

Journaling's Impact on Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

Journaling is a genre found to have great significance for both the writer and the reader. The following study utilizes a mixed-methods approach to gain a deeper understanding of the benefits of journaling, especially in relation to the mental health of college undergraduates in upper-level English courses at UWL (N=19). A quantitative survey, qualitative student and professional interviews, along with a self-implementation of journaling was used to gather data and get a deeper look into its impact. The results suggest that the act of journaling is highly adaptable and has the opportunity to be a great tool for bettering mental health and promoting personal growth. Participants reported journaling as being an effective tool in many settings such as academics, personal use, and in accompaniment with psychiatric therapy. The fact that journaling can be tailored to meet personal needs and goals makes it especially effective.

“I write because it makes me feel like someone’s listening.
-or maybe I am finally listening to myself.”
~ Shubhangi Swarup

INTRODUCTION & LITERATURE REVIEW

While the earliest known journals, as we understand them today, date back to Greek and Roman times (Janesick, 1999), people have been making marks of their existence, such as markings on cave walls, for much longer. It is human nature to record our experiences and feelings in a physical form. You’ve probably had a little diary with a cheap lock on the cover that you spilled your secrets to at some point in your life. But for many, keeping a journal is more than an elementary school phase. Journal-writing is a popular and cathartic practice for all ages that many find beneficial throughout their lifetime.

Journals are historically significant texts that provide a glimpse into the minds of people at various times. For example, arguably one of the most well-known journals is the *Diary of Anne Frank* whose entries helped capture life during the Holocaust and the feelings and experiences of a young girl growing up under impossible circumstances. As a result of her diary, we are able to observe and learn from the day-to-day life of a thirteen-year-old Jewish girl nearly eighty years later. Much of history has been stitched together through the first-hand accounts of people who chronicled historical events in their journals.

These serve as primary documents that provide a personal perspective from those actually living through a particular time. Although often not apparent in the moment, our personal words could help shape the narrative of our time. Contemporarily, we are living during the global COVID-19 pandemic. Official and civilian response to the pandemic will surely be studied for centuries to come. Journals of individual experiences and day-to-day life during this time could become artifacts that contribute to how the story of this time is told. We have come to learn a lot about cultural evolution, human values, and morality by viewing the world through individuals’ unique lenses.

While journals can teach us about the past, their creation is also beneficial for their authors. In the writing studies field, it has been found that journal-writing can help students form their identity and begin to understand their place in the world (Collins 2015). It has also been found that there is a heightened level of meaningfulness and engagement in the classroom when instructors implement a form of journaling with their students such as gratitude, change, and question journaling (Flinchbaugh, Moore, Chang, & May 2012). In the classroom, the pedagogies of expressivist writing theory and metacognition are often used and utilize student journaling as a tool for growth. Expressivist theory emphasizes writing as a process and is concerned with the learners’ experiences as well as their motivation. It emphasizes the importance of freeing one’s imagination and giving power to the personal voices and

creative abilities of all students. The goal is for writing to become a process of discovery for both the writer themselves and the ideas they imagine. This approach is the most widespread poststructural approach in the teaching of composition (Laila 2014). Keeping a journal is a large part of this pedagogy since journaling allows for students to express themselves in a way that will help them develop their personalities and affirm their self-realization (Elbow 1973). In 2014, Laila implemented the expressivist pedagogy as well as journaling with undergraduate English majors in a college writing course. It was reported that in addition to students feeling more confident in their writing abilities, students claimed that journaling became very therapeutic and cathartic for them. The student's beliefs about journaling echoed the notion that writing about important personal experiences in an emotional way brings about improvements in emotional and physical health (Pennebaker & Seagal 1999) as well as generates new ways of thinking about emotions, cognitive processing, and health (Smyth & Pennebaker 2008).

