

Do counter-stereotypic stories influence preschool children's gender stereotypes and behavioral intentions?

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Background

Children's books feature role models for gendered behavior and provide opportunities for discussing associations between gender, traits, and activities (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Accordingly, they have been proposed as sources for acquiring and reinforcing, but also for breaking gender stereotypes (e.g., Abad & Pruden, 2013). The aims of the present study were (1) to examine the impact of counter-stereotypic stories on preschool children's gender stereotypes and their behavioral intentions towards gender-associated activities, and (2) to explore the effect of gender typicality of the story protagonist on effects of counter-stereotypic stories.

Methods

To do so, 75 preschool children listened to 32 counter-stereotypic short stories (e.g., a boy playing with dolls, a girl playing soccer), with eight featuring a gender-typical male protagonist, eight a gender-typical female protagonist, eight a gender-atypical male protagonist, and eight a gender-atypical female protagonist. Gender association ratings (*Is playing soccer something for girls, boys or for both?*) and behavioral intentions (*Would you like to play soccer?*) towards gender-associated target activities were assessed before and after story presentation on a computerized visual analogue scale (range: 1 to 99).

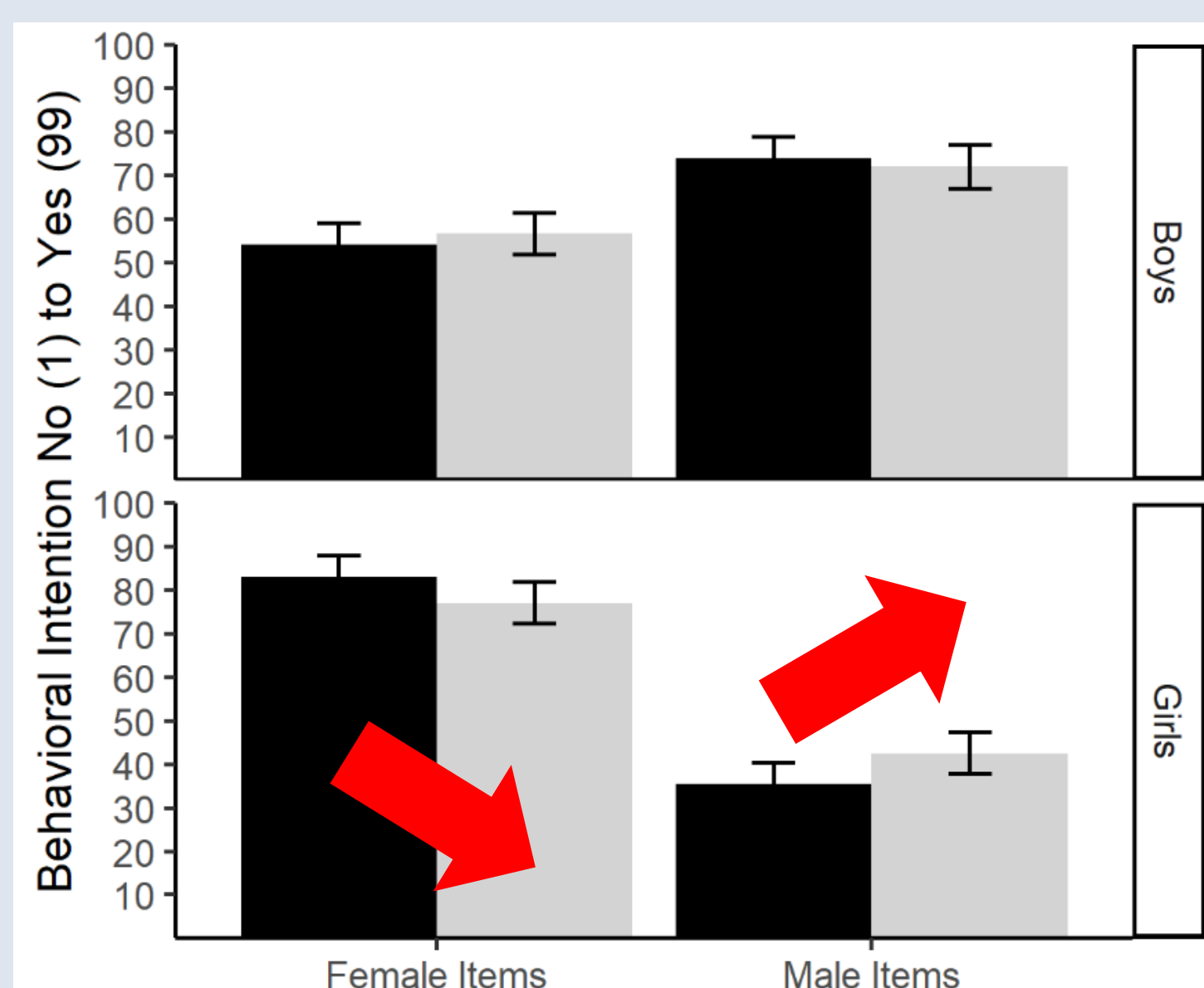
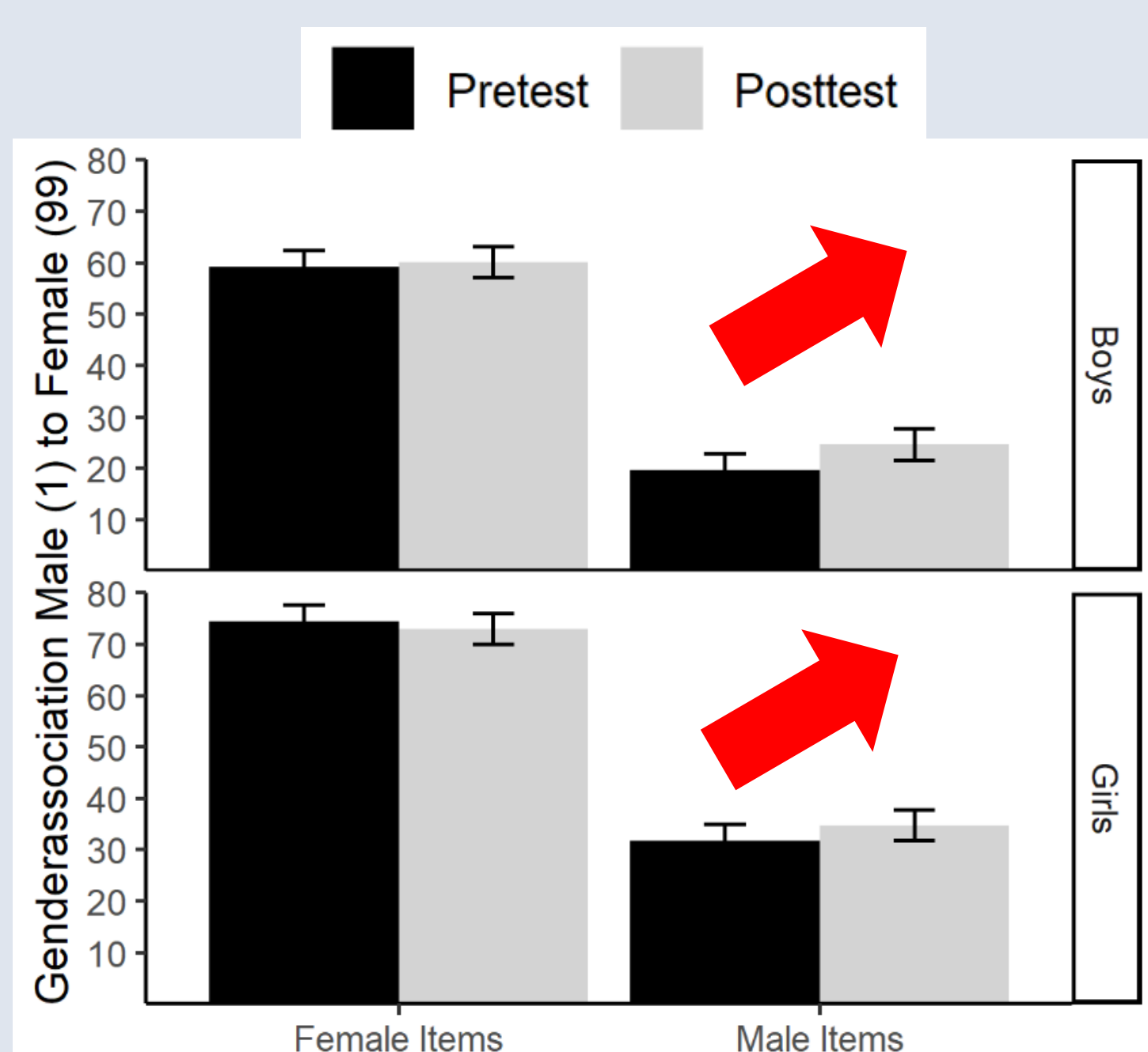
Results

Gender association ratings

- "Female" items received feminine ratings, "male" items received masculine ratings.
- Girls showed stronger gender-congruent associations for "female" items, boys for "male" items.
- Counter-stereotypic stories decreased children's associations for "male" items, but not for "female" items across girls and boys.
- No significant effect of typicality of the story protagonist (not shown in the figure).

Behavioral intention ratings

- Girls reported higher behavioral intentions towards "female" items, boys towards "male" items.
- Counter-stereotypic stories influenced girls' behavioral intentions towards "female" items (decrease) and "male" items (increase).
- No significant effect of typicality of the story protagonist (not shown in the figure).



Literature: Abad, C., & Pruden, S. M. (2013). Do storybooks really break children's gender stereotypes? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 4:986. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2013.00986>; Bussey, K., & Bandura, A. (1999). Social cognitive theory of gender development and differentiation. *Psychological Review*, 106(4), 676-713.