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The effects of gender label on young children's interpretation of an infant's behavior

Susan Sterkel Haugh

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THE EFFECT OF GENDER LABEL ON YOUNG CHILDREN'S
INTERPRETATION OF AN INFANT'S BEHAVIOR

A THESIS
PRESENTED TO THE
FACULTY OF
CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE
SAN BERNARDINO

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Psychology

by

Susan Sterkel Haugh
October 1978
THE EFFECT OF GENDER LABEL ON YOUNG CHILDREN'S INTERPRETATION OF AN INFANT'S BEHAVIOR

A Thesis
Presented to the Faculty of California State College San Bernardino

by
Susan Sterkel Haugh
October 1978

Approved by:

Chairperson

Date
ABSTRACT

The present study was designed to further investigate the effects of gender labeling by examining the extent to which the qualities attributed to an infant depend on whether that infant is described as a male or a female. Eighty children, 20 boys and 20 girls from each of 3- and 5-year-old age groups were shown a 5-minute videotape of a male and a female infant engaged in a variety of activities. One of the infants was labeled a boy and the other a girl, with these labels reversed for half of the subjects. Each child was then asked to respond to a series of 12 bipolar adjectives, 9 representing sex-stereotypic dimensions, in a forced-choice manner. As predicted the major finding was that 3- and 5-year-old boys and girls identified the infant labeled "girl" as being little, scared, slow, weak, nice, quiet, dumb and soft regardless of the infant's actual gender. As also predicted, it was found that the infant labeled "boy" was identified as being big, mad, fast, strong, mean, loud, smart and hard regardless of the infant's actual gender. The findings of this study contribute substantively to the literature by demonstrating that children as young as 3-years of age will attribute sex-stereotypic qualities to infants on the basis of gender labels. The implications of this study are discussed in relation to the major theories of early sex-role development.
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To my beautiful family Thom, Kevin, and Jennifer, my deepest thanks for their loving support and unending encouragement.
INTRODUCTION

Each individual fulfills many roles during their lifetime, however, the role ascribed on the basis of one's sex is perhaps acquired the earliest and endures the longest (Flex, Fidler & Rogers, 1976). Sex-typing has often produced rigid, mutually exclusive conceptualizations of appropriate abilities and behaviors for both females and males. Despite an increasing flexibility in the roles and activities considered permissible for each sex there is evidence that traditional sex-role stereotypes are still pervasive (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Bem, 1974). Sex-trait stereotypes may be defined as the constellations of psychological characteristics which are said to characterize one sex more or less frequently than the other. Conceptually, sex-trait stereotypes may be viewed as providing the psychological justification for the more general sex-role stereotypes which consist of beliefs concerning the appropriateness of various activities for men and women and which, in turn, support the different sex roles traditionally occupied by men and women (Best, Williams, Cloud, Davis and Robertson, 1977).

A review of the early sex-role development literature, from a variety of theoretical perspectives (Mussen, 1969; Kohlberg, 1966; Mischel, 1970 & Money, 1963) indicates
that the acquisition of concepts about sex-roles begins at an early age. Gender self-labeling is learned as early as age two and in the following two years children learn to label the gender of others by utilizing such conventional cues as hair, size and clothing (Kohlberg, 1966; Money, 1963). It has further been demonstrated that stereotypic sex-role behaviors are pronounced in four- and five-year old children (Mussen, 1969). Kohlberg has found that by age five children of both sexes attribute greater power, strength and competence to the male. At this same age a number of values are also attributed to females, including attractiveness, nurturance and moral niceness. According to Kohlberg (1966) the fact that children are still confused about genital differences at an age when they clearly stereotype sex-roles in terms of size, strength, aggression and power, strongly suggests that genital concepts do not form the direct basis for these other connotations of gender differences.

