

## In-Between-ness

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## In-between-ness:

# Using art to capture changes to the self during anti-depressant treatment

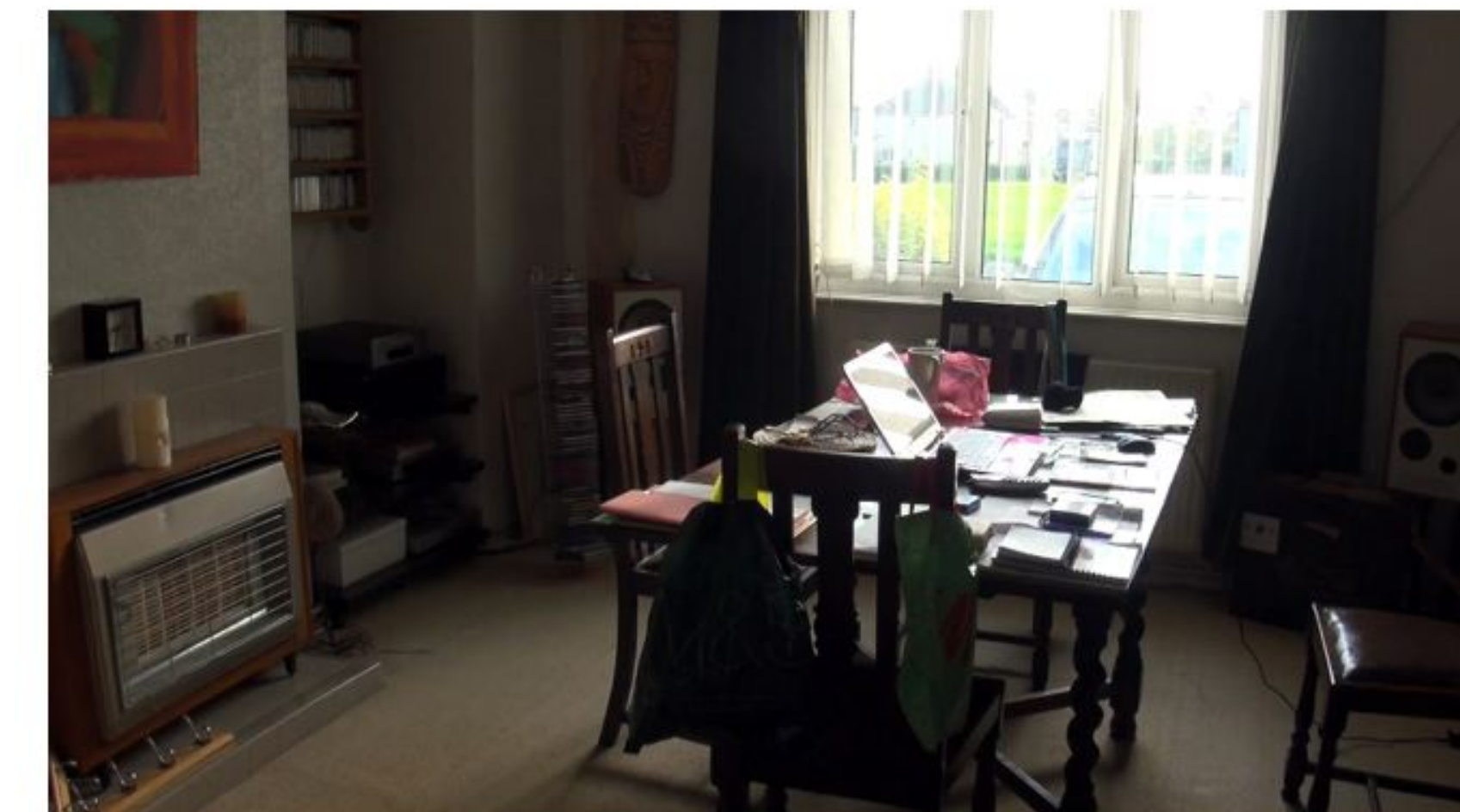
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## Background

Recent research has shown that treatment of depression with antidepressants produces changes in emotional processing<sup>1</sup>. These changes predict clinical recovery from depression. This work is set in the context of rapidly expanding knowledge of how the brain processes emotional stimuli, how these processes are affected by depression, and how these processes change in response to treatment. To date these changes have been investigated using very specific psychological tasks. However, it is still unclear to what degree depression, recovery and antidepressants affect a range of psychological processes, and ultimately how the experience of the patient changes during treatment. To inform future directions of research in this area this innovative health/arts collaboration explores experiential changes during treatment with antidepressants. It builds on experience over several years of Arts in Health projects across Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board, supporting professional artists in residence in a variety of health care settings across North Wales. The project was also inspired by previous studies using photography as a means to explore personal authenticity in children being treated with stimulants for ADHD<sup>2</sup>. In addition to the aims of the psychiatrists, the artists were keen to explore the role of preverbal language and creativity for patients navigating the "in-between-ness" from depression to recovery.

