

“Brinquedos não têm gênero”: Cultura Visual e a construção visual de masculinidades e feminilidades desde a infância

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Resumo

Roupas, filmes, desenhos animados, materiais escolares, brinquedos e outros artefatos da cultura visual indicam, aos meninos e meninas, maneiras específicas de experimentarem suas identidades e vivências. Neste artigo, temos como objetivo debater sobre artefatos da cultura visual relacionados às infâncias, investigando o que eles sugerem em relação à construção de masculinidades e feminilidades. Para tanto, utilizamo-nos de uma abordagem qualitativa e estruturamos uma pesquisa bibliográfica, dividida em dois tópicos. No primeiro, refletimos sobre as identidades infantis e as práticas culturais que se articulam, ao redor delas, distinguindo-as e constituindo-as a partir do gênero. Demos ênfase às práticas de Chá de Revelação para exemplificar a artificialidade com a qual, desde a cultura e as visualidades, produzem-se masculinidades e feminilidades. No segundo, o foco de análise fora conduzido aos brinquedos, percebendo-os como artefatos cujos significados ofertam referências aos meninos e meninas para que percebam, dentre outras coisas, o que é adequado ou não ao seu gênero.

Palavras-chave: Infâncias. Educação. Gênero. Imagens.

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“Toys have no gender”: Visual Culture and the visual construction of masculinities and femininities since childhood

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Abstract

Clothing, movies, cartoons, school supplies, toys, and other artifacts of visual culture indicate specific ways for children to experience their identities and experiences. In this article, we aim to discuss visual culture artifacts related to childhood, investigating what they suggest in relation to the construction of masculinities and femininities. To do this, we use a qualitative approach and structure a bibliographical research, divided into two themes. In the first, we reflect on children's identities and the cultural practices that are articulated around them, distinguishing them and constituting them based on gender. We emphasize the practices of Revelation Tea to exemplify the artificiality with which, from culture and visualities, masculinities and femininities are produced. In the second, the focus of analysis was on toys, perceiving them as artifacts whose meanings offer references to boys and girls so that they perceive, among other things, what is appropriate or not for their gender.

Keywords: Childhood. Education. Gender. Images.

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Resumen

Ropas, películas, dibujos de animados, útiles escolares, juguetes y otros artefactos de la cultura visual indican a los niños y niñas formas específicas de experimentar sus identidades y experiencias. En este artículo, nuestro objetivo es discutir los artefactos de la cultura visual relacionados con la infancia, investigando lo que sugieren en relación con la construcción de masculinidades y feminidades. Para ello, utilizamos un enfoque cualitativo y estructuramos una investigación bibliográfica, dividida en dos temas. En el primero, reflexionamos sobre las identidades infantiles y las prácticas culturales que se articulan en torno a ellas, distinguiéndolas y constituyéndolas en función del género. Enfatizamos las prácticas del Té Revelación para ejemplificar la artificialidad con la que, desde la cultura y las visualidades, se producen masculinidades y feminidades. En el segundo, el foco de análisis se dirigió a los juguetes, percibiéndolos como artefactos cuyos significados ofrecen referencias a niños y niñas para que perciban, entre otras cosas, lo que es apropiado o no para su género.

Palabras clave: Infancias. Educación. Género. Imágenes.

Introduction

“A child should be free to choose their own play.

I believe play should not have a gender”

(Luke Vidal, July 2022)

In July 2022, the toy retail chain Ri Happy³ found itself embroiled in controversy after posting the first episode of a web series called *Deixa Brincar* ("Let Them Play") on its social media channels. The series is hosted by actor Ricardo Cubba from Minas Gerais, who had already been creating content for the brand through the character *Menina Mofo*. Both in his performances as the character and during the interview featured in the web series, Cubba emphasizes the importance of allowing children to have fun and play with whatever they want. The episode⁴ that sparked outrage among many on social media was the one in which Cubba interviewed singer and influencer Luke Vidal⁵, who shares his family's daily life on his social media platforms.

In the video, both Cubba and Vidal are in a setting reminiscent of talk show formats, creating a sense of closeness between the interviewer and the guest. Throughout the video, the two engage in a dialogue about Vidal's reactions and interactions regarding how his son plays. The singer and influencer asserts that he believes it is important for parents and guardians to understand that they should not dictate what children should or should not play with, as, in his view, children should be free to choose their own toys and activities. He further added that play should not be tied to gender, but rather serve to enrich the child's life.

