MOOD

Beyond the feeling of blue

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Graduation manifesto by Lolita Kamper
Introduction

Overwhelmed by an anxiety attack

Picture a young woman in a store just staring into nothingness with a pale scared face. I was staring at the door to run – the door was right there, but I could not move. Everything felt like it was paralysed. The feeling that I was hunted but was not able to run or hide, it was staring me in the face.

Believe me when I say that after a busy period I needed a relaxing shopping day. That morning when I woke up I already felt a little lightheaded but I did not think much of it except maybe tiredness could be the reason. Until that sudden moment in the store when it felt like my body had decided it was time for an emergency. I was in a situation in which it felt like I had to go home right away or things were going to get out of hand.

All these alarming thoughts where running through my head and made my mind spin. My breathing that normally comes and goes without thinking now started to shorten. All the noises around me got louder like a crowd of people that was chatting really loudly. No screaming, just steady, confusing noises.

Finally, what felt like a whole day my sister tapped me on the shoulder to ask me if I was okay. This tapping stopped me in my wanders and brought me into reality again. My body immediately relaxed and my breathing skipped one breath into a steadier breathing. While my body slowly got back to normal again, something in me had changed.

I had incidents like this before but nothing as powerful as this feeling of fear, that trapped feeling of paralyzing claustrophobia having my brain spiral out of control with anxiety. It was my first panic attack and it is one I will never forget. Regardless how many times I told myself to calm down, my brain would have no part in it. To my brain my world was imploding and it was do-or-die situation (medium, 2017).

That feeling of being trapped and desperately needing to be somewhere else somehow opened a part of my brain that I never knew existed. That day after all the shopping was done, I was thankful that the feeling of anxiety was over but I did not realize that my brain had been permanently changed. Little did I know that single incident would affect the rest of my life and make me realize that a human brain is an incredibly powerful organ that can change things for good but also for bad.

This example of a moment in which I got overwhelmed by anxiety is just one of the examples and states of anxiety. Anxiety attacks don not just happen to me. Anyone can experience panic attacks and feelings of
anxiety. They are part of the emotional and protective responses hardwired into the human body. It is when either occurs frequently that there is cause for concern. No matter which you experience, it is important to understand their definitions, symptoms, and treatments (Very well mind, 2018).

As a designer I always start to work from a personal event that is recognisable and relevant for others people in my millennial generation (born between 1980 - 2000). One of my earlier collections was based on the feeling of fear and searching to feel fearless this by expressing tension and release in my design. This was translated into stretchy materials that showed the tension by pulling the material. On other places the fabric would burst out into a draping volume of release. Because these ideas arose from my personal experiences a lot of the ideas are inspired by feelings.

Anxiety

Anxiety is a feeling of vulnerability and being out of control which comes in waves and usually occurs unexpectedly. The simplest way to describe it is feeling worried or nervous about the future or uncertain situations. In small doses, anxiety can help motivate to get things done. However, when it escalates it can be debilitating and have serious effects on our physical health (Vogue, 2018). From the outside a person can look calm, from the inside the same person can be fighting the battle against himself. The mind takes over and starts to change thoughts into dark ones. Focus is lost and becomes blurry and white like it was overexposed (figure 1).

Fig. 1: The illuminated man (Duane Michals, 1986, www.artnet.com)
Anxiety is a normal healthy emotion (web md, 2018). It is thought to be a function of our survival instinct. When we become anxious, our brain gets a bit more active and certain types of anxiety can actually increase our performance for example in sport or test-like situations. Anxiety helps us get ‘psyched up’ in response to some kind of threat. In ancient times, when the bushes rustled, our brains needed something to get focused and figure out whether we had to flee or fight. Unfortunately, sometimes our brains get it wrong. Nearly one in five people (about 14% of adults and 3-5% of kids are diagnosed every year) this in itself normal emotion will turn into a disorder (The dirt psychology, 2015).

Anxiety can result into anxiety attacks or panic attacks. These are often associated with sudden fear and anxiety with high-stress levels or excessive worrying. When you are diagnosed with a Panic Disorder (PD) this will be characterised by panic attacks. Panic attacks are not just a burst of concern about something. They are an extended rush of distress and anxiety. There are the classic physical symptoms: heart palpitations, dizziness, chest pain, tingling, numbness and breathlessness (figure 2). The cognitive thoughts like a fear of dying or a fear of losing control. These two kinds of symptoms combine in a tangle of extreme distress that can last an average of ten to fifteen minutes. Almost anyone can suffer a panic attack. Drinking too many red bulls or vodkas combined with dancing could start those physical symptoms. Going for a run and feeling your heart beat like a drum can cause a panic attack. What takes it to the next level, the Panic Disorder level, is the worrying about having a panic attack. It is no longer just an attack of anxiety, but a general anxiety about having an attack of anxiety (The dirt psychology, 2015).

Treatments for anxiety attacks can be found in yoga, meditation or drinking a large glass of red wine.

