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Mental Illness Campaigns

By

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Abstract

The target population of the research is people with mental diseases. It aims to study the symptoms of their illnesses and to understand the pain they encounter from the perspective of these patients. Based on that, this research combines with strong visual design and creative layout, presents art posters with impact and influence. The purpose of the research is to give mental patients recognition, encouragement and care to a certain extent through the art form of posters. This series consists of five posters, each poster describes the five most common mental illnesses in the United States, which are anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder, depression, and schizophrenia. This series of posters was exhibited at Imagine RIT in 2019, and was supported and affirmed by many academic groups and social personnel who came to visit. The same series of videos were also exhibited along with the poster. The video provided explanations for the poster while attracting more audiences. In this exhibition, a local psychological counseling agency issued invitations for cooperation, hoping to present the posters out of their respective clinics to help more patients. Moreover, many visitors also expressed their appreciation after understanding the concept behind the posters, and intuitively shared their experiences and feelings when fighting against mental illness.
Keywords: Mental Health, Mental Illness, Anxiety Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, Bipolar Disorder, Depression, Schizophrenia
Introduction

With the rapid development of modern society, the pace of life has accelerated, and competition has become fiercer, the individuals are in a more intense emotional state. Therefore, mental health issues have become one of the most important concerns of modern people. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), one in 5 Americans (43.8 million) experiences mental illness, and Nearly 1 in 25 (10 million) adults in America live with a serious mental illness that substantially interferes with or limits one's access to health care. The barrier of shame, fear and silence prevent far too many people from seeking help. Although there have been many posters about mental diseases in society which also aim to make people pay more attention to these patients, however, it is extremely difficult for people without mental problems to empathize due to the abstractness, complexity and similarity of symptoms of mental diseases. It is difficult for them to understand the emotions and complaints from the patient's point of view, and to give the patient a strong sense of mental support, instead, they can only try to understand and feel it on rare occasions. Therefore, the study is based on the perspective of patients with mental illness and uses various design elements to visually recreate the typical symptoms of mental illness to resonate with more patients and provide them with emotional and spiritual comfort.
Context

Background

Mainstream psychology posters in society are designed to hope that ordinary people will understand, accept, and care for people with mental illness. But because of the abstract nature of mental illness symptoms, it is difficult for ordinary people, through their ability to empathize, to truly understand the suffering of people with mental illness. So the series of posters address the problem of providing emotional and psychological comfort by allowing people with mental illness to empathize with the symptoms of mental illness presented in the posters and to feel that they understand their state of mind and condition. The poster's slogan is, "You are not the only person who is defined by mental illness."

Interviews

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the patient's psychological state and the pain these mental illnesses cause, I interviewed two patients one-on-one.

The first patient I interviewed is Joy M.. She said that during a conversation with a friend, she tried to talk about her depression and anxiety with her friend, who offered comfort and support and shared her history of depression after hearing her share her "secret" that she was hiding in her heart. They were able to feel
a sense of belonging to each other while at the same time experiencing pain. In the name of protecting them, their families advised not to let outsiders know about their illnesses to avoid being ostracized or looked at differently. But during that conversation, they realized how important it was to have someone they could feel comfortable talking to and how positive it was for their psychological well-being. So they all decided to stop hiding their state of mind, stop feeling embarrassed about their mental illness, be brave enough to face their symptoms, and be optimistic sufficient to talk to others or seek help.

The second one I interviewed is K.C, who is from San Francisco. The first time she knew she had OCD when she was 12 years old. She told her parents, but they only said to her that "You are just a child. You are overthinking." From then on, She lived with and struggled with OCD. And then the illness develops into Depression, Anxiety. The three mental diseases have been eating me up. She tried many ways to solve herself, such as seeing a doctor every week, take medicine, reading many psychology books, but it doesn't help. She tried to talk to someone close to her, but they also can't understand my feelings. Most of the time, She feels she is the only person defined by mental illness. "I am lonely, guilty of living in the world," she said.
Through these two interviews, it was found that while patients with mental illnesses receive medical treatment and psychological intervention, they also need the sense of belonging-emotional comfort, and spiritual solace that they get from “others like them”. Research shows that improvement of an individual’s sense of belonging may be an important aspect of treatment for depression and hopeless thoughts.

