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In general English grammar, the semicolon is used to connect two sentences that are either related or complete each other. It was first used by the humanist Aldus Manutius in Venice in 1494, the time of linguistic experimentation. This unique mark combines a comma and a colon signifying both uses of each are being used together. Fast forward to the year 2013, Amy Bleuel sparks the Semicolon Project - a mental health movement for those experiencing mental illness. The semicolon here represents that every person experiencing mental illness has a story to tell and it is one that they choose to leave continuous, meaning they survived or will survive through it. Having a story implies that each one of us is our own author, so we would have to have a good understanding of linguistics, communication, language, and symbols. In the readings “Nature of Linguistic Sign” by Saussure, the “Counting Sheep” essay by Lupton Miller, and “Our Book” by El Lissitsky they thoroughly speak about these topics. The Semicolon Project relates to both linguistics and semiotics in a way that can even be considered avant-garde, due to its symbolic and innovative nature.

The most obvious relationship to theory in this case is semiotics, which is the study of signs and symbols along with their purpose and meanings. According to Lupton Miller, any sign or symbol must also have a signifier and signified. The signifier is the word and image that this symbol represents. In this case, the signifier is the word semicolon and what it looks like, which is a combination of a period and a comma. The signified is the mental concept of the sign, which

would be that it is a punctuation mark that is used when a sentence can end but does not. It was once only associated with writing and grammar but it is now related to the Semicolon Project and is representative of a life that could have ended but did not. Finally, the sign is the actual object in question, which can be anything that conveys meaning. It is a combination of both the sound imagine, signifier, and the concept, the signified. In this case, the sign is the semicolon itself and all its descriptions, uses, connotations, and representations.

Writing is one of the most spread out uses of communication there is. These stories are only able to make it to others through communication which would only be understood through general understanding of language and speech. Lupton Miller writes “A form of communication only qualifies as writing if it is a representation of speech, capable of being read back orally as a series of words, one after the other,” which means that writing can only be considered as such if it is a direct representation of speech. Language is more than just words or symbols with direct meanings, words are always related to more than just what they represent. Saussure says that “ready-made ideas exist before words” meaning the human mind associates language and words with ideas that were already existing in the world and everyone shares these ideas. The ideas are not really outright spoken about but are generally understood by people who speak the same language. Similarly, if you were to see a semicolon the automatic understanding of it would be that it is part of the English grammar and is a punctuation tool used to combine sentences into each other simultaneously. However, once The Semicolon Project was introduced, this symbol, which had already had a fixed singular definition, became much more. Along with the movement it started to be understood that the semicolon was being used to cater to the continuation and flexibility of one's own battle with their mental illness. In this way the semicolon is now serving a purpose much larger and meaningful than its first.

The ability to take one symbol which meant one thing permanently for hundreds of years and completely add a different and much broader meaning to it in its essence is avant-garde. This unique and influential way of viewing the norm that was just a simple semicolon is truly phenomenal. This was a new and different idea that was introduced to bring awareness to the very relevant problem of mental health issues. Not only does it speak to thousands of people globally, it also inspires them to pull through no matter how hard their struggles may be because their semicolons are specific to their story and however they want to paint it. Even if all semicolons do look exactly the same, they are all different depending on which of the hundreds of thousand survivors you may ask.

The semicolon has not lost its original meaning, but is now representative of something more meaningful than it ever was. The complexity of language and linguistics is well demonstrated in this case. Language can change its meaning over time, but a semicolon will always be a semicolon and will continue to be used in writing, but now has another deeper association. In terms of semiotics, the semicolon as a sign is comprised of its sound image and its concept, which is no longer limited to just one definition. This attempt at redefinition is in itself avant garde in a way, as it is challenging the norm and innovating it in a way to bring awareness to a larger issue and to be symbolic enough to represent a vast group of people while also holding a unique meaning and story for every individual.



## References

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