

## Colors and Moods

Scientists have studied the effect of color on our mood and way of thinking for many years. Since the time of Pavlov and his experiments with salivating dogs, psychologists have known that stimuli can take on the properties of other stimuli with which they are associated. Pavlov used a bell and some meat; current theorists are focusing on colors and the moods with which they are associated.

Since everyone has different experiences, there will be some variability of associations to colors. There also are some correlations that are specific to particular cultures. However, there are also universal associations that are applicable to nearly everyone. There is surprising consistency among authors who describe these associations. (Eiseman, Holtschue, McCauley, Morton) Because of its association with nature and vegetation, green is associated with growth, fruitfulness and renewal.

Red, being the color of blood and fire, brings feelings of warmth, excitement, and passion. Blues, referring to the sky and lakes, associate with spirituality, cleanliness and tranquillity. Yellow is the color of sunlight and fruits, and brings feelings of cheer hope, and vitality. Orange, with its reference to fire and sunset, evokes feelings of energy and excitement. Purple, which rarely occurs in nature, is linked to spirituality, mysticism, and creativity. Jill Morton (1997) determined the accuracy of these associations with an international database of over 60,000 individuals.

In addition to mental associations, there are also physical responses to color. Light energy stimulates the pituitary and penal glands, and these regulate hormones and our bodies' other physiological systems. Red, for example, stimulates, excites and warms the body, increases the heart rate, brain wave activity, and respiration (Friedman).

Bright colors, such as yellow, reflect more light and stimulate the eyes. Yellow is the color that the eye processes first, and is the most luminous and visible color in the spectrum. There may be effects from colors that we do not even understand yet. Neuropsychologist Kurt Goldstein found that a blindfolded person will experience physiological reactions under rays of different colors. The skin may be able to "read color" and our bodies, minds, and emotions respond (Santa Lucia, p. 12).

The effect of colors on emotion is currently a topic of much interest. Magazines such as *Self*, *Cosmopolitan*, *McCall's*, *American Health and Psychology Today* have articles describing the association between color and mood. The November 6, 2004 issue of the Cincinnati Post contained an article about the effect of color on mood, and Realty Times featured an article on November 5, 2004, about the way that color affects how people feel.

Color therapy is gaining acceptance in the scientific community. In England, a headteacher improved behavior in students using "Kaleidoscope Therapy" in which colored lights are projected around a therapy room, and children explore emotions through color and positive affirmation (Lubbock). In the United States, Baker-Miller Pink has been used in jail cells to calm prisoners. Dr. Alexander Schauss Ph.D., director of the American Institute for Biosocial

Research in Tacoma Washington stated, " (pink is a) tranquilizing color that saps your energy. Even the color-blind are tranquilized by pink rooms" (Walker, pp. 50-52). Intermittent use appears more effective than long term exposure.

University of Hawaii associate head coach George Lumkin was a member of the 1991 staff that saw visitor's locker rooms at Iowa and Colorado State painted pink in the belief that the color made players passive. Now there is a rule that a visiting team's locker room cannot be painted a different color than the home team's locker room. In other words, it can be pink, black or any color of the rainbow, as long as both locker rooms are the same color. (Color Matters)

Alternative medicine is embracing the concept of color therapy. Like aromatherapy, color therapy is used to rebalance and heal the body. According to the International Association of Colour, the body achieves psychological and physical harmony through the use of color's vibrational energy (Raines). Products such as Philosophy's color therapy bubble bath called Rainbow Connection, and Tony and Tina's nail polishes named for the aura they emit (such as deep red for courage) reflect the popular interest in color and emotion. There are also psychological tests where your personality or career needs are determined by the colors you prefer. (Colorwize)

Color defines our world and gives definition to the objects around us. The human reaction to color is based on nature's symbolism, and the human psyche is what interprets these colors and gives them meaning. We are just beginning to understand the subtleties of the influence of color on our moods and emotion, and how we can use this influence to set a positive tone for our life.

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