

# **PINK: A LANGUAGE OF COMMUNICATION FOR FEMINISM**

## **Abstract**

Communication is comprised of, but not limited to spoken or written word, the non-verbal cues in itself are a language capable of denoting meaning and context for communication of ideologies and content. This study aims to contribute to a wider understanding of how symbols and colours may be reinterpreted to empower sidelined groups and challenge existing norms by examining the various ways that Pink functions as a language of communication within feminist studies. It examines the feminism-related symbolic meaning and expressive potential of the colour Pink. We will explore how Pink has progressed from being a mere hue to becoming an element of a movement, a symbol of a substantial number of people, a discriminator of sexuality, and an identity-provider. The colour Pink, which has historically been connected to femininity, is frequently employed to support gender norms. But by looking at how feminists have reclaimed and recycled pink as a weapon for social critique and liberation, this study seeks to reinterpret the colour Pink as a gender-neutral force in the communication arena.

**Keywords:** Language, Feminism.

## **Author**

**Ms. Anjali Gupta**

Research Associate

Department of Journalism and Mass  
Communication

Banasthali Vidyapith.

guptanjali857@gmail.com

"I wish everything was gender neutral. I wish we weren't separated by boundaries like pink and blue and little things like that. I wish we could choose how we express ourselves without hate." – Jazz Jennings

“Language is defined as a system of conventional spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves.” For communication, language need not necessarily be limited to only written or spoken words, rather symbols of various kinds can also act as a representative of communicative language. Language has a multi-functional role to play vis-à-vis communication, expression of identity, emotions, and establishing and maintaining relations in society. But, only understanding the language is not enough to understand the meaning of words, to grasp the actual meaning of the words associated with the language, one must learn the concept behind it to reach the intended meaning. Language includes but is not limited to oral and written words, colours also have a language of their own, and one such language symbol we will be looking at is Pink, not just the colour pink but the term with its many connotations, concepts, meaning, and representations. We'll discuss how Pink has evolved from being a mere colour to being part of a movement, to being a symbol/ a representation of a large section of people, to being a discriminator of sexuality, and to being an identity-provider. Pink, an everyday and age-old word used largely for denoting to the feminine beings, their identity, and representation in various social and cultural aspects. Pink is a vast term encompassing various contexts, concepts, words, symbols and meanings bringing forth a representation of a language of its own, the language of feminism; not just of the soft and kind-hearted, fragile beings but of the stronger, fiercer, independent, life-giving force that women are.

The most popular and wide usage of the term Pink is in the context of colour pink, a colour of joy, happiness, and youth. This secondary colour is a result of mixture of the zeal of red with the wholesomeness of white giving an aesthetic shade of soft pink that is associated with romance and the flush of a young woman's cheeks. The resultant color, pink, has gradually attained more than one meaning linked to it. In the framework of cultural studies, a word is an amalgamation of the representative symbol, the context and the meaning it denotes. Pink has not merely stayed a colour anymore but has a significant role today and has become a symbol of feminism, one of the most prominent socio-cultural and intellectual movements that the world has witnessed. Pink colour has developed into a language to communicate the ideologies and beliefs of that section of society which has committed to take a stand for the equality or equity of sexes.

The phrase pink as a colour was acknowledged as an idea in literature for the first time in the *Odyssey*, published in roughly 800 BCE by Greek poet Homer, he wrote "Then, when the child of morning, rosy-fingered dawn appeared...".The hue was also mentioned by Roman poets. *Roseus* is a Latin word that means "rosy" or "pink." In his epic poem 'On the Nature of Things (*De rerum natura*),' Lucretius used the term to describe the dawn. In the Middle Ages, pink was not a prevalent colour in the fashion; brighter reds, such as crimson, were usually preferred by nobles. Pink became popular among male and female nobles as an expression of class and luxury by the middle of the 18th century. In works by Italian painters Cimabue and Duccio, over the course of the 13th and 14th centuries, the Christ child was on rare occasion illustrated clad in pink, the hue associated with the Christ's body.

Etymologically speaking, "Pink" was the common name of a garden plant. The origin of the word pink itself is unknown. Throughout the years and decades, pink has become a term referring to multiple meanings and representations. A few of those mentions are:

**1471** - Pink refers to a fishing boat.

**1512**- It means an eyelet and a century later a stab wound that might be pink.

**1573** - It begins to be used to describe a number of flowers (Dianthus)

**1634**- The earliest recorded use of pink to mean a pigment. The pinks are all lakes that are they are all made by staining precipitated chalk or ground cattle-fish bone. The actual Paint is made from pigment mixed with a medium (oil, gum and wax).

