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## **THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF FLOWERS: EXPLORING THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SENSORY IMPACT OF FLORAL DESIGN**

*Annotation: This article explores the emotional intelligence of flowers and their ability to influence human mood, perception, and presence. Based on the author's experience conducting floral workshops since 2018 and scientific literature on color and sensory psychology, the study examines how working with flowers can promote emotional well-being and connection. Particular attention is given to tactile engagement, color choices, and emotional responses across age groups. The article highlights the therapeutic potential of floral design as a sensory practice. Findings suggest that floristry offers an accessible form of emotional expression and soft therapy.*

*Keywords: emotional impact, floral design, color psychology, sensory experience, floral therapy, well-being, floral workshops*

### **Introduction**

Flowers have always held a special place in human culture — from ancient rituals to modern celebrations — often serving as symbols of love, grief, or renewal. Yet their emotional influence goes beyond symbolism. Scientific research increasingly supports what florists and flower lovers intuitively know: flowers

have the power to shift mood, stimulate the senses, and create meaningful human connections.

The rise of interest in wellness, mindfulness, and therapeutic design has brought new attention to everyday creative practices, including floral arranging. As the floral industry evolves, it is important to consider not only sustainability and aesthetics but also how floristry functions as an emotional and sensory experience. This article aims to explore how interaction with flowers — whether through receiving, arranging, or simply observing — contributes to psychological well-being.

Drawing on both personal practice and established research, the study focuses on the author's experience conducting floral workshops for non-professionals in the U.S. and abroad. These workshops, open to participants of all ages and genders, consistently reveal the emotional and sensory depth of floristry. By analyzing observed reactions and connecting them with psychological theory, this article argues for a broader understanding of floral design as an emotionally intelligent practice — one that engages the senses, enhances mood, and encourages creative presence.

### **Methods**

This study is based on a combination of professional experience and interdisciplinary research. The following qualitative methods were applied:

- Autoethnographic observation: The author has conducted floral workshops since 2018 in various formats — indoor and outdoor, individual and group, for both adults and children (ages 2 to 60+). Emotional responses, sensory engagement, and participant behavior were closely observed and documented after each session.

- Content analysis of feedback: Verbal and written feedback was collected from workshop participants to assess perceived emotional changes and personal experience.
- Comparative literature review: The study references academic research in psychology, sensory science, and design theory, particularly focusing on color psychology (Birren, 1950), embodied cognition (Paul, 2021), and the Rutgers Flower Study (Haviland-Jones, 2005).
- Practical reflection: The author also integrates insights from her regular floral practice, including her personal habit of gifting flowers to individuals of all genders and ages, and the emotional responses observed in those interactions.

### **The Psychology of Flowers**

The emotional impact of flowers is supported not only by centuries of cultural practice but also by modern psychological research. A key study conducted at Rutgers University (Haviland-Jones et al., 2005) found that the presence of flowers consistently triggers positive emotional responses in both men and women, regardless of age. Participants who received flowers reported increased happiness, gratitude, and connection, effects that lasted several days after the interaction.

Color also plays a central role. According to Birren (1950), specific colors stimulate different psychological states: warm tones such as yellow and orange evoke energy and optimism, while cooler tones like blue and green promote calm and reflection. In floral design, the intentional use of color can be harnessed to guide emotion, whether to energize a space, create intimacy, or honor memory.

In the author's experience, the emotional effect is almost universal: even individuals who claim they "don't care about flowers" tend to soften when receiving a thoughtfully arranged bouquet. In professional practice, flowers are

used to create emotional tone — from bridal joy to memorial reverence — and to mark transitions in life with visual symbolism.

### **Floral Design as a Sensory and Embodied Experience**

Floristry is more than visual composition — it is a tactile, olfactory, and embodied practice. According to cognitive science researcher Annie Murphy Paul (2021), the brain's ability to process information is significantly enhanced through hands-on, physical engagement — what she calls "embodied cognition." In this framework, the act of arranging flowers becomes a form of emotional regulation and sensory mindfulness.

Workshop participants often describe unexpected feelings of peace, curiosity, or joy when handling stems, adjusting arrangements, or simply smelling a fragrant bloom. Even when technical results are imperfect, the process itself generates positive emotion and attentional presence. This supports Walker's (2019) view that deep noticing — attention to small beauty — fosters emotional resilience and connection to the present moment.

For many participants, especially those unfamiliar with floral design, the sensory pleasure of touch and smell creates a meditative state. The process slows the mind and fosters a sense of "flow," aligning well with recent movements in therapeutic art and design psychology.

### **The Emotional Impact of Workshops**

Since 2018, the author has conducted floral workshops in a wide variety of settings — indoor and outdoor, individual and group, private and public. Participants have ranged from children as young as two years old (accompanied by parents) to seniors in their sixties and older. Across all demographics, one pattern remains consistent: emotional engagement.

Children express natural excitement, sensory curiosity, and joy. Adults show moments of calm, quiet focus, and creative experimentation. Older participants

often reflect on personal memories triggered by flowers — a scent, a flower from their childhood, or a story from their homeland. Gender makes no difference in response; emotional pleasure appears to be universal.

An important observation is the emergence of non-verbal emotion. Participants often fall silent during the process, not from discomfort, but from immersion. Eyes light up, hands become careful, and posture softens. The experience transforms from "crafting" into connection with the material, with oneself, and with others.

These patterns suggest that floral workshops may serve as low-barrier forms of emotional processing, accessible even to those with no creative background. This aligns with Lucy Hunter's (2021) reflections on floral design as a "quiet language of care."

### **Flowers, Ritual, and Connection**

Beyond personal emotion, flowers carry collective meaning. They are used in rituals across cultures: births, weddings, memorials, religious holidays, and political events. Each flower can symbolize a memory, a person, or a collective story. In this way, floristry operates as a kind of emotional language, speaking where words fail.

In the author's personal and professional life, flowers are offered freely to friends, family, and even strangers, regardless of gender or occasion. This practice has shown again and again that flowers dissolve barriers: people smile, soften, and connect. Flowers are not transactional; they are relational.

Slow flower movement advocate Debra Prinzing (2013) emphasizes this emotional ecology, where local flowers and seasonal arrangements reflect care not only for the environment, but for the people receiving them. The emotional intelligence of flowers, then, is not only in their beauty, but in their ability to bring people into a relationship with the world and with each other.

## **Results**

The analysis of workshop observations and participant feedback yielded the following key findings:

- Emotional responses were consistent across age and gender.
- The act of arranging flowers created a meditative, focused state.
- Color choices influenced emotional tone.
- Physical interaction with flowers enhanced emotional awareness.
- The social context of workshops encouraged non-verbal connection.

These results suggest that floral engagement, even in non-professional settings, can function as an accessible and meaningful form of emotional regulation and interpersonal connection.

## **Conclusion**

The emotional power of flowers extends far beyond their decorative role. As this study demonstrates, working with flowers — through touch, sight, scent, and arrangement — activates human emotion, attention, and memory in profound ways. Floral design engages not only the eye, but the whole body and mind.

In a world where emotional burnout and disconnection are rising, practices like floral workshops offer simple yet powerful tools for grounding, joy, and presence. The author's experience since 2018 confirms that participants of all ages and backgrounds respond positively to flowers, not because of aesthetic standards, but because of the emotional intelligence embedded in the material itself.

As a member of the FSFA, the author encourages further exploration of floristry as a form of soft therapy, sensory practice, and cultural connection. While more quantitative studies are needed, this qualitative research affirms what many florists intuitively know: flowers speak a universal emotional language, and we are only beginning to understand their depth.

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