



LEGO's alleged commitment to gender equality:  
How the company's discourse shapes gender

## ABSTRACT

This paper analyses LEGO's efforts toward gender inclusion and raises concerns about the company's commitment and coherence in its discourse. Examination of LEGO's press release from 2021, its Diversity and Inclusivity website and its Brand website reveals a lack of depth in promoting nonbinary perspectives through discourse, although there are some positive aspects, such as partly inclusive language. By applying Judith Butler's theory of performativity, LEGO's discourse still reinforces existing gender norms and excludes nonbinary individuals. However, it is argued that gender inclusion has proven to be commercially beneficial for LEGO. Nevertheless, the company's hesitation and inconsistency in its discourses and in the gender debate cast doubt on its commitment to nonbinary equality. In conclusion, LEGO needs to engage in a more consistent and committed discourse to challenge societal norms and promote true gender equality. Through its influential media presence, LEGO has the potential to influence public discourse and contribute to a more inclusive society.

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## 1. Introduction

In 1932, Ole Kirk Kristensen founded the LEGO Group in Billund, Denmark. Initially, the company produced wooden toys, but it achieved global success with the introduction of the LEGO brick in 1958. Despite challenges at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, LEGO made a triumphant comeback in 2004, solidifying its position as the world's largest toy manufacturer.

LEGO's origins were based on the idea of being a toy for everyone. Over time, however, the company gradually shifted its focus to gender-specific products. By the 1980s, LEGO had gained a reputation as a "boy's toy," and by 2004, girls were excluded from the line-up. The introduction of LEGO Friends in 2012 sparked mixed reactions as critics pointed out that it reinforced gender stereotypes.

LEGO recognized the need for change and set out on a path to inclusion. It introduced various figures and sets that also depicted people with disabilities and the LGBTQ+ community. LEGO partnered with organizations and foundations that advocated for inclusion and actively shared ideas with its customers through platforms like LEGO Ideas and took ideas from fans for new sets. (Mazzarella & Hains, 2019)

In a significant 2021 press release, LEGO announced its commitment to eliminating gender bias and promoting gender equity. In collaboration with the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media, the company conducted a study with 7,000 participants, including parents and children from various countries.

*“The company will ensure any child, regardless of gender identify, feels they can build anything they like, playing in a way that will help them develop and realize their unique talent.”*

LEGO's press release suggests the inclusion of all genders, across the spectrum. Considering the marginalization and ongoing debate of gender, considering an established brand such as LEGO as an ally or supporter of the cause seem like a win. However, recent developments and critiques about companies who simply implement superficial changes are predominant. This criticism, which may be traced back to capitalist systems, should be carefully examined. This is especially important when a major global toy manufacturer, with a questionable history on gender issues, announces its intention to change and become more inclusive.

Given the changing landscape of gender inclusivity and LEGO's notable announcement in 2021 to become gender inclusive, this study aims to shed more light on the company's efforts. The purpose of this study is to answer the following research question in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of LEGO's commitment to inclusion:

**“To what extent has LEGO's new approach to gender incorporated nonbinary perspectives in the company's discourse since its pledge in 2021 to become gender inclusive?”**

The discourses to be analysed are the LEGO press release from 2021, the LEGO Diversity and Inclusivity website and the LEGO Brand website. These three textual sources provide different levels of insight: The press release is considered least significant in terms of incorporating a nonbinary perspective into corporate discourse. The diversity and inclusion website is more significant as an official statement of corporate values. The deepest level of analysis involves examining the LEGO brand website, which represents the core of the company and its aspirations. It describes the ideals and promises that LEGO strives to embody.

By using a critical discourse analysis (CDA), I analyse if and how LEGO has incorporated a nonbinary approach to the discourses mentioned previously. Following the three-dimensional CDA model proposed by Fairclough I analyse first the text dimension, second the discourse practice dimension and third the social practice dimension. Due to reasons of simplicity and better comprehension the theories are mainly applied in the discussion part instead, as usually to be found according to Fairclough within the social practice dimension.

To ensure transparency for the reader, the discourses and the associated tables organizing the linguistic features for the first dimension can be found in Appendix A to F. On corresponding points throughout this study it is referred to them.

The results of the analysis, which are compared with existing theories on gender, media, and marketing, as well as with findings from other scholars, produced different findings: Despite some positive aspects, such as the partial use of inclusive language, there are concerns about the LEGO's overall commitment and intention. In examining LEGO's discourse, a lack of consistency and depth in promoting nonbinary perspectives becomes apparent. The company's discursive practices still conform to social norms and power dynamics, highlighting the need for further improvement.

Applying Judith Butler's theory of performativity, it becomes clear that LEGO's approach is contradictory and inconsistent. The emphasis on a binary gender perspective and the lack of explicit gender discussions on the brand website contribute to reinforcing existing gender norms and excluding people outside the gender binary. However, LEGO has the potential to significantly influence gender discourse and challenge societal norms if the company fully commits to its pledge to inclusion.

From an economic perspective, the consideration of girls has had a significant positive impact on the company's net profits. This reflects research indicating that introducing a gender inclusive approach could double the potential of the toy market with no reducing demand. However, LEGO faces a dilemma in the gender debate, as any positioning of the company potentially affects its sales. The company's hesitation and inconsistent approach raises questions about its commitment to gender equality and inclusion.

In summary, while LEGO has taken steps toward gender equality, more consistency and commitment are needed to fulfil the company's commitment and to challenge societal norms and promote true nonbinary gender equality. LEGO's influence and reach in the media can play a transformative role in shaping public discourse and promoting a nonbinary perspective on gender. By actively promoting inclusion and equality for all genders, LEGO can contribute to the emergence of a more inclusive society.

## 2. Theory

This chapter will provide an overview of the different theories used for the analysis. I will define the key terms of this thesis followed by different approaches to these terms. The first sub-chapter discussed Gender; the term's history and the development the term has undergone including the cultural aspect of the topic. A focus is on Judith Butler's gender performativity theory as it is main part of my discussion.

### 2.1. Gender

Gender, although it just became more popular to talk about in recent years, the term can get traced back to the ancient Greek, though not in the same conceptual form as it does today. Based on the theories of various scholars, such as Judith Butler, Simone de Beauvoir, Marx, Engels, Weber, and Durkheim argue that gender has been shaped by different perspectives and cultural contexts throughout history. The distinction between sex and gender emerged only in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with gender defined as socially produced differences.

Early views viewed gender as innate and determined by biology, with the essentialist belief that certain characteristics inherently belong to certain groups. (Skewes et al., 2018)

However, history shows that perceptions of sexuality and gender have evolved.

Thomas Laqueur's book *Making Sex* (1990) shows that there was a different understanding of sexuality before the Renaissance. Laqueur argues that until the mid-18th century, science viewed women and men as one sex, which is known as the "one-sex model." In this model, women were considered "lesser men, with the clitoris and the uterus just reduced or inverted versions of the penis and scrotum". (Felluga, 2015; p. 112) Consequently, differences between the sexes were neither clear nor significant. He argues that the historical perception of sexuality as the "one-sex model" has been influenced by political and epistemological factors. He notes that sex is shaped by history and intertwined with gender and power dynamics. According to Laquer, discussions of sex are inevitably linked to considerations of gender and are situated in the context of struggles over gender and power.

Outside the Western world, non-binary conceptions of gender exist in various cultures (Godman, 2018, p. 8), such as Native Americans and South Asia. Gender is constructed based on cultural expectations and ideals. For instance, there is the Native American term Two-Spirit which is used to describe

individuals “both and neither men and women” (Roscoe, 1991, p. 153). Another example is the “berdache,” a term used to describe both men and women who take on alternative gender roles. This alternative gender has been documented in 130 North American tribes. “Hijra”, a term used in South Asia, is another example. (Godman, 2018, pp. 8–9) It describes individuals who are born male but identify as female or are born intersex. “Often called transgender by outsiders, Indian society and most hijras consider themselves to be third gender—neither male nor female, not transitioning.” (Moore, 2018)

These examples and the previously mentioned developments and theories emphasize that gender is defined by cultural expectations and ideals. In the late 20th century, the view of gender as a concept eventually shifted from essentialism to constructivism:

One of the most famous works of this time, which also marks the time as a turning point of the concept is Judith Butler’s “Gender Troubles” (1990). She describes gender as performative, characterized by our repetitive experiences and actions. It is therefore constructed by the way we perform gender repeatedly and is “a stylized repetition of acts” that results in a “constructed identity” that we “come to believe and to perform in the mode off belief”. (Butler, 1999, p. 179) She further argues that there is no *self* in the construction of gender because without the existence of norms and expectation we would not *exist*. Our self therefore a product of these norms and expectations. (Butler, 1993, p. 7) Constructing gender means trying to “impersonating an ideal that nobody actually inhabits”. (Butler, 1992) She urges that gender is *presupposed*. (Butler, 1992)

In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler introduces drag, suggesting “that ‘imitation’ is at the heart of the heterosexual project and its gender binarism” (Butler, 1993, p. 125). That means that gender, as it is continually constructed and performed by imitating, can be considered *drag*. This is worth noting but won’t be further discussed in this paper as it doesn’t contribute to the main purpose of this study. However, drag, in its subversive character, challenges the nature or originality of heterosexuality and the concept of gender binarism itself. (Butler, 1993, p. 125)

Subversion through performance in general is not simple. We cannot just “get up in the morning, look in [our] closet, and decide which gender [we] want to be today”. (Butler, 1992) This results in not knowing which of our acts are subversive and which not. The subversiveness of gender performance is complex, and there is no easy way to measure it. (Butler, 1992)

She argues that in order to gender being a social construct, biological sex is relative. According to her “‘coherent identification’ has to be cultivated, policed, and enforced; and that the violation of that has to be punished, usually through shame.” (Butler, 1992)

“Gender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed” (Butler, 1999, p. 527). Thus, gender is no longer bonded to binarism but to fluidity. By being inclusive of the LGBTQ+ community, the diversity of gender identities and experiences that exist beyond the binary framework is acknowledged. To achieve true gender inclusion, it is important to recognize and respect the identities and contributions of all individuals within the LGBTQ+ community.

In this paper the relevance of a non-binary approach to marketing is analysed, with LEGO's approach assessed in terms of inclusivity beyond the binary. Butler's theory is drawn upon to explain the importance of non-binary representations in the media and how LEGO's marketing contributes to the construction of its customers' gender identities.

## 2.2. Media

This sub-chapter addresses the background of media to give the reader a comprehensive understanding of the term. Theories on mass media, such as the gatekeeping and the agenda-setting-theory are explained. The power of media is further undermined by describing Foucault's regimes of truth.

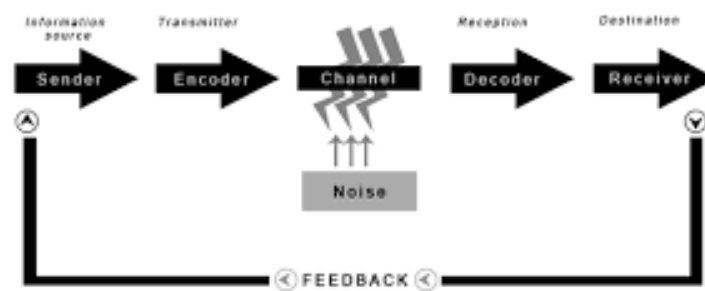
The oxford dictionary defines media as “the main ways that large numbers of people receive information and entertainment, that is television, radio, newspapers, and the Internet” (*Media*, n.d.). Thus, media is directly connected to communication. To understand media, it is inevitable to know how communication works and what it is in the first place.

Many theorists, such as Harold Lasswell, Marshall McLuhan, Davin Berlo or Wilbur Schramm, have written about the process of communication. According to Fiske “communication is talking to one another, it is television, it is spreading information, it is our hair style, it is literary criticism: the list is endless.” (Fiske, 1990, p. 1) However, Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver might be among the most influential theorists of the field. (Fiske, 1990, p. 6) They introduced the Shannon-Weaver model, which is also known as “Information Theory Model” or “Transmission Model” originally consists of five steps: sender, encoder, channel, decoder, and receiver. (Shannon, 1948) Additionally, they included the concept of noise, which is “anything that is added to the signal between its transmission and reception that is not intended by the source”. (Fiske, 1990, p. 8)

Shannon and Weaver's original model did not include feedback, which was criticized by researchers. Later theorists recognized this limitation and included feedback in the model (see graphic below). It is important to note that “though feedback inserts a return loop from destination to source, it does not



destroy the linearity of the model. It is there to make the process of transmitting messages more efficient.” (Fiske, 1990, p. 22)



SHANNON-WEAVER'S MODEL OF COMMUNICATION

Fiske, when he explains the Shannon-Weaver model, introduces the word *medium*, and consequently *media*. He categorizes media into three main types: presentational media (voice, face, body), representational media (books, paintings, photographs), and mechanical media (telephones, radio, television). These categories can sometimes overlap or merge. (Fiske, 1990, p. 18)

Especially in the context both of globalization and digitalization, and this paper mass media, shall be described further: As described by Ott and Mack, mass media are communication technologies that play a crucial role in mediating information and bridging the gap between sender and receiver. The scholars emphasize the significance of mass media in shaping our knowledge and the way we acquire it. (Ott & Mack, 2014, pp. 2–3) They categorize mass media into different categories: print media, motion picture and sound recording, broadcast media, and stress that the fourth category, new media, is the “broadest and, hence, the most difficult [is] to delimit and define”. (Ott & Mack, 2014, p. 8) Lev Manovich (2001) defines new media as the cultural objects that use digital computer technology to distribute and circulate messages and Ott and Mack acknowledge that the term "new media" may be revised over time as the technologies become commonplace. (Ott & Mack, 2014).

The introduction of mass media leads inescapably to the introduction of the theories of gatekeeping and agenda setting. Gatekeeping theory states that individuals or organizations control the flow of information and filter news based on factors such as routine and values. (Luttrell & Wallace, 2021, p. 55) The availability of information also often plays a crucial role. (McCombs and Maxwell in Luttrell & Wallace, 2021, p. 55) Agenda-setting theory, originated by Walter Lippman and further developed and spread by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972, states that media has significant influence on what people should think *about*, rather than what people should think. They determine the focus and importance of issues, shape public opinion, and promote public discourse. Thus, media can dictate

what topics shall be focused on and which overlooked. (Luttrell & Wallace, 2021, p. 57, McCombs and Maxwell in 2021, p. 57)

The media plays an important role in shaping and representing gender. Krijnen and Bauwel (2015) discuss the media's role in portraying and constructing gender, which can influence our perception and actions, hence, our gender development. Stereotypical gender representations in the media can lead to stereotypical behaviour. Despite the socially and culturally constructed nature of gender, it still has real effects on an individual's subjectivity. (Gray, 1992; Krijnen & Bauwel, 2015)

To understand the role of the media in shaping the gender debate, it is important to understand Foucault's concept of discourse and regimes of truth. According to Foucault, discourse functions as a generator of knowledge and meaning. (Krijnen & Bauwel, 2015) Regimes of truth refer to dominant discourses that are accepted as truth in certain contexts and time frames. These discourses are established and maintained by social institutions such as science and law, which are influenced by power dynamics. (Krijnen & Bauwel, 2015) A government's requirement to choose between “female” or “male” when applying for a new passport is an example of a normalized act that reinforces the idea that gender is binary. This repeated practice leads to a naturalization of this accepted truth. Butler's theory of performativity, drawing on Foucault, also contributes to our understanding of these processes.

The media play an important role in relation to the construction of gender. (Krijnen & Bauwel, 2015) Images of gender that are consistent with prevailing social notions of femininity, masculinity, and sexuality in the Western world are repeatedly portrayed. As a result, people may internalize these representations and perceive them as natural or inherent. In other words, it can be argued that the media reinforce and perpetuate existing notions of gender and shape our understanding and acceptance of these norms.

### 2.3. Marketing

This section examines gender-specific marketing, including its use in targeting segmented groups. It also looks how gender-specific toy marketing affects children's skills and gender development. Finally, the emerging topic of non-binary marketing is addressed, including the do's and don'ts and its benefits.

#### **Gendered Marketing**

The influential gender-based marketing strategy of associating pink with girls and blue with boys has significant consequences. Not only does it divide people into two categories, but it also leads to marketing campaigns that target specific genders. (Maclaran & Chatzidakis, 2022)

Gendered marketing emerged in the early 20th century and initially focused on household and automotive products. However, it later expanded to reinforce traditional gender roles and stereotypes. (*Shattered Gendered Marketing*, 2020) Rosalind Gill argues that gendered marketing excludes non-binary individuals, reinforces gender biases, and influences consumer preferences. (Gill, 2007) While marketing can combat gender bias, it often remains limited and tied to economic power. To achieve equality, economic resources and biases in marketing practices must be addressed. (Maclaran & Chatzidakis, 2022, p. 1)

### **Gendered Toy Marketing**

Gendering in the toy industry can be attributed to the industry's strategy of segmenting children's markets by gender for greater profit. (Kline and Schor in Sweet, 2013, p. 2) 1997, p. 17) Gendered Toy Marketing (GTM) reinforces gender stereotypes by portraying gender-specific behaviours and situations. (Sweet, 2013, p. 1) It is interesting to note that Foucault's truth regime is also applicable here. Toys as boys' or girls' toys have been naturalized in society, gender stereotypes thus reinforced.

The industry justifies gender-specific marketing by claiming that it meets customer demand based on perceived differences in the interests and abilities of girls and boys. However, companies often neglect the impact of gender-specific marketing in reinforcing gender stereotypes and roles (Sweet, 2013, p. 2) Thus, contribute to inequality processes. (Sweet, 2013, p. 226) Reinforcing gender stereotypes and roles, undermines the assumption that girls and boys have elementary different traits, interests, and abilities. These assumptions may be internalized by children and their parents, resulting in a negative impact of children's future educational and occupational ambitions. (Sweet, 2013, p. 227) This aligns also with Butler's gender performativity theory.

Cordelia Fine and Emma Rush argue that the current defence of gendered toy marketing fails because it imposes artificial categories on children's intersecting interests. (Fine & Rush, 2018, pp. 775–776) Based on Sandra Lipsitz Bem's book from 1983 they highlight the importance of gender as a social category and emphasize its influence on children's gender development, which starts around two to three years of age. (Fine & Rush, 2018, p. 776) The authors suggest that gender-neutral marketing could double the potential toy market without reducing demand, and they conclude that "gender-targeted messages and products can be huge drivers for positive change" (Gilmour (The Marketing Society Forum 2014) in Fine & Rush, 2018, p. 779).

