Children's Preferences of Package Design

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This research explores influences of package design on children’s preferences in three dimensions: shape (straight or rounded), figurativeness, and complexity. Analysis of data from 766 children 3-12 years of age reveals that, unlike prior findings on gender differences in adults’ preferences for straight or rounded shapes, children generally prefer rounded package shapes. Meanwhile, the results indicate that children prefer realistic, figurative package design and that children’s preferences for complex package shapes increase with age.

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Abstract
This research explores influences of package design on children’s preferences in three aspects: shape (straight or rounded), figurativeness, and complexity. Analysis of data from 766 children 3-12 years of age reveals that, unlike prior findings on gender differences in adults’ preferences for straight or rounded shapes, children generally prefer rounded package shapes. Meanwhile, the results indicate that children prefer realistic, figurative package design and that children’s preferences for complex package shapes increase with age.

References
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The Negotiation and Consumption of Mediated Masculinities in the Artistry of the Male Self

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Extended Abstract

Feminist critic Judith Butler records gender identities as ‘a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being’ (Butler, 1990: 33). In reference to Foucault’s technologies of the self, Whitehead concludes ‘for the subject to “create itself as a (masculine) work of art” it must reach for those ideal(ised) representations of gender that surround it. Consequently, being masculine must be constantly engaged with, worked at, and explored’ (Whitehead, 2002: 215-216). Foucault’s work distinguishes between juridical power and regulatory power, advising that whilst the latter exercising of power appears more autonomous, he warns how it can be most powerful when it is least repressive (Foucault, 1980). Take in point the mass media; when we are presented with mediated images appealing to individuals to engage in practices that will in turn offer self-fulfilment and self-improvement, in essence we are being instructed ‘to work on ourselves to make sure that we are this kind of person’ (Lawler, 2008: 57). Similarly Cronin identifies consumerism to be a technology of the self whereby discourses of advertising herald the choice and the power within individuals to transform themselves, that is transform themselves through the purchase of the suggested advertised product (Cronin, 2000). It can be deduced that although the modern Western world is not being ruled by any sovereign or juridical stronghold per se, this has become virtually unnecessary as Western society so tightly governs themselves through what Foucault terms ‘techniques of normalisation’, or ‘governmentality’.

Foucault’s critical ontology of the present can be attributed with renewing focus on the relationship of the individual embedded within their community, and thus to the wider power structures within which they consequently exist. This provocation offers a unique realm for us to consider contemporary society, its freedom and its constraints (Moss, 1998: 16). In particular, Kimmel cautions against contemporary considerations of freedom, a freedom his research reveals is often devoid of moral and ethical responsibility and more importantly, adult support and guidance. He is concerned ‘today’s young men are coming of age in an era with no road maps, no blueprints, and no primers to tell them what a man is or how to become one’ (Kimmel, 2008: 42).

In considering the individual’s existence within its culture, while Foucault locates the subject within their own social group, literary theorist Stanley Fish identifies this social group as being one’s ‘interpretive community’. Yannopoulou and Elliott specify that interpretive communities when considered in relation to advertising, have been envisioned as ‘a cultural formation with a shared social and historical context that results in similar interpretations, with particular reference to the use of discursive modes of interpreting media content’ (Yannopoulou and Elliott, 2008: 12). It is within this context that the male subject is thus considered.

This research follows a Life-History Analysis whereby in-depth interviews have been conducted to consider on one level young Irish men’s negotiation and interpretation of advertising material in order to unearth in Holland’s terms the subject’s ‘identity theme’ or ‘life theme’. The second section of the in-depth interview serves to reconstruct the subject’s life story. In Foucauldian terms, such life stories will determine the men’s practices of the self, how they go about constructing their self as a ‘work of art’. I draw upon Mick and Buhl’s (1992) Meaning-Based Model of Advertising Experiences to conceptualise my consideration of an individual subject immersed within a socio-cultural context whereby their constitution of their self is embedded within their life theme and life projects.

Initial analysis indicates young Irish men’s roles from dominant patriarchal positions to a more ‘feminized’ or what has been recently termed, ‘metrosexual’ men. However a deeper-rooted connection to traditional Irish masculinity appears difficult to sever, leaving a contradiction between what one says and how one performs his masculinity.

Regarding construction of the male body, preliminary research suggest respondents draw heavily from mediated resources, akin to Ancient Grecian schools of ethics, to acquire tools and practices for self-constitution. Sources such as Men’s Health website and magazine are tools young men reference to develop techniques for diets, weights regimes and other such body-altering procedures. Practices to enhance the male physique were primarily followed with a specific goal-oriented rationale, for example, participation in triathlons or for work-related purposes.

Those respondents dwelling in a rural Irish town displayed a distinct consciousness of their self, and how this self could be acted out within the confines of this community. There appeared unwritten rules of acceptability as to how one behaved and dressed ‘down the town’. In particular one respondent, a relatively high-profile music band member, struggled greatly with his ‘mediated self’ and his ‘home self’, rigorously policing his self to ensure he was not seen to be ‘stepping up above the crowd’.

In the literature consideration is given to Bly’s (1990) proposal that young men in Western society are at a loss for masculine guidance and a lamentation of the departure of ‘traditional’ society initiation ceremonies. However this research suggests a rite of passage does take place for young Irish men, for better or for worse; the ceremonial site taking the format of the ‘auld lad’s pub’, and the ritualistic practice his ‘first pint of Guinness’ followed by a ‘whiskey chaser’. The elder, be it father, or stranger, witnesses the ‘young fella’ taking his first sup, and there’s no time for ‘squeamishness’ in this ‘manly’ space.

References


