

Question of Policy: Should preschools have gender-specific toys for children to play with?

Thesis: Gender-specific toys for children should be available in schools for children to play with as studies have shown that children as young as 2 years old know specific gender roles, however, gender-specific toys for children restricts children's development potential as it leads to the promotion of different skills than gender-neutral toys.

I. Introduction

- A. Story: In 2010, a Maryland-based parenting blogger Maria Moser was on a mission to find a toy baby stroller and the only thing she had in mind was for it not to be pink. As she searched for the toy baby stroller she learned that it was difficult to find a neutral colored stroller. But the stroller was for her son rather than her daughter. (Johnson, 2015)
 1. Maria felt as though she was raising men rather than boys and felt that in time she would raise them to become husbands and fathers one day and felt that it was important for her sons to play with babies.
 2. "I knew that they'd have the rest of their lives to have gender stereotypes shoved down their throats, and I wanted them to have the safety of exploring whatever they wanted without ridicule," Moser said." (Johnson, 2015)
 - a. But Jim Silver, CEO of the toy review company TTPM, says toy firms actually follow sound business practices by developing their products based on their expected demographics. (Johnson, 2015)
- B. Thesis: Gender-specific toys for children should be available in schools for children to play with as studies have shown that children as young as 2 years old know specific gender roles, however, gender-specific toys for children restricts children's development potential as it leads to the promotion of different skills than gender-neutral toys.

II. Preschools should have gender-specific toys for children to play with because some children prefer to play with their own gender specific toy.

- A. Gender-specific toys allow preschool children to play with the dolls they prefer. It is not the thought process of a 1 year old that they should play with a gender neutral toy because all they can associate at that age is the colors and likeness of the toy they prefer.
 - 1. According to a study by Davis & Hines (2020), boys favored boy-associated dolls more than girls, and at the same time girls favored girl-associated dolls more than boys.
 - 2. “Our systematic review and meta-analysis combined 113 effect sizes from 75 studies to estimate the magnitude of gender-related differences in toy preferences. We also assessed the impact of using different toys or methods to assess these differences, as well as the effect of age on gender-related toy preferences.” (Davis & Hines, 2020)
 - 3. Based on the study they found a general continuity of findings across the vast variety of studies on gender-based toy preferences for children: children displayed strong and consistent preferences for toys specific to their own gender. (Davis & Hines, 2020)

III. As children get older they are able to differentiate gender-specific toys, thus resulting in them choosing what they prefer to play with whether it be boys playing with boy toys or girls playing with girl toys.

- A. Children can start perceiving gender differences in their social surroundings at two years, thus connecting various features and behaviors for men and women. Hence at three, they can verbally and nonverbally realize the events and items attributed to a different gender (Skočajić et al., 2020).
 - 1. “Children prefer playing with children of the same sex, thus they are learning “gender appropriate” games (the boys tend to play games involving running or throwing a ball at recess; the girls tend to stay close to the teacher, talking of playing games such as jumping rope or hops-cotch).because of their cognitive development, they are also becoming more aware of potential models of their gender with whom to identify (Berns, 2009). “ (Oncu & Unluer, 2012)
- B. Gender-specific toys allow children to define groups based on their societal characteristics and develop behavioral standards about a specific group (Skočajić et al., 2020). Therefore, gender stereotypes have a

significant role in defining the attributes and behaviors of men and women in society.

1. This study shows that even at an early preschool age, children are not only aware of gender norms but also ready to let others know of those that violate those roles.

IV. Preschools should not have gender-specific toys for children to play with as some experts and parents feel as though it is stopping children from reaching their full potential as to what they can and cannot do based on society putting a label on them.

- A. According to Klass (2018), use of neutral-gender toys in preschool children allowed them to demonstrate more suppleness than when using gender-specific toys. For example, they grasped that while both boys and girls played with Batman toys, all of them believed they could be like Batman.
 1. “But there is also research to say that when the lines are drawn too strictly, children’s worlds become not only more divided, but also more limited. Traditionally masculine toys like blocks and puzzles, Dr. Spinner said, encourage visual and spatial skills, while traditionally feminine toys encourage communication and social skills. “If children only play with one, then they are missing out on a whole host of skills,” she said. They are also limiting their own interests and the scope of their futures.” (Klass, 2018)
- B. Diverse gender play is essential in providing children with an opportunity to interact with one another and hence realizing behavioral similarities because the stereotypes developed can form and strengthen various things, including societal development, livelihood as well as edification goals. As stated, it is crucial to have children achieve various experiences in a broader manner (Klass, 2018).
 1. A recent research explores the potential influence of words and pictures to counter gender roles and to open up what children see for themselves as future desires and experiences. And experts agree that decisions are important because they will affect the cognitive ability of children and the opportunities that they see for themselves.(Klass, 2018)

V. The selection of toys parents make for children can play a significant factor in children's gender socialization. Promoting interaction with toys of the same sex limits children's ability for their future.

A. Gender-specific toys influence certain behaviors in children, making them more divided and limited as stated by Kollmayer et al. (2018), boys' toys, such as puzzles, influence their views and three-dimensional abilities while girls dolls inspire message passing and societal skills hence making them miss out on the whole set of skills. Moreover, the study also indicated that strongly-gender typed toys are not as much help in the growth of kids' physical, mental and imaginative skills than moderately gender-types or gender-neutral toys. (Kollmayer, Schultes, Schober, Hodosi, & Spiel, 2018)

1. Toys play a significant part in socializing gender and developmental processes in children. They promote the production of imaginative play and social play, and cognitive skills. Many toys are stereotyped as suitable for one demographic and not the other. (Kollmayer, Schultes, Schober, Hodosi, & Spiel, 2018)

B. Men and women are usually considered to vary in terms of achievement-oriented characteristics, defined as organization, ability or instrumentality, and social-and service-oriented characteristics, defined as fellowship, comfort or expressiveness. (Kollmayer, Schultes, Schober, Hodosi, & Spiel, 2018)

1. These gender differences contribute to unequal perceptions of men and women or boys and girls with respect to positions, ambitions and abilities and hence have a direct effect on the fields of education and jobs. (Kollmayer, Schultes, Schober, Hodosi, & Spiel, 2018)
2. "Gender-typed toy play leads to the promotion of different skills in boys and girls, with girls practicing communal roles and boys practicing agentic roles. This guides children's activities in accordance with gender stereotypes and thus restricts their individual development potential". (Kollmayer, Schultes, Schober, Hodosi, & Spiel, 2018)

VI. Conclusion

- A. Gender-specific toys allow children to play with the toys they prefer, use objects attributed to their gender and define groups based on societal features.
 - 1. It allows them to differentiate objects that are meant for boys and objects that are meant for girls, thus resulting in being able to make their own decisions.
- B. However, gender-specific toys can hinder a child's flexibility while growing up, limit their interaction with one another and divide them based on behavioral and character standards.
 - 1. If preschools have gender-specific toys for children it can hinder their possibilities for their future. Gender-neutral toys reduce stereotypes, thus providing children the opportunity to discover their interest according to their partiality.

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