

## EVALUATION OF CLOTHING COLOR PREFERENCES: A COMPARISON OF ASIAN AND WHITE CONSUMERS

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Data on United States apparel consumption indicate it is a major market, accounting for over 50 billion dollars per year in consumer expenditures, according to the American Apparel Manufacturers Association. Industry experience as well as empirical research indicate that color is one of the more important factors affecting salability of garments at retail.

Previous research suggests that cultural heritage and ethnic identification are related to clothing color preferences. However, this research is limited and largely focused on black consumers. Research on other minorities, such as Hispanics and Asians would be useful in determining how to best meet the needs of these expanding markets.

The present study was designed to determine whether ethnic identity was related to clothing color preference for one type of apparel, female sleepwear. To assess the effect of context on these preferences, color ratings were requested for both general use and a special situation. Purchase for a wedding trousseau was selected as the special situation since trade data indicate that this market is experiencing a revival. If preferences for wedding wear were found to differ from preferences for general wear, this fact would have obvious implications for meeting the needs of this developing market. Furthermore, consumer research has largely ignored ritualized activities and events in spite of evidence that these are frequent and important components of human experience. Based on Rook's analysis of the relationship between ritual vitality and prescription of artifactual consumption, it was hypothesized that cultural norms associated with weddings would decrease differences in preference that might ordinarily be found between people in different ethnic groups.

Subjects for this study were 71 female university students who volunteered to participate in a study of color preferences. Of these, 50 indicated White as their ethnic identity and 21 checked Asian. Analysis of the subjects by major indicated that there was a good cross-section of the general university population.

Selection of colors was based on the Cromarama<sup>®</sup> color wheel cross-referenced with the Pantone<sup>®</sup> professional color system. Eight hues, a gray and a brown were chosen along with the corresponding lightest tint, medium tint, and medium shade. Squares of each color were affixed to a questionnaire and rated by each subject once as to preference for inclusion in a trousseau and again as to preference for lingerie for general use. Ratings were made on a seven-point scale ranging from like very much to dislike very much.

Stepwise discriminant analysis was used to determine whether color preferences differed by

ethnic identity. Separate analyses were run for the light tints, medium tints, hues and shades. Rank order correlations were computed to determine whether, within each ethnic group, the order of preference was different for weddings compared to general use.

The stepwise discriminant analyses of ratings for a wedding trousseau indicated that the two ethnic groups could be differentiated on the basis of preference for tints but not hues or shades. Among the lightest tints, preferences for pale pink provided for a significant differentiation between Whites and Asians with Asians indicating a higher preference. Univariate analyses indicated that Asians also showed a higher average preference for pale orange and pale purple, but these latter values did not add significant information to the multivariate analysis. With respect to medium tints, preference for orange differentiated between the two groups, with Asians having higher average ratings. The univariate analyses indicated that the value between red and purple (rose) was also rated higher by Asians. These findings suggest that some segmentation of the trousseau market by ethnic identity may be useful, although similarities in preference are much more in evidence than differences. The similarities with respect to this special situation suggest that the normative values associated with a cultural ritual may be related to small variations in preferences for the regalia associated with that ritual.

More significant differences were found with respect to preferences for general use. Asians gave significantly higher ratings to the two tints and hue for brown. For the lightest tints, their higher average preference for pink added significant information to the multivariate prediction equation. With respect to shades, Asians gave significantly higher average ratings to yellow. The univariate analyses indicated that ratings of the tints of orange, rose, purple, green and a medium gray also were significantly higher for Asians compared to Whites. These data suggest that for the general use market, it may be more important to segment on the basis of ethnic identity, especially with respect to the tints.

A comparison of trousseau ratings with general use ratings within ethnic groups suggested that both Asians and Whites were consistent in the order in which they preferred different colors. For Asians, the Spearman Rank-Order Correlation Coefficient was .95 ( $p < .001$ ) and for Whites, it was .93 ( $p < .001$ ). These data suggest that once the market has been segmented by ethnic identity, having separate stock plans for general versus wedding wear, at least in terms of color, may not be worth the effort.

(References available upon request.)