

Television  
advertisings influence  
on gender roles  
sociology essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The television advertising industry has changed the way Americans raise their children in the United States. Generally, pink is for girls and blue is for boys...these concepts have been around for ages. “ Color palette as bold or pastel and predominant color are often an important aspect of gendered learning that allows children to begin to associate objects, including toys, with one gender or the other” (Karniol 2011). Within media, the history of advertising has evolved from black and white televisions of the past to the color televisions that exist now. Although advertising promotes new products that may enhance your lifestyle, emphasis is placed on gender and influences the way children think. My unobtrusive research will focus on the influence and evolution of television ads from the 1960s through the 1980s, and how it contributes to gender roles.

To understand television’s influence on society, one must realize how society affects people. Society exerts influence on its members through certain identifiable structural features and historical circumstances (David 2011). This is what we call socialization. “ Socialization is a process through which society learns how to act according to the rules and expectations of a particular culture” (Newman 2011: 57). Through socialization, individuals learn what role to play in society. Socialization is a lifelong process and the roles that we play differ based on the situations that we are in. There are variables included in this process such as “ family friends, peers, teammates, teachers, schools, religious institutions and the media which are called agents of socialization” (Newman 2011: 59). “ Many agents of socialization can influence our self-concepts, attitudes, tastes, values, emotions, and behavior” (Newman 2011). Television is a major influence which helps

society determines what purchases to make by giving a false reality of being part of a glorious total experience. For example, in the 80s, there was the Cabbage Patch Doll craze. Each doll was unique because it came with a name and its very own birth certificate, they were marketed as one of a kind dolls there were no two alike. Many people purchased them for their children so that they would be able to flaunt their purchase. The purchase of a Cabbage Patch doll led to many aggressive interchanges during holiday seasons. Gradually the uproar died down and the popularity faded.

Undeniably, advertising encourages the sense of urgency to its viewers. Many ads use celebrities such as actors, singers, and young models, as a spectacle. This notion creates an instant need to the consumer so they can have what their favorite celebrity is promoting. Most consumers of media want to feel as close to the particular medium as possible. Aware of the effectiveness of advertising, companies are willing to spend billions of dollars to engage viewers in profitable commercials. Commercial cost can run anywhere from a couple of hundred dollars to millions of dollars for a 30-second spot depending on network, time of day and if there is a special event such as a Presidential Campaign, the Olympics or the Super Bowl.

Television is a luxury that some Americans refuse to live without. In America the average household has at least two televisions. One can see how detrimental television is by the general expectation that, "if it is on television, than it must be true." Majority of truths that people perceive is provided by major networks broadcasted on television. "The average American over the age of two spends more than 34 hours a week watching live television, says a new Nielsen report - plus another three to six hours

watching taped programs making TV a major agent of socialization” (Hinkley 2012). Advertising has dramatically changed, prior to the 1960s; television was black and white which made the ads neutral because you could not see the color of the product that is being advertised. The ads painted the picture in the absence of color. In the 60s, television commercials were more kid friendly; the shows that the children watched introduced them to the products. The Howdy Doody show which was very popular at that time, introduced everyone to products ranging from Hostess cakes, wonder bread, etc. Those were the less-intrusive days of advertising.

According to Newman, “ gender designates masculinity and femininity, the psychological, social, and cultural aspects of maleness and femaleness” (Newman 2011: 65). The concept of gender has been around for a long time. Gender separates males from females. Shockingly enough, we select a gender even before a child is born. For example, if the baby kicks too hard, we assume that it is a boy or try to make an educated guess based on how the stomach is sitting. When the baby is in the womb, some pregnant mothers use different voices depending on if they anticipate a boy or a girl. One may speak softly perhaps if it’s a girl and louder if it’s a boy. According to Kimmel (2011), “ during the first six months of a child’s life, mothers tend to look at and talk to girl infants more than boy infants, and mothers tend to respond to girls’ crying more immediately than they do to boys’.” We use color preference on birth announcements “ It’s a boy” or “ It’s a girl” and one cannot forget the nursery decorations. As stated before, the color selection for the two primarily recognized genders are usually the standard pink or blue.

According to research conducted by Rheingold and Cook (1975) they observed toys and other objects present in one to six-year-old boys' and girls' bedrooms. The results indicated that boys and girls had the same number of books, musical items, stuffed animals, and the same amount of furniture. However, boys had a greater variety of toys, and they tended to have more toys overall. There were also differences in the kinds of toys that boys and girls possessed. In a typical boy's room one may find a vast array of vehicles such as cars trucks and trains and sports equipment like footballs, basketballs, baseballs. On the other hand, a typical girl's room may contain dolls, doll houses, stuffed animals and coincidentally, toys that reflect domestic roles such as vacuums, toy washer and dryers, and kitchen sets. The differences also reflect the parent's acceptance of said gender roles by purchasing these items.

