

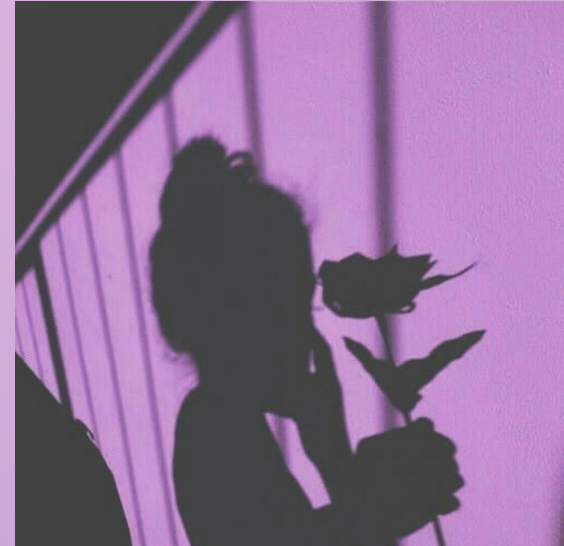
An illustration of a woman with a long black ponytail, wearing glasses, a white t-shirt, and blue overalls. She is holding a large, dark blue rectangular sign with both hands. The background is a solid light purple color with stylized white and light purple clouds. The sign has the title 'Confronting Our Shadow' in white text, and the author's name 'By Mikayla LaFleur' in smaller white text below it.

# Confronting Our Shadow

By Mikayla LaFleur

# Shadow work

Shadow work is the practice of working with/exploring one's shadow self.



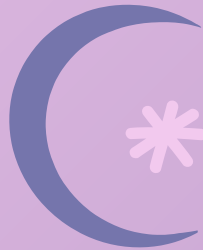
# What is the shadow self?



The shadow self is the parts of oneself that are repressed, forgotten, disowned, or rejected. It is the unconscious parts of our psyche, the parts of ourselves that we can not see or do not want to see.

## Why Shadow Work?

Since I have not been able to go out into the world much during this pandemic, I decided to journey inwards instead. I've been trying to use this time for inner work and healing, and when my friend told me about shadow work I thought it might be an interesting tool for self reflection and growth.



# Carl Jung

- ❖ Psychologist who first wrote about the concept of the shadow self
- ❖ Early supporter of Freud
- ❖ His psychoanalytic theory was similar to Freud's with a few key differences, one of which is the concept of the shadow



## How the shadow is formed

- ❖ The shadow emerges during childhood and further develops later in life as a result of our experiences.
- ❖ The shadow usually forms as a result of social norms or adapting to our environment.
- ❖ We are taught that certain behaviors and emotions are “bad” and so we learn to repress them and they become a part of our shadow self. (similar to operant conditioning)



# The Dangers of Repressing one's Shadow Self

- ❖ The shadow can operate without us being aware of it
- ❖ Our repressed parts will turn against us
- ❖ We tend to dislike qualities in other people that we repress in ourselves
- ❖ Missed learning opportunity- our dark side can be an excellent teacher



# Research Questions

What effect does shadow work through means of art making have on one's psyche and overall mental health?

What are some artistic shadow work exercises and how do they work?

What is the experience of creating shadow work art like for the practitioner?







# Methodology

I conducted a self study and additionally studied three participants in order to gather data

The three participants were all female friends of mine in their 20's

I had the participants partake in a brief shadow work activity through the means of art making and then answer a list of questions

For the self study, I did a series of artmaking shadow work activities and wrote in a journal to record my mental state throughout the process



## Participant Activity

I asked the participants to start with a short meditation. Then they did some meditative drawing, where they drew for 5 minutes without thinking about the final product or planning what they were going to draw next. The purpose of this exercise is to silence the conscious mind and let the subconscious be expressed through drawing (or any medium of choice).

The second activity was to focus on a specific emotion that is associated with the shadow self. In this case I asked them to meditate on the word shame and then draw whatever came to mind.

After this the participants were asked to repeat the same process, but instead of thinking of shame they were asked to focus on their needs, feelings, desires and/or drives.

