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# An Exploration of Creative Arts-Based Self-Care Practices among Music Therapy Students

Marion Kaiser

This research was completed as part of the degree requirements for the [Music Therapy](#) Department at Molloy College.

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AN EXPLORATION OF CREATIVE ARTS-BASED SELF-CARE PRACTICES  
AMONG MUSIC THERAPY STUDENTS

A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the degree of Master of Science  
In Music Therapy

by

Marion Kaiser  
Molloy College  
Rockville Centre, NY  
2017

MOLLOY COLLEGE

An Exploration of Creative Arts-Based Self-Care Practices among Music Therapy Students

by

Marion Kaiser

A Master's Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Molloy College

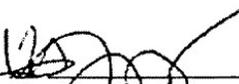
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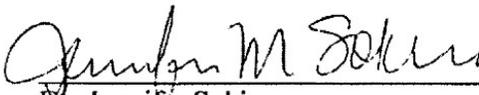
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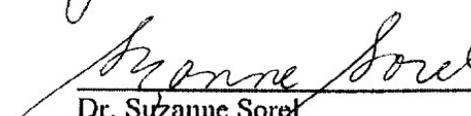
Thesis Committee:

 PhD, MT-BC  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Heather Wagner  
Faculty Advisor

5/3/17  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

 MMT, LCAT,  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Jennifer Sokira  
Committee Member  
MT-BC

5/4/17  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

 Dr. Suzanne Sorrel, DA, LCAT, MT-BC  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Suzanne Sorrel  
Director of Graduate Music Therapy

5/10/17  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Abstract**

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to develop a theory based on the experiences of music therapy students' use of creative arts as a self-care practice. In addition, this study was intended to determine these students' perception of self-care and the perceived differences between self-care practices among students and professionals. A grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) was utilized in order to analyze the data gained from semi-structured interviews. From this data, six themes emerged and a formal theory was developed. The main theory emphasizes the importance of incorporating access to and information regarding the utilization of creative arts as a self-care practice while studying in a music therapy program. The theory was developed from participants' experiences engaging in creative arts self-care practices and the lack of advocacy each participant perceived from her music therapy program. These findings provide support for the benefits music therapy students may experience by learning to utilize creative arts self-care within their music therapy programs.

*Keywords:* self-care, creative arts, self-awareness

### **Acknowledgements**

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I would also like to thank my parents, George and Patricia Kaiser, for supporting me in my decision to move to New York and to pursue a degree in Music Therapy. Thank you for encouraging me to pursue a life of music and to take the necessary risks to do so. Your love and care for me is invaluable and I am forever grateful.

Thank you to my younger sister, Anna, for obtaining the contact information for my first piano teacher when I was too shy to do so. You helped me begin my journey as a musician, which has affected the entire course of my life. You continue to inspire me to be a better person and I have always cherished the time we've spent together, which was usually spent laughing. I want to thank my other siblings as well, Patty, Lorena, and Mario, for all of their encouragement throughout my life. I love all of you with all my heart.

Lastly, thank you to my participants for taking the time to share their experiences with me. Because of your candor and willingness to share, this thesis was made possible.

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## **Introduction**

I have conducted an investigation of various creative arts-based self-care practices among students in the field of music therapy, and the significance of these practices to their training in music therapy. I utilized a grounded theory methodology to discover the mechanisms and perceived importance of self-care among music therapy students, specifically considering creative arts practices. This study included undergraduate students who were not board-certified, to limit participants to students who acquired their knowledge of self-care primarily from music therapy academic programs, clinical practicums, and internships, rather than occupational experience. I examined the ways in which self-care was beneficial to participants through semi-structured interviews. Analysis of the data using a grounded theory methodology revealed six main themes, as well as a formal theory regarding this topic.

Self-care is an important concept in the helping professions, but there is limited literature on the benefits of self-care for music therapy students. Grounded theory was the most appropriate methodology for this study because of its incorporation of in-depth data analysis and the resulting development of a theory. I conducted a qualitative study because a constructivist point-of-view is most aligned with my personal stance, and a goal for many constructivists is to focus on the participants' views of the studied topic (Creswell, 2014).

### **Personal Source of the Topic (Epoche)**

This research interest resulted from my own struggles in self-care while immersed in a graduate music therapy program. Conceptually, I understand the benefits of self-care; however, I neglected self-care throughout much of my graduate studies due to the overwhelming stress of balancing academics, maintaining musicianship skills, and working to support myself financially. My only consistent self-care practice was playing music in a group with other

people. This involvement was primarily due to other members' reliance on my presence to practice before upcoming shows. Despite external pressures, I realized that this group benefited me tremendously. I thoroughly enjoyed playing with others, creating music, and playing shows, which became great outlets for stress. This research was built from these personal experiences to explore how creative arts, such as art, dance, film, and music, affect students' self-care. It is my belief that music therapy students should implement self-care practices in their daily lives, both for self-benefit and for the benefit of their clients.

### **Professional Source of the Study**

Past research included qualitative studies that explored the experiences of students involved in self-care practices during the course of their studies in a music therapy program. Gardstrom and Jackson (2012) discussed the involvement of students in music therapy sessions. Themes of increased self-awareness, emotional safety, self-expression, client empathy, connection to others, and self-care were prevalent. Some students claimed that the therapy sessions added a valuable self-care practice to their lives (Gardstrom & Jackson, 2012).

Other studies addressed self-care practices such as mindfulness meditation, autohypnosis, music, and spirituality for working health professionals (Gambrel, Keeling, Moore, Richardson, & Williams, 2010). Self-care practices can help prevent burnout and maintain empathy and connectedness with clients. This need for self-care to prevent burnout could be applicable to students training to become music therapists because of their involvement in observations, clinical practicum, and internships, which directly involve the treatment of clients. Students should learn how to incorporate self-care practices into their lives before they start their career in order to continue these practices when entering the field as a professional. Overall, it could be beneficial to the field of music therapy to explore music therapy students' experiences with self-

care practices, specifically those related to creative arts due to possible benefits of carrying these practices over to their careers as music therapists. This study informs students new to the field of music therapy about the benefits of self-care practices.

### **Research Questions and Sub-questions**

The primary research question for this study was: What creative arts self-care practices do students engage in during their training, if any? Sub-questions include:

1. How have creative arts self-care practices benefited students while training to enter the field of music therapy?
2. Are there differences in self-care practices for students and professionals? If so, what are these differences and how are they significant?
3. What is the perception of music therapy students on the importance of self-care?

## **Literature Review**

### **Self-Care**

Self-care is a broad concept, and there are few concrete definitions of the phenomenon. According to Campenni, Muse-Burke, and Richards (2010), self-care for healthcare professionals involves an individual's intention to improve his/her well-being through physical, psychological, spiritual, and/or supportive means. This includes exercising or other physical activities, receiving counseling, meditation, and interactions within personal and professional relationships. As cited by the World Health Organization (2009), self-care involves activities individuals undertake with the intention of improving their health, preventing disease, and limiting illness. Self-care is any activity that helps maintain mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. Self-care encompasses the many ways which individuals strive to improve,

such as a healthy diet and proper sleep, confronting practices like therapy, and embracing spiritual beliefs (Campenni et al., 2010). There is limited literature, however, regarding the utilization of creative arts as self-care for healthcare professionals, particularly music therapists.

