The Effects of Coloring Books on Adults and the Art Therapy Profession

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Abstract

This project will discuss the topic of coloring books for adults. Coloring books have recently grown exponentially in popularity as an increasing number of people are buying coloring books marketed towards adults with many different subjects. Many people, from scientists to psychologists, claim that coloring books are calming and relaxing, and can create a more balanced life (Marsh, 2015). Many are also claiming that these books have positive effects on diseases such as dementia (Hattori et al. 2011). Finally, many of these books are being advertised specifically as art therapy books. Many people have formed opinions on their stance on this matter, including the American Art Therapy Association (AATA). There has also been research done on the affects that this has on the Art Therapy profession. This paper will explore the history of how coloring books have an effect on the people that use them, and determine if the claims that have been made about these books are backed by substantial evidence. Because these types of books are relatively new, it appears that not a lot of research has been done on this topic. As a result of wider use of coloring books, this paper will identify the research that has been done on this topic to develop a more well-informed and accurate knowledge of the effects that coloring and coloring books have for adults. This paper will specifically highlight the history of coloring books and the impact that these books have from a psycho-social standpoint on the symptoms of anxiety, depression, and memory loss in the adult population, as well as examine coloring books relationship to the Art Therapy profession and Adlerian concepts such as social interest and encouragement. Through researching peer reviewed journals and popular press and online resources on the topic, this paper will examine the use of coloring books in a therapeutic setting, define and determine the differences between Art Therapy and coloring books for adults, and determine the benefits as well as the negative effects that coloring books
have on adults who use them.
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The Effects of Coloring Books on Adults and the Art Therapy Profession

**Introduction**

Coloring books have grown exponentially in popularity with adults. This is shown by the fact that 6 out of the top 10 bestselling books on Amazon were coloring books for adults (McAfee, 2015). Additionally, 12% of children’s books sold nationwide are coloring and activity books, accounting for over 104 million units sold, and representing more than $230 million in annual revenue (Fitzpatrick, & McPherson, 2010). This increase in popularity of coloring books does not appear to be slowing down. This trend has also resulted in many articles and news stories focusing on this topic, and the many people partaking in this newly common activity for adults (McAfee, 2015).

Many different people, from scientists to psychologists, claim that coloring books are calming, relaxing, and can create a more balanced life (McAfee, 2015). They claimed that coloring books have had positive effects on diseases such as dementia (Color Between the Lines, 2015). Finally, many of these books are being advertised specifically and incorrectly as art therapy books. This has raised a debate within the art therapy profession and the American Art Therapy Association (AATA) about the use of coloring books.

The growing public interest in coloring books and coloring clubs for adults has stimulated many articles and news reports on the social, emotional, and physical effects of individual and group coloring. This paper will present information on the history of coloring books, analyze the research that has been done on the topic of adult coloring books and their relevance to Adlerian Psychology and art therapy. This will provide a better understanding of the benefits of coloring books on personal wellness and symptom reduction while articulating the differences between coloring and art therapy.
The article “The Coloring Craze,” by Milliot (2015), discussed how coloring books for adults are currently popular, and how they are continuing to grow in demand as reflected in coloring book sales. Milliot claims that the adult coloring book craze that started at the beginning of 2015, shows no sign of slowing down. A list of some of the biggest sellers to date showed that 10 of the most popular books have combined to sell about 1.5 million copies at outlets that report to BookScan, which contains about 80% of print book sales. Many publishers note that they have done very well in nontraditional outlets. Sales data compiled by Milliot (2015) reflects this growing trend of the interest in adult coloring books.

The independent publisher the Experiment reports that it has more than 280,000 print copies of The Mindfulness Coloring Book, which was released in June 2015, and more than 85,000 print copies of the second volume, which was published in the fall of 2015. Familius Publishing just signed a deal with artist Pamela Smart in order to release Color Me Your Way, her bestselling series of adult coloring books. The four books are likely to sell more than one million copies in a year (Milliot, 2015).

The coloring book phenomenon is also causing publishers of these books to look for related activities to include in their products. For example, Fox Chapel created a coloring book that includes stickers that can be colored and removed from the book to place anywhere. In early 2016, Brown will introduce four coloring books that include connect-the-dots books for adults. A final sign of the continued interest in this category is the response to the call for information for these types of books (Milliot, 2015).

The growing interest in coloring books among adults has caused a progression to incorporating other art mediums into coloring books, such as the example of stickers. This could
potentially also create a natural progression of the increase in popularity among other types of art, and an increase in interest in the therapeutic benefits of art.

**The History of Coloring Books**

The history of coloring books is an important and interesting component of explaining the current growth trend of coloring books. Traditionally, coloring books were geared towards children, and it was not common for adults to use this type of publication. It was not common for adults to use coloring books until about 1961 (Marsh, 2015). At this time, coloring books began to use subjects pertaining to adults, such as the workplace and humor. Since then, they have changed drastically in style, as well as in status. Adult coloring books are being geared towards a multitude of different adult populations, and are being sold in record high numbers (Marsh, 2015). Historically, coloring books for adults have had a trendy influence on popular culture. For example, Drucker’s *JFK Coloring Book* spent 14 weeks at the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list in 1962, and sales of adult coloring books reached $1 million. In 2016, coloring books are even more profitable. Johanna Basford’s *Secret Garden* and *Enchanted Forest* were the two best-selling books on Amazon in April 2015. Basford has sold nearly 10 million coloring books since *Secret Garden* was published in 2013 (Marsh, 2015).

When coloring books for adults were originally created, they were created with a different purpose than they have morphed into today. When they were originally created, their intention was to be used for political messages or for humor, as opposed to being used for the purpose of being of social interest, or relaxation, and as mindful coloring, as they are often used. Kate Greenaway is credited with developing one of the first coloring books intended for children to paint in 1884, *A Painting Book*, later published as *The Little Folks’ Paint Book* (Fitzpatrick, & McPherson, 2010).
It was in the 1930s that coloring with wax crayons really took off. By 1935, the manufacture of crayons and pencils was a $20 million industry—one that had grown by nearly 40 per cent in the two years since 1933. In 1934, the *Chicago Daily Tribune* reported on the crayons’ “gain in size color and tricks,” commenting on the assortment of “blue violets, yellow oranges, and other delectable colors” now available. (Marsh, 2015, p. 16)

The introduction of crayons as a media in the 1930s and 40s, though, facilitated the first trendy wave for the activity of coloring (Marsh, 2015). Art education was a discipline that had not rejected coloring books as a useful tool in the classroom during the 30s and 40s. This negative response to coloring books would not happen until the late 1950s when Viktor Lowenfeld, who was one of the most influential scholars of art education, claimed that coloring books had a devastating effect on children because they prevented them from being able to develop their own ideas. He clarified, though, that general statements should not be made about the effect that these books have on every individual (Marsh, 2015).

In the early sixties, coloring books first started to be used among adults. There was not a strong emphasis on creativity at the time, which resulted in a minimal number of adults using coloring books. Marsh stated that coloring books for adults still exerted a strong influence on a generation’s imagination in the early sixties and gave a possible reason behind this as being that coloring books, which were a nursery activity that was adopted by adults, exploded just as interest in Freudian psychoanalysis and child development gained an increase in popularity. (Marsh, 2015).

Not only did coloring books show adults a childishly simple view of a corrupt world, they also showed how a child could be corrupted in the process of learning. When the child is
instructed to color the executive gray, she sees the absurdity of conformism, but ultimately learns to take part in it by following the instructions. For adults, the conceit of a return to childhood offered the chance to reject the system and embrace entirely new principles; this questioning of the norms of America society would also stoke the emerging civil rights, anti-war, and women’s liberation movements. (Marsh, 2015, p. 15)

Marsh’s article, “The Radical History of 1960s Adult Coloring Books” stated that the first adult coloring book, which was published in late 1961, mocked the conformism that dominated the corporate workplace of the time (Marsh, 2015). It showed pictures of a businessman going through each stage throughout the day in order to show what he did on a daily basis. It was meant to teach children what their fathers did at work, but the captions of the pages, which provided specific instructions on how the individual was supposed to color the images, were isolated in general.

This is my suit. Color it gray or I will lose my job,” reads a caption next to a picture of a man getting dressed for work. Another page shows men in bowler hats boarding their commuter train. “This is my train,” it reads. “It takes me to my office every day. You meet lots of interesting people on the train. Color them all gray.” The rare appearance of a non-gray color is even more disturbing: “This is my pill. It is round. It is pink. It makes me not care. (Marsh, 2015, p. 14).

These captions were intended to create a sense of uniformity throughout the coloring book, and to add meaning to the images. This showed how the specific nature of the instructions in the early coloring books did not allow for a full use of creativity for the adults who used them. For example, the instructions on the coloring pages told the person who was coloring them what part of the picture to color, and what color to use when coloring it. It also did not use a wide
variety of options in colors. This emphasized conformity that was reflective of the business culture in the United States at the time. It also discussed how coloring books from early on addressed a wide variety of important issues, such as mental health, which aid in their ability to be therapeutic.

