Toy stores are divided distinctively into separate gender-specified aisles filled with puzzles, science sets and action figures for boys and baby dolls, kitchen sets and bleach-blonde Barbies for girls. It is finally an accepted fact that both men and women are the same but made and viewed differently only by society’s standards. Toy guns and other violent action figures teach boys from when they are young to always be aggressive and take control over the situation no matter the costs. As they grow up into men, they still hold these actions, which can cause sexist and destructive acts towards women. Are toys really influencing how we grow and develop as different sexes?

I can honestly say that when I was a little girl, I most certainly enjoyed playing house and putting on fashion shows with feathered hats and sequin belts, so when I read the idea about how children are affected by what toys they play with in my Sociology book, it made me wonder the true extent of this topic. Reading only a brief mention of a subject with so much research behind it made me want to find out if toys really do have a direct correlation to how you behave and act as an adult. With more women in the workforce than ever before, can this be at all related to the fact that toy companies are producing more unisex toys than fifty years ago? Children change and grow so much every day, so it is fair to question if the toys they are in at least someway affect their growth and ideas as they enter adulthood. We as humans feel the need to set two sides to everything. For some reason women were given the domestic, passive role perhaps
because of their child birthing, and men were given the aggressive, protector role. The
issue is not so much how each was decided, but more importantly, the way in which we
extend these stereotypes. With my research thus far, I have realized that there is a definite
division of the kind of toys each sex is intended to play with. I have discovered that the
toy companies directly market certain toys to a specific sex and sometimes discriminate
with what they develop and sell. With an emphasis on cooking supplies, dress-up clothes,
pink strollers with bobbling-head baby dolls, it’s no wonder that few little girls aspire to
even think to be an architect, computer engineer or even president when they grow up.

From birth, babies are usually only distinguished by the obvious difference in
their outfits. Girls are usually snuggled within mounds of ruffles and pink with rhinestone
headbands where boys are covered in navy blue jumpers covered in baseballs or other
sports-related appliqués. If the baby is not adorning a specific shade of blue or pink, the
observers looking into the carriage may ask, “How cute, but is it a boy or a girl?” There is
an age-old standard when it comes to how to dress your child or what items you give
them to play with. Although they seem like harmless playthings, they are subconsciously
shaping their thoughts and actions as they grow. Why are young boys given toys that
require deep thought processes and coax problem solving when girls are given tea sets
and Easy Bake Ovens that nurture the idea that women need to be gentle homemakers? It
might instill the idea that their role in life should only be to adhere to men’s commands,
cook them dinner, produce babies and clean their house and not to think about their own
needs and wants.

Other researches feel that although there are toys geared for different sexes, that a
large role of the upbringing is based on the parents’ decisions of what toys to put in their
children’s toy box. Why is it offensive when a little boy joins in with his older sister when playing with Barbies? Fathers tend to overreact when their son is found playing with toys associated traditionally with girls. I think that parents have the largest effect on how children grow and develop, and they sometimes do not even realize the repercussions of the toys they place in their children’s toy boxes. Young children of both sexes will usually play with toys that society associated with one specific gender, but they do not become ashamed or reject the toys until they are older or when adults dramatize over their choices. Boys play with dolls, but they happen to call their dolls action figures. Yet the nature of each gender’s play tends to differ. Observing a young girl with a doll, she will often rock and nurture it, whereas little boys will use the doll in battle scenes with other action figures.

If a little sister is born into a family with five other brothers, their choices of toys may be limited to hand-me-downs of tiny army men and soccer balls as opposed to baby carriages and dollhouses. Although society is much more accepting of girls acting like tomboys as opposed to boys acting like girls. It is common for children to go through gender issues while growing up. It boils down to the fact that toy designers need to be thinking of more unisex toys so that both genders can strengthen the skills needed for their futures.

When it comes to the field of technology, girls are often left out of the designing strategies. Recently, though, Mattel has released a new toy called “Ellos” that is a building toy with artsy, curvy packaging and warm colors that allow girls to build mini houses, picture frames and every jewelry. Although this may seem to adhere to the
stereotype of girls only wanting to play dress-up in pink satin dresses and use vanity sets, it allows them to develop hand-eye coordination and logical thinking.

Using LexisNexis and EBSCOHost to find reliable databases, I have started to formulate ideas concerning sexist toys and their consequences on young minds. The Baby X story in the *Women: Images and Realities* book provided me with an excellent basis for the gender issue relating to not only toys but clothes and attitudes as well. Another topic I might want to investigate is the intentional purposes for specific toys. Why are some of the colors chosen and what does the toy company see the toy to be used for. I also found an interview from *ABC’s 20/20* that interviewed and researched actual children and how they interacted with toys. I think this could be of great use, because it deals directly with the children, and what they think about playing with a toy meant for the opposite sex.

Thinking about how much of an influence toys have, it can also lead to bringing up the topic of gender misunderstanding and possible homosexuality. I found a Peer Reviewed Journal titled *An Evolutionary Perspective of Sex-Typed Toy Preferences: Pink, Blue, and the Brain* on EBSCOHost that would be perfect; it examines how children are actually biologically drawn to certain colors making them choose specific toys. I also have been doing research in the WVU required book for Psychology 241, which is the developmental psychology class. *A Topical Approach to Lifespan Development* takes the stance that children develop mostly through observational learning. In the end, I hope to find out specific studies on whether or not a youngster blames or praises their childhood toys as making them who they are as an adult.