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HEG84-192 Analyzing Color in Your Wardrobe

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Analyzing Color in Your Wardrobe

This NebGuide discusses the importance of color in your wardrobe and offers suggestions on how to select colors to complement your personal coloring.

Thelma Thompson, Extension Specialist-Clothing and Textiles

Color is a powerful design element in our environment and our wardrobes. Although color is only one facet of design, it is usually the one that first attracts us to clothing. To learn how to use color, we need to understand the meaning of such terms as hue, value and intensity, and how to combine colors in pleasing harmonies.

Personal coloring -- your skin, hair and eye colors -- is the key to making harmonious color selections in clothing. Color can affect your apparent size and body shape, as well as reveal your mood, personality and sense of fashion. As you become more aware of color and relate it to your own coloring and lifestyle, you can make more appropriate clothing choices which will save both shopping time and money. And, you will save time in dressing, and feel better about your color-related appearance.

Color Terminology

To become familiar with the dimensions of color, let's review a few terms.

- **Hue** refers to the color name.

Primary hues are red, yellow and blue. These hues cannot be produced by combining other colors, but are the basis for making all other colors. On the color wheel, the primary colors form a major triangle (*Figure 1*).

Secondary hues are formed by combining two primary hues. The three secondary hues are orange, green and violet.

Tertiary or *intermediate* hues are formed when a primary and neighboring secondary hues are combined. These include yellow-green, blue-green, blue-violet, red-violet, red-orange and yellow-orange. The Primary, Secondary and Tertiary hues are the basic twelve colors, but numerous color variations can be produced from them.

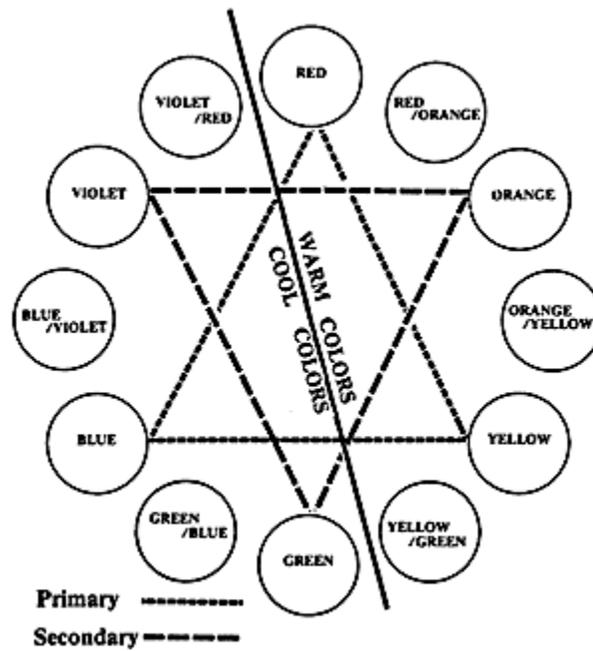


Figure 1. Color Wheel.

- **Value** is the lightness or darkness of a hue, ranging from white to black on the value scale. Add white to a hue and it becomes a *tint*; add black and it becomes a *shade*. For example, red can vary from pink to wine on the value scale.
- **Intensity** (chroma) is the brightness or dullness of a color. We refer to the strength or weakness of a color, depending on the saturation of color. Full saturation refers to the pure hue. When a pure hue is mixed with another color, it becomes grayed.

Color Combinations

Colors can be combined in various ways, but the three most common color harmonies are *monochromatic*, *analogous* and *complementary* (Figure 2). By knowing the various color schemes, you can select the colors that are harmonious to each other and to your personal coloring.

