

Considering Childhood Experiences in a Late 19th Century Settler-Colonial Household: Children's Toys from the Schreiber Wood Project

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I wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island and I am grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

Introduction & Background

- From the mid-1880s until the early-1900s, the multi-generational Schreiber family occupied three houses—Iverholme, Lislehurst, and Mount Woodham—on what is now a portion of the University of Toronto Mississauga (UTM) campus.
- The Schreiber children frequented all three houses with two boys and three girls living at Lislehurst (close to AjGw-534), three girls living at Iverholme (AjGw-535), and the children's grandparents living at Mount Woodham (nearby Lislehurst).
- Since 2013, UTM archaeological field school excavations at AjGw-534 and AjGw-535 have recovered over 19,000 artifacts—of which 129 have been classified as children's toys.
- This poster is a preliminary look at an ongoing research project concerning childhood within the context of the Schreiber Wood Project. I draw upon a gender-focused lens to better understand the role toys played in raising children and determining a child's place in a 19th cen. household; I also highlight potential uses of historical childrearing manuals for future interpretations of childhood artifacts.

Summarizing the Toy Assemblage

- The assemblage is comprised of a combination of metal and ceramic toys that make up approximately 0.67% (n = 129) of the sites' total assemblage (n = 19367).
- Toys from AjGw-535 (n = 111) were more abundant compared to AjGw-534 (n = 18).
- More girls' toys were found at AjGw-535 (n = 109; 98%) compared to boys' toys (n = 1; 0.9%); while more boys' toys were found at AjGw-534 (n = 11; 61%) compared to girls' toys (n = 7; 39%).
- The sole gender-neutral toy—a metal jack—was found at AjGw-535.
- Dolls were the most common toy artifacts at AjGw-535 (n = 74; 67%); they are primarily doll fragments.
- Toy soldiers were the most common toy artifacts at AjGw-534 (n = 10; 56%).

Table 1. Distribution of the toy artifacts at AjGw-534 and at AjGw-535 categorized by toy type and associated gender.

Artifact Type	Artifact Count		Associated Gender
	AjGw-534	AjGw-535	
Toy (unspecified)	1	4	Boys, Girls, Neutral*
Toy Soldier	10		Boys
Figurine		14	Girls
Tea Set, Toy	2	19	Girls
Doll	5	74	Girls
Grand Total	18	111	

*Of the five Toy (unspecified) artifacts, two toys are considered girls', two are boys', and one is gender neutral; all were found at AjGw-535 except for one toy metal revolver (boys') at AjGw-534.

