

The Gender Identity Enhanced by Consumerism through Analysis of Color Harness

Ruien Chen

Chongqing Foreign Language School, Chongqing, 400000, China

Abstract

The people's apparel style has been associated with gender labels since the young age. The gender labels may be one of the cornerstones of gender stereotypes, which has limited people's perceptions of gender characteristics, especially for the sexual minorities. Research shows that consumerism is one of the factors deepening gender stereotypes, even if it may not be the original intention. Furthermore, in this process, color is one of the factors that cannot be ignored. The use of color can serve as a typical aspect to discuss how it affects the shaping of gender identity.

Keywords

Gender Identity; Consumerism; Color Harness.

1. The Relationship between Gender and Color

Researchers proposed Gender Schema Theory. This theory believes that children gradually form representations of gender and their own gender schema during development (Martin, Ruble & Szkrybalo, 2002), and then they actively seek out information related to their own gender and integrate this information into their own gender concept. Due to social customs, boys are more inclined to choose blue, while girls are more inclined to choose pink as their most preferred color.

The development of gender awareness and the subtle influence of social roles and social identity have caused gender differences in people's color preferences (Wong&Hines, 2015). In childhood, surrounding's influence on people is that they tend to accept and imitate, so during this period, people's independent personality, preferences, and values have not been shaped. Children's preference for color may also be the result of being shaped by their parents, because the family is the first visual stimulus that children come into contact with after birth.

The color matching of the family environment, the colors of the parents' clothes, the children's rooms, the colors of toys and clothes, etc are all factors arranged by the parents, and children have been influenced by this environment for a long time, which laid the psychological foundation for their color preference in the future. (Yang, 2014) From the age of 4-6, there has been a difference in preference for pink between men and women. For example, girls use more colors such as pink, yellow, and purple to paint, and boys use more colors such as black and blue (Iijima, Arisaka, Minamoto & Arai, 2001). Girls like pink items, and boys avoid pink items. (Karniol, 2011).

The Korean artist JeongMee Yoon filmed the photography series "Pink and Blue" to explore the impact of consumerism on gender identity. In the picture where children sit between pink or blue objects, younger girls are mostly surrounded by the sweet, candy-like pink objects filled the screen, revealing the kind of "feminine" and thoughts under the cultural control.

On the contrary, boys are surrounded by blue and male metaphor objects, and some teenagers will sit in opposite colors. She believes that children are not born with a color preference. This association of pink and blue is related to gender politics. It may leave such a gender restriction after the child grows up.



(a)



(b)

Fig 1. Source:<http://www.imgii.com/archives/40369>(2014)

Actually, for infants and preschool children, there is no gender difference in color preference, and they all prefer bright colors. (Burkitt,2003) This may be because their acquired color cognition is not mature enough, and they are less influenced by social culture. Bright colors can attract their attention more. In the process of growing up, children receive the influence of surrounding culture and education. They will actively seek gender-related information, and personal color preferences will therefore produce gender differences.

2. The Rules of Gender and Color are not Innate

Such rules about gender and colour-- "Blue for boys and pink for girls" was not born with consumption of people. In the eighteenth-century, Americans only use color of clothes to mark the age of children, and they wouldn't wear special colors for children in term of gender. In the years until the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the connection between color and gender did not appear, when both boys and girls wore white dresses.(Paoletti,2012) The practice of confirming gender by color began around World War I. In 1918, the American "Home" magazine wrote that boys are suitable for pink, and girls are suitable for blue. They gave out their reason that the pink as a warm color shows the firm and strong power, and the blue is more delicate. In the 1960s, the female liberation movement in the United States began, and many feminists opposed the link between color and gender. In order to eliminate the gender suggestion brought by the color, the young girl put on the pink clothes that used to represent male. Until the 1970s, the relationship between gender and color was deliberately diluted, and even styles of different genders became similar. However, this did not last for a long time. When a new generation of feminists no longer believed that color led to gender identity, the distinction between blue and pink appeared again, but this time the definition is dominated by the business.(Du,2014) Business reports advised department stores that if they want to increase sales, before two years of age, they should separate boys' clothing from girls' clothing and use different color labels to cater gender differences. With the global wave of commercialization, the world gradually began to accept this concept. The results show that the strategy of separating and reclassifying minors by age and gender is very popular in the consumer society.

