The Art of Mending Together:
Integrating Kintsugi and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

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ABSTRACT

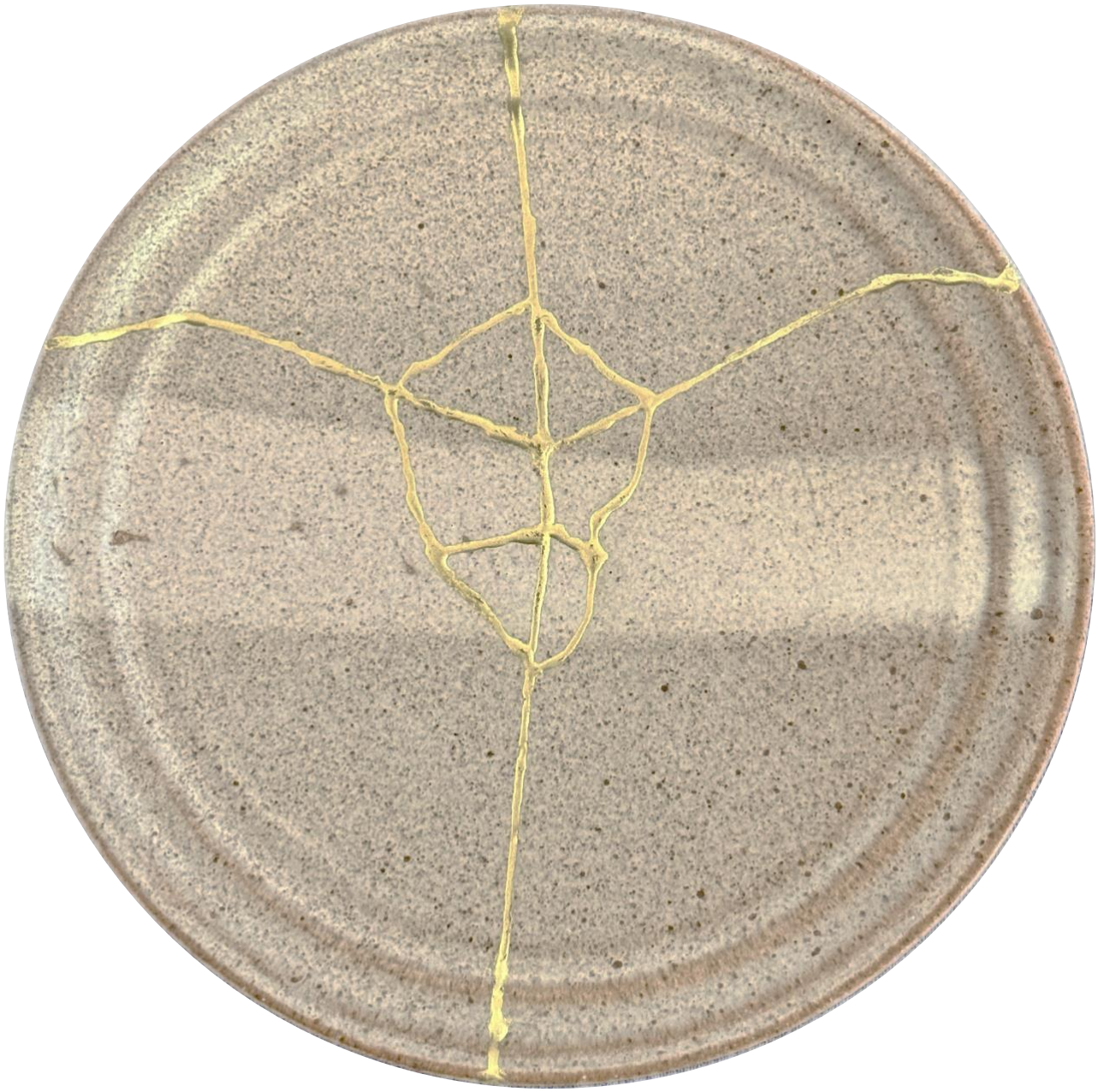
Accessing psychological support remains challenging for many individuals due to long waitlists, high costs, and persistent stigma. The World Health Organization (2022) encourages the development of preventive approaches to empower and promote mental health and well-being. Hence, this study aims to offer an accessible, creative, nonclinical preventive intervention. It is grounded in the awareness that everyone experiences psychological challenges to varying degrees. Therefore, equipping individuals with practical psychological skills is necessary and valuable.

This qualitative study explored the integration of *Kintsugi*, the Japanese art of mending broken pottery with lacquer and gold, with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) to promote psychological well-being. Kintsugi, a centuries-old Japanese repair tradition, has gained global attention for both its aesthetic and its philosophy of finding beauty in brokenness and imperfection. ACT is an evidence-based approach known to enhance psychological flexibility. Their integration as a creative psychological intervention remains unexplored. Hence, this study examined how participants experienced and made meaning of an integrated Kintsugi-ACT workshop. Data were collected from nine participants who attended a Kintsugi-ACT workshop and participated in semi-structured interviews. The workshop translated ACT principles into a hands-on, creative mending process of modern kintsugi. Data were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). It revealed five themes: integrating Kintsugi and ACT; realising healing as a mending process; extending from uniqueness to shared experience; preserving, transforming, and opening possibilities; and deepening the self through metaphor.

Findings show a dynamic conceptual and practical alignment between Kintsugi and ACT. They mutually enriched each other, enabling participants to learn ACT's psychological flexibility processes through Kintsugi practice and philosophy. Consequently, kintsugi evolved from a repair technique into a meaningful activity that supported personal growth and well-being through psychological processes such as reflection, self-improvement, mindfulness, interpersonal connection, values clarification, and resilience. Participants described repairing not only the pottery but also mending aspects of themselves. The study demonstrated how Kintsugi gives tangible form to ACT's psychological processes, thereby bridging art and psychology. Practically, it offers an accessible framework in which creativity becomes a compassionate medium for meaning-making and psychological skill development.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This *kintsugi* represents this project
Each piece stands for the people
Who helped me bring it together…



…each line of gold
holds a story of generosity,
guidance and kindness
that helped shape this work.

Dr Heather Kempton,
for your steady guidance,
for believing that art and psychology
can meet and make a difference.

The participants,
for your trust and openness.
You are the heart of this research.

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that started this project to grow.

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& the SouthLink Health Group,
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creativity and compassion could meet.

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for teaching me the true art of kintsugi
repairing with compassion,
restoring with gratitude.

My family,
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for your constant faith in me that I could do this.

My friends,
for the stress reset, support, and
for cheering me up that I got this.

To all my *inspirations*,
fellow artists, collectors, clients,
and those who shared conversations
about my art and psychology journey,
you are gold!

To *Mickey,* well done!

To *everyone*
who became part of this project,
thank you for helping me put this piece together.

This. Is. For. You.

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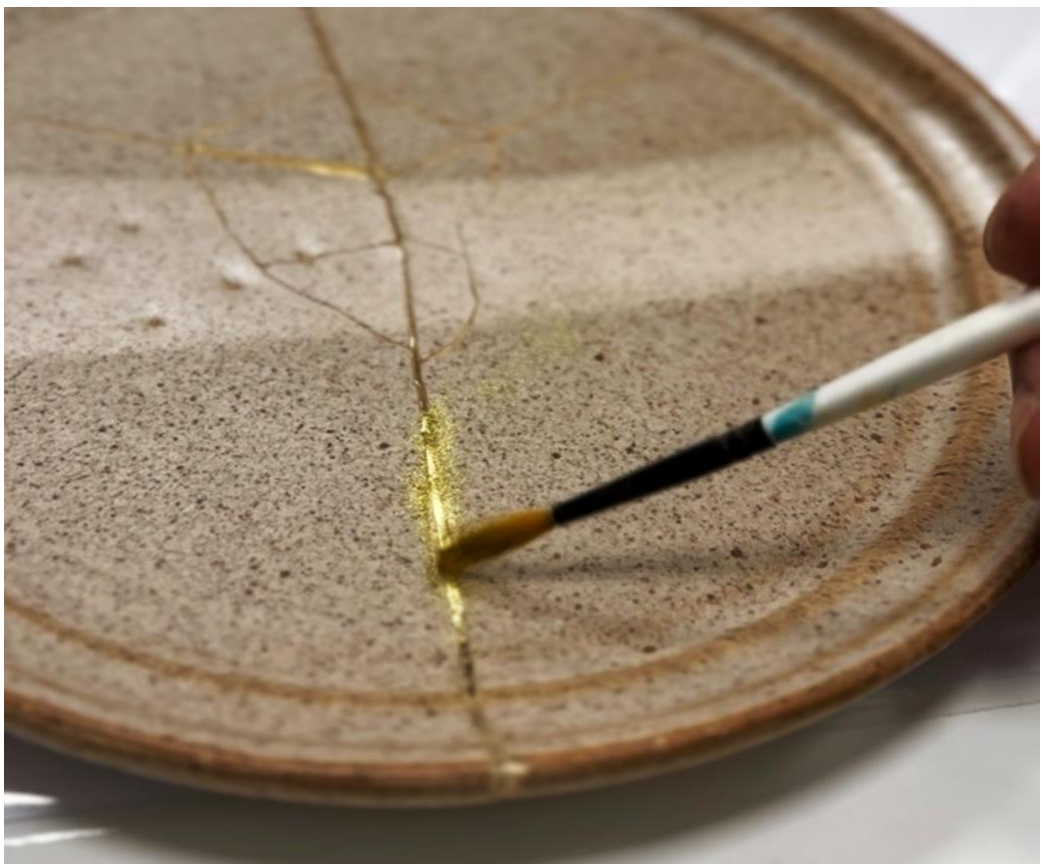
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Everybody is *broken.* People describe this brokenness in different ways: heartbroken, grieving, struggling, lost, overwhelmed, or simply I'm-not-okay. Regardless of the words used, these expressions point to a shared human experience of brokenness. Yet within these painful or shattering experiences, there can also be a sense of transformation to something more beautiful. This reflects the meaningful metaphor of *kintsugi* (金継ぎ, pronounced *keen-tsoo-gee*), a Japanese tradition of repairing broken pottery with lacquer and gold (*Figure* 1; Kemske, 2021). Rather than hiding the damage, it highlights the cracks with precious metals, turning them into features of beauty and renewed value. At its core, kintsugi reflects the belief that there is beauty in brokenness and imperfection.

Figure 1. Mending of a broken plate using kintsugi technique



Note. Kintsugi piece and image by the researcher.

This thesis explores how the Japanese practice of *kintsugi*, when integrated with the principles of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), can offer a creative and practical pathway to promote psychological well-being from a nonclinical perspective.

Currently, mental health is widely recognised as a global priority. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), approximately one in eight individuals across the globe lived with a mental disorder in 2019, with depression noted as the leading cause of disability (*World Mental Health Report*, 2022). New Zealand reflects a similar pattern. One in five adults has a mood or anxiety disorder, and suicide is a leading cause of death among youth (Aikman & Collinson, 2023). The Ministry of Health's recent data also show an increase in unmet need for professional mental health support, from 4.9% in 2016 to 7.9% (*Annual Update of Key Results 2022/23*, 2023).

Indeed, there are still many who are left with little or no support at all. Much of mental health care remains clinical and reactive. Nearly half of those affected receive no treatment globally (*World Mental Health Report*, 2022). Also, in New Zealand, the system remains fragmented, with long waits and limited access (New Zealand Mental Health and Wellbeing Commission, 2022; Te Pou, 2022). *He Ara Oranga* (2018), which is the report of the government inquiry into mental health and addiction, emphasised the urgency of prevention, early intervention, and community-driven solutions.

In response, there is a growing need for preventive mental health strategies. These approaches aim to build resilience, strengthen emotional awareness, and teach skills to cope with stress before it leads to clinical problems (Herrman et al., 2005; Keyes, 2007). WHO promotes mental health at every level: individual, local community, and to the larger population (*World Mental Health Report*, 2022). It recommends early action and collaboration across sectors such as education, health, and employment.

Mental health exists on a continuum (*World Mental Health Report*, 2022). This means it ranges from positive well-being to severe distress. Even people with mental health conditions can experience periods of well-being (*World Mental Health Report*, 2022). It is also safe to assume that the opposite is true; even people without a diagnosed mental health condition can experience periods of distress. Thus, it is important to equip every individual with useful mental health skills and strategies to cope with their distress and make sense of the challenges that they are going through.

WHO suggests embedding mental health in schools, workplaces, and healthcare settings (*World Mental Health Report*, 2022). Reflecting these principles, the New Zealand government has launched initiatives like the *Employee Assisted Programme* (EAP) for workplace mental health support and *Every Life Matters* suicide prevention strategy and support packages for young people (*Annual Update of Key Results 2022/23*, 2023). These efforts signal a shift in how mental health is viewed and addressed. They mark a move away from isolated, crisis-driven care towards preventive, inclusive, and community-led models that promote well-being for all.

1.2 Identifying Practical and Research Gaps

In line with this current demand for preventive mental health strategies, there is a vital need to develop innovative and accessible interventions. Currently, it takes up to three weeks or longer for most individuals to access mental health and addiction services in New Zealand's public sector, with some populations, such as the youth, facing even longer delays (Te Pou, 2022). In the private sector, the waiting times reportedly exceed 12 months due to workforce shortages (Ellingham & reporter, 2024). These delays highlight a pressing need for innovative, accessible, and preventive interventions that can support individuals before their mental health deteriorates.

Art is more accessible than psychologists. Unlike traditional psychotherapy, art-based approaches are more accessible, less resource-dependent, and culturally adaptable. There are many different forms of art-based therapies. This includes music, poetry, dance, painting and others. In recent years, kintsugi has been rising in global popularity because of its aesthetic and philosophy. Kintsugi is a Japanese repair technique in which broken ceramics or pottery are put back together using lacquer and then coated with precious metals like gold, silver, or platinum (Kemske, 2021). Rather than concealing the cracks, the repair emphasises and beautifies them, honouring the object’s history (Kemske, 2021). This philosophy conveys that fractures are not flaws to conceal but, rather, sources of unique beauty and strength (Kemske, 2021).

Because of the philosophy behind kintsugi, the researcher finds potential to use it as a tool to make a positive difference on a personal level. It is meaningfully rich; however, there is currently no psychological framework that backs up kintsugi. To address that gap, I use the

lens of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) as the psychological framework to enrich the practice. Kintsugi serves as a powerful metaphor for emotional healing through embracing imperfection (Kemske, 2021). It closely aligns with ACT's emphasis on acceptance, mindfulness, and values-based living (Hayes & Rowse, 2020; Hayes et al., 2006; Strosahl et al., 2004). The process of repairing a broken object using the kintsugi technique may serve as an embodied metaphor for practicing psychological flexibility. For example, as individuals engage with the cracks and reconstruct the form, they are encountering moments of discomfort or imperfection. Within the ACT framework, this can be seen as an opportunity to observe difficult emotions (acceptance), recognise unhelpful thought patterns (cognitive defusion), and commit to personally meaningful actions (values-based living) (Hayes et al., 2006). In this way, the kintsugi process invites participants to experience healing not only intellectually but through tangible, hands-on reflection.

Art therapists, such as Dr Amy Backos (2022), have advanced creative applications of ACT, combining it with expressive techniques to foster psychological insight and transformation. However, these applications largely employ general creative processes rather than incorporating the Japanese practice and philosophy of kintsugi.

The creative practice of kintsugi guided by ACT offers a promising way to teach psychological flexibility, emotional literacy, and resilience skills. By using art as a symbolic and embodied tool, preventive mental health strategies can reach a broader audience and reduce the pressure on overstretched psychological services.

Moreover, most ACT interventions are embedded in clinical environments and delivered in multi-session formats (Herrman et al., 2005). This limits the public's accessibility, particularly in community-based settings where resources are scarce and mental health stigma remains high. Kintsugi presents an opportunity to teach ACT principles in a low-cost, brief, and embodied way, making it especially relevant for early intervention and public mental health promotion (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010).

Although literature shows that artmaking supports emotional healing and resilience (Sheridan & Van Lith, 2024; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010), important gaps remain. Few studies have explored how creative repair practices can be integrated with psychological frameworks such as ACT. Existing research largely focuses on clinical settings (Santos & Costa, 2025), offering

limited insight into how artmaking can serve as a preventive, community-based approach to well-being.

The present study responds to these gaps by exploring a Kintsugi-ACT framework that integrates creativity with evidence-based psychological principles to support psychological well-being in communities.

1.3 Research Aim and Questions

This study aims to explore how participants experience and make meaning of a Kintsugi and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) integration. The following are the three research questions:

1. In what ways do participants perceive the connections between ACT principles and the kintsugi philosophy and process?

The goal of this study is to capture how participants talked about links between ACT concepts and kintsugi during the workshop, in their own words, reflections and perceptions.

2. In what ways do participants experience the repair process of the Kintsugi-ACT workshop?

This study seeks to understand what it was like for participants to take part in the repair process, such as the materials, the pace, the context, and the interactions. It seeks to understand what these different aspects meant to them.

3. In what ways do participants describe the value and perceived benefits of the Kintsugi-ACT workshop?

This study seeks to describe how participants perceive that the workshop was useful in their lives, including any value or uses they felt it offered.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is important for several reasons. First, it offers a practical way to support mental health in everyday settings. Many people cannot easily access therapy, so this workshop provides a low-cost and non-clinical option. It helps people learn useful skills like emotional

awareness, psychological flexibility, and self-compassion through creative and meaningful activity.

Second, this study adds something new to academic research. It brings together ACT and kintsugi, two areas that have not been previously connected. By combining a well-established therapeutic framework with a meaningful, hands-on art practice, it shows that healing can happen in creative and personal ways. It also adds to preventive psychology by offering a tangible, symbolic intervention that people can relate to and access more easily.

Moreover, this study is important for social and cultural reasons. It supports the idea that healing does not have to follow a medical model. Instead, it highlights the value of culture, art, and community. It emphasises the importance of holistic models of care, such as *Te Whare Tapa Whā* and Andre McLachlan's (2021) *Whiti Te Rā,* which emphasised the interconnected pathways of well-being from the Māori worldview. This model recognises *mahi-a-toi* (expressive art forms) not merely as an aesthetic pursuit but as a vital pathway to well-being. This present research contributes to culturally responsive approaches that honour indigenous knowledge systems and promote mental health in ways that resonate deeply with diverse communities.

In addition, this study holds personal significance for me, both as a researcher and as a professional artist. My artistic and creative practice is deeply influenced by the aesthetic elements and philosophy of kintsugi, which not only shapes the focus of this research but also enriches its authenticity and reflective depth.

Overall, this present study contributes to the psychological body of research, reinforcing existing frameworks and models of care, and more importantly, it practically opens space for more accessible, creative and safe conversations about human imperfection and brokenness.

1.5 Scope and Delimitations

This study aims to apply kintsugi as a preventative mental health intervention with ACT principles as a guiding psychological framework. The programme is designed as a single workshop to be undergone by adults aged at least 18 years. The study uses a qualitative approach to examine participants' lived experiences, symbolic meanings, and personal

perceived value of engaging in the activity. Interviews and post-workshop reflection were employed to collect information about participants' use of the kintsugi process to ACT principles.

In this study, a non-traditional modern kintsugi technique is used to adapt the process for a single-session workshop. Traditional kintsugi is a time-intensive process that can take several weeks to months due to the slow drying time of natural *urushi* lacquer (Kemske, 2021). This modified, modern approach maintains the symbolic essence of kintsugi while making it more practical for brief, structured interventions.

This study is not designed to offer clinical treatment or to make a diagnosis of mental illness. It is not designed to replace formal therapy. The study does not include longitudinal follow-up or tracking post-workshop. The research does not measure therapy outcomes via standardised psychometric tools. Instead, it focuses on rich, descriptive narration and reflection in a community-based, non-clinical setting.

The findings of this study would be limited to participants of this research and could not be extended to other populations or clinical environments. The study seeks to move the creative therapies practice forward by increasing the depth of kintsugi practice as informed by ACT principles and proposing an innovative and creative way of enhancing mental well-being.

In summary, this study is grounded in the discipline of psychology and guided by the principles of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). It is explicitly not a form of clinical therapy or regulated art therapy. Instead, it offers a preventive, psychoeducational art-based intervention aimed at promoting psychological well-being in community settings. The researcher did not engage in diagnosis or treatment, and clearly informed participants that the workshop is not a substitute for professional therapy. This approach ensures the study remains within the ethical and professional scope of master level psychological research in New Zealand.

1.6 Definition of Terms

Art-based Intervention

A therapeutic or psychoeducational method that uses creative activities such as painting, drawing, music, or movement to support emotional expression, self-reflection, and

psychological well-being. These interventions are often used in community or non-clinical settings (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). This term is not to be confused with *Art Therapy*, which involves formal clinical practice by trained professionals (American Art Therapy Association [AATA], n.d.; Australian, New Zealand and Asian Creative Arts Therapies Association [ANZACATA], n.d.).

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

A modern behavioural therapy that helps individuals accept difficult thoughts and feelings while committing to actions aligned with their values. The aim is to enhance psychological flexibility rather than eliminate distress (Hayes et al., 2012). ACT is the psychological framework used to enrich the practice of kintsugi in this present study.

Kintsugi

A traditional Japanese art form that involves repairing broken pottery with lacquer mixed with gold, silver, or platinum. Symbolically, it embraces the idea that flaws and breakage can lead to new forms of beauty and meaning, often used as a metaphor for emotional healing and resilience (Kemske, 2021). The kintsugi technique used in this research is the modern method devised by the researcher to suit the practical nature and limited timeframe of the workshop.

Kintsugi-ACT Framework

An integrative model grounded in the philosophy and practice of Kintsugi, the psychology of ACT, and the lived experience of participants in the Kintsugi-ACT workshop.

Kintsugi-ACT Workshop

A single session, 2.5-hour art-based repair integrating the Japanese practice of Kintsugi with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) principles. Participants repair broken ceramics while engaging in reflective and experiential activities that cultivate psychological flexibility. It served as the primary method of data generation and was designed based on the initial integration of the Kintsugi-ACT framework.

Preventive Psychology

A field of psychology that emphasises promoting mental health and preventing psychological problems before they arise. It includes developing skills such as emotional

awareness, resilience, and adaptive coping (Herrman et al., 2005). This present study is positioned from a preventive point of view to align with the project's objective to offer a nonclinical, community-based and accessible intervention.

Psychological Flexibility

The capacity to stay present, openly experience thoughts and emotions, and adapt behaviour based on personal values (Harris, 2009; Hayes et al., 2012). It is the central goal of ACT and is associated with better mental health outcomes (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). In this present study, psychological well-being is conceptualised through the lens of psychological flexibility, focusing on how participants respond to their experience of the kintsugi workshop in relation to their psychological well-being. Operationally, psychological well-being and psychological flexibility are used interchangeably.

1.7 Chapter Summary and Thesis Structure Overview

This current chapter (Chapter 1) introduced the study by outlining its background, rationale, research questions, scope, significance and definition of terminologies. Altogether, the thesis is organised into five chapters. It is structured to provide a coherent and progressive narrative of the research in relation to the research aim and questions. The following is the overview of each of the succeeding chapters:

Chapter 2 presents a critical review of relevant literature on creative arts interventions, the philosophy and psychology of Kintsugi, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and their conceptual alignment as a creative intervention to well-being.

Chapter 3 explains the methodological framework, detailing the qualitative design, participants, procedures, materials, analytical process, and ethical considerations.

Chapter 4 presents and discusses the findings derived from Reflexive Thematic Analysis, structured around five key themes that capture participants' experiences of the Kintsugi-ACT workshop.

Finally, Chapter 5 offers the conclusion by summarising the study's contributions, theoretical and practical implications, and recommendations for future research and practice.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the related literature to understand the context of the present study within existing research and theory. It builds on the foundational concepts of this research by exploring and understanding the relevant frameworks and studies on Creative Arts Intervention, Kintsugi and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT).

2.1 Understanding Creative Arts Intervention

Creative arts therapy involves therapeutic interventions that utilise artistic forms such as visual arts, music, poetry, dance, and drama to facilitate communication and emotional expression and foster health and positive change (*APA Dictionary of Psychology*, n.d).

According to the American Art Therapy Association (AATA, n.d.), art therapy is broadly defined as a form of psychotherapy that uses art media and the creative process to improve mental, emotional, and physical well-being. AATA (n.d.) emphasises that art therapy is an integrative mental health profession, combining knowledge of human development and psychological theory with active artmaking within a therapeutic relationship. In art therapy sessions, clients create art under the guidance of a trained art therapist, using visual and symbolic expression to communicate experiences that might be difficult to express with words (AATA, n.d.). This creative process engages the mind and body in ways distinct from verbal therapy (AATA, n.d.). It offers physical, sensory, and symbolic experiences that enable alternative forms of communication, helping to overcome language barriers (AATA, n.d.). Through artmaking, individuals can express experiences and support personal and collective transformation (AATA, n.d.).

Clinical Art Therapy vs. Community Art-based Interventions

Arts can serve as a bridge between psychological prevention and therapy. An emerging consensus in preventive psychology is that engaging in artistic expression can promote mental health before serious issues develop. A 2019 World Health Organization scoping review of over 3,000 studies identified a major role for the arts in preventing ill health and actively promoting well-being (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Unlike purely clinical approaches, art-based activities

tend to focus holistically on personal growth and resilience. As one seminal review concluded, the use of the arts in healing complements the biomedical perspective by addressing not only the illness but the person's overall well-being (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010).

In this present research on kintsugi and ACT, the orientation of the study is towards exploring and developing a nonclinical art-based intervention, as discussed in the scope and delimitation.

Art as a buffer against stress and trauma

Research underscores that participating in the arts can buffer against stress and even trauma. Annie Heiderscheit (2022) examined the unique role that expressive arts therapies can play in trauma-informed practice and the embodied healing of trauma. An important principle in art therapy is that the artwork serves as an externalised representation of the emotions and conflict happening within, allowing individuals to explore feelings safely and symbolically through art (AATA, n.d.). By engaging the body's senses with the images or movements they create, clients can gain insight and develop revised coping narratives and meaning (Heiderscheit, 2022). Another study by Shukla and colleagues (2022) emphasised that creative activities have been shown to help people cope with despair and alleviate the burden of chronic mental pressures. Over the last decade, health psychologists have examined how artmaking can heal emotional trauma, enhance self-awareness, encourage self-reflection, and even lead to positive shifts in thinking and behaviour (Shukla et al., 2022). In summary, art therapy operates on the premise that creative expression can be therapeutic. It can facilitate emotional release, self-discovery, and healing.

These studies support the present research by showing that creative expression plays a significant role in emotional healing and self-understanding. Heiderscheit (2022) demonstrated how art can serve as a safe, external channel for processing inner experiences, while Shukla and colleagues (2022) highlighted its benefits in reducing psychological distress and fostering self-awareness. Together, they affirm that artmaking can promote emotional recovery and personal growth. However, while these studies established the therapeutic value of art, they focused mainly on clinical or trauma-related contexts. There remains limited research on how creative artmaking, such as kintsugi, can be applied within a preventive and community framework that promotes well-being before distress becomes severe.

Art as Symbolic Expression and Effective Intervention

A core aspect of art-based interventions is their use of symbols and metaphors for emotional expression. Unlike talk therapy, which relies on direct language, art allows people to project and work through complex feelings via imagery and creative symbolism. For example, in the study by Sheridan and Van Lith (2024), exploring the impact of metaphors on resilience, the participants engaged in a two-week online painting program, and they found that the results suggested that metaphorical expression can facilitate resilience-building mechanisms. Through art, individuals might symbolically represent a trauma in the past, hopes, or self-concept in a way that words cannot capture. Malhotra and colleagues (2024) proposed a neurocognitive framework for how art-based interventions support trauma recovery. Their research reported neuroscientific evidence that creative activities may activate the same brain regions involved in emotion regulation, which is important in improving emotional understanding and supporting emotional healing (Malhotra et al., 2024).

In the context of this study, kintsugi can be viewed as a form of symbolic art expression. The broken pottery and its golden repairs serve as metaphors for personal brokenness and healing. Before specifically exploring kintsugi, it is useful to review evidence on how art-based interventions in general contribute to psychological well-being or recovery.

