

Unravel: (Re)discover your daily routine as a source of pleasure

Design by Ezgi Orçun
Text by Pieter Desmet

Languishing – the feeling of stagnation and emptiness. You don't necessarily feel depressed, but somewhat joyless, feeling a bit 'meh'. In our vast emotional repertoire, it doesn't immediately grab the attention. Regardless, it is the dominant mood of 2021, according to psychologist Adam Grant (2021). Grant published an article in the New York Times about this mood during the pandemic. People muddle through their days, looking at their lives through foggy lenses. Aha, I thought. So that's what I've been experiencing these past months - a similar pattern I noticed among my colleagues and students too. A stifling sense of indifference. Designer Ezgi Orçun certainly didn't let it get to her. She chose 'languishing' as the subject for her final project: "How can I help young adults rediscover their enthusiasm in times of the pandemic?" The result is 'Unravel': an aid to rediscover your daily routine as a source of pleasure.



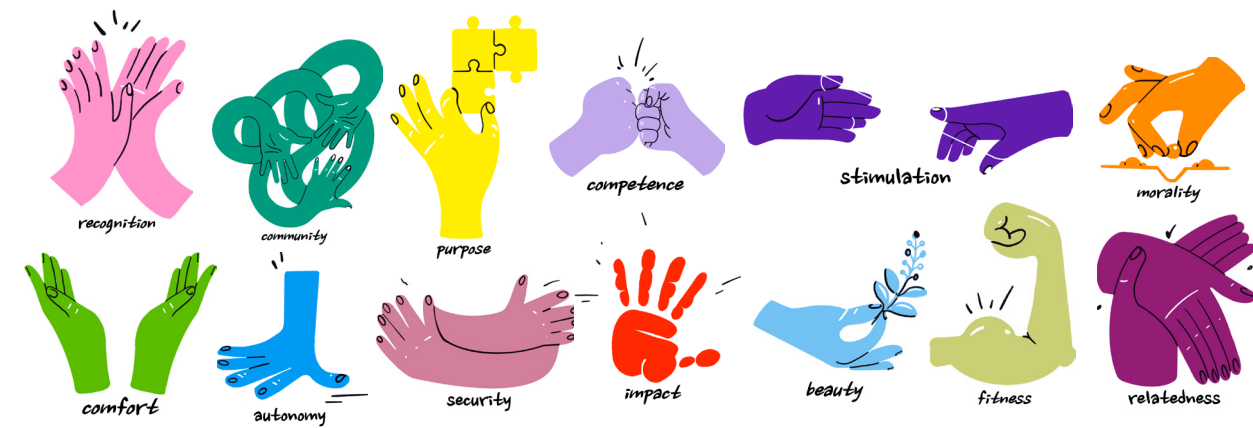


Figure 1: Pictograms for 13 Basic Needs (designed by Ezgi Orçun and Asude Çelik)

Under the spell of the pandemic

On 30 January 2020, the World Health Organisation declared the COVID-19 outbreak a global health crisis, and shortly thereafter a pandemic. Within two months, about half of the world's population was living in some form of lockdown. Curfews, quarantine, closed restaurants and similar social restrictions. These so-called 'Nonpharmaceutical Interventions' (NPI) have drastically affected our daily lives, with a shockingly negative impact on the well-being of many (Ruiz, 2021). They prohibit activities that contribute to our well-being, such as travelling, going out, family events, visiting museums: all essential for fulfilling kinship, stimulation, autonomy, meaning, competence and other primary psychological needs.

Moments of pleasure

With the pandemic underway, Ezgi's first idea was to design something that would help people develop new routines to replace activities that were no longer possible. We're no longer able to go to a concert for excitement - so what can we do in stead? You can't go out for dinner with friends to connect - so what can you do? Ezgi had 20 young adults keep a diary of the fun moments during their daily routines. She then asked them to reflect on those moments: which need(s) were fulfilled? As a helpful tool, she provided an overview of 13 fundamental needs (see Desmet & Fokkinga, 2021). This research resulted in a collection of hundreds of so-called 'pleasure moments'. And it gave her a surprising new insight: the invitation to reflection itself turned out to be an effective intervention. Her respondents appreciated the small everyday moments of pleasure much more deeply, precisely because they were asked to think about the relationship between pleasure, deeper needs and well-being.



