

# Sex and gender differences in children's reading motivation and reading habits

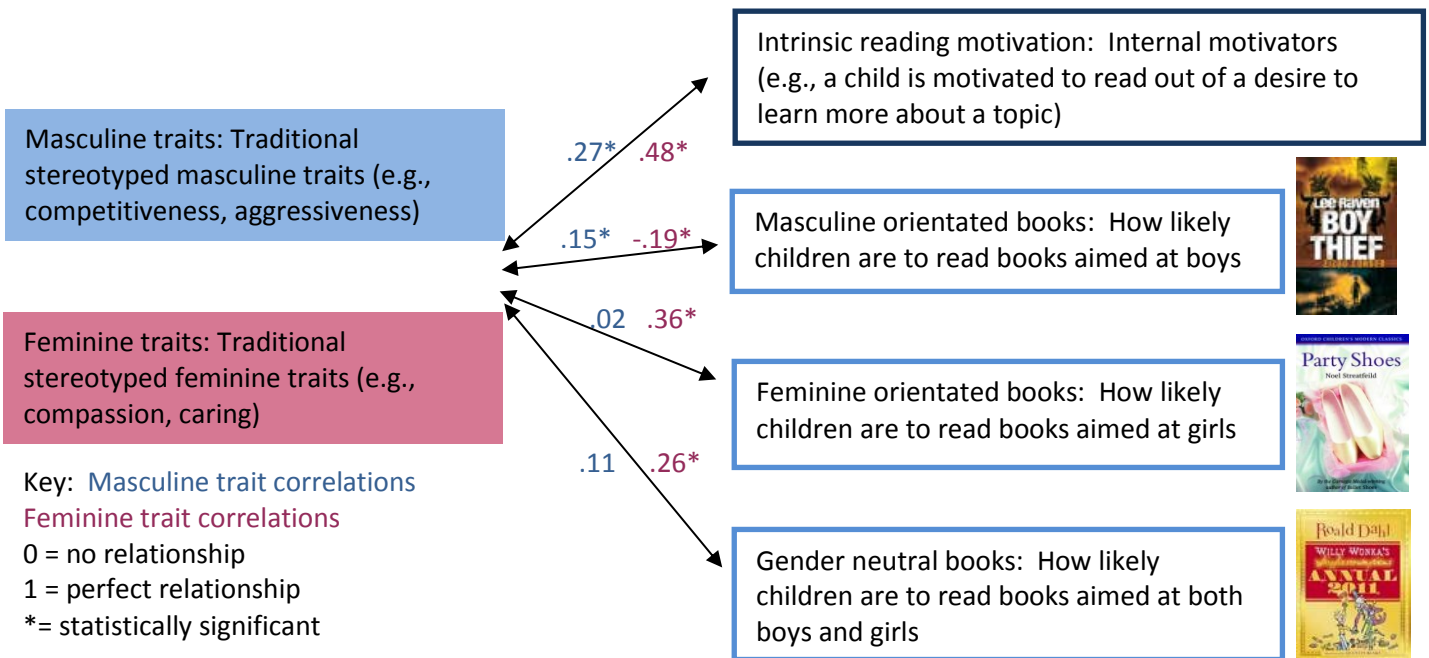
## A summary for teachers

Contact: s.mcgeown@ed.ac.uk

**Background:** Gender differences in children's motivation to read and reading habits are consistently reported, but do these differences reflect sex differences (i.e., male/female comparisons) or gender differences (i.e., the extent to which children identify with masculine and feminine traits)? The present study examined this.

**Aim:** To examine whether sex (boy/girl) or gender identity (the extent to which boys' and girls' identify with masculine and feminine traits) better explains levels of reading motivation, reading skill and engagement in different book reading activities.

**Participants:** 223 children (43% male) aged 8 – 11 took part in the project. All completed a questionnaire examining their gender identity, motivation to read, interest in different book types (masculine, feminine, gender neutral books) and an assessment of reading skill



**Results:** Identification with feminine traits (in both boys and girls) was associated with greater motivation to read and greater interest in reading gender neutral books and books aimed specifically at girls, when compared to identification with masculine traits. On the other hand, identification with masculine traits (in both boys and girls) was associated with greater interest in reading books aimed at boys (although this relationship was quite weak).

**Implications for education:** Among children, reading is often perceived as a more feminine activity; the present study is consistent with this. Interventions aimed at boys that attempt to reduce the feminine view of reading may be effective at increasing their motivation to read and engagement in a wider variety of texts.

Books which are often regarded as 'gender neutral' are not necessarily neutral. It is important that schools have sufficient reading resources (i.e., boy orientated fiction books) to ensure that boys have good access to books which they would choose to read. Girls are more likely than boys to transcend gender boundaries; however ensuring both boys' and girls' reading interests are met is important.

**Academic paper:** McGeown, S. (2012). Sex or gender identity? Understanding children's reading choices and motivation. *Journal of Research in Reading*, DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9817.2012.01546.x.