

NURSING STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE WITH JOURNALING AND PERCEIVED STRESS

by

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ABSTRACT

Nursing students are often subject to many stressors during their time in nursing school, including clinical, academic, and social stressors. Expressive writing, journaling, or free writing, all terms used to describe the act of freely writing, has been recognized as an effective method of stress management in previous research. However, there is little to be found on the impact of journaling on nursing students. A qualitative descriptive study with online focused interviews was utilized to explore the perceptions students had of a free writing assignment. Participants were specifically asked about their opinions about the assignment, their habit formation, and their perceived effects of journaling. The benefits that the participants experienced were due to their ability to use journaling as a tool to allow them to be aware of their thoughts and emotions, understand them, and then take action. Of the six participants in the study, all continued to write after the assignment was over. Two stopped journaling in the period between the end of the assignment and the time of the interview. However, both of these participants stated that they planned to begin again. Findings from the study revealed that journaling had a positive effect on the mental and emotional wellbeing of nursing students. The experiences that the participants shared illustrated that journaling has the capability of being an effective tool for stress management and overall wellbeing for nursing students. However, the limited number of participants and lack of variance among participants make it difficult to determine whether the effectiveness of free writing can be generalized for all nursing student populations.

Nursing Students' Experience with Journaling and Perceived Stress

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Texas Christian University

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Author's Note

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	7
Literature Review	8
Theoretical Framework.....	11
Methods.....	12
Design.....	12
Setting and Sample	12
Description of Class Journaling Assignment.....	13
Recruitment	13
Consent Process	15
Data Collection	15
Data Analysis	16
Confidentiality Statement/Data Protection	16
Findings.....	17
Demographics.....	17
Significant Interview Themes.....	17
Discussion	22
Lessons Learned.....	23
References	25

Appendix A: Informational Flyer About Study27

Appendix B: Recruitment Emails.....28

Appendix C: In-Class Recruitment Announcement33

Appendix D: Informed Consent.....34

Appendix E: Demographic Data Form39

Appendix F: Interview Script41

Appendix G: Demographic Data Statistics.....43

Nursing Students' Experience with Journaling and Perceived Stress

Nurses experience difficult demands while they are on the job. As emotional, psychological, and physical demands accumulate, the toll of the profession on the nurse builds. The long 12-hour shifts, the emotional exhaustion and moral trauma, which is the distress that occurs from witnessing or committing an act that is against one's personal beliefs, of being a nurse, and the desire to maintain a composed image combine to increase stress and anxiety levels. Nurses are prepared to spend all of their time caring for others, but they often neglect to care for themselves (Tonarelli et al., 2017). Over time, nurses experience adverse consequences, such as burnout, which are associated with lower quality of patient care and higher turnover rates.

Stress occurs as a response to a changing event or circumstance. Selye (1974) identified two different kinds of stress, *distress* and *eustress*. Human bodies physiologically respond in the same manner to both kinds. However, mentally and emotionally, distress produces negative emotions and reactions, while eustress produces positive reactions. Often, when we discuss the implications of stress, we are discussing distress. The factors contributing to distress in nurses begin before they even commence their careers. They begin when students are enrolled in nursing programs. Once the program begins, students face the same stressors working nurses face, in addition to the stressors of academia. The time spent in nursing programs is when students develop and refine their nursing skills. This period is also critical for developing healthy habits. If nursing students have high levels of stress and poor coping mechanisms throughout all of their academic careers, they will likely carry these levels of stress and habits with them into their professional nursing careers.

However, effective stress management can lead to increased job satisfaction and quality patient care. Nurses must implement self-care activities into daily routines. Journaling is an effective coping mechanism for nurses and has helped reduced burnout (Dimitroff et al., 2016). Yet, the effects of consistent journaling on stress in nursing students have not been analyzed. If the habit of routine journaling can be added into their lives, nursing students would be able to carry it into their careers as nurses to help relieve chronic stress levels.

This study will explore nursing students' experience with expressive writing and their perception of how it affects their stress. *Expressive writing, journaling, and free writing* will be used interchangeably throughout this paper to describe the action of freely writing to express emotions and experiences. This writing practice allows students to write for themselves and gives them the power to decide whether to share their writing with others.

Literature Review

The student investigator found countless articles on mindfulness, journaling, nurses, and nursing students; however, there was little evidence on nursing students' utilizing journaling as a wellness practice. Search databases used were CINAHL, Medline, EMBASE, and Ovid. Based on the gap in research, the clinical question that the student investigator addressed was, "How do nursing students perceive the practice of regular journaling and its effect on stress in their daily lives?"

As nurses and other healthcare workers encounter stressful events, many of them internalize their emotional thoughts and reactions to those events. Journaling, especially expressive journaling, helps healthcare workers process thoughts that they may want

hidden from others (Tonarelli et al., 2017). Tonarelli et al. compared the differences in the effects of expressive writing and neutral writing on healthcare worker coping strategies, working satisfaction, and relational communication satisfaction. For the group assigned expressive writing, the participants were to describe their feelings about emotional events that occurred. Participants assigned to neutral writing were instructed to write about events in an objective manner, without any emotions. The participants assigned to expressive writing reported a significant increase in work satisfaction, compared to the neutral writing group. Additionally, over the course of the three days of the study, the expressive writing group displayed an increased use of positive adjectives and emotions to describe their feelings. As a result of being able to emotionally reflect on their experiences, these participants gained improved coping strategies and satisfaction (Tonarelli et al., 2017).

