The Relationship Between Self-esteem and Preference Type of Play by Gender of Elementary School Students

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The purpose of this study is to differentiate the gender into males and females based on prior research that children prefer different types of play depending on their gender, and to see what the relationship between their self-esteem and preferred types of play is. Random stratified method was used to collect study participants for this study. Elementary school students in Incheon Metropolitan City, Republic of Korea, were set up as a population, the city was divided into six areas in a similar area, and each school was numbered after identifying local elementary schools. A total of six schools were selected for each region by making random checks. A total of 18 classes were selected for each of the four, five, and six grades. A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed, but 381 of them were used for statistical analysis, except for 69 that were judged to have been poorly response. There were 215 male, 166 female, 151 in fourth grade, 109 in fifth grade, and 121 in sixth grade. There are two questionnaires used in this study. First, to measure self-esteem, Rosengerg’s 10-item Self Esteem Scale was used to assess self-esteem. The scale, which provides a convenient measure of global attitudes about the self, has five negatively worded items and five positively worded items. This scale is one of the most widely used measures of self-esteem and has displayed good reliability and validity. Cronbach’s $a$ showed 0.859. Second, to find out the preference for play types, we used those produced by Choi and Lee based on four types of play suggested by Roger Caillois. The questionnaire consists of four sub-variables: competition (Agon), chance (Alea), simulation (Mimicry) and vertigo (Ilinx). The Cronbach’s $a$ values are 0.705, 0.694, 0.786, and 0.722, respectively. The class teacher of the selected school was contacted and explained the purpose of the study and asked for consent. On the measurement date, we visited the class and conducted the measurement. Before measurement, we informed the purpose of the study again and asked for consent. The self-reported method was used to respond, and the measurement time was about 10 minutes. The responses were coded using the SPSS (win) 15.0 program and frequency analysis was performed to characterize the data. The independent $t$-test was carried out to see if there was a difference between self-esteem and preferred types of play by gender. Correlation analysis was performed to see how self-esteem relates to the type of preferred play. All statistical significance levels are set as $p < 0.05$. Children’s self-esteem does not differ depending on their gender. And it turned out that boys preferred competition, and girls preferred simulation, and chance and vertigo did not differ depending on gender. In male, a correlation between self-esteem and preference for play types has resulted in statistically significant correlation between self-esteem and competition, chance, and vertigo. In female, a correlation between self-esteem and preference for play types was performed in vertigo, where self-esteem was statistically significant.

Keywords: self-esteem, preference type of play, gender, elementary school students
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SELF-ESTEEM AND PREFERENCE TYPE OF PLAY

Introduction

Childhood develops a multifaceted concept of self while experiencing positive relationships through playing with peers and having opportunities for cooperation and negotiation to solve various problems. Children communicate with the world through play and grow into human beings who are harmonized with the world through play (Yun & An, 2016). This interaction in play with peers develops social skills (Shaffer, 2008), becomes a means to master social skills, and enhances social competence while experiencing the emotions and actions of others (Bagdi & Vacca, 2005). In this process, self-esteem also develops. From the moment him or herself make a judgment on him or herself, it affects the child's self-formation and affects the child's emotional and behavioral development (Phelan, 2003). It is said that children with positive self-esteem who are involved in social development involved in the formation of desirable social relations (Santrock, 2007) are confident in problem solving situations and are flexible without being frustrated or embarrassed (Crocker, Brook, Niiya, & Villacorta, 2006).

Studies have shown that children prefer different types of play by gender (Fromberg, 2002; Kim, 2007; Pellegrini & Perlmutter, 1989; Quay, Weaver, & Neel, 1986).

Chi (1991), Fromberg (2002), Pellegrini and Perlmutter (1989) and Quay, Weaver, & Neel (1986) studied the play types by categorizing them into block play, role play and art play. And Kim (2007) was categorized into function play, constructive play, games with ruled and dramatic play. After classifying according to the characteristics of play, children's play was observed, Pellegrini and Perlmutter (1989) and Chi (1991) was found that boys preferred the block play, girls preferred role play, and art games favored both boys and girls. And Kim (2007) was found that boys prefer function play, games with ruled, and girls prefer constructive play and dramatic play.

Why does the type of play vary according to gender? This can affect the self-esteem of the participating individuals. Self-esteem refers to evaluating yourself positively. In a broad sense, self-acceptance, self-assurance, self-strengthening, and self-perception are used in the same sense (Ryu, 2002). A person is more likely to be influenced by self-esteem when he/she chooses future actions. Self-esteem increases intrinsic motivation, which increases the likelihood of participation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

The future of children is unknown. Their potential is endless. It is therefore important to look at self-esteem in predicting the future behavior of children. Because self-esteem is not actually observable, it is difficult to know without a psychological examination. It is therefore necessary to identify what type of self-esteem is possible through observable behavior.

