

Attitudes and Expectations About Children with Nontraditional and Traditional Gender Roles¹

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Cross-sex behavior in boys generally is viewed more negatively than cross-sex behavior in girls. The two goals of this study were to assess attitudes toward tomboys and sissies, and to explore possible causes for differential evaluations of tomboys and sissies. Eighty undergraduates completed questionnaires assessing their attitudes toward tomboys and sissies, and their expectations for the future adult behavior of typical boys, typical girls, tomboys, and sissies. Results revealed that sissies were more negatively evaluated than tomboys. Women were more accepting of, and perceived more societal acceptance for cross-sex children, than were men. One reason for the negative evaluation of sissies may be that there is more concern for their future outcomes than for tomboys. Analyses of predictions concerning future behavior showed that sissies, more so than tomboys, were expected to continue to show cross-gender behavior into adulthood. Also, sissies were rated as likely to be less well adjusted and more likely to be homosexual when they grow up than other children. The accuracy of these beliefs and their implications for child-rearing practices are discussed.

Many people prefer that their children adhere to traditional sex roles and are concerned when they do not. When children behave in ways that run

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counter to traditional roles, their activities are often discouraged by parents, teachers, and peers (e.g., Atkinson & Endsley, 1976; Carter & McCloskey, 1984; Lamb, Easterbrooks, & Holden, 1980; Lamb & Roopnarine, 1979; Langlois & Downs, 1980). The extent to which cross-sex behavior is discouraged, however, appears to depend, in part, on the sex of the child. Boys who routinely engage in traditionally feminine activities are viewed more negatively than girls who engage in masculine activities. For example, Feinman (1974, 1981) found that adults more strongly disapproved of cross-sex behavior in boys than girls. The label given to boys who engage in cross-sex behavior ("sissy") is a pejorative term and yet the label given to girls who engage in cross-sex behavior ("tomboys") is not (Green, 1975). It is possible that the stronger disapproval given to cross-sex boys accounts for the findings that many more boys than girls are referred to clinics for treatment of cross-sex behavior patterns (Green, 1975).

Several explanations have been proposed to account for the differential evaluations given to cross-sex behavior of girls and boys. One explanation concerns the different status levels associated with masculine and feminine roles (Feinman, 1981). Feinman's status differential hypothesis is based on the idea that a female's movement into the highly valued male role is more acceptable than a male's movement into the less valued female role.

Two other explanations for the differential evaluations involve expectations about the child's future. Green (1975) suggested that differing evaluations are due to the belief that girls, but not boys, will eventually "grow out" of their cross-sex behavior. If this is the case, then adults may disapprove of cross-sex behavior for both girls and boys, but because they believe boys will continue to show cross-sex behavior into adulthood, boys are considered to have a more serious problem. The third explanation is that adults fear that cross-sex boys will be more likely than cross-sex girls to grow up to show atypical sexual behavior. For instance, there may be the fear that feminine boys will grow up to be homosexual or transsexual (Green, 1975). For instance, Antill (1987) found that parents believed cross-sex play in boys, more than in girls, was an indicator of homosexuality.

The kinds of explanations for the differential evaluations of cross-sex girls and boys are varied and lack empirical support. The present study was designed to explore some of these explanations. The first step was to assess attitudes toward cross-sex boys and cross-sex girls using a broader range of questions than has been used before. The second step was to explore the possible causes for the differential evaluations. In particular, the goal was to investigate the extent to which differential evaluations of tomboys and sissies are influenced by beliefs about the future outcomes of these children (i.e., the second and third explanations presented above).

Adult participants completed questionnaires concerning their attitudes and their expectations about the future behavior of typical girls, typical boys, sissies, and tomboys. I expected to replicate earlier studies by finding that adults have differing evaluations of tomboys and sissies, with sissies being more negatively evaluated. This pattern was expected to hold for a variety of questions concerning participants' perceptions of societal beliefs as well as their own beliefs about having a cross-sex son or daughter. I also expected to find that these differing evaluations would be based, at least in part, on adults' concern for the future outcomes of tomboys and sissies. Specifically, the expectation was that adults would predict that sissies will be less psychologically adjusted and will be more likely to be homosexual when they grow up than children who adhere to traditional gender roles in childhood.

