

THE UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA

A CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY OF CHILDREN'S  
CONCEPTS OF CULTURALLY ASCRIBED  
SEXUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF DRESS

by

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## ABSTRACT

The problem investigated in this study was children's acquisition of knowledge of the relationship of sex-appropriate clothing to the physical sex and appropriate behavior. Specifically, it attempted to demonstrate a developmental trend in the number of sex-role elements children at various age levels use to explain their selection of certain garments. The study also attempted to demonstrate the effects of sex, and negative and positive sex-role patterns on this acquisition of knowledge.

Fifty-eight children, thirty boys and twenty-eight girls, ranging in age from two to twelve years were interviewed. A wooden figure and five types of garments were used as stimulus objects in the interview.

An analysis of variance for age and sex demonstrated a highly significant difference among age groups but no difference between sexes. The children did not show negative sex-role patterns.

It was concluded that children acquire a knowledge of the interrelationship between physical sex, symbolic sex, and appropriate behavior in a cumulative manner, and that this learning, as defined for this study, is complete, or nearly complete by eight years of age.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### The Problem

Though social scientists have done extensive research on sex-differences and sex-role characteristics, little attention has been given to the difference in clothing that distinguish sex. This is true in spite of the fact that even researchers distinguish among themselves on this very basis. As children they were probably dressed in garments that characterized them as either boys or girls, and as they grew older they were expected to learn to use clothing to distinguish between each other. They were also expected, not only to distinguish in these terms, but to select and wear the appropriate type of clothing.

This study, in contrast, focused on changes in children's concepts of the culturally ascribed sex-appropriateness of clothing. In this way the researcher hoped to clarify the process by which children learn the interrelationship between physical and symbolic sex-differences in appearance and the appropriate behavior reflecting these two facts.

#### Definition of Terms

Concepts fundamental to this exploration were physical sex, appropriate clothing (symbolic sex), and appropriate behavior. Physical sex, for the purpose of this study, was taken to mean the medical birth designation of a child as belonging to the universal and mutually exclusive classes of male sex or female sex. Appropriate clothing was defined



as clothing which functions as an outward symbol of the physical sex as delineated or ascribed by cultural consensus. This term can be used interchangeably with the term "symbolic sex" because appropriate clothing is defined as a symbol of sex. Appropriate behavior was defined as the culturally ascribed ways of acting and thinking compatible with physical sex and toward appropriate clothing.

#### Format of the Thesis

In CHAPTER II of the thesis related literature relevant to the problem will be reviewed. Theoretical framework, statement of the problem, and assumptions will be the subject of CHAPTER III. The method of the study will comprize CHAPTER IV while CHAPTER V will present the results, followed by a discussion in CHAPTER VI. Finally, CHAPTER VII will include a summary, conclusions, and recommendations for further study of this and related problems.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Although no investigations have dealt with the problem under investigation, several studies have some content and technical relevance. Among the pertinent topics discussed in this chapter are physical sex and related behavior, sex-appropriate clothing, and age. Some observations on technique are also included.

#### Physical Sex and Related Behavior

In a classic study of children's awareness of sex-differences, Conn and Kanner (1947: 34-39) demonstrated that children are generally aware of genital sex as early as four, five, or six years of age. Of the children they tested, only about one-third were not aware of such differences while the remaining two-thirds indicated an awareness by pointing to their location, merely stating that they existed, or naming and describing the differences in primitive terms.

For children in the seven-and eight-year-old age group, Conn and Kanner found a decreasing percentage of the children (about 26 percent) were not aware of genital differences between the sexes. Non-awareness was attributed to the lack of opportunity to observe. Of the remaining 74 percent, some of the children indicated dissimilarity with a mere statement while a majority gave a description in the vernacular common to their age.

Among the children in the eight-and nine-year-old group they

found that 34 percent were unaware of physical sex-differences partly because they had not actually observed the dissimilarity in genital organs. A more important factor in the failure of many of the children to mention sex-differences was that they were reluctant to tell what they knew because of moral teachings of their parents. For those that did, however, most gave a description of the difference in fairly sophisticated terms. Boys, they noted, were far more sensitive to reporting than were girls.

Except for 14 percent in the eleven-and twelve-year-old group the children were able to demonstrate a knowledge of genital sex-differences. In this group, they were more reluctant than any other to tell what they knew about sex-differences and at this age there was a shift from the boys to the girls in sensitivity to the topic.

Conn and Kanner (1947: 12) point out, however, that even before a child can be expected to recognize genital differences they are confronted with different stimuli which distinguish the sexes. Among these are objects and activities which divide people into a father-brother-me category or a mother-sister-me category.

Past research confirms that children may choose objects and activities that indicate their sex-role identity. Brown (1956: 11-13), using the IT scale, observed that boys chose objects such as tractors, razors, and hammers, whereas girls chose dolls, cosmetics, and cake pans. Similarly, children chose from among activities such as wearing a dress, being an Indian chief, and playing house, those which were appropriate.

These choices, in part, may be explained by what Kohlberg (1966:

115) calls the ". . . egocentric or absolutistic evaluation of whatever is like the self." Kohlberg points out, in contrast to other researchers, that the choice does not necessarily reflect an absolute value of masculinity or femininity, but may equally indicate an apathy and consequent disregard for that which is not like the self.

Girls, in Brown's study (1956: 11-13), often demonstrated greater variability in their preferences, sometimes scoring high on the masculine dimension of the IT scale. Boys, on the other hand, rarely scored high on the feminine dimension. This variability was further confirmed in a subsequent study by Brown (1957: 199), and though using a different approach, Hartup and Zook (1960: 422-426) would seem to concur. They found that male preferences were stronger among boys than female preferences were among girls. Schell and Silber's study (1968: 382-389) seems to follow from the previous reports in that at the time when boys seem to have distinctively male preferences girls still indicated mixed or ambiguous preferences. In addition, it appeared that boys developed male preferences earlier than girls developed female preferences.

However, Biller and Liebman (1971: 84) suggested that boys may place less confidence in their sex-role identity depending on their body build, producing variability in their preferences as well. It was among the class of boys designated as mesomorphs (noted for their muscle development) that their subjects were judged to express both masculine and feminine sex-role preferences. The boys with the most nonmasculine physiques, particularly the ectomorphs, had consistently more masculine

sex-role preferences than did the mesomorphic boys. They state further:

Clinical experience suggests that most adolescent boys with grossly unmasculine physiques want very much to be masculine. However, they seem to find it easier to express masculine interests and aspirations than to act in a successful masculine manner in social interaction and in competitive activities (Biller and Liebman, 1971: 84-85).

Brown (1958: 236) noted that other researchers concluded boys are more aware of sex-appropriate behavior than girls. However, Brown felt that the relative lack of flexibility in the sex-role of boys probably accounts for the greater awareness of sex-appropriate behavior among boys. "Boys simply do not have the same freedom of choice as girls when it comes to sex-typed objects and activities" (Brown, 1958: 236).

#### Sex-Appropriate Clothing

It has been found that children appear to recognize the culturally ascribed characteristics of clothing and distinguish male from female by attributing these characteristics to the person. Conn and Kanner (1947: 13) noted that three-quarters of the children considered clothing to be an indicator of sex-differences among people and that of those, about 83 percent stated clothing to be the first and foremost means of distinguishing between the sexes. Four-year-olds among their subjects failed to indicate that clothing could be used in this way, but 21 percent of the five-year-olds did. From six years of age and upward to ten years of age over 82 percent of the children responded to clothing as a means of distinguishing between sexes. At age eleven and after they noted that genital differences took preference over clothing as the most important means of identifying sex. Nonetheless, between 33 and 67

percent of these children at each age level maintained that clothing was one of the three most reliable methods of distinguishing. Pants and suits were the usual items by which boys were distinguished, while for girls dresses were the most common clothing item given. Overalls, underwear, shirts, and neckties were sometimes added as distinguishing items for boys, whereas for girls such items as petticoats, slips, bloomers, shirts, blouses, and ribbons were added. Not as common, however, was the occasional mention of differences in hat, shoe, and stocking styles.

