

Stereotypes About Children with Traditional and Nontraditional Gender Roles¹

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Two studies were done to assess different aspects of gender stereotypes about traditional and nontraditional girls and boys. In Study 1, 81 undergraduates (57 females, 24 males; 88% Caucasian, 12% Asian) rated the typicality and desirability of 25 personality traits and behaviors for boys and girls. Analyses showed that this sample believed that typical girls and boys differ on 24 out of the 25 behaviors and traits. There were fewer differences when they rated the desirability of the characteristics for each sex. In Study 2, 154 undergraduates (97 females, 57 males, 82% Caucasian, 18% Asian) estimated the percentage of occurrence of 26 traits and behaviors in traditional and nontraditional girls and boys (i.e., tomboys and sissies). These estimates were used to determine two aspects of stereotypes: the characteristics that are perceived to occur most often in a group and the characteristics that are particularly distinctive for a group. Again, stereotypes of girls and boys were found to be extensive. Percentage estimates, however, illustrated that stereotypes are probabilistic in that many boys and girls are believed to have both masculine and feminine characteristics. Stereotypes of nontraditional children were compared to stereotypes of traditional children. Analyses showed that tomboys were stereotyped similarly to traditional boys but sissies were not stereotyped similarly to traditional girls. Instead, the sissy stereotype was found to be very narrow. The advantage of using a variety of assessments methods is discussed.

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Adults' stereotypes about children may influence gender-role development in many ways. Adults may differentially reward and punish children on the basis of their stereotypes (Mischel, 1966). Also, children may themselves learn about gender stereotypes through direct exposure to adults' stereotypes. Furthermore, stereotypes provide a standard against which children's behaviors are judged (Kohlberg, 1966). Children's self concepts may also be influenced by adults' stereotypes (Martin & Halverson, 1981). For instance, a child may come to view herself as being feminine because other people in her social world view her in this way and tell her so. Finally, adults' attributions can have an influence through behavioral confirmation of expectations (see Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Snyder, Tanke, & Berscheid, 1977) in which individuals come to behave according to the gender-typed labels others attribute to them (Skrypnek & Snyder, 1982). Regardless of whether expectations are directly transmitted through differential behavior (e.g., reward and punishment) or are more subtly transmitted, it is important that we define the extent to which adults hold differential expectations and beliefs about boys and girls. In addition to these reasons, to the extent that adults who are parents hold stereotypic beliefs about girls and boys, they may treat their children differently and hold different expectations for them, based on their sex (Eccles, Jacobs, & Harold, 1990).

Assessments of Adults' Gender Stereotypes About Children

Most studies of gender stereotypes have focused on adults' stereotypes of other adults (e.g., Ruble & Ruble, 1982). Nonetheless, there have also been many studies of adults' expectations and beliefs about girls and boys, using wide variations in the target samples and in the aspects of stereotypes that have been investigated (e.g., Aberle & Naegele, 1952; Intons-Peterson, 1988; Levintin & Chananie, 1972; Tasch, 1952; Wise, 1978). In some studies only one particular content domain of stereotypes have been assessed, for instance, achievement (Marcus & Corsini, 1978), toy choices (Schua, Kahn, Diepold, & Cherry, 1980), emotions (Fabes & Martin, 1990), and a few have examined multiple domains (Intons-Peterson, 1988) or overall gender-typing (Goodenough, 1957).

One of the most ambitious projects involved assessing parents' beliefs about sex differences as part of a large study designed to investigate the role that parental values (i.e., egalitarian versus traditional) play in influencing child-rearing practices (Antill, 1987). In this study, parents were asked to describe the ways in which girls and boys differ. Parents believed there were many differences between girls and boys but more readily ac-

knowledge of sex differences in interests (e.g., playing with dolls) than in personality traits (e.g., gentle).

Several studies have distinguished between aspects of stereotypes by separately asking about what is typical in girls and boys versus what would be ideal. For instance, Rothbart and Maccoby (1966) assessed parents' opinions about differences that *actually* exist between boys and girls and differences that *should* exist. Similarly, Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) were interested in comparing parents' beliefs about sex differences in young children with how desirable certain characteristics are for girls and boys. They presented an item analysis using data from a study by Lambert, Yackley, and Hein (1971). English- and French-Canadian parents rated a series of characteristics as to how typical they were for boys and girls using Rothbart and Maccoby's (1966) "Perception" and "Expectation" scales. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) reported that the characteristics perceived as being typical of boys and girls were quite different. Typical boy behaviors were being noisy, rough, active, competitive, defending themselves, defying punishment, doing dangerous things and enjoying mechanical objects. Typical girl behaviors were being helpful, neat and clean, quiet, well-mannered, being a tattletale, crying, and being easily frightened. In contrast, parents reported few perceived sex differences when identifying behaviors considered ideal for girls and boys to have. Parents reported that it was important for *both* boys and girls to be neat and clean, helpful, to take care of themselves, not to be easily angered, not to do dangerous things, not to cry, to be thoughtful and considerate, to defend themselves, and to be competitive. These results lead Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) to speculate that parents may be trying to socialize children of both sexes toward the same goals (the desirable characteristics), but "they believe they are starting from different points, with each sex having a different set of "natural" assets and liabilities" (p. 344).

More recently, Intons-Peterson (1988) collected open-ended responses about stereotypes from a sample of U.S. and Swedish children and young adults to assess the characteristics associated with typical boys, girls, women, and men, and asked them to rate the importance of personality traits and physical characteristics for the same groups. On the open-ended responses, Intons-Peterson found that American girls were characterized as having both expressive and instrumental traits, whereas American boys were characterized as having mainly instrumental traits. On the importance ratings, the results showed less agreement with stereotypes in that the most important attributes were not differently attributed to boys versus girls. The traits attributed differently usually were in the stereotypic direction, however. Because these results show fewer differences on "most important" (i.e., desirable) traits than on stereotypic traits, they provide indirect con-

firmation of Maccoby and Jacklin's expectation that there are fewer differences found on desirable versus on typical characteristics.

