

## Sawbones 399: Baker-Miller Pink

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**Intro (Clint McElroy):** *Sawbones* is a show about medical history, and nothing the hosts say should be taken as medical advice or opinion. It's for fun. Can't you just have fun for an hour and not try to diagnose your mystery boil? We think you've earned it. Just sit back, relax, and enjoy a moment of distraction from that weird growth. You're worth it.

[theme music plays]

**Justin:** Hello everybody, and welcome to *Sawbones*, a marital tour of misguided medicine. I'm your cohost, Justin McElroy.

**Sydnee:** And I'm Sydnee McElroy.

**Justin:** And Syd, the timer has begun. This is like an episode of *24*.  
[imitates beeping]

**Sydnee:** Yeah, so it is— This happens a lot when we're recording. Our kid has a lot of half days.

**Justin:** Yes, on Fridays they have half days a lot.

**Sydnee:** I don't know why. I never know why. I mean, I'm happy about it.

**Justin:** My friends—

**Sydnee:** Because I get her home earlier.

**Justin:** I want to tell you exactly how long this episode is going to be. And it is 30 minutes.

**Sydnee:** Because that's when we need to go pick up Charlie from school.

**Justin:** So let's not waste any time with the usual, like, falderal and fiddle dee dee. [wheezes]

**Sydnee:** Well, this is a little bit of a lighter episode, so maybe there is some falderal.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** I don't know about fiddle dee dee, let's not go that far. But last week was heavy.

**Justin:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** Thank you for everybody who emailed about that, by the way. I mean, I don't know why that sounded sarcastic. I meant, truly, thank you. There were a lot of nice emails and responses that we got to that, so...

**Justin:** It didn't sound sarcastic to me.

**Sydnee:** I don't know, it came out. I had a weird— Anyway, the point is thank you. That's what I'm trying to say. It really meant a lot to me. Everybody reached out about that and I appreciate your support. And if you were worried, I am okay.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** There were some worried people. Let me— I am fine. Don't worry.

**Justin:** You can't keep Sydnee down.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, but I appreciate it. This week we need something lighter. What's lighter than pink, Justin?

**Justin:** Uh...

**Sydnee:** Pink makes you happy, right? Pink is pretty and soft and light and fun and it's like parties and...

**Justin:** [overlapping] I guess— Thanks to lady— Thanks to Lady Bird Johnson, who sort of got that whole thing started.

**Sydnee:** Are you going to give us the history of the color pink?

**Justin:** No, I think I heard *99% Invisible* about it.

**Sydnee:** Okay.

**Justin:** Maybe. Yeah, maybe? I don't remember. You know, it's interesting! Look into it.

**Sydnee:** Okay, well, our kids like the color pink a lot. Pink has never been one of my favorites. I'm more of a purple fan. Didn't quite love the pink. Now when I was little, all about the pink.

**Justin:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** But there's a specific pink that has medical, sort of— Like it's connected. It's in the world. It's in the medical world. And so that's the pink I want to talk about. That's what this episode is about. A pink called Baker Miller Pink.

**Justin:** It's a specific pink?

**Sydnee:** It's a specific pink. Have you heard of Baker Miller Pink?

**Justin:** No.

**Sydnee:** If you'd like to do a quick search, if there is a search engine that Justin has invented by now [laughs]. If you'd like to do a quick search for Baker Miller Pink, you can to see what it looks like.

**Justin:** Okay. I'll do that right now.

**Sydnee:** It's a very bright pink. I don't know how to describe different pinks. It's a bright pink. It's not a soft pink.

**Justin:** I don't know how you would describe it. It's like. It's like pink. I don't know! It's pink!

**Sydnee:** It's pink.

**Justin:** Can I say it's Pepto-Bismol?

**Sydnee:** Yes. A lot of people have compared it Pepto-Bismol. That is a pink that it is. So why am I talking about this color pink? What does it have to do with anything vaguely medical? Let me tell you. We're going back to the 70s, okay?

