational clothing is uniform, as it is appropriate for both men and women, and occupational role-play is appropriate for both girls and boys.

Leena also justified her acceptance of freely acting professional roles in dramatic play as the professions’ uniforms have a neutral look, making it appropriate for girls’ and boys’ appearances. She pointed out,

If they [boys and girls] play roles of the professions (careers), I have no problem that both boys and girls wear the uniforms of the professions that they want to embody because in the end, it is a dramatic play and it is based on the imaginations of the child. Also, the shape of the professions’ uniform is uniform for both genders, so I have no problem with both boys and girls wearing it.

Nevertheless, Sarah indicated that they believe that some professional roles were gendered and therefore their enactment during dramatic play should be reserved for their respective genders. In this regard, Sarah revealed that she holds the perception that “hairstyling and teaching are female occupations, while firefighters and police work are reserved for men.”
This is an indication that participatory appropriation is occurring at different levels among the preschool teachers. The teachers who held traditional Saudi views on gender roles and strong religious beliefs accepted that gender roles are clearly demarcated for men and women based on their biological makeup. In contrast, the educators who had accepted gender blindness in professional roles believed that men and women could perform any professional duty regardless of their gender. In turn, such teachers facilitate participatory appropriation among their preschoolers by providing guided activities that leave the children free to enact roles as they wish (Rogoff, 1995).

Teachers' Reluctance to Apply Gender-Inclusive Play Recommendations

This theme is related to the understanding that the teachers had regarding a) how they perceive gender-inclusive play policies and b) how their perceptions may change regarding gender-inclusive play according to the current move in gender roles in the Saudi context.

Saudi Arabia’s National Center for Assessment (2017) has put forward many recommendations aimed at improving teachers’ practices, ensuring gender-inclusive play in their classrooms. The center has recommended that the teacher’s role include creating an inclusive play environment where children are afforded the freedom to choose their preferred play roles and types. However, the four preschool teachers indicated their rejection of these recommendations, voicing that the recommendations are not in line with Saudi culture, and revealed that they did not apply them in their classrooms. This is representative of what Servos et al. (2016) mentioned in their study about how teachers socialize children’s gender roles by including gender role modeling, passing along cultural meanings, and cultural objects. For example, Sarah stated,
I didn’t like those recommendations, and I ignored them because they are not associated with our culture. I still observe the children during dramatic play, and if I feel that this role is not appropriate for the boy or girl to play and it resembles the opposite gender, I must intervene and direct the child to play another role that is consistent with our [Saudi people’s] cultural beliefs.

Amal justified her refusal to implement these recommendations as follows:

These recommendations were not created with convincing justifications and did not relate to cultural beliefs at that time. I refused to apply them in my classroom because I am the classroom teacher and I deal with children and teach them what suits our [Saudi people’s] cultural beliefs and traditions.

The teachers justified their refusal to apply gender-inclusive recommendations because the dominance of gender conversation in Saudi culture has made it difficult to follow through and apply in classrooms. Norah reinforced this position, arguing that Saudi culture is “strict with using the separation of children by gender and assigning expected roles for each gender.”

Therefore, the resistance that gender inclusivity of play faces can be traced to the previous rigid perceptions in the culture about what masculinity and femininity are. She also mentioned, “Introducing alternative ideas is therefore taboo in Saudi society, with connotations of homophobia emerging.” Masculinity is particularly a safe asset, and this explains the backlash boys face for experimenting with feminine items. Masculinity is propped in many cultures by a rigid code of behavior that demands courage, physicality, adventurousness, and competitiveness (Fine, 2011). Any nuance to this construct of masculinity is considered homosexuality. Boys who fail to meet the threshold of “hegemonic masculinity” are therefore perceived to be homosexual. In Saudi Arabia, from Norah’s point of view, these notions are much more
pronounced, owing to the conservative nature of society and the rigid application of gender expectations. It is therefore conceivable that Saudi culture would be much more resistant to changes in the conditioning of preschool children in their process of gender identification.

The teachers’ perceptions changed a little according to the current social transformation of traditional gender role practices taking part in the Saudi context. The new moves regarding gender roles in Saudi Arabia made Amal, Norah, Sarah, and Leena hold these perceptions, along with their traditional perceptions of gender-inclusive play in the dramatic play center, as true. In contrast with their perceptions of general roles, the preschool teachers revealed in the responses how they have changed their practices in their classrooms. They indicated that they had become more tolerant to the display of inclusive play roles by children during dramatic play, particularly when they were role-playing different professions. For instance, Leena explained this by stating,

Previously, I did not like the girl playing the role of the policeman because I always thought that this role contradicted her characteristics as a female. But now, with the opening of the space for women to join the military sectors, my view has changed completely. I have come to see it as possible that the girl plays this role in dramatic play, and she may take this role in the future. Also, in the past, I was not encouraging boys a lot to play the role of a tailor or a cooker because we [Saudi people] saw sewing and cooking as women’s fields in the past. Now, my perception of such roles has changed, and I think they are no longer limited to women. Now, with the new Saudi policies, all fields have become for both genders, so we [teachers] should not assign children specific roles to play in the dramatic play center.

