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AN EXPLORATION OF GREEK PARENTS' TOYS SELECTION CRITERIA

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the toy selection criteria of Greek parents, mothers and fathers, whose children are between preschool and first years of primary school (0-9 years of age). It also examines if there are differences in their toy selection criteria in relation to their age, gender, level of education and personal income. We conducted quantitative research with the Toy Selection Preference Questionnaire (TSPQ). The total sample of the research was 356 parents (30 men and 326 women) and was selected using snowball sampling. The analysis of the data revealed various criteria in parents' preferences by which they choose toys for their children. Parents show the most attention to the developmental, educative and pedagogical aspects of toys but not at the expense of the entertaining dimension of them. The results also indicate that parents are informed also on other critical issues related to toys (design, durability, quality, cost, etc.). Accordingly, they are also sensitized to issues that are relevant to stereotypes, environment and safety. Individual differences are also evident in some cases and mainly in relation to the level of education, age and gender of the parents. Our study contributes to the extension of the scientific knowledge in the field with data from the Greek context. Further research is needed with a sample of a broader population of parents

and mainly of various economic and social characteristics. Mixed methods would be also recommended in future research to examine in more depth the parents' views on toys selection criteria.

Keywords: *aspects of toys; evaluation of toys; parents' views on toys; play and learning; toys' selection criteria*

Introduction

Toys are interrelated with play and playing with toys enable children to meet a wide range of stimuli and experiences, which finally promote integrated development. The acknowledged benefits of playing with toys has urged adults to associate them with the achievement of specific pedagogical and academic goals that they have set for children, such as independency, practicing specific skills and accelerating knowledge among others (Karadimitriou, 2019). Teaching through play is an intertemporal idea. Everyday objects used as means for play or manufactured toys can support the learning activities. From the renaissance era, in the European area, Erasmus cited as an example of good practice an English parent who used the bow and the arrows as means of teaching his son how to recognize and pronounce the letters of the alphabet by aiming at letters of the Greek and Latin alphabets, pronounce them and rewarding him every time he succeeded to fulfill the task (Cunningham, 2020).

Locke, a former of the enlightenment era, also argued that play promotes children's harmonious development and suggested that learning activities should be appropriately adapted in order not to cause aversion to the child (Androne, 2014). For that purpose, he proposed an educational toy with four cubes, with the letters of the alphabet on their sides for learning children to read (Reble, 1992).

In the 19th century, Froebel's "gifts" were a landmark for the connection between toys and learning. Their creation arose from his metaphysical ideas that children perceive the inner connection of all things and the unity between physical objects and the spiritual world through play with objects (Bloch & Choi 1990). Similarly, Montessori's material has become a landmark of the 20th century. Their design provided children with stimuli for action and experimentation and enabled them to learn independent-

ly, based on the principle of self-direction (Boehm, 2000). The growing perception of the positive relation between toys and learning is also reflected in the toy industry production. From the late 19th century, manufacturers, mainly in the United States of America, have started to produce many kinds of educational toys, for a wide variety of subjects, for the kindergarten and the other levels of education (West, 1984). Later, the huge development of industry during the 20th century has contributed to the mass production of toys which gave the opportunity to the consumers to buy them as they became more affordable.

Nowadays the development of technology and computers has a great influence both in toys and in the way children play. Not only many traditional toys have technologically been transformed but also new forms of experiences through play came to the fore (e.g., virtual worlds, playing through internet etc.) (Cambre & Hawkes, 2004; Jarvis, Dodds & Brock, 2013; D 'Hooge, Dalton, Shwe, Lieberman & O' Malley, 2000).

The role of toys in the development and education of children has been the subject of research and theoretical reports that examine also play as an activity. The literature highlights multifaceted benefits (cognitive, social, psycho-emotional, etc.) that arise for children when playing with toys (Karadimitriou, 2021). Particularly important in this field are the findings of neuroscience which lay emphasis on the importance of experience in human development (Frost, Wortham & Reifel, 2008). Especially during the critical period of early childhood, the acquisition of rich experiences (physical, cognitive, emotional, etc.) by children lays the foundations for the development of the neural pathways of the brain that facilitate learning (Kieff & Casbergue, 2000). Playing with toys is one of the most important contexts for children to acquire experiences. As analyzed by Liu et al. (2017) learning experiences in play are characterized by joy, meaning, active engagement, repeatability and social interaction. All the above make learning to be deeper and more effective.

