

Rigidity in Gender Stereotyped Attitudes: Ability versus Category Stereotypes

Introduction

The gender literature includes research on the development of children's stereotype knowledge and the developmental timing of rigidity in attitudes; however, little attention has been paid to the role that the stereotype *construct* may play in children's beliefs and behaviors (Miller, Trautner, & Ruble, 2006). The present research includes two studies that assessed whether elementary school children exhibit different levels of rigidity when prompted to make **category** versus **ability** gender-stereotyped decisions.

Research Questions

1. Do children exhibit different levels of rigidity when making category versus ability gender-stereotyped decisions?
2. Does children's responses to category versus ability prompts depend on grade, participant's gender, and the gender-typed items (feminine or masculine)?

Participants

- ❖ **Study 1:** K/1st ($n = 140$), 2nd/3rd ($n = 112$), and 4th/5th ($n = 145$) grade students (54% female)
- ❖ **Study 2:** K/1st ($n = 179$), 2nd/3rd ($n = 168$), and 4th/5th ($n = 192$) grade students (53% female)
- ❖ Across both studies: 40% Caucasian, 24% Latinx, 12% Multiracial, 9% African American

Measure

- ❖ **Study 1:** Eight neutral skill items (e.g. learning from mistakes)
 - Category: *Who is this for?*
 - Ability: *Who is good at...?*
- ❖ **Study 2:** Fourteen gender-typed occupations (e.g., babysitter, police officer) from the COAT scales (Liben & Bigler, 2002)
 - Category: *Who is this job for?*
 - Ability: *Who would be a good....?*

Response choices: *only boys, both boys and girls, only girls* (dependent measure = % of "only" responses)

Analyses

- ❖ In both studies, mixed-design analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were used to explore if children responded differently to the category and ability prompts and whether differences depended on grade, participant's gender, and the gender-typed items (feminine or masculine; Study 2 only).

Study 1 Results

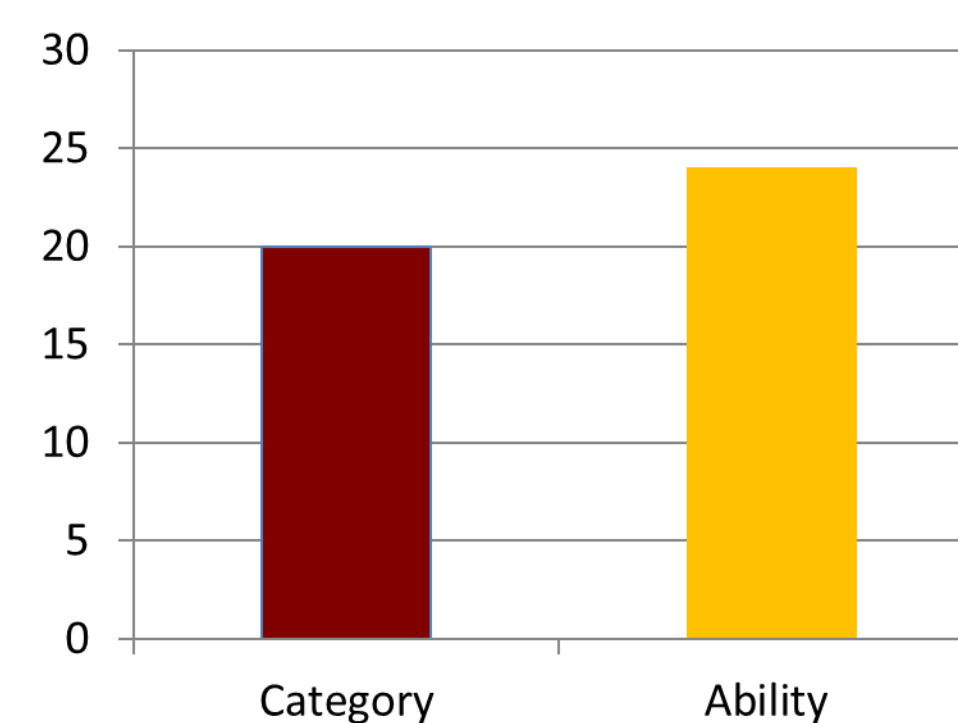


Figure 1. Overall proportion of *only* responses to the category and ability measures.

