

SOMETIMES WHEN WOMEN WEAR RED

Investigating when and whether women wear red

compiled by Dirk Manley, Improbable Research staff

The question of why some women sometimes wear red clothing may have no one simple answer. Here are three studies that examine aspects of that vast subject.

Red versus Pink at Peak Fertility

“Women Are More Likely to Wear Red or Pink at Peak Fertility,” Alec T. Beall and Jessica L. Tracy, *Psychological Science*, July 23, 2013. (Thanks to William F. Brewster for bringing this to our attention.) The authors, at the University of British Columbia, explain:

In many species, females signal their reproductive period by displaying red or pink coloring. Could this be true in humans as well? Female participants were split into a high-conception-risk group and a low-conception-risk group based on the date of their last period of menses. The researchers then asked the women to report what color shirts they were wearing. Women with a high conception risk were more likely to report wearing a red or pink shirt than were women with a low conception risk... [These] findings suggest that displays of red and pink adornments -- such as clothing -- are a fertility cue in women.



Researcher Jessica Tracy. Drawing by Nan Swift, Improbable Research staff.

Red versus Pink at Peak Fertility, Depending on the Weather

“The Impact of Weather on Women’s Tendency to Wear Red or Pink when at High Risk for Conception,” Jessica L. Tracy and Alec T. Beall, *PLoS ONE*, vol. 9, no. 2, 2014, e88852. The authors explain:

[These] findings suggest that the previously documented red-dress effect is moderated by current climate concerns, and provide further evidence that under certain circumstances red/pink dress is reliably associated with female fertility.

Red for Menstruation, Fashionably Speaking, Reportedly

“Lady in Red: Hormonal Predictors of Women’s Clothing Choices,” Adar B. Eisenbruch, Zachary L. Simmons, and James R. Roney, *Psychological Science*, vol. 26, no. 8, August 2015, pp. 1332-1338. The authors, at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and the University of Portland, explain:

Recent evidence supports the idea that women use red clothing as a courtship tactic, and results from one study further suggested that women were more likely to wear red on days of high fertility in their menstrual cycles.... We found that women were more likely to wear red during the fertile window than on other cycle days.... Our results appear to represent the first direct demonstration of specific hormone measurements predicting observable changes in women’s courtship-related behaviors.

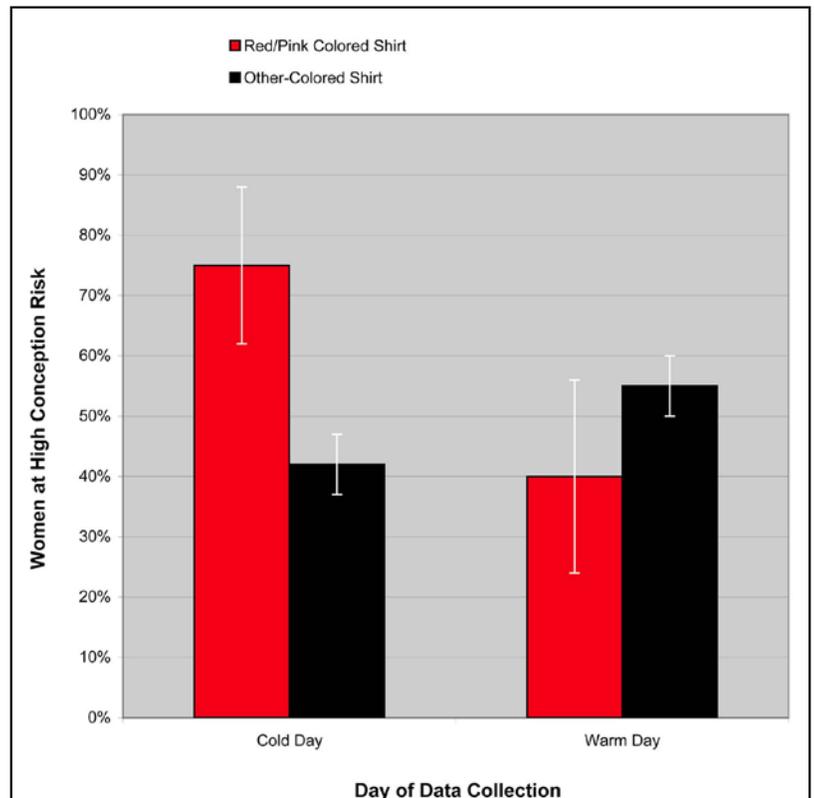


Figure 1. Percentage of women at high-conception risk as a function of shirt color and day of data collected between day of collection and shirt color, $B = 2.06$, Wald (1) = 4.49, $p = .03$, indicated that, while on the Cold Days red indicator of conception risk, (1, $N = 108$) = 4.78, $p = .03$ (Odds ratio = 4.20); on the Warm Day shirt color did not significantly differ, (1, $N = 101$) = 0.81, $p = .37$ (Odds ratio = 0.55). Error bars indicate standard errors of the mean.

Detail from the study “The Impact of Weather on Women’s Tendency to Wear Red or Pink when at High Risk for Conception.”