AN INVESTIGATION OF PLAY BEHAVIORS AND SOCIAL BEHAVIORS BY GENDER

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Abstract— The aim of the present study is to investigate play behaviors and social behaviors by gender. The study employed a variational mixed model. The study group consisted of 109 children aged 5-6 years. Quantitative data was collected using Preschool Play Behavior Scale and Preschool Social Behavior Scale, while qualitative data was collected by semi-structured interview format. In the analysis of quantitative data, t-Test and Pearson's correlation coefficient were used for unrelated measures. On the other hand, qualitative data collected from the study group was evaluated by a descriptive analysis. The results of the study demonstrated that the scores of rough and tumble play behaviors, physical aggression, and positive social behaviors showed a significant difference by gender.

Keywords— Gender, Play Behaviors, Social Behaviors.

I. INTRODUCTION

Gender refers to the attributes of women and men. During preschool years, most children behave increasingly in accordance with gender roles defined by their cultural context. Biology (chromosome, hormones, evolution), social impacts (parents, peers), and cognitive effects have been pointed to contribute to the development of gender [1]. Play produces socialization effects on gender development and boys and girls may behave very different from each other at play [2]-[3]. In all socio-economic groups and cultures children show gender differences during play [3]-[2]. Preschool children associate clothes, tools, housewares, occupations, colors, and behaviors with gender. In the meantime, as well as their play preferences, their actions also reflect their beliefs on gender. Boys are more likely to be active, intuitive, sociable, and physically aggressive, while girls are more fearful, dependent, emotionally sensitive, docile, favored in effortful control, and more able to understand self-conscious emotions and expressing indirect relational aggression. During this period, children's beliefs on gender stereotypes grow stronger, and thus, most children resort to those beliefs not as a flexible guidance, but as obligatory rules that must be obeyed, rather than [4].

There is a mutual interaction between play and social behaviors. Children develop their social behaviors through play. The play environment, in which peer relationships are build, plays a key role in the development of these behaviors. Children learn social skills by maintaining peer relationships during play. When children join a certain group, they find out that not every child acts the same, and that some behaviors are not accepted. Children develop social relationships with their peers when playing with a material such as clay, and learn how to be together while playing. Therefore, play helps children become socialized [5]. Children exhibiting positive social behaviors are observed to be more successful at building and maintaining a friendship and less likely to display problem behaviors [6]. In their relationship with their peers, children may be helpful, understanding, and candid, as well as competitive, quarrelsome, and aggressive [7]. Children's displaying negative behaviors at play may cause them to be rejected by their peers and to have behavior and adjustment problems in their social relationships [7]-[8].

During early childhood, children show gender differences in their social interactions and in their play behaviors. Boys prefer to engage in more active, rough and tumble play, while girls prefer more quiet and passive play [3]. There are many examples that show children's tendency towards choosing gender appropriate activities. For instance, girls are more willing to play with dolls, while boys are more apt to play with cars, and it is observed that parents have a role in the socialization of these differences [9]. The best environment to know and evaluate a child is the play environment, in which they can display their natural behaviors. This is because children are driven by internal motivations that cause them to take action and proceed, and children have these motivations during play [10]. In the literature, there are studies indicating that play and social behaviors are interacted with each other [11]-[12]-[13]-[14]. In our country, however, no studies have demonstrated a direct effect of this interaction on boys and girls. Therefore, children's play and social behaviors have been evaluated together. The present study, performed in Ankara, Turkey, will contribute to the literature by revealing the association between social behaviors and play behaviors. In consideration of these facts, this study aimed to investigate children's (aged 5-6 years) social and play behaviors by gender.

In parallel with this aim, answers were sought for the following questions:

1-Do play behaviors of a child vary by gender?

2-Do social behaviors of a child vary by gender?

3-Is there any relationship between subscales of play behaviors and social behaviors?
4-What are boys' and girls' opinions about their favorite play centers, the roles they assume at play, and the toys they play?

II. METHODS

This part presents details on the study design, the study group providing data, data tools, and analyses of data.

2.1. Design of the Study

The present study employed a variational mixed model in order to develop the data obtained by quantitative and qualitative methods [15].

2.2. Participants

The study group included 109 children (aged 5-6) attending two preschools affiliated to a public university in the center of Ankara in 2015-2016 school year. The rates of boys and girls in the study group were 57.8% (n=63) and 42.2% (n=46), respectively. 43.4% (n=46) of children were 50-60 months old and 56.6% (n=63) were 61-71 months old. To collect quantitative data, criterion sampling from purposive sampling methods was used for the assignment of the study group. Inclusion criteria were attending the same preschool for six months, availability, and voluntary participation in the study. A total of 28 children, 14 girls and 14 boys, were selected from the study group by random sampling in order to collect qualitative data [16].