Another popular composition pedagogy that believes in the power of journal-writing is metacognition. Metacognition is described as a human's unique ability to reflect on, monitor, and control knowledge and thoughts (Flavell 1979). This pedagogy focuses on self-regulation through writing and giving individuals an insight into their strengths and weaknesses. Metacognition goes hand in hand with the famous psychologist Albert Bandura's theory of reciprocal determination and agency. Metacognition allows an individual to be aware of their agency and helps them develop self-regulation and transfer skills, knowledge, and strategies across contexts and situations. A study conducted by Negretti in 2012 integrated these ideas by introducing college undergraduate writing students to prompted journaling to elicit their metacognitive awareness. Throughout the semester, students began to self-regulate through the development of their personal writing and became more successful at analyzing the task at hand and making appropriate rhetorical choices in their academic writing (Negretti 2012). Another study by Bekeleski in 2016 found that undergraduate students in a dental hygiene program who implemented regular reflective journaling into their routine had increased scores on the California Critical Thinking Skills Test (CCST) compared to their peers who did not journal. This suggests that the act of journaling and reflective writing can increase one's critical thinking skills (Bekeleski 2016). Literature in writing studies suggests that implementing journaling can help students both with their skills in the classroom as well as in their daily life.

Along with the writing studies field, the findings of psychological studies also support the idea that writing for oneself can be a very emotional and ultimately healing practice. For example, journaling has actually been shown to increase one's affect and self-control (Warwick 2018). A study conducted by Suhr et al. in 2017 discovered that participants who journaled had lower depression scores compared to the control group who did not journal and reported an increased use of the functional emotion regulation strategy reappraisal. Psychologists advocate that journaling can become a dynamic tool for personal growth and healing (Borkin 2014). In another study conducted by Phillips, Lynne, & Rolfe in 2016, participants used writing as a means of catharsis and to enable expression and exploration of parts of the self that were not immediately accessible. Writing was also a safe and private place for the participants to express "unmanageable" material, the true or hidden self, and the process of counseling itself. In a sense, writing functioned as a bridge, enabling participants to hold onto, internalize, and extend their counseling. Due to its benefits, journaling is often used in the therapy process to aid in mental health healing and maintenance.

Journaling allows a platform for the writer to get their thoughts out while minimizing the fear of self-disclosure (Asbury, Casey, & Desai 2018). Due to its nature, journaling is a unique form of writing whose intended audience is usually only oneself. Because of this, individuals don't have the same fears of self-disclosure as they would if they were to share their thoughts or feelings with another person. This allows writers to work through their thoughts in a physical way rather than keeping everything bottled up in their head. Getting inner turmoil out on paper can be a form of catharsis and aid in the healing process. Whether used hand-in-hand with psychiatric therapy, or just journaling for one's pleasure, journal-writing has been shown to greatly benefit a writer's mental health.

Journaling is proven to have benefits for the writer as well as potential future readers and can take many forms such as free journaling, guided journaling, writing with a pen and paper, or writing digitally. For the purpose of this study, I am less interested in a specific type of journaling and more interested in the impact of writing, in any form, used to help process an individual's internal and external environments. The proposed research study will add to the existing field of literature and seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How does the act of journaling affect mental health in the students in upper-level English courses at UWL?
- How is journaling beneficial to undergraduate English majors in terms of processing emotion?
- What percentage of upper-level students in English courses surveyed at UWL journal regularly?
- What do these students who journal frequently find the most beneficial about journaling?
- What can journaling do for me personally?

I aim to understand the significance of using journaling as a tool to improve or maintain mental health and what aspects of journal-writing upper-level college students find beneficial. I thought this population would be interesting to examine because college students often face stressful situations and life transitions, and students taking upper-level English courses are likely to find joy in the act of writing and composition. I aim to hear directly from the users of this therapeutic tool to gain a deeper understanding of this genre.

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

I am a second semester senior at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse and am conducting this research project as my English Capstone for the course ENG 413. I am a double English and psychology major and am going to graduate school to become a PhD level psychologist. Prior to this study, I had never consistently journaled or seen its benefits first-hand. This topic allows me to merge my love of writing and psychology as well as provide me with a new tool for expression and processing. This topic will also be helpful and informative in my graduate school pursuits and may be something I implement in my own professional practice one day.

METHOD

Participants

Participants in this study include individuals enrolled in upper-level English Courses. Participants are undergraduate college students around the age of 19 to 25 years old from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, a medium sized, predominantly white institution in the Midwest. Participants were informed of the nature of the study as well as any possible inherent risks involved with participation and consented by clicking the arrow to begin the survey. This study is IRB approved.

