Spring 2018

Happy

Dontay Farley

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This thesis is an exploration of graphic design and how it can be used as a tool to create awareness about mental illness and positive solutions to decrease its affect on individuals. Using the “simple things” in life as metaphors, this thesis attempts to use graphic design as a way to help decrease depression. Drawing on the emergent strands of enquiry associated with mental illness, this thesis will investigate how design and its basic principles can be used to create positive experiences for the complex issue of mental illness.

This thesis will also review the body of critical and historical design thinking, approaches and solutions of graphic design for social awareness, evaluating it for both its advancements and limitations. This evaluation will provide valuable insight to identify design trends when designing for social awareness.

I understand that graphic design alone can not cure mental illness or rid the world of depression, but it can be used as a tool to create awareness. This thesis uses graphic design as an initiative to bring awareness and reinforce positivity. Instead of designing to show the problem and the statistics associated with mental illness, my work focuses on as a support system to reduce mental anxiety and depression by using care, support, such as support, encouragement,
patience and positive human interaction. In my thesis project I have used small, simple things in life as metaphors to communicate that there are people who care about you and want to help and support you.

INDEX WORDS: Graphic design, Mental illness, Design, Activism, Health, Wellness
HAPPY

by

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B.A., Fort Valley State University, 2007

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Georgia Southern University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF FINE ART

STATESBORO, GEORGIA
HAPPY

by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family. Thank you for always supporting my goals and ambitions with your prayers, faith, love and patience.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my thesis chair, Santanu Majumdar, my thesis committee Edward Rushton and Onyile Onyile. Thank you for pushing me to be better each and every day. Their guidance has helped me become a successful student and professional.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Can art and design be used as tools for social awareness? As a graphic designer, a great percentage of what we do is for commercial use. Such practice even coined the terms “Commercial Design or Commercial Art in the 1980’s. Whether it’s branding a new company, designing a layout for websites or designing a layout out for print purposes, a graphic designer’s service can never seem to escape the marketing needs of consumerist driven American society.

This thesis will focus on how design is used as a tool to aid in decreasing depression and human isolation. As a graphic designer, I’m experimenting on how design and color can influence positive human interaction which benefits people dealing with mental illness and depression. Using graphic design, this study shows how support and other positive interactions individuals isolated by depression can achieve mental wellness and began building meaningful relationships.

The need for design to have a purpose other than its traditional function created possibilities in the area of activism, protest and awareness. Using design as a vehicle to create social awareness about various social issues allows graphic designers and their work to be a voice for change. Art and design as activism complements Harvard University’s Assistant Dean, Cesar Cruz’s quote, “Art should comfort the disturbed and disturb the comfortable”. This quote in a “design for social awareness” sense is very powerful. It demands that design be powerful and challenge the audience to think, view or interact about an idea differently. This idea of disturbing the comfortable generates an emotional response or thought, which in most cases creates a memorable experience visually.
Design activism according to Parsons the New School for Design’s Associate Professor Dr. Otto von Busch is, an inherent part of design, as it may expose the political nature of design and challenges the designated paths. Taking action may be an act of self-defense, confronting a status quo or dominant protocol of action. It may suggest new possibilities, often from a position of autonomy or self-definition.\(^6\)

As a relative, friend and associate to many individuals who battle mental illness daily, I often felt powerless in being able to help. That same powerless feeling that many of my loved ones faced, served as a reflection to me for not having an adequate support system to use or to recommended. Not knowing what to do or where to go to get help made day to day interaction difficult between loved ones and I. Graphic design serves as my voice of change and the focus of my thesis for design activism is mental illness. National Alliance of Mental Illness website defines mental illness as a condition that impacts a person's thinking, feeling or mood and may affect his or her ability to relate to others and function on a daily basis. Each person will have different experiences, even people with the same diagnosis.\(^2\) The focus of my thesis is mental illness and how depression leads to human isolation.
CHAPTER 2
RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

The primary goal of this chapter is to address mental illness by the numbers showing who and how many individuals are affected by mental illness. This research will give design a better insight the most effective design approach as it relates to those directly and indirectly affected by mental illness.