After the episode was posted on Ri Happy's official social media accounts, the brand faced accusations from specific groups of attempting to promote what they referred to as "gender ideology"⁶ and these groups also opposed the idea that "toys have no gender." As a result, the store faced heavy

³ Ri Happy was founded in 1988 by pediatrician Ricardo Sayon, his wife Juanita Sayon, and business administrator Roberto Saba.

⁴ In light of attacks from organized groups opposed to the idea that "toys have no gender," the store faced significant criticism and consequently chose to delete not only the offensive comments from its social media but also to take the video down. Despite this, it is still possible to find the video on the YouTube platform. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ka7hVvKLDMe4>. Accessed on: October 5, 2022.

⁵ Luke Vidal is a digital influencer and singer, known for his representation, especially among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Transvestite, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and other LGBTQIA+ individuals. Under the title "The World of Three of Us," Vidal shares his experiences with his husband, Rafael Cesar, and their 6-year-old son, Kauan. Instagram: @sigaluke. YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/c/escuteluke/featured>.

⁶ "Gender ideology" is a term used by conservative and Christian groups to refer to gender studies. These groups use the term to argue that gender studies are based on a "conspiracy" aimed at destroying the "traditional family" and the "natural" heterosexual order, which they claim underpins society.

criticism, both in its physical and virtual platforms, and decided to not only delete the offensive comments from its social media but also remove the video altogether.

In light of the video in question, we believe that children, from birth, relate to the world around them, and it is through their experiences with play, toys, and other artifacts of visual culture that these connections expand. It is in these interactions and games that they develop, establish relationships, and form knowledge about themselves and the world around them. This action can be referred to as play.

Through play, children establish multiple relationships that enable them to shape their way of being, thinking, and acting in and with the world, as affirmed by Aliandra Cristina Mesomo Lira, Eliane Dominico, Maristela Aparecida Nunes, and Marta Regina Furlan de Oliveira (2021). In their text, *The Sacralization of Play and Its Paradoxes: School, Industry, and Consumption Under Suspicion*, the authors argue that these relationships facilitate education that results in the "humanization" of individuals, and that this process develops through interaction with others. For young children, these interactions promote the development of reflection, autonomy, imagination, verbal expression, and concrete thinking, as well as socialization, which occur particularly through play. As noted by Lira, Dominico, Nunes, and Oliveira (2021, p. 74), referring to contemporary artifacts, "Toys have undergone profound transformations, from the materials used in their manufacture to their characteristics, modes of production, and consumption".

Consumerism among children has been growing to such an extent that its influence can be seen even in the ways of playing that are being offered and valued through the media. We can observe this encouragement of consumption in toys that imitate cash registers, vending machines with coins, ATMs, shopping carts, slot machine-like rolling machines, or even versions of games like *Banco Imobiliário*⁷, which come with card machines. Additionally, we can mention *Skins*⁸ that can be purchased in virtual games by paying players, as well as collectible toys like Hot Wheels⁹ cars and their racetracks, Polly dolls¹⁰, that include characters, animals, clothing, shoes, transportation,

⁷ *Banco Imobiliário* is a board game launched by the company Brinquedos Estrela. It is a version of a game internationally known as Monopoly.

⁸ They are accessories used in virtual games to change and/or vary the appearance of an avatar or character. Through this paid service, players can, for example, change outfits, add weapons, vehicles, and other benefits compared to non-paying players.

⁹ It is a brand of toy car miniatures introduced by the toy manufacturer Mattel in 1968. Hot Wheels is currently the largest brand of toy car miniatures.

¹⁰ It is a toy franchise developed by Bluebird since 1989. Originally conceived as a small, portable doll, over the years, the doll has grown larger.

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furniture, real estate, and other accessories, and more recently, Funko Pops¹¹. Common to these examples, under the justification of "collecting," these artifacts mobilize not just the purchase of a single product but the continuous acquisition of multiple items.