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** It's the 70s. Doctor Alexander Schauss awoke from his sleep with a thought. It is a simple thought, perhaps a little bit intuitive, maybe something that you would think, "Well, yeah, obviously." But it turned out to be a very important thought, and it was that what if color, which we think can have an impact on our mood or our emotional state, what if that would therefore impact our behavior? What if a color could change us?

**Justin:** Mm. Now, this is a concept that is not new to Sawbones listeners. We've talked about color therapy in different forms before.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Justin:** There's blue light therapy that we talked about, for sure.

**Sydnee:** Yes.

**Justin:** I feel like there's another one, right?

**Sydnee:** I think we've just talked about the general use in the past of colors as medicine. Like that looking at colors or wearing colors or being exposed to certain colors could somehow alter, you know, your state of being, your health, make things better or worse.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And to be fair, even prior to the 70s, Dr. Schauss had been considering this relationship since he studied psychology at the University of New Mexico. He had been thinking about, like, color and personality, color and behavior. Like, what this kind of relationship is. He'd conducted studies initially where he asked people about their color preferences and then he would have them do, like, different personality tests, like a Rorschach test or like a Personality Inventory, one of those big long—

You know, the tests we all love to do on the Internet that tell us what types we are, give us numbers or letters or whatever, and then we can connect that to *Harry Potter* characters or something, you know.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Like, people love those personality tests. And he was using those and connecting them to colors to see if you ask somebody their favorite color, like, I've already revealed, I like purple. What's your current favorite color? It was always red.

**Justin:** Blue. It's blue, now.

**Sydnee:** Now it's blue because Charlie made it blue.

**Justin:** Navy blue, specifically.

**Sydnee:** Okay. Navy?

**Justin:** Navy blue.

**Sydnee:** Navy blue is your favorite color?

**Justin:** What's wrong with that?

**Sydnee:** I don't know. I just, I don't get it.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** What do you think that reveals about your personality? Dr. Schauss would have opinions.

**Justin:** That I'm attracted to judgmental women.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] So initially, he was doing research on what does your favorite color reveal about you? What can we insinuate about a person's— or assume about a person's personality based on their favorite color? Not that that's like a fun thing to do, but that was the original sort of track of the research. And then he began to consider sort of like the chicken and the egg phenomenon. Okay, well, if your personality influences what colors you are drawn to...

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** Can colors actually change aspects of who you are, your behavior, the way you think, the way you feel, your emotions? Is color reflecting an underlying hormonal and chemical brain composition that makes your persona? Or is color causing those hormonal changes?

**Justin:** I don't know.

**Sydnee:** Like, if I like purple, so I surround myself in purple. Is purple making me a certain way?

**Justin:** Chicken and egg.

**Sydnee:** You know what I'm saying?

**Justin:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** Okay. This is not, as you've already referenced, this is not the first time we thought about this, that maybe color has an effect on humans. We've done episodes before on color therapy and the idea that color could treat or cure disease. They can't, [laughs] but we've done that before. But this particular area that he became interested in was a newer science at the time and is known as behavioral photobiology.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** Okay. Specifically, the impact of what he referred to as perceptible radiant energy on our behavior.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** Got it?

**Justin:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** So you're not using color as medicine per se, but you're using it to change people's behaviors and actions.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** Okay. His research was really accelerated, so he had this interest, he had these ideas, and then he started working with a Dr. John Ott at City University in Seattle in 1978. And the two of them were studying the impact of different lighting on people who are incarcerated. The idea of, like, if we have, like, fights or outbursts or behaviors that we don't want inside some sort of facility, if we change the lighting, does that help?

**Justin:** I mean, I will speak for myself. I— Fluorescent light does make me, like, feel violent. Like, it makes me want to punch somebody in the face. I can't stand it.

