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What (Others Think) Your Favorite Color Tells About Your Personality: An Interpersonal Circumplex Analysis

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INTRODUCTION

So far, psychological research has found little evidence for a relationship between personality and color preference. In folk psychology, however, it is a widely held belief that a person's color preferences may give insights into his or her personality as, for example, is demonstrated by the popularity of the famous-infamous Lüscher Test. Using Wiggins' interpersonal circumplex as a nomological net (Gurtman, 1992; Wiggins & Broughton, 1991), two studies are presented investigating assumptions about interpersonal characteristics that people make when given information about a person's favorite color.

Wiggins' interpersonal circumplex is constructed from two orthogonal axes, *nurturance* representing emotional aspects (horizontal axis) and *dominance* representing the social-status aspects of interpersonal relations (vertical axis). These axes span a two-dimensional space which can be segmented into eight octants arranged in a circular fashion (see Figures 1 and 2)

The aim of Study 1 was to investigate if people infer interpersonal characteristics from a person's favorite color and, if so, what dominant characteristics they associate with what color. The aim of Study 2 was to replicate the findings of Study 1. Moreover, Study 2 investigated the specificity of these inferences by comparing the trait inferences with ratings of the colors themselves.

STUDY 1

Participants. $N = 80$ students (16 male, 64 female) from the University of Greifswald.

Design, Methods, and Procedure. The design corresponded to a 2×8 mixed ANOVA with gender of the target person as between-participants factor and favorite color as within-participants factor. Participants were asked to indicate which personality characteristics they expected for a person who declared a specific favorite color. For half of the participants, this target person was "a man," for the other half it was "a woman." Each participant rated eight target persons, each with a different favorite color — red, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple, white, and black (sequence randomized) — on eight items, one for each octant. Octant items were constructed using the octant labels and items from the revised Interpersonal Adjectives Scales (Wiggins et al., 1988; German version: Ostendorf & Angleitner, 1997). Items were rated on a 5-point scale from "definitely not" (-2) to "definitely yes" (+2). From the standardized octant item scores, circumplex scores for nurturance (LOV) and dominance (DOM) were computed following Wiggins and Broughton (1991).

Results. Color had a significant main effect on both LOV scores, $F(7, 72) = 22.0, p < .001$, and DOM scores, $F(7, 72) = 17.2, p < .001$, while gender of target had no significant effects. Therefore, color scores for male and female targets were combined and then projected into the interpersonal circle (see Figure 1).