Brieland and Nelson (1951: 309) and Katcher (1955: 135) stated that children as young as two and one-half and three years of age were able to distinguish between male and female figures when clothed but not when unclothed. These children were dependent upon clothing, hair style, and other appearance items. Older children (eight years and older) were less dependent upon these symbolic expressions basing their distinctions on genital differences.

The investigations of Verner and Weese (1965: 52-53) and Verner and Snyder (1966: 162-164) would seem to confirm the previous studies. They found that children of two and one-half years were able to distinguish between the apparel items as appropriate for a "mommy" or a "daddy." Among these apparel items were included a hat, stockings, and scarf; and tie, shirt, and socks.

#### Age

Because the approach of this study was developmental, an examin-

ation of the age variable was necessary. Of the studies reviewed none used subjects younger than two years of age. The reason given for not using younger children was their inability to verbalize the types of information these studies required.

Verner and Weese (1965: 52-53) reported that two-and three-year-olds made a larger number of incorrect responses in selecting appearance and task items associated with sex-roles. The errors made by these children were of the type reported by Goodenough (1957: 314): two-year-olds failed to make reference to clothing in identifying persons, while on the other hand, three-year-olds who made reference to apparel identified the gender incorrectly, for example, girls making reference to "his dress." Though Kohlberg (1966: 94) admits that there may be some innate basis for sex-role identification at age two, he suggests that interest in the test materials is a more potent stimulus to respond to than is masculine or feminine identification.

At four to five years of age it appears that masculine and feminine identification become increasingly important in the selection of objects and activities. Kohlberg (1966: 115) suggests this is made possible by the awakening egocentric tendency of the three-year-old to value himself and things like himself positively. Consequently, the four-and five-year-old child will select those materials that represent to him his gender as if they were as much a part of himself as his own body. Schell and Silber (1968: 382-389) confirmed this in their study with three-and four-year-old children. This had already been intimated in the classic study of Conn and Kanner (1947: 12-13).

Typical of the age range six to nine years, as Kohlberg found in 1962 (as discussed in Kohlberg, 1966: 115), the selection of objects and activities is not only based on the masculine or feminine identification of the child himself, but on his ability to identify the masculine and feminine components of other persons, objects, and activities. Further confirmation of this was found by Brieland and Nelson (1951: 309), Katcher (1955: 135-138), and Brown (1956: 7-15), all of whom noted increased accuracy in assigning sex identities to persons, objects, and activities.

At age ten years and older, the ability to distinguish the sexual component as the basis for the culturally assigned sex identity is operative according to the authors cited above. In almost every instance, children at this age select from test materials the appropriate objects and activities equally well for others as for themselves.

#### Techniques Used for Studying Sex-Difference Knowledge among Children

Nearly all the investigators previously discussed used object stimulus interviews to obtain data from the children they studied. Conn and Kanner (1947: 5) used a doll-play technique, while Brown (1956: 4; 1957: 198) used the IT scale which he developed. Hartup and Zook (1960: 421), Kohlberg and Zigler (1967: 118-119), and Schell and Silber (1968: 381) also used the IT scale. Verner and Weese (1965: 50) and Verner and Snyder (1966: 161) used a picture technique as did Brieland and Nelson (1951: 309), and Katcher (1955: 133). Goodenough (1957: 296) used the Draw-a-Man test.



The two notable exceptions were Kohlberg (1966: 82) who used situational questions and adaptations of Piagetian tasks, and Biller and Liebman who used the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (1971: 82).

It is generally agreed by researchers working with children under the age of eight that an object is essential to the data gathering process. Above age eight, the objective aspects of a testing situation are less important. Children in this older age range tend to be as cooperative in the object stimulus type of testing as they are in more abstract testing situations.

While the IT scale (Brown, 1956: 1) was the most widely used object test, it was noted that there has been some question as to the validity of the scale. Brown's review (1962: 477) indicated that other researchers have found that the IT figure does not possess the neutrality of sex desirable in a test instrument of this type. He concluded that further research is needed in this regard.

## CHAPTER III

### THE PROBLEM

#### Theoretical Framework

What McCandless has pointed out in regard to identification also holds true of the learning of sex-role, namely, that ". . . as the term is used in the literature, [it] often includes--and confuses--process, source, and product; . . ." (cited in Reese and Lipsitt, 1970: 601). Central to the problem in this study is the provision of a theoretical framework which delineates process as opposed to source or product, even though evidence must be taken in the form of product. The product is the willingness of children to wear certain garments. Willingness may be explained through three indicators: (1) physical self, that is, sex of the child; (2) symbolic sex, that is, the culturally assigned sexual characteristics of the garment; and (3) appropriate behavior, that is, the behavior linking these two. An explanation offered by a child for his choice of a garment could be expected to include one or more of these three indicators. As a child increases in age and experience, it could likewise be expected that the number of indicators used by the child would increase thereby providing evidence of a cumulative process of learning.

Indicators may be of two modes--the male and the female. For example, the physical self may be genitally male or female. Similarly, symbolic sex, differences in appearance, may be culturally defined in

terms of male clothing or female clothing. Finally, appropriate behavior may be defined among males as willingness to wear male clothing, and among females, as willingness to wear female clothing.

Within each of these modes a positive and negative form may exist. It is equally possible that a male child may designate himself as being male or not female, his clothes as being male or not female, and his behavior as being male or not female. In the instances where he designates himself, his clothing, and his behavior as being male he is affirming his identity in a positive manner. Conversely, if he designates himself, his clothing, and his behavior as not female, he is indeed affirming his identity, but by a means of a negative reference. Although a child can designate what he is not, it cannot be inferred that he has designated what, in fact, he is. Similarly, the female child may affirm her identity in a positive manner by designating herself as a female or in a negative manner by designating herself not male.

The foregoing discussion suggests that a child has a potential for expressing his sex-role with twelve elements. That is, each of the basic indicators of physical sex, symbolic sex, and appropriate behavior can be classified into a male or female mode, and each of the resulting subclasses can be further classified into positive and negative sex-role forms--thus yielding twelve elements (see Figure 1).

It would appear that the child not only uses this field of twelve elements to explain his own sex-role, but likewise uses them to express his conception of the sex-role identity of others. For example, a two-year-old child might designate his mother in terms of only two indicators,

