

THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER AND AGE ON PLAY EXCLUSION METHODS OF  
PRESCHOOL AGE CHILDREN

A THESIS

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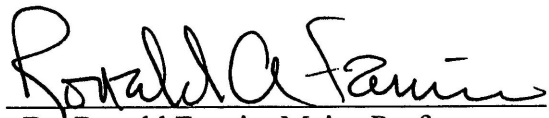
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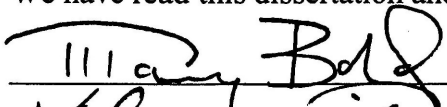
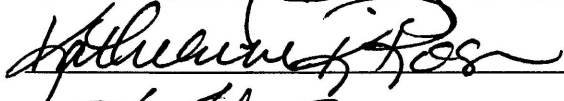
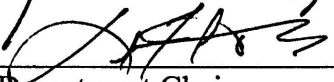
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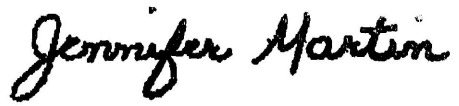
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Tiffany Hamlett entitled "A Content Analysis of Aggression in Television Programs for Preschoolers." I have examined this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy with a major in Child Development.

  
Dr. Ronald Fannin, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

  
  
  
Department Chair

Accepted:

  
Dean of the Graduate School

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## DEDICATION

To Jeremy, for inspiring and supporting me.

To Lola, who made this degree more meaningful.

To Darla, for keeping me company late at night.



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## ABSTRACT

TIFFANY HAMLETT

### THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER AND AGE ON PLAY EXCLUSION METHODS OF PRESCHOOL AGE CHILDREN

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The purpose of this study was to examine play exclusion in preschool age children. Play exclusion was noted by the frequency and methods that were used by children. The two variables that were examined in this study were gender and age of preschool children. The study was conducted using observations of free play activities for two age groups of children at a child development center. The findings of this study indicate that gender and age influence the methods of play exclusion and the frequency with which they occur. Boys were found to engage in play exclusion more frequently than girls and to use physical methods. Girls were found to use verbal methods of exclusion more frequently. In addition, younger children were found to engage in physical exclusion more than older children.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

For young children, play is an important part of development (Hughes, 1999). Most children feel that play is an enjoyable event and can be further enriched through interactions with peers. One potential possibility of play with peers is play rejection or exclusion. At the preschool age, the majority of a young child's time is spent in play; consequently exclusion is more likely to occur in this context than during other activities. Therefore, in order to fully understand play exclusion, one should examine the early foundations.

#### *Statement of Problem*

In the past, many studies have addressed play exclusion in children; however few have focused on the preschool population. In fact, the majority of studies center on children aged 5 and up. Although this older age group has provided a wealth of information in this area of research, one flaw is that older children engage in less free play activities than younger children due to time restraints such as school (Hughes, 1999). Therefore, in order to gain a more accurate view of play exclusion one should examine children during a developmental stage at which play is more prominent. By examining preschool age children, not only will one be able to observe more free play activities, one will also be able examine the formation of play exclusion methods from an early age.

One other area that past research has neglected is a comparison of behaviors across age groups. Although numerous studies have examined play exclusion at a specific age, a clear comparison has only been drawn across genders (Grotmeter & Crick, 1996; Wood, Cowan, & Baker, 2002). By comparing both the variables of age and gender, a better understanding of play exclusion may be gained.

### *Statement of Purpose*

The purpose of this study was to examine the methods of play exclusion utilized by preschool age children of different ages. As children mature, the types of play they engage in change; therefore, the methods used to exclude others from play may also be altered to meet the needs of the current play stage. In addition to identifying methods of play exclusion, the study examined how and if these methods varied by gender.

### *Research Questions*

For this study the two research questions were examined:

1. Are there any observable gender differences in play exclusion methods used by preschool age boys and girls between the ages 24 to 47 months?
2. Are there any observable age differences in play exclusion methods used by preschool age children when children ages 24 to 36 months old are compared to children ages 38 to 47 months old?

### *Definitions*

In order to clarify the focus of the study, the following definitions were used.

*Play exclusion:* Play exclusion is defined as any verbal or non-verbal action that is used by one or more children to prevent another child from engaging in play. Verbal

actions would include statements such as “go away”, “you can’t play with me/us”, “ I/we don’t like you”, or “NO”. In addition, name-calling or teasing might also be used. Non-verbal actions would include ignoring another child’s request to play, moving away from the child who wishes to play, hoarding toys to prevent play, or physical contact such as hitting or pushing to deter another child from engaging in play.

*Method:* Method is defined as a procedure or process for achieving an end; a manner or way of doing something (Merriam-Webster, 1995).

### *Assumptions*

The majority of the children observed were classified as typically developing. Although some children observed in this study may not have fallen into this category, the researcher did not know the specifics of each child; therefore these differences in the children were not be included in the research.

All observations took place during free play activities. No observations were conducted during teacher lead activities or play between an adult and the children. By eliminating teacher lead play and activities from this study, a less biased picture of the children’s interactions with peers was provided.

### *Delimitations*

One potential problem with this study was distinguishing onlooker play from play exclusion. Onlooker play occurs when a child watches other children engage in play but does not interact (Hughes, 1999). In this case it might have been difficult for the observer to rate this as a form of exclusion, since the observer might not have been sure if the onlooker was actually excluded. In order to distinguish onlooker play from play



exclusion, only instances where the child's request to play are ignored or rejected were recorded. If the child made no attempt to engage in play with peers, then his actions were classified as on-looker play. By defining onlooker play and play exclusion in these manners, one was to distinguish between the two behaviors.

One other barrier to this study was the presence of the teacher. Although the teacher may not have affected some children during their play, others might have altered their interactions when a teacher was near. Play exclusion might have occurred more frequently when there was not an adult present. In order to eliminate such influences, observations were made with children that were only interacting with peers.

### *Summary*

This study attempted to examine play exclusion in young children. The study examined both the frequency and methods that were employed by preschool age children on the variables of gender and age. Play exclusion was defined as any verbal or non-verbal action that was used to prevent another child from entering into play. For this study it was assumed that all children were typically developing and observations were only made during free play with peers. Possible delimitations for this study could have been distinguishing onlooker play from play exclusion and the influence of the teachers on the children's actions.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of Literature

#### *Introduction*

The goal of this study was to evaluate the differences in play exclusion methods by gender and age. By focusing on play exclusion, one could possibly identify how this contributes to social development as well as how it relates to the development of play skills in children. By examining the dimensions of play exclusion, a better understanding of the interaction between gender, age, and play exclusion may emerge.

When engaging in social interactions, children may experience play exclusion from their peers. Factors that could contribute to this exclusion include the behavioral characteristics of the child such as aggression or isolation, as well as their developmental level or ability to communicate with peers. Any combination of these factors as well as an interaction with their age and gender could influence the frequency in which they are excluded from play. These factors could also contribute to the methods that they themselves use to exclude others. The gender and age of the child could influence the frequency as well as the method of play exclusion that is used against their peers. Although studies have examined similar variables (Crick, Casas, & Mosher, 1997), no study has focused specifically on these two variables, especially across age groups of preschoolers. This study attempted to examine the influence of these variables on play exclusion in preschool children.

