

BRIEF REPORT

Gender Identity and Adjustment in Black, Hispanic, and White Preadolescents

Brooke C. Corby
Florida Atlantic University

Ernest V. E. Hodges
St. John's University

David G. Perry
Florida Atlantic University

The generality of S. K. Egan and D. G. Perry's (2001) model of gender identity and adjustment was evaluated by examining associations between gender identity (felt gender typicality, felt gender contentedness, and felt pressure for gender conformity) and social adjustment in 863 White, Black, and Hispanic 5th graders (mean age = 11.1 years). Relations between gender identity and adjustment varied across ethnic/racial groups, indicating that S. K. Egan and D. G. Perry's model requires amendment. It is suggested that the implications of gender identity for adjustment depend on the particular meanings that a child attaches to gender (e.g., the specific attributes the child regards as desirable for each sex); these meanings may vary across and within ethnic/racial groups. Cross-ethnic/racial investigation can aid theory building by pointing to constructs that are neglected in research with a single ethnic/racial group but that are crucial components of basic developmental processes.

Keywords: gender identity, sex roles, gender roles, gender stereotypes, race

Little is known about the implications of children's gender identity for psychosocial adjustment (Ruble & Martin, 1998). Responding to this void, Egan and Perry (2001) advanced a model of gender identity and its implications for adjustment. In their model, gender identity comprises five components: (a) *membership knowledge* (knowledge of one's gender); (b) *gender typicality* (perceived similarity to others of one's gender); (c) *gender contentedness* (satisfaction with one's gender assignment); (d) *felt pressure* for gender conformity (pressure felt from parents, peers, and the self for conforming to gender stereotypes); and (e) *intergroup bias* (the belief that one's own sex is superior to the other). Three of these components are expected to affect children's psychological well-being: Appraisals of the self as gender typical and contentment with one's gender assignment are thought to be positive influences on adjustment, whereas feeling strong pressure for gender conformity is believed to be a negative influence (see Yungler, Carver, & Perry, 2004). As expected, low gender typicality, low gender contentedness, and high felt pressure are associated with less than optimal adjustment (e.g., lower self-esteem, greater inter-

nalizing symptoms, peer rejection) among White preadolescent children (Carver, Yungler, & Perry, 2003; Egan & Perry, 2001; Yungler et al., 2004).

One might assume that these links between gender identity and adjustment hold across all ethnic/racial groups. Indeed, the gender identity variables might be construed as evolved self-regulatory mechanisms that promote gender differentiation in a universal, species-wide manner (e.g., discomfort generated by self-appraisals of gender atypicality might prompt reparative efforts to be more normatively sex typed). However, given that Egan and Perry's (2001) model has received support only with predominantly White, middle-class samples, such a conclusion would be premature.

This study explored the generality of Egan and Perry's (2001) model by comparing links between gender identity and adjustment across three ethnic/racial groups—White, Black, and Hispanic preadolescents. The study was not designed as a test of a coherent model of how ethnicity or race might work together with gender identity to affect adjustment. Instead, the goal was to see whether the overall pattern of results would confirm the adequacy of Egan and Perry's model or challenge it in ways that would stimulate the development of a more adequate model of gender identity and adjustment.

Because Egan and Perry's (2001) model emphasizes the implications of gender identity for personal distress, three measures of distress—global self-worth, internalizing symptoms, and victimization by peers—were collected. For comparison, externalizing problems were also assessed; in Egan and Perry's formulation, gender identity is not hypothesized to affect ex-

Brooke C. Corby and David G. Perry, Department of Psychology, Florida Atlantic University; Ernest V. E. Hodges, Department of Psychology, St. John's University.

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to David G. Perry, Department of Psychology, Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, FL 33431. E-mail: perrydg@fau.edu

ternalizing behavior. Finally, peer reports of agentic and communal behavior were also collected; these behaviors have been suggested to be core components of male and female gender roles, respectively (e.g., Bem, 1981).

