

Popular Product Aesthetics and Gender

We live in a society centered around consumerism. It tells us what to buy, who we are, and how we perceive the world around us. Everywhere we look there are advertisements telling us that you must have this new product, and with it you will finally be accepted into the "cool crowd." This need for the newest and the finest has impacted who who are as a society. Wightman (2006) argues, that "as consumers, most of us do not consciously or actively recognize the many variables that are in place to guide or manipulate us to purchase (p.129). Being an adolescent is no exception- since the 1950s advertisers have targeted adolescents (Duncum, 2003) as viable consumers. Buckingham (2000) states, "there is the question of how children understand and respond to advertising, and to other forms of promotional culture such as merchandising" (p. 165). Despite growing commercial involvement in education, consumer culture is an area that schools generally neglect; yet there is evidence to suggest that children can develop "economic literacy" at a much earlier age than it is typically assumed (Buckingham, 2000). By bringing in consumer culture into the classroom, my students will examine how advertising and merchandising can affect them, as well as understand the power they have over product design, while becoming aware that certain products are marketed to a determined gender. They will be aware of how gender stereotypes are reinforced in products and analyze what makes those products so enticing. They will become critical thinkers about consumerism- think before they buy, examine what they value about the product, make an informed decision about how this product will affect their lives, and to what that product says about them as a person. Students will be asked, in gender based groups, to design a brand new product to be 'sold' to the opposite sex. They will have the chance to go out to the real world, examine

marketing strategies, and utilize principles of design to create a product that will excite their peers. In designing these products, the questions that will be answered by the students are: who are we as consumers? Why do we buy the products we buy? What about the product makes it so enticing? Do we buy only products that are targeted towards my individual sex? By having students actively roam the aisles of a large retail store results in meaningful dialogue about our consumer based culture and has them “not only become aware of the many nuances of meaning of a given product, but also how each product offers and intentional aesthetic designed to manipulate the consumer in a variety of ways” (Wightman, 2006, p.127). Looking critically at marketing strategies, we can gauge their effectiveness and interpret how these corporations use sophisticated forms of advertising and marketing to sell their products.

Economics and aesthetics collide in a capitalist society. Duncum believes, and I agree, that aesthetics is viewed in site specific and social terms in what has become an ordinary language. By adopting these values and beliefs we should be able to advance visual culture in art education (Duncum, 2007). Why do we rely on “traditional” views of art education when the world around us is in a constant state of change? Duncum argues, “what is important is curiosity, not only about what things mean, but also how things mean” (p. 286). It is aesthetics that distinguishes products and makes the difference between a products success or failure (Duncum, 2007) and by bringing in product design and marketing, my students will start to think about everything that is involved in making a successful product.

Companies are in constant competition to make the newest and most coveted product, and new product development is a major activity for firms (Hoffman, Kopalle, & Novak 2010). Hoffman, Kopalle, & Novak (2010) state, “consumer firms are interested in learning which consumers might be the ‘right’ ones in

developing new product concepts so that they can improve their chances of success in the marketplace” (p. 854). As Duncum (2003) argues in his article on visual culture in the classroom, “children possess little economic power, but considerable ‘pester power’ by which they influence purchasing decisions made by other family members (p. 29). In this perspective, Duncum gives adolescents the power- they are the ones making the decisions on what they want, and the companies making those products must adhere to those desires to be successful.

There is much debate as to whether consumerism is having a positive or negative effect on children; according to Campbell, “contemporary consumerism is frequently the target of criticisms by intellectuals, academics, religious spokesmen and commentators” (p. 279). It is argued that consumerism is becoming an “addiction” (Campbell, 2010) with the “result that individuals come to value material objects, especially commodities, above all else” (Campbell, 2010, p. 285). And if this is the case, I want my students to not be passive consumers, but active and aware ones. This curriculum will find that empowerment is to be had through consumption (Duncum, 2007). Garber (2003) argues that, “identity is constructed in terms of multiple descriptors, and is not fixed, but shifts over time and within different contexts” (p. 59). Being aware that what they buy is a statement of who they are, they have become an informed consumer. One of the more common criticisms directed against modern consumerism is that it leads to people consuming more than they need (Campbell, 2010). “The notion of ‘false needs’ inevitably implies that there are true needs which can be identified and agreed on” (Buckingham, 2000, p.149-150) This curriculum forces my students to analyze their “needs” and be able to express them to an audience. Being able to communicate to their peers the things they value in a product, and expressing what they could do better, not only gives them a sense of purpose as a consumer but more conscious of who they are as an individual.

