



Self-Helper

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Growing up, I spent a lot of time trying to figure out what was “wrong” with me. I didn’t know why I felt afraid and sad most of the time, but I knew the answer had to be somewhere on the internet.

I must have taken a hundred personality quizzes between the ages of 10 and 16. I would sometimes print the results and add them to a manila folder, feeling one step closer to cracking the code. I knew there must have been some special sub-category of people out there that I belonged to. In the meantime, I navigated adolescence the best I could. If I read enough wikihow articles about “How to Make Friends” I knew I would be fine.

I only now realize that what I was really looking for was

- 1) a diagnosis
- 2) a cure

Coming from a family affected by various mental disorders, I am biologically and psychology wired to see the glass as half empty. I’m particularly affected by social anxiety disorder and depression. Intrusive negative and obsessive thoughts shape what I do, who I am and how I’m perceived constantly. I deal with it the only way that seems to work— with patience and a sense of humor.

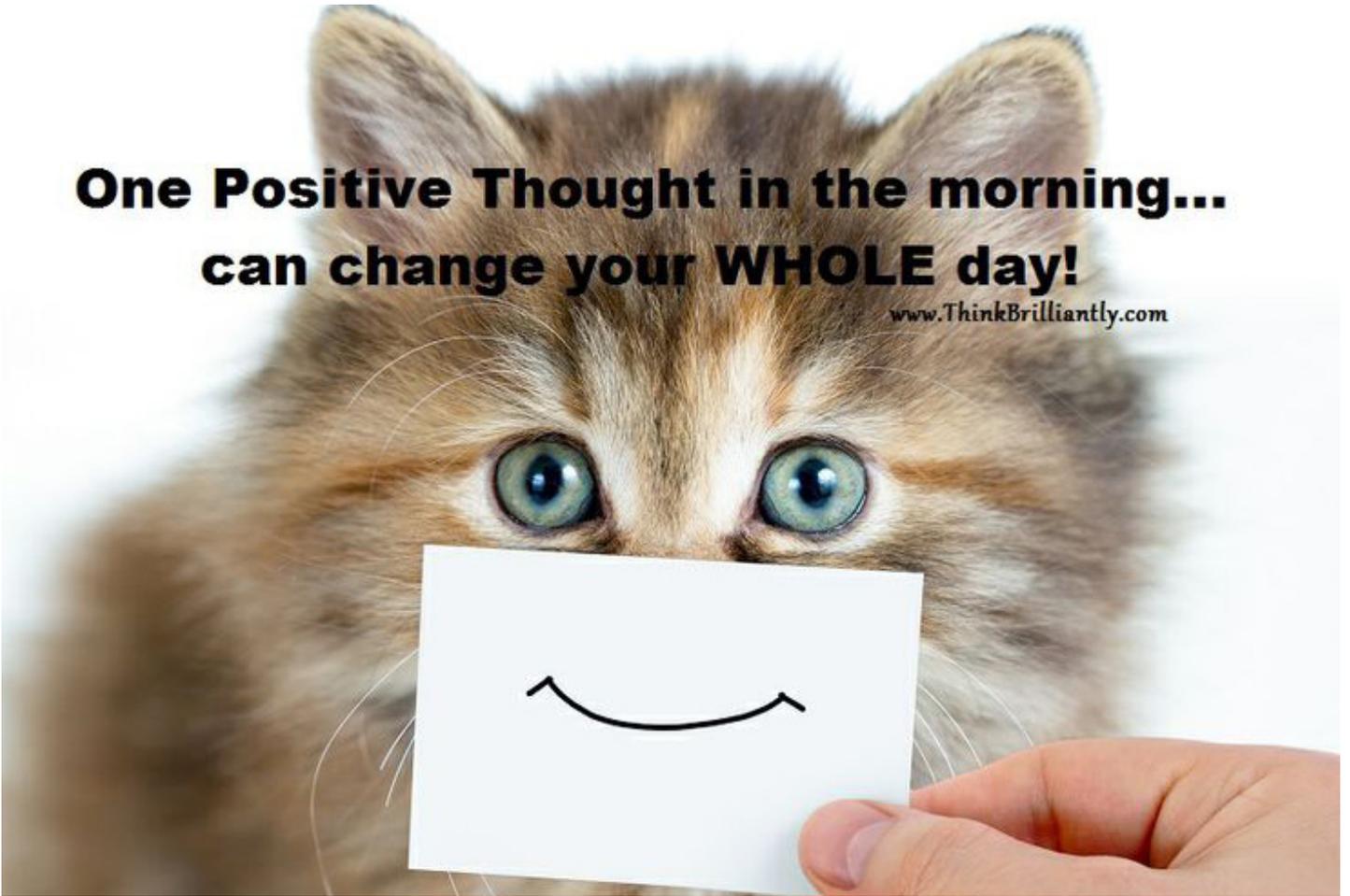
There is no quick fix. Learning to control and shape emotions and thoughts takes time and effort. The internet, in particular, is a smörgåsbord of mental health resources that unrealistically claim to turn anyone into an optimist. Self help websites, inspirational stories, 12 step programs and other places on the web that promise better days became a source of interest for this project. There are as many sworn-by methods for curing depression as there are trendy diets or workout regimens. Some even contradict each other.