Three general theories have been postulated to explain early sex-role development (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Frieze, Parsons, Johnson, Ruble, & Zellman, 1978). Reinforcement and social learning theory emphasize the role of parents and the larger social system as the major factors in the development of sex-typed behaviors through teaching, reward and punishment, generalization and modeling (Mischel, 1970). Mischel (1970) has suggested that exposure to traditional
sex-typed models in television, movies, and children's books play a significant role in the learning of traditional sex-role standards. The second theory of early sex-role development is the psychoanalytically based identification theory. Somewhat related to social learning theory, the focus is on the role of the parents or parent surrogates in the development of sex-role behavior (Bandura, 1965; Frieze et. al., 1978). According to identification theory, children identify with their same-sex parent and imitate that parent's sex-role behaviors until eventually incorporating them as a part of his or her own personality. The third theory is the cognitive-developmental theory of sex-role development proposed by Kohlberg (1966). According to this theory, sex-typing is a cognitive-developmental process of maturation which emerges relatively independent of socialization experiences (Mussen, 1969). It emphasizes the fact that at any given developmental stage children's cognitive abilities, which include perceptions and understanding of his or her environment, are the major influence in the development of sex-role behavior. Children structure and interpret their experience at various levels of cognitive maturity in order to maintain a competent, positive self-image and to master the behaviors which they judge to be appropriate for themselves (Kohlberg, 1966). While there is a need for further empirical validation of each of these theories they currently serve to clarify various aspects of
the acquisition of sex-roles

The empirical evidence regarding the age at which the development of sex-roles begins is somewhat conflicting. Slaby and Frey (1975) investigated Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental theory of sex-role development by administering a questionnaire to children between the ages of 26-68 months. The questionnaire was designed to gather information concerning various "concept-of-gender" stages. These included gender identity, gender stability over time and gender consistency across various conditions. The results indicated that children in the youngest group (x = 34 months) had not developed any of the concept of gender stages. In this study, complete concept of gender was not demonstrated until approximately 55 months of age.

Thompson (1975) administered a series of tests to children from two- to three-years-of-age. Included in the testing series were: (1) a test designed to determine a child's ability to properly use gender labels; (2) a self-sort test which examined a child's ability to recognize him or herself in various photographs; (3) a series of questions related to concept-of-gender; (4) a picture preference test in which sex-typed or evaluative labels were attached to pictures of non-sex-typed objects in order to measure a child's selection preferences; (5) an auditory gender label preference test in which a properly selected button would activate comments related to "boys" or "girls";
(6) a sex-role stereotype test designed to determine the extent to which a child recognized sex-typed objects as being for either males or females. Contrary to the previous study by Slaby and Frey (1975), Thompson concluded that children as young as two-years-of-age are aware of certain aspects of sex stereotyping and concept-of-gender. By two-and-a-half years, it was demonstrated that children of both sexes very accurately recognized the different sexes, answered questions concerning their sex classification correctly, and demonstrated pronounced awareness of cultural sex-typing of clothing and household articles.

The majority of research in the area of the acquisition of sex-roles has focused on various gender identification concepts, sex-typing of objects, and sex-typing of activities (Slaby & Frey, 1975; Katcher, 1955; Thompson, 1975; Hartley & Hardesty, 1964). More recently, research has been directed toward the investigation of the extent to which children assign particular psychological traits to persons on the basis of sex. This process has been previously labeled sex-trait stereotyping. Williams, Bennett, and Best (1975) attempted to determine whether or not preschool children assign psychological traits to persons on the basis of sex, and if the tendency increases during the early school years. In this study a children's picture-story technique known as the Sex Stereotype Measure (Williams & Bennett, 1975) based on the male and female
stereotypes defined by college students was administered to kindergarten, second, and fourth-grade children. This measure involved telling a child a story which describes sex-stereotypical behaviors and attributes. The child is then directed to point to either a female drawing or a male drawing to indicate who the main character might be. The principle findings were that kindergarten children show an appreciable degree of knowledge of adult sex stereotypes, that this knowledge increases to the second grade level but shows no increase during the next two years, and that the male stereotype is learned at an earlier age than the female stereotype. Also, the expression of stereotypic responses was sometimes influenced by the sex of the examiner. The authors suggest that the stimulus figures (full-length drawings of males and females) may have confounded their research because of the possibility of subjects' responding to characteristics of the figure other than those which were indicative of gender.