Research shows that reflecting on and finding meaning in ones choices may be an important step in linking behaviour with the self-concept (Dishon, Oldmeadow, Critchley, Kaufman (2017). As millennials, we are experts in escapism. We turn on Netflix, browse through Facebook and scour the internet for connection. But when are we truly able to turn off the screens and tune into ourselves, the answers are within us all (Stand desk, 2018). To helps us do that we need to reflect on our actions and our mood to find the answers within ourselves.
Why are the millennials the most anxious generation in history?

Research show that the millennial generation are at higher risk for mental health issues like anxiety, depressions and thoughts of suicide (Big think, 2018). This is far more common among women, who were nearly twice as likely to be affected by mental health issues than men (Health, 2016; Vogue, 2018). They are overstimulated by their surroundings and by carrying a much higher level of perfectionism. This phenomenon was unknown to their parents and grandparents and the elevated expectations of today’s society is blamed for it.

A report from Forbes found that sources of millennial anxiety may include a difficult job market, student debt and even psychological issues such as ambition addiction, career crisis and choice overload: striving to reach impossible standards, boundless internet, choices really are everywhere – from where you are going to eat, to what brand of sponges really kill the most grease (Forbes, 2017).

We have been working on ourselves, forever striving for self-improvement, particularly in the forms of higher education and career attainment and better social standing. This may generate feelings of instability, vulnerability and isolation which creates stress and anxiety into a way of life.

The data revealed that millennials experience all three types of perfectionism: self-oriented, socially prescribed and other-oriented perfectionism. Self-oriented perfectionism, occurs when “individuals attach irrational importance to being perfect and hold unrealistic expectations of themselves”. Socially prescribed perfectionism takes place when “individuals believe their social context is excessively demanding and that they must display perfection to secure approval”. The third category other-oriented perfectionism is present when “individuals impose unrealistic standards on those around them” (Medical news today, 2018).

Fig. 1 Average Stress Levels vs Healthy Stress Levels (American psychological association, 2018 www.apa.org)

Their scores were higher compared with other generation groups. They found that self-oriented perfectionism increased 10% from 1989 to 2018. Socially prescribed perfectionism increased 33% in that same time period. And Other-oriented perfectionism shot up 16% (figure 3) (Stand desk, 2018).

The APA’s report (Forbes, 2018) also notes that 12% of millennials have an officially diagnosed anxiety disorder that is almost twice the percentage of baby boomers (from 1945 till 1955). While this is likely to have contributed to a number of factors, including more access to mental health providers or a decreased social stigma towards therapy and medication for anxiety, millennials recognize their anxiety and are seeking help. Studies also show that 86% of millennials believe they are going through some form of a quarter life crisis, proving that the vast majority of 20-something individuals believe they are not successfully living life (Stand desk, 2018).
So why the increase? On the one hand you see the changing relation towards others: “Today’s young people are competing with each other in order to meet societal pressures to succeed and they feel that perfectionism is necessary in order to feel safe, socially connected, and of worth” (USA today, 2018). “Perfectionism is a weakness. It is making us ill” (The Guardian, 2018). The study found that a lot of the perfectionism centred around the participants’ need to “measure up” to their peers, and that they tended to judge others harshly, too. On the other hand, being surrounded by technology: reports show our computer screens keep us awake, lack of sleep keeps us from being productive, lack of productivity makes us feel sad, and feeling sad makes us anxious. This is an endless cycle (Stand desk, 2018).

Being a millennial myself, I recognize the fact that we are the most tech-savvy generation in human history and the most anxious. Coincidence?

Keeping too many tabs open will drain our batteries. It is also a neat metaphor for modern life: many of us are running around with too many tabs open inside our heads. We constantly toggle between screens, compulsively check social media, multi-task and then cancel commitments because we are so exhausted (Vogue, 2018).

Furthermore, millennials are the first generation to experience a coming-of-age at the same time that social media exploded. We have experienced a major shift in how we communicate and relate to other people over an extremely short amount of time. With the majority of millennials projecting a false sense of success and happiness via their Instagram pages, it is exceedingly difficult to refrain from harmful comparisons to our peers (Stand desk, 2018).

As millennial we are coming towards the end of a decade in which we have been encouraged to think of our public life as a performance instead of a participation exercise. We know how it feels to envy other people and their celebrations, achievements and holidays, and that our craving for validation leads towards mental health issues, body issues and even, social isolation. (The Guardian, 2018).
The collection: Design principles

Exposed
When you are a millennial with anxiety issues you can experience a feeling of overexposure, being exposed too much to everything around you. On the one hand you want to be seen but on the other hand you are not happy with the feeling that your vulnerability is displayed in a bright light. In this bright light you desperately want to shelter yourself because your colours will start to fade.
This can lead to underexposure: a sheltered feeling of not being exposed enough. This might get you into a dark place in which you will not be seen anymore. Both exposure and underexposure are expressed with light and the way light can change your colours and mood. This concept will be base of the principal underlying idea behind the design philosophy used for this collection.

