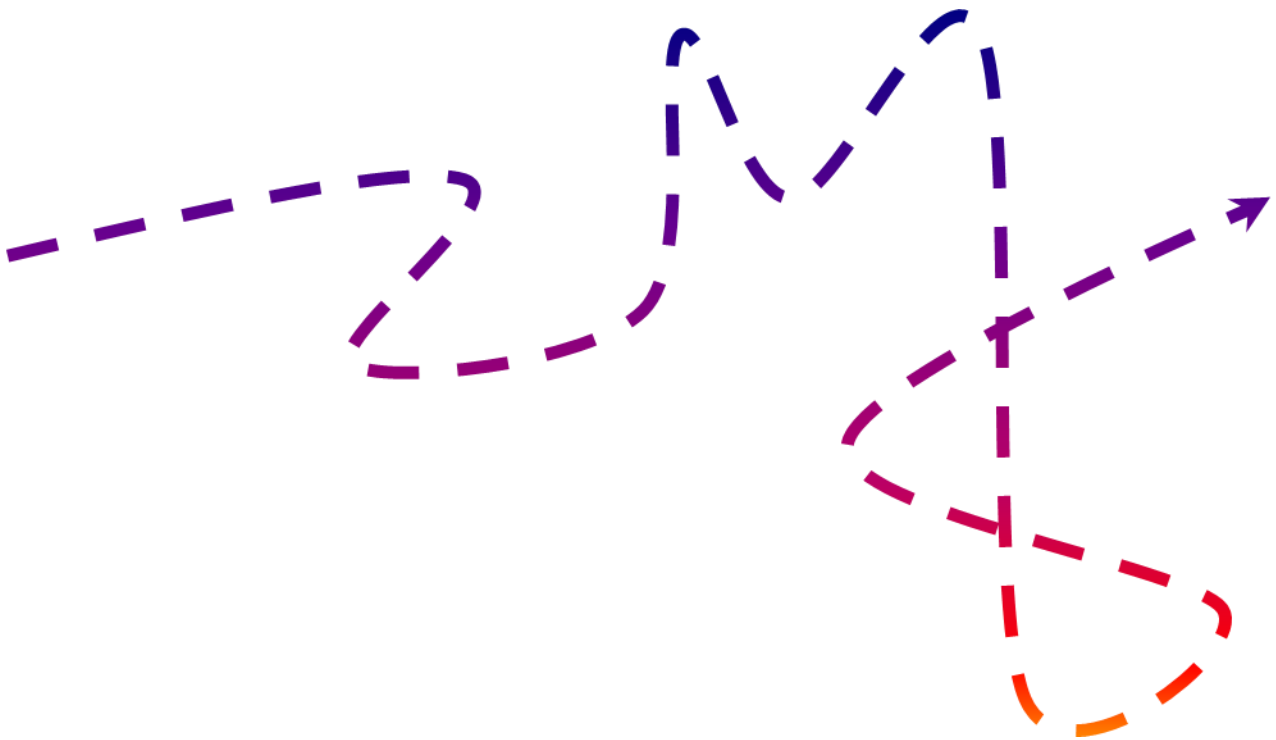


CRIKEY! CHECK OUT THAT SELF-DOUBT COMPLEX!

A Personal Adventure in Search of Self-belief.

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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Diploma of Process Oriented Psychology Australia New Zealand Process Oriented Psychology Inc.

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GLOSSARY

Process Work: also known as Process Oriented Psychology, is an evolving modality founded by Dr Arnold Mindell. Starting initially as an extension of Jungian dream-based methods into physical and body symptoms, it has grown in a multitude of directions including applications in community and organisational development, spiritual practice, diversity and leadership training, artistic practice, individual psychotherapy, relationship counselling and group work. It has been greatly influenced by Dr. Mindell's own background in quantum physics, along with spiritual traditions such as Taoism and Indigenous wisdom. Key concepts in Process Work are outlined below:

Primary Process: the self-description – methods and culture with which you and your group identify. Who we say we are and how we identify ourselves.

Secondary Process: Aspects of ourselves that we, as individuals or groups, do not identify with.

Edge: An edge describes the boundary between the known parts of our identity and the unknown, emergent parts. It exists as both the limit or constraint of identity, but also the dynamic point of contact with the new.

Intentional Field: "A generative, creative force that is always present within and around us and which we can experience by becoming aware of the slightest tendencies within and around us in any given moment"¹. Also known by names such as the Tao, Process Mind, Indigenous Dreaming, Sentience.

The 3 levels of experience:

- **Consensus Reality:** the reality that is generally agreed on as 'real'. For example, we can all usually agree what the time is in any specific part of the world.
- **Dreamland:** the subjective world of dreams, projections, roles, figures, polarities and fantasies.
- **Sentience/Essence Level:** a deep experience of oneness, the source. It cannot be separated into parts and is often difficult to put into words. Also known as 'the Tao that cannot be said', the Intentional Field, and in Australian Indigenous culture 'The Dreaming'.

Signals: Pieces of information, found in intended or unintended communication.

Channels: Modes of experience. Process Work identifies six channels through which we experience phenomena. These can be singular channels such as Visual (dreams, images), Auditory (Sounds – both internal sounds we hear with our inner ear and external sounds), Kinaesthetic (Movement), Proprioceptive (feeling – including taste, sensation, heat,

¹ (A. Mindell 2005)

pressure etc), as well as the composite channels of relationship and the world. There are experiences which we identify with congruently in particular channels – these are occupied channels – for example I wave to you. I am clearly identified with communicating through the movement channel. There are also experiences that occur in unoccupied channels – these are secondary, which means that we are unaware of them or they are involuntary. For example, as I'm talking, I might not notice that I'm also tapping my foot. This could indicate there is a secondary signal happening in the movement channel and possibly the auditory channel (if there is a rhythm to it).

Innerwork: A process of self-reflection, intentionally self-facilitating or working on internal aspects of your own experience, usually by yourself.

Rank: Rank Theory, developed by Arnold Mindell and his co-workers is a way of talking about the different levels of power in both individuals and groups. Rank is contextual – in one setting you may have high rank and another, low. There are four key domains of rank:

- **Social Rank:** One has more or less social rank based on whether or not one identifies or is seen as part of a dominant group in society. Social rank is unearned rank, determined by social and cultural values Eg. race, gender, age, economics, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, education, health, language are all factors that determine our social rank.
- **Structural Rank:** structural rank is designated by groups and organisations as an identifiable hierarchy of power. This is known as formal structural rank. Structural rank can also be informal or hidden – such as the person who has a lot of influence in a group.
- **Psychological Rank:** a sense of feeling centred, secure in oneself. It is connected with awareness, self-knowledge and self-esteem and comes from sources such as being loved as a child, having one's opinions validated, surviving suffering, working on oneself in therapy etc.
- **Spiritual Rank:** A sense of being connected with something greater. This rank keeps people centred even in the midst of crisis or terrible conflict. People with spiritual rank are often community builders, those who bring others together. It is a kind of eldership that is independent of culture, family and the world.

Life myth: A Jungian concept that refers to the individuation² process, the basic blueprint behind life's meandering path.

Metacommunication: The ability to communicate about things that are happening whilst you are experiencing them.

² Individuation is a concept defined by Carl Jung, referencing the “actualization of the potential within the personality to become what is within it to become” (Wilmer 1987, p163)

INTRODUCTION

“When you own this story, you get to write the ending”

Brene Brown

“You don’t have anything to offer. You don’t have anything to offer other than your own self-absorption”.

Meet Sharon, my inner critic. She had a few words to say in the process of getting to this thesis. It took a long time to get to this point of acceptance that I was going to be the topic of my own area of research. Incidentally she also likes a costume change, and has a few friends that she likes to call in from time to time to get her point across. She’s very resourceful.

When I was dreaming of this thesis, I wanted to create something original, to offer something to the world, to have an impact, to effect some change. It was my self-doubt process encapsulated – an extremely tall order, immersed in a process of high dream obsessing. As such, it became loaded with pressure and tension. Enough to strangle nearly all my creativity.

Then one day I spoke to an Indigenous colleague of mine, and he reflected on how stories play such a significant role in Indigenous culture. He mentioned how they are given a story, and that they grow into their story, they discover new parts, they live it more deeply as time goes on. He spoke of how their relationship to it changes throughout their life, as they get more and more intimate with the story they’ve been given. I’ve not been given a story, but it grew an idea, that this thesis was part of my story, growing in me at this particular time in my life. I live this story – it is my lived experience, my own personal action research. It has been and is, embodied. In Australian Indigenous culture, “embodying things becomes part of our living knowledge” he said. It really struck me.

Amy Mindell puts it succinctly when she says

*“The process paradigm would say that it is only through hindrances that we learn to follow ourselves and the Tao. To be truly congruent you must notice what is happening inside yourself even in you think it is ridiculous and only your process”*³

I realised that perhaps the story was it. It is a story of my living knowledge – of what I’ve come to know and how I’ve come to know it. It captures a moment in time, and the fact that my colleague spoke to something deeper is poignant in hindsight.

³ (A. Mindell 1995, p164)

THE BACKSTORY

A Supervisor kept saying 'crippling self-doubt'. It felt too much. Was it crippling? No. But if I was honest, it had been at times. Did it impinge on me being able to do things? Well, yes, it did. I felt like I was constantly constraining myself by it. It was frustrating in that I could see it on one level, yet be completely blind to its power in other contexts. At this particular stage of my life, it was ruling my world. However, the way I saw it, I didn't suffer from crippling self-doubt, but rather chronic mild self-doubt that emerged every now and again with a vengeance to be well, crippling.

Many people wouldn't know I've struggled with self-doubt. I get the impression through feedback over the years that people experience me as a self-confident leader who seems pretty grounded. "A natural air of authority" someone once said.

A part of me agreed with them – I kind of knew that I had this, that people often listened, that I spoke with confidence. I thought I understood it intellectually. I'm trained as a performer, and part of me wrote it off as simply that, having literally been trained to have presence in a room. It rarely reflected my internal experience. What I've recently realised is that though I accessed a level of self-worthiness (likely born out of my social rank and upbringing) what I didn't have was a deeper sense of trust in my own intrinsic nature and power. My self-belief until this time had hinged on a scaffolding of external factors – namely configured around how good I was at things. In keeping with a family tradition of hard work, I would work my butt off to do well – at pretty much everything I put my mind to. This generally reaped dividends, and kept my self-doubt in check, but the trouble was it all depended on external factors. Factors I often didn't have control of.

Cue life.

Coming to the final stages of this Diploma, a constellation of external factors made me deeply question who I am and what I have to offer the world. It wasn't a dramatic, catastrophic event, but rather a series of cumulative struggles that revealed an underlying pattern that I felt constantly at the mercy of, and could no longer ignore. The external factors were in order:

Bi-products of Motherhood: Rank adjustments. Initially when I had my first child, I stayed in my career, but stepped down from a leadership role. It involved having to hand over the running of an organisation that I had built, to another person who I was going to work under (so that I could work part time). It was a process of relinquishing structural rank – and it glaringly highlighted to me how attached I'd been to the leadership role as an identity. But I figured it was good learning. And I was a good learner. Tick.

Bi-products of Motherhood: Identity shifts. Prior to having kids, I knew that I defined myself by my work. What was I going to do when I no longer did that work? When I left my Theatre career for motherhood after the birth of my second daughter, I prepared myself to accept

my role of being 'just' a mother. I love my kids, and love being a mother. However, I was often applying my 'best practice/hard work/high dream' to being a mother, which meant that I constantly felt under pressure and inadequate. I was also trying *really hard* to accept it and enjoy not working, an inner commentary on high rotation "you're so lucky! You wanted this! Why aren't you appreciative"? I discovered that motherhood aside, and whether or not I attach my identity to it, I simply love working. I enjoy my work, it's challenging and rewarding. It makes me feel alive. Of course, now that I realised this, I was unemployed and couldn't get work.

Changing Careers: "The Fraud". I decided it was time to change careers, and we moved cities at the same time. I had no work, and no connections to leverage off. No-one knew me, and they didn't trust that I had anything to offer. To compound it, the career shift from Theatre and the Arts to Psychology and consultancy wasn't a usual one, so people couldn't see much of a connection. It felt like I'd shifted from being an expert to a beginner, and yet as a consultant in the new career I had to sell myself as an expert to get work. Funnily enough, I didn't get much work – so I went from having a really established positive feedback loop (you're good at what you do) to no feedback at all. I felt like a failure and a fraud. In my new career, I became part of a collective of amazing, highly intelligent folk working in a field. I was new to the field, but brought other skills that were entirely relevant. Yet despite much encouragement and support from my colleagues, I consistently felt I shouldn't really be there.

Failing study. I studied throughout this whole process, but after a lifetime of identifying with being a good learner and student, I was flabbergasted to get into a process of failure upon failure. The good learner was one of the final things I was clinging to, and that identity was sinking, fast.

Friendship breakdown. Throughout this period, my best friend blocked me out of their life for a year. Up until that point, I had prided myself on being a good friend. At that time, they obviously didn't agree. It was emotionally huge for me, it cut deep. As far as I was concerned, it went beyond what I did for a job, or studied, this was about who I was as a person.

They're not much each on their own, but it was the compounded effect that ate at me.

I managed to get through those things, with a few depression dips in between, and things started to pick up. I finally started to get work and I thought, yessss – I'm through this. I went into overdrive, worked really hard at making the most of every opportunity and figured if I could just write my thesis then everything would fall into place. But I couldn't write my thesis. I didn't have a topic. I'd thought about it for years, I'd asked for dreams, I tried to read my way through it. Nothing seemed to stick. Every two days I'd come up with a new idea, and a day later drop it as it didn't interest me deeply enough. It was the final straw.

Then all my paid work dried up with nothing on the horizon. It was clear. I was failing everything.

It felt like no matter how hard I worked, nothing worked. I tried to 'not work' at it, but effortlessness didn't seem to be bearing much fruit. I tried to be OK with all the nothingness. I tried to meditate in order to foster an acceptance of what was.

But then I just got really sad. I'd lost hope. It had been 4 years of struggling and I was over it. Every part of me was turning on itself. My critic Sharon was in full flight: ever present and going nuts. And after getting myself out of the lowest point, it would just keep recycling. Again and again. Self doubt. Self-criticism. A disconnect between myself and my worth.

The last four years have been a deep challenge to my identity, a life stage process that began with Motherhood but went way beyond it. A range of disturbances were amplifying my self-doubt. I wandered around aimlessly in the midst of it for years, when finally this thesis became a lightning rod for it all. It became my attempt at building myself a map, in order to understand where I was, and find a way through it.

ON USING MYSELF AS A CASE IN POINT

This thesis is broadly about self-doubt and intrinsic self-belief.

