

Process for photoshoot: The phases of Melancholy

I was inspired by the subject of depression because there have been times where I can say that I was in a really dark place, constituted in certain perspectives as depression. During these periods of depression I didn't even realize I was depressed. I've come to realize that while in a particular phase of depression you can't objectively see that you're depressed. It is only until after reflection that you can judge that you were in a dark place, depressed.

The reasoning behind this project was to take a look at what depression looks like. However because you can only see depression objectively after experiencing it I believed it must be possible to create simulated depression. I wanted to photograph this to get an insight of what it looks like in different phases; from initial stage of the darkest period, the period where you are slowly becoming okay again, and the last stage where you really begin to be okay again and feel balanced. In last phase subjects were given a massage for 10 minutes as in my research it was illuminated that physical contact stimulates the most serotonin and dopamine.

When the subject entered room I greeted them and offer them tea, coffee, water. By providing some snacks I asked them to pick something to eat and settle in.

After the subject or model was comfortable enough I asked them to sit down and begin to frame them while sitting across from me. In this project I used a Nikon F on a tripod and injector so I could control when the shots took place.

Next, I gave myself 10 minutes to explain the project accounting for feedback or questions. Though I realize now that the shoot in general takes a lot less time than originally planned. I previously told models that the shoot would take give or take 2 hours. In reality it took about an hour and half, differing from person to person.

I began the project by asking a series of question and planned out how this process would take place. First;

I Ask them if they are ready to get started.

'Would I be able I record this conversation on my phone? I'm going to ask some questions about you and your current state... your answers will remain between us this would be purely for my reference. Is that okay?'

This information I only used to transcribe data and will not be included in this research. I then begun by asking them a series of questions formulated from a combination of depression indication questionnaires.

Guideline questions and points for The Phases of Melancholy Shoot

All questions should be based on the past 3-4 weeks.

1. How are you?
How has it really been going?
Fears...feeling stuck...stressed...unmotivated...unloved

2. Do you consider yourself a happy person?
3. Have you been feeling unmotivated or uninterested in things that you enjoy?
4. How have you been sleeping?
trouble falling asleep, staying asleep or sleeping too much...etc.
5. Has your appetite been poor?
Not eating enough, having immense cravings
6. Have you been extremely tired...more than usual?
Not able to get out of bed...having to take small naps, vague and foggy...etc.
7. Can you remember a time in the past several weeks when you have struggled with concentrating on... (schoolwork, work, reading, watching TV?)
8. Has there been something specific distracting you? Issues, situations in life
9. Are there periods where you find it difficult to finish simple tasks?
tidying up, cooking food, Grocery shopping, getting dressed...etc.
Do you know the reason behind it?
10. Have there been any moments that you've been extremely agitated about things that later seem to be not such a big deal?
11. Any feelings of restlessness?
12. Have you felt like you let someone or yourself down in the last few weeks?
Why?
13. When feeling your lowest, while in your darkest period...what is something that you do to pull yourself out of it?

(I changed the script slightly from the original version)

The mediation for this project was spoken in a very soft meditative voice:

'Okay so now I'm going to ask you to close your eyes...So I want you to just relax your body
Feel fully at ease.

I want you to take a deep breath in and now a deep breath out

A deep breath in and a deep breath out

So now I would like you try go back and visualize a time where you struggled the most in your life.

Think back to your darkest period;

Do you remember what season it was?

(take pause)

Was it warm?...were the leaves just falling?...was it cold?

Where were you exactly?

(pause)

Think of different factors in the given situation...

Think of the people involved

(long pause)

What sort of feelings were you feeling?

I want you to think back to the breaking point of this period...

The most awful, dreadful of days... and try to remember what were you were feeling?

What were you feeling?

Remember the pain you felt...

And now open your eyes.'

I had practiced this with myself with eyes closed and discovered when you meditate and think back on a moment of sadness or deep despair you are able to go back when thinking of the right settings and elements of that period. I tried this in the mirror and noticed that there is a melancholic look that comes over your face, it lasts for about 5 seconds. Hence why I utilized the injector tool with the camera so I could try to capture the most essential moment.

'Okay great, based on the previous questions... I asked you to recommend an activity that you do to give you some relief to the darkness/sadness in these periods. Now I want you to do the activity that puts you at ease. I will take photos of the process right before, during and right after.'

(activity took place for 3-10-20 minutes depending on activity)

('In the next simulation you will be asked to sit in UV-ray light for 15 minutes.')

The above simulation, was not actually done as I decided that this phase was very difficult and expensive to simulate inside.

