

## Pink, Blue, and Gender: An Update

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The role of pink and blue as gender markers is a source of endless fascination for both academics and the broader public. Five years ago I documented how a narrative that I labeled the “pink–blue reversal” (PBR) had become entrenched in contemporary culture (Del Giudice, 2012). The PBR maintains that, in the U.S., pink was associated with males and blue with females until the 1940s, when the convention underwent a rapid and complete reversal. At the time, the PBR was treated as established fact in the media and the scientific literature. However, its originator—American Studies researcher Jo Paoletti—never argued that the convention was *reversed* prior to the 1940s, but only that it was *inconsistent* (Paoletti, 1987, 1997, 2012). I suggested that this disconnect between the reports and the original claim qualified the PBR as a scientific urban legend. I also noted that the idea that gender coding had been inconsistent prior to the 1940s was based on a handful of quotes from newspapers and magazines, and performed a more systematic search in the extensive book database provided by the Google Books Ngram Viewer (<https://books.google.com/ngrams>). The search failed to identify any inconsistent associations (most likely, they were too few to be included in the Ngram corpus), but returned many occurrences of the standard convention of “blue for boys” and “pink for girls” between 1880 and 1980. Based on this finding, I suggested that even Paoletti’s original argument might have been overstated, and noted that the gender associations of pink and blue appeared to have been more stable than previously believed (Del Giudice,

2012). Even if the PBR as usually described never occurred, it continues to be mentioned uncritically in academic papers (e.g., Al-Rasheed, 2015) as well as in the media—most recently in an essay published in the *New York Times* (Miller, 2017).

The use of pink and blue in relation to gender is more than a sociological curiosity. Some researchers have suggested that sex-differentiated color preferences may have a biological basis and reflect evolved predispositions in addition to social learning (Hurlbert & Ling, 2007); the PBR has been used to dismiss evolutionary speculations on this topic as baseless “just so stories” (e.g., Fine, 2010). Indeed, the idea of an evolved basis for pink versus blue preferences is hard to reconcile with a rapid historical reversal, though it may be compatible with a phase of inconsistent or conflicting conventions. Investigating the biological foundations of color preferences could reveal new facts about the functioning of the human visual system and shed light on fascinating aspects of our cognitive and social evolution. It would be unfortunate if progress in this area was hampered by the persistence of inaccurate historical narratives.

Since the publication of my 2012 Letter, more sources of information have become available and the existing ones have considerably expanded. To begin, the 2009 corpus of the Ngram Viewer was updated in 2012 to include more books (about 8 million compared with the initial 5 million) and correct early problems with text recognition. The U.S. Library of Congress offers *Chronicling America*, a searchable historical archive of U.S. newspapers (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>). I learned about this archive in a recent online discussion of pink–blue coding (<https://skeptics.stackexchange.com/questions/38606/>). The coverage of *Chronicling America* has increased from about 5 million newspaper pages in 2012 to about 12 million today. Finally, a recently created Wikipedia page compiles quotes about the use of pink and blue as gender markers throughout history ([https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_historical\\_sources\\_for\\_pink\\_and\\_blue\\_as\\_gender\\_signifiers](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_historical_sources_for_pink_and_blue_as_gender_signifiers)). Research on sex-

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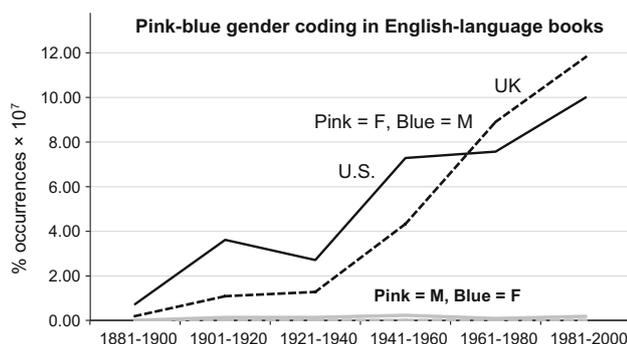
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differentiated color preferences and their development has also made significant advances, with several relevant papers published over the last few years. In this Letter, I update the results of the 2012 search and supplement them with new data on pink–blue gender coding in U.S. newspapers and magazines. I then review some recent studies of color preferences and discuss their potential biological implications. My goal is not to settle the issue or provide definitive answers, but to stimulate further reflection and highlight some promising directions for research.