Under this perspective toys' evaluation acquires special importance. Today, the criteria for the selection of toys have become a subject of interest both in the scientific literature and in practical guides for parents and teachers. The main aspects examined have to do with: a) safety and hygiene, b) the extent to which they correspond to the child's interests and ability level, c) the behavioral patterns that they provoke, d) the quality of their construction, e) their cost and f) their design features (e.g. the space that

allow for the imagination to develop, the simplicity of their use, etc.) (Karadimitriou, 2019).

In the industry, age is also a criterion for categorizing toys, as their "recommended" use by the manufacturers is usually related to the developmental characteristics of the age groups they are aiming at (Kudrowitz & Wallace, 2010). As Morgenthaler (2006) also points out, children's play with objects varies in many aspects as they grow.

One more factor which becomes evident in the design of toys, is related to the gender of the children to whom they are addressed. There are also "gender-neutral" toys, but it is a fact that many of them are characterized by gender characteristics (Karadimitriou, 2021).

Many criteria of parents for selecting toys have been investigated in the literature. Ummanel (2017), for example, found that mothers believe that toys should be safe, age and developmentally appropriate, fun and help children gain social skills. Tabak and Tunçay (2020) found that Turkish parents of children aged between 3-6 years old consider for toys selection their children's developmental characteristics, their wishes, the price of the toy, the quality, and the appropriateness of the toy for their children's gender. Kollmayer et al.'s (2018) survey found that Austrian parents of 3–6-year-old children rated same-gender-typed and gender-neutral toys as more desirable for their children than cross-gender-typed toys. Similarly, Demirkaya, Kömleksiz and Özdemir (2018) explored the opinions of parents of 3–6-year-old children regarding to the factors affecting them when choosing toys for them. Age and gender of their children proved to be a main factor that affects their choices. Moreover, their research showed that parents prefer educative toys, toys that do not include violence and they believe that toys of cartoon characters affect their children and preference for toys both in positive and negative ways. Finally, the price of a toy, safety, quality issues and hygiene are also considered critical issues for them. One more extended research regarding parents' criteria is that of Kabadayi (2014), who found significant differences in choice criteria of Turkish parents of preschoolers in relevance to their education level and their economic status. The instrument that he has developed for the research included many subdimensions of toys aspects: Health, Cognitive, Social, Toy Design, Parents Appreciation and Child Friendly.

The research of the relevant literature showed that there are no studies with Greek parents regarding their choices in toys and the criteria they implement when buying them for their children. The present study explores the toy selection criteria of Greek parents, mothers and fathers, whose children are between preschool and first years of primary school (0-9 years of age). It also examines if there are differences in their toy selection criteria in relation to their age, gender, level of education and personal income. Our study contributes to the extension of the scientific knowledge in the field with data from the Greek context. The following research questions lead the present study:

1. Which are the most important criteria of Greek parents when selecting toys for their children 0-9 years of age?
2. Are there any differences in the parents' toy selection criteria in relevance to their age?
3. Are there any differences in the parents' toy selection criteria in relevance to their gender?
4. Are there any differences in the parents' toy selection criteria in relevance to their level of education?
5. Are there any differences in the parents' toy selection criteria in relevance to their income?

Method

To answer the above research questions, we conducted quantitative research and specifically a survey with a questionnaire. This type of research is appropriate for collecting a volume of research data in a short period of time and can provide useful information about the opinions of a specific population.

Sample

The population of this study consists of parents whose children are between 0 - 9 years old. The total sample of the research is 356 parents. The sample was selected using snowball sampling. In snowball sampling the researcher selects certain individuals with the specific characteristics he wishes to study. These people then recommend other peo-

ple willing to participate in the study. This method relies on networking and is necessary in populations that are not easy to identify by random sampling (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002).

The sample consisted of 30 men (8.4%) and 326 women (91.6%) (table 1). Most of them were between 31-40 years of age (244 parents, 68.5%), 86 parents were between 41-50 years of age (24.2%), 21 parents were under 30 years of age (5.9%) and 5 parents were over 50 years of age (1.4%) (table 2).

Table 1. Participants' gender

Gender	N	%
Men	30	8,4%
Women	326	91,6%
Total	356	100%

Table 2. Participants' age

Age	N	%
≤30	21	5,9%
31- 40	244	68,5%
41 – 50	86	24,2%
>50	5	1,4%
Total	356	100%

Most of them are higher education graduates (N=166, 46.6%) and 42,1% of them (150 parents) hold a master's degree (N=135) or a PhD (N=15). Only 40 parents (11,2%) have secondary level of education (Lyceum) (table 3).

