

Does Self-Discrepant Gender Identity Foster Peer Aggression and Victimization?

Patrick J. Cooper¹, Rachel E. Pauletti², Christopher D. Aults², and David G. Perry²

Lynn University¹, Florida Atlantic University²

What is Gender Identity?

- **Gender Identity** is a multidimensional construct that encompasses one's evaluation of how they fit in their gender collective.
 - Two dimensions of interest here include:
 - **Gender Typicality** – self-appraised similarity to one's gender; generally associated with positive outcomes (e.g., higher self-esteem, lower internalizing problems).
 - **Felt Pressure for Gender Differentiation** – the degree to which children anticipate negative reactions for exhibiting cross-gender behavior; generally associated with negative outcomes (e.g., lower self-esteem and social competence).

Hypothesis

- Previous research suggests that these dimensions are not correlated with one another. Therefore it is reasonable to suggest that children who exhibit low gender typicality and high felt pressure possess a gender self-discrepancy and are at risk for social problems including victimization and aggression.

Method

- N = 195 4th-7th grade boys and girls (M age = 10.1 years)
- *Gender typicality* and *felt pressure* were assessed in self-report format as described in Egan & Perry, 2001.
- *Aggression toward boys*, *aggression toward girls*, *victimization by boys*, *victimization by girls* were assessed using a peer nomination inventory.

Means and Standard Deviations of Measures

Measure	Time 1				Sex difference (t)
	Girls		Boys		
	M	SD	M	SD	
Gender typicality	2.81	.68	3.05	.65	2.34*
Felt pressure	1.69	.50	2.54	.79	8.80***
Aggression toward boys	.06	.07	.06	.08	.15
Aggression toward girls	.04	.06	.04	.07	.75
Victimization by boys	.05	.07	.06	.05	.86
Victimization by girls	.04	.05	.06	.04	2.57*

Measure	Time 2				Sex difference (t)
	Girls		Boys		
	M	SD	M	SD	
Gender typicality	2.79	.77	3.30	.63	4.86***
Felt pressure	1.60	.49	2.56	.82	9.74***
Aggression toward boys	.09	.12	.08	.10	-.43
Aggression toward girls	.05	.07	.06	.08	1.48
Victimization by boys	.07	.05	.08	.07	2.66**
Victimization by girls	.05	.04	.09	.08	4.82***

Note. The significance of the sex difference was tested controlling for ethnicity/race. Sex was coded 0 for girls, 1 for boys. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Results

Relations Among Measures for Girls

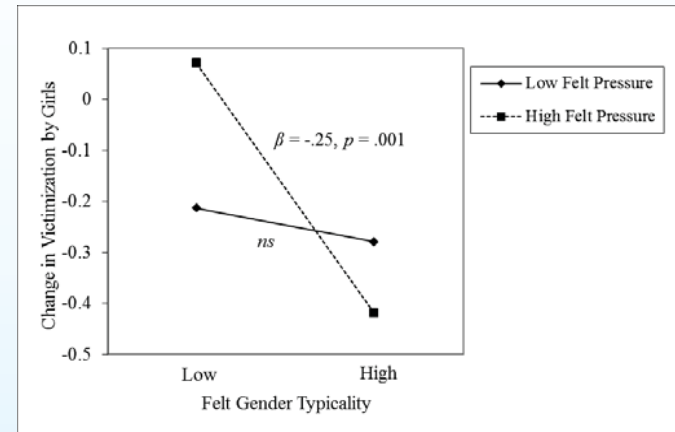
Predictor	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Gender typicality	.59***	.01	.23*	.25*	-.05	-.14
2 Felt pressure	.10	.66***	.11	.10	.12	.08
3 Aggression toward boys	.15	.13	.67***	.75***	.25*	.10
4 Aggression toward girls	.21*	.02	.72***	.76***	.20*	.15
5 Victimization by boys	-.07	.21*	.51***	.39***	.54***	.57***
6 Victimization by girls	-.02	.09	.18†	.28**	.58***	.79***

Note. Entries for Time 1 are above the diagonal; entries for Time 2 are below the diagonal. Entries are partial correlations with age controlled. † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Relations Among Measures for Boys

Predictor	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Gender typicality	.46***	.03	-.02	.03	.02	-.05
2 Felt pressure	-.08	.78***	.13	.11	-.01	.09
3 Aggression toward boys	.00	.22*	.89***	.84***	.59***	.45***
4 Aggression toward girls	-.01	.18	.84***	.80***	.51***	.48***
5 Victimization by boys	.05	.04	.66***	.48***	.81***	.63***
6 Victimization by girls	-.19†	.04	.38***	.41***	.51***	.67***

Note. Entries for Time 1 are above the diagonal; entries for Time 2 are below the diagonal. Entries are partial correlations with age controlled. † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

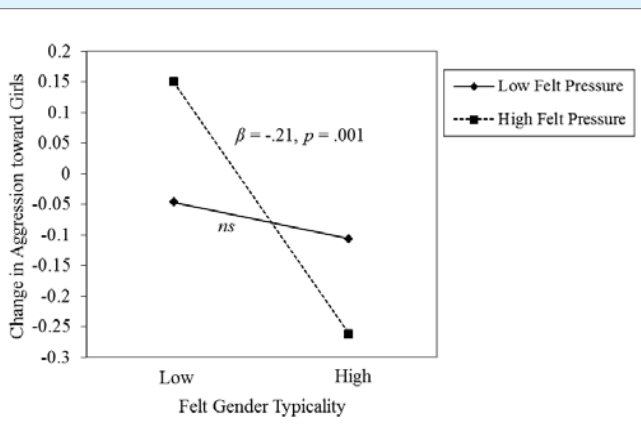


- The two-way interaction of felt gender typicality × felt pressure for gender conformity significantly predicted victimization by girls ($\beta = -.11, p = .029$).
- Follow-up analysis showed that low felt gender typicality resulted in children being more victimized by girls ($\beta = -.25, p < .001$) only if they also reported high felt-pressure for gender conformity.

Discussion

This supports the hypothesis that children who feel pressure to conform to their gender's norms yet feel like atypical members of their gender collective possess a self-discrepancy that puts them at risk for maladjustment.

- Children who possessed this type of self-discrepancy were more aggressive toward and victimized by girls.
 - It is important to note that there was no sex difference here; both boys and girls who possessed this self-discrepancy had a contentious relationship with girls and not boys. Perhaps, there are different underlying reasons why self-discrepant boys and self-discrepant girls have a contentious relationship with girls.
 - For boys, it might be that they are attempting to further derogate the out-group. These boys may already feel pressure to avoid cross-gender behavior and because they might be worrying about their own gender inadequacy, they tend to have contentious relationships with girls.
 - Gender self-discrepant girls might have a contentious relationship with others girls because they do not fit in with them. These girls may not feel like typical members of their gender collective; perhaps they hold male-typical beliefs and enjoy traditional male-typical activities. This could breed conflict with other girls.



- The two-way interaction of felt gender typicality × felt pressure for gender conformity significantly predicted aggression toward girls ($\beta = -.09, p = .037$).
- Follow-up analysis showed that low felt gender typicality encouraged children to be more aggressive towards girls ($\beta = -.21, p < .001$) only if they also reported high felt-pressure for gender conformity.