

FINAL INTEGRATIVE PAPER

**Final Reflection Paper**

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## Integrative Paper

Whenever a student decides to study social work, they are quickly introduced to the concepts of self-care. Despite being in a career that impacts so many lives, it's easy to experience burn-out and stress in social work related careers. As a result, several high-stress jobs have a high turn-over rate. So as a social worker, it is important to learn how to manage these stressors and utilize effective self-care techniques. However, what I have learned most about this course is practicing self-care is not only for my benefit, but also is an act of worship to God as it is showing care for his creation: me!

Generally, people consider self-care as doing activities you enjoy to destress. However there are different approaches to implementing self-care in your life beyond just doing your favorite hobbies. For example, in a short space of time , I experienced several changes that added stressors in my life. In 2022, I got married, had a baby and began experiencing some difficulties with the management at my job. Moreover, I was also in the middle of completing my graduate studies. The culmination of these stressors had various psychological and physiological impacts on my body as a result. Unfortunately, there isn't always enough time in the day to do the self-care activities I enjoy. As a result, it is important to sometimes take a proactive approach to self-care by utilizing time-management (Cox & Steiner, 2013). If I manage my time better with school assignments and work, it will not be too difficult to do the things I enjoy. Furthermore, it will prevent me from experiencing low motivation and negative feelings about my work.

Taking a proactive approach to self-care will also prevent 'compassion fatigue' and 'burn-out.' Generally, most social workers at some point will either experience compassion fatigue or burn-out at some point in time. Cox and Steiner explain that burnout and compassion fatigue usually occur when an individual is constantly interacting with unmanaged repeated

stressors over a long period of time (2013). In the past, when I worked in Foster Care and at a Group home, the workload and clientele was immensely stressful that I experienced burnout and found myself not able to do my work the way I used to when I first started. Now at my current place of work, I am experiencing compassion fatigue, and I find it hard to get excited when clients meet with me.

According to Cox and Steiner, the reasons why I might be feeling burnout and fatigue is due to little control and influence over my responsibilities (2013). I have several projects and ideas that I would like to do but I am unable to do so within my role and I feel like I have little support. On the other hand, I recently found out I was being paid below the actual salary for my position and was upset that no one in management informed me on how to be promoted to the actual salary. Another aspect Cox and Steiner described that contributed to my burnout was feelings of not being appreciated (2013). There were several times when I contributed to important projects and was not praised or acknowledged for my contributions. However, when I made mistakes I was harshly penalized.

Noticing burnout or compassion fatigue isn't always as obvious as it sounds. At first I did not notice, until certain colleagues informed me that I did not seem like myself. It was through these conversations that I realized that I did have some of the symptoms of burnout and fatigues. These symptoms can of course be physical, or emotional. For me, I realized that I suddenly had a disinterest in seeing my clients, and was agitated when new clients were assigned to me. I also would feel exhausted after seeing them (Cox and Steiner, 2013). On the other hand, I found myself much more irritable at home and withdrew from my colleagues. I suppose it was this sudden change that caused them to ask if I was okay.

Nevertheless, these experiences proved that self-awareness is essential in self-care and stress management. It is important to identify when I am experiencing burnout or simply when my body says I need a break from all the roles I play as mom, student, employee and wife. Once you know how your body responds to stress, you can quickly address it and take the right actions to manage the stressors causing burnout and fatigue.

Of course in some areas where your stress is your manager, clients, or difficulty caring for a new baby, doing your hobbies may not be enough because it will not remove the stressor from your life. As a result, you will need to take a different approach which Cox and Steiner expounds on. In the cases of difficult clients, I definitely can utilize supervision to help process out my challenges and work out with my manager how to best proceed moving forward. On the other hand, if I am experiencing difficulty caring for my new baby, it is important to utilize community. This is something I am learning to use since I generally prided myself on being independent. However, I cannot do it all on my own when I have someone who now requires so much of my attention. Utilizing the support that comes from community is also a form of self-care.