Table 3. Participants' Education level

Education level	N	%
Secondary education (Lyceum)	40	11,2%
Higher education	166	46,6%
Master's degree (135) / PhD (15)	150	42,1%
Total	356	100%

Most of the parents (138 parents, 38.8%) had personal income between 1001-1500 euros per month, 122 parents (34.3%) had income between 501-1000 euros per month, 37 of them (10.4%) had personal income over 1500 euros and 37 parents (10.4%) had personal income lower than 500 euros per month. Twenty-two parents (6.2%) did not wish to answer the question about their income (chose the questionnaire's choice: I wish not to answer) (table 4).

Table 4. Participants' personal income

Personal income (EUR)	N	%
≤500	37	10,4%
501 - 1000	122	34,3%
1001 – 1500	138	38,8%
>1500	37	10,4%
I wish not to answer	22	6,2%
Total	356	100%

Cases of participants with missing values were excluded from the final sample. In one case a parent chose not to determine gender (chose the questionnaire's choice: other) and two parents had primary level of education. All those cases were also excluded from the final sample because they were under-represented in the research.

Instrument

Toy Selection Preference Questionnaire (TSPQ) which is developed by Abdülkadir Kabadayı (2014) was used, with the permission of its manufacturer. The questionnaire was translated, and a pilot study was carried out to measure its reliability and to adapt it to the Greek context. The final instrument of this study - after some minor differentiations from the original - had two sections. The first section examines demographic elements of the parents. The second section examines the parents' selection criteria regarding toys and has 38 statements, which are answered with 4 options in a Likert scale (0: I do not know / no opinion, 1: No, 2: sometimes, 3: Yes). The final questionnaire examines four dimensions of toys: a) developmental, educational, pedagogical aspects (e.g. mental development, promotion of creativity, promotion of independency, etc.), b) design aspects which include ergonomics, aesthetics, durability, novelty etc., c) health, safety

and environmental aspects, d) financial aspects (cost). The internal consistency reliability was assessed with the Cronbach's alpha coefficient which showed that the questionnaire is reliable (a=0.89).

Procedures

Data collection was conducted from December of 2022 to March of 2023 with an online questionnaire in Google Form. After a pilot study, the questionnaire was distributed through social networking platforms to groups of parents of children who met the criteria of participating in the survey. Many parents who had participated in the study were asked to promote the questionnaire to other platforms.

The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the researchers' Institution in the 3rd committee meeting at 29/11/2022. The questionnaire was accompanied by a letter in which information was presented about the content of the survey and its purpose. Participants were informed of the assurance of anonymity and the assurance of confidentiality and gave their electronic consent.

Data analysis was performed with SPSS v. 25. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test of normality showed that the data were not normally distributed ($p<0.05$). Therefore, we used non-parametric tests (Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis) to analyze the data. Statistically significant findings that were revealed from the Kruskal-Wallis test were further examined with the Dunn test for pair wise multiple comparisons.

Results and Discussion

Toys are an integral part of children's lives. Hence, parents need to be conscious when it comes to choosing toys for their children. On the one hand, they must consider their children's level of development to provide them with appropriate learning experiences but also moments of fun, on the other hand, they must reflect on their children's interests, as interesting toys create better conditions for engagement. The pedagogical value of a toy must also be considered. Educational toys stimulate interest, expand children's intellectual horizons, improve their skills and offer quality fun while at the same time they do not promote stereotypes of any kind. Furthermore, parents must check the safety of the toys they choose. Finally, toys must be child-friendly (non-toxic, suitable sizes to

avoid choking, ecological construction materials, recyclable) (Karadimitriou, 2019; 2021).

Another indisputable criterion in the choice of toys from the parents' perspective is the cost of it. The cost of a toy can range from very low to extremely high, so parents should consider the amount of money they are able to afford. But it is important to point out that quality is always preferable to quantity when it comes to toys. Fewer but better-quality toys can prove more beneficial and constructive for a child than many inferior toys.

All the above issues and many others have been highlighted in the present study which explores the selection criteria of Greek parents of preschool and first years of primary school children (0-9 years old). The first research question explores their most important criteria when selecting toys. We present in the following table (table 5) the means and the standard deviation of the 356 parents' answers in each of the 38 statements of the questionnaire in descending order. As we can see from the scores for each statement, parents show the most attention to the developmental, educative and pedagogical aspects of toys. It is indicative that eleven of the seventeen higher rated statements (mean>2.5) are included in this category (a).

