Clothing: The Gateway to Trucks or Tiaras

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Clothing: The Gateway to Trucks or Tiaras

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Intelligence and National Security

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Abstract:

This research observes and analyzes the gendering of children’s clothing and how this affects how adults see children and gender, how children will grow to view one another, as well as how the children will eventually see themselves. For the purpose of this research, I am analyzing clothing for children of the ages two to eight because that is when a child begins to recognize themselves as their own person, begins to understand their personality, and starts to understand their own sex (Capsi, Roberst, Shiner 256). Children’s clothing often expresses messages that assert a masculine or feminine gender. These messages are not only specific to the gender binary, but they also can be based on gender stereotypes. These specifications can be problematic because they can force a child into a certain gender before the child realizes who they are on their own. Girl’s clothing can consist of pink, purple, and other bright colors with messages that portray a sense of sweetness or delicacy. Boy’s clothing expresses more of a rougher and outgoing message with darker colors. This research analyzes the information and observes different clothing sections in multiple stores and their online websites, such as Target, Children’s Place, and OshKosh B’Gosh. It also identifies any gender fluid clothing sections, as well as clothing sections that follow the gender binary and what these different sections look like. This matters to the research because it allows for the researcher to examine how each store understands gender. This research ultimately analyzes how putting children at the ages two to eight in clothing that is specific to male or females has the possibility to alter the way they are portrayed to the world and how they will eventually view themselves, which in return will affect the way other people interact with them as they grow older and the opportunities they will be offered.

Key Words: children, clothing, gender binary, gender fluid, and gender stereotypes
Introduction:

If most boys and girls were exact representations of the clothing they wore, then girls would be dainty flowers and boys would be destructive monsters. People normally look at children’s clothing and think the color schemes and funny sayings portrayed on their outfits are cute and harmless, but what most people do not understand is how gendering a child at such an early age can affect them as they gain relationships and integrate into society. The existing literature does allude to these risks; however, it lacks the field research of what the clothing market actually looks like. The reality of the clothing market will add tangible explanations to the idea that gendered clothing can cause certain issues amongst young children. There are many ways this affects a child, but throughout this research psychological, institutional, and
interpersonal implications will be analyzed. This research serves as an opportunity to allow parents to assess the way children are portrayed to the world and for themselves.

Problem and Why it Matters:

As a child develops their sense of self, it is important to allow them to have their own say in how they want to portray themselves. This can provide children with a sense of confidence and security in their own body (Caspi, Roberts, and Shiner 461). The gendering of a child’s clothing can push them into identities that might not fit them as they develop their personality. The age range of two to eight is where children not only learn the patterns of themselves, but they also learn patterns of gendered clothing through their own clothing and dress up play (Paoletti 2). My research is important because it identifies the possible negative impacts that gendered clothing can have on a child and their relationships, as well as how society will see them. The views of society will impact them throughout their development, but also in their adult life. In their adult life, there will be hardships related to gender in areas such as work, family, friendships, and relationships.

Clothing has a deeper meaning to it because the messages that are illustrated conform to the gender stereotypes found in our society. A little boy will be found in clothing that normally portrays a destructive and messy personality, but it also can portray a motivated or even “world changer” message. Little girls’ clothes are more likely to be found with a message that makes them seem complacent and nice (Martin 499). These messages can limit the child to a certain personality, which can be problematic because a child may not want to be the stereotypical girl that is “Daddy’s Little Angel”. That child may want to be seen as more than kind and angelic. These limitations can cause a child to feel stuck in these gender expectations, which can cause
issues as they grow older if they realize that they might not want to conform to those expectations (Rahilly 347). The limitations can also disrupt the way the opposite sex views one another (Wade and Ferree 65). Clothing makes the world and the child look at themselves a certain way before the child can even express on their own.