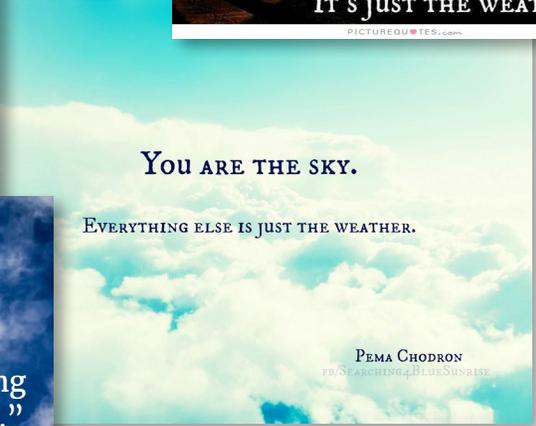
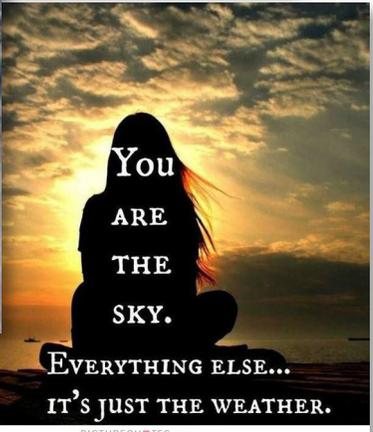
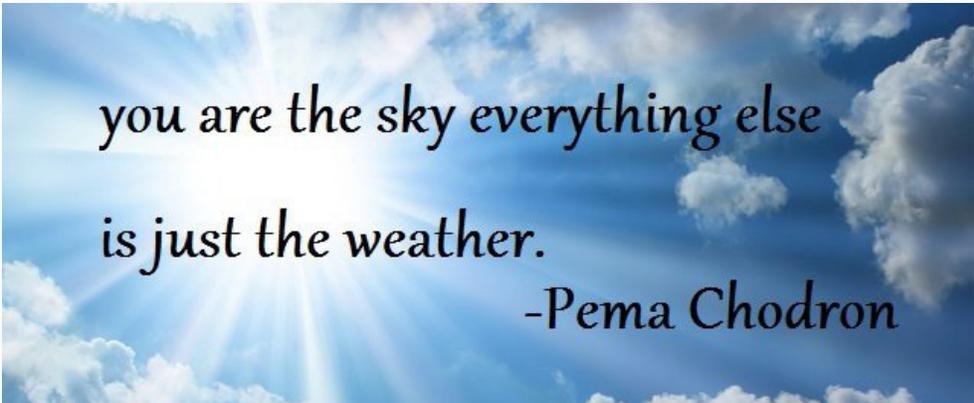
***Does smiling actually trick your
brain into thinking you're happy?
The jury's still out.***