The other six higher rated statements are relevant to toy design aspects (category: b) (child friendly design, attractive/stimulating, durable and quality) and safety (c).

The analysis of the above data shows that most of the parents prefer to buy toys that promote the child's creativity and mental development. In addition, they prefer to buy toys with a child-friendly design, which does not promote violence. The above conclusions agree with the findings of previous research findings (Christensen & Stockdale, 1991) and fit with the recommendations for parents that stem from similar research (Kabaday, 2014). That means parents of our sample are well informed concerning toy selection criteria. Parents also show a preference for toys that support various areas of child development and combine learning with fun. This result is interesting because it shows the importance of the cultural context on this issue. The notion of learning through play is highly appreciated in western culture. Contrary, Huang's (2013) study on Chinese parents has shown that the relationship between play and teaching materials is incompatible for them because of their strict perceptions about childhood.

Price, safety issues, health and environmental aspects are also highly acknowledged as criteria by parents (means between 2 and 2.5) when buying a toy although they seem not to be much sensitized to recycling. Earlier research by Erden & Alisinanoğlu (2002) also concluded that the price of the toy has a catalytic role in choosing a toy. However, parents of our study generally emphasize quality, and this fact allows us to conclude that they would purchase a toy even the high cost, if they judge that worths and meets their other criteria for selection. As found by Venkatesan & Yashodharakumar (2017), parents choose toys based on their quality and appropriateness of price among other factors.

Parallelly, parents seem not to give much importance to the appearance only of a toy (mean=1.15) and to toys that are inspired from popular animated characters (mean=1.64). Finally, it is very encouraging that gender friendly toys are preferred by parents only occasionally (mean=1.71). Earlier research by Haight et al. (1997) also concluded that the choice of toys is not always influenced by the gender of the child.

However other studies show opposite results (Demirkaya, Kömleksiz and Özdemir, 2018; Eisen, Matthews & Jirout, 2021). In addition, in Kollmayer et al.'s (2018) survey with Australian parents, it was found that the five toys most chosen for girls are Barbie, wooden beads, dollhouse, doll clothes and doll carriage. Accordingly, Transformers, helicopters, boxing gloves, trucks and cars are chosen for the boys.

Table 4. Mean of parents' answers in the statements of the questionnaire

Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
I prefer to buy toys which improve childrens' creativity (a)*	356	2,84	,474
I prefere to buy toys which are both entertaining and educative (a)	356	2,81	,495
I prefer to buy toys which enhance childrens' mental development (a)	356	2,81	,532
I prefere to buy child friendly toys conserning their design (b)	356	2,81	,525
I prefer to buy toys which support various developmental domains of children (a)	356	2,79	,525
I prefer to buy toys which do not promote violence (a)	356	2,78	,609
I prefer to buy toys which increase childrens' imagination (a)	356	2,75	,602
I prefer to buy toys which enhance childrens' individual talents (a)	356	2,73	,583
I prefere to buy colorfull, interesting toys having different dimensions and structures (b)	356	2,73	,637
I prefer to buy toys which do not promote negative social stereotypes (a)	356	2,72	,675

I prefer to buy toys which do not promote racial stereotypes (a)	356	2,71	,692
I prefer to buy age friendly toys (b)	356	2,71	,612
I prefer to buy toys that my child can play both with friends and independently (a)	356	2,68	,579
I prefer to buy toys that do not have spiky, sharp ends and cutter head (c)	356	2,65	,687
I prefer to buy toys which do not promote gender stereotypes (a)	356	2,62	,715
I prefere to buy durable toys so that my child could use it for a long time (b)	356	2,53	,733
I prefer to buy fewer toys but with more quality (b)	356	2,51	,690
The price of the toy effects my choices (d)	356	2,44	,658
I prefer to buy toys which have multi-purpose use (a)	356	2,43	,719
I prefer to buy toys that meet hygiene requirements (c)	356	2,34	,848
When buying, I read the warnings on the toys (c)	356	2,32	,775
I prefere to buy ergonomic toys (b)	356	2,31	,818
I prefer to buy toys that are CE marked (c)	356	2,28	,887
I prefer to buy toys with quality assurance certificate (c)	356	2,27	,881
I prefer to buy toys that can be cleaned easily (c)	356	2,25	,811
I prefer to buy toys that i can play with my child (a)	356	2,21	,700
I prefer to buy environment friendly toys (c)	356	2,13	,767
I prefer to buy extraordinary toys (b)	356	2,08	,778
I prefer to buy the toys produced on the rules of ISO 9000 (c)	356	2,01	,911
I made my mind up which toys to buy before going out for shopping (d)	356	1,99	,778
I prefer to buy simple toys (b)	356	1,99	,822
I do not prefer to buy cheap toys that are sold on the streets (d)	356	1,97	,873
I choose toys which appeal my taste (b)	356	1,94	,796
When buying a toy, I care to be recyclable (c)	356	1,71	,739
I prefer to buy gender friendly toys (b)	356	1,71	,822
It is important for me to know what kind of materials are used in the production of the toys (b)	356	1,68	,835
I prefer to buy toys of popular animated characters (b)	356	1,64	,732
Only the appearance of the toy is important for me (b)	356	1,15	,573

