

AN INSIGHT INTO THE MIND

A GUIDE TO SURVIVE: ART, PHOTOGRAPHY AND MENTAL
HEALTH

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“We are all strangers in a strange land (...)” (Madeleine L’Engle)

In this thesis I will try to explore and answer all of the following questions. I will try to showcase the link between art and mental health, firstly introducing how we, as people, are driven to understand and explore who we are and what our purpose is, and how this driven motivation towards finding our identity can differ between people, artists in particular. All of us want to understand the world, yet it is often the artists that try to find the most unconventional ways and inventions to get closer to that question, as those who are more open minded and mentally driven, are often seem to be more creative (Jamison, 1994).

The main focus however, as mentioned previously, will be art and mental health, the link between the two and how art can help artists and regular people understand and deal with their issues. Trying to explore and understand the world can cause mental health issues cannot be scientifically proven, there seems to be a link between the creative and more expressive and mental health issues (Jamison, 1994), and this subject in particular will be the focus on this dissertation. Will you be able to find out the scientifically proven reason behind it? Will you be able to find out how to prevent it from happening? Not necessarily, as this paper is not a scientific thesis. However, you will be able to expand on your knowledge on mental health, art and art therapy as well as artists that fought and lost against their mental stability, and artists that won their battle using their own work. It cannot be said whether it is the mentality that pushes the creativeness, or whether it is the creativity that leads to mental issues, whether it is the mind that is ill, or whether it is the soul that is more aware. There is scientific evidence that showcases correlation between art and mental health, but there is no proof to suggest one causes the other (Jamison, 1994).

While reading, you will be introduced to some researched based information about identity and the mind, artists that dealt (and to this day, deal with) mental health problems, and will be introduced to the idea of art therapy with a main focus on phototherapy; which can be defined as the use of photography in health treatment particularly mental health issues; its psychological and artistic background and link. You will find out how art can help with understanding your own mind and mentality, and how it can help with healing wounds. The strong focus on phototherapy will be later understood through an auto-fictional story about a young girl who struggled with multiple mental health problems and how photography and the art world helped her to understand and conquer her issues.

Although the dissertation will focus strongly on phototherapy, you will also be able to find out about different types of art therapy and how it can help. A part of the paper will be research based, however the autobiographically based auto-fictional story will be influenced by personal experiences.

Overall, after reading this dissertation you will have a more expanded knowledge on the link between identity, art and mental health and how art therapy can be helpful with understanding, dealing and healing. One thing that needs to be remembered is that this particular written piece, though based on academic, psychological and artistic research, is in no way a medical thesis nor a guide.

We all attend to represent the world as we see it, but everyone sees the world differently. We can make something that does not exist, existent. We can create and recreate our own reality in our heads (Burke, 2009). But is that a good thing? Can creating a different world change one's reality for the better, or can it drive one mad?

In order to understand who we are and to understand our identity, one needs to look at themselves from different perspectives, as if they were looking at other people.

To find yourself and truly accept yourself, one needs to firstly understand who they are.

To do so, one has to look deep down into their mind, have a discussion with their own mind, look at it and analyse it (Burke, 2009).

Identity is an accomplishment, a process. It is not something one has, but something one does; creates. It is a complex concept, unstable, constantly changing, developing.

By learning about others and the world around us, we are able to simultaneously understand who we are and who we are not, as we identify ourselves as one, by not identifying ourselves as the other. People that try and be 'different' than everyone else, are affected by those around them to the point they create and develop their own identity based on who they are not. It is concurrently us that, and those around us that shape who we are. We can create who we are based on who we aspire to be. Just because one isn't who they wish they were, does not mean they cannot reshape and develop.

Continuously changing does not mean we are abandoning our past selves, rather, we are developing the us now, for the awaiting future (Lawler, 2013). Identity is a human capacity of who's who, a way to know and understand the world and our own selves.

It is ongoing, fugitive and flexible (Jenkins, 2014). It is a basic cognitive mechanism that allows us, humans to 'sort out' themselves. Identity does not determine who we are, yet it is all we are. Nevertheless, the constant opportunity to develop and reshape one's identity allows one to stay who they are without being trapped inside their own selves (Jenkins, 2014).

The point of growing up is discovering the world around us and our own selves. Our lives are based on who we are, what we think of ourselves, how we react to ourselves, and how we change based on our discoveries and experiences. The exploration works both ways as living allows us to shape who we are, and developing our identity helps us with understanding and accepting our place and purpose (Jenkins, 2014). But questions arise, do we actually have any power over who we are, or is it the environment we grow up in that determines how we shape ourselves? Many identities are 'made' by society, is it for a purpose of identifying and understanding, or the purpose of classifying and labelling (Lawler, 2013)?

We develop our identity throughout our whole life. No one is just simply born as themselves, we change, shape and develop who we are as humans (Burke, 2009). Our identity is combined of who we were born as, and who we become in the society we live in (Jenkins, 2014). We see our reflection in the reactions of others, and shape our identity to fit into the norms (Burke, 2009). But fitting in can be difficult. It can be stressful, more so for individuals that seem to have more to say about who they are, individuals that refuse to become part of the 'norm', individuals that try to find their own selves, by themselves. Humans act on the basis of the meaning (Burke, 2009). To find the meaning of life, to find the meaning of their own selves. That is the purpose of many. But can it be the other way around? Can we be creating the meaning of who we are and the world around us? It is complicated, and it can be extremely difficult for some to find the answers, to accept the reality they live in, to understand who they are. It can drive one mad...

We all have multiple identities (Burke, 2009). It does not mean we pretend to be someone else, but simply, we repaint the empty canvas in a way that is more appropriate and based on the moment. There is a difference between self-definition and the way others define us, yet both are real. Successfully holding multiple identities is showing the emotive self.

Having personal, public, family-based or any other identity, is simply reshaping oneself based on the environment. Our identities are authentic when they are all in harmony. The identities do not need to be exactly the same, but should never cross over, they should be in harmony (Jenkins, 2014). If the harmony is broken and the identities cross over or disagree, it can lead to identity crisis, it can lead to issues with understanding oneself and the world around us, it can lead to confusion of who we are which can be linked to mental health problems. But, does a damaged mind mean a damaged self? (Jenkins, 2014)

If one understands their different identities and is able to reconnect with each one of them, they are able to bring their meaning to life, however if one's identities clash too much, they will become more and more distressed, bringing their self-esteem down, creating more questions than answers, producing more issues in their heads (Burke, 2009).

Emotions are often shown in symbolism. Emotions affect our identities and affect the ways we think and behave. (Burke, 2009). Do emotions affect our minds, or do the minds affect the emotions? What is the real trigger of our behaviour? All of these questions cannot be answered simply. There is a possibility that they cannot be answered at all.

However, many philosophers, psychologists and artists try to answer those, in their own ways. Scientists use data, philosophers and artists used their minds. However, can opening your mind towards your emotions, towards trying to understand yourself, drive one insane?

How can you help yourself? How can you help others? Is it possible to overcome your mental health issues without medications or hospitalisation? Or is one destined to a life in madness?

All is possible. There are many different ways, medical or else, to help those with mental health. Art Therapy is one of them. Art is a way of expressing one's feelings and emotions, and therapy allows one to identify, analyse and diagnose these. It helps those in need. Even if some are sceptical about it, saying 'I can't draw', 'I don't have a talent', 'I don't know how to write' or 'I don't even own a camera', many mental health clients move from "*an initial resistance to an enthusiasm and desire to attend sessions. (...) Art therapy is a creative process of making art with an aim to express feelings, realise repressed emotions and develop personal growth.*" (Rowley & Comisari, 2016, p.48).