And 'broadly' is the operative word there. For it is a mighty big territory to cover, and one that I have no intention of doing justice to. To be honest, for the purpose of this work, I'm not really interested in 'broad'.

What I am interested in, is 'deep'. You could say 'deeply personal'.

So whilst those are the broader themes of this thesis, the more particular focus has been to explore deeply what constitutes my own self-doubt complex (or schema), and to see if understanding it, and working on it could contribute to the building of my own intrinsic sense of self-belief. The methodology I have used is Process Oriented 'Innerwork'⁴.

I have chosen to be both researcher and subject for this study. The framework I have chosen is informed by the personal nature of that process, born out of how the process revealed itself. An example of this is the decision not to reference comparative literature on the topic.

From the beginning I noticed a sensation of almost recoiling at reading literature on self-doubt. Although I'm not particularly academic, this was unusual for me, I usually love reading and getting insights from others' experiences. I kept trying to fight it, but as it was

⁴ See Glossary page 7.

such a strong, energetic reaction, I became curious. Process Work encourages curiosity about our disturbances, and so, in defeat, I leant into it.

I realised my aversion to comparative literature was related to the core purpose of this project. This project was explicitly for me to deeply understand my experience. Comparing myself to others was a key behaviour that reinforced the self-doubt dynamic, and so I was wary of bringing it in, but even that wasn't the main issue. What this project was really about and required, was a turning inwards, and giving that priority. Approaching my experience from a theoretical angle has been a more habitual practice, coming from a place of mind rather than the body, feeling, energy. Focusing on the theoretical has inadvertently served as an avoidance process, taking me away from the depth of my experience until now.

It hasn't been, and isn't enough, to understand my experience theoretically. Much of this project has been about getting away from my 'ideas' and more comfortable with feeling, being, listening. I realise that I am easily distracted and enthralled in others processes or conceptual theories and they can serve to take me off my edge in this particular endeavour, take me away from deep listening, connecting to a deeper feeling state and occasionally just following sparks in the sky or seeds in the wind.

To that end, the framework of this thesis is unabashedly self-focused. I will contextualise briefly where necessary, but generally its sole focus will be my personal experience.

AIMS

My aims are threefold: to emerge with a deeper understanding of my self-doubt, to extrapolate how to work with it from a Process Oriented perspective, and to answer the question - If I do so, can I foster an intrinsic sense of self-belief using Process Oriented methods?

The plan to get a deeper understanding of my self-doubt is to unpack the different components of my self-doubt complex by approaching my self-doubt from two distinct angles of function: one that is rooted in the now, and one as an indicator of something emergent. I do this by framing these approaches under two key Process Work perspectives: Firstly seeing its function as a complex edge system (now) and then, seeing its function as a secondary process (emergent). By covering it from these two different angles, I aim to get a more holistic understanding of the overall *purpose* of the self-doubt.

The **assessment as to whether the process fosters an intrinsic self-belief** will be reflected on in Section 3, after I have a deeper understanding of the entire process.

Through the process of exploring my own experience at this deeper level, I will **extrapolate a plan for approaching self-doubt using Process Work methods**, reflecting on particular

interventions that enabled progress in my own personal process. This will be positioned at the end of section 4 as a workbook.

I hope that this paper might contribute to the growing body of Process Oriented literature on working with inner-criticism and self-belief using different levels of experience.

ON THE RESEARCH STRUCTURE AND APPROACH

This is a creative research project - it involved me reflecting on, doing innerwork exercises with, and writing about, my experiences as they occur over a period of twelve months. These experiences reflect both a more recent 4 year process, but also a chronic life long struggle with a particular form of self-doubt. It involves slowly sense-making out of the reflections on the experiences as they happen. It is a living, breathing, writing project - an iterative process, building on my knowledge as I write about it.

I evaluate this approach and the answer to my questions (of how to work with self-doubt using Process Work methods, and whether doing so builds an intrinsic sense of self-belief) using the same process, by my experience of the *impact* of the work as I am writing it. This is intricately linked with the ongoing sense-making process of innerwork, reflection and writing. It is difficult at times, particularly when working with my moods – how do you work with your own self-doubt of the entire structure of your thesis on self-doubt? And to be brutally honest, at some stages I felt like I was in some sort of Escher nightmare, endlessly reflecting on myself. Overall, the creative constraint of living/writing it enabled me to form insight and glean learning from this experience.

The finished form is a paper that outlines my experience, explains the learnings I make throughout this process, and puts them into a generalised tool for others to use for their own personal development. It is intended that this paper is for the broader Process Work community at this stage, with potentially an extrapolation of the content being rewritten to take to the wider community at a later date.

A LITTLE BIT ABOUT PROCESS WORK

Self-doubt is an enormous area of study. It presents in such a variety of forms and variables, often coming under broader topics of Anxiety, Depression, Self-esteem, Self-worth and Confidence. It also brings into question the definition of 'self' and what constitutes an individual identity. A comparative study on differing therapeutic approaches to working with self-doubt would be an interesting topic for another paper, or more likely compendium!

This project is a deep exploration of a personal process, and doesn't touch on the broader literature of self-doubt from the perspective of different modalities.

As a bootstrap modality⁵ Process Oriented Psychology (Process Work) aligns with, and can draw upon, many different modalities within its own approaches. However there are some pertinent key concepts of Process Work that are unique to both the modality itself, and that relate to the specific ways that I will use Process Work as a method to approach my presentation of self-doubt, differentiating it from other modalities.

One of the core concepts of Process Work pertains to its view of levels of experience. Arnold Mindell, founder of Process Work, posits that there are three levels of experience:

Consensus Reality (CR): The daily reality that we all agree on. For example, the ‘time’ that we agree is happening in a particular part of the world.

Dreamland or Dreaming Reality (DR): the subjective experience of reality – including polarities, fantasies, dreams, body symptoms, world events and internal figures.

Sentient or Essence Level (also known as many other names including the Process Mind, the Tao, the Intentional Field, and Australian Indigenous Dreaming): An energy of deep oneness often referenced in Indigenous cultures throughout the world, and many religions. It has no parts.

Like some other current psychological modalities, Process Work doesn’t seek to make judgement on the presenting ‘problem’, however what separates Process Work out from most other modalities is that it sees meaning in the ‘problem’ - a sign that something is trying to emerge. In this way, “resolution of problems is viewed as a bi-product of developing awareness, rather than as an end in itself”⁶.

Opposite to Freud’s use of the same terms, in Process Work, if something is ‘primary’ it refers to elements of our behaviour and identity that are known and intentional. They exist on one side of the boundary of our identity. The part of my identity that is hard working is primary. I know I’m hard working, it’s probably one way I could describe myself. ‘Secondary’ refers to the less known, more emergent aspects of our identity. Between primary and secondary, lies the ‘Edge’. The edge represents the limit of the known identity and a point of contact with unknown experiences or identities⁷. ‘Problems’ are approached as disturbances, and therefore seen as secondary, signalling some sort of process trying to come forth. Process Work tracks these disturbances as they appear in ‘channels’. Diamond and Jones describe channels as “a sensory, motor or relational mode of perceiving or communicating experience”⁸. So a disturbance might present in the visual channel as an image in a dream, aurally as a sound, kinaesthetically as an involuntary movement,

⁵ In that it can embrace and tie together a whole range of other modalities within it (if it aligns with your process and what works best for you).

⁶ (Diamond and Spark-Jones 2004, p148)

⁷ (Diamond and Spark-Jones 2004, p20)

⁸ (Diamond and Spark-Jones 2004, p25)

proprioceptively as a feeling sensation, as well as occurring in areas of life including our relationships and events in the world. Process Work focuses closely on the sensory grounded experience of the 'problem/disturbance' and then homes in on that further in order to unpack it, to ultimately get an energetic sense of its meaning. By bringing in the energy of what is secondary, emergent or less known, and integrating it with our known identity, the theory is that we work towards individuation⁹ or becoming more whole. The principle runs across individuals, relationships and groups. It is this approach, in combination with working explicitly across all three levels of experience, and the application of interventions on *all* of these levels to my self-doubt presentation that I wish to explore in this paper.

Section 1 explores my presentation of self-doubt on a Consensus Reality and occasionally Dreamland level. I ask: How does it present? What might have caused it to develop in the way it has? What keeps the symptoms in place? I approach the self-doubt as a complex edge system and look at contributing factors such as the Imposter Phenomenon, family patterns and historical influences, cultural notions of value and worth, life phase, low rank and reinforcing behaviours at the edge of my identity. Whilst specifically coming from a Process Oriented lens, at this stage the work can easily be compared with similar interventions from other comparative approaches.

Section 2 approaches my presentation as a disturbance with an underlying emergent or 'secondary' meaning. Whilst occasionally working in the consensus reality domain, this approach explores predominantly the Dreamland and deeper Sentient/Essence levels of experience. I explore the dreamland figures in my field and what role they play, the role of the self-doubt as a mood and altered state, as an expression of the high and low dream. I explore my undesirable behaviours as personal patterns over the edge, and discuss whether a physical embodiment process is required to fully integrate the emergent insight.

Section 3 summarises my learnings and I reflect on the entire writing project and whether undertaking it does contribute to an intrinsic sense of self-belief.

Section 4 extrapolates the learnings from the process and puts them in a Self-doubt workbook that people can use to work with their own self-doubt presentations.

ON THE STYLE AND FORM OF THIS PAPER

It is important to me that this is an accessible read. Given it is such a raw, deeply personal process, as I imagine it is for anyone suffering with their self-doubt, I choose to make the style of this paper, personal. Our vulnerability is deeply personal, and so it is written deliberately as though I am having a bit of a chat. This is in part influenced by the personal style of writers such as Brene Brown and Elizabeth Gilbert and is also a reference to the

⁹ See Glossary: Footnote 2, p7

'lived' experiential nature of the project. I want to de-mythologise the issue of self-doubt, remove it from a conceptual realm of theory, take the shame out of the shadows, give it some air and bring it out in the open. Peppered throughout the paper are examples of my internal process from my perspective as it is happening. These are featured in red. The aim of this is to give you a direct experience of mine as I am going through it, to bring a felt sense to the written ideas. They of course don't fully compare with the actual bodily experience, but hope to convey the mood or feeling as it is happening. Rather than explain Process Work concepts as I go, a glossary of terms is included at the outset following the acknowledgements to outline basic (Process Work) concepts that I refer to throughout the paper and can be used as a reference as required.

FURTHER APPLICATIONS OF THE WORK

I can see many applications of this beyond this thesis and believe it could be more broadly contextualised, with a cross-comparison to other modality approaches to this dynamic. I also see great potential for the workbook to become fleshed out, in forms such as a workshop or online articles where the ideas within could have a broader use and context.

PART 1:
UNDERSTANDING MY LANDSCAPE OF SELF DOUBT

*I climbed a mountain and I turned around.
And I saw my reflection in the snow-covered hills,
til a landslide brought it down.
Mirror in the sky, what is love?
Can the child in my heart rise above?
Can I sail through the changing ocean tides,
can I handle the seasons of my life?
Oh I've been afraid of changing,
because I built my life around you.
But time makes you bolder, even children get older,
and I'm getting older too
Fleetwood Mac, Landslide*

PART ONE: UNDERSTANDING THE LANDSCAPE OF MY SELF-DOUBT

Self-doubt: a lack of faith in oneself: a feeling of doubt or uncertainty about one's abilities, actions, etc.¹⁰

A lack of faith.

It struck me, this phrase.

Faith.

Belief.

This is about perception, how I view myself. It is about belief, and misguided belief and ultimately it is about identity. This process started with the deeply disturbing realisation that in my heart, I didn't feel my 'self' was enough. I realised I'd spent my life overcompensating.

I'm acutely aware that my experience of self-doubt is not the same as yours or anyone else. My self-doubt is born out of *my* perspective of *my* identity, and as such, is going to be deeply subjective. However, in order to understand how I've come to the conclusions I have, we need to start with how I experience my self-doubt.

On a Consensus Reality or daily level my self-doubt presents as:

- A feeling of holding myself back
- A feeling like I'm going to stuff up, I'm not good enough.
- A feeling like I don't belong, that I'm not smart/talented enough to be in this position/group
- An occasional complete lack of ability to be able to accurately gauge how competent I am at something
- An ongoing feeling of being a failure, never able to live up to my own expectations

However this doesn't quite capture how I really experience it, particularly the amplified way I've been experiencing it for the last 4 years.

I have begun to see it as a kind of territory that I can get lost in. Whilst it is true that the self-doubt is an edge to intrinsic self-belief, calling it simply an edge somehow belies how complex and immersive the experience of it really is. Goodbread describes the dynamic aspect of the edge as a kind of conflict zone between two conflicting versions of reality, one

¹⁰ (Mirriam-Webster Dictionary n.d.)

which the individual or group knows about themselves, and the other which they distance themselves from¹¹. I like this description because it brings into focus the often contradictory nature of the edge, which is part of the reason it can feel so discombobulating. Helene Gronda also discusses the difficulties in working with Edges –

*Edges affect our state of mind, our experience of ourselves and our ability to relate..In the vicinity of an edge there can be strange emotional states, blankness, reactivity, attacks on others or self, irrational yet utterly gripping fears of death or abandonment, social annihilation, shame and ostracism.*¹²

My self-doubt process is a conflictual landscape unto itself, one that feels desolate and dangerous within. When I feel completely at the mercy of it, I have no ability to accurately gauge my emotional responses to things. Generally, I just wanted to escape from the experience, however when I turned my attention towards it, I began to better understand its parts. So, like an internal cartographer and anthropologist, I set out to discover what was out there.

1. SELF-DOUBT AS A COMPLEX EDGE SYSTEM

During early reading for this project, I came across the seminal study on the Imposter Phenomenon¹³. I begin here with an overview of the phenomenon, as it gives some overall context to the other conditions prevalent in the system of my self-doubt, followed by a breakdown of the various components of my edge system.

THE IMPOSTER PHENOMENON

*“The term imposter phenomenon is used to designate an internal experience of intellectual phoniness which appears to be particularly prevalent and intense among a select sample of high achieving women”*¹⁴

‘The imposter phenomenon’ was a phrase coined in a study of a group of 178 high achieving women working and studying at university, including undergraduates, graduate students, faculty members, medical students and professional women working in such fields as law, nursing, anthropology, counselling, religious education, social work, occupational therapy and teaching. One third of the women were therapy clients and two thirds attended ‘growth-oriented interaction groups’. They were predominantly white, middle class women

¹¹ (Goodbread 1997, p223)

¹² (Gronda 2013, p43)

¹³ The Imposter Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention (Clance and Imes 1978)

¹⁴ (Clance and Imes 1978, p241)

between the ages of 20-45 years. Whilst previous studies¹⁵ had identified a gender difference in attribution (women were more likely to attribute success to outside sources and failures to lack of ability whereas men were more likely to attribute success to their ability and failure to luck or task difficulty) it was widely hypothesised that this 'internalised societal sex-role stereotype' would be changed by repeated success experiences. This landmark study proved that in a particular group of women, this wasn't the case. The constant, recurring belief cycle that they were fraudulent, an 'imposter' despite having achieved considerable intellectual success benchmarks by any outside source, was long lasting, self-perpetuating and not broken by repeated successes. These women were found to have little or no internal sense of success, and had an underlying belief that they didn't really deserve their achievements.

