Making Matters

Addressing the inherent turbulence of being a designer

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Making Matters: Addressing the inherent

turbulence of being a designer

by

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ABSTRACT

Design master students often focus on delivering creative, resourceful and unique ideas on the design problems at hand while encountering periods of uncertainty, such as dealing with stress, anxiety and depression. Additionally, some design practices do not propose to pause and wonder what will happen if students take time to explore and comprehend their emotions, as recognizing and understanding emotions is sometimes challenging.

However, pursuing reflective practices could foster students' confidence, facilitating self-expression and creativity. To explore this area, I conducted an immersive, exploratory action-research dialogue that questioned how design master students could nourish their emotional well-being under periods of uncertainty. The findings indicate that bringing emotions to a tactile form enables students to experience a sense of well-being and cultivate confidence.

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KEY DEFINITIONS

Emotion:

A complex reaction pattern involves experiential, behavioural, and physiological elements, by which individual attempts to deal with a personally significant matter or event. (American Psychological Association, n.d.)

Well-being:

Presence of positive emotions and moods (e.g., contentment, happiness), the absence of negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety), satisfaction with life, fulfillment and positive functioning. (Milman et al., 2020)

Confidence:

An emotion of assured expectation representing positive encouragement to action that facilitates self-expression and creativity. (Sas et al., 2010)

A LETTER TO MYSELF

Hurray! You made it. You make it work!

You have finished your work here. You somehow managed to navigate and address the uncertainty of being a designer while doing a master's degree. You learned to steer your emotions and work in a space out of your comfort zone, in a new country and with new and exciting weather.

So here we are, writing a letter as a reminder that anything in life is worth working for and dreaming of and that we should enjoy the new paths to follow without hesitating. Remember that no matter what, there is someone with the power to find balance, strength, vision and the power to concentrate on the goals you once set. Guess what? That someone is you.

You also have the power to discover new ways of feeling and knowing. You can choose to be part of any project as a designer and feel confident that no matter the path to follow, someone will encourage you to keep going. Perhaps that someone is you, other times your family, most of the time your husband Rulo and last but not least, all the friends, peers, faculty, your supervisor Jonathan and anyone you talked with during this time of growth.

BELIEVE IN YOURSELF, AND REMEMBER WHY YOU STARTED.

WHEN I GOT MY FIRST PANICK ATTACT

As design students, we navigate uncertain waters while building our practice. Occasionally, we are too busy to care, full of deadlines we must catch up on daily, but somehow thoughts of the unknown or the ambiguity of our design practice keep intruding. However, instead of realizing we can find a route to navigate in a calmer form following the rhythm of the water, we panic. The entire experience of what I expected from moving into a new city for my master's degree changed when I got my first panic attack. Even though I was connected by my family and friends back home through video calls, I could not find a state of calm or manage my emotions. However, this journey opened the space to acknowledge the importance of emotions.

Introduction & Context

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Numerous students in higher education are experiencing depression and anxiety. The problem keeps growing as different anxiety symptoms emerge during and after Covid-19. (Price, 2022) Design students can struggle with mental health challenges due to the isolating nature of research and, even more, the pressure to produce creative work. As Ulibarri (2014) says, some students are lonely but, at the same time, too busy to create meaningful and supportive social structures.

As defined by Buchanan (1982) and Cross (2011), uncertainty is a defining feature of the design space. This project aims to identify techniques that cultivate confidence and a sense of well-being in students even when, or especially when, navigating periods of uncertainty in their personal lives or their work. The research I have conducted is predominantly focused on complex or poorly defined challenges that students can better understand through reflection, exploration and speculation.

As Buchanan and Cross point out, designers should embrace uncertainty as a motivational force because it is part of their daily practice as designers. (Tracey et al., 2016) Hence, the impact of a design practice will change if designers take the time to recognize, understand and acknowledge emotions. As Sas[1] and Zhang[2] (2010) argued, emotions are a valuable source of information. For this reason, designers should take the time to explore their emotions, explicitly looking out to boost their confidence. According to Sas et al. (2010), confidence is an emotion of assured expectation representing positive encouragement to action that facilitates self-expression and creativity. Meaning that there is an opportunity for design to assist design master students in curating their techniques that fosters their emotional well-being, as that might impact how they design.

[1] Corina Sas, an award-winning researcher in Human-Computer Interaction at the University of Lancaster in the UK.

[2] Chenyan Zhang from the School of Computing and Communications at the University of Lancaster in the UK.

Research Questions & Rationale

LIFE IN BLACK AND WHITE

Over the first couple of months in Vancouver, I started feeling blue. It all started when I left Mexico and could not hug my grandmother because of Covid-19 public health measures. As a designer, I knew I needed to express myself to understand one new feeling I was dealing with; within this space, it made sense when I decided to work with hugs. The project became an attempt to connect and explore emotions as my research.

THE HUG: A GESTURE OF EMPATHY

How can we enrich social interaction with people experiencing fear of post-pandemic exposure? Can a "normal" blanket function as a "barrier," meaning a barrier is something to protect or help you stay away from this fear that triggers anxiety? This inquiry aimed to examine meaningful moments that enable us to connect even while encountering fear of post-pandemic exposure—focusing on relationships that take form through the acts of hugging. This project aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the communicative phenomenon of hugging. As Forshell (2012) stated, hugs may refer to physical sensations and a psychological sense of well-being and often offer a positive emotional experience. Therefore, as hugs are a manifestation of support and a gesture of comfort that might enhance the sensation of well-being, it was crucial to continue reading about other academics that explore how to promote well-being within students.

Not only do we miss hugs, but we also need them.

▶ 4:18 4:41   🔊 ⊡

▶ 1:01 4:41   🔇 ⊡   Fig. 2

▶ 1:16 4:41   🔇 ⊡   Fig. 3

▶ 1:54 4:41   🔇 ⊡   Fig. 4

Fig. 1-4: Screenshots of The Hug Video from the course Design Studio I, 2021.

WHO CARES?

The academics Corina Sas, an award-winning researcher in Human-Computer Interaction and Chenyan Zhang from the School of Computing and Communications at the University of Lancaster in the UK, questioned whether designers' emotions matter in the design field. This article raised the question of whether design students are conscious of their emotions. If that is the case, will they benefit by achieving better and richer design outcomes? Can design master students have the opportunity to explore their emotions? Can they find creative confidence by doing so?

Since designers often work in the capacity of facilitating projects — for example, book designers co-ordinate with marketing, production, and editorial team members, all of whom have different expertise and requirements — design students will benefit from developing the skills and flexibility to cope with ill-defined problems and periods of uncertainty. Thus, **How can design master students nourish their emotional well-being under periods of uncertainty?** One key might be developing confidence.

As explained by Cross[3] (2006), to cope with ill-defined problems, designers must learn to have the self-confidence to define, redefine and change the problem as given in the light of the solution that emerges from their minds and hands. Consequently, self-confidence is an integral part of the emotional exploration as well as of design practice itself. So, **How can design help students to curate their techniques to amplify their confidence?**

[3] Nigel Cross says that the underlying axiom of this discipline is that there are forms of knowledge peculiar to the awareness and ability of a designer. He argues that design has its own distinct 'things to know, ways of knowing them, and ways of finding out about them. (Cross, 2006)

Existing Work

IT TURNS OUT I AM NOT THE ONLY ONE

Behind being vulnerable, exposing myself and sharing my journey around my level of anxiety, I began seeing changes in how I expressed myself in my studio design projects and work. Then I noticed how it changed from black and white into colour. In other words, I perceived differences in how I have been experiencing my creativity and confidence as a designer. These changes led me to continue exploring and wondering whether others might feel similar. Therefore, through a series of in-studio explorations, I discovered that I was not the only one experiencing emotions that inhibited my work as a designer.

Existing Work

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Designers are often faced with challenges which need to be tackled creatively at multiple levels since the problem itself may need to be defined before the designer can generate solutions to that problem. These problems' solutions are not self-evident from the outset, making the designer's path feel uncertain, which co-relates to (or can produce feelings of) anxiety. If designers must cope with uncertainty, as it is part of their daily practice as designers (Tracey et al., 2016), they should perform reflective practices aligned with exploring their emotions. As designers are reflective practitioners (Schön, 1993), how they feel and know is intrinsically linked to their confidence and design creativity. As stated by Leenders et al. (2003), one of the core products of design creativity is the generation and reweaving of knowledge. (Rauth et al., 2010) Therefore, offering solutions to nourish design master students' emotional well-being will enable the opportunity to generate more knowledge.