Sarah also mentioned the same concept:
Previously, I would not have let a girl play in a car or play the role of driving a car, as I was always trying to direct her to play another role and I used to tell them, “Driving a car is for the boys only, and they drive us to the place we want to go.” Now, with women driving, I allow girls to play this role because my thinking has changed, and I see that this role is appropriate for both of them. As for the boys, I wasn’t encouraging them to play the role of the cook because I thought that cooking was the role of a woman. Now, they have complete freedom to play this role.

Norah noted the impact of the current changes of gender roles in the Saudi context on children’s roles in dramatic play:

Currently, I see that there are no specific roles for boys and girls in dramatic play, especially in playing professions, because all professions have become available to men and women and are not limited to a specific sex.

Amal confirmed this notion: “Now in preschool, when we have the unit of professions (careers), we have started to see girls wearing police clothes, while previously, it was impossible to see girls wearing this uniform because this profession was reserved for males only.”

However, when I discussed with the teachers if they think differently about the inclusive play recommendations of the National Center for Assessment created in 2017, their responses showed that they are still unsure about them and that their perceptions of these recommendations have not changed significantly from their previous perceptions. That was clear in Leena’s response when she noted,

If I am obliged to implement these recommendations, I will not place in the dramatic center things and tools that tend toward a certain gender to make sure that boys and girls do not play roles that are similar to the opposite gender appearance.
Amal also mentioned the same solution if these recommendations become policies. She stated,

If the Ministry of Education took these recommendations as policies and we got an order to implement them, then I cannot organize the dramatic play center in a way that fits only one of the genders, such as clothes and tools that are associated with one of them.

Regulations from the Ministry of Education and the Crown Prince’s Vision 2030 are intended to relax the stereotyping of gender roles in education. From teachers’ interviews, these may have had some impact on the teachers themselves, but it is unclear whether they have had much impact on their perceptions of gender-inclusive play in dramatic play (other than in the professions).

From these sentiments, it can be understood that Amal, Norah, Sarah, and Leena are cognizant that the dramatic play centers are theaters for socializing preschool students about gender roles because roles not only expose the children to diverse roles but also provide the children freedom to enact those roles. From a sociocultural perspective, the preschool teachers understood that the dramatic play center is a platform, in which the preschoolers are apprentices participating collectively in culturally organized activities, to facilitate the development of students (Murphy et al., 2012). Amal, Norah, Sarah, and Leena understood that preschoolers are active participants in the cultural activity of enacting gender roles, and this is the reason why they encouraged their students to act based on their appropriate gender roles in the dramatic play center (Murphy et al., 2012). Moreover, the educators provided guided participation to the preschoolers by designing activities to be undertaken at the dramatic play centers to enable the children enact the traditional gender roles.

On a personal dimension of sociocultural theory, the educators’ viewpoints exhibited several commonalities. The preschool teachers believed that dramatic role-play is necessary for
the classroom setting because it facilitates an integral learning component for boys and girls to model roles of Saudi men and women, as enacted by the children during their make-believe play (Bodrova & Leong, 2015). In this regard, the findings indicate that the educators believed that dramatic play enabled them to direct children’s gender roles through their knowledge of rules and norms, cultivating acceptable ways of interacting and inculcating boundaries that dictate the socially acceptable behavior for gender roles (Koivula & Hännikäinen, 2017). Consequently, the dramatic play centers were platforms for the personal development of children that the preschool teachers used in matters related to the gender roles in Saudi culture.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I revealed the perceptions of the Saudi ECEs (Amal, Norah, Sarah, and Leena) relating to the gender roles displayed by children during dramatic play. I discussed the themes of the study: Teachers privileged families’ perspectives over policy, teachers' maintained entrenched notions of appropriate gender roles in play, and teachers' reluctance to apply gender-inclusive play recommendations. The next chapter includes a discussion of the study findings and conclusions.
Chapter 5
Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter discusses the findings of the study and provides meaning to the nuanced perceptions articulated by the study participants that would answer the research question. The purpose of this study was to better understand Saudi preschool teachers’ perceptions of gender roles in children’s dramatic play by mainly focusing on whether and how the current moves and relevant policy changes in the Saudi context may help ECEs to think differently about gender roles in children’s dramatic play. The overarching question that guided this study is as follows: What perceptions do Saudi ECEs hold about children’s gender roles in dramatic play?

Consequently, this study sought to fill the gap in the literature related to teachers’ gender perceptions and children’s gender roles in play in Arabic and Islamic culture while giving special attention to the Saudi context from a sociocultural perspective. This chapter discusses the interpretation of the major findings of the study, conclusions, implications, recommendations for future research, and reflexivity.

Teachers Privileged Families’ Perspectives Over Policy

This theme emerged from the traditional views about gender roles that were held by the teachers and how these perceptions are reflected in the dramatic play of children in their classrooms. This theme is particularly insightful on the gender role perceptions held by teachers against the backdrop of those held traditionally by Saudi society. This study revealed that Saudi traditions, culture, and religion hold a strong sway on the perceptions of Amal, Norah, Sarah, and Leena regarding gender roles generally. Even Amal and Norah, who were viewed as the most contemporaries’ participants of the four by the researcher, still held the traditional cultural and
religious norms related to gender roles dearly, despite their contemporary worldviews on the
subject. The traditional view of the four participants conforms to what is prevalent in Saudi
society, with specific roles assigned to men and women based on Arabic culture and the Islamic
religion. Men have been assigned the role of family provider and protector, while women have
been tasked with bearing and raising children, as well as serving their spouses. In this regard, the
family was the first and most influential agent of socialization about gender role perceptions for
the teachers, which was further reinforced by societal interactions.