In the middle of the 20th century, practitioners started noticing that individuals suffering from mental health problems often expressed themselves through drawings, writing and other artworks, hence the progression to use art as a healing strategy (Rowley & Comisari, 2016). Edith Kramer, the pioneer of Art Therapy, believed that engaging in an artistic activity can allow one to externalise, re-experience and resolve their feelings and emotions (Waller & Gilroy, 1992).

Photography is one of examples of Art Therapy. It allows the patient/client/artist to engage more with, not only their own selves, but their surroundings and environment, without putting themselves in the midst of the chaos. It helps them to understand their own selves, the world around them, and their place in it. Photographing oneself can help a person look at their own selves from a different perspective, allowing them to create a distance between who they are and who they think they are, which further can help them with understanding their own selves, dealing, and healing. Photography reflects emotional experiences and allows the author of the image to confront their senses and feelings in a more physical way – it is easier for many to help others, so looking at oneself from a different point of view can help one with accepting themselves. It is a language of its own, similarly to other types of Art Therapy, it allows the involved to express themselves without the pressure of verbal communication. Being able to look at the world and oneself from a different angle, from a different perspective, through the lens; can help with capturing the unseen reality. The camera does not lie about the unconscious, and the feelings and emotions of a photographer are always visible in the photograph. Photography gives a patient power, control over what they capture, giving them a glimpse into the control over their lives (Berman, 1993). Art Therapy allows people to take control of who they are.

Art Therapy. This subject is fairly new in the worlds of art and therapy. Many associate it with occupational therapy, however there is a very big difference between the two. Occupational therapy tries to make the patient focus on any topic or task to keep them away from their issues, whereas art therapy encourages the patient to use their mind to express themselves, to help focus on a different task while allowing them to express their feelings and thoughts. So, even though, the two share a similar mindset, art therapy keeps a strong focus on allowing the emotions linked with the worries and issues to be expressed (Waller & Gilroy, 1992).

Art may involve the psychology of feeling (Titchener, 1909). Mentality and insanity have been an interest of many artists since the ancient times (Topp & Blackshaw, 2009). Artists have also been expressing their thoughts, performing psychoanalysis on their artwork and their own selves for years. An artist creates a world within their art, that sets it apart from reality, yet allows the artist to look at the reality more clearly (Vygotskii, 1971).

Art Therapy is a collection of diverse practices that holds a healing value of making and creating. It allows for externalisation of thoughts, it can be both therapeutic and diagnostic, it is where art and science meet and collaborate (Waller & Gilroy, 1992).

The act of creation is, in itself, a healing process. Art is known to be expressive, it may seem obvious to say that art allows one to express their feelings, emotions, thoughts and worries. Creating and expressing oneself through art allows one to bring the unconscious feelings into the conscious level of mind. It is the fundamental curiosity, the need to understand others and ourselves, that makes us want to create and express ourselves (Waller & Gilroy, 1992). Art allows to do exactly that, and those who are lost, those who do not understand what is going on in their heads, those with mental health problems... those are the people that need to be able to express themselves more than anyone else. Art can help people to express themselves, therapy helps with a diagnosis, and art therapy allows them to further understand themselves, and understanding is the first step in the process of change.

The reason for Art Therapy to become more and more popular amongst artists and psychotherapists is the fact that people suffering from mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, bi-polar, or manic-depressive disorder are often unwilling to talk about their thoughts and issues, or even able to admit them to their own selves. Art Therapy is a non-verbal, low-communication therapy that allows the patient to feel safe and express their emotions.

As the creation of art comes from the subconscious, people with mental health problems are often drawn to creating, whether it is painting, photographing, writing or any other type of artwork (Vygotskii, 1971). Art is a fantasy, and those who are most unsatisfied with their reality, are the ones who fantasize the most.

Those who suffer from mental disorders, especially those with severe depression or anxiety often have the most unsatisfied desires, which; controversially, is the basis of all art according to Freud himself (Vygotskii, 1971). It is due to the fact that they are not satisfied with the reality of their own lives, and often, with their own selves.

Consequently, it can be clear that Art Therapy is forward move into one's mind and can allow to understand and heal as looking over your expressive work can help one explore their own selves, and expressing one's emotions and worries can help them to let go.

Since the beginning of time, artists have been misunderstood. Their work was often seen as evidence for their madness. Art movements such as Cubism, Abstract or Expressionism were seen as ridiculous and insane. Many did not understand the appeal of the, often aesthetically simple, paintings. Did these artists use art as a way of showing their insanity? As a way of communicating their mindsets? Or as a way of healing through expressing their inner selves? Or, all of the above (Lombroso, 2011).

There were numerous artists whose work was left unnoticed until they did something extraordinary, something 'mad'. One of the most famous cases being Vincent Van Gogh, the man that cut off his own ear. His work did not catch much interest until after his tragic death, a suicide. It is interesting that his work was unnoticed, and the artist himself seen as a failure, and a mad man, before his death. It was after the suicide, when people started to gain more interest in the art world and the meanings behind the works. Now, he is seen as one of the misunderstood geniuses of the art world (Blumer, 2002). And he is not the only one.

It was around the time of Van Gogh's lifetime when people and critics started to look at the artist as well as the art, to look at the person behind the art, as it were. One of the big reasons was the psychologist Freud who was interested in the workings of the mind and believed that our conscious selves were affected by unconscious processes (Topp & Blackshaw, 2009). It was nineteenth century Vienna that started to change the view on art and its creators due to the fact that the late nineteenth century Vienna was home of artists such as Gustav Klimt or Oskar Kokoschka, and the psychiatrist Sigmund Freud himself (Topp & Blackshaw, 2009).

It is true that manic-depressive illness is the most common mental issue in artists, and the artists were believed to be the most likely to suffer (Jamison, 1994). Is it in light of the fact that creative people are more sensitive and open to the influence of the unconscious? That is what many, including Freud, believe. And a city where all the masterminds cohabited together, was bound to become fascinated with the link between the worlds of visual arts and psychiatry.

At the time, it was believed that anyone who showed any minor mental instability, had to be hospitalised. They were classified as manic-depressive and were sent onto the curb of; not only the art world, but the society as a whole (Jamison, 1994).

Nonetheless, the idea of madness being the new genius started to become more popularised. Some believed that the painters such as Kokoschka whose portraits of other mentally unstable patients showed the madness of the sitter, were able to see the world in the different way. The canvas became a way of explaining one's thoughts and feelings. It became a door into a different world, a different reality. The line between madness and genius started to be less visible (Topp & Blackshaw, 2009).

Since then, the view on the arts has changed drastically. Simple nostalgia or sadness are not seen as reason to lock a person up, and artists are taken more seriously. With some controversy, that we are not going to get into, it can now be agreed that artists are, indeed more open minded, they are more emotional and see the world not only with their eyes, but also with their hearts. This passion is no longer seen as madness. Artists communicate their reality through their work (MacGregor, 1989).

Nevertheless, it is believed that artists are more sensitive which allows them to perceive the world in a different way, leaving them more impacted by the social changes around them, causing artists to be more likely to suffer from mental health problems. But can their art be simply a way of dealing with those problems? Can art act as a healing process? Can it help in identifying the issue?

You can never succeed to see the madness in someone's head, as well as it is showcased on their canvas. Art is a human expression, and creativity allows one to use it for their own, personal means and purpose (Vygotskii, 1971).

As mentioned previously, it was not until recently when the idea of the link between artist's mental state and emotions, and their work has been accepted. Since the nineteenth century a lot has changed, and art therapy is widely popular amongst, not only artists, psychotherapists themselves. It is now used all around the world to help suffering people heal their pain. It works, because it allows the patient to express their thoughts and emotions without having to talk about them, which many find difficult (Vygotskii, 1971).