In the field of child development there are numerous theories that contribute to the understanding of children. Two theories in particular are applicable to the area of play exclusion. Jean Piaget's theory explains the cognitive development of children by focusing specifically on how they interpret the world around them based on their level of development (Siegler, 1998). Albert Bandura's social learning theory explains behavior of children based on their ability to model behaviors that they see in their environment (Berk, 2000). By combining the principles of these two studies, one may see how play exclusion is interpreted from the child's perspective.

### *Theoretical Framework*

*Jean Piaget:* Although Piaget's theory on child development was not specifically focused on play, one element of his work is applicable to the understanding of play exclusion. According to Piaget, children between the ages of 2 and 6 are classified in the preoperational stage of development. A key element of this stage is the concept of egocentrism, which is defined as the inability to perceive something from someone else's perspective (Siegler, 1998). Since the age group for this study falls into this developmental stage, play exclusion may simply be the result of an inability to understand the other child's wish to play. Therefore, all behavior would center on the individual's own desires, without any consideration for other children's feelings.

*Albert Bandura:* Bandura's Social Learning Theory centers on the idea that all behavior is learned through observation and reinforcement (Berk, 2000). Play exclusion methods thus may be the result of observation of peers or older playmates. The reinforcement element occurs when the model child's actions achieve a reward. In this

case, the reward would occur when the child's method of exclusion is successful.

Children that view a successful execution of play exclusion could then mimic the observed behavior and theoretically receive similar results. In addition, the methods that are used by each gender to reject peers may also be the result of imitation of others of the same gender. Bandura would argue that the tendency to imitate others increases when one observes someone of the same sex and age (Berk, 2000). Therefore, imitating those who have similar characteristics could in turn lead to a prominent gender difference in play exclusion methods.

Many theorists have contributed to the field of child development; however, Piaget and Bandura provide some insight into the mind of children. By applying their theories to the topic of play exclusion, this occurrence may be viewed as a normal behavior for children.

### *Review of Literature*

Play exclusion can occur in many forms and contexts. The methods that are used to exclude others from play may vary by situation, individuals, or gender. In addition, the reasons that the individual is rejected may also vary due to reasons such as popularity or even personality traits.

Numerous factors can contribute to the exclusion of peers from play. Some variables that have been identified include the behavioral characteristics of the child as well as the child's development level. Other factors that might increase a child's risk of play exclusion include the ability of a child to enter into a playgroup, the ability of a child to communicate with peers, the child's egocentrism, and the child's stage of play

development. In addition, the environment in which the children interact may contribute to the frequency of play exclusion, especially among preschoolers.

### *Behavioral Characteristics*

Although children express a wide variety of emotions during social interactions, children that are overly aggressive in nature or that are socially withdrawn from others tend to have an increased risk for exclusion from play by peers (Berk, 2000). According to Berk, children who are rejected because of aggression show high rates of conflict and hostility, as well as impulsive behaviors. Dunn and Hughes (2001) found that children often verbally expressed that they did not want to play with a peer who was aggressive in nature. In Dunn and Hughes' study, children who initiated violent pretend play themes were often left to play on their own or were not allowed to join in an already present play theme. Although these aggressive actions in this study were primarily verbal, physical aggressiveness has also been shown to attribute to a peer's exclusion from a playgroup.

One influential element in such behavior has been identified as chronic maltreatment throughout development. Chronic maltreatment is long-term neglect or abuse by a caregiver or older adult (Berk, 2000). Children who experience such conditions have an increased likelihood of expressing aggressive and coercive behaviors (Bolger & Patterson, 2001). A second variable that can influence aggressive behavior is the strength of parental attachment. The attachment level at which a child is classified is found to have a significant role on their interaction with peers (Turner, 1991). Children, especially boys who are classified as insecure, express more aggressiveness and less positive behavior than other children. These behaviors in turn result in more conflict and

exclusion by peers. Therefore, since attachment develops very early in life, aggression due to insecure attachment may be exhibited in young children.

Since cooperation is an essential role in play, children that express aggressiveness are more likely to be disliked by peers and have a higher rate of exclusion from play as well as fewer peer interactions (Howes & Phillipsen, 1998). More significantly, aggressive as well as socially withdrawn behaviors that are shown during the preschool years often remain stable through adolescence. Therefore, a child who exhibits these behaviors may experience play exclusion throughout the entire school experience (Howes & Phillipsen).

Aggression has been shown to be a prominent factor in play exclusion; however, in some cases aggressive behavior does not always lead to exclusion. For example, peers sometimes view aggressive children as popular, especially in adolescent males (Farmer, 2000). Although aggressive behavior may not harm social status, girls who exhibit highly dominant behaviors are viewed less favorably than their male counterparts (Seban, Pierce, Cheatham, & Gunner, 2003). Therefore, the exclusion of aggressive peers may be affected by the gender of the child.

A second group of children who tend to be rejected due to their behavior characteristics are those that are socially withdrawn (Berk, 2000). Children that are socially withdrawn tend to avoid interactions when faced with social challenges. Often, children with this tendency are too overwhelmed by social anxiety to even attempt to participate with others. Due to their lack of interaction, children with social withdrawal

tendencies tend to be rejected from play by more competent peers (Bolger & Patterson, 2001; Rosen, Furman, & Hartup, 2001).

As with aggressive behaviors, influencing factors to social withdrawal include chronic maltreatment and abuse. However, in addition to social withdrawal, children who are exposed to such conditions often display developmental delays in socialization skills as well as cognitive development when compared to typically developing children (Bolger & Patterson, 2001). These characteristics further increase the likelihood for play exclusion by peers, which can remain constant throughout childhood.

Although aggressive and socially withdrawn personality traits are more distinguishable in school age children, some studies have shown that they emerge during the preschool years (Howes & Phillipsen, 1998). However, since the study that measured these attributes for the preschool age groups measured them in terms of play complexity, it is difficult to accurately assess aggression and social withdrawal in the manner in which it was measured in studies with older children. In order to identify the impact that such behaviors may have on preschool age children, one should examine the behavior characteristics of a child as well as how frequently they are excluded from play.

### *Developmental Levels*

Although behavioral characteristics of a child can have a significant role on play exclusion, a second variable that could be a potential factor is the developmental level of the child. Children who are similar in social and cognitive development may exclude those that do not express comparable skills. For example, children who exhibit similar levels of development on spectrums such as social skills or maturation have been shown

to engage in play activities for a longer period of time than when engaging with peers who do not show the same developmental level (McLeod & Nowicki, 1985). This point is illustrated in children with mild mental disabilities. When these children engage with typically developing children, an increased rate of exclusion has been found (Farmer, 2000). Although the studies used in these findings addressed older children, development levels may also be a factor in toddler play exclusion. Developmental patterns suggest that play and language skills develop simultaneously, which in turn influences how a child is able to interact with peers (Lyytinen, Laakso, Poikkeus, & Rita, 1990). Therefore, toddlers may also choose to play with peers who match their current level of play ability. A possible reason for this variable could be that young children are not able to adjust their play to accommodate the needs of the other child, especially toddlers.

### *Communication Skills*

Another factor could be that the less developed child is not socially able to initiate entrance into a current playgroup. Hazen and Black (1989) identified three communication skills that were important to coherent discourse within a group. These included the ability to clearly direct initiations, the ability to respond appropriately to the initiations of others, and the ability to reinitiate with supportive reasons if the first attempt is unsuccessful. Children less skilled in these three communication abilities were more likely to be excluded from play, especially with more advanced peers. Therefore, if younger children are unable to efficiently express their desire to play, their chance of exclusion may be elevated.



