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Gender, Affiliation, Assertion, and the Interactive Context of Parent–Child Play

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Ninety-eight young U.S. children (mean age = 48 months) with either European, Latin American, or multiple ethnic backgrounds were videotaped with their mothers and their fathers on separate occasions in their families' homes. Parent–child pairs played for 8 min each with a feminine-stereotyped toy set (foods and plates) and a masculine-stereotyped toy set (track and cars). Levels of affiliation (engaging vs. distancing) and assertion (direct vs. nondirect) were rated on 7-point scales every 5 s from the videotapes for both parent and child. Overall, the play activity accounted for a large proportion of the variance in parents' and children's mean affiliation and assertion ratings. Some hypothesized gender-related differences in behavior were also observed. In addition, exploratory analyses revealed some differences between the different ethnic groups. The results highlight the importance of role modeling and activity settings in the socialization and social construction of gender.

Although several researchers have observed systematic gender differences in both parents' and children's behavior, there are also many reports of no differences (see Lytton & Romney, 1991; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Zern, 1984). The inconsistencies across studies may be explained partly by the overemphasis in most earlier studies on testing for univariate gender effects. In contrast, the present study is based on contextual models of gender that emphasize the influences of the interactive setting on social behavior (see Beall, 1993; Caldera, Huston, & O'Brien, 1989; Carpenter, 1983; Deaux & Major, 1987; Leaper & Gleason, 1996; Lewis & Gregory, 1987; Liss, 1983; Lott & Maluso, 1993; O'Brien & Nagle, 1987). Rather than viewing gender-related differences in behavior as reflecting underlying "feminine" or "masculine" traits, these models interpret them more as social constructions that often depend on the circumstances.

Relevant contextual factors considered in Deaux and Major's (1987) theoretical model of gender include the task demands of the interactive setting and people's reactions to one another's behavior. In the present study I investigated the interrelationship between these factors and the likelihood of gender-typed patterns of behavior. Specifically, I examined the influences of the play activity, the other person's gender, and the other person's behavior as possible moderators of gender typing in parent–child interactions. As reviewed below, each of these variables has been investigated separately in prior studies, but there has been little research considering the interrelationship of these factors in the gender-typing process.

Gender-typed behavior is conceptualized here in terms of the two underlying dimensions of *interpersonal affiliation* and *self-assertion* (Leaper, 1994).[1] The psychological characteristics associated with self-assertion (e.g., independence, decisiveness, dominance) and interpersonal affiliation (e.g., warmth, responsiveness, support) have been used to define psychological masculinity and femininity, respectively (for reviews, see Huston, 1983; Leaper, 1994; Ruble & Martin, 1998). The two-dimensional model of gender-typed behavior allows for two alternative analytic strategies. First, one can devise a set of coding categories based on the intersection of the two dimensions, as in my characterization of communicative acts (Leaper, 1991) as either collaborative (affili-

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[1] Other models of interpersonal behavior have made a similar distinction between constructs that are analogous to affiliation and assertion. Some of them include, respectively, the constructs of *communion* and *agency* (Bakan, 1966), *warmth* and *control* (Baumrind & Black, 1967), *expressiveness* and *instrumentality* (Bales, 1970), *affiliation* and *control* (Wiggins, 1979), *friendliness* and *dominance* (Kiesler, 1983), and *connectedness* and *individuality* (Grotevant & Cooper, 1985).

ative and assertive), controlling (assertive but nonaffiliative), obliging (affiliative but nonassertive), or withdrawing (nonassertive and nonaffiliative). The categorical approach has the advantage of taking into account the interrelationship between the two dimensions simultaneously. For example, I used this type of model to study peer interactions among middle-class (Leaper, 1991) and low-income (Leaper, Tenenbaum, & Shaffer, 1999) children. In both studies, girls were not generally less assertive than boys. Instead, girls were more likely than boys to use collaborative communication acts that simultaneously combined high assertion with high affiliation (e.g., proposals for joint action or building on the other's initiative); boys were more likely than girls to use controlling acts that exerted high assertion and low affiliation (e.g., commands or disagreements).

Alternatively, one can analyze affiliation and assertion as two separate dimensions of behavior. The advantage of this approach is that it allows one to explore the correlates of each dimension more fully. To illustrate, researchers studying gender-role identity have used the Femininity (i.e., Expressiveness) and the Masculinity (i.e., Instrumentality) scales from either the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (Spence & Helmreich, 1978) or the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem, 1974) in two ways. Some investigators have used the scales to form four gender-role classifications (androgynous, feminine, masculine, or undifferentiated). However, other researchers have used the two scales as separate predictors. When the latter strategy is applied, the two dimensions often have different correlates (e.g., see Archer, 1989; Cota & Fekken, 1988; Leaper, 1987; Twenge, 1997). To my knowledge, there has been no prior study of gender-typed behavior that has analyzed affiliation and assertion separately. Using this analytic strategy in the present study made it possible to examine if and how various factors are differently related to affiliation and assertion between parents and children. As explained in the following sections, the hypotheses in the present study were specific to either the affiliation or the assertion dimension.

Parental Modeling

To what extent is there evidence that assertion and affiliation are differentially socialized in girls and boys during development? To answer this question, researchers generally consider two types of socialization processes. One source for gender learning comes in the form of the relevant role models in the child's environment. Pertinent aspects of the child's ecology include the gender-related characteristics and scripts modeled by family members or other socializing agents.

Several studies have highlighted ways in which mothers and fathers tend to behave differently (see Fagot, 1995, and Ruble & Martin, 1998, for recent narrative reviews). In addition, Leaper, Anderson, and Sanders's (1998) meta-analysis highlighted various ways in which mothers and fathers talked differently with their children. Consistent with the division of roles in traditional marriages was the finding that mothers tended to talk and use affiliative-expressive speech (e.g., supportive statements) with their children more than did fathers. In contrast, fathers tended to use assertive-instrumental speech (e.g., directives and informing statements) more than did mothers. Therefore, the first set of predictions in the present study was that mothers would generally

demonstrate higher degrees of affiliation than would fathers, whereas fathers would generally demonstrate higher levels of assertion. Unlike prior studies, the present investigation coded for levels of affiliation and assertion rather than counting frequencies of discrete behavioral acts. Affiliation ranges from being highly distant to highly engaged and interdependent. Assertion ranges from being highly nondirect and passive to being highly direct.

Differential Treatment of Daughters and Sons

Besides modeling, gender learning can occur when particular types of behavior are reinforced or discouraged (Lott & Maluso, 1993). Although many reviews of the research have concluded that there is little evidence for parents' differential treatment of sons and daughters (Lytton & Romney, 1991; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974; Zern, 1984), other reviews point to differential treatment when certain considerations are taken into account. First, studies are more likely to identify systematic ways in which daughters and sons are treated differently when behavioral observations rather than self-report measures are used (Leaper et al., 1998; Lytton & Romney, 1991). For example, when reviewing observational studies of mothers' speech to children, Leaper et al. (1998) found in their meta-analysis that mothers tended to use more affiliative speech (e.g., supportive statements) with daughters than with sons and tended to use fewer power-assertive statements (e.g., commands) with sons than with daughters.[2] In these ways, sons were viewed as receiving more encouragement for independence, whereas daughters were seen as receiving more support for verbal closeness and dependence. On the basis of these prior findings, in the present study I tested to see if parents would demonstrate higher levels of affiliation with daughters and lower levels of assertion with sons.

Activity Settings

The purpose of the interactive setting also can influence the likelihood that parents treat girls and boys differently. In their meta-analysis, Lytton and Romney (1991) identified only 1 out of 19 reviewed socialization areas that was associated with a sizable gender-typing effect: Parents generally encouraged gender-stereotyped activities in their children. To the extent that gender-typed activities provide different opportunities for practicing social and cognitive skills (Leaper, 2000; Liss, 1983), Lytton and Romney's finding is not inconsequential. Feminine-stereotyped toys and play activities, such as toy food sets, tend to emphasize social-relational behaviors that may help prepare the person for intimate relationships. In contrast, masculine-stereotyped toys and play activities, such as construction toys, exercise instrumental behaviors that may generalize to the world of work outside the home (see Block, 1983; Hughes, 1991; Huston, 1985; Leaper, 1994; Leaper & Gleason, 1996; Liss, 1983).

The role of the activity setting in parental gender typing was underscored in Leaper et al.'s (1998) meta-analysis of gender effects on parents' speech. Effect sizes were largest when studies

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[2] Commands are high in assertion and low in affiliation. In contrast, supportive statements are high in affiliation and can also be high in assertion (e.g., praise).

were based on observations of unstructured activities. In contrast, effect sizes were usually negligible when specific tasks were assigned to the parent–child pairs. Thus, if parents tend to encourage different activities for daughters and sons (as indicated in Lytton and Romney's 1991 meta-analysis), then parents' differential treatment of their daughters and sons may depend on the type of task or activity that is selected. To take the activity setting into account, I studied parent–child interactions during both feminine- and masculine-stereotyped play settings. Many feminine-stereo-typed forms of play, such as cooperative pretend play, require collaborative styles of interaction involving the coordination of assertion and affiliation (see Leaper, 1994; Sheldon, 1992), whereas masculine-stereotyped play activities involving more independence, such as construction play, tend to emphasize high assertion and relatively low affiliation. Therefore, levels of affiliation may vary across different play activity settings more than do levels of assertion.

Gender and Play Activity Interactions

The impact of the play setting on parents' behavior was also expected to interact with gender. Some prior studies have suggested that some parents react more negatively and less positively when their children are engaged in cross-gender-typed as opposed to gender-typed activities (Caldera et al., 1989; Fagot, 1978; Langlois & Downs, 1980; Leaper, Leve, Strasser, & Schwartz, 1995). Furthermore, negative reactions to cross-gender-typed behavior appear more likely among fathers than among mothers (see Siegal, 1987). Therefore, parents generally—and fathers especially—were hypothesized to demonstrate less affiliation in cross-gender-stereotyped than in gender-stereotyped play settings.

Mutual Influences

People's behavior generally depends on how others act with them. For this reason, most contemporary models of family interaction (Cowan, Cowan, & Kerig, 1993; Maccoby & Martin, 1983) and gender typing (Fagot, 1995) emphasize the importance of transactional influences. However, most of the previous studies examining gender-typed interactions have looked only at parents' use of certain behaviors without regard to the child's behavior. It may be additionally informative to examine how parents' and children's behaviors are interrelated. Prior research with European American families (Gleason, 1987; Mannle & Tomasello, 1987) as well as Mexican American families (Tenenbaum & Leaper, 1998) suggests that fathers may place higher cognitive demands on their children than do mothers. In contrast, mothers may be more apt to accommodate their own behavior in response to the child's behavior. Therefore, fathers were hypothesized to demonstrate higher overall levels of assertion than their children would, whereas mothers were hypothesized to show lower levels of assertion than their children would. Also, on the basis of studies finding more encouragement of independence in sons than in daughters (e.g., Block, 1983; Leaper et al., 1998), parents were expected to demonstrate relatively lower levels of assertion with their sons than with their daughters.

Child's Age Level as a Moderator

Prior reviews suggest that parental gender-typing effects may change as children get older. For example, Leaper et al.'s (1998) meta-analysis indicated that mother–father differences in supportive speech were more likely among younger (toddler) than older children, whereas mother–father differences in directive speech were more likely among older than younger children. However, mothers' differential uses of supportive and directive speech with daughters versus sons were more likely with older children. Therefore, I explored child age level as a possible moderator of the effects of the other variables.

Exploring Possible Variations Related to Ethnic Background

In addition to testing the hypothesized effects, in the present study I also considered the association between the family's sociocultural background and parent–child behaviors. The sample included families from Latin American, European, and other ethnic backgrounds. Cultural background may be especially pertinent when examining affiliation and assertion (Cooper & Denner, 1998; Greenfield, 1994; Triandis, 1989) as well as gender. Not only do cultural traditions vary in their respective emphases on affiliation and assertion in childrearing, they also vary along these dimensions in patterns of gender typing (e.g., Hurtado, 1995; Whiting & Edwards, 1988). Some research suggests, however, that factors such as economic status and education may underlie cultural variations in gender typing (e.g., Dryler, 1998; Eisenberg, 1996; Leaper & Valin, 1996). For example, Leaper and Valin (1996) found that gender-egalitarian attitudes were more likely among Mexican-descent parents with higher education levels. Similar to arguments made in the psychology of gender, the need to consider factors related to within-group variations has been emphasized by researchers studying culture and ethnicity (e.g., Azmitia, Cooper, Garcia, & Dunbar, 1996; Sue & Sue, 1987; Weisner, Gallimore, & Jordon, 1988). Therefore, in the present study, I carried out exploratory analyses to compare families from different ethnic backgrounds while including relevant variables such as education and socioeconomic status as covariates. The tests were designed primarily to see whether any of the hypothesized gender-typing effects held for one ethnic group more than another. A secondary purpose was to determine if there were any variations in behavior related to ethnic background.

In summary, the present study examined affiliation and assertion as separate psychosocial dimensions of gender typing in parent–child interactions. To consider contextual influences on the gender-typing process, I compared parent–child interactions in feminine-stereotyped and masculine-stereotyped play activities. Using these procedures, I tested the following sets of hypotheses:

1. Parent gender differences were expected in affiliation and assertion ratings. Specifically, mothers were hypothesized to demonstrate higher mean affiliation and lower mean assertion compared with fathers.

2. Parents generally (and fathers especially) were expected to use lower levels of assertion when interacting with sons than when interacting with daughters.

