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ABSTRACT

This study modifies and expands on earlier research in an effort to incorporate an examination of consultant's sex as an instrumental dimension in determining children's and adolescents' consultant preferences. It was hypothesized that: (1) children would prefer same-sex consultants, and this preference would continue for female adolescents; (2) if sex preferences reflected perceived differences in socialization functions, adolescent males would not demonstrate a same-sex bias; (3) peer preferences would increase with age; and (4) although children's preference for adult consultants would decrease with age, adults would remain viable consultants. Subjects, 241 males and females at ages 8, 11, 14, and 17 years in Toronto, Ontario, completed questionnaires that described five hypothetical problem situations. Subjects rated their preferences for 12 categories of consultants. The categories crossed three dimensions: age (peer, three years older, and adult); familiarity (familiar versus expert); and sex. As predicted, results revealed that male and female children preferred same-sex consultants, and this preference continued for adolescent females, but not males. Other findings demonstrated the importance of peer expert consultants and indicated that consultants who were three years older, while valued, are never the most preferred category. The findings address the importance of peer counseling programs and stress the need for female practitioners for female clients. (GLR)

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Consultant Preferences of Children and Adolescents:
A replication and expansion to include sex bonds

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ABSTRACT

How the sex of consultant influences children and adolescents' consultant preferences addresses the theoretical question of whether sex is operant due to perceived similarities with the consultant or due to expectations of sex-related differences in interpersonal styles. Males and females at ages 8, 11, 14, and 17 years (N=241) completed questionnaires describing hypothetical situations by rating their corresponding preferences for 12 categories of consultant. The categories crossed three dimensions - age (peer, 3-years-older, adult); familiarity (familiar vs expert); and sex. The results reveal that whereas male and female children prefer same-sex consultants, this preference continues for adolescent females, but not males. Other findings demonstrate the importance of peer expert consultants and indicate that 3-year-older consultants, while valued, do not play a unique role. Applied implications note the importance of peer counselling programs and stress the need for female practitioners for female clients.

INTRODUCTION

The present study modifies and expands the research design of Wintre et al. (1988) primarily to incorporate an examination of the consultants' sex as an instrumental dimension in determining children and adolescents' consultant preferences. The gender composition of relationships and the differential significance of same-sex and cross-sex relationships for adults are current topics of investigation (Woolsey, 1987). However, little is known about when the child develops an appreciation of sex related differential social functions, and how it may influence behaviour such as consultant preferences. Furthermore, if youth demonstrate sex preferences for consultants, is it because they employ sex as a variable due to its connotations of the sex-related social functions described above, or because of the perceived similarity between self and same-sex other, thereby enhancing the salience of the same-sex other (c.f. Bandura, 1969) ?

It seems clear that children use gender as a social category in the composition of typically unisexual social groupings (Lockheed & Klein, 1985). Nonetheless these relationships differ in

that males have a wider circle of acquaintances than females (Hartup et al., 1988). And girls, more than boys, tend to value interpersonal issues of intimacy, mutual aid, support and understanding in their fewer, more exclusive friendships (Bryant, 1985; Bukowsky & Kramer, 1986; Duck, 1975; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1987).

During mid and late adolescence, cross-sex friendships emerge as significant components of the social world (Blyth et al., 1982). It has been suggested that adolescent females value these cross-sex relations more than males. Yet, by adulthood, females report that their same-sex friendships remain more supportive and stronger than cross-sex ones, whereas male preferences for same-sex friendships are not as clear (Buhrke & Fuqua, 1987). The present study tests whether these age and sex differences in valuing same-sex and cross-sex relations are reflected in youth's consultant preferences. The study also attempts to replicate the findings of Wintre et al (1988) using group-administered questionnaires and rating scales, and by adding a third age category (3-years-old).

HYPOTHESES

- 1) Children would prefer same-sex consultants, and this preference would continue for female adolescents.
- 2) If sex preferences reflect perceived differences in socialization functions, adolescent males would not demonstrate a same-sex bias.
- 3) Peer preferences would increase with age.
- 4) Adults, although decreasing in preference with age, would remain viable consultants.

METHOD SUBJECTS

241 students participated in the study. There were 4 age groups: 8-year-olds consisting of 30 males and 30 females (M age = 105 mos); 11-year-olds consisting of 29 males and 31 females (M age = 142 mos); 14-year-olds consisting of 30 males and 30 females (M age = 178 mos); and 17-year-olds consisting of 30 males and 31 females (M age = 225 mos). The subjects were selected from 2 elementary schools and 1 high school in Toronto. The student populations were described as lower-middle and middle class.

QUESTIONNAIRE

A questionnaire was developed which presented Ss with 5 hypothetical problem situations.

