

GIRL TOYS: COMMUNICATING GENDER STEREOTYPES TO CHILDREN

Leading Question

Does only playing with dolls hurt young girls?

Watch the video

<https://youtu.be/AzDdiQzKUaQ>

Beginning at birth, gender stereotypes are communicated to children. They can affect us for the rest of our lives in ways we may not even realize. It's important to think about whether or not these stereotypes reflect our true values.

1. Given her background, how do you think Debra Sterling felt when she was told that girls would not be interested in construction toys?
 2. Do you think there is anything Debra could have said to change the minds of the men from the toy industry?
 3. Describe the characteristics of stereotypical toys intended for girls? Boys? What gender roles do toys for girls promote? What about those for boys?
 4. How might a child feel whose interest in a toy does not match its stereotypical target group? Consider children that identify as a boy, a girl, both, or neither.
 5. Research shows that cognitive and social skills are reinforced by the kinds of toys that children play with. What types of skills do you think construction and building toys reinforce? What about dolls and house-keeping toys?
 6. What are some ways that stereotypical toys can have a positive effect on children? A negative effect?
 7. Do you think toys are more or less stereotyped today than they were 10, 30, or 50 years ago?
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START SOMETHING

Think about your own school or work environment. Have you ever noticed gender biases in yourself or others? What was the situation? Consider how you could take steps to change it in the future.

BIOGRAPHY

Debra Sterling

Stanford engineering graduate Debra Sterling is on a mission to disrupt the “pink aisle” in toy stores globally. Her award-winning children’s multimedia company, GoldieBlox, challenges gender stereotypes with the world’s first girl engineer character and construction toys for girls. Sterling was recently added to Fortune magazine’s 40 Under 40 list and has received a number of other awards.

RESOURCES

Watch all nine videos of Women’s Work:

Perspectives on Gender in Tech

<http://www.computerhistory.org/exponential/women-work/>

Wonder Women:

Entrepreneurship, Education, and New Frontiers

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UC99u7NJh14&index=3&list=PLQsxaNHyv8dZMhpT8-934UPMdto7G2_W

How to Play Like a Girl

<http://theatlntc/2GTRoEW>

Breaking Gender Stereotypes in the Toy Box

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/05/well/family/gender-stereotypes-children-toys.html>

The Effects of Stereotyped Toys and Gender on Play Assessment in Children Aged 18–47 Months

<https://www.andrews.edu/~rbailey/Chapter%20one/9040385.pdf>

Peer Toy Play as a Gateway to Children’s Gender Flexibility: The Effect of (Counter)Stereotypic Portrayals of Peers in Children’s Magazines

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs11199-017-0883-3>

Preschoolers’ perceptions of gendered toy commercials in the US

<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17482798.2017.1297247>

About

This discussion guide is part of the series Women’s Work: Perspectives on Gender in Tech, nine videos produced by the Exponential Center at the Computer History Museum. The center is dedicated to capturing the legacy and advancing the future of entrepreneurship and innovation in Silicon Valley and around the world.

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