

fathers are psychologically important to their children's gender development (Tenenbaum & May, 2014). Cultures around the world, however, can vary in their role expectations for mother and fathers (Chen, Lee, & Chen, 2018). A research review provided these conclusions (Bronstein, 2006):

- *Mothers' socialization strategies.* In many cultures, mothers socialize their daughters to be more obedient and responsible than their sons. They also place more restrictions on their daughters' autonomy.
- *Fathers' socialization strategies.* Fathers show more attention to their sons than to their daughters, engage in more activities with their sons, and put forth more effort to promote their sons' intellectual development.

Thus, according to Bronstein (2006, pp. 269–270), “Despite an increased awareness in the United States and other Western cultures of the detrimental effects of gender stereotyping, many parents continue to foster behaviors and perceptions that are consonant with traditional gender role norms.”

Peer Influences

Parents provide the earliest discrimination of gender roles, but before long, peers join the process of responding to and modeling masculine and feminine behavior (Brown & Stone, 2018; Rose & Smith, 2018; Zozuls & others, 2016). In fact, peers become so important to gender development that the playground has been described as “gender school” (Luria & Herzog, 1985).

Peers extensively reward and punish gender behavior (Rubin, Bukowski, & Bowker, 2015). For example, when children play in ways that the culture considers sex-appropriate, their peers tend to reward them. But peers often reject children who act in a manner that is considered more characteristic of the other gender (Handrinos & others, 2012). A little girl who brings a doll to the park may find herself surrounded by new friends; a little boy who does the same thing might be jeered at. However, there is greater pressure for boys to conform to a traditional male role than for girls to conform to a traditional female role (Fagot, Rodgers, & Leinbach, 2000). For example, a preschool girl who wants to wear boys' clothing receives considerably more approval than a boy who wants to wear a dress. The very term “tomboy” implies broad social acceptance of girls' adopting traditional male behaviors. In a recent study of 9- to 10-year-olds in Great Britain, gender-nonconforming boys were most at risk for peer rejection (Braun & Davidson, 2017). In this study, gender-nonconforming girls were preferred more than gender-conforming girls, with children most often citing masculine activities as the reason for this choice.

Gender molds important aspects of peer relations (Rubin, Bukowski, & Bowker, 2015). It influences the composition of children's groups, the size of groups, and interactions within a group (Maccoby, 1998, 2002).

- *Gender composition of children's groups.* Around age 3, children already show a preference for spending time with same-sex playmates. This preference increases until around age 12, and during the elementary school years children spend a large majority of their free time with children of their own sex (see Figure 1). Observations of children show that they are more likely to play in same-sex than mixed-sex groups. This tendency increases between 4 and 6 years of age.
- *Group size.* From about age 5, boys are more likely to interact socially in larger clusters than girls are. Boys are also more likely to participate in organized

How Would You...?

As a human development and family studies professional, how would you describe the ways in which parents influence their children's notions of gender roles?

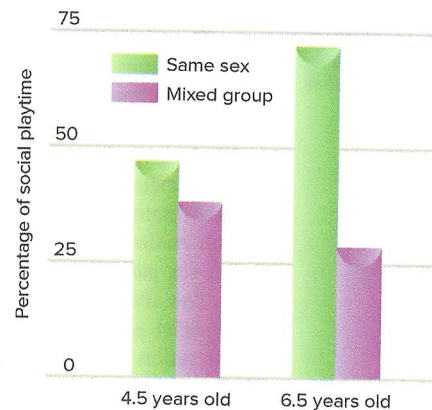


Figure 1
Developmental Changes in Percentage of Time Spent in Same-Sex and Mixed-Sex Group Settings
Observations of children show that they are more likely to play in same-sex than mixed-sex groups. This tendency increases between 4 and 6 years of age.

group games than girls are. In one study, same-sex groups of six children were permitted to use play materials in any way they wished (Benenson, Apostolaris, & Parnass, 1997). Girls were more likely than boys to play in dyads or triads, while boys were more likely to interact in larger groups and seek to attain a group goal.

- *Interaction in same-sex groups.* Boys are more likely than girls to engage in rough-and-tumble play, competition, conflict, ego displays, risk taking, and quests for dominance. By contrast, girls are more likely to engage in “collaborative discourse,” in which they talk and act in a more reciprocal manner.

Cognitive Influences

Observation, imitation, rewards, and punishment—these are the mechanisms by which gender develops, according to social cognitive theory. Interactions between the child and the social environment are the main keys to gender development. Some critics argue that this explanation pays too little attention to the child’s own mind and understanding, and portrays the child as passively acquiring gender roles (Martin & Ruble, 2010).

One influential cognitive theory is **gender schema theory**, which states that gender typing emerges as children gradually develop gender schemas of what is gender-appropriate and gender-inappropriate in their culture (Halim & others, 2016; Liben, 2017; Liben & others, 2018; Martin & Cook, 2017; Martin, Fabes, & Hanish, 2018). A schema is a cognitive structure, a network of associations that guide an individual’s perceptions. A gender schema organizes the world in terms of female and male. Children are internally motivated to perceive the world and to act in accordance with their developing schemas. Bit by bit, children pick up what is gender-appropriate and gender-inappropriate in their culture, developing gender schemas that shape how they perceive the world and what they remember (Conry-Murray, Kim, & Turiel, 2012). Children are motivated to act in ways that conform with these gender schemas. Thus, gender schemas fuel gender typing.

How Would You...?

As an educator, how would you create a classroom climate that promotes healthy gender development for both boys and girls?



Families

Attachment to a caregiver is a key social relationship during infancy, but some experts maintain that secure attachment and the infant’s early experiences have been overdramatized as determinants of life-span development. Social and emotional development is also shaped by other relationships and by temperament, contexts, and social experiences in the early childhood years and later (Almy & Cicchetti, 2018; Gartstein & others, 2017). In this section, we discuss aspects of social relationships in early childhood that go beyond attachment.

Parenting

Some recent media accounts portray many parents as unhappy, feeling little joy in caring for their children. However, researchers have found that parents are more satisfied with their lives than are nonparents, feel relatively better on a daily basis than do nonparents, and have more positive feelings related to caring for their children than to engaging in other daily activities (Nelson & others, 2013).

Good parenting takes time and effort (Grusec, 2017; Lindsay, 2018; Serrano-Villar, Huang, & Calzada, 2017). You can’t do it in a minute here and a minute there. You can’t do it with CDs or DVDs. Of course, it’s not just the quantity of time parents spend with children that is important for children’s development—the quality of the parenting is clearly important.

gender schema theory The theory that gender typing emerges as children gradually develop gender schemas of what is gender-appropriate and gender-inappropriate in their culture.