Over the past few decades, a growing body of research has evaluated the efficacy of art therapy and related creative interventions for various mental health outcomes. Overall, findings suggest that engaging in artmaking can yield meaningful psychological benefits. A seminal review by Stuckey and Nobel (2010) analysed numerous studies and concluded that art-based interventions can effectively reduce both physiological and psychological distress, contributing to improved overall well-being in diverse patient groups. Their review, which spanned different creative forms (visual arts, music, movement, writing), found improvements in indicators such as stress, anxiety, and mood among participants engaging in the arts, alongside enhancements in subjective well-being and social functioning (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). The authors noted that while art interventions show promise in healing trauma, expressing emotions, and even improving medical outcomes, more research is needed to fully understand how these interventions enhance overall health status (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010).

In line with this, a comprehensive meta-analysis published by Joschko and colleagues (2024) examined 50 randomised controlled trials of visual art therapy across various clinical

and community settings. The meta-analysis found that, compared to control conditions, art therapy was associated with significant improvement in about 18% of measured outcomes (Joschko et al., 2024). Although it is not the total remedy, these results confirm that active visual art therapy can produce therapeutic benefits for some mental health outcomes, and Joschko et al. (2024) even suggest it may be considered to valuably complement standard medical care.

Other studies similarly report positive impacts. For instance, art therapy has been shown to significantly reduce anxiety symptoms in children and adolescents (Joschko et al., 2024) and to help trauma survivors express and integrate painful memories (Campbell et al., 2016). The mechanisms by which art heals are thought to include emotional processing through symbolism and the development of self-efficacy through structured creative expression (Haeyen et al., 2015), as well as enhanced social connection and emotional engagement through group art activities (Ullán et al., 2013).

Many people turn to art-based activities to cope with emotional pain, even outside formal therapy. Creating art can complement a mindful state (Javadian et al., 2025) and provide a safe space for self-expression and healing (AATA, n.d.). In clinical art therapy, this process is harnessed intentionally to help clients process grief, trauma, and other physical and emotional challenges (AATA, n.d.; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). Art therapy has been used to help people recover from their trauma. A study by Gantt and Tinnin (2009) presented a neurobiological framework that supports the use of art therapy in trauma treatment. Trauma-focused art therapy allows survivors of abuse or disaster to visually narrate their experiences, which can facilitate post-traumatic growth by transforming chaotic memories into organised artwork that "tells a story" (Gantt & Tinnin, 2009). The symbolic nature of art means that a painting of a stormy landscape could represent inner turmoil, or the act of moulding clay could symbolise taking control of one's life. Through discussing and reflecting on their art with a therapist, clients find meanings and resolutions: the storm passes, new perspectives emerge, and previously unspoken feelings are validated.

In this study, healing through symbolism is highly relevant to kintsugi, which, as an art form, explicitly uses the symbol of broken ceramics repaired with precious metal to represent healing and resilience. Indeed, as discussed in the next section, kintsugi may function as a potential arts-based intervention. The philosophy of kintsugi embodies the idea that there is beauty in brokenness.

Art as Preventive Intervention

Beyond formal therapy for diagnosed conditions, art-based interventions are increasingly used in preventive and community mental health contexts. Painting, pottery, or craft workshops can be offered to the public to manage stress, foster social connection, and build emotional resilience before serious mental health issues develop. Public health researchers note that engaging in the arts aligns with a holistic health model, viewing well-being not merely as the absence of illness but as the presence of positive factors like emotional expression, creativity, and community engagement (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Moreover, the holistic view of health resonates with *Te Whare Tapa Whā,* a Māori model of health developed by Sir Mason Durie. This model shows how well-being is supported by four interconnected dimensions: *taha tinana* (physical health), *taha hinengaro* (mental and emotional health), *taha whānau* (social and family connection), and *taha wairua* (spiritual well-being) (*Te Whare Tapa Whā Model of Māori Health*, 2023).

In addition, *Whiti Te Rā* (McLachlan, 2021) offers a complementary Māori perspective with a holistic model of well-being grounded in six interconnected pathways: *mauri* (life force), *whanaungatanga* (relationships and belonging), *hinengaro* (mind and emotions), *wairua* (spirituality), *tinana* (physical body), and *mahi-a-toi* (creative practice) (McLachlan, 2021). The image associated with this model is of the rising sun, which reflects a movement from darkness toward restoration through the interconnected pathways (McLachlan, 2021). An important element of this model that is most relevant to this present study is *mahi-a-toi* (expressive arts). This present study upholds the *mahi-a-toi* aspect of *Whiti Te Rā* by recognising kintsugi as both an expressive and transformative artistic process that enables creative expression, reconnection, and healing.

Given this holistic approach to well-being, art programs, therefore, can be part of promoting mental wellness in the community. For example, community art studios such as *Artsenta* (Dunedin, New Zealand), a studio for mental health service users, provide a supportive space where people can create art, thereby reducing isolation and improving self-esteem. Stuckey and Nobel (2010) emphasised that such community-based arts programs can help individuals experience “greater wellness” and that partnerships between healthcare and arts professionals are a promising avenue for public health.

In a sense, creative activities often carry less stigma than traditional psychotherapy. An individual might be more ready to join a kintsugi workshop without feeling labelled as a patient. Beato and colleagues (2024) evaluated the effectiveness of an arts-based program in reducing mental health stigma among youth. The arts-based nature of the program provided an inclusive and engaging platform, and at the same time, served as a form of psychoeducation to promote well-being, increase mental health awareness and reduce the stigma around it (Beato et al., 2024). This makes art interventions more attractive as preventive interventions, since they can reach individuals who might not otherwise seek mental health support.

In the context of this study, framing a kintsugi intervention as an artistic workshop rather than a therapy session may encourage community participation, providing a gentle introduction to therapeutic concepts (like acceptance, values clarification and mindfulness) in a normalised setting. Before elaborating on how kintsugi could serve this preventive role, the next section discusses the detailed exploration of what kintsugi is and why it holds psychological significance.

In summary, many studies show that art provides a symbolic and sensory way for individuals to express and process emotions that may be difficult to verbalise, leading to increased resilience, emotional regulation, and self-awareness (Malhotra et al., 2024; Sheridan & Van Lith, 2024; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). Empirical evidence also suggests that visual art therapy can enhance psychological well-being across various populations and settings (Joschko et al., 2024). Furthermore, creative community programmes have been shown to reduce stigma and promote inclusion, making the arts a promising pathway for preventive mental health (Beato et al., 2024).

However, the literature reveals gaps that this study seeks to address. Conceptually, while research supports the therapeutic and symbolic value of artmaking (Sheridan & Van Lith, 2024; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010), few studies have connected these creative processes to a structured psychological framework, such as ACT. It is also evident that these studies explored artmaking in general, but not the “repair-based” art forms like kintsugi. Methodologically, limited empirical work has examined how metaphor-driven art practices can be systematically integrated with evidence-based models to explain how art facilitates psychological change (Joschko et al., 2024; Malhotra et al., 2024). Practically, existing studies remain focused on clinical or trauma-specific contexts, with little exploration of preventive, culturally grounded,

and community-based approaches that promote well-being through creative expression (Beato et al., 2024; Heiderscheit, 2022; Santos & Costa, 2025).

Hence, this present study aims to address these gaps through the development of a repair-based art form that is informed and enriched by an evidence-based psychological framework in a nonclinical setting that integrates kintsugi and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT).

With that, the discussion proceeds with understanding both kintsugi and ACT to critically synthesise their possible conceptual integration. This initial alignment of kintsugi and ACT is important for this study to proceed with its development of a methodological framework to achieve the research aim and address the questions of the present study.

2.2 Understanding Kintsugi

The following section is a discussion on the origins, practice, techniques, philosophical foundations, and psychological significance of kintsugi.

Kintsugi: Origins and Practice

Kintsugi (金継ぎ), which translates to "golden joinery," is a traditional Japanese tradition of repairing broken pottery with lacquer mixed with precious metals such as powdered gold or silver (Kemske, 2021). This technique is centuries old. The exact origin of kintsugi is still unknown to this day. But it is believed to have started in the late 16th or early 17th century (Kemske, 2021). Three historical contexts are co-occurring in the aesthetic origins of kintsugi: the luxuriousness of the Momoyama Era, the rise of the Japanese tea ceremony (*chanoyu*), and the expansion of lacquer art (*maki-e*)(Kemske, 2021). During that era, the war had ended, and the lifestyle had become more luxurious. The tea ceremony has become traditionally important. Hence, the pottery and tea for that tradition are regarded as valuable (Kemske, 2021). Thus, when these patterns get broken, owners are drawn to mend them but make them more beautiful and valuable (Kemske, 2021).

The practice has continued up to the present time as a skilful, aesthetic and traditional repair (Kemske, 2021). Kintsugi is particularly in demand after earthquakes or calamities in Japan. People approach kintsugi artists after a disaster to repair ceramics associated with their loved one, to cherish the object's value and the history that it holds (Kemske, 2021).

Outside of Japan, kintsugi has only recently gained global popularity, with workshops, tutorials, and do-it-yourself (DIY) kits now offered in countries across Asia, Europe, North America, and Australia (Kemske, 2021). While traditional kintsugi requires years of training and the use of *urushi* (a natural tree sap lacquer), many modern adaptations, often called "easy" or "modern" kintsugi, use alternative adhesives and simplified techniques (Kemske, 2021). This widespread interest suggests that, beyond craftsmanship, kintsugi's underlying philosophy resonates with people worldwide.

Different Techniques and Aesthetics

There is no one definitive way to do kintsugi. The following discussion is an exposition of the different techniques and aesthetics that give each repair its unique character.

Process: Traditional vs Modern Kintsugi (Non-traditional)

The traditional method uses *urushi* lacquer as an adhesive to rejoin broken ceramic pieces, and then highlights the resulting seams or cracks with gold powder (Palazzolo, 2025). Traditionally, kintsugi is meticulous and time-consuming. The broken object is reassembled with multiple layers of lacquer and allowed to cure slowly, often over weeks, before the gold is applied (Palazzolo, 2025). Modern kintsugi is a contemporary adaptation of the traditional kintsugi. While traditional kintsugi uses *urushi* lacquer and real powdered gold, modern techniques often use synthetic adhesives like epoxy resin, combined with metallic powders, foils or paints. The modern technique is more cost-effective, less time-consuming and simpler in terms of the process (Palazzolo, 2025).

Finish: Gold vs Other Materials

Commonly, kintsugi uses gold powder to complete the repair. Apart from gold, some kintsugi artists use silver. Silver has become popular because it is less expensive than gold and, in some cases, the ceramic appears more aesthetically pleasing when mended with silver. In such cases, a repair finished with silver is called *gintsugi* (Kemske, 2021). Some craftsmen also use melted glass to join broken pieces, a technique known as *yakitsugi,* while others may use brass alloy or platinum (Kemske, 2021). This suggests that there is no one way to mend a broken pot. It is not always gold or any other precious metal. The idea is to introduce a foreign material to the original pottery to make it whole again, more valuable or more beautiful. It is not about returning the object to its original state before it was broken, but to transform and creatively highlight its history represented by the cracks and imperfections.

Surface Appearance: *Togidashi*, *Hiramakie*, *Takamakie* or *Makienaoishi*

The way the kintsugi lines look can vary depending on the technique used. Each style shows its own visual character. In *togidashi*, the gold or lacquer is polished flat against the surface, blending in smoothly with the ceramics (Kemske, 2021). *Hiramakie* creates a gently raised line that softly highlights the fracture (Kemske, 2021). *Takamakie*, on the other hand, produces high relief gold lines (Kemske, 2021). Finally, *makienaoishi* takes the repair further by adding decorative patterns using *maki-e* techniques, turning the fixed area into a beautiful, expressive feature of the piece, such as using floral patterns (Kemske, 2021).

Types of Repairs: Crack Repair, Reconstruction and Filling in Missing Parts

Depending on the damage to the ceramic, there are three basic types of repair: (1) crack repair, where cracks are reinforced by filling in the tiny gaps with *urushi*; (2) reconstruction, when the pot is broken but no pieces are missing, and it is put back together; and (3) reconstruction with filling in of missing parts, when a relatively significant portion is missing and the gap is filled using other foreign materials such as *urushi* putty, parts from other broken ceramics, or sometimes glass (Kemske, 2021).

There is no single way to do kintsugi. It depends on the materials, process, finish, and the extent of the damage. Regardless, the outcome is often lines of precious material along the cracks. The fractures are not hidden, but rather highlighted. Notably, the repaired piece becomes unique and more beautiful and valuable. Though there are different techniques and finishes, the underlying philosophy of kintsugi remains the same: there is beauty in brokenness and imperfection.

Kintsugi's Philosophical Foundations

The following discussion outlines the philosophical foundations of kintsugi, including the Japanese aesthetic of *wabi-sabi*, the concept of *homo reparans*, and its Buddhist influences.

Kintsugi as Wabi-sabi

Kintsugi is under a broader philosophy and aesthetics called *wabi-sabi* (侘び寂び, *wab-ee-SAB-ee)* (Kemske, 2021). Dominic Wilkinson (2022) explained that, as a virtue, w*abi-sabi* is about appreciating beauty in imperfection and impermanence. *Wabi* (侘) indicates "austerity, simplicity, the quiet life"; and *Sabi* (寂) indicates "maturity, solitude, naturalness"

(Wilkinson, 2022). *Wabi-sabi* is notable in many Japanese art forms and traditions, such as *raku* pottery, bonsai, haiku, stone garden, and kintsugi.

Kintsugi and Homo Reparans

In his book *Le réparable et l'irréparable: L'humain au temps du vulnerable* (The Repairable and the Irreparable: The Human in the Age of Vulnerability), French philosopher John Michel conceptualised *homo reparans* (Bessone, 2023; Michel, 2023). His position is that "repair" is universal and innate among human beings in response to vulnerability (Bessone, 2023; Michel, 2023). Also, Elizabeth Spelman (2002) reflected on the theme of repair. In her book *Repair: The Impulse to Restore in a Fragile World*, she examined the human inclination to mend what is broken, both materially and metaphorically, highlighting repair as a vital and creative human need (Spelman, 2002). Michel (2023) suggested that the act of repairing is central to the human condition, whether it is psychological, historical, or physical. Repair becomes a mode of existence through which humans acknowledge fragility, make sense of brokenness, and engage in the continuous effort to preserve meaning and coherence in life (Bessone, 2023; Michel, 2023; Spelman, 2002).

Kintsugi and Buddhism

Buddhism was introduced to Japan in the 6th century and gradually merged with indigenous Shinto beliefs, shaping not only religious life but also deeply influencing Japanese art, philosophy, and daily practices (Harvey, 2013). Among its many forms, Zen Buddhism became especially prominent. Known for its emphasis on meditation, simplicity, and direct experiential insight, Zen has left a strong imprint on Japanese aesthetics, including the philosophy that underpins kintsugi (Harvey, 2013). Central to Buddhist thought are several core principles that underpin the spiritual meaning of kintsugi:

Impermanence (*anicca*). This is the idea that all things are in a state of constant change (Harvey, 2013). Kintsugi reflects this truth by embracing rather than concealing the evidence of breakage and time. It highlights the temporal and material transformation of the kintsugi piece, which is evidence of its impermanence.

Suffering (*dukkha*). The first noble truth in Buddhism, which is the truth of suffering, is a fundamental reality of human existence; hence, it is inevitable (Harvey, 2013). The kintsugi process can be viewed as an acceptance of suffering because attempting to erase it is

impossible. Hence, rather than hopelessly avoiding suffering, kintsugi suggests meaningfully integrating it as part of the whole reality.

N**on-self** (*anatta*). This concept explains that there is no unchanging, permanent self or soul in living beings (Harvey, 2013). By highlighting rather than hiding flaws, kintsugi challenges notions of fixed identity, encouraging a more flexible and compassionate view of the self.

Karma and Rebirth. This reflects the potential for transformation. The art of kintsugi symbolises a form of rebirth that becomes possible through connection with something beyond the original self (Cusinato, 2023).

Buddhism: on Healing and Kintsugi's Role

Kintsugi, in a way, embodies the Buddhist concept of healing. A documentary by Candice Kumai (2025) entitled *Kintsugi* features a conversation with Buddhist Reverend Takafumi Kawakami, where they reflected on healing in this modern world. They discussed that life does not need to be perfect, and that acceptance is key to healing. Negative emotions are seen as tools that help people navigate through life (Kumai, 2025). Inspired by the metaphor of kintsugi, they described how cracks allow light to enter, and over time, these visible repairs become part of one's unique personality. Kawakami also noted that kintsugi has two functions: first, it gives an individual uniqueness; and second, it fosters a sense of commonness, a shared experience of brokenness (Kumai, 2025). Kintsugi, therefore, is more than just a craft; it is a lived expression of Buddhist wisdom.

Kintsugi's Psychological Perspective

The philosophical foundations of kintsugi emphasise several core values: accepting and appreciating imperfections, striving for personal transformation, and believing in the possibility of healing. These align closely with themes in psychology around self-acceptance, post-traumatic growth, recovery and resilience. Given these rich values, it is no surprise that kintsugi has been increasingly adopted as a metaphor in psychology and mental health contexts around the world.

Emerging research has begun to explore kintsugi-based therapeutic practices. Santos and Costa (2025) demonstrated the clinical utility of a kintsugi-based psychotherapeutic technique, showing significant increases in psychological well-being and decreases in anxiety across 200 participants. Their findings support kintsugi as an effective therapeutic tool in a

clinical setting. Randazzo and Ammari (2025) explored how trauma survivors reconstruct self-identity using the metaphor of kintsugi. They have found that trauma-informed design can support identity integration, with a kintsugi-inspired approach helping survivors integrate identities that both acknowledge the trauma and foster growth (Randazzo & Ammari, 2025). This study applies kintsugi metaphorically to identity reconstruction after trauma but does not explore its potential as an embodied or experiential intervention for psychological well-being.

Another application is found in the trauma therapy training program that Scherb (2018) developed. He utilised a kintsugi metaphor-based training program for survivors of torture and severe trauma, using the idea of healing and repair with golden joins to help communicate recovery (Scherb, 2018). In addition, in a systematic review of recovery after psychosis by Harris et al. (2022), the word “Kintsugi” is used in the title of their paper to describe how individuals rebuild identity following a mental health breakdown. Their review synthesised that people often undergo an identity reconstruction, integrating the psychotic experience into a new sense of self, just like a broken pot being reassembled with valued new substance (gold or silver) to fill the cracks (Harris et al., 2022). Scherb's (2018) study used the metaphor of kintsugi to support the understanding of trauma recovery; however, the actual practice of kintsugi was not used in the study. Similarly, the systematic review of Harris et al. (2022) did not examine kintsugi; it was referenced solely to anchor the title of their paper.

Another qualitative study by Princer (2022) implemented a three-part art therapy based on kintsugi to help young adults process shame and guilt, but introduced a non-essential step done in kintsugi, that is, purposely breaking the object. Participants created art, destroyed it, and then used the broken pieces to make something new or repair, mirroring the kintsugi process (Princer, 2022). The results indicated that this experience effectively evoked feelings of resilience and self-forgiveness in the participants (Princer, 2022). The act of breaking their own created art and then repairing it allowed them to symbolically confront feelings of “brokenness” in themselves and then process those feelings by mending. Princer (2022) noted that few studies have explored the therapeutic potential of intentionally destroying art; thus, she hopes that her study starts the conversation on using kintsugi and similar techniques in therapy (Princer, 2022). Another explorative review observed the “breaking” stage and even used kintsugi outside the usual pottery. Michener (2022) explored the application of a kintsugi-inspired mask-making process in addressing addictive behaviours. Michener (2022) observed that by making, breaking, and repairing ceramic masks, the participants reflect on their healing

journeys. Through this creative act, the participants were encouraged to see beauty and hope in their path to recovery (Michener, 2022).

Both Princer (2022) and Michener (2022) showed how practising kintsugi can help people reflect, heal, and build resilience through art. However, their work mainly focused on emotional expression (catharsis) and does not explain how the process supports psychological change.

From a cultural and philosophical perspective, the act of breaking goes against the idea of kintsugi (Kemske, 2021). Although breaking could be a symbolic act and may represent an important element for further study, this present study deliberately designed a kintsugi method that is close to the essence of traditional kintsugi. In addition, these studies are based in therapy settings rather than community or preventive contexts. This thesis responds to these gaps by combining kintsugi practice with an established evidence-based Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and attempts to link kintsugi to psychological principles and cultural meaning within a structured, nonclinical approach to mental well-being.

The current literatures illustrate that kintsugi's metaphor resonates across different psychological contexts, from addressing personal shame to recovering from psychosis and trauma. It provides a visually powerful and personal way to talk about acceptance of brokenness and the possibility of transformation. The researcher has observed that there is currently a limited amount of research on the potential of kintsugi in the field of psychology. Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the growing body of knowledge exploring kintsugi within a psychological context using an evidence-based psychological framework. In this case, the research critically adopted Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to serve as the psychological framework to enrich kintsugi.

2.3 Understanding Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)

This section discusses Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), which is essential to understand because it provides the framework for exploring the practice and philosophy of kintsugi from a psychological perspective. It includes an overview and exposition of the six core processes and a brief form of ACT known as Focused Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (FACT).

Overview and Origins of ACT

Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT, pronounced as the word "act") is a modern cognitive-behavioural therapy approach that originated in the late 20th century as part of the "third wave" of behaviour therapies (Hayes et al., 2006). Developed by Steven C. Hayes, Kelly Wilson, Kirk Strosahl and colleagues (2004), ACT was first articulated in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with a foundational text published in 1999. ACT arose from a context in which traditional Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) was evolving. Researchers found that directly challenging or changing the content of thoughts was not always necessary for improvement (Biglan et al., 2008). Instead, ACT and other third-wave therapies introduced strategies of acceptance, mindfulness, and values-guided action to address psychological problems (Biglan et al., 2008). The theoretical foundation of ACT is rooted in Contextual Behavioural Science and specifically Relational Frame Theory (RFT), a behaviour-analytic account of language and cognition (Hayes et al., 2013). RFT suggests that human language and thought, while very useful, can also trap people into maladaptive patterns (Strosahl et al., 2004). Hence, people relate thoughts and concepts in ways that can produce suffering (Hayes et al., 2013). For example, an individual might say or think, "I am worthless because of a failure." ACT was designed to counteract these harmful effects of language through contextual strategies (Strosahl et al., 2004). Rather than disputing the literal truth of thoughts, ACT changes the context in which thoughts and feelings are experienced (Biglan et al., 2008). This leads to the central aim of ACT, that is, to increase psychological flexibility, which is defined as the capacity to fully contact the present moment and one's experiences without needless defence, and to persist or change behaviour in pursuit of one's values (Hayes & Pierson, 2005). In essence, ACT helps people open up to what they are feeling, step back from cognitive entanglement, and engage in meaningful life directions, thereby improving mental health and well-being (Hayes & Pierson, 2005; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010).

The Three Pillars of ACT

Before exploring the six core processes, it is important to introduce ACT's three pillars: *openness*, *awareness*, and *engagement* (Hayes et al., 2006). These three interrelated pillars provide the conceptual foundation upon which the six ACT processes are built. Openness (*Acceptance* and *Cognitive Defusion*) involves accepting one's thoughts and emotions without unnecessary struggle (Hayes et al., 2006). Awareness (*Present Moment Awareness* and *Self-as-context*) refers to mindful presence and perspective-taking. Engagement (*Values* and

Committed Action) entails living in alignment with personal values through meaningful action (Hayes et al., 2012).

The Six Core Processes of ACT

ACT achieves its outcomes through six core therapeutic processes, often depicted on a hexagon diagram or sometimes called *hexaflex* (Hayes et al., 2006). These six processes are acceptance, cognitive defusion, present moment awareness, self-as-context, values, and committed action (Hayes et al., 2006).

Each process targets a common psychological issue, particularly the tendency toward experiential avoidance, that is, trying to avoid or suppress unwanted internal experiences, which ACT views as a root of many problems (Biglan et al., 2008). By cultivating each of the six processes, the individual becomes more psychologically flexible, able to handle difficult thoughts and feelings more healthily and still move toward goals that matter. It is important to note that these processes do not operate independently or in a linear sequence; rather, they interact with one another (Arch et al., 2023; Biglan et al., 2008; Hayes et al., 2006). Brief definitions of the six core ACT processes are as follows (Hayes et al., 2006):

(1) Acceptance

In ACT, *experiential acceptance* means actively embracing private experiences such as emotions, thoughts, and bodily sensations without trying to control, escape, or avoid them (Biglan et al., 2008). This is not passive resignation, but rather a willingness to experience one's feelings as they are, in the service of living a full life (Biglan et al., 2008). For example, instead of fighting anxiety or pain, a person practices opening and making room for those sensations, letting them come and go without controlling. The therapeutic point is that attempts to suppress or eliminate certain thoughts or feelings often backfire (Biglan et al., 2008; Hayes et al., 2006). Acceptance allows one to move through suffering without getting stuck in it. In ACT, clients learn that accepting what they cannot change internally can free up energy to focus on what they can do (Biglan et al., 2008). This process is similar to mindfulness practices of nonjudgmental awareness, and it directly opposes experiential avoidance (Hayes et al., 2012; Strosahl et al., 2004). For instance, a client with social anxiety might accept that "I will feel anxious at times when meeting new people" rather than letting that anxiety dictate avoidance of social situations.

(2) Cognitive Defusion

Defusion involves learning to step back from one's thoughts and see them as just thoughts, not absolute truths or commands (Hayes et al., 2012). Humans tend to fuse with their thoughts, which means that they get entangled and treat them as equivalent to reality (Strosahl et al., 2004). For example, the thought *"*I'm a failure*"* is held as true and shapes the behaviour accordingly. ACT teaches various techniques to create psychological distance from thoughts, so their grip loosens (Hayes et al., 2006; Strosahl et al., 2004). For example, instead of "I am a failure," one might rephrase it as "I'm having the thought that I'm a failure" (Hayes et al., 2012). By seeing thoughts as transient mental events, individuals can reduce the power of negative thinking patterns. Defusion does not aim to replace negative thoughts with positive ones, but rather to reduce their literal believability. That is why defusion is sometimes called "*de*literalization" (Hayes et al., 2012). This way, even if the thought "I am a failure" shows up, it no longer prevents the person from trying again. The thought can coexist without being controlled by it. Metaphors are often used, such as watching thoughts as leaves on a stream floating by. Ultimately, cognitive defusion fosters a healthier relationship with one's mind, where thoughts are noticed and acknowledged but not obeyed blindly (Hayes et al., 2012).

(3) Present Moment Awareness

ACT encourages an open and non-judgmental contact with the present moment. To be mindful means bringing awareness to the here-and-now, rather than being caught up in memories of the past or projections about the future (Hayes et al., 2012). By grounding attention in the present, individuals can connect more with their actual life as it is happening, and notice both external events and internal reactions with clarity (Hayes et al., 2012). Mindfulness itself has deep roots in Buddhism, just like kintsugi, where it is understood as an intentional awareness of the present moment developed through meditation and reflection (Harvey, 2013). It helps reduce the automatic pilot mode in which people often operate, where they might be ruminating or worrying and thus missing the moment (Strosahl et al., 2004). In ACT, being present also means maintaining a flexible, attentive stance that is conscious of opportunities to act in line with one's values at any given moment (Biglan et al., 2008). Techniques to cultivate this include mindful breathing, observing surroundings, or mindful attention to tasks. Being present is important because suffering is often compounded when the mind time-travels (Hayes et al., 2012). For instance, reliving a trauma or anticipating a catastrophe can cause as much distress as the actual event. By anchoring in the now, one can

handle whatever feelings are present (using acceptance and defusion) and engage with life directly (Hayes et al., 2012).

(4) Self-As-Context

Self-as-context refers to fostering a flexible sense of self that is distinct from the content of one's experiences. In ACT, a distinction is made between the *conceptualised self,* which is the story or identity content people often fuse with and, on the other hand, the deeper aspect of self that is the observer or context for all experiences (Hayes et al., 2012). The idea of self-as-context is that there is a perspective from which one can observe thoughts and feelings without being defined by them, hence, sometimes also called the "observing self" or "transcendent sense of self" (Hayes et al., 2012). This is probably the most abstract part of ACT. But the clinical significance of this concept is that, by contacting this observing self, clients can realise they are not their thoughts; instead, they are the one noticing these thoughts (Harris, 2019). This awareness helps untangle rigid self-concepts such as "I'm broken beyond repair," allowing these thoughts to be seen as mental events rather than defining truths about the self (Harris, 2019). Exercises to cultivate self-as-context often include metaphors like the "chessboard metaphor," which helps clients step back and observe their experiences with distance and compassion (Harris, 2019). The individual is the board on which black and white pieces (thoughts) battle, but the individual is not the pieces (Harris, 2019). Another strategy is to use mindfulness exercises that observe experiences coming and going (Strosahl et al., 2004). The therapeutic benefit is increased perspective-taking and compassion for oneself (Strosahl et al., 2004). This can be powerful for people stuck in self-judgment or who have experienced a shattering of identity (Strosahl et al., 2004). For example, after trauma, someone might overly identify with being a victim; self-as-context could help the person see that part of them was victimised, but that's not their whole self.

