

Running Head: GENDER ROLES

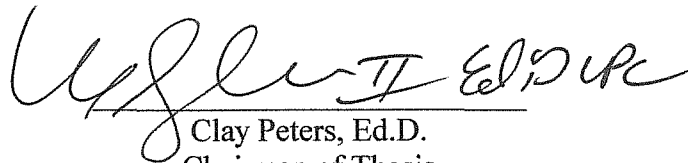
External Influences of Children's Socialization to Gender Roles

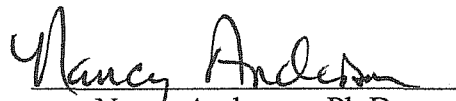
Sarah A. Chartschlaa

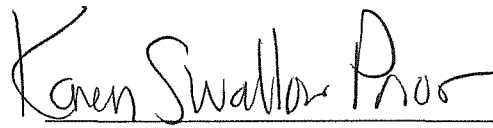
A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for graduation  
in the Honors Program  
Liberty University  
Fall Semester 2004

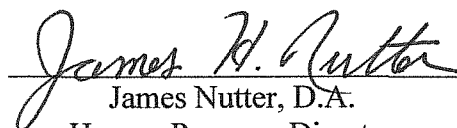
Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the Honors Program of Liberty University.

  
Clay Peters, Ed.D.  
Chairman of Thesis

  
Nancy Anderson, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

  
Karen Prior, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

  
James Nutter, D.A.  
Honors Program Director

  
Date

## Abstract

It is evident in North American society that there are certain roles placed on boys and girls in accordance with their gender. These gender roles are imposed on children from birth and are taught until eventually they are accepted as absolute truth. Newborn babies are carried out of the hospital in either a pink blanket or a blue blanket depending on gender. Gifts of trucks or dolls are given to toddlers depending on the child's sex. Stories about princesses are read to little girls, while stories of dragons and swords are read to little boys. This socialization of gender roles is reinforced through the family, media, and education system. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of childhood on adults' opinions of gender roles. It was hypothesized that this study would lend support to the theory that family has an influential role in determining one's views of gender. However, the findings did not support the hypothesis that college students from non-traditional families would hold more non-traditional gender role stereotypes than children from traditional families.

### External Influences of Children's Socialization to Gender Roles

Children in this society learn at a very young age that there are differences between boys and girls. This idea permeates daily life and is encouraged by parents, peers, school, and the media. Little girls learn that they are supposed to like dolls and pink, while little boys learn that they are supposed to like trucks and the color blue. Through various forms of guidance and direction from external influences, children experience gender role socialization (Albert, 1988). They quickly learn what behaviors are encouraged by their parents and peers, and which ones are not. These ideas are further reinforced by the media's portrayal of traditional gender roles. As a result, children internalize these beliefs pertaining to gender roles and their behavior is modified accordingly.

During the second half of the twentieth century there was a dramatic shift in society's perception of gender roles. This was due to many variables but the most prominent influence was the increase of women in the workplace. The public began to see men and women from a more equalitarian viewpoint. Researchers hypothesized that this would result in a decrease of gender role stereotypes throughout society. However, there has not been a significant change in adults' perceptions of gender roles as they relate to children (Brooks & Bolzendahl, 2004).

The stereotypes that adults hold pertaining to gender roles has a significant influence on children. Adults may inadvertently reward or punish children on the basis of these stereotypes. Children may also form their own stereotypes based on the stereotypes they observe in the adults within their environment (Martin, 1995). Adults,

whether intentionally or not, influence children in regard to gender role socialization through the family, media and school system.

### The Influence of Family on Gender Role Stereotypes

The child's first influence in regards to gender roles is the family. From birth to five years of age, most children are almost constantly surrounded by family. A child's first exposure to gender differences is learned through interaction with his or her parents. Most parents dress their infants in gender-specific clothing and give them toys according to gender stereotypes. One study shows that parents expect their infants to act differently, according to gender, as early as 24 hours after birth (Witt, 1997). The colors that parents use in clothing, room décor, and toys is one way in which gender role stereotyping is evident. Color serves as a cue to inform children of whether an article is masculine or feminine. A study on children's rooms reflects gender differences. Little girls' rooms tend to be decorated in pink with dolls and manipulative toys. Little boys' rooms tend to have more blue and include items like sports equipment and vehicles (Pomerleau, Bolduc, Malcuit & Cossette, 1990).

Gender stereotypes are especially evident in the distribution of gender specific toys to children. In one study parents were asked to sort toys into three categories: masculine, feminine, and neutral. The parents were then asked to play with their toddlers while being observed. Researchers found that the parents of the boys tended to exclusively play with masculine toys while entertaining their child. The parents of the girl toddlers were a little more flexible in their choice of toys and would use both feminine and neutral toys to amuse their children (Wood, 2002). This study reflects the unyielding expectations by which boys are required to play with only masculine toys and

the acceptance of girls playing with toys of a feminine and gender neutral nature. The distribution of toys has often been seen as one of the most prevalent forms of gender role socialization within the family (Campenni, 1999).

