

Effects of university affiliation and 'school spirit' on color preferences: Berkeley versus Stanford

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Abstract:

The ecological valence theory (EVT) posits that preference for a color is determined by people's average affective response to everything associated with it (Palmer & Schloss, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 107, 8877-8882, 2010). The EVT thus implies the existence of sociocultural effects: Color preference should increase with positive feelings (or decrease with negative feelings) toward an institution strongly associated with a color. We tested this prediction by measuring undergraduates' color preferences at two rival universities, Berkeley and Stanford, to determine whether students liked their university's colors better than their rivals did. Students not only preferred their own colors more than their rivals did, but the degree of their preference increased with self-rated positive affect ('school spirit') for their university. These results support the EVT's claim that color preference is caused by learned affective responses to associated objects and institutions, because it is unlikely that students choose their university or develop their degree of school spirit on the basis of preexisting color preferences.