3. The play activity setting was also hypothesized to influence

behavior. In particular, higher mean affiliation ratings were expected during a feminine-stereotyped activity emphasizing cooperative pretend play than in a masculine-stereotyped activity emphasizing construction play.

4. Parents generally (and fathers especially) were hypothesized to show lower affiliation levels during cross-gender-typed activities than during gender-typed activities.

5. Parent and child assertion ratings were expected to be interrelated. Specifically, fathers were predicted to demonstrate higher overall assertion levels than their children, whereas mothers were predicted to show lower overall assertion levels than their children.

6. The child's age level was examined as a possible moderator of gender-related effects on behavior. Parental gender-typing effects were hypothesized to increase with the child's age. Also, gender differences in children's own behavior were expected to be more likely at the older age level.

In addition to testing these six sets of hypotheses, I carried out three types of exploratory analyses. First, gender-related variations in the magnitude of the correlation between parents' and children's affiliation and assertion were examined. Second, the predictor variables were tested in relation to children's affiliation and assertion. Finally, to explore how family demographic factors might be related to parent–child behavior, I examined ethnic background as a possible predictor or moderator variable of affiliation and assertion.

Method

Participants

Sample characteristics. The present sample consisted of 98 two-parent families with a preschool-age child. There were 49 families with a target daughter and 49 families with a target son. The mean age of the children was 47.50 months (range = 36–65 months; SD = 10.44). For the analyses described later, the median child age was used to divide the children into a younger age group (N = 49; range = 30–47 months; M = 38.39 months; SD = 5.28) and an older age group (N = 49; range = 48–65 months; M = 56.61 months; SD = 4.80). Fifty-three percent of the children were firstborns, and 36% of the children had at least one younger sibling. There were no significant differences between daughters and sons in age, birth order, or number of siblings.

Families resided in urban, suburban, or agricultural areas along or nearby the central California coast. The mean age of the mothers was 34.65 years (SD = 5.43), and the mean age of the fathers was 37.21 years (SD = 6.42). The parents' ethnic backgrounds were predominantly European (61% of mothers and 54% of fathers) or Latin American (34% of mothers and 32% of fathers). Eighty percent of the mothers and 72% of the fathers were born in the United States. Parents born outside the United States were mostly from Mexico (18% of the mothers and 24% of the fathers). Fifty-five percent of the Latina mothers and 58% of the Latino fathers reported that they spoke only Spanish in their homes. Nineteen percent of the Latina mothers and 19% of the Latino fathers reported that they spoke both Spanish and English in the home. Because of the number of mixed-ethnicity marriages, families were classified according to how the parents described the child's ethnicity. There were 48 children (23 daughters and 25 sons) identified as being of European descent, 30 children (15 daughters and 15 sons) characterized as being of Latin American descent, 19 children (11 daughters and 8 sons) described as having more than one ethnic background, and 1 son described as having an East Asian background. For the statistical analyses described later, the last child was included in the mixed-ethnic-background group.

Fifty-five percent of the mothers and 88% of the fathers had paid employment. The median occupational prestige ranking (Stevens & Cho, 1985) for mothers was "semi-skilled worker," and for fathers it was "semi-professional." When the highest occupational prestige ranking of either parent was used, the median level was "semi-professional." Parents of non-Latino children were significantly higher in socioeconomic status (SES) rankings (M = 6.38, SD = 1.57) than were parents of Latino children (M = 4.53, SD = 2.49), $F(1, 96)$ = 19.77, p < .001. Among the non-Latino families, there was no difference in SES between the European American and the mixed-ethnicity groups.

Parents reported their education using the following scale: 1 = *some elementary school,* 2 = *completed elementary school,* 3 = *some high school,* 4 = *completed high school,* 5 = *some college,* 6 = *completed college,* 7 = *some graduate or professional school,* and 8 = *completed graduate or professional school.* One mother did not report her education level. The median level of education for both mothers and fathers was having a college degree. Mothers and fathers did not significantly differ in education levels, $t(95)$ = 1.10, *ns.* To create a parent education variable, I used the higher of the mother's or the father's ranking. Parents of non-Latino children were significantly higher in education rankings (M = 5.72, SD = 1.20) than were parents of Latino children (M = 3.70, SD = 1.88), $F(1, 96)$ = 41.21, p < .001. Among non-Latino parents, the European American and the mixed-ethnicity samples did not differ.

Recruitment. The project was described as "a study of normal children's play and language development." Participating families were recruited primarily through two methods. First, flyers were distributed at day-care centers and preschools. Second, using names and addresses obtained either through birth announcements in a local newspaper or through a mailing list purchased from a direct-mail marketing firm, I sent letters with return postcards to families. Families received either a children's book or a $10 gift certificate as an honorarium for their participation.

Procedure

Parent–child play sessions were recorded in each family's home. Separate visits were made to observe mother–child and father–child interactions. The second visit occurred approximately 1–2 weeks after the first one. There were equal numbers of families in which mothers or fathers were visited first. Because of parents' scheduling demands, however, it was not always possible to assign the order of visits randomly.

At least two women research assistants visited each family's home. Researchers visiting Spanish-speaking families were fluent in Spanish themselves. Upon arrival, one research assistant asked the parent to complete an informed consent form and a questionnaire containing family demographic questions while a second research assistant set up the video equipment. (English and Spanish versions of the questionnaires were available.) Next, the parent–child dyad was videotaped while they played with different sets of toys. One research assistant operated the video camera while the other assistant helped to keep other family members out of the recording area. Recordings typically occurred in the family's living room.

Parents were asked to play with three different sets of toys for 8 min each. After 8 min, each set of toys was removed and the next set was placed on the floor. First, a Playmobil zoo with animals, people, and surroundings was introduced. This relatively gender-neutral toy set was used as a warm-up context to help the parent and child accommodate to being videotaped while playing together. After the warm-up play session, two gender-typed toy sets were presented in counterbalanced order across families. Within each family, the order of toy presentation was the same for mothers and fathers. The feminine-stereotyped toy set consisted of Playskool plastic foods, pots, and place settings for two. The masculine-stereotyped toy set consisted of a Little Tikes large plastic track requiring assembly along with a tunnel, station, and two cars with people. The

gender-typed classifications of the toy sets are consistent with previous research on both stereotypes and preferences (see Hughes, 1991, for a review). In addition to being gender-stereotyped, the two toys reflect functionally different types of play. The toy foods and plates tend to elicit collaborative social-dramatic play, whereas the toy track and cars emphasize construction and action-oriented play (Hughes, 1991). Only the behaviors from the two gender-typed settings were analyzed for the study.

Behavioral Ratings

Parent and child behaviors were rated from the videotape recordings with the Psychosocial Processes Rating Scheme (PPRS; Leaper, 1992). The PPRS includes separate 7-point ordinal scales for rating levels of affiliation and assertion (see below). Separate ratings were made of parent and child behavior every 5 s. Thus, during each 8-min play session, a total of 96 ratings each were made for parent affiliation, child affiliation, parent assertion, and child assertion. A 5-s time-sampling unit is considered a sensitive time period for this sort of analysis (Mann, ten Have, Plunkett, & Meisels, 1991).

