Toys Are Not Us

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Years ago, I remember seeing a little boy waiting in line at the Burbank Airport, holding a baby doll. I also remember thinking to myself how strange that looked. I immediately hated that these stereotypical thoughts crossed my mind, but I just couldn’t help it. A boy holding a “girl toy” was definitely something I did not see every day. Normally, I saw boys holding trucks or action figures, like Spiderman. In my head I knew that there was absolutely nothing wrong with this little boy, but by the way people looked at him, you would have thought he had grown two heads. Whether we choose to believe it or not, stereotypes are everywhere and they start at a young age: there are “boy toys” and then there are “girl toys.” Unfortunately, kids who are not following the correct toy rules are considered weird. All people should be both independent and sensitive. It is important for males and females to be able to work, cook, and clean. I think little boys and girls should be able to play with whatever toys interest them, no matter what gender the toys are intended for.

I think toy stores do a horrible job of making it easy to play with the opposite sex’s toys. All the girl toys, like Barbie dolls and dress-up clothes, are located in one section. The same goes for boy toys: all Hot Wheels and Nerf guns are located in their own section which is separate from the girl-toy aisles. I think this toy segregation in many toy stores is causing little kids to feel forced to play with gender-assigned toys in order to be considered normal. This issue is one of the reasons children today are afraid to be original. In the article, “Toys Start the Equality Rift,” Katrin Bennhold explains that toys are characterized by the colors pink (for girls) and blue (for boys). She points out that children’s toys are also heavily determined by gender roles. For example, girls are supposed to be more nurturing, so people think they need to play with dolls and kitchen sets. Likewise, boys tend to be more adventurous and rough, so they are expected to play with tools and monster trucks (Bennhold). If children do not solidly fit into the correct gender mold, people view them as weird or unnatural. Bennhold explains that many girls today enjoy building things out of LEGOs and some boys like to play with stove sets. Bennhold suggests that parents should introduce gender-neutral toys to their children and allow them to choose which toys they want to play with and how to play with them.
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Bennhold states that stereotyping is also very prevalent in the adult world. She points out that the more nurturing jobs, such as teaching and nursing, are considered female jobs, so they pay less. I had never really thought about this issue, but it could not be truer. Males earn more money because society thinks that the man should be the main supporter of his household. In reality, women are just as capable of supporting the family. All one really needs to be successful is the proper skill to perform the task. Oftentimes, gender stereotypes make people feel uncomfortable if they do not fit properly into the mold. These so-called “misfits” become the minority and are often looked down upon because they are different. I think that people should put all judgments aside and just be themselves, even if that means you’re a man who likes to cook and clean, or a woman who wants to build things and put out fires.

I strongly believe that children should play with whichever toys they want. If the children are happy, then nothing else should matter. They are just toys, and it is not the end of the world if your son plays with a doll or your daughter plays with tools. There are bigger problems in the world. Holly Wall writes about how gender stereotypes affect both sexes. LEGOs for girls, called “LEGO Friends,” were created so girls could play with these plastic blocks too. However, this actually made many mothers very upset. The mothers argued that their daughters could play with the original LEGOs just as much as with the purple and pink ones. I agree with Wall when she states that stereotyping girls also affects how boys view females and their roles in society. The truth is that children look up to their parents and want to be just like them. I have talked to many children and they have told me that they want to be able to cook and fix cars. I feel it is very important to teach children that they can do anything they want to. Wall’s article is also very helpful for parents because it gives a list of ways in which they can start to decrease gender stereotypes. I think that if the child is happy, then the parents should be happy too.

Gender stereotyping has become a habit in our society today. When we go shopping to buy a present for a little girl, we head straight towards the girl section to pick out the newest Barbie doll. It does not even cross our minds to see what the latest boy toy is. In the article, “Guys and Dolls: Reducing Stereotypes in Your Home,” Jae Curtis discusses how toy companies have decided what is “normal” for each gender. Curtis points out that many girl toys are based on appearance, like plastic make-up and princess dresses. Similarly, boy toys are more focused on male’s traits and actions, like playing sports or performing science experiments (Curtis). Unfortunately, these gender stereotypes encouraged by toy manufacturers make girls and boys wonder if they are feminine or masculine enough. Curtis points out that by the time toddlers are thirty months old, they already realize what is appropriate for their specific
gender, and as a result, start to reject certain toys. This is one of the main reasons children fear being different and unique. Both Curtis and I strongly believe that people should let their children be who they want to be.

The entertainment industry also plays a big role in keeping the gender stereotypes alive and flourishing. Often, kids who watch cartoons or movies learn that certain things are acceptable, while others are firmly looked down upon. I think that if movies were more accepting of different gender roles, then there would be less stereotyping amongst the sexes. In the article “Toy Story,” Kelli Bender talks about how the movie Toy Story 3 uses toys to stereotype the genders. She explains that in the movie Ken is negatively stereotyped as a weak, emotional man who cares too much about his looks (Bender). The other characters frequently make fun of him because he is different. Little kids are going to view these types of men that same way the characters do. Similarly, the movie portrays Barbie as a melodramatic, hyper-emotional girl (Bender). These negative stereotypes belittle women and degrade people who are different. Little kids are like sponges and absorb everything they see. I used to think the original Toy Story movie was a great movie because it taught children that boys and girls could play with the same toys because Andy played with Little Bo Peep and Buzz Lightyear. Now, however, my view of this popular Disney movie has changed because of how the characters are negatively portrayed.

I believe that girls are self-conscious and boys are not as open about showing their emotions because of these expectations to be a certain way. There are many things that both girls and boys can do. It is not the end of the world if your son wants to play dress-up, or if your daughter wants to play with Hot Wheels. Each child is going to like different things, so should not be limited in his or her desire to play with a toy that is not quite girly or boyish enough. Parents could buy gender-neutral toys like brain stimulating games, educational toys, puzzles, and books. Parents could invite children of both genders over for play dates so they get used to playing together. When it comes to the child’s toys, the child should be the one leading the parent.

Works Cited

