



## **The Psychological Perceptions of Fashion in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century regarding People's Behaviour in response to Colour and Design.**

Dr. Emmanuel Munsamy, PH.D. Educational Psychology

The College of Fashion & Design, Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Email: [mervyn.emmanuel@cf-dubai.com](mailto:mervyn.emmanuel@cf-dubai.com)

“Clothes maketh a man”. This age-old adage has been the mainstay driving the fashion industry for ages. The idea of you are what you wear has been the barometer used by the so-called elitists of society to establish social class and success. Clothing is selected and worn according to our perception of what we deem as style fashionable, as well as convey a message to society about our personality and self-confidence. In considering the effects of fashion there needs to be an understanding about the psyche involved with fashion regarding how does clothing affect the person as well as the perception of society regarding the user? In order to understand the statement of fashion that drives the concept of popularity and acceptance there needs to be an understanding about the psychology of fashion. The aim of this journal is to provide an understanding of the statement fashion is intended to be conveyed through the medium of perception about the language of fashion and provide soundproof that people are perceived and judged by what they wear. The psychology surrounding fashion will be categorised into three sections for the purpose of this study. There will be the establishment of the role of colour in determining its effect on psychology, the socio-psychological impact of clothing and finally gender based equality and perceptions regarding clothing. Finally, we will examine some of the recent fashion shows, trends and brands to assess its effect on the industry. It is clearly evident that fashion and its effect of people provide an important asset in gaining social acceptance and a channel of communication.

Keywords: Fashion, psychology, trends, social, confidence.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Dress is defined as “an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body” (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). The purpose of clothing during early civilization was to keep warm and be modest, fast forward to the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the function of clothing transformed into a highly sophisticated multimillion-dollar industry. Furthermore, it provides distinction amongst the different

social classes, peoples, places and religion. It provides an opportunity for people to demonstrate their dress sense as it shows forth their uniqueness and creativity advertise their personal wealth as it demonstrates position or rank within a group. The use of different styles of clothing demonstrates many aspects of people's lives regarding their economic status, social identity, religion, occupation and gender. This applies to Policemen, military, nurses' doctors, priests' sportsmen and all other professionals. In order to understand the language of fashion and its impact on people there needs to be knowledge of what fashion means to them. "The social psychology of fashion relates to behaviour and perception of the person wearing a particular style as well as reaction of others to the clothes adorned by the person.

"By the late 1950's social science theories from economics, psychology, social psychology, and sociology were being used to study dress and human behaviour (Rudd,1991). According to George Taylor as mentioned previously stated that in most societies fashion emulates specific taste and personal wealth. The Hemline index which was presented in 1926 by Taylor emphasized this. He was of the understanding that fashion had a great impact on the nature of styles, he stated that when a country is in recession, women select longer dresses and the opposite happens during times of prosperity enhancing the mood and tone of the season. The psychology of fashion has a powerful influence on self-confidence and class because what is worn sends a resounding and powerful message to strangers and peers. Researchers have always based their study on the social psychology of dress by focusing on fashion as a variable stimulus, such as the dress effects on the formation of impressions (Lennon & Davies 1989) or the effects of dress on behaviour (Johnson et al. 2008). According to (Damhorst 1984-85) explains that the context within which the dress is perceived and the approval or disapproval of the audience (Burns & Lennon 1993) has a profound effect on the outcome. For the purpose of this study there will be an analysis where focus will be placed on 3 areas that focus on fashion accessories as well.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **The Meaning of Colours in Clothing Psychology**

The vast array of colours is extremely important in creating a sense of joie de vie or disaster. Colour has the ability to enhance the visual and aesthetic appearance of both male and female fashionistas. The use of colour has the ability to convey a message of what we believe, who we are and how we feel. Since the dawn of the Renaissance colour has played a vital role in distinguishing the different classes. Certain colours were only worn by the upper class and royalty. For example, the colour purple was only allowed to be worn by aristocrats, the colour developed a deep symbolic meaning indicates the individuals social and economic status. There have been suggestions that different colours appeal to the senses and have the ability to impact either negatively or positively. The cognitive aspect in

terms of vision and perception indicates what it means to people, women for example select colours that invoke a desired response of being seductive.

