

Why Should Toys be Marketed as Gender Neutral?

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Abstract

Endorsing gender-neutral toys may reduce gender stereotypes and provide children with a broader self-concept, including a wider range of career options. It also reduces in-group bias by obviating the need for labels. Additionally, gender-neutral toys might be a step to reducing prejudice towards people who display cross-sex interests, and it has the potential to expand children's self-concept in terms of how they might become in the future. Children should not be compelled to play with gender-specific toys, but when do parents realize they are exacerbating the situation? Promoting gender-specific toys may become one of the origins of hegemonic masculinity when boys are harshly chastised for playing with "feminine" toys. Further research is encouraged to assess the impact of gender-neutral toys.

Keywords

Children; Toys; Gender; Gender-neutral; Gender-specific; In-group bias; Prejudice; Stereotypes.

1. Introduction

If toys primarily marketed to one gender can only be played by that gender, it is likely to result in gender exclusion. Gender preconceptions are reinforced as a result of this exclusion. When one toy is labeled for boys or girls, a list of which toys are appropriate for whom is created. Some toys are designed based on particular vocations, such as cooking sets for girls and toy guns for boys. Girls are perceived to be future caregivers who are able to cook, and boys are perceived to be future protectors to engage in careers like police officers. Gender labels could be restricting children's thoughts about what they could do as a future career and a mindset of a traditional gender role [1]. Unfortunately, children's toys, especially infants' toys, are always chosen by their parents. Hence, when parents buy a gender-specific toy for their child, the child is then reinforced by gender prejudices. Nonetheless, sometimes parents do not have much choice of purchasing gender-neutral toys when the stores clearly separate toys with boys' and girls' sections. For instance, parents are preoccupied with what the stores recommend to them through symbolic messages such as labeling a section or an entire row as toys for boys and toys for girls. On the other hand, they may ask the service there for recommendations for their child, which are often gender-based. To break down gender preconceptions, toys should be marketed as gender-neutral.

2. Benefits of Marketing Toys as Gender-Neutral

2.1. Gender-Neutral Toys Reduce Hegemonic Masculinity

The problem with hegemonic masculinity is that our society has highly preferred masculine traits over feminine traits, which leads to the dominance of wanting masculine traits more in men and significantly divides females to their traditional femininity. As men become more masculine in their boldness and courage, feminine traits are drastically stigmatized, such as reaching out for help from others or showing signs of weakness. Such socialized trends tend to

create a climate for alienation. Alienation prevents the well-being of others in a particular social group, as they become outsiders or misfits of society. Hence, the problem of hegemonic masculinity can be cured by beginning the process of making toys more gender-neutral.

Criticizing boys harder for playing with feminine toys could become one of the roots of hegemonic masculinity even though boys and girls are both bound to become potential parents (father and mother). When boys play with baby dolls, they are perceived much more negatively than a girl playing with trucks who would hardly receive any criticism or mocking [3]. As a result, boys are indeed driven to appear more masculine to escape criticism from their society and for wanting to seem like a "strong man."

Taking that into account, according to Jadva et al., the preferential looking paradigm manifests that both girls and boys prefer reddish colors over blue, and rounded shapes over angular shapes [2]. Therefore, it does not make sense to assign the color pink exclusively to girls and the color blue exclusively to boys. Moreover, baby dolls as rounded shapes toys should be more appealing to both boys and girls. With that in mind, the roles for parenting are equal in that men should also be able to demonstrate nurturing and caring traits during play. The subtle message here is that femininity is perceived as less valuable, so it is relatively normative for girls to look up to and acquire masculine traits, but it is unacceptable for boys to develop feminine characteristics [3]. Besides, this fear to appear feminine among men is one of the characteristics of hegemonic masculinity. Therefore, one of the benefits of gender-neutral toys is not intentionally letting boys learn to avoid and degrade feminine traits. Consequently, boys are less likely to adopt an adverse opinion toward femininity and women in general.

2.2. Gender-Neutral Toys Provide A Broader Self-Concept and Career Choices

Furthermore, endorsing gender-neutral toys might decrease gender stereotypes and provide a broader self-concept for children, including their range of career choices. It also mitigates in-group bias through having non-preferential treatment towards a certain gender or sexuality by not labeling toys. Moreover, gender-neutral toys could be a start to reducing people's discrimination toward those individuals who are expressing cross-sex behaviors, allowing for more gender-role fluidity. In addition, it could break through the limitations for children's self-concept in what they can become in the future. For example, caregiving roles could also be seen as a wonderful occupation for men, and the S.T.E.M. (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) field can be suited towards women as well. While not implying that many more boys would be teachers and nurses, or girls would be scientists and engineers, just by playing gender-neutral toys [4]. Nonetheless, these toys convey the suggestion for gender aschematic, which means not to use gender as a silent schema to interpret the world [5]. Thus, gender-neutral toys provide children the tendency to be more acknowledged and confident for setting career goals as they please.