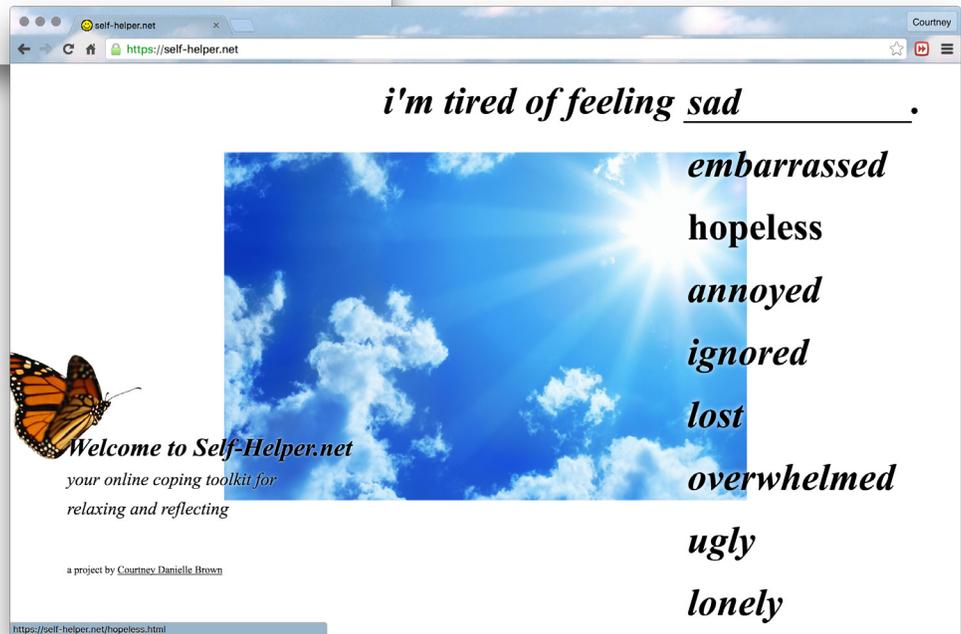
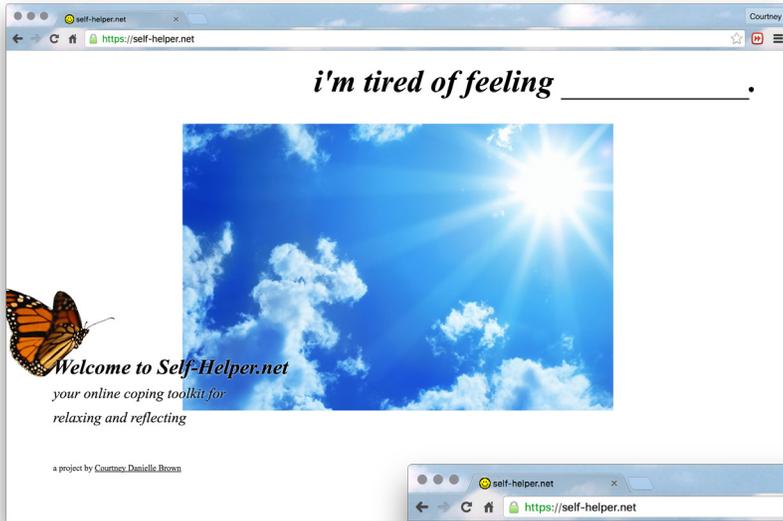
**One Positive Thought in the morning...
can change your WHOLE day!**

www.ThinkBrilliantly.com



Many self proclaimed “positive sites” adapt an overly cheery tone, one that is naive to the reality of the mindsets of those they hope to help. Telling someone to think positively doesn’t actually help them, even if you pair it with a smiling cat. I became interested in this palette, linguistically and visually, and how the generic (in this case: stock photos, clipart, inspirational quotes, ect.) is used to communicate with individuals on a personal level. The same images and quotes are passed around facebook pages, inspirational blogs, and pinterest boards. It seems that Carl Jung’s collective unconscious can be cataloged through google image searches.





Self-Helper.net is an exploration of emotion and interaction. It is a site that presents itself as a home for healing, which asks the user to confess how they feel. The website then attempts to provide a solution based on their emotion. The solutions are each one page, many with just one interaction, but are presented as if they are the sole cure to your distress. In this way, the site pokes fun at the ridiculousness of the “quick fix” dream. It isn’t intended to actually fix anything, although it seems to promise to. Instead, it provides the user with moments to reflect and play. Without presenting real advice, It is a site that simply acknowledges how you’re feeling. This is how the website becomes actually helpful—not in it’s apparent cures for negativity, but in it’s ability to surprise, humor, and relate to the user through familiar language and unexpected interfaces.