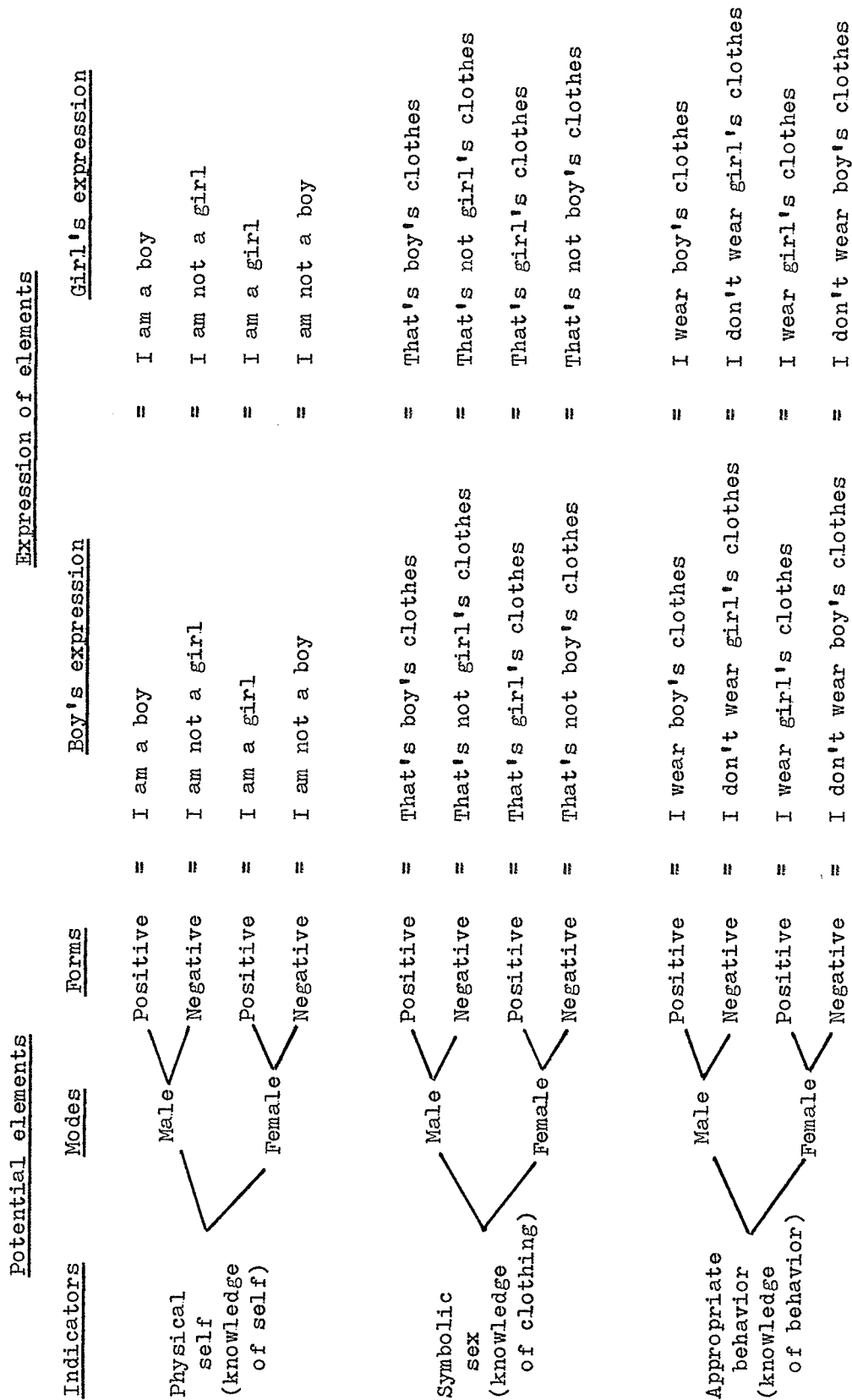


Figure 1. The Twelve Potential Elements Expressing Sex-Role of Boys or Girls.

her clothing and her behavior, failing to acknowledge her physical self. At age four he may have added the physical self of mother and, in addition, distinguished her as not being "Daddy." At later ages he is likely to command a full knowledge of her physical self, her clothing, and her behavior, as well as a full knowledge of what is not his mother's identity in these respects.

#### Statement of the Problem

A central question which evolved from the previously discussed framework, namely, children's acquisition of the knowledge of the appropriate clothing to the physical self and appropriate behavior, became the focus of this study. This interrelationship was determined by eliciting children's responses at various ages to the three basic indicators and the twelve elements of which they were comprized. As previously discussed, children's acquisition of knowledge may be viewed as cumulative. Therefore, it was expected that with development an increasingly complex learning of interrelationships among elements would be shown.

The questions implicit in the theoretical framework of this study were formulated as the following hypotheses:

(1) the number of elements in children's responses to the selection of garments for themselves will vary directly with chronological age; and

(2) children giving an initial positive response pattern will use a greater number of elements than children giving an initial negative

response pattern.

An additional hypothesis of interest was: the number of elements used by boys and girls will be different.

### Assumptions

Inherent in the theoretical framework, the hypotheses and the method used for this study are three basic assumptions. For this study it was assumed that:

(1) the acquisition of knowledge is a cumulative process and cannot be explained merely by heredity, spontaneity, or any other such mechanism;

(2) the sampling of groups of children at designated age levels (cross-sectional sampling) is an accurate means for investigation of a developmental process; and

(3) children are capable of projecting themselves into the stimulus object and will do so.

## CHAPTER IV

### METHOD

#### Design

Boys and girls at six ages were selected for investigation in this study. The subjects were divided into cells according to age and sex. Each child in a cell was presented with garments that were ordered differently.

#### Subjects

Fifty-eight children, thirty boys and twenty-eight girls,<sup>1</sup> ranging in age from two to twelve years were included in the study. Age groups were two, four, six, eight, ten, and twelve. Each group was defined in terms of the children's ages from one birthday until the next birthday. For example, the age two group included children ranging from twenty-four months through thirty-six months. Age groups four, six, eight, ten, and twelve were similarly defined (see TABLE I).

An attempt was made to obtain a homogeneous group of subjects in respect to socioeconomic class as indicated by the father's occupation. Therefore, the investigator selected a single profession<sup>2</sup> and through

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<sup>1</sup>Two female subjects are missing. Among the families in the population there were only three twelve-year-old girls. This was taken into account in the analysis of this data by substituting the cell mean for the two missing subjects.

<sup>2</sup>In terms of Fleming's scale, the selected profession is classified as a high status occupation (John A. Porter, The Vertical Mosaic,

TABLE I

Mean Ages and Standard Deviations of the Male and  
Female Subjects of each of the Six Age Groups

Males		Females	
Mean ages (months)	<u>sd</u>	Mean ages (months)	<u>sd</u>
28.6	3.66	30.8	3.38
52.0	3.85	55.6	3.01
77.6	2.33	77.8	3.66
98.6	2.58	103.8	5.34
124.4	4.50	125.2	4.92
150.0	5.83	145.7	4.50

contacts with its professional association obtained a list of families whose children could serve as subjects for this study. Thirty-six randomly chosen families from this list participated in the study. Of these families, twenty-one contributed one subject, ten families contributed two subjects, four families contributed three, and one family contributed five subjects to the study.

Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965). At the request of the association the profession will not be identified.



### Testing Materials

Wooden figures and paper garments, developed specifically for this study, were used as stimulus objects in the interviews. The figures were of abstract human form with physical characteristics which were neither male nor female (see APPENDIX A). The figures used were nine inches tall, painted a flesh color, with stylized linear features, and a hair style common to both boys and girls. Shoes were painted with black. Two such figures, distinguished only by hair color, were used. One figure was blond and the other brunette in order to provide a stimulus with which the subject would more readily identify.

Garments to suit the figures were reproduced on paper from a 1970-1971 department store catalogue. Color was held constant by rendering the garments in pale blue. Five garment forms were selected from among one hundred twenty-six tracings which had been rated by twelve judges (faculty and graduate students of the department of clothing and textiles) who separated them into five categories. The five categories were:

Distinctively male--a garment judged to be what a male should wear and possessing no female characteristics;

Ambiguously male--a garment judged to be male, but with some detail which was judged to be female;

Ambiguous--a garment which was judged to be equally male and female in its characteristics;

Ambiguously female--a garment judged to be female but with some detail which was judged to be male; and

Distinctively female--a garment judged to be what a female should wear and possessing no male characteristics.

One hundred percent agreement between the judges was obtained for the distinctively male, ambiguous, and distinctively female garments included in the study. For the ambiguously male and ambiguously female garments 75 percent agreement was obtained.

### Procedure

Subjects were interviewed in their homes with no other family members present. Some two-year-olds wished their mother to be present; in these cases she remained silent and out of the child's visual range.

Each child was presented with a wooden figure and instructed to pretend that the figure was himself. The figure was presented on a horizontal surface approximately six inches from the child.

The five garments were then presented by arranging them in a semicircle around the top of the figure. Order of presentation from left to right varied between five predetermined patterns:

(1) distinctively male, ambiguously female, ambiguous, ambiguously male, distinctively female;

(2) ambiguously female, ambiguous, ambiguously male, distinctively female, distinctively male;

(3) ambiguous, ambiguously male, distinctively female, distinctively male, ambiguously female;

(4) ambiguously male, distinctively female, distinctively male, ambiguously female, ambiguous; and

(5) distinctively female, distinctively male, ambiguously female, ambiguous, ambiguously male.