Aesthetic value is enhanced by tastefully using colour combinations that are pleasing to the eye and soothing to the soul. In a study conducted by Jastrow about the preference of colour at the world's Colombian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, 4556 visitors were requested to select their favourite colours, they selected bright colours like light blue, red and violet-blue, darker colours like orange and yellow. These colours have proven most popular when Roberts, Owen & Havlicek in an investigation on the judgement of attractiveness of both male and female respondents. It proved that females are attracted to males based on the colours worn by them and they are biased to colour based on the social aspect. It was further determined that red is a preferred colour for victory and success and prosperity whilst black symbolises evil and death. Another negative connotation of the colour black is its association with criminals and violence. 'The colour, style and texture of personal aesthetics express a position regarding gender, ethnicity, race, class, nationality, religion, sexuality and age. People use colour to express their social identity, hierarchy, emotions political leanings, personal identity, self-image, and aesthetic tastes. Clothing colour conveys value, attitudes, personalities and tendencies towards conformity or individuality.

### **The Socio-psychological aspect of clothes**

The portrayal of one's body image plays a vital part in the selection of clothing and perceptions. Clothing is an extension that adds value and self-confidence to a person's body image since society believes you are what you wear. Reed found that an individual's clothing style is influenced by aspects of self-concept, such as identity, value, attitude and mood. According to Sontag and Lee identified the need and importance of body image regarding clothing and included a body image dimension in the Proximity of Clothing to Self-scale. They theorise that the image of one's body may impact the behaviour in relation to clothing that affects self-feelings and body image. The conclusion was that the manner in which we perceive our bodies may affect the style we choose to adopt when selecting clothing. Research using clothing as a variable has indicated that discordance between attire and verbal message or between attire and role/stereotypes can result in less positive judgements by the perceiver. The conclusion from a cognitive perspective means that clothing or other cues are considered as a stimulus that motivates the wearer to select clothing based on the assumption of the observer.

The use of formal wear subscribes to a code of norms that is associated with a different class of people who are professionals and are not easily approachable. Formal attire is considered to be being aloof and socially unapproachable whilst casual clothing is more laid back and related to familiarity and intimacy. Formally clothed people are described as more rational and competent because of social barriers.

In a study conducted by Howlett et.al.,2014 models were photographed in realistic scenarios to prove that women are considered less efficient, the variable used was a camisole which was manipulated for the desired result. The result showed that women who wears revealing clothing are considered incompetent and immoral. It also proved that the correct ensemble of clothing has the potential to demonstrate power. The wearing of pumps and stilettos convey a message of poise and attractiveness as well as convey a message of confidence. The wearing of uniforms conveys a message of power and authority, it provides distinguished distinction and commands respect from the rest of the people. They invoke a sense of safety and protection to those around them. They also portray a sense of reliability, competence, status, intelligence, assistance and authority. The honour and dignity are appreciation for the uniform and not the person wearing the uniform.

There have also been comparisons made between behavioural changes as it was found that people displayed more aggression when wearing black sportswear as well as wearing a cap and hood as when compared to women wearing a white nurses uniform who were considered less aggressive. Adam & Galinsky coined the term: “unclothed cognition” which is based on the phenomenon where traits and characteristics are adopted which is associated by the type of clothing that is worn. During interviews Forseth discovered that candidates who wore dark coloured suits for the interview were discovered to be more confident and acceptable than their counterparts, who were dressed in a lighter coloured dress portraying femininity. The person wearing the suit was most likely to be hired for the post.

### **Gender Equality/Inequality in relation to Clothing**

There has been an age-old bias towards Female fashion for centuries. There is a general perception that fashion is essentially stereotyped as for women whilst male fashion has been limited more so for older men population. Another reason is that fashion has culturally being considered as for females only. Recent studies on Menswear and current trends in Masculine fashion reveals that it should be studied intently as well because modern men of all ages are evidently more interested in fashion and should be given the same amount of consideration as with feminine fashion. It has been estimated that men have more interest and self-awareness of fashion than women in terms of their personal style and presentation. It is with this in mind that one needs to examine both male and female to understand the perception of their interest and ideas about their selection of clothing. Regardless of whether it is male or female fashion, the concept remains that fashion choices affect one's self confidence and style as well as the perception of others towards their dress and attire as well as their response and behaviour towards the person. The concept of “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” applies in this case where everything is influenced by this from watching a game to the interviewer's perception of the candidate's ability to function effectively at the job position. In a study on the preference of dressing in older people, Chowdary and Spruiell & Jernigan suggests that they prefer

chique clothing that is well tailored, impressionable and modern. They pay special attention to proper size and cost of the clothing. The type of fabric, comfort and suitability is also a major consideration. The psychological aspect of elderly men and women's fashion interest and need for clothing, type of clothing and opinion and experience while shopping in Hong Kong was studied by Au, lam Ho. The men preferred functional sensible clothing with toned down colours like white, black and blue. The women needed to be noticed and preferred warm colours like red.

