Designing a Coloring Book as a Tool to Introduce Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)

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DESIGNING A COLORING BOOK AS A TOOL TO INTRODUCE
MINDFULNESS-BASED STRESS REDUCTION (MBSR)

by

BILLIE BETH CHARLES

©

SYNTHESIS*

MASTER OF ARTS
CRITICAL AND CREATIVE THINKING
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS BOSTON

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Advisor: Robert Ricketts

* The Synthesis can take a variety of forms, from a position paper to curriculum or professional development workshop to an original contribution in the creative arts or writing. The expectation is that students use their Synthesis to show how they have integrated knowledge, tools, experience, and support gained in the program so as to prepare themselves to be constructive, reflective agents of change in work, education, social movements, science, creative arts, or other endeavors.
ABSTRACT

This paper explores the design process of developing an illustrated coloring book, as a tool to introduce Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) techniques to young adults experiencing heightened levels of anxiety, panic, and depression. The MBSR coloring book, is being developed based on a theory, and supporting evidence, that engaging in an artistic activity like coloring, can make MBSR techniques accessible to young adults seeking help for anxiety and panic-related symptoms.

The author discusses the challenges young adults face in the current societal context and highlights the need for effective and accessible strategies to manage mental health issues. Through research, experience, and literature review, the author outlines how practicing MBSR strategies can help reduce anxiety. The paper proposes a coloring book as an accessible and appropriate medium to introduce MBSR, presenting arguments in favor of its use. It also explores counterarguments regarding the efficacy of coloring as a viable medium to introducing MBSR. The design factors for creating an attached coloring book prototype are discussed, emphasizing the importance of incorporating an introduction to mindfulness principles, as well as MBSR breathing techniques. In conclusion, the paper highlights the significance of integrating MBSR and coloring as tool to make this holistic intervention for some of the most common mental health disorders more accessible to young adults seeking treatment.
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Prologue

Imagine a young woman in her early twenties, who lives just outside of a major city in an apartment with family members. She attends a local community college part-time in the evenings while working full-time at a minimum-wage job throughout the week. She relies on the subway system to get everywhere from that shared apartment, taking the train several times a day to get from home to work, class, doctors’ appointments, shopping, and meeting up with friends. Nearly every activity in her daily life is connected by that subway system. Now imagine through some unexplainable occurrence, the subway system becomes her enemy. Something that was once seen as a gateway to freedom, a cheap ride to anywhere the young woman could dream up, as a means of connecting with new people and opportunities, becomes a dark, scary place that makes her feel like she is going to die. Literally.

She walks from the two-bedroom apartment she shares with her sister and brother-in-law in Dorchester, a neighborhood of Boston located south of the city, that, before present-day gentrification, has a reputation for high crime rates and gang activity. On her way to the Ashmont train station, the first stop on the MBTA red line, the 20-year-old college student is thinking about the day ahead. She will spend just over an hour on the subway system getting to work, where the next eight hours will be spent fielding calls at her temporary receptionist position. This position makes her feel like she has finally become an adult, after hustling through shifts at various food stands in Faneuil Hall for the past three years. At exactly 5:00 p.m. on this day, she will leave the office to board yet another train to make it to a 3-hour long evening class. By 9:00 p.m. she will walk exhaustedly through the dark parking lot of Bunker Hill Community College, to begin the reverse journey that will take her back to where she started the day.
Ugh, she sighs as she thinks about the walk home, which is already starting to cause her stress. She feels a tightness in her chest that she tries to dismiss as she recalls hearing about a series of violent incidents that have occurred late at night around the city. Just that morning she saw on the news that a woman about her age was caught in the crossfires of a drive-by shooting on a street bordering the train station she is about to enter. She juxtaposes that incident on top of a series of other violent headlines that include crimes against women in the form of sexual assaults, date rapes, abductions, and gruesome murders. Seemingly beyond her control, she imagines herself on her walk home this evening, becoming the victim of each of these horrifying scenarios on the half-mile stretch in the dark, unlit area where she will exit the train station that connects to the more populated streets that will lead her home tonight. She starts to feel a shortness of breath that she ignores, as she approaches the turnstile that will take her to the subway platform.

She is shocked out of her reverie by the noisy morning commuters rushing to get a prime spot near the edge of the platform, where the subway train will stop, and the doors will open. She feels disconnected from reality and the feeling of being unsettled will not leave her as she joins the herd of rushing people, who seem ominous and overwhelming after her fearful musings. She continues to feel tightness in her chest and now it is becoming increasingly hard to breathe, as she tries to force herself into the present moment and shake away the feeling of impending doom that will not leave her as the train approaches. Suddenly she is unexplainably afraid of getting on the train that she boards every single day. The smells of perfume, homelessness, and of someone who has consumed too much alcohol the night before all mingle together into one palpable, nauseating mix, and she feels dizzy and weightless as she half walks and is half pushed through the doors of the northbound train. She can bring herself to the present moment only
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long enough to stagger through several people to get to the last empty seat on the train where she hopes she will be able to regain composure. But as the doors close, still feeling dizzy and weightless, the shortness of breath now becomes an inability to take in any air and she fears more than anything that she will pass out in front of everyone or vomit all over herself or someone else on the train. She can think of nothing but escaping this nightmare and is truly afraid she is having a heart attack, dying, or about to lose her mind. As she contemplates sudden death, she avoids making eye contact with anyone in the crowd of people threatening to suffocate her. She is afraid someone will realize she is about to lose control and it takes all her willpower to contain this growing monster inside while counting each painful passing second until the door will open again. Five minutes later, as the train emerges through a dark tunnel and comes to a halt, she jumps out of her seat and rushes through the open doors to gasp for fresh air.

She wanders as far away from this new crowd of commuters as she possibly can and sits down on an empty bench to take stock of what just happened. With each breath of fresh air and at a safe distance from prying eyes, slowly, the dizziness and nausea fade into the background, to be replaced with overwhelming exhaustion. She is now back in the present moment and is consciously aware that she is still miles from the temporary job she values so much, knows she must board the train again to get there and will be late, and she feels ashamed and scared about what just happened and fear of when it might happen again. She has just experienced her first panic attack and unbeknownst to her, she will soon be diagnosed with generalized anxiety and panic disorder and will spend the next 20 or so years of her life seeking relief from the debilitating symptoms just described. If only she knew about a tool called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)...
1. Introduction

The year is 2023 and the world has emerged from a global pandemic that contributed to a rise in depression, anxiety, and mental health issues that were already underway before the spring of 2020. Focusing specifically on young adults, ages 18-30, they are experiencing levels of stress, anxiety, and depression beyond what is expected as part of the normal transition from teenager to adulthood.