Although both parents in this study displayed a degree of gender stereotypical behavior in regards to toy selection, fathers were found to have more rigid stereotyped expectations. Fathers were much more likely to play with dolls with their daughters than they were with their sons. Also, they were more likely than mothers to give their children sex stereotyped toys. However, neither parent verbally discouraged or physically prevented their child from playing with a toy associated with the other sex (Wood, 2002). Fisher-Thompson (1990) did a study on toys purchased by adults who were exiting a toy store. It was found that the adults were more likely to buy gender-stereotyped toys than more neutral alternatives. This was especially true in regards to toys purchased for boys.

By the age of one year old, boys and girls are treated differently by their fathers. Fathers were more likely to use physical or verbal prohibitions with their one-year-old sons than they were with their daughters of the same age. Also, fathers and daughters were more likely to be in close proximity as opposed to fathers and sons. Fathers more frequently held their daughters than their sons. Various conclusions were drawn based on this data. For example, fathers perceive girls as softer and therefore more sensitive to harsh rebuke than sons. This perception is usually carried on into adolescence when fathers are more likely to reprimand their sons than their daughters. The fact that fathers were more likely to hold their daughters than their sons is also a trend that carries on into adolescence. Fathers are much less likely to show physical affection to their adolescent sons than they are to their adolescent daughters (Snow, Jacklin & Maccoby, 1983).

These differences in the way that fathers treat their infant sons and daughters reflects gender role socialization virtually from birth.

Early in life children observe the interactions between the family and form conclusions pertaining to gender roles. One of the most prevalent influences in a child's gender acquisition is his or her observation of the distribution of household chores. Household chores can be seen as a symbol of gender attitudes in the home. In a study on gender acquisition through household chores, Cunningham (2001) discovered that early childhood factors within the home are significant in the gender acquisition process. He also found that the mother's attitude towards gender roles influenced the children's attitudes. This was especially true in regards to the mother's perspective on division of labor. The child's opinion on the ideal division of tasks significantly reflected the mother's attitude. Children are more likely to agree that stereotypical female chores should be divided between the parents if their father was actively involved in household chores. Cunningham's work further expressed that children tended to support family behavior patterns that were similar to their family of origin. The parents' roles in regards to household chores also affect the children's chores. Women who view cleaning and cooking as gender specific will not encourage their sons to participate. These views are thus passed down from generation to generation. This research reflects the significance the family has in regards to the socialization of a child (Antill, 1996).

One study surveyed parents in regards to the career aspirations they had for their male and female children. The study found that most parents were supportive and enthusiastic that their daughters were studying physical science and other traditionally masculine subjects. The parents were also supportive of mothers working outside the

home, equal pay and equal distribution of domestic chores between the males and females of a family. However, the researchers found that the parents were sending mixed messages to their children. Although they were supportive of non-traditional roles for women in society as a whole, they had very different expectations of their own children. Within the families, the domestic labor was incredibly sex stereotyped in regards to which child did which chore. When asked in the survey if both boys and girls should have the same household chores, 79% of the parents responded affirmatively. However, when the parents were questioned in regards to their own children, it was found that only 29% of the boys helped with cleaning the house while 72% of the girls were required to perform this task (Kelly, 1982). This is significant because while many parents profess to believe in the theoretical equality of the sexes, this belief is not evident in their daily life practices and their childrearing.

In general, parents tend to encourage their children to participate in gender specific activities. For example, boys are more likely to be encouraged to play sports, while girls are encouraged to participate in housekeeping activities (Witt, 1997). Research has consistently shown that parents treat sons and daughters differently as well as expecting them to act differently. Parents tend to expect sons to be involved in play which involves motor activity and rough housing. However, this same behavior is usually seen as inappropriate aggression in daughters (Albert, 1988).

Parents in one study were asked to identify the differences between girls and boys. They were much more likely to identify differences about the children's interests rather than personality traits. Typical boy behaviors were "being noisy, rough, active, competitive, defending themselves, defying punishment, doing dangerous things and



enjoying mechanical objects” (Martin, 1995, p. 728). The behaviors identified as characteristic of girls were, “being helpful, neat and clean, quiet, well-mannered, being a tattletale, crying and being easily frightened” (p. 728). Although parents identified different typical behaviors for the sexes, they identified the same behaviors as being ideal for both genders. These ideal behaviors included being neat and clean, helpful, taking of themselves, not being easily angered, not doing dangerous things, not crying, being thoughtful and considerate, defending themselves, and being competitive. This information is significant because it reflects that parents want their children of both sexes to reach the same goals of desirable behavior, but they believe that their children are starting from different points (Martin, 1995).

Within the family there is a definite double standard by which girls are allowed to display traditionally masculine characteristics but boys are restricted from displaying traditionally feminine characteristics. The word *tomboy* is one which refers to a girl who does not enjoy wearing pink dresses, plays with boys and prefers stereotypically masculine toys as opposed to dolls. Girls who display these characteristics during childhood very rarely experience negative consequences for their choices. However, boys who enjoy playing with dolls or playing dress-up are labeled as *sissies* and do receive negative consequences for their behavior. Parents are far more likely to encourage their daughters to adopt masculine qualities than they are to encourage their sons to adopt feminine qualities (Van Volkom, 2003).

