

Colour

Colour can have a powerful effect on every aspect of our lives, from the food we eat to the homes we live in. Can it heal us too?

Colour is something most of us take for granted, but how would we feel if it was suddenly drained away? I feel sure it would have a profound effect on everything we do and how we feel, physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

Just think of all the 'clues' we get from colour in our day-to-day lives; it can tell us if someone's ill or if food is fresh and fruit ripe. It tells us what to do at traffic lights and can make objects and places instantly recognisable; New York has yellow taxis, London has red buses.

Colour therapy

Colour therapy has featured in religions and medicine since records began. The ancient Egyptians built solariums fitted with coloured panels of glass. When the sun shone through these the room and patients within were flooded with colour. It's found in Ayurveda – a form of medicine practised in India. In traditional Chinese

medicine each organ is associated with a colour. In Europe the rooms of those suffering from smallpox were draped in red to draw out the disease. My mother still has memories of being clothed in a red cardigan when she suffered from Scarlet Fever as a child. It was used to 'draw out' the rash! So there's a long history of its use medically, but is there any hard scientific evidence that it actually works?

In the early 1900s, Dr Max Luscher studied how colour affects behaviour. He found that certain colours caused an emotional response in people and developed a personality test based on his findings. The test is used by some companies, psychologists and doctors to give an indication of a person's emotional state at the time of taking the test.

As knitters and stitchers we know that colour can inspire or calm us – many of the stories sent to us mention the power of colour. You've only got to think

about that first bright yellow daffodil that pops its head up on a grey winter's morning to know that colour can make your heart skip a beat. A field of golden sunflowers or ruby red poppies can do the same. Colour clearly has the power to improve your mood, even make you happy, so does that mean it can help to heal you too?

Colour therapists say it can. One told us recently that in order to be 'balanced' you should like all colours. If you think about this statement logically, it kind of makes sense. Perhaps our dislike of certain colours stems from unpleasant or traumatic childhood events which need resolving? Red, for example doesn't feature on my mother's favourites list and still evokes memories of itchy cardigans on sore skin!

Colour balanced?

Those who have a tendency towards manic behaviour or suffer from schizophrenia appear to love very vibrant,

almost fluorescent, clashing colour schemes. Those who are depressed often live in a grey world drained of colour. So does this mean that to be 'balanced' you should be somewhere in the middle?

I've noticed the colour yarn used often reflects the knitter's state of mind, but is there any science behind colour therapy? At this stage

“You may dislike certain colours if you link them to bad memories. So can learning to like them help to soothe the memory linked to it?”

I'd have to say, 'No not really', but Professor Semir Zeki of University College London aims to address this. He is Director of the newly set up Department of Neuroaesthetics which aims to use neuroscience to understand art and aesthetic experience/behaviour. His aim is to discover the neuro correlates of beauty and love – if they exist.

Measure of beauty

We've all experienced the deep emotions which can be triggered when we view something beautiful or ugly, but will brain scans be able to 'see' them? Will we be able to, one day, 'measure' beauty or love?

Those of you who did a bit of physics in school might

remember that white light is made up of seven spectrum colours – the colours of the rainbow. Each of the spectrum colours is a light with its own wavelength and frequency, so each will have its own energy. We react to other radiations in the electromagnetic spectrum, such as ultra violet light, x-ray and radio active Gamma Rays, so why not to light in the visible spectrum?

Could this mean that some people may be able to 'sense' colour? Do blind people live in a world of colour or in one of hues of blacks and white? A nurse who filled in our online questionnaire told us she'd once taught a blind person to knit – she could tell the colour she was knitting with by its touch!

So is it just our eyes that 'take in' colour or are our other senses involved in some way, too? The Turkish painter Esref Armagan has been blind since birth and paints pictures with vibrant colour, shadows and perspective, yet scientists have confirmed that no light enters his brain! Melvyn Goodale and David Milner's book, *Sight Unseen* is a fascinating description of TWO visual systems and has forced a re-examination of the accepted ways of understanding the human visual experience.

We know that white light makes those suffering from SAD feel better, so does light

of different wavelengths have different effects?

It's generally accepted that blue is calming, while red can make us agitated and raise blood pressure, violet/purple absorbs sound, white reflects it. Colour therapists say that violet relates to spiritual awareness and meditation. Violet has been used by many religions for centuries. Is this just coincidence or did ancient religions choose it for this property? If so how could they know?

Orange is used by colour therapists to treat depression and pessimism. Interestingly when we asked our members on the Forum which colour was their least favourite it was orange, with blues and turquoises coming top of the list. Does your favourite colour say something about you?

What do you feel?

As we grow we attach different feelings and emotions to various colours – some may bring back happy memories while others may evoke sadness. Many of you have said that colours you knit with bring back memories linked to them – the colour of your grandmother's shawl, the turquoise of a warm sea. You may also dislike certain colours if you link them to bad memories. So can learning to like those colours help to soothe the memory linked to it? Why not tell us your opinion?