Color therapy in mental health and well-being

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Abstract

In life, there are a ton of different factors that influence your mood and mental health. As we run in the pursuit for an 'unshakable' state of mind, bringing mindful awareness to color is important. It's important to understand how color affects your mood if you're going to create an environment of peacefulness and mental clarity. It's not always the 'big things' that can influence your mood, like falling out with a friend or having an injury. Simply the colors we immerse ourselves in can have a subconscious effect on our mood and state of mind

Key words: - Color therapy, mental health, and well-being

Color therapy (or chromo therapy) is an alternative remedy that uses color and light to treat physical or mental health by balancing the body's energy centers, also known chakras. This concept dates back to ancient Egyptians who used sun-activated solarium rooms constructed with colored glass for therapeutic purposes. Today, both conventional and holistic practitioners acknowledge the bright potential of art therapy (which, naturally, includes color). And, although color therapy remains a gray area in Western medicine, enthusiasts are tickled pink over its influence. Color therapy is a non-invasive and holistic treatment that brings balance and health to your mind and body. The vibrations of the color in color therapy class improve your mood and overall health.

The basic idea of colour therapy

Colours are made up of reflected lights that hit our retinas as the wavelengths vibrate. Our brain interprets these wavelengths, which ultimately makes our perception of colour as a physical and sensory experience. Colour therapy is based on the idea that colours create an electrical impulse in our brain, which stimulates hormonal and biochemical processes in our body. These processes either stimulate or calm us.

How to get started with color therapy

There are as many colors in color therapy sessions as there are colors in the rainbow. As you start with your color therapy session, your therapist will give you an analysis of all colors and ask you about the aspects of life in which you think these colors can improve. Many salons combine color and aromatherapy. In some salons, you might even get a massage with different colors of light being projected on your body to stimulate health and healing. Many spas also offer treatment in which they place different colors of silk on different points of your body, which are said to control your mood and emotional well-being.
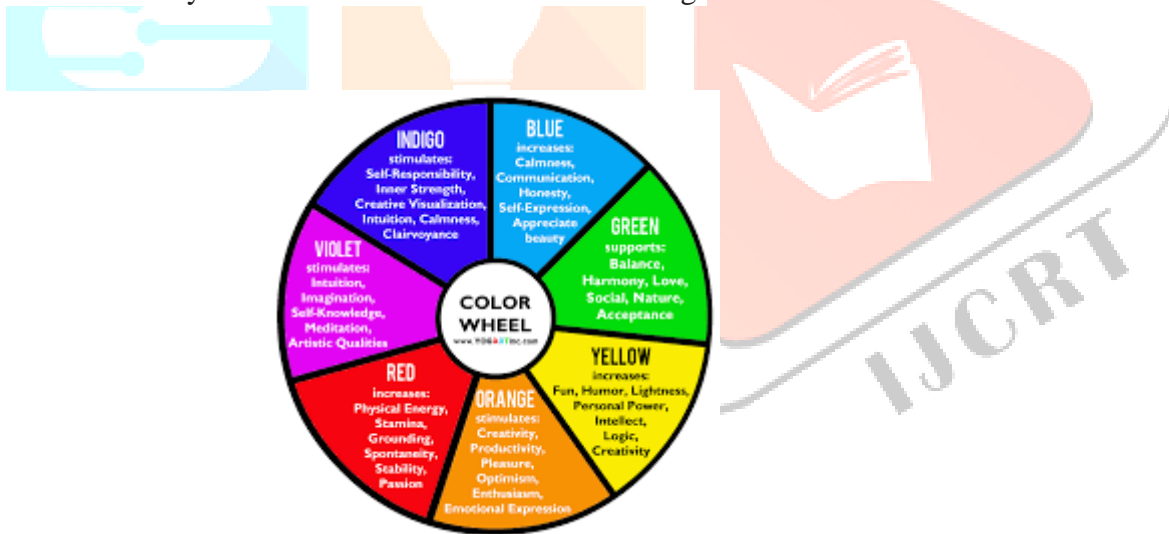
The Effects of Blue on Your Mental Health

