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# Millennial music students: Perceptions of general stress, performance stress, physical health, and mental health

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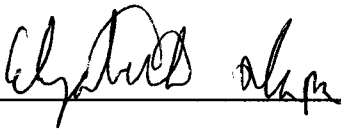
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Millennial music students: Perceptions of general stress,  
performance stress, physical health, and mental health

(TITLE)

BY

Elizabeth Plapp

**THESIS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

Master of Science in College Student Affairs

IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
CHARLESTON, ILLINOIS

2011

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my nieces and nephews; Matthew, James, Ashley, Mikaela, Kenny, Jacob, Abby, and Hannah. You all are blessings and an inspiration to me. I hope to be a support in your life as your parents and grandparents have been to me.

*“Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss you will land among the stars.”* –Brian Littrell

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## ABSTRACT

The participants in the current study were examined utilizing qualitative research. Focus groups were conducted to examine the experience of music majors in relation to general stress, performance stress, physical health, mental health, and well-being strategies.

Results found participants perceived stress as ambient due to excessive non-credit course, studio and private practice loads, expectations for participation outside of coursework, practicing toward an ill-defined concept of 'success', and poor time management skills. Participants discussed a continuum of stress from performance before private instructor and peers (more stressful) to a general audience (less stressful). Participants expressed a moderate amount of physical health concerns, mostly about the impact of physical health on practice time. Data related to mental health was limited and most participants expressed more frustration over time commitments than identified mental health issues. Participants were unable to articulate well-being coping strategies they practice.

Recommendations for Student Affairs professionals were to increase awareness of stressors facing music students, helping students set reachable goals, and focusing on providing music students with well-being strategies.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

In addition to typical college issues faced by previous generations, millennials, students born between 1980 and the mid-1990's, face factors unique to their generation. Sternbach (2008) observed that pressures and stress levels in current college students are on the rise. Classes, character development, establishing sexual identity, social stressors, and adapting to conflicts are a few of the many challenges that face college students. Pritchard, Wilson, and Yamnitz (2007) determined there is an increase in health problems during the first year of college. They found one quarter of freshmen do not return to the same institution the following year, frequently stating emotional reasons for their withdrawal. Sometimes referred to as Millennials or Generation Next, Keup (2008) positively characterized them as high achieving, civic minded, moral, and holding a promise of greatness. However, they have also been noted as requiring additional assistance concerning teaching methods, student engagement, and personal development.

Millennial students have a lower 'tipping point', that is, they turn regular stress into an emotional crisis more quickly than previous generations. Reasons for this phenomenon include overprotection from failure, developing less resiliency compared to previous generations, taking part in fewer stress reducing activities, drinking and partying more often, and relying heavily on their parents for emotional support. Taliaferro, Rienzo, Pigg, Miller, and Dodd (2009) found current college students have feelings of hopelessness, depression, and difficulty functioning as a result of facing not only the typical challenges of college but also coping with handling problems on their own with less parental support and learning to cope with stress. Taliaferro et al. found that students

enter college with a higher rate of mental instability, show a decline in physical health and experience a rise in feelings of depression during the first year of college. They also state additional stress can be expected throughout college. In addition, Pritchard et al. (2007) found that the psychological and physical health problems also increase during the first year of college.

Along with the general population of students, researchers have also begun studying specific sub-groups. For example, Sternbach (1993) found that music students face additional challenges, stressors, and physical injuries that other college students are not likely to experience. For example, music performance students scored lower than health students in areas of health responsibility, physical activity, nutrition, spiritual growth, stress management, personal relationships, self-efficacy, and self-regulation (Ginsborg, Kreutz, Thomas, and Williamon, 2009). Spahn, Richter, and Zschocke (2002) found 68% suffered from playing related symptoms either physical or psychological. Specifically, challenges facing music students include the following: extra time commitments to music ensembles, practicing, balancing social life with time commitments, mental strain from constant performance criticism, and physical strain from the act of practicing. Lessons and rehearsal require not only an investment of time in addition to course work, but also an ability to take criticism on a near daily basis. Young musicians who practice extensively have reduced time in comparison to their peers to develop social skills, potentially limiting their involvement in opportunities that may later prove useful to help balance the demands of their music career. Sternbach stated that many music students are able to balance academics, social life, and music

commitments without concern, but there are some who require specialized attention to help manage the stressors brought on by being a musician.

Millennials rely on parent support more than previous generations. If music students are first generational college attendees, or have parents who are not musicians, they may not be receiving the support they need. Dews & Williams (1989) found a significant amount of music students would utilize a counselor who knew music and be able to relate to their unique problems. In addition, Zander, Voltmer, Spahn, and Mus (2010) reported music students indicated an increase in psychological problems during their first two years of study. This indicates music students are looking for and need resources unique to their field of study.

Sternbach (1993) discussed three categories of stress that professional musicians face: environmental hazards, psychological pressures, and intrinsic factors. Environmental hazards consist of workplace issues. Psychological pressures refer to both intrapersonal and interpersonal issues, and intrinsic factors refer to stressors unique to the lifestyle of a performer. They experience constant changes in their 'shift work', workplace locations, changes in supervision, and economic security. Musicians are also constantly vulnerable to physical injury. Sternbach stated college music students are now facing an increase in physical injuries previously seen in professional musicians. Brandfonbrener (2009) found physical injuries in college musicians to be rather high. Percussionists reported the highest percentage of having an injury related to playing their instrument at 100%. Guptill, Zaza, and Paul (2000) found alarmingly high numbers of musicians reported a playing related injury at some point in their life. Musicians are

constantly vulnerable to injuries. A sprained finger, bruised lip, or sore throat may prohibit a musician from working for a day where others may be able to. They risk hearing loss and tinnitus. They suffer from on stage and post-performance anxiety.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The focus of the present study is centered upon the experiences of college music education majors. The purpose of the study is to explore college music major's experience in relation to general stress, performance stress, physical health, and mental health.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed to guide the present study:

- 1) How do music majors perceive their general stress?
- 2) How do music majors perceive stress related to performance?
- 3) What experiences have you had in relation to physical health?
- 4) What experiences have you had that relate to mental health?
- 5) What wellbeing strategies are utilized that help overall performance of a musician?

### **Significance of the Study**

There are several studies related to the stress musicians face and research on the millennial college student population. However, there is limited qualitative research focused on either the perceptions of stress of musicians or of the millennial generation. Qualitative research allowed insight into the phenomena of millennial students (Cody, L.

R. & Mills, G., 2006) comparing music students to other students. In addition, there is limited research focusing specifically on stress as it relates to millennial music students.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Due to the nature of available participants, string students were not included in the music students studied. Participants all attended a music camp focused on marching band. Participants may have included a very specific slice of music students and therefore may not accurately reflect the views of all music performance students. The sample size of six students was likely to have limited the study due to the small number, lack of representation of all instruments, and lack of diversity in desired career outcomes of the students.

A further limitation was the setting, location, and time constraints on the study. As the participants were attendees of a music camp, an hour and a half time slot was all that was available for the focus groups. In addition, these slots were over meal times. This may have led to a rushed environment and participants may also have been distracted by other activities from their day.

### **Summary**

Many issues face university students, however music students experience additional unique concerns. Research indicated that musicians struggle with time commitment, social adjustment, and physical ailments. Studies on millennial college students indicate a rise in mental health concerns, a need for additional support for personal development, and a lack of experience when dealing with life crises. Questions

remain regarding student musicians perception of general stress, performance, stress, mental health, physical health, and well-being strategies.

## CHAPTER II

### Review of Literature

Five areas relevant to this study were examined in the literature review. The first area is physical and mental health in the current student college population. The second explores physical and mental health specifically of musicians. The third compares the two populations (general students vs. music students). The fourth covers action being taken in the form of health promoting courses to address concerns of both the general and music population. The last body of literature discusses the life of a musician once they leave school and enter the workforce.

#### **Physical and Mental Health of the General College Population**

During the transition to college, students commonly question their relationships, direction in life, and self-worth (Chickering, 2006). Pritchard, Wilson, and Yamnitz (2007) examined how student psychological and physical health changes during the college experience. Data was collected from 242 freshmen during orientation before the first week of class to establish a baseline of coping, health, self-esteem, and participation in extracurricular activities. Health was measured by assessing 21 negatively related health symptoms, how often they drank, their stress levels (Inventory of College Student Recent Life Experiences), perfectionist tendencies, self-esteem (Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale), coping tactics, optimism (12 item Life Orientation Test), psychological adaptation (Profile of Mood States) anxiety, tension, depression, anger, confusion, and fatigue, and personality (introversion/extroversion scale).



Results showed an increase in health problems during the first year ( $p < .01$ ) of college. Stress levels did not increase yet negative moods did ( $p < .01$ ). Students reporting more health problems at stage two of the study were more likely to report higher levels of perfectionism and lower levels of self-esteem and optimism. Competitiveness was found to be related to depression. Other findings stated extroverts tend to be happier and thus less depressed.

Keup (2008) identified Millennials as optimistic, high achieving, civic minded, moral, and overall holding a promise of greatness. Millennial students have a lower 'tipping point' where regular stress turns into an emotional crisis more easily than previous generations. This is likely due to being shielded from failure, developing fewer resiliencies than previous generations, taking part in fewer stress reducing activities, drinking and partying more often, and relying heavily on their parents for emotional support.

