

Influences of Gender Identity on Children's Maltreatment of Gender-Nonconforming Peers: A Person \times Target Analysis of Aggression

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We investigated whether gender identity influences preadolescents' tendency to single out gender-atypical peers for abuse. Data were gathered from 195 boys and girls (M age = 10.1 years) in the fall and spring of a school year. Children self-reported multiple dimensions of gender identity (intergroup bias, felt pressure for gender differentiation, felt gender typicality, gender contentedness); peers assessed each other's social behavior (gender nonconformity, aggression toward each classmate). Using multilevel modeling, we examined how children's attacks on gender-nonconforming peers (relative to their attacks on other peers) changed over the school year depending on their gender identity. There was modest support for the hypothesis that overconfident, arrogant gender identity promotes abuse of gender-atypical peers but considerable support for the hypothesis that insecure, self-questioning gender identity fosters this tendency. Implications for issues central to contemporary personality theory (e.g., Person \times Situation interaction) are discussed. New and somewhat surprising information about the cognitive and behavioral characteristics of gender-nonconforming preadolescents is provided.

Keywords: aggression, gender identity, gender nonconformity, Person \times Situation interaction, victimization

Children, adolescents, and adults who exhibit salient cross-gender characteristics are at heightened risk for rejection, harassment, discrimination, and abuse. As early as the preschool years, children who behave in gender-atypical ways elicit dislike, teasing, and even physical aggression from (some of) their peers (Fagot, 1977; Langlois & Downs, 1980). Negative judgments and harsh treatment of gender-atypical peers continue across middle childhood and into adolescence; boys are more likely than girls both to treat their gender-atypical peers badly and to be harassed for having gender-atypical qualities (Berndt & Heller, 1986; Kite & Whitley, 1996; Lobel, 1994; Moller, Hymel, & Rubin, 1992; Poteat, Espelage, & Green, 2007). Moreover, youths who are victimized for cross-gender behavior are at heightened risk for additional negative outcomes, including depression, substance abuse, truancy, social isolation, hopelessness, and violence (Kimmel & Mahler, 2003; Lampinen et al., 2008; Mishna, Newman, Daley, & Solomon, 2009; Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, & Russell, 2010; Walls, Kane, & Wisneski, 2010). Understanding the roots of aggression toward gender-atypical persons is an important challenge.

Harmful attitudes and actions toward gender-atypical persons are perpetrated by a minority of individuals, raising questions about the unique psychological factors that motivate them. Our knowledge of the motives underlying negative treatment of individuals with cross-gender characteristics comes mainly from studies of adolescents and adults who dislike, harass, or assault persons

whom they presume to be gay or lesbian. An implicit (but untested) assumption of this research is that negative treatment of gender-atypical individuals derives from more than simple dispositional or trait aggression (i.e., the tendency to be more aggressive than other people across diverse situations, including different target types) but rather is motivated, at least in part, by cognitive factors (e.g., values, beliefs, expectancies, goals, identities) specific to gender. In other words, it is believed that perpetrators do not treat gender-atypical persons harshly simply because such targets constitute a convenient victim group (e.g., likely to hand over resources, unlikely to be defended by peers) but rather because the perpetrators' gendered cognitions are stimulated by the targets' gender-atypical behaviors in ways that arouse disgust, threat, anger, and aggression specifically toward these targets.

This literature has identified several cognitive predictors of harsh treatment of gender-atypical others, though many studies are characterized by methodological weaknesses (e.g., concurrent research designs, exclusive use of self-reports, failure to test whether the cognitive structures predict harsher treatment of gender-atypical persons than of other target types, lack of control for trait aggression). This work, which is mainly with adolescent and adult males, has highlighted two cognitive patterns associated with aggression toward gender-nonconforming others. The first pattern reflects an overconfident gender identity rooted in strong gender stereotypes and attitudes. That is, much harsh treatment of gender-atypical males is perpetrated by males who polarize the sexes (believe that males and females should act very differently), who espouse hypermasculinity (believe that males should inhibit tender emotions, take dangerous risks, dominate others, etc.), and who appraise themselves as hypermasculine (Herek, 1988, 2000; Parrott, 2009; Parrott, Adams, & Zeichner, 2002; Pryor & Whalen, 1997; Stark, 1991; Thompson, Grisanti, & Pleck, 1985; Whitley, 2001). Also, women who endorse the traditional female role some-

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times dislike and are angered by gender-atypical females (Parrott & Gallagher, 2008). Presumably, people with strong gender-differentiating beliefs and identities harass gender-atypical others because they perceive them as threats to their worldviews, as morally disgusting, as challenges to the positive distinctiveness of their gender collective, as disloyal and untrustworthy members of the collective, or as expecting other people to reciprocate their gender-atypical behavior.

A second cognitive pattern associated with maltreatment of gender-atypical persons reflects insecure gender identity—uncertainty and anxiety over one's adequacy as a member of one's gender collective. Insecurity over one's gender fit is especially conducive to attacks on gender-atypical others for individuals who also possess strong gender-differentiating stereotypes and attitudes (in this regard, they resemble persons with overconfident gender identity). That is, males who subscribe to rigid standards of hypermasculinity but perceive themselves as failing to live up to the standards tend to treat gender-atypical others harshly (Bernat, Calhoun, Adams, & Zeichner, 2001; Eisler & Skidmore, 1987; Franchina, Eisler, & Moore, 2001; Kimmel, 1994; Parrott, 2009; Vandello, Bosson, Cohen, Burnaford, & Weaver, 2008). Such males presumably experience a disturbing *ought self-discrepancy* (a gap between what one feels one should be and what one really is). Ought self-discrepancies are conducive to frustration, agitated distress, guilt, shame, self-rejection, anger, and loss of self-regulatory control (C. S. Carver, Lawrence, & Scheier, 1999; Higgins, 1987; Swann & Bosson, 2008; Tangney, Wagner, Fletcher, & Gramzow, 1992). Males with a strongly gendered ought self-discrepancy are said to experience *masculine gender role stress* (Levant, 2011). Although they strive to be male typical, they either lack self-efficacy for self-prescribed male-typical behaviors (e.g., dominance, risk taking) or fear that in certain situations they will be unable to inhibit feminine behavior. Presumably, they perceive in gender-atypical others what they fear in themselves, and this perception activates latent feelings of insecurity (fears of gender inadequacy, of being perceived as gay, of rejection by same-sex others) that motivate them to lash out defensively at gender-atypical persons, thereby removing the threat and demonstrating that the gender inadequacy resides in other people and not themselves.

Note that a common element of both the overconfident and insecure cognitive patterns is investment in gender-differentiating stereotypes and attitudes. When people adopt such standards and successfully emulate them, the result is an overconfident gender identity. When people hold the standards but fail to fulfill them, the result is an insecure gender identity. Perhaps either pattern disposes persons to harass gender-nonconforming others.

The Present Study

To our knowledge, no study has investigated the factors that lead preadolescent children to single out gender-nonconforming peers for abuse. The principal purpose of the present study was to investigate the role of gender identity in preadolescents' maltreatment of gender-atypical peers.

Gender identity is a multidimensional construct encompassing a person's felt compatibility with, quality of motivation to fit in with, and evaluation of a gender collective (Ashmore, Deaux, & McLaughlin-Volpe, 2004; Egan & Perry, 2001; Tobin et al., 2010).

Using a model of gender identity proposed by Egan and Perry (2001), we examined how four dimensions of gender identity might, individually and in combination with other variables, affect children's tendencies to abuse gender-atypical peers. These dimensions of gender identity were *intergroup bias* (perceiving one's own gender more favorably than the other), *felt pressure for gender differentiation* (internalized pressure to avoid other-sex behaviors), *felt gender typicality* (perceived similarity to same-sex others), and *gender contentedness* (satisfaction with one's gender).

The first two dimensions—intergroup bias and felt pressure for gender differentiation—may be considered *between-gender* facets of gender identity in that they depend on perceiving, and likely exaggerating, differences between the sexes. Strong forms of these facets of gender identity may well contribute to the desire to interact with, fit in with, and emulate others of one's gender, but they probably also encourage avoidance and disparagement of other-gender activities and persons. Felt pressure for gender differentiation is in fact assessed as the expectation of punishment (e.g., ridicule, alienation) for cross-gender behavior (Egan & Perry, 2001). Intergroup bias is part of a set of intergroup cognitions that also includes exaggeration of differences between the sexes, greater use of stereotypes, and homogenization of the other sex (Powlisha, 1995; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). By preadolescence, these gender-polarizing forms of identity are relatively immature and are associated with peer-relational difficulties, low self-esteem, internalizing problems (for girls), and externalizing problems (for boys; P. R. Carver, Egan, & Perry, 2004; P. R. Carver, Yunger, & Perry, 2003; Corby, Hodges, & Perry, 2007; Egan & Perry, 2001; Smith & Leaper, 2006; Yunger, Carver, & Perry, 2004).

The other two dimensions of gender identity—felt gender typicality and gender contentedness—may be considered *within-gender* facets of gender identity because they capture children's feelings of compatibility with, and acceptance by, their own gender collective. They are largely a function of children's self-perception of salient and valued same-gender attributes (e.g., same-sex friendships) and are not necessarily undermined by self-perception of a few other-gender attributes (Egan & Perry, 2001; Spence, 1993). These dimensions of gender identity are usually positively correlated with self-esteem, social skills (e.g., prosocial behavior), and peer acceptance (P. R. Carver et al., 2003, 2004; Corby et al., 2007; Egan & Perry, 2001; Smith & Leaper, 2006; Yunger et al., 2004).

Because the four dimensions of gender identity typically show low correlations with one another (e.g., Egan & Perry, 2001; Yunger et al., 2004), they cannot be considered interchangeable reflections of a single, common underlying construct (e.g., *gender schematicity*, or a generalized tendency to view self and others through a pernicious gender lens; Bem, 1981). Moreover, as noted, the between-gender and the within-gender forms of gender identity usually relate to adjustment in opposite ways.

Using measures of the four gender identity dimensions (and of other potentially relevant aspects of self-concept, described below), we examined whether the cognitive patterns found in previous research to be associated with maltreatment of gender-nonconforming people by older persons (overconfident and insecure gender identity) also motivate preadolescents to attack gender-nonconforming peers. There are grounds for expecting both patterns to apply to preadolescents.

Children with overconfident gender identity might aggress toward gender-atypical peers for many of the same reasons that older persons do (e.g., moral outrage, distrust, threat to ingroup cohesiveness). Overconfident gender identity is perhaps most clearly represented when a strong form of between-gender identity (strong intergroup bias or felt pressure for gender differentiation) combines with strong felt compatibility with one's gender (strong felt gender typicality or gender contentedness). Thus, we examined whether each form of between-gender identity interacts synergistically with each form of within-gender identity to spur children to attack gender-nonconforming peers. However, we also examined whether each between-gender form of gender identity combines with each of four gender-nonspecific self-appraisals to stimulate attacks on gender-nonconforming peers. These other self-appraisals were global self-esteem and perceptions of self-efficacy for dominance, popularity, and physical attractiveness. High self-esteem motivates people to act confidently on their self-perceived strengths, goals, identities, and values (Baumeister, 1998). When high self-esteem is paired with self-serving ideation (e.g., narcissism), it sometimes fosters aggression, for both adults and children (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996; Morf & Rhodewalt, 2001; Thomaes & Bushman, 2011; Thomaes, Bushman, Stegge, & Olthof, 2008). Thus, high self-esteem might encourage children with strong ingroup favoritism or felt pressure for gender differentiation to attack gender-nonconforming others. High self-efficacy for dominance, popularity, or attractiveness might as well. High self-efficacy in these domains reflects confidence in one's social status and in one's ability to satisfy *demonstration goals*, or desires to be admired by peers; children with such goals tend to display adjustment difficulties, including aggression (O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001; Rodkin, Ryan, Jamison, & Wilson, 2013; Rudolph, Abaied, Flynn, Sugimura, & Agoston, 2011; Salmivalli, 1998). It is conceivable that high self-efficacy in these domains empowers children with strong gender-polarizing identity to strive for admiration and status by discriminating against gender-nonconforming peers.

Overconfident gender identity may not always require strong between-gender identity, however. Strong within-gender identity—high felt gender typicality or gender contentedness—might also sometimes take on shades of overconfidence or narcissistic arrogance and promote attacks on gender-nonconforming peers. Perhaps this occurs when strong within-gender identity is accompanied by high self-esteem or self-efficacy for dominance, popularity, or attractiveness. Thus, we also examined whether each form of within-gender identity interacts with self-esteem or a measure of self-efficacy to promote harassment of gender-atypical peers.

Children with insecure gender identity might also discriminate against gender-nonconforming others for many of the same reasons that older persons do (e.g., defensive lashing out at those who arouse their inner conflict, attempting to show that the deficiency lies in others and not themselves). Insecure gender identity is perhaps most clearly represented when a strong form of between-gender identity (intergroup bias or felt pressure for gender differentiation) combines with strong felt *incompatibility* with one's gender (low felt gender typicality or low gender contentedness). Such pairings constitute clear-cut gender self-discrepancies. However, children with strong between-gender identity might also feel self-discrepant and anxious if they have low self-esteem or feel incapable of displaying dominance, popularity, or good looks.