During times of extreme stress and trauma, individuals need ways to cope. Journaling provides those who may feel alone an outlet to express their fears and emotions. Scannell-Desch (2005) used a phenomenological study to explore the lived experience of nurses during the Vietnam War. In the study, multiple nurses discussed the positive effects of journaling for them. They stated that journaling helped them remember their experiences, process their feelings, and put events and memories into perspective. The nurses who did not journal regretted their decision. While most nursing students may not experience armed conflict, they do experience trauma, and the positive effects of journaling on emotions and memory can still apply. Students may experience distress due to their interactions with patients and providers in the clinical environment and academic and performance pressures in the classroom environment. Nursing students can utilize

expressive journaling as an effective method to express their emotions and reflect on their experiences, which can positively impact their academic success and wellbeing.

Compassion, the ability to not only feel for others and their suffering, but also act towards alleviating it, is an important aspect of nursing (Schantz, 2007). Compassion fatigue occurs when nurses are repeatedly caring for patients and exposed to patient suffering, without re-energizing and prioritizing their own emotional needs and wellbeing to allow them to continue to care for others (Dimitroff et al., 2016). When nurses experience compassion fatigue, their ability to effectively and holistically care for their patients becomes impaired. On the other end of the spectrum, compassion satisfaction occurs when nurses feel satisfied with the care and compassion they have given their patients. Dimitroff et al. explored the effects of journaling on compassion satisfaction, burnout, and trauma/compassion fatigue. Journaling allowed nurses to further understand their thoughts and feelings and make reasonable decisions.

Although journaling can be used as a primary source of self-care and coping, it can also be used in combination with other methods of mindfulness. Song and Lindquist (2020) examined the effect of mindfulness interventions on reducing stress, depression, and anxiety in students. MSBR (mindfulness based stress reduction) programs were used to teach students how to self-manage stress and anxiety levels and included activities such as meditation and yoga. The results of the study showed that those who participated in this program and gained mindful awareness also had reduced levels of depression, anxiety, and stress (Song & Lindquist, 2020). While journaling was not included in this specific study, it can be included in the process of mindfulness and self-care to further improve levels of stress and coping. Tonnarelli et al. (2017) discovered the positive

effects of journaling on coping and satisfaction. Therefore, the addition of journaling to existing mindfulness practices may produce a cumulative effect on nursing student wellness.

Theoretical Framework

The Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982) focuses on the behaviors and thoughts of individuals who are in the process of change. When applied to the concept of journaling and stress in nursing students, the action of journaling to reduce stress is the change that students need to enact. There are five stages of change that exist in a closed continuum: precontemplation, contemplation, determination, action, and maintenance. This research study took place during the contemplation, determination, and action stages of nursing students developing a journaling habit.

During the precontemplation stage, people are unaware. In this case, many nursing students are unaware of the effects their unhealthy levels of stress and coping mechanisms have on their health and future career. They do not know the positive effects of journaling or have not taken action to implement expressive writing into their daily lives. The contemplation stage exists when people become aware of the negative consequences and are considering changing their actions. When people progress to determination, they make a commitment to implementing changes in their behavior. The goal of this study is to promote awareness about the power nurses and nursing students have over managing their stress and mental health. In this case, the power that nursing students can gain is through journaling. They are asked commit to journal throughout the length of a semester. The action stage occurs as people actively engage in changing their behavior. By consistently journaling, nursing students are taking steps to effectively

manage their stress. Once the maintenance stage is reached, the new action becomes easier to continue and old habits are not as tempting. The maintenance should occur as a result of the intervention and journaling should become a habit that students can maintain into their post-college career. If reduced levels of stress are achieved during the journaling intervention, students should be willing to maintain their journaling habits. In times of increased stress or lack of control, people tend to fall back on both effective and ineffective habits and perform them more frequently (Neal et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important to instill positive habits in behavior so that individuals can maximize productivity and control.

Methods

Design

The student investigator conducted a qualitative descriptive study with online focused interviews. The study explored nursing students' experience with a required journaling assignment and its impact on their stress during the semester. Following the Nursing Review Board and University Review Board approval, recruitment, consent, and interviews with participants began. The study built on a larger faculty-driven teaching strategy examining the effects of journaling on writing development and perceived nursing student wellness. The student investigator focused interviews on the participants' experience with journaling and perceived stress.

Setting and Sample

The study was conducted at a private Christian university in the southern United States with a baccalaureate nursing program. The journaling intervention was incorporated into three sections of the required nursing course, Professional Roles III

N30633, in the Junior II semester. The opportunity to participate was offered to all students over the age of 18 that have been enrolled in the course during 2020 (section 056 of spring 2020, section 011 of summer 2020, section 055 of fall 2020). Students in the course were given routine assignments in which they journaled for a specific number of minutes and days each week for 10 to 11 weeks throughout the semester for course credit.

Description of Class Journaling Assignment. As part of the requirements for the course, students journaled multiple times each week to instill the habit of daily journaling. The professor gave students weekly journal assignments to guide them. The assignment encouraged free writing. Students could write about anything they wanted, for the entire time they were supposed to be journaling. The professor also provided prompts for students who preferred to use them. The combination of prompts and free writing in the assignment gave students flexibility in their writing. They could have chosen to write about whatever topic they want, or they could use any of the prompts. Each week students reported the number of days and amount of time they had journaled, but they did not submit their journals for faculty review or grading.