*Dimensions of the questionnaire: (a) developmental, educational, pedagogical aspects of toys, (b) design aspects which include ergonomics, aesthetics, durability, novelty etc., (c) health, safety and environmental aspects, (d) financial aspects (cost).

After the presentation of descriptive statistics, a Kruskal-Wallis test was performed in order to reveal significand differences in parents' statements (dependent variables) in relation to their age, education level and personal income (independent varia-

bles) and Mann-Whitney U test for investigating parents' statements (dependent variables) in relation to their gender (independent variable). These tests will help us answer the next four research questions which examine whether parents differ in their toy choices criteria in relevance to their age, level of education, personal income and gender.

For the case of age, significant differences were revealed in two statements. Parents over 50 years of age were merged for this test with the category of parents between 41-50 years of age because they were underrepresented in the study (N=5). The first statement where a significant difference exists is: "I prefer to buy fewer toys but with more quality" (H (2) =13,139, p=0.001). Dunn's test for pair wise multiple comparisons showed that parents under 30 years of age (mean rank=118,17) had a significant lower mean rank compared to parents between 31-40 years of age (mean rank=177,24, p=0.011) and 41-50+ years of age (mean rank=195,81, p=0.001).

The second statement where significant difference exists between age groups is: "It is important for me to know what kind of materials are used in the production of the toys" (H (2) =9,696, p= 0.008). Dunn's test for pair wise multiple comparisons revealed that parents under 30 years of age (mean rank=135,26) had again a significant lower mean rank (p=0.015) compared to parents between 41-50+years of age (mean rank=200,85). We can conclude from the above results that younger parents are less concerned to quality issues when they buy toys compared to their elder ones.

For the case of Education level, significant differences were found in seven statements. In the first which is: "I prefer to buy toys that meet hygiene requirements" (H (2)=30,325, p<0.001), Dunn's test for pair wise multiple comparisons revealed that parents with a Master's degree/or PhD (mean rank=207.71) had significantly higher mean rank than parents with a secondary education degree (mean rank=128.85, p<0.001) and higher education degree (mean rank=164, p<0.001). Similarly in the statement: "I prefer to buy environment friendly toys" (H (2)=12,901, p=0.002), Dunn's test for pair wise multiple comparisons revealed that parents with a Master's degree/or PhD had significantly higher mean rank (mean rank=198.95) than parents with a secondary education degree (Mean rank=153,38, p=0.018) and higher education degree (mean rank=166,44, p=0.006). In the statement: "I prefer to buy toys that are CE marked" (H (2) =6,830, p=0.033), Dunn's test for pair wise multiple comparisons revealed that parents with a

Master's degree/or PhD had significantly higher mean rank (mean rank=189,75) than parents with a secondary education degree (mean rank=146,81, p=0.031). In the statement: "I prefer to buy toys according to the gender of the children" (H (2)=12,265, p= 0.002), Dunn's test for pair wise multiple comparisons revealed that parents with a Master's degree/or PhD had significantly lower mean rank (mean rank=158,59) than parents with a secondary education degree (mean rank=208.30, p=0.011) and parents with a higher education degree (mean rank=189.31, p=0.014). In the statement: "I prefer to buy toys that don't promote racial stereotypes" (H (2) =7,882, p= 0.019), Dunn's test for pair wise multiple comparisons revealed that parents with a Master's degree/or PhD had significantly higher mean rank (mean rank=188.3) than parents with a secondary education degree (mean rank=154,18, p=0.02). In the statement: "I prefer to buy toys of popular animated characters" (H (2) =8,101, p=0.017), Dunn's test for pair wise multiple comparisons revealed that parents with a master's degree/or PhD had significantly lower mean rank (mean rank=165,41) than parents with a secondary education degree (mean rank=211,41, p=0.018). Finally in the statement: "I prefer to buy toys that my child can play both with friends and independently" (H (2)=11,498, p=0.003), Dunn's test for pair wise multiple comparisons revealed that parents with higher education degree (mean rank=189,45, p=0.006) had significantly higher mean rank compared to parents with a Master's degree/or PhD (mean rank=161,84).