I searched the Google Books Ngram Viewer on June 7, 2017, using the 2012 American English corpus (identifier: google-books-eng-us-all-20120701) and the 2012 British English corpus (identifier: googlebooks-eng-gb-all-20120701). The following search phrases were used (case insensitive): “pink for a girl,” “blue for a boy,” “blue for a girl,” “pink for a boy,” “pink for girls,” “blue for boys,” “blue for girls,” “pink for boys,” “pink for the girls,” “blue for the boys,” “blue for the girls,” and “pink for the boys” (see Del Giudice, 2012). The search was repeated on six 20-year intervals spanning the range 1881–2000, with smoothing set to 20 years to obtain the mean percentage of occurrences over each time interval. Percentages were summed across search phrases corresponding to the present-day standard convention (pink = F, blue = M) and phrases corresponding to the reverse convention (pink = M, blue = F). Finally, total percentages were multiplied by  $10^7$  for readability. The results are shown in Fig. 1 (raw data are available as supplementary material).

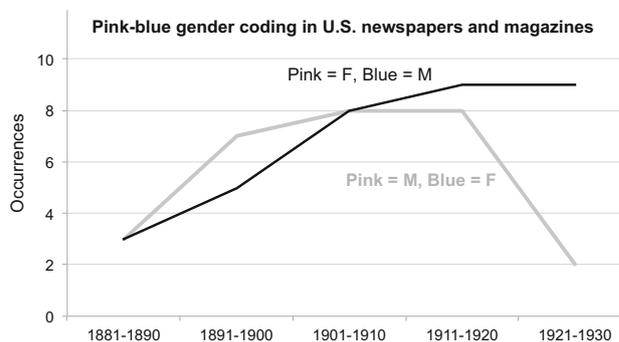
In line with the original search reported in Del Giudice (2012), English-language books showed virtually no evidence of either reversed or inconsistent usage prior to the 1940s. The few instances of reverse gender coding were found in the American corpus and were all matches to the phrase “blue for girls.” Note that this search was not predicated on the assumptions that *all* matches found in the Ngram corpora necessarily refer to gender conventions, or that the chosen phrases correctly identified *all* the relevant occurrences in the database. Instead, the point of the search was to obtain a rough estimate of the relative frequency of occurrences suggesting standard versus reverse coding, using the same phrases but switching color terms to make the results maximally comparable. One should also remember that the rep-



**Fig. 1** Pink–blue gender coding in English-language books (1881–2000). Source Google Books Ngram Viewer. See the main text for details

resentation of different kinds of books in the corpora (e.g., professional texts, popular books, novels) is not constant over time; for example, the proportion of scientific books in the Google database increases steadily throughout the twentieth century (Pechenick, Danforth, & Dodds, 2015). This limits the inferences that can be drawn from the historical trends depicted in Fig. 1. Despite these limitations, the figure clearly shows an overwhelming asymmetry in favor of the standard convention throughout the period considered. Furthermore, the pattern of occurrences is very similar in the U.S. and UK corpora, contradicting the notion that pink–blue coding was especially inconsistent in North American culture.

For newspapers, I searched the Chronicling America database on June 7, 2017. On that date, the database included 11,980,448 digitized pages spanning the period from 1789 to 1924. The search was performed with the string “blue pink boy girl,” and returned 62 matches ranging from 1889 to 1922. Each match was inspected individually, and the relevant text was extracted and coded (see the Appendix section). Of the 62 matches returned by the search, 27 were unique, informative quotes; 13 were duplicate quotes (articles or advertisements reproduced verbatim in more than one newspaper); and 22 were uninformative matches unrelated to gender coding (not reported here). The 27 unique quotes contained 14 instances of standard coding (pink = F, blue = M) and 14 instances of reverse coding (pink = M, blue = F; one of the quotes featured a debate between proponents of opposite conventions). To further increase coverage, I supplemented the search results with additional quotes from newspapers and popular magazines obtained from the Wikipedia page cited above (also retrieved on June 7, 2017). For consistency, quotes from scientific books and trade magazines were not included in the count. After removing duplicate entries, the Wikipedia page provided 20 additional instances of standard coding and 14 additional instances of reverse coding over the period 1881–1930 (see the Appendix section). In total, the database of quotes from newspapers and magazines comprised 34 instances of standard coding and 28 instances of reverse coding. The combined data are plotted in Fig. 2. While the number of occurrences in the figure is too small to draw confident con-



**Fig. 2** Pink–blue gender coding in U.S. newspapers and popular magazines (1881–1930). Sources Chronicling America, Wikipedia. See the main text for details

clusions, the distribution of standard versus reversed gender coding looks approximately even, at least until about 1920.

