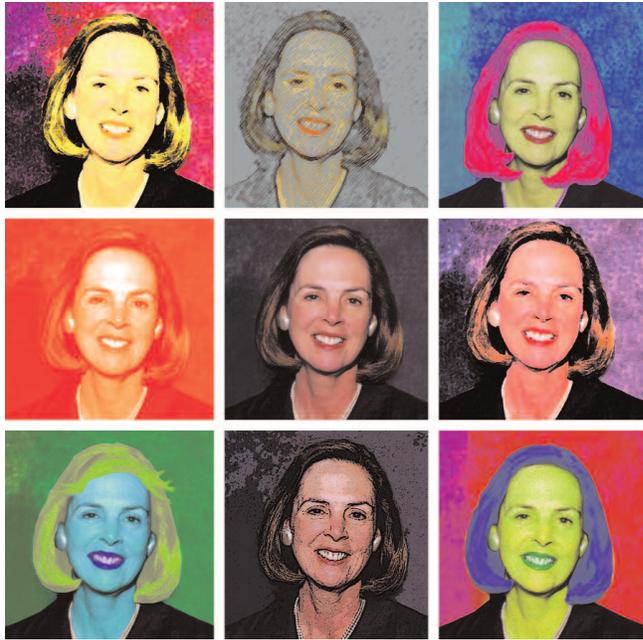


What do our color choices say to book buyers?

By Marlene LeFever



The above treatment of Marlene's portrait mimics American pop artist Andy Warhol's work (see www.warhol.org).

Colors on the Publisher's Canvas

Color! God must love color. He splashed our world with so much of it that we can see 7.5 million colors and shades of color. Yet color does not interact only with our visual senses. Twenty percent of the optical fibers in the eye do not go to the optic nerves, but to the pituitary gland at the base of the brain, influencing our feelings. Color is an integral part of our message as publishers. It can draw people toward our books, or push them away.

Red causes the pituitary gland to secrete more adrenalin than any other color. Our pulse increases. If dinner is served on a red plate, we eat more! Red is associated with strong emotions. In English, if I say, "After reading that editorial, I saw red," I mean that the editorial angered me.

The first color babies can see is red. As they grow girls and boys have slightly different shade preferences. Boys prefer a yellow based red—rust, brick, crimson. Girls prefer a blue-based red—burgundy, maroon, and cranberry. This is true of children all over the world. The preferences for these shades of red continue to adulthood. Interesting, but why should a publisher care? Suppose you are publishing a biography on a man who was martyred for his faith. Red will play a big part in the cover design. You determine the book will have a strong male readership. What shade of red would attract your intended market? Researchers tell us that 60 percent of a customer's acceptance of an ad or book cover is based on color.

Red remains most children's favorite color until they are five or six. After that, 80 percent of us pick blue as our favorite color. Blue is one of the few colors to carry moral weight. In our David C. Cook Sunday school curriculum, Cook wanted children to quickly identify the pictures of people in Bible stories. So Paul, Moses, or Peter would always wear the same color clothing. Children would also know which flannelgraph figure was Jesus. He was always dressed in a white robe with a blue sash. Why blue? Many people think of blue as a pure color. This is a cultural distinction that is true in countries that have had exposure to the Catholic church and its extensive contribution to biblical art. As early as A.D. 431, painters wanted to paint Mary in the richest possible color. They

chose a deep blue paint that was even more expensive to make than gold leaf. In time, the color took on the qualities of that young virgin who responded to the angel Gabriel's message, "I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said." Therefore blue, in many countries, subliminally suggests, "This is true. This is honest."

Discuss what different colors mean in your culture. While some colors mean the same thing cross-culturally, others do not. In Japan, traditional brides choose red kimonos; Red in the United States can symbolize immorality and would be the last color chosen by a bride. She usually picks white, a color symbolizing virginity. White symbolizes death or mourning in some cultures.

Do you want to find out more? Read two secular books published by the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development: *Arts with the Brain in Mind* by Eric Jensen (2001) and *Visual Literacy* by Lynell Burmark (2002). These books were sources for this column.

Look at one more color, yellow. A customer looks around a bookstore, and the yellow books are the ones the eye sees first. (The last colors we focus on are browns and grays.) Consider this experiment. Print the same book but use different colors for the cover design and spine. Which sells better? Which colors look expensive? Affordable? In some cultures, dark colors say to the buyer, "You can't afford me."

The use of color is an art, but there is science involved too. Adults pick yellow as a happy color; but it is also true that babies cry more in a yellow room. Yellow is not a good color for materials that will go to poor or elderly people. Many people who do not get proper nutrition and exercise cannot see yellow. To their eyes, it looks like dull, dirty white.

My prayer for all of us publishers includes color! "Oh! May the God of green hope fill you up with joy, fill you up with peace, so that your believing lives, filled with the life-giving energy of the Holy Spirit, will brim over with hope!" (Romans 15:13, *The Message*) ∇