Taliaferro, Rienzo, Pigg, Miller, and Dodd (2009) found college students have feelings of hopelessness, depression, and difficulty functioning due to their symptoms. These students are entering college with a higher rate of mental instability, a decline in physical health, and a rise in feelings of depression during their first year of college. Additional stress is expected during the first year and throughout college.

High levels of stress and inability to cope with college has become apparent in retention numbers in institutions across the nation. Pritchard, Wilson, and Yamnitz (2007) found one quarter of incoming freshmen do not return to the same institution the following year, many of them citing emotional reasons for their withdrawal. Pritchard et

al. examined how psychological and physical health change during the college experience. Results showed an increase in health problems during the first year of college. Sternbach (2008) observed that the college population goes through changes concerning course work, personal development, social life, sexual identity, and conflict management all contributing to an increase in stress.

Eisenburg, Gollust, Golberstein, and Hefner (2007) examined depression, anxiety, and thoughts of suicide through web-based surveys distributed to graduate and undergraduate students at a large Midwestern public university. Depression and anxiety were measured with the PHQ-9, asking how often symptoms associated to depression and anxiety were experienced in the past two or four weeks respectively. Three questions from the National Comorbidity Survey were used to assess suicidality in the past four weeks. In total 2,843 students completed the survey. According to the PHQ, 15.6% of undergraduate and 13.0% of graduate students screened as positive for depression or anxiety disorder. Suicidal thoughts were reported in the past four weeks by 2.5% of undergraduates and 1.6% of graduate students ( $p < .05$ ). Missing academic obligations in the past four weeks because of mental health was reported by 18.4% of undergraduates and 14.1% of graduate students. In addition, 44.3% of undergraduates and 41.2% of graduate students reported that mental or emotional difficulties affected their academic performance in the past four weeks.

Stress levels in students from four institutions were studied utilizing 814 student research participants. Participants were asked to complete basic demographic information in addition to responding to questions assessing health behaviors such as

physical activity, stress level, and hassles levels. Physical activity was measured as mild, moderate, and strenuous and how often the research participant took part in each per week. Stress levels were measured using The Graduate Stress Inventory. All data analyses were performed using SAS v8.2. Students at private institutions received the highest score for participation in physical activity with community college students ranking the lowest. Their scores ranged from 40.4 to 32.86 accordingly. Community college students had lower perceived stress and hassles scores, scoring a 1.41 compared to private schools with a 1.65 and State universities a 1.64 ( $p < .05$ ). No significant associations were found between physical activity hassles, and stress (Nguyen-Michel, Unger, Hamilton, & Spruijt-Metz 2006).

Although findings by Nguyen-Michel, Unger, Hamilton, and Spruijt-Metz (2006) indicate no correlation between physical activity and stress, a study by Taliaferro, Rienzo, Pigg, Miller, & Todd (2009) found associations between physical activity and mental health ailments. Data collected from 43,499 students participating in the Spring 2005 National College Health Assessment found physically active men experienced lower rates of hopelessness (57% vs. 61%), depression, and suicidal behavior (9% vs. 12%) than their inactive counterparts ( $p < .001$ ). Results were similar among women but not as significant. Physically active women reported similar results ( $p < .011$ ) in relation to physical activity and feelings of hopelessness (69% vs. 72%), depression (49% vs. 54%), and suicidal behavior (11% vs. 14%) but not as significant as those of males.

Research shows the physical and mental health of the current college population is a concerning factor. College is a time in which individuals are questioning their

general direction in life (Chickering, 2006). Pritchard, Wilson and Yamnitz (2007) found an increase in health problems during the first year of college. Keup (2008) discussed some of the traits of millennials as limiting their ability to handle failure, cope with stress, and thus potentially maximizing difficulties all college student's face in the college transition. Tailaferro, Rienzo, Pigg, Miller, and Dodd (2009) found that students are entering college with lowered levels of physical and mental health and experience a rise in feelings of depression during the first year of college. Tailaferro et al. found a positive correlation between physical activity and emotional health; however Nguyen-Michel, Unger, Hamilton, and Spruijt-Metz (2006) found no correlation between physical activity and mental health. A study by Eisenberg, Gollust, Golberstein, and Hefner (2007) concluded nearly half of graduate students reported mental or emotional difficulties affected their academic performance in the past month.

### **Physical and Mental Health of College Music Students**

Spahn, Richter, and Zschocke (2002) analyzed health attitudes and preventive behaviors in 197 music students at the Freiburg Conservatory. The Epidemiological Questionnaire for Musicians and Questionnaire to Measure Illness and Health Locus of Control were used as measurement instruments. Results were evaluated using SPSS, t-tests, the Spearman coefficient, the Pearson correlation coefficient, and the chi-square tests. Data reported 68% of music students previously suffered from troublesome playing related symptoms either physical or psychological ( $p < .05$ ). No statistical correlation was found between age, number of semesters music was studied, or course of study.

Another study was designed to gather information on the emotional and psychological issues facing musicians and their ways of coping with problems. Four major sections were covered: stresses and issues of concerns to musicians, methods of coping, student motivations, and perfectionism. Graduate and undergraduate students were selected from Southwest Texas State University, University of Miami, and the Manhattan School of Music. The instrument used was a questionnaire divided into three sections: a list of 22 issues of concern to musicians, short answer and multiple choice questions to determine feelings towards specialized counseling of musicians, and a demographics portion. Surveys were distributed and completed by 201 students.

The top 10 issues of concern for all students combined were: stress, pre-performance nervousness, progress impatience, burnout with musical progress, job insecurity, feeling conflict between music and one's personal life, inadequate practice facilities, depression, stage fright, and concentration. Issues of job insecurity, burnout, and progress impatience were significantly higher in students of Manhattan School of Music. These students were especially troubled by symptoms of anger, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. Self-esteem was found to be directly related to how a student feels they perform, as reported by 79% of participants. When dealing with a problem, 96% of students sought help turning to friends, teachers, and family members respectively. A need for a specialized counselor who would know music and be able to relate to their unique problem was expressed in 72% of those completing the survey. Of those indicating this need, 63% said they would utilize such an individual (Dews & Williams, 1989).

Guptill, Zaza, and Paul (2000) conducted a similar study that examined treatment music students sought out, the rate of satisfaction they had for their treatment, assessed the need for professionals with a background of music knowledge in treating musicians, and prevalence of playing related injuries in musicians. Non-vocal music majors participating in one of three major instrumental ensembles at a large Midwestern institution were surveyed for this study. Results were analyzed using SPSS. In total 106 students responded to a questionnaire that consisted of demographic questions, treatment history, and importance of music knowledge in health professionals. Pearson's chi-squared test analyzed the significance of the findings ( $p < .05$ ). Of the students surveyed 91.8% of females and 81.8% of males reported having had a music related injury at some point in their lives. No significance was found between gender, instrument type, or type of major within the music department. Students feeling better immediately following treatment were found to feel better in the future in regards to their playing related injury ( $p < .05$ ). The importance of musical knowledge in professionals treating students with music related injuries was ranked highly (4 out of 5 on a Likert scale) in 79% of respondents.

Another study examined playing related pain that students encountered prior to their college years at Northwestern University in an attempt to identify associated risk factors. Four incoming classes were surveyed for a total of 330 participants. Demographic data, instrument history, practice habits, and exercise routines were analyzed. Results showed 79% ( $p < .05$ ) of surveyed students reported a history of playing related pain. Practice time ranged from ½ hour to hours a day; no relationship was found relating to prevalence of pain. There was also a lack of association between

students who stretched before playing, participated in regular exercise, and those who did neither. Percussionist's reported the highest percentage of pain at 100%. It is important to note seven percussionists total participated. String, keyboards, woodwind, and brass players consistently reported 84-87% experience of pain. Voice students reported 61% of incidence of pain. No significant differences were associated with gender or year one began playing their instrument (Brandfonbrener, 2009).

Spahn, Burger, Hildebrandt and Seidenglanz (2005) found 61% of music students reported previously suffering from playing related health problems. Of these, 45% described their problems as physical, 15% as psychological, and 40% as both. The Locus of Control Inventory of Illness and Health and the Epidemiological Questionnaire for Musicians were used to assess these results in 326 students from the University of Freiburg. The sample of music students had a significantly higher locus of control than medical students ( $p < .001$ ) and that of the norm sample ( $p < .0001$ ). Students indicating playing-related health problems showed a significantly higher locus of control ( $p < .001$ ) than those students indicating no previous health problems.

A study by Larsson, Baum, Mudholkar, and Kollia (1993) further examined the impact of injury on health and performance in addition to frequency of injury in 660 Eastman School of Music students and faculty. Participants answered a 53 item questionnaire and were also asked about past medical history, instruments played, physical symptoms or personal consequences of music performance, and medications to alleviate symptoms. Individuals were broken into seven classes of instruments: string, woodwind, brass, keyboard, percussion, vocal, and miscellaneous. Practice time varied

from ½ hour a day to 8-9 hours. Problems were noted in 67% during practice or performance of music. The most common complaint was pain followed by weakness, muscle spasms, and numbness. Musculoskeletal problems caused 13.6% of individuals to give up playing or change an instrument. In remedy for playing related problems, 31% stopped playing for a period of time, 24% changed practice duration, 12% changed the mode of playing (i.e. Fingering), 5% changed repertoire, and 28% attempted change in other ways not listed (Larsson, Baum, Mudholkar, & Kollia, 1993).

