Gender and Object Identification in Childhood: Implications for the Classroom
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Dolls and stuffed animals as objects of identification in childhood

Dolls “born” more than 35,000 years ago as a symbol of human life

Stuffed animals in 1883 (Margerete Steiff) as symbols of living animals

The revitalization of *A Study of Dolls* A. Caswell Ellis & G. Stanely Hall 1897

“The educational value of dolls is enormous… and to learn how to control and apply it will be to discover a new instrument in education of the very highest potency.” (Ellis & Hall 1897, 53)

Pedagogical potential through relationship and identification

Dolls work as mediators in four main “Areas of Agency”

- Self Identity: connecting the child with his/her own becoming
- Empathy: connection with others
- Imitation and Learning: connecting the child with the requirements of the outer world
- Communication: among children and between children and adults

Dolls work intra psychically (within the child), interpersonally and in interaction between the child and the external environment

Most potent area is the intermediate area between inner and outer realities

Gender Differences in Doll Preference

Girls: baby dolls and *Barbie* → caring and “mothering” exaggerated femininity

Boys: monster and action figures → action and aggression exaggerated masculinity

Questions:

Do dolls function as cause, intensifier or sealer of gender-specific stereotypes?

Are children subjugated to exaggeration of adult gender idealizations?

Implications for the Classroom:

With purposeful application, these objects of identification can be effective partners in the four main areas of agency *within, across and beyond* gender boundaries.

Bibliography:


