The Development of Race, Gender, and Social Class Stereotypes
in Black and White Adolescents

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Abstract

We examined race, gender, and social class stereotypes in fourth, sixth, and eighth grade European American and African American children. Participants reported their perceptions of the competence of rich, poor, Black, White, female and male children in academic domains, sports, and music. Sixth and eighth graders were more likely than fourth graders to report traditional stereotypes. Low status groups (girls and African American children) did not endorse stereotypes that reflected negatively on their own group, but were likely to report stereotypes that favored their social group. Correlations among stereotype scores indicated that children consistently favored one social group over another, and eighth graders, but not younger children, showed moderate consistency in their tendency to be traditional versus egalitarian. Our results show the importance of social status in children’s endorsement of stereotypes.
The Development of Race, Gender, and Social Class Stereotypes in Black and White Adolescents

Although holding stereotypes about social groups is often viewed negatively, stereotypes are grounded in our knowledge about the world and our attempts to differentiate among concepts (e.g., “boyness” versus “girlness”). Thus, children’s stereotypes—or their understanding of the attributes of various social groups—reflect their concept development (e.g., what is a “girl”) and are also important in the child’s emerging sense of self (e.g., I am a girl; therefore I wear dresses) and of social relationships (I am a girl; I play with girls). An early rudimentary understanding of social categories such as race, gender, and even social class eventually develops into a rich knowledge base and belief system regarding the behaviors and attributes ascribed to groups as well as the awareness that all group members do not share these characteristics.

The present study focuses on the development of race (African American and European American), sex, and social class (rich, poor) stereotypes regarding academic skills. We had three goals. The first goal was to investigate whether children’s stereotypes/beliefs about race, sex, and social class differences in academic skills and the strength of those stereotypes change with age. The second aim was to examine whether there were race and sex differences in stereotypes. The third goal was to determine whether individuals who held traditional stereotypes in one domain (e.g., sex) were likely to hold traditional stereotypes in other domains (e.g., race). In the following discussion, we first briefly summarize the development of race, gender, and social class stereotypes. Next we discuss race, sex, and grade differences in stereotypes. We conclude with a description of our research questions.
The Development of Social Stereotypes

Stereotypes are cognitive structures that represent social groups (Hamilton, Stroessner, & Driscoll, 1994). As such, they develop through both cognitive processes and social experience (Bigler & Liben, 1992). From a cognitive developmental perspective, children’s understanding of stereotypes increases with certain cognitive competencies, such as multiple classification (Bigler & Liben, 1992), conservation (Serbin, Powlishta, & Gulko, 1993), and social cognition (Spencer, 1982). A strong cognitive theory would suggest that children’s stereotypes regarding members of different social groups should become more traditional and flexible over time and should share similar developmental trajectories. Few studies of stereotype development allow examination of this possibility, however, as most focus on a single social category such as gender or race, rather than examining the simultaneous development of several categories.

A second set of theories of stereotype development suggests that environmental factors and social interaction strongly influence children’s adoption of stereotypes (Chafel, 1995; Huston, 1983; Katz, 1983, 1987; Leahy, 1983). According to these theories, stereotypes of different groups develop as individuals interact with members of the stereotyped group or obtain information about the group from other sources. For example, Quintana and de Baessa (1996, as cited in Quintana, 1998) found that children in Guatemala were aware of social class differences earlier than U.S. children, probably because the degree of economic stratification is greater in Guatemala than in the U.S. Such a social experiential theory allows for both intra-individual variability (i.e., variability in the strength of stereotypes across domains, but with individuals) and inter-individual variability (i.e., variability in stereotypes with domains among children of similar age). It is still possible, however, that the traditionality of different types of
stereotypes converges at some point as a result of both cognitive maturation and social experience. Indeed, research in stereotypes across a variety of social categories and content domains has shown that children’s stereotypes increase in sophistication and flexibility throughout childhood and into adolescence (Signorella, Bigler, & Liben, 1993). In the following section we briefly examine the development of stereotypes in each of the three focal areas of this project: race, sex, and social class stereotypes regarding academic skills.

The predominant academic racial stereotype in the United States is that African Americans are not as smart and do not do as well in school as their European American (and Asian American) counterparts. In addition, it is widely believed that African Americans’ natural talents lie in their musical, and especially, sports abilities. Children as young as 3 years old can reliably categorize individuals according to race (Aboud, 1988; Katz, 1983). Moreover, children report traditional race stereotypes (i.e., according greater status to Whites than Blacks) by age 5 (Clark & Mamie K. Clark, 1939). Although few studies have examined race-related academic stereotypes, research about race differences in general characteristics has shown that a pro-white bias develops in Black and White children at a young age. However, as children move into middle childhood, both Black and White children become more positive towards Blacks and view Whites less favorably (Doyle & Aboud, 1995; (Doyle, Beaudet, & Aboud, 1988); Freeman, 1997). Unfortunately, most of these studies include only participants who are less than 10 years old. Thus, it is unclear whether attitudes towards Blacks continue to grow more positive beyond this age or whether they remain constant.

