

The Wellness Design Lab

Enlightening everyday experience
through wellness practices.

Blair Muxiang Yu



Sunset at Namsan Tower, Seoul, Korea.

The Wellness Design Lab:
Enlightening everyday experience
through wellness practices.

by Blair Muxiang Yu

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Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Katherine Gillieson

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Figure 1: View from Tunnel Bluffs, Squamish-Lillooet D, BC

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research has been conducted on the unceded traditional territories of the Coast Salish people, the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. This research also embeds rich embodiment and cultural influence from stepping foot on lands across The UK, China, and South Korea. I am very grateful for the opportunities to visit these beautiful lands and the possibilities these lands have brought me and my work.



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To my dogs: Xiangxiang and Mocha for always running towards me, and being a constant source of joy and comfort for me.

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Figure 3: Lynn Canyon Suspension Bridge Park, North Vancouver, BC

KEYWORDS

- Wellness
- Nature
- Ritual
- Self-care
- Communication Design
- Interaction Design
- Systems Design
- UX/UI Design
- Journalling
- Photography

GLOSSARY

WELLNESS:

/ˈwelnəs/
noun

In this research paper, wellness means an act of taking care of yourself and a state of happiness that people experience while practicing activities they truly enjoy doing.

UNWELLNESS:

un·well·ness
noun

In this thesis, the term unwellness does not refer to physical and mental illness, but the feeling that an individual experiences when lacking wellness practices, or temporary stress from work/school.

ABSTRACT



This thesis research explores the topic of wellness from the post-secondary student perspective in this post-pandemic era. It begins with the question: “How might the practice of wellness become an accessible ‘tool’ to maximize everyday experiences and foster a wellness-centred lifestyle?” This research aims to help people move from lacking well-being to feeling well by promoting and embedding wellness practices into everyday activities.

This thesis inquires into the practice of wellness from both an auto-ethnographic lens and a participatory perspective. By documenting personal data and my wellness journey through travelling, being outside and disconnecting from society, the auto-ethnographic design experiment employs descriptive reflections, photography and bookmaking. The participatory perspective includes gathering insights from surveys and hosting participatory workshop activities with current and recently graduated post-secondary students. This collected information is then thematically analyzed, and published as a website with the research process.

By aligning the similarities from the two design experiments, the findings indicate that reframing wellness as an un-privileged practice and embedding the wellness mindset in everyday lives, could help balance negative emotions and maximize everyday experiences. This led to the summative system design project: The Wellness Design Lab care kit, which proposes to elevate daily experiences through personalized wellness practices.

INTRODUCTION



Figure 4: Illustration of a stressed student.

My experience and the problem:

Early adulthood — being in the early 20s — feels magical, like anything can happen. But that very ‘magic’ means that people in early adulthood are also vulnerable to the anxiety and unpleasantness of the unexpected and unfamiliar. The milestone of early adulthood can be a heavyweight that burdens younger generations with responsibility and loneliness. When we step into the stage of our life where we must face the world alone, we need dedication, strength, and support.

In this semi-post-pandemic era, we are forced to transition from a “pause” to an “un-pause”. Although the fear from the pandemic has been left in the past, the feelings of unwellness, stress, anxiety, and depression have been carried forward (Neustaeter, 2022). For many post-secondary students, these emotions arise frequently and affect their everyday behaviours heavily.

As students, we often have a hard time balancing our school and our everyday lives. There are often too many priorities that we have to focus on, while at the same time, many of us work hard to meet every expectation that is landing on our shoulders. Assignments, jobs, relationships, financial issues, etc... We find ourselves constantly struggling with balancing our pace and adjusting ourselves to changes as we transition out of the pandemic era. During my undergrad and graduate school, feeling stress is an emotion that I and many classmates experience repeatedly. Occasionally, stress can provide students with motivation for their studies, however, sometimes it can lead to a serious situation where students are required to visit health experts. As defined by Schimelpfening (2020), many individuals cannot balance the stress they are experiencing, which might affect their mental health and may also cause other psychological disorders like depression.

The data collected from the article: Trends in Post-Secondary Student Stress: A Pan-Canadian Study shows that 45.6% of students experience high levels of stress, and 15.3% describe their stress level as tremendous. There is also a high number of students who express that they felt hopeless and anxious (Linden, Stuart, Ecclestone, 2022). Based on these insights and experiences, I decided to enter the journey of promoting the importance of wellness to younger generations (20-30 years of age) through communication and interaction design methods.

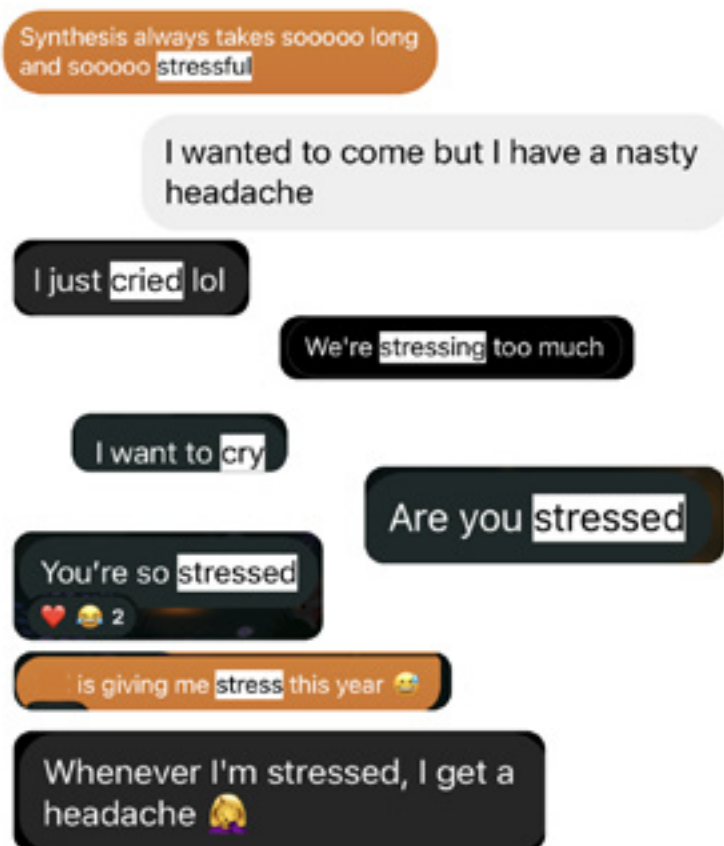


Figure 5: Screenshot of texts on being stressed with friends on Instagram

I began by framing my research through “The Wellness Design Lab”, which aims to shed light on the challenges of pursuing wellness, identify gaps and needs while practicing wellness, as well as understand young adults’ current wellness experiences in order to help them establish a healthier, low-stress lifestyle. Some of the initial questions asked of participants include:

1. What does wellness mean to you?
2. How has the pandemic affected your wellness?
3. What holds you back from practicing wellness?
4. What are your wellness methods or tips?
5. What do you pay the most attention to in your life?
6. What are your top priorities?
7. What do you think you need to become a better self?