Self-care is important for music therapists or any healthcare professionals to prevent burnout, improve health and well-being, and increase self-awareness. These benefits are interconnected. For example, music therapists may experience burnout because they are overworked and do not take time away from their job. By increasing self-awareness and understanding the importance of taking time off, burnout may be prevented, leading to more effective clinical practice.

**Importance of self-care.** Prevention of *burnout* is a primary concern for healthcare professionals. According to Espeland (2006), burnout occurs when an individual is mentally and emotionally fatigued by his/her work. This definition applies specifically to nurses, but is applicable to many professionals in other mental health fields. Work overload, inadequate salary, and challenging clients also contribute to burnout (Kunimara, 2016). When a therapist is dealing with unresolved personal issues, s/he is more likely to experience burnout because his/her mental, emotional, or physical health may not be stable (Pace & Rosenberg, 2006). Taking time to resolve personal issues and engaging in self-care practices helps prevent burnout for individuals in helping professions.

An important element of self-care is having self-awareness. In order to discover appropriate self-care practices and implementation, one must be aware of his/her stress and the strategies that help with coping. Self-awareness is challenging to define because of the many constructs and interpretations of the term. According to O'Brien and Silvia (2004), self-awareness is the "capacity to focus attention on oneself" (p. 475), and thus can provide insight to

recognize factors that may lead to burnout. Fenigstein, Scheier, and Buss (1975) stated that self-awareness is knowledge regarding one's own thoughts, emotions, and behaviors; it is an overall state of being.

Mental health professions tend to be particularly demanding, and require support practices to maintain a healthy well-being. Coster and Schwebel (1997) discovered themes among well-functioning psychologists that included having a balanced life, undergoing personal therapy, and utilizing coping mechanisms such as vacations, rests, exercise, and spirituality. Each of these themes is an aspect of self-care. Self-care improves the quality of psychologists' practice in addition to their personal health and well-being.

### **Self-Care among Healthcare Professionals**

**Common self-care practices.** Many practices may be considered self-care practices and include but are not limited to physical, spiritual, social, emotional, and creative self-care practices. The basic, physical self-care practices that apply to most professionals and students include nutrition, exercise, and proper sleep (Campenni et al., 2010). Relaxation techniques fall into the category of physical self-care (Becher, Crook-Lyon, Im, Shannon, & Simmelink-McCleary, 2014), but are also closely related to meditation and spiritual self-care practices. Many other self-care practices fall into more than one category as well.

A social support system, whether family and friends or a personal therapist, is an important element of self-care. Stewart (2002) emphasized the use of a social support from peers, the work place, supervisors, family, and friends as an essential aspect of self-care, particularly when dealing with traumatic experiences. Music-making could provide benefits as a social support and as a creative self-care practice when playing with others. Again, many self-care practices overlap into varying categories.

Literature is limited on the use of creative arts as self-care. Creative arts self-care practices have included music therapy, art therapy, movement therapy, drama therapy, painting, prayer, meditation, hobbies, task involvement, leisure time, performing, dancing, and cooking (Stewart, 2002). Despite the lack of literature on the topic, based upon personal experience, I perceive that creative arts therapists may benefit from writing music or engaging in some other art form that is not associated with helping clients.

**Creative arts and self-care.** Many professionals in therapeutic medical fields recognize the benefits of music for well-being and health. MacDonald (2013) examined various uses of music, such as community music, music education, music and medicine, and music therapy, to improve well-being in healthcare professionals. Many of these uses overlap with music therapy in the community, schools, and hospitals. Relaxing music may have physiological effects such as slowing down breathing and heart rates (Clements-Cortes, 2011), which could provide an effective way to relieve stress among healthcare professionals. Music and music therapy contribute to the health and well-being of individuals and are valuable self-care practices.

Many health care professionals put aside personal interests because of the demands inherent in helping others. However, creative self-care practices provide an outlet for workers in these fields to acknowledge and pursue their interests, express their feelings, and stimulate their creativity, according to Garish's (2014) study about self-exploration. This study implemented a creative writing project with four medical students that involved writing about self-exploration and creative writings' effects on health. The students reported that they felt better able to discover things about themselves and to be in touch with their emotions after the workshop, which helped them become more empathetic and effective doctors.

Caregivers in a hospice setting participated in a similar workshop that included journal writing, art therapy, and music therapy. Murrant (2000) stated that journaling can be cathartic and also provide an opportunity for creativity and discovery. The participants completed writing exercises that ignited their creativity and allowed them to explore their unique way of writing in relation to others. Music and art therapy provided alternate avenues of expression for these caregivers, and evoked repressed emotions and experiences that may not have been acknowledged or explored otherwise. Self-awareness and understanding of personal feelings is essential in caregiving and can improve through creative arts self-care practices (Murrant, 2000).

Professional hospice workers reported newly-found creativity after participating in a creative arts workshop (Fritz & Westrhenen, 2012). The workshop included painting, drama, massage, creative writing, music, and dance. After expressing themselves and gaining a stronger sense of self, the hospice workers were less likely to experience compassion fatigue and burnout. Compassion fatigue is emotional or physical distress due to the continuous use of empathy to support clients (Stebnicki, 2007). Participating in creative arts provided caregivers with opportunities to non-verbally communicate thoughts and feelings to relieve stress (Fritz & Westrhenen, 2012).

Group drumming and other musical activities or interventions may help release stress and provide a connection with others. Social workers involved in a recreational group drumming program showed significant decreases in stress, and increases in energy and feelings of confidence (Maschi, MacMillan, & Viola, 2012). This program enabled expression through a combination of each individual's unique drumming experience and the ability to contribute to a group in a creative way.

Creative arts therapists by definition use the arts in their professional work, but this experience differs from using art for self-care. Kunimara (2016) discussed the term *clinification* in arts therapy. This term described the experience of creative arts clinicians who only apply creativity to their work and do not invest time in creating for themselves. Clinification may lead to music therapists' burnout due to the decline in creating or playing music for personal enjoyment. A music therapist's relationship with music may become associated only with work, which could decrease effective communication with clients through music.

The phenomenon of clinification (Kunimara, 2016) was described in terms of professional creative arts therapists, yet it seems worthwhile to consider it from the perspective of creative arts therapy students. Music therapy students, in particular, must be aware of their relationship with music and actively engage in creativity throughout their time as students and when entering the professional field. This will maintain the empathetic and intuitive skills developed through a personal relationship with music.

### **Self-Care among Students**

**Self-care and students in healthcare fields.** Because of the demanding schedules of clinical practica and internship placements, it is an ethical requisite for students to engage in self-care practices. Bordfeld et al. (2012) emphasized stress management as a necessity for improving academic performance and clinical skills. When entering a healthcare profession, student access to self-care information is essential. Bamonti et al. (2014), when referring to self-care practices of psychology graduate students, suggested self-care practices should be "encouraged and/or supported by faculty and administration" (p. 253). Practices included exercising, getting sufficient sleep, social support, emotional regulation, and mindfulness practices. Encouragement

received from professors and other faculty members could increase the likelihood of students engaging in self-care practices.

Social work is one such healthcare profession that is often perceived as demanding. Self-care is required to manage the high demands and many roles of social work students (Bledsoe, Moore, Perry, & Robinson, 2011). Reflection, the development of self-awareness, and processing stressful situations are essential when enrolled in a social work program. When considering mental and emotional self-care, common practices among social work students included reading for pleasure, watching a movie, and listening to music. Physical self-care activities included exercising, yoga, and healthy eating. Social self-care is important as well, but busy schedules may make this difficult. Students reported positive effects from spending time with friends and family, talking on the phone, and having dinner with coworkers. Varying spiritual practices included prayer, devotionals, and reading about spirituality (Bledsoe et al., 2011).