Gender is universally one of the most salient social categories for human beings and thus is a powerful influence on children’s developing understanding of the world and of themselves. Already by 30 months of age, children label themselves and others as male and
female and show some limited knowledge of gender stereotypes (Fagot & Leinbach, 1989; Huston, 1983; Katz, 1983; Weinraub et al., 1984). Children’s awareness and reports of gender-based academic stereotypes have been researched much less than other stereotype categories such as occupations (e.g., nurses are female), personal qualities (e.g., boys are strong), and activities (e.g., girls like to jump rope). Although research on children’s reports of ability stereotypes is limited, a substantial body of research has shown that gender differences appear in self-perceptions of academic skill by late childhood or early adolescence. This research has shown that males tend to overestimate their performance across the board, and both males and females report self-perceptions in line with traditional stereotypes (i.e., girls report greater self competence in verbal domains whereas boys report greater self competence in math and science) (Bornholt, Goodnow, & Cooney, 1994; Lundeberg, Fox, & Puncochar, 1994; Stevenson & Newman, 1986; (Wigfield et al., 1997), Eccles, Yoon, Harold, Arbreton, Doan, & Blumenfeld, 1997). Elementary-aged girls’ and boys’ self-perceptions of sports and music abilities also show similarities to societal stereotypes: Girls believe that they are better in music and boys view themselves as better at sports (Wigfield et al., 1997). Researchers have not substantiated whether differences in individuals’ perceptions of self competence reflect differences in underlying beliefs about sex differences in ability, or whether these beliefs change as children enter adolescence.

Unlike gender and race, social class is not biologically based, but socially derived, making its markers less stable and distinct, and perhaps less recognizable to children. Consequently, we might expect that stereotypes about social class would emerge later than sex and race stereotypes. Yet a growing body of research suggests that by age 5 children have at least a rudimentary schema for economic status (Ramsey, 1991), and by middle childhood they
are able to distinguish among a variety of possessions and occupations on the basis of economic status cues (Brusdal, 1990; Emler & Dickinson, 1985; Estvan, 1952; Jahoda, 1959; Leahy, 1981, 1983; Mistry & Crosby, 2001; Stendler, 1949; Tudor, 1971). Much less is known about the development of children’s beliefs about the attributes of rich and poor people (see review by Chafel, 1995). It has been suggested, however, that children begin to form such beliefs at an early age (Chafel, 1997; Mistry & Crosby, 2001; Skaft, 1988; Stendler, 1949). In a classic study, Stendler (1949) reported age-related differences in first, fourth, sixth, and eighth graders’ conceptions of rich and poor individuals. Younger children tended to ascribe positive attributes to the rich and negative attributes to the poor, whereas adolescents attributed more negative characteristics to the rich and more positive attributes to the poor.

More recent studies report findings that are both consistent with and in contradiction to Stendler’s (1949) results. For example, in a study of second, fourth, and sixth graders, Mistry and Crosby (2001) reported that favorable evaluations of the rich (including ratings of academic skills) decreased with age, whereas positive evaluations of the poor increased with age. In contrast, Skaft (1988) observed that adolescents’ ratings of strangers were significantly lower on qualities such as intelligence, happiness, and ability to make friends if the stranger was depicted as being poor than if the stranger was depicted as being rich. In the present study, we examine whether children report social class differences in academic skills, whether these stereotypes change with the transition to adolescence, and whether there are sex or racial group differences in stereotypes. We turn next to a discussion of group differences in stereotypes.

**Group Differences in Stereotypes**

Social psychologists have long reported that both adults and children quickly and easily develop in-group biases, even when the groups are created arbitrarily (Nesdale & Flessser, 2001;
Tajfel & Billig, 1974). One criticism of lab-based experimental studies of intergroup processes and stereotyping, though, is that artificially formed groups do not reflect real status differences between certain groups such as men and women and Blacks and Whites (Bigler, Brown, & Markell, 2001). The pervasive nature of race, gender, and social class stereotypes in America may make it difficult for members of negatively stereotyped groups to report an in-group bias regarding certain group attributes. Research by Tajfel (Tajfel, Nemeth, Jahoda, & Campbell, 1970; Tajfel et al., 1972) on ethnic group preferences demonstrates that although most individuals are biased toward their own group, members of low status groups (“underprivileged” or minority groups) do not show this in-group bias. In an innovative, non-laboratory study by Bigler and her colleagues (2001), elementary school children were randomly assigned to different groups. A colored t-shirt worn during school hours denoted group membership. Children were subtly primed over time to be aware of the greater status of one group over the other. As in the work by Tajfel, children from high status, but not low status groups reported positive stereotypes in favor of their own group (Bigler et al., 2001). Students from low status groups were more egalitarian; that is they reported no differences between groups (cf. Signorella, Bigler, & Liben, 1993). Thus, it appears that although members of negatively stereotyped groups do not report in-group bias, they also fail to endorse the widely-held negative societal stereotypes. This egalitarian stance may reflect efforts to protect the self-esteem through group enhancement.

