

FOR BOYS OR GIRLS? GENDER CULTURAL REPRESENTATIONS IN TOY PACKAGING

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to analyze gender-representative images on toy packaging for children over three years of age.

Method: this is a photo ethnographic study developed in play sections of six department stores located in one of the municipalities in the metropolitan region of Rio de Janeiro in August 2018. Image analysis was applied to 17 photographs of toy packages according to criteria repetition, content type and low cost to purchase, associated with content analysis.

Results: the images partially reflect their content. The gender colors in the packaging and contents are traditional (pink and lilac) and unrealistic in the toys for girls. Those with images of boys have neutral and realistic colors (gray, olive green, navy blue). Miniaturized or life-size toys items “for girls” include those that encourage playing ‘house’ (dish rack and cups), personal care (makeup and clothing) and maternity (dolls). “For boys”, they strengthen the social image of family protector (hero), home provider (tools, builder, and executive) and “male” professions (cook, fireman, policeman).

Conclusion: these images reinforce binary conceptions of gender, stereotyped in society, rooting cultural constructions of the adult world in the development of children over three years old.

DESCRIPTORS: Play and playthings. Games recreational. Child. Preschool. Gender identity. Behavior and behavior mechanisms. Public health nursing.

HOW CITED: Souza RR, Depianti JRB, Bubadué RM, Mattos CX, Esperón JMT, Cabral IE. For boys or girls? Gender cultural representations in toy packaging. *Texto Contexto Enferm* [Internet]. 2021 [cited YEAR MONTH DAY]; 30:e20190391. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1590/1980-265X-TCE-2019-0391>.

PARA MENINO OU MENINA? REPRESENTAÇÕES CULTURAIS DE GÊNERO NAS EMBALAGENS DE BRINQUEDOS

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar imagens representativas de gênero nas embalagens de brinquedos para crianças acima de três anos de idade.

Método: estudo foto etnográfico, desenvolvido em seções de brinquedos de seis lojas de departamento localizadas em um dos municípios da região metropolitana do Rio de Janeiro, no mês de agosto de 2018. Aplicou-se a análise imagética em 17 fotografias de embalagens de brinquedos segundo critérios de repetição, tipo de conteúdo e baixo custo para aquisição, associado à análise de conteúdo.

Resultados: as imagens refletem parcialmente seu conteúdo. As cores de gênero nas embalagens e conteúdos são tradicionais (rosa e lilás) e irrealistas nos brinquedos para meninas. Aqueles com imagens de meninos possuem cores neutras e realistas (cinza, verde oliva, azul marinho). Brinquedos miniaturizados ou em tamanho natural “para as meninas” incluem os que estimulam o brincar de ‘dona-de-casa’ (escorredor de louça e xícaras), cuidados pessoais (maquiagem e vestuário) e maternagem (bonecas). “Para meninos”, fortalecem a imagem social de protetor da família (herói), provedor do lar (ferramentas, construtor e executivo) e profissões “masculinas” (cozinheiro, bombeiro, policial).

Conclusão: essas imagens reforçam concepções binárias de gênero, estereotipadas na sociedade, enraizando construções culturais do mundo adulto no desenvolvimento de crianças nas idades acima de três anos.

DESCRITORES: Jogos e brinquedos. Jogos recreativos. Criança. Pré-escolar. Identidade de gênero. Comportamento e mecanismos comportamentais. Enfermagem de saúde pública.

PARA NIÑOS O NIÑAS? REPRESENTACIONES CULTURALES DE GÉNERO EN ENVASES DE JUGUETES

RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar imágenes representativas del género en los envases de juguetes para niños mayores de tres años.

Método: estudio foto etnográfico, desarrollado en secciones de juguetes de seis grandes almacenes ubicados en uno de los municipios de la región metropolitana de Rio de Janeiro, en agosto de 2018. Se aplicó análisis de imagen a 17 fotografías de empaques de juguetes según criterio repetición, tipo de contenido y bajo costo de compra, asociado al análisis de contenido.