Pedagogical concepts such as Project-based Learning or Design Thinking help students find their design voice and intuition within their design field. (Rauth et al., 2010) Finding this voice or this creative confidence[4] will enable design students to continue finding solutions to those vague and complex problems. This voice might help designers stay motivated, easing those negative feelings and reflecting on their practice as they find their way into this vast design world. However, developing creative confidence, viewing learning opportunities in scenarios that involve failure and being capable of seeing that a non-defined process will lead to results (Ulibarri et al., 2014) are characteristics that design students need to discover. Perhaps students might discover those characteristics by exploring their emotions-which are complex reaction patterns- to find patterns within their practice.

[4] Confidence, as found by Sas et al. (2010), is an emotion of confident expectation that leads to positive encouragement and therefore facilitates self-expression and creativity.

Since creative confidence is connected to problem-solving, researchers and designers should first explore their emotions if they intend to understand how they might affect design outcomes. As stated by Sas et al. (2010), confidence[4] should be the primary emotion designers should work with to achieve better and richer design outcomes. Moreover, they found that emotional regulation within expert designers is acquired by experience and the repetition of scenarios within the design practice.

Based on the findings of Tracey et al. (2016), maintaining a reflective practice is innate to support design students' identity development. The field of design is complex and iterative; therefore, designers should embrace uncertainty as a motivational force. As stated by Cross (2006), 'Designerly Ways of Knowing' reveals a unique way of thinking and doing that perhaps some design students are still learning. Moreover, students can use reflection as an anchor point to manage uncertainty, instability and uniqueness values inherent in ill-defined design problems. (Tracey et al., 2013) These academics demonstrated that reflective skills could show improvement with time, practice and guidance.

Rebecca Anne Price (2022) from the Faculty of Industrial Design Engineering at Delft University of Technology offers the concept of design resilience. She noted that, unfortunately, students in higher education experience depression and anxiety and that, especially during covid-19, educators needed to find ways to improve students' well-being and work with strategies to develop student resilience. As she found in her study *A Review of Resilience in Higher Education: Toward the emerging concept of Designer Resilience (2022)*, the practice of resilience and the practice of design have elements in common. She proposes that designers should have some balance as they experience uncertainty and ambiguity daily. I found this to be true in my experience during my bachelor's, my period working in my own design studio and during my master's degree.

Finally, Burçak Altay (2021) from the Department of Interior Architecture and Environmental Design at Bilkent University in Turkey and Nicole Porter from the Department of Architecture and Built Environment at the University of Nottingham in the UK are introducing the importance of mindfulness within the design field. Through their research, they strongly argue that design educators must engage in supporting students' well-being and how students can acquire new knowledge by doing reflective design practices. These academics explored how meditation practices and a mindful approach to design can facilitate creative thinking and free up one's inner critic. Their research proposes that mindfulness training is fruitful for the holistic development of students, supporting them to be genuinely reflective practitioners who creatively attend to the well-being of others and themselves. (Burçak et al., 2021)

Existing Work

SCOPE & LIMITATIONS

Although some theories and concepts arise from neuroscience, psychology, Buddhism and philosophy, this research focuses on helping design students curate their techniques to amplify their confidence inspired by the integration and relation between those concepts and the explorations gathered through the study. As this research approaches from a design perspective and I'm not a mental health expert, the research will not focus on what emotions mean nor psychoanalyze students. However, it will offer a technique that will enable master design students to help them nourish their emotional well-being under periods of uncertainty.

The Opportunity

DON'T WORRY. IT IS OKAY TO CRY

To continue the research, I needed to find a way to keep going. I needed to remind myself that I should not worry and that crying was okay. I realized that I might first understand myself, explore my emotions, and start doing reflective practices to understand others. Also, I wanted to know what emotions designers experience during their design process and how they work with these emotions.

The Opportunity

METHODOLOGY

This study uses action research as one of the methods. Action research can involve problem-solving if the solution to the problem leads to the improvement of the practice. As Kosky et al. (2013) stated, many findings will emerge during action research, but these findings will not be conclusive or absolute. These findings have been useful in guiding the research for this project by encouraging me to continually redefine and question the relationship between emotions and design practice.

The second method used in this research is autoethnography[5]. The objective of this method was to gather information through casual conversations, reflect on insights from participant interviews or dialogues and interpret those stories to keep journaling and use writing as a form of expression. As Poulos (2021) stated, the writing itself is also a form of inquiry, and this proceeds via close and systematic reflexive introspection aimed at discerning what might be going on. Although some readers may consider this method to be subjective, I judged it to important in allowing me to explore and question designers' practices.

[5] Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that 1) uses a researcher's personal experience to describe and critique cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences; 2) acknowledges and values a researcher's relationships with others; 3) uses deep and careful self-reflection-typically referred to as *reflexivity- to name and interrogate the intersections between self and society, the particular and the general, the personal and the political; 4) Shows people the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles; 5) balances intellectual and methodological rigour, emotion, and creativity.(Poulos, 2021)

However, to further develop the study, this research made use of a questionnaire provided to the MDes Program Cohort at Emily Carr University. The study found that participants experienced negative feelings while designing, such as feeling anxious, guilty, overwhelmed, tired, stressed, nervous, worried, frustrated, upset, overworked and in pain.
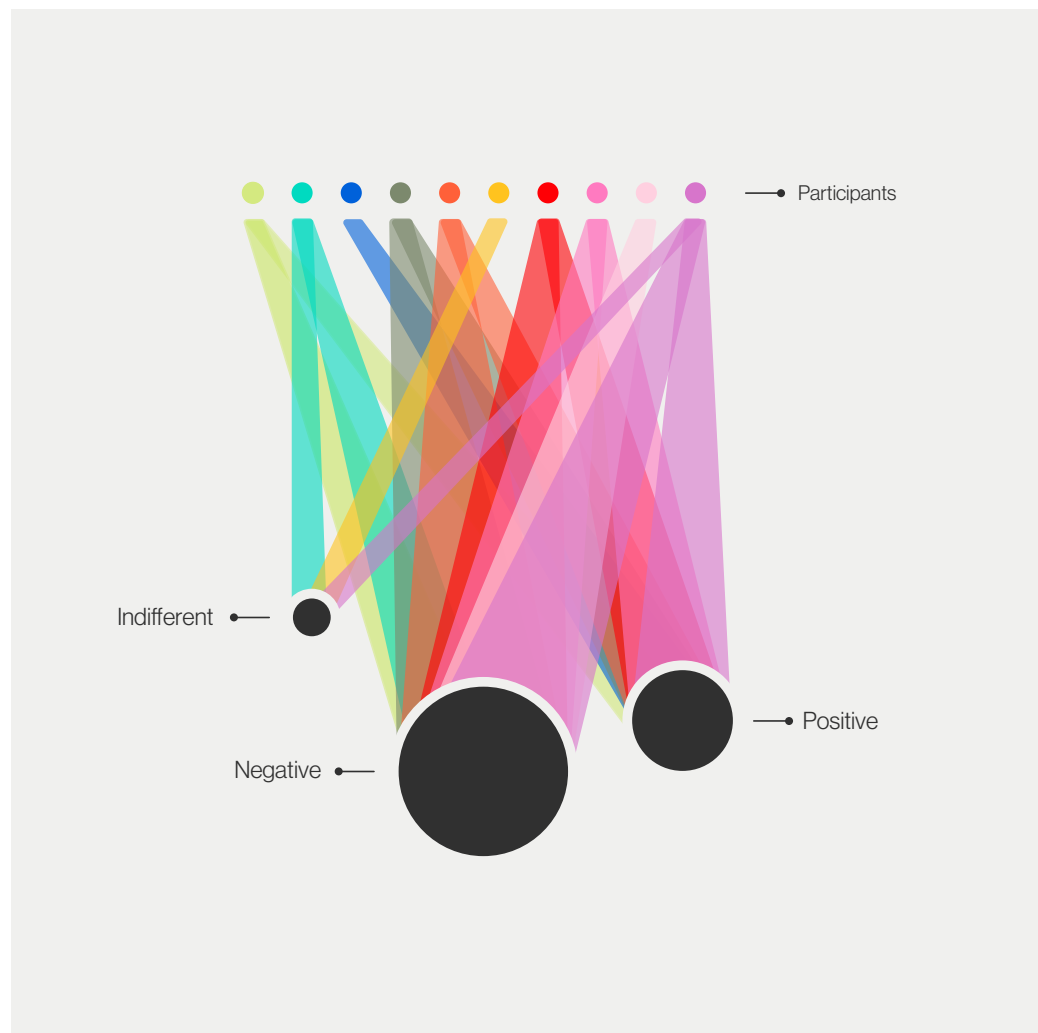