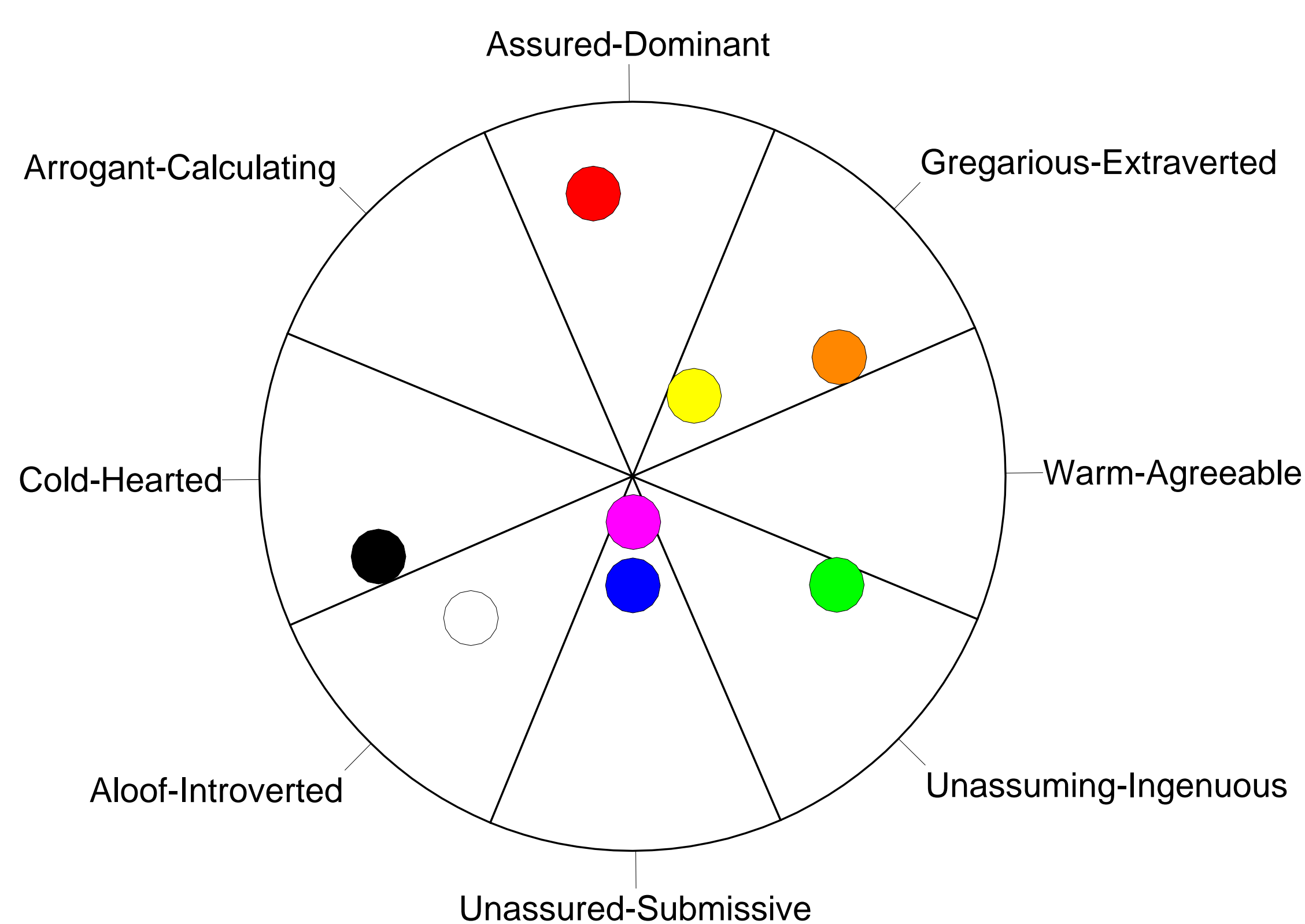


Figure 1. Expected interpersonal characteristics of persons with specific favorite colors (Study 1).

STUDY 2

Participants. $N = 81$ students (11 male, 67 female, 3 with no indication of gender) from the University of Greifswald.

Design, Methods, and Procedure. The design corresponded to a 3×8 mixed ANOVA with target as between-participants factor and color as within-participants factor. 42 participants were asked to indicate which personality characteristics they assumed for a man or a woman who declared a specific favorite color. For $n = 20$ participants, the target person was "a man," for $n = 22$ it was "a woman." The remaining $n = 39$ participants rated the characteristics of the colors themselves. Else, the procedure was the same as in Study 1.

Results. First, the 42 participants, who rated persons with favorite colors, were analyzed. Again, color had a significant main effect on both LOV scores, $F(7, 34) = 11.3, p < .001$, and DOM scores, $F(7, 34) = 8.1, p < .001$. As before, gender of target had no significant effects so that scores for male and female targets were combined and projected into the interpersonal circle (Figure 2). Second, the 39 participants, who had rated colors only, were included into the analyses. However, when contrasting target classes (person ratings vs. color-only ratings), all effects were nonsignificant.