In addition to failing to endorse negative stereotypes, low status groups may emphasize positive stereotypes of their group. For instance, rather than reporting egalitarian views of their abilities in sports, African American children may endorse strong positive stereotypes in favor of their group. In addition, girls may strongly emphasize the belief that girls are better than
boys in reading and writing as a way for compensating for the negative views related to their relative math and science performance. Most studies of low status groups only evaluate groups on negative attributes. The second aim of our study—an examination of sex and racial differences in stereotypes—was undertaken to determine whether members of disparaged or low status groups would endorse negative and positive stereotypes of their own groups or would simply report no differences. In previous studies, low status groups reported no differences, but these studies did not tap into strongly entrenched societal stereotypes such as those related to race, gender, and social class in the United States, and few earlier studies with children have examined positive stereotypes of low status groups.

An additional unexplored question relates to the interactions among race, gender, and status. Although Whites and males typically have higher status in the classroom than Blacks and girls, academic stereotypes of Black males tend to be less positive than those of Black girls (Graham, Taylor, & Hudley, 1998; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999; Sidanius & Veniegas, 2000). According to status theory of stereotyping, Black males should be most egalitarian in their academic stereotypes. On the other hand, some suggest that Black females suffer from double jeopardy (cf. Beale, 1970) from being at once female and Black. They may therefore be even less likely to endorse stereotypes negative stereotypes and more likely to report positive stereotypes of the groups to which they belong than others.

Goals of this Study

The present study examines the development of race, gender, and social class academic stereotypes in fourth, sixth, and eighth grade European American and African American children. We examined these age groups to capture children’s stereotype beliefs on both sides of the transition to middle school, a time of rapid cognitive, social, and physical change. Young
adolescents’ abilities to think abstractly and flexibly as well as their ability to integrate contradictory information lend themselves to more frequent use of broad, generalized stereotypes than younger children (Huston, 1983; Leahy & Shirk, 1985). In addition, social knowledge increases greatly and social relationships take on greater meaning during this period. These factors seem to culminate in an overall decline in self-perceptions of ability as children move into middle school (Anderman & Midgely, 1997; Eccles & Midgely, 1989; Wigfeld et al., 1997). This decline may result, in part, because students perceive a stronger focus on ability in middle school classrooms than in elementary school classrooms (Anderman & Midgely, 1997). The focus on ability in middle school, coupled with the increasing range of grades may serve to amplify societal stereotypes about race, class, and gender differences in academic ability. Little research has examined changes in stereotypes that occur in the midst of these cognitive, social, and physical changes.

We had three main objectives in this study. First, we assessed if race, gender, and social class stereotypes of children entering adolescence vary systematically by age. We reasoned that if developmental factors are primarily driving stereotype development, eighth graders would hold stronger stereotypes than fourth graders.

The second research question we addressed was whether members of each social group would be more likely to view their group more positively than the out-group. As outlined above, status theory of stereotyping would predict that children of lower status would be less likely to report negative stereotypes about their own social groups. For instance, girls would not report that boys are better than girls in math and science and Blacks would not report that Whites perform better academically than Blacks. Furthermore, low status children may try to
buffer their self-esteem by strongly endorsing commonly held positive stereotypes of their group.

The third purpose of the study was to compare the strength of stereotypes across domains to determine if children who have stronger stereotypes in one domain (e.g., SES) also have strong stereotypes in the other domains (race, gender). In other words, if stereotyping is primarily an individual difference construct whereby some individuals are more likely to hold stereotypes than others, we would expect positive relationships across the three social categories. We also assessed whether the relationships among stereotypes varied across age. We hypothesized that older children would be more consistently stereotyped or egalitarian across the three social categories than younger children.

Method

Participants

Participants were a subgroup of children from a larger, cross-sectional investigation on children’s social stereotype beliefs and academic achievement. Because we were interested in examining how Black children compared their group to Whites and how White children compared their group to Blacks, only data of children who indicated they were European American ($n = 162$) or African American ($n = 93$) were included in the analyses reported here. Children of other ethnicities, including 30 Hispanic, one Asian American, four Native Americans, and 7 children of mixed ethnicity were dropped from this set of analyses.

The final sample of 255 children was comprised of 83 fourth graders (44 boys, 39 girls), 75 sixth graders (31 boys, 44 girls), and 97 eighth graders (31 boys, 66 girls) from elementary and middle schools in the Southeastern region of the United States. Most participating schools were predominantly White though fairly well integrated, with African American children
representing between 18 and 35% of the school population. Mean ages were 9.4 years for fourth graders ($SD = .54$), 11.6 years for sixth graders ($SD = .66$), and 13.4 years for eighth graders ($SD = .57$).