The study uncovered a series of patterns replicated across the women– in early family dynamics as the potential origins of the experience, along with a range of behaviours that tended to keep the dynamic in place. The women who experienced this phenomenon, typically fell into two cohorts – in one group were women who had a sibling or close relative who was designated as 'the smart/intelligent' one and nothing the women did or achieved would change the narrative within the family. This view was then internalised by the woman. The second group had an almost opposite experience that caused the same outcome – they were told by their family that they were superior and could do anything, and something happened to the girl in childhood that countered this experience, causing a trust rupture to the point that the child internalised a mistrust of the idea that she had talent.

The study found that the root of the imposter phenomenon therefore began in early family dynamics, and was subsequently maintained and perpetuated throughout life by a series of behaviours. Evidence of the phenomenon would only occur with women after several sessions of therapy, as being so ingrained, it was usually experienced as a secret and rarely stated as a presenting problem. They identified at least four particular behaviours across the cohort, with those identified participating in at least one or more of these behaviours. In brief the four behaviours are outlined as follows: 1) Diligence and hard work is used as a compensating mechanism (so people don't discover her stupidity). This causes a cycle of worry about intelligence- hard work and cover up strategies – good grades/performances – which is well rewarded and provides temporary good feelings which is reinforcing; 2) an engagement in a level of intellectual inauthenticity, whereby the woman pretends or isn't herself in order to fit in or go along with the predominant view, or appeals to her teachers bias regardless of whether she believes it herself – again rewarding her well, so she develops the feeling that if she'd followed what she really thought she would have failed. 3) Using charm and perceptiveness to win the approval of superiors, which makes her feel special and compensates for a feeling of inadequacy. This however doesn't last as deep

¹⁵ (Deaux 1976)

down she believes it's because of her charm and not her actual abilities and so it repeats. 4) Avoiding success by maintaining a personal view of herself as an intellectual phony, thus allaying her fears and anxiety about the potential negative consequences of being a successful woman in society. Societal rejection was often the historical consequence of women being confident and ambitious, so in this way, it occurred as a protective response to the negative consequences that could befall a woman who was outwardly confident about her abilities, whilst simultaneously allowing her to live out her achievement orientation. Upon discovering these patterns, the authors of the study subsequently trialled and suggested therapeutic interventions, many of which were group and Gestalt¹⁶ based, and from that came to some conclusions about the nature of the experience and what therapeutic interventions were likely to work with clients experiencing the phenomenon. Suggestions were made around bringing awareness to the magical and superstitious qualities the women attributed; working in group settings so women could witness the disconnect between the belief and the reality of achievement; homework to practice new ideas of self and decrease compulsive work habits; role work where the women were to play people they had 'fooled' and imagine their responses; as well as keeping records as data on positive achievements. Another intervention was to get the women to roleplay the opposite of 'I'm not smart' and become a person who was smart – this proved to reveal a pattern whereby many of the women had a hidden secret fantasy that she was actually special and outstanding which was surrounded by feelings of fear and guilt.

I inadvertently discover that this research aligns with my experience. It frames aspects of the systemic nature of my self-doubt, the chronic and long term nature of my complex, and by de-personalising it, serves to counter some of the shame processes embedded within my experience. The findings in the study have had many implications on my understanding of how and why some aspects of my self-doubt play out – which I explore throughout the remainder of this paper.

THE CONDITIONS OF MY EDGE SYSTEM

I start by approaching my self-doubt from a Consensus or daily reality viewpoint. I currently work in Systems change, and as such, I find myself looking at my particular brand of self-doubt through that lens - as a system that is kept in place by a number of conditions that contribute to it acting the way it does. Systems are never broken, but rather orchestrated to keep the status quo the way it is. The system around my self-doubt is a part of the edge itself, my old identity trying to preserve its boundary. In this way, you could say my self-doubt lies between me and a new emerging identity process.

¹⁶ "Gestalt Therapy, developed by Fritz Perls and his wife, Laura, in the 1940s, is an existential/phenomenological approach based on the premise that people must find their own way in life and accept personal responsibility if they hope to achieve maturity" (Corey 1996, p224)

To understand a system better, it can be useful to look at the landscape or conditions that keep the system the way it is. The key factors that contribute to the current presentation of my self-doubt are:

- historical belief systems that potentially established the narrative in the first place
- my cultural value system – in this case, value set up by a transactional, monetary structure
- My Life phase, and Experience and perception of Low rank as trigger points

There are also reinforcing behaviours that keep it all in place.

I am curious about these elements, and want to get an accurate sense of what role they each have in forming my self-doubt landscape. In the following sections, I will explore each of them as contributing factors.

CONTRIBUTING FACTOR #1: FAMILY PATTERNS AND HISTORICAL INFLUENCES

Prior to my reading of the Imposter phenomenon research, I had already stumbled upon some formative moments from my childhood that I suspected contributed to my self-doubt, and now, it is becoming clear where early childhood influences are holding my edge system in place.

A memory flashes in – it's the 1980s and my dad has just come home from doing a 'New Age Thinking' Course. He is full of inspiration, saying "Rebecca, you can do anything you put your mind to". I'm a little girl, about 8 years old, a competitive gymnast. I am training about 25 hours a week outside of school hours, and Dad says I can do anything I put my mind to. I really want to be an Olympic gymnast, the best in the world. I want to be like those girls from China and Russia. I try and try to put my mind to it. I believe him. I work really hard. I train as hard as I can. And somewhere along the line, seeing and comparing myself to my training friends and my heroes, I know deep inside that despite what he says, I don't have what it takes to be an Olympic Gymnast.

It was meant with the best of intentions – and I'm conscious as a woman, that even in that era, I was lucky to have a father who believed that of me. He was saying 'go for it'. The trouble I had was putting my mind to it. I tried and tried, I really wanted to believe. However, my daily reality gave me a different story.

Looking back now, it's obvious. In one word: genetics. No matter how hard I trained, my back just wasn't going to become any more flexible. The scenario created an internal dilemma in my child mind - I should be able to put my mind to this. What was implied was 'if you think in the right way and work hard you can make it happen'. I was working hard. But it

wasn't happening. Deep down, some part of me felt like an inherent failure. And yet, I know that deep down I also knew, even as a kid, that I couldn't do anything about it. It was a bind. After a while I just found a reason to quit gymnastics and move on. I realise that I've never really resolved this internally. It feels like a blueprint for a pattern I've been stuck in for most of my life.

Here is my childhood experience falling very neatly into the second cohort of the imposter phenomenon women, where a girl was told she could do anything, but secretly as a child realises that she can't, and consequently "she begins to distrust her parents' perceptions of her. Moreover, she begins to doubt herself"¹⁷

I can see how this pattern plays a role in how I find it very hard to assess or accept when others compliment my skills or talents. In Process Work terms, I can see how within this internal narrative born out of early family dynamics there is a strong edge figure¹⁸ of a child who can't trust what others think of her abilities. Discovering this brings perspective. I can begin to recognise how the dynamic also manifests a whole suite of reinforcing behaviours that keep the edge in place. This hidden, ghost-like influence maintains the status quo. I can recognise that I have harboured a lot of shame about feeling self-doubt when I was given so much parental support, that I am perpetuating reinforcing behaviours by trying to exercise control, or make things happen through thinking and hard work. When inevitably, that doesn't work – I regress, like an early emotional reflex, to this childhood state of "I'm a failure".

CONTRIBUTING FACTOR #2: CULTURAL NOTIONS OF VALUES AND WORTH

Worth: having a particular value, especially in money¹⁹.

A second condition keeping my edge system in place is the invisible force and influence of cultural values and worth. I am slowly realising that I have spent much of my life in a constant state of proving my worth.

I think underneath it all, I doubt that my essential self is enough in the world. I don't know what benchmark I am measuring myself against. It's as if I had to prove myself to be here.

Over years of innerwork, I have noticed a personal pattern of exchange-based thinking, rarely valuing something for what it is, or for the pure joy of doing it. I place a lot of value in

¹⁷ (Clance and Imes 1978, p243)

¹⁸ An edge figure is a role/position/voice that is against change or crossing the edge.

¹⁹ (Cambridge Dictionary n.d.)

being 'useful for others'. Generally, it has served me well, and seems a noble cause. However, despite its seemingly good intentions, being useful has got in the way over the years - as a therapist, a facilitator, a friend. I've spent a lifetime trying too hard to be useful, and not just *there*, for others. It is clearly apparent that I do not consider being 'there' enough. In looking at it now, I'm struck by how functional and transactional it all is. Why do I feel the need to base my worth on how 'useful' I am?

Johan Hari, in his book on the causes of Depression discusses how current culture in the US (and Australia and other western countries) sends us messages around values of what will make us feel successful and happy that are entirely contrary with evidence of what makes people feel content²⁰. He cites the work of Tim Kasser, who framed the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, with intrinsic motivation being described as something you do for the pure joy or love of it, and extrinsic motivation as something that is done for a return²¹. Hari proposes that we are culturally encouraged to be motivated by extrinsic factors to achieve happiness. Kasser's evidence highlighted that those that achieved intrinsic goals became significantly happier, whereas extrinsic motivators had no impact on happiness. My desire to be useful to others, at its heart, is an extrinsic motive, to serve a more deep seated function of feeling valuable. In Process Work terms, my primary goal of being 'valuable' is a compensating factor for the secondary polarity of 'valuing myself'. The consequence of this is that the more I strive to be helpful and valuable, the further away I am from a deeply connected sense of self. Trying to be useful doesn't always feel emotionally or energetically congruent, and this feeling of incongruence causes me to doubt myself. In response, I have compensated by trying harder to be useful – trapping me in a reinforcing self-doubt loop.

CONTRIBUTING FACTOR #3: LIFE PHASE, LOW RANK AND HOW IT PLAYS OUT

I feel so out of depth in this group. Every meeting tends to constellate this process. They are always asking my opinion, constantly assuming that I have one. I'm still trying to process what has been said. I'm new and have very little context to apply all this new information to. I stay silent. They wait expectantly. If I don't offer an opinion, I feel like I'm not contributing, so I say something, anything. Immediately I feel ridiculous. I feel like I shouldn't be there, that I've managed to sneak in. I imagine they're thinking "how did we let this happen? We thought she had the experience, but she obviously doesn't. And now we have to tolerate her uninformed opinions". I'm such a fraud. I could leave, but I need the work.

²⁰ (Hari 2018, p96)

²¹ (Kasser and Ryan 2001)

It's 5am and I've been lying here awake for three hours thinking about how this happened yesterday. It's like a grey cloud hanging over me.

I am in a new career. I'm in a work environment that is new, and yet, because my role is as a consultant, on some level, I feel like I'm supposed to be 'an expert'. It is paradoxical. My inadequacies have often made me feel as if I need to prove myself or justify my presence to be in the organisation I'm contracted to. I have also felt a need to promote my skills in order to get paid work. It has resulted in me marginalising my vulnerability, feeling new, a beginner, in a world of intellect and complexity.

You could say I am feeling my low rank.

Oh boy, am I feeling that low rank!

Mindell used the term 'rank' to describe the multiple dimensions of power that play out for individuals, relationships and groups²². He differentiated rank into four domains – Social rank, the rank we are born with such as age, gender, culture, race, marital status, sexuality, religion, physical health or ability; Contextual rank, that which is defined by the context you are in or your position within a system such as workplace hierarchy; Psychological rank, the power that comes from self-awareness, life experience, being loved and loving, feeling valued; and Spiritual rank, a rank and wisdom coming from facing and surviving failure, trauma and loss, or a connection to something greater.

My life-phase experience of breaking from a career in order to have children, then changing careers whilst in that transition, is a relatively common experience for women these days in Australia. However the fact that it happens more often, does not belie the enormity of a shift it causes in an individual's rank terrain. My contextual and social rank, things I had long established and taken for granted, suddenly became in doubt. Compounding the low rank context I found myself in, was confusion of my different rank dimensions, all of which felt knotted through each other like a big tangle. Australian society still places stay at home mothers at the low end of social rank structure. I have inadvertently internalised this. I have also shifted to a new career, with social/cultural rank values at play even within the careers I've had. I used to work in the arts (low rank), and community arts (lower arts rank) and now I'm in consultancy (higher social rank, but I feel completely inadequate). The result is that when it comes to my sense of power, I find it hard to know where I am over identifying with my low rank, marginalising my high rank, and when I am actually trying to avoid my true low rank. It is also apparent that up until this point in my life, I have been leveraging heavily off what Julie Diamond would call my 'Social power'.

²² Mindell first mentioned this work in (The year I: Global Process Work with Planetary Tensions 1989)

“Social Power extracts its validity from other people. It’s outsourced power. It only becomes real and valid when others legitimize it”²³

In addition to the shifts in my contextual rank, I have had a value system that places value and worth on ‘being useful’ and ‘being good at what you do’. Both of these factors involve others to legitimise my value. This may have still worked in my life, were it not for the fact that I’d also moved away to a new town, where there were no others to reference my value off. My experience of competence had entirely shifted - from feeling highly competent (and high profile) in my old career, to being a stay at home mother (no profile) to feeling like a beginner in my new career. In the ‘Four stages of Learning’ model²⁴ (outlining stages of change, in sequential order from Unconscious Incompetence; Conscious Incompetence; Conscious competence; to Unconscious competence) I note I have shifted abruptly from unconscious competence to very conscious incompetence.

According to Author, teacher and family counsellor, Dorothy Corkille Briggs, strong self-respect is based on two main convictions (or two basic needs): “I am loveable” (I matter and have value because I exist); and “I am worthwhile” (I can handle myself and my environment with competence. I know I have something to offer others)²⁵. In a new career, I identify with a low sense of competence. It stands to reason then, that low sense of competence could trigger a low sense of worthiness.

Shifting this condition requires recognising my stage of learning and untangling my rank knots. Where do I have rank? I need to acknowledge the rank I do have. I also need to acknowledge the invisible cultural values around motherhood, and recognise that part of my self-doubt is caused by an attachment to feeling competent, and a resistance to being a beginner. Diamond advises to “embrace your vulnerability and embrace the experiences in your low rank roles”²⁶. I hope to shift the balance from external forms of validity to more internal ones.

