

Briefing: December 2012

The Campaign

Let Toys be Toys - for Girls & Boys



The Campaign

Let Toys Be Toys is a new campaign set up by parents, asking retailers to stop limiting children's imaginations and interests by promoting some toys as only suitable for girls, and others only for boys.

We are asking retailers to present toys by theme or function, rather than by gender, and to let children decide which toys they want to play with.



Survey Overview

Which retailers let toys be toys?

During November 2012 a group of volunteer parents carried out a pilot survey, visiting toy stores, supermarkets and department stores across the UK and Ireland; checking whether they had sections for 'Boys Toys' and 'Girls Toys', how strongly these were marked out, and which toys were included in each section. They also looked at the corresponding online toy stores.

The initial survey visited 40 different retail branches to get an initial view of which retailers are doing the best at letting toys be toys, and which are limiting children's choices by gender. In 2013 we will expand this survey so that we an benchmark the progress of each retailer.



Which retailers let toys be toys?

End of term report card, December 2012

Failed to make the grade

- ❑ Wilkinsons
- ❑ TK Maxx
- ❑ The Entertainer
- ❑ Asda
- ❑ M&S

Mixed performance

- ❑ Debenhams
- ❑ Boots
- ❑ Toys R Us
- ❑ Argos
- ❑ John Lewis
- ❑ Tesco

Top of the class

- ❑ Sainsbury's
- ❑ Fun Learning
- ❑ Early Learning Centre
- ❑ Hamleys

Based on mystery shop of stores and websites



What let them down?

	Labeled sections	Labeled toys	Online tagging by gender
Fun Learning			
Sainsbury's			☹
Early Learning Centre			☹
Hamleys			☹
Toys R Us	☹		
John Lewis			☹
Argos	-		
Tesco			☹
Debenhams	☹	☹	☹
Asda	☹	☹	☹
M&S	☹	☹	☹
Boots	☹	☹	☹
TK Maxx	☹	☹	-
The Entertainer	☹	☹	☹
Wilkinsons	☹	☹	☹

Half of the stores visited signposted ‘Boys’ and ‘Girls’ toys

These included:

- **Wilkinsons** (The Gates Shopping Centre, Durham)
- **Boots** (Cork, Ireland)
- **Debenhams** (Cork, Ireland; Norwich; Bristol
- **TK Maxx** (Cork, Ireland; Stockport; Norwich)
- **Tesco** (Cork, Ireland)
- **The Entertainer** (Winchester, Grimsby, Reading)
- **Toys R Us** (Newberry Park, London)
- **Sainsbury’s** (Fallowfield, Manchester)
- **Asda** (Ferring, West Sussex)





Many stores used a range of signals to reinforce the message

Labels on shelves



Half of visited stores

Labels on toys



A quarter of stores visited

Single sex pictures



Half of visited stores

Colour-coding



Most visited stores

Clustering otherwise unrelated toys



Half of visited stores



The stores with the strongest gender division were

- **Wilkinsons**, (The Gates shopping Centre, Durham)
- **TK Maxx** (Norwich; Stockport; Cork City, Ireland)
- **Boots** (Crawley, West Sussex; Cork City, Ireland)
- **Debenhams** (Cork City, Ireland; Bristol)
- **Tesco,** (Cork City, Ireland; Inverurie, Aberdeenshire)
- **The Entertainer,** (Grimsby;
- **Toys R Us** (Dundee; Reading)
- **Asda** (Durham; Ferring, West Sussex)

[All stores using between 3 and 5 signals to mark out 'Boys' and 'Girls' toy areas]



The stores with the least gender division were

- **Sainsbury's** (Eastbourne East Sussex)
- **Boots** (Cheltenham)
- **John Lewis** (Watford)
- **Toys R Us** (Bromley, London)
- **ELC** (Chichester)
- **Fun Learning** (St Albans)

What the mystery shoppers saw

- ☹ “All science and Lego is for boys. All home play for girls. The only section for any gender is preschool. They shelve Playmobil toys here even though they are for older girls and boys” – The Entertainer, Winchester

- ☹ “The labelled boys section was blue and the labeled girls section was pink. Along the usual stereotypical toys in each there were random gender neutral toys segregated for no good reason at all” – The Entertainer, Reading

- ☹ “The only toys not displayed by gender were craft and jigsaws and some books” – TK Maxx, Norwich

- ☹ “Play Doh and lots of other craft materials you are shelved alongside the dolls and toys in pink packaging.” – Asda, Durham



What the mystery shoppers saw

- ☺ “What an excellent shop! Everything categorised by theme, not gender. This is how it should be done! Just brilliant. Check out the house toys for example - the cookery sets and kitchen stuff are primary colours, the same as the drill, tools and doctor's set, which are all in the same section.” – Sainsbury’s Eastbourne

- ☺ “I thought this toys were laid out well. They were in groups rather than boys or girls themes. For instance, they had dolls and Barbies next to the action toys, craft sections and cars next to cleaning toys, babies section next to scooters. The toys seemed to be grouped by what they did, not by colour or boys/girls.” Toys R Us, Bromley, London.