**Procedure**

Written parental informed consent was a prerequisite for study participation. Self-report questionnaires were administered to groups of 2 to 15 children on school premises. Research assistants read a prepared script directing children to respond to each item and. Questionnaires were completed in a single session. Each participating child received a small gift (e.g., stress ball; key chain flashlight) at the end of the session.

**Measures**

**Demographic Information.** Demographic information was obtained via self-report. Children indicated their age in years and months as well as their gender. Participants were asked to circle the label or labels that best described their race and/or ethnicity. These included the categories White/Caucasian, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, Native American, Asian American/Pacific Islander, and Other. Children who chose the “Other” category were asked to write their ethnicity in the provided space. Participants who circled two ethnic groups ($n = 7$) were classified as bi-racial and were excluded from the present analyses.

**Perceptions of Group Competence.** Visual analogue scales (VAS) were created to capture how children believed boys, girls, Blacks, Whites, rich, and poor children perform on a variety of competencies such as sports, reading, and math. Children placed a mark on a 100-millimeter line to indicate how “good” they felt that particular group of children was within a particular domain. For example, the item “I think that in science boys do this well” was followed by a scale with “not good at all” on the very left (0 millimeters) and “very good” on
the right (100 millimeters). Separate items were used to assess math, science, reading, writing, music, sports, school grades, and smartness for each of the six social groups. Children rated each social group (e.g., girls) on all eight items before proceeding to the next social group. The social groups were arranged in three different sequences in order to control for response bias. In addition, the two members of each social category were never adjacent to one another in the protocol (e.g., “boys” was not adjacent to “girls”). Perceived group competence scores represented how far in millimeters along the 100-millimeter line a child had marked, with lower scores representing lower competence ratings.

**Social Group Stereotype Scores.** Exploratory factor analyses were conducted on Perceived Group Competence item scores by grade to determine whether items could be aggregated and to examine differences across grades in factor structure. A separate factor analysis was conducted for each set of Perceived Competence scores (i.e., those for Whites, Blacks, Rich, Poor, Boys, and Girls). In general, items for each social group could be characterized by one factor. In all cases but two, one large eigenvalue (greater than 4) was followed by significantly smaller values (less than 1). This result suggests that participants were considering broad stereotypes and not differentiating among ability types (i.e., science versus sports) to a great degree. Exceptions were the following. One factor emerged for “rich” ability scores for fourth graders, but two factors emerged for sixth and eighth graders, for whom a sports/music ability factor separated from the academic factor. Similarly, “Black” ability items grouped as one factor for fourth and sixth graders, but formed two factors (sports/music vs. academic abilities) for eighth graders.

We created composite scores based on results of the factor analysis and on the previous literature on the nature of race, gender, and class stereotypes. For instance, in the area of
gender we examined math/science and reading/writing stereotypes separately because of previous differentiation of those domains, whereas for race and social class we created a single composite academic score (average of the reading, writing, math, science, school grades, and smartness scales). Music and sports were examined separately for girls because common stereotypes suggest that girls tend to be better in music and boys are better in sports. We combined sports and music in one score for race composites. Because we did not have firm hypotheses regarding social class stereotypes of sports and music, we examined those two domains separately.

To assess whether children held traditional verses non-traditional beliefs, social group stereotype scores were calculated for each child by subtracting his or her perceived competence composite score for the negatively stereotyped group from his or her score for the positively stereotyped group. For example, math/science gender stereotype scores were created by subtracting the girl math/science composite score from the boy math/science composite score. Thus, positive values indicated more traditional beliefs, values near zero indicated egalitarian beliefs, and negative values indicated non-conventional beliefs. The ten social group stereotype formulas are depicted below. Table 1 lists each stereotype and the group whom we consider to have the advantage (i.e., the positively stereotyped group).

Gender Math/Science Stereotypes = boys’ math/science competence – girls’ math/science competence

Gender Reading/Writing Stereotypes = girls’ reading/writing competence – boys’ reading/writing competence

Gender Music Stereotypes = girls’ music competence – boys’ music competence

Gender Sports Stereotypes = boys’ sports competence – girls’ sports competence
Race Academic Stereotypes = Whites’ academic competence – Blacks’ academic competence

Race Sports/Music Stereotypes = Blacks’ sports/music competence – Whites’ sports/music competence

Social Class Academic Stereotypes = rich children’s academic competence – poor children’s academic competence

Social Class Music Stereotypes = poor children’s music competence – rich children’s music competence

Social Class Sports Stereotypes = poor children’s sports competence – rich children’s sports competence

Global Stereotype Scores. Finally, a global stereotype score was computed for each social category (gender, race, and social class) by adding all social group stereotype scores within each category together. The global race stereotype score was computed by adding the race academic and race sports/music scores; global gender stereotypes were the sum of gender math/science, gender read/write, gender music, and gender sports scores; and overall social class stereotypes were the sum of social class academics, social class music, and social class sports scores. Again, positive values indicated more traditional beliefs (e.g., boys are better than girls at math/science and sports; Blacks are better than Whites at sports and music), neutral values indicated more egalitarian beliefs, and negative values indicated non-conventional beliefs (e.g., poor people are better students than rich people).

