

ARE YOU BUYING TOYS FOR KIDS OR FOR YOURSELF?

Yi-Mu Chen, I-Shou University

Wen-Hsuan Lee, Mingchi University of Technology/National Chengchi University

Yu-Shan Chen, National Chengchi University

ABSTRACT

Children nowadays are especially precious and pampered as a result of the constant decline in the birth rate and the decreasing number of children in every family in recent years. Because of this reason, most parents are generous to spend money on their children. Thus, this study mainly investigated the difference in values between parents and children currently when it comes to the choice of toys, and the ways in which parents dealt with their children's emotions when the parents and children contradicted each other.

A qualitative approach which on-site observation was adopted, and the interactions of 20 parent-kid pairs were observed. This study mainly targeted young children above the age of 5 (kindergarteners) and below the age of 12 (elementary school students). The children in middle childhood, the years from 6 to 12, do not automatically or passively accept the lessons adults intend. Adults tell children what is good/bad to choose, and then reward, ignore, or punish children accordingly. Thus, the good or bad feeling which children perceived depended on adult response (Paley, 1984). If the parent-kid interactions in toys selection were observed, the dyad precise dance would have been discovered.

The locations for observations were focused on toy stores and the toy department in department stores. In addition to demographic data on the parents and children, the interactions and conversations between parents and children during consumption, the toys that children preferred, prices of the toys, and reasons for any conflicts between children and parents were recorded in the observation log. Moreover, the fact whether a purchase was made was noted. Depending on whether a toy was bought, any proviso accompanying the purchase, the content of the proviso, and any disagreement between fathers and mothers were noted down if a toy was purchased. In the case where no toys were bought, the reasons, children's reactions and parents' role in turning down children's requests were recorded.

It was found from the observations that few harsh conflicts occurred. Instead, parents would seek their children's opinions while cheerfully selecting toys for them. Price of toy is not the whole story. Parents could accept a wide range of toy prices and were willing to purchase toys, given that their financial condition permits and the prices are within a reasonable range. As a keeper, most parents were well responsible for quality, functions, and attributes of toys. Parents encouraged more gender-proper toys than opposite ones, especially fathers did.

In terms of the types of products purchased, the 2 (father/mother) X 2 (gender proper toys or not) pairs were discussed. Most boys were interested in toy car models or a variety of robots. In father

accompanied with boy situations, the communications were smooth and the target toys were always purchased. Fathers spend lots of time in holding appreciatively toys as if they were buying the toys for themselves. Most of the girls chose Barbie dolls or play-kitchen sets (such as toy cooking utensils and tableware sets). If there were no significant troubles with the toys, the fathers would be pursued by daughters; nevertheless, the fathers did not devote themselves to daughters' world of dolls. Mothers were more rational than fathers in toys consumptions. Most girls shopped with their mothers, but they did not take any advantage. Girls' requests of gender-proper toys were always refused by mothers, on the other hand, boys' requests of cars or robots were almost satisfied by mothers.

In father-son interactions, fathers could easily devote themselves into toys consumptions. Regarding the positive attitude and strong passion that fathers demonstrate toward the purchase of toys, this study suggested that is a possible result of the parents' projections of needs. The economic conditions in most parents' childhood were not as good as they are now, therefore, parents tried to satisfy their offspring by providing practical stuff. Parents could deny their childhood aspirations, thoughts, and emotions subconsciously, and project the feeling to their children. Thus, parents project their preferences to their children on choosing toys. People project themselves on similar others than on dissimilar ones (e.g., Robbins & Krueger, 2005). It provides an explanation that fathers projected themselves on boys rather than on daughters. Usually toys were accompanied by provisos proposed by parents if parents finally agreed to purchase a toy after interacting with their children. Almost all provisos were related to academic achievements or performance at school. If the decision was not to purchase a toy after interacting with their children, most of the reasons that parents used to refuse their children's toy purchase requests included: "You have already had this" or "We bought this kind of toy before, and you quickly quit playing with it." Under such circumstance, parents often attempted to convince or persuade their children not to buy. Lastly, this study observed really short attention spans among children. Many parents resolved the problem of not buying by taking their children away from the spot or changing topics.

This study proposes the following suggestions regarding marketing practice: First, parents cared about toys' quality and functions which on marketers should put more efforts. Second, fathers are encouraged to participate in toys consumptions to increase the sales. For example, marketers could organize on-site activities to create the chances of interactions between parents and children. On the spot, broadcasting retrospective films according to the possible parents' age may be a good idea. For the further research, the details of interactions between diverse dyad might be worth to discuss.

References

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