Many young adults will experience challenges during the period of time that is referred to as a “quarter-life crisis,” defined by Agarwal et al. as “a term for developmental crisis episodes that occur during early adulthood (ages 18–30).” It is not surprising that in this period, people may experience brief episodes of anxiety and/or depression while going through this “coming of age” where they are in some ways an adult, yet in some ways not, often characterized by instability in roles, relationships, and living situations. Young adults are constantly sleeping in someone else’s apartment, dormitory, or another home, and packing, moving, and unpacking all their belongings, sometimes as frequently as every 6-12 months. Additionally, job changes and unstable relationships can cause stress.

However normal and inevitable that period of instability may seem, an increasing number of young adults are experiencing more than normal bouts of heightened anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues, due to a variety of reasons including increased digital footprints, rising expectation levels for education, and resulting debt, climate change, and global natural disasters. In the digital age, young adults are continuously plugged into feedback from all areas. Peers, parents, teachers, the media, and the entertainment industry are all sending communications via email, text, television, billboards, digital signage, and radio ads. Additionally, current world affairs and the constant barrage of media are putting issues in the
spotlight for young adults that previous generations did not have to face, including the possibility of a third world war, global warming, inflation, and a volatile political climate. All these issues are now competing for attention through the media and are contributing to a rise in mental health issues facing young adults today. This paper will focus specifically on young adults experiencing symptoms of anxiety and panic disorders, who are seeking treatment and relief through parents, healthcare providers, counselors, and other mental health professionals.

Currently, there are a variety of treatments available for symptoms related to anxiety and panic disorder, ranging from medication alone or in combination with one of several models of therapy, including Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Exposure Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) to name a few. Additionally, there are numerous non-traditional therapies utilized in the treatment of symptoms from anxiety and panic disorders including special diets, acupuncture, self-hypnosis, meditation, and yoga therapy as some examples. For the topic of this paper, it is enough to say there is a range of traditional and non-traditional treatments available for anxiety and panic symptoms, but it is outside of the scope of this paper to deep dive into the benefits and downfalls of each. This paper will focus on, is a technique called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) that can be introduced as a stand-alone intervention or alongside other treatments like therapy and/or medication. Mindfulness is a tool that can put the power back in one’s own hands so that a person who suffers from symptoms of anxiety and panic disorders might better be able to manage their symptoms in the long term.

While MBSR is not a new method or tool that I am proposing, I am focused on making this already established process accessible to young adults who might not be introduced or drawn to the subject matter in their regular encounters with therapists, doctors, and alternative healers.
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Through my research and experience with the topic, combined with formal education and professional work as a designer, I am developing a non-pharmaceutical, art-based coloring book, that will introduce MBSR techniques to young adults experiencing anxiety and panic attack symptoms. The tool will be based on my theory, and supporting evidence, that engaging in an artistic activity like coloring, can make MBSR techniques accessible to young adults seeking help for anxiety and panic-related symptoms. In the following sections, I will review the current literature in the field of MBSR and talk about how practicing MBSR strategies can reduce anxiety. Then, I will explain why a coloring book is an accessible and appropriate medium to introduce MBSR to young adults based on the strategies provided. After making a case for the coloring book as an ideal tool to introduce MBSR strategies to young adults, I will evaluate arguments in favor of this medium and also discuss counter perspectives. Once all angles are covered, I will provide a detailed design process and decision-making rationale for the contents of the coloring book and review any additional related considerations having to do with design choices, themes, images, and complexity of the project. After the conclusion of this paper, a prototype will follow, that will illustrate how the core elements of the Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program can be translated into a coloring book for young adults.

2. Research, experience, and literature review

This investigation of literature is part of a process of research that I chose due to my personal experience with generalized anxiety and panic disorder. I have experienced generalized anxiety disorder and panic disorder since the onset of sudden panic attacks in my early 20s. Being now in my 40s, I have had two decades of experience being a “practitioner” of anxiety if being a practitioner includes one who has thoroughly experienced a subject and also put into practice multiple interventions to varying levels of success to address the issue. I am familiar
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with a range of treatments for panic and anxiety disorder including psychotherapy, cognitive behavioral therapy, exposure therapy, medication, mindfulness, meditation, and breathing exercises. I do not disagree with the effectiveness of medication in the treatment of anxiety. I am not a medical doctor and I have no medical training in diagnosing or treating mental illness. By being familiar, I mean that I have tried all those various techniques and have identified what has been the most successful option for me in managing symptoms of anxiety and panic. Practicing mindfulness and mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques has helped me to manage my symptoms and live with more ease.

In combination with my direct experience with anxiety and panic attacks and mindfulness-based stress reduction, I am also a graphic designer and fine artist. I have noticed that using art and mindfulness techniques in combination can result in reduced symptoms of anxiety and panic. While mindfulness-based stress reduction is a technique widely accepted in the field of stress reduction, coloring, and art are less associated. As part of the research process in this project, I viewed several recently published studies that make a direct correlation between coloring and anxiety reduction and the results are promising.

In summary, the primary goal of the following literature review was to research and practice the techniques I am designing, describing, and presenting in the MBSR coloring book for people experiencing anxiety and panic symptoms. The coloring book is about symptom reduction via an introduction to mindfulness principles and techniques, presented with exercises and writing designed to help someone alter behaviors and thinking patterns. Below, I present the primary literature review in order of significance to the MBSR coloring book.

In many ways, Jon Kabat-Zinn is a leader in the field of mindfulness, and he has been credited with introducing mindfulness as a legitimate stress reduction tool into the lives of
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everyday people as well as into the mainstream of some of Western society’s larger institutions, over the past 5 decades, and his work continues to this day. As stated in his biography, “Jon Kabat-Zinn, Ph.D. is a Professor of Medicine emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, where he founded its world-renown Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Clinic in 1979, and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society (CFM), in 1995. Both the MBSR Clinic and the CFM are now part of UMassMemorial Health.” My introduction to mindfulness was through the above-referenced 8-week MBSR program, which was brought onsite for employees at the insurance company where I work. I didn’t know it at the time, but the seeds planted in the year 2016 when I took that course, would continue to grow and blossom in the coming years, to contribute to the research and ultimate synthesis of my Critical and Creative Thinking program experience. With that in mind, I use much of his writing in Full Catastrophe Living, the written version of his program, as inspiration for material in the coloring book I am designing.