(5) Values

Values in ACT are defined as chosen life directions (Biglan et al., 2008). These are fundamental desires about what is deeply important to an individual, such as relationships, creativity, integrity, helping others and health. Unlike goals, which are specific, achievable outcomes, values are continuous guiding principles (Strosahl et al., 2004). One can never finish a value; it's like a compass direction one continuously travels (Strosahl et al., 2004). ACT places strong emphasis on helping clients clarify their values, because these are the life directions that motivate change and are a source of meaning. The therapeutic significance of

values is that clients may explore questions like: “What do you want your life to stand for? What kind of person do you want to be? What brings you a sense of vitality and meaning?” (Hayes et al., 2012). By identifying values, people gain a positive reason to endure difficult feelings (Hayes et al., 2012). For example, someone might accept the discomfort of doing household chores because they value loving and peaceful relationships or face their anxiety to be the loving parent they wish to be. Values give context to pain (Hayes et al., 2012). “You hurt where you care, and care where you hurt” (Hayes, 2019). If losing someone causes grief, it is because a value, someone important, was present. Thus, values can help people reframe pain as evidence of what they cherish (Hayes, 2019). In summary, values are the heart of what makes life worth living for the person, and in ACT, this becomes the beacon that guides therapy.

(6) Committed Action

Finally, ACT focuses on committed action, which means taking concrete steps in line with one’s values, even in the face of obstacles (Strosahl et al., 2004). This is where behaviour change comes in. It is not enough to accept and defuse from experiences internally; ACT also encourages actively moving life forward through goal-setting and action (Hayes et al., 2012). Commitment implies that these actions are linked to values and pursued with persistence (Hayes, 2019). For instance, if one value is health, a committed action might be to eat healthy, develop good sleep hygiene or go for regular walking or exercise. If one values kindness and connection, a committed action might be volunteering and reaching out more to friends, respectively. Therapy involves identifying small, achievable steps and problem-solving barriers, including the internal barriers like fear or thoughts that might show up (Hayes et al., 2012). Through committed action, individuals learn that they can live out their values now, even when it is hard, and not someday when everything is perfect (Hayes et al., 2012). Setbacks are reframed as learning experiences, and the commitment is to keep returning to the valued direction (Hayes, 2019). As discussed, values are life directions, a guide or compass, so much so that a sailor continually corrects course toward a destination despite the strong ocean tides. Over time, these actions accumulate into meaningful behaviour change and a life that feels more authentic and fulfilling to the individual (Strosahl et al., 2004).

These six processes are interrelated and often learned in a nonlinear fashion. Collectively, they undermine pathological *experiential avoidance*, which is the impulse to escape unpleasant internal experiences (Strosahl et al., 2004). ACT builds the positive skills of acceptance and mindfulness, while also activating the person’s life through values and action

(Biglan et al., 2008). The outcome of successful ACT is an increase in psychological flexibility, which is the capacity to be fully aware of the present moment and to adjust or maintain one's behaviour when it supports meaningful and valued goals (Biglan et al., 2008).

Research has shown that psychological flexibility is a robust predictor of mental health; higher flexibility is associated with less depression, anxiety, and stress, and with greater quality of life (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). ACT's efficacy across many studies (ranging from depression and anxiety disorders to chronic pain, PTSD, and even areas like smoking cessation) appears to be mediated by changes in psychological flexibility. As clients become more accepting and less entangled in their thoughts, they report symptom reduction and improved functioning (Gloster et al., 2020; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010; Hayes et al., 2006).

Psychological Flexibility

Psychological flexibility is the central concept in and therapeutic aim of ACT (Hayes et al., 2006). It refers to the capacity to stay open to thoughts and emotions while acting in ways that reflect one's personal values (Hayes et al., 2012). This flexibility allows people to adapt to change, face difficult experiences with present awareness, and engage with actions based on values (Hayes et al., 2006). The six core processes of ACT work together to develop this capacity (Hayes et al., 2006). Each process contributes to learning how to observe experiences without being dominated by them and to make choices guided by intention rather than avoidance (Harris, 2009). For instance, a person may feel anxious before an important conversation yet still choose to engage because connection is deeply valued (Harris, 2009). Kashdan and Rottenberg (2010) identified psychological flexibility as a key component of emotional health, describing it as the ability to respond to life's demands with balance and purpose. Harris (2019) similarly explains that it allows people to "pivot toward what matters," turning pain into an opportunity for growth. In this present study, psychological flexibility provides a foundation for understanding how kintsugi supports psychological well-being by encouraging acceptance, mindful awareness, and actions that express and move towards one's values.

Focused Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (FACT)

It is important to highlight one more development in ACT that is relevant to this study, Focused Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (FACT). FACT is the brief version of ACT. As ACT gained evidence as a psychotherapy, practitioners also began adapting it for brief

interventions and primary care settings (Strosahl et al., 2012). Developed by Kirk Strosahl and Patricia Robinson (2012), FACT is essentially an abridged version of ACT that can be delivered in a shorter time frame while aiming for similar core outcomes. They described FACT as applying ACT principles in a focused and quick way, often in just one to four sessions, to accommodate settings like primary care, school, EAP, prison and universities (Strosahl et al., 2012). The rationale is that many individuals can benefit from a brief boost in psychological flexibility, even if they do not engage in long-term therapy (Strosahl et al., 2012).

FACT maintains ACT's emphasis on acceptance, mindfulness, and values, but streamlines the intervention to target the person's central issue quickly and foster commitment to a small change (Strosahl et al., 2012). It tends to be very present-focused and practical. For example, in a primary care context, a provider using FACT might help a patient with stress identify one key value and one avoidance pattern in a single meeting, then negotiate a committed action homework to try before the next visit (Strosahl et al., 2012).

According to reports, FACT has been used effectively for preventive mental health because it can reach a larger number of people with brief doses (Strosahl et al., 2012). It's been applied in workplace stress programs, university counselling centres for subclinical issues, and community workshops for enhancing coping skills (Strosahl et al., 2012). FACT provides a condensed form of ACT that achieves comparable outcomes within a shorter period of time (Strosahl et al., 2012). By focusing on experiential exercises and quick values clarification, FACT can ignite meaningful behaviour change even when time is limited. This makes ACT not only a therapeutic tool but also a preventive intervention approach that can be integrated into wellness programs.

In summary, ACT provides a rich, evidence-based framework for fostering mental well-being through acceptance, mindfulness, and values-based action. The shorter version of FACT is relevant to the current study's interest in brief, community-friendly interventions. A kintsugi workshop guided by ACT principles could be seen as an example of a brief, focused application of ACT, perhaps delivered in one day or a few short sessions, intended to promote psychological well-being.

ACT and Metaphor

A notable feature of ACT is its heavy use of experiential exercises and metaphors in therapy sessions (Strosahl et al., 2004), such as the "chessboard metaphor" mentioned in the

previous section. Rather than relying only on didactic explanations, ACT therapists often introduce creative analogies or physical exercises to help clients grasp concepts like defusion or acceptance. For example, a therapist might use a *"tug-of-war with a monster"* metaphor for struggling with anxiety (illustrating that dropping the rope, i.e., acceptance, ends the struggle), or the *"passengers on the bus"* metaphor where the client (as the bus driver) learns to let scary passengers (thoughts) come along without giving in to these (Harris, 2019). These metaphors make ACT interventions more relatable and engaging, allowing clients to experience a principle rather than just talk about it (Harris, 2019).

This aligns well with the nature of art and symbolic activities, suggesting a natural synergy between ACT and artmaking. Dr Amy Backos (2022), a psychologist and art therapist, notes that ACT's concepts can be effectively taught through creative approaches. She and others have pioneered combining ACT with art therapy techniques, recognising that artmaking itself can serve as a metaphorical process to explore acceptance, values, or cognitive change (Backos, 2022). At this point, this foreshadows the integration of ACT with kintsugi in terms of the use of the metaphors of repairing pottery. This could be an innovative way to illustrate ACT's processes in a tangible form. Something that people can sense and make sense of.

2.4 Initial Conceptual Integration: Kintsugi and ACT

Having reviewed the key components of both kintsugi and ACT, this section explores how the practical and philosophical themes of kintsugi align with each of ACT's six core processes, laying the groundwork for integrating the two as an intervention. This discussion provides the initial conceptual integration of kintsugi and ACT, informing the study's conceptual and methodological framework. This alignment is used to design the art-based inquiry that guides both the workshop design and the analysis of the data collected. Each of ACT's core processes is considered in the light of the metaphor and practice of kintsugi. These connections are later illustrated in *Figure 2*, which provides a visual representation of the Kintsugi-ACT framework developed for this study. The alignment is discussed as follows:

Acceptance (ACT) and Embracing Imperfection & Discomfort (Kintsugi)

The principle of acceptance in ACT encourages individuals to open up to painful feelings and acknowledge reality without futile resistance (Biglan et al., 2008). This is mirrored almost directly in kintsugi's philosophy.

Kintsugi begins with accepting that the pot is broken. Rather than throwing it away, the person faces and acknowledges the brokenness and then decides to work with it. Psychologically, this is analogous to a person confronting their emotional pain or personal flaws instead of avoiding them. Kintsugi teaches that brokenness is not something to hide or be ashamed of, but something to acknowledge and even honour (Kumai, 2025). This aligns with ACT's message that accepting personal pain, such as trauma, loss, or anxiety, is a prerequisite to healing (Hayes et al., 2006, 2012; Strosahl et al., 2004). One must first say "yes, this happened" or "yes, I feel this" before one can move forward. In kintsugi, the very act of repair implicitly accepts the crack. A person cannot repair what they refuse to admit as broken. For instance, acceptance might mean allowing oneself to grieve a loss fully, or to feel anger without immediately trying to suppress it.

The kintsugi metaphor reinforces that acceptance is not equivalent to liking the pain but rather acknowledging its reality and significance. The golden repair reflects that by accepting the crack, whether this symbolises a mistake, trauma, imperfection, and tending to it, one can transform it into a source of strength or beauty. For example, a person who has long felt ashamed of a past failure might, through kintsugi, reframe that experience as a golden thread in their life story. Is it painful? Yes! But at the same time, it is also formative in making them who they are. This parallels what an ACT therapist might help a client do, that is, to accept the past failure, see what values it implies and integrate it into their self-concept in a healthy way (Strosahl et al., 2004). The whole experience of brokenness becomes a learning experience rather than a mark of worthlessness. Both ACT and kintsugi affirm that healing starts with acceptance.

Adversities in life change individuals in different ways. Kintsugi teaches people that things may not be the same as before, but there is a way to live more meaningfully, a life that is not perfect but still precious. This is also the very essence of ACT's acceptance. It does not suppress the painful experiences and ugly imperfections, but, instead, carries them gracefully as part of one's journey and history.

Additionally, the philosophy of wabi-sabi is tied to kintsugi, appreciating the present state of an object with all its imperfections, rather than longing for its past pristine state or a hypothetical perfect future state (Wilkinson, 2022).

Moreover, acceptance can be experienced by allowing oneself to experience the uncomfortable (Harris, 2019). Kintsugi is not an easy process; there is hard work involved. For instance, sanding off the edges of the broken pieces is an effortful, uncomfortable experience. This moment can be used as an opportunity to link ACT's concept of acceptance. Kintsugi breaks open a space where pain and discomfort are accepted and not avoided.

Cognitive Defusion (ACT) and Disentangling (Kintsugi)

ACT's cognitive defusion techniques help individuals see their thoughts as thoughts, thereby diminishing the literal power of negative self-judgments or beliefs (Hayes et al., 2012). ACT uses different metaphors as helpful strategies to reduce the unhelpful believability of negative thoughts. Kintsugi offers that metaphor. It can be used as a powerful tool to distance oneself from negative thoughts by symbolising the thoughts as the broken pieces needing to be disentangled before permanently fixing them together. In doing so, metaphorically, the thoughts are noticed and acknowledged (Hayes et al., 2012).

In kintsugi, a pottery piece that is broken into a few pieces needs to be initially put together to get the overall form of what it was like before it broke. This initial act of assembling the pieces can be likened to disentangling, which helps with planning the process of the repair. It helps to know which piece should be attached to other pieces. This moment can be an opportunity to discuss the importance of having a healthy psychological distance or disentangling from all these fused thoughts. They can learn that rather than becoming entangled or fused with these unhelpful negative thoughts, they may observe them more clearly and objectively. Kintsugi offers this step as an opportunity to practise dealing with unwanted thoughts the ACT way.

The metaphor of disentangling and assembling the broken pieces illustrates cognitive defusion. This fosters a healthier relationship with the mind, which is one of the goals of cognitive defusion (Hayes et al., 2012). Empirical support for this alignment comes indirectly from the study of Princer (2022), where young adults who engaged in the kintsugi-inspired three-step art process: creating, breaking, and mending. The participants began to see themselves as resilient and forgivable, rather than irredeemable (Princer, 2022). Kintsugi parallels cognitive defusion by helping people to step back and see their story from a distance. The psychological distance is necessary to reflect and reevaluate the meaning and importance of their adversities, thereby setting the individuals off to recreate a healthier narrative.

Cognitive defusion does not aim to change the thoughts, but to see thoughts as thoughts, an important step to eventually foster a positive cognitive shift (Hayes et al., 2012).

Self-as-context (ACT) and Constructive Observation (Kintsugi)

It was discussed how kintsugi aligns with cognitive defusion. The researcher used kintsugi as a metaphor to distance themselves from thoughts and emotions by carefully disentangling and assembling the broken ceramics. This act of disentangling and initial assembly represents a necessary psychological distance that helps reduce the literal meaning of painful thoughts and emotions. In doing so, as the broken object reveals its original form, the individual takes an observer stance. This suggests self-as-context, an experience of a deeper sense of self, one that stands as an observer, a context rather than the content of the experience (Strosahl et al., 2004). Hence, one of the deeper parallels between ACT and kintsugi lies in how kintsugi can inform a person's sense of self.

Kintsugi embodies the individual's inner thoughts and emotions through the parts that are broken. It makes it easier for them to see objectively the difficult experience that it represents, allowing individuals to disentangle these private, complex thoughts and emotions. From here, the person can observe them through the broken pieces, cracks or gaps. They see them, acknowledge them, and mindfully mend them. The person then steps back and looks at the whole pot. This reflects the principle of self-as-context. It allows individuals to observe their thoughts and feelings without being consumed by them, but at the same time allows them to see the whole of the situation and thereby make a decision based on values and not on the literal meaning of the thoughts and emotions (Hayes et al., 2012). The individual experiences the pain from a self-as-context perspective. This makes them realise that they are not the damage. In kintsugi, a person does not become the crack but remains the whole pot despite the cracks. As Akanuma Taka said, *"*do not look at the kintsugi, look through the kintsugi to the pot that it is" (Kemske, 2021). The gaps with gold lines exist only as a part of the greater pot. Its beauty exists relative to the preciousness of the pot.

From this viewpoint, one can step back and witness their experiences without being overwhelmed. Kintsugi as self-as-context offers a reminder that a person is more than their pain or imperfection. They are still the person, the matter that holds it, with the capacity to grow and transform through it.

ACT's self-as-context process helps individuals see that they are more than the content of their experiences (Hayes et al., 2012). They are not defined solely by their trauma, depression, or thoughts (Hayes et al., 2012). Kintsugi offers a metaphor for a continuing self that endures damage and repair. The object that undergoes kintsugi is still fundamentally the same. A bowl is still a bowl. It retains its core identity, but its form has been changed and enriched by the experience of breaking and mending. Similarly, a person remains the same underlying self even after going through major life changes or challenges. The self-as-context can be thought of like the bowl itself, whereas specific experiences (thoughts, feelings, events) are like glazes on the surface; they can crack and be reglued, but the person who witnesses it all, the observer or the *I* in the here-and-now, persists. The kintsugi piece powerfully illustrates continuity. In the aftermath of trauma or illness, people often feel shattered or like they are not the person they used to be. The kintsugi narrative can help them reconceptualise their identity not as irretrievably broken but as beautifully transformed.

The pot is not the same as it was before the break, but in some ways, it may be even more special. This can translate to a survivor's identity, for which the experience has changed the individual. The scars remain, but they have helped shape a stronger and more compassionate self. Harris, in their systematic review on psychosis recovery, used kintsugi as a metaphor for identity reconstruction, implying that individuals can rebuild a coherent sense of self after a shattering episode, integrating the brokenness into a new self-narrative (Harris et al., 2022). This is very much in line with self-as-context: the person observes the changes and integrates them, rather than losing themselves in them.

Another aspect is that kintsugi emphasises contextual beauty. In art appreciation, people understand and appreciate the artwork more if they have the contextual information (Darda & Chatterjee, 2023). According to the study of Darda and Chatterjee (2023), contextual information significantly influences how people engage with artworks. In ACT, symbolised by kintsugi, the beauty of the repaired object comes from the context of both the material history that it holds and the personal history that it represents.

ACT's self-as-context suggests that identity is the context that holds all our experiences (Hayes et al., 2012). For instance, the gold in the cracks could be likened to the wisdom or strength one gains, which becomes part of one's identity context after surviving hardship. In summary, kintsugi reassures that people can be broken, mended and remain themselves, an idea that also suggests a flexible, growing yet continuous sense of self (Hayes et al., 2012).

Being Present (ACT) and Mindfulness in the Repair Process (Kintsugi)

Kintsugi is a slow and deliberate process requiring careful attention (Santini, 2019). Many craftsmen describe the act of repairing pottery with lacquer and gold as meditative (Kemske, 2021). From mixing the lacquer, aligning broken pieces, waiting for drying, to applying gold dust, each step encourages patience and focus on the present stage of repair (Santini, 2019). This resonates with the ACT process of present-moment awareness. By engaging in kintsugi, individuals can practice mindfulness naturally. The tactile experience of handling ceramic pieces, the sight of the shiny gold filling a crack, the smell of lacquer, all these sensory experiences can ground a person in the present moment. Instead of ruminating on the past or worrying about the future, one must pay attention to what one is doing with the object right now (Strosahl et al., 2004). This mirrors many mindfulness-based art therapy techniques where the creative act induces a flow state or deep focus (Rappaport, 2013).

ACT's present focus often includes noticing thoughts and feelings in the moment (Hayes et al., 2012). During a kintsugi activity, a person may notice feelings that arise, perhaps sadness at the break, patience or hope during the repair. These are worth observing, just like what ACT training encourages during mindfulness activity. Some therapists might incorporate a mindful breathing exercise during the session to help the client anchor in the present moment (Harris, 2019).

For kintsugi, the repairing task itself requires focus, which helps ground the individuals in the present moment. Apart from that, kintsugi involves moments of waiting, a pause to let the lacquer or glue set properly (Santini, 2019). As a possible option, during these waiting times, in between steps, mindfulness activities can be incorporated as well.

The act of waiting for the lacquer to cure may also symbolise how patience and presence are part of healing, transformation and resilience building (Santini, 2019). Kintsugi provides an opportunity to practice mindfulness. The present moment is where acceptance and change happen, and kintsugi's careful, step-by-step process reinforces staying in the present moment. For example, if one hurries or is inattentive in kintsugi, the repair will not hold well. Kintsugi thus rewards the presence of mind. This is analogous to how ACT suggests that by staying present with one's emotions, not avoiding or rushing through them, one can respond more skilfully (Strosahl et al., 2004). Both kintsugi and ACT convey the importance of mindfully taking care of what is here and now, whether it is a broken cup or a pain in one's heart.

Values (ACT) and Finding Meaning in Repair (Kintsugi)

In ACT, clarifying values gives one a reason to endure difficulties. Values serve as life directions (Biglan et al., 2008; Hayes, 2019; Strosahl et al., 2012). Moreover, the process of kintsugi is valuable; it is not just random or purely aesthetic. It is driven by the idea that the object is worth repairing because it has value, perhaps a sentimental value, cultural value, or simply the inherent value that nothing should be wasted, a principle similar to the Japanese concept of *mottainai,* which means "avoid waste" (Kemske, 2021).

In a therapeutic metaphor, choosing to repair one's life or self through kintsugi may reflect an underlying value of self-worth and growth. It means that the individual sees themselves as worthy of the effort to heal and transform. This value can also extend to others, such as relationships with family, friends, and society. Such reflection might help individuals articulate values like self-compassion and compassion for others.

Another key value represented in kintsugi is resilience (Kemske, 2021). While resilience is an outcome, it is often tied to a value, such as the value of life, personal growth, or resilience (Kemske, 2021). The decision to fix a broken pot rather than throw it away parallels the decision to rebuild one's life rather than surrender to despair. That decision usually stems from something valued, possibly love for others, a goal still to be reached, or a sense of purpose.

In addition, it was discussed earlier that contextual information makes an artwork more appreciated, a contextual beauty (Darda & Chatterjee, 2023). Kintsugi becomes a meaningful activity by contextualising the process of repairing broken ceramics with personal values. Kintsugi may visually reinforce values such as authenticity, perseverance, and care. For example, the act of mindfully repairing an object rather than discarding it can symbolise the value of commitment, whether it is a commitment to one's healing, maintaining important bonds, or cherishing sentimental memories. Perhaps, in a kintsugi workshop, participants may be encouraged to reflectively repair with personal meaning, such as thinking of each gold fill as representing something or someone important that helped them heal. One might dedicate a crack repair to "being a loving partner" or "being a compassionate friend." In this way, the kintsugi becomes a tangible representation, a map or an opportunity to clarify personal values.

In summary, kintsugi is beneficial as a point of reflection on what matters, contextualising the repair to personal values to make the activity more meaningful. In addition,

Kintsugi carries the implicit value message that everyone is worthy of care, and every life is precious even if it is broken and imperfect.

Committed Action (ACT) and Active Process of Mending (Kintsugi)

Finally, kintsugi is inherently about action, the act of repair. Psychological acceptance alone does not fix the bowl. One must take action: mix the lacquer, align the pieces, fill the gaps, and apply the gold. This reflects the ACT idea of committed action: taking concrete steps guided by values, even when it is challenging (Strosahl et al., 2004).

The kintsugi process can be laborious and requires commitment to see it through. The traditional method alone may take days or weeks for a larger repair, with multiple stages. Even the modern kintsugi technique still requires commitment to successfully mend the pieces.

If an individual begins a kintsugi project, they are practising following through on an intention to repair, parallel to the willingness to make a positive change in life, even in difficult times. There is a valuable lesson of perseverance, when pieces do not fit perfectly, or the repair needs to be redone; likewise in life, one might relapse or face setbacks, but the value-driven commitment is to keep working at it. With that being said, this is a realistic depiction of healing or recovery; it is a process and not instantaneous (Gantt & Tinnin, 2009). Gantt and Tinnin (2009) showed a neurobiological perspective on trauma recovery. They highlighted that healing unfolds gradually and rarely follows a linear path (Gantt & Tinnin, 2009). Rather than occurring through a single moment of emotional release, recovery involves the slow reintegration of fragmented sensory, emotional, and cognitive memories. Through structured and repetitive artmaking, individuals externalise their experiences, reclaim agency, and transform disorganised memories into coherent personal narratives that promote psychological healing (Gantt & Tinnin, 2009).

Healing is not a straightforward, upward journey. Instead, it is an ongoing process with highs and lows. Some days may feel okay, while other days do not. It is neither quick nor easy; rather, it is often painful and challenging. One key lesson from kintsugi is to persevere through these fluctuations and remain resilient (Santini, 2019).

Kintsugi teaches a person to commit to life again after brokenness (Kumai, 2025; Santini, 2019). For example, someone heartbroken from a loss might, through the metaphor, decide to engage again with life's possibilities, essentially committing to not "throwing away" their life. Committed action is evident in how kintsugi demands effort, time, patience and active

creativity, just as ACT asks clients to take often uncomfortable steps, such as initiating a difficult conversation, attending a social event despite anxiety, and practising helpful mental health skills (Harris, 2019). Eventually, people reap what they sow. The reward for committed action in kintsugi is a beautifully restored object; in life, the reward is movement towards an imperfect yet meaningful life.

Importantly, kintsugi also illustrates that healing is an active process: one does not passively become whole; one actively works to make meaning and to grow. In ACT, while acceptance is sometimes passive sounding, it is very much about doing by values (Strosahl et al., 2004). The kintsugi metaphor offers individuals the strength to persist. It is an experiential reminder that each step in healing is like filling one gap after another, going back to mixing lacquer again, layering patiently, figuring out the pieces that go together, until the gold is dusted, the piece is left to cure, gently buffed, and finally revealed as a beautifully mended ceramic.

In summary, it is striking that an ancient art form and a contemporary psychotherapy, developed independently and in different cultures, share many common insights about coping with suffering and pursuing what matters. For instance, regarding mindfulness, both ACT and kintsugi share a philosophical foundation rooted in Buddhist thought. In all these alignments, kintsugi's metaphorical meanings enrich ACT's processes and vice versa. Acceptance is illustrated by embracing the broken pieces or opening to the difficult experiences; defusion by disentangling the unwanted thoughts; mindfulness by the careful artistic presence throughout the repair process; self-as-context by taking an observer stance from the object; values by the meaning embedded in the repair; and committed action by the act of mending from start to finish. This seemingly natural alignment between ACT and kintsugi serves as a foundational framework of the study.

2.5 Kintsugi-ACT Conceptual Framework

Having mapped kintsugi's practice and philosophy onto ACT's principles, this section presents the initial conceptual integration of the two approaches. This integration is significant because it informs the structure of the art-based intervention and inquiry employed in this study. It provides the foundation for designing the workshop and guides the process of data collection, analysis and interpretation. This foundational framework, consequently, provides the

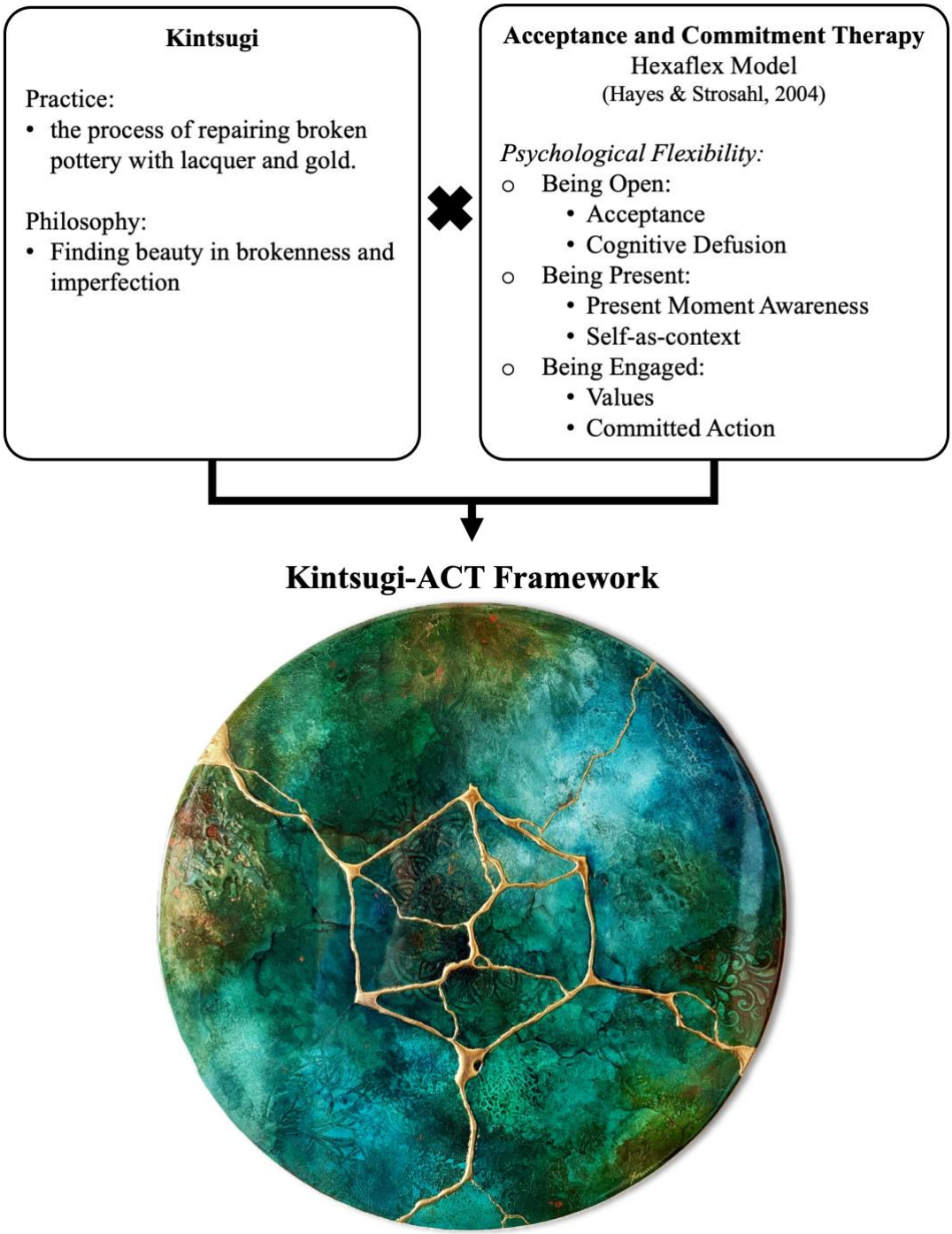
conceptual and methodological framework as it proceeds with grounding this integration in participants' experiences.

