

Sex and gender differences in children's motivation to read

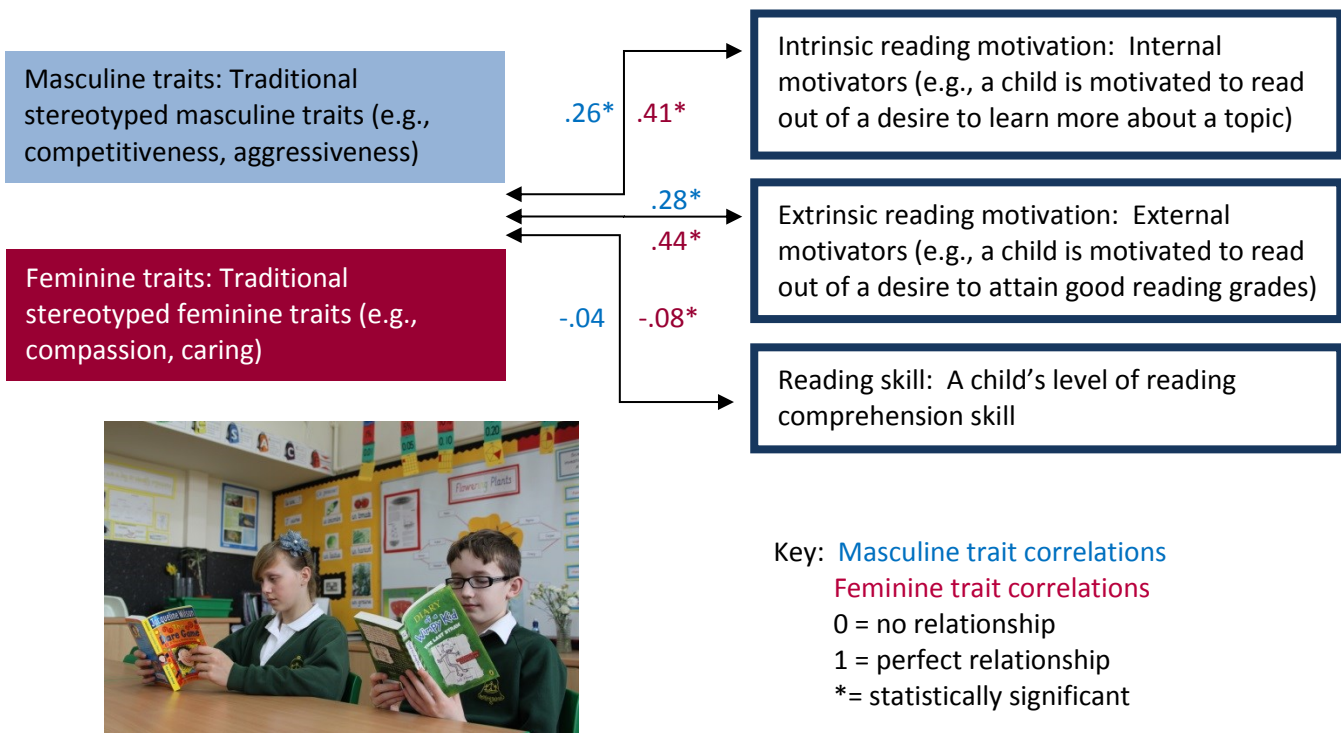
A summary for teachers

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Background: Gender differences in children's motivation to read 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 and reading skill.

Participants: 182 children (54% male) aged 8 – 11 took part in the study. All completed a questionnaire examining their motivation to read, their gender identity and a test of reading skill



Results: A small significant sex difference was found in children's intrinsic reading motivation, but not in their extrinsic reading motivation or reading skill. Boys and girls who reported greater identification with feminine traits reported greater motivation to read; the relationship between masculine traits and reading motivation was not as strong. In addition, neither masculine nor feminine traits were related to reading skill level.

Implications for education: Among children, reading is often perceived as a more feminine activity; the present study is consistent with this. To reduce the gender gap in reading it is important to reduce this perception. Research in this area has examined a number of interventions to do this. These include: providing male reading role models, increasing father/child home reading activities, using male reading mentors (i.e., older students) to work with younger male students, increasing teachers' knowledge and awareness of books and other literature that are often preferred by boys, involving boys in choosing books for the school library, harnessing boys' preferences for digital texts and online reading and having open discussions with boys about how best to engage them in reading.

Academic paper: McGeown, S., Goodwin, H., Henderson, N., & Wright, P. (2011). Gender differences in reading motivation: does sex or gender identity provide a better account? *Journal of Research in Reading* 35, 328-336.