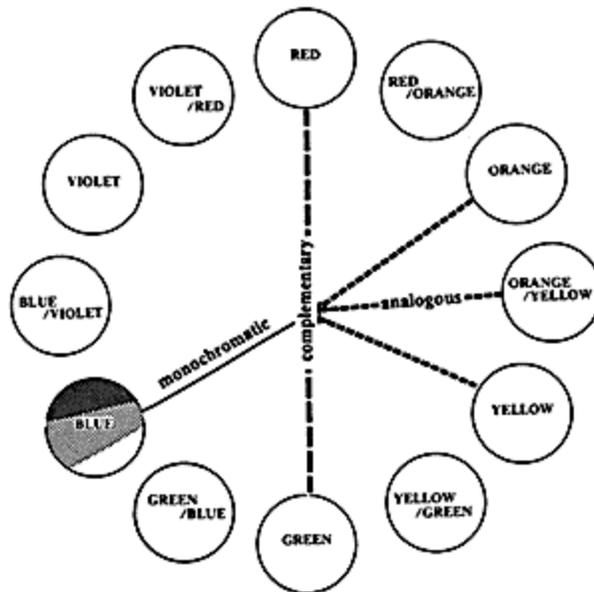


Figure 2. Color Harmonies.

- **Monochromatic** harmony is developed around one color. This could mean variations in value or intensity of one hue, such as light, medium and dark blue. Monochromatic color schemes are easy and restful, but can become monotonous.
- **Analogous** harmony refers to neighboring colors on the color wheel. An example is yellow, yellow-green and green. This produces a restful effect and is less dramatic than the complementary color scheme.
- **Complementary** harmonies are colors that are directly opposite of each other on the color wheel. They tend to be dramatic, such as the red and green Christmas color scheme. Complementary colors intensify each other and tend to be bold and attention-getting. However, if these colors are grayed they become more wearable.

Color Communications

We use color to express our feelings. We may say we are "feeling blue," "green with envy" or "red with anger." Color is used to control traffic -- stop on red, caution with yellow and go on green. Color can inspire action, warm us, stimulate happiness or provide serenity.

When shopping for clothing, color usually gets our attention first. If the color is appealing, we are then ready to look at the fabric, style and texture. Color choices affect mood and reveal personality traits. What does your wardrobe say about you? Do you use color to counteract a gloomy day? Do you find yourself gravitating toward certain colors and avoiding others? We should respect our intuitive feelings about colors we like to wear, and yet we also need to experiment with other colors.

Warm and Cool Colors

Psychologists divide hues by those associated with warmth and coolness. *Warm* hues include the yellows, oranges and reds. These hues accelerate the pulse, increase body temperature, and indicate an extroverted emotional response. *Cool* hues include the blues and violets, and are perceived as receding,

tranquil, and passive. Dark values of any hue are considered warmer, while light colors are considered cooler. If the hue is intense and warm, the color is considered warm. Likewise, cool, intense hues are considered cool. Thus, we can use color to serve desired physical and psychological needs.

Warm, or advancing, colors appear closer than they actually are. These colors include the bright warm hues of red, orange and yellow. The more intense a color, the more advancing it seems. Cool, or receding, colors make objects appear farther away than they actually are. These include blues and violets.

Influences on Color

We do not see color by itself. Color is related to light, texture and other colors.

The type of *light* under which a color is seen has a direct effect on its perception. When the source of light changes, the color also changes. Natural daylight from a northern exposure is the best light in which to view color and its effect on a person. Artificial incandescent light projects yellow and red onto color. Fluorescent lights tend to cast blue to green tones on color. If you can, test proposed purchases in the type of lighting in which the garment will be worn. If you can't, be aware of such lighting effects when selecting clothing.

Generally speaking, rough *textures* tend to absorb light, making colors appear deep and dull, while shiny surfaces tend to make colors appear clear and bright.

Colors are also influenced by *other colors*. When two colors are placed side by side, differences appear greater. For example, have you ever tried to purchase a red sweater for a red skirt? Were you surprised in the difference between the two reds? Those differences will vary directly according to how much the colors differ in hue, value and intensity.

Another consideration is the colors (such as office or living room walls) where the garments are to be worn. Colors with little background contrast in value may appear more slenderizing than black, which is a high contrast color. Light colors on a dark background appear lighter.

