The Emotional Aspect of Color

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Does blue make you calm, make you want to swim in the ocean or make you excited? Does a dark shade of red make you feel romantic or remind you of blood? Colors can have this affect on us; they can make us relaxed or uncomfortable. Color is inescapable; it is everywhere we go. Like touching and feeling, we are forced to experience things with no way of really avoiding them. Our eyes are designed to filter out the light on an object and create a color. Color affects us physically and psychologically, whether we are conscious of it or not. If we lived without color, our behavior towards many things would change. The sky would not be different shades of blue and leaves would not be a beautiful shade of red during the fall. Color can even describe us as people. We choose to wear a certain color everyday or decorate our homes a certain way that convey the way we are feeling; colors express emotions. How does color change our emotions and feelings? How does it change our outlook on the world we live in?

Color is an interesting phenomenon and has become a factor in almost every part of our lives. It gives the world emotion and feeling. Without color, our world would be bland, emotionless and boring. We all use color for different reasons—advertisement companies to attract a certain audience, clothing to show how we are feeling that day, or decorating a home a specific color that makes us feel calm. Everyone uses color to express their feelings through their clothing and what they wear. When seeing a man dressed in black one might feel the person is lonely or sad because of the absence of color; a bright color would show a different emotion. Not only do people show their feelings through their clothing, color can also be used in make-up. A woman may wear a pink blush on her cheeks and wear gold eye-shadow to make herself look prettier. These colors convey an emotion to her or to who will be seeing it.[1] As we grow older, we use color to show many different types of emotions.

Even though color is universal, all the emotions that many people associate with them is not. In some cultures the meaning of color may be the exact opposite of its symbolic value in another culture. An example of that is the color white. In Western culture, white is a symbol of purity, cleanliness and reflects what is sacred; it is the color of perfection. That is the reason that doctors wear white coats and why brides wear white dresses; it is pure and peaceful.[2] In India, white is associated with death and unhappiness; it is only acceptable to wear it when one is at a funeral or at a ceremony that marks a death in a family. When a woman's husband dies and she becomes a widow, it is only acceptable that her clothes are white.[3] In India, white is the absence of color; it repels all light and color. Widows are supposed to be disconnected from the pleasures of life and normal participation in society. Even though white in India is associated with death, in some settings, like white can be accepted as the color of peace and purity.

Like white, red has a negative and positive emotion that it is connected to in different cultures. In China, red is associated with good luck and celebration. At a wedding, brides wear red to symbolize their passionate love. While in China red is seen as a joyous color, in Western countries red is seen as the color of war and blood[4].

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[1] Creating emotion through color." *Iml*. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 May 2011. <http://iml.jou.ufl.edu/ projects/fall05/rosenblatt/intro.html>.

[2] Meaning, Symbolism and Psychology. *Squidoo*. N.p., 2011. Web. 6 May 2011. <http://www.squidoo.com/colorexpert>.

[3] "India, A Country of Symbolic Colors." *Sensational Colors*. N.p., 2011. Web. 6 May 2011.

<http://www.sensationalcolor.com/color-messages-meanings/color-around-the-globe/ india-a-country-of-symbolic-colors.html>.

[4] "Meanings by Cultures." *The International Business Edge*. Globalization Group, n.d. Web. 9 May 2011.

Throughout the world, color is perceived differently. It can be used in many different ways for advertising, art, architecture and much more. Even though colors may be used for different reasons, what the color gives off is usually the same—to evoke emotion in the viewer when seeing a product. Not everyone has a similar emotion for certain colors, but studies have shown that many people share a common favorite color.

Blue is the majority of people's favorite color.[5] Blue usually gives off a calming, restful emotion and is associated with creativity, knowledge, and health[6] and tends to connect us to holistic thoughts. Studies have shown that seeing a certain shade of blue makes the body produce chemicals that are calming, a reason why many bedrooms are painted a shade of blue. Certain shades have proven that people who lift weights in blue rooms are able to lift more because it lowers their blood pressure[7]. Like many other colors, when used too much, the color can have a negative emotion. When used too much, blue can give off a depressing, cold or insecure feeling.

Psychology & Color

When we see certain colors, our minds give off different emotions, which can change our mood or perspective on something. Certain colors can raise our blood pressure, can cause more rapid breathing, and increase our pulse rate, our adrenaline and galvanic skin response. Usually we are unaware of these changes when seeing a color and have related it more to events around us. What would happen if we were only surrounded by colors that made us calm and happy? What if we had the perfect balance of colors? How would that change our lives? In a recent study, researchers conducted tests with 600 people to determine the emotions that varied when seeing red or blue.[8] The participants performed different tasks with images and words that were displayed in either red or blue. The groups who saw red did better on tests that applied to attention to detail, while the blue groups did better on tests that applied to imagination and being creative. "If you're talking about wanting enhanced memory for something like proofreading skills, then a red color should be used, but for a brainstorming session for a new product or coming up with a new solution to fight child obesity or teenage smoking, then you should get people into a blue room." In certain shades, red can give a physical effect that increases rate of respiration and raises blood pressure[9]. We are usually not aware of these body changes while seeing color; it has become an unconscious thing that we do.