The goal of the present studies was to assess adults' stereotypes of gender-traditional and -nontraditional children using three different methods. In Study 1, adults' stereotypes about traditional boys and girls were assessed by examining the typicality and desirability of a range of traits and behaviors. In Study 2, a new method of assessing stereotypic characteristics was used to investigate adults' stereotypes about traditional and nontraditional girls and boys.

STUDY 1

The goal of the first study was to assess stereotypes about boys and girls using a range of characteristics that included both behaviors and traits. In addition to using some of the same behaviors that Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) examined in parents, a set of expressive and instrumental personality traits were included in the questionnaire. Furthermore, two methods of assessing stereotypes were used, each expected to provide different types of information about adults' beliefs. Specifically, each characteristic was rated according to how *typical* it was of boys and of girls and how *desirable* it was for girls and for boys. Similar to Maccoby and Jacklin (1974), the expectation was that adults' would hold stronger stereotypes on behaviors when they were rated for typicality than for desirability. Moreover, the study allowed for investigation of whether adults' ratings of personality traits will follow the same pattern, that is, whether they will stereotype traits more when they are rated for their typicality than when they are rated for their desirability for the sexes.

Method

Participants. A total of 81 undergraduate students (57 women and 24 men) from the University of British Columbia participated in this study. The mean age of participants was 23 years (range from 19 to 45, median age was 22). The majority of the students were Caucasian and some were Asian (approximately 12%) and most were from middle class families. Married students were not specifically excluded, but parents were. The students were recruited from psychology classes.

Materials. A questionnaire was designed to assess adults' beliefs and expectations about young children. The first part assessed the desirability of a series of characteristics for girls and for boys. Participants rated all

the items first for one sex and then for the other (order was counterbalanced). Each item was rated for each target sex on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) "not at all desirable" to (7) "very desirable." The second part of the questionnaire assessed the typicality of the same characteristics for girls and for boys. Participants rated all the items first for one sex and then the other (order counterbalanced). Each item was rated for each target sex on a seven-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) "not at all typical" to (7) "very typical." For both parts of the questionnaire, participants were told to rate the characteristics by considering four- to seven-year old children. Because ratings could vary by age of target, it was important to define a particular age range. The desirability questions were given first because earlier research has shown less stereotyping on these items than on typicality items.

Characteristics were chosen from two sources. One source was the "Expectation" and "Perception" scales used by Rothbart and Maccoby (1966) (11 items) and the other source was the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI, Bem, 1974) (5 masculine, 5 feminine, 4 neutral items). The items were selected in an attempt to balance masculine and feminine characteristics, while also including some neutral items that the participants might consider to be similar in girls and boys. Items were randomly ordered and, for each participant, the order of items was the same for each target.

Results

Typicality Ratings. Dependent *t*-tests were performed on each characteristic between each subject's ratings of typicality for boy targets and for girl targets. As illustrated in Table I, 11 characteristics (e.g., noisy, competitive) were significantly more typical of boys than girls ($p < .01$, two-tailed). Thirteen characteristics (e.g., gentle, helpful around the house) were rated as being more typical of girls than boys ($p < .01$). Only one characteristic (adaptable) was not rated as being more typical of one sex than the other.

Desirability Ratings. To assess desirability of each trait, the mean scores for girls and boys were examined. Scores over 4 (midpoint of scale) were considered desirable, and those lower than the midpoint were considered undesirable. Furthermore, for each characteristic, to assess whether desirability ratings differed depending on the target, dependent *t*-tests were performed on ratings of desirability for boy targets and girl targets. As can be seen in Table II, 16 characteristics were given desirability ratings over 4.0 for both targets, indicating that these characteristics were considered desirable for both sexes. However, out of these, four were rated as more de-

Table I. Mean Typicality Ratings by Sex of Child
Target: Study 1^a

Item Type	Boys	Girls
Sex-typed masculine^b		
Self-reliant	5.05	3.69
Does dangerous things	4.96	2.57
Enjoys mechanical objects	5.57	2.68
Dominant	5.36	3.54
Enjoys rough play	6.09	3.07
Independent	4.95	3.59
Competitive	5.70	4.16
Noisy	5.78	3.93
Physically active	6.23	4.80
Aggressive	5.60	3.41
Conceited	4.38	3.46
Sex-typed feminine^c		
Gentle	3.21	5.36
Neat and clean	3.05	5.42
Sympathetic	3.42	5.33
Eager to soothe hurt feelings	3.35	5.33
Well-mannered	4.01	5.44
Cries and gets upset easily	3.20	4.95
Easily frightened	3.27	4.89
Soft-spoken	3.00	4.64
Helpful around the house	3.27	5.31
Gullible	3.74	4.33
Reliable	4.33	4.74
Truthful	4.31	4.91
Likable	4.99	5.68
Nonsex-typed		
Adaptable	4.90	4.72

^aMaximum scores = 7.0.

^bIndicates that ratings for boys were significantly higher than for girls.

^cIndicates that ratings for girls were significantly higher than for boys.

sirable for boys than girls and six were rated as more desirable for girls than for boys ($ps < .05$). Only six characteristics were rated as being equally desirable for both sexes.

Six characteristics were given desirability ratings below 4.0 (the scale midpoint) for both targets, suggesting that these characteristics were considered relatively undesirable for both sexes. Of these, two characteristics were particularly undesirable for boys (e.g., crying), one characteristic was particularly undesirable for girls (i.e., noisy) ($ps < .05$) and three characteristics were rated as equally undesirable for both girls and boys. Only three characteristics showed mixed desirability; that is, desirable for one sex but undesirable for the other ($p < .05$).