These self-appraisals do not necessarily reflect felt incompatibility with one's gender collective, but at this age, children tend to judge their self-worth and competencies by comparing themselves to same-gender others (Harter, 2006), and self-appraisals on these dimensions are therefore likely to reflect how well children feel they are stacking up against same-sex others. Moreover, children with strong between-gender identity might focus on satisfying demonstration goals (e.g., feeling superior, being admired, avoiding ridicule), and if they view themselves as valueless or as incapable of fulfilling these goals, their frustration and insecurity may be acute. Although research on self-discrepancies in children is scant, children who ardently strive for status and admiration in the peer group but perceive themselves as falling short do tend to be aggressive (Barry, Frick, & Killian, 2003; Harter & McCarley, 2004; Pauletti, Menon, Menon, Tobin, & Perry, 2012); it is plausible that between-gender identity channels the aggression of these frustrated children toward gender-atypical targets. Thus, the insecure pathway to aggression toward gender-nonconforming peers would be supported if for children with a strong form of between-gender identity, *lower* felt gender typicality, gender contentedness, self-esteem, or self-efficacy for dominance, popularity, or attractiveness were to motivate attacks on gender-nonconforming peers.

However, like overconfident gender identity, insecure gender identity may not always require strong between-gender identity. Children who feel incompatible with their gender (who feel gender atypical or discontent) probably experience some uncertainty over their adequacy as members of their gender collective even if they lack strong gender-differentiating stereotypes and attitudes; moreover, their anxiety may be exacerbated if they have low self-esteem or feel incapable of displaying attributes needed for status in their peer group. Thus, low self-esteem or low self-efficacy for dominance, popularity, or attractiveness might potentiate a tendency on the part of children who feel gender incompatible to demonstrate their gender adequacy by hassling gender-nonconforming peers.

The overconfident and insecure pathways may well be alternate routes to preadolescents' harassment of gender-nonconforming peers: Some children might harass gender-atypical peers because of overconfident gender identity, others because of insecure gender identity. We allowed for this possibility in our analytic strategy by probing for a quadratic effect of one cognitive variable (e.g., self-esteem) at different levels of another cognitive variable (conceptualized as the moderator; e.g., intergroup bias). For example, it might be that for children with high intergroup bias (but not for children with low intergroup bias), maltreatment of gender-atypical peers is greater for children with *either* high or low self-esteem than for children with intermediate self-esteem. Such a pattern would constitute evidence for both pathways.

The Present Study in Relation to Contemporary Personality Theory

Our approach to conceptualizing and evaluating cognitive pathways to harassment of gender-atypical others is grounded in contemporary cognitive metatheories of personality (Cervone, 2004; Mischel & Shoda, 1995, 2008; Read et al., 2010; Zakriski, Wright, & Underwood, 2005). These theories offer conceptual strategies for generating hypotheses linking people's stable cognitive processing structures—their values, expectancies, goals, beliefs, iden-

ties, and the like—to their social behavior. Because our research questions and paradigm were stimulated by these theories and because the theories depart in critical ways from other approaches to investigating human aggression, we describe certain features of the theories and tell how they guided the present study.

Cognitive theories emphasize that many persons display considerable situational specificity in a social behavior (e.g., aggression) owing to interactions between their relatively enduring processing structures and features of the situations they encounter. That is, people's unique cognitive structures cause them to be sensitive to, and to react in particular ways to, aspects of situations that are psychologically relevant to them. These theories do not deny that aggression also possesses the qualities of a personality trait (i.e., that some people are generally more aggressive than others), but they suggest that much can be learned about aggressive motivation by studying how individuals organize their aggression around particular eliciting circumstances.

Although data are still accumulating, it is clear that many children do possess unique *aggression signatures* (Mischel & Shoda, 1995)—distinctive and stable personal profiles indicating how their aggression varies over different situations (relative to other children's aggression in the same situations). To determine children's signatures, children are observed for aggression in several situations. For each situation, each child's aggression is converted to a *z* score indicating the child's aggression relative to other children, thus removing the nomothetic influence of the situation. A child's idiographic profile of *z* scores across the situations is the child's aggression signature. The child's average *z* score is a measure of trait aggression (Fournier, Moskowitz, & Zuroff, 2008; Mischel & Shoda, 1995). Many children differ markedly across situations in their aggression, and this variability cannot always be accounted for by trait aggression. In other words, after the normative influences of situations and trait aggression are removed, considerable intraindividual differences across situations (signatures) often remain to be explained.

There has been some effort to identify the salient features of situations that organize within-child variability in children's aggression. Chief among these situational features are the characteristics and behaviors of a child's interaction partners (e.g., peer vs. adult, male peer vs. female peer, liked peer vs. disliked peer; Coie et al., 1999; Hodges, Peets, & Salmivalli, 2009; Matthys, Maassen, Cuperus, & Van Engeland, 2001; Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Peets, Hodges, & Salmivalli, 2011; Rodkin & Berger, 2008; Veenstra et al., 2007; Zakriski et al., 2005). These data support Fournier et al.'s (2008, p. 533) observation that "the most salient psychological features of the situation are found in the behavior of the individual with whom one is interacting."

Although there has been progress in identifying some features of situations (e.g., target characteristics) that underpin within-child situational variability in aggression, a central tenet of cognitive theories—the idea that individual differences in within-child situational variability in aggression are predictable from enduring cognitive processing structures—has, to our knowledge, yet to be investigated. The present study illustrates a paradigm for researching this issue, by examining whether children's cognitive structures predict their tendency to aggress more toward gender-atypical peers than toward other peers. Thus, we conceptualize the degree to which a child's interaction partner is characteristically gender atypical as a situational variable that interacts with chil-

dren's processing structures to affect aggression. Our paradigm therefore is one of Person \times Target interaction.

To examine cognitive pathways to children's harassment of gender-atypical peers, we used multilevel modeling. In both the fall and spring of a school year, we collected measures of children's cognitions, of their aggression toward each classmate, and of their gender-atypical behavior. For each child, a beta coefficient (slope) was calculated indicating how the child's aggression toward his or her classmates changed over the school year as a function of the classmates' gender-atypical behavior in the fall (within-subjects analyses). To test the hypotheses, these within-child slopes were predicted from measures of participants' cognitions (between-subjects analyses). The longitudinal design was used to help rule out certain alternative directions of influence. For example, it is conceivable that children's cognitions are reactive to their aggression toward gender-atypical others (e.g., boys who attack boys for playing with girls may afterward feel more gender typical or more dominant).

It is important to note that our hypotheses address only the degree to which the cognitive variables affect children's tendencies to *discriminate* against gender-atypical peers, that is, to direct more aggression toward gender-atypical peers than toward gender-typical peers. Our hypotheses do not address the absolute severity of children's aggression toward their victims. Two children may be similarly inclined to victimize gender-atypical peers more than gender-typical ones (i.e., have similar positive within-child betas), but one child may aggress generally (across all peer targets) at a higher level than the other and therefore show a more generally elevated pattern (i.e., a higher intercept). Sensitivity to a target feature (captured by slope) and average aggression across targets (i.e., trait or general aggression, captured by intercept) are distinct constructs, and our hypotheses address the impact of social identity only on the former.

Characteristics of Gender-Nonconforming Children

Although the focus of this investigation was on the cognitive determinants of children's aggression toward gender-atypical peers, the measures we collected afforded an opportunity to learn more about the children whose victimization was the focus of study—gender-nonconforming preadolescents. We describe the self-concepts and social-behavioral qualities of these children. We examine whether gender nonconformity predicts, or is predicted by, each other study variable over time. Although this aspect of our study was largely exploratory rather than hypothesis driven, we examined whether gender-nonconforming children are at greater risk for adjustment difficulties (e.g., peer victimization, internalizing problems, low self-esteem) if they possess a problematic form of gender identity (high between-gender identity, low within-gender identity) than if they do not. For example, gender-nonconforming children who feel strong pressure for gender differentiation or feel disconnected from their own gender may be particularly distressed.

Method

Participants and Procedure

All children in the fourth through seventh grades of a university laboratory school were invited to participate. Participants were 101 boys (*M* age = 10.2 years) and 94 girls (*M* age = 10.0 years) who received written informed parental consent; they represented 75%

of the children in their grades. The numbers (and mean ages in the fall) of children in Grades 4 through 7, respectively, were 52 (8.7 years), 56 (9.7 years), 43 (10.7 years), and 44 (11.7 years). Four additional children were tested in the fall but did not participate in the spring; participation in the spring was limited to children who had participated in the fall, and thus spring participants represented 98% of fall participants. The sample was approximately 51% White, 21 % Black, 20% Hispanic, and 8% other. The admissions procedures of the school ensure that the student body is representative of the entire population of Florida in terms of ethnicity/race and socioeconomic level.

Children were tested individually in a library cubicle in both the fall and spring of the school year. At the start of each session, children signed an assent form describing the questionnaires and stating that they were free to leave blank any question they preferred not to answer. At the conclusion, children were asked not to discuss their responses or the study with other children.

Assessment of Cognitive Variables

Gender identity. Four dimensions of gender identity were assessed. *Intergroup bias* was calculated from children's ratings of how much they liked each of their participating classmates ("How much do you like each kid?"). Ratings were on a 4-point scale with 1 indicating *Not at all* and 4 indicating *A lot*. A child's rating of a peer was converted to a *z* score indicating the child's liking of the peer relative to all children's liking of that peer. The average other-sex *z* was subtracted from the average same-sex *z* to index intergroup bias, or ingroup favoritism.

The other three facets of gender identity were assessed with modified versions of Egan and Perry's (2001) scales; the scales were shortened to retain items with high item-total correlations in previous studies. *Felt pressure for gender differentiation* was assessed with seven items. Children rated statements on 4-point scales with 1 indicating *Not at all true for me* and 4, *Very true for me*. Items described possible reactions for gender-atypical behavior from parents (two items; e.g., "My parents would be upset if they saw me acting like a girl"), same-sex peers (two items; e.g., "The boys I know would be upset if I wanted to learn an activity that girls usually do"), and the self (three items; e.g., "I wouldn't like myself if I heard myself talking or laughing like a girl"). Scale totals were averages of the seven items. Cronbach's alpha was .81.

Items on the *felt gender typicality* and *gender contentedness* scales were formatted alike. Each had five items, with about half reverse-scored. For each item, children read descriptions of two kinds of children—ones depicted as high on the gender identity dimension and ones depicted as low—and chose which kind of children they resembled more; they then indicated whether this choice was *Very true* or *Sort of true* for them. This yielded a 4-point scale, with higher scores indicating greater gender identity. Scale scores were item averages. Items assessing gender typicality included (from the girls' form) "Some girls feel they are *different* from other girls BUT Other girls feel they are *similar* to other girls" and "Some girls have the same feelings that other girls have BUT Other girls *don't* have the same feelings that other girls have." Gender contentedness items included "Some girls are happy that they were born a girl BUT Other girls are not happy that they were born a girl" and "Some girls wish they didn't have to be a girl all their life BUT Other girls are glad they'll be a girl all their life."

Cronbach's alpha was .68 for gender typicality and .59 for gender contentedness. The marginal reliability of the gender contentedness scale indicates that results with this measure should be interpreted cautiously.

Gender-nonspecific self-appraisals. *Self-esteem* was assessed with Harter's (1985) six-item global self-worth scale; each item is scored from 1 to 4 (averaged for the scale total); Cronbach's alpha was .73. Self-efficacy for dominance, popularity, and attractiveness was measured by having children rate how hard versus easy it was for them to enact each of 18 behaviors. Children rated each behavior on a 4-point scale, with 1 indicating *HARD!* and 4 indicating *EASY!* *Dominance self-efficacy* was assessed with eight items (e.g., "Bossing others around is ____ for me," "Making others feel like I am in charge is ____ for me"). *Popularity self-efficacy* was assessed with six items (e.g., "Being popular is ____ for me," "Being cool is ____ for me"). *Attractiveness self-efficacy* was assessed with four items (e.g., "Looking good in a bathing suit is ____ for me," "Being good looking is ____ for me"). Cronbach's alphas for these scales, respectively, were .79, .84, and .87.

Assessment of Social Behavior

The study required assessments of children's gender-atypical behavior as well as of their aggression toward each classmate. These measures came from separate peer nomination instruments, described in turn. Only the names of children with parental permission to participate were included on these instruments.

Assessment of gender nonconformity (and other social behaviors) in the peer group. Fourth and fifth graders provided peer nomination data for all of their classmates. Because sixth and seventh graders did not have a homeroom class but knew all the children in their grade very well, each child provided nominations for 14–15 grade-mates (a randomization procedure ensured that each child could nominate, and be nominated by, a similar number of peers). We use the term *classmates* to refer both to fourth and fifth graders' classmates and to sixth and seventh graders' grade-mates. The mean number of peers serving as nominators for a child was 16.1 (minimum = 14).

A 23-item peer nomination inventory was administered. Items covered a broad array of social behaviors in the peer group. Most items came from previous studies (e.g., Pauletti et al., 2012), but four that assessed gender-atypical behavior were written for the present study (from the boys' form: "He'd rather play with girls than with boys," "He likes to do things that girls usually do," "He acts like a girl," and "He always plays with girls"). Children checked off the names of classmates who fit each item (unlimited nominations); children crossed their own name off the list so they did not nominate themselves. A child's score on each item was the proportion of classmates (of either sex) who nominated the child for the item. A principal components analysis (with varimax rotation) on the data of all children in the fall yielded five components, one of which had very high loadings for all four gender-atypicality items (.83 to .92) and very low loadings for the remaining 19 items (–.16 to .23); it was labeled *gender nonconformity*. The other components were labeled *social prominence* (e.g., popularity, sports competence), *prosocial qualities* (e.g., helpful behavior, physical attractiveness), *coercion* (e.g., dominance, manipulation), and *internalizing problems* (e.g., sadness, anxiety). A similar anal-

ysis on the spring data yielded a nearly identical structure. Component scores were computed for both the fall and the spring by the SPSS program, which yields uncorrelated factors. Children's scores for gender nonconformity were of particular interest in this study.