The presentation of professionals such as general practitioners is extremely important in portraying a sense and impression of credibility and efficiency. Hartman et al. investigated the kind of impression patients had on doctors' attire in terms of their confidence level towards them being experts. A survey was conducted with images of six models with different styles of clothing such as casual, formal, semi-formal and professional. Most of the participants preferred female doctors in a white coat regardless of their age. Their male counterparts were preferred as wearing semi-formal attire in young and middle age doctors. There has been a study by Stokes proved that gender and sexuality played a significant role towards the success in fashion design. There was evidence that gay designers were well sought after and very popular working with high end fashion houses.

## **The Social Psychology of Fashion**

### **Methods**

The aim is to find any theoretical research used to conduct studies in this area as well as to provide a background of research study in this area and emphasize key results as well as discover any further possibilities of further studies in this area. In studying the subject focus was placed on the dress as a variable: for example, the discovering the wow factor of the outfit on acquiring the desired effect, attributions and social acceptance. Using the provocative dress as a stimuli, the intention was to determine the effect it would have on the general audience based on the findings of Edmonds and Cahoon (1986) where it was discovered that women who wore the provocative dress were negatively perceived than women who were modestly dressed. In order to establish if perceptions have changed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century questionnaires were handed out to male and female respondents between the age group of 18 to 30. The intention was to determine if perceptions have changed towards provocative clothing.

### **Results**

There was no specific theory guiding the research except to judge if perceptions had changed over time. According to the results with the model wearing a provocative dress was rated more attractive, appealing sexually and most likely to be experienced sexually, more attractive and less faithful in marriage. Contrary to belief they also emerged as more likely to engage in sex for personal gain and

more likely to be raped wearing a conservative dress. It was also discovered that women and men had similar opinions with the men being more emphatic in their judgement. There were two samples of clothes provided one revealing and the other conservative. Participants rated the sample model on a series of physical traits. When compared it was discovered that the people with revealing clothing were rated more sexy, seductive, assertive, promiscuous and insincere and inconsiderate. They were more prone to incidents of sexual assaults and harassment. Women living in cultures that are steeped in liberalism were subjected to objectification where they are dehumanised and viewed merely as objects, a means to an end. In a study to experiment the objectification theory, Triggerman and Andrew (2012) conducted studies on the effects of clothing on self-perceptions and self-objectifications, state of body shame, body dissatisfaction and negativity of mood. Unlike the previous studies, participants were not asked to try on a bathing suit or sweater to be evaluated. The participants were instructed to think about what thoughts, feelings and imagination would be invoked in the different scenarios. The four examples used included thoughts about wearing a swimsuit in public, wearing one in a dressing room, wearing a sweater in public and wearing a sweater in the change room. It was discovered that merely thinking about the different ideas caused a higher state of self-objectification by invoking a sense of opinion through imagination.

### **The Red Dress Research**

Previous studies in fashion psychology have not included any emphasis on the colour of the dress. There has already been evidence of the importance of colour as discussed previously in this study. In the 1980's and 1990's to further reiterate the importance of colours on the perception of others, some researchers explored the importance of colour (Abramov 1985; Francis and Evans 1987; Hilliker and Rodgers; Radeloff 1991). It was discovered that the focus person was received positively dressed in another colour instead of their preferred colours. Managers of clothing stores were questioned regarding the use of the colour analysing systems and discovered an impact on the industry, but it was not significant and there was discord amongst the managers regarding integrity related to systems. Furthermore, Abramov criticized the colour analysis because he believed it to be vague and confusing as there was no evidence or documented research to validate the argument. Another flaw according to Abramov was that there was no evidence-based study regarding the theory of colour affect the psyche of colour. In 1990 a theory was propagated about this subject (Elliot & Maier, 2007) which was referred to as colour-in context theory.

The concept of this theory is that as there are many components that affect the social perception of people, as with the colour theory concept; conveys meaning in a manner that the perception of colour varies according to the context. Colour has been used to guide behaviour and is related to repeated pairings with communication or systems (a red stop sign ascribed to danger), or a code blue indicating a life-threatening situation or a yellow sign indicating biohazards. The colour red is associated with

sensuality (Gueguen and Acob, 2013). People respond to what they see the biological preferences elicit responses based on colour which either attracts or repulses them. There is evidence that red has been perceived as the most dramatic colour in the kaleidoscope.