Everyone has a favorite color, or a color that they naturally gravitate towards. When you're feeling sad or you are depressed, people will refer to it as 'having the blues'. But why is this? In an early study during the 1930's, Siegfried E Katz of the New York Psychiatric Institute published a study in the Journal of Psychology called Color Preference of the Insane. Effectively, the study involved exposing 134 hospitalized patients to small triangles of colors. The study was limited to 6 colors. There was no white or black, only red, orange, yellow, green, blue and violet. The patients were asked to point out the best color and then point out the next best, and so forth. Interestingly, the color blue was the most popular for being 'the best color'. The study implied that if you are suffering from mental health, or an extreme mental health disorder, it's likely that you associate with the color blue more so than other colors. Studies like this, and sayings like 'having the blues' enforce the color blues presenters in mental health. So should you limit your exposure if you're suffering with

anxiety or depression? On the flip side, many will experience confidence with the color blue. Blue can also be associated with cool, content, goals, and determination.

Effects of the Color Green on Your Mental Health

The color green is widely accepted as the color of nourishment, growth and health. Many health brands use the color green for their logos for example to give the consumer a sense of health and nourishment. The psychology is, using the color green encourages a sense of trust and wellbeing. This by itself can have a big impact on whether the consumer goes on to buy a product.

Green can have big benefits for you mental health. Surrounding yourself with colors of green can enforce feelings of restoration and neutrality. This is why spending time in nature can be an effective way to balance your mind and mood. The various shades of green in a natural environment manifest sensations of wellbeing and peacefulness. Green is a color used to imply regeneration. We see green on our screens when we recharge our phone batteries or health bars when we play video games. Surrounding yourself in your home with shades of green could bring balance to your mind.

Effects of Grey on Your Mood and Mind

Shades of grey are associated with calm and neutrality. Grey is another color like green that can bring balance to your mind and emotions. Because it's such a neutral color, it has the power to bring sensations of stillness. Grey is neither here or there, right between black and white. When we're suffering from anxiety or stress, we often have extreme thoughts that we put through a negative filter. We often refer to things as being 'good' or 'bad' with little room in the middle. This 'closed mind' way of thinking does not allow us to see the bigger picture in different situations. Grey, whilst maybe seeming dull and boring, can bring about that 'middle ground' that we need with our thoughts. Grey encourages feelings of authority, possibility and strength. These are all feelings which we need when we're suffering from anxiety, depression or stress. CBT offers us the opportunity to challenge our thoughts and view our thoughts from different angles. Rather than labeling something either 'good' or 'bad', we are able to see all of the other outcomes there might be. Grey can give us the strength we need when we are down. The color also represents structure (often seen in the foundation of buildings) which encourages feelings of togetherness and a strong self. Do you think grey is dull? Maybe it could help you to feel calmer and broaden your mind and mood.

How the Color Yellow Affects Your Mood

Yellow has one of the most powerful effects on your mood and mental health. Yellow represents happiness, clarity and energy. Being so bright, it's often used in children's advertisements to grab attention quickly. Yellow is associated with freshness and regeneration much like green, however, too much exposure to yellow can have negative effects. Studies have shown that yellow in the right tone can spark creativity and wellbeing. However, studies have also shown that babies spending too much time in a bright yellow room often cry more due to the intense stimulus yellow offers. Darker yellow is also used as caution signs on the road to give warnings to drivers. It grabs your attention and encourages a feeling of uncertainty and anxiety. Too much yellow exposure can also cause forgetfulness and loss of focus. Yellow is powerful in the fact that it can overstimulate the brain. By doing so for long periods, its thought that it can increase anxiety and cause low self-esteem. Because yellow packs such a powerful punch, it's better to use yellow in small doses, rather than painting your room bright yellow. For example, having a sunflower on your unit provides enough positive stimuli without being overbearing in a room environment.

How the Color Purple Affects Your Mood

There's something truly soothing about purple, at least from my perspective. That's why I chose purple as part of the color scheme for Project Energise.com. Mixed with the greeny color in the logo, it is pleasing on the eye whilst giving a healthy feeling output. Purple can be relaxing for you mood. Purple is one of the more exotic colors, much like pink. It's striking and has a real impact on your mood. Purple can give us a feeling of

wisdom, luxury and creativity. It's also a slightly more interesting color. The color purple is different enough from the other colors in the spectrum to look unique. Often times when we see a rainbow, it's the purple, or violet that stands out to us. Although striking, it's a soft and inviting color that, in many cases, many females associate with. It's also a positive color that can emit feelings of calm and coziness. Purple is a mixture or red and blue, energetic colors and calm colors which bring a balance of peacefulness when mixed into purple. Having purple colors and objects near you can increase your mood and make you feel more creative. Purple is a distractive color that has a sense of mystery about it.