Figure 2 presents the conceptual framework that integrates kintsugi and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). On the left, kintsugi is shown as both a practice and a philosophy. The practice involves repairing broken pottery with lacquer and gold, while the philosophy emphasises finding beauty in brokenness and imperfection. On the right, ACT is represented through the hexaflex model (Hayes et al., 2006), which promotes psychological flexibility. This model includes three pillars and six core processes: *being open* through (1) acceptance and (2) cognitive defusion, *being present* through (4) present moment awareness and (5) self-as-context and *being engaged* through (5) values and (6) committed action.

The diagram illustrates how these two elements converge to form the Kintsugi-ACT framework. By integrating kintsugi and ACT principles, the framework offers participants experiential and psychological pathways to foster mental well-being. The circular artwork shows a kintsugi version of the hexaflex model, which is the visual representation of this synthesis.

The Kintsugi-ACT approach is well-suited for promoting mental health and well-being through creative engagement. This framework brings together ACT's psychological flexibility skills and the symbolic, aesthetic power of kintsugi. By merging these elements, the practice of kintsugi gains psychological depth, while ACT becomes more tangible and experiential. This integration offers participants a meaningful way to learn and apply ACT principles through artmaking.

Figure 2. Kintsugi-ACT Framework



Note. The picture representing the Kintsugi-ACT framework is a kintsugi-inspired adaptation of ACT's hexaflex model. The artist, who is also the author and researcher of this study, created this art piece to visually present how Kintsugi and ACT mutually enrich and empower one another.

Kintsugi-ACT Intervention Design

Building on the conceptual alignment of ACT and kintsugi, this integration served as the foundation for developing the intervention procedure. *Table* 1 illustrates how the principles of ACT and kintsugi translate into the step-by-step repair process, alongside corresponding personal goals that make the workshop experience more meaningful.

Table 1. Kintsugi-ACT workshop flow

ACT Process		Kintsugi Step	Personal Goal
Be Open	Defusion	Assembling the broken pieces	Sorting and fitting broken pieces together mirrors disentangling from thoughts and observing them with clarity.
	Acceptance	Sanding the sharp edges	Sanding, though unpleasant, symbolises embracing imperfection and willingness to stay with discomfort rather than avoiding it.
Be Aware	Present Moment Awareness	Applying adhesive and aligning pieces	Requires focus and mindful attention to align pieces accurately, inviting awareness and presence.
	Self-as-Context	Observing the reconstructed object	Stepping back to view the repaired piece represents seeing oneself from a broader perspective rather than through brokenness.
Be Engaged	Values Clarification	Applying precious metals (gold or silver)	Gold or silver represents what we hold precious, encouraging reflection and clarification on what truly matters.
	Committed Action	Finishing touches with care and purpose	Applying gold mindfully reflects taking values-guided actions that move one toward a meaningful life.

Note. This table was included in the handout provided to the participants to show the workshop design framework and to demonstrate how the physical stages of kintsugi were intentionally aligned with ACT's psychological processes, creating a deeper connection between artistic repair and psychological flexibility. It reflects the deliberate blending of art and evidence-based practice to foster both creativity and wellbeing. Each step corresponds to a reflective prompt.

Framework Rationale

Brief and Adaptable Format. A notable advantage of a Kintsugi-ACT approach is that it can be delivered in a brief format, aligning with FACT's purpose, and can be engaging and culturally resonant. A single-day workshop or a short series, such as three weekly sessions, could incorporate storytelling, art, and group discussion. These are modalities that tend to maintain participants' interest more than purely didactic stress management lectures. The hands-on nature means it could be offered in community centres, art centres, workplaces, or educational settings without huge resource investments. Kintsugi can fill a gap by reaching people earlier and in non-stigmatising ways (Jani, 2022). In New Zealand, where mental health services are often burdened, and many individuals who need help do not access formal therapy, community-based programs like kintsugi could make a positive difference in the life of the individual (Ellingham & reporter, 2024; Jani, 2022; Woodcock, 2011).

Enhancing Psychological Well-being. Due to the current limited literature, kintsugi-based psychological interventions are not directly evaluated in the literature reviewed. However, studies show how ACT intervention can become an effective preventive intervention. For example, Bohlmeijer et al. (2015) found that guided self-help ACT intervention can significantly enhance flourishing in individuals with depressive symptoms. Also, Jeffcoat and Hayes (2012) examined the effectiveness of ACT-based bibliotherapy in improving mental health among K-12 educators. They found that participants who engaged with the self-help workbook showed significant improvements in psychological health, with both preventive and therapeutic effects for depression, anxiety, and stress, particularly among those with higher psychological flexibility (Jeffcoat & Hayes, 2012). In addition, the work of Fledderus and colleagues (2012) demonstrated that both group and self-help ACT and mindfulness formats achieved medium-high effect sizes for depression and anxiety while boosting positive mental health and psychological flexibility. Richardson et al. (2018) and Fledderus (2012) further documented that one-to-one and group-based ACT interventions improved global mental health markers and emotional well-being; improvements were maintained over a three-month follow-up in most cases.

The primary outcome one would expect from such an intervention is increased psychological flexibility, which is known to underlie resilience (Anusuya & Gayatridevi, 2025). By explicitly teaching *acceptance* (through discussions and exercises around embracing imperfection and the uncomfortable), *defusion* (through disentangling and assembling broken

pieces), *present-moment awareness* (through mindful repair and reflection), *self-as-context* (through observing experiences), *values* (through personal values clarification), and *committed action* (through values-based goal setting), a Kintsugi-ACT workshop offers practical tools to learn useful psychological skills.

ACT's proven components of mindfulness, acceptance, and value-based action can create an effective community-based preventive intervention for adults with mild to moderate distress (Fledderus, 2012). Integrating kintsugi-based activities guided by ACT is another potential way to promote mental well-being.

ACT interventions in non-clinical groups have improved well-being indicators (Anusuya & Gayatridevi, 2025). Another recent trial in Canada found that a brief group ACT intervention at workplaces led to significant boosts in employees' psychological well-being and a reduction in burnout, demonstrating the power of ACT in a preventive, high-stress environment (Piot et al., 2024).

While the integrated Kintsugi-ACT approach is novel, there are existing studies on which this research can draw on related empirical evidence to anticipate its effectiveness. ACT is proven effective as a psychological intervention. Therefore, it is worth exploring how ACT, integrated with a compelling metaphor, kintsugi, could be more impactful by facilitating deeper emotional processing. Secondly, expressive art therapies and narrative therapies have evidence for fostering resilience and personal growth (Backos, 2022; Princer, 2022). This is what the researcher hopes to offer. A Kintsugi-ACT framework that might help facilitate personal growth, resilience, transformation, self-compassion and compassion with others.

Application in Non-Clinical Adult Communities in NZ. Implementing a creative intervention approach, in this case kintsugi, in New Zealand with general adult groups (e.g., community workshop attendees, workplace wellness programs, adult education classes) could have several benefits. It may reduce mental health stigma by focusing on well-being and creativity rather than on illness. It aligns well with New Zealand's push for improving preventive mental health. For instance, this supports the national campaigns such as "Like Minds, Like Mine" which aim to increase understanding and acceptance around mental health, and the Ministry of Health's focus on building community resilience as part of its wellbeing promotion (Fleming et al., 2024; Kulshrestha & Shahid, 2022). By teaching acceptance, mindfulness, and value-driven action, the programme might deliver important psychological

skills. These skills apply to many challenges: from coping with pandemic-related stress to dealing with job uncertainty to navigating relationship changes. Over time, as more individuals in a community build psychological flexibility, we could even see a broader public health impact, perhaps lower prevalence of stress-related disorders, or greater uptake of positive health behaviours.

Another advantage in New Zealand is the strong arts culture and interest in mindfulness-based programmes, such as yoga and meditation groups. An integrated kintsugi and ACT workshop could attract people who might not sign up for a straight CBT skills class but are interested in a creative self-exploration experience. This way, the reach of preventive mental health efforts can be broadened. For instance, someone who loves pottery or Japanese culture might attend out of curiosity and leave with tangible ACT skills for handling emotions, which is a win in terms of public health outreach.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed the recent literature on creative arts interventions, kintsugi, and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). These studies show how art can support self-expression and psychological well-being, while ACT provides a structured way to build mindfulness, acceptance, and purposeful action. The review also identified clear gaps. Although kintsugi has often been described by studies as a metaphor for recovery and resilience, very few studies have explored it as a real, hands-on practice that promotes psychological well-being. In addition, no research connects kintsugi with ACT in both clinical and non-clinical settings.

This gap highlights the importance of this research. By introducing the kintsugi and ACT framework, this research offers a new way to understand how creative practice and psychological science can complement each other. The framework presents kintsugi not only as a practice and philosophy but also as a tangible way to learn ACT. In doing so, it responds to the need for accessible and culturally relevant approaches that promote mental well-being through creativity (*World Mental Health Report*, 2022).

The kintsugi and ACT conceptual framework serve as both the foundation and the guide for this study. Consequently, it informs the design of the Kintsugi-ACT workshop and shapes how the research explores and interprets participants' experiences. Establishing the study in

this integration allows it to stay connected to its theoretical foundations while remaining open to the insights that come from participants' lived experience of Kintsugi-ACT integration.

The next chapter, Methodology, explains how this framework informed the study's research design. It outlines how the art-based inquiry or workshop was conducted, how data were collected, and how participants' experiences were analysed to understand the Kintsugi-ACT approach.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodological approach used in this study and explains how it provided the information needed to meet the research aim, which is to explore how participants experienced and made meaning of a Kintsugi-ACT workshop. It begins with the description of sampling, participants, materials, procedures, analysis and research design in detail. Ethical considerations are also addressed, followed by a discussion of the researcher's positionality. Collectively, these sections demonstrate how the study was structured and carried out to produce findings that directly respond to the research aim.

3.1 Sampling and Participants

This section describes the sampling method used in the study and provides general information about the participants. It explains how individuals were recruited and the key characteristics relevant to their involvement in the research.

Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants for the Kintsugi-ACT workshop and interviews. This method allowed the deliberate selection of individuals who met specific inclusion criteria.

Participants

Participants were recruited through community art centres, art groups, public notices, and social media platforms. There were about 80 initial expressions of interest; only those who met the inclusion criteria and were available for the set workshop times were invited to participate. Due to limited workshop capacity, a small number of participants were selected from the eligible pool. Applicants had to fill in a form, making sure that they had met the set criteria. Eligible participants were adults aged 18 and over, with an interest in kintsugi or creative activities. Individuals with known allergies, medical, and clinical conditions that could be triggered by workshop materials were excluded for safety reasons, as noted in the informed consent form. *Appendix* A shows the *Informed Consent Form* outlining the specific criteria.

All research participants included in the study identified as female. Ages ranged from 30 to 76 years. Participants were divided into groups of three to foster in-depth engagement, reflective sharing, and personalised support. This small-group format also encouraged psychological safety and allowed participants to express themselves more freely within a supportive and creative environment. Practical considerations, including venue capacity, material availability, and health and safety protocols, were also considered. Ethically, small group sizes allowed for better attention to participant needs and the promotion of their comfort and well-being. Before the research group, an initial group, which involved six (6) participants, served as a pilot study to refine the structure, flow, and facilitation of the Kintsugi-ACT workshop. These pilot sessions helped with making minor adjustments in terms of the materials and delivery to ensure alignment with the research aims. Nine (9) participants constituted the primary research groups. A total of fifteen (15) participants took part in five separate workshop sessions.

To acknowledge their time and contribution, participants were invited to take home the kintsugi pieces they created during the workshop. This gesture honoured their creative engagement and served as a meaningful, tangible reminder of their participation and ACT principles.

3.2 Materials

A Kintsugi-ACT workshop served as the central data generation for this study. The workshop employed the modern kintsugi process supported by ACT principles.

The workshop used a modern kintsugi technique. It included non-traditional materials to achieve the aesthetic characteristics while aligning the process to the traditional kintsugi. The use of a modern kintsugi technique is consistent with contemporary adaptations, who note that simplified materials such as epoxy and metallic powders are commonly used in short-format workshops to ensure practicality and safety (Palazzolo, 2025). Modern kintsugi is used to ensure that the activity can be completed within 2.5 hours. The kintsugi component required broken ceramic pieces, epoxy adhesive, applicators, mixing tools, tape, sandpaper, diamond files, a brush, and gold or silver metallic powders. All broken ceramic pieces were prepared and provided by the researcher. Participants did not bring their own pieces but selected from pre-broken pieces.

In support of the ACT component, psychoeducation and reflections were integrated into the workshop procedure. Handouts were provided (*Appendix* B) to support the learning of key ACT concepts relevant to each phase of the activity. Reflective prompts were also used to guide participants' personal meaning-making throughout the repair process.

For the interview phase, a semi-structured interview guide and an audio-recording device were utilised to document participants' individual reflections following the workshop.

3.3 Procedure

Data were collected through three Kintsugi-ACT workshops, each delivered as a single session to three separate groups of three participants, followed by individual interviews. The workshop integrated kintsugi with ACT-based experiential exercises, psychoeducation and reflective prompts. The researcher's reflections were documented in a reflective journal throughout the kintsugi workshop sessions to capture insights, observations and biases.

Workshop Overview

Each Kintsugi-ACT workshop session lasted approximately 2 hours and 30 minutes and was facilitated by the researcher. Participants engaged in a creative process of mending broken ceramics while reflecting on related themes.

The workshop process was intentionally structured to mirror ACT concepts at key stages. Participants were guided through the workshop that supported two main goals: first, to learn the physical skill of repairing broken pottery using modern kintsugi techniques, and second, to learn useful psychological skills inspired by ACT principles related to kintsugi. To support this dual learning objective, participants were provided with psychoeducational resources during the session, including a custom-designed handout that linked each step of the kintsugi process to ACT processes. Additional ACT resources were also provided, including handouts on fusion and defusion, values clarification, and mindfulness. These handouts are included in *Appendix* B, which also includes the table (*Table* 1) that links each Kintsugi repair step with ACT processes. These materials supported the aim to integrate both the psychological and practical aspects of the workshop.

Activities were sequenced to support experiential learning, emotional reflection, and personal meaning-making. Throughout the session, participants were invited to reflect on what their experience of repairing a broken ceramic meant to them.

The sequence of the workshop consisted of four parts: opening and introduction, the kintsugi repair process, group reflection, and closing and debriefing. The session began with a brief introduction, an outline of the session flow, a health and safety briefing, and clarification of expectations. Participants then engaged in the kintsugi repair process, which involved three phases: (1) preparing the broken ceramic pieces, (2) applying adhesive, and (3) applying the metallic finish. Following the repair activity, a short group reflection was facilitated. The session concluded with closing remarks, reminders related to research participation, and debriefing. Individual interviews were conducted after the workshop to further explore participants' experiences. For detailed schedule and materials used, see *Appendix* C: Workshop Structure and Materials.

Individual Interviews

Following the workshop, participants took part in individual semi-structured interviews, conducted within one to two days after the workshop. The semi-structured interview guide used for these interviews is provided in *Appendix* D. Semi structured interviews were selected because they allow depth, flexibility, and participant led meaning-making, which is recommended for experiential qualitative studies (Braun & Clarke, 2021). These interviews allowed for a deeper exploration of participants' experiences. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed as close to verbatim as possible. Minor adjustments were made to improve readability, such as removing fillers, repetitions, or unclear utterances. These light edits were carefully applied by the researcher to enhance the clarity and flow of participants' accounts, while ensuring their intended meanings and emotional tones remained intact.

Reflexive Journal

A reflexive journal was kept throughout the research to record the researcher's insights, biases, observations, and emotional responses during the Kintsugi-ACT workshops and analysis. This journaling process fostered transparency and critical self-awareness, recognising the researcher's active role in meaning-making within RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The reflections were critically referred to during the analysis and interpretation stage. This helped ensure that emerging themes were examined and grounded in participants' accounts, and that the researcher's accounts were held with reflexivity to add depth and clarity to the analysis and interpretation.

3.4 Research Design

The study adopted an exploratory qualitative research design and employed Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), a flexible and interpretive approach to analysing patterns of meaning across qualitative data that emphasises the active, reflective role of the researcher in theme development (Braun & Clarke, 2021). RTA was chosen because it allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences and supports the development of themes through an interpretive and reflective process. The method was well-suited to the study's nature and purpose to identify the different meanings that emerged from the participants' experiences.

This research is theory informed. It is guided by Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). According to Willig and colleagues (2017), RTA is compatible with theory-informed research as it allows the researcher to explore how specific psychological processes are reflected in the narratives of the participants. The flexibility of RTA enabled theoretical and experiential insights to complement each other. Participants' voices remained central to the analysis, while interpretations were viewed through the lens of ACT and themes related to kintsugi.

RTA is particularly appropriate for this research as it values depth, context, and reflexivity. It is well-suited to the aim of exploring how participants made sense of their engagement with the Kintsugi-ACT activity. It encourages attention to nuance and variation, making space for both surface-level observations and deeper metaphorical interpretations. Also, it emphasises the active role of the researcher. Throughout this study, reflexivity was embraced as a meaningful part of the interpretive process. This allowed for the analysis to attend to the interplay between participants' voices and researcher insights.

3.5 Philosophical Underpinning

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) is recognised for its philosophical flexibility, allowing it to be used across different research paradigms. Braun and Clarke (2021) explained that in its reflexive form, RTA aligns most naturally with a constructionist or interpretivist epistemology and a relativist ontology. In this perspective, meaning is not treated as something waiting to be discovered. Instead, it is created through interaction between participants, the researcher, and the contexts in which the research unfolds (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

This study leaned into a contextualist position. Within this paradigm, knowledge is not considered fixed or objective; instead, it is understood as constructed through context, relationships, and timing (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Such a stance aligns closely with the foundations of ACT, which highlights the importance of individual meaning-making, situated experience, and the influence of personal values (Hayes et al., 2012). Because of this theoretical alignment, RTA was considered an appropriate approach.

The underlying ontology of this approach assumes that there are many valid ways of seeing and understanding the world (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Reality, from this view, is shaped by culture, society, and personal history (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In addition, an interpretivist epistemology encourages researchers to treat participants' accounts not as data to be measured, but as rich, layered stories that require careful interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2021). These commitments influenced every stage of this research: from how the data were generated and analysed, to how meaning was collaboratively constructed through dialogue, reflection, and creative expression.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2021) six-phase approach. This method supports a flexible yet rigorous exploration of patterned meaning across qualitative data, with an emphasis on researcher subjectivity, context, and reflexivity. The generation of themes operated along the continuum between inductive and deductive analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). The process was primarily grounded in participants' accounts, allowing meaning to emerge from the data itself, while also being sensitised through the lens of ACT and the philosophical principles of kintsugi. In this way, the analysis remained reflexive while acknowledging that interpretation was both informed by the data and shaped by the researcher's theoretical and experiential understanding.

The development of themes was primarily grounded in the interview data, with dataset from participants' verbal reflections during the workshop, notes from group reflections, and entries from the researcher's reflexive journal were used to contextualise and deepen the analysis and interpretation of the interview data.

NVivo Software was used for data organisation. However, there was no automation in the interpretive process. The emphasis remained on reflexive, iterative engagement with the

interview transcripts. Braun and Clarke (2021) described six phases of analysis, which includes the following:

Familiarisation with the data. Immersion with the data by listening to audio recordings, transcribing, reading and re-reading transcripts, and documenting initial ideas and observations.

Generating initial codes. Codes were created to capture both semantic (explicit) and latent (underlying) features of the data that were relevant to the research questions. Manual coding in NVivo was undertaken and refined through multiple iterations.

Constructing initial themes. Related codes were grouped and organised into preliminary themes. These themes reflected shared patterns of meaning and were informed by core organising ideas aligned with the principles of ACT and kintsugi.

Reviewing themes. Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately represented the coded data and the dataset. This process included checking for coherence within themes and clear distinctions between them.

Defining and naming themes. Five main themes were generated. Each theme was clearly defined and named to reflect its core. Descriptions were developed to articulate the significance and contribution of each theme to the overall analysis.

Producing the report. The final stage involved writing a coherent analytical narrative that integrated participants' quotes, thematic interpretations, and links to relevant literature.

3.7 Research Rigour and Trustworthiness

To ensure that the discussion and findings of this qualitative research were trustworthy and meaningful, several strategies were implemented based on the four key criteria of qualitative rigour: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Nowell et al., 2017).

Qualitative Rigor

Credibility was supported by directly interacting with participants during the workshop and interviews to build trust and gather rich, honest reflections (Nowell et al., 2017). I further observed credibility by capturing my reflexivity through journaling, documenting my

assumptions and decisions throughout the process. Using an in vivo transcription technique with minimal light edits ensured participants' voices were preserved accurately. Immersion in the data allowed me to stay close to participants' accounts, ensuring interpretations remained true to their experiences.

Transferability was addressed by providing detailed descriptions of the workshop setting, materials, procedures, and participants (Nowell et al., 2017). This helps others understand the context and assess whether the findings might apply to similar situations.

Dependability was ensured by clearly documenting each step of the research process, from participant recruitment to data collection and analysis (Nowell et al., 2017). This makes the study process transparent and repeatable.

Confirmability was supported using a reflexive journal and an audit trail (Nowell et al., 2017). The researcher regularly reflected on the thoughts and decisions throughout the study to stay aware of personal biases and ensure that the findings were mainly grounded in the participants' voices, and the researcher's reflexivity is carefully and critically integrated.

Use of Generative AI and Research Tools

In alignment with principles of confirmability and transparency, AI-powered tools were used to support the research process. These tools were employed responsibly and under Massey University's guidelines for ethical and academic use of generative AI (Massey University, n.d.).

Microsoft Copilot (GPT-5), *Grammarly*, and *ChatGPT (GPT-4o and GPT-5)* were used only to assist in brainstorming, literature searching, refining, and improving clarity in research documentation. The use of these tools was documented as part of the research audit trail to uphold the integrity and rigour of the qualitative research process.

Contents. Any AI-supported enhancements were used only to refine wording or improve clarity. All content was originally drafted by the researcher, and any AI-suggested edits were carefully reviewed and revised to ensure accuracy with the goal to preserve the original meaning, tone, and intent of the researcher's work. The final language and content decisions remained entirely with the researcher.

Sources. All sources identified by AI tools were independently and responsibly accessed, reviewed, verified, and critically analysed by the researcher to ensure scholarly rigour and relevance.

Data. There are no AI tools used for data collection, analysis, or interpretation.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

This study followed ethical guidelines to ensure the safety, dignity, and rights of everyone involved (New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2012).. The procedures align with standard ethical requirements for qualitative research, which emphasise informed consent, confidentiality, safety, and participant autonomy (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Willig et al., 2017). The measures below reflect a commitment to respectful and responsible research practice:

Participant protection. All participants were treated with respect and positive regard. Protection measures were in place to ensure their safety, including clear explanations of participants' rights and procedures for managing any issues or incidents (New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2012).

Informed consent. All participants received clear information about the purpose of the study, its procedures, and any potential risks or benefits (New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2012). Written informed consent was obtained before participation. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty.

Confidentiality and anonymity. Personal information was stored securely and anonymised using pseudonyms (New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2012).. Only the researcher had access to the identifying data. Results were reported in a way that protected participants' identities.

Emotional risks and support. Due to the reflective content of the study, participants were made aware of potential emotional discomfort (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007). Resources for support (including contact information for university counselling services and community helplines such as 1737 Need to Talk) and debriefing options were made available. No risky or harmful incidents occurred during the procedure.

Ethical use of artwork and reflections. All kintsugi pieces remained the participants' property (New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2012). Permission was explicitly obtained to use artwork or written reflections in research and/or presentations. Participants remained anonymous for the acknowledgement of the pieces.

Data storage and withdrawal rights. All data were securely stored on encrypted, password-protected devices. Participants could request the removal of their data at any time before final analysis. Data retention followed university policy and national data protection regulations.

Health and safety considerations. Workshops took place in a conducive venue (SouthLink House, Dunedin, Otago) that was safe and accessible, with clear emergency procedures. Any potential risks were explained in advance. Participants were asked to disclose any relevant health conditions, and public health guidelines were followed.

Cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. The study was conducted using culturally responsive and inclusive approaches (New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2012). Language, materials, and facilitation methods were adapted where necessary to accommodate participants from diverse cultural and personal backgrounds (New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2012). The researcher also made efforts to ensure the cultural relevance and appropriateness of kintsugi, acknowledging its roots and significance. This included travelling to Japan to learn directly from a traditional kintsugi master and participating in a hands-on workshop, deepening my understanding of the cultural, historical, and philosophical foundations of the practice.

Researcher reflexivity. I have regularly reflected on my roles, assumptions, and influence throughout the study. I remained mindful of power dynamics and sought to foster a respectful and inclusive environment (Willig et al., 2017). Opportunities for feedback and shared decision-making were encouraged.

Ethical approval. Low-Risk Ethics Notification from Massey University *(Notification Number: 4000030767)*. This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk.

3.9 Researcher's Positionality and Reflexivity

Reflexivity was practiced throughout the study (Willig et al., 2017). It was shaped by the convergence of three interconnected roles I held throughout the process: artist, facilitator, and researcher. Each role brought a different perspective and depth to how I designed the study, connected with participants, and interpreted the findings (Willig et al., 2017).

Artist

My engagement with this project began as an artist deeply drawn to the aesthetics and philosophy of kintsugi. This centuries-old Japanese practice of repair has long inspired my creative work, not just aesthetically, but personally and philosophically. In my creative practice and exhibitions, I have repeatedly returned to kintsugi as a metaphor for healing, transformation, and the beauty of imperfection. These ideas became more than just artistic concepts; they became my ways of connecting with others. Over the years, I have had the privilege of speaking with collectors, viewers, and community members who found personal meaning in the stories behind my work. These conversations shaped the way I understand how art can support emotional well-being.

My commitment to kintsugi also led me to Japan, where I had the opportunity to learn from traditional practitioners. Participating in a hands-on workshop allowed me to appreciate the historical and cultural depth of the practice. This experience not only enriched my personal understanding but also helped me create a respectful, modern adaptation suitable for therapeutic and community settings. This reimagined method became the foundation for the workshop used in this study.

Facilitator

As the facilitator of the Kintsugi-ACT workshop, I was responsible for designing a process that combined artmaking with psychological reflection. My goal was to create a meaningful experience that invited participants to connect with both the physical act of repair and the inner work of healing. Guided by Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), I incorporated reflective prompts and exercises that supported emotional awareness, values clarification, and acceptance.

Facilitating this workshop required me to be fully present. I was attentive to the group's emotional tone, mindful of each participant's comfort, and responsive to the unfolding needs of the session. The workshop was never just about technique. It was about creating a safe and respectful environment where participants could explore difficult feelings, make meaning, and feel seen. Being in this role gave me a first-hand view of how people interacted with the materials, the process, and themselves.

Researcher

In my role as a researcher, I brought a strong foundation in ACT, a therapeutic model I also connect with personally. Its principles, particularly those around psychological flexibility, defusion, and values-driven action, offered a useful lens through which to interpret the workshop experience. The alignment between ACT and *Kintsugi* felt both intuitive and meaningful.

Moreover, my philosophical understanding was strongly influenced by my academic background in philosophy, where I was immersed in diverse schools of thought and developed a metaphysical understanding of the concepts linked in this present study. For example, the development of the theme about uniqueness and shared brokenness is perhaps influenced by my understanding of the metaphysical problem of *One and the Many.* Specifically, Aristotle's idea of the One and the Many means that many different things can share one common feature or essence, while still being individual and unique (Gaukroger, 1982).

