# Proposal to Limit Gender Stereotypes in Children's Toys and Clothing

## Abstract

Between the early 1980s way into the 1990s when women were struggling to bridge the gap in employment and education as well as breaking into top industrial and political ranks, one sector was unfortunately headed in the wrong direction. Today’s toy world resembles that of the 1950s and not one in the 21st Century. According to Elizabeth Sweet of the University of California, who is a sociologist in gender inequality and is involved in children’s study, toys in the era preceding the turn of the century were gender specific such that, particular toys were designated for boys while others bearing particular features were specifically meant for girls (Weisgram, Fulcher and Dinella, 2014).. Although the magnitude of this trend has progressively deteriorated presently in the 21st Century, there still exist the gender stereotypes in children’s clothing and toys.

The trend has been progressive from the mid-1990s where advertising based on gender returned to the levels of the mid Twentieth Century, which has gradually found its way into the 21st Century. Critics are quick to blame the second-wave feminism backlash and shrewd marketing strategies to nostalgic characteristic gift-giving grand-parents who emphasize on gender specific clothing and toys of different versions of similar merchandise.

## Introduction

To the majority of parents, the inclination and attraction towards purchasing dissimilar color-coded shopping merchandise for boys and girls feels natural denoting a belief of discrete interests and innate gender differences. However, in recent times, various campaigns such as No Gender December and Let Toys Be Toys have become the talk of town featuring in major international news channels for advocating desegregated toy channels and recommending reorganization by interest or theme instead. According to Trawick-Smith et.al (2015), rather than the general belief that science kits and trucks are meant for boys while crafts and dolls are meant to be girls’ toys, these campaigns demand that all toys belong to children of ether gender. The former President of the United States, Barack Obama, also supported this notion when he proposed that girls would well fit in T-ball sets as ideal gifts. He even stated that it was his intention to disintegrate the gender stereotypes that were reminiscent of the early 1950s and 1960s.

Children use toys to explore interests, experiment, and try out new roles as explained by a Harvard Medical School psychologist, Susan Linn who also doubles up as the executive director of a campaign based in Boston. Toy marketing that is rigidly gendered directs children on the things that should interest them, which is an imposition on their innate childhood choices. It also directs children on the manner that they should behave and ultimately shaping the kind of individuals they should be. This approach is an unhealthy psychological aspect in the growth and development of the child since children should have the discretion to be children and to enjoy their childhood time as children.

## Research problem

Recent research reveals that toys in today’s world are divided by gender, similar to how the situation was five decades ago only in a much lesser magnitude. There still exists gendered items in stores nowadays just like in previous eras when gender discrimination was an acceptable social tendency. Apparently, these research studies have demonstrated that children are more inclined to develop lasting memories of and pay more attention to the apparel and toys that they are directed to believe belong to their gender.

A case in point is the study by Marilyn Bradbard, a psychologist in child behavior. She sought to examine memory tests on children and discern their capacity to distinguish gender-specific toys in unfamiliar boxes. She discovered that little girls had a more comprehensive recollection of the boxes that had a girly nature in them and vice versa. Vasquez (2014) contends that organizing children products using gender tends to create impediments for children to explore the broad variety of activities and toys available.

## Research Methodology and Rationalization

The recent past has witnessed a shift towards the gradual eradication of gender stereotypes in children’s clothing and toys (Halim et.al, 2013). Toys R Us and Wal-Mart have been on the front line in this campaign to tone down their marketing strategies that are gender specific with regard to children. Gender based beddings for children have also experienced a tremendous reduction as large retail companies have opted to face out the use of gender based colors such as blue and pink to distinguish girls’ and boys‘ preferences respectively.

Likewise, many government departments have erased the concept of labeling homes, toyshops and entertainment facilities for children using gender based criteria. Wong and Hines (2015) assert that the majority of companies are continuously responding to their social media critics who have embarked on an aggressive campaign to limit and eventually eradicate gender specific apparel and toys for children. Since social media is a powerful marketing tool in reaching out to potential clientele and positively influencing them, major companies have currently resorted to marketing non-gender apparel and toys for children in a bid to woo many more potential clients.

Several researches have revealed that competition in the retail business has compelled many companies to follow suit in eliminating the stereotypes that would rather have gender based clothing and toys for children. This situation is compounded further by the decision of large multinationals such as Toys for Us and Wal-Mart to lead the way in selling children merchandise that has no gender based affiliation. Psychologists have also been at the forefront in applauding this move by large multinationals, where they cite the removal of gender labels as a fundamental step in the total obliteration of gender stereotypes. Monmouth University psychologist Lisa Dinella indicated the power of color in influencing the choice of children with regard to apparel and toys. She discerned that young girls were more likely to choose airplane and truck toys if such toys were colored pink. This goes to show the influence that color has on the choice of toys by children.

## Conclusion

The concept of gender segmentation has over the years led to young boys and girls desisting from playing together at much younger ages. This stereotyped rigidity of gender roles is both unhealthy and detrimental to the growth and development of children and their consequent relationship with each other later in life. It should be noted that both females and males have distinct similarities, which they can positively share and expound in the absence of such stereotype mentality of likes and dislikes.

According to Dinella, much of the social inequality processes have in recent times markedly and primarily been caused by the marketing strategies that tend to normalize the aspect of female and male differences. This normalization is initially instilled in children through the choice of their clothes and toys. It is subsequently extended later in life to such children’s characteristics, occupations and future roles.

## References

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