## Nonbinary Marketing

Younger generations increasingly reject binary gender classifications, with 2-3% of the European population identifying as transgender, gender fluid, or non-binary. (Statista, 2021) In the United States, “one in five adults know someone who uses a gender-neutral pronoun” and a 35 percent reject the idea that there are only two genders. This opinion is shared by a significant portion of people in 35 countries worldwide. (Ipsos, 2020, p. 21) A McKinsey study has shown that brands that avoid classifying products by gender are valued by nearly half of Generation Z consumers and over a third of consumers from other generations. (Francis & Hoefel, 2018) Research also suggests that demographics, gender, and income have less influence on consumer decisions than previously thought. (Bharadwaj et al., 2020)

Implementing a non-binary marketing approach can improve brand funnel metrics such as brand consideration and preference. Targeting women exclusively with household products is limiting, and children grow up beyond traditional gender roles. Acknowledging and respecting transgender, genderqueer and non-binary people is critical to a brand's success. (Kaplan, 2020) Ignoring this population can have negative consequences thus, it seems like a “smart move for brands that want to future-proof their numbers” (Prokopets, 2022) to implement a nonbinary marketing approach.

Elena Prokopets discusses in her article for Latana why gender-specific marketing can no longer be the solution and features three brands that are already embracing gender-neutral marketing. Gender-neutral marketing is becoming increasingly popular and major brands such as Gucci, LV and Levi's have launched gender-neutral collections, and inclusive advertising with different models is on the rise. Younger consumers are guided by this approach in their purchasing decisions. Elena Prokopets emphasizes that “consumers’ contexts and social values are the two shaping forces in decision-making”, and brands need to align their positioning and creative choices accordingly. While some brands make superficial changes, such as implementing gender-specific packaging, truly connecting with younger audiences requires “more meaningful, well-thought-out, and intentional” changes in marketing strategies. This may include treating influencers equally, regardless of gender or ethnicity. Prokopets stresses the importance of listening to consumer insights to determine if the transition to gender-neutral marketing makes sense. (Prokopets, 2022)

Abby Kaplan's blog post for Adlucent discusses the challenges and successes of gender-responsive marketing. She writes: “Younger generations are pushing back on what they see as unnecessarily gendered products as part of a greater resistance to patriarchal ideals.” (Kaplan, 2020) The post offers tips for companies to develop inclusive marketing strategies, emphasizing the importance of workforce diversity, supporting trans\* rights, and understanding the needs of the target audience. It is not

enough to simply offer gender-neutral products or work with gender-fluid influencers. Companies should take a closer look at consumer representation to effectively meet their needs and increase sales. (Kaplan, 2020)

Previously explained theories and insights will be used to examine in how far LEGO's new marketing approach. Is the toy manufacturer using a binary view on gender? Is its new marketing approach *all* gender inclusive? Or is LEGO only focused on breaking into the so called *girls market*? Further, I will include the impact on children's development in my discussion as well as the reinforcement of gender stereotypes. Judith Butler's gender performativity theory will be used as an overshadowing theory over this paper.

### 3. Methodology

The following section presents the methodology of the study, including the underlying strategy of the work, the research methods used, and the expected results. This part aims to provide clarity on the approaches of the study and clearly define its objectives.

#### 3.1. Epistemological and ontological approach

The following chapters will focus on the epistemological and ontological considerations necessary to conduct sufficient research. Considerations that will shape the use of the chosen methods and data through an ontological understanding of the nature of social entities (Bryman, 2012, p. 32). In addition, there is an epistemological focus on the qualifications and limitations of my understanding of knowledge.

##### 3.1.1. Social Constructivism

This research paper starts from a social constructivist paradigm that views "reality" as a product of social construction. According to this view, people are social beings shaped by their social relationships. In simpler terms, constructivism assumes that people create society and society in turn shapes individuals, thereby shaping the world in which we live. (Onuf, 2013, p. 4) Or how Bryman described it:

“Constructionism is an ontological position (often also referred to as constructivism) that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. It implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision. In recent years, the term has also come to include the notion that researchers’ own accounts of the social world are constructions.” (Bryman, 2012, p. 33)

Vivien Burr addresses the importance of language within social constructivism. She describes how the acquisition of concepts and categories is closely linked to language development and is reproduced daily by people who share a common culture and language. Therefore, language is a fundamental component of individual thought, as it provides the necessary framework for meaning and understanding. Ultimately, language is a prerequisite for thinking. Accordingly, “when people talk to

each other, the world gets constructed” (Burr, 2015, p. 11). The use of language can therefore be seen as a kind of action and social constructionism emphasizes that language has real consequences for individuals that cannot be ignored. (Burr, 2015, pp. 10–11) This aligns with Vygotsky theory, that language and culture provide the fundamental framework through which humans encounter, mediate, and comprehend reality, and the observation Potter’s that “the world is constituted in one way or another as people talk it, write it and argue it” (Potter, 1996, p. 98).

This paper emphasizes the importance of language in social constructivism as it is used to analyze and discuss LEGO’s discourse: By analyzing LEGO’s discourse – The LEGO press release from 2021, the LEGO Diversity and Inclusivity website, and the LEGO Brand website – I analyze how the language used is inclusive, and which message(s) LEGO conveys with it. Burr, Vygotsky and Potter explicitly describe that and why language matters in the construction of our reality. I analyze how LEGO contributes or influences the reader’s reality with language. Since “social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision” (Bryman, 2012, p. 33), I further address if and how the reader’s view on gender is influenced by LEGO’s discourse. Eventually, I discuss LEGO’s influence on people’s perception of gender and specifically their construction of their own reality, hence, their gender. This aligns with the essential belief of constructivism that our reality is “an ongoing accomplishment” (Bryman, 2012, p. 34).

### 3.1.2. Qualitative research

This paper follows is qualitative research as it aims to understand and interpret in-depth if and how LEGO’s discourse is inclusive from a nonbinary perspective.

Various scholars have written about and defined the term of qualitative research. Strauss and Corbin define it, relatively broad, as “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” (1990 p. 17). Other theorists are more specific and include, for instance, the “interpretation in the construction of meaning in concepts”, or the “socially constructed nature of reality” to their definitions. The approach of this paper further aligns with Berg’s and Lune’s definition that “qualitative research properly seeks answers to questions by examining various social settings and the individuals who inhabit these settings” (Lune & Berg, 2017, p. 15).

Authors Lofland and Lofland (1995) presented two key principles that underpin the epistemology of qualitative research: Firstly, the most comprehensive form of engagement with another person's

thoughts and experiences is face-to-face interaction, and secondly, to gain social knowledge, one must actively engage with and understand the perspectives of others, often referred to in sociology as *taking on the role of the other*.

In this study, my understanding of intended meaning and how audiences perceive it is based on assumptions derived from examining written materials and analysing different forms of communication, according to the second key principle of Lofland's and Lofland's. The first key-principle cannot be applied as no face-to-face interaction, whether with the audience nor LEGO is included in this study.

Conducting qualitative research enables to interpret and thus, understand and explain if and how LEGO shapes the perception of gender within the society. The application of different theories, such as the agenda-setting theory or the gender performativity theory, are used to interpret, understand and describe how LEGO's new marketing approach influences the society's perceptions.

Furthermore, both the qualitative research approach and social constructivist paradigm employed in this study assume that "reality" is constructed through shared experiences and beliefs within social contexts, recognizing its dynamic and ever-evolving nature. How to interpret this construction is main part of this study, and is another characteristic of qualitative research. (Bryman, 2012, p. 399) Further reasoning of qualitative research can be found in my choice of research design and research methods which are explained in the next two chapters.

### 3.2. Case Study

According to Bryman "the emphasis [of a case study] tends to be upon an intensive examination of the setting" (Bryman, 2012, p. 67) and demands the thorough and intensive analysis of a case. Further, a case study aims to provide an in-depth exposition, used to enlarge existing knowledge of "individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena" (Yin, 2009, p. 4)

Bryman explains that there are two different approaches possible within a case study: the *idiographic* approach and the *nomothetic* approach. The nomothetic approach focuses, e.g., on laws or patterns applicable to larger groups of people and is often connected to quantitative methods. On the contrary, the idiographic approach aims to explore humans' experiences, is often connected to culture and people's identity and behaviour, hence, is mainly to be understood to apply qualitative methods. Often, a mixed methods approach is used, however, it is not mandatory. (Bryman, 2012, p. 69) This



paper, therefore, can be understood as an idiographic approach as its objective is to examine LEGO's discourse and to draw conclusions of how the company's discourse affects society, thus culture.

Schramm defines the core of a case study a "decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result" (Yin, 2009, p. 17), which is another definition of a case study that aligns with the approach of this paper, discussed in the next chapter. These questions are answered or discussed in this paper. With this thesis I analyse in-depth how LEGO implemented its new marketing approach, discuss the company's reasons and the results of their new tactic.

Moreover, the lens of social constructivism which views our reality as constructed and the theories applied in this study aim to identify, interpreted, and explain and discuss the topic in a similar manner to gain in-depth knowledge.

### 3.3. Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) focuses on the relationship between language, power, and social structures. The method explicitly "emphasizes the role of language as a power recourse that is related to ideology and socio-cultural change".

Different scholars developed different approaches and definitions of CDA studies (Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Teun A. van Dijk, Paul Chilton). However, in this paper Fairclough's approach is applied as his main argument regarding CDA is that the ultimate goal is to raise awareness and critical understanding of oppressive social conditions through the analysis of language. (Fairclough, 2015, p. 4) The applied method is implemented by Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model:

The first dimension, the *text dimension*, examines "the actual content, structure, and meaning of the text" (Grant et al., 2004, p. 11) and focuses on the 'linguistic features of the text', which is in this case LEGO's press release from 2021, LEGO's Diversity and Inclusivity website, and LEGO's Brand website. This dimension is divided into four main categories – vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, text structure – including meaning in relation to political and ideological implications as well as transitivity and modality. While transitivity focuses on the connection between events/processes and subjects/objects thus, agency, modality focuses "on the speaker's degree of affinity with or affiliation to her or his statement." Additionally, there are three further categories that are used within the first dimension: "the 'force' of utterances, i.e. what sorts of speech acts (promises, requests, threats etc.) they constitute, the 'coherence' of texts; and the 'intertextuality' of texts." Fairclough further emphasizes

the use of discourse as a tool of hegemony and the importance of uncovering hidden meanings, implicit ideologies, and discursive strategies embedded in language. (Fairclough, 1992)

The second, the *discourse practice dimension*, and examines “the form of discursive interaction used to communicate meaning and beliefs” (Grant et al., 2004, p. 11) and focuses on how the texts are ‘produced, distributed, and consumed’. It includes analysis of the processes and practices involved in the production and interpretation of discourse when it is consumed. These practices are not neutral but are influenced by power relations and social ideologies. Everyday life involves discursive practices that play a role in both reproducing and changing social and cultural aspects. (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 61) This dimension includes production conditions and techniques, as well as the role of institutions and social actors in shaping discourse. Fairclough’s model included the exploration of “connections between the nature of the discourse processes in particular instances, and the nature of the social practices they are part of” (Fairclough, 1992).

The *social practice dimension* is the third dimension of the model, considers “the social context in which the discursive event is taking place” (Grant et al., 2004, p. 11) and focuses on “the wider social practice to which the [discourse] belongs” (Fairclough, 1992). It further is applied to provide knowledge about the ‘social matrix of discourse’, and the ‘orders of discourse’. Fairclough states that there is no strict guide on what exactly shall be analysed however, he gives some examples on which I elaborate and base this paper’s perspective on it. According to him, the aim is to specify the social and hegemonic relations and structures which constitute the matrix of this particular instance of social and discursive practice. Thus, within the third dimension social and hegemonic relations regarding the examined text are discussed as well as the effects or results of the examined discourse. The latter is, whether and how the text under study influences subsequent discourse. Moreover, Fairclough emphasizes the ‘ideological and political effects of discourse’. It examines how the studies discourse impacts the ‘system of knowledge and belief, social relations, and social identities’. He further emphasises the importance of power dynamics and ideologies that underlie social practices. According to him, in this dimension it is essential to apply other theories as well to provide an in-depth insight into the analysis of the discourse. (Fairclough, 1992) However, in this paper the theories described in chapter 2: Theory are mainly applied in the discussion for simplicity and better comprehension.

### 3.4. Data Selection

Equality and gendered marketing don't align with each other. Patriarchal and capitalist structures dominate our society, shaping power dynamics and influencing consumer behavior. In this context, the most influential actors are well-known brands that target both adults and children as consumers. These brands have considerable power and influence over consumer choices and preferences. However, opinions from the public sphere have gotten louder, the people ask companies to finally meet their corporate social responsibilities. Nonetheless, because of the level of influence media and thus, companies, have on society.

Companies that have been using a gendered marketing approach for years must now reconsider their strategy. While younger companies often have gender inclusivity among their values, bigger companies might still have some catching up to do. Of course, change does not happen overnight, however, having a closer look at the market gives reason to hope. In recent years an increasing number of (big) brands implemented gender inclusive lines or approaches. (Prokopets, 2022) Many companies participate in the Pride Month – a month dedicated to LGBTQ+ rights. Which also results in critiques because it may be difficult to differentiate between companies that believe in the cause and companies that make use of these efforts, solely for their objective of increasing their profit. (Tapi, 2022)

In the process of finding the company to be the studied in my research, I had to take multiple factors into account: On what field should my research be focused on? What are the reasons for my field of choice? How to decide which company is suitable for this study? Which discourses should I analyse? This chapter will answer these questions and provides a wide understanding of this paper's approach and motivation.

Considering different markets, such as fashion, beauty and makeup, and eventually toys I found a variety of cases that could have been a match. Different factors were considered such as the influence of the industry, the reputation of the industry, as well as characteristic structures of each industry. Regarding the influence of the industry, it quickly became clear that the toy market has great impact on society: The baby and child market had a yearly revenue of 4.65 billion U.S. dollars in 2023. (12.2022, n.d.) Marketing addresses children however, companies also address parents to buy toys for their children. Thus, the potential societal impact of the toy industry is considered fitting for this research.

The reputation of different industries may vary, while every industry is criticized for different things, the toy industry is among other points especially critiqued for gender stereotyping, lack of diversity

and representation as well as limited option for non-tradition play. (Sweet, 2013) Thus, the toy industry also meets the requirement of being criticized for not acting gender inclusive.

One condition is inevitable, especially for my discussion: The company's pledge to act gender inclusive. Although every company could be analysed in terms of gender inclusivity, for this paper it was important to be able to compare the company's promise with its actual intentions. This opens the discussion point whether the studied company really values and believes in gender inclusivity or if the firm implemented changes and made promises to increase sale numbers and profit. Since LEGO in 2021 has announced to become gender inclusive, the company meets the requirement of being studied.

Besides the company's status and its critiques and reputation, the fact that it is a European brand contributed enormous to my decision to make it my case as the consideration and appropriateness of the location a study stakes place add value to the research itself.

LEGO already implemented changes to make the company more gender inclusive, for example, the filters 'for gilrs' and 'for boys' on the website have already been deleted. Now one can filter for interests and categories instead. (Russell, 2021) However, it can be questioned if LEGO actually wants to become gender inclusive towards all genders or if the company simply wants to further capitalise on other genders markets. To be able to provide a sufficient answer to this I had to decide how to identify LEGO's intention to remove gender bias and the company's efforts in doing so. The potential of being researched is another requirement the case of this study had to meet.

By conducting a critical discourse analysis of LEGO's official discourses, the company's intentions are revealed. In order to provide a comprehensive analysis, this study examined certain variables, specifically LEGO's press release from 2021, the LEGO Diversity and Inclusivity website and, the LEGO Brand website. By focusing on these three textual sources, a multi-layered understanding can be achieved at different levels. At the first level, the LEGO press release from 2021 is analysed as it is described as a commitment that has yet to be put into action. At the second level, the inclusivity statement published on the website assumes deeper importance as it is an easily accessible and enduring representation of LEGO's stance. Finally, the third and deepest level deals with LEGO's values, which are an integral part of the company's fundamental activities and guiding principles. By analysing these three different levels, one gains a comprehensive insight into LEGO's approach to inclusion. Although, there were multiple alternative approaches possible, I focused on this one as it provides a layered in-depth analysis which results in comprehensive knowledge. More details to alternative approaches can be found in chapter 3.6 Limitations of the study.

### 3.5. Ethical considerations

Every study has a responsibility to the people and organizations that are the addressees of its research activities. (Bryman, 2012, p. XXXV) Research within the field of gender, especially involves different ethical considerations, as it is a delicate subject itself. (Ellison, 1990)

In this study I take a critical stance who assumes that gender inclusivity results in positive changes. However, I acknowledge that not everyone accepts the fluid perspective on gender. Certain people may still believe in gender as a binary and feel offended or upset when being told differently. Researching such a topic from a gender inclusive favouring perspective does not align with this group's beliefs and may result in stronger opposing opinions. Since people's reactions can never be predicted with certainty, these stronger opposing opinions may in turn lead to greater contempt, more verbal violence, or even physical violence against people who do not self-identify with gender binarism. These potential negative outcomes need to be considered when conducting research within the field of gender. It is important to acknowledge other people's beliefs and include these beliefs – no matter if we, or I, agree with them or not – and take them into account.

Western perspectives are often the main stance of society studies. Western exceptionalism, eurocentrism and colonialism are continuing issues, that remain to largely impact the concept and the theories of gender. This problem is widely known; however, I acknowledge that this paper is set in a Western context. The theories that are applied are mainly written by scholars from the global West and are based on Western societies, values, and ideology. This inherently concludes in results and discussion points reflecting the Western perspective. Gender roles are, among other things, a product of colonialism and patriarchal power structures, and the exercise of these leads to the oppression of women - or better: to the favouring of men. I mention the favouring of men explicitly because of gender roles for women and men consequently followed the suppression of everyone who has not fit the characteristics of being a *man*. However, not every culture has incorporated gender roles as they are known in the West. There are e.g. cultures with a social system of matriarchy (*5 Matriarchal Societies Where Women Are in Charge*, 2023), or different assumptions of societal roles.

### 3.6. Limitations of the study

Every research study is different and has limitations that are influenced by the nature of the research. However, there are certain common factors that must be considered. In this chapter, both the general

and specific limitations of this study are outlined to provide a complete understanding of the research process and to maintain transparency.

One limitation of this study is that it focuses exclusively on the official texts and ignores other factors that could be analysed. For example, an alternative approach would have been to examine the marketing campaigns conducted by LEGO after the release of the statement in 2021. In addition, an examination of consumer opinions through a survey or focus group with individuals or children representing different gender identities could have provided valuable insights. Moreover, an interview with a representative could have given insightful results to LEGO's intentions.