Results

We begin the results section with descriptive data on stereotypes of the entire sample. Next we evaluate developmental, race, and sex differences in stereotypes. We conclude with an
development of the relationships among stereotypes across social groups (i.e., sex, race, social class).

**Stereotypes in the Full Sample**

Table 1 contains descriptive statistics for each stereotype score. Although aggregating across groups obscures important sources of variability, this information gives a general picture of how the sample as a whole viewed the social groups under study. There was a wide absolute range of scores, although at least 90% of the scores for each stereotype composite fell between –50 and 50. Mean scores were generally as would be expected. Overall, students believed that girls were better than boys in reading/writing and music. Boys were reported to be better in sports. Interestingly, girls were viewed as slightly better in math/science than boys. Whites were viewed as somewhat stronger academically than Blacks, and Blacks were viewed as better in sports and music. The rich were generally viewed as stronger academically; reported class differences in sports and music were minimal, but favored the poor.

**Grade, Gender, and Race Differences in Stereotypes**

A series of multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were computed to examine Grade, Gender, and Race differences in stereotypes by social category. In each of these analyses, Grade, Gender, and Race served as between-subjects variables and the stereotype scores described above were dependent variables. Tukey’s Least Significant Difference test was used to evaluate comparisons among means.

**Gender Stereotypes.** To examine group differences in gender stereotypes, a 3(Grade) x 2(Race) x 2(Gender) MANOVA was run with reading/writing, math/science, music, and sports stereotype scores as dependent variables. The main effects of Gender and Race were significant, \( F(4, 234) = 17.9 \) and \( 3.21, p < .01 \) and .05 respectively. Univariate effects for
Gender on math/science, reading/writing, music, and sports were all significant, $F(1, 237) = 20.79, 90.62, 52.49, \text{ and } 100.46$, respectively, all $p$’s < .01. These results are displayed in Figure 1. Boys were more egalitarian (i.e., close to 0) than girls in their stereotypes regarding reading/writing, math/science, and music ability. For sports ability both sexes viewed boys as better than girls, with boys reporting a stronger advantage.

The only univariate test that was significant under the Race main effect in gender stereotypes was music, $F(1, 237) = 3.94, p < .05$. Whites tended to view girls as much more proficient than boys in music ($M = 19.12$), whereas Blacks viewed girls as only somewhat more proficient ($M = 10.89$).

Although the multivariate effect for the Gender by Race interaction was non-significant, $F(4, 234) = 1.74, p = .14$, the univariate interactions for math/science and reading/writing were significant, $F(1, 237) = 4.34 \text{ and } 5.62, p < .05$. Black girls viewed girls as more competent than boys to a greater degree than did White girls in math/science, $M = -21.41 \text{ vs. } -9.83, F(1, 243) = 5.04, p < .05$. Although both Black and White males tended to be relatively egalitarian in their gender stereotypes of math/science abilities, Black boys were reported slightly stronger views than White boys did that boys were better than girls in math/science, $M = 2.47 \text{ vs. } 1.67, F(1, 243) = 4.43, p < .05$. There were no significant race differences within either gender group for reading/writing stereotypes. There were, however, significant differences within race according to gender for both reading/writing and math/science stereotypes. In both cases, the difference between boys’ and girls’ assessments of abilities was greater for Black participants than for Whites. There was a difference of 31.26 between Black girls’ and Black boys’ scores on reading/writing gender stereotypes, and a difference of 15.1 between White girls’ and White boys’ scores, $F (1, 243) = 37.76, p < .001$. Similarly, there was a difference of 18.94 points
between Black girls’ assessments of math/science stereotypes, but a difference of 8.16 for White boys and girls. In both cases, girls reported that girls were more competent than boys.

Finally, the Gender x Race x Grade interaction on reading/writing stereotypes was significant, $F(2, 237) = 3.67, p < .05$. This interaction is portrayed in Figure 2. There were significant differences in Black and White boy’s reports of gender stereotypes at fourth and sixth grades, $F(1, 243) = 4.36$ and $9.74, p < .05$ and .01 respectively. White fourth grade boys were egalitarian, but slightly in favor of boys ($M = -5.19$), whereas White sixth and eighth grade boys reported sex differences in favor of girls ($M = 17.29$ and $13.93$ respectively). The responses of Black boys, on the other hand, were more variable. In fourth grade, Black boys were relatively egalitarian, but favored girls ($M = 7.28$). In sixth grade, Black boys reported that boys were better than girls in reading/writing ability ($M = -10.04$). In eighth grade they were egalitarian, but slightly in favor of girls ($M = 4.48$). The simple effects ANOVAs showed no significant race differences for girls across grades. The main effect of Grade and the two-way interactions involving Grade were nonsignificant.