However, art therapy is not only about 'painting out' one's emotions or, drawing the images in their heads.

Any creative activity can be helpful and use as a way of healing one's wounds. Whether it is painting, drawing, singing, writing or photographing. The latter one is what we are going to focus on the most (Hunt, 2013).

Art has been used for centuries as a way of expressing oneself. However, it has not been until late 20th century when idea of art as a way of healing became popularised and the term 'art therapy' has become accepted in the worlds of art and psychology (Topp & Blackshaw, 2009). And since then, photography has become one of the easily approachable methods of expressing and dealing with one's problems and experiences, creating the term 'phototherapy' that now exists by itself, separately from art therapy (Berman, 1993).

Photography is a way of communicating one's reality, it is a language of its own. Photographs can be visual recollections of the past reminding what shaped the present; they may allow the viewer to understand the emotions of the photographer. Photographs create a door into the world of art, and allow the artist to manipulate the real world with their own reality. The process of photographing can be reflexive. Photographs can help one to get in touch with their past (or their present) selves, and begin to convey this. Photography expands one's awareness and expands the potential of the mind. It reflects emotional experiences and allows the photographer to confront their senses and feelings in more physical way, they are a unique way into the unconscious. Photography captures the essence, it can capture the face one is unaware of, making one confront their greatest fears (Rugg, 1997).

And therefore, photography is a reachable, combined method of art and psychology, making phototherapy a perfect and accessible form of healing.

Photography can be used as a therapy, whether by amateurs or professionals, as it is an easy access that allows one to express themselves. It can act as a therapeutic source. And it has been used that way before. Phototherapy is an ever so growing type of therapy that can help one with finding and understanding themselves and the world around them, with understanding what is going on in one's head (Berman, 1993).

Jo Spence, one of the most famous artists that popularised the idea of using phototherapy to help yourself, worked with text and photography from the beginning of her career, trying to use her work as a way of understanding her own identity and her place in the society.

Spence's 'Beyond the Family Album' was a first step into using photography as a way of understanding oneself and healing the wounds of the past. But it was not until she found out about her cancer, that the artist started using therapy as a way of dealing with what the physical changes have done to her mental state (Spence, 1986).

At the beginning of her treatment, after many troubles with accepting the fact she was ill, Spence decided to document her treatment as a way of evidencing the journey. However, the physical changes turned her whole world around, causing traumatising experiences to her psychological state. And there onwards, Spence became, who is by some believed to be, the innovator of phototherapy. Her 'The Picture Of Health?' project documents her journey of treating her physical state, as well as the changes in her mental state. Creating the work allowed the artist to express her thoughts, worries, and emotions, and accept her changes (Museu d'Art Contemporani, 2005). As to capture, is to be willing to understand and accept. Expression. Acceptance. Healing. These are the key words of any therapy. And thus, Jo Spence has become a photo therapist. Photographing herself, enabled Spence to visualise the effect the experiences on her self-image, allowed Spence to express and confront her inner worries, and looking at the work open the possibilities to look at herself from a different angle, to sympathize and understand the person on the photographs (Spence, 1986). Being photographed is often about exposing the things one is most self-conscious about, as the camera can capture the hidden, it can reveal the inner face behind the external mask. It makes the photographed understand their own identity better, pushing them to conform and accept who they are. Photography help us know more about ourselves and the world (Berman, 1993).

Phototherapy contains of different types of work, from photographing one's surroundings to staging a persona. However, self-portraits are often the most common way of any project that deals with one's identity as self-portraits provide an extra dimension and contrast of who the person is, or wishes to be (Berman, 1993).

Whether the portrait is of the artist as they are here and now, or whether it involves times of staging and recreating, as can be evident in Spence's 'Phototherapy' project she worked on with the collaboration of photographer Rosy Martin, the process will enable the artist to express their real selves, whereas the result will empower them to understand and accept who they really are.

The 'Phototherapy' project created by Spence and Martin was a partly written, partly photographed piece on the identity of a female and how one's upbringing shapes who we become as females in our society. It allowed the artists to look back at who they were, who they were affected by the most during their lives, and who shaped them into the humans they currently are. Partly photographed, partly written (Jo Spence, 1986). Writing can be another way of healing. It can also be classified as part of the therapeutic world. It stands on its own, however it is often paired with other arts. Artists often use text as a way of putting their emotions into words, and vice versa, use other aspects of art such as painting, drawing, photography (and many more) to fulfil what words cannot express. Therefore, the two; work hand in hand. What cannot be fully understood with a picture, can be finished with a piece of text, and what cannot be expressed with words, can be created with an easel, a pencil or a camera (Waller & Gilroy, 1992).

Another artist that worth mentioning is Bobby Baker. Bobby has been dealing with mental health problems majority of her adult life and used diaries as a way of telling her stories. Baker is a multi-disciplinary artist and is most famous for her illustrations, and the way she pairs them with text. Baker's 'Diary Drawings' is a book filled up with diary entries that explain her thoughts, and illustrations that explain her emotions. The two combined together allowed the artist to showcase her own reality. Creating it allowed Baker to let go of what was in her head and heart, as making art based off of one's feelings and worries will let one release those (Baker, 2010). Creating the work was a way of dealing with the artist's life obstacles that affected her mental health, which worsened the troubles. Mental health issues are a cycle of experiencing, feeling, which worsens the experience, which creates more feelings.

Baker, however, found a way of discharging those feelings by recreating her reality in illustrations, and sharing her thoughts in written words. The project is a methodology which allows the artist to deal and heal (Waller & Gilroy, 1992).

Publicising the work, allows the artist to create something that they can look at from a different perspective, as if they were looking at a stranger's story, as very often; it is easier to help someone else than it is to help your own self. Creating the work will allow one to look at their own problems as if they were looking at someone else, making it easier to accept the issues and find solutions.

Creating is a way of coping with the problems and reality, looking is a way of understanding and accepting the person that deals with those (Hunt, 2013).

Artists like Jo Spence or Bobby Baker were ones of those who created their work about suffering, while they were suffering. It helped them to cope with what they were dealing with. However, many artists recreate their suffering as an aftermath. Artists such as Judge Schreber or Leonora Carrington suffered with mental problems, yet were unable to create any work about it at the time (Baker, 2010).

Years after, they went back in time to the minds of their broken selves, and told their stories in writing, using it as a way of letting go of the past and starting anew. Sometimes it becomes easier to tell a story later in life, as it allows one to look at it from yet a different perspective. Mental health battles never truly end, and the illnesses stick with one forever. Even if one is able to overcome their troubles, the illness will never truly go away, it will always be around, waiting for a moment of weakness to hit you again. However, telling the story of one's darkest moments; whether in writing, through staging in front of a camera, or representing in painting; can help the artist accept the darkness of the past, and bury it deep down, where it can never come back from. (MacGregor, 1989) You cannot hide, you cannot run away, but it is possible to live with it. To live a normal life, without the constant fear and pain. And art therapy is one of the ways to do so.

An amazing thing about any type of art therapy, is that it cannot only help the artist in the making, or heal the artist in the aftermath, but it can also heal the viewer (Waller & Gilroy, 1992).

Art. Creation. Healing. Concepts that seem so disconnected, can come together and help people.

Artists, of any kind, often create their work as a way of working out their thoughts and worries, as a way of expressing their own emotions. It comes from the subconscious (Vygotskii, 1971). Looking back at their creations allows them to understand their own selves, and; in the long running; heal their wounds (Baker, 2010). But can it help strangers? Can people that did not engage into creating the work, see it and understand it? Can they relate? Can it help them understand themselves?