Resultados: las imágenes reflejan parcialmente su contenido. Los colores de género en el empaque y el contenido son tradicionales (rosa y lila) y poco realistas en los juguetes para niñas. Aquellos con imágenes de niños tienen colores neutros y realistas (gris, verde oliva, azul marino). Los juguetes miniaturizados o de tamaño natural “para niñas” incluyen aquellos que fomentan el juego del “ama de casa” (escurrer platos y tazas), el cuidado personal (maquillaje y ropa) y la maternidad (muñecas). “Para los niños”, fortalecer la imagen social de protector familiar (héroe), proveedor de hogar (herramientas, constructor y ejecutivo) y profesiones “masculinas” (cocinero, bombero, policía).

Conclusión: estas imágenes refuerzan concepciones binarias de género, estereotipadas en la sociedad, enraizando construcciones culturales del mundo adulto en el desarrollo de niños mayores de tres años.

DESCRIPTORES: Juegos e implementos de juego. Juegos recreacionales. Niño. Preescolar. Identidad de género. Conducta y mecanismos de conducta. Enfermería en salud pública.

INTRODUCTION

Playing, in addition to providing fun and distraction for children, promotes children's learning and maturation, which are essential for their development. It is through play that they activate their creativity and imagination, which contributes to the construction of knowledge.¹

Toys are the main means of child development, as they play an important role in the life and socialization of boys and girls, who spend a great deal of time playing alone, in groups and/or with family members.² In this sense, play offers opportunities for interactions that allow them to learn to cooperate and take on socially acceptable behavior.³⁻⁴

In the universe of children's play, the meaning of images prints on packaging toys can influence their consumption. Mainly, adults buy children's toys based on color, gender, and age. In choosing and buying them, there is a dynamic of power guides in which adults, whether parents or guardians, exercise control over whether or not to buy for children. In this sense, even if children participate in the decision-making process of purchasing a toy, their choice is regulated by the perception of what adults think is appropriate for them.⁵

In Brazil, some regulations support children's fundamental rights, whose participation in the processes that involve their life must be guaranteed and respected.⁶ However, children's social history is marked by silencing and regulation imposed by what the adult believes to be ethically important for children's moral education.⁷

In this context, the packaging of children's toys enact ideologies socially and morally built by adults since they carry characteristics crystallized on gender roles (male and female).⁸ Gender is understood as a set of characteristics determined by society, a construction on how we present ourselves, recognize, and wish to be identified. It involves female or male representation or the transition between the two, regardless of sexual orientation or biological sex.⁹

Among the gender categories, there is a gender role, i.e., norms and values mandated by a given society's culture about behaviors expected or not for boys and girls. These roles are expressed in models of moral behavior considered correct by the family and social circle since childhood.⁹ Thus, through play, children develop and appropriate cultural elements and meanings of socially determined gender roles.¹⁰

In this context, the apparent choice for a given toy based on the sex of the child is more of a social construct than a child's choice. Massive exposure to children's toy selling media as a market product contributes to the choices of its buyers (families and friends) and the play of its consumers (children).¹¹

Given the above, it was asked: how are gender roles represented in children's toy packaging? The objective was to analyze representative images of gender in toy packaging for children over three years of age.

METHOD

The qualitative and exploratory research developed according to photo ethnography in stores located in one of the municipalities in Rio de Janeiro's metropolitan region. This method uses photography as a visual image narrative capable of preserving the data and converging cultural information about the studied group to the readers. Images favor understanding the transformation processes in society, being an essential element for analyzing the meanings instilled and conveyed by social media. They capture anthropological, socio-cultural characteristics with a wealth of details that, perhaps, could not be apprehended otherwise.¹²

Photography can take on several meanings, including the visual expression of its author.¹³ However, in this study, photography was adopted as a data generation device, as an access route, and not as a research participant's visual expression.

Therefore, observing a photograph is much more than an essential instrument; it is a creative act capable of creating new values.¹³ Indeed, it is more than decoding an objective message since it requires marking the image, reviewing it, and remaking it, thus constructing meanings on gender roles.

The selection of stores to capture photographic images should meet the following criteria: large popular stores that sell toys at low cost to consumers, with exclusive departments for children's toys, located in socially vulnerable areas.