**Sydnee:** I don't know if that was— I mean, I didn't look into the lighting part of their research because I was really focused on the color, but I'm sure that was part of—

**Justin:** What's worse? I mean, like, what's worse?

**Sydnee:** I mean, bright lights in general are rough for long periods of time, I think.

**Justin:** Yeah. You know me, though. Sydnee gets on my case all the time because I like it dark.

**Sydnee:** Well, I think you go to the other extreme. I'll come in the kitchen and it's just like, it's just so dark and it's daytime, we're awake, turn things on.

**Justin:** There's sun. Let the sun do its job.

**Sydnee:** There's not enough. I need more!

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** So anyway, Ott said there was some research that he had done where he was looking at not just light, but color. Specifically, the impact of color on strength.

**Justin:** Whoa, yes!

**Sydnee:** So the idea is, are you weaker while you're looking at one color, like a certain color instead of a different one?

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** So he would try to repeat these results, by the way, and these studies, I love these studies. This was so fun to read about. And you can look at these studies, they're out there, you can read them. But basically, you get a bunch of people, usually like college students or the aim of this— That's who they did these studies on.

And he would have them do a hand grip strength kind of test, like squeeze something that you could measure how tightly you're gripping it. Um, and he would do it, like, have the people do it while they were looking at a pink square and then a blue square and compare how tightly they could squeeze...

**Justin:** [laughing]

**Sydnee:** ... whether they were looking at the color pink or the color blue. They tried a similar thing with, like, leg strength, like the thigh muscles. If



you're, like, extending the legs against weight— You know, using your thigh muscles to lift weights.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** How well, how much weight can you lift? How quickly can you do it? How efficient are you if you're looking at a pink square versus a blue square?

**Justin:** Got it.

**Sydnee:** Okay. And even like, he tried to replicate it on himself by looking at two different colors and measuring his pulse and blood pressure. Like, do you see changes in these vital signs when you're looking at different colors? The results were interesting for sure, but not overwhelming in the sense they didn't prove anything.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** There was a slight improvement in strength while looking at the blue square.

**Justin:** Interesting.

**Sydnee:** Not a huge number of people and not a huge difference. So hard to say that this definitively is proof.

**Justin:** But if you do need to be strong and you can see something blue, I think it's worth a shot, right?

**Sydnee:** [laughing] If you need to be strong and you can see something blue—

**Justin:** If you need to lift a car off your grandma...

**Sydnee:** You hope that car is blue.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** But again, not a huge difference.

**Justin:** Is it true that people can get superhuman strength in times of great need?

**Sydnee:** Not— I mean, you can—

**Justin:** I saw that on the Hulk.

**Sydnee:** Not like lift a car, perhaps.

**Justin:** Bill Bixby said lift a car, so.

**Sydnee:** Well, you're still limited by the actual, like, your own musculature and body and stature and stuff like that. There are limitations, but a rush of adrenaline will push you. I mean... Anyway, this is—

**Justin:** Like that one time I saw, um...

**Sydnee:** There could be a change if you are, like...

**Justin:** That one time I saw a mouse in the pool skimmer and I jumped, like, so far. And I don't think I could do it again, even if I tried.

**Sydnee:** Like, super sympathetic nervous system activation.

**Justin:** Super human.

**Sydnee:** No, not super human, certainly. But like your own peak—

**Justin:** [wheezes] You just said super. You said super!

**Sydnee:** I mean, like, your own— Super for you. [laughs]

**Justin:** [cackles] That's a low bar!

**Sydnee:** Your own peak performance, perhaps.

**Justin:** [laughs] You may not like it, Sydnee, but this is what peak performance looks like.

**Sydnee:** Anyway, so like I said, he wasn't— You know, it was interesting. He liked some of the results, but they weren't enough to say for sure. And then he thought there wasn't much of a change with my blood pressure and pulse. That one he didn't really notice any difference.