Although this study is strictly visual analysis, it is important to understand the amount of individuals being affected by mental illness. Mental illness is a condition that affects about half the families living in America today. According to the National Alliance of Mental Illness website, nami.org, 43.5 million adults experience a mental illness every year. Mental illness also affects 1 in 5 children between the ages of 13 -18.1 Mental illness affects are all types of people from different backgrounds and different walks of life. Stigma associated with mental illness and fear of losing jobs, friends, and other meaningful relationships make it difficult for others suffering with mental illness to come forward and seek help. That fear, in some instances cause individuals to isolate themselves therefore increasing detrimental effects to one’s mental and physical health. Understanding that fear, and what it forces individuals to do, allows for design to gaining a another level insight on how one thinks and reacts to anxiety or depression and how they affect the individual. Understanding what causes mental illness and what it leads to, gives design inform insight on entry point interaction for possible solutions.
Loneliness, a widespread problem for people with suffering from depression. It causes a vicious cycle for receiving proper care. Loneliness worsens as loneliness progresses and people who are affected become alienated from human interaction and normal social activities.³

Social Isolation at times can be used as a form of punishment for fear of losing friends, jobs, and meaningful relationships. One may even be in a normal social environment and feel secluded. Even though our need to connect is innate, some of us always go home alone. You could have people around you throughout the day or even be in a lifelong relationship, and still experience a deep, pervasive depression and loneliness.⁸ Unsurprisingly, isolation can have a serious detrimental effect on one’s mental and physical health. The only positive thing about depression and loneliness is that it does not cause permanent damage or mental deterioration, and even a person suffering from depression for a long period of time can make a full and complete recovery.

To aid in identifying first hand how and who mental illness affected, I have attended several NAMI meetings to further my knowledge of mental illness and the effects that loneliness has on it. I found that face to face human interaction and group activities are highly encouraged and it gives those who have mental conditions a positive support system to lean on. Valuable insight was gained from hearing the challenges and successes of others. Each group was led by NAMI-trained facilitators who've been there. I found the support groups to be very unique because they follow a structured model to ensure everyone in the group have an opportunity to be heard and to get what they need. This structure allowed for the sharing of experiences in a safe confidential setting, which in turn help individuals gain hope, support and develop relationships by encouraging empathy support and productive discussion and a sense of
community. The NAMI support group meetings help individuals see the individual first, not the illness, aim for better coping skills, finding strength in sharing experiences, accept that one cannot solve every problem, embrace humor as healthy and many other positive outlooks.
CHAPTER 3

PRODUCTION AND ANALYSIS

There were two mediums used for creating the touch points for the Happy.org initiative. Print and digital media and are the touch points that will occupy spaces where we as humans consume most of our visual information. This chapter will examine my design thinking, strategies and implementation. Design activism allows for my work to be a voice for change and awareness. I achieve this voice by mixing typography with space and everyday items we tend to overlook which allows me to create a unique form of communication. This form of communication minimizes visual content and noise while maximizing the intent of the message.

The conversation between the piece and the environment, the piece and the viewer, and the viewer and the environment is what I aim for. The following paragraphs will examine how design affects depression through the various print and design mediums

Billboards

The name billboard is derived from the term "billing board," and is a large outdoor advertising space designed to capture the attention of motorists and pedestrians. Typically placed around high traffic areas (both automotive and foot traffic), billboards are meant to be simple, striking, and creative. In fact, the creative department in any advertising agency still prizes the billboard space, as it is a golden opportunity to do groundbreaking, impactful work.

