

The Wellness Industry has an estimated value of around \$3.7b¹ which poses the question of how genuine the interests of these multimillion-dollar companies are. In light of this huge opportunity for profit, there is a possibility that there is a misalignment of incentives since companies are often driven by profit. Given that one in four people in England will experience a mental health problem each year² the necessity for prevention of mental illnesses and the promotion of positive wellbeing is needed more than ever. For my Student Devised Assessment (SDA) I have decided to design an online retreat which teaches individuals authentic practices to maintain wellbeing. It will also raise a discussion regarding the Wellbeing Industry's incentives and objectives.

The objective of the retreat is to make those attending aware of the extent to which looking after one's wellbeing has become commercialised, materialistic, and often, expensive. One of the main reasons for this change is the development and boom of the so-called Wellbeing Industry. During my retreat and in particular the talk, I want to bring to light the Wellbeing Industry's position and challenge their interests. How authentic are their aims when the sole objective is to make profit off the public's wellbeing, happiness and mental health? The SDA will acknowledge that whilst it has rendered wellbeing a commodity it is also an immensely helpful, effective and well-researched industry. The key aim and hope for this retreat is to engender a sense of prevention is better than cure, so if we employ better approaches to self-care, we are less likely to need more intrusive interventions. It is important to stress that there is not a one-size-fits-all method, and the retreat hopes to be both inclusive and encouraging throughout.

My main concern before beginning the project was the obsession and new wave of materialistic self-care. The modern-day meditation one might find in an app or a YouTube video "are put to work in the service of certain political and economic interests. They are not simply gifted to us for our own Aristotelian flourishing."³ These commodities are so contrary to what internal positive wellbeing is that we need to question how we can reclaim it back to us. Davies indicates the rise in hedonistic self-care when in fact the World Health Organisation (WHO) defined wellness as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being"⁴ thus, highlighting that "to be well" is not simply a lack of illness but rather a positive and healthy state of mind too. The hedonistic approach to wellbeing is a focus that

¹ Well-to-do, Global Wellness Industry Trend Report, 2018, <<https://www.welltodoglobal.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/WelltodoTrend-Report.pdf>>, [accessed: 30/12/2020], p. 3

² Mind, 'How common are mental health problems?', *Mental health facts and statistics*, <<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/types-of-mental-health-problems/statistics-and-facts-about-mental-health/how-common-are-mental-health-problems/#collapse2e240/>>, [accessed: 30/12/2020]

³ Davies, W, *The Happiness Industry: how the government and big business sold us well-being*. (London: Verso, 2015) p. 6

⁴ World Health Organisation (WHO), 'Constitution', <<https://www.who.int/about/who-we-are/constitution>>, [accessed: 03/01/2021]

that is unfortunately underpinned by the Wellbeing Industry as they feed on “mood boosts” and make the consumers falsely believe certain goods are essential and valuable.

I began investigating this topic because of my desire to raise awareness of how simple and accessible methods of managing wellbeing are. The phrase “Mental Wellbeing” can often connote mental health and alongside that, mental illness, therefore certain stigmas still exist surrounding the topic⁵ in the same way that poor physical wellbeing remains loosely related to being overweight. To counteract this, an effective approach is to introduce from a young age that self-care is the most effective strategy. Being self-aware is an easier way to remain healthy and reduce the risk of mental illness in the long-term. It is necessary for people of all ages, in all stages of life to recognise the benefits of authentic mental-wellbeing management. For this reason, the retreat includes practices we have learnt throughout the IATL module but also educates on theoretical background to explain why such methods are effective and helpful.

The principal audience for my retreat is students at university because they are a demographic who are in dire need of support and guidance with regards to their mental health⁶ and practical skills for managing wellbeing. This specific medium was chosen for the assessment because it appeals to a young-adult demographic, is an effective platform to achieve the objectives, and finally provides an interactive learning space for attendees to acquire new ways of managing wellbeing. The retreat uses informal language which is appropriate for the target audience of students and is suitable for a relaxed retreat environment. Moreover, the tone is a low register to be more engaging. Despite this, the language choices remain academic in some places because University Students are by definition involved in academic study and can therefore understand the concepts. Additionally, with drugs still being “the most common form of treatment”⁷ for mental health problems in the UK, I wanted to propose a retreat which incorporates varied approaches to managing mental wellbeing alone in order to reduce the need for medication in the long-term.

The four stages of the retreat are self-explanatory and consist of teaching the attendees examples of practical skills they can incorporate into daily life.

⁵ YMCA, NHS, *'I am Whole, A report investigating the stigma faced by young people experiencing mental health difficulties'*, 2016, <<https://www.ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/IAMWHOLE-v1.1.1.pdf>>, [accessed: 03/01/2021], p. 4

⁶ “78% students believed they’d experienced mental health problems in last year” APPG, *'Lost in transition? – provision of mental health support for 16-21 year olds moving to further and higher education'*, 2015, <<https://appg-students.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/APPG-on-Students-December-Mental-health-briefing.pdf>>, [accessed: 03/01/2021], pp. 2-3

⁷ Brown, D, *'Mental health: 10 charts on the scale of the problem'*, <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-41125009>>, [accessed 03/01/2021]

The first workshop centres around vigorous physical activity. The Go Set Go programme recommends that one of the first medical recommendations and interventions for mild or moderate depression should be physical activity.⁸ Physical activity, both moderate and vigorous, can reduce anxiety and stress and increase self-esteem and energy levels at the same time as simply helping you to become fitter. It can also “improve wellbeing and enhance resilience”.⁹ These positive consequences of engaging in physical activity will be demonstrated in the first workshop by asking attendees to rate how they feel before and after a short session and thus indicating that mood can be improved post work-out due to the increase in blood flow, endorphins and the resulting increase in energy. I have ensured that the workshops are inclusive and accessible to all, by incorporating short, simple and beginner-friendly sessions. Sport, diet and mental health are personal and sometimes sensitive topics, and I did not want to create a barrier to any attendees taking part.

