

# IoToys and gender

Reijo Kupiainen and Charles Mifsud

The issue of gender and how this impacts on the study of childhood and media has been a common topic of discussion for decades. It is a wide-ranging topic, however. In this chapter, we focus on a number of IoToys as examples of gendered toys.

IoToys are a new phenomenon in children's changing media environment. Discussion and so-called media panic usually tend to focus on new and still partially unknown phenomena, such as privacy risks. Although there are rapid changes in the media environment and in the notion of childhood itself, there are also some recurring features that remain largely unchanged. Examples of these are gendered toys, games and play. Previous research on toys has documented the gender-differentiated use of such explicit markers as colours, names and logos in toy marketing (Owen & Padron, 2016). Digital gaming has been promoted by marketing different games for boys and girls. This has been noticed for example in the Children's Media Barometer in Finland 2012 (Suoninen, 2013; Kotilainen & Suoninen, 2013). The segmentation of gender into target groups has been done largely for commercial reasons, in order to market products more accurately. Gendered toys are perhaps the best-known and most visually perceivable example of segmentation. A brief visit to any toy store will instantly show "pink and blue" sides of the store and the toy market. However, IoToys bring a new and interesting dimension to segmentation. Traditionally, toys for boys have focused more on technology than those for girls (Buckingham, 2011). Also, boys have owned more technological devices, especially televisions, computers and games consoles (d'Haenens, 2001; Marsh et al., 2005). But IoToys combine technology and toys, and in this way they can be considered as somewhat ambivalent products that blur the gender boundary in the toy market.

In this chapter, we focus on some IoT toys as examples of segmenting the children's market into specific niches based on gender: boy, girl and for both sexes. We analysed three Internet of Toys devices that were very popular in our sample during the Christmas period that we studied. The analysis was conducted by looking at the websites on which the respective toys were promoted. We looked at one toy marketed for girls, another for boys, and a third for both sexes.

## 7.1 Hatchimals (<http://www.hatchimals.com>)<sup>7</sup>

The pink colour of the website, as well as the characters, voices and icons in the promotional video, makes it clear that the product is marketed for girls. In the video, we observed three girls and one boy, the latter appearing only for a split second in the picture. There are many icons representing hearts and a girl's voiceover talking about Valentine's Day (sic!) and love. A Hatchimal is presented as a technological and interactive puppy or baby that requires care. Nurturing and interactivity that can be realised technologically seemed to be a Christmas hit in Europe in the year of our study. This kind of toy also constructs gender differences by combining notions of girl- and motherhood and nurturing together.



<sup>7</sup> Image: <http://wfla.com/2016/12/29/do-hatchimals-have-potty-mouths/>

## 7.2 Anki Overdrive (<http://www.anki.com/en-us/overdrive>)<sup>8</sup>

These supercars are described as self-aware robots, which are driven by powerful artificial intelligence (AI). The characters presented in the promotional video are exclusively boys. The video itself is presented by a man. There is a lot of emphasis on speed, beating your competitor and using track design to your advantage. The colours of the site and cars are red, brown, blue and black. The toys are specifically promoted and marketed for boys.



## 7.3 VaiKai (<http://www.vaikai.com>)

The toys are crafted in wood and intended to appeal to both boys and girls. The toys come in a pair, twins, and are presented as gender-neutral, especially when they are not painted and only have the colour of wood. On the website, sometimes the twin toys are featured in colour, one in blue and the other in yellow. The avoidance of pink is a marketing strategy for both boys' toys and gender-neutral toys so that boys will not be 'put off' the toy. The children appearing in the promotional video are evenly distributed between girls and boys. It is evident that the toys are explicitly marketed to appeal to both boys and girls.

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<sup>8</sup> Image: <https://anki.com/en-us/overdrive>