Since mental illness affects an estimated 43 millions people living in American, billboards are one of the most effective mediums to use because they provide an effective tool to
strategically attract larger audiences. Billboards are part of the OOH marketing mix, which stands for Out Of Home. OOH marketing is extremely important to creating awareness and positive engagement to those individual who commute in high traffic areas by car or on feet being that studies have shown that mental illness in metropolitan and urban vs rural areas are significant higher.\textsuperscript{9}

Since this thesis is using graphic design to creating awareness, billboard advertising is a great option. The Happy.org billboards use one word phrases that urge the viewer to either think or do something that will have a positive affect or outlook on their life. One word phrases such as SMILE, TOGETHER, GRATITUDE AND PATIENCE accompanied by a bluish and green gradient filling the empty space in the background gives the viewer the opportunity to digest the message quickly and ponder thought that is influenced by the applied intentional empty space.

A great example of how space and one word designs can be used to influence thought is the Obama “Forward” reelection campaign. The Forward campaign induced ideas that Americans should vote in the reelection of President Obama and move forward with the support of the ideology of hope and change that helped Barack Obama get elected as the first African-American president in United States History. The word “forward” accompanied by the iconic “O” logo designed by Sol Sender, substituted for the “o” in forward also provided a flag waving propaganda technique as a psychological link to the American sunrise or a metaphorical new day in politics.

Although America is a democracy and not under the leadership of a dictator, the campaign still employed a dictator’s propaganda technique. The designer does this by not giving
the audience an alternative choice but instead telling the audience exactly what to do by simply saying FORWARD. The bright white, all caps message “FORWARD” serves as a commanding statement to do exactly what it is saying. The white color of the message contrasting against the black background is used as a psychological metaphor for letting the light lead you forward out of the darkness. The Forward campaign and Happy.org billboards share similar design thinking and strategies by getting the audience to think differently about an idea and moving progressively towards that idea. They both usher a since of action in thought to manifest in reality.

Figure 1

The idea of using space to a designer’s advantage was echoed by American composer Frank Zappa when he was quoted saying “There’s got be enough space in there.”11 You have to leave room for the sounds to be distinguished from each other, to be heard for what they are. A
few notes played together form a chord. All notes played together form noise. To create rhythm and melody requires a measured and planned space. Music isn’t sound. It’s a balance between sound and space. Without both there is no music.

Although Zappa was the speaking in a musical sense, the same holds true visually. There’s got to be enough space. Without proper spacing none of your elements will get seen. They become noise.¹¹ The empty space used in the billboard in figure 1 also allow for the message to fall in place and gives the viewer a place for their eyes to rest. Which it needs to do in order absorb the message that is being communicated. It makes the billboard easier to navigate visually and legible not causing an unwanted distraction which in turn makes traffic safer.

I felt the spacing in “Forward” campaign was very important in the successful of the campaign in the sense that it provided calmness to the American audience and a feeling of reassurance which ultimately help the president get reelected. The idea of “Forward” simplified what was then a very complex political landscape. Space is used in the billboards to convey quality, a connection with spirituality, openness and calmness, all things used in therapy that are beneficial in aiding those who suffer from depression. (Figures 2 – 4)
Happy.org Patience billboard mockup.
Figure 3

Happy.org Smile billboard mockup.
Figure 4

Happy.org wall mockup.
Metaphors for Mental Illness

Using metaphors to bring awareness to social issues has always provided and creative tool and outlook on how design thinkers chose to strategically solve design problems. An example of metaphors being used in design can be seen in the US anti narcotic campaign, “This is Your Brain on Drugs”. “This is Your Brain on Drugs” was a US anti-narcotics campaign by Partnership for a Drug-Free America (PDFA) launched in 1987, that used three televised public service announcements and a related poster campaign. The 30-second version of the first PSA, from 1987, shows a man (played by John Roselius) in a starkly furnished apartment who asks if there is anyone out there who still doesn't understand the dangers of drug abuse. He holds up an egg and says, "This is your brain," before motioning to a frying pan and adding, "This is drugs." He then cracks open the egg, fries the contents, and says, "This is your brain on drugs." Finally, he looks up at the camera and asks, "Any questions?"