Figure 2: Inspired by the 'beauty' tip card, respondents came up with a challenge: how can we serve leftovers from yesterday as aesthetically pleasing as possible?

(Re)discovering existing routines

Her research gave Ezgi new insights. She abandoned the idea of helping people develop new routines to replace what was no longer possible. Instead, she focused on creating fun in the routines that people have. This resulted in the creation of 'Unravel': a set of 39 cards that allow you to (re)discover daily activities as a source of pleasure. She started by exploring the routine of preparing a meal. She created a series of two to four cards for each of the 13 basic needs. Every card gives a specific tip on how to fulfill that need while preparing a meal. The cards also feature an inspiring image and a QR code for a website with extra information and tips. A few examples are shown on the right.

On a journey of discovery in your familiar routines

Unravel was designed as a month-long voyage of discovery. It consists of a square box containing the tip cards and a set of fridge magnets. When you open the box, it unfolds into a small poster. The cards are then placed in the middle. The poster provides a brief explanation of each fundamental need. For the first step, you choose five cards that appeal to you. You then place these on your fridge. Every day you pick one to experiment with. After several days - when you're ready to do so - you can replace one card with another from the set. This way, Unravel contributes to your well-being in two ways. First, it gives you the pleasure of carrying out little experiments. This is the main pleasure, but second, the information on the cards also gives you insight into the relationship between pleasure and your deeper needs. You get to know your own needs and how to fulfill them in the context of cooking.



Autonomy
Being the cause of your actions and feeling that you can do things your own way.



Beauty
Seeing elegance, coherence and harmony in both the world and your direct environment



Connectedness
Having warm, trusting relationships with people you care about.

Figure 3: Three Examples of Unravel Tip Cards



Figure 4: the Unravel Card Set with Poster

Colophon

Unravel: (Re)discover your daily routine as a source of pleasure

2022

Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering
Delft University of Technology
The Netherlands

Product concept & design by Ezgi Orçun

Text by Pieter Desmet

All images by Ezgi Orçun.

Graphic design by Lotte Peeters Weem

Copyright © 2022 by Ezgi Orçun and Pieter Desmet.

All rights reserved. This article or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner without written permission of the copyright holders.

This article was originally written for the Dutch Journal of Positive Psychology (www.tijdschriftpositievepsychologie.nl).

All articles from the series can be downloaded at www.diopd.org

Reference

Desmet, P.M.A. (2022). Unravel: (Re)discover your daily routine as a source of pleasure. Delft, Delft University of Technology.

DELFT INSTITUTE OF
positive design

TU Delft

The feeling of revelation

Ezgi asked six young adults to use Unravel for ten days and record their experiences. One wrote: “The small steps had a big impact: I was able to take my cooking experiences to a much higher level”. Of course she also identified many points for improvement, but it was nice to see that during the oppressive lockdown, there was still some room for fun. Another respondent wrote that he could apply his experiences with Unravel in other areas of his life too. Ezgi was very happy to hear this, because Unravel was created as a series. In addition to Unravel Cooking, the game can be expanded with

Unravel Exercise, Household Chores, etc. The lockdown inspired Ezgi to create this new concept. But I suspect Unravel will not lose its relevance once the lockdown is lifted. For as Abraham Maslow (1987) previously observed: Happy is the person for whom “every sunset is as beautiful as the first and every flower is as breath-taking, even after they have seen a million flowers before”. This person finds adventure in even the most mundane, wrote Maslow. And thanks to Ezgi from now on also with a little help from Unravel.



Ezgi Orçun (photo) developed Unravel in 2021 as part of a self-initiated graduation project for the master's programme Design for Interaction. Supervisors were Marieke Sonneveld and Pieter Desmet (TU Delft). During her bachelor's, she studied fine arts and psychology specialising in human-centered design and cognitive sciences at Koç University (Istanbul, Turkey). Ezgi's design projects are guided by the principles of positive psychology, and she is passionate about the ways in which the fields of psychology and design are able to inform and reinforce each other.

References

Orçun, E. (2021). Designing for Well-being during Covid-19: Converting daily activities into [un]conscious pursuits of joy. Unpublished Master Thesis. Delft: Delft University of Technology.