The above results show that differences exist between parents in critical issues concerning toys in relation to their education level not only between those who hold the secondary education degree and the other more educated groups (higher education and Master/PhD) but also between those who hold a higher education degree and the group of those who hold a Master/PhD.

For the case of personal income there were found no significant differences between parents' statements although one critical factor influencing the choice of toys by parents is their socio-economic level (Christensen & Stockdale, 1991). Parents of our sample are generally well educated and with a decent personal income (we can assume that the family income is even higher). Probably the outcomes of this study would be different with parents of different or mixed socio – economic status. Kabaday's (2014) study for example found differences related to the economic status of the parents.

For the case of gender, Mann-Whitney U test revealed that there are significant differences between fathers and mothers in four statements. In the statement: "I prefer to buy toys that don't promote negative social stereotypes" (z=-3.004, p=0.003), mothers (mean rank=181,86) had significantly higher mean rank from fathers (mean rank=141,97). This outcome is consistent, in a broader sense, to the study of Ummanel (2017) who found that mothers choose more than fathers, toys that do not promote violence. Similarly in the statement: "I prefer to buy toys that don't promote racial stereotypes" (z=-2,655, p= 0.008) mothers (mean rank=181,52) had significantly higher mean rank from fathers (mean rank=145,63). Finally in the statement "I prefer to buy toys that don't promote gender stereotypes" (z=-2,183, p= 0.029) mothers (mean rank=181,31) had significantly higher mean rank from fathers (mean rank=148,02). Kollmayer et al.'s (2018) found also that fathers give more importance to the gender of their child following the traditional patterns of perceptions and stereotypes. Only in the statement: "I prefer to buy toys of popular animated characters" (z= -2.317, p=0.021), fathers (mean rank=216,53) had significantly higher mean rank from mothers (mean rank=175).

It seems from the above results that mothers are more sensitive than fathers to issues concerning stereotypes when choosing toys and, they are less affected than fathers from the media promoted toys (e.g. tv and advertisements).

This study revealed various criteria by which parents choose toys for their children. The results indicate that they are quite informed on a wide range of issues related to toys and embrace contemporary pedagogical views about the importance of playing with toys for the child's development and learning.

However, few studies have dealt with this specific subject. For this reason, further research is needed with a sample of a broader population of parents and mainly of various economic and social characteristics. Mixed methods would be also recommended to examine in more depth the parents' views on toys selection criteria.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was primarily to explore the toy selection criteria of Greek parents, mothers and fathers, whose children are between preschool and first years of primary school (0-9 years of age) and subsequently to examine if there are differences

in relation to their age, gender, level of education and personal income. Their answers to the Toy Selection Preference Questionnaire (TSPQ) which includes statements from the contemporary scientific literature about dimensions of toys showed that the parents of our sample adapt various criteria in their choices. Not surprisingly, parents show the most attention to the developmental, educative and pedagogical aspects of toys but not at the expense of the entertaining dimension of them. The results indicate that parents are informed also on other critical issues related to toys (design, durability, quality, cost, etc.). Accordingly, they are sensitized to issues that are relevant to stereotypes, environment and safety. We should point out here that most of the parents of our sample are females (mothers) and well educated and both of those characteristics should be taken into consideration for the interpretation of the above outcomes. Individual differences related to the gender and the level of education also support that those two factors affect parent choices. Mothers are more sensitized than fathers to issues concerning stereotypes, and they are less affected than fathers from the media promoted toys. Level of education seems to affect parents' choices in critical issues (e.g.: hygiene, safety, stereotypes, environment). It is interesting that differences exist not only between those parents who hold a secondary education degree and the other more educated groups (higher education and Master/PhD) but also between those who hold a higher education degree and the group of those who hold a Master/PhD. Finally, the age of parents also seems to be related to their choices. Younger parents are less concerned to quality issues when they buy toys compared to their elder ones.

The present study has the limitations of the non-probability sampling methods. Consequently, results cannot be generalized to the population of Greek parents. However very interesting outcomes are conducted which reveal individual differences and represent selection criteria for toys from a large sample of Greek parents with the specific characteristics.

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