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The Silent Weight of Social Anxiety

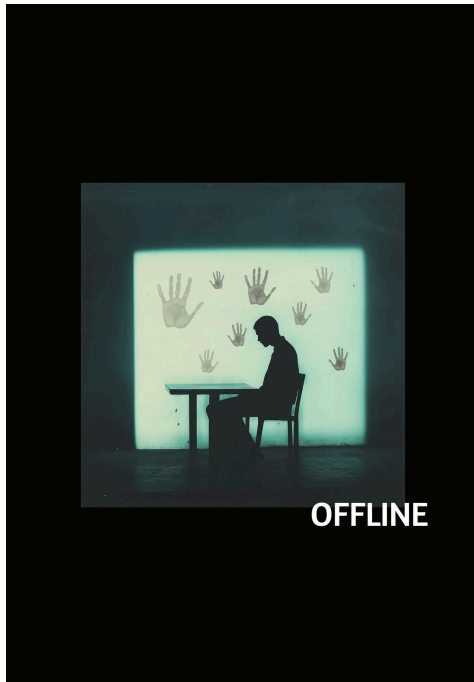
Introduction

In this assignment, I aim to convey the feeling of social anxiety through my four artworks:

Isolated, Offline, No Signal, and Anxiety Always Finds Me First. Social anxiety is often invisible.

Even though a person may be surrounded by others and seem to always be connected to the surroundings, they can still feel completely alone and emotionally detached. Since social anxiety is a personal experience of mine, I want to express those emotions that are difficult to explain through words through this project visually, and I hope to create pictures that allow viewers to empathize. I feel that social anxiety often brings about tension, loneliness, and pressure. At the same time, I also agree with the viewpoint of the American Graphic Design Association (AIGA), that effective design should touch people's emotions and prompt them to think critically. Through these four artworks, I hope to show that anxiety is not always obvious, and I hope to evoke emotional resonance in people, so that they can better understand their social anxiety and inspire a deeper discussion about this topic.

Offline



In this design, I aim to convey an objective expression. The self-seclusion within our minds is caused by social anxiety. I try to create an internal and external contrast to establish some internal-external connections, so the audience can feel a very powerful sense of anxiety. I used minimalist text, using only one word offline, because I wanted the image itself to carry most of the emotional meaning. The word Offline actually expresses well the emotional withdrawal and disconnection of a person in this state, as well as the disconnection from social communication. During the creation of this photo, I first chose the black background. In the middle area, I chose a relatively bright independent space. In this photo, a person is sitting at a table, and behind it, there is a large area of blue-green background. After inserting these two photos into this frame, I felt that in order to reflect the anxiety of the protagonist, I wanted to create some micro-terrifying effects. I found some palm prints. After cropping them, I created them in various sizes, making them symmetrical, and added them to different layers to achieve a harmonious effect. Feeling that someone is trying to knock on the protagonist's door from outside, we can sense countless hands trying to grasp the protagonist to get out of this enclosed and safe space, trying to make

the protagonist give a response. According to Robin Williams in his book *The Non-Designer's Design Book*, contrast helps organize information and guide the viewer's attention(6). I used a strong contrast between the black background and the bright central light source to quickly focus attention on the isolated character. Even though the color outside is brighter, it seems that the feeling expressed by this space is a kind of unfree, painful inner sensation.



Isolated

In this design, I still wanted to convey a sense of social anxiety and emotional isolation. I aimed to express the feeling of detachment between the self and the group. I chose a black and white color scheme. I wanted to highlight a strong visual contrast effect. I formed a long diagonal line

with a large group of people, hoping it would run through the entire picture. Then I added a new layer, placing a solitary figure in the blank area at the lower left. I wanted to use this obvious visual separation and the contrast of many versus few to highlight his loneliness and sense of detachment. Meanwhile, most of the blank space would create an emotional distance. On the text side, I got help from Chris. In his feedback, he said that I could add some words to make this picture more understandable for the viewers. So I added the word isolated. And I transformed it into a circular form surrounding this individual. I think this way can have a better visual effect. This word enfold this solitary person. It gives the impression that he is completely unable to integrate into a group and seems to be a barrier in his heart that isolates him from his surroundings.

No Signal

This is my third design. What I aim to convey is an objectified expression. Therefore, what I still want to depict is the feeling of an individual's inability to fit in within a noisy environment. So, I came up with the idea of using televisions, because they transmit images using the same wireless signal. However, if a person is unable to connect to the group's signal, then he cannot integrate with the entire group, and it becomes very conspicuous. This is similar to the feeling of social

loneliness. At the same time, I think this signal can also be regarded as a social expectation. Because everyone hopes to have the same frequency for social interaction so that they can have more topics to talk about, but in this environment, I am



unable to connect. I want to connect, but I can't, and it is a sense of powerlessness. Moreover, in this large environment, I still have to try to pretend that I have integrated with everyone, even though I seem very disconnected in this group. Therefore, through this television that is completely different from the surroundings, I want to express people's emotional fatigue and self-isolation. During the production of this design, I actually created many layers to achieve this effect. First, I found a photo of a full set of televisions, and then I adjusted their colors. I wanted to create a somewhat retro feel. Next, I removed the middle television screen and placed a black-and-white TV screen beneath this layer. Finally, I added my slogan No Signal. In terms of color application, I adjusted a lot and asked my team members what they thought I could adjust, so finally I chose the combination of red and white as this color scheme. According to the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA), effective design should be able to capture attention, evoke emotional responses, and prompt viewers to critically think about the conveyed information. I hope that the bright screen and the prominent red No Signal can immediately capture the audience's attention and create an uncomfortable feeling.