Another limitation is the fact that I chose LEGO as a case study. There is a discernible trend for more and more companies, especially younger ones, to have a particular focus on and interest in gender equality from the outset. Given the change in consumer preferences, it would have been useful to examine the social impact of growing companies in light of the topic of this study. More elaborate reasons about the choice of this case can be found in the chapter 3.4: Data selection.

### 3.7. Reliability, replicability, and validity

The main objective of this study is to provide solid and credible findings on the selected topic. Therefore, this section comprehensively examines the research criteria of reliability, replicability, and validity. Adherence to and demonstration of these principles will ensure the high quality and trustworthiness of the research findings.

This study attempts to improve reliability and replicability by providing the reader with a comprehensive understanding of the entire research process. Not only is the motivation for the study explained, but the methodology for data selection (chapter 3.4) and subsequent analysis of existing discourse and theories is also outlined. This transparency allows both the reader and other researchers to understand the steps taken. Although it is difficult in the field of social constructivism to provide absolute certainty in replicating the study and exact results (Porta & Keating, 2008, p. 62), this study strives for a high level of transparency by detailing each step. Although different researchers may reach different conclusions and studies may yield different results, this work offers clear and understandable insights into its approach and provides readers with comprehensive information about each stage of the research. Therefore, the results and findings of this study are considered plausible.

In order to establish both external and internal validity, for external validity, it is critical to examine the generalizability of the statements made for a particular case to other cases. In addition, for internal validity, it is necessary to ensure that the research indicators used to measure the research units actually capture the intended constructs or variables. (Porta & Keating, 2008, p. 62)

The main focus of this study is to analyse LEGO's discourse on gender inclusion, either conducted or published. It is assumed that comparable results can be obtained if other cases that meet the criteria outlined in chapter 3.4 Data selection are examined using an approach similar to the one applied to LEGO in this study. It is important to recognize that researchers may interpret results differently, leading to different outcomes.

Internal validity is ensured by the selection of appropriate theories and discourses. In addition, the selection of data also contributes to internal validity, as all of the above components are compatible with the research question. Defining the research process from the beginning ensured that each subsequent step was related to the previous one and finally to the research question.

## 4. Analysis

This chapter is organized according to the three-dimensional CDA model by Fairclough. First, the text dimension according to Fairclough's model, is analysed. Then the discourse practice dimension is examined, followed by an evaluation of the social practice dimension. Each chapter or dimension concludes with a final assessment that clarifies the collective findings from each dimension of the three texts as a whole. Both the factors to be analysed within the text dimension and the discourses analysed can be found under appendix A to F.

### 4.1. The Text Dimension

This chapter identifies linguistic features used in the chosen discourses by LEGO and interprets those. Social, cultural and historical context is considered in this interpretation to examine how the texts reinforces or challenges social norms. A specific focus lays on ideological biases, more specifically, if the language used can be considered non-binary, this is all-gender inclusive. Finally, I reflect my finding, identify their potential effects on society and draw conclusions.

The chapter will analyse first LEGO's press release from October 10, 2021, followed by LEGO's Diversity and Inclusivity website and finally focuses on LEGO's brand website. This approach provides in-depth knowledge on different levels and thus, enables me to answer the research question: "To what extent has LEGO's new approach to gender incorporated nonbinary perspectives in the company's discourse with and since its pledge in 2021 to become gender inclusive?"

#### **The LEGO Press Release**

LEGO's press release from 2021, which was published on October 10, the International Day of The Girl, and in the relation to LEGO's 'Ready for Girls' campaign is structured into four parts. However, before the reader gets to the paragraphs and passages of the text, the headline is the first thing to be seen. The headline of the "Girls are ready to overcome gender norms but society continues to enforce biases that hamper their creative potential" starts with the word "girls". The location of this word implies that girls are the topic or theme of the sentence thus, consequently that is what the article is about. The headline further presents the action of girls as being "ready to overcome gender norms". The second part of the headline, which contradicts the first half-sentence of it goes "[...] but society continues to enforce biases that hamper their creative potential" and also only focuses on girls hence one gender only as "their" relates to "Girls". Thus, other genders are not included in the headline which indicates



that they are either not considered at all or – in relation to the headline – not ready to overcome gender norms.

First, the introduction, which consists mainly of a summary of the results obtained from a study commissioned by LEGO “highlights the need for society to rebuild perceptions, actions and words to support the creative empowerment of all children.” It is interesting to note here, that although the result focus on “girls” and “boys” as the text reveals, the term “all children” is introduced at the end of this paragraph. This may be interpreted as an inclusion of all genders for the very first time in this text.

The part to be found under the sub-headline “Ready for Girls” provides a more elaborate description of the research results. In this part of the press release the vocabulary is within the gender binarism. “Girls” was used 12 times, “daughter” once and “boys” 9 times, “son” once. The first paragraph of this text part starts with saying that “girls are ready for the world but society isn’t quite ready to support their growth through play”. This mix of linguistic features – a metaphor and a coordinating conjunction – creates first the impression that girls are ready, prepared for and awaiting anything. This could be mowing grass, having tea, going to a galactical war; The metaphor is used to give the reader the impression of girls being prepared for whatever there may be or come. Considering the rest of the sentence, it becomes clear that in this case “world” is associated with “growth by play”. However, the next part of the sentence, that is introduced by the conjunctive “but”, changes this picture. The “but” contrasts the girls’ condition of being “ready” with the societies unwillingness to support their potential “growth by play”. This interplay of words and linguistic features creates a contrast between “girls” and “society”. The “girls” can be considered the *good* people, the “society” the *bad* people. It is important to acknowledge here that this way of thinking is also socially constructed. Accordingly, girls are often portrayed as sweet, innocent; people who wouldn’t do anything wrong. On the other hand “the society” is often mentioned as part of the problem why gender stereotypes and roles are still being reinforced. Other factors, such as ongoing bad news can be attribute as well to the society’s *bad* image. Thus, the metaphor creates sympathy for girls and aversion for the society. On a deeper level the sentence reflects the continuing systematic oppression of girls and women by social norms, such as gender roles and gender typical behaviour and stereotypes. It should be emphasized that this sentence conveys a message congruent with the headline: Whereas the headline is more fact-based, the sentence used in this passage is more open to interpretation. The repetition emphasises the statement and it becomes more salient to the audience. It can also be argued that the text uses this repetition to influence the readers attitude towards the subject discussed. Thus, the reader is advised that the society plays a major role in reinforcing inequality, and which may result in increased awareness towards the topic. The repetition also highlights the importance that LEGO attaches to the

statement and its underlying meaning. However, this sentence such as the headline only focuses on girls. Consequently, the text excludes other gender identities, which raises the question of whether they are intentionally disregarded or considered not “ready for the world”.

While the first paragraph of this text part is concerned with the results based on the children’s responses of the study, the second paragraph includes parents’ opinions too. The paragraph talks about the research outcomes from questions about professions and gender and ends with “consider a wider range of professions to be for both women and men”. In this partial sentence I focus on “both women and men” because it reinforces the idea of gender binary. The word “both” indicates that there are no other genders besides “women” and “men” and excludes any other gender. However, it is interesting to note that “women” comes first, followed by “men”. This implies an underlying feminist perspective in the text.

The next text part, which can be found under the sub-headline “Rebuilding the World” encourages parents and “children” to “inclusive play” on the “International Day of The Girl”. The language used in the beginning of this paragraph can be considered mostly gender inclusive. It can even be argued that “calling on parents and children to champion inclusive play” uses an intersectional approach because “inclusive play” must not necessarily be restricted to gender, but may include people of different origins, ethnicities, people with disabilities, only to name a few. However, the text then promotes LEGO’s short films about “inspiring and entrepreneurial girls” from different countries, which were produced within the company’s “Ready for Girls” campaign. The paragraph concludes with a statement by Geena Davis, the founder of the Geena Davies Institute on Gender and Media. This statement can also be considered being worded within gender binary as she says “[...] inspire creativity in girls through play [...]” and “We also know that showing girls unique and unstereotyped activities can lead to an expanded viewpoint of possibilities and opportunities.” Emphasis lays on the usage of “girls” in these examples.

The paragraph encourages parents and children to engage in inclusive play on International Day of the Girl. The language used at the beginning of the paragraph is predominantly gendered, suggesting “inclusive play”. However, the paragraph then highlights LEGO's short films featuring inspiring and entrepreneurial girls, which are part of the Ready for Girls campaign. The paragraph concludes with a statement from Geena Davis, founder of the Geena Davies Institute on Gender and Media. Notably, the statement uses gendered language emphasizing activities for girls and their expanded view of possibilities and opportunities. Interesting to note here is, that although the passage is clearly about girls, LEGO chose to introduce “inclusive play” which can be interpreted both as intersectional and including all genders. Another important discovery is that when Geena Davis says “We also know that

showing girls unique and unstereotyped activities can lead to an expanded viewpoint of possibilities and opportunities” she excludes any other genders. The choice of vocabulary by Geena Davis raises the question of whether the deliberate use of such language willfully excludes all other genders or implies that its message can only be realized by girls.

The part of the text with the sub-headline “The role of LEGO play” is the most gender inclusively written part of the text so far. Three times “all children” are addressed. This passage also includes a statement by Julia Goldin, Chief Product and Marketing Officer at LEGO, which is formulated in a gender-inclusive, nonbinary way. By using vocabulary such as “all children”, “[...] one specific gender” and “as inclusive as possible”. The last paragraph of this part of the text is significant for the text analysis as well because from only talking about “girls” in relation to the ‘Ready for Girls’ campaign the text shifts in the second sentence to a more inclusive wording by addressing “any child, regardless of gender identity”. The last sentence of this part of the text – “The company will ensure any child, regardless of gender identify, feels they can build anything they like, playing in a way that will help them develop and realise their unique talent.” – can furthermore be analyzed according to its transitivity: The actor is “The company” thus, LEGO; the subjective is “any child” and the attribute to that is “regardless of gender identity”. The circumstances provide additional information about how the subjective is achieved: “feels they can build anything they like”, and its purpose: “playing in a way that will help them develop and realise their unique talent”. Overall, LEGO takes on the role of enabling a child's freedom to build, encouraging play, and supporting the development and expression of their unique talents. The use of inclusive language stresses the company's commitment to diversity and inclusivity. This wording highlights that the company recognizes and acknowledges the importance of creating an inclusive environment where all children can freely express themselves and develop their abilities. It positions the company as a positive force that challenges gender norms and promotes a sense of equality and self-determination in children. Furthermore, as force of utterance can be understood as a *commitment* to “any child, regardless of gender identity”. In terms of epistemic modality, the use of “will ” indicates a strong commitment to take action and deliver on this promise.

“Our commitment” is the last sub-headline. This part of the text articulates in its first sentence that “ensuring more inclusive play and raising the debate around gender norms is critical, not just for girls but for any child”. Thus, highlights that the debate around gender norms should include gender across the spectrum. This is underlined by the choice of vocabulary, but also by the vocabulary that had not been chosen: If the intention would have been to argue within the gender binary, the text stated, “*not just for girls but for boys too*”. Interesting to note here is that this sentence is stated without any active actor but as a general statement. Thus, the power relation can be considered neutral. The next sentences of this passage are characterized differently: It switches back to a binary view on gender,

talking about “girls” and “boys”. The usage of “opposite sex” and “opposite gender” denotes that it is used in the same manner. Further, by using the term “other gender” it is implied that there are only two genders, hence, the language cannot be considered nonbinary. The last paragraph is the actual commitment and general force of utterance of the passage and the press release: “The company is committed to making LEGO play more inclusive and ensuring that children’s creative ambitions – both now in the future – are not limited by gender stereotypes. We know there is work to do which is why from 2021, we will work closely with the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media and UNICEF to ensure LEGO products and marketing are accessible to all and free of gender bias and harmful stereotypes.” The term “committed” implies a high level of certainty and the further choice of vocabulary signals an all-gender inclusive or nonbinary approach towards gender: “not limited by gender stereotypes”, “accessible to all” and “free of gender bias and harmful stereotypes”. However, while some of these examples could also be used from a binary perspective on gender, based on the previous passage and “accessible to all” it may be assumed that the intention was to formulate in a nonbinary intention. LEGO is very certain about its commitment to as implied with the epistemic modality “will” in the last sentence. Thus, the presence of a substantial degree of certainty to “ensure LEGO products and marketing are accessible to all and free of gender bias and harmful stereotypes” is indicated.

The word “girl” was used 26 times, “daughter” 3 times. The word “boy” was used 12 times, “son” 3 times. “All children” was used 4 times. This imbalance implies a marginalization of people or children who identify outside the gender binary which in turn reinforces a binary view of gender. It is interesting to note that “all children” was mainly (3 times) used in one paragraph under the sub-headline “The role of LEGO play”. One time, the phrase was used in the introduction. This both is noteworthy and reasonable due to the structure and the intertextuality of the press release. The text often refers to the results of the study, which was conducted within the gender binary. This explains partially the amounts of times the text uses “girl” or “daughter” and “boy” and son”. It is conspicuous that the most nonbinary passage is the “The role of LEGO play”, including Goldin’s statement, is the part of the text which is the most all-gender inclusive or nonbinary. This might be reasoned in her personal beliefs rather than the company’s beliefs. Another remarkable fact is that after this part, the language loses some level of inclusivity. The text from this point may arguable still be formulated in a nonbinary setting with some insertions of the gender binary, when addressing research results, but is not as strongly nonbinary articulated as the previous passage “The role of LEGO play”. This may indicate some degree of uncertainty regarding implementation potential of and the belief in the new strategy.

In summary, LEGO’s press release takes a mixed approach to gender inclusion. While the text demonstrates a commitment to challenging gender norms and promoting equality, there are instances

where binary gender perspectives are reinforced and individuals who identify outside of traditional gender categories are marginalized. The prevalence of gendered terms suggests a limited understanding of gender beyond the binary. However, the use of inclusive language and nonbinary terminology in some parts, including the outstanding linguistic features and content of the last two text parts reflect a strong commitment to nonbinary inclusion and diversity.

### **The Lego Inclusivity and Diversity Landing Page**

The LEGO Inclusivity and Diversity Landing Page provides a lot of information, about different approaches towards inclusivity and diversity. Besides the introduction, the landing page consists of three main parts or blocks. Every block starts with a headline and an introduction to the topic addressed in the block. Then either more background information is stated, which will be examined as well, and supporting units and examples of how LEGO has incorporated and implemented these approaches towards inclusivity and diversity. This analysis focuses mainly on the introductions and descriptions of the three blocks. Supporting units and examples are acknowledged and partially included in the analysis of the structure and coherence of the landing page however, they are not in-depth analysed. The reason for this is that this paper focuses on how LEGO uses language to convey meanings and beliefs, rather than how and what the company does to promote its intentional statements.

The first main part, the introduction to the landing page communicates that the LEGO Group beliefs in diversity and inclusivity are the same as in LEGO play: “We believe the LEGO Group – and LEGO® play [...]”. The first sentence is articulated in a very inclusive way, which arguable includes all genders across the spectrum. It states that LEGO “is for everyone, no matter where you come from, what you look like or how you identify”. Next, the text expresses the company’s mission: “It’s our mission to inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow”. It is interesting to note that the mission is completely gender-neutral formulated. Depending on the interpretation it could address any gender or any person in general. Thus, everyone may identify with it. The transitivity of the sentence reveals LEGO’s agency and commitment to the objectives of “inspire and develop”. The word “must” in the following sentence can be considered a deontic modality. It expresses a strong sense of obligation or necessity: “we [LEGO] must continue to play our part in building a more inclusive and equitable world, starting with our own organization.” This, again, emphasises LEGO’s agency and commitment to “inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow” who are according to the phrasing of the paragraph are “all children” or “everyone, no matter where you come from, what you look like or how you identify”.

The second part, “What does diversity and inclusion mean to us”, again creates a direct connection between LEGO play and LEGO as a workspace: “LEGO play is for everyone, and so is our workspace”. The word “everyone” includes arguable all genders and thus, is inclusive and nonbinary. The text then uses a comparative structure when stating “The more diverse backgrounds we have represented within our business, who are each heard and valued, the more we will all contribute, thrive and grow.” It implies a relation, or positive correlation between diversity among employees and the positive outcome mentioned. The next passages address LEGO’s “two global priorities” (Weckstrom, 2020): “Valuing differences” and “Improve representation” Under “valuing differences” vocabulary like “everyone”, “inclusive of all” or “welcome everyone” is used which implies a nonbinary approach to gender. Furthermore “allies” although historically different defined relates in pop culture often to the LGBTQ+ community. (Queer in the world, 2021) Thus, intentional, or not intentional used, the LGBTQ+ community, henceforth people who identify outside the gender binary, may feel included. There are two remarkable examples in this passage: It starts with “Inclusion is a choice, a conscious behavior, which starts with creating a safe space for everyone to be seen, heard, valued and respected.” An interesting point of this sentence is that although it states that the diverse backgrounds will “each [be] heard and valued” it doesn’t specify by who hears and values them. There is no agency visible which may lead to the question if there will be anyone at all hearing and valuing these backgrounds. The lack of representation raises the question of LEGO’s commitment. The second global priority, “Improve representation”, is described with vocabulary that does not imply any gender. The text statement “Currently we focus on gender, ethnicity, LGBTQIA+ communities and people with disabilities” suggests that there may be moments when other areas are emphasized more. This implies that LEGO places unstable importance on the representation of gender, ethnicity, LGBTQ+ communities, and people with disabilities. Such a view has the potential to influence individuals’ interpretations and perceptions of the company. Individuals who identify with these groups may ask questions about the company’s goals and inquire about its future course of action.

The next text part, “Breaking down gender stereotypes”, begins with what can be considered nonbinary with vocabulary like “children” or “create opportunities for everyone” used in the first passage. The second passage states LEGO long-term objective of becoming “a complete gender-balanced organization”. Although that seems and might be somewhat inclusive, it only includes the binary perspective on gender as clarified in LEGO’s Gender Balance Policy. In this policy, the company explains that “the LEGO Group deeply respects that gender is not binary. However, for the purposes of Danish legal requirements and reporting, this policy uses the traditional gender categories of male and female” (Ng, 2021). I recognize the need for companies to comply with legal requirements. However, I maintain that gender representation is not determined solely by legal obligations. Thus,

reports to official institutions etc. may be required to be within the gender binary. Focusing only on women and men and excluding other genders from the company's internal ambitions however, may arguable lead to lower credibility for the company considering that LEGO itself states in the beginning of this very website that the company as a workplace and its products are “for everyone, no matter where you come from, what you look like” and especially important in this context: “how you identify”. The last passage of this introductory part is the most gendered. It uses “women” three times, and stress that explains the company goals as “share of women at Director level and above”. While until the second passage, where LEGO states its objective to become a “gender-balanced” organization it could be argued that the text follows a gender-neutral, or nonbinary, language. However, even without the background information from LEGO’s Gender Balance Policy the audience would recognize that gender-balance in this case only includes women and men. Especially if the reader has not read the mentioned policy additionally, they would not be provided with the note that LEGO “deeply respects that gender is not binary” (Ng, 2021).