The economically disadvantaged population seeks new forms of consumption to try to participate in this consumer cultural practice, whose process of acquisition/purchase/discard, intensified by the media, creates the idea that individuals should consume far beyond their needs, thus contributing to the increase in class inequality and generating a standardization of tastes, thoughts, habits, and values. Marta Regina Furlan de Oliveira and Jaqueline Delgado Paschoal (2015) contribute to this discussion by explaining the impacts of the cultural industry and consumption on individuals' lives, especially in the case of children, and in the process of adapting to social standards that uniform behaviors, desires, and ideals according to the commodity. Children, from an early age, have access to media that allow contact with advertisements and other artifacts of visual culture that carry explicit and implicit meanings. In the text *Childhood and the Society of Consumption: Cultural Industry and Children's Imaginary*, the authors highlight that “[...] contemporary society has been characterized by production and consumption relations that permeate social interactions and the very formation of human thought” (OLIVEIRA; PASCHOAL, 2015, p.7).

In commercials on television channels, YouTube videos, and other artifacts of visual culture, it is possible to observe commercials and disguised promotions that, in addition to inducing excessive consumption of a particular product, present, in their structure, representations of their target audience, showing it in a stereotypical manner. The visual culture constructed through toys and other artifacts creates standards and legitimizes what is beautiful and ideal for bodies, as well as guiding tastes, habits, and values. Animated cartoons, films, series, cinema, advertising and promotions, product packaging, clothing, footwear, magazines, school materials, social media, billboards, music, books, games, illustrations, toys, electronics, reality shows, digital influencers, horoscopes, store windows, and other imagistic artifacts are referred to by Fernando Hernández (2007) as artifacts of visual culture. In *Visual Culture Gatherers* (HERNÁNDEZ, 2007), the author underscores the pedagogical nature of these artifacts that generally act to value hegemonic forms of being—and are rarely or never problematized by teachers. Similarly, Maria Emilia Sardelich (2006), in *Reading Images, Visual Culture, and Educational Practice*, points out the need for teachers to pay attention

¹¹ The history of Funko begins in 1998, when American Mike Becker (1943--) founded a small company that would later become a massive obsession for collectors and pop culture enthusiasts.

to the intrinsic meanings of images addressed to children and to question them from the outset in school education:

[...] social representations of girl, boy, woman, man, family, child, teenager, adult, elderly, poor, rich, black, white, teacher, student, school, among many other possibilities, in images found in textbooks, notebooks, magazines, billboards, video games, television, postcards, toys, works of art, etc. (SARDELICH, 2006, p. 468).

Given these considerations, this article aims to discuss artifacts of visual culture related to childhood, investigating what they suggest regarding the construction of masculinities and femininities. To this end, we employed a qualitative approach and structured a bibliographic research, as classified by Carlos Antônio Gil (2002) in *Como elaborar projetos de pesquisa*. The author indicates that “bibliographic research is developed based on previously prepared material, primarily consisting of books and scientific articles” (GIL, 2002, p. 44). Structurally, we divided the development into two sections. In the first, we reflect on childhood identities and the cultural practices that articulate around them, distinguishing and constituting them based on gender. We emphasized the practice of gender reveal parties to exemplify the artificiality with which masculinities and femininities are produced through culture and visibility. In the second section, the focus of analysis is directed toward toys, perceiving them as artifacts whose meanings provide references for boys and girls to understand, among other things, what is appropriate or not for their gender.

Reflections on Childhood Identity: Blue and Pink and Other Gendered Distinctions

We highlight that gender issues do not only affect the lives of adult subjects but also influence how childhood is experienced by children and perceived by the community as a whole. From the moment of birth or even before, boys and girls have their bodies read through gendered lenses. Visual meanings are attributed to their bodies from the moment their biological differences are “revealed,” expressed through the identification of their genitalia. It is from this point that the first gender distinctions are made.

Regarding gender reveal parties, Rodrigo Pedro Casteleira (2022), in the chapter titled “We Announce, Sir/Madam, Your Gender,” discusses bodies whose desires contradict those defended by Christian colonizers. He also problematizes the value that contemporary, capitalist, and patriarchal societies place on male genitalia, indicating that this is not a universal principle for Indigenous and Black bodies. Specifically referring to the practice of gender reveal parties, the author notes that a lack of cautious interpretation of the terms “man” and “woman” creates expectations about the infant

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body that is yet to come. Even before birth, the fetus is already assigned a name, a sex, the prospect of a sexuality, a layette, and various toys, all organized around the "revelation" announcing whether it is a boy or a girl. Casteleira (2022, p. 78) emphasizes the need for defining others' gender and sexuality, stating that this practice “[...] seems recurrent in the colonial context, first used to punish Indigenous and Black sexual practices and later to anticipate the sexual and gender practices of children who have yet to be born.”

