

Floating Identities : Me, Her and Us – An Interactive Site-Specific Art Installation Based on Adler’s Inferiority Complex to Conclude the Detachment and Reform of Modern Females

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Abstract

According to Alfred Adler’s theory of “Inferiority complex”, all individuals were born with different levels of sense of inferiority. People are usually unsatisfied with where they stand so they try ways to make up for what they do not own, thus forming a chain of compensation. This concept is focus on exploring the variety of symptoms caused by the compensation mechanism in females. This project use common psychological conditions usually seen in females to portray different levels of self-awareness. Include the viewers by taking them through a journey of mental stages using interactive demonstration, so they can experience the difference in intensity during different stages, leaving the viewer’s options to interpret and imagine themselves in such stages which in turn offering them a chance to rebuild and reform their confidence. Through qualitative analysis, we conclude the three mental stages, which are “space”, “process” and “introspection”. After reviewing the relationship between the three stages, we then observe and construct the psychological stages of denial, rebuild, reform, and reconstruction of self-relationship. The conclusion and achievement obtained are hoped to have the value of feasibility for future reference.

Keywords

Alfred Adler, inferiority complex, inferiority and compensation, modern females.

Introduction

People today are immersed in a media-dominant world with information explosion, prompting great impacts and changes in our overall consciousness and behaviors. Psychologically, excessively high self-expectations are common sources of pressure, creating challenges on social and peer relations, mental conflicts, work-induced stresses, or anxieties caused by environmental factors. Discourses of the feminine body in the modern capitalist society have imposed stricter social and cultural constraints and disciplines on women compared with any other time periods throughout history, which have led to both tangible and intangible pressures on women as they engage in social activities, work, family, and even in their personal lives. Women are, therefore, forced to constrict their own bodies in accordance to society’s various consumer and entertainment standards [1]. Via the perspective of a female

artist, the aim of this research was to investigate the feminine innermost state of being. By examining and categorizing literatures pertaining to the current urban setting, media ecology, and contemporary interactive art, viewpoints were then applied as creative elements to create an interactive installation artwork based on post-modern feminine perspectives. Inferiority complex observed in today’s urban women who are objects of the act of looking was used to explore oneself and with the process incorporated in the artwork. By taking on the mindset of a flâneur in the city, viewers were encouraged to uncover and analyze the true values within themselves through this process of exploration and to use the opportunity to once again gaze within their own frames of mind.

Literature Review

Alfred Adler, Inferiority Complex

Adler placed significant emphasis on inferiority and argued that a varying level of inferiority is felt by each person because nobody is content with their present state of being, and inferiority is a normal condition experienced by all, as it also motivates us to be the best we can be. It is a collective human nature to want to pursue a sense of superiority; however, Adler also postulated that whether or not a child suffers from any physical defects, every child experiences the feelings of inferiority as the result of being depended and controlled by adults. When this sense of inferiority is used by children as excuses for their inaction, the inferiority then develops into a psychological inclination, especially with children, and driven by such feelings of inferiority, people can be motivated to strive for higher and better developments. If the sense of inferiority continues to persist in one’s life, it will evolve into an inferiority complex. If the inferiority complex can be compensated through a correct approach, success and perfection could be attained, with the feelings of inferiority resolved. On the contrary, if an inappropriate objective was defined and an incorrect approach opted, the person’s life may then feel useless or become a case of failure. Challenges are then avoided, with a false sense of confidence and security gained from avoiding difficulties. This sense of superiority is used by people to steer clear of feeling inferior, and the continuously mis-

taken compensations could then lead to severe inferiority complex, as internal issues that should be resolved are concealed by the false sense of inferiority. Figure 1 shows the structure of inferiority and compensation as described by Adler. Some modern cosmopolitan women have been known for their pathological pursuits of the perfect self, with extreme or demented ways used to achieve superficial looks to compensate for the inferiorities they feel for their physical looks. Makeup and plastic surgeries are used by some to conceal their true selves. These insufficiencies and compensations of various forms are unable to fulfill or overcome feelings of inferiority, and Adler referred to these abnormalities with inferiority and superiority as inferiority complex and superiority complex, resulting from over compensating one's inferiority and superiority.

