

TAKING NOTE:
EFFECTS OF SONG AND POETRY WRITING ON STRESS RELIEF

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ABSTRACT

This research looks at song and poetry writing and the effects on stress and stress relief in various age groups, professions, and lifestyles, and how and why the process of making this kind of art has such results. Being that song and poetry writing is a very personal experience for the writer, this research makes use of a variety of sources including empirical research, interviews, and personal exploration. The existing research focuses on one specific group or type of subject to this research and is a compilation of those studies in addition to incorporating personal experiences and experiences of those in the local community with this style of writing. It looks at the research component as a starting point and analyzes possible explanations given, as well as drawing on interviews and finding commonality between the experiences of songwriters and those that write poetry and comparing the crossovers and differences between the two writing forms. Lastly, this study allows for personal exploration and immersion on the part of the researcher. It looks to analyze the how and why of song and poetry writing and its effects on the writer as well as shining light on a form of writing that many are familiar with but few pursue as a personal activity.

I. INTRODUCTION

“Songwriting is my way of channeling my feelings and my thoughts. Not just mine, but the things I see, the people I care about. My head would explode if I didn't get some of that stuff out.” This quote from singer-songwriter, Dolly Parton (2002) encapsulates the way so many view songwriting. This idea of a physical and emotional release created by writing is one that is echoed by both research and informal commentaries of local song and poetry writers. Through personal exploration, I have absolutely found this statement to be true. Song and poetry writing seem to bring order to chaos for me and so many others. Though there is this idea that song and poetry writing have a highly therapeutic element, the current work seeks to consider not only the empirical research regarding song and poetry writing as a form of stress relief, but also the experiences of those in the field, and personal exploration as well.

II. EXISTING RESEARCH

Research regarding writing, specifically song and poetry writing, as a form of stress relief has been conducted on a wide variety of social groups including incarcerated women and school children. Though the research participants vary in many ways, the body of literature reaches the conclusion that there is therapeutic value in this type of art-based therapy coming from the concrete nature of writing down thoughts, sharing feelings with others, and focusing emotions into a more constructive format.

Song and poetry writing fall under the broader topic of writing in general, so it is important begin with a discussion of the therapeutic benefits more generally. In a 2016 piece, Pankey, Kelly, and Megha note the stress relieving benefit of writing on women in jail. They stated there were “significantly decreased symptoms of depression and post-

traumatic stress disorder” because of writing about emotional experiences (as cited in Pankey, Kelly, & Megha, 2016, p. 241). The outlet provided the participants a space to write without fear of judgment and allowed for a release of emotions that had previously been held within. Throughout this brief writing intervention, the study participants reported feeling an improvement with interpersonal communication and coping skills due to the self-expression opportunity (Pankey et al., 2016, p. 244). Because the study participants were able to write and share their writings with others in a safe environment, they reported greater confidence in both sharing feelings and handling them in an appropriate manner. Though this study was broader in scope, it provided that writing in general has benefits that likely carry over into more specialized artistic writings such as songwriting and poetry.

In addition to the advantages provided by writing in a general sense, songwriting, poetry, and song poetry provide additional benefits specifically related to stress relief. Participants in the 2012 Baker and Krout study state that “expressing feelings in a song...[was] better than expressing them verbally” (p. 139-140) and noted that it made them more consciously aware of their feelings. This awareness of feelings led to a greater sense of control in the lives of the participants and provided a way for “stress, frustration, and anger” to be controlled and released in addition to avoiding negativity in other areas of their lives. (Baker & Krout, 2012, p. 141). The university student participants in this study found that the control they gained through songwriting created a greater sense of control in their lives in and out of a classroom setting, as it served as a way to debrief from stressful situations in a constructive manner. Many of the participants also noted that this method allowed them a way to relieve stress that was not only creative, but also

fun and therapeutic (Baker & Krout, 2012, p. 143). Though these students as participants have greater musical knowledge because they are music therapy students, other studies have found similar results. Such studies include Conley and Stockel's 2007, piece "Song-poetry as an expression of responding to and coping with addiction counselor stress" and Jack Coulehan's 2009 research entitled, "Compassionate solidarity: Suffering, poetry, and medicine", among others.