The discrepancy between the two searches raises an intriguing historical puzzle. While the PBR account remains unsupported, quotes from newspapers and magazines suggest a pattern of variable and/or conflicting conventions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see the [Appendix](#) section). However, the marked inconsistency observed in newspapers is virtually absent from the books published in the same period; instead, the pattern found in books overwhelmingly conforms to the standard convention of pink for girls and blue for boys. It is noteworthy that Paoletti (1987) relied on excerpts from newspaper and magazines to support her original argument (see Del Giudice, 2012). To summarize, there is evidence that, at least in the U.S., pink–blue gender coding showed a certain degree of inconsistency (though *not* a reversal) between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; however, the true extent of that inconsistency is still unclear, as different kinds of sources return dramatically different pictures. A satisfactory account of why the content of newspapers and magazines diverges from that of books will require in-depth investigation beyond the scope of this Letter.

Before moving on to the literature on color preferences, it is important to ask whether the existence of sex-related biological biases is compatible with *any* degree of inconsistency in gender coding throughout history. I suggest that the answer is likely to depend on the intensity of the putative biases: subtle differences in aesthetic preferences between males and females may take a relatively long time to drive the evolution of cultural norms, resulting in an initial phase of conflicting conventions followed by a shift toward the preferred, stable equilibrium. In this regard, it is interesting to note how fast the present convention of pink–blue coding has spread across the world, seemingly encountering little resistance even in non-Western cultures. Two additional factors that are rarely considered in this context might have further contributed to slow down the initial diffusion of what has eventually become the established norm. First, the ability of children to choose their own toys and clothes used to be much more limited in the past; to the extent that those choices were primarily made by mothers and other females (e.g., grandmothers), they may have been partly shaped by female-typical biases regardless of the child’s sex. As an illustration, consider the following quote:

That is the usual custom, pink for a girl, blue for a boy. But many mothers who are fond of pink let their babies wear it whether they are boys or girls. (*Evening Public Ledger*, December 30, 1919)

Second, color printing, textile dyeing, and other coloring technologies made spectacular advances in the twentieth century, allowing an ever-expanding range of bright and unusual colors to be applied to mass-produced items (e.g., Nassau, 1998). It is possible that the pink and blue hues available in the early decades of the century were only imperfectly matched to evolved

preferences; as technology improved, the distance between actual and preferred colors may have progressively narrowed, amplifying the initial bias and eventually triggering a rapid transition toward a stable convention. If this is the case, the bright, saturated pink and blues that are commonplace in today’s gendered products might work as “supernormal stimuli” that exploit a preexisting preference to trigger an exaggerated, evolutionarily novel response (see Arak & Enquist, 1993; Barrett, 2010).

So what do we know about sex-differentiated color preferences? Ten years ago, the topic was brought under the spotlight by Hurlbert and Ling (2007), who found a similar pattern in two samples of British and Chinese participants—a strong female preference for reddish-purple hues and a weaker male preference for colors in the blue–green region. Hurlbert and Ling suggested that their findings could be explained by evolved sex differences in low-level visual processes such as cone-opponent contrasts. The same general pattern of female preferences for reddish-purple colors and (weaker) male preferences for blue has emerged from large-scale analyses of color choices in social media; females also tend to prefer brighter colors across the board (Alowibdi, Buy, & Yu, 2013; Fortmann-Roe, 2013). While social learning clearly plays an important role in the development of aesthetic preferences, sex differences in this domain may be driven—at least in part—by biological predispositions that transcend the peculiarities of individual cultures.

Subsequent research has compared Western samples with other populations, including the Yali of Papua New Guinea, the Himba of Namibia, as well as Japanese and Arab participants (Al-Rasheed, 2015; Sorokowski, Sorokowska, & Witzel, 2014; Taylor, Clifford, & Franklin, 2013; Witzel, 2015; Yokosawa, Schloss, Asano, & Palmer, 2016). Research in this area is limited by the small size of most samples, which—for the relevant comparisons—range from  $N = 80$  in Taylor et al. (2013) to  $N = 308$  in Sorokowski et al. (2014). In light of this, it is remarkable that a common pattern of sex differences along a blue versus reddish-purple gradient seems to emerge cross-culturally in most studies. Commonalities become especially clear when sex differences are analyzed while controlling for overall differences between cultures (Witzel, 2015). The main contradictory finding in this area comes from a study by Taylor et al. (2013), which found a mixed pattern with stronger preference for red in Himba men; however, this is also the smallest study in the set, and replication would be highly desirable. Taken together, cross-cultural studies offer promising support for the existence of sex-related biases that may have a biological origin, even if the low-level visual processes emphasized by Hurlbert and Ling (2007) are probably insufficient to explain the empirical findings (see Al-Rasheed, 2015; Sorokowski et al., 2014).