But instead of just like at baseline, what he did was he did a bunch of vigorous exercise, and then he looked at the two different colors to see how fast he could calm himself back down. Like, how fast could his vitals return to normal while looking at pink versus looking at blue? And that he did notice a little bit more of a difference in, you know, if I look at the pink, my vitals come down faster, it seems like.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** It's an N of one, it's on himself, but he thought it was interesting. So this is when he awakes with this epiphany. It is at this period of time that he wakes up and he thinks if looking at the pink helped lower his vitals faster after exercise, right? His blood pressure and pulse return to normal faster...

**Justin:** Then it calms you down.

**Sydnee:** Then maybe it could lower blood pressure and pulse in people who are like, let's say, emotionally agitated or frustrated or under a lot of stress, right? Not just like they've exercised, but other things that would cause those things to go up, right?

And so— And when you make a person physiologically more at ease, when you bring down their blood pressure and pulse, they're going to feel calmer. So perhaps you can influence their emotional state and therefore their behavior by exposing them to a color.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** So, could pink calm people down to the point that it would quell violent or aggressive behavior?

**Justin:** I don't know.

**Sydnee:** Well, that's what he wanted to explore.

**Justin:** Oh! Yeah, that makes sense.

**Sydnee:** So that is exactly, like, this is how he got to this question, because it's sort of a weird question to ask. Like, and I mean, often in science it's like this. Somebody comes up with a study question and you're sitting there thinking, "Why did you ever—?"

**Justin:** "Why did you even think to ask that?"

**Sydnee:** "Why did you want to investigate that?" And it's usually a series of things like this that lead you to this sort of core idea that seems bizarre, but when you piece together the breadcrumbs. Anyway, so step one was finding the perfect pink. He felt like pink was the thing. But which pink? Because there's lots of pinks. So, I don't know. I really want a description of this process. Like, was he mixing pinks?

I mean, ultimately, he found it by mixing two cans of paint in the right quantity, like pink and red— Or I mean red and white and making pink. So that was what it was. But, like, how did he— In my mind, it's like, you know on Project Runway when they would send them into Mood Fabrics...

**Justin:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Sydnee:** ... and they would let them run around Mood and they would be like, dashing around looking fabrics. In my head, he's doing that. He's like, wandering around Mood and looking at different pinks, and he's like, that's the one. I don't think that's what happened.

**Justin:** What fantastic— Has there ever been a more advantageous placement of product in a show? Like, it's so weird that if I was in New York

and I needed fabric, I would be able to say, "Oh, well, we could go to Mood Fabric." Like, yeah absolutely.

**Sydnee:** I know what Mood is and I don't know— I've never sewn. I can't make anything. I don't have any design skills. I have no— I don't want to.

**Justin:** Yeah. Don't want to.

**Sydnee:** But I know that. Anyway, so somehow, whether he was running around a fabric store or probably just mixing cans of paint together, honestly, is what he was doing. He located just the right shade of pink. It was called at the time, P-618.

**Justin:** Ooh. Sexy.

**Sydnee:** The name gets better.

**Justin:** Okay.

**Sydnee:** But at the time, it was P-618 and now he needed to test it out on real humans, right? So, like, he's got his pink. He needs to see, can it calm people down? Can it make them not be violent? And he initially tries to sell the idea to the Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission because he already taught a class through them called Innovative Treatment Techniques and Correctional Research.

So basically, he has this relationship, and he's like, can we try this out by painting one of your isolation rooms pink and just see if it helps an incarcerated person calm down faster if they're in a pink room. This is what he proposes. And they say, "No, you can't paint an isolat— No. You can't paint a room pink."

**Justin:** "No. This is a place of business!"

**Sydnee:** And that's the end of the episode.

**Justin:** Okay, cool. Well, thanks so much for listening—

**Sydnee:** No, I'm joking! Obviously, something else happens. But first, we got to go to the billing department.

**Justin:** Let's go.

[ad break]

**Justin:** Okay, Syd, you were saying?

**Sydnee:** Okay—

**Justin:** The drama of this is they weren't allowed to paint a room pink.

**Sydnee:** Dr. Schauss is not allowed to paint.

**Justin:** That's the cliffhanger.

**Sydnee:** They won't let him paint a room pink. I'm putting the stress on "they" won't.

**Justin:** The man won't.

**Sydnee:** But somebody else sees this research, somebody else hears these ideas.

**Justin:** And it's a Flamingo.

**Sydnee:** The US Naval Correctional Center in Seattle kind of catches wind of this. He's writing about it and talking about it and they hear about it.