Another insightful revelation from the sentiments expressed by the participants regarding
traditionally based gender role perspectives is that the level of traditional conservatism in
families and the region of origin in Saudi Arabia were critical factors of influence on the
participants. For instance, the participants that hailed from traditionally conservative families
held stronger perceptions of traditionally assigned gender roles, while those from culturally
permissive families held more contemporary worldviews about gender roles.

Family and societal values not only influence teachers’ gender perceptions but also
impact children’s interactions and play roles. For example, the teachers perceived that children
who hail from conservative cities, such as Arar, uphold more traditional gender roles compared
to those from Riyadh and Makah. In Arar, playing roles ascribed to the opposite gender is
abhorred and invites violent criticism and rejection, while in Makkah and Riyadh, such role
interchange is tolerated by families and society.

Sociocultural theory indicates that the personal, interpersonal, and cultural/institutional
dimensions are valuable in contextualizing the traditional gender role perspectives held by
preschool teachers. Specifically, although the educators held gender role perceptions that were
influenced by their families and reinforced by some of their interactions with children and
parents of the children, the government as an institution is endeavoring to change these perceptions to promote inclusive play in schools (Rogoff, 2003). This is consistent with the argument advanced by Pradhan and Pelletier (2017), who stated that many societies and individuals have resisted alternative ideas that they believe to be taboo and even invoked homophobia.

**Teachers’ Maintained Entrenched Notions of Appropriate Gender Roles in Play**

This theme is directly related to the previous one because it addresses the participants’ perceptions of their understanding of biological differences as the basis of the gender roles enacted by children during dramatic play in the classroom. The participants held that the perceptions that the play roles assigned to girls and boys are based on their biological attributes and that the biological basis of gender is the premise on which the culturally and religiously acceptable gender roles have been entrenched in Saudi society. According to their perceptions, the four participants believed that men are stronger physically and mentally than women. Therefore, Amal, Norah, Sarah, and Leena believed that it is right to assign gender roles biologically and promote the perceived biologically assigned roles among children during dramatic play in the classroom.

The participants’ perceptions influenced their supervision of children during dramatic play in class. The four participants confessed that they encourage children to play gender roles that are compatible with their biological characteristics and generally discourage children from interchanging gender roles. This is evidenced by when boys are discouraged from playing the role of a pregnant woman, a breastfeeding mother, or a hairdresser, and the girls are discouraged from depicting firefighters or police officers.
The perceptions of gender roles held by the participants are further reflected in the dramatic play supervision provided to the students in the classroom. The teachers could not avoid intervening in dramatic play when children sought to play the roles ascribed to the opposite gender. This reaction was common among the four participants despite their diverse worldviews. For instance, Sarah intervened when children took roles ascribed to the opposite gender during dramatic play and directed the children to take up those that were consistent with Saudi cultural beliefs, while Amal insisted that she teaches children about gender roles that suited the cultural beliefs and traditions of Saudi society. These participants attributed these interventions to what they had learned from their family experiences, especially the gender roles played by their fathers and mothers. In turn, they passed these deeply ingrained experiences to the children during dramatic play by directing and persuading the youngsters to assume culturally appropriate roles. The participants provided further insights into their perceptions when they indicated that when children display a tendency to play roles of the opposite gender, they consult the parents to ensure that such dramatic play does not violate the education philosophy of their family. This means that although some of the participants may be tolerant of children playing roles of the opposite gender, they were apprehensive about encouraging such play without the permission of the children’s parents because they feared the wrath they would face from traditionally conservative parents. Interestingly, teachers assume that cross-gender play may cause changes in the children’s construction identity, which may not be suitable and or be the best fit in society. Teachers may receive criticism and pressure, causing further issues for them. At some points, the teachers related their rejection of cross-gender play, as they perceive the origin of the gender-based division of roles and representation of various social characters is linked with the religion of Islam. Warin and Adriany (2015) argued that teachers’ perceptions of
gender roles as biological differences are mostly constructed by religious discourses. Therefore, Saudi preschool teachers perceive gender role differences as based on biological differences created by God, so children need to adhere to them.

Incidentally, the participants diverted from the fast-held gender roles based on biological attributes when it came to the enactment of professional roles in children’s dramatic play. The educators felt that professions roles in contemporary society were gender-neutral so long as it was a profession that was not traditionally, culturally, or religiously assigned to any one gender.

From a sociocultural perspective, the entrenchment of biologically appropriate gender roles in Saudi society is a product of apprenticeship that the teachers underwent during their formation years and thereafter and the guided participation used to direct the socialization of preschoolers (Rogoff, 1995).

**Teachers’ Reluctance to Apply Gender-Inclusive Play Recommendations**

Although the Saudi National Center for Assessment created clear recommendations for enhancing the gender-inclusive play environment in Saudi preschools’ classrooms in 2017, these recommendations were not followed by the teachers. According to this resource, the teachers’ role in dramatic play centers includes ensuring gender-inclusive play by creating a conducive inclusive play environment and interfering minimally with the children’s gender role choices and activities (National Center for Assessment, 2017).

