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Pink or blue? Which is for you? The discursive and material construction of gender identity through children's toys

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Abstract

This research study will investigate how linguistic and visual resources are employed in children's toys in a variety of retail spaces, and how such resources reproduce and/or contest gender roles and stereotypes within a given semiotic landscape or space.

There are three main objectives of this study. The first objective is to determine the sexualisation and gendering of space within three different toy stores. The second objective is to understand whether, and if so, how the gendering of space is influenced by social categories such as race, age and geographical location. The third objective is to look at the way in which gender and other social identities are produced and created through children's toys.

In order to achieve these aims, the study will employ qualitative methods. The first qualitative aspect to this project is that of analysing pictures, toy packages and photographs of children's toys. The second qualitative aspect of the study includes an analysis of the interviews conducted with the parents to determine their thoughts and feelings regarding gender stereotypes and the construction of societal norms. The main Linguistic theoretical frameworks that are used throughout the research paper are that of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Multi-Modal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA).

It was found that heterosexual parents agree very strongly with the gender stereotypes that still exist within our community. They do not see anything wrong with the advertising techniques used and they do not think that change is necessary within our community. Lesbian parents felt that children should be allowed to be who they want to be without having the pressures of society pushing down on them. Gay parents agreed with this and felt that children should grow up to be themselves and if that is different to what society expects then that is also fine and acceptable. Two black parents agreed with the heterosexual parents on this matter, while two black parents sided with the gay and lesbian parents regarding gender stereotyping for little children.