

Girls prefer pink, or at least a redder shade of blue

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A study in the August 21st issue of *Current Biology*, a publication of Cell Press, reports some of the first conclusive evidence in support of the long-held notion that men and women differ when it comes to their favorite colors. Indeed, the researchers found that women really do prefer pink—or at least a redder shade of blue—than men do.

"Although we expected to find sex differences, we were surprised at how robust they were, given the simplicity of our test," said Anya Hurlbert of Newcastle University, UK. In the test, young adult men and women were asked to select, as rapidly as possible, their preferred color from each of a series of paired, colored rectangles.

The universal favorite color for all people appears to be blue, they found. "On top of that, females have a preference for the red end of the red-green axis, and this shifts their color preference slightly away from blue towards red, which tends to make pinks and lilacs the most preferred colors in comparison with others," she said.

Overall, the differences between men and women were clear enough that the seasoned researchers can now usually predict the sex of a participant based on their favorite-color profile.

To begin to address whether sex differences in color preference depend more on biology or culture, the researchers tested a small group of Chinese people amongst the other 171 British Caucasian study participants. The results among the Chinese were similar, Hurlbert said,

strengthening the idea that the sex differences might be biological. The explanation might go back to humans' hunter-gatherer days, when women—the primary gatherers--would have benefited from an ability to key in on ripe, red fruits.

"Evolution may have driven females to prefer reddish colors--reddish fruits, healthy, reddish faces," Hurlbert said. "Culture may exploit and compound this natural female preference."

She said another way to separate "nature versus nurture" when it comes to favorite colors will be to test the preferences of infants. The researchers have plans to modify the color-choice test for use in young babies and hope to have some answers on that front soon.

About the universal preference for blue, "I can only speculate," said Hurlbert. "I would favor evolutionary arguments again here. Going back to our 'savannah' days, we would have a natural preference for a clear blue sky, because it signaled good weather. Clear blue also signals a good water source."

Source: Cell Press

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