

Girl power

People



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As a 44 year old father of a 16 month girl, I did not know how society planned on giving my daughter a sense of femininity. I mentally prepared myself to be a Daddy and give my daughter Isabel all the support and teachings I thought I was capable of. I knew that it was going to be a daunting task a single father to a daughter to give her a sense of girl power. I was surprised to find out the toy and media industries were not onboard with giving my daughter a sense of what it was to be a strong, powerful, and anything is possible little girl in today's society.

I've noticed that the toy industry and media tend to develop and promote their products toward boys. I realized that the two industries felt that girls would learn on their own what it was to be feminine and that the toys, television shows, and movies that are predominately marketed for boys wouldn't affect that process. Poet, critic, and columnist Katha Pollitt who is best known for her " Subject to Debate" column in The Nation magazine describes her own experiences as a mother of a 3-year-old daughter and asking the questions of why the media is selling the stories they are to girls and boys.

In the essay " The Smurfette Principle," she asks the tough questions of why the she finds the high ration of male to female characters in most children's books, television shows, and movies. Pollitt points out that, " many male characters are most often cast as active and outgoing and that female characters are most often stereotyped as quiet, hair bow-wearing sidekicks, helpers, or little sisters to the boys—even when the characters are friendly, fuzzy monsters" (544). It should be the parents, producers, writers and toy manufacturer's pureresponsibilityto empower young girls.

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Pollitt states that, " Contemporary shows are either essentially all-male, like Garfield, or are organized on what I call the Smurfette principle: a group of male buddies will be accented by a lone female, stereotypically defined". Many parents don't ever think about the characters in a movie or television show and they those characters may impact are children. Growing up watching such children's shows such as the Little Rascals confirms what Pollitt in expressing in the " Smurfette Principle". It was a bunch of boys having fun and Darla was always tagging along.

Darla was portrayed as a tough little girl you didn't want to mess with. The show always had her in a dress, but if you messed with her she would give you a black eye. There was no semblance of any femininity what so ever about Darla. Producers and parents may not understand how much of an impact this character and many like it have an impact on our children. My daughter Isabel understands way more than I initially gave her credit for and she picks up on things like a sponge. Shows like the Little Rascals are giving her a false perception of what it is like to be a girl in today's society.

Cartoons play such a major role in the development of our children these days. Television, movies and toys play such a huge role in teaching are children to read, count, socialize and understand there place in society based on their gender. Much of what we see and read to our children teaches them that boys are more important than girls. Pollitt states, " The female is usually a little-sister type, a bunny in a pink dress and hair-ribbons who tags along with the adventurous bears and badgers" (345).

This is due to the fact that most producers, writers and animators are of the male persuasion. " Boys define the group, its story, and its code of values"

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(345). Pollitt understands how these people are influencing the way our little girls are perceiving the world and themselves based on what they are watching. " Girls exist only in relation to boys" (345). The toy industry is one of the biggest offenders when it comes to portraying what a girl should want in a toy and how it fits her gender.

One of the biggest offenders when it comes to commercialism of their licensed products is Sesame Street. For all the good they do promoting learning and gender equality they lack the determination to produce toys that little girls would identify with. The Muppets which are the important ones of Sesame Street are the personalities that kids identify with. All these characters which are turned into toys and pushed through commercials and ads are all male. Pollitt knew one little girl that was so upset when she found out that even Big Bird was a boy she stopped watching the show all together.

The toy industry is not teaching are young girls that it is okay to like toy cars, tractors, blocks, Transformers and many more cross gender toys. The industry is changing, companies such as Disney, Cartoon Network, Nickelodeon, and Warner Brothers are making cartoons that have very strong female characters. Animaniacs, The Last Airbender, Scooby Doo, Kim Impossible, and Gargoyles all have strong female characters that show our young girls that they can play a major role, do anything, and be just as important as any male in society.

I my daughter is finding herself even at this young age and I know she and I don't have much time to reinforce her idea of gender equality. Pollitt ends her essay with, " it sure would help if the bunnies took off their hair ribbons, and if half of the monsters were fuzzy, blue - and female" (547). I know I have

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my work cut out for me just like Pollitt does, but it is a job a truly am thankful to have. Isabel will know where she stands in the world and that she is just as important as any little boy.