

PSYCHOLOGY OF COLOUR

Colour consultants claim hues in the red area of colour are typically viewed as "warm" while those in the blue and green range are typically viewed as "cool". Reds are also viewed as active and exciting, while the blues and greens are viewed as soothing and passive. Physiological tests have revealed similar responses. It's claimed that red hues increase bodily tension and stimulate the nervous system, while "cool" hues release tension.

Colour consultants also point to an increasing number of studies linking colours to specific responses. One study found that weight lifters have more powerful performances in blue rooms, and another study found that babies cry more frequently in yellow rooms. Another used "drunk tank pink" to calm prisoners. Colour consultants believe that the colours used in the design of environment can have a significant impact on the emotions and performance of people within that environment.

Although colour psychology is a relatively new area of scientific research, ancient civilizations believed in the influence of colour on humans. The ancient Chinese, Egyptians, and Indians believed in chromo therapy, or healing with colours.

Various cultures see colour differently. In India, blue is associated with Krishna (a very positive association), green with Islam, red with purity (used as a wedding color) and brown with mourning. In most Asian cultures, yellow is the imperial colour with many of the same cultural associations as purple in the west. In China, red is symbolic of celebration, luck and prosperity; white is symbolic of mourning and death, while green hats mean a man's wife is cheating on him. In Europe colours are more strongly associated with political parties than they are in the U.S. In many countries black is synonymous with conservatism, red with socialism, while brown is still immediately associated with the Nazis. Many believe that blue is universally the best colour as it has the most positive and fewest negative cultural associations across various cultures.

Studies have shown most colours have more positive than negative associations, and even when a colour has negative association, it is normally only when used in a particular context.

People in many cultures have an automatic negative perception of the colour black, according to some researchers. Thomas Gilovich and Mark Frank found that sports teams with primarily black uniforms were significantly more likely to receive penalties in historical data. Students were more likely to infer negative traits from a picture of a player wearing a black uniform. They also taped staged football matches, with one team wearing black and another wearing white. Experienced referees were more likely to penalize black-wearing players for nearly identical plays. Finally, groups of students tended to prefer more aggressive sports if wearing black shirts themselves.

COLOUR POSITIVES AND NEGATIVES

Grey - Elegance, humility, respect, reverence, stability, subtlety, timelessness, wisdom
Anachronism, boredom, decay, decrepitude, dullness, dust, pollution, urban sprawl

White - Reverence, purity, snow, peace, innocence, cleanliness, simplicity, security, humility, marriage,
sterility, winter Coldness, sterility, clinicism, surrender, cowardice, fearfulness, winter, unimaginative

Black - Modernity, power, sophistication, formality, elegance, wealth, mystery, style
Evil, death, fear, anonymity, anger, sadness, remorse, mourning, unhappiness, mystery

Red - Passion, strength, energy, fire, love, sex, excitement, speed, heat, leadership, masculinity, power
Danger, fire, gaudiness, blood, war, anger, revolution, radicalism, aggression, stop

Blue - Seas, skies, peace, unity, harmony, tranquility, calmness, coolness, confidence, water, ice, loyalty, conservatism, dependability, cleanliness, technology, winter
Depression, coldness, idealism, obscenity, ice, tackiness, winter

Green - Nature, spring, fertility, youth, environment, wealth, money, good luck, vigour, generosity, go, grass

Aggression, inexperience, envy, misfortune, jealousy, money, illness, greed

Yellow - Sunlight, joy, happiness, optimism, idealism, wealth (gold), summer, hope, air

Cowardice, illness (quarantine), hazards, dishonesty, avarice, weakness

Purple - Sensuality, spirituality, creativity, wealth, royalty, nobility, ceremony, mystery, wisdom, enlightenment
Arrogance, flamboyance, gaudiness, mourning, profanity, exaggeration, confusion

Orange - Buddhism, energy, balance, heat, fire, enthusiasm, flamboyance, playfulness

Aggression, arrogance, flamboyance, gaudiness, over emotion, warning, danger, fire

Brown - Calm, depth, natural organisms, nature, richness, rusticism, stability, tradition

Anachronism, boorishness, dirt, dullness, filth, heaviness, poverty, roughness

Most evidence suggests the lack of a single, universal psychological reaction to a particular colour. For example, death is symbolized by black in most Western cultures and by white in many Eastern cultures. Even members of the same culture from different age groups can act differently. Referencing colours with emotions is developed by every individual when they feel an emotion and then see a colour repeated during this time. After the connection is ingrained, the referencing can go both ways.

It can be summarized that emotional response to colours is learned. Some colour responses are more fundamental and therefore universal eg. the reaction to warm and cold colours (very much a personal body response to

comfort or danger) or the calmness generated by greens and blues together is likely to be as a result of an association with landscape and natural things essential for our survival as human beings. Other colour responses are learned as a result of cultural influences.

A painting is very much a colour statement and as artists it is useful to be aware of the possible significance of the colours we choose to use.

If we understand the power of colours to generate mood or symbolize then we are able to express our own feelings or ideas with greater effect.