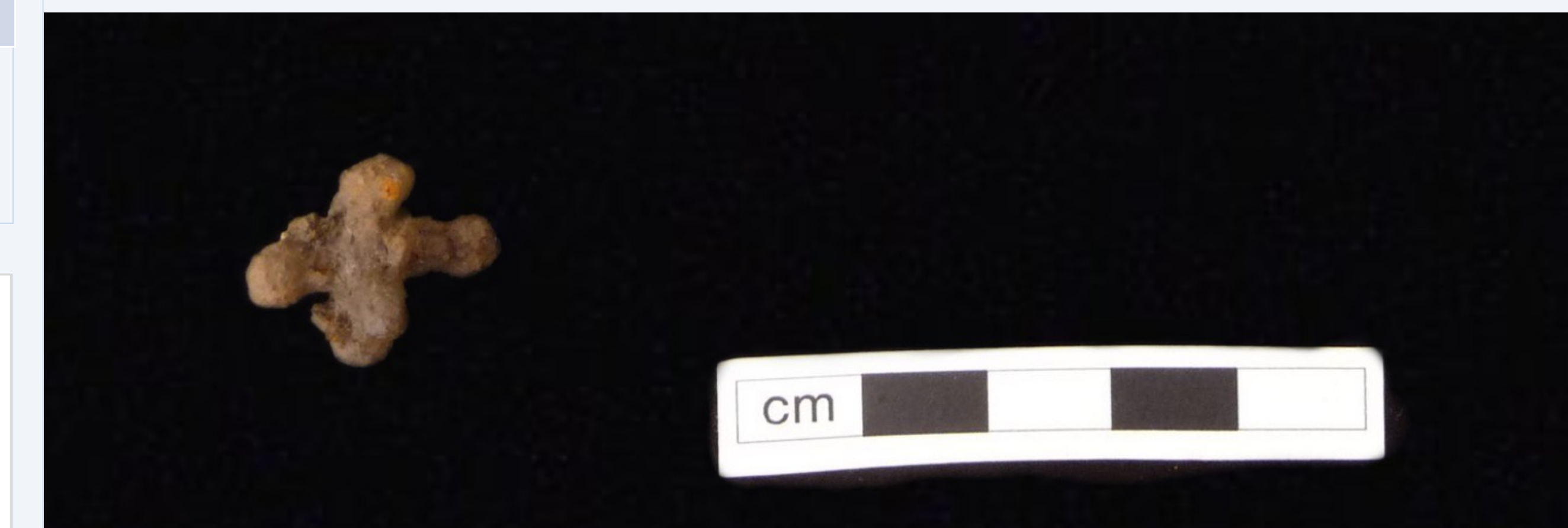


Figure 4. Examples from the Schreiber Wood Project of toy soldiers (top) that would be denoted as boys' toys, as well as a metal jack that is categorized as a gender-neutral Toy (unspecified). (Photo credit: Mahalia Johnna Baguio [top], Michael Brand [bottom])

Conclusion & Future Research

At a glance, the assemblage of children's toys from the Schreiber Wood Project fits the expectations for a 19th cen. British-Canadian household. Children's artifacts from the period typically account for 0-2% of the total assemblage (Baxter 2022:65)—the Schreiber children's toys alone account for 0.67% of the assemblage across both sites. Moreover, the vast amounts of primary historical sources pertaining to upper-middle class British-Canadian families like the Schreiber's offers a unique opportunity to pursue further, historically-informed research avenues with this selection of artifacts as it pertains to class, childhood agency, small community living, and other topics. As such, the following questions and research avenues will be explored as this project progresses:

- How do the Schreiber toys—their types and distribution of associated gender—compare to similar sites, and what does this tell us about the Schreiber's household status and the role of their children in the household?
- What do the large amount of fragmented doll pieces signal about the children's treatment of and access to dolls? Was this a means for children to exert a sense of agency over a toy type that is rigid in its symbolism of motherhood and a woman's place in the household?
- Does the toy assemblage differ in distribution and frequency from other children's artifacts from the property, and what meaning can be ascribed to the prevalence of toys as materials in the household? How might that have shaped the children's activities and their approach to "playtime"?



Figure 1. Examples from the Schreiber Wood Project of toy tea set, figurines, and doll fragments that would typically be attributed as girls' toys. (Photo credit: Michael Brand [left], Ya Qi Mo [right])

Methods

- The artifacts were collected during the 2013 to 2020 field seasons through surface collection, test pitting, and conducting unit excavations.
- The toy types are further categorized by gender (i.e., boys, girls, neutral) based on period-typical attitudes towards gender (e.g., the role of girls and women as homemakers, hence toy tea sets are linked to girls).
- Additional research is being conducted to better understand 19th cen. attitudes towards children and childhood using primary historical texts—namely, childrearing manuals and household guides for middle and upper-middle class families.