Backlund, Karlsson, Olsson, and Zetterburg (1998) evaluated the prevalence of musculoskeletal problems in different body areas among music students at the university level and examine the relationship between these and type of instrument, practice time, years of study, gender, hyper mobility of joints, psychosocial, and environmental factors. The study was performed at the University School of Music and Musicology in Goteborg, Sweden. There are five major programs: musicians, church musicians, music education, and rhythmic and improvisation pedagogues. 227 questionnaires were returned. Questions about sex, age, weight, height, dominant hand, academic year, instrument, previous education, repertoire, hours of practice per day, smoking, physical exercise, present diseases, trauma, previous surgery, headaches, and other were all asked. General physical complaints were registered by the Nordic Musculoskeletal Questionnaire. Work environmental factors were evaluated using the psychosocial work score of Karasek and Theorell.

Results were analyzed using SPSS, t-test, chi-squares, and multiple linear and logistic regression analyses were performed in the multivariate analyses. The average



student practiced 2.8 hours per day. Bodily pain in the past 12 months was reported by 89% of respondents. More of the women had pain than the men, 96% and 82% respectively ( $p < .01$ ). The most significant problem reported was shoulder pain in 32% of students followed by neck pain in 13%. Stress was considered as a cause of 21% of the men and 47% of the women ( $p < .001$ ). Reported disorders were considered to be an obstacle in performance among 44% of students ( $p < .01$ ). The Von Korff index showed higher pain and disability scores for the women as compared with the men ( $p < .001$ ) with no relation between the years in school or instrument played. (Backlund, Karlsson, Olsson, & Zetterberg, 1998).

One study focused on medical problems of 97 marching band members including 64 musicians, 20 flag line members, four equipment crew members, and 13 others associated with the marching band ranging in ages from 14-59. A questionnaire asking for demographic information and health problems was utilized. Those surveyed reported 21.2 hours a week at school a week with the extreme between 78 hours. They estimated an average of 6.5 hours per week of physical practice with their flag or instrument. The importance of musical activity in their lives was rated a 7.9 on a scale from 1-10. Musicians reported pain or stiffness in their upper and lower extremities at 36% and 22% respectively ( $p < .05$ ). Musicians reported seeking care from a health professional related to the following concerns: headache (16%), dizziness (13%), shortness of breath (30%), chest pain (11%), and exhaustion (34%) (Harman, 1993).

Social and emotional concerns of self-identified music majors from a large southwestern university seeking counseling and the student counseling center was

examined by Young and Hipple (1996). A 50 item check list allowed clients to provide information regarding how frequently their concerns were interfering with their lives as well as how their concerns were interfering with their academic performance. Clients also filled out demographic forms. Clients were asked to check items on the 50 item check list of concern to them, and check items twice that were of most concern to them. The 10 most frequently endorsed problems were as follows: unable to concentrate, discouraged about the future, not being the kind of person they want to be, financial problems, unhappy too much of the time, can't study effectively, unsure of career choice, too tired to do anything, sleep problems, and feeling no one understands (Young & Hipple, 1996).

In this area of the literature review the physical and mental health of college music students was explored. Dews and Williams (1989) identified major concerns facing music students, finding issues of burnout, progress, and job insecurity to be more concerning among students attending an institution aimed to produce performers. They also found a direct correlation between perception of performance and self-esteem. Another finding by Dews and Williams was the overwhelming need for a counselor who would be able to empathize with their unique needs as a music student. The findings of Guptill, Zaza, and Paul (2000) aligned with the need of a professional with knowledge of music for treatment of students, but on a physical level. In addition, Guptill, Zaza, and Paul found more than 80% of students to have had a music related injury at some point in their lives. The findings of Brandfonbrener (2009), Spahn, Burger, Hildebrandt, and Seidenglanz (2005), and Backlund, Karlsson, Olsson, and Zetterburg (1998) conclude physical ailments related to performance or practice in musicians. Larsson, Baum, and

Mudholkar, and Killia (1993) also found a high prevalence of injuries in musicians and also found that in some cases musculoskeletal problems caused individuals to change practice duration, mode of playing, repertoire, stopped playing for a period of time or even permanently.

Spahn, Richter, and Zschocke (2002) found more than half of music students previously suffered from troublesome playing related symptoms either physical or psychological, a higher number than that found previously in a study Eisenberg, Gollust, Golberstein, and Hefner (2007) in the general college student population. The next section will examine literature focused on the comparison of music students to the general student population.

### **Music Students in Comparison with Other Students**

Sternbach (2008) noted music students have additional obstacles in the form of extra time commitments to music ensembles, practicing, balancing social life with time commitments, mental strain from constant performance criticism, and physical strain from the act of practicing. Lessons and rehearsal require not only an investment of time in addition to course work, but also an ability to take criticism on a near daily basis. Practice time may cut into time other children have to develop social skills needed later in life, particularly useful to musicians who may be balancing the demands of a music career. Sternbach stated there are many music students who balance their academics, social life, and music commitments without concern, but many who do not receive the specialized attention they need to deal with the stressors brought on by being a musician. As previously mentioned, Millennials rely on parent support more than previous

generations. Students may not be receiving they expect from their parents if their parents do not have relatable experience allowing them to understand the lifestyle of musicians.

A study conducted by Ginsborg, Kreutz, Thomas, & Williamon (2009) examined what differences, if any, there were between health-promoting behaviors of music performance and health students in addition to differences in ill-health reported by the two groups, and to what extent there is an association between the results of the two groups. A total of 348 students from four universities responded to the survey. The survey consisted of six types of questions: demographic, the positive and negative affect scale (PANAS), the health-programming lifestyle inventory (HPLP), the self-efficacy scale and a questionnaire scale devised to identify self-reported muscol and non-musculoskeletal health problems. Repeated-measures analyses of variance were undertaken to investigate main effects of and interactions between student type, music performance or health, and sex on the six subscales of the HPLL.

T-tests comparing the two groups revealed a statistically significant effect of student type ( $p < .009$ ) such that music performance students scored lower than health students in areas of health responsibility, physical activity, nutrition, spiritual growth, stress management, and personal relationships. Neck and spine pain is one example where music students reported a higher percentage of neck and spine issues, 72.2%, compared to 58.5% of health students. Women as a whole reported higher feelings of fatigue and higher scores of interpersonal relations, health responsibility, and nutrition. Females scored lower than males in self-efficacy, reported lower levels of self-efficacy

and self-regulation than non-music performance students (Ginsborg, Kreutz, Thomas, Williamon, 2009).

In a similar study, Spahn, Strukley, & Lehmann (2004) investigated the prevalence of physical and psychological health problems and of subject-related complaints, attitudes toward the major subject, and health attitudes of music, psychology, medical, and sports students at the beginning of university study. The breakdown of participants was as follows: 247 music students, 266 medical students, 71 psychology students, and 71 sports students, a total of 655. Instruments of measurement consisted of the Epidemiological questionnaire, Giessen Symptom Questionnaire, Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale, Questionnaire on Study-Related Patterns of Behavior and Experience, and Questionnaire on Health Locus of Control.

On the anxiety scale of HADS, 33.5% of music student's scores were elevated significantly more often than medical students ( $p < .033$ ) and sports students ( $p < .002$ ). There was not a significant deviation found from psychology students. Playing related health problems were reported in 24.8% of music students, 23.9% in sports students. Fewer medical and psychology students complained of symptoms hampering their studies. On the AVEM questionnaire, music students showed a significantly higher willingness to commit themselves to their major subject than all other students. A positive outcome from this study was the finding music students most strongly believe their own behavior can influence their health (Spahn, Strukley, & Lehmann, 2004).

Sternbach (2008) compares the life of a music student to that of a typical student noting additional stressors in their time commitments, physical strain from performance,

and mental differences due to social development and frequent exposure to criticism. Ginsborg, Kreutz, Thomas, and Williamon (2009) found music students scored lower than health students concerning multiple areas of physical health and personal well-being. Spahn, Strukley, and Lehmann (2004) concluded similar results finding music students to have more anxiety than medical and sports students.

### **Health Promoting Courses in Higher Education**

Higgins, Lauzon, Yew, Bratseth, and Morley (2009) described the influence of a health education course aimed to promote lifestyle change on first year students. The study focused on 150 students who took part in the class during one of two terms. The 13 week course was assessed through one minute papers gathered on the final day of class and through personal interviews with seven former students. The results were categorized according to the Quality of Life (QOL) model domains of being, belonging, and becoming. The impact of the course was strong on all three domains, suggesting that the course influenced physical, spiritual, and psychological well-being of those who participated.

