



Special Issue Editorial: *Design for Subjective Well-Being*

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Citation: Desmet, P. M. A., Pohlmeier, A. E., & Forlizzi, J. (2013). Special issue editorial: Design for subjective well-being. *International Journal of Design*, 7(3), 1-3.

How can design contribute to happiness? The current issue of the *International Journal of Design* is dedicated to this question—a question that can evoke mixed reactions. Some may feel that the phenomenon of happiness is something too elusive to allow for meaningful scientific enquiry. They might argue that happiness is a superficial state, for which the investment of precious research time would be frivolous. Are there not more pressing issues waiting to be studied? At the same time, there are others who are fascinated, enthusiastic even, about the possibility of gaining practical insight into the role of happiness in design practice and education.

We belong to the latter group, and we are willing to take up the challenge of establishing a scientific design research approach that could serve the interests of presumably the largest target group imaginable: everyone. After all, we *all* wish to live a good life, and though the definition of a good life might vary from person to person, happiness is a universal and necessary condition (see Diener, 2000; Suh, Diener, Oishi, & Triandis, 1998). The pursuit of happiness is basic to all people in all cultures. Happiness was acknowledged in a 2011 UN resolution as a fundamental human goal that is in line with the Millennium Development Goals (United Nations, 2011). In other words, happiness is not simply a matter for those who have nothing else to worry about. On the contrary, a holistic approach to human development, as emphasized in the UN resolution, might be essential for tackling some of the most urgent challenges of our time. This has also been recognized on a policy level. A famous example is that of the former king of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, who soon after his enthronement in 1972 stated that for his kingdom Gross National Happiness (GNH) was more important than Gross Domestic Product (GDP). He went on to make GNH the guiding philosophy of Bhutan's development process (see Bates, 2009; Ura, Alkire, Zangmo, & Wangdi, 2013).

Since then, the weight of happiness in human development has become a global topic of inquiry. At least six international conferences have been dedicated to GNH, attracting researchers and policy makers from all parts of the world. More and more countries are paying attention to this and similar national happiness indices, incorporating them as criteria in the formation of public policies.

Now that human happiness is widely acknowledged to have an important role in human development, it should be given serious attention in the design discipline as well. It deserves to be examined through scientific investigations and sound design research. With design being perhaps one of the most intimate means for reaching people, it is time to explore the possibilities it offers for supporting the inherent human aspiration of living a good life.

In our work as researchers and educators, we have encountered many designers who find inspiration in the idea that their designs could contribute to people's happiness. In fact, the interest in happiness in our professional community is rapidly growing. We believe that this is not a drifting trend but a lasting development, an effect of the changing world of design. As the discipline of design grows and matures, the model of one designer creating one product is no longer adequate. Design is transforming into a more expansive discipline, one that includes the coordinated design of artifacts, services, systems, environments, human action, and many other resources. This evolving view also reveals that designers are seeking to find meaning in the activity of designing, and to find satisfaction in the knowledge that what we design is improving the world for the people it has been designed for. And user happiness is clearly a truthful measure of any such improvement. We hope that this special issue will provide a framework and a research agenda with which the community can go forward and leverage the momentum that is currently observed in this *positive design movement*.

We use the term *subjective well-being* to refer to happiness as an enduring sense of appreciation for one's life (i.e., being happy with one's life), rather than a momentary feeling. According to this meaning, happiness is neither frivolous nor superficial. Design for Subjective Well-Being supports this definition by presenting itself as the activity of designing with the explicit intention to support people in their pursuit of a pleasurable and satisfying life, and, even more important, in their desire to flourish. Design for Subjective Well-Being is understandably broad. It aims at designing products that contribute positively to the experienced quality of life, in making things that are useful, usable, enjoyable, purposeful, desirable, and even virtuous and ethical. It is an approach that helps designers to think through the values they want to support and maximize in what they design. With the explicit focus on long-term happiness, Design for Subjective Well-Being is a novel approach that deserves the kind of research attention that will advance understanding and practical implications in the field.

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This issue of the *International Journal of Design* explores the constructs of Design for Subjective Well-Being through a set of five papers, which together examine the topic through a variety of lenses—of daily life, work, leisure, fun, and health. The intention is to present a selection of research that will appeal to a broad audience: to individuals as well as groups in the private, public, social, and healthcare sectors. Furthermore, this special issue provides a broad range of disciplinary perspectives in design research: After introducing subjective well-being as an explicit design objective, the topic will be discussed in terms of experience design, business, ethics, and co-design.

The first contribution, “Positive Design: An Introduction to Design for Subjective Well-Being,” by two of the guest editors of this special issue, Pieter Desmet and Anna Pohlmeier, gives an introduction to the topic and lays out its thematic roots and influences. It offers a positive design framework that depicts three core ingredients: design for pleasure, for personal significance, and for virtue. The authors propose that “Positive Design” represents the sweet spot where these core ingredients meet, a point at which design enables and stimulates human flourishing. Distinguishing characteristics of the design process are discussed as well as urgent topics for a forthcoming research agenda.

In the article “Designing Moments of Meaning and Pleasure. Experience Design and Happiness,” Marc Hassenzahl, Kai Eckoldt, Sarah Diefenbach, Matthias Laschke, Eva Lenz, and Joonhwan Kim propose experience design as a conceptual tool for deriving pleasurable as well as meaningful moments as an outcome of the design process. They use psychological needs as a way to categorize and add meaning to experiences that are mediated through material artifacts. Their approach focuses on real life holistic experiences that include social contexts and narratives. These experiences are analyzed with the purpose of formulating “experience patterns,” which are essentially abstractions of experiences. By representing the essence of an experience, these patterns can be used as the basis for designing new artifacts. The authors provide design case examples and also reflect on the moral issues of designing in this way.