A follow-up to the previous study has explored the development of sex-trait stereotypes in the United States, England and Ireland (Best, Williams, Cloud, Davis, Robertson, Edwards, Giles, & Fowles, 1977). A revised version of the Sex Stereotype Measure (SSM II) was developed to insure that subjects did not respond to any characteristics of the stimulus figures other than gender. This was accomplished by changing from a full-length drawing of a male and a female
to a full-length silhouette of a male and a female. The only indicators of gender were hair length and dress. The SSM II was administered to five- and eight-year-old children in the United States, England, and Ireland, and group administered to eleven-year-olds in the United States. The significant findings for children in the United States were that knowledge of sex-trait stereotypes was found to develop in a linear fashion between the ages of five and eleven, with more male traits than female traits being known at each level. More specifically, by age five, children were aware that women are supposed to be gentle and affectionate and that men are supposed to be strong, aggressive, and dominant. Contrary to the previous research, it was found that the expression of stereotypic responses was not influenced by the sex of the examiner.

A recently published study by Kuhn, Nash, and Bruken (1978) investigated the relationship between knowledge of sex-role stereotypes and comprehension of gender identity in two and three-year-old children. By utilizing a design similar to that of Williams et al. (1975), children were questioned in the areas of sex-typed activities, adult sex-roles, sex-trait stereotypes and gender identity. The results of this study yielded a high correlation (.85) between knowledge of sex-role stereotypes and comprehension of gender identity as an irreversible characteristic. Minimal knowledge of sex-trait stereotypes was demonstrated, with
children ascribing more positive characteristics to their own sex and more negative characteristics to the opposite sex, however, there was no evidence that two and three-year-old children attribute such traditional sex-trait stereotypes as strength, intelligence, fear, kindness, speed or quietness to one sex more often than the other.

The studies by Williams et al. (1975) and Best et al. (1977) have focused on the problem of assessing a child's responses to the more abstract concepts of "males in general" and "females in general" rather than the narrower aspects of sex-role stereotypes. Maccoby and Jacklin (1974) have strongly emphasized that knowledge of gender can, however unconsciously, affect the ways in which adults perceive and interpret the various behaviors of children. This thought process involves the use of the gender label to organize ambiguous, conflicting aspects of behavior and manner into a meaningful whole. To date, no research has investigated the extent to which children utilize this same process as a result of gender labeling. If adults are as instrumental in the acquisition of sex-roles as the literature indicates (McCandless, 1969), the differential effects of gender labeling on the interpretation of children's behavior in sex-role terms could play a significant part in teaching a child his/her appropriate sex-role. It could further be stated that as children develop knowledge of sex-roles and sex-trait stereotypes, they too will draw upon
this knowledge in perceiving and interpreting their own behavior as well as the behavior of their peers. This would serve to enhance the already significant effect of peer relationships in the acquisition of sex-roles (McCandless, 1969) by shaping and strengthening the traditional roles and attitudes.

While not directly applicable to children, research has examined the effects of gender labeling on adult's interpretation of an infant's behavior. In a study by Rubin, Provenzano, and Luria (1976) parents were asked to describe their newborn sons or daughters shortly after their birth. It was demonstrated that parents, especially fathers, differentially label their infants as a function of the infant's gender. These results were especially significant in light of the fact that although the sample of male and female infants did not differ in birth weight or length, the females were rated as significantly more delicate, soft, little, and fine featured, while the males were rated as significantly more large featured, well-coordinated, alert, strong, and big.

Meyer and Sobiezek (1972) presented adults with videotapes of two seventeen-month-old babies (each of whom was sometimes described as a boy and sometimes described as a girl), and asked their subjects to describe and interpret the babies' behavior. They found that male subjects, as well as those subjects who have had little contact with
small children, were more likely (although not always significantly so) to rate the children in a sex-stereotypic fashion. Such qualities as independence, aggressiveness, activity and alertness were attributed to the child presented as a boy, and the contrasting qualities of cuddliness, passivity, and delicacy to the child presented as a girl.

