

The Impact of Pink Camo on Girls' Apparel

Today, Martial-Oriented Clothing Targets Both Boys and Girls

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It may be a Madison Avenue axiom that marketing creates new demand, but it's a rare coup to successfully instill it in a whole new demographic.

Lionel Trains got a tantalizing, if brief, taste of this possibility in 1957. Discovering how little girls enjoyed playing with electric trains as much as their brothers, the company issued the now-infamous [pink train set](#), spawning the toy industry's answer to the Ford Edsel.

In contrast, today's dual-gender outreach to child consumers and their parents defines one of the most formidable aspects of modern war marketing, distinguishing it from anything seen previously in popular culture.

Pink Camo Chic

Take the traditional camouflage print. Since 9/11, the olive drab-and-forest green combination is now complemented by a feminine pink-and-burgundy pattern, widely seen in girls' clothing and accessories.

This fashion iteration is readily informed by recent U.S. legislation proposing the reinstatement of a [draft for men and women](#) from ages 18 through 42 into the armed forces, or for other state service. The presence of girls in ROTC classes in secondary schools (courtesy of the recruitment-friendly No Child Left Behind Act from 2001) is as common as that of boys.

Gymboree Fights the Power... Sort of

A more gentle, even festive method of engendering the same "Go Army" sentiment in grade school girls is applied via cute animal mascots. Some backpacks come adorned with a cartoon cat driving a florescent armored tank, while bizarrely flourishing a flag displaying a dove. This invokes the same Orwellian doublethink as hats and skirts found in mall outlets like Gymboree, juxtaposing the ubiquitous camouflage motif with the "Peace" symbol.

In graphic terms, this is remarkably evocative of what renowned political critic Noam Chomsky cites in *The New Military Humanism* [Common Courage Press, 2002], wherein the Pentagon paints an almost philanthropic facade onto campaigns that raze the infrastructures and economies of whole nations.

Winter Pajamas for Battle

Overtures are made to still younger consumers. In recent winter seasons, retailers' one-piece pajamas for infants and toddlers have also sported the his-and-hers camo print, but with a truly subversive seasonal twist. Up close, the tessellating splotches of color depict frosty vistas of snowmen and children on sleighs. Stand back a foot or two, though, and the pattern coalesces into something more appropriate for the Battle of Hurtgen Forest.

What makes these items so particularly unsettling is their calculated effort to target children at a

pre- to newly-literate level in their development, much in the manner of TV's *Teletubbies*.

Taking Back The Children's Place

Of course, discriminating purchasing and calling retailers or manufacturers to task are the most immediate ways for parents to fight back. But, if the child is old enough, martial marketing also affords a valuable opportunity (particularly for girls) to introduce children to the semiotic import of clothing, toys and the other aspects of their daily lives, and how to productively counter it.

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