Affiliation ratings. The affiliation ratings ranged from Level 1 to Level 7 as follows: 1 = *highly distant* (e.g., anger, hostility, active resistance, strong disagreement, self-preoccupation without regard to the other), 2 = *moderately distant* (e.g., slight resistance, mild disagreement), 3 = *slightly distant* (e.g., close-ended response to the other's query), 4 = *available or permitting* (e.g., eye gaze toward the other without participation in the other's activity, simple acknowledgment of the other's contribution), 5 = *approaching or slightly interdependent* (e.g., descriptive comments or explanations, fact- or task-oriented questions, elaborated acknowledgment of the other's contribution, directing the other's activity in a guiding manner), 6 = *moderately interdependent* (e.g., asking for the other's opinion or desire, suggestion for shared activity), and 7 = *joining or highly interdependent* (e.g., cooperative activity, praise or reassurance, shared amusement).

Assertion ratings. The assertion ratings ranged from Level 1 to Level 7 as follows: 1 = *highly nondirect* (e.g., sitting passively, withdrawing, clinging), 2 = *moderately nondirect* (e.g., following the other's suggestions, repeating the other), 3 = *slightly nondirect* (e.g., simple acknowledgment of the other's contribution, going along without adding, obliging), 4 = *maintain* (e.g., continuing to play with objects in a similar way, commenting about ongoing behavior), 5 = *slightly assertive* (e.g., most spontaneous informing comments, task-oriented questions, mild disagreement), 6 = *moderately assertive* (e.g., suggestion or proposal, reassurance, elaborating on the other's contribution), and 7 = *highly assertive* (e.g., expressing desires, command or demand, aggression or rejection, strong disagreement, praise).

Reliability. Women research assistants rated the videotapes using the PPRS. Training lasted approximately 6–8 weeks for each assistant. Once the trainer and the assistant were confident that there was good agreement, an interrater reliability test was calculated using the independent ratings of 3-min segments from each of the toy activities from three different families. Reliability tests were repeated approximately every 2–3 months during 2 years of coding. The minimum interrater reliabilities between pairs of coders were as follows: Spearman $r(216) = .59$ ($p < .001$) for affiliation ratings; Spearman $r(216) = .66$ ($p < .001$) for assertion ratings.

Mean affiliation and mean assertion ratings. Parents' and children's mean ratings of affiliation and assertion were computed by averaging each individual's ratings across the 96 five-second observations for each play activity setting. There were mean affiliation ratings and mean assertion ratings for each parent and each child in each setting. Each parent had a mean affiliation rating and a mean assertion rating for the toy food activity and the same two types of ratings for the toy track activity. Each child had the same set of ratings for her or his interactions with mothers and with fathers in each of the two play activities.

Results

The results are summarized in three sections. First, some correlation tests examining the relationship between individuals' assertion and affiliation ratings are described. Second, the results pertinent to the study's hypotheses are presented. Finally, exploratory analyses testing for ethnic-group differences are summarized.

Correlations Between Individuals' Mean Affiliation and Assertion Ratings

Relationship between assertion and affiliation. As reviewed in the introduction, assertion and affiliation are viewed as two simultaneous dimensions underlying behavior. As depicted in the PPRS definitions described in the Method section, certain types of behavior are coded as both high in assertion and high in affiliation. For example, cooperative activity is considered both highly affiliative and high assertive. Other types of behavior, however, are rated as high in one dimension but low in the other dimension. For example, strong disagreement is considered highly assertive but relatively low in affiliation. Still other behaviors may be rated low in both dimensions—as is the case with withdrawal, which is considered low in assertion and low in affiliation. Accordingly, the affiliation and the assertion dimensions were moderately correlated for parents (Spearman $r = .44$, $p < .001$) and children (Spearman $r = .52$, $p < .001$). To the extent that playing with one another requires relatively high degrees of both assertion (moving the play activity along) and affiliation (playing with the other person), positive correlations were expected.

Gender differences in the magnitude of association between affiliation and assertion ratings. Additional Spearman correlation tests were conducted to analyze if the strength of association varied by play activity, parent gender, or child gender. Subsequent comparison tests were run to determine if there were any differences across the different contexts. The results are presented in Table 1.

There were some gender-related differences in the magnitude of the affiliation and assertion correlations. The strength of the correlation was especially strong for fathers during the toy food play activity. Conversely, the magnitudes of the correlations were comparatively low for mothers with sons in the feminine-stereotyped toy food play as well as for fathers with daughters during the masculine-stereotyped toy track play. In other words, parents appeared less likely to coordinate their levels of affiliation and assertion during cross-gender-stereotyped activity settings. Among the children, the smallest correlation was for sons with mothers during the toy track play; the largest correlation was for daughters with fathers during the toy food play.

Testing Hypotheses

To test the effects of the hypothesized predictor variables on the participants' mean ratings, I performed analyses of variance (ANOVAs) using the general linear model procedure for unbalanced designs. Separate ANOVAs were performed for affiliation and assertion ratings. Five-way mixed-design ANOVAs were initially carried out. Child gender (daughter–parent vs. son–parent)

Table 1

Correlations Between Affiliation and Assertion by Play Activity, Child Gender, Actor, and Parent Gender

	Mother–child pairs				Father–child pairs			
	Toy food play activity		Toy track play activity		Toy food play activity		Toy track play activity	
Actor	D	S	D	S	D	S	D	S
Parent	$.52^{***}_{ab}$	$.33^{*}_{a}$	$.48^{***}_{ab}$	$.47^{***}_{ab}$	$.76^{***}_{c}$	$.79^{***}_{c}$	$.28_{a}$	$.65^{***}_{bc}$
Child	$.54^{***}_{ab}$	$.46^{***}_{ab}$	$.47^{***}_{ab}$	$.32^{*}_{a}$	$.64^{***}_{b}$	$.46^{***}_{ab}$	$.40^{**}_{ab}$	$.36^{*}_{ab}$

Note. Correlation coefficients in the same row with different subscripts are significantly different ($p < .05$). D = daughters. S = sons.
$* p < .05.$ $** p < .01.$ $*** p < .001.$

dyad and child age level (younger vs. older) were between-group factors. Play activity (toy food vs. toy track), parent gender (mother–child vs. father–child dyad), and actor (parent's vs. child's behavior) were entered as within-group repeated measures.[3] Child age level did not appear in any significant main effects or interactions in these analyses. Therefore, the ANOVAs were run again without the age level variable in order to increase the statistical power of the analyses. Parents' and children's mean affiliation and assertion ratings are broken down by child gender, parent gender, and play activity setting in Table 2.