How the Color White Affects Your Mood

The color white is a neutral color. It's associated with pureness and clarity. Many modern establishments use white to evoke feelings of newness and cleanliness. Although some may not consider white to be a color and instead more of a shade, white is still powerful for lifting spirits when we're feeling down. White gives sensations of space and hygiene and is often used to make rooms feel bigger than they really are. Often times, medical environments will use the color white to enforce a sense of hygiene. When we see white, we generally think about clarity and clean environments. Using white can lift spirits up even more when used alongside a color like green or yellow. The powerful combination of clean and natural feeling colors can create mental sensations of clarity when we're feeling low.

How Color Affects Your Mood and Mental Health

Of course, all of the above is subjective like we previously mentioned. Your own personal experiences will determine how you interpret certain colors. You might find the color blue, for example, a positive influence on your mental health. You might even find that you can't stand the color green because of certain experiences. Because we all interpret colors differently, identifying how colors make you feel personally is important. Using colors to enhance your mood becomes easy when you know what you respond well to. Color, one of the most powerful aspects of the environment, has been reported to promote human adaptation to the environment and enhance spatial form. Color may change the perceived size and warmth of a room, elicit associations, enhance introversion or extroversion, incite anger of relaxation, and influence physiological responses. Several studies have been conducted to study the psychological impact of color. For example, whereas warm colors provide visual activation and stimulation, cool colors communicate subtlety and relaxation.

The visual environment is a vital element influencing hospital staff morale and productivity; studies have even reported that an enhanced visual environment have produced improved faster recovery rates by as much as 10%. In fact, these improvements have been attributed to particular elements of the visual environment; they include the use of appropriate color in interior design. In hospital design, color can have an impact on peoples' perceptions and responses to the environment and also affect patient recovery rates, improving the quality and overall experience of patients, staff and visitors. Color is also powerful tools for coding, navigation and wayfinding, color can also promote a sense of well-being and independence.

Review of literature

Kwallek and Lewis (1988) investigated effects of environmental color on gender using a red, white, and green office. The experiment assessed worker performance in proofreading and mood under different colored office environments.

Weller and Livingston (1988) examined the effect of colored-paper on emotional responses obtained from questionnaires. Six different questionnaires were designed and compiled in this order: pink-guilty, pink-not guilty; blue-guilty, blue-not guilty; white-guilty, white-not guilty.

Boyatzis and Varghese (1994) investigated children's color and emotion associations. They found that children showed positive emotions to bright colors (pink, red, yellow, green, purple, or blue) and negative emotions for dark colors (brown, black, gray).

Ghadiali (1873-1966), a naturalized American from India, who had studied Babbitt's work. The doctor spent many years researching the effects of color on disease and developing colored filters. In 1920, he introduced a system of colored lights, which he sold under the name "Spectro-Chrome" lamps. Touted as a treatment for such diseases as diabetes, tuberculosis, and chronic gonorrhea, the healing lamps were considered preposterous by many M.D.s and miraculous by others who claimed success with them. Although controversial (Dinshah spent much time in court defending his product), his work continues to inspire many color therapists today.

Elliot and Maier (2012) have proposed color-in-context theory, which draws on social learning, as well as biology. Some responses to color stimuli are presumed to be solely due to the repeated pairing of color and particular concepts, messages, and experiences. Others, however, are presumed to represent a biologically engrained predisposition that is reinforced and shaped by social learning. Through this social learning, color associations can be extended beyond natural bodily processes (e.g., blood flow modulations) to objects in close proximity to the body (e.g., clothes, accessories). Thus, for example, red may not only increase attractiveness evaluations when viewed on the face, but also when viewed on a shirt or dress. As implied by the name of the theory, the physical and psychological context in which color is perceived is thought to influence its meaning and, accordingly, responses to it. Thus, blue on a ribbon is positive (indicating first place), but blue on a piece of meat is negative (indicating rotten), and a red shirt may enhance the attractiveness of a potential mate (red = sex/romance), but not of a person evaluating one's competence (red = failure/danger)

Meier and Robinson (2005) and Meier (in press) have posited a conceptual metaphor theory of color. From this perspective, people talk and think about abstract concepts in concrete terms grounded in perceptual experience (i.e., they use metaphors) to help them understand and navigate their social world (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999). Thus, anger entails reddening of the face, so anger is metaphorically described as "seeing red," and positive emotions and experiences are often depicted in terms of lightness (rather than darkness), so lightness is metaphorically linked to good ("seeing the light") rather than bad ("in the dark"). These metaphoric associations are presumed to have implications for important outcomes such as morality judgments (e.g., white things are viewed as pure) and stereotyping (e.g., dark faces are viewed more negatively).