Despite the fact that the four participants were from different origins, societies, and religious backgrounds, their perceptions of the facilitation to enable children to take up gender roles of their choice during play were almost the same. The participants revealed that they felt that these recommendations did not fit with Saudi culture and children’s family values. The participants held strong opinions about allowing children to play roles of the opposite gender.
during dramatic play in their classrooms. In this regard, the teachers, based on their perceptions of gender roles, are guiding children toward roles that normally fit their gender.

The participants revealed that their perceptions of the current move regarding gender roles in the Saudi context have changed a little, especially when children are engaged in role-playing depicting different professional roles. This insight is particularly revealing because it indicates that the traditional perceptions of the teachers about children’s roles in dramatic play are undergoing fundamental changes with the increase in the empowerment of the Saudi woman. All the participants confessed that their perceptions of gender roles in professional contexts assume a contemporary perspective that was gender-neutral, which is a contradiction of the traditional views they hold regarding the role of boys and girls in the family. This is an indication that the participating teachers are adopting some of the recommendations of the Saudi government concerning inclusive play. The ultimate effect of this paradoxical perception of gender roles is that the teachers, who are women, would not interact with men freely or take up gender roles that are traditionally assigned to men, but they would allow children in their classrooms to role-play professional roles and interact during dramatic play without considering gender roles.

Although the teachers’ perceptions changed due to the new Saudi legislation regarding gender roles in the Saudi context, they showed reluctance to implement gender-inclusive play in their classrooms because they still think this might contradict the child’s family philosophy and Saudi cultural values. This shows that the role of parents and cultural values appears to supersede all other considerations in how teachers actually supervise the role of gender in children’s dramatic play. This implies that, from a sociocultural perspective, Saudi social institutions were critical in aligning the educators’ perceptions of gender roles to those of the society and the
government policies. The concept of participatory appropriation captures the transformation that may be occurring in preschool educators as they interact with actors with different mindsets about gender roles and reflect on their teaching experiences (Rogoff, 1995). The preschool educators have to contend with traditional and conservative parents and their own prejudices; on the other hand, they are navigating government policies that advocate inclusive play, of which the teachers felt that the initiatives intend to transform the longstanding Saudi culture, traditions, and values.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to better understand the perceptions that Saudi ECEs hold about gender roles in children’s dramatic play, focusing on how they have responded to the current move in Saudi policies that think differently about gender roles in the Saudi context and the relevant policy changes. Ultimately, the intention of this study is to contribute to the existing knowledge and enhance teachers’ awareness about gender issues and practices to promote children’s learning and development in the classroom. To this end, the overarching question that guided this study is as follows: What perceptions do Saudi ECEs hold about children’s gender roles in dramatic play?

This study answered the research question by revealing the perceptions that Saudi educators held regarding children’s gender roles in dramatic play. The perceptions of the preschool teachers were largely consistent with the cultural and religious values of Saudi society, in which biological characteristics are the basis of role assignment. These perceptions have a significant traditional element that the Arabic society has held for eons, where men and boys are assigned the physically and mentally challenging roles, while women and girls are assigned the caring and less menial roles. In turn, the educators pass on these perspectives as part of the
socialization process of their students and use the dramatic play centers as the platforms of such socialization. This indicates that the family and society are the most influential agents of socialization for the educators’ and children’s perceptions of gender roles. Subsequently, it can be concluded that the perceptions of the educators are influenced significantly by their educational background, interaction with parents and children, Saudi traditions, culture, institutions, and values.

The teachers’ responses to the changes induced by the Saudi government policies on inclusive education, which implored them to think differently about their pedagogical approaches toward preschooolers, indicate that a dilemma persists. Although the educators referred to the Ministry of Education policy guidelines when designing the role-play activities that the children would undertake in the dramatic play centers in their classrooms and promoted inclusive play, they were apprehensive of the repeated enactment of opposite gender role depictions by the children. The teachers found the policy recommendations to be inconsistent with Saudi traditions, culture, and religion and hence did not comprehensively implement them in their dramatic play sessions. The teachers believed that implementing such policies would disorient the identities of the children and draw them away from the traditions that are the hallmark of Saudi traditions.

**Implications and Recommendations**

This study provided insights into Saudi ECEs’ perceptions of children’s gender roles in dramatic play. Findings from this study indicate that while the teachers were aware of the changing gender role worldviews in Saudi society, courtesy of the Saudi government efforts to promote inclusive play, gender role assignments based on traditional Saudi customs, culture, and religion persist, in which gender roles are based on the perceived biological abilities of males and
females. To promote inclusive play, a paradigm shift is needed by the teachers to enable them to promote inclusive play without the fear of undermining family educational philosophies, demeasuring their own religious and cultural convictions, and fomenting an identity crisis in children. To this end, a professional development program is required for in-service teachers. This initiative should target comprehensively training prospective and practicing teachers on gender issues. Teachers that are equipped with sufficient knowledge on gender issues are more likely to embrace the gender role inversion by children during dramatic play as a way of raising gender awareness in children at a critical stage of their learning and development trajectory. Moreover, teachers sufficiently equipped with gender knowledge are more likely to embrace the government’s initiatives and policies on the empowerment of women for social and economic gain without violating cultural and religious norms.