Also credited for his role in bringing mindfulness to the West, is Thich Nhat Hanh, a global spiritual leader, poet, and peace activist, well respected for his teachings and writings on mindfulness and peace. He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Price by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and has been a pioneer in bringing Buddhism and mindfulness to the West, and establishing an engaged Buddhist community for the 21st Century. It was during the Reflective Practice part of the Critical and Creative Thinking program that I learned the interconnectedness of Mindfulness, Meditation, Yoga, and Buddhism. That is to say, through the expanded practice of Mindfulness, Meditation, and Yoga, it became necessary to understand the origin of these practices. As part of a plan for practice and reflection, I read the book Being Peace, by Thich Nhat Hanh, who, through the use of storytelling, recounts the history of Buddhism and its
connections to mindfulness and meditation. This excerpt from the book provides a sample of the way he communicates how mindfulness and meditation, and the breath can work to calm the body, through poetry and storytelling.

I would like to offer one short poem you can recite from time to time while breathing and smiling:

“Breathing in I calm my body.
Breathing out, I smile.
Dwelling in the present moment
I know this is a wonderful moment.”

“Breathing in, I calm my body.” Reciting this line is like drinking a glass of iced water – you feel the cold, and the freshness, permeate your body. When I breathe in and recite this line, I actually feel the breathing calming my body, calming my mind.

“Breathing out, I smile.” You know the effect of a smile. A smile can relax hundreds of muscles in your face, and relax your nervous system. A smile makes you master of yourself. That is why the Buddhas and bodhisattvas are always smiling. When you smile, you realize the wonder of the smile.

“Dwelling in the present moment.” While I sit here, I don’t think of somewhere else, of the future or the past. I sit here, and I know where I am. This is very important. We tend to be alive in the future, not now. We tend to postpone being alive to the future, the distant future, we don’t know when. Now is not the moment to be alive. We may never be alive
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at all in our entire life. Therefore, the technique, if we have to speak of a technique is to be in the present moment, to be aware that we are here and now, and the only moment to be alive is the present moment.

By slowly reading and digesting the meanings in Thich Nhat Hanhs stories in Being Peace, I was able to connect mindfulness to a way of living beyond anxiety reduction, to incorporate some Buddhist principles into a belief system, shaped by grounding in the present moment to reflect peace inward and outward for better outcomes in life and experiences with others. I will incorporate some of Thich Nhat Hanh’s quotes and stories into the MBSR coloring book as well to give meaning and context to the exercises.

By way of introduction to the topic of mindfulness, and MBSR as a tool for anxiety reduction, Basant Pradhan, in Yoga and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy: A Clinical Guide, combines yoga and mindfulness with traditional cognitive therapy in one clinical guide that provides a succinct history of all three topics and connects the different techniques to outline a valid new therapy model (Yoga and Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (Y-MBCT)). This book, related to my topic, “provides symptom-specific applications of mindfulness meditation as well as other principles and skills from the broad system of Yoga for clinical intervention and treatment (viii).” I use this book as general guidance for providing an introduction to MBSR with a therapeutic focus that is still in line with the spiritual belief system of Buddhism, but separate from religion or having a religious basis.

Bob Stahl and Elisha Goldstein published A Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Workbook, in 2010, which is a step-by-step lesson plan for MBSR stress reduction that claims to teach mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), a program developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn. In 2013, Bob Stahl and Wendy Millstine, in Calming the Rush of Panic: A Mindfulness-Based
**Stress Reduction Guide to Freeing Yourself from Panic Attacks and Living a Vital Life**, put together a guide similar in concept to the MBSR coloring book that I am proposing. *Calming the Rush of Panic* offers readers powerful mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) practices in a quick, accessible format to help them cope with panic disorder. The book contains guided mindfulness meditations and exercises to help reduce fears, restore feelings of security and safety, stay calm, and get back to living life. This is a tool for stress reduction that is like the type of experience I have been talking about creating, a coloring book that serves as a tool to introduce people to mindfulness-based stress reduction techniques.

In the *American Journal of Public Health*, a review of recent publications and studies titled, *The connection between art, healing, and public health*, compiles and summarizes credible research over the past two decades that support evidence that art can be used to “heal emotional injuries, increase understanding of oneself and others, develop a capacity for self-reflection, reduce symptoms, and alter behaviors and thinking patterns (Stuckey, H. L., & Nobel, J. (2010, p. 254).” Additionally, Lynn Kapitan, in “Art Therapy’s Sweet Spot Between Art, Anxiety, and the Flow Experience,” makes the connection between practicing art, anxiety reduction, and the “flow state.”

Finally, in the publication, *When Did Coloring Books Become Mindful? Mantzios and Giannou* explore the effectiveness of a novel method of mindfulness-guided instructions for coloring books to increase mindfulness and decrease anxiety. This supplied me with a plethora of valid research and credible sources that helped to clarify the language around this project and to see the current challenges that I may face with credibility in the field and how to address them with my project, to differentiate it from what is currently available in the area of mindfulness coloring books. I think the fine-tuning of instructional-based mindfulness is the challenge I will
face in finding the balance between instruction without disrupting the flow state of coloring. Other challenges include reaching an audience that dislikes the act of coloring and/or guided mindfulness-based activities.

I view the material summarized above as supporting information that highlights a need in society for the proposed MBSR coloring book, and that the tool I am proposing has solid evidence to support its usefulness. I also see the proposed tool and supporting research, as a culmination of my life experience, my career experience, and my personal experience. Through the processes of research and engagement, while applying critical and creative thinking skills, I came up with a tool to help people in my immediate sphere of influence. My life experience includes living with generalized anxiety and panic disorder, and trying a variety of treatments for symptoms, over a span of two decades before I was introduced to a tool that works predictably and better with practice over time. That tool is Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction and I propose that practicing MBSR strategies while using a coloring book, may reduce anxiety symptoms.