Table II. Mean Desirability Ratings by Sex of Child Target:
Study 1^a

Item Type	Boys	Girls
Highly desirable, especially for boys ^b		
Enjoys mechanical objects	5.12	4.49
Dominant	4.68	4.07
Independent	6.06	5.86
Competitive	5.21	4.86
Highly desirable, especially for girls ^c		
Gentle	5.44	6.01
Neat and clean	5.27	5.81
Sympathetic	5.53	5.96
Eager to soothe hurt feelings	5.11	5.73
Well-mannered	6.17	6.33
Helpful around the house	5.52	5.99
Highly desirable, no sex differences		
Self-reliant	6.07	6.00
Likable	6.21	6.33
Truthful	6.35	6.44
Active	6.19	6.00
Reliable	6.19	6.21
Adaptable	6.28	6.25
Low desirable, especially for boys ^c		
Cries and gets upset easily	2.32	2.62
Easily frightened	2.32	2.69
Low desirable, especially for girls ^b		
Noisy	3.27	2.68
Low desirable, no sex differences		
Conceited	2.09	2.01
Does dangerous things	2.51	2.27
Gullible	2.01	2.06
Desirable for boys and not girls ^b		
Enjoys rough play	4.78	3.52
Aggressive	4.46	3.72
Desirable for girls and not boys ^c		
Soft-spoken	3.62	4.54

^aMaximum score = 7.0.

^bIndicates that ratings for boys were significantly higher than those for girls.

^cIndicates that ratings for girls were significantly higher than those for boys.

Discussion

Sex-Typing of Behaviors. In developing the set of characteristics to be tested, 20 items were selected that were found in previous studies (Bem, 1974; Rothbart & Maccoby, 1966) to be sex-typed as masculine or feminine and some items were selected that were previously found to be neutral. All of the selected sex-typed items, including both behaviors and traits,

were rated as distinguishing the sexes, as expected. Surprisingly, the majority of the selected neutral items were also rated as distinguishing the sexes. One of the purportedly neutral characteristics (conceited) was considered stereotypic of boys, whereas three of these characteristics (likable, truthful, reliable) were considered stereotypic of girls.

Overall, the present findings are consistent with previous research in which parents (Aberle & Naegele, 1956; Antill, 1987; Goodenough, 1957; Lambert et al, 1971; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Marcus & Corsini, 1978; Schau et al., 1980; Tasch, 1952) and teachers (Levintin & Chananie, 1972; Wise, 1978), and young adults (Intons-Peterson, 1988) indicated that they have different ideas about typical traits and behavioral characteristics of boys and girls. It is interesting, however, that this sample stereotyped the "neutral" characteristics, suggesting that stereotypes of boys and girls may be even more extensive than stereotypes of men and women. For example, in a study using some of the same characteristics, Martin (1987) found that a student sample did not stereotype other adults on the neutral characteristics as much as the students in the present study stereotyped children on these same characteristics. It may be the case that students hold stronger stereotypes of children than of other adults due to perceived outgroup homogeneity. That is, research has demonstrated that ratings of in-group members are less stereotyped than ratings of out-group members (Park & Rothbart, 1982). Possibly adults perceive children as an out-group relative to other adults. Direct comparison of adults' stereotypes of females and males of different ages, however, is necessary before firm conclusions can be drawn.

Desirability of Characteristics. Consistent with Maccoby and Jacklin's (1974) report of parental expectations and Intons-Peterson's (1988) findings with an eighteen-year old sample of Americans, this sample showed definite preferences for some kinds of children's behavior and for some traits. They preferred that children, for example, be self-reliant, truthful, reliable, and adaptable. They found it undesirable for children to be conceited, gullible, and for them to engage in dangerous activities. Interestingly, the desirability and undesirability of characteristics in the present study also matched children's ratings of many of the same traits used in a recent study (Powlishta, 1995). Although children were not asked to rate boys and girls, the traits considered desirable and undesirable generally matched with the patterns found in this sample of adults.

Contrary to the Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) findings, desirability of behaviors and traits varied according to the sex of the child. Although many characteristics were rated as desirable for both sexes, this sample rated it as more desirable for boys than girls to be mechanical, dominant, independent, and competitive, whereas it was more desirable for girls to be

gentle, neat and clean, sympathetic, to soothe hurt feelings, to be well-mannered, and to be helpful. Similarly, Intons-Peterson (1988) found that eighteen-year old American raters considered it more important for boys than girls to be competitive and dominant and for girls more than boys to be eager to soothe hurt feelings. In the present results, the sample considered some characteristics to be undesirable for both sexes, but they rated it as more undesirable for boys to cry and be easily frightened and more undesirable for girls to be noisy. For only a few items, ratings indicated that the behavior was desirable for one sex but undesirable for the other sex. Engaging in rough play and being aggressive were rated as desirable for boys and not girls, whereas being soft-spoken was rated as desirable for girls and not boys.

The present findings suggest that this sample may have the same general goals for children of each sex, but that they differ in the *degree* to which certain characteristics are considered to be desirable for boys versus girls. These minor differences in desirability may or may not influence actual behavior. In future research, it would be useful to compare how parents versus non-parents respond to desirable and typical characteristics. Possibly, once having gained experience with children (by having one), parents come to value certain characteristics and are less concerned with the sex-appropriateness of the characteristic. Ideally, longitudinal research needs to be conducted to assess whether views about ideal and typical characteristics of girls and boys change after having a child, and to explore how these beliefs relate to behavior.

STUDY 2

In the adult social psychological literature there has been controversy about the best ways to measure stereotypes (see Ashmore & Del Boca, 1981; Martin, 1987). One aspect of the controversy concerns whether or not stereotypes are to be defined by the frequency or distinctiveness of features. Features that are frequent, or characteristic of a group, occur in many members of a group. In contrast, features that are distinctive are those that occur more often in one group than another, even if they are low frequency. Let's consider a hypothetical example. Few men use physical aggression to obtain goods they desire, such that we would expect participants to estimate a low percentage, such as 10%. Even fewer women would be expected to use physical aggression to obtain goods—an estimate might be 5%. In this case, physical aggression to obtain goods one wants is not really typical or characteristic of either sex in that the vast majority of each sex would not use aggression for this end. However, twice as many men

than women (10 versus 5%) are estimated to use aggression in this way, thereby suggesting that participants believe the use of aggression is distinctive of men in comparison with women.