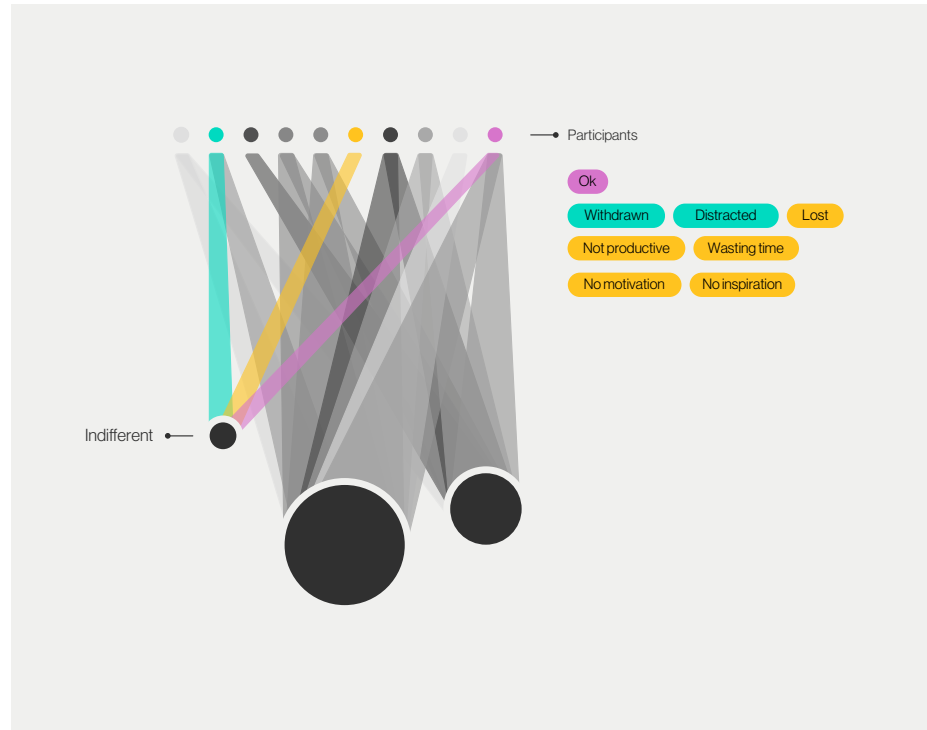Fig. 5: Data visualization overview: How do you feel while designing?

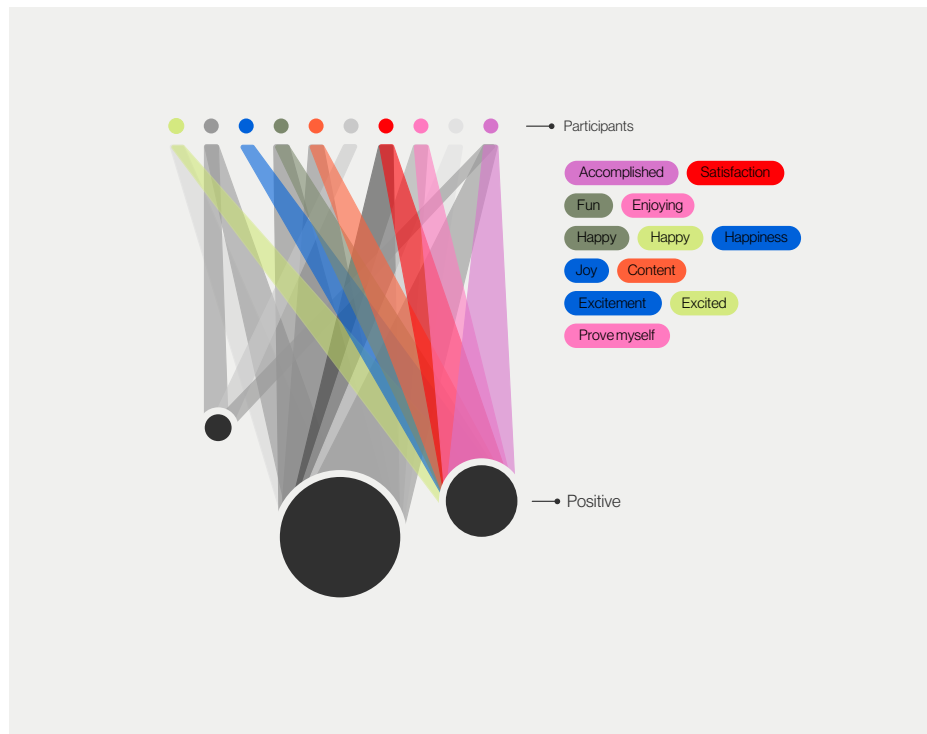Fig. 6: Data visualization indifferent overview: How do you feel while designing?

Fig. 7: Data visualization positive overview: How do you feel while designing?
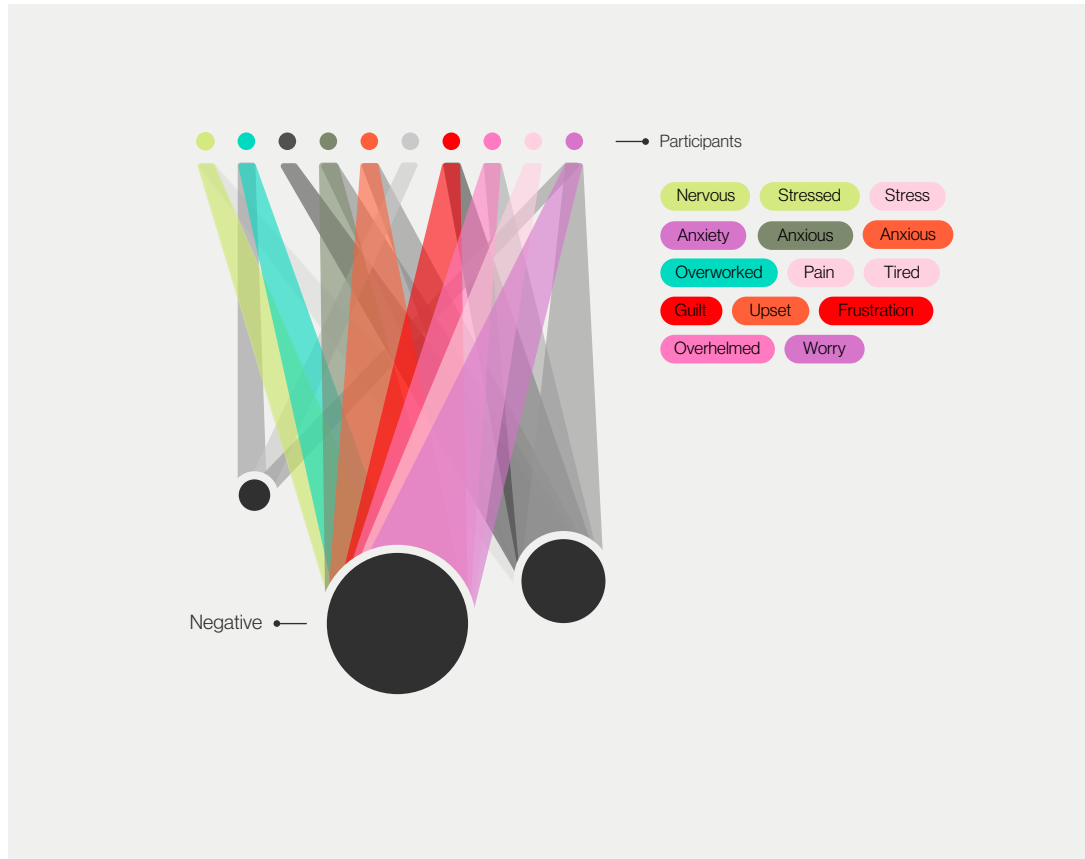
Fig. 8: Data visualization negative overview: How do you feel while designing?