The solution for “I’m tired of feeling annoyed,” appears to be an innocent countdown video. The user is instructed to focus on breathing. A butterfly floats in front of a dreamy sky. Everything is great. A message presents itself harshly once the countdown ends: “the inevitability of death may put your current situation in perspective.”

In contrast to expressions you may find on a self help site, this language is much more reflective of coping self-talk a person with depression might use. A depressed person can only see the world through the lense of depression. There is no “looking on the bright side.” Subverting negative, self deprecating, or nihilistic thoughts into helpful mantras is a way of survival for people who cannot simply snap out of it.

Imagery and video on Self-Helper are collages of media found on the internet, specifically clipart and stock photos/ videos. By approaching the site with mock naivety, I position myself amongst other self help sites as equally corny and impersonally personal. Presenting distinct statements with this imagery dresses them up as if they’re inspiring quotes or meditations. This subversion of the generic characterizes Self-Helper’s palette. Pushing the visual language to the extreme, in combination with harsh, more specific vocabulary creates a humorous but honest depiction of how I attempt to “self help.”





***“Nothing matters” can be freeing for
someone who is constantly overwhelmed.***



“People don’t think about you as much as you think they do,” another unsettling message. When expressed as solving embarrassment, though, it’s somewhat comforting. Awkward 3D gifs of people walking arrange on the page. On hover they grow, allowing the user to view their details. The looping figures walk in place, without acknowledging the viewer, like they don’t know we’re watching. It’s a simple interaction, and besides being odd and amusing, it reinforces the message. Those tiny 3D people are just trying to get where they’re going. They aren’t thinking about you. Sometimes, overcoming social anxiety just means acknowledging that people don’t actually care very much if you mess up. They have their own things to worry about.

phone wallpaper



If someone I know is approaching me and I don’t know if it’s ok to say “hi”, or weird to say “hi”, or if I’m at all uncomfortable with what the protocol is, I look at my phone. It’s an easy way to disengage and avoid any social faux pas. This is why various pages, like “feeling embarrassed,” have a downloadable phone wallpaper. That way, when the user is feeling anxious, they may be reminded that things aren’t as catastrophic as they seem.