Color in Fashion

You may wonder why you can't find your favorite color in a particular season. This is because manufacturers plan the colors they will use well ahead of the time they'll be worn. Members of an International Color Authority meet twice a year and plan colors two years in advance. As a result, fashion colors reflect the moods of the nation and world. The economic condition, state of war or peace and environment interests are all reflected in the colors shown.

As a result of fashion color changes, we need to update our wardrobes by finding colors that relate to our color plans. However, before adapting off-beat or raw colors such as mustard or magenta, be sure they relate to your personal coloring.

Personal Color Analysis

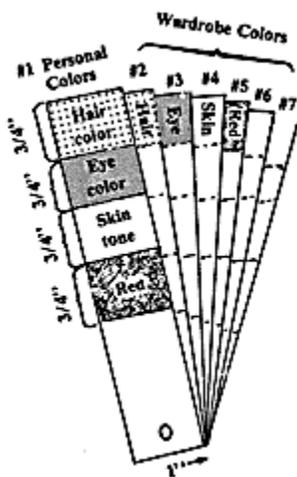
Johannes Itten, the famous Bauhaus colorist, claimed that every woman should know what colors are becoming to her, and that those will be her subjective colors and their complements. How do we discover what our subjective colors are? Our color choices may be influenced by parents, friends or past experiences. Another method is by identifying your personal colors.

Authorities differ in how personal colors are identified, but basically, they are the colors of your skin, hair, and eyes. Most consider the skin as most important. The skin contains three pigments: hemoglobin (red), carotene (yellow-orange), and melanin (brown)-- the suntan and freckle pigment. All races have the same three pigments, but in different concentrations.

Black people have more melanin in their skin tones than Caucasians; Orientals have greater amounts of carotene than other groups. People of the same race differ from each other in value (lightness and darkness) due to the melanin content of their skin.

There are several theories for analyzing personal coloring. Most of them are *seasonal*; in other words, during color analyses, consultants place their clients in either Summer, Autumn, Winter or Spring categories, based on their personal coloring. The client then receives "prepackaged" colors.

The University of California-Munsell color theory, a scientific study of personal coloring, classifies skin tones as *pink*, *peach* and *golden*. Of course, not everyone falls into those precise groups. There are those people with skin tones between pink and peach or between peach and golden.



There are color consultants who, for a fee, will color analyze you and give you a pre-packaged group of colors, or who will develop a personalized color profile. The latter service will probably be more extensive and more expensive. However, if you have the interest and time, you can make your own color aid.

Matching colors to your eyes, hair, skin and related reds become the basis for selecting and making a color aid (*Figure 3*). Related reds are inspired by the red in your skin tone. When a person blushes, you see the basis for related reds. They are used in lipstick colors for women and in tie colors for men. This red can be varied as long as it is related to the red in skin color.

Figure 3. Color Aid.

A color aid is a basis for adding colors. Generally speaking, the colors you choose to add to your hair, eyes, skin and related reds should be lighter or darker than your personal colors. "Don't make anything you have look dull," says Debra Linquist, a personal color consultant and co-founder of Color Profiles, Ltd., Denver, Co. How many times have you see a person with pale blue eyes wear a dress of intense royal blue? The color overpowers the person. The person, not the color, should be most important.

