Development of gender knowledge and preferences about toys: looking to 4 year-old children's reasoning

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Introduction

- Toys: gateway to gender development in early childhood (preferences, knowledge) (Blakemore et al., 2009; Rouyer, 2007; Ruble et al., 2006)
- Gender development: biological, social and psychological factors (i.e. cognitive) (Blakemore et al., 2009; Ruble et al., 2006)
- Socialisation as a dynamic process linking two sides (Malrieu, 1973):
  - acculturation (internalization of the social norms)
  - personalization (construction of individuality and creation of meaning)
(Rouyer, 2007; 2013; Rouyer & Troupel-Crémel, 2013 for a review of models)
Introduction

- Gender identity (*identité sexuée*) (Mieyaa & Rouyer, 2013; Rouyer, 2007; 2013):
  - objective factors (such as the sex assignment, and gender roles culturally defined);
  - subjective factors (sense of belonging to a gender group, and sense of masculinity and femininity)

- life-span developmental perspective

- **Objective**: examine the reasoning of four-year-old French boys’ and girls’ gender classifications and preferences of toy pictures
Method

- **Participants**: 102 French children (60 boys and 42 girls), first-born and 47 months aged (mean: 47 months and 12 days), from middle to upper-middle class backgrounds.

- **Materials and procedure**:
  - each child met in a room of the nursery school
  - set of 18 pictures of masculine, feminine and neutral toys (Tap, 1985; Le Maner, 1997)
  - three steps: “familiarisation”, preferences for toys, identify « boy » and « girl »’ toys
  - how do children explain their answers?
Results - Gender preferences

- *score of gender preferences*: 1 point if a child declared he/she liked a toy conform to gender or he/she did no like a toy conform to the other gender group (0 point if not)
Results - Gender preferences

Girls and boys showed in a same proportion gender preferences for toys (no significant difference).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender preferences scores for toys</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Girls</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard deviation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Results - Gender knowledge

- **Score**: 1 point when the child did correctly label the toy as feminine, masculine or neutral (when not, 0 point)
Results - Gender knowledge

Mean gender scores for toys (standard deviation in parentheses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masculine toys</td>
<td>3.60 (1.65)</td>
<td>4.58 (1.62)</td>
<td>4.18 (1.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral toys</td>
<td>1.88 (1.88)</td>
<td>1.82 (1.59)</td>
<td>1.84 (1.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminine toys</td>
<td>4.57 (1.62)</td>
<td>3.07 (1.63)</td>
<td>3.69 (1.78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All toys</td>
<td>10.05 (2.95)</td>
<td>9.47 (2.41)</td>
<td>9.47 (2.41)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Girls knew best the feminine toys than boys (t(100)=4.59 ; p=.00) and boys knew best the masculine toys than girls (t(100)=3.01 ; p=.003)
• Lower score for neutral toys for girls and boys
Results - Reasons given by children

- 9 categories (Cherney et al., 2006):
  - gender association (GA)
  - colour (C)
  - familiarity (F)
  - not interesting (NI)
  - egocentric (E)
  - gender role (GR)
  - particular characteristics (PC)
  - previously seen (P)
  - other (A)
## Results - Reasons given by children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Girls (%)</th>
<th>Boys (%)</th>
<th>Total (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender association (GA)</td>
<td>2.13%</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Familiarity (F)</td>
<td>19.15%</td>
<td>32.88%</td>
<td>27.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Egocentric (E)</td>
<td>57.45%</td>
<td>41.10%</td>
<td>55.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender roles (GR)</td>
<td>6.38%</td>
<td>5.48%</td>
<td>5.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Particular characteristics (PC)</td>
<td></td>
<td>5.48%</td>
<td>3.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (O)</td>
<td>14.89%</td>
<td>15.07%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discussion

- Similar patterns of gender preferences and knowledge about toys for boys and girls, in particular those whose are appropriated to their gender
- Neutral toys: children tended to appropriate them to their gender group
- Two main reasons: “egocentric” and “familiarity”
- Importance of the relationships with other children (siblings or peers) in the way 4 year-old children mean gender
Conclusion

- Differential patterns linking gender knowledge and preferences for toys, and two main explanations ("egocentric"; "familiarity"), based on the way children refer to their socialisation experiences, mainly their relationships with siblings and peers.
- Importance of the way children mean gender within their environment and with their interpersonal experiences.
- Gender development as a co-construction between child and social environments.
References