“The only power that can transfer from context to context, that can withstand the limbic threat of low rank, that isn’t subject to emotional turmoil, is in-sourced power, that which comes from within. Our personal power”²⁷

In her book, Diamond goes on to offer a personal inventory process to elicit your own strengths and challenges within relation to rank and power. Through undertaking this exercise²⁸, I note my challenges: such as operating out of fear and scarcity, identifying with

²³ (Diamond 2016, p63)

²⁴ (Adams 2015)

²⁵ (Corkille Briggs 1975, p)

²⁶ (Diamond 2016, p106)

²⁷ (Diamond 2016, p63)

²⁸ It’s possible to access a free online version of this exercise:

<https://diamondleadership.com/leadership-resources/powerprint-worksheet/>

low rank a lot, and being wedded to expectations, as well as identifying strengths and rank I seldom consider: tenacity, authenticity and a deep belief that grounds me.

2. REINFORCING BEHAVIOURS AT THE EDGE

Right now I notice an intense desire to sort. I spend a lot of my time sifting, sorting, planning, making lists. Ordering things. It's not a tidy thing, it's a trying-to-get-my-head-around-this kind of thing. Sometimes it's what gets things done. Often it's edge behaviour. I notice the busyness. I notice that I am exerting a lot of effort, trying to force my understanding in a way. I'm in a 'doing' zone, but not a productive one.

The self-reflective nature of this project has revealed patterns of behaviour that I now recognise as being associated with my self-doubt. Many of these behaviours occur as a function of the edge – they exist to keep the edge system the way it is. Some of these behaviours, such as Hard Work, have been very rewarding to me in life, and have accorded me success, which makes them even harder to recognise or attend to. However, I can't ignore that hard work, shame and the internal retaliation process that comes whenever I challenge the edge, all serve to maintain or even amplify, the self-doubt process.

HARD WORK

Hard Work was recognised as one of four behaviours that maintain the Imposter Phenomenon²⁹. Overworking, and trying to work my way out of things, have all been patterns at my edge to intrinsic self-belief. I work to try and overcome the feelings of inadequacy I might be feeling. I work and get busy as an avoidance process to sitting with a low feeling state that is emerging. The work brings an immediate sense of relief from the discomfort of the edge, but only reinforces the system, as it denies me the opportunity to sink deeply into a more emergent sentient process, or a deeper feeling state.

It is here that I can see what catapulted me into the low dream process that began in my Diploma studies and brought about this thesis. When I repeatedly failed process work exams despite working really hard, I was thrown into shock. Not only was my identity as a 'good student' suddenly questionable, but the system that had functioned to reinforce that behaviour was in flux. It felt like no matter what I did it didn't help, again triggering that reflexive childhood 'failure' response.

²⁹ (Clance and Imes 1978, p244)

Right now I'm feeling down. I notice the mood. But at the same time, I'm trying to make sense of it, to work on it, to make it valuable for the thesis. It's like I'm squeezing the life out of something, trying to extract something from it. I notice the clinging again.

Hardworking is so hardwired! It's a lifetime habit - subtle but profound. Rather than be with, or listen to, or experience, the mood, I instead try to 'work' on the mood – which creates a kind of striving – a primary response to a secondary disturbance. My value gauge is still set to 'useful' rather than 'listening/being' – the hard work factor reinforces that. This perpetuates the feeling of self-doubt, as trying to 'work' on it doesn't work, the striving strangling the emergent. Enter the critic and the self-doubt process recycles.

SHAME

When I became focused on making Theatre with marginalised communities, part of it was born out of a desire to be of service, a partly misguided notion of being a 'helper', and if I'm honest, a part of it was also as a compensating factor for my un-earned privilege. In working with those communities I was very quickly exposed to the giant crevasse of terrain between my privilege and theirs. It was the beginning of a critic that said

“who are you to have worries? Look at the extraordinary lives and resilience of the people you work alongside. You have no right to feel down. For god sake, pull yourself together!”

My family brought me up with constant love and support. I had access to everything I needed. I was given every opportunity available. I was encouraged to believe I could do anything, and yet I still had self-doubt. I have felt terribly guilty for that.

This is a form of shame. I come from privilege. I try to be aware of it, and own it as much as I can. I was ashamed, that with all the privileges afforded to me, I still felt low. So I avoided feeling low, and it kept the cycle going. I would feel shame for feeling low, and then shame for feeling self-doubt that came as a result of trying to avoid feeling low. For a long time I couldn't even allow myself to use the word 'shame' – to me it has always to me been such a dramatically loaded word, and my life had been too easy to have experienced anything that warranted shame. I have been blinded by it, too ashamed to talk about shame. The shame of acknowledging my struggles with self-doubt, meant that I didn't acknowledge it. It kept that exact self-doubt in place, an important and undermining aspect of a chronic problem.³⁰

³⁰ (Scott 2014, p59)

THE INTERNAL RETALIATION

Journeying through my self-doubt desert over the last four years has involved constantly cycling through bouts of intense emotions. Each time I'd get into a self-doubt pit, I'd learn a little bit, and as I did, I'd think that I'd 'got it' and I could move on. I would begin anew, all fresh and hopeful, only to suffer an internal retaliatory backlash, an internal punishment for changing, causing me to fall into the self-doubt experience again, often even more strongly. Liz Scott describes a similar edge retaliation process in her own innerwork "*I had seemingly 'tweaked the dragon's tail' and set off a powerful reactive resistance, unwittingly amplifying all my symptoms. The intensity of response indicated I was right 'on the button' – that going for such a big goal faced and challenged the very thing that my critic maintained I couldn't do. In going against its directives, that part increased its attacks*"³¹. My experience always starts by me beating myself up about it happening again - as if it is a sign that nothing has changed.

But something is changing, ever so slightly.

Each time, I'm learning. It feels like the resurgence is more intense each time, probably because, like some sort of psychological goldfish, I am more shocked about it returning. But each time I am also able to sit with it more, notice the differences and the experience isn't lasting as long in duration. It helps to remind myself that this is a process of the edge system trying to keep itself in place. Gradually I notice the shift in my low states from sadness to a kind of grieving, and I wonder – could this be a signal that something is ending?

³¹ (Scott 2014, p43)

PART TWO:
THE POTENTIAL WITHIN SELF-DOUBT

*I have heard enough warrior stories of hero daring.
Tell me how you crumble when you hit the wall,
the place you cannot go beyond by the strength of your own will.
What carries you to the other side of that wall,
to the fragile beauty of your own humanness?*

The Dance, Oriah Mountain Dreamer

PART TWO: THE POTENTIAL WITHIN SELF-DOUBT

I start this writing process trying to eradicate my self-doubt. Sometimes, I have mistakenly believed it is eradicated, and then I rejoice as though I've found the meaning of life, only to be rudely shocked when it recurs. I wanted to be like one of those people who seem to entirely lack self-doubt. I envied them. As I begin to appreciate the multi-dimensional nature of my self-doubt, I also begin to see it as a chronic, lifelong process, one that has potential in some way - to be an ally in aligning with my deepest nature³². Part of this begins with my exploration of the secondary or lesser known aspects of my self-doubt, approaching it from the dreamy and depth levels of experience, rather than from my daily mind.

3. THE CHARACTERS – UNDERSTANDING THE FIGURES WITHIN MY SELF DOUBT

Various internal figures surface around this self-doubt project. Some have been around a long time and whose opinions and voices are well known, such as my critic, Sharon. Others emerged at peak times during the process. Over time it became clear that a few key characters kept appearing again and again. Sometimes they appeared in dreams, sometimes they were the voices in my head. I discover some of them because I go looking for them to counter the others. I'm including them here because I became aware throughout this project of how I need all of them. Let me introduce you to the team.

³² *“Chronic processes are, by nature, multi-channelled dreaming processes, in which similar messages appear in different areas of our life, indicating a deeply entrenched pattern...Over time continual wrestling and interacting with them changes and deepens the nature of our relationship to them and ourselves”* (Scott 2014, p61)



SHARON. My Critic. She means business. In 1980s power-dressing kind of way. She's strong, forceful, often unrelenting and can border on annihilating, but after years of therapy I gather that she generally just wants me to be the best I can be.



THE RIGOUR MASTER. Along with Sharon, the Rigour master has been a lead character in this drama. Rigour is a strength-based view of him. He is also very much about pressure. He wants everything to be the exact and the absolute best it can be which has a tendency to err closely into expecting perfection. The Rigour master is what drives things onwards, which is helpful, but is also impatient and exacting.



THE DO-ER. This figure is all about action. Useful generally, but really depends on the timing. Has a kind of ruthless efficiency and is all about practicality. Can be both a catalyst for change, as well as one which perpetuates avoidance by fostering busyness.



THE MOTHER. She is a very new figure, discovered in the depths of a depressive state that occurred as part of this process. She loves unconditionally, but isn't just a cheerleader for the sake of it – she'll kindly and gently tell me when I'm off track, or need to rethink things. She's the mother I aspire to be for my kids.



THE ENERGETIC ENTHUSIAST. Steve Irwin (aka The Crocodile Hunter) appears in my dreams, and the 'puppy' energy has come up in therapy and innerwork many times. Steve Irwin had a playful, curious, enthusiastic energy that I share – and am learning to let it out a bit more.



THE HOST/ SHOWMAN. Daryl Somers was a popular TV variety show host in Australia in the 1980s of my childhood. Daryl is in my childhood dream. Daryl is a shameless performer, big and bright who loves to put himself forward. He was also the host – so he kind of kept the whole show together with all its different parts.

Right now, Sharon reckons this process is ridiculous, and listing these guys has nothing to do with this thesis. Steve's curious and reckons we should dive in there and just give it a go! The mother is encouraging me to go on. The Rigour master says that if we do it, we have to do it properly. The do-er thinks we should stop arguing and just get on with it. Who knows

what Daryl is up to. This is how things work around here. So to take that all in – What do these guys have to do with understanding self-doubt?

You are shit. Your studies are shit.

You're never going to graduate. You're taking too long, not getting enough done.

There's a reason you are stuck here. Because you just aren't good enough.

It started out as a fight really. The Rigour master and Sharon were ganging up on me, Sharon was laying in repeatedly, day in, day out. Lying on my bed in despair, some part of me was able to notice that I felt like a child curled up and crying in the bottom of a well. I'm a mum, I know and see the vulnerability of small children on a daily basis. Often they just need a hug. It triggers the thought – if there is a child, maybe it might just need a hug from a mum?

I think of what an unconditionally loving mother would do. I imagine that this small child crying on the bed (me) is one of my kids. I'm far from any sort of perfect mum, but I have aspirations to be a good mother. This figure is the mother I hope to be to them.

I imagine holding her.

You're ok, I say.

You're ok.

I don't know whether I would have thought of this prior to this stage of my life as a mother. Maybe that's why that figure hasn't been around until now.

At this time, in my journey through the self-doubt desert, the mother figure is the missing link. She is needed to counter the one-sidedness of the constant internal criticism I am hoisting on myself. As a protector and encouraging figure, yet also a figure of honest truth, she becomes the first key to fostering an internal resilience.

THE POWER WITHIN MULTIPLE ROLES

I have often thought of these figures in isolation – Sharon is attacking me, so I need the Mother. One works to counter the other. However, I began to see the value of these figures, each on their own, but also in partnership with one another. Sometimes one is enough, but often, it is a combination that is required. Sometimes it is the whole team. Some partnerships need to be fostered, and others avoided. The Rigour Master and Sharon aren't a helpful combination, neither are the Do-er and the Rigour Master. Sharon and the Do-er aren't great either. However the Rigour Master is tolerable if partnered with the Mother. There is something incredibly relieving about having an internal team working for me. It no longer feels like I am solely responsible. It relieves an internal pressure for one part of me to

find all the answers and get myself out. It alleviates the sense that it is all 'my' fault, and that 'I' am failing. I am tired and often feel like I have nothing left. My team broadens my concept of self, to something more multi-dimensional.

if I don't have answers, I can always outsource to the team.

The thing about being stuck in a self-doubt desert by yourself is that it's lonely. When you're at the mercy of it, you lose any sense of detachment. You feel like everything is on your shoulders, no-one really understands. And yes, you can have a very understanding partner and a great therapist, but they are not with you, in the thick of it, day in and out, for years. My internal figures are always with me. I just have to get better at seeing them as a resource.

I have spent much of my working life as a Theatre-maker, so it makes sense that the idea of roles brings me comfort in some way. I understand them, they are part of the fabric of how I view the world. The development of the Role concept in sociology and psychology was born out of theatrical roots³³. However, oddly enough, my reflection on internal teamwork is in part influenced by a televised news story I came across about an incredible woman with Dissociative Identity Disorder, Jeni Haynes. Jeni, suffering extreme trauma as a child, has developed more than 2000 personalities. In the interview, her psychiatrist discussed how dissociation is just an incredibly sophisticated coping mechanism of the brain. He noted that we "we can all dissociate if we are subjected to sufficient distress"³⁴. Jeni went on to describe how, as a child, she had survived extreme levels of abuse by having different personalities (figures or roles) take over. At one point, there was even a rostering system of roles whom would face her abuser. They were her team, her "army" and they worked together for her. In this way she survived the unspeakable.

It makes me ask: why wait until we are subjected to sufficient distress? Why not harness this 'incredibly sophisticated' ability now in a more fluid way - with awareness and intention?

The founder of psychodrama and sociodrama, Jacob Moreno, brought attention to the distinction between how and where roles function in life – that they can't be simply limited to social roles, but that rather they need to be seen within three dimensions: social roles, representing the social dimension, psychosomatic roles of the physical dimension and psychodramatic roles, which relate to the psychological expression of the self.

The function of the role is to enter the unconscious from the social world and bring shape and order to it [...] the individual craves to embody far more roles than those he allowed to act out in life, and even within the same role, one or more varieties of it. Every individual is filled with different roles in which he wants to become active and that are present in him at different stages of development. (Moreno 1987, p63)

³³ (Moreno 1987, p62)

³⁴ (Haynes n.d.)

All these roles or figures, given my history, are a natural way of me bringing shape and order to my sense of self, in all its diversity. It is curious to think that as my self-doubt complex is being triggered at this point in my life, potentially as my sense of self is shifting, so too is it mirrored in the shifting of the internal relationships between the roles. I not only need to understand them individually, but also create an awareness of how I can better access their wisdom by using different combinations of them. Arnold Mindell speaks of this when he says,

*We need a 'work' that demands from us nothing less than complete access to all our parts and selves. Nothing else is satisfying.*³⁵

I need all of them at this time, and as a group facilitator I know that the relationships between the role and the group are always more than the sum of their parts. Teamwork creates something that the individual roles cannot achieve alone. I find that growing my awareness of the internal roles around in any given moment, and fostering some combinations and avoiding others, provides a new resource to draw upon in relation to my self-doubt. So if Sharon is giving me a hard time, I imagine what the mother would say about that. If I can feel my pressure mounting, I try to slow things down to work out which internal figures are there – often the Rigour master and the Do-er have teamed up and I need to separate them out. One might be valuable right now, but the two together aren't working. It is a quick and accessible tool that I can use to manage my internal self-doubt when it appears in the thick of daily life or work.