Although parents are the greatest influence within the family in teaching gender roles, older siblings also play a part in the socialization process. Research supports the theory that children learn same sex stereotypes from older siblings through forms of

modeling and reinforcement (Albert, 1988). Children's observations of older siblings' behaviors serve as a guide to gender role expectations. Therefore, these observations increase the likelihood that these gender role stereotypes will be internalized by younger siblings and adopted. Older siblings frequently serve as examples in selections of activities, hobbies, interests, and goals (Van Volkom, 2003). Consequently, older siblings are a means by which gender role stereotypes continue to perpetuate in society.

### The Influence of Media on Gender Role Stereotypes

Media is also a powerful tool by which gender roles are learned by children. This is especially true of television advertising. One study showed that advertisements oriented towards boys used words emphasizing action, competition, destruction, agency, and control. This clearly reflects the media's perspective that the male role involves those elements. Young boys are taught through the media that they are supposed to identify with these characteristics. The study also showed that advertisements targeting girls used verb elements that emphasized limited activity, feelings, and nurturing. These advertisements, therefore, encourage girls to be less active and more emotional than their male counterparts (Johnson, 2002). Another similar study found that advertisements featuring only one sex tended to exhibit sex role stereotypes. Since children often model behavior they see on television, the media is encouraging children to display traditional gender roles behavior (Smith, 1994).

Television programs also influence children as they are learning gender roles. Television teaches children messages pertaining to what behaviors are gender appropriate. One study found that only 17.7 % of major characters in prime time television were women. The women usually filled less serious and less significant roles.

The male actors were more likely to dominate the show and were usually the focus of attention. The study further showed that 40% of females appearing on screen filled light or comic roles. This reflects primetime television's unwillingness to take women seriously (Elasmar, 1999). Children internalize these messages and learn that men are to be taken more seriously than women.

A study was also done on animated cartoons since this television programming is deliberately aimed towards children. The study included 176 episodes of various animated cartoons from 41 different programs. The researchers concluded that the majority of the lead roles were given to male characters. Of further significance is their conclusion that the male and female characters exhibited gender stereotypic roles (Johnson, 2002). A similar study was done by professors at the University of California, Santa Cruz. They also found that male characters were significantly more prevalent than female characters. Male characters were also more likely to use physical aggression than were the female characters. Female characters exhibited behavior including showing fear, acting romantic, being polite and acting supportive (Leaper, Breed, Hoffman, & Perlman, 2002). This study is particularly significant since aggression is a trait that is commonly associated with masculinity. The fact that male cartoon characters display more aggression than females is a cue for young male viewers of expected behavior. The same is true for female viewers in regards to the traits commonly exhibited by female cartoon characters. Children model the behaviors they see displayed on television and internalize the messages of gender role expectations (Johnson, 2002).

Not only were the cartoon programs stereotyped, but the commercials shown during children's television programming are also guilty of portraying gender role

stereotypes. Females were commonly shown in passive roles rather than being actively involved with the activities depicted in the commercials. More males than females were shown in the workplace, and more females than males were shown in the home. Men were commonly shown in independent, high activity positions, whereas women were shown in passive, group oriented roles. The commercials send messages to children that if they want to be socially acceptable little girls and boys, then they will desire the gender appropriate products and behave in the ways depicted by the actors (Davis, 2003).

Various studies have shown that children who watch more television have more traditional sex role stereotypes than other children. Kimball compared children's sex-typed attitudes in different towns. Most of the towns had access to television, and there was one without access. The children who lived in the town without television possessed very low perceptions of sex-typed roles in comparison with the children from surrounding towns. However, only two years after television was introduced to the town there was no difference in children's perceptions of sex-typed roles (Kimball, 1986). The children had undergone gender role socialization through the influence of the media.

The physical characteristics of the women portrayed in primetime television are also significant in the transference of gender roles. Elasmar's study (1990) found that the average woman portrayed in the early 1990s, was young, single, independent, and free from family and workplace pressures. This role provides young girls with a model of behavior to which they should attain. Therefore, girls are taught that they are to be carefree and lighthearted. A different study found that female characters on television were more likely to be provocatively dressed than males. This included tight fitting clothing as well as being scantily clad (Glascock, 2001). Thus, young girls learn that

their role is to seduce and excite men. Young boys, on the other hand, learn that men are inept and irresponsible. This is due to the increase in comedy series depicting the men as weak and blubbing fools while the women are strong and responsible (Glascock, 2001). Therefore, both boys and girls learn gender roles through primetime television.