Hoffman, Kopalle, & Novak (2010) have found that:

Consumers with an emergent nature- the unique capability to envision how new product concepts might be developed- can be identified and used in business-to-consumer markets to further improve new product concepts so that they will be successful in the marketplace. (p. 861).

We believe that because of their openness to new experiences, reflection, verbal and visual processing styles, creativity, and optimism, consumers high in emergent nature are to engage both in a process of successful idea generation to enhance original concepts and in logical analysis to refine and develop concepts further. (p. 862).

By expecting my students to possess the ability to process information both verbally and imaginably, they are being consumers high in emergent nature (Hoffman, Kopalle, & Novak, 2010). Being familiar with, and creating a product design, while also having the ability to showcase and sell their product to their peers, can enhance this emergent nature. When it comes to advertisements, Freedman (1994) has found that “the students frequently valued the ad characters as being totally independent people, not bound by the restrictions of the students’ lived realities nor by the context of the consumer purpose of the image” (p. 164). Buckingham (2000), when commenting on how the market is meeting the needs of the child, sees children as “a sophisticated and demanding audience” who are “far from being passive victims of commercial culture” (p.148).

Along with teaching the students to be an informed consumer, this curriculum will touch on how gender plays a role in advertising and marketing. Much has been written about the role of gender in our society. Gender discourses are embedded so deeply within our popular cultural texts that they play a

large part in constructing the gender regimes we live with (Marsh and Millard, 2000). Marsh and Millard argue that “children are subjected to propaganda which identifies particular roles and kinds of behavior as inherently male or female” (p. 31). What I am interested in for this curriculum is how these gender distinctions play a part in consumerism-products that are being marketed specifically to a certain gender. Freedman (1994) argues, and I agree, that “to deal effectively with the issue of gender in art education requires attention to the relationships that exist between student gender identity and visual culture” (p. 158). Richards (2007) quotes Butler (1990), “gender is a socially constructed relation among subjects which is performed and changes according to context and time” (p. 27). Are products for girls and boys the same as they have been for decades, or have they changed to a more neutral direction? What about a product makes it relatable to a specific gender? My students will be able to answer these questions and experience the division between male and female targeted products by being out in the real world. They will experience the “blue aisles” and the “pink aisles” and comment on the effects it has on their personal feelings about a certain product. By challenging the gender based groups to produce a product for the opposite gender, we will see if that product sticks with or defies the traditional gender stereotypes. By examining what products each group comes up with, I will be able to determine if these stereotypes exist in the mind of the adolescent consumer.

This curriculum is not to make judgments on gender stereotypes but rather to force my students to be more aware of the marketing strategies that they are subjected to. Being part of a collaborative, gender based group of peers will be a forum where they will be able to challenge each other, express their feelings towards individual thoughts and beliefs, and produce a product that they believe the opposite gender will like. Students should be able to critically assess gender stereotypes in visual culture and gain understanding of the

ways that images work to shape student identity (Freedman, 1994).

By engaging the students in a critical analysis of product design and marketing, along with getting them out into the real world of consumerism, I will have given them the tools not only be more informed consumers, but well-informed product designers. Understanding all the elements that go into product design and marketing that make successful products will enable them to appreciate their own designs. It is important for adolescents to understand how their identities are formed and know that their opinions, desires, and insight are highly valued.

References

Buckingham, D. (2000). *After the death of childhood: Growing up in the age of electronic media*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Campbell, C. (2010). What is wrong with consumerism? An assessment of some common criticisms. *Anuario Filosofico*, 43(2), 279-296.

Duncum, P. (2003). Visual culture in the classroom. *Art Education*, 56(2), 25-32.

