



EFFECTS OF INTERMINGLING OF CULTURES ON THE USE OF ADORNMENT SYMBOLS IN APPEARANCE MANAGEMENT IN MUTARE, ZIMBABWE

Shoko Betty

Department of Applied Education, Midlands State University

ABSTRACT

With increased intercultural contact, people with different backgrounds and orientations come into contact with one another. In this contact meanings assigned to appearance management symbols are not necessarily correctly interpreted. This study set out to examine how the intermingling of cultures has affected the use of symbols in appearance management in Mutare, Zimbabwe. The study was guided by three research questions: 1) what meanings do the different cultures in Chisamba area assign to their adornment symbols? 2) How have the meanings been affected by the intermingling of cultures? 3) Do these meanings still portray their cultural beliefs? In-depth interviews of 40 participants and non-participant observations were used for data collection. For some participants meanings of symbols attached to dress and appearance management have changed while some have been completely lost. The erosion of cultural meanings was attributed to contact between cultures and globalisation.

Keywords: Culture, Appearance management, Adornment, Dress, Intermingling, Adornment symbols.

CULTURE

Culture is the way people live within a social group or the aspects of life that can be passed from generation to generation. People within a given society create their own way of living and what is acceptable to them (Matson, 2005; Scheifer, 2006). Today many societies are multicultural with different cultures existing alongside each other, often intermingling and incorporating aspects that define other cultures. In a society the culture or values of people are expressed through various means. Dress expresses the culture of people and socially sets humans apart from other living species. Clothing in different cultures also shapes the traditional beliefs of people and the roles they play as well as giving them identity. Though cultures differ, humans have cultural universalities such as dress and the use of codes to express themselves and communicate with each other (Kaiser,

2002). In Mutare, there are many cultural groups that have been trying to portray their way of living through dress and appearance management. Appearance management is one aspect of culture which has been passed from our forefathers to the present generation. Appearance management refers to how people create images through dress and managing the outward body to reflect and express how they feel about themselves and portrays personal and cultural values (Moyana and Sibanda, 1984; Proctor, 1984). People use forms of symbolic codes to portray and maintain their cultural patterns. However, the meanings attached to these symbols have been fast declining because societies are becoming pluralistic (Chipangura, 2010). Mutare residents are no longer staying within their cultural or tribal groups, therefore, the coded symbols no longer portray their meanings as they used to do.

Historical Background of the People of Mutare

Traditionally, people of Mutare used to belong to the Manyika and the Ndau cultures. They used to stay within their tribal groups and they could maintain their values and customs. The development of industrialization and modernization saw people moving out of their societies to live in new areas in search of employment since the economy was fast moving into a capitalist economy.

People came to stay in Mutare in search of employment. There was gold mining in Penhalonga and railway construction in the Umtali to Beira Seaport. Mutare was also a town surrounded by farms so people had to migrate in search of employment in the canning and paper making factories. Not only did the people of Mutare and other parts of Zimbabwe migrate from their rural homes, but the people of Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique came into this country to work on farms and mines (Garlake and Proctor, 2002). Those people who came from other countries or within the country brought with them their codes of dress. The way the people dressed was either acceptable within the new society or was shunned. The need to be fully accepted within the new society led people into changing the way they dressed leading to the erosion of traditional practices (Bourdillon, 1997; Blaurer, 1999).

The transmission of dress codes has been done through the media, advertising in magazines, televisions and internet. These have influenced people, especially the young generations, into adopting new forms of dress.

Symbols in Dress and Appearance Management

Symbols such as ornaments, paints and tattoos have been seen to be universal. People of various tribal groups have been using them to portray different meanings. Blaurer (1999) argues that “sexual attraction, enhancing beauty and expressing one’s social status in life” have been the main reasons why people have been using the coded symbols to dress and manage their appearances. The preoccupation with the beautification of the body has been self-compelling since the earliest recordings of history indicate that man has not been contented with an unadorned body (Smiley and Mueller, 1995). Paints, ornaments or jewelry and scarification or tattoos were common symbols of

adornment used by people of various cultural groups to achieve the desired effect, which was beauty in various forms. Among the Ndaub tribe, ornaments such as beads, beaded clothing and earrings were common symbols used by women who were ready for marriage. Young girls who had reached puberty could beautify themselves by means of coloured beads and other ornaments. The beads would be worn on the waist, ankles, wrists and neck and as a head cover.