In a recent study by Condry and Condry (1976) a nine-month-old infant was videotaped responding to four different stimuli (teddy bear; jack-in-the-box; doll; and buzzer). Half of the adult subjects were told the infant was a girl (Dana), while the other half were told the infant was a boy (David). Subjects were asked to rate the type and intensity of emotion displayed for each stimulus. Gender label was shown to have significant effects on the ratings of the infant. These effects include: (1) when the infant was labeled "boy" it was seen as showing more pleasure, across all situations; (2) the more ambiguous the situation the more differences subjects report seeing between the sexes; (3) the infant as a "boy" was rated as experiencing more pleasure and less fear than the "girl"; (4) the infant as a "boy" was seen as being more active and potent than the infant "girl"; (5) the negative emotion displayed (crying) was labeled anger in the "boy," but fear in the "girl."

It is the purpose of this research to further
investigate the effects of gender labeling by examining the extent to which the qualities attributed to an infant depend on whether it is described as a male or a female. While utilizing research procedures similar to those in the studies by Condry et al. (1976) and Meyer et al. (1972), the present research will investigate the perceptions and interpretations of children, rather than adults.

In this research, a videotape of two twelve-month-old infants is shown to three- and five-year-old children of both sexes. For half of the children the female infant is labeled "girl" and the male infant is labeled "boy." For the remaining half of the children the labels are reversed. Children describe each infant by selecting from a series of bipolar adjectives. Nine of the adjectives represent, in a simplified form, traits which have been determined as sex-role linked in previous literature (Maccoby, 1966; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Williams & Bennett, 1975; Condry & Condry, 1976). The remaining three sets of adjectives were selected to measure same-sex preferences and value judgments (Maccoby, 1966).

The literature has provided sufficient evidence to support the hypothesis of this study that those attributes (Maccoby, 1966; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Williams & Bennett, 1975; Condry & Condry, 1976) which have been previously determined to be consistent with the male sex-role, will be used by children to describe an infant labeled "boy"
regardless of it's actual gender. It is further hypothesized that those attributes which have been previously determined to be consistent with the female sex-role (Maccoby, 1966; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Williams & Bennett, 1975; Condry & Condry, 1976), will be used by children to describe an infant labeled "girl" regardless of it's actual gender.

Previous research has demonstrated the existence of various sex-role concepts in five-year-old children (Kohlberg, 1966; Mussen, 1969; Slaby & Frey, 1975; Thompson, 1975; Katcher, 1955; Hartley & Hardesty, 1964; Williams et al., 1975; Best et al., 1977), but, the evidence regarding the age at which the development of these concepts begin is somewhat conflicting (Thompson, 1975; Slaby & Frey, 1975). The current study will investigate the effects of gender labeling on three- and five-year-old children of both sexes. In light of the findings of Best et al. (1977) that knowledge of sex-trait stereotypes develop in a linear fashion, the present study will examine developmental differences between these two age groups. Any differential effects related to the sex of the children will also be examined. Although adult research cannot be directly applied to children, the research with adults has indicated a greater tendency toward stereotyping in males than females (Meyer & Sobieszek, 1972; Rubin, Provenzano, & Luria, 1976).

This investigation will also explore the extent to which three- and five-year-old children make evaluative
judgments of children of their same sex and whether or not they show a preference for children of their same sex. The literature suggests that at this age most children value more positively those persons and objects that represent his/her own gender (Maccoby, 1966).
METHOD

Subjects

Eighty children, 20 boys and 20 girls from each of three- and five-year-old age groups participated in the present study. Children in the three-year-old group ranged in age from 36 to 47 months with a mean age of 41 months. Five-year-old children ranged in age from 60 to 71 months with a mean age of 65 months. The children were obtained through solicitation at pre-schools in the San Bernardino area. Each of the two pre-schools involved in this study were private facilities; however, approximately thirty percent of the children in attendance receive Aid to Dependent Children daycare subsidies. Letters explaining the research procedure and requesting parental permission to participate were sent home with all of the children in each of the appropriate age groups; of these, sixty percent were returned with parental permission granted (see Appendix A). The remainder of the letters were never returned, with the exception of one which was returned without parental permission granted. The children who actually participated in the study represented varied racial, religious and socio-economic backgrounds. The children also varied in the number of hours spent at the pre-school each week.
Materials

A videotape of two infants was designed for use in this study. The infants selected for the videotaping were a twelve-month-old female and a twelve-month-old male. Each of the infants had very little hair, typical for their age, and in the videotape each wore the same terry-cloth play suit. The infants each weighed twenty pounds and measured thirty inches in height. The age difference between the infants was only fourteen days, with the female being older.