1. **An IMPERSONAL Problem** - choice between 2 movies.
2. **An Interpersonal Problem with a PEER.**
3. **An Interpersonal Problem with a PARENT.**
4. **An Interpersonal Problem with a TEACHER.**
5. **A Cross-Cultural Problem - IGLOO building**

Ss rated " I would prefer to talk about this problem with this type of person" followed by a fixed list of 12 categories:

1. **Familiar Adult:** an adult I know well (woman, then man).
2. **Familiar Peer:** a good friend my age (girl, then boy).
3. **Adult Expert:** an adult whose job it is to help with these problems (woman, then man).
4. **Peer Expert:** someone my age who had the same problem (girl, then boy).
5. **3-year-older Familiar:** someone about 3 years older than me that I know well (girl, then boy).
6. **3-year-older Expert:** someone about 3 years older who had the same problem (girl, then boy).

RESULTS

A six-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with repeated measures was conducted on the 12 consultant categories to evaluate differences in preference ratings. The two independent variables were sex and age of subjects while the four repeated within-subjects variables were the sex, age and expertise (familiar and expert) of the consultants and situation. Out of a possible 63 effects, 20 effects were found to be statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) (Table 1). Preferences according to the sex and age of consultants are addressed in the age x sex x age of consultant x sex of consultant interaction (see Fig. 1).

Sex Bond Preference

1. Females prefer same-sex consultants for all categories at ages 8 & 11, for peer and adult consultants at age 14, and for peer consultants at age 17.
2. Males prefer same-sex for peer and 3-year-old consultants at ages 8 & 11. They demonstrate no sex preference at ages 14 and 17.

Age of Consultant Preference

A) Female Subjects

1. *Same-sex Consultants:* Females at ages 11, 14, and 17 prefer female peers more than female adults. At age 11 they also prefer female peers more than 3-year-old females.

2. *Cross-sex Consultants:* Females at age 8 prefer male adults more than male peers. At age 17 females prefer male peers and males 3-years-old more than male adults.

B) Male Subjects

1. *Same-sex Consultants:* Males at age 14 and 17 prefer peers more than males 3-years-old and at 17 they prefer male peer and 3-years-old more than male adults.

2. *Cross-sex Consultants:* At age 17, males prefer female peers as consultants more than the other 2 female categories.

THREE-YEARS-OLDER

These consultants proved to be a viable category of consultants but were not clearly aligned with either the peer or adult categories. However, they were never the most preferred.

DISCUSSION

The results from the present study replicate the general findings of Wintre et al. (1988) that there are age by sex and age by situation differences in children and adolescents' consultant preferences for various problem types. The inclusion of sex of the consultant produced a significant four-way interaction between subject age and sex and consultant age and sex. Subsequent analyses of this interaction confirmed the hypothesis that children ages 8 & 11 prefer same-sex consultants. This finding supports the substantial number of previous studies (e.g. Hartup et al., 1988; Jacklin & Maccoby, 1978; La Frenier et al., 1984; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1987) demonstrating that sex is a social category influencing children's interpersonal relationships.

As was predicted, adolescent males did not demonstrate a same-sex bias, reflecting perceived differences in socialization functions or interpersonal styles. Only female adolescents continue to prefer same-sex consultants, especially with regard to peers and adults. The findings imply that sex of consultant is a salient issue for adolescent females seeking help.

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In summary, these results advance our understanding of children and adolescents' consultant preferences and social relations in ways that are of applied and theoretical significance. The results confirm previous findings that while preference for peer consultants increases with age, familiar adults continue to be valued as consultants in many situations.

Moreover, peer experts are also consistently preferred consultants emphasizing the potential advantages of peer counselling programs. However, consultants three years older than the subjects, while valued, are never the most preferred category. Preference for consultants of the same sex are important for both male and female children. Moreover, preference for same-sex consultants remains significant for adolescent females but not males. These findings stress the need for available female consultants for female clients. The findings also imply that implicit interpersonal styles can be differentially attributed to the sexes and eliminate same-sex consultant preferences for males at ages 14 and 17.

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Consultant Preferences - Sex

