How correcting generic statements about gender limits kind-beliefs
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BACKGROUND

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?

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)

DEPENDENT VARIABLES

Same across conditions

Then children answered questions measuring their beliefs about gender categories

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,” $p = .01$).

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.