## *Egocentrism*

In addition to cognitive and social development, another contributing factor to play exclusion may center on a child's level of play development. During the preschool years especially, children hold a very strong egocentric view about the world around them (Fields & Boesser, 2002). Not only are children unable to see things from others' perspectives, they are also unable to interpret others' emotions. When children are not developmentally able to see beyond their own view, they may be more likely to exclude others, simply because they do not understand a desire to play. McElwain and Volling (2002) observed more instances of conflict over play materials when a child had a low false belief understanding. False belief is the ability to understand that others may hold different beliefs, which in turn will influence their decisions. This indicates that when children cannot understand another's perspective the chance of conflict increases due to their egocentrism. This in turn can result in the play exclusion due to the child's inability to comprehend the situation at hand.

## *Play Stages*

Another developmental issue related to play exclusion may be found in the child's ability to engage in various stages of play. As children mature, their play ability becomes more complex. The typical sequence of play development moves from solitary or onlooker play in which a child plays alone to more interactive stages such as associative and cooperative play (Hughes, 1999). During the latter two stages, a child will engage in play with more than one peer in a complex play theme. If a child is not developmentally ready to engage in cooperative play, he or she may reject another child because group

play is too overwhelming. This may be especially true among toddlers since they are only in the early stages of play.

### *Environment*

A final contributing factor in play exclusion is the environment in which the children interact. When children play in a group setting, a competition for resources is likely to occur. An unequal or lack of desirable play material may cause children to use physical or verbal methods to gain control of the items. This is especially true for toddlers (Hay & Ross, 1982). In social settings, toddlers are more likely to exclude others from play in order to maintain the resources for themselves. Although older children may also use similar methods, their ability to share materials is more developed. Therefore, play exclusion is more likely to occur in toddlers when their play resources are limited.

As shown by the previous literature, numerous factors may contribute to the tendency for a child to be excluded. However, these studies have not examined the methods that children use to exclude others. The following paragraphs will examine the role of gender and age on play exclusion methods employed by children.

### *Methods of Play Exclusion*

In addition to the various reasons for exclusion, there are also different play exclusion methods. The two main types of methods identified in this study are verbal and physical exclusion (Crick, 1997; Crick, Casas, & Mosher, 1997). Not only do these methods vary by technique, they also may vary by how and when they are used. One element that may play a role in the type of play exclusion that is utilized by children is

gender. A second element that may distinguish the type of method that is used is the age of the child.

### *Verbal Exclusion*

Although play exclusion can occur in numerous forms, one method that is often used by children is verbal exclusion. When this method is used, children verbally express that they do not want to play with a peer. Even though verbal exclusion can be utilized by both sexes, girls tend to prefer this method to others. For example, preschool girls are more likely to use verbal exclusion, such as stating that the other child could not play (Sheldon, 1996). Preschool age girls are more likely to provide support for their exclusion, such as providing a logical argument as to why an additional person would not be appropriate for the current play scenario.

Another method of verbal play exclusion is relational aggression. This method is also found to exist more frequently in girls (Grotperter & Crick, 1996). This type of exclusion is less candid in its approach in that it focuses on disrupting friendships and peer group formation through covert methods (Wood, Cowan, & Baker, 2002). In relational aggression, children use verbal methods such as gossip or name calling to destroy friendships among peers. For example, a child might tell a peer that that they will not be friends unless they share a desired toy. By threatening to terminate a friendship or relation, a child can have control over the peer group. Although relational aggression can be harmful, studies have shown that children who use overt methods of aggression are actually viewed as more maladjusted (Crick, 1997). However, the impact of relational aggression should not be dismissed. Although it would seem reasonable that relational

aggression is used by school age children, it is somewhat surprising that preschoolers also engage in this form of exclusion (Crick, Casas, & Mosher, 1997). Children as young as three years of age were found to utilize this method to prevent others from engaging in play activities. Because toddlers are not as vocal as older preschool children, relational aggression may not be prevalent in both age groups of preschool girls.

Although toddlers are not as verbal as older preschoolers, verbal play exclusion may still be used. Hay and Ross (1982) found that toddlers actually attempted verbal exclusion on their first attempts at play exclusion. However, if this method were unsuccessful they would then resort to physical forms. Nevertheless, since the toddler's verbal skills are still developing, the forms in which verbal exclusion occurs may be less complex than that of older children. For example, toddlers may simply say "no", or use screams and whines, whereas older children may provide a more complex response.

### *Physical Exclusion*

A second method of play exclusion that is used by children is physical exclusion. This method uses such tactics as pushing, hoarding of play objects, or ignoring others to prevent entrance into play. As with verbal methods of exclusion, physical methods of play exclusion have also been found to exist in both genders (Sebanc, Pierce, Cheatham, & Gunner, 2003). However, physical exclusion is found more prominently in boys. Boys are more likely to use aggressive methods such as shoving or hitting to prevent others from playing. The use of physical exclusion could be the result of numerous variables; however, one possible explanation was found by Hubbard (2001). In this study boys were found to show more angry facial expressions, angry verbal intonations, and angry

nonverbal behaviors across multiple contexts. These findings could indicate higher levels of aggression, which could be externalized to physical methods of play exclusion. It would therefore be anticipated that boys would use physical forms of play exclusion more frequently than girls.

Despite a higher frequency of physical methods of play exclusion, on a whole boys have been shown to exhibit more prosocial behaviors than girls, especially when introduced to new playmates (DiLalla, 1998). This finding is further supported by a study by McElwain and Volling (2002) who found that despite the gender differences in play exclusion methods, more conflict occurs during interactions between girls than between boys. Also, when school age children engaged in cross-sex play, girls tended to dominate the game, often excluding the boys from play (Goodwin, 2001). However, since prior studies have focused on school age children, preschool children may display different behaviors.

### *Peer Influences on Exclusion Methods*

As shown in previous studies, gender appears to play a role in the type of play exclusion method that is used. One possible explanation for this gender difference is how peers view the exclusion methods. In general, boys view overt or physical methods as a more acceptable means of exclusion while girls view relational or verbal methods as more acceptable; however, these views were expressed by school age children, therefore preschoolers may not hold similar views (Crick, 1997; Crick, Casas, & Mosher, 1997). When children resort to the exclusion method that is counter to that for their gender, their peer group views their behavior as inappropriate. For example, girls who display physical

methods of play exclusion are viewed as less favorable than those who use verbal or relational forms (Crick & Werner, 1998). As children mature, gender appropriate exclusion methods become more concrete. Relational or verbal aggression is viewed as more appropriate for girls as the grade levels increases, while physical methods remain appropriate for boys at all ages. This indicates that girls may view both physical and verbal exclusion methods as acceptable at an early age, but as they mature, only relational aggressive forms are viewed as acceptable (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996). In addition to the views of those in their peer group, the views of the opposite sex may also attribute to the type of exclusion that is displayed. Both genders view physical exclusion as more appropriate for boys and verbal exclusion appropriate for girls. Although the majority of studies focus on older children, gender differences in play exclusion methods have also been exhibited in preschool age children. As with older children, preschool boys are more likely to experience physical means of exclusion, while preschool girls are more likely to experience verbal or relational exclusion; however, just because preschoolers experience gender specific exclusion does not mean that they use gender specific methods themselves (Crick, Casas, & Hu, 1999).