- ❖ Across age and gender, children provided more rigid responses on the ability (24%) than category (20%) measure

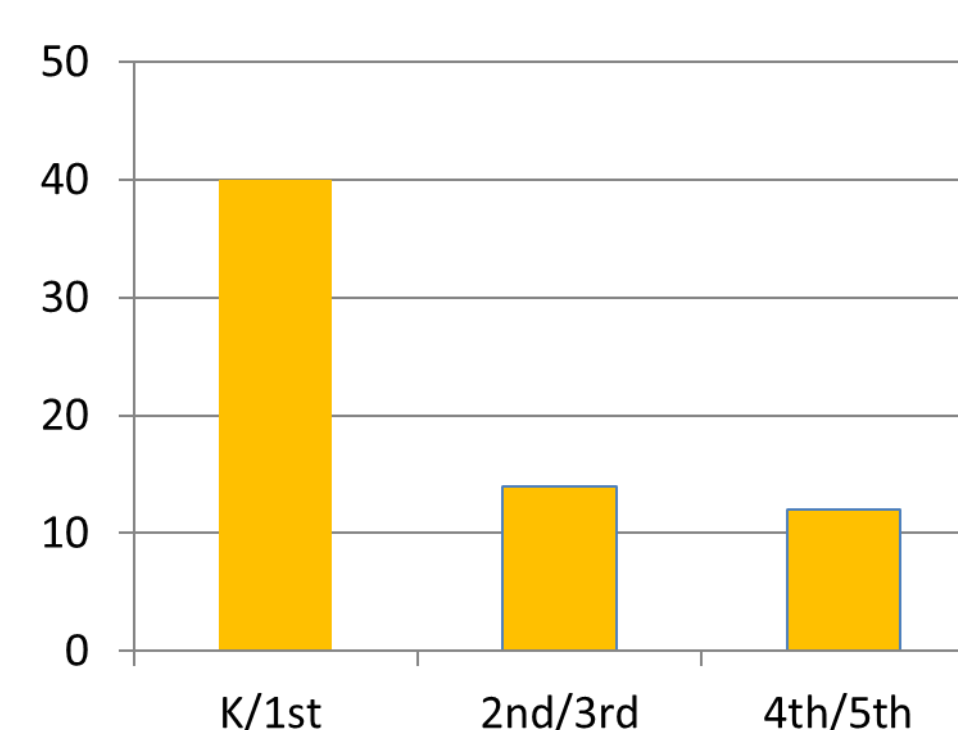


Figure 2. Overall proportion of *only* responses as a function of grade.

- ❖ K/1st grade students (40%) provided more rigid responses than 2nd/3rd (14%) and 4th/5th (12%) grade students
- ❖ There were no main or interaction effects for gender

