Will They Listen To Me? An Examination Of In-group Gender Bias In Children's Communication Beliefs

SUMMARY: Gender biases and beliefs can affect the quality of interactions in mixed-gender group settings, and an understanding of gender-related communication styles can help children improve the skills they need to thrive in mixed-gender settings. This study investigated children's belief about their peers' communicative responsiveness and interruptive behaviors. Findings show participants reported more positive responsiveness and less interruptive communication with their same-gender peers in comparison to their opposite-gender peers.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Participants reported more responsiveness in communication with same-gendered peers than with opposite-gendered peers.
- Girls reported their same-gender peers as being less interruptive in comparison to their opposite-gender peers, while boys reported their same- and opposite-gender peers as being equally interruptive.
- Participants who had positive beliefs about their same- and opposite-gendered peers (e.g., viewing them as more responsive) were associated with having positive outcomes such as more friends, feeling more inclusion, and less discomfort.
- Negative beliefs (e.g., belief that a peer would be more interruptive) about the interruptions from peers, regardless of gender, were associated with more negative outcomes (e.g., feeling less included, feeling more discomfort). Participants' beliefs of interruption was not related to number of same-gendered or opposite-gendered friends they had.

IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS:

- Help develop age-appropriate modules and activities that promote gender sensitivity, which is the awareness of how gender can be a factor in the treatment of others
- Implement activities that promote cross-gender interaction and cooperation in a safe environment

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS:

- Provide workshops to help children and youth learn about appropriate and effective communication styles with peers and authorities
- Develop training for program staff to learn how to better identify children and youth that have difficulties communicating with peers and adults

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS:

- Support programs that aim to identify and reduce potential gender biases in children and youth programs
- Recommend collaboration among schools and community-based organizations to support youth who may be experiencing exclusion from peers

The Center for Research and Outreach
REACH
Leveraging Evidence and Science into Practice

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
Driven to Discover℠

The Center for Research and Outreach

Putting Research to Work
for Families

The Center for Research and Outreach
REACH
Leveraging Evidence and Science into Practice

METHODS

- Data were collected once a year for two years from eight elementary schools in a large southwestern U.S. city.
- The research team developed a self-report measure to assess children's beliefs about same- and opposite-gender peers' communicative responsiveness and interruptions.
- Children also completed a self-report measure for assessing friendships and responded to a vignette to measure expectation of inclusion and discomfort related to same- and opposite-gendered peers.
- Multiple comparisons were used to compare association between participants' own gender and their beliefs about peer communication styles

PARTICIPANTS

- A total of 311 children participated in this study. Of the total participants, 159 were in the third grade and 152 were in the fifth grade.
- The average age of the third graders was 7.13 years old (SD = 0.49), and the average age of the fifth graders was 9.8 years old (SD = 0.71).
- Fifty-two percent of the third graders were girls, while 46% of the fifth graders were girls.
- Participants identified as 56% White, 18% Latino, 4% Black, 5% Asian American, 2% Native American, 13% Multiracial, and less than 1% as Pacific Islander. The study did not include any other racial/ethnic make up information of the participants.

LIMITATIONS

- The findings were cross-sectional, which does not allow for interpretations of causal relationships between childrens' beliefs and social outcomes.
- The measures used to assess childrens' beliefs about their peers' communicative responsiveness and interruptive behaviors were not standardized, so results should be interpreted with caution.
- The data were dependent on participants' self-reporting of their own beliefs, peers' communication styles, and number of friends; only one source of information for all the variables could introduce bias among the sample.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Collect data from youth and their peers across more time points to obtain more accurate patterns of communication
- Develop standardized scales to measure communicative and disruptive communication responses
- Include variables that can measure long-term effects of gender sensitivity and inclusion

ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS

Design
★★★
Excellent
Research Plan
and Sample

Methods
★★★
Excellent
Measurement
and Analysis

Limitations
★★☆
Few

For more information about the Assessing Research that Works rating scale visit:
https://reachfamilies.umn.edu/content/assessing-research-that-works