Although the “Any questions?” question posed at the end of the spot was rhetorical, the metaphor of frying pan and fried egg was undeniable. The ad didn’t show a single drug but used an idea other as a vessel that drugs are dangerous to connect that awareness and ultimately urge the youth 30 years ago to not use drugs.

The use of scale in the posters associated with the campaign made the focal point of the idea seem larger than life or more serious than usual. The hyper scaled image of the frying egg serves as a constant reminder of how dangerous the use of drugs can be to one’s brain. The scale of the image was also used to show the metaphorically dominance, superiority, authority, strength and power the United States Government perceived drugs to have on individuals. The
fact that there was no opposing image or idea to confront the frying pan and egg showed that this was a serious focal point on the governments of agenda.

Figure 5

![This is your brain on drugs campaign.](image)

Although the “This is your Brain on Drugs campaign” was jolting campaign, it’s failure to identify which drugs and target audience it was actually targeting made it difficult to understand. The oversimplified persuasive design approach created a generalization/stereotype that this is what will happen to anyone’s brain if they use any drug. This persuasive approach although strong was very misleading and it was used to associate fear or negative feelings with the idea of drug use even though there are drugs used for medical purposes that actually help individuals get better.

The contrasting colors of black and yellow in the “This is your Brain on Drugs campaign, I feel were as metaphorically contrasted as the idea itself of a brain on drugs and a frying pan and egg. The black of the frying pan served as a dark background which was symbolic of illegal drug use in the 80’s in poverty stricken communities. The yellow from the campaign connected the yellow of the egg yolk with ideas of caution. The caution of the yellow and the black ground made a very convincing connection between the two ideas.
According to Judy Belmont, psychotherapist and creator of Belmontwellness.com, metaphors can be used for healing agents of change in working with those who battle depression and other mental illnesses. Metaphors create tangible images which in turn can invoke emotions. They can help those suffering release old ways of thinking with a refreshing way to look at things. Metaphors help reveal things in a new light, and lower your defenses when one would normally uphold some rigidity in the way they view things. Metaphors enhance design in many ways. They give the audience a picture in mind of what’s is being discussed. The design is trying to get the audience to see how dangerous drug use is by showing what happens to an egg once it touches at hot frying pan. The comparison of drug use and a fried egg helps the reader see just how dangerous drugs are.

To create a sense of reassurance and support in my design solution, I created 3 large scale 24 x 36 posters and a Public Service Announcement (PSA) humor video using images of everyday items that are used but tend to go unnoticed. Using these items as metaphors in this way allows for the viewer to connect with the solution more so than focusing on the problem. I chose to make the everyday used objects oversized to emphasize the importance of the simple things in life and to encourage a new perspective.

The proportion is used in the poster designs are by design. This balance proportion was use to influence calmness and content or the general idea that things are and/or will be okay. Rather than challenging the emotions, the proportion used ushers a relaxing sense of completeness that adds harmony and symmetry among the parts as a whole.
A study published in the Health Information and Libraries Journal found that poster presentations are some of the most commonly used formats for communicating information in academic and public health fields. Further to the point, the report identified that these tools have the ability to increase knowledge, change attitudes and alter behaviors.

Additionally, posters provide a very clear overview of a topic or idea, ensuring that the designer only conveys information when absolutely necessary. The study in the Health Information and Libraries Journal discovered that this promotes learning, as the small but pertinent amount of visual content and information on posters inspires the audience to participate and ask questions. A discussion can quickly form and information will spread at a faster rate than otherwise passive forms of presenting, such as those that lack visual aid and have too much textual information.

The objects used for the posters are objects that people already have at home, use at work or are familiar with in one sense or another. These items are used to remind viewers of the metaphorical lessons to stay positive in their everyday life. They serve as tangible, visual reminders of positivity. This induces a new positive outlook at the world. (Figures 6 - 8)
Happy.org Together Earring poster.
Figure 7

Happy.org Together Sock poster.
Figure 8

Happy Together PSA video.
Happy.org and App

Happy.org is a hypothetical semi social website and application that helps individuals track their emotional states and how they change over time for personal insight and accurate reporting to a mental health professional. The semi social aspect of the app focuses on support groups and how they are vital to maintaining mental stability in time of need.

