

Trucks and trains for boys. Dolls and kitchens for girls. This is how gender specific toys have been marketed for decades.

But are finally seeing the end of gender stereotyping toys?

Children, especially those in at the beginning of their learning, learn through play. Playing and all that it encompasses is their whole world. The toys that they play with have a massive impact on their mindsets and thought processes.

Gender itself, and what that means to children, is also learnt at this early stage. Western society has made huge leaps forward in gender equality since the beginning of the 20th century, but when toys are considered it's difficult to agree. Toys, it would seem, are becoming more and more stereotyped. The traditional gender roles are being further concentrated and even promoted. This doesn't paint a pretty picture, especially when we consider the impact this has on girls' self-image and understanding.

Looking back in time.

In the period between the 1920s and 1950s toys were marketed directly at prescribed gender roles. The "little housewife" and the "young man of industry". The traditional roles weren't only pushed on families and children but they were positively encouraged.

It took until the 1970s, with a resurgence in the feminist movement, for some change to take place. In fact, in America, by 1975 only roughly 2% of toys marketed by Sears (a US catalogue industry giant) were directly marketed at girls or boys. Even Barbie, the paragon of pink, wore primary, gender neutral colours.

Unfortunately the 1980s brought back the stereotypes. Television advertisers had their reins loosened and were able to directly appeal to the markets that they saw best fit. Children's television shows aimed solely at one gender started to become more and more prolific. GI Joe and My Little Pony flew the flag of gender stereotyping, and so did the toys that came with them.

This style of marketing is still prevalent in the modern day. Until only recently one could easily browse toy websites using *Boys* and *Girls* sections. Even as regularly as 2017 The Disney Store happily promoted products for specific genders with barely any crossover in the *Both* section. Thankfully this has since been corrected, with every toy now being cross referenced for both. But does this solve the problem? Marketing has a great deal to answer for but surely the issue's heart lies at conception.

The costs are bigger than it might seem on the surface. Construction toys, an eduKidz favourite, are far more likely to be played with by boys than girls. These toys hold huge benefits for children as

they develop, especially when it comes to spatial intelligence (our understanding of the world around us). Even my favourite toy line, LEGO, is guilty of gender stereotyping. Their girl-focused LEGO Friends set required minimal construction and was designed to be used more like a dolls house than a building toy. We've covered the benefits, of which there are many, LEGO provides to kids in a previous article. It would be a crying shame if only 50% of children were able to reap these benefits.

If one visits a typical toy shop it can lead to a veritable indoctrination. Pink, kitchens, princesses and beauty for girls. Blue, action heroes, war and bravery for boys. We can clearly see who might lose out here. Girls aren't even being offered the chance to consider roles outside of those typically mandated to them.

It's time for a change.

A viral video in 2017 showed the roles that primary children felt were appropriate for them in adult life. By age 11 (the end of primary school) they have very clear ideas about who can do what, and these ideas are difficult to change.

Insert Video

The world is catching up with itself. More and more of the general population no longer stand for gender specific branding and marketing. Leading the charge in the UK, Let Toys Be Toys campaign for gender neutral toys and an abandonment of stereotypes. Research that they carried out found direct links between gender labelling and inequality in later life.

The emphasis is on retailers to bring about the change. That's why here at eduKidz we're practicing what we preach. We can guarantee that you won't find any gender specific toys,

There are signs things may be changing. Major toy retailers from Target to Walmart to Amazon are de-emphasizing gender labeling of toys. Even the oldest toy store in the world—Hamley's in the U.K., which dates back to 1750—dropped gender labeling in 2012.

Yet the toys themselves remain heavily split, the gender roles reminiscent of those pushed on kids in 1925, but more fantastical: The homemaker is the princess; the carpenter, the action hero.

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