- ☺ “This shop is great. All the shelves are labelled with what the toys do rather than whether than whether they are for girls or boys. Rockets and planets in a section called ‘Space’, there are sections for crafts, pretend play, construction and so on.” Fun Learning, St Albans



What goes where

What kind of toys are promoted to boys and girls?



What kind of toys are promoted to boys and girls ?

- **DIY** - Ten times as many stores promoted toolkits to boys than to girls
- **Engineering -** Three times as many stores promoted construction toys to boys as to girls
- **Science** - Twice as many stores promoted chemistry sets to boys as to girls.
- **Beauty** - Six times as many stores promoted personal grooming/beauty products to girls as to boys
- **Cooking** - Four times as many stores promoted play kitchens to girls as to boys.
- **Cleaning** - Four times as many stores promoted cleaning sets to girls as to boys
- **Crafts** - Three times as many stores promoted crafts to girls as to boys





My little buggy: Wilkinsons



“Boys stuff”: Marks and Spencer



Lil miss arty microphones, Marks and Spencer



Globe in the Boys Section, TK Maxx



Botany set, listed under Boys, Debenhams Online



Gruffalo slipper ‘boys’: John Lewis online



Marble run ‘boys stuff’, Marks & Spencer

SCIENCE KITS



All science toys under “gifts for boys”
Boots (Cork, Ireland)

Why does it matter?



Why does it matter?

- Limiting play opportunities can affect children's development
- Allowing children to develop their natural talents benefits everybody
- Consumers are frustrated that their choices are being limited
- Gendering children's toys doesn't reflect the real world
- It's easy for retailers to make a positive difference, and they should benefit too



Labeling toys by gender stifles children's opportunity to develop

- **Play is crucial to how children develop and learn about the world**.
  - Toys focused on action, construction and technology hone spatial skills, foster problem solving and encourage children to be active.
  - Toys focused on role play and small scale theatre allow them to practice social skills.
  - Arts & crafts enable children to practice fine motor skills and perseverance.
- **Many stores divide a wide range of their toys into boy's and girls sections.**
  - Action construction and technology toys are predominantly marketed to boys while social role play and arts and crafts toys are predominantly marketed to girls.
  - Role play toys often reflect outdated stereotypes; doctors kits for boys, nurses kits for girls, DIY for boys and cooking for girls etc…
- **How toys are labelled and displayed effects consumers' buying habits.**
  - Many people feel uncomfortable buying a boy a pink toy or a girl a toy labelled as 'for boys'.
  - Others are simply not aware of the restricted choices they are being offered. They may not notice that science kits and construction toys are missing from the "girls" section, or art & crafts and kitchen toys from the "boys".



It's easy for retailers to make a positive difference, and they should benefit too

- This campaign is asking retailers to categorise their toys by theme and function rather than gender.
- We are not asking retailers to change the toys they sell.
- We are asking them to stop organising their stores into ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ aisles, take down signs in stores and on packaging, and instead let toys be toys.
- It’s an easy change to make. Hamley’s did it last year; Next are considering for 2013.
- It’s a win-win: we're talking about retailers offering consumers more not less .



Parents' perspectives



Parents say



- ‘My 4 year old daughter is now starting to get self conscious walking into the 'boys' section to get her favourite things and it's heart-breaking to watch.’

- ‘My girls love Lego, trains, swords and pirates, along with dolls and crafts. They're getting to an age where they worry about things for girls and boys, and hesitate to play with "boys" toys now as they feel they're doing wrong. I hate having their options limited by retailers and the media.’



Parents say



- ‘My son confessed that he has always wanted a dolls house but has always been too embarrassed to ask for one because he thought they were just for girls. He’s 11.’

- ‘I'm sick of people saying my daughters toys are boys toys, I don't want her to feel she should not play with them because she is not a boy!’

Parents say



- ‘I purchased my godson a beautiful freestanding kitchen for his birthday. His father huffed and moaned about it being a "girl's toy”’
- ‘I feel sad because my 5yo daughter … only just realised that some people think girls and outer space don't go….’

Parents say



- ‘I was looking at scooters with my daughter a while back, she was quite happily whizzing up and down the aisle on a blue flashing light type thing when the shop assistant came over and said, 'here's a nice girly one for you' and handed us a clunky Disney Princess heap. My daughter got on it and gave it a try, then handed it back with a look, said 'it's too slow' and got back on the blue one. He looked confused. It's this kind of interference though that can make kids think they should be a certain way, I hate it.’

Parents say



- ‘My 3 year old son got a kitchen for his birthdays last year, he also has a pink toy umbrella stroller that he picked himself and he loves playing with toy dolls and with my daughter's tea set.’

- ‘I'm happy to 'let her be a girl' - it's just that my definition of 'girl' is significantly different from that of the toy and retail industry marketing bods’.

How people can get involved

- Connect with the campaign on social media, share photos and examples and spread the word.

  www.facebook.com/pages/Let-Toys-Be-Toys-For-Girls-and-Boys

  www.twitter.com/lettoysbetoys

- Sign the petition at change.org.

  www.change.org/en-GB/organizations/let_toys_be_toys

- Write to retailers and tell them why this matters.



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