The gender of the child may also influence the manner in which they are excluded. Although the forms of play exclusion tend to differ by gender, the sex of the peer that they are used against varies. During preschool, opposite-sex peers are often excluded from play (Serbin, Tonk, & Sternglanz, 1977). Therefore, children may experience both types of exclusion depending on the gender of the child who they try to play with. As children mature, playgroups tend to become segregated by gender.

Therefore as the child begins to play with only those of the same gender they may only experience and use the type of exclusion that is prominent for their gender.

### *Age and Play Exclusion*

In addition to gender, the age of the child may also influence the method of exclusion that is used. According to Crick, Bigbee, and Howes (1996), younger children are more overtly aggressive than older children. Therefore, toddlers may primarily use physical methods of play exclusion. However, since toddlers engage primarily in solitary play, it may be difficult to measure physical exclusion. Another potential obstacle in measuring play exclusion in toddlers is that the role of the aggressor may not yet be stable, meaning that all young children may at some point use physical methods to reject another from play (Crick, Casas, and Ku, 1999). However, some studies indicate that especially young children such as toddlers are actually better at maintaining friendships (Lokken, 2000). Lokken suggested that toddlers are able to engage in affective involvement with peers better than other ages, therefore less exclusion may occur with this age group. Despite this finding, play exclusion may still occur especially when there is conflict over a desired item or person. Therefore, the behavior of both toddlers and older preschool children should be investigated.

### *Long Term Effect of Play Exclusion*

While the methods of play exclusion may vary by gender, all forms of exclusion are viewed by all children as aggressive in nature (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996). One significant consequence of such forms of exclusion is the impact that it can have on the victim. While both physical and relational forms of play exclusion can cause detrimental

affects, peers who frequently experience relational aggression are more likely to be socially and psychologically maladjusted (Crick, Casas, & Ku, 1999). Also surprising is that these behaviors begin during the preschool years. By identifying play exclusion in these ages, one might be able to counteract the damaging affects.

Although some children may experience play exclusion more than others, at some point all children may be victims of another child's actions (Farmer, 2000). Farmer's study on peer exclusion in adolescents (2000), suggested that even children who are not normally rejected may be challenged by their peers, especially if they must compete for a dominate role in their group. The findings from this study further suggest that all children may have to exhibit anti-social or harmful behavior towards another member in order to maintain their social status. Although the age group for this study was older than the focus of this study, these findings may still be applicable. As children begin to form friendships, the security of the relationship may be challenged at times. In order to prevent others from disrupting the friendship, young children may resort to play exclusion to maintain their current role. Friendships may also be formed based on the type of aggression that is displayed by their playmates. Children who use overt methods of play exclusion against their peers often form friendships with each other. However, this is not found to exist in children who use relational aggression (Grotperter & Crick, 1996).

Although play exclusion may be a common occurrence in the play of young children, prolonged exclusion may lead to peer rejection. Peer rejection varies from play exclusion in that it centers on the exclusion of a child from all activities with another



peer. In addition, this exclusion may extend throughout the entire childhood, whereas play exclusion may only be short term. However, play exclusion and peer rejection are not independent of each other. Long-term effects of peer rejection can have detrimental effects on the self-esteem and well being of a child. Children who are rejected by peers have been found to express more anger and sadness than non-rejected peers (Hubbard, 2001). In addition, peer rejection in youth can significantly influence behaviors in adulthood (Hock & Lutz, 2001).

Since peer rejection has been found to be detrimental to the well being of children, one should strive to prevent this occurrence. Therefore, in order to gain a better understanding of this experience, play exclusion should be examined during the early stages of development.

### *Summary and Conclusion*

The focus of this chapter was to identify the underlying causes of play exclusion, as well as the methods of exclusion that are utilized by preschool age children. Various studies identified the two main personality types that can lead to exclusion of young children. These included aggressive behavior and social withdrawal. In addition to these behaviors, the child's level of social and cognitive development, and the environment can also attribute to play exclusion. In many instances children who are not at the same stage of development are often excluded by more developed peers.

In addition to the attributing factors for exclusion there are various methods that are used to prevent others from joining into play. Both physical and verbal methods are utilized by both genders, however each gender utilizes one form more frequently.

Preschool and grade school age girls are found to use verbal exclusion methods, which include telling another child they cannot play, and using verbal expressions to manipulate friendships. Boys, on the other hand, tend to use physical methods such as pushing or hitting as well as hoarding play materials. However, since the focus of this study will include children who are both verbal and pre-verbal, the findings of past studies may not be applicable.

Overall, past studies have found gender differences in play exclusion methods; however, the majority of research has been conducted on children over the age of 5. In order to gain a better picture of how play exclusion forms in the early stages of social development, one should examine the preschool years. Therefore, the present study will attempt to identify play exclusion in two preschool age groups in addition to how it varies by gender. By examining play exclusion, gender differences as well as a developmental change may be revealed. This in turn may aid in the deterrence of peer rejection as children mature, thus preventing future problems.

## CHAPTER III

### Methods of Procedure

The purpose of this chapter was to identify the subjects and research method for this study. The chapter will address the procedure that was used, as well as the design of the study. Further more, it will discuss how the collected data was coded and analyzed.

#### *Participants*

The participants for this study were divided into two age groups. The first group of children in this study consisted of 13 participants ranging in age from approximately 24 to 36 months. Of these children 6 were girls and 7 were boys. The second group in this study consisted of 17 children that range in age from 38 to 47 months. Of these 17 children, 9 were girls and 8 were boys.

#### *Protection of human subjects*

In order to protect the participants of this study, the names of the children were not used. In addition, individual characteristics were not reported. Furthermore, since all children in this study were students at a college affiliated child development center, all children were given consent to act as participants in college student's observations by their parents upon enrollment into the center. In addition, the procedure for this study was approved by the IRB, therefore all ethical concerns were be addressed prior to the start of the study.

## *Instruments*

In order to obtain accurate measures, all recorded instances of play exclusion adhered to the operational definition of this term. For this study play exclusion was defined as any verbal or non-verbal action that is used by one or more children to prevent another child from engaging in play. Verbal actions would include statements such as “go away”, “you can’t play with me/us”, “ I/we don’t like you”, or “NO”. In addition, name-calling or teasing might also be used. Non-verbal actions would include ignoring another child’s request to play, moving away from the child who wishes to play, hoarding toys to prevent play, or physical contact such as hitting or pushing to deter another child from engaging in play. All observed instances of play exclusion were then recorded into a notebook and later entered into a spreadsheet that cross-referenced the variables of gender and age. The spreadsheet also addressed the method of exclusion was used by the children (see Appendix A). The spreadsheet contained four categories of information, but for this study only three categories were used.

## *Design*

The site for this study was the TWU Pioneer School. Since the chosen site has numerous classrooms that were divided into age groups, the selected groups of participants were already established prior to the start of the study. Since age groups divide the classes, the researcher was able to observe interactions among children of the same age. This eliminated confusion that might have occurred if the researcher had to observe a group of children that varied in age. In addition, the classrooms consisted of both boys and girls. Although the distributions were not always equal, there were enough

children of both sexes to gain an accurate picture of their behavioral differences. The observations were then compared on play exclusion methods that were most prominent for each group. The data was further compared for gender differences both within and across the two groups.