METHOD

Subjects

Eighty students (40 women and 40 men) from introductory psychology classes at the University of British Columbia volunteered to participate in the study. The majority were Caucasian and ranged in age from 19 to 42 years of age.

Materials

As part of a large study on sex stereotypes and attitudes, the students filled out a 24-item questionnaire. Six questions dealt with subjects' beliefs about the acceptability in our society for various aspects of cross-sex behavior. Two of the six questions concerned acceptability of young boys (girls) being sissies (tomboys), two concerned acceptability for young girls (boys) to play with boys' (girls') toys, and two concerned acceptability for young boys (girls) to have feminine (masculine) personality characteristics. Each of the six societal acceptability questions were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not all acceptable* to 7 = *very acceptable*). Two additional questions were designed to assess how subjects thought they would feel if their own boy (girl) was a sissy (tomboy). These questions were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *very bad* to 7 = *very good*). Another group of 16 questions concerned subjects' expectations about the future outcome of typical girls, typical boys, sissies, and tomboys. Four questions were asked for each of the four target groups of children: (a) perceived likelihood of target children growing up

to be masculine, (b) perceived likelihood of target children growing up to be feminine, (c) perceived likelihood of the target children growing up to be homosexual, and (d) the perceived likelihood of the target children growing up to be psychologically well adjusted. Each of these questions was rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *not at all likely* to 7 = *very likely*). Three different orders of questions were used.

Procedure

Subjects were given the questionnaires to fill out in large groups. All the questions concerning attitudes and future outcomes of the target groups were given in one session that lasted about 20 minutes.

RESULTS

Acceptability of Cross-Sex Behavior

Responses concerning perceptions of societal acceptance of tomboys and sissies were the dependent measures in a repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) with one between-subject factor (sex of subject) and one within-subject factor (sex of target group, male or female). As expected, the sex of the target children made a significant difference in perceived acceptability [$F(1, 78) = 331.10, p < .001$].³ As can be seen in Table I, girls who are labeled as tomboys were rated as being much more socially acceptable than were boys labeled as sissies. This effect was subsumed by the significant sex of subject by sex of target group interaction [$F(1, 78) = 4.77, p < .04$]. In rating the acceptability of sissies in society, male subjects ($M = 2.20$) and female subjects ($M = 2.10$) did not differ. In rating the acceptability of tomboys, there was a trend toward female subjects ($M = 5.25$) rating them as being more acceptable than did male subjects ($M = 4.68; p < .07$).⁴

³Because multiple analyses were done to assess whether subjects' ratings for similar questions varied depending on the sex of the target, the Bonferroni inequality (Grove & Andreasen, 1982) was used as protection for multiple measures. Four comparisons (i.e., overall societal acceptability, societal acceptability of personality traits, societal acceptability of toy preferences, and feelings about their own children) were made with an overall alpha of .05. Thus, the individual levels of significance for each test were .0125.

⁴An earlier pilot study using the same questions was done with 86 women and 23 men (undergraduates). The results essentially replicated those reported here. The results from the earlier study were presented at the meetings of the American Psychological Association, Los Angeles, 1985.

Table I. Mean Scores on Questions Concerning Attitudes Toward Tomboys and Sissies

Question	Mean score
Acceptability in our society	
Of tomboys	4.96
Of sissies	2.15
1 = <i>not acceptable</i> to 7 = <i>very acceptable</i>	
Acceptability in our society	
Of girls with masculine personality	4.35
Of boys with feminine personality	2.90
1 = <i>not acceptable</i> to 7 = <i>very acceptable</i>	
Acceptability in our society for	
Girls to play with boys' toys	5.35
Boys to play with girls' toys	2.80
1 = <i>not acceptable</i> to 7 = <i>very acceptable</i>	
How would you feel if your	
Girl was a tomboy	4.71
Boy was a sissy	2.60
1 = <i>very bad</i> to 7 = <i>very good</i>	

Responses concerning societal acceptance of cross-sex personality characteristics and toy preferences were analyzed in similar ANOVAs. For personality characteristics, the sex of the target children influenced acceptability ratings [$F(1, 78) = 78.09, p < .001$]. As can be seen in Table I, cross-sex personality characteristics were rated as more acceptable in girls than in boys. For cross-sex toy preferences, sex of the target children also influenced the ratings [$F(1, 78) = 279.16, p < .001$]. As expected, boys who preferred girls' toys were rated as less acceptable to society than girls who preferred boys' toys (see Table I). A main effect for sex of subject also was found [$F(1, 78) = 4.21, p < .05$]. Women were significantly more likely to be accepting of children's cross-sex toy preferences ($M = 4.31$) than men ($M = 3.84$).