2.3. Instruments

Within the scope of this study, data from the study group were collected using "Preschool Play Behavior Scale", "Preschool Social Behavior Scale"and"Semi-structured Interview Format".

2.3.1. Preschool Play Behavior Scale

This study applied "the Preschool Play Behavior Scale" developed by Coplan and Rubin and adapted to Turkish by Gulay-Ogelman [17]-[18]. The scale consisted of 18 items scored on 5-point Likert-Type scale. Test-re-test reliability and Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient were calculated to determine the scale's reliability. As a result of the calculation, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was found 0.88 for social play, 0.90 for isolated-passive behavior; 0.86 for rough and tumble play, 0.86 for quite behavior, and 0.72 for isolated-active behavior. Test-re-test results ranged between 0.66 and 0.92 [18]. In parallel with the teachers' responses, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale was estimated as 0.88 for social play, 0.64 for isolated-passive play behavior, 0.89 for rough-and-tumble play, 0.76 for quite play behavior, and 0.79 for isolated-active play behavior.

2.3.2. Preschool Social Behavior Scale

To determine preschool children's social behaviors, the current study applied "the Preschool Social Behavior Scale" developed by Crick, Casas, and Mosher and adapted to Turkish by Sen and Ari [19]-[20]. The scale contained 24 items scored on 5-point Likert-Type scale. Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient and test-re-test coefficient were estimated to determine the reliability of the responses on the scale. As a result, the level of overt/physical aggression was detected as .95, positive social behavior as .89, relational aggression as .90, and depressive affective behavior as .51. Test-re-test reliability coefficient was found .85 for overt/physical aggression, .81 for positive social behavior, .73 for relational aggression, and .56 for depressive affective behavior [20]. During the study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the scale estimated the level of overt/physical aggression as 0.93, positive social behavior as 0.90, relational aggression as 0.91, and depressive affective as 0.66.

2.3.3. Semi-structured Interview Format

The purpose of using a semi-structured interview format in this study is to perform a detailed examination on children's play behaviors in learning centers [21]. In line with this purpose, a semi-structured interview format was designed by researchers to engage children in conversations. This format was examined for content and face validity by asking the opinions of three academicians with a field of expertise and experience. In parallel with the feedback received, the format included three questions to determine the children's play behaviors during their free time (Which learning center in your classroom you like to play in the most?", Which plays you like the most in these centers?", Which toys you like to play with the most in these centers?").

2.4. Procedure

Permissions for the scales applied in the study were obtained by the researcher from those adapting the scales for Turkish Sampling and those performing validity and reliability studies. The study was based on the principle of voluntary participation of the students and teachers. Schools of the study group were pre-visited and the researchers introduced themselves to the children. To collect data from the children, "Preschool Play Behavior Scale" and "Preschool Social Behavior Scale" were filled out by the teachers. Also, the teachers needed to spend at least six months with these children in the same classroom. An individual semi-structured interview with a child was conducted by a researcher in a separate place from the group.

2.5. Analyses

In the quantitative analysis of the study, Pearson's correlation coefficient and t test were used for unrelated measures. On the qualitative side, descriptive analysis was carried out for the assessment of interviews carried out with children [16]. For analyzing data, a framework was established by utilizing a relevant literature and

categories were created according to the children's preferences for learning centers, the roles they like to assume, and the toys they prefer to play with in these centers. Accordingly, learning centers were grouped under three categories: dramatic play center, block center, and art center [2]. Children's role-plays were grouped under three categories: family roles, character roles, and functional roles [22].Finally, the toys they prefer were divided into four categories established by Hewitt and Roomet (1979) and Wolfe (2002): sensory/motor, representational, construction, and replacement toys[23]. During the organization of data according to a thematic framework, categories falling outside the scope of those presented in the table were excluded. On the qualitative side, coding method was employed to ensure the reliability of data analyses. Five interview transcripts were selected randomly, reviewed separately by two independent coders, one of whom was the researcher, and reanalyzed by the categories specified. The level of reliability between the researchers was estimated 95% by determining the frequencies of agreement and disagreement in five interview transcripts [24].

III. RESULTS

This part presents findings obtained as a result of statistical analyses of data collected within the study.

