

Gender-Specific Colours of Textile and Clothing Products throughout History

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Abstract

This study is focused on the development of textile and clothing colour for different genders namely male and female. Colours used for female and male consumers were surveyed across history starting from prehistory passing through Greece and Roman civilisations, medieval period, eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries ending by the twenty first century. It is evident that the development of colour trend for different genders was reflected in its range and specifications. It is apparent that progress of civilisations, technology and economy highly affecting colour trends generally and its selection for specific gender especially. It is interesting to find that colours started with prehistory of similar materials and colours for men and women and developed across history to make significant difference between both genders. Lately, there have been calls for gender equality including textile and clothing colour design.

1. Introduction

Colour is one of the basic design elements used in making textile and clothing products. Colour trend is an observable and signifying element defining and determining fashion design. It has been always tied to an era, product or style (Buddy, 1992). Its selection is affected by several aspects and factors which have been changed across history. These factors include technological, social, psychological, political, gender and cultural aspects. Therefore, investigating and tracing the development of colour design in the field of textile and clothing design is essential for designers and manufacturers. This is in order to competently understand the selection process of colours for designs under the making process and efficiently forecast colours used in textile and clothing design in the future.

This study is concerned with the development of colour in textile and clothing design across history. The impact of gender on textile and clothing colours is the main focus of this study. It is limited with main civilizations across history. For the contemporary era, international trends related to gender is discussed. The findings and implications of this study will be supportive for designers, manufactures and marketers in the textile and clothing industries. It is going to provide workers engaged in textile and clothing industry with a clear guide of the relationship between all aspects signifying an era and gender specific colours.

2. Implications and discussion

2.1 Prehistoric period

Archaeologists suggest that humans would have begun wearing clothes since 100000 to 500000 years ago. However, sewing clothes would have begun 40000 years ago and dyeing fibres would be dated back to 36000 BC. In prehistory, men and women wore clothes of similar colours and materials. There is no evidence for different textile and clothing colours in this period. Natural materials such as fibres' plants and animals' skin were used (see Figure 1). This means that natural colours including different tones of beige, grey and brown colours were used (History-of-clothing., 2018).

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Figure 1 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in Prehistoric age (Shayori-Dutta, 2014)

2.1 Ancient Egypt

Ancient Egyptians used colour pigment in producing their art products such as accessories, wall paintings. They employed a range of colours including variations of black, white, blue, green, yellow and red. Over centuries, their clothes were made of undyed linen fibres (Boddy-Evans, 2017). Small amounts of silk, wool, cotton and animal skin were found in ancient Egyptian clothes. This shows that these materials were not widely used in ancient Egypt. Differences between unlike classes and gender were expressed by style of clothing rather than its colour (see Figure 2). Non Egyptians were shown in ancient Egyptian art wearing dyed clothes (Brier & Hobbs, 2008; Crystalinks, 2018). The dress worn by ancient Egyptians was white colour. However, ancient Syrian people wore dresses of dark blue and dark red colours (David, 1999).



Figure 2 Sample of textile and clothing colours used in Ancient Egypt (Kreiter, 2017)

2.1. Classical antiquity

This is the period in which Greece and Roman civilizations flourished and had impact on Mediterranean culture.

2.1.1. Ancient Greece

Greek men and women used to wear plain white clothes made of linen and wool i.e. himation and chiton. However, a variety of colours was used namely red, yellow, blue, and green. Moreover, ornaments of red colour especially were employed. The difference between men and women was presented in the clothing length (Hello-World-Civ, 2015). Elaborated Fabrics of bright colours were rarely used. For clothing found from the 8th century BC, both men and women were significantly similar (Adkins & Adkins, 2014). Some colours such as purple and yellow were used rarely because of its high cost (Figure 3 and Figure 4).



Figure 3 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in ancient Greece for men



Figure 4 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in ancient Greece for women clothing (Albert Kretschmer-painters and costumer to the Royal Court Theatre, 2010)

2.1.2. Ancient Rome

For women garments, gold and yellow colours were used. Black colour was the colour of mourning used by ancient Greek and also taken over by ancient Rome. It was used for men as well because of its darkness. Gender difference related to garment's colour was insignificant and more associated to being an outer or inner garment. Outer garment was described by masculinity and inner garments by femininity. Cross-dressing was significantly used in Greek and roman dressing. However, some pieces of garments were significant for either females or males according to situation (see Figure 5 and Figure 6).