### *Procedure*

As previously mentioned, the participants in this study were classified by age prior to the start of the study. Therefore the researcher did not have any input in composition of the groups. Also, since all children in this school had their parent's consent to participate in student observations, no further contact was necessary.

In order to collect the data for this study, direct observations were made both in the classroom and in two indoor playrooms. Although other children besides those in the study may have been in the other playrooms at the same time as the selected children, play exclusion was only recorded if it involved children in the sample.

The data was initially collected through anecdotal notes taken during observations. It was later transformed into a spreadsheet that aided in the classification of the behaviors. The data was first sorted by age groups, and was then coded as either physical or verbal exclusion. Specific details about exclusion method were also noted. In addition, the gender of the excluder was recorded next to their actions.

### *Data Collection*

The data for this study was gathered through 30 hours of observations made over the course of several weeks. Of these 30 hours, 18 hours were spent observing the younger age group and 12 hours were spent observing the older age group. An equal

amount of observation hours were not made between the two classrooms due to the fact that the younger age group often had fewer children present at the time of the studies. Therefore, in order to gain an accurate picture of their behavior more time had to be spent with this age group. In order to maintain accurate measures during the course of the study, all recorded occurrences were compared to the guidelines set by the operational definition of play exclusion. If an observed occurrence did not meet the guidelines it was not used for this study.

### *Data Analysis*

In order to study play exclusion in preschool age children, a quantitative design was used that examined the data in categorical terms. Due to the small sample size, the data were analyzed using frequencies and percentages to show differences between genders and age groups.

### *Summary*

In conclusion, a quantitative study of categorical data was conducted to measure play exclusion behaviors in preschool age children. The data for this study were collected through observational methods and were then coded based on the behaviors and actions of the preschool children. In order to ensure protection of the participants, the identities of the observed children were kept confidential and were only used by the researcher in the data collection. Data were collected through direct observations and was written in anecdotal form in a notebook. These data were then coded in terms of exclusion method, age, and gender into a spreadsheet. The data were then analyzed in terms of frequencies and percentages to examine differences between the gender and age groups.

## CHAPTER IV

### Results and Findings

The focus of this chapter is to address the findings of this study. The purpose of this study was to examine play exclusion in preschool children. By examining the collected data in terms of the research questions, a difference in play exclusion methods used by preschoolers may be revealed along the variables of gender and age. This chapter will examine the results based on the two research questions for this study. The two research questions were as follows:

1. Are there any observable gender differences in play exclusion methods used by preschool age boys and preschool age girls between the ages 24 to 47 months?
2. Are there any observable age differences in play exclusion methods used by preschool age children when children ages 24 to 36 months old are compared to children ages 38 to 47 months old?

The participants for this study were composed of 30 preschool aged children enrolled in a university affiliated child development center. Of these participants 13 were 24-36 months of age at the time of the study. The remaining 17 were 38-47 months of age. In the youngest age group, 6 children were girls and 7 were boys. In the older age group 9 were girls and 8 were boys. For this study the ratio of boys to girls was equal, with 15 participants of each gender. Also, the number of participants in each age group was close in number.

## Results

In regards to the first research questions, “are there any observable gender differences in play exclusion methods used by preschool age boys and preschool age girls between the ages 24 to 47 months”, several gender differences were found. One difference that was found was the amount of play exclusion that was exhibited by each gender. A second difference that was found was a difference in the method of play exclusion that was utilized by the participants.

This study recorded play exclusion in both genders numerous times throughout the observations; however, it was found to occur more frequently among boys. Boys were found to engage in play exclusion almost twice as frequently as girls (see table 1). This finding indicates that play exclusion may occur more among boys during peer interactions.

Table 1

Number of Play Exclusion Occurrences By Gender

Gender	Frequency
Boys	72
Girls	46

A second gender difference that emerged centered on the method of play exclusion. In this study, boys were found to utilize physical methods of play exclusion more frequently than girls. Physical methods that were observed included pushing a peer away from the play area, hitting, and hoarding the play material. In contrast, girls tended



to use verbal methods more frequently than boys; however, this difference was only slight. Verbal methods of exclusion that were observed were statements of “No”, “You can’t play”, “I don’t like you”, and “You’re not my friend”. One other method of play exclusion that was observed in children utilized a combination of both physical and verbal exclusion. One example of this behavior that were observed was a child saying, “You can’t play”, while pushing a peer away from the play area. For this combination method of play exclusion there was only a slight gender difference with boys using this method more frequently. As shown by the data, boys tend to exhibit play exclusion more frequently than girls (see table 2). These findings did indicate a gender difference in the play exclusion methods that are chosen by children; however, this difference is trivial in several cases. Therefore, although the overall findings suggest a difference between the genders, the actual difference is small when the data is examined on the variable of gender and method of play exclusion.

Table 2

Gender Differences in Play Exclusion Methods

Gender	Physical	Verbal	Combination
Boys	40	11	21
Girls	14	14	18

In regards to the second research question, “are there any observable age differences in play exclusion methods used by preschool age children when children ages 24 to 36 months old are compared to children ages 38 to 47 months old”, the findings

indicate that an age difference exists in play exclusion methods. When the two groups were compared for the total number of recorded instances, the amount of occurrences was found to be equal for both age groups. At first glance, this finding could indicate that there is no difference between the groups; however, when the groups were compared on both age and gender, a strong trend emerged.

The findings from the first research question indicated that overall, boys engaged in physical exclusion methods more than girls. For the second research question, this finding was still accurate; however, boys in the 24 to 36 month age group engaged in physical exclusion slightly more than boys in the 38 to 47 month age group. In contrast, girls in the 38 to 47 month age group engaged in physical exclusion more than girls in the 24 to 36 month age group. These findings indicate that boys in the younger group and girls in the older group use physical exclusion more frequently than boys in the older group and girls in the younger group (see table 3).

Table 3

Age Differences in Physical Methods of Play Exclusion

Age	Frequency
24 to 36 months	
Boys	21
Girls	5
38 to 47 months	
Boys	19
Girls	9

A second difference between the two age groups was the amount of verbal exclusion that was used by the participants. For this method of play exclusion, the 38 to 47 month age groups was found to use verbal exclusion more frequently than the 24 to 36 month age group (see table 4). This finding indicates that the older age group engages in verbal exclusion more frequently than the younger age group. As mentioned with the first research question, verbal exclusion was more frequent among the girls in this study. This trend continued when the age of the participants was factored into the findings. Children in the 38 to 47 month age group were found to use verbal exclusion more frequently than children in the 24 to 36 month age group. Based on these findings, it appears that older children tend to use verbal exclusion more frequently than younger children.

Table 4  
Age Differences in Verbal Methods of Play Exclusion

Age	Frequency
24 to 36 months	
Boys	4
Girls	2
38 to 47 months	
Boys	7
Girls	12

One other trend that was found when the two age groups were compared was a difference in the amount of exclusion that used a combination of both verbal and physical

methods at the same time. In previous findings the 37 to 48 month age group was found to use play exclusion methods more frequently; however, when the a combination of both methods were used the 24 to 36 month age group engaged in this method more frequently than the 37 to 48 month age group (see table 5). This indicates that the younger participants would attempt both methods of play exclusion, while the older group would primarily use only one method.