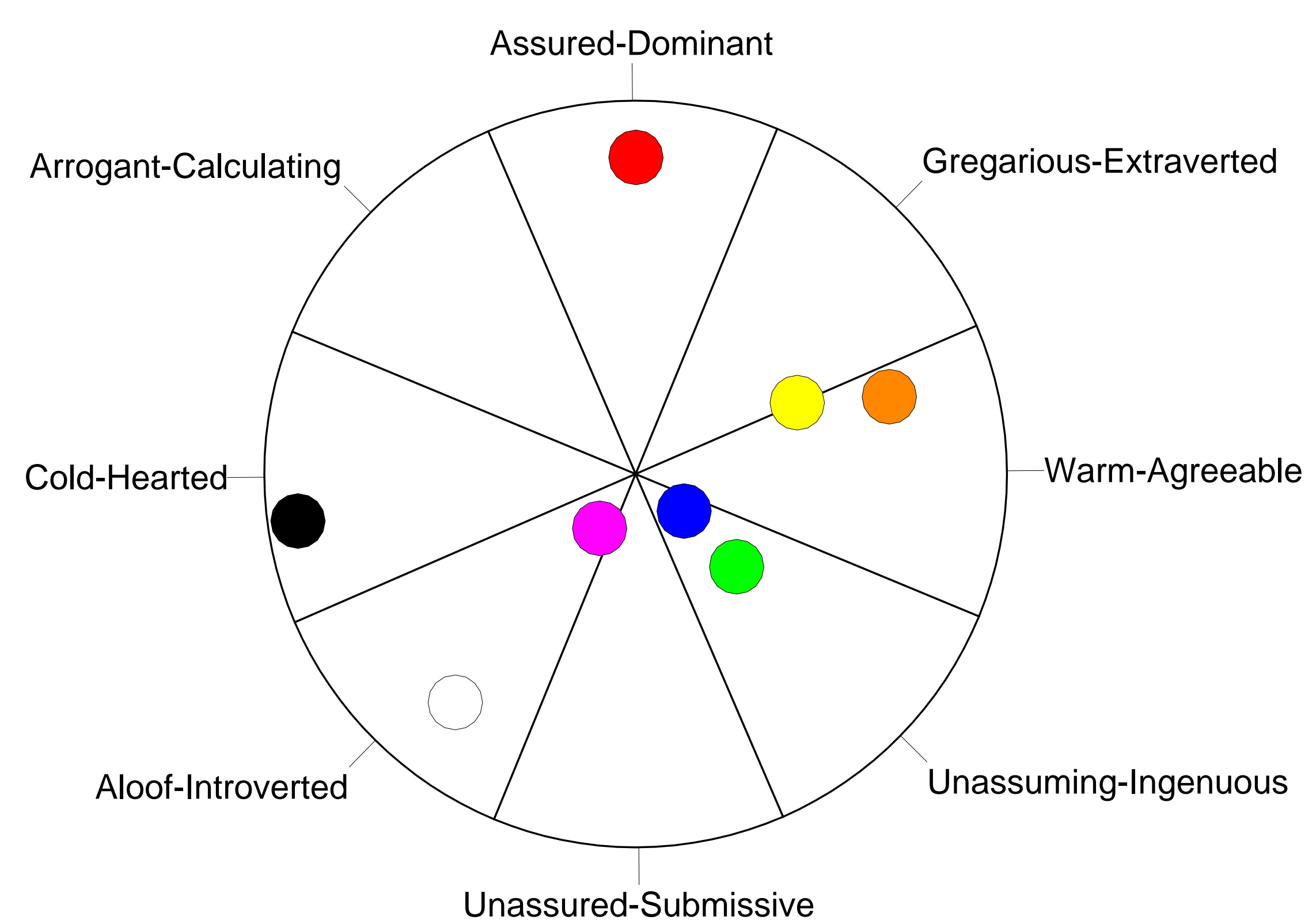


Figure 2. Expected interpersonal characteristics of persons with specific favorite colors (Study 2).

CONCLUSIONS

Except for blue and purple, all colors showed marked projections into interpersonal space. Red was associated with the assured-dominant octant. Black was placed in the cold-hearted octant while white was projected into the aloof-introverted octant. Both yellow and orange were located at the border between the warm-agreeable and the gregarious-extraverted octant. Finally, green was projected into the unassuming-ingenuous octant. Additional analyses found no evidence that the expectations based on a person's favorite color differed from the characteristics attributed to colors only. Therefore, it may be argued that cultural stereotypes associated with specific colors (e.g., Heller, 1989) present the basis for the trait inferences associated with favorite colors.

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