Wool and flax were used in Greek and Roman civilizations. The usage of old silk and cotton fabrics were adopted (Cleland, Davies, & Llewellyn-Jones, 2007). Bright colours were developed and used in women clothes (Wonder., 2017).



Figure 5 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in ancient Rome for women (Wonder., 2017)



Figure 6 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in ancient Rome for men (Wonder., 2017)

2.2 Medieval period (5th- 15th century)

The medieval period began with the fall of Roman Empire in the west. Mainly, three colours made of vegetables dyestuff were used in clothing at this period. These are red, yellow and blue. A variety of tints was produced by mixing these three colours and metallic mordents (see Figure 7 and Figure 8). Men's dresses were coloured in blue and yellow. Later in the 14th and 15th century, vermillion red and light greenish blue were used (Gage, 1978).



Figure 7 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in the medieval period for women (Embleton & Howe, 1995)

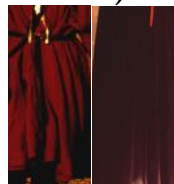


Figure 8 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in the medieval period for men (Embleton & Howe, 1995)

2.3 The 18th century

In the eighteenth century, men and women were not freely allowed to set their identity including clothing colours. This century has witnessed a wave of modernity. Females were concerned with femininity of their clothes which is associated to seeking for freedom and the emergence of Parisian fashion (Morag, 2007). It is evident from Figure 9 that women in the 18th century wore almost light natural and earth colours and dark brown and light blue were worn as well. On the other hand, men wore almost dark colours i.e. blue and brown (see Figure 9 and Figure 10).



Figure 9 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in the 18th century for women



Figure 10 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in the 18th century for men (Behance, 2016)

2.4 The 19th century

In the nineteenth century, colours of men's clothing changed significantly making obvious difference from women's dresses. Highly decorated clothes (similar to women's) disappeared in sake of plain clothes. This is considered an obvious and evident variation from previous 17th and 18th centuries. Men wore woollen suits of dark colours such as grey, blue and black symbolizing serious business. Trousers of stripy pattern were used. So, by late 19th century pastel colours were very fashionable.

For women clothing- in the late 19th century-new synthetic fabric types and dyes were developed and added to natural materials of muted colours already used. This was reflected in clothing of more vividness, intense and darkness. The available range of colours included dark hues such as black, brown, bronze and blue. A range of greenish colours were available such as green, blue green, emerald, olive and linden green. Reddish colours were employed by women in their clothes such as orange, pink, coral, claret red and violet. Moreover, these colours were combined making pattern design and became popular. Black colour became a fashionable colour for female clothing rather than being used only for mourning clothes. Besides, muted colours i.e. grey and beige, and intense colours i.e. yellows and gold were employed (see Figure 11 and Figure 12). Different fabric types and contrasting colours were mixed in one dress (Buddy, 1992).



Figure 11 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in the 19th century for women



Figure 12 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in the 19th century for men (Historical-Accuracy-Reincarnated, 2017)

2.5 The first half of the twentieth century (1900-1940)

The twentieth century witnessed strong alteration in using colour for clothing. This is due to social, economic and political circumstances which developed art movements influencing peoples' perception and usage of colour.

In the beginning of twentieth century, the art movement of impressionism (started in late 19th century) pushed and inspired clothing makers and people of using miscellaneous and various colours in a novel way.

Figures 13 and 14 show the development of clothing colours through the first half of the twentieth century namely from 1900 to 1940. It is evident from Figure 13 and 14 that women colours were developed more significantly than men’s colours(Buddy, 1992). Men’s colours were dark muted 1900-1940. However, women’s colours developed through these decades to include brighter colours in late decades than early ones(Buddy, 1992).

Due to World War 2 (1939-1945), new technologies and fabrics were developed and natural materials such as leather became uncommon. From 1900 to 1949, there was significant change in fashion. New wide range of intense synthetic dyes was developed dyeing synthetic silk (rayon) and nylon. By the 1920s, the traditional white was ignored and bright colours were adopted (Hewitt, Kellogg, Peterson, Vaughan, & Payne, 2008). By the 1930s colours inspired by Van Gogh artworks and surrealism were used. Later in 1940s, contrasted colours of dark pastels and bright colours were used followed by pink and turquoise colours in 1950s. The black colour dominated fashion in the 1980s(Buddy, 1992).