One of these orders of presentation was given to a boy and a girl in each age group. Since five children of one sex were in each age group the order of garment presentation was different for each child.

Each child was instructed to select the garment he would like best to wear and dress himself, that is, the figure. The child was then asked to explain why he had selected that garment and was probed by the experimenter to allow every opportunity to expand his explanation. Subsequently, the experimenter dressed the figure in the remaining garments and for each in turn asked the child (1) if he would wear the garment, and (2) why he would or would not wear it.

Finally, the subject was asked to indicate the garment his mother would select for him and which one his father would select for him. The reasons for this selection were also probed.

An interview schedule (see APPENDIX B) was used to ensure consistent and complete questioning.

Interviews were taperecorded and a written record of garment selection and nonverbal responses was made. A transcription of the tapes and written materials were used for analysis.<sup>3</sup>

### Scoring

A score was derived for each subject by counting the number of

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<sup>3</sup>Sample transcriptions are included in APPENDIX C.

elements that occurred in his explanation of garment choice. The twelve elements defined in the theoretical discussion, with their corresponding codes, are in TABLE II.

A subject received a point for each different element used. Even

TABLE II  
Description of the Twelve Elements and  
their Corresponding Codes

Code	Description of elements
Physical sex	
1A	knowledge of sex, male
1A'	knowledge of sex, not male
1B	knowledge of sex, female
1B'	knowledge of sex, not female
Symbolic sex	
2A	knowledge of clothing, male appropriate
2A'	knowledge of clothing, male not appropriate
2B	knowledge of clothing, female appropriate
2B'	knowledge of clothing, female not appropriate
Appropriate behavior	
3A	knowledge of behavior, male behavior
3A'	knowledge of behavior, not male behavior
3B	knowledge of behavior, female behavior
3B'	knowledge of behavior, not female behavior

though an element was repeated only one point was given because only one element was used. Hence, a maximum score of twelve could be derived for each subject.

The interreliability coefficient for the coding of the child's explanation of his garment choice for himself was  $r = .97$  ( $p < .01$ ).

Positive and negative patterns of response were determined for each subject by classifying his first response. First responses only were used to categorize pattern on the assumption that a child's initial statement would be most indicative of the form of his learning experience.

## CHAPTER V

### RESULTS

Order of presentation of garments was examined; mean scores and standard deviations are given in TABLE III. From an analysis of variance (see TABLE IV) it was concluded that the predetermined order of presenta-

TABLE III

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Garment Order

Garment order	1	2	3	4	5
Mean score	5.33	5.82	5.62	5.67	5.89
<u>sd</u>	2.41	2.73	2.56	1.89	1.52

TABLE IV

Analysis of Variance of Scores for Garment Order

Source of variance	<u>ss</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>ms</u>	<u>F</u> - ratio	
Garment order	3.30	4	.824	.169	p = <u>NS</u>
Within groups	267.86	55	4.870	-	-
Total	271.15	59	-	-	-

tion did not affect the results ( $F = .169$ ,  $df = 4$ ,  $p = \text{NS}$ ).

Since the majority of the children had siblings who were also included within the sample, the correlation coefficient between the scores of pairs of siblings was calculated in an attempt to determine whether sibling relationships had an effect on the scores. No significant correlation ( $r = .15$ ,  $df = 31$ ,  $p = \text{NS}$ ) was found. It, therefore, appears that the score achieved by each child was independent of sibling influence.

The mean scores and standard deviations for ages and sexes are found in TABLE V. Mean scores increased across age for boys from 2.0 at age two to 7.2 at age eight where it decreased slightly to 6.8 at

TABLE V

Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for the Male and Female Subjects of each of the Six Age Groups

Ages	Males		Females	
	Mean	<u>sd</u>	Mean	<u>sd</u>
2	2.0	1.27	2.0	0.84
4	5.8	2.23	5.2	0.98
6	6.4	0.49	6.4	0.49
8	7.2	0.98	6.6	1.22
10	6.6	0.83	5.6	1.35
12	6.8	1.17	6.5	1.37

age twelve. On the other hand, the girls scores increased from 2.0 at age two to 6.6 at age eight and then remained fairly constant to age twelve.

Analysis of variance of age and sex (see TABLE VI) demonstrated highly significant differences among age groups ( $F = 18.92$ ,  $df = 5$ ,  $p < .01$ ) but no difference between sexes ( $F = 1.20$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $p = \underline{NS}$ ).

Orthogonal comparisons of age group means indicated a highly significant linear trend ( $F = 7.34$ ,  $df = 1/60$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and a significant quadratic trend ( $F = 4.38$ ,  $df = 1/60$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Analysis of the scores of the four younger age groups showed a linear trend ( $F = 5.07$ ,  $df = 1/40$ ,  $p < .05$ ) but no quadratic trend ( $F = .95$ ,  $df = 1/40$ ,  $p = \underline{NS}$ ).

TABLE VI

## Analysis of Variance of Scores by Age and Sex

Source of variance	<u>ss</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>ms</u>	<u>F</u> - ratio	
Age	166.31	5	33.26	15.12	$p < .01$
Sex	2.64	1	2.64	1.20	$p = \underline{NS}$
Age x sex	5.49	5	1.10	0.50	$p = \underline{NS}$
Within groups	105.47	48	2.20	-	-
Total	279.91	59	-	-	-



The quadratic trend in the analysis of the six age groups would, therefore, appear to be a result of the leveling off or decline of the scores of the two older groups (see Figure 2).

An initial negative pattern of response was shown by none of the fifty-eight subjects. Hence, differences in the number of elements in positive and negative response patterns were not examined.

