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*Mirror Docket*

Acrylic, Digital

I was inspired by the concept of coping mechanisms. As my research progressed, I started to think about my own ways of coping, so I chose to do my sink in my room at home. It is the one place I go to whenever I'm feeling any kind of overwhelming feeling, so I decided to make something related to my sink, but how was I supposed to do that, and make it a challenge?

The one thing I knew I wanted to incorporate in my project was animation, so I came to the idea of making a physical replica of my sink and animated three portraits on top. This way, I could incorporate every medium I wanted.

I started on the three portraits, one of me crying, one of me getting ready to go out, and one of me on the phone. Three different versions of myself that my mirror sees a lot of. Then I moved on to making the sink. My original idea was to make the bathroom relatively small, only including the mirror and the two sinks, but after some thinking I decided to go big and include the lights above the mirror and the cabinets underneath the sink. Then, I put it all together on photoshop and used a highly edited photo of my mirror at home in the final animation.

When people look at my piece I want them to question what their coping mechanisms are. This piece may be personal to me, but I want others to discover something new about themselves looking at my piece. I hope the viewers of my piece come in with an open mind and try not to think too much about my relation to it but their own.

# What Helps You Cope?



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*This paper is going to answer the question: why do people find comfort in odd things, actions, or places? It is an exploratory paper, written in the first and second person. This paper talks about dealing with anxiety, depression, trauma, and grief. The paper also touches on topics of self-harm.*

## **I.**

I will be taking a step into others' and my mind and seeking out the ways people have learned to cope with the many stresses of life. First I should explain what coping is: conscious or unconscious strategies used to reduce unpleasant emotions. Coping mechanisms are the strategies people often use in the face of stress and/or trauma to help manage painful or difficult emotions. I have my odd ways of coping with nearly any kind of overstimulating situation, sitting on my bathroom sink. I have many other coping mechanisms, for example in the past I used to bite my nails till my fingers bleed if I was anxious and I had a tiny stuffed cat I used to cry to as a child when I needed to calm down. I have discovered many unusual ways to cope with daily life and as I was doing research I wanted to explore what ways have other people learned to cope with life. I asked myself why do people find comfort in odd things, actions, or places, and what are some examples of those coping mechanisms? By discovering other people's odd habits maybe I can start to understand my own and feel less alone. I must not be the only person who feels different because of my coping mechanisms, so I'm writing this paper to bring awareness to the different ways people cope. Let's explore the curious rituals, objects, and places that people have discovered to help them cope with mental illness.

## II.

In this portion of the paper, I'm going to explore the way people cope using certain rituals. Many people, especially over covid, started daily rituals to keep their daily life feeling normal in a chaotic world. The article, *The Restorative Power of Ritual* by Scott Berinato explains, “ rituals play several critical roles: rituals in the face of loss can help us feel less grief, rituals with families can make us feel closer, and rituals with our partners can reinforce our commitment to each other” (Berinato 1). These rituals are an important part of people's daily lives after they start consistently doing them to cope. Some examples of these rituals can be exercising daily, weekly family dinners or family events, meditation, doing their hair, etc. These rituals can either bring a positive change to their life or a negative one. A positive change would be getting into shape from exercising, but if someone would push themselves too hard with their exercise ritual it would then be negative.

Coping takes many forms, if someone is struggling with grief they might use aggressive, damaging rituals to cope which is unhealthy, but it might be easy to create a new coping mechanism. It can be very hard to let go of it if it's damaging. Back to the Covid example, people found themselves feeling an overwhelming sense of anxiety and some fell into major depressive episodes during the quarantine but after a few months into the quarantine, people started creating and discovering daily rituals that made them feel normal again, in the article *The Restorative Power of Ritual* it states, “people reported feeling a little better at the moment, even when just remembering the ritual they performed. But we also wanted to see if the rituals themselves made people feel better when they did them” (Berinato 2). Another explanation for the instant gratification we get from doing rituals, if even thinking about them helps someone relax, they should be normalized.

### III.

I will next be addressing the different ways people cope using objects. These types of coping objects, or better known as transitional objects, are found to be more apparent in children's comfort methods. Some examples of these objects can be stuffed animals such as a bear, or a blanket, or some type of toy. Children have these objects that remind them of their parents when they are not around, in their mind, they are always with their parents as they are caring about their comfort item. The article "The Transitional Objects and Self Comfort" by Allan Schwartz explains this child's mindset, "The transitional object is comforting when the mother is not around or at any other time. Most mothers try to wash it because it becomes dirty and smelly. Most kids hold onto it because the smelliness and dirtiness form part of what feels familiar, safe, and comforting" (Schwartz 1). This quote explains the close connection children develop with these items, it is so close they don't even want to have it clean. But this does not mean that adults do not have traditional items, adults might hold onto something from a deceased family member or get a pet.

