

# AESTHETICS AND INTERIOR DESIGN: EFFECTS ON OVERALL MENTAL HEALTH

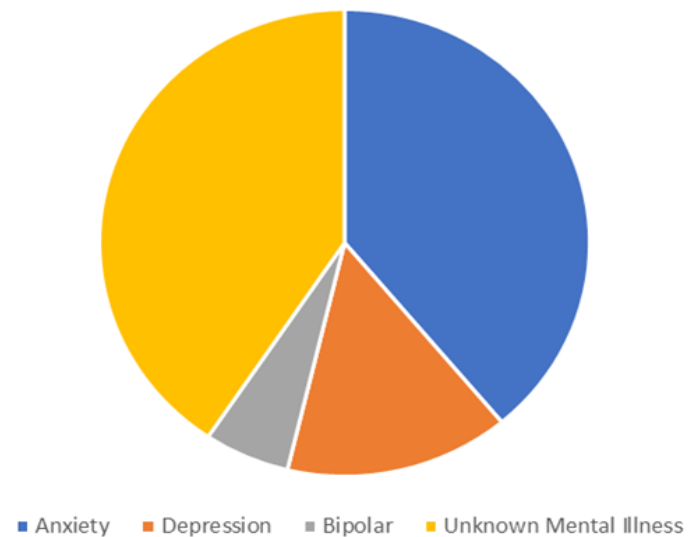
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## Introduction

According to the Mental Health Foundation, 1 in 6 people suffer from mental health issues weekly (Mental Health Foundation, 2018). Among these, anxiety and depression are the most common (ADAA, 2018). On a positive note, research is supporting the fact that people can give their mental well-being a boost by implementing some simple interior design techniques in their homes. Psychological theorists dating decades back, emphasized the significance of homes and their interiors on emotional stability (Graham, Gosling, & Travis, 2015). The Psychology of Design is examining the actual characteristics and qualities that distinguish a “home” from a mere “place of residence” to capture this healthy and mindful ambiance (Graham, Gosling, & Travis, 2016).

Mental Illness in America



With the popularity of interior design on the rise, there has been a recent increase in the call to action regarding future research of Design Psychology. One reason for this sense of urgency is directly related to the severe impact that anxiety and depression have on the sufferers and those around them. Depression harms mentally and physically, and prevents those afflicted from functioning at their full potential (Muller, 2014).

The proof that human environments influence mood and emotion is coming out in the research of Design Psychology and is attracting attention from multiple disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, geography, history, philosophy, and architecture (Graham, Gosling, & Travis, 2015). The discovery of these correlations are now prompting developers, architects, and designers alike to apply these concepts to the home, workplace and health care environments. Although there are many elements of design that are being identified as having an impact on mental health, there are a couple components that are making a presence in recent studies. Light, texture and pattern, and room organization have been recognized as producing restorative qualities in homes that have proven to reduce anxiety and depression.

## The Element of Light

Current research is analyzing light, not just as a perceptive point of view, but as a vehicle for cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses (Tomassoni, Galetta, & Treglia, 2015). It has been purported that light can be likened to a cognitive map that aids an individual in a discovery of their surroundings (Tomassoni, Galetta, & Treglia, 2015). Specifically, natural light has been proven to contribute to improved mood, increased energy, and higher morale (Edwards & Torcellini, 2002). On the other hand, artificial light sources, which include white florescent and incandescent, have shown to deplete physical and emotional energy (Edwards & Torcellini, 2002).



At first glance, the benefits of this type of research may not be entirely clear. Health, balance, and emotional regulation, which are regulated by the endocrine and nervous system, are directly stimulated by daylight (Edwards & Torcellini, 2002). These systems are the body's major health keepers even far beyond what modern science currently claims (Edwards & Torcellini, 2002). Therefore, consistent and prolonged exposure to natural light is imperative for internal regulation and emotional stability (Edwards & Torcellini, 2002).



Homeowners and interior designers can apply this information when planning any room of a home to promote psychophysiological wellness. For instance, the amount of natural light can be increased in any area by removing overhangs over windows, changing window coverings, using mirrors on walls to reflect light, and using light and bright colors for fabrics and walls.

## Texture and Pattern

Furthermore, a study by Toet, Henselamns, Lucassen, & Gevers (2011) explored the effects that visually dynamic textures have on human emotional experience. Textures help us distinguish among objects that we are familiar with, so they are an integral part of our everyday sensory experiences (Liu, Leghofer & Zeng, 2015). They are also ubiquitous, so knowledge of their impact on human emotion is quite valuable (Toet, Henselamns, Lucassen, & Gevers, 2011). Liu, Lughofer, & Zeng (2015) have correlated that sensory encounters of specific textures and patterns create lasting aesthetic experiences. These imprint on the brain, associating them with the positive emotions elicited in all similar textural and patterned interactions in the future.



Specifically, dynamic textures are spatially repetitive, time-varying visual patterns that tend to repeat. These types of textures stimulate visual imagery which induces soothing emotion in the brain (Juslin & Vasrfjall, 2008). Textures that mimic water movement or are like natural plant patterns are directly correlated to calm, content, and positive emotional states (Juslin & Vasrfjall, 2008). This imagery can be incorporated into any room by adding real plants, patterned fabric on pillows and blankets, and wallpapers. Some of these repetitive and wave like patterns can also be captured by using natural hard surfaces for tables and countertops like wood and granite.

In the past, textures were an after thought in interior design, but as this new scientific information is released it has become an essential design consideration. Textures and patterns are a visual weight that not only make a room unique but foster balance and harmony in the eye of its beholder.



## Room Organization

Finally, the notion of “room organization” is proving to be just as important as furniture and décor items when it comes to interior design. Graham, Gosling, & Travis (2015) identified that the organization of a room is another key component to consider when designing spaces that support peace and mindfulness. This study discussed the positive effect on mood when a space was arranged in such a way that fostered social interaction and was open and easy to maneuver through as well (Graham, Gosling, & Travis, 2015). This open concept also included the presence of overall organization and lack of clutter and untidiness (Saxbe & Repetti, 2010). Kaplan and Kaplan (1989) reinforced this concept by explaining that inhabitants of a room that was disorganized, cluttered, and unkept, experienced increased anxiety and feelings of being overwhelmed.

When we seek retreat in our homes from the daily chaos of work and life, our minds and bodies yearn for a soothing and harmonious environment. Environments that have the aforementioned elements lower stress hormone levels, lower blood pressure, alleviate symptoms of anxiety and depression, and improve overall mood (Saxbe & Repetti, 2010). No matter the room size, interior designers can use furniture arrangement and functional furniture pieces to effectively fashion a mentally healthy space.



## Conclusion

These studies provide insight into the psychological richness of home environments. The facets of Design Psychology discussed can be used by homeowners decorating their own home, or in unison with an interior decorator. Implementing Design Psychology can produce positive tangible emotions that result in overall well-being (Taylor, 2016). As people become more mindful of health and the importance of balance in their lives information such as this will continue to grow in popularity.



Interior designers are also beginning to extract much of this type of data to share with their clients. By doing so, they can educate them on creating restorative environments that provide a haven from daily stress and anxiety. When utilized, these simple design philosophies will reduce mental health symptoms and improve inclusive quality of life.

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