

PERSONAL VISUALS AND BELONGING: EXPLORING EMOTIONAL TIES IN FAMILY HISTORY NARRATIVES

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Abstract. This study explores the transformative role of personal visual identification, particularly family photographs, as a tool for cultivating emotional affirmation and a sense of belonging within family histories. Drawing from the fields of visual culture, therapeutic art, and memory studies, the research investigates how personal and inherited imagery can evoke deep emotional connections, foster intergenerational understanding, and support self-identity formation. Through a qualitative and arts-based approach, the study analyses visual narratives embedded in family photo albums, interpreting them not only as documentation of the past but also as vessels of memory, healing, and identity negotiation. These images serve as emotional touchstones, enabling individuals to process grief, rediscover forgotten stories, and reconnect with their cultural and familial roots. The research also incorporates elements of self-help design, highlighting how principles of color, composition, and symbolism can enhance emotional engagement with personal imagery. By combining theoretical insight with creative practice, this paper emphasizes the therapeutic potential of visual storytelling in affirming belonging, especially within fragmented or diasporic family narratives. The findings suggest that visual representation, when approached thoughtfully can foster resilience, emotional well-being, and a more cohesive sense of self within family contexts. This study contributes to ongoing conversations in design, art therapy, and genealogy, offering a framework for future interdisciplinary exploration.

Keywords: *design, self-help, imagery, principles, well-being, visual identity*

Introduction

This research deepens into the vital role of art therapeutic experience and effectively emphasizes visual identification. It emphasizes the importance of comprehending and applying visuals to affirm the sense of belonging. This thoroughly explores how visuals can be leveraged to heighten self-help imagery's emotional and psychological impact, ultimately fostering personal growth and well-being. Furthermore, it underscores the potential for future research to delve into the specific effects of design elements and principles on individual growth and well-being-exploring the role of design elements and principles in creating compelling self-help imagery. The paper highlights the importance of understanding and applying design fundamentals to craft images that are not only visually compelling but also emotionally resonant and supportive of personal growth. In the comprehensive exploration of family genealogy, the researcher undertook a transformative investigation that significantly reshaped their understanding of family history. By meticulously examining various layers of time, the researcher immersed themselves in the intricate tapestry of their ancestry, uncovering narratives that had long remained concealed. This exploration was driven by an intrinsic curiosity, prompting the researcher to analyze a collection of photographs, each serving as a vivid representation of the lives of their ancestors. The researcher scrutinized each photograph and established a profound connection to their familial past. They methodically assessed

the expressions and details captured in these images, reflecting on the stories and emotions conveyed within them. Each photograph became a vessel holding secrets of resilience, joy, sorrow, and struggle, facilitating a deep engagement with the internal conflicts experienced by previous generations. In these moments of reflection, the researcher recognized their role in this familial narrative as an active participant rather than a passive observer, intricately woven into a story that extended beyond their immediate existence.

The photographs proved to be more than mere artifacts; they emerged as valuable instruments for exploring complex themes of memory and identity. Through analysis, the researcher uncovered a rich tapestry of intergenerational relationships, revealing how ancestors' experiences had a lasting influence on their sense of self. The researcher sought to illuminate the connections among these lives, striving to offer new interpretations of their previously obscured heritage. As the investigation advanced, the researcher identified that each photograph represented a "place of memory." These places could encompass vibrant physical locations filled with familial interactions, treasured objects imbued with historical significance, or intimate exchanges that echoed through the family narrative. The researcher undertook a creative endeavor, generating artistic representations that encapsulated the essence of these memories, intertwining their preconceived notions of self with the broader context of family history, thus discovering overlooked stories from their matrilineal line. The researcher grounded their exploration in a theoretical framework to elucidate the connections between family history and personal identity. The photographs were a methodological tool, evoking deep emotional responses and nostalgia. They documented the past and facilitated a more profound comprehension of family dynamics and heritage. In constructing the family tree, the researcher recognized an imperative to confront their past, akin to an actor immersing themselves fully in a role to grasp the character's motivations and experiences. Ultimately, the researcher's undertaking in family genealogy revealed profound insights regarding their lineage and vital revelations about their personal identity. They gained an appreciation for the intricate nature of heritage, including the substantial weight of narratives transmitted across generations and their significant role within that continuum. This journey transcended a mere revisitation of the past; it emerged as a pathway toward healing and connection, celebrating the empowerment derived from the visual narrative of their family history while enriching their comprehension of personal growth and identity.