Painters, photographers, writers, dancers, singers. All make their work by themselves and for themselves, and others. For centuries, people looked up to artists and creators, idolised them and their work. But many use the work of others as a way of understanding their own selves.

Not knowing, is the first step to understanding. If you are lost within your own mind, trying to figure out who you really are and how to deal with life, wanting to know more is the opening door into researching and understanding.

People with mental health problems, often find themselves in dark places, not really knowing what is going on, not understanding what is wrong with them (Styron, 2001). And if you do not understand something, you seek answers. And sometimes the answers can be hidden in the work of other people. People that have been through similar experiences, people that were struggling and were working towards figuring out their own selves.

Creative people such as Jo Spence, Bobby Baker or William Styron made their work as a way of healing themselves, as a way of being able to capture their own thoughts and emotions, their struggles and troubles, and make something out of this madness. Photographing, drawing or writing can help one see themselves from a different perspective, a perspective another person has from the start (Hunt, 2013). And that person can be anyone. Anyone seeking answers. Anyone dealing with mental issues that affect their day to day life. Issues that one is unable to get a hold of before understanding them. Whether it is anxiety, depression, phobia, a trauma or any other mental state, one needs to understand what it is going on in their heads, before being able to deal with it.

Creating a written piece, a painting or a picture can allow one to express what is going on in their heads, and put it together. Looking at the work of someone who was once going through a similar issue, can allow one to look at their own selves from a different perspective, to get a hold of their own mind, to understand their own selves. Looking can be just as important and meaningful as creating.

What is it that made Jo Spence and Rosy Martin so famous? Why was Bobby Baker's book published? Who is still reading William Styron self-deprecating books? Us. It is us. Anxious young adults who are afraid of stepping into the real world. Depressed elders who are unsure of their future. Teenagers who hate the way they look. Adults that faced difficulties in their childhood. Us, meaning anyone. It is the people that struggle with mental health issues in their day to day life and are seeking for acceptance, are seeking for someone that could understand them, seeking for answers (Kidd, 2012). We are all looking for ways to get better, looking for ways to understand what is causing our worries and struggles, looking for ways to escape. And art can be a way to do so.

Artists use their work as a guide for others whether intentionally or not. Jo Spence created a phototherapeutic piece of work that allowed her to understand who she is and accept her changes, as well as opened a new world for many, allowing people to find a gateway into the creative part of their minds (Spence, 1986). Bobby Baker wrote and illustrated a book that helped her let go of her thoughts and worries and allowed the viewer/reader to identify their own selves within the same struggles (Baker, 2010). Whereas the work of William Styron tells a story of his struggles, years after, suggesting that it is possible to overcome it (Styron, 2001). The work created by these artists enables the viewer to find their own selves in the work. To find a place where they belong.

We all want to belong somewhere. We all want to fit in. We are all looking for people that can understand and accept us in a way that we cannot understand and accept ourselves (Burke, 2009). Looking at or reading the work of people that create their artworks based on their own mental health struggles allows one to learn about, not only the artist, but their own selves.

The act of creating links with the act of self-reflection which leads to greater awareness, acceptance and understanding of your own self and the world around you (Baker, 2010).

Learning is understanding. Understanding is accepting. Once we learn about the struggles of others and can find the relation between them and ourselves, we are able to connect who we are, understand and accept it. And once you accept who you are, you can finally start working on yourself, working on developing your own identity further, working on overcoming your troubles (Burke, 2009).

Some may decide to try the arts themselves, as a way of self-therapy, for some it may be the first step into getting better, and for others an eye-opener, a realisation that they are not alone, that there are others who understand what one is going through. Whichever it is, looking at someone else's therapeutic work can be a therapy in itself (Berman, 1993).

Looking at art pieces based on mental health issues may be difficult for some, as it is still a difficult subject within our society, but the more and more artists will open about their struggles and publicise their work about it, it will normalise the illnesses, allowing young people to find something that reflects them, someone that they can relate to, enable them to understand their own selves. To accept who they are (Burke, 2009). To let them start the process, the process of healing. To heal their minds, and hearts (Berman, 1993).

Being able to look at, read, watch or listen to the work of people who have been through similar experiences as you, who can understand your feelings and thoughts like no one else around you can be a blessing to many. To be able to understand your own mind, you may need to look for those who already struggled through understanding theirs and try and do the same. Using a different perspective to look into someone's mind may just help you with healing your own.

But can anyone hate me more than I
hate myself?

We walk to survive life, but we live
just to die. Where's the joy?
Where's the time for happiness?
Does it even exist, or do we just
bury it?

I wish I could become the lifeless corpse
and I wish I could never wake up
again. I wish I was never born.

Now, since you have learnt and now understand more about art, mental health and Art Therapy, let me tell you a real-life research-based story.

This part of the paper will be a personal case study written in diary-like manner, as sometimes, it is important to omit the book-based facts and focus on the real people. As a disclaimer, this case-study will involve sensitive subjects such as suicide, and may not be for everyone. As an addition, I, nor anyone involved with this case study is a psychology official or a professional. However, it is believed that to help with understanding an illness, the people involved must be able to speak up, as no doctor or a professional can truly describe what is going on in a person's head, it is only that person that will be able to portray their thoughts and emotions.

Let me introduce you to a girl. Her name is Pauline, she is 22, in the middle of her Arts Masters Degree, working part-time as a bartender and volunteering in a gallery. She is happy; usually. Her life is good; overall. There are times where she will find herself crying in her room at night, terrified of the future, trying to forget the past. There are times where she avoids socialising, worried about meeting new people, not wanting to talk to anyone. There are times where she gets angry, annoyed at the late bus, screaming into the emptiness. But she is strong. She is able to get over it, she can overcome the hardships. She is able to constantly fight them, and win. She falls down, but she is able to get up again. Sometimes it's not easy, sometimes it takes longer than preferable, sometimes she needs a little bit of help. But she is able to do it. She is able to overcome it all. She doesn't give up. Yet things have not always been this way. There were times where she could not get up. Times where she wanted to give up, she was tired of fighting, tired of life. There were times where she wouldn't think she'd live long enough to go to University, heck, she hoped she wouldn't...

Pauline was a happy, kind child. A chubby ray of sunshine, at times. She had a good relationship with her classmates, she had some really good friends, she even had a best friend. But everything changed when her mother lost her job, and the family had to move abroad, outside from the Polish reality she knew and understood. Pauline was ten years old at the time, and her parents didn't want to pull her out of school straight away. They decided to let her finish primary school in one place.



Therefore, they decided to leave her with her grandparents, for the whole two years, while they were trying to make a living for them all. It wasn't easy.

Sometimes it was really tough, for her, for her parents, for the grandparents. But after long two years, she has finished school and it was decided she will be moving with her parents, moving abroad, to England. They had everything prepared. They got a place to live, they admitted her to a good high school. Everything seemed to be working out, right?

Wrong. That's when the real troubles started...

Everything was sorted out. Pauline moved to a house with her parents in Northern England. Her room was nicely decorated, the school was chosen, things seemed to be working out. But Pauline was not confident about any of this. She attended private English lessons a year prior to all this, but will it be enough? Will she be able to properly attend school? Will she be able to make friends? Is she going to be okay? I mean, the school building was pretty modern, the property consisted of three buildings, they had Polish teaching assistants to help the numerous Polish children that attended this school. Yet, somehow, Pauline was not sure of any of it. To be honest, she was terrified. And she was right to be...