Adults using coloring books may be different than children using them primarily due to the fact that adults have already learned societal norms; however, it is similar because using the coloring books allow for the adult to be able to return to a child-like state of mind, and relearn these child-like principles. This was an extremely helpful and therapeutic technique because it allows for the mind to be relieved of stress. (Marsh, 2015).

The mediums that were used for coloring books in the early sixties were different than they are today. The generation that came of age in the early sixties was the first generation that grew up with waxed crayons. (Marsh, 2015.)

An extremely wide variety of coloring books became available for adults as they started to become more popular. The increase in attention of these books led to an increase in the variety of books that were created and accessible. Many of these books contained messages that were meant to capture the attention of specific groups of people, and to expand the market share of coloring books.

There was a wide variety of subjects that were used in coloring books during the 60s. As the trend of adults using coloring books expanded, the targets of these books became more predictable. Often, publishers would ridicule certain occupations and lifestyles. For example, the Bureaucrat’s Coloring Book made fun of government commissions and regulations. Another example was The Hipster Coloring Book, which made jokes about the dynamic of the hipster lifestyle. Over time, the captions of these books became more metaphorical. An example of this
is the use of a picture of a young man who says that he is having a fun time, and instructs the person coloring to color in the gleam of his eyes. 1963’s *Programmer’s Primer and Coloring Book* made complicated jokes with bizarre instructions to color Mickey Mouse and color him naïve. They lacked the sadness of *The Executive Coloring Book’s* instruction, which included phrases such as making a person appear to be more sad by coloring them grey (Marsh, 2015, p. 15). This allowed the person coloring to be able to take more initiative in their coloring and make more decisions of what they wanted to do with their pages.

The captions didn’t necessarily need to be clear, since they were never intended to be real instructions for a reader with a set of crayons. The point of the coloring books for adults during the sixties was not to sit down and color. The point of these books was to read their message and take a stand on the important topics that these books discussed. In this way, they were more like a specialized form of political cartoons.

Marsh’s 2016 article “Color Me Subversive” further explained the purpose of coloring books by stating that the coloring books that were made during the late 60’s covered a selection of the decade’s neuroses. These topics included national security, technology, and mental illness. In general, these books comprised the topics of many political issues. Two popular books took aim at President Kennedy in particular. These books were Drucker’s *JFK Coloring Book* and Joe B. Nation’s *New Frontier Coloring Book*. There were also coloring books that made fun of communists and coloring books that made fun of people who were scared of communists. For example, *Khrushchev’s Top Secret Coloring Book: Your First Red Reader* included characters who are depictions of Soviet leaders and life under communist rule. This book was still deemed objectionable and was banned by the United States Military. Another example was *The John Birch Society Coloring Book*, which ridiculed conspiracy theorists and
extremists, and stretched the coloring book concept to its limits with a blank page, captioned: “How many Communists can you find in this picture? I can find 11. It takes practice.” (Marsh, 2016, p. 15)

The seventies resulted in a change in coloring books and the demise of the political coloring books. Although newspapers occasionally announced revivals of the adult coloring book craze throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the popularity of coloring books was more often nostalgic and discussed as being a thing of the past.

Marsh (2016) identified how coloring books for adults were meant to have significant messages, such as political statements, faded out because they were replaced with things such as reading books or comic strips. Marsh stated that coloring books will most likely not ever be subversive again.

**Types of Coloring Books**

The article, “Color Me Trendy” by Nargi (2015), discussed how, as the coloring book craze increased, publishers were trying to differentiate their products from other products that were being sold. Almost every craft publisher was attempting to become involved in the world of adult coloring books. Their goal was to attempt to capitalize on the successes of Basford’s *Secret Garden*, which had sold more than 278,000 copies, and *Enchanted Forest*, which has sold more than 179,000 copies since its February 2015 release.

Nargi’s (2015) article anticipated that coloring books would evolve from being a trend and grow into becoming a more established and recognized form of art for adults to use. These books were seeing a large amount of success with the releases of books such as *Splendid Cities* by Rosie Goodwin and Alice Chadwick, and *Secret Paris* by Zoe des Las Cases, with combined sales of more than 20,000 copies.
Coloring Books for Adults

The rapid growth in popularity of coloring books for adults demonstrated how types of coloring books have become more diverse, and more easily accessible (McAfee, 2015). Themes of these books range from the interests of different age groups, such as toys for younger children, to themes that are geared towards adults. Different types of coloring books vary in level of difficulty, subject matter, number of pages, target demographic, and style.

The increase in availability of coloring books also generates more interest in these products. As more stores and online websites carry coloring books, as well as crayons or markers to color with, they become easier to obtain. The easier the products are to obtain, the more people will be interested in using them as a result of the increase in accessibility. Additionally, others will search extensively online to find specific coloring media and books that suite their interests (McAfee, 2015).

The internet has an influence on the kinds of coloring books that are available. It facilitates access to a wide variety of coloring pages via search engines. There are a number of chat rooms and discussion boards, which allow for people to share their experiences with coloring by sharing images and resources.

It is easy to find plenty of pages posted online from these books that have been scanned, and are printable. While the pages are useable, there are almost no examples of colored-in panels. There is, however, an endless variety of adult coloring pages with intricate pictures and patterns that have been finished that you can find on many websites such as Pinterest or Instagram.

It is widely agreed among the consumers of coloring books, as well as the members of coloring circles, or groups of people who get together and color in coloring books, that the act of
coloring can be relaxing (Marsh, 2015). The recent popularity of coloring books for adults has attracted attention from both the New Yorker and T: The New York Times Style Magazine, and in mid-2016, coloring books have made frequent appearances on national bestseller lists. This raises the question of how much more the market can handle having this craze continue. It has been predicted that there is going to come a time when the trend of coloring books is no longer only a trend, but that coloring books might actually become an established category (Marsh, 2015).

Popular Culture

With the rise of popularity in coloring books, the types of coloring books being sold have shifted to include popular subject matter, such as politics, movies, or television shows. These popular culture subject matter may also have an influence in the growth of the coloring book market (Marsh, 2015). Additionally, the coloring activity may be having an influence in the other craft and creativity consumer markets.

Recent politically-themed coloring books—*Hillary: The Coloring Book* and *Trump 2016: Off-Color Coloring Book* among others—have been relatively late additions to the latest crop, but neither their sales nor their cultural impact can match their therapeutic, decorative counterparts. (Marsh, 2015, p. 16)

Crafts

Publicity and marketing professionals, have seen a connection between coloring and crafting. They report a large amount of requests from fiber artists who want to reproduce certain coloring page designs with embroidery. They have noticed embroiderers are starting to use their coloring titles for design inspiration in their books. The new *Color Yourself Calm*, (2015) with illustrations by Chopra Center teacher Paul Heussenstamm and text by Tiddy Rowan, has created
a series of the same name from Barron’s; the next three titles will focus on the use of different media in order to incorporate more crafts. The Mystical Mandala Coloring Book (2007) by Alberta Hutchinson has sold almost 185,000 print copies. With prices of approximately $15, these books are highly sought after. They advertise their use of heavy stock paper in order to avoid markers bleeding through the pages, and perforated pages so that the user has the ability to cut and frame their finished images, if desired (Nargi, 2015).

There is something satisfying about being able to creatively express oneself without a lot of instruction, time, or effort involved. The number of large retail outlets that encouraged the growth of these books also contributed to the increase in popularity of coloring books for adults. Nargi’s (2015) article considered coloring books to be a potential stepping stone into different types of art. Using coloring books can create further interest into more complex art mediums.

Materials

The trend of adults using coloring books has become popular in such a short amount of time, and thousands of people are buying these coloring books. The demand is also influencing the art materials market as other types of mediums, such as embroidery and stickers, are being created as well as crayons. These coloring books are also created using many different materials, such as different types of paper, cardstock, and 3-dimensional coloring pages. The use of materials that are chosen can vary depending on the person’s preference. Different materials can be used in order to give the individual more control over what they are coloring, or less control over it depending on what is needed. These materials can include colored pencils, or fine tip pens, which allow for a large amount of control from the person coloring, as well as markers or watercolor pens, which allow for less control. The materials that a person who is coloring will subconsciously choose can provide a good amount of insight into how a therapist can most
effectively assist them (Barret, 2015). The type of material used can lead to different outcomes in the art creation.

The use of alternative mediums in creative expressions such as coloring books for adults can achieve different healing benefits. Different mediums being used can result in having new experiences while using them. Markers and colored pencils, for example, tend to be more sophisticated because they allow for more control when being used, so it can create more detail. Crayons are a material that tends to be more child like in nature, and can create a more child like experience for any person who uses them.