The last block-headline, “Everyone is Awesome”, addresses LGBTQ+ matters. The first thing to note here is that the introduction to this part is not very informative itself. It lacks in explanation and addressing its target audience. Without the image and the existing partnership stated bellow the introduction, it would not be clear that this part of the website concerns the LGBTQ+ community. The introduction is: “Everyone is unique, and with a little more love, acceptance and understanding in the world, we can all feel free to be our true AWESOME selves, in the workplace and everywhere else!”. The sentence acknowledges the prevailing inequality in society by stating the premise of “more love, acceptance and understanding” for being able to “all feel free to be our true AWESOME selves”. The vocabulary of this passage uses vocabulary like “everyone” and “all” and thus, can be understood as inclusive towards all genders or nonbinary. The exclamation mark – which is the only one to be found on the entire landing page – emphasizes a very strong feeling about the previously sentence. Thus, it can be argued that LEGO clearly emphasizes the importance of this part of the website. However, to effectively promote the company's holistic support for individuals who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community, it would have been appropriate to mention the LGBTQ+ community earlier on this website. This is because gender issues are also relevant to the LGBTQ+ community, particularly because individuals who identify as non-binary are included in that community.

While the first main part “What does diversity and inclusion mean to us” is clearly structured, the second part “Breaking down gender stereotypes” gets more unclear because it contains many (four) supporting units and examples on how LEGO incorporates what is stated in each introduction. LEGO’s “partnering with UN Women”, “Our policies”, “Paid parental leave for all”, “Member of Business Disability forum” can be found among them. However, "Member of the Business Disability Forum"

seems somewhat out of place as part of the "Breaking down gender stereotypes" block, as no intersectional approach is defined or used in the description. Furthermore, can be argued that LGBTQ+ may should be included to the block about gender stereotypes as well. Arguably, this would contribute to greater representation and inclusion of marginalized groups and people. In turn, this could contribute to audience gender development, awareness, and greater consumer centralization, which in turn increases brand trust and reach.

In summary, the analysed website contains both inclusive and questionable aspects. LEGO sets an inclusive tone in the introduction but is not coherently inclusive of nonbinary identities. The emphasis on gender-balance focuses solely on women and neglects other genders. The section on LGBTQ+ regarding gender inclusivity could have been better integrated earlier in the text. A clearer structure or intersectional approach would improve representation and inclusion. Overall, while LEGO demonstrates some level of inclusivity, there is room for improvement in challenging gender norms and promoting inclusive, nonbinary diversity and inclusivity.

### **The LEGO Brand Website**

The LEGO Brand Website consists of The LEGO Brand Values, The LEGO Brand Framework, and The LEGO Promises. There are six Brand Values: Imagination, Creativity, Fun, Learning, Caring, Quality. The Brand Framework consists of seven steps; from bottom to top: Spirit, Promises, Values, Idea, Vision, Mission, Belief. There are four LEGO promises: People Promise, Play Promise, Planet Promise, Partner Promise.

The first part, the LEGO Brand Values are written in a gender-neutral style with one thing standing out right away: None of The LEGO Brand Values address inclusivity or gender. However, analysing the use of language it can be noted that the text does not use gendered pronouns, instead it focuses on "children" and "all". Pronouns such as "we" and "us" are used which may not only promote a sense of unity and collective purpose, but also a sense of inclusion and belonging.

The LEGO Brand Framework also is articulated in a gender-neutral way. No pronouns are used in the framework. "Children are our role models" is LEGO's belief. This sentence does not imply any gender of the children thus, it can be argued that it is meant to include everyone, regardless of their gender. LEGO's mission goes: "Inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow". In this example there is also no pronoun accompanying the object of the sentence – the builders of tomorrow. However, gender inclusivity is not explicitly mentioned – nowhere in the framework.



The third and last part of the webpage, The LEGO Promises, which include the “People Promise”, the “Play Promise”, the “Planet Promise” and the “Partner Promise” are also formulated in a gender-neutral language. “Everyone” is used once, “children” twice. The only used pronouns are “we” and “us”. In total, the text does not suggest any gender at no place.

The LEGO Brand Website uses a gender-neutral approach throughout. The language used throughout the site avoids gendered pronouns and emphasizes inclusivity through terms such as "children" and "everyone." LEGO Brand Values, Brand Framework, and Promises are all presented in a gender-neutral way arguable to promote unity and shared purpose. However, the lack of explicit references to gender and inclusion raises questions about LEGO's stance on these issues, especially considering their pledge to become more inclusive. It suggests either a cautious approach to gender discourse or a possible lack of emphasis on gender equality in the company's philosophy. Overall, while the content of the website is gender neutral, the lack of explicit discussion of gender leaves room for interpretation regarding LEGO's commitment to gender equality.

In short, the LEGO brand website takes a gender-neutral approach in its language and content. Although it promotes inclusivity with terms such as "children" and "everyone", the lack of explicit references to gender and inclusivity raises questions about LEGO's commitment to gender equality.

In summary, the analysis of the different discourses reveals different perspectives on LEGO's approach to gender inclusion. The LEGO Press Release shows a mixed approach, with a commitment to challenging gender norms and promoting equality, but also examples of reinforcing binary perspectives and marginalizing non-traditional gender categories. LEGO's Inclusion and Diversity Website shows both inclusive and questionable aspects, with an inclusive attitude in the introduction but inconsistency in addressing nonbinary identities and disregarding other genders. A gender-neutral approach is apparent on the LEGO Brand Website, avoiding gendered pronouns and emphasizing inclusivity, but the lack of explicit consideration about gender and inclusion raises questions about LEGO's perspective on these issues. Overall, the progress and commitment to nonbinary inclusion and diversity is acknowledged, but there is room for improvement in challenging gender norms and promoting inclusion. Greater clarity, coherence, and intersectionality in messages and actions would contribute to a more inclusivity and diversity.

## 4.2. The Discourse Practice Dimension

First, I identify the social context the discourses analysed are situated in. Then the production process, the distribution and the consumption stage of each text is examined. Once these three steps are analysed the effects of the discourses are identified and reflected critically. Eventually, conclusions about relationships between discursive practices and social structures are drawn.

LEGO has had the reputation of being a *boys toy*, receiving critiques from different sides for not being inclusive enough. (Sweet, 2013) Although the company has done some progress in the last years, LEGO's history is characterized by gendered marketing. This opens the discussions of the company's intentions: Does LEGO want to be more inclusive to promote equality or is it only superficial changes and marketing?

Furthermore, it is important to address the cultural norms and power dynamics the text production and interpretation may be influenced by: The discussion about gender has become bigger in recent years in the field of science as well as in our everyday life considering articles and theories about it. For example, in job ads we can find (m/f/d), on social medias we can add our pronoun etc. The gender roles tackling campaign mentioned in the introduction – Imagine a CEO – is it a man? – went viral. (Cowan, 2022) However, our society is still very much characterized by gender roles and marginalisation. (The Guardian, 2018) Some ideologies are so internalized that is difficult to challenge or overcome them. The previously described information influences the production of the analysed discourses in this chapter, because discourse depends on already existing discourse and on ideologies and norms.

### **The LEGO Press Release**

The analysed press release has been issued by LEGO itself and is mainly based on the results of a study commissioned by LEGO and conducted by the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media (GDIGM), a consulting partner of LEGO's since 2021. "Founded in 2004 by Academy Award Winning Actor Geena Davis, the Institute is the only research-based organization working collaboratively within the entertainment industry to create gender balance, foster inclusion and reduce negative stereotyping in family entertainment media." (LEGO, 2021) Accordingly, the power relation in this relationship is clear: LEGO is the client, GDIGM the contractor. Thus, the power lays with LEGO. Another noteworthy discovery at this point is that GDIGM is the only existing organisation of this kind. It can be argued that this organisation has the monopoly in this field. These power relations must be considered because

LEGO as the client may have commissioned the study, testing the outcome of the study is difficult since GDIGM is the only organization of this kind. The Institute has worked together with various major media companies (GDIGM, n.d.) which could be considered a support argument; however, the fact that there is no other organisation this argument cannot be proven with certainty.

The power relations of how the text has been issued, LEGO's historical context and societal ideologies and norms the text has been produced within are reflected in the press release. This is, by its vocabulary, and the mentioning of gender norms and the society. The text further mirrors the ongoing debate about gender. Although main parts of the text are addressing children as "girls" and "boys" it can be recognized that LEGO tries to be non-binary – up to a certain degree. It seems like the company itself reflects our society: used to gender from a binary perspective, but well knowing that gender is constructed and varies from person to person and not from sex to sex.

The press release was initially distributed online, on LEGO's website as a type of blog post and has been disseminated by multiple communication channels detectable by social media platforms and blog posts on third party websites, as well as, presumably, by newspapers. All these channels can be considered new media hence, mass media. As explained in chapter 2.2 Media, mass media play a crucial role in mediating information and bridging the gap between sender and receiver and in shaping our knowledge and the way we acquire it. (Ott & Mack, 2014, pp. 2–3) Considering new media nowadays it can be argued that the press release has been published online to reach as many people as possible in as little time as possible. The fact that the press release has firstly been published on LEGO's website may have several reasons: The company has direct control over the content as well as the presentation and the timing of the release. The release may contribute to the company's and be included in the company's strategy – communication, social media, branding, only to name a few. The text itself may have been SEO-optimized and increased for online visibility and traffic. This can be seen e.g., by the fact that it shows up within the first few hits of search engines. There is the possibility that LEGO sent the release previously to familiar press contacts. Although most articles about the press release have been issued the same or within one day, (Russell, 2021; Talmazan, 2021) this cannot be said with certainty and thus, won't be discussed further.

The press release can be interpreted differently, depending on the audience or reader. It can be argued that a person's perception of the press release depends on the discourse and the social circle, cultural background etc. Audience that already has been in contact with the topic of gender equality and inclusivity is arguable more likely interpret the release in a positive way than people who are less engaged with the topic. This could be people who don't know anyone who is concerned by gender issues or simply because they do not think that there is such thing as inequality among genders – this

may have different reasons such as individual experiences. In turn those people also may be less likely to support the commitment stated in the press release. For others it could be the initial contact with the topic.

The discursive practices of the press release may have different effects. Due to LEGO's cooperation with GDIGM, although it is the only organisation of this kind, may rises awareness of the topic within the industry. LEGO, one of the biggest toy manufacturers worldwide, is working together with an external organisation to make the company's business more inclusive and shares the results of this work openly on the company's website. This may result in open discussions and conversations regarding gender but can on the other side also have a negative effect on society, especially people who already are biased in this regard. More to this can be found in chapter 3.5 Ethical Considerations.

The previous analysis presents a mixed picture: the steps taken by LEGO are positive, but the company's actual commitment is questionable. The discursive practices in the press release reflect social norms and power dynamics. The distribution through mass media or new media suggests strategic control over content. Interpretations vary depending on prior engagement with the subject. The partnership with the Geena Davis Institute highlights limited research opportunities. While LEGO's efforts may inspire industry discussion, their wider impact depends on ethical considerations and societal biases. However, only based on the press release form 2021 it cannot be excluded that LEGO chose to write the article the way it has been published to increase sales and to meet the demands of the wide-ranging population.

### **The LEGO Diversity and Inclusivity Website**

In terms of the production process, since the source is LEGO's official website and nothing else is noted on the site, it is reasonable to assume that the content was created by the company itself. It is important to acknowledge that companies strive to portray themselves in a positive light and contribute positively to their brand efforts. Therefore, it can be assumed that the discourse of study is designed to enhance LEGO's reputation as much as possible. LEGO can be considered as being in the power position. As long the company acts within legal boundaries it can position itself as preferred. It can be stated that LEGO has considered expectations of stakeholders as much as social context. More to the social context can be found in the beginning of this chapter. Moreover, the website analysed has arguable a higher degree of formality and authority than the press release discussed earlier.

The LEGO Diversity and Inclusivity Website has been naturally distributed online and can be reached with a maximum of four clicks from the official LEGO landing page and is thus easily accessible for users

with a computer and internet access. A search query for "LEGO Inclusivity" returns the desired link as the first search result. This greater accessibility and prominence of the website emphasizes the impression of credibility and reliability. The fact that the text is not entirely nonbinary formulated may be attributed to several factors: First, in the social context, LEGO may be forced to conform to the expectations and demands of its stakeholders and therefore take a somewhat or partially conventional approach to gender. A throughout nonbinary approach might be perceived as too daring or a deviation from societal norms from the company's perspective. Second, according to the company the Danish legislation also plays a role and is stated as a reason why LEGO uses only two genders in their reports, policies, and objectives regarding gender. LEGO strategically navigates the gender debate by invoking "legal requirements" as a protective measure that requires closer scrutiny. The company's position seems to reflect societal norms that gender is predominantly understood through a binary lens, although the constructed nature of gender and its individual variability are acknowledged in the company's Gender Balance Policy. This recognition suggests that the company is aware of alternative perspectives, even if this is not reflected in its approach to gender. This discrepancy raises questions about whether the company is prioritizing sales goals over a genuine commitment to equality, and highlights a potential disconnect between rhetoric and action. The site's content appears to be optimized for search engines, which may be contributing to LEGO's branding process.

The interpretation of the website studied may differ from person to person. Visitors to this website are arguably more likely to already have an interest in inclusion and diversity, or are specifically interested in LEGO as a company, possibly as customers or potential employees. Understanding the different expectations and motivations of these individuals presents a challenge, as their specific needs and desires can vary widely. While some visitors may find that the site meets their expectations, especially in terms of gender inclusion viewed through a conventional lens, others, especially those attuned to the concept of gender fluidity, may initially perceive the site as inclusive. However, their perceptions may change upon closer examination when they encounter non-inclusive language, the predominantly exclusive approach to achieving "gender-balance," and the insufficient consideration of LGBTQ+ issues in gender discussions.

The LEGO Diversity and Inclusivity website addresses prevailing ideologies actively as well as passively. Gender issues from a binary perspective are directly addressed while from a nonbinary perspective all genders are partially included in the company's choice of words, as further portrayed in chapter 4.1. The information, found in LEGO's Gender Balance Policy, is important to consider. Firstly, because intertextuality is important and secondly, because it provides the reader with significant background information. In relation to the website of study itself this additional information enhances the belief that LEGO knows about the fact that gender is fluid and constructed yet the company does not

incorporate it in its gender-balance objectives or in their overall approach towards gender. This reinforces the belief of the society that gender is binary, excludes and people outside this binary, marginalises them. Although the company claims that LEGO “is for everyone, no matter where you come from, what you look like or how you identify” on the same website from which this quote comes, the company acts differently and excludes people outside the gender binary. In other words, LEGO can be said to display rhetoric that lacks concrete action, and to make commitments or assurances that it cannot or will not fulfil. Consequently, this phenomenon has a significant impact on the social behaviour and attitudes of the reader, as the impression is given that as long as one acknowledges the nonbinary approach, there is no need to implement it or act accordingly.

In summary, it can be said that the company's history of gendered marketing raises questions about its true commitment to inclusion. The discourse generally reflects prevailing cultural norms and power dynamics. The LEGO Diversity and Inclusivity website can be considered accessible and credible. It takes a conventional approach to gender and does not fully address gender fluidity, and LGBTQ+ issues are presented comparatively little. There may be varying interpretations of the website: Some may see it as inclusive, while others may point out its limitations. The discourse reinforces prevailing ideologies of gender as binary and marginalizes those outside of this binary. LEGO's rhetoric without concrete action casts doubt on its commitment to true equality. Further analysis is needed to assess the effectiveness of LEGO's efforts in challenging gender norms and promoting inclusivity.

### **The LEGO Brand Website**

The production process of the LEGO Brand website can be described similar to the production process of The LEGO Diversity and Inclusivity website: It can be assumed that the content included was created by the company itself. Further, it is noteworthy that this website contributes to LEGO's online performance and to its branding process. Therefore, it can be assumed that the website is designed to enhance LEGO's reputation as much as possible. LEGO takes a position of power and uses regulatory compliance to establish itself as a favoured company, nonetheless through the chosen language. The company demonstrates attention to stakeholder and social expectations, as described earlier in this chapter. In addition, the website under study has a considerable amount of formality and authority, surpassing the other discourses analysed in this study.

The distribution of the LEGO brand website is naturally online, making it easily accessible to users with computers and internet access. A simple search for "LEGO values" leads to the desired link as the first search result, further emphasizing the site's accessibility and awareness. These factors contribute to

the website being perceived as credible and reliable. There is no indication on the website analysed that the LEGO Brand Values, LEGO Brand Framework, or LEGO Promises were disseminated elsewhere, like on different channels etc. However, it can also not be ruled out with certainty. The fact that the text is completely gender-neutral formulated may be attributed to several factors: First, the social context – as explained in the beginning of this chapter –, second: As one of the largest toy manufacturers in the world, LEGO arguably bears some responsibility. However, the company also faces the challenge of softening potential risks or missteps that could result from its actions. Thus, gender-neutral wording is useful because it doesn't exclude anyone; especially considering the ongoing debate about gender. LEGO's deliberate omission of the topic of gender equality from this website has the potential to influence public opinion and discourse on the topic. This could have the effect of weakening awareness of the issue and limiting discussions about it, leading to a higher prevalence of misunderstanding and (further) marginalization of underrepresented groups.

The interpretation of the analysed website may vary from person to person. It can be argued that some visitors to the website might be satisfied with the language used because it does not explicitly exclude any gender. However, it may be more plausible that the audience of this website expresses dissatisfaction due to the complete absence of the gender theme as such. Considering the criticism LEGO has faced in the past for advertising exclusively to boys and for reinforcing gender stereotypes, this omission is cause for concern. In addition, the content is not in line with the company's commitment to become more gender inclusive, as stated in LEGO's 2021 press release.