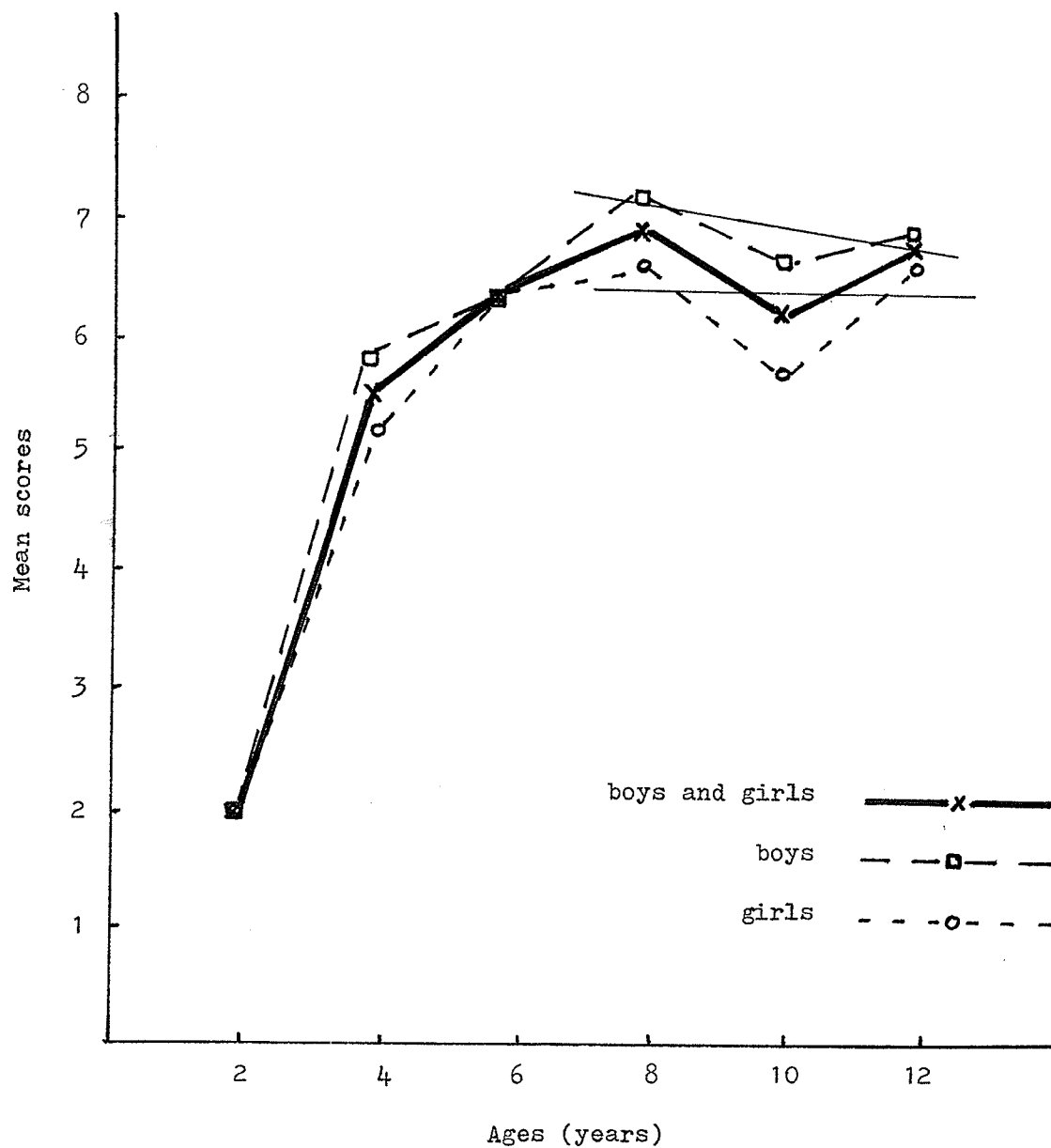


Figure 2. Linear and Quadratic Trends of Mean Scores in Boys' and Girls' Acquisition of Knowledge of Sex and Roles.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION

As can be seen by the increase in scores from age two to eight years, the children's explanations of their physical sex, their clothing, and their behavior which relates to these two variables, provides evidence of increasing sex knowledge with age. A continued increase in knowledge was not shown beyond age eight, after which the girls maintained a relatively constant level of knowledge while the boys appeared to show a decrease. Nevertheless, the general trend of increased knowledge was significant enough to support the first hypothesis of this study.

As suggested by the theoretical framework of this study, two-year-olds generally confined themselves to the use of one indicator category, namely, appropriate clothing ( $N = 8$ ). Only three of this age group made any reference to sex-appropriate behavior and none made specific reference to their physical sex. Similarly, four-year-olds used the same major category ( $N = 10$ ) but, in addition, used the behavior category extensively ( $N = 10$ ); only a few mentioned physical sex ( $N = 2$ ). Fewer six-year-olds restricted their explanations to sex-appropriate clothing and behavior ( $N = 10$ ), incorporating physical sex as well ( $N = 3$ ).

A gradual increase in knowledge from ages two to ten had been expected.<sup>4</sup> By the age of eight the children demonstrated the widest

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<sup>4</sup>The lower limit of this developmental process was not in the scope of this project because it is believed to occur before the child learns to speak.

choice of elements. In fact, on the average, the eight-year-olds used the highest number of the different elements in their various explanations. The indicator categories they used most frequently were appropriate clothing ( $N = 10$ ) and behavior ( $N = 10$ ). On the other hand, the least used category was physical sex ( $N = 1$ ). Similarly, both ten- and twelve-year-olds used appropriate clothing ( $N = 10$ ,  $N = 10$ , respectively), appropriate behavior ( $N = 10$ ,  $N = 10$ , respectively), and physical sex ( $N = 2$ ,  $N = 1$ , respectively).

On inspection of Figure 2 there is an apparent difference between the boys and girls from age eight to twelve. While the girls appeared to maintain fairly constant scores, the boys' scores tended to decline. This may indicate a maintained interest in appropriate clothing and appropriate behavior on the part of the girls. Actual physical changes in body structure and proportion were occurring for the older girls in this sample, while for the older boys such changes were negligible. Because of these physical changes there was probably more need for the girls to continue their interest in appropriate clothing and behavior. This should not be interpreted to suggest that boys have no interest in the physical changes which they are undergoing, but instead, that their level of interest is lower than that of girls because the body plastics involved are far less dramatic.

In like manner, girls at ages eight through twelve can still anticipate the experience of a variety of female garments they have not yet worn even though they have ~~a~~knowledge of these. The girls in this study were not yet wearing brassieres and formal dresses, for example.

On the other hand, boys had already exhausted the variety of clothing available for males. Thus, we could expect that the introduction of new types of clothing into the wardrobe of girls would influence them toward a maintained interest in the selection of appropriate clothing for themselves.

The apparent decrease in the older boys' scores suggests a shift of interest from the relationship between sex, clothes, and behavior to physical sex, task, and behavior rather than a decrease in knowledge. Older boys seemed to be more interested in tasks, like sports, than in clothes. For example, a response given to the question "Where would you wear something like that (distinctively male garment)?" was "Just to go out. I wouldn't wear fancy clothes to play ball or anything like that. Just if I was going out."

Finally, it should be emphasized that the leveling or decline of scores after age eight suggests that the learning of the relationship between physical sex, clothing, and behavior is complete or nearly complete. This is not to say that no new learning is occurring, with regard to these elements, but that the learning is focused on different aspects of them. For example, a girl of this age is not only aware that a dress is a female garment, but is becoming aware that dresses can be used to attract the attention of boys and to compete with other girls. Boys, at this same time, are learning that clothes must not interfere with tasks, and it is even better if they are in service of the tasks. For example, jeans are more appropriate for playing hockey than are dress slacks, but it is even better yet to have a genuine hockey outfit. In-

terestingly, the older children included such facts as comfort, style, and suitability for specific occasion as an explanation for their clothing choice.

The second hypothesis concerned with positive and negative patterns of response could not be accepted or rejected. In spite of the fact that negative patterns as defined in the study are theoretically possible, they were not shown by the subjects. Experience would seem to indicate children are exposed to negative statements, for example, boys are told, "Little girls do that" or girls are told, "Only boys wear those." In both examples the child is given reference to what he/she is not, and not to what he/she is. Even though it is known that the child experiences negative elements, these apparently do not interfere with the learning of positive elements. Failure to discover negative patterns in this study would not deny their existence. The procedure used may not have allowed adequate operationalization of negative patterns because only the first response was used for the classification of such patterns.

Since there was no difference in the number of elements used by boys and girls, the findings of this study agree with those of Conn and Kanner (1947), Brieland and Nelson (1951), Katcher (1957), and Verner and Snyder (1966).

Of additional interest is a similarity between some observations of this study and those reported by Brown (1956; 1957), Hartup and Zook (1960), and Schell and Silber (1968). They noted that girls were more ambiguous in sex-role and object preference than were boys. In the pre-

sent study it was found that some of the girls regarded all five garments as appropriate for themselves while all boys, except two of the two-year-olds, indicated that only those on the male side of the scale were appropriate for them. More specifically, of the twenty-eight girls, four chose the ambiguous male garment, seven chose the ambiguous, four chose the ambiguously female, and thirteen chose the distinctively female garment. Of the thirty boys in the study, two chose distinctively female garments, none chose the ambiguously female garment, eleven chose the ambiguous garment, while three chose the ambiguously male garment and fourteen chose the distinctively male garment.

Again, the most distinctive differences in response was noted across age. The two-year-olds typically were most varied in their choice of garment with both boys and girls making their selection from virtually the full range of garments available. It could, therefore, be inferred that children of this age are just beginning the process of learning the interrelationship among physical sex, appropriate clothing, and appropriate behavior, and have not yet formed a definitive concept of any one of these. With increasing age boys and girls more frequently chose the culturally accepted type of clothing. The increasingly consistent choice of appropriate garments could be interpreted to suggest that these children are acquiring an equally dynamic sense of sex, clothing, and behavior.

## CHAPTER VII

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to determine the process by which children acquired a knowledge of the interrelationship between physical sex, symbolic sex (clothing), and appropriate behavior across six age groups (two, four, six, eight, ten, and twelve). Fifty-eight children were interviewed. A wooden figure and five types of garments were used as the stimulus objects in the interviews. The measure of sex-role knowledge employed as the dependent variable was the number of elements used in the child's description of why he would wear the preferred garment.

