NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

Gender Stereotyping in Children and Adults

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HONORS CAPSTONE ABSTRACT

Gender stereotyping can have a big impact on the development of children, which can impact many aspects of an individual's life, even into adulthood. The purpose of this study was to examine age-related changes in gender stereotyping. The sample consisted of forty-four children and adults between the ages of 3 and 60 years old. Participants were interviewed using gender stereotyping scripts and presentations of images. They were shown two images of either a toy, activity, occupation, or a personality trait, and a boy and girl. Then they were told to point to one picture or both pictures of the boy and girl in response to the question asked from the script. The results indicated significant differences in the amount of stereotyping depending on the category of the item and age.
Gender Stereotyping in Children and Adults

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Abstract

Gender stereotyping can have a big impact on the development of children, which can impact many aspects of an individual's life, even into adulthood. The purpose of this study was to examine age-related changes in gender stereotyping. The sample consisted of forty-four children and adults between the ages of 3 and 60 years old. Participants were interviewed using gender stereotyping scripts and presentations of images. They were shown two images of either a toy, activity, occupation, or a personality trait, and a boy and girl. Then they were told to point to one picture or both pictures of the boy and girl in response to the question asked from the script. The results indicated significant differences in the amount of stereotyping depending on the category of the item and age.
Gender Stereotyping in Children and Adults

Gender is one of the main ways in which children and adults divide the society into categories (Fast & Olson, 2018). Children develop their definition of gender at an early age (Freeman, 2017). Research suggests that they appropriate a big amount of knowledge about gender during their first decade (Tenenbaum, Hill, Joseph, Roche, 2010). According to Freeman (2017), by about 24 months, children start to define themselves as “girls” or “boys.” Then they accurately apply gender stereotypes to the toys they use by the age of three based on the societal norms they perceive (Freeman, 2017). Gender roles are directly connected to gender stereotyping. According to Olsson and Martiny (2018), gender roles are created during childhood and continue to affect behavior throughout adolescence and adulthood. Children are exposed to these gender roles through family members, peers, teachers, and the media (Olsson & Martiny, 2018).

Gender stereotypes that are developed at a young age can affect many aspects of an individual's life. These gender stereotypes can lead individuals to make important decisions based on these wrong reasons (Mulvey & Irvin, 2018). According to Filipović (2018), the effect of gender stereotyping can be seen in children’s choice of activity, career goals, and their academic outcomes. This means that children’s choices, whether small or big, are all impacted by gender stereotypes, which can result in bigger consequences as they grow and make important life decisions such as career goals. Furthermore, “Research with younger children confirms that, even as young as 5-years-of-age, children associate different values with traditionally masculine and feminine careers and they hold gender stereotypes surrounding intellectual ability in early childhood as well” (Mulvey & Irvin, 2018, p. 221). This further shows that children associate certain occupations to specific genders. This can be seen in the small representation of women
and ethnic minorities in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) careers (Mulvey & Irvin, 2018).

According to Filipović (2018), “Studies show that exposure to gender stereotypes negatively affects girls and boys, limiting the scope of acceptable roles and behaviors, and normalizing gender inequalities” (p. 311). This gender inequality affects important things such as income (Willie, Gaspard, Trautwein, Oschatz, Scheiter, & Nagengast, 2018). Parents and other adults play an important role in this conversation. “Through differential reinforcement by parents and other adults such as teachers, boys and girls are taught to do boy and girl things, to pursue “gender appropriate” academic subjects, and to aspire to occupations that fit their own gender” (Helwig, 1998, p. 404). This means that reinforcement, on purpose or not, is teaching children gendered ideas. Children also learn through observational learning by imitation and modeling, which causes them to choose gender-stereotypical occupations, therefore being aware of one’s actions is important as a parent or adult (Helwig, 1998). Ultimately, it is important to discourage the use of gender stereotypes among children (Mulvey & Irvin, 2018).

According to Helwig (1998), “Younger children’s greater stereotyping of adult occupations than older ones was consistent” (p. 404). This means that gender stereotyping changes over time. It has been shown that children naturally exhibit an increase in gender stereotype flexibility as they age (Banse, Gawronski, Gutt, Morton, Trautwein, Oschatz, Scheiter, Nagengast, 2010). The purpose of this study is to deeper examine age-related changes in gender stereotyping. I hypothesize that stereotyping will decrease with age. I also hypothesize that toys will be stereotyped the most. This study will contribute to the understanding on age-related changes in gender stereotyping,

Method
The use of participants, materials, and procedures used in this study were in accordance with APA and institutional ethical guidelines.