Turning to possible evolutionary explanations for sex-differentiated color preferences, to my knowledge there has been virtually no research on this topic after Hurlbert and Ling’s contribution. They advanced two tentative hypotheses to explain women’s preference for reddish-purple hues. First, perceptual

specializations for gathering (e.g., enhanced identification of fruit against green backgrounds) may have been under stronger selection in females (see also Alexander, 2003). Second, females may have been selected for enhanced detection of emotional signals, some of which involve subtle changes in skin redness (indicating changes in peripheral blood circulation).

While these particular hypotheses are rather speculative and may well be incorrect, the general idea that reddish-purple colors have a different signal value for males and females is far from implausible. Consistent with Hurlbert and Ling's suggestions, there is evidence that both fruit detection and sensitivity to social signals have shaped the evolution of trichromatic vision in primates (Hiramatsu, Melin, Allen, Debuc, & Higham, 2017; Melin et al., 2014); they should not be discounted too quickly as potential contributing factors. The color red is implicated in sexual choice in many animal species; in humans, skin redness is a cue of health and attractiveness and—intriguingly—has a sexually dimorphic distribution, with men showing higher average levels of redness than women (e.g., Henderson et al., 2017; Pazda, Thorstenson, Elliot, & Perrett, 2016; Re, Witehead, Xiao, & Perrett, 2011; Stephen, Oldham, Perrett, & Barton, 2012; Thorstenson, Pazda, Elliot, & Perrett, 2017). This raises the possibility that women may be more sensitive than men to skin redness in potential sexual partners. The skin of newborns and infants also shows elevated redness compared with that of adults and takes a pink coloration in areas that are especially rich in capillary loops (e.g., cheeks) (Piérard, Paquet, & Piérard-Franchimont, 2003). Preferences for red and pink may be partly linked to female preferences for babies (Maestripieri & Pelka, 2002), especially if these colors reliably signal infant health (Alexander, 2003). This explanation would be consistent with the strong “cute” connotation of pink. I have been unable to find out whether the sexual dimorphism in skin redness is already present at birth—if so, average differences in skin color between male and female babies might have suggested an association between males and the color pink, which would conflict with the female-pink association based on the direction of visual preferences. Note that my goal here is not to advocate a particular hypothesis, but to point out that this promising area of research has yet to be explored in any detail.

If color preferences in adults are a robust phenomenon (whatever their ultimate cause), their development remains poorly understood. Sex-differentiated preferences for pink and blue emerge between 2 and 3 years of age; the strongest effects are observed for pink, which becomes more attractive for girls but begins to be actively avoided by boys (Jadva, Hines, & Golombok, 2010; LoBue & DeLoache, 2011; Wong & Hines, 2015). A study of children with gender dysphoria (3–12 years old) found a pattern of reversed preferences: gender-dysphoric boys preferred pink and brighter shades of blue, whereas gender-dysphoric girls avoided pink and tended to choose the darker blues. Interestingly, when children explained their choices they almost never referred to their preferred colors' associations with gender (Chiu et al.,

2006). In toddlers, color preferences are temporally unstable and largely uncorrelated with preferences for gender-typed toys, which emerge very early and are already established before 9 months of age (Alexander, Wilcox, & Woods, 2009; Wong & Hines, 2015). While this finding does not negate the possibility of a biological influence, it suggests that the development of color preferences follows a distinct and perhaps more complex trajectory. In principle, it is even possible that early preferences are mainly due to socialization effects (as suggested by parent–child correlations in Wong & Hines, 2015), whereas later preferences increasingly come to reflect the influence of unfolding hormonal processes. If this were the case, children with sex-atypical hormonal profiles should show systematic shifts in their color preferences over time. The transition between early and middle childhood is marked by the secretion of adrenal androgens and the emergence or intensification of sex differences in multiple domains (see Del Giudice, 2014); it would not be surprising if this transition turned out to be an important node in the development of color preferences. Clearly, there is more to pink and blue than meets the eye—and a wealth of fascinating questions that we have barely started to answer.

