GENDER AND SOCIETY (SJS 205)

ASSIGNMENT

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**Question**

How is children’s play influenced by gender roles? Think back to your childhood. How “gendered”  
were the toys and activities available to you? Do you remember gender expectations being conveyed  
through the approval or disapproval of your playtime choices?

**INTRODUCTION**

[Gender roles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_role) are the social and behavioural norms considered appropriate in social situations for people of different genders. An understanding of these roles is evident in children as young as age 4 and are extremely important for their social development. Gender roles are influenced by the media, family, environment, and society.

A child's understanding of gender roles impacts how they socialize with their peers and form relationships. Many young children have a firm sense of their gender identity, while some children can experience [gender identity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gender_identity) confusion. In addition to biological maturation, children develop within a set of gender-specific [social and behavioural norms](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norm_(social)) embedded in family structure, natural play patterns, close [friendships](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Friendship), and the teeming social jungle of school life. The gender roles encountered in childhood play a large part in shaping an individual's self-concept and influence the way he or she forms relationships later on in life.

Expectations for children's future adult lives, like financial success or future care giving, may lead parents to encourage certain behaviours in children. However, most parental behaviours remain uninfluenced by the gender of the child, including speaking to, playing, teaching, and caretaking.

[Family dynamics](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Family_dynamics&action=edit&redlink=1) can especially influence gender specialization. Parents of sons are more likely to express conservative gender role views than parents of daughters, with fathers emphasizing the [paternal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paternal) [breadwinning](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/breadwinner) role for males. The effects of parental expectations of gender roles can especially be seen in the role children play in household duties. Girls generally do more [housework](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Housework) than boys and the type of housework assigned to children largely depends on gender. Thus, household dynamics further advance gender role expectations on children.

Children's toy preferences are significantly related to parental sex-typing, such as girls playing with [dolls](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Doll) and boys participating in [sports](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sport). While both fathers and mothers encourage traditional gender roles in their children, fathers tend to encourage these roles more frequently than mothers.  Parents choose activities that they believe their children will enjoy and value. By choosing their children's activities, parents are directly influencing their gender role views and preferences onto their children and shaping expectations.

In early childhood, gender roles become apparent in patterns of play. Until 1983, these play differences were ignored in studies of the differences between boys and girls, but recent research has shed light on these sex differences.

One of the earliest signs of gender differences in play patterns is the appearance of gender-segregated play groups and toy preferences. Boys tend to be more "rough and tumble" in their play while girls shy away from this aggressive behaviour, leading to the formation of separate play groups. Calvert 2013 In addition, boys tend to gravitate more towards toys such as trucks while girls tend to gravitate towards dolls, but these preferences are not absolutes. A study by Alexander, Wilcox, and Woods showed that female infants showed more visual interest in a doll over a toy truck while male infants showed more visual interest in a toy truck over a doll, but these differences were more pronounced in the females. This study suggests that preferences for feminine or masculine toys precede any sex differences in the perceptual features of such toys, leading to the assumption that gender-based toy preference is innate.

A study found children instinctively prefer playthings targeted at traditional gender roles - such as lorries and toy soldiers for boys and dolls and kitchen sets for girls.

Girls are more likely than boys to be influenced as they grow up by parents and the other adults and children around them, as well as what they see on television.

But boys stick to boys’ toys, especially as they get older. And if given traditionally female toys, they will use them for "aggressive" play - for instance turning them into guns.

A team led by psychologists from City University London compiled evidence collected by researchers across the Western world over the last eight decades, [reports the Daily Mail](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-5106139/Biology-means-children-prefer-toys-aimed-gender.html).

The study found clear differences between what toy girls and boys choose, which "indicates an innate influence on this behaviour" in spite of [a trend towards gender-neutral teaching and parenting](https://www.thesun.co.uk/living/4248040/gender-neutral-parenting-gender-free-teaching/).

It said: "Despite methodological variation in the choice and number of toys offered, context of testing, and age of child, the consistency in finding sex differences in children’s preferences for toys typed to their own gender indicates the strength of this phenomenon and the likelihood that it has a biological origin."

Some attempts to study children found boys tended to play aggressively even if they were given traditional girls’ toys, the researchers said.

In 1980, one group of psychologists "noted in their observation that boys played with a toy food mixer as if it were a machine gun".

Recently girls have been less likely to play with dolls and other toys once considered female such as makeup and kitchens.

The study said: "One interpretation is that, over the years, girls have been exposed to increasing pressure to play with neutral-typed toys as the volume of advertising to children and expansion on the number and type of children’s media outlets have increased enormously."

Psychologist Dr Brenda Todd of City University said: "What we found is that as boys get older we see increased play with toys typed to their gender.

"In addition, we saw that girls have started to play increasingly less with female-typed toys over more recent decades, which may possibly indicate moves towards greater gender equality in Western societies where most of the studies were conducted.

"However despite difference among individual boys’ and girls’ behaviour, children do overwhelmingly choose toys typed to their gender."

**CONCLUSION**

When I was a child, my kind of toys where those kind mentioned above used majorly by boys my age: action figures, race toy car, toy guns etc. there was no girl at that point. One day my mom got back from somewhere, with a new toy, a doll, a Barbie doll. Though it was nice and beautiful, but with the professional help of my brothers, we pimped the doll, dismantling it and turned it into a character suitable for fighting.

We probably didn’t know what we were doing but we did it anyway. That could establish the innate gender role.

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