**Justin:** "Did you hear about this guy who wanted to paint a room pink? That sounds good to us, right?"

**Sydnee:** Yes. Specifically, two guys. Commander Miller and CWO Jean Baker are like, "I love this idea." They didn't even call him. They just went and painted one of their admission cells pink. They just did it.

**Justin:** "Yeah. We don't need that guy." That's great for science, I bet he was so annoyed.

**Sydnee:** [overlapping] Dr. Schauss later was like— No, he was excited! Because, like, "I didn't tell them to do it. They were so compelled by this idea that they did it on their own." Like, that's perfect. Your idea is so great that you don't even have to sell them.

**Justin:** Oh, Commander Miller and CWO Jean Baker. I just got it. Okay.

**Sydnee:** And so they did it, uh, March 1, 1979 was when the room was fully painted and ready for use. And for the next 156 days, they claimed that there were no incidents of, quote, "erratic or hostile behavior" in that cell.

**Justin:** Interesting.

**Sydnee:** That is what they claimed.

**Justin:** Now, that's a small sample size, but still, it's interesting.

**Sydnee:** Yes. And they sent out a memo about it. And as you can imagine, once Dr. Schauss heard about all this, oh he was excited.

**Justin:** Oh, yeah.

**Sydnee:** So moved, so moved by what these guys have done that he named the Pink Baker-Miller Pink.

**Justin:** There you go.

**Sydnee:** For these two guys. Um, it would still be a difficult sell. Not impossible now because, like, the Navy tried it and they liked it, which is a little bit easier when it's like, "Oh, well, maybe we'll check it out" because he needed to reproduce it. I mean, it was being a good scientist.

He was like, "That's cool. I love this. But that doesn't prove anything." Which is a theme if you read, like, what he says about all of this, he consistently says, "We haven't proven this yet. Yes, this is interesting. I still think there's

something there. We haven't proven it." So he's not jumping the gun. He knows.

But anyway, so he's trying to get it to be reproduced in other facilities so we can see if there's actually something to it. There were a couple of correctional facilities in California that eventually adopted it and were like, "Yeah, we'll paint a room, paint. We'll check it out." He convinced a psychiatric hospital in Alabama to do it in one of their intake rooms. A VA in Los Angeles set up, like, a whole series of different colored rooms so that they could kind of compare, I guess, like the pink room, the blue room, the red room, the brown room, I don't know, and see, is one better than the other.

There was a youth detention facility in California that started using a pink room as like a place to calm— Like, we need you to calm down. Come sit in the pink room. And there's even, like one—

**Justin:** That's kind of like the one time I was on shrooms and I got really fixated on that green room.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. The green room was very safe.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** So there was even like this one incident where during a trial, like in a courtroom, there was a child involved in the case, and the judge had the kid go sit in the pink room to calm down because he becoming— he was having outbursts in the courtroom. And they claim, like, and he came back and he was very calm.

I think, I read about that and I thought, if you're in that situation, which I mean, we can all agree that I'm just talking about pink rooms. There are problems in all of these things we're talking about, right? Like, none of this is happy and fun, and everybody has the best of intentions and everything is done for the wellbeing, you know, the best wellbeing of everybody involved.



I think we can all agree on that. But if you are that minor and they send you, the judge is like, we're going to have you go sit in a pink room for a little bit. That would seem so weird. I mean...

