

Gender Stereotypes Among Children

Nicole Carlson
Chelsea Charvat
Felicia Miller
Tiffany Monschau
Carlene Hale

A Summary of Research as Partial Fulfillment for Sociology 1010

Karen Cohen
Macomb Communiy College
May 3, 2007

I. Introduction

A. As we all have been taught, gender is the feelings, attitudes, and behaviors typically associated with being male or female, according to the *Learning System of Sociology 4e*. The ever-popular pink hat for a baby girl and blue for a baby boy impose gender roles on children at birth, universally. From the delivery room, babies are brought home and from then on their parents are the most powerful influences in their lives when it comes to imposing gender roles. According to research, a child has a vague sense of being boy or girl as early as 1 year old and can differentiate between sexes at the ages of 2 or 3. Socially a strong sense of gender is imposed on children through clothing and toys, and is especially prevalent in selection after the children can identify their sex. Little girls are taught to not get their pretty dresses dirty while the boys in the overalls and tennis shoes are more appropriately dressed for rough and adventurous play. According to psychologist Jean Piaget, there are three stages in a child's cognitive development and in the first stage, Sensorimotor; around the age of 2 a toddler has a growing awareness of objects in the social world. At 2 ½ a toddler can represent their world symbolically and transform and invent objects and roles. Interestingly this is the same time in which children have a strong sense of gender.

The Wikipedia dictionary defines a toy as “as object used in play [...] the young use toys and play to discover their identity, help their bodies grow strong, learn cause and effect, explore relationships and practice skills they need as adults [...] toys are more than simple amusement, and they and the way they are used profoundly influences most aspects of life (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Toy>.)” Since toys are representative of objects and roles to a child in the world, it is possible to question whether or not they are being exposed to appropriate toys, clothing and books in order to have a healthy outlook on gender roles.

II. Children's Books

A. Past-1940-1980

1. Amelia Bedilia, Author: Peggy Parish, Date: 1964
 - a. Characters- Amelia Bedilia; young, red hair, wore maids outfit. Mrs. Rogers; old, grey curly hair, ugly old flower printed dresses. Mr. Rogers; old, grey hair and mustache, top hat, trench coat. Great Aunt Myra; old, grey hair, dressed up with the big hat and pearls.
2. Seven Little Postmen-“Little Golden Book,” Author: Margaret Wise Brown and Edith Thacher Hurd, Date: 1952
 - a. Characters- Boy; young, looked like he dressed himself, didn't match. Postmen; all white male, dressed with post office cap and tie.
3. Jack and the Beanstalk- Author: Stella Williams Nathan, Date: 1973
 - a. Characters- Mother; very sad in beginning, plump, and poor. Jack; poor, poorly clothed, no shoes, young boy. Old lady; big nose, a lot of baggy clothing. Giant's wife; nice, helpful,

protected Jack. Giant; mean, big, angry. Bean seller; old, grey hair and cane.

4. We Look and See- “Dick and Jane,” Author: William S. Gray, Dorothy Baruch, and Elizabeth Rider Montgomery, Date: 1946
 - a. Characters- Dick; brown shorts, sweater, blue socks, black boots, brown hair, like any young boy always looking around to play with something they aren’t supposed to, climbs trees, helps pick up his youngest sister. Jane; blonde, always in a dress with puffy shoulders, has a bonnet on sometimes, white socks and black dress shoes. Baby; doesn’t have a name in this story; wears dresses, and wears flower jumper, blonde short hair, makes a mess.
5. We Come and Go- “Dick and Jane,” Author: William S. Gray, Dorothy Baruch, and Elizabeth Rider Montgomery, Date: 1946
 - a. Characters- Jane; same as before. Dick; same as before, wears a striped collared shirt. Baby; has a name this time. Mom; doesn’t have a name, wears dresses, bonnets, carries a basket for groceries, wears high heeled shoes. Baker; tall, white, male, dress shirt and tie, hair slicked back, wears his little bakers cap. Dad; no name, suit and tie, dress shoes.
6. We Work and Play- “Dick and Jane,” Author: S. gray, Marion Monroe, A. Sterl Artley, May Hill Arbuthnot, Date: 1956
 - a. Characters- Dick; jeans and striped t-shirt, climbs and twist on the tree, plays with train set. Jane; same as before but now she has a blue dress and bow in her hair. Baby Sally; dress and white socks. The girls do summersaults on the grass, play with their dolls. Dad; brown slacks, long sleeved shirt. The kids play house and Dick dresses like his father and Jane dresses like their mother.