In 1996, Crayola reported manufacturing their 100 billionth crayon (Fitzpatrick, & McPherson, 2010). The article “Crayola Now Has Its Own Line of Coloring Books For Adults” (Liszewski, 2015) discussed the increase in sales of these products, and stated a possible cause of this being the new trend of coloring books for adults. The article lists many different products, such as kits that contain colored pencils, and other various mediums to fill the pages of the coloring books that the Crayola Company has come out with in order to keep up with this new trend. With all of the various escapes it is obvious that Crayola is positioning its new coloring book line as a great way for adults to relieve stress, and as a cheaper alternative to seeing a therapist (Liszewski, 2015).

Liszewski (2015) stated that coloring books are starting to become a popular alternative to therapy, which could be controversial because many trained professionals such as Art Therapist Donna Betts, would not agree that they are as effective as art therapy sessions. As President of the Board of Directors for the American Art Therapy Association (AATA), Betts has watched with some concern as adult coloring books, labeled as art therapy, are sold at many bookstores. While Betts has praised coloring as a beneficial self-help activity, she and her
colleagues worry about titles like *Color Therapy: An Anti-Stress Coloring Book* and Disney’s *Frozen Art Therapy Coloring Book*. She believes that by marketing these books as art therapy activities the books come close to blurring the line between a hobby and a mental health profession that treats clients with conditions ranging from post-traumatic stress disorder to Alzheimer’s disease.

**Anti-Coloring Books**

Anti-coloring books are a series of books that were created by Susan Striker. She created these books in order to use a tool for learning techniques for the children who they are geared towards. They were created as a reaction against generic coloring books. A statement given by the company describing these books explains their use by stating that,

*Anti-Coloring Books®*  A series of books with creative activities for ages 6 to 60. The numbered-titled books (First, Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth) are of general interest to all children. Other books appeal to children with special interests. The *Anti-Coloring Books®* teach children in the 21st century skills they will need to be successful in a world we can't yet imagine. (Nobleman, 2014)

The Anti-Coloring Books were created in order to be a way for coloring books to include activities that teach people, specifically children, skills that are beneficial in life, as opposed to simply being fun activities. They are intended to be used as an activity to provide more meaning and stimulate more creativity than the standard coloring books would give to the people who use them (Nobleman, 2014).

Critical thinking, problem solving and thinking "outside the box" may well replace the 3 r's as the basic education that will ensure our children's future. Test-taking skills, mindless copying and coloring adult art are not activities any child should devote even a
minute of their day to, whether at home or at school. *The Anti-Coloring Books*, "revolutionary" in the late 1970s, are now more important than ever. (Nobleman, 2014)

Susan Striker, who does not believe that mindless or simple coloring is beneficial to any child, was interviewed to discuss her process of creating these Anti-coloring books. The interview was a description of how she came up with the idea for them, her process for publishing them, and their means of success. During the interview, Striker discussed how her mother did not agree with using coloring books when she was a child. Her mother was an artist and a teacher. The reason that she did not like coloring books was because they literally put a border around a person’s creative impulse. Because of this, she preferred to use a blank piece of paper, which influenced Susan to also use these materials instead of coloring books. When asked how she got the idea for The Anti-Coloring Book, she responded by saying that she had been teaching art for about ten years when she took an art education course. The professor of the course gave a lecture about how stifling coloring books were for children. She mentioned that this information had been known for decades yet coloring books were still popular. The professor then told her that her assignment for the term was to come up with an alternative to these books. This assignment became the Anti-Coloring books (Nobleman, 2014).

The first book of the Anti-Coloring book series was the first book that Striker ever had published. It got outstanding reviews and the first printing sold out immediately. There have been 14 versions of *The Anti-Coloring Book* and one called *Young at Art: An Anti-Coloring Book for Preschoolers*. Striker wrote them all and either drew the illustrations or supervised the artists who drew them. After the first book came out, some school districts banned coloring books and workbooks. This made the author feel that she was able to accomplish her goal, however, these schools did not use her books either.
Striker is working on creating an Anti-Coloring app for iPads and mini iPads. It will include pages from published books that children can work on with iPads instead of crayons. Anti-coloring books and political coloring books are just some of many different types of coloring books that have been created, and a vast array of these types of books are being published in order to meet the growing demand (Nobleman, 2014).

**Coloring Clubs**

Coloring clubs are another emerging fad that allows for multiple people to come together and participate in this activity and share in the mutual enjoyment of coloring. They are low-cost, low-risk programs that do not require much work or resources. Participants of these groups also don’t have to know a specific skill or do any preparation to join in (Marcotte, 2015). There is no work to be done that is required ahead of time for these groups, which is one of their appeals. Participants also don’t need the dexterity they would to put a craft together, so they are able to relax more because it is a less stressful non-competitive activity (Marcotte, 2015).

Coloring clubs have helped members to unwind, but initially, it is helpful if people return to their childhood carefreeness. Many people, especially adults, prefer to have instructions, but these groups have no instructions or rules to them. This is much easier for children to follow because they don’t know those inhibitions. When adults realize this, they let their guard down and allow themselves to enjoy coloring again (Marcotte, 2015).

With an abundant array of mediums to color with along with a vast variety of themes, coloring can appeal to many adults. The social nature of the coloring club trend mirrors a number of significant concepts that are prevalent in the theory of Adlerian psychotherapy, which will be discussed in the next section.
Relation to Adlerian Psychology

Adlerian Psychology is a positive psychology that involves growth motivation. The therapy process involves analyzing the client’s lifestyle. This includes exploring a person’s world views and mistaken beliefs. It engages people using encouragement and strengths identification to create growth, versus a drive reduction, which is an instinct based model of human behavior. It takes social context into consideration in all manner of human endeavors (Mozdzierz, 2015).

Adlerian concepts can be identified while people are engaged in an individual or group coloring process. This creates a connection between Adlerian Psychotherapy and coloring. These concepts include encouragement, social interest, self-worth, and the lifestyle (Dreikurs, 1976, p. 69).

Social Interest

One Adlerian concept that can be relevant to coloring books is the concept of social interest. Social interest is a term that is used to describe doing something that enhances the group as a whole (Richardson & Guignon, 1991). The term Gemeinschaftsgefühl is closely related to this, and describes a sense of belonging. Both of these terms are explained by Mozdzierz (2015).

Gemeinschaftsgefühl, was primarily prominent in the European literature, and conveyed a meaning of community feeling, a feeling of belonging and connectedness. The second term, social interest, was more prominent in the English literature. Ansbacher is careful to note that the two terms actually convey different meanings, namely, Gemeinschaftsgefühl is a feeling while social interest represents an interest in the interests of others. (2015, p. 367)
Coloring books can create a sense of social interest for the people who use them because they allow the people who are coloring to be able to relate to other people in a similar experience. They are able to discuss the experiences that they have had with the coloring books, such as image, themes, mediums used and resources, with others who have also engaged in coloring. This creates the sense of connection, and contribution, which benefits all of the individuals involved. Coloring is also an activity that allows individuals to easily be a part of a group. This can provide an environment that allows for multiple people to benefit from social interest and experience community feeling while coloring.

Circulation Supervisor Ann Daigle says the club provides its older demographic in Florida an opportunity to meet new people. “There’s a lot of laughter. They’re coloring but they’re talking,” Daigle says. “It’s stress-free, and they do comment when they leave that they feel so much better and it did them good to get out of the house and see other people (Marcotte, 2015, para. 7).

Social interest is an aspect of Adlerian theory that needs to be developed through skills of success and feelings of accomplishment. Using the Adlerian frame of reference to develop a sense of belonging, of worthwhileness, and of social interest, is an important human quality (Dreikurs, 1976. p. 69). When using coloring books, the feeling of being successful and sense of belonging and contributing is created, which increases social interest.

There are, however some differences between coloring individually and coloring in groups. There are both disadvantages and benefits to both of these options.

**Benefits.** One benefit to coloring in groups is that other people around are able to influence, inspire, and help to process through the image that is being created while coloring in these books. Other people who are coloring can help share materials or resources, and motivate each other to continue the process of coloring. The other group members can be very
encouraging and provide others with feedback on the coloring process and products, which can help to illuminate through the potential meaning, feeling, or memories behind the colored image.

One benefit to coloring alone is that the people who are coloring are able to make all of the decisions of what he or she creates, they are less apt to be distracted, and he or she does not need to worry about the opinion of others on what or why they create. It is possible that it causes them to feel more open to the creative process, and that they do not feel the need to censor their creativity, allowing them to feel more open to creativity as a whole. The process of coloring can be soothing, relaxing and meditative. This experience can also occur in a group setting (Marsh, 2015).

