

# Coloring your Life

By Suze Hargraves

I've been "the woman in black" since I was old enough to chose my own clothing. I like black. It looks good on me, it's practical and it negates the need for me to think about matching things in the morning. Other colors do dot my wardrobe in small doses. If I'm feeling really feisty, I'll toss on a white blouse with my black pants. The colors we wear say a lot about us, our mood and our personality. Apparently my wardrobe leads people to believe that I know where they buried Jimmy Hoffa (and no I don't...honestly....), but I'm okay with that. It works for me. Color can also influence your health and happiness.

R. Douglas Fields writing for Psychology Today reports, "Colors influence object preferences in many situations in modern life, for example house paint, clothes, and furniture. Our individual preference for a particular color associated with these objects (a living room wall or an automobile) will be produced and reinforced by the positive feedback associated with the object and the color it has. Everyone has a somewhat different life experience, and so as people increasingly experience pleasure in something they bought in a particular color, they will tend to chose similar objects in the future with the same color. This leads to a self perpetuating situation." Well, that's a mouthful. Let's break that down.

When we have a positive experience, with which we associate a color, we will tend to make future color choices based on that experience. That color choice can relax, invigorate, inspire, calm or otherwise alter our mental and physical health simply by making us happy. Let's say your family had a yellow kitchen growing up. You have fond memories of good times, comfort food and love circulating around that room and experience. Look around you. How much yellow is in your life? I don't know how this theory will pan out for you, but it seems to explain a color I like to paint with called "barn red". It's a sort of rusty brownish red-much the color of the Irish Setters in our family who have brought so much joy to my life. Food for thought isn't it?

In the world of alternative medicine, using color to effect mood, health or behavior is called chromotherapy. Chromotherapy is based on the theory that working with certain colors in relation to our physical and mental health can produce healing and/or soothing effects. One practice recommends surrounding yourself in light of the color prescribed for your ailment. This is also seen in practices that deal with chakras, color visualization and meditations based on colors. Does chromotherapy work? It has a long history and there is an abundance of personal experience supporting that, for some people, it does. Modern scientific research into its effectiveness is, however, scarce at best. You can read more about chakras and chromotherapy at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1297510/>. Always check in with your healthcare provider before using alternative medicines of any kind. Even if they don't support the practice, they should be able to objectively tell you if you're headed down a dangerous path.

The colors we wear, surround ourselves with and are attracted to impact our lives. Paint your life in the colors that make you happy. When you do, you'll find yourself doing something really good for you: smiling.

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