



Conduct an in-depth personal inquiry using the heuristic method to explore an aspect of your development as a practitioner and its impact on your clinical practice: Critically engage with a heuristic case study to examine how your personal experiences and

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A heuristic Inquiry into the inner turmoil of my procrastination; will it help reduce the actions in order to help my counselling practice?

Introduction

Moustakas presented the heuristic inquiry to aid individuals in exploring a part of themselves further in an attempt to improve or know themselves better. This exploration will be into the act of procrastination, exploring the fundamental reasoning behind this action and what ways the researcher can improve this. Throughout this inquiry, the reflective tools used varied due to the researcher finding new ways of grounding and expressing their views. Before exploring the techniques used, understanding procrastination and the heuristic process will be more effective.

Literature review

This heuristic inquiry will primarily focus on procrastination and the fear of disappointing others. However, before delving into it, understanding if there are specific cultural impacts on the act of procrastination is essential, clarifying if there are sociological impacts on procrastination. Procrastination is the voluntary act of delaying a needed action, which has negative consequences for the individual procrastinating (Steel, 2007). Procrastination has been found to have a high correlation between depression, anxiety and reduced life satisfaction. However, it is also seen as a detrimental cycle which is hard to rectify (Ferne et al., 2017; Johansson et al., 2023). Due to the impact on mental health, more specifically within

young adults, understanding some of the possible underlying causes for the cycle to begin will help alter the cycle in the future.

When exploring any correlations between culture and procrastination, google will first state that those within Western culture will use procrastination to avoid failure, compared to those outside Western culture, who may use procrastination not to be viewed as incompetent. However, no articles fully back up this statement made on Google. A meta-analysis presented by Lu D. et al. (2022) did not find a high correlation between cultural, social, economic, or family dynamics and the personality trait of procrastination. However, the study did present a gender correlation, stating that males demonstrated a higher connection to procrastination due to having lower self-control and higher impulsive responses compared to females, which has been connected to procrastination. However, another study demonstrated that when in academia, the fear of failure and the weight of responsibilities can heighten the chances of procrastination (Zarrn & Gracia, 2020). The findings by Zarrn & Gracia (2020) demonstrated that males are more likely to procrastinate; this is supported by the later findings by Lu D et al. (2022), explaining the possible explanation behind this is due to males having higher impulsivity, which is dependent on changes of mood and gratification; both of these are correlated with procrastination. However, Zarrn & Gracia (2020) also found that the fear of failure or not achieving a particular goal was higher for the female participants, which was found to have a high correlation with procrastination. Therefore, according to studies, males do procrastinate more than women; however, women do correlate with fear of disappointing and failing, highlighting that they do still correlate with procrastination.

As stated previously, this essay will be a heuristic inquiry. However, understanding the basics around it will be beneficial before delving into the process. Heuristic inquiry is a process that requires a lot from the researcher partaking in it. Moustakas (1990) reiterated that a heuristic investigation highly involved 'self-search, self-dialogue' and the openness to the possibility of discovery of a new self. Moustakas (1990) developed the work conducted in 1985 by Douglass and Moustakas, which emphasised the need to understand the nature of phenomena. Their work attempted to gain first-person accounts of an experience and reach the core of an individual's lived experience, including perspectives, feelings and awareness of what is happening for someone in that experience. This investigation is similar to a phenomenological approach to experiences. However, one of the more significant differences is that the phenomenological approach tries to separate the lived experience from the event.

In contrast, the heuristic approach attempts to delve further into the personal experience and the individual's responses throughout the event (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985). Another area similar to the heuristic inquiry is Mindful Inquiry, which was presented by Bentz and Shapiro in 1998. Mindfulness inquiry involves engaging with changes in emotions and thoughts and approaching them with curiosity (Herbert, 2014). The ability to give attention to the present moment and the actions one practices do not actively affect mindfulness as long as one engages fully with the experience. To feel the impact of the heuristic inquiry, one must experience mindfulness to immerse oneself fully in the chosen topic.

