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Elisa Leigh Vandergriff  
*East Tennessee State University*

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SONDER: Exploration of the Relationship between Digital Media and  
Graphic Design through the Creation of Print and Digital Publications

By

Elisa Leigh Vandergriff

An Undergraduate Honors Thesis  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
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Elisa Leigh Vandergriff

4/20/18  
Date

  
Jonathan Hounshell, Thesis Mentor

4/24/18  
Date

  
Dr. Scott Contreras-Koterbay, Reader

4/20/18  
Date

  
Marty Fitzgerald, Reader

4/20/18  
Date

Jack Kerouac once said, “Live, travel, adventure, bless, and don't be sorry.” This is a mantra I aspire to live by and one which resonated with me as I approached the formative stages of my senior honors thesis. I wanted to find a way to share the opportunities I have had to live, travel, and adventure and be able to bless others with resources and inspiration to do the same. Thus, *Sonder* was born. *Sonder* is an exploration of the relationship between digital media and graphic design through the creation of print and digital publications.

*Sonder*, at its very foundation, is a travel magazine with both a physical print publication and a digital publication designed for a tablet. It includes photography, articles, poetry, and travel tips. It has a clean, modern aesthetic with bright photographs and accents. The print and the digital versions contain the same content, but explore different methods of presentation. What makes *Sonder* unique from other travel magazines is its content, creators, and target audience.

The goal of *Sonder* was to create a resource that someone like me would want to pick up: travel information presented with a nice aesthetic for a young student with limited funds, the desire to travel, and no idea how to do it or what to expect. Because my own study abroad experience was so influential in my life, I purposefully incorporated a strong emphasis on the amazing possibilities and importance of embracing study abroad opportunities.

In 2016 I spent a semester studying abroad in Milan, Italy through an ISEP exchange program. Studying in Italy had always been a dream of mine and East Tennessee State University helped me accomplish that. I have always loved travelling but my study abroad experience was completely life-changing. When a person is totally immersed in a new culture, it becomes less about seeing all the sights and more about experiencing every single unique moment as it happens and re-discovering oneself outside of familiarity.

Ever since my own incredible study abroad experience, I have been encouraging everyone I know to take advantage of any similar opportunities they encounter. Unfortunately, moving to another country and school is a monumental and terrifying task. I wanted to create a resource for anybody interested in the idea of studying abroad that would help calm some of those nerves, give advice and ideas, and to encourage the unsure student. Ultimately, I desired to create a resource that would have been monumentally valuable for me to have read before I went abroad.

*Sonder* explores the relationship between digital media and graphic design. I study digital media and have a strong focus and passion for graphic design, therefore I desired to create a thesis that converged the two and examined the differences. I first discovered my love for digital publishing in 2016 through a small digital magazine project I completed for a class. I wanted to explore that area of publishing design to a fuller extent. Curating and creating a full-sized digital magazine together with a print version was the route I decided to take.

The word “sonder” is a relatively new expression created by John Koenig for his project *The Dictionary of Obscure Sorrows* in 2012. Sonder is defined as, “the realization that each random passerby is living a life as vivid and complex as your own—populated with their own ambitions, friends, routines, worries and inherited craziness—an epic story that continues invisibly around you like an anthill sprawling deep underground, with elaborate passageways to thousands of other lives that you’ll never know existed, in which you might appear only once, as an extra sipping coffee in the background, as a blur of traffic passing on the highway, as a lighted window at dusk” (Koenig).

When brainstorming names for my publication I knew I wanted a name that related to travel, but in a subtle way. The sound of the word *sonder* is very similar to wonder, wander, and saunter which all infer elements of travel. More importantly, I chose *Sonder* because it is a unique feeling that tends to be experienced most frequently while travelling in an unfamiliar place surrounded by strangers and new experiences. It is a simple title which is easy to pronounce yet a word new and unfamiliar enough to strike the interest of potential readers.

A goal of mine was to make *Sonder* a completely female produced publication; every article, photograph, and illustration in *Sonder* was written or created by women. In a world that is still so threatening to women, I felt compelled to encourage and empower other girls by sharing stories from women who have travelled around the world, sometimes even doing it alone. However, I intentionally did not make female empowerment the main theme of the magazine. *Sonder* is a publication for anyone and everyone and the all-female aspect was intentionally kept subtle as to not distract from the main idea of the magazine.