By vulnerability, broader social and cultural dynamics are understood in connection with individual aspects. It refers to the existence of inequality relations that limit people's ability to act, with insufficient institutional support, denial of the effective exercise of social rights and, therefore, insecurity and instability in future projects.¹⁴

To photograph, toy packaging containing images or recommendations for children over three years old was selected, as they correspond to early childhood. In this development stage, several skills are acquired, whether motor, cognitive, norms, and social values mediated within the family and society. In this way, toys become essential to support child development and how they learn and experience social gender roles.¹⁵

Data production took place on four Saturdays in August 2018. The photographs were recorded on a cell phone camera with a 32 GB memory, capturing a resolution images with 9.7 megapixels and 16x9 dimensions.

After applying technical criteria related to the photograph's quality (resolution, clarity, framing), eliminating repeated images, and preserving ethical issues (store and consumer anonymity), 17/126 remained, which were submitted to the analysis procedures.

Additionally, an analytical treatment for no moving images consists of dividing them into quadrants, which are numbered to locate the primary and secondary elements of importance in the message communication.¹⁶

Therefore, the quadrants were numbered clockwise to size the primary information that occupies most of these quadrants. Subsequently, the image's description was detailed, starting from the secondary ones' main figurative element.

To identify and describe each image, the object of analysis, the letter I was assigned, followed by the number corresponding to the order of appearance in a counterclockwise direction (I1, I2, I3 ... I17) (Figure 1). The described image constituted the textual corpus submitted to the content analysis, with pre-analysis, material exploration, treatment of results, and interpretation.¹⁷

For conducting this type of analysis, two questions were asked: what constitutive elements of the toy packaging images can be associated with gender roles? How are gender roles represented in packaging and content? The answers were then systematized in register units, adding to those that converged to the same meaning field in axial coding, forming units of meaning. The set of meaning units were again aggregated to constitute three categories: gender colors in child development; what is expected from boys and girls; appeal messages that reinforce gender role.

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee EEAN/HESFA-UFRJ, pursuant to Resolution 466 of December 12, 2012 of the Brazilian National Health Council (*Conselho Nacional de Saúde*).



Figure 1 - An illustration of an image analysis application that mix image and text.¹⁶

Packaging of the toy “Enxugando Loucinha” (8, bottom right) occupies all quadrants of the image (2). The packaging ‘Contains 9 pieces, 2 plates, 4 cutlery, 2 glasses in lilac and 1 dish rack in pink’ (6, top right). Images 2,3,4, 5 and 12 show the description of these items. A toy “For all children!” (9, bottom left and right) aged “+3 years” (10, bottom left). The product is modeled on a smiling girl, white race/color, blond hair (1, upper left corner). The message “Let’s play drying the dishes” is an invitation to wash and dry dishes (11, center of the lower left quadrant). The packaging display shows the content in all quadrants of the image (11).

RESULTS

Of the six stores in the municipality of Grande Rio, in four of them, all toys were separated by packaging colors and two by the age of children for whom the toy was intended. The 17 photographs of toy packaging reinforce male (11) and female (6) models. They are low-cost toys to serve a popular consumer market, living in the geographic region wherein the stores were photographed. In this region, live children whose families belong to social classes with less purchasing power. Therefore, they are children exposed to low-cost toys that reinforce gender roles.

In this media game, toy packaging reflects the social ideal in which girls are socialized to be careful with their physical appearance (being and keeping themselves beautiful and well-dressed), taking care of children (playing with dolls) and the house (cooking, cleaning, washing dishes).

Toys for boys stimulate the development of future family providers for military, firefighter or soldier, superheroes, well-dressed, and who will take care of their wife and children in the game of life. Reading the images of the packaging and the toys’ content revealed cultural traits inscribed on them and reinforce the binary role of gender for a hetero-Cis-normalization society.

Gender colors in child development

The toy packaging colors are aimed at a well-defined target audience when designing models of boy or girl, baby dolls (white and black) with female complexions, and dolls with adolescent complexion features. In this sense, there is a chromatic aspect in gender roles whose colors are emblematic to represent the feminine and masculine.

Pink, lilac, and purple (Figure 2) were the colors that figured prominently in the packaging of toys said for girls. The color tone expresses a feminine image of softness and femininity. Paradoxically, the colors of toy items do not match those same real-life objects.

