

Extra Credit Week 3 - 1

BOYS WILL BE BOYS? AN OBSERVATIONAL STUDY OF CHILDREN'S ACTIVITY LEVELS

Purpose: This exercise is designed to have you assess factors that might influence differences in girls' and boys' activity levels.

Instructions: A thorough meta-analysis of the psychological research (Eaton & Enns, 1986) found that most studies find higher levels of physical activity among boys. Overall, this is considered to be a gender difference that is moderate in size.

A number of factors influence the size of this gender difference. These include the following:

Age: The size of this gender difference is smallest in infancy, and it increases during the preschool and elementary school years. This means that boys are more active than girls beginning the first year of life. In addition, compared to girls, boys' activity levels increase through middle childhood.

Presence of Peers: When children are playing alone, boys engage in more active play than do girls. On the other hand, when children are playing with their peers, the size of the gender difference increases. That is, compared to girls boys become even *more* active when they are playing with other children.

Spend about an hour observing preschool or elementary-school-aged children at play. Try to find one or more settings where children are interacting with minimal adult supervision. You might choose a setting such as a local park, a playground at a fast food restaurant, etc

. Rather than code individual behaviors, try to get a sense of the boys' and girls' interactions. You will be asked to compare girls' and boys' activity levels when they are playing alone and when they are playing with at least one other peer.

You will first need to develop an operational definition of activity level that will enable you to evaluate the interactions. Keep it simple to reduce observer bias.

1. What sort of behaviors will you include in your observation? These might include rough-and-tumble play; loud, boisterous speech; quiet play; etc.

Summarize your observation by responding to the following questions.

2. Briefly describe the setting. What are the approximate ages of the children? Are the groups all girls, all boys, girls and boys? Are the children culturally diverse or homogeneous in terms of race or ethnicity?

3. Did the boys engage in more active play than the girls? Summarize your observation using the operational definitions you devised.
4. How did the situation influence the children's activity levels? Again, using your operational definitions, compare and contrast girls' and boys' activity levels when playing alone with their activity levels when playing with others.
5. Did you observe attempts to control behaviors or level of activity by adults or the children themselves? If so, describe.
6. Compare and contrast your observation with the research discussed in your text.
7. Boys are much more likely than girls to be diagnosed as hyperactive. Considering the manner in which biological and social factors interact, what speculations might you make about this observed difference in hyperactivity?