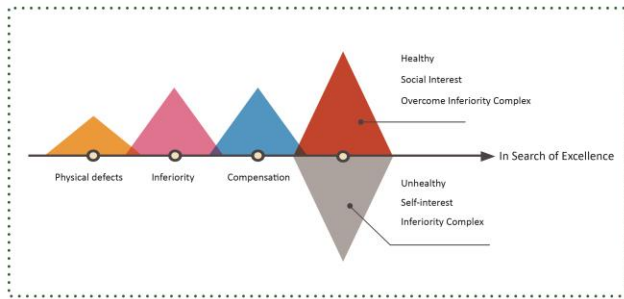


Figure 1. Inferiority and compensation conformation

Consumer Society

Tracing back to the origin of consumerism, it was first dictated by supply and demand, with objects of equal economic values traded between two parties, with desired objects obtained through trades and ex-changes. Along with scientific and economic developments, consumption also rapidly expanded. Pat-terns of modern consumer culture have gradually taken shape through distributions of mass communication and the modern way of life, with consumer culture arising from capitalism. Consumer culture was initially formed due to the decadent lifestyle touted by capitalism, as a way to satisfy the needs of commercial capitalist developments [1]. The purpose of modern consumption has long surpassed economic parameters, with complex and deficient icons of desire incorporated. Undeniably, a consumer society brings great material satisfaction and convenience to people's lives, and different material needs and desires are within reach through monetary consumptions. Life is based on the connection between people and the world, and it includes the surrounding environment and people's subjectivity; however, a woman's awareness of herself is reflected by the situation that depends upon the organization of society [2]. However, qualities of consumer culture are especially noted in women. Linda McDowell (2006) argues that with cities defined as consumer domains, gender is not only interjected in commercial institutions; it has also positioned women as consumers[3]. From the ways that gender culture engages in consumer society,

throughout the course of history, consumption by women, various rejections targeted at women have extensively been taking place in public domains, with one of the core elements of Western patriarchal culture sees women as objects to be looked at, with women accepting the (male) voyeuristic gaze. Women have long been regarded as the other in male-dominated society, placing them in a secondary position. Although women, like the entire human race, are individual entities that enjoy independent existence, they are, nonetheless, dominated by men and forced to take on the identity of the other [4].

Gazed Cosmopolitan Women

In today's era of information explosion, the portrayal of feminine bodies as decorative objects in media advertisements or commercial marketing has become increasingly more common. Liesbet van Zoonen (2001) argues that the feminine body is constantly exploited in popular culture for the sake of "art", and it has become women's destiny to be gazed, with the act of looking reserved only for men [5]. Women may engage in the act of looking, but it wouldn't be through their own eyes. The following was proposed by Jacques Lacan (1978) regarding the gaze, "The subject is presented as other than he is, and what one shows him is not what he wishes to see. It is in this way that the eye may function as object a, that is to say, at the level of the lack (-Φ)" [6]. Many feminists have also indicated that this notion of "to-be-looked-at-ness" may have negative effects on women. Wendy Chapkis (1986) has pointed out that cultural messages for looking beautiful and skinny have provoked negative impacts on how happiness and femininity are grasped by her and other women [7]. Kathryn Morgan (1991) argues that blind pursuits of beauty and the massive cosmetic surgery industry are indicative of society's colonization of women's bodies [8]. With the rise of consumerism, not only are women positioned as consumers, they have also become the object of looking and gazing, with the female image increasingly used for marketing and displaying purposes.