The figures I know least, are the Steve Irwin and Daryl Somers figures. As I write this, I catch a glimmer of an idea – what Steve would say

Well go on – ask me about it now! I mean, I just reckon it's great. Here you have, all these amazing different parts, all completely different right? I mean look, you've got old, young, men, women – so different from just the one dimension you see on the outside. And we've got no idea! I mean, imagine if we all could learn about all the amazingly different parts we have inside, and give them a bit more air? Imagine how it would change how hard we were on ourselves? Imagine how it would change how we related to each other in the world? Imagine the possibilities of what that would mean – for what we could do both individually and collectively! Crikey!

It's nice to let him out – he's so infectious! He's an anti-dote to the self-doubt and I wonder why I have such an edge to this role in myself. I suspect it is tied up to my low rank process – at some point in my life I have made a connection between enthusiasm and naivety/ youth, and so I've perhaps tried to repress some of my enthusiastic energy lest it shows up my inexperience. When I step into his role fully, I feel a surge of energy and a kind of

³⁵ (Mindell and Mindell 1992, p227)

unbounded freedom. I was more acquainted with this role when I was younger. At my age and in my stage of life, he's become more secondary to me – and now exists as an emergent energy. I'm looking forward to getting to know Steve more.

4. SELF-DOUBT AS A MOOD AND ALTERED STATE

Is Self-doubt a mood? I certainly experience it that way. Sometimes it feels like such a heavy weight.

Feeling pretty low and depressed right now. And sad. Feels like I try so hard and I'm working so hard and all I'd like is to just earn some money and be able to affirm my family's belief and trust in me. I feel like I'm letting them down, not pulling my weight. I've taken a risk, and what for? I'm just a burden. I took the risk and now they are having to suffer for my stupid decisions. Why do I do this to myself?

According to Arnold Mindell, moods resemble force fields such as magnetism³⁶. They appear to exert force or move objects about at a distance. This is often why we feel powerless against them, pulled and trapped by them. In his comparison between psychology and quantum physics, he notes three characteristics that moods share with force fields. They can foster: 1) creation (of new figures/ new particles); 2) annihilation (an altered state in which your normal self is knocked out/ a particle colliding with its antiparticle destroying both and releasing energy and other particles); and 3) detachment. Mindell notes that in shamanic traditions, shamans would often follow the detachment option, looking upon moods as an opportunity to detach from a daily reality and engage with spirit figures, ghosts and allies. Mindell states that behind both moods and force fields lie “*virtual, dreamlike figures and their potential direction or path*”³⁷.

We feel moods when we can't fully embody an emotional state with intention, or as Mindell would say, when we can't embody the energy of that potential direction or path. The mood thus becomes a threshold or edge between daily life and something deeper. At this stage, my experience of self-doubt feels like annihilation, and I wonder (and let's face it, hope!) that it could also potentially be a pre-cursor to some sort of creation process trying to be born.

³⁶ (A. Mindell 2007, p91)

³⁷ (A. Mindell 2007, p93)

DREAMING BIG AND NOT SIZING UP: THE ROLE OF HIGH AND LOW DREAMS

My experience of wandering about in the self-doubt landscape is more than self-criticism, it is a mood state. More so, it is an experience of constantly being flung between high and low moods.

Mindell coined the terms 'High and low dreams' to describe a set of polarities that individuals and groups fall into and oscillate between. High dreams are your highest hopes, low dreams are a bursting of that bubble, a loss of hope. High dreams can describe your ideal world that you want to manifest, the low dream an experience of bitter disappointment, shock, the absence of any hope. These 'dreams' or fantasies, are always forming in relation to ourselves, each other, and groups. They are merely ends of a polarity spectrum, and one that is not fixed, but rather manifest in a moment in time. Diamond and Jones noted how this presents when working with clients. An inability to live ones hopes and dreams can bring a sense of despair, and clients presenting with this often are in a mood of inevitability and hopelessness, characterised with verbal presentations such as 'always/never/if only/once/ever'³⁸.

Mindell described the high dream as "your deepest beliefs and highest hopes...the world you want to create"³⁹. The function of high and low dreams depends on the circumstances they present in. The upside of high dreams is that they keep you engaged in life (in my case, my drive) and can be a motivating force. It's similar to hope. We need it. However, the downside is that they can cut you off from reality (in my case always having expectations rather than just accepting what is happening) and make you co-dependent (holding out and waiting for the high dream to arrive). Like the polarities of yin and yang, they are both compensating factors for the opposite state, and as such, each tends to begin within the other state. They are also often energetic disturbances to the status quo – and can function as a kind of energetic signal or doorway to a deeper process that hasn't yet been embodied.

I had a recurrent high dream/fantasy about international recognition – being recognised and celebrated for creating something original and helpful in the world. The way the high and low dream manifested for me personally is that either I was feeling low about my life circumstances, and would actively seek out the high dream to make myself feel better, or the high dream appeared as a spontaneous fantasy when I was in the midst of feeling low. So I would try and avoid the sadness and grief of my life, by seeking out my ideal hopes, my high dream. Although I could access the high dream for a moment, by its nature, it would trigger the low dream, which I would then try to avoid. It became an endless mood cycle, fuelled by a kind of High Dream addiction process.

³⁸ (Diamond and Spark-Jones 2004, p120)

³⁹ (A. Mindell 1995, p199)

THE HIGH DREAM ADDICTION AND THE IMPOSTER PHENOMENON

Until this thesis, I was completely blind to how wedded I have been to my high dream. I had been taught to reach for your goals, be ambitious, dream big. When the odds are against you, get positive! So, when I was feeling down, I'd reach for that high dream. Given my disappointment with life circumstances, I had been reaching for it a lot. The high dream gave me hope in times of despair and for that I am grateful. However, the constant reaching had many ramifications, including disappointment because I had expectations around life or others, relationships or events, and most painfully in that I couldn't live up to what I felt I was supposed to be. It was distressing, and that distress had become acutely amplified over the recent years. An ongoing permeating sense of failed expectations ruled my life, and even though I knew it was causing me grief, I couldn't seem to stop the cycle.

I began to realise that the problem was not the high dream itself, but rather my process of clinging to it. It seems I have mistakenly taken the energetic source of the high dream expression and given it more weight than it is due. My high dream had morphed with 'life goals' and 'purpose in life', 'lifelong dreams' and 'what I was put on this earth to do'. Consequently, each time I felt that high dream energy I'd take it as some sort of confirmation that my destiny was happening, giving me momentary solace. At a time where I was feeling decidedly disconnected from the world and hopeless in so many avenues of my life, I tried to avoid my sadness by seeking out my high dream. That potentially may have worked if I had been just seeking the embodied energy of it in the moment. As it was born out of avoiding a naturally occurring sadness and grieving process, and I could never live up to the one-dimensional ideals that my high dream referenced, I would fail, and this sent me crashing down. Without awareness of what was happening, it created a brutal process where I equated my high dream with a life purpose and then tore myself to shreds when it (inevitably) continued to not eventuate. It felt like failing at my own destiny. It was a setup. A painful setup.

"When we look back, it may seem as if our high dreams had to be exploded in order to prepare the ground for an even more comprehensive view of the world" (A. Mindell 1995, p201)

With a new awareness of my addiction to my high dream, I start a process of tracking when the high and low dream appear naturally and what follows. I notice that when I'm feeling low, and in the midst of the low dream, the high dream intrudes.

I am sitting at my desk. I can feel my stress levels rising. I feel overwhelmed, I'm not coping with a work situation, which is quickly shifting into feeling completely inadequate, rapidly catastrophizing into questioning my involvement in the project at all. What am I doing here? Sharon my critic is saying "They've figured you out. They must regret taking you on"

...and in a flash fantasy I imagine the opposite - them saying

“Wow, what Beck offers is so different. It has changed the way we work, and it’s really valuable and if you need to deal with this stuff, go to her, she’s our go-to on that, she’s got a way of being able to get really deep and unlock those stalemates”

And because I’m in a low mood, Sharon is standing by. She leaps on it like a tiger attacking its prey – quick, ruthless, efficient.

“You are so ridiculous! As if that will ever happen” she says.

And because it is a high dream fantasy and amplified (read unrealistic) – internally I agree with Sharon and proceed to beat myself up for ever having those thoughts in the first place, reinforcing the downward spiral.

The Imposter phenomenon study made reference to this exact fantasy (Clance and Imes 1978) which has subsequently shed a lot of light on my high dream obsession and how entangled it has become with my identity. In one of the therapeutic interventions described in the study, they got the woman to role-play the opposite of the view they had of themselves as dumb. When the women embodied a role of being bright and smart, the researchers subsequently uncovered a pattern: that many of the women harboured a secret fantasy that they were somehow special and outstanding – “a facet of the self-image that lurks beneath the overriding feeling of self-doubt”⁴⁰.

This was *exactly* my experience. It was as if there was a sense of an underlying destiny of greatness that the flickering high dream tapped into. I can’t explain how shocked I was when I read it – it was like someone opening a secret box that I’d hidden even to myself. Personally, the idea that I secretly think myself extraordinary, feels shameful and embarrassing. Naming this process, and discovering that other women feel it too, has been incredibly relieving and enabled me to look at it with curiosity rather than hide it in mortification. I realise that this had been a completely blind hook for me – I had a secret unacknowledged aspect of my identity that thought I was special and destined for great things. It explains why I have become so wedded to the high dream fantasies – why I felt they were a part of the destiny I was meant to live out. And I was so secretly embarrassed and ashamed of this, I never acknowledged it, and thus it was able to attach itself seamlessly to the high dream process. In Process Work terms, we could frame the findings from the Imposter phenomenon study as a mythic edge process, a long term life challenge that continues to play out and grow with us through life. In my particular case, it involves my edge to the full expression of the energetic source of both the sadness underneath the self-doubt and the greatness of the fantasy. By not fully expressing the sadness of the self-doubt, the high dream fantasy initially occurs as a compensating factor. However, because of the shame associated with feeling the fantasy, there was an edge to express it fully and it

⁴⁰ (Clance and Imes 1978, p246)

was repressed. The energy, having not been fully embodied, then emerged as a 'hook' further perpetuating the self-doubt/fantasy (low dream/high dream) cycle.

LEANING INTO THE MOMENTARY ENERGY OF THE HIGH AND LOW DREAM

Now that I can separate out the addictive nature and pull of the high dream fantasy, I want to better understand the naturally occurring, rather than sought after, presence of my high and low dreams, to uncover their inherent purpose.

High and low dreams, as natural energetic occurrences, point to something trying to emerge, and if noted with awareness can be actively used to align oneself with one's deeper process. Take the previous example of the high dream interjecting in the low. It was a compensating factor, but within it was also an opportunity.

The way my high dream fantasy usually happens is incredibly quick, a flickering moment. Consequently, it has been either easy to dismiss, or because it often gives me solace from feeling bad about myself, I just enjoy it (and secretly identify with it as it serves that part of my identity). With awareness of it, I start to pick apart its function in the moment – as a secondary disturber of the status quo. I hypothesise that if I can catch and hold that fantasy down for a moment – I can uncover what is trying to happen.

If we continue to take the previous example, instead of clinging to the hope that one day, someone will value me and say how great I am and what I offer, I start by taking the projections out of the way and ask – how could I value *myself* in this moment?

How could I value myself more right now?

I'm feeling pretty shit right now, so I can't think of anything.

Ok Baby steps.

I look at what I wanted others to notice about me in the fantasy - a call to deepness, to bring depth and awareness to people's engagements with each other.

That is a deep core value that I hold. It is important to me, and it's bigger than me, it sits beyond my little worried self.

It is relieving in itself to name it, and reminds me of its presence.

I can appreciate and value that part of myself in the moment, it's important.

My mood shifts.

I am not always able to completely express the feeling, but I am growing muscle in doing it, and that is something.

EXPRESSING AND INTEGRATING THE HIGH/LOW DREAM DYNAMIC

I have heard a number of my teachers over the years talk anecdotally about the need to ‘put some feet on the high dream’, a reference to grounding and integration. Understanding the function of high and low dreams as doors leading to a potential emergent process, enables me to discover different ways I can integrate the meaning that is trying to happen through their existence in the first place.

Ultimately a full expression of the experience is required. Nowhere is this more clear to me than in my experiences of the low dream.

Right now, as I’m writing, Sharon has called in a few followers to stage an intervention. There’s a big mob of them, all agreeing with each other. They’re saying. You’re stating the obvious. Can this even be defined as a thesis? You’re so up yourself. You’re writing the obvious as if it’s original.

A small voice in me tries to argue back but it’s a pretty lame argument, as if it’s already being convinced by the others “but not everyone writes ground-breaking theses – it needs to serve them in their lives”.

The voice that tries to counteract, does so using comparison to others. It’s a poor strategy. I’ve spent my life comparing myself to others and it fails me constantly. I’m never good enough because there is always someone else out there better at whatever the thing is I’m focusing on. This creates a reinforcing neural pathway, or internal narrative, of never being good enough. Self-doubt, by its nature, reinforces self-doubt.

I’ve come to recognise that the low dream for me personally, is a deeply feeling state. I’ve been trying to avoid those feelings. Throughout this writing project, I am gradually learning to open up to the expression of those states. And opportunities don’t take long to reveal themselves. Following the realisation of the link between my high dream addiction and the imposter Phenomenon, I think I’ve solved it all. It is done. Ha! As if. Here it is again.

I’m in a panic, I feel stress rising, a kind of internal lock-down happening.

The idea that I have to hand this thesis over, now, is constellating a process. I notice that my critic has come back with a vengeance – I feel a deep sadness of disappointment. It’s compounded by the situation. Sharon is saying

“Here you are writing about self-doubt and yet you’re still here in this mess now. What a fraud.”

I feel like a bubble has burst – I realise that despite thinking I understood it, I am still holding to the high dream of this thesis being groundbreaking. And now having to hand over this very rough, unformed first draft, and knowing that it is so far from groundbreaking, I’m low, feeling like crap, like I’m a failure, a hoax.

It's hard to put the depth of this feeling into words – it is like my entire life purpose is void.

My self-doubt presents as such a black and white experience. There's so little grey or shade in there. If it isn't stellar, it's shit. There's no nuance, and in the moment, it feels like no alternatives.

I start by at least noticing I've been captured by the pull of the fantasy, the 'ground-breaking thesis' high dream. And now here I am in the low.