3. The Views and reactions of Gender-Neutral Toys

3.1. Current Opinions of Gender-Neutral Toys

Supporters of gender-neutral toys point out that giving children the freedom to play with anything they choose empowers them. On the other hand, some parents think that gender-specific toy is a minor issue compared to the more significant issues at stake. Others disagree since they believe their children will always choose a toy that matches their gender. Nevertheless, research indicates that this is not always the case until "gender categories" have been created. Researchers argue that children's concept of gender norms sometimes is impacted by their parents, as they "nominate toys" [6] to newborns, they will absorb different indications from adults regarding the appropriateness of toys, and older kids will begin to draw their cues from other factors, such as the product's color scheme [6]. "Let Toys Be Toys" is part

of a more extensive discussion over gender-neutral childcare, which many parents oppose [7]. Opponents of gender-neutral parenting say that gender-neutral toys are damaging their children by confusing them, which will affect how they engage with the public and their classmates as they grow.

3.2. Parents' Reactions to the Situation

Children should not be forced to play with toys unique to their gender, but when do parents recognize that they are exaggerating the situation? Yet the irony is because we and the whole society are the ones who created the gendered specific toys and assigned pink for girls and blue for boys in the first place. Toys should have no other purpose than to enhance children's experience of playing. When parents get enraged about situations concerning their children, they are not effectively solving the problems. There are many dramas around this problem, but it's also adding to the gender-neutral vs. gender-specific parent debate [8]. Arguments and hate comments from both sides are pointless and do nothing to resolve the situation. Once, a lady created a gender-neutral clothing line on Kickstarter. She received hate letters for that, including one that said: "forcing children to wear her t-shirts constituted child cruelty" and another that said she was a "frustrated feminist who was attempting to convert her children queer" [9]. These messages are overwhelming and do not solve our current issue.

4. Many Other Items Should Also Be Marketed As Gender-neutral

In addition to toys, other items should also be marketed in a gender-neutral manner. For instance, shaving cream, razors, deodorant, hair coloring, and other items are all used in the same way and are anticipated to provide the same outcomes, with none of them interacting differently depending on the gender of the customers [10]. Gender-specific products foster incorrect gender preconceptions and may even lead to economic discrimination. For instance, male deodorants are woody and smoky, whereas female deodorants are flowery and fresh. However, both men and women have natural body odor, so it is not necessary to assign different scents to each gender. With this being said, the gender-separated product not only reinforces prejudices and stereotypes [10]. Since female deodorants are often smaller and more expensive than male deodorants, women are subjected to a higher tax than males, known as the pink tax [11]. To avoid gender stereotyping and financial discrimination, toys and other items should be marketed as gender-neutral.

5. Literature References

| Products | Number of Products* | Women's Average | Men's Average | Price Difference | Percent Difference |
|--------------|---------------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Dress Pants | 40 | \$75.66 | \$71.71 | \$3.95 | 6% |
| Dress Shirts | 40 | \$58.11 | \$51.46 | \$6.65 | 13% |
| Sweaters | 42 | \$63.19 | \$59.45 | \$3.74 | 6% |
| Jeans | 50 | \$62.75 | \$57.09 | \$5.66 | 10% |
| Shirts | 40 | \$29.23 | \$25.51 | \$3.72 | 15% |
| Socks | 40 | \$9.98 | \$9.73 | \$0.25 | 3% |
| Underwear | 40 | \$8.46 | \$10.90 | (\$2.44) | 29% |
| Total | 292 | \$307.38 | \$285.85 | \$21.53 | 8% |

Figure 1. [12] Demonstration of pink tax

6. Conclusion

There is a need to combat gender stereotypes presented in children's toys to create a more gender-neutral market and a more gender-equal society. They are adamant about instilling in youngsters the belief they can use with whatever toy they desire, regardless of their gender. Toys for children have traditionally been occupation-based, such as baby dolls and cooking toys for girls and toy cars and toolsets for boys. With princess toys for girls and heroic Star Wars toys for boys, gender norms have been still evidently concerning in recent years. Finally, several adverts also advocate for gender equality. An advertisement in a Canadian Tire catalog suggested that children may play with anything they wish. Apparel manufacturers have also campaigned for more unisex clothing to be manufactured for children. In an advertisement that appeared recently, Celine Dion advocated for gender equality while marketing gender-neutral toys. At the same time, we still have a long way to go for this matter.

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