In summary, girls reported that girls outperform boys in all domains except sports. Boys, in contrast, were egalitarian in all domains except sports, where they favored their own group. Black girls, in comparison to all other children, reported a relatively stronger advantage for girls in academic domains. Sixth and eighth graders showed stronger traditional literacy stereotypes (i.e., favoring girls over boys) than fourth graders for all groups except Black boys.

**Race Stereotypes.** To examine race stereotypes, we entered the general academic ability and music/sports race stereotype scores as dependent variables in a 3(Grade) x 2(Race) x 2(Gender) MANOVA. The main effects of Race and Grade were significant, $F(2, 240) = 9.8, p < .01$ and $F(4, 480) = 3.0, p < .05$. Whites rated themselves as slightly more competent than
Blacks in academics ($M = 5.75$) and slightly less competent in music/sports ($M = 7.17$). Blacks reported no race-related differences in academics ($M = 1.19$), but rated themselves more positively than Whites in music and sports ($M = 19.98$). Race-related stereotypes of music/sports abilities increased between fourth and sixth grade, $F(2, 241) = 4.51, p < .05$. Fourth graders ($M = 7.34$) reported few race differences in music/sports, whereas sixth and eighth graders reported that Blacks are better in music/sports ($M = 15.89$ and $17.49$ respectively). The main effect of gender and all interactions were nonsignificant.

**Social Class Stereotypes.** To analyze social class stereotypes, we conducted a $3(\text{Grade}) \times 2(\text{Race}) \times 2(\text{Gender})$ MANOVA using general academic, music, and sports social class stereotype scores as the three dependent variables. The main effect of Grade was significant, $F(6, 464) = 2.7, p < .05$. For music, fourth graders ($M = 12.4$) reported that poor children are better than rich; whereas sixth and eighth graders ($M = -3.6$ and $-0.2$, respectively) were egalitarian in their views, $F(2, 234) = 3.7$. In contrast, fourth graders were egalitarian in their views of sports abilities, whereas sixth and eighth graders gave an advantage to poor children ($M's = -3.4, 10.1$, and $6.6$, respectively), $F(2, 234) = 3.3$. Main effects of Race and Gender and all interactions were nonsignificant.

**Cross-Category Stereotype Strength**

We calculated bivariate correlations to determine whether individuals held stereotypes of similar strength across domains and social categories (see Table 2). Because of the large number of correlations computed, we used an alpha level of .01. In a first set of analyses, we calculated correlations among all possible combinations of the nine stereotype scores. We hypothesized that scores would be most likely to be related either within social group (e.g., individuals who held traditional race academic stereotypes might also hold traditional
stereotypes regarding race differences in sports and music abilities) or within area of competence (e.g., race academic stereotypes might correlate with social class academic stereotypes). We found that correlations within social groups were mostly significant, favoring one gender, race, or social class over the other (e.g., children who ranked boys higher in math/science also ranked boys as better in reading and writing). Thus, rather than consistency in tendency to be traditional versus egalitarian, children were consistent in favoring one social group over another for all areas of competence.

Next, correlations were calculated among global stereotype scores. These scores are aggregates of academic, music, and sports stereotypes and reflect the strength of the overall race, gender, and social class stereotypes without regard to domain of competence. Higher scores reflect greater traditionality of beliefs. Correlations were computed for the full sample and within each grade. The analysis with the full sample suggested that endorsement of race stereotypes is positively correlated with endorsement of gender ($r(247) = .23$) and social class ($r(245) = .26$) stereotypes. In addition, the correlation between class and gender stereotypes was significant $r(244) = .17$.

As expected, it was found that concordance among stereotypes was stronger for eighth graders than for fourth or sixth graders. In fact, there were no significant correlations among stereotype composite scores for fourth or sixth graders. For eighth graders, race stereotypes were positively correlated with both gender and social class stereotypes, $r(92) = .39$ and .30, respectively. Gender and class stereotypes were not significantly correlated, $r(92) = .08$.

Discussion

The main goal of this study was to examine African American and European American children’s academic stereotypes regarding gender, race, and social class groups. We were
especially interested in how these stereotypes differed across grades that span the transition to middle school and whether low status groups (girls and African Americans) would differ from high status groups (boys and European Americans) in their endorsement of positive and negative stereotypes. We also explored consistency in stereotyping and developmental differences in consistency. In the following sections we discuss our results and their implications for theories of the development of stereotypes.

*The Development of Race, Gender, and Class Stereotypes in Young Adolescents*

Our results regarding developmental differences in stereotypes were mixed. Where age differences appeared, older children were usually more traditional in beliefs than younger children, who were more egalitarian. In particular, stereotypes about sex differences in literacy skills, race differences in sports and music, and social class differences in sports ability were more traditional among sixth and eighth graders than among fourth graders. The only exception was in the area of social class stereotypes for music ability, where fourth graders reported that poor children are more skilled, and older children reported no class differences. Age differences were not significant for other stereotypes.