Method

Participants

Participants were 863 fifth graders (mean age = 11.1 years) attending five public elementary schools in southeast Florida. The schools generally served lower-middle-class neighborhoods. Hispanic families represented several national backgrounds (mainly Puerto Rico but also Guatemala and Mexico). Children's ethnicity/race was identified by their teacher. Participating children represented 64% of all fifth graders at the schools; participation rate did not vary significantly with ethnic/racial group. The sample of 863 children included 436 White children (212 boys, 224 girls), 260 Black children (120 boys, 140 girls), and 167 Hispanic children (88 boys, 79 girls). No data were collected for this sample regarding family socioeconomic status or level of parental education.

Procedure

A Self-Concept Questionnaire and a Peer Nomination Inventory were individually administered to children during regular school hours by one of several female graduate students.

Self-Concept Questionnaire

This questionnaire contained four scales; all items were written in the format developed by Harter (1985). The first scale was Harter's Global Self-Worth Scale (six items). Scale scores were derived by averaging across items and could range from 1 to 4, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .75 for White children, .66 for Black children, and .78 for Hispanic children.

The other three scales were developed by Egan and Perry (2001) to assess gender typicality, gender contentedness, and felt pressure. The Gender Typicality Scale (eight items) assessed the degree to which a child feels that he or she is a typical member of his or her gender. A sample item (from the girls' form) is listed below:

Some girls don't feel that they're just like all the other girls their age		BUT	Other girls do feel that they're just like all the other girls their age.	
Very true for me	Sort of true for me		Sort of true for me	Very true for me

The Gender Contentedness Scale (8 items) measured the extent to which a child is happy with his or her gender assignment (e.g., "Some girls like being a girl BUT Other girls don't. . ."). The Felt Pressure Scale (12 items) captured the degree to which a child feels pressure from parents, peers, and the self for gender conformity (e.g., "Some girls think their parents would be upset if they wanted to play with boys' toys BUT Other girls don't think. . ."). For each of the three gender identity measures, scale scores were formed by averaging across items and could range from 1 to 4, with higher scores indicating higher gender typicality, higher gender contentedness, or higher felt pressure. For White, Black, and Hispanic children, respectively, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were .85, .73, and .78 for gender typicality; .81, .64, and .64 for gender contentedness; and .94, .89, and .92 for felt pressure.

Peer Nomination Inventory

Peer-reported adjustment was assessed with a modification of Wiggins and Winder's (1961) Peer Nomination Inventory. The 40-item

inventory included items tapping *agentic traits* (5 items), *communal traits* (5 items), *internalizing problems* (11 items), *victimization* (3 items), and *externalizing problems* (9 items); remaining items were fillers. Children checked off the names of same-sex classmates who fit the behavioral description in each item. A child's score on each item was calculated as the proportion of same-sex classmates who checked the child's name for the item, and the child's score on each scale was calculated by averaging the child's scores across the scale's items. Agentic items tapped bravery, interest in sports, assertiveness, leadership, and competitiveness (e.g., "She stands up for herself when someone tries to push her around"). Communal items assessed agreeableness, helpfulness, sharing, friendliness, and empathy (e.g., "When a kid is sad, she tries to make them feel better"). Internalizing items tapped self-derogation, social withdrawal, sadness, anxiety, and helplessness (e.g., "She says bad things about herself"). Victimization items tapped physical and verbal abuse by peers (e.g., "She gets hit and pushed by other kids"). Externalizing items assessed aggression, disruptiveness, dishonesty, and argumentativeness (e.g., "She hits and pushes others around"). Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the scales were similar across ethnic/racial groups; for the total sample, the coefficients for the scales assessing agentic traits, communal traits, internalizing difficulties, victimization, and externalizing problems, respectively, were .84, .87, .86, .90, and .95.