The significant effects from the separate ANOVAs for affiliation and assertion ratings are summarized in Table 3. The results are summarized below in relation to each set of hypotheses. In addition, in both the table and the text, η^2 estimates are presented. η^2 is a measure of the proportion of variance accounted for by a predictor. When η^2 is .01 or above, it is considered a small effect size; when η^2 is .09 or above, it is considered a medium effect size; and when η^2 is .25 or above, it is viewed as a large effect size (Rosenthal & Rosnow, 1984).

Parent gender effects. The first set of hypotheses predicted that mothers would generally demonstrate higher mean affiliation ratings and lower mean assertion ratings compared with fathers. Support was found for both predictions. With affiliation ratings, there was a significant parent gender main effect and a three-way Actor × Parent Gender × Play Setting interaction (see Table 3). First, mother–child pairs were higher in mean affiliation ($M = 4.18$, $SD = .34$) than were father–child pairs ($M = 4.11$, $SD = .38$). Second, consistent with the hypothesis, a simple main effect for parent gender with parents' affiliation ratings indicated that mothers were higher than fathers in mean affiliation; however, this effect occurred only during the toy track activity, $F(1, 96) = 6.05$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$. Mothers and fathers did not differ in affiliation ratings during the toy food activity.

With assertion ratings, there was an Actor × Parent Gender interaction. Subsequent tests indicated a significant parent gender difference in parents' mean assertion ratings, $F(1, 96) = 4.18$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$. As predicted, fathers were more assertive than were mothers. In addition, a marginally significant effect suggested that children tended to demonstrate higher assertion levels with mothers than with fathers, $F(1, 96) = 2.82$, $p < .10$, $\eta^2 = .03$.

Child gender effects. According to the second set of hypotheses, parents were expected to show higher mean affiliation ratings

with daughters and lower mean assertion ratings with sons. Contrary to prediction, there were no significant child gender effects on parents' affiliation or assertion ratings. However, as described later, there was a pertinent interaction effect involving child gender with parents' behavior.

Whereas the hypothesized child gender effects on parents' behavior were not confirmed, there was a significant child gender effect on children's mean assertion ratings. As shown in Table 3, there was a significant three-way Actor × Play Activity Setting × Child Gender interaction with assertion. Univariate follow-up tests revealed one child gender simple main effect for children's mean assertion during the toy track activity, $F(1, 96) = 6.21$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .06$. In the masculine-stereotyped setting, sons demonstrated significantly higher assertion levels than did daughters. Sons and daughters did not significantly differ in the toy food setting. Also, parents did not significantly differ in assertion levels with sons and daughters in either play setting.

Play activity effects. The third set of hypotheses predicted that affiliation and assertion ratings would differ across play activity settings. Significant play setting main effects occurred with both affiliation and assertion ratings (see Table 3). As expected, the toy food play setting was associated with both higher mean affiliation and higher mean assertion ratings than was the toy track setting. In addition, with assertion ratings there were two significant interaction effects involving play activity (see Table 3). First, with respect to an Actor × Play Setting interaction, follow-up univariate tests indicated significantly higher mean assertion for parents during the toy food activity than during the toy track activity, $F(1,$

Table 2

Parents' and Children's Mean Affiliation and Assertion Ratings by Actor, Play Activity Setting, Parent Gender, and Child Gender

| | Parents' behavior | | | | Children's behavior | | | |
| | Toy food play activity | | Toy track play activity | | Toy food play activity | | Toy track play activity | |
Behavior and gender composition of pair	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Mean affiliation ratings								
Mother–daughter	4.59	.34	4.42	.33	4.00	.55	3.57	.65
Father–daughter	4.56	.32	4.29	.41	3.92	.50	3.61	.54
Mother–son	4.65	.25	4.48	.32	4.02	.57	3.72	.63
Father–son	4.64	.34	4.37	.37	3.93	.51	3.56	.71
Mean assertion ratings								
Mother–daughter	4.14	.65	3.85	.77	4.23	.41	4.11	.37
Father–daughter	4.17	.65	4.03	.67	4.17	.39	4.05	.34
Mother–son	4.09	.57	3.73	.69	4.21	.38	4.25	.31
Father–son	4.26	.60	3.83	.70	4.15	.39	4.19	.34

96) = 57.68, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .38$. In contrast, there was no play activity main effect associated with children's mean assertion, $F(1, 96) = 2.72$, ns.

In addition, there was a three-way Actor × Play Setting × Child Gender interaction with assertion (see Table 3). Regarding parents' assertion, the play setting effect occurred in interactions with either daughters or sons. However, with respect to children's assertion, a play setting effect occurred for daughters, $F(1, 48) = 11.09$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .19$, but not for sons, $F(1, 48) = 1.95$, ns. Thus, among parents and children, sons were the only ones who did not tend to use higher affiliation levels in the toy food activity than in the toy track activity.

Parents' affiliation in response to cross-gender-typed play settings. The fourth set of hypotheses predicted that parents generally—and fathers especially—would use lower mean levels of affiliation during cross-gender-typed activities. Support for this hypothesis was not found. Neither parent demonstrated less affiliation with daughters during the masculine-stereotyped (toy track) activity than during the feminine-stereotyped (toy foods) activity. Also, neither parent showed less affiliation with sons during

Table 3

Significant Effects Associated With Mean Affiliation and Assertion Ratings in Four-Way ANOVAs

| | Mean affiliation ratings | | Mean assertion ratings | |
Predictor	F(1, 96)	η^2	F(1, 96)	η^2
Child gender (G)	<1	.00	<1	.00
Actor (A)	293.09***	.75	6.66*	.07
Play setting (S)	157.16***	.62	59.22***	.38
Parent gender (P)	3.91†	.04	1.32	.01
A × P	<1	.00	5.24*	.05
A × S	15.81***	.14	29.51***	.24
A × S × G	<1	.00	12.62***	.12
A × P × S	4.12*	.04	<1	.00

†$p < .10$. *$p < .05$. ***$p < .001$.

the feminine-stereotyped activity than during the masculine-stereotyped activity.

Relationship between parent and child assertion. The fifth set of hypotheses concerned the interrelationship between parent and child behaviors. First, children were expected to demonstrate higher mean assertion levels than their mothers, whereas fathers were hypothesized to use higher levels of assertion than their children. As previously noted, an Actor × Parent Gender interaction occurred with assertion ratings. Subsequent tests for actor simple main effects showed that, as predicted, mothers were less assertive than their children, $F(1, 96) = 12.51$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .12$. However, no significant difference in mean assertion occurred between fathers and their children, $F(1, 96) = .81$, ns.

In addition, parents were hypothesized to use less assertion with children during gender-stereotyped activities. Conversely, children were expected to demonstrate more assertion during gender-stereotyped activities. Support for these predictions was found regarding the masculine-stereotyped play activity. As can be seen in Table 3, there was a three-way Actor × Play Setting × Child Gender interaction. Follow-up tests revealed one actor simple main effect, and it occurred for parent–son interactions during the toy track activity, $F(1, 48) = 19.48$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .29$. Parents demonstrated less assertion than did their sons in the masculine-stereotyped context. There were no differences either between parents and daughters during the masculine-stereotyped play, between parents and sons during the feminine-stereotyped play, or between parents and daughters during the feminine-stereotyped play.