Assessment of target-specific aggression. We needed a measure of each child's aggression toward each classmate. Because obtaining such data is time consuming and burdensome (especially for the child), we assessed global aggression only (i.e., being mean to someone); we did not repeat the assessment process for different subtypes of aggression (e.g., physical, relational). This procedure allowed children to consider a wide range of acts as mean, presumably increasing the likelihood that children would nominate all peers whom they perceived to be mean to someone in one or more significant ways. The following instructions were read to the child:

We want to find out which kids sometimes do mean things to other kids, and who they are doing it to. There are many different ways to be mean to other kids. For example, a kid could hit or punch someone, tease someone or say something mean about them, or do something mean over the cell phone or the Internet. For each kid, we want you to tell us whether he or she is sometimes mean to each kid on the list.

Children were then presented a booklet. Each page had the name of a different peer at the top, followed by a list of all of that peer's classmates. Next to each of the classmates' names there was a place for the child to check either "Yes" or "No" in response to the question, "Is (name of the peer at the top of the page) mean to (name of the classmate)?" Thus, the peer whose name appeared at the top of the page was a potential aggressor, and the children whose names followed were potential victims. Fourth and fifth graders' booklets had a page for each classmate, and sixth and seventh graders had a page for each of the 14–15 peers for whom they had provided the nominations described above. However, all children's lists of potential victims included all of the potential aggressor's classmates (both male and female). The mean number of peers listed as potential victims was 28.5 (minimum = 14, maximum = 43, minimum number of peers of a given sex = 7). Participants' own names were never in the booklet, so they did not nominate themselves as aggressors or as victims. A child's raw aggression toward a peer was the percentage of nominators who named the child as mean to that peer. These scores were used in the first step of the multilevel analyses described later. A child's raw victimization by a peer was the percentage of nominators who named the peer as mean to the child.

Nearly all children (179 of 195, or 91.8%) were nominated by at least one classmate (in either fall or spring) as mean to a peer. Of the aggressor–victim pairs so identified, the minimum, maximum, and mean numbers of nominators in the fall (spring), respectively, were one (one), 13 (16), and 2.01 (2.19).

To estimate stability over the year in children's profiles of preferred victims, each child's profile of raw aggression toward classmates in the spring was predicted from the child's profile of raw aggression toward the same classmates in the fall, using the hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) program (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). The mean (and standard deviation) of these within-child betas were .63 (.31) for boys' aggression toward boys, .54 (.36) for boys' aggression toward girls, .53 (.22) for girls' aggression toward boys, and .46 (.15) for girls' aggression toward girls.

These moderate coefficients indicate there was some stability but also room for change in children's targets over the year.

At each time, each child's raw aggression toward male peers was averaged to estimate the child's *general aggression toward male peers*; a measure of *general aggression toward female peers* was similarly computed. Also at each time, each child's raw victimization by male peers was averaged to estimate the child's *general victimization by male peers*; a measure of *general victimization by female peers* was similarly computed.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 gives the mean and standard deviation of each measure in both the fall and the spring of the school year, as well as the stability of each measure from fall to spring. (To be consistent with subsequent analyses, measures of general aggression and victimization are given separately in relation to same-sex and other-sex peers.) Correlations among the measures are presented in Table 2 for the fall and in Table 3 for the spring. Henceforth, for clarity, we use the term *felt gender typicality* to refer to children's self-rated gender typicality and the term *gender nonconformity* to refer to peers' perceptions of children's overt, behavioral gender nonconformity.

Does Gender Identity Predict Children's Aggression Toward Gender-Nonconforming Peers?

Analysis strategy. To answer this question, we ran a series of HLM models. Conceptually, each model involved two steps. First, a measure was computed for each child capturing the degree to which the child's aggression toward peer targets changed over the school year as a function of target gender nonconformity. That is, a within-child beta coefficient (slope) was calculated for each child predicting the child's raw aggression toward his or her classmates in the spring from the classmates' gender nonconformity in the fall. The beta controlled for the child's raw aggression toward each classmate in the fall, so in effect it assessed change over the school year in the child's propensity to attack peers based on their gender nonconformity. The larger the slope, the more the child increased his or her aggression toward gender-nonconforming peers (relative to other targets) over the year. (These within-child associations were computed separately for children's aggression toward boys and children's aggression toward girls.) Two other variables were controlled in these betas—the degree to which a classmate was generally victimized by peers (to remove nomothetic target influences) and classmates' aggression toward the participant (to reduce the possibility that participants' aggression was reactive to classmates' aggression). A Level 1 equation was used to compute these within-child betas.

In the second step of each HLM model, the within-child slopes just described served as the dependent variable in analyses in which the cognitive variables were predictors (slopes-as-outcomes analyses; e.g., Nezlek, 2011). Thus, these were between-child analyses. These analyses controlled for child general aggression (trait aggression), age, and sex (though interactions with sex were also examined). A Level 2 equation served this purpose. A significant effect of the focal cognitive term in this equation indicated

Table 1
Stability, Mean, and Standard Deviation of Each Measure

Measure	Stability	Fall wave				Spring wave				Wave difference in the spring (<i>t</i>) ^(a)
		Boys		Girls		Boys		Girls		
		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Cognitive variables										
Intergroup bias	.46	0.48	0.53	0.55	0.52	0.56	0.56	0.60	0.50	-0.17
Felt pressure for gender differentiation	.83	2.54	0.79	1.69	0.50	2.56	0.82	1.60	0.49	9.74***
Felt gender typicality	.56	3.05	0.65	2.81	0.68	3.30	0.63	2.79	0.77	4.86***
Gender contentedness	.47	3.79	0.32	3.76	0.36	3.82	0.35	3.73	0.39	1.41
Self-esteem	.49	3.56	0.47	3.60	0.42	3.62	0.45	3.60	0.54	0.38
Dominance self-efficacy	.69	2.66	0.59	2.56	0.59	2.77	0.58	2.58	0.61	2.02*
Popularity self-efficacy	.79	3.32	0.61	3.29	0.56	3.41	0.62	3.34	0.56	0.91
Attractiveness self-efficacy	.67	3.04	0.76	3.21	0.68	3.16	0.73	3.26	0.71	-0.82
Behavioral variables										
Gender nonconformity	.82	-0.12	0.97	0.13	1.04	-0.09	1.02	0.10	0.97	-1.24
Social prominence	.91	0.31	1.04	-0.32	0.86	0.29	1.00	-0.31	0.91	4.21***
Prosocial qualities	.85	-0.36	0.87	0.42	0.96	-0.37	0.92	0.40	0.93	-5.66***
Coercion	.77	-0.21	0.88	0.21	1.08	-0.13	0.94	0.13	1.05	-1.82
Internalizing problems	.71	-0.06	1.04	-0.06	0.95	0.16	1.06	-0.17	0.90	2.37**
General aggression toward same-sex peers	.84	0.06	0.08	0.04	0.06	0.08	0.10	0.05	0.07	3.06**
General aggression toward other-sex peers	.71	0.04	0.07	0.06	0.07	0.06	0.08	0.09	0.12	-1.96
General victimization by same-sex peers	.78	0.06	0.05	0.04	0.05	0.08	0.07	0.05	0.04	4.98***
General victimization by other-sex peers	.54	0.06	0.04	0.05	0.07	0.09	0.08	0.07	0.05	2.83**

^a Entries in this column are *t* values from repeated measures tests.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 2
Correlations Among Variables in the Fall

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Intergroup bias	—	.04	.13	.00	.04	.08	.15	.00	-.25*	.12	-.04	-.05	-.16	-.11	-.11	-.08	-.17
2. Felt pressure for gender differentiation	.17	—	.03	.02	.05	.18	.15	.12	.04	.01	-.10	.12	-.08	.13	.11	-.01	.09
3. Felt gender typicality	.03	.01	—	.17	.43***	.05	.20	.14	.05	-.03	-.08	-.07	-.08	-.02	.03	.02	-.05
4. Gender contentedness	-.24	-.13	.17	—	.40***	-.03	.07	.10	-.01	.06	.03	.04	.02	.07	.05	-.03	.12
5. Self-esteem	-.09	-.23*	.17	.38	—	.05	.20*	.25*	.00	.01	.17	-.15	-.13	-.18	-.19	-.18	-.05
6. Dominance self-efficacy	-.10	-.09	.01	-.01	.15	—	.25*	.43***	-.16	.28**	-.31**	.23*	-.36***	.14	.18	-.08	.03
7. Popularity self-efficacy	-.22*	-.12	.09	.12	.23*	.47***	—	.61***	-.03	.40***	.14	.19	-.42***	-.19	-.09	-.31**	-.26**
8. Attractiveness self-efficacy	-.17	.05	.10	.23*	.21*	.20	.51***	—	.01	.33**	-.05	.15	-.45***	.01	.07	-.09	-.30**
9. Gender nonconformity	-.17	-.01	-.02	.03	.05	.11	.33**	.25*	.04	-.06	—	.27**	.20*	.19	.33**	.29*	.30**
10. Social prominence	-.11	-.13	.08	.05	.11	.33**	.25*	.04	.50***	—	.31**	-.02	.18	.19	.11	-.40***	-.45***
11. Prosocial qualities	-.06	.01	-.08	.12	.06	-.05	.10	.06	-.24*	.07	—	-.13	.12	-.47***	-.47***	-.44***	—
12. Coercion	-.25**	.09	.14	.12	.21*	.16	.30***	.28**	-.03	-.07	.00	—	.08	.58***	.42***	.19	.13
13. Internalizing problems	.17	.17	-.21*	-.15	-.18	-.21*	-.38***	-.13	-.16	-.04	.05	-.08	—	.31**	.25*	.55***	.29**
14. General aggression toward same-sex peers	-.21*	.10	.25**	.04	.09	.11	.13	.09	.02	-.25*	-.50***	.36***	-.27**	—	.84***	.60***	.45***
15. General aggression toward other-sex peers	-.08	.11	.23*	-.04	.15	.04	.15	.15	.10	-.17	-.50***	.53***	-.14	.75***	—	.51***	.48***
16. General victimization by same-sex peers	.09	.08	-.14	-.23*	-.04	.00	-.25*	-.14	-.05	-.26*	-.35***	-.12	.38***	.15	.10	—	.63***
17. General victimization by other-sex peers	.01	.12	-.05	-.14	.07	.08	-.02	.09	-.11	-.18	-.21*	.12	.23*	.20*	.25*	.57***	—

Note. Correlations for boys are above the diagonal; correlations for girls are below the diagonal. Entries are partial correlations with age controlled.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Table 3
Correlations Among Variables in the Spring

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
1. Intergroup bias	—	.11	.18	.13	.26**	.24**	.18	.03	-.21*	.11	-.06	-.12	-.08	-.12	-.07	-.09	.17
2. Felt pressure for gender differentiation	.16	—	-.08	.12	.02	.08	.09	.10	.02	.00	-.12	-.07	-.08	.22*	.18	.04	.04
3. Felt gender typicality	.01	.10	—	.37***	.38***	.21*	.17	.09	-.01	.15	-.04	-.01	-.09	.00	-.01	.05	-.19
4. Gender contentedness	-.01	.01	.23*	—	.47***	.18	.12	-.06	-.09	.09	.03	.08	-.08	.01	-.03	-.03	.02
5. Self-esteem	-.10	-.34***	.28**	.36***	—	.19	.39***	.24**	-.06	.13	.20*	-.01	-.33***	-.24*	-.27**	-.26*	-.24**
6. Dominance self-efficacy	-.03	-.25**	-.14	-.29**	.10	—	.45***	.54***	-.12	.33*	-.27**	.21*	-.51***	.01	.10	-.32*	-.16
7. Popularity self-efficacy	-.13	-.19	.20	.14	.49***	.33***	—	.69***	-.07	.47***	.25**	.16	-.44***	-.27**	-.15	-.49***	-.33***
8. Attractiveness self-efficacy	-.15	.03	.28**	.06	.27**	.22*	.53*	-.23*	.04	.51***	.13	.19	-.40***	-.09	.04	-.39***	-.29**
9. Gender nonconformity	-.09	-.02	-.14	.05	.06	.12	-.06	-.23*	—	.34***	.08	.09	-.40***	.00	.21*	.26*	.10
10. Social prominence	-.14	-.20	-.22*	-.16	.05	.35***	.11	.04	.51***	—	.27**	.23*	-.17	-.20*	-.13	-.42***	-.31**
11. Prosocial qualities	-.02	.04	.05	.06	.13	.09	.10	.08	-.21*	.01	—	-.11	.10	-.55***	-.51***	-.35***	-.31**
12. Coercion	-.17	.02	.19	.16	.17	.17	.23*	.26**	-.11	-.17	.01	—	.08	.41***	.42***	.15	.04
13. Internalizing problems	.03	.04	-.12	-.13	-.33**	-.12	-.37***	-.12	.03	.11	.05	-.08	—	.28*	.10	.63***	.38***
14. General aggression toward same-sex peers	-.24*	.02	.21*	.10	.10	-.15	.10	.13	.07	-.16	-.47***	.42***	-.02	—	.84***	.66***	.38***
15. General aggression toward other-sex peers	.04	.13	.15	.07	.06	-.08	.08	.09	.19	-.03	-.27**	.48***	.02	.72***	—	.48***	.41***
16. General victimization by same-sex peers	.04	.09	-.02	.07	-.20	-.24*	-.30**	-.14	-.09	-.16	-.31**	.00	.54***	.28**	.18*	—	.51***
17. General victimization by other-sex peers	.00	.21*	-.07	-.08	-.27**	.00	-.21*	-.11	.08	-.11	-.13	.24*	.51***	.39***	.51***	.58***	—

Note. Correlations for boys are above the diagonal; correlations for girls are below the diagonal. Entries are partial correlations with age controlled.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

that the cognitive variable moderated the influence of targets' gender nonconformity on change in participants' aggression over the school year. Thus, the effect indicated a cross-level interaction of a subject variable with a target variable.

