How does having children of both genders in a family relate to children's gender-related behaviors and maternal attitudes about them?

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Sibling Gender Configuration, Maternal Attitudes, and Children’s Gender
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Abstract
When families had children of both genders, mothers of 3- to 11-year-olds were less accepting of daughters’ feminine play and more accepting of sons’ feminine play. In turn, children with opposite gendered siblings had less stereotyped interests and traits than children who only had same gendered siblings.

Introduction
Numerous theories, especially social cognitive theory (Bussey & Bandura, 1999), propose that children’s gender-related characteristics are affected by experiences in the family. Some research shows that parents’ socialization practices (Fagot & Leinbach, 1995) and having siblings of the other gender (Rust et al., 2000) are both related to gender development. Research has also indicated that sibling gender configuration is related to parents’ socialization practices (McHale, Crouser, & Whitman, 2003). However, research has rarely examined both factors together.

The current poster examines how mothers’ interests, attitudes, and gender socialization practices are related to children’s gender-related traits and interests in families with children of different gender configurations. The current poster examines how mothers’ interests, attitudes, and gender socialization practices are related to children’s gender-related traits and interests in families with children of different gender configurations.

Method
Participants
The sample consisted of mothers of 3- to 11-year-old children (42 M; 60 F; M age = 6.88 years; SD = 2.85), reporting on one or more target children.

Measures
The Child Gender Socialization Scale (CGSS, Blakemore & Hill, 2008): This measures parents’ attitudes about the desirability of gender-related characteristics in their children.

Occupations, Activities & Traits Scales (OAT) (Liben & Bigler, 2002). These include a measure of mothers’ interests in masculine and feminine occupations and activities, and a measure of their attitudes about who ought to do such activities and occupations.

Pre-School Activities Inventory (PSAI) (Golombok and Rust, 1993), a measure of a target child’s gender-related traits and interests. In addition to an overall score, the PSAI examines masculine and feminine interests separately.

Results
Mothers’ Gender Socialization Attitudes
Attitudes about their Children Playing with Traditional “Girls’” Toys (CGSS-Girls’ Toys)
Child Gender: F (1, 95) = 70.58, p < .001, \( \eta^2 = .42 \)
Girls’ M = 5.68, SD = 1.03
Boys’ M = 3.88, SD = 1.20

Child Gender X Family Type:
F (1, 95) = 5.45, p = .02, \( \eta^2 = .03 \)

Attitudes about their Children Playing with Traditional “Boys’” Toys (CGSS-Boys’ Toys)
Child Gender: F (1, 95) = 45.83, p < .001, \( \eta^2 = .32 \)
Girls’ M = 3.76, SD = 1.42
Boys’ M = 5.57, SD = .98

Attitudes about their Children Having Attributes and Interests of the Other Gender (CGSS-Disapprove Other Gender)
Child Gender: F (1, 95) = 18.50, p < .001, \( \eta^2 = .16 \)
Girls’ M = 2.40, SD = 1.45
Boys’ M = 3.79, SD = 1.89

Children’s Gender-Related Interests and Traits
Gender Stereotyped Interests and Traits (PSAI)
Child Gender: F (1, 93) = 40.25, p < .001, \( \eta^2 = .28 \)
Girls’ M = 44.90, SD = 13.89
Boys’ M = 59.78, SD = 11.57

Child Gender X Family Type:
F (1, 93) = 12.19, p = .001, \( \eta^2 = .09 \)

Conclusion
Mothers’ Gender-Related Interests and Traits
Regardless of family type, mothers’ own gender-related interests and attitudes (OAT scales) were not different. However, mothers were more positive about daughters’ feminine play if families only had daughters, and less positive about sons’ feminine play in families with only sons (CGSS). This indicates that sibling configuration affects mothers’ attitudes about gender socialization.

Children’s Gender-Related Interests and Traits
When children have siblings of the other gender they showed fewer stereotyped traits and interests (PSAI overall) than children with same gendered siblings. Boys with sisters had more feminine interests than boys with none, and girls with brothers had less feminine interests than girls with none (PSAI-F). This indicates that having opposite gendered siblings affects children’s own gender-related interests and traits.