The previous analysis of the LEGO Brand website raises concerns about LEGO's approach to gender inclusion. The lack of addressing gender inclusively on site suggests a lack of prioritization and recognition of gender equality. This raises questions about the company's commitment to meaningful change and undermines the company's credibility, considering its commitment to become more inclusive. There may be mixed interpretations of the website: Some may perceive it as inclusive, while others may find it lacking. The failure to challenge social norms and power relations exacerbates these concerns. Overall, this analysis stresses the need for sincere effort and consideration of cultural norms and power relations to achieve gender equality.

In conclusion, analysis of the three discourses raises concerns about LEGO's approach to gender inclusivity. The LEGO press release raises questions about the company's actual commitment and the discursive practices used reflect social norms and power dynamics. While LEGO's diversity and inclusion website generally reflects prevailing cultural norms and power relations it lacks a comprehensive acknowledgement of gender fluidity and LGBTQ+ issues. The discourse reinforces the prevailing ideology of gender as binary and marginalizes those who identify outside the gender binary.

The rhetoric used by LEGO without concrete action creates doubt on the company's commitment to true gender equality. The fact that gender is not explicitly addressed on the LEGO brand website suggests that gender equality is not a priority or acknowledged. This absence raises questions about the company's commitment to meaningful change and undermines its credibility, particularly considering its stated commitment to gender inclusion. Interpretations may vary, with some perceiving the discourses as (somewhat) inclusive, while others note limitations. Failure to challenge social norms and power relations is a common concern, given the level of gendered language used in the discourse. Overall, the analysis of the three discourses highlights the need for genuine effort, ethical consideration, and conscious questioning of prevailing ideologies and power dynamics in order to achieve meaningful change and true equality. LEGO must foreground inclusivity and representation and actively challenge societal norms to guarantee that its discourse aligns with its intended commitment to creating inclusivity and equality.

#### 4.3. The Social Practice Dimension

In this chapter, the social practice dimension of Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA model, I first identify the social practices within the context. Then the power relations within the social practices are assessed and ideologies and beliefs uncovered. Eventually, I analyse social structures reflected in the texts and consider social change and agency thus, I evaluate the potential for social change within the discourse and social practices. Unlike other applications of Fairclough's model, the theories described in chapter 2: Theory are applied in the following chapter 5: Discussion for simplicity and better understanding.

##### **The LEGO Press Release**

A press release is commonly written in an official manner, considering potential outcomes and effects based on the company's communication and publication. The company's or brand's image must always be considered because every, in this case, press release contributes to the branding process. A company must consider its stakeholders' opinions if it wants to succeed. (Hristov & Appolloni, 2022) Thus, while LEGO may influence its audience with its publications, the audience in turn has influence on the company as well. However, considering recent developments towards gender inclusivity and equality among the people, and according to the study by the GDIGM, it can be argued that LEGO meets the people's demand with its press release.



LEGO'S press release does challenge gender roles – from a traditional perspective on gender. Although parts of the press release are articulated in a nonbinary view, it implies that the company's level of certainty to approach gender from a nonbinary perspective is not absolute. The press release addresses and challenges gender stereotypes although it is not consistent in its language. Thus, the ongoing debate about gender is reflected in the text. However, the text does in parts include people outside the gender binary, and the statement by Julia Goldin can be considered very certain and without doubt all-gender inclusive and thus, nonbinary. The fact that this is a direct quotation by LEGO's CMO strengthens the statement that "all children should be able to reach their true creative potential" (LEGO, 2021). Thus, although, not the entire text is nonbinary formulated or inclusive it can be argued that using the approach LEGO has chosen in its press release – a mix of gender inclusivity from a binary but also from a fluid, nonbinary perspective – can contribute to society's willingness to discuss gender on a more objective level. According to the agenda-setting theory LEGO may influence society's recent discussion points by openly addressing gender issues which may be motivating for further discourse about gender and increase awareness of the issue. Moreover, LEGO's development from gender stereotyping and gendered marketing towards a more inclusive approach can motivate consumers and audience to also be more open about different or new ideas. Considering LEGO's size and reach it can be argued that the messages of its press release can have impact on society which eventually, results in positive change and more acceptance of de-gendered products, activities, etc.

Considering LEGO as a gatekeeper, the company's approach to gender – particularly its partial exclusion of people who identify outside the gender binary or its ignoring of other genders within their gender-balance objectives – also shapes public discourse by choosing to take a binary approach to gender and not adding, for instance, further explanation to the topic. This also means that LEGO can choose which information is released and published, and which not. This decision process may be influenced by various factors such as personal and company values, organizational structures, or biases.

The fact that the press release is in great parts using the traditional gender perspective can be considered excluding of people identifying outside the gender binary. In general, media plays an important role in constructing gender (Krijnen & Bauwel, 2015), which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

In summary, LEGO's press release combines elements of challenging gender roles with a traditional perspective. Although it addresses some nonbinary views, it lacks consistency and inclusivity. However, it can contribute to and raise awareness of a factual discussion about gender. LEGO's shift toward inclusivity has the potential to spark openness to new ideas. As a gatekeeper, LEGO's selective choices

shape public discourse, but its exclusion of non-binary people is a cause for concern. The role of the media in the construction of gender is significant and will be discussed further later collected in this chapter.

### **The LEGO Diversity and Inclusion Website**

The website of a company is mainly written in a favourable language, to increase trust in the brand, create a consumer-customer relationship and to attract potential customers. The Diversity and Inclusion Website contributes to LEGO's branding significantly because due to the website the company positioning itself within different social contexts. The sheer existence of this website is significant. As agenda-setting theory suggests, LEGO's engagement with gender issues has the potential to influence and shape societal discussions. By actively addressing gender concerns, LEGO can serve as a catalyst for continued discourse on gender and contribute to increased awareness of the issue. This proactive stance by LEGO can encourage further conversation and dialogue about gender and ultimately influence the broader social agenda on this issue.

Regarding gender representation it can be argued that LEGO aims to address everyone across the gender spectrum, however, in depth its actions and values seem to differ. While the website first includes everyone, regardless their gender, the text and underlying content suggest gender from a binary perspective.

According to gatekeeping theory, the LEGO Group exercises control over its website and the information presented there. However, an analysis of the intertextual elements shows that the company is aware of and acknowledges nonbinary gender identities. The use of a binary approach, influenced by Danish legal requirements and reporting considerations, raises questions about the company's actual commitment to inclusivity. While the explicit mention of legal obligations may provide justification for the use of a binary frame, it also raises questions about whether LEGO holds onto traditional gender categories out of necessity or uses them as a shield or justification. In this context, gatekeeping theory highlights the company's role in deciding what information to present and how to frame it and raises questions about motivations and levels of inclusivity.

The studied website challenges gender norms in general, however, it does not follow a coherent approach to gender. While some passages include all gender, some are excluding. The website illustrates the historical association of LEGO with *boys toys* influenced by social gender discourses and prevailing capitalist frameworks. However, the inconsistent approach towards gender may influence societal norms and structures as well. The extent to which LEGO is truly committed to inclusion of all

genders and strives for gender equality remains uncertain. It is to be discussed whether the company's efforts to appeal to people outside the gender binary are based on a sincere commitment or driven by other, possibly self-serving motives.

In summary, the LEGO Diversity and Inclusion website plays an important role in branding and positioning the company in the social context. Addressing gender issues has the potential to influence societal discussions and raise awareness of gender concerns. However, the website's inconsistent approach to gender representation raises questions about LEGO's true commitment to inclusion and the motivations behind its adherence to traditional gender categories. Gatekeeping theory highlights the company's control over website content and underscores the need for critical examination of the company's inclusion efforts. The website furthermore, plays an influential role in the construction of gender. This will be discussed further later collected in this chapter.

### **The LEGO Brand Website**

LEGO brand values and promises are designed to reflect the company's positive attitude and present it in a favourable light. But the opinions of stakeholders are also of great importance, as meeting their demands is essential to the success of any company. (Hristov & Appolloni, 2022) In light of the ongoing social discourse on gender, the introduction of gender-neutral language on the LEGO platform can be seen as a potential contribution to this debate. However, it is important to recognize that this approach can also be seen as a cautious stance that focuses on risk aversion rather than being consistent with LEGO's stated commitment to promoting inclusivity.

The omission of the topic of gender from the website can be seen as a gatekeeping decision, where LEGO chooses not to present or address the topic of gender in a prominent place. That affects the information available to its audience. This decision, arguable influenced by different factors, raises questions about LEGO's commitment to inclusion and how gender-related information is presented. This is consistent with agenda-setting theory in that it limits public awareness and discussion of gender issues. The lack of explicit discussion of gender issues unintentionally conveys the message that gender concerns do not matter, potentially reinforcing existing gender norms.

Given that the company has previously faced criticism for its perceived deficiencies in inclusion in marketing and product design, it can be concluded that it is motivated to actively integrate and embed gender inclusion at a more substantial level throughout its organizational structure. However, it is important to recognize that superficial change alone is not enough to achieve true inclusion. Real

change must be deliberate and explicit. (Prokopets, 2022) However, such changes or implementations are not evident on the LEGO brand website.

The lack of gender discourse on LEGO's brand website reflects a gatekeeping decision that limits public awareness and discussion of the issue. To invalidate past criticisms and promote true inclusion, LEGO must move beyond superficial changes and take deliberate and explicit action to embed gender inclusion throughout the organization. In doing so, LEGO can positively contribute to ongoing societal discussions on gender. More broadly, the media plays a critical role in shaping gender norms (Krijnen & Bauwel, 2015) and will be discussed further collectively in the next chapter.

## 5. Discussion

The next chapter examines and discusses data analysis using various theories presented in chapter 2. It can be considered part of Fairclough's third dimension as most of the theories described in chapter 2 are applied below.

First, the data analysis of the discourses will be discussed to show to what extent LEGO has incorporated nonbinary perspectives in the company's discourse with and since its pledge in 2021 to become gender inclusive. Second, LEGO's power over is discussed using Butler's theory of performativity and incorporating theories of gendered toy marketing. Finally, LEGO's approach will be discussed from an economic perspective considering consumer demands and market potential drawing on Kaplan and Prokopets.

### 5.1. A genuine intention or mere marketing tactic?

The previous chapter provides information on the extent to which the company has effectively implemented measures to promote nonbinary gender inclusivity. The purpose of this evaluation is to assess the extent to which LEGO's commitment to promoting gender inclusion has been integrated into company practices.

#### **The LEGO Press Release**

The company's press release shows a mix of positive steps to challenge gender norms and promote inclusion, but also instances where traditional binary perspectives are reinforced, and nonbinary people are marginalized. While there are commendable aspects, such as the use of inclusive language and nonbinary terminology in some sections, the overall consistency and depth of LEGO's commitment to nonbinary inclusion and diversity are questionable.

LEGO's discursive practices reflect social norms and power dynamics, with strategic control over content dissemination through mass or new media. Interpretations of the press release vary depending on prior engagement with the topic, highlighting the importance of diverse perspectives in understanding the impact of LEGO's messages. The partnership with the Geena Davis Institute demonstrates a limited research opportunity and the potential for positive industry discussion.

However, it is important to critically examine LEGO's motivations and the broader societal biases that may influence their approach. It is possible that LEGO was guided by commercial considerations and a desire to meet the demands of a broad population when issuing the press release. The economic perspective is further discussed in the next sub-chapter.

I argue that LEGO issued the press release in good will and clear intention to become more gender inclusive. The inconsistency in the language and between language and study results the press released was broadly based on, suggests that although the intention to incorporate gender inclusivity throughout the fluid spectrum was there, it is not clear to what extent it will or shall be implemented. While LEGO's press release is a step toward challenging gender roles and raising awareness, its limitations and inconsistencies highlight the need for further improvement.

### **The LEGO Diversity and Inclusivity Website**

The LEGO Diversity and Inclusivity Website includes both positive and concerning developments of the company's approach to gender inclusivity. LEGO places an inclusive emphasis in its messaging but fails to fully consider non-binary identities and neglects to represent other genders beyond a binary framework. The emphasis on gender balance focuses primarily on women and ignores a comprehensive understanding of gender diversity.

The discourse on the website reflects prevailing cultural norms and power dynamics and raises questions about LEGO's actual commitment to equity and inclusion. While accessible and credible, the website does not fully address gender fluidity and marginalizes individuals outside of the gender binary. This inconsistency between rhetoric and action casts doubt on the company's commitment to real change.

I argue that the LEGO Diversity and Inclusivity Website shows that LEGO's efforts to be more gender inclusive have not been fully realized. The presence of traditional gendered linguistic in texts that aim at promoting inclusion raises questions about the seriousness of the company's commitment. Furthermore, while some aspects are consistent with a nonbinary gender perspective, the predominant use of traditional gender categories suggests that the changes made are primarily superficial.

## **The LEGO Brand Website**

The analysis of the LEGO brand website, which operates as a reflection of the company's core, uses a gender-neutral language and presentation however, gender inclusivity is not explicitly mentioned or included. This lack of intent to actively address gender equity suggests a lack of real effort in this regard.

I argue that this could indicate possible lack of emphasis on gender inclusion in the company's philosophy. The absence of gender-specific discussions on the LEGO brand website suggests a lack of implementation of the company's stated commitments to gender inclusion at a more fundamental organizational level. Consequently, the current analysis suggests that the intentions the company stated in its 2021 Press Release appear to be of limited substance or real commitment.

In conclusion, this paper argues that although LEGO committed to become more gender inclusive, people outside the gender binary have been marginalized with and since the 2021 LEGO Press Release. In this discussion I assume that the press release itself is the least significant, as linguistic inconsistencies have the least impact on the degree to which a nonbinary perspective is included in the corporate discourse. The diversity and inclusion website can be considered a second level or stage as it gains prominence and importance as an official proclamation of corporate values. This progression terminates in the deepest level of analysis, which involves the examination of the LEGO brand website with its brand values, frameworks, and promises. It is assumed that this website serves as a tangible representation of the fundamental essence of the company, describing the aspirational or actual position that LEGO strives to embody. This approach reasons by argumentation that LEGO's pledge to become gender inclusive can only be considered superficial at this point. The lack of consistency and commitment to the course is too prevailing as it can be considered slight discrepancies. I further argue, that it is critical for LEGO to address the concerns raised and demonstrate a serious effort to challenge societal norms and power dynamics to achieve true gender equality.

## **5.2. LEGO's Potential Power over Gender**

In examining LEGO discourse through the lens of Judith Butler, it is clear that the analysis presented is consistent with certain aspects of Butler's framework. The contradictory and inconsistent nature of LEGO's discourse highlighted in the analysis is consistent with Butler's emphasis on the performative nature of gender. It is crucial to examine how LEGO's discourse not only reinforces gender norms, but also promotes specific performative gender expressions.

Analysing LEGO's media representation reveals both the progress and limitations of its approach to gender inclusion. By the company's choice of representation of gender and the level of inclusivity the audiences perception of gender is shaped. The reoccurring gendered language or actions within discourse influence our behaviour and our understanding of gender, thus contribute to the audience's gender construct. It is creditable that LEGO incorporates elements of gender integration into its media representation. However, closer examination reveals limitations consistent with Butler's framework. The emphasis on a binary gender perspective, as expressed in the company's definition of "gender balance," may lead to the exclusion of individuals who do not identify within the gender binary. The lack of explicit gendered discussions on the LEGO Brand website raises questions about LEGO's commitment to inclusion and points to the need for concrete steps to challenge social norms and promote gender equality.

The emphasis on binary gender reinforces a particular truth regime that perpetuates existing gender norms and expectations. By categorizing individuals as female or male, LEGO inadvertently contributes to the prevailing social discourse that demands conformity to these limited options. This not only reinforces existing gender norms, but also marginalizes and excludes individuals who identify outside the binary spectrum.

I argue that LEGO has the potential to significantly influence gender discourse and challenge existing social norms and power dynamics if it fully realizes its stated goal of becoming gender inclusive, including all genders. As a prominent player in new media and mass media, LEGO has significant influence on social perceptions and can play a critical role in shaping public discourse.

While acknowledging that gender is presupposed and subversion is not an inherently easy process, and requires continuing commitment and effort, LEGO's commitment to inclusivity can pave the way for transformative change. By actively promoting inclusion and equality for all genders, LEGO can challenge and subvert what Michel Foucault called "regimes of truth" - the dominant systems of knowledge and power that determine social norms.

LEGO's influence on media is far-reaching, and through repeated actions and behaviours, LEGO can contribute to the normalization of a nonbinary perspective on gender. By consistently portraying different gender identities, LEGO can help break down the existing binary gender schema and create new regime of truth that acknowledges and accommodates the diversity of gender expressions.

In summary, LEGO can play a transformative role in changing existing and future discourses if the company maintains its commitment to gender equality. By challenging social norms and power



dynamics through its media representation, LEGO can help subvert established systems of truth and promote the emergence of a more inclusive society that embraces a non-binary perspective on gender.

### 5.3. An Economic Perspective

Younger generations increasingly reject binary gender classifications, almost half of Generation Z and over a third of consumers from other generations value brands that avoid classifying products by gender. The toy market, divided into the girls market and the boys market, focuses consequently on different target groups which halves potential sales. However, children and parents favour a nongendered approach and experts argue that a nonbinary approach could double the potential toy market without reducing demand. (Fine & Rush, 2018) Research also suggests that demographics, gender, and income have less influence on consumer decisions than previously thought. (Bharadwaj et al., 2020)

Since 2012 LEGO's products have changed and also included girls toys, which were initially reinforcing gender roles rather than challenging them. However, since 2012 after the company overcame partially the critiques of their gender products and introduces lines portraying women in roles traditionally associated with men, the net profit rose significantly. In the period from 2011 to 2012, LEGO recorded a significant increase in net profit by one third, or 1.4 billion Danish kroner, from 4.2 billion to 5.6 billion. This positive development continued through 2016, culminating in a net profit of 9.4 billion Danish kroner. However, following years witnessed a comparatively weaker performance, with net profit ranging from 7.81 billion to 8.31 billion from 2017 to 2019. Despite this temporary decline, LEGO's net profit in 2020 surpassed the previous record set in 2016 and showed significant growth in the two subsequent years. Noteworthy is the fact that net profit increased by one-third, or 3.36 billion Danish kroner, from 2020 to 2021.

Although net profit depends on a number of factors influenced by market dynamics, it is important to highlight the arguable remarkable impact of LEGO's strategic decision to target advertising and marketing at other genders, particularly girls. Since this deliberate change the company's net profit in remarkably increased by 228%.