With women regarded as objects of the gaze in society and men always the ones doing the looking, it signifies that women need to live up to the looks and the standards of the gazers. Although women are in possession of their own bodies, however, as a subject being gazed upon, the ability to look at themselves seems to have been lost in women, causing the ones being looked at becoming hyper-critical of themselves, with concerns whether or not they have lived up to the expectations of the ones gazing. This has impelled the women being looked at to have a constant fear of not being good enough, prompting feelings of inferiority. Consumer society has pushed the progression of social culture; however, it has also produced more gazing forces in the environment it has created, causing the subjects being gazed to be in a constant state of judging oneself. The objective for the artwork created for this research is to investigate this specific condition and to propose it as its creative intent. A process of self-awareness was achieved with art used to represent suppressed psychological states.

Through the application of interactive technological art, inner states were exchanged as physical engagements were conducted by the spectators. As the spectators' personal narratives and the artwork's storytelling quality interconnected, introspections and dialogues with oneself were made possible. A layer was expanded which was specifically designed for looking at oneself and also for being looked at, with further considerations placed in allowing the audience to take on the possible identity of being a creator and to reinterpret and reflect on the relationship between themselves and others.

Artwork Planning and Design

Creative Concept –Floating Identities: Me, Her, and U

Floating Identities: Me, Her, and Us, showcased in the digital exhibition *The Five Wardrobes She Has*, began by awakening the feminine self-awareness and further examined the process and the stages with urban women coming to the realization of their sense of self. The core of the exhibition saw the wardrobe as a micro social domain for women, with the wardrobe acting as a metaphor for the feminine inner private state of mind. As a connecting bridge between women and their self-awareness, being inside the exhibition space also brought the audience into the consciousness behind the creative endeavor. The exhibition was comprised with five wardrobes that linked together different personal experiences of the feminine consciousness. Extending from the exterior to the inner state, personal interpretations of one's surroundings were conducted based on continuous introspections, deconstructions, and reconstructions between the self and others. The foundation of the exhibition, *The Five Wardrobes She Has*, was the feeling of inferiority mentioned in Alfred Adler's individual psychology, and how this common psychological feeling of not being good enough can motivate people to work hard and strive to improve. Compensation is used as a way to overcome inferiority, a motivational force to push for higher standards. Compensation is derived from feelings of inferiority; however, the success of the compensation will depend on the approach opted. Interactive technology applied in this artwork was used to spark possible extensions from transformations and developments intended by the artwork's creative core. It began with realizing the self as a complete entity and then further encouraged the audience to reevaluate their surroundings and also themselves

Planning of the Creative Space

The artwork of this research, *Floating Identities: Me, Her, and Us*, was presented in Exhibition Space One (Fig.2) during the digital art exhibition, *The Five Wardrobes She Has*. Following is a list of the reasons behind the planning of this artwork based on the actual site and also the presentation and the concept behind the artwork:

Artwork Placement in Exhibition Space One

The exhibition space was elongated, with only one entrance. Audiences could only enter and exit from this entrance, which made the display in Exhibition Space One the first to be seen by the audience. After seeing the entire exhibition, the audience once again passed by and exited from Exhibition Space One, and thus, the position of this space was similar to being the gateway of this exhibition. As described in the creative concept, the inferiority complex theory was the foundation of this artwork; therefore, in addition to spatial reasons and with the exhibition acting as a guide to lead the audience from dwelling in their clothes to stepping out of their garments, by being the first display in the exhibition, the artwork sparked the audience's awareness of their feelings of inferiority. Furthermore, the use of clothing as a compensation mechanism was also symbolic of the audience's elevated position in seeing the exhibition as a whole, after they have experienced the process of seeing their own inferiority and compensation.