These same themes are present in James Cantor's 2006 narrative exploration, though the studied population consisted of children, rather than university students. He concludes that songwriting both provided a way for children to communicate their feelings and allowed him to personally recount ideas and thoughts on both the study and his profession (Cantor, 2006). Additionally, he notes songwriting is a way to "express empathy" for other people (Cantor, 2006, p. 62). This emphasizes the idea that the benefits of songwriting are not limited to one specific age group but can carry on through life and enhance learning and professional experiences.

Though previous studies focus on students of differing ages, a 2014 study by Jabarouti, Shariat, and Shariat gives insight into the effects of poetry on retired academicians. This study notes that "stress and language are the commonest intakes of human[s] in the societies, [but] the relationship between the two has remained ambiguous" until studies like the ones presented in this research were conducted (p. 25). The external stimuli of poetry have shown a measurable positive effect on the release of stress hormones and a lower blood pressure (Jabarouti et al., 2014). The writing of poetry "can reduce the level of stress hormone" (p. 26) and has a "relaxing effect" (p. 26) on participants, providing a non-pharmacological alternative (Jabarouti et al., 2014). Though

the aforementioned studies were conducted on varied age groups and different life-stages, the results all were similar. This indicates that the benefits of song and poetry writing are not limited to a specific age group and also give possible explanations for the positive effect on stress.

While the previous studies place their focus on individuals from various age groups, other researchers focus their efforts on different groups of varying ages and make connections between songwriting and poetry through song poetry as a creative medium. In Jack Coulehan's 2009 piece, the focus is on individuals in the medical community and relieving job-related stress as well as relations with patients through song and lyric writing. Coulehan (2009) notes that these specific benefits are the result of health professionals gaining a "greater understanding of suffering, empathy, compassion, and symbolic healing" (p. 585). This study makes use of the definition of songwriting proposed by Baker and Krout (2012) as "the process of creating, notating and/or recording lyrics and music by the client or clients and therapist within a therapeutic relationship to address psychosocial, emotional, cognitive, and communication needs of the client" (p. 143). Though the physicians do not serve as traditional therapists, they are a main point of contact for patients undergoing treatment for chronic and serious illness during an emotionally taxing time. The doctors in this study provide that songwriting allows patients to manipulate "meaningful symbols and narratives" to serve their needed purposes (Coulehan, 2009, p. 588). The manipulation of words and turning abstract feeling into concrete language allowed patients to have a better grasp on the realities of their illnesses and leads to better coping with their situation. Coulehan (2009) describes this phenomenon as a "imposing order on the experience and making it comprehensible"

(p. 590). This order is not only a coping mechanism but also a grounding mechanism, allowing the patients to feel more in control which, in turn leads to a lessening of feelings of stress and helplessness.

Songwriting, while therapeutic, is not the only kind of writing that may be beneficial for both people undergoing medical treatment and their physicians, as various studies have shown the positive effects of poetry writing on stress relief. Poetry provides “adjunctive therapy for people with organic illness” (Rickett, Greive, & Gordon, 2011, p. 265). This combination of traditional therapy with more artistic methods caters more to aspects of the individual patient. Rickett and colleagues’ 2011 study explains that “the technical challenges of writing poetry” (p. 267) not only gives the participants a way to channel their energy into constructive practices rather than negative thoughts, but also provides a way to convey their feelings to other people. The participants in this research appreciated that the poetry writing allowed them to focus their thoughts into “significant existential questions, rather than simply dealing with the details of their illnesses” (Rickett et al., 2011, p. 268). This shifted focus is beneficial, as it emphasizes things that are constructive rather than destructive to the mental states of the patients.