In addition,there are reasons why businesses choose blue and pink as gender symbols. This is to create a habit based on catering to children's psychology. The main characteristic of three

to four-year-old children's thinking is its concrete image. Children start to understand the world around them by focusing on the superficial characteristics of the shape, color and function of objects. Such characteristics can be related to the Ecological Valence Theory proposed by Palmer and Schloss. They believe that people's preference for abstract colors is determined by their emotional valence for objects closely related to each color. In other words, people like certain colors because they like objects that are closely related to these colors. For example, blue reminds people of the sky, the ocean, and the clear water. Pink, reminiscent of flowers, peaches, and skin. Brown is more likely to remind people of unpleasant things such as dirty soil and excrement. This may be the reason why children still prefer brighter colors after receiving social information. Based on this, merchants use pink and blue, which are widely accepted, as representatives, and use them to distinguish goods with gender.

3. The Influence of Consumerism on Gender Identity

New consumption rules mean new consumption choices. The way to distinguish gender by dressing is to cater to consumerism, because it means that the previous consumer choice needs to be replaced. In a period when economic stimulus is needed to increase consumption, such an approach is in line with the trend of the era. In addition, such suggestive guidance of consumption will not cause consumers to resist, but instead they will believe that such an approach is reasonable and in line with popular values.

On the one hand, distinguishing the characteristics of consumer groups will lead to more categories of consumption, because such rules establish a shopping purpose for consumers that does not exist in itself. Under such circumstances, manufacturers have reason to launch more types of products to cater to the market. Rich categories can stimulate consumers' curiosity more than single categories, thus leading to higher consumption and greater profit margins.

On the other hand, the deepening of gender stereotypes will affect consumers' gender identity, especially young consumers who have not yet established a complete concept. Whether it is to seek a stronger sense of gender identity or stand opposite to such gender rules, it will guide consumers to purchase more. If consumers are at a stage where their gender concept is ambiguous, they often try to buy products with different gender characteristics to seek answers. In fact, without these established rules, consumers will not have this idea.

However, even if businesses allow consumers to accept new consumption rules, such rules are just a habit that can guide consumption and gender identity, but they may not necessarily become preferences.

Sinha conducted an abstract color preference study on adolescents between the ages of 13 and 19 and found that the gender difference was not significant (Sinha & Krishna, 2007). This situation can explain why the adolescents in the works of photographer JeongMee Yoon prefer colors that are contrary to their gender impression. With age, self-selection will gradually replace parental choice, which is a process of getting rid of gender impression. But it is also possible to fall into another gender stereotype unconsciously in order to counter the rules of antigen. The purpose of consumerism is only to guide more and richer consumption, not to change the psychological state of consumers. As long as the masses are used to the consumption rules set by the merchants, their actual preferences are not considered.

4. Conclusion

To conclude, 'buy more' and 'buy variety' are how gender differentiation affects consumption. Meaning is not inherent in the commodity but is produced through actual usage. (Chris, 2000) In people's daily consumption, the unspoken rules of consumerism affect our choices invisibly. They represent a kind of meaning, but they are not necessary and original.

References

- [1] Burkitt, E. (2003) Children's colour choices for completing drawing of affectively characterised topics.
- [2] Chris, B. (2000) Culture Studies: Theory and Practice.
- [3] Du, H.(2014) Gender Has its Own Color. China Academic Journal Electronic Publishing House. Beijing.
- [4] Iijima,M.,Arisaka,O.,Minamoto, F. & Arai, Y. (2001). Sex differences in children' s free drawings: A study of girls with congenital adrenal hyperplasia.
- [5] Karniol, R. (2011). The color of children's gender stereotypes.
- [6] Liu, Y. (2015) The Gender Metaphor Mechanism and the Influence on Consumer Behavior.
- [7] Martin, C. L., Ruble, D. N. & Szkrybalo, J. (2002). Cognitive theories of early gender development.
- [8] Palmer, S. E., & Schloss, K. B. (2010). An ecological valence theory of human color preference. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.
- [9] Paoletti, B. (2012) Pink and Blue: Telling the Boys from the Girls in America.
- [10] Sinha,N.& Krishna,P. (2007) Sex differences in color preference of adolescents.
- [11] Wong,W. & Hines,M. (2015) Effects of Gender Color-Coding on Toddlers'Gender--Typical Toy Play.
- [12] Yang,M.&Hu, L.(2014) Color preferences and characteristics of 3-4 year olds. Research on Preschool Education. Chinese Society of Preschool Education.Changsha.