# Playtime: A great influence to gender roles

Have you ever noticed how a mother is given gifts according to the sex of the baby? Like if it is a baby boy everyone seems to buy blue clothes, toy cars, toy soldiers, toy helicopters, toy trains and things with similar prints and designs. All the same applies if the baby is a girl, she gets dolls, pink clothes, toy tea sets, a play house which is similar to a kitchen. This is where gender roles are first modeled.

I mean a girl is first told of her gender roles before she can even tell apart the sky and the earth. I remember this other time when I was playing with a toy car. A lady stopped and discouraged me saying that was a toy meant for boys. I really got confused because my dream was of having a car in the future. So if a toy car was meant for boys, girls cannot dream of driving one day?

Girls are taught how to carry a baby on their back as soon as they can walk. You see a mother trying her best to put the doll on the baby’s back. She names the child and just pretends she is a mother. Then you get mad when a teenager gets pregnant? They have already practiced how to be a responsible mother and a submissive wife at the age of two. Play time is the most influencing stage of every child. They are socialized to what they will be in the future.

I remember playtime when I was growing. We referred to it as ‘mahumbwe’ it is a type of game whereby girls take the roles of mothers and girl children, and the boys take the roles of fathers and brothers. At that time the ‘mother’ mixes dirt and water pretending to be cooking. The father lives for work and the sisters sweep the selected area which they claim to be their house. Jerseys wrapped to mimic a real baby are put on the mother’s back. They take care of the baby as what they see their mothers doing.

Now we zoom in this kind of play. A girl is entitled to think that they are only born to produce babies, take good care of them, clean the house, fetch water and prepare food for their husbands. We claim that we want gender equality but do we teach our children that. Instead we install in them that mentality. It is a rare case to see a girl child playing with a toy car. Play time is meant to give a child a chance to think of what they want to be when they get a little bit older.

So if a girl is not given a chance to explore their capabilities to drive a toy car do you expect them to dream of driving one. Some years back when I was in grade one my teacher asked our dream jobs.” I want to do the dishes and sweep the house just as what my mom does” said Mary. My teacher froze for some time in shock. She expected professions such as being a doctor, nurse, lawyer or even a teacher only to get a girl who wishes to be a house wife. To be honest I do not blame her, she was raised to think that a girl is destined to carry a baby on her back whilst she does all the roles picked for her gender. She was never given room to enjoy playing pilot, soldier or police. So we cannot naturally think she can dream of being part of them.

Just like how you cannot teach an old dog new tricks, it is hard to make the two genders equal after dividing them during play time. For us to archive our goal of reaching a point of equality we must first correct the play time. For it has a great influence on gender roles.