As for the doctors and their experience with songwriting, a different purpose was served. Not unlike the study conducted on music therapy students by Baker and Krout (2012), the physicians used this method of stress relief and coping to gain a better understanding of their profession and their clients. The medical practitioners note that “relationships are a part of medical practice” and that a greater sense of empathy for “fellow human [beings] was beneficial in their profession” (Coulehan, 2009 p. 594). The physicians got a greater connection with their own feelings as well as a better

understanding of the feelings of their patients through the writing process and their patients sharing their written lyrics, thereby creating a “compassionate solidarity” (Coulehan, 2009, p. 598). This helps the doctors to empathize with their patients, and allows not only a better bedside relationship, but a better understanding of the patients struggles and feelings as well as an understanding of the origins of those feelings in addition to insight for the doctors as to the effects of illness on the emotional and mental states.

These experiences are not limited to doctors and surgeons but extend to caregivers and hospice workers as well. In 2014, a study conducted on hospice care workers in South Africa had similar findings (Repar & Reid, 2014). The participants in this study noticed an “ongoing release of stress, grief, and other emotions over the three months...[that] stimulated a revelation or a change in self-perception” and led to increased self-care (Repar & Reid, 2014, p. 952). Repar and Reid (2014) focus on this self-care and how it leads to a lessened degree of stress because it provides an outlet and a direction. They conclude that creative therapy such as poetry writing and songwriting “can help us find new ways of working, new perspectives on and solutions to old problems, and the inspiration to move forward regardless of how difficult things may seem” (Repar & Reid, 2014, p. 953). This process aids in alleviating anxiety through finding solutions rather than continuing to avoid or exacerbate problems.

Other mental health professionals have also seen a benefit from songwriting and song poetry in regard to dealing with stress and anxiety. Addiction counselors have high levels of job-related stress and have found that song poetry is an effective way to deal with it (Conley & Stoeckel, 2008, p. 237). The research done on this specific group found

that the process of writing a poem that eventually would become a song “was cathartic” for the participants (Conley & Stoeckel, 2008, p. 241). They were able to write about their experiences in their field of work and process their emotions so that they could continue to do their jobs without falling into depression and other stress-related disorders (Conley & Stoeckel, 2008). Though most of the writings the counselors created came from places of negativity, the release had beneficial effects on the high-stress nature of addiction counseling. Conley and Stoeckel (2008) state that this is due to the “creative art [providing] a physical outlet—a literal release of energy” for the participants, which in turn led to them being able to do their jobs more effectively (p. 244). Though the profession itself is not directly related to creative writing, providing that outlet as a way to alleviate stress related to the workplace proved to enhance not only the well-being of the employees, but those they are seeking to counsel as well.

While many studies are specialized in the groups they focus on, several are geared toward more personal exploration in private and career atmospheres. In 2014, Michael Turner looked at the therapeutic effects of lyric writing on the writer. He presents the idea that “song lyrics and poetry have always been synonymous with examples dating back to the great epic poems and Psalms from the Bible” and states that songs and poetry are more alike than different (Turner, 2014, p. 143). Turner (2014) notes the positive effects of songwriting in his own life and sensed a “lessening of depression, anxiety, and worry about the future” (p. 148) when writing song lyrics and a “physical sense of peace” (p. 144) throughout the writing process. Though the experience is personal, the emotions carry “that same power out into the universe of the hearer” and the feeling of connections with other people only furthers that sense of purpose and anxiety relief that comes with

the writing process (Turner, 2014, p. 151). Turner's experiences display the reach of songwriting beyond oneself and into relationships and the community as a whole.

Many of the same themes that are present regarding the effects of songwriting on the writer's personal life are also present in their careers. While writing, music therapy, and music making can cause "positive changes in survival, biological markers of immunity and stress, assist in the treatment of depression, and improve coping," they also contribute to overall wellness (O'Kelly, 2008, p. 282-83). This more complete wellness carries over into all aspects of life for the individual, including work and career. Songwriting as therapy provides a flexible therapy option and provides a "unique and authentic insight" into the specific experience for the individual and their career (O'Kelly, 2008, p. 285). Allowing one to step back and look at their life and experiences with the detail that comes from writing allows for growth, as it reveals opportunity and areas of excellence and gives a holistic picture.