The Level 1 equation used to calculate the within-child betas was

$$\begin{aligned} \text{ParAggToTar2}_{ij} = & b_{0j} + b_{1j} * (\text{ParAggToTar1}_{ij}) \\ & + b_{2j} * (\text{NomVicOfTar1}_{ij}) \\ & + b_{3j} * (\text{TarAggToPar1}_{ij}) \\ & + b_{4j} * (\text{TarGenderNoncon1}_{ij}) + r_{ij}. \end{aligned}$$

In this equation, *ParAggToTar2* and *ParAggToTar1* are participant's aggression toward target in spring and fall, respectively; b_{0j} is the intercept; *NomVicOfTar1* is nomothetic victimization of target in fall; *TarAggToPar1* is target's aggression toward participant in fall; *TarGenderNoncon1* is target gender-atypical behavior in fall; and r_{ij} is error. All variables were group-mean centered. The beta yielded by the equation for the *TarGenderNoncon1* term (b_{4j}) indicated how change in the child's aggression over the year depended on target's gender-atypical behavior in the fall.

To evaluate effects of the cognitive variables on the dependent variable (the within-child betas), we ran a series of HLM models. To evaluate the main effect of a single cognitive variable, the following basic Level 2 equation was used:

$$\begin{aligned} B_{4j} = & \gamma_{40} + \gamma_{41} * (\text{ParGenAgg1}_j) + \gamma_{42} * (\text{ParSex}_j) \\ & + \gamma_{43} * (\text{ParAge1}_j) + \gamma_{44} * (\text{ParCog1}_j) + u_{4j}. \end{aligned}$$

In this equation, B_{4j} is the within-child beta yielded by the Level 1 equation for the *TarGenderNoncon1* term, γ_{40} is the intercept, *ParGenAgg1* is participant's general aggression in fall, *ParSex* is the participant's sex, *ParAge1* is the participant's fall age in months, *ParCog1* is the participant's fall cognitive measure, and u_{4j} is error. All variables were grand-mean centered. The significance of the coefficient of the cognitive variable indicated whether that variable predicted change in children's aggression as a function of peers' gender nonconformity. To evaluate a Cognition \times Sex interaction, the model was rerun to include the interaction term. The main-effect impact of each of our eight individual cognitive variables (four gender identity dimensions, four gender-nonspecific self-appraisals) on change in children's targeting of gender-nonconforming peers was examined in this way.

However, overconfident and insecure forms of gender identity are better captured by combinations of cognitive variables than by any single variable. Thus, we also evaluated 20 two-way interactions among the cognitive variables, representing the pairings of variables that we suggested create an overconfident or insecure gender identity. The pairings are listed in Table 4. To evaluate a two-way interaction, the single cognitive term in the basic Level 2 equation (above) was replaced by three new terms—the main

Table 4

Results of Hierarchical Linear Modeling Analyses Evaluating Influences of Gender Identity on Change Over Time in Children's Selective Targeting of Gender-Nonconforming Peers

Interaction term ^a	Fixed effects			Random effects		
	γ	SE	t	SD	χ^2	df
Intergroup bias \times						
Felt gender typicality	-0.33	.39	-0.87	.35	219.06 [†]	188
Gender contentedness	-0.80	.67	-1.20	.33	218.09 [†]	188
Self-esteem ^b	-2.64	.78	-3.40***	.35	113.02	95
Dominance self-efficacy	0.20	.35	0.58	.36	219.29 [†]	188
Popularity self-efficacy ^c	1.28	.45	2.86**	.37	207.03	186
Attractiveness self-efficacy ^d	0.93	.35	2.64**	.33	207.57	186
Felt pressure for gender differentiation \times						
Felt gender typicality ^e	0.92	.36	2.55*	.36	210.46	186
Gender contentedness	-1.16	.44	-2.61*	.30	212.31	188
Self-esteem	-0.95	.33	-2.85**	.27	209.47	188
Dominance self-efficacy	-0.46	.24	-1.91	.34	215.47 [†]	188
Popularity self-efficacy	-0.30	.25	-1.19	.35	217.91 [†]	188
Attractiveness self-efficacy	-0.26	.22	-1.22	.35	216.55 [†]	188
Felt gender typicality \times						
Self-esteem	0.71	.44	1.62	.35	215.89 [†]	188
Dominance self-efficacy	0.46	.36	1.25	.35	218.05 [†]	188
Popularity self-efficacy	0.86	.35	2.44*	.32	213.40	188
Attractiveness self-efficacy	0.86	.29	2.94**	.34	211.45	188
Gender contentedness \times						
Self-esteem	-0.90	.88	-1.03	.33	217.53 [†]	188
Dominance self-efficacy	-1.11	.54	-2.06*	.38	215.75 [†]	188
Popularity self-efficacy	0.88	.46	1.91	.39	216.45 [†]	188
Attractiveness self-efficacy	1.21	.46	2.65**	.38	212.36	188

^a When an interaction term was significant, it was followed up to see if the gender identity variable preceding \times moderated the relation of the other variable to selective targeting of gender-nonconforming peers. ^b Data in this row are for boys only. ^c Data in this row are for the interaction of intergroup bias and the quadratic effect of popularity self-efficacy. ^d Data in this row are for the interaction of intergroup bias and the quadratic effect of attractiveness self-efficacy. ^e Data in this row are for the interaction of felt pressure and the quadratic effect of felt gender typicality.

[†] $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

effects of the two cognitive variables and their product. If the interaction was significant (and not qualified by child sex or by a quadratic term, as described next), we examined its pattern. If, however, the three-way interaction of child sex and the cognitive variables was significant (in a subsequent model that included the three-way interaction and the two-way interactions of sex with each cognitive variable), we evaluated the interaction of the cognitive variables separately for each sex. Also for each two-way interaction, we examined whether the first-named member of each variable pair listed in Table 4 moderated a quadratic effect of its partner variable; this was done by running subsequent models that included not only the two main effects and their interaction but also the quadratic effect of the partner variable and the interaction of this quadratic variable with its potential moderator. If this interaction was significant, we examined its pattern. (We also ran models to see if any such interactions were qualified by child sex; none was.)

When a Level 2 equation is used to predict the slopes from a Level 1 equation, the model may be misspecified unless a second equation is included at Level 2—one predicting the intercepts from Level 1 (from the same terms as those predicting the slopes). We therefore always included such an equation at Level 2. An intercept from Level 1 estimates a participant's general (trait) aggression in the spring. Because this extra equation predicts the intercepts from cognition with fall general aggression controlled, the coefficients for the cognitive terms indicate whether cognition predicts change over the year in trait aggression. Our hypotheses do not address influences of cognition on trait aggression, but we later comment on these effects. Although we have described the analysis as proceeding in two steps (from Level 1 to Level 2), in reality the HLM program estimates all equations simultaneously.

Each HLM analysis included the data for boys' aggression toward boys and for girls' aggression toward girls. Participant sex is therefore confounded (deliberately) with target sex, but as noted, sex was examined both as a main effect and as a moderator of cognitive effects. This analytic strategy is appropriate when testing hypotheses expected to operate similarly in both boys' and girls' interactions with same-sex peers but not necessarily in their interactions with other-sex peers (e.g., Rodkin & Berger, 2008; Sainio, Veenstra, Huitsing, & Salmivalli, 2012). We also ran a parallel series of analyses examining children's aggression toward other-sex targets. Because the base rate of children's aggression toward other-sex peers is very low and because there is less reason to expect gender identity to affect aggression toward other-sex peers, we expected few results for this set of analyses. We first summarize results for same-sex targets.

Aggression toward gender-nonconforming same-sex peers. No cognitive variable predicted change in children's maltreatment of gender-nonconforming peers over the school year as a main effect. However, the interaction of sex and self-esteem was significant ($\gamma = -1.40$, $p = .009$, $t = -2.64$). For boys only, low self-esteem forecast increased targeting of gender-nonconforming peers ($\gamma = -0.81$, $p = .029$, $t = -2.22$). (The gamma symbol γ denotes an unstandardized beta coefficient from a cognitive term in a Level 2 equation predicting slopes.)

To evaluate the overconfident and insecure pathways to aggression toward gender-nonconforming peers, we tested the 20 two-way interactions listed in Table 4. Evidence that high scores on a gender identity variable combined with high scores on another

variable to encourage maltreatment of gender-nonconforming peers was taken as support for the overconfident pathway. The insecure pathway was seen as supported if high scores on a measure of between-gender identity or low scores on a measure of within-gender identity combined with low scores on another variable to promote harassment of gender-nonconforming peers. Of the 20 interactions tested, 10 were significant, only one of which was moderated by child sex. We describe the significant interactions for each gender identity variable in turn (in order of Table 4). As we shall see, most results supported the insecure pathway to maltreatment of gender-nonconforming peers, but there was also some evidence for the overconfident route.

Intergroup bias. Intergroup bias did not interact with any other gender identity variable but did interact with three gender-nonspecific self-appraisals—self-esteem, popularity self-efficacy, and attractiveness self-efficacy—to predict increased victimization of gender-nonconforming peers. Because the interaction of intergroup bias with self-esteem was qualified by child sex (three-way interaction $\gamma = -2.63$, $p = .018$, $t = -2.40$), the two-way interaction of Intergroup Bias \times Self-Esteem was examined for each sex. This interaction was significant for boys ($p < .001$) but not girls (details of significant interactions are in Table 4). Significant interactions were followed up using procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991), that is, the effect of one variable was estimated at 1 and -1 SD of the other (conceptualized as the moderator). As seen in Figure 1A, low self-esteem predicted victimization of gender-nonconforming peers only for boys with strong ingroup favoritism ($p < .001$). This supports the insecure, self-discrepant pathway to harassment of gender-nonconforming peers: Boys who saw their own gender as superior but nonetheless questioned their own worth grew increasingly mean to gender-nonconforming peers with time. (This was the only interaction to be moderated by child sex; all remaining interactions in this section capture patterns for the total sample.)

Intergroup bias also interacted with the quadratic form of both popularity self-efficacy and attractiveness self-efficacy (see Figures 1B and 1C). In each case, the quadratic effect of the self-efficacy variable was highly significant for children with strong intergroup bias (both $ps = .003$) but not significant for children with little intergroup bias: For children with high intergroup bias, either very low or very high self-efficacy led to selective harassment of gender-nonconforming peers. That children high in both intergroup bias and self-efficacy for a demonstration goal harass these peers supports the overconfident pathway; that children high in intergroup bias but low in self-efficacy also do so supports the insecure, self-discrepant pathway.

Felt pressure for gender differentiation. Felt pressure for gender differentiation interacted with three variables—felt gender typicality, gender contentedness, and self-esteem—to predict increased attacks on gender-nonconforming peers. These interactions are depicted in Figures 2A, 2B, and 2C. Felt pressure interacted with the quadratic form of felt typicality ($p = .012$; see Figure 2A). The pattern does not provide strong support for either pathway because the quadratic effect of felt typicality is not significant at high felt pressure, but it is more consistent with the insecure, self-discrepant pathway than with the overconfident pathway. This is because for children who felt gender atypical, high felt pressure was more conducive than low felt pressure to victimization of gender-nonconforming peers ($b = -0.75$, $p =$

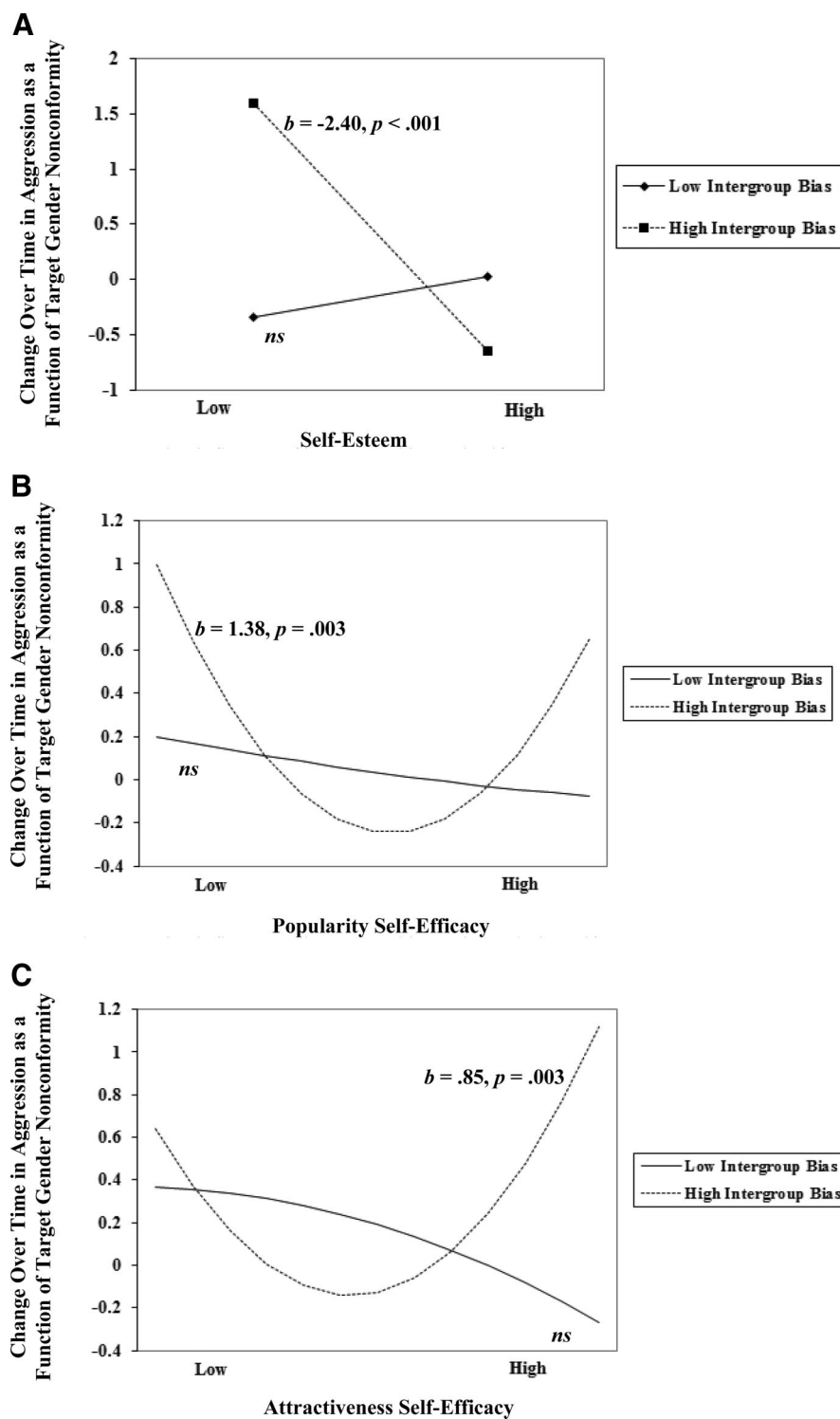


Figure 1. A: Interactive influence of intergroup bias and self-esteem on change over time in boys' selective targeting of gender-nonconforming male peers (y-axis units are within-child betas from the hierarchical linear modeling [HLM] Level 1 equation). B: Interactive influence of intergroup bias and popularity self-efficacy on change over time in children's selective targeting of gender-nonconforming same-sex peers (y-axis units are within-child betas from the HLM Level 1 equation). C: Interactive influence of intergroup bias and attractiveness self-efficacy on change over time in children's selective targeting of gender-nonconforming same-sex peers (y-axis units are within-child betas from the HLM Level 1 equation).

