

Trajectories of parents' gendered play attitudes during early childhood and the implications for children's gender development.

THE GIST: In this study, we wanted to get a glimpse of children's growing understanding of gender, so we observed their preferences for things like friends, toys, and clothing. We followed families over four years to study how children inherit gendered attitudes from their parents. We theorized that people may fall back on more traditional and familiar gender roles during big transitions like marriage or parenthood. When children are born, the only thing parents may know for sure about the child is the gender, so they work with that until they have more information. As children develop personalities and talents, parent ideas about gender can break down and become flexible again as they reevaluate their relationships with each other and with their child.

THE TAKEAWAY: Children base their growing understanding of gender (even gender awareness and gender stereotyping) on the attitudes of their parents during the child's early years of socializing. Parents can teach children through what they say and do, modeling gender-appropriate behavior. Parent attitudes toward gender-type play change and grow with children and life experiences. Never underestimate the influence of parents! They can be a source of change in family dynamics and help shape a child's early understanding of the world.