Our results point to the importance of both cognitive development and experiential factors in the development of stereotypes. As would be predicted by theories of cognitive development, older children as compared to younger children were both somewhat more likely to espouse traditional stereotypes and were more consistent in their tendency to be traditional or egalitarian. However, developmental differences in belief were not uniform across either social categories (i.e., race, gender, social class), or across domain (i.e., academic skills, sports, music), thus showing the importance of experiential factors in shaping children’s beliefs.
Furthermore, sex and race differences in stereotype reports speak strongly to the importance of experiential and self-identity factors as a lens guiding children’s developing beliefs.

The similarity in age differences in race and social class sports stereotypes may represent the tendency for children to merge conceptions of the poor and minority groups over time and with experience. If this is the case, it could have far-reaching implications as it may reflect a tendency for adolescents to think of the typical African American as poor or the typical European American as rich. Black students could thus be subject to two sets of negative stereotypes.

*Status and Stereotypes*

Our data provide a fresh perspective on in-group bias and status theory in several ways. First, most research on in-group bias has relied on arbitrarily created groups. We examined the real-world categories of sex, race, and social class—categories that are highly salient to individuals and play a strong role in shaping their identities. Second, we examined endorsement of stereotypes that were both negative and positive for groups of varying social status, whereas most prior research has focused on negative views of low status groups. Third, we examined developmental changes in children’s academic stereotypes, which have not been explored in prior research. Fourth, our design permitted us to examine interactions among race and gender subgroups, thereby testing whether the reports of Black girls versus those of Black boys, for instance, were most consistent with predictions of status theory.

With some exceptions, our results supported the status theory of stereotyping. Low status groups (girls and African Americans) did not endorse stereotypes that reflected negatively on their own group. Girls did not report that boys excel in math and science, and Black children reported no race differences in academic skills. Furthermore, low status groups
more strongly endorsed commonly held positive stereotypes of their group than did high status
groups. For gender stereotypes, we found that low status individuals (girls) were more likely
than high status individuals (boys) to report an in-group bias in all domains except sports. This
result was especially pronounced for Black girls, who according to the double jeopardy theory
have low status both by virtue of their sex and their race (Beale, 1970). Girls even reported a
female advantage in math and science, areas traditionally thought of as male-dominated. In the
area of race stereotypes, the low status group (African American children) reported strong
advantages for Blacks in sports and music. Thus, it was not the case that low status groups were
simply more egalitarian than high status groups in their assessments.

   Status theory predicts that high status groups endorse views that reflect positively on
their own group, thus showing an in-group bias. In our data, White children—the high status
group—endorsed traditional race stereotypes that Whites are stronger academically than
Blacks. In contrast, boys – a high status group – were egalitarian in their reports of sex
differences in math and science skills. Boys’ reports for math and science are seemingly in
contradiction both with status theory and with research showing that boys report higher self-
competence than girls in math and science. These egalitarian reports of boys may reflect the
fact that, especially in the early grades, girls either out-perform boys in math and science or
perform at the same level. Considering our results in light of other research, it is likely that the
boys in our sample distinguished between performance of their social group (i.e., boys) and of
themselves as individuals. In other words, whereas boys report higher self-competence in math
and science than girls (Bornholt, Goodnow, & Cooney, 1994; Lundeberg, Fox, & Puncochar,
1994; Stevenson & Newman, 1986; Wigfield, Eccles, Yoon, Harold, Arbreton, Doan, &
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Blumenfeld, 1997), our results imply that they do not necessarily generalize their beliefs about skill to their social group.

Although it appears that boys, a high status group, are behaving as if they were of low status, examination of the race by gender interaction suggests that this is not entirely so. Whereas Black boys (a low status group) reported no difference between boys and girls on math/science and reading/writing, White boys (a high status group) tended to endorse the traditional stereotype that girls are better than boys in reading/writing. Both White and Black boys reported egalitarian beliefs about gender differences in math/science. It is possible that members of high status groups feel less need to buffer their self-esteem by not endorsing negative stereotypes of their group.

Our results also suggest that low status groups emphasize attributes for which there are positive stereotypes of their group. Girls reported that girls are quite a bit better in reading and writing and music than boys. Black students, irrespective of gender, were likely to strongly endorse positive race stereotypes regarding music and sports abilities. In addition to emphasizing music and sports abilities, Black girls, possibly because of their doubly low status, strongly endorse positive female stereotypes. Specifically, the gap between boys’ and girls assessments of girls’ greater reading/writing competence relative to boys was much larger for Blacks than for Whites. Thus, Black girls utilize a group enhancement strategy for both their female and their Black group memberships. It is also possible that these results are owing to the fact that Black girls do out-perform Black boys on average.