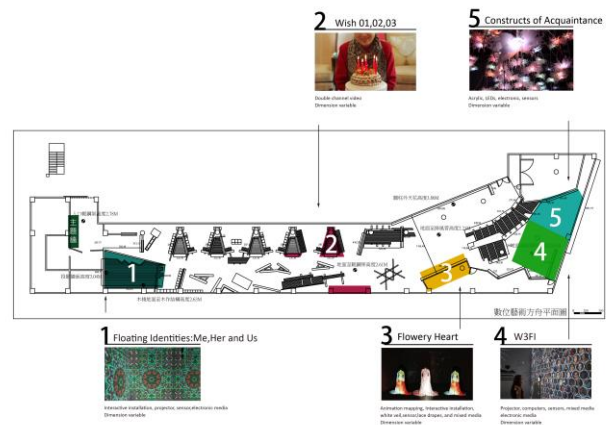


Figure 2. Creativity space planning map

Artwork Installation in Exhibition Space One

Different from other locations in the exhibition site, Exhibition Space One was an elongated room, which provided advantageous benefits for the set-up of the projection and also allowed the audience to slowly enter into the exhibition space to see the artwork. A space for better self-introspection and interpretation was also offered to the audience due to the space's enclosed quality. The audience could freely experience and see the installation in the space, and the location also matched the artwork's design of treating the space as the audience's internal micro urban setting. Separated from the surroundings outside of the exhibition space, the audience was slowly guided into a private domain. A metaphor for the audience entering into their private inner states to search for help through com-

pensation was formed via the imagery of entering into a wardrobe to look for a piece of clothing.

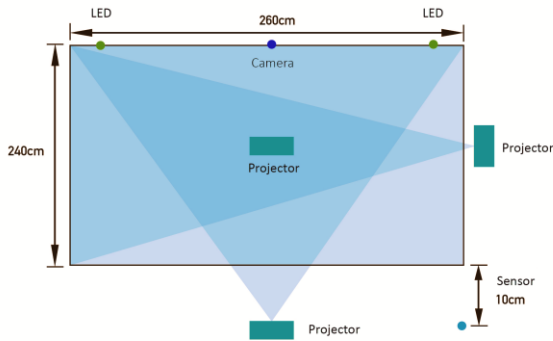


Figure 3. Creativity space product planning map

Artwork Research Methodology

A fortuitous relationship was derived from the experience connected with the exhibition space. A structural formation based on the trinity of the artwork, spectators' memories, and culture was created by the spectators through the meticulously created scenario presented in the exhibition space, resulting in an open and unexpected journey [9]. After the artwork was put on display, interviews were conducted with the audience, with contents of the interviews collected and categorized for qualitative research, which were compiled to show the feasibility of the artwork and examine its values and possible contributions. From the direct and in-depth interviews with the audience, it was anticipated for more understanding to be garnered for their experiences and thoughts with seeing the artwork, which could lead to further discussions about the artwork. Female audience members were the targeted subjects of the interviews, with the interviews conducted after they have concluded seeing the exhibition and their feelings towards the exhibition documented. As the interviews led to more in-depth discussions, it was anticipated for information of greater scope and depth to be gathered. Contents of the interviews were then transcribed verbatim, and from the information collected, further analyses were conducted to formulate the artwork's significance and also propose a conclusion.

Public Display of the Artwork

The completed artwork was showcased publically at the digital art exhibition, *The Five Wardrobes She Has*, presented in 2014 at National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts' Digiark. Interviews with the audience were recorded to garner further understandings for the public's viewpoints, suggestions, and feedbacks. Observations and results from the interviews were then organized and used to assess and formulate a conclusion for this artwork.

Artwork Production And Development

Artwork Media Content Design

Floating Identities: Me, Her and Us was positioned as the opening artwork for the exhibition, which was intended to guide the audience to recognize the self they have concealed inside. When the audience entered the dark long corridor, it signified that by entering into the wardrobe, the audience was transformed into "her", the female protagonist of the artwork, as a search was embarked on piece together the clothing fit for the self. The flickering white light represented scenario changes. With the internal state that had been concealed for a long time opened up, one's deep inner subconscious, which was previously intentionally hidden, drifted, scattered, collapsed, and then was collaged together, but it still wandered with a soul of restlessness and feelings of inferiority. Only by directly facing one's inferiority could we encounter our true selves.