Ashmore and Del Boca (1981) have provided convincing arguments that both types of features—those characteristic of groups and those distinctive of groups—constitute stereotypes. For both racial (McCauley & Stitt, 1978) and gender stereotypes in adults (Martin, 1987), there is evidence that stereotypes contain both types of features and that assessments of stereotypes using both types of information provides a more complete picture of stereotypes.

In 1978, McCauley and Stitt elaborated a new approach for measuring stereotypes that can be used to assess both the frequency and distinctiveness of features in gender stereotypes. Their approach involves computing a diagnostic ratio for each characteristic based on the estimated incidence of the attribute in the target group divided by the estimated base rate, that is, the incidence of that attribute in the population or a comparison group (see McCauley & Stitt, 1978; McCauley et al., 1980, for discussion). The extent to which a characteristic's ratio score differs from 1.0 indicates the degree to which that characteristic is believed to distinguish the groups. For instance, participants are asked to estimate the percentage of men who are assertive and the percentage of women who are assertive. From these estimates, a ratio score is derived which indicates the extent to which assertiveness is attributed to one sex more than the other. The advantage of this method is that it is possible to assess both the perceived frequency of occurrence of a characteristic in a group (using the percentage estimates) and how distinctive that characteristic is for one group versus another group (using the ratio scores). Using the example of aggression, the diagnostic ratio for physical aggression would be 2.0 (ratio of 10% men to 5% women attributed with use of physical aggression), indicating that the characteristic is more distinctive of men than women.

The first goal of study 2 was to use the ratio method to assess adults' stereotypes of girls and boys. Adults estimated the percentage of girls and boys with each characteristic and these estimates were used to compute ratio measures for each characteristic. Diagnostic ratios were calculated by dividing the probability of each characteristic in boys, $p(\text{feature}|\text{boys})$, by the probability of the characteristic in girls, $p(\text{feature}|\text{girls})$. Ratios greater than 1.0 indicate that more boys than girls are believed to have the traits, whereas scores less than 1.0 mean that more girls than boys are believed to have the trait. A score of 1.0 indicates that the same number of boys and girls are believed to possess that characteristic. Cultural stereotypes concerning boys and girls were identified by averaging scores across participants for each item. A particular item was considered to be part of the

stereotype if its ratio score differed significantly from 1.0, using *t*-tests (see Martin, 1987).

The second goal of Study 2 was to expand the assessment of stereotypes to include stereotypes about non-traditional children. Children who engage in cross-sex behavior find that they receive discouragement from parents, teachers, and peers (Atkinson & Endsley, 1976; Carter & McCloskey, 1984; Fagot, 1987; Lamb, Easterbrooks, & Holden, 1980; Lamb & Roopnarine, 1979; Langlois & Downs, 1980). For instance, evidence confirms that preadolescents believe that boys who play feminine games with girls are different from other boys and they are less well liked (Lobel, 1994). It may be that any time children adopt non-traditional gender roles they will face negative consequences from others. Although cross-gender behavior often leads to negative consequences for both sexes, boys who adopt feminine behavior (“sissies”) tend to face more negative consequences than girls who adopt masculine behavior (“tomboys”). Boys who engage in traditionally feminine activities tend to be viewed much more negatively than girls who engage in masculine activities (Feinman, 1981) and they are more often referred to gender clinics than are girls (Green, 1975). Adults are more likely to predict negative outcomes in adulthood for boys labeled as sissies than for girls labeled as tomboys (Martin, 1990). For most adults, “sissy” appears to be a culturally pejorative term whereas “tomboy” is not (Green, 1975). Feinman (1981) argues that the differential evaluation of cross-sex girls and boys is due to the status difference in roles such 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.

The untested assumption underlying Feinman’s hypothesis is that cross-gender children have merely traded the traditional role prescribed for their own sex for those of the other sex—in essence, mirror images of traditional children. That is, sissies are assumed to have feminine and not masculine characteristics, similar to traditional girls; and tomboys are assumed to have masculine but not feminine characteristics, similar to traditional boys. Another possibility was proposed by Plumb and Cowan (1984), who argued that sissies have rejected their own gender role whereas tomboys have embraced both roles.

One way to begin to investigate this issue is to examine the kinds of stereotypes adults hold about gender traditional and gender non-traditional children. Surprisingly little empirical evidence exists about the kinds of stereotypes adults have of tomboys and sissies. We do not know whether children who purportedly share similar roles (i.e., the feminine role shared by girls and sissies; the masculine role shared by boys and tomboys) are stereotyped similarly. For instance, are tomboys and boys stereotyped in similar ways and are sissies and girls stereotyped in similar ways? The com-

mon roles may not generate similar stereotypes; instead, it may be that sissies and tomboys are not simply seen as mirror images of typical boys and girls, but rather, they may have particular features not common to stereotypes of traditional children.

The ratio method can easily be used to make the kinds of direct comparisons needed to assess the similarities and differences between traditional girls versus sissies and traditional boys versus tomboys. The estimated frequencies of occurrence of each characteristic can be compared between the two target groups to discover how the groups are seen to differ in levels of masculinity and femininity. Ratios can be derived from the estimates and can be used to indicate how the two target groups differ in distinctive characteristics. Also, using the information obtained in study 1, the four groups can be compared on desirable versus undesirable characteristics to obtain additional information about stereotypes of these children.

Participants were asked to assess, as accurately as possible, the characteristics of young children (from 4- to 7-years old) by rating a list of 26 characteristics according to the percentage of typical girls, typical boys, sissies, and tomboys they believed exhibited each characteristic. These percentage scores were used to derive ratio scores.

Method

Subjects. The participants were 154 (97 female, 57 male, mean age = 23 years, median 21 years) undergraduate students ranging in age from 18 to 46 years of age. The participants were students in psychology classes at the University of British Columbia. A majority of the students were Caucasian and a small percentage were Asian (approximately 18%) and most were from middle class families.