Procedure

This study utilizes a mixed-methods approach that incorporates quantitative survey data, qualitative interviews with students and a licensed psychologist, as well as a qualitative personal reflection on the benefits of incorporating journaling into my daily life. Participants were asked to complete a short survey on Qualtrics that asked closed and open-ended questions about their journaling habits. They were encouraged to take the survey even if they do not journal. The survey utilized branching logic that collected different types of information depending on if the participant journals or not. The last question of the survey asked if the participant wanted to volunteer to be interviewed about their experience with journal-writing. Four students volunteered and were interviewed via Zoom. They agreed to the interview being recorded, in writing via email, as well as verbally before the interview. For the sake of confidentiality, all student participants will remain anonymous. Psychologist Katie Moore, PhD was also interviewed on Zoom and agreed to the recording of the interview. In addition to survey and interview data, I implemented journaling into my routine. I journaled 3-7 times per week for 10 weeks and documented my experiences by noting progress, setbacks, and breakthroughs I had with the journaling process.

RESULTS

Survey

My Qualtrics survey received 19 responses over a 33-day period. Only 2 participants responded that they do not journal at all. The rest reported they either journal rarely, 2-5 times per week, or nearly every day. 1 participant reported that they journal multiple times a day (see figure 1 for breakdown).

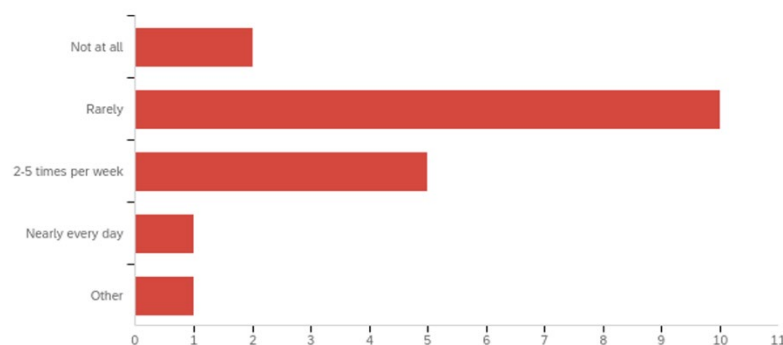


Figure 1: How often participants reported that they journal

The 2 participants who responded that they never journal were directed to a secondary set of questions. One of the participants reported that they used to journal in the past but found they do not have enough time to keep up with it and usually turn to social media to document their life instead. The other participant reported that they have never journaled because they just have never had an interest in it.

The remaining 17 participants were directed to questions regarding their journaling habits. When asked how they journaled (freestyle, prompted, timed, bullet journal, or other) nearly 79% of participants reported freestyle. Most participants (73.7%) also preferred to journal traditionally with a pencil and paper rather than digitally or in a different medium (15.8%).

Interestingly, when asked how enjoyable journaling is (see figure 2) and how much the participant feels it aids their mental health (see figure 3), responses were split. Although degrees of intensity varied, most participants reported journaling to be at least a little enjoyable (94.74%) and beneficial to their mental health (94.74%).