Gendering a child through their clothing at the age of eight or younger creates an internal and an external issue. Internally, they could be forced into a gender identity before they have the chance to express themselves on their own. Externally, they are treated differently by society based on how they are portrayed to the world because a boy with a shirt that tells everyone that he can change the world communicates to those people just that: Boy’s change the world. A girl with a shirt that tells people she is sassy but cute allows for two interpretations: She may have an attitude, but she is cute so it makes up for it. Later in life, this can specifically affect women in the workplace because they are often not taken seriously by her male counterparts due to these stereotypes. Women have grown up portraying themselves this way and the men have grown up treating women as this.

It can be hard to escape the gender binary in today’s society and clothing is no exception. Clothing that breaks the gender binary and seeks a gender neutral message can be expensive. Expensive clothing can mean that it is not as accessible to everyone due to economic status. A parent at a higher economic status will have more access to gender binary clothing, than that of a lower economic status. This is important to my research because I will be analyzing the pricing of the various stores and determining whether or not gender neutral clothing is more expensive. As I will discuss later in this research, this can cause issues for parents who want to allow their child to express themselves, but cannot afford gender neutral clothing.
**Literature Review:**

Since this research is interdisciplinary, there are many different topics that are discussed. For that reason, the literature will be divided by the discipline sources fall into. Research that discusses the development of children within the ages of two to eight and gender identity will be discussed in the psychology section. Literature that discusses the implications of gendering children’s clothing will be in the women’s and gender studies section. Lastly, research that explains the advertising and monetary aspect of children’s clothing will be discussed in the marketing section. Therefore, I have collected data that fall into these three disciplines.

*Psychology*

When analyzing how gendered clothing affects children at the ages two to eight, it is important to highlight the development that is occurring during this stage of their life. The article “Personality and Development: Stability and Change” (2005) by Brent Roberts, Avshalom Caspi, and Rebecca Shiner states that a child begins to develop their personality between the ages of two and eight, which means there are many different development changes that happen during this age range. During this time period, two different types of traits are developing. A child is developing higher-order traits and lower-order traits. Higher-order traits are ones that are broader and can consist of traits that deal with how they take criticism or whether they thrive off approval from others. Lower-order traits are more specific and can provide a better look at the development of the child's personality and behavioral outcomes (Capsi, Roberts, Shiner 257). The study discusses the important developments that occur during the age range of two to eight years old and how certain personality traits form that will be crucial to how the child reacts to certain situations as they grow older. The major traits can range between how the child will deal
with an authority figure to how talkative they may be. Data shows that confidence levels become distinguishable around the age of five and can be connected to whether a child is more of an extrovert or introvert. A child with more confidence and that is extraverted is known to be more dominant and assertive (Caspi, Roberts, and Shiner 457). This information will be discussed throughout my research when analyzing how certain messages on clothing affects children during this developmental stage.

Women’s and Gender Studies

Gender is something that is taught at a very young age and carries into a child’s development. In the book, *Gender: Ideas, Interactions, Institutions (2015)*, the author’s Lisa Wade and Myra Marx Ferree discuss many topics regarding gender and society. For the purposes of this research, I will use chapter four, *Performances*, to support my research. This chapter explains how children learn the rules of gender at a very young age because of the way they are treated and what they are exposed to at this age. Chapter four explains that there are definitive distinctions during school of what boys and girls do, which creates separation and gives children a pair of “gender binary glasses”. The authors explain that by the age of five, “children develop an impressive constellation of stereotypes about gender (often amusing and correct) that they apply to themselves and others” (Wade and Ferree 65). This is when the children use their gender binary glasses and begin to act accordingly to the views of gender stereotypes. Wade and Ferree conclude by claiming that at this age children begin to make assumptions about the opposite sex due to the social norms and the gender binary glasses. This timeline of children understands their sex and gender norms is key to understanding how the gendering of children’s clothing has many implications.
Similar to Wade and Ferree, the authors of “Becoming a Gendered Body: Practices of Preschools” (1998) discuss the gendering of children's clothing in schools when playing dress up, but also the clothing restrictions that girls have that boys do not. The author, Karen Martin, makes the claim “however, it is not only the dress itself, but the knowledge about how to behave in a dress that is restrictive” (498). She argues that dresses restrict girls at playtime, but what is more restricting is how girls are taught to behave when wearing such clothing. Additionally, Martin explains the patterns she found when observing children at the ages three and five playing dress up. The patterns will be used throughout my research by analyzing how freely children were able to dress and if there were common gender restrictions.