Week 1



## Methods

Five primary care patients about to commence antidepressant treatment for moderate severity depression will be recruited through purposive sampling to take part in the project. Following initial screening by a psychiatrist (RT) participants consenting to take part will meet with the artists (KH & SL) to be shown how to use the video camera and discuss the boundaries for filming. The artists have also created objects or prompts, imbued with exploratory text, to help focus participants to act on their creative impulses with the video camera to produce artworks. Participants will begin filming for 24 hours before commencing antidepressant medication, and will continue throughout the first six weeks of treatment. Each week the participants meet with the artists to review and discuss their films. These discussions are audiotaped and transcribed. Subjects will be encouraged to reflect on: how their emotional perception of their environment is changing; their sense of self and personal authenticity; and their sense of agency and affirmation in relation to their recovery. Qualitative exploration of the interview transcripts will use a framework analysis approach<sup>3</sup>. At the end of six weeks participants will be invited to take part in the ongoing development of their films with the artists towards staging a touring exhibition. A second consent is taken at this stage for public display of the artworks.



## Results

So far four participants have completed the project. This poster presents findings from the transcript analysis of one participant, along with stills taken from her films produced from before treatment through to six weeks into treatment. During this time she experienced a significant recovery from her depression. The following key themes emerged from the framework analysis:

### 1. Responsiveness to sensations

At the beginning of treatment the participant was preoccupied by internal ruminations, but over time became more aware of external stimuli.

### 2. Appreciation of external environment

Initially the participant focused on negative aspects of her environment, but this changed into an appreciation of the beauty of the landscapes and details around her, with engagement of all her senses.

### 3. Quality of feelings

The participant describes a lack of feelings towards things around her, but over time the emotional response intensifies, with greater reference to both positive and negative emotions.

### 4. Value of production

The participant devalues and is critical of the film she has produced. Following repeated feedback from the artists highlighting the aesthetic quality of her filming, she begins to value and self-praises the work she has produced.

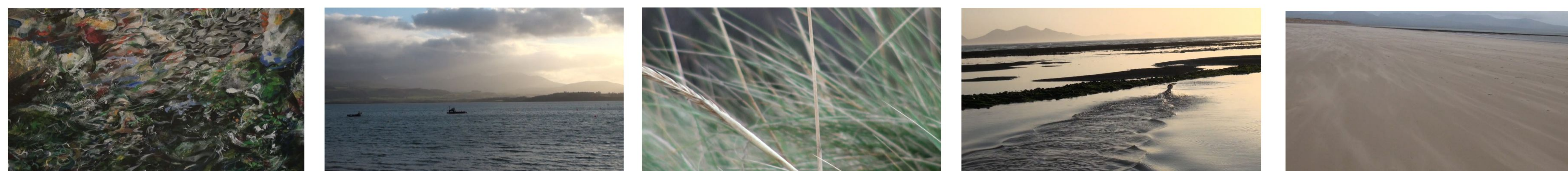
### 5. Shame

Descriptions of the self are dominated by a sense of shame of being depressed and taking medication. This gives way to more openness, self-acceptance and greater interaction with others.

### 6. Stories and narratives

The increased awareness of things around her also promotes the recollection of stories from her life and of people she has known. Recovery stimulates the reconstruction of a personal narrative.

recovery



## Discussion

Although the project was conceived as a method of exploring the experiential effects of antidepressant medication, these preliminary findings raise the possibility that engagement in the creative process itself may aid recovery from depression. This may be through diverting attention from internal ruminations towards external sensations, enhancing self-worth through the creation of aesthetic work and promoting the reconstruction of a meaningful personal narrative. The artists perceived these abstract and poetic non-linear narratives as "dream films", referring to a transitional space where contextualisation begins to re-emerge. The relative contributions of medication and interactions with professional artists to this recovery cannot be disentangled in this project. As well as generating potentially testable hypotheses for future research into the psychological effects of antidepressants, the project also points toward clinical studies investigating the role of creativity in recovery from depression. Such future work would also benefit from the collaborative approach adopted in this project, that respected and valued the creative space developed and nurtured by the artistic partners.

<sup>1</sup> Tranter, R. et al. (2009) The effect of serotonergic and noradrenergic antidepressants on face emotion processing in depressed patients. *J Affect Disord*, **118**, 87-93. <sup>2</sup> Singh, I. (2007) Clinical implications of ethical concepts: moral self-understandings in children taking methylphenidate for ADHD. *Clinical Child Psychology & Psychiatry*, **12**(2):16782. <sup>3</sup> Ritchie, J. & Spencer, L. (2002) Qualitative data analysis for applied policy research. *The qualitative researcher's companion*, 305-329.

Week 6