A strong developmental trend was observed across age groups with older children using more elements. There was no difference in the use of elements by boys or girls. Although the possibility of negative and positive patterns was hypothesized, the children did not show negative patterns so no conclusion could be drawn concerning the effect of these patterns.

#### Conclusions

The direct relationship between chronological age and the number of different elements used by children in explaining their selection of a garment does appear to provide evidence that the interrelationship between the physical self, symbolic sex-differences in appearance, and appropriate behavior is learned cumulatively by children. Although this



study included children from ages two to twelve, it would appear that the learning occurs between two and eight years of age.

It can be concluded that the learning of the interrelationships among physical sex, clothing, and appropriate behavior does not differ for boys and girls. Age would, therefore, appear to be the most important variable in learning the interrelationships among these three factors.

Failure to discover negative patterns in this study would not deny their existence, and, in fact, would suggest that this may be a viable question for further investigation. It may be that information from both parent and child are needed to answer this question.

It was recognized at the outset of this study that the selection of the subjects from a highly homogeneous socioeconomic class would restrict generalization of results. It could, therefore, be recommended that this study be replicated using subjects representative of other socioeconomic strata. Further, with appropriate adjustments in the testing materials, it would seem advisable to seek replication of this study with other socio-cultural groups.

Although this study attempted to focus on the process of the prescribed learning as opposed to the source and the product, it is felt that future investigations into the source of the learning must be made before the relationship between self, clothing, and behavior is clearly understood.

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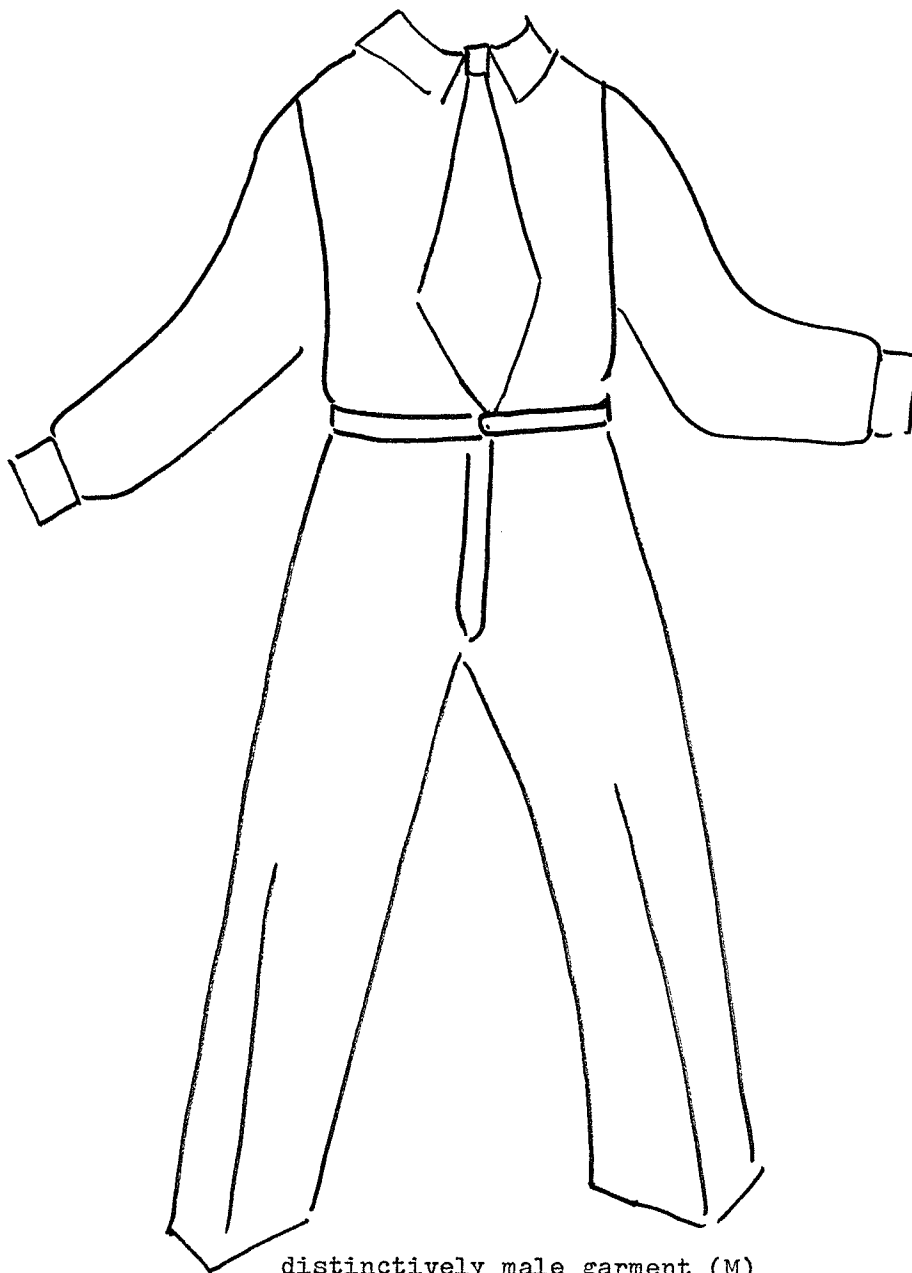
## APPENDIXES