In “The Gender Binary Meets the Gender-Variant Child” (2015), Elizabeth Rahilly discusses how a parent navigates through their child not wanting to conform to the gender binary. The author asked the audience to “imagine more gender inclusive opportunities” (Rahilly 1). She specifically looks at gender hedging and how parents will contradict how they view gender based on clothing. Rahilly interviewed parents that stated they had children that were gender nonconforming and asked them how their child went against the gender binary. She introduces the idea of “boundary maintenance” and how parents practiced this with their child. This allowed the data to show the common themes of what is seen as normal for certain genders. Rahilly conducted a study where she interviewed parents that had gender nonconforming children. The results of this study will be pertinent to my research because it will allow me to analyze how parents play an important role in how children experience and learn gender.

Marketing
“How Commercial Advertising Enforces Gender Stereotypes among Children and the Ways This Affects Them Psychologically” (2019) by Abigail Frisoli examines marketing in stores and how advertising to the gender binary is more profitable, which is why most stores do it. She mainly examines the topic of gendered toys, but most of her claims and research can be used throughout my research to connect to clothing. Frisoli discusses that it is effortless for children to gravitate towards the gendered sections in stores because the children are already aware of those social cues, such as colors. When children do not follow the social cues that the marketing industry has used to profit off of, then children are seen as outcast by other children. The author states that the marketing industry has set rules for what is masculine and feminine, which are used to promote conformity within children. This information is important because it will help assess pricing differences in clothing, as well as why the marketing industry continues to create more clothing that follows the gender binary.

The article “Clothing Color Preferences of Boys and Girls Aged Between Six and Nine” (2011) by Nurgul Kilinc discusses the marketing side of color preferences, but also the gendering of color for children. Kilinc specifically examined what color clothing children of different sexes preferred and how the marketing industry profits off of color preferences. He claims that if companies try to sell the “wrong” color to a consumer, then the company will be less likely to profit. Kilinc’s study provides statistic that explain which color clothing boys and girls prefer. These statistics will be important to my research because it will allow me to analyze why stores have a certain color scheme for children’s clothing. Additionally, this data will provide an understanding of marketing of the gender binary in children’s clothing.

This literature provides a detailed outline of how gender affects children from birth, their development, the restrictions of children’s clothing, the effects of marketing and affordability,
and how parents contribute to the gendering of their child. However, it does fail to analyze the everyday clothing that is available for children. There is a gap when discussing how the different expectations of dress up may create a divide between girls and boys. In addition, research regarding the affordability of gender neutral clothing is lacking. My research will analyze the pricing from each store to add data to this field regarding how gender neutral clothing pricing compares to clothing that follows the gender binary. My research also aims to fill each of these gaps and utilizes this literature to analyze what I have gathered in my field study to better understand the implications of gendered children’s clothing.

**Methodology:**

For this research, I studied peer reviewed literature within the fields of psychology, marketing, and women’s and gender studies and collected both qualitative and quantitative data by visiting various stores and their websites that sell children’s clothing for children between the ages of two and eight years old. I conducted research at Target, Children’s Place, and OshKosh B’gosh. The majority of my data collection and analysis comes from the store websites due to the wider selection of clothing. I chose chain style stores because I wanted to focus on stores that serve a wider variety and larger number of people, rather than a small business that would not be as widely shopped. I collected data on how the clothing sections are set up, specifically if they are separated by girls and boys. I also observed the color schemes of each section, along with what messages the clothing portrays for the specific gendered section. I categorize the messages in my analysis by positive, positive practice, and binary. Positive meaning that it promotes gender neutrality or an empowering message. Positive practice is used when clothing is making an obvious effort to promote gender positive messages, but is still doing so through the gender binary. Binary messages are ones that follow the gender binary and do not make any efforts to
break it. I took pictures and recorded any patterns I saw amongst the various stores. Lastly, I gathered data regarding the pricing of gender neutral clothing and gendered clothing in order to compare the two categories. This was done to analyze the affordability and availability of gender neutral clothing.

