



ENGLISH 102  
FINAL EXAMINATION  
FALL 2003-2004

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READING COMPREHENSION

Why Boys Don't Play With Dolls  
by  
Katha Pollitt

1. It's twenty-eight years since the founding of NOW\*, and boys still like trucks and girls still like dolls. Increasingly, we are told that the source of these robust preferences must lie outside society—in prenatal\* hormonal\* influences, brain chemistry, genes—and that feminism\* has reached its natural limits. What else could possibly explain the love of preschool girls for pretty dresses or the desire of toddler boys to own more guns than Mark from Michigan?
2. True, recent studies claim to show small cognitive\* differences between the sexes: He gets around by orienting himself in space; she does it by remembering landmarks. Time will tell if any deserve the hoopla with which each is invariably\* greeted, over the protests of the researchers themselves. But even if the results hold up (and the history of such research is not encouraging), we don't need studies of sex-differentiated brain activity in reading, say, to understand why boys and girls still seem so unlike.
3. The feminist movement has done much for some women, and something for every woman, but it has hardly turned America into a playground free of sex roles. It hasn't even got women to stop dieting or men to stop interrupting them.
4. Instead of looking at kids to "prove" that differences in behavior by sex are innate\*, we can look at the ways we raise kids as an index\* to how unfinished the feminist revolution really is, and how tentatively\* it is embraced even by adults who fully expect their daughters to enter previously male-dominated professions and their sons to change diapers.
5. I'm at a children's birthday party. "I'm sorry," one mom silently mouths to the mother of the birthday girl, who has just torn open her present—Tropical Splash Barbie. Now, you can love Barbie or you can hate Barbie, and there are feminists in both camps. But *apologize* for Barbie? Inflict Barbie, against your own convictions, on the child of a friend you know will be non too pleased?
6. Every mother in that room had spent years becoming a person who had to be taken seriously, not least by herself. Even the most attractive, I'm willing to bet, had suffered over her body's failure to fit the impossible American ideal. Given all that, it seems crazy to transmit Barbie to the next generation. Yet to reject her is to say that what Barbie represents—being sexy, thin, stylish—is unimportant, which is obviously not true, and children know it's not true.



7. Women's looks matter terribly in this society, and so Barbie, however ambivalently\*, must be passed along. After all, there are worse toys. The Cut and Style Barbie styling head, for example, a grotesque\* object intended to encourage "hair play." The grown-ups who give that probably apologize, too.
8. How happy would most parents be to have a child who flouted\* sex conventions\*? I know a lot of women, feminists, who complain in a comical, eyeball-rolling way about their sons' passion for sports: the ruined weekends, obnoxious coaches, macho values. But they would not think of discouraging their sons from participating in this activity they find so foolish. Or do they? Their husbands are sports fans, too, and they like their husbands a lot.
9. Could it be that even sports-resistant moms see athletics as part of manliness? That if their sons wanted to spend the weekend writing up their diaries, or reading, or baking, they'd find it disturbing? Too anti-social? Too lonely? Too gay?
10. Theories of innate differences in behavior are appealing. They let parents off the hook—no small recommendation in a culture that holds moms, and sometimes even dads, responsible for their children's every misstep on the road to bliss and success.
11. They allow grown-ups to take the path of least resistance to the dominant culture, which always requires less psychic effort, even if it means more actual work: Just ask the working mother who comes home exhausted and nonetheless finds it easier to pick up her son's socks than make him do it himself. They let families buy for their children, without *too* much guilt, the unbelievably sexist junk that the kids, who have been watching commercials since birth, understandably crave.
12. But the thing the theories do most of all is tell adults that the *adult* world—in which moms and dads still play by many of the old rules even as they question and fidget and chafe against them—is the way it's supposed to be. A girl with a doll and a boy with a truck "explain" why men are from Mars and women are from Venus, why wives do housework and husbands just don't understand.
13. The paradox is that the world of rigid and hierarchical\* sex roles evoked\* by determinist\* theories is already passing away. Three-year-olds may indeed insist that doctors are male and nurses are female, even if their own mother is a physician. Six-year-olds know better. These days, something like half of all medical students are female, and male applications to nursing school are inching upward. When tomorrow's three-year-olds play doctor, who's to say how they'll assign the roles?
14. With sex roles, as in every area of life, people aspire to what is possible, and conform to what is necessary. But these are not fixed, especially today. Biological determinism may reassure some adults about their present, but it is feminism, the