Description of the Story Behind the Artwork:

She is the happiest person right now.

I am not her,

The woman that we all don't know.

Her, someone with five wardrobes

Is shielded by a garment

that best suits the identity she holds today.

She is looking for self-worth in the eyes of others;

This is her destiny,

To live inside her wardrobe.

She is the most self-conscious person right now.

I am her,

The woman that we all know.



Figure 4. Excerpts of creative situation

Artwork Interactive Mechanism Production

Interactive Image Production

Created with Adobe After Effects, the duration for the animation used for the artwork was 1 minute and 30 seconds long. The animation began with the use of a high chroma image as its base, and the dazzling ever-evolving kaleidoscopic effects were the results of change of angles designated on the timeframe of the animation, along with position and size alterations of the image. An ever-evolving mode and display rotations were used to portray the identi-

ty shifts experienced by modern urban women in a consumer society as subjects being watched, as women go through rapid external changes. The fundamental image used for the production of the interactive image is indicated in Figure 4, with animated images produced based on this backdrop image. Figure 5 shows the variety of images used in the animation.

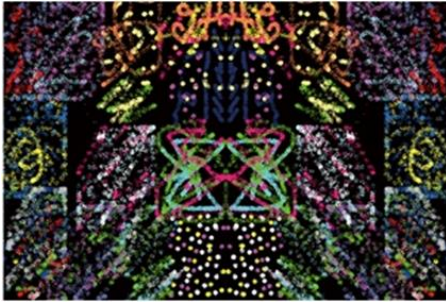


Figure 5. Interactive image base diagram

Interactive Model Production

The interactive model was created with interactive program writing and sensor device production. The installation was initiated when a user walked by the sensor, and after the prearranged flickering of the light came to an end, the image then shifted from its original rotating display of animation to a recording mode. An omnidirectional image of the viewer in the space was then displayed, which represented the stage in the artwork that involved the self being watched. The flickering light that went off after the sensor was initiated acted as a warning for the audience and also a blank space, which was followed by the omnidirectional image of the self.

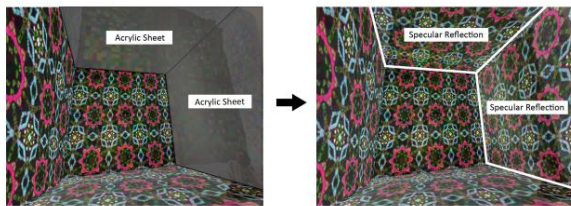


Figure 6. Space mirror diagram

Interactive Model for the Audience

The ways that modern urban women exist are quite different from their male counterparts. Cosmopolitan feminine identities are often constructed based on the viewpoints of others, meaning they are formed under the expectations of the subjects doing the looking and also the self. In the more reserved Asian society, people are less willing to blatantly talk about their inferiorities, with inferiorities often talked about through the spectator perspective, as feelings of inferiorities are endured and even accepted.

Through the “her” in the eyes of others, a complete self was constructed via the artwork. When the audience entered the exhibition space, they were asked to remove their

shoes and to begin withstand inferiorities through looking, which also represented the detachment of the physical subjectivity of the self. This acted as the first step for the audience to be segregated from the existing surrounding. The interactive model was ultimately attained when the audience standing in the center (the participant) and the audience on the periphery (the spectators) simultaneously co-existed in the space. This space acted as a symbolic micro urban setting. With cosmopolitan women regarded as subjects being watched, the psychological state of inferiority when faced with spectators’ voyeuristic gazes was examined. Figure 7 shows a relational diagram of the interactive model.

