ABSTRACT

Feeling blue? Seeing red? Green with envy? Browned off? Who assigned these colors to our states of mind? Is there really a connection between mood and hue?

How many of you have felt some aspects of SAD (seasonal affective disorder) during the gray morbid days of winter? Could this have anything to do with the absence of environmental color and light? Scientists in this field say, yes. The primary colors of nature, especially, have had their influence on us and these influences are deep seated in our biological make up.

Color and its effect on the central nervous system have been a science since man first saw and felt the difference in his homeostasis between night and day. According to Dr. Alexander Schauss, director of the American Institute for Biosocial Research in Tacoma, Washington, as soon as color enters our sensory system, it stimulates the pituitary and pineal glands. Certain hormones are then triggered, which in turn, produce a variety of physiological responses. Thus, color has been found to have a direct influence on our thoughts, moods and behavior; even, remarkably, on blind people, who are thought to sense color as a result of energy vibrations created within the body.

But no one has so deftly researched and put together a more interesting hypothesis on the human organism and its response to color than Dr. Max Luscher, founder of the Institute of Psycho-Medical Diagnostics in Lucerne, Switzerland. His Luscher Color Diagnostik has been circulating since 1947, and has been translated into 29 different languages.

Dr. Luscher studied psychiatry during the same time period as William Glasser and earned a doctorate in the fields of philosophy, psychology and clinical psychiatry. He shares a similar evolutionary journey and global influence as does Dr. Glasser, and amazing similarities in his theory and interpretations of man, his needs and his search for meaning and happiness. The Luscher Color Test is taught in universities throughout the world in seven different languages, and is used by professional caregivers around the globe.

In my practice, it is common in my experience to have a child come to me unknown. When I do the test and subsequently share the interpretative tables with parents, they, nine times out of ten, confirm that the results are accurate. These experiences I would be happy to share with curious readers, but prefer to use the valuable space here to acquaint you with the corollaries between Luscher’s color interpretations and Glasser’s five basic needs.

My work as a diagnostican with children with learning disabilities, and the social and emotional problems that accompany that package, led me to the discovery of the Luscher Color Test from a local school counselor. I have used the test for over twenty five years, but it didn’t become clear to me how the basic primary colors of the test correlated with Glasser’s five basic needs until some time after I was certified and actually began instructing others in Choice Theory. It has never ceased to amaze me how accurate the test is to the reality of the individual’s current psychological and physical state. As I went into private practice for myself, this reality began to sink deeper into my intuitive cognizance, due to the fact that it was the first thing I did when testing children. Because of its unobtrusive approach, it appeals to children, like play. I refer here to the quick eight-color test contained in the paperback The Luscher Color Test, published by Random House in 1969. Dr. Luscher, like Glasser, has evolved with his own theory in many ways, and now has taken the test mentioned above off the market, and replaced it with a more researched and revised version available from his website: www.luscher-color.com.

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THEORY COMPARISONS

In 1975, Luscher published another popular best seller called The 4-Color Person. It wasn’t until I read this book that I began to make the connections that he, too, believed that man is propelled by four psychological ‘senses of self’. He refers to:

Self-respect which is interpreted by a certain hue of green
Self-confidence is represented by red
Self-moderation is represented by blue
Self-development is represented by yellow

As he elaborates on each of these ‘senses’, it starts to line up clearly that what he means by self moderation is what man feels when he is “content and able to feel empathy and devotion and feel respect and real love for (and from) others.”; a sense of harmony with his relationships; clearly Glasser’s love and belonging need. It is interesting
that this need is not represented by the color red as Rudolph Valentino would have us choose, but by the more calming hue of blue; deep blue, like a fathomless ocean; Ever enduring, as a mother or parent love. “You feel the attachment all around you; a sense of belonging. After all we know that blue is the color of loyalty.” (pp 167) Could this have anything to do with the expression ‘true blue’? It is also interesting to note that prison cells and their accompanying environments are often painted in deeper colors, such as calming blue, to play down stimulation.