**Detriments.** A downside to coloring alone is that it can be very isolating. The individual is not able to share in the presence of other people while coloring, nor are they able to engage in a sense of community and experience sense of belonging or contributing. Sharing the presence of others can be something that inspires creativity, which can be beneficial for coloring, as well as helping to process while coloring. If others are not around while doing this they experience less external encouragement and support from others. This social aspect is part of the reason why coloring clubs have been so successful (Marsh, 2015).

**Encouragement**

Encouragement is another Adlerian concept that relates to coloring books for adults. Encouragement is a large term in positive psychologies.

The Adlerian concept of encouragement can be demonstrated in the use of coloring books when a person participating in a coloring club or on-line group not only experiences meditative and creative stimulation but the social aspect of the group naturally engages the participant in mutual support and encouragement. This enhances motivation and encourages the person to
continue to color try new themes, materials, techniques and share ideas and experiences with others. One of the benefits of coloring books, especially in a social context is to provide the person a safe place to color freely and engage in a state where they are able to focus on the coloring books, and resulting image without fear of critical judgement, therefore, this encouraging state reduces the stress level in their life at the time. When coloring in groups a person can experience the encouragement of others and they in turn can become an encourager. This subsequently supports social interest and community feeling, and can be a positive motivator for them.

**Self-Worth**

Self-worth is a concept that describes the amount of value, worth, and positivity a person places on themself. This is described by Gerald Mozdzierz in his 2015 Ansbacher lecture when he states,

> The takeaway for Individual Psychology might be: belying positive emotions are values and goals toward which each individual strives, seeking fulfillment, completion, perfection, and ultimately a sense of belonging, being valued, and feeling worthwhile. Practice of such emotions contributes to a healthy adaptation/lifestyle whereas habitual negative emotional states have a more dysfunctional relationship to human health. (p. 365)

The connection between self-worth and coloring is illustrated when the person who is coloring is able to see the pages be filled up by their own striving. Clients are able to visually see an end result leading to a sense of fulfillment and completion, which gives them a feeling of accomplishment, and enhances their feeling of self-worth. Finishing a page, or an entire book makes them feel good about what they have created, and gives them confidence in the
knowledge that they have done it themselves.

**Lifestyle**

Lifestyle involves everything that makes up how a person lives out their life. This includes mistaken beliefs, goals, and the way that these affect the way the lifestyle is played out.

The reader will notice that while psychology as a whole has focused its attention on pathology, Adlerian theory and practice has always focused its attention on mistaken goals that troubled individuals can choose to change. The distinction may be small but it is an important one. Mistaken goals pertain to all human beings while clinically they can also represent a wide variety of psychopathologies of a distinctly different species (Mozdzierz, 2015, p. 364).

The Adlerian concept of lifestyle can be related to the process of coloring and coloring books. Elements of a person’s lifestyle, particularly their strengths, can be demonstrated through their choice of patterns and themes, color palette, and energy and focus put forth in the coloring process. An example of this may be how the type of patterns and selection of a more controlled medium and coloring style within the lines are often chosen by people who are perfectionists.

To understand the conscious or the unconscious one must take them in their coherence:

*Man understands nothing about his goal, but still he pursues it. He understands nothing about his style of life, yet he is continually bound to it.* (Ansbacher, 1982, p. 33)

Adler believed that everyone is made up of his or her lifestyle, and that the lifestyle is something that can continuously play a factor in how the individual lives his or her life. This includes the way that they solve problems and accomplish goals. This is demonstrated by the way that individuals use coloring books, and well as spontaneous art.
Coloring Books vs. Spontaneous Art

Spontaneous art is art that is created naturally and unplanned. It results from an impulse or tendency (Nobleman, 2014). The term has a fairly broad definition, yet people are attempting to narrow the definition so that it becomes clearer. This implies something important about the interesting nature of the medium. There is a large amount of literature describing the therapeutic use of patients' creations in psychiatric practice. A number of these books and papers describe the importance of such art therapists as Naumburg and Kramer. Coloring books and spontaneous art have similarities but also many differences. These processes also have advantages and disadvantages for the individuals and group members that engage in using either approach. These will be outlined in the following sections.

Similarities

A similarity of coloring books and spontaneous art is that coloring books are able to be directed towards the interest of the person who is coloring them. For example, the person who is coloring has the ability to choose the subject and style of the coloring book that they use, their approach to the coloring process, and the media that they choose to use to color with. Similarly, spontaneous art allows for the individual to direct their interests into the art that they make by allowing for a wide variety of materials, surfaces, and sizes to be used, and allowing for the artist to choose the subject they use.

Additionally, they both require inspiration, as well as give inspiration. To the creator and others, coloring books and spontaneous art require having motivation in order to begin the process. Both provide motivation to the person who is creating as well as spark new ideas for the creator, and others who view the finished products.
Differences

The main difference between spontaneous art and coloring books is that coloring books have been previously created, either by computers or through hand-drawing, while spontaneous art is created either by one person or a group of people completing the entire process of making the work of art from start to finish. Spontaneous art allows for different media to be used, while there is more limitation to the different types of media that can be used in coloring books.

Another major difference between coloring books and spontaneous art is that, when coloring in a coloring book, the person is likely not as concerned with what other people around them are thinking, so they are not going to include or exclude certain information in the coloring that could be beneficial or crucial to the therapeutic process because of what they believe other people will think of that information. Spontaneous art could potentially be negatively influenced by others while creating it. Because they are able to make all of the creative decisions about their art, the opinions of others on their art could be more important.

Advantages

An advantage of pre-drawn coloring books is that they could serve as a good starting point for someone who is unsure of where to begin with their art, or are hesitant about their art making skills. Another advantage is that they have a good amount of direction and structure them for people who are in need of more focus or inspiration.

Coloring for adults was proven to be a positive activity for assessing the current state and mood of the person who is coloring (Kersten & van der Vennet, 2010). This was done by investigating the things such as the colors that they chose, or the method they chose to use to color in the pre-drawn pictures. This suggests that using pre-drawn images such as the ones that are in coloring books could be effective tools to use in art therapy settings. The mandala study
also showed how there are limitations of using coloring books as Art Therapy, because they do not allow for the full use of creativity provided by spontaneous art (Kersten & van der Vennet, 2010). There are both positive and negative sides to using coloring books in therapeutic sessions.

Kim stated,

The method suggests performance-related elements such as completeness, accuracy and degree of concentration as elements, can objectively and quantitatively rate these elements as well as various color-related elements, can detect the changes of these elements in pattern colorings, can estimate the levels and changes of psychological symptoms and disorders and determine whether the symptoms and disorders are serious or not, can acquire various kinds of knowledge in the field of art therapy and establish a knowledge base, and can interpret the pattern colorings based on the analysis and knowledge base. (Kim, 2014, para. 1)

Coloring has also been identified to be psychologically beneficial from a meditative standpoint (Kersten & van der Vennet, 2010). It helps the brain to be able to relax, and obtain a meditative state of mind. Coloring allows for the ability to unlock the creative potential that all people possess, but it more importantly helps with relieving anxiety and tension. When coloring, memories from childhood can be accessed (EWAO, 2015).

I recommend it as a relaxation technique. We can use it to enter a more creative, freer state. I recommend it in a quiet environment, even with chill music. Let the color and the lines flow.” Psychologist Ben Michaelis has this to say, “There is a long history of people coloring for mental health reasons. (EWAO, 2015. para. 3)
Carl Jung attempted to get his clients to color in mandalas at the turn of the last century as a way of getting people to be able to focus and allow the subconscious to relive stress (EWAO, 2015).

Experience shows that individual mandalas are symbols of order, and that they occur in patients principally during times of psychic disorientation or re-orientation. As magic circles they bind and subdue the lawless powers belonging to the world of darkness, and depict or create an order that transforms the chaos into a cosmos. The mandala at first comes into the conscious mind as an unimpressive point or dot, and a great deal of hard and painstaking work as well as the integration of many projections are generally required before the full range of the symbol can be anything like completely understood. If this insight were purely intellectual it could be achieved without much difficulty. (Jung, 1972, p. 174)

Coloring books can be used as an effective tool in assisting people who are dealing with disorders such as depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, and other mental illnesses. They assist in this is by using the individual’s coloring to help allows for a better knowledge of how to assist the client because there is a better understanding of what they need (EWAO, 2015). While coloring books can give good insight into diagnoses, they alone should not be used in order to diagnose clients because the amount of information obtained from these books is not adequate for this.

An advantage of spontaneous art is that it allows for a good amount of creative expression. Because it allows for a full ability to make decisions on the type of art that is made, the materials that are used, and the subjects in the art, it allows for more opportunities of personal creativity. Another benefit to spontaneous art is that the creators of the art are able to
make all of the decisions of what they create, and they do not need to worry about the opinion of others on what they create. It is possible that it causes them to feel more open to the creative process and that they do not feel the need to censor their creativity, allowing them to feel more open to creativity as a whole.

