

In five experiments implicit and explicit memory for color were explored. Unlike tests of explicit memory, implicit memory tasks do not require intentional recollection of prior experiences, and memory is measured indirectly. The results of the present experiments are clearly at odds with the widely accepted notion that color is an irrelevant feature dimension in memory.

In the color-choice task (implicit test), specific color effects were obtained for achromatic versions of line drawings: When asked to select an appropriate color spontaneously, participants chose previously seen colors more often than would be expected by chance. Priming was insensitive both to changes of display format (from verbal versions of study stimuli to pictorial stimuli tested) and to exemplar changes from study to test, suggesting that color priming may be conceptually mediated. However, color specificity was also obtained in two other tests of implicit memory, including a newly designed preference task: When asked to choose the preferred color on the basis of visibly presented color test stimuli, priming depended on perceptual similarity of study and test stimuli, indicating that perceptual processes played an important role. Thus, even perceptual implicit memory tests may be sensitive to color features.

With additional explicit versions of the memory tasks, however, different patterns of results were obtained. Apparently, encoded information was used differently depending on whether the task required conscious recollection of the study episode or not.