



Gender Stereotypes; More Than Pink or Blue

Discussion > Advanced 9



Exercise 1 – Vocabulary

innocuous	Safe and not causing harm or offense.
[adjective]	<i>Ex: A goldfish is a relatively innocuous pet.</i>

imbibe	Receive into the mind; assimilate or absorb (an idea, principle, etc).
[verb]	<i>Ex: He has imbibed his moral principles from the indigenous peoples of his country.</i>

sartorial	Relating to clothes.
[adjective]	<i>Ex: She was praised for her sartorial elegance on a number of occasions.</i>

insouciance	Lack of concern or worry; nonchalance.
[noun]	<i>Ex: There was an air of youthful insouciance about the captain that made us admire him even more.</i>

sashay	Walk in a confident and relaxed fashion.
[verb]	<i>Ex: Everyone was looking at her as she sashayed across the room.</i>



Exercise 2 – Reading

Read the text aloud with your tutor and discuss the key points.

Gender Stereotypes; More Than Pink or Blue

Boys don't cry. Sit like a lady. Barbie for girls and Lego for boys. These are seemingly innocuous adages that generations of people have grown up with. But is it really that innocent or well-meaning?

It is not just that girls are supposed to wear pink; they should also play with toy vacuum cleaners and learn to relate to fluffy, cuddly animals. Boys, on the other hand, are supposed to wear blue and have rugged adventures.

Most people never learn to question these inflexible binaries and end up replicating them in every aspect of their lives. When a little girl is being given a toy vacuum cleaner and a little boy is being given a NASA t-shirt, people tell them what they expect of them: the girl to become a homemaker and the boy to aspire to become an astronaut.

Community Correspondent Daxaben Punjabhai from Gujarat, one of the less developed states of India, set out to explore how children there relate to gender stereotypes imbibed from their families and surroundings.



She asked them to perform how girls and boys act in various situations: how do boys cry, laugh, sit, stand, walk and dance? And how do girls do the same? Their responses were not as uniform as one might expect.

Sometimes gender difference is only limited to the sartorial: boys don the dupatta (scarf) to indicate they are now acting in a feminine role. Girls wear sunglasses and a hat when they are enacting masculine roles.

However, a clear difference emerges between the two genders when they are asked to show the difference in sitting, standing, walking and dancing, whereas they cry and laugh in a somewhat similar fashion. Both boys and girls think that when girls sit, they do so in postures that are markedly ‘feminine’: a hand on the cheek, primly folded legs. When boys sit, there’s casual masculine insouciance radiating from them: hands crossed over the chest authoritatively, or legs spread comfortably apart.

Girls are supposed to sashay like they are on the ramp when they walk. Boys have a definite swagger, upturned collars and often wear goggles (apparently).



The most marked difference is in how boys and girls are perceived to dance. Girls are demure, mostly using a dupatta, and their dance moves are limited to hand movements and swaying hips.

The girls think that boys, on the other hand, only perform the Punjabi bhangra – uninhibited and an exhibition of joyous exuberance. Boys themselves think that their dance moves must show how physically able they are – they turn cartwheels and do complicated breakdance moves.

However, more and more young women across the world are writing, painting, and creating memes to challenge and subvert the expectations of traditional gender roles. They are doing this with humor and empathy, but experience abuse from online trolls who resort to ever more vicious attacks to “defend” their male privilege. The onus is on us to talk and write about challenging gender roles so that someday a little boy wearing a skirt and a little girl who plays with toy soldiers are no longer seen as aberrations.



Exercise 3 – Discussion

Discuss the following questions with your tutor.

1. What do you think about the findings of the experiment?
2. In what ways would you say children “end up replicating” the things they learn in childhood later in life?
3. Do you think it's important to “subvert the expectations of traditional gender roles?” Why? Why not?
4. Are you of the opinion that men can be victims of gender bias as well? Please explain your answer.
5. What do you think are the most effective ways to combat gender stereotyping?
6. Do you think there are certain jobs that are only suitable for a particular gender? If so, which ones?
7. Would you say that your society often prevents women from realizing their true potential?
8. Do you think that absolute gender equality is achievable? Why? Why not?