**Methods**

**Design Goals**

Visualizing the abstraction, complexity, and similarities between symptoms of mental illness from the perspective of people with mental illness, and visually recreating the typical symptoms of mental illness, thus resonating with more people with mental illness and giving them emotional comfort and spiritual solace from within. To let people with mental illness know that “you are not alone” or “you are not the only person defined by mental illness.”

Before starting the visualization phase of the poster design, I did a lot of research. First of all, I understand and collect information about the most common types of mental illnesses in the United States and their causes, symptoms, etc., by literature review. Secondly, I conducted one-on-one interviews with
people with mental illnesses to get a deeper understanding of the real mental activities and intuitive feelings of the patients themselves.

The ideation process is divided into the following five parts: Selection of mental illnesses types, Analysis of the symptoms of mental disorders, Visualization of typical symptoms through the selection of visual elements selection, Organization of visual elements to form a unique visual system, Creation of innovative typography based on the visual system use.

Figure 1. Ideation Process (Image by the Author)

**Ideation Process about Research**

The research mainly focused on the five most common mental illnesses in the United States: anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, bipolar disorder, depression, and schizophrenia. Anxiety disorder is the most common mental illness in the United States. It affects 40 million American adults over the age of 18, accounting for 18.1% of the annual population. OCD affects 2.2 million adults, which is 1.0% of the US
population. It is estimated that 2.6% of the US population is diagnosed with bipolar disorder and over 83% of those cases are severe. An estimated 17.3 million adults in the United States had at least one major depressive episode. More than 200,000 people in the United States suffer from schizophrenia each year.

I used the brain storming method to list typical symptoms of mental illnesses.

Anxiety disorders are characterized by an emotional experience of anxiety, which is mainly characterized by nervous worry and restlessness about unspecified objects. Secondly, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a type of anxiety disorder with two main elements: Obsession and Compulsion. Obsessive-compulsive disorder is a neurological disorder in which there is a recurrence of irrational ideas, emotions, intentions, or behaviors that are devoid of realistic meaning. The patients are unable to escape from,
despite trying to resist. Bipolar disorder is accompanied by alternating irregular episodes of depression
and mania. Depression is characterized by a marked and persistent depressed state of mind and is the
main clinical type of mood disorder. Schizophrenia is the most common type of psychiatric disorder
characterized by basic personality changes, fragmentation of thinking, feeling, and behavior, and
incompatibility of mental activity with the environment.

**Ideation Process about Visualization**

I used "experimental typography" as a stylistic feature for this set of posters. The reason why did I use it is
that "Experimental typography" is defined as an unconventional and more artistic approach to typeface
selection. Experimental typography is said to be considered an art as it emphasizes the expression of
emotion rather than focusing on legibility in communicating ideas. The use of experimental typography is
not used much in mainstream commercial posters, as it is more of an artistic expression. Therefore, due
to the abstract nature of the symptoms of mental illness, experimental typography can express emotional
ups and downs through the combination of a sense of line and a sense of frame in the sparse
presentation of text. This allows patients to better communicate emotionally and emotionally with the
poster.
For example, patients with anxiety disorders have fluctuating moods and difficulty concentrating their thoughts during episodes, so I used wavy text with the repetitive word "anxiety" to represent their state of anxiety. I did not include experimental typography for schizophrenic patients because their symptoms were hallucinations and delusions, so they did not think they were mentally ill, and so the experimental typography was not present. For bipolar patients in a manic state, I used messy lines to represent the patient's manic mood.