B. Present 1990-2006

1. The Reluctant Dragon- Author: Vaccarro Associates, Date: 1994
 - a. Characters- Dragon; nice, sweet, gentleman, caring, doesn’t want trouble. Sir George; dragon slayer, hero, knight, wants to save the town.
2. Dora the Explorer Goes to School- Author: Leslie Valdes, Date: 2004
 - a. Characters- Dora; young girl, short brown hair, Latino, looks a little masculine. Teacher; African American, wore dresses, road a bike, backpack; helps Dora hold the map and other things on their journey. Boots; her friend who is a monkey, he wears red boots, and helps Dora on their journey. Swiper; bad fox, tries to steal the map from Dora.
3. Back to School Berenstain Bears- Author: Stan and Jan Berenstain, Date: 1996
 - a. Characters- Sister; girl cub, doesn’t have a name, wears a bow in her hair and pink outfit. Brother; boy cub, doesn’t have a

name, red sweater and jeans. Mama; no name, wears matching polka dot bonnet and dress. Papa; no name, jean overalls with yellow long sleeved shirt under. Cubs are equal in this story, there isn't a time when the boy does something and girl doesn't.

4. No Place like Home- "Rugrats," Author: Donna Taylor, Date: 2000
 - a. Characters- Susie; African American, young girl, a lot of pony tails going everywhere. Lucy; Susie's mom, she is the doctor. Angelica; mean, snobby, nasty little white girl. Chucky; toddler, always scared, thinks everything is a bad idea, has purple glasses, crazy wild red hair, wears green shorts and a space shirt. Tommy; kind, caring, baby, wears a diaper, has barely any hair. Phil and Lil; twins that fight over everything, they can't share with each other.
5. Magic School Bus Gets a Bright Idea- Author: Joanna Cole and Bruce Degen, Date: 1999
 - a. Characters- Ms. Frizzle; crazy red haired teacher that everyone loves and she almost always scared everyone with her wacky ideas. DA; short for Dorothy Ann, white, blonde hair in pig tails, purple shirt, blue skirt. Janet; Arnold cousin that nobody likes, she wears red glasses and her and Arnold look scary alike. Arnold; looks like Janet, wears jeans and yellow striped long sleeved shirt, goofy blonde hair, glasses. Wanda; Chinese, short black hair, red outfit. Carlos; Latino. Tim; African American. Ralphie; class clown, funny guy, wears red baseball cap, green outfit. Keesha; loud, African American, purple outfit, very smart. All these kids are mostly from different races and they all look different from one another. They are all very smart and this book gives a lot of information.
6. Super-Fine Valentine- Author: Bill Cosby. Date: 1998
 - a. Characters- Little Bill; main character, bald, African American, big feet, wears jeans and vest, very shy, nervous talking to girls. Mia; the girl Little Bill likes, African American, wears dresses. Bobby; Bill's brother, is good with giving advice to his brother, very smart.

III. Gender and Clothing

A. Girls Clothing

1. There are numerous colors on the racks of girl's clothes at all children's clothing stores. There is a wide array of pinks, oranges, yellows, bright greens, reds, and white. The types of clothing ranges from tank tops, dresses, shirts, shorts, skirts, flip flops, tennis shoes, hats, sport team outfits, and bathing suits.
2. Children's clothes from birth to one-year changes every year. The outfits become more modernized. Mommies little daughters are starting to dress

a lot older than they actually are. One-year olds are wearing mini-skirts and bikinis.

3. Little girls clothing looks exactly as expected. Their outfits have ruffles, flowers, little designs, different color stitching, three quarter length sleeves, and many other stereotypical aspects of girls fashion.

B. Boys Clothing

1. Like girls clothing, young boy's spring and summer clothing come in many different colors. However, the colors include all shades of blues, greens, reds, browns, and oranges. Moms have the choice to buy their little boy hats, tank tops, shorts, jerseys, flip flops, tennis shoes, shirts, or swimming trunks.
2. As boys get older, even by the months, their clothing becomes more masculine. It is not "cute" to wear a light blue one-piece with a fuzzy teddy bear on it any more. The clothing becomes more "manly". The little boys can wear matching Pistons jerseys just like daddy.
3. When you think boys, you think tumbling around, and being rough and dirty. That is exactly what you expect when you see their clothing. Younger clothing for boys are light colored but especially as they age the colors becomes darker.