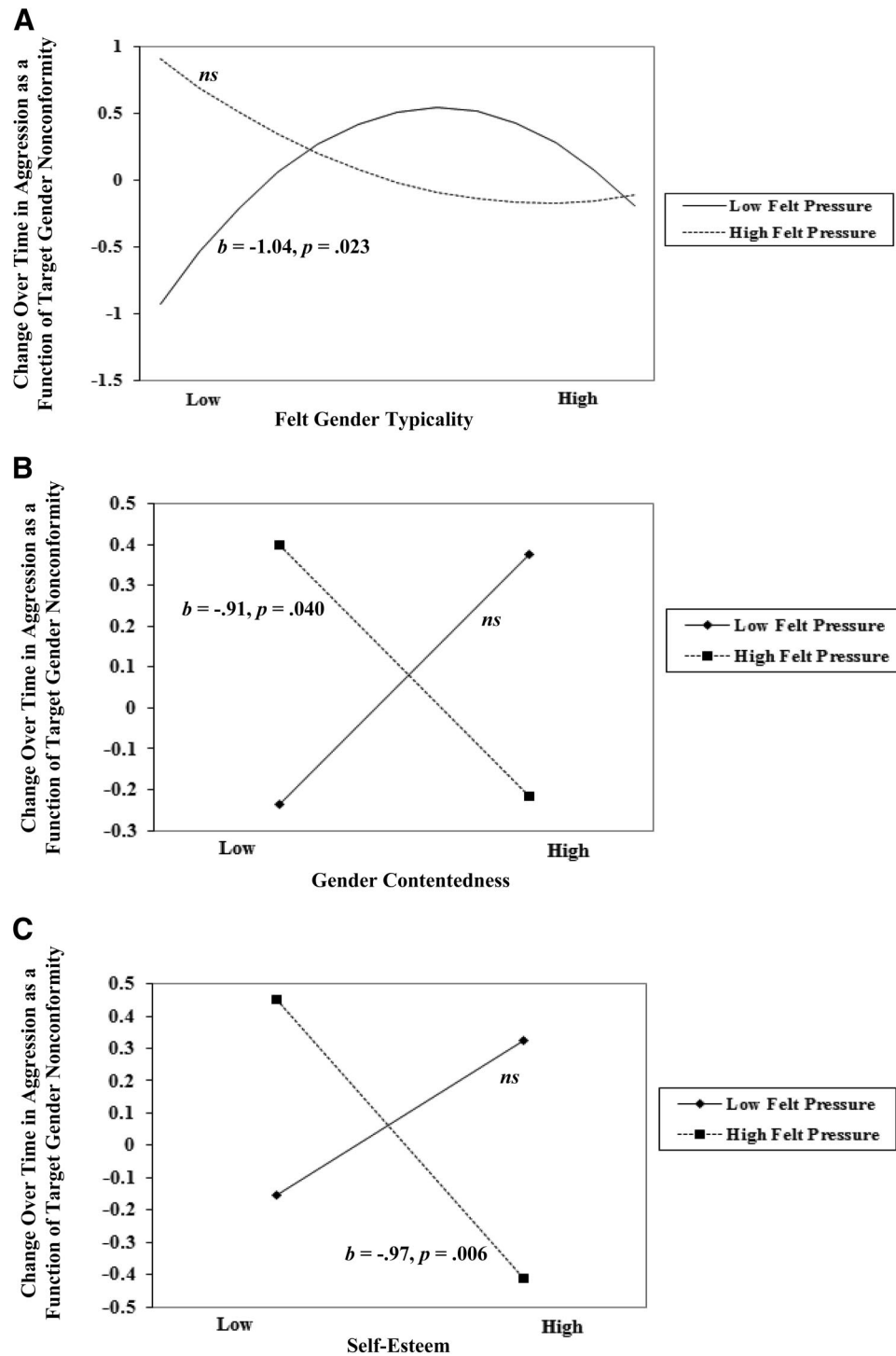


Figure 2. A: Interactive influence of felt pressure for gender differentiation and felt gender typicality on change over time in children's selective targeting of gender-nonconforming same-sex peers (y-axis units are within-child betas from the hierarchical linear modeling [HLM] Level 1 equation). B: Interactive influence of felt pressure for gender differentiation and gender contentedness on change over time in children's selective targeting of gender-nonconforming same-sex peers (y-axis units are within-child betas from the HLM Level 1 equation). C: Interactive influence of felt pressure for gender differentiation and self-esteem on change over time in children's selective targeting of gender-nonconforming same-sex peers (y-axis units are within-child betas from the HLM Level 1 equation).

.034); for children who felt gender typical, felt pressure made no difference.

The interactions of felt pressure for gender differentiation with gender contentedness ($p = .010$; see Figure 2B) and with self-esteem ($p = .005$; see Figure 2C) also support the insecure, self-discrepant pathway. Low gender contentedness forecast victimization of gender-nonconforming peers to the extent that children also felt pressure to inhibit cross-gender behavior ($p = .040$); the effect of gender contentedness was in fact reversed for children feeling little such pressure, though not significantly. The other interaction was similar, showing that low self-esteem encouraged victimization of gender-nonconforming peers for children high in felt pressure for gender differentiation ($p = .006$) but not for children low in felt pressure; the effect of self-esteem was also reversed for children low in felt pressure, albeit not significantly.

Felt gender typicality. In addition to interacting with felt pressure for gender differentiation (see above), felt gender typicality interacted with self-efficacy for popularity ($p = .016$) and with self-efficacy for attractiveness ($p = .004$) to predict maltreatment of gender-nonconforming peers. Both interactions (see Figures 3A and 3B) support the insecure pathway. Children who felt incapable of popularity or good looks increased their harassment of gender-nonconforming peers to the extent they felt that they too were gender atypical ($ps = .017$ and $.004$, respectively); self-efficacy for these demonstration qualities was not significantly related to harassment of gender-nonconforming peers for children who felt more gender typical.

Gender contentedness. In addition to interacting with felt pressure for gender differentiation (see above), gender contentedness interacted with self-efficacy for dominance ($p = .040$) and

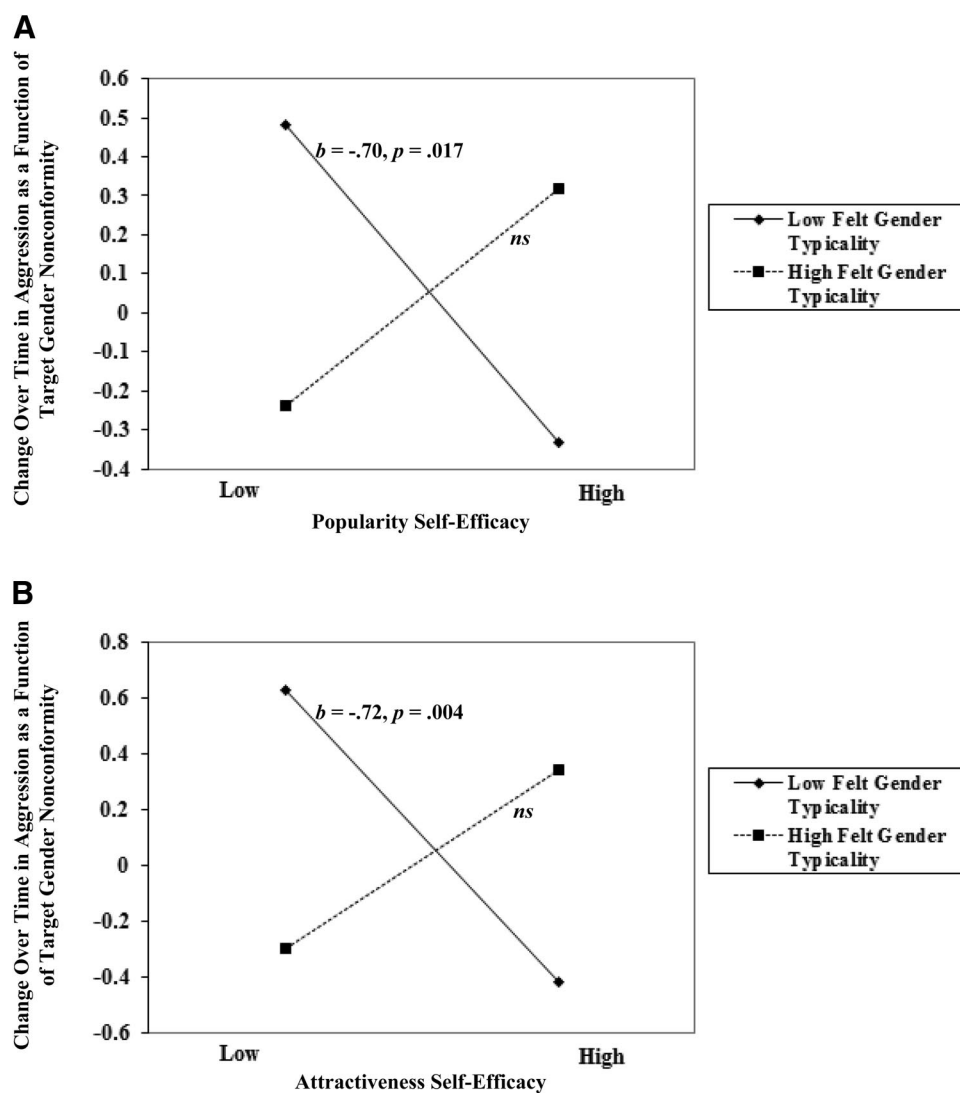


Figure 3. A: Interactive influence of felt gender typicality and popularity self-efficacy on change over time in children's selective targeting of gender-nonconforming same-sex peers (y-axis units are within-child betas from the hierarchical linear modeling [HLM] Level 1 equation). B: Interactive influence of felt gender typicality and attractiveness self-efficacy on change over time in children's selective targeting of gender-nonconforming same-sex peers (y-axis units are within-child betas from the HLM Level 1 equation).

with self-efficacy for attractiveness ($p = .009$) to predict victimization of gender-nonconforming peers. Because follow-ups of the Gender Contentedness \times Dominance Self-Efficacy interaction failed to yield a significant simple slope (regardless of which variable served as the moderator) and because the pattern did not support either the overconfident or the insecure pathway, we do not discuss it further. The interaction of gender contentedness and self-efficacy for attractiveness is depicted in Figure 4. For children who felt discontent with their gender, low self-efficacy for attractiveness led to victimization of gender-nonconforming peers ($p = .013$); for children more satisfied with their gender, attractiveness self-efficacy had no significant effect, though it trended in a direction suggestive of the overconfident pathway (i.e., children high in both gender contentedness and self-efficacy also showed some inclination to harass gender-nonconforming classmates).

Other significant interactions. In addition to testing the 20 interactions listed in Table 4, we tested the eight remaining possible two-way interactions among the cognitive variables. Of these, two were significant. Self-esteem interacted with popularity self-efficacy ($\gamma = 0.92$, $p = .032$, $t = 2.16$) and with attractiveness self-efficacy ($\gamma = 0.79$, $p = .012$, $t = 2.54$) to predict maltreatment of gender-nonconforming peers. The patterns of these two interactions were very similar and indicated that children with low self-esteem were more likely than children with high self-esteem to increase their harassment of gender-nonconforming peers only if they perceived themselves as incapable of popularity ($b = -0.75$, $p = .035$) or of good looks ($b = -0.68$, $p = .037$). These interactions support the idea that an insecure, self-doubting self-concept encourages maltreatment of gender-nonconforming others. However, neither interaction involves a gender identity variable. This raises the possibility that these gender-nonspecific patterns of insecure self-concept might account for the interaction effects reported above that do involve a gender identity variable.