How color psychology work

When light strikes any colored object, the object absorbs only the wavelengths that exactly match its own atomic structure and reflects the rest to the observer. When light strikes the human eye, the wavelengths do so in different ways, influencing our perceptions. The hypothalamus is the part of the brain governing our hormones and our endocrine system, when light hits the retina it is converted to electrical impulses that are then transmitted to the hypothalamus for interpretation.

The hypothalamus houses the body's biological clock (Wright, 2008). This is so because it governs our body's temperature, our appetite, sexual functions, sleeping, and behavioral patterns, and so on. It has been proved several times that color has a physical effect on humans due to its energy; an experiment carried out on blind people to identify some colors resulted in these blind subjects identifying the colors with no problems at all.

Colors for Stress Management:

The energy relating to each of the seven spectrum colors of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet, resonates with the energy of each of the seven main chakras/energy centers of the body. If you can imagine the chakras as a set of cogs/wheels, they are rather like the workings of a clock or an engine; each cog/wheel needs to move smoothly for the clock/engine to work properly. Thus good health and wellbeing is achieved by a balance of all these energies. Balance of the energy in each of the body's chakras is very important for health and wellbeing. Color therapy can help to re-balance and/or stimulate these energies by applying the appropriate color to the body and therefore re-balance our chakras.

Red relates to the base chakra, orange the sacral chakra, yellow the solar plexus chakra, green the heart chakra, blue the throat chakra, indigo the brow chakra (sometimes referred to as the third eye) and violet relates to the crown chakra. Color is absorbed by the eyes, skin, skull our 'magnetic energy field' or aura and the energy of color affects us on all levels, that is to say, physical, spiritual and emotional. Every cell in the body needs light energy – thus color energy has widespread effects on the whole body. There are many different ways of giving color, including; Solarized Water, Light boxes/lamps with color filters, color silks and hands on healing using color.

Color therapy can be shown to help on a physical level, which is perhaps easier to quantify, however there are deeper issues around the colors on the psychological and spiritual levels. Our wellbeing is not, of course, purely a physical issue. Fortunately, many more practitioners, both orthodox and complementary are now treating patients in an holistic manner. That is to say, we are body, mind and spirit and none of these areas function entirely alone; each has an effect upon the other. This is why Color Therapy can be so helpful since color addresses all levels of our being.

Benefits of color therapy

In this way, color can be used for not only mental but also physical benefits. "There are simple meditation and visualization techniques that can be used to bring color healing to our physical, emotional and energetic bodies, and these can be very effective," Bilski explains. "A simple exercise is to relax your body, focus on your breathing and to picture a color that you may need, then breathe in that color, see it surround your body and maybe even penetrate your physical body – you can choose a specific color or work your way through the colors of the rainbow and visualize each color energizing your body and chakras."

For those who don't subscribe to energetic spirituality, the simplest experience of color therapy is how colors impact on your emotions. "Colors can also have an impact on our mood and emotions by interacting with our nervous system, acting as a subtle cue for physical and emotional responses," Bilski says. This is generally associated with their perception as either hot or cold, and as moist or dry. Hotter colors tend to foster feelings of energy or ferocity, cooler colors of calm or even melancholy. "As we move into winter, people tend to wear darker colors but this can actually bring your mood down," says Bilski. "As the days are darker, we want to bring lightness, vibrancy and warmth into our clothes and surroundings rather than more darkness and greyness."

Other than what you choose to wear, you can apply color therapy to your life in many equally simple ways. You might choose to accessories with it, to decorate your home or office with it, or burn colored candles. According to Bilski, you can even absorb the benefits of colors in what you eat and drink. "One can be very creative in the use of color," she says. "You can add color to your bath, wrap yourself with a bright blanket or add it to food…the list is endless."

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