I visited the toy section in Oroville’s Walmart, last night, March 5th, around 8:00, when not a lot of toy shopper were present. During my visit I observed roughly 6 rows of toys that were overwhelmingly gender specific in their display. In fact, what directed me to the toy section and the first thing that caught my eye was the color pink. The bright bubblegum color clouding my vision immediately got my attention, but as I approached the first row I was a bit shocked and disappointed to find how much gender does influence the way toys are marketed towards children.

As I stared at the all of the Disney princess dolls looking back at me, I thought about my childhood and the toys I grew up with, none of them ever being so gender specific. Maybe it’s because I didn’t have a lot of toys growing up, but I remember playing outside as kid with my younger brother and all our stuffed animals. I remembered how much fun we had in our little adventures with our “little friend”, the toys were neutral and ours to share. I can’t image this being the norm today where opposite sexed siblings could comfortably and mutually share their toys with one another; marketing and the media has had a huge impact in changing our societal norms in this regard. Though women are making strides for equality, the contemporary gender gap seems to be getting wider in certain areas (i.e., the toy industry).

Looking at these princesses, I noticed several themes in how we are socializing little girls to what’s important. They are as following: pink, image/outward appearance, and love. The prominent color girls are exposed to is: pink. Though it’s a fine, lovely color, it seems to be the only color acceptable for young girls to like. Girls are introduced to pink starting from infancy and their fancy for it continues into adulthood where this one color alone is highly associated with femininity. In regards to image, girls are socialized to think highly of their outward appearance through various grooming toys and accessories that are sold in addition to these, often unrealistic, yet idealistic, dolls. Girls are also socialized into believing in traditional romance and love, which was depicted as some of the princesses were sold with their loving princes.

          For boys, marketing is slightly more simplistic and so is socialization. Boys are socialized to be adventurous problem solvers and this is represented in their toys, which often include model cars, and action figures. Action figures are similar to dolls in appearance, but the roles these figures serve are completely different. Action figures are powerful individuals who save the world, very different from most dolls aimed at girls. Though socialization is simplistic in that it’s straight forward and less complicated for boys, there are more repercussions for boys if they do not follow gender stereotypical norms (i.e., boys are not supposed to like pink), while gender neutrality is more acceptable for girls.

As previously mentioned aims for equality in this country has been progressive for the most part, but developmental socialization is being stinted by the media and marketing as traditional gender roles are being enforced. The way children’s toys are being marketed is widening the gender gap.