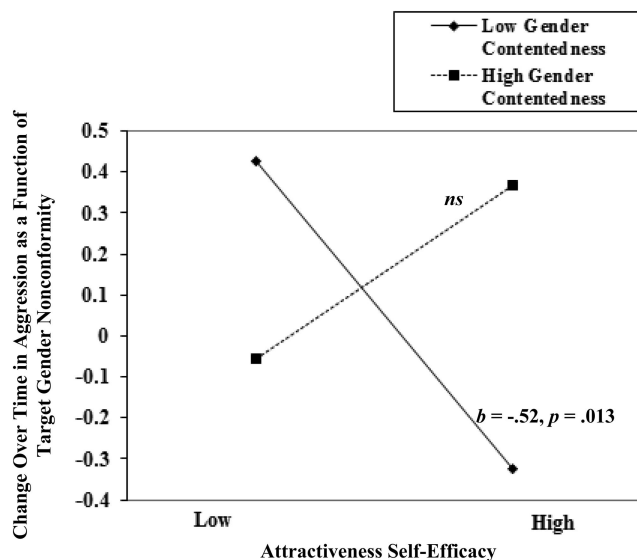


Figure 4. Interactive influence of gender contentedness and attractiveness self-efficacy on change over time in children's selective targeting of gender-nonconforming same-sex peers (y-axis units are within-child betas from the hierarchical linear modeling Level 1 equation).

Thus, we ran 20 additional analyses to see if either of these two gender-nonspecific interactions mediated any of the 10 significant interaction effects reported above. These analyses simultaneously tested the two interaction terms, main effects, and control variables; in the case of the Intergroup Bias \times Self-Esteem interaction, analyses were run only on the boys' data. In all but four cases, the initially significant gender identity interaction remained significant. Two previously significant interactions were reduced to marginal significance when entered with the interaction of Self-Esteem \times Popularity Self-Efficacy (Felt Gender Typicality \times Popularity Self-Efficacy, $p = .092$; Gender Contentedness \times Attractiveness Self-Efficacy, $p = .066$), one became marginally significant when entered with the interaction of Self-Esteem \times Attractiveness Self-Efficacy (Gender Contentedness \times Dominance Self-Efficacy, $p = .083$), and one became nonsignificant when entered with the interaction of Self-Esteem \times Attractiveness Self-Efficacy (Gender Contentedness \times Appearance Self-Efficacy, $p = .111$). In one case the gender-nonspecific interaction was significant whereas the gender identity interaction was not. This was the interaction of Self-Esteem \times Appearance Self-Efficacy ($p = .015$) when entered with the interaction of Gender Contentedness \times Dominance Self-Efficacy. However, this result is of little interest because this gender identity interaction was uninformative (see above). In sum, these results attest to the importance of gender-specific sources of insecurity in children's self-concepts as contributors to children's motivation for harassing gender-nonconforming peers.

Are the gender identity effects accounted for by children's harassment of peers with qualities correlated with gender nonconformity? Gender-nonconforming children differ from their peers in several respects (e.g., social status), and it is possible that gender identity predicts maltreatment of gender-nonconforming peers because it causes maltreatment of peers with one or more correlated characteristics. Our theory, however, is that troubled gender identity influences maltreatment of peers contingent specifically on peers' gender nonconformity, not on the basis of correlated target qualities. To examine this issue, we took the following steps. First, we identified cognitive and behavioral correlates of gender nonconformity in the fall; these variables could possibly account for the within-child betas yielded by the HLM Level 1 equation; that is, the betas capturing change over the school year in children's dispositions to attack gender-nonconforming peers could be artifacts of the correlation of fall gender nonconformity with the fall measure of one of these rival peer qualities. Next, for each of these correlated characteristics, we ran HLM models in which target gender nonconformity was replaced with the alternate target characteristic (in the Level 1 equation), and the resulting betas (which now indexed change in children's aggression toward peers as a function of the alternate target quality) were predicted from one of the 10 gender identity interaction terms that had predicted aggression toward gender-nonconforming peers (in the Level 2 equation). A significant interaction indicated that the alternate quality could possibly account for the impact of the gender identity pattern on children's aggression toward gender-nonconforming peers. Thus, in cases where this interaction was significant, we reran the original HLM analysis with the alternate peer quality included as an additional control in the Level 1 equation. A significant interaction now meant that the gender identity pattern predicted change in chil-

dren's aggression toward gender-nonconforming peers beyond any effect of the rival quality.

We identified six variables that were correlated with gender nonconformity for either sex at $p < .10$ in the fall (see Table 2); these qualities served as the alternate target qualities in the analyses just outlined. These variables were intergroup bias, dominance self-efficacy, social prominence, prosocial qualities, internalizing problems, and general aggression. (General victimization also qualified but was irrelevant because it was already controlled in the Level 1 equation.) For each alternate peer characteristic, we ran 10 HLM analyses—one for each significant gender identity interaction term reported above—to see if the interaction was also significant when the alternate quality was substituted for gender nonconformity as the focal target quality. Of these 60 analyses, only three yielded a significant interaction: The interaction of Intergroup Bias \times Self-Esteem predicted change in aggression as a function of peers' prosocial qualities ($\gamma = 3.19, p = .024, t = 2.29$; tested for boys only), the interaction of Intergroup Bias \times the Quadratic Form of Popularity Self-Efficacy predicted change in aggression as a function of peers' intergroup bias ($\gamma = -2.58, p = .016, t = -2.43$), and the interaction of Felt Pressure for Gender Differentiation \times Gender Contentedness predicted change in aggression as a function of peers' intergroup bias ($\gamma = 2.50, p = .009, t = 2.66$). We then reran the original HLM analyses to see whether the interaction terms still predicted change in aggression toward gender-nonconforming peers when the alternate peer quality (prosocial behavior or intergroup bias) was included among the controls in the Level 1 equation. In all three cases, it did ($ps < .05$). Thus, alternate peer qualities correlated with gender nonconformity do not account for the major findings of the study (i.e., influences of gender identity on children's increased selective maltreatment of gender-nonconforming peers over time).

Main effects of child sex. In no HLM analysis was the main effect of child sex significant. This indicates that girls and boys were fairly similar in the tendency to victimize gender-nonconforming peers. To make sure this was not because the HLM models had included cognitive variables, some of which are sex differentiated (see Table 1), we ran an additional HLM analysis without any cognitive term in the Level 2 equation. Again, there was no sex difference.

Summary. Ten of 20 two-way interactions that included at least one gender identity variable significantly predicted change over the school year in children's selective victimization of gender-nonconforming same-sex peers. Most of these interactions supported the idea that insecure gender identity motivates attacks on gender-atypical peers; two interactions also supported the idea that overconfident gender identity does so as well. Supplementary analyses indicated that (a) the effects of problematic gender identity on victimization of gender-nonconforming peers are not accounted for by gender-nonspecific aspects of self-concept and (b) the influences of gender identity on harassment of gender-nonconforming peers are not attributable to gender identity influences on harassment of peers with qualities correlated with gender nonconformity.

Aggression toward gender-nonconforming other-sex peers. There was little evidence that gender identity is implicated in aggression toward gender-nonconforming peers of the other sex. We ran the same analyses on aggression toward other-sex peers as we had on aggression toward same-sex peers. Only one effect was

significant—the interaction of Felt Gender Typicality \times Sex ($\gamma = -0.68, p = .044, t = -2.03$). Boys who felt gender atypical were somewhat more likely than boys who felt gender typical to be mean to gender-nonconforming girls ($\gamma = -0.42, p = .080, t = -1.77$); there was no effect for girls. There was also no main effect of child sex on the tendency to harass gender-nonconforming other-sex peers.

Does Gender Identity Predict Children's General (Trait) Aggression?

The HLM analyses included a Level 2 equation that predicted change in children's average aggression across all peer targets (intercepts) from the cognitive variables. Because these results do not bear on the hypotheses, they are not presented in any detail but are available from the first author. In brief, there were several significant cognitive effects on the intercepts (in the analyses on aggression toward same-sex peers), but there was little overlap in the cognitive terms that predicted the slopes (preference for gender-atypical targets) and the cognitive terms that predicted the intercepts (general aggression). Moreover, because the equations were estimated simultaneously, any above-reported effect of a cognitive term on slopes was over and above any effect of the cognitive term on intercepts.

Characteristics of Gender-Nonconforming Preadolescents

Results thus far have focused on the cognitive features of children who selectively harass gender-nonconforming peers. Here we shift the focus to the qualities of the gender-nonconforming children whose victimization was under study. We summarize findings bearing on the stability, correlates, consequences, and antecedents of gender nonconformity.

Stability of gender nonconformity. The stability of gender nonconformity from fall to spring was very high, for both girls ($r = .81$) and boys ($r = .82$). Gender nonconformity appears to be a distinct and stable personality trait for preadolescent children.

Concurrent correlates of gender nonconformity. Tables 1 and 2 present the correlations between gender nonconformity and the other 16 variables (separately for boys and girls) in the fall and spring, respectively. Gender-nonconforming girls were consistently perceived by peers as socially prominent (popular, athletic) but also as low in prosocial qualities; they were not victimized overall more than other girls. Gender-nonconforming boys were consistently perceived as low in social prominence, as aggressive, and as victimized, but they exhibited less intergroup bias than other boys did. The associations between boys' gender nonconformity and general victimization disappeared when a variable more strongly correlated with victimization (social prominence, internalizing problems, or general aggression) was controlled. These results suggest that gender nonconformity does not contribute as strongly or directly to children's general victimization as certain other target qualities do, but they do not challenge the value of identifying cognitive factors that do lead some children to harm peers specifically contingent on their gender nonconformity, which was the purpose of our study.

These results are as informative for what they do not show as for what they do show. Notably, as a group, gender-nonconforming

children (of either sex) displayed few signs of internal distress or problematic self-concept: They did not have lower self-esteem, their self-efficacy beliefs were not much different, and they did not show disturbed gender identity.

Longitudinal effects. Our longitudinal design afforded an opportunity to see if gender nonconformity predicted change in any other variable, or if any other variable predicted change in gender nonconformity, over time. Such information provides clues about the likely direction of a causal arrow, if any, between gender nonconformity and each other variable.

Influences of gender nonconformity on change in other variables. We ran a regression analysis on each of the 16 other variables, treating the spring measure as the dependent variable. Age, sex, and the fall measure of the variable were entered as controls on the first step. On the second step, fall gender nonconformity was entered; on the third step, the interaction of Sex \times Gender Nonconformity was tested. Several effects of gender nonconformity were significant; none was moderated by child sex.

Gender nonconformity predicted reduced felt gender typicality over the school year ($b = -0.13, p = .026$). Thus, even though peer-perceived behavioral nonconformity and self-rated felt typicality were not concurrently correlated (see above), overt nonconformity augured a reduction in felt typicality over time.

Gender-nonconforming children increased in general aggression over the school year toward both same-sex peers ($b = 0.09, p = .018$) and other-sex peers ($b = 0.13, p = .014$). We examined several possible explanations for this unexpected result. First, in the fall, gender nonconformity was associated with several other variables for one or both sexes (intergroup bias, dominance self-efficacy, social prominence, prosocial qualities, internalizing symptoms, general victimization measures), and one of these variables might account for the impact of gender nonconformity on aggression. For example, gender-nonconforming children's increased aggression might be a reaction to their greater victimization in the fall. However, regardless of which other variable was entered as an additional control in follow-up regression analyses, the contribution of gender nonconformity to general aggression always remained significant.

Second, we explored whether gender nonconformity might foster general aggression in combination with some other determinant. Possibly, gender-nonconforming children develop aggressive habits only if they are also victimized. However, fall victimization (by either same-sex or other-sex peers) did not moderate the influence of fall gender nonconformity on general aggression (toward either same-sex or other-sex peers).

Given our interest in gender identity, we explored whether gender identity might moderate gender nonconformity's influence on general aggression (toward same-sex or other-sex peers). The interactive influence of each gender identity variable with gender nonconformity on change in aggression was tested. One interaction was significant: Felt pressure for gender differentiation moderated the influence of gender nonconformity on change in aggression toward same-sex peers ($b = 0.08, p = .032$). This interaction, plotted in Figure 5, shows that gender nonconformity predicted aggression toward same-sex peers for children with strong felt pressure for gender differentiation ($b = 0.17, p < .001$) but had no effect on the aggression of children lacking such pressure.

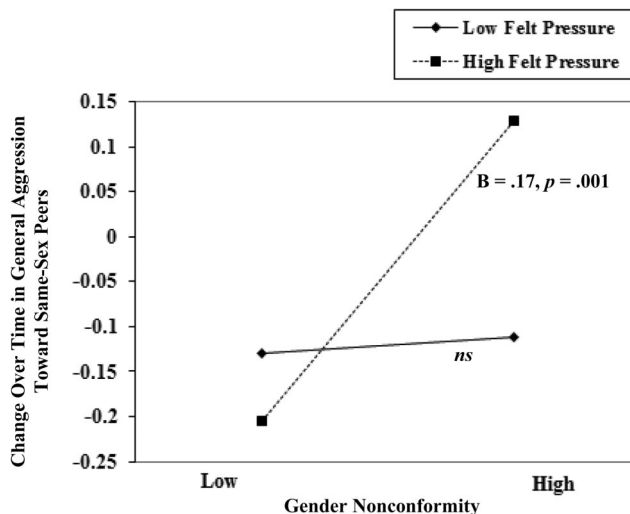


Figure 5. Interactive influence of felt pressure for gender differentiation and gender nonconformity on change over time in children's general aggression toward same-sex peers.

In concurrent analyses, the contribution of gender nonconformity to general victimization (for boys) disappeared when other target qualities were controlled. In longitudinal analyses, gender nonconformity did not predict increased victimization over the school year by either same-sex or other-sex peers even when other target qualities were left uncontrolled. Several variables did, however, predict increased general victimization and in ways consistent with prior longitudinal studies (e.g., Egan & Perry, 1998; Hodges & Perry, 1999): Victimization by same-sex peers was predicted ($p < .05$) by child sex (greater increase for boys), low self-efficacy for dominance, low self-efficacy for popularity (boys only), low social prominence, high coercion, high internalizing problems, and high aggression toward both same-sex and other-sex peers. Victimization by other-sex peers was predicted ($p < .05$) by child sex (greater increase for boys), low felt gender typicality (boys only), low popularity self-efficacy, and low appearance self-efficacy (boys only).

