# Gender Learning

According to social learning theory, gender roles and identities are development sets that are acquired from the environment. Parents are considered the most influential agents in as far as the social development of children within natural units is concerned.Sexual orientation is the most basic method that these parents use to develop the social wellbeing of their children. In particular the play materials can influence children’s orientation and give rise to stereotypes that may passed on from generation to generation. Play toys and materials that a child is exposed to have the potential to shape their behavior, beliefs and attitudes in either positive or negative ways. Ultimately this can determine the interpersonal and intrapersonal skills that children develop as they transition into adulthood.  In the natural social units, parents form the most influential agents in the children social development. The basic method that they use to encourage these developments is through sexual orientation. This paper seeks to examine the role that gender-based cognitive theories undertake in reasoning out children’s preferenceplaymaterials.

During the 20th century, toy ads did not exude gender disparity and history states that this aspect emerged during toy marketing in pre-post World War II periods. As of 1995, the market was greatly affected by stereotyping advertising of toys and despite the innocent aim of firms to boost their sales through such strategies, the ads had nostalgic effects on children.

There are two major approaches taken by social learning psychologists in their analysis of gender orientation and development issues. Some psychologists have  undertaken laboratory experiments to observe behavioral characteristics and measure effects of both aspects. On the other hand, there are psychologists who have conducted naturalistic observation of toddlers’ behavior and compared this to their adult behavior within natural settings. From the naturalistic observation it is clearly evident that both parents and children choose playing materials such as toys based on gender-centric and egocentric mechanisms. Parents rely on their pre-existing knowledge and the beliefs on different sex orientations to choose the toys for their children based on their genders. Gender stereotyped labels on toys significantly affect choice of toys, exploration of play things and how children perform in certain toy-related games. The naturalistic observations also explore how traits stemming from playthings affect the traits of children and become streamlined in their minds, creating stereotype expectations that become part of their growth and development cycle.

Psychologists have adopted two important theories based on this phenomenon and these are the learning theory and gender schema theory. Both theories expound on the role of parents in determining gender and socialization stereotypes in their children and how this impacts on the children as they grow into adulthood.  According to the learning theory, children learn about gender roles and behavior through external stimuli such as the rewards and punishments they receive from their parents. Stimuli development conceptualizes the aspects of rewards and punishment which can range from simple facial expression and verbal cues to active involvement with play and specific toys.

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In social learning theory parents are considered the main molders or sculptors of the social process while children are simply dormant participants and observers who absorb the gender related information generated  by their parents. This assumption is essential in learning  and comprehending the role played by parents in gender socialization. For instance, Oloiya et al., observed during their study observed that parents usually guide  and direct children in selecting toys and their reactions, whether in the form or rewards or punishments, to a greater extent affect gender development in these children.  For example when female children choose feminine stereotyped toys such as dolls, they receive parental reinforcement yet if the same girls chose masculine stereotyped toys such as trucks, their choice would be met with disapproval. The same applies to male children depending on whether they choose masculine or feminine toys.

The gender schema theory on the other hand suggests that sex typing is not generated from outside forces but is more of an innate creation that stems from an individual based on gender schematic capabilities. The shifted focus on individual capabilities explains the varying levels of  femininity and masculinity in children despite having been brought up in the same social settings. Parents play the role of creating learning environments based on gender while societal gender expectations provide children with sex-type information based on toy ads which they internalize and self-conceptualize. While boys learn and hold masculine schemes and knowledge on such schemes, female children are taught feminine knowledge Boys hold schemes with greater masculine knowledge while girls possess famine knowledge. Additionally, children’s bedrooms also provide social contexts where masculine and feminine orientations are developed. This is because they are usually furnished with sex-typed, clothes and colors that provide a rich setting for typical gender stereotyping.

Research findings also find that it is documented in several places that tough toys such as arms, vehicles and soccer balls are considered masculine hence provided for boys while soft toys such as dolls, kitchen ware and telephones.  Further research also indicates that the sex-typed masculine toys promote both physical cognitive development domains and mobility as they fully utilize space and agility. On the other hand, feminine sex-typed toys only promote imaginative and domestic play hence limiting the development of female children and causing them to be outperformed by their male counterparts, thus creating gender disparities.

Furthermore, studies show that there is a link between the career path a child chooses to pursue and the toys they are exposed to. In fact, masculine toys have been perceived as more powerful as they create ambitions of bigger careers in children. Parents who expose their children to such toys can expect them to join  higher learning institutions as they provide better paths for confidence and orientation towards winning most of the games. One of the most cited examples in this case is the link between children who become athletics and football champions. These tend to be exposed to masculine toys during childhood.

As shown by different studies, playthings and toys affect gender socialization and recent statistics depict a shocking rise in segregation and stereotyping of toys along gender lines. It is imperative for society and parents to embrace neutral toys that reduce gender disparities. Exposing female children to such toys will encourage them to pursue roles that are stereotyped for men while male children who are exposed to neutral toys can become more aware of female obligations.

In this era, there has been an increase in diversification of roles within family and society and this calls for more sensitivity towards gender based issues so as to encourage cohesiveness.  Researchers have provided useful information regarding self-conceptualization based on gender sex-typed toys. The implicit theories have explained why children develop certain traits and behavior. As a result it is high time that society recognized the need for a neutral dispensation of toys, playthings and other child-related materials to reduce gender disparities and enhance cohesiveness in society.