Red is scientifically well accepted to be a color that stimulates and raises the blood pressure. Words Luscher used, when referring to the need for red or the application of red, are passion, excitement, and energy. I think what we are being reminded of each February, as Valentine’s day comes around, is the need to put the romance, the joie de vivre, back into our relationships; the fun and learning that comes with excitement and new beginnings.

Green, a shade akin to forest green, Luscher has researched as the color of respect; Self respect, self worth, or as we might say in Glasser terms, personal power. Surrounded by the green of the earth, early farmers were more inclined to persist and exercise their physical will towards a bountiful harvest. When we keep our gardens green, they sustain us. Persistence and will power produce enduring hard earned and satisfying results, making us proud of our accomplishments. There is an element of hope when green is a very light yellowish color. Green, as it first appears in its young life in nature, is more yellow, reaching out to develop and grow towards something more permanent and strong. As it reaches maturity in the form of a tall tree, it stands proud and tall, well defined against the world, protecting, sustaining, dependable. Words used by Luscher, as he describes fir green, are: stability, solidity, constancy, persistence and resilience of the will. What else would we need to gain personal power?

Yellow, says Luscher, brings with it more of a surface nature. Quote “Goethe : “It is the color closest to light. In its utmost purity, it always implies the nature of brightness and has a cheerful serene, gently stimulating character. Hence experience teaches us that yellow makes a thoroughly warm and comforting impression” (pp171)

Is this not close to the feeling we get when others act in a way that frees us up to be our true selves? Luscher says, while green can be pent up and static, yellow corresponds more with dynamic kinetic energy. Yellow is a basic color and corresponds with the basic need of free development. He uses words such as openness, “yellow transmits a feeling of vastness, of change of development, of liberation and ease... it is preferred by people looking for altered, liberating conditions. People who love flying, who like to leave the ground of reality, often prefer the color yellow”. Thence, the need for freedom and self-expression.

The color brown in the test is a darkened yellow red. The impactful energy essence of red is reduced and darkened somewhat to make it more passively receptive and sensory based. “Brown, therefore, represents sensation as it applies to the body senses.” (TCT p78) Our physical needs. I have found when working with the test, that in cases where clients have not been paying attention to their physical and ‘survival’ old brain needs, brown is pushed more forward in the test or totally rejected revealing serious stress created by ignorance of physiological needs. If one considers the association with brown and Mother Earth and how it sustains our survival, the connection is metaphorically clear.

CONCLUSION

It is not very difficult to see, as these descriptions play out, that Dr Luscher has been on the same trail in his own colorful way, as has Glasser. He brings to the field a widely and now very deeply researched package, already scientifically sound. He provides us with a tool that I believe could be invaluable to those of us working in the care giving professions to help others, in an unobtrusive way, to become aware of what they might be addressing or rejecting within their basic needs system.

I am currently in communication with Dr Luscher and am becoming acquainted with his much more technical and revised test. His very popular The Law of Harmony Within Us (1985) is already into its tenth edition, but, unfortunately, not yet published in English. In this treatise, he refers to his psychology as a self-regulating psychology, which recognizes the power within the individual to maintain balance and seek meaningfulness from the inside out, as does choice theory. He describes a system designed to regulate itself. He has communicated to me that the follow up therapy he employs when working with patients, he also calls reality therapy since it draws on the reality of the individual and does not lean on external dictatorships. I believe, had more of his work been published in English or more of Glasser’s work been published in German, Max Luscher and William Glasser might have been led to each other in their earlier years.

I have wanted to write a manual for some time sharing these ideas and successes with the integration of Luscher’s work with choice theory and reality therapy, and Dr Luscher has kindly offered to support me through this. I would be interested to know how much interest there is out there in our RT/CT community in using such a tool and/or reading more about the integration of the basic colors when teaching choice theory to children and youth.

REFERENCES

Luscher, M. (1979) The 4-Color Person N.Y. WSP, Simon and Schuster

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