C. Clothing That Boys and Girls Can Wear

1. There are many colors that a little boy or a little girl could wear. Sometimes couples do not want to know the sex of their child until birth, which is why there are many outfits that could go both ways. Some colors of outfits that would be included are light yellows, pale greens, or white. These outfits include all the same separate pieces as listed above for both the boy and girl clothing.
2. Sometimes even as the child gets older, the parents are still dressing their children in outfits that a boy or a girl could wear. It is becoming more common for a boy to wear pink. Fifteen years ago it was unheard of for parents to dress their little boy in the color pink. Now fathers themselves are wearing the color pink and dressing their little boys to be just like them.
3. Little girls can now wear sweat suit outfits, sport team jerseys, and athletic tennis shoes just like little boys. In the previous generation little girls didn't generally wear athletic attire unless they were wearing boys clothing. Little girls were typically dressed in dresses and ruffled cute outfits.

IV. Children's Toys

A. Infant Toys

1. Infant toys are found to be produced abundantly in primary colors. It can be concluded that these toys are in a wide variety of colors because infants prefer bright colors and as stated by Piaget, infants are not aware of

gender differences therefore it would only make sense to produce toys in gender neutral colors.

2. Usually there is no gender distinction between toys.
3. During the first year of a child's life bright colors play a vital role in their toys due to the developmental purpose. Rattles, pacifiers, blocks, teething rings, and mobiles all stimulate the senses therefore the use of colors such as purple, blue green, and red according to Parent Magazine, are best suited to achieve the cognitive development of an infant. These colors were proved to best stimulate an infant due to their underdeveloped sense of sight,

B. Toys for Ages 2 and Up

1. Girls Toy Displays- After the toddler stage, children face the imperative decision of turning left or right once walking into a toy store.

a. The girls aisles are distinguishable from boys due to the predominant pink and blue colors that in a sense radiate from the aisles. The young girls aisles were very serene less active than the boys aisles. A single television was found in the aisle advertising Barbie. Other than that the one television, there were pictures of young boys on the packaging of girls toys including kitchen sets and grocery carts.

b. The primary colors that were sprawled over the infant section are now just a mere memory of ones past.

2. Girls Toys

a. Colors- it is obvious that pink has been donned a girl color, but only recently.

b. Barbie- "Believe it or not, **Barbie** originally was a real person. Her name was Barbara (Barbie) Handler and her mother and father were Ruth and Elliot. In the early 1950's, Barbie's mother watched her and her girlfriends play with *adult female dolls* more than they did baby dolls. Her mother knew it was just as important for young girls to imagine what it would be like to be grown up. Since most of the adult dolls available at the time were paper or cardboard, Barbie's mother decided to make a three-dimensional female adult doll; One that was lifelike enough to serve as an inspiration for little girl's dreams of the future (<http://www.billbam.com/barbiehistory.html>.)"

1. Ironically today, Barbie has received backlash for an unrealistic representation of women. Barbie promotes patriarchy in that there are no "Brain Surgeon Babies" but "Baby Dr. Barbie and Pet Sitter Barbie." Where is Single mother Barbie? Since the creation of Barbie in 1959, the traditional nuclear family has since then been altered and a single mother would never bring in enough income to support a family as "Wedding Day Barbie." Barbie also tends to be scantily clad and her shape is one that is

unrealistically idealized by many women. In 1994 Teen Talk Barbie spoke the phrase “Math is hard!”