Materials. The characteristics used in Study 2 were the same ones as used in Study 1 with the exception of one new trait, "warm," added to better represent the expressive/nurturant dimension which was not represented in the items used in Study 1. A questionnaire containing the 26 characteristics (10 selected as being masculine, 11 feminine, and 5 neutral) was given to the students. For each characteristic, participants were asked to rate the percentage of typical boys, typical girls, sissies, and tomboys they believe exhibit each characteristic. The order of ratings (i.e., the target group) was counterbalanced across characteristics. Items were randomly ordered.

Procedure. Participants were given the questionnaire as part of a larger study. Participants were tested in small groups. The questionnaires took approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Table III. Estimated Percentages for Characteristics as a Function of Target Group: Study 2

Item Type ^a	Boys	Tomboys	Girls	Sissies
Masculine traits				
Does dangerous things	69	67	37	28
Enjoys rough play	78	77	42	31
Enjoys mechanical objects	72	60	42	33
Dominant	68	65	48	31
Aggressive	74	73	50	26
Competitive	74	75	58	36
Independent	63	63	50	35
Physically active	78	79	64	46
Noisy	75	73	61	42
Self-reliant	65	70	56	36
Conceited	60	54	58	45
Feminine characteristics				
Cries and gets upset easily	37	36	64	67
Soft-spoken	31	32	60	63
Sympathetic	43	43	65	60
Neat and clean	43	41	70	66
Helpful around the house	45	47	70	61
Eager to soothe hurt feelings	42	47	66	58
Gentle	45	46	71	69
Easily frightened	49	49	68	68
Warm	53	53	70	61
Well-mannered	53	49	70	65
Gullible	46	43	56	61
Reliable	54	60	66	61
Truthful	59	61	67	66
Neutral characteristics				
Likable	69	59	73	45
Adaptable	62	57	62	45

^aCategories are based on diagnostic ratios.

Results

Stereotypes of Gender Traditional Girls and Boys. The estimated percentages of occurrence of each characteristic in each group are shown in Table III. The characteristics that are believed to occur most often in boys are engaging in rough play and being active whereas the characteristics believed to occur least often in boys are crying and being soft spoken. For girls, the characteristics believed to occur most often are being warm, neat and clean, helpful, and gentle whereas being aggressive and doing dangerous things are believed to occur less often. It is interesting to note, however, that about 30 to 60% of girls are believed to have distinctively masculine characteristics and about the same number of boys are believed to have

Table IV. Distinctive Characteristics of Girls and Boys: Study 2

	Diagnostic Ratio
Distinctive characteristics of boys as compared to girls ^a	
Does dangerous things	2.25
Enjoys rough play	1.58
Enjoys mechanical objects	1.26
Dominant	.69
Aggressive	.66
Competitive	.43
Independent	.41
Physically active	.34
Noisy	.31
Self-reliant	.21
Conceited	.10
Distinctive characteristics of girls as compared to boys ^b	
Cries and gets upset easily	-1.65
Soft-spoken	-1.36
Sympathetic	-1.17
Neat and clean	-1.15
Helpful around the house	-1.14
Eager to soothe hurt feelings	-1.02
Gentle	-.94
Easily frightened	-.70
Warm	-.53
Well-mannered	-.48
Gullible	-.39
Reliable	-.29
Truthful	-.20
Nondistinctive characteristics	
Likable	-.11
Adaptable	-.02

^aIndicates that transformed diagnostic ratios were significantly different from 0, in the direction indicating that more boys than girls are perceived as having the characteristic.

^bIndicates that transformed diagnostic ratios were significantly different from 0, in the direction indicating that more girls than boys are perceived as having the characteristic.

distinctively feminine characteristics. Clearly, stereotypes tend to be probabilistic and are not dichotomous distinctions.

The estimated percentages of occurrence of characteristics were used for assessing the distinctive characteristics associated with traditional girls and boys. For each rater on each item, a diagnostic ratio was computed. For example, the percentage of boys judged to be dominant was divided by the percentage of girls judged to be dominant. To obtain a mean diagnostic ratio for each item, diagnostic ratios for the item were averaged

Table V. Distinctive Characteristics of Tomboys and Boys: Study 2

	Diagnostic Ratio
Distinctive characteristics of tomboys as compared to boys ^a	
Self-reliant	.12
Distinctive characteristics of boys ^b	
Likable	-.56
Enjoys mechanical objects	-.29
Adaptable	-.26
Conceited	-.23
Guillible	-.14
Dominant	-.11
Does dangerous things	-.04
Nondistinctive characteristics	
Neat and clean	-.45
Well-mannered	-.18
Soft-spoken	-.18
Cries and gets upset easily	-.13
Physically active	-.06
Warm	-.04
Noisy	-.03
Aggressive	-.01
Easily frightened	.00
Enjoys rough play	.00
Independent	.01
Gentle	.02
Helpful around the house	.02
Competitive	.03
Truthful	.03
Reliable	.04
Sympathetic	.07
Eager to soothe hurt feelings	.20

^aIndicates that transformed diagnostic ratio was significantly different from 0, in the direction suggesting that more tomboys than boys are perceived to have the characteristic.

^bIndicates that transformed diagnostic ratio was significantly different from 0, in the direction suggesting that more boys than tomboys are perceived to have the characteristic.

across participants.³ For each mean ratio, a one-sample *t*-test was used to assess whether the diagnostic ratio differed significantly from 0 (once transformed, a score of 0 indicates that the characteristic is not distinctive). Be-

³To equate the range of scores from 0 to 1.0 with scores ranging from 1.0 to infinity, diagnostic ratios were transformed prior to obtaining mean ratios. For diagnostic ratios greater than or equal to 1.0, the transformed diagnostic ratio was obtained by subtracting 1.0 from the original diagnostic ratio. For diagnostic ratios less than 1.0, the transformed diagnostic ratio was obtained by subtracting the inverse of the diagnostic ratio from 1.0 (C. McCauley, personal communication, September 21, 1983). The tables include the transformed ratios.

cause the standard deviations varied considerably among items, in some cases a small diagnostic ratio is significant and in other cases it is not.

