



Self-Perceived Gender Typicality and Appearance-Focused

Beliefs in 6- to 10- Year Old Girls

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Introduction

- Children as young as preschool exhibit anti-fat attitudes (Holub, Tan, & Patel, 2011; Musher-Eizenman et al., 2003), and Western feminine norms entail a focus on appearance and thinness (Mahalik et al., 2005).
- Gender atypicality, in combination with high felt pressure, is a risk factor for low self-worth and depression in children (Carver et al., 2003).
- Recently, researchers have begun to examine the positive correlates of gender atypicality and have found that gender atypical children hold less rigid gender stereotypes (Patterson, 2012).

We extend this body of work testing the hypothesis that gender typicality would predict greater importance placed on appearance in girls. We also explore anti-fat stereotyping and appearance-focused beliefs as mediators of the relation between gender typicality and body esteem.

Method

Participants

- 117 girls, 6-10 years old, $M_{age} = 8.08$, 62% White

Measures

- Perceived gender typicality.** Ten items with graphic scales representing perceived similarity to girls/boys (Martin et al., 2017; see Figure 1).
- Girls as appearance-focused beliefs.** Three items developed by Stone, Brown, and Jewell (2015; e.g., "How important do you think it is that a girl looks pretty every day?") were administered using 4-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*).
- Anti-fat/thin stereotyping.** Thin and overweight figures (Figure 2) were rated on five adjective pairs presented on 7-point semantic differential scales (e.g., neat/sloppy; cute/ugly)

- Body esteem.** Nine items with responses made on 4-point scales ("Do you like what you look like in pictures?"; Mendelson, White, & Mendelson, 1996).
- Felt pressure to conform to gender norms.** Ten items assessing pressure from parents and peers to adhere to gender norms (e.g., "How upset would your parents/other kids be if you looked like a boy?"). Responses were rated on 4-point scales ranging from (1) *not at all upset* to (4) *really upset*.

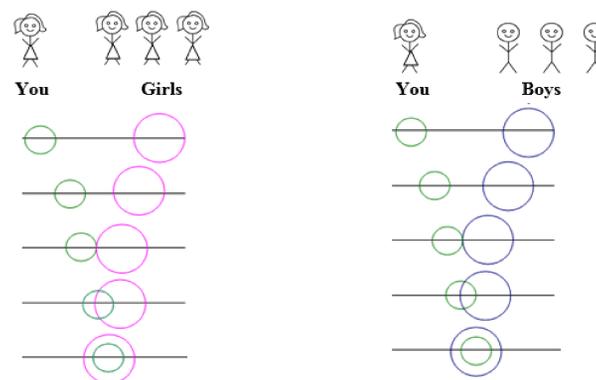


Figure 1. Graphic scales representing perceived similarity to other girls/boys.

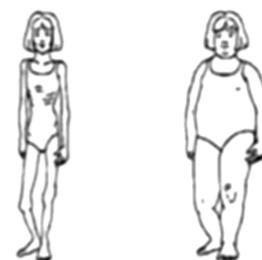


Figure 2. Figures rated in the anti-fat/anti-thin stereotyping measures

Results

- Felt similarity to girls, felt pressure from parents, and felt pressure from peers were positively associated with endorsement of girls as appearance-focused beliefs.
- There was a significant indirect effect of perceived similarity through girls as appearance-focused beliefs (see Figure 3)

- Felt pressure from peers was positively associated with endorsing negative stereotypes about the thin and overweight figures.



Figure 3. Values are unstandardized regression coefficients. The solid (dashed) lines illustrate significant (nonsignificant) relationships. The value in parentheses reflects the total effect of perceived similarity to girls on body esteem.

Table 1

Intercorrelations for Study Variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Body esteem	—						
2. Perceived similarity to other girls	-.019	—					
3. Perceived similarity to boys	-.072	.050	—				
4. Felt pressure – Parents	-.228*	.243**	-.103	—			
5. Felt pressure – Peers	-.256**	.188	-.221*	.532***	—		
6. Girls as appearance-focused beliefs	-.260**	.353***	-.006	.386***	.196*	—	
7. Anti-fat stereotyping	-.142	-.021	-.148	.161	.292**	.098	—
8. Anti-thin stereotyping	-.241**	-.098	-.154	.214*	.246**	-.094	.217*

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Discussion

- These findings point to a need to examine health behaviors that may correlate with appearance focused beliefs for girls who see themselves as more gender-typical.
- Pressure to conform to gender norms also warrants continued exploration as a body image-related risk factor.