Collectively, my worldview made Reflexive Thematic Analysis a fitting methodological choice for this study. It supported my intent to explore not just what participants experienced, but how they made meaning of those experiences. It also allowed me to reflect on how my own philosophical leanings, and my lived experience shaped the process of analysis. I embraced my role as a co-constructor of meaning alongside participants, mindful of the complex interplay between their narratives and my interpretations.

Throughout the research, I maintained a reflexive journal where I documented moments of uncertainty and insight to capture my own biases. This helped me remain grounded in the data and honest about the way my own experiences and expectations might shape interpretation. I was mindful of power dynamics, especially during interviews, and did my best to hold space with care, curiosity, and humility.

Bringing these roles together as artist, facilitator, and researcher allowed me to approach this research with both structure and sensitivity. This research was never just a formal requirement. It was a process of connection and learning. I hope that by drawing from all parts of myself, I was able to honour the voices of participants and contribute something meaningful to the conversation on compassionate and creative psychological wellbeing.

3.10 Methodological Framework

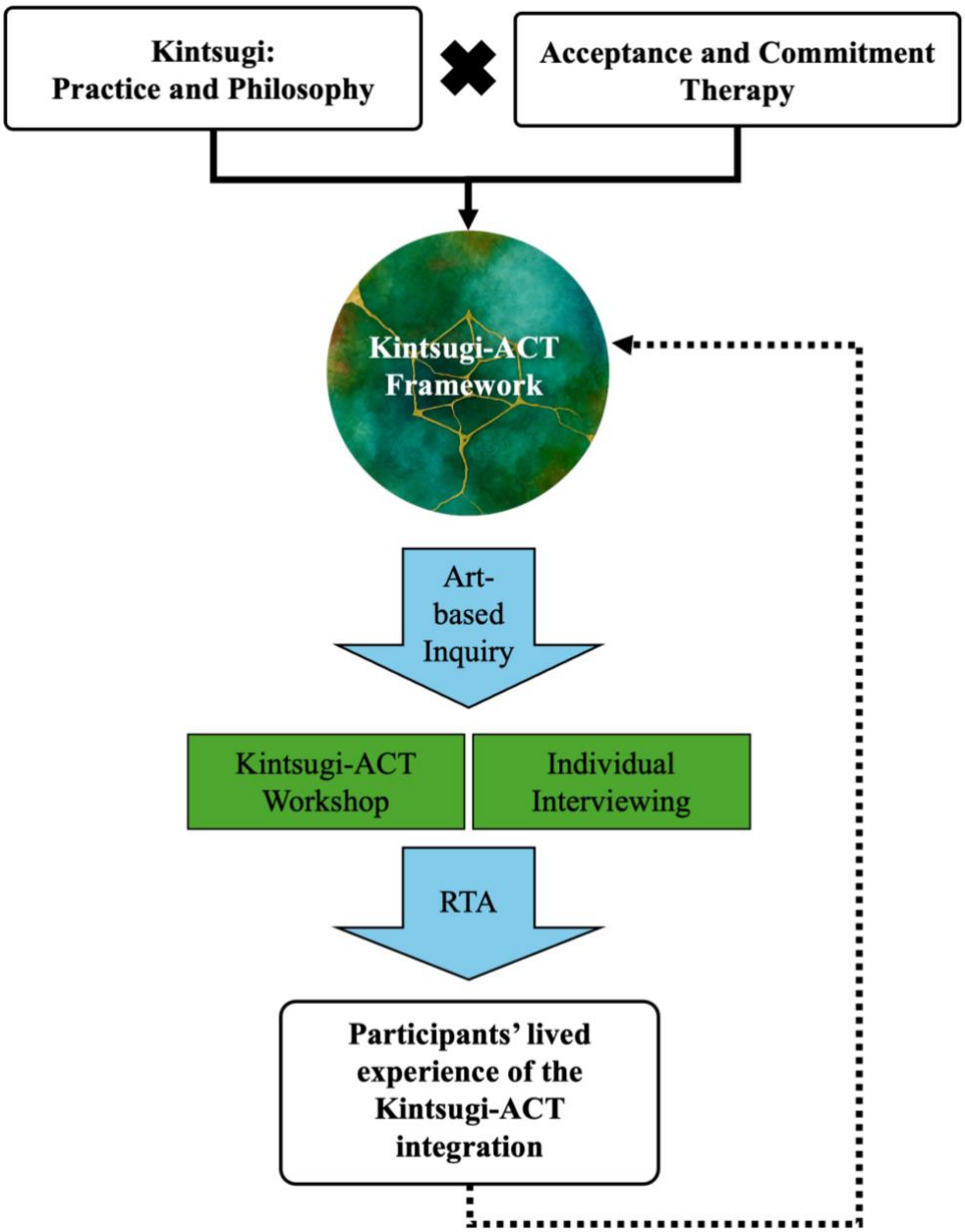
The visual diagram in *Figure* 3 illustrates the methodological framework of this study. Taking the conceptual framework, it begins with the integration of kintsugi and ACT to form the foundation of this study, previously presented in Chapter 2 (*Figure* 2). This integration shaped an art-based inquiry where participants engaged in a Kintsugi-ACT workshop that embodied ACT principles through the physical act of repairing broken pottery using kintsugi. Individual interviews complemented the workshop, capturing participants' reflections and experiences of the Kintsugi-ACT workshop session. The data were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), employing critical and reflexive analysis. The findings, in turn, enrich the Kintsugi-ACT framework by grounding it in the participants' experience of the workshop.

3.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology used to explore participants' experiences of the Kintsugi-ACT workshop. Participants' interview accounts were analysed through Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), adopting a contextualist approach recognising meaning as co-constructed. Data were collected through the workshop, semi-structured interviews, and reflexive journaling. Ethical, cultural, and reflexive considerations ensured the study's rigour and integrity.

The next chapter presents the findings and discussion, talking about the five central themes that describe how participants experienced the Kintsugi-ACT workshop.

Figure 3. Research Methodological Framework



CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of the study, anchored by the overarching research aim to explore how participants make meaning of their participation in a Kintsugi-ACT workshop. Through Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), participants' accounts were critically and reflexively interpreted to uncover the multifaceted ways in which they made meaning and reflected on their experience of engaging in a Kintsugi-ACT workshop. Five central themes emerged from their reflections and interpretations of their experiences.

The first theme, *integrating kintsugi and ACT frameworks*, describes how participants linked the main ideas of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy to kintsugi through the subthemes *Letting go, Living in the moment, and Acting in values.*

The second theme, *Realising healing as a mending process*, explores how participants made meaning of healing as a gradual and ongoing effort to mend what has been broken.

The third theme, *Extending from unique to shared experience*, includes the subthemes *Cultivating uniqueness and authenticity* and *Fostering connection and togetherness*. This illustrates how the realisation of uniqueness extends to signify connection.

The fourth theme, *Preserving, transforming, and opening possibilities,* explores how participants move from their encounter with the broken, mending it and discovering more possibilities that go beyond its original form and purpose. They were weaving the past, present, and future together as discussed through the subthemes *Preserving sustainability, Transforming through repair, and Opening possibilities.*

The fifth theme, *Deepening the self through metaphors*, focuses on participants' accounts using kintsugi as a metaphor for personal reflection and, in turn, enabling self-understanding and development.

The chapter concludes with a synthesis to narratively bring together the five central themes, showing their integration and interconnection.

4.1 Integrating Kintsugi and ACT Frameworks

This theme explores how participants experienced the intersection of kintsugi philosophy and ACT principles. It shows how the kintsugi process became a lived experience of ACT's three pillars of openness, awareness, and engagement to foster psychological flexibility.

When reflecting on participants' stories, what stood out was the overlap between the philosophy of kintsugi and ACT principles. At times, participants paused, were curious, and then realised how the act of repairing broken ceramics mirrored ACT. Across the participants, they spoke of letting go, being in the present moment, and acting according to their values. This goes to show that they have internalised the essential components of ACT: *being open, being aware* and *being engaged* (Biglan et al., 2008; Hayes et al., 2012; Strosahl et al., 2004). In doing so, they demonstrated that kintsugi can nurture therapeutic awareness without relying purely on verbal interventions. This aligns with contemporary art therapy approaches that emphasise embodied, process-based meaning-making and recovery (Backos, 2022; Heiderscheit, 2022).

Under this theme, there are three subthemes: Letting go, Living in the moment, and Acting in values**.** These correspond accordingly to ACT's three pillars of *openness*, *awareness*, and *engagement* (Hayes et al., 2012). Together, they represent a movement from acceptance towards committed action. The workshop thus became both a reflective and experiential space, where artistic physical repair becomes a therapeutic process. It enabled the participants to learn the ACT's psychological skills of being open, aware and engaged. The following are the discussions of the subthemes:

Letting Go

Participants described letting go of perfectionism and a willingness to meet the object as it is. Letting go, in this context, was not resignation; it was an active turn toward being human and realistic. Abby reflected, "We're not here to be perfect. We're here to be human. And everything around us should reflect that." Hazel complemented this as she reflected on her kintsugi piece (*Figure* 4). She shared, "It's beautiful, but it's not the same as it *was* before. And it does not have to be. That's okay" (Hazel). These reflections captured the concept of

acceptance in ACT; the participants were in a stance of openness to experience without unnecessary struggle or control (Harris, 2009; Hayes et al., 2012). They were letting go.

Figure 4. Hazel's kintsugi piece, "Bringing Together"

(a) (b)

Note. The kintsugi piece represents Hazel's memories of family, shared meals, her late sister and the job that she does. It symbolises connection, community, and the act of bringing people and memories together. The images illustrate the participant's kintsugi piece before (a) and after (b) repair. Photographed by the researcher.

Letting go also appeared in the way participants approached the practical task of repair. They put emphasis on the first phase of the kintsugi process of assessing, sorting, and sanding off the edges before joining pieces. Beth found this phase "quite enlightening." Frida also commented on the importance of this step, "Stand back, and look at things slightly differently than close up." These accounts exemplify *cognitive defusion* in ACT, which involves changing one's relationship to thoughts so they can be seen as passing events rather than literal truths (Strosahl et al., 2004). In kintsugi practice, disentangling fragments before permanently putting them back together parallels stepping back from rigid thoughts before acting. Participants paused, gained perspective, and then chose the next workable step. In their words, it is enlightening to step back for a better perspective.

Interpretively, *letting go* functioned as a doorway to psychological flexibility by loosening perfectionistic, rigid rules and relating differently to unhelpful thoughts. Participants created space for acceptance and defusion. The material aspect of kintsugi supported this shift. Imperfections did not need hiding. Instead, they could be acknowledged and highlighted with something valuable. In this sense, acceptance and defusion were not abstract techniques; they were felt in the hands while they were sanding the edges and disentangling the broken pieces.

In summary, these accounts show *letting go* as being open. Participants acknowledged imperfection, stepped back from rigid thoughts, disentangled them, and chose workable actions. This subtheme aligns with ACT's *openness* pillar (Harris, 2009; Hayes et al., 2012), which illustrates how kintsugi can cultivate *acceptance* and *cognitive defusion* through the simple yet profound act of repair.

Living in the Moment

Participants described being deeply absorbed in the process of repairing their broken ceramics, often losing a sense of time and self as they worked. Isabel expressed, "I think I must have gone into a flow state during the painting [brushing gold powder]. That part [I] was particularly calm and focused." Abby also shared, "It's almost like I'm working in a flow state." These reflections illustrate immersion in the present moment, an experience central to mindfulness and self-as-context within ACT. The kintsugi process encouraged a form of awareness where participants observed their inner experiences with focused detachment while remaining fully engaged in the activity.

In addition, Frida described, "I just focused on each stage. I didn't think about the whole thing. Because I didn't really have an idea of what was happening. That focus on each step made it flow better." She also added, "One day at a time. Because when I start to think too far ahead, it became overwhelming. That was something I learned." (Frida). This description captures how *self-as-context* allows an individual to remain grounded as an observer of their experiences rather than being pulled into them (Harris, 2019). In ACT, self-as-context refers to the stable sense of awareness that notices thoughts and emotions without being defined by them (Harris, 2019). By maintaining this observer perspective, participants were able to navigate uncertainty and engage in the process moment by moment, which signifies the act of mindful awareness through kintsugi.

Beth described how engaging in kintsugi offered a gentle pause from mental clutter: "Actually taking the time to focus on something outside of the usual noise in my head [and] giving that time to sit with this piece and assessing how to fix it, it just shuts everything else out." Beth's words capture a personal experience of finding calm through presence. In ACT, this state reflects *being aware,* which, in the six core ACT processes, includes *contact with the present moment* and *self-as-context* (Hayes et al., 2012). This is also described as the *observing self* that notices thoughts and feelings without being swept away by them (Hayes et al., 2012). Rather than trying to control or change her thinking, Beth became the witness of her own experience, allowing thoughts to come and go while staying grounded in the act of repair. This moment of awareness illustrated mindfulness in action. It is a form of compassionate awareness that, as Hayes (2019) suggested, strengthens psychological flexibility by helping people see themselves as more than their passing experiences.

One of the participants' accounts reinforced the role of kintsugi as a space for cultivating mindfulness and perspective-taking. When asked whether kintsugi is a good activity to help her be more mindful, Cora admitted, "Absolutely! I'm prone to casting forward into the future. I have a very scattered mind. I would like to be more present. The scattered mind doesn't really help; it just adds stress." For Cora, the deliberate and slow unfolding element of the kintsugi process encouraged a shift from distracted thinking toward mindfulness. This demonstrated how being in contact with the present moment and self-as-context can be strengthened through creative practice. Cora's account of being present in the moment during the workshop, despite admittedly being easily distracted, was reflected in her beautiful and delicately done kintsugi piece (*Figure* 5).

These accounts show that living in the moment involved more than awareness of the present. It also involved the participants in experiencing themselves as observers of their inner world. By engaging with the physical repair of broken ceramics, participants metaphorically enacted the process of self-as-context, noticing their mental activity without losing themselves in it (Biglan et al., 2008; Harris, 2019; Hayes, 2019; Strosahl et al., 2004). This awareness enhances psychological flexibility by fostering distance from unhelpful thoughts and promoting values-guided action (Hayes et al., 2012). The kintsugi and ACT workshop provided a tangible and creative way to cultivate this observer perspective, transforming a mindful art

process into a practice of presence, clarity, and self-awareness and affirms the study of Heiderscheit (2022).

Figure 5. Cora's kintsugi piece, "Family Triptych"

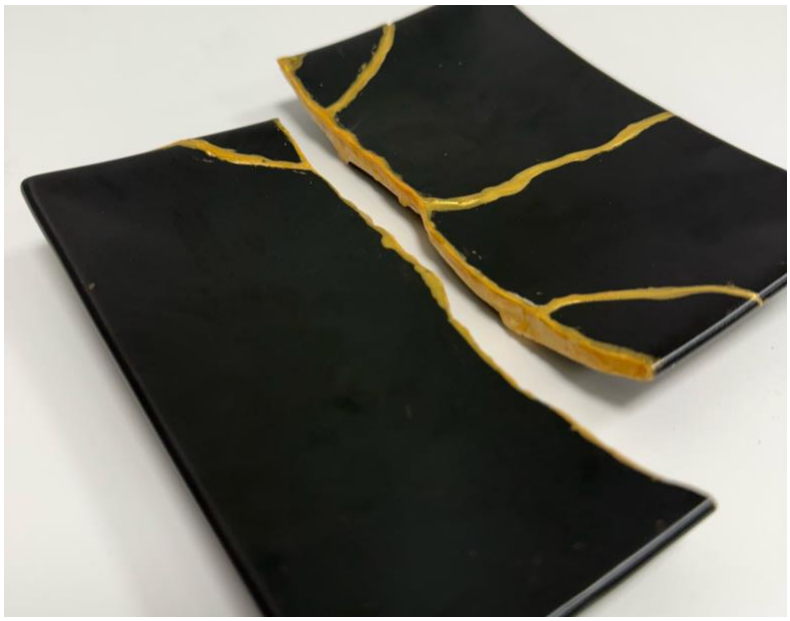
(a) (b)

Note. The kintsugi piece represents Cora's reflections on family and self, showing how broken relationships and personal parts come together to form a sense of wholeness. The images illustrate the participant's kintsugi piece before (a) and after (b) repair. Photographed by the researcher.

Acting in Values

Participants spoke about how the Kintsugi-ACT workshop inspired them to take purposeful actions aligned with what truly matters to them. This subtheme reflects engagement with values-based action. In ACT, this is *committed action***,** the process of behaving in ways guided by personal values rather than avoidance or fear (Hayes, 2019; Strosahl et al., 2004). Eva described the lesson she learned after struggling to attach her broken pieces (*Figure* 6), "Not to abandon something. To keep going. Work with what you've got." This statement reflects perseverance and working with what is available, resonating deeply with the ACT principle that values provide direction even when circumstances are not conducive.

Figure 6. Eva's detached kintsugi piece



Note. Eva's kintsugi piece did not attach together midway through the process, but she carried on with the idea of highlighting the actual surface of the fracture with gold instead, and just accepting it as it is. Photographed by the researcher.

For some participants, acting on values is challenging. Hazel reflected, "I think a lot, but the action part I find harder. Thinking in a way that aligns with my values is one thing, but acting on it is harder." This illustrates the gap between knowing one's values and living them, a struggle common in psychological practice and daily life. Gemma is convinced, however, that "When you put the *mahi* [work] in, you get the reward." Gemma's reflection captured the empowering notion that values-based action requires effort and persistence but ultimately leads to meaningful outcomes. Together, these reflections highlight the importance of active engagement with values rather than remaining in contemplation.

The workshop setting provided space for participants to practice committed action in a tangible way. Hazel observed, "It felt like I was choosing and making decisions about what I wanted it to look like, rather than following a set procedure." This statement underscores a sense of autonomy and agency, key elements of committed action. By making creative choices, participants expressed values such as personal growth, authenticity, and responsibility through the repair process itself.

On a reflexive note, looking back on my facilitation, the design of the workshop intentionally fostered such agency. I encouraged participants to make their own choices, from

selecting the ceramics, strategising the repair, to choosing the shade of gold or silver finish. My role was to guide, teach techniques, and share insights, but ultimately to allow participants to shape their experience. Even though the ceramics were not originally theirs, this approach promoted a sense of ownership and connection to their work, consequently facilitating a deeper personal reflection.

Another moment that stood out was when one participant redid her gold lines more than twice because they were not setting in properly. Diane said:

> I actually did it right at first and then decided it wasn't good enough. That's when I wiped everything off and actually made it worse. Just openness to experience, around not getting it perfect and not needing to redo it. Just learning to accept. (Diane)

Diane's determination to start again illustrated *committed action***,** persisting despite frustration and imperfection. Later, she added*,* "I'm so fixated on getting to the end or the destination point, [but] the whole point is that journey through" (Diane). Through her experience, Diane embodied a key ACT and kintsugi insight that meaning lies not in achieving perfection but in engaging fully with the process (Harris, 2019). She highlighted the importance of staying engaged in the journey or the process, which is what committed means in ACT's *committed action*.

Moreover, ACT emphasises that acceptance and action are intertwined; thus, progress happens when one moves toward what matters, even amidst discomfort (Harris, 2019; Hayes, 2019). Diane's experience of redoing the gold lines was not only about committed action. She was also showing acceptance when she pointed out that her challenge was also about being open and not getting it perfect. Therefore, this illustrates that psychological flexibility is not linear but interconnected, with all six core processes working together.

On a reflexive note, I saw how the workshop encouraged commitment and values-driven action through creativity and persistence. Each stage carried a lesson: patience while joining pieces, self-compassion when mistakes occurred, and commitment to finishing the repair task. As the facilitator, I made sure that the workshop goals were achieved. Hence, when there is an opportunity to have a conversation about these deeper lessons, I deliberately incorporate them into the participants' experience of kintsugi.

This subtheme demonstrates that acting on one's values involves courage, persistence, and self-compassion. The kintsugi and ACT processes made this visible. Participants physically enacted their values by repairing what was broken, committing to the process even when it was imperfect and challenging. This theme sheds light on the essence of ACT's concept of *engagement*, where action rooted in values becomes a meaningful and transformative experience (Hayes et al., 2012). This confirms the interconnectedness of ACT's six core processes as visually shown in the hexaflex model (Harris, 2009).

Discussion on Integrating Kintsugi and ACT Frameworks

The first theme, *Integrating kintsugi and ACT frameworks*, captures how participants began to see the art of kintsugi not just as a creative task but as a practical expression of ACT. What started as a simple act of repair turned into a reflective practice of *openness*, *awareness*, and *engagement* (Hayes et al., 2012). As they pieced the broken ceramics together, they were, in a way, also learning how to hold their own experiences with deeper value and meaning. It was not just about repairing what was broken but also allowing brokenness to exist while going along the process with openness, awareness and engagement. This shift mirrored what ACT describes as psychological flexibility (Strosahl et al., 2004). The participants were practicing acceptance, mindfulness, and values-based action. They felt these ideas through their hands, through the series of small, deliberate actions of mending broken pieces together.

This finding highlights the integration between kintsugi and ACT. Letting go, for instance, speaks to the ACT process of openness, the willingness to experience life without excessive control or avoidance (Hayes et al., 2012). The Japanese aesthetic of *wabi-sabi* complements this beautifully, inviting one to appreciate the incomplete, the impermanent, and the imperfect (Kemske, 2021; Wilkinson, 2022). Letting go is a reminder that imperfection is part of being human. Taking this perspective, the participants experienced liberation from the rigid idea of perfectionism.

Similarly, the slow and engaging flow of kintsugi invited living in the moment. Every step of the kintsugi process requires careful attention, the same kind of awareness ACT encourages in mindfulness (Backos, 2022). Participants often found themselves pausing, stepping back, observing or thinking. These moments of putting all their attention to their piece became their mindfulness practice.

Meanwhile, the final act of putting everything together, even when the result was not perfect, represented acting on values and a commitment to persistence (Hayes, 2019; Strosahl et al., 2012). It is here that kintsugi became more than just a repair technique or an art form. It has evolved into a metaphorical map for value-driven action. The act of finishing the mended pieces with precious metal adds value to an object that was once considered not valuable. This can only be done after being persistent to the very end of the process. The participants, therefore, were drawn to finish their piece and willingly went through the process before they got to finish it off with gold or silver. Apart from the material aspect, what made the piece more valuable is that, at the end of the kintsugi workshop, the participants developed an affinity for the piece. They have put in the effort to fix it, and they have put in their personal stories, mind and emotion. A part of their selves is represented in that kintsugi piece. It has become a deeply personal representation.

It is important to note that the design and delivery of the workshop deliberately mirrored the ACT framework itself. The sequence of kintsugi steps is aligned with the six core ACT processes (outlined in *Table* 1 in Chapter 2). This intentional structure may have shaped how participants connected their experiences to ACT principles. On a reflexive note, I recognise that this influence was not accidental but embedded in the design of the workshop. One of my objectives in conducting this research was to enrich the traditional practice of kintsugi by grounding it in an evidence-based therapeutic model, which is ACT. This integration was intended to enhance the workshop's depth and relevance, helping participants experience both the physical repair and the psychological growth it symbolised. At the beginning of each session, I explained that we had two shared goals: to learn the physical skill of repairing using the kintsugi technique and to learn psychological skills informed by ACT processes. This dual focus allowed art-based activity to unfold together, fostering both creative and reflective engagement.

Moreover, creativity itself plays an important role in building resilience (Backos, 2022; Santini, 2019). The World Health Organization points to creative and community-based approaches as powerful ways to promote mental well-being (Fancourt & Finn, 2019; *World Mental Health Report*, 2022). Similarly, Bohlmeijer et al. (2015) found that ACT-based interventions increase flourishing by strengthening psychological flexibility. Taken together, these ideas support how a kintsugi activity and ACT framework can encourage healing, not just merely through talking about resilience, but through experiencing it (Heiderscheit, 2022).

This study reinforces what many artists and practitioners already have in mind, that art can be a therapy even without calling it therapy. Participants learned ACT principles through kintsugi, not just as an instruction but as an experience as well. As Backos (2022) suggested, psychological flexibility can be cultivated through creative doing, through the mess, uncertainty, and beauty of making something by hand. The workshop bridged the gap between formal therapy and everyday creativity, confirming that people can learn to navigate emotional pain through small, mindful acts. It shows that therapeutic change does not always happen in a clinical setting. Sometimes it happens quietly at a table, actively engaging in mending broken pieces together, and highlighting the brokenness with gold. In other words, sometimes personal change happens through kintsugi.

In relation to this present study's aim, this theme sheds light on the first research question, which explores the alignment of kintsugi and ACT. This is discussed further in the *conclusion* chapter.

4.2 Realising Healing as a Mending Process

This theme conceptualises healing as a continuous process. The participants thought that healing emerges as an ongoing and deeply personal practice of mending, where growth occurs gradually and meaningfully. It unfolds over time and demands sustained effort, patience, and persistence because it can be painful sometimes.

During the Kintsugi-ACT workshop, the act of repair became more than a practical task. It turned into a living metaphor, a way of sensing, feeling, and accepting imperfection through the hands-on repair. Participants described healing as unpredictable, personal, and filled with patience and effort. The process of joining broken pieces mirrored emotional repair, helping them discover strength and beauty in what was once broken.

Abby shared how the process of adding gold to her piece mirrored her experience of grief:

> I think it was putting the gold in. That was the healing process, where things came back into focus and began to heal. That's when it suddenly hit me. This is about my grief process. This is me struggling through it all. I put it together, and I think while I was

> doing it, the thought was, 'I'm making it whole again.' In a way, with the grief, I'm reinventing it. (Abby)

This account reveals how the physical act of repair opened a space for emotional transformation. The moment gold filled the cracks, grief turned into a reimagined story of loss and renewal. In ACT, healing unfolds through acceptance, allowing painful emotions to be held rather than avoided (Hayes et al., 2012). Similarly, in kintsugi, the precious gold is not a disguise for damage, but it is used to add to and highlight the value of its brokenness. The act of mending became an opportunity to redeem and make meaning of the challenges.

Moreover, Beth, when reflecting on her kintsugi piece called *Moving Forward* (*Figure* 7), spoke of how healing also involves discomfort and reflection:

> You don't just get fixed. You have to go through a bit of pain before you get the answers. And you've got to be able to move forward. It's going back to what we have talked about, the stepping back, to assess, to look, then find the ways to mend before you move forward. (Beth)

This account of Beth highlights the essence of psychological flexibility, the willingness to sit with discomfort while still moving toward what truly matters (Harris, 2019; Hayes, 2019). The phrase *stepping back* reflects defusion and self-as-context, or the ability to create psychological space between the self and experience. Much like kintsugi, this process requires care and patience; each broken piece must be studied and understood before it can be joined. In a way, instead of being rigid with the repair, participants practiced flexibility in their approach. Healing, in this sense, unfolds as an ongoing conversation between pain and purpose, allowing a level of flexibility to experience both.

Other participants described healing as something continuous rather than complete. Cora noted, "There's no linear process to healing. There are lots of cracks and spaces. You can piece things together in a way that helps you make sense of it or be at peace with it." Eva added, "It's ongoing. You don't just fix something, and it's done. The whole process is ongoing. I'll be fixing things until the end of my life." These accounts reveal that healing is not a destination but a journey, and each step moves between acceptance and commitment to mend. It connects with *wabi-sabi*, the Japanese appreciation of impermanence (Wilkinson, 2022), and aligns with ACT's focus on process over outcome (Harris, 2019). Both perspectives are reminders that brokenness does not end the flow of life; it becomes part of how life carries on.

Figure 7. Beth's kintsugi piece, "Moving Forward"

(a) (b)

Note. The kintsugi piece symbolises Beth's personal growth and her reminder to pause, reflect, and keep moving forward despite life's busyness. The images illustrate the participant's kintsugi piece before (a) and after (b) repair. Photographed by the researcher.

Participants also reflected on patience and time as important parts of healing. Frida shared that "It's a process. It takes time. It doesn't happen all at once." This reflection captures the rhythm of repair. It served as a reminder that transformation happens gradually and that healing cannot be rushed. Gemma described her process, saying, "You've got to file [sand the sharp edges] and slowly bring it together. You see how it progresses and what it looks like." Gemma's words highlight the tactile awareness and mindfulness built into the act of mending, where patience becomes both a skill and a mindset. Hazel added, "Good things take time. Things don't happen instantly. It's a process, and things don't have to be the same as they were before to be good." This excerpt deepens the understanding of change and acceptance within kintsugi, where healing is not about returning to the point before breakage but a process of embracing what has evolved.