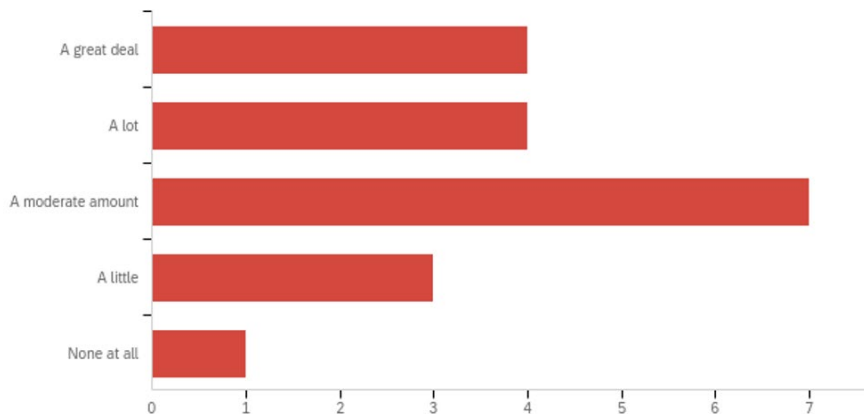


Figure 2. Self-rated enjoyment of journaling

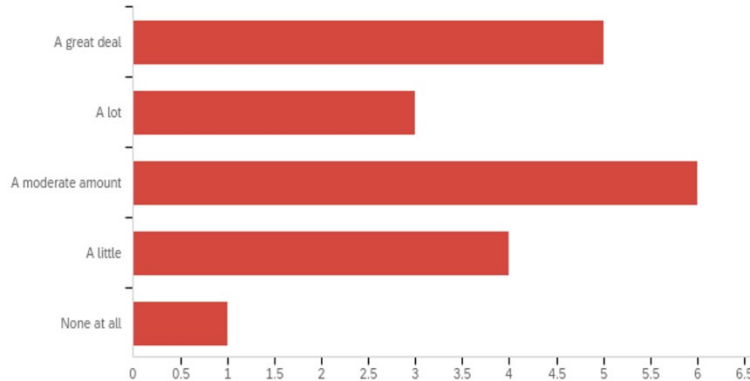


Figure 3. Participant’s beliefs on how much journaling helps their mental health

Participants were then asked a series of open-ended questions regarding their relationship to journaling. I organized and coded responses for each question. The first open-ended question asked participants why they journal. 11% reported that they journal for religious reasons such as prayer, scripture, or relating God’s word to daily life. 35% of responses indicated that journaling serves as an outlet for them to vent or dump their thoughts out on paper. 29% of responses conveyed that they journal to help process their emotions or use journaling as a part of their mental health treatment. The remaining 25% of responses explained that they journal to document their life to be able to remember and reflect on later.

The next question asked participants how they got into journaling. I received 16 responses to this question. Responses to how the participant got started journaling varied greatly, however, the categories that had the most responses were: therapy/counseling (19%), religious practices (13%), grade school (13%), and socially whether through friends, family, or social media (25%).

The following question asked participants how they typically feel after they journal. 35% of participants noted a feeling of relief or feeling lighter after they journal. 30% of participants reported a feeling of calm or peace and 24% reported feeling a reduction in stress/anxiety. Interestingly, 11% of participants reported negative feelings after journaling such as “horrible,” “guilty,” “frustrated,” “sad,” or “angry.”

The last question asked participants what they find themselves writing about most often. 17% reported journaling about prayer or scripture. 24% reported writing most about emotions or mental health. 35% stated they write about life stressors or problems they are facing. The remaining 24% indicated that they journal about their daily life or events that happened that day.

I deduce from this data that although participants shared some similarities in their responses, there wasn't a clear consensus. This suggests that journaling is a unique practice to each individual and there is no one 'right' or agreed upon guidelines for how journaling functions.

Student Interviews

I conducted 4 student interviews to gain a deeper understanding of my population's experience with journaling. For the sake of confidentiality, the students interviewed will remain anonymous and they will be referred to as Student 1, Student 2, Student 3, and Student 4. All 4 students indicated on the survey that they are regular journalers and volunteered to be interviewed and share more about their experiences.

After interviewing my peers, it became apparent that although all 4 students utilize journaling, they have very different histories with, relationships with, and processes or styles for how they approach journaling. Many students noted that their journaling journey has been very fluid with shifting methods, mediums, and level of consistency throughout the years.

2 students stated that their journaling is tied into their religious practice. Student 1 noted she often uses journaling during Eucharistic adoration and noted, “I picked up journaling for anything spiritual like prayers.” Student 4 expressed a similar passion for using journaling as an extension of her religious practice. She noted, “Journaling is tied in with my prayer so a lot of times I will go sit in the Chapel with my journal and write.” She also noted that she believes journaling is so important to her because, “To some extent I'd say the Lord is working through my writing.”

While all students interviewed seem to utilize journaling for their own individualized purpose, they all reported journaling to be a helpful tool for them to use in their life. Student 1 noted, “I think I'm the kind of person that can be kind of blind to my emotions and blind to how I'm actually feeling and how I'm reacting to things, so writing it down actually allows me to physically see it and to actually sit with it and process it.” Student 2 explained journaling helps her process emotions and big changes or transitional periods in her life such as “starting a new school or coming to college for the first time.” Similarly, Student 3 acknowledged the challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic and said, “I feel like it's really easy to get overwhelmed with a lot of emotions this past year and whenever I feel like I can't move on from a thought, move on from a feeling, or get past something that's when I need to journal. I need to write it out, so I can move on. I need to say my feelings to be more at peace with them, be able to move past it, and just keep going.”

When asked if journaling has ever helped them heal from a situation, all four students acknowledged that journaling itself is not a magic cure, but it is a tool to help and at the very least, document their struggles to reflect on later. Student 1 explained that journaling helps her “get those feelings out and down and get a little separation from them to kind of just you know, restore that self-love and self-appreciation feeling.” She continued on saying, “I can get everything out and look at it and, like take a pause on everything, I guess, instead of trying to solve everything in my brain right now. It's okay, I just take one day at a time. Slowly I've seen that it allows me to kind of step outside of the situation and analyze it from a different perspective and then grow and heal from that I guess.” She stated that, “It's a step in the healing process. You can document to look back and feel proud of your growth.”