Another study investigated the effectiveness of a course on prevention of problems and health of music students. Assessment consisted of a pre and post test administered to a test group and a control group each consisting of 22 equally matched groups according to age, sex, course study, and number of years spent at the Conservatory. Participants in the test group received intervention of 17 double hour sessions with one half hour focused on theoretical teaching and the other half hour focused on practical teaching. Measurement instruments consisted of the Kiel

Modification-Sensitive-Symptom List (KASSL), The Frankfurt Body Concept Scale (FKKS), the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS), the Epidemiological Questionnaire for Musicians, The Questionnaire on Coping with Work as Musician (HIL), and an Evaluatory Questionnaire.

Results were evaluated using SPSS applying the Pearson correlation coefficient, Spearman coefficient, chi square test, and MANOVA. No statistical significance was found between the test and control group on the KASSL scales, the HADS questionnaire, and FKKS at the start of the study. After intervention, symptoms associated with music making ( $p < .01$ ) decreased and ability to cope with work as a music student ( $p < .001$ ) improved (Spahn, Hildebrandt, & Seidenglanz, 2001).

Students at the Freiburg Music University were studied to determine the state and the developmental course of music students' health and to test the effectiveness of a preventive curriculum. Survey results consisting of the Kiel Modification-Sensitive Symptom List, Giessen Symptom Questionnaire, and Epidemiological Questionnaire for Musicians were collected from 247 students. Pre-post intervention and a one year follow up evaluation aided in the assessment of the course. Students in the 'Musician Specific Health Prevention I and II' received curriculum during their first and second semesters at the institution. The first semester consisted of information regarding the structure and function of the human body specific to instruments and every day aspects of music making. The second part of the course contained topics focused on demands musicians are required to meet, instrument specific practice, preparing for a performance, and external performance conditions. Of the students participating, 85% responded positively

to the curriculum. Despite their involvement in the course and its positive impact on many students, this study also researched the effects of college study during the beginning of one's college career. During the first two years of study, students indicated an increase in psychological problems. Six students began the year suffering from psychological symptoms, almost a year later there were twelve students reporting these symptoms. Another year later there were 15. Physical symptoms showed a slight increase in the first year and then fell significantly in the second. (Zander, Voltmer, Spahn, & Mus, D., 2010)

Another program was designed with the purpose of examining the effectiveness of a course in health promotion and injury prevention catered towards music students. Student participants were freshmen music majors at a private Midwestern institution required to take an orientation seminar during their first semester of study. They took part in a 'Health promotion and prevention of injury for musicians' course aimed to address common medical problems seen in musicians, risk for injury in musicians, health promotion strategies related to diet/nutrition, physical fitness, and emotional well-being. 26 students participated. They were given a pre-course, post-test 1, and post-test 2 to assess effects of the course. The pre-test measured baseline knowledge of medical problems, risk factors for musicians, and strategies for health promotion. A self-assessment looked at the current use of health promotion or injury prevention strategies utilized among students. Data was analyzed using SPSS. The mean pre-course test score was a 25.5, which increased to 31.6 for posttest 1 and 29.7 for posttest 2 ( $p < .00$ ), meaning participation in the program resulted in an increase of positive strategies related



to sleep habits, practice routines, diet, and physical activity. (Barton, DHS, OTR, & Feinberg, 2008).

Current research shows positive outcomes of courses related to health related courses in higher education, both in non-music students and music students. Higgins, Lauzon, Yew, Bratseth, and Morley (2009) found the impact of a course to positively influence physical, spiritual, and psychological well-being. Spahn, Hildebrant, and Seifenglanz (2001) conducted a similar course on music students, finding no significance related to some aspects of a health promoting course, however did associate a decrease in negative symptoms and improve the ability to cope with work as a music student. Barton, DHS, OTR, and Feinburg (2008) implemented a program that successfully increased positive health habits in participants.

### **Musicians in the Workforce**

Sternbach (1993) identified several stressors unique to musicians: they perform before the public, work under constant scrutiny, and are expected to deliver perfection under all circumstances. For example, a major league baseball player with a .300 batting average would be considered a success but no audience would tolerate a musician who missed seven out of ten notes. A variety of issues face students once they enter the workforce as a musician. For those pursuing professional careers in music, the pressure of the workforce affects them even in their college years. Issues of job insecurity, burnout, and progress impatience were significantly higher in students of Manhattan School of Music. These students were especially troubled by symptoms of anger, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem. (Dews & Williams, 1989)

Brandfonbrener (2009) also found physical injuries in musicians to be rather high, 100% of percussionists reported a history of playing reported pain. Guptill, Zaza, and Paul (2000) also found alarmingly high numbers of musicians reported a playing related injury at some point in their life. Musicians are constantly vulnerable to injuries such as a sprained finger, bruised lip, or sore throat. These injuries may not impact individuals in other professions from working, but may prohibit a musician. They risk hearing loss and tinnitus. They suffer from on stage and post-performance anxiety.

Current literature does not include research on the group at hand for the present study. However in a similar subgroup in-depth interviews and a questionnaire were used to examine the occupational stress among British popular musicians. Psychosomatic health, job satisfaction, alcohol and cigarette consumption, and use of illegal drugs were examined. Physical and mental health was measured by the Gurin Psychomatic Symptom List. Job satisfaction was measured by modifying items taken from the Job Satisfaction Scale and various stress research studies. Alcohol and cigarette consumption were measures through adaptations from the Henley Executive Questionnaire. The question, "How often, if ever, do you use the following drugs?" was used to assess the extent to which participants use illegal drugs. Coping ability was measured using items from the coping subscale of the Conflict/Stress Questionnaire by Steinmetz. Stepwise multiple regression analysis was used to analyze relationships. Popular musicians were found above average in regard to psychological anxiety (28%) in comparison to of the normative sample (22%). Physical health, immobilization, and physical activity showed no difference between popular musicians and the general population. Four variables predicted job dissatisfaction: career development, lack of gigs, and desire for more pay,

and difficulty to get a good recording. Another prediction of job dissatisfaction was things going wrong on a gig. The third was a low type A behavior score. Popular musicians exhibit above average levels of type A behavior, whose positive traits are drive, ambition for personal satisfaction, and desire to attain self-imposed standards. Musicians low on these characteristics may experience a sense of unfulfillment. No significant difference between popular musicians and the norm was found in relation to alcohol consumption. The same holds true for smoking: 3% more popular musicians than the general population reported smoking. Illegal drugs were also not seen in higher percentages among popular musicians. (Wills & Cooper, 1987)

One long term physical ailment facing musicians is dystonia. There are over 300,000 documented cases of dystonia in North America alone. Musicians affected with the disorder are not often able to rejuvenate their careers, only 38% have done so in the past. Dystonia can start in any part of the body but typically stays in one area such as the embouchure, fingers, hand, or neck. The musician who experiences dystonia often finds it manifested in an area critical to his or her technique. World-renowned musicians have been affected with focal dystonia over the years. One of these was pianists Leon Fleisher who at the age of 37 was forced to turn his attention to conducting and teaching. Another well-known musician, Alison Young resigned her solo career and her position as principal flutist with the Houston Ballet after being diagnosed with focal dystonia. Similarly, former principal oboist for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Alex Klein finds he can still perform but for shorter periods and with weeks in between concerts (Dunham, 2007).

Another concern for musicians in the workforce is finances. Recently, DSO management proposed salary reductions up to 30% for existing players and 40% for new hires. Also proposed were a reduced work schedule and the elimination of tenure. (Lewis) The Detroit Symphony Orchestra (DSO) is one of the top ten orchestras in the country, yet it's in a multi-million dollar budget deficit. Mackey, a DSO member for 27 years said the cuts management proposed to the musician's salaries would irreparably harm the quality of the orchestra (Guerra).

The above area focused on research on musicians once they leave college and enter the workforce. Sternbach (1993) discussed a need to deliver perfection, more so perhaps than many other professions. Dews and Williams (1989) highlight issues facing music students intending to enter the workforce as a performer versus their non-performing peers. Brandfonbrener (2009) discussed how a physical injury may prohibit musicians from their work on days when other's experiencing the same injury would be fully functioning in their work setting. Wills and Cooper (1987) found popular musicians to have higher psychological anxiety compared to the norm, identified factors to predict job dissatisfaction for performing musicians, and identified musicians to exhibit type A behavior at a higher rate than the average population. Dunham (2007) discussed focal dystonia as a potential career ending injury effecting musicians and Brandfonbrener (2009) mentions hearing loss as a concern for performers. In addition, financial concerns are noted by Guerra and Lewis highlighting struggles facing top orchestras in the USA such as the DSO and thus affecting the salary and work load of performing musicians.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the above literature covers five areas of content relevant to this study. The topics include the following: physical and mental health in the current college population, physical and mental health of musicians, a comparison of music students to the general student, health promoting courses aimed to address health concerns of the student population, and the lifestyle of working musicians.

## CHAPTER III

### Methodology

#### Design of the Study

The focus of the study was centered upon the experiences of college music education majors. The purpose of the study was to explore college music major's experience in relation to general stress, performance stress, physical health, and mental health. The research questions were:

R1: How do music majors perceive their general stress?

R2: How do music majors perceive stress related to performance?

R3: What experiences have you had in relation to physical health?

R4: What experiences have you had that relate to mental health?

R5: What wellbeing strategies are utilized that help overall performance of a musician?