Results

Sex and Ethnic/Racial Differences in Means and Intercorrelations of Gender Identity Measures

A 2 (sex) $\times$ 3 (ethnic/racial group) analysis of variance was performed on each gender identity measure. On all three measures, boys far outscored girls ($ps < .001$); means for boys (means for girls shown in parentheses) on gender typicality, gender contentedness, and felt pressure, respectively, were 2.94 (2.62), 3.49 (3.05), and 3.05 (2.14). Of greater interest is that ethnic/racial groups differed significantly on only one measure—felt pressure for gender conformity, $F(2, 857) = 7.52$, $p < .001$; means (and standard deviations) for White, Black, and Hispanic children, respectively, were 2.50 (0.62), 2.61 (0.63), and 2.75 (0.63). White children reported significantly less pressure than both Black children ($p < .05$) and Hispanic children ($p < .001$), but the latter two groups did not differ significantly.

Table 1 displays correlations among the gender identity measures for each ethnic/racial group (and for each sex). The associations do not differ much by ethnic/racial group or sex, with the exception that for Black boys there is a significant (positive) association between gender typicality and felt pressure. In general, the correlations among the gender identity measures are not great, suggesting that a multidimensional perspective on gender identity is applicable across the three ethnic/racial groups.¹

¹ Although the three gender identity measures generally relate similarly to one another across the participant groups (i.e., Sex $\times$ Ethnic/Racial Groups), it is acknowledged that the factor structure underlying gender identity may differ somewhat across groups. Given the limited sizes of our minority samples, we did not perform factor analyses of our gender identity items by subgroup, but such analyses should be undertaken with larger samples in the future.

Table 1
Correlations Among Gender Identity Measures

Measure	Gender typicality	Gender contentedness	Felt pressure
White children			
Gender typicality	—	.26**	.04
Gender contentedness	.37**	—	.21**
Felt pressure	.12	.28**	—
Black children			
Gender typicality	—	.26**	.23*
Gender contentedness	.17*	—	.38**
Felt pressure	-.04	.22**	—
Hispanic children			
Gender typicality	—	.18	.01
Gender contentedness	.29**	—	.23*
Felt pressure	.10	.34**	—

Note. For each ethnic group, relations for boys are above the diagonal; relations for girls are below the diagonal.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Relations Between Gender Identity and Adjustment

Relations between gender identity and adjustment were examined with multiple regression. Initially, omnibus regression analyses were run to determine whether associations between gender identity and adjustment vary with child sex, ethnic/racial group, or both. In these preliminary analyses, performed on the total sample, each adjustment measure served as a dependent variable in three hierarchical regression analyses (one for each gender identity measure). In each analysis, predictors included three main effects (a gender identity variable, sex, and ethnic/racial group), all possible two-way interactions, and the three-way interaction. In these analyses, $p < .10$ was adopted as the criterion for significance of an interaction term; this practice helps compensate for the low power of regression product terms (Jaccard & Wan, 1995; McClelland & Judd, 1993). Numerous significant interactions were found. There was a significant Sex $\times$ Gender Identity interaction in four analyses: Sex interacted with gender contentedness to predict internalizing problems ($p < .001$) and with felt pressure to predict agentic behavior ($p < .05$), internalizing problems ($p < .001$), and victimization ($p < .002$). Five Ethnicity/Race $\times$ Gender Identity interactions were significant: Ethnicity/Race interacted with gender typicality to predict global self-worth ($p < .03$), communal behavior ($p < .10$), and victimization ($p < .10$) and with felt pressure to predict global self-worth ($p < .01$) and internalizing problems ($p < .06$). The three-way interaction of Sex $\times$ Ethnicity/Race $\times$ Gender Identity was significant in six analyses: Gender typicality interacted with sex and ethnicity/race to predict agentic behavior ($p < .03$); gender contentedness interacted with sex and ethnicity/race to predict communal behavior ($p < .06$), internalizing problems ($p < .08$), and victimization ($p < .05$); and felt pressure interacted with sex and ethnicity/race to predict internalizing problems ($p < .05$) and externalizing problems ($p < .05$).