What does Wellness mean?

The majority of Canadians have access to adequate food, and people whose basic survival needs are met have the opportunity to focus on health and wellness. Wellness refers to habits which allow us to thrive, rather than merely surviving. I believe personal health and wellness are the foundation of everything, the pursuit of wellness is the basis of all happiness and anything we do in life. From a student's perspective, lack of well-being will affect your attention to learning. According to the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Division of Population Health, "well-being includes the presence of positive emotions and moods (e.g., contentment, happiness), the absence of negative emotions (e.g., depression, anxiety), satisfaction with life, fulfillment and positive functioning" (Milman, Tuckwiller, 2020). Wellness is about how a person is feeling about themselves, the pursuit of wellness should bring comfort, relaxation and joy. Wellness is deeply tied to one's overall health, it is not just about one's physical well-being, but also in the scope of mental, emotional, spiritual, social and environmental (Stoewen, 2017). To many people, wellness can seem like a broad topic, but at the same time, it is very personal and deeply tied to every one of us. It is about being aware and making personal choices that lead toward an outcome of optimal holistic health and well-being (Global Wellness Institute, 2023).



Figure 6: The Kare Project final crochet design.

The talk with family, where everything began:

My thesis research journey was initiated by a conversation with my parents. In the first year of my Master's degree, I worked on a co-design project with my parents.

The project is about the definition of “care” in Chinese culture. Together, we co-designed 9 crochet patterns (colours, amount of rows to stitch, etc.) based on my parents’ understanding of care.

A variety of crochet methods were used: single, double, half-double crochet, and puff stitches. Through making, I wanted to capture their idea of care, and create a yarn-made tapestry/cloth to gift to my parents and remind them that they are being cared for by me too and that I am very grateful for their care.

The word ‘care’ means a lot of different things to different people and in different cultures. One definition from Oxford Languages states that ‘care’ as a verb has the meaning of looking after and providing for needs. When thinking of the word care, the first thing that comes up in my mind is the act of sacrifice for another. It means giving out time and attention to one party, providing love and meeting their needs. The axis of care can be multi-directional or reciprocal, but when I speak about caring for someone/something,

the action of care becomes one-directional. Despite the critical definition, I want to find out what the word “care” means to different individuals. Does care always mean good? If so, how can we define good care?

I reached out to my parent by starting the conversation with a question: “What does ‘care’ mean to you?” Unlike in English, there is no direct translation of the word “care” in Chinese. I explained the word “care” as “providing attention (关心 care from the heart)” and “providing love (关爱 care with love)”.

Interestingly, both of my parents told me their definition of care is caring for others, and caring for the family. In their opinion, “care” is an unconditional action, but it is also a responsibility. They see care as caring for the old, the young, the vulnerable, and the environment, but not caring for themselves. It was surprising to me that their answers carry so much responsibility and selflessness, and neither of them thought of care as caring for themselves.

How can the idea of self-care be missing? How will they continue to care for the family if they aren’t aware of their own wellness?

I grew up in a very loving and traditional yet open-minded Chinese family. Both of my parents were born and raised in China

Thematic analysis



By Workshop participant: Haeli Li

Design Ideas: Granny squares

originated from the middle east: Afghanistan



Figure 7: The Kare Project design process.

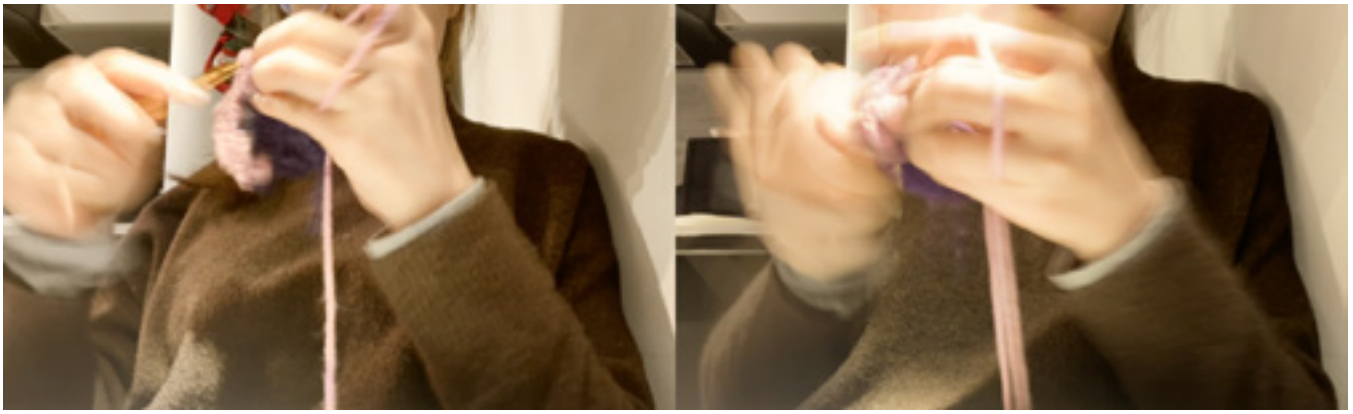


Figure 8: The Kare Project design process.

(Beijing and Qingdao). Growing up, one of the most important family values that my parents taught me is “孝顺 Filial piety” which means to care and be respectful when around the elderly. “Filial piety demonstrates the virtue of exhibiting the proper love and respect for one’s parents, elders in general, and ancestors, particularly within the context of Confucian, Chinese Buddhist, and Daoist ethics.” (Chan, Tan, 2004) In Chinese, this term means to take care of your parents, grandparents, or elders who are close to you. It is associated with responsibilities and expectations that the younger generation in the family will provide love, respect, and any kind of support to them to reciprocate back the hard work that elders put in when raising the children in the family. This ethical principle is an invisible promise to the family, and the care is unconditional. We were raised to believe that by sacrificing our own time for other’s needs, we should always be considerate of others above our own needs (Ritchie, 2022).

