

Color Party: TEDx NYU

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On April 15, 2016, I had the opportunity to represent the American Art Therapy Association alongside fellow art therapists and digital arts developers to discuss adult coloring books at Color Party: TEDx NYU (New York University). TEDx NYU is a student organization that plans annual conferences, as well as more intimate community events through the year to address pertinent topics. Chastity Polk, Director of Community Events for TEDx NYU, invited a range of speakers to discuss coloring from different perspectives. We were joined by almost 200 students on the top floor of the NYU Kimmel Center for University Life for an evening of food, coloring sheets, and learning.



Richard Chang, Pixite.



Oles, Honeycombinatorics.

The two digital arts app developers described how they hoped to increase access to coloring by moving it from paper to tablets and phones. Richard Chang, developer at Pixite, spoke about their app Pigment. Instead of a coloring app that has users fill a shape with a click, Pigment provides users with the ability to shade and crosshatch, mimicking the strokes of coloring on paper. Oles, founder of Honeycombinatorics, described his app Chromaldry. This app provides users with more freedom in selecting an image to color by allowing users to turn their photos into coloring pages and providing a digital coloring experience akin to finger painting. For art therapists interested in incorporating digital media into their practice, these apps are available for iPhone and iPad.

The art therapists who presented all described a role for coloring as a relaxing activity, but clarified the benefits as distinct from art therapy. Maggie Ritmour presented on the differences between coloring and art therapy by describing how an art therapist may use a color sheet in contrast to traditional adult coloring books. Marygrace Berberian, Art Therapy Program Coordinator at NYU, described how media choices in art therapy may reflect personal preferences, but can also be harnessed to aid emotional regulation. My talk connected adult coloring books to the larger phenomenon of success-oriented adult art activities such as contemporary paint-by-number and glaze your own ceramic studios. I contrasted these leisure-based activities, which intend to promote escapism, with art therapy, which supports art making for improving one's self, relationships, and communities.

Nadia Jenefsky, Clinical Director at New York Creative Arts Therapists, and Rawan Bajasair, a soon to be graduate from NYU, described their insight behind creating [*The Real Art Therapists of New York Coloring Book*](#). The 50 coloring pages were each created by a qualified art therapist. In addition to an image, all of the contributors described their work. The book functions as a coloring book, but also as an awareness raising publication on art therapy.



Marygrace Berberian



Rawan Bajasair and Nadia Jenefsky



Maggie Ritmour



Jordan Potash

The various speakers reminded us all that coloring can be a useful activity, but should be considered as just one way to engage with art materials along a wider spectrum of how the arts can promote well-being.

My talk is available as a podcast at:
<http://jordanpotash.com/art/podcasts/>

Photo Credit: Carla Burkett, TEDx NYU.



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