**Justin:** You'd probably come back like, I'm not angry anymore. I'm just sort of, like, confused.

**Sydnee:** And unsettled. Like, what's your deal, man?

**Justin:** [simultaneously] Yeah, it's like, kind of unsettling. Yeah. What's this cute Kubrickian horror you've cooked up for me?

**Sydnee:** Right? Exactly. Like, there's something very dystopian about—

**Justin:** "To the pink room!"

**Sydnee:** "To the pink room!" Right? So I would imagine that there's some— There's got to be something—

**Justin:** "Send this boy to the laser zone! Where he'll be in prison for a hundred eons!"

**Sydnee:** There has to be some aspect of that where, like, you hear whispers. It's sort of like in 1984 when they talk about, what is it, room 101?

**Justin:** Yeah, I guess.

**Sydnee:** And you don't know what's in room 101.

**Justin:** I'm not a big movie guy. Who's got the time?

**Sydnee:** There's a book. It's a book.

**Justin:** Who's got the time?

**Sydnee:** You didn't read the book?

**Justin:** I mean, I saw the—

**Sydnee:** You know what's in room 101! You have blocked it because of how horrible it was for you.

**Justin:** No, no, no— I saw that Apple commercial. I figured I got it.

**Sydnee:** You really don't know?

**Justin:** Throw a hammer through the screen. I get it. No, but I've heard enough people in different protests mention it that I feel like I really understand what it's about. It's mainly about vaccines, right?

**Sydnee:** Right. You're just messing with me now. In all these settings, the officials reported that there were improvements in behavior. This was subjective, to be fair. Right? Like, I mean, yes, there are incident reports when things happen, but there's also a subjectivity to, like, what escalates to an incident report and that kind of thing. So there is a perception issue here.

They say they had less fights and arguments, that people tended to have fewer violent outbursts. They tended to calm down faster when they were experiencing extreme emotions. Generally, they all liked the pink rooms. Um, Johns Hopkins would take this in a slightly stranger direction.

They noticed this other sort of side effect where people claimed that they felt less hungry when they looked at the color pink.

**Justin:** Weird.

**Sydnee:** And so they did a four year study on 1700 people to see if it could suppress appetite and lead to weight loss.

**Justin:** Huh. Did it work?

**Sydnee:** Maybe?

**Justin:** [laughs]

**Sydnee:** I was trying to read what were the results of this and they were like, a third of the people seemed to feel less stress and, like decreased appetite, perhaps. I don't know. I don't think we have— None of this seems to be particularly, like, robust in terms of evidence. Let's just say that. And I mean, I don't know if everybody was just sort of thinking like, "Are we still just looking at pink? Is that really what this is? We're just looking at pin?"

So, from all this research, the idea became more refined. It wasn't just pink. Obviously, it's a specific pink. That was very important. It was thought that a smaller room worked better to kind of, like, engulf you in the color. And similarly, they said, like, it works better with one person in a room to allow them to calm down, as opposed to a bunch of people. Imagine, like, um, some sort of—

I don't know anything about jails, but some sort of holding cell where you would have a lot of people. I know that those exist where you would have a lot of people in there.

**Justin:** Gen pop.

**Sydnee:** If you paint that room pink, they don't notice as much of an effect. I would say it's because it's a bunch of people all crammed into a small space, which is very stressful. They also said they think it breaks up the monochromatic element because you've got people and clothes, and that introduces a lot of other colors.

**Justin:** Too much other things vying for your attention.

**Sydnee:** Yeah, exactly. Um, because of this, there was increased uptake, though. Like, if you look throughout, like the 80s, especially the early 80s, Baker-Miller pink starts showing up in different places, specifically, quote, unquote, "drunk tanks," leading to the name, the alternative name for Baker-Miller pink, which is drunk tank pink. Apparently, this became popular in some places to paint your drunk tank pink to calm people down.

This is different, by the way. When I started thinking about, like, jails painting things pink, I started thinking about that awful sheriff in Arizona, in

Maricopa County who made people who are incarcerated wear pink underwear. Do you remember this?