Because so many associations between gender identity and adjustment were moderated by sex, ethnicity/race, or both, asso-

ciations between the gender identity measures and the adjustment measures are presented separately for each Sex $\times$ Ethnic/Racial Group in Table 2. Table entries that are not in parentheses tell the zero-order associations (standardized beta coefficients) between the gender identity measures and the adjustment measures. The significant interaction effects summarized in the preceding paragraph indicate significant sources of variability, if any, among the betas within the rows of the table.

Also presented in Table 2 are results from regression analyses in which all three gender identity variables were simultaneously entered as predictors of an adjustment index. Table entries in parentheses are standardized betas that tell the relation of each gender identity variable to each adjustment index with the other two gender identity variables controlled. These analyses were conducted because there were significant (albeit modest) correlations among the gender identity variables (see Table 1). When predictors are correlated, evaluating the effect of each predictor with the other predictors controlled guards not only against spurious associations but also against failure to detect true associations owing to suppressor effects. Moreover, Egan and Perry's (2001) multidimensional model holds that the different dimensions of gender identity make additive contributions to adjustment; these analyses evaluate that proposition.²

² Unsurprisingly, the strength of some associations in Table 2 varies depending on whether the other two gender identity variables are controlled or uncontrolled. For example, as may be seen, the relation of felt pressure to global self-worth for White children is significant only when the other two gender identity variables are controlled, indicating that, when left uncontrolled, the other gender identity variables suppress the relation of felt pressure to self-esteem (this may occur because felt pressure and gender contentedness are positively correlated with each other yet bear opposite relations to self-esteem). In general, however, the betas are not greatly different when the other gender identity variables are controlled versus uncontrolled.

Table 2
Associations Between Gender Identity Measures and Adjustment Measures

Predictor	White children		Black children		Hispanic children	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Global self-worth						
Gender typicality	.42** (.36**)	.41** (.35**)	.13 (.06)	.21* (.16*)	.47** (.46**)	.23* (.23*)
Gender contentedness	.34** (.28**)	.34** (.24**)	.31** (.28**)	.36** (.33**)	.12 (.07)	.10 (.16)
Felt pressure	-.13 (-.20**)	-.02 (-.13*)	.14 (.03)	.04 (-.02)	-.11 (-.13)	-.29** (-.35**)
Agentic behavior						
Gender typicality	.23** (.24**)	.00 (.05)	-.11 (-.10)	.05 (.04)	-.04 (-.02)	.07 (.14)
Gender contentedness	.04 (-.03)	-.14† (-.11)	-.08 (-.05)	.00 (.02)	-.06 (-.10)	-.25† (-.26*)
Felt pressure	.01 (.01)	-.18** (-.16*)	-.04 (.00)	-.10 (-.10)	.20† (.22*)	-.15 (-.08)
Communal behavior						
Gender typicality	.04 (.05)	.10 (.04)	-.04 (-.06)	.06 (.06)	-.11 (-.17)	-.15 (-.17)
Gender contentedness	-.03 (-.03)	.18** (.19**)	.09 (.12)	-.04 (.00)	.31** (.35**)	.02 (.06)
Felt pressure	-.08 (-.07)	-.04 (-.10)	.00 (-.02)	-.21* (-.21*)	.03 (-.04)	.04 (.04)
Internalizing problems						
Gender typicality	-.20** (-.16*)	-.10 (-.16**)	-.09 (-.10)	-.04 (-.04)	-.17 (-.16)	-.19† (-.30**)
Gender contentedness	-.21** (-.17*)	.12† (.10)	.03 (.07)	.02 (.01)	-.10 (-.02)	.37** (.40**)
Felt pressure	.00 (.05)	.32** (.32**)	-.04 (-.04)	.07 (.07)	-.22* (-.22*)	.27* (.18)
Victimization						
Gender typicality	-.18** (-.15*)	-.15* (-.19**)	.04 (.02)	-.04 (-.01)	-.05 (-.02)	-.12 (-.16)
Gender contentedness	-.19** (-.15*)	.03 (.03)	.10 (.12)	-.13 (-.17)	-.14 (-.11)	.11 (.08)
Felt pressure	-.02 (.02)	.24** (.25**)	-.02 (-.07)	.11 (.14)	-.10 (-.08)	.21† (.19)
Externalizing problems						
Gender typicality	-.04 (-.02)	-.05 (-.03)	-.01 (.03)	-.08 (-.05)	.02 (.06)	.04 (.10)
Gender contentedness	-.09 (-.11)	-.07 (-.07)	-.08 (-.03)	-.08 (-.12)	-.23* (-.23*)	-.20 (-.20)
Felt pressure	.07 (.09)	.04 (.06)	-.13 (-.13)	.15† (.17*)	-.09 (-.04)	-.11 (-.06)