“The Impact of Anxious and Calm Emotional States on Color Usage in Pre-Drawn Mandalas” used a study to examine the benefits of coloring books for adults (Kersten & van der Vennet, 2010). It discussed the hypothesis that when coloring a pre-drawn mandala, participants would most likely choose warm colors when they were anxious and cool colors when they were calm. In this study, the researchers calculated the percentage of each mandala that was colored with warm colors and compared the results. The researchers found no differences in the color choices of participants who were feeling anxious, calm, or neutral when they were coloring a pre-drawn mandala. The findings indicated that color usage may have more to do with color preferences and memories that are associated with colors than current emotional state (Kersten & van der Vennet, 2010).

Although this study showed that a common art therapy directive, such as mandalas, can be used to examine artistic expression, it also showed how assuming an emotional state based on only one aspect of a work of art can be limiting. Associating color with a specific emotion greatly simplifies the complicated act of making a piece of art as well as the motivation that the artist has for making it. The mandala, however, may be useful in future studies that investigate emotional states in order to explore motivations for making certain works of art (Kersten & van der Vennet, 2010).
Disadvantages

There are also disadvantages to both coloring books and spontaneous art. For example, a disadvantage of spontaneous art is that it could be too overwhelming for someone who is uncertain of what they want to create because of the large amount of options available to them, which could cause them to be hesitant to engage in art making.

A disadvantage of coloring books is that they could serve as a hindrance to the creativity of the individual. Another disadvantage is that coloring books are not a recognized form of therapy, due to their self-directed nature. Also, the lack of consistency and accountability due to the absence of a therapist could potentially be a hindrance to receiving the full therapeutic benefits of a therapy session.

A downside of using coloring books in place of therapy sessions is that most all aspects of therapy sessions are not present in coloring books. One thing that is absent in coloring books, that is essential for the art therapy process is the complete ability for the individual to have free creative expression and the presence of a therapist (Ziff, 2010). The creative expression is missing because of the fact that coloring books were previously created, and not created by the individual who is coloring them. This can be a hindrance to those who would otherwise want to have complete control over their creativity, and not want to use something that was already created for them.

Fitzpatrick and McPherson (2010) discussed the disadvantages of adults using coloring books. Coloring books have been criticized for causing a lack of creativity. While using these books, children are encouraged to color within the lines (Fitzpatrick, & McPherson, 2010). When purchasing coloring books, parents and caregivers should be aware that the content of coloring books is strongly tied to the licensing of mass product merchandizing. Images such as
COLORING BOOKS

cartoons, television, comic books, and movie characters, which are popular subjects, are what coloring books are being geared towards, in order for more of these items to be sold. It is important to consider what items are most suitable for the needs of the person that the coloring books will be for when purchasing them. There could potentially be some material that could be considered offensive or inappropriate for children.

Another disadvantage of the use of these books by adults is that the content and subject matter in these books is solely directed towards mass markets. This limits the topics that these books can include, which can also limit the personal expression, as well as the therapeutic value that these books can have. This is another reason that some people are skeptical to use them in a therapeutic setting.

Finally, coloring books could be considered to be too overwhelming. They could be particularly overwhelming if they are not using a style of coloring book that is not suited to their needs, some coloring books could be too complex for certain individuals, which could cause them to feel a sense of inadequacy. Also, because coloring books typically take a certain amount of time in order to complete, finding time to use them can be overwhelming for some people who have other things that need to be done, and it can begin to feel like an obligation, as opposed to something that is done for fun (King, 1991).

There are many factors to be considered when it comes to the benefits and negatives of adult coloring books, and the American Art Therapy Association has given their opinion on these factors.

**AATA**

AATA released a statement that discussed the differences between making art privately and the art therapy profession (The American Art Therapy Association, n.d.). Adult coloring
books have become increasingly popular. The American Art Therapy Association and its members have received many requests from the media to answer questions about the value of coloring books for adults as a self-care hobby for managing stress. Some consumers and media have asked about the differences between at-home coloring, or any form of interacting with art on a private basis, and the art therapy profession. They are distinctly separate topics with one commonality. This commonality is that art making is personally rewarding and potentially therapeutic. The American Art Therapy Association showed support for the use of coloring books for pleasure and self-care. The association stressed that these uses should not be confused with the action of professional art therapy services, during which a client engages with a credentialed art therapist? (The American Art Therapy Association, n.d.).

The outpouring in popularity of adults using coloring books is likely due to individuals tapping into and spreading the word about the intrinsic healing qualities that art has, which have served as a benefit to people of all cultures throughout history. Since engaging in any form of art can reduce stress, it inherently leads to the fact that templates for adult coloring have taken on such a tremendous popularity (The American Art Therapy Association, n.d.). It also makes sense that there are specific uses to these books when they are applied in the proper context. Coloring books can provide a controlled, contained use of art for self-soothing purposes, and their success-oriented nature is conducive to fulfillment of the need for instant gratification, which many individuals are searching for (The American Art Therapy Association, n.d). They can be completed by anyone with minimal risk. Preprinted designs allow for structure that facilitates safety and minimizes emotional risk, which may explain their appeal to broader audiences. For instance, mandalas are often used to promote centering of the mind, and stress reduction. This benefit can be enhanced when using mandala coloring books (Carolan & Betts.
The coloring book phenomenon is helping to reintroduce art as an important component of health and wellness. However, those seeking professional art therapy services are encouraged to consult a credentialed art therapist. (The American Art Therapy Association, n.d., para. 3)

Art therapists might offer coloring books to clients outside of treatment to improve focus and stress reduction. They also might offer them as an initial way to get back in touch with the creative self. Coloring books can also provide a structured way to feel engaged with the art process. Coloring is an active process that can serve as a practice of focusing minds and redirecting individuals who are pre-occupied in unhealthy thoughts. Despite their inherent benefits, coloring books should not be confused with the creative process that is inherent in art making, which occurs during an art therapy session. During this process, under the guidance of a trained art therapist, individuals may realize that certain images can be felt internally in ways that evoke emotions or understanding. An art therapist might then guide individuals in focusing on those areas as a therapeutic intervention.

Art therapy as a mental health profession involves significant professional training and experience required of the art therapist. Over the last 60 years, the profession has grown in the United States and throughout the world. With changes in the requirements of training and experience, research guides credentialed practitioners in the ethical practice of art therapy. Art therapy is currently practiced in a wide variety of settings including hospitals, psychiatric and rehabilitation facilities, wellness centers, forensic institutions, schools, crisis centers, senior communities, private practice, and other clinical and community settings. National requirements for becoming a professional in the practice of art therapy include a minimum of a master’s
degree and post-graduate clinical experience under the supervision of credentialed art therapists. This process typically requires a minimum of 4 years (The American Art Therapy Association, 2016).

There are clear similarities and differences between creating art individually, and the Art Therapy profession. AATA’s statement clearly defined the differences between the two, and suggests the importance of acknowledging the differences between the two to make sure that they are not confused in any way.

Some coloring book publishers are inaccurately using the term art therapy in their branding. The popularity of adult coloring seems to indicate a renewed public awakening to the use of this activity for self-care. However, coloring books are not art therapy, and AATA endeavors to promote accurate information that distinguishes between engaging with coloring for self-care and accessing art therapy services provided by a credentialed art therapist. We also acknowledge the coloring book trend as an opportunity for the AATA to help educate the public about the evidence-based integrative mental health profession, art therapy. (The American Art Therapy Association, 2016, para. 1).

It also stated that, while there are definite differences, both can be therapeutic.

AATA interviewed with major media outlets and provided opportunities to clarify the difference between coloring books and the art therapy profession. They have also researched the issue with experts and strategized about effective ways to approach the coloring book phenomenon as an opportunity for public education and awareness about art therapy. They have also clarified the correct definition of art therapy on a case-by-case basis with each publisher, corporation, or reporter as examples of “art therapy” are being linked to coloring books (The American Art Therapy Association, 2016). Finally, they have entered a joint marketing
agreement with Dover Publishing that included shared messages and a purchasing opportunity for AATA members who are also customers of Dover coloring books for personal use, and have explored new avenues to navigate the coloring book trend as an opportunity to both educate the publishers as well as the public and to harness the interest in coloring as self-care. Doing this enabled them to be able to build awareness for people who are interested in mental health care and inform them of how art therapy is able to incorporate creative, life-enhancing work (The American Art Therapy Association, 2016).

AATA’s views on coloring books are comparable to the findings of many research articles that have been published on this topic. They believe that coloring books are beneficial tools that provide a source of relaxation and mindfulness, but are not meant to be considered specifically as Art Therapy coloring books (The American Art Therapy Association, 2016). The American Art Therapy Association supports the idea that coloring is beneficial as a self-care activity. It went on to further explain specifically what the American Art Therapy Association’s views on adult coloring books are. It started off by giving a brief description of what the American Art Therapy Association is, and a clarification of what the Art Therapy profession is (The American Art Therapy Association, 2016).