**Data and Findings:**

As the existing literature demonstrates, a child develops major traits between the ages of two and eight, which is also when they are learning gender rules and becoming familiar with their sex. One of the major traits a child is developing at this age is confidence. Confidence is key for many situations such as bullying, relationships, job interviews, wage negotiation, etc. In order to have confidence, you must be brought up in a way that allows you to gain confidence (Caspi, Roberts, and Shiner 457). If a child is only told they are kind, then they might never learn to stand up for themselves in certain situations. In contrast, it also creates a disadvantage for boys because they are stereotypically seen as dominant, but if a boy is not these things that the clothes are depicting, then he falls victim to possible bullying from others for not being how a boy should be (Frisoli 28). My field research supports these claims because it demonstrates that girl’s clothing more often than not depicts binary messages that only portray girls as kind and sweet. These findings from field research will be analyzed in detail later on in the paper.

A connection can be made between girls being depicted as kind and the possibility of how agreeable they are. Agreeableness is a trait that develops during this age range. Data that discusses the development of children suggests that agreeableness of a child can incorporate how willingly they accommodate other people (Caspi, Roberts, and Shiner 459). Furthermore, if a girl is always taught to be nice and she is portrayed as this, then I would claim that she would grow
up to be an agreeable person. In return, this perpetuates the stereotype that women owe people, specifically men, something. It is important to note that when discussing developmental traits, it is understood that genetics do contribute to how a child’s personality develops (Penke and Jokela 2). However, it is still necessary for this research to discuss these traits because they can be connected to the gender stereotypes and the gender binary that children’s clothing exemplifies.

Throughout research in the women’s and gender studies field, I collected data on topics that included parents and what their idea of gender nonconforming is, as well as how gendering clothing can affect gender identity of young children. Research that studies the effects of clothing and gender identity with children examines the question of whether or not it matters what children wear. Studies show that it does in fact matter because it creates a first impression on a child’s counterparts, whether they be other children or adults (Paoletti 7). The most shocking aspect of the literature that discusses gender nonconformity was how parents found any reason to keep their child from breaking the gender binary except by telling them the truth. A young boy’s heels would be mysteriously chewed up by their dog or pants became the best clothing item to wear during play time because skirts got in the way when playing. Instead of allowing their child to express themselves through their clothing, the parents were too worried about how society might react that they kept their child confined indoors when breaking the binary, but when in public they must conform. I would argue that this parenting style can cause many issues for a child that is struggling with their gender identity. For example, a child who does not look like a girl, but wishes to dress like one may not feel comfortable in a public setting because they are not allowed to fully be themselves. If and when they are mis-gendered, it can cause harsh internal implications (Rahilly 353). It was also found that parents of transgender or gender nonconforming children use terms, such as “playing along” and “head game” when
explaining to other people what their child is going through. Instead of discussing their child’s wants and how they can help them, parents are often displacing these wants for “phases” or “games” when it is actually deeper than that. Children are dealing with this internally and need their parents to allow them this body autonomy in order for them to fully express themselves.

As transgender and other gender nonconforming people are minorities, they are unlike other minorities in the way that they receive criticism from not only society, but also possibly from within their own family. This is a hard adjustment for someone, especially a child because they are in an emotional development state that does not allow them to fully understand how they are feeling (Caspi, Roberts, and Shiner 459). The possible criticism or disregard from their own family, whom at such a young age are supposed to be who protect you from harm, can cause a sense of helplessness and loneliness for the child because they do not have the one group of people that most minority groups have to rely on (Ehrensaft 529).