Covariate effects. Significant covariate effects occurred with regard to assertion. There was a significant main effect for SES, indicating that higher mean assertive ratings tended to occur in parent–child interactions among lower SES families, $F(1, 96) = 6.39$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .07$. In addition, there was a significant Parent Gender × Education interaction with assertion, $F(1, 96) = 4.07$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$. A significant negative correlation between education level and assertion ratings was found with

mothers, Spearman $r(96) = -.36, p < .001, \eta^2 = .13$, but not with fathers, Spearman $r(96) = -.20, ns, \eta^2 = .04$.

Child age effects. As previously noted, there were no significant effects related to child age. This included both main effects and interaction effects. Therefore, child age level did not appear to moderate any of the effects of the other variables.

Exploratory Analyses: Testing for Ethnic-Group Differences

No specific hypotheses were advanced regarding family ethnicity. However, this factor was included in a set of exploratory analyses to see if there were any overall group differences and to find out if the previously reported significant effects varied across ethnic groups. One of the limitations of comparing different ethnic groups is that there are often several confounding variables associated with ethnic-group status. In the present sample, for example, the Latino families had significantly less formal education, had lower SES, and were younger than either the European American families or the multiple-ethnicity families (see Method section). Therefore, these variables (parent education, family SES, mother's age, and father's age) were entered as covariates. (Either the mother's or the father's education level was used, whichever was higher.)

Affiliation ratings. With affiliation ratings, ethnic group was found to occur as a factor in three significant interaction effects. The interactions were initially analyzed to see if any previously reported significant effects differed according to the family's ethnic background. There were no relevant findings in this regard. Second, possible ethnic group simple main effects were tested. The results indicated differences between the ethnic groups in mean affiliation ratings depending on either the play setting, the parent's gender, or the actor.

First, there was a significant Ethnic Group × Play Setting interaction with mean affiliation, $F(2, 88) = 3.93, p < .05, \eta^2 = .08$. A simple main effect for ethnic group was associated with the toy track activity, $F(2, 88) = 4.33, p < .05, \eta^2 = .09$, but not the toy food activity, $F(2, 88) = 1.07, ns$. During the toy track activity, Latino child–parent pairs demonstrated significantly higher levels of affiliation than either European American child–parent pairs, $F(1, 76) = 6.91, p < .05, \eta^2 = .08$, or mixed-ethnicity child–parent pairs, $F(1, 48) = 8.73, p < .01, \eta^2 = .15$. There was no difference between the latter two groups.

Affiliation ratings were also associated with an Ethnic Group × Parent Gender interaction, $F(2, 88) = 4.37, p < .05, \eta^2 = .09$. Subsequent tests showed there was an ethnic-group simple main effect for father–child pairs, $F(2, 88) = 5.03, p < .01, \eta^2 = .10$, but not for mother–child pairs, $F(2, 88) = 1.15, ns$. Comparison tests indicated significantly higher affiliation means in Latino child–father pairs than in either European American child–father pairs, $F(1, 66) = 9.55, p < .01, \eta^2 = .13$, or mixed-ethnicity child–father pairs, $F(1, 38) = 7.99, p < .01, \eta^2 = .17$. There was no significant difference between the latter two groups.

Finally, there was an Ethnic Group × Actor interaction with mean affiliation ratings, $F(2, 88) = 4.07, p < .05, \eta^2 = .09$. A significant ethnic-group simple main effect occurred with children's affiliation, $F(2, 88) = 3.93, p < .05, \eta^2 = .08$, but not with parents' affiliation, $F(2, 88) = 0.40, ns$. Comparison tests showed

that Latino children demonstrated significantly higher affiliation levels than either European American children, $F(1, 70) = 6.94, p < .01, \eta^2 = .08$, or mixed-ethnicity children, $F(1, 42) = 6.29, p < .05, \eta^2 = .13$. The latter two groups did not differ significantly.

Assertion ratings. Ethnic group appeared as a significant main effect when assertion ratings were analyzed, $F(2, 88) = 11.28, p < .001, \eta^2 = .20$. Higher mean assertion levels occurred in interactions between Latino children and parents than in interactions either between European American children and parents, $F(1, 70) = 17.21, p < .001, \eta^2 = .20$, or between mixed-ethnicity children and parents, $F(1, 42) = 23.17, p < .001, \eta^2 = .36$. The two non-Latino groups did not differ significantly.

Discussion

Play activity setting, parent gender, and child gender were investigated as possible influences on affiliation and assertion in parent–child interactions. Moreover, the study was based on a relatively diverse sample of families from different ethnic, economic, and educational backgrounds. As discussed later, exploratory analyses were carried out to see if ethnic background (with SES-related variables as covariates) might be related to the parents' or the children's behavior.

The findings reaffirm the potential importance of two sources for children's gender learning emphasized in both cognitive-social-learning theory and sociocultural theory. First, children learn by observing how their mothers, fathers, and other community members act (Bellinger & Gleason, 1982; Fagot, 1995; Leaper, 2000; Lott & Maluso, 1993; Ruble & Martin, 1998). Second, children's learning depends on their opportunities to practice particular activities and behaviors (Leaper, 2000; Lott & Maluso, 1993; Rogoff, 1990). Turning first to the potential influence of role models on gender development, one can see that the results revealed some ways in which mothers and fathers may provide different role models for behavior. Fathers were generally more assertive than mothers. In contrast, during the toy track play activity, mothers generally demonstrated higher affiliation levels than did fathers.

The observed differences between mothers and fathers are consistent, first, with the traditional emphases in boys' and men's interactions on power and dominance and, second, with the traditional emphases in girls' and women's interactions on interpersonal closeness and support (see Leaper, 1994; Leaper et al., 1998; Maccoby, 1998). Therefore, providing young children with alternative gender role models would partly depend on parents expressing both high affiliation and high assertion. Parents who provide egalitarian role models share in both the caregiver and the breadwinner functions. In some non-Western societies, mothers and fathers regularly provide egalitarian role models to their children (e.g., Endicott, 1992; Hewlett, 1991). Also, nontraditional role models can be found within U.S. society in homes headed by single-parent mothers (Leaper et al., 1995), single-parent fathers (Risman, 1987), lesbian and gay couples (Patterson & Chan, 1999), and some heterosexual couples (Haas, 1993; Mintz, 1998) who balance both instrumental-assertive and expressive-affiliative functions. However, we know relatively little about the impact of

egalitarian parenting on children's development (see Fagot & Leinbach, 1995; Williams, Radin, & Allegro, 1992).