This research will delve into the heuristic approach, which consists of six steps. It is important to emphasise that while these steps provide a framework, they may not always unfold linearly.

There will be times when the individual will need to step back, depending on their emotional state and the context of the process. This flexibility and adaptability are key to the success of the research, making it an engaging and dynamic process.

Initial Engagement

During the heuristic inquiry, there are six stages the participant should explore. The first step of the heuristic Inquiry is *Initial Engagement* (Moustakas, 1990). This step is there to gauge the individual exploring heuristic investigations to find a passionate area that requires improvement or an area that calls concern. This stage could uncover tacit knowledge and help the researcher find their question. Although this area seems straightforward, it requires much reflection on my critical nature and thoughts that I attempt to avoid as I do not see them as productive but more harmful to my self-development. Before starting this process, I had already begun to engage in more beneficial habits that could influence my procrastination and discipline. I attempted to do this by partaking in the gym and trying to lose weight by eating within a caloric deficit; this goal would have held multiple benefits for me if I had successfully stuck to it. However, during this health journey, I kept becoming unwell from work. Therefore, I had to take a break to let my body rest. This made me feel worse than before, as the feeling of failure seemed more substantial. Therefore, after what felt like a setback, I approached this with a new frame of mind, hoping that this heuristic inquiry would allow a greater understanding of my procrastination.

Many articles mention self-dialogue when starting the heuristic process; however, talking to myself or listening to a recording makes me uncomfortable. Therefore, I resorted to writing down my thoughts on areas that require improvement and how this impacts my clinical work as a practitioner. I found this easier to do, as these are not thoughts I shy away from. However, the area I found difficult was staying in those moments and fully feeling the experience of what I was writing. I approached this topic as though it was an academic piece. I started by writing all the areas I liked about myself, followed by the areas that caused me aggravation. When continuing with those thoughts, I kept finding links to my procrastinating and, to some extent, my laziness in some areas (Appendix A). During this, I felt very down and tired. The tiredness was not physical but more mental; I could feel the heaviness of my eyes slowly weighing down and the ache in my temple starting to pulse into a throbbing headache. The thoughts that contribute to my disliking of myself tire me.

Alongside the tiredness, the overwhelming feelings during this moment were shame, agitation and disappointment. Procrastination was at the centre of many of my thoughts regarding areas of self-improvement. Shame and self-disappointment are not always beneficial, but they bring comfort, knowing I do not deal with this alone. A study provided by Stead et al. (2010) demonstrated that high levels of stress and procrastination heighten the chance of poor mental health and negative thoughts. Following this, Martinčková & Enright (2020) highlighted the connection between procrastination and shame and how self-forgiveness is also essential. Self-forgiveness, the act of forgiving oneself for past mistakes or shortcomings, is key to creating a positive correlation with motivation (Martinčková & Enright, 2020). However, when negative self-thought, for instance, shame, denial and self-disappointment, the chances of a repeated

cycle of procrastination will continue. Therefore, self-care and healthy reflection do help. The research found during initial engagement did help me, as the sense of loneliness that creeps up when feeling overwhelmed did not feel as restricted as before, knowing logically that many people struggle with this and that there are ways to help.

While delving deeper into these feelings, the questions that emerged for me were, 'How can I knock this to the ground?', 'How do I stop procrastinating so much?' and 'What is the opposite of procrastinating?'. More importantly, what will help me overcome my fear of failure, which is a common psychological factor contributing to procrastination, and desire to stay comfortable? To stop the procrastinating.

Immersion

Moustakas (1990) stated that immersion is the act of full engagement with the question found within. By completing mundane tasks and generally trivial actions, the chosen area will become a key thought process, and the researcher will become aware of any phenomenon happening to it.