Recreational drumming as an intervention among social work students offered a sense of community and helped improve stress and energy levels (Bradley & Maschi, 2010). Students' involvement in the intervention enhanced their motivation and sense of connectedness with other people. Similarly, social work students' involvement in other self-care practices, including journaling, writing, reading, gardening, watching movies, and listening to music, provided benefits as self-care practices (Armon, Bledsoe, Moore, & Robinson, 2011). Journaling, in particular, provided an opportunity for self-reflection and served as an outlet for anxiety.

Self-care is also essential for medical and nursing students. According to Courtney-Pratt, Harbrow, Levett-Jones, and Pitt (2015), "high levels of stress combined with low levels of self-care contribute to emotional exhaustion and burnout in the nursing workforce" (p. 307). Burnout

is a common issue for nurses, but self-care education while in school may prevent it. Nursing student evaluations of self-care workshops indicated an increase in self-awareness and awareness of the importance of self-care (Healy & Sharry, 2011). Educating students about various self-care practices and their importance increased self-awareness and continued commitment to effective practices. Chang, Coverdale, and Eddins-Folensbee (2012) found that medical programs that educate students about self-care and provide an environment in which peers are supportive of each other may improve the mental health of students. Peer support and self-care education could increase the use of self-care practices among students, which could then assist in preventing burnout when they become professionals.

Counseling is another profession that is emotionally stressful. Devries, Mayorga, and Wardle (2015) examined the correlation between stress levels and self-care practices among counseling students, and found that the less engaged students were in self-care activities, the higher their stress levels. This does not imply that a lack of self-care causes stress, but that self-care practices may reduce stress and anxiety among students in a counseling program. Self-care practices may include subtle habits such as getting sufficient sleep and eating healthy foods, which can be neglected by students with complicated and demanding schedules (Devries et al., 2015).

**Self-care and music therapy students.** Aspiring music therapists often enter the field because of the belief that music therapy is beneficial for clients. Further, engagement in personal music therapy may also benefit students in a music therapy program. In a qualitative phenomenological study by Gardstrom and Jackson (2012), undergraduate music therapy students participated in music therapy sessions, and shared their experiences. The most common themes were increased self-awareness, and the opportunity for self-exploration. Students also

reported a desire to implement techniques learned from the music therapy sessions in their daily lives. Understanding the differences between personal and professional roles and therapists may benefit clients through increased empathy and connectedness to others.

There is a gap in the literature regarding self-care for music therapy students. The field of music therapy requires self-growth and self-exploration, not only as a music therapist but also as an individual. New music therapy students may benefit from learning about self-care and engaging in self-care practices. Understanding the benefits of creative arts self-care practices, and incorporating the practices into the lives of music therapy students may improve students' effectiveness as music therapists when working with clients in a practicum or internship.

## **Method**

### **Grounded Theory Methodology**

I used grounded theory methodology to discover the mechanisms of creative arts self-care practices among music therapy students. This methodology involved discovery of themes, and ultimately, an emergent theory of a phenomenon through analysis of data from interviews with music therapy students. According to Amir (2005), grounded theory is “a general approach of comparative analysis linked with data collection that uses a systematically applied set of methods to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area” (p. 561). I gathered data from interviews, and analyzed the data for emergent themes. After data was coded by breaking down content to discover related concepts and categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), a theory was developed based on recurring themes.

I chose a grounded theory methodology in order to understand the benefits of various creative arts self-care practices, particularly among music therapy students. Grounded theory is the most appropriate method because it incorporates in-depth data analysis of participants'

personal experiences so the researcher may develop a theory. I developed a theory regarding the mechanisms of self-care, specifically among music therapy students' creative arts practices. I selected this topic due to the gap in literature about creative arts self-care practices among music therapy students, and because of my personal experience utilizing creative arts self-care practices while enrolled in a music therapy program.

### **Participants**

Participants were selected based on the following criteria, at the time of the interview: (a) participants were enrolled as an undergraduate or graduate student in a music therapy program, including equivalency programs; (b) participants did not have their music therapy board-certification; and (c) participants had experience with some form of creative arts self-care practice. Four participants were selected for interviews.

I informed participants of the reason for this study and explained that interviews would address their experiences with creative arts self-care practices, which may include music, art, dancing, and journaling. The goal of this study was to develop a theory about the usefulness of creative arts self-care practices for music therapy students. Snowball sampling, a technique in which participants recruit acquaintances, as well as the utilization of the American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) website, resulted in four undergraduate music therapy student participants. Four participants is an appropriate and common number of subjects when utilizing grounded theory methodology. Recruiting methods included contacting music therapy departments at various universities, contacting student members of the AMTA, sending out personal e-mails, and utilizing social media. E-mails were sent to possible participants inviting them to participate and describing the criteria needed to do so (see Appendix A). An informed

consent form was included in this invitation describing the study and detailing the risks and benefits that came with participating (see Appendix B).

### **Research Questions and Sub-questions**

The primary research question for this study was: What creative arts self-care practices do students engage in during their training, if any? Sub-questions include:

1. How have creative arts self-care practices benefited students while training to enter the field of music therapy?
2. Are there differences in self-care practices for students and professionals? If so, what are these differences and how are they significant?
3. What is the perception of music therapy students on the importance of self-care?

### **Data Collection**

I collected data from semi-structured individual interviews. These interviews took place through video conference calls. Each interview lasted between 40 to 50 minutes. I used guiding questions (Appendix C) to start the interviews, but the questions were not used strictly. Interviews were recorded and transcribed for data analysis. I sent each interviewee her interview transcription in order for them to make any clarifications or to add any more information that was not conveyed during the interview. Little or no feedback was received from the participants regarding their interviews. IRB approval was received for the implementation of this study (see Appendix D).

### **Data Analysis**

After the collection of interview data, this data were coded according to grounded theory research methodology. Open coding was the first step in data analysis. Open coding involved dividing data into categories and themes (Amir, 2005). These categories developed from

responses to the research questions. I documented the coding process and the findings were summarized. I used inductive open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to develop codes from the data as it was gathered. The developed categories were further analyzed and navigated according to the expected theoretical outcome. This produced more categories and relationships from the data. Axial coding then connected the categories, and determined the dimensions of the information (Amir, 2005). Through selective coding, I identified essential categories and grouped these with related categories. I wrote memos during data analysis to document each coding process. After data analysis, a narrative was developed to explain the findings.

Participant identities were kept confidential, and participant codes were used in all written documentation of their participation. All documentation related to the study was kept on a password-protected computer only available to me. If there had been any part of the interview that a participant did not want included in the study, it would have been removed from data analysis. However, no participants wished to omit anything from their interviews during the course of this study. All study data will be kept for three years, as per Molloy College Institutional Review Board Requirements.

## **Results**

The purpose of this study was to explore the use and possible benefits of creative arts self-care practices among students enrolled in a music therapy program, and to develop a theory regarding the mechanism of self-care. Four music therapy students were interviewed. Data analysis included open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, all inherent in a grounded theory methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), along with written memos regarding the feelings and interpretations of the researcher during this process. Six major themes were discovered

during the data analysis. These six themes, in no particular order, included: (a) Inconsistency and Need for Implementation, (b) Musical Self-Expression and Identity, (c) Internal Coping and Stress, (d) Preferred Self-Care and Higher Expectations, (e) External Obligations, and (f) Balance and Importance of Self-Care.