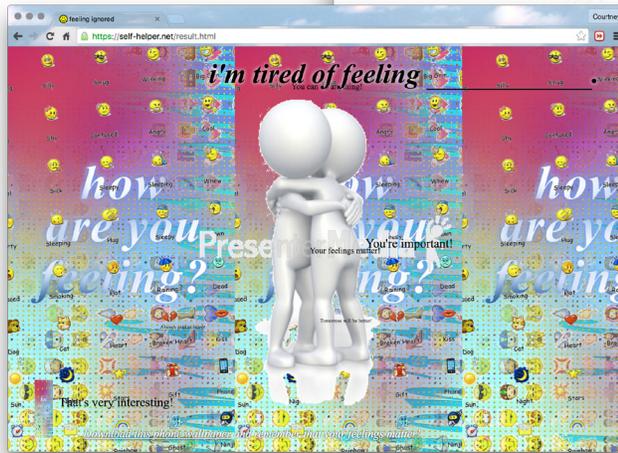
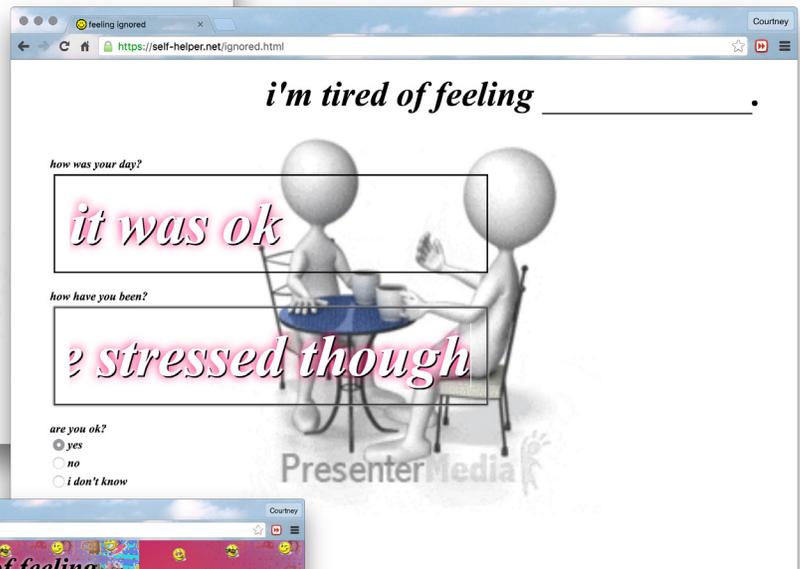
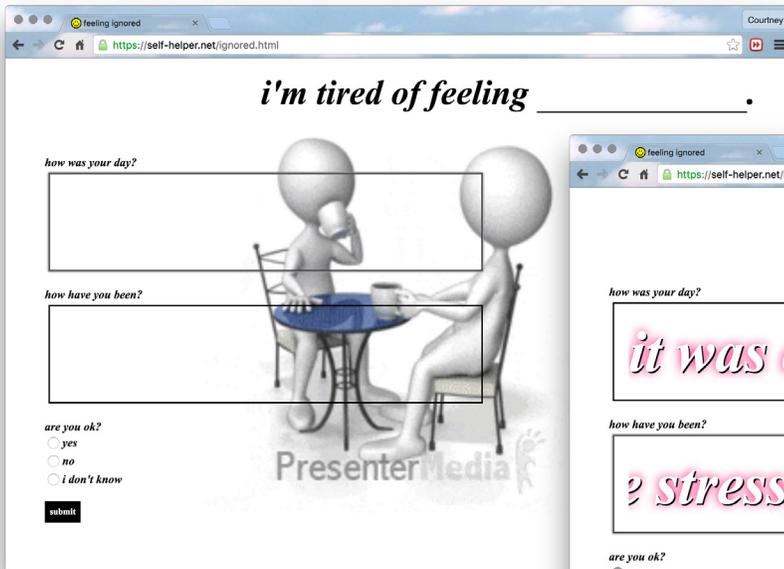
A handful of digital takeaways like this one are available on the site, which push the barrier between web and life. Like a token or charm, they are meant to represent and acknowledge the individual and their emotions. They are reminders that Self-Helper.net cares.



“I’m tired of feeling overwhelmed” will lead the user here.

A downloadable desktop wallpaper reminds “the crippling weight of your responsibilities won’t stop you today!” A message that, in part, uses the optimistic language of a self help site but also is empathetic to your situation. The page is cluttered with desktop icons, representing the piling of obligations and to-dos. Clicking on the icons deletes them—another extremely simple interaction, but one that whispers “you can handle this.”

The digital takeaway, in this case a desktop wallpaper, hopes to present itself whenever the user is likely to experience the negative emotion. To me, I feel most overwhelmed when I sit down on my computer and begin work that I know will take me all night.



User interaction and input became an interesting way to explore how a website can feel like a friend. “I’m tired of feeling ignored,” asks the user to write about how they’re feeling. The act of asking oneself, “am I ok?” is a therapeutic prompt on its own, but the strange pseudo personal gesture of a website asking is both artificial and somehow kinda sweet. Although so removed from the action, knowing that a human (me) is out there somewhere, expressing care through lines of code, is somewhat comforting. The input doesn’t actually go anywhere, but the website is listening for that one moment. No matter what your answer, it responds with a virtual hug and a reminder that your feelings matter.



Self-Helper recognizes the user and their emotions through interaction. The pages act like shrines to feelings. Word, image, and interaction create a multifaceted experience. Since starting this project, I have a better understanding of how the three interact and how they can mimic or contrast each other to deliver a complex message. As a designer, creating Self-Helper was a way for me to experiment with the relationship between the three. Although I'm reluctant to call it a brand, Self-Helper forced me to work through the decision making processes that must occur when building a system that communicates in a multitude of ways. Having full control over the look, language, and function of a project so abstract was challenging and exciting! I have a better understanding of what it means to have a unified voice across varied media, and how a user's read can be directed through stylistic decisions.

Self-Helper.net is the website I was looking for ten years ago. It approaches coping with humor and understanding and is transparent about its inability to change you. It is a self help site that validates and relates, rather than advises. It also has room to grow. I hope to expand it into a huge, strange database of emotions with many pages that affirm: you're not alone, and here's something to remind you.