The user along with their trusted identified support group will all create secured profile accompanied by their health professional. The app works in conjunction with Bitmoji which creates personalized avatars that will provide some level of visual privacy and conceal a certain level of the individual’s identity.

Persons who suffer from depression will update or log their mood profile throughout the day using bitmojis and its facial expression. The mood profile can then be sent out to their support group. Once the support group receives the mood profile, they can in turn send messages back to the individual with hopes of getting that individual back to a more desired mood or state of mind. (Figure 9 - 10) Individuals can also send out their location in case they are in a more serious need of care.

Website are effective tools in social awareness. A website itself can be used to accomplish many different design strategies to help an idea or product grow. As a graphic designer, you need to know where your audience is. But what if the audience knows your business and what you can offer, but they can’t reach you? That is one of the design challenges a designer for social awareness face by not having a website for to house your message and content. The main benefit of having a website and social app is accessibility. Accessible around
the clock gives the audience access to the support and information they need 24/7/365. This is important because the audience needs 24-hour access as one may not when anxiety or depression are triggered.

Figure 9
Figure 10

Mental illness is a condition that affects about half the families living in America today. According to NAMI, 43.8 million adults experience mental illness every year. Mental illness also affects 3 in 5 children between the ages of 3-17. There are all types of people from different backgrounds and different levels in life, essays associated with mental illness and fear of losing jobs, friends, and many other meaningful relationships make it difficult for many others suffering with mental illness to come forward and seek help. That fear, in some instances cause individuals to isolate themselves, therefore increasing their mental efforts to work mental and physical health.

The Happy app is a hypothetical semi social application that helps individuals track their emotions and states and how they change over time for personal insight and accurate reporting to a mental health professional. This semi-automated aspect of the app focuses on support groups and how they are vital in maintaining mental stability in time of need.

BILLBOARDS
The Billboards like we Billboards are designed urge the viewer to either think or do something that will have a positive effect or outlook on their life. One word phrases such as SMILE, TOGETHER, GRATITUDE, AND PATIENCE.
Color

Color choice we very pertinent when designing for mental illness. Color itself carries emotional resonance within it. When we see a color, we have an emotional response towards that color. Black can be seen as sad, or death. While white can be seen as pure and clean. We naturally associate colors with emotions because it is hard to put words to what we are feeling.

Colors connect to our feelings in a unique and memorable way, which makes them a powerful marketing tool to keep in mind in design. Color in design needs to be purposeful and have meaning in their use. Color is important for discerning what message you want to share about your upcoming event, business, or product and make sure your color choices reflect that. It’s also important to keep in mind the print medium and size and how it will be perceived by the passing audience and what can draw their attention. Particularly, in large format print projects, color matters because that is what will draw the eye and be the first line of communication.

One of the best writers on psychology aspect of color is Kurt Goldstein. Goldstein writes, “Each color has a special importance and all colors together help guarantee normal life.” Goldstein writes of a woman with a cerebellar disease who had a tendency to fall unexpectedly and to walk in an unsteady gait. When she wore a red dress such symptoms were more pronounced. Green and blue clothing had the opposite effect and restored her equilibrium almost to normal. Faber Birren, author of Color Psychology and Color Therapy writes, “The equilibrium of the human organism is disturbed far more by red than it is by green.”

