

A visit to toys' r us

Life



| A Visit to Toys' R US| How Toys are Affecting Gender Roles in Growing Children| | Ji-Young Kim| | 2012-05-21| | Today's toy store is the Mecca for children. Although many traditional toy stores have died out due to the advent of electronic toys, big stores like Toys' R US have survived by flexibly by absorbing its new adversaries. Now, they sell a very wide arrange of toys, from orthodox toys like dolls and action figures to toys that followed technology's evolution, like electronic book readers and of course, video games.

However, while toys have evolved, it became clear from my observation that the buyer's attitudes about what toys are appropriate for each sex has not changed much. Also, although many previous masculine themed toys have become gender-neutral, still many more gender-biased toys carry messages of what boys and girls are expected to grow up. Still, I could see signs of improvement overall, and believe that as long as there is room for improvement, gender bias amongst children will gradually disappear.

As I coursed through the aisles, I noticed that the store divided itself into several parts: boys, girls, electronic games, and gender neutral. I found it amusing that the section for the girl's toys was in the very back of the store. I assumed that this would result in girls getting a taste of the boy's toys, but not vice versa. It would be profitable for the toy store to place the girl's section in the front, because ignored products are often placed in the most valued spots (e. g. shelves that meets eyelevel), but I guessed that the toy store assumed that it would hear complaints from the parents if they decided to place toys that way.

The front of the store, excluding the girl's section, was divided into half by gender-neutral toys and toys for boys. Interestingly, the section for boys and gender-neutral sections were not marked ' boys' but only the types of the toys (e. g. action figures), but the section for girls was clearly marked as ' girls'. Firstly what I see was the gender-neutral area contained mainly storybooks, board games, Lego, sports and musical instruments. I noticed that many toys that were traditionally considered masculine, like drums and skateboards, were now in the gender-neutral area.

However, some toys we consider traditionally gender-neutral like sports equipments, had no pink colored items (lacrosse sticks), while some other equipments, like tennis rackets, which were placed right next to the lacrosse sticks, came out in both pink and blue. I assumed that there was no market for pink lacrosse sticks, or it wasn't significant enough to fit into a toy store. Board games almost always showed ageism and reinforced sex stereotypes on their cover when depicting men or women. It is also worth noting that toys that are completely free of gender bias are based on themes completely unrelated to social activities (e. . rubber dinosaur models). One interesting board game for small children, named Battle of the Sexes by Imagination, was about testing the opposite sex about the interests of the player's sex (e. g. The number of football players in a team). Outwardly, this seems like an excellent game which allows you to get to know what the opposite sex is like, but is in fact reinforcing ideas about the norms of the opposite sex into children. The gender-neutral section also included the well-known Lego series.

Although I call this a gender-neutral toy, it is only so because it has a small amount of pink-colored sets containing pieces that are mostly women. Despite the Lego series' seemingly gender-neutral concept of building blocks, most of the toys are themed around mostly masculine activities. Many, if not most, depict warfare, a theme based on violence, which is mostly considered masculine. Adventure themed Lego toys have no women characters involved; it always depicted men who are digging up a desolate landscape and fighting mummies with, of course, pistols and swords.

Maybe, as shown in a video " Different but Equal", boys will have a better initial ability to construct Lego blocks creatively due to their superior space recognition skills, but they will be able to further reinforce their abilities by playing with the blocks frequently, and ultimately resulting in reinforcing the idea that this ability is male-oriented. However, as recent studies show, women have just as much potential to do as well as men do on those areas. Sadly, parents who have daughters may be ignorant of these facts and may be intent on getting their daughters' dolls rather than block toys.

Still, the fact that there are Lego toys aimed for girls can mean things have improved such as Lego Friends, for only a decade ago it was even hard to find women figures in Lego products. It may be that some parents are shifting their paradigms and starting to get children what they wish for. The electronics corner was filled with toys that included characters symbolizing the peak of masculinity. For instance, the famous Super Mario series from Nintendo that has lasted for more than 30 years as a bestseller series, almost always depicts Mario, the main hero of the series, rescuing Princess Peach, the traditional helpless princess from danger.

