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Title: Gender Specificity in Toddler Toy Selection: An Exploratory Study

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Abstract: Gender stereotypical attitudes are prevalent in advertising, mass media and also children's toys. Recent work indicates that gender-constancy stage, (with the rigidity peak about gender norms at five to six) and children's own-gender-flexibility, between eight and ten motivate children to prefer own gender option for play (Ulrich & Ezan, 2016). But how much do we know about gender centred toy selection of toddlers, by parents? The study explores the influences of parents and guardians in purchasing/selecting gender-specific toys for toddlers, by adopting a critical realism approach to the research design. Thirteen semi-structured interviews of parents/guardians in Devon UK were conducted using gender specific stimuli (5 gender-specific toys selected based on their ratings on toy E-retailers) in an effort to understand participants' decision making process when making these purchases. The findings mainly confirmed the expected Gender norms and Gender congruent colours and packaging symbolism to influence parent choice of toddler toys. In addition to 'gender appropriates', as well as the colour of the packaging of the toy which influenced the overall purchasing decision the data indicated that the toy's branding and the participants' familiarity with the brand influences toy selection. Although many participants did acknowledge their responses were 'gender stereotypical' and conformed to gender stereotypical associations, some participants displayed a degree of shame and embarrassment when responding in this manner and used society as their justification for answering in such a way.