



Contemporaneity of Language and Literature in the Robotized Millennium

Vol: 2(1), 2020

REST Publisher

ISBN No: 978-81-936097-3-6

Website: <http://restpublisher.com/book-series/cllrm/>

Toys - The Gendered tools

Tippabhotla Vyomakesisri

PhD Research Scholar, Osmania University

vyomakesi@yahoo.co.in

Abstract

Gender stereotyping and Gender conformity come in different forms. Toys are no exception. Toys are not only a source of fun and play but they are also a window to the world through which children learn to walk, talk, develop cognitive and motor skills. They also play a vital role in social, emotional and language development in children. For this very reason parents observe their child's behaviour and supply them with toys that support their passions. This paper discusses how toys are tools for creating and breaking the gender binary. It is important to note that toys can negatively impact a child's development through hidden messages about social issues. These include gender and racial inequalities as the most serious. Parents should try to provide their children with gender neutral toys and teach them to be tolerant. In addition, teaching boys and girls to play with all toys will provide them with a sufficient means of teaching them equal opportunities in life.

1. Introduction

It is a widely acknowledged fact that toys are a quintessential part of every child's Childhood. Without toys there is no culture. In the absence of mass-produced and mass-marketed toys, kids turn everyday objects into games, puzzles, imaginative friends and enemies. Toys can be the centre of lonely meditation and recreation, objects, or social interaction. Over the last century, toys have been the centre of a huge industry, commercializing and commodifying childhood. They became signs of cultural controversy, serious and less serious scholarship topics, and sometimes tools of psychological research. Today's toys are full of meaning. Researcher and writer Brian Sutton Smith emphasize in his books "Toys as Culture and Play of Ambiguity", that toys mean different things to different people. When these meanings fuse with each other, there's a lot of controversy about Barbie's waist size, G.I. Joe's guns etc. As a result, toys have become potential playthings providing children with entertainment and imagination while teaching strict social norms. They bring home the mess of mass consumer culture, enormous benefits to multinational organizations whose public relations office is committed to putting the interests of children first. Psychologists have added a few drops of their own to this whirlwind of conflicting interests and ideas. It's a well-known fact that no child plays with the same toy over and over again. As the child grows so does his taste, preference and the play changes eventually the toys too transform. Jean Piaget, in her 1952 classic, *Play, Dreams, and Imitation in Childhood*, inquired into children's changing styles of play. Catherine Tamis-LeMonda, a psychologist of New York University traced the evolution of play from sensorimotor exploration to non-symbolic manipulation to symbolic play, exploring the blurry borderlines between Piaget's clear-cut stages and how each stage contains a host of minor shifts that may eventually lead to revolutions. Although much of the impetus for these shifts comes from the child, the parents are not just passive observers. "Even if parents don't know what they are doing, parents encourage this different level of play," says TamisLemonda. Play helps children teach social roles for better or for worse. When a boy notices that certain toys are reserved for girls, or violent sports are banned, he finds something about the society in which he lives. "It teaches children about social practices and social norms, both good and bad," says Tamis-Lemonda.

2. Gender Construction through Toys

Regardless of the roots of gender-specific toy preferences, it's clear that toys and toy advertising have a strong impact on how children construct their gender identity. Girls between the ages of five and eight who were exposed to Barbie dolls felt worse about their bodies than girls who are exposed to dolls with a more realistic physique. This emerges from a study recently published by the University of Sussex psychologist Helga Dittmar and her colleagues in *Developmental Psychology*. In a recent article, Sex Role, Jennifer Pike, and Nancy Jennings reported that the gendered aspects of television advertising particularly influenced boys. If boys watched an ad in which girls were playing with a particular toy, they were much less likely to play with that toy when given the opportunity. Whether children play with boys 'or girls' toys has important implications for the nature of their play, says Isabel Cherni, a developmental psychologist at Crabton University. Cherni and her colleagues have found that toys with female stereotypes promote the most complex play in children of 18-47 months. But as they get older, their gender stereotypes about toys grow stronger. Boys, in particular, are more likely to avoid playing with "girl's toys", owing to the fear of social consequences from their peers.