In my family, providing care is a promise. In the book, *Simple Abundance Companion*

(2000), Sarah B. Breathnach speaks about the two kinds of promises people like to make to themselves: the outer and the inner. Outer promises are the ones that we make to our family and friends, and most of the time, we do it unconsciously. The inner promise is the promise we make to our minds, bodies and spirits. That could be things that you enjoy doing and promising yourself to make the time for it.

To my parents, “caring for others” is the outer promise they made to themselves.

This conversation and this project pointed me toward my journey and my thesis research on self-care and wellness through communication and interaction design practices and methods (both physical and digital methods).

The conversation with my parents about what care means strengthened my own understanding of how I could care for myself. I would encourage everyone who can to have a conversation about care with yourself or your family.



METHODOLOGIES & EXPLORATIONS

The auto-ethnographic design practice:

Auto-ethnographic research is a personal approach and self-reflection to an experience. Through journaling, documenting one's experience, personal reflection on culture/experiences, etc. The approach to auto-ethnography design research is closely tied to an individual's creative expression. It is a practice where the designer is interrogated into the topic, practicing it, examining it and assessing it from a personal standpoint (Fuller, 2022).

As I have indicated, while wellness suggests thriving through self-care, what constitutes wellness specifically, and what practices a person employs to achieve it, varies from person to person. For me, wellness practice means doing things that I truly enjoy doing. Being able to concentrate on things that I am passionate about helps erase the negative feelings within me. In the book *'My Life's History'* (2015), Grandma Moses speaks about the definition of self-love. Where truly loving yourself does not mean sacrificing all your time and energy to strive for a successful future, but giving the time to things you truly enjoy doing and practicing them. The things we are passionate about will fill joy and add excitement within our hearts, and that's what self-love means (Moses, 2015).

One thing that brings me joy is being outside. Growing up, I have always been a curious young girl who loves travelling and exploring. The new experiences that come along with exploring boost the feeling of wellness and excite every sense within me (Brenneman, 2023). With that in mind, I began my auto-ethnographic wellness journey by exploring around Vancouver.

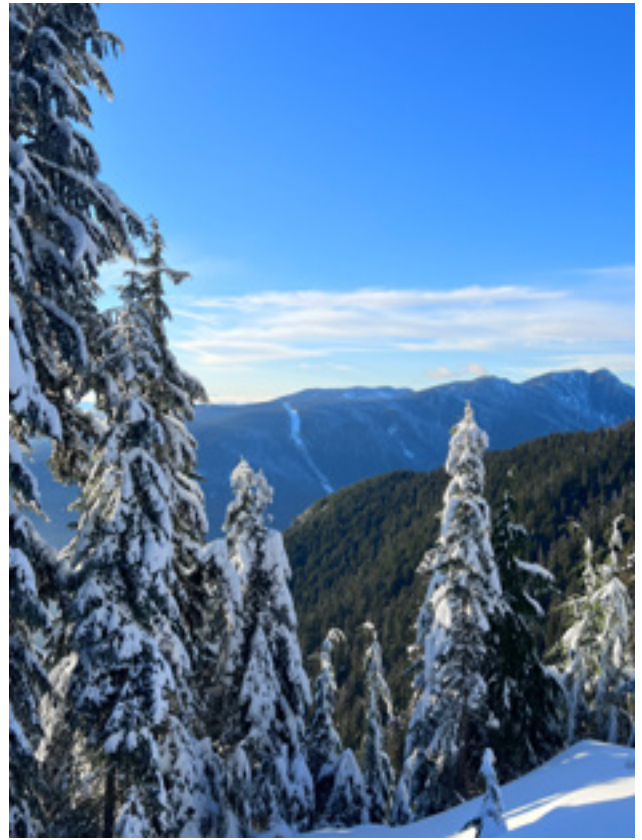


Figure 10: Snowshoeing views from Grouse Mountain, North Vancouver, BC



Figure 11: Sunset from Grouse Mountain, North Vancouver, BC



Figure 12: Mountain view from Grouse Mountain, North Vancouver, BC

December, 2022

I started my first snowshoeing experience with my best friend from undergrad. I remember driving straight from school after my work as a research assistant, I remember being deeply chaotic with life that month, and I felt a lot of stress about the work that was piling up at the end of the semester.

Carrying this ‘unwellness’, I arrived at the mountains.

Unlike the gloomy grey sky above the city of Vancouver, up on the mountains, all I could see was pure white. The sky is light-washed, and the air is moist, refreshing yet biting.

That very moment felt like a movie, a scene where Alice first enters Wonderland. All the burden had been left behind with the grey sky beneath my feet, what was in front of me was this clear path covered with sparkling power, waiting for me to make a new step.

2023 was the year that I committed myself to the wilderness.



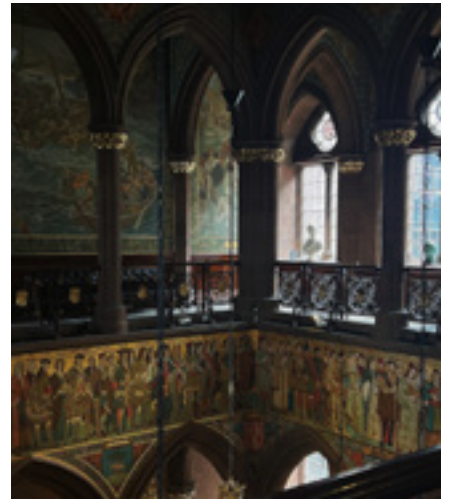
May & June 2023, Canada

In May and June, I became extremely fascinated by the outdoors. Running away from the hustle and bustle of the city and work life, I decided to travel through the mountains. Walking on the endless trails with muddy boots, stepping through gleaming snow. Getting sunburned in between the bushes, wearing sweaty shirts. Appreciating the fresh breeze, becoming friends with the flowers, birds and trees, seeing the breathtaking views on top of the mountains, and the various forms of the clouds. I felt so small and vulnerable within this environment, yet was struck by the feeling of fullness and courage. In total, I explored 8 mountains in these two months across the lower mainland, and have embodied endless joy, states of well-being, and everlasting openness. Being in the outdoors was my way of reclaiming freedom and pursuing wellness in this post-pandemic world.





