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Young children think gender-related behavior is inborn

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Young children think about gender in the same way they think about species of animals. They believe, for example, that a boy's preference for football is innate, as is a girl's preference for dolls, just as cats' behavior is innately different from dogs'.

That's the finding of a new study from researchers at Pacific Lutheran University and the University of Michigan. The study appears in the March/April 2009 issue of the journal *Child Development.*

"These results have important implications for how children think about activities that are culturally associated with the other gender, for example, how girls think about science or math," explains Marianne Taylor, assistant professor of psychology at Pacific Lutheran University, who led the study. "By confronting this belief directly, parents and teachers can help encourage girls and boys to explore a wider range of school activities."

The researchers surveyed more than 450 Americans from diverse racial-ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds who were 5 years old to college age. The study's findings confirm prior research, which has shown that adults and children alike think different species have deep biological differences, for example, that innate differences cause dogs to behave differently from cats. This study also found that it's not until children are at least 10 that they treat gender and species concepts as distinct from one another, as adults do. At that age, they also understand that environment plays a role in gender-related behaviors.

Source: Society for Research in Child Development (news : web)