Even though gender nonconformity did not predict general victimization as a main effect, it is possible that it interacts with one or more other variables to do so. For example, gender-nonconforming children might be victimized by peers to the extent they have previously aggressed toward them, or perhaps distressed gender identity (e.g., low felt gender typicality) renders gender-nonconforming children vulnerable to victimization by peers. There was no support for either of these possibilities.

Given that our study was designed to understand why gender-nonconforming children are victimized, it is ironic to have found stronger evidence for a contribution of gender nonconformity to aggression than to victimization. Nonetheless, that gender nonconformity did not directly predict general victimization concurrently or longitudinally does not negate the fact that some children—those with troubled gender identity—increasingly singled out gender-nonconforming peers for abuse.

Consistent with the concurrent correlations, there was little evidence that gender nonconformity is conducive to internal distress (other than to reduced felt gender typicality). Gender non-

conformity did not, as a main effect, predict increased internalizing problems or reduced self-esteem. However, we also examined whether each gender identity variable moderated the impact of gender nonconformity on these outcomes. In the analysis on self-esteem, the three-way interaction of Sex \times Gender Contentedness \times Gender Nonconformity was significant ($b = 0.19, p = .037$), and the follow-up two-way interaction of Gender Contentedness \times Gender Nonconformity was significant for boys ($b = 0.25, p = .004$) but not girls. Gender nonconformity predicted a steep loss of self-esteem for boys who were dissatisfied with their gender ($b = -0.34, p = .009$) but not for boys more content with their gender.

We examined one final question, one dealing with how gender-nonconforming children might cope with abuse from their peers. As a main effect, gender-nonconformity predicted neither internalized distress (except for gender-discontented boys) nor general victimization. Nonetheless, gender-nonconforming children might have more adverse reactions (increased internalizing, reduced self-esteem) to peer victimization than other children do, perhaps because they are prone to interpreting being victimized as condemnation of a central, unchangeable part of their personality. Furthermore, making this attribution might depend on their gender identity. That is, gender-nonconforming children with either strong between-gender identity or weak within-gender identity might be especially likely to explain their abuse in this way. Thus, we examined the three-way interaction of Gender Nonconformity \times General Victimization (by either same-sex or other-sex peers) \times Gender Identity on internalizing problems and on self-esteem (with main effects and lower order interactions in the models; we also examined whether sex moderated any effect). Indeed, gender-nonconforming children reacted adversely to victimization by peers mainly (or only) when they also possessed a troubling form of gender identity. All four gender identity variables had this moderator effect. Three three-way interactions were significant ($ps < .05$) and not moderated by child sex: The contribution of victimization by same-sex peers to gender-nonconforming children's internalizing problems was stronger for children high in intergroup bias ($b = 0.64, p < .001$) than for children with little bias ($b = 0.18, p = .024$), and the effect of victimization by same-sex peers as well as by other-sex peers on gender-nonconforming children's internalizing problems was evident if the children were high in felt pressure for gender conformity (victimization by same-sex peers, $b = 0.22, p = .013$; victimization by other-sex peers, $b = 0.23, p = .006$) but not if they were low in felt pressure. In three cases, the four-way interaction was significant ($ps < .05$). We ran analyses for each sex and found that only for girls did gender identity matter: Victimization by other-sex peers significantly forecast internalizing problems for gender-nonconforming girls low in felt gender typicality ($b = 0.87, p = .004$) but not for girls high in felt typicality, victimization by same-sex peers led to internalizing symptoms for gender-nonconforming girls low in gender contentedness ($b = 1.22, p < .001$) but not for girls more satisfied with their gender, and victimization by other-sex peers led to reduced self-esteem for gender-nonconforming girls low in gender contentedness ($b = -1.24, p < .001$) but not for girls more content with their gender. Thus, six of 16 three-way interactions tested yielded the

expected moderating effect of gender identity either for all children or for girls.

Influences of other variables on change in gender nonconformity. The fall measure of each of the other 16 variables took a turn as the predictor in a regression analysis in which spring gender nonconformity was the dependent variable (with fall level controlled). Owing to the high stability of gender nonconformity, we did not expect many results. Only one variable predicted change over the school year in gender nonconformity as a main effect: The more children were discontent with their gender in the fall, the more gender nonconforming they became ($b = -0.11, p = .007$). The interaction of child sex and peer-perceived coercion also predicted change in gender nonconformity ($b = 0.12, p = .032$): The more that girls (but not boys) were viewed as coercive in the fall, the less the girls were perceived to be gender nonconforming in the spring ($b = -0.14, p = .024$); perhaps this is a chance result.

Discussion

Influences of Gender Identity on Aggression Toward Gender-Nonconforming Peers

In prior research with adolescents and adults, both overconfident gender identity and insecure gender identity have been associated (concurrently) with harassment of gender-atypical others. We examined whether similar patterns of gender identity predict preadolescent children's tendency to harass gender-nonconforming peers (more than other peers) increasingly over a school year. We assessed four dimensions of gender identity, two of which tap between-gender components of gender identity in that they assess tendencies to polarize the sexes (intergroup bias and felt pressure for gender differentiation) and two of which capture within-gender forms of gender identity in that they assess feelings of compatibility with one's own gender (felt gender typicality and gender contentedness). We assessed four gender-nonspecific self-appraisals as well (self-esteem and self-efficacy for dominance, popularity, and attractiveness). We proposed several ways in which the gender identity variables might pair with each other or with one of the other self-appraisals to form overconfident or insecure gender identity. We summarize the evidence we found for effects of overconfident and insecure patterns in turn. Our discussion focuses on aggression toward same-sex peers because there was little evidence that the cognitive variables affected children's aggression toward other-sex peers. Our discussion pertains to both boys and girls because influences of the gender identity patterns generally were not moderated by child sex (an exception is noted).

Only slim support was found for the overconfident gender identity pathway to maltreatment of gender-atypical peers. Children who reported strong intergroup bias along with high self-efficacy for popularity or good looks increasingly singled out gender-nonconforming peers for abuse. Children with this pattern not only see their sex as superior but also are confident in their superior social status. Strong self-perceived high popularity or attractiveness is associated with aggression at this age (O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001; Rodkin et al., 2013; Rudolph et al., 2011; Salmivalli, 1998); perhaps these children's same-gender favoritism channels their aggression toward gender-nonconforming peers.

The children may perceive gender-atypical peers as inferior and valueless, as challenges to their worldview, as disloyal, as threats to ingroup cohesiveness, or as wanting others to participate in their cross-gender behavior.

Much more support was found for the insecure gender identity route to harassment of gender-nonconforming peers. We had proposed two general ways in which our cognitive variables might pair to form insecure gender identity. First, we suggested that children who possess strong gender-differentiating stereotypes and attitudes (i.e., intergroup bias or felt pressure for gender differentiation) yet evaluate themselves negatively (i.e., see themselves as poor fits with their gender, as lacking self-worth, or as incapable of exhibiting attributes associated with social status) experience a confusing and painful self-discrepancy conducive to insecurity, anxiety, and frustration. Indeed, children who possessed strong intergroup bias yet had low self-esteem (boys only), low self-efficacy for popularity, or low self-efficacy for attractiveness became increasingly aggressive toward gender-nonconforming peers over the year. In a similar vein, children who reported strong felt pressure for gender differentiation yet saw themselves as gender atypical, were discontent with their gender, or lacked self-esteem also became more aggressive toward gender-nonconforming peers. Thus, strong between-gender identity of either form may intensify the frustration of children who question their social success and at the same time channel the children's aggression toward gender-atypical peers. Presumably, such peers serve as painful mirrors of the children's own inner conflict, and by attacking them, the children can both repel the threat and demonstrate that the gender deficiency lies in other children and not themselves.

Second, we had suggested that children whose within-gender identity is low (who feel gender atypical or discontent) and who lack self-worth or self-efficacy also experience insecurity conducive to aggression toward gender-nonconforming peers. Such children are likely to be anxious and frustrated even if they do not possess strong between-gender identity. Indeed, children who felt gender atypical and lacked self-efficacy for popularity or attractiveness increasingly singled out gender-nonconforming peers for abuse. The same was true for children who were dissatisfied with their gender and lacked self-efficacy for attractiveness. These children may attack gender-nonconforming peers for the same reasons that cause children with frustrated between-gender identity to do so—to remove painful reminders of their inadequacy and to show that the inadequacy resides in others and not themselves.

Although we found less evidence for the overconfident pathway than for the insecure pathway, it is notable that some interactions provided support for both. In particular, for children high in intergroup bias, *either* very high or very low self-efficacy for popularity (or attractiveness) led to increased aggression toward gender-atypical peers. Thus, consistent with the adult literature, there appear to be at least two alternate ways in which troubled gender identity contributes to preadolescents' aggressive discrimination toward gender-atypical others. The insecure route may be more common in preadolescence because this is a period when children struggle to find an acceptable niche within the same-gender collective and feelings of insecurity are common and highly distressing.

Results advance our understanding of the gender identity and other cognitive variables we studied. Although none of our gender identity variables acted alone, it is noteworthy that it was *high*

levels of between-gender identity (intergroup bias, felt pressure for gender differentiation) and *low* levels of within-gender identity (felt gender typicality, gender contentedness) that combined with other problematic cognitions to promote harassment of gender-atypical peers. These forms of gender identity have also been found in prior studies to be associated with problematic adjustment (e.g., low self-esteem, internalizing problems, externalizing problems), though relations sometimes hinge on child sex or ethnicity (P. R. Carver et al., 2003; Corby et al., 2007). Thus, these forms of gender identity appear to be broadly problematic for preadolescent children's well-being (and the well-being of their gender-nonconforming peers).¹

The relation of self-esteem to aggression has been controversial. The traditional view is that low self-esteem encourages aggression (Donnellan, Trzesniewski, Robins, Moffitt, & Caspi, 2005; Kipnis, 1976). Our results accord with this view. However, low self-esteem did not act alone to promote harassment of gender-atypical peers but rather partnered with problematic gender identity to have its effect. Nonetheless, under some circumstances, it is high rather than low self-esteem that is conducive to aggression. In particular, narcissistic persons (children and adults) are more likely to respond to direct insults with aggression (in laboratory studies) if their self-esteem is high rather than low (Thomaes & Bushman, 2011; Thomaes et al., 2008). Further complicating matters, narcissistic children naturalistically display higher levels of trait aggression if their self-esteem is low rather than high, suggesting that failure to fulfill a sought-after grandiose self has a broadly instigating influence on children's aggression (Barry et al., 2003; Harter & McCarley, 2004; Pauletti et al., 2012). Thus, self-esteem's relation to aggression likely depends on other features of the child's self-concept (e.g., gender identity, narcissism) as well as on whether aggression is assessed as a trait or as a response to a particular sort of stimulus. Finally, it is interesting that dominance self-efficacy did not partner with gender identity to predict aggression toward gender-atypical peers (for either boys or girls). Children's self-appraisals on the dimensions of popularity and attractiveness—attributes that garner favorable peer reactions—may have a greater impact on how children think they are faring as members of their gender collective.

Sex of child made little difference in the tendency to harass gender-nonconforming peers (or in overall aggression). This was surprising, given that boys generally subscribe more strongly to gender stereotypes than girls do and that at older ages males are more likely than females to harm gender-nonconforming persons. Part of the reason for the lack of a sex difference may lie in our generic measure of aggression. By asking children simply to report who is mean to whom, we allowed them to nominate not only children whose aggression was male typical (i.e., direct physical or verbal aggression) but also children whose aggression was of forms favored by females (e.g., gossip, social exclusion, and

¹ Although felt gender typicality ordinarily promotes favorable adjustment (e.g., self-esteem), in one study it also predicted externalizing behavior (Yunger et al., 2004). In the present study, it was associated with general aggression for girls and with dominance self-efficacy for boys, especially in the fall. It is unclear what this means, but it is worth emphasizing that in the present study, it was lower rather than higher felt gender typicality that (in combination with other problematic cognitions) predicted aggression specifically toward gender-nonconforming peers.

Internet aggression). (However, boys showed a bigger increase in general aggression over the school year than girls; sex difference $b = 1.70, p = .010$.) Sex of child also made little difference in the relations of gender identity to harassment of gender-nonconforming peers. It seems that boys and girls are rather similar in the motives that make them treat gender-atypical peers badly.

Our study involved several methodological innovations in comparison to previous work on this topic with older participants. We used independent respondents to report on children's gender identity and their aggression toward peers. Our dependent variable was directing greater aggression toward gender-nonconforming targets than toward other targets (rather than aggression only toward the former, which is confounded with trait aggression). We included measures that allowed us to run analyses to show that the effects of problematic gender identity could not be accounted for by gender-nonspecific aspects of self-concept and were not mediated by harassment of peers with qualities correlated with gender nonconformity. Our analyses were longitudinal, allowing stronger inferences about direction of effects.

Gender nonconformity was not directly related to children's general victimization (average victimization by peers) either concurrently or prospectively. This might lead one to question the value of striving to identify the cognitive (and other) factors that cause some children to single out gender-nonconforming peers for abuse: Why invest the effort to understand aggression toward gender-nonconforming children if these children are not victimized overall more than others? Children need not be widely victimized in order to suffer serious injury at the hands of a few peers who do harbor a motive to hurt them. Our data make clear that even though gender-nonconforming children are not broadly victimized, they nonetheless are increasingly singled out for abuse by peers with troubled gender identity. One possible reason why gender-nonconforming children showed no increase in general victimization over the school year is that at this age most children are outgrowing the tendency to judge cross-gender behavior by others harshly (Ruble, Martin, & Berenbaum, 2006). A general developmental trend to inhibit aggression toward gender-nonconforming peers at this age may have offset any increased victimization of these children by the few peers who did increase their aggression toward them, resulting in no net increase in their general victimization.