Table 1. Unrelated t Test Results of Children's Play Behaviors by Gender

Play behaviors	Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	SS	sd	t	p
Social play	Male	63	24.46	4.22	107	1.27	0.21
	Female	46	25.48	4.00			
Isolated-passive	Male	63	12.37	2.52	107	0.41	0.68
	Female	46	12.15	2.88			
Rough and tumble	Male	63	5.41	2.58	107	6.97	0.00*
	Female	46	2.61	1.02			
Quite	Male	63	7.76	2.96	107	0.47	0.64
	Female	46	8.02	2.63			
Isolated-active	Male	63	5.35	2.00	107	1.09	0.27
	Female	**46**	**5.78**	**2.08**			

***p<0.05**

According to data given in Table 1, it was determined that children's rough and tumble play scores showed a significant difference by gender (t(107)=6.97; p<0.05). Boys (5.4±2.58) were found to have higher scores on rough-and-tumble play compared to girls (2.61±1.02). In addition, no significant difference by gender was found in the scores of social play (t(107)=1.27; p>0.05), isolated-passive play (t(107)=0.41; p>0.05), quite (t(107)=0.47; p>0.05), and isolated-active play behavior (t(107)=1.09; p>0.05).

Table 2. Unrelated t Test Results of Children's Social Behaviors by Gender

Social Behaviors	Gender	N	$\bar{X}$	SS	sd	t	p
Physical Aggression	Male	63	14.05	6.65	107	3.58	0.01*
	Female	46	10.13	3.87			
Positive social	Male	63	25.05	5.16	107	2.52	0.01*
	Female	46	27.70	5.75			
Relational aggression	Male	63	12.44	4.99	107	0.14	0.89
	Female	46	12.30	5.39			
Depressive affective	Male	63	7.57	2.30	107	0.45	0.65
	Female	46	7.37	2.28			

*p<0.05

As can be seen in Table 2, a significant difference by gender was detected between physical aggression (t(107)=3.58; p<0.05) and positive social behavior scores (t(107)=2.52; p<0.05). Boys (14.05±6.65) were found to have higher scores on physical aggression social behavior than girls (10.13±3.87). In addition, girls (27.70±5.75) received higher scores on positive social behavior than boys (25.05±5.16). However, there was no significant difference by gender between relational aggression scores (t(107)=0.14; p>0.05) and depressive affective behavior scores (t(107)=0.45; p>0.05).

Table 3. Pearson's Coefficient Analysis on the Association between Children's Play Behaviors and Social Behaviors

	Subscales		Social behaviours: Physical aggression	Positive social	Relational aggression	Depressive affective
Play behaviours	Social play	r	0.08	0.46**	0.20*	-0.46**
		p	0.41	0.00	0.03	0,00
	Isolated-passive	r	0.08	0.09	-0.19	-0.17
		p	0.40	0.33	0.05	0.07
	Rough and tumble	r	0.70**	-0.48**	0.43**	0.13
		p	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.19
	Quite	r	-0.14	-0.30**	-0.24*	0.37**
		p	0.14	0.01	0.01	0.00
	Isolated-active	r	0.19*	0.09	-0.01	-0.15
		p	0.04	0.36	0.92	0.12

p<0.01; p*<.,05**

Subscale scores of play behaviors shown in Table 3 demonstrated that the association of children's rough and tumble play scores was positive and high with physical aggression social behavior (r=0.70; p<0.01), negative and moderate with positive social behavior (r=-0.48; p<0.01), positive and moderate with relational aggression (r=0.43; p<0.01), and was not significant with depressive affective behavior scores (r=0.13; p>0.05). Additionally, the association of children's social play behavior scores was positive and moderate (r=0.45; p<0.01) with positive social behavior, positive and low (r=0.20; p<0.05) with relational aggression social behavior, and negative and moderate (r=-0.46; p<0,01) with depressive affective social behavior, and not significant with physical aggression scores (r=0.08; p>0.05). Also, no

significant difference was detected between children's isolated-passive play behaviors and social behaviors ($p>0.05$).

There was no significant difference found between children's quite play behaviors and physical aggression behaviors ($r=-0.14$; $p>0.05$). It was found that the association of quite play behaviors was negative and low with positive social ($r=-0.30$; $p<0.01$) behaviors and relational aggression ($r=-0.24$; $p<0.05$) and was positive and low with depressive affective behavior ($r=0.37$; $p<0.01$). Also, there was a positive and low association between preschool children's isolated-active play behavior scores and physical aggression scores ($r=0.19$; $p<0.05$). No significant association was detected between isolated-active play behavior and other social behaviors ($p>0.05$).