3. Practicing MBSR strategies may reduce anxiety

MBSR is a program of instruction used in the medical and health care fields, and more recently in corporate environments, to reduce stress, increase relaxation, alleviate pain, and reduce anxiety through the use of mindfulness techniques. The following study, “Effects of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) on emotion regulation in social anxiety disorder,” explains in technical terms, how MBSR works on the brain, to reduce anxiety symptoms:

MBSR is believed to alter emotional responses by modifying cognitive–affective processes. Given that social anxiety disorder (SAD) is characterized by emotional
and attentional biases as well as distorted negative self-beliefs, we examined MBSR-related changes in the brain-behavior indices of emotional reactivity and regulation of negative self-beliefs in patients with SAD. Sixteen patients underwent functional MRI while reacting to negative self-beliefs and while regulating negative emotions using 2 types of attention deployment emotion regulation—breath-focused attention and distraction-focused attention. Post-MBSR, 14 patients completed neuroimaging assessments. **Compared with baseline, MBSR completers showed improvement in anxiety and depression symptoms and self-esteem.** During the breath-focused attention task (but not the distraction-focused attention task), they also showed (a) decreased negative emotion experience, (b) reduced amygdala activity, and (c) increased activity in brain regions implicated in attentional deployment. **MBSR training in patients with SAD may reduce emotional reactivity while enhancing emotion regulation. These changes might facilitate a reduction in SAD-related avoidance behaviors, clinical symptoms, and automatic emotional reactivity to negative self-beliefs in adults with SAD** (Goldin, P. R., & Gross).

That study, published in 2010, is backed up by more evidence, learned from a randomized clinical trial published in November 2022, that Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction was similarly as effective in treating anxiety disorder, as a commonly prescribed medication. In this trial, “Eligible participants were aged 18 to 75 years with a current primary diagnosis of generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, panic disorder, or agoraphobia, as determined by structured psychiatric diagnostic interviews. The results from this randomized clinical trial comparing a standardized evidence-based mindfulness-based intervention with
pharmacotherapy for the treatment of anxiety disorders found that MBSR was non-inferior to escitalopram (Hoge EA, Bui E, Mete M, Dutton MA, Baker AW, Simon NM.)”

Research dating back from the late 1970s to the present day supports MBSR as a valid tool to reduce symptoms of anxiety and panic-related disorders. Most commonly, the MBSR program is taught by a certified guide, in person or online. However, as mentioned in the introduction, access to mental health treatment, including this program, is not widely distributed to young adults seeking help. As an alternative to in-person and online mindfulness-based stress reduction, a more accessible and easily distributed tool, recently popularized by the adult coloring book, could be a coloring book that specifically utilizes the anxiety reduction qualities of coloring, to introduce the concepts of mindfulness and MBSR to young adults.

4. A coloring book is an accessible and appropriate medium to introduce MBSR

Ultimately, the coloring book is the vehicle, by which the mindfulness concepts and exercises, as I interpret them, are presented to the person experiencing symptoms of anxiety and panic, or beyond, to include an audience that needs to destress. In a question about the validity of a coloring book as a tool, I sought to find evidence of similar tools, and while many on the market of adult coloring books brand themselves as mindful coloring books or stress reduction coloring books, none that I encountered, specifically illustrated the breathing and mindfulness techniques in a way that I was envisioning, that could combine the relaxing element of physical coloring, along with the written and illustrated breathing and mediation exercise instructions. I was able, through networking with people in the local yoga community and field of mindfulness instruction, to gain insight from someone who used an alternative, artistic medium, specifically rap music, to communicate mindfulness practice to the world.

Through a reflective practice that includes daily yoga, meditation, and writing exercises, I met a yoga teacher named Ann Brieck, who is also a fundraiser at The Copper Beach Institute, a
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Mindfulness and Well-Being retreat center located in West Hartford Connecticut. This synchronistical introduction during one part of the Critical and Creative Thinking program led to an interview during another part of the program. Ann has served as a source of inspiration and support to me along my journey through the topic of mindfulness by providing local, affordable yoga classes, encouraging me at each session I attend, and by making introductions for me to support my research along the way. During my final class before the Synthesis, Process of Research and Engagement, Ann introduced me to Brian Thompson, a graduate of Lesley University with a master’s degree in Mindfulness, who now works at Copper Beach Institute in the professional development area, where he facilitates educational mindfulness workshops, leads guided meditations, and furthers the mission of the institute. Through this interview, I was able to gain valuable feedback and insight from a professional in the field of mindfulness, who has also used an alternative medium to communicate the message of mindfulness, through rap music.

When I ask Brian about his experience with mindfulness and mindfulness facilitation, he says that ultimately, “mindfulness is just a word” and here I paraphrase, “it is the experience each person gains from the practice that makes up the meaning of mindfulness for them.” With that in mind, he focuses more on meeting people where they are in life and bringing mindfulness concepts to fruition by inviting people to participate in the experience of mindfulness in an area of interest to them. This was critical validation for me, as I spoke to him about communicating MBSR strategies through a coloring book, that what I am designing can be a valid and useful tool to communicate mindfulness stress reduction strategies. The most valuable insight I received from Brian was a caution though, about losing the overall meaning of Mindfulness by only focusing on breathing strategies in the coloring book.
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His biggest concern about focusing on hand-picked MBSR techniques for anxiety reduction is losing the point of mindfulness or losing the audience based on an experience that was not comprehensive in representing the field of mindfulness, based on a limited number of exercises taken out of context. Specifically, some people may struggle with breathing techniques and think that Mindfulness is not for them based on one or two exercises. Stress reduction and anxiety reduction do not represent all of mindfulness. I took careful consideration of Brian’s concerns when designing this book and have worked to expand the content beyond breathing exercises to include the most basic mindfulness-based principles. While the introduction to mindfulness and guided stress reduction exercises are on their own intended to help manage symptoms of anxiety and panic in the moment and over time, the physical act of coloring has also been shown to relieve stress and anxiety.

Participating in the experience of creating art, and coloring specifically, allows for some immediate stress and anxiety reduction, making it an ideal vehicle to introduce a longer-term tool for the management of symptoms related to anxiety and panic disorders. The rise of popularity in adult coloring books has created debates among critics in the field of art therapy, mindfulness, and more traditional therapies alike. Ashlock, et al summarizes the current state of research and commentary:

Previous studies suggest varying reasons for the differential impacts of coloring activities on anxiety. Neurologically, recent literature has examined the effects of visual art on the brain. Bolwerk, Mack-Andrick, Lang, Dörfler, and Maihöfner (2014) found that among retired adults, there were notable differences in psychological resilience and brain connectivity between those who cognitively evaluated visual art and those
who created art. However, most studies examining structured coloring activities point to theories of mindfulness in art-making to explain its effects. However, some critics of the adult coloring book movement are skeptical of its benefits, suggesting that coloring books promote mindlessness by simply letting people distract themselves from whatever is on their mind (Mossman, 2015). Whereas Curry and Kasser (2005) and van der Vennet and Serice (2012) asserted that the structure of the coloring activity played a role in anxiety reduction, Sandmire et al. (2012) suggested that it was simply the trance-like effect of any repetitive creative activity and the effect of time spent interacting with peers during the activity that led to anxiety reduction. Others, including Carsley et al. (2012), based their hypotheses on theories of mindfulness, and the idea that art-making can have many positive effects on mood and affective state in addition to anxiety reduction.