In any event, color preferences for genders are evolving. Clark (2012) noted " in the 1920s children wore white, boys and girls wore dresses, and there was no social issue. When the color assignments among boys and girls evolved in the '20s, the colors were reversed: pink was for boys and blue for girls. It was not until around the 1940s that the colors flip-flopped to the assignment we recognize today. Clearly, America has entered a new era where society is slowly loosening gender stereotypes. According to Kahlenberg and Hein, they found " that when commercials on Nickelodeon were mostly pastel, they had only girls in them and pastel colored toys tended to be shown with girls. In contrast, boys tended to be dressed wearing bright or neon colors in these advertisements" (Kahlenberg and Hein 2010). As an illustration, while channel surfing through television shopping

networks for clothes, the colors of the clothes is what draws attention to the product and gives the urgency to make your purchase without feeling or trying on the clothes before they sell out of the item. “ Of course, color is not the only factor that is important when companies try to sell a product, but it is one factor that attracts the customer, and if the wrong color is used the product will be less likely to sell” (KILINÇ 2011). Therefore, advertising is playing a big part in mainstreams America.

Consequently, gender stereotypes are introduced to society through television ads in which advertisers push these stereotypes onto children. While watching television, children learn social behaviors and their roles by imitating what they see. To demonstrate this, there was a recent YouTube video showing of a young boy about five years old playing with an Easy-Bake Oven. The interviewer asked what he wanted for Christmas and the boy replied “ I want a dinosaur and an Easy-Bake Oven” he went on to say that boys cannot play with an Easy-Bake Oven because there are only girls in the commercials” (YouTube 2012). His visual of the commercial made him able to determine if a particular toy that is available to all children are made to be played with by either the girl or the boy. Children who cannot read may know exactly what aisle is for them in any department store or toy store based on the colors that are more prevalent on that aisle. Girls search for pink to find dolls and Easy-Bake Ovens and boys find blue and acquires cars and trucks. The boys find out at an early age that it is not masculine to play with dolls. Unfortunately this is reinforced by the parents and these lessons are embedded in the children which enforce gender roles.

In modern day, television has changed the concept of gender with the acceptance of new gender roles. Reality shows are now bringing to light individuals who do not conform to standard gender roles such as members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community (LGBT). “

Lesbian/Gay is a term that is used to describe a woman/man who has an emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to members of one’s own sex” (Committee 2012). “ Some women also define themselves as gay rather than lesbian; it is a generic term for lesbian and gay sexuality” (Teeside Positive Action 2012). “ A bisexual person is someone who is sexually and/or emotionally attracted to people of all genders. Many people who experience a wide range of feelings towards both men and women use the term bisexual” (Woodhouse and Roberts 2008-2012). A transgender is someone who insists that they were born in the wrong body. While they have the body of one gender, transgender people have the conscience of the opposite gender (Bassplayer 2010).

Television has introduced us to programs that are available for members of LGBT community and others to view such as Queer Eye for the Straight guy and The New Normal. The main characters of these shows are gay and have problems like heterosexuals do. For instance in Queer Eye, we witness the trials and tribulations they face as gay men in American which lessen the shock value because society can relate. The New Normal is a sitcom in which the two characters are trying to have a baby to complete their family via a surrogate mother, which is the same route some heterosexual couples take if they are unable to conceive. Also color roles are shifting within genders.

Nowadays, men are more susceptible to wear bright colors such as pink. “

<https://assignbuster.com/television-advertisings-influence-on-gender-roles-sociology-essay/>

Rather than equating masculinity and femininity with stereotypical gender traits and roles, masculinity and femininity can be re-conceptualized in terms of the gender identity construct, and, thus, as part of one's self concept" according to Hoffman. (2000). For example, artists such as Justin Bieber may wear colors that are usually categorized as feminine colors and on the other hand Janelle Monae can frequently be seen wearing a dark suit and tie displaying a more masculine look. Neither Justin nor Janelle is viewed by the public as a member of these categories. Role models are now being accepted regardless of gender by the newer generation although there are people that are not willing to conform.

Americans see a more diverse group of people doing diverse thing on television. Boys are no longer stigmatized if they wear pink. Many toy companies are introducing more gender neutral toys for children to identify and play with. According to Auster, companies have the ability to market toys in a more gender-neutral way, such that advertisements for action figures and cooking toys could portray both boys and girls playing with them. (2012) Companies could also modify the toys to make some of them more likable to both boys and girls. This will offer change, but it proves the unrelenting influence of certain colors as gender markers. If children played with a wider assortment of toys, they might grow with an open repertoire of cognitive, physical, and social skills (Auster 2012). Offering children opportunities to develop their interpersonal skills would be a worthy objective, and acceptance of toys that are for both genders would help this come to fruition.