Girls' Opinions About Their Learning Center Preferences, Their Roles At Pretend Play, and Their Toy Preferences

A total of 17 responses from the girls to a question "Which learning center in your classroom you like to play in the most?", were grouped under three categories. These were dramatic, art, and block centers. The most frequent response given to this question was the category of "dramatic learning center" *(f=14).* This was followed by the categories of art *(f=2)* and block *(f=1)* learning centers. Girls' opinions about their learning center preferences are as follows: *"...I like playing house and playing with dolls in the playing house section (A1)... Playing house section is my favorite (A2)... I like drawing in the art center, but I like playing in the playing house center (A9)... Playing house, in the block center (A11)…"*

A total of 25 responses from the girls to a question "Which roles you like to assume the most in learning centers?", were grouped under three categories as family, character, and functional roles. Girls' responses on their roles at pretend play were grouped under the categories of "family roles" *(f=15),* "character roles" *(f=7),* and "functional roles" *(f=3).* Girls' responses on pretend play category are as follows:*"...For example, playing a mother, a sister, or a baby role (A3)... I like playing a mother, a sister, a baby role with my girlfriends. Boys sometimes act out like a zombie and they argue a lot, I don't want that. Girls don't act like a zombie (A4)... It is nice to be Winx, Barbie, Maya the Bee (A7)...."*

A total of 22 responses from the girls to a question "What kind of toys you like to play with the most in learning centers?" were grouped under two categories. Girls expressed *(f=20)* opinions on "representational toy" category and *(f=2)* opinions on "construction toy" category. Girls' responses on toy category are as follows: *"...Playing house objects with dishes (A2)... We are decorating a cake with fruits, playing with cushions, glasses, and playing with the dolls as if they were our kids (A6)... I'm playing with tableware toys, toy houses, and toy sofas in the playing house section (A10)..."*

Boys' Opinions About Their Learning Center Preferences, Their Roles At Pretend Play, and Toy Preferences

A total of 20 responses from the boys to a question "Which learning center in your classroom you like to play in the most?". were grouped under three categories. They were determined as block, dramatic, and art centers. The most frequent response on learning centers was related to the category of "block center" *(f=10).* This was followed by the categories of dramatic *(f=8)* and art *(f=2)* learning centers. Boys' responses on the category of learning centers are as follows: *"...I always want to play differentgames in the block section (B1)... Playing on the boys' corner. There is a carpet there, I like building a house with blocks. I want other boys to be there (B4)... I don't like playing in kitchen, in the playing house section (B6)..."*

A total of 23 responses from the boys to a question "Which roles you like to assume the most in learning centers?", were grouped under three categories as family *(f=5),* character *(f=8),* and functional roles *(f=10).* Boys' responses on the category of pretend play are as follows: *"... I don't like playing on the corners. I like assuming the role of a monster (B2)… I take on a father's, an uncle's role.. Sometimes a child's role (B5).... I act out like a zombie. I play cops and robbers (B9)... Mosques. We build mosques.. There are lights and roads (B14)..."*

25 responses from the boys to a question "What kind of toys you like to play with the most in learning centers?", were grouped under two categories. Children expressed *(f=13)* opinions on "representational toy" category and *(f=12)* opinions on "construction toy" category. Boys' responses on the category of toys are as follows: *"... With connecting, attachable and detachable toys (B12)... Repair tools toys. Playing a role of a repairman with them (B5)... Angry Bird, Lightning McQueen, I always play with blocks (B7)... With a wooden car and with experiment kits. Sometimes I play alone (B8)..."*

CONCLUSIONS

This part discusses the findings obtained in parallel with the aim of this study and its related sub-goals, as well as presenting results and recommendations. Boys were found to have higher scores on rough and tumble play behaviors and on physical aggression social behavior, whereas girls were found to have higher scores on positive social behaviors. During early childhood, boys are more active and spend more time in motor activities than girls. Children's activities reduce as they grow older. Therefore, gender differences in children's activity level may result from maturity differences. In the meantime,

parents support and reward active behaviors of boys, while they do not encourage girls in these types of behaviors. Boys engage more in physical play (chasing, rough and tumble), while girls are more apt to social skills and are very attentive in physical activities (a clapping game). In most cultures and societies, boys engage more in rough and tumble play. Some psychologists support the idea that this can be attributed to biology. Others, on the other hand, discuss that family and culture have an impact on socialization, thereby affecting play preferences of girls and boys [2]-[25]. Reference [26] shows that types of play differ in boys and girls, boys prefer more active and more rough play, while girls are apt to play more quite and detailed play.