Discussion on Realising Healing as a Mending Process

The second theme, *Realising healing as a mending process*, captures how participants came to understand healing as something slow, imperfect, and deeply human. It was not a sudden transformation but a gradual unfolding, requiring patience, self-compassion, and the willingness to keep engaging. Much like kintsugi itself, the process of repair became symbolic of rebuilding oneself, piece by piece, moment by moment. It was not linear, but rather circular. Several participants described how the physical act of mending a broken object mirrored their own journey of emotional recovery. Healing, they realised, was both an act of acceptance and of commitment to mend and be mended. It is acknowledging the occurrence of both allowing what is and moving toward what matters. This mirrors the essence of ACT, where acceptance and committed action coexist (Hayes, 2019; Strosahl et al., 2004).

The participants' reflections resonated with ACT's central processes of acceptance and committed action. Acceptance, within this framework, is the ability to stay present with discomfort rather than resist it (Hayes et al., 2012). Committed action, on the other hand, involves taking purposeful steps guided by one's values (Hayes et al., 2012). Seen through this lens, healing becomes an intentional, active process rather than a passive return to feeling whole again. This aligns with ACT's conceptualisation of well-being as learning to relate differently yet healthily to one's thoughts and emotions while continuing to engage in life meaningfully (Hayes et al., 2012).

Philosophically, the theme aligns with the Japanese aesthetic of *wabi-sabi* and the essence of kintsugi, both of which honour imperfection, impermanence, and authenticity (Kemske, 2021; Wilkinson, 2022). Participants often spoke of finding beauty in the imperfect, viewing cracks not as evidence of failure but as markers of resilience. These reflections reflect the growing body of evidence linking creative engagement to emotional healing. Artmaking enhances self-understanding and emotional regulation (Shukla et al., 2022; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010), while mindfulness-integrated interventions, such as ACT, support similar gains of enhancing *flourishing* and not only reduce psychopathology (Bohlmeijer et al., 2015). Participants' experiences of kintsugi repair, therefore, bridge artistic and psychological frameworks in tangible ways (Heiderscheit, 2022) to promote healing or mental well-being (Fledderus, 2012).

This theme expands on the understanding of healing as experiential and process-oriented. It reaffirms that healing is not about erasing pain but learning to live with it in new ways. Reflection through kintsugi provided participants with the means to practice psychological flexibility, confirming Backos' (2022) observation that creative expression can integrate therapeutic learning into everyday experience. The integration of ACT and kintsugi thus offers a framework for preventive psychology that is accessible and nonclinical, grounded in creative doing. Within this workshop, healing was not only discussed but it was also enacted, shaped by acts of mending, mindful presence, and reflection.

4.3 Extending from Unique to Shared Experience

This theme captures how participants made meaning of their individuality and interconnectedness through the process of repair. It highlights a psychological and relational movement from recognising the self as unique to acknowledging shared experiences of brokenness, hence, fostering a sense of belongingness.

Through kintsugi, brokenness and imperfection became a bridge between authenticity and empathy, reflecting how self-understanding expands into collective awareness. Each kintsugi piece gives both unique and universal experiences. Two subthemes emerged from these accounts: *Cultivating uniqueness and authenticity*, which explores how brokenness was reimagined as a source of identity and meaning, and *Fostering connection and togetherness*, which considers how shared vulnerability and collective artmaking fostered empathy and a sense of belonging.

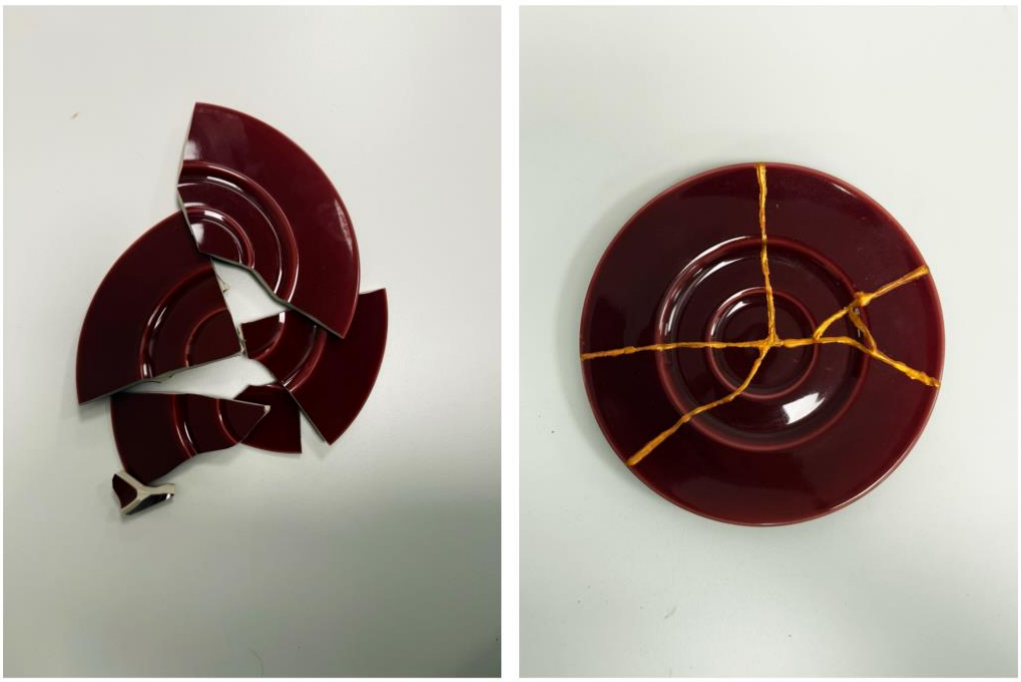
Cultivating Uniqueness and Authenticity

Across participants, there was a profound appreciation of how brokenness shaped identity. Abby shared, “There will never be another one like this. When something breaks and gets repaired, it stops being just another mass-made object. It becomes one of a kind.” This statement captures how the act of mending transforms a common object into a unique piece. The repaired piece, like the self, holds traces of its history that cannot be replicated.

Gemma reflected that “even cracks can be beautiful.” Her kintsugi plate (*Figure* 8) may also symbolise the individuality of human experience, with each fracture contributing to a distinct narrative that cannot be reproduced. Gemma elaborated, “You’re not the same person

as you were before. You are something different. You are an artwork piece." This insight aligns with the kintsugi philosophy that repair enhances rather than diminishes value, and relates to the ACT principle of acceptance, which involves acknowledging pain as part of meaningful growth (Hayes et al., 2012; Strosahl et al., 2004).

Figure 8. Gemma's kintsugi piece, "Shogun"



(a) (b)

Note. The kintsugi piece reflects Gemma's appreciation of Japanese culture. She chose the title Shogun to show respect for the tradition and history of Kintsugi. The images illustrate the participant's kintsugi piece before (a) and after (b) repair. Photographed by the researcher.

Hazel described a similar transformation in perspective: "I thought it wouldn't be possible for the bowl to look as beautiful as it had before it was broken. But it actually adds to my story rather than taking away from it." This reflection reveals an embodied recognition that imperfections can enrich personal narratives rather than diminish them. Abby supported this view, noting that "You do mend. You don't lose anything and leave anything behind. You bring it with you, and it's almost enriched." Both accounts align with ACT, which suggests that embracing past pain cultivates authenticity and purpose (Hayes 2019).

Eva's story extends this notion through metaphor. She named her kintsugi piece *Blacky* (*Figure* 9), after a *tui* (a New Zealand native bird) she recognised whenever she feeds the birds in her backyard every morning because of its broken leg. "It was broken," Eva said, "that's how I knew it was the same bird." This recognition of brokenness as an identifying mark parallels the view that cracks add to one's story. Brokenness then becomes a marker of identity, a reminder that imperfection carries meaning, memory, and individuality. Such reflections illustrate how participants saw themselves from their kintsugi piece, finding beauty and authenticity in brokenness and imperfection.

Figure 9. Eva's kintsugi piece, "Blacky"

Note. The kintsugi piece represents Eva's connection to a one-legged tui [New Zealand native bird] she once cared for. The images illustrate the participant's kintsugi piece before (a) and after (b) repair. Photographed by the researcher.

Fostering Connection and Togetherness

As participants recognised the uniqueness of their repaired pieces, they also discovered a sense of connection with others. Abby reflected on her past encounters with other people who also lost their loved ones. Abby shared, "Once I opened the door to grief and someone dying, many people came to share their stories. We all walk the same path" This openness to

vulnerability invited mutual sharing and empathy, suggesting that personal healing can unfold within collective experience. Abby later remarked, “We’re both broken. We have a connection.”

Hazel described the workshop as a space where “it felt like we were all similar people, which was really nice.” Frida noted simply, “It’s amazing when you think about it, we’re not that different.” These insights affirm a paradoxical reflection that I always wittingly say, “You are unique, just like everyone else.” The paradox highlights the kintsugi metaphor as both personal and communal, showing that each person’s story is distinct, yet the recognition of brokenness binds them together.

This sense of togetherness was shown through both material and cultural metaphors. Gemma shared:

> You’ve got the four pillars [referring to *Te Whare Tapa Whā*] to keep the house together. And you’ve got the glue that binds us together, the gold. The gold fills the cracks and holds everything in place. It brings the whole thing back into harmony, just like how people hold each other up. The parts we glued are probably the strongest now. (Gemma)

Gemma moved to connect the idea of repair to *Te Whare Tapa Whā,* a Māori model of health that explains wellbeing as being supported by four interrelated dimensions: *taha wairua* (spiritual), *taha hinengaro* (mental and emotional), *taha tinana (*physical), and *taha whānau* (family and social) (*Te Whare Tapa Whā Model of Māori Health*, 2023). Isabel related the process of mending to “weaving things together”, which connects to the Māori concept of *raranga*, or the art of weaving (McLachlan, 2021). *Raranga* symbolises the interconnection of people within the community, where every strand contributes to the strength of the whole (McLachlan, 2021). Together, these reflections highlight *whakawhanaungatanga*, the building of relationships and the deepening of community through shared creative repair (McLachlan, 2021). Hazel’s account powerfully embodied this integration: “little bits of [my patients] are added into me. Those stories fit into the cracks as well, making up the whole bowl.” This metaphor of acknowledging others’ stories through compassionate care parallels the purpose of art therapy, where creative processes foster empathy and communal healing (“About Art Therapy,” n.d.; Heiderscheit, 2022; Shukla et al., 2022; Woodcock, 2011). In addition, the titles chosen by some of the participants – *Bringing Together* (Hazel), *Familial Lines* (Abby), and

Family Triptych (Cora) – reflect how kintsugi became a symbolic medium to reflect on personal connections.

Connection also unfolded practically during the workshop. As Eva noted, "We only had one [ultraviolet] torch, that was a measure of sharing things." Cora pointed out that limited tools "make people interact, sharing everything." Even while working on separate pieces, participants engaged in subtle collaboration, mirroring the therapeutic principle that shared vulnerability strengthens cohesion. The act of repair, therefore, became both an individual and a community activity. It is a lived metaphor not only for identity but also for belonging, cooperation, and communal understanding.

Discussion on Extending from Unique to Shared Experience

The third theme, *Extending from unique to shared experience*, illustrates how participants progress from individual realisation of their uniqueness toward a collective awareness of empathy and social connection. What initially emerged as an individual and agentic act of repair evolved into a relational and communal process, highlighting the social dimension of kintsugi.

During the Kintsugi-ACT workshop, participants first engaged in quiet, focused repair. Eventually, their interactions deepened through conversation and shared activity. The activity of mending transformed from an isolated task into a shared experience, fostering a sense of belongingness.

Materially, the finished pieces also sparked acknowledgements of their brokenness as a feature of uniqueness. The participants thought that a ceramic that is mass-produced, once it is broken, is bound to be unique and one-of-a-kind. More so, when the kintsugi pieces are placed next to each other, the gold lines connect to the other pieces (*Figure* 10). This is a visual reminder of how kintsugi was used as a metaphor to signify connections and reconnections to the people that matter to the participants, such as their parents, partners, siblings, youth, patients, or as simple as a family memory of dining out in a Chinese restaurant. The process and the pieces are extended to these important core social connections and events in their lives.

This movement from individuality toward interconnectedness reflects ACT's process of values-based connection. Well-being grows through compassion, openness, and shared purpose (Harris, 2019; McLachlan, 2021; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). ACT invites people to live in alignment with what truly matters, and often what matters most involves connection (Hayes,

Figure 10. Shared Brokenness

Note. Kintsugi pieces of Cora, Frida and Diane placed next to each other to show the extension of the gold lines to others. This represent the idea of "shared brokenness" to support the relational component of Kintsugi-ACT workshop, elaborately discussed on the third theme. Photographed by the researcher.

2019). Likewise, the kintsugi philosophy celebrates both uniqueness and universality. Each repair is distinct, yet all carry the same essence of continuity (Kemske, 2021; Wilkinson, 2022). Together, these insights serve as a reminder that individuality and a sense of community are not opposites but two parts of the same whole.

The literature on group art making deepens this understanding. Collaborative creative processes nurture empathy, trust, and belonging. Stuckey and Nobel (2010) describe art as a communal language through which people can share experience, while the American Art Therapy Association (n.d.) noted that group art often leads to mutual recognition and healing. These insights resonate with the reflections shared in the workshop. Many participants described an unexpected sense of belonging when observing others repair their pieces. The rhythm of the activity was not only deliberate and attentive but also shared.

This theme also confirms Māori concepts of holistic health. For instance, *Te Whare Tapa Whā Model of Māori Health* (2023), where balance across the four pillars of health, which are spiritual, emotional, physical, and social dimensions, sustains well-being. The most evident are the *taha hinengaro* (psychological health) and *taha whanau* (social health). Also,

McLachlan's (2021) *Whiti Te Rā,* which highlights the different specific pathways to achieve wellbeing that complements the existing Māori models of health. One of the six pathways is about creative engagement, *mahi-a-toi*, which reflects the role of different Māori expressive arts and practices in holistic well-being (McLachlan, 2021). Also, another pathway highlighted in this model is the *Ngā ara Take Pū Whānau* (Māori Relational Values), which emphasises the activities that lead to strengthening *whānau* well-being (family or social wellbeing). The Kintsugi-ACT workshop, though simple in structure, contributed to the different pillars of this model of health. Extended in a wider perspective, the workshop offers an activity that supports the essence of *Whiti Te Rā's mahi-a-toi* and *whānau* well-being pathways. Broader literature supports the importance of belongingness, showing that social bonds strengthen resilience and well-being (Backos, 2022; Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Fledderus, 2012).

This theme adds to the understanding of kintsugi as more than an individual reflection on imperfection. It extends to others. It is an experience of uniqueness that becomes a deeply human encounter or dialogue with others. Observing one another's repair process sparked compassion, eased self-criticism, and nurtured a sense of belongingness. This connection, perhaps, was nourished by the activity itself, meeting the human need to belong.

The participants discovered that their brokenness was not a mark of weakness but uniqueness and belongingness. This observation supports earlier literature suggesting that creative group experiences strengthen connection and mutual care (Backos, 2022; Hayes, 2019; Princer, 2022; Shukla et al., 2022). It also invites reflection on how such shared vulnerability might deepen self-awareness beyond the workshop's boundaries. Kintsugi, in this context, moves from being a metaphor to a lived experience, that extends to shared experience. It is an art of empathy that reminds us that no one should heal in isolation. Hence, this research is called The Art of Mending *Together.*

4.4 Preserving, Transforming, and Opening Possibilities

This theme explores how participants understood the coexistence of both change and continuity. Through kintsugi, they learned to acknowledge their past experiences, appreciate the evolved present, and look forward to more possibilities. This theme shows transcendence, moving beyond the broken object and finding meaning that surpasses the temporalities of life.

The theme includes three subthemes. The first subtheme, *Preserving sustainability*, focuses on how participants valued maintaining and protecting what already exists. The second subtheme, *Transforming through repair*, highlights how they found beauty and growth in the repair process, showing that change and continuity can exist together. Lastly, the third subtheme, *Opening possibilities*, describes how repaired objects inspired imagination, creativity, and new ways of using or understanding them. Together, these subthemes show how participants experienced transcendence as a movement through time and purpose, honouring the past, engaging in the present, and staying open to the future.

Preserving Sustainability

Participants described preservation as both a practical and philosophical idea. Eva explained, "I very rarely discard anything. There's always something you can fix or make something of it. I'm not someone who throws things in the bin and says, 'I've absolutely ruined it.' I always try to make something of what's broken." During the workshop, Eva's kintsugi piece broke midway during the repair (previously shown in *Figure* 6 and *Figure* 9), yet she decided to keep mending it. This decision to persist reflected a strong belief in sustainability, the idea that what is broken still has value and can be given new life. This view shows that sustainability extends beyond caring for the environment; it is also about resourcefulness and creative renewal. The kintsugi process encourages people to reuse and restore what they already have, keeping objects meaningful and useful while appreciating the care and effort that went into creating them.

Other participants shared emphasis on sustainability as a liberating experience. Gemma noted, "I don't feel as nervous handling ceramics anymore because I know I can fix them and turn them into something beautiful." Diane complemented this idea by saying, "If my piece breaks again, I'll just put it back together." These insights show how repair becomes a mindset that liberates and sees value in what already exists. For the participants, mending the broken meant giving hope. In the context of kintsugi, this was an opportunity for them to participate in adding more meaning and beauty. This idea relates closely to art therapy, which teaches that the innate desire to repair (Michel, 2023; Spelman, 2002) is not only about fixing materially but also about rebuilding hope and resilience through creative expression (Backos, 2022; Woodcock, 2011).

Isabel connected this idea to environmental and cultural awareness, saying:

> One of the guiding aspects of my life is sustainability and making the most of the resources we already have. Something that involves repairing feels important to me. I want to revive those skills and make them part of everyday life. For me, this pot is symbolic of that. It also connects me to Japan. There's a Japanese concept called *mottainai*. (Isabel)

Mottainai means gratitude for what exists and a commitment to avoid waste, showing respect for both the material and the process (Kemske, 2021). Seen through this lens, kintsugi becomes both a sustainable practice and a philosophy that values preservation, mindful use of resources, and appreciation of the past.

Transforming through Repair

Transformation was a meaningful experience for many participants who noticed how beauty could come from brokenness. Hazel shared, "Before coming, I didn't think it would be possible for it to be more beautiful after it was broken than when it was new." Abby said, "It's not what it was before. It's different, but it's also the same." These reflections show how change and stability can exist together and connect to the first subtheme about sustainability. Sustainability means fixing and caring for what already exists while also making room for new growth and change, which is what transformation means. Beth summed up what transformation through kintsugi means: "We've made this amazing solid thing out of broken" (previously shown in *Figure* 7). This idea relates to the ACT concept of acceptance, where growth happens not by fighting change but by learning to be open to it (Harris, 2019; Hayes, 2019; Strosahl et al., 2012).

Furthermore, transformation was also realised beyond the kintsugi piece. Frida titled her piece *Hope* (*Figure* 11) and explained, "Because something good can come out of nothing. Even a plate can evolve. So, if a plate can evolve, what can a human do?" Frida showed how transformation through repair represents personal growth and renewal. Fixing broken pieces became a symbol of human strength, showing that mending is not only physical but also psychological. This idea connects to art therapy, which highlights how creative repair can support healing and help people find purpose and hope (Bohlmeijer et al., 2015; Princer, 2022; Shukla et al., 2022; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010).

Figure 11. Frida's kintsugi piece, "Hope"

(a) (b)

Note. Frida called this kintsugi piece Hope "because something good can come out of nothing." The images illustrate the participant's kintsugi piece before (a) and after (b) repair. Photographed by the researcher.

Opening Possibilities

Participants shared how their repaired objects took on new meanings and uses, showing how this subtheme reflects the idea of opening new possibilities through creativity and reimagining the purpose of what was once broken. Diane said, "It could be a method for people to tell their story." This shows how kintsugi can go beyond art to become a storytelling tool, a way for people to express experiences of growth and change. Gemma reflected, "Once it's fixed, it's no longer just a plate. It's an artwork. It doesn't just have one use. The different uses give it life over the years. It will last." This shows how repair opens new possibilities for creativity and function. Instead of returning an object to its old form, participants saw the repair as giving it a renewed life or a second chance. There are valuable lessons to this. It taps into self-compassion, new life, second chances, mending, finding meaning, new beginnings or forgiveness.

Isabel, when reflecting on her kintsugi piece (*Figure* 12), linked the sense of openness to the Māori concept of *Te Kore*. She explained, "By making an object, giving it new life, you're tapping into the *Te Kore,* the void of potential and creation that comes before the world of light [*Te Ao Mārama*]." This concept describes the potential for new beginnings that come from what seems broken. In this sense, *Te Kore* mirrors the process of kintsugi, turning emptiness or loss into a source of creation (Mead, 2003). It also connects with Māori perspectives on time as cyclical and interconnected, where the past, present, and future continually inform each other (Mead, 2003).

Figure 12. Isabel's kintsugi piece, "Duck Egg"

(a) (b)

Note. Isabel's kintsugi piece represents both fragility and new life. Isabel compared it to a duck egg, delicate yet full of potential. She said, "It is like little life can come on from that going to the world." The images illustrate the participant's kintsugi piece before (a) and after (b) repair. Photographed by the researcher.

Discussion on Preserving, Transforming, and Opening Possibilities

The fourth theme, *Preserving, transforming, and opening possibilities*, captures how participants experienced the Kintsugi-ACT workshop as a movement from repair towards

transformation and beyond. Many participants described this process as preserving what still mattered from the past while reimagining new possibilities for the present and future. Kintsugi, in this sense, became more than a metaphor for mending; it was a lived experience with impermanence, continuity, and hope. Through creative engagement, they appeared to acknowledge that impermanence does not need to signify loss but can instead open space for transformation. This insight aligns closely with psychological flexibility, where openness to change allows individuals to adapt to life's uncertainties with intention and care (Biglan et al., 2008; Hayes et al., 2012).

This theme reflects ACT's emphasis on values-guided action and acceptance (Hayes, 2019; Hayes et al., 2012). Participants viewed the repair process as active and intentional rather than passive, illustrating how creativity can operationalise psychological flexibility. The philosophical foundations of kintsugi and Buddhist thought further inform this interpretation. The principle of impermanence, or *anicca*, is a central tenet in Buddhism that teaches the transience of all things (Harvey, 2013). It resonates with participants' reflections that nothing is fixed and that change, while inevitable, can be restorative. Kemske (2021) similarly portrays kintsugi as an art of gratitude and sustainability, where preservation and transformation exist in dynamic balance. The experience of the participants also affirms and supports the anthropo-philosophical idea proposed by Michel (2023) and Spelman (2002), *homo reparans.* This idea paints a picture of the innate human impulse to mend what is broken, both materially and emotionally, to restore meaning or coherence (Michel, 2023; Spelman, 2002).

This theme also finds connection with the concept of post-traumatic growth, where struggle and loss can give rise to new perspectives and meaning (Gantt & Tinnin, 2009; Heiderscheit, 2022; Randazzo & Ammari, 2025). Participants described moments of insight and appreciation emerging through their creative engagement in turning adversity into renewal. These experiences mirror global health perspectives that recognise creative expression as a pathway to well-being, adaptability, and resilience (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Choosing to preserve and repurpose broken pieces rather than discarding them reflected participants' acceptance of both their history and potential for change. This reinforces ACT's preference for acceptance over avoidance.

This theme expands the meaning of kintsugi that goes beyond the idea of restoration and positions it as an active practice of transformation and hope. Participants' reflections indicated that healing and growth do not merely close a wound but effectively redefine it. They

put the object back together. But also, added more value to it, making it more beautiful. They were integrating the past and transforming it into a narrative of growth. The repaired object held the memory of its brokenness while also becoming something renewed and meaningful. This observation affirms Heiderscheit's (2022) research that creative work reconstructs meaning by transforming sensory and emotional experience into form. This theme reinforces the interplay between material and psychological repair, showing how tactile engagement can make abstract psychological ideas more concrete and understandable.

Participants' reflections on colour, texture, and form also revealed that transformation was experienced physically. It involved something they could feel and experience through their senses. This awareness of both mind and body working together helps in understanding what transformation means. It is not only about creating something completely new, but also about renewal. Hence, the workshop made participants realise that kintsugi is powerful in a way that it made them understand their capability to be active, creative beings. The way the participants interacted with the materials, they experienced what it feels like to go through change with their *whole* self: mind and body, vulnerability and strength, pain and purpose, all existing together.

4.5 Deepening the Self through Metaphors

This theme is the process of deepening self-understanding through metaphorical engagement. The participants used the Kintsugi-ACT workshop as a reflective medium for introspection and personal growth. The tactile and reflective process allowed them to weave personal stories, values, and emotions into their repaired pieces. For example, kintsugi became a metaphor of mending, connection, and duality through which they recollected, reconnected, and reinterpreted aspects of their identity.

Isabel used the act of connecting broken pieces as a prompt for reconnecting with the self: "Connecting the pieces but also connecting to other parts of myself. It's about connecting the fragmented parts into a whole, connecting myself to the present moment, and connecting myself to my values." This reflection illustrates how the physical act of mending a broken pot symbolised inner integration. Not only the process, but the mended pot itself represents a lesson that she could use as a tangible reminder. Isabel further shared, "The reconstructed pot embodies the idea of being connected or reconnected." This account resonates with the idea of

wholeness. The reconstruction of a pot parallels how people assemble the different parts of themselves, their past, present, and values, into a cohesive whole.

Diane described how her kintsugi piece (*Figure* 13) became a vessel for her personal story and a way of feeling validated:

> It's almost getting infused with my story as well, which is pretty meaningful, actually, because I feel like I'm being heard and seen. I'm literally putting my story into this, and it's like a metaphorical representation of my story as well. That makes it so powerful. I can see my story. And I know that my story can't see me, but with the title *Eyes Wide Open,* it can almost. I can look at my story and feel seen or heard by it. And I'm so much more appreciative of how imperfect and bumpy and outside the lines it is now, because that's like my story, it's not machine-made. (Diane)

Figure 13. Diane's kintsugi piece, "Eyes Wide Open"

(a) (b)

Note. The kintsugi piece represents Diane's story of self-recognition and acceptance. She described feeling seen and heard through the piece, as if it reflected her life back to her, imperfect, unpolished, yet authentically her own. The images illustrate the participant's kintsugi piece before (a) and after (b) repair. Photographed by the researcher.

This reflection exemplifies how art-making can externalise personal narratives, allowing individuals to witness and appreciate their own stories from a place of compassion (Backos, 2022; Gantt & Tinnin, 2009; Shukla et al., 2022). This mirrors what art therapy literature describes as the nonverbal dialogue between the creator and the creation, where making art enables one to symbolically process emotions (Backos, 2022; Sheridan & Van Lith, 2024; Shukla et al., 2022; Woodcock, 2011).

Abby opened about how the repaired object prompted reflection on perspective and acceptance. Initially drawn to a piece she thought was circular, and later discovered it was oblong (*Figure* 14). Instead of disappointment, she found meaning in this discovery:

> Coming in, you showed me the pieces, and I had a choice. The first thing I saw was the circle, and I thought, 'Oh, it's got a circle in it.' I didn't even realise it was the base. All I saw was the circle, and that resonated with me. So, I said, 'I'll have it that way.' Then I realised that it wasn't actually going to be the front, it was the back. And I thought, okay, I'll have to live with that. (Abby)

Figure 14. Abby's kintsugi piece, "Familial Connections"

Note. The kintsugi piece represents Abby's family, showing her and their two daughters (three pieces) and her late husband (round base). The gold lines symbolise their lasting connection and how the husband's memory continues to hold them together. The images illustrate the participant's kintsugi piece before (a) and after repair: (b) front, (c) back. Photographed by the researcher.

Abby later reflected on duality, “There are two sides to the story." This dual perspective was realised by Abby when she reflected on the front side of her piece (*Figure* 14.b) and gained a different reassuring perspective by looking at the back side (*Figure* 14.c). This perspective-taking helped her process her grief following the loss of her husband:

> He [Abby’s late husband] was trying to protect me. He had to make that decision [to stop treatment] on his own. He would never want to leave. He’d never, *ever, ever*, in the 53 years, considered leaving me. And suddenly he had to make that decision. (Abby)

Abby understood her husband’s tough decision by assuming his perspective, which she metaphorically reflected on the two sides of her kintsugi plate. Recollecting this emotional experience and looking at it from a different perspective helped her reinterpret the meaning of a painful experience more healthily and therapeutically.

