

Tiah Northway  
Colleen Syron  
GRPH 426

### **The Development of Coping Methods and Understanding of Self through the Female Lens**

The “modern woman” needs to balance all which life throws at her while following her desire to be an individual. With society’s continuously contradicting messages on what a woman is meant to be, each woman is forced into the balancing act of her work, her family, her desires and her personal identity. By exploring the stresses faced by women daily, I intend to establish connections between gender, mental health and the concept of self as defined by the philosopher Plato. With this information in mind, I designed an experience based on the discomfort of daily stressors and how this impacts the development of female identity.

In Phaedrus, a dialogue written by Plato, the protagonists discuss various topics including the chariot allegory. The chariot allegory is used to describe the soul (self) as being divided into three parts; the charioteer which steers, and the better horse and the worse horse which the charioteer guides. Each piece represents an essential part to the human soul (self) that requires balancing to maintain. I propose that this allegory can be applied to the “modern woman” as a means of understanding the need to find a balance among the constant stresses of daily life, but I also argue from further investigation of Plato’s dialogue that the unbalance is what makes humans human and applying this logic to the female experience only reaffirms her value as a human.

#### **I. Review of Design for Mental Health**

Upon searching the design world for inspiration, I came across many examples of mental health focused concepts. With the recent push for mental health discussions, design has taken their role in the movement. Examples can be found in a variety of design fields including, but not limited to data visualization, product design, print design, campaigns, environmental design, etc.

The examples that I found are all from the recent 2000s which feels appropriate in consideration of the recent conversations, most notably, being held on college campuses and online in forms of social media, blogs, videos and forums. With the freedom of the internet, youth are taking the opportunities to discuss tabooed topics such as depression, anxiety, suicide and general mental health struggles. Due to this, the mainstream media has been able to refocus on to these topics and create an outlet for further discussion.

Designers like Kristen Southwell (Figure 1) and Yi Fei Chen (Figure 2) have taken the concepts of mental health and applied their personal experiences to a form allowing others to find common ground. These designers have found a means of articulating a mental health topic, that can often be misrepresented/ misunderstood, in a physical or visual format allowing the audience to formulate deeper connections to their own personal experiences.

Other designers have found ways to create tool kits that provide users with what is necessary to help themselves. These types of designed tools are essential in recognizing the unique experiences of the individuals who potentially suffer from even the most minute of mental stresses. Sara Lopez Ibanez designed Mindnosis (Figure 3), Nicolette Bodewes designed Tools for Therapy (Figure 4), and Rui Sun designed Emotional First Aid Kit (Figure 5) all created their kits to benefit each user in terms of their needs.

The need for further recognition is exemplified by designers trying to change the environment that society performs in. An example includes The Centre for Urban Design and Mental Health whose mission is “to help inform, motivate and empower policymakers, designers, planners, and public health professionals to build better mental health into their cities through smarter urban design.” They are not alone in their desires for future societal standards towards mental health.

## **II. Figures**

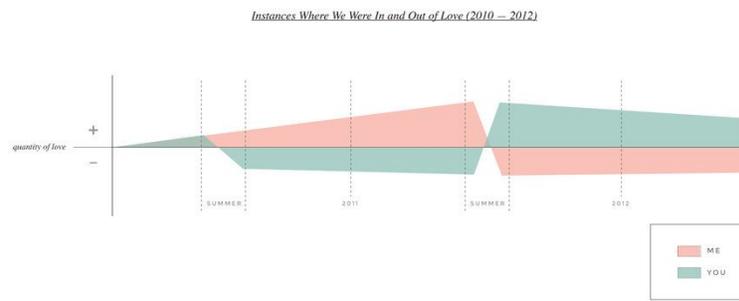


Figure 1

Southwell, Kirsten "Instances: Where We Were In and Out of Love (2010 - 2012)" 2 Feb., 2018

<http://www.kmsouthwell.com/coping-mechanisms/>

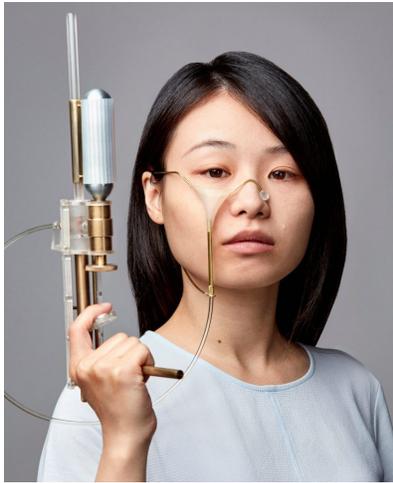


Figure 2

Morby, Alice. "Yi-Fei Chen Designs a Gun for Firing Her Tears." Dezeen. Dezeen, 01 Nov. 2017. Web. 2 Feb. 2018.