Qualitative methods were used to gather perceptions of the experience college music performance majors undergo. This method of study was chosen as qualitative research allows involvement in the collection of data and the data collection to occur in a naturalistic setting (Cody & Mills, 2006). This was essential in understanding the unique aspects of being music majors. Qualitative research allowed the researcher to make deductions about the lifestyle of music students related to stress.

Focus groups were formed to gain insight and facilitate discussion between students. Questions were structured in advance, formulated to focus conversation around

the unique experiences of college music majors. All data were analyzed and transcribed to identify common themes.

### **Participants**

Participants for this study came from a variety of institutions. The common connection between participants was their involvement in the Smith-Walbridge music camp that was based at a medium sized public institution during the summer of 2011. Two focus groups were conducted consisting of five and two students respectively. Purposeful sampling with use of a gatekeeper, the director of the camp, was used to identify volunteers qualified for the study.

The first participant in group 1 (1:1) was a senior music education major who played clarinet and saxophone at a large public institution. Participant 1:2 was a sophomore music education major who played both flute and saxophone at the same institution as participant 1:1. Participant 1:3 was an incoming freshmen music education major at an independent four year institution that played both saxophone and piano. Participant 1:4 was an incoming freshmen music education major at a public institution that played trumpet and percussion. Participant 1:5 was an incoming flute performance and biology major at a medium sized public institution that played flute.

Participant 2:1 was an incoming freshmen music education major at a state institution whose primary instrument was voice and secondary instrument was flute. Participant 2:2 was a sophomore music education major at a public institution that focused on clarinet and also played saxophone.

**Site**

Research was conducted at a mid-sized public university hosting the Smith-Walbridge music camp. Focus groups were held at a classroom on the same site the music camp was taking place.

**Data Collection**

Participants were selected using snowball sampling through the use of the camp gate-keeper. Snowball sampling was selected as method of collection as it allowed the gate-keeper to identify individuals with particular experiences fitting the criteria of the present study (Patton, 1990). Communication with the gatekeeper took place approximately three months before the study to identify potential participants. One week prior to the study the gatekeeper was presented an informational letter to share with camp participants containing the intent of the study. Due to the nature of the camp and that participants were not on site or in direct contact with either the gatekeeper or primary researcher, participants were verbally notified of the research taking place upon their arrival at the camp. The camp ran from 8am to 8pm for one week with breaks for lunch and dinner. Participants were invited to attend focus groups during an hour and a half dinner break. Focus group questions focused on the experiences and perceptions of their lives as music majors, or in the case of incoming freshmen, their lives as those involved with music and their expectations and perceptions of the college music community.

**Treatment of Data**

Data was collected by interviewing the two focus groups utilizing audio recording and transcribed on the primary researcher's personal computer. Participant names were



not transcribed, but rather were replaced pseudonyms. The data was copied onto a hard drive which remained in the possession of the primary researcher. Following the study, all data related to the research was kept for three years and then destroyed.

## CHAPTER IV

### Findings

Research questions were asked to examine how music majors perceive general stress, stress related to performance, physical health, mental health, and wellbeing strategies. The following questions guided the study: how do you as a music major perceive your general stress, how do music majors perceive stress related to performance, what experiences have you had in relation to physical health, what experiences have you had that relate to mental health, and what wellbeing strategies are utilized that help overall performance of a musician.

Throughout this chapter, participants will be referred to by number within focus group for purposes of anonymity. For example, the first participant in the first focus group is identified as 1:1, the first person in the second focus group is referred to as 2:1. A semi-structured interview protocol was used by the primary investigator to facilitate discussion within each focus group. All focus group interviews were conducted in a residence hall classroom. Focus group participant responses are organized in this chapter by research question and additional themes emerging from cross-comparative analysis (Patton, 1991) of the focus group data are identified at the end.

#### Research Question Results

##### **Research Question #1: How do you as a music major perceive your general stress?**

The consensus among focus group participants was general stress experienced by musicians was due to the following: student course load, additional expectations outside of classes, homework/practicing, defining success, and overall time commitment.

### *Course Load.*

Participants said their daily schedule differed from typical non-music students. Participants indicated their typical day began at 8am and ended around 13 or 14 hours later, and was filled with classes, ensembles, and practice time. The typical student load consisted of a high number of academic or music-related courses, many for little or no credit, scattered throughout the day. Participant 1:3 stated, “whereas they [non-music majors] have five or six classes a day, I’m registered for 14 classes.” He was not complaining about his course load or wishing his load was less, but was stating music majors had a greater number of classes scheduled during the week than his non-music major peers. Multiple participants discussed taking an overload of courses. Many of these courses were often taken for no credit in order to avoid being prohibited from taking the course due to amount of credit hours or for paying additional money for courses beyond the accepted institutional limit. Furthermore, professors overtly or by subtle means pressured students to take additional courses regardless of credit status. Participant 1:3 reflected on their experience in fulfilling the expectations of his private lessons instructor.

My saxophone teacher pretty much requires all his students to be in jazz band as well. I can’t even take that as a credit without going into overload so I’m enrolled in jazz band without credit. So I’m putting the work into a class without even getting any credit for it.

He indicated taking this course at no credit did not assist him in matriculating through the program toward a degree. Rather, the course was taken to enhance the faculty member’s

idea of an ideal educational experience for musicians, even though the department's curriculum did not require taking courses at no credit in their curriculum. Students were forced to please many stakeholders, which resulted in a level of stress that takes its toll over time. The relationship between students and private lesson instructors can be intense and pleasing the instructor outweighs limiting curriculum load to the point where the student circumvents department and university requirements for what course load a student should maintain in order to succeed in school. This relationship between private lesson instructor and student will be discussed further in additional themes.

The greater the number of courses taken in a given semester, regardless of credit status, led to increased stress among music majors. They are taking more classes (not just more for credit) than their non-music counterparts, meaning their efforts to succeed in all of their courses are spread thin. Whereas most students are focusing on homework, class time, and spending their energy worrying about four or five courses, music students are meeting the requirements for up to "14 classes" as participant 1:3 mentioned.

#### *Expectations in Addition to Coursework.*

In addition to courses taken for credit or non-credit, participants indicated there were other participation requirements for their degree programs that also contributed to their overall stress. These extra hours consisted of juries, ensembles, studio courses, and recital attendance.

For example Participant 1:4 stated: "It's called juries and it's twice a week. You have to show up and sit in an auditorium and listen to other music majors play stuff and

you don't even get credit for it." Participants shared similar experiences at their varying institutions ranging from juries to studio courses to required recital attendance.

Participant 1:3 said he was required to go to up to 30 performances during the semester, but for 0 credits. Participant 1:4 said his requirement was for only 15 performances.

Others stated they were only required to attend recitals if someone from their studio was playing. Most participants expressed they were required to attend some variation of studio and/or jury performances. These can add up to large amounts of hours over the course of a semester. In participant 1:3's case, his requirement of attending 30 performances in a semester may add up to 30 or more hours of time.

Prolonged exposure to listening to other music majors does not in itself contribute to stress. However, the participants were frustrated that so much time was committed to activities that do not move them personally toward graduation. In addition, the hours of listening to others meant that participants were constantly comparing themselves to how well or how poorly other musicians performed. Participant 1:1 said she had the thought in studio class of, "Whoa, how did they get in the studio?" and she herself worried that if she sounded poorly, would others have similar thoughts and wondered "are they going to be my friends if I suck?" The participants expressed the idea that it made them wonder how they sounded when they performed. The stress was implied as ambient, or the idea that musicians are constantly put in a position to compare themselves to others and rarely feel contentment about their level of achievement.

### *Practicing and Success.*

In addition to ensemble commitments and class, music majors were also expected to spend extensive time refining their skills in the practice room. Practicing was defined by participant 1:2 as “our homework”. Although the weight of the course load and both stated and unstated requirements expected of music majors was reflected in the participants, they also acknowledged their assigned / written homework load may be significantly lighter than those of their non-music classmates. It was expressed that little to no written homework was required for most of their music related courses. Much of their degree program was skill based, meaning they spent their time learning and practicing the skill of playing music. This set of performance based versus cognitive based learning outcomes would help justify the additional expectations of jury/studio/recital/other additional non-credit expectations since music students are observing others and learning through ‘hands on’ experience as opposed to completing written homework to enhance their skills.

When asked how often they practiced each day, comments such as “not as much as I would like for it to be” or “[not as much] as it’s supposed to be” were expressed. Reasons for not practicing enough were stated as lack of practice rooms, distance from campus, physical limitations, lack of time, and lack of motivation. Actual practice time was mentioned as anywhere from two hours a day to six hours a day to whatever was allowed given time between classes. Practice time was said to increase when studio performances, lessons, or auditions were coming up.

The nature of success as defined in terms of music education was also discussed. Whereas math students may spend hours doing homework and focusing on finding a solution to a specific problem, music students spend hours trying to find a 'solution' to a problem that is not clearly defined for them. There is no defined amount of practice time that makes students feel accomplished; where other students have the ability to say they are 'done' with homework for the night when a problem set is completed, there are always the subtle nuances involved in refining a musical phrase into a more complete expression of the composer's intent. Participant 2:1 said "I can never just leave the practice room without having improved something." This may mean that the task to be accomplished when entering the practice room was to improve something, the 'something' being anywhere from improving a piece to improving a concept, to expressing an emotion through the music.