In summary, LEGO's emphasis on two genders, thus the inclusion of girls, has had a debateable significant positive impact on the company's net profit, indicating its economic value. However, this observation also suggests that the inclusion of other genders could potentially return similar benefits. From an economic perspective, it could be argued that adopting a nonbinary approach would be

beneficial to the company's sales. This raises concerns about LEGO's commitment and intent behind the commitment to become gender inclusive, especially given the conflicting discourses and language used. The lack of coherence within the previously analysed discourse further calls into question the seriousness of LEGO's efforts.

Opposing, as mentioned earlier in this paper, 35 percent of people in 35 countries reject the idea that there are only two genders. Consequently, 65 percent do not share this believe. Thus, positioning the company clearly at the supporting side of the gender debate has the potential to negatively impact sales, too.

I argue that LEGO faces a dilemma in the gender debate, as any position the company chooses could negatively impact sales. Given the capitalist nature of many countries, including Denmark, LEGO's hesitation and inconsistency in its discourse can be seen as a coherent response to this challenge. This strategic approach reflects an understanding of the complex dynamics of the market-based economy in which the company operates. However, it also questions the intention and commitment to LEGO's pledge to become gender inclusive.

## 6. Conclusion

The analysis undertaken in this paper sheds light on LEGO's efforts to become gender inclusive. Three discourses issues and distributed by LEGO has been analysed and further discussed. This paper highlights some concerns and inconsistencies in the company's discourse that raise questions about the depth of commitment and intent.

Examination of LEGO's press release from 2021, the company's diversity and inclusion website, and brand website reveals mixed results. While there are respectable aspects, such as the use of inclusive language and some efforts to challenge gender norms, there is an overall lack of consistency and depth in promoting nonbinary perspectives. LEGO's discursive practices still reflect social norms and power dynamics, and further improvement is needed to address the concerns raised.

An analysis of LEGO's discourse through the lens of Judith Butler's theory of performativity reveals the contradictory and inconsistent nature of LEGO's approach. The company's reoccurring emphasis on a binary gender perspective and the lack of explicit discussions of gender on the brand website contribute to reinforcing existing gender norms and excluding individuals who identify outside the gender binary. However, LEGO has the potential to significantly influence gender discourse and subvert challenge social norms and power dynamics if the company fully implements its commitment to inclusion.

From an economic perspective, the inclusion of girls in LEGO's products has had a significant positive impact on the company's net profits. This reflects research suggesting that introducing a gender inclusive approach could double the potential of the toy market without reducing demand. However, LEGO faces a dilemma in the gender debate, as any firm positioning of the company potentially impacts its sales. The company's hesitant and inconsistent approach reflects an understanding of market economics but calls into question its commitment to gender equality. This raises concerns about LEGO's commitment and intentions behind the promise to become gender neutral, especially given the conflicting discourses and language used.

In summary, while LEGO has taken some steps toward gender inclusion, more consistency, commitment in its discourses are needed to challenge social norms and promote true, nonbinary, gender equality. LEGO's media influence and reach can play a transformative role in shaping public discourse and promoting a nonbinary perspective on gender. By actively promoting inclusion and equality for all genders, LEGO can contribute to the emergence of a more inclusive society.

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## **Girls are ready to overcome gender norms but society continues to enforce biases that hamper their creative potential**

- **New research from the LEGO Group and Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media finds that while girls are ready to break out of gender stereotypes, their creative potential is at risk of social bias constraints**
- **Informed by the research, the LEGO Group launches its 'Ready for Girls' campaign to celebrate girls who rebuild the story of old-fashioned gender norms**

**Billund, October 11<sup>th</sup>:** New research commissioned by the LEGO Group reveals that girls today feel increasingly confident to engage in all types of play and creative activities, but remain held back by society's ingrained gender stereotypes as they grow older. The study was carried out by the Geena Davis Institute in recognition of the UN's International Day of the Girl and to mark the launch of a new LEGO® campaign, 'Ready for Girls', which celebrates girls who rebuild the world through creative problem solving.

The research, which surveyed nearly 7,000 parents and children aged 6-14 years old in China, Czech Republic, Japan, Poland, Russia, UK and USA highlights the need for society to rebuild perceptions, actions and words to support the creative empowerment of all children.

### **Ready for Girls**

The research findings show that girls are ready for the world but society isn't quite ready to support their growth through play. Girls feel less restrained by and are less supportive of typical gender biases than boys when it comes to creative play (74% of boys vs. 62% of girls believe that some activities are just meant for girls, while others are meant for boys), and they are more open towards different types of creative play compared to what their parents and society typically encourage. For example, 82% of girls believe it's OK for girls to play football and boys to practice ballet, compared to only 71% of boys. However, despite the progress made in girls brushing off prejudice at an early age, general attitudes surrounding play and creative careers remain unequal and restrictive, according to this research:

- For most creative professions, parents who answered the survey imagine a man, regardless of whether they have a son, daughter, or both. They are almost six times as likely to think of scientists and athletes as men than women (85% vs. 15%) and over eight times as likely to think of engineers as men than women (89% vs. 11%). The children surveyed in this research share these same impressions except girls are much more likely than boys to consider a wider range of professions to be for both women and men.
- Our insights further indicate that girls are typically encouraged into activities that are more cognitive, artistic and related to performance compared to boys who are more likely to be pushed into physical and STEM-like activities (digital, science, building, tools). Parents from this study are almost five times as likely to encourage girls over boys to engage in dance (81% vs. 19%) and dress-up (83% vs. 17%) activities, and over three times as likely to do the same

for cooking/baking (80% vs. 20%). Adversely, they are almost four times as likely to encourage boys over girls to engage in program games (80% vs. 20%) and sports (76% vs. 24%) and over twice as likely to do the same when it comes to coding toys (71% vs. 29%)

## **Rebuilding the World**

On International Day of The Girl, the LEGO Group is calling on parents and children to champion inclusive play. To help, they have developed a fun 10-step guide and invite parents to share photos of their child's LEGO creations against a pre-defined AR backdrop featuring the words 'Get the World Ready for Me'.

In addition, the LEGO Group has made short films celebrating inspiring and entrepreneurial girls from the United Arab Emirates, United States and Japan, each of which are already rebuilding the world through creativity.

**Fatima & Shaikha (18 and 8, UAE)** Fatima is the UAE's youngest inventor. Her sister Shaikha loves space and wants to be the first woman on the Moon.

**Chelsea (11, USA)** is the founder of Chelsea's Charity, where she gives away free art supplies to children in need so they can creatively express their emotions and overcome challenging times.

**Mahiru (11, Japan)** is a key member of SEEDS+, a school marching band that exists to bring joy through music and creativity and rebuild how her city is portrayed after the difficult time it's been through.

The campaign will be further amplified through local partnerships and activity in several locations.

"As a Mom of three children, I have long admired the LEGO Group and I'm heartened by their global commitment to this study to inform how we can dramatically inspire creativity in girls through play and storytelling," said Geena Davis, Founder of Geena Davies Institute on Gender in Media. "We also know that showing girls unique and unstereotyped activities can lead to an expanded viewpoint of possibilities and opportunities."

## **The role of LEGO play**

The LEGO Group believes in the value of learning through play and that the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills from LEGO play are equally relevant to all children.

While many parents perceive the LEGO brand as a good example of an inclusive toy brand, LEGO play is still considered more relevant to boys than girls, with 59% of parents saying they encourage their sons to build with LEGO bricks compared to 48% who say they encourage it with their daughters. This view became more pronounced when parents were asked to complete an implicit bias assessment and 76% said they would encourage LEGO play to a son vs. 24% who would recommend it to a daughter.

"The benefits of creative play such as building confidence, creativity and communication skills are felt by all children and yet we still experience age-old stereotypes that label activities as only being suitable for one specific gender. At the LEGO Group we know we have a role to play in putting this right, and this campaign is one of several initiatives we are putting in place to raise awareness of the issue and ensure we make LEGO play as inclusive as possible. All children should be able to reach their true creative potential," says Julia Goldin, Chief Product and Marketing Officer, the LEGO Group.



The 'Ready for Girls' campaign aims to help girls rebuild the story and welcome more girls to LEGO building, ensuring they aren't losing out on the benefits of LEGO play due to societal expectations. The company will ensure any child, regardless of gender identify, feels they can build anything they like, playing in a way that will help them develop and realise their unique talent.

## Our

## commitment

Ensuring more inclusive play and raising the debate around gender norms is critical, not just for girls but for any child. The LEGO Group knows that boys are also battling prejudice when it comes to creative play and playing with toys that are traditionally seen as being for the opposite sex. 71% of boys vs. 42% of girls say they worry about being made fun of if they play with a toy typically associated for the other gender.

The company is committed to making LEGO play more inclusive and ensuring that children's creative ambitions – both now in the future – are not limited by gender stereotypes. We know there is work to do which is why from 2021 we will work closely with the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media and UNICEF to ensure LEGO products and marketing are accessible to all and free of gender bias and harmful stereotypes.

For media enquiries please contact: [media@lego.com](mailto:media@lego.com)

To download campaign assets please visit: [www.lego.com/aboutus/news/2021/september/lego-ready-for-girls-campaign](http://www.lego.com/aboutus/news/2021/september/lego-ready-for-girls-campaign)

## B

The LEGO Press Release from 2021	Examples
Vocabulary	<p>Headline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“<b>Girls</b> are ready to <b>overcome gender norms</b> but society continues to enforce biases that hamper <b>their</b> creative potential”</li> </ul> <p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Girls”</li> <li>“Boys”</li> <li>“highlights the need for society to rebuild perceptions, actions and words to support the creative empowerment of <b>all children</b>”</li> </ul> <p>Ready for Girls</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Ready for Girls”</li> <li>“Girls” (12x)</li> <li>“Daughter”</li> <li>“Boys” (9x)</li> <li>“Son”</li> <li>“women and men”</li> <li>“women”</li> <li>“men”</li> </ul> <p>Rebuilding the World</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Children”</li> <li>“Child”</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Inclusive play”</li> <li>• “calling on parents and children to champion inclusive play”</li> <li>• “Celebrating inspiring and entrepreneurial <b>girls</b>”</li> <li>• “Inspire creativity in <b>girls</b> through play”</li> <li>• “We also know that showing <b>girls</b> unique and unstereotyped activities can lead to an expanded viewpoint of possibilities and opportunities.”</li> </ul> <p>The role of LEGO play</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “all children” (3x)</li> <li>• “one specific gender”</li> <li>• “as inclusive as possible”</li> <li>• “girls”</li> <li>• “The company will ensure <b>any child, regardless of gender identify</b>, feels they can build anything they like, playing in a way that will help them develop and realise their unique talent.”</li> </ul> <p>Our commitment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Ensuring more inclusive play and raising the debate around gender norms is critical, not just for girls but for any child”</li> <li>• “Girls”</li> <li>• “Boys”</li> <li>• “Opposite sex”</li> <li>• “Opposite gender”</li> <li>• “Other gender”</li> <li>• “The company is committed to making LEGO play more inclusive and ensuring that children’s creative ambitions – both now in the future – are <b>not limited by gender stereotypes</b>. We know there is work to do which is why from 2021, we will work closely with the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media and UNICEF to ensure LEGO products and marketing are <b>accessible to all</b> and <b>free of gender bias and harmful stereotypes</b>.”</li> </ul> <p>In total:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Girls (26x)</li> <li>• Boys (12x)</li> <li>• Sons (3x)</li> <li>• Daughter (3x)</li> <li>• All children (4x)</li> </ul>
<b>Grammar</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Epistemic modality (the speakers degree of affinity with or affiliation to her or his statement) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “The company <b>will</b> ensure any child, regardless of gender identify, feels they can build anything they like, playing in a way that will help them develop and realise their unique talent.”</li> <li>○ “we <b>will</b> work [...] to ensure LEGO products and marketing are accessible to all and free of gender bias and harmful stereotypes”</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Metaphor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “Girls are ready for the world but society isn’t quite ready to support their growth through play”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Text Structure	<p>5 parts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction</li> <li>• Ready for Girls (results of the study commissioned by LEGO)</li> <li>• Rebuilding the World (focused on girls, (day of the girls etc.))</li> <li>• The role of LEGO play (most nonbinary text part)</li> <li>• Our commitment</li> <li>• “Girls” as first word</li> </ul>
Transitivity (connection between events/processes and subjects/objectives)	<p>Girls are ready to overcome gender norms but society continues to enforce biases that hamper their creative potential</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process: “are ready to overcome”, “continue to enforce”, “hamper”</li> <li>• Participants: “girls”, “society” are the actors; the objective are “gender norms”, “biases”</li> <li>• Circumstances: There is no specific time or location stated however, the way of writing (are; continues) gives reason to assume that it relates to the present.</li> </ul> <p>The LEGO Group believes in the value of learning through play and that the development of 21st century skills from LEGO play are equally relevant to all children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process: The process it “believes in”, “are relevant”</li> <li>• Participants: “The LEGO Group” is the actor; the objective is “the value of learning through play” and “the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills”</li> <li>• It affects “all children”</li> <li>• Circumstances: Relates to 21<sup>st</sup> century skills however, the sentence itself doesn’t include a time or location frame. Time stamp in the beginning -&gt; November 2021</li> </ul> <p>“The company will ensure any child, regardless of gender identify, feels they can build anything they like, playing in a way that will help them develop and realise their unique talent.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process: “will ensure”</li> <li>• Participants: “The company” (LEGO) is the actor; the objective is “any child”</li> <li>• Attribute: “regardless of gender identity”</li> <li>• Circumstances: Manner: “feels they can build anything they like” Purpose: “playing in a way that will help them develop and realise their unique talent”</li> </ul> <p>“Ensuring more inclusive play and raising the debate around gender norms is critical, not just for girls but for any child”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No actor!</li> </ul>
Force of utterance (what sorts of speech acts (promises, request, threats, etc.))	<p>Announcement, Publication of study results concluding in a commitment.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The company <b>will</b> ensure any child, regardless of gender identify, feels they can build anything they like, playing in a way that will help them develop and realise their unique talent.”</li> <li>• “The company is <b>committed</b> to making LEGO play more inclusive and ensuring that children’s creative ambitions – both now in the future – are not limited by gender stereotypes. We know there is work to do which is why from 2021, we will work closely with the Geena</li> </ul>

	Davis Institute on Gender in Media and UNICEF to ensure LEGO products and marketing are accessible to all and free of gender bias and harmful stereotypes.”
<b>Coherence of the text</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Change of vocabulary which changes the view on gender (binary/nonbinary)</li> <li>• Vocabulary is at some points contradictive</li> </ul>
<b>Intertextuality of texts</b>	Often referred/based on a study commissioned by LEGO and conducted by GDIGM

## Sustainability



# Diverse and inclusive workplace



We believe the LEGO Group – and LEGO® play – is for everyone, no matter where you come from, what you look like or how you identify.

It's our mission to inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow. To succeed in this mission, and help all children develop the skills that will help them fulfil their potential, we must continue to play our part in

building a more inclusive and equitable world, starting with our own organization.

## **What does diversity and inclusion mean to us**

LEGO® play is for everyone, and so is our workplace. The more diverse backgrounds we have represented within our business, who are each heard and valued, the more we will all contribute, thrive and grow.



## Valuing differences

Inclusion is a choice, a conscious behavior, which starts with creating a safe space for everyone to be seen, heard, valued and respected. And the magic is in the mix. Embracing different ideas, opinions and approaches is also what helps us create LEGO® play experiences that are inclusive of all and welcome everyone to the joy of building. We introduced Conscious Inclusion training to help strengthen conscious inclusion behaviors in all.

Beyond Conscious Inclusion, we focus on developing the ability in all to address microaggressions and be allies for one another, understand and navigate cultural differences, learn about the lived experiences of others and become advocates for diversity and inclusion in the communities we are part of.

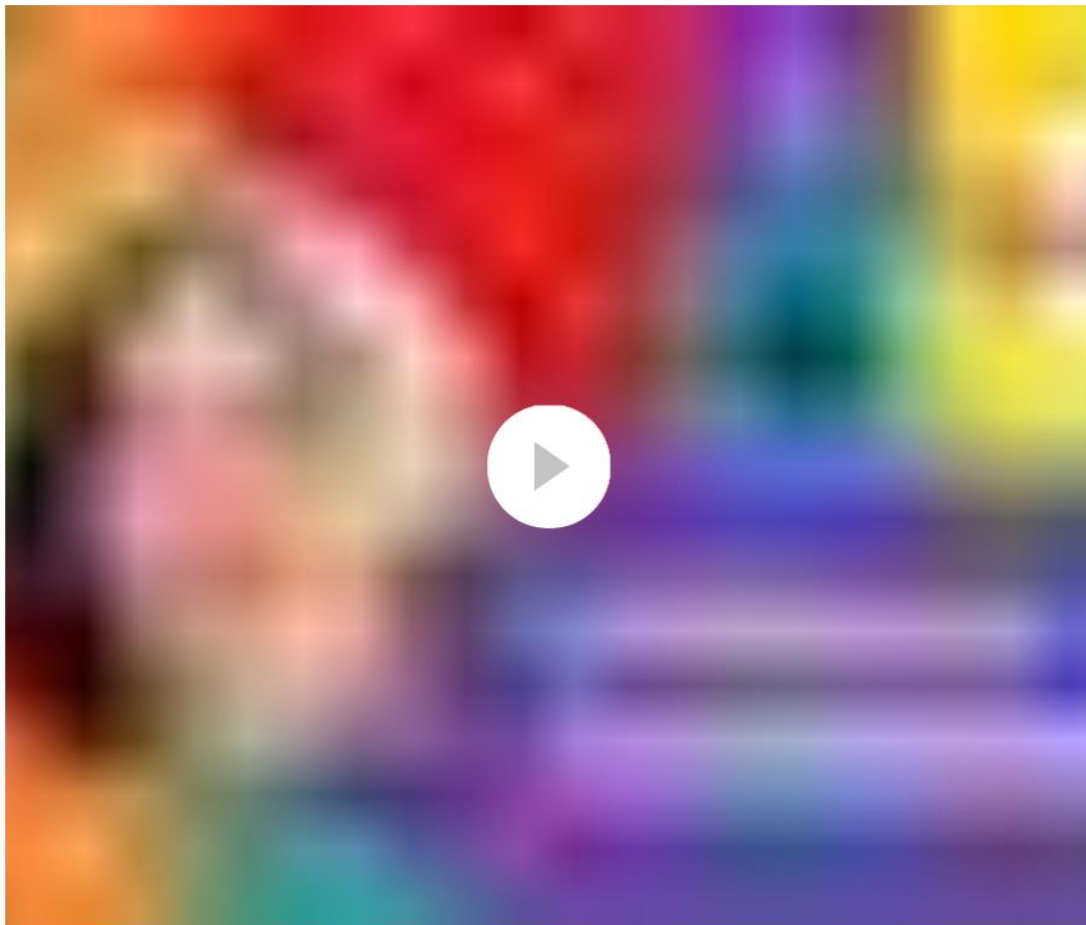




## Improve representation

Diversity is the visible and invisible dimensions that make each of us unique. We want our organization to reflect the diversity of the world we operate in and seek to inspire. Currently we focus on gender, ethnicity, LGBTQIA+ communities and people with disabilities.