Results and Discussion

Background of research

Family relationships are the cornerstone of human social structures, providing a sense of emotional affirmation and belonging essential for individual well-being. The bonds formed within families offer support, love, and a sense of identity, which are crucial for emotional stability and personal growth. Emotional affirmation within family dynamics fosters a nurturing environment where individuals feel valued and understood, reinforcing their sense of belonging and self-worth. Art, with its therapeutic benefits, plays a significant role in expressing and processing emotions. Engaging in artistic activities can help individuals explore their feelings, reduce stress, and enhance their overall mental health. The creative process allows for expressing complex emotions that might be difficult to articulate through words alone, providing a valuable outlet for

emotional release and self-discovery. Collecting and studying photo albums from diverse periods and geographical locations is crucial to understanding family photos' emotional and historical significance. These photo albums serve as visual narratives that capture the essence of family life, documenting moments of joy, sorrow, and everything in between. By examining these collections, researchers can identify recurring themes and patterns that shed light on family dynamics, emotional expressions, and belonging across different cultures and eras (*Figure 1*).



Figure 1. *The photographs reveal glimpses of the past, inspiring thoughts on the role of memory in storytelling. Each picture speaks a thousand words, adding depth and meaning to the narratives we tell.*

Furthermore, exploring various painting techniques and artistic styles can effectively capture these precious family photo albums' emotional depth and historical significance. Artistic interpretations of family photos can reveal hidden layers of meaning and provide new perspectives on the emotional connections and historical contexts they represent. This interdisciplinary approach enriches our understanding of family relationships and the profound impact of emotional affirmation and belonging on human lives. The significance of this paper lies in its exploration of how design elements and principles contribute to the creation of impactful self-help imagery. By emphasizing the necessity of understanding and applying design fundamentals, the study underscores the potential of visually compelling images to evoke emotional resonance and facilitate personal growth. This research is vital for both designers and those in the self-help field, as it provides insights into This paper elucidates the essential role of compelling imagery in facilitating individuals' journeys toward self-improvement. It asserts that well-designed self-help imagery can significantly enhance engagement and motivation, promoting personal growth and overall well-being. The research provides a comprehensive framework for designers and creators, equipping them with the necessary knowledge to make informed decisions regarding design elements and principles. This approach ensures that the imagery accurately conveys the intended message and resonates profoundly with the audience, ultimately supporting their transformative processes. Moreover, this study contributes valuable insights into the intersection of design and self-help, highlighting the influence of visual elements on individual development. It identifies promising areas for future research, including the psychological impacts of diverse design features and the potential advantages of tailored design strategies in enhancing personal growth. By emphasizing the empowerment that visual art can impart, the paper underscores the transformative capabilities of design in

encouraging positive life changes. Overall, this research possesses significant implications for inspiring designers, creators, and researchers to harness the power of design, thereby fostering a more supportive and uplifting visual culture that prioritizes well-being and self-improvement.

The intersection of artworks and personal development increasingly captured the interest of scholars and practitioners alike. This convergence spotlighted how visual elements and design principles significantly enhanced the effectiveness of self-help materials, ultimately fostering personal growth and well-being. In recent years, a growing body of research has been aimed at understanding the mechanisms through which design elements influence individuals' psychological states and behaviors. At its core, the literature suggests that self-help imagery-such as inspirational posters, infographics, and digital content-serves as potent tools for motivation and reflection when thoughtfully designed (*Figure 2*). To explore this further, one must consider the foundational principles of effective design. Elements such as color theory, typography, composition, and imagery critically elicited emotional responses. For instance, colors could evoke specific feelings; warm hues could stir enthusiasm and energy, while cooler tones might promote calmness and introspection. When applied skillfully in personal development contexts, these colors align with the intended message, reinforcing the content rather than detracting from it. Typography also carried significant weight in design. The choice of font dictated the perceived authority of the message. Clear, bold typefaces instilled confidence and assertiveness, while softer, more flowing fonts encouraged a sense of openness and creativity. In self-help imagery, the typography resonated with the audience's underlying motivations, whether to inspire courage in the face of adversity or to cultivate serenity during tumultuous times. Composition, too, shaped how individuals interacted with self-help materials. Balanced layouts that guided the eye effortlessly through the content enhanced comprehension and retention. Furthermore, the strategic placement of imagery alongside text created a powerful narrative reinforcing the taught principles. This synergy between text and visuals led to a more immersive experience, empowering individuals to visualize their goals and aspirations more vividly.