Knowing what I do so far, I know that avoiding the feelings won't help. I attempt to sit with the sadness of the disappointment. I look down and notice my hands doing an involuntary movement. I know this movement – I recognise it, because my feet sometimes do something similar. I find it very soothing, it's like an involuntary self-soothing movement. I've never really tried to understand it – so I try to follow it -

It's a movement where the fingers and thumb of one hand, slide in snugly to fit within the other hand. I draw it. I feel it again. I notice its qualities: it's not soft – it is quite pressured, like I need to really feel the other side. It's a bit like buckle or clasp that's just a really satisfying fit when it falls into place.

It provides warmth. It's strong. It holds me where I am, supports me. It reminds me of a type of hug –the sort of hug you get from someone when something really distressing has happened - that doesn't try to change things, but rather just kind of holds you in a strong way, so you feel held to be able to handle it. I reflect on what this means. Right now, I don't need to do anything, I just need to hold myself, support myself through the reaction. So I do.

I sit with the feeling further, curious to see if there is a deeper process trying to emerge. I feel the fit. The snug, firm, fit.

I wonder about a place in nature – my mind jumps to an image of me curled up within the crevice of rock, like the rock was made for me. Nature holding me. It's as if nature herself is saying, you fit here. You belong. You're ok.

Tears come.

I feel raw. Humble. I'm enough.

It feels like this slow process of accepting my sadness is shifting something deeply in me. I am slowly extracting myself from the entanglement of a life-long web I've been caught in. I realise that I don't need to do anything drastic, just catching it, noticing and listening will be enough.

A few days later, feeling like now I'm really beginning to break through this self-doubt complex, it recurs suddenly - an internal retaliation, another whipping backlash. It's a reaction to the deep shift this knowledge has brought about in my notion of self, the edge trying to reinforce itself.

I notice that knowing about my self-doubt, my high dream 'fantasy' isn't enough today. Something else is around. There is a secondary sadness now, a kind of grieving that the dream of 'being outstanding' that I've lived with secretly my whole life is not true.

It feels brutal. Like someone is smashing my life, my worldview.

...

With my newfound perspective, I see that I have spent my life using it as a kind of safety net. A background support that gets me through tough times, a secret knowing that somehow, someday, it will all be alright because I'm going to be amazing, and that will make everything OK. It's an intoxicating thought. And here now, the idea that my magical reality is just an illusion – feels like a black hole.

A nothingness.

I think a part of me is really scared that I will no longer have hope, or drive, or be the energised person I've been.

I feel a deep sense of loss. I think I'm grieving.

I decide to hold myself in this place. Catch the Do-er that wants to do something about it. Just sit and listen and hold myself.

I feel stripped back. Raw.

I sit with it.

After a while, beneath it all I notice that there is something so true, real and vital about this state. It's pure.

Something is starting to play out. I am getting better at just being. Being with the feelings, not trying to 'do' something about them. And so I wonder, whether I am getting better at just being 'me'?

Understanding the role that High and Low dreams have played in my process has been crucial to developing an ability to externally witness my own self-doubt. By being able to view my mood in the moment through the lens of high and low dreams, I have become

better able to recognise the self-doubt as something trying to emerge in the instance it happens, an expression of energy that serves its purpose in the moment⁴¹.

Recognising the patterns, and then opening myself up to my formerly disavowed sadness, has provided me with an access to sentience or a deep essence level experience I have struggled to access before.

Here, in this writing project, I find it waiting for me in my deepest, darkest processes. Accessing those disavowed feelings, and just feeling them, has been a fast-track to a sense of deep connection and oneness. I find within that essence level, an alternative sense of identity that isn't tied up with comparison, or what others think, but rather something deeper, fuller and without expectation.

5. UNDESIRABLE BEHAVIOURS AS EMERGENT PATTERNS OVER THE EDGE

My self-doubt is often triggered by things I don't do the same as everyone else. These behaviour processes, patterns of behaviour that are entwined with who I am, are things I don't like about myself, part of the self-doubt arsenal. They are 'my way of doing things' that stubbornly persist despite my efforts at changing them. Julie Diamond looks to harness these 'deficits' as personal power sources.

When we embrace our total self – the parts we like, and the ones we've been conditioned not to- then we have nothing to hide. Our inner freedom is the foundation for our personal power. (Diamond 2016, p96)

Throughout this period of my life, culminating in this writing project, these behaviours that have started out as challenges and disturbances, are slowly being transformed into allies. I notice that ironically, these particular ways of doing things that I don't like about myself, are becoming my key modes of transport across this self-doubt desert.

FROM 'DUMB' AND 'SLOW' TO THE SLOW BREW

Being 'dumb' is a childhood fear. Again, referenced in the Imposter phenomenon, the authors note "realising that she cannot live up to this standard, she jumps to the conclusion that she must be dumb. She is not a genius; therefore, she must be an intellectual imposter"⁴². What makes it such a powerful hook is that it speaks to something I feel I can't change. The fear is that I will forever be locked into a low level of intelligence, which by its

⁴¹ "Hold onto self-descriptions and images as long as they are valid, remembering that in essence they are some sort of time spirit" (Mindell and Mindell 1992, p229)

⁴² (Clance and Imes 1978, p243)

very nature stops me from learning my way out of it. The idea of things being unchangeable has been terrifying to me.

The 'slowness' comes from the fact that I don't tend to synthesize information quickly.

I'm trying to write rationally and in sequence. But it's just not working. I'm making connections quickly but my mind tends to shoot off sparks in all directions like someone accidentally lit a box of fireworks. I feel like I'm running around trying to catch and contain the sparks, lest I lose them. In the process I lose my sense of continuity. I then spend what seems like an inordinate amount of time trying to make sense of all the sparks. The ideas that emerge for this thesis all seem vaguely related in some way. I can feel it, I just can't see it. Do they have a bigger meaning as a whole? ...There is something about how the whole process makes me feel something...I can sense it...but goddamn it is so slow and ANNOYING.

I often feel like others around me seem to be able to effortlessly look at the scenario and quickly ascertain that a) there was a box of fireworks b) someone accidentally lit it c) it caused multiple explosions and therefore d) it should be kept away from others. Meanwhile I'm still caught in the excitement of the fireworks, the feeling of the experience, and wondering about what it all means on other levels.

Recently a kind colleague reframed my contribution, when I apologised for how slow I was at grasping the content of a group we were a part of. She reframed that I offer something different – that I tend to sink deeper and offer a depth perspective that often affects the nature of the item being discussed. I do seek to understand things deeply, and am curious about the deeper relational aspects of things in the field. More to the point, I tend to 'feel' things first, rather than think about them and I think part of my slowness in synthesizing is that generally I've tried to ignore my feelings, rather than harness them. I hypothesise that the more I get comfortable with accepting, understanding and trusting my feeling nature, the quicker I'll be able to make sense of it, or perhaps the more comfortable I'll get with just feeling and taking my time.

Writing this thesis has been a good example. I feel like I've spent a year working and reworking the nature of the connections born out of this reflective project – but this process has happened enough now in so many other areas of my life that I can see the pattern for what it is, and tentatively, trust it. It always tends to constellate in the end.

Here my rigour master comes to the fore -

We haven't quite got to the bottom of it yet – so we can't finish right now.

This is the good part of his role – he supports me to stay there, sticking it out until I feel the knowing in an embodied way. Only problem is that he follows it with:

Why can't we get to the bottom of it! You are taking TOO LONG! THIS IS NEVER GOING TO END!"

The Mother comes in handy here:

it's Ok – you know you get there in the end, and it's always worth the wait. You wouldn't be happy if you didn't get to the bottom of it.

FROM 'SELF-ABSORBED' AND 'LOST' TO 'DEEPLY LISTENING'

I have often been torn between both an intense desire to turn inwards and understand what I was feeling, and an external family notion that 'navel-gazing' is indulgent and selfish. Yet, despite all my efforts - the pull to focus within has been inexhaustible.

I remember an early boyfriend who used to laugh at me always saying that I needed time by myself 'to think'. He laughed because he thought that it implied I wasn't thinking otherwise. What I was really trying to express, was that I needed to stop and listen to my feelings. I remember acutely a moment when we had been travelling together in South America, and had spent the previous fortnight living collectively with about 40 volunteers in a biological station in the Ecuadorian Amazon rainforest. I felt like I had to be in relationship with all these people constantly – there was no reprieve, and I was struggling with jealousy and insecurity. It was building and building and I couldn't process it. One day we went on a field trip – visiting a local village where they were going to teach us how to weave. Of all the things I'm interested in, this was my ideal. It is the sort of thing I travel for. But I was overwhelmed with feelings that I couldn't process and because of that I couldn't really function. As we hiked through the rainforest to the village, I just stopped suddenly and sat down. I was consumed with emotions and I wasn't going any further. "Go ahead without me and meet me back here on your way back" I said. "I need to think". I just sat there for hours - listening, drawing and writing until I could release what I felt and get a better sense of what was happening to me.

Here again, I am writing about myself, in order to understand. I initially tried to avoid it because it felt self-indulgent, but no matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't. Then, I have been trying over and over again to 'do' this thesis. Over time, I am beginning to catch the 'doing' element. The 'doing' is to avoid the feeling of being lost. But if instead I can catch the lost feeling – slow down and see it as an opportunity to check in – it can shift to a 'listening'⁴³ process. By listening, it speaks to the indigenous concept of Dadirri, an "Inner

⁴³ My concept of listening has been greatly influenced by Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr and the concept of 'Dadirri' (Ungunmerr n.d.). The word, concept and spiritual practice that is *dadirri* (*da-did-ee*) is from the Ngan'gikurunggurr and Ngen'giwumirri languages of the

*deep listening and quiet, still awareness*⁴⁴ which includes a sense of reciprocity, both attending to the deep flow of nature, but also receiving a guidance that comes from the deep. Judy Atkinson writes:

“Dadirri at its deepest level is the search for understanding and meaning. It is listening and learning at its most profound level – more than just listening by the ear, but listening from the heart” (Atkinson 2002, p19)

I’m writing and writing and trying to understand. But there is a clinging nature – it’s exhausting and it becomes a bit relentless, like I can’t stop. It feels fruitless and pointless like its turning on itself. It is a straining that I recognise.

I choose this time instead to slow down and listen. I hear the wind in the trees. I listen to the wind. It’s soothing. I decide to amplify the aural channel since it is not often occupied for me. I listen and notice what sound emerges from my mouth. It’s a kind of chant/drone...and after a while of it comes with a rhythm. I walk with this rhythm to get my cup of tea. I return to my desk still stomping the rhythm with my feet..I get a flash image – first my Process Work student dream (wind blowing through Arny and Amy Mindell’s house) then a woman standing in the house, wind blowing, hair billowing as she chants, arms out in and through and with the wind. A shamanic woman, wild, full of power, channelling the wind. I step into this figure and embody it, until it drops away.

I wonder if I have an edge to stepping into my full power? I’m reminded of my daughter, who appears to relish feeling her own power. As the youngest child, she spends a lot of time feeling like she’s behind and it’s not fair. But when she feels strong she loves it. She grins and wants to wrestle and prove she can do it over and over again. Perhaps I need to consider this for myself? What is my shamanic woman offering me today for my writing task? I step into her again. She is bold. “Listen but don’t angst” she says simply. There’s a ruthlessly clear quality about it.

This project has revealed to me that I can embrace the reflective part of myself that is curious about how I am feeling, but that I need to catch how I do it. Ironically, my desire to understand, if it becomes a straining/striving, can get in the way of deep understanding.

Aboriginal peoples of the Daly River region (Northern Territory, Australia). I use the term with permission from Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr.

⁴⁴ (Ungunmerr n.d.)

6. BECOMING

When it came to the final stages of writing this thesis – I just couldn't finish it. It felt endless, like some sort of cruel mindtrap. The final pieces of the puzzle ultimately arrived - in the form of a series of 'finish processes' enabling me to complete and release this chapter in my life.

The first 'finish' starts when I book a 4 day retreat to escape my work and family commitments and immerse myself in the thesis-writing process. I was really looking forward to it. I'd always wanted to 'go away and write'. It felt like something important. Plus, I'd given myself quite a tight deadline to turn the thesis around and time was a'ticking. I needed the 4 days if I was going to be able complete it in time.

It was school holidays in the lead up, which is always a difficult balancing act trying to juggle the kids and work. I hadn't been able to write much recently, and I was feeling it. I made sure I was extra organised so that I could make the most of my time away. I made sure I was on top of all my other commitments in order to make it happen. I planned and made lists. I even thought about how I could treat myself throughout the process – what snacks would I like? What sort of qualities does the room have to have? What fun things could I do for myself when I've run out of steam? I was feeling a little run down, trying to manage everything in the lead up. It's Ok, I have my 4 days. Here come my 4 days I think. Little signs were emerging of my stress. A headcold. A case of shingles appearing on my arm. By the time I get to the day before my time away, I am exhausted. A kind of can't-get-out-of-the-house exhausted. I fight. For god sake, not now. This is the culmination of ten years of study - this can't be happening now. Then I quickly adjust - that's Ok, I think – even if I just need to rest for a day, I'll still have 3 days. I push on, get in the car and drive the few hours to my accommodation. By the time I get there, it hits me – the flu. I spend the entire 4 days and the following week – not even able to look at my thesis.

Sitting in the sun, unable to do anything else – I can see how much pressure I've been putting on myself for the 4 days. The expectations were high. And hidden within them, were high dream notions of what it meant to be a writer and to blast out a thesis loaded with insight because I immersed myself in it. It was all high dream fantasy. Sigh.

The flu brings with it a process of total surrender. I have to relinquish all my ideals for the thesis, my hopes for graduating in time. It strips me of everything - all my energy, my drive, my passion and pins me to the wall.

Given that I was too sick to fall back on my usual ways of working my way through it, I had no choice but to just give up. Hello Death and rebirth.

When I did get a fraction of energy back, I reflected on what this might mean for me – the flu was a ruthless blast that cut through. It tore through everything and pointed to what was most important. There was a clarity about it all. No getting caught up in the headiness of

ideas. In my raw, barely functional state, I became more attuned to what was important. Little things. I noticed how nice it is to just sit in the sun. To feel nurtured by nature. I felt fortunate for the wonderful place I lived in, I noticed things about my kids. All simple things that I could appreciate – things that make life worth living. The energy of the flu was inherently a kind of precise force. And within it..tiny seeds were beginning to poke their heads up through the sand. I knew I just had to calibrate myself to the most important learnings, knowing that things still move, no matter what I do. No super sense of confidence and self-worth, no amazing writing retreat, no incredible academic breakthroughs, just the energy of life itself.

There has been a pattern throughout this process of needing to completely surrender in order to be able to fully cross my edge into something else.

But what am I surrendering to?