The colors blue, green, red, gray, and black are predominantly displayed in the toy packages aimed at children. The toy packaging containing kitchen utensils has colors that match real-world items (Figure 3, 1.12). The color tone associates the toy with ideal masculinity that reflects realism, pragmatism, and strength.



Figure 2 - Packaging and content of children's toys contribute to the socialization of gender roles for girls.

Toy packaging (recommended for girls) is presented in colors with strong shades of pink, lilac, blue, green, red, orange. All packaging has a transparent display for viewing the product. The texts are published in black, blue, and white.



Figure 3 - Packaging and content of children's toys contribute to the socialization of gender roles for boys. In I7, I8, I10 I11 (Mega text), I14, I16 and I17, red and blue tones in the box or its contents stand out. Already I9, background of I11, I13 and I14 shades of green. In I12, gray and black reflect the colors of real-world objects. The personal care objects in I13 have the same colors as the real world.

What is expected from boys and girls?

The packaging and content of toys reflect what society expects of girls and boys since the early years of childhood.

An image of a smiling girl in the foreground of the packaging invites girls to “together dry the dishes”, with nine household items (2 plates, 2 glasses, 4 cutleries, 1 dish rack). In the second image, another girl plays to dry the dishes as part of this imagery set, reproducing an easy task performed by the woman in the house’s labor. Both images project women as housewives performing their housework with pleasure.

Toys like a dish rack, cup set with saucer, cutlery, teapot, pots, and pans project the image of a smiling girl to suggest happiness in ‘playing house freely’ (I1-2 and I4).

In addition to caring for the home, toy packaging reinforces the feminine maternal role, presenting the image of a baby, with an inviting look to care in playing. The model’s motherhood gaze reveals maternal care that can be provided by playing with dolls. Packaging projects the image of a white baby and a black baby’s content, indicating the ideological white domination even when there is an approach of racial diversity in playing in childhood. The expressions ‘feeling like carrying a real baby’ and ‘Baby alive’ refer to the realism of the baby’s size.

The packaging’s content of the black ‘baby alive’ doll, dressed in one piece. Externally, the packaging presents the image of a white baby girl and looks at consumers (I3).

The packaging and its content reinforce aesthetic standards imposed by society—the image of a white girl with light, straight hair prints the packaging. The packaging contains a doll, mirror, comb, brush, and hairdryer. Playing with these items reinforces the expected behavior for girls in self-care and thus reaches a socially accepted standard of Caucasian beauty for women according to the race whitening ideology.

The doll with white adolescent complexions and red hair exposes a set of toys for girls over 3 years of age to be a “beautiful girl” in care when dressing up (15).

The doll’s main image on the packaging exposes a hairdryer, mirror, brush, and comb, suggesting self-care and female beauty (16).

The images of toy packaging for boys depict tasks and professions that society expects as an adult. Thus, they are expected to excel in strength and courage, playing with dolls representing soldiers, firefighters, and superheroes. The boys with these toys are prepared to take over the worker’s male role as a chef, firefighters, military soldier, truck driver, builder, and successful entrepreneurs, a superhero in the world of life.

There are three images of puppets: an army soldier dressed in uniform and action glove accessories, bulletproof vest, mask, and weapons (115); firefighter with “rescue operation” accessories [magirus ladder, hose] (116) and the superhero from the comics “Captain America” (117).

Additionally, packaging brings toys that encourage tools used by an adult man, performing the function of driving or building, and these are socially attributed to the male gender. There is a similarity between these toys and the work tools used by a plumber, a builder. Men are the “chef’s club” when they work in the kitchen; kitchen utensils in real colors reinforce the profession of “chef de cuisine” or Gourmet, an emerging profession in our culture.

A boy of about three years old in the fire truck packaging was happy to be playing with his new stroller. The car comes with rescue accessories [magirus ladder, fire extinguishers, rescue board] (17). In image 10, the car with a bucket is visualized (110).

In the tool toy, the boy is the poster boy for building blocks. In the “mega constructions” toy, a smiling boy is dressed as a builder and holding a hammer (111 and 14).

Kitchen utensils, cutlery (knife, spoons, fork), stove, pan with lids associate with a boy chef (112).