Essentially, the question of whether or not the act of coloring pictures produces the effect of anxiety reduction and promotes mindfulness is still up for debate in the field. For the purpose of this project, the coloring workbook is not intended to suggest the act of coloring alone is the answer to reducing panic and anxiety symptoms. Rather, the immediate stress reduction qualities of coloring would be paired with text and visuals depicted within the workbook that introduces the user to mindfulness breathing and meditation techniques known to be most effective in their anxiety-reducing qualities. The coloring book will introduce MBSR strategies for behavioral changes that result in anxiety and panic symptom reduction.
5. Arguments in favor of using coloring books as a tool for MBSR

Through my research, the practice of mindfulness, literature reviews, and meeting with people in the field, I have come to identify several core propositions that support a coloring book as a tool to introduce MBSR to young adults.

An increasing number of young adults are experiencing more than normal bouts of heightened anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues, due to a variety of reasons including increased digital footprints, rising expectation levels for education, and resulting debt, climate change, and global natural disasters. Research shows that even before the COVID-19 pandemic and war in Ukraine that caused more global uncertainty, anxiety levels in young adults were already on the rise. A study published in the Journal of Psychiatric Research of young adults experiencing levels of anxiety from 2008-2018 concluded, “Anxiety is increasing among adults under age 50 in the US, with more rapid increase among young adults. To prepare for a healthier adulthood and given direct and indirect (via 24/7 media) exposure to anxiety-provoking world events, prophylactic measures that can bolster healthy coping responses and/or treatment-seeking seem warranted on a broad scale (Goodwin et al., 2020).”

Additionally, as covered in section III of this paper, data shows that MBSR strategies may work to reduce anxiety. The technique called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) can be introduced as a stand-alone intervention for people experiencing anxiety and panic disorder symptoms, or alongside other treatments like therapy and/or medication. MBSR is a program of instruction used in the medical and health care fields, and more recently in corporate environments, to reduce stress, increase relaxation, alleviate pain, and reduce anxiety using mindfulness techniques.

Engaging in an artistic activity like coloring can make MBSR techniques accessible to young adults seeking help for anxiety and panic-related symptoms.
Licensed Social Worker (LICSW) providing psychotherapy care for children, adolescents, and adults in Albert Lea and Austin since 2005, notes the following statements about the benefits of coloring in facilitating mindfulness and relieving stress, “Coloring can help you be more mindful. For example, because you're focusing on color choice and staying inside the lines, you're only thinking about the present moment. You can shut off the noise around you and give your mind the gift of focusing on the movements, sensations, and emotions of your present moment. Coloring is a healthy way to relieve stress. It calms the brain and helps your body relax. This can improve sleep and fatigue while decreasing body aches, heart rate, respiration, and feelings of depression and anxiety (LICSW, 2022).”

Essentially, it is the premise of this paper and coloring book prototype, that an increasing number of young adults are experiencing anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues, creating a need for non-traditional anxiety reduction tools. Data shows that MBSR strategies do work to reduce anxiety, and the passive act of coloring has also been shown to reduce stress and anxiety in adults. These propositions all support that engaging in an artistic activity like coloring may be an ideal way to introduce MBSR techniques to young adults seeking help for anxiety and panic-related symptoms. With that said, there are some counterarguments to consider when researching a topic and proposed course of action.

6. **Counterarguments to the degree of efficacy for the activity of coloring relative to introducing MBSR**

Not to be taken lightly, there are valid counterarguments around the potential use of a coloring book as a medium to introduce the vast and complex topic of mindfulness, as currently presented by scholars, to an audience of young adults. Additionally, the efficacy of such a product, when compared to modern medicine and traditional counseling structures, is also of concern. Let us explore them individually in the following paragraphs.
It is worth considering that anxiety and panic symptoms that young adults are experiencing are a normal part of the quarter-life-crisis period when going from high supervision and low responsibility living to adult responsibilities and independence. Many adults from different generations may reflect on their own experience during the age of 18-30 and recall they often felt anxious or stressed and even may have experienced a panic attack or two. With that lens, I would argue that the digital age has brought on a barrage of heightened sensations, emotions, and experiences, that we have yet to understand the full impacts of as a civilization. To put this in perspective, I write this paper at 43 years old, born at the very tale end of the Generation X period. I am part of the last generation of human beings to have spent my childhood years without cable television, mobile phones, or the internet. I did not have the stress of social media to worry about, or a camera at my disposal to record every moment of my life. Today young adults face peers, parents, teachers, the media, and the entertainment industry all sending communications via email, text, television, billboards, digital signage, and radio ads almost every minute of their waking life. Additionally, current world affairs and the constant barrage of media are putting issues in the spotlight for young adults that previous generations did not have to face, including the possibility of a third world war, global warming, inflation, and a volatile political climate. All these issues are now competing for attention through the media and are contributing to a rise in mental health issues facing young adults today, which is broader than the “coming of age” or “quarter-life crisis” phrases that were coined when the experiences of young adults were much less complicated than they are today.