Grades were expressed as something participants were highly concerned about, many mentioning having high GPAs or simply not wanting to see their GPA suffer. As mentioned previously the homework of a music major and thus what they are often graded on is focused on the outcome of their practice time. The relationship between grades and practicing was discussed by participant 1:4 with the following statement. "...professor says something like you're expected to practice a minimum of three hours a day...if I practice three hours a day is that a d- or is that an a?" Participant 1:4 went on to say the following.

...the number one stress area is not exactly knowing what you're getting graded on...they are really secretive (professors) not wanting to tell you exactly how

you're going to be graded. It's kind of hard to grade something like music because a lot of it is thoughts and feelings and emotions and how do you put a grade on that?

The above participant discussed the difficulty of getting an 'A' on his homework as expectations were unable to be defined for his practice time or on what basis his professor was grading him. This is an understandably difficult concept to grasp as rarely if ever is there written criteria that states a musical performance is 'A' material.

Practice time was frequently mentioned as a stressor that no one felt truly accomplished with. The appropriate amount of practice time was a difficult concept for many of the participants. They all had a desire to practice and to practice enough, but never seemed satisfied with the amount of practice time they were able to put in. Participant 1:2 said "there's always the pressure to practice". This could be due to her need to achieve an 'A' in her course work graded on skill.

Having no established standard of what being 'done' with homework looks like or what sounding good enough to get an 'A' means contributed to the following statement made by participant 1:1.

I want to go take a nap, but you know you have to practice or you know you have to study or you have to go talk to someone about your concert band, there's always something, there's not really a break.

Focus group participants gave the impression there never would be time for a break without some sense of guilt. Some of this guilt was due to their extensive time



commitments and some due to a lack of a meaningful criterion (rubric) allowing them to feel satisfied with their work. There appeared to be an unwritten standard that *good* would never be good enough, whether related to success in the classroom or quality of musical performance.

### ***Time Management.***

A general agreement among all participants was that being a music major in college, or really a musician at any point in life, leads to a different type of lifestyle and set of time management skills that one comes to accept if they are to be truly passionate about their musical vocation. From the time musicians begin their career, they take on additional expectations of practice time, ensemble commitments, attending master classes, conferences, and camps, all to improve their own skills. As a student, musicians are similar to student athletes in the amount of time they commit to extracurricular activities. However, additional general stressors are presented as they spend large amounts of time practicing on their own and taking part in multiple ensembles, such as musicals, marching band, jazz band, and concert band at the same time. Statements were made by participants in both focus groups that they wouldn't be taking on such loads if they weren't passionate about or didn't believe in the value of what they were doing.

Participant 1:2 said

I had a friend; actually, her and I were both saxophone players, we went through freshmen year together. She's switching to actuarial science next year. It's not that she didn't excel she still got good grades, like a 3.75, but just realized 'music for me is more of a hobby....I don't think it's something for me to do the rest of

my life.’ So I think when you see people struggling it’s because with a lack of motivation, you’re not going to excel. You absolutely need that motivation of, ‘I love this,’ and ‘This is what I want to do.’

She believed that her friend was switching majors because she came to realize that she did not have the inner motivation and personal drive to accept the stressors that come with being a music major; it was not worth the sacrifice.

The overall time commitment of being a music major was mentioned frequently. Participants discussed their commitments to ensembles, classes, and practice time. Participant 2:1 shared their time obligations from her freshmen year of college.

I did marching band, which was a ridiculous time commitment. Two hour rehearsals three days a week and also football games on the weekends and probably other sectionals and pep band...It was an ongoing process all year, pep band and marching band. I also did jazz ensemble...so then I was practicing not only clarinet but saxophone music, too. And I also did the pit orchestra for the [school] musical. I did nine shows... I was doing wind symphony, symphonic winds the first semester, marching band, jazz ensemble, pep band, everything I could get into, really.

Participant 2:1 was highly involved in commitments to music, perhaps beyond what was required to attain her degree in music, or, as previously discussed, not what was required of her but what she perceived was expected of her. Other participants shared

similar experiences taking part in multiple ensembles for either degree purposes or by choice for their own personal satisfaction and professional development.

Stressors consistently mentioned among focus group participants were course load, additional expectations outside of classes, homework/practicing, defining success, and overall time commitment. All participants expressed a unique type of stress related to being a music major, yet seldom in a negative light. Many mentioned they thrived on the busy lifestyle of a music major and commented that although their courses and future careers led to stress, playing music was also their stress relief.

**Research Question #2: How do music majors perceive stress related to performance?**

Participants in this study largely agreed the performances they were most nervous about were not those in front of large groups, but rather were those at studio classes with their peers or in lessons with their teachers. Participant 2:1 made the following statement. "I'm always nervous no matter how I prepare for a lesson. I'm always nervous in lessons and even more so in studio classes when he assigns us a day to perform. I'm especially nervous that day." Participant 1:1 shared their experience related to stress caused by lessons.

I can play something perfectly in the practice room and then when I get to my lesson its absolute crap. It's like I swear I know how to play this it's so easy and I just, you know, get so nervous.

She went on to say her nervousness for playing in lessons stemmed from her respect for her professor. She had spent time in lessons with a Graduate Assistant, but now she earned the privilege of studying with a Professor and she did not want to disappoint this individual:

You just don't want to let them down...I studied with a grad assistant and then last year I was able to actually have lessons with the professor. So for me I was like, OK, you know, cause every semester he goes through and he's like, 'Well which students do I want?' So there's that pressure on me, I want to make sure I'm staying strong throughout the fall semester because I don't want him to drop me back down to a grad assistant in the spring semester.

Other participants echoed this sentiment of fear, respect and not wishing to disappoint. This participant indicated a need to please her professor while at the same time fearing the possibility that she would be dropped back to receiving lessons from someone less renowned. The combination of respect and fear are contributing factors to increased general stress.

The fear of disappointing a professor is a theme that reoccurred on both a personal and professional level among other participants. On a personal level, multiple participants discussed relationships they established with their professors leading to performance pressure in lessons. Participant 1:3 stated he knew his private lesson teacher prior to college due to involvement in the music community, but was now taking lessons with him for the first time. He said "I know how to be this guy's friend but I'm not entirely sure what it's going to be like to be his student."

Along with respect and wishing to please is the idea of fearing rejection and being “sent back to the minors”. Participant 1:1 discussed feeling pressure to perform for her private lessons teacher to avoid being ‘dropped down’ to taking lessons with a graduate assistant again. This pressure also implied she wanted to be at the top, something other music students mentioned throughout. They do not want to be thought of as a failure or let down either to their faculty members or their peers. Participant 1:3 said, “There’s someone we admire or respect or something so you obviously want to meet those expectations.” Aligning their fear of not meeting interpersonal and/or performance expectations with findings previously identified related to general stress; it makes sense that lessons would be stressful as student participants had a desire to meet expectations, but were not even sure what those expectations were.

Along with lessons, studio class was the other type of performance participants said caused them the most stress. Participant 1:1 shared her feelings on playing for studio class.

For a studio performance it does stress me out because a lot of my good friends are in the class, studio, and it’s like I know they’re better than me because they’re placed in the top band...it sounds silly but like are they going to be my friend if I suck?

She discussed making a personal relationship, more than just wanting to have her performance accepted by those listening. She feared a poor performance would affect her personal relationships with her friends listening.

Multiple participants discussed the feeling of being 'inadequate' to be playing among their peers or the fear of being judged by those they are playing with at the time. Participant 2:1, who was in the top band, discussed the pressure she felt from her peers for being there. "...it was intense because I didn't feel adequate enough to be sitting in that chair there were only six clarinets allowed in there and I was one of them." Even though she was identified as one of the top clarinets at her institution, she felt an inner pressure that she was not good enough to be sitting among them.

One might be surprised that performances for audiences was not mentioned when discussing performance stress. Participant 1:3 provided reasoning for why he felt less stress when performing for an audience then when in studio class or lessons.

I think there's less pressure performing something for an audience then there is performing at a lesson where someone is going to give you direct criticism and feedback...I guess when there's someone right there, that's a greater stressor to me than performing for even if there was tons of people.

A conclusion was made by participant 1:3 with this statement, "...it's not the amount of people you are performing for; it is more intimidating to play for one person who is right there and truly listening to you than for a large group of people." He also mentioned being apprehensive to criticism and feedback. When playing for an audience, no one is going to be providing immediate feedback on your performance unless perhaps in a published performance review if one is a professional musician.

Another thought on why performing for an audience is less stressful is made by participant 1:4 with the following statement.

I think a big part of it is who you're playing the music for. When I play a concert for someone and it doesn't matter if it's like a formal band concert or it's just me going down to the coffee house with a few friends and jamming, it's just sharing your music with other people. You're probably never going to see them again, it's just you giving them the gift of your music. Now when you go to a lesson, it's like you're being analyzed in every single little tiny move you make.

He hinted that performances were a time when musicians could share their music with others. He also reinforced participant 1:3's comment concerning criticism and feedback that comes from playing for smaller groups of people. Criticism of playing leading to performance stress was a theme mentioned throughout the focus groups.