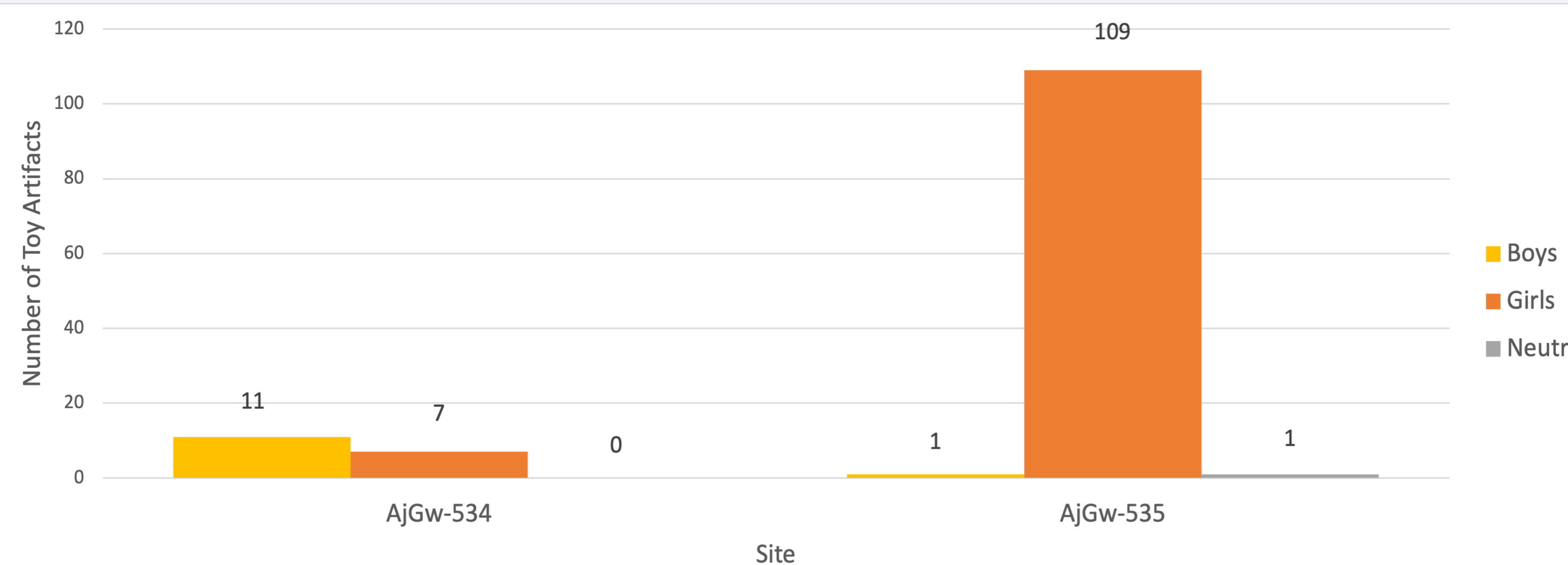


Figure 3. Gender distribution of toy artifacts at AjGw-534 (left) and AjGw-535 (right).

Discussion & Interpretative Challenges

- The higher overall distribution of girls' toys reflects the higher number of girls living on the property; the same can be said for the higher distribution of boys' toys at AjGw-534 compared to AjGw-535, as two boys lived around AjGw-534 while AjGw-535 was not home to boys during the Schreiber period.
- The prominence of girls' dolls and toy tea sets mirrors 19th cen. gender expectations; historical texts refer to toys as "necessary means of instruction [...] of mental culture" (Keyl et al. 1878:370) which has been interpreted, specifically with dolls and tea sets, as a way for "girls [to] learn social graces, practice proper etiquette, and embrace a sense of proper fashion by hosting tea parties and other events through imaginative girl play" (Baxter 2022:74).
- As with most children's artifacts, toys may have also been used, played or engaged with by adults in a manner that could be similar or dissimilar to a child; the influence of adults in purchasing the toy and their intentions in purchasing the toy for a child or children should also be considered.
- Similarly, associating a particular gender to certain toy types based on the time period's attitudes towards gender is restrictive and does not account for digressions from gender norms; ethnographic and archaeological works have indicated that children living in isolated areas—like the Schreiber children—were more likely to play with both boys and girls as their options in playmates, and sometimes toys, were limited.