A fifty-minute videotape was made of each infant playing with an assortment of toys and displaying a wide variety of behavioral responses. The toys consisted of seven non-sex-typed objects including a xylophone, picture books, a stuffed animal, nested cups, a puzzle ball, a bowl with lid, and a rubber mouse. Each infant was videotaped in the laboratory room with only the female experimenter and the infant's father present. The videotapes were then edited into one five-minute tape which was composed of seven paired behavioral sequences. The infants were arbitrarily assigned the labels "Baby A" and "Baby B," with Baby A presented first in each paired sequence. Each behavioral sequence pair depicted Baby A playing with a toy immediately followed by Baby B playing with the same toy. The length of time with each toy was matched for both infants, although the length of time varied from toy to toy. Extensive editing included matching the emotional expression and behavioral
activity of each infant in each of the seven paired sequences. The camera angle and distance were also matched in order that each infant had the same number of close-up, distance, front, and angle poses.

**Procedure**

Each child viewed the five-minute videotape individually in a room located at their respective pre-school facility. Only the experimenter and the child serving as subject were present at this time.

A block randomization procedure was used to divide the children into balanced groups. Half of each age and sex group was assigned to the first control condition in which Baby A was labeled "boy" (Bobby) and Baby B was labeled "girl" (Lisa). The remaining half of each age and sex group was assigned to the second control condition in which Baby A was labeled "girl" (Lisa) and Baby B was labeled "boy" (Bobby). The two control conditions were used to rotate the labels in order to eliminate any possible position effect. Before viewing the videotape each subject was given the following statement:

I'm here to show you a short film of two babies. One of the babies is a boy named Bobby and one of the babies is a girl named Lisa. Please watch very closely because I am going to ask you some questions about Bobby and Lisa.

As the child watched the first sequences of the videotape the experimenter identified which infant was "Lisa" and which infant was "Bobby" appropriately according to the
condition to which the child was assigned. As the videotape continued, the child was asked to identify each of the infants to make sure the correct name had been applied to each infant. All subjects found this to be an easy task.

Immediately after viewing the videotape, the child was given a photograph of each infant (taken from the videotape) and was told to remember which baby was Lisa and which baby was Bobby. The experimenter then questioned the subject utilizing the twelve bipolar adjective pairs: Big-Little; Mad-Scared; Happy-Sad; Fast-Slow; Good-Bad; Strong-Weak; Mean-Nice; Quiet-Loud; Smart-Dumb; Awake-Sleepy; Hard-Soft; Fun to play with--Not fun to play with. Each child was first asked, "Show me which baby was big (or small)." Immediately following the child's response the experimenter asked, "And which baby was small (or big)," thereby presenting a forced-choice situation. The presenting order of each adjective within a pair was randomized as was the presentation of each of the pictures. The experimenter recorded each of the subject's responses and then proceeded to the next question (see Appendix B). When the child had completed the task, she/he was thanked by the experimenter and escorted back to the classroom. The entire procedure involved approximately ten minutes for each subject.
RESULTS

The obtained distribution of all subjects' choices for each of the twelve bipolar adjectives is indicated in Tables 1 and 2.

In order to examine any interactions, a three-factor between groups analysis of variance of the number of sex-stereotypical responses for age, sex, and control condition was carried out on the nine sex-stereotype dimensions. This analysis, summarized in Table 3, revealed no significant effects.