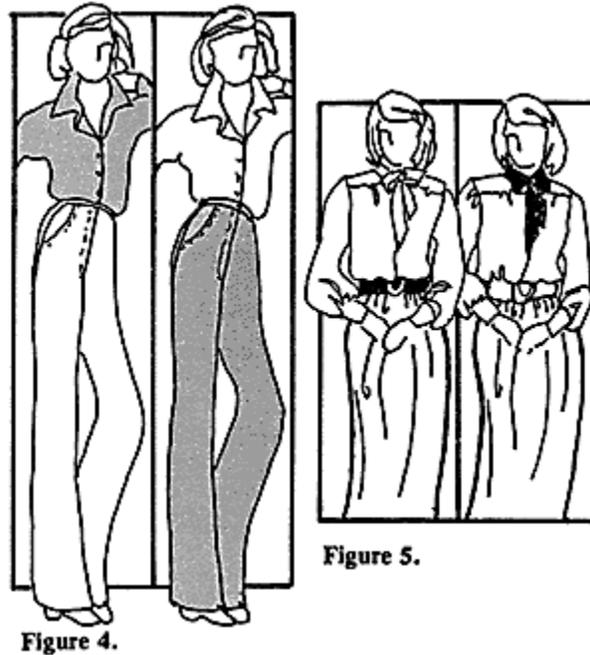
Color in Your Wardrobe

Once you have identified your best colors, compare them with what you have in your wardrobe. Colored scarves are an excellent and inexpensive way to experiment with new colors. Not-so-flattering colors can be worn away from the face. A scarf, collar or massive jewelry can bring the desired color next to your face.

A versatile wardrobe will include a few favorite basic colors such as black, camel or navy. These basic colors make it much easier to coordinate your colors and accessories. There should be a pleasing harmony among all of the colors in your wardrobe.

Effects of Color on the Figure

Clothing colors affect apparent body size. Generally, warm, light and bright colors make the figure appear larger; cool, dark and dull colors make it appear smaller. If you have large hips, which pair of slacks in *Figure 4* would you choose? Color contrast can have dramatic results. The point where different colors meet produces a focal point that draws the eye's attention. For example, a contrasting colored belt draws attention to the waistline, cuts apparent height and has a broadening effect. A bright or contrasting color worn on or near the head draws the eye vertically and has a slenderizing effect (*Figure 5*).



Use colors to reflect or counteract your mood. They can help you to be the star of the evening, go unnoticed, give you a lift or help you establish credibility. Warm and bright colors lend a friendly, personal feeling. Wear them for parties, recreation and occasions when you want to be noticed. Cool and dull colors are refined, reserved and conservative. Use these for business, ceremonial, and quiet occasions. Neutrals are good wardrobe extenders because they are not readily noticed. They are appropriate for business occasions and can be easily accessorized.

Color Guides

- To create interest in your costume, keep color proportions unequal. Costumes that are half one color and half another lack dominance.
- Limit accent colors to one or two items. Too many colors appear spotty. Test the effect of color accents with half closed eyes. Colors shouldn't seem to jump out at you, they should form a pleasing relationship.

Selecting a Consultant With Focus on Color

If you are interested in obtaining the services of an Image Consultant to have a personal Color Analysis, here are a few questions to ask before making a decision.

1. Does the consultant have lifestyle information; knowledge of role identification; ability to work with a variety of ages; ability to work with males and females of various races?

2. Does the consultant have an attractive appearance?
3. Does the consultant have successful clients? What are the results of his/her work? How long has the consultant been in business?
4. Is the consultant able to visualize?
5. Training -- was it formal or informal? Has the consultant continued his/her education?
6. How does this person compare with others in the Color Analysis field?
7. What are the long term benefits of the service?
8. Color is only one facet of dressing. Is consideration also given to texture, line, pattern and design principles?
9. Does the consultant have before and after pictures of clients? What kind of lighting/equipment was used?
10. What kind of services can you expect from the consultant? What is the price and time frame? Is this in writing?

Color is probably the most important aspect of your wardrobe. While it cannot be separated from the style, line, pattern or texture of the fabric, color plays the dominant role in making an outfit flattering. Determine your best selection of colors and wear them with confidence.

Portions of this publication have been adapted from "Create the Look You Like -- With Color," by B. Rhodes, Texas Agricultural Extension Service; "How to Make a Color Aid," by F.R. Quinn, California Agricultural Extension Service; and "Color and the Individual," by M.A. Crawford, M.J. Dallas, and H.R. Richards, Colorado Cooperative Extension Service.

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