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** And he had an outdoor tent city, that awful guy. Anyway, this is different than that. That, I think was like a homophobic punishment was the intention. Whereas this is like some sort of science-based effort to help people calm down.

**Justin:** Right.

**Sydnee:** As I was talking about this, I was like, "you can draw this connection." And I wanted to make that kind of clarification. Now, here's the rub. So this all sounds really good, right? Like, good. You just paint a room pink.

**Justin:** [quietly, overlapping] Thanks so much for listening—

**Sydnee:** And if you love the color pink, this is awesome, because now more things are pink. However, even Dr. Schauss was not entirely certain that this was working. So he started repeating some of these experiments and found that, you know, not only do I think maybe this doesn't work, but he started to fear that it was having the opposite reaction.

That for like the first 15 minutes, the pink does calm you down. Which again, I don't know if that's just confusion, because if somebody threw me in a completely Pepto-Bismol colored room, I know I'd have a moment where I'm like, "Okay, what is...? What is—" I don't know. Wouldn't that confuse you for a minute?

**Justin:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** Okay. But after that first 15 minutes, some facilities actually reported that the person would become even more angry than they were before.

**Justin:** Okay. It was already a fairly mild effect to begin with, right? So, yeah.

**Sydnee:** Yes, so like some sort of rebound effect, like they would become very enraged by the pink after the first initial calming period. But even that, there isn't enough to prove that that effect happens. The idea is, does it do anything? Is it anything other than confusing? And to his credit, like I said, Schauss himself has always doubted that, "I don't know. I don't know. It was interesting we did these studies. I'm not entirely sure."

He noted throughout his papers that there are a lot of variables that you're not controlling for. There's a lot of different things that could have influenced why somebody calmed down or somebody else didn't. And it was not scientifically possible to absolutely conclude that it worked, even if it seemed like it did.

And, uh, not only that, but he did make this point, which I think is very important. And he said this over and over again, especially when it started to be used in sort of these juvenile detention facilities, that it's nice if a pink room helps, but this is not a treatment.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** This does not replace any sort of therapy. And he said no color can substitute for the attention that any human asks for while in a state of turmoil. I think that's a really important point to make.

**Justin:** Yes.

**Sydnee:** It removed some of the dystopian aspects of this, I think. And he also noted that in subsequent experiments on pink versus blue and muscle strength, again, trying to see what's stronger, what will make you stronger. This is all predicated on a belief that blue is the opposite of pink.

**Justin:** Oh, yeah.

**Sydnee:** Is blue the opposite of pink?

**Justin:** No.

**Sydnee:** It is not.

**Justin:** It is not.

**Sydnee:** No. Some sort of green shade would be the opposite of pink.

**Justin:** Yeah, that's true.

**Sydnee:** So if you really wanted to see a difference, you would have to do— I mean, like, we pick pink and blue because that's a social choice.

**Justin:** Yeah. It's the gender attachments.

**Sydnee:** Yes. But not because that was— That is not the most scientifically sound way to do it.

**Justin:** Yeah. The opposite of pink is green.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. So, really, if you wanted to do these studies appropriately, you should have done pink and green. But we don't have the same societal attachments to green, right? Green doesn't mean, like, masculine.

**Justin:** Yeah, right.

**Sydnee:** Green means science and red means math.

**Justin:** Green means money and red means blood.

**Sydnee:** [laughs]

**Justin:** I play a lot of video games, so those are the only—

**Sydnee:** In my notebooks, my folders and my binders, green means science, red means math.

**Justin:** We have two minutes.

**Sydnee:** Anyway, it was redone. The studies were so— That was kind of where Doctor Schauss left it. He went on to do other things. Most of his papers published about this are from the late 70s, early 80s and then he moved on. He had other work to do.

It was redone about 30 years later by a psychologist, Oliver Genschow. And he found absolutely no difference, that the pink doesn't— No, there's no effect. It's pink or it's blue or whatever. It doesn't matter. So is that case closed? Not quite. Because in 2011, there was a Swiss psychologist named Daniella Spath who wrote about her own experiments, but she used a different shade of pink.

