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Adriana Iverson

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How Does Coloring Affect Your Mental Health?

At some point, I'm sure we have all felt the urge to crack open a coloring book and go to town with our crayons, markers, and colored pencils. We may even download a coloring app on our phones to help pass the time at a boring event or waiting in a line. While many people stop coloring at a young age, many people continue their coloring career into adulthood, and for good reason. Coloring has been proven to help reduce anxiety levels and negative moods, along with many other positive factors. While the studies this information is gathered from may have some implications, the overall consensus about coloring is a positive one.

Judy Eaton and Christine Tieber are part of the staff at Wilfrid Laurier University in Brantford, Ontario. They wrote about how coloring relates to anxiety in their article, *The Effects of Coloring on Anxiety, Mood, and Perseverance*. They define coloring as “[A]n activity that promotes concentration and engagement but does not require excessive skill or focus” (2017). Coloring is seen as an activity everyone can do. It is easy for children and keeps them occupied, and it is inexpensive and seen as a form of self-care. (2017).



Many people understand coloring is an anxiety reliever for adults, which is the basis of its appeal. Nicola Holt, Leah Furbert, and Emily Sweetingham conducted a study on undergraduate students to see the effects of coloring in their article, *Cognitive and Affective Benefits of Coloring: Two Randomized Controlled Crossover Studies*. They hypothesized “coloring would lead to reduced anxiety and focused attention” (2019). Their hypothesis proved to be correct, and many other researchers and authors agree with their findings and hypothesis. Nicole Turturro and Jennifer Drake, authors of, *Does Coloring Reduce Anxiety?*

Comparing the Psychological and Psychophysiological Benefits of Coloring Versus Drawing, write a similar hypothesis, stating distraction is the key to reducing anxiety. Their study was also conducted with undergraduate students, but they took their research a step farther. They based their research on more than just coloring. They included coloring or drawing a design and drawing anything they wanted, (i.e. expression). They also found an effect on anxiety in the undergraduate students. “We found that all three conditions resulted in a decrease in anxiety” (2022). With evidence from both studies and authors, we can see why many adults take their anxiety out on the pages of a coloring book. Coloring does not only reduce anxiety, but it can also influence one’s negative mood.

A negative mood can ruin someone’s day, leading them to be anti-social or unproductive. According to the previous three articles, coloring can help improve a negative mood. There is evidence stating coloring, among other forms of art, “decreased negative affect...[and] improved positive effect” (Turturro & Drake, 2022). To second this finding, we see proof that coloring, “improved hedonic tone and reduced activating moods (anxiety and alertness) on self-report measures...” (Holt, Furbert & Sweetingham, 2019). Lastly, Eaton & Tieber provide their results for readers stating, “Our findings showed that 30 min of coloring resulted in lower negative mood and lower anxiety, especially when participants were allowed free choice of colors” (2017). This demonstrates even a little time spend buried in a coloring book will improve a negative mood. So, when a negative mood has overcome the body, coloring will help uplift one’s spirits.

There are a variety of other benefits coloring can offer an individual, one of those being lower levels of depression. Jayde Flett and her co-authors wrote in their article, Sharpen your Pencils: Preliminary Evidence that Adult Coloring Reduces Depressive Symptoms and Anxiety,

about the study they conducted. They had female adults partake in a “coloring intervention” for seven days. “Following a week of coloring, but not puzzling, participants reported lower levels of depressive symptoms and anxiety” (2017). Not only does coloring help with anxiety, which is a major disorder we see today, but also depression, which is just as major.

Other improvements discussed by every article were improved mindfulness, improved well-being, and an increased engagement in proactive behaviors. Holt, Furbert and Sweetingham give their readers a greater list of benefits, including “affective consequences” and “cognitive consequences”. These include, reducing anxiety, improving positive mood, and “improving one’s ability to focus attention and produce original responses to problems...” (2019). They go on to write that coloring can “increase one’s capacity to solve problems in daily life.” These are all great reasons to add coloring to the list of daily tasks.

Although each of these studies provide many benefits of coloring, a few of them express a minor hesitation. “However, further research is required to explore the role of expectation effects and examine the longitudinal impact of coloring on mood and cognition” (Holt, Furbert & Sweetingham, 2019). This means, though it is true that coloring can improve mood and reduce anxiety, it is important to understand these studies were done over a short period of time.

There are many reasons one may want to use coloring as a source of relief. Anxiety, depression, and an increased well-being are all things coloring can help improve. While many people may believe coloring is just for the artistic or young minds, this is not the case. After learning about how coloring can have positive effects, are you going to crack open a coloring book and get to work?

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