Moving to this stage of the process was not necessarily intentional in specific areas; I noticed that I was watching my actions and responses to certain situations. I am becoming more aware of when I avoid specific responsibilities until the last minute. I have taken much thought of clear patterns that have impacted not only my personal life but also my partitioning skills. A clear one that came to me like a sharp knife, a splitting headache: My avoidance of practising and

learning new skills is an area that brings anxiety. It started during my graduate certificate for counselling; the overwhelming feeling of inadequacy became prominent. I do not always push myself into an understanding or enthusiastically attempt as I do not always have enough experience to approach the topics mentioned. When in class, many individuals have much more life experience and trauma to draw from for inspiration on what benefits them and others; however, I have lived a happily privileged life; at times, I feel like this will make me a poor counsellor. Therefore, I have reservations about trying specific skills in case I am too pushy or awkward, as I may not know what I am talking about. On the other side of the coin, it is a frustrating mentality to have as I am aware that it is essential and part of the whole learning process, making mistakes, and evolving in any way I can.

However, all I had buzzing around my head like little wasps were the constant praise and statements of others, which all collaborated in a similar theme of approval and faith that I will always do well in this work area. However, this, paired with my lack of worldly experience, made me feel as though I was not going to fulfil my hopes and was also failing to meet the expectations of others. This is where my drawback is that I do not mind failing myself, as I can always make it up, but a part of me does seek approval and praise. Therefore, I want to do well for them and my clients, as I do not want to disappoint them.

I explored different techniques to engage my mind and body in this experience fully. One way I did this was with ice baths/cold showers. I used this technique to improve my connection to my body and regulate my breathing to self-soothe when I became overwhelmed. Although this approach was extreme, I found research suggesting other benefits; it would help in multiple

areas of my life. Janecic (2023) highlighted that a certain amount of discomfort would help train oneself to cope with other areas of difficulty. This was supported by NeuroLaunch (2024), which emphasised the impact of mental clarity and alertness as it puts your body into a sudden state of shock. Therefore, your body becomes more cognitively aware of any sudden changes. This can help improve focus as well as heighten mental clarity. In addition, multiple studies have highlighted the positive impacts of cold exposure on mental health and quality of life. Sheehan (2024) did a brief exploration into cold exposure and found that it did decrease cortisol levels and showed a positive decrease in depressive symptoms (Rymaszewska et al., 2020; Srámek et al., 2000).

Therefore, due to the suggested health and mental benefits and enhancement of discipline and routine, I used this technique when immersing myself in the heuristic task. I plan to start healthy habits to overcome the less healthy ones in my mental and physical health (Janecic, 2023). This technique allowed me to reprieve from my immersed thoughts into why I use procrastination; the more difficult is why I use it so much. Although the constant overturn of my thoughts answered this, the part that caught me off guard the most was the firm lump that edged its way up through my chest, lodging itself within my throat. When thinking through all the areas in which I have disappointed myself and others, the feeling of shame seeped through me and enclosed me with a tightness which I always attempt to avoid. To truly encapture that visual of my emotions, I decided to doodle a simple sketch of what I thought my shame looked like. Giving it a solid form, a separate identity of such to confront. Once I finished the image of shame (Appendix B).

This technique benefited me regarding my counselling practice on a particular Wednesday. None of my clients showed up this Wednesday, leaving me feeling disheartened alongside drained, as there is a timely commute to placement. The cold immersion technique refreshed me and motivated me to do something productive. Therefore, with this time, I did some counselling skills as this is an area I feel nervous about practising and following with university work. Although this does not seem like a large stretch of work, it felt like a small win that could develop into a bigger one (Appendix C).