In accordance to surveys based on public opinion in the United States and Europe, pink is the hue that is "usually associated with charm, politeness, sensitivity, tenderness, sweetness, gentleness, childhood, the feminine, and the romantic." Pink represents friendship, harmony, and affection. Pink, a perfect mixture of red and white, carries the urge for action associated with the colour red while also attaining the potential for achievement and understanding provided by the colour white. It combines red's power and fervor with white's purity, openness, and completion.

Ironically, what is largely considered today as the cultural and societal symbol of femininity was once considered a masculine colour. The notion that Pink embodies femininity and womanliness is not a phenomenon of the bygone era. The Earnshaw's Infants' Department published an article in June 1918 that said "The generally accepted rule is pink for the boys, and blue for the girls. The reason is that pink, being a more decided and stronger colour, is more suitable for the boy, while blue, which is more delicate and dainty, is prettier for the girl." This statement is a testament of how strongly pink has become stereotyped and associated with femininity. The choice for colours has since then entirely reversed, but one thing hasn't changed: everything that is deemed to be more robust and determined will be for the boys, and anything that is dainty, and fragile will be for the girls. Pink is now regarded as soft and delicate, as opposed to before when it was considered powerful and determined, since it has become the hue associated with femininity and all things girly.

When exactly Pink become a feminine colour? Colour symbolism is highly culture specific. Pastel hues were seen as "youthful" in much of Europe and America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and were more frequently employed to enhance the complexion than to indicate gender. People with brown eyes and hair were considered to look more appealing in pink, while those with blue eyes were thought to look more appealing in blue. When pink or blue coloured clothes were worn in gender-specific ways, it appeared to be a matter of style, a passing fad rather than a long-standing custom.

In the latter half of the 1800s, attitudes towards subject matter varied between nations (in France, pink for girls was in vogue), as well as within the United States (the Midwest saw an upward trend in the popularity of pink for boys). There was an upward movement towards increasing gender differentiation in clothing from around 1900 to 1940, initially for toddlers and subsequently for newborns, and this entailed employing pink and blue to denote gender more frequently. As they attempted to reach an understanding on a single regulation for the entire nation, apparel manufacturers and retailers similarly struggled to agree on which was which.

The emergence of pink as a sexually distinguishing marker for girls developed gradually, in the 1920s, pink was acknowledged as a handsome and masculine colour, analogous to red, which was regarded best suited for men but a milder shade of red (pink) for boys. However, retailers saw that customers were increasingly opting to purchase blue for boys and pink for girls, until this practice became the acknowledged standard in the 1940s. Around the turn of the century, manufacturers saw there was more revenue to be gained by designing and producing apparel for distinct genders, and by the 1950s, the norm that pink is for girls while blue is for boys had become more universally accepted.

By the 1950s, pink was stalwartly linked with femininity but to an extent that was "neither rigid nor universal" as it later became. For the first time in 1980's, pink became so intricately linked with femininity that wearing it as a boy or man was no longer called out to be an occurrence of wearing it as "just a colour," but an act of rebellion or personal expression that was beyond the aesthetics of mere appearance. Second, it progressively knocked other hues out of the possibilities for newborns and young girls. Subsequently, pink was embraced by hundreds of product makers as a strategy to identify their clothes and sell more merchandise, particularly for children.

During the 19th century, unisex all-white outfits were the norm for infants and toddlers of all genders. Jo B. Paoletti, a historian at the University of Maryland and author of "Pink and Blue: Telling the Boys from the Girls in America", details about it in her book, "pink and blue were not considered gender-specific colours and were used interchangeably (and often together) in infants' nurseries and children clothing accessories. In fact, the dividing line for donning pink wasn't between women and men, but the young and old; as the colour was associated with health, newness, and innocence but because pink showed newborns, flushed cheeks, rosy-hued sunrises, it was considered more appropriate for children than adults."

As a result, in order to feminise geek merchandise or campaigns or to purposefully make them appealing to women, pink became a hue stereotypically associated with females or femininity. In the contemporary western society and culture, pink is typically linked with females, and particularly young girls. Formerly, pink was seen to be an appropriate colour for boys since it was a lighter hue of red, which was viewed as an invigorating colour. The lighter shade of blue was thought to be more appropriate for females since it is a "calm" and "graceful" shade. Identification of the color pink with femininity and womanhood is a relatively new phenomenon that has risen quickly in the latter part of the 20th and early 21st centuries.