Therefore, developing alternatives for design students that support them in building creative confidence, maintaining motivation, and understanding that uncertainty is intrinsically linked to being a designer is one of the aims of this research. Providing the substance necessary for growth, health, and good condition became the primary goal of this research, nourishing their emotional well-being.

Emotional ways of knowing

One thing that changed my emotional state was acknowledging my feelings and understanding my emotions. This journey allowed me to open up more, connect to my new peers at the studio, and build relationships between myself, new friends, and nature. My frequent walks in parks across Vancouver and Burnaby and the time spent fostering connections with new friends led me to understand the importance of studying different papers and books to comprehend the link between emotions, creativity, and how we feel and know.

It has been said that studying ourselves provides all the books we need - Pema Chödrön, a Buddhist teacher, author, nun and mother.

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DISCOURSE & DEVELOPMENT OF IDEAS

It has been noted that the mental health needs of graduate students are high and that insufficient attention has been paid to their mental happiness (Hyun et al., 2006). For this reason, exploring alternatives to enhance emotional well-being became the research discourse. Designing situations where design students might face uncertainty serves as an exploration to identify how uncertainty might trigger one's emotional state. Even though the literature is focused on the general population and not just on designers, findings about how uncertainty may influence how we think, feel and act should keep emerging. (Tracey et al. 2016)

Evidence shows how designers' emotions and emotional processing in the design space-unrelated to empathy-influence design actions and outcomes. (Tracey et al. 2016) Building a technique that offers design students a way to achieve emotional well-being could also contribute to helping designers achieve better design outcomes. Consequently, materializing and investigating other graduate design students' and my emotions through the following actions might point out some insights to further explore whether designers' emotions influence design actions.

Action # 1

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

We say more with our eyes and our body than with words. Indeed, as Barry (2019) states, our experiences present themselves, eventually, as language, but in this world of isolation, we crave to have different types of conversations. This type of conversation is expressed as having people around, conversations between sharing smiles, hugging, and just being there, in the same space, without saying a word but feeling the whole world.

Non-verbal communication is:

"Any kind of message transmission that occurs without words. Everything in an environment creates a message"
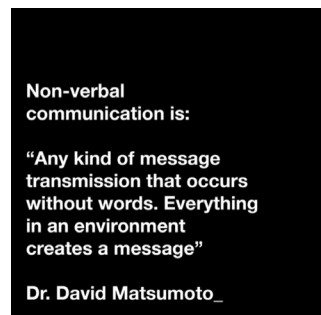
Dr. David Matsumoto_

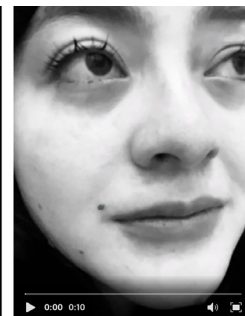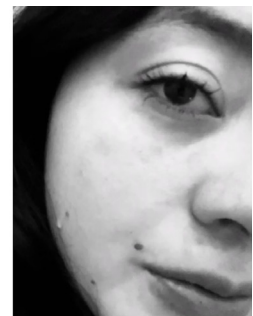Fig. 9: Quote Dr. Matsumuto   Fig. 10: Crying 01   Fig. 11: Crying 02

In action #1 the use of photos and short videos helped to express feelings. The photos and videos were uploaded to an internal blog and presented during a studio session. The intent was to understand if the photos and videos opened up a conversation around empathy and how sometimes we mirror our emotions over other people's emotions.

Action # 2

REINTRODUCE TO THE MOOD OF MAKING

Being out of your comfort zone in a new studio is, without a doubt, scary. However, as soon as you have the material in your hands, that fear goes away. A piece of advice to graduate design students is to explore the studios, get to know the material used and reintroduce yourself into the mood of making. Perhaps not following a specific design brief will enable a designer to start making with a different mindset. Maybe clay might help practice making without the fear of the results.

Fig. 12, 13, 14: Explorations at the Ceramic Studio, Emily Carr University.

In action #2, making without any particular task or set of instructions became the primary goal. Using the wheel-thrown and recycled clay allowed the designer to create something without having a result.

Action # 3

LAYERS BEHIND
THE WORDS

Is there a way in which we can address and regulate intangible "things," such as our emotions linked to memories triggered by "uncomfortable" situations in a designer's life? What if a workshop utilizing clay provides a space where design students can reflect on the shared experiences, feelings, and memories encountered? Will the material facilitate the sharing of thoughts?

Fig. 15: Explorations during Design Studio II, Emily Carr University.

Fig. 16: Explorations with clay during Design Studio II, Emily Carr University.

After the workshop, some questions arose: Does the material take the form of those memories? If so, does that help to regulate their emotions? How can designers work towards managing their continued emotional engagement to design better? Perhaps building connections can facilitate designers to focus on the moment and the present. Possibly playing around with clay can encourage designers to go back into the art of making with their hands and build a connection between the material and the designer. Will clay enable a state of calm while experiencing those moments of ambiguity designers face?

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Action # 4

BRING EMOTIONS TO A TACTILE FORM

The concept of bringing emotions to a tactile form might allow the designer to build a connection between thoughts, hands and the material. As seen by Fridja (1993), emotions are elicited by an external event, such as the behaviour of others, a change in the current situation, novel stimuli, or an internal event. Having a moldable material within your hands, letting things go and going with the flow might help elicit the emotions and feelings a designer is experiencing at that moment.

Fig. 17: Explorations with air-dry modelling clay 01.

Fig. 18: Explorations with air-dry modelling clay 02.

In action #4, using air-dry modelling clay helped the designer express her feelings. Whenever there was a moment of uncertainty, the designer took the material and played with it until it took a specific form. Later, reflections over a journal in the form of a poem were made. The poem and the clay enable the opportunity to bring those emotions into a tactile form, which helps to process those feelings and understand the process.

To conclude, the four actions presented above suggested some characteristics or design principles to keep in mind for creating the core of the project proposal, which in this case, will be held within an app. For example, action #1 conveys that non-verbal communication, like photos and videos, might help others situate themselves within a space of empathy. As Barry (2019) states, in this world of isolation, we crave different types of conversations that present themselves as language. Consequently, adding the features of documenting your makings with photos/videos or creating vectors in the app evokes space for non-verbal communication- which, according to Dr. Matsumoto, is any message transmission that occurs without words, as everything in an environment creates a message. Eventually, the journey section in the app will show the user's profile which will emulate this environment where students can have a space to start this non-verbal communication.

Action #2 communicates that making without the rigidity of following a design brief-or what Pink et al. (2018) argue in their paper Uncertainty and Possibility: New Approaches to Future Making in Design, considering uncertainty through disruption, enables the designer to focus on appreciating all the what ifs of the making by revealing and engaging the designer with all the possibilities that emerged from those uncertain circumstances. Therefore, the prompts suggested in the making section of the app will work as a facilitator to initiate a conversation around shifting the understanding of the conventional ways of making to a disruptive one.

Action #3 articulates the importance of building connections within a group with similar experiences. Developing creative confidence, viewing learning opportunities in scenarios that involve failure and being capable of seeing that a non-defined process will lead to results (Ulibarri et al., 2014) are characteristics that design students need to discover. However, workshops held for MDes students within Emily Carr opened a space for exploring, connecting, and sharing while making. The workshops built a space where students could communicate their experience of being a designer and evoked a sense of belonging. For this reason, the connecting section is one of the app's characteristics. It will promote building a space where students can discover the inherent turbulence of being a designer together.

Finally, action #4 frames the essence of bringing emotions into a tactile form as it helps process the feelings encountered. If designers must cope with uncertainty, as it is part of their daily practice as designers (Tracey et al., 2016), they should perform reflective practices aligned with exploring their emotions. The core message of the app is to communicate to design students the importance of acknowledging that dealing with uncertainty is inevitably part of being a designer and is also a way of knowing. As a result, the app will have messages or notification systems that will remind the students that making matters.

