

Data Collection Assignment #1B

Toys are more than simple objects for children to play with. Toys allow children to use their imaginations and imagine themselves in a variety of roles and situations. In addition, toys become a method that allows children to explore the world. Since the majority of children spend large amounts of their time playing with toys, the types of toys that parents chose for their kids to play with becomes very important. The textbook states that "parents often encourage their children to develop gender-typed interests by providing different kinds of toys for their daughters and sons" (pg. 86). However, often times parents are not aware that by providing different types of toys they are contributing to the stereotyping of their children according to their gender.

Additionally, according to the book, adults give different toys to infants based on the infant's gender (pg. 80). "Girl" toys tend to be associated with nurturance and passive play, while "boy" toys tend to be associated with active and aggressive play. Thus, it is apparent that the creation of gender stereotypes begins very early in life. For this assignment, I visited a TOYS R US store to see if girl and boy toys were marketed differently from one another. I have been to many toy stores before, especially because I have a 7-year-old brother and a 9-year-old sister. However, I have never been so aware of all the gender stereotypes that I saw reflected on the great majority of the toys. What I noticed and found after more than an hour of browsing around was quite shocking and discouraging.

METHOD

I went to the Burnsville TOYS R US on a Tuesday evening. I walked in and decided to browse around in order of how the toy sections were arranged in the store. I looked at every section of the store making note of whether girl and boy sections were together or separate from each other. I also looked at how the toys were arranged: by age or manufacturer. I also made note of the colors, written words and messages on the toys, as well as the pictures of children on the covers of the boxes. I looked for differences in color patterns, word choice patterns, and little details such as toy arrangements and locations of toys relative to one another. I also paid attention to see if one particular section of the store was bigger. After I looked around for a while I left the store without having had anyone approach me to see if I needed help.

Results:

The first thing I did was look at the "Imaginarium Play Zone." Right Away I found that all of the LEGO toys were targeted for boys. All of the boxes featured male sports characters, G.I. Joe's, Tonka, Spiderman, etc. drawings on the covers. The rest of the toys were arranged by age and by gender. The counters were divided in half, and each half had boy and girl toys. I found it quite disturbing that the section of the store that was suppose to encourage creativity and learning had only 2 girls featured on the covers of the toys! I must have looked at hundreds of toys, and to only find 2 girls on the covers was very shocking and disappointing. Furthermore, I was amazed at the fact that the great majority of "creative toys" that were targeted towards girls dealt with making jewelry and accessories, while the toys

targeted towards boys dealt with chemistry, science, and invention/exploration sets. The "interactive learning" Toys were the only toys out of this section that seemed to be more gender neutral, although that was probably only around 10% of the toys. Even though the toys were "neutral" and were in bright, bold colors, the pictures on the packages were almost completely of boys. The "Toddlers/Preschool" part of the store had toys arranged side by side, with girl toys right next to boy toys. I noticed a similar trend in these toys. The toys for girls deal a lot with houses and dolls. A lot of "sweet sounds home" toys were placed next to "animal sounds farm" toys, which seemed very odd to me. I mean who would want a house that does nothing but play "sweet sounds," and what exactly are sweet sounds? I know that if I were a kid I would rather have a farm. I also noticed that the rest of the toys for girls were all "my first baby" or "my first princess dolls." On the other hand, toys for boys were "rescue heroes" and "baby" action heroes (which by the way were all male figures). The "Barbie/dolls/dress up/pretend food" section of the store was next. I could not help but notice how the pink and purple shiny colors were all around. The section was no longer divided by age, it was divided by manufacturers. I looked around and the words that seemed to describe most of the toys were words such as "fairy tale," "princess," "friends/friendship," "family," "fantasy," "fashion/trendy," and "styling."

All of the dolls and barbies had girls pictured on the cover, and the majority of them were sitting down, slouching, and in very "passive" positions. Something that was also very shocking to me was the fact that these dolls called "Lil' Bratz" had the following statement all over the box: "The little girls with big fashion sense!" Another version of these same dolls called "Bratz" said: "The girls with a passion for fashion." The rest of the dolls had statements dealing with fashion, beauty, and nurturance or "being a good mommy, " and having babies that "look and feel real."

The dress up section was invaded with tons of shiny dresses, shoes, accessories, and of course plenty of makeup. The pretend food aisle was full of tea cup sets, pretend food and barbeque toys that had pictures of girls making the food and boys eating it or sitting down while waiting for their food.

As I moved to the "boys" section of the store I noticed that the "sports" section that has all of the balls, bikes, skates and what not was right next to the boys section, actually sort of intertwined with it. The boys section was also arranged by manufacturers and it was further subdivided into action figures, cars, radio control cars, workshop tools, etc. sections. The contrast of the colors of the toys was very noticeable. Bright, bold colors like black, red, green, and yellow were all over the place. The words that stood out more were words such as the following: "beast," "turbo," "monster jam," "blasting," "wild," "force," "power," "battles," and "action."

Also, all of the boys pictured on the covers were very active. They were jumping, kicking, fighting, running, jumping, or doing some sort of crazy leap. I was also shocked at the fact that some wrestling action figures had messages such as "toothless aggression doll" and "flex'em monsters."

There was also a huge subsection with toys that dealt with construction work, garden work, electronics, etc. and on the cover these toys had pictures of little boys imitating their dads. And as oppose as the dress up section in the girls side of the store, the "dress up" section for the boys section was full of customs of all sorts of "heroes." At

first I thought that the boy section of the store seemed larger, but after looking around I found out that both sections were around the same size.

Conclusions and Implications:

I think that this experience made me really aware of the ways that our culture and society imposes gender stereotypes on people at a very young age. It seems that our society places a lot of emphasis on having children play with the "right types" or "appropriate" toys. It was really sad for me to realize that society has a pre-conceived notion of what boys and girls should do, act like, and be concerned with. This is reflected in the variety and availability of toys that are presented to children. From looking around the toy store I got the message that little girls should only be concerned with fashion and beauty because that is what society praises, values, emphasizes. It was extremely sad for me to see statements of "little girls having great fashion sense" because manufacturers (as well as the rest of society) are teaching girls at a very young age that appearances should be a priority because they are the only things that matter.

Another sad message that I got was that little girls should only play with dolls, babies, and nurseries because after all, that is what they are going to have to do with the rest of their lives: take care of children and look after their home. On the other hand, little boys are expected to want to be some sort of "hero" and they are suppose to be powerful, aggressive, handy, active, and fearless. Little boys are suppose to have others look up to them and they are expected to be tough and not show emotions. Now more than ever I feel that exposure to this kind of toys limits the choices and roles of women and men. As stated in the book, "unfortunately, repeated play with stereotyped toys may keep children from developing broader competencies" (pg. 80).

If children grow up playing with stereotyped toys, then chances are they are going to start believing these stereotypes. And if children start to believe in these stereotypes then they are likely to grow up and not be all that they can be or want to be. They might feel that they have to act in ways that are consistent to their stereotypes, thus not achieving their goals, dreams, and potentials. Doing this assignment made me more aware of how gender stereotypes are inflected in people at a very young age. This assignment also made me aware of the importance of carefully choosing the toys and experiences that we expose children to. I only hope that all of this information and experiences help me if I ever have children of my own.