

Pink & Femininity

Lydia Abuli

TSOC 165



PANTONE®
91 C
Girls just want to have fun



PANTONE®
218 C
GNO



PANTONE®
706 C
Wifey



PANTONE®
1905 C
Girlboss

Was pink always a girl color?

Before parents started dressing their baby boys in blue onesies and the girls in pink onesies all babies no matter their gender wore white dresses "until they were about six" (Grannan). After that age boys and girls would switch between wearing pink and blue as well as other colors.

It wasn't until the 20th century that color began being assigned with gender. The color pink at the time was related to strength and considered a masculine color and in print catalogs they would include pictures of little boys wearing pink outfits. As for girls they decided that blue was a more suitable color because it was viewed as "dainty and delicate". Which fit what they believed the characteristics of a girl should be at the time.



Pink for Girls Blue for Boys

- In the 1890s manufacturers believed if they color coded infant clothes, they could sell more units. However, the manufacturers did not specify which color would be assigned to which gender.
- There is speculation that in the 18th century an art collector and millionaire named Henry Huntington bought two paintings by Thomas Gainsborough and Thomas Lawrence which helped influence people to choose pink for girls and blue for boys. The paintings were called "The Blue Boy" and "Pinkie" as referenced on the right of the slide. Nonetheless, it was not the 1940s when stores began to greatly push the narrative of pink clothes for girls and blue for boys.
- In the 20th century as mentioned above companies and department stores such as Macy's started to get more involved in persuading parents to buy gender specific clothing. A Time magazine article in 1927 claimed that big box stores suggested pink for boys. Due to the press surrounding the pink for boys, campaign customers could now go to department stores and see displays of pink clothing for boys and blue for girls. However, there wasn't uniformity in the push for all department stores to sell pink clothing for boys. This meant that customers could also find displays of blue clothing for boys as well. As time progressed during the Baby Boomers era, department stores began to support the same agenda of pink for girls and blue for boys overall, fiercely persuading parents to choose between those two options. That is how the popularity of the gender association between the two colors came to be in clothing.



Is Pink Changing?

- The meaning of pink has changed over time from starting out as strong and aggressive when referring to boys and then sensitivity and feminine when referring to girls. Pink has taken on a new transformation. Female characters or icons that were not considered strong and independent are now embracing that confidence while wearing pink.
- On the right we can see actress Issa Rae playing President Barbie in an all-pink female run Supreme Court. Just below that picture is Reese Witherspoon as Elle Woods, a Harvard lawyer dressed in pink while the courtroom behind her is dressed in dark tones. There is also the Plastics with Rachel McAdams as Regina George, their leader wearing pink. All these women are in some position of power that is often led by men. They are leaders, lawyers, and influencers of people who look to them for guidance. These movies have not only transformed the meaning of what it means to be feminine and wear pink. It has inspired many women viewers to defy the odds in a traditionally male dominated field without having to fit the ridge description of those positions. For instance, Elle Woods in Legally Blonde has motivated many women to go to law school. Although the movie doesn't give a completely accurate representation of law school, the character didn't have to change the way she presented herself to accomplish her dream. She could still wear a color that is depicted as soft and sensitive. While still presenting herself as confident, capable, and qualified for her position as a lawyer.
- Pink has continued to transform in the 2010s when it was used to symbolize power and reclaim femininity. It was seen in the Women's March in 2017 as "an emblem for a more aggressive power". The meaning behind pink has changed but in a way it has regained its original meaning. Only the ideologies of what women represent and their attachment to pink has changed.



The Exclusion of Pink

Most people may associate breast cancer with women and the famous pink bow. But what about the men who have also had breast cancer. How do they feel about the pink ribbons linked to it? A study published in 2016 aimed to find out what male breast cancer patients thought of the association of pink and femininity in breast cancer. One person in the study claimed that when receiving “feel good” advice on how to cope most of the information was targeted toward women stating things like “put some makeup on to feel good and lift your day” which he said was not “relevant to a man”.

The strong relation to femininity with the pink bows, pink shirts, and more “may have deter men from discussing breast cancer”. The structure created by the notion that girls wear pink has created a problem where men felt that they couldn’t come forward with their diagnosis because of its female connotation. Another quote from the study stated that, “men disclosed their diagnosis immediately to their family but were hesitant to tell extended family and friends”.

Even though pink has evolved over time its social connotation still has a type of exclusion toward males who have breast cancer because they may feel that they don’t belong in that group.



The "Pink" Tax

- For decades women's products have cost more than men's. However, there is now a name for that called the "Pink" tax.
- The "Pink" tax is a markup on goods and services marketed to women. Items that are more known for having pink tax are lotions, razors, liquid soap, and shampoos to name a few. The gap is also known to be larger in personal care items.
- However, the marketing and price tactics do not only discriminate against women, it also adds to the gender wage pay gap. In 2022, American women typically earned \$0.82 for every \$1 a man earned (Pew Research Center). If women have to pay more for the same types of products that men use like razors or deodorant this makes it even harder to close that gap.



Pink is involving

Throughout time pink has changed from a neutral color, to a masculine color, and then to a feminine color. But where is pink now? Both genders are now seen wearing pink, but it is still in a place where if a man wears pink he is "making a statement" instead of simply wearing a color.