The findings of this study demonstrated that teachers' perceptions are influenced by their educational practices backgrounds. Therefore, teacher educators can play a major role in implementing the goal of vision 2030, which includes gender equality in Saudi context. This can be done by aiding teachers candidates' self-examination and self-awareness of their perceptions toward gender roles in children's play. New information and theories about such gender issues can be easily rejected by teachers' candidates, especially if they are originally from conservative regions. The process of raising teacher candidates’ self-awareness should be guided by the teacher educators who encourage teachers candidates to become critical thinkers throughout their teacher preparation program. In order to develop teacher candidates’ self-awareness, teacher educators must create an emotionally and intellectually safe environment. For teacher candidates to express their feelings and perceptions, they need to gain trust in their educators and develop a feeling of comfort. Therefore, teacher educators should not only focus on teacher candidates’
cognitive knowledge, but also help them to discover their opinions, thoughts, and perceptions. “[The teacher educator’s] role is to support [teacher candidates] perceptions' exploration, offering suggestions, information, and resources when they may be helpful to further [teacher candidates'] development” (Baum & King, 2006, p. 220). To help teacher candidates explore their perceptions toward gender roles, teacher educators can create a space for discussions that allows teachers to reflect their own experiences related to gender roles and express how these experiences shaped their current gender perceptions. This allows the teacher candidates to examine their current perceptions toward gender roles in children's play and understand how they constructed these perceptions. It also gives an opportunity for teachers' educators to suggest teaching methods that may challenge the gender perceptions that teacher candidates bring to their program of study.

Finally, this study showed families’ views appeared to supersede all other considerations in how teachers actually supervise the role of gender in children’s dramatic play. Because of this, I see the importance of families and teachers working together to move forward in implementing gender equity as stipulated in the new Saudi vision 2030. Teacher-parent conferences would enable both parties to share ideas about gender inclusivity in play and learning, in a way that permeates both home and school environments. Both parties can be able to voice their fears and resistance in a conducive and welcoming environment, thus beginning to break down the families and societal barriers. This type of engagement will also enable teachers to communicate their experiences, beliefs, and ideas with parents and to provide resources for the community and schools to cultivate healthy gender attitudes.
Recommendations for Future Research

This study investigated the perceptions of preschool teachers using a qualitative interview approach. Future studies could use alternative appropriate approaches, such as focus groups and surveys of a larger number of teachers. The focus groups would help unearth insights into the teachers’ perceptions from a groupthink perspective, which may or may not differ from that of the individual teacher. This would help to determine the confidence level of the teachers in expressing gender role views that are divergent from those of colleagues and society, which would indicate the likelihood of teachers implementing dramatic play according to the government’s recommendations.

This study focused on teachers practicing in Arar, Saudi Arabia. Future studies could expand the sample size of the participants, including other cities and regions in Saudi Arabia, to generate insights from a national perception. Moreover, future studies could take a cross-cultural approach in which the perceptions of Saudi teachers are compared to those of educators in other Arabic and Islamic, as well as non-Arabic and Islamic, countries. Such comparative methods would provide more insights into the prevalence of the traditional gender role perceptions among teachers and the influence they have on the conduct of children’s dramatic play in their classrooms.

Further, this study focused on the perceptions of teachers, which revealed that they are influenced by family educational philosophies and cultural and religious convictions. Future studies could survey parents to determine the level of entrenchment of the traditional views regarding the dramatic play of their children and their perceptions of inclusive play. This would
help to identify the level of parental influence on teachers’ efforts to promote inclusive play in
dramatic play centers.

**Reflexivity**

Reflexivity is a critical thinking approach employed by researchers that seeks to elucidate
the context that shaped the research process and the knowledge production thereafter (Lazard &
McAvoy, 2020). From this precept, I traced my journey through the research process and present
the experiences that influenced my research interest and approach and, eventually, my role as the
researcher of this study.

My interest in the topic of gender issues was inspired by my educational background and
teacher training experiences, as well as the experiences I have gathered along my teaching
journey as a professional practitioner. Gender issues represent a dominant topic in social
discourses in Saudi society – which is currently seeking to empower its citizens to become
adaptive in the global environment, as reflected in the government’s educational and
empowerment policies and initiatives. However, the topic remains highly emotive and
controversial because the new ideas that are emerging and becoming increasingly embraced by a
section of Saudi society seek to overturn the longstanding Saudi cultural and religious traditions.
With women driving and participating in professional activities previously viewed to be the
preserve of men, I felt the need to promote this emerging mindset and worldview early, and the
preschool context provides an apt platform to promote this social and cultural transformation. In
turn, these notions inspired me to employ sociocultural theory as the lens with which to
undertake this study, as I felt it would provide valuable insights for promoting gender inclusivity
and social justice in a dramatic play setting.
My footprint in this study is best illustrated in the data analysis and discussion sections, in which my input was greatest and most significant to the study (Davis, 2020). This provided an opportunity for good interactions between myself and the participants. In this regard, I selected the interview method as the most suitable approach for documenting these interactions and the nuanced perspectives that emerged. This enabled me to pursue and unearth insights into the gender role issues from the perceptions of the teachers from their lens.