Not only is gender-role stereotyping evident in television programming, but it is also evident in magazine advertisements directed towards children. Traditionally, sport-related advertising reiterates gender-role stereotypes and biases. This is especially significant when directed towards children since young children understand pictures before they understand the meaning of written words. A study was done over a six-year period by which advertisements appearing in *Sports Illustrated for Kids* were analyzed for gender role stereotypes. The researchers concluded that males were represented in both prominent and supporting roles much more frequently than females. In the cases where females were featured, they served supporting roles rather than prominent ones. For example, although females would be present in ads for tennis or jogging, the male would be the central and active model. All of the product ads featured males as the prominent model. For instance, in a sports drink ad, the female model would be serving the male models or would be in the background of the picture. In equipments ads, the females were usually spectators while the males were actively involved in the use of the sport equipment. In the ads where women were prominent models, they were posed rather than active and were frequently posed in provocative positions. Unfortunately, this was true for both adult females and young girls (Cuneen & Sidell, 1998). These advertisements are clearly a strong influence on children's gender role socialization.

### The Influence of the Education System on Gender Role Stereotypes

School is another implement by which gender roles are transferred to children. This is mainly accomplished through peer influence. Throughout the early years of elementary school boys and girls are quick to point out to one another what the appropriate gender roles are. For example, if a boy attempts to bake mud cookies with a group of girls, he will quickly learn that this is a *girls only* activity. The same usually goes for girls who want to play football or monster trucks. Very young children tend to segregate by gender and thus form different identities than the other gender group. One study found that children who spent more time with same-sex peers in the fall demonstrated more gender-typical behavior in the spring (Szegedy-Maszak, 2001). This clearly reflects the peer influence that exists within a school environment.

Children in the preschool years tend to base gender on behavior and physical appearance. For example, clothing and hair length are usually indicators to children of the other person's gender. As children vocalize these differences, they are forming their own views on gender role differences. Little boys and girls are careful to make sure their clothing and toy choice are gender specific. A young girl may only wear a certain color associated with femininity, while a boy may insist on wearing his sports hat to indicate his masculinity. This behavior is usually encouraged by peers as well as teachers. Many teachers reward gender stereotypes within the classroom. For example, a teacher may expect boys to be noisier than girls and will therefore be quicker to punish a noisy girl than she will a noisy boy. Through this interaction, the children are learning that girls are to be compliant and quiet, while boys are expected to be aggressive and forceful. Certain activities in school are also categorized according to gender. Children tend to group

blocks and outdoor play as boy activities and art, music and dramatic play as girl activities (Miller & Church, 2002). Children's gender stereotypes are usually acquired through the influence of an adult such as parents or teachers. Therefore, to understand a child's stereotype, it is essential to understand the stereotypes of the adults in that child's life.

It is typically accepted that opinions and beliefs shape behavior. Therefore, researchers sought to understand the opinions and beliefs of early education teachers about gender roles, in an attempt to predict their behavior. One study reflected that teachers would commonly use gender stereotypes to guide their behavior when interacting with children they did not know well (Fagot, 1984). Teachers generally were uncomfortable with children behaving in non-conventional ways. This included boys who cried easily or girls who were more interested in playing with trucks than with the playhouse. Boys who exhibited traditionally feminine characteristics were identified by teachers as being likely to grow up homosexual (Martin, 1990). This assumption by teachers would likely affect the interactions the teacher would have with the student. In a separate study early childhood teachers expressed the belief that it was appropriate for girls to explore behaviors that were commonly associated with masculinity but not appropriate for boys to explore traditionally feminine behaviors (Cahill & Adams, 1997). This information is noteworthy because it shows that a significant number of early education teachers possess traditional gender role stereotypes. These stereotypes, therefore, are taught to the students through modeling.

Peers have a very influential position in propagating gender role stereotypes. In elementary schools boys and girls develop a romanticized view of masculine and

feminine roles. It is these views which dictate whether a boy or girl is worthy of popularity. Boys who display athleticism, coolness, toughness, social skills and success in cross-gender relationships are identified as popular. A different standard is used to determine whether a girl is popular or not. Popularity for girls is based on parents' socio-economic status and their own physical appearance, social skills and academic success. Researchers noted that the majority of the criteria for male popularity is active and achievable. However, the majority of the characteristics in a popular girl are passive and ascribed rather than achieved (Adler, Kless & Adler, 1992). Therefore, school is also an area by which peers can influence other students towards more traditional gender roles.

Although it is commonly accepted that older children understand that their actions affect their popularity, there is now research that children as young as four modify their behavior in order to receive peer acceptance. Sixty-four children from the ages of 4-9 were asked to describe their favorite activities and toys once while the children were alone and once more when they had an audience composed of same sex peers. The boys in the study were found to respond in such a way as to appear more sex-typed in front of their peers than when they were questioned alone. There was not a significant change in the way the girls responded alone as opposed to in front of a group. The fact that girls did not change the strength of their sex-type when surrounded by peers reflects the fact that society is more tolerant of females not adhering to strict gender roles than of males not doing so. The boys, however, recognized that their popularity depended on their observance of stereotypical male behavior. The boys used what they knew about gender role stereotypes and acted accordingly in order to appear more masculine in front of their peers. Therefore, gender role socialization is not a phenomenon that is uncontrollable but



rather children modify their behavior based on motivations such as popularity and acceptance (Banjeree & Lintern, 2000).