As I continue with my field study research, I will utilize this data throughout my analysis. The majority of my research was dedicated to observing three stores that are commonly shopped at when looking for children’s clothing. As stated previously, I visited The Children’s Place, Target, and OshKosh B’Gosh. These stores were chosen because they reach a wide variety of the population. A wide variety is important to this research because it allows the analysis to focus on how the clothing affects the majority of children, rather than analyzing a store that might reach a more direct audience. I not only visited the store to collect data, but I analyzed their websites and utilized that selection for this research. In an effort to make this data organized, I have categorized my field research based on the type of messaging that I found in stores and online. The categories will be the same as stated previously, positive, positive practice, and binary.
Positive

To begin, positive messages at Target, which has 1,904 stores open in North America as of 2020 (Target Corporation). The online girl’s section offered darker colors with graphics of movies that are stereotypical “boy movies” such as, *Jurassic Park, Harry Potter,* and *Star Wars.* The majority of these clothes did not have any hyper feminization, which I think is a great step towards gender neutrality. Something that is typically a boy’s interest should not have to be feminized in order for a girl to wear it. Throughout my time of observation, I noticed that the gender binary was less present throughout the store and online. Additionally, I found that there were many more shirts that offered positive and empowering messages for little girls. Online shirts had phrases on them that stated, “Life is tough, but so are you” with a graphic of a woman superhero, “The force is strong with this little one”, and “Be brave, be bold, be anything”. The phrase “Brave” was found on shirts in the store as well (See Appendix B). The words “strong”, “brave”, “clever” and “tough” are common terms in boy’s clothing. I also found shirts online that depicted mathematics and even a shirt that displayed the word, “Clever”. This type of clothing was also offered at OshKosh B’Gosh. This was the third store I analyzed throughout this field study and has 459 stores throughout the United States (Carters). I was pleasantly surprised at the amount of gender neutral clothing that was offered online. There were many video game t-shirts, as well as a large selection of sports team merchandise. You could also find a few graphic shirts that portrayed stereotypical boy movies, such as Star Wars, which I also found at Target. A shirt that stood out to me was a shirt that said, “Girls rule the world” and it had different races and looks of girls (See Appendix F). It had girls with glasses, curly hair, straight hair, Asian girls, African American, and Caucasian girls. This type of representation is valuable for young children especially when using strong, empowering wording like, “rule the world”. When a
young, African American girl sees this shirt, I would argue she can see herself in a power position rather than only seeing Caucasian girls as those powerful women.

This can play a major role in how their confidence will progress considering that is one of the most valuable traits they are developing at this age (Capsi, Roberts, and Shiner 461). This claim can be supported by other literature that states a child cannot become what they do not observe (Frisoli 25). For example, if a young boy does not see himself depicted as a ballerina because the gender binary does not allow for it, then that young boy would never know that being a ballerina is a possibility for him. Due to this gender binary, that boy will most likely see ballerinas as girly and will not be interested in them. Furthermore, the literature supports this because it states that children often dismiss certain things that do not agree with their gender because of early taught norms and stereotypes (Wade and Ferree 65). By incorporating these words and graphics into girl’s clothing, it is allowing for young girls to see themselves as such. Girls who are being reminded of their bravery and toughness will be able to display more confidence as they gain their personality. Additionally, this allows for girls to see that intelligence is not gendered and it is normal for girls to be interested in subjects such as math. I would claim that this gives young girls who are learning about themselves a voice. As stated previously, research shows that allowing a child to express themselves and have an opinion in their own appearance can positively impact their psychological development, as well as their sense of self (Caspi, Roberts, and Shiner 461).

The boy’s section of Target was filled with gender nonconformity. There were shirts that were offered online that could also be found in the girl’s section. I found this to be a good sign of gender neutrality and although they may be labeled as boy’s or girl’s sections, the clothing being offered in both sections demonstrates that girls and boys can wear the same clothing.
Furthermore, many of the clothing online depicted female superheroes with empowering phrases. Male superheroes are often seen as stronger and more reliable than women superheroes and since superheroes are stereotypically a boy’s interest, this can discredit the idea of women superheroes. Research states that this is because men are seen as protectors, so more often than not men are depicted in superhero form (Stabile 87). Furthermore, I would argue that by having girl superheroes depicted on boy’s clothing it allows boys to see women depicted as strong and independent, which in return will teach boys to respect their girl counterparts at an early age. In the book *Gender: Ideas, Interactions, and Institutions*, the authors explain that children by the age of three prefer to play with their own sex and have a more positive outlook on their own group (Wade and Ferree 65). This is because of the gender rules we teach and expose our children to at a young age, such as the gendering of their clothing. Further research to support these claims states that cross-group friendships, which are friend groups of different genders and races, allow for children to better respect others as they grow older. Additionally, this research states that promoting this type of friend group can increase equal status within the friendships (Turner and Cameron 216). Therefore, if boys are breaking away from gender norms, then I would argue that it will allow for them to be more open with interacting with girls. Boy’s interpersonal and personal relationships with girls will benefit because they will be less likely to see girls as the enemy or as lesser.