Research done by various individuals on variety of subjects has shown support for the therapeutic benefits of song and poetry writing. Both are shown to have multiple positive effects on the writer, including stress and anxiety relief due to reasons that are simultaneously concrete and intangible. The existing research on this phenomenon shows that songwriting is an effective way to channel thoughts rather than bottling them up and building stress. These positive improvements are not limited to one specific age group, profession, or lifestyle, showing that releasing stress on even the smallest levels have constructive effects on society, and implementation and education on the useful advantages of song and poetry writing could lead to more people experiencing such benefits.

III. INTERVIEW RESULTS

In moving towards creating a more complete picture of song and poetry writing and the effects they have on the writer, interviewing those in the field is a crucial element. In embarking on this particular section of this research, I began with a simple social media post asking if anybody writes or knew somebody who writes songs and/or poetry and then followed up on those specific leads. Some were people I knew personally, and some were friends of friends, but the answers I received had a great impact on my research as a whole. Due to distance and time constraints, my interviews were conducted via email to voluntary research participants, once consent had been obtained. In these interviews, I received responses from eight participants, four poets and four songwriters, with a few individuals who fell under both categories. The interview consisted of eleven questions that were very open, as I wanted the responses to come from what they felt personally, allowing space to write as much or as little as they liked. While some questions garnered short responses and others gave more room for explanation, the answers I received had a great deal of similarities and differences along the way, with various themes emerging throughout the process including inspiration, writing as expression or release, the impact of life experiences, therapy, a focus on the process, clarity, and impact on other people

I began my interviews with the simple question, “When did you start writing?” Some participants responded that they began writing at a very young age, others around high school, and a couple did not begin writing until their college and adult life. Some participants told stories about the thing that they first wrote about and these ranged from poems about animals or plants to songs that related to personal experiences or popular

culture. Though this question seemed irrelevant initially, in looking into the existing research on this topic, I noticed that the age at which one starts writing can have an effect on the way one writes and the style and topics of one's writings, so I wanted to look into that in my personal research. Through this question, the theme of inspiration emerged. Many respondents noted that the reason they began to write was inspiration that came from one or more aspects of their life, whether that be nature, experiences, laughter, or something else entirely. While that inspiration differed for different individuals, it continued to impact their song and poetry writing careers, as the inspiration persevered and led to a sustained song and/or poetry writing career.

I then delved into the more difficult question of 'why?', asking my participants, why do you write? This is where the answers started to show amazing similarity and stark differences. The recurring similarity that came out of this question was the idea that writing songs or poetry was used as a way to express feelings, release and connect with emotion, and cope with situations of everyday life as well as out of the ordinary experiences. The biggest difference was that some of the writers stated that they enjoy writing for other people because they like the impact their writing has on others, while some noted that writing is extremely personal and comes from inspiration within. I think these differences come from personality differences of the writer, as some get a therapeutic benefit from helping others and sharing their work while others see the act of writing poetry and songs as cathartic in and of itself. The idea of writing as a release or expression led to referring to it as "free therapy" by some participants. Even those who enjoyed writing for other people got the benefit of feeling proud of the product they

created, while those who felt more comfortable if their writing was kept private felt more of a benefit just from the writing process itself.

This question and the answers it generated led perfectly into the following question: do you view writing as an outlet? For the most part, participants responded with a resounding yes! They echoed the aforementioned Dolly Parton quote, responding that writing was the best way for them to get their thoughts out of their heads in a constructive, healthy way. Some respondents noted a connection with writing music or poetry in an emotionally vulnerable state or it helping to soothe mental states and overall wellbeing. Conversely, other participants did not like to put a label on what writing meant for them because leaving it as more of a hobby kept it fun, rather than a chore to make them feel better. Even though the latter participants did not refer to writing as a therapeutic outlet, they did note that writing made them feel better when it came from a position of vulnerability, so all the participants could recognize that whether or not they used writing as an outlet, it served as a release in one way or another. This theme of writing as a release or an outlet continued throughout the remainder of the research.