Figure 14: Garibaldi Park , BC



July 2023: The UK: England & Scotland

Then it was July.

This month, I chose to practice escape as my wellness method. Escaping from some of my top priorities on the 'survival' list: I ended my research assistantship at the Health Design Lab, put a pause on all of my school work, left my family in Vancouver and went travel alone to the UK.

I walked along the coast of Scotland, fascinated by the unique volcanic landscapes, and watched a sunset on the top of Portree with boats railing afar in the oceans. Hiked the Arthur's seat in Edinburgh in the pouring rain, and felt profoundly inspired standing in front of the artworks that only appeared in art history class before.

The meaning of travel is indescribable. It is an adventure, a form of relaxation, a getaway. Being able to center all of my attention on embracing new cultures and environments was truly comforting, exciting and inspiring both mentally, physically, and spiritually.

Escaping from my own expectations of myself to travel alone allowed me to step out from my everyday life to see other forms of life. Knowing that at the end of the day, I am not returning back to the society I am familiar with. Knowing that I am in a foreign country where no one recognizes me, I no longer feel that I am being constrained by these expectations. Deep down within my heart, I could sense a feeling of greatness arose from this escape. As if a new me is rising from the ashes, this new me standing opposed to my old self, telling me that I could be myself at this very moment, or not be myself if I so choose.





Figure 16. Travel pictures from The UK.



Figure 17: Travel pictures from The UK





Figure 18: Arthurs Seat, Scotland, UK.





Figure 20: Sunset at Namsan Tower, Seoul, Korea.

September & October 2023: China, Korea

September and October are the months for gathering.

At the end of September, I had the chance to visit Beijing and several surrounding cities. Spending time with and exploring familiar places with loved ones was another form of wellness that I encountered. As many people say: Home is where families are. The sense of solidity and security I felt by being around my family is something I have never experienced while travelling alone.



Figure 21: Namsan Tower, Seoul, Korea



Figure 22: Streetview in Seoul, Korea.

With the opportunity to visit places around the globe, I captured my journeys in a wellness journal titled “Tranquillity 人生若寄”.

Tranquillity is the quality or state of being free from agitation of mind or spirit; free from turmoil (Oxford Language, 2024).

This journal is a summary of my auto-ethnographic practice of finding peace in this chaotic world. This project is inspired by a Chinese poetry book I read “星期六晚我们去散步吧 (Saturday Night, let’s Go for a Walk) ”.

Without directly approaching the issue/story, the author uses metaphors and forms of storytelling to address the pain points that exist among younger Chinese generations (隔花人 Gehuaren, 2023). The wellness journal contains a series of photos captured throughout 2023, along with descriptive writing (in both Chinese and English) that I wrote on the voyage of reclaiming freedom and finding wellness by being outside (Canada, The UK, China, and Korea). It is structured into two chapters: Roofless Places, and Forms of Life. Roofless Places contains a collection of thoughts and images documented by being in the wilderness; Forms of Life speaks to my wellness relationship with people I interacted with, the culture I was surrounded by, and the society I was embraced in during my visits. (You can view the full-text journal in Appendix 3, pg. 74)

The intention of this auto-ethnographic piece is not to suggest readers follow the steps I took and/or stay outside to find wellness, but to feel a sense of calmness, to slow down, and to feel inspired and supported by the things I captured on this wellness journey.

This research experiment made me realize the potential of carrying wellness practices into the everyday, not just pursuing wellness through vacation. By carrying the mindset of wellness throughout every experience, waking up to it, thinking about it, making time for it, practicing it, and reflecting on it. Our hearts will be filled with joy through this self-love and self-bonding. The mindset of seeking wellness from the simplest thing we do will make a big change in the overall experience.

As I write in the wellness journal, Tranquillity:

To those who are feeling overwhelmed in this chaotic world:

Hope you can find where your heart belongs, overcome obstacles, travel across mountains and seas, find your tranquillity and lastly, discover your true self.



Figure 23: Pages from the Wellness Journal Project.

10		CONTENTS 目录	11
1. ROOFLESS PLACES 没有屋顶的地方		2. FORMS OF LIFE 多姿百态的生活	
Go out and discover 去发现	11	Unknown 未知	16
Make a wish 许愿	12	Pengquan 主人公	17
The definition of travel 旅行的意义	13	Starlight 星空	18
About travelling 关于旅行	14	The other I 另一个我	19
Questions 问题	15	A letter to me 致自己	20
One day 一天	16		
Suspicion 猜忌	17		
The scent of tranquillity 宁静的味道	18	3. BACKNOTES 附录	21

	<p>未知</p> <p>当火车达到一定速度的时候，窗外的风景会幻化成一条条彩色的线条。车像是穿梭在一个神秘的对光隧道。这一瞬间，烦事被抛脑后，而我尽情的享受着这充满未知的旅途被惊喜与色彩填满。</p> <p>Unknown</p> <p>When the train reaches a certain speed, the scenery outside the window will turn into thousands of colourful thin lines. One after the other, flashing by quickly, as if you are travelling through a mysterious time tunnel. At this moment, all of my anxiety and worries have been thrown away. My mind is filled with nothing but the peacefulness brought by the colours and the excitement of discovering the unknown on this journey.</p>	
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	<p>宁静的味道</p> <p>记得一个人到苏格兰的时候，是早上八点多，那时的阳光是牛油果颜色的。星星点点的野花在风中摇曳，像一个个在风中舞蹈的精灵。</p> <p>微风轻拂，带来阵阵清凉的气息，那是大自然最温柔的抚摸。闭上眼睛，仿佛能听到大地的心跳，感受到那份宁静与祥和。</p> <p>The scent of tranquillity</p> <p>Flashing back to me hiking the Arthur's Seat in Scotland. It was around eight o'clock in the morning, peaceful and refreshing. Wild grass shaken along the trail path in a bright avocado-green colour, while dots of peach and purple flowers hide among the green.</p> <p>In Edinburgh, the sun and the rain are like two lovers, tugging with each other. On top of the hill, I was gazing at this beautiful town below in this unpredictable weather. I could feel the moisture after the rain, the warmth of the sunshine. The air tasted sweet with a mixture of fresh grass. It's the scent of tranquillity.</p>	
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Figure 24: Spreads from the Wellness Journal Project.

