

A Project Report which recommends an appropriate strategic response for LEGO to gender, and gender stereotypes in marketing

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NAME:	Heather Jackson
STUDENT NUMBER:	1704024

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is set to recommend a strategic response to the diversity issue of gender stereotypes within marketing. Understanding gender stereotypes is essential, sex assigned at birth is separate to gender, gender is defined by Parsons and Maclaran (2009) to be the 'cultural manifestation of biological sexual differences. A stereotype is the perception of an individual, or group of individuals based on their characteristics, characteristics such as religion, race, gender, age and preferences. Parsons and Maclaran (2009) identify gender stereotypes to be a stereotype relating exclusively to gender, these stereotypes can be harmful and can have a negative effect on an individual's perception of themselves as well as their performance.

Grau and Zotos (2016) emphasise the historic context of gender stereotypes within marketing, stating that for a long-time women have been depicted within advertising as inferior, and or less capable than they have become over the past few decades. Continuing that despite the shift in gender roles within society, advertising was slow to catch up creating a culture lag. An example of this was Nestlé's Yorkie bar rebranding in 2002 which essentially 'banned' girls from purchasing the chocolate bar, the organisation faced backlash in 2003, however the ASA dismissed the complaints at the time. In the subsequent decade and a half major changes have taken place, and currently the Advertising Standards Authority (2017) state that: 'Gender stereotypes have the potential to cause harm by inviting assumptions about adults and children that might negatively restrict how they see themselves and how others see them'.

This has put pressure on all industries but specifically the children's toy industry, with the Let Toys Be Toys campaign putting pressure on manufacturers and retailers to become gender neutral. This pressure has caused companies such as Mattel (2020) the maker of the Barbie doll to release new gender neutral product lines. Therefore it is recommended that LEGO continue their efforts to gender neutralise their websites and packaging, as well as investigate the potential for gender neutral product lines, along with restrictions put on retailers relating to how they are allowed to display and market LEGO's products.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 BACKGROUND

The aim of this report is to create a strategic response for LEGO (2020) to the changing demands of diversity and inclusion within marketing, relating specifically to gender stereotypes. LEGO (2020) is one of the world's leading manufacturers in play toy materials, LEGO was founded in 1932 by Ole Kirk Kristiansen, originally a carpenter's workshop LEGO has come a long way in the last 85 years. Roderick (2017) highlights the changes that have been made in recent years relevant to the advertising of toys in relation to gender stereotypes, arguing that businesses like LEGO must do more than just mostly 'get it right'.

2.2 RELEVANT DEFINITIONS

For the reader to be able to fully understand Gender as well as gender stereotypes within the marketing context gender, stereotypes, and then gender stereotypes must first be defined. Gender is defined by Parsons and Maclaran (2009) to be the 'cultural manifestation of biological sexual differences'. However, Parsons and Maclaran (2009) continues by stating that despite human beings getting assigned a sex at birth based on the sex organs they are born with, their gender does not necessarily match this. Parsons and Maclaran (2009) continue by highlighting that gender can be defined by a multitude of social and cultural factors, including but not limited to, the job an individual holds, how they walk and talk, as well as what their preferences are.

Lippmann (1922) was the first to identify stereotypes, highlighting the perception that an individual may have of themselves, as well as how they feel the outside world perceives them, or should perceive them. Stating that these perceptions are comparable to "pictures inside the heads of these human beings, the pictures of themselves, of others, of their needs, and relationships" as well as "the pictures inside people's heads do not automatically correspond with the world outside" In simpler terms, a stereotype is a perception held towards an individual, or group of individuals based on their characteristics, characteristics such as religion, race, gender, age and preferences. Inzlicht and Schmader (2011) highlight 'stereotype threat' referring to stereotype threat as how an individual's performance and or actions can be 'seen through the lens' of a negative stereotype.

Once both gender, and stereotypes are understood as separate entities, Gender stereotypes can be explained, Parsons and Maclaran (2009) identify gender stereotypes to be a stereotype relating exclusively to gender, a woman who likes to shop, cook and clean, or a man who likes alcohol, sex and fast cars. Continuing though that some Gender stereotypes can be harmful, this is evident in the the case Inzlicht and Schmader (2011) describe such as: How a negative perception of women's ability to perform in Science and Math can impact on their real-life performance, continuing that how an individual thinks the world may see them relates to how they will perform.