Note. Entries outside of parentheses are the associations (standardized betas) between the gender identity measure and the adjustment measure without controlling for the other two gender identity variables. Entries within parentheses are the associations (standardized betas) between the gender identity measure and the adjustment measure controlling for the other two gender identity variables.

† $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

We highlight here results relevant to Egan and Perry's (2001) hypotheses (i.e., relations between gender identity and distress), although it is clear from the regression results that ethnic/racial group also moderated other links between gender identity and adjustment. First, we consider whether results for White children replicate prior findings. Then, considering each minority group in turn, we highlight unanticipated results that challenge Egan and Perry's model.

White children. Consistent with prior findings, high gender typicality, high gender contentedness, and low felt pressure tend to be associated with favorable adjustment (high self-esteem, low internalizing problems, and low victimization) for White children (see first two columns of Table 2). Some associations are evident only for one sex (also consistent with prior findings), but no association is significant in a direction opposite to that expected.

Black children. The most remarkable feature of results for Black children is the paucity of relations between gender identity

and adjustment. Although, as expected, gender contentedness is strongly correlated with self-esteem, neither gender typicality nor felt pressure bears a strong or consistent relation with any adjustment index. One might think the low reliability of certain measures for Black children accounts for the few associations found for these children. However, the strongest associations found for Black children (associations between gender contentedness and global self-worth) involved measures with the lowest reliability, arguing against such an interpretation.

Hispanic children. Results for Hispanic children are provocative. Although, as expected, feeling gender typical tends to be associated with favorable adjustment for Hispanic children (generally to about the same degree as for White children), gender contentedness and felt pressure bear some significant associations with adjustment that are opposite to those anticipated by Egan and Perry's (2001) model. Two findings are noteworthy. First, for Hispanic girls, gender contentedness is associated with higher

rather than lower internalizing problems. Second, for Hispanic boys, felt pressure is associated with lower rather than higher internalizing problems.

Discussion

Results for White children generally are consistent with predictions of Egan and Perry's (2001) model and with prior findings with predominantly White samples: Feeling gender typical, feeling content with one's gender, and feeling free of pressure for gender conformity tended to be associated with favorable personal and social adjustment. However, clear differences among ethnic/racial groups either in mean levels of gender identity or in relations between gender identity and adjustment were also found. Three findings are noteworthy. First, Black and Hispanic children reported more pressure for gender conformity than White children did. Second, for Black children there were very few associations between gender identity and adjustment, though gender contentedness was strongly linked to self-esteem, as it was for White children. Third, although some associations for Hispanic children were similar to those for White children, gender contentment was associated with internalizing problems for Hispanic girls, and felt pressure was associated with reduced internalizing problems for Hispanic boys. These latter results directly contradict Egan and Perry's predictions.