- A. TESTING MATERIALS
- B. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
- C. SAMPLE TRANSCRIPTIONS

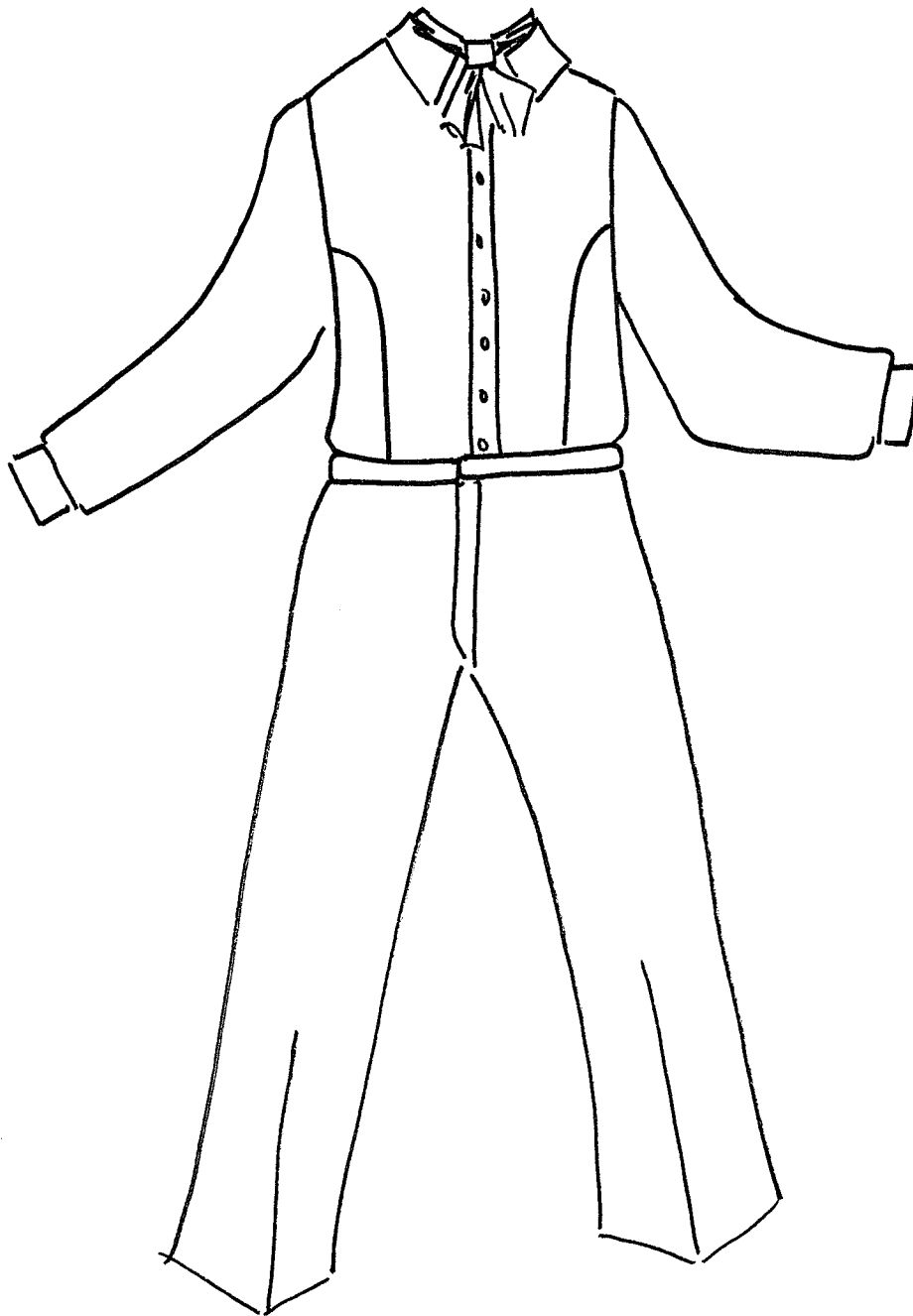


APPENDIX A

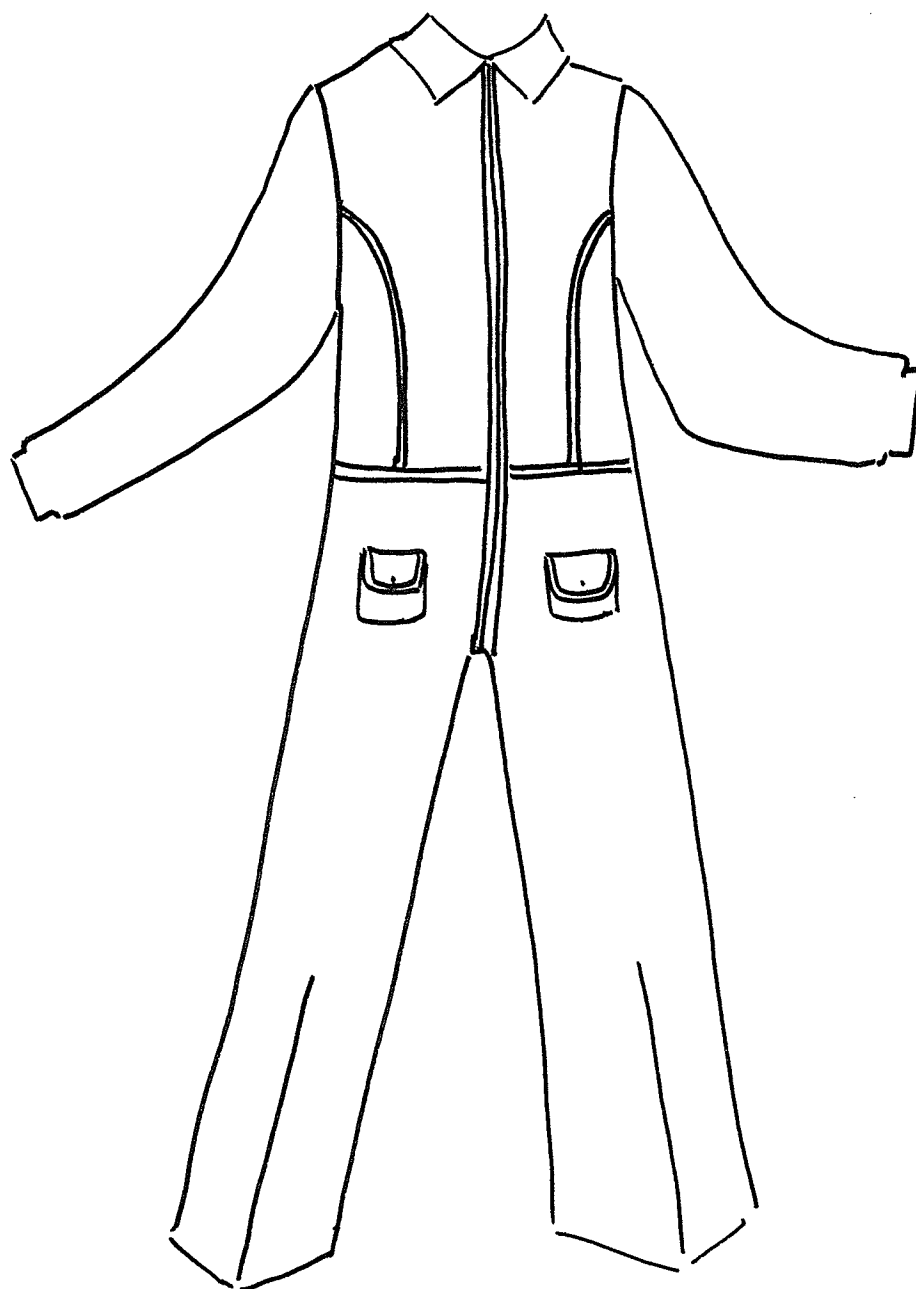
TESTING MATERIALS



distinctively male garment (M)



ambiguously male garment (AM)



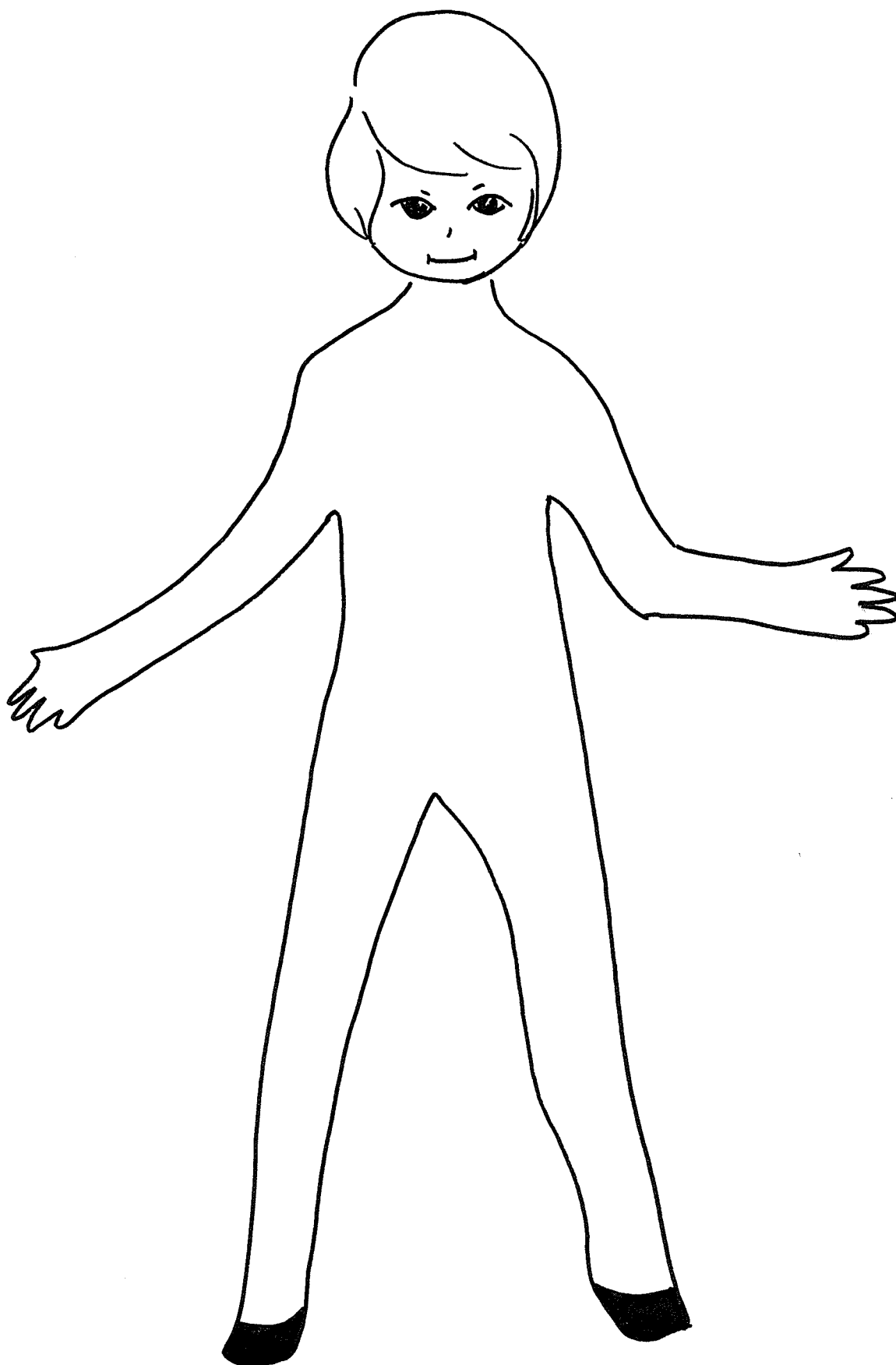
ambiguous garment (A)