Isabela Daiane Pironi, Jean Pablo Guimarães Rossi, and Eliane Rose Maio (2022) similarly address gender and sexuality through the lens of gender reveal parties in their text titled "It Doesn't Matter the Sex, I Just Want It to Be a Boy: Cisheteronormativity of Bodies in Gender Reveal Parties." The authors note that the act of discovering the biological sex of a child has become a true event, pointing out that, in various countries, this practice is growing and becoming a trend on social media. Pironi, Rossi, and Maio (2022) indicate that through events like this, it is possible to observe the crystallization of practices and discourses aimed at preserving the norms that regulate the genders of young children, essentially monitoring them to ensure they fit within the framework that defines what it means to be a boy or a girl.

The authors examine three videos available on YouTube using the search term "gender reveal." In the first video, which documents a party titled "Charraia #theo#aurora," they note a high production value, with professionals hired for audiovisual capture, and the gender revelation occurs via a helicopter. Thus, not only is the sex revealed, but also the class status of the unborn child. Pironi, Rossi, and Maio (2022) draw attention to the expectations of the guests regarding the fetus's sex, particularly the father and grandfather, who express their preference for the child to be a "boy" in several scenes.

In the second analyzed video, the discovery is made through a cake with blue and pink icing, where the color of the filling indicates the child's sex. Before the revelation, the father gives a speech to the guests, announcing, as the authors indicate, “[...] that the child would be ‘welcome regardless of sex’” (PIRONI; ROSSI; MAIO, 2022, p. 41). After cutting the cake and discovering that the filling is blue, the father faints. However, in the continuation of the video, the mother reads a letter revealing that the baby is female and that the earlier revelation was a prank. At this point, Pironi, Rossi, and Maio (2022) note that it is evident there is a break and decline in expectations on the part of the father. The third and final video is described as a homemade production that captures the moment when the agitated husband starts shouting insults at his wife and destroys the decorations of the party.

But why do fathers, mothers, grandfathers, and family members, in general, prefer that children be boys rather than girls? It is noticeable in these described performances that gender issues

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are activated by social expectations. Social relationships largely value male bodies over female bodies, and such situations tend to prioritize the desire to have a son over having a daughter, as evidenced by the emotion and enthusiasm in the gestures and speeches made during gender reveal events. We agree with the authors once again as they emphasize that this type of event reinforces cisheteronormativity as something natural to humanity.

These parties include various stereotypes about the social roles to be played by these children, manifested from an early age. For example, boys are associated with the color blue and toys related to the public sphere, such as cars, balls, and sports, while girls are assigned the color pink and toys linked to the private sphere, such as dollhouses, dolls, and household items (PIRONI; ROSSI; MAIO, 2022, p. 36)

Matheus Estevão Ferreira da Silva and Tânia Suely Antonelli Marcelino Brabo (2016) point out in their text "The Introduction of Gender Roles in Childhood: Toys for Girls and/or Boys?" that from birth, an individual is inserted into a group. In this group, a boy or girl will be subjected to processes of socialization, such that throughout their life, positive examples will be introduced in accordance with established norms, while negative examples will be discouraged and removed to suppress any potential "deviations" in behavior. As the authors state, models of masculinity and femininity "[...] are gradually constructed within the family or at school, through games, toys, television [...]" and other artifacts (SILVA E BRABO, 2016, p.129).

Figure 01 - Revelation Tea Doll



Source: Image from Pinterest, available at: <https://pin.it/78OC8bU>.

The **Bebê Surpresa** artifact from Estrela aims to bring the rituals and procedures contained in gender reveal parties into the child's reality. The child represented by this toy is wrapped in a diaper, with closed eyes and no visible markers regarding their gender. Only the skin color is perceptible. The packaging indicates that to discover the color of the child's eyes, among the four possible color options, one simply needs to rub a wet cotton ball over that area. After the "discovery" of the eye color, the eyes will remain "open" from that point on. The information on the packaging also states that by removing the diaper that covers the toy's body, the consumer discovers the sex, between the two options: "female" and "male."

This artifact not only reiterates the perceptions of Casteleira (2022) and Pironi, Rossi, and Maio (2022) regarding the growth and popularity of the gender reveal practice but also indicates that this manifestation has been transported into the children's universe, even being transformed into a toy. Thus, we observe that, by interacting with this artifact from a very young age, children will not only learn to identify its gender, conceptualizing it as either a doll or an action figure, but they will also be able to associate gender-specific expectations regarding names, abilities, play, professions, and games that they can, playfully, assign to the toy. Furthermore, just like traditional gender reveal parties, the toy's packaging proposes a "surprise" that is revealed through specific colors—pink for

girls and blue for boys. In this case, the colors are revealed in the composition of the underwear beneath the diaper covering part of the toy.