Even if we establish an increased need for anxiety and panic reduction tools in today’s society, some people do not consider mindfulness a valid treatment for symptoms of anxiety and panic-related disorders. They might argue that mindfulness is not accessible to all
populations, and not something young adults can readily encounter and incorporate into their lives, suggesting that it is a new age fad that elite corporations, schools, governments, and the military have coopted as a technique for self-pacification. I may be biased in that I have personally found relief in Mindfulness and do believe it is a valuable tool in helping to control symptoms of anxiety and panic. But my personal experience reflects the evidence that suggests that practicing mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) techniques can result in a reduction of symptoms related to anxiety disorders by helping a person stay focused on the present moment, versus allowing their mind to wander down endless roads of negative possibilities and outcomes. In addition to personal experience, recent studies make a case for why Mindfulness is being taken more seriously:

Effective treatments for anxiety disorders exist and include medications and cognitive behavioral therapy, but not all patients have access to them, respond to them, or are comfortable seeking care in a psychiatric setting. For example, nearly one-third of people surveyed in 1 study believed that psychiatric medication would interfere with daily activities, and about one-fourth believed it is harmful to the body. Further, roughly two-thirds of patients who do start taking an antidepressant discontinue it. While cognitive behavioral therapy is also effective, it can be difficult for patients to access due to a lack of healthcare professionals trained in this technique. These challenges support a need for additional evidence-based treatment options for patients with anxiety disorders with broad acceptability. Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) may be seen as a more acceptable option given that mindfulness meditation has recently become more popular (Hoge EA, Bui E, Mete M, Dutton MA, Baker AW, Simon NM).
There will be some people who do not believe a coloring book is a serious enough tool to treat mental health disorders, and there will also be a population who the coloring book will not work for. To the first point, most commonly, the MBSR program is taught by a certified guide, in person or online. However, access to mental health treatment, including this program, is not widely distributed to young adults seeking help. As an alternative to in-person and online mindfulness-based stress reduction, a more accessible and easily distributed tool, recently popularized by the adult coloring book, could be a workbook that utilizes the anxiety reduction qualities of coloring, to introduce the concepts of mindfulness and MBSR to young adults. The target population of this intervention would be young adults or people experiencing anxiety and being introduced to mindfulness as a tool. The tool is designed to work best for a person who can read and who can color.

Potential limitations with interpreting high-level facts and presenting them in an illustrated coloring book without formal instruction in the proposed coloring book as a tool for introducing MBSR include the potential for misinterpretation or misapplication of MBSR practices. This was specifically brought up in the above-referenced interview with Brian Thompson, where he expressed concerns about limiting the coloring book contents to breathing exercises. In the attached coloring book prototype, these concerns are addressed by providing a basic introduction to the concepts of mindfulness and breathing exercises, along with a list of MBSR resources.

Here there is an acknowledgment that a coloring book will not work for everyone with symptoms of anxiety and panic, or to teach the concepts of mindfulness. Some people will not be able to tolerate the combination of reading and breathing and coloring at the same time. Some people may prefer traditional therapy or medication to new concepts. Furthermore, due to
more severe mental health, or physical health issues, this tool may not be the best solution. In the future, a complementary website and YouTube channel may be designed to further the accessibility of this tool.

7. Design Factors to Consider:

When designing a coloring book as a tool that is aligned with mindfulness-based stress reduction strategies, I utilized a model of Critical and Creative Thinking that will present and describe in the paragraphs that follow. Before creating the model, I focused on what I was trying to accomplish from a design and communication perspective:

- I am trying to take concepts written by people with the highest levels of education, who have traveled the world, tested their research, and created formal courses of instruction
- and translate these concepts to someone with a high-school level education equivalent, or even lower, 6-12th grade concept knowledge.
- I don’t expect a reader will leave fully educated on the topic of mindfulness with all of the tools for MBSR memorized.
- I simply hope to plant a seed, by introducing mindfulness via a broad, high-level overview of concepts, with some breathing exercises for immediate anxiety and panic relief, to introduce a new tool and way of living with more ease that the reader will be left wanting to find out more on the topic.

The model below explains how the processes of Critical and Creative Thinking plus life experience were used to design the MBSR coloring book prototype:
In its simplest form, creativity is the ability to produce new or original ideas, concepts, products, or “output” of some kind. **Creative thinking** is a way of thinking that helps you consider things from all angles, using empathy, curiosity, willingness to try new things, and brainstorming, among other techniques. Similarly, “Divergent thinking is creative thinking in which an individual solves a problem or reaches a decision using strategies that deviate from commonly used or previously taught strategies (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.-b).” The goal of divergent thinking is to expand one’s knowledge and vision beyond the current state by generating multiple ideas about a singular topic or problem. This generally happens in a free-flowing manner with limited restrictions to allow for the most expansive amount of new ideas possible. **In this way,**
using divergent thinking as part of the Creative Thinking process to consider all of my options around ways to help people suffering from anxiety and panic-related disorders, utilizing the knowledge, education, and life experience I have acquired to this point in time.

• Where creative thinking is expansive, I think of critical thinking as a way of taking all of the facts and knowledge of creative and divergent thinking and boiling it down to make sense of it all. Critical thinking is a kind of thinking in which you question, analyze, interpret, evaluate, and make a judgment about what you read, hear, say, or write. Convergent Thinking is “Critical thinking in which an individual uses linear, logical steps to analyze a number of already formulated solutions to a problem to determine the correct one or the one that is most likely to be successful (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.-b).”

• I am a graphic designer, artist, student, and communications professional, and I have experienced symptoms of anxiety and panic disorder since early adulthood. I have tried multiple treatments both pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical and I have found mindfulness to be beneficial. When taking my life experience, my career experience, and my personal experience, along with my skills and talents, I came up with a tool to help people in my immediate sphere of influence. This is using life skills to interpret the Critical and Creative Thinking program and make something unique.

• Antiracist and Multicultural Education and Inclusivity. When designing a coloring book for people experiencing anxiety issues, the goal is to be as inclusive as possible and to respect diverse cultures and populations. With those considerations in mind:
- Illustrations are designed to represent diverse populations by paying particular attention to facial structure and body type and not favoring one race/sex over another.

- Instructions are written in plain language without the use of slang or dialect.

- With regards to Accessibility, the coloring book will be printed in English, with high-contrast black and white ink and large lettering. A future state may include translation into other languages and an accompanying website and social media channels with online guided breathing exercises and links to supporting information, to make the coloring book and Mindfulness-Based Stress reduction tools even more accessible.

In summary, each page of the coloring book will present the reader with a small amount of explanatory text, written in a way that is accessible for people with a high school education or lower, displayed in large font. Additionally, complementary illustrations are created to communicate the same message via visual storytelling. Every word and picture is generated using the Critical and Creative Thinking plus life experience model described.

I would be remiss if I did not include that this process, while it appears well-organized in the model and paragraphs above, was not always a conscious decision. Throughout this process, I was gathering information and formulated opinions before I knew that I was applying methods of critical and creative thinking. For example, I might read a complicated line of text about mindfulness and look up a word in the dictionary that I did not understand, and then I would synthesize and process that information by drawing an image. Only towards the end of the phases of research and engagement was I able to look at the process of creating a coloring book as a holistic reflection of the concepts learned in the Critical and Creative Thinking program.
8. Conclusion – putting it all together

Critical and Creative Thinking and if I have come to believe any differently about special
talent creatives.

