

## What Is Gender Identity?

Princeton University defines gender identity as “Your identity as it is experienced with regard to your individuality as male or female; awareness normally begins in infancy and is reinforced during adolescence.” American society plays a large role in the figuring out of whether you are male or female along with genetics. It’s as if there is a rules and regulations book that we, as Americans, go by telling us which toys to play with and what kind of clothes to wear to determine our gender identity. The way we act when we are put in a particular situation, how we show our feelings to others, and our personal interests are all written down in this intangible rule book that we abide by, whole heartedly, as Americans and citizens of this world. But the rules about “boys” and “girls” seem to become more and more flexible every day.

From the second we leave our mothers womb we have the pressures of American society barreling down upon us. We are either put in little baseball uniforms to show that we are tough boys or pretty little frilly dresses and an ugly head band telling the world we are girls. Little boys are given baseball gloves, footballs and toy trucks, where as girls are give dolls, tea sets, and make-up. But why is it that little boys do not get the make-up and dolls, and for little girls toy trucks and baseball gloves? It’s because the rule book says no! In most cases parents do not want there children to be ridiculed for how they look <sup>or</sup> how they act so they forced society’s rules of what makes us boys and girls because there is the fear that if boys play with girls toys they will not grow up to be men, but gay men, and baseball gloves and toy trucks will not form graceful young ladies, but lesbians. But this is far from the truth today. A little girl who played sports can still grow up to be a really feminine young lady. Just look at women like soccer star

Mia Ham or softball player Jenny Finch. Also a boy who played house and with dolls can still grow up to be a strong young man. My father was raised with three sisters and two brothers, he has told me stories about how he cooked and cleaned and even knitted, but he still turned out to be what society would call a "man". But the rules still seem to exist that tell us whether we are male or female, it's these rules that determine who we are in life.

Who we become in life is, for the most part, based on how we were treated as children by our parents and peers. When a little boy falls and gets hurt he is told to not cry because "big boys don't cry." As that boy grows older he remembers this "rule" and applies it to everything. Men show little emotion because of this "rule" that they were taught when they were much younger. As a result when these young men grow up their relationships with women seem to hit a bump in the road. Women <sup>want</sup> what their partner to feel comfortable with telling them their feelings. Also women might not like the rough and merciless way men portray themselves, which sometimes leads to relationship failure. On the other hand, when a girl falls she is cuddled and consoled and her "boo- boo" gets "special kisses" to make her feel better. This then stays with the little girl into ~~women hood~~ <sup>womanhood</sup> which translates to an emotional women. A women who depends on the strength of a man to take care of her, But what happens when a girl doesn't get this special treatment? As <sup>a</sup> child my dad told me that crying was not acceptable. When I would get hurt I was not allowed to cry because my dad did not like to hear crying from anyone in our house. I guess you could say that it was a good thing that my dad raised me this way because I'm not dependent on men to take care of me, but it's also bad because I still show very little emotion. Now my friends don't understand why I'm not emotional like them. They wonder why I don't show my feelings. In society it's okay for a man or boy to be emotionless but not for women and girls. Society would probably see me as a cold person, but if I were I man it would be okay.

A man or boy who shows no emotion when they get hurt is perfectly acceptable. In addition to being emotionless boys are also accepted if they are tough. "Boys are rewarded for throwing hard. Most other activities— reading, befriending girls, or just thinking— are considered weird." (p. 59) Which is quite true. I remember as a child my father was teaching my brothers how to put gas in the lawn mower, I was just watching. He asked my brothers to open the gas can, first my oldest brother tried and he could not do it, then my other brother and his results were the same, then my dad asked me to do it, and I did. He then proceeded to scold my brothers and said, "Why couldn't you open it? You had to let your little sister do it for you!" This is a case where they didn't get rewarded because they didn't succeed, but where was my congratulations? I did not receive one because it was not encouraged of me to be strong. My brothers got scolded because they weren't being strong, they weren't being "men". Some effects of boys getting scolded for not being "men" are that later on in life they do things to prove that they are men. They beat up on smaller weaker boys to prove to their parents that they are the tougher of two sexes. My brothers were taught to be tough. My dad would buy them toy cars, G.I. Joe dolls, and taught them how to fight. He even wanted them to get into a fight with a boy down the street because the boy was messing with me, but they didn't. Maybe they didn't fight because they were afraid that they would not have the results that my dad wanted. When my dad found out that they didn't he seemed upset with them and he never forced them to do things like that again. Even though one of my brothers was raised to be ultra macho he did not turn out to be what today's society calls a "man". Yes genetically he is a man, but he is a gay man. Even after all the years of macho-ism forced into him by my father he did not turn out the way the rule book planned.

It's true that society does play a large role in our gender identity, but an even larger part is

who we want ourselves to be. My brother went along with what my father wanted him to do, but later realized that what he was being made into wasn't his true self. When we are young we have no clue on what we were supposed to be like until our parents give us toys, clothes, and we are forced to function in society, but as we grow older and learn more about ourselves we are ultimately the ones who decide what our gender identity is. We decide if we want to stick to the mold, because that's what we like and want out of life, or like my brother, knowingly dive face first into criticism and hatred for the sake of pleasing ones self and being what is comfortable for you.

→ Today's society seems to be a little less black and white than our past perceptions on what makes a man and what makes a woman, but the shades of black and white are still there.

Society, as a whole, seems to be more understanding of peoples feelings. I guess you would say that in our new politically correct world people do not want to say things that might offend someone else. There is not much <sup>c</sup>concern about women in sports and jobs that require a lot of physical energy like it was years ago during the war era. As I look at my wall with a sign of Rosie the Riveter and the words "We Can Do It!," I can only imagine what the women back then had to go through, and I think if they could see how much society has accepted women today they would go through all the drama all over again if they had the chance. //Another thing that has changed us that young men used to think that it wasn't a cool thing to wear pink because only girls wear pink, but now men everywhere seem to have a little pink in their wardrobe. This taboo has changed so much that there are now shirts that read, "Real Men Wear Pink." It's also becoming more acceptable for women and girls to be involved in sports without them being labeled as lesbians. A tough girl isn't seen as she once was. I play sports, I'm a tough girl, and I enjoy getting dirty from time to time, but I'm still feminine. I might not be the exact definition

of feminine (having qualities traditionally associated with women, especially delicacy and prettiness) but I still like to get dressed up, wear feminine clothing, and wear make-up. And my brother who cares about his looks, enjoys shopping, theater and dance, all things I enjoy but not as much as he does, might not be the definition of masculine, but he is still a man none-the-less and has male traits. All in all there are good influences and there are bad influences that society has on us today, but I think it's safe to say that the rules book is becoming more and more flexible every day.