Participants

Forty-four children and adults between the ages of 3 and 60 years old participated in the study. The sample consisted of 50% males ($N = 22$) and 50% females ($N = 22$). The participants were split into four different age groups, which were 3-6-year old’s, 7-10-year old’s, 11-16-year old’s, and 21 to 60-year old’s. The first group consisted of children ages 3 to 6 years, 5 months old ($N = 12, M = 4$). There was 50% males ($N = 6$) and 50% females ($N = 6$). The second group consisted of children ages 7 to 10 years old ($N = 12, M = 8$). There was 58% males ($N = 7$) and 42% females ($N = 5$). The third group consisted of children ages 11 to 16 years, 4 months old ($N = 10, M = 13$). There was 50% males ($N = 5$) and 50% females ($N = 5$). The fourth group consisted of adults ages 21 to 60 years old ($N = 10, M = 31$). There was 40% males ($N = 4$) and 60% females ($N = 6$). There was not a set criteria for individuals needed in this study except that they had to be at least 3 years old or older.

Materials

The materials used were two versions of a gender stereotyping script with 28 questions each and two PowerPoint presentations of images that went with the corresponding script. Each PowerPoint slide had an image of a boy, a girl, and either a masculine, feminine, or neutral item. The items were either a toy, activity, occupation, or personality trait.

Procedure

The purpose of this study was to examine age-related changes in gender stereotyping. The study consisted of four age group levels and two gender participation levels. For the independent variable, there were four levels of item category and two levels of item gender
stereotype. The dependent variable was the image choice of either a boy, girl, or both. Individuals were recruited by using a convenience sample of the experimenter. Before starting, participants were told that the study was about impressions of other people. Participants were interviewed using one version of a gender stereotyping script and one version of the PowerPoint presentations of images. Participants were randomly assigned one of the two scripts when interviewed. Each version of the script presented the items in a different random sequence. In each of the two sets of PowerPoint presentations, the images were arranged in a different sequence as well. For each participant, the image sequence was always matched with the same number as the script. For example, script 1 was always matched with image sequence 1.

The two PowerPoint presentations of images were presented on a computer screen. On each slide, there were two images of either a toy, activity, occupation, or a personality trait, and a boy and girl. Participants were shown the images on the slide then asked the corresponding question and told them to point to one picture or both pictures of the boy and girl in response. Sample items included questions such as, “Here are two children. I wonder who likes dress up costume. Who do you think likes dress up costumes?” and, “Here are two children. I wonder who wants to be a firefighter. Who do you think wants to be a firefighter?” For each question, the participant’s response was recorded on the script by writing M if the participant pointed to the boy, F if the participant pointed to the girl, or B if the participant pointed to both.

The scoring was based on the four behavior categories, which were toys, activities, occupations, and personality traits and the item gender stereotype. For masculine and feminine items these scores range from 0 to 3. For neutral items these scores are either 0 or 1. All data gathered was kept confidential by only taking the observed child’s first name, age, and gender.
Information was stored on a password protected computer and locked away where only the researcher could access it.

**Results**

An Age Group x Participant Gender x Item Category x Item Gender ANOVA (4 x 2 x 4 x 2) was conducted to evaluate how many times the image of the boy was chosen for masculine items and how many times the image of the girl was chosen for feminine items. The results indicated a main effect for the Item Category, $F(3,108) = 14.34, p < .001$. This means that there was a significant difference in the degree of stereotyping depending on the category of the item. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 1. The results also showed an Item Category x Item Gender Interaction, $F(3, 108) = 5.33, p = .01$. This means that there is a significant interaction between Item Category and Item Gender, which suggests that the gender of the item influenced the effect that the item category had on stereotyping. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 2. Another Age Group x Participant Gender x Item Category x Item Gender ANOVA was conducted to assess how many children chose both picture for neutral items. The results indicated a main effect for the Item Category on image choice, $F(3, 108) = 2.87, p = .05$. This means that there is a significant difference in neutrality ratings amongst item categories. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3. Last, the results indicated an Age Group x Participant Gender x Item Gender Interaction, $F(3, 36) = 9.23, p < .001$. This means that there is a significant interaction between Age Group, Participant Gender, and Item Gender that influence each other, leading to the item stereotyping. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4.