The *Happy* campaign uses greens and blues according to the objective impressions of the modern American color associations, variations of greens and blues are used to communicate unity and nature; both of which are essential to the success of moving from depression to mental stability. Green is used objectively to represent a quieting, refreshing, peaceful, nascent mind state. Blue is used objectively as subduing, melancholy, contemplative and sobering to the mind state. The idea of new opportunities or new beginnings are implied by the use of space in my design. Empty space and the lack of decorative elements also allow the viewer to focus solely on the message. Figure 11
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Color</th>
<th>General Appearance</th>
<th>Mental Associations</th>
<th>Direct Associations</th>
<th>Objective Impressions</th>
<th>Subjective Impressions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Red</td>
<td>Brilliant, intense, opaque, dry</td>
<td>Hot, Fire, Heat Blood</td>
<td>Danger, Christmas, Fourth of July, Mothers day, Flag</td>
<td>Passionate, exciting, fervid, active</td>
<td>Intensity, rage, capacity, fierceness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange</td>
<td>Bright, Luminous, glowing</td>
<td>Warm, metallic, autumnal</td>
<td>Halloween, Thanksgiving</td>
<td>Jovial, lively, energetic, forceful</td>
<td>Hilarity, exuberance, satiety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yellow</td>
<td>Sunny, Incandescent, radiant</td>
<td>Sunlight</td>
<td>Caution</td>
<td>Cheerful, inspiring, vital, celestial</td>
<td>High spirit, health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Green</td>
<td>Clear, Mist</td>
<td>Cool, Nature, Water</td>
<td>Clear, St. Patrick's day</td>
<td>Quieting, refreshing, peaceful, nascent</td>
<td>Ghostliness, disease, terror, guilt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue</td>
<td>Transparent, wet</td>
<td>Cold, sky, water, ice</td>
<td>Service, flag</td>
<td>Subduing, Melancholy, contemplative, sober</td>
<td>Gloom, fearfulness, furtiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purple</td>
<td>Deep, Soft, Atmospheric</td>
<td>Cool, mist, darkness, shadow</td>
<td>Mourning, Easter</td>
<td>Dignified, pompous, mournful, mystic</td>
<td>Loneliness, desperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>Spatial - Light</td>
<td>Cool, Snow</td>
<td>Cleanliness, Mother's Day</td>
<td>Pure, clean, frank, youthful</td>
<td>Brightness of spirit, normality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Spatial - Darkness</td>
<td>Neutral, night, emptiness</td>
<td>Mourning</td>
<td>Funereal, Ominous, deadly, depressing</td>
<td>Negation of spirit, death</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The outcomes of a designer that designs for positivity should be to offer opportunities to improve wellbeing and mental balance; stimulate and encourage to engage in meaningful activities and relationships that aid in human flourishing; This thesis shows how graphic design affects the overall human experience and involves both positive and negative emotions because an understanding in both is equally important for improving conditions for a person who may be dealing with a mental illness. And finally, designing for social change and awareness should have short and long term impact on its target audience.

More and more designers have been influenced and inspired by an increasing interest in the relationship between design and human well-being. Contributing to something/someone bigger than the self helps promote and stimulate a sense of purpose, which enhances someone’s mental well-being. This I feel is very important because it engage both the designer and the audience in a way that is beneficial to both parties.

Now the question remains: how can we design for positivity or happiness when there is no predetermined goal for what happiness is, when it is achieved of a group, and what achieves it. The challenge becomes designing for an idea that is normally individualized by one’s personal experience. In other words, what makes me happy may drive you crazy or we all have our own version of what happiness is. As designers, it’s our duty to find that balance in society that can communicate to the audience a message that is clear, concise and beneficial.

In conclusion this thesis is based on simplistic design for human flourishing. People who flourish are those who live to their fullest potential. They are functioning optimally, developing
as individuals and acting in the best interests of society. As designers it is our duty to help initiate and usher the ideas that promote human flourishing and well-being whether it’s designing the next hearing aid for the deaf community, designing the next clean water filtration system for a third world country, or a simple poster design that makes someone smile. Positive design will always enhance life, promote positive experiences, initiate positive human interaction. Positive design should create short and long term benefits, it should be responsible, honorable and have purpose and intention. Positive design is powerful.
REFERENCES