Discussion on Deepening the Self through Metaphors

The fifth theme, *Deepening the self through metaphors*, explores how participants used kintsugi as a reflective lens for self-awareness, emotional understanding, and personal growth. What first appeared as a simple creative task gradually unfolded into a deeply introspective process. Through the metaphors linked to kintsugi, participants connected with their inner experiences and translated them into visible form. The act of repair became a profound exercise of meaning-making. This suggests that kintsugi’s symbolism of brokenness and repair allowed them to engage in personal reflection and with vulnerability in ways that felt safe and transformative. This theme reflects the powerful capacity of art to foster psychological depth and growth.

Although this theme may seem to overlap with other themes, it stands apart to emphasise the inward focus orientation. While other themes speak of psychological flexibility, healing, transformation, and connection, this theme turns toward the broader sense of introspection. It shows how participants used kintsugi to explore their inner world, finding that repairing something broken often mirrored their own inner processes to rediscover patience, strength, and emotional awareness. The emphasis here is on the general idea of creative reflection, helping individuals listen to themselves and uncover meaning in their experiences. This theme stands independently because it highlights a different kind of learning, which is grounded in self-reflection. Involving oneself in artistic creation becomes an opportunity to meet oneself. The act of mending transforms into an expressive and thoughtful practice. While

kintsugi facilitates conversations on healing or connections, it also turns inward, guiding them toward a deeper connection with their own sense of self.

This theme links closely to ACT's ideas: perspective taking and learning to look at experiences with openness instead of control (Harris, 2019; Hayes et al., 2012; Strosahl et al., 2004). In many ways, kintsugi mirrors this idea. As participants repaired their broken pieces, they were not just fixing objects but also observing themselves. It was their chance to notice without judgment. This practice reflects ACT's concept of self-as-context, where awareness offers a space for noticing what happens rather than trying to change it (Strosahl et al., 2004). The repair process became more than symbolic; it turned into a hands-on way of prompting the self to look inward and reflect (Heiderscheit, 2022; Sheridan & Van Lith, 2024; Shukla et al., 2022).

Art therapy research also supports this connection between art-making and meaning-making. Backos (2022) and Rappaport (2013) explained that working through metaphor helps people express emotions that words alone cannot. There is something deeply human about this idea: how broken pieces, put together with lacquer and gold, can translate personal experiences. Similarly, Princer (2022) and Harris et al. (2022) show that creative activity helps people rebuild a sense of identity after loss, creating new ways to understand wholeness. Studies linking self-awareness, mindfulness, and well-being add further support, suggesting that reflective art making provides a gentle but powerful path toward balance and growth (Bohlmeijer et al., 2015; Sheridan & Van Lith, 2024; Shukla et al., 2022). Together, these ideas suggest that introspection happens when artmaking and meaning-making meet, consequently leading to self-discovery and self-compassion.

4.6 Summary of Findings

This section offers a summary of the central themes and subthemes discussed in the previous chapter. This highlights how these themes are collectively anchored in participants' experience of the Kintsugi-ACT workshop.

Theme 1: Integrating Kintsugi and ACT Frameworks

Participants' accounts reflect a foundational alignment between kintsugi and ACT, aimed at understanding how these two complement each other to foster psychological

flexibility. Participants' experiences indicate that kintsugi offers a practical and creative way to learn and apply ACT principles.

Letting Go. Participants developed a greater sense of acceptance by letting go of perfectionistic tendencies and embracing imperfection as a natural part of being human. They have also realised the importance of disentangling, which can be likened to practicing cognitive defusion. This mirrors ACT's pillar of *being open*.

Living in the Moment. Participants experienced heightened focus and moments of stepping back as observers while engaging in the repair process. This reflects the ACT's pillar of *being aware.*

Acting in Values. Participants transformed personal reflections into values-based actions, showing persistence, autonomy, and agency in their creative repair. This reflects ACT's pillar of *being engaged.*

Table 1 in Chapter 2 outlined the workshop design and its alignment with kintsugi and ACT principles. Parallel to that, *Table* 2 presents an extension of *Table* 1 to show how participants experienced this integration throughout the workshop.

Table 2. Participants Integration of Kintsugi and ACT

ACT Process		**Kintsugi Step**	**Participants Lived Experience of Kintsugi-ACT integration**
Be Open	Defusion	Assembling the broken pieces	**Letting Go** Participants embraced imperfection and the uncomfortable while letting go of perfectionism and disentangling fragments, reflecting ACT's pillar of Being Open
	Acceptance	Sanding the sharp edges	
Be Aware	Present Moment Awareness	Applying adhesive and aligning pieces	**Living in the Moment** Focused, mindful awareness and observation during repair, reflecting ACT's pillar of Being Aware
	Self-as-Context	Observing the reconstructed object	
Be Engaged	Values Clarification	Applying precious metals (gold or silver)	**Acting in Values** Participants took intentional, persistent, values-driven action, practicing ACT's pillar of Being Engaged
	Committed Action	Finishing touches with care and purpose	

Theme 2: Realising Healing as a Mending Process

Healing was experienced as a continuous effort requiring time, patience, and persistence. Participants understood that healing is deeply personal and not linear, often moving between moments of pain and purpose. This highlights the essence of kintsugi as a practice and philosophy of mending, which was more realised by integrating it with ACT principles.

Theme 3: Extending from Unique to Shared Experience

Kintsugi helped participants recognise their uniqueness as part of a broader shared human experience. This extending movement from personal authenticity to collective awareness nurtured compassion both to the self and to others. This indicates a relational element of the participants' experience of the Kintsugi-ACT workshop.

Cultivating Uniqueness and Authenticity. Repairing broken objects helped participants see how their experiences of imperfection and encounter of mended brokenness strengthened their unique sense of identity and personal meaning.

Fostering Connection and Togetherness. Participants working together and realising their shared brokenness encouraged connection. This has fostered a sense of belongingness and empathy.

Theme 4: Preserving, Transforming, and Opening Possibilities

Participants experienced functional and temporal transcendence as a process of continuity, change and creative purpose. Through the act of kintsugi, they realised this transcending movement by acknowledging the past, embracing the present, and approaching the future with openness to the possibilities.

Preserving Sustainability. Participants valued patience, care, and the act of maintaining what already exists. This reflected both environmental and personal sustainability, where resilience meant finding new use and meaning rather than discarding what was damaged.

Transforming through Repair. Participants found renewed beauty and growth through the process of mending. They viewed change as part of continuity, acknowledging both the history of the object and what it has evolved into. They have linked this realisation to the reality of human development.

Opening Possibilities. Participants perceived their repaired objects as evolving and symbolic of creativity, imagination, and potential for new meaning. During the process of preservation and transformation, the participants were engaging with the object with a new meaning or purpose; hence, kintsugi has unlocked more potential for the object, both practically and psychologically.

Theme 5: Deepening the Self through Metaphors

The Kintsugi-ACT workshop encouraged deep personal reflection and growth. Through the symbolic act of repair, participants reconnected with their inner world, fostering self-awareness, healthy introspection, and renewed understanding of the self. It allowed for the opportunity to delve within to enrich personal meaning and process experiences.

These are the central themes that emerged from the participants' experience of the Kintsugi-ACT workshop. They are grounded in the experience of the participants and critically and reflexively interpreted. The present study suggests that the practical workshop functioned as a space for emotional expression and thoughtful exploration. Through creative activity and reflection, participants deepened their awareness of both their inner and outer worlds.

On a reflexive note, both participants and I, as the researcher, facilitator and artist, influenced the knowledge that emerged by reflecting and making sense of the experience together. These findings represent more than a summary of participants' accounts; they reflect a co-constructed interpretation shaped by the researcher's active engagement with the data. The discussion highlights how meaning was not simply found but formed through an iterative and reflexive process of interpreting participants' experiences, contextualised within the philosophical and psychological principles of kintsugi and ACT. This process involved both analysis and reflection, showing that understanding developed through ongoing interpretation rather than simple observation.

The themes are organised in a way that supports the research aim and provide answers to the research questions, which is elaborated further in the next chapter along with the discussion of the limitations, implications, and recommendations for future studies.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This chapter provides the conclusion of this thesis. It begins by addressing the research aim and questions. The discussion then moves to the broader implications for theory and practice. Limitations are presented to ensure transparency, and recommendations for future research are outlined. Finally, the chapter concludes with a reflective closing section.

5.2 Addressing the Research Aim and Questions

The primary aim of this study was to explore how participants made meaning of their participation in an integrated Kintsugi and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) workshop.

The first theme established the foundation to understand ACT and kintsugi, and how they align together. Participants explained how they brought together the kintsugi and ACT frameworks. They were grounding both the philosophical and practical foundations of kintsugi while aligning these with the psychological framework of ACT. This integration helped them to connect the process of repair with mindfulness, acceptance, and values-based action.

The second theme illuminated the essence of kintsugi as integrated with ACT. Following this, participants shed light on kintsugi's deeper meaning as an ongoing active process of mending, which they related to their idea of healing, resilience and recovery.

The remaining three themes indicate a sense of movement; each represents a different direction of reflection: looking across, going beyond, and delving within.

The third theme focuses on looking across. Participants were extending their reflections of realising personal uniqueness to the shared experience of brokenness. Through recognising both individuality and interconnectedness, they discovered a sense of connection grounded in shared brokenness and imperfection.

The fourth theme reflects going beyond, signifying temporal and functional transcendence. Participants described weaving together the past, present, and future of an object, and metaphorically, of their own lives. This movement captures continuity, change and creative purpose coexisting in the process of kintsugi.

Finally, the fifth theme involves delving within, with the aim to deepen the understanding of their selves. Participants described how the metaphors of kintsugi naturally prompted reflection on the self. It encouraged them to find meaning, coherence, and growth through their engagement with the kintsugi process.

Together, these themes reveal how the Kintsugi-ACT integration offered a multifaceted experience to foster psychological well-being. Participants created meaning through reflective engagement with the practical, artistic and psychological dimensions of the kintsugi process. For them, repairing the broken ceramics was more than a creative task or a physical skill of repairing. The mending evolved into a tangible metaphor for psychological flexibility, healing, connection, transformation, and reflection.

The workshop offered a safe space where creative repair supported psychological reflection and skill-building. As participants engaged with the materials, they described becoming more aware of how the act of mending paralleled internal change. Each step of repair encouraged them to face the broken and imperfect with acceptance and the intention to transform it into something meaningful. Through this process, mending became a way of practicing healthy mental well-being. The hands-on activity developed into insight and a lived experience of psychological skills such as openness, mindful presence, and values-guided action (Hayes et al., 2012). Participants also described holding both pain and purpose at the same time, viewing healing as becoming whole in a different way.

Overall, the Kintsugi-ACT workshop emerged as a reflective and transformative experience for the participants. Meaning unfolded through their hands-on engagement, personal reflection, and social connection.

The following discussion explores further the participants' experience of the integrated Kintsugi and ACT workshop by answering the research questions.

Research Question 1

In what ways do participants perceive the connections between Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) principles and the Kintsugi process?

Participants perceived strong connections between the principles of ACT and the philosophy of Kintsugi (Theme 1). They described how the process of mending broken ceramics reflected ACT concepts such as openness, present moment awareness and values-

based engagement (Hayes et al., 2012). Kintsugi became a lived metaphor for psychological flexibility. Participants learned to notice their thoughts and emotions without judgment while staying engaged in the creative mending task. Letting go of perfectionism and disentangling fragments represented acceptance and defusion. Careful focus and observation during the repair process embodied mindfulness and observer perspective. Persevering to transform the broken object in a kintsugi aesthetic way mirrors values clarification and committed action.

Participants reported that this experiential connection between art and psychology made ACT principles more accessible and personally meaningful. Rather than learning ACT through theory, they internalised its lessons through hands-on practice. This suggests that kintsugi embodied ACT's abstract therapeutic ideas into a lived experience (Backos, 2022; Heiderscheit, 2022). Hence, ACT could be more available to the communities rather than learning it in conventional settings such as clinics, schools and mental health workshops.

Other themes also provide answers to this research question. Participants described healing as something that takes time and patience, similar to ACT's focus on accepting difficulties while moving toward their values (Theme 2). Preserving and transforming the broken ceramics showed how they could accept the past while staying open to change and new possibilities, reflecting psychological flexibility (Theme 4). Finally, using kintsugi as a metaphor encouraged reflection and values-based living, which connects to ACT's use of metaphors to communicate its processes (Theme 5). Overall, participants experienced kintsugi as a practical way to live out ACT principles.

Research Question 2

In what ways do participants experience the repair process of the Kintsugi and ACT workshop?

Participants described the slow, deliberate act of mending as calming and grounding, which cultivated mindfulness and personal regulation (Santini, 2019; Shukla et al., 2022). The process of sanding down the sharp edges allowed them to sit with discomfort, uncertainty, and imperfection, reflecting the ACT principle of acceptance (Theme 1).

The repair itself became symbolic of healing (Theme 2). As participants joined broken pieces, they thought about their own pain and struggles. The cracks reminded them of parts of themselves that felt damaged. Adding gold to those cracks represented turning those flaws or challenges into strength and beauty.

Additionally, the group context and even the act of sharing materials encouraged connection (Theme 3). The workshop fostered not only personal reflection but also a sense of belongingness. Working side by side allowed participants to exchange ideas, offer help, and affirm each other's progress, which strengthened a sense of community. Moreover, the kintsugi process facilitated the realisation of shared brokenness (Theme 3). Participants learned values such as empathy, compassion, and the courage to be vulnerable. The workshop became a safe space where participants could face their brokenness while feeling supported by others.

Moreover, the transformation of the broken object mirrored their own personal transformation (Themes 4), which is achieved by stepping back and assessing the ceramics before committing to the act of mending and finishing it off with the gold (Theme 1).

The kintsugi process also prompted the participants to reflect and understand parts of themselves (Theme 5). For example, the two sides of a plate reminded them to see things from different perspectives, while the broken pieces represented parts of themselves that needed healing. In addition, the gold lines symbolised their values, strength, and resilience, showing that imperfections can become something beautiful and strong.

The participants discovered that the process of repair could become a meaningful activity that transforms brokenness into wholeness. The gold that filled the cracks became more than aesthetic; it symbolised healing, resilience, connection, transformation, and the willingness to be seen despite imperfection. It was experienced as creative and practical, but also gentle and insightful.

Research Question 3

In what ways do participants describe the value and perceived benefits of the Kintsugi and ACT workshop?

Participants described the value and benefits of the Kintsugi-ACT workshop as layered and multidimensional. It facilitated practical yet meaningful repair skills (Theme 4), personal therapeutic insight (Themes 1, 2 and 5), interpersonal connection (Theme 3), and reflective learning (Theme 5). They often spoke of it not simply as a creative pursuit but as a space where art met psychology. The workshop became an opportunity for them to slow down, reflect, and reconnect with themselves and others. The concrete and hands-on experience of handling broken pieces was, in a way, a tangible experience of the intangibles: sensing acceptance, embracing imperfection, feeling patience, hearing introspection, and seeing deep reflections.

The participants' reflections revealed that the workshop's meaning extended beyond the self. Engaging in shared creation and open conversation deepened empathy and mutual understanding (Theme 3). Working with others or simply reflecting on the continuity of the gold lines among the kintsugi pieces nurtured a sense of belongingness that transcended individuality. This process of seeing and being seen mirrored ACT's relational components, where openness and perspective-taking enhance empathy, social connectedness (Shukla et al., 2022; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010) and psychological flexibility (Backos, 2022; Hayes et al., 2012; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010).

Ultimately, the Kintsugi-ACT workshop functioned as both metaphor and method. It is a lived experience and a learning process. Through tactile engagement and metaphorical reflection, participants embodied the therapeutic essence of acceptance, mindfulness, and value-guided action. The experience illuminated that repair, whether material or immaterial (emotional, psychological or social), is not about perfect restoration to what it was before but values-based and meaningful transformation.

Each of the research questions directly ties back to the main aim of this study, showing how participants made meaning of their Kintsugi-ACT workshop experience through interrelated psychological, creative, and practical processes. When taken all together, the findings reveal a cohesive narrative. Participants perceived clear connections between ACT principles and the philosophy of kintsugi, finding that the creative repair process embodied psychological flexibility (Research Question 1). Participants experienced the repair process as personal and meaningful, using it to accept imperfections, understand healing, discover aspects of themselves and connect with others (Research Question 2). Participants described the value and benefits of the Kintsugi-ACT workshop as multilayered, viewing it as more than learning a physical skill of repair. For them, the experience fostered useful psychological skills (Research Question 3).

5.3 Theoretical and Practical Implications

This section explores how the findings of this study and the Kintsugi-ACT framework contribute to theory and practice.

Theoretical Implications

This study strengthens the link between psychology and art. It reveals how kintsugi functions not just as a symbol but as a lived experience of psychological flexibility. Participants learned ACT principles such as acceptance, mindfulness, and values-based action, through hands-on repair and reflection. The process showed that mending, transformation or self-growth is not always a product of abstract reasoning. Sometimes, it is felt first in the hands before it is understood by the mind.

The findings build on resilience and post-traumatic growth studies. They extend them by introducing a tangible and creative way to psychological flexibility (Gantt & Tinnin, 2009; Heiderscheit, 2022; Princer, 2022). It also supports Backos' (2022) work on establishing creative approaches to ACT and connects with studies linking artmaking to trauma recovery and identity reconstruction (Gantt & Tinnin, 2009; Heiderscheit, 2022; Princer, 2022; Randazzo & Ammari, 2025; Santos & Costa, 2025). These findings challenge the assumption that therapeutic change emerges through talk alone. They suggest that psychological insight and transformation can come from experiencing movements (sanding, disentangling, fixing broken pieces together) and material engagement (brushing gold powder, applying adhesives, reflecting on the finished kintsugi piece). Creativity becomes a pathway to self-understanding, healing, connection and growth.

Furthermore, this study continues to challenge long-held assumptions in psychological therapy. Earlier research often centred on the therapist-client relationship in a formal, clinical setup as the primary mechanism of change (Gantt & Tinnin, 2009; Heiderscheit, 2022; Santos & Costa, 2025; Shukla et al., 2022). However, in this present study, meaningful growth occurred in a community-based setting without formal therapy (Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). Participants discovered that reflection and repair, shared with others, could be transformative. This finding expands current thinking about how psychological support can be delivered.

Conceptually, kintsugi is reframed and evolved from a popular metaphor to a dynamic and meaningful psychological process. The Kintsugi way of repair translated abstract ACT principles into lived experience. Mutually, ACT principles enriched the kintsugi practice and philosophy with evidence-based psychology. Participants learned to hold imperfection and approach brokenness with compassion and understanding, to act in alignment with values, and

to view transformation as an ever-unfolding process rather than just an ending. Grounded in participants' experiences, the kintsugi metaphor gained much more depth and clarity. Integrated with ACT, kintsugi became not just a symbol or something to look at, but a way of life.

Finally, the theoretical insights from this study point to wider application. The Kintsugi-ACT framework can be adapted for use across cultural and professional contexts. Its blend of creativity and psychological theory makes it relevant to education, healthcare, and community well-being. Because it values process over perfection, it speaks to universal human experiences of loss, recovery, and growth. It holds potential as a culturally adaptable and preventive model that bridges art and mental health.

Practical Implications

The theoretical implications extend organically into real-world practice. The Kintsugi-ACT framework, grounded in philosophical creativity and evidence-based psychology, can be taken to places like schools, workplaces, and community settings. It is given that kintsugi is becoming more popular now. It seems like there is already a pre-existing interest amongst the public. For instance, during the recruitment stage for this study, there were about 80 initial expressions of interest received. In addition, kintsugi's strength lies in its richness in meaning and gentleness on the idea of imperfection. The Kintsugi-ACT framework values process over perfection. It offers a universal and deeply human language for healing, growth, and connection.

In community mental health contexts, the Kintsugi-ACT framework can serve as a low-cost, culturally adaptable approach to well-being. Group workshops provide accessible spaces for reflection and emotional regulation (Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). Framing psychoeducation as creative and collective rather than clinical could help reduce stigma and invite broader participation (Beato et al., 2024). Community mental health organisations could incorporate these workshops into preventive health programs to enhance coping skills and strengthen social bonds (Herrman et al., 2005).

Kintsugi-based activities can also enrich psycho-socioemotional learning in education setting. By linking artmaking with principles of ACT, students can explore self-awareness and emotional flexibility in engaging, non-threatening ways. Creative ACT activities provide developmentally appropriate ways for young people to build emotional literacy and resilience (Backos, 2022; Bohlmeijer et al., 2015; Sheridan & Van Lith, 2024). These creative exercises

may pave safe entry points for conversations about mental health, making them well-suited for school well-being initiatives and youth leadership programs (Fancourt & Finn, 2019).

Within workplaces, Kintsugi-ACT workshops can promote adaptability, cooperation, burnout reduction and creative problem-solving (Jeffcoat & Hayes, 2012; Piot et al., 2024; Richardson et al., 2018). Collaborative repair processes encourage reflection and shared meaning, which may reinforce a culture of openness and resilience. (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). Employers could integrate such sessions into wellness initiatives to support psychological flexibility and strengthen team cohesion.

The philosophy of kintsugi, though the richness of it seemed to be experienced at a personal level, has universality (Kumai, 2025). Kintsugi is becoming globally popular. It also speaks a meaning that is deeply human and relatable (Kemske, 2021; Kumai, 2025). Thus, this implies that it can translate or relate across cultures. So, kintsugi and ACT integrated together can be a powerful framework to promote mental health globally. Consequently, this study offers an answer to the World Health Organization's call for a more preventive approach to mental health (*World Mental Health Report*, 2022). This could also be applied to global crisis or post-crisis settings, such as disaster recovery or refugee programmes (*World Mental Health Report*, 2022). Through collective repair, communities can process trauma and rediscover shared strength. Its emphasis on practical and tangible participation rather than verbal allows diverse groups to connect beyond language (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). Hence, it fosters cultural sensitivity and inclusion. Moreover, philosophies of repair and sustainability reflect indigenous and ecological values. By valuing repair over replacement, this study contributes to sustainability (Bessone, 2023; Mead, 2003). It encourages mindful resource use and, therefore, nurturing not only psychological wellbeing but also environmental well-being (McLachlan, 2021; Mead, 2003).

Although this study is meant to be community-based and a non-clinical creative way of promoting mental health, the researcher acknowledges and realises its potential value in clinical settings (Santos & Costa, 2025). Kintsugi-ACT framework offers a creative and tangible complement to traditional talk-based therapy. Integrating kintsugi with ACT principles can help clients who struggle with verbal processing engage more deeply (Heiderscheit, 2022). Practitioners may use kintsugi as an experiential tool for promoting functional psychological skills such as acceptance, emotional regulation, meaning making and resilience (Backos, 2022; S. C. Hayes et al., 2012). This approach redefines therapy as an active, participatory journey.

It is a framework that invites clients to piece their experiences together with compassion and intention in a way that is valuable and useful.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

This study offers valuable insights into the integration of Kintsugi and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT); however, several limitations and directions for future studies must be acknowledged.

Limitations

The study involved only nine participants, which is suitable for an exploratory qualitative design but limits the generalisability of findings. While this allowed for rich, in-depth analysis, larger samples would be necessary to confirm whether the themes identified here are consistent across diverse populations (Price et al., n.d.). In addition to the small sample, gender representation also presents a limitation. All participants identified as female, restricting insights into how gender differences might influence engagement with creative and therapeutic processes. Gender may shape experiences of vulnerability, artistic expression, and group interaction. Future research should include participants of varied gender identities to provide a more comprehensive perspective. Furthermore, recruitment methods may have introduced additional bias. Participants were recruited through art groups and social media networks, which may have introduced bias toward individuals already interested in creative expression. This self-selection could have influenced how the intervention was received and interpreted, as participants may have been predisposed to view the process positively. Broader recruitment strategies could help address this bias (Price et al., n.d.).

Cultural representation also warrants consideration. Although some cultural diversity was present, the absence of Māori, Pasifika, Asian, and particularly Japanese participants is a notable limitation. Given that kintsugi originates from Japanese tradition, perspectives from these cultural groups may offer unique cultural insights into the symbolic and therapeutic meaning of the practice (Kemske, 2021; Kumai, 2025). Greater cultural inclusivity would strengthen future studies.

The short duration of the workshop and lack of follow-up also limit understanding of the intervention's long-term impact (Caruana et al., 2015). The workshop was conducted as a

single-session intervention without follow-up, limiting understanding of its long-term impact. Without longitudinal data, it is unclear whether the benefits participants described, such as reflection, healing, and connection, persist over time or translate into sustained behavioural change. Future research should incorporate follow-up assessments to evaluate the durability of outcomes.

Another methodological consideration relates to the modernised technique used during the workshop. Simplified materials and methods were used to make kintsugi accessible, differing from traditional Japanese practices that emphasise ritual, patience, and craftsmanship (Kemske, 2021). This adaptation may have altered the depth of symbolic engagement and cultural meaning. Future studies could compare traditional and modernised approaches to examine differences in psychological impact.

Voluntary participation may indicate a pre-existing interest in art or therapeutic practices, which could skew findings toward individuals already open to creative interventions. This limits the applicability of results to those less inclined toward such activities. Randomised recruitment or inclusion of participants with varying levels of interest could address this limitation (Price et al., n.d.).

Researcher influence must also be acknowledged, as I facilitated the workshop and collected data, which may have introduced additional bias (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Participants might have felt inclined to respond positively or align their reflections with perceived expectations, influencing the authenticity of responses. Employing independent facilitators, anonymous feedback mechanisms, or different interviewers could reduce this potential bias (Price et al., n.d.). Participants experiences may have also been shaped by their group dynamics, such as comfort in sharing and collaboration, which were not systematically measured. These interpersonal factors could have influenced participants' sense of belonging and engagement with the process. Future research should consider assessing group cohesion and its role in therapeutic outcomes.

Additionally, the study relied solely on qualitative data analysed through Reflexive Thematic Analysis, which provided rich insights but lacked measurable indicators of change (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Without quantitative measures, it is difficult to assess the magnitude of effects or compare outcomes across different populations. Mixed-methods designs could strengthen future research.

Finally, although the kintsugi workshop involved creative, hands-on artmaking, this study did not use Arts-Based Research (ABR) as its methodology. While parts of the study may look similar to arts-based inquiry, ABR is a specialised approach with its own philosophical foundations, the use of artwork as primary data, and distinct analytic methods, which were beyond the scope of this research (Leavy, 2015). In this study, the creative component served solely as a structured experiential activity within a qualitative design, and all data were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future studies could build on this research by exploring other several methodological directions, applications and approaches.

Long-term studies are needed to determine if the benefits of kintsugi and ACT are sustained over time. A longitudinal design would show whether changes persist (Caruana et al., 2015). For example, future research could incorporate follow-up interviews with participants to explore their longer-term experience of the workshop. Another possibility is the use of traditional materials or more complex repair tasks. In saying that, future studies should compare traditional and modern kintsugi techniques (Kemske, 2021). This may reveal whether the slower process of traditional methods leads to deeper engagement and greater therapeutic experience (Kemske, 2021). Rather than a single session intervention, multiple sessions employing the traditional kintsugi method would allow for first-hand experience of the slow, persistent process of traditional kintsugi. Such an approach aligns with longitudinal research recommendations (Caruana et al., 2015) and would also honour the cultural and historical roots of kintsugi (Kemske, 2021).

In terms of expanding this study, future recruitment strategy should aim to reduce self-selection bias. Reaching individuals who do not already have an interest in art or therapy may be important. Partnerships with community organisations, health services, and workplaces may help to generate a more representative sample. In addition, future studies could include larger and more diverse samples (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Price et al., n.d.). This will improve generalisability and allow exploration of individual differences such as gender, age, and cultural background. For example, including more gender diverse samples would allow for wider perspectives from different genders. In addition, including Māori, Pasifika, Asian, and Japanese perspectives would deepen understanding of cultural influences on kintsugi and ACT.

Comparative research could also examine whether kintsugi promotes psychological flexibility differently across cultural settings (Lau & Holbrook, 2017).