One of the first steps I took to create *Sonder* was selecting my writers. Staying true to my concept of real stories by young travelling women, I contacted friends and family whom I knew had traveling experience, with whom I had travelled, or whom I met while travelling. I had general idea about the experiences of each of my writers and asked that they all send me rough drafts with a one-month deadline. I gave them full autonomy in selecting the topics they wanted to write about, requesting only that it be something they were passionate about. In response, I received articles with tips and ideas for travelling to certain cities, journal entry-like articles about incredible experiences, observational articles about interesting countries, and articles about friendships made while abroad. I am proud to know that every article in *Sonder* is entirely genuine.

Research played a large part in the production on *Sonder*; however, I quickly discovered that this design research process was quite different from typical academic research. I started by viewing websites like Behance, Issuu, and even Pinterest to get inspired and to become familiar with current design and magazine trends. For more technical research, I scoured through digital versions of magazines designed for tablets and opened countless physical magazines, dissecting every page and layout to get an idea of how I wanted *Sonder* to look and feel.

Choosing the style, color palette, look, and feel of *Sonder* was a crucial task. It is rare in the design world to create a piece of work that is completely one's own with no guidelines, client input, rules, or plans at all. This was not only my very own project, but a project I hoped many people would view and enjoy in the future. I wanted the aesthetic to be targeted toward college-age people, but in a sleek, clean, and modern way.

I chose to keep the color palette softer with a few select low-saturation earth-toned colors. Because I had personally travelled to most of the locations my writers described, I decided to use my own photographs wherever I could. I edited my photos in a darker, moody look with colors and tones complementing and corresponding with my color palette. I chose a serif font for my magazine title, articles, and article titles and a more light, fun brush font to be used for accents and alternate titles. I then established the necessary font sizes and pleasing paragraph styles for both the print and digital versions. I used thin lines on select articles to direct eye flow and to define cohesive graphic elements. I wanted my articles to be simple, eye catching, balanced, clean, and stimulating.

After carefully analyzing all my articles and putting together a rough idea of what each spread would look like, I started establishing the outline for *Sonder*. I first decided which articles

I wanted for my first, last, and feature articles. For my first article I wanted something fun and universally relatable to catch the reader's attention and motivate them to continue reading. I chose a quirky article written by Molly Bee about the importance of attaining a good pair of shoes before you go abroad. I wanted my magazine to end on a similarly positive and relatable note thus I chose an article about discovering self-worth through friendships made abroad by Jen Kusmer.

I wanted my feature article to be about a location; somewhere incredibly beautiful and prevalent in the current travel culture. Iceland seemed to be the obvious answer to me. Iceland happened to be my personal most recent trip abroad and a destination growing in popularity. I had a plethora of beautiful photographs and video footage and my sister, Maranda Vandergriff, provided a lovely article outlining some of the most beautiful destinations on the otherworldly island.

After establishing my first, last, and feature articles, I completed a rough draft of the whole outline. I wanted to evenly disperse articles throughout the publication based on length, writing style, and location. Careful consideration was taken into the placement of each and every page, photograph, title, and article in order to keep a smooth and enticing flow to the magazine. After completing multiple drafts of both the print and digital versions, all the articles were lined up once more, analyzed also this time by color and layout, and rearranged to complete the final order of *Sonder*.

When I began working on the layout of the magazine, I started designing the print version first. I chose a standard 8.5"x11" page size and worked on each article individually in separate files. I carefully selected photographs from my personal files from the locations I had visited and

requested photographs from those who wrote about places I had not. It was crucial that the photographs selected accurately depicted each of the locations, were well composed, and would be pleasing and alluring to readers. I assigned one color from my color palette to each article that I felt corresponded with the photographs and to the subject of the writing. I established general ideas of how the text needed to flow and where the photographs should be placed, then reworked each article countless times.

After establishing a solid first draft of every article, I printed, arranged, evaluated, marked up, and reworked each page to make sure every element was optimal. I then imported each article into a single document for easier access and to establish a better idea of the flow of the magazine. Once everything was in place, edited, and rearranged exactly how I wanted, I changed and corrected the page numbers.

Creating the print version of *Sonder* and the digital version were two completely different experiences. The switch from building the print version to creating the digital version was when the relationship and differences in the graphic design and digital media aspects really began to show. With printed items, the experience of looking at the design on a computer screen and holding a physical finished product in one's hands are two entirely different experiences. The difficult areas are usually the transference of color from screen to paper and filling up space on the surface effectively with a fine balance between too much and too little. Although color and balance were also important matters in the digital version, the interactive elements were the predominant digital concern. Although I could have simply created only one version of *Sonder* or simplified versions of both, I wanted to push myself to create a beautiful print version and an entirely interactive digital version of my magazine.