The first day wasn't that bad. It turned out she actually had some fellow Poles in her tutor group and in most of her classes. When needed, she was told the Polish-speaking teacher assistant will be there to help her. She wasn't really able to understand that much, she pretty much didn't speak to people at all. But everything should eventually get better, technically... right?

Unfortunately, things were getting worse and worse with each week, each day, each lesson. Pauline was unable to understand most of the things the teachers said, the fellow Polish girl that was supposed to take care of her and translate for her, turned out to be a cunning one, and she could feel people staring and laughing at her. The way she walked, the way she looked, the way she spoke. Laughter after laughter.

Every single day after school, her parents would want a full on report on how school is going, how she is doing. And one thing was repeated over and over – 'Just say one word, and we are going to pack everything and leave. You are the most important to us.' But Pauline knew she couldn't really say anything. She couldn't just ask her parents to drop everything, everything they worked so hard for and go back to... where? The house they lived in Poland was rented, so that was gone, and her parents did not have a chance in getting well-paid jobs there, so going back to Poland would mean having to start everything from scratch, unsure of the future. She didn't want that. She didn't want that for them. Pauline wanted her parents to be able to have a decent life, live in a decent house, go on decent holidays, even if it meant she was going to be unhappy forever...

Going back was no option. Going to school was the only thing Pauline could do, to make sure her parents don't suspect anything. Even though they had. Almost every Monday morning, right after her mom left for work, she would have to call her with a really bad stomach-ache, or a temperature, or a sickness. The reason? Drama. Drama lesson was the first thing Monday morning and it was there that Pauline started developing anxiety. She was never as terrified about anything, never panicked as much as she has been during that lesson. The teacher would put everyone in groups, everyone was given a role, everyone had to act out a minor performance with short to no lines. Seems fine, right? Not when you don't understand anything and have no idea what you're supposed to be doing. Pauline cried, a lot. Before, during, after. It was hard. It's not that she wasn't willing to learn the language. She already learnt all the grammar. She knew the basics. She would come back home from school every day and translate all her schoolwork, all her homework, and prepare for the next day. But somehow, none of it was enough.

That's when the bullying started.

It seemed just childish and innocent laughs at first. It was simply funny to laugh at the fat immigrant who doesn't know what she is doing. But it got worse and worse. The laughs and pointing would go outside of the classroom. The lunch break was no different. And it wasn't just her classmates. The children that had no idea who she was. Except one thing, they knew she was Polish. Poles were not welcomed at this school, they were not welcomed in this town at all to be honest. So it wasn't just her that was constantly reminded that no one wants her here, that she should – 'Go back to her fucking country'. All the Polish kids were treated in a similar way. They couldn't go outside during breaks because someone would throw raw eggs at them. And what did the school have to say? –'There is nothing we can do', 'We can't identify the people', 'You should hang out in smaller groups to not bring so much attention', 'You should start speaking English!'. Basically, it was the Polish kids; that had no choice, but to come to this country and tried their best to learn and fit in; that were blamed. The school ended up banning Polish children (and Polish ones only) from speaking in their Native language unless it was for translating purposes. And since some of them were unable to speak much English, they were pretty much banned from speaking at all.

And that's when it all started getting worse.

Pauline started blaming herself for everything, believing she is the reason her friends are being bullied, she is the reason her parents had to move, she is the reason for all the wrongs in the world. Naturally, she became full of anger. Angry at the bullies, angry at the world, angry at herself. The anger turned into pity, pity turned into anger. It was a constant circle. She would come back from school, binge on sweets to fulfil her sadness, argue with her parents to get rid of the anger, then hate on herself for it all, and cry herself to sleep. It wasn't easy. And it wasn't getting any better...

That's when it all really started. Pauline stopped really caring about herself, about anything. The possibly only positive thing about it all is that she decided to focus on her studies. She wanted to make sure her parents had nothing to worry about. She pretended to be this good, happy girl who simply enjoys studying. And she kind of was, as it was the only thing she had a power over. The only thing she could really do. Pauline would put a fake smile on every morning, go to school and spend all lessons making notes, all breaks sitting in the corner watching her friends enjoy themselves, go back home, study more, and cry herself to sleep. Did her parents know? Maybe. But Pauline learnt to fake it all, at all times. Outside, she would seem like this nice, smart girl who would help out at home, not waste any money on going out or partying. But her parents knew something wasn't right, they just could not figure out what it was. Teenagers. Growing up. That's what all the questions and arguments would end with. But that was not it.

Whatever happiness is, that wasn't it. Pauline wasn't happy. She was anxious, angry and depressed. But she didn't realise it at the time, she didn't tell anyone how she felt, she didn't ask for help, she tried to avoid people and conversation at all cost. That is, how her social anxiety developed.

So here she was, a young, overweight girl who hated everything and everyone, herself the most. A child who blamed herself for everything, who would argue, cry, and apologise, argue, cry and apologise. All that made her tired. She was angry, anxious, and tired. She stopped trying to make things better. She would stay in the same mindset for years, believing that's what life is for her, that's what she deserves.

To break it down. Pauline suffered from a lot of anger issues. She hated her bullies, hated the world, yet all of it made her hate who she was the most.



Pauline would worry and panic a lot, about her parents, about school, about it all. She started suffering from severe anxiety. She tried to keep it all inside, stay away from other people as much as she could, believing she will only cause trouble and pain. Socialising became very difficult. That's how the social anxiety developed. Instead of talking to anyone, she would overeat while crying, then hate on herself and vomit it all out. That is how her bulimia episodes started. All of these emotions, this anxiety, hate, and pain made her loath life, and herself. It made her depressed. Some of these emotions, these issues were stronger than others, some would happen occasionally, some would be with her everywhere she went. One thing that can be said, life wasn't easy. There were days where she had enough. There was nothing left of the old her, she felt empty inside, she believed pain and sadness is all she deserved. So she would lock herself in the bathroom at night, with a pair of scissors, a razor, a blade. She wanted to feel the pain, she wanted to see the blood flowing down her arm, she wanted the evidence that she was not as empty as she felt, that she was still alive, because life was a living hell...

This went on for years. There were days where she would feel okay, days where she would start believing things will get better. Days where she would leave the house to hang out with some friends, days where something would make her laugh, genuinely. But there were also days where she stopped believing, days where she wanted to end it all, days where she wanted to really die. And so, she tried...

More than once...

A time came when Pauline just could not take it anymore, she did not want to continue on living, she did not see a point in it, she did not see a future for herself, she had enough. And so she used her father's razor blade, and cut, deeper than ever... but deep down, she knew it wouldn't work, she knew the cut was not done in the 'right' direction, it was not deep enough, maybe deep down she still had hope, maybe she did not want to die after all... Maybe. But at the time, that was not what she believed. Not being able to end her suffering, made her feel more ashamed than ever, made her hate herself even more. Why? Pauline believed that she brought all the suffering upon her family, her friends, even watching television and seeing disasters happening thousands of miles away to strangers, somehow, her brain made her believe it was all her fault.



And so, ending her own life would not only end her own suffering, but all the suffering in the world. Stupid. Ridiculous. Irrational. Well, that's what mental disorders do to your thoughts...

Therefore, not being able to end her life, made Pauline think of herself as a coward. 'Do you not want to help others?' 'Do you not want to make your family happy?' 'You are a horrible human being!' 'You deserve all that is happening to you!' 'You don't deserve happiness!' These were not the words of any hater, these were words created in her own mind. She hated herself more than anyone ever could...