So for the final simulation I decided to give subject massage as an external source that would put them at ease.

'Now for the final simulation you will be massaged for a total of 10 minutes and afterward I will take the final shot.'

Ready subject/set timer (7 minutes)

Massage (10 minutes)

Take shot

'This was the end of the photo session! Thank you so much for being a part of it.'

Subject 1 data:

- 1) Stress is good and can be healthy. There is of course a balance but it does challenge us to keep on developing ourselves.
- 2) No, happiness is a state of being. Being stable is what I strive for as I don't think ultimately being happy exists, the stable state of happiness is unattainable. I really feel like this idea from the media of being "happy" and that you can constantly be happy makes people experience periods of pining for something or feeling like there is something missing from their life. It is definitely something I experienced...

Having the feeling that something in my life is missing, but I also really think there is a connection between pain and happiness. Creativity is born from sadness and pain. The periods that I am really creative come right after these painful experiences. So without pain there is no happiness.

- 3) No
- 4) I have never had problems sleeping
- 5) I am always hungry and horny
- 6) In high stress environment like school you tend to be more tired. Since September I've been constantly feeling tired and the more tired I am the more easily stressed I become.
- 7) I have this cycle of 2 weeks of being really distracted and not being able to really focus on what I need to. I am actively talking myself out of feeling FOMO(fear of missing out). It makes me feel really anxious and It's happened about 3-4 times in the last several weeks.
- 8) Sometimes I just can't be bothered with tidying up and doing mundane tasks when I'm in these periods of being either really stressed or just not motivated to do things like doing dishes, folding clothes, etc. Sometimes it's also because I simply don't have the time for it.
- 9) No I don't get agitated very easily so when I do it is because it was a big deal.
- 10) Definitely Myself...In the past weeks I just feel like I haven't fulfilled expectations set for myself.
- 11) There is a distinction, I feel like if I am heartbroken I just eat. When I am truly sad and feel the injustices of life I write poetry about them and listen to angry music. Or just music in general also just to lift me out of my mood.

Subject 2 data:

- 1) I've been motivated to live life to the fullest, traveling, going to festivals, seeing movies and doing other social events. I'm even motivated at work because I love what I do. (works at independent movie theater) However, lately have been very unmotivated in school, where I am now in my third year bachelors. Somehow I'm just not motivated to do things that people expect me to do like working on assignments for school.
- 2) Yes, I do.

- 3) No, I do get joy out of the things that I like to do but what I noticed really makes me unhappy is the things that I feel I'm obliged to do. It's the process of the type of learning in school that I find demotivating, it depresses me slightly.
- 4) Feeling pretty exhausted not sleep well due to school and personal life balance. I think the keeping up of this balance of school and having a social life is the cause.
- 5) Little, to poor appetite. I'm constantly on the run so I sometimes don't even think of eating.
- 6) Yes Leukemia has made me extremely exhausted even now in remission.
- 7) Yes definitely with school but also sometimes my head is just somewhere else.
- 8) I have that I'm busy, so sometimes there is no time for showering. Tidying up is sometimes difficult and it comes in waves when it gets really bad...my cleaning routines. Cleaning does change my mood though and it can be so rewarding but starting is the hardest.
- 9) I recently got broken up with my girlfriend so these dark events or heartbreak really make me have moments of feeling it can be transformative but it has also potential to be destructive. When my senses are overwhelmed I can feel pretty agitated.
- 10) Yes—Others. When letting others down I feel as if you synonymously let myself down.
- 11) For me, it's listening to music it can be uplifting music or really depressing music. The mix of happy and sad music makes you go through a mix of emotions that make you feel alive.

Subject 3 data:

- 1) I've been pretty exhausted from work and under a great amount of pressure. Pressures from the world and even ones that I set for myself. It's probably because I strive for perfection and control; it is one of my coping mechanisms. I also feel myself yearning for something maybe becoming more myself—my real self. Like I find myself questioning "who are you?"
- 2) I would consider myself a positive person but I do have trouble letting go, I'm constantly moving in a fast pace. (through life)
- 3) No, I'm finally more interested again in the things that I enjoy like drawing and painting. I'm experiencing somewhat of an upward spiral.
- 4) From high pressure I feel myself becoming overstimulated, which makes it very difficult to fall into sleep. So I'm not sleeping that well once I am asleep.
- 5) I haven't had much of an appetite because of exhaustion.
- 6) Not much of an increase of lethargy to my knowledge.
- 7) I can't remember where concentration has been an issue, but lethargy has been an issue in the past. Where due to stress I experience heart palpitations.
- 8) I would say I have days not periods. Routine helps me stay sane and is key for balance. Having routine in my life, is a good base like cleaning house is important for mental health. It's my basis for feeling good.
- 9) I do experience agitation normally when I'm at work and overwhelmed. I have good endurance for hard times—this is often instilled in structured coping mechanisms. Selective memories allow us to avoid things.
- 10) Yes, my sick grandma. I keep on forgetting to contact her and visit. I think it is because I have been trying to avoid the unpleasantness of seeing her sick. Though I think I'm just avoiding reality and avoiding the stress of it.
- 11) I use my coping mechanisms like cleaning; my routines, talking to girlfriends. Also, yoga.