2.3 HISTORICAL CONTEXT WITHIN MARKETING

Parsons (2015) highlights the historical context of marketing used by brands such as 'Fosters' and 'Lynx' to be made for 'real men' by men, pushing a link between the sip of a beer as you turn a burger on the barbeque, and that of being a 'real man', as well as in the case that smelling like Lynx deodorant would have all the women chasing you, as though this must be any man's ultimate goal. Parsons (2015) refers to this type of 'blokey' marketing as a 'hangover from the 1990's when Britpop and loaded magazines' made the advertisement of a man's love of, women, football and beer to go unrestricted. Grau and Zotos (2016) emphasise the historic context of gender stereotypes within marketing, stating that for a long-time women have been depicted within advertising as inferior, and or less capable than they have become over the past few decades. Continuing that despite the shift in gender roles within society advertising was slow to catch up creating a culture lag. Grau and Zotos (2016) also emphasises the 'Mirror' verses 'Mould' effect of advertising, the mirror arguments say that advertising can only mirror what it sees in society, at worst creating a magnifying glass to the gender differences and inequalities. Whereas the Mould effect creates a reflection of society and its values, this effect arguably is what shapes society's view of itself, that the media are largely responsible for this.

An example of how genders were portrayed within the media is Nestlé (2020) chocolate bar the 'Yorkie', which was originally launched in 1976. Day (2002) highlights it's re-branding in April of 2002 that saw the 'O' in Yorkie on the front packaging become a symbol that banned women from buying and eating the chocolate bar. Day (2002) continues by emphasising the tag line given to the chocolate in 2002 which was 'No Girls Allowed', Nestlé also used slogans within their billboard campaigns such as 'Don't feed the birds', 'King size not queen size' and 'Not available in Pink'.

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Marketing Week News (2003) highlights the backlash Yorkie faced at the time, with specific reference to the complaints they faced for their marketing campaign using the slogan 'Save your money for driving lessons', implying that women can't drive as well as men, however the ASA dismissed these complaints and deemed them unharmed to women. Nevertheless, things have significantly changed since, The Advertising standards Authority (2017) published a report relating to harmful gender stereotypes within advertising, a report summarising the research they conducted prior to changing their regulations relating to the use of gender stereotypes in advertising. The Advertising standards Authority (2017) state that 'Gender stereotypes have the potential to cause harm by inviting assumptions about adults and children that might negatively restrict how they see themselves and how others see them'. Continuing however that although it is recognised that there are a multitude of factors effecting an individual's perception of themselves, in relation to gender stereotypes The Advertising Standards Authority also recognise that it cannot be ignored that the use of gender stereotypes in adverts 'have the potential to cause harm by contributing to unequal gender outcome.

3. GENDER STEREOTYPES AND MARKETING

3.1 MARKETING BROADLY

As mentioned above, The Advertising Standards Authority (2017) have changed their guidelines in recent years to match the demand put on the marketing industry to keep up with the world's recognition and celebration of diversity. Hammett (2019a) highlights the demand put on the marketers to think neutrally when marketing, if marketing materials produced by a firm are not neutrally marketed, as opposed to gendered then the firm could face backlash. Hammett (2019b) talks about the ASA's decision to ban the car manufacturer VW and Philadelphia cheese's adverts, based on their depiction of 'harmful gender stereotypes'. Continuing that TV advertising is an expensive part of a business's marketing strategy, meaning that if adverts containing gender stereotypes risk never being displayed on consumers television screens organisations must seriously consider gender stereotypes or risk wasting a significant amount of their marketing budget.

Parsons and Maclaran (2009) highlight the theories relating to gender and consumption, gender allows for an insight into consumer buyer behaviour, therefore an insight into how to target a particular market and maximise profits. Parsons and Maclaran (2009) use the example of the difference gender plays in the decoration of a child's bedroom, how a company's ability to understand the differences in the wants of boys and girls, allows for the organisation to better meet their needs using marketing materials. Tadajewski and Brownlie (2008) as well as Blythe (2013) highlight how using gender to categorise and target consumers in relation to marketing has been used throughout the development of marketing, changes made by the ASA's guidelines driven by pressure led campaigns such as 'Let Toys Be Toys' are fundamentally changing the way that organisations can target their markets, forcing a gradual remould of the industry as a whole in relation to diversity. Blythe (2013) continues by stating that this shift is proving harder for industries that are traditionally dominated by one gender, such as 'highly technical durable products', products such as Televisions and computers which have traditionally been purchases made by the husband within the traditional husband and wife setting.