The theme Inconsistency and Need for Implementation is most representative of the discovered structure because of its prevalence within the data. The themes of Musical Self-Expression and Identity and Internal Coping and Stress were inherent in the data as well and have significance to the results of the study. All themes will be explored in this section. The coding process will be included and discussed in the exploration of each theme. As shown through the use of tables, the open codes were provided in order to display the method of data analysis for each theme within a grounded theory framework. In order to maintain confidentiality, each of the four participants will be referred to by their first initial (L, C, T, & M).

### **Inconsistency and Need for Implementation**

A common topic among all participants' responses was the lack of emphasis and access to information regarding creative arts self-care in their music therapy programs. The theme of Inconsistency and Need for Implementation was created, based on this topic. This theme is most representative of the formal theory developed from this study. Table 1 shows the open codes and quotes from participants that support the development of this theme, and the derived grounded theory.

Table 1

*Open Coding for Inconsistency and Need for Implementation*


---

<u>Open Code</u>	<u>Participant Example</u>
Insufficient Information	<u>Participant L:</u> "...if you were having a stressful day and your professor could tell, it would be like hey, here are some things to do" "...never like a class or a lecture" "...never like a formal thing" "That was a little lacking in our program."
Possibilities for Program	<u>Participant C:</u> "Relaxation Night" "Music and Relaxation type event" <u>Participant M:</u> "I think like having a broader creative arts therapy class would be nice" "Creative arts therapist guest speaker" "Not quite sure where that would fit in"
Internship Encouragement	<u>Participant T:</u> "Internship supervisors encourage using music for self" "Supervisors encourage us to play music or write songs, or things like that"
Intended/Not Implemented	<u>Participant M:</u> "I think it's something that everybody says is a good idea, but not very many people actually practice self-care"

---

T, whose school appeared to have the most access to self-care based on her responses, stated that there was no advocacy for using music or any other art form for oneself. She only discovered the use of music as a self-care practice for herself after being encouraged by her internship supervisor. T described moments of "catharsis" while using music as a self-care practice and emphasized the importance of its utilization in her life. Emotional processing was required by T's academic program through journaling and was intended to provide an outlet.

However, T did not receive benefits from journaling because it was not a preferred self-care practice, such as music.

L discovered the use of music for herself on her own and discussed the lack of information in her program regarding all types of self-care, not just those practice involving creative arts. The idea of reactive self-care arose from L's experience with a professor reacting to a student in crisis. In this case, information about self-care was only given when a state of duress was reached. This idea of reactive rather than preventative self-care is contradictory. Proper self-care practice should enable students to avoid reaching those moments of extreme stress. This, of course, is ideal but not necessarily realistic for all music therapy students. One suggestion from L was to include a course or a lecture about self-care in the curriculum. This could introduce the concept of self-care to all students and provide them with options, including utilizing creative arts, on how to best discover an appropriate self-care practice.

C also discussed the overall lack of information about self-care in her music therapy program. She noted that she enjoyed playing music for herself as well as with peers in an elective ensemble. However, she did not perceive an advocacy for the utilization of music or other art forms for self-care. A suggestion from C included having a creative arts self-care event, such as a music and relaxation night, from which music therapy students could benefit by listening to music created to induce relaxation and relieve stress.

M discussed her experience using crafting and cooking as self-care practices, both of which she discovered on her own accord. Her music therapy program encouraged the use of prayer journals, which she utilized on a daily basis, but no other creative outlets were suggested. Because she was in her second year of her music therapy program, M indicated the possibility that she had not yet reached a course in which self-care is more thoroughly discussed and could

receive information about it later on in the program. A creative arts guest speaker, who could inform students of various ways to incorporate creative arts as a self-care into their lives, was suggested by M as a way to implement more information about creative arts self-care in her academic program. She also suggested the development of a Music Therapy Club, which was not included in her program at the time.

Overall, there is a common theme of insufficient information about self-care among the participants, especially in regards to creative arts. All students had utilized some form of creative arts self-care, but the discovery of such self-care practices varied. Some participants discovered using music and other art forms, including crafting and painting, on their own or from sources outside of their music therapy program. Each participant discussed the benefits received from utilization of these creative arts self-care practices. This information indicates that dissemination of information about creative arts self-care within a music therapy program might prove beneficial to enrolled students.

### **Musical Self-Expression and Identity**

The theme of Musical Self-Expression and Identity derived from the first three participants and their experiences utilizing music as a form of expression. This theme encompasses the perceptions of the participants' personal identities as musicians. Musical self-expression was also prevalent among each participant's experiences and is important when considering the use of music as a self-care practice. The open codes and participant quotes for this theme can be found in Table 2.

Table 2

*Open Coding for Musical Self-Expression and Identity*


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<u>Open Code</u>	<u>Participant Example</u>
Creative Diversion	<u>Participant L:</u> “I don’t have to think about these other factors outside of my life right now that I can’t control.”
Expression and Regulation	<u>Participant L:</u> “...expressing yourself as an individual in that type of music”
Attending Concerts	<u>Participant L:</u> “Being able to see creative art done in a way that’s not necessarily for clinical reasons” “Being here has given me some refreshment” “This is great to be able to hear really good music”
Having Fun with Music	<u>Participant C:</u> “...didn’t feel like practicing the stuff I had to practice for school” “We’re working on the music but we just sit there and goof off for a little bit” “Not all proper technique”
Low Pressure/Relaxing	<u>Participant C:</u> “...just kind of making music for me and not for anybody else” “Relaxing, but it’s also helping me” “Listening to music”
Music for Self	<u>Participant L:</u> “I believe it’s really important to have music that is not related to your practice.” <u>Participant C:</u> “Important to use music for us” <u>Participant T:</u> “That music is then for me and it’s not something I have to share with clients...It’s more just kind of me getting to take from the music instead of me having to give all the time”

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When considering the use of music as a self-care practice, one must take into account the value of playing music as a musician in contrast to playing music as a music therapist. L stated that a music therapist might enjoy the music that is played for and with clients, but its purpose is

not for the therapist's personal enjoyment. She further discussed the desire to perform and "show off," and questioned whether or not she was still considered a musician. L stated that sessions with clients were "not for you to show off or for you to demonstrate those skills." This blurred identity due to the lack of performing may cause distress in music therapy students if they are not actively performing music. L also described playing classical music as a diversion from the external stimuli that caused stress in her life. L expressed that she felt relaxed while playing classical music on the piano because she was familiar with it and could use it as a way to not "have to think about these other factors outside of my life right now that I can't control." She also felt challenged while playing because she was challenged internally instead of externally. This form of musical self-expression was essential to L's self-care practice.

Other participants perceived fewer differences between being a musician and a music therapist. T believed that because music therapists are musicians first, they should utilize music in their daily lives. She shared an experience in which a patient had recently passed away at her internship, causing her to "just [sit] down and [play] the piano for about an hour." She described this experience as cathartic and as a way of releasing "all of that pressure, energy, emotion." T also discussed her perspective regarding exclusive and preferred music, "that music is then for me and it's not something I have to share with clients." T did not recall any advocacy from her music therapy program using music in this way as a self-care practice and only discovered it through her internship site, which "encourage[d] us to use music as part of our self-care because it's why we became music therapists, because we're musicians. We're musicians first." This identity as a musician was reasoning for encouraging students to use music for self-care. T was able to utilize music as a form of expressing her feelings and as a catharsis during stressful situations.