Table 1

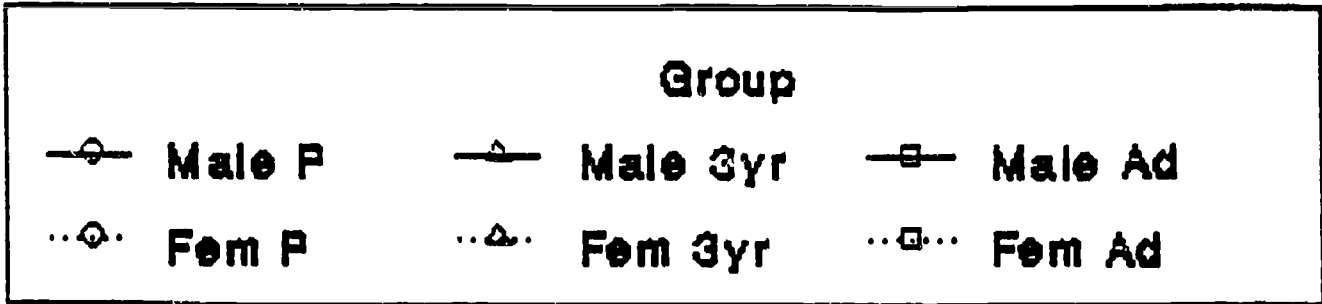
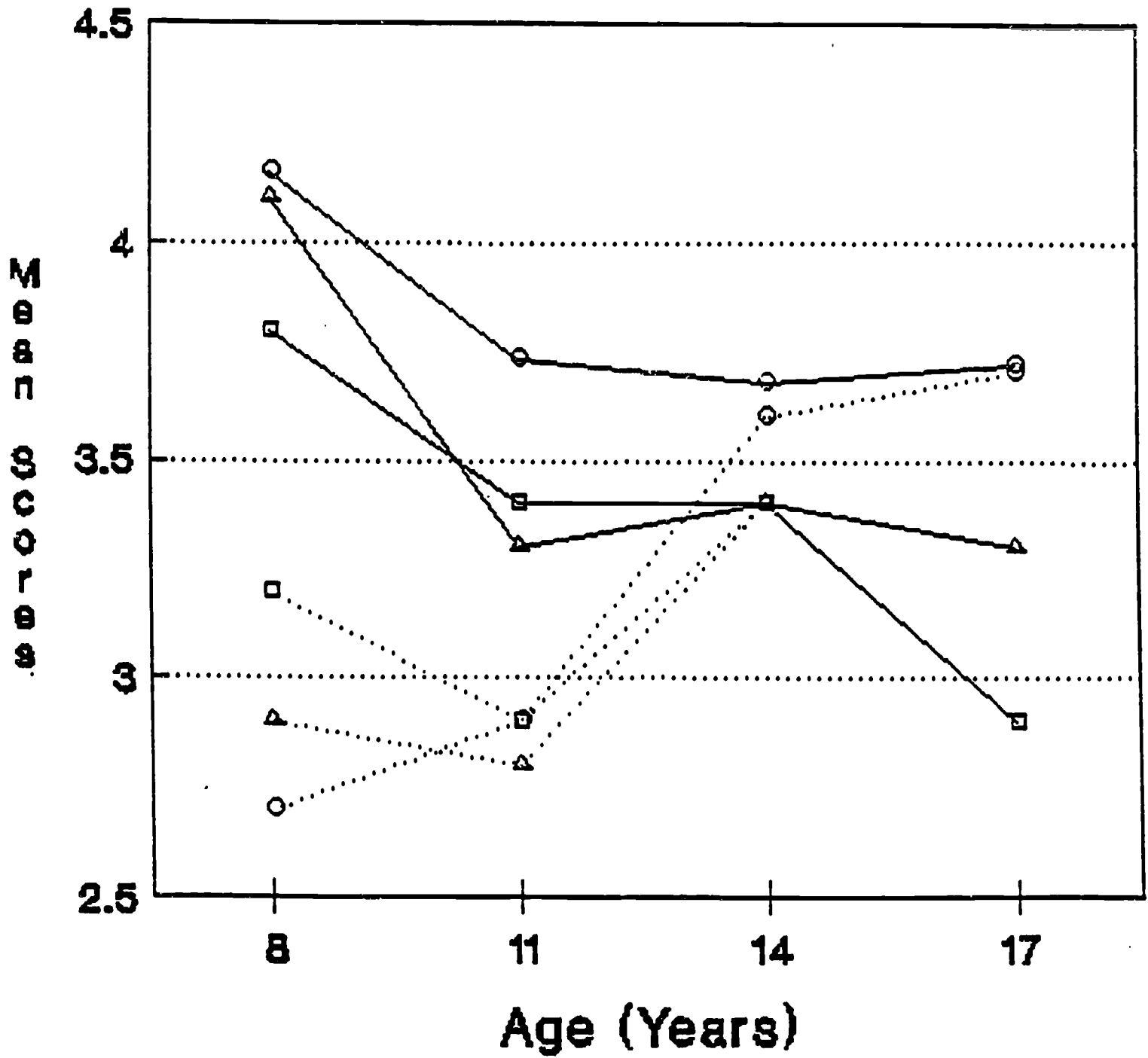
Multivariate Tests of Significance of 6-way anova

<u>Effect</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>F¹</u>	<u>p</u>
Age	3	3.79	.011
Age x Sex	3	4.04	.008
Sit	4	21.31	.000
Age x Sit	12	2.25	.009
Agecon	2	32.70	.000
Age x Agecon	6	11.47	.000
Sex x Sexcon	1	107.74	.000
Age x Sex x Sexcon	3	20.75	.000
Sit x Agecon	8	9.15	.000
*Age x Sit x Agecon	24	2.28	.000
Sit x Expcon	4	7.75	.000
*Age x Sit x Expcon	12	4.16	.000
Sit x Sexcon	4	2.98	.020
Agecon x Expcon	2	9.21	.000
*Age x Agecon x Expcon	6	2.14	.048
*Sex x Agecon x Expcon	2	3.47	.033
Sex x Agecon x Sexcon	2	18.60	.000
*Age x Sex x Agecon x Sexcon	6	3.70	.001
*Sit x Agecon x Expcon	8	2.18	.030
*Sit x Agecon x Sexcon	8	2.04	.043

¹ F value derived from Wilks Lambda.

* Significant higher-order interactions.

Figure 1
Males



Females