## Appendix: Quotes from Newspapers and Magazines

### Unique Quotes (Chronicling America)

*St. Paul Daily Globe, October 22, 1889.* First and foremost there is the basket, an elaborate affair of gilded wicker work upon a stand just conveniently high for daily use. This is lined with silk or satin, pure white or palest pink or blue—pink for boys and blue for girls, the gossips say; but that's a matter of taste. **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*Evening Star, September 20, 1890.* Ribbons run in drawn work are favorite ornaments on long dresses, white ribbons for the first three months, afterward pink for a boy and blue for a girl—clover pink for a blonde boy, and very pale blue for a dark baby girl. **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*The Roanoke Times, November 16, 1890.* If any color is used for infants, let it be blue for boys and pink for girls. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*The Sun, July 03, 1892.* Then these later-day babies must not be rocked, so say the physicians and nurses, and the old-time cradle is replaced by a willow basket bed, which is covered with lace-edged linen or lawn ruffles, and casings put on over pink for a boy, or blue for a girl, according to the French fashion. **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*Lawrence Democrat, September 29, 1893.* Pink for a boy and blue for a girl is a generally accepted dictum, though why nobody quite knows, unless a boy's outlook is so much more roseate that the girl is fairly tipified by blue. **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*The Salt Lake Herald, July 26, 1896.* Again the celluloid toilet articles will be in a delicate tint to match the basket ribbons,

which are generally pink for a boy and blue for a girl. **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*The Daily Morning Journal and Courier, March 01, 1900.* “Jennie, she told me not to put the border on until we knew,” again spreading out the jacket, “for It’s pink for a boy and blue for a girl, you know, ma’am, and Jennie said it wasn’t right to tempt Providence by selecting the wrong color.” **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*The Times, August 19, 1902.* “Please inform me which is the baby girl’s and which the baby boy’s color? Pink is for boys and blue for girls? Or vice versa?” REDDY. Blue for boys and pink for girls. The question was settled more than forty-seven years ago by Eugenie, Empress of the French, who had the layette, of her hoped-for heir fitted up with blue. She refused to consider the possibility that it would not be a son. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*The Evening World, July 26, 1905.* Rosie.—Blue for boy babies; pink for girls. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*The Morning Journal-Courier, October 22, 1908.* Let it be printed in colors, blue for boys, pink for girls, yellow for twins, red, white and blue for triplets, etc., to match the baby ribbon with which the cards inside are tied. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*The Tacoma Times, September 08, 1909.* Dear Miss Grey: What clothing is required for a new baby? And is blue for boys and pink for girls? MRS. A. H. A.: [...] Yes, blue is popularly supposed to be the color for boys and pink for girls. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*The Tacoma Times, May 17, 1910.* “Dear Miss Grey: (1) Is it bad luck to have one’s wedding ring made smaller? (2) Which is proper, Adele or Adelle? (3) Is pink a baby girl’s color?” READER. A.—(1) No. (2) Adele. (3) Pink for boys, and blue for girls. **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*University Missourian, June 28, 1910.* Pink for Girls, Blue for Boys. Mrs. Up-to-Date (in Infants’ Wear Department)—You may send me this cap, please. Clerk—Yes, madam. Do you wish the ribbons pink or blue? Mrs. Up-to-Date—Oh, pale yellow, of course! The dear little thing is a suffragette.—Judge. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*The San Francisco Call, September 04, 1910.* THERE are many things which can be embroidered or entirely made by the clever aunt or best friend of the new arrival’s mother. Usually they should be in white, although pink for a boy and blue for a girl are also sanctioned. **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*The Spokane Press, October 20, 1910.* Blue for Boy; Pink for Girl. Editor The Press: Which color stands for a boy baby, pink or blue. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*The Evening World, September 12, 1911.* We have literally sold thousands of these tender, beautiful Pictures since they were published in their original form. Now they appear in an attractive panel style, artistically framed in blue (for boys), or pink (for girls), also in gilt; with an appropriate verse by Burges Johnson. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*El Paso Herald, December 11, 1912.* Dear Miss Fairfax: To settle an argument, would you kindly tell what colors are used