3.2 THE TOY INDUSTRY

Campaigns such as Let Toys be Toys (2020) are putting pressure on toy manufacturers as well as retailers to do away with unnecessarily gendered toys, arguing that toys are supposed to be fun and educational, that children do not need to be told what they should and shouldn't be playing with based on their gender. Let Toys be Toys (2020) argue that toys should be sorted and displayed based on their function rather than by gender to allow children to choose what it is that they want to play with, research conducted by the organisation in 2016 showed that there were no longer signs in store windows advertising 'Girls' or 'Boys toys'. However, a study they conducted in 2017 showed that the gender representation in catalogues and online was still heavily stereotyped, pink and dolls for girls, and blue and cars for boys. Campaigns such as 'Let Toys be Toys' are applying direct pressure to companies such as LEGO (2020) aiming to force the illuminate of gender stereotypes within all aspects of their marketing, from packaging, to tv and radio adverts, as well as restrictions on how retailers display their toys in store.

Mattel (2020) the company behind 'Barbie' is a good example of a big player in the toy industry meeting the demands of these pressure groups, one of their newer product line launches is the 'Creatable world' doll, which claims to be making doll play more inclusive. The creatable world doll launched by Mattel (2020) has been marketed as a gender neutral children's play doll, the doll's themselves are gender neutral as well as all marketing materials, materials feature both boys and girls playing with the creatable world doll, view Appendix A for more details.

Barnett (2017) discusses LEGO's decision to start product testing toys in mixed groups of children, previously to 2017 LEGO had only tested its toys in gender specific groups, continuing that it may come as a surprise that they did not product test in mixed groups previously, however it was not common practice in the industry. Auster and Mansbach (2012) identify that although there is a shift to reduce labelling and direct marketing of toys to children through gender, most retailers are yet to eliminate the pink and blue stigma in stores surrounding the gender specific toy isles. Kollmayer et al., (2018) highlights the importance of toy play in children's gender and socialisation, that children that have limited play with gender specific toys are less likely to engage in gender stereotyping activity, because of this parents now see gender neutral toys to

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be more desirable, leading to an increased chance of purchase. This indicates a competitor advantage over gender specific toys, companies at the forefront of toy gender neutralisation are likely to benefit from the shift in public opinion. This overlaps with Mattel's (2020) recent success of its launch of gender neutral doll, as well as LEGO's (2020) shift towards mixed gender product testing and their lack of gender specific pages on their website.

4. CONCLUSION

4.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the Findings of this report three recommendations will be made to LEGO in relation to their strategic response to the diversity issue of gender they are currently facing.

Recommendation 1

It is Recommended that is that LEGO continue their efforts to reduce gender labelling on all aspects of their packaging, as well as other marketing materials including their website. Not only is it essential for LEGO to remove the 'Boy' and 'Girl' Labels, but also make efforts to show advertisements featuring both male and female children playing with what could otherwise be considered gender specific toys. This should help LEGO maintain their competitive advantage.

Recommendation 2

It is Recommended that LEGO investigate the possibility of introducing gender neutral LEGO figures, toys that have features such as interchangeable clothes and hair, that eliminate their overall male or female representation. This strategy has proven successful for Mattel (2020) not just in terms of financial gains relating to sales, but also the positive publicity the launch generated.

Recommendation 3

It is Recommended that LEGO impose restrictions on how the retailers stocking their toys are permitted to market them, as poor marketing at shop level could unwind all the efforts LEGO as an organisation are making to create a more gender neutral and inclusive image.

4.2 CONCLUSION

While it is now widely recognised and respected that an individual's gender is separate to their sex it has become evident that there is still a culture lag between the changing gender roles of modern society and how they are depicted by marketing materials. Gender stereotypes are still present in 2020 however there has been a significant change to them since the early 2000's the days of 'No girls aloud' chocolate bars. The gender issues recognised have now been legislated, with restrictions on harmful gender advertising been put in place, giving organisations clear guidelines as to what is and isn't considered harmful. The pressure from the public to neutralise gender specific advertising has been identified to heavily impact on that of the children's toy industry, the industry which LEGO operates within, these pressures are forcing organisations such as LEGO to make changes to their marketing practices and remove gender separation. Organisations such as Mattel that have done this well to date haveing gained a distinct competitor advantage, and good publicity with their gender neutral doll. It has been recommended that LEGO continue down their path of gender neutralisation while they look to create new and inclusive toy ranges in future. Due to the limitations of this report not all the benefits and disadvantages of gender neutral marketing could be looked at in depth, it would be recommended that further research is carried out in this area.

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6. APPENDICES

Appendix A