Out of the 26 characteristics assessed, adults' perceived sex differences to exist on 24 of the characteristics. As can be seen in Table IV, 11 characteristics were rated as being significantly more likely to occur in boys than in girls whereas 13 characteristics were rated as being significantly more likely to occur in girls than boys ($ps < .05$). Only two items were rated as occurring equally often in both sexes, likable and adaptable.

Stereotypes of Gender Nontraditional Children. The estimated percentages of occurrence of each characteristic for sissies and for tomboys are shown in Table III. The characteristics believed to occur most often in sissies are being gentle, being easily frightened, and crying whereas those occurring least often are being aggressive and doing dangerous things. The characteristics believed to occur most often in tomboys are being active and engaging in rough play whereas being soft spoken and crying occur least often.

For each rater on each item, a diagnostic ratio was computed. To compare stereotypes of non-traditional and traditional children, for each item, the scores for each group were used to calculate ratio scores. For example, to assess how stereotypes of boys and tomboys compare, a ratio was computed from the estimated percentage of tomboys judged to be dominant divided by the percentage of boys judged to be dominant. As in the first comparison, diagnostic ratios were averaged across participants to obtain a mean diagnostic ratio for each item and one-sample t -tests were used to assess whether the mean transformed diagnostic ratios differed from 0.

As can be seen in Table V, adults perceived that tomboys and boys differ on only 8 out of 26 of the characteristics ($ps < .05$). Adults believe that more tomboys than boys are self reliant and they believe that more boys than tomboys show various characteristics (e.g., dominant, mechanical). Out of the seven characteristics that were estimated to occur more often in boys than in tomboys, four of these were masculine characteristics, one was feminine, and two were neutral (on the first analysis). Overall, boys and tomboys were rated as being similar in characteristics.

A similar analysis was done comparing the estimated percentages of occurrence of characteristics for sissies and girls. As shown in Table VI, sissies and girls were rated as being quite different. Out of the 26 characteristics, this sample believed that sissies and girls differ on 21 of these characteristics ($ps < .05$). On only one characteristic, that of being gullible (a feminine characteristic in the first analysis), did adults believe that more sissies had the characteristic than girls. For the other 20 characteristics the groups were perceived to differ on, more girls were perceived to have the

Table VI. Distinctive Characteristics of Sissies and Girls: Study 2

	Diagnostic Ratio
Distinctive characteristics of sissies as compared to girls ^a	
Gullible	.16
Distinctive characteristics of girls as compared to sissies ^b	
Aggressive	-3.11
Likable	-2.22
Dominant	-2.18
Competitive	-1.63
Enjoys rough play	-1.60
Independent	-1.36
Self-reliant	-1.10
Adaptable	-1.07
Noisy	-1.06
Does dangerous things	-.92
Conceited	-.91
Enjoys mechanical objects	-.82
Physically active	-.76
Warm	-.47
Helpful around the house	-.29
Eager to soothe hurt feelings	-.26
Reliable	-.18
Sympathetic	-.14
Neat and clean	-.13
Well-mannered	-.13
Nondistinctive characteristics	
Easily frightened	-.03
Gentle	-.01
Soft-spoken	.06
Cries and gets upset easily	.06
Truthful	.13

^aIndicates that transformed diagnostic ratio was significantly different from 0, in the direction suggesting that more sissies than girls are perceived to have the characteristic.

^bIndicates that transformed diagnostic ratio was significantly different from 0, in the direction suggesting that more girls than sissies are perceived to have the characteristic.

characteristic than sissies. Out of these 20 characteristics, 11 were masculine in the first analysis, 6 were feminine, and 3 were neutral.

Perceived Masculinity and Femininity in Stereotypes of Children. To determine if the different groups were perceived to differ in masculinity and femininity, a repeated measures analysis of variance was run with sex of subject as a between subject factor and sex of target (boys, girls), traditionality of target (traditional, nontraditional), and feature type (masculine, feminine) as within subject factors. The dependent measure was the mean percentage estimates given for the characteristic types (e.g., masculine char-

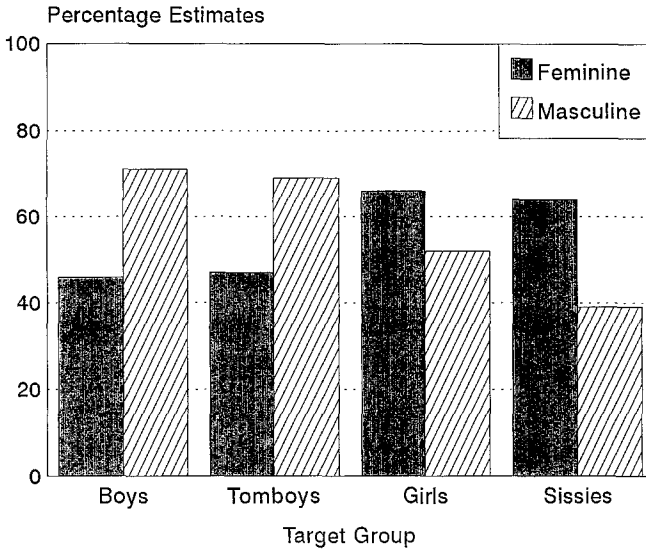


Fig. 1. Mean ratings of masculinity and femininity as a function of the sex and traditionality of the target.

acteristics, feminine characteristics) identified in the first analysis. Because only two characteristics were identified as being neutral, they were not included in the analysis.

As expected, the sex of target by traditionality by characteristic type interaction was significant, $F(1, 118) = 329.79, p < .001$. Simple effects analyses were done to determine whether the sex of target by traditionality effect was significant for each characteristic type. The two-way interaction was significant for both masculine and feminine characteristics ($ps < .001$). Because the comparisons of interest incorporated levels within both factors, t -tests were then used to do pairwise comparisons. As illustrated by Fig. 1, adults believe that more boys and tomboys have masculine than feminine characteristics ($ps < .001$) and do not differ on levels of femininity that are attributed to them ($p < .50$) but they differ somewhat in masculinity, with more boys being attributed with masculine characteristics ($p < .003$). Adults also believe that more girls and sissies have feminine than masculine characteristics ($ps < .001$). Fewer sissies are attributed with masculine characteristics than any other group, even girls ($ps < .001$). Both tomboys and boys were attributed masculine characteristics more than girls ($ps < .001$). Participants believed that more girls had feminine characteristics than any other group ($ps < .001$).