Figure 2. *Fragments rearranged into an installation, echoes of memories and pieces of untold histories.*

Imagery, often the centerpiece of self-help graphics, played a crucial role in personal development. Symbols and metaphors encapsulated complex concepts, allowing individuals to connect with ideas on a deeper, more intuitive level. For example, an image of a tree symbolizes growth and resilience, motivating individuals seeking to overcome life's challenges. By embedding such powerful visuals into self-help resources, designers created touchpoints that resonated with personal experiences and

emotional journeys. Moreover, the literature highlighted the importance of audience engagement in this intersection. Different demographics responded uniquely to various design elements; hence, understanding the target audience proved paramount. Research indicated that tailored design not only improved accessibility but also enhanced the relevance of the content, fostering a stronger connection with users. For example, visuals that reflected cultural diversity elevated a sense of belonging and recognition for individuals from various backgrounds, driving engagement and motivation toward personal development. Finally, the practical implications of these insights were profound. Educators, coaches, and mental health professionals increasingly integrated design principles into their practices. Workshops and training sessions emphasized creating visually engaging self-help materials, allowing clients to interact with their personal development journeys more dynamically. As the demand for self-help resources continued to rise, so did the imperative for creators to apply design thinking in ways that maximized impact. In summary, the synthesis of existing research revealed that design principles played a pivotal role in the effectiveness of self-help imagery. Through thoughtful application of color, typography, composition, and imagery, alongside a deep understanding of audience needs, designers could create resources that inform and inspire. This burgeoning field had the potential to transform personal development experiences, ultimately contributing to holistic personal growth and overall well-being. As exploration of this intersection continued, the possibilities for fostering transformation through design remained vast and inviting.

The intersection of installation art and design offers a fascinating exploration of communication beyond mere aesthetics. At its core, art and design serve as powerful conduits for expressing complex emotions and influencing behaviors. As Norman (2007) suggests, effective design transcends surface beauty; it taps into the cognitive and emotional frameworks of the audience, crafting experiences that resonate deeply. This principle is especially relevant in the self-help sector, where the right design can amplify motivational messages, making them more impactful and accessible. Consider the fundamental design elements like color, typography, and composition, which are vital in shaping viewer engagement. Color, for instance, operates almost like a language of its own. Research by Elliot and Maier (2014) illustrates how warm hues—think shades of red and orange—can evoke feelings of passion and motivation, inspiring action. In contrast, more terrific blues and greens create a sense of calmness and introspection, encouraging reflection and thoughtfulness. This emotional responsiveness showcased by colors exemplifies the powerful relationship between visual elements and human feelings. Typography adds another layer of nuance to design. The typeface selection can drastically alter a message's mood and readability. Bold, modern fonts may evoke urgency and strength, prompting the audience to act immediately. In contrast, serif fonts often embody tradition and reliability, offering a comforting presence that can instill trust. Combining these design facets can create an immersive atmosphere where the viewer feels engaged and compelled. In self-help, imagery catalyzes personal growth. The visual formats seen in posters, social media graphics, and printed materials aim to motivate and inspire individuals on their journeys. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of these images is contingent upon how well they incorporate design elements that resonate with the audience's emotional states. The most striking visuals evoke feelings that can ignite the desire for change while providing a sense of coherence and clarity.

