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

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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.

Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Time 1</th>
<th>Time 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender typicality</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>2.79</td>
<td>.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felt pressure</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td>.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>1.94</td>
<td>.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• The two-way interaction of felt gender typicality × felt pressure for gender conformity significantly predicted victimization by girls ($β = -0.11$, $p = 0.029$).
• Follow-up analysis showed that low felt gender typicality resulted in children being more victimized by girls ($β = -0.25$, $p < .001$) only if they also reported high felt-pressure for gender conformity.

Discussion

• 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 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.