Table VII. Percentage Estimates as a Function of Desirability of Characteristics

	Boys	Tomboys	Girls	Sissies
Highly desirable				
Especially for boys (4) ^a	70.16	66.61	49.61	34.16
Especially for girls (6)	44.85 ^b	45.73 ^b	68.65	63.48
Equal (6)	64.95 ^b	63.88 ^b	64.64 ^b	50.56
Low desirability				
Especially for boys (2)	42.95 ^b	41.97 ^b	66.03	67.73
Especially for girls (1)	76.02	73.74	62.42	42.82
Equal (3)	58.38	54.77	50.25	45.09
Mixed desirability				
High for boys/Low for girls (2)	76.52 ^b	75.36 ^b	46.67	29.26
High for girls/Low for boys (1)	33.59 ^b	32.76 ^b	60.73	63.07

^aThe numbers in parentheses indicate the number of items used in the category.

^bEstimates with the same superscripts do not differ significantly across the target groups.

The sex by characteristic-type interaction was also significant, $F(1, 118) = 10.63$, $p < .001$. Simple effects analyses showed that the characteristic type effect was significant for female participants ($F(1, 96) = 26.69$, $p < .001$) but not for male participants ($p = .30$). Overall, female participants gave higher scores on masculine characteristics than on feminine ones.

Although the neutral characteristics were not included in the ANOVA, comparisons were done to determine whether participants believed the groups differed on the neutral characteristics. Participants believed that slightly more girls ($M = 67.40$) had neutral characteristics than boys ($M = 65.57$) ($p < .05$) and that both of these groups had more of the neutral characteristics than tomboys ($M = 58.17$, $p < .001$). Participants believed fewer sissies ($M = 46.03$) had the neutral characteristics than all other groups ($ps < .001$).

Desirability Analyses. The results of the Study 1 desirability analysis were used to form eight item groups that varied in their perceived desirability for girls and for boys. Paired t -tests were used to compare percentage estimates across target groups for the different characteristic groups. As can be seen in Tables III and VII, for highly desirable characteristics (scores above 4.0) that are particularly desirable for boys (significantly higher than for girls), each target group differed from each other group. Participants estimated that fewer sissies had these characteristics than any other group. For highly desirable characteristics that are particularly desirable for girls, estimates for all groups differed from one another except for ratings for tomboys and boys who were given similar estimates that were lower than all other groups. Participants estimated that more girls than sissies had these characteristics. For highly desirable characteristics that are equally

desirable for each sex, participants estimated significantly fewer sissies would have the characteristics than each of the other three groups, which did not differ significantly from one another.

For low desirable characteristics that are less desirable for boys, participants estimated that significantly more sissies and girls had the characteristics than tomboys and boys (and they did not differ). For low desirable characteristics that are less desirable for girls, participants' estimates were significantly different for each group with significantly fewer sissies estimated as having the characteristics than any other group. For low desirable characteristics that are equally undesirable for both sexes, participants' estimates were significantly different for each group with fewer sissies estimated to have the characteristics than all other groups (all $ps < .05$).

Some characteristics showed mixed desirability; that is, they were rated as being desirable for one sex and not for the other ($ps < .05$). For characteristics desirable for boys and not girls, participants' estimates differed for all groups except for tomboys and boys. Tomboys and boys were believed to have the characteristics more than the other groups and only a few sissies were considered to have these characteristics. For characteristics desirable for girls and not boys, participants' estimates differed for all groups except for tomboys and boys. Very few tomboys and boys were estimated to have the characteristics and more girls were rated as having these characteristics than any other group.

In sum, the desirability ratings from Study 1 were used to group characteristics so frequency estimates for each group could be compared. Overall, estimates for tomboys and boys showed similar patterns whereas estimates for girls and sissies were quite different. Generally, fewer sissies were thought as having highly desirable or undesirable characteristics than all other groups.

Discussion

In this study, stereotypes of gender traditional and gender non-traditional children were investigated by analyzing adults' estimates of the percentage of members of each target group that have each of 26 characteristics. These estimates were used in several ways to examine the frequency and distinctiveness of characteristics attributed to different children.

Similar to Study 1, the adults in this sample believed that there are many differences between girls and boys (for 24 out of 26 of the characteristics). Furthermore, as in study 1, some of the characteristics that have been found to be neutral (e.g., reliable, truthful) when individuals rate their own personalities were found to be sex-typed by this sample. Together, these findings suggest that adults hold extensive and highly differentiated

gender stereotypes of young children just as they do of other adults. The reasons for these extensive stereotypes of children needs further exploration. It may be that adults stereotype children more extensively because of lack of experience with them, or because they are "outgroup" members.

Several other interesting findings emerged concerning stereotypes of girls and boys. First, the percentage estimates clearly illustrated the probabilistic nature of stereotypes. Even for characteristics considered most distinctive for a group, only about 60 to 70% of the group members were believed to have the characteristic and, importantly, between 30 to 60% of the *other* group was also believed to have the characteristic. This pattern was particularly true for masculine characteristics: between 37 to 64% of girls were rated as having masculine characteristics.

The second interesting pattern that was apparent because of the use of both percentage estimates and diagnostic ratios was that a characteristic can be considered distinctive of a group even when barely a majority of group members are believed to have the characteristic. For instance, only slightly more than half of girls were believed to be gullible and yet the characteristic is considered to be distinctive of girls as compared to boys. Other traits and characteristics may show even more obvious cases of this pattern, namely, the actual frequencies of occurrence could be extremely low and yet a characteristic could be held to be significantly more distinctive of one group than the other.