![Experimental Typographic Design](Image by the Author)

For the representative words presented in experimental typography, I chose words that real people with bipolar disorder would say, for example, in the manic phase, they would have, "Look, I'm a genius." and "Shut up, you're not right. In the depressive phase, they have the sadness mood of "I'm a loser. For people with depression, they more often express: "I'm not unhappy, I'm just tired".
Figure 4. Representative Words for Experimental Typographic Design (Image by the Author)

For the selection of visual elements for the main body of the poster, the first step was to present the symptoms of different mental illnesses through the models' movements and expressions. For example, in the poster for anxiety disorders, the model represents the Worry, anxiety, and fear states of anxiety sufferers; in the poster for obsessive-compulsive disorder, the model represents the Agitation and panic attack states. In the case of schizophrenia, the model's movements and expressions are typical of hallucinations and delusions. The second step is to add visual effects to the image based on the symptoms of the disease. For example, patients with anxiety disorders have difficulty controlling their emotions and states during an anxiety attack, so the images use the representation of "fragmentation" to represent a difficult state of restraint. People with bipolar disorder can switch between two extreme mental states, so the visuals use "fragmentation" to represent this. Hallucinations and delusions often
influence people with schizophrenia to form "different selves," so the visual effect of "being separated into different people" is added.

Finally, I used the color of the rectangles and the density distribution of rectangular and linear rectangular groups to reflect the characteristic states of mental disorders. For example, anxiety (presented by a red rectangle) is often present in normal everyday emotions (presented by a uniformly distributed group of linear blue rectangles). For OCD, obsessive thoughts (presented by purple rectangles) controlled for healthy thoughts (presented by linear green rectangle groups). Change between depressive phase (present by linear blue rectangle groups) and manic phase (present by linear yellow rectangle groups) in bipolar disorder. For schizophrenia, the daily state (present by uniformly distributed linear blue rectangle
groups) is affected by hallucinations and delusions (present by abstract mixed rectangle groups), but, the
patient does not know it (covered by the white board).

An Example – Creating Posters for Bipolar Disorder

Taking the poster about bipolar disorder as an example, people with bipolar disorder can have extreme
mood changes, from depressive lows to manic highs. So I first had the model show the extreme states of
depression and mania, and then added a visual effect of "dissociation" to the image to visualize the
patient switching between the two forms of mood states. For the experimental typography part, when the
patient is in the depressive phase, the depressive state tends to be a lack of interest in anything, so I
used the phrase "I'm a loser" as a proxy for the depressive mood that usually represents the patient.

When patients are in the manic phase, they are very agitated, aggressive, and have an increased rate of
association with their thoughts, so I chose words like that. "You see, what is hard for others is easy for me!"; "Look, I'm a genius. You're wrong." They are then expressed through relatively chaotic yet rhythmic lines by using form space, which forms a unique design element of the poster. Finally, vector visual elements were added to represent the patient's two emotional states. For example, the blue line represents the patient's depressed mood, with a large space between the lines and no undulated, thus representing a relatively low mood. It also contrasts with the aggressive mood indicated by the yellow line.

Figure 7. Bipolar Disorder Poster (Image by the Author)
Results

From the perspective of patients with mental illness, it combines "Experimental Typography" with images, graphics and other visual elements to create a unique creative poster design. The posters present the typical symptoms and states of different mental illnesses and resonate with people with mental illness.

Figure 8. Final Work (Image by the Author)
Evaluation

The posters attracted many people with mental illness to stop and share their stories about their struggles with mental illness. For the exhibition, a local counseling agency has extended an invitation to collaborate on a project to help more patients by displaying the posters in their clinics.

![Posters at Imagine RIT](image)

Figure 9. Exhibited at Imagine RIT in 2019 (Photo by the Author)

Conclusions

The goal I want to achieve is to make my design needed. My target audience will be able to read my posters and find comfort in them, a sense of belonging. Not only do they know that their friends and family maybe cannot fully understand them, but there are "others like them" all over the world who are quietly struggling with the same disease as they are. They are invisibly cared for and understood. The point of this poster is also to send a signal to our fast-moving society to slow down their step and notice if there
are someone around them who are suffering from mental illness, to actively ask if they need help, and
sometimes listening is an invisible but indispensable help.