Recruitment

There were three phases of recruitment. During the initial phase of recruitment, the student investigator attended the fall 2020 class section in which the targeted population was enrolled to explain the study purpose, the methods, and interview procedure. The student investigator provided a flyer with information about the study and contact information for the student investigator (Appendix A). Students in the class were informed they could choose not to participate in the study. The professor, who is also the faculty

investigator, introduced the student investigator and emphasized that participation or non-participation would have no bearing on the course procedures and outcomes. The professor was not present during the student investigator's presentation. Instead, another faculty member on the research committee was present to assist.

The student investigator initiated the second phase of recruitment after no students enrolled in the study. During the second phase of recruitment, emails were sent to engage all students from 2020, including the spring, summer, and fall 2020 semesters. The student and faculty investigators collaborated with the nursing program administration to send emails. A total of four emails were sent at the beginning of each week of recruitment (Appendix B). The email explained the study purpose, methods, and interview procedure and was sent to all students who completed the journaling assignment. The email also let students know they did not have to participate in the study. A recruitment flyer with information about the study was also attached to the email for the potential participants to review.

After the second phase, three participants enrolled. After transcripts from those three participants were analyzed, investigators decided to add a third phase of recruitment to explore findings further. The final phase of recruitment occurred as a series of three emails, similar to those sent during the second phase. However, following these emails, announcements were made in class where students were enrolled to remind students of the email (Appendix C).

The student investigator was available to answer questions via phone or email. Students who chose to participate were given the link to the consent on Qualtrics and a link to schedule the interviews. If the participant was not available during any of the pre-

assigned time slots, the participant and student investigator scheduled alternative times to fit both of their schedules. Participants who completed all requirements of the study received a complimentary journal, nursing pen, and \$10 Amazon gift card that was distributed following the completion of the interviews. The complimentary journal was the Josie King Foundation journal (<https://josieking.org/jkf-tools/nurses-journal/>).

Consent Process

The student investigator obtained informed consent from participants prior to the beginning of data collection. The participants were given the link to the consent (Appendix D) to read in the recruitment email and the student investigator was available via phone or email to answer any possible questions the participants may have had prior to their signature. Once participants consented, they were each de-identified and assigned a unique numeric code, starting with 101. The coding sheet that identified the associated participant was online in a password-protected Excel file. It was kept confidential and only accessible to investigators on the password-protected Excel file.

Data Collection

After consent and before the interview, demographic data (age, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, economic status, and current mindfulness practices) were collected using a survey created by the student investigator (Appendix E). Mailing information for the participants was also collected using Qualtrics formatting that separated the information from the demographic data. The faculty investigator provided the average amount of time students in the course, regardless of participation in the study, journaled throughout the semester.

The interviews were scheduled using an online video call. The participants were asked questions regarding their thoughts and experiences using journaling and how it affected their stress (Appendix F). All the interviews were audio-recorded using an external recorder. The audio-recorded interviews were transcribed using TranscribeMe, an online professional transcription program.

Data Analysis. *Content analysis*, the analysis of words and phrases to find common themes and concepts, was the technique used to analyze the transcriptions. Once the transcriptions were completed, categories were used to group topics that were discussed in the interview. The student and faculty investigators began individually analyzing the transcripts to find significant words and phrases within and across categories. The investigators used constant comparison to compare new findings to previous findings. Data were grouped into similar themes. As the process continued, it evolved into a collaborative reading process where both investigators read and categorized transcripts together. Once each investigator was done, notes were compared in order to verify findings. Differences were resolved through discussion and consensus building. This process continued until the investigators had each carefully reviewed all responses.

Confidentiality Statement/Data Protection

All information collected as part of this study was kept confidential. No participant names were placed on any of the data collection measures. Only the investigators of this study had access to the password-protected coding sheet that aligned the participants' names to their codes. The consent forms were on Qualtrics online containing the participant names and contact information and were kept separately from any of the other

data collection measures. The demographic data received through Qualtrics was de-identified and only the designated investigators had access to the data collected.

Findings

Demographics

There were six participants in the study (Appendix G). All participants reported being White, heterosexual females. No participants reported significant financial burdens. Four participants were enrolled in the spring 2020 semester, and one was enrolled in the summer 2020 semester and had since graduated from the nursing program. Four of the six participants had some form of journaling experience prior to the class assignment.

Significant Interview Themes

The contents of the interview transcripts were categorized based on questions that were asked in the interview and the meanings behind them. After categorization of all the transcripts, themes were searched for within and across all categories. Seven significant themes were discovered.

Opinions on the Assignment and Journaling as a Tool. When the journaling intervention was first assigned, most participants viewed it as another task to complete. However, those participants seemed to experience a change in their perception as they participated in the assignment. Over time, participants began to enjoy the assignment as they observed the benefits.

Initially, I was like, "Oh, this assignment, I don't really want to do it." Very quickly I realized how good it was going to be for me.

There was also a suggestion to begin this assignment earlier on in the nursing program in order to better with the habit formation process.

I think that more teachers should implement that into their classes. That's the only teacher I've had in all of nursing school that has suggested doing journaling as an assignment. And I think that it should be continued throughout or even started freshman year in our first year of nursing classes, instead of all the way up to all role three. Because by then we don't have as much school left as we could have, so maybe just starting it a little bit earlier and just trying to get teachers in different classes, maybe in all of the three roles classes - those are our writing classes - to continue to keep it up, throughout all of nursing school.

Starting Process. With the exception of one participant, participants shared that starting with small doses of five minutes per day made journaling sustainable. The assignment also offered accountability for participants to continue to journal. However, once they began to participate in journaling and noticed the benefits, accountability shifted from the assignment to self.