There was also evidence in the present study that children acted differently with mothers than with fathers. Children were generally more assertive than their mothers but not more assertive than their fathers. This finding may reflect a difference between mothers' and fathers' willingness to let the child take control. In addition, the result may either reflect or lead to an expectation among the children that they can influence mothers more than fathers. Thus, children may be inadvertently forming a stereotype that women are less powerful than men are. Research on children's developing understandings of gender and power is scant. However, one prior study suggested that boys may be particularly attentive to power and status when evaluating potential role models (Bussey & Bandura, 1984).

In addition to observing role models, another important source for young children's learning comes from the opportunities and incentives they are provided. Accordingly, researchers have described ways in which parents treat daughters and sons differently (see Block, 1983; Leaper et al., 1998; Lott & Maluso, 1993). Although no overall differences were observed in parents' behavior toward sons and daughters, substantial differences in behavior were found between the two gender-typed activity settings. Most notably, the play activity accounted for 62% of the variance in mean affiliation ratings and 38% of the variance in mean assertion ratings. Other researchers have similarly highlighted the impact of activity settings on parents' or children's behavior (Brédart-Compernol, Rondal, & Perée, 1981; Brody, Stoneman, & Mac-Kinnon, 1986; Caldera et al., 1989; Carpenter, 1983; Leaper & Gleason, 1996; Lewis & Gregory, 1987; O'Brien & Nagle, 1987). The activity setting effects are especially pertinent in light of prior studies indicating that one of the most consistent ways parents treat girls and boys differently is through the encouragement of gender-typed activities and the discouragement of cross-gender-typed activities (see Lytton & Romney, 1991).

If children's opportunities tend to be restricted to gender-typed (and neutral) activities, then comparing the behavioral content of different activities can reveal relevant aspects of the gender-typing process. In other words, children's participation in particular types of activities can shape the types of behaviors that they are apt to practice (see Leaper, 2000; Lott & Maluso, 1993). To the extent that girls are encouraged more than boys to participate in play activities that emphasize collaborative role play (e.g., toy food sets), then girls are also being provided more opportunities to practice affiliative skills than boys are. Therefore, parents and teachers interested in fostering social-relational competence in boys may want to encourage play with toys and in activities that involve social-role play and reciprocal collaborative interchanges. Active participation in both expressive and instrumental play activities will help provide children with opportunities to develop a broader range of preferences and skills (see Leaper, 1994; Liss, 1983). Furthermore, breaking down gender boundaries that limit opportunities during childhood may reduce gender inequities in status and power during adulthood (see Leaper, 2000).

The findings did not indicate that the feminine-stereotyped toy play was associated with lower (nondirect or passive) assertion compared with the masculine-stereotyped toy play. In contrast, the toy food setting was generally associated with both higher mean assertion and higher mean affiliation than was the toy track setting. Thus, insofar as girls are more likely than boys to select activities similar to the toy food play, girls may also get more practice than boys exercising collaborative behaviors that combine high assertion and high affiliation. In support of this idea, recent research on gender typing indicates that girls' social interactions tend to place more emphasis on the joint coordination of assertion and affiliation, relative to boys' greater emphasis on unmitigated assertion (see Leaper, 1991, 1994; Leaper et al., 1999).

The present study also highlights how certain contexts may moderate the likelihood of parental gender typing. As previously noted, differences in fathers' and mothers' behavior largely depended on the particular play activity. For instance, mothers generally showed higher affiliation than did fathers, especially during the toy track activity. During the toy food activity, in contrast, there was no corresponding parent gender difference. Why did the mothers and fathers differ in mean affiliation ratings only during the toy track play? The toy track activity was relatively unstructured and permitted a greater range of parental involvement. Whereas some parents did work actively with their children, other parents sat back and let the children build the track largely on their own. In contrast, the task demands of the toy food play required the collaborative participation of both parties in order to role-play having a meal together. Thus, during gender-typed activities such as those studied here, boys may get more practice working independently whereas girls may get more practice working cooperatively. In a similar manner, Carpenter (1983) observed that unstructured, peer-directed activities (which she found occurring more among boys) encourage taking initiative, whereas structured, adult-directed activities (which she observed occurring more among girls) foster compliance.

The hypothesis that parents generally would use lower mean levels of affiliation during cross-gender-typed activities was not confirmed. The reasoning for this hypothesis was that parents would express their disapproval of cross-gender-typed activities by disengaging. Moreover, inasmuch as fathers tend to enforce gender typing more than mothers do (Siegal, 1987), this effect was expected to be more likely for fathers than for mothers. However, these gender-related variations were not seen. There was no corresponding Child Gender × Play Activity interaction effect to support the hypothesis. Instead, both mothers and fathers generally demonstrated significantly higher affiliation levels in the feminine-stereotyped play activity than in the masculine-stereotyped activity. Thus, the structure of the activity may guide participants' behavior more than their individual preferences or tendencies. In a study specifically addressing this point, Idle, Wood, and Desmarais (1993) found that mothers and fathers generally reported gender-stereotyped preferences for particular play activities but behaved similarly when asked to participate in each activity. Also, Leaper et al.'s (1998) meta-analysis indicated that gender effects on parents' communication are attenuated when specific activities are assigned.

Although the hypothesis concerning parents' reactions to cross-gender-typed play settings was not confirmed, indirect support was obtained when mothers and fathers were compared in terms of the magnitude of the correlations between their affiliation and assertion ratings. Affiliation and assertion ratings were least strongly correlated for mothers when they were with sons in the feminine-

stereotyped activity and for fathers when they were with daughters in the masculine-stereotyped activity (see Table 1). The relatively weak correlations for mothers and fathers in the cross-gender-typed settings suggest that the parents may have been less likely to use a combination of high affiliation and high assertion in these contexts. In contrast, combining high affiliation and high assertion—known as collaboration (Leaper, 1991, 1994; Leaper et al., 1999)—is characteristic of cooperative interchanges. Thus, the parents may have been assertive but not especially affiliative (e.g., directing the child) or affiliative but not especially assertive (e.g., going along with the child). Consequently, parents may have indirectly expressed their preferences during cross-gender-typed activities by either showing less interpersonal engagement (low affiliation) or being less active in the task (low assertion).

In addition to examining how gender and the activity setting might influence parents' behavior, I also considered the interrelationship between each child's and each parent's behavior. As expected, mothers used lower levels of assertion than their children did, whereas fathers and their children did not differ. The result is consistent with prior research with European American parents (Gleason, 1987; Mannle & Tomasello, 1987) as well as with Mexican American parents (Tenenbaum & Leaper, 1998) indicating that mothers are more likely than fathers to accommodate their behavior in response to the child's behavior. By acting less assertively, mothers may have been trying to encourage their children to explore on their own. In contrast, perhaps fathers either were trying to place more cognitive demand on their children (Gleason, 1987; Mannle & Tomasello, 1987) or were reluctant to downplay their authority.