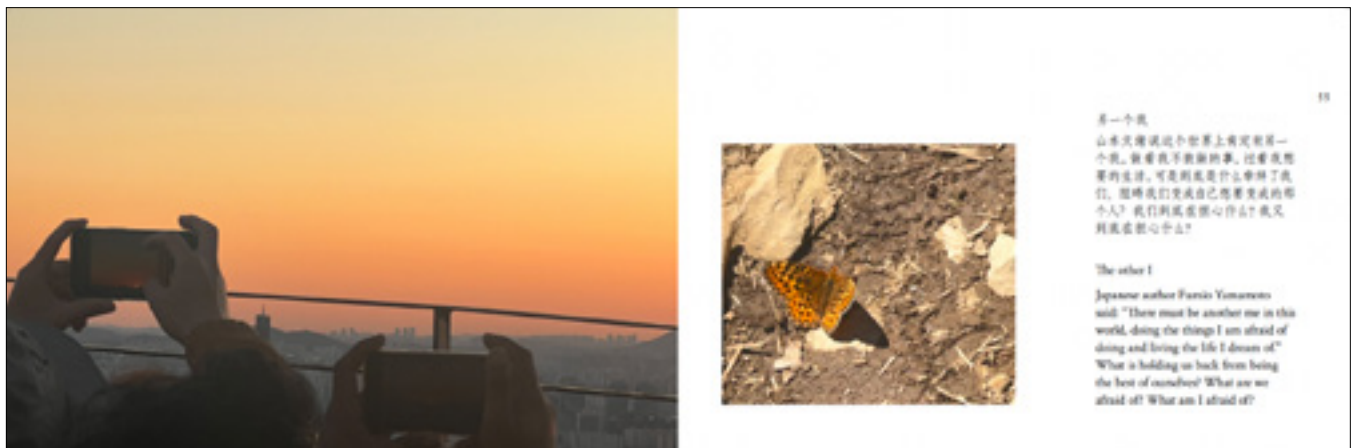


Figure 25: Spreads from the Wellness Journal Project.



Figure 25: The Voyage Game

Studio Practice: The Voyage

The Voyage, a project undertaken in 1st year studio (Fall 2022), is a wellness-centered game design that aims to bridge the missed connection between yourself and others. It is designed to help the players get to know themselves through answering the prompts while getting to know others as they respond to the prompts. Getting to know someone (including yourself) is like a voyage. As if you are travelling to a new place, the sense of familiarity with this new environment builds slowly as time progresses. Same as getting to know someone, it takes time to develop comfort and trust. In this journey of getting to know someone, the game invites people to bond through sharing their stories and vulnerability.

Inside the game, you will find a card set with a total of 53 prompts (5 card sets), 6 sets of puzzles (99 pieces) for journey building, and stickers as giveaways for other participants.

3 levels of prompt cards with 2 sets of support cards:

- Day 1 cards are a set of introductory questions that help the plays to feel comfortable with the other players. This set of cards can be used in icebreaker activities with people just encountered.
- Day 2 cards are personal questions that reveals your personality. These are questions that players would ask someone who they have already known. (friends, co-workers, etc.)
- Day 3 cards are deep questions that help the players to reflect on their values in life, and uncovers vulnerability. These questions are designed for people who have already established a strong bond.
- Question cards are expandable prompt cards that comes right after each Day. Players are able to ask any question that corresponds to the same level of prompts.
- Action Cards are cards that help to connect and build trust through simple actions.

The experience of playing this game with two of my friends was exciting and informative. Knowing them both for a few years, we were still able to uncover many new things about each other by answering the prompts. We found ourselves expanding on the existing prompts while sharing more personal stories. Overall, the value of this game was to bring people together and create meaningful/personal conversations for the players to build a stronger connection.

THE CARD SETS

TOTAL 53 PROMPTS

The voyage: as if you are on a journey to getting to know someone.



PROMPTS

3 LEVELS OF PROMPT CARDS WITH 2 SETS OF SUPPORT CARDS



GAME RULES

LEARN HOW TO PLAY



THE STICKERS SETS

THE IDEA OF GIFTING

- The idea of gifting as a way of caring and bonding through objects.



THE PUZZLES

SIZE: 6 SETS, TOTAL 96 PUZZLES
REGULAR + ROUND CORNER PIECES

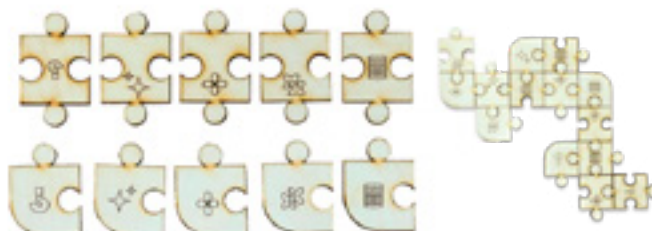




Figure 27: The Voyage Game.



Flashback to your favourite memories, what comes to mind first? When did you feel most joyful?

PLACE
STAMP
HERE

created by blair musing yu

Figure 28: The participatory workshop postcards.



Oftentimes, we put others' priorities above ourselves. What are some promises you made to others and kept at the cost of your own desires (during school/work)?

Were you happy about these promises?

Did you mean to make that promise? And what made you grant your time and energy to that promise?

The Business Design Lab 2022



PLACE
STAMP
HERE

created by blair musing yu

The participatory design practice:

“Participatory design is a collaborative design approach that involves end-users in the design process. It aims to create products and services that better meet the needs and expectations of users by applying their knowledge and experiences.” (Interaction Design Foundation-IxDF, 2023)

Ever since I was a child, I have always been obsessed with stories. To me, stories carry many possibilities and wonders. It is a way for me to encounter different forms of life. Regardless of their authenticity, stories stay within my memories like a guidepost, leading me toward new directions. Hearing other's stories was one of my favourite things to do. Especially from people who are older than me, listening to their life experiences, and taking note of the detours they took in life inspires me with how I would go about things in mine.