Looking into existing studies highlights the potential of design in enhancing the self-help experience. For example, Pink (2007), Malchiodi (2006), and Nora (1989)

explored visual motivational cues on social media and discovered that high-contrast colors and dynamic compositions significantly elevated user engagement. This suggests that thoughtful design can augment emotional responses, sparking interaction and resonance with the viewer. Similarly, Leavy (2015), Kapitan (2010), as well as Hirsch (1997) found that well-designed self-help materials, with clear visuals and impactful statements, were perceived as more credible and valuable. Such findings indicate that the presentation of self-help content is just as important as the content itself. However, there is a noticeable gap in research focusing on how design principles can be adapted to enhance self-help imagery. While numerous studies have delved into broader contexts, such as advertising or educational materials, the unique nuances of self-help as a genre remain largely unexplored. This presents a critical opportunity for further investigation, inviting researchers and practitioners to examine how design can attract attention and meaningfully influence the efficacy of self-help materials (*Figure 3*). The researcher explores the feelings of disconnection and lack of familiarity that often exist within family dynamics through a body of work that embraces the uncomfortable realities of family drama while simultaneously seeking to uncover origins and identity mentioned by Cortes (2020). Similarly, Tinh Trinh (2020) suggests that by combining sewing and photography, the researcher transforms family photographs into a medium for mourning the loss of family history, employing fragmentation as a key technique to deconstruct and reimagine these images. This process involves tearing, cutting, and distorting photographs, then reassembling them in unexpected forms-such as re-sewn images or collaged 3D sculptures-to reflect the fractured and incomplete nature of memory and familial narratives as mentioned by Cortes (2020). These techniques offer a visual language that engages viewers in the complexities of familial identity, while also functioning as integral elements of installation-based storytelling. In overall, the narrative of design in the context of self-help illuminates the profound impact that thoughtful aesthetics can have on communication and personal growth. By thoughtful engagement with elements like color, typography, and composition, creators can foster environments that inspire action and cultivate trust and credibility. As we explore this critical area, the potential for design to transform self-help imagery into powerful tools for change is immense, paving the way for future studies and innovative applications.



Figure 3. Deconstruct and rearrange elements to symbolize fractured memories or incomplete histories.

Conclusion

The intricate relationship between design and self-help imagery has presented significant opportunities for enhancing personal growth initiatives. By understanding the psychological foundations of various design elements-such as color, layout, typography, and imagery-and their emotional impacts, creators have been empowered to develop more effective self-help materials. For example, specific colors have produced particular emotions; warm tones have evoked feelings of warmth and comfort, while cooler tones have instilled a sense of calm and reflection. Additionally, the layout and structure of materials have influenced how information is perceived and absorbed, with clarity and organization playing crucial roles in facilitating comprehension and engagement. Reflecting on past research efforts, there has been a systematic evaluation of the effectiveness of distinct design strategies within the self-help context. This evaluation has included quantitative measures of user engagement and qualitative feedback from individuals who utilized these materials. As a result, this work has contributed to a more nuanced understanding of how thoughtful design has facilitated personal empowerment and promoted overall well-being. Ultimately, such an approach has created self-help resources that resonate profoundly with individuals seeking personal growth. In light of the findings on the transformative power of therapeutic art

within family contexts, it is recommended that future research explores a broader range of art forms, including digital and performance art, to capture their unique impacts on emotional healing and family dynamics. Additionally, investigating intergenerational relationships will provide valuable insights into how these creative practices can bridge gaps among family members and enhance connectivity. Longitudinal studies are also crucial, as they will help assess the long-term effects of therapeutic art on emotional resilience and personal growth, revealing how sustained engagement can foster a deeper sense of belonging. Furthermore, developing community-based workshops that incorporate therapeutic art can offer families practical tools to strengthen their emotional bonds and facilitate open communication through creative expression. Integrating therapeutic art practices into family therapy settings could provide alternative strategies for families to navigate emotional challenges while enhancing their collective identity. Lastly, future research should consider cultural contexts, examining how various backgrounds influence the perception and effectiveness of therapeutic art to ensure accessibility and relevance for all family structures. By pursuing these recommendations, future efforts can further illuminate the vital role of therapeutic art in fostering emotional affirmation and belonging within families, ultimately contributing to healthier dynamics and personal growth.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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