As new generations are growing up their opinions on pink are also changing. Pink might be on its way to becoming a neutral color, at least for older individuals. As we reference popular culture, we see on the right Robert Redford in the *Great Gatsby* made a statement and popularized the color pink for men in the 1970s when he wore the Ralph Lauren pink suit. Just beside that picture is the Arsenal soccer team wearing pink as their uniforms for the new season.

Pink has slowly started to become less of a taboo to wear for men and has the potential to take on a neutral stance. However, the gender divide for pink with children not just in terms of clothes but toys and even gender reveals continues to remain.



Annotated Bibliography

1. Grannan, C. (2016). Has Pink Always Been a “Girly” Color?. In Encyclopædia Britannica. <https://www.britannica.com/story/has-pink-always-been-a-girly-color>

This source uncovers the reasons why pink, originally a color assigned to boys, has now become associated with girls and femininity. It also brings attention to the masculine and feminine stereotypes relating to these different genders such as boys are strong, and girls are delicate. I plan to use this source to establish a background to the history of pink and blue with boys and girls to pinpoint how gender roles played a part in relating these colors.

2. Dockterman, E. (2023, August 31). Is Pink Still a “Girl Color”? An Exploration. Time. <https://time.com/6309632/is-pink-girl-color-barbie/>

This annotation discusses the transformation of the meanings attached to pink as decades have passed. It emphasizes the use of pink in women centered protests, the rebranding of pink in the ‘girl boss’ era of the mid 2010s, and if pink has the potential to be a neutral color with the younger generations. I would use this article to describe pink’s slow transition into potentially becoming a neutral color no matter the gender and the pushback of pink and blue for children into a traditional neutral color scheme.

3. Rabbee, Z., & Grogan, S. (2016). Young Men’s Understandings of Male Breast Cancer: “Pink Ribbons” and “War Wounds.” International Journal of Men’s Health, 15(3), 210–217. <https://doi-org.offcampus.lib.washington.edu/10.3149/jmh.1503.210>

This excerpt discusses the strong ties of breast cancer with femininity and how men feel reluctant or excluded when it comes to finding out if they have the diagnosis or declaring that they are a breast cancer survivor. This also showcases how the symbol for breast cancer, a pink ribbon, and the materials given to those who have the diagnosis are centered around feminine characteristics. I plan to use the source to distinguish how pink and gender roles affect society.

4. Bhattacharjee, P. (2018, January 12). The Complicated Gender History of Pink. CNN. <https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/12/health/colorscope-pink-boy-girl-gender/index.html>

This source provides a history on the relations of pink and blue between boys and girls. It also sheds light on how commercialism and media influenced parents to adopt the pink is for girls and blue is for boys agenda. I would like to use this article to discuss media and corporations’ influence on emphasizing the difference between genders and what they “can and can’t wear” and how that affects parents who are buying clothes for their children.

5. Guittar, S. G., Grauerholz, L., Kidder, E. N., Daye, S. D., & McLaughlin, M. (2022). Beyond the Pink Tax: Gender-Based Pricing and Differentiation of Personal Care Products. Gender Issues, 39(1), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12147-021-09280-9>

This annotation analyzes the price discrepancy in items sold to females versus items sold to males such as razors, deodorant, and other personal care items. The raised prices for similar products marketed to women is defined as pink tax which further promotes the idea of traditional gender roles of male and female but also sheds light on the price discrimination that women face when purchasing the everyday items on top of the issue of the gender wage pay gap.

6. Davis, J. T. M., Robertson, E., Lew-Levy, S., Neldner, K., Kapitany, R., Nielsen, M., & Hines, M. (2021). Cultural Components of Sex Differences in Color Preference. Child Development, 92(4), 1574–1589. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.13528>

This study talks about the culture's effect on color preferences among children. It bases its study on different countries around the world like Congo and Australia and deciphers if the preference for pink with girls is due to their own personal choices or because of their environment; and it finds that the environment and the culture around the children greatly persuades their choice in associating pink with females. I would use this source to compare the concept of femininity and pink with cultures that embrace that narrative and cultures that do not.

Annotated Bibliography

Photo Credits:

<https://northbynorthwestern.com/think-pink-a-color-of-femininity-2/>

<https://www.littleyellowbird.com/blogs/news/history-of-pink-and-blue>

<https://www.pinterest.ca/pin/760545455800030413/>

<https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/gainsborough-blue-boy-returns-to-united-kingdom-national-gallery-1234597317/>

<https://customprints.huntington.org/detail/479304/lawrence-sarah-goodin-barrett-moulton-pinkie-1794>

<https://www.teenvogue.com/story/barbie-issa-rae-interview>

<https://divinity.uchicago.edu/sightings/articles/getting-serious-about-legally-blonde>

<https://www.racked.com/2015/3/20/8260341/pink-color-history>

<https://www.today.com/life/holidays/pink-ribbon-meaning-rcna48915>

<https://www.goodhousekeeping.com/life/money/a27409442/what-is-pink-tax/>

<https://fromtailorswithlove.co.uk/the-great-gatsby-1974-the-story-behind-those-beautiful-shirts-92>

https://www.espn.com/soccer/story/_/id/37630510/arsenal-new-pink-2022-23-third-kit-celebrates-local-community