Continuing with the interview, I asked what emotional benefits and stress relief participants saw within themselves as a result of writing song and/or poetry. Responses ranged from feeling like a weight was lifted, feelings of pride and accomplishment, clarity, and combinations of these things. This only furthered the idea that writing song and poetry was an emotional release for at least some people. Some respondents stated that they felt unburdened and that this came from the release of stress that resulted from writing song lyrics and poetry, while others said they were able to transfer that feeling of being unburdened into pride and accomplishment. It is possible that this is the result of

taking a heavy feeling or task or thought and turning it into art and exercising control over a situation rather than letting it control you, not unlike the results Baker and Krout found in their 2014 study. Others found that the process of finding concrete words to describe abstract feelings gave a sense of clarity which not only lessened stress, but gave a greater sense of peace. This focus on the process of writing, had a strong impact on this research and the personal exploration section, as well as how I viewed the writing process and the results that came of song and poetry writing.

That question regarding emotion and stress relief transitioned well into the following question, which asked how participants felt before, during, and after writing. This question provided the most similar responses from participants as a whole, as every person noted that they felt anxious and emotional prior to writing, drained and frustrated yet focused while writing and finally, numb yet proud upon completion of writing the song or poem. This anxiousness and emotional state makes sense as previous questions noted that the anxiety or another emotion was often the catalyst for finally starting to write. As the existing research, including the 2016 Pankey, Kelly, & Megha piece notes, a great deal of writing comes from adversity, so in order to relieve the stress that accompanies difficult situations, writing was used as a stress-relieving mechanism, not unlike what these interviewees stated they experience. In regard to the feelings during writing, the interviews indicate that they seemingly come from wanting to find the right words to describe the situation at hand and, with songwriting and some poetry writing, it comes from finding the words to rhyme and the music to accompany the words and convey the meaning through the music. Finally, this feeling of numbness in a positive sense was the most striking to me, as I personally do not feel that same way upon

completion of a big task. I typically feel proud and energized when something that I have been struggling with is finally completed. With songwriting and poetry writing alike, I think the numb feeling the participants experience comes from knowing it is done and the emotions have been released. Additionally, the process itself was exhausting so there is an appreciation of the benefit of the act itself, but a recognition that it was difficult and rest is helpful in reconnecting with reality.

The following question saw some disconnects between song and poetry, as when I asked if participants liked to share their work, most were willing to share their songs with others, but poetry was more of a personal experience. I think some of that comes from how long the individual has been writing as well as the reasons they write and their personality. This question is difficult to grasp, as there does not seem to be a concrete reason as to why people chose to share or withhold their work from others. I think songwriters were more willing to share their work because music is a more common, mainstream medium of expression than poetry is, and with poetry it is the words exclusively that are being analyzed rather than words plus music, though that effect could be completely reversed depending on the individual. Though both forms of writing were referred to as therapeutic by participants, the therapy may come from different part of the process.

I had the most fun with the question, what do you write about? This gave individual participants a chance to show what interests them and gave an opportunity to get insight into what these people felt connection to or with. Many participants noted that they wrote about nature and personal experiences, while others said literally anything that makes them feel was fair game, and a few wrote about entirely different things like

psychology, politics, and pizza. I think these differences come from what matters to the individual as well as what is happening in the life of person that strikes the inspiration to write for them at that time. I think that threshold is different for different people, and I think the ideas manifest differently for different people; perhaps that is why there are a multitude of songs written in popular culture about everything from love to tractors. Though the subject matter may differ, the idea of writing from inspiration and writing from life experiences continued though this research and impacted my personal view of writing and what the process encompasses. These ideas continued in a later question which asked where inspiration came from in the individual's writing. While some individuals' inspiration came from random encounters and objects, the majority came from an encounter or experience that caused that person to feel and think. This recurring theme of inspiration leading to a drive to write pushed this research forward, and only confirmed that anybody can write and it could be used in a multitude of situations.