The position of men in leadership positions stands out, as an entrepreneur, an engineer, or a restaurant chef, these being positions that will bring them success and money. The new professions are illustrated by the presence of the chef in the foreground of the image. The other images reflect old situations that are rooted in society and culture, i.e., the nuclear family, the head of the family and home providers who provide for women physically (has the strength and resistance to carry her in their arms) and financially (when they take on the position of the executive).

The images of male characters developing successful professions, such as engineers and entrepreneurs, are intended for males. As for women, a role is reserved to stay at home with their children waiting for the men.

It is packaging a set, highlighting men in the foreground with chef/cook uniforms, executive suite, and carrying the woman on his lap. In the third plane, quadrants 1 and 4, the image of a family man and a couple dressed as newlyweds transported in a balloon. In the second lower quadrant, in the image’s foreground, the “New Professions Situations” toy catchword (18).

A man is represented as a small entrepreneur with entrepreneurial characteristics. The image represented by a large amount of money alludes to the game’s name and proposal (19).

In this regard, the game of life projects what is expected from men and women’s roles in everyday life. On the one hand, strength, power, success, and work activity outside the home; and on the other, delicacy, female submission, care, and maternal activity at home.

Messages that reinforce the gender role

The messages conveyed in children’s toy packaging reinforce gender roles, showing that the dish rack will succeed among the female audience and that all girls play cooking. When the toy’s target audience is girls, the text is written on the packaging is made up of direct and straightforward phrases, with slogans that focus on the activity itself and not on children. The play orders them to cook.

The dish rack is an 'absolute hit among girls' (12).

'A kitchen for all girls' [...]. 'It is time to play cooking' (14).

For boys, the messages reinforce men's role in society, encourage them to choose successful professions, shaving, dressing elegantly, and guiding parents to purchase toys: consequently, children's moral education, as a successful man, provider, and a family protector, were taught. The textual approach emphasizes the boy more, with images of men in the nuclear family structure's parenting than girls. The language used in the toy items invites boys to dress elegantly in a suit and tie, like an entrepreneur who gets dressed and is a family man.

The small business owner. A fun game for small entrepreneurs (19).

Barbershop set [...]. For stylish boys (113).

New style. High quality. It is giving a child a unique design (114).

This discursive dichotomy reinforces gender roles of female submission and male superiority.

DISCUSSION

Low-cost toys favor boys and girls from economically disadvantaged strata to be exposed to cultural gender constructions that shape roles and stereotypes of what society can expect from each other. Mainly, in the metropolitan region, where the study was developed, economic and social contradictions are found. According to the Human Development Atlas in Brazil, referring to the 2010 Census and the last one published,¹⁸ the development index of that municipality (MHDI 0.711) is considered high (between 0.700 and 0.799); however, poverty affects more than a quarter (28.43%) of the general population. The vulnerability is more significant for a fifth (21%) of mother's heads of households who do not have elementary education and financial provide their young children alone. The child population from 0 to 4 years old corresponded to 59,068, and at the age of 5 to 9 years old, 66,016; school-age children (6 to 14 years) enrolled at school represented 96.1%. Infant mortality was 14.1 for every 1,000 live births. The proportion of employed persons in relation to the total population was 19.5%. Considering households with monthly income of up to half a minimum wage per person, 37.8% of the population are in these conditions.¹⁹ This situation of social vulnerability increases the possibilities of the toy's cost to direct choices that affect cultural gender constructions for children living in poverty.

It was evident that toy package colors reinforce the cultural representations of gender roles, which directly influence child development. In toys said for girls, strong color tones (pink and lilac) predominate, unrelated to any realism with the objects used in everyday life. For boys, packaging, and items with less intense and neutral color tones (blue, green, red, silver-gray, and black) stand out, corresponding to these objects' colors in daily use.