When asked her feelings about the use of music outside of the therapy session, C stated that as musicians, “we use music all the time.” However, this unclear identity as a musician may be perceived differently by various music therapy students and could have an effect on their utilization of music in their self-care practice. C expressed that creating music for herself was “making music for me and not for anybody else.” The freeness of playing music for oneself was considered when discussing C’s experience of “jamming out on my guitar.” She also discussed the fun she had while singing with peers in an elective ensemble. She described it as “low pressure” and as a way to create music with others in a non-restrictive manner. These individual and group forms of musical expression aided C in her overall self-care practice.

The use of music as means for self-expression was prevalent among three participants (L, C, & T). The fourth participant, M, recalled using music for herself in high school, however, she did not currently have the desire or the need to play music for herself because of the considerable amount of music she played for her courses. She instead utilized crafting, cooking, and journaling as self-care practices. Despite not discussing a method for creating or playing music in her self-care routine, M stated that she did benefit from listening to music and attending concerts.

Most of the participants’ experiences confirm the possible benefits of musical self-expression. These experiences also emphasize the importance of utilizing music in one’s self-care practice that is different or unrelated to the music played with clients in sessions.

### **Internal Coping and Stress**

The theme of Internal Coping and Stress is representative of the participants’ methods for relieving stress and coping other than using music, which include journaling, painting, cooking, crafting, and song-writing. This theme is reflective of the emotional aspect of self-care, including

having a creative outlet for emotional stress and processing feelings. The concepts of routine self-care practices and awareness of emotional stress are prevalent in this theme. Table 3 shows the open codes and examples of participant responses that aided in developing this theme.

Table 3

*Open Coding for Internal Coping and Stress*

<u>Open Code</u>	<u>Participant Example</u>
Internal Self-Care	<u>Participant L:</u> “Don’t want to disturb anyone” “That’s the art part of it, I find that I tend to do when I’m a lot more stressed about things” “I’m recognizing the emotion or the stress that I’m dealing with and I kind of do like word art from there”
Emotional Self-Care	<u>Participant C:</u> “When I like to talk about my feelings, sometimes I get too overwhelmed, so I just like write them out and it’s easier than having to talk about it with someone sometimes.”
Relief from Stress	<u>Participant C:</u> “...journalled when I’ve gotten really stressed”
Nostalgic Expression	<u>Participant T:</u> “I just would paint stuff, like mainly places I’ve been.” “I did a bunch of landscapes of [childhood home], that was great.”
Daily Self-Care	<u>Participant M:</u> “A lot of self-care things are kind of like for regular basis” “...not to wait until there’s a crisis to do it, but to kind of do it consistently” “If I’m stressed out about something, I’ll talk about it and kind of listen to what he’s trying to tell me”
Self-Expression using Song	<u>Participant M:</u> “Once in a while I do some song-writing...I’ll write a few words and probably like one line...that’s all I really wanted to say”

Journaling was the only method that was mentioned by every participant; however, one participant’s experience with journaling was only mentioned because it was a requirement of her

academic program. The use of journaling was beneficial to most participants and provided an accessible outlet for them to express their feelings in moments of stress. L described a time in which she “didn’t want to disturb anyone” by playing music, which could be a cause for concern with using music as a self-care practice. She has used various methods of journaling, including word art and poetry. Journaling served as a form of release in that particular stressful moment.

C mentioned utilizing journaling as a way of “coping with emotional stress” and writing out her feelings. She also stated that it was “easier than talking to someone.” Journaling provided an accessible method of expressing her feelings without having to seek out help from others. In extremely stressful situations, C found journaling to be the least intrusive and most comforting option for dealing with her emotional stress.

In T’s music therapy program, she was required to journal every day, mainly reflecting on emotions and/or writing about things for which she was grateful. As discussed previously, she did not find it beneficial to engage in this type of self-care. T has benefited from water color painting in the past, but is not using it in her current self-care practice. She described her use of water-color painting to paint places she had been and of her hometown. T expressed the enjoyment she received from painting, particularly during times when she felt homesick. She hopes to incorporate the use of water color painting back into her self-care routine.

Other creative arts provided benefits as self-care practices for some participants, including M, who did not utilize music in her self-care practice. She utilized a prayer journal as a daily self-care practice and also wrote to God asking advice in regards to stressful situations. M described that she enjoyed cooking and crafting, particularly when she was able to share the products of these activities with others. This correlates to a social aspect of self-care: she had a creative outlet that resulted in something she wanted to share. She found it beneficial to cook for

her family and to craft cards for friends and family. This supports the idea that the various facets of self-care, including emotional, physical, mental, spiritual, and social, could overlap in various ways.

The evidence for using creative arts as a self-care practice, even if one does not conceptually understand the act as being one of self-care, is substantial in this study. Along with the use of music, as discussed in the previous section, other art forms such as journaling, painting, crafting, and cooking have benefited these students while enrolled in a music therapy program.

### **Preferred Self-Care and Higher Expectations**

The theme of Preferred Self-Care and Higher Expectations developed from the responses to the second research question. This question investigated student perception about the differences in self-care practice, if any, between students and professionals. All participants verbalized an expectation that self-care practices would change once becoming a professional, but the viewpoints on how this change manifests are varied. Table 4 depicts the open codes and quotes from participants.

Table 4

*Open Coding for Preferred Self-Care and Higher Expectations*


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<u>Open Code</u>	<u>Participant Example</u>
Intentional Self-Care	<u>Participant L:</u> "...more intentional with the self-care" "...you like acknowledge the fact that I'm going to be stressed a lot of my times as a music therapist and I know that there are times where I will still perform my duty as a therapist, but I may need to take it easy that day"
Community	<u>Participant C:</u> "I could go talk to friends or go do things with friends, and like as a professional, I feel that that's not something I'm going to have constant access to"
Expectation	<u>Participant C:</u> "Higher expectations for professionals" <u>Participant L:</u> "As a professional, I would hope you're managing your time a little bit better."
Mandatory Self-Care	<u>Participant T:</u> "Self-care will be more preferred than what's required" "...it'll transition from being what other people put one me"
Transitional Life Changes	<u>Participant M:</u> "I think it's reasonable to assume that the next season of my life, I might have slightly different self-care practices" "I have different self-care practices now than when I was in high school"

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The idea of having higher self-expectations as a professional arose within the responses of some of the participants. T focused on being able to choose a preferred self-care practice once becoming a professional. Her emphasis on preference is important to consider because once leaving her academic program, she will no longer have to practice a required self-care routine from which she did not benefit. She perceives that, as a professional, self-care will not be imposed upon her and she will have the freedom to engage in preferred self-care practices.

C also mentioned her perception of higher expectations as a professional. The idea of gaining more maturity, managing time more effectively, and “being an adult,” as stated by C, is important to consider in the transition between student and professional. C also mentioned the concept of community regarding the social resources of students, including professors, peers, and other music therapy students. Professionals may not have as many people surrounding them at their place of work, and may have to work harder to seek out people as a resource for their self-care. One’s environment does change on becoming a professional, and with that, the available social network.

M stated that she suspects there will be a difference because of the transitional aspect of becoming a professional but is unsure about how it will be different. M’s personal assumption that changes will occur in her self-care because changes usually occur when undergoing a transition is an interesting viewpoint. One could argue, however, that if one’s self-care practice is effective and could be applied as a student in the same manner in which it could be applied as a professional, there would be no need to change.