A toy wouldn't disrupt decades of socializing, which has led us to believe boys wear blue, have short hair, and play with trucks, while girls like pink, have long hair and play with Barbie dolls or kitchen sets. In particular, it doesn't change the way boys learn that masculinity is good and femininity is weak. But research shows that it is linked to sexual abuse.

3. Gendered Toys Marketing – Color And Role Symbolism

The color Pink and Blue instantly bring the gender associated with them i.e. pink is for girls and blue is for boys. We often find that the toys that are marketed for boys that are often found in the toy stores are mostly blue and are more of action-oriented, superheroes, war based trucks, tanks etc. and tend to be more aggressive while the toys marketed for girls come in pink color that are usually symbolic of Passiveness, stressing beauty and nurturing and are mostly barbie dolls, Kitchen sets, princesses etc. This wasn't the case earlier though. By the turn of the 20th C toy marketers had potentially found out that if toys were manufactured according to the tastes of the wealthy by adhering to strict gender binary they would market more. This is how the concept of Pink for girls and Blue for boys was born. Linked to the type of toys we play with, it was observed that by giving barbie dolls, princesses and kitchen sets for girls, we implicitly pass on the quality of passiveness and condition the minds of the girls to strive for beauty, whereas by giving toys like trucks, tanks, superheroes figures, guns etc. we are stereotyping the gender roles. This thus gives way for gender domination in the later lives of children. On careful examination of Lego Sets, we clearly understand that the sets manufactured and marketed by them demonstrate a clear dichotomy by emphasizing skilled professions, adventures, building expertise, saving people etc. for boys and for girls, stressing the importance of staying and looking beautiful, preoccupied with sitting at home, going to the beach, and shopping and taking care of others. This in a way makes way for picturizing girls as subordinate to boys that would psychologically prepare themselves to accept the same in their life. When Elaine Blakemore, a psychologist at Indiana University and Purdue University in Fort Wayne, asked her students about the potential benefits of different toys for gender and children's development she found out that, the toys that were considered moderately masculine or neutral were considered extremely positive. On the other hand, "female and male toys seem to be associated with the worst aspects of sexual behavior: the focus on appearance in girls and the emphasis on violence in boys."

4. Gender Tolerance through Gender Non - Conforming Toys

When Mattel's world's first gender-neutral doll was released, it was considered a positive move. But there was always a risk of Gender neutrality representing an absence of Gender and not the tolerance of Gender expression. Gender Neutral toys doesn't connote being tomboyish or masculine by moving away from femininity. Even the body shape, facial features, dressing styles cannot be changed to appeal to what we call gender neutrality. Instead its wise to consider doing something gender nonconforming with the toys. Though they are not enough to break gender stereotypes but they can be a good start.

5. Conclusion

The world of toys is sexist, the obsession of binaries and the relentless imposition of tired old gender norms on children. We need choices that do not impose these worn-out, sexist standards on the developing brain. Mattel must be applauded for seeing the demand/ need for gender-neutral toys. Although this is a fast, fashionable money grab, it reflects how far society has come in terms of non-binary acceptance in just a few years.

References

- [1]. <https://www.psychologicalscience.org/observer/toy-stories>
- [2]. <https://theconversation.com/how-toys-became-gendered-and-why-itll-take-more-than-a-gender-neutral-doll-to-change-how-boys-perceive-femininity-124386>
- [3]. Jo B. Paoletti. *Pink and Blue: Telling the Boys from the Girls in America*. Indiana University Press, February 6, 2012.
- [4]. <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/05/legos/484115/>
- [5]. <https://humanparts.medium.com/mattels-gender-neutral-dolls-don-t-represent-real-nonbinary-people-601df69d4d5b>