One of the key points that came up in my initial conversations with people about wellness is that everyone is aware of its importance, its benefits, and the changes it will make to their current lives, but the majority of people are not practicing wellness (e.g., the activities of their choice that will improve their wellness). We all have a great understanding of what will be beneficial for our wellness, but because of other priorities that we value in life (career, family, etc.), many of us choose to push wellness practices aside, and/or not leave enough time

to ourselves. Reflecting on my own experience, I am also one of the people who will not listen to other's past experiences until I experience it myself. I used to prioritize my school work more than my personal health, which has led me through a difficult time with eating. I wasn't able to realize the importance of wellness until I learned it the hard way.

To better understand people's lived experience with wellness, I decided to host a creative participatory workshop with young adults (20-30 years old). The participatory design method is a great way to gather people who bring their own expertise, to share their experience collectively. This approach creates possibilities “to gain access to the experienter's world only through his/her participation in expressing that experience” (E. Sanders, U. Dandavate, 2019).

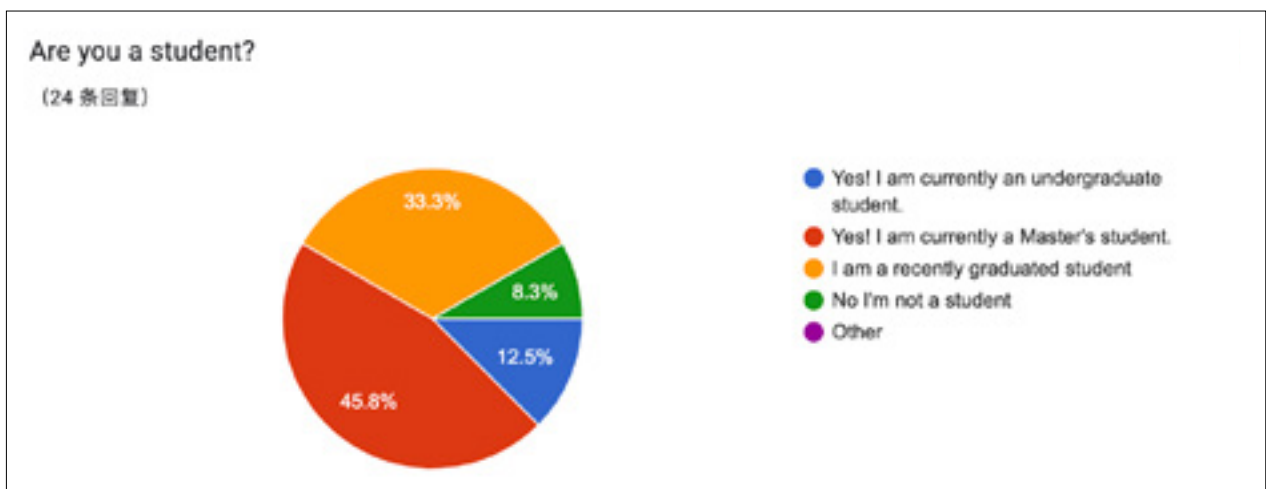
In this participatory workshop, each individual is the expert of their own experience. To minimize the hierarchy within a group, the workshop was only open to past and current students, without any faculty attending. Through this workshop, I hoped to hear about individual stories as well as forming a small communities for connection building, and I hope this workshop could help participants reflect and realize the importance of wellness and begin practicing it.

Workshop survey

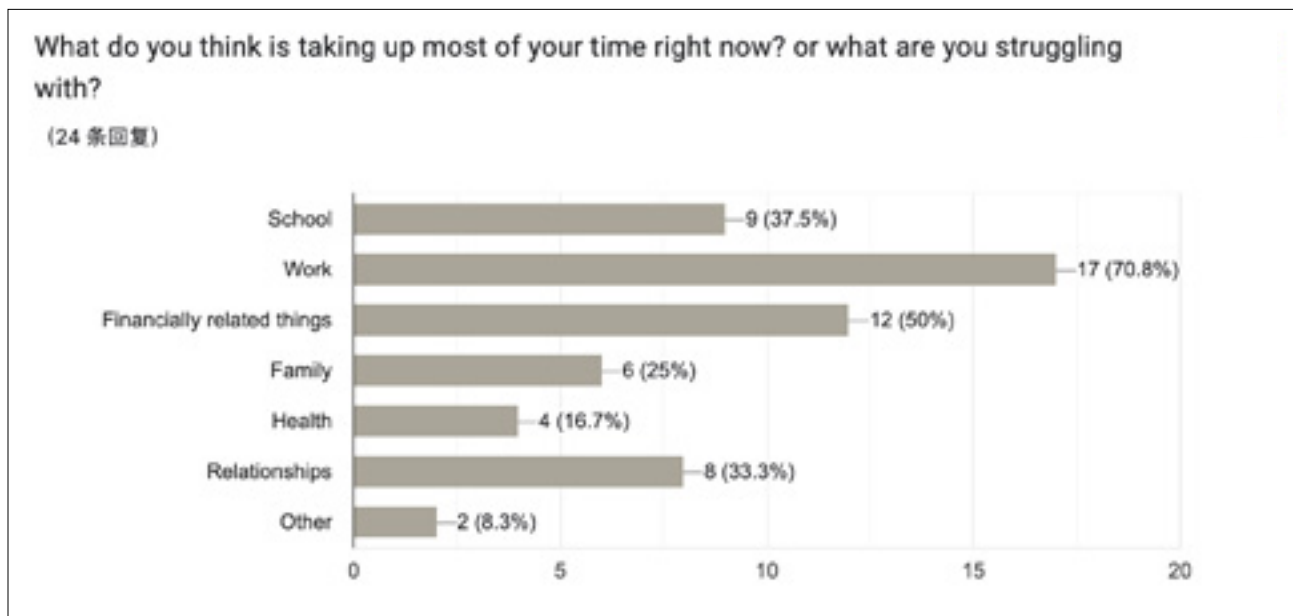
In order to have a better understanding of individuals' wellness relationships prior to the workshop, I created a Wellness Design lab survey on Google Forms and sent it across social media platforms (Instagram stories, Whatsapp group chats etc.) over the month of August in 2023 to reach to both current and past students.

This survey contains a total of 16 questions, centred around young adults' current wellness journey. These questions aim to create a better understanding of the experience young adults are having with work/life balance and their wellness stories during and post the pandemic. Gathering initial insights on participants' definitions of wellness, wellness methods that they are practicing, struggles that they underwent, particular needs for wellness and more.

The survey reached a total of 24 participants aged from 21 to 33 years old, both current students and full-time workers (recent graduates).