Stereotypes of gender non-traditional children were also investigated in this study using both percentage estimates and ratio measures. When distinctive features were compared (using ratios), stereotypes of tomboys were found to be similar to stereotypes of boys. Out of 26 characteristics assessed in the study, distinctiveness ratios showed that tomboys and boys shared 69% of the characteristics. Stereotypes of sissies, however, were not at all similar in distinctive features to stereotypes of girls in that they shared only 19% of the characteristics in common.

The analyses of percentage estimates concerning masculine and feminine characteristics revealed a similar pattern. The estimates of the number of tomboys and boys with masculine characteristics and with feminine characteristics were similar indicating that adults hold similar views of these two groups. The estimates of the number of girls and sissies with masculine characteristics varied considerably, indicating dissimilar stereotypes, although there was more similarity on the feminine characteristics. Specifically, more girls than sissies were estimated to have both feminine and masculine characteristics. Stereotypes of sissies appear to be best characterized by being narrow (i.e., containing few characteristic features) rather than being marked by the adoption of the feminine role by a boy. The

most characteristic features for sissies were being gentle, being neat and clean, crying a lot, and being easily frightened.

Given the pejorative nature of the term "sissy", it was somewhat surprising that few sissies were estimated to have undesirable characteristics as compared to other groups. The undesirable characteristics most common in perceptions of sissies (and in girls), however, were those that are considered to be particularly undesirable for boys. The lack of undesirable characteristics was not suggestive of a positive stereotype: sissies also were not seen as having many desirable characteristics as compared to other groups. Estimates showed that participants believed few sissies (even fewer than girls) had characteristics that are desirable especially for boys or had characteristics that are desirable for both sexes. Very few sissies, even fewer than girls, were estimated as having those characteristics that are desirable for boys and undesirable for girls. Again, it appears that the sissy stereotypes has few features, either positive or negative.

The results from Study 2 provide some insights into why sissies are more negatively evaluated than tomboys or gender-traditional children (Feinman, 1981; Martin, 1990). Feinman (1981) argued that the male's movement into a less valued feminine role is less acceptable than the female's movement into the more highly valued male role. Whereas feminine and masculine roles may be unequally valued, this status differential hypothesis may not completely account for the differing evaluations of tomboys and sissies because it assumes that cross-gender children merely adopt, in full measure, the "roles" of the other sex. According to the present results, stereotypes of tomboys and sissies do not totally reflect this assumption. Girls who are tomboys are seen to be "boy-like" but boys who are sissies are not seen to be "girl-like". Instead, they are perceived as having few of the characteristics of girls. Not surprisingly, they are seen as having fewer masculine characteristics than boys, tomboys and even girls. They are also seen as having more feminine characteristics than boys and tomboys, and they are seen as having fewer feminine characteristics than girls. Thus, stereotypes of sissies are not that they are more feminine than girls. Instead, they have a paucity of characteristic and distinguishing features. Of course, the label "sissy" may reflect more than the adoption of cross-sex behaviors, and so in future research it would be interesting to compare stereotypes of children described by these labels versus those described by having specific cross-sex interests but are not labeled.

It is also not the case that sissies are perceived as having merely rejected their own sex role (Plumb & Cowan, 1984). The present results suggest that they are seen as rejecting their own role and even the feminine role somewhat. It is interesting, however, that sissies are seen to be more extremely gender-differentiated in terms of roles (much more feminine

than masculine) than are girls. In the future, it would be useful to replicate these studies using larger samples, especially including more males. It may be that the lack of characteristics attributed to sissies was partially due to lack of exposure of female participants to many children who would fit this label.

The results may help explain the perception of tomboys as well. Tomboys are not considered to be androgynous children who embrace both roles (Plumb & Cowan, 1984), instead, they are seen to mimic boys in their characteristics by having many masculine characteristics and few feminine ones.

For future research, it would be useful to analyze the stereotypes of adults who are more and less familiar with children, for instance, parents and non-parents. Furthermore, the use of target ages for children could easily be expanded, as Fabes and Martin (1991) did in their study of gender stereotypes of emotions across the lifespan. The target range used in the present study was from four-to seven-years, with the goal of eliciting stereotypes about only young children. Of course, the sample may not have targeted this age range, but given the general congruence of the findings with previous studies, it seems likely they did. Finally, because the present study involved assessing stereotypes of labeled groups, it would be interesting also to assess stereotypes of children given specific descriptions concerning their gender-related behavior (e.g., a boy who wears girls' clothes frequently; a girl who only plays with other girls) to explore whether some types of behavior elicit stronger stereotypes than other sorts of behavior. Finally, given the multidimensional nature of gender (Spence, 1993; Ashmore, 1990), it is important to compare stereotypes representing different components with the purpose of assessing the consistency of stereotypic beliefs.

Conclusions

In the present studies, several different methods were used to assess adults' stereotypes of gender traditional and non-traditional children. Although slightly different types of information were obtained using each method, a convergent pattern of results was found. Adults' stereotypes of young children are extensive; they include personality traits as well as interests, and there were few characteristics that were not sex-typed. However, it is important to remember that these adults also were frequently attributing characteristics to both sexes, even though one sex may be attributed a characteristic significantly more often than the other.

The most surprising findings concerned stereotypes of non-traditional children. As one might expect, tomboys were perceived to be similar to traditional boys. Contrary to expectations, however, sissies were not per-

ceived as being boys who act in feminine ways. Instead, the sissy stereotype is very narrow and entails fewer feminine characteristics than does the stereotype for traditional girls.

The importance of assessing different types of information in stereotypes was illustrated by these studies. The extent to which the characteristics are attributed to each sex varies considerably depending on whether stereotypes about desirable versus typical characteristics are assessed. Also, the difference in assessing the frequency of characteristics within groups and the distinctive characteristics across groups is critical to consider in the study of stereotypes. Groups may be highly distinguished on characteristics that are believed to occur in relatively few group members. The mental representations that perceivers hold about groups are best tapped by assessing both frequency and distinctiveness of characteristics.

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