As people grow older and leave their childhood homes they still have that part of them that craves their parents so bringing an object that was formerly owned by their parents. This object is the "transitional object" for adults. Dr. Schwartz further explains, "As adults, there are other types of objects that serve a similar purpose as transitional objects used by children. It is common for adults to keep prized possessions owned by their parents when they were growing up. Dad may have passed away many years ago but wearing his watch is a comforting reminder of that relationship" (Schwartz 1). This is a great example of a reason an adult may carry a transitional object. When it comes to having a pet as a comfort item, instead of coping with separation with their pet they look at their pets as distressing mechanisms. The thought of snuggling up with your furry friend is instantly calming, which is why most adults suffering from stress seek out pets. A

distressing mechanism directly relates to distressing behavior which is defined as behavior displayed more frequently by persons who are depressed. Such behavior includes nonverbal facial expressions and body postures which are typically labeled as "sad," and verbal responses involving self-denigration or complaints. Then people create mechanisms, mechanisms are the strategies people often use in the face of stress and/or trauma to help manage painful or difficult emotions that directly relate to this behavior. With all of this information together, let's be honest we all at some point in our lives have had a transitional object.

#### **IV.**

Finally, I will be talking about certain places that help people cope. The places people go to are usually quiet, and far away from other people, some examples are a room closet, bathroom, bedroom, roofs, beach, or any kind of hideout. People are usually pulled towards these places to escape the stress of socializing, if you're in a quiet space you can fill it with your noise not the noise of others. Socializing is well known for being overwhelming and burdening, the need to calm down after socializing is always needed. Places with mirrors are quite popular as well, crying into a mirror has some sort of satisfying appeal. Emily Fonseca, just a regular everyday person, posted a statement on the Quora website saying, "I find when I look at myself in the mirror when I cry it kinda just calms me down. makes me focus on my face. like if I think I'm ugly when I look in the mirror I will only focus on that. When you are lonely or there is no one there to help you, I kinda get comfort in seeing a person there feeling the same way I am feeling. talking to myself also goes along with it. just talking out my feelings, asking myself why I feel that way. it's basically like reflecting on your problems" (Fonseca 1). Fonseca perfectly explains the way people feel when they cry into the mirror, there is just something so satisfying about staring at someone who looks

just as miserable as you; In a way, looking at yourself when you are in a saddened state makes you want to do better. This transition from being sad and crying to wanting to be a better version of yourself is a great example of how a bathroom can be a great coping space. A bathroom might seem like an odd place to feel comfortable, but a strange phenomenon makes it so amazing in a difficult time. I know someone that climbs onto their roof and stares at the stars at night to calm down from a long day of socializing. A roof is a great hidden place, that you usually don't expect someone to be up there, socializing with family can still be very exhausting and when you are living with them it is good for you once in a while to have a break. Finding your own hidden comfortable spot is a key factor in coping with stress.

## V.

As we're all aware now, coping comes in many different shapes and sizes and coping mechanisms come in even bigger shapes and sizes. Coping and coping mechanisms are different for every individual but keep in mind that everyone copes with things differently and no one has any right to judge others on what they do to cope. Even if we see someone doing an unusual or harmful coping strategy, we do not have the right to judge them. Under no circumstance is it to judge someone for the way they cope, harmful coping mechanisms should be seen as a cry for help from others. People only need to cope when they are having a hard time mentally, that in itself should be a reason to seek help. If you stumble upon someone who uses any kind of self-harm methods to cope, seek help for them, everyone deserves to have healthy and comforting coping mechanisms. Bringing awareness to unusual or harmful coping strategies helps bring down the wall of judgment society has built around mental illness and coping. People should have the chance to talk about coping and their mental illness without feeling like they are odd or unusual. Everyone, one way or

another, copes with something going on in life or in their own mind. It should be normalized to have these conversations and be more educated on this topic, so we can help others in need.

In conclusion, people rely on very odd actions, objects, and places to cope with mental illness but if it's helping them, it is the right thing to do or have. Everyone should have or find their coping mechanism, it is very beneficial with coping with anxiety, grief, trauma, and depression. Finding a coping mechanism is a very independent process, for some, it might come to you or you already have one without noticing, but for others, you can search through old objects from your childhood or your parents; or find a nice quiet spot, like a bathroom with mirrors to cry into; or even pick up some kind of ritual, like exercise. This topic should be normalized, and we should all bring awareness to the different ways people cope and their mental illnesses. Coping is a very normal thing for everyone and there should be no judgment attached to the topic. So we are going to stop judging people for something out of their control and we are going to ask ourselves: What do you do or have that helps you cope?



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