All 4 students enjoy rereading past journal entries and noticing change and personal growth. Student 2 often goes back in past journals with a different color pen and adds comments on post-it notes or in the margins. She explained it's “kind of a conversation with myself either highlighting things I really love that I said or making a comment like, ‘you'll get there, this happened later, or here's how that turned out.’” Similarly, Student 1 noted, “I definitely go back and reread and it's definitely cool to see the growth as me as a person, but also the growth in my journaling style and what I tend to write about.” All students interviewed acknowledged that rereading their writing is very beneficial once they have had time and space from the situation to gain perspective and compare their past to the present.

Two students discussed journaling being important because it is something for yourself or others to look back on and learn from in the future. Student 1 stated, “who knows who is going to read it, but on the off chance that your children inherit it when you pass away, that's something that they can have that's yours and that's super super special.” Student 3 also noted feeling compelled to journal to have a personal account to look back on. She said,

“This will be so interesting and beautiful for me to look at whenever I'm older because we're living at such important times. Right now, especially during a pandemic, we're living through a monumental time in our lives being in our early 20s, with social justice issues happening, and you want to remember these moments and they deserve to be given the spotlight.”

Lastly, another aspect that all 4 students talked about was journaling's personal benefits for their mind and mental health. Student 2 expressed that journaling is cathartic for her because “I am such a language nerd whenever I can put my thoughts down into that form that I feel very comfortable with. It just feels like it's easier to kind of work through and it kind of makes you take that pause and take that moment to just feel free, like a meditative moment just to reflect.” She added on saying, “It took me a while to kind of get into it and feel the benefits of it, but once I started, I kind of haven't stopped just because it is so refreshing, and it connects me to myself a little bit.” Student 3 noted, “Journaling is definitely self-care for me because I like pausing my day and being mindful. It's definitely helped me become more mindful and that's so easy to not be in today's society, to not take time and pause and think about how you feel or how others feel.” Like many, Student 4 has found journaling to be beneficial “just in a general way for my mental health, like it's been really, really good.” Explaining, “It's just like a very tangible way to approach situations and I know exactly what I need to do in order to just feel better.” Even though all students interviewed journaled differently, the main theme all four discussed was the positive impact journaling has had on their minds and their ability to process their lives.

Professional Interview

My interview with Katie Moore, PhD helped me gain a deeper understanding of how journaling can be used during the therapy process. Dr. Moore provides therapy services for children, adolescents, and young adults in Madison, WI. She stated that she primarily uses journaling with her clients to prompt self-monitoring which leads to greater self-awareness. This process also allows for individuals to “take more control over their emotional experience.” She explained that in the therapy process, journaling can take many different forms depending on the function the provider and client want it to serve. For example, if a client is being treated for a trauma they experienced, they would write a trauma narrative about a difficult experience for the purpose of cognitive processing. If someone is experiencing depression or anxiety, they may use journaling as a form of emotional expression. Journaling can also be used to decrease someone's negative self-talk by using journaling to “engage in that more realistic self-talk so that they develop more awareness into what their negative thought patterns are.” Journaling can also aid in exposure therapy, especially when treating anxiety. A client might write an entire narrative on “the worst-case scenario that could happen” and then the provider and the client go through it and talk about it a couple of times to decrease anxiety.

When asked how journaling could be beneficial for one's mental health, Dr. Moore explained that for many mental health issues such as anxiety and depression, the crux of the problem oftentimes is emotional avoidance. In other words, when experiencing big, intense emotion people often do everything they can to push it down to control it. Dr. Moore stated that journaling allows a way to approach those emotions and work to “understand them and validate them in a context that feels a lot safer and also in a context that's a lot more contained.” This increases the individual's emotional awareness and allows them to respond to their emotions rather than react. In a therapy setting, Dr. Moore advocates that the audience of a client's journal entry should never be herself, but rather the individual themselves. Sometimes a client's journal entries even take on the form of letters meant for a person in their life that allow for an unfiltered way to express everything the client wishes they could say. Journaling during therapy treatment may be different than other journaling settings because the goal of therapy is behavior modification. Dr. Moore states that in therapy, “there needs to be an aspect of ‘I need to read this over, I need to look for negative thought patterns, or I need to reflect on this, so that I could do things differently.’” Writing seems to only be half of the process, the other is rereading and reflecting on one's entries. In this setting, journaling is used as a tool to build self-awareness that can lead to self-reflection and ultimately change that will lead to improved mental health.

