

# Boys will be boys: kids think gender-related behavior is inborn

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Small children tend to believe boys are born to like football and girls are born to like dolls—much in the same way that cats are born different from dogs, research shows.

The new study offers important implications for how children think about activities that are culturally associated with particular genders, said University of Michigan psychology researchers Susan Gelman and Marjorie Rhodes, and Pacific Lutheran University professor Marianne Taylor. The research is featured in the journal *Child Development*.

"By confronting this belief directly, parents and teachers can help encourage girls and boys to explore a wider range of school activities," Gelman said.

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.

When children are at least 10, according to the research, they begin to treat gender and species concepts as distinct from one another. At that age, they also understand that environment plays a role in gender-related behaviors.

Researchers used a "switched at birth" test developed by Gelman where children are told stories about babies (either human or animals) born in one family but raised in another, asking children to pit the notions of nature versus nurture.

"Younger children typically endorse innate and internal causes for both physical and behavioral properties and tend to reject environmental influences," Gelman said. "With age, [children](#) increasingly distinguish between [gender](#) and animal species and develop a new conceptual framework."

The study appears in Volume 80, Issue 2 of the journal *Child Development*.

Provided by University of Michigan ([news](#) : [web](#))

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