Being that song and poetry writing are new fields for me, I wanted to know if there was a format or if it was different for songs versus poetry. I found that for poetry, very different formats were normal, and sometimes no format was okay and a more freeform approach could be taken. I think this ties into the statements mentioned earlier, that poetry is more often used as a way of releasing emotions in a personal way, while songs are more often shared with others, so they have a more recognizable format. Some of the interviewees that wrote poetry liked to rhyme because it made them think more and others refrained from writing in rhyme because they could use the exact words they were feeling rather than having to change it in order to adhere to a specific rhyme scheme. With songwriting, there is more structure as there are specific pieces that go into a song

in order for it to be considered a song, like the verse, chorus, and bridge. Participants in this research had their own order in which those pieces came into play, but they were all present. I think the choice to write in a format or more freeform is representative of the individual and their goals they hope to achieve by writing, but was a small piece when it comes to analyzing the emotional benefits of song and poetry writing.

The next question asked if the individual participants believed song and poetry writing were connected and every single person said they did think the two forms of writing were not only connected but completely intertwined. Some even used the same phrase used in Conley and Stockel's 2008 research, calling music, song poetry. Many participants noted the similarities in rhythm between the two writing forms and others found that the biggest similarity was that they were both therapeutic writing forms. While I personally see a connection between the two mediums for these same reasons, to have the connection validated through these interviews made this research feel more complete.

In concluding my interviews, I asked the participants if there was anything they would like to add about the writing process, experiences, or anything in general. Overall the theme of writing providing a sense of clarity dominated the answers to this question. Additionally, respondents stated that a great deal of bravery and vulnerability was required for any kind of writing. Some stated that this came from the raw emotions being on display, and others said resulted from the process of recording history, whether that be personal or societal. This recording of a point in history gave some a way to look back on a particular experience and see growth or gain a deeper understanding of self. In a societal context, respondents provided that writing has existed throughout history and provided a snapshot of lifestyle and personal encounters over time and would continue to

do so. The interviews done for this research shed light onto the experiences of real writers and made the research not only applicable, but tangible. Though the existing research guided the personal exploration that took place over the course of this research, the interviews from the various individuals gave differing perspective that allowed this research experience to feel collaborative and holistic. Overall, interviewees saw song and poetry writing as an ongoing process that requires attention, focus, and practice and that it was a form of free therapy in every sense of the word, something that I experienced as I ventured into the world of poetry writing and dipped my toe into songwriting.

IV. PERSONAL EXPLORATION

When I was a little girl my mom would take me to the grocery store and I would stand in the basket and sing LeAnn Rimes at the top of my lungs, and not much has changed except I do not fit in the basket as well now. Music has always been a huge part of my life, and I have always been fascinated with song lyrics and the meanings behind them. As I began this project, I knew I wanted to delve into songwriting eventually, but I was also fascinated with poetry and the process of structured writing. I used the aforementioned research to guide my personal exploration in the field of poetry and, eventually, songwriting, but then created my own process.

I began by keeping a journal of my everyday experiences, particularly when something new or different or emotionally taxing happened. I made writing my thoughts down on paper a priority when something happened in my life, and eventually I developed this strong urge to record my feelings and I did not have to think about it as a chore anymore. I then set out time to look through my journal entries and turn those words into poems. This simple process led to a great deal of clarity as I moved through this

research. As my interviews would find, the process of writing was increasingly therapeutic. Beginning with journaling allowed me to get the raw thought written and out of my head and onto something that I could physically touch and see. I would then return to that thought and relive the emotional state and force myself to think through the situation and find the right words to rhyme. I found the process of turning my journal entries into poems and songs to be a very complex process. I would find myself getting frustrated when the right words would not fit or did not make sense in the context of the rhyme scheme or rhythm, but I felt a sense of pride and accomplishment when the writing was complete. Though my process was very different from those I interviewed, I found the results to be similar and saw the “free therapy” my respondents discussed. In navigating college and the stresses it brings, this outlet was a very welcome and needed intervention in my everyday life and will continue beyond this research.