Implications for Personality Theory and Research

Our results illustrate and confirm key elements of contemporary cognitive theories of personality (and aggression) emphasizing that people's enduring cognitive-affective processing structures (e.g., values, expectancies, goals, identities) interact with psychologically relevant features of situations (including attributes and actions of interaction partners) to create stable patterns of situation-specific social behavior (e.g., Cervone, 2004; Mischel & Shoda, 1995, 2008; Read et al., 2010). First, our processing structures (gender identity and other self-appraisals) were fairly stable over time (see Table 1). Second, children's preferences for attacking gender-nonconforming peers were also stable. Using HLM, we computed two betas for each child—one assessing preference for gender-atypical victims in the fall, the other assessing this preference in the spring; the correlation was .66. Third, and most relevant, children's cognitive structures interacted with the gender

atypicality of their potential targets to predict aggression. (The significant gender identity effects in the Level 2 equations indicated a cross-level interaction, i.e., an interactive influence of gender identity and target gender nonconformity on aggression.) To our knowledge, this is the first study to show that stable individual differences in within-child situational variability in aggression are predictable from enduring cognitive-affective processing structures. Fourth, our cognitive variables operated interactively, illustrating that cognitive-affective processing units do not operate singly or in isolation but rather that it is the organization among them that interacts with situational cues (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). Fifth, cognitive theories predict some specificity in the situational factors that engage a given cognitive-affective processing system. Our data confirmed this expectation, in that gender identity predicted little in the way of aggression toward other types of peer targets. Presumably, different processing systems are responsible for selective victimization of other target types.

Our paradigm incorporated the distinction drawn in cognitive theories of aggression between the dependency of a person's aggression on a situational cue and the average or trait level of the person's aggression (Mischel & Shoda, 2008). Our hypotheses addressed influences of gender identity on children's proclivity to attack gender-nonconforming peers more than other peers, not on the general level of their aggression (i.e., their average aggression across potential targets). Indeed, gender identity had more effects on slopes than on intercepts (general aggression). Thus, the constellations of cognitive variables that create a target dependency are not necessarily the same ones that foster trait aggression. Furthermore, gender identity patterns predicted the target dependency of children's aggression beyond any effect of trait aggression.

We noted that children need not be victimized by numerous peers in order to be caused serious harm by a few peers who do victimize them. Similarly, children need not attack many peers in order to inflict serious injury on a few whom they do attack. That is, children can be generally low in trait aggression yet discriminate sharply between peers who possess a focal quality and those who do not and direct whatever aggression they do enact toward the former. Indeed, a good deal of aggression is perpetrated by persons who are not trait aggressors and is directed toward targets who normatively discourage rather than invite victimization—popular children, girls, close friends, romantic partners, attractive peers, and even agreeable, prosocial peers (Crick, Grotpeter, & Bigbee, 2002; Delveaux & Daniels, 2000; Moffitt, Caspi, Rutter, & Silva, 2001; Peets et al., 2011; Pettit, Lansford, Malone, Dodge, & Bates, 2010; Rodkin & Berger, 2008; Rose, Glick, & Smith, 2011; Rose & Rudolph, 2006; Underwood, 2003). Research on the cognitive motivators of these (and other) target dependencies has been slow in coming, though there has been provocative theorizing. For example, it has been suggested that jealous, rejection-sensitive girls who wish to appear as “nice girls” may be generally nonaggressive yet attack attractive, popular girls whom they perceive as threats to their own popularity or friendships (Rose et al., 2011; Underwood, 2003). Children who are neither frequent perpetrators nor frequent victims of peer aggression are unlikely to draw the concern of adults as much as habitual participants in peer conflicts do. Nonetheless, identifying the cognitive-affective systems responsible for the aggression in which they do participate

might greatly enrich our appreciation of the diversity of motivation that underlies children's (and older persons') aggression.

An important challenge for future theory and research on aggression is to clarify the relation of target dependencies to trait aggression. One possibility is that trait aggression is simply the sum of multiple situational dependencies, meaning that there is no need to posit separate trait-level determinants (Mischel & Shoda, 1995). Another possibility is that trait aggression and target dependencies have overlapping as well as unique biological, environmental, and cognitive determinants. Ultimately, an adequate theory of aggression must account for both situational determinants and trait levels.²

Characteristics of Gender-Nonconforming Children

Our study provided a unique look into the cognitive and behavioral characteristics of gender-nonconforming preadolescents. Somewhat surprisingly, the gender identity of gender-nonconforming children, as a group, was not much different from other children's. In neither the fall nor the spring did gender-nonconforming girls or boys feel particularly incompatible with their own gender. Thus, despite their overt cross-sex behavior, many of these children apparently are able to perceive sufficient same-gender characteristics in themselves to prevent feeling alienated from their own gender. Perhaps a valued same-sex activity or friendship is all that is needed. Gender-nonconforming children as a group also did not feel greater pressure for gender differentiation than other children, suggesting that many are able to enact cross-gender behavior without the burden of feeling they are doing something wrong. Less surprising was that gender-nonconforming children showed less bias in favor of their own gender than other children.

The fact that the gender identity of gender-nonconforming children, as a group, is not much different from other children's masks the reality that some of them *do* feel pressure for gender conformity, feel gender atypical, feel gender discontent, or even regard their own sex as superior to the other. As described later, when gender-nonconforming children do possess one of these forms of gender identity, their well-being is jeopardized.

Even though gender nonconformity was not concurrently associated with either felt gender typicality or gender contentedness, there were longitudinal links between gender nonconformity and these two forms of gender identity. Fall gender nonconformity predicted decreased felt gender typicality over the year. This supports the suggestion that felt gender typicality results from reflecting on one's gender-typical characteristics and cognitively integrating them into a summary representation (Egan & Perry, 2001; Spence, 1993). Low gender contentedness in the fall predicted increased gender nonconformity over the year. Thus, in contrast to felt gender typicality, gender discontent may be mainly a motivator of, rather than an after-the-fact summary of, a child's cross-gender behavior.

Although gender nonconformity was concurrently associated with general victimization (for boys), this association disappeared when correlated variables (e.g., social prominence) were controlled. This does not mean that gender nonconformity did not contribute to boys' general victimization, only that any such contribution may be indirect (e.g., routed through low social prominence). For example, gender-nonconforming boys may be widely

victimized because they are perceived to be of low social status. However, these correlated target attributes are likely attracting aggressors for reasons other than disturbed gender identity.

One of the more interesting and important findings of our study was that even though gender-nonconforming children did not exhibit broad and severe adjustment difficulties, their risk for such problems increased sharply if they possessed a troublesome form of gender identity. This was evident in three ways. First, gender-nonconforming children of both sexes became more aggressive over the school year only if they felt strong pressure for gender differentiation. Perhaps the internal conflict and tension created by failing to regulate the very behaviors that they condemned in themselves and likely were striving to avoid undermined their self-regulatory capabilities (C. S. Carver et al., 1999; Higgins, 1987), causing them to resort to aggression as a general coping strategy. Second, even though gender-nonconforming children generally were not characterized by strong internal distress (i.e., internalizing symptoms or low self-esteem), gender-nonconforming boys (but not girls) who were discontent with their gender showed a sharp drop in self-esteem over the school year. Perhaps for gender-nonconforming preadolescent boys, gender discontent signals the presence of strong and enduring cross-sex wishes that the boys realize will be difficult to regulate and will likely cause them relationship and adjustment difficulties later on. Third, even though gender-nonconforming children were not widely victimized by peers, those who were in fact victimized were more likely to develop internalized distress over the school year if they possessed a problematic form of gender identity. Troubled gender identity may present children with self-evaluative standards that gender-nonconforming children have trouble meeting. It is perhaps especially interesting that gender-nonconforming children who were victimized by same-sex others developed internalizing problems to a greater extent if they reported higher

² Although our study was not designed to illuminate the relation of trait aggression to target-dependent aggression, our data showed that target preferences and general (trait) aggression, though conceptually and operationally distinct, are not unrelated. Prior research had shown that children high in trait aggression generally attack vulnerable peers—weak, withdrawn, self-deprecating, fearful, sad, friendless, and socially marginalized peers (e.g., Egan & Perry, 1998; Hodges & Perry, 1999). Our data confirmed these target preferences of trait aggressors but showed that trait aggressors single out gender-nonconforming targets as well. General aggression was a control in the Level 2 equation predicting the slopes, but its effect was always significant regardless of the cognitive predictor(s) included; that is, general aggression was a robust independent predictor of increased selective victimization of gender-nonconforming peers over time. To further examine the target preferences associated with general aggression, we ran supplementary HLM analyses to examine the effect of general aggression on change in children's tendencies to aggress toward each of five types of same-sex targets (with no cognitive term in the model). General aggression predicted increased targeting of gender-nonconforming peers ($\gamma = 4.39, p = .029$) and of peers with internalizing problems ($\gamma = 9.56, p < .001$) but decreased targeting of socially prominent peers ($\gamma = -7.53, p = .005$) and of prosocial/attractive peers ($\gamma = -6.84, p = .015$); it had no effect on the targeting of coercive peers ($\gamma = -0.56, ns$). Clearly, trait aggressors are not indiscriminate in their target preferences. Understanding exactly why trait aggressors target each of these sorts of peers is a matter for future study, though the overall pattern of their target preferences is consistent with the view that they are motivated by goals for dominance and social status that lead them to attack peers who cannot defend themselves or are unlikely to be defended by others (e.g., Salmivalli, 1998).

rather than lower intergroup bias (i.e., if they favored their own sex over the other). Gender-nonconforming children ordinarily are biased in favor of the other sex, but for the few whose bias favors their own sex, victimization by same-sex peers may be particularly painful. In sum, troubled gender identity not only leads children to single out gender-nonconforming peers for abuse but also increases the risk of both externalizing and internalizing problems for gender-nonconforming children.

Qualifications

Our study addressed only part of the process by which cognition affects a target dependency in aggression. In a more complete model of cognition and aggression, enduring cognitions interact with features of situations to stimulate temporary real-time cognitive processing (social information processing; e.g., appraisal of a provocateur's intentions, perceived ease of vanquishing a foe at hand, value placed on a possible reward) that then serves as the proximal determinant of aggression. It is important to distinguish enduring knowledge structures from temporary appraisals (Cer-vone, 2004), and our study addressed only the former. In future, investigating the online thoughts and feelings (e.g., anger, fear, disgust) experienced by children with different enduring cognitive-affective systems when they interact with various types of targets might reveal much about the proximal mediators of more stable cognitive-affective structures (e.g., gender identity).

We did not distinguish among different subtypes of aggression (e.g., relational, physical, verbal, Internet) in our hypotheses or measures. Possibly, some cognitive-affective systems are more predictive of a target dependency in one type of aggression than in another. For example, jealous, narcissistic girls might attack their rivals mainly via covert, relational aggression, especially if they wish to hide their intentions or are fearful of retaliation (Ostrov & Godleski, 2010; Rose et al., 2011; Underwood, 2003).

Our study spanned just a single school year during preadolescence, and our results might have been different had we studied children over a longer period of time or during another age period. Nonetheless, a school year is a significant period of time in preadolescents' lives. Moreover, the within-year longitudinal design is well suited to testing causal hypotheses about significant changes in children's peer relations. In the fall, children are getting to know one another, and there is flux in their interaction patterns and partners, but with time they find compatible friends, make enemies, and in some cases settle on victims to harm. Observing the same children from fall to spring holds the pool of peers constant, allowing researchers to track changes over time in children's interactions with the same set of peers.

Although the proclivity to harass gender-nonconforming peers was fairly stable over the school year, it remains uncertain whether this disposition during preadolescence predicts related later significant outcomes (e.g., a tendency to maltreat gay or lesbian persons in adolescence or adulthood). A related question is whether this (or any other) target dependency works independently of, or conjointly with, trait aggression to affect later outcomes.

A limitation of our study is that age was confounded with number of classmates listed as potential victims on the instrument assessing target-specific aggression (i.e., older children had a larger nominating roster). We controlled age in the analyses, thereby removing effects of this confounded variable, but it was

not possible to separate age effects from any potential (and unknown) effects of size of the nominating roster. In the future, this confound should be avoided, especially if age differences are of interest.

We conceptualized and assessed gender nonconformity as a continuous personality variable applicable to a nonpreselected sample of children. It is clear that sufficient individual differences exist among ordinary school children on this dimension to make its study worthwhile. However, certain findings may not generalize to children with more extreme levels of gender nonconformity (e.g., children with gender identity disorder).

Finally, although cognitive structures help give direction to a child's aggression, they do not operate in a contextual vacuum. The normativeness and perceived acceptance of harassment of gender-nonconforming peers within a school also affect children's tendencies to maltreat such peers (Poteat et al., 2007). Effective interventions must therefore address contextual as well as individual-level influences.

Conclusion

Much is known about the cognitive underpinnings of trait aggression (e.g., hostile attributional bias, self-efficacy for aggression, aggressive scripts, expected outcomes for aggression, normative beliefs about aggression, mechanisms of moral disengagement; Pettit & Mize, 2007). However, people differ not only in trait aggression but also in patterns of within-person variability in aggression across situations. Very little is known about what causes these patterns. However, identifying the cognitive-affective patterns that lead people to aggress in certain situations is likely essential for understanding the motivation behind much human aggression. The nature and diversity of this motivation will not be grasped unless the study of aggression expands beyond a focus on trait aggression to include a companion focus on patterns of situational specificity and the underlying roots of these patterns.

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