Gender Socialization

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Basic model of gender socialization

1. People think boys and girls are supposed to be different
2. People treat boys and girls differently and give them different opportunities
3. The differential treatment leads to different behaviors and self-images
Some ways parents treat boys & girls differently:
- Describe and interact with newborns using gender stereotypes
- Gender appropriate chores
- Gender appropriate clothing
- Different toys & other gifts

Major finding: “wings” vs. “roots”
- Boys socialized for autonomy ("wings")
- Girls socialized for interdependence ("roots")
Gender socialization: peers

✓ Children segregate themselves by sex
✓ Children sanction violators of gender norms
  • “I wouldn’t go anywhere near him.”
  • “I’d call him a sissy and make fun of him.”
  • “I’d probably hit him and take away the doll.”
  • “I would push him and call him a weirdo.”
✓ Children engage in cross-gender “borderwork” (Barrie Thorne)
  • Borderwork: cross-sex activity that strengthens boundaries between girls and boys
  • E.g., contests, rituals of pollution, playground invasions