

P = Presenter A = Alison N = Natasha

P: 'Pink is for girls, blue is for boys.' How many times have we heard that? And if you walk down the aisles of children's clothes shops you'll see rows and rows of clothes in these two colours. But where does this rule come from exactly? Are little girls genetically attracted to pink, and little boys to blue?

It seems not. You may be surprised to hear that 100 years ago, it was the exact opposite. In a popular magazine of the time, an article said "The generally accepted rule is pink for boys and blue for girls. The reason is that pink, being a stronger colour, is more suitable for a boy, while blue, which is more delicate, is prettier for a girl." The change to pink for girls and blue for boys happened only after World War II. The idea of women being equal to men emerged and, as a result, people started dressing little girls in pink. Soon advertisers got hold of the idea, and made blue the colour for boys. Since then the pink and blue stereotype has never gone away. And it's not only clothes, but all sorts of other things as well. Girls' rooms and furniture are painted pink, girls' accessories are made in pink, girls' toys are packaged in pink. South Korean photographer JeongMee Yoon was so struck by this that she created a series of photographs called

The Pink and Blue Project, where children were photographed in their rooms with all the things they possessed in either pink or blue.

But is this something we really need to worry about? Alison Carr, from the Institute of Engineering and Technology, says yes.

A: When we're choosing between one toy or another to buy as a present for a child, we're influenced by stereotypes, and if the child is a girl we'll probably choose something pink. And this is a problem, because not only are 89% of girls' toys pink, but also only a very few of them are connected with science or maths. Most girls' toys are still based on dolls and dressing up, while boys' toys are more likely to be related to building and cars. And the problem is that the toys we play with influence our interests, and even the jobs that we end up getting. If girls don't have access to as many construction toys, or mechanical and scientific toys as boys, they'll think that science and technology is 'not for them' so they'll be less likely to choose to study it at school and later at university. I think that if they were allowed to choose for themselves, girls and boys would choose the same sort of toys, and that parents need to forget about the stereotypes, about pink and blue. Toys should be the same colours for all children, red, yellow, green, whatever.

P: However Natasha Crookes, from the British Toy & Hobby Association doesn't agree.

N: I think that instead of abandoning the pink and blue thing we should use it. If we want girls to get interested in maths and science, we should package science and engineering toys in a pink box. Then maybe girls – or their parents – will start buying them.

P: Thank you Natasha, And now we move on to the social history...