Participant 2:1 said,

You're always getting criticized about how you play, how well or how horribly you play and there's always the pressure to practice and get better...if it's gonna affect your grade you have to work on it and you feel that pressure constantly.

This statement connects back to the theme of general stress. Participants in this study placed an emphasis on the importance of getting good grades. Those studied were all pursuing professions in music education, not music performance. One could assume their stress of maintaining good grades stems from the fact that one day they want to be

educators, and if they would be more stressed about performances themselves if they were music performance majors.

There was no mention in either focus group of practicing to prepare for the next concert or performance. This was due to two variables: one being lessons and studio class are the performances music students were most concerned about, and two, they felt adequately prepared for their large group performances.

Participants expressed little need to practice for large ensemble commitments or during times when they had little to no performances with 'pressure', in this case performances for smaller groups such as studio, lessons, or auditions. If these participants were in more challenging ensembles or were given more challenging pieces to work on for these ensembles it would be curious to see if their views on stress related to public performances would increase.

The concept of performing with a 'group' was not discussed in detail. Further research should examine how participants feel performing with other individuals effects their stress levels. It was also not clearly defined whether solo performances in front of larger groups were a concern for these music education students.

**Research Question #3: What experiences have you had in relation to physical health?**

Participants discussed a variety of issues concerning their physical health. There were no overwhelming themes or even substantial concerns expressed in the area of



physical health mentioned by these participants. However, the physical issues mentioned were primarily associated with practice time.

The lack of physical health concerns could be linked to the view participants held on what level of obligation justifies enduring pain as well as the nature of the accepted norm of physical health for musicians. A significant majority of participants said they were willing to push through any physical pain or general stress they might experience to achieve their musical objectives. The following were short responses participants in the first focus group gave when asked what they do to alleviate or prevent physical health issues from affecting the quality of their musical performance: “ignore it”, “I don’t know how much you can do”, “take some Motrin and keep going”, and “push through it”.

Physical ailments were specifically mentioned that affected one’s ability to practice. Participant 1:2 shared issues with her bottom lip in addition to having two fractures in her spine and a herniated disc that made proper musical posture to play her instrument challenging. Although she was not sure if the ailments in her back related to playing specifically, she did say “...the saxophone neck strap... it pulls down on your neck and then like your whole spine goes down. I mean, it’s bad. There are days when I cannot play it hurts so badly.”

Two other participants shared similar issues concerning their lips and practice time. Additional issues mentioned were calluses, neck pain from lack of good posture, and wrist pain. Participants mentioned issues they had seen in other musicians or experienced firsthand. Participant 1:2 said the following:

I've noticed my wrists have started to hurt really bad on the sides of, just from holding my saxophone and moving my wrists a lot. Actually that happened to a couple kids in the studio this year. They had to take a couple weeks off playing and wear a wrist brace because they had injured themselves from playing.

Participant 1:4 shared injuries he heard of affecting brass players.

I have heard of some permanent injuries from playing brass instruments... a lot of people who play brass instruments will kind of push inward onto their teeth so you see brass players with like caved in teeth or jaw problems.

Two musicians stated the majority of their physical ailments were related to performing in marching band. Responses showed a lack of common physical concerns facing participants, outside of ailments said to affect their practice time.

**Research Question #4: What experiences have you had that relate to mental health?**

Participant responses focused on mental health in this study were limited. Participants expressed feeling pushed to go through their day and skipping classes in relation to mental health.

They mentioned a 'drive for perfection' that seemingly never let up, not allowing them to relax or take breaks. Participant 1:1 said the following.

There would be times when I'd need to get up and practice but I don't want to, or I need to and you don't, on the rare occasion that you have a long break between

classes you just want to chill. I want to go take a nap, but you know you have to practice or you know you have to study, or you have to go talk to someone about your concert band, there's always something, there's not really a break.

This was enforced by participant 1:2's comment of "I just always push through every day." Here the participant was referring to not skipping classes, something that many participants said they often did to garner extra practice time. Although taking breaks is something they say they don't do, she was implying it was a struggle and they must 'push' through each day to accomplish what they saw as necessary.

Participant 2:1 stated she sometimes skipped class for the following reason: "I need this time for myself to maybe catch some more sleep or maybe do this assignment for this other class that I didn't do because I was practicing."

Overall, the participants did not make a conscious connection between their experiences as a music major and mental health. This may be a result of the particular makeup of the focus-group participants.

**Research Question #5: What wellbeing strategies are utilized that help overall performance of a musician?**

Themes emerging around wellbeing strategies were limited in this study. The observation was made that making music was a major stress relief for many music students and that routines/staying busy were coping strategies necessary to succeed in their endeavors. Outside of these, the depth of similar ways to manage well-being was

limited among participants. The lack of well-being strategies emerged as a theme worthy of discussion.

Focus group participants said they had the privilege of their scholastic focus being a stress relief. Participant 2:2 stated, "...what I'm going to be doing is how I relieve stress". Participants in this study enjoyed making music, seeing the benefits of it outweighing any negative effects. However, statements were made indicating physical stress, stress related to practicing, and general stress. With the above quote participants agreed although there are these stressors, the act of simply making music is both a coping skill to manage stress and a reassurance to them that the stress they experienced was worthwhile.

There was a divide among participants concerning other strategies of coping with stress. Participant 1:2 emphasized routines where participants 1:1, 1:3, and 1:4 stated they thrived off stress. However, they all agreed that being busy helped them stay focused and often when they were busy is when they were at their best. Participant 1:2 gave her view with the following statement.

Routines, routines, routines...it makes everything so much easier when you have a routine and I say I have this class and this class and during this break I practice and then I go to this class and then during this break I eat lunch. That's when I'm able to feel good about myself and succeed and have a good day. It's when that routine gets messed up that I kind of start to get stressed out.

She was the only participant to clearly state she utilized routines as a coping skill to maintain a balance in her life. Day in and day out she followed a strict, planned routine to get herself through the day. When something in her routine went array, such as having to take care of something else during a scheduled practice time, is when she said she began to get stressed out.

Participant 1:4 gave the following seemingly opposing statement discussing how he thrives off of stress.

I'm one of those people who thrives off of a lot of stress...Being a music major and being a music student in high school, too, worked perfectly for me because the stress level was just right; it kept me busy, it kept me engaged, and it kept me constantly doing things.

He said being busy and having a more chaotic lifestyle is what kept him on top of his game. Although he did not say his lifestyle lacked structure, he did imply that being simply busy and stressed is what he believed kept him at his best. The majority of participants related with his view.

Participant 1:1 bridged the gap between the two views with the following statement.

When I was at my lowest was when I wasn't being pushed...started getting pushed again and that's when I started thriving again and now I'm better than I've ever been with my flute performance...it's almost like the stress pushes me to the next level to excel even more.

She made a similar comparison to participant 1:4, saying the stress of being pushed is what allowed her to be at her best. When she struggled the most was when she was not being pushed. She also stated, “It’s almost like being busy pushes you into a routine without realizing it”, further aligning the views between routines and stress.

Although participant 1:2 seemed to be the only one holding the view that routines were an effective well-being strategy, the statement above implies there may be more of a similarity between her and other participants than it seemed at first glance. Being busy, or ‘stressed’ as some were saying, caused the unintended effect of pushing participants into a routine. When they were not busy, they were not forced to have a structured routine.

Additional well-being strategies were mentioned by individuals, but not supported by any consensus among group participants: getting enough sleep, working out, recreational activities, proper posture, practicing in small increments, utilizing support networks, and stretching before and during practice time as personal methods to stay at top performance level.

### **Additional Themes**

#### **Relationships.**

Relationships were talked about in the following ways throughout the focus groups: as a reason participants chose their college institutions or major, networking capabilities, relationships with other music students, student to teacher relationships, and performance impacts of relationships.

Multiple participants mentioned a previous relationship with either a faculty member or prior experiences with the institution as a reason for why they chose their college institution. Participants consistently mentioned how small the world of music was in reference to networking capabilities in the field as a whole and to their college music departments. Participants expressed knowing someone at their institution prior to choosing that institution for their college career, as did participant 1:3 when he described the relationship he had with his private lessons teacher.

Participants mentioned being close with their music counterparts throughout their college experience; participant 2:1 stated, "...you end up knowing everybody by the end of at least your first year" and participant 1:1 stated, "especially the instrumentalists, we're really close knit."

These close relationships among music students are not surprising given the amount of time they spend together in classes and in ensembles. Outside of institutions with an extremely large group of musicians, most students are with a 'cohort' of students who share the same academic classes year in and year out. In addition, ensembles contain students from all years of college music students not to mention studio courses and jury performances, causing frequent exposure to other musicians from the same school.

Participants also mentioned the similarity in schedules and downtime as reasoning for their close relationships with other music students. Participant 1:1 said in between classes she will say, "Oh hey, in between this class let's go grab lunch." Participant 2:1 discussed hanging out in specific locations with other music majors during down time.

Given their high number of courses and limited break time during the day, music students will hang out around music classrooms together.

Mentions of competition came from participant 2:1 when she discussed her feelings of being only one of six clarinets in the top band. Although proud to be in the top band, she constantly felt “nervous” in rehearsals concerned she did not deserve to be there among others. Another competition previously discussed was participant 1:1’s desire to be taking lessons with the full time professor, not the graduate student. The choice was left up to the professor to select who was ‘worthy’ of taking lessons with him and who was not.