Mario has mustaches and grows in size and power when he consumes mushrooms, symbolizing the masculine features of a man, while Princess Peach wears pink frilly dresses, is always helpless and carries an umbrella, not to mention wearing makeup and jewelry. I believe that the video game company is unwilling to discard this facet of the game, because it has sold well for more than 30 years by creating games that live up to gender stereotypes.

In rare cases the main character was a heroine, the female is either wearing a robotic outfit that covers the entire body and has a gun in the place of her hand (Metroid, Nintendo) or dressed up in formal dresses (The Island Princess, Nintendo). It was clear that the former was meant for boys and the latter for girls. Most video games for boys were about destroying or somehow vanquishing the opponent, reinforcing the idea of 'control' and 'power', and ultimately in aggressive behavior.

The section with toys for boys was filled with items that emphasize masculinity, especially action figures. Figures of men (especially superheroes and professional wrestlers with bulging muscles and tattoos) show boys from an early age how an 'ideal' man should look like. These toys will very likely lead to respect of power from a very early age, and will affect their speech style and ultimately reinforce differences in gender roles. Other than action figures, other notable toys were racecars and other automobiles, especially fighter planes.

These toys would most probably give boys the idea of what would be 'cool' or what a 'cool job' looks like. These jobs have a thing in common: they are all risk-taking, and therefore toys are teaching boys to be risk-takers from an

early point of their lives, as described in the video " Different but Equal", although we have outlived the stone age. On the other hand, the girls' toy section was the polar opposite: the whole area was an oversized dollhouse covered from start to end with pink. Merchandises included basic make-up, small frilly dresses for children and of course, dolls.

All dolls were very slim and tall, and mostly had makeup on their faces, showing contrast to the tattooed and muscular action figures. These dolls will help keep future women in line by building an image of an ideal woman within a girl's head, from a very early age. One interesting feature was that while there were Caucasian and African American dolls, there were none depicting Asians, perhaps because Asians have a longing for whiter skin, and prefer Caucasian over Asian dolls. It explicitly shows the place of Asians in American society: a race that aspires to become Caucasians, both in and outwardly.

That clearly affects Asian girls, or Asian mothers, as there seems to be no market for Asian dolls, and thus reinforces the ' traditional female sex behaviors' white girls are often encouraged to follow (Lips, 203). On the day of May 19th, 2012, I got a chance to interview Berj, one of the managers of the store. He had short black hair, dark shiny eyes, and was wearing a uniform of white pants and a shirt with the ' ToysRUS' logo stitched into it. Every time before he started to speak, he cleaned his throat with a weird sound. Our short ten-minute interview began in a small manager's room at the corner of the store.

The interview with Berj revealed that the directions for the positioning of the toys came from higher up, specifically from a manual distributed from the <https://assignbuster.com/a-visit-to-toys-r-us/>

main company. This showed that the positioning of toys were carefully planned to make the most profit possible, and was considered a major factor in profit-making. Such systematic planning showed that the company was much more willing to cope and follow the current set system of sexual assignment, rather than challenge it. I could not fault them much; companies are profit-driven, and it is only natural and easier to follow the rules rather than challenge them. In the toy store I could see a whole generation repeating the footsteps of its former. Parents will buy for their children what they think is right and appropriate, and will enforce those regulations on them if necessary. And so, children who grow up accustomed to those restrictions and bonds will naturally repeat the former generation. Most, if not all boys will play with action figures depicting machismo men, and most girls will always prefer dolls over toys. It was like seeing a never-ending cycle; in Buddhist terms, samsara. Fortunately though, I could see signs of hope.

By the works of countless feminists beforehand, we can see children's movies like Mulan, where the heroine actually takes his father's place in war, or skateboards created for girls. Although these examples aren't completely free of gender bias in that Mulan is still a slim and beautiful girl and those skateboards come in pink, I believe that girls (and boys) who grow up experiencing these new changes will become adults who won't enforce their views as strongly as their parents did, and maybe someday Americans will be able to overcome this typical bias as we can never imagine.

It won't be anytime soon, but someday they will. Reference " The Human Sexes (Part One) - Different But Equal. " The Human Sexes (Part One) -

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Different But Equal. Web. 20 May 2012. . Hillary Lips, " Gender role socialization: Lessons in femininity. " Pp. 197-216 in Jo Freeman (ed.), Women: A Feminist Perspective. Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, 1989.