Pauline did try to kill herself more than once. Using razor blades, drowning herself in the bath, taking way too many sleeping pills, doing all three at once. Or even running out in front of a moving car. Putting her legs over the bridge fence. But she was never able to finish it. She was never able to "succeed". I mean, "succeed" because ending your own life, ending anyone's life for that matter, should never be seen as success. It is nothing good, nothing successful, nothing to be proud of. Neither is trying, but not being able to do it, well that can be seen as more of a success. Being able to continue on living, that's success. If there is anyone suffering, anyone who has constant thoughts of ending their life, just know that you, getting out of bed in the morning; you, going through another day; is the biggest success of your life. You are a successful person, and you should never forget that! Unfortunately, Pauline did not have anyone to tell her that. And even if she did, she probably would not listen. Her mind convinced her she is the biggest failure in the world, and these thoughts stayed with her for years, heck, they still come back to her. But she is better now. Not perfect, but better. But that did not come out of nowhere. It took time. It took people. It took therapy. Maybe not the conventional 'sit and talk' therapy, but something different, something more personal, something that worked for her...



Everyone needs help. Everyone needs attention. Everyone needs someone.

Not matter how hard you try to convince yourself and others that you do not need nobody, you do. We all do. And so did Pauline. She did not want to admit it, especially not to herself, but she did.







And there she found Martina. Or rather, Martina found her. Kind of. Well, the Polish assistant that worked at her school had a daughter, a year above Pauline, and wanted to get the two together. Martina, the daughter we are speaking of, was not having it at first. For the popular, fun and outgoing girl like her, it felt like a job to have to hang out with this very quiet, shy, 'perfect student' type of person. However, after a while, they found a lot of similarities between the two. The type of movies they watch, the type of music they listen to, the hobbies they share. And so the real friendship began. It was not easy. Martina would try to get Pauline out of the house, if not to a party, then at least to go to a cinema, bowling or even a walk. It did not work at first. Most of the free time they would spend together was at home, watching movies, listening to music, sharing stories. However, neither of them minded. They worked well together, whether chilling inside or partying outside. Martina introduced a new world to Pauline, she helped her open up a little bit. For the first time in a very long time, Pauline felt like she actually had someone to talk to, someone that would listen, someone that would not judge. Maybe she did not fully understand Pauline at the time, but she was able to accept her. And that was what Pauline needed, someone that would like her for who she was, with all her issues and flaws. Martina and Pauline would end up spending a lot of time together. Of course, there were days where Pauline did not feel like talking to anyone, she would rather stay at home in bed and cry. Or days when her anger towards the world made her explode and hurt her friend with words and actions she did not mean. But Martina did not give up on her.

The more Pauline tried to push her friend away, the more Martina stuck to her. If Pauline cancelled their plans, and did not want to hang out, Martina would show up at her front door and drag her outside. Not to do anything crazy. Just to go out for a walk. And she knew the right spots too. So they would walk, for hours and hours, often without saying a word. Martina understood what Pauline needed the most. It wasn't isolation. It was feeling at ease, while around others. It was being left alone with her thoughts, without letting her feel lonely. That's when their friendship got deeper. That's when they started talking about more than just boys, tv shows or school.

They would go into a forest, watch the sunset on the top of a hill, talk next to the waterfall. Pauline started noticing that not everything in the world is ugly. That there is beauty around her, and she fits right in. That there is hope...

The walks made Pauline want to explore more and more, go deeper into the forest, go higher up the hill, go under rather than over the waterfall. It made her want to do things. However mundane it sounds, it was a light in the very deep darkness. And Pauline wanted to capture all this beauty, that hid her hopes and worries. Martina and Pauline started taking more and more photos of the places they went to. Usually with their phones at first as both girls enjoyed photography, but never really took it seriously. Until then. Pauline decided to save up, to buy herself a camera, to be able to capture all her feelings and emotions in a picture. And so she did. Pauline very quickly realised how much, not only the walks, but the photographing helped her. When she was pressing the button, for the first time, she was in a full control. She knew what she was doing, and she felt good about the results of something she created. The moment the shutter closed and opened again, Pauline was able to save the view and her own thoughts forever. It also allowed her to let go of those thoughts. It was like saving it onto something else, giving them away to someone, or something else. It was like a therapy...

Photography as therapy? Why not?

At the time, Pauline wasn't sure what was the core cause of her issues, she did not know how to deal with them. It's not that she did not want to be cured, it's that she did not think it was possible...

Pauline did not think about therapy. She did not want to think about it. There was no hope anyway, right? She was a lost cause, right? Nothing can help her, right? Well, that's what she believed. However, the time spent with Martina, the long walks, the views, and the photography. It all helped. It made her think about life as a future rather than a journey towards death. Especially the photography. It allowed her to have control, to create something beautiful out of nothingness. Of course, it's not technically like that, but it felt like it. It gave her the power she needed to keep going. It made her want to leave the house. It made her want to go outside and explore the world. It made her want to live.





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The camera was not only an eye opener and a beauty catcher, but also a sense of comfort, a hideout. This little, shy and anxious girl was able to go outside, go out onto a busy street. All to take a good photograph. Somehow, when she would put her face behind the camera, even though she was clearly still very visible, she felt like she could hide. She was able to stand in the middle of a crowd and not get angry if someone bumped into her, not get anxious if someone looked at her, not get a panic attack because there were a lot of people around her, not get paranoid that people may be talking about her. It started with quiet walks into the forest, empty fields or abandoned buildings, and moved onto something else. The camera has become her walking stick, her cover, her life. And some may say it's nothing, it sounds very strange and isolated. And it is. But it was a huge step forward from where Pauline was before. Emotionally and mentally.

Pauline felt like taking a photograph was not only capturing the view, the moment, but the feelings and emotions. A simple photograph of an empty field could have been full of anger, whereas a street full of people could have been full of sadness and isolation. All the photographs meant much more to her than they would to an average viewer. However, Pauline never photographed herself. She hated it. She did not want to be physically captured. Is it because she hated herself so much? Possibly. Not everything can be easily cured and changed. But it was all a step forward.

Pauline decided to study photography as part of her A-levels. And it was a very good idea. It was there, where she met so many amazing people, had so many amazing experiences, made so many changes. Became better. Happier. It was college when she decided to change her life. She changed her diet, started exercising. She actually WANTED to make a change, she WANTED to become happier, she WANTED to keep on living. For the first time since she moved into this country.

Was she fully cured? No. But she was getting better. She wanted to get better. And that was the biggest difference in her mentality, the fact that she wanted to make her life worth living. Some may say photography had nothing to do with it, it was her friend, or a change of the environment, or time. And, indeed, all of these factors had an impact, but it was the photography that made her feel like she was able to do something, made her feel worth something, made her feel secured.

Pauline continued with her A-levels in a much better state of mind than she had back in high school. She separated herself from the toxic people of her past, and decided to move on.

She made friends that liked her and accepted her for who she was. And this time, she genuinely believed they actually liked her. She believed she isn't all worthless and deserves friends. Of course, it wasn't always perfect. There were better and worse days.

But it was nothing compared to the past. And it was the photography that made her want to talk to people. She carried her camera everywhere. She felt secured with it. She felt like she can talk to anyone, ask about anything. And so she did. And so she made friends.

And so she become happier.

Pauline did multiple subjects for A-levels (as we established before, she did not want to worry her parents, so studied hard to be a 'perfect' student). But it was the photography that made her want to continue. It was when she had photography lessons, she had no problems with getting out of bed, heck, she was excited about getting out of bed!

She was excited about learning new tricks, about talking with other passionate students, talking with her truly amazing and understanding photography teacher, Lucy.

It was Lucy that gave her a free hand. It was Lucy who accepted her interpretations and encouraged her ideas. It was the photography that made her want to go out, do stuff, talk to people, live. It was that passion for something. And it felt incredible. Pauline has not been passionate or excited about anything for years and years, so being like this, finally feeling like there was more to life than just self-hate and misery, it felt good.