Pink is no longer just a term pertaining to the category of a colour shade or of referring a specific meaning, the connotations attached with the term pink have been changing and increasing drastically. Another connotation associated with pink which we will be looking in this chapter is its relationship with the various subcultures. Pink's significance and implicated meaning shifts when it moves from mainstream society to subcultures, such as homosexual and lesbian cultures and their resulting visual codes. Pink is regarded as feminine in the present-day Western countries. It conjures up images of stereotypical feminine gender norms, such as compassion for others, and virtue and cooperation. Lesbian, homosexual, bisexual, and transgender advocacy groups frequently utilise the colour pink as a symbol for their cause.

Pink News is a gay newspaper and online news service in the United Kingdom, while nl.roze is a Dutch newsgroup concerning homosexuality in the Netherlands. Pink, a magazine for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community, publishes multiple versions for different metropolitan regions. Pink TV is an LGBT satellite television station in France. In Ireland, Pink family is a comparatively impartial umbrella word defined as single gay men, single lesbians, or same-gender couples who want to adopt, are in the process of adopting, or have already adopted by the support organisation Irish Pink Adoptions. Furthermore, adults born or raised in such households are likewise covered. The term "pinkwashing" is referred to using tactics that seem to support breast cancer awareness or LGBTQ+ rights to minimize the bad features of a business or political organization. The phrase "pink tax" is also used to refer to the reality that women frequently pay extra money for items marketed exclusively to women.. The name of Vienna's Lesbian and homosexual Centre, "Pink and Purple House" (Rosa Lila Villa), further demonstrates the allocation of pink to homosexual men and purple to gay women.

Pink symbolises optimism conferring to colour psychology. It is a cheerful shade that evokes sentiments of warmth and comfort and a conviction that everything will turn out just fine. Pink is perceptive and intuitive, displaying compassion and gentleness via its empathy and sensitivity. Our emotive and demonstrative energies are pacified and reassured by the colour pink, which minimizes feelings of rage, aggressiveness, resentment, abandonment, and neglect. Large doses of pink have been shown in studies to have a soothing impact on the nervous system.

The pink ribbon is an internationally recognised symbol of breast cancer awareness. Breast cancer charitable organisations around the world have used the colour in order to symbolise support for the ones diagnosed with the disease and to raise awareness of it. These nonprofit organisations encourage both men and women to wear the colour pink to show their support to those fighting against breast cancer, and spread awareness, and promote research. Pink's strong association with femininity was one of the primary factors that contributed to its selection as the symbolic colour. The pink ribbon stands for the generosity of people and organisations that openly support the breast cancer movement, and it also represents the anxiousness and fear of breast cancer, hope for the future, and optimism. It is meant to stimulate empathy and compassion for women who are currently battling breast cancer. The pink ribbon serves as an emblem and a symbol for support for women universally.

In order to break the stereotypes associated with pink colour and enhance the association of pink with feminism and women empowerment, various practices and programs have come into practice worldwide. The term "Pinkification" refers to an effort to make something stereotypically male more intriguing or appealing to women by equating it with features or concepts associated with women. At a Harvard event in February 2014 intended to pique women's interest in computer science, sponsor Goldman Sachs distributed nail files and cosmetic mirrors. In the UK, a rental automobile business called Pink Ladies is run by women for women providing them with hired car service. When they arrive, female drivers in readily recognisable pink cars call the passengers on the phone before waiting for them to enter their locations before driving off.

A campaign called "Pinkstinks" takes aim at the media, marketing, and goods that give young girls very stereotypical and stifling roles to young girls. Youngsters, both boys

and girls, are impacted by girlhood whether they are aware of it or not, and preconceived notions may be tackled by fostering media literacy, self-esteem, a healthy body image, and promoting exemplary female role models for younger generations. More guys in the contemporary world can be seen wearing pink in the last few years. It started with pale pink colour, but now bolder shades of pink in golf/cargo shorts, polos, swimsuits and other men's apparel. So maybe the convention is changing again.

Apart from the various negative or stereotypical connotations associated with pink where women are showcased as fragile beings. Additionally, more effective attempts at recuperating pink with positive traits have been attempted. The Gulabi Gang of Uttar Pradesh is a gang of pink-clad ladies fighting for women's empowerment. They break the shackles the society has encircled women with and the preconceived notions of being weak and docile, by fighting against significant issues like domestic violence, child labour, child marriages, dowry demands etc., while being attired in a colour that has long been conventionally and inappropriately imposed.