Lastly, the participant where given the option to be done with the activity or to continue creating art thinking about other subject matter related to the shadow self such as their fears, doubts, anger, sadness, trauma or pain.

## Questions:

1. How did you feel before making this art?
2. How do you feel after making this art?
3. Have you ever heard of shadow work before?
4. Have you ever done any shadow work before? If so, what specifically did you do?
5. What did you learn about yourself?
6. Was any part of your subconscious revealed? If so what?
7. Do you feel like you know yourself better?
8. Are there any parts of yourself that you reject, repress or are ashamed of?
9. Did these exercises help you to accept these parts of yourself more? How?
10. What do you think about this art making process?
11. Is this different from how you usually make art? How?
12. Do you have any other comments about this experience or shadow work in general?



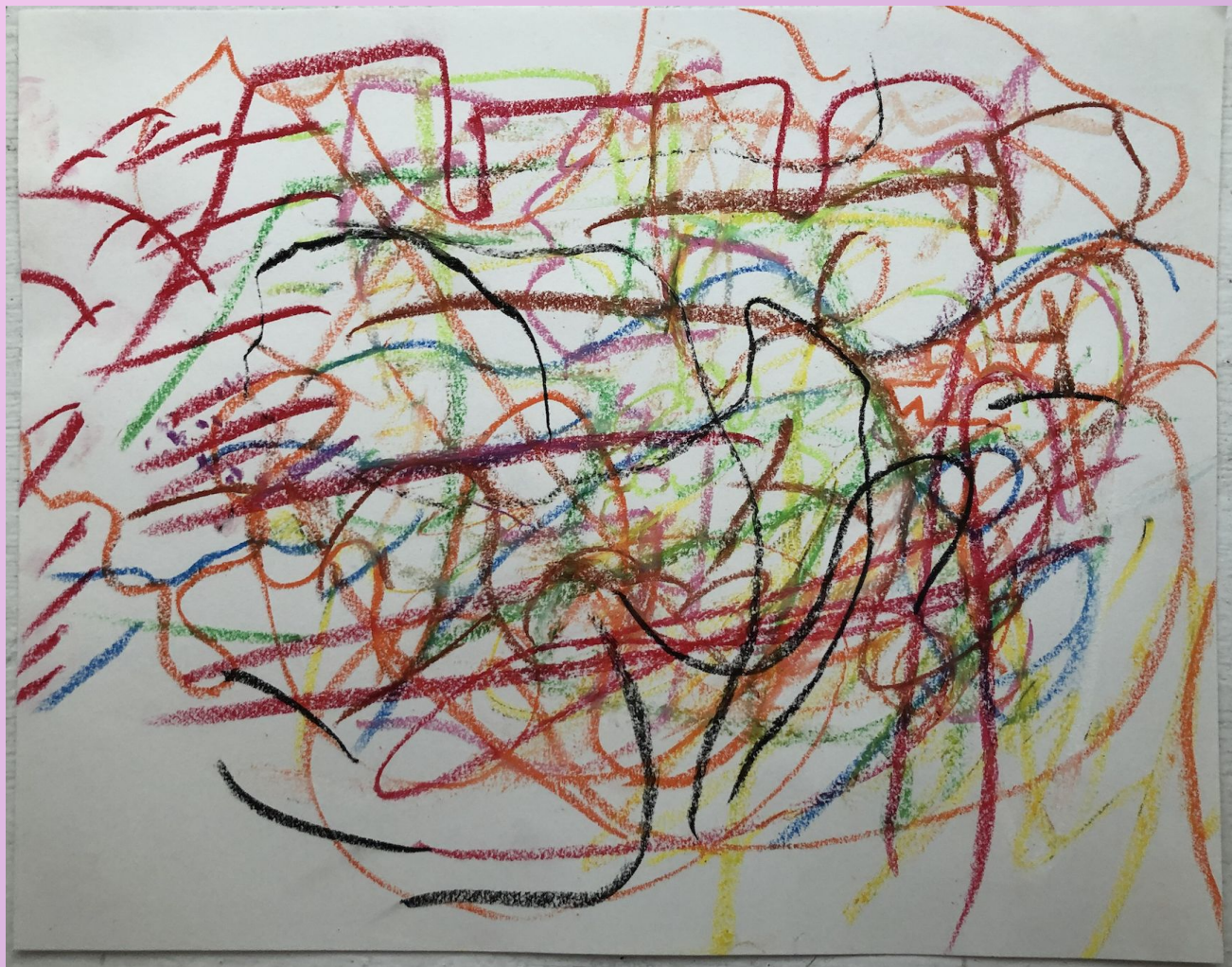


## Disclaimer

Shadow work is a completely introspective process. The art made from this process is not meant to be shown to an audience. It is made for therapeutic purposes only, with no intention of having a beautiful final product, since the final product is not meant to be seen. I am essentially letting you sit in on my therapy sessions with myself.