Duncum, P. (2007). Aesthetics, popular visual culture, and designer capitalism. *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, 26(3), 285-295.

Freedman, K. (1994). Interpreting gender and visual culture in art classrooms. *Studies in Art Education*, 35(3), 157-170.

Garber, E. (2003). Teaching about gender issues in the art education classroom: Myra Sadker Day. *Studies in Art Education*, 45(1), 56-72.

Hoffman, D., Kopalle, P., & Novak, T. (2010). The 'right' consumers for better concepts: Identifying consumers high in emergent nature to develop new product concepts. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 47(5), 854-865.

Marsh, J., & Millard, E. (2000). *Literacy and popular culture*. London: Paul Chapman.

Richards, M. (2007). Engaging "looking-glass" youth in art through the visual narratives of the transforming self in popular culture. *Visual Arts Research*, 33(65), 24-37.

Wightman, W. (2006). Making the familiar "unfamiliar": Kmart, consumer aesthetics, and art education. In P. Duncum (Ed.), *Visual culture in the art class: Case studies* (pp.126-134). Reston, VA: NAEA.

Curriculum Theme: Designing a brand new age appropriate product looking at aesthetics, marketing, and gender.

Teacher: Chelsea Wagner

Grade Level: Middle school/ grades 6-8

State Fine Art Goals: VA-6- 1.2, 1.4, 2.1, 2.3, 3.2, 6.3

State Media Arts Goals (if any): MA6- 1.1, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6, 4.1, 4.2

State Language Arts Goals (if any): N/A

General goals for the curriculum (describe in 2-5 sentences): In today's society, adolescents play a major role in consumerism. This curriculum will help my students analyze why they buy a certain product, while also looking at how gender affects their decisions. By specifically looking at products marketed for this age group, my students will analyze the marketing strategies behind the products. By making their own product they will have first hand experience about production and marketing of a product marketed to the opposite sex.

Lesson title (name each lesson to reflect a general unit theme)	Visual Exemplars (list specific images and artists, TV shows, and/or books that you plan to use for each lesson)	Motivation / dialogue (list basic issues and questions to be explored during classroom dialogue and any other motivational strategies that you plan to use for each lesson)	Media / process (list artistic processes that your students will engage in during each lesson)	Concepts and/or design principles to be learned during each lesson	Closure (list an assessment strategy that can be used at the end of each lesson)
Lesson (class period) 1 : What do we like?	Part 2: Images of Jeong Mee Yoon's The Pink and Blue Project Part 3: I will bring in a few popular products for the class to look at: silly bandz, Barbie Doll, Nerf gun, Sports equipment: football, skateboard, tennis racquet, Xbox games: Halo, Karaoke	I will introduce the unit project: What makes us want to buy a product? I will tell the class that we will be working on a project that has to do with popular toys/products for their age group while looking at marketing strategies to sell the product. Questions I will ask to form discussion: Part 1: I will ask for some examples of toys/products that they like and play with. Why do you like these products? What specifically do you like about them? What age group do they think purchases this product? I will be putting all this information up on the board. Part 2: Gender- of the list, what products are made for boys, and which ones are for girls? I will show artworks from Jeong Mee Yoon. What makes a product fit for a boy? Or a girl? Do any of the girls like the "boy" products, and vise versa? Is it "cool" to like toys for the opposite gender? Are there any products on the list that are for both sexes? Part 3: Looking at the products I brought in, which of them are most popular? Can you pick out the boy products, and then the girl products? Look at the packaging- what do you like about it? What colors are used? Does the packaging fit with the gender?	Lesson 1 will just be a critical and visual analysis of the aesthetics of the products they came up with as well as the ones I brought in for them to look at.	The concepts that will be learned in this lesson is to be aware that products are made and marketed for a specific age group and sometimes for a specific gender. Students will be more aware of what products they like, and why they like them. They will also gain knowledge of products that are popular with their peers.	Through the discussion students will show me that they are critically thinking about the products that they like, as well as what their peers like. They will be able to explain why they like certain things and also be aware that certain products are being marketed to a specific age group/gender. They will start to get an idea of what all goes into making a product and then marketing that product in the real world.

