

Self-Care Assignment

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University is a new beginning for most upon arrival. Familiar to many, exploring Vancouver and UBC was a foreign experience for myself. My education prior to university was almost entirely through the private school system. The school I attended offered an environment rich of support and beneficial resources to help students succeed. However, the graduating class of thirteen students all went their separate ways resulting in a lonely beginning at UBC for myself. Although this encompasses just one of the barriers a student may face, it served as the preface for this concept of university stressors. Leaping to one month later, the assignments, midterms, labs, financial insecurities, and a fear for the future hit me all at once causing frequent doses of emotional turmoil.

The most impactful stressor to my wellbeing included transient insomnia. In a 2013 study on students and insomnia, it was discovered through sleep diaries that 9.5% of students that were studied possessed complaints of chronic insomnia (Taylor, Bramoweth, Grieser, Tatum, & Roane, 2013). This study further reports that amongst this group, symptoms of depression, anxiety, stress, and fatigue accompanied this insomnia (Taylor et al., 2013). In my second year, the stress of feeling overwhelmed has not ceased and I would classify my insomnia as intermittent (Seaward, 2018). A management method that has reduced my stress for several years includes playing guitar. Any time I experience an overwhelming feeling or have difficulties sleeping I would transfer that emotion to the guitar and mitigate the stress through the ringing of six strings.

Examining a meta-analysis on music therapy, the results show that musically assisted stress reduction techniques have proved to be reliably effective (Pelletier, 2004). By playing guitar when stressed, I can either activate a parasympathetic response to reduce stress arousal or translate frustration into music. When faced with a stressor or challenge, my anger style can be

classified as a mix between the self punisher and exploder (Seaward, 2018). My method of playing guitar aids in the reduction of the exploder anger style; however, being a self punisher has proved problematic when attempting to cope with this stress. Playing a song or progression until it is correct can have disruptive effects upon failure leading to an additional accumulation of stress.

Throughout this term, I sought out for a stress management technique that allows me to express my emotions and create something new. I considered writing poetry at the beginning of the term as an alternative form of expression. When a negative or overwhelming feeling arises, I am able to take out a pen or even a laptop anywhere I am and put my mind onto paper. No piece of my work is wrong, nor can it even be compared on such a scale of correctness. The poems I write are unique to my thoughts and act as a conduit of stress transference.

Poetry is proven to be an evidence-based method for stress management. A study completed over a seven-week period concluded that poetry therapy reduced levels of stress and anxiety in students during this period (Mohammadian et al., 2011). In addition to the mitigation of stress response symptoms, poetry therapy is known to increase self esteem, self exploration and self expression (Mohammadian et al., 2011). Music and poetry therapy offer a playground for expression; however, poetry is portable and accessible so that thoughts can be written down directly at a time of stress.

Poetry is an exceptional way to verbalize emotion, release stress and discomfort, and develop a sense of creativity and power (Mohammadian et al., 2011). Playing an instrument, although effective, does not allow for an accessible and immediate flow of creativity. There is evidence that depicts the relationship between creativity and stress as negative (Byron, Khazanchi, & Nazarian, 2010). A stress that is uncontrollable is described to linearly decrease

creative performance (Byron et al., 2010). Music therapy as creative expression is effective in many cases; however, disturbed emotions and discomfort are still possible results (O'Callaghan, 1996). In other words, the creativity component may be lost to a mere enhancement of arousal due to stressors. Poetry offers a medium to use negative emotions as part of the creation process and allow it to be physically and mentally appreciated.

Being an intermediate level guitarist means that there is still a learning process for creating sound. Frustration as a result of my personal lack of patience can often elicit an undesired stress response. With this personality type, music therapy, although proven effective, is not adequate on its own to manage my personal stress. Music therapy can however, work congruently with poetry writing allowing for all of my emotions to be released or relieved while still offering a platform for creativity. My experiences with this type of therapy has been enlightening upon reflection. When revisiting poems, there is variety of writing styles as well as emotional context. Many poems reflect feelings of anger and frustration, while others implement a more anxiety driven approach. One poem I wrote tells the story of the human life cycle told through the growing of a tree, with an accompanying personification of musical sound. This poem represents my growth with stress while overcoming its nature.

Poetry is a catalyst for endless communication between the mind and understanding. To contain my thoughts and express them as art is an effective practice to manage my stress for the future. In unison with other techniques, I will continue to use poetry therapy throughout my time in university and work life as it has proved to be personally effective and beneficial for my emotional health. Collaterally, my writing skills and execution for communicating thought will greatly improve, in turn benefiting my education. Stress will not simply escape my future,

however, using this stress to create positivity and enlightenment will serve as a timeless resource for my wellbeing.

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