Culture values can shape people's perspective of color, just as age can. When many kids are young, they are drawn to more vibrant colors like pink and blue. When walking into a kindergarten classroom, walls are often decorated with bright drawings. This is because certain

<http://www.globalization-group.com/edge/resources/color-meanings-by-culture/>.

[5] "Psychology of Color." *Precision intermedia*. N.p., n.d. Web. 6 May 2011.
    <http://www.precisionintermedia.com/color.html>.

[6] "Blue." *About.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 8 May 2011. <http://desktoppub.about.com/cs/colorselection/p/
    blue.htm>.

[7] "Color Psychology." *Think Quest*. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 May 2011. <http://library.thinkquest.org/27066/
    psychology/nlcolorpsych.html>.

[8] Bulluck, Pam. "Reinvent Wheel? Blue Room. Defusing a Bomb? Red Room." *NY Times*. N.p., 4 Feb. 2009.
    Web. 6 May 2011. <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/06/science/06color.html>.

[9] "Color Psychology." *Think Quest*. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 May 2011. <http://library.thinkquest.org/27066/
    psychology/nlcolorpsych.html>.

colors like purple, orange, and yellow are proven to stimulate mental activity and help increase creativity[10]. When kids are born their eyes only see black and white, which is why many parents buy black and white toys. Over the first six to eight weeks, babies' eyes drastically change. First, they start seeing red, then they start to perceive bright colors like yellow. As children grow, their eyes start developing more and they begin to see different hues of color. Studies have shown that children under the age of ten say that their favorite color is pink or yellow, but as they get older, their favorite color can turn into blue. Another factor of children choosing their favorite color is gender. It is still unsolved, but throughout many studies it has been shown that younger girls like pink, lavender, or violet and young boys like black and other dark colors. We are uncertain of why this is, but it seems that the same genders have the same preferred colors. Not only does this apply to what color parents decided to paint their children's room, advertising companies consider colors that attract children. When you walk into a toy store there are bright colors everywhere—Barbies are bright pink and HotWheels are bright red and blue. Almost all of our advertising today is aimed at younger people[11].

Advertising & Color

Color plays a huge part in advertising. Not only do they draw in a certain age group or type of person, but they catch the attention of different consumers and their habits; it is a determinant of character. When using a different color, it attracts customer with the same habits. Dark and heavy colors can reflect a type of customer who is impulsive and active. But bright colors can reflect a selective and valuable type of customer[12]. For some big advertisers, colors can show the class and the characteristics of the product. Studies have shown that color signals will affect the human senses much more quickly than voice signals. As we watch a television commercial or see a big billboard, the things that attract us fastest are the colors. If all there was in an advertisement was a man in black and white just talking we wouldn't feel so drawn to it. But if there were many bright colors surrounding the man talking, we would feel more drawn into the advertisement.

As we get older we are not drawn to bright colors are much as when we were younger; bright colors can appear more sickening than exciting. Many companies use their packaging to attract adolescents, and use the bright colors to make them buy the product. There have been many controversies with many adult product companies trying to attract adolescents. Alcoholic beverage companies and cigarette companies are being accused of drawing in underage buyers. Recently, the government is trying to make cigarette companies use only black and white in their cigarette box wrapping because they believe that the bright colors attract a younger audience[13].

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[10] "How colors can affect our health." *Stimulation Status*. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 May 2011.
<http://stimulationstatus.onsugar.com/How-Colors-can-Affect-your-Health-14746364>.

[11] *International Business Management*. Smart Ads and Color Selection, 2011. Web. 6 May 2011.
<http://www.wcdarc-ohrid.org/smart-ads-color-selection.html>.

[12] "Smart Ads and Color Selection." *Effective Advertising Strategies*. Wcdarc-ohrid, n.d. Web. 9 May 2011. <http://www.wcdarc-ohrid.org/smart-ads-color-selection.html>.

[13] Conley, Lucas, and Lucas Conley. "Taste the Rainbow: Cigarette Makers' Colorful Answer to FDA Packaging Regs." *Fast Company*. N.p., 22 Oct. 2009. Web. 8 May 2011.
<http://www.fastcompany.com/blog/lucas-conley/advertising-branding-and-marketing/smoke-and-mirrors-smoke-signals-tobacco-two-ste>.

They believe that the bright gold and red on the packaging is drawing young people's attention, making them buy the cigarettes and start smoking. If the packaging is changed to black and white, then the attraction towards the product will lessen and lower the amount of young smokers.

Try to imagine the world without color—no green grass, no bright blue skies. Our world would be dull and boring or just nothing at all. This is a subject that many people do not thoroughly think about. We put on a piece of clothing or paint a wall a certain color because we think it looks good. Many people do not think about why they choose a color. Maybe because it is soothing or makes that person feel happy. This concept of color escapes our minds, even though it is always there. Who knew that yellow walls make a baby cry more[14] or that too much of blue can make someone nauseous? The knowledge of color can drastically change someone's life. Color is interwoven into every part of our lives; it is something that no one can avoid.

[14] "Matters-Vision." *Color Matters*. N.p., n.d. Web. 9 May 2011. <http://www.colormatters.com/ optics.html>.

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