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Social Psychology

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Social Privilege Activity Response

For this project, I chose to go to Target. I found a variety of items, from dolls to cards to picture frames. Target has everything. So it wasn’t a shock when I found most of the items on the list. There were a few items that were more difficult to find in a variety of diversity, but I feel that I was successful in locating nearly all of these categories.

One of the hardest parts of this assignment was navigating the store I was in. I went to Target, and one would think that every Target is similarly laid out, but I got turned around a couple of times, because I was expecting the layout of the Targets in Southern California. Once I got my bearings, it wasn’t too hard to find most of the items on the list. One of the items I could not find was a sign featuring people over the age of 60. I looked through the clothing section and the make up section, thinking they would be the most likely places, but even in the food section, the appliance section, the toys, and the home goods sections, none had a sign with anyone even looking over the age of 40. Another item I could not find was religious holiday cards, most likely because most major holidays have past. When it comes to Band-Aids, there weren’t any packages that had multiple shades of skin tone; most were either light tan/almost clear or dark tan, along with many different patterned styles. The last of the items I had a hard time finding were any items featuring Native Americans not associated as a sports team mascot. Unless you counted a Disney Pocahontas doll, which I did not, there seems to be very few, if any, merchandise related to Native Americans.

Walking around the store, I wasn’t too shocked by some of the numbers based on race or gender, what shocked me the most was the almost blatant lack of older adults in any pictures or marketing adds. It’s as if turning 50 years old means you are no longer a part of a company’s desired demographic, it does not matter what brands you pick or items you decide to purchase. I think, in this situation, maybe companies believe that, at this age, you have already made your decision on what you will buy, so it does not make a difference to attempt to sway you one way or the other. As for race, I was surprised how few items were either marketed for or contained filler photos of Asian and Latino/a people there were, and I was surprised at how close the counts were for items featuring White and African-American people.

This activity can really show you how hard it is to find items representing something that is not in line with the “average” consumer. Based on the items I found, I would consider the “average” consumer of Target to be a straight person of White or African-American descent in their late 20s/30s, and the “abnormal” consumer of Target to be Asian, Latino/a, people over 40, or members of the LGBT community. For a child, having something as simple as a toy that looks similar to you (if that’s what they want) can really change your outlook on life, and how you feel about yourself. Without it, children may begin to think they are less than perfect. Something as simple as a doll with the same features as you can be a self-confidence boost. I think it is important to discuss and understand social privilege in order to help combat it. I don’t think judging people or trying to bring them down because of any privilege they may or may not have simply by how they look or where they were born is the correct way to combat social privilege. I believe that understanding it will help us create a more inclusive market where there are products available for everyone.

The availability of these items, along with what they mean in regards to social privilege, seem to show that combatting privilege is on the rise. Many everyday products are being made more inclusive and available for a more diverse group of people. This is a rising trend, and should be put in the win column. Although social privilege is not yet a thing of the past, it is becoming more irrelevant; we are becoming part of a more inclusive society every day.