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A Day in the Life

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UWill Discover! Proposal: *A Day in the Life*

Proposal Type: Performance

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Depression and anxiety can affect anyone, whether it is directly through the person who has these mental health issues, or indirectly through people who know of others who have mental health issues. This is not new information. Research has been done on the topics, and it is very well understood what depression and anxiety are. Personally, I have been affected by depression and anxiety through family members, and very close friends who face these issues. I have seen them in prolonged states of unhappiness, talked to them about how hopeless they feel and how the world is better off without them, and I have seen the scars of their self-harm. I became motivated to help the people I love with their struggles. I wanted to create a way of communicating through the arts, specifically through physical theatre. This led to the creation of my two-minute movement piece called “A Day In the Life”, which I created for an assignment in my movement class. This project is not based on a theoretical approach: it is an artistic expression of an examination of family and friends. It is through the observation of people in my environment, and the challenges they were facing, that I was able to help them using my passion for physical theatre.

To begin the creative process, my teacher asked that we create our movement compositions based on something we are passionate about. Along with this, we needed to form a question with an anchor (an event or person that links us to the question). Since I have already been observing people with mental health issues, I realized that this project could serve a second purpose. I always wanted to help someone close to me person, but to do so, I had to understand her emotions and thoughts with greater clarity. Through my movement composition, I could do

this. My existing state of knowledge was only the results of her depression: how she just wanted to be left alone, how she wanted to die, how she felt worthless and how she turned to self harm. I knew what happened as a result of her depression, but my goal was to understand the process, which leads her to self-harm or attempted suicide. These actions are the result of her emotions; I wanted to gain a greater understanding of her emotions and thoughts. So the essence of my project is this question: In one day, what does the mind of a person who has depression and anxiety go through? To answer this, I used these methods.

My first method was observing the way she acted when her depression and anxiety were significant. Since it is an expressive movement piece, I observed her body language. I took note of how she carried out various random tasks, how she talked, and how she acted around people. I found that when it was just her and I, she did not want to even move unless they absolutely had to. She wanted to stay in a place that was isolated from everyone. She resorted to small shapes like the fetal position, which I use in the beginning of my composition. Her body was lazy and all of her movements were with low energy. I found this changed immediately when she interacted with people who do not know about her depression and anxiety. When around these people, she was springy, and happy about everything, normal seeming; maybe slightly too happy. She could flip a switch and go from one extreme to the other, but there never seemed to be a middle ground that was peaceful. Both extremes had a sense of tension to them. I applied these and other observations to my composition.

My second method was to talk to the person about their depression and anxiety and their feelings regarding the mental health challenges they are facing. Two of the key descriptions that I used for my composition were: she feels like she's drowning in her anxiety with no hope of reaching the surface and breaking it, and that her bed was her only safe haven. Since my piece is based on a 24 hour time period, I used the image of a bed as a starting point. I used the drowning image as a stimulus for my emotion when performing the piece. As the character in my composition, I am reaching for the surface, trying to break free of my anxiety and depression, but I stop myself because I think it is hopeless.

My third and most fundamental method in creating my piece was using the structure and elements of composition. The assignment had guidelines declaring what was necessary to the composition and set rules according to time. The composition had to include movements like rolls, jumps, movement along the floor, and ten seconds of stillness. It also had to include ten seconds of hysterical laughing or crying, five seconds of gibberish, and could include no more than one word. These essential components defined my ideas and made them concrete. I chose my one word to be "help". In the beginning of my piece, the word "help" is barely audible, but after my desperation has reached its climax, I am screaming for help, but my screams are never heard. I use the ten seconds of stillness in a notably effective way at the end of my composition. By the end, I have broken down and am crying and hyperventilating with my face covered by my hands. As I straighten up in a kneeling position, my right hand moves from the top of my face and down, revealing a sickly fake smile. My close friend admitted that she often resorted to masking her true

emotions because it was easier for her to cope. She would fake a smile almost everyday. These guidelines established the base for which I built my composition on top of.

My final method in creating my composition was to add my own feelings and emotional discoveries into it. As my devised work, there are going to be parts of my artistic aesthetics will factor into my composition. The goal of my composition is to gain a greater understanding of the person; a complete understanding would take much more research over a long period of time. The parts in which I didn't fully understand, I filled in with my emotions that resulted from my movements. It is comparable to a sketch artist sketching the face of a criminal being described to them. Often, the criminal is not described in full detail. The sketch artist is told most of the details of the criminal: the colour of their hair, or their eye colour, the shape of their nose, and other general features. The artist then completes the sketch using his own ideas of what the criminal may look like based off of the information that he/she has been presented. The practice I used to stimulate my emotions and movement is called *plastiquing*.

Plastiquing is improvised movement often made to music. In acting, it is taught that "being" is the result of "doing". An internal reaction (emotion) is the result of an external stimulus. Once this external stimulus is absorbed, an internal reaction occurs. This internal reaction then produces an impulse for a physical action. So, the process is external stimulus, reaction, impulse, and action. I used an external stimulus (the music I chose) which acted as the catalyst of a reaction inside me (my emotions), which fostered an impulse for spontaneous action (my

improvised movements. I videotaped this, and then reviewed it to see which movements I would add to my composition.

My movement composition fulfilled my task. Through it, I was able to better understand what the person was going through. Her words were not enough to paint a clear picture for me. Movement acted as a second language, turning her words into visual art, which I could grasp with much more success. For over a year, they kept their depression and anxiety a secret, even from their family, but I was able to convince them to talk openly to their parents about it and seek counselling. Now, a little over a month later, the person is progressing and able to be more open about their mental health issues.

This project has the power to stimulate dialogue. Through my passion for physical theatre, I was able to inspire action in myself, inspire communication about her depression and anxiety, and inspire the person to take action for herself. This project has the power to benefit the community by painting a visual picture for people to observe depression in a new light, a light that may be clearer for them. It has the power to inspire expressivity of people's emotions and feelings using their passions. My expression was through physical theatre, but it does not necessarily have to be this: it could be any form of the arts! As a result, those who feel like they don't have a voice can be given a voice with dignity. They can be given a voice that is unique to them and their situation. This project can spark the process of individual transformation.