Responses concerning subjects' feelings about their own children if they were tomboys or sissies were dependent measures in an ANOVA (same as one used above). Similar to their feelings about societal acceptability, subjects' rated themselves as feeling worse if their sons were sissies than if their daughters were tomboys [see Table I; $F(1, 78) = 208.01, p < .001$]. Women ($M = 4.03$) were generally more accepting of having cross-sex children than men [$M = 3.29; F(1, 78) = 9.88, p < .002$].

Expectations About Future Outcomes

Each of the four future outcome measures was analyzed using a repeated measures ANOVA with one between-subjects factor (sex of subject) and two within-subjects factors (sex of target children, type of label—"typical" and "cross-sex").

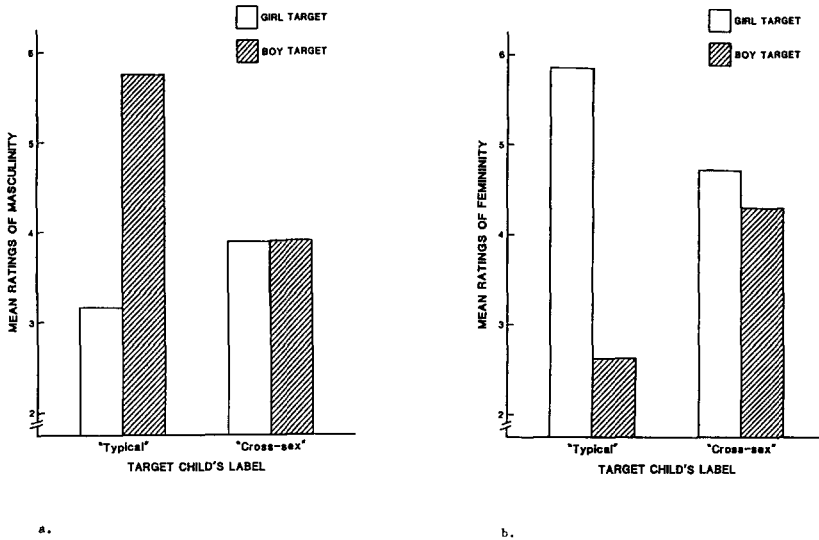


Fig. 1. (a) Mean ratings of predicted masculinity in adulthood as a function of child's sex and label. (b) Mean ratings of predicted femininity in adulthood as a function of child's sex and label.

When predicting future masculinity, the main effects for sex of target [$F(1, 78) = 62.96, p < .001$] and for type of label [$F(1, 78) = 28.40, p < .001$] were significant. These effects were subsumed by the sex of target group by type of label interaction [$F(1, 78) = 129.06, p < .001$]. Simple effects analyses showed that the labels given to children influenced adults' ratings of both boys and girls. As can be seen in Fig. 1(a), typical boys were predicted to become more masculine as adults than were cross-sex boys and typical girls were expected to be less masculine adults than cross-sex girls ($ps < .001$).

Although masculinity and femininity are independent dimensions when individuals rate their own personality characteristics (Bem, 1974), the subjects' predictions about future masculinity and femininity of each group of children were correlated (average $r = -.46$). As a result, the findings for predicted femininity were similar to those found for masculinity. When predicting future femininity, sex of the target group influenced ratings [$F(1, 78) = 138.56, p < .001$], as did the labels given the children [$F(1, 78) = 8.60, p < .004$]. Both of these effects were subsumed by the significant sex of the target group by type of label interaction [$F(1, 78) = 151.92, p < .001$]. Simple effects analyses showed that the labels given children influenced the ratings of both girls and boys. As can be seen in Fig. 1(b), typical girls were predicted to be more feminine as adults than cross-sex girls and typical boys were expected to be less feminine as adults than cross-sex boys ($ps < .001$).