Digital magazines are technological evolutions of classic print magazines. *Wired Magazine* paved the way for new digital publishing technology after partnering with Adobe to develop a new experience for magazine readers (Brandt). So, what is a digital magazine? According to a case study done in 2012 by Adobe employees Joel Brandt and Jeremy Clark, "... a digital magazine should combine the beauty of print, the engagement of print, and digital distribution." A digital magazine is presented on a tablet screen with the capacity of vertical and horizontal scroll as well as a variety of ways to reveal content like buttons, scrollable frames, or slideshows. As opposed to just a flattened PDF version of a print magazine, digital magazines offer a new and evolved way of interacting with articles in the digital realm.

Building the digital version of *Sonder*, as I quickly realized, was much more difficult than copying and pasting pages from the already-designed print version. To achieve a functioning interactive version of the magazine, I used the older 2014 version of Adobe InDesign for its superb digital publishing features that have been altered in newer versions of the software. I first had to import all the text, photographs, and graphic elements from the corresponding articles in the print files and rework each page to better suit the 768x1024px layout of tablets. Instead of having a two-page spread, the digital version is laid out one page at a time with a vertical scroll for each individual article and a horizontal swipe to view the next.

Creating a digital magazine presents endless interactive possibilities. I wanted to keep the same clean and simple look that the print version maintained, but add entertaining elements like slideshows, buttons, scrollable frames, and image sequences. I evaluated the way information was presented in each article and built different levels of interaction respectively. When I took many of the photographs I included in the print version, I also captured video in the same locations with similar composition. Whenever this was the case, I replaced the still photographs

with moving image sequences from the video footage to create an intensified impression of the locations.

I animated instances in which I used a brush font to give the impression of the words being hand-written out before the reader. To create a guided user experience, I created content that had to be revealed by tapping or swiping. To test every interactive aspect, I uploaded each file onto the Adobe Folio Builder to view and interact with on a tablet with Adobe Content Viewer. Every time I made a change I updated the files to make sure everything I added worked flawlessly. Keeping with the style of the print version, I kept all the elements simple and subtle but impactful.

One of the final steps for both the print and the digital versions was creating the table of contents and acknowledgments pages and finalizing the cover. I saved these steps for the very end because they represent the entire publication and I wanted to know exactly what would be inside before deciding how it would be represented on the outside. In the print version, I included the definition of sonder on the back cover and built the contents page with a sliver of photographs from each article next to the article titles. For the digital version, I included a slide up element with the definition of sonder on the cover page. I imbedded links in the photograph slivers on the contents page to each corresponding article so that when tapped, the reader would be redirected to that article.

To finalize digital version of the magazine, I uploaded all my files and articles into the Adobe Folio Builder to be viewable in the Adobe Content Viewer on a tablet. To finalize my print version, I checked the resolution of every photograph to make sure it had the correct PPI (pixels per inch) ratio so that the images would look crisp. I ran test prints to ensure the colors

and photographs would appear accurately and set up the bleeds for my document to ensure no unnecessary white space would be left around the pages when printed. Because of complications with the printing system, I had to manually arrange the entire document for printing, ensuring that when stacked and bound, each page would be properly placed across from its corresponding spread. After several test prints to make sure the final result was flawless, I printed four copies of the entire magazine on 12x18" paper and then trimmed each spread down to 11x17". I wanted the first few copies of the print version to be special so after I printed and trimmed them, I hand bound them with thread waxed with beeswax which is stronger and more durable than regular thread.

Although *Sonder* is a thesis project, I have high hopes for it to become so much more. It is most likely I will not be able to publish the digital version of *Sonder* due to high fees and restrictions through the Adobe publishing system, but I would like to at least make the digital version accessible on a small scale through the Adobe Content Viewer sharing options. I would like to have the printed version printed in bulk so copies can be distributed and sold. I would also like to have the print files uploaded to an online magazine publishing service so that it will also be easily accessible. I thoroughly enjoyed the process and it is a dream of mine to continue to produce new editions of *Sonder* with different writers and content and to further explore the world of independent magazine publishing.

Through every step that led up to the creation of *Sonder*, I feel I have had the opportunity to live, travel, and adventure. Now going forward, I hope I am able to bless someone who is in the same place I was a few years ago - looking at the world with wide eyes yet in need of a little help and encouragement. Perhaps they will find a copy of *Sonder* and feel ready to take on the world. My dream for this project is that it will inspire others to also live their fullest lives, travel

the world, find adventure in every moment, and bless those they meet along the way. Finally, I hope they are never sorry they did.

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