Subject 4 data:

- 1) Very tired and stressed, but doing better than earlier this winter because of nice weather.
- 2) I do consider myself a happy person, well a positive person. You can control happiness but not dragging yourself through things.
- 3) I have been pretty unmotivated to draw which I normally like doing. It's for me just difficult to make the step of taking time to do it. Lately I have been feeling uninspired.
- 4) Generally sleeping well but I've noticed that changes with my personal life can affect my sleep. I've been experiencing insomnia when faced with great change or when I don't feel safe.
- 5) Appetite is pretty good now...but it was affected from my childhood when I was bullied for being overweight. The social pressures of appearance were really important to me then and greatly affected my appetite. Somehow I saw it as control and being skinny related to happiness and balance.
- 6) (because answered in question 1 voided this) Very tired.
- 7) I always had trouble with concentration especially sometimes even with one-on-one contact. I find it overstimulating when you are surrounded by one more people. I believe my attention span has been effected by social media.
- 8) Small tasks need to be done to create normalcy but I have experienced times of just wanting to chill but not because of sadness.
- 9) I've experienced Agitation before meeting someone. I have difficulty staying in the moment around people without overthinking feelings of not completely being myself.
- 10) I feel like I let myself down when I give way to letting people influence what I actually want to do. So myself I'd say.
- 11) Drinking wine and smoking a cigarette.

From collective data, I do see that a lot of the subjects experience similar things for instance social pressures and generally being exhausted because of all that is required from them. Overstimulation being sometimes the cause of agitation. Difficulty focusing because of social media is a circumstance of overstimulation.

Another factor that inspired me to do this project was that I've noticed as have read that people from my generation tend to be majorly depressed and anxious then say 3 to 5 decades ago. However, in my research I found that there isn't enough quantifiable evidence to support this claim. Partly because people in that time didn't openly talk about their feeling or express feelings of angst as easily as people in recent years. Living in a time where it is more accepted to express emotions more openly and seek help if you are severely struggling with depression. This has been revealed in Shakya, H. B., & Christakis, N. A. (2017). Association of Facebook use with compromised well-being: A longitudinal study. *American Journal of Epidemiology* that Social Media has its role to play in depression,

but it just plays a factor in our depression. Which ultimately stems from Social pressure of projecting your best side while you revile in your darkness alone.

From this perspective I hoped to capture the heart of the dark place and the transition between emotions among subjects. This is why I created a meditation script to bring people mentally back into this state of mind; back into the dark place. I want to explore what happens when they use coping mechanisms to put themselves at ease (an activity they use as a coping mechanism e.g., listening to music, drinking wine, physical exertion, painting, etc.) or what happens when an external factor puts them at ease (e.g., physical contact) We all express emotions differently and It's a constant up and down but what do these phases look like for each of us. Hence this project phases of melancholy.

In conclusion, I don't believe that everyone is chronically or medially depressed, but I do believe everyone has experienced a moment of their life where they have been depressed. Depression can be understood as a feeling (mood) or bodily state as stated in Kangas: Making Sense of Depression. Vulnerability factors of feeling a level of low self-esteem give way to this feeling of feeling depressed. Depression is deeply interwoven in everyday life...and the narrative of one's life serves as context to understanding the existential self and a person's sense of social and individual identity; expressed in Good's Culture and Depression. This is why I think it's important to talk about depression not only as a condition but also as something that everyone experiences. It is a normal experience and mood that we all share, and should share with each other. I believe if depression would be destigmatized because of its definition, we could alleviate pressures of social anxieties and get people talking about this issue more; perhaps preventing certain people from clinical depression or at least facing depression or clinical depression alone.

https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ilka_Haarni/publication/249723447_Making_Sense_of_Depression_Perceptions_of_Melancholia_in_Lay_Narratives/links/546dd8c10cf2a7492c560578.pdf

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28093386>

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5143470/>