Self-Reflection

After doing so much research on journal-writing, I thought it would be beneficial to insert myself into the research and see how journaling may impact me personally. I bought a journal and implemented journaling into my routine. I journaled 3-7 times a week for 10 weeks. I used the traditional medium of pen and paper and wrote in freestyle. I have 42 entries total of varying lengths and subject matter. Writing primarily at night before I went to bed, I found this practice a nice way to reflect on the day's events. This semester began with passing of my grandfather as well as held tremendous life events such as interviewing for graduate school, deciding which graduate program to attend, supporting my family through hardships, finding a place to live and a job in a brand-new city, losing 12-week life and death battle for my grandma whom I could not visit in the hospital due to Covid restrictions, and preparing to graduate and say goodbye to the friends I have made. These pivotal events will have profound influence on the course of my life. I discovered writing through them extremely helpful. I found

myself processing emotion rather than suppressing it and pushing forward, seemingly stumbling to the finish line. I discovered early on that I wasn't getting much out of simply documenting the day's events. Incorporating my feelings and thoughts from the day provided much more benefit.

I also found myself writing my entries to my future self. This helped me put things into perspective: that what seems big now, won't in a few years. I also geared my entries to my future self because I'm excited to look back on this time in my life and have personal documentation of my thoughts and experiences. I made sure to write down heartfelt memories that I know I will love having detailed recounts of later in life, like my brother asking me to be my niece's godmother or my last memories with my Grandpa. I also wanted to document the hardships I faced so I can look back and remember everything I went through and how hard I worked for what I have. By rereading entries from the beginning of my journaling experience, I already see growth and realize that things oftentimes aren't worth worrying about so much in the moment, and that everything tends to work out in the end.

Although I began to realize some of the benefits from journaling early on, I still struggled with consistency and having the motivation to write entries. I categorized my reasons for not wanting to journal as: not knowing what to write about, feeling too tired and just wanting to go to bed, and feeling too busy or overwhelmed. I often felt I needed to have something profound to say in order to journal, so if I had an average, boring day I wasn't sure I could contribute any meaningful thoughts to an entry. Sometimes, if something very emotional or upsetting happened, I found myself not wanting to write it down because that seemed to make it real. In reality though, these events were the ones that yielded the greatest benefit. Lastly, at times journaling just felt like one more thing I had to do on my seemingly never-ending to-do list.

A few weeks into my implementation I hit a wall and was beginning to feel resentful and frustrated that I *had* to find the time, energy, and subject matter to write about. I had clearly lost sight of what journaling is really about - that it's for me. I found that the hardest part was usually starting. Once I made an entry, I usually felt better, however, it really began to be a struggle to put the pen to paper. Conducting the peer interviews restored my passion. Hearing 4 of my peers share about how beneficial journaling is for them and how much they enjoy it was really inspiring. Their passion rubbed off on me and restored my enthusiasm about this process. The day of my final peer interview, I sat outside in the sunshine and wrote 10 pages. Once I started, I couldn't seem to stop. Afterwards, I felt indescribably lighter, at peace, and rejuvenated. That day served as a turning point for me, and I approached journaling differently after that. I saw it more as something for me rather than something I had to do. My interview participants also served as a great source of advice and encouragement over the weeks. My final interview question was a bit of a selfish one - I asked if they had any advice for me as an aspiring journaler. They all had insightful advice, and many advised me to not force myself to write if I do not want to, and to keep in mind that journaling is something that should help you, not be something that you feel pressure to do. This experience suggests that perhaps journalers benefit from having a sense of community with fellow journal-writers to share their progress and inspire one another.

I am very grateful for the opportunity to dive into the genre of journaling and witness first-hand its benefits. I found journaling especially helpful when it was regarding topics that I am hesitant to talk about out loud and process verbally. Journaling is a tool for processing without having to involve other people. Over the weeks, I also found myself journaling with mixed mediums as I would write down thoughts in my notes app on my phone when I didn't have my journal with me. This process has made me more reflective and aware of how events of my daily life affect me. I also learned a lot from a psychology standpoint as I experienced how writing things out can help with processing. I am very interested in continuing to learn more about journaling's use in psychotherapy and hope to utilize it with my patients during their treatment one day. I believe that I have really developed my love for journaling and will continue to journal frequently and see its benefits for many years to come.