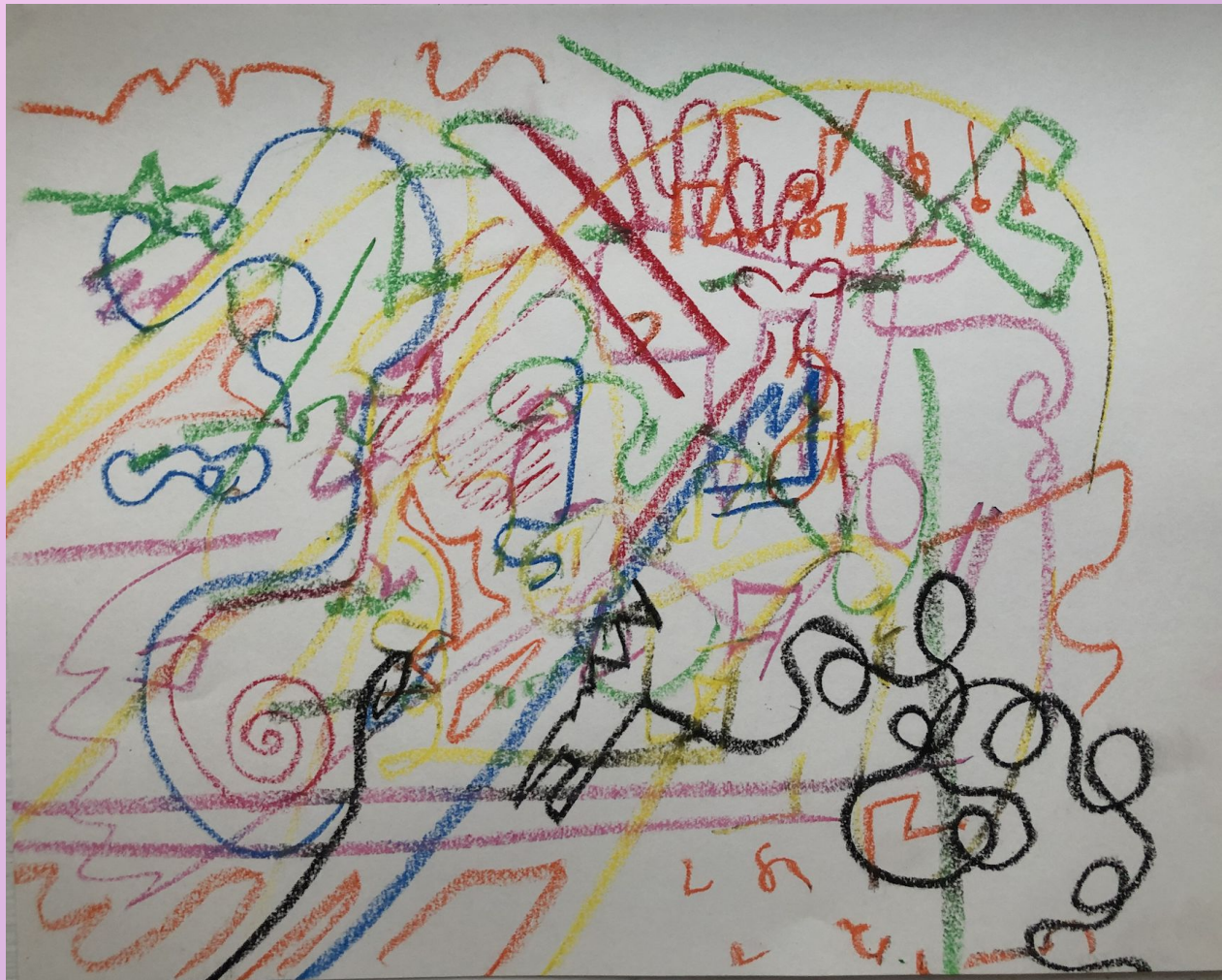
# Meditative Drawings





Meditative drawing #1  
Oil pastel on paper  
11x14 inches





Meditative drawing #2  
Oil pastel on paper  
11x14 inches

# Spontaneous Drawing

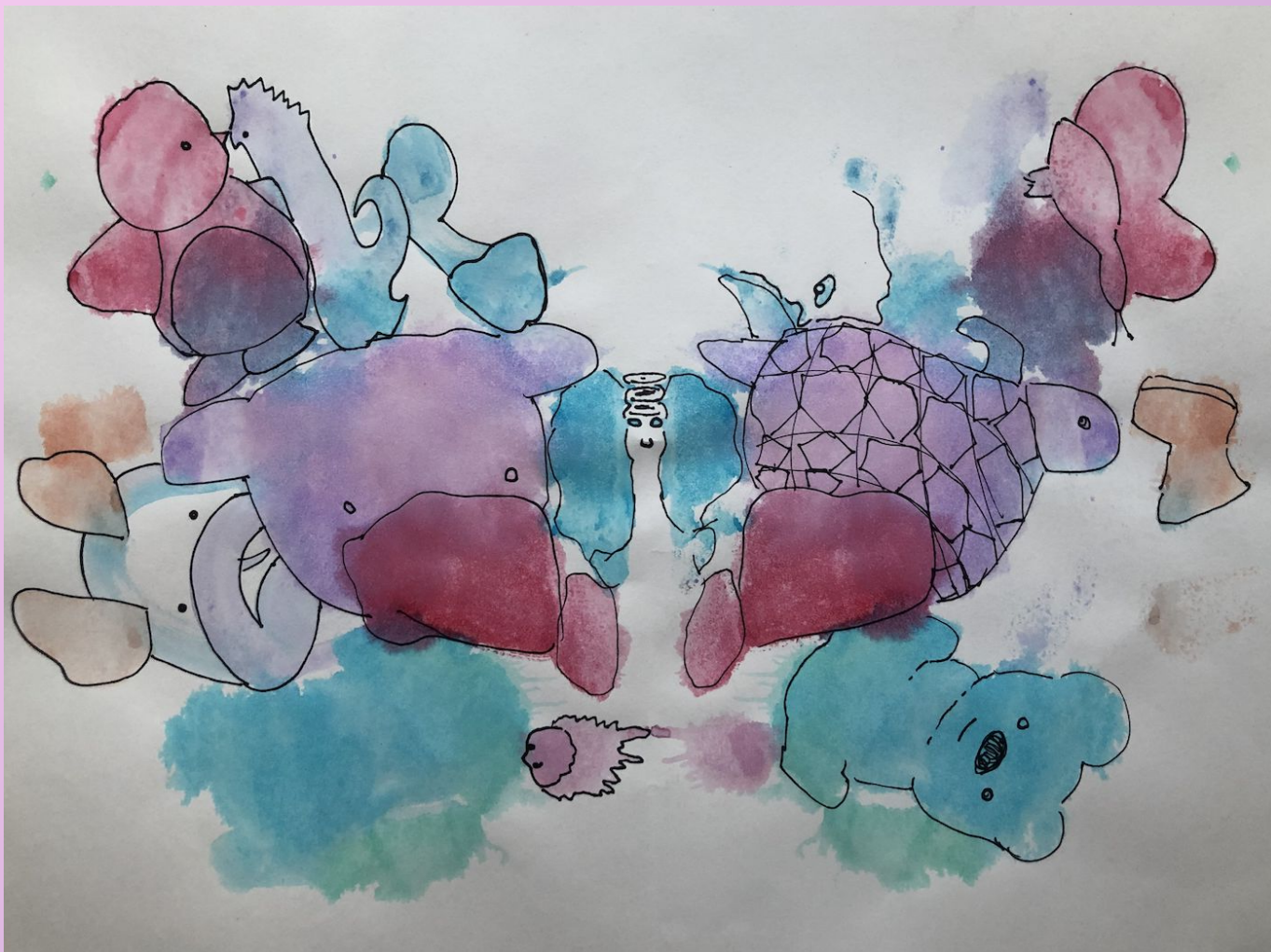
I did two different spontaneous drawing activities. The first one was on a blank piece of white paper. I attempted to silence my conscious mind and then drew whatever came up, with the intention of revealing the subconscious. The second type of spontaneous drawing I did was inspired by the infamous ink blot test. I painted with watercolor and then folded the paper in half. Then I drew what I saw.







