

Why I hate my daughter's toys

M's grandfather repaired the lawn mower yesterday. When he came in for a glass of water, he left his tool-belt on the floor for a moment. M toddled over and took each tool out one by one, but she was particularly impressed with the screwdriver. She tried to screw imaginary screws into the hardwood floor, which is now irreparably scratched.

"Should she be chewing on that?" Grandpa asked. I ran over and took it from her. I'm pretty laid back, but I'm pretty sure motor oil and gas residue aren't a great choice for a baby. M wailed – and then reached down and grabbed another screwdriver, which she was hiding under her butt. She poked me in the leg with it and I swatted her hand. "No," I snapped. "That hurt!"

The next day after she had calmed down (and hopefully forgotten about it), we went to the store to get a tool set of her own. She's always been fascinated by tools and if it's what she wants to do, I'm all for it. M also really likes pink, so we were hoping to get her a pink tool set. None there. (Amazon does sell an [adult version](#) that's worth checking out.)

Granted, when I was a kid, it was expected that girls would play with Easy Bake Ovens and dolls and boys would build forts and play with tools. But, I didn't and it always made me feel a little strange. I had hoped that in the past 30 years things would have changed. After all, we have women [CEOs](#), [senators](#) and even [NASCAR](#) drivers. But the toy aisle is still as gendered as ever. Girls' toys depict unnatural looking women, makeup and tiaras. The boy's section, on the other hand, is all about tools and science, or pretend leadership.

Looking at those aisles, I wonder what we are really teaching our children. It's a commonly held belief that very young children can be untaught those gender specific expectations when they enter high-school, since that is when much of the adult personality is developing. Or is toy preference an [inborn trait](#)? I wonder if damage is being done early in the lives of our children?

A child's perception of gender starts at age [two](#) and is relatively concrete by the age of five. That's right, before kindergarten, they already are forming their identity around gender specific traits. And according to the psychology journal *Sex Roles*, a [majority of toys geared towards children under the age of five are very much gender specific](#). This means that we're teaching our children what their general role in life is supposed to be before they even start school. I find that to be incredibly concerning. A paper published by the [University of North Carolina](#) mirrors my concerns, by examining the effects of toys (and toy store division) on a developing child. What is more upsetting is what the toys teach to boys versus girls. Boys are taught about science, building things, leadership and other helpful career traits. In essence, boys are taught that their mind and skills matter. By contrast, girls are taught that appearance, clothes, body image and material wealth are the crucial skills. It's no wonder many women grow up with body image issues since it's one of the first lessons they are taught! *Forbes* talks about the long-term effects of "princess culture" and feminine toys in their article [7 ways You're Hurting Your Daughter's Future](#). The gist of the article is

that the toys we give our children and the way we play with them as babies determine how they see themselves and the behaviors they exhibit as adults. While there is nothing wrong with playing dress-up occasionally, it should be balanced with games that will teach independence, self-confidence, self-reliance and reward scholastic endeavors.

We got M a black-and-blue tool set. She's happily trying to screw screws into the bookshelf. Maybe, this will help her to learn how to fix things around the house. I'd be more than happy to pay her a nice allowance in exchange for someone to help with all the assembly that children's toys seem to require.