She said the reason it didn't work is because, again, if you look at Baker-Miller pink, it's quite bright. It's a very bright, vibrant, I would say somewhat, I don't know if colors are stimulating, but to me, I would call it more stimulating than calming sort of shade of pink, if those things exist.

She painted cell walls Cooldown Pink was her pink, which is a different pink, and you can look it up. It's much softer. It's a much paler pink. And this happened in Switzerland. They did it in ten different prisons. They were observed for four years. The guards said they noticed a difference.

I don't know if it's statistically significant, but they thought there was a difference. However, the idea of Baker-Miller pink has not gone away. Just a few years ago, Kendall Jenner painted a wall in her house Baker-Miller pink, to calm her down and suppress her appetite. They did an article about it.

**Justin:** Best of luck to her.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. So it hasn't gone away. I think there's a hoodie that was made in Baker-Miller pink, too. The idea being, like, wear this hoodie and it will really calm you down when you're feeling stressed.

**Justin:** That sounds like something that would be on many websites. That tracks.

**Sydnee:** Yeah. And if all of this, you're thinking doesn't sound right, I think it is fair to point out, as I sort of already alluded to with the jail in Maricopa County that was doing this as like a punishment. You can't erase the kind of, like, our social connections to these colors. You know, in the time period we're talking about the early 80s in the US, pink is a girl, quote, unquote "girl color." Blue is a quote unquote, "boy color."

I am not saying I believe this, but these would have been sort of attachments of the time. And so there is this sort of, like, inherent kind of misogyny and homophobia to this idea that pink is weak.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** Pink makes you weak. Blue makes you strong.

**Justin:** Yeah.

**Sydnee:** You know, and this is, um, I think it's interesting because this is sort of echoed in— Did you know that the University of Iowa football team in the early 80s...?

**Justin:** No, I can go ahead and say no, I did not know, but go on.

**Sydnee:** [laughs] Had their locker room, their visitors', let me clear this, visitors' locker room at Kinnick Stadium painted pink.

**Justin:** To try to make them weaker.

**Sydnee:** Well, that's not what they said. The coach said it was because pink was a calming color and it would make them calm and they would lose their competitive edge because they were so calm.

**Justin:** Sure.

**Sydnee:** Just like Baker-Miller pink. I mean, we're looking at the same time frame. So he had research to backup these claims. In 2005, they even added pink lockers and pink urinals. Now this is not Baker-Miller. It's a dusty rose.



**Justin:** Oh, you used to love that jam.

**Sydnee:** Loved dusty rose when I was younger, but the idea is the same. Now, I think a lot of people have accused them over the years of like, "This is— You get why this is so offensive?"

Because what you're saying is we're going to paint it girly pink because girls are bad. They're bad at sports and this is why you're doing— You know? I mean, like, that is the implication here. And I'm not saying that the University of Iowa stands by it by saying, like, "Look, it's just in good fun. It's funny. We have a pink locker room where you don't mean any harm. Everybody's great regardless of their gender. This is not aimed at anybody."

I think there are others who would argue otherwise and have but since the early 80s, I thought it was worth mentioning, Dr. Schauss, unlike many of our *Sawbones* featured guests, is alive and well and continues to do research in other areas like nutrition and behavior and that kind of stuff. Supplements and stuff. Moved away from Baker Miller pink, but Baker-Miller pink lives on forever.

**Justin:** Thank you so much for listening to this episode of *Sawbones*. I hope you enjoyed yourself. Thanks to Taxpayers for use of their song *Medicines* as the intro and outro of our program and thank you to you for listening. We very much appreciate you. That's going to do it for us. Until next time. My name is Justin McElroy.

**Sydnee:** I'm Sydnee McElroy.

**Justin:** As always, don't drill a hole in your head!

[theme music plays]

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