From the Wellness Design Lab survey, 45.8% (n=11/24) are current master's students. 33.3% (n=8/24) are recently graduated students. 12.5% (n=3/24) are current undergraduate students. 8.3% (n=2/24) are not students.



To many survey participants, wellness means a balance of work, life and relationships. It means taking care of yourself in any possible way and it is about feeling optimistic and happy. 91.6% (n=22/24) of the participants associate wellness with mental health, and with self emotions. One of the participants responded the definition of wellness means: “To take care of oneself (me/you) mental and physical needs with affection and gratitude, prioritize oneself needs, even if it’s regarded as weird/cold-distancing or selfish. We are responsible for the outcomes of our own choices and actions, so better start loving yourself.”

To some participants, wellness also means practicing activities that we enjoy doing, and finding times to take breaks in between

work: “Balanced [life]. It is really hard to achieve it, especially at a time when we’re always busy and don’t have time for ourselves. So for me, wellness is also having some time to relax, meditate, cook, play, take a comfortable bath or just do nothing (something really hard to understand in our busy minds).”

From the survey, many participants expressed that work/school is taking up most of their time in their life (Work 70.8%, School 37.5%) followed by financial issues 50%, and relationships 33.3%. It is unexpected to see the health category ranked in the second last section before Other.



The participatory workshop

After having an understanding of what wellness relationships and definitions mean to the young adults that I reached out to, and based on the insights collected from the survey, I then invited 11 participants to The Wellness Design Lab workshop, both current students and recent graduates. The purpose of this workshop is to understand first-hand experience on wellness through creative and storytelling methods. As well as asking participants about their wellness journey during and post the pandemic.

The workshop was approved by the Research Ethics Board at Emily Carr University and it was about 2 hours and 30 minutes long. As the workshop facilitator, I began by asking participants to write down their names on paper stands, and draw a doodle that represents their feeling of that day. This icebreaker activity aims to get participants to feel comfortable and safe around the workshop space and to prepare them for a mental space for reflecting upon their current wellness experience for later activities in the workshop.

The second workshop activity contains ten postcard-style prompt cards that invite participants to share their current experience with school/work/life/wellness. Each participant receives a pack of ten postcards containing question prompts for the workshop, and as takeaways to keep, or to pass on to others in need. The questions used in the workshops are inspired by the book *Sample Abundance Companion* by Breathnach, Sarah B. (2000), and the survey data gathered from participants.



AUG. 15

* An invitation sent to you by The Wellness Lab *

Dear

This is Blair! I would like to invite you to The Wellness Design Lab Workshop!
Here are some workshop details:

When: August 15th Tuesday at 4:30 pm-6 pm

Where: At Emily Carr University 3rd floor, The Hub room C3235

What to expect: Wellness prompts, story sharing, music and collages/drawings!

Bonus: To thank you for participating in the workshop, there will be food, and takeaways for all participants.

Can't wait to see you on Tuesday, August 15th at 4:30 pm!

Sending you lots of love and positive vibes!

Yours truly,

Blair ♡



Figure 30: The participatory workshop invitation and stickers..

1. **Wellness experience during the**

pandemic: Workshop participants pointed out several wellness issues during the pandemic that are related to mental wellness, physical wellness, and environmental wellness. Participants expressed that mental health was a huge issue during the pandemic era. Many pointed out their emotion was under control from being struck at home, while some had limited personal space living with their family members. One participant shared: “During the pandemic, that’s when I realized my mental health was not at its best. I did feel trapped, I felt no connection to the world including family and friends. I felt like I got in touch with feelings I never thought I’d feel.” The societal negativity and having to adapt to new ways of living was another unwellness that was expressed in the workshop. A participant told me: “So many things in the world were changing quickly and it was hard to adjust. There was also so much negativity in the news and online that caused me to feel even more negative. Covid made me feel kind of like a pandemic is my wake-up call to prioritize my health, especially since university life added so much anxiety and stress.”

2. Wellness post-pandemic: Many participants find their wellness has improved compared to during the pandemic. The experience through the pandemic raised personal awareness of self-care, pointing

many to learn to prioritize personal health, as one participant shared: “My wellness is much better now in comparison, which I am proud of because it became a goal for me. I try to take the time to focus on my wellness and well-being. Just taking time for myself and focusing on how I feel and taking care of myself. It was hard to imagine being more mentally healthy during the Pandemic, but I feel like I have been able to work towards it.”

3. Wellness definitions: Wellness definitions vary from person to person, it could be an emotion, it means relaxation, it means practicing the activities that one enjoys doing, it means slowing down and focusing on the contemporary, it is about self-understanding and self-love. From the workshop, some participants spoke about wellness as a joyful emotion that emerges while doing preferred activities, or being around loved ones. “Wellness right now is love for me. Being cared for by my partner, spending time with them and completely forgetting about work and school. It’s only about care and feelings, not about thoughts.” Some participants shared that wellness means focusing on the contemporary, not feeling guilty about relaxing, and taking a break whenever the body or the mind gives out the physical signs. It is about self-love and self-understanding.



Figure 31: The participatory workshop.

- 4. Promises to self:** Promises to self could be personal desires that one truly enjoys doing or self-expectations that one puts on. Workshop participants shared a variety of promises made to themselves including health-related promises, career/personal growth promises, activity-related promises, etc. However, some find it difficult to accomplish these promises due to limited free time and laziness. One participant says in the workshop: “I have thought of learning a new skill, but I know myself... I’d start something and I will stop midway... Sometimes I stop because I look down on my ability to make something or laziness takes over my life. This is something I need to work on.” Another participant shared: “I wanted to improve my book Art/book-making skill, but I stopped binding books after the first try, because I was lazy.” Many participants discover that they are always unintentionally making promises that lay in the self-expectations category. These promises often began with the phrase “I should do... or I have to...”. Examples shared in the workshop were learning new software that will benefit future career roles, reading more books related to their studies, and doing exercise daily to keep fit. “I promised myself a lot, it feels sad that I won’t be able to do it. It’s hard not to be hard on myself.”
- 5. Rewards to self:** A few things that participants share that cheer them up are taking breaks from work/school, spending quality time with loved ones, and treating themselves with purchases and good meals.