Meanwhile, According to Caillois (1953), the children’s preferred play types are specific to the individual. There are children who like to play while competing with others like football, marbling, or dodge, some children like to play luck like cards, roulettes, lotteries, some children like to play imitating another object such as house play, cosplay and some children like to play with thrill because of the rapid movement such as spinning or falling (eg. roller coaster, sliding, slacklining etc.). This kind of play is the most observed type among higher grade elementary school children, and it is expected that more information can be obtained than the previous classification method in understanding the relationship between play type preference and physical, psychological, and social variables.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between self-esteem and favorite play types according to gender, based on previous research that children prefer different types of play according to gender.
Methods

Participants

Random stratified method was used to collect study participants for this study. Elementary school students in Incheon Metropolitan City, Republic of Korea, were set up as a population, the city was divided into six areas in a similar area, and each school was numbered after identifying local elementary schools. A total of six schools were selected for each region by making random checks. A total of 18 classes were selected for each of the four, five, and six grades. A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed, but 381 of them were used for statistical analysis, except for 69 that were judged to have been poorly response. There were 215 male, 166 female, 151 in fourth grade, 109 in fifth grade, and 121 in sixth grade.

Measurement

To measure self-esteem, Rosenberg’s (1965) 10-item Self-Esteem Scale was used to assess self-esteem. The scale, which provides a convenient measure of global attitudes about the self, has five negatively worded items and five positively worded items. This scale is one of the most widely used measures of self-esteem and has displayed good reliability and validity (Crandall, 1973; Rosenberg, 1965).

In order to study play, it is necessary to establish a classification principle and divide it into a small number of categories. Several studies related to play have been made by the classification method suggested by Roger Caillois (1953). Caillois distinguishes four types of play: Agon, Alea, Mimicry, and Ilinx, which determine which of the four characteristics dominates the play. In this study, to find out the preference for play types, we used those produced by Choi and Lee (2004) based on four types of play suggested by Caillois. The questionnaire consists of four sub-variables: competition (Agon), chance (Alea), simulation (Mimicry), and vertigo (Ilinx). The Crombach’s $a$ values are 0.705, 0.694, 0.786, and 0.722, respectively.

Procedure

The class teacher of the selected school was contacted and explained the purpose of the study and asked for consent. On the measurement date, we visited the class and conducted the measurement. Before measurement, we informed the purpose of the study again and asked for consent. The self-reported method was used to respond, and the measurement time was about 10 minutes.

Analysis

The responses were coded using the SPSS (win) 15.0 program and frequency analysis was performed to characterize the data. The independent $t$-test was carried out to see if there was a difference between self-esteem and preferred types of play by gender. Pearson’s correlation analysis was performed to clarify the relationship between self-esteem and preferred play type. All statistical significance levels are set as $p < 0.05$.

Results

Table 1 shows the results of the independent $t$-tests conducted to examine differences in self-esteem according to gender. As shown in Table 1, there was no difference in self-esteem according to gender ($t (379) = 1.894, p > 0.05$).
Table 1

*Differences in Self-esteem According to Gender*

| Gender | N   | M   | SD     | t    | p    |
|--------|-----|-----|--------|------|------|
| Self-esteem | Male | 215 | 3.7788 | 0.59499 | 1.894 | 0.059 |
|         | Female | 166 | 3.6660 | 0.55150 |      |      |

Table 2 shows the results of the independent *t*-tests conducted to examine the differences in the types of preferred plays according to gender. As shown in Table 2, there is a difference in the type of play that is preferred according to gender. In other words, the boys preferred to play the Agon (*t* (379) = 8.324, *p* < 0.05) and the girls preferred the Mimicry (*t* (379) = -4.991, *p* < 0.05). There was no difference between the Area and the Ilinx.

The results of Pearson’s correlation analysis are shown in Tables 3 and 4, to examine the relationship between self-esteem and the preferred type of play. As shown in Table 3, the self-esteem of male children showed a statistically significant correlation with Agon, Area, and Ilinx. As shown in Table 4, the self-esteem of female children showed a statistically significant correlation with Agon and Ilinx.

Table 2

*Differences in Preference Type of Play According to Gender*

| Gender | N   | M   | SD     | t    | p    |
|--------|-----|-----|--------|------|------|
| Agon   | Male | 215 | 3.8372 | 0.80934 | 8.324 | 0.001 |
|        | Female | 166 | 3.1551 | 0.77143 |      |      |
| Area   | Male | 215 | 3.1651 | 0.90756 | 0.808 | 0.420 |
|        | Female | 166 | 3.0934 | 0.79364 |      |      |
| Mimicry | Male | 215 | 2.3162 | 0.96416 | -4.991 | 0.001 |
|        | Female | 166 | 2.8172 | 0.98100 |      |      |
| Ilinx  | Male | 215 | 3.7233 | 0.92166 | -0.044 | 0.965 |
|        | Female | 166 | 3.7274 | 0.90446 |      |      |

These results show that children who have high self-esteem regardless of gender enjoy competition and thrill.