The results point to another way in which parent and child behaviors were interrelated. Parents tended to act less assertively than their sons during the toy track activity. There was no average difference in assertion ratings between parents and daughters in the same setting. In this way, parents may have been encouraging their sons to take more control during the masculine-stereotyped activity. By not downplaying their assertion with daughters during the toy track activity, perhaps parents were not encouraging autonomy in this setting as much as they were with sons. However, it is also possible that the parents were responding to gender differences in the children's behavior. Sons were generally more assertive than daughters in the toy track play. Consequently, perhaps parents simply deferred to the sons' greater initiative in taking control during the masculine-stereotyped activity.

Finally, I carried out a set of exploratory analyses to consider if and how ethnic background was related to variations in affiliation or assertion. Cultural background is a relevant factor when considering affiliation and assertion as dimensions of family behavior (Cooper & Denner, 1998; Greenfield, 1994; Triandis, 1989) as well as when studying variations in gender typing. First, the results did not indicate that any of the previously reported findings depended on the family's ethnic background. In other words, the observed patterns of gender typing did not appear to apply only to either the Latino or the non-Latino families.

Although ethnic-group status did not qualify any of the other findings, there were some ethnic-group main effects. Higher mean assertion ratings were more likely in parent–child interactions among Latino than non-Latino families. Also, affiliation ratings tended to be higher among Latino than non-Latino families under the following circumstances: either among the children generally, in father–child interactions, or during the toy track activity. Thus, it appears that the Latino families tended to express both more assertion and (under certain circumstances) more affiliation than the non-Latino families. There was a greater level of instrumental participation (i.e., higher assertion) as well as a greater degree of interpersonal engagement (i.e., higher affiliation) in Latino than in non-Latino parent–child play interactions. The findings appear consistent with reports that Mexican and other Latin American families emphasize family closeness ("familism"; Bernal & Knight, 1993; Bornstein, Haynes, Pascual, Painter, & Galperín, 1999; Gaines, Buriel, Liu, & Rios, 1997; Hurtado, 1995; Raeff, 1997; Ramirez, 1989; Triandis, 1989). In addition, social collaborative play may have different meanings and serve different functions depending on the family's sociocultural background (Bornstein et al., 1999; Farver & Howes, 1993).

The reader is strongly advised to view the findings regarding ethnic-group differences with caution. Past studies have shown that SES-related variables can act as better predictors of family behavior patterns than either ethnic or cultural background (Dryler, 1998; Eisenberg, 1996; Laosa, 1980; Leaper & Valin, 1996). In the present study, the Latino and the non-Latino samples were not equivalent in parent education, SES, mother age, or father age. When these variables were included as covariates, education and SES appeared as significant predictors of mean assertion ratings, although significant ethnicity main effects still occurred. It is possible that there were other variables not identified in the present analyses—such as generational status, family size, or religion— that would have replaced ethnicity as better predictors of behavior (see Azmitia et al., 1996; Sue & Sue, 1987; and Weisner et al., 1988, for critiques of making ethnic-group comparisons).

In addition to ethnicity and SES, other aspects of family background warrant consideration in future studies of gender typing in the family. The sample used in the present study consisted of married couples. Analyses focused on the extent and manner in which gender-typing processes varied with mothers and fathers. However, some of the other aspects of family structure that can moderate the gender-typing process include marital equality (e.g., Johnson, 1988), marital satisfaction (e.g., Kerig et al., 1993), marital status (e.g., Leaper et al., 1995), family size (e.g., Kidwell, 1981), use of sibling caregivers (e.g., Weisner, 1987), and the involvement of grandparents (e.g., Wilson, 1986).

Child effects on parents' behavior also deserve further attention. In the present investigation I considered child gender, child age, and child behavior as possible influences on parents' behavior. Some of the other pertinent variables that may moderate parental gender typing include child temperament (e.g., Maccoby, Snow, & Jacklin, 1984) and child language competence (e.g., Bornstein, Haynes, O'Reilly, & Painter, 1996).

Still another issue to consider in future studies is how different interactive settings may influence the likelihood of gender-typed behaviors. The present investigation was limited to dyadic parent–child interactions in one masculine-stereotyped toy setting and one feminine-stereotyped toy setting. The observed play setting effects may not extend to triadic mother–father–child interactions (e.g., Stoneman & Brody, 1981), to parent–child interactions when other siblings are present (e.g., Cicirelli, 1978), to other gender-typed activities (e.g., Caldera & Sciaraffa, 1998), or to nonplay interac-

tions (e.g., Moreno, 1997). By continuing to address contextual moderators of gender, researchers will move away from an essentialist view of gender as a fixed characteristic and move toward interactive models that view gender largely as a social construction that develops out of one's experiences and is embedded in particular interactive contexts.

Conclusions

The findings of the present study lend support to both contextual and socialization approaches to the study of gender. Contextual and constructionist models of gender emphasize the influences of the interactive setting on people's social behavior (see Beall, 1993; Carpenter, 1983; Deaux & Major, 1987). Rather than viewing gender-related differences in behavior as reflecting underlying traits or abilities, these models interpret gender as a social construction that depends on the circumstances of the interaction. In the present study, the play activity, the other person's gender, and the other person's behavior were significant influences on people's behavior. Each of these variables has been investigated separately in prior studies, but there has been little research considering the interrelationship of these factors in the gender-typing process.

The foregoing contextual analysis highlights the need to conceptualize gender typing in terms of an interdependence of individual and situational factors. Instead of primarily focusing on whether or not gender differences do occur, researchers need to continue redirecting their theoretical models and analytic methods to address the underlying factors that influence when and where differences do occur. Attempts to limit the study of gender typing only to gender main effects are apt to provide a potentially misleading picture of gender development. First, important contextual moderators may be ignored. Moreover, when gender main effects are reported without addressing contextual moderators, the results may fuel essentialist arguments for the existence of inherent gender differences.

A contextual analysis of gender is not incompatible with the socialization approach of social-learning theory (see Leaper, 2000). If girls and boys are systematically provided different opportunities to practice certain behaviors, these different experiences can shape these children's expectations, preferences, and abilities. In other words, situationally constructed gender differences in experience can create gender differences in cognitive and social skills (Liss, 1983; Lott & Maluso, 1993). This view of gender development is consistent with Vygotsky's idea that development proceeds first at the social-interactional level and is later internalized within the child at the individual-psychological level (see Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992). Modern sociocultural (or ecocultural) theory similarly emphasizes the role of activity settings in development (Rogoff, 1990; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). Thus, girls may become more comfortable with and better skilled at affiliative-expressive behaviors than boys, whereas boys may become more comfortable with and better skilled at power-assertive or instrumental behaviors than girls. By the time individuals reach adulthood, these asymmetries may establish the basis for corresponding gender differences in intimacy and power (Henley, 1995; Holtgraves & Yang, 1992; Leaper, 2000; Leaper & Anderson, 1997; McAdams, Healy, & Krause, 1984). According to the view proposed here, however, gender inequities are not inevitable. To the extent that girls and boys both expect and experience equal opportunities, we may anticipate greater similarity in developmental outcomes (see Leaper, 2000).

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