The second workshop teaches the usefulness of journaling and educates the listeners on The 5 Ways to Wellbeing. Firstly, journaling is a way for anyone to reflect on how they are feeling in the present moment. As demonstrated in numerous stories and studies in the All-Party-Parliamentary report on Creative Arts, journaling and engaging with arts can reduce the need for medication for mental health disorders¹⁰. It is a pro-active way of focusing one’s thoughts on emotions and the events in one’s life. Secondly, the New Economics Foundation’s initiative of The 5 Ways to Wellbeing is an incredibly useful and efficient way of promoting easy steps to looking after one’s wellbeing.¹¹ This is an initiative I discovered during this module that I strongly believe in and think should be promoted to a greater extent around the UK. For this reason, I included it in my retreat. It consists of the easy-to-remember acronym, G.R.E.A.T, teaching the public the importance of Giving, Relating (connecting) with others, Exercising, Awareness (living mindfully and eudemonically), and Trying out new things. The 5 steps are all easy to apply and give a sense of direction to those who engage with it.

The third workshop is the main body of the retreat and is a talk. It centres around the main theme by calling into question the Wellbeing Industry’s sincerity as they are profiting off the public’s wellbeing, something which seems juxtaposed when compared with the roots and personal-development aim of wellbeing.

⁸Get Set to Go Research Consortium, ‘Get Set to Go: Research findings’, 2017, London: Mind, p. 4

⁹ Clow, A., and Edmunds, S. (Eds.), 2014. *Physical Activity and Mental Health*. Human Kinetics: Leeds; Chapter 1, p. 8

¹⁰ APPG, ‘*Creative Health: The Arts for Health and Wellbeing, The Short Report*’, 2018, <https://www.culturehealthandwellbeing.org.uk/appg-inquiry/Publications/Creative_Health_The_Short_Report.pdf>, [accessed: 30/12/2020] pp. 3, 5, 6

¹¹ New Economics Forum, ‘*Five Ways to Wellbeing*’, 2008, <<https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/five-ways-to-wellbeing-1.pdf>> [accessed: 03/01/2021] p. 8

At this point the retreat moves on to a yoga session. However, to improve the retreat, I could have included a workshop which involved cooking a meal together after the talk. This could have taught the links between diet and mental wellbeing and explored the interesting and surprising links between the gut and the brain.¹² If the retreat were to actually take place I would research more into the clear connection between nutrition and wellbeing and thus include it in the retreat plan.

The final session of the day discusses mindfulness and features a short yoga session, intentionally positioned at the end of the retreat to reinforce the reflective nature of the next steps following the retreat: what are YOU going to do now? Meditation is in part an acceptance of self and of others teaching a “present moment focus... and the development of...joy, compassion, wisdom.”¹³ Additionally, according to Mind “practising mindfulness can help manage depression and some anxiety problems.”¹⁴ I chose to include a workshop on mindfulness because it returns us to the issue of commoditising wellness practices. In the corporate world, mindfulness is more and more often sold as a cure and quick fix. It is seen as an easy transformational procedure when in fact research proves it is rather the opposite. “Rather than applying mindfulness as a means to awaken individuals...from the unwholesome roots of greed... and delusion, it is being refashioned into a banal... self-help technique that can actually reinforce those roots.”¹⁵ The modern, commercialised version conveniently shifts the issue of stress onto the individual rather than address the real issue of a toxic work environment or high-stress life. Including a mindfulness and yoga workshop in the retreat is important to highlight how capitalism has allowed this industry to become what it is today.

To conclude, the world is conflicted because so much of what we need we expect to be provided by the state, when in reality it is within our reach. My SDA hopes to equip those attending with tools to manage their own mental and physical wellbeing demonstrating the importance of preventative methods, authentic self-care and finally overcoming the final taboo surrounding mental wellbeing.

¹²Harvard Health Publishing, ‘The gut-brain connection, pay attention to your gut-brain connections’, in *Healthbeat*, <https://www.health.harvard.edu/diseases-and-conditions/the-gut-brain-connection>, [accessed: 03/01/2021]

¹³ Crane, R. S., Brewer, J., C. Feldman, Kabat-Zinn, J., Santorelli, S., Williams, J. M. G., and Kuyken, W., ‘What defines mindfulness-based programs? The warp and the weft’, *Psychological Medicine* 47:6, Cambridge University Press, 2016, p. 1

¹⁴ Mind, ‘Can mindfulness treat mental health problems?’, *What is Mindfulness?*, <<https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/drugs-and-treatments/mindfulness/about-mindfulness/#CanMindfulnessTreatMentalHealthProblems>>, [accessed: 30/12/2020]

¹⁵ Pursor, R., Loy, D., *Beyond McMindfulness*, (2013) <https://www.huffpost.com/entry/beyond-mcmindfulness_b_3519289?quccounter=1> [Accessed 16/11/2020]

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