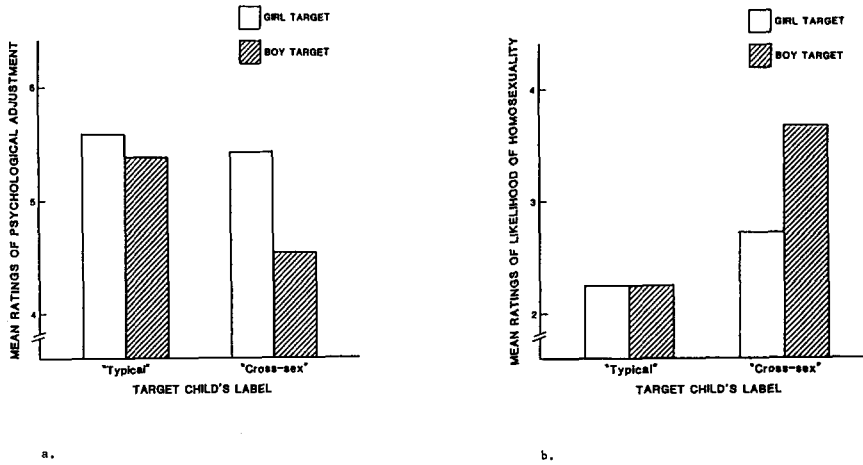


Fig. 2. (a) Mean ratings of predicted psychological adjustment in adulthood as a function of child's sex and label. (b) Mean ratings of predicted homosexuality in adulthood as a function of child's sex and label.

To determine whether cross-sex children were believed to grow out of their roles by adulthood, direct comparisons (using *t* tests) of masculine and feminine scores were done. Subjects believed that, as adults, tomboys would be significantly more feminine than masculine ($p < .001$) but that sissies would be only slightly (and not significantly) more feminine than masculine as adults ($p < .12$). Tomboys were also believed to adopt the feminine roles more as adults than sissies were believed to adopt the masculine role as adults ($p < .001$).

When subjects predicted future psychological adjustment, sex of the target group influenced ratings [$F(1, 78) = 47.19, p < .001$], as did type of label [$F(1, 78) = 16.84, p < .001$]. Both of these effects were subsumed by the significant sex of target group by type of label interaction [$F(1, 78) = 46.86, p < .001$]. Simple effects analyses showed that the labels given to children influenced ratings of adjustment for boys ($p < .01$) but not girls. As can be seen in Fig. 2(a), ratings for the likelihood of adjustment for typical girls, typical boys, and cross-sex girls were similar. Cross-sex boys were predicted to be less likely than the other children, even the tomboys, to be psychologically well adjusted as adults ($ps < .001$).

When predicting future likelihood of homosexuality, the sex of the target group influenced ratings [$F(1, 78) = 22.02, p < .001$], as did the type label given to the children [$F(1, 78) = 40.27, p < .001$]. Both of these effects were subsumed by the sex of target group by type of label interaction [$F(1, 78) = 20.76, p < .001$]. Simple effects analyses showed that children's labels influenced ratings for both sexes, but particularly for boys ($ps < .01$). As

Table II. Correlations Among Acceptability Measures

Acceptability of	Acceptability of	
	Tomboys	Sissies
Girls playing with boys' toys	.52 ^c	.22 ^a
Boys playing with girls' toys	.42 ^c	.65 ^c
Girls with masculine personality	.41 ^c	.30 ^b
Boys with feminine personality	.26 ^a	.33 ^b

^a $p < .05$.
^b $p < .01$.
^c $p < .001$.

can be seen in Fig. 2(b), typical boys and typical girls were rated as about equally likely to grow up to be homosexual. Cross-sex girls were rated as slightly more likely to be homosexual when they grow up than the two groups of typical children ($p < .05$). Cross-sex boys were rated as more likely than the cross-sex girls and the other children to grow up to be homosexual ($p < .001$).