“The adult coloring phenomenon is reintroducing art as an important component of health and wellness,” says Dr. Donna Betts, ATR-BC, AATA President. “The AATA has been impressed by many of Dover’s publications, especially the Creative Haven® coloring books for adults,” adds Dr. Betts. “Obviously, anyone who requires professional art therapy services should visit the Dover Publications website for more information, but these books provide a pathway to the life-affirming pleasures of making art (American Art Therapy Association, 2016, para. 3).
These coloring books can create an interest in using art in a therapeutic way, and can be a good way to encourage people to research more information about Art Therapy as a profession (American Art Therapy Association, n.d.). Since there are more than 10,000 low-priced books in print covering dozens of subjects, it is not surprising that Dover publishes many titles that can be used in self-care or as a supplemental art activity. With over 10 million copies sold, Creative Haven® coloring books are one of the most popular choices for adults who love to color and relax (American Art Therapy Association, 2016).

More accessibility to these books is a factor that plays a role in the increase in popularity of adults using them. According to the statement that has been released by AATA, coloring books for adults are beneficial, therapeutic, and positive, however, calling them “Art Therapy” books would not be an accurate statement (American Art Therapy Association, 2016). Studies have been conducted that prove that there are benefits to using these types of books. Studies do not include certain specific elements of an art therapy session, such as processing of the art with an unbiased individual, that are essential for the process of art therapy to achieve the full benefits (McAfee, 2015).

**Therapeutic Benefits**

Through the progression of coloring books, the rise in popularity in the adult population in recent years is likely caused by the decrease in the stereotypes of coloring books. It was originally thought that coloring books were a hindrance because it taught them to only color inside the lines. It was later believed that coloring books are a source of encouragement for creativity (McAfee, 2015). The more popular these books become for the adult population, the less of a stigma there is for adults to use them. This has resulted in more adults using them, and will likely continue to cause an increase in adults using coloring books. The many therapeutic
benefits for adults who use coloring books include reducing anxiety and relieving stress (McAfee, 2015). Many articles have aimed to examine the validity of the claims that coloring books actually possess these benefits. Fitzpatrick and McPherson (2010) suggests how coloring can be a rewarding experience for those who participate in it. Coloring books appear to have many benefits for children. These benefits include using crayons, which facilitates hand-eye coordination. Many of these books expose children to a variety of print for reading, offer children a large amount of focused attention, and appear to increase their imagination as they participate in the coloring process. When children experiment with crayons and coloring they learn that using writing tools is a pleasurable and rewarding activity.

The article “Adult Coloring Books Topping Bestseller Lists” stated that the therapeutic benefits of art are nothing new. They are concepts that practitioners currently use with patients of all different ages. Some art therapists who published several coloring books have claimed that coloring can lift the mood, reduce anxiety, and relieve stress (McAfee, 2015). Further support is referenced by research that has shown, through the use of art therapy, that the human brain can physically change, grow, and rejuvenate. Research and the ethical professional practice has also stressed that art therapy should be administered only by a qualified professional (McAfee, 2015).

Some art therapists would sometimes give their clients mandala coloring books for homework in between the sessions that they have together because they believe coloring mandalas can empower a client to be able to manage their thoughts and feelings on their own with the positive activity of coloring, and use these as coping mechanisms instead of other methods which are not as healthy, such as binge eating, or abusing other substances (McAfee, 2015).

In mindfulness, it is encouraged to break patterns in life by introducing variation to avoid
the sensation of being on autopilot. Each page of these coloring books has been designed with this in mind, so that the person coloring can change from one pattern to the next at random. Coloring books bring a bit of calming and spirituality, but for some adult enthusiasts, coloring is just a fun throwback to a more simple time (McAfee, 2015).

Fincher, as cited in McAfee, said that it reminded her of filling in coloring books when she was a little girl. She brought up the point that in the current digital age of society, it can only be a good thing to feel young again by using these coloring books to bring back memories (McAfee, 2015).

The Lowenfeld and Brittain (1965) article stressed that there is no single approach to freeing children or adults in their creative potential or making them more sensitive toward themselves and their environment. It also said, however, that whatever a teacher does in stimulating creativeness greatly depends on personality, of which creativeness, sensitivity, and relationship to environment are important, as well as the ability to put oneself into the place of others, and the understanding and knowledge of the needs of the individuals that they are teaching. One approach is not necessarily the best for all people, when it comes to creativity. This suggested how Art Therapy uses many different means of allowing clients to express themselves through art in order to best achieve the goals of the client. While coloring books can play a role in Art Therapy, they are only a small tool of what the profession of Art Therapy encompasses.

Making a distinction of the definition of the profession of Art Therapy is important. Since it is a relatively new field that it still growing in popularity, many people are not completely aware of what it specifically entails. Art Therapy as a profession involves many different mediums and techniques that are not well known, and are things that are difficult to
explain. Many times, these things, and this field, need to be experienced in order to be fully understood. Because of this, coming up with an adequate definition that clarifies what Art Therapy is as a whole is extremely important. Coloring books can create some confusion about this.

There are many different reasons why coloring is an effective therapeutic tool for adults to use; including being a relaxing, meditative activity, and improving memory and focus. While it is a powerful intervention, it is important to mention that there is a difference between being a therapeutic tool, and being considered as Art Therapy. The difference between these two is that these coloring books are things that are used as a tool to assist in therapy, but Art Therapy is a profession that encompasses much more than that.

There are competing and mutually exclusive definitions of art therapy that have already been published by art therapists. There are psychiatrists who object to the looseness with which the term art therapy is used (Ulman, 1992). Therapists have attempted to tighten up the meaning of art therapy. Psychiatrists also have suggested various combinations of new names to designate special uses of art materials in psychotherapy.

A Therapeutic Relationship

One distinct difference between the use of coloring books and the Art Therapy profession is that therapy must include a therapist that has specific training, experience, and certifications, and without this, the healing process does not necessarily reach its full potential (Diconsiglio, 2016). The Art Therapy profession uses many more mediums than coloring, which have the potential to achieve strong therapeutic relationships.

Perhaps the most fundamental and critical difference between coloring books and art therapy, Betts noted, is the presence of a trained and certified clinicians. “The therapist
and the therapeutic relationship are integral to the patient’s healing,” she said. In art therapy sessions, therapists oversee the art making process and use their expert observations to help clients untangle the messages in their creative efforts. Far from merely decorating coloring books’ floral arrangements and geographic designs, art therapy allows people to communicate painful feelings and traumatic experiences that may be too difficult to express in words. (Diconsiglio, 2016, p. 7)

Because coloring books have been previously made, they seem to insinuate a direct action that should be taken. This obstructs from the creative process of the patient, and therefore could potentially obstruct from the therapeutic process and therapeutic goals of the clients. These limits could be detrimental to the process of using art in a therapeutic way (Diconsiglio, 2016).

Art Therapist Donna Betts has answered more questions on coloring books than any other art therapy-related topic. Along with her AATA colleagues, she has advised publishers and retailers on ways to more accurately market and display their products without sending misleading messages. Betts does not promote coloring as a stress reliever, as there are few studies confirming this claim. AATA has also entered an agreement with adult coloring book leader Dover Publishing to include professional art therapy resources with their materials (Diconsiglio, 2016).

Betts looked at the rise of adult coloring books as an opportunity for people to be able to start a conversation about art therapy. Even though it is a widely respected integrative mental health profession, art therapy still faces challenges when it comes to winning acceptance in the health care world and, to some extent, among the general public.

Many of these books include the words therapy or stress-relieving in their titles.
Coloring is therapeutic at least in the sense that it has the potential to make us feel calm and reassured, even if prominent therapists insist that they have never used coloring books in a therapy session, and would never consider it. (Marsh, 2015, p. 15)

Coloring books in therapy has been proven to be a tool that can be helpful, but not widely used in therapy (Carney, 2003, p. 313). This is because while they are effective, therapeutic, and beneficial, they are not an accurate representation of what Art Therapy as a profession is. Because there is already so much confusion about what Art Therapy is outside of the Art Therapy community, this causes even more assumptions and confusion. This is why many people have stated their opinion that these books should not be sold with the title of “Art Therapy” books.

Art therapy is appropriate to every age and cultural background. Creating art is an appropriate outlet for expressing fears of death and feelings of grief that children are neither able to understand nor express effectively in any other way. Children can draw death as the cavemen did by drawing a feared animal or a fearful event to defeat it, thus overcoming their fears. Inappropriate impulses can be channeled into positive experiences. (Carney, 2003, p. 313)

The use of coloring books, as well as art therapy in general, can be an effective way to create a therapeutic relationship. Along with creating a therapeutic relationship, another benefit to the use of coloring books for adults is the increase of relaxation and mindfulness.