Another indication of gender neutrality within Target’s selection was floral graphics that were used in many t-shirt designs online, as well as two shirts that depicted Princess Elsa from the movie *Frozen*. In addition, shirts in the store had sparkles and sequins (See Appendix D). Each of these designs are stereotypically seen on girl’s shirts, which limits many children who wish to be interested in things outside of their assigned sex. This concept of cross-gender
dressing that we are seeing in Target’s selection was applied in Karen Martin’s study that was discussed earlier. The children who played dress up were almost always dressing according to their gender and how they see themselves. Boys were dressing up as firefighters and wore minimal clothing to convey their new personas. Girls wore elaborate costumes and acted like adult women by carrying purses and wearing jewelry. The author then argues that if a parent is gendering their child at home through clothing, that child will not explore outside of that gender (Martin 500). Additionally, a study that was conducted with children at the ages of three to eleven, asked what the children thought about the violation of certain gender norms. Boys wearing girls’ clothing was seen as the worst way to violate gender norms that these children understood. This violation ranked higher than any others such as boys playing with barbie dolls or boys becoming moms (Blakemore 417-418). Furthermore, by allowing boys to wear clothing with these images, it can help take away the stigma of what is considered “girly” or “boy” stuff, which will then allow children to express themselves more freely without the restrictions of societal expectations.

*Positive Practice*

Throughout The Children’s Place, I found a few shirts that were attempting to empower little girls. For example, shirts had phrases like, “This princess will save the world” or “Girls love dinos too”. The gender binary is still present in these shirts because girls are still being portrayed as dainty princesses. In addition, an attempt to express the unisex love for dinosaurs, is overridden by a bright pink shirt with pink dinosaurs that have eyelashes and blush on. Girl’s shirts are still depicting binary messages that they are dainty and/or sweet even when there is a push for gender neutrality. I would argue that the clothing exaggerates their femininity by adding unnecessary makeup and female features to animals in order to reiterate their fragileness.
Similarly, Target’s girls section also struggled breaking away from the gender binary in some ways. Girl’s clothes online and in store still portrayed cuteness, princesses, and dainty animals. A shirt that stood out to me was online and had a character from a stereotypical boy’s movie that said, “Come to the Cute Side” (See Appendix C). I would categorize some of the clothing at these two stores to be positive practice because they are actively incorporating interests of the opposing gender, but the gender binary is still present. It is a common theme throughout these stores that beauty is being depicted in all girl’s sections. This reiterates what the literature discusses about how putting too much emphasis on a young girl's appearance can cause psychological and interpersonal issues as she grows older (Martin 499). Research also states that by the age of five young girls are already taught that beauty is one of the main components of femininity (Coyne, et al. 1912). Given this information, I would argue that a girl who is taught she will be noticed by her appearance will not be able to focus on certain aspects of her life, such as working or participating in school because she is too worried about how she looks or how people will view her.

The Children’s place is the first store that I visited during my field study. This children’s store has over 900 locations throughout the world and is known as one of the top places for children’s clothing (Children’s Place Corporation). As I walked through the girl’s section, there were plenty of bright colors, which were mostly pink or orange (See Appendix A). Studies show that girls between the ages six and nine prefer clothing with a red-orange and red-violet color, whereas boys prefer black, blue, and yellow (Kilinc 1364). These color schemes were apparent in most of the clothing offered in the stores and online. In store for The Children Place, there were not many shirts that depicted messages, but online I did find plenty of shirts that had
phrases and other pictures on them. The graphic t-shirts online displayed binary messages about being nice, staying positive, and being a princess. When they did not involve a direct phrase, the shirts had images of butterflies, unicorns, and mermaids. All three of these animals are known for depicting softness and beauty.