DESIGN OUTCOME: MAKING MATTERS APP PROPOSAL

After understanding that emotions play a significant role in the designers' design process and that confidence is linked to creativity, it made sense to develop a technique that is easy to follow. Creating an app became the main goal as designers typically have their cellphones nearby while working.

As a result, the readings and the actions made during the primary research build the direction of the research as they pointed out that making is something inherent to being a designer[6]. Consequently, finding ways to express feelings, documenting your creations, not following a specific task but exploring and finally stepping out of your comfort zone while connecting with yourself, your peers and your community of designers inspired the creation of Making Matters.

Making Matters is a journal for designers' well-being. Over time, designers will learn to identify the patterns between their emotions and practice by following the explore, make and connect technique.

[6]The designer constructs the design world within which he/she sets the dimensions of his/her problem space and invents the moves by which he/she attempts to find solutions. (Schön, 1992 p. 11) (Visser, 2010)
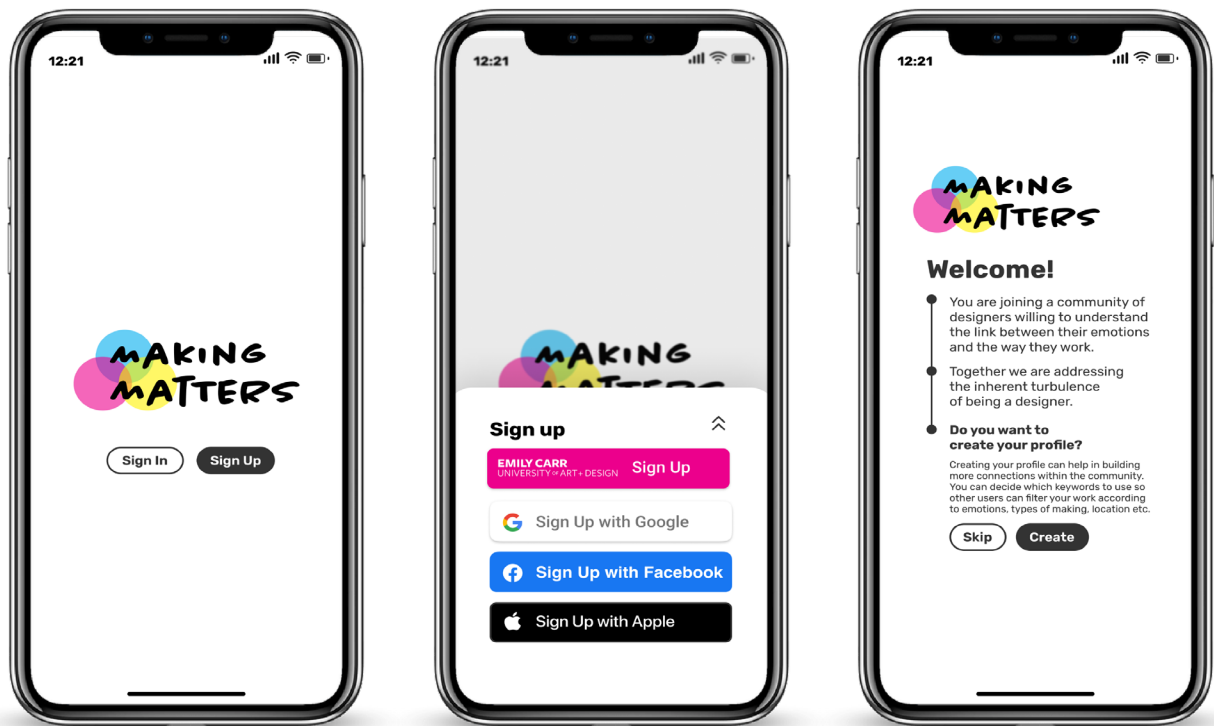
Fig. 19: Making Matters onboarding

Making Matters App solves the challenge of building emotional resilience and confidence in designers as it lets designers reflect on their emotional well-being daily by asking how they are in the exploring section. Then it suggests different ways to make with what you have around and, later, the option of documenting your process. The Journey section helps users identify the patterns and connections between their emotions, who they are with, and where they work. Also, it shows the trends of feelings and identifies the specific prompts in the making section that enabled them to feel better.
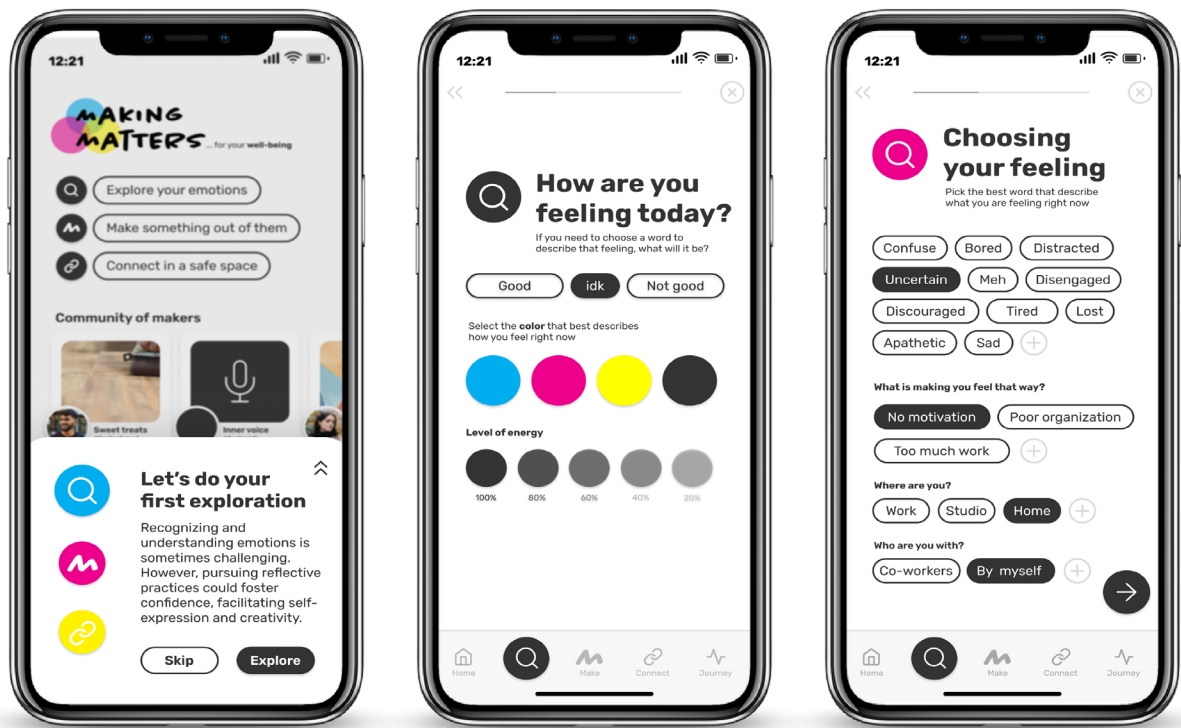
Fig. 20: Making Matters: Home screen and exploration section