Study 2 Results

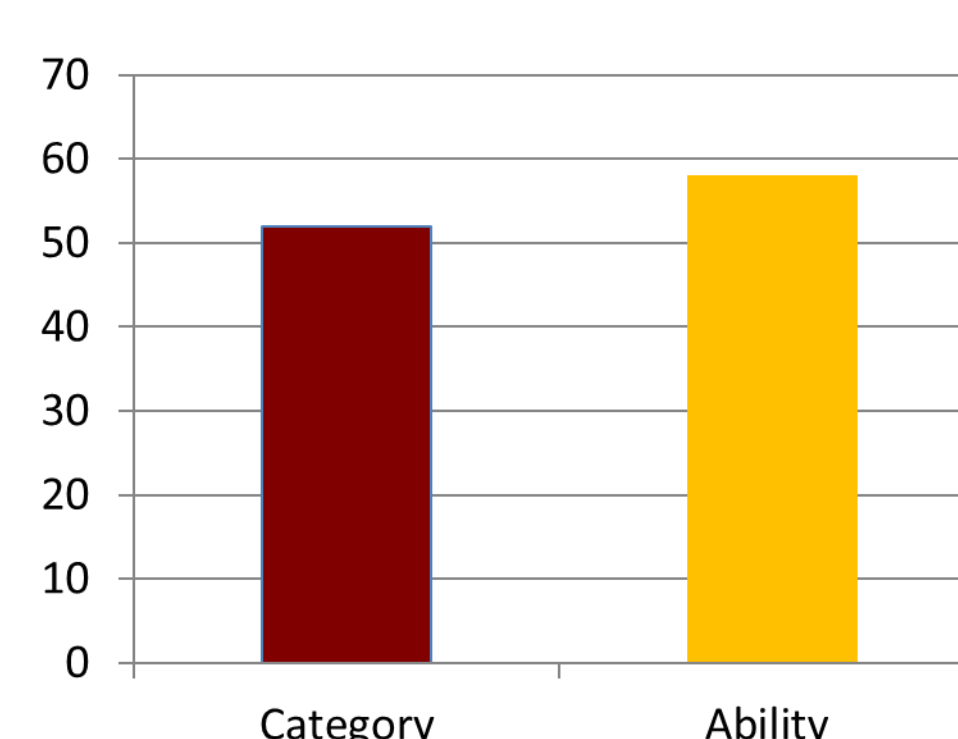


Figure 3. Overall proportion of *only* responses to the category and ability measures.

- ❖ Across age and gender, children provided more rigid responses on the ability (58%) than category (52%) measure

Study 2 Results (cont.)

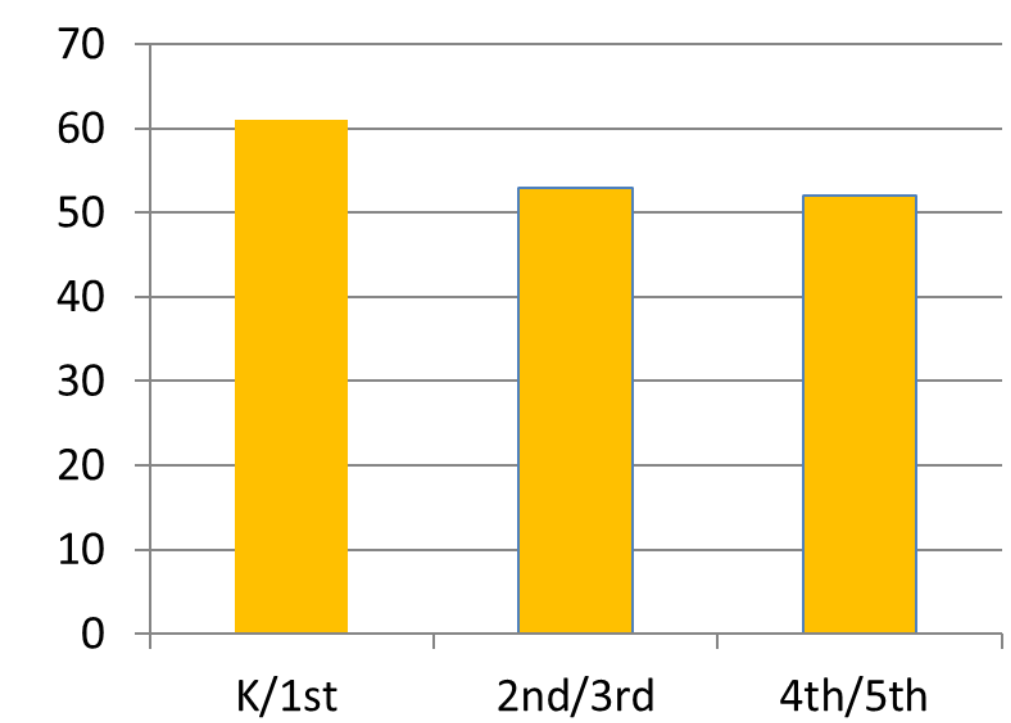


Figure 4. Overall proportion of *only* responses as a function of grade.

