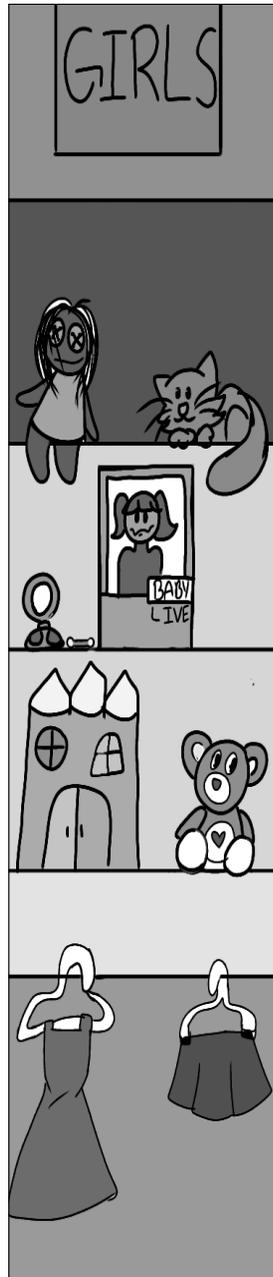


# Gender constructs harm children growth



**I Will Rise**  
Morgan Walker

A little boy walks into a toy store with his parents. It is his birthday, a day all about him. His parents say he can get anything he wants from the store. The boy walks around in the tall aisles that have all the toys you could ever think of in the girl's section, where he spots a beautiful doll that he saw in the magazines at home. He picks it up, but his parents quickly direct him to the boys section,

explaining that section is only for girls—and that he was not a girl. He is confused. They previously said he could have anything he wanted. Why can dolls not be for boys, too?

This happens to children and teens all across the globe. These parents are teaching gender roles that were also taught to them, using conventional methods for raising children. For example, the traditional method for boys is wearing pants and taking control of situations, and traditional method for girls is wearing dresses and 'acting like a lady.'

But sometimes tradition needs to be abandoned if it is negatively affecting the child. When kids are looking at toys they do not see gender; they see something that will be fun to play with.

Toys are made to teach

children. As practiced customarily in society, girls are supposed to take care of children, so dolls are directed towards girls, while boys are supposed to enjoy getting their hands dirty, so trucks and car toys are directed towards them. The world is changing; there are a lot more single dads

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and female race car drivers. However, toy companies cast children of the gender they are targeting. For example, little girls in commercials for nail art, and little boys in commercials for toy cars. These casts should be diverse and filled with boys and girls. If a child does not see another child of their gender in a commercial, it is likely they will feel like they are not allowed to play with those toys.

Boys and girls can suffer from not being able to do what they love. Aside from just limiting what children can explore, genuine health risks are also a concern when gender roles are enforced.

“For girls, those risks can include child marriage, pregnancy, leaving school early, sexually transmitted infections and exposure to violence. Boys suffer, too, from increased risk

of substance abuse, suicide and shorter life expectancy than women -- especially if they try to challenge masculine norms,” said CNN writers Emanuella Grinberg and Victoria Larned in an article entitled “This is what happens when gender roles are forced on kids.”

Parents need to allow children to explore childhood activities without assigning gender to them. Raising children with strict gender roles will wake it a lot harder to change how they feel about gender as they grow, because it is ingrained into their mind; even if they do not follow the norm and challenge what is expected of them as they grow, that past mindset of doubt will always creep in.

Objects should not have a gender. These ideas are man-made. Makeup is great for a boy. Girls can play whatever sport they want. And I bet you would not believe that pink used to be a boy color, and blue used to be a girl color. If they can be switched around so easily, why do we associate certain colors strictly with certain genders?

It is important we do not let people use gender roles against our children. It is unfair to tell a child they can only do certain activities or to pigeonhole them because of their gender. No one should have to worry if they are acting “too girly” or “like a boy” because there is no such thing; just let people identify how they want to identify.

If we do not push stereotypes on our children, we can work towards a world where toys can just be toys, and kids can just be kids.



Sam Haney / The Bagpiper