Incubation

The incubation phase of heuristic inquiry is seen as a temporary retreat from the intense process. During this part of the experience, the researcher takes a step back from examining the chosen area of focus, allowing for natural revelations and a chance for the individual to have a reprieve. This stage hopes to inspire different perspectives on the selected subject. The reprieve from this process of procrastination was not a relaxation technique but going to my full-time job. As a carer, I have long days away from the house and university work; three twelve-hour shifts a week can re-direct someone's focus. In this instance, my focus. In most circumstances, work exhausts me mentally and physically. When at work, I choose whether or not to take my other work in with me to complete on break; this choice helps when coming close to an assignment deadline. However, procrastination gets me away from my thoughts. Work gives me no choice but to focus on the task at hand and cope with any changes that are happening there. Therefore, I cannot risk or dwell on anything specific that is bothering me. This has hindered me sometimes, as I sometimes feel more pressure when returning home at

seven in the evening to complete assignments or portfolio documents. I have left them too long, which is linked to my procrastination.

Following this, I also incubated for this assignment with reading. I read fantasy novels to cope. These novels act as a mental retreat for me, giving me a chance to live adventurously momentarily. While reading, I can feel many emotions at once, and then I can put the book down and walk away. However, I often do not like walking away from the story until I reach the end. The end of an excellent book fills me with slight sadness and peace. My small bubble, in which I do not have to please anyone, allows me to feel what I want and imagine the scenes how I wish. If the book ends on a cliffhanger, I can create my ending. When this heuristic inquiry became exasperating, I indulged in a new book that made this more bearable. While reading is an indulgence, I have realised that I use it as a procrastination tool, a way to 'bury my head in the sand'. I clocked this behaviour when I went through four fantasy novels in a week and a half at the beginning of the heuristic process. Hyper focused on something that did not require it at the time.

Illumination

The stage of Illumination is a spontaneous experience. Self-realisations and the ability to rely on intuitive sensations can start to form. While I understood some heuristic processes, it did not illuminate a specific answer to help with procrastination. However, it did highlight common areas that come up when procrastinating. My illuminating experience left a tightening sensation around my chest, not quite a suffocating feeling but more of a restriction I did not

want to let go of. It is as if you are being hugged by someone too tight, but you enjoy their company enough to tell them to let go. These areas to note behind the procrastination will be explained more deeply in Explication.

Explication

Explication is like writing this heuristic inquiry essay, as it is the stage in which all the knowledge and revelations have come to light during this process. This heuristic inquiry has brought many items forward that contribute to my procrastination, some less surprising than others.

-A loss of identity

The idea of losing identity is not as strong as the others. However, this was the most surprising revelation. I have always known that I like being viewed as valuable, liked/approachable, and sometimes intelligent. Whilst in comprehensive, I was viewed as the nurturing presence, in my undergraduate, I was considered the head of the house; in both dynamics, I was a people pleaser. When living with others, I did not procrastinate on as many things as I knew that I may have been needed for something. However, I no longer have that pressure since graduating and living alone. I realised that I did not miss it. However, this has altered how I view myself. I had always considered myself a people-pleaser, but I cannot place myself in the context of being a 'people-pleaser' like I once did.

My perceived roles do not negatively correlate with my clinical practice. The 'roles' did help me in social contexts, which could also be an underlying cause for my trepidation within class

settings, as I have not fully come to terms with my current role, or even if I have one. However, this train of thought will require more time to explore, as I do not think this influences my actions enough in a class setting. However, it does help in counselling, as I know I am there to help another individual with whatever they need (Appendix D)

- Fear of failure

As demonstrated throughout this heuristic piece, there are many expectations from myself and others to do well. I am fully aware that it comes from a place of care and affection; that does not take away from the guilt and shame I feel when I do not reach that height. As highlighted in the abstract, this affects my professional practice and private life. However, across the board, my personal and private are not separate. This reflection was prominent when I drew an ocean view with a sunset and many colours fading together (Appendix E)

My untidiness disappoints my mother. I have clutter, and there have been many arguments about this. For my father, my focus should be on my education first, followed by the tidying. This makes sense, as I do attempt to prioritise. However, my clutter can overwhelm me, therefore affecting my university work. This alters my ability to separate the two aspects of my life as they overlap in some areas; the gradient of colours represents this in my drawing. My procrastination becomes an escape mechanism to avoid responsibilities when they become overwhelming, either by the pressure or the amount of focus and time required to undertake the task. When expectations are involved, I would procrastinate more. However, I have a habit

of justifying the behaviour, which is a negative cycle as it pushes the inevitable to the last minute.