The consolidation of pink as a feminine color and blue as masculine is recent. Until the beginning of the 20th century, it was understood that blue was a delicate and lovely color, the color of the Virgin Mary's mantle, and therefore feminine. Pink was seen as a strong and decided color and, therefore, masculine. The inversion only occurred, effectively, in the 1980s, due to an economic and market motivation, whose marketing favored consumption. Although the semantics of color have been reversed, gender roles were incorporated into our society's culture, with chromatic symbolism being a way of translating socially constructed stereotypes.²⁰⁻²¹

Playing is an activity that favors child development. In this sense, gender clues in toy package impact children's perceptions and future behaviors. The toy producer's choice of colors is not without intentionality and has been cultural and socioeconomic determined. As a result, this perspective had already been grounded in the socialization of gender, even before the children's birth. Children learn to choose colors according to their gender and to develop social skills through play that is exposed or imposed on them.²⁰⁻²¹

Colors help children to associate and include a toy genre. Colors vary according to each toy's purpose, as they carry the intention of communicating, conditioning the production of particular meanings and not others in the culture of a particular social group. Thus, it is understood that the color in the toy packaging intended for children reinforces the idea of binary gender roles concerning the colors that boys and girls should use in a society with a hetero-Cis-normalization ideology.²¹⁻²²

In addition to the colors, the toy package reinforces the idea that girls should work at homework, be mothers, and present themselves as well-dressed and beautiful. Meanwhile, boys are encouraged to play in professions that require strength, courage, or be a successful entrepreneur. That is, culturally, through play, these findings circulate social roles expected in culture, instructing children on how they should play.

Typified toys for boys are red, black, brown, or gray, representing action characters, builders who use weapons or motor vehicles. As for girls, the typified ones are pink or purple in dolls and beauty items to dress up and put on makeup.²³

Stereotypes linked to gender relations, roles, and identity reinforce the sexist and unequal gender approach. In toys, the feminine is identified as fragile, referring to aesthetics and beauty and household chores; and the male is referenced to virility, strength skills, economic responsibilities, and work outside the home.²²⁻²⁴

Children started a social apprenticeship from a very early age that "playing with dolls is a girl's thing". Boys are allowed to play with prams, superhero dolls, or represent professional roles, firefighters, and soldiers. In this sense, the root ideas and social roles of gender, by naturalizing that it is up to women to perform socially maternal care; and men, protectors, and home and family providers.

Thus, from the third year of life onwards, children begin to dramatize social roles, in which there is always some culturally based representation.²⁴ It is through play that children perceive the world around them and come into contact with themselves and with the other. Thus, they can identify with their mother, father or other significant people in their daily lives. However, based on this process of interaction with others and with toys, they build gender identities and incorporate their respective roles.²⁵

The images on boys' toys packaging carry elements that refer to being like their father (protector and provider) and having professions that require strength, agility and reasoning (fireman, soldier, builder), in addition to making money and being successful. These choices lead to socialization, often mediated by the gender produced by the stereotyping of playing.⁸

Thus, segregating or directing the activities determined by gender roles daily stimulates the male power and subordination of the female to the male. Moreover, they reflect conflicting socialization, as they meet the stereotype and roles traditionally constructed; this portrays, later in life, conflicts, and even discontent with the role it plays. All of this leads us to critically rethink the gender role that is culturally disseminated in our society.

These toys limit boys' parental responsibilities to a routine of providing for the family and being protective heroes of women and children. The commitment to play, in which there are less effort and parental obligations in sharing care with the home and children, reinforces this binary and sexist model.¹¹⁻¹² Furthermore, toys encourage an early insertion in the labor market, attributed to professional exercise with a certain degree of financial independence.²⁶

Messages on children's toy packaging can reinforce the representation of gender roles, as 'kitchen cooking is for all girls', and boys can be 'small entrepreneurs.' In this sense, the construct of what is feminine and masculine mediated by toys is still strongly perceived in commercial establishments both by how they are exposed and by the colors, illustrations, and shapes of the packaging.

In this way, toy packaging becomes an attractive invitation, as it is loaded with meanings and messages directed at the tasks that boys and girls must perform in society. In other words, they become social agents that foster and act in the configuration ordered by what boys must do to be socially accepted,⁷ reinforcing the binary gender role.

As for child development, the characteristics of children's toys that are commonly marketed may be limited to the experiences lived by girls and boys, with different developmental skills, be they cognitive, emotional, physical, or social. Thus, there is a need to deconstruct this separation of toys and games in the children's universe since playing is for everyone, regardless of sex.