Spontaneous Drawing #2  
Pen on paper  
11x14 inches



Paint-blot drawing #1  
Watercolor and pen on paper  
11x14 inches





Paint-blot drawing #2  
Watercolor and pen on paper  
11x14 inches



Paint-blot drawing #3  
Watercolor and pen on paper  
11x14 inches



# Song Association

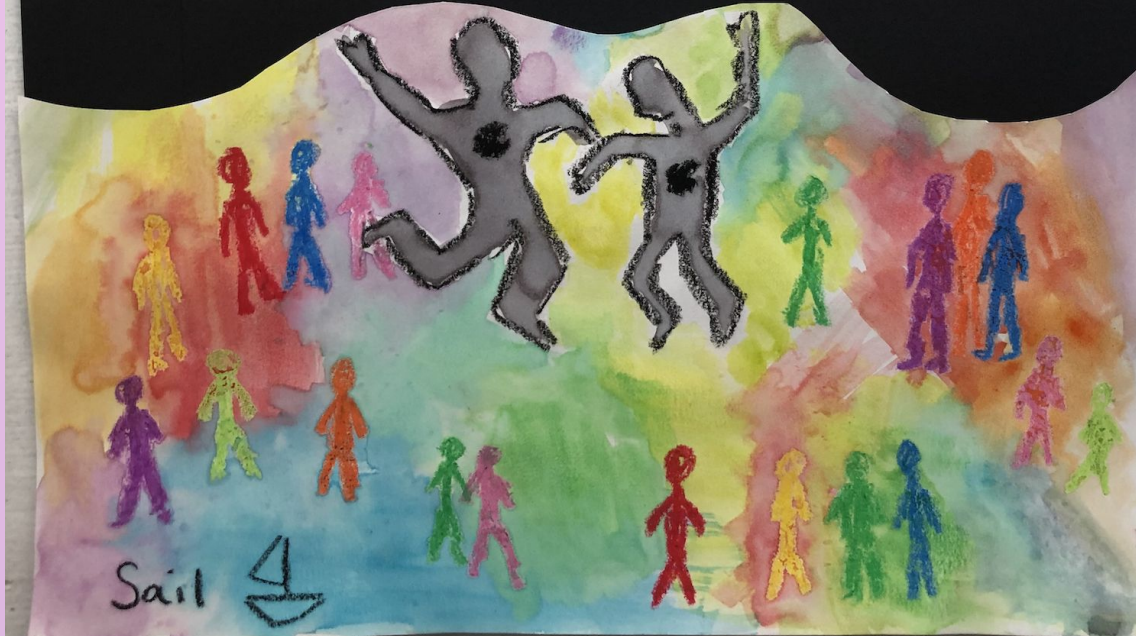
For this activity, I played songs that I listened to at various periods in my life and then drew whatever came up while listening to them. Music can be a very powerful memory tool, which is why we put the alphabet to a song and why music is sometimes used in treatment for alzheimer's patients. For this reason, I thought that music might bring up repressed memories or subconscious feelings.