The exploring section starts with a simple question: How are you feeling today? The purpose of starting with a casual tone of voice is to emulate a conversation between friends. Later it asks to choose one of the CMYK colours. The main goal of picking a colour is to customize the rest of the screens based on the user's selection. Finally, the app asks about users' level of energy. The purpose of setting a specific percentage for their energy level is to build the journey section and identify patterns between users' feelings and their energy levels.
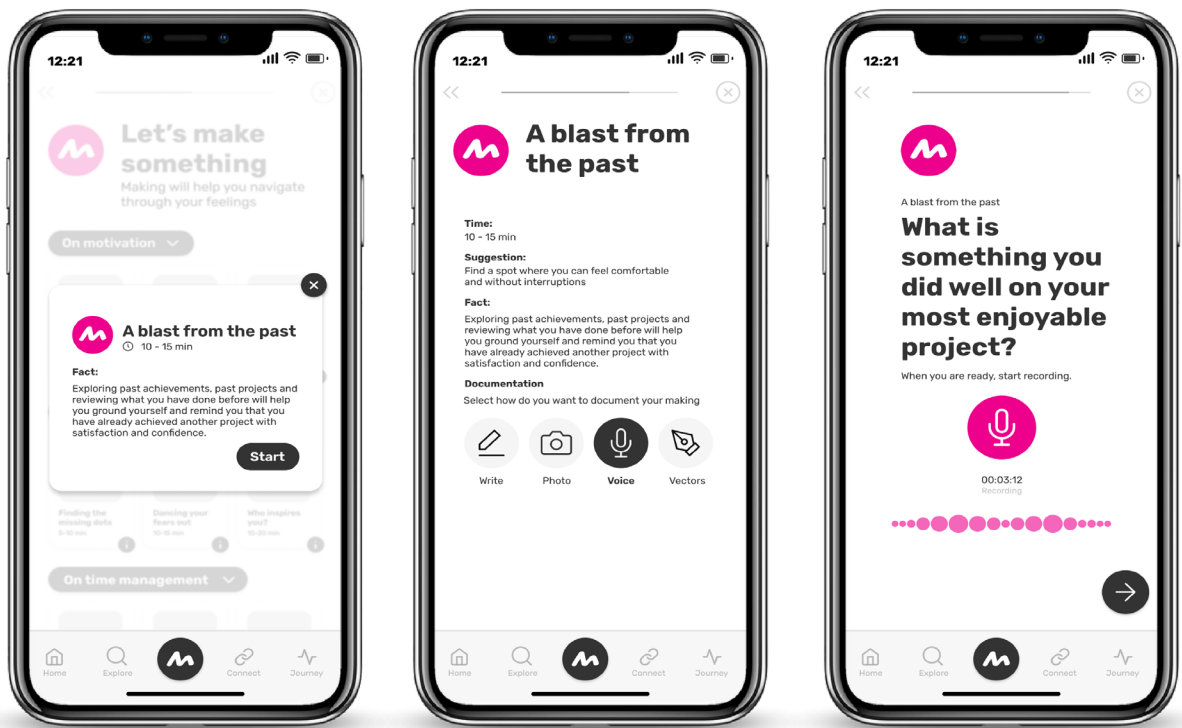
Fig. 21: Making Matters: Making Screens (Prompt preview card, prompt documentation option, prompt)

According to the user's selections, the app will suggest different categories with prompts to set a space where the user can start conversing with those feelings. This conversation will be documented in different ways, such as by writing, recording your voice, taking a picture or using your phone to draw. Finally, it will suggest that the user navigate through other users' explorations or continue with the making phase.

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OTHER APPS IN THE MARKET VS MAKING MATTERS

There are other apps in the market such as *How We Feel*, which focuses on teaching users to identify or name their emotions. *Stoic* is a mental health tracking app; *Daylio* is a diary mood tracker and *Thought Diary is a* tool focus on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.

WHO IS THE AUDIENCE FOR THE MAKING MATTER APP?

Making Matters App will be a university-focused community app. This way, the app can have a more significant impact as it also fosters face-to-face belonging within already available spaces dedicated to students' mental health and well-being. The universities can offer a digital space where new students can navigate through an archive of past and present students that shared their makings within their journeys as becoming creative practitioners.
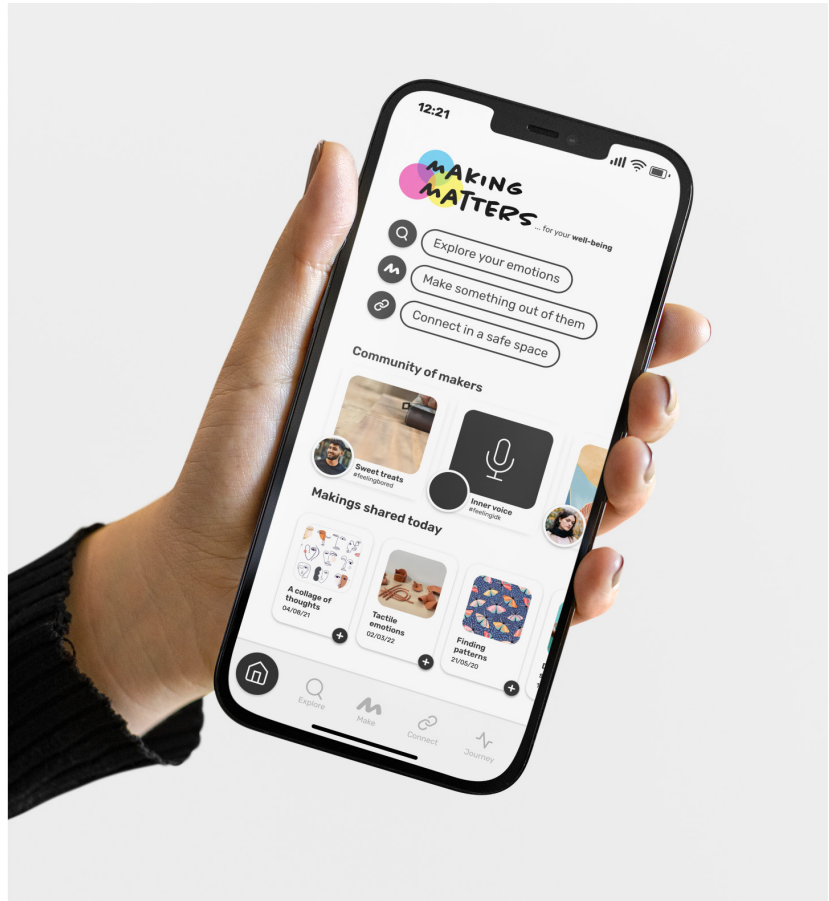
Fig. 22: Making Matters Home Screen

Furthermore, becoming a creative practitioner acknowledges the importance of 'learning through doing' and that designing is an ongoing process involving many emotions. Pink and Akama argued in Un/certainty (2015) that designing entangles serendipity, emergence, frustrations and unexpected discoveries, which I also categorized as the inherent turbulence of being a designer. Therefore, providing a tool to foster a community within a space that most students already own, a smartphone, will enable them to address those moments of uncertainty together apart from the physical space provided by the university.

WHY THE MAKING MATTERS APP?

Making Matters App is a digital space or a tool to encounter the world as a designer/researcher. Its main principle is to offer a way for students to acknowledge that uncertainty is inevitably part of being a designer and a way of knowing. Therefore, the Making Matter App is a tool to promote that uncertainty is part of the generative process of creating possibilities and by acknowledging that it is a way to step into unknowable futures, as Pink, Sarah, et al. (2018) pointed out.
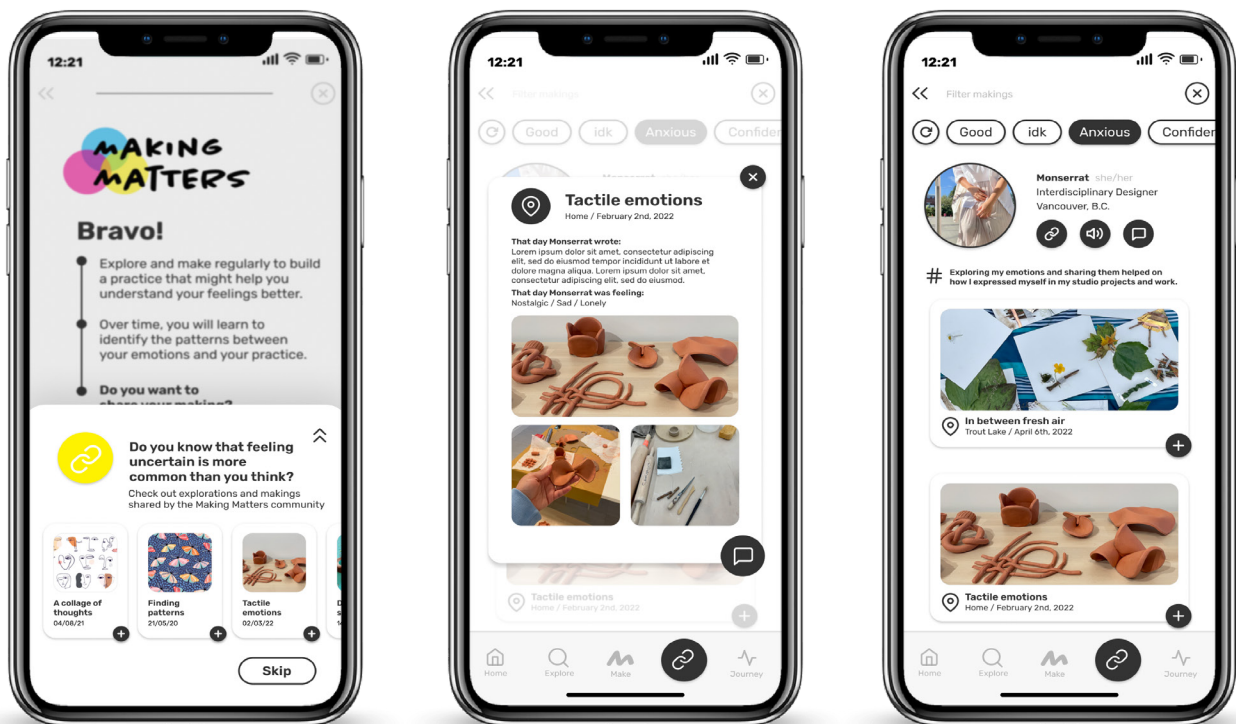