Creative Synthesis

Creative synthesis is the final stage of the process, when all the information, intuitive knowledge, revelations, and acknowledgements of the experience are brought together into one piece of material. This can be art, pottery, or literature; it holds weight with the individual and their experience. For me, this piece is a mix of poetry and drawing. Although it is not a fantastic piece of art, it still holds meaning.

This drawing is at the seaside with a grass hill above it, a storm brewing in the distance. The storm represents the possible consequences of my procrastinating habit that will come to pass eventually. This will either be by finding ways to cope, or the storm will hit, and I will be left with the mess after it. The Greenery with flowers represents everything I have completed and allowed to bloom. I want to remind myself that even though I have areas that require work, I have still achieved so much and deserve to be proud of what I have done and who I have helped on this journey. However, from now on, to alter my procrastinating habits and develop my counselling skills, I must be a realist. This is the sandy beach, facing the storm and edging the grass, where I stand (Appendix F).

Conclusion

While aiming to understand the heuristic inquiry process, this process attempts to get to one's core internal frame of reference and feelings underlying the chosen topic. The heuristic inquiry process assignment has required me to put myself under that microscope. My view on the process is very mixed, as I cannot state that I found it overall beneficial. I did not feel much different from starting, nor did I feel a sense of satisfaction once I completed it. Before attempting to begin this assignment, many individuals on the course, alongside lecturers, spoke of a heuristic inquiry as illuminating and leaving them feeling that some part of them had evolved. I had not experienced such emotion during this process, which left me with a lot of doubt about whether I had completed it correctly. On the other hand, it has made me confront certain areas that I try to avoid and has led me to a different perspective of what could be underlying my behaviour, which I will explore further.

Following this, heuristic inquiry has allowed me to delve into new tools I wish to keep up with going forward, as those tools alone were more effective. The cold exposure technique was highly effective, immersing me in my body and emotions. Once the initial shock and control of breathing passed, I found this moment lightening, refreshing my mood and perspective and allowing me to continue with more gumption. Journalling this experience was satisfying as it tied the whole experience together. This technique will not be effective for procrastination alone. However, sharpened clarity helps with focus and motivation; therefore, cold exposure proved to be an ideal tool to help improve my procrastination.

Overall, Moustakas's (1990) heuristic inquiry was a complex process, but I plan to return with a better understanding in the near future. Therefore, I will continue with my journaling on this.

However, the importance of self-discovery and learning is an underexplored area of research. Having a greater understanding of oneself has the potential, no matter the topic, to benefit a counsellor's practice as it grants the counsellor better self-awareness. This awareness supports the counsellor in being congruent with their client about what phenomena they are experiencing and what the client may be experiencing (Karkare & Dutt, 2018; Uhlemann & Jordan, 1981). Therefore, the heuristic inquiry holds benefits that I and others should explore further, as no one has ever finished learning about themselves or others.