Figure 13 Samples of textile and clothing colours used 1900-1940for women(Styles-Matter, 2014)



Figure 14 Samples of textile and clothing colours used 1900-1940for men(Vintage Dancer.com, 2018a, 2018b)

2.6 The 1950s

By this decade men wore neutral subdued colours. This shows that attention was focused on achieving success at work, society, economy and policy rather than following new fashion trends. On the other hand women had wider range of colours as they were more engrossed than men in showing beautiful appearance (Hewitt et al., 2008). Women clothes were coloured in dark solid colours (see Figure 15 and Figure 16). Moreover, bright printed pattern inspired by tropical elements were introduced. White and pastels were used for winter and spring seasons respectively (Pandey, 2016). On the other hand, men's wear were coloured in mixed blues, browns and greys (Hewitt et al., 2008).



Figure 15 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in the 1950s for women (Landscape-change-Program, 2018; VintageDancer.com, 2014)

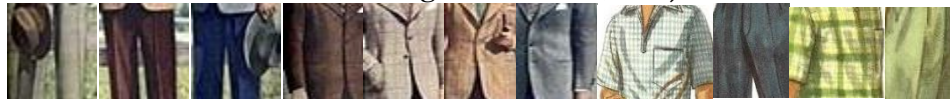


Figure 16 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in the 1950s for men (Fifties-Web, 2018)

2.7 The 1960s

Pastel and neutral colours such as peach, pink, yellow, beige, and cream were associated with femininity. By the late 1960s, strong colours and increased ornaments using variety of decoration techniques were taken over (Pandey, 2016). Published research work considered colour associations as blue with masculinity and pink with femininity (Laurence, Charles, Reginald, & Kyung-Il, 1991). In this decade, designers increased the range of men colours by adding bold colours such as navy, burgundy and green and illusive patterns to classical colours i.e. black and white (see Figure 17 and Figure 18). Dark colours i.e. black, blue were the popular colours used. Slight usage of bright strong colours such as pink, green, and red either solid or patterned using paisley and polka dots was noticed in this period (Hewitt et al., 2008).



Figure 17 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in the 1960s for women (Stylishwife, 2013)

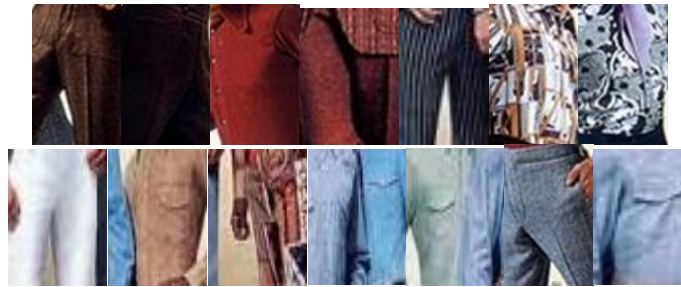


Figure 18 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in the 1960s for men (Stylishwife, 2013)

2.8 The 1970s

As this decade progressed, different solid neutral earth tones of beige and brown colours were popular for women clothes. Natural fibres were used extensively in this decade (Pandey, 2016). Men continued with black as classical colour and added pastel blue, salmon, green, rust and orange. Large scale pattern on ties of bright colours were introduced. Casual were introduced in this decade represented by T-shirt (bright and dull colours) and denim (blue and other) fabric (see Figure 19 and Figure 20). Dark colours dominated men's palette. However, mixing dark and bright colours using different pieces of garment or on one garment were potentialities (Hewitt et al., 2008).

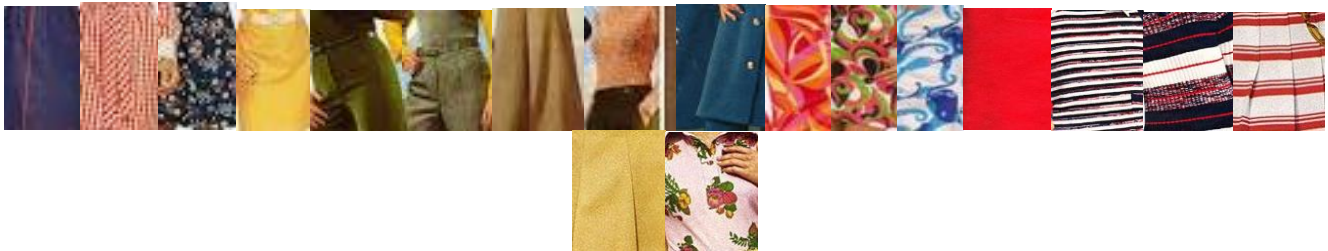


Figure 19 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in the 1970s for women (Lowbrow, 2014; RetroWaste, 2018; Treacherous-minx, 2010)