I really did find myself trying to follow a schedule of when the journals were due and how often we were supposed to do it. And I found myself keeping up with it even after a while just because of how good it made me feel while I was doing it, especially with all the stuff that was going on last month or I guess that was a year ago.

Benefits. The benefits that participants experienced from journaling occurred in an arc of three stages. Initially, participants were able to become self-aware of their emotions and thoughts. After the realization, participants were able to interpret and make meaning out of what they are feeling. Finally, they were able to act and move forward.

I think it was just an outlet for anything that I needed to - I guess - talk about, but I didn't know. Don't express my feelings. So just because it's like, "Oh whatever [laughter]", but I think it allowed me to write things out and think about things so that I could decompress [inaudible] "Oh, maybe that's not actually that big of a deal." Or maybe I should think about that a little bit more or focus on this more. So, I guess, re-evaluating.

Benefits Regarding Stress. Some participants stated that journaling helped alleviate stress by allowing them to express their thoughts and reasons for stress. Through this expression, participants felt a sense of relief and a decrease in stress occurred.

And I still find myself when I'm stressed or when I'm struggling and I just have a lot of thoughts running through my mind, especially at night, I can just kind of roll over and just jot some things down and it's just a way that I can get something out.

Benefits Found in Exemplar. During the interview, the student investigator asked participants "Can you describe a specific instance when journaling was therapeutic?" When describing examples of therapeutic journaling experiences, participants described journaling as a tool for them to slow down, allow themselves to be immersed in their feelings, and then make their decisions. This pattern aligned with the general benefits of journaling that the participants shared regarding self-awareness, interpretation of emotions, and further action.

A participant shared an experience where she initially immediately acted, but then decided to pause, take a step back to journal, then return to the situation she was facing.

I immediately went to go care for my mom and I realized very quickly that I didn't feel equipped to do that. And so I went and journaled... And I was able to kind of help process that with myself before going and caring for my mom. And so once I was able to journal and start that processing of my own, I was better able to care for her.

One participant's journaling practice was able to help her through difficult decision making by allowing her to sit with her thoughts and values.

So I journaled about that experience a lot just because it was a tough battle for me to have to choose during all that time ... nobody really knew what was right or wrong early on in that time. So that was an experience that helped me kind of think through it and think through what I should say to her.

Downsides. Participants either did not state any downsides in regard to journaling or only referred to downsides relating to the assignment, but not the act of journaling itself.

I do you think that any time you have to do something, it makes it ... It's a task in that sense. So I think that's really it, though. But when you look at it realistically, it wasn't a huge time commitment or anything.

Nursing Student to Nursing Student Advice. When asked about the advice they would give to other nursing students beginning the practice of journaling, most participants shared similar answers regarding habit formation and thought processes. First, to start a habit, it is important to start small, such as a sentence or a minute, but to practice regularly. However, it is important to not put any pressure on writing and to have

grace for oneself. Second, to fully enjoy and gain the benefits of journaling, students must allow themselves to be free and honest with themselves and their circumstances.

I would say don't put pressure on yourself and don't feel like you have to write about certain things or I felt like some days maybe I had a sentence to write and I felt okay with just writing that. And I know that as humans, we always want to just have so much and we want to do the most. But I think my advice would be, if you have one sentence just to write down, write it down, say something on that, because the likelihood of you just going on past that one sentence is so easy after you just start writing.

Current Practice. After students completed the semester in which they were enrolled in Professional Roles III, all participants of the study continued to journal afterward. Two of the six participants stopped journaling during the time between the end of the semester they were enrolled and the interview. However, those two participants stated that they plan on beginning the practice again.

I was for a little while. I was taking a break from it, but I want to try to pick it back up. No real reason. Like I said, I do think it's therapeutic and it helps process through things. But I just haven't. I think I just got distracted from it and so trying to get back into it.

Presence of Faith. Without prompting, the topic of faith and religion surfaced with three of the participants. These participants discussed the incorporation and influence of their faith, specifically Christianity, on their journaling habits. It appeared that these participants that were faith driven were also those who were still regularly journaling at the time of their interviews.

I set aside an hour to spend time in worship or in prayer and reading the bible. And so for me, journaling comes natural with that... my journal is sometimes where it's written as one big prayer of me pouring my heart before... so I think that's something that's influenced my practice.

Discussion

Overall, the demographic data showed that the participant population had similar characteristics in terms of gender, race, sexuality, and economic stability. With little variance in demographics, it is difficult to determine if journaling is an effective intervention for all nursing student populations. According to the survey, four of the six participants had some form of previous journaling experience. From further discussion in the interviews, only two of those four with experience practiced regular journaling prior to the Professional Roles III course. Despite previous journaling experience, all participants were able to improve their journaling habits and experience greater benefits.

The findings revealed that nursing students who practiced regular free writing experienced positive effects. Themes found throughout the study revolved around thought processes that participants experienced as they journaled, which was consistent with the current literature (Scannell-Desch, 2005). However, the presence and influence of faith on free writing was a theme that presented an area that could use further investigation.

Discoveries were made about nursing student journaling during the contemplation, determination, action, and maintenance stages of the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982). Many participants discussed changing their opinion on journaling after realizing its positive effects on them. As a result, participants gained

intrinsic motivation to keep up with their journaling instead of just completing their assignments. All of the participants were able to maintain their writing for some period of time after the end of the assignment. However, at the time of the interviews, only four participants shared that they still journaled every day or during times of increased stress.