The most significant lesson I gathered from this study is that gender role stereotyping persists in Saudi society, including the preschool setting. Therefore, an effective move toward gender equity and social justice would require the undoing of the deeply entrenched and traditional Arabic and Islamic notions of gender roles. This is because although there is evidence that Saudi society is gradually transforming, the conservative mindsets of parents and prejudices of the educators are stifling this transformation. To remedy the situation, a comprehensive drive to change the Saudi national worldview and mindset of citizens should begin by equipping preschool educators with sufficient and current knowledge on gender issues, accompanied by increased awareness raising among parents of preschoolers to transform their entrenched gender stereotypes. Another critical lesson was the enhancement of my self-awareness regarding my own gender-related prejudices and my unending dilemma and conflict regarding the stark differences between traditional Saudi practices, beliefs, and values and the worldviews that are being promoted by the global society and the Saudi government. This paradox is shared by many other educators and globally exposed Saudi citizenry.
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Appendix A: Approval of the Ministry of Education in Arar, Saudi Arabia
Appendix B: First Interview Protocol

General Questions

- How long have you been teaching preschool?

- What did you like most about teaching preschool age?

Guiding Questions

- What does the word gender mean to you? Why did you describe it like that?

- What are your perceptions about gender roles in general?

- Tell me a little bit about your family perceptions of men and women gender roles in general.

- What are your society perceptions of men and women gender roles?

- How do you see Saudi culture-defining gender roles?

- Please describe how do your gender perceptions are influenced by what did you learn from your family, society and culture about men’s and women’s roles?
Appendix C: Second Interview Protocol

- What does dramatic play mean to you?
- Please tell me a little bit about a dramatic play center in your classroom.
- In your classroom, how do boys and girls play in dramatic play? What do you think about their play?
- What do you think the reasons are for children to choose particular roles in dramatic play?
- Please describe how gender may impact children’s play. How does gender impact children’s dramatic play?
- Do you believe some play roles are not appropriate for a girl or boys to play in dramatic play? What are they? Why are they not appropriate?
- What would you do if someone wants to play a role in generally associate with the other gender? Why?
- What social traditions and norms did you consider when conceptualizing the appropriate gender roles in children’s play?
- How did you respond to the recommendations of Assessment and Evaluation Center in 2017 for applying gender inclusive play in the preschools’ classrooms? Why?
- Related to that, do you think in 2020 we are different in our thinking about gender roles from ten years ago? How?
- How do you respond to the current move of Saudi policies to think differently in terms of how do you see gender roles in Saudi context? In what way, this respond to these changes let you think differently about gender roles of boys and girls in dramatic play?
Appendix D: Informed Consent (Arabic Version)

privacy: يُطلب منك المشاركة في دراسة بحثية يجب أن تماحى المعلومات المرتبطة في هذا المنشور على تحديد ما إذا كنت ترقع في المشاركة أو لا ترقع. الإفصاح عن المعلومات الأساسية حول الدراسة يتم في ظروف أخرى. يسعى هذا القسم النصي الرئيسي لتحديد ما في هذا البحث عن علماء فلسطين، قصد تعليم الطبقة الأولى في المستشفيات العربية، وتوجيه لعمليات البحث المعمودية الأخرى عبر بناء النواحي الرئيسية.

تفاصيل الدراسة: هذه الدراسة سوف تجري مع مشاركة رأس الأطباء الأساسيين والمكلفين بالمتابعة العربية السعودية. الهدف من هذه الدراسة هو تحسين التصورات السكانية لدرجة محددات الأدوية في البلاد العربي في الأطباء الذين يعانون من هذه الظاهرة. يتلقى المشاركون في هذه الدراسةDuration من 30 إلى 60 دقيقة لكل حالة.

موضوع الدراسة: تتطلب المشاركة في هذه الدراسة لأنه معروف في حالة الفقر والبطالة، ومع ذلك، فإن المشاركة في الفحص، يمكن أن يساعد في التقليل من هذه الأدوية، بما في ذلك استخدام الأدوية. يشير الفحص، يمكن أن يساعد في التقليل من هذه الأدوية، بما في ذلك استخدام الأدوية.

الشروط: حتى إذا أتمّت مؤلف هذه الدراسة، فإن الموضوعات ذات الخصوصية ودرجة معلوماتك الشخصية، يجب على أي شخص لديه سياسة الأشخاص على سماحك بناء القائلون عليها.

لا يجب أن تكون هذه المشاركة...
المشتركة في مباشرين ونورا عدداً مهماً من المشاركين على أساس الوقت العضب وقد تم اختيارهم أيضاً ما إذا كانوا مشاركاً

* كمالة عبر الإنترنت أو مقالة في علكة.*

* ستكون للمشاركة نشاط متواصل متغيراً ومستمر ومستمر، من 3 إلى 50، بواقع مثقاة أو من خلال تطبيق متقدم.*

* المشاركين ستكون في مختلف المواقع من 30 إلى 60 دقيقة في الساعة لجلسة الدردشة.*

* الجلسة الأولى تشمل توجيه المشاركين إلى مبدأ اتصاله في البداية الدقيقة للدردشة، والمواقع، والחותم، والموقع، والموقع، والموقع.*

* ستكون الميزة مملوكة إلى مستوى الأعراض المتأصلة، وستكون تعليقات على الاتصال الدقيق في البداية الدقيقة للدردشة.*

* المشاركين سيسجلون شكل الأعراض المتأصلة في السلسلة تشغيل الأعراض المتأصلة.*

* يمكن استخدام نتائج هذه الدقائق لتقييم الأعراض المتأصلة، ومستوى الأعراض المتأصلة.*

* في المواقع الثلاثة، أو الوظيفة.*

* إجمالي عدد المشاركين في الدراسة:* 6 مشاركين، خلال أشهر استخدام دردشة في مرحلة مباشرين في المراكز العربية لل여تاة في هذه الدراسة.