In modern multicultural Mutare, people still use jewelry to beautify themselves. Jewelry is now being used by the modern man and woman to protect them from the monotony of clothing. Everyone wants to improve the appearance of his material covering by making use of jewelry. Men are using tie pins, cuff links as modes of improving their clothing. Women on the other hand, are now using necklaces, bracelets and hair pins to adorn themselves. People also use jewelry to accentuate important points of a person's appearance and to bring out individuality to mass produced goods such as clothing (Blaurer, 1999).

Traditionally, women were expected to worry more about clothing than men but men are now showing concern about dress and management of appearances. In Mutare's Manyika and Ndaub cultures, use of earrings was dominant among the women and only the ears could be pierced though the Tsonga women would also pierce their lips (Moyana and Sibanda, 1984). Piercing of nose, navel, tongue and the introduction of many holes on the ears have been done as a way of sexually attracting the opposite sex but as (Chipangura, 2010) says "the ways people are using symbols these days no longer articulate the perceptions of society and culture or give meanings and coherence to these symbols."

In traditional Mutare, dress conveyed the social status of the wearer and it carried a world of significance and symbolism but with the intermingling of cultures meanings have been modified. Shapes culturally reserved for chiefs, such as the half-moon are now being used by brides as crowns to portray purity and by models during beauty pageants (Karin, 1997). Among the Shona, Ndebele and Tonga tribes of the high ranks hair was styled with elaborate costly ornaments. Beads, sea shells and wood chips could be tied at the end of each plait after the tufts had been plaited using tree bark. Feathers stuck into the hair as a form of adorning the hair by men was a status symbol to show bravery.

Body Paintings and Decorations

Painting of the skin is one of the oldest ways of adorning the body. People never wore clothes, so the best way of adorning the body was to use paints on it. Man painted his body because he was proud of it and it made him feel more important and attractive. Painting of the body was the most effective way of enhancing beauty, protection against weather elements, evil spirits and from being bitten by insects (Louw, 2007). Different colours of paints could be used on the body to convey messages and information. The Tonga tribe used white paint or ashes on the whole body to portray people in mourning. On the other hand, the Shona women, as a way of making themselves

beautiful used crushed white and brown soft stone (Moyana and Sibanda, 1984). Blood from animals killed by hunters, juice from wild fruits, black grease made from burnt castor seeds and vegetable dyes were the main colours which were used to make the paints. The occasions on which the paints were used and meanings attached were different. White and black dots could be painted on the eyes to accentuate the eyes while black grease could be used to prevent skin from being chapped as well as making it look attractive (Garlake and Proctor, 2002).

Scarifications and Tattoos

Tattoos and scarifications are permanent marks or designs made on the skins by pricking and ingraining skin with an indelible pigment (Handy, 2008). These cuts or decorations are made in the form of dots or small dashes that combine to create patterns (Louw, 2007). In Mutare, tattoos and scarifications were a form of adornment which was commonly used by the Tonga, Korekore and the Ndau tribes. These taboos and their meanings were different for men and women. Meanings varied from sexuality, fertility, or beauty for women while for men the designs often indicated social ranks, traits of character or political status (Handy, 2008).

Among the Ndau and Tonga women, tattoos were made on the women at different stages. At puberty, the face, upper arms and chest could be scarred. After the birth of the first child or at the end of breastfeeding a tattoo was made to highlight the bravery of a woman in enduring the pain. Tattoos marked the life of boys, witnessing their courage, strength and resistance to pain borne during initiations to become a man (Moyana and Sibanda, 1984). In Ndau women, tattoos accentuated the erotic and sensual parts of the body. These were done tactually and visually. The Ndau and Tonga women had their buttocks and thighs scarred to sexually please males. These tattoos were for the husbands' viewing only. Legs, buttocks and breasts were considered to be the most attractive parts of the body and the designs that were made were supposed to produce intimate feelings.

The meanings attached to tattoos have changed. Due to the intermingling of cultures, tattoos and scarifications which used to have deep and vigorous meanings in society have since lost their meanings and importance. Both males and females are seen to be using the same types of tattoos. New generations now decide on tattoo designs that best suit them or their personalities. Tattoos of creatures such as scorpions, stars of the Zodiac and the heart sign with a stabbing spear are common types of tattoos (Gold, 1987); (Labelle, 2005). Different cultures considered nudity as shameful so they encouraged members of their societies to cover their private parts. Tattoos which have a sexual appeal had to be covered by any form of clothing. Nowadays different parts of the body can have a sexual appeal depending on the type of tattoos made. Tattoos are being made on the upper arm, shoulder back and on the cleavage. To expose these tattoos the women and men leave the tattooed parts uncovered. The aim of this study was to examine how intermingling of cultures has affected meanings attached to symbols used in appearance management in Chisamba area of Sakubva, Mutare.

