

HOW THE COLOUR RED WARPS THE MIND

We can never know what was going through our ancestors' minds, tens of thousands of years ago, when they first picked up natural **crayons** and began painting their bodies. But it is perhaps significant that they chose a rich, red colour—the colour of our blood and a **vivid** reminder of life, and death.

Today, shades of red are linked with power, aggression, and sex. And those associations may not be coincidence. A new **branch** of science called “colour psychology” has found that red can have a profound influence on our mood, perceptions and actions.

Wearing red can even change your physiology and balance of hormones. So what is it about the shades of red that makes them so potent? There is no doubt that our appreciation of red coincides with one of the most important events in our evolutionary history. Red skin is an important sign of dominance for many primates. Mandrill monkeys are perhaps the most famous example, with vivid markings on their face and bottom that signal their position in the group's strict hierarchy; the fitter, and more dominant an individual is, the redder he appears.

It was only in 2004 that two psychologists—Russell Hill and Robert Barton at the University of Durham—began to wonder whether humans might react in the same way. Although we don't tend to **flush** a vivid, inflamed red like a mandrill, we do sometimes burn up with anger. So the sight of red clothes could perhaps carry associations of aggression and dominance. The exact reason for these associations still remains a matter of debate. Researchers point to studies showing that people who wear red often feel more dominant themselves. Or perhaps the red intimidates the competitor: if you see red, you'll feel fear and be aware of your difficult situation, and as a result your testosterone drops.

Perhaps the most studied effect concerns the association of the colour with desire, seduction, and sin. A series of experiments, by Andrew Elliot and other colleagues at the University of Rochester in New York State, have all confirmed that men and women are both considered as being more attractive when wearing red compared to other colours. A possible explanation is that slightly redder skin seems to signal health and fitness; perhaps, by extension, we read the same from the clothes that we wear. Otherwise, not all the findings of colour psychology are robust enough to be fully trusted just yet. “I think the investigation is at a very early stage of development,” says Elliot. “Eventually we might be able to use colour psychology to create a more productive working environment, but we're far from that point.”

Elliot would also like to see more work investigating the rest of the rainbow. He has found that while red may **hinder** performance, green and blue can encourage creativity in certain kinds of word games. Even so, Elliot suspects that their influence will be fairly limited, compared to the potent effect that red has over our behaviour.

“The perception of red will always be associated with connotations and influences that run as deep as the blood in our veins. Perhaps we are only confirming what our ancestors realised when they first started painting their bodies: there is no other colour like it.”

Text adapted from an article by

David ROBSON. *BBC.com* [online] (September 1, 2014)

to warp: torçar / torcer

crayon: llapis de color / lápiz de color

vivid: intens / intenso

branch: branca / rama

to flush: enrogir / enrojecer

to hinder: impedir

Part 2: Writing

Choose ONE topic. Write about number 1 or 2. Minimum length: 100 words.

[4 points]

1. Can we judge others by the way they look? Does a person's appearance influence his or her character? **Write an opinion essay.**
2. Next academic year you may be living in a shared flat with other students or in a university residence, or maybe you'll be staying in your own house with your family. **Write a 'for and against' essay** explaining the advantages and disadvantages of living away from home while you're a university student. Make sure you do NOT use your own name in your essay.

Grammar	
Vocabulary	
Text	
Maturity	
Total	
Nota de la redacció	