Why humans need light
There is more to light than meets the eye. Although you take it easily for granted, it is in fact the essence of our ecosystem. While the dangers of skin cancer from unprotected sun exposure are well known, a moderate amount of exposure is good for you. Significantly, sunlight boosts levels of vitamin D, which can prevent or slow down the growth of tumours and even boost survival rates for cancer patients.
A healthy dose of sunshine can help with pain control. Research shows that patients whose beds are on a sunny side of a hospital experience less pain than those whose rooms are in the shade. As well as reduced pain, patients in sunny rooms tend to recover sooner, use fewer painkillers and feel less stressed.
Whether sick or healthy, light definitely affects your mood. According to research, one in four people in Alaska suffers from depression – and it is mainly caused by a lack of sunlight (Led Vance, 2018).

Did you know that colours affect the way you feel?
Colour psychology is the study of how colours impact mood, feelings, and behaviours. Certain colours are known to make you happy, sad, anxious, or calm when they are in your environment or even if you are wearing them. So which colours do we need to wear to boost our confidence levels, energy, productivity, and positivity?
Have you ever noticed that you might feel a bit anxious in a yellow room or calmer in a blue one? Since the beginning of time, ancient societies had noticed the effect colours had on people. The Egyptians and Chinese used colours to heal – otherwise known as chromotherapy. This is still used in modern times as a holistic treatment for certain emotional conditions such as depression or anxiety. In chromotherapy, specific colours are used to stimulate different parts of the mind and body.
One of the first scientists to consider the effect of colours was August Pleasonton. In 1876 he published ‘The Influence of the Blue Ray of Sunlight and of the Blue Colour of the Sky’ in which he studied how blue can stimulate the growth of plants and cattle. He also mentioned that this colour can help make the human body better. This book introduced chromotherapy into modern medicine (Very well mind, 2018).
Colours and their meaning
Studies have shown that each colour has a certain meaning to help you emotionally and mentally. (Very well mind, 2018). White purifies the mind, helps clear thinking and stimulates a lack of focus and concentration. Yellow increases cheerfulness, encourages communication and helps us to relieves negativity. Orange stimulates creative thoughts and new ideas. Red gives energy, ambition and strength. Pink increases self-love and brings us closer to our feelings. Purple has meditative qualities and helps with emotional healing. Blue calms people downs and soothes the mind. Green balances emotions and calms a state of disharmony. Black gives silence (Deep trance now, 2014).

Visualisation
I wanted to create a collection for the millennial woman that just like me dealing with anxiety. This collection is based on 8 stages of anxiety, namely isolation, motivation through fear, overthinking, overwhelmed by fear, fear of staring people, fear of anxiety, being overactive, repeated avoidance (figure 4).

Fig.4: Concept board (Lolita Kamper, 2018)
Every stage has its own anxiety associated effects and particular translation into the specific colours, materials and types of garments that will give the wearer of the garment physical, emotional and mental balance again. I will explain one stage with the specifications of the collection below.

Collection
In the stage of isolation, you are in need of protection, being covered, snugness, quietness and warmth. This will be translated into a padded coat that gives the illusion that you are safely in bed under your covers. The 100% bamboo has a luxuriously-soft hand-feel and superior breathability also used for actual sheets for the ultimate comfort. This material has antibacterial and moisture-absorbent characteristic, it is biodegradable and friendly during production (needs less water and energy for washing). All the materials that will be used in the collection are ecologic and organic. In accordance with millennials consciousness to be careful with the planet and its resources, I think it important to pay attention to the environmental friendly materials.
The coat will have a digital print with a black background to have a feeling of a dark bedroom where a small light entered. All the prints are made by projecting the colour card with a beamer on tulle fabric (figure 6).

I created the colour cards used for the treatment of chromotherapy as a starting point. The healing power of light is combined with colours. Every garment with its own anxiety stage will have a certain colour combination that regulates mood against anxiety. I made this by calculating how much percentage of which colour was needed to go against the effects and get balanced again. For example, in a state of isolation you need (figure 6):

- 35% RED for energy, aid for those who are afraid of life, strength, stimulation.
- 30% Orange for lifting the emotions, improving the mood and to give cheerful emotions.
- 25% White to balance, feel protection and to increase your vitamin D for SAD (seasonal affective disorder)
- 10% Yellow for positivity and to feel more optimistic

Fig. 5: Photograph coloured light on tulle translated into illustration (Lolita Kamper, 2018)

Fig. 6: Colour card (Lolita Kamper, 2018)
Source list

Websites:


Philip, P. 2018. Millennials are at higher risk for mental health issues this may be why. January 8. From: https://bigthink.com/philip-perry/millennials-are-at-higher-risk-for-mental-health-issues-this-may-be-why (consulted: 26 September 2018)


Images
Fig. 1: Duane, M., 1986, the illuminated man (online) from: http://www.artnet.com/artists/duane-michals/the-illuminated-man-l0jqq8WrLLpmTvqGJCBK-A2 (consulted: 12 September 2018)

Fig. 2: Legg, T., 2018, Effects of anxiety on the body. from: https://www.healthline.com/health/anxiety/effects-on-body#2 (consulted: 25 October 2018)


Fig. 4: Concept board Lolita Kamper, 2018

Fig. 5: Colour card, Lolita Kamper, 2018

Fig. 6: Photograph coloured light on tulle, lolita Kamper 2018