Despite this, we can highlight as a positive aspect that the toy allows the buyer to acquire a doll without knowing its "sex." Thus, perhaps, girls can receive action figures as gifts and not just dolls. In comments on the websites of stores selling this product, we find many reviews from consumers who reported that this was the first boy doll their daughters, nieces, or granddaughters received, and that these children reacted positively to it. However, we note that there are no comments on these same sites regarding boys' reactions, possibly indicating that this is a toy given to girls. The hypothesis we formulate for this situation relates to patriarchal values, which articulate that boys should not handle dolls, even if they are action figures, as this would supposedly feminize and soften their bodies and behaviors. It also relates to the conception that caring for children is a woman's role, so girls, from a very young age, should become accustomed to and familiar with this through their toys, dolls, and action figures.

In "Doll is a thing for girls": the virilization and docilization of boys and girls in a world of two sexes, we find provocations regarding the childhood experiences that are naturalized by societies. In this text, Andréa Zíngara Miranda (2022) addresses the construction of two "worlds" for children: one for boys and another for girls. Throughout the text, the author, seeking to understand how the apparatus of sexuality promotes knowledge about the sex and sexuality of individuals, points out how historical events, social practices, and the creation of hierarchies between the sexes naturalize a discourse that either docilizes or virilizes the child according to their biological sex. The author prompts us to think that both boys and girls are victims of social constructions that shape children according to a compulsory heterosexual view. "From this perspective, boys and girls are, from an early age, disciplined to behave in a certain way according to their sex" (MIRANDA, 2022, p. 62). The author also notes that historically, there have been specific moments when the hierarchy between the sexes was established. In the field of Education, especially, as she explains, around the 18th century, the studies of Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) contributed to an even stricter delineation of the social roles that boys and girls were to fulfill, including in schools. In the guidelines proposed by the philosopher, women and girls had their status as citizens denied and were characterized, both biologically and morally, based on maternal and domestic functions. Therefore, in the educational sphere, they were to have their bodies disciplined, as well as their feelings and desires, so that their docile, passive, and submissive character would be preserved. As for men and boys, according to Rousseau's pedagogical philosophy, they had the duty to engage in work—which, according to Miranda's analysis (2022), was deemed indispensable for a social man in that context.

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The author asserts that, despite studies on sexual differences gaining strength around the 19th century, preconceived ideas of an “essence” difference still persist. Ideas such as that of a “fragile,” “docile,” and naturally “passive” woman, propagated by Rousseau, remain strong today, just as it still raises eyebrows to see boys playing with dolls or girls playing soccer. Miranda (2022, p. 68) indicates that “As long as people are classified by their anatomy, disregarding their sexuality, the question ‘Is it a boy or a girl?’ will remain very much alive in social discursive practices”.

Is it a boy or a girl? Discovering the gender of the artifact

Beyond issues of class, consumerism, and the conceptions of what it means to “be a child,” toys often reproduce and validate behaviors deemed specifically “masculine” and “feminine.” This was the question raised by Ricardo Cubba and Luke Vidal in the web series associated with the Ri Happy brand, as highlighted in the epigraph and introduction of this article. The phrase “toys do not have a gender,” launched and discussed by them during the video, contradicts the notions that, from common sense to the guidance provided by education professionals, dictate, for example, that boys should play with cars and girls should play house.

The character related to childhood and the act of playing, as demonstrated by the situation presented in this introduction involving the dispute over the meanings attributed to toys, assumes new shapes in contemporary society, alongside new forms of communication, creation, and dissemination. These, in subtle ways and with accessible language for children, encourage consumption and assist in the constitution of children's subjectivities. Sometimes, toys and other artifacts directed at children, in their forms, colors, and visualities, refer to the standardization of behaviors, desires, and ideas. In the 21st century, when, in some societies and cultures, children have become the focus of productions, promotions, and sales by specific corporations, toys take on meanings that extend far beyond entertainment, as demonstrated in the figure 02.