* الدعائم / المشاركية النموذجية / الإصابة*:

* ليس هناك مشكلة في هذه الدراسة البديلة، يجب أن تكون في هذه الدراسة فقط، إذا كان لدى المشاركين يوجد*.

* أي مشكلة في المشاركة في هذه الدراسة، أو Participate في أي وقت، يمكن أن تكون هناك عرية أو خطر في*.

* إذا تم تتويج المشاركات في هذه الدراسة، أو مشاركاة في هدف المشاركة في هذه الدراسة، أو مشاركة في هدف المشاركة.*

* الفاتحة:

* ينبغي توصيف هذه الدراسة في مهنة واحدة، ويجب أن تكون مشاركة مع مراعاة مشاركات الزيادة في أوروبا لتحسين*.

* لم يكن قادر على استخدام المشاركين.*

* المخاطر أو استخدام الأدوية الملاحثة.*

* يجب أن يكون للباحث على حد الأقل من المشاركين، حيث أن المخاطر المرتبطة بهذه الدراسة هي نفسها التي تم تجاوزها، وتم*.

* ذلك، من خلال المخاطر الملاحثة، وينبغي أن تكون هذه الأدوات، وتسهيلاً على ما يلي، يمكن أن تكون من المخاطر، وينبغي*.

* في حين تجربة الأدوات، ينبغي أن تكون هذه الأدوات، وتسهيلنا على ما يلي، يمكن أن تكون من المخاطر، وينبغي*.

* إجراءات، وتشمل من ناحية أخرى، دردشة عبر الإنترنت، عبر الإنترنت الوظائف، والوظائف الأكاديمية، جرب اجتياح.*

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التعريضات

لن تكون أي أجراً أو تعويضات أخرى مقابل المشاركة في هذه الدراسة.

التكليف

شاركتك في الدراسة إن كانت أي شيء.

الخصوصية والسرية

مغادرة قصيرة جداً للمعازل على خصوصية وسرية مبالاة. لا يمكننا ضمان السرية المطلقة، قد يتم كشف بعض المعلومات الشخصية إذا كان ذلك مطلوباً بموجب القانون. قد يحتاج بعض الأشخاص إلى الإبلاغ عن ممارسات الدراسة الخاصة بنا. هذه الأفراد هم:

أ) أفقي الجسد: بما في ذلك البحث الرئيسي وبيانات الدراسة وجميع معلومات البحث الأخرى.

ب) بعض الأشخاص المعنيين والتشريعات الذين ينتمون إلى مجموع ممارسات الدراسة على سبيل المثال، قد يحتاج الأفراد الذين تتعلق بهم في الدراسة إلى الإبلاغ عن ممارسات الدراسة للجمعية. يتم ذلك بانتظام من قبل جمعية ممارسات الدراسة للجمعية.

ب) مجموع المعلومات العضوية التابعة لجامعة أوبوردا والموظفين المرتبين به الذين لديهم مسؤوليات إشرافية لهذه الدراسة، الموظفين في كل تفاصيل الحجز والمتابعة.

قد تكون أن تكون من هذه الدراسة إذا انتهت تلك الإجراءات. إن تنشر أي شيء من شأنه أن يتعرض لشخص آخر.

ماذا لو تتوفر معلومات جديدة عن الدراسة؟

خلال هذه الدراسة قد تكون المعلومات التي تتوفر بمجرد أن تكون دقيقة. قد تتوفر تلك المعلومات التي، بعد ذلك، قد تتم المحاكمة أو زيادة شأنها أو الاكتشاف في أي وقت ممكن إذا تتوفر معلومات أخرى.

المخاوف أو الشكوى

إذا كانت لديك أي استفسار أو مخاوف بشأن هذا الدراسة، فالأفضل أن تقوم بإرساله إلى:

RSCH-IRB@unr.edu

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الموافقة على المشاركة في البحث

هناك اتفاق في المشاركة في هذه الدراسة. يجب أن يكون الاختيار النهائي لموقعك، سواء إذا تم تقديم الموافقة للدراسة أو لا.
Appendix E: Informed Consent (English Version)

Informed Consent to Participate in Research Involving Minimal Risk

Title: Saudi Early Childhood Educators' Perceptions of Gender Roles in Children's Dramatic Play

Study # STUDY000850

Overview: You are being asked to take part in a research study. The information in this document should help you to decide if you would like to participate. The sections in this Overview provide the basic information about the study. More detailed information is provided in the remainder of the document.

Study Staff: This study is being led by Dalal Alanazi who is a PhD student at Early Childhood Education in University of South Florida. This person is called the Principal Investigator. is being guided in this research by Jolyn Blank, USF professor of early Childhood Education. Other approved research staff may act on behalf of the Principal Investigator.

Study Details: This study is being conducted with in-service preschool teachers in Arar, Saudi Arabia. The purpose of this study is to better understand Saudi preschool teachers' perceptions of gender roles in children's dramatic play. For this, I will use two semi-structured interviews for 30 to 60 minutes for each interview.

Subjects: You are being asked to take part in this research study because you are a female and in-service preschool teacher in Arar, Saudi Arabia.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time. There will be no penalties or loss of benefits or opportunities if you do not participate or decide to stop once you start. Your decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your job status, employment record, employee evaluations, or advancement opportunities.