Moving forward, free writing should continue to be investigated as a form of stress management. Based on a participant's advice, the free writing assignment should be given to students earlier on in their nursing program and continued until they graduate. Studies should be conducted on the increased length of intervention to determine if it improves habit maintenance and positive perception by nursing students. In addition, to supplement current qualitative studies on journaling and stress on nursing students, quantitative studies can be conducted using hair follicles to measure cortisol and physiological stress levels.

Lessons Learned

While working on this project, I (student investigator) have gained a lot of knowledge and wisdom. The biggest piece of knowledge that I've learned is that research, of any kind, but especially those with participants, requires a lot of resilience, persistence, creativity, and flexibility. When I first began this project over one year ago, my initial plan was to conduct a quantitative study with average cortisol levels to measure physiological stress levels. However, due to the unforeseen circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, my plan altered to this qualitative descriptive study. As researchers, it is important to be prepared for unexpected external circumstances that may affect the study and be ready to change paths. Furthermore, it is important for researchers to believe in and be invested in their work. With all of the obstacles faced, it

is easy to feel defeated. However, passion in the research makes it easier to be persistent and resilient.

As a result of this change to qualitative research, I have been able to realize how rich and complex qualitative can be. Numerical data from quantitative research offers concrete and straightforward information. However, it limits the further interpretation of results. Researchers are given specific answers to the questions they were asking. The data gathered from qualitative studies, such as interviews, allows for exploration and multidimensional insight. Participants have the ability to provide valuable information that was not initially asked for, which can add to the researcher's findings.

As I move forward in my nursing career towards the bedside, I will bring all of my lessons learned related to not only my study, but research in general, with me. The positive effects that I have discovered from using free writing as a stress management tool will be helpful for me to keep in mind and share with other new nurses around me as we navigate this big shift in our lives. Lastly, the power of resilience, passion, and exploratory questioning can also be applied towards the nursing profession.

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Appendix A**Informational Flyer about Study**

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH STUDY
**Nursing Students' Experience with
Journaling and Perceived Stress**

IRB# 1920-333-AM1

Dr. Pam Frable, Nalissa Houth

- TCU Nursing is conducting research to determine the effect of journaling in nursing students, specifically regarding perceived stress levels.
- Recruitment criteria include nursing students, over the age of 18, who were enrolled in the Professional Roles III N30633 (section 056 in Spring 2020, section 011 in Summer 2020, section 055 in Fall 2020) course during 2020.
- You will be asked to complete a demographic data survey and participate in a 30- to 45- minute interview to discuss your experience with the journaling assignment in your Professional Roles III course.
- Participation will take place online via Zoom and Qualtrics. There are minimal risks involved in this research that include emotional discomfort or distress. However, you will not be forced to answer questions or share anything that you do not want to. COVID-19 risks will be minimized through the use of Qualtrics and Zoom to prevent in person contact.
- The benefits of the study include the opportunity for you to reflect on your experience journaling throughout the semester and the ability for you to contribute to the TCU Nursing Student Wellness Initiative.
- After completion of the study, you will receive a complimentary journal, pen, and \$10 Amazon gift card.

For more information, please scan the QR code:



Or go to: <https://linktr.ee/journalingandstress>

Texas Christian University

TCU does not discriminate based upon any protected status. Please see

<http://www.tcu.edu/notice-of-nondiscrimination.asp>

Appendix B

Recruitment Emails

Recruitment Message 1

I hope you are doing well, staying safe, and looking forward to the promise and opportunities of 2021.

Purpose: I am writing to invite you to participate in a qualitative study that Nalissa Houth, an Honors student, designed to explore nursing students' experiences with expressive writing. Nalissa needs your help to complete her study, which is part of upper division Honors requirements. Although there is research about nurses and expressive writing, there is little to no research about nursing students and expressive writing.

Background. In 2020 during Professional Roles III (Research and EBP in Nursing), you completed an ongoing journaling assignment to build writing skills and promote wellbeing. Senior II students who worked on the TCU nursing student wellness initiative in 2019 advocated for "free" writing as a wellness practice. They defined "free" writing as being able to journal without being required to submit journals for faculty review. Because of your experience with the journaling assignment in Professional Roles III, you are in a unique position to share how journaling affected your wellbeing.

How to join the study: Please consider accepting this invitation to participate in Nalissa's study. The results of the study will contribute to the TCU nursing student wellness initiative. I have attached a flyer about the study. You can contact Nalissa at n.houth@tcu.edu or (214-934-4256). You can access the informed consent here: https://tcu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3WuP0Gx12kofE3j If you choose to be in the study and complete all the requirements, you will receive a complimentary journal, nursing pen, and \$10 Amazon gift card.

Thank you for thinking about volunteering to be part of this study. I realize the beginning of the semester is busy, so I will send reminders about this opportunity over the next few weeks.

Be safe, be healthy, and stay strong through 2021.

Dr. Frable

Recruitment Message 2

I hope your semester is off to a good start. I wanted to remind you that Nalissa Houth is recruiting participants for her qualitative study exploring nursing students' experiences with expressive writing. Because you journaled in Professional Roles III, you are in a unique position to contribute to this study. By participating in this study, you will help build the TCU nursing student wellness initiative and help Nalissa complete an important aspect of her upper division Honors requirements.

You can learn more by reviewing the attached flyer or contacting Nalissa at n.houth@tcu.edu or (214-934-4256). You can access the informed consent here: https://tcu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3WuP0Gx12kofE3j Your total time commitment will be about an hour. If you choose to be in the study and complete all the

requirements, you will receive a complimentary journal, nursing pen, and \$10 Amazon gift card.

Thank you for considering participating in the study. Remain safe, healthy, and strong through 2021.

