

Toys for Me? Which Gender Category?:

Toddlers' Gender Stereotype Knowledge in a Sequential Touching Task

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Research Aims

- ◆ Investigate gender stereotype knowledge (GSK) in children 30 months old & younger
- ◆ Adapt and improve current GSK measures for this age range
- ◆ Document the development of GSK

Background

- ◆ Gender may be one of the earliest areas in which stereotypes develop because:
 - the categories are perceptually salient
 - children tend to have frequent exposure to people of both sexes
 - it is personally relevant
 - many of the stereotypes are concrete (e.g., occupations, clothing, & physical appearances)
- ◆ Children approach ceiling levels of such concrete stereotype knowledge between 5 and 7 years old
 - Serbin, Powlishta, & Gulko, 1993
- ◆ However, most research on gender development has focused on children ages 3 years and older
 - Primarily a methodological issue
 - Improvements in infancy measures & renewed discussion of the importance of gender development in infancy have led to new measures for this age group
- ◆ Evidence of GSK has been found in children ages 18 to 31 months
 - However, the findings have been inconsistent
 - some studies find GSK in only one sex
 - others find knowledge of only feminine or only masculine stereotypes

Background, cont'd

- ◆ This inconsistency may be because previous measures:
 - are not engaging the attention of very young children
 - require boys to use dolls to indicate responses, which some boys resist
 - use items that may be unfamiliar to young children (e.g., a drill).
- ◆ The Sequential Touching paradigm (ST) may resolve the first two issues
 - Has been used extensively in infant categorization research (e.g., animals vs. vehicles; Mandler & McDonough, 1996)
 - If children can distinguish between two categories, they show systematic examination of the toys by category
 - It is an active paradigm that does not require play with dolls
 - Allows us to determine whether children categorize feminine & masculine toys separately
- ◆ Item familiarity was addressed via pre-testing with 3.5-year-olds (close in age to our group, but old enough to test with more traditional measures)


Research Questions

- ◆ Do 24- and 30-month-olds show knowledge of feminine and masculine gender stereotypes?
 - Are there age differences?
 - Are there sex differences?

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<http://genderlab.nmu.edu/>

Methods

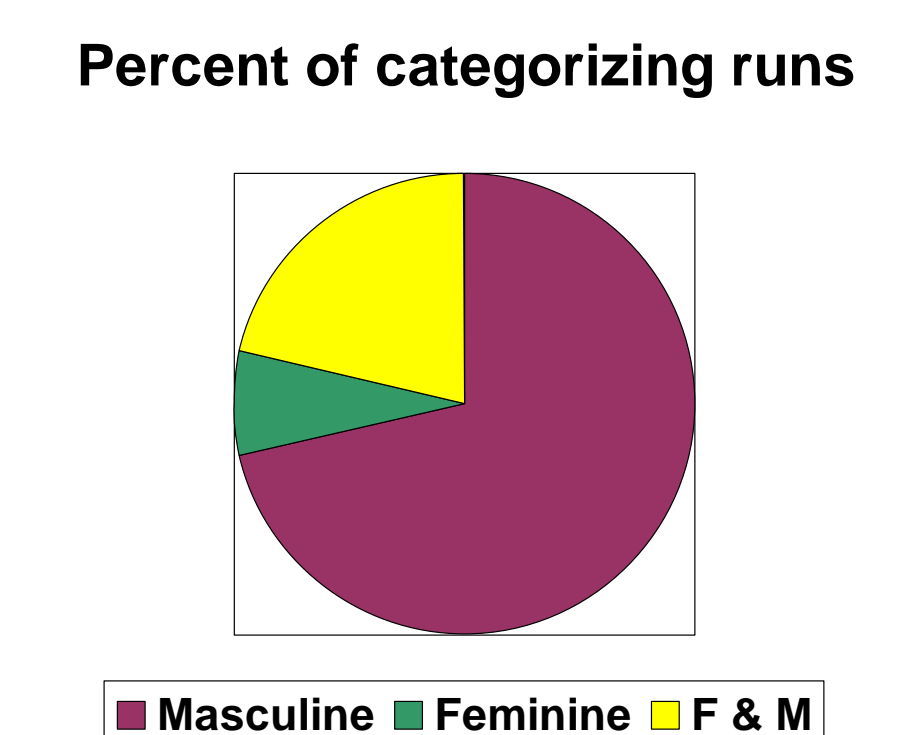
- ◆ 40 participants from two age groups
 - 24 month-olds: 7 female & 11 male, M = 732 days (24 months, 2 days)
 - 30 month-olds: 10 female & 12 male, M = 912 days (30 months, 0 days)
 - ◆ Procedure
 - 4 feminine toys: teapot, dress, hair dryer, purse
 - 4 masculine toys: helicopter, hockey stick, ditch digger, lawnmower
 - Presented in a random layout
 - 2 minutes to explore & manipulate the toys
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- ◆ Coding
 - Order & specific toys touched were coded
 - Mean run length (MRL) was calculated to determine if children touched the toys systematically.
 - If a child shows a touching pattern of FFFMMFFMMM, the MRL for this child would be 2.5 $([3+2+2+3]/4)$.

Results

- ◆ Overall, children's MRL (2.05; SD = 1.12) did not differ from chance (1.75)
 - $t(39) = 1.72, p = 0.09$
- ◆ To determine whether MRLs differed by age & sex, a 2 (sex) x 2 (age) ANOVA was calculated
 - There were no effects of age or sex: $F(3,32) = 0.55, p=0.65$

Results, cont'd

- ◆ Monte Carlo simulations were used to identify categorizers (cutoff of $p < 0.10$)
 - 14/40 (35%) were categorizers



Conclusion

- ◆ Children did not touch toys systematically
 - As a group, they showed no GSK
- ◆ However, 35% of the children **did** categorize toys based on gender
 - Of the categorizers, most (71.4%) categorized only the masculine toys
 - 21.4% categorized both the feminine & masculine toys
- ◆ Higher levels of categorization of masculine toys could indicate a preference for these toys. Indeed, there was a tendency to touch masculine toys (56.2%) more often than feminine toys (43.8%); $t(39)=1.97, p=.056$
 - This finding will be explored in more depth when more children have been tested
- ◆ Thus, the current findings indicate that about 1/3 of 24- and 30-month-old children showed evidence of GSK. Of those:
 - 92.8% showed knowledge of masculine stereotypes
 - 28.5% showed knowledge of feminine stereotypes