Consistency in Stereotypes across Social Categories

Few prior studies have examined stereotypes across social groups in a single study, thereby enabling comparisons of children’s tendency to stereotype across groups. In our
sample, children were consistent in their tendency to favor one social group over another in various domains. For example, children who reported that Black children are better than Whites academically were also likely to report that Black children were better in sports and music. In addition, older children were consistent in their tendency to be traditional across social groups.

We examined children’s stereotypes for three social categories: race, gender, and social class. Although all three categories exemplify areas in which one group (males, Whites, rich) has higher status in our society than the other group, these three categories differ from each other in important ways. First, the three are on a continuum in terms of the age at which children are aware of them as social categories. Children’s awareness of gender appears first, in the third year of life. By the fourth year, children show awareness of race as a social category. Awareness of social class emerges later. Second, sex and race differ from social class both in terms of their salience and in terms of self-identification. Whereas physical markers of sex and race are apparent, social class is much less obvious. In addition, individuals in the United States easily self-identify as male or female, Black or White, whereas the majority of Americans do not view themselves as either rich or poor.

Given that social class is less visible and is less salient in self-identity than race or gender, it is not surprising that traditionality of social class stereotypes was unrelated to traditionality of gender stereotypes. In contrast, consistency in the tendency of eighth graders to endorse traditional versus egalitarian stereotypes across the domains of race and sex and across race and social class may reflect a developmental shift in organization of social perceptions, or may reflect individual differences in experience that lead adolescents to be egalitarian versus traditional in their views. The significant correlation between race and social class stereotypes
may arise because of the conflation of race and social class in American society—the poor and minorities are often viewed as one and the same.

Limitations

This study contributes uniquely to the literature on stereotyping in that we used direct assessments of children’s beliefs about the abilities of different groups, rather than using implicit assessment techniques. However, this design raises the possibility of effects of social desirability and political correctness. Indeed, even White students’ reports of sensitive issues such as Black-White differences in academic achievement were of much smaller magnitude than boys’ reports of the more socially acceptable stereotypes of boy-girl differences in reading and writing. Overall, groups’ reports of group differences in music/sports abilities were substantial.

Another limitation of the study was that we did not have reliable information on students’ socioeconomic backgrounds. Because we only had contact with student participants for a large number of participants, we could not get indicators of class standing, which students of this age are rarely able to provide reliably. Subjective views of SES could have been employed, but there is some indication that the vast majority of children view themselves to be middle class, regardless of actual class standing. Thus, neither the rich nor the poor would be considered the in-group for most participants in our study.

Questions for Future Research

Future research employing a longitudinal design would allow us to examine intra-individual change in stereotypes across this critical transition to middle school. Such a design could lead to further exploration of our finding that the traditionality of stereotypes tends to converge as children get older and on how other individual factors affect trajectories of
stereotype development. Moreover, a longitudinal design would allow for examination of the relative stability in stereotypes over time and whether stereotypes are stable across domains.

Steele and Aronson’s research (Aronson, Quinn, & Spencer, 1998); Steele & Aronson, 1998) implies that negative group stereotypes negatively impact performance of both low and high status groups. It is unclear, though, whether this is true for adolescents and what the role, if any, endorsement of positive stereotypes play. In addition, our study and those of Steele and Aronson focused on group differences in stereotype endorsement. Additional research on the implications of individual differences in race, gender, and social class stereotypes on children’s beliefs about their own competence and their actual achievement striving is warranted. Of particular concern is whether group enhancement efforts, where members of low status groups fail to endorse widely held negative stereotypes of their group while strongly endorsing positive societal stereotypes, may result in a drop in motivation in academic areas that have real consequences for life chances in the future. The question remains whether Black boys who believe that they are better than others in sports or music and equal in academic areas will at some point stop pressing for academic achievement in favor of success in other arenas.
References


Table 1

*Social Group Stereotype Scores*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Social Category</th>
<th>Stereotype</th>
<th>Advantage</th>
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<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Math/Science</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading/Writing</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Girls</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>Boys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>Whites</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports/Music</td>
<td>Blacks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>Poor</td>
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Table 2

Stereotype scores for the entire sample.

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<th>Stereotype domain</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
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<td>23.3</td>
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<td>31.5</td>
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<td>99.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender Sports</td>
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<td>34.3</td>
<td>-99.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
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<td>17.4</td>
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<td>-86.0</td>
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<td>99.0</td>
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### Table 3

**Correlations of Stereotype Strength Across Social Groups**

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<td>0.53*</td>
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<td>0.04</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>-0.19*</td>
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<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.04</td>
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<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.02</td>
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<td>-0.02</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-0.51*</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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</table>

* p < .01
Figure Captions

Figure 1. Sex differences in gender stereotypes.

Figure 2. Reading/writing stereotypes for Black and White boys and girls.