Figure 02- Advertisements from the 20th and 21st Centuries



Source: **Blog Ana Caldato**, available at: <https://anacaldatto.blogspot.com/2012/07/chegada-do-boneco-ken-bob-ao-brasil.html>. **Site Anne Claire Baby**, available at: <https://www.anneclairebaby.com/products/l-o-l-surprise-winter-disco-bigger-surprise>. Accessed on: October 15, 2021

In the first image, we can observe a banner for the Barbie Sun Bath doll from 1989. As indicated in the image, the doll comes with sunglasses, a visor, a seahorse-shaped comb, and a beach disc, and it promises to display a tan and have a pink streak in her hair after just a few moments in the sun. Furthermore, the advertisement reveals much more than what will be purchased, as the Barbie¹² does not come with all the friends shown in the image. In the second image, we see a model of a more contemporary doll, the L.O.L doll, which stands for Little Outrageous Littles¹³. This particular edition is named L.O.L Bigger Surprise, and as indicated in the image, it comes with a magnifying glass, six stickers, and four secret messages in its packaging. But that's not all. The kit includes twenty-six accessories and six capsules for displaying the doll. When we examine the advertisements for these artifacts from different centuries, it is noticeable that, even in distinct ways, the dolls aim to captivate children. One offers the idea of fun at the beach with the promise of a "cool" tan, while the other presents the concept of surprise through a suitcase filled with numerous items, allowing for a more enjoyable play experience

¹² The Barbie doll was created in 1959 by American businesswoman Ruth Handler (1916-2002) and is produced by the company Mattel.

¹³ Little Outrageous Littles, commonly known as LOL dolls, are produced by the company Candide.

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Both dolls overflow with "femininity" based on a restricted understanding of the term and are icons of "perfection." They are well thought out from a consumerist perspective, accompanied by collectible accessories and clothing. In the advertisement for the L.O.L doll, we can observe that the toy is overloaded with accessories and features flashy hair and outfits. At this point, we note that it is not only the doll that presents an image corresponding to a particular ideal of femininity: the girl appearing in the image also presents herself with clothing and an appearance that does not align with her age. The girl also wears makeup and extravagant earrings and expresses surprise at the display of over forty accessories accompanying the product.

Figure 03 illustrates two dolls with distinct characteristics. In their pedagogical aspects, these artifacts allow the child to express their feelings and to simulate and rehearse everyday and unreal situations. Such toys can help the child to express themselves and even construct their identity. Significant differences can be noted between the toys depicted in the figure. The first is characterized by prominent muscles, with clothing and boots that integrate into the plasticity of its body, and by colors that represent masculinity. Furthermore, it suggests that the notion of masculinity is related to strength, protection, and exudes virility. The second image, that of the doll, defines femininity through long hair - which can be styled, tied, and caressed - and through clothing and shoes made of various materials, which allow for change and interaction, suggesting to girls specific play involving care, dressing up, and beautifying. The toy contains accessories predominantly in shades of pink and lavender, socially recognized as feminine colors, which demonstrate a concern with appearance.

Figure 03- Masculinities and Femininity



Source: Image from Pinterest, available at: <https://br.pinterest.com/pin/63683782233890911/>. Image from Pinterest, available at: <https://br.pinterest.com/pin/17873729757906957/>.

The first character represents a superhero, who displays more rigid and stiff traits, reflecting in his posture and a sense of bravery and sobriety. In contrast, the second character expresses a slight inclination in her posture and a gentle way of positioning her hands over her face and accessories. Additionally, the slight bend of her legs conveys a sense of softness in her stance, as if she is posing for a photo. There is also a significant chromatic distinction in the composition of the dolls, with the first character featuring bluish, grayish, red, and white tones, while the second is composed of pink and purple tones. The pedagogical and gendered aspects of these colors were addressed by us in another discussion (AUTOR¹⁴, 2021), where we emphasized that the systematization of "blue for boys and pink for girls" was established and consolidated in the mid-20th century. In "You Are Not Born Blue or Pink, You Become" (2021), we highlighted that in the 20th century, in a context of product accessibility, consumerist practices, and the development of technologies that allowed the identification of a baby's sex before birth, toys and clothing played a leading role in visually and chromatically distinguishing boys from girls. Before this, as Jo Paoletti (2012) demonstrates in "Pink and Blue," boys and girls interacted with colors differently. After investigating clothing, baby books, and paper dolls in the United States, the author concludes that, in the 19th century, the color pink was similarly assigned to both boys and girls. "Simply put, most babies born before 1960 would likely have received pink gifts, regardless of their sex" (PAOLETTI, 2012, p. 92, our translation)¹⁵.

