



STEREOTYPES: MYTH VS. FACT

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MYTH: Letting girls do rough and tumble play encourages them to be tomboys.

FACT: Rough and tumble play comes naturally to many children, especially at earlier ages. Play of a particular kind will not make a girl any more or less feminine. Meanwhile, discouraging her may teach her to be less confident physically and afraid that being honest about her feelings is not safe.

MYTH: Bullying is a natural phase boys grow out of.

FACT: Bullying is not natural but learned. And boys who learn to bully others are more likely to be bullied themselves and to use aggression as adults once they grow up.

MYTH: Bullying is a problem mostly for boys.

FACT: Girls actually bully *as much or more than* boys. While physical assaults are more common among boys, girls tend to attack using social aggression – public humiliation, verbal bullying, and ostracism.

MYTH: Boys are naturally better at things like math, computers, and science.

FACT: There are no innate differences between boys and girls when it comes to math and science -- although girls are still often discouraged from pursuing both. In Japan, where math excellence is expected from all children, girls perform just as well in mathematics as boys.

MYTH: Stereotypes only hurt children when they're grown up and aware of them.

FACT: Children become aware of gender and ethnic stereotypes around 3 years old, and they begin internalizing them as early as kindergarten.

MYTH: Kids start worrying about their body image and weight in their teens.

FACT: By third grade, children have already internalized social ideals about their weight. About two-thirds of 9-year-olds report being “very scared about being fat,” almost half of 9-year-olds think “it’s important for women to be thin,” and about three-quarters of third grade girls think about trying to be thin.

MYTH: More feminine girls are less likely to bully.

FACT: Girls who are more stereotypically feminine are actually *more* likely to engage in social bullying and aggression against other girls.

MYTH: Being tough and aggressive is part of growing up and good for boys.

FACT: Toughness and aggression in young boys has been linked to academic under-achievement, discipline problems, and relationship difficulties as an adult.

MYTH: If you let boys cry a lot they can learn to be over-sensitive or cowardly.

FACT: From as early as two, boys are taught to avoid crying and that emotional vulnerability is weak and feminine. By the time they are teens, these boys are more likely to have trouble expressing themselves, knowing what they are feeling, or forming warm, strong attachments.

MYTH: Boys and girls don't start getting treated differently until they're out of childhood.

FACT: Actually, different treatment starts from birth. For instance, parents describe a crying baby as “angry” if told it’s a boy, “sad” if told it’s a girl. They tend to pat or rub a child if told it’s a girl, but bounce it if told it’s a boy.

MYTH: Letting boys play with dolls can encourage them to be sissies.

FACT: Doll play is common and appropriate for both boys and girls, especially at younger ages. Although adults often discourage it because of their own discomfort, playing with a particular kind of toy will not make a boy any more or less masculine. Meanwhile, discouraging him may teach him to be ashamed of his feelings and that it is unsafe to show them openly.

MYTH: Stereotypes affect all kids about the same regardless of their ethnicity.

FACT: Stereotypes often have a special emphasis depending on a child’s ethnic or racial backgrounds. For example, Latina girls may feel pressured to live up to *machista* codes of femininity; African-American boys may feel they are expected to be great athletes; and Asian-American children may feel teachers or peers assume they’ll be strong in math and science.

MYTH: Parenting magazines generally contain sound advice about combatting stereotypes.

Almost 40% the articles in the highest circulation magazines promote common stereotypes about children—for example that looks are very important for girls – and only about 1-in-5 encouraged any behavior that wasn’t stereotypical.

Additional Sources:

<http://www.campbell-kibler.com/Stereo.pdf>

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