To some it is believed to be a bad omen whilst other believes it stirs up and excites the senses providing confidence, pizzazz and popularity. In an experiment conducted by (Guegan, 2012) five female hitchhikers wearing different coloured t shirts were left on the side of the road to find a ride, the women drivers were oblivious to the colour of the T shirts yet the male drivers paid special attention to the one that wore a red T shirt whilst ignoring the others. Online shoppers also gravitated to clothing that wear red in colour as opposed to those of any other colour (Guegan & Jacob, 2013).

Continued investigation with regards to the psychology of dress is the interaction between the dress and the person. In order to further understand this, research was conducted on individual perceptions between the person and body investigation. Emphasis is placed on the reaction of the body regarding modifications and alterations. The first part has to do with body modifications that may cause a negative impact with those that do not; and the second part which is using social perceptions and the influence of body language in dictating body image. The perception of feminine beauty according to western standards is gauged by how slim the woman is and with Males; it is according to their chiselled facial features and muscular physique. (Karazia et al. 2013). Recognition of social standards projected by multiple media platforms has been highlighted as the main cause in perceptions of what is acceptable and fashionable. People who have fallen short of this ideology through assumptions, have resorted to other methods of coping with the so called deficiency which includes dangerous self-destructive behaviour such as eating disorders that result in Anorexia and Bulimia in Women (Cafri et al.2005a), and the enhancement of muscles and modified eating plans in Men(Tylka, 2011), young adults may make use of the practice of body piercing and tattooing and sometimes tanning.

A study conducted to examine the effects of external sources and media projections regarding the perceptions of body image has indicated that misrepresented standards for acceptable cultural and social norms cause men and women to experience greater dissatisfaction with their bodies (Blond 2008:Grabe et al.,2008).The results of a Meta-analysis of real life situations indicated that the norms did not have a broad spectrum of definitions, very structured and mainly for females. The women were more pressurized to fit into specific norms of appearance which they believed could be attained with effort, time and money. The men did not feel as pressurized to ascribe to the demands of presumed social norms (Buote et al., 2011). Whilst there has been much research done into self-perceptions regarding clothing worn, Hannover and Kuhnen (2002) were interested in researching the cause and effect of wearing particular types of clothing. The first test was to examine how priming

might have a role in understanding clothing impact on one's perception. They found that clothing definitely primed and stirred up specific categories of self-knowledge.

## **INTERACTION WITH OTHERS AND DRESS**

The research into this was to establish what the perceptions were towards dress as well as the appearance of it. Symbolic interaction was used as a framework by Blumer, Mead and Stone in the early years. The main question was "What common set of symbols and understandings has emerged to give meaning to people's interactions?" (Patton, 2002). There were three premises that emerged, the first one was regarding our behaviour regarding things such as physical objects or other people is formed by how meaningful they are to them; the second one is obtained by our social interaction with others (Blumer) and the third premise is regarding interpersonal communication with others. Stone (1962) it ascribes to wearing clothing to convey a desired message to people as well as the perception of one's confidence with a particular dress style.

## **CONCLUSION**

Studies in psychology had suggested that our identities and feelings greatly influence the type of clothing we choose to wear. The concepts of Psychology that may suggest what causes people to love brands are emotional decision making and identity formation. There are many uses for clothing which include protection from environmental issues like the weather, provision of hygienic barriers and acceptance into social norms. It can be used as a type of adornment as well as to express personal taste and style. It is safe to assume that clothing conveys a lot about the user especially after research on this paper. There has been evidence that colour plays a vital role in determining peoples' perceptions and behavioural tendencies with regard to fashion and style. It was established through research that psychology plays a vital role in the fashion industry. Media plays a vital role in causing people to dress in a specific manner in order to be accepted by others in society.

The meaning and communication of colours in terms of clothing psychology has been clearly established, determining that the colour red was the most prominent colour to attract attention especially to the male population. Colour is an important element in order to determine attractiveness or unattractiveness. The use of colour has now become a very important tool for communication. Clothing colours are worn by people to establish who they are, how they feel and what they believe in; it is further used as an expression to relay their emotions, social identity, self-image and aesthetic tastes. The research method used in data processing provided a systematic and analytical review of information regarding the psychology of clothing. The databases that were used was primarily magazines and journals, books and conference papers. The meaning of colours and body image as well as social aspects of fashion psychology has been clearly defined.



It has been established that colour and people's perceptions to stimuli externally greatly impacts their choice of clothing and the colours they choose. Society has placed a high premium on peoples' desire and ability to decide if they want to either fit in or stand out. The desire to feel socially accepted has resulted in people resorting to extreme measures which are detrimental to their health and wellbeing. Society has dictated, through the use of social platforms what they believe is the acceptable way to dress in order to be part of the in crowd.

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