Again getting closer to the finish line I can feel the pressure mounting. I try to be cool about it, but that deadline is looming. LOOMING. I know I am missing something. But I bloody can't get it. Then a series of dreams sweep through.

I'm on the dancefloor with this guy who likes me. It's like the beginning of attraction in the relationship. Watching me dance, he says "You're really dynamic when you let go"

Talk about cutting through! Doesn't get much more direct than that.

It is time for me to surrender and actually let go of the focus on my self-doubt complex within this thesis, in order to re-discover my dynamism.

I start noticing how I am being drawn to bursts of colour in nature. Brightness is flirting with me everywhere. A flower, the sole explosion of pink amongst the green in the garden. The thrilling flash of red appearing under the tail of a black cockatoo. The wattle in full electric yellow bloom. Also other odd things, like being obsessed with the flamenco dancer emoji on my phone, finding a way to put her in every message! Colour, energy and movement are starting to pull me towards them. Hello Daryl!

Previously, I had needed to turn toward my sadness and go there. I needed to sink deep into it to find my own stillness and depth. But that time is ending, and staying in this reflective frame is beginning to feel stifling – I am ready to shed my skin.

Here we are at the end of winter. Spring is on her way, my studies, after ten years, are finishing. I am leaving the constraints of the student role behind and stepping into something else. I have felt so weighed down by sadness and obligation these last four years, and yet within that, I have grown some pretty deep roots. I needed to write this out. Now it's time to burst forth into something new, whatever it is. But I feel that it's bright.

I recently read an interview with Worimi woman, artist, and mother of two, Lydia Fairhall and her experience really correlated with mine. Speaking of how she personally needed to shift from the activist role to something else, when the activist role no longer worked for her, she noted *“If you go back to energy and how energy and matter works, we know that what you focus on expands. All of these Lores that we live by, spiritually and culturally, they’re also the laws that are just in nature. It’s that very beginning of the conversation. The grit is so important in making that pearl in the oyster...the big shifts for me personally have been when I heavily focused with a great deal of clarity on the things that are strong and beautiful and bright and light. And they have expanded”* (Lieberman 2019)

This gets me part of the way, but surprise! There are more finishes waiting. I was still stressing about completing my Diploma, running out of time. I felt it as an intense pressure that I just couldn’t shake. Along comes another dream – Steve Irwin comes to visit.

Steve lives next door. We are starting to have a relationship but it is new and sort of a secret. There’s a group of people coming over to his house for some sort of gathering before a trip away – I’m coming with the group. I notice when I get there that he’s tidied up his house and it’s a transformation – he’s done it thoroughly, but quickly and efficiently too. I didn’t know that about him, I think. We sit next to each other and hold hands. It’s our way of coming out to the group, open, but no overt announcements. I notice that they notice. Afterwards I stick around to say goodbye to him – I’m going away for a while – but the relationship feels like it’s in a good place.

Ah Steve. You turned up right in time! I have learnt that when I’m in alignment with my process, time becomes irrelevant. Things just happen effortlessly. Right now, I need to become Steve and become the energy within him.

I take a moment to act as though I’m Steve, to try and get a sense of his energy. When I get there – it starts as enthusiasm, then beyond it, is exuberance. And then when I really get into it deeply at its essence is love. He loves nature with a kind of fierce, exuberant love.

I feel like I’ve found it. This writing self-doubt project is done. Woo hoo!

I get a bit of writing done, but then life gets in the way. Shit happens – the whole section I write from the Steve energy doesn’t save and I lose it all. I spend what feels like my last day of available time, trying to write and get nothing done. I can’t believe it. I start to really crumble – all my shit comes back in a kind of last ditch shit hurricane – all of it. In my face.

I Scream. Cry. I RAGE.

I can *feel* this power and I know it’s there, but half the time I just feel so at the mercy of it.

I go to bed early. Put my dream diary out hoping that something will resolve overnight...

I'm working at some sort of clinic –for expectant mothers. I arrive but something doesn't feel right. I speak to the other girl who is the co-ordinator. She's on the phone to someone who is telling her what to do. She mentions something about hands. The atmosphere is dread – like you know something is really, really, wrong but you don't know what it is yet. When she gets off the phone – I ask about the hands. She tries to brush me off – but I insist, and realising I'm not going to let it go, and knowing the doors are locked and we can't go anywhere, she reveals that when the mothers arrive, we are going to nail all the expectant mothers hands to the wall in some sort of ritualistic crucifixion sacrifice. In fear and shock I wake up.

Urgh. Ok.

I think about the least known part of the dream. It's whoever is calling the shots on the phone. But they are so ghostlike I can't get much of a grip on them. I think about what has been going on for me in the past day. The mounting pressure. How I feel it. It's like something bigger is calling the shots, putting a vice on my head, squeezing, squeezing – an internal pain like they are pushing in through my ears. I know it's the same force – who's doing this? I draw it. Then in a flash I get a fleeting scene in my head -

A giant figure – squeezing, squeezing the tiny brain of the other. I take it further - squeeze and squeeze until pop! The head explodes and a baby flies out -

I need to know this figure. I had thought all this pressure was the Rigour master but this is different – it's bigger and almost demonic. I realise she's like the character of Miss Trunchbull in Roald Dahl's *Matilda*⁴⁵. Larger than life. I try to gossip about the figure in order to elicit more information⁴⁶. She's so big. She's so scary. She doesn't think, she's like a bulldozer. I notice an involuntary movement – I've started to rock. I rock forward, rock and rock and rock, getting more and more powerful as I go. I start to feel this power, this force in my body. I feel it. It's not a thinking thing. It's an energetic, visceral, bodily thing. It's no wonder I haven't been able to find it by writing about it! I need to *move*.

I decide to go for a run.

I'm bloody unfit, but it feels good. I feel the force pumping through my veins. As I run, the insights start to flow - I need to physically experience my power. It's not enough to know, or think or write.

I need to physically be it.

⁴⁵ (Dahl 2016)

⁴⁶ Arnold Mindell refers to gossiping as a technique you can use in uncovering unconscious or forbidden information through 'unwitting amplification and reflection' (A. Mindell 2001, p76)

When I know it's around, but can't access it in normal ways – I can just become it by moving.

You know that student dream I mentioned previously – the one of the wind going through Arnold and Amy Mindell's house? Well the original detail of the dream was that I was standing below looking up at their house, which in the dream was built on the rooves of all the other houses, a kind of box filled entirely with louvre windows on all four sides. In the dream I looked up at those louvre windows and thought - but how do they write their books with all that wind blowing?

This thesis has become my answer to my own question: how to write with the wind blowing. I had to learn to read the weather patterns, then surrender to the wind, and finally I had to become the wind itself.

PART THREE:
TOWARDS BUILDING SELF BELIEF

The force is strong with this one.
Darth Vader

PART THREE: TOWARDS BUILDING SELF BELIEF

SUMMARY

I set out in this project to understand my self-doubt complex - both the causes and dynamics as they play out, and also explore what was emergent in the process at this stage of my life.

I learnt that my self-doubt exists as a mythic and complex edge system, born out of early childhood experiences which match with the Imposter phenomenon. These experiences created a strong edge figure of a child who doesn't trust that she can do things – resulting in a childhood emotional response of “I'm a failure” to experiences of task related difficulty. Cultural notions of value and worth further perpetuate the phenomenon as I have internalised an extrinsic motivation to be useful, to compensate for a need to feel valuable. By actively trying to be 'valuable' in my primary process, it takes me further away from my secondary process of valuing myself, which creates incongruence and reinforces the feelings of self-doubt. Recent changes to my life circumstances have further revealed an over identification with social rank, and a new experience of low rank. Attempts to avoid or disavow the experience of sadness about the change in circumstances have created a dynamic that amplifies my experiences of self-doubt as a secondary disturbance. I have identified that these causes and a combination of reinforcing behaviours all kept the identity system in place – behaviours such as overcompensating with hard work, and avoiding feelings of shame.

When approaching my self-doubt experience as a disturbance signalling a secondary, emergent process I have discovered that I have a cast of internal figures that can relieve the pressure of feeling at the mercy of the self-doubt, and can be actively harnessed to find meaning in the process. The more I get to know the figures, the less susceptible I am to being annihilated by my own self-doubt.

In exploring the experience of it as a mood, I recognise part of my self-doubt process occurred as a high and low dream dynamic, entangled in an identity process linked with the Imposter phenomenon. By appreciating the function of the low and high dreams, as doors to an emergent process trying to happen and as compensating factors for each other, I can grasp why I had felt so flung around by them. My addiction to my high dream was to avoid feelings of sadness. By crossing my edge to fully feeling the sadness in the low dream, and by leaning into, and sitting within, some of my darkest places, I have found a path to sentient experience and a deeper sense of self. This has been harrowing at times. Yet it was ultimately this very part of the process that provided the biggest, and deepest breakthrough. Once this threshold had been crossed, when I went there, stuck it out and survived, it felt released - paving the way for a turning upwards and outwards to integration

and the world. A journey down into the depths before reaching up to the light – my own personal creation myth referencing the darkest time before the dawn.

In looking at disliked personal behavioural patterns that I often felt self-doubt about, I have discovered allied processes that when embraced rather than avoided, give me an integrated pathway to navigate life that lessens feelings of self-doubt, and make me feel more connected and aligned with my own energy. This writing project alone has taught me to stay close to my experience and write from that, rather than what I think others want to hear. I have found my own style – it's not academic, but it's me. And I like it that way.

Finally, I have needed to uncover all these parts to be able to embrace the full diversity of all that I am. I had to fully surrender, to die and die again, in order to consciously release myself from old roles and create space for the new. Now I need to move beyond my mind, to physically become the new roles that are emerging, in order to fully experience the energy that is trying to burst forth out of all the pressure within the self-doubt complex.

BEING ME IN THE WORLD

So am I healed? Have I built an intrinsic sense of self-belief? Have I got to a part of my life where 'being me' is enough? Sometimes.

Let's get this straight. My self-doubt has not shifted to -

I FEEL LIKE I CAN DO ANYTHING!

My (fantasy) ideal of having self-belief was that I never doubted myself ever again and felt endlessly confident all the time. Damn sneaky High Dream – I see you there hiding behind that bush!

What has changed is that I don't feel tyrannised by the high dream addiction any more. It's been a mighty reveal, one that can't be undone. I can continue to recognise the hook now. This has had a ripple effect – I am catastrophising less when things don't work, because I can now recognise that it is just a challenge to be solved, rather than a deeper sign that I am failing as a human being. It has removed much of the emotional impact and toll. I now understand what happens when I get caught in my self-doubt complex. It doesn't stop me getting caught up – it still happens. But I can separate the edge behaviour out from it now, and see the components for what they are, knowing the role they are playing in the moment, in the thick of it. I can meta-communicate that to myself, and the ability to slow it down and know that, allows me to feel safe enough to lean into the underlying process to see *why* it is happening, *now*, so that I can harness the inherent wisdom that is trying to come from the experience in the first place. Knowing that I can go to those depths, and be OK, gives me the confidence to know I can do it again.

Feeling like 'I'm enough' is going to be an ongoing practice. It doesn't always come easily to me. I'm shifting my internal story to be one that is more useful, less damaging, and more unconditionally loving of me. I'm growing my relationship to my self-doubt as an ally, recognising it as a signal to go deep and listen to an energy trying to be lived. The key to an ongoing deep sense of self belief for me is linked to following my energy rather than my mind. It's a process of slowing down, deep listening, following the energy, and then *being* the energy, rather than any expectation of what that might mean. Yesterday it was about listening to the brightness and colour that was calling me – and to follow it, without the constraints of expectation. Today I am the force.

Intrinsic self-belief doesn't look like I thought it would. In fact, I'm not even sure what I've found is intrinsic self-belief. That is what I'd gone looking for in a primary way, from a primary perspective. What has emerged out of this discovery is something of its own.

It isn't static, and it certainly isn't singular. Sometimes it's more like a raw humility. A deeply humble experience of acceptance. Open and honest without pre-conceived ideas of what things might be, or whether or not I might be able to do them. Sometimes it's abandon and wildness. Sometimes it's colour and brightness and fun. And sometimes it is just pure power and force. All of these states feel both new now, and yet known, like they've been around all my life. I recognise them. In some ways I feel like I'm returning to different parts of myself I knew when I was younger – but I never had access to all of them at once before, and never with the awareness I have as a result of this process. Now they feel more grounded and rooted and I know I'm more than any of them alone. I don't have to be strength and force, or brightness or enthusiasm or deep stillness all the time, but rather recognise that energy when it is around, and have the courage and confidence to follow and be it in the moment.

I needed to truly and deeply understand the functional components of my self-doubt before I could begin walking towards self-belief. It's as though I needed to build the map in order to be able to understand where I'd come from, how I'd got there, where I was. It was built to be able to find alternative routes through the landscape, but the map and those routes weren't enough on their own.

“Rather than place the emphasis on our present or future identities, dream figures, fairytale figures and problems, why not place it on our constantly changing eternal nature, which has its own innate foundations in awareness?” (Mindell and Mindell 1992, p228)

The beauty of Process Work, in all of its complexity, is that it offers this – a way of understanding our inner and relational life from all these points of view – from the daily psychology born out of family history, to the inner dreaming lands of figures and roles. But where it truly comes into its own for me personally, is extending beyond what we know and understand in our minds, to the physical embodiment of energetic forces, and an endless source of being in nature.

What I'd really sought wasn't a map, but rather a way to listen deeply – to follow myself, in connection with the world. Through getting to know my self-doubt complex so intimately, I have found a way that I can connect and align myself with my path in an ongoing way. By letting go of habitual and unhelpful ways, knowing deeply the breadth and diversity of all that I am, I can feel confident in bringing the fullness of that out into the world, when it feels aligned. This is me.

Here I am.

In all my ever-changing glory.

PART FOUR:
GRAB YOUR BACKPACK, IT'S TIME TO GO ON AN
ADVENTURE!

Practical and creative exercises to explore the
meaning in your self-doubt

PART FOUR: PACK YOUR BACKPACK, IT'S TIME TO GO ON AN ADVENTURE!

A SELF-DOUBT WORKBOOK

This Workbook comes in two parts. The first part: *Mapping the Existing self-doubt landscape*, aims to bring awareness to how your self-doubt plays out now. The second part: *Adventuring beyond the Known*, explores the possibilities and potential hidden within your self-doubt experience from now on.

HOW TO USE IT

The exercises following are Innerwork exercises. You can do these alone, or if you are less experienced with Process Work, it might be helpful to do them with a trusted friend where each of you can lead the other through the exercise and then share your experiences.

MAPPING THE EXISTING SELF-DOUBT LANDSCAPE

KNOW THE PATTERNS

1. How do you experience your self-doubt? List the different ways it comes up. Be as explicit as you can.
2. Reflect on your trigger points by journaling for a week. Notice and note down when your self-doubt appears. Try and catch the fleeting thoughts. What exactly do those thoughts say? What has happened just before that moment to cause them? Don't try and change anything just notice and write it down. After a week, read back over it and see if you can see any repeating patterns.