L stated that the inexperience of a student as opposed to a professional has an effect on the aspect of one’s self-care. Self-care is more “intentional” and acknowledged as a professional, whereas the less mature student may neglect their self-care practice until reaching a moment of extreme stress. L also mentioned the time constraints she endured as a student while balancing schoolwork, practicum, and work. L perceived that better time management skills would be another change in the transition from student to professional.

The perception of a difference between student and professional is prevalent among all participant responses and could also vary among other music therapy students. However, their

perceptions of this transitional experience may be quite different from the reality when it actually takes place in their lives.

### External Obligations

Even experiences often cited as helpful for self-care in the literature (Armon et al., 2011; Bradley & Maschi, 2010; Clements-Cortes, 2011; Coster and Schwebel, 1997; Devries et al. 2015; Gardstrom & Jackson, 2012; Garish, 2014; Healy & Sharry, 2011; MacDonald, 2013; Murrant, 2000) can be perceived as unhelpful when they become an imposed obligation. The external obligations include the participants' obligations for creating music, as well as the required self-care practice imposed by a music therapy program. Each participant experienced some form of obligation in regards to creating music and/or self-care practices within their music therapy program. Table 5 provides the open codes and quotes from participants' that aided the development of this theme.

Table 5

#### *Open Coding for External Obligations*

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<u>Open Code</u>	<u>Participant Example</u>
Obligatory Music-Making	<u>Participant L:</u> "...the music that you're creating in those moments are [sic] not for you as a therapist, because you're the therapist" "...wasn't always something I could find de-stressing"
Mandatory Self-Care	<u>Participant T:</u> "It's required for us to do daily journaling for our self-care, which was never quite my style and I always thought of it as something that was mandatory."
School Requirement	<u>Participant M:</u> "I do more music now than I did in high school, so it's like, when I do self-care, I want to do something other than music often" "When I'm not taking as many music classes, I will probably play more music for myself."

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L discussed the difference between playing music as an obligation, including creating music for clients or for school classes, and playing music for herself. While playing music for herself, she felt relaxed and that there was no expectation imposed on her. L discovered that practicing classical music on the piano was an essential self-care practice for her. She stated that she was comfortable with this kind of music and had an understanding of it. Because playing this type of music wasn't required of her by any external obligation, she was able to benefit from it as a self-care practice.

C mentioned that the music created with peers in an elective ensemble was less stressful compared to Concert Choir, a required ensemble. She discovered a benefit from creating music with such peers. In her selected elective ensemble, C stated that it was a "fun time" for her and the other students, and that they could "tak[e] time in learning the music." There was an element of requirement, however, in that the group was to perform a show at the end of the year. However, because C selected this ensemble as an elective, the element of obligation was significantly diminished.

As a music therapy student, there is a great deal of required music-making. This may include, but is not limited to, playing music for clients in a practicum or internship, playing music for coursework, and playing music in class. Because of this extensive amount of music-making, students may differ in what is the most appropriate approach in how to – or not to – incorporate music into their self-care practice. M expressed that, because she played an extensive amount of music for school and clients, she had no desire to play music for herself. She did, however, enjoy listening to music that differed from the music she played for her courses. M also mentioned the physical limitations of being a vocalist. If the amount of required singing she had

done in a day caused any vocal distress, she would be unlikely to seek singing as a self-care practice.

The concept of a mandatory self-care is contradictory because of the obligatory pressure. In T's experience, her school program imposed a journal requirement for every student as a self-care practice. T discussed that she "hated every minute" of the journal-writing requirement included in her music therapy program. A self-care journal could be beneficial, as long as the practice is preferred and enjoyed by the student. However, in this case, T did not enjoy journaling. T would likely have benefitted more fully from another form of self-care. According to T, who was in her last year of the program, "using music for yourself wasn't something that was incorporated in the curriculum." Only through the advocacy of her internship site and supervisor did T discover the benefit of playing music for herself, which she found preferable.

The theme of external obligations is relevant to this study and the exploration of creative arts self-care because the element of obligation has an effect on student perception. Most participants were unable to benefit from music or journaling that was required of them but were able to seek out other creative arts practices that were essential to their self-care practice. Each participant's experience is quite varied, however, all were related to the idea of the inability to benefit in those things that were imposed upon them.

### **Life Balance and Importance of Self-Care**

The theme of Balance and Importance of Self-Care derived from participants' definitions of self-care and their perceived importance of maintaining balance in all facets of self-care. Campenni et al., (2010) report that self-care involves an individual's intention to improve his/her well-being through physical, psychological, spiritual, and/or supportive means. Table 6 shows the open codes and quotes from participants that reflect the process of developing this theme.

Table 6

*Open Coding for Life Balance and Importance of Self-Care*


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<u>Open Code</u>	<u>Participant Example</u>
Self-Awareness of Stress	<u>Participant L:</u> “I try to regulate that as much as I can, whether it’s you know, acknowledging like hey, I feel really stressed today” “Tension in my sleep” “Nitpicking something that I shouldn’t need to nitpick”
Self-Care Defined	<u>Participant C:</u> “Taking time for myself in a way to de-stress” “...calm down from all the things I have to do” <u>Participant L:</u> “I look at self-care as both an emotional and physical...facet” <u>Participant T:</u> “In the past, self-care has always been something that’s been a requirement” <u>Participant M:</u> “My understanding of self-care is taking care of yourself physically, emotionally, spiritually, so that you’re able to keep going and care for other people”
Fundamental “Self-care is essential”	<u>Participant T:</u> “Can’t give from an empty cup” “We use so much of our energy and our time giving to other people”
Daily Self-Care	<u>Participant M:</u> “Not to wait until there’s a crisis to do it but to kind of do it consistently”
Essential in Life Balance	<u>Participant M:</u> “It’s important because you can get tired or burn out” “Keep you balanced”

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The balance in one’s life can be maintained by having a self-awareness of one’s stress levels, according to L. She shared that if she acknowledges that she is overwhelmed or stressed, she can actively seek out a self-care practice in order to relieve some of that stress. L expressed

that she “tri[es] to regulate that as much as [she] can” when referring to her stress levels. The acknowledgement of stress is important for any music therapy student in order to intentionally engage in self-care practices to relieve said stress.

Self-care can be utilized to “keep you balanced,” according to M. M also stated that self-care is necessary in order to prevent burnout and that self-care should be incorporated into one’s routine, rather than waiting for a “crisis” to occur and then seeking assistance through self-care practices. This preventative viewpoint on self-care is essential and supports the idea of providing advocacy for self-care to students enrolled in a music therapy program.

C stated that it is essential to “calm down from all the things” she is supposed to do. The importance of “taking time for myself in a way to destress” was emphasized when asked about her perception of self-care. As music therapy students, the workload can become overwhelming. Taking time for oneself is an important element of maintaining balance in one’s life.

T utilized the phrase of not being able to “give from an empty cup.” This phrase is important when considering the importance of taking care of oneself in order to effectively care for others as a music therapist. “We use so much of our energy and our time giving to other people,” according to T, so “self-care is essential.” Although T previously described negative implications when referring to self-care because of the imposed self-care requirement she endured, she understood the importance of incorporating self-care into her life.

Overall, the theme of Balance and Importance of Self-Care is essential for every music therapy student to consider while in a music therapy program. Based upon the interviews from participants, incorporating self-care practices helped them relieve stress, regulate, and maintain balance during their course of study. This theme addresses the perception of music therapy

students on the concept of self-care and reveals that students do think it is valuable, as a student and as a professional.