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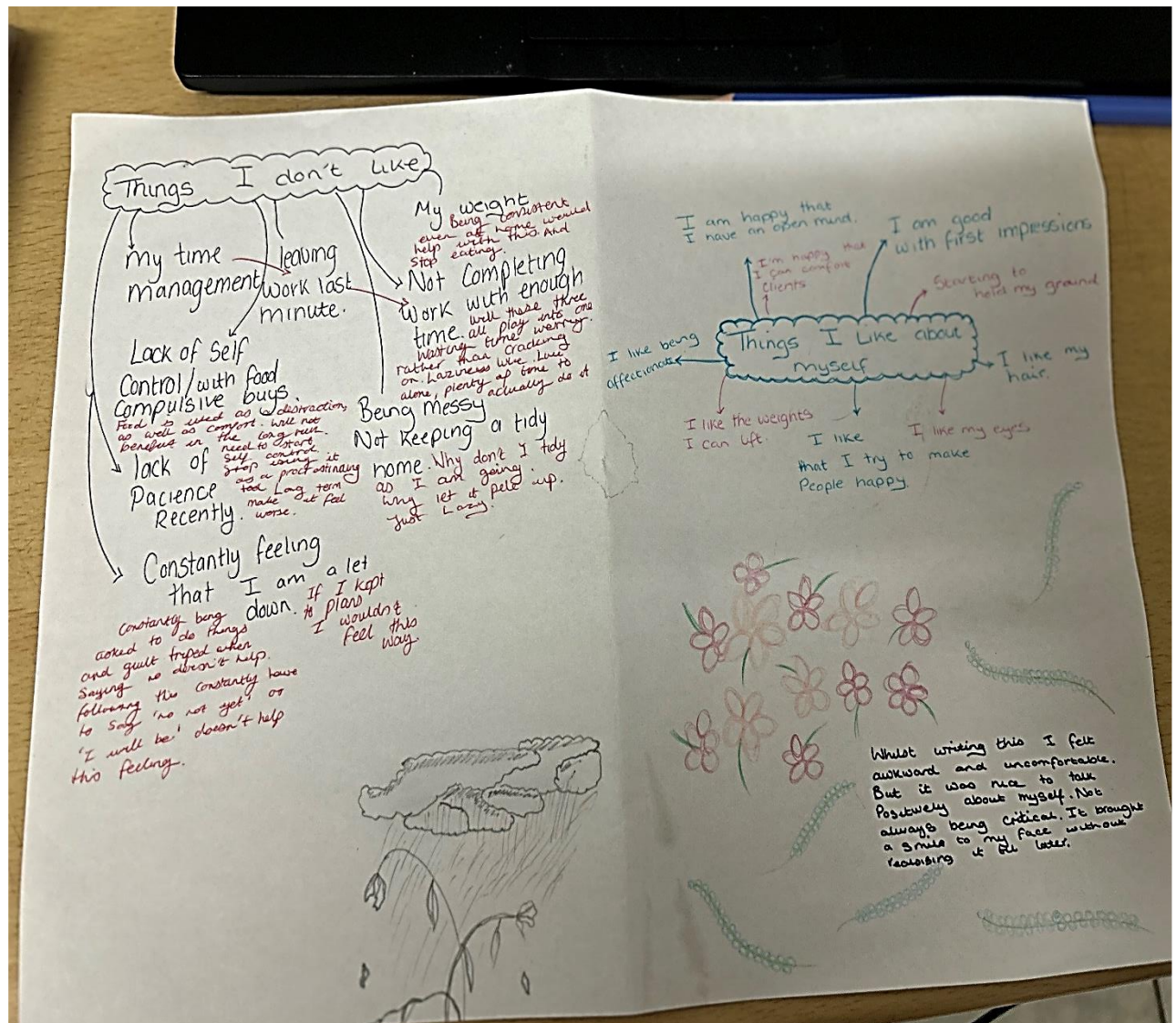
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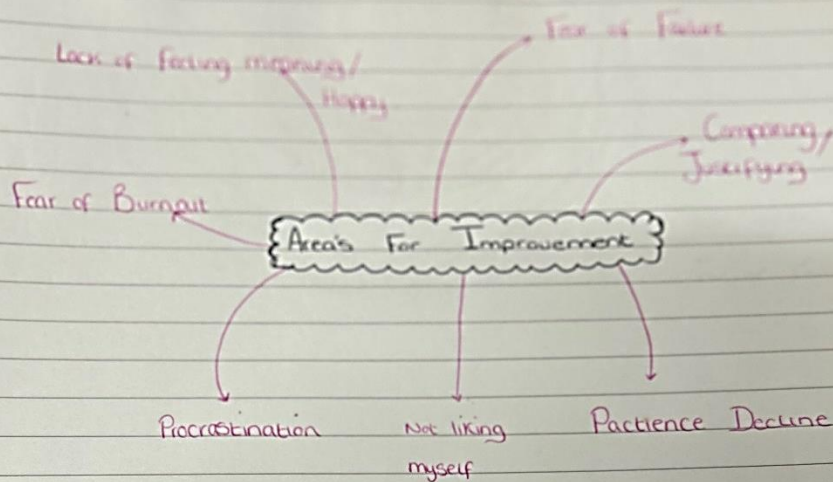
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Appendices

