

Nudge the gender box

One could have many hours of discussion over whether ‘gender’ consists of more than just a simple binary split of ‘male’ and ‘female’. One could also spend time discussing whether ‘gender’ is a concept which can be discussed without other factors such as culture, race, and social class etc. However, these concepts, although extremely important and thought-provoking, are not ones which I have spent several years contemplating and exploring.

I have recently (2023) completed my PhD (prof), at the University of Lincoln where I have been exploring the potential harm that putting children and young people into ‘*gender boxes*’ can cause with regards to their current and future personal, academic and career aspirations, as well as to their mental health and wellbeing. For the sake of simplicity, and to avoid any dilution caused by divergence into other gender-related areas, I use the term ‘*gender*’ to mean the behaviours, attributes, and traits which society stereotypically dictates as indicative of being either ‘male’ or ‘female’.

Through my research, I have discovered how children from a very young age are often bombarded with messages about how ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ should behave. For example, it could be through the ways in which boys and girls are treated differently by the adults around them – the expectations these adults have, the ways in which the adults interact differently with boys and girls, or with the activities they expect the children to participate in. It could also be through literature, films, television programmes, social media, and advertising.

I have also discovered that gender stereotypes can be perpetuated in ways you wouldn’t even consider to be gender stereotypical! For example, in the subtly different ways in which the actual birth of a baby boy or baby girl might be announced and the styles and colours of clothing and toys which adults choose for their baby boys or baby girls.

Through my research I am led to believe that the continued propagation of these *gender boxes* can cause harm to children’s mental health and wellbeing both now and as they grow up. I am also led to believe that these *gender boxes* can cause individuals to limit their own aspirations in terms of curriculum subjects and future career aspirations.

Staff working in schools have tremendous power to manipulate the environment in their classrooms and schools, as their actions and repeated expectations impact on children’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. It is my belief that staff working in schools could potentially be perpetuating these *gender boxes* through their actions (or lack of), albeit unconsciously.

It is also my belief that there are very simple actions that staff working in schools could take to ‘*nudge the gender box*’ ©2023 RES-Ed which would allow children to be free to explore themselves and the world around them without potentially harmful gender stereotypical constraints.

As a result of completing my PhD (prof) I have created a concept entitled ‘***Nudge the gender box***’, which can be easily understood and actioned by staff who work in schools...and it is completely free!

If you are interested in finding out more about *Nudge the gender box*, then please contact me:

Email: rs@res-ed.co.uk

Twitter / X: @RESED02

LinkedIn: www.linkedin.com/in/dr-rachael-shaw-phd-39121351

Blog: <http://resedhome.wordpress.com>