

# How correcting generic statements about gender limits kind-beliefs

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## BACKGROUND

- Generic statements (e.g., “Girls hate math”) are a powerful vehicle for communicating beliefs about kinds (Gelman, Ware, & Kleinberg, 2010; Rhodes, Leslie, & Tworek, 2012).
- Generics are common in parent-child conversations about gender (Gelman, Taylor, & Nguyen, 2004).
- Correcting generics to refer to specific individuals limits beliefs about novel kinds (Foster-Hanson, Leslie, & Rhodes, 2019).
- Does correcting generics about gender limit gender beliefs?

## REFERENCES

Foster-Hanson, E., Leslie, S., & Rhodes, M. (2019). Speaking of kinds: How generic language shapes the development of category representations. <https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/28qf>

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Gelman, S. A., Ware, E. A., & Kleinberg, F. (2010). Effects of generic language on category content and structure. *Cognitive Psychology*, 61(3), 273-301. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cogpsych.2010.06.001>

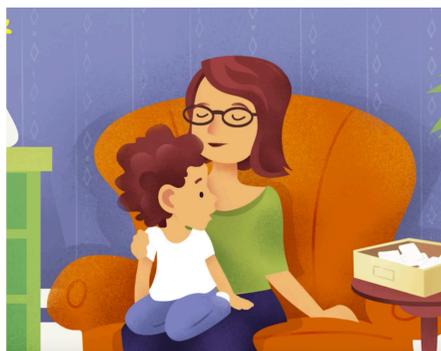
Liben, L. S., & Bigler, R. S. (2002). The developmental course of gender differentiation. *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development*, 67(2), 1-147. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-5834.101-1-00188>

Rhodes, M., Leslie, S., & Tworek, C. M. (2012). Cultural transmission of social essentialism. *PNAS Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 109(34), 13526-13531. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1208951109>

## Condition manipulation

Different across conditions

Children watched an animated parent-child conversation about “pictures from camp”



The child character made a generic statement about each picture

The parent responded in different ways, depending on condition

- Children heard about girls or boys (random assignment)
- All properties were gender-neutral (Liben & Bigler, 2002)



Girls are good at acting

Girls are good at hide-and-peek

Girls are good at reading books

Generic

Yes, girls are good at acting

Yes, girls are good at hide-and-peek

Yes, girls are good at reading books

Broad

Lots of kids are good at acting

Lots of kids are good at hide-and-peek

Lots of kids are good at reading books

Specific

Anna is good at acting

Maura is good at hide-and-peek

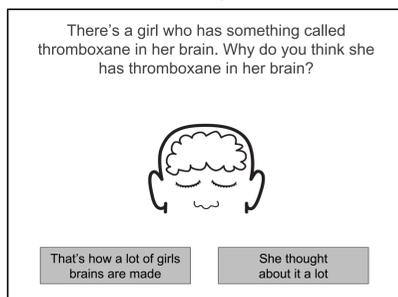
Gina is good at reading books

## Dependent variables

Same across conditions

Then children answered questions measuring their beliefs about gender categories

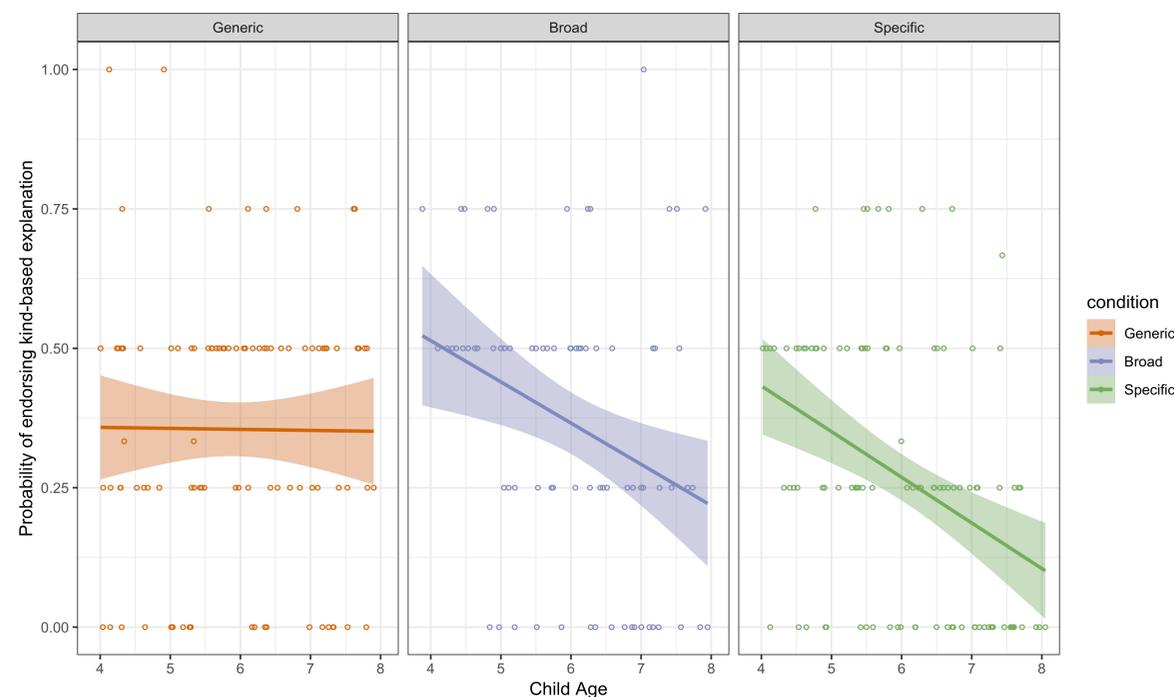
For example...



## RESULTS

Children’s endorsement of kind-based explanations varied by condition and age ( $\chi^2(2) = 10.71, p = .005$ ; condition,  $\chi^2(2) = 9.93, p = .007$ ; age,  $\chi^2 = 15.08, p < .001$ ).

Children who heard the parent character shift focus to specific individuals chose fewer kind-based explanations than children who heard the parent affirm the generic ( $p = .02$ ) or refer to the superordinate category (i.e., “a lot of kids,”  $p = .01$ ).



N = 282  
4- to 7-year-olds

## CONCLUSIONS

- Responding to generic statements about gender by shifting focus to specific individuals can help limit children’s beliefs that gender determines what people can do. Shifting focus to superordinate categories is less effective.
- Children become more sensitive to the corrections between ages 4-7.
- In ongoing work, we are testing whether sharing these language strategies with parents could have long-term consequences for the development of gender essentialism and stereotypes in children.