Table 3

*Correlation Between Self-esteem and Preferred Play Type of Male*

| Self-esteem | Agon | Area | Mimicry | Ilinx |
|-------------|------|------|---------|-------|
| Self-esteem | 0.332** | 0.175* | 0.461** | 0.287** |
| Agon        |      | 0.461** | 0.038 | 0.415** |
| Area        | 0.105 |      | 0.402** | 0.014 |
| Mimicry     |     | 0.038 |      |        |
| Ilinx       | 0.272** | 0.415** |      |        |

* *p* < 0.05; ** *p* < 0.01.
Table 4

|                      | Self-esteem | Agon | Area | Mimicry | Ilinx |
|----------------------|-------------|------|------|---------|-------|
| Self-esteem          |             |      |      |         |       |
| Agon                 | 0.182*      |      |      |         |       |
| Area                 | 0.026       | 0.327** |      |         |       |
| Mimicry              | 0.049       | 0.135 | 0.317** |         |       |
| Ilinx                | 0.188*      | 0.278** | 0.064 | 0.002   |       |

* $p < 0.05$  ** $p < 0.01$.

Discussion

Self-esteem is the cornerstone of the formation of ego-identity and is reported to affect various areas such as interpersonal relationships, academics, sports, and leadership (Coopersmith, 1967). It is very important to understand the self-esteem of children belonging to this period because this self-esteem is rapidly formed during childhood (6-12 age), which is a critical period of self-development (Erikson, 1968).

Looking at the results of this study, first, it was found that there was no difference in the self-esteem of children by gender ($p > 0.05$). However, considering the difference in mean values between groups (male = 3.77 VS female = 3.66) and the level of significance ($p = 0.059$), it seems that some difference is acceptable. This result is similar to the results of studies conducted in the past that men tend to have higher self-esteem than women (Huang, 2010; Kling, Hyde, Showers, & Buswell, 1999; Orth & Robins, 2014; Robins & Trzesniewski, 2005; Trzesniewski, Donnellan, & Robins, 2013).

For this reason, Agam, Tamir, and Golan (2015) explain that boys are more likely to face competition, conflict, power, and excitement than girls by traditional gender roles, thus increasing externalized emotions, or confidence. Meanwhile, Zeigler-Hill and Myers (2012) found that self-esteem in their review study showed that boys have higher self-esteem than women in the areas of athletic, physical appearance, self-satisfaction, and personal self-esteem, while women in the areas of moral-ethical and behavioral conduct self-esteem. And they said that there was no difference in gender in academic, influence, social acceptance, and family self-efficacy. In other words, it was concluded that there are meaningful gender differences in the experience of self-esteem but these differences, are complex and depend upon the way in which self-esteem is conceptualized.

The South Korea is rapidly changing into a gender equality society in just 10 years. This social change background seems to have influenced the results. In the future, in countries where women's human rights are strengthened, such as the South Korea, differences in gender roles by gender will gradually decrease, and due to such socio-cultural effects, children's self-esteem is expected to gradually decrease between genders.

Second, there was a difference in preference for play according to gender. Boys preferred Agon (competitive play) over girls ($p < 0.001$), and girls preferred Mimicry (simulation play) over boys ($p < 0.001$). Children's gender differences appear not only in peers, toys and activities, but also where and how they play. Children participate in socio-dramatic play with the same frequency and motivation as both boys and girls, but their roles vary widely in many cultures. In general, boys prefer roles like heroes, monsters, and warriors in imaginative situations that require very noisy and vigorous physical activity, while girls prefer a “realistic” role in focusing on interpersonal relationships and parenting in situations such as home, school, and hospital. Children after 5 years of age have a distinct gender difference in terms of physical activity, but boys have a greater amount of physical activity. Boys enjoy testing physical conditions, so they participate in competitive
sports such as soccer, gymnastics, basketball, baseball, volleyball and tennis. On the other hand, girls like rhythm, body coordination, and chanting or singing, so they participate in games such as skipping, hopscotch and clapping (Edwards, Knoche, & Kumru, 2001).

The results of this study can be interpreted in the light of Korean social context and Edwards et al. (2001). Currently, Korea’s sports market and entertainment business are at their peak. A player who plays in the professional big leagues and a singer (idol group who dances and sings together) that is creating a “Korean Wave” fever are exposed to the media every day. It is thought that this result came out because many children prefer to use the Agon that remains as a role model and the Mimicry as a girl.

Third, we examined the relationship between self-esteem and preferred play type. Self-esteem, Agon (competition), and Ilinx (vertigo) showed a significant correlation between boys and girls. A number of studies have shown that self-esteem affects leadership (Ok, 2016; Jeong & Kwon, 2011). According to a study by Rhim & Kim (2019), children who participate in somewhat dangerous play have higher leadership. Dangerous play here is such as great heights (eg. trees and other structures to scary heights etc.), rapid speeds (eg. swing on vines, ropes, slide on sleds, skis, skates etc.), dangerous tools (eg. knives, bows, arrows and farm machinery etc.), dangerous elements (eg. fire and deep water etc.), rough and tumble (eg. chase one another around and fight playful etc.) and disappearing (eg. play hide and seek, thrill of scary separation from their companions etc.) (Sandseter & Kennair, 2011). Among these attributes of play are competition and dizzying elements. Participants need a very high level of concentration, a high level of physical ability, and sufficient self-efficacy to effectively deal with risk factors. It will not be a play that anyone can play. The high self-esteem of children with these factors may be a natural consequence.

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