Along the line of using a comparative design, future research can compare kintsugi-based interventions with traditional talk therapies to assess differences in outcomes such as psychological flexibility, resilience, and emotional regulation. A comparative study design would clarify whether kintsugi offers unique or similar benefits to the traditional talk therapies (Lau & Holbrook, 2017). Such approach could also strengthen evidence for the value of artmaking in psychological settings. Another possibility is to use a mixed-methods approach. Combining qualitative and quantitative methods would provide richer data (Price et al., n.d.). Qualitative insights capture personal meaning, while quantitative measures track outcomes (Price et al., n.d.). Clear outcome measures would strengthen evidence for using kintsugi-informed practices in mental health programmes. In relation to that, future studies could use experimental or quasi-experimental designs to test the cause and effect (Price et al., n.d.), particularly whether kintsugi causes improvements in psychological flexibility. Researchers should include clear, measurable outcomes and should consider using psychometrically sound tests that measure constructs such as psychological flexibility, acceptance, mindfulness, values, resilience, and openness to experience (Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). In relation to measuring other psychological constructs, future research could also focus on specific psychological constructs that are linked to kintsugi, such as perfectionism, values clarification, and trauma recovery (Kumai, 2025; Randazzo & Ammari, 2025; Santos & Costa, 2025). Perhaps, using validated measures for each construct would provide clear evidence of therapeutic benefits.

Moreover**,** future research could explore how a formal Arts-Based Research (ABR) might offer additional insights into the Kintsugi-ACT process. Because ABR treats the artwork itself as data, using this methodology could help researchers examine how the repaired pieces communicate meaning or reflect participants' experiences in ways that interviews alone cannot (Leavy, 2015). This would provide a useful comparison to the qualitative approach used in this study and may deepen understanding of the creative and reflective aspects of kintsugi (Leavy, 2015).

Future research could also examine how other psychological models could complement or replace ACT principles in kintsugi-based interventions. For example, Positive Psychology could focus on strengths and meaning-making (Seligman, 2011), while Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) could deepen the meditative aspects of the repair process (Kriakous

et al., 2021). Narrative Therapy might help participants re-author personal stories through the symbolism of broken and repaired objects (Ghavibazou et al., 2022). Comparing these frameworks with ACT could reveal which framework best supports kintsugi as a tool to foster psychological well-being.

It is also worth exploring whether kintsugi can be established as its own theoretical model for psychological growth and recovery. This would involve identifying core principles, processes, and mechanisms that distinguish kintsugi from existing frameworks. Researchers could examine how these principles integrate with or diverge from established models such as ACT, Positive Psychology, or Narrative Therapy (Ghavibazou et al., 2022; S. C. Hayes et al., 2006; Seligman, 2011). Developing a culturally grounded theory could provide a unique contribution to creative arts therapies and mental health practice.

Although this study focused on community engagement, future research could also examine the clinical potential of kintsugi-based interventions (Santos & Costa, 2025). Studies are needed to establish the evidence for its reliability and validity in clinical settings and determine whether this approach can complement or enhance existing clinical therapeutic interventions. In addition, future research could also assess the cost-effectiveness of implementing kintsugi workshops in community and clinical settings. Understanding resource requirements and feasibility will support decisions about scaling and sustainability (Jordans & Kohrt, 2020).

Collaboration between mental health professionals and creative arts practitioners is also worth considering to enrich and enlarge this study. This could refine the kintsugi-ACT framework and make it more accessible. Future work could explore developing resources or a practical guide based on the Kintsugi-ACT framework. Such a resource could make these principles accessible to the public and support community well-being (Fancourt & Finn, 2019). This approach may complement clinical interventions and extend the reach of psychological flexibility strategies beyond formal therapy settings. Also, the repaired object might serve as a physical reminder of ACT principles, offering a more tangible form of learning than traditional therapies or bibliotherapy (Backos, 2022; Heiderscheit, 2022).

In terms of cross-disciplinary applications, it is worth exploring how kintsugi-based interventions can be integrated into other disciplines such as social work, occupational therapy, rehabilitation, or stress management programmes. This could expand its relevance beyond

mental health settings. Moreover, kintsugi can be adapted to respond to other diverse contexts. Future studies could explore how kintsugi workshops work in aged care, education, or healthcare settings. In consideration, time and mobility constraints may affect participation. Digital or hybrid formats could improve access for rural or resource-limited communities (Singla, 2024). In line with that, future research could explore the use of virtual or distanced facilitation of kintsugi. This may provide an alternative for participants who cannot attend in person and could enhance engagement through interactive digital experiences (Singla, 2024).

5.5 Concluding Reflection

This study began with a simple yet profound question: how can kintsugi promote mental health? This curiosity developed into much more refined research questions and aimed at grounding the answers from the participant's lived experience of the Kintsugi-ACT workshop. The participants' accounts suggest that when kintsugi and ACT are integrated together, the practical repair technique evolves into a rich philosophical encounter and then into a deeply psychological human experience.

Theoretically, this research broadens the understanding of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), kintsugi, and art-based intervention by showing how the creative act of repair can be a lived expression of psychological flexibility. In this sense, kintsugi operates as both metaphor and method, giving physical form to abstract ideas such as resilience and post-traumatic growth. The findings also deepen art therapy by affirming that artistic creation can bridge reflection, emotion, and action, supporting creative practice as a therapeutic process (Backos, 2022; Woodcock, 2011). Overall, the study suggests that art and psychology together can shape new ways of understanding and nurturing psychological well-being.

Practically, the Kintsugi-ACT framework provides a creative and inclusive way to strengthen mental health and well-being. It brings the principles and useful psychological skills such as acceptance, mindfulness, and compassion into everyday life through the simple act of mending broken pottery. The framework can be adapted for schools, healthcare, community, and therapeutic settings, supporting well-being initiatives that encourage connection and resilience from a preventive point of view (*World Mental Health Report*, 2022).

This research is not an ending but an opening. It has its limitations, which invite further exploration on how practical creative methods can complement existing evidence-based

therapeutic models. Future studies might test variations and different directions of the Kintsugi-ACT framework, such as longer interventions, cross-cultural adaptations, clinical contextualisation, or virtual sessions, to understand how this framework manifests across different settings. Each new iteration carries the potential to deepen understanding of how art can support psychology. This work also posits a broader question about the role of art in psychology. Could art-based practices help reimagine how society approaches mental health? Could art serve not merely as a treatment for distress, but as a simple yet sincere means of cultivating meaning and a sense of community? Art is perhaps more accessible than mental health practitioners, so the possibility of utilising creative platforms feels not only exciting but necessary.

This research offers more than data; it offers perspective. Kintsugi and ACT, when integrated, teach that psychological well-being is both an art and a discipline. It is a conversation between art and psychology, where creativity and compassion come together. This study showed a creative and compassionate perspective of looking at imperfection and brokenness through the lens of kintsugi philosophy and the psychology of ACT. Through this merge, this study validates the human capacity to mend, reflect, and grow.

The Kintsugi-ACT framework invites psychological flexibility, healing, connection, transformation and introspection in a way that is tangible or embodied, thus making the experience truly human. The individuals in the workshop did not simply talk about acceptance, healing, openness or transformation. They experienced them. As they held the broken pieces in their hands, they directly confronted imperfection. They were pausing, reflecting, and sharing while they were persistently repairing and gilding the broken ceramics in front of them. The gold that highlighted the cracks was not only an aesthetic; it was evidence of somebody's openness, presence, and values-based engagement. This defining moment is what grounded kintsugi as *the art of mending together.*

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APPENDIX A. INFORMED CONSENT FORM

MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
TE KURA PŪKENGA TANGATA

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Working Title:
The Art of Mending Together:
Integrating Kintsugi and ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy)
to Promote Psychological Well-being in Communities

Researcher:
Mickey Espino
Master of Science in Psychology

You are invited to take part in a research study exploring how *Kintsugi*, the Japanese art of repairing ceramics with gold or silver, guided by Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), may help build useful mental health skills and promote psychological well-being. This form provides you with information about the study to help you decide whether to participate. Please read it carefully and ask questions if anything is unclear.

1. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to evaluate the benefits of participating in a Kintsugi-based workshop grounded in ACT principles to promote psychological well-being in the community. The goal is to offer an accessible, creative, non-clinical, community-based approach to build useful mental health skills.

2. Participant Eligibility and Health Declarations

To ensure the safety and appropriateness of your participation within the scope, limitation and ethical consideration of this research, the following criteria apply:

- **AGE:** You must be 18 years of age or older.
- **MEDICAL CONDITION:** You must not have any known allergies or medical conditions that could be triggered by materials used during the workshop. These include epoxy adhesives, latex gloves, ceramic particles, gold dust, and other standard art supplies.
- **TOOL HANDLING:** You must be able to safely and confidently use basic craft tools, such as scissors and a craft knife.
- **MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION:** You must not currently be experiencing a clinical or severe mental health condition requiring medical or psychological treatment. This study is intended for community-based, non-clinical participation and does not serve as a substitute for professional therapeutic intervention.

3. What Participation Involves

Participation in the research-workshop is free and you will gain ownership of your kintsugi piece. If you agree to take part, you will be asked to:

- Attend a one-off Kintsugi workshop including a focus group discussion for approximately 2.5 hours.
- Participate in a one-on-one interview (approximately 45–60 minutes) within two weeks following the workshop.
- Share your experiences related to the workshop, including reflections on well-being, creativity, and personal insights.

5. Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time before data analysis begins, without giving a reason and without any negative consequences.

6. Potential Risks and Benefits

There are minimal risks involved in this research. The workshop and interview provide an opportunity for meaningful reflection and creative expression, which some participants may find emotionally moving positively. If at any point you feel the need to pause or step back, you are welcome to do so. Debriefing will be available and a list of local support services will also be available should you wish to access additional support.

Health and safety are paramount. Personal protective equipment (PPE)—including gloves, a face mask, and an apron—will be provided and used to ensure safe handling of materials during the workshop. A demonstration of correct handling procedures will be given at the beginning of the session. In the event of any accidental tool mishandling, first aid support will be readily available on-site.

The benefits of participating may include personal insight, creative expression, and the opportunity to contribute to research in mental health and creative therapies. In addition, you will retain ownership of your kintsugi piece.

7. Confidentiality

All personal information will be kept confidential. Your identity will be protected using a pseudonym in all written materials. Audio recordings and transcripts will be securely stored and accessible only to the researcher.

8. Data Use and Dissemination

Your anonymised data may be used in academic publications, conference presentations, and reports. You will not be identifiable in any of these formats.

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9. Cultural and Ethical Considerations

This research has been designed with cultural sensitivity, appropriateness, and inclusivity in mind. The researcher has made deliberate efforts to develop a meaningful understanding of Kintsugi by studying its origins, participating in a workshop in Japan, and consulting with experienced practitioners. Ethical considerations have been thoroughly discussed with the research supervisor and appropriately registered under Massey University's low-risk ethics notification process.

10. Low-Risk Ethics Notification from Massey University

Ethics Notification Number: 4000030767

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher named above is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

11. Questions and Concerns

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact the supervisor or Massey University Human Ethics by email: humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

Researcher:
Mickey Espino
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Massey University
Email: espino.mikeian@gmail.com

***Supervisor*:**
Dr. Heather Kempton
School of Psychology
Massey University, Albany
Email: h.kempton@massey.ac.nz

The Kintsugi Process through the Lens of ACT

This table uses the process of Kintsugi as a metaphor for the Self, explained through the six core processes of ACT. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT, pronounced as "act") is a proven approach that helps people become more flexible in how they think, feel, and respond to life. It encourages us to *open up* to difficult experiences, *stay present*, and *take action* based on what matters most. Each step in the Kintsugi process offers a chance to reflect and apply these ACT skills, showing how healing can be both practical and meaningful.

	ACT Process	Kintsugi Step	Description	Personal Benefit or Goal
BE OPEN	**Defusion**	Assembling the broken pieces	Sorting through and fitting the ceramic fragments together mirrors disentangling and stepping back from our thoughts and observing them clearly.	Reduce the impact of unhelpful thinking by separating yourself from your thoughts, so you can observe them without being controlled by them.
	Acceptance	Sanding sharp edges	Sanding is unpleasant but necessary. It symbolises the willingness to stay with discomfort without avoiding it.	Increase openness to experience by making room for difficult thoughts and feelings without trying to suppress or avoid them.
BE AWARE	**Present Moment Awareness**	Applying adhesive and aligning pieces	Requires focused attention to align the pieces and together—inviting mindful action, awareness of detail, and presence.	Enhance awareness and engagement by focusing on the here and now, rather than getting caught up in the past or future.
	Self-as-Context	Observing the reconstructed object	Stepping back to view the repaired piece helps us see ourselves from a broader perspective, not just defined by brokenness.	Cultivate a stable perspective of self by recognising that you are not defined by your thoughts and feelings, but rather you are the ongoing observer of them.
BE ENGAGED	**Values Clarification**	Applying precious metals	Gold or Silver represents what we hold precious. Highlighting cracks encourages reflection on what truly matters.	Guide meaningful action by clarifying your personal values.
	Committed Action	Finishing touches with care and purpose	Applying gold mindfully reflects taking values-guided actions that move us toward a meaningful life.	Promote behaviour change and resilience by taking steps, guided by your values, to create a more meaningful life.

Summary Reflection

Kintsugi, like ACT, is a process of transformation. The broken parts are not hidden but embraced and highlighted with greater value. Through each symbolic step, we learn to engage with our experience more flexibly, kindly, and intentionally. The goal is to build **Psychological Flexibility** which helps us cope with life's challenges. This happens when all six ACT processes work together—just like the steps in Kintsugi, where each part of the repair helps create something stronger and more meaningful.

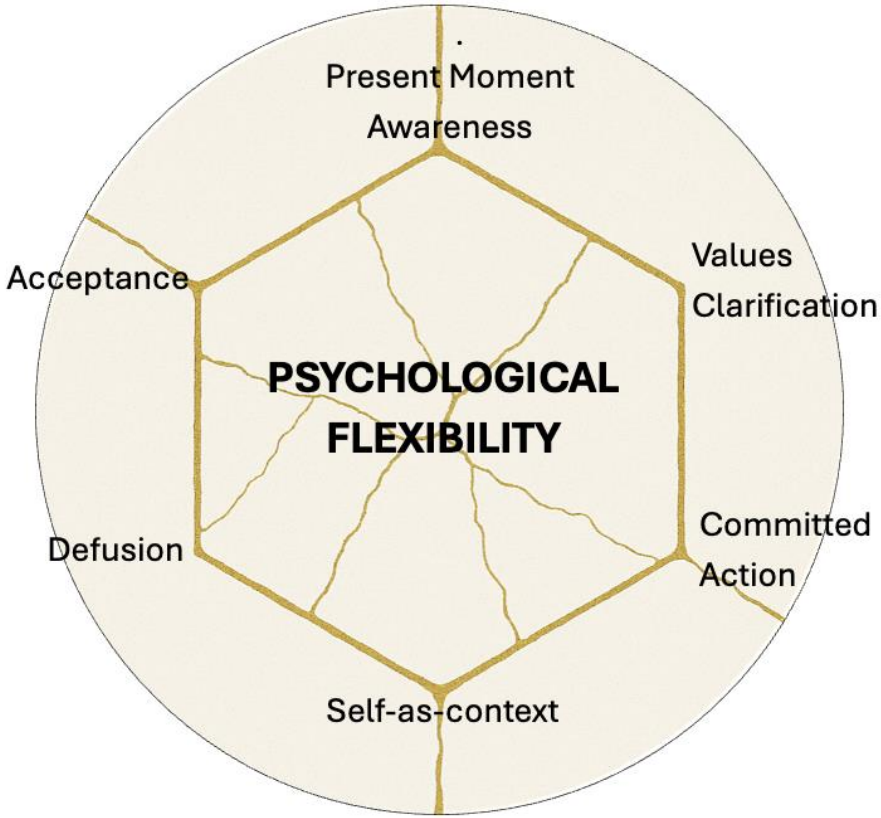


***Figure. Kintsugi*-inspired version of the ACT's Hexaflex model, showing the Six-Core Processes working together to increase Psychological Flexibility**

The hexaflex diagram in ACT illustrates the six core processes supporting psychological flexibility. These include the interplay of acceptance, defusion, present-moment awareness, self-as-context, values, and committed action. The skills in each process all interact together to increase psychological flexibility. It guides individuals in building a healthier relationship with their thoughts and emotions, encouraging actions that align with their personal values rather than attempts to control inner experiences. The ACT hexaflex is a reminder that psychological flexibility is not about eliminating difficult emotions or thoughts, but rather about learning to relate to them in a healthy way and living a life aligned with your values.

Relationships & Connection

Value Statement	Committed Action
"I want to be a loving and supportive friend, even during hard times."	Send a message to a friend today to check in or plan a catch-up.
"I value honesty and connection in my relationships."	Have a kind but honest conversation you've been putting off.
"I want to be present and attentive with my loved ones."	Put away devices during meals or conversations and listen mindfully.
"I value kindness, especially toward those who are overlooked or struggling."	Perform a small act of kindness for someone without expecting anything in return.
"I value fairness and standing up for what's right."	Support a cause or speak up when witnessing injustice or exclusion.

Personal Growth & Learning

Value Statement	Committed Action
"I want to keep learning, growing, and being curious about life."	Sign up for a class or read a book on a topic that excites you.
"I value creativity and self-expression in how I live and work."	Schedule a creative session this week (e.g., painting, journaling).
"I want to live with courage and authenticity."	Share a personal story or truth with someone, even if it feels a bit vulnerable.
"I value open-mindedness and learning from others."	Have a conversation with someone who holds a different perspective and truly listen.
"I value being a lifelong learner."	Ask a question you've always wondered about and look into it today.

Health & Wellbeing

Value Statement	Committed Action
"I want to care for my body with compassion, not punishment."	Go for a gentle walk or prepare a nourishing meal today.
"I value balance between work and rest to support my mental health."	Set a boundary around work hours and take a screen-free break.
"I want to live a life filled with gratitude and appreciation."	Start or end your day by writing down three things you're grateful for.
"I value playfulness and joy in everyday life."	Do something spontaneous and fun today, like dancing, drawing, or playing a game.

Purpose & Contribution

Value Statement	Committed Action
"I want to give back to my community in a way that feels meaningful."	Volunteer a few hours this month or offer help to someone nearby.
"I want to be someone who works with integrity, even when it's difficult."	Speak up when something at work doesn't feel aligned with your values.
"I value perseverance and doing work that aligns with my purpose."	Break a big goal into a small, doable step and take that first step today.
"I want to nurture and protect the natural world."	Reduce waste, plant something, or spend mindful time

Examples of *Fusion* vs *Defusion* Statements

Here is a simple comparison of **fusion** and **defusion** statements, using everyday thought patterns. This tables show how a fused thought might show up, and what it could look like when defused.

Quick Tips:

✗ **Fusion** = getting *caught up* in thoughts as literal truth.

✓ **Defusion** = *stepping back* to observe the thought, not argue with it.

1. Self-Criticism

Fusion Statement	Defusion Statement
"I'm a failure."	"I'm having the thought that I'm a failure."
"I always mess things up."	"Here's the 'I mess things up' story again."
"I'm not good enough."	"My mind is telling me I'm not good enough."
"There's no point in trying."	"That's a thought — not a fact."
"I can't do this."	"I notice I'm thinking 'I can't do this' right now."

2. Worry & Catastrophising

Fusion Statement	Defusion Statement
"Something bad is going to happen."	"My mind is predicting something bad might happen."
"What if I fail?"	"Thanks, mind, for the 'what if I fail' thought."
"Everything will go wrong."	"I'm having the 'everything will go wrong' story again."
"I need to control everything..."	"That's my 'control everything' narrative showing up."
"People will judge me."	"Ah, here comes the 'people will judge me' thought again."

3. Negative Self-Image & Shame

Fusion Statement	Defusion Statement
"I'm broken."	"I'm noticing the thought that I'm broken."
"There's something wrong with me."	"That's a painful thought I'm having about myself."
"I'm too sensitive."	"Here's the 'too sensitive' label my mind likes to use."
"I should be over this by now."	"That's a 'should' thought — I can choose how I respond."
"I'm not like other people."	"That's my mind comparing me to others again."

4. Overwhelm & Emotional Struggle

Fusion Statement	Defusion Statement
"I am anxious."	"Anxiety is here. I can notice it without becoming it."
"I can't handle this feeling."	"I'm having the thought that I can't handle this feeling."
"This pain will never go away."	"My mind is telling me this pain is permanent."
"I'm drowning in emotions."	"These are strong feelings — and I can observe them."
"I shouldn't feel this way."	"There's a judgmental thought about my feelings."

5. Control & Perfectionism

Fusion Statement	Defusion Statement
"It has to be perfect."	"That's my perfectionism voice talking again."
"If I don't do it right, I'll fail."	"There's the 'do it right or fail' story showing up."
"I mustn't make mistakes."	"I notice the rule 'no mistakes allowed' is in my mind."
"I need to fix this now."	"My mind is urgently pushing for control again."
"I have to figure everything out."	"That's a thought — not a requirement."

6. Kintsugi-Specific Themes

Fusion Statement	Defusion Statement
"This piece is ruined."	"I'm having the thought that this piece is ruined — and I can still work with it."
"It doesn't look how it's supposed to."	"That's my mind comparing this to an imagined perfect version."
"The cracks are flaws."	"There's a story that cracks equal flaws — but I can choose a different view."
"If it's broken, it has no value."	"My mind is telling me broken means worthless — is that always true?"
"I should have done better with this artwork."	"I notice I'm judging my work — can I treat that with kindness and curiosity?"
"Others will think this is ugly."	"That's the 'others will judge this' story — I don't have to believe it."
"I failed at making it right."	"That's a thought — not a fact — and I can keep creating."
"This piece is too broken to fix."	"I notice the 'too broken' thought — and I can take one step toward restoration."
"I need to hide the mistakes."	"There's the 'hide the flaw' urge — but I can choose to honour it instead."

APPENDIX C. WORKSHOP PROGRAMME

A. Opening and Introduction (15 minutes)

- *Participant Check-in:* Participants will be welcomed for the session.
- *Brief Overview of the Workshop:* A short introduction to the purpose and activities of the workshop.
- *Structure and flow of the session:* The facilitator explains the step-by-step schedule for the session.
- *Goal of the session:* Clarifies the aim of integrating art, healing, and psychology as part of this research.
- *Health & Safety Briefing:* Provides important safety information for working with materials.
- *Expectations:* Research-Workshop. Kintsugi Piece. Individual Interview.

B. Kintsugi Repair Process (120 minutes)

- *Step-by-Step Guidance:* Facilitator leads the group through each repair stage with demonstrations and guidance. The repair process is categorised into three main steps:

PHASE 1. Preparing broken ceramics

- *Sorting the pieces in place:* Participants identify and organise broken parts.
- *Preparing ceramic pieces:* temporary taping, sanding. Participants clean and prepare pieces for adhesion.
- *Personal reflection:* Reflecting on the themes of this step relative to ACT's core process.

PHASE 2. Applying Adhesive

- *Mixing epoxy:* Participants mix the adhesive solution.
- *Applying Adhesive to the pieces:* Glue will be carefully applied to reattach broken parts.
- *Waiting/Drying time for the adhesive:* Participants wait while the adhesive sets.
- *Personal reflection:* Reflecting on the themes of this step relative to ACT's core process.

PHASE 3. Applying Precious Metals

- Participants can choose among different shades of gold and silver powder. Each person selects their preferred finish.
- Waiting/Drying time for the gold or silver to set properly: Final setting of the decorative material.
- *Personal reflection:* Reflecting on the themes of this step relative to ACT's core process.

C. Group Reflection (10 minutes)

- Guided Group Reflection will be facilitated by the researcher: Group conversation to process the experience.
- *Sharing of Final Pieces:* Participants display and talk about their repaired items.
- *ACT Integration:* Highlighting ACT skills will be used during the process: Links the hands-on activity to ACT tools like acceptance and values.
- *Encouraging application of these useful skills in daily life:* Invites reflection on how these strategies can support everyday well-being.

D. Closing and Debriefing (5 minutes)

- *Closing words from facilitator:* Final gratitude and thoughts shared by the facilitator.
- *Consent Reminders:* Ethical reminders about research participation.
- *Feedback Forms about the Workshop experience:* Participants complete feedback to support future improvements.

APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide

PURPOSE: To explore participants' lived experiences and meaning-making following the Kintsugi-ACT workshop.

AUDIO RECORDING: “Before we start, I’d like to let you know that this interview will be audio recorded. This is simply to help me remember what was said so I can reflect on your words accurately later when I write up the findings. The recording will be stored securely and only used for research purposes. Everything you share will remain confidential, and you’re free to ask for the recording to be paused or stopped at any time.

GOAL: I may ask a few guiding questions, but the main goal is to understand your experience from your perspective. Everything you share will be kept confidential, and you can pause or skip any question at any point.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

1. Reason for wanting to do Kintsugi
   - What made you join the workshop?
   - Could you tell me a little bit of a background about you?
2. Experience of the Workshop
   - Can you tell me about your experience during the Kintsugi workshop?
   - What moments stood out for you the most, and why?
   - What were your thoughts or feelings as you were working on your piece?
3. Emotional and Psychological Responses
   - How did it feel to repair the piece?
   - Did the activity bring up any memories or personal reflections?
   - Were there any emotions you didn’t expect to feel?
4. Sense-Making and Metaphor
   - What does the process of mending with gold mean to you now?
   - In what ways did you see yourself reflected in the broken or repaired piece?
   - What does your final kintsugi represent to you personally?
5. Impact and Insight
   - Has this experience shifted anything in how you view yourself or your life?
   - What will you take away from this experience?
   - Did the workshop help you connect with any of your values or inner strengths?
6. ACT Principles in Practice (Implicit or Explicit)
   - Was there a moment where you noticed yourself letting go, or accepting something?
   - Did the activity help you reflect on what’s important to you?
   - Did you find yourself being more clear with the actions you need to take that is aligned with your values?
7. Personal Meaning and Context
   - How does this experience relate to other challenges or experiences in your life?
   - Have you encountered other forms of healing or self-reflection before? How was this similar or different?
   - If you were to share this experience with someone close to you, how would you describe it?
8. Final Reflections
   - What *title* would you give your artwork or your experience of this process?
   - Is there anything else you’d like to share that we haven’t covered?
   - If this workshop were a message to you, what would it be saying?

APPENDIX E. KINTSUGI PIECES OF PARTICIPANTS

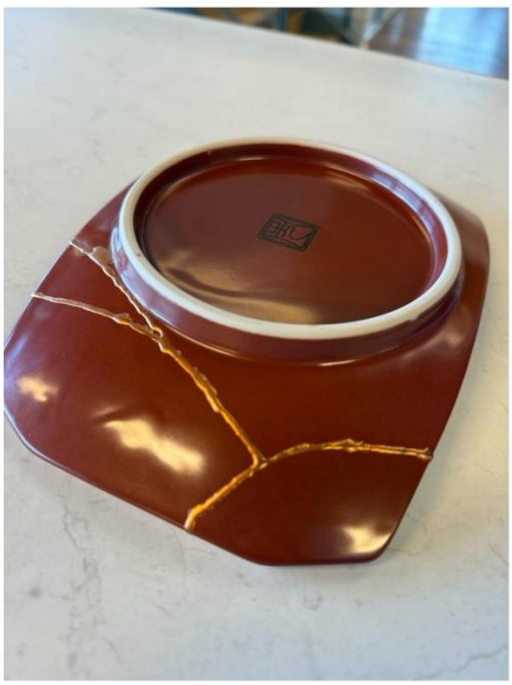
FAMILIAL LINES

MOVING FORWARD

xxx

FAMILY TRIPTYCH

EYES WIDE OPEN



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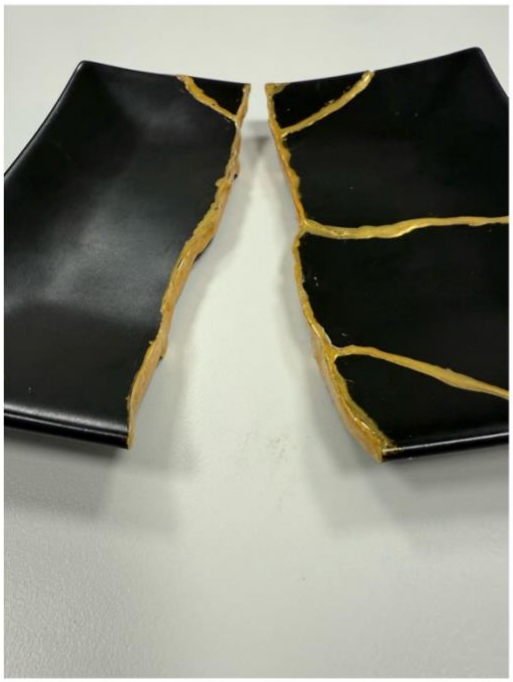

HOPE

SHOGUN

BRINGING TOGETHER

DUCK EGG