Dr. Fable

Recruitment Message 3

JOURNALING AND STRESS

How does reflective journaling affect stress and daily life?

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to explore the experience of nursing students as they develop the habit of journaling and how it effects stress and self care.

METHODS

Between January 19, 2020, and February 19, 2020, participants will have the opportunity to be interviewed through Zoom about their experience journaling throughout the semester.

BENEFITS FOR YOU

You will be have the opportunity to reflect on your experience throughout the journaling assignment from Professional Roles III. If effective, journaling can be incorporated into daily life as you navigate the rest of nursing school or the nursing profession. You will also be contributing to the good of the nursing student community because this study is part of the nursing student wellness initiative. You will receive a complimentary journal, nursing pen, and \$10 Amazon gift card after you have completed all requirements of the study.



If interested, use the QR code below to sign up for a time slot for the interview, along with the link to the consent and surveys.



Recruitment Message 4

There is still time for you to enroll in Nalissa Houth's qualitative study exploring nursing students' experiences with expressive writing. Your participation is important for building the TCU nursing student wellness initiative. I hope you will consider being in the study. You can learn more by reviewing the attached flyer or contacting Nalissa at n.houth@tcu.edu or (214-934-4256). You can access the informed consent here: https://tcu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3WuP0Gx12kofE3j Your total time commitment will be about an hour. If you choose to be in the study and complete all the requirements, you will receive a complimentary journal, nursing pen, and \$10 Amazon gift card.

Thank you for considering participating in the study. Remain safe, healthy, and strong through 2021.

Dr. Frable

Recruitment Message 5

There is still time to share your experiences with journaling and wellbeing. We are looking for three more people to participate in a qualitative study that Nalissa Houth, an Honors student, designed to explore nursing students' experiences with expressive writing.

Nalissa needs your help to complete her study, which is part of upper division Honors requirements. Although there is research about nurses and expressive writing, there is little to no research about nursing students and expressive writing.

Background. In 2020 during Professional Roles III (Research and EBP in Nursing), you completed an ongoing journaling assignment to build writing skills and promote wellbeing. Senior II students who worked on the TCU nursing student wellness initiative in 2019 advocated for "free" writing as a wellness practice. They defined "free" writing as being able to journal without being required to submit journals for faculty review. Because of your experience with the journaling assignment in Professional Roles III, you are in a unique position to share how journaling affected your wellbeing.

How to join the study: Please consider accepting this invitation to participate in Nalissa's study. The results of the study will contribute to the TCU nursing student wellness initiative. I have attached a flyer about the study. You can contact Nalissa at n.houth@tcu.edu or (214-934-4256). You can access the informed consent here: https://tcu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3WuP0Gx12kofE3j If you choose to be in the study and complete all the requirements, you will receive a complimentary journal, nursing pen, and \$10 Amazon gift card.

Thank you for thinking about volunteering to be part of this study. I realize the beginning of the semester is busy, so I will send reminders about this opportunity over the next few weeks.

I hope you continue to be safe, be healthy, and strong as you complete this semester.

Dr. Frable

Recruitment Message 6

We need your insights. Please consider joining the qualitative study exploring nursing students' experiences with expressive writing.

Nalissa Houth is seeking three more participants for this study. Because you journaled in Professional Roles III, you are in a unique position to contribute to this study. By participating in this study, you will help build the TCU nursing student wellness initiative and help Nalissa complete an important aspect of her upper division Honors requirements.

You can learn more by reviewing the attached flyer or contacting Nalissa at n.houth@tcu.edu or (214-934-4256). You can access the informed consent here: https://tcu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3WuP0Gx12kofE3j Your total time commitment will be about an hour. If you choose to be in the study and complete all the requirements, you will receive a complimentary journal, nursing pen, and \$10 Amazon gift card.

Thank you for considering participating in the study.

Remain safe, healthy, and strong through 2021.

Dr. Frable

Recruitment Message 7

There is still time for you to enroll in Nalissa Houth's qualitative study exploring nursing students' experiences with expressive writing. Your participation is important for building the TCU nursing student wellness initiative. I hope you will consider being in the study.

You can learn more by reviewing the attached flyer or contacting Nalissa at n.houth@tcu.edu or (214-934-4256). You can access the informed consent here: https://tcu.co1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3WuP0Gx12kofE3j Your total time commitment will be about an hour. If you choose to be in the study and complete all the requirements, you will receive a complimentary journal, nursing pen, and \$10 Amazon gift card.

Thank you for considering participating in the study. We hope you are enjoying your semester and the advent of spring.

Dr. Frable

Appendix C

In-Class Recruitment Announcement

Announcement by Dr. Frable

“Some of you were in the Roles III Evidence Based Practice in Nursing courses I taught in 2020. If you were, I recently sent an email reminding you of the opportunity to join Nalissa Houth’s study exploring journaling and nursing student wellness. We’re still looking for a few more participants. I know we all get a lot of emails, so I wanted to highlight that email in case you want to consider being a part of the study.”

Announcement by faculty other than Dr. Frable

“Some of you were in the Roles III Evidence Based Practice in Nursing courses Dr. Frable taught in 2020. If you were, she recently sent an email reminding you of the opportunity to join Nalissa Houth’s study exploring journaling and nursing student wellness. Nalissa is still looking for a few more participants. I know we all get a lot of emails, so I wanted to highlight that email in case you want to consider being a part of the study.”