Relations Among Attitude Measures

Subjects' beliefs about societal acceptability of tomboys were positively related to their beliefs about the acceptability of sissies. This pattern held for general acceptability [$r(78) = .40, p < .001$], acceptability of cross-sex toy play [$r(78) = .42, p < .001$], acceptability of cross-sex personality characteristics [$r(78) = .42, p < .001$], and when rating their feelings about having a child labeled as a tomboy or sissy [$r(78) = .48, p < .001$]. As can be seen in Table II, subjects' beliefs about the general acceptability of tomboys and of sissies were positively related to their ratings of acceptability for the more specific types of cross-sex manifestations of toy preferences and personality characteristics.

The Relations Among Future Expectation Measures

Table III presents the correlations of perceived future masculinity and femininity with perceived future adjustment and likelihood of homosexuality for each of the four target groups. When predicting the future psychological adjustment of typical boys and typical girls, perceived adjustment was found to be positively related to the degree to which subjects believed the children adopted the traditional gender identity in adulthood. In other words, subjects predicted that the more feminine a typical girl became as an adult, the more psychologically well adjusted she would be as an adult. The degree of cross-sex gender identity did not correlate with adjustment. For atypical

Table III. Relations Among Future Expectations Measures

	Predicted adjustment	Likelihood of homosexuality
Typical boy		
Predicted masculinity	.27 ^a	-.10
Predicted femininity	-.19	.34 ^b
Typical girl		
Predicted masculinity	-.06	.34 ^b
Predicted femininity	.38 ^c	-.18
Sissy		
Predicted masculinity	.32 ^b	-.51 ^c
Predicted femininity	-.27 ^a	.65 ^c
Tomboy		
Predicted masculinity	-.31 ^b	.33 ^b
Predicted femininity	.29 ^a	-.24 ^a

^a*p* < .05.^b*p* < .01.^c*p* < .001.

children (tomboys and sissies), their perceived future adjustment related to *both* same-sex and cross-sex gender identity; that is, same-sex gender identity was positively related to adjustment whereas cross-sex gender identity was negatively related to adjustment. For instance, subjects predicted that the more feminine and less masculine a tomboy becomes as an adult, the more psychologically well adjusted she would be.

When subjects rated the likelihood of the children in each of the four groups growing up to be homosexual, for typical children, future homosexuality was positively related to the degree of perceived adherence to cross-sex gender identity and was not related to degree of adherence to own-sex identity (see Table III). For example, subjects predicted that the more masculine a typical girl becomes as an adult, the more likely it will be that she would become an homosexual. For the atypical children, likelihood of future homosexuality was positively related to the degree of adherence to cross-sex gender identity and negatively related to degree of adherence to own-sex gender identity.

DISCUSSION

Adults expressed different attitudes about the acceptability in our society of girls and boys with cross-sex characteristics. Boys who fail to adhere to traditional sex roles in general, or specifically as in playing with girls' toys or having feminine personality characteristics, were more negatively evaluated than girls who adopt cross-sex characteristics. Generally, women perceived more acceptability for, and were more accepting of, cross-sex children

than men. Both men and women expressed feeling better about having a daughter who is a tomboy than about a son who is a sissy. These results are consistent with earlier studies that found adults to be more concerned about boys deviating from traditional gender roles than girls (e.g., Feinman, 1981).

It is unclear whether the source of differential evaluations is due to believing that sissies will not change but that tomboys will grow out of it when they reach adolescence (Green, 1975). Sissies were expected to have similar levels of cross-sex and same-sex characteristics as adults, and as such, they were expected to grow up to be quite different from typical boys (i.e., they were predicted to be more feminine and less masculine as adults). In contrast, as adults, tomboys were expected to have same-sex characteristics (i.e., they were predicted to be more feminine than masculine) and yet they were still expected to be dissimilar to typical girls (i.e., they were predicted to be less feminine and more masculine). Thus, neither tomboys nor sissies were expected to totally "grow out of it" and become similar to typical children, but tomboys were perceived as being more likely to convert from previous nontraditional behavior to more traditional behavior as they grow older (see also Hemmer & Kleiber, 1981).

The reasons for the differential evaluation of tomboys and sissies appear most strongly related to concerns for future adjustment and for future sexual practices. The adults in this sample expressed the belief that sissies were more likely than any other group of children (even tomboys) to grow up to be homosexual and were less likely than the other children to grow up to be psychologically well adjusted. It is also interesting to note that the predictors of future adjustment and likelihood of homosexuality varied depending on whether the predictions were made for atypical or typical children. For atypical children, degree of adherence to both gender roles predicted adjustment and for typical children, adherence to only same-sex gender role predicted adjustment.