**Relaxation and Mindfulness**

Coloring books relate to mindfulness because they have been shown to create a sense of relaxation for the people who use them. The article, “Color Between the Lines, Adult Coloring Books are a Fun Way to Relieve Stress and Sharpen Your Mental Skills,” brought up how a
favorite childhood activity has been given a new life in order to help people ease their stress and stimulate mindfulness. This article stated that people can simply grab some crayons or markers and flip open a coloring book to be able to relieve stress.

Coloring is a tool that at times may be used in art therapy, and numerous studies have shown that making art can normalize blood pressure, cortisol levels, and heart rate as well as improve feelings of well-being and self-esteem, says Erica Curtis, LMFT, a board-certified art therapist and instructor with UCLArts and Healing. (Color Between the Lines, 2015, p. 4)

Adult coloring books have recently become top sellers on Amazon.com. Other titles are theme-specific, like stress reduction, calmness, and balance, or gardens, flowers, waterfalls, animals, and architecture. The designs often are variations of mandalas (Color Between the Lines, 2015).

When someone is exposed to artistic expression, such as coloring, it relaxes the brain’s amygdala, which processes emotions. Imbalance in the amygdala has been linked to increased anxiety, depression, phobias, and post-traumatic stress disorder. In this way, coloring is like a form of meditation (Color Between the Lines, 2015).

Coloring involves attention to the present moment,” says Curtis. “And like during meditation your mind may wander, yet the task of coloring requires it to return to a focal point that is grounded in the present—in this case, selecting a color or focusing on a shape you are coloring.” (Color Between the Lines, 2015, p. 4)

The back-and-forth repetitiveness of coloring, and the act of coloring within boundaries, also offers a soothing, calming effect, much like deep breathing or slow walking, both of which
help people to be able to ground themselves while doing this. Coloring can be a relaxing act, much like meditation.

Coloring mandalas encourages a balanced amount of being focused without feeling overwhelmed, and therefore, relives the individual of negative or anxious thoughts. Engaging in activities that keep the individual in the present also strengthen the ability to be able to recognize when they are not in the moment, and are reflecting about the past or worrying about the future.

A study in the Curry and Kasser article (2005) examined a method of decreasing anxiety called “coloring therapy” that combines elements of art therapy and meditation. Coloring therapy is when individuals color geometric forms. They have an opportunity to engage in an activity that removes them from negative thoughts and emotions that can sometimes dominate their lives (Curry, & Kasser, 2005).

The results of this study supported the hypothesis that coloring a mandala for 20 minutes reduces anxiety more effectively than free-form coloring for 20 minutes. 20 minutes of coloring demonstrated that participants who colored on a blank piece of paper did not show any reduction in anxiety, whereas participants who colored a mandala actually decreased their anxiety levels to below the levels reported before the anxiety orientation (Curry, & Kasser, 2005). The effects of coloring a mandala on the reduction of anxiety were hardly different from the effects of coloring a plaid design. Those participants who colored a plaid design for 20 minutes experienced as much relief from anxiety as the participants who colored a mandala. Free-form coloring resulted in no relief from anxiety (Curry, & Kasser, 2005).

Color between the lines (2015) discussed the specific increased benefits of the designs of adult coloring books in comparison to drawing and coloring designs individually on blank paper. Coloring a mandala or plaid design was shown to be more effective at reducing anxiety levels in
COLORING BOOKS

comparison to free-form coloring over the same time period (Color Between the Lines, 2015). The designs used when coloring has a significant impact on the experience that it has while coloring images.

Researchers in the study in this article speculated that the designs were complex enough to require a certain amount of attention without being too stimulating. The mandala and plaid pictures also provided enough visual interest to distract from patients’ current anxiety, as well as offer structure and direction. This means that the designs of the mandalas were able to keep the interest of the person who is coloring them, without being a distraction from their ability to focus on the act of coloring.

The 2015 article “Color Between the Lines” is a good example of the specific effects that coloring, and art in general, has on the brain. It discussed how art therapists sometimes use coloring in their work, and how it can normalize blood pressure, cortisol levels, and heart rate, improve feelings of well-being and self-esteem, which is how it can be seen as a form of meditation and relaxation. The article explained that the repetitive nature can be a calming motion, and keeping focus on the coloring can help the brain stay in the present moment, which can be meditative. The article also touched on how it can improve lifestyle if done on a regular basis, because it can become part of a routine, much like meditation. Many of the characteristics of coloring books are similar to meditation, and these books can be relaxing for those who use them. Focusing on a single task like coloring pushes aside worries and stressful thoughts. This helps develop concentration in meditation. The structure of mandalas are very ordered, so it creates a framework for directing the mind to focus. Everything from selecting colors to the motions of filling in the blank spaces calms the mind (Alpert, 2015).
The nature of mandalas allows for the mind to be able to focus. Coloring books and mandalas create a sense of relaxation and mindfulness, as well as a connection between patients with dementia.

**Alzheimer’s Connection**

It has been claimed that the effects of Alzheimer’s and dementia can be reduced by using coloring books. This claim has been researched in article “Coloring Between the Lines: Adult Coloring Books are a Fun Way to relieve Stress and Sharpen Your Mental Skills” (2015).

Coloring books are also a way for people to artistically express themselves when they may lack the skills or ability to try traditional art forms like painting, sculpting, or craftwork. You don’t have to learn how to color. This is why coloring may be ideal for people with decreased cognitive function, like dementia and Alzheimer’s disease, or those who have trouble concentrating, as well as people who suffer from arthritis. (Color Between the Lines, 2015, p. 4)

This study suggested that the effects of Alzheimer’s are reduced through the use of coloring books. It explained how the brain is affected by the act of coloring. As the brain is both stimulated and relaxed in order to allow it to remain in the present. This can have positive effects on people with dementia. Coloring is beneficial for people with Alzheimer’s or dementia because it allows for people to work on fine motor skills and participate in group or individual activities if they do not have the ability to do traditional or more complex forms of coloring. Someone with dementia who is not necessarily able to focus on complicated mediums; therefore, is still sometimes able to use coloring books and able to receive the benefits that they offer to the functioning of the brain.

According to Hattori, Hattori, Hokao, Mizushima, and Mase (2011), Art Therapy has
been reported to be effective for alleviating psychiatric symptoms of dementia and is expected to be useful, but there have been few comparative studies using a control group.

This study evaluated the effects of art therapy on Alzheimer’s disease. It analyzed different factors including cognitive function, vitality, behavior and burden on caregivers. A variety of therapies for dementia, including cognitive-behavioral therapy, cognitive rehabilitation, reality orientation training, reminiscence therapy, music therapy, aromatherapy, animal therapy, and exercise therapy, were proposed. This study was conducted in patients that were carefully diagnosed on the basis of clinical symptoms.

No clear evidence that art therapy improves cognitive function in patients with Alzheimer’s disease was found in the results of the Hattori et al. (2011) study. Improvements in the vitality and quality of life were found instead. In the calculation drill group, an improvement in the cognitive function was noted, but improvements in other items were unclear. Art therapy has been reported to improve attention, interest, emotion of joy, self-respect and quality of life, and this was proven to be true in the results of this study (Hattori et al., 2011).

As an improvement in the cognitive function was observed in the calculation drill group, the results of this study indicated no comparison of art therapy and calculation drill therapies. To improve the daily life of patients with dementia, it is important to create a system that allows the most appropriate approach and to take consideration into the condition and preferences of each individual patient rather than comparing various techniques of therapy in order to determine their effectiveness.

According to the Hattori et al. (2011) study, while cognitive function was not proven to be improved in people with Alzheimer’s, vitality and quality of life were improved through the use of coloring books. While this study had a short time frame, and the measurements of their
findings were difficult to attain, the methods of finding them through a control sample group appeared to be effective. This suggests how the use of coloring books can be beneficial for people with Alzheimer’s disease.

A second study was also conducted in order to determine the effectiveness of using coloring books on patients with Alzheimer’s (Lancioni, Perilli, Singh, O’Reilly, & Cassano, 2011). This study was an effort to assess the intervention with a man with Alzheimer’s disease who had high levels of wandering without any apparent searching goal. The participant was 85 years old and was considered to function at the severe level of Alzheimer’s disease. He could not speak, even though he seemed to understand some simple verbal commands. He did not participate in regular daily activities, nor did he actually engage in picture coloring activities. His wandering consisted of pacing of the living room of the day center that he attended.

The results showed that wandering was fairly constant when Stuart was not involved in any specific stimulation or activity. This decreased, however, during the coloring and music conditions. The coloring condition, which encouraged high levels of constructive engagement, was also the one that Stuart strongly preferred. No evidence is available to determine whether the coloring activity and the music conditions were successful because their positive effects took the place of wandering. It could also be the case that music and coloring helped the patient overcome his fear and anxiety problems and thus reduced the need for a behavior, such as wandering, that could have had a similar function.