for babies in sending out birth notices? Whether it is pink for boys and blue for girls, or blue for boys and pink for Girls? M. A. B. It is not important which color is used, but custom has given blue to the girl baby and pink to the boy. **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*The Bridgeport Evening Farmer, March 17, 1913.* Baby books in complete variety at Jackson’s Book Shop, 986-988 Main Street, blue for girls and pink for boys. **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*The Washington Herald, June 01, 1914.* Pink is the fashionable color in baby land now. The old saying was, “Pink for a girl, blue for a boy,” but as most of the exclusive baby outfits provided by the special shops now are pink, one must conclude that as this is the age of the feminists and the suffragists, pink for girls rules the day. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*El Paso Herald, August 06, 1914.* Dear Miss Fairfax: Will you kindly tell me the color used for baby boys? Anxious Mother. Pink is for boys. Blue for girls. It used to be just the opposite but this arrangement seems more suitable. **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*The Seattle Star, November 27, 1916.* Q—A short time ago, one of your readers asked you to tell them the proper color to prepare in anticipation of a girl or a boy baby. You stated that pink was for boys and blue for girls. This is not right. There is an old Dutch legend that establishes that, and it means blue for boys and pink for girls. D. D. A—According to the authorities at the public library, the way that I stated the answer is correct. Pink is for boys and blue for girls. This is an old Dutch custom. When a boy baby was born, a pink ball was hung out, and when a girl baby was born a blue ball was displayed. **[Pink = F, Blue = M] + [Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*Norwich bulletin, September 09, 1916.* A double faced Turkish set consisting of a lap blanket, about one and one-half yard square, two face cloths and two bath towels can be purchased for one dollar; pink for a girl, blue for a boy, latest arrangement of colors is carried out in a crocheted edge on each piece and dainty cross stitch design, one in each corner of the lap blanket and one on each other article. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*Ottumwa Semi-weekly Courier, October 23, 1917.* Make your embroidery in white or a very delicate shade of pink or blue. “Blue for girls: pink for boys” holds good in these little “affairs of the heart.” **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*Evening Public Ledger, December 30, 1919.* To the Editor of Woman’s Page: Dear Madam—What colors are usually worn by a girl baby, is it pink for a girl and blue for a boy? That is the usual custom, pink for a girl, blue for a boy. But many mothers who are fond of pink let their babies wear it whether they are boys or girls. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*East Oregonian, December 27, 1919.* Oh, shades of Polly Chase, as the pink pajama girl, the blue pajama boy promises to be the bright particular star of this sartorial season. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*The Review, September 22, 1921.* There wasn’t any question about “blue for a boy, pink for a girl.” [In a column about the behavior of baby turtles.] **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*The Bennington Evening Banner, May 03, 1922.* In SWEATERS, pink trimmed for the boy, blue for the girl [Advertisement.] [**Pink = M, Blue = F**]

### Duplicate Quotes (Chronicling America)

*The Indianapolis Journal, September 21, 1890.* Ribbons run in drawn work are favorite ornaments on long dresses, white ribbons for the first three months, afterward pink for a boy and blue for a girl—clover pink for a blonde boy, and very pale blue for a dark baby girl.

*The Lafayette Gazette, October 28, 1893.* Pink for a boy and blue for a girl is a generally accepted dictum, though why nobody quite knows, unless a boy's outlook is so much more roseate that the girl is fairly typified by blue.

*The Citizen-Republican, September 29, 1910.* There are many things which can be embroidered or entirely made by the clever aunt or best friend of the new arrival's mother. Usually they should be in white, although pink for a boy and blue for a girl are also sanctioned.

*The Prince George's Enquirer and Southern Maryland Advertiser, July 29, 1910.* Pink for Girls, Blue for Boys. Mrs. Up-to-Date (in Infants' Wear Department)—You may send me this cap, please. Clerk—Yes, madam. Do you wish the ribbons pink or blue? Mrs. Up-to-Date—Oh, pale yellow, of course! The dear little thing is a suffragette.—Judge.

*The Tacoma Times, November 28, 1916.* Q—A short time ago, one of your readers asked you to tell them the proper color to prepare in anticipation of a girl or a boy baby. You stated that pink was for boys and blue for girls. This is not right. There is an old Dutch legend that establishes that, and it means blue for boys and pink for girls. D. D. A—According to the authorities at the public library, the way that I stated the answer is correct. Pink is for boys and blue for girls. This is an old Dutch custom. When a boy baby was born, a pink ball was hung out, and when a girl baby was born a blue ball was displayed.

*The Topeka State Journal, December 27, 1919.* Oh, shades of Polly Chase, as the pink pajama girl, the blue pajama boy promises to be the bright particular star of this sartorial season.

*The Evening Missourian, December 30, 1919.* Oh, shades of Polly Chase, as the pink pajama girl, the blue pajama boy promises to be the bright particular star of this sartorial season.

*The Chickasha Daily Express, January 09, 1920.* Oh, shades of Polly Chase, as the pink pajama girl, the blue pajama boy promises to be the bright particular star of this sartorial season.

*The St. Charles Herald, October 15, 1921.* There wasn't any question about "blue for a boy, pink for a girl."

*The L'Anse Sentinel, October 7, 1921.* There wasn't any question about "blue for a boy, pink for a girl."

*Clearwater Republican, October 28, 1921.* There wasn't any question about "blue for a boy, pink for a girl."

*The Bennington Evening Banner, May 4, 1922.* In SWEATERS, pink trimmed for the boy, blue for the girl [Advertisement.]