Appendix D

Informed Consent



Texas Christian University Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Title of Research: Nursing Students' Experience with Journaling and Perceived Stress

Principal Investigator: Dr. Pam Frable

[Co-investigators:] Nalissa Houth

Overview: You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a current or former TCU Nursing student, over the age of 18, who was enrolled in Professional Roles III N30633 (section 056 in Spring 2020, section 011 in Summer 2020, section 055 in Fall 2020) during 2020. Taking part in this research is voluntary.

Study Details: This study is being conducted via *Qualtrics* and *Zoom*. The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of journaling on stress in nursing students. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to schedule an interview to discuss your experience with the journaling assignment in your Professional Roles III course. The interview will take approximately 30- to 45- minutes.

Participants: You are being asked to take part because you were or are currently nursing students. We want to see how a journaling intervention impacts students' experience with stress. If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of maximum 23 participants in this research study at TCU.

Voluntary Participation: Your participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate and may stop your participation at any time.

Confidentiality: Even if we publish the findings from this study, we will keep your information private and confidential. Anyone with authority to look at your records must keep them confidential.

What is the purpose of the research? The purpose of the study is to explore nursing students' experiences with expressive writing and their perception of its effect on their stress. Based on previous research (Dimitroff et al., 2017; Scannell-Desch, 2005; Tonarelli et al., 2017), journaling has been shown to be an effective method of stress management in many populations, including nurses and nursing students. However, previous studies focused on self-reported stress levels or salivary biomarkers to determine the efficacy of journaling. In this research study, we will be exploring the experiences that students have while they are journaling and its effects on stress.

What is my involvement for participating in this study?

We expect your participation to take typically two interactions. After consent and before the interview, the first interaction will be when you fill in the demographic data form. During the second interaction, you will be asked to participate in a 30- to 45- minute interview between January 19, 2021, and March 31, 2021, in order to reflect on your experience journaling during the course. You will sign up for an interview time slot using the link provided. If you are not available during any of the predetermined time slots, you may reach out the Nalissa Houth to schedule an alternative time. The interview will occur via Zoom and will be audio recorded using an external device and transcribed using TranscribeMe. Questions such as "Can you describe a specific instance when journaling was therapeutic?" will be asked. You may choose not to answer a question or withdraw at any time during the interview or after the interview is over.

Recordings will not be identifiable and will be labeled based on the unique code number assigned to participants after consent, starting from 101 in the order in which participants enroll. Recordings and transcripts will be kept for 3 years after the study is completed and a final report has been submitted to the IRB and will then be destroyed.

A fact sheet about the results of this study will be sent to all class members at their TCU email address regardless of participation.

Are there any alternatives and can I withdraw?

You do not have to participate in this research study.

You should only take part in this study if you want to volunteer. You should not feel that there is any pressure to take part in the study. You are free to participate in this research or withdraw at any time. You may withdraw from the study or withdraw any responses from the study at any time, even after the interview has been completed.

What are the risks for participating in this study and how will they be minimized?

There are some risks you might experience from being in this study. They include possible distress, grief, anxiety, discomfort, or other negative emotional consequences due to interview questions that will ask you to discuss stress. To minimize emotional distress, you will not be forced to answer any questions or share anything that you do not want to. To minimize risks to privacy, participant information will be stored securely and be password protected. The study will be online in order to reduce COVID-19 risks. The consents will be signed using online and surveys will be completed using Qualtrics. The interviews will be conducted online so that participants will not be in contact with the researchers or other participants.

What are the benefits of participating in this study?

You might benefit from being in this study because it will allow you to reflect on your experience writing throughout the semester. Through the interview, you may realize the advantages or disadvantages that journaling has on your daily life. This study will be contributing to the TCU nursing student wellness initiative, so participation will also

benefit the nursing student community at TCU. You will also receive a fact sheet about the study once it is complete.

Will I be compensated for participating in this study?

You will receive a complimentary journal (\$5), pen (\$1), and Amazon gift card (\$10) for participating in this study. They will be disbursed after the study has been completed via mail to the address given to us by participants.

What are my costs to participate in the study?

To participate in the research, you will not need to pay for anything.

How will my confidentiality be protected?

Every effort will be made to limit the use and disclosure of your personal information, including research study records, to people who have a need to review this information. We cannot promise complete secrecy. Your records may be reviewed by authorized University personnel or other individuals who will be bound by the same provisions of confidentiality.

All information collected as part of this study will be kept confidential. No participant names will be placed on any of the data collection measures, but rather each participant will be assigned a unique code number. The participants will be assigned a number in chronological order starting from 101 in the order in which participants enroll. Only the investigators of this study will have access to the password-protected coding sheet that aligns the participants' names to their codes. The consent forms will be on Qualtrics online containing the participant names and contact information and will be kept separately from any of the other data collection measures. Paper back-up copies of the consents and transcripts will be kept in the faculty investigator's locked office and in locked cabinets where only designated investigators have access. Digital copies of transcripts will be secured in a password protected folder accessible by the PI's password protected computers. Demographic data received through Qualtrics will be de-identified and only the designated investigators will have access to the data collected. Only the co-PI will have access to the names of participants in the study. Your information or samples collected as part of the research, even if identifiers are removed, will NOT be used or distributed for future research studies.

We may publish what we learn from this study. If we do, we will not include your name. We will not publish anything that would let people know who you are.

What will happen to the information collected about me after the study is over?

We will not keep your research data to use for future research or other purpose. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be kept secure and stored separately from the research data collected as part of the project.

We will not share your research data with other investigators.

Who should I contact if I have questions regarding the study or concerns regarding my rights as a study participant?