### **Discussion**

Research into the concept of creative arts self-care among music therapy students is important because of the many possible benefits for its utilization. However, evidence from this study suggests that the access to information regarding these types of practices is limited within academic music therapy programs. The inspiration for this study arose from my personal experience with using music as a self-care practice without realizing how beneficial it was for me at the time. My identity as a musician is essential to me; it has continued during my course of study to become a music therapist. Playing music for myself, which differs from playing music for clients or for coursework, provided a creative outlet for me and became an integral part of my self-care practice.

Using grounded theory methodology, I interviewed four music therapy students in search of their perception and experiences with utilizing creative arts as a self-care practice, as well as their overall perception of self-care and the differences between students and professionals. Memos were written to document my feelings and interpretations of participant interviews during the coding process.

Through the analysis of these interviews, I developed a formal theory. The theory states that, due to the benefits received by the participants' utilization of creative arts in their self-care practice, there is a need for the implementation of creative arts as a self-care practice among music therapy students. Based on these participants' perceptions, there was little to no advocacy from their music therapy programs about using creative arts in their self-care practices. Thus, a

need for the incorporation of creative arts self-care practices within the curriculum of music therapy programs is apparent. Other important themes are significant in regards to the participants' use of preferred creative arts self-care practices as well as their identities as musicians compared to music therapists.

A significant point of this study pertains to the importance of overall self-care among music therapy students. Self-care, which is an individual's intention to improve their well-being (Campenni et al., 2010), was recognized by the participants as an essential part of their lives. This was reflected in one participant's statement that we "can't give from an empty cup." By not incorporating proper self-care into one's life, one can experience burnout, which occurs when an individual is emotionally or mentally fatigued by his/her work (Espeland, 2006).

As a student, balancing schoolwork, practicum, and other life challenges can cause immense stress. Being aware of one's stress levels is important in order to know when to calm down and take a break from obligations. However, daily self-care is important for prevention, rather than just engaging in self-care when one experiences stress. If self-care practices are incorporated into one's routine, then they can provide a preventative purpose, rather than a restorative purpose when one reaches a "crisis" point. Self-awareness and the incorporation of self-care practices could provide benefits to all music therapy students enrolled in music therapy programs. In addition, because all participants benefited from creative arts self-care practices, the incorporation of creative arts in one's self-care routine could also provide benefits to music therapy students.

A significant discovery was the concept of the participants' identities as musicians. Each participant brought up being a musician, and how it related to her life and experience as a music therapy student. One participant stated that she did not quite feel like a musician because she was

only using music for clinical work and school. She practiced classical music for her self-care practice, but did not feel as though she were a true musician because she was not performing. Other participants who also incorporated playing music for their self-care positively identified with being a musician. They stated that because they were musicians first, it made sense for them to play music other than the music that they were obligated to perform. One participant mentioned that she was “taking from the music and not having to give,” which exemplifies the difference between playing music for clients and playing for herself. Kunimara (2016) discussed the term *clinification*, which refers to the experience of creative arts therapists who only apply creativity to their work, and do not take time in creating for themselves. If, as music therapists, we view music only as an obligation and not as something that is enjoyable and part of our identity, our relationship with music could suffer. This could then have a negative impact on our use of music with clients.

One of the participants, M, described an experience related to *clinification*. Because she used an extensive amount of music for school and practicum, she did not have a desire to play music for herself. She did, however, utilize other creative arts for her self-care, including journaling, crafting, and cooking. Although, not all of the participants’ perceptions of being a musician align, it is important to consider the relationship that music therapy students have with music. From my experience, being a musician has always been an integral part of my life, because it allowed an outlet for my expression. Music therapy students’ ability to express themselves through a creative outlet could prove essential for any student to effectively practice self-care. Thus, the implementation of creative arts self-care in music therapy programs could prove beneficial for these students.

An important point of discussion is the idea of an external obligation to create music or engage in self-care. Although only one participant discussed an experience in which she was required to incorporate an unwanted self-care practice into her routine, all participants relayed an experience in which they did not benefit from a creative practice when it was imposed on them. Participant T's program required her to journal about her feelings, which she stated was not beneficial to her. The concept of mandatory self-care is contradictory based upon participant responses; when an obligation is imposed, the pressure of expectation may diminish the possible effectiveness as a self-care practice. Self-care is essential to incorporate as a music therapy student, however, when it becomes a requirement, it may be viewed as just another obligation. Other participants discussed how they only considered performing to be a self-care activity when they were practicing music that was not required of them. One participant's experience included playing with peers, and another reflected playing by herself. The low pressure and low expectation allowed them to play music more freely without having to worry about "proper technique," which helped relieve stress. Overall, this discovery could prove beneficial to the incorporation of self-care in music therapy curricula. Self-care should incorporate students' preferences, and be uniquely designed to benefit them in the most effective manner.

In relation to preferred self-care practices, most participants mentioned journaling as an effective way of processing emotions and coping with stress. The only participant who did not find journaling beneficial was the student whose academic program required her to journal. There is not enough evidence to determine whether she did not benefit from it because it was required of her. It is a possibility that the requirement did affect her perception of journaling. Overall, journaling proved to be an accessible and unobtrusive form of self-care for most participants. Two participants utilizing journaling in moments of stress and another participant

discussed her daily use of a prayer journal, which provided a spiritual outlet for her as well as a creative one. Journaling was described as unobtrusive because of the internal processing inherent in journaling, which is important because of the common use of journaling and its use for expression among all participants.

A theme derived from the original research questions and participant responses was the perceived difference between self-care practices as a student and as a professional. Despite not having experience as a professional, each student participant believed there would be differences between self-care as a student and as a professional. The differences themselves were not consistent. It is interesting the commonality of the perception of change in self-care when transitioning from student to professional. One participant discussed that, as a student, time management is more difficult due to inexperience and the task of balancing schoolwork, practicum, and working, which some students must do in order to financially support themselves. A common theme among most participants was that there was also a higher expectation for incorporating balance and self-care into one's life as a professional. This may be due to maturity, and the idea of "being an adult."

If a self-care practice is effective as a student, it is possible that the self-care practice may still be effective when working as a professional. In contrast, if a self-care practice is no longer effective, the individual may have the self-awareness to pursue another form of self-care. If more students have access to information regarding self-care, and gain experience as a student, it is more likely they will carry on those same self-care practices, or have the knowledge to seek out current self-care practices that suit them. These may or may not involve creative arts. Because of the perceived benefits gained from creative arts, it would be reasonable to incorporate them, thus supporting the developed theory.

**Limitations**

There were several limitations in the study. The first limitation was the interview process. I had difficulty remaining neutral to client responses and unknowingly attempted to validate them in order to make them feel at ease. This compromised some of the data because of my possible influence on their responses. I attempted to remain more neutral and objective as I underwent each interview, however, there continued to be moments of struggle in this aspect throughout the process of data collection.

A second limitation was my inexperience with grounded theory methodology. Although I utilized many sources in order to educate myself about this theory, I felt as if my analysis could have been more representative of the methodology. The memos included in the analysis process could have been more thorough in order to reflect the appropriate use of the grounded theory framework. Data analysis did not commence until after the first three of four interviews were conducted, whereas a grounded theory framework recommends that data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously. This limitation caused my selection of future participants to be less discerning, thus disabling the possibility of more appropriate data.