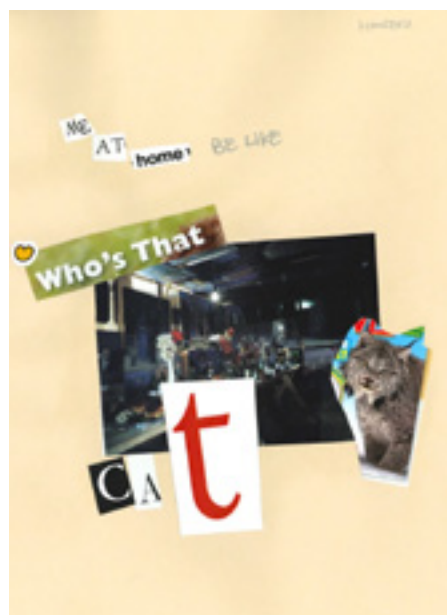
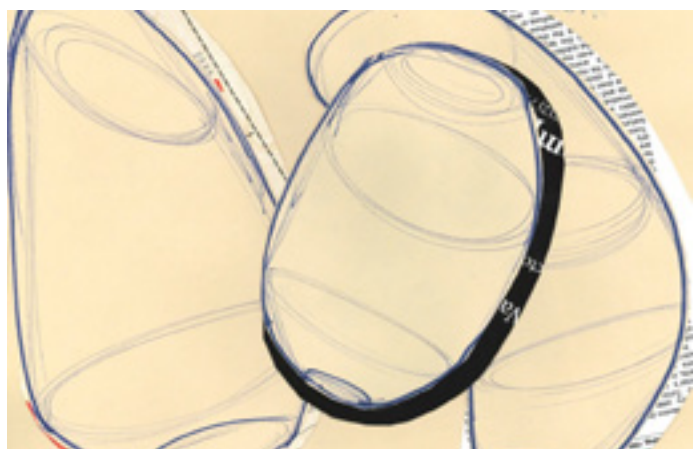


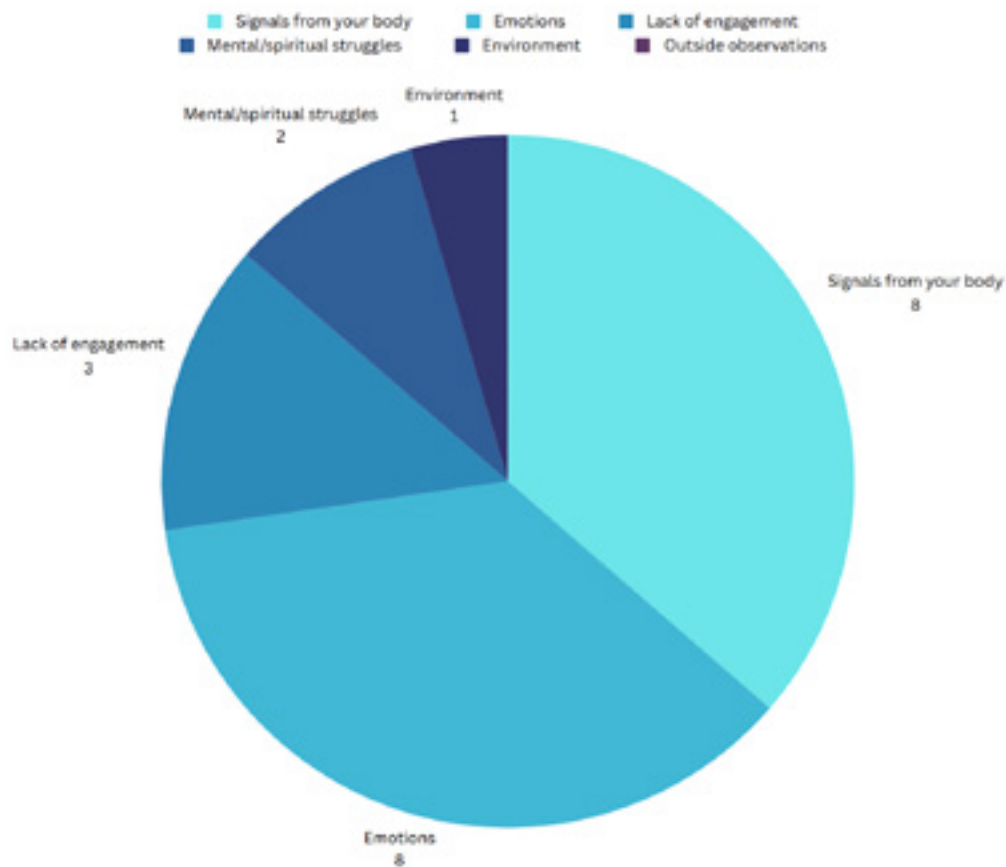
Figure 32: The participatory workshop collages..

6. Favourite memories and joyful moments: For many participants, joyful moments are the key to wellness. It is the time when one feels the greatest and most relaxed. Participants shared that spending time with family and friends is most joyful. From the workshop, we heard: “My mom took me shopping when I was younger, and [during] my recent trip back home, she took me shopping and it brought out the little girl in me.”

Some participants also shared that their joyful moment also relates to big milestones in life, for example receiving offers from grad school and entering new chapters in their life. One participant shared that: “The first thing that comes to mind [that I feel the most joyful] is after graduating from Bachelors. | felt so much relief that it was finally over. Once I finally finished it felt like I finally could start living my life the way I wanted to and do the things I wanted to do. Besides that, I think of random moments with my friends and family where we had fun or laughed or felt memorable. I think of moments when I was younger too and in my childhood. It makes me think of when things were easier and there was less to worry about.”

In part 2 of this workshop, participants are asked to re-imagine their ideal wellness experience in the form of collages or doodling. Page 56 documents some beautiful works from participants.

After the workshop was hosted, a Wellness Design Lab website: <https://yumuxiang69.wixsite.com/wellnessdesignlab> summarizing both the participatory workshop and the auto-ethnographic research experiment was created as an open source for audiences from outside of Emily Carr University to access. This website is designed for people with aligned interests to connect or as a guide for people who want to begin a wellness journey but don't know where to begin.



Selected Activities (Top 3 were selected from survey)			
1	Exercise		
2	Entertainment		
3	Sleep	Being in nature	Talking/being with people (family, friends, pets, etc.)
4	Through Eating	Shopping	Travelling Write about it
5	Keep everything to yourself		Music
6	Draw or craft	Give up	

Second survey

This survey was sent out on the Emily