Benefits, Compensation, and Risk: We do not know if you will receive any benefit from your participation. There is no cost to participate. You will not be compensated for your participation. This research is considered minimal risk. Minimal risk means that study risks are the same as the risks you face in daily life. However, with in-person interviews there is a risk of transmission of the novel coronavirus from these procedures, and that while precautions will be taken, I cannot guarantee that the participant will not be exposed to the virus. Therefore, interviews will be conducting remotely by doing phone or virtual video interviews as you choose.

Confidentiality: Even if we publish the findings from this study, we will keep your study information private and confidential. Anyone with the authority to look at your records must keep them confidential.

Why are you being asked to take part?
Study # STUDY000850

The purpose of this research study is to understand the perceptions of Saudi early childhood teachers about gender roles in children's dramatic play. You are being asked to take part in this study because: (1) you are in-service preschool teacher in Arar, Saudi Arabia, (2) you are a female, (3) you have a bachelor's degree in early childhood education, and (4) you range of age 23-35 years old.

Study Procedures:
If you take a part in this study you will be asked to:
- Participate in two interviews conducted by the researcher. The interviews will take place based on your convenient time. You will also identify whether you want it as phone interview or virtual video interview.
- The two interviews will be semi-structured interviews between 30 to 60 minutes. The first interview will be about the open-ended questions I formulated to investigate the study research question. The second interview will be to expand the our conversation about the study so that it will include the rest of the open-ended questions which have been prepared in my interview protocol, follow up questions, expansion, and clarifications.
- The interviews will be audio recorded for analysis purposes. The researcher will take permission of you to record the interviews. To protect your confidentiality, I will use pseudonyms in the study. I will put your real names and your assigning pseudonyms in a password-protected log for my record in drop-box.
- The findings of this study may be used for educational purposes as a part of teacher training. Furthermore, the study findings may be presented at local/ or national conferences.

Total Number of Subjects
About 6 Saudi in-service preschools at Arar, Saudi Arabia will take part in this study.

Alternatives / Voluntary Participation / Withdrawal
You do not have to participate in this research study. You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you are entitled to receive if you stop taking part in this study. Decision to participate or not to participate will not affect your job status.

Benefits
The potential benefits of participating in this research study include:
- This study may add to your knowledge in the field and enhance your awareness about gender issues and practices to better enhance children's development and learning in your classroom.
Study # STUDY000150

Risks or Discomfort
This research is considered to be minimal risk. That means that the risks associated with this study are the same as what you face every day. However, with in-person interviews there is a risk of transmission of the novel coronavirus from these procedures, and that while precautions will be taken, I cannot guarantee that the participant will not be exposed to the virus. Therefore, interviews will be conducted remotely by doing phone or virtual video interviews as you choose.

Compensation
You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

Costs
It will not cost you anything to take part in the study.

Privacy and Confidentiality
We will do our best to keep your records private and confidential. We cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Your personal information may be disclosed if required by law. Certain people may need to see your study records. These individuals include:

- The research team, including the Principal Investigator, study coordinator, study nurses, and all other research staff.
- Certain government and university people who need to know more about the study. For example, individuals who provide oversight on this study may need to look at your records. This is done to make sure that we are doing the study in the right way. They also need to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety.
- The USF Institutional Review Board (IRB) and its related staff who have oversight responsibilities for this study, and staff in USF Research Integrity and Compliance.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

What if new information becomes available about the study?
During the course of this study, we may find more information that could be important to you. This includes information that, once learned, might cause you to change your mind about being in this study. We will notify you as soon as possible if such information becomes available.

Concerns, or complaints.
If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this study, call Dalal Alanazi at + (966) 559086335.
Study # STUDY/000850

If you have questions about your rights, complaints, or issues as a person taking part in this study, call the USF IRB at (813) 974-5638 or contact by email at IRB@usf.edu.

Consent to Take Part in Research

Would you like to participate in this study? [If verbal consent is given]
Appendix F: IRB letter of Approval

EXEMPT DETERMINATION

October 9, 2020

Dalal Alanazi
1247 Timber Trace Dr
Wesley chapel, FL 33543

Dear Dalal Alanazi:

On 10/8/2020, the IRB reviewed and approved the following protocol:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application Type</th>
<th>Initial Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IRB ID</td>
<td>STUDY000850</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review Type</td>
<td>Exempt 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Saudi Early Childhood Educators’ Perceptions of Gender Roles in Children’s Dramatic Play</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protocol</td>
<td>• Social -Behavioral protocol template</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The IRB determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review.

In conducting this protocol, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the INVESTIGATOR MANUAL (HRP-103).

Please note, as per USF policy, once the exempt determination is made, the application is closed in BullsIRB. This does not limit your ability to conduct the research. Any proposed or anticipated change to the study design that was previously declared exempt from IRB oversight must be submitted to the IRB as a new study prior to initiation of the change. However, administrative changes, including changes in research personnel, do not warrant a modification or new application.

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit a new request to the IRB for a determination.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Walker
IRB Research Compliance Administrator
Appendix G: Citi Program Certificate

Certificate of Completion

Dalal Alanazi

Completed the Social / Behavioral Investigators and Key Personnel Refresher Course

on Sunday, January 20, 2019

CITI Certificate ID#: 1108