

Gender norms and identity among young children

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From the moment babies are born, most parents treat boys and girls differently.

One study says that parents have different expectations for boys and girls as early as 24 hours from birth, according to Susan D. Witt of the University of Akron. Gender is a huge aspect of society that influences much of how people act, regardless of age. However, gender identity is something that is discovered and explored during earlier stages of childhood development, especially around the ages 3 to 7, according to [healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org).

It all begins with an infant's awareness of their sex, which usually develops within in the first year of life. Between 1 and 2 years old, children begin to notice the physical differences between males and females, and typically by their third birthday they are able to easily identify themselves as a boy or a girl. Gender role is strongly influenced by the identification of prevalent males and females in their life, and by their relationship with their mother and father, according to [healthychildren.org](https://www.healthychildren.org). Children model their behavior on same-sex members of their family, their friends, and the images they come across. Therefore, the examples the parents set for their children and the reactions they have to ways that their children interact with gender are critical in the development of gender for their child.

For generations, if parents noticed their children going against gender norms, they would try to change what their child played with. Nowadays, however, some parents are taking a different approach, according to Jan Hoffman, in an article in the New York Times. Instead of repressing it, they are trying to understand their child's unconventional behavior in order to be

able to support them during possible future conflicts. It is possible that many children feel pressured to conform to the gender restrictions in society, which is why there is a smaller number of children who defy these norms. Doctors have begun to advise families to let these children be “ who they are” to ensure a sense of security and self-esteem, according to Patricia Leigh Brown of the New York Times. For some parents, though, it is a difficult adjustment, especially because it is a more complicated growing-up experience.

Studies, according to the New York Times article, have shown that most boys who defy gender norms as children wind up identifying as gay as adults. About a quarter of kids who defy gender norms, end up identifying as heterosexual; very few actually end up transgender. Even in more liberal neighborhoods, there is still much controversy over the best way to handle children who struggle with gender identity because of the conflicts that can emerge. There have been laws put into effect in Massachusetts, Minnesota, California, New Jersey, and Washington DC that protect the rights of transgender students as gender identity is becoming a more common and noted issue. New York City made a decision to allow people to alter the sex that is listed on their birth certificate, and other changes about accepting gender are taking place in schools and families, according to the New York Times.

In many situations, if parents noticed their child playing with a toy typically used by the opposite gender, they would try to restrict them from playing with it, and although this was more prevalent in past generations, it is still present in today’s society. “ Gender has always played a role in the world of <https://assignbuster.com/gender-norms-and-identity-among-young-children/>

toys. What's surprising is that " over the last generation, the gender segregation and stereotyping of toys have grown to unprecedented levels," said Elizabeth Sweet in an article for the New York Times. Despite great strides towards gender equity, the world of toys has not come so far. In most stores, toys are clearly geared towards certain genders, with pink and sparkles for girls and blues and cars for boys.

This demonstrates how children are taught from a young age what they should like based simply on their gender. " Even if parents attempt to shield their children from things like Disney Princesses, they could still be exposed to it at school and feel left out," said Rebecca Schrag, a clinical psychologist at Montefiore Medical Group-Family Care Center in the Bronx.. And it starts at a young age. Dr.

Schrag, expecting a baby herself, also said " getting even newborn clothes, all the boys ones have sports, and all the girls ones are pink and lacy." " It all depends on what the children are exposed to at home," said Jennifer Lassell, a preschool teacher in Queens, New York. She also said that gender roles are largely influenced by culture, and how parents want their children to be. As a preschool teacher, Ms. Lassell plays a major role in how the children in her class develop, so she makes sure to be accepting of anything they feel passionate about doing. " We try to establish acceptance, give [the children] time to be themselves," she said.

When asked about gender preference in her classroom, Ms. Lassell said that kids play together because of common interests, and who gets along with each other is based on personalities, not gender. She also said that a big

gender divider with her students has to do with colors. “ It is perfectly normal for a boy to go play in the kitchen area,” but there are times when “ if a boy uses a pink crayon, the other students say ‘ that’s a girl color!’ And I will use this is an opportunity to teach a lesson on diversity.” Recently, there have been some changes made to make clothing and toy industry less direct to gender. “ Hamleys, which is London’s 251-year-old version of F.

A. O. Schwarz, recently dismantled its pink ‘ girls’ and blue “ boys’ sections in favor of a gender-neutral store,” Peggy Orenstein told the New York Times. These kinds of changes could lead to a more accepting society of all gender identities, and become more supportive of equality, although it is still controversial. It is a challenge to create a solution, but collaborative work is the first step.