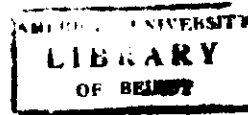
ideology of flexible and converging sex roles, that fits our children's future. And the kids, somehow, know this.

15. That's why, if you look carefully, you'll find that for every kid who fits a stereotype, there's another who's breaking one down. Sometimes it's the same kid—the boy who skateboards *and* takes cooking in his afterschool program; the girl who collects stuffed animals *and* A-pluses in science.
16. Feminists are often accused of imposing their "agenda" on children. Isn't that what adults always do, consciously and unconsciously? Kids aren't born religious, or polite, or kind, or able to remember where they put their sneakers. Inculcating\* these behaviors, and the values behind them, is a tremendous amount of work, involving many adults. We don't have a choice, really, about *whether* we should give our children messages about what it means to be male and female—they're bombarded with them from morning till night.

Taken from: Muller, Gilbert H & Harvey S. Wiener (Eds.).  
The Short Prose Reader. 10<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2002

## GLOSSARY

1. **NOW** (par. 1) **National Organization for Women**, a women's liberation movement which was founded by feminists in the United States in 1966
2. **Prenatal** (par. 1) before birth
3. **Feminism** (par. 1) advocacy of women's rights and sexual equality
4. **Hormonal** (par. 1) having to do with hormones, that is, those chemical substances that are created by living cells and trigger activity elsewhere in the body
5. **Cognitive** (par. 2) having to do with mental processes
6. **Invariably** (par. 2) unchangeably; always the same; constant, fixed
7. **Innate** (par. 4) inborn, something we are born with
8. **Index** (par. 4) indication
9. **Tentatively** (par. 4) hesitantly; undecidedly
10. **Ambivalently** (par. 7) with mixed feelings
11. **Grotesque** (par. 7) comically or repulsively distorted; ugly
12. **Flouted** (par. 8) disobeyed contemptuously; mocked, defied
13. **Conventions** (par. 8) general agreements on social behavior etc. by implicit majority consent; traditions or customs
14. **Hierarchical** (par. 13) arranged in order of rank, status, or importance
15. **Evoked** (par. 13) inspired
16. **Determinist** (par. 13) the view that acts or attributes are wholly caused by preexisting factors, such as genes
17. **Inculcating** (par. 16) instilling or introducing (a feeling, idea, etc.) into a person's mind etc.



ENGLISH 102  
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READING COMPREHENSION

Allocated time: 2 HOURS and 45 minutes

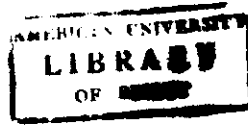
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Section: \_\_\_\_\_

Student ID# \_\_\_\_\_

Instructor: \_\_\_\_\_

- I. **MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS: Circle the letter of the correct answer. (25 pts.)**
1. **According to the author in paragraph 3, the Feminist Movement:**
    - A) Turned America into a playground free of sex roles
    - B) Did not turn America into a playground free of sex roles
    - C) Freed women from dieting at regular intervals
    - D) Stopped men from interrupting women while they're talking
  
  2. **Which sentence is true according to paragraphs 6 and 7?**
    - A) Barbie should be carried on to the next generation
    - B) What Barbie represents is unimportant to society
    - C) Barbie is a mom's worst toy because it is grotesque
    - D) Barbie is the most appropriate birthday present for a girl
  
