

# LOST IN TRANSLATION: MALE AND FEMALE ROLES IN SOCIETY

**“An you be mine, I’ll give you to my friend.  
An you be not, hang! Beg! Starve! Die in the streets!”**

—Capulet to Juliet when she refuses to marry Paris, Act 3, sc. 5

Society’s expectations of boys and girls are usually always different. Queen Elizabeth I, the ruler of England in Shakespeare’s time, always had to defend her extraordinary ability to run the country, since women were not expected to be capable of leadership.

## In Shakespeare’s Time:

### PERCEPTIONS OF MALES

Natural capacity for learning and rational thought.....  
Leaders in society .....  
Physically strong .....

Dominant over a wife and children.....

### PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALES

Emotional, not capable of logical thought.....  
Indecent for women to be seen in public as leaders .....  
Should be beautiful for others to enjoy .....  
Submissive to the husband’s or father’s rule.....

### RESULTS

School day lasted from 6AM – 5PM  
Politicians and rulers were usually male  
Noble boys schooled in swordplay, horsemanship, etc.  
The father’s rule prevailed in the household

### RESULTS

Were kept home from school and taught domestic chores of housekeeping and child-rearing  
Only had command over children  
Beauty regimens proposed  
Had no rights as an individual citizen

As you can see, the way boys and girls are treated has changed greatly. But boys and girls are still different from each other, and are still subject to opposing expectations.

## **In Modern Times: Ask Yourself:**

Do any of these Elizabethan attitudes towards boys and girls remain today? For instance, are girls still expected to be beautiful? How and why?  
What qualities and attributes made a person popular or a leader in Elizabethan times? Are they the same now? Are they the same for men as for women?  
Do adults treat boys and girls differently? How?  
Do certain cultures place more value on being a boy or being a girl? Why?  
Do you think men get certain opportunities in life that women don’t? Do women have opportunities that men don’t get? Why do you think that?