Figure 3

Morby, Alice. "Mindnosis Kit Is Designed to Help People Overcome Their Mental Health Issues." Dezeen. Dezeen, 06 July 2017.

Web. 2 Feb. 2018.



Figure 4

Morby, Alice. "Tools for Therapy Encourage People to Open up about Their Emotions." Dezeen. Dezeen, 03 Feb. 2017. Web. 2 Feb. 2018.



Figure 5

Morby, Alice. "Emotional First Aid Kit Is Designed to Help Those in Stressful Situations." Dezeen. Dezeen, 22 June 2017. Web. 2 Feb. 2018.

### III. Qualitative Data Analysis

My hopes from my survey were that there would be not only be a larger response, but also a potential link between the person and who they associated their coping methods with. Unfortunately, I found no discernable pattern and most not associating their coping methods with anyone. With this in mind, I did find other patterns among the women who were able to provide their insight. The sample size of one survey was 28 and the sample size of the second survey was 12. Even with a small pool of responses to review, I was lead to necessary insights.

For the sake of clarity, I will define the surveys from here as Survey One and Survey Two. Survey One with 28 responses focused on women, stressors, personal coping methods and the relation of art. Survey Two with 12 responses focused on women, stressors, personal coping methods with no direct mention of art.

Survey One, found that the subjects defined art often in terms of how it provided an emotional or sensory experience often creating meaning, providing expression or a sense of beauty from within. The way that the subjects defined art was also often how they found themselves to be using, creating or maintaining art in their daily life to this day.

When asked when do they create art, many subjects mentioned when they are stressed, when they have free time or when inspired while others stated whenever they could or daily. When posed the question about how they relieve stress, it was surprising to not see a single one of them mention a traditional artistic expression outside of music and dance. Upon reviewing the question of whether art causes or relieves stress, a conclusion can be drawn that because many felt art could be defined as either personal vs. work or enjoyment vs. deadlines, it is not their primary go to for coping with life's stressors because it can be one of those very stressors which will ultimately affect the outcome of the work itself. Similarly, in Survey Two the subjects stated that their work is affected directly by their stressors often leaving them feeling unbalanced, unmotivated and affecting their general mood.

With a significantly smaller sample size, it is hard to come to successful conclusion for Survey Two, but when reviewing the questions repeated in both surveys a general consensus can be reached about the benefits and disadvantages of the current coping methods that the subjects use. Most, if not all, subjects felt that the biggest problems with their coping methods are that they are a waste of time or time consuming and usually don't solve the original problem while the major benefit was about allowing themselves to stop, take a moment, slow down and put things back in to perspective.

As mentioned prior, an extremely small sample size of a significant demographic does not provide a strong basis for conclusions, but helps push my argument into an area that needs reviewing. Does the current "modern woman" view coping methods to be more wasteful than beneficial? Do they need help defining coping methods, more so appropriate coping methods? How does this benefit their future experiences and ultimately their future work whether it is art related or not?

#### **IV. Limitations and Final Thoughts**

The limitations of this study surround how specific my personal experience and beliefs are. My focus is on learning about others, but ultimately the end result may not be effective for others who have vastly different experiences from mine. People gain experiences that are deeply influenced by their varying identities, as have I, so it is challenging to pinpoint a successful applicative process to be all inclusive especially when the definition of even woman is being redefined.

With all of the previous considerations, the goal to create a possible connection to other females based on the focus of mental health awareness and personal experiences provides me with enough of a starting point that the limitations do not feel as such. Acknowledgment of these limitations will be a vital element for the final product.

## V. Bibliography

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