Table 5

Age Differences in Combination Methods of Play Exclusion

Age	Frequency
24 to 36 months	
Boys	15
Girls	12
38 to 47 months	
Boys	6
Girls	6

The findings of this study indicate several gender and age related trends. In regards to the first research question, are there any observable gender differences in play exclusion methods used by preschool age boys and preschool age girls between the ages 24 to 47 months, the data indicated that gender was a variable in the selection of play exclusion methods. Overall, boys were found to exhibit a higher rate of play exclusion of peers, and tended to use physical methods of exclusion. Girls were found to engage in

less play exclusion, and tended to choose verbal methods of play exclusion. These findings support previous research findings that suggest gender is a contributing variable in the method of play exclusion (Crick, 1997; Crick, Casas, & Mosher, 1997).

### *Summary*

The focus of this chapter was to report the results of this study. The study addressed play exclusion in preschool children. This topic was examined across the variables of gender and age. The findings of this study indicated that boys tend to engage in play exclusion more frequently than girls. In addition, boys tend to use physical methods of play exclusion, while girls tend to use verbal methods of exclusion. Children of both genders were found to use both methods of play exclusion at the same time in several instances; however the difference between them was only slight. When the variable of age was examined, children in the 24 to 36 month age group were found to engage in play exclusion as frequently as children in the 37 to 48 month age group; however, when gender was factored into the analysis a slight age difference emerges (see Appendixes B-F for graphs of data). Overall, the findings of this study indicate that age and gender play a role in the frequency and method of play exclusion that are used by preschool age children.

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion of Findings

Play exclusion is a method in which children strive to prevent others from joining in social interaction. All children engaging in play at some point may utilize such methods, or may have these methods turned on them. Past studies have examined related issues such as peer rejection and behavioral characteristics that attribute to rejection, yet few have examined the developmental pattern of play exclusion in preschool age children (Bolger & Patterson, 2001; Rosen, Furman, & Hartup, 2001). The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of gender and age on the methods used by preschool age children to exclude others from play.

In order to examine the variables of gender and age, two age groups of preschool age children were observed during normal free play activities. During free play, all occurrences of play exclusion were recorded. The recorded information noted the age group of the child that was excluding the peer, as well as the gender and type of play exclusion method that was employed. For this study, play exclusion was defined as any verbal or non-verbal method that was used by a child to prevent another from engaging in play. In addition to just verbal or physical exclusion methods, a third method of play exclusion was also recorded. The third method utilized both verbal and physical methods at the same time. The findings of this study found several trends in play exclusion were related to the gender and age of the children. Based on these findings, gender and age appear to be an influencing variable in play exclusion in preschool age children.

This chapter will examine the results of the study focusing specifically on the research variables of gender and age. The first section will examine the findings of the study based on the variables of investigation as well as the possible explanations for these findings. This section will first examine the impact that gender had on the frequency and method choice of play exclusion that was shown by the preschool children in this study. The section will then examine the role that age had on the differences in play exclusion between the two age groups. Following these sections, the chapter will then provide possible implications and recommendations for future studies.

### *Findings*

The focus of this study was to examine the impact that gender and age had on play exclusion methods in preschool age children. The study examined how the variables of gender and age affected the frequency and methods of play exclusion that was used during social interactions with peers. The findings suggest that both variables of this study play a role in play exclusion methods of children. Although only two variables were examined, numerous factors could contribute to the differences that were found in the results. Therefore, one should examine the possible factors that could explain the differences in play exclusion that were found between the gender and age of the preschool children in this study.

The findings of this study suggest that a gender difference exists in the methods of play exclusion used by preschool age children. Overall, boys were found to use physical methods of exclusion, whereas girls were found to use verbal methods. These findings coincide with previous studies that have supported gender differences in behavior and

social interactions. As shown with this study, girls have been found to use verbal forms of aggression during play and peer interactions more than boys (Grotzinger & Crick, 1996; Wood, Cowan, & Baker, 2002). In contrast, boys have been shown to use physical forms of aggression more frequently (Sebanc, Pierce, Cheatham, & Gunner, 2003). One explanation for this gender difference could lie in the need for children to conform to stereotypic behavior for their gender. At an early age, children demonstrate an understanding of what is acceptable behavior for their gender (Crick, 1997). On a whole, children view physical aggression in boys and verbal aggression in girls as the acceptable norm (Crick, Casas, & Mosher, 1997). Expressing behaviors that are counter to these gender norms could be viewed as unfavorable. For example, girls who act aggressively, such as hitting or pushing, are viewed as more maladjusted than girls who verbalize their hostile feelings (Crick & Werner, 1998). Children may therefore feel a need to conform to the socially acceptable form of exclusion for their gender in order to avoid conflict in their environment. This in turn could account for the gender difference in play exclusion that was found in this study.

In addition to a gender difference, age was also found to play a role in the type of play exclusion employed by children. Overall, children in both age groups displayed an equal amount of play exclusion; however, boys in the 24 to 36 month age group were found to engage in physical exclusion more frequently than the rest of the children in both age groups. This finding supports Crick, Bigbee, and Howes (1996), who found that younger children are more overtly aggressive than older children. One other difference between the age groups in the present study indicates that children in the 37 to 48 month



age group use verbal forms of exclusion more frequently than those in the younger group. This finding contradicts Hay and Ross (1982), who found that younger preschoolers attempted verbal exclusion more frequently than older preschoolers. One reason for this contrast in findings could be that exclusion methods that used both physical and verbal methods at the same time were not added into the independent categories for each method of exclusion for this study. Had the data been interpreted in this manner, the actual amount of verbal exclusion for children in the younger group would have exceeded that for the older children, thus supporting the findings of Hay and Ross. Overall, this study found only a slight difference in the play exclusion behavior in children based on age; however, due to the manner in which the data was coded, a greater difference between the two age groups in this study may have existed but was not shown in the results.

Past research has not often examined play exclusion or aggressive behavior between age groups, especially in preschool age children. Any number of factors could attribute to behavioral differences between the age groups in this study. As children mature, the methods in which they exclude others not only changes but also become less frequent. Although there is no clear answer as to why this change occurs, some influencing factors may be the development of perspective taking in the child as well as a greater capacity to include others in play (Siegler, 1998). Another contributing factor could be an increased pressure to cooperate with peers as the children mature. The inability to get along with others is seen as an undesirable quality, even by children (Crick, Bigbee, & Howes, 1996). Therefore, children may realize this at a young age and alter their behavior to meet social norms. Since physical exclusion is more obvious to

detect, children may turn to verbal methods as they mature in order avoid conflict for their actions. One other factor that might contribute to the difference in age is the child's ability to successfully execute a play exclusion method. Younger children may not be as skilled as older children in preventing peer entrance into play. This in turn could result in repeated attempts to exclude the same peer. As shown, numerous factors could contribute to the difference in play exclusion methods that are used by preschool age children of different ages. In order to gain a clear understanding as to why this difference exists more research is needed in the area.