We work on a range of initiatives to improve representation, from partnerships and outreach, to ensuring the language in our job listings is welcoming of everyone, and are continuously improving our people processes to ensure they are fair and equitable for all.



## Employee Advocacy

Our colleagues play a vital role in how we work with diversity and inclusion. From inspiring a culture of learning and allyship, to helping us identify local needs and opportunities, our Global and Local Employee Advocacy Groups (EAGs) connect colleagues with an interest in shaping our work. We currently have EAGs



for Accessibility, Age, Asian, LGBTQIA+, People of Color and Women, and expect to establish more over time.

## Breaking down gender stereotypes

At the LEGO Group, we believe children are our role models. We look to them for inspiration every day and want to help them break down gender stereotypes and create opportunities for everyone.

Our long-term ambition is a completely gender-balanced organization at all levels by 2032.

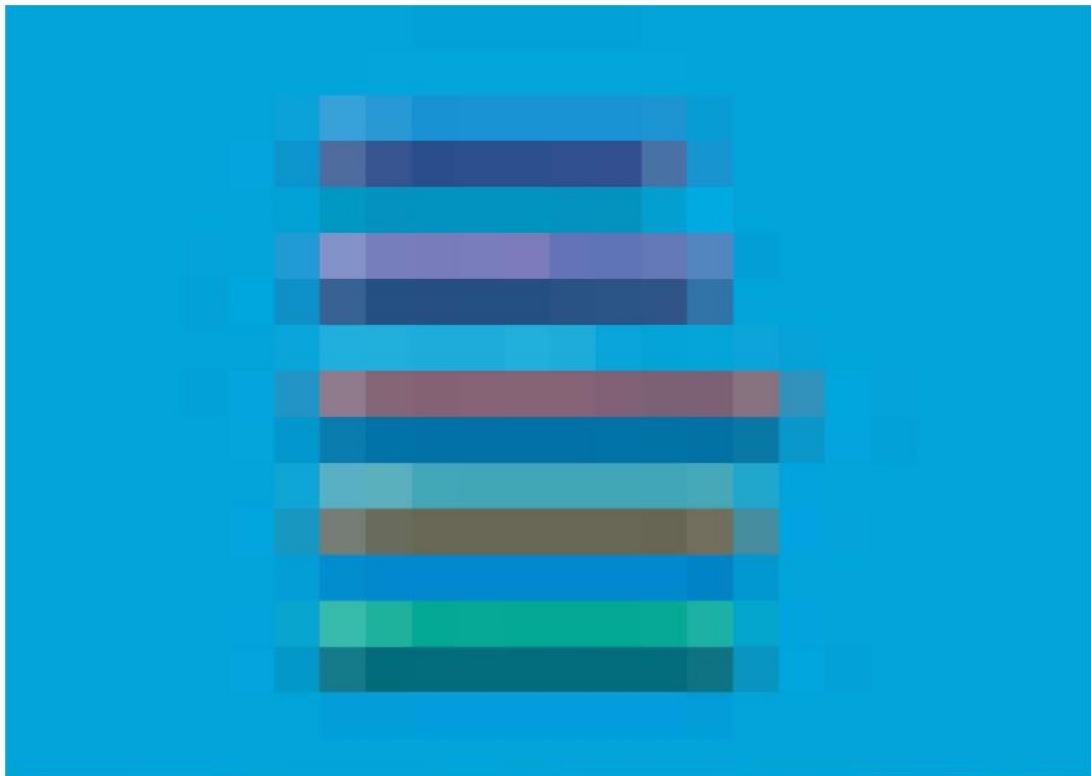
We measure and report on the progress on the share of women globally and set annual targets for share of women at Director level and above, i.e. women in executive positions.

Share of women  
**Our targets**





Share of women  
**Progress since 2019**

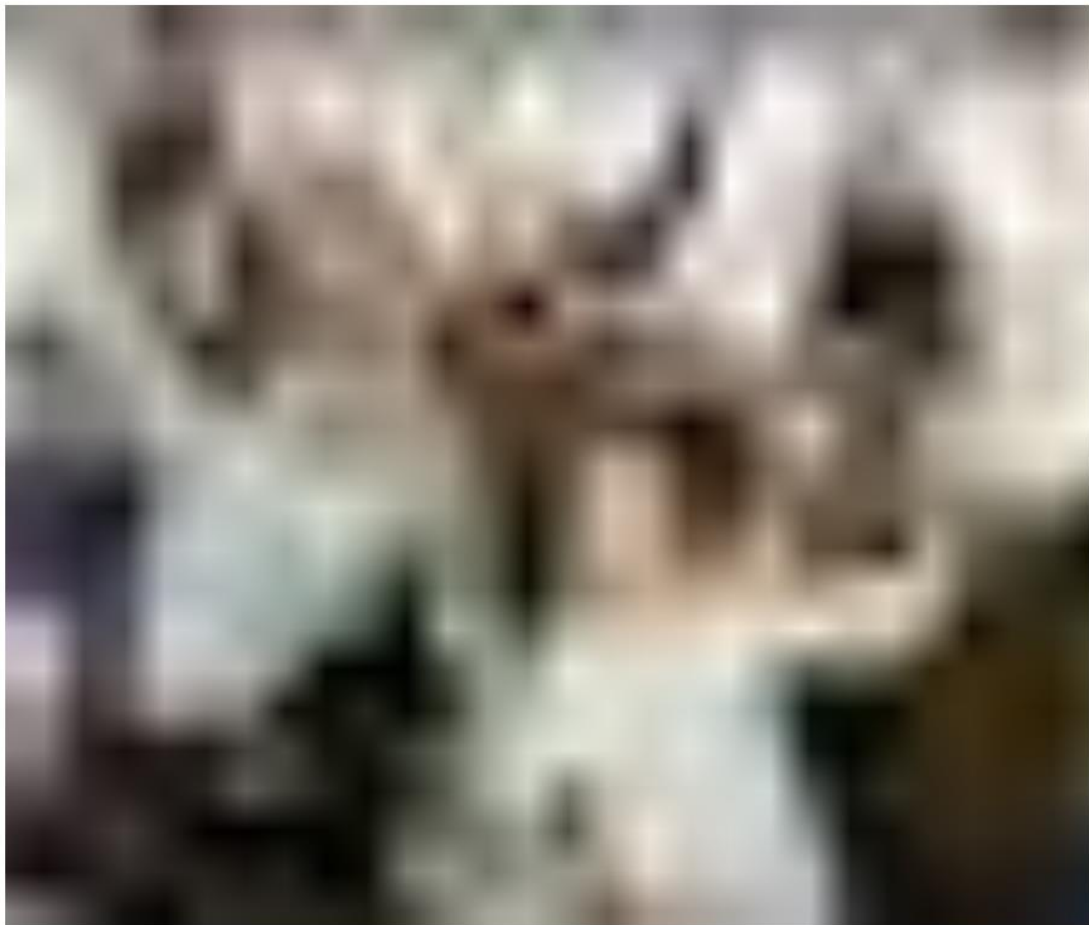


## Partnering with UN Women

We signed a partnership with UN Women and consequently apply the United Nations Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) which outline how businesses can deliver on gender equality and women's empowerment.

With this partnership, we are committed to taking bold steps, as part of our Sustainability 2022 ambitions to advance gender equality in our workplace, marketplace and community.

[Learn more](#)



## Our policies

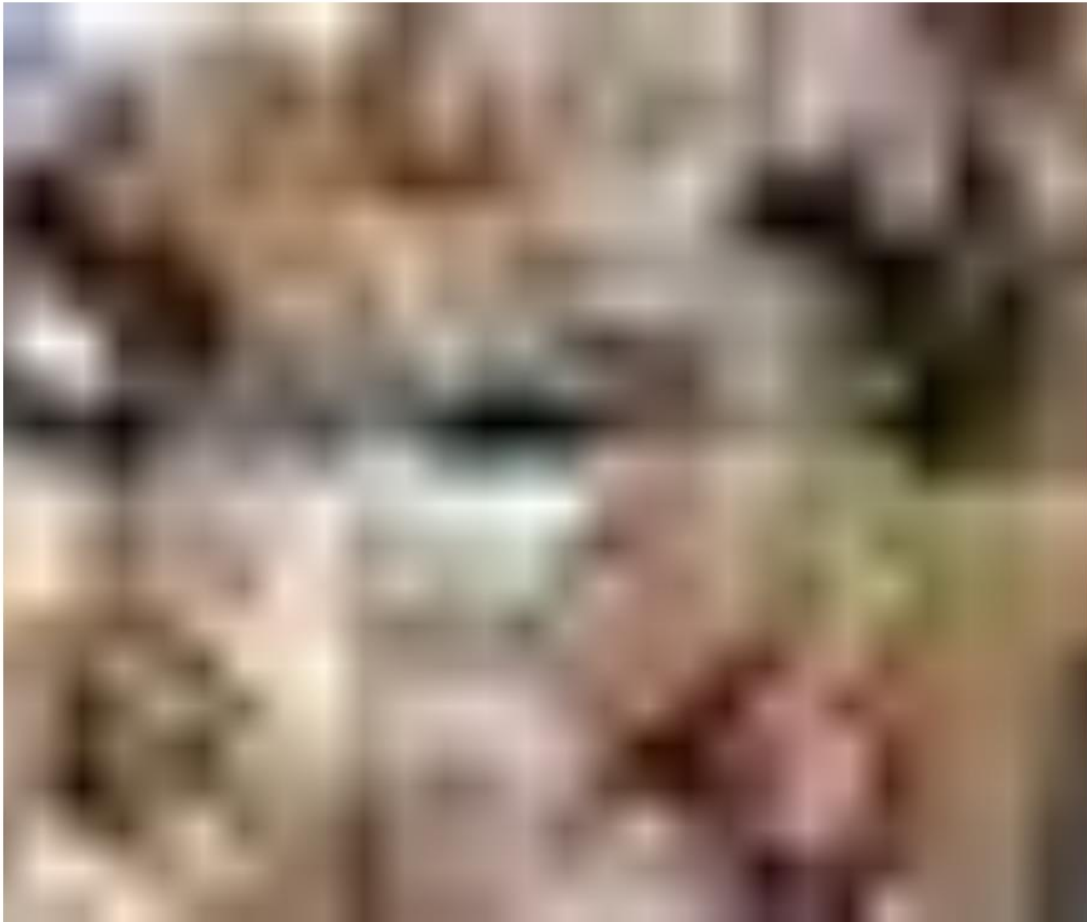
<https://www.lego.com/en-us/sustainability/people/diversity-and-inclusion/>

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Our policies on Gender balance and Diversity & Inclusion outline our goal to increase representation of all dimensions to reflect the increasingly diverse global marketplace we operate in, as well as our commitment to ensuring equitable practices in hiring, promoting and developing all talent, thereby improving diversity and gender balance at all organizational levels.

Gender balance policy

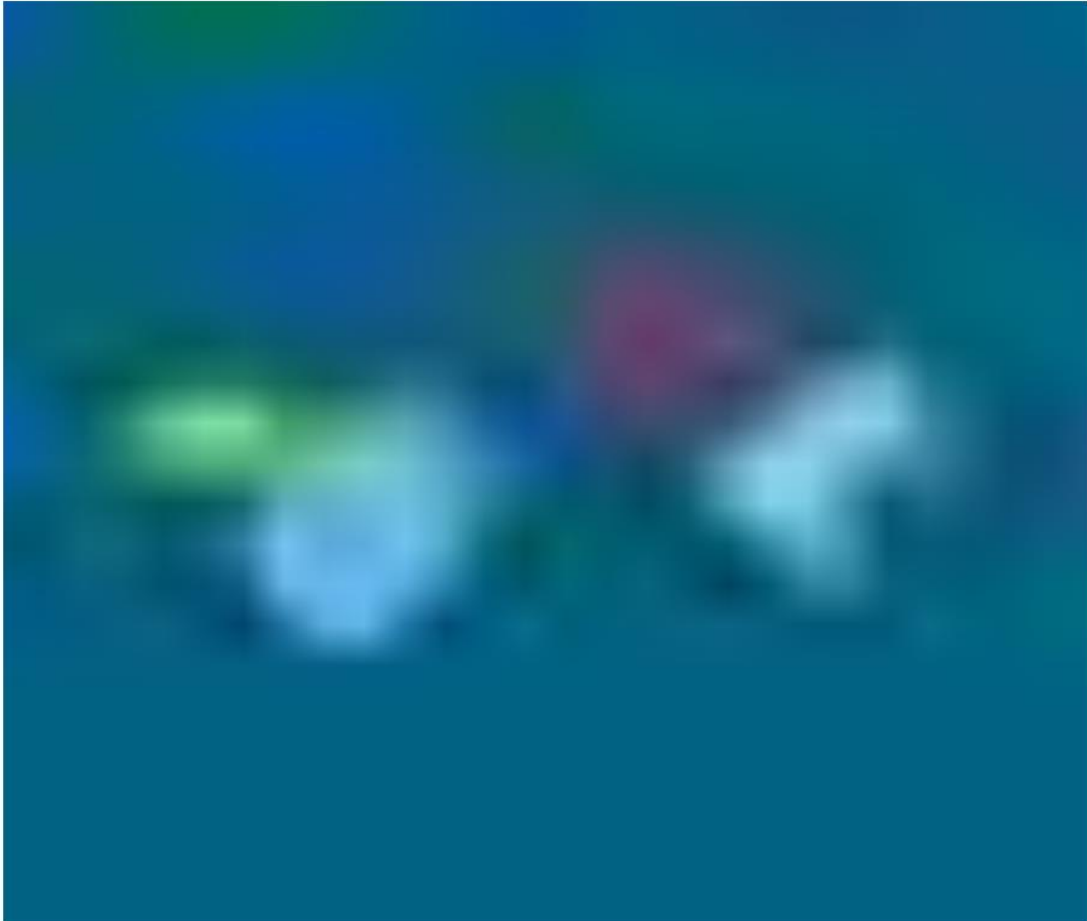
Diversity and inclusion policy



## **Paid parental leave for all**

We understand the critical role parents and caregivers have, especially during a child's formative years, and believe that the impact of workplace policies on a parent's opportunity to fulfil this role is critical. We want to enable all our employees to spend precious time with their children, so we have established an extended paid parental leave policy globally. All employees, no matter where they work or what they do, will receive a minimum of 26 weeks' paid childcare leave for the primary caregiver and 8 weeks' paid leave for the secondary caregiver. It's up to the parents to decide who is the primary and secondary caregiver.

[Read more](#)



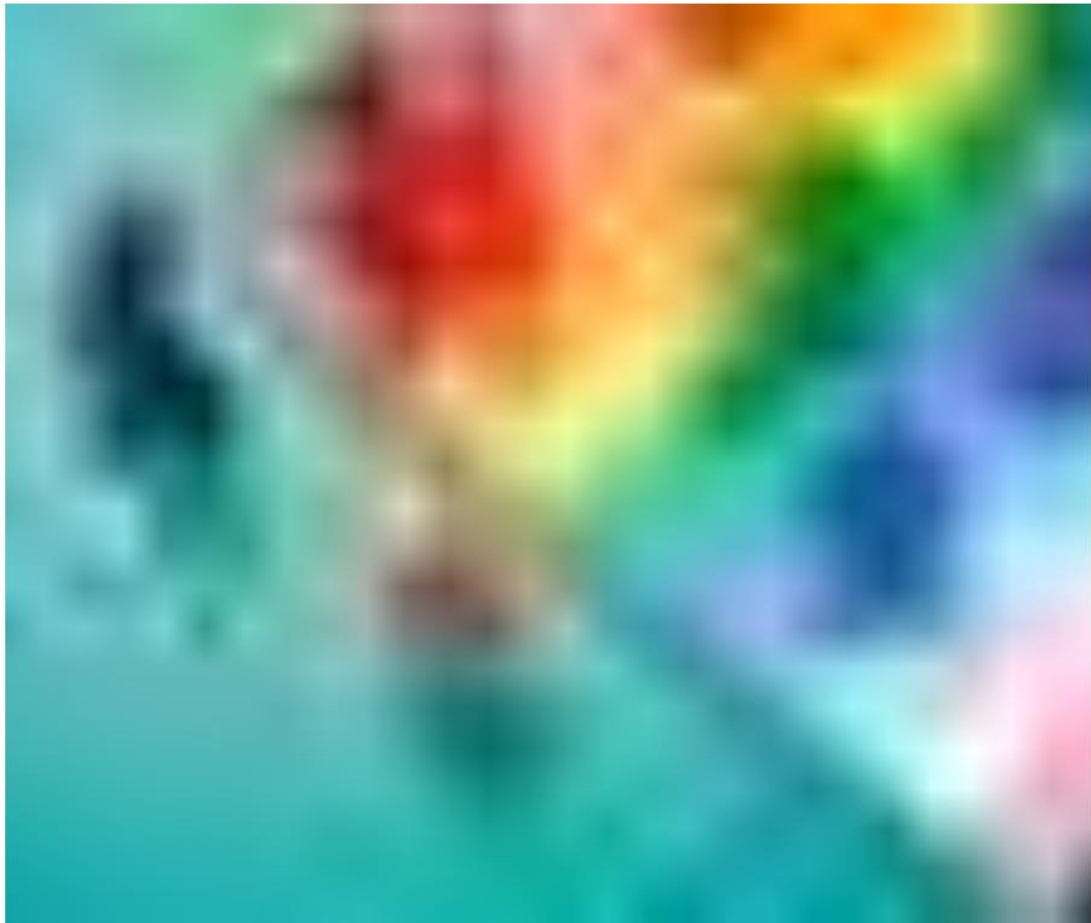
## Member of Business Disability Forum

The LEGO Group has joined as a member of the UK organisation, Business Disability Forum, to help understand how best to support colleagues with a disability or long-term condition. This is another important step on our D&I journey to ensure that colleagues are enabled to succeed at work and that our workplace, just like LEGO® play, is for everyone