Lesson 2: Field trip to Target	Each student will receive a hand out (See attachments) to fill out during the visit to Target.	<p>Part 1: Before leaving the classroom, I will quickly do a review of last weeks lesson- what they like about certain products, what gender is the product marketed for? I will explain to the students that the purpose of this field trip is to look through the toy/sports sections of the store and write down products that appeal to them. The handout that they will receive will help them to think critically about the products they are choosing. I want to emphasize that they are choosing only for themselves, and not to influence another students decision.</p> <p>Part 2: During the trip, I will be walking around the store with the students and frequently asking them what products they find appealing and why. They should be thinking about all elements of the product- the function, aesthetic appeal, marketing strategies, etc. (whatever they think is interesting about the product)They are encouraged to talk with each other and form opinions about the products, but are not to influence another student's decision.</p>	Lesson 2 will be another aesthetic analysis of products that are sold in Target. They will be required to answer the questions on the handout, as well as choose one product of their liking to sketch.	<p>The concept that will be learned from this field trip is to gain first hand consumer experience. Choosing one product that appeals to them, and having to answer questions about why they chose that product will force the students to think critically about their choices. It will also reveal their likes/dislikes to be shared with the class.</p>	This trip is designed to have the students be active consumers. They will be given the opportunity to choose a product of their liking and have to defend their decision to their peers.
--------------------------------------	--	---	---	--	--

<p>Lesson 3: What did you find?</p>	<p>Power point with images of popular products (skateboards, Nintendo system, Bratz Dolls, makeup, etc). We will also be looking at the sketches they made of the products from the store.</p> <p>2 YouTube clips of toy advertisements: 1. Disney Princess: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=grLL8pAIHMc</p> <p>2. G. I. Joe: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MLL67CN2hmv</p>	<p>Discussion: Part 1: We will begin by talking about the trip: what were the products that they liked? Did anyone choose the same products? What was appealing about those products? On the board I will list the products the boys chose, next to a list of the products the girls chose. Were there are products that are for both sexes? Who chose what, and why?As a class we will go over the handout and sketches. Gender: Did you notice that distinctions between the girl and boy aisles? Pink aisles vs. blue aisles? How did those aisles make you feel? Did you spend time on the aisles of your opposite gender?Commercials- are they stereotypical of what you found in Target? Part 2: What was missing? Was there a product that they wanted but couldn't find? If they could design their own product, what would they make? Part 3: The class will be divided up- boys and girls. From there those groups will be divided into small groups of 3 or 4 by gender.</p>	<p>After being put into the gender specific groups, the students will work together (in their groups) to come up with and start to sketch a product, marketed for the opposite sex. They must create and design a brand new product that at the conclusion of the unit will be "sold" to the class. The two groups (male and female) with the most votes will win the contest and their product design will be featured in the classroom.</p>	<p>This lesson will focus on the aesthetics of the products they chose. The students will also begin the design process of their new product. They will have to take into consideration the following design principles in their designs: unity, harmony, contrast, variety, emphasis, balance, proportion, and functionality. We will also talk about line, color, and shape regarding the products and their packaging.</p>	<p>Students will be beginning to create a new product from the concepts they have learned concerning aesthetics, marketing, and gender. They will have to work together to come up with a design that will appeal to their peers.</p>
<p>Lesson 4: Product design</p>	<p>Product Design video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2tqLSIPcPtY&playnext=1&list=PLC9044217A9FBFF8D&index=22</p>	<p>I will show a shirt video on product design. Students will get into their groups and start brainstorming ideas for their products. I will be going around to each group to check on the progress of the product creation. Some questions I will expect them to answer: what is the name of this product? What design elements will you focus on? What is the function on the product? Who is this product marketed for/who is the audience? What about the product makes it desirable?</p>	<p>Lesson 4 will be about working together to come up with an idea for the product they will be 'selling' to the class. By the end of the class they should have an idea of what they want to create as well as a general sketch of what the product will look like. They will be given product guidelines (se attachment).</p>	<p>Using paper and pencil the students are to work on their sketch of their products, taking into consideration the following design principles in their designs: unity, harmony, contrast, variety, emphasis, balance, proportion, and functionality.</p>	<p>Students will continue to create their products.</p>