Preadolescent children, between grades 4-8, were also found to place a high level of importance on gender role conformity. Children have the need to feel that they are representative members of their own gender group. Those children who felt they did not identify with members of their same-sex peer group suffered low self-image and dissatisfaction. Children within this age group were also found to veer away from activities and behaviors that they did not associate with their same sex peer group (Egan & Perry, 2001). Evidently, children of all ages feel the social pressure to conform to behavior that is exhibited by other members of their gender peer group.

The materials used within the classroom also have an influence on the gender roles children learn. One specific area in which research has been conducted is the use of fairy tales. The female stereotype that is usually perpetuated in fairy tales is that women are either young, beautiful and innocent or evil, old and ugly. The men are portrayed as the possessors of wealth and power. These messages teach young girls that the ideal for them is to be dressed nicely while they wait for a boy to rescue them. Boys are taught that they are to be domineering and in control of any situation. In one study, children were encouraged to create their own fairy tale. The majority of the girls veered from the traditional fairy tale and made their princess the heroine. However, the boys were more faithful in following the traditional story line because, male characters in fairy tales are better off than the female characters (Westland, 1993). The males do what they please while the females wait for the males to give them direction or purpose. This harmful message is being inadvertently taught to children through the sharing of fairy tales.

Children's literature is a very powerful tool by which children are taught what is expected and valued in the real world. Books teach children a variety of values and traditions but also included are lessons pertaining to gender role expectation. It has been established through research that children exposed to stories depicting stereotypical behavior were more likely to adhere to traditional gender role beliefs. Likewise, children exposed to books with characters depicting egalitarian roles had decreased traditional stereotypes pertaining to gender roles (Diekman & Murnen, 2004). One study divided children's books into sexist and nonsexist books. However, researchers found that both categories had a degree of traditionalism in that marriage and romance was a vital ingredient to ensure a happily ever after ending. Children's books written fifty years ago are expected to display elements of sexism, but this same study found incredible levels of prejudice in recently published books. Women and girls were found to be underrepresented in illustrations, and the books contained gender exclusive language (Gooden & Gooden, 2001). Although children's books have been published recently which contain female characters adopting traditionally masculine characteristics, there are not books which contain male characters adopting traditionally feminine characteristics. For example, a female character in a children's book may be shown mowing the lawn or involved in a traditionally masculine job such as business. However, male characters are not shown washing dishes or showing emotions such as fear which is usually associated with femininity (Diekman & Murnen, 2004).

Due to the increase and importance of technology in society, many classrooms in the United States now contain televisions. These televisions are used by the teachers to expand the students' curriculum through the use of educational and informational

television programming. These educational programs have the potential to exhibit less gender stereotypical behavior in their characters, but unfortunately these programs are similar to non educational programming in their portrayal of traditional male and female roles. For example there is a three to one ratio of male actors to female. Also, no educational programming with a female central character was found (Barner, 1999). Calvert, Kotler, Zehnder and Shockey (2003) did a study on educational programming and found that male characters spent more time speaking than female actors spent on the screen. Gender stereotypes were further displayed through the use of emotional responses and behaviors. Male characters were found to be more active, constructive, dominant, aggressive and attention seeking. Female characters exhibited behaviors such as deference, dependence, and nurturance (Barner, 1999). It is significant that television programming created for the educational pursuits in the classroom contain the same forms of gender stereotyping as other children's television programming.

School sports are also an important means by which gender role stereotypes are taught and reinforced. This is one of the earliest public organizations that children are exposed to since many are involved in school sports as early as five years of age. Most elementary school systems encourage co-ed teams as an attempt to teach children gender equality. However, one study of a co-ed kindergarten tee ball league reflected that gender equality was notably absent. When coaches were interviewed they responded that their female players were not as interested in playing tee ball as their male players. This opinion of the coaches was reflected in how they treated the different players during practices and games. Coaches were more likely to reprimand female players more harshly for the same behavior exhibited by male players. The coaches were also

observed making sexist comments such as, *I threw like a girl*, when making a mistake in throwing. This sends a clear message to the girls of their perceived incompetence and inferiority. Girls were also more likely to be placed in the outfield which is significant since in tee ball the ball is rarely hit very far. Therefore, the girls were given inferior positions while the boys were the basemen, pitcher, shortstop, and catcher. The researchers concluded that the kindergarten sport was a very powerful means by which girls were taught of their inferiority in regard to athletics (Landers, 1996).

These gender stereotyped messages pertaining to sports delivered in early childhood has a definite effect on children in middle childhood. Riemer and Visio (2003) did a study on children's perceptions of sports and whether they were masculine, feminine or neutral. The children were given a list of sports and rated on a Likert scale whether the sports were feminine, masculine, or neutral. The results reflected the effect of gender role socialization on the children's perceptions of appropriate sports. Further studies by Riemer and Visio found that although the children felt that both boys and girls should be allowed to play any sport, they felt that certain ones were not appropriate. For example, football was identified as a masculine sport that was not appropriate for girls to participate in, and aerobics was identified as a feminine sport that males should not be involved with.