*The Bennington Evening Banner, May 5, 1922.* In SWEATERS, pink trimmed for the boy, blue for the girl [Advertisement.]

### Additional Quotes (Wikipedia)

*Harper's Bazaar, volume 20, page 874, December 31, 1887.* ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS—U.—Pink is the color for baby girls' ribbons, and blue for boys. There is no new form of announcing the birth of an infant. [**Pink = F, Blue = M**]

*Atchison Daily Globe, Wednesday, July 18, 1888.* New York Fashion—Magnificent colors will be seen this fall. New York, July 12—... The newest style in infants' robes is to use valenciennes lace instead of embroideries, as they are finer and more delicate. Blue satin ribbons are for boys, pink for girls. [**Pink = F, Blue = M**]

*Ladies' Home Journal, November 1890.* Hints on Home Dress-Making by Emma M. Hooper. SELECTIONS OF COLORS AND STUFFS. Pure white is used for all babies—blue for girls and pink for boys, when a color is wished. [**Pink = M, Blue = F**]

*The Peterson Magazine, 1892.* BABY'S BLANKET: "Blue is used for boys', pink is for girls." [**Pink = F, Blue = M**]

*San Antonio Daily Light April 29, 1892.* The Baby's Dainty Blanket. The French think blue the most appropriate for boys, and pink for girls. [**Pink = F, Blue = M**]

*New York Times, July 23, 1893.* FINERY FOR INFANTS. "Oh, pink for a boy and blue for a girl!" exclaims a young woman who is preparing some gifts for a newly arrived nephew. [**Pink = M, Blue = F**]

*Hornellsville Weekly Tribune November 17, 1893.* New York Fashions. Mate Leroy's discusses the revival of ancient styles. There was a mite of a hoof of cashmere to go with it. Pink ribbons are for girls and blue for boys. Loving mothers prefer making the garments for the little strangers... [**Pink = F, Blue = M**]

*Los Angeles Times, July 19, 1893.* From Our Regular New York Fashion Correspondent. The very latest nursery fad is a silkey hammock for the new baby... First on the net is laid a silk quilted blanket, pink for a girl, blue for a boy... byline DALPHINE [**Pink = F, Blue = M**]

*New York Times, 24 January 1897.* BABY'S FIRST WARDROBE. There are, in the first place, six knitted shirts, made of the finest Saxony; six knitted bands, and a dozen socks, assorted sizes. These are of fine, soft wool, and may be either all white or varied with pink and blue—no other colors for a little baby. The pink is usually considered the color for a boy and the blue for a girl, but mothers use their own taste in such matters... [**Pink = M, Blue = F**]

*Table Talk (Philadelphia), volume 14, number 11, November 1899.* All Through the Year by Mrs. M. C. Myer. "Cuddledown