Figure 20 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in the 1970s for men (MeTVStaff, 2016; The-Advertising-Archives, 2018)

2.9 Late twentieth century

2.9.1 1980s

The usage of natural fibres and colours (earth tones and soft pastels) continued in this decade. Besides, sparkly strong colours were used reflecting strong personality of women. These colours include emerald green and candy-apple red to royal blue and deep purple. On the other hand conservative and classical personalities held on pastel shades of pink, green and blue colours. Mixing and matching black colour with pastel and bright shades were used. The range of colours used ranging from pastel passing through strong to reach fluorescent colours. Printed pattern on women clothes adopted alternative inspiration resources including animal and geometrical shapes. For men clothes, pastel and bright colours were used by some men. Dark colours were used including basic black, navy and brown colours (see Figure 21 and Figure 22). Denim clothes still used by men however washed look was used by young men (Hewitt et al., 2008).

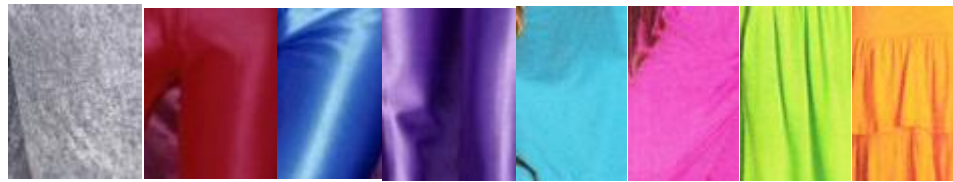


Figure 21 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in the 1980s for women (Adelaide-magazine, 2016)



Figure 22 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in the 1980s for men (Mens-Fashion-Magazine, 2016)

2.9.2 The 1990s

For women clothes, this decade was signified by using black colour. Moreover, neutral colours were used in addition to pastel colours. In late 1990s, bright and vivid colours were adopted. Classical black suits and white shirts dominated men’s clothes in this decade. Dark colours were used for men’s clothes. Shirts had different colours and patterns affected by social and business level (see Figure 23 and Figure 24). This is varied from white and light colours of high end to stripy pattern for lower end (Hewitt et al., 2008).

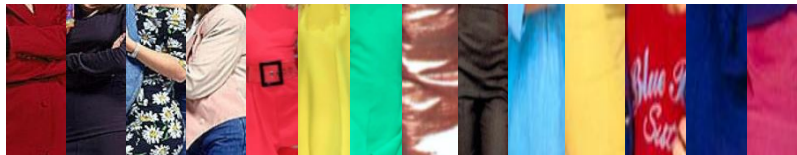


Figure 23 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in the 1990s for women (Carreon, 2017; Fashion-Ideas, 2018; NYC stylist, 2015)

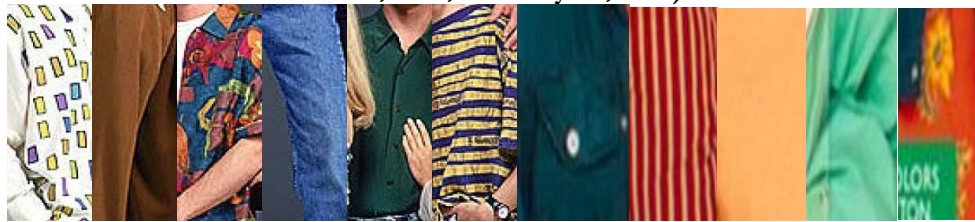


Figure 24 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in the 1990s for men (Carreon, 2017; Fashion-Ideas, 2018)

2.9.3 The 2000s

In the 2000s, boxy shapes and loud bold prints were used for designing men’s clothes. In terms of colour, pastel natural colours were used in colouring men’s clothing (The-Idle-Man, 2016). Coloured jeans were developed in the clothing industry (Babcock, 2018). For women clothing, range of colours used became wider than before. Floral and geometrical prints were adopted. Pastel, bright and dark colourways were included (see Figure 25 and Figure 26).

