**General Information**

* Humans are exposed to a learning history that transforms them into ‘symbolic beings’ (e.g., Hughes, De Houwer, & Barnes-Holmes, 2016).
* For these organisms any cue in the environment, proximal or distal, can serve as a ‘symbol’ or be imbued with symbolic meaning (e.g., De Houwer & Hughes, 2016). Thus the topographical barrier between words and regularities melts away. Pairings, actions, or frequency can all function as symbols or contextual cues.
* Any common feature shared by stimuli can function as a symbol indicating that those stimuli are equivalent/similar to one another, and as a result, a transfer of valence may take place from one stimulus to another.
* In most EC studies the common feature is *contiguity*: the CS and US are similar with regard to their spatio-temporal properties. However – *in principle* – any common feature may be enough for people to treat the stimuli as equivalent.
* We will explore this idea using *color* as a common feature. Within the same learning procedure, CSs and USs are presented in either the same or different colors.
* We assume that CSs and USs that share a common color will produce larger EC effects than those that are presented in different colors.
* Experiment 1 confirmed our hypothesis, showing that CSs acquire the valence of the US that switches to the same color as the CS. This effect was evident on implicit and explicit measures of evaluation and behavioral intentions.
* Upon reflection, however, the fact that the CS acquired the valence of the US that matched it in color might be due to (a) the regularity in the *mere* *presence* of two stimuli of the same color, or (b) the regularity in the *simultaneous* *switching* of two stimuli to the same color.
  + Specifically, the EC effect could be moderated by the fact that two (of the three) stimuli shared the same color. But it is also possible that participants’ attention was captured by the change in color and that they did not attend to the third stimulus onscreen (i.e., they only perceived, attended to, or remembered the presence of two stimuli and not three). If this was the case, then the EC was less to do with a common feature and more to do with the fact that participants were only attending to two, rather than three, stimuli.
* We explored this in Experiment 2. Rather than being initially presented in white, all the stimuli appeared in one color at the beginning of the trial and then, only the unmatched US switched to a different color, while the CS and the matched US maintained the original color.
* In this way, we set out to investigate whether eliminating simultaneous switching from color matching had an impact in the observed transfer of valence.
* In Experiment 2 it seems that the change in color gave rise to two broadly different set of inferences in participants: (a) “the color changes – this must be important in some way – therefore pay attention to it”. This directed attention away from the color match between CS and US and gave rise to an attenuation or reversal in the EC effect, (b) “the two stimuli stay in the same color 🡪 they must be related”. This gave rise to a similar pattern of evaluations as seen in Experiment 1. We believe that this variation in the inferences that participants drew was in part prompted by the instructions used in Experiment 2. Specifically, instructions told participants to pay attention to the *change* in colors. This may have directed their attention away from the color matching and towards the color change, and thus caused participants to show contrast effects.
* In Experiment 3 we will attempt to replicate and extend Experiment 2. Specifically, all aspects of the study will remain the same. Except for the task instructions which will now emphasize to participants that the CS and US will remain in the same color (rather than telling them that the CS and US will change color). We expect that these new instructions may cause most people to form the inference that the CS and US are related (because they share a common feature – color) and thus lead to assimilative EC effects.