DISCUSSION, LIMITATIONS, & FURTHER STUDY

The results of this study suggest that journaling has many benefits. Whether journaling is done for personal reasons or as a supplement to psychiatric therapy, shining a spotlight on and putting into print what is in a person's head and heart can help make sense of life events. Out of the 19 undergraduate college students enrolled in upper-level English courses surveyed at UWL, 89% of students surveyed reported that they journal, although there were variations in the frequency of their journaling. Of those students, 94.74% reported enjoying journaling and that they found journaling to be beneficial to some degree for their mental health. Interviews with 4 of the surveyed students allowed me to gain a deeper look into this population's journal-writing beliefs and practices. Although there were common themes identified, there was no singular answer for why exactly journaling is beneficial for mental health. This suggests that journaling is a highly individualized practice, and everyone has a unique approach or style to get what they want and/or need out of it. I also found that the process of journaling is very fluid and people use it in the

way that is most beneficial for their current situation and needs. Journaling is a tool to serve a specific function for the individual, and the practice will look different depending on its intended function.

To gain a better understanding of how journaling can impact mental health, my interview with a professional licensed psychologist revealed that journaling is beneficial in the long-term through the process of rereading entries to self-monitor, promote self-awareness, and monitor personal growth. This suggests that through a psychological lens, journaling needs to be performed with the intention of reflection to promote behavioral change. Writing in a journal is a helpful therapeutic tool to process emotions and self-monitor reactions without the fear of self-disclosing to others.

Personally, through some trial and error, I also found journaling to be a beneficial practice. After changing my mindset and viewing journaling as a practice meant for me, rather than just another thing I had to do, I found journal-writing to be very helpful with processing emotions and events. I found it to be valuable in the moment to release emotions instead of keeping them all inside. I would often feel lighter and relieved to have let those thoughts and feelings out into the world, even if no one else would ever see them. I also came to view journaling as a tool for measuring personal growth. I feel inspired to leave an account of my life - a little piece of myself, the highs and lows, triumphs and failures for myself or others to look back on later. I am excited to be able to look back on this time and have an account of who I was compared to who I became.

This research could be expanded and studied further. Although sufficient for analyzing trends, my response rate and corresponding sample size of 19 is relatively small and I believe the research could benefit from replication with a larger sample size. In addition, almost the entire population identifies as female. It would be interesting to include more male and non-binary participants to determine if gender identification plays a role in how journaling is utilized and practiced. In addition, the population for this study consisted of students in upper-level English courses. Students who pursue English studies in college are likely to already be lovers of written word and find comfort in the act of writing. I hypothesize that college-level English students are more likely to turn to writing in a journal for a sense of comfort compared to students studying other disciplines. It would be interesting to survey students taking courses in other majors/departments to see if journaling is less frequently used and valued. Similarly, only college-aged students were studied. This study could be expanded to students of different age and grade levels to determine if different age groups utilize journaling more or less than others, and if certain age groups see varying levels of benefit based on what individuals belonging to certain age groups tend to write about.

The literature suggests that journal-writing has numerous benefits in several settings such as in the classroom, as a part of therapeutic treatment, and for personal use. I believe the findings that highlight journaling's positive impact on the writer have several practical implications. Findings in writing studies suggests that journaling may be more regularly implemented in the classroom from a young age to aid students in emotional growth, academic pursuits, and writing skill improvement. The integration of journaling into popular pedagogy is worth further study to determine if children being taught journaling as a self-reflective tool from a young age is beneficial for their emotional and academic development. The psychological field also supports the claim that journaling is a useful tool for mental health healing and maintenance when journaling is used as a part of therapy. What I learned from this study will help inform and guide my professional development as I train to be a psychologist. I hope to further expand this research to learn more about the process and benefits of journal-writing.

Journaling appears to be a varied practice that looks different for everyone. Individuals have control over their practice, what they write about, and what function journaling serves for them. There is not necessarily a right or wrong way to journal. Rather, journaling is an open-ended genre that allows for the writer to guide their experience. In other words, the writer has the power to get out of journaling what they desire based on the effort and content they put into the practice. Journaling is a useful tool that I will continue to utilize and advocate for both personally and professionally.

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