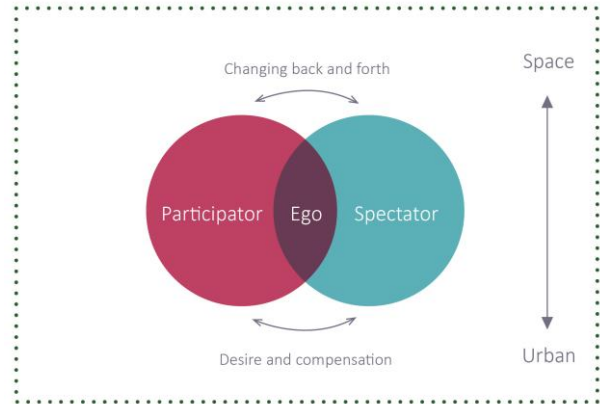


Figure 7. Interactive mode diagram

Exhibition of ‘Floating Identities: Me, Her and Us

The artwork was exhibited in the digital art curatorial exhibition, *The Five Wardrobes She Has*, in 2014 at the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts Digiark. The following segment contains information for the exhibition and its planning details, which included interviews conducted during the exhibition with members of the audience and also experts.



Figure 8. National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts Digiark entrance images

The artwork for this research was exhibited in *The Five Wardrobes She Has*, presented at the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts Digiark. Following are some images of the exhibition and audience’s engagements.

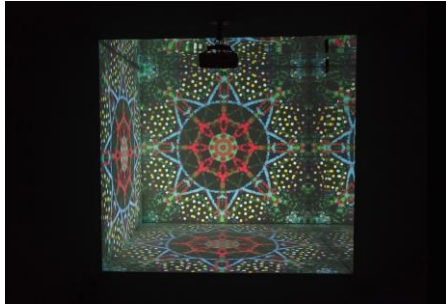


Figure 9. Overall display live picture 1



Figure 10. Overall display live picture 2

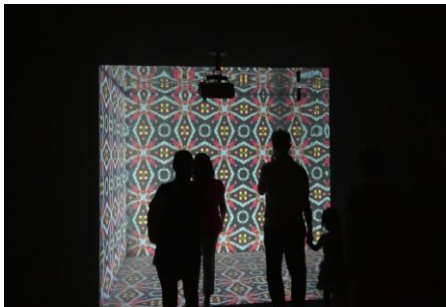


Figure 11. Overall display live picture 3

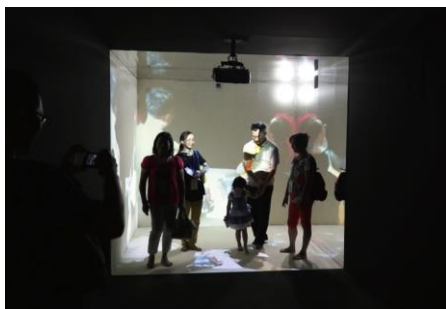


Figure 12. Overall display live picture 4

Interview Results for the Artwork

By organizing and analyzing the interviews with the audience, it was observed that the experience with seeing the exhibition for the audience could be largely divided into three phases: space, process, and introspection.

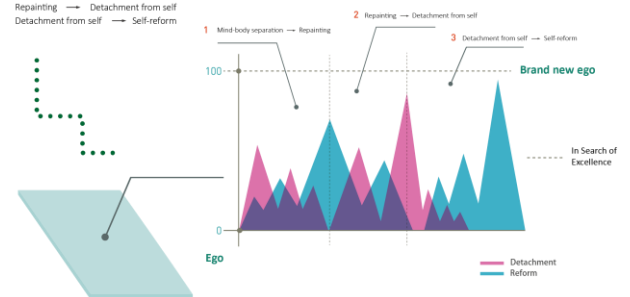
Introspection

Conform to social expectations
Fragile body image
Realize self-fulfillment



Process

Mind-body separation → Repainting
Repainting → Detachment from self
Detachment from self → Self-reform



Space

Shoes off → Walk in the room



Figure 13. Theoretical framework conceptual diagram

Space

Through the visual structure created with the creative space, a separation from one's physical body was engaged in by the audience when they entered into the urban setting created in the space. It was postulated that this separation was a process of detachment, with the surrounding forcing the audience to break away from oneself in the artwork setting. The psychological feeling prompted by this detachment and also impacted by the ambiance in the space was then observed by the audience. From feelings that were driven by curiosity to being attracted to the visual colors, the audience also felt more calm and collected due to the private nature projected by this personal space. This shift in emotions also drew the audience closer to the artwork, as they felt more at peace to see the artwork. This stage also acted as a psychological preparation for the audience. The physical separation experienced in this phase guided the audience to become more prepared psychologically and to better engage in the setting for the imagery that the artwork intended to convey.