Accuracy of Beliefs and Concerns About Tomboys and Sissies

One controversial issue concerns the extent to which societal stereotypes are accurate (e.g., Ashmore & DelBoca, 1981; Martin, 1987; McCauley & Stitt, 1978). Accordingly, it is important to ascertain whether or not the beliefs expressed by this sample are based in fact. This problem is difficult to address because we do not yet have definitive answers about the future outcomes of cross-gender children. Nonetheless, it is possible to speculate about the accuracy of these beliefs.

One issue concerns the extent that role conformity is perceived to be related to mental health. Adults could fear later psychological problems for *any* child who fails to adopt the prescribed gender roles of his/her culture.

However, the adults in this study reported that they believed sissies more at risk for psychological problems in adulthood than tomboys even though both groups of children deviate from "traditional" roles.

Any child who consistently exhibits cross-sex behavior in childhood may, in fact, be at risk for psychological problems due to difficulties with peers. Even very young children reward others who engage in sex-appropriate play and punish those who engage in sex-inappropriate play (Carter & McCloskey, 1984; Damon, 1979; Lamb & Roopnarine, 1979). Peer difficulties are more likely, however, for cross-sex boys than girls. Girls who show moderate levels of cross-sex behavior are not treated differently by their peers whereas boys who show moderate cross-sex behavior are rejected by their peers; they were criticized more often and receive less positive feedback (Fagot, 1977). Boys who have been referred to clinics for consistent cross-sex behaviors also tend to report being rejected (Green, 1987). To the extent that these boys are rejected by their peers, they would have an increased risk for a wide variety of future problems (e.g., see Hartup, 1983).

One belief expressed by the sample was that sissies, more so than tomboys, were likely to grow up to be homosexual, and both were more likely to be homosexual than typical boys and girls. A link between boyhood femininity and adult homosexuality has long been suspected (Green, 1987). Retrospective studies have confirmed this link. "Childhood gender nonconformity" has been found to be very strong predictor of sexual preference in adulthood (Bell, Weinberg, & Hammersmith, 1981). Saghir and Robins (1973) found that 67% of male homosexuals, as opposed to only 3% of male heterosexuals, reported being "girl-like" as children. Similarly, Grellert, Newcomb, and Bentler (1982) found adult homosexual males were more likely than a heterosexual comparison group to report preferring "feminine" activities. Although fewer studies have been conducted with women, the results of several retrospective studies suggest that women homosexuals described themselves as having been masculine or having masculine interests while growing up (e.g., Bell, Weinberg, & Hammersmith, 1981; Grellert et al., 1982).

Although these studies provide consistent evidence of a link between childhood cross-sex behavior and later homosexuality, data collected prospectively provides even more compelling evidence. For example, Green (1987) reported the findings from an extensive 15-year study involving a group of 66 "feminine boys" and a comparison group of 55 "typical" boys. Of the feminine boys who were tested as adults, about 75% were exclusively homosexual or bisexual in orientation, whereas in the comparison group there was only one bisexual (2%) and no exclusively homosexual men.

The empirical evidence concerning the link between childhood cross-sex behavior and later homosexuality is clearer for males than for females. Nonetheless, it is interesting that the subjects in the present study and the parents in Antill's (1987) study believed sissies were more likely to develop

a homosexual orientation than were all other children, including tomboys. Adults may be less aware of female homosexuality than of male homosexuality because of its lower prevalence (Kinsey, Pomeroy, & Martin, 1948; Kinsey, Pomeroy, Martin, & Gebhard, 1953) and so be less concerned, or female homosexuality may be more accepted than male homosexuality.

Regardless of the reason for the failure to strongly link girls' masculinity with future homosexuality, the adults in this study did consider it more likely that a tomboy would grow up to be homosexual than typical girls or boys. This suggests that adults may hold the general belief that there is a link between childhood gender role transgressions and sexual nonconformity in adulthood. Why this link is so much stronger when predicting the outcomes for boys than for girls is not yet clear.