The positive findings of this study on the effects of the coloring condition need to be interpreted with caution because the evidence is based on a single case. Doing this investigation would require determining the leisure activities that the person had prior to his disease and examining how many of these were still considered desirable at this stage of his life.
Lifestyle

The article “Healthy Aging: Stop Acting Your Age” says that creativity boosts your health and quality of life. It gave the examples of watching an artist paint, a dancer glide across the stage, or a singer belt out a tune and said that it is like watching the artist in pure bliss. Children can find that same joyful state of absorption more easily than adults by simply using single crayon on paper to do it. As adults, however, that sense of blissful play is often easily lost, but by doing certain activities, it can be found again. “Because the arts serve as an emotional and physical outlet, it also helps to decrease stress, combat depression and loneliness,” (Healthy Aging, 2016).

Coloring is a healthy means of distraction from pains, discomfort or other life stressors. This article shows how coloring can be a reliever of stress as well as depression and loneliness. It explains that is because it serves as an outlet to be able to express and release these emotions in a healthy way. It also is a distraction from the things that can be causing these stressors, which aids in being able to process through them in a healthy way as well.

The article “Color Between the Lines” further explained the impact that using coloring books can have on the lifestyle of adults.

When is the best time to color? Whenever you need it. “Just like following a healthy diet and exercise, the more you do it, the more you will reap its positive rewards,” says Curtis. And perhaps best of all, it doesn’t require a lot of time. “You may find that five to ten minutes here or there throughout the week is all you need. (Color Between the Lines, 2015, para. 15)

There is no specific time that is the best time to color, but the more that it is done causes it to become a part of a routine, which can positively influence the lifestyle of the individual. If a
person is willing to put in a small amount of time and effort into the coloring activity, then the lifestyle will be reflective of the benefits that can be received through the process of coloring.

Most of the focus in art therapy is on the creation of an image or a representation of reality. Ostensibly missing from the discussion are the therapeutic benefits of nonrepresentational visual art. Preimage elements of art, such as line, form, and color, can be used by clients themselves in their own healing. Much, in fact, is known about color and the effects it has on people, but this knowledge has seldom been applied in depth to art therapy. (Withrow, 2004, para. 2)

Using color in creative expression can add a valuable dimension to traditional art therapy, for two reasons. First, color has shown to have a profound impact on the mind and body. Second, it lends itself easily to nonrepresentational art, which can lead to therapeutic benefits that are absent in most representational art (Kuban, 2015).

Art activities can allow children to be able to access and externalize the sensations, memories, and visual images that are shaped by trauma. Youth can benefit from drawing by being able to safely communicate and provide a visual representation of their experiences. These visual representations can help adolescents to describe their memories. Art also can provide youth with a medium to express and explore images of self that are strength-based and resilience-focused (Kuban, 2015). Art can be a useful way for people to be able to express themselves and their experiences. These coloring books also have disadvantages.

**Disadvantages**

While there are many advantages and benefits of coloring books for adults, there are also some disadvantages. These disadvantages include not being a recognized form of therapy, due to their self-directed nature, and lack of a therapeutic relationship. Also, the lack of consistency
and accountability due to the absence of a therapist would be a hindrance to receiving the full benefits of a therapy session.

A downside of using coloring books in place of therapy sessions is that certain aspects of therapy sessions are not present in coloring books. One thing that is absent in coloring books, that is essential for the art therapy process is the complete ability for the individual to have free creative expression. The creative expression is missing because coloring books were previously created, and not created by the individual who is coloring them. This can be beneficial for people who need a starting point because they are unsure of where to begin in their art process. It can provide a source of inspiration for these people. It can also be a hindrance to those who would otherwise want to have complete control over their creativity, and not want to use something that was already created for them.

According to Diconsiglio (2016) an art therapy student learned how to use materials like clay and colored pencils in order to help clients be able to more effectively work through their emotional pain. She has used art therapy interventions such as mask-making-as-metaphor to assist in revealing the inner struggles of her clients. She also used Jungian mandalas, which are circular designs that promote focus and reflection. One tool that she has never used, however, and does not plan on using it any time in the future, is adult coloring books.

Don’t get me wrong, I think they are great,” she said of the trend that has taken the publishing world by storm. “Like Sudoku or crossword puzzles, they can be a terrific leisure activity. But you’ll never see one in an art therapy class. (Diconsiglio, 2016, para. 3)

The reason that she chose not to use them in her therapy sessions was, while millions of adults were caught up in the coloring craze, experts like Assistant Professor of Art Therapy
Donna Betts recommended approaching them with caution. She believes that coloring books may be a relaxing and enjoyable means to unwind, but they are very definitely not art therapy, and do not fit the definition or qualifications of the profession. “We all have our own ways of zoning out: cooking, gardening, coloring. And that’s fine,” Betts said. “But art therapy is so much more” (Diconsiglio, 2016).

The reason that some therapists do not use these books in Art Therapy sessions is because they do not give a good example of the complete benefits of Art Therapy, even if they are beneficial. Betts feels that these books are a good way to zone out and relax, but are not helpful in an Art Therapy room. As an Art Therapist, Betts recognizes the therapeutic benefits that these books have, such as being a beneficial leisurely self-help activity, but she chooses not to use them because of the fact that they are very close to the fine line between being a hobby and the mental health profession. She prefers to use other mediums in her art therapy practice.

Maureen J. Fitzpatrick and Barbara J. McPherson discussed the disadvantages of adults using coloring books. Coloring books have been criticized for engendering a lack of creativity. The reason for this is because of the fact that while using these books, children are encouraged to color within the lines (Fitzpatrick, & McPherson, 2010). When purchasing coloring books, parents and caregivers should be aware that the content of coloring books is strongly tied to the licensing of mass product merchandizing.

Coloring books have the possibility of hindering the possible level of creativity to be achieved while using them because they are previously made, and occasionally even include directions on how to use them. The person using the coloring books could potentially not be able to fully express themselves through the use of these books, in a way that they could using other mediums. This has been a main criticism of using these books in therapy sessions (Fitzpatrick,
Another criticism of the use of these books by adults is that the content and subject matter in these books is solely directed towards mass markets. This limits the topics that these books can include, which can also limit the creativity, as well as the therapeutic value that these books can have. This is another reason that some people are skeptical to use them in a therapeutic setting.

Finally, because coloring books typically take a certain amount of time in order to do, finding time to use them can be overwhelming for some people who have other things that need to be done, and it can begin to feel like an obligation, or another thing that needs to be done, as opposed to something that is done for fun. The view that coloring books can be a useful teaching tool which can lead children into a deeper understanding and appreciation of art is proposed, and a call is made for further research to investigate the effects of coloring books upon children (King, 1991).

**Conclusion**

This paper explored the history of coloring books and have explored the effects of coloring books on adults. It also explained the difference between coloring books being used as recreation, as a therapeutic tool, and being considered Art Therapy. The research that has been done on this topic has suggested that there are many different benefits to adults using these coloring books therapeutically. These benefits include being used for reducing stress and anxiety, and increasing relaxation and mindfulness. Other benefits include reducing the effects of dementia and bringing the person who is coloring back to a child-like state of mind as a result of increased creativity.

Overall, coloring books are beneficial, therapeutic and positive things, however, they are
not “Art Therapy”. The reason why they are beneficial is because they provide a tool in order to assist in relaxation. They also reduce stress and anxiety. This goes to show that while these coloring books are therapeutic, they also should not be considered Art Therapy. It does not give an accurate representation of the actual definition of Art Therapy, and gives a misrepresentation of what Art Therapy truly is.

Another main component in this paper is analyzing different Adlerian concepts, such as encouragement, self-worth, and social interest, and the way that these concepts are related to the topic of coloring books for adults. Encouragement, or the use of positive psychology is involved in coloring books because a goal of coloring books is to allow the person who is using them to be able to focus on the coloring books, and not think about other stressors in their life. Self-worth is the amount of value, worth, and positivity a person places on themself. This relates to coloring books because the person who is coloring in these books is able to see the pages be filled up by their own efforts, which creates a sense of self-worth. Social interest, which is doing something that enhances the group and the community as a whole, is created in the environment of coloring books because they allow for multiple people to benefit from using these books.

Finally, based on the research that has been done on the subject, coloring books have been shown to be beneficial because they are tools that assist with the reduction of dementia. This tool by itself cannot be considered Art Therapy; however, because they are missing key elements from Art Therapy that hinder their ability to achieve the full benefits of a true therapeutic session with a trained, professional Art Therapist witnessing and processing the art with the creator. It is important to consider the difference between the two, especially when purchasing books that are titled as Art Therapy coloring books.

Everyone is entitled to form their own opinion on these coloring books for adults, and it
is encouraged for people to try them out for themselves in order to have an experience and form an opinion. The reader is encouraged to consider the role that these books may play in the profession of Art Therapy, as well as the recreational and social aspects of coloring.
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