Competition may appear to be an unhealthy component, causing stress, to participants. However the present study also demonstrates their relationships driven performances, studio class and private lessons, are those that motivate them most.

### **Perception of Music Majors.**

Another additional theme that emerged from the study was that music majors perceived their peer group to be a unique type of individual who have a constant desire to improve and excel, work harder, thrive under stress, and have an extreme commitment to music.

What was not clear was whether or not music students are a unique type of people, or whether music study creates and provides skills that makes musicians unique. Participant 1:1 said, “...there’s tons of studies that show students who go through music education classes have better grades. They study better, they work harder, and they have



more motivation.” Participants in the first focus group agreed, yet also agreed with the following statement made by participant 1:3. “...what we do as musicians attracts a kind of person that even in tough situations works better...it attracts the people who are interested in it and are the kind of people that want to work hard.” It was unclear whether the belief is that music students are unique due to internal (predetermined characteristics that attract individuals to music) or external factors (experiencing education as a music student increases the chance that individuals have these traits).

### **Summary**

Themes concerning general stress, performance stress, physical health, mental health, relationships, and perceptions of music majors as a result of focus group data. Chapter five will conclude by incorporating current themes with previous literature in addition to providing recommendations for music educators, student affairs professionals, and future researchers.

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion, Recommendations, & Conclusions

#### Discussion

The researcher utilized a qualitative approach to gain insight into the music student's perceptions and experiences concerning general stress, performance stress, physical health, and mental health. Themes found as a result of focus groups supported, contradicted, and expanded upon previous research.

The first research question asked about general stress among the participants. General stressors were identified as follows based on focus group analysis: course load, additional expectations outside of classes, homework/practicing, defining success, and overall time commitment.

Keup's (2008) research indicated that millennial students are high achieving but may have a lower tipping point than previous generations. This tipping point results in a more crisis orientation to life. The present research found that the participants are indeed high achieving. They are required to take additional hours beyond what is required to obtain a formal degree. For example, music education students are required to take music courses, teaching courses, and music teaching courses. In addition, they are also expected to attend concerts and participate in ensembles and most of these requirements result in no credit toward degree completion. However, at no time did these students suggest they were near a "tipping point". None indicated any crisis and tended to describe their stress as ambient.

Dews and Williams (1989) identified ten issues of concern for music students: stress, pre-performance nervousness, progress impatience, burnout with musical progress, job insecurity, feeling conflict between music and one's personal life, inadequate practice facilities, depression, stage fright, and concentration. Many of these issues were expressed by respondents in the present study. Issues of concern present in both studies were stress, burnout with musical progress, and inadequate practice facilities. As previously discussed, music students identified ambient stress was a problem due to protracted non-credited schedules and the general lifestyle of a musician. They indicated both a fear of burning out from over-commitment and a fear of not being challenged enough by their professors and peers. Many said they were at their best when being pushed and at their worst when there was nothing for them to feel stress about and work towards. Lastly, inadequate practice facilities were discussed as a reason participants did not practice. They indicated there were not enough available rooms for them to practice. Job insecurity, depression, stage fright, and concentration were not mentioned as concerns for study participants.

Findings by Sternbach (2008) indicated that music students are overburdened with extra courses for no credit, excessive practice routines and constant feedback from professors and peers on their musicianship. Likewise, the participants in this research stated the additional courses left them struggling to balance the various tasks. No one was satisfied with practice time and that criticism was particularly stressful when coming from their professors and peers. One area in which Sternbach's conclusions were not supported was that students lack the time to improve their social skills. In the present

study, participants discussed having friends both within and outside of the music department, making it clear they have built social relationships.

A second research question examined performance and stress. Dews and Williams (1989) found a direct correlation between levels of self-esteem and how musicians felt about their performance. In the present study, participants did not indicate that their self-esteem was an issue. What they did express was that their performance anxiety changed with the nature of the audience. The participants indicated that the people they respect, professors and peers, were a more difficult and thus more stressful audience to play for than a larger more general audience. There was a continuum of perceived stress that increased as the audience changed from instructor to peer to general audience.

A third research question examined the nature of physical health. Spahn, Richter, and Zschocke (2002) found a significant number of music students suffered physical health problems. The present research supported their findings and the participants discussed a prevalence of physical ailments. Participants discussed physical concerns being severe enough to affect their ability to practice. Physical injuries from marching band were more prevalent in the present study, also congruent with previous findings.

Physical injuries in marching band musicians was also studied by Harman (1993) who found a large number of musicians sought out professional care for their injuries. Both focus groups discussed the physical strain marching band placed on them. The weight of carrying brass instruments and the angle at which one is expected to carry them was offered by the participants as a reason for the physical issues in the upper extremities.

Research by Larsson, Baum, Mudholkar, and Kollia (1993) found musicians to cope with physical pain by limiting their playing to short increments, not playing altogether, or to change mode of playing. Participants in this study reacted to physical ailments in a similar manner. Participants, as well as others they had heard about, took breaks from their instrument or practicing for shorter increments in an attempt to minimize pain.

A fourth research question concerned music students and mental health. Taliaferro, Rienzo, Pigg, Miller, and Dodd (2009) stated college students have difficulty functioning due to feelings of depression and hopelessness. Participants in the present study did not directly state feelings of depression or hopelessness, but did express times where they had difficulty functioning. Multiple participants said they skipped class due to a need for a break or to work on another task that needed to be completed. Taliaferro et al. also stated students have more trouble coping with their problems, which was also found to be true in the research. Participants were unable to articulate ways in which they managed stress.

There was a lack of well-being strategies discussed in the study at hand. Previous research indicates a high success rate for courses aimed to provide coping strategies for college music students (Spahn, Hildebrandt, & Seidenglanz, 2001, Zander, Voltmer, Spahn, & Mus, D., 2010, Barton, DHS, OTR, & Feinberg, 2008). No such courses were mentioned by any participants.

An additional theme found in the present study was that music majors perceive themselves as being a unique type of individual. Wills and Cooper (1987) found popular

musicians exhibited above average levels of Type A behavior in comparison to the general population. Many participants discussed feeling that musicians are 'different' than other people and that it draws a certain type of personality to it. Perhaps these types of people are 'Type A' personalities. Sternbach (1993) also identified a need for perfection in musicians. This finding clearly translated to participants in the present study. There was a constant feeling of a drive to be better, practice more, and get good grades.

### **Recommendations for Student Affairs Professionals**

Student affairs professionals and music educators can make great strides in working with music students to alleviate general stress, stress related to performance, physical health concerns, and mental health issues. They can make these efforts by increasing their awareness of the stressors placed on music students, assisting students in setting attainable goals, and promoting well-being strategies.

1. Students would benefit from having professionals such as residence hall directors, professors, or private lessons instructors, understand the unique stressors placed on them as musicians. Participants indicated that music professors often place expectations on them as if their course/lesson/ensemble was the only commitment students had. Being aware and potentially adapting to other factors present in the life of a student may allow students relief in knowing their professor, who they respect and value their relationship, understands they may not always be at their best due to another circumstance present in one's routine. Student affairs professionals can serve as resources to music students by having an understanding

of music student's full commitment to music during their college career. This would assist students in making healthy decisions about the amount of involvement they are taking on, their ability to perform, and ways to manage their commitments.

2. Music instructors can also collaborate with students in defining success and determining reachable goals. A theme throughout the present study was that music students desired to be excellent but had difficulty determining what that meant. Teachers can provide students clear guidelines on what to work on when practicing and how to feel accomplished in their work.
3. A last recommendation is for all professionals who interact with millennial music students to encourage well-being strategies. In the present study, strategies of handling stress were limited. Institutions might consider adding a course aimed at improving lifestyle for millennial students if they don't already offer such a course. Music departments in particular should consider this given the findings of the present study.

### **Recommendations for Future Researchers**

1. The present research found stress increased along a continuum from private instructor to general audience. Future researchers could quantitatively measure stress related to performance along this continuum.
2. Researchers could broaden the participants to include music performance and more students currently enrolled in higher education.

3. Lastly, researchers could examine the implications of “curriculum creep” and the amount of studios and non-credit experiences on music majors. They could examine time to degree completion compared to other non-music majors.

## **Conclusions**

The participants in the current study were examined utilizing qualitative research. Focus groups were conducted to examine the experience of music majors in relation to general stress, performance stress, physical health, mental health, and well-being strategies.

Results found participants perceived stress as ambient due to excessive non-credit course, studio and private practice loads, expectations for participation outside of coursework, practicing toward an ill-defined concept of ‘success’, and poor time management skills. Participants discussed a continuum of stress from performance before private instructor and peers (more stressful) to a general audience (less stressful). Participants expressed a moderate amount of physical health concerns, mostly about the impact of physical health on practice time. Data related to mental health was limited and most participants expressed more frustration over time commitments than identified mental health issues. Participants were unable to articulate well-being coping strategies they practice.

Recommendations for Student Affairs professionals were to increase awareness of stressors facing music students, helping students set reachable goals, and focusing on providing music students with well-being strategies.



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