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### Gender Roles and Sexism

Do parents who force stereotypical gender preferences on their children perpetuate gender inequality in society? According to Kerry Smith, there are many ways to teach children how to behave. Reinforcement, punishment, and mirroring are crucial ways in which parents teach children about how to act in the world (2). Parents who use these methods to enforce stereotypical gender preferences on their children affect their development and learning in a negative way. It is through family that “many [children] first experience gender because societal differences between girls and boys are transferred through early teachings by family members...[they] dress them in gender-’appropriate’ colors, give them different toys, and decorate their bedrooms in different ways that tend to facilitate and enforce cisgender behaviors” (Shaw, 444).

Society has the idea that women are weaker, less capable, and submissive. “The root of the misconception, the sexism, starts the day parents bring their child home” (Smith, 2). From the very start of their lives, babies who are assigned female at birth are raised and treated drastically different than males. For example, traditional families punish women while praising men for certain stereotypical behaviors. It is a popular belief that children “naturally gravitate toward stereotypical [behaviors]” (Berg 35), but this is a misconception. Evidence shows that “[children] will play with anything...until age three...[when] parents push children into more gender-specific items” (Berg 35). As time goes by, children choose toys, clothes, sports, and activities that fit into the gender-specific categories learned from their parents.

Works Cited

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Smith, Kerry. "Sexism: It Starts at Childhood." *Atavist*, 6 May 2016, [kerrysmith.atavist.com/sexism-it-starts-at-childhood](http://kerrysmith.atavist.com/sexism-it-starts-at-childhood).

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