Process

Physical Separation to Re-colorization: Audience Reconstruction of the Self's External Garment after Physical Separation from Oneself

After the audience went through physical self-separation, a detachment from the shallow layer of the internal state was experienced. The audience then entered the exhibition space feeling restless due to the separation; the restlessness was also sparked by personal memories that were being recalled. This opportunity became a critical element for the next stage. Because of the restlessness caused by the separation, the audience began to seek out possibilities for reconstructing an external garment; however, the reconstruction at this stage was merely a forced result caused by the surrounding, a passive reconstruction.

Re-colorization to Self-Detachment: Audience Reconstruction of the Self's External Garment to Experiencing Self-Detachment

This process of detachment differed from the first separation that the audience experienced due to environmental factors. This detachment symbolized the process of separation between the audience and the self. After the step-by-step reconstruction of the self's external garment and also with the initiation of the interactive installation, through separation of the visual image, it was observed from the detachment experienced by the audience during this phase that rapid reconstruction and detachment had lowered the audience's psychological sense of security, leading to feelings of restlessness. The audience began to feel concerned for how others were looking at them, with worries how others might look at their imperfections.

Self-detachment to Reconfiguring Oneself: Process of the Audience's Self-detachment to Reconfiguring Oneself

This involved a more in-depth internal detachment after the audience had already experienced self-detachment. By putting on their shoes and walking out of the exhibition space, the act represented a role switch, with the audience now in a state of watching others and themselves. The opportunity for reconfiguring oneself required the thinking process prompted by role switching. With the shock of realizing that control over one's thoughts had been lost, gradual steps were then taken to reconfigure the self.

Introspection

By reflecting on the previous experiences, the audience came to realize through this process comprised of different stages that this sense of inferiority inside was actually a curve that existed both internally and externally, and it also held specific viewpoints but was also wavering. As thoughts occurred both internally and externally, a process of introspection was attained through shifting detachment and reconfiguration and along with changes with one's viewpoints and thoughts. Following are further explanations of this process:

Hoping to Live Up to Society's Expectations

The process of reconfiguring the self through physical separation to re-colorization was a procedure that guided the viewer in reflecting on both internal and external aspects. From observations made during this phase, the viewer's attempts to hide and unwillingness to be watched by others unveiled the duality that was present in the self. Since the moment of self-detachment, the audience then began to compare and struggle in a back-and-forth manner, and the theory for the reason behind this was because of one's fear of becoming an anomaly in the group, with concerns for damaging one's interpersonal relationships. Through re-configuration prompted by environmental factors, the person then further hoped that his or her inner and external components could all live to up others' expectations.

Image in Life's Fragility

Induced by environmental factors, an external garment of self-protection was passively reconfigured by the audience, and the self was detached once again during the process of re-colorization and self-detachment. Through rapid detachment and reconfiguration, the audience realized in this phase that the identification and one's image in life constructed based on the looks or standards of others was quite fragile, with an existence that was unstable and elusive.

Restoring One's Self-worth

The process of self-detachment and reconfiguring oneself sparked thoughts in the audience that were driven by changes in one's personal power. Distinctive roles of the "participant" and the "spectator" were presented, and when the audience took on different roles of looking at others or being watched, psychological changes were also induced. The self the exited the exhibition space wandered in and out of watching others and also watching oneself, and through this method of introspection, the role of the self was positioned at various heights and depths. This represented the turning of oneself into a 'they-self' dwelling in a new level, as one gradually strayed away from needing other's acceptance, with one's self-worth ultimately restored.