Throughout the world there are various stereotypes pertaining to how each gender is expected to behave, dress, think, and talk. These stereotypes permeate society and as a result are evident in the family, the media, and the school system. During their early years of development, children learn what it means to be a girl or a boy within their society. Parents have the primary influence on a child's internalization of gender roles

since prior to kindergarten most children spend the majority of their time with a parent. However, once the child reaches kindergarten, the peer group also has an influential part in the child's view on gender roles. Children learn from one another what is gender appropriate and what is not. The media, through advertising and television, is consistent in defining gender roles and teaching impressionable children how they ought to behave as a boy or girl in society. These three areas consistently encourage children to behave, dress, and think a certain way. Eventually, children internalize these messages and begin to believe their validity.

As a result of previous research stressing the influence of family on gender role socialization, it was hypothesized that college students from traditional families would hold traditional stereotypes pertaining to male and female gender roles. The goal of this study was to determine whether there was a relationship between family of origin and gender role stereotypes. It was further hypothesized that there would be a significant difference between the gender role stereotypes of males as opposed to the gender role stereotypes of females.

## Method

### *Subjects*

Subjects were 44 upper-class psychology majors at a conservative college campus in the southeast. There were 17 males and 27 females. The ages of the participants ranged from 19-27, with the average age being 21.5. There were 32 individuals from traditional families which were defined as the biological parents being married to one another. Twelve of the participants were from non-traditional families which included divorced, widowed, single, remarried, or other.

### *Apparatus*

A questionnaire was designed by Chang and McBride-Chang to assess college students' beliefs and opinions regarding expectations they held for each gender. There were 36 statements regarding gender roles which were then rated by the participant on a 5 point Likert scale. A (1) indicated the participant strongly agreed with the statements, and a (5) indicated the participant strongly disagreed with the statement. The statements were drawn from a study done by Chang and McBride-Chang (1997). The 36 statements were equally divided between statements referring to women and ones referring to men. Each statement was written twice, with the opposite gender used the second time. The items were randomly distributed. The questionnaire was divided by Chang and McBride-Chang into four different sub-scales. These included the Ambition Scale, Affiliative Scale, Control Scale, and Home Life Scale. These items were also randomly distributed throughout the survey. Information regarding the reliability and validity of Chang and McBride-Chang's survey was not available. A copy of this survey is found in Appendix 1. The demographic survey was included on the backside of the questionnaire and included questions regarding gender, age, and family of origin. The demographic survey is included in Appendix 2.

### *Procedure*

The participants were given the survey in the beginning of two, upper-level psychology courses. They were told that their participation was voluntary. They were then asked to complete every question on the survey honestly and to complete the demographic survey on the back of the page. They were not given a consent form since

the survey was anonymous. Participants completed the questionnaires in approximately ten minutes. Eighteen of the statements were later recoded.

### Results

In order to assess gender role stereotypes, the subjects' responses to the statements in the ambition scale were analyzed. The ambition scale included 14 statements equally divided between statements pertaining to women and those pertaining to men. A score of 5 indicated traditional gender-role stereotypes and a score of 1 indicated untraditional gender-role stereotypes. The scores for male and females were summed separately. A score of 3.47 was the mean for the males, and a score of 3.39 was the mean score for the females. In Chang and McBride-Chang's study the mean for men and women on a 9 point Likert scale were 7.6 and 7.2, respectively. The mean male and female scores from the 5 point Likert scale become 6.24 and 6.1, respectively. A t-test was done on the data, and no significant difference was found between male and female gender role stereotypes. [ $t(42)=-.992$ ,  $p=.327$ , see Table 1].

The scores of college students from traditional versus non-traditional homes were also summed separately. The average score for students from non traditional homes was 3.40 and the average for students from traditional homes was 3.42. To test the hypothesis, a t test was performed on the data. No significant findings were found between family of origin and gender role stereotypes. [ $t(42)=.27$ ,  $p=.788$ , see Table 2].

### Discussion and Conclusion

It was hypothesized that college students from non-traditional families would hold non-traditional gender role stereotypes and that students from traditional families would hold traditional gender role stereotypes. The results from this study did not lend support

Table 1.

*Mean Gender Role Stereotype Scores by Subject's Gender*

	gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ambition	male	17	3.4706	.25512	.06188
	female	27	3.3915	.25858	.04976



Table 2.

*Mean Gender Role Stereotype Scores by Subject's Family of Origin*

family		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
ambition	tradit	32	3.4286	.23516	.04157
	nontrad	12	3.4048	.31992	.09235

to the hypothesis. No significant effect of family of origin on gender role stereotypes was found. The difference between the responses from the students from traditional families versus non-traditional families was minute. The findings from this study also differed from those previously found by Chang and McBride-Chang (1997). This difference could be due to multiple factors, including location, sample size, and changing opinions across time in regard to gender roles.