- ❖ K/1st grade students (61%) provided more rigid responses than 2nd/3rd (53%) and 4th/5th (52%) grade students

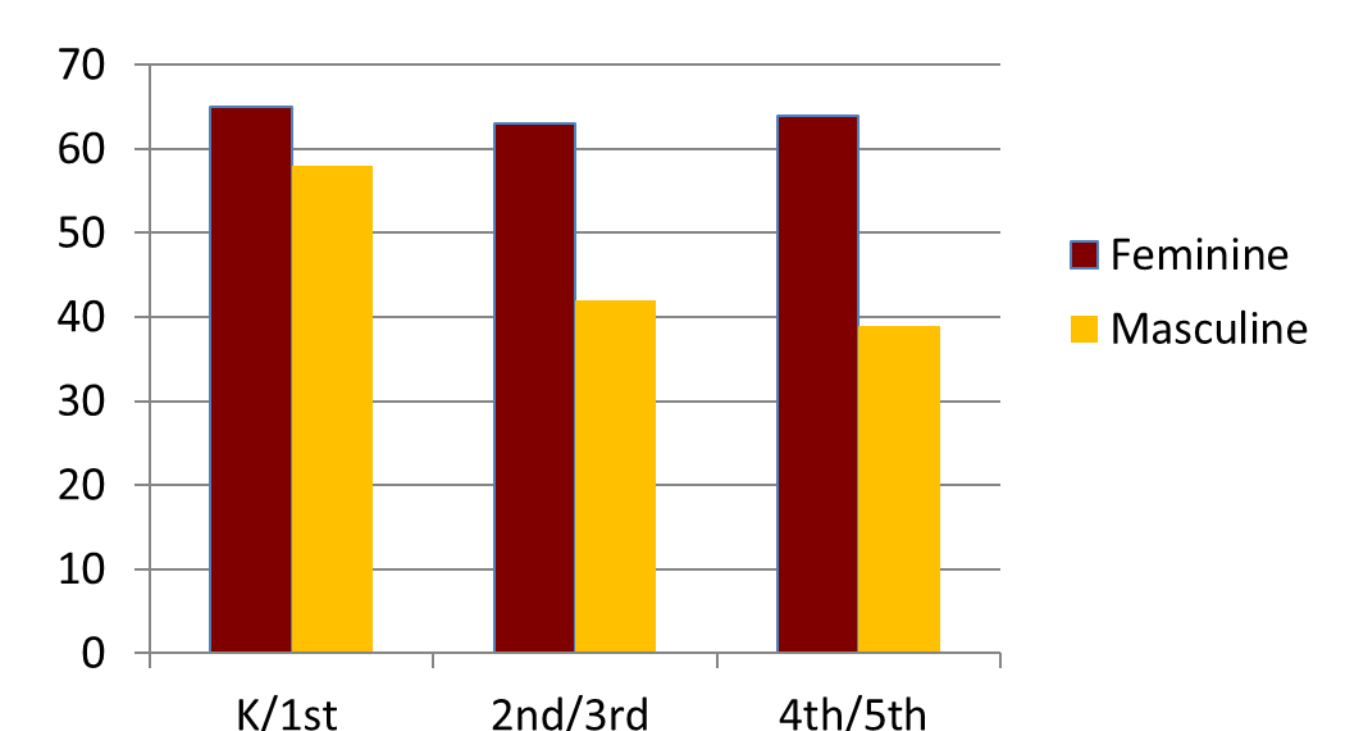


Figure 5. Proportion of *only* responses to feminine and masculine occupations as a function of grade.

- ❖ Overall, children provided more rigid responses when asked about feminine (64%) than masculine (46%) occupations
- ❖ Younger children did not provide more rigid responses than older children when asked about feminine occupations

Conclusions

The present study found:

1. children show more rigidity when making ability versus category gender-stereotyped decisions
2. younger children do not exhibit more rigidity than older children when making decisions about feminine occupations

These findings suggest that, even if children endorse that males and females equally *belong* in particular occupations, they still might ascribe higher *competency* to one gender. Further, even though it is believed that rigidity decreases with age, the present study shows that older children continue to hold rigid attitudes about males working in feminine occupations.

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