At the very beginning of this paper, a mental health crisis facing young adults was
established. The cause of this current mental health crisis has to do with emerging from a global
pandemic, in combination with an ever-changing digitally focused environment, where young
people are inescapably exposed to ongoing environmental stressors through their digital
exposure to tv, phones, email, social media, etc. While there are pharmaceutical and non-
pharmaceutical options available, access to those treatments can be hard to navigate and is often
not equitably distributed. With that scenario established, the reader was invited to imagine an
alternative intervention to provide relief of anxiety and panic symptoms, related to some of the
most commonly reported mental health disorders.

There is a practice called Mindfulness and within that practice an even more specific area
of mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), that can help a person to manage anxiety and
panic-related symptoms, in addition to a myriad of other benefits. As an easily distributed tool
that takes advantage of popular trends, a coloring workbook book is an ideal and accessible
medium to introduce MBSR tools and techniques to the population experiencing a mental health
crisis, specifically anxiety and panic-related disorders.

The process of synthesizing information from complex text, high-level multimedia
content, and Ph.D. level authors, to easily understood short sentences and instructional
illustrations in some ways complements the Critical and Creative thinking process model.
Through a circular process that incorporates the concepts of Critical Thinking, Creative
Thinking, Dialogue, Metacognition, Action Research, Research and Engagement, and Reflective
DESIGNING A COLORING BOOK AS A TOOL TO INTRODUCE MBSR

Practice, I was exposed to a plethora of high-level ideas and concepts, and by thinking about the information, putting it into practice, reflecting on that practice, consulting with others, sharing designs, came to the idea of utilizing my skills and life experience, could create an output that would be useful to other people. On a macro level, the synthesis of the CCT program and this Critical and Creative Thinking process is a coloring book to introduce MBSR to young adults experiencing symptoms of anxiety and panic disorders. On a micro level, each page of the coloring book also represents the Critical and Creative Thinking process as well. Each sentence has blossomed from the roots of higher-level education, the experience of taking in knowledge from a plethora of sources and expanding thoughts on the topic, and is then, through a process of critical and convergent thinking, boiled down to its core meaning and communicated in short text and illustrations, that can be understood at a much more general level of education and life experience, meeting the target audience of young adults.

The intended future outcome is for this coloring workbook to be distributed to help young adults manage stress, anxiety, and panic symptoms. The workbook will be successful if it is:

- able to be produced and distributed to the population most in need,
- and the resulting feedback indicates the exercises within have introduced mindfulness as a concept,
- and the MBSR exercises have helped in reducing anxiety and panic-related symptoms.

It is worth mentioning that the greatest barrier to the effectiveness of this workbook is the lack of face-to-face interaction. In designing the workbook with clear and accurate written instructions, as well as pictorial images, readers will be best set up for independent self-guided learning. The workbook should be tested with a variety of users from diverse backgrounds and walks of life, to ensure the optimal experience, and finally, the most ideal scenario would be for
DESIGNING A COLORING BOOK AS A TOOL TO INTRODUCE MBSR

this workbook to be introduced with some guidance by a counselor, mindfulness guide, or other established counseling professional.

Ultimately, the development of a Coloring Book as a tool to introduce Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction opens up several new avenues for classroom instruction, behavioral service providers, and opportunities for artists to contribute. I can envision that a tool like this could be developed for different age groups and used as supplemental material in classrooms and counselors’ offices, in addition to high-stress environments like hospital or crisis center waiting rooms. Creative arts professionals could contribute to the illustrated content, and the books if done in series, could feature creatives from vast cultures and walks of life.
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DESIGNING A COLORING BOOK AS A TOOL TO INTRODUCE MBSR

APPENDIX A: Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction Coloring Book Prototype

An Introduction to Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) Coloring Book

By: Billie Charles

2023 Prototype

Introduction

The practice of mindfulness has changed my life and helped me to manage symptoms of anxiety and panic that I have been experiencing for more than 20 years. I was introduced to the UMass Memorial Health Center for Mindfulness' 8-week, mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) program, which was brought to my workplace as a pilot initiative launched by Human Resources to help employees manage stress, in 2016. With that foundation, I have spent more than 8 years incorporating the concepts learned from that program into my personal and professional life, and I am passionate about making mindfulness accessible to those who have not encountered this tool yet.

Mindfulness is not a new concept or a quick fix to serious mental health issues, but it is a tool that can help someone experiencing symptoms of anxiety and panic manage their experience from moment to moment with more ease.

If you are reading this book, chances are, you are still breathing, and that means you still living. Take that in. I’m going to give you the quick secret to managing anxiety with your own mind and body. Spoiler alert: Breathing is the key to everything. On the following pages, I will introduce you to the concept of mindfulness and provide some mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR)-guided coloring exercises. I intend to leave you with tools that you can utilize to help manage symptoms related to the experiences of stress, anxiety, and panic. Through these illustrations, mindfulness quotations, and breathing exercises, I hope to provide an interesting, thought-provoking, and most importantly, relaxing experience that you can build upon with continued practice.

The recommendations made in this book are not meant to replace formal medical or psychiatric treatment.

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3. Non-Judgement 8
4. Stress Reduction 10
5. The Breath 12
6. Stress Reduction Exercises 14
7. A New Way of Thinking 22
8. Free Online Resources 23
1. What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is being in the present moment with no judgment. Observing what is around you instead of paying attention to the thoughts in your head and attaching feelings to them.

Simply put, mindfulness is moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness.

- Jon Kabat-Zinn
Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness

2. Present Moment

What is the present moment and how do you get there? Take a moment to look up for a second and tune in to your surroundings. What colors do you see, scents do you smell, sounds do you hear, textures do you feel? You might notice your breathing. Inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale again.

Bring your attention back to the words on this page and see the text. That is being in the present moment, not distracted by ruminations on the past or worries about the future, but centered in the here and now.

Mindfulness is the energy that helps us recognize the conditions of happiness that are already present in our lives. You don’t have to wait ten years to experience this happiness. It is present in every moment of your daily life. There are those of us who are alive but don’t know it. But when you breathe in, and you are aware of your in-breath, you touch the miracle of being alive. That is why mindfulness is a source of happiness and joy.