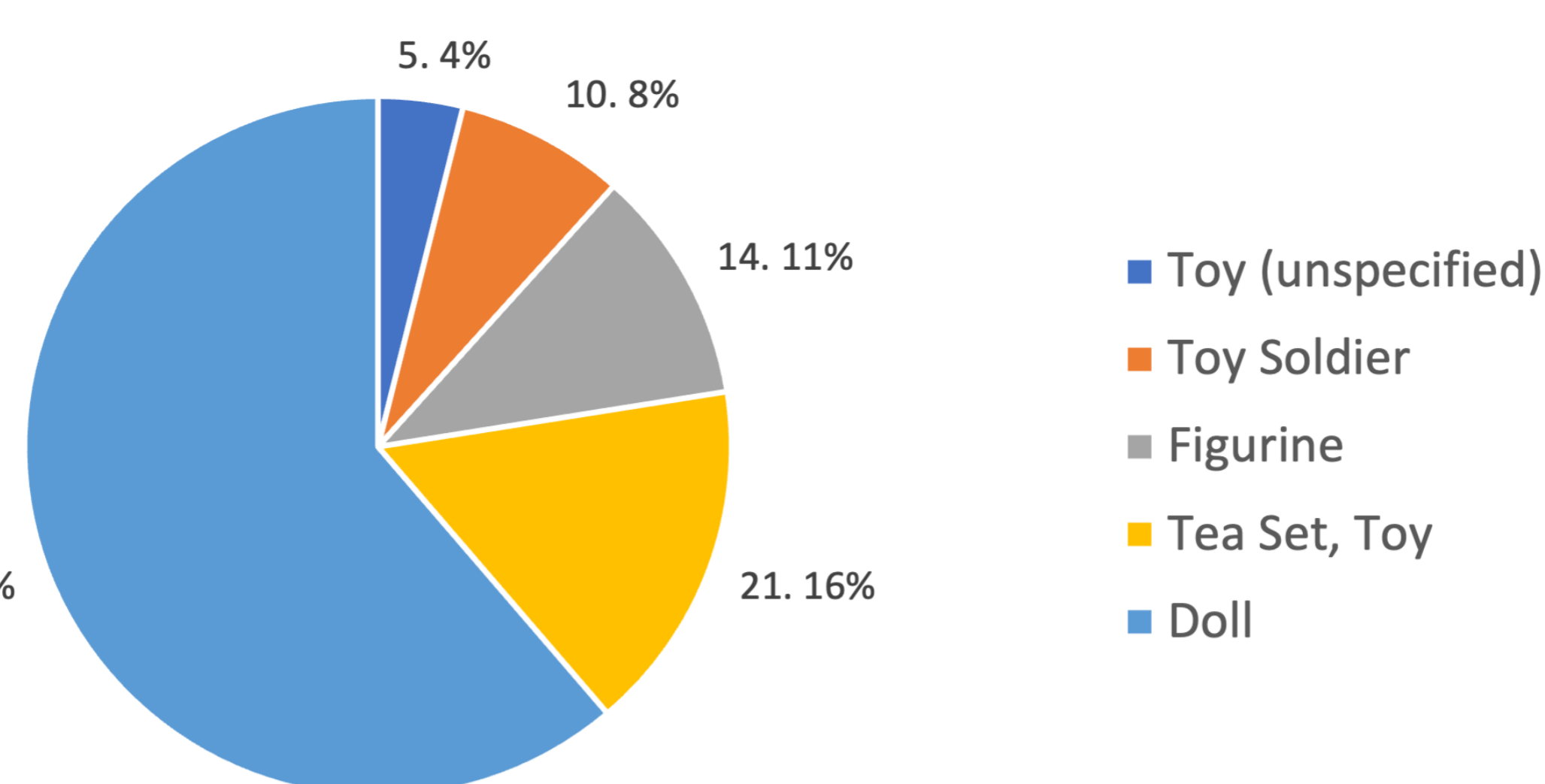


Figure 2. Relative abundance of toys from AjGw-534 and AjGw-535 combined.

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