Lesson 5: Product design		<p>Questions I will ask: Does each group have a solid idea of the product they are designing? Does it answer all the questions I asked previous class (what is the name of this product? What design elements will you focus on? What is the function on the product? Who is this product marketed for/who is the audience? What about the product makes it desirable?) Has any group decided to design a gender neutral product?</p>	<p>Students will continue to work on their product designs. They will still be using pencil, colored pencil and paper.</p>	<p>Using paper and pencil (colored and regular) the students are to work on completing the sketches of their products, taking into consideration the following design principles in their designs: unity, harmony, contrast, variety, emphasis, balance, proportion, and functionality.</p>	<p>Students will continue to work on the creation of their products.</p>
Lesson 6: Product Design	<p>Short Video on package design: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFsr8qZ7Zk0</p>	<p>At the beginning of class I will be going over the design principles they are using for this project as well as answer any questions they might have. I will also show a shirt clip on package design. I will be checking on the progress of the designs: does each group have a solid idea? Is this product functional? Is it designed for the appropriate age group and gender? What can be improved on? Questions I will ask the students: What about your product makes it gender specific? Would you use this product? What makes is new/different then all the other products out there in the stores?</p>	<p>Students will continue to work on their product designs. They will still be using pencil, colored pencil and paper. By the end of class they should have completed their product sketch/design and begin on the final work. They will be given one sheet of large white poster board and acrylic paints.</p>	<p>Using paper and pencil (colored and regular) the students are to complete the sketches of their products, taking into consideration the following design principles in their designs: unity, harmony, contrast, variety, emphasis, balance, proportion, and functionality.</p>	<p>I will be checking the progress of the designs: does each group have a solid idea? Is this product functional? Is it designed for the appropriate age group and gender?</p>
Lesson 7: Product Completion		<p>Questions I will ask: Does your product look complete? Does it follow the guidelines that I have given to you? Have you used all the design elements? Is there anything you want to change? Are you happy with the product? I want them to start thinking of ways to "sell" this product to the class. Homework: the students are to come up with ways to "sell" this product to the class- come up with a slogan, or a catchy jingle on why your product is the best.</p>	<p>The students should work on completing their images of the products. The products should be fully rendered on the sheet of poster board be ready to be presented to the class. They should be working together to complete the project.</p>	<p>Using acrylic paints, pencils, and black markers, the students should finish their product designs, still taking into consideration the following design principles in their designs: unity, harmony, contrast, variety, emphasis, balance, proportion, and functionality.</p>	<p>Homework: the students are to come up with ways to "sell" this product to the class- come up with a slogan, or a catchy jingle on why your product is the best.</p>

Lesson 8: Presentation Day		<p>Class presentations. Questions I will be asking the class while they are presenting their products: Who is this product designed for? What is your marketing strategy? What is new and exciting about this product? What is the function of this product? Why would the opposite want to buy this product? Explain your color choices and designs elements. What kind of store would you find your product in?</p>	<p>Lesson 8 is presentation day. Female gender small groups will present first. Each group will share their concepts of their design and "sell" their product to the opposite sex. The students will choose their favorite product and the boys will vote (by secret ballot) for the winner of the girls group, and vice versa.</p>	<p>Students will have to evaluate and interpret each groups design. The following design principles are considered: unity, harmony, contrast, variety, emphasis, balance, proportion, and functionality.</p>	<p>The students products will be evaluated through oral critiques.</p>
Lesson 9: Critique		<p>Before class I will count the votes and determine which team from the boys, and which team from the girls has won the most votes. The products from the two winners will be featured on the wall inside the classroom.</p> <p>After the students come in and see the winners, I will ask them some questions about their choices.</p> <p>Questions I will ask the students: What about the winning products did you like most? What would you change? Is either of the products gender neutral? What are the stereotypes included in the product? Who would want to buy this product? Why do you think this team won the most votes? What elements were the most effective? Do you agree with the winners?</p>	<p>Lesson 9 will focus on the products that got the most votes. As a class, we will talk about the workmanship and design of the winning products.</p>	<p>Students will evaluate each others work. They will focus on the following design elements and principles: unity, harmony, contrast, variety, emphasis, balance, proportion, and functionality.</p>	<p>I will be providing each group with a written critique from me.</p>

Lesson #1

Lesson title: What do we like?