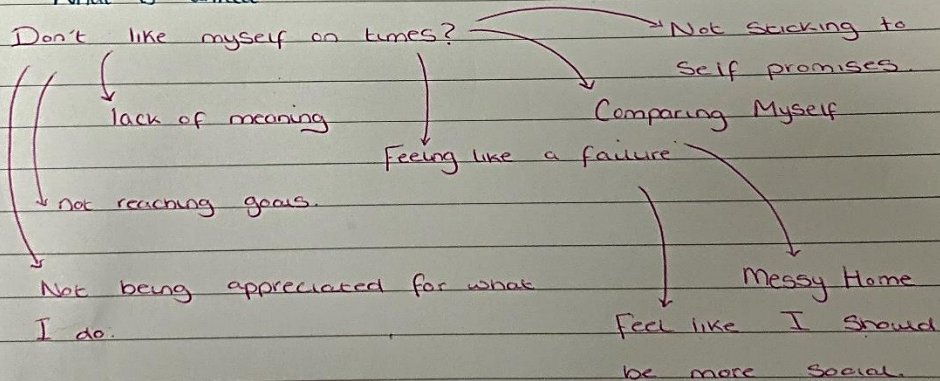
Appendix A



(Appendix 2) maybe...



What is linked??



* Whilst writing all this down I feel exhasberated and Silly. As though that some people have it worse and I am being childish. That I do not constantly feel like this so why should I be dwelling in darker thoughts.

Appendix B



19/02/25

16:43 Well today feels shit so far. Went all the way to placement for neither clients to show. This soured my mood for the rest of the day. And since I have been home (14:00) my nan has been here, therefore having no 'me' time.

As she left, I went in the shower. I wasn't going to do a cold one but once I was finished cleaning I slowly turned the hot water to cold. As it was gradual I found that my body wasn't as shocked but by the end I did manage a minute of cold water. It has refreshed me slightly. Still feeling a little down but besides that I have a sense of motivation.

26/02/25

Today, I didn't have a cold shower but I did have a cooler one whilst having an indept shower. It was most needed. I felt very happy and calm. Today has been a day to me which was extremely needed.

27/02/25

Today I started with a warm shower and then before getting out I turned it to cold. It was lovely and refreshing. After colouring yesterday and the Icebather just now I feel like I can make a start. However, I still don't feel like I am doing it right unfortunately. Just ploughing through it to get something marked really.

Flowers are beautiful. They hold potential. They can last long, they shelter others. Hold others. They survive.

I Sometimes feel like a flower... Perhaps we are pretty flower, perhaps we are a globe thistle. Underated. They are also blue, when I like. I know what coming I feel dramatic and silly as many people love me and want what's best for me. But, at the same time, I don't feel like what I do is ever enough. A flower can bloom, smell lovely, help bees pollinate, bring colors to meadows. But when the times come some people will complain that they were gone so soon. However at the same time, sometimes people contrarily push. Wane all for nothing. No respect. Place too many petals and expecting the flower to be just as beautiful.

> I like being viewed as valuable, approachable and intelligent. I've never been known as smart though.