REFLECT ON HISTORY, CULTURAL INFLUENCES AND WHERE YOU FEEL A LACK OF POWER

Think about where some of your self-doubt ideas may have come from.

- Were there incidents in childhood where you felt others doubted your abilities, or that made you doubt yourself?
- What cultural ideas are you exposed to that potentially support or reinforce these ideas?
- Are you feeling low rank? If yes, consider when you feel low rank and when you feel high rank. Think about where others might view your rank. Ideally do an inventory – Julie Diamonds powerprint exercise is ideal for this, and luckily for us you can get a free download.

<https://diamondleadership.com/leadership-resources/powerprint-worksheet/>

SEE YOUR SELF-DOUBT AS A SYSTEM

Consider your findings from the previous questions. Using the knowledge you've gained, create a causal loop diagram that represents the conditions that keep your self-doubt in place.

To create a causal loop diagram you will need to fill in points in each column in the worksheet on the next page.

Direct causes – list the triggers you identified in the 'Know the patterns' exercise above.

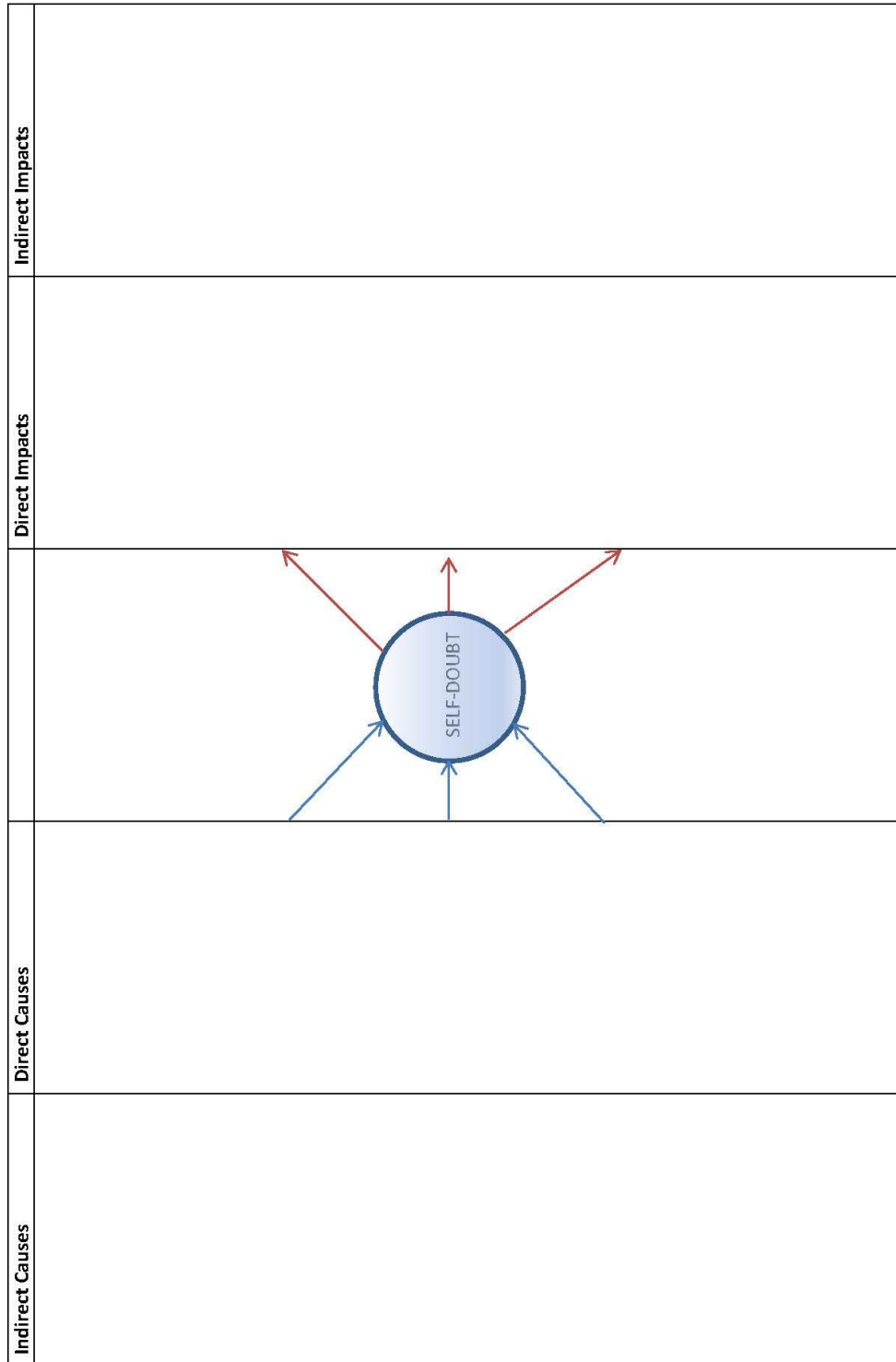
Indirect causes – list the influences you noted in your reflections on history, cultural values and rank. Connect backwards from the direct causes to the indirect causes.

Direct Impacts – list the ways you experience your self-doubt (part 1 in 'Know the patterns' exercise)

Indirect Impacts – list the wider ramifications of these experiences.

Once you've plotted in the whole picture, see if there are things you've missed and add them in. Start to make connections between impacts to causes and see if you can find reinforcing loops. Here's an example of my process -





1. Looking at your causal loop map – what are the behaviours that reinforce the system and keep it the way it is? This gives you an insight into where interventions are likely to have the most impact.
 - Do you have behaviours that give you temporary relief from the self-doubt? Could these be compensating behaviours?
 - Could shame play a role in this for you? If yes, what?
 - Looking at the map – what part do feelings play in this picture? Are they in your map? If not, put them in. Are there feelings that come up as part of this process that you try and avoid?
2. Harness your own mental and emotional insight. Reflect on the knowledge that you have across.
 - What insight does this bring for you?
 - What feelings do you notice are around?

ADVENTURING BEYOND THE KNOWN –

HARNESSING INTERNAL FIGURES AROUND YOUR SELF DOUBT

CREATIVE EXERCISE #1: YOUR CAST OF CHARACTERS

1. Think of a scenario that triggers your self-doubt.
2. Think about the internal figures that you know already around your self-doubt. Reflect on them, their qualities and give them names if they don't already have them. This process helps to externalise these mindsets that influence us. If you haven't thought of this before, start with the internal critic. This is likely to be a negative internal commentary that you hear around your self-doubt. The figures that consistently show up in your dreams are also a good place to start. Consider this list as the beginning of your cast of characters.
3. Reflect on *the feeling* experience your self-doubt. What does it feel like? If you could personify or symbolise this feeling in a figure what would it be? Eg. Child, baby, animal, spirit, something that doesn't like sunlight, etc. Give it a name. Feel free to be as creative as you can. For the purpose of this exercise I'll refer to this character as Character A.
4. Now for an Improvised writing exercise. You are going to create a story using a number of components and a story structure. You can choose to do this in writing or cartoon format, depending on what you feel like.
The components to use are the figures you have listed so far in point 2 and 3.
The story structure is:
 - Character A (from point 3) is at the mercy of some other characters (the critical ones from point 2).
 - A crisis/challenge occurs involving character A
 - A new mystery figure comes in to help Character A and together they triumph/ resolve the crisis/challenge.
5. Reflection. Who was the mystery character? What qualities did they have that assisted the other figure?
6. Become the mystery character for a few minutes. Breathe as they breathe, move as they move. Do they have anything to say about the issue you outlined in point 1?
7. Give the mystery character a name and consider how you could foster these qualities more in yourself to support you around your self-doubt.
8. Ongoing reflection. Get to know your internal cast of characters. What partnerships are helpful? What aren't? Can you foster partnerships? Or get creative with how you see them in your life? Think about the characters that you don't know as well, and make an effort to learn more about them.

SELF DOUBT & GENERAL MOODS

CREATIVE EXERCISE #2: UNCOVERING THE HIDDEN ENERGY WITHIN MOODS.

1. Remember a time when there was a mood around your self-doubt, or notice one when you're in it. If you can catch it, give it a name. Here comes the '...'.
2. Do an expressive drawing of the mood, in whatever way works for you. Don't think about it too much – it's not an art commission! Some ideas for how to do an expressive drawing: let your hand just try and express the energy and see what comes out; pick colours that communicate the feeling; or imagine you are trying to draw a picture to explain to a child. Notice as you go things like the pressure of how you draw – is it a light airy feeling, or are you nearly scratching a hole through the paper? Stick it up on the wall and leave the room. Go make yourself a cup of tea or something!
3. Come back and notice the first visual thing that you notice about the picture – what is your eye drawn to? Try and catch the very first thing, before your brain kicks in and tries to decide cerebrally.
4. Take a minute to write a few descriptive words that describe whatever that first thing is: anything that comes to mind eg. intensity/ Argh!/ Ripping/ Bright/ flow/ straight/ whirlpool etc.
5. Try and walk/move the quality in the words. Give yourself 3-5 mins to really surrender to the movement. The more you can use your whole body, the more effective this will be. However, if you can't for whatever reason – confine the movement to your hand, foot, or one part of the body. Play with making it bigger or doing it in slow motion. Consider this movement/energy a natural force of life, whatever it is. Practice deep listening – listen to the feeling of embodying this energy.
6. Embody the energy for 1 more minute, and this time as you do so, ask – what feels good about this? Write a few notes down about what feels good about the energy.
7. Reflect on the following questions, preferably making notes as you go:
 - Are there parts of your life this energy exists already? Maybe you recognise it from your dreams? See if you can catch it next time you feel it 😊
 - How/where could you live out this energy more in your life?
 - How could this energy be helpful in the situations where your self-doubt arises?

EXPLORING HIGH AND LOW DREAMS AROUND SELF DOUBT

High and low dreams are particular types of moods. Start by noticing moods around your self-doubt. Is this mood related to your highest hopes or conversely of not achieving that? If this is the case, you are likely experiencing high and low dreams. High and low dreams are momentary energy signals that are important and have meaning for the *moment and circumstances they happen in*. See if you can hone your ability to notice the mood in the moment it happens. It can be useful to track this by writing down what you notice, and particularly what triggered the mood in the first place.

CREATIVE EXERCISE #3: THE GODDESS OF HIGH DREAMING

1. Let the high dream out. What is it exactly that is happening in your high dream? What are the hopes? Write it out, or draw a picture – actually make it explicit. Note that high dreams can have shameful components⁴⁷ so explicitly naming them for yourself is important to be able to separate it out from shame's grasp.
2. Give yourself a few minutes to dream into or imagine the high dream happening. If this is too difficult for you, try alternatively to write a fantasy story about it, or draw a cartoon sequence of the events unfolding. Eg. my high dream about international recognition – when I imagine getting that recognition, I imagine a spotlight – feeling 'seen' and 'for people to be really appreciative of what I offer'. Now, quickly jot down lists of words that sum up the visual/sounds/feelings within it. Think of this like rapid stream of consciousness. Mine were: light; big; bright; warmth; appreciated.
3. Write these words at the top of a separate piece of paper.
4. Now we can get really creative! Look at the words at the top of the page and imagine/dream up an Omnipotent Being/God or Goddess/Witch or Wizard/Superhero that is known for these qualities. Go bananas and have a play with it. Draw it. Give the figure a name.
5. Stand up as the figure. What is its posture like? How do they hold their arms? What's the facial expression they hold? If they could make a sound what would it be? Notice what being this feels like. Jot down a few words that sum up the *spirit* of this figure
6. Think back to the self-doubt that triggered the high dream. How can you bring more of this spirit to those circumstances?

As high dreams are ephemeral – the idea here is that by undertaking these exercises in relation to memories, you can build an experiential knowledge bank, later harnessing your own wisdom when you notice a similar instance or circumstance.

⁴⁷ This is particularly the case culturally. For example in Australia 'being great/achieving success' is looked down upon, commonly known as the "tall poppy syndrome".

CREATIVE EXERCISE #4: DEPTH WORK, LOW DREAMS, THE BODY AND NATURE

The thing I have found most useful about working with low dreams is training my awareness to be curious about them, rather than avoid them. This is easier said than done. However, in doing exercises like the one below, you train your inner explorer, growing your muscles to harness the wisdom within the low dream in relation to your self-doubt.

1. Notice the low mood.
2. Start by setting yourself some boundaries to help hold yourself. Low moods are often frightening, hence our desire to avoid them. Set a time limit that you are going to allow yourself to explore the feelings of the low mood. 3-5 mins is a good starting place. Set a timer if it helps you feel safer.
3. Once the time has started, give yourself permission to feel the mood fully *in your body*. Keep your awareness primed on your bodily experience, rather than the commentary going on in your head. Notice: where is it located in your body? What are the qualities of the feeling? Does it feel heavy/ light/ pressured/ pointed/ squishy? Gently notice these elements as they occur.
4. After the time has finished, jot down a few of the qualities you noticed.
5. Imagine an animal, plant, place in nature or natural occurrence that has these qualities.
6. You may like to think about the role this animal/plant/natural occurrence plays within its own natural ecosystem.
7. Dream into becoming this animal/plant/natural occurrence – fulfilling its role in its environment, doing what it does.
8. Muse on how these same qualities could be needed in relationship to your situation that triggered the low dream.

UNWANTED BEHAVIOURS AS SELF-DOUBT SUPER-POWERS

Recognise the potential in your behaviours/style that trigger your self-doubt. What are those behaviours that are related to, or trigger your self-doubt, that you've tried to change, but you just can't shake? Try undertaking these creative exercises in relationship to them and see what happens.

CREATIVE EXERCISE #5: WAYS TO DISCOVER YOUR OWN WEIRDASS SUPERPOWERS

- a. **Imagine one of these behaviours was your secret super-power.** Write a ridiculously fictional story about them as a super-power. Draw the lead character in all their ridiculous glory. I mean costume, the works. Read back the story when you are done. What made you smile? Look out for the things that surprised you.
- b. **Reframe the behaviour.** Imagine a close friend that has these qualities and is beating themselves up about them – how would you reframe it to them?
- c. **Look for allies** – what people or characters do you know that have these qualities and it really works for them? If you can't think of anyone, make it up.
- d. **Write chapter 2.** Repeat the writing exercise this time with more specifics – the setting of the story is now a circumstance that usually triggers your self-doubt. How does the character use their super-powers to address the issue?
- e. **Reflect** on how these behaviours might support you around your self-doubt.
- f. **Embrace it.** Once you've got a bit more comfortable with the qualities, think about how you can do them *more*, not less, in your life.

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