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YOUR LIFE KIDS



BRIGHT
Siobhan
with Jesse
- and her
princess
bedroom

All this girly pink is making me feel blue

Education experts are now saying what columnist and mum-of-one Siobhan McNally has suspected all along - that pink does stink

My daughter Jesse loves any colour - as long as it's pink. She lives in a fairy princess bubble of pinkness, show tunes and strawberry lipgloss.

When she breaks into song and shimmies across the room in her pink feather boa, it's like Barbara Cartland has been reincarnated as a showgirl.

Jesse is only five but like many other little girls she is already programmed to love pink. And now education experts are saying this early colour coding by gender is damaging and will seriously harm her future.

Last week Hannah Webster, of education standards watchdog The Independent Association of Prep Schools, said: "There will be those who say pink and blue colour coding does not matter - they are wrong."

"If we designate a colour to a gender it leads us to designate other things by gender too. The result is girls and boys read different kinds of books, play with different kinds of toys, study different subjects, consider different careers, have different roles at work and in the family and are ultimately valued differently by society."

Campaign groups such as Pink Stinks and Let Toys Be Toys have been banging this particular drum for some time.

And although some retailers like M&S and Toys

R Us have pledged to market their toys to kids in a more gender-neutral way, the change has been slow. I'm sure there are plenty of little girls out there who loved pink and have since gone on to get a degree in rocket science. But they are in the minority. And the full effect of this pinkification remains to be seen as it's a recent thing.

Back in the early 20th century, pink was a colour associated with boys. Even when I grew up in the 1970s, there certainly wasn't any pink to break up the brown and orange vibe we were rocking back then. Orange space hoppers, brown clackers, black and yellow chopper bikes - but no gender-specific colours.

We know little girls are naturally inclined to play with dolls and boys just want to saw someone's head off but now toy manufacturers and retailers are shaping our children's future. The gender-marketing tool is so successful that if you dyed a cat hairball pink, stuck googly eyes on it and gave it a cute name - it would sell fast to millions of little girls.

I wouldn't mind so much if you could buy a build-your-own pink rocket but pink toys are mostly limited to dolls, dustpans and brushes. Being a cleaner is a perfectly honest job but not really what we want for our

daughters. There are two toy shops in my town of Winchester - one an old-fashioned store, the other a chain. While the traditional shop mixes up the "girl" and "boy" toys, the chain store is divided into pink and blue areas. On one side they have created a pink ghetto of plastic-doll hell, while even family games like Monopoly are stacked in the blue section.

Even that perennial favourite Lego has been given a pink-over to double up on sales. Boys get a movie-merchandise scene, girls get the Friends range and can build shops, beach scenes, juice bars, and er... shops. All they need is a plastic surgery office and their Desperate Housewives film set would be complete.

I do believe kids grow out of this - puberty doesn't discriminate with piercings and black Goth shrouds.

But I'm irritated my daughter misses out on half the fun of being a child.

Jesse enjoys playing with boys she knows outside school but I wondered if she ever joins the boys in her class at playtime.

"No way," she told me. "They just want to be super heroes."

"That doesn't sound so bad," I replied. "What do you girls play then?" "We play fairies and princesses," she said.

"But you like sword fights," I argued. "Why don't you play with the boys too?" "Because the girls say I shouldn't," she mumbled. Peer pressure from the five-year-old pink police means Jesse must fall into line to be accepted.

I'm a firm believer that being groomed and feminine does not kill off brain cells - unless you sniff too much nail polish remover. But if Jesse doesn't think she can be a superhero, how do I get her to aim for the skies?



THE BLUES Siobhan fears Jesse is missing out on fun boys' stuff