Objectives

The objectives of the study were: (1) to establish the symbols used in appearance management by residents of various cultures in Chisamba, (2) to establish the effect intermingling of cultures has had on meanings assigned to symbols used in appearance management, (3) to determine whether the meanings assigned to the symbols still portray their original cultural meanings.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey design was used to gather data from respondents. Data were collected through structured interviews and non-participant observations. The study was limited to Chisamba area of Sakubva high density suburb of Mutare. Mutare is located in the Manicaland province of Zimbabwe. Mutare was chosen for the study because it has several cultures including some from other parts of Zimbabwe as well as from neighbouring Mozambique, Malawi and Zambia. The population for the study comprised the residents of Chisamba. According to Mutare City Council 2010 records, Chisamba has 400 households. Chisamba was chosen because it houses more people of different cultural backgrounds than any other area of Sakubva and is the oldest high density suburb in Mutare. Purposive sampling was used to select 40 households to participate in the study. Sampling was done to include residents originating from Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique who make up the bulk of Chisamba and have different cultural beliefs and practices (Moyana and Sibanda, 1984). The households were grouped according to country of origin.

Table-1. Sample characteristics

Country of origin	No. of households	Female respondents	Male respondents
Zimbabwe	170	12	5
Zambia	60	4	2
Malawi	90	6	3
Mozambique	80	5	3

Ten percent of each group was used as the sample. The first 17 Zimbabwean, 6 Zambian, 9 Malawian and 8 Mozambique households made up the sample. Simple random sampling was used to select one respondent from each household using the hat method (Leedy, 1993). The sample included males and females as every individual manages their appearance in one way or another (Kaiser, 1990).

Interviews were conducted as they were flexible and offered the possibility of modifying the line of enquiry and allowed clarification of questions. Interviews were also useful as the elderly respondents, who were more knowledgeable on the subject, were mostly illiterate (Cohen and Manion, 1994). Non-participant observations were conducted. The researcher explained the purpose of the observations but did not give the residents time to modify their appearance in order to gather realistic data (Price and Oswald, 2006). Verbal consent was obtained from the participants after explaining the purpose of the research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Age Range

Nineteen female respondents and 6 males were in the 20 to 49 years age range. The younger age group of below 20 years comprised 4 females and 2 males. Two males and 7 females constituted respondents in the 50 years and above age range. This showed that respondents in all age groups use symbols to dress and manage their appearances. This agrees with Louw (2007) who states that all people have the desire to have a pleasing appearance and they always look for ways of improving their appearances.

Period of Stay in Chisamba

The results of the interview showed that thirty eight respondents have lived in Chisamba for more than 10 years while two respondents have stayed in Chisamba for less than ten years. The length of their stay enabled them to observe and adopt the symbols being used by various tribal groups around them resulting in dilution of the meanings and significance of symbols used in dress appearance management (Steele, 2000).

Adornment Symbols

Mascara, lipstick and nail polish are some of the paintings used by the nineteen female respondents who are in the nineteen to forty nine years age group. Six males in the 19 to 29 age group listed jewelry, scarifications and tattoos, use of bandanas, hair locking and plaiting as common ways of adorning themselves in order to have an attractive appearance. The elderly 7 females and 2 males, who are between fifty and sixty years of age, listed head shaving, scarification, hair plaiting, the use of "doek" to cover their heads and beaded clothing as their common symbols for adornment. Results revealed that the elderly used different symbols from the younger respondents. The younger respondents considered scarification decorations of primitive times (Louw, 2007).

Meanings Assigned to Adornment Symbols

The findings showed that twenty two respondents assigned enhancing beauty as a meaning attached to the adornment symbols they use, while eight respondents stated that they used symbols to enhance sexual attractiveness. The remaining four respondents indicated the need to be associated with high rank in society as the meaning they attached to symbols. (Karin, 1997) agrees with the respondents by stating that the way one dresses makes his or her status to be raised in the community.

Symbols Being Used By Mutareans That Still Portray Cultural Values

Respondents below 20 years of age showed that they did not know the meanings attached to symbols used in dress and appearance management, so they did not know if the way they dressed portrayed their cultural values. Eighteen respondents who comprised the elderly and the middle aged listed jewellery, scarifications, hair plaiting and paintings as some of the symbols that are

being used by Mutareans to portray cultural values. Women still use jewelry, paint and plaiting and ornaments as a common way of adorning the hair.