How should these influences of ethnic/racial group be understood, and what implications do they hold for Egan and Perry's (2001) model? One might be tempted to interpret certain results in terms of broad dimensions of between-culture variability. For example, it might be argued that Black and Hispanic children report stronger pressure for gender conformity because their cultures are relatively collectivist (pressures for group conformity presumably are stronger in collectivist as opposed to individualist cultures; A. P. Fiske, Kitayama, Markus, & Nisbett, 1998), or it might be argued that the internalizing difficulties of Hispanic girls who voice strong gender contentment reflect these girls' internalization of a patriarchal, subservient, and helpless role for girls. Explaining our ethnic/racial differences in terms of broad cultural influences, however, may be ill advised for several reasons. First, each of our three ethnic/racial groups is likely to be culturally diverse (i.e., comprising several subcultures), so characterizing them in terms of broad cultural stereotypes may be misleading. Indeed, even within a given subculture, children are likely to differ in the messages they internalize about gender (see below). Second, in this study, no assessments were made on cultural variables that might permit inferences about cultural influence. Third, certain of our ethnic/racial effects can be explained without reference to cultural content. For example, the greater felt pressure for gender conformity reported by Black and Hispanic children may reflect the fact that persons of minority status tend to self-generate pressure to adhere to groups norms, including gender norms (Arndt, Greenberg, Schimmel, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 2002; S. T. Fiske, 1993; Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson, 2003). In a similar vein, the paucity of associations between gender identity and adjustment for Black children may indicate not that gender is relatively unimportant in Black culture, but rather that Black preadolescents are coping with a racial minority identity, causing other dimensions of identity to be less influential at this age.

Notwithstanding these interpretive complications, the results of this study do point to one firm conclusion: As currently formulated, Egan and Perry's (2001) model of gender identity and adjustment has limited applicability to Black and Hispanic children. Additional conceptual and empirical work is needed to understand why. Perhaps separate models of gender identity and adjustment will be required for minority children. An alternative solution might be to attempt to modify Egan and Perry's model to account more adequately for variability between (and within) ethnic/racial groups in the impact of gender identity on adjustment. We offer here a tentative reformulation, as follows. In Egan and Perry's original model, gender identity is cast as a direct influence on adjustment. However, the implications of gender identity for adjustment may hinge crucially on the particular messages about gender that children experience and internalize (depending on many variables, some of which are culture correlated, such as family practices and relationships, socioeconomic status, religion, neighborhood, peer groups, and media exposure). The extent to which gender identity contributes to healthy adjustment may depend on the degree to which children internalize gender norms that are healthy and adaptive. For children with socially maladaptive or inherently self-limiting gender beliefs (e.g., a boy who defines maleness in terms of violence, dangerous risk-taking, and defiance of adults, or a girl who defines femaleness in terms of subservience to men, helplessness, and self-deprecation), stronger gender typicality, gender contentedness, and felt pressure may all promote unhealthy adaptation (including externalizing problems, at least for boys).

This consideration suggests that Egan and Perry's (2001) model might be amended to include an additional cognitive construct—children's conceptions of the attributes that are important for persons of each sex to possess. In this revised model, children's gender identity and children's conceptions of gender roles become two interacting components of a causal cognitive system, with the effects of gender identity on adjustment moderated by the specific content (and adaptiveness) of children's conceptions of gender roles. Some recent efforts to assess children's and adolescents' gender conceptions and ideologies have been made (e.g., McHale, Kim, Whiteman, & Crouter, 2004; Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1993). Including assessments of children's conceptions of gender roles along with assessments of their gender identity in future research would allow determining not only the degree to which gender conceptions differ across ethnic/racial subgroups but also the degree to which such conceptions actually account for between- and within-ethnic/racial group variability in the impact of gender identity on adjustment.

Several limitations of this study should be underscored. First, as noted, the assignment of children to three generic ethnic/racial groups masks the considerable diversity that likely characterizes children (and their subcultures) within each generic group. Second, participants were preadolescents; caution should be exercised in generalizing results to younger or older age groups. Third, the study was not longitudinal. Although a recent longitudinal study suggests that gender identity is more likely a determinant than a consequence of adjustment (Yunger et al., 2004), some of the associations found in the present study may reflect effects of behavior on gender identity. A longitudinal study that tests the reformulated version of Egan and Perry's (2001) model with children of diverse ages and backgrounds would be especially

useful in helping researchers understand how children's gendered cognitions contribute to their development and their well-being.

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