Fig. 23: Making Matters Connect Screens (Pop up message, making card and user profile)

Making Matters App does not intend to provide a space of emotional granularity- which, according to Dr. Feldman Barret, is the individual's ability to differentiate between the specificity of their emotions. Instead, the app offers a digital space where students can encounter and share practicing various makings that emerged from the possibilities that moments where lack of certainty is predominant. The prompts suggested in the making section will enable the student to shift their understanding of what is visible and dissolve the sense of certainty, opening a space for disruption, as Pink, Sarah, et al. (2018) pointed out. This series of activities or prompts will foster more what if's to enable a space for making in an unintentional way. Later those makings might generate opportunities where uncertainty will be the core power providing new possibilities or what I call—boosting creative confidence. Those prompts within the app address the inherent turbulence of being a designer, or what Pink, Sarah, et al. (2018) says; it aims to demonstrate how uncertainty might be engaged as a technology that intervenes to generate new forms of possibility.

WHAT I HAVE DISCOVERED WHILE BEING VULNERABLE

Immersing in the emotional, reflective practices, uncovering the most vulnerable part of me and sharing all the experiences within my cohort led me to understand that design can be a way of communication that fosters and encourages connections with ourselves, our emotions and our surroundings.

Furthermore, the different actions explored within these past months at Emily Carr University let me recognize the importance of questioning our design process and how our connection with ourselves, our emotions and our surroundings will, without a doubt, impact our design practice. Design is an uncertain yet imaginative practice that invariably expands its terrains as new tools and software are available for us to help explode our journey as creatives. However, being aware of how our emotions will impact the way in which we design is something to keep an eye on.

Some years ask questions, and others years answers - Zora Neale Hurston.

THE INHERENT TURBULENCE OF BEING A DESIGNER

Earlier in this thesis, I established that uncertainty is an unavoidable component of designers' processes. This section will further explore the inherent turbulence of the design process and explain how emotional resilience supports designers in managing it, allowing them to achieve excellence in their creative work.

Even though studies from Mentally Healthy 2022 state that attitudes toward mental ill-health are improving, there is still space to work on how mental health is seen. It is about improving the workflow and finding ways to create techniques that designers can benefit from. For instance, exploring concepts and ideas to understand design researchers' emotional well-being becomes essential as they might understand themselves more than others. According to Mentally Health (2022), it is imperative to look out for younger people in the creative industry more than ever, as their results imply that those under 29 are more likely to show signs of depression.
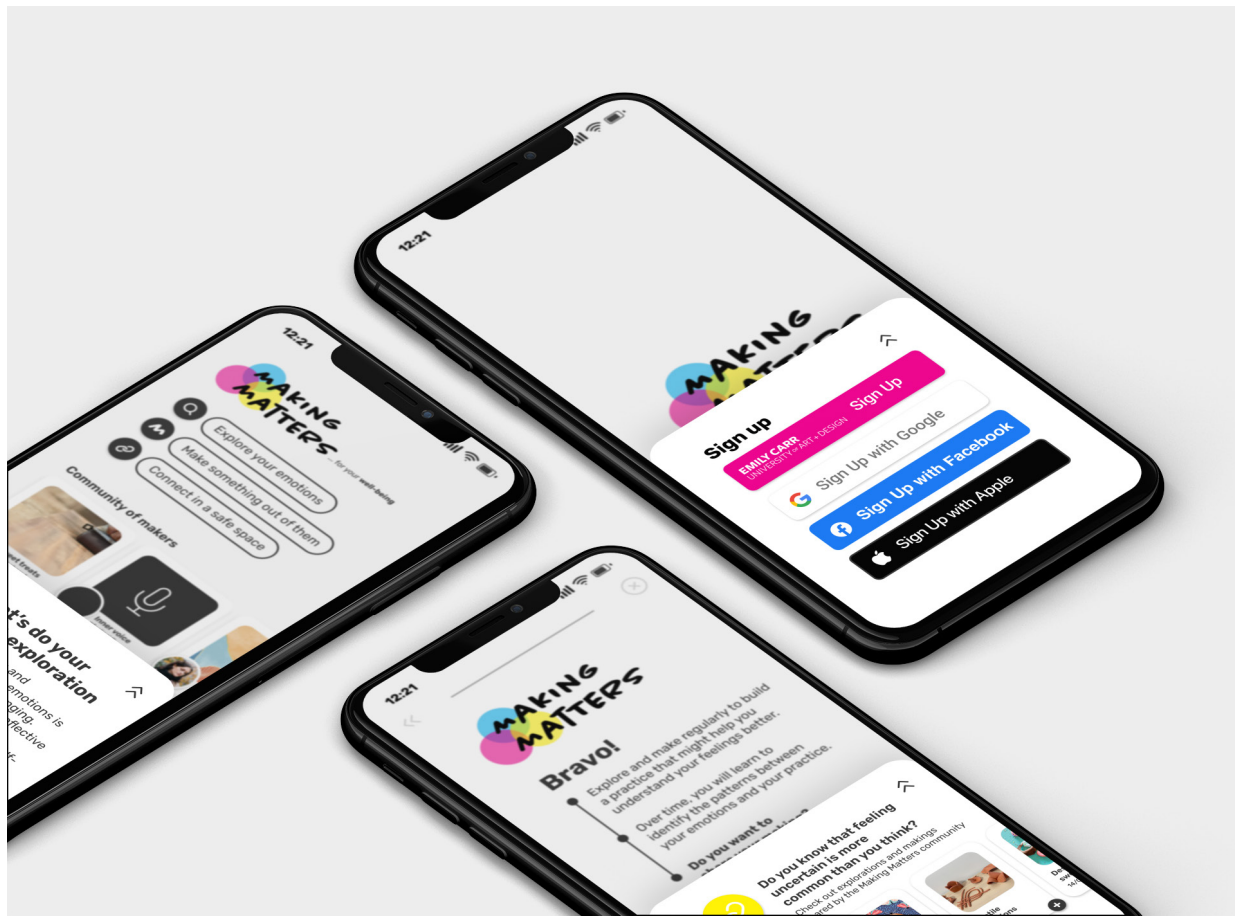
Fig. 24: Making Matters various screens

As designers form part of the creative industry and act as human instruments (Tracey et al., 2013), they should know how to work within emergent frameworks. Designers need to adapt to unknown situations in advance. That is the inherent turbulence of being a designer. The turbulence of having the freedom and courage to fail/take creative risks and knowing that all the ideas created have value. (Grossman-Kahn, 2011; Kelley & Kelly, 2013) (Ulibarri et al., 2014)

Analysis & Reflection of the Design Project

BARRIERS, LIMITATIONS & BREAKTHROUGHS

While these improvements in attitudes toward mental health are encouraging, it is essential to remember that communicating emotions is a challenging, ongoing, and repetitive process that may include each individual's rejection. This project suggests an alternative way to deal with emotions and express your thoughts and feelings by bringing emotions to a tactile form. Each individual or design student should serve as the master of their practice. If we continue researching the psychological makeup of individual designers, we might understand how it influences their design actions and decisions. (Tracey et al. 2016) Therefore, it is necessary to suggest exploring and curating the techniques that echo the most with their personalities for analyzing their emotions.

The development of an app is a detailed and rigorous process that takes several months to create. The intervention of other fields, such as a team of psychologists, developers, and a legal group, is encouraged to continue developing the Making Matters app.

