

# Inside toyland essay



Inside Toyland, written by Christine L. Williams, is a look into toy stores and the race, class, and gender issues.

Williams worked about six weeks at two toy stores, Diamond Toys and Toy Warehouse, long enough to be able to detect patterns in store operations and the interactions between the workers and the costumers. She wanted to attempt to describe and analyze the rules that govern giant toy stores. Her main goal was to understand how shopping was socially organized and how it might be transformed to enhance the lives of workers. During the twentieth century, toy stores became bigger and helped suburbanization and deregulation.

Specialty toy stores existed but sold mainly to adults, not to children. Men used to be the workers at toy stores until it changed and became feminized, racially mixed, part time, and temporary. As box stores came and conquered the land, toy stores started catering to children and offering larger selections at low prices. The box stores became powerful in the flip-flop of the power going from manufacturers to the retailers. Now, the retail giants determine what they will sell and at what price they will sell it. One of the first things Williams noticed in the store was the workers themselves and the genders and races of people and the hierarchy of positions in both stores.

In both toy stores, they had directors at the top, then management, supervisors, the associates, security, and cleaning crew. In Toy Warehouse, the directors and management were all white males except for Olive an African-American women, and the associates were both men and women, all of different races. The men mainly worked in the backroom and the women

were the cashiers. The security officers at Toy Warehouse black men and the cleaning crew was three Latinas. They were also not unionized. At Diamond Toys, they were all white except for two African-American women and one Latina, who made up the cleaning crew.

They were unionized. At Diamond Toys they sold “whiteness”, people see white people as being more educated and Diamond Toys sold themselves as a toy store that had expert workers who were educated at what they did. They catered to the upper-class white women adults who would be buying the toy for the child. Toy Warehouse though, sold to the children.

Their ideal customer was the white middle-class mom. They played on their low prices and child friendly atmosphere. At both places, the manager who did the hiring used interpellation, a stereotype view of who should work where in the store and the employees themselves ended up taking on that stereotype and acting in the manner appropriate. If the manager had a certain person in mind for the position, for example, Toy Warehouse employed white women as cashiers; it would leave men out for the job, or the same with race. An example of Interpellation at Toy Warehouse was when an African-American man named Deshay who normally worked as a merchandiser, finding lost UPC's and setting out the merchandise, was asked to help at the registers but skillfully evaded the job. He said it was because he had too many other jobs to do, that he was not hired to work the cash register, and that he would file a lawsuit if they forced him to work the register.

Deshay saw himself in the stereotypes appropriate for black man that the hierarchy established at Toy Warehouse portrayed. At Toy Warehouse and at Diamond Toys, white middle-class and upper class women had the power. If they complained about a toy or the service they received, they usually were compensated. In one case, a black man tried to return a Lego kit to Diamond Toys and they said they could only give merchandise credit because he did not have a receipt he got upset. He threw the toy and it happened to hit a phone and then hit Williams in the face.

The White manager said to call the police. Williams did not press charges, but this is an example of how black men, when disagreeing with workers, are seen as a threat; but white women are instantly pleased to keep their business. Social class, gender, racism, and white privilege definitely plays a part in this. In line at Toy Warehouse, White women will often display their impatience at having to wait in line by rolling their eyes at other White people trying to see a sign of recognition that the service they were receiving was inferior because most of the cashiers were African-American women. Another example of White privilege was when an African-American manager was training Williams and customers were getting irritated. They elbowed themselves up to the counter and told Williams to call someone else up to the register.

When Williams told them that she was the one being trained, the women seemed embarrassed by their presumption. Male privilege was also a problem. At Diamond Toys when men would come into the store to shop, they expected everyone to help them at the drop of a hat. One man got angry because they could not find the upc code for a Barney sippy cup and

made Williams call the store director and he told both of them what he thought of store operations. He then threatened to write up a critique and submit it to a business journal for publication unless they sold him the sippy cup.

Other men did things that they were told not to, like use the phone and others still would bring in lists and expect the workers to go get the toys for him like at Toy Warehouse. Inside Toyland tells us about the power in our society by showing us who has the buying power. White middle to upper class White people have the power and that is who shapes what goes on in the stores and how they function. The White people get their demands met, whereas the “others” get what people give them; do not talk back or you will have the police called on you is one of the many messages that is sent out. I concur with Williams claims because I worked in retail for 5 years and saw all of this first hand myself. I never realized what it was until I read this book.

We were told to always watch out for the group of black guys that would come up to the jewelry kiosk because they would try to overcome you and steal the jewelry while you showed it to them. It was very eye opening to read this and to go back and compare it to what I had learned about people where I had worked. According to Williams, a renewed commitment to the values of the citizen consumer is necessary to bring about changes in the retail industry. She said that the political economy of shopping must change and that the retail industry must be reined in by new legislation mandating worker rights to living wages, health care, and equal opportunities.

I think that what she says is true. The whole retail system need revamped to take in the consideration of the workers, and until the consumers start to realize this and demand changes, nothing will change. I learned a lot from this book. I learned a lot about why some stores are structured the way they are and how race, class, and gender are deeply imbedded in everything in the world and in everything we do. There is nothing we do that does not involve at least one of these aspects.