Anxiety Always Finds Me First

For my fourth design, I wanted to convey this feeling: Anxiety often emerges before all other emotions, surfacing before anything else. In this design, I used a crowded background filled with people to represent the party social environment. I adjusted it to black and white to create greater contrast. The black and white tones create a heavy and tense emotional atmosphere. I abandoned bright colors because I wanted to focus on the weight of the emotions. Secondly, the person falling down on top of it, I increased his brightness to the maximum and added a black-and-white contrast to make it clearer that it's two layers. And the movements of the two layers are also quite different. The party-goers are moving forward, while the person is falling downward. Below, I have added my title. For this font, I also conducted a detailed comparison and also sought the opinions of my team members. They thought that this Gothic-style font would actually be more

suitable for my theme. I adopted this suggestion in the final adjustments. I set the font to a semi-arc shape, aiming to convey a profound meaning through this sentence by complementing the falling figure.

Reflection

My theme centers on social anxiety. I use four images to express psychological experiences. The first image contrasts an individual against a massive crowd, emphasizing the sense of isolation. The second image shows a person falling within a crowd of people with the text “Anxiety always finds me first,” conveying a sense of loss of control in social settings. In the third image, numerous television screens appear repeatedly. One of them is in black and white and displays a “No Signal” message. This represents the feeling of being disconnected from others in social situations. In the fourth image, a person sits in front of a bright light, surrounded by transparent handprints, symbolizing the feeling of being watched by others and surrounded by invisible pressure.

During the creative process, I mainly used Pixlr for editing. I start with the most basic crop, then adjust the colors with filters, and gradually use layers to combine images. Using Pixlr has been both fun and challenging for me. The layers feature allows me to combine different elements to create more complex visual effects. For example, in the television image, I selected a photo of multiple televisions, cut out one of them, and added a black-and-white background below. This creates a contrast between the normal functioning televisions and the one that is broken. I hope that this contrast will draw the viewer’s attention to the exception.

Throughout this process, I also received help from my peers. During peer reviews, I always asked for their thoughts on my designs to understand what changes I needed to make to ensure my audience understood my messages. For instance, Eva pointed out that my text wasn't visible enough in some images, so I adjusted the text's color and placement.

Through my design process, I have developed a deeper understanding of AIGA's argument that design is more than decoration. According to AIGA, design is about "creating visual solutions to communication problems" (AIGA). This idea is particularly important in my project because I use images, text, and composition to communicate the experience of social anxiety. As Robin Williams explains in *The Non-Designer's Design Book*, contrast helps create visual interest and "aid in the organization of the information" (Williams 6). I applied this principle throughout my designs by using big differences in light, color, and composition to guide viewers' attention and emphasize emotional isolation. In my work, I also try to guide the viewer's attention through contrasts in light and dark. For example, in the piece with the television, I use extensive color grading and red text on a white background to convey my message. Through this assignment, I can better use Pixlr and gain a deeper understanding of multimodal writing. I realized that conveying an idea doesn't have to only rely only on text, by using images can also form a narrative. This allows the audience to experience the visuals and understand the meaning I intend to convey.

If I were to offer a suggestion, I think it would be helpful to spend more time at the beginning helping students narrow down their topics. I personally struggled for a long time trying to decide on a topic. I wasn't sure if it was the right choice for this assignment, especially since the four

images are supposed to revolve around a single theme. I was worried I wouldn't have enough ideas to develop around a single theme.

During the revision process, Chris's feedback was extremely helpful to me. I watched the video comments he recorded and carefully reviewed the written suggestions he left on the PDF.

Through this process, I realized that there were many expression issues that I had not noticed while writing. As the creator, I already understood the ideas and emotions behind my designs, so some explanations seemed clear to me. However, after reading Chris's comments, I realized that certain descriptions could be confusing for readers who were encountering the project for the first time. His feedback helped me think more carefully about audience perspective and how effectively my ideas were being communicated. I revised those to make my explanations clearer and try to strengthen the connections between my design choices and the concepts discussed in the sources. This experience helped me understand that effective communication is not only about expressing ideas, but also about ensuring that audiences can accurately understand the intended message.

Work Cited

AIGA. "What is Design." AIGA Website, 2022, www.aiga.org/what-is-design. Accessed 19 Sept.

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Williams, Robin. *The Non-designer's Design Book*. 3rd ed., Berkeley, CA, Peachpit Press, 2008