An overall chi-square analysis was carried out in order to determine if subjects were responding in a sex-stereotypical direction. The overall analysis yielded a significant chi-square value of 78.67 ($p < .001$). A series of chi-square analyses were run to determine any response differences on each of the individual dimensions. Table 4 indicates the total number of sex-stereotypical responses across age and sex of subjects for each of the sex-stereotype dimensions. As can be seen in this table, the number of subjects responding in the sex-stereotypical direction was significant for all but one of the dimensions.

The direction of response and the actual gender of the infant were examined to detect any interaction. The
number of times each infant was identified as having male or female attributes, irrespective of the assigned gender label, was not significant. Baby A, the female infant, was given 366 female attributes and 354 male attributes, while Baby B, the male infant, was given 354 female attributes and 366 male attributes.

Another series of chi-square analyses were carried out on the three remaining non-stereotypical bipolar adjective pairs (happy/sad, fun to play with/not fun to play with, good/bad) indicated that three- and five-year-old children of both sexes (1) selected the infant with the same gender label as themselves as being happy ($X^2 = 5$, $p < .025$); (2) specified that they would have fun playing with the infant labeled as the same gender as themselves ($X^2 = 18.15$, $p < .001$); and (3) identified the infant labeled "girl" as being good ($X^2 = 5.336$, $p < .025$).
| Bipolar Adjectives | Sex of Subject | Gender Labels | | | |
|--------------------|----------------|---------------|---|---|
|                    | Males          | Females       | Boy | Girl | Boy | Girl |
| Big-Little         | 13             | 7             | 13 | 7    | | |
| Scared-Mad         | 7              | 13            | 6  | 14   | | |
| Happy-Sad          | 15             | 5             | 5  | 15   | | |
| Fast-Slow          | 16             | 4             | 17 | 3    | | |
| Good-Bad           | 10             | 10            | 2  | 18   | | |
| Strong-Weak        | 18             | 2             | 13 | 7    | | |
| Nice-Mean          | 6              | 14            | 7  | 13   | | |
| Quiet-Loud         | 7              | 13            | 5  | 15   | | |
| Smart-Dumb         | 15             | 5             | 11 | 9    | | |
| Awake-Sleepy       | 12             | 6             | 10 | 10   | | |
| Soft-Hard          | 3              | 17            | 3  | 17   | | |
| Fun to play with-  | 15             | 5             | 4  | 16   | | |
| Not fun to play with |               |               |    |      | | |

Note. Data in table indicate number of subjects choosing underlined adjective of each pair.
TABLE 2
BIPOLAR ADJECTIVE CHOICES OF FIVE-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex of Subject</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender Labels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Bipolar Adjectives</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Big-Little</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scared-Mad</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy-Sad</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast-Slow</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good-Bad</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong-Weak</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nice-Mean</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet-Loud</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart-Dumb</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awake-Sleepy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft-Hard</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fun to play with-Not fun to play with</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data in table indicate number of subjects choosing underlined adjective of each pair.
### TABLE 4
NUMBER OF SEX-STEREOTYPIC RESPONSES ACROSS AGE AND SEX OF RESPONDENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bipolar Adjectives</th>
<th>Stereotypic</th>
<th>Non-Stereotypic</th>
<th>Chi Square</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Big/Little</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8.46****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mad/Scared</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18.15*****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fast/Slow</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong/Weak</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>26.45*****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean/Nice</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>11.25*****</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quiet/Loud</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4.05*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart/Dumb</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>5.00**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awake/Sleepy</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soft/Hard</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>22.15*****</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < .05.

**p < .025.

***p < .01.

****p < .005.

*****p < .001.
DISCUSSION

The major finding of this study is that by age three children have not only learned sex-trait stereotypes, but ascribe these stereotypes to infants on the basis of whether they are told the infant is a boy or a girl and do so in the same manner as do five-year-old children. When either infant was labeled "girl," "she" was seen as little, scared, slow, weak, nice, quiet, dumb, and soft by significantly more three- and five-year-old boys and girls than was the infant labeled "boy." It was also found that significantly more three- and five-year-old boys and girls identified the infant labeled "boy" as big, mad, fast, strong, mean, loud, smart, and hard. No significant developmental differences were obtained.

