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## GENDER

### GIRLS PLAY WITH CARS AND BOYS WITH DOLLS

#### EDITORIAL

**S**EX AND GENDER ARE OFTEN CONFUSED. SEX IS EASY TO DEFINE, since it is determined by biological and anatomical characteristics. Defining gender is a task that has provided sociologists and psychologists many a headache. It has been the subject of exhaustive debate, including a special United Nations session at the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. It is generally accepted that gender concerns a set of qualities and behaviours expected from a male or female by society.

Gender attribution starts as soon as we are born, sometimes even earlier. Boys get their rooms painted blue; girls get theirs painted pink. As they get older little boys play with cars and guns, whereas little girls play house or play with dolls. When I was a young boy my parents gave me a doll. It could drink and had eyes that could blink. I still preferred to play with my toy cars and even though my parents forbade me to play with toy guns, I would manage to build them from sticks or Duplo bricks. Despite my parents efforts I had fallen into the traditional role of a young boy. How much does sex influence gender? Is it biological predisposition, the influence of the environment or merely personal rebellion? Whatever the reasons, it is inescapable that the roles male and female are expected to play are different.

Nevertheless, that is not to say that these roles are fixed and incapable of changing over time. In the past, necessity has been a catalyst for change. When the men went to war, it was imperative that the women take up their jobs. And when they returned, they were probably forced to re-evaluate their perspective on the distribution of tasks according to gender. The borders of gender roles in modern society are becoming increasingly blurred. Men are expected to do housework and women may be expected to provide for the family. These changes once again force people to reconsider the qualities they have attributed to each gender. As fathers stay home and take care of the children, the concept that they are not equally capable to raise them becomes absurd. As women succeed at high levels in competitive industries, the concept that they are too soft and not ruthless enough becomes ridiculous.

Although gender is a broad concept that includes the roles of both male and female, women are often in a more vulnerable situation which is why the gender issues discussed in this issue revolve mainly around the rights of women and gender equity. As Dorothy Allison, an award winning editor of several early feminist and Lesbian & Gay journals, says: "Class, race, sexuality, gender and all other categories by which we categorize and dismiss each other need to be excavated from the inside." And this is what we aim to do. □

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