The evaluation of the relationship between children's play behaviors and social behaviors showed that children's rough and tumble play behaviors increase as physical aggression and relational aggression social behaviors rise. Besides, rough and tumble play behaviors show decrease as positive social behaviors improve. This finding also explains the results of girls' and boys' play and social behavior scores. Researchers suggest that women are more prone to establish a relationship than men, and they believe that this tendency should be rewarded in their cultures more than it is today. In addition, criticisms voiced about the opinions on gender differences express that these opinions are mainly based on stereotypes. Men's roles are generally expected to be dominant, strong, and aggressive [1]. In a study investigating children's aggression types during early childhood, boys were found to display more physical aggression than girls [27]. All in all, boys show more aggression than girls. However, when these results are examined more closely, it can be seen that gender is not associated with the level of aggression, but with the type of aggression that is displayed. Boys generally display overt aggression as verbal and behavioral, while girls mostly display aggression towards relationships [28]. Studies performed in both natural and laboratory settings complicate the explanation of the association between gender, aggression, and bullying. Girls and boys can be both bullies at play; yet, girls express mostly indirect, relational aggression [2]-[19]. Reference [17]-[29] shows that preschool children's being rejected by their peers as a result of their asocial play behaviors was associated with problem behaviors, such as aggression and anxiety. These results support the findings of this study. The present study found that children's quite play behaviors showed decrease as their positive social and relational aggression behaviors increased. It was also concluded that children's quite play behaviors increased as their depressive affective behaviors grew. Reference [17] shows that preschool children with isolated passive play behaviors interacted less with their peers. Reference [30] shows that an inversely proportional association between increased frequency of isolated play behavior and social competence.

The current study determined that boys' favorite learning center was the block section, they liked to assume functional roles at the most, and preferred to play with representational toys. On the other hand, all girls preferred playing in a dramatic learning center, liked to assume the roles of family members, and preferred representational toys to play with. Girls tend to play by sitting down, as in drawing, coloring, modeling with clay, leafing through books, playing with dolls, whereas boys tend to play more active games, such as building with blocks, playing with cars and trucks, or driving a toy car [2]. In a study examining children's preferences for learning centers and toys by gender, it was found that boys preferred more manipulative materials, balls, blocks, vehicles, while girls preferred dramatization materials and music instruments [31]. It is also seen that gender role behaviors also have an effect on children's preferences for toys. In a relevant literature, it is suggested that children's gender-based behaviors are formed long before they develop ideas on gender roles or stereotypes. Children begin to prefer more gender-stereotyped toys before they realize their own gender. For instance, girls prefer to play with dolls, while boys prefer to play with trucks or cubes [7]-[9]. Reference [32] shows that girls engaged more in dramatic play, whereas boys preferred functional play. When children's roles at play were examined, it was observed that girls assumed the role of mother the most, while boys preferred to take on functional roles, such as a constructor or a repairman. During play, children do a rehearsal of the roles they will assume in future by imitating their gender-based role models [33]. By acting out as a mother or a father, children do a rehearsal of their social roles that they will adopt in future. In this direction, the process of choosing the gender-appropriate play roles develop in accordance with expectations of parents and the impact of cultural and social context they belong to.

Identifying preschool children's play and social behaviors is essential for the application of developmental intervention programs, if needed, and acquiring knowledge about child development. Considering that the present study was conducted on a specific study group, gender was found to play a determining effect upon children's play and social behaviors. In our country, there is a limited number of studies on child development that deals with the gender variable alone. However, when the biological, social, and cognitive effects on gender are taken into account, the necessity of drawing this distinction by future studies becomes more prominent. In this way, there will be a detailed information provided on gender differences in children's play and social behaviors. Additionally, further studies addressing the gender variable alone and those with different variables revealing different aspects of child development will contribute to the relevant literature.

In most cultures, studies on children's play are conducted mostly on children attending preschools. The preschool's play materials, the program applied in children, and peer groups may have an impact on children's play and social behaviors. Moreover, teachers' opinions about children's behaviors may not be objective. For this reason, the true impact of gender may not be reflected on children's play and social behaviors in the school environment. Therefore, future studies on this subject should investigate children's play and social behaviors in their natural environment.

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