A Pearson $r$ correlation analysis was conducted for the total stereotype scores of each item category. The results indicated that there was a significant positive correlation between the stereotype scores for toys and activities, $r (44) = .50, p = .01$. This means as the amount of
stereotype scores for toys increased, so did the stereotype scores of activities. There was also a significant positive correlation between the stereotype scores for toys and occupations, $r_{(44)} = .41$, $p = .01$. This means as the amount of stereotype scores for toys increased, so did the stereotype scores of occupations. The results also indicated a significant positive correlation between stereotype scores for toys and personality traits, $r_{(44)} = .36$, $p = .05$. This means as the amount of stereotype scores for toys increased, so did the stereotype scores of personality traits. Furthermore, the results indicated a significant positive correlation between activities and occupations, $r_{(44)} = .50$, $p = .01$. This means as the amount of stereotype scores for activities increased, so did stereotype scores for occupations. The last Pearson $r$ correlation analysis indicated a significant correlation between occupations and personality traits, $r_{(44)} = .34$, $p = .05$. This means as the amount of stereotype scores for occupations increased, so did stereotypes scores for personality traits.
## Table 1. Mean Stereotype Scores by Item Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Category</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toys</td>
<td>4.14</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupations</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Table 2. Stereotype Means Item Category x Item Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Category</th>
<th>Masculine</th>
<th>Feminine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toy</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>2.34</td>
<td>1.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>1.66</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>1.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Table 3. Neutral Items “both” Means by Item Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Category</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toys</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activities</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupations</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Table 4. Stereotype Means by Age, Participant Gender, & Item Category

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Masculine</td>
<td>Feminine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-6</td>
<td>2.63</td>
<td>1.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-10</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-16</td>
<td>1.55</td>
<td>1.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult</td>
<td>1.75</td>
<td>1.50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine age-related changes in gender stereotyping. As hypothesized, the results of the present study found that stereotyping decreased with age. This could be explained by greater gender stereotype flexibility as one ages. The results also indicated that toys were stereotyped the most. According to Helwig’s literature review and study, implications suggest the “inevitability of gender-role stereotyping by young children” specifically with occupations (1998, p. 420). This study added more evidence to his claim. Ultimately, children use gender stereotyping for many things such as predicting others preferences, traits, and behaviors (Renno, 2017). However, Helwig writes that “children can be encouraged to become self-aware, counseled and advised to consider nontraditional occupations, and taught decision-making skills” (1998, p. 420). This will make the difference in the choices they make regarding things such as career goals when they are adults. Furthermore, “In the middle elementary years, personal social values and ability identification begin to influence leanings towards occupations and assume more importance than gender of occupation” (Helwig, 1998, p. 420). This reiterates that gender stereotyping naturally decreases with age.

Limitations

There are limitations to consider. First, the sample consisted of forty-four participants which is a small sample. Second, the participants used were a convenience sample which could have created bias. With that being said, the measures used may have introduced incorrect interpretations of the questions based on wording and bias as well. Last, the interview could have been too long for some participants and caused fatigue, which would result in inaccurate data.

Implications and Future Research
It is important that more studies be done focusing on fixing the issues of sample size, possible bias, and length in order to properly expand on the knowledge of the relationship between these variables. This can be done by future research broadening the sample to more. The use of existing measures that are shorter and to fix things such as wording errors/confusion could also help. This research could help us identify the true age-related changes in gender stereotyping. Doing this type of research, could create a better understanding of the importance of decreasing gender stereotyping based on outcomes. To decrease gender stereotyping, parents and teachers could encourage more neutrality.

**Conclusion**

Gender stereotyping can impact an individual’s life in many ways. The purpose of this study was to examine age-related changes in gender stereotyping. The results indicated significant differences in the amount of stereotyping depending on the category of the item and age. Therefore, as hypothesized, stereotyping decreased with age and toys were stereotyped the most. Knowing this, the results suggest that gender stereotyping decreases with age. However, it is still crucial that parents and adults avoid encouraging it within children because it can affect their “activity choices, career aspirations, and academic outcomes,” which can lead to negative results (Filipović, 2018, p. 311).
Resources