Town.” A marked color-line now exists in the toilets and appointments of the boy and girl-baby. If a flutter of pink is noticeable as the royal carriage passes, it is safe to conclude that His Majesty “the King” is taking an airing. If light blue decorations are in evidence, behold! It is the Queen! **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*Home Mission Monthly, 1900.* When the dues are paid, each child receives a badge—pink for girls, and blue for boys. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*Woman’s Work for Woman—volume 16, 1901.* Mrs. Wells of Utica excited great interest in her Baby Band and their badges, pink for boys and blue for girls. **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*New York Times, 17 March 1901.* For Baby’s Layette. With wool in which there is a little silk, the little sock has the lower part of blue for a girl baby and pink for the small boy, usually combined with white... **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*The Hutchinson News, February 26, 1903.* It is customary to trim the little clothes preparatory to the stork’s visit with blue, if a girl is wanted, and pink for a boy.—Atchison Globe **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*New York Times, 25 April 1904.* In the Shops. The velvet used with them is one of two colors, pink or blue, the two colors usually see in the cradles or layettes of babies, pink for the boys, blue for the small girls. **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*New York Times, 26 March 1905.* Cost of the American Baby. During their early months the little man and little woman dress exactly alike unless Master Baby should have pink for the prevailing color in his wardrobe and its accessories—the baby boy color; while Miss Baby will have blue, as that is supposed to be the girl baby color. **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*The New York Times, May 20, 1906.* Dreamland reopens and shows new glories. The Coney Island season received added impetus yesterday. Dreamland threw open its doors with the annual flourish of trumpets... One of the old features the crowd liked best yesterday was the infant incubator exhibit. Seven sterilized infants under glass in regulated temperatures and antisepticised atmosphere slept peacefully in their little white blankets. The boys had blue ribbons tied around them and the girls pink, and not one was over two weeks old. A model sterilized nursery goes with this exhibit. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*San Francisco Chronicle, March 10, 1909.* One of the Silver Cups Be Given to a Prize Baby of Los Gatos. All boy babies are to wear a pink ribbon and all girl babies will wear a blue ribbon. **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*Fort Wayne Journal Gazette, August 21, 1910.* Luxurious Preparations for the AUTUMN BABY... and the white bassinette is trimmed with a big ribbon bowe—blue for a boy, according to the old tradition, and pink for a girl. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*San Francisco Chronicle, April 14, 1912.* Birth Announcement. The correct announcement card which is sent out to intimate friends within twenty-four hours after baby’s arrival is a beveled edge six-inch square of highly glazed cardboard... “Name, Date of Birth, and Signature,” in blue lettering if the recent arrival is a boy and in pink for a girl. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*Fort Wayne Journal Gazette, July 6, 1913.* The World of Fashion—Luxuries for King Baby. Of course everyone knows—or soon discovers—the tradition about “blue for a boy and pink for a girl” and trims her baskets according to her hopes—though many a lusty boy has had to endure girlish pink belongings, and many a lovely wee girl has gone through babyhood suffering the indignity of masculine blue. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*The Los Angeles Sunday Times, February 7, 1915.* The Bright Side of Sunshine Land—People and Their Doings—a Hundred Happy Affairs: A DEBUTANTE’S LETTER. We are tremendously interested in Clara’s coming event—is she banking on pink or blue? Pink for a boy, blue for a girl, you know. Lavender for twins. **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*New York Times, May 24, 1916.* 20,000 WOMEN MEET IN ARMORY TONIGHT § Mrs. W. J. Bryan a Guest. They are talking of fixing up a day nursery to accommodate club babies at the armory so the mothers and grandmothers who have brought the babies along can attend the convention and feel that the children are safe. It will be decorated in blue, blue being the color for little girls, while pink is for boys. This is a woman’s convention. **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*San Francisco Chronicle, September 14, 1920.* Opening of Livingston Bros.’ New Store Is Colorful Event. Modern Nursery. A little away from the beaten path of the models the newly installed modern nursery held a group of women enthralled with the daintiness of its appointments in “pink for girls and blue for boys.” **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*Good Housekeeping, volume 71, October 1920.* Advertisement for Rogers, Lunt & Bowlin Co., Silversmiths, Greenfield, Massachusetts Illustration shows a three-piece Baby Set in special Gift Box—blue for girls, pink for boys. **[Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*Popular Science, August 1921...* maternity hospital in New York City... The sex of the baby is indicated by the color of the beads—blue for a boy and pink for a girl. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*Woman’s Home Companion—volume 49, 1922.* An Indian Maid with bow and arrows presided at the tree, and agreeably explained that the articles in blue were for boys, and pink for girls. Each person, on payment of five cents, was permitted to shoot at the tree with bow and arrow till... **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*Vogue—volume 59, May 1, 1922.* Vogue essays on etiquette: Questions and answers. What are the proper colours for the different sexes? Blue for boy. Pink for girl. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*The Golden Book Magazine, volume 2, 1925.* Blue is for boys; pink for girls. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*Everybody’s Magazine—volume 53, 1925.* “...Why should mothers buy blue for boy babies and pink for girl babies? The psychology of colors has always interested me.” **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*Los Angeles Times, July 7, 1928.* NANCY PAGE: Re-peter Gets Bank Book and Kodak in Color by Florence La Ganke. The kodak seemed very much a gift since it came in a colored case and had a colored frame of its own. It was dainty enough for a small baby. The color of the case was blue. That is because,

thought Nancy, the baby is a boy. Thank goodness, it is now considered correct to use blue for boys and pink for girls. The other color scheme always seemed wrong. Pink is a little girl's color, always. And anyway, B stands for blue and for boy. Had the baby been a girl the friend would have sent a kodak in a shade of rich rose. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

*New York Times*, 30 March 1929. Macy's Display Ad. Blue for a Girl and Pink for a Boy. (footnote): Some say, "pink for a girl and blue for a boy." Our advice is still: choose pink—it's prettiest. **[Pink = F, Blue = M] + [Pink = M, Blue = F]**

*San Francisco Chronicle*, April 18, 1930. Conduct and Common Sense by Anne Singleton, The Christening. An angel cake, which is all white, inside and out, would be more suitable. The baby's name might appear on it in blue letters for a boy, or pink letters for a girl, and the baby's mother would cut it. **[Pink = F, Blue = M]**

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