

Gender-Neutral Marketing of Toys

Gendered toy media marketing has a huge impact on how items and gender roles are perceived and learned by children and adults. In this activity, you critically examine how children's toys are marketed and then share your thoughts in an Op-Ed commentary presenting your views about legislation to promote gender-neutral advertising in the media and in-store displays.

In October, 2021, California passed a [Gender Neutral Retail Departments](#) law requiring all large scale department stores (500 or more employees) to maintain a "reasonable" number of toys and other items for children in a gender-neutral area of the store. The law does not ban traditional boys and girls sections, but does force changes in how and where items are marketed in stores.



[Watch on YouTube](#)

Consumer advocates supported this first-in-the-nation law as a response to how traditional marketing to children has reinforced gender-stereotypes and reinforced some skill and mindset over others (boys' toys for example emphasize construction, movement, and building). Critics claim this law is a form of government interference on the rights of parents to raise children as they see fit.

Also in 2021, the toymaker LEGO announced it would no longer label its products by gender ([LEGO to Remove Gender Bias from its Toys after Findings of Child Survey](#), October 10, 2021). LEGO took action following a study by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media that found 71% of boys feared they would be made fun of if they played with what are considered to be "girls" toys.

To examine gendered toy marketing in action, try the **Gendered Advertising Remixer** at <https://genderremixer.com/>. Put an ad targeting boys in box 1 and an ad targeting girls in box 2 and press mashup and watch what happens.

Activity: Examine Gendered Toy Marketing

Begin this activity by visiting one or more of the large department stores in your community (like Target or Walmart) and record where toys are displayed.

- o What marketing patterns do you notice?
- o Are toys and other items divided by gender?
- o Is there a gender-neutral section for children's items?

Look at the packaging and advertising of the items you find in the children's section(s) of the store.

- o What type of gendered language is used on the packaging of the items and store displays?
- o How is art and design used to suggest that certain items are directed to boys or to girls?

Next consider the gendered messages and meanings that children are receiving from the media they encounter in the children's section(s) of the store.

- o How might gendered toys and gendered sections influence children's future careers in politics or government?
- o Are there any toys that might be considered "presidential" or "CEO-related," or reflect women as leaders and change-makers?

Then, complete one of the following activities:

- o **Write an [Op-Ed commentary letter](#)** for your school, local, or state newspaper about how gendered marketing of toys might influence the representation of women and individuals who identify as female in government and/or politics.
- o **Write a persuasive letter or design a social media campaign** to urge other states to adopt legislation similar to the law in California for gender-neutral retail departments.

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Examine gendered toy marketing](#) by Caroline Brown

Additional Resources

- [California will require large retailers to provide gender-neutral toy sections](#) (video), *Los Angeles Times*
- [Does Gendered Toy Marketing Have A Place in 2022?](#)

Connecting to the Building Democracy for All eBook

[Building Democracy for All: Gender-Inclusive, Non-Binary, and Anti-Racist Language and Images in State Constitutions, Laws, and Materials](#)



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