## Business Disability Forum

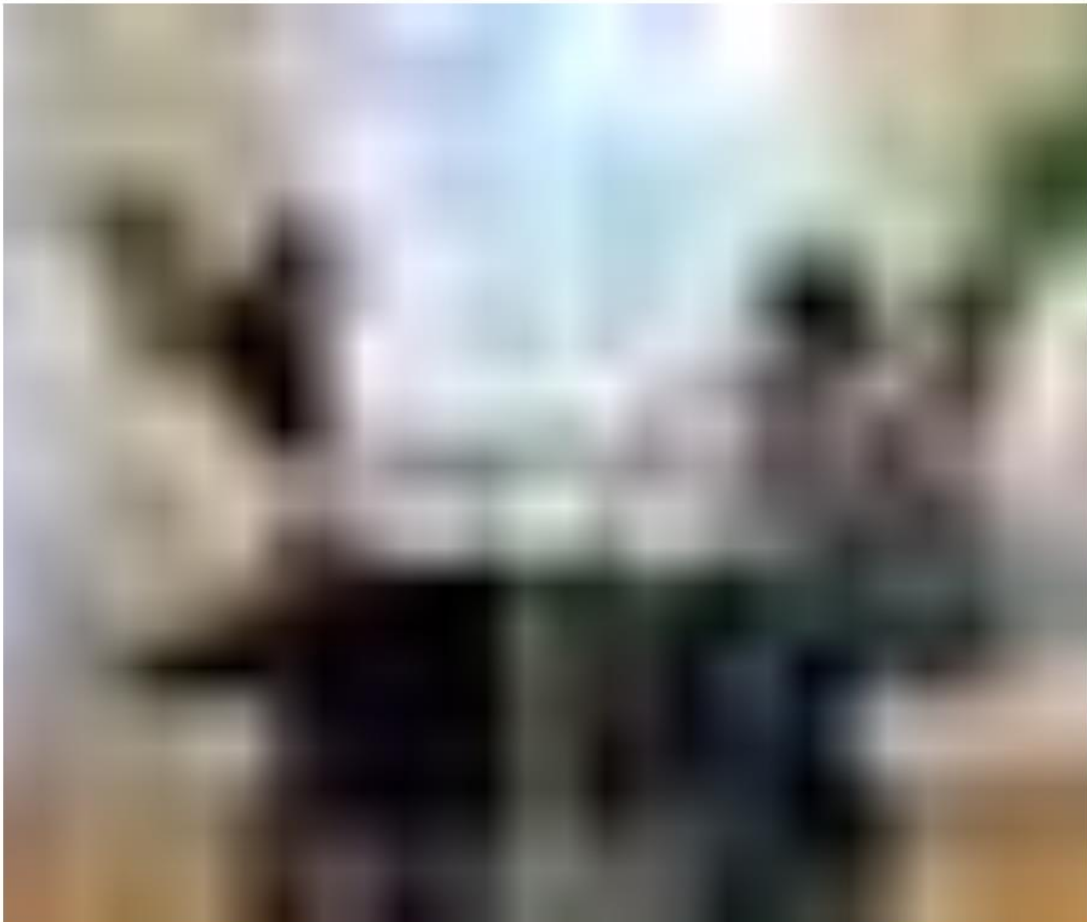
# Everyone is Awesome

Everyone is unique, and with a little more love, acceptance and understanding in the world, we can all feel free to be our true AWESOME selves, in the workplace and everywhere else!



## Partnerships

We partner with Workplace Pride, Stonewall and Open for Business to help shape strategy and programs to support employees who identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community and allies across the company. We also invested to help future generations learn about empathy and inclusivity through partnerships with the UK charity Diversity Role Models.



## Want to join us?

Do you want to make an impact on our diversity and inclusion journey? We bring our global ideas to life at a local level wherever we work.

[Learn more](#)



## Responsible Business Principles

We treat everyone involved in making LEGO products fairly, whatever their role. We ensure our suppliers and partners share our commitment to business integrity and we help them minimize their environmental impact.

[Learn more >](#)



<https://www.lego.com/en-us/sustainability/people/diversity-and-inclusion/>

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supply chain.

[Read more >](#)

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The Lego Inclusivity and Diversity Landing Page	Examples
<b>Vocabulary</b>	<p>Diverse and inclusive workplace</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We believe the LEGO Group – and LEGO play – is for everyone, no matter where you come from, what you look like or how you identify.”</li> <li>• “it’s our mission to inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow”,</li> <li>• “all children”</li> </ul> <p>What does diversity and inclusion mean to us</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “LEGO play is for everyone, and so is our workplace”</li> </ul> <p>Valuing differences (global priority)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Everyone”</li> <li>• “Inclusive of alle”</li> <li>• “Welcome everyone”</li> <li>• “allies”</li> <li>• “Inclusion is a choice, a conscious behavior, which starts with creating a safe space for everyone to be seen, heard, valued and respected.”</li> </ul> <p>Improve representation (global priority)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Currently we focus on gender, ethnicity, LGBTQIA+ communities and people with disabilities”</li> </ul> <p>Breaking down gender stereotypes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Children”</li> <li>• “Create opportunities for everyone”</li> <li>• “A complete gender-balanced organization”</li> <li>• “Women” (3x)</li> <li>• “share of women at Director level and above”</li> </ul> <p>Everyone is Awesome</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “<b>Everyone</b> is unique, and with a little more love, acceptance and understanding in the world, we can <b>all</b> feel free to be our true AWESOME selves, in the workplace and everywhere else!”</li> </ul>
<b>Grammar</b>	<p>Epistemic modality (belief regarding likelihood/truth):</p> <p>Deontic modality (evaluation of necessity etc.):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “we <b>must</b> continue to play our part in building a more inclusive and equitable world, starting with our own organization.”</li> </ul> <p>Comparative structure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The more diverse backgrounds we have represented within our business, who are each heard and valued, the more we will all contribute, thrive and grow.”</li> </ul>
<b>Text Structure</b>	<p>3 main blocks</p> <p>“What does diversity and inclusion mean to us”.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearly structured, 1 supporting feature</li> </ul> <p>“Breaking down gender stereotypes”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many (4) supporting features → not as easy to follow</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Member of Business Disability Forum among them: makes little sense</li> </ul> <p>“Everyone is Awesome”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearly structured, introduction not informative enough</li> </ul> <p>General:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are there topics that are not as important to LEGO?</li> </ul>
<b>Transitivity (connection between events/processes and subjects/objectives)</b>	<p>Introduction</p> <p>“It’s our mission to inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process: “inspire and develop”</li> <li>• Participants: “it”, “our mission” is the actor; the objective is “the builders of tomorrow”</li> </ul> <p>“Inclusion is a choice, a conscious behavior, which starts with creating a safe space for everyone to be seen, heard, valued and respected.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No actor/agency</li> </ul>
<b>Coherence of the text</b>	<p>“Everyone is Awesome” not clear that this part concerns the LGBTQ+community only from the introduction part. Becomes clear only with the image and the additionally stated partnerships.</p>
<b>Intertextuality of texts</b>	<p>Diversity and inclusion policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We work with two global priorities: valuing differences and improving representation</li> </ul> <p>Gender balance policy:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “We work with two global priorities: valuing differences and improving representation”</li> <li>• “The LEGO Group deeply respects that gender is not binary. However, for the purposes of Danish legal requirements and reporting, this policy uses the traditional gender categories of male and female.”</li> </ul>

## About Us



# The LEGO® Brand



## The LEGO® Brand Values

## Imagination

Free play is how children develop their imagination – the foundation for creativity. Curiosity asks WHY and imagines possible explanations. Playfulness asks WHAT IF and imagines how the ordinary becomes extraordinary, fantasy or fiction. Dreaming it is a first step towards doing it.

## Creativity

Creativity is the ability to come up with ideas that are new, surprising and valuable – and it's an essential 21st century skill. Systematic creativity is a particular form of creativity that combines logic and reasoning with playfulness and imagination.

## Fun

Fun is being active together, the thrill of an adventure, the joyful enthusiasm of children and the delight in surprising both yourself and others in what you can do or create. Fun is the happiness we experience when we are fully engaged in something that requires mastery, when our abilities are in balance with the challenge at hand and we are making progress towards a goal.

## Learning

Learning is about being curious, experimenting and collaborating – expanding our thinking and doing, helping us develop new insights and new skills. We learn through play by putting things together, taking them apart and putting them together in different ways. Building, un-building, rebuilding, thereby creating new things and developing new ways of thinking about ourselves, and the world.

## Caring

Caring is about our desire to make a positive difference in the lives of children, for our colleagues, our partners, and the world we live in. Doing that little extra, not because we have to – but because it feels right and because we care.

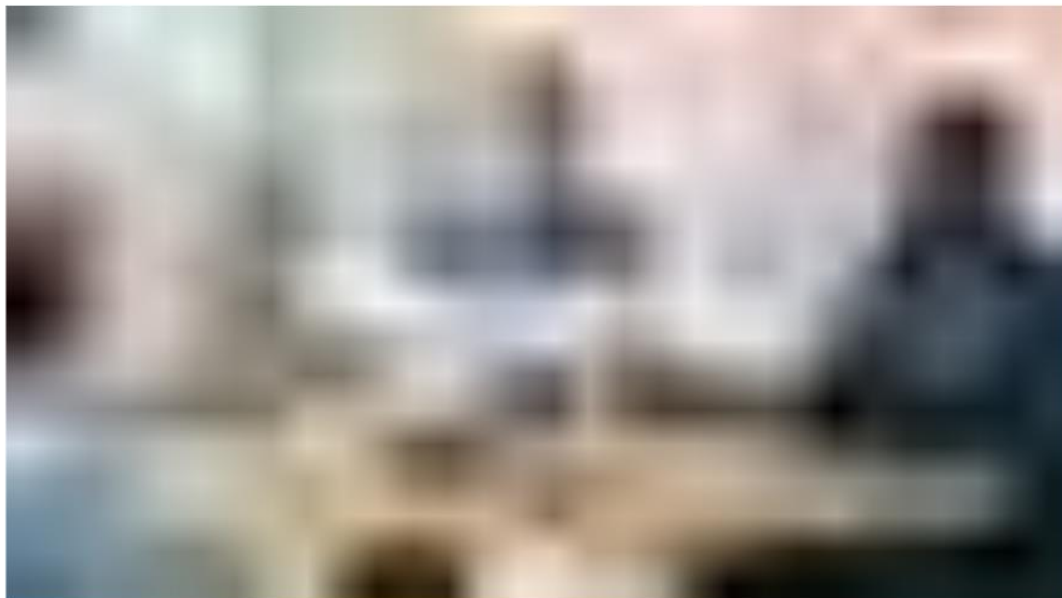
## Quality

For us quality means the challenge of continuous improvement to provide the best play material, the best for children and their development and the best to our community and partners. From a reputation for manufacturing excellence to becoming trusted by all – we believe in quality that speaks for itself and earns us the recommendation of all.

# The LEGO® Brand Framework

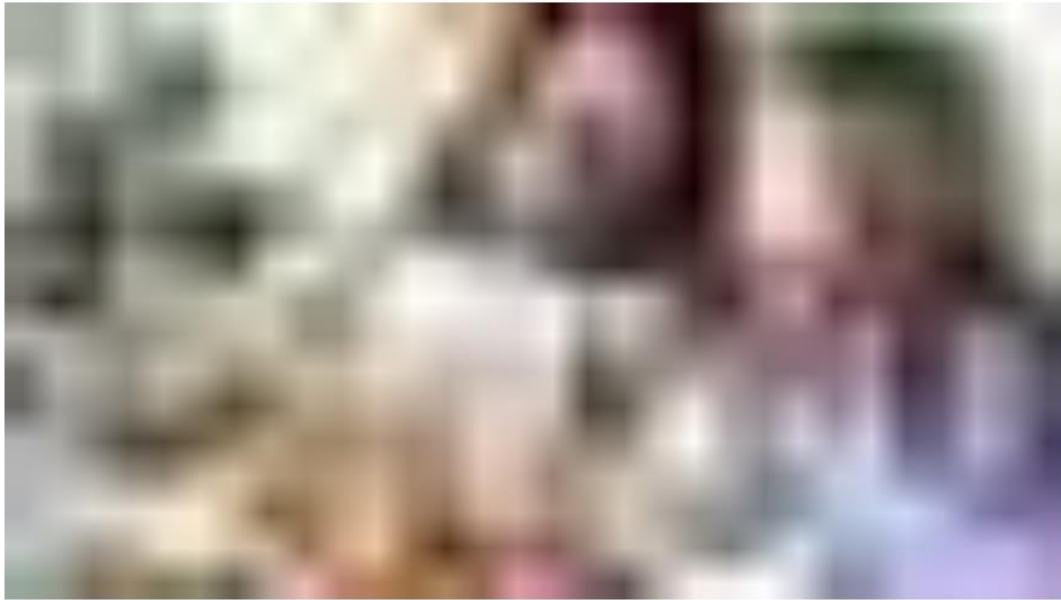


## The LEGO® Promises



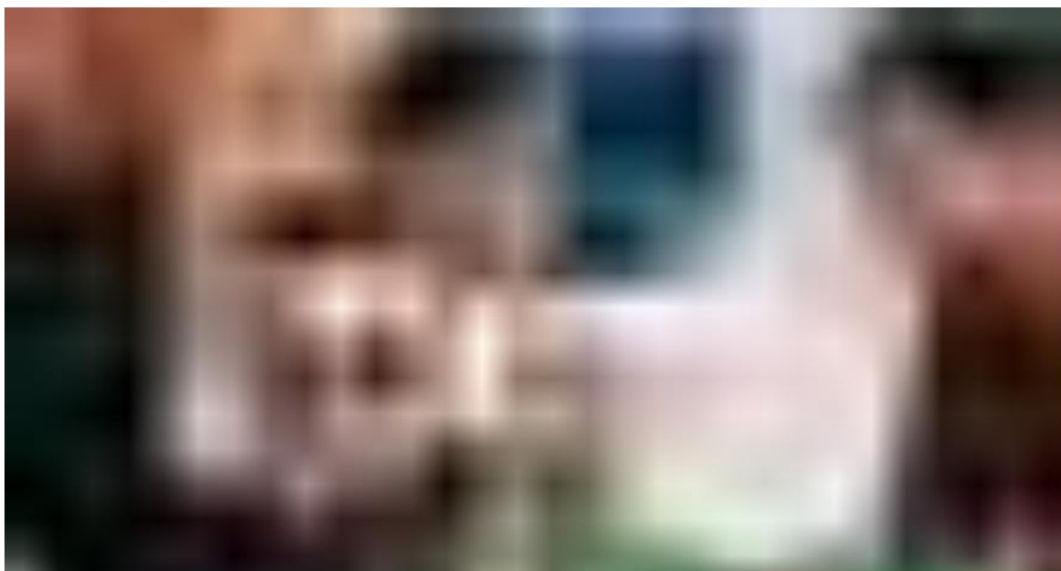
We strive to deliver values-driven results for the LEGO Group and our stakeholders, cultivating an environment where everyone is enabled to succeed and grow together, inspired by the Leadership Playground.


By celebrating differences, through our culture of authenticity, inclusion and energizing play, we create a unique sense of belonging.



We strive to consistently deliver experiences that embody the spirit of our brand name, which is derived from the words "play well" in Danish.

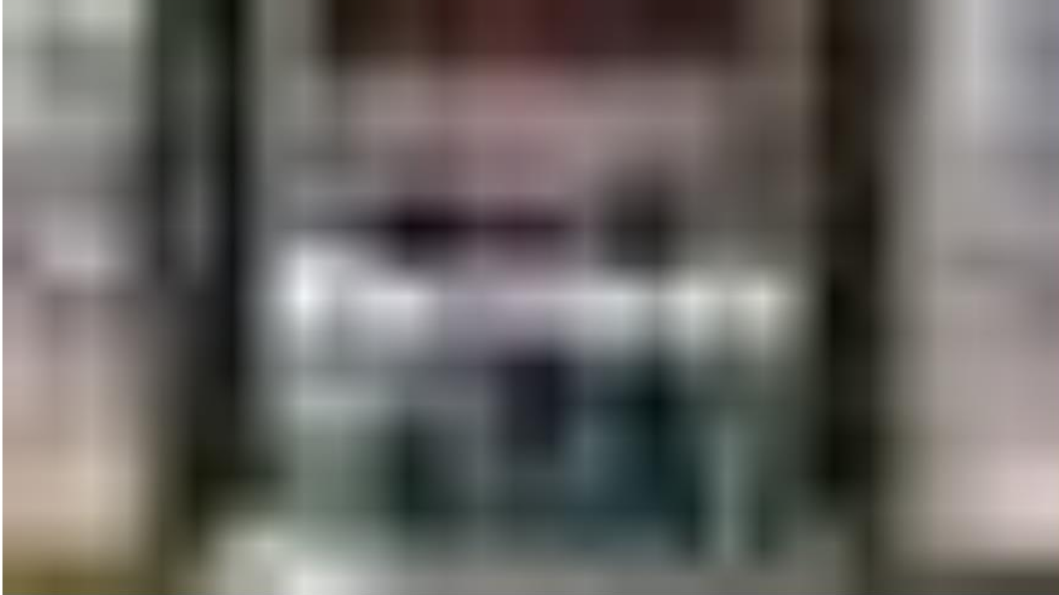
By creating fun experiences inspired by our unique building system that combine logic and reasoning with playfulness and imagination, we prepare our playful learners for life.





the planet, which children will inherit.

By engaging with our entire value chain, we aim for zero environmental impact while driving positive change for children by helping them develop critical skills to thrive today and in the future through Learning through Play.



## Partner Promise

We strive to build partnerships with customers, suppliers and intellectual property partners based on mutual value creation.

This collaboration, built on shared values, is the best way to meet the challenges and opportunities of our complex world.

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The Lego Brand Website	Examples
<b>Vocabulary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “children”</li> <li>• “everyone”</li> <li>• “we”</li> <li>• “us”</li> <li>• “Children are our role models”</li> <li>• “Inspire and develop the builders of tomorrow”</li> <li>• No pronouns</li> </ul>
<b>Grammar</b>	<p>Epistemic modality (belief regarding likelihood/truth):</p> <p>Deontic modality (evaluation of necessity etc.):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “we <b>must</b> continue to play our part in building a more inclusive and equitable world, starting with our own organization.”</li> </ul> <p>Comparative structure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The more diverse backgrounds we have represented within our business, who are each heard and valued, the more we will all contribute, thrive and grow.”</li> </ul>
<b>Text Structure</b>	<p>3 parts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brand Values</li> <li>• Brand Framework</li> <li>• Brand Promises</li> </ul> <p>General:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gender or Inclusivity is not explicitly mentioned</li> </ul>
<b>Coherence of the text</b>	Throughout gender-neutral formulated