The purpose of this study was to assess whether or not family of origin had a significant effect on gender role stereotypes. The data neither proves nor disproves this hypothesis. Rather, more questions are revealed by the lack of significant findings. For instance, the answers may have been different if asked of children still living in their family home. Perhaps by the college years there are more significant influences than family of origin on the student's opinions and beliefs. Therefore, it would be beneficial to assess correlations between a number of factors and the students' opinions of gender role stereotypes. These factors could include perception of peer beliefs toward gender roles, perception of societal expectations of gender roles, religion, age, marital status, and demographic location.

There are errors in this present study which may have affected the outcome. The first error of the study is the research design. The questionnaire is an example of a one shot experimental case study. This form has low internal validity (Leedy, 2005). The second flaw of the research design is the measurement instrument. Since it is not an exact replication of the survey created by Chang and McBride-Chang, there is no way to ensure the reliability or validity of the results. There was also a large sampling error since all subjects were attending a conservative, Christian university. There are increased

pressures and influences in regards to gender roles within this community. The sample, therefore, is not representative of the general population. Therefore, the responses can only be applied to this particular population rather than the population as a whole. If this study were to be repeated, it would be beneficial to include several universities in the sample to receive a more accurate portrayal of the influence of family on gender role stereotypes in the general population.

There are limitations within this present study. The apparatus was based on self-report which increased the possibility of halo effect, mood effects, and response biases. Also, the survey contained broad statements which allowed room for personal interpretation. It would be beneficial to obtain a survey with more narrow and specific statements in order to limit the effect of interpretation on subjects' responses. The survey statements were also very obvious in their intent. The desired response would be clear to a subject when he or she reads the survey. All statements are obviously dealing with gender-role stereotypes. This may have been especially detrimental within this particular sample because of the felt pressure to assimilate with the gender role stereotypes found within the conservative institution. If this study were to be repeated it would be advantageous to choose a questionnaire with masked intent to decrease subject's answer bias. This would produce a more credible research project.

In conclusion, acquisition of gender role stereotypes is an extremely complex and multifaceted concept. The present study sought to show a significant effect of family of origin on gender role stereotypes. However, the hypothesis was not supported by the data which may have been due to a number of previously stated limitations. Further research needs to be conducted on this subject matter to reach a more definite conclusion.

## References

- Adler, P.A., Kless, S., & Adler P. (1992). Socialization to gender roles: Popularity among elementary school boys and girls. *Sociology of Education*, 65 (3) 169-188.
- Albert, A. (1988). Children's gender-role stereotypes: A sociological investigation of psychological models. *Sociological Forum*, 3 (2), 184-210.
- Antill, J.K. (1996). The influence of parents and family context on children's involvement in household tasks. *Sex Roles*, 34, 215-238.
- Banerjee, R., & Lintern, V. (2000). Boys will be boys: The effect of social evaluation concerns on gender-typing. *Social Development*, 9, 397-408.
- Barner, M.R. (1999). Sex role stereotyping in FCC-mandated children's educational television. *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, 43, 551-564.
- Brooks, C. & Bolzendahl, C. (2004). The transformation of US gender role attitudes: Cohort replacement, social-structural change, and ideological learning. *Social Science Research*, 33 (1), 106-134.
- Cahill, B. & Adams, E. (1997). An exploratory study of early childhood teachers' attitudes toward gender roles. *Sex Roles*, 36, 517-530.
- Calvert, S., Kotler, J., Zehnder, S., Shockey, E. (2003). Gender stereotypes in children's reports about educational and informational television programs. *Media Psychology*, 5, 139-162.
- Campenni, C.E. (1999). Gender stereotyping of children's toys: A comparison of parents and non parents. *Sex Roles*, 40, 121-138.

- Chang, L., McBride-Chang, C., (1997). Self and peer-ratings of female and male roles and attributes. *Journal of Social Psychology, 137*, 527-530.
- Cuneen, J., & Sidwell, M. (1998). Gender portrayals in Sports Illustrated for Kids Advertisements: A content analysis of prominent and supporting models. *Journal of Sport Management, 12*, 39-50.
- Cunningham, M. (2001). The influence of parental attitudes and behaviors on children's attitudes toward gender and household labor in early adulthood. *Journal of Marriage & Family, 63* (1), 111-123.
- Davis, S.N. (2003). Sex stereotypes in commercials targeted toward children: A content analysis. *Sociological Spectrum, 23*, 407-424.
- Diekmann, A.B. & Murnen, S.K. (2004). Learning to be little women and little men: The inequitable gender equality of nonsexist children's literature. *Sex Roles, 50*, 373-390.
- Egan, S., & Perry, D. (2001). Gender identity: A multidimensional analysis with implications for psychosocial adjustment. *Developmental Psychology, 37* (4), 451-463.
- Elasmir, M. (1999). The portrayal of women in U.S. prime time television. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 43* (1), 20-35.
- Fagot, B.I. (1984). Teacher and peer reactions to boys' and girls' play style. *Sex Roles, 11*, 691-702.
- Fisher-Thompson, D. (1990). Adult sex typing of children's toys. *Sex Roles, 23*, 290-302.