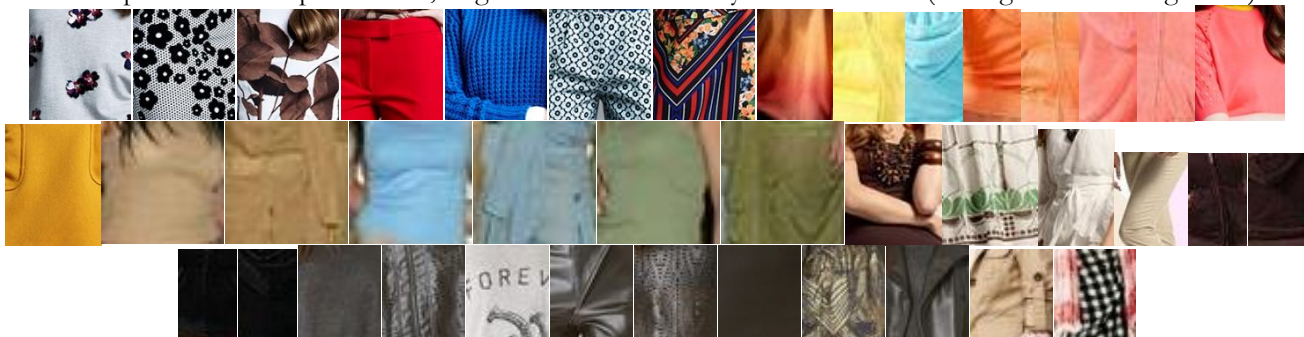


Figure 25 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in the 2000s for women (Fashion-Style, 2018)



Figure 26 Samples of textile and clothing colours used in the 2000s for men(Fashion-Style, 2018)

2.10 Children clothes

Children Gender difference regarding textile and apparel products was not exist until 1918. White colour was used for both genders. Before 1918 children wore white clothes. Using pink and blue colours for gender difference is a clear example of gender stereotyping in textile and apparel products. In 1918, it was suggested by a trade journal to employ pink and blue colours for boys and girls respectively. This was based on their strength as the stronger colour i.e. pink was suggested for boys and the more delicate one i.e. blue was used for girls (Maglaty, 2011). This has begun in 1918 and in 1927 leading US stores recommended using these colours in this way which was established after 1940 and became a trend in 1960s, opposed by women activists in 1970s, returned in the 1980s. The exploration of test determining baby's sex made family members do shopping of baby's clothes in advance based on its sex. There is a tendency removing this significance based gender (Pandey, 2016).

2.11 Genderless colours

Gender equality has become increasingly an interest, demand, urgent and controversial issue around the world. In 1824, new Harmony socialist utopian community allowed both men and women to wear trousers. In late 19th century, the right of women to wear trousers under their dresses was claimed. In 1960s, unisex appearance and clothes were used to signify social classes including hippies (Stylishwife, 2013). Unisex clothes such as denim have emerged. All these trends were carried out aside from fashion industry. Fashion industry would exploit these social revolution and trends to make profit.

3 Conclusions

This study was concerned with investigating the development of colour trends based on gender with special focus on textile and clothing products. In ancient Egypt whitening fibres was developed to make white linen dresses for women and men. Colouring of clothing materials were progressed in Greece and Roman civilisations, but gender specific colours was not significantly developed. In the medieval period, dark colours were used for both genders. The 18th century evidently witnessed the development of gender specific colours. Women in this century wore light natural colours and dark colours would be used. However, men used to wear dark colours. In the 19th century, this colour trend was confirmed with increased colour range and textile and clothing materials. Clothing colour gender was significantly developed in the twentieth century. This is evident by significant changes in colour palettes and materials used in decades from the beginning to the end of this century.

It can be concluded that colour trends for women and men has been developed across history. This is in terms of variety and specifications. In this study, several factors affecting textile and clothing colouration were discussed. The most important and significant factors were found psychological, economic, social and technological aspects. The more human become civilised seeking freedom and new techniques of fibres treatment and colouration developed, the wider the colour range become. In prehistory, men and women wore similar colours as clothing materials were made of natural materials and not affecting masculinity and femininity. It was noticed that human's seeking of freedom is related to colour brightness. This is evident by using Neon colours in the 1980s. It is noteworthy that significant difference between male and female colours was noted across the history. On one hand, dark muted colours were used for men; on the other hand bright colours were obviously used for women.

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