As I search through the boy’s graphic t-shirt section of The Children’s Place website, it is impossible to miss the countless dangerous animals that are displayed. Sharks, lions, tigers, dinosaurs, and dragons. In comparison to the girl’s section, dinosaurs and lions were also on display, but they were being depicted as calm and cosmetically inclined. All the animals in the boy’s section were portrayed as violent, whether that includes breathing fire, roaring ferociously, or riding a motorcycle. Furthermore, the phrases almost always portrayed confidence and/or destructiveness. A few phrases included, “Total Beast” with a rhinoceros running through the words. Another included the phrases “Off-Road Monster” with a graphic of a monster truck. Along with the repetitive graphics, I found common words that were used throughout the boy section, such as legend, boss, beast, MVP. All of these words directly project confidence and the graphics in relation to the phrases assert a destructive manner.

The boy’s section of OshKosh B’Gosh was similar to that of The Children’s Place. It was filled with angry animals and phrases that promote aggressiveness and dominance. Additionally, shirts that portrayed dinosaurs were the most common and showed the dinosaurs roaring or destroying things (See Appendix G). I found similar phrases as I did in other stores, the words that told young boys they are kings and legends. Specifically, one shirt had a phrase on it that stated: “I am in charge” with a rhinoceros on it. This shirt stood out to me because there were no shirts like this in the girl’s section. As discussed earlier in this research, the age range of two to eight is when children develop the part of their personality that will help them interact with
authority figures (Caspi, Roberts, and Shiner 457). The clothing for boys in this age range exemplifies high levels of activeness, destructiveness, and empowering messages regarding their abilities. I would argue that this empowerment teaches young boys’ traits of confidence and dominance. Additionally, the world will see him as these things because that is how he is portrayed. Given this information, a girl would be less likely to stand up to someone than a boy that is normally portrayed as a legend or a boss at such a young age. We allow society and more specifically, the marketing industry, tell us that boys are dominant, not girls.

In regards to destructiveness and aggression, data shows that physical acts of aggression are more common in boys and can begin as early as two years old (Dayton and Malone 151). Other research states that, “boys engaged primarily in physically aggressive behaviors” (Giles and Heyman 111). It has been a common theme throughout other stores that boy’s shirts have signs of destruction and aggressiveness. This is being conveyed by images of dinosaurs smashing into objects and/or ninjas that are doing karate moves. This data suggests that there are two factors that affect a child’s aggressiveness. One of them is biological and the other environmental. The environmental factors are what I will use to analyze aggressiveness in young boy’s and has to do with gender socialization, which is identified as, “how parents and the society respond to and shape the behaviors and experiences of young boys and girls starting from birth” (Dayton and Malone 152). Given this information, as parents continue to dress their boys in shirts that promote aggression, then the boy is being shaped by that clothing. I would claim that children’s clothing that conveys destructiveness and aggression is influencing boys at a young age. We also know from previous literature that children at this age range are beginning to pick up on social cues (Frisoli 23). I would argue that because this type of clothing can shape young boys and promote aggression, girls will pick up on this social cue that is surrounding
them. The social cue being that boys are tough and aggressive and not girls because there are no cues that teach that.

Online for OshKosh B’Gosh had different tabs for girl’s and boy’s clothing. A labeled section that stood out to me was the activewear, which was only featured in the boy’s section. This leads me to believe that girls are seen as less active and playful, whereas boys are seen to be so active that they deserve an entire line of clothing just for that. This can be connected back to the literature that discusses the dilemma’s for girls who try to play during recess, but their clothing restricts them (Martin 498). Girls are too often restricted in dresses or skirts that prohibit them from being active at playtime, which I would argue also causes them to be less sociable. In return, I would claim that this causes a great divide between boys and girls because the two will not be able to play together if girls are constantly being worried about their skirt or dress coming up. The literature tells us that not only is the clothing restrictive, but the behaviors that little girls are told are not appropriate when wearing dresses or skirts, such as jumping and playing on the playground (Martin 498). If a girl did not have to worry about her dress or skirt coming up, it would allow for girls to feel more comfortable being active around boys and create a more equal playing field for both. This can generate respect between the two children, as well as allow boys to see girls as active and energetic like they are.