Thus, adults' beliefs about boys appear to have a kernel of truth: sissies are more likely to grow up to be homosexual than typical boys. We must, however, be careful about accepting this belief as being entirely accurate because cross-sex children may not all be alike. For example, these children appear to be of two types: those with a "cross-gender identification" (i.e., a boy who regards himself as a girl) and those with "gender behavior disturbance" (i.e., a boy who has same-gender identification but who engages in cross-sex behaviors; Zucker, Finegan, Doering, & Bradley, 1984). These two subtypes may differ in their propensity to homosexuality.

A second related issue that complicates the accuracy issue is how to interpret findings that link boyhood femininity and later homosexuality. As Green (1987) noted, his results do not mean that occasional cross-sex activities lead to behavior problems or that they predict later atypical sexuality. The feminine boys he followed were extreme cases: they preferred girls' roles, girls' toys, and girl friends. Many of them wanted to be girls. Most boys who engage in occasional cross-sex play do not orient so strongly toward roles traditionally considered appropriate for girls (Green, 1987). Even those boys who consistently engage in cross-sex play (and are labeled sissies) are unlikely to be as extreme as the feminine boys in Green's study. If adults' beliefs about boyhood femininity leading to future problems are based on their knowledge of similar extreme cases, they may have been generalizing from limited and nonrepresentative cases. We do not yet know whether *occasional* cross-sex play predicts later atypical sexual behavior for either boys or girls.

Implications for Child Rearing

Regardless of individuals' accuracy in predicting the future outcome of cross-sex children, they still may use these beliefs as behavioral guides when they become parents. For instance, the present results suggest that par-

ents may be upset by extreme cross-sex behavior, especially in their sons.⁵ In the past, when encouraging traditional gender roles in children was considered "proper socialization," such anxiety may have been appropriate. Today, however, androgyny (having both masculine and feminine characteristics) is considered to be the healthy ideal by many researchers and clinicians (e.g., Bem, 1975; Gilbert, 1981; Kaplan, 1976). Although evidence supporting this conclusion in adults is mixed (Taylor & Hall, 1982; cf. Paulhus & Martin, 1988), the assumption remains that limiting a child's exposure to only "feminine" or to only "masculine" toys hinders the development of a full range of capabilities (see Bradbard, Martin, Endsley, & Halverson, 1986). To have children who are able to engage in cross-sex behaviors may require that parents not only condone the behavior, but that they also encourage it.

If parents believe boys' adoption of cross-sex behaviors is risky, they may be more prone to seek treatment for cross-sex behavior in their sons than in their daughters. Moreover, parents may be more rejecting of sons who engage in cross-sex behavior. In addition, parents' beliefs may trigger a negative cycle. To the extent that adults believe boys' cross-sex behavior is a harbinger of future problems, they may transmit these values to their children, who in turn, may reject boys who adopt cross-sex behaviors. Boys who are rejected may then truly be at risk for psychological problems. Thus, the prophecy is fulfilled even though it need not be.

Conclusion

Adults' attitudes toward tomboys and sissies are different. The results of this study suggest that concerns for future outcomes account, at least in part, for more negative attitudes toward sissies. Several other factors that may also contribute to differing evaluations of sissies and tomboys were not tested. For instance, the positive values and status associated with the male role may cause a boy's rejection of this role to be considered a serious problem. The stereotypes that adults hold about tomboys and sissies may also account for differential evaluation of children given these labels. For instance, "sissies" may be seen as boys who reject their own sex role whereas "tom-

⁵We must be careful, however, not to conclude from the present findings that these adults would discourage all forms of cross-sex behavior in their own children. In this study, adults were asked about children with cross-sex labels (i.e., tomboys and sissies) and not about occasional cross-sex play. That is, the results are based on subjects' ratings of extreme cases rather than on cases where children have adopted *both* feminine and masculine behaviors. Of course some parents probably equate *any* level of adoption of cross-sex characteristics (even when balanced by adoption of same-sex characteristics) with increased risk of psychological problems.

boys" may be seen as girls who embrace both roles (see Plumb & Cowan, 1984). Further study of adults' attitudes toward and stereotypes about children in traditional and nontraditional gender roles should be helpful in understanding how these roles are maintained and how they might be changed.

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