Grade: 6-8

Teacher: Chelsea Wagner

Length: 50 min period

State fine arts goals: VA 6- 1.2, 2.1, 3.2

State media arts goals: MA6- 2.1, 3.1, 3.4, 3.6, 4.1

State language arts goals: N/A

Objectives: The students will discuss the role marketers have on reinforcing popular interests and products. We will also begin to discuss the role of gender and how it is used by marketers to sell products.

Concepts and vocabulary:

Vocabulary:

Marketing- the process or technique of promoting, selling, and distributing a product or service

Strategy- A careful plan or method

Awareness- having or showing realization, perception, or knowledge

Gender- Sex, i.e. male or female

Gender stereotype- conforming genders to a fixed or general pattern

Design- the arrangement of elements or details in a product or work of art

Color scheme- a planned combination of colors

Concepts:

The students, after discussion, will have the chance to

express their feelings towards certain products making them more aware of the products they like, and why they like them. They will also gain knowledge of products that are popular with their peers. They will understand that certain products are marketed to certain age groups, as well as certain genders.

Teacher materials:

- Images of Jeong Mee Yoon's The Pink and Blue Project
- Products for viewing and spring-boarding discussion: silly bandz, Barbie Doll, Nerf gun, sports equipment- football, skateboard, tennis racquet, and a Xbox games- Halo, and Karaoke

Student materials:

- Pencil and paper if they would like to take notes (not required)

Procedures:

1. Introduce the unit project: What makes us want to buy a product? (10-15 min.):
2. As a class, students are encouraged to express their feelings towards certain products- they can use the products that I brought in, or they can use products that they are familiar with and like
3. I will list those products that they like on the board, and ask them to tell me what they specifically like about those products- be it function, colors, packaging, how it makes them feel, what their peers think, etc.
4. I will go over the vocabulary words and write them on the board- they do not have to copy them down

5. More questions I will ask:
6. What age group is this product geared towards?
7. Is this product “cool”?
8. What about it makes it “cool” to have?
9. Does anyone want to come up to the board and add anything that we missed to the list?
10. After the discussion and listing of the products that the whole class likes, I will begin the discussion on gender (10 min.):

- I will show images of Jeong Mee Yoon’s The Pink and Blue Project to start discussion:

a. What do you think the artist was trying to convey? Do you see this in real life?

1. Of the list of products on the board, what are products are made specifically for girls, and which ones for boys?
2. I will then circle the ones for girls in red, and the ones they choose for boys in blue
3. What about the ones that I did not circle, that are gender neutral?
4. Do any of the girls like any of products that we labeled for boys? and vice versa
5. Is it “cool” for you to like a toy that is labeled for the opposite sex?
6. Why do you think companies market toys for certain sexes? What are the advantages to this?
7. From the products I brought in, which ones are girl products, and which ones are boy products (7-10 min)?
8. Before they answer, I want them to look closely at the packaging, the color scheme, the writing on the outside of the package.
9. Does the packaging fit with the gender you thought it would?
10. Why do you think they used this certain color scheme?
11. Do you agree with your peers?

12. End of class (5 min): At the end of the discussion I will tell them about the field trip they will be taking to Target next week. I will hand out permission forms for their parents to sign.
13. Pack up (2 min): Students will be dismissed by table when the bell rings and proceed to their next class.

Closure:

Through the discussion students will show me that they are thinking critically about the products they like, as well as what their peers like. They will be able to explain what they like about a certain product, going into detail about packaging and functionality of the product. They will also be more aware that certain products are being marketed to a specific gender. They are beginning to get an idea of what all goes in to making a product, and then marketing that product in the real world.

Learning center/back up activity (if any):

N/A

Links:

Jeong Mee Yoon http://www.jeongmeeyoon.com/aw_pinkblue.htm