In my past assignments or projects, commercial posters are usually the most common, but in this process
I learned how to use art design to transform the abstract emotions of human beings, first of all, to bring
myself into the emotional role of the patient, to think from their point of view, to investigate them, to
understand them, to know the real emotional state of their hearts, and to do extensive research to better
understand the emotional state of their hearts. Representative, unique visual elements visualize the
condition of the patient under study, and systematically investigate how these systematic visual elements
can be used to present and distinguish between different psychological disorders with similar symptoms,
and how they can be systematized in a visual system. For example, through this research, I discovered
experimental typography as a design language, so in the future, I will continue to create psychological
altitudes in the style of experimental typography, and the selection of topics will be extended not only to
mental health but also to the human mind, such as confusion, escape, and hesitation. After receiving
support and affirmation from visitors, academic groups, and several audience members with mental
illnesses during the exhibition, I was given great encouragement and confidence that my design was
needed. In my future designs, I will continue to think about how I can use my designs to help others and to see things from their perspective.

References


Authors, All, Lauren B. Fisher, and Additional InformationNotes on ContributorsLauren B. FisherLauren B. Fisher.

Appendix: Presentation and Web Documentation
PROMPT

How can people with mental illnesses get emotional comfort and spiritual consolation?
BACKGROUND

According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), one in 5 Americans (43.8 million) experiences mental illness, and nearly 1 in 25 (10 million) adults in America live with a serious mental illness that substantially interferes with or limits one or more major life activities. The barrier of shame, fear and silence prevent far too many people from seeking help.
PROBLEM

Many activities and slogans about mental health issues in society are to make people pay more attention to mental illness patients. But for the emotional and psychological issue, ordinary people can only do feel it as much as possible with enough attention and care. Still, no one can feel the same as people with mental illnesses.
Joy M., 42

I DON'T WANT MY ILLNESS TO BE A SECRET. "When I first began to experience depression and anxiety, I felt so alone. I remember telling a friend, and she whispered to me that she had depression too, but not to tell anyone because her husband would be mortified other people knew. It made me feel even worse, and I vowed that day to be as open as possible about my depression and anxiety so those around me would never feel so isolated. We don't have to—and we don't want to—quietly suffer alone."

K.C., 28

The first time I know I had OCD when I was 12 years old. I told my parents, but they only tell me that "You are just a child, you are thinking too much." From then on, I live with and struggle with OCD. And then the illness develops to Depression, Anxiety. The three mental diseases have been eating me up. I tried many ways to solve myself, such as seeing a doctor every week, take medicine, read many psychology books, but it doesn't help. I tried to talk to someone close to me, but they also can't understand my feeling. Most of the time, I feel I'm the only person defined by mental illness. I am lonely, guilty of living in the world.
SOLUTION

From the perspective of patients with mental illness, it combines "Experimental Typography" with images, graphics and other visual elements to create a unique creative poster design. The posters present the typical symptoms and states of different mental illnesses and resonate with people with mental illness.
OBJECTIVE

Visualizing the abstraction, complexity, and similarities between symptoms of mental illness from the perspective of people with mental illness, and visually recreating the typical symptoms of mental illness, thus resonating with more people with mental illness and giving them emotional comfort and spiritual solace from within. To let people with mental illness know that "you are not alone" or "you are not the only one defined by mental illness."
“You’re not the only one defined by mental illness.”
IDEATION PROCESS

IDEATION PROCESS: from Research to Visualization

1. Selection of mental illnesses types
2. Analysis of the symptoms of mental disorders
3. Visualization of typical symptoms through selection of visual elements selection
4. Organization of visual elements to form a unique visual system
5. Creation of innovative typography based on the visual system use
1 Selection of mental illnesses types

I choose the 4 most common mental illnesses: Anxiety disorder, Depression, Bipolar disorder, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD), Schizophrenia.

Anxiety disorders are the most common mental health condition in the US and can include OCD, panic attacks and phobias. It is estimated that 40 million adults, 18.1% of adults in the U.S. have an anxiety disorder.

OCD affects 2.2 million adults or 1.0% of the U.S. population.

322 million people worldwide live with depression. An estimated 16 million American adults—almost 7% of the population—had at least one major depressive episode in the past year.