Pauline knew she was a different person. She felt different, she looked different.

One thing she did not realise, is that her parents have also noticed the difference.

For years, Pauline believed she was really good and hiding, pretending, faking it.

She believed her family had no idea how damaged she was. She did not realise how wrong she was until one day she came back from college, walking into the house and saying hi to her mum, all excited wanting to tell her about a trip her photography teacher has organised for them. It was then, when her mum looked at her with a massive smile and said "You've changed. I have not seen you smile like this for a very long time. I think college has changed you a lot. For the better. I am happy for you. I am proud of you" It was then that Pauline realised how badly damaged she was before. How dark was the place she was in. And how it is all genuinely behind her. How she was, genuinely, happy.



Pauline did not understand why and how photography helped her. She just knew it did. She knew that she was happier since she found photography, she knew she wanted to continue on doing it. She felt more comfortable with a camera around her neck, than anything else. It allowed her to go places she was too paranoid to go to before, it allowed her to talk to people she would never open up to before, it allowed her to be part of the world again, to feel like she was alive.

After a while, Pauline started realising how damaged she actually was, and how she was changing. It wasn't only the way she looked, but the way she spoke, behaved, her attitude. Everything has changed. It does not mean she has changed. Pauline has always been herself, but that person was buried deep down under the anxious and depressed girl, deep down in her brain. Photography let her out.

One of the first 'official' photography project Pauline has done in college was taking an object for a walk, where each student had to pick an object and take it for a walk. Simple. And extremely therapeutic for someone like Pauline. Walking and photography were the two things that made her feel free, made her feel alive. For the first time since years, Pauline took her army boots off, and held them in her arms, taking them for a walk. She was taking the shoes, rather than the shoes taking her. She was in charge. She spent weeks on the project, exploring new places, visiting friends, even asking her family to go on weekend gateways, so she can take some photos. This project wasn't just about taking an object for a walk, it was about opening up, letting herself go. And so she continued with a similar concept for the whole year. She felt good, she felt comfortable. However, she no longer felt challenged. Being in control no longer felt right. Pauline started feeling down again, as if her passion was wearing out. She decided to turn to her photography teacher for advice, and she got it. She was told to try and break boundaries. If walking felt like the right thing to do, continue on walking, but instead of taking an object for a walk, take her own self. And so she did.

At this point, Pauline believed she found her calling. She enjoyed going for lonely walks, she was able to think things through, to have a conversation with her own self. It may sound crazy to some, but it was necessary for her. When she was alone, even in a crowded place, she would focus on her own self, no longer as anxious and paranoid as she had been before. And so she started thinking, analysing; her behaviour, her changes, her thoughts.

She wasn't ready yet to share her issues with others, but she was finally able to share them with herself, able to admit she has problems that will not just disappear, but most importantly, she accepted those issues and wanted to work through them. She gave up on giving up. Pauline wanted to continue to move forward. And that was when she became so interested in street photography.

Pauline would go for walks, often in the evenings or mornings when the streets were quieter, or when the people were in such a hurry, they would never pay attention to her. And she would watch the empty roads, observe the busy people, and snap. Snap as many photographs, as she could. Some of them would be almost identical, around the same time of the same road. But they were never the same. The empty roads where like choices, they showed a journey Pauline was going through, they showcased that, even if everything seems the same, she is slowly moving forward, letting go of the darkness, moving into the light.

And that was it. Street photography. That was what Pauline believed was her calling. And so she decided to get a Photography degree.

Coming to University was one of the most difficult things for Pauline. The last time she had to move, her world crumbled and she lost her will to continue. She was very afraid. She did not want to go back to that dark place in her mind. She blocked it out. As if it never existed...

Moving wasn't easy. The idea of having to meet new people was terrifying to Pauline. Her mind was playing with her again. 'Will they like me?' 'Will I be able to make friends?' 'Is my photography good enough?' 'Will I survive?'... All these thoughts were rolling around in her head on daily basis. Thoughts of giving up and staying at home were always at the back of her head. But she did not want to give up. She did not want to disappoint her family, she did not want to disappoint herself.

And so she moved.

And so her life changed completely.

University was never easy. There were ups and downs; with the degree, with the social life, with finances. But Pauline worked through them. She seemed happy.

Everything seemed okay. She tried different things in the studio, in the darkroom. However, she wasn't that interested. She believed street photography was her calling, it allowed her to be by herself, yet surrounded by other, it allowed her to be alone, yet not lonely. It allowed her to move forward, to forget the past. But the past would not let her forget...

Pauline accepted her issues with social anxiety. The need to photograph empty places all by herself made her realise how much she wanted to be alone. Not because she hated everyone, but simply because she was scared. She knew it. She accepted it. But there was nothing that made it seem as if she wanted to change it.

Depression. Pauline accepted her past, understood what she was going through, believed it was all past her. She did not want to go back. However, sometimes you have to turn back and look into the darkness to be able to truly let it go...

Pauline never liked being in front of the camera. She didn't like the way she looked. Even though she was much more comfortable in her body than she has ever been, it wasn't good enough for the eye of the camera. The lens can capture all the imperfections, and Pauline was not ready to face them. Until one day...

The 'Identity' project. It was a project in which the students were asked to portray their identity, in their own way. Pauline wasn't very close with the people in her class, even though she wanted to. But there was always the voice in her head telling her they would never like her, telling her they would eventually find out all her flaws and issues, and ridicule her. But she wanted people to get to know her, the real her. Not the quiet, shy, forever-emo girl that sat at the back corner of the room. So she decided to photograph some of the objects she felt described who she was. Posters. Video screenshots. Clothes. Instead of photographing others and the outside, she took it out of her comfort zone, and into the studio. And surprisingly, she enjoyed it. Pauline didn't want to enjoy the studio. Why would she? She wasn't a studio photographer. The streets were her calling. But the studio, somehow, felt comforting.

As a perfectionist, it was good to be able to set and light everything exactly the way she imagined. And the photographs were nice, pretty. But it did not feel fully real. It felt boring. She knew it.

During one of the monthly group crits Pauline's lecturer said the same things, adding 'How do you feel about putting yourself in front of the camera?' – 'No. No. Never. I don't like being in front of the lens' – she responded. The conversation was over. Moved onto the next student. And the next one. Some of them more or less interesting. Some of them talked about their struggles with anxiety, their struggles with loss, with the past. And how they wanted to portray that in their work, to show the real them. As a way of letting go. As a way of therapy... It all made Pauline think. But that wasn't the breakthrough. The breakthrough happened when a guest speaker came and everyone was asked to prepare a small project that linked with the 'Identity' project. That's when Pauline decided, it was the time. It was the time to stop ignoring her demons, and start fighting them. It was the only way to win. And so, Pauline went into the studio wearing all black, with the idea of channelling the past feelings, thoughts, and emotions; with the idea of showcasing anger, anxiety, and depression. That was the moment Pauline realised none of it was over. She felt better. She felt happier. But her demons never truly left her, they were always there waiting for her to trip. And they still do. But that was the moment Pauline decided to fight. Well, maybe a week later...

The guest speaker came. Everyone was to give a small presentation about their projects. A presentation. In front of a group of people. That alone was the biggest of fears for someone with social anxiety. Pauline had written a whole script, making sure all is well organised, all matches. The idea was to read through it all as quickly as possible without looking at anyone. One thing was a problem. The subject. Pauline never told anyone about her issues. And she was set to open up about all her struggles in front of all these people that she will be seeing for at least another year. She was terrified. But she was ready. She wanted to showcase the real self. She wanted to truly let go of the past. Surprise, surprise; she didn't. Pauline broke down in the middle of her perfectly prepared speech, lost her ability to speak, started hyperventilating. That was it. The worst nightmare has happened. Her anxiety took over. Her mental demons won.