Maria Sääksjärvi and Katarina Hellén explore “How Designers and Marketers can Work Together to Support Consumers’ Happiness.” The authors propose that when designing

for a customer’s subjective well-being, designers and marketers should work alongside each other to create authentic value propositions. The authors draw upon the literature of positive psychology to present three propositions of design for happiness; these are directed toward helping designers as well as marketers to understand what it means to design for the happiness of their customers and, in turn, to create authentic value together for all of the stakeholders associated with a design.

In the fourth contribution, “Technology, Well-being, and Freedom: The Legacy of Utopian Design,” Steven Dorrestijn and Peter-Paul Verbeek seek to raise awareness of the ethical and political concerns of design for subjective well-being. The authors take a historical view in examining two contemporary approaches of user-influencing design: “nudge” and “persuasive technology.” They examine how such approaches, which are meant to improve well-being, can be applied without risking the pitfalls of previous utopian design movements. They propose that a basic ethical concern in design for well-being is finding the right balance between determination and freedom.

The final article, “The Role of Subjective Well-being in Co-designing Open-design Assistive Devices,” by Lieven De Couvreur, Walter Dejonghe, Jan Detand and Richard Goossens, explores the role of subjective well-being through a case study of the design of a personalized assistive device. This paper describes a collaborative design process—between an individual, his or her occupational therapists, and a design team—that results in a new way to improve a disabled person’s physical, mental, and social well-being. The case study demonstrates that being a participant in a design process can be a source of happiness in itself, apart from the impact of the resulting design: The experience of contributing to the process can be empowering, as it can provide the participant with agency, self-worth, and achievement.

The call for papers for this special issue was met with overwhelming interest. More than forty papers were submitted, representing a wide variety of studies, theoretical explorations, and design cases. Our main challenge was to select those manuscripts that had an explicit focus on subjective well-being. In a way, most (or perhaps all) design can be considered to be design for happiness, because all design aims to contribute to the quality of life of its users. Even though most submissions for this issue were of high quality, many did not accentuate the specific role of subjective well-being in their discussion. This perhaps demonstrates that the topic has only started to emerge: It is challenging to express a well-defined focus when a clear language and set of relevant distinctions has not yet crystallized. Design for Subjective Well-Being is a nascent field within the larger discipline of design, and we selected those manuscripts that we believe can further an understanding of the domain. The work done by the authors chosen here begins to lay out the exciting landscape of research and design in this area. It is our hope that this work will go a great way toward creating the enthusiasm and motivation that are necessary for this field to continue to build and, as a result, to contribute to the well-being of individuals and communities.

Prof. Dr. **Pieter Desmet** is chair of the Design for Experience research group and chair of the Design for Interaction master’s program at the Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering at Delft University of Technology. His main research interests are in the fields of design, emotion, and subjective well-being. Desmet is a board member of the international Design & Emotion Society and co-founder of the Delft Institute of Positive Design.

Dr.-Ing. **Anna Pohlmeier** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Industrial Design at Delft University of Technology, co-chair of the Delft Institute of Positive Design, and co-founder of the research group Intuitive Use of User Interfaces (IUUI). With a background in psychology (Humboldt University of Berlin) and a Ph.D. in engineering (TU Berlin & University of Luxembourg), her research topics include design for subjective well-being, user experience, and user-centered design.

Dr. **Jodi Forlizzi** is an Associate Professor in the Human-Computer Interaction Institute and the School of Design at Carnegie Mellon University. Her research interests span experience design, service design, and the design of social products ranging from agents and avatars to embodied robots. Forlizzi leads the Human-Systems Interaction group for the Quality of Life Technology Center at Carnegie Mellon University.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all of the authors for their tremendous efforts in creating the body of research that is represented in this issue of *International Journal of Design* and for carefully modifying their articles based on reviewer feedback. We also express gratitude to our reviewers of this issue for their time and patience in providing constructive feedback: Dr. Aisling Kelleher, Dr. Bruce Hanington, Dr. Çiğdem Erbuğ, Dr. Clarine van Oel, Dr. Debra Satterfield, Dr. Elisa Giaccardi, Dr. Elizabeth Sanders, Dr. Erik Stolterman, Dr. Evangelos Karapanos, Dr. Giulio Jacucci, Dr. Ilpo Koskinen, Dr. Irene Kamp, Dr. John Zimmerman, Dr. Jonas Löwgren, Dr. Ka Nin Chow, Dr. Kristina Höök, Dr. Lily Diaz-Kommonen, Dr. Lucien Leahu, Dr. Marco Roozendaal, Mathieu Gielen, Dr. Nathan Crilly, Dr. Neelke Doorn, Dr. Nicola Morelli, Dr. Paul Hekkert, Dr. Peter Scupelli, Dr. Ravindra Chitturi, Dr. Ryan Baker, Dr. Samantha Porter, Dr. Sari Kujala, Dr. Steven Dow, Dr. Vesna Popovic, Dr. Vikram Parmar, and Dr. Young Kyung Lim. In addition, we wish to thank the copy editors for their assistance in producing this special issue: Dr. Carolyn Barnes, Sarah Brooks, Hsiao-Yun Chu, Robert Taylor, Harold Thompson, and Jianne Whelton. And finally, we express our sincere appreciation to Dr. Lin-Lin Chen, Editor in Chief of the journal, and Managing Editors Dr. Yaliang Chang & Dr. Wei-Ken Hung for their tireless efforts and guidance in bringing this issue to fruition.

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