Findings on how toy package images disseminate the ideology of self-care, household chores, and family livelihoods clash with men and women's parental responsibilities in the contemporary world. Nowadays, taking care of oneself (wearing clothes, getting dressed, shaving), of the children (young and older children), of the house (cooking, washing, and drying dishes), providing for themselves and the family are the responsibilities of men and women in the exercise of parenting, regardless of family arrangements.

Such perception reflects a trend in the toy market that mobilizes the need for changes in children's think and play, color, and features. Toy colors can impact the performance of gender roles.^{25,27} There must be a break with this segregation of gender roles contained in children's toy packaging to promote the inclusion of boys in the games historically attributed to girls, such as playing with dolls and cliques; and the same happens the other way around when girls are encouraged to play with strollers, tools and superhero dolls.

As childhood is configured in a physical, cognitive, and social process in constant construction, it multiplies and transcends; a movement is necessary to end the border between the female and male universe in play. It is necessary to establish a new paradigm, breaking with this separation of binary gender roles that some toys have still provided, aiming at gender equity. Thus, girls can be adventurers, firefighters, and boys can take care of the home and children. Toys should be for those who want to play, without differentiating colors, to express realism and promote responsibly and shared parenting since the exercise of dramatized play.

This study's findings can alert nursing professionals who work in school health, Primary Health Care, and in-hospital care when addressing toys and playing in the care process with children and family.²⁸⁻²⁹ For instance, they also have implications for educating new professionals by mediating learning content about therapeutic play.²⁹

The study's fieldwork is restricted to the photography of toys. Non-observation of consumers when in contact with products stands out as limits of this study. Moreover, it was not observed the functionality that children give to toys in playing, its capacity to be inventive and creative. In this sense, more studies need to be developed to understand how these cultural constructions produced by toys are recreated in the act of playing by children over three years old.

CONCLUSIONS

Children's toy packaging reproduces cultural representations of the gender roles expected for boys and girls in society, especially in a metropolitan region whose families live in a context of social vulnerability due to poverty. Therefore, children are more exposed to low-cost toys that reinforce gender roles in global development.

Toys packaging's imagery and textual elements reflect gender colors in the genesis of child development and nursing care. These colors have been socially determined since before the child was born, but they acquire visibility and resonance with toys for children over three years old when they dramatize the world of unreal (colors for girls) and real (colors for boys) life mediated by playing, which can influence health promotion in childhood.

Culturally, it has seen both genders accept blue color; conversely, the color pink presents more resistance by men. The same happens with some types of toys when washing dishes, ironing clothes are for girls, and games, miniatures of motor vehicles, and dolls (superheroes and representatives of professions) are for boys.

The packaging is loaded with stereotypes about what is intended for the female and male audience. Whether by the adult or child audience, the perceptions and choices of toys and plays are sexist and determined by objects' colors and features.

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NOTES

ORIGIN OF THE ARTICLE

This is the conclusion work of the course integrated to the research-action-extension project - *(Des) construção de gênero e promoção de saúde na escola, Escola de Enfermagem Anna Nery, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro*, implemented in 2016-2018.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We would like to thank the team of researchers who are part of the action-extension research project Gender and Health Promotion at School: Dr. Juliana Rezende Montenegro Medeiros de Moraes, Dr. Elisa da Conceição Rodrigues, Dr. Roberto José Leal and Dr. Lia Leão Ciuffo.

FUNDING INFORMATION

The study was funded through PIBEX scholarship 2017-2018 from the Research-Action-Extension Project "*(Des) construção de gênero e promoção de saúde na escola*". Dean of Extension of *Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro*, PROFAEX 128/2017 Notice - Institutional Program for Single Promotion of Extension Actions.

APPROVAL OF ETHICS COMMITTEE IN RESEARCH

Approved by the Ethics Committee in Research with Human Beings of the *Escola de Enfermagem Anna Nery, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro*, Opinion 1.866.131 CAAE (*Certificado de Apresentação para Apreciação Ética*) 62725116.9.0000.5238.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

There is no conflict of interest.

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Associated Editors: Selma Regina de Andrade, Gisele Cristina Manfrini, Melissa Orlandi Honório Locks, Ana Izabel Jatobá de Souza.

Editor-in-chief: Roberta Costa.

HISTORICAL

Received: February 06, 2020.

Approved: June 10, 2020.

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