ambiguously female garment (AF)



distinctively female garment (F)



APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE



1. INTRODUCTION TO CHILD: "I want you to help me with this."
2. PRESENTATION OF FIGURE: "Here is a little wooden figure made to look like a person. We're going to pretend that it is you. To help us, we'll call it (child's name)."
3. PRESENTATION OF GARMENTS: "Now here are some clothes. Would you pick the one that you'd like best to wear, and dress yourself in it?"
4. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON CHILD'S GARMENT CHOICE: "Can you tell me why you picked that one?"
  - A. Behavior Response: For example, "That's what you're supposed to wear."
 

Establish:

    - who could or should wear it.
    - who could not or should not wear it.
    - is it boy clothing or girl clothing.
    - on the basis of above, why the child chose the garment.

Probes:

    - Who wears this?
    - Who is supposed to wear this?
    - Is there anyone who shouldn't wear it?
    - What kind of clothes are these?
    - Why did you pick it?
  - B. Clothing Response: For example, "boy clothing" or "girl clothing"
 

Establish:

    - do all people wear this?
    - who does wear it?
    - who does not wear this?
    - on the basis of above, why the child chose the garment.

Probes:

    - Does everyone wear this?
    - Do your friends wear this?
    - Is there anyone who can't wear this?
    - Why did you pick this one?
  - C. General Response: For example, "I like it."
 

Establish:

    - for whom is wearing this garment appropriate behavior.

- is it boy clothing or girl clothing?
- on the basis of above, why the child chose the garment.

## Probes:

- Why do you like it?
- Where would you wear that?
- Do your friends wear that?
- Is there anyone who shouldn't wear that?
- Why would you wear that?

5. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON  
REMAINING GARMENTS:

"Now I'll dress you in this one. Would you like to wear that? Why (not)?"

- A. Behavior Response: Establish facts and probe same as 4.
- B. Clothing Response: Establish facts and probe same as 4.
- C. General Response: Establish facts and probe same as 4.

All remaining garments can be used in this section as stimuli to obtain information about self, clothing, and behavior. As many garments as necessary can be used, but the child must be given the opportunity to express his ideas on what he considers the sex-inappropriate garment, which would be the garment opposite to the one he chose initially.

6. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS ON  
PARENTS' GARMENT SELECTION:

A. Father's Garment  
Selection for  
Subject:

"Which one would your father like you to wear?"

## Establish:

- reasons for the choice.
- sex-appropriateness of choice.
- appropriate behavior in wearing this garment.

## Probes:

- Why would he pick that one?
- Would he like you to wear this one too? (Use remaining garments as stimuli, especially opposite sexed garment.)
- Why would (wouldn't) he like you to wear that one?
- Who might wear that one?

B. Mother's Garment  
Selection for  
Subject:

"Which one would she like you to wear?"  
(Establish facts and probe same as  
"father's garment selection for sub-  
ject.")

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE TRANSCRIPTIONS

## INTERVIEW 13

SUBJECT: female, age 10

GARMENT ORDER: 1

I: Pick the one you'd like best to wear and dress yourself.

S: This one (AF).

I: Can you tell me why you picked that one?

S: I like the style, I like wearing dresses. I like wearing pants too.

I: Where would you wear a dress like that?

S: I'd wear it to school and Sunday school.

I: Now I'll dress you. I'll put this on you. How would you like that (M)?

S: It's okay.

I: Which would you rather wear?

S: The dress.

I: Why the dress?

S: I don't really like the tie and the pants.

I: Why not?

S: I don't know.

I: Does it look like something you'd wear?

S: Not really.

I: Would your friends wear something like this?

S: Maybe.

I: Which of your friends?

S: Laurie.

I: How about this (F)?

S: Yes.

I: Which would they rather wear?

S: I think the dress.

I: Why?

S: I don't know.

I: Would your mother like you to wear this (M)?

S: Not all the time.

I: Which one would your father pick for you?

S: I'm not really sure.

I: Would he like this one (F)?

S: I don't know.

I: Would he like this one (M)?

S: I don't know.

## INTERVIEW 29

SUBJECT: male, age 12

GARMENT ORDER: 2

I: Pick the one you'd like best to wear and dress yourself.

S: I guess I have to take that one (M).

I: Why did you pick that one?

S: I'm not too sure. It looks the neatest.

I: Where would you wear it?

S: So I'd look good.

I: Would you wear this one (AM)?

S: Sometimes.

I: Would you wear this one (A)?

S: I'm not sure.

I: Why?

S: I don't like one piece suits.

I: Would you wear this one (F)?

S: No.

I: Why not?

S: Well, it's a dress, and boys don't wear dresses.

I: Who does?

S: Girls, mainly.

I: What do you mean, mainly?

S: They usually wear dresses--most of the time.

I: Would they wear this (M)?

S: Some girls do.

I: Which would your father pick for you?

S: This one (M).

I: Why?

S: In his opinion, it would look the best.

I: What would he do if you wore this one (F)?

S: Tell me to take it off and put something else on.

I: Why do you think he'd do that?

S: I'm not sure.

I: Which would your mother pick for you?

S: This (M). The same as my father.

I: Why?

S: It looks the best.



## INTERVIEW 36

SUBJECT: male, age 4

GARMENT ORDER: 2

I: Pick the one you'd like best to wear and dress yourself.

S: (M).

I: Can you tell me why you picked that one?

S: I like the tie.

I: Do you wear ties like that?

S: No, but I just like ties.

I: Would you like to wear this sometimes (AM)?

S: Okay.

I: Where would you wear it?

S: Everywhere I go.

I: Do your friends wear things like this?

S: Yeah--Hey, this is for girls (F).

I: Well, I'll put it on you. Would you wear it?

S: Naaa.

I: Why not?

S: Cause it's a dress.

I: How about this one (AF)?

S: That's a dress too.

I: Who would wear it?

S: Girls.

I: Anyone else?

S: Just girls wear that.

I: Do they wear this too (M)?

S: NO.

I: Who would?

S: Boys--all boys.

I: How about this one (AM)?

S: Boys.

I: Would you wear it?

S: No.

I: Why not?

S: Cause I like ties. There (M).

I: Which would your father pick for you?

S: This (M).

I: Why?

S: Because I'm such a big boy--can't wear any baby clothes.

I: How would he like this one (F)?

S: NO.

I: Why?

S: Cause this is for girls. Everybody would laugh at me.

I: Which would your mother pick for you?

S: This (A).

I: Why that one?

S: Because it doesn't have these (buttons on AM). These are for girls.

I: Would she like this one (F)?

S: No. That doesn't fit.