2. “Lets Stop Teaching Preschoolers to be Sexy” article from the Glamour Magazine, April 2007.
3. Domestic Toys- Girls toy aisles are lined with toys that promote the domestication of women.
 - a. Easy Bake Oven (must mix ingredients and literally cook food, Dirt Devils (that actually vacuum,) make-up kits (promote idealized beauty,) Kitchen sets, Baby Dolls (women take care of the children)
4. Age Appropriateness
 - a. Pole dancing kit (Tesco.com)
 - b. Barbie’s clothes
 - c. Make up
 - d. “Exercise with Barbie”
5. Boys Toy Displays
 - a. Boys’ toy aisles are dominated by shades of blue. Upon personal experience, the boy’s aisles were more active. Soldiers were hung from the ceiling “parachuting,” there were displays of lights over the *Hot Wheels* section , blinking red, green, and yellow, and there were televisions advertising toys in the aisles. There was a sense of adventure and activity promoted through the displays. Also there were very few pictures of young girls on the packaging of boy toys, which is very ironic considering that it is more acceptable for a girl to be a “tomboy” than for a boy to exert any feminine characteristics.
6. Boys Toys
 - a. Blue is the dominant color in boy toy
 - b. Some toys are “Pretend and Play” Office kit compared to School kit for girls.
 - c. Toys have more aggressive adventurous nature- Hot Wheels, Nerf Guns, and Action Figures.
7. Toys from the Past
 - a. Gender Stereotypes- toys from the past included cooking sets, western wear, baby dolls, and guns. These toys seem to have established the stereotypes of modern day toys.
 - b. 1970s- In the 1970s a spike of gender neutral toys came into the scene with rises in popularity. This was partially due to the rise in feminists views during this decade. This decade was one of revolution leading to that in toys as well. The “hippies” incorporated their artistic views in gender neutral toys such as toy pianos and drum sets.
 - c. The Collapse of Gender Neutral Toys
 1. Why then has society fallen back into the old ways of gender stereotyping toys

2. Radio Flyers, Building Blocks, Lincoln Logs, and Legos have all made the test of time in the increasingly hard task of entertaining a child. If gender neutral toys can stand the test of time why did Barbie, G.I. Joe, princesses and toy cars come into the picture again.

d. Pink vs. Blue

“There has been great diversity on the subject best generally accepted, blue for boys, and pink for girls. The reason is blue being more decided and stronger is best suited for boys, while pink, is more delicate and dainty, is prettier for girls, (Ladies Home Journal, 1918.)”

1. Jean Heifetz states that for centuries European children were dressed in blue due to its association with the Virgin Mary.
2. In 1921 the Women’s Institute for Domestic Science in Pennsylvania encouraged the idea of pink for boys and blue for girls.
3. During World War I, the Nazi assigned pink to homosexual Jews, feminizing the color.
4. These color associations derived from the fact that blue was a calm and passive color therefore assigned to young girls. Pink was considered an active color hence given a masculine nature.

8. Biology

- a. Research shows that there are scientific differences in the anatomy of young boys and girls brains.
 - i. Boys have better spatial skills; this attracts them to toys that have the potential ability to move such as cars, spaceships, and action figures. At age 2 boys are noticeably more physically active than girls, leading them to admire due to idealized male empowerment.
 - ii. The brain of a young girl pays more attention to people rather than mechanical objects. This leads them to play with dolls and objects they can take care of.
 - iii. Generally boy’s brains pay more attention to fear and anger while the girls focus on sadness and empathy leading them to a choice that appeals to these emotions.
- b. *“Is it a Big Deal for your Son to Play with a Doll?” from the website Parenting.com*

9. Experiments on Gender Genetic Dispositions

- a. An experiment was done on young boys and girls to research the manner in which different genders play with the same toys. Both sexes were given a toy telephone with wheels. The boys rolled it on its wheels as if it were a toy car, while the girls held the receiver up to their ears having pretend conversations.

b. Melissa Hine from the University of London conducted a gender experiment on monkeys. She found that even though the monkeys were not socialized in the same manner as humans they stuck to their gender appropriate toys.

c. Dr. Christine Williams from the University of Texas at Austin researched purchasing toys based on gender and found “in 300 hours of toy selling, I only witnessed 2 occasions of customer resisting typical gender categories.”

V. Conclusion

A. Gender roles are generally stereotyped. Children are being exposed to stereotypical roles way too early in life. Our research supports the fact that gender stereotypes are most influential from birth until the age of six years old. This is the most pivotal stage in a child's socialization. Things that they learn during this time are critical to their understanding of life itself. In a sense, we are setting ourselves up for gender inequality by promoting gender stereotypes for the next generation to come. Women continue to be undermined, underestimated, and sexually exploited, whereas men are still considered the breadwinners of the family, and the superior in society. According to our research, gender stereotypes are evident in children's books, toys, and clothes. It goes to show that patriarchy is still on the rise and gender equality is far from accomplished.