Admittedly, I started drawing this as an attempt at reflection and coming across perhaps. However, half-way through I came to the realization that this is a distraction from my assignment which I am only 2000 words in. A way of refusing to actually sit down and focusing on what needed. But this is what has made me write this because although it's wasting time to a certain extent. I found it enjoyable and relaxing, feeling all the colors together. Looking how nothing is separate when it logically you could pick them apart it is evident that none I would not have been as satisfying or as beautiful to draw. Knowing what I believe life is like. All though the drawing is not a perfect material and a possible waste, it still holds value. And I will acknowledge it was mostly done for the assignment. I do not take away the relaxation reflection and the feelings I had after it. Perhaps I will try this more often or instead of an Icarus for reflection.

"It is said before entering the sea,

A river trembles with fear.
She looks back at the path she has travelled
from the peace of the mountains, the long winding
forests and villages.

And in front of her, she sees an ocean so vast, that to
enter there seems nothing more than disappear forever.

But there is no other way.
The river cannot go back.

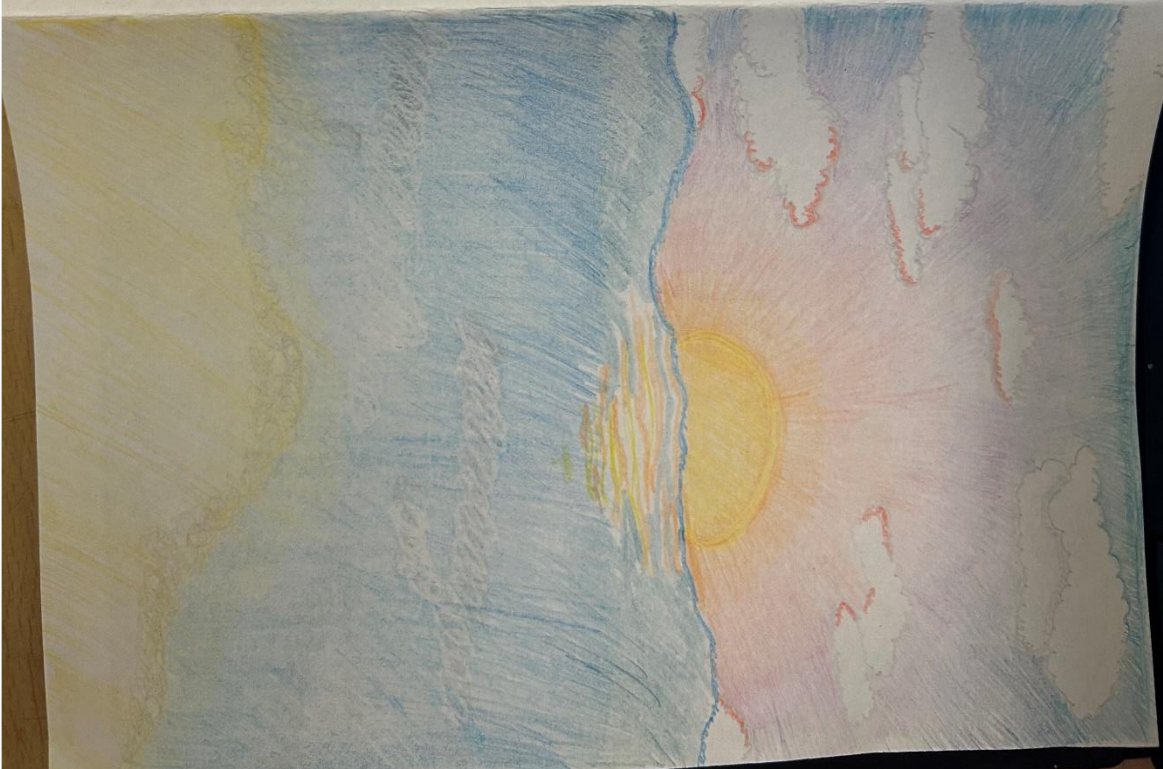
Nobody can go back.

To go back is impossible existence.

The river needs to take the risk of entering the ocean
because only then will fear disappear because that
where the river will know it is about to disappear
into the ocean, but of becoming the ocean!

~ Khalid Gibran.

26/02/25



Appendix F