- Thich Nhat Hanh on The Practice of Mindfulness
Lions Roar, 2003, Jan 15
3. Nonjudgment

Nonjudgment is the practice of letting go of judgments that arise in your mind with your experiences. Pretty, ugly, smart, social, quiet, shy, thin, thick, late, early, fast, slow, pretty, old, young, smart, popular. Opinions about all sorts of things pop into our minds like unwanted guests, throughout each day. Setting down the judging mind, even for a short while, can be relaxing and freeing.

In practicing non-judgment, there’s no longer anything to be done about the present moment. No grasping for more, no resisting what’s there, and no ignoring life’s present moment experience.

In order to let go of our judgments, we need to first be aware of what they are. Once we identify our judgments, we can actively let them go, perhaps by imagining them floating away like clouds. When we learn to stop judging our experiences, we can just be.

We are truly present in the moment and can enjoy it more.

- Theresa Davis, M.A., Ph.D., The Berkeley Well-Being Institute

4. Stress Reduction

Many people will experience heightened levels of stress at certain points in their lives. With increasing responsibility, new living situations, constant change, and the overwhelming presence of digital and social media, feelings of instability can lead to stress, anxiety, and even panic.

Practicing mindfulness may help to anchor you in the present, where you can observe your thoughts and feelings without chasing them and without assigning judgment or attaching emotions to them. In this way, mindfulness is a tool that has been shown to reduce stress, manage symptoms of anxiety, and allow people to live in the present moment with more ease.

Researchers reviewed more than 200 studies of mindfulness among healthy people and found mindfulness-based therapy was especially effective for reducing stress, anxiety and depression.

Mindfulness can also help treat people with specific problems including depression, pain, smoking and addiction.

- American Psychological Association (2019, October 30)

Mindfulness meditation. A research-proven way to reduce stress.
5. The Breath

The Breath is everything. If we are not breathing, we are not living. When experiencing feelings of anxiety, it is common to find you are holding your breath or taking shallow breaths. The physical impacts of holding or restricting your breath can symptoms of anxiety and panic, whereas controlling your breath through various exercises can have a calming, anxiety-reducing effect.

Deep breathing increases the supply of oxygen to your brain and stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, which promotes a state of calmness. Breathing techniques help you feel connected to your body—it brings your awareness away from the worries in your head and quiet your mind.

- The American Institute of Stress. (2013, August 10). Take a Deep Breath

6. Stress Reduction Exercises

I invite you to try practice some of the breathing exercises in the following section. If you are able to, read the written instructions first, and then follow the steps as you color the illustrations. If you practice these breathing exercises regularly, you will have a resource to call upon whenever you are experiencing heightened levels of stress.

These methods are not quick fixes to mental health issues, but they can be effective tools to help manage and reduce symptoms of stress, anxiety, and panic.

Breath is the bridge which connects life to consciousness, which unites your body to your thoughts. Whenever your mind becomes scattered, use your breath as the means to take hold of your mind again.

- Thich Nhat Hanh

The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation
6. Stress Reduction Exercises

4-2-6 Breathing
4-2-6 breathing is something you can consider a “rescue” breathing method that can be in times of stress to quickly increase the supply of oxygen to the blood and bring about feelings of relaxation. This can also be practiced when you are more relaxed, so the exercise can be recalled at will.

1. Inhale deeply and slowly count to 4, expanding your belly as you do so
2. Hold that breath for a count of 2
3. Slowly exhale though your mouth for a count of 6

Repeat steps 1-3 for 3 to 5 minutes.

Box Breathing
Box breathing is sometimes also referred to as square breathing. It is an exercise that can help you slow down and gain control of your breathing. It works by distracting your mind as you count to four, calming your nervous system, and decreasing stress in your body.

1. Inhale steadily to a count of 4
2. Hold that breath for a count of 4
3. Exhale steadily to a count of 4
4. Hold that breath for a count of 4

Repeat steps 1-4 for 3-5 minutes.
6. Stress Reduction Exercises

Mindful Breathing

Mindfulness meditation involves focusing on your breathing and bringing your attention to the present without allowing your mind to drift to the past or future. Engaging in mindfulness breathing exercises serves the same purpose, which can help ease your anxiety.

One mindfulness breathing exercise to try involves choosing a calming focus, including a sound (“om”), positive word (“peace”), or phrase (“breathe in calm, breathe out tension”) to repeat silently as you inhale or exhale.

Let go and relax. If you notice that your mind has drifted, take a deep breath and gently return your attention to the present.

7. A New Way of Thinking

The introduction to mindfulness and sample exercises in this coloring book prototype offer a sampling of what is contained in formal Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program.

I hope this book has planted a seed that practicing mindfulness can lead to a new way of thinking that puts the power of managing symptoms of stress, anxiety, and panic into your own capacity. Please find resources on the following page to help you continue to explore mindfulness.

Please send feedback on your experience with this coloring book to the following email address: billiecharles@gmail.com

"Mindfulness increases the awareness of the Nature of the Mind. If we learn to control our mind and listen to our Soul, we can consciously choose to be joyful instead of sad, peaceful and loving, alert and relaxed."
- Nalako Panachee, Mindful Being

8. Free Online Resources

American Mindfulness Research Association: The American Mindfulness Research Association was founded in 2013 and is a website that brings together the latest research in mindfulness. http://www.americanmindfulness.org

East Coast Mindfulness: Online mindfulness programs for living authentic, healthy, happy lives. https://www.eastcoastmindfulness.com

Free Mindfulness: A website which gathers resources from a community of mindfulness practitioners. There is a "free resources" section with mindfulness practices to download. http://www.femindfulness.org

Greater Good Magazine Science-Based Insights for Meaningful Life: Greater Good magazine turns scientific research into stories, tips, and tools for a happier life and a more compassionate society. Within their library, there is a wealth of information and articles on the topic of mindfulness. https://www.greatergood.berkeley.edu

Mindful Communications: Mindful Communications is dedicated to sharing the gifts of mindfulness through content, training, courses, and resources—helping people enjoy better health, foster more caring relationships, and cultivate a more compassionate society. https://www.mindful.org

Pocket Mindfulness: Pocket Mindfulness is a website to help others learn about, understand and apply mindfulness in everyday life. http://www.pocketmindfulness.com

UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center (MARC): The mission of the Mindful Awareness Research Center (MARC) is to foster awareness across the lifespan through education and research to promote well-being and a more compassionate society. http://www.uclahealth.org/programs/marc