As predicted, significantly more three- and five-year-old girls indicated that the infant labeled "girl" was happy and would be more fun to play with, while three- and five-year-old boys indicated that the infant labeled "boy" was happy and would be more fun to play with. Consistent with the literature which suggests that three- and five-year-old children value more positively those persons and objects which represent his/her own gender identity, the present findings emphasize the strength by which children identify with their gender at this early age. Contrary to the
hypothesis that children would identify the infant with the same gender label as themselves as being good, there was no significant response pattern overall. It is suggested that these results indicate the possibility that some children may have defined "good" in terms of "moral niceness" rather than as an indicator of positive feelings. Kohlberg (1966) has demonstrated that "moral niceness" is a sex-trait stereotype attributed to females; consequently, the direction of response on this measure may have been affected.

The results of this study add to a growing literature (Williams et al., 1975; Best et al., 1977; Kuhn et al., 1978) indicating the acquisition of sex-trait stereotypes very early, by two or three-years of age, or as soon as children can be tested systematically. These findings are especially significant because they demonstrate the strength of traditional sex-role attitudes which exist in spite of the present trend toward the re-evaluation of rigid role definitions. The fact that children have learned sex-trait stereotypes at such an incredibably early age suggests that no single learning process or socializing agent is responsible. Moreover, these findings suggest that numerous interdependent and, perhaps, reciprocal influences must be interacting to produce these impressive indicators of the early acquisition of sex-trait stereotypes. These findings that very young children can attribute on the basis of sex-trait stereotypes does, however, clearly indicate that an important early
cognitive component is at work to mediate their attributions. The fact that this cognitive process is taking place at age three is contrary to Kohlberg's cognitive developmental theory (1966) in that he has theorized that this mode of cognitive functioning would not appear until five years of age.
APPENDIX A

PARENTAL PERMISSION LETTER

June 14, 1977

Dear Parent:

I am currently working on my Master's Thesis in Psychology at California State College at San Bernardino, exploring ways in which pre-school children see and describe the behavior of infants. This work has been approved by the Department of Psychology and your child's pre-school and I am requesting your permission for your child to participate.

A two minute film will be shown to your child on an individual basis. This film consists of two twelve month old infants playing with several different toys. One infant is a boy and one is a girl. Following the film your child will be asked to indicate which words best describe each of the infants. An example of a question that could be asked is: "Which baby was quiet and which baby was loud?" Your child will indicate his/her choice by selecting a picture of one of the infants. This procedure will take place at your child's pre-school and will require approximately 10-15 minutes of his/her time. For purposes of this study, your child's identity will be kept anonymous by the use of a numerical code. It is also important to note that this experience should prove to be an enjoyable one for your child.

A copy of the final report of this study will be available upon its completion from both the pre-school your child is attending and from the Psychology Department at California State College at San Bernardino. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Susan Sterkel Haugh
Department of Psychology
California State College at San Bernardino
Department Phone: 887-7226
Home Phone: 864-0745

Charles Hoffman, Ph.D.
Department of Psychology
California State College
Phone: 887-7265

_________________________ has permission  does not have permission
(child's name)

to participate in the child development study outlined above being conducted at:

_________________________ during the week of ____________________.

Signed_________________________ (parent or guardian)
APPENDIX B

BIPOLAR ADJECTIVE CHECK LIST

1. BIG = A B ———— LITTLE = A B
2. MAD = A B ———— SCARED = A B
3. HAPPY = A B ———— SAD = A B
4. FAST = A B ———— SLOW = A B
5. GOOD = A B ———— BAD = A B
6. STRONG = A B ———— WEAK = A B
7. MEAN = A B ———— NICE = A B
8. QUIET = A B ———— LOUD = A B
9. SMART = A B ———— DUMB = A B
10. AWAKE = A B ———— SLEEPY = A B
11. HARD = A B ———— SOFT = A B
12. FUN TO PLAY W/ = A B ——— NOT FUN TO PLAY W/ = A B

COMMENTS:
REFERENCES


Williams, J. E., & Bennett, S. M. The definition of sex stereotypes via the Adjective Check List. *Sex Roles, 1975, 1*, 327-337.