Schizophrenia affects 1.1 percent of the U.S. population or about 2.6 million adults over the age of 18. It is estimated that 40% of patients go untreated each year.
IDEATION PROCESS

2. Analysis of the symptoms of mental disorders

Anxiety Disorder

- Rapidly
- Repetitive
- Loss of anxiety
- Insomnia
- Aggressive
- Vomiting
- Insomnia
- Red
- Heart Rate

Bipolar Disorder

- Manic
- Depressed
- Aggressive
- Ego
- Paranoid

OCD

- Repetitive behaviors
- Routine

Depression

- Guilt
- Apathy
- Sadness
- Hopelessness
- Going over thoughts
- Loss of interest

Schizophrenia

- Delusions
- Thought disorder
- Hallucinations
- Amnesia
- Split
IDEATION PROCESS

3. Visualization for **featured symptoms** through visual elements selection

**Inspiration Board**

"Chaos, Breathless, Destruction"

**Style Board**

"Experimental typography" is defined as the unconventional and more artistic approach to typeface selection. ... Experimental typography is said to place emphasis on expressing emotion, rather than having a concern for legibility while communicating ideas, hence considered bordering on being art.
IDEATION PROCESS

4. ORGANIZATION of visual elements as distinct visual systems

- Anxiety Disorder
- Bipolar Disorder
- OCD
- Depression
- Schizophrenia

1. Take photos that stand out the state of people with different mental illnesses

- Anxiety: Worry, anxiety, and fear
- Bipolar Disorder: Agitation, and panic attack
- OCD: Elevated mood, racing thoughts, and aggression
- Depression: Sadness, hopelessness, and loss of interest
- Schizophrenia: Delusions, hallucinations and thought disorder

2. Add visual effects to the photo.

- "Can't control- Break up"
- "Things are magnified indefinitely through unstoppable thinking"
- "Dissociation"
- "Hidden & Struggle"
- "Formed by hallucinations and delusions"
IDEATION PROCESS

3- Choose representative words to present the patient's thoughts

Create a sense of entanglement and anxiety through the overlapping use of serif fonts.

Anxiety, Anxiety, Anxiety, Anxiety, Anxiety, Anxiety

I can't stop thinking.
I know what I'm thinking doesn't make sense, but I have to do it this way.
I was miserable because I knew it was obviously wrong, but there was no way I could avoid the control of my mind.
I had to have everything perfect because if not, I felt that I was going to fail.
I had kept the OCD bottled up inside of me for longer than I can remember, telling nobody but myself about the wicked voice imprisoned in my mind, torturing me and making my life a tumultuous series of pressures.

I'm a genius.
Look, what's hard for others is easy for me.
How exciting! I want to put my heart and soul into it, I don't need to sleep for two days!
Everything's coming back. Why did I have the frustration I had before?
My work is so cool.
You don't understand. I'm right!

I'm a loser.
I'm in a terrible situation right now.
I feel that I can't change this situation with all my efforts.
I wasted a lot of opportunities to make me better.
Why am I the worst?

I'm fine, really I am.
Yes, I am feeling better, thank you.
I'm not upset, I'm just tired.

4- Experimental typographic design combined with the representative words

"Fluctuant"

"Constraint"

"Change between calm and agitate"

"Into a swamp, into a whirlpool"
IDEATION PROCESS

Creating vector graphics based on daily changes of psychological state

I used the color of the rectangles and the density distribution of rectangular and linear rectangular groups to reflect the characteristic states of mental disorders.

Anxiety (presented by a red rectangle) is often present in normal everyday emotions (presented by a uniformly distributed group of linear blue rectangles).

Obsessive thoughts (presented by purple rectangles) controlled for healthy thoughts (presented by linear green rectangle groups).

Change between depressive phase (present by linear blue rectangle groups) and manic phase (present by linear yellow rectangle groups).

Overwhelming daily chores

The daily state (present by uniformly distributed linear blue rectangle groups) is affected by hallucinations and delusions (present by abstract mixed rectangle groups), but the patient does not know it (covered by white board).
5 Creation of innovative typography based on the visual system use

- Anxiety Disorder
- OCD
- Bipolar Disorder
- Depression
- Schizophrenia