**Future Considerations**

Further investigation into the use of creative arts as self-care could prove beneficial to students in music therapy programs, and to professionals in the field. In addition to a grounded theory methodology, phenomenological inquiry and arts-based research could prove useful in studying this topic. The use of creative arts as self-care could provide more knowledge regarding the importance of using music for self-expression and the importance of being a musician in the field of music therapy.

### Conclusion

The theory developed from this study indicates that access to information regarding creative arts self-care practices should be provided in music therapy programs. It is understood that different music therapy programs have various approaches, and certain limitations as to what and how this implementation could take effect. The evidence gathered in this study indicates that creative arts have been demonstrated as a beneficial self-care practice for those music therapy student research participants who have used them. Important elements of this theory are that the engagement of *preferred* self-care practices are essential to effectiveness, and that music therapy students should be aware of their relationship with music and their identities as musicians. It is also important to be aware of how this relationship evolves over time as one transitions from student to professional. As musicians, awareness of our relationship with music is necessary because of our continuous use of music with clients. Incorporating self-care practices is also essential for music therapy students and music therapists because their wellness is an integral part of effectively working with clients. Creative arts could provide valuable resources for self-care practices for students and professionals, and in turn, could also provide immense benefits for music therapy clients.

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## Appendix A

### Invitational Email

Dear Music Therapy Student,

My name is Marion Kaiser and I am a current graduate student at Molloy College. I am conducting a research study called *An Exploration of Creative-Arts Based Self-Care Practices among Music Therapy Students*. The purpose of this study is to explore the use and possible benefits of creative arts self-care practices among students enrolled in a music therapy program and to develop a theory regarding the mechanism of self-care.

If you are receiving this email, you may be a possible candidate for this study. The requirements for participation are that you:

1. Are currently enrolled in an American Music Therapy Association (AMTA) approved undergraduate or graduate music therapy program
2. Are NOT a board certified music therapist
3. Have had experience utilizing creative arts as a self-care practice. This includes music, art, dance/movement, writing, and/or drama.

If you meet the criteria and are willing to share your experience over a scheduled interview, I invite you to participate in this study. The interview will take approximately one hour and may be done in person or over video conference call based on your preference. The questions will include open-ended questions that will seek to explore your experience using creative-arts as a self-care practice, the benefits you have received from using such practices, and your viewpoint on their importance for music therapy students and professionals.

Please note that participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time by contacting me or my faculty supervisor, even if the interview has already been conducted.

Please contact me below via email or phone if you wish to participate in this study.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Marion Kaiser

Molloy College

[Marionkaiser.piano@gmail.com](mailto:Marionkaiser.piano@gmail.com)

702-807-4577

Faculty Supervisor

Heather Wagner, PhD, MT-BC

[hwagner@molloy.edu](mailto:hwagner@molloy.edu)

860-550-4884

## **Appendix B**

### Consent Form

To Whom It May Concern:

Thank you for your interest in this study. Here is some information about the study being conducted so that you can make an informed decision about participating.

The title of this study is as follows: An Exploration of Creative-Arts Based Self-Care Practices among New Music Therapy Students

The primary researcher is Marion Kaiser with supervisory advisement from Heather Wagner.

The purpose of this study is to explore the use and possible benefits of creative arts self-care practices among students enrolled in a music therapy program and to develop a theory regarding the mechanism of self-care.

This study is a grounded theory qualitative study utilizing open-ended questions about personal experiences. Participation requires a semi-structured interview with the researcher that will last between 45-60 minutes. If necessary, the researcher may contact you after the initial interview with follow-up questions. These questions will not require more than 30 minutes of your time. These interviews will be conducted either in person or via video conference call. The interview questions will include inquiries about any creative self-care practices in which you engage and your experiences with such practices. These interviews will then be transcribed for data analysis. Coding techniques, which are inherent when conducting grounded theory

research, will be used to analyze and interpret these interviews. This information will then be analyzed and grouped into categories in order to develop themes. A theory will be developed based on the findings about the concept of self-care, specifically regarding music therapy students and creative-arts.

There are currently no known benefits to you as a participant, however, it is possible for the outcome of the study to provide important knowledge regarding self-care for music therapists and music therapy students, including you.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts. If for any reason, a question in the interview causes you discomfort, you will not be required to answer. The researcher may also provide a referral to a qualified professional if you show continued distress.

Because this is a qualitative study, participants will not be anonymous to the researcher. Participant identities will be kept confidential by the researcher, and participant codes will be used in all written documentation of their participation. All study information/documentation will be kept on a password protected computer only available to the researcher. If there is any part of the interview that you do not want to be included in the study, the researcher will remove it from data analysis. All study data will be kept for three years, as per Molloy College Institutional Review Board Requirements.

If you wish to withdraw from the study, you may do so by contacting me or my faculty supervisor by phone, email, or in person at any time during the duration of the study. This may be done before or after interviews have been conducted, and there is no penalty for withdrawal from the study.

If there are any questions regarding this study or any information contained in this form of consent, please contact the researcher or faculty supervisor. See below for contact information.

Researcher

Marion Kaiser

Molloy College

[Marionkaiser.piano@gmail.com](mailto:Marionkaiser.piano@gmail.com)

702-807-4577

Faculty Supervisor

Heather Wagner, PhD, MT-BC

[hwagner@molloy.edu](mailto:hwagner@molloy.edu)

860-550-4884

## Appendix C

### Guiding Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

1. What are the current self-care practices in which you engage?
2. Which self-care practices do you feel involve the use of creative arts?
3. How do you feel these practices benefit you?
4. Can you share a particular experience in which you benefited, physically, mentally, and/or emotionally, from one of these practices?
5. Do you think self-care is essential as a music therapy student? As a music therapist?
6. Is there a difference between self-care practices for professionals and for students?
7. Do you think it's important to play music for yourself unrelated to the music you play with clients?
8. Do you feel you have adequate access to information about self-care practices?
9. Does your current music therapy program advocate for students to engage in creative arts self-care practices?
10. What are some ways your music therapy program can provide opportunities for music therapy students to engage in creative arts self-care practices?

## Appendix D



1000 Hempstead Avenue  
Rockville Centre, NY 11571  
[www.molloy.edu](http://www.molloy.edu)

Tel. 516.323.3801

Tel. 516.323.3711

Date: December 22, 2016  
To: Professor Heather Wagner for Student Marion Kaiser  
From: Kathleen Maurer Smith, Ph.D.  
Co-Chair, Molloy College Institutional Review Board  
Patricia Eckardt, Ph.D., RN  
Co-Chair, Molloy College Institutional Review Board

**SUBJECT: MOLLOY IRB REVIEW AND DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS – MUS 551**  
**Study Title: An Exploration of Creative –Arts Based Self-Care Practices among Music Therapy Students**  
**Approved: December 22, 2016**  
**Approval No.: 13110109-1222**

Dear Dr. Heather Wagner / Marion Kaiser:

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Molloy College has reviewed the above-mentioned research proposal and determined that this proposal is approved by the committee. It is considered an EXEMPT review per the requirements of Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) regulations for the protection of human subjects as defined in 45CFR46.101(b) and has met the conditions for conducting the research. The IRB approval is given to the faculty supervisor and agency supervisor who have given their signed approval to oversee the work and student compliance with appropriate norms and professional behaviors in carrying out the project.

You may proceed with your research. Please submit a report to the committee at the conclusion of your project.

Changes to the Research: It is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to inform the Molloy College IRB of any changes to this research. A change in the research may change the project from EXPEDITED status that would require communication with the IRB.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Maurer Smith, Ph.D.

Patricia Eckardt, Ph.D., RN