You can contact Dr. Pam Frable at p.frable@tcu.edu, (817-253-6707) or Nalissa Houth at n.houth@tcu.edu, (214-934-4256) with any questions that you have about the study.

Dr. Dru Riddle, Chair, TCU Institutional Review Board, (817) 257-6811, d.riddle@tcu.edu; or Dr. Floyd Wormley, Associate Provost of Research, research@tcu.edu

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. A copy also will be kept with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

Printed Participant Name

Participant Email Address

Signature Date

Nalissa Houth

Printed Name of the person obtaining consent

Nalissa Houth

10/31/20

Signature Date

Consent to be audio recorded

I agree to be audio recorded. Yes _____ No _____

Signature Date



**TEXAS CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY
Media Recording Release Form**

Title of Research: Nursing Students' Experience with Journaling and Perceived Stress

Study Investigators: Nalissa Houth, Dr. Pam Frable

Record types. As part of this study, the following types of media records will be made of you during your participation in the research:

- Audio Recording

Record uses. Please indicate what uses of the media records listed above you are willing to permit by initialing below and signing the form at the end. We will only use the media records in ways that you agree to.

- The media record(s) can be studied by the research team for use in this research project.

Please initial: _____

- The media records(s) and/or their transcriptions can be used for scientific or scholarly publications.
- The media records(s) and/or their transcriptions can be used at scholarly conferences, meeting, or workshops.

Please initial: _____

I have read the above descriptions and give my consent for the use of the media recordings as indicated by my initials above.

Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

If you have concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, Dr. Dru Riddle, Chair, TCU Institutional Review Board, (817) 257-6811, d.riddle@tcu.edu; or Dr. Floyd Wormley, Associate Provost of Research, research@tcu.edu

Appendix E

Demographic Data Form

Age: _____

Pronouns: _____

Gender: _____

Sexual Orientation: _____

Semester enrolled in Professional Roles III:

Spring 2020

Summer 2020

Fall 2020

Race (more than one may be selected):

White

Black/African American

Native American/Alaskan Native

Asian

Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

Other: _____

Ethnicity: Hispanic/Latinx

non-Hispanic/non-Latinx

Are you an international student?

Yes

No

If Yes, list nationality: _____

Is your household income sufficient to meet your needs? Yes

No

Student Loans:

Yes

No

If Yes:

< \$10,000

\$10,000-\$20,000

\$20,000-\$40,000

>\$40,000

Do you work part time at least 18 hours a week?

Yes

No

Have you ever gone without food because of finances?

Yes

No

Did you journal prior to the class assignment?

Yes

No

Do you currently engage in regular practice of

Yoga?

Yes

No

Mindfulness?

Yes

No

Meditation?

Yes

No

Other relaxation techniques?

Yes

No

List: _____

Mailing Address (This will only be used to mail your complimentary gifts to you after the completion of the study.)

Appendix F

Interview Script

Hello, my name is Nalissa Houth. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Just to remind you, this will be a 30-45-minute interview regarding your experience journaling for your Professional Roles III class. I will be audio recording this interview using an external audio recorder to transcribe later on using TranscribeMe, a professional transcription service. You can choose not to answer a question and ask any questions as needed at any point in the interview. You may also withdraw at any time during the interview or after the interview is over. To ensure your confidentiality, I will not refer to you by your name during the interview. I will begin the interview by stating the date and identification number.

1. Please describe your experience journaling when you were in Professional Roles III.

If further prompting is needed, ask these follow-up prompts:

- a. How easy or difficult was it for you to maintain this habit of journaling?
- b. How did you feel about setting aside time in your day to journal?
- c. What were specific benefits related to the journaling?
- d. What downsides did you find to journaling, if any?

2. How did journaling affect you?

If not mentioned by the participant, ask this question:

- a. Do you think it had an effect on your emotional or mental wellbeing?

3. Can you describe a specific instance when journaling was therapeutic?

4. What advice would you give to other nursing students, or people in general, who want to begin a habit of journaling?

If further prompting is needed, ask this follow-up prompt:

- a. What would you change about how you began your experience journaling in order to improve your experience or make it more effective?

5. Have you continued to journal since the class ended? Why or why not?

If participant has continued to journal, ask this question:

- a. Can you describe what your journaling practice is like now?

6. Is there anything that I didn't ask you that you wanted me to ask you? Or is there anything else you want to tell me about your experience?

Those are all the questions that I have for you today. Do you want your complimentary gifts to be mailed or do you want to pick them up from the nursing office?

If mailed: Your complimentary gifts for your participation should be mailed and delivered to you within the next couple of weeks. Can you verify the address that I have on file for you? Thank you again for your time.

Appendix G

Demographic Data Statistics

Age	21: 16.67% 22: 66.67 % 29: 16.67%
Pronouns	She/Her: 100%
Gender	Female: 100%
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual: 100%
Semester Enrolled in Professional Roles III	Spring 2020: 66.67% Summer 2020: 16.67% Fall 2020: 16.67%
Race	White: 100%
Ethnicity	Hispanic/Latinx: 16.67% Non-Hispanic/Non-Latinx: 83.33%
International Student	No: 100%
Sufficient Household Income	Yes: 100%
Student Loans (If yes, how much)	Yes (\$10,000-\$20,000): 16.67% No: 83.33%
Part Time Work (at least 18 hours)	No: 100%
Ever Gone Without Food?	No: 100%
Prior Journaling Experience	Yes: 66.67% No: 33.33%
Other Stress Reduction Practices:	Yoga: 66.67% Mindfulness: 33.33% Meditation: 50% Other: 16.67%