- Glascoock, J. (2001). Gender roles on prime-time network television: Demographics and behaviors. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 45 (4), 656-670.
- Gooden, A.M., & Gooden, M.A., (2001). Gender representation in notable children's picture books: 1995-1999. *Sex Roles*, 45, 89-101.
- Johnson, F.L. (2002). Gendered voices in children's television advertising. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 19 (4), 461-481.
- Kelly, A. (1982). Gender roles at home and school. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 3 (3), 281-295.
- Kimball, M. M., (1986). Television and sex role attitudes. Pp 265-301 in *The impact of television: A natural experiment in three communities*, edited by T.M. Williams. London: Academic Press.
- Landers, M. (1996). Learning life's lessons in tee ball: The reinforcement of gender and status in kindergarten sport. *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 13, 87-93.
- Leaper, C., Breed, L., Hoffman, L., Perlman, C.A., (2002). Variations in gender-stereotyped content of children's television cartoons across genres. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 32 (8), 1653-4363.
- Leedy, P. (2005). *Practical research*. Upper Saddle River: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Martin, C. (1995). Stereotypes about children with traditional and nontraditional gender roles. *Sex Roles*, 33, 727-752.
- Martin, C.L. (1990). Attitudes and expectations about children with nontraditional and traditional gender roles. *Sex Roles*, 22, 151-165.
- Miller, S., & Church, E.B. (2002). I'm a boy & you're a girl! *Early Childhood Today*, 17 (20), 29-31.

- Pomerleau, A., Bolduc, D., Malcuit, G., Cossette, L. (1990). Pink or blue: Environmental gender stereotypes in the first two years of life. *Sex Roles, 22*, 359-367.
- Riemer, B., & Visio, M. (2003). Gender typing of sports: An investigation of Methany's classification. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport, 74*, 193-105.
- Snow, M., Jacklin, C., & Maccoby, E. (1983). Sex of child differences in father-child interaction at one year of age. *Child Development, 54*, 227-232.
- Smith, L.J. (1994). A content analysis of gender differences in children's advertising. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 38*, 323-337.
- Szegedy-Maszak, M. (2001). The power of gender. *U.S. News & World Report, 130* (22), 52.
- Van Volkom, M. (2003). The relationships between childhood tomboyism, siblings' activities, and adult gender roles. *Sex Roles, 49*, 609-619.
- Westland, E. (1993). Cinderella in the classroom. Children's responses to gender. *Gender & Education, 5* (3), 237-250.
- Witt, S.D. (1997). Parental influence on children's socialization to gender roles. *Adolescence, 32* (126), 253-260.
- Wood, E. (2002). The impact of parenting experience on gender stereotyped toy play of children. *Sex Roles, 47*, 39-50.

## Appendix 1

Please read each of the following statements and rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statement. Please fill each blank with a number between 1 and 5 based on the scale below.

1-----2-----3-----4-----5  
Strongly agree Strongly disagree

1. Men should have a career. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Women should be intelligent. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Women should be clean and neat. \_\_\_\_\_
4. Men should be the primary financial provider for the family. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Men should receive the highest education available. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Women should control their emotions. \_\_\_\_\_
7. Men should be in charge at home. \_\_\_\_\_
8. Women should be the primary financial provider for the family. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Women should not use foul language. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Men should be attentive to their appearance. \_\_\_\_\_
11. Women should remain calm. \_\_\_\_\_
12. Women should be faithful to their husbands. \_\_\_\_\_
13. Men should be independent. \_\_\_\_\_
14. Men should be intelligent. \_\_\_\_\_
15. Women should help their children with homework. \_\_\_\_\_
16. Men should be neat and clean. \_\_\_\_\_
17. Women should not have premarital sex. \_\_\_\_\_
18. Men should be kind to others. \_\_\_\_\_
19. Women should be independent. \_\_\_\_\_
20. Men should be patient. \_\_\_\_\_
21. Women should be in charge at home. \_\_\_\_\_
22. Men should not use foul language. \_\_\_\_\_
23. Women should do housework. \_\_\_\_\_
24. Men should not have premarital sex. \_\_\_\_\_
25. Men should have control over their emotions. \_\_\_\_\_
26. Women should have a career. \_\_\_\_\_
27. Women should help their children develop sports interests. \_\_\_\_\_
28. Men should remain calm. \_\_\_\_\_
29. Men should help children with their homework. \_\_\_\_\_
30. Men should help their children develop interest in sports. \_\_\_\_\_
31. Women should receive the highest education possible. \_\_\_\_\_
32. Men should be faithful to their wives. \_\_\_\_\_
33. Women should be kind to others. \_\_\_\_\_
34. Men should do housework. \_\_\_\_\_
35. Women should be attentive to their physical appearance. \_\_\_\_\_
36. Women should be patient. \_\_\_\_\_



Appendix 2

Please indicate which category you belong to by writing either a 1 or a 2 in the line below.

\_\_\_\_\_

1. My biological parents are married to one another.
2. My parents are divorced, remarried, deceased, widowed, single or other.

Gender: Male    Female

Age: \_\_\_\_\_