

Gender stereotype

Are parents so unaware of the expectations they project onto their children? To find out, we asked 5 families to participate in a local TV experiment. We prepared a waiting room filled with toys and pulled out all the stops when it came to stereotypes. The boys' toys were on one side and the girls' toys were on the other. We specifically wanted to test the fathers and, with the help of the mothers, we left them alone in the room with their child. The experiment started immediately, under the gaze of our hidden cameras.

What is in there? Do you put the other one in there too?

Immediately, the fathers played with the toys that corresponded to the gender of their child. I saw a pretty princess costume so I decided to dress her as a princess because I don't usually have the chance to do that when she is at home with her two brothers, so I took advantage of the opportunity.

The parents will encourage and discourage their children in extremely subtle ways. When their child goes toward an object that is not traditionally for their gender, we can hear the father saying, "Yes, come here, that is a crane machine... play with this."

Then, the mothers returned. At this stage, we asked them to motivate their children to play with toys for the opposite sex. "Should we wear the skirt?" Obviously, the children were delighted. When the fathers return, how will they react?

While their child played with a toy designated for the opposite gender, the fathers didn't stop them from playing with it but said, "That is for boys. That is a game for boys so let's do the ironing", which implies, "That is for the opposite gender. You'd better play with something for your own sex." She was playing with tools and a workbench, and I said to her, "My girl, drop that, play with the iron instead."

Can you show it to Dad? Mom, she's coming back. Show Dad the tools. The father stays in the background and says nothing, meaning he does not encourage playing with toys for the opposite gender. But no encouragement is perceived as discouragement for children.

"Where is the castle?"

"It's here."

You said to her: Where is the castle?

"Yes, that's possible, yes."

"Yes, well it's true that unconsciously we push her to play a game that contains girls' colors, pink..."

Meanwhile, we have another father who watches his son playing with girls' toys. He looks at the room, gets up, walks all around the room, and says, "Wow, have you seen this firefighter helmet..." He places the helmet on his head. He shows the child how a man plays with this type of toy.

I don't know why I was attracted to the firefighter helmet and wanted him to play with it. I can't explain it. It's not always the case that fathers are very macho...absolutely not!

We were raised like that, so we are not aware of reproducing the same stereotypes. But still, there are differences in the way boys and girls are treated. Usually, a boy is punished more if he wants to do something labeled as the opposite sex than if it's a little girl. The first reason for this is social value. The fact is that on the social ladder, masculinity is higher than femininity, so it's clear that a little boy who does something feminine loses some of his social prestige. The second reason is the fear of homosexuality, which strictly speaking, has nothing to do with playing toys traditionally meant for the opposite sex. However, parents, and fathers specifically, imagine that if their son plays with feminine objects, he would risk becoming homosexual.

Our volunteer parents did nothing out of the ordinary, they did what the majority of fathers and mothers in society would have. Here, we see the weight of traditions. Some participants still showed an open mind.