



Must toys be gendered?

AYRA AREEBA ABID

Growing up, most children and parents have the notion that pink is for girls and blue is for boys. The same can be said for the toys that are marketed towards children and their parents.

The way that the portrayal of specific cartoons can be drastically different, like Barbie versus Ben 10, toys are also responsible for overall gender segregation and, to a certain extent, the promotion of sexism.

An extremely popular brand of chocolate chooses to have two separate kinds of containers, a pink one for girls and a blue for boys. Inside, you'll find different types of toys for each of the two sexes.

Toys centred towards boys are notorious for being more traditionally "masculine", in the sense that they are more action-centric. Building blocks, cars, action figures, and even weapons are promoted for boys. While girls are expected to play with dolls, kitchen utensils, and play dress-up among others.

The toy shops in Dhaka, like most toy shops around the world, keep their toys separated at different aisles. One side is entirely bright pink, exuding a gentle, sweet, and calm aura. The other side meant for boys seemed more active, and gave a general vibe of being tough.

This reinforces the stereotype further that males have more strength, are expected to be braver and more outgoing. While females are expected to be more ladylike, reserved, and caring.

Apart from distinctive colours, there are also products displaying floral prints meant to portray femininity and its expected qualities, such as vulnerability. While products for boys lean more on darker colours and athletics.

Often, the two sexes will be attracted to the ones that are sort of "assigned" to them by societal norms. This particular mindset can follow them well throughout their lives, stretching through milestones. Thus, many people are often stuck in a loop where the gender roles assigned to them dictate their life choices, which in turn strengthen the prevalence of such roles in the first place.

Stereotypes seep in quite early since our childhood, often beginning with the toys we are given and choose to play with. Labelling will only continue to make idea of segregation more concrete and it is irrational to be utterly blind to preference due to societal norms and the urge to follow them.

In order to gradually end this mindset, it is highly imperative to pay attention when children close to us get to the age to play with toys. The idea of segregating toys since childhood and everything relevant should be nipped in the bud, so as not to let it grow and harbour in the minds of children.

Gendered toys have been a common stereotype for ages and it is high time we re-consider such choices.

Ayra Areeba Abid's favourite word is 'serendipity' and she's a linguistics geek. Connect with her at areeba.ayra@gmail.com

STRESS CULTURE AT UNIVERSITIES

Is it time to take a break?

SABIBA HOSSAIN

"Once I start going to university, I'll become super active."

This resolution may seem familiar to some of us who rarely participated in activities outside the classroom. We thought university life would be the meaning we were looking for, handing us solutions to our problems on a silver platter. Unfortunately, as we may have soon found out, things don't usually pan out like that.

From being purely focused on academics to taking up ten jobs at a time — the motivation quickly takes an overwhelming turn, leaving us exhausted at the end of the day. Often, we struggle to juggle all the activities on our list. At some point, we begin to question our enthusiasm for such an experience.

"I didn't get much chance to participate in extracurricular activities at high school. So, I wanted to have eclectic experiences at University," says Nibedita Paul, a freshman in Military Institute of Science Technology.

However, she experienced burnout trying to balance exams and activities. "When I tried to engage myself in activities, I struggled with studies. It was really difficult," she adds.

At the same time, the presence of hustle culture at institutions make us feel as if our worth is singularly tied to the work we do, thus making it impossible to leave jobs that may exhaust us.

"I'm tutoring four students, volunteering in an organisation in order to learn photography, videog-

raphy and editing among other skills," says Mehrin Tazin, a freshman at IBA, University of Dhaka.

"However, I now understand that I've taken too many things in my hand without realizing."

She adds, "I haven't stopped doing any of these activities. Instead, I break the task into small pieces."

Even people who were involved with extracurricular activities at school seem to struggle. That may be due to the differing nature of activities we do at school and university. Participating in extra-curricular activities at universities is often especially difficult due to the added pressure of preparing for jobs while also maintaining a good CGPA.

We are living in a time when everyone is an overachiever. Those who focused on academics at school and dreamt of being an overachiever who simply did more with their time, often find themselves exhausted by this ordeal. Thus, it is important to take a break sometimes.

Taking a break from activities doesn't mean leaving them forever. One can always come back when they feel ready. It is also important to understand that leaving the things one may have once loved to do, doesn't make them a careless underachiever. Sitting down to watch a movie or completing a reading challenge does not make one lazy. The time has come for us to normalize taking breaks, at least for the ones who are to follow us.

Sabiba is a Hufflepuff who plans to go into hibernation every winter but never succeeds. Send help at fb.com/Sabibastro



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