  3. **In paragraph 10, the author states that:**
    - A) Parents dislike theories of innate differences in behavior
    - B) Parents feel guilty when they ask their kids to perform chores
    - C) The American culture holds parents accountable for their kids' misdeeds
    - D) Parents are pleased when their children disobey sex roles
  
  4. **"With sex roles, as in every area of life, people aspire to what is possible, and conform to what is necessary." (Paragraph 14)**  
**This statement means:**
    - A) People seek what is possible and abide by what is important
    - B) People reject what is crucial and aspire to what is possible
    - C) People deny what is possible and reject what is necessary
    - D) People accept what is possible and aspire to what is crucial
  
  5. **The author indicates in paragraph 13 that:**
    - A) Few males want to become nurses
    - B) Everyone wants to apply to medical school
    - C) Most doctors in hospitals are females
    - D) Male applications to nursing are increasing



**II. VOCABULARY: follow the directions for the following words and phrases. (20 pts.)**

1. Give a **synonym** for these words:

a. 'embraced' in paragraph 4 \_\_\_\_\_

b. 'crave' in paragraph 11 \_\_\_\_\_

c. 'converging' in paragraph 14 \_\_\_\_\_

2. Find a phrase in paragraph 8, which means "offensive trainers."  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Circle the correct answer

'bombarded with them' (paragraph 16) means:

A) supplied with them

B) attacked with them

C) equated with them

D) exchanged with them

**III. COMPREHENSION and RHETORICAL QUESTIONS:**

**Answer the following short-answer questions in the provided space by using coherent and concise language. (55 pts.)**

1. In your own words, state the thesis that emerges from the title and the essay.  
(10 pts.)

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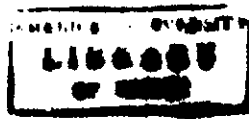
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2. Does the author believe that brain chemistry and genes are responsible for male/female roles in society? Explain and support your answer from the text.  
(6 pts.)

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3. Name two types of concrete support used in this passage to show gender differences. (6 pts.)

a) Concrete support: \_\_\_\_\_ Paragraph: \_\_\_\_\_

b) Concrete support: \_\_\_\_\_ Paragraph: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Based on the ideas presented by Pollitt throughout the essay, what would you say is the author's answer to the question she poses at the beginning of paragraph 8? Explain and support your answer from the text. (10 pts.)

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5. Paraphrase paragraph [10]: "Theories of innate differences... on the road to bliss and success." (10 pts.)

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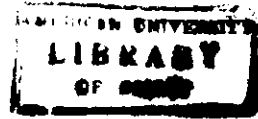
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6. Who is Pollitt's **MAIN** audience for this essay? Support your answer by quoting from the text. (5 pts.)

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7. "We don't have a choice... they're bombarded with them from morning till night." (parag. 16)

a. Explain what the author means by this concluding statement. (4 pts.)

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b. Do you agree with her? Why? Why not? (4 pts.)

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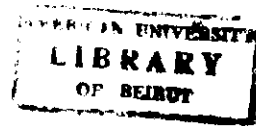
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ESSAY TOPICS

Choose ONE of the following topics and write a well-organized and concise essay of 4-6 paragraphs. Be sure to give a title, underline your thesis, and include at least 3 or 4 support paragraphs with topic sentences to explain your thesis. DO NOT choose a topic that you have already done in class.

1. Compare and contrast how boys and girls are raised and treated in Lebanon, or in any other country in the Arab world.
2. Write a cause and effect essay, which outlines the different problems that have resulted from changes in the traditional roles of husbands and wives in Lebanon, or in any other country in the Arab world.
3. Think about a quality that is important to you; for example, solitude or happiness, and then write an essay about a place or environment that captures this quality.
4. Create a central metaphor out of a familiar place; for example, "university is a jail," "the world is a jungle," or "my room is an oasis." Write an essay describing the place you have selected, and using vocabulary that reflects your central metaphor.

Over