When a Bollywood film focused on three powerful, independent women was given the moniker Pink, misconceptions and stereotypes around the phrase were similarly deconstructed. The film focused on the respect, agency, dignity, and bravery of women. It wasn't at all how people often see the colour, yet it was everything the colour might be. The film received a lot of positive reviews and received extensive media coverage. The film highlights various significant issues concerning women and their image in society. There is just one assumed relevance of choosing pink as the name of the movie because of the centralization of the art on feminine characters whereas rather than being portrayed as stereotypical women characters unable to take stand for themselves, the fight for justice, equal social status and consideration in society is highlighted. Busting the myths associated with the hue pink, that it is a favorite colour of girls and linked with Barbie dolls. 'Pink' here brings into light a notion of empowerment that women are strong, independent and reserve the right to fight if and when needed for their rights, freedom and liberty. Mr. Shoojit Sircar, the filmmaker, has been noted as stating "that the deeper meaning of pink will be apparent after people see the movie."

Because of its connections with femininity, wearing pink as a hue on a man was formerly noteworthy. This association between females and the hue pink, on the other hand, is quite new. Eventually, Pink became a strong symbol of femininity, that different shades signify different meaning of it, which can be seen as gentle, soft, pretty as well as empowerment. This colour has a significant role to play in today's society and on people who live in it, being a strong and confident colour; it is also shown as a representative of women empowerment. This was not a one-day thing; the significance of this colour eventually grew because of the change of culture when it passed from one to the other. Pink being strong and confident colour, has become embedded as a representation or a symbol for women empowerment.

Although pink hasn't always been out of fashion for men, but these days, it is considered that wearing it is to support breast cancer or women empowerment or feminism. "Today, a boy or man can't wear pink without it being some kind of statement", said Jo Paoletti, a historian at the University of Maryland and author of "Pink and Blue: Telling the Girls from the Boys in America." Paoletti said that "if a male friend of hers was wearing a

pink tie or pink shirt, they would point it out”. “If it was just a colour, you wouldn’t have to do that. You are using a pink tie to show that ‘I am a feminist’ or that ‘I am not tied to gender roles.’ ” Substantiating the idea that pink has become such a prominent and well-acknowledged symbol of feminism and the ideologies associated with the movement that wearing or carrying of the shade by the opposite gender is in itself considered a statement; that they stand for the women and their struggles and rights.

The term pink has become so gender-entrenched that despite the various phases of feminism, it has still managed to associate itself with the movement and general idea of feminism, although the negative attributes related to it are taking a backseat and a more gender-neutral approach towards the term is likely to become a reality in the future. It can be concluded that pink has come a long way from being a color concept in 800 BCE to being considered a language which is representative of a movement that has encompassed decades and boundaries. Pink is being recognized widely as a language being used for communicating the ideologies and beliefs of feminism and as a representative of how a women is more than just a fragile and docile being donning the color while shedding the preconceived notions attached to it.

## REFERENCE

- [1] Koller, V. (2008). ‘Not just a colour’: pink as a gender and sexuality marker in visual communication. *Visual Communication*, 7(4), 395–423.
- [2] Suzanne Ferriss, Mallory Young, *Chick Flicks: Contemporary Women at the Movies*, 2008
- [3] Smithsonian.com: Jeanne Maglaty, "When Did Girls Start Wearing Pink?," April 8, 2011, accessed June 4, 2011
- [4] Merkin, Daphne. "Gender Trouble", *The New York Times Style Magazine*, March 12, 2006. Retrieved 10 December 2007.
- [5] Orenstein, Peggy. "What's Wrong With Cinderella?", *The New York Times Magazine*, December 24, 2006, retrieved December 10, 2007. Orenstein writes: "When colors were first introduced to the nursery in the early part of the 20th century, pink was considered the more masculine hue, a pastel version of red. Blue, with its intimations of the Virgin Mary, constancy and faithfulness, was thought to be dainty. Why or when that switched is not clear, but as late as the 1930s a significant percentage of adults in one national survey held to that split."
- [6] Jude Stewart (2008). "Pink is for Boys: cultural history of the color pink". *Step Inside Design Magazine*. Archived from the original on 2008-02-28.
- [7] Kimmell, Michael. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 1996, The Free Press. p.158
- [8] Ben Goldacre (2007-08-25). "Bad Science". *Out of the Blue and into the Pink*. London.
- [9] <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-color-psychology-of-pink-2795819>
- [10] <https://www.sensationalcolor.com/meaning-of-pink/>
- [11] <https://www.color-meanings.com/pink-color-meaning-the-color-pink/>