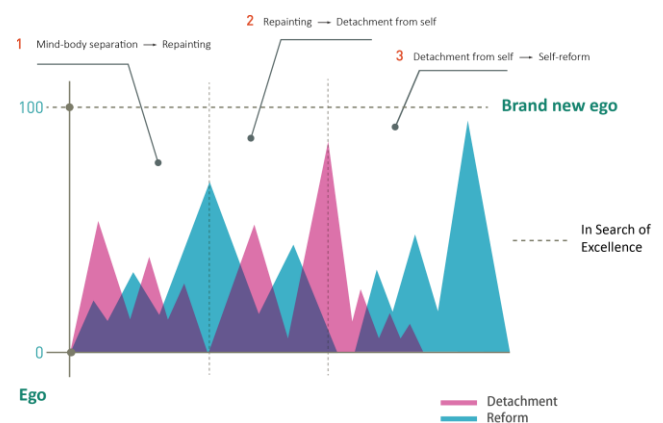


Figure 14. Process category Chart

Conclusion and Recommendations

As today's society rapidly develops along with technological progression, people's lives have grown increasingly more convenient and advanced compared to before. However, pressures have also escalated with society's advancements, becoming a critical challenge for people today. From which, feminine roles in society make it easy for women to become subjects of others' gazes. Through this research, it is discovered that as women become objectified in life, recurring internal detachments and reconfigurations are commonly observed in women, and as proposed by Adler's inferiority complex, this repetitive compensation mechanism is used to motivate self-improvement.

Through interactive art, spiritual mindsets of modern day people are interpreted during this research. With advantages provided by the art form, interactions extended beyond just people and art; it also occurred between people and even between people and their own internal states. Prompted by the interactions between the viewers and the artwork, audiences were encouraged to partake in the experience and to further engage in the artwork. Interactive mechanisms of various layers guided the audience in experiencing and altering their thoughts, while rights were reserved for them to freely interpret and associate. Dialogues with oneself were also encouraged, and through power exerted from the self, connections and emotions were formed with the artwork and even others, with an opportunity for the audience to reconfigure and restore themselves provided. Results from interviews with the audience were organized based on the psychological experiences faced by the audience during the exhibition, which were divided into the categories of *space*, *process*, and *introspection*. Within these stages, psychological emotions and compensations experienced by the audience during the exhibition were further sub-organized to result in a clearer categorization of the transformative process that the audience went through internally, as a motivational force for the viewer and the self was also constructed.

Retracing the journey of this creative research, following are concluding remarks based on the creative aspects of this interactive artwork.

Spatial Design

Although confined by the exhibition space's limitations in size, spatial advantages of the limiting space were, nevertheless, well utilized. The space's private and enclosed qualities were especially incorporated to express and convey the perceptual experience intended by the artwork to the audience. The way that the exhibition space was presented was analogous to a piece of clothing created for the artwork. Through the progression phases and the ambiance onsite, the audience was able to concentrate more easily and to better immerse in the artwork.

Process Design

Not only was the interactive model between the viewers and the artwork included in the design for the process in-

involved in the artwork, but interactive models between the viewers and others and the viewers and themselves were also provided. Through progressing interactions that moved back-and-forth, ways of seeing, and changes with one's thoughts, conventional advantages for interactive art were preserved, and furthermore, the intangible interactive models applied also enhanced the awareness of the viewers and allowed for their own interpretations.

Audience Introspection

Thoughts and feedbacks from the audience were made possible through the interviews conducted after they've experienced the exhibition. Motivational forces behind the audience's introspective thoughts were discovered and categorized according to analyses conducted on the contents of the interviews, which also elevated to become a force to inspire for self-improvement. The introspective process created great impacts not only for the audience but also for the spectators.

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