### *Conclusion*

The research questions for this study examined the impact that gender and age had on play exclusion in preschool age children. The results of this study indicate that the gender of the child influenced the type of play exclusion that the child used, as well as the frequency of the occurrences. These findings supported previous research that also found gender to be a contributing factor in aggressive and exclusionary behavior. The second variable under investigation was the age of the children. The findings of this study indicated that age was a factor in the type of play exclusion that was exhibited by the children. Although past research has addressed play exclusion in preschoolers, the findings of this study did not support previous findings. Since this study examined the combination method of play exclusion as a separate event instead of examining it on separate variables of physical and verbal methods, this could account for the difference in results between the current study and past research. Due to this discrepancy, more

research is needed on this topic to fully understand how play exclusion is affected by the gender and age of children.

### *Implications*

The findings from this study suggest a developmental trend in the methods of play exclusion. As shown in the results, gender and age were a key factor in the methods of play exclusion that were utilized by the children in this study. Based on this trend, one can begin to define typical play exclusion behaviors for children of different ages and genders. Many theorists have provided the field of child development with guidelines for development in numerous areas. For example, Jean Piaget provided a timeline for cognitive development (Siegler, 1998). In addition, G. Stanley Hall provided a timeline for the development of motor skills (Berk, 2000), and Mildred Parten developed the stages of play in children (Hughes, 1999). Despite the broad spectrum of development that has been covered by past research, very little has examined the developmental timeline for play exclusion. Often, play exclusion could be viewed as aggressive behavior, especially if it incorporates physical methods. Those who view these behaviors may classify children that display such behavior as aggressive or anti-social; however, these children may actually be displaying typical behavior for their developmental level. By examining play exclusion in children, patterns that are gender and age related may emerge, allowing for a model of typical play exclusion methods to emerge.

One benefit of creating such a model is that it could provide another tool for researchers and educators to use when assessing behavior and development in children. Many tools are currently available for use on play assessment, yet play exclusion is not

included in these models (Heidemann & Hewitt, 1992). By including play exclusion in these models, anti-social behaviors may be viewed in a different light. Children who may express delays in other areas of play development might exhibit typical play exclusion behavior. This factor could in turn provide a more accurate measure of a child's level of development.

In order to incorporate play exclusion into current assessment tools, more research is needed in this area. One area that should be addressed is how play exclusion changes over the entire course of development during the preschool years. By examining this entire age span, one will gain a better understanding of play exclusion behavior for all preschool age children. In addition, play exclusion should be examined in children that may express developmental delays, in order to provide a comparison of typical and non-typical behavior. As a result of incorporating these variables into future research, play exclusion could become a valuable measure of behavior in young children.

### *Recommendations*

The findings of this study indicate that play exclusion methods that are employed by preschool age children are influenced by the gender and age of the child. Although these findings address the research questions, modifications to the current study might increase the external validity. One modification would be a larger sample size. In order to provide a clear representation of preschool children, the sample size should be increased to allow for more variation in the data. Another modification that might aid in increasing the external validity is sampling from several preschool centers. For this study, only one observation site was used. By examining other centers, different results might occur

because the backgrounds of children may be more diverse. Also, other centers may have different instructional practices that could affect the behavior of the children.

In order to increase the internal validity of this study, future studies could increase the amount of observation time spent in the classrooms. Ideally, one could observe throughout the course of the entire school year. By observing children as they mature over the school year, the developmental changes in behavior may become more apparent.

Other studies that could be created from this premise could examine the impact of the classroom environment on play exclusion behavior in children. Classrooms that have a smaller student to teacher ratio may exhibit different frequencies of play exclusion behavior than those with a higher ratio. Also, the amount of available resources for play may influence play exclusion behavior. Children with a limited number of play materials may have a higher rate of exclusion due to a competition for resources. In comparison, children with more available play material may exhibit play exclusion less frequently. Due to the number of factors that can contribute to play exclusion, additional study is called for to gain a clear understanding of this behavior.

### *Summary*

The purpose of this study was to examine play exclusion methods in preschool age children along the variables of gender and age. This study was conducted using observations of children in a preschool setting during free play activities. The participants in this study were grouped by age, with approximately one-year difference between the youngest and oldest group. The findings of this study suggest that a difference in play exclusion methods exists between genders as well as between the age groups. Overall,

boys tended to display play exclusion more frequently than girls. In addition, boys had a higher rate of physical exclusion, whereas girls had a higher rate of verbal exclusion. Also, play exclusion was more common in the younger age group of children. The findings of this study indicate that play exclusion may change as children mature, which may provide the field of child development with another guideline for development in children. By including play exclusion in the assessment of children, a more complete picture of a child's ability may be revealed. Therefore, play exclusion could be a valuable area of study for the field of child development.

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APPENDIX A

Play Exclusion Table

# Play Exclusion Table

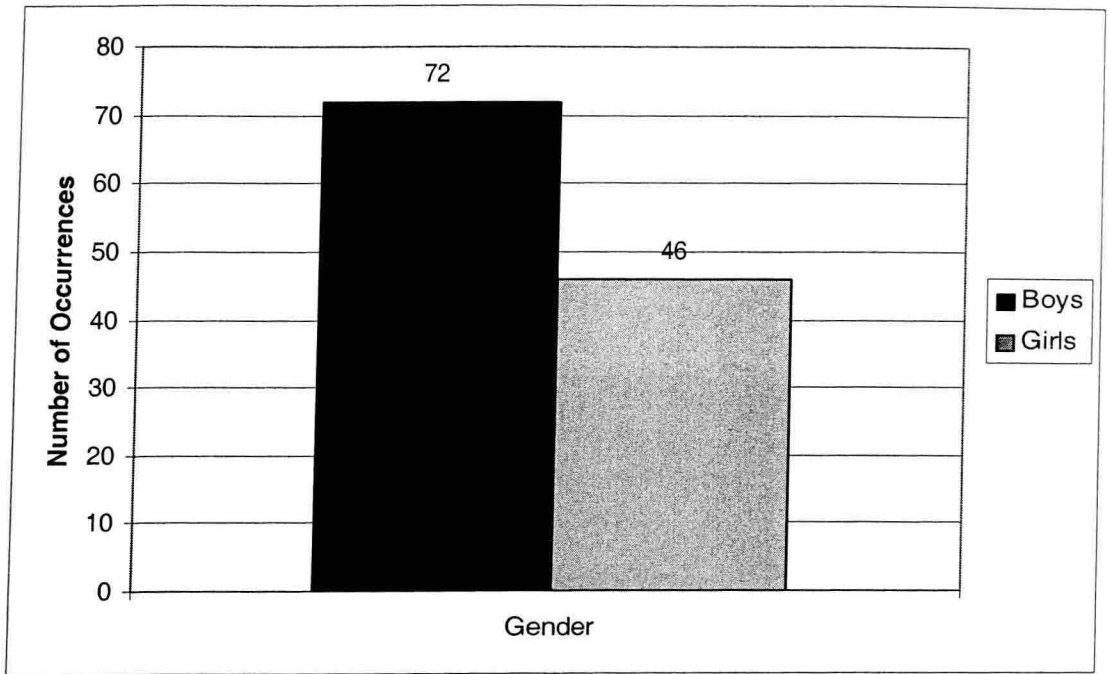
Age Group: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender	Physical Exclusion	Verbal Exclusion	Victim and Outcome