We observe at this point that not all toys exhibit a gendering in their "construction." Beyond the examples we have analyzed so far, there are other toys that are characterized by stimulating exploration, enabling new discoveries, and exercising creativity without necessarily indicating a "correct" gender to which they are intended. These are toys that focus on creation, playfulness, imagination, and the fun they can provide to children, regardless of whether they are girls or boys, as we can see in Figure 04.

¹⁴ To avoid compromising the blind review process, we have omitted the author's name from the book as they are also a co-author of this article. Should this manuscript be accepted, we will make the necessary insertions as indicated in the guidelines of the journal *Educação em Foco* before its publication.

¹⁵ "Simply put, most babies born before 1960 were probably likely to receive pink gifts, regardless of their sex" (PAOLETTI, 2012, p.92).

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Figure 04 - Board game



Source: Image from Pinterest, available at: <<https://br.pinterest.com/pin/395190936052419562/>>.

The game "Guess Who?" involves two players and aims to "uncover" the character chosen by their opponent. The game promotes interactions between players, as well as organization, logical reasoning, creativity, imagination, vision, hearing, and strategy. Visually, it does not characterize masculinity and femininity but rather the skills that both boys and girls can develop by discovering their opponent's character first. In fact, as indicated on the game's packaging, boys and girls can play together.

Despite the existence of media representations related to toys that suggest boys and girls can use the same object, there remains a subtle division between what is considered "boys' toys" and those deemed "girls' toys." This gendered division underscores the characteristics that are socially attributed to each gender, namely, hegemonic masculinities and femininities. By hegemonic masculinities and femininities, we refer to the appropriation of values regarding what is expected of masculine and feminine bodies within a normative behavior standard. Hegemonic masculinity can thus be explained as the legitimization of the socially dominant position of men and the subordination of women. Such norms lead to the marginalization of diverse forms of being a man or a woman that deviate from or challenge the hegemonic standard. Those who differ or "deviate" from these references such as men with long hair and painted nails or women with short "boyish" hairstyles or who do not shave may be considered dissenters.

There are characteristics associated with the expectations of each gender and social rules regarding how they should behave. Women are presumed to be more sensitive, patient, emotionally fragile, to sit with their legs in a certain way, and to have less body hair. In contrast, men are expected

to maintain emotional control, be dominant, self-sufficient, assertive, and to communicate in a particular manner. However, this division does not occur naturally. It is essential to remember and highlight that it is a culturally constructed and taught phenomenon throughout life. While girls are encouraged to behave obediently and to engage in play and activities that involve more affectivity than speed, boys participate in play and activities that involve logical reasoning, invention, and exploration of external spaces.

Conclusion

Toys are more than just objects; they enable the creation and modification of meanings and experiences for those who play with them. They are objects that foster creativity, inventiveness, and imagination, generally lacking pre-established rules, thus allowing for numerous ways to play with the same item. This artifact carries significant responsibilities as it provides children with experiences from their daily lives and facilitates the creation and development of their own personalities, values, ethics, motor coordination, and, most importantly, creativity and imagination.

Based on the studies and surveys conducted in the preparation of this research, we understand that artifacts of visual culture contribute to the construction of children's subjectivities. Through the manipulation of these artifacts, children represent reality, translating concepts, meanings, and interpretations that are attributed to and internalized by them. Thus, it is possible to assert that the ways in which they play with their toys contribute to their personality formation and to the ways they will understand and engage with the world. This process also shapes the representations of childhood, as well as what is considered beautiful, ideal, and acceptable for children.

In this regard, we refer to researchers Tatiane Nascimento de Borba and Bianca Salazar Guizzo (2020) in their paper titled "Representations of motherhood/fatherhood in contemporary educational materials: A study from gender issues." In this work, the authors indicate that children's experiences in manipulating artifacts of visual culture contribute to the construction of their subjectivity. Referring to child subjects, the authors explain that visual culture artifacts "[...] facilitate the establishment of processes of signification that, in combination with other cultural elements they experience, contribute to the formation of their ways of being and behaving" (BORBA; GUIZZO, 2020, p. 323). Therefore, the feeling or idea of norm is produced through discursive, cultural, and visual processes that are also pedagogical. The norm, then, is taught.

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