Song Association #1  
Oil Pastel and watercolor on paper  
11x14 inches



Maybe I'm a diffent breed.  
Blaim it on my ADD.  
This is how an angel dies.  
Maybe I should cry for help. Maybe I  
should Kill  
Myself



Song Association #2  
Oil Pastel and watercolor on paper  
14x14 inches



Song Association #3  
Oil Pastel and watercolor on paper  
11x14 inches





Song Association #4  
Oil Pastel and watercolor on paper  
11x14 inches

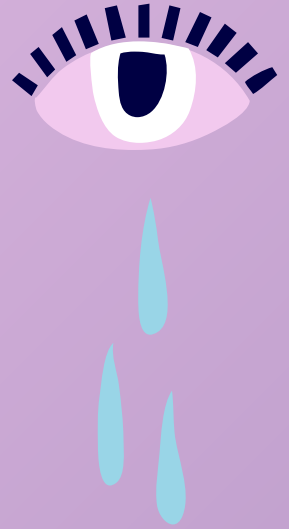




Song Association #5  
Oil Pastel and watercolor on paper  
11x14 inches

# Anger + Shame

For the final activity I focused on specific emotions that are associated with the shadow self and then drew whatever came to mind.





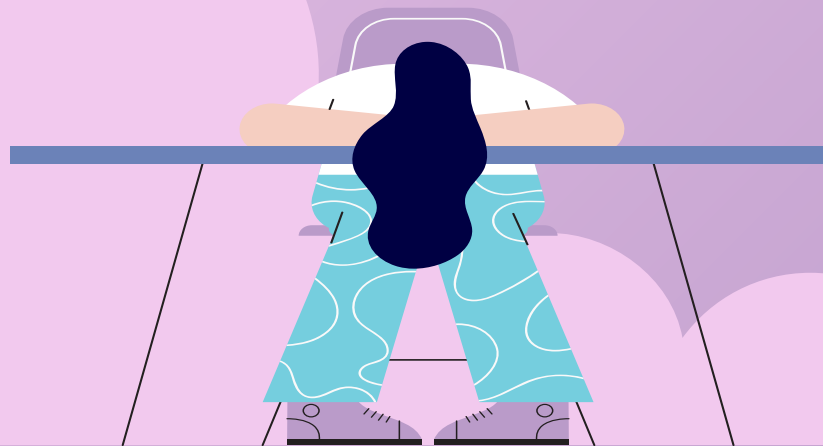
Anger  
Oil Pastel, sharpie, pencil,  
highlighter, colored pencil, and pen  
on paper  
11x14 inches



# Findings

# Confronting the shadow can be uncomfortable

All three participants expressed that shadow work isn't necessarily the most pleasant thing to do. Two of the participants mentioned feeling uncomfortable and/or vulnerable during the activities, while the third stated that confronting one's shadow is not easy. Personally, I felt a bit vulnerable and uncomfortable when making this art, but more so when showing it.





## Know Thyself

The second finding was that shadow work can help the practitioner learn about themselves. All three participants stated that they learned something about themselves and/or their subconscious mind. One participant said that after the shadow work exercised they felt “overwhelmingly self aware”. I also learned a lot about myself and my subconscious through this experience.



# Express to Destress

The participants stated that the shadow work allowed them to express their emotions through artmaking. Two of the participants used the word “release” in their responses describing how the shadow work made them feel. For me, the song association activity helped me to express certain emotions about specific experiences which in turn helped me to let go.








# Effect On Mental State



Overall the shadow work seemed to have a positive impact on the practitioners mental state. It helped the participants and myself to process and reflect, as well as bring our subconscious to the surface. One participant said it was very helpful for dealing with trauma and negative emotions. I feel like my mental health has improved over the course of the semester, which may not necessarily be because of the shadow work since there are numerous factors at play. I do feel like I understand myself a lot more and was able to process some memories and emotions, which in turn has improved my mental state overall.



# Conclusion

Shadow work can be immensely helpful for understanding one's self, expressing one's emotions and improving one's overall mental health. We shouldn't be afraid of our dark side, instead we should learn to embrace both the light and the dark in us, since that's what makes us whole. Plus you never know what wisdom you might find in the shadows of your mind.