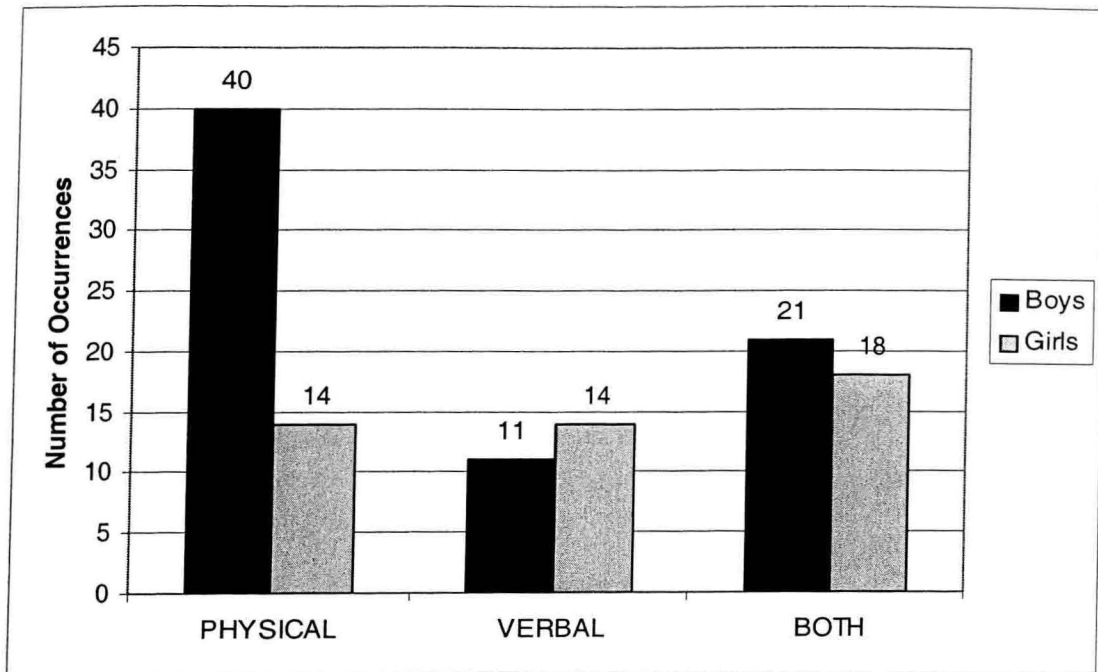
## APPENDIX B

### Graph of Total Number of Play Exclusion Occurrences



## APPENDIX C

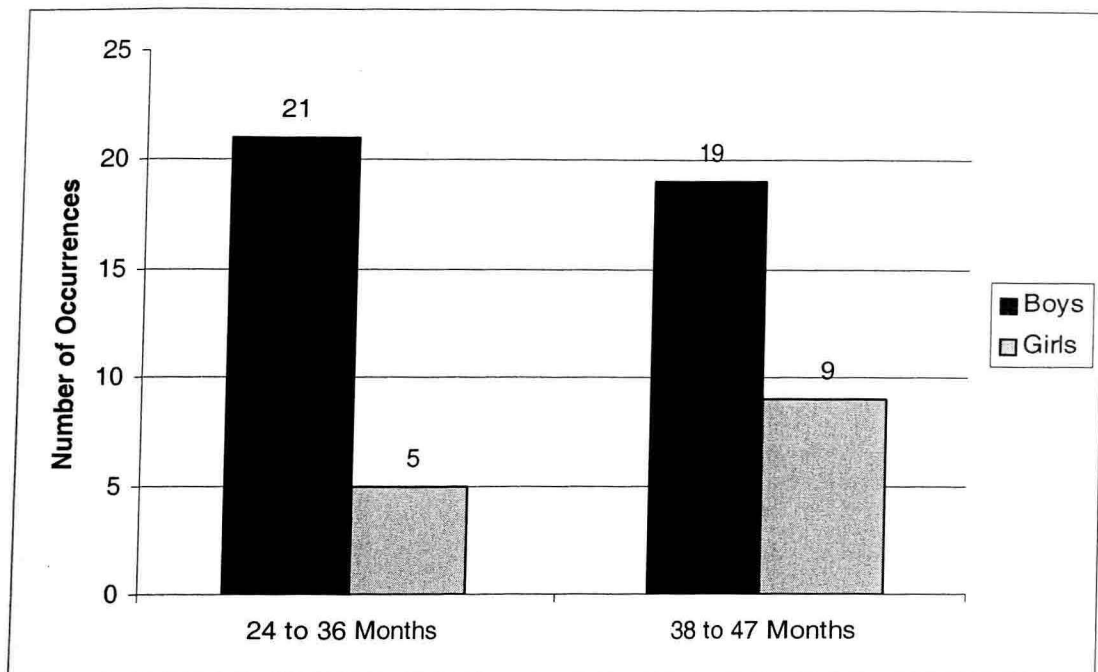
Graph of Play Exclusion Methods on the Variable of Gender





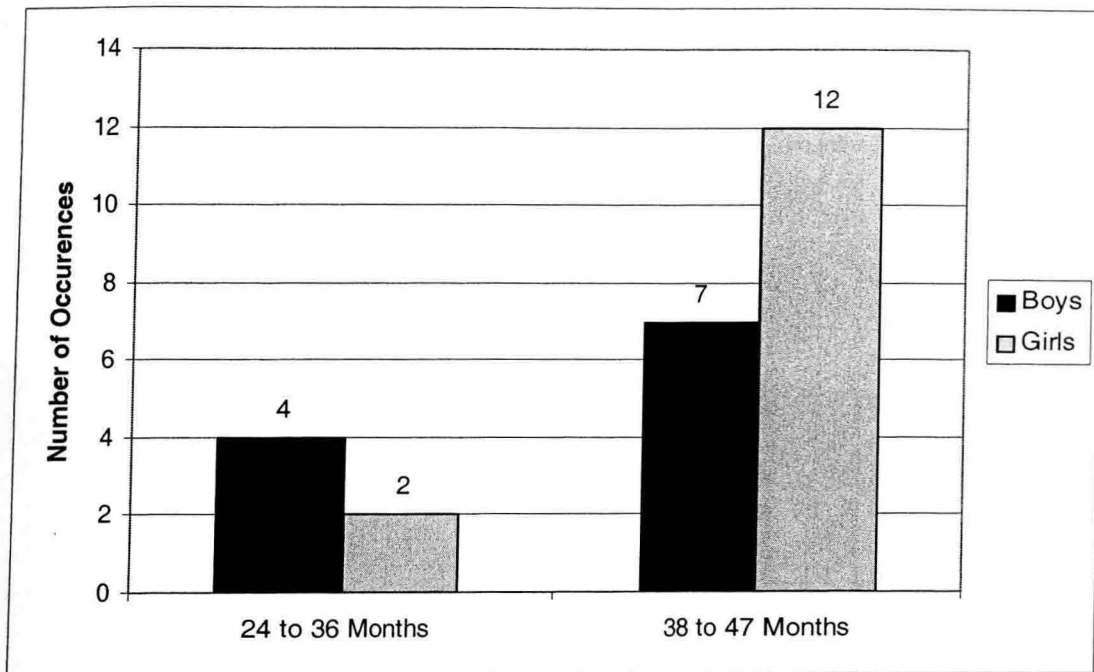
## APPENDIX D

### Graph of Physical Play Exclusion Methods Between Age Groups



## APPENDIX E

### Graph of Verbal Play Exclusion Methods Between Age Groups



## APPENDIX F

### Graph of Combination Play Exclusion Methods Between Age Groups