My priority in developing the Making Matter app was to show user flows to gather participant feedback, as they will be the main users. After gathering this information, my research was able to make use of these gathered insights. For example, reducing the number of screens asking for user background, reducing the options of feelings and adjusting the making wireframe will induce a smoother use of the App. Making the App more playful and customizable will also increase the chances of designers being more creative.

Eventually, Making Matters could serve as an initiative to partner with different design universities. For example, The Wellness Center at Emily Carr University could offer a space where designers can connect and share their makings and provide small boxes with recycled materials from the different studios to encourage the technique.

ICE CREAMS AS REMINDERS

I encourage everyone to choose their way to remember that sometimes even if you think you have a fantastic idea, other factors will inevitably impact your goals. Use any form of expression to remember that sometimes your expectations change, like how ice cream melts and is okay; later, you will find another.

Implications for Design

LEARNINGS & KEY REFLECTIONS

Designers have to find their way of mastering their creative confidence, and educators are essential in helping students find their way of thinking and developing their creativity and confidence. "In real-world practice, problems do not present themselves to the practitioners as givens. They must be constructed from the materials of problematic situations which are puzzling, troubling, and uncertain." (Schon, 1983, p. 39-40) (Visser, 2010) Therefore, this research reminds us that we must change how we approach design as practitioners[7] and educators by focusing on our emotional well-being. New ways of dealing with uncertainty before, during and after the design process will inevitably impact the emotional well-being of design students and how they design.

Further research in this area benefits our field broadly as there are still better pathways that might help design master students continue with their excellent work. Therefore developing this app and launching it will enable this research and future researchers to capture data from designers around the world.

[7]A 'practice' is often how an artist's ongoing work is described. An artist's practice not only includes producing finished artwork but can also refer to other things happening in the background and over the longer term, such as research and experimentation with a particular idea.
-Barry K.

Gathering information about what designers feel before exploring, the way they make and what they feel after might lead to a better understanding of how emotions affect designers' creative process. This app will give specific information about the creative industry apart from bringing designers' techniques or prompts that help them find ways to nourish their emotional well-being.

Not only graduate design students should have alternatives for exploring their emotions. All designers should be able to build healthy emotional spaces within their workspace and workflow. They should accomplish reflective practices that allow them to feel and know in their peculiar way, as it is part of those 'Designerly Ways of Knowing' established by Cross. (Cross, 2006). How designers reflect on these ill-defined problems, explore the feelings attributed to this reflection, and 'reflect-in-action' and 'know-in-action' (Schön, 1993) varies according to each practitioner.

YOU DON'T NEED PERMISSION. DANCE LIKE A FOOL

As a friend said, emotions are like ocean waves. If we resist the waves, they will eventually become more robust and finally conquer the barrier they encounter. What should we do then? This research suggests moving around, finding the rhythm, connecting with emotions, letting thoughts arrive and bringing those emotions into a tactile form. Evidence reveals that reflective skills can show improvement with time, practice and guidance. (Tracey et al. 2013)

For this reason, grab your headphones and perhaps your favourite pair of shoes and dance, swim or move around; find that balance, ground yourself and keep designing. Nourish yourself by exploring your emotions and curating the techniques needed to find emotional well-being. Hopefully, this research provokes further discourse on how designers can manage their emotional well-being and design strategies to cope with their unusual ways of knowing.

Gracias 2021-2022 porque fuiste lluvia y me enseñaste a ser el sol - Luna Tinta Y Pluma

CONCLUSION

As this thesis establishes, mental well-being is important to the designer's capacity for successful creative work. Therefore, a collaboration between developers and psychologists is necessary to fully succeed as an app that suggests techniques for the emotional well-being of designers. Many paths remain to complete as the user flows keep growing according to the offerings suggested after the user selects an option. Also, more time to analyze the user's primary routes is needed. Regardless, the development of the Making Matters App will serve as a starting point to answer how design can help students to curate their technique to amplify their confidence and, by doing so, nourish their emotional well-being under periods of uncertainty.

Making Matters App gathers information to develop other strategies or products that help designers understand the relationship between emotions and their reflective practice. Moreover, the app offers a straightforward way of documentation, and finally, the reminders and notifications are a crucial part of the app as they help build reflective practice. However, there isspace for improvement as the app's flow might seem tedious.

MAKING MATTERS

An app that encourages designers to **make**, **explore** and **connect**.

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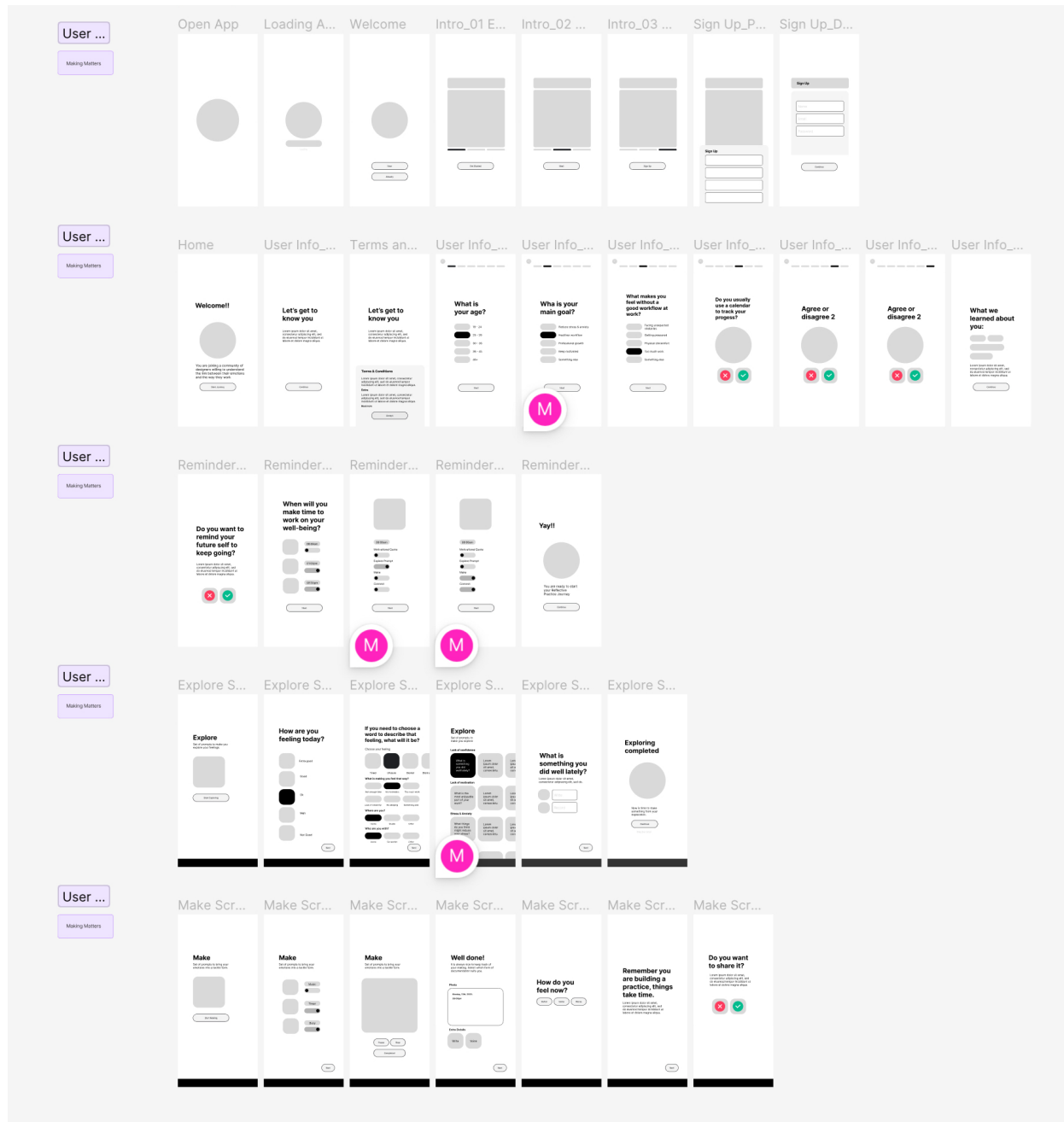
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