Everyone was about to start laughing. She lost. She was a failure. She was ready to run out of the room and never come back. And then she looked up from her, now drained in tears, paper. No one was laughing. Everyone looked at her sadly. Not pitifully, simply intrigued. They all saw her in a different light for the very first time, and they all accepted who she was.

Not one person in that room believed she was a failure. Not one person in that room hated her. She could see it. She could feel it. They all believed in her. They all thought she was strong for overcoming what she went through. She wasn't a failure. She was a champion. The lecturer softly asked her 'Do you want to stop?' 'Do you want to take a break?' – 'No' – she said. Pauline knew that if she was to take a break, she would not be able to finish, if she was to stop, she would not be the champion everyone in this room believed she was. So, choking on the air, with tears running down her face, she finished the presentation. And THAT was the breakthrough.

After that one shoot, after that one lecture, Pauline's whole concept of her future fell apart. Yet somehow, it felt good; somehow, it felt like the right thing. It's not that Pauline decided to stop doing street, and move into the studio. It's not that she stopped photographing spaces and started photographing faces, it's not that she stepped in front of the camera rather than behind it; it was the purpose of the photography that changed. It was no longer a way of running away from others without looking back into the past. Photography became a way of going deeper into her own soul, into her own mind. It became a way of analysing and examining herself, a way of understanding who she was, and who she was becoming. Photography has become a way of capturing and preserving her identity. It became a real therapy.

Pauline didn't realise before, what her photographs meant, she didn't know why she was drawn to empty roads, dark streets, and crowds away from crowds. But after that moment, she started going back in her mind, looking back at the photographs taken in the past and noticing a correlation, noticing a reason. Pauline was drawn to the dark, eerie streets because it felt comfortable, it was something her mind knew and something she understood. It reflected her own thoughts and emotions. The empty roads were like a way of running away, looking down, Pauline saw an escape. Photographing the crowded streets from far away was like her anxiety screaming for her, it was Pauline wanting to be part of something, to have a crowd of her own, it was something she was the most scared of, yet something she most desired. At the time, Pauline did not know these things. She believed it was the beauty and comfort of the streets that made her want to photograph it, yet it was all her mind, her demons telling her what is good and what isn't. She wasn't aware of it all until the day she stood in front of the camera herself, until she had to act and re-enact her deepest, darkest thoughts and emotions, until she finally opened up. That day was the day she realised none of it is over, her demons are still around her, waiting for her to trip; yet that day became the real beginning...

Since then, Pauline focused on photographing emotions rather than places and people. She created multiple projects from different areas of photography, from studio portraits through snap shots, to documentary. But all those photographs are not about what or who is physically in front of the camera, rather, what feelings are conveyed, what is left unspoken, what is the atmosphere of the image suggesting.

Photography allowed Pauline to understand who she was, her issues and problems. It, to this day, helps her to accept her issues and flaws. It is a way of living, a way of identifying oneself. Since Pauline went out for that walk with Martina a lot of time has passed and a lot has changed, especially herself. Over the years, she started analysing herself deeper and deeper, using photography. She started understanding herself more and more, using photography. She started accepting herself for who she was, using photography. It would be wrong to say that photography was the only way for Pauline to identify, understand and accept her issues and her own mind. It wasn't. It was a long process involving many factors. Time, people, research, environment. All of the above helped Pauline. But photography was the one that was always the most present. It was the one that made Pauline comfortable in her own body and mind. It would be wrong to say that photography cured her, but it was like a medicine. It was photography that allowed her to cope when she finally realised she was ill. It was photography that motivated her to reason with her own demons and overcome them. And that is why photography will always be a very important part of Pauline's life. It will always be her therapy.

The whole process was and always will be a therapy for Pauline. And it will possibly never stop. There will always be the darkness in her that will try to get out, and photography will always be a way to tame it down, to understand and accept the past and the present.

Right now, Pauline really IS happy. Not every day. Not all the time. There are days where a simple issue or a conversation will be turned into a massive problem in Pauline's head. But now, she is able to organise her thoughts before the darkness takes over again. She still struggles with anxiety. Talking in front of a group of people is still like a scene from a nightmare. But she is able to do it. It's not easy, and it never will be. But she has the motivation to go through it, the motivation to not give up. Photography was a way for her to find this motivation, and is still a way for her to keep it up.

Pauline is now a young adult who has finished her photography degree and has moved onto studying Masters degree. Her plan for the future is to write and create artwork that will help herself and others. And she believes in it. She wants it to happen. And she is not willing to give up.





I am Pauline. And photography was my saviour, and is my therapy. I am in no way a doctor or a specialised therapist, but I went through a lot, I have suffered enough. So, if you are looking for something to take your mind off of... your mind; anything to find your passion and will again, photography, or any type of art for that matter, is something I would recommend trying. If, however, you have extremely dark thoughts about your life or its end, seek help. It is okay to be broken, it is okay to need help, we all deserve to be happy.



As mentioned previously in this dissertation, phototherapy is a type of art therapy. However, art therapy can come in many ways. It is a collection of diverse practices (Waller&Gilroy, 1992) from painting and drawing; through photography, writing, dancing, and even reading or watching. It can help creators and viewers alike analyse, understand and accept their own issues, and that they are not alone. It can be done by anyone, at any age, in any way. Statistics show that at least 40% of kids should be given mental help during school due to stress, learning difficulties and mental health problems such as anxiety (Waller&Gilroy, 1992); and art therapy is a good way to do so, as it breaks the taboo of visiting a doctor, and is easily accessible.

Art Therapy can be done by anyone, whether a specialised practitioner is present. Some believe, all artists can be seen as practitioners of art therapy as they all use their art as a way of escaping and expressing themselves (Rowley&Comisari, 2016).

Not everyone has the talent to draw or paint, but therapy is not about talent. It is about being able to open up, express yourself, and being able to analyse and understand one's thoughts and emotions. Painting can be one way to do it, but not the only way. As this paper has proven, based on the research and case study conducted, photography is another type of art therapy that can be successful with mental health problems. Writing is another way of therapy that can also be easily combined with other forms of arts, as proven by Baker's 'Diary Drawings' (2010) or Styron's 'Darkness Visible' (2001). Writing about the past as well as the present can allow the person to look at their own selves from a different perspective, to organise their thoughts, analyse, and understand.

Art Therapy has proven to be a successful way of helping with coping, and healing.

Art Therapy is the past, the present, and the future.

Overall, it can be concluded that art and mental health have a strong link with one another, they can come together through many angles. Based on the research and the personal case study, it can be agreed that all art can work as a way of therapy for those mentally ill. It can definitely be used as a coping mechanism, and a way of analysing and understanding those with severe mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety, or even maniac depressive disorder.

It has been learned and understood through research that photography, and Phototherapy, is one of the many ways Art Therapy can be used by anyone. It can help a patient to not only diagnose themselves, but allow them to be understood by others and organise and understand their own selves. It can be used by professionals as a way of helping the patient to open up, to express their thoughts, feelings, and emotions. Art is a way for creative minds to make out a coherent understanding of their own selves. Art Therapy is a way of helping those minds that lost their path, finding their meaning again.

In conclusion, it can be agreed that Art Therapy and Phototherapy are positive types of unconventional therapies for those suffering from curable mental illnesses, and can work and stretch upon all platforms, ages, and minds.

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