Changes in Significance of Meanings Attached to Symbols Due to Intermingling of Cultures

From the interviews and observations carried out, the researcher noted that there has been a significant change in the significance of meanings attached to symbols. The following table shows recordings of observations made on the elderly and younger generations on symbols commonly used.

Table-2.Observations of the elderly

Symbols	Changes in assigned meanings
Jewelry	There has been no change in the use of jewelry. Men still wear no jewelry.
Tattoos and scarifications	The Malawians, Ndaou and Zambians still have scarifications and tattoos made during initiation ceremonies.
Hair	Males cut their hair short while women either plaited or covered their heads with the doek.
Painting	No painting was evident on any of the respondents.

Table-3.Observation of younger respondents

Symbols used	Changes in significance of meanings assigned to symbols
Jewelry	Both males and females use jewelry in the form of ear, nose and finger rings. Even those who are not married wear finger rings and refer to them as “dress rings or fashion rings.”
Tattoos and scarifications	Tattoos were a common feature among males who used them as a status symbol or to depict some act they were proud of. No tattoos or scarifications were observed on women although they could have been covered by clothing as they are usually situated on very private parts of the body.
Hair adornment	Hair plaiting was common among both men and women but artificial extensions were added to women’ hair. Males either shaved their heads or cut the hair very short. Hair locking was also common. Hair pieces such as wigs were common among women.
Painting	Younger women used facial make-up in the form of mascara, eye shadow, foundation cream and lipstick. Nail polish was used to colour the nails. Colours that matched clothing were used. No natural paints were used.

Youths saw themselves as belonging to the wider world so they integrated themselves by using symbols with no meanings attached to their cultural backgrounds(Bourdillon, 1997). The elderly on the other hand stated that symbols no longer have the significance they had in their cultural groups.

Portrayal of Social, Moral and Cultural Values

Thirty two respondents expressed the view that symbols no longer portray the social, moral and cultural values of their tribal groups. Eight respondents stated that there is partial portrayal of values especially among the elderly who are in the above sixty age group. The middle aged also

expressed that there was partial portrayal of values. This is supported by Bourdillon (1997) who states that traditional dress portrays people's cultures but they mix them with other items of dress thereby creating new patterns of dress which fit the times they are in.

Symbols Most Affected In Use by the Intermingling of Cultures

The use of paint, hairstyles, jewelry and body decorations in the form of tattoos have been most affected in use by intermingling of cultures. (Gold, 1987) expresses the view that the desire for decorations is universal and conveys messages. This, however, has not augured well with the elderly of various tribal groups. From the interview, nine respondents felt that they were not pleased with the way symbols were being used. Plaiting of hair by males and leaving of the cleavage uncovered to expose tattoos by young females embarrassed the elderly especially when they were with people of the same tribal group. (Gold, 1987)'s views were supported by the younger generations as they stated that they were copying the way people of other countries, especially Americans, dressed. Thirty two respondents were of the view that culture has been eroded. Symbols being used to manage appearances no longer portrayed their cultural and moral values. They stated that younger generations will never know the meanings attached to symbols that were used by their tribal groups. Eight respondents stated that meanings attached to symbols suited them because culture is dynamic and they should copy what people of other countries do. This will enable them to fit well with the wider world.

Are People Who Use These Symbols Accepted in Tribal Group?

People who "misuse" the symbols have been accepted with reservations among the elderly as they still maintain that for their culture to be preserved, people should continue to dress the way they used to dress in their junior years. The way they dress was dignified and people, especially women, earned respect. The younger generations felt that they were being shunned by the elderly, especially their grandmothers, who rebuke them for the way they dress. These younger generations, especially the below 20 years age group, stated that adults should accept changes because the world is "moving fast" in as far as dress and appearance management is concerned. The elderly respondents were of the idea that the younger generations should be taught about meanings attached to symbols and be encouraged to use them for the preservation of culture. The elderly were also of the opinion that the young generations should be discouraged from using symbols not suitable for their sex, for example, hair plaiting and use of earrings by boys was seen as taboo in most cultural groups of Chisamba. The young male respondents suggested that the elderly should allow them to dress as they saw fit because they did not want be labeled as too traditional.

CONCLUSION

Various cultural groups co-exist in Chisamba and have all brought with them their own appearance management symbols. The intermingling of the cultures has led to people adopting adornment symbols from cultures other than their own. This has resulted in the modification or complete

change of meanings attached to the symbols. The younger generations do not know meanings attached to most symbols they use in managing appearances. They create their own meanings as they go.

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