Even so, there are times when supervision and community is not enough, which is why I am fortunate to be able to have a higher power to lead on. Nouwen, Mc. Neil and Morssion give readers great comfort in knowing that God does not delight in our suffering (McNeill et al., 2010). Because he is an all knowing God, he knows our heart and what troubles us. I am experiencing challenges with my supervisor, and generally I am a person who can adapt. Nevertheless, the work environment has affected me so much, I desperately want to leave. Unfortunately, due to my expenses and responsibility to my son, I cannot leave this stressful

situation. Nevertheless, I can change my attitude because that is what I can control until I find a new job.

This perspective is similar to what the author describes when we see horrible realities for people around the world. Due to television, social media and radio, we are constantly exposed to the horrors around the world, and often we feel angry because our control to change these things are limited (McNeill et al., 2010). However, we can choose to not be solely filled with anger, but move with compassion as Jesus moved with compassion.

What also stood out to me in the book “Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life” is the ideology that prayer and action are not contradictory (McNeill et al., 2010). Instead the two are complimentary, and the best results come with the effective combination of both. As a child of a minister, I often got frustrated with my mother. It would seem that everytime I came to her with a problem her only advice would be to pray about it. This would be very frustrating as I had learned that the best way to get results was to be proactive, ask questions, follow up and eventually something would happen. However, recent events have shown me that my approach was not always effective and would lead to me feeling more frustrated since despite my efforts no change occurred.

However, after reading the book, I have a different understanding on why both prayer and action must work in tandem with one another. For example, prayer signifies the need for higher power’s intervention. There are certain challenges that are outside my control. When I pray, it reminds that there is someone who is concerned about the situations that trouble me and wants to help me. On the other hand, action reminds me that I do have power and that I am not powerless. Beyond just praying for people suffering, I can start initiatives that donate food, clothes or even provide shelter to those in need, because I do have power. I used to struggle with the idea that if I

tried to do things within my own ability, it would mean that I was not having faith in God.

However, I understand now that trusting in my God given abilities is still having faith in God.

What I struggle with now though is having the confidence to move forward and achieve my goals. For many years, I have wanted to open a transitional shelter for 'aging out' foster youth. This desire of mine solidified that I was in the right field. However, with my limited resources , it seems impossible to realize this dream. Nevertheless, I now know that this is where I commit this goal to prayer, and trust that God is concerned with the issue of homeless foster youth and connect me to the right resources in his time. Moreover, while I wait for God to act, I will continue to stay informed on the developing issues of these youth and look for opportunities from humanitarian agencies.

One other activity that helped form my perspective on self-care and spirituality was creating a rule of life. The exercises where I had to explore what I perceived as my roles, gifts, desires, vision and mission pushed me to contemplate my relationships with God , family and Community. For example, I was pushed to explore how some of my closest relationships felt exhausting and how that was contributing to my overall mental health. I also was able to reflect on my greatest desires and goals and how my struggles in reaching them were causing frustration. Lastly, I was able to reflect on how my calling to be a teacher of the word was something I was running away from. I have no issues being a worship leader, and find security in doing that role. However, I understand that I do have an ability to teach the word of God to new believers, yet I do not want to.

One aspect about the 'Framing the Rule of Life" section that stood out to me was the section on my temple. As a christian, I learned from a very young age that my body was the

temple of the holy spirit. This importance of my body shifted when I transitioned into highschool. As a woman, society makes you feel that your value is largely based on your physical appearance, and for some time I took pride in being classified as an attractive archetype. However, after having my son, my body changed drastically and I have been trying to learn to love this new body, while also going to the gym to 'fix' my less desirable parts. Macchia helped to refocus these unhealthy thoughts about my body by allowing me to see I shouldn't aspire for a healthy body to be deemed attractive. Instead, I should aspire for a healthy body so that I can sustain the calling of my life and live long enough to see it to completion. Overall, although going to the gym is classified as one of my self-care activities, it is important for me to not only focus on how attractive I will feel eventually, but also on how I can please God with my body (Macchia, 2012).

References

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