In examining the overall impact of song and poetry writing on me personally, I turned to the same interview questions asked of my research participants, but asked them of myself. While this project marked the beginning of my structured song and poetry career in a more voluntary sense, I did write some poetry for class in high school which initially sparked my interest in poetry writing as an expression of oneself. I was able to see that writing really does not require any specific skill set and is something very widely available to various ages and backgrounds. When asking myself why I write, I found that writing was a release for me, whether it be the stream of consciousness that came from my journal writings, or from the interpretation of those feelings and turning them into poems and simple songs. Being that the arts have been a major part of my life since a

very young age, this allowed me to reconnect with my artistic and creative sides and continue to create even if it was more of a personal than shared experience.

For me, the question as to whether writing was an outlet was absolutely, yes. Journaling and then creating a structured piece allowed me to extend my understanding of my thoughts and emotions beyond myself. Some of the journal entries never turned into any kind of song because I did not feel a deeper connection with those emotions when looking back, while others begged to be re-felt and re-examined. I found that forcing myself to unpack previously felt experiences and emotions later helped me see them with a greater sense of clarity, rather than being blinded by the intense emotion I was feeling at the time. I can say things when I write that I cannot verbally express and that power enabled me to tap into a deeper sense of self throughout this process. I saw this emotional and stress relieving benefit in myself due to writing, something that gave me a fuller understanding of what researchers noted in their studies and of what those I interviewed said they felt about writing songs and poetry.

In looking at my feelings and thoughts before, during, and after I write, I found that it differed for pure journal writing and for turning those journal entries into song. Journal entries felt like a release when I physically wrote my thoughts out, but left me feeling anxious because they felt unfinished. Conversely, when writing song and poetry, it felt like reopening those emotions, causing myself to feel again and then working through them and facing every facet of the words. Poetry writing, which created the basis for the songs I wrote, is a long and sometimes frustrating process because it forces a mirror on the writer. It is exhausting because it requires a very intense focus. When writing songs from those poems, it became a little easier because the innate rhythm was

already there. The process felt very personal and introspective as a whole, leaving me exhausted but peaceful once a piece of poetry or a song was completed, and proud of the work I did.

I began to really relate to some of my interview respondents when I was deciding whether to share my writings with others. For me, my poetry and songs are very much my personal therapy sessions, so sharing them at this point feels very daunting and scary. While I am proud of the work I did, the emotions are very fresh and some of the things I decided to write about come from places within myself that have not yet been shared publicly. Going into this research, I intended to share all the work that resulted from this project; however, my views of song and poetry writing have evolved greatly and I have seen the work and time that goes into creating a finished product as well as gained an understanding of where the words begin and end in the context of writing.

I wrote about everything from serial killers to dealing with anxiety and uncertainty over the course of this semester. I drew from present and past experiences and found that tapping into memories sometimes gave a better understanding of current feelings and emotions, and sometimes allowed me to process the past in a way that I had not understood before. I used a structure to both my song and poetry writings because I found that structuring my writing forced me to think through every word and assign it meaning rather than simply putting the raw thought on a page. I looked to the songwriting styles of artists I admire to come up with simplified melodies, because for me and for this project, the focus was more on the words than the music itself. Throughout this process, I drew inspiration from memories and current experiences and how they impacted one another. I used my stress from school and work and everyday life to write emotional

pieces and I used educational content from past and present classes to gain insight into research and academic writings.

My personal experience with writing showed me that every person's experience with writing is different, but the process of writing songs and poetry provide similar benefits regardless of that experience. The research shows that writing is not limited to one specific age group, profession, or lifestyle, but rather can be utilized by many people to tap into deeper thoughts and release emotions and stress overall. Music and poems and the rhythm created echo the mental rhythm of the writers and the personal growth can lead to a clearer picture of self. Through the analysis of this research, including academic research, interviews, and personal reflection, it is clear that song and poetry writing allow for clarity and provide a way to work through the "stuff" that comes up and creates order out of the chaos of everyday life.

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