In an effort to make this research intersectional, I observed the pricing of the clothing to examine if there are any differences between gender neutral clothing and one’s that abide by the gender binary. There is minimal research regarding whether there are pricing differences between these two types of clothing. However, research does make the claim that the marketing industry continues to profit off of clothing that follows the gender binary because that is what is most common in our society (Frisoli 2). Furthermore, this literature states that children who are
old enough to ask for articles of clothing at the store are gravitating to the gender binary due to the stereotypes and gender rules children are exposed to at such a young age (Frisoli 1). Throughout most of the stores, pricing was low for shirt’s, as low as $6 and as high as $28. The highest price was found at OshKosh B’gosh and was for sports merchandise in the girl’s section. The lowest price was found at Target and I observed no substantial pricing differences between the two types of clothing. At The Children’s Place, graphic shirts ranged from $10.50 to $12 and did not fluctuate much since there was minimal gender neutral clothing offered at this store. I expected Target to be more expensive than what it was for both areas of clothing and I had the same expectations for The Children’s Place. OshKosh B’Gosh was the only store that showed significant pricing differences for gender neutral clothing. The price spiked for shirts that are typically found in the boy’s section, but decreased when promoting binary messages. Earlier in this research, I made the claim that one reason children dress mainly in gender binary clothing is because gender neutral clothing is less accessible for parents due to pricing. In return, this can push children into the gender binary due to their economic status. Following my analysis of the available literature, I will now state that the pricing did not vary drastically between the three stores that I observed. Furthermore, I would argue that this choice for parents is less about affordability and more about conformity, which was discussed previously in this research.

To summarize my findings, it is evident that the gender binary is present in all three stores. Whether this be strictly through binary messaging or even positive practice, each store expressed gender conformity for children’s clothing. More specifically, one out of the three stores offered both positive and positive practice messaging. One store had signs of positive practice and binary messaging and one store offered both positive and binary messages. As noted, there is a wide variety of clothing that is being offered at most of the stores. However, the
most notable observations were that Target was the only store that I observed that did not fall into binary messaging and OshKosh B’Gosh was either positive or binary messaging. OshKosh B’Gosh had positive messaging for girls, but continued the gender binary in the boy’s section. Additionally, the most common themes found in the girl’s section were beauty and graphics with majestic animals. The most common theme for boys was images of strong animals and phrases that promote aggressiveness. Lastly, my research confirms previous research that states most children’s clothing is gendered and this does affect the child as they grow older. This research was important to understanding how clothing can be a major factor in how children are portrayed by society and how they understand themselves at an early age.

**Conclusion:**

Overall, this research illustrates the importance of development during the age range of two to eight. These ages provide children with lifelong skills that will carry them through hardships and relationships. Furthermore, how they see themselves and how they think the world sees them is important to these developments. Children have gendered stereotypes around them constantly that try and tell them how they should act, so their clothing should not limit them to who and what they can be. Instead of limiting children, clothing stores should consider breaking away from the gender binary and carrying clothing that promotes a more positive message for all genders and children. In addition, parents should allow their child to cross gender play and encourage that freedom. It should also be considered how we can make this clothing affordable for anyone, rather than capitalizing on the want to break away from gender stereotypes. I would challenge future research to be done on how the affordability of gender neutral clothing could change the children’s clothing industry. It could be important to that future research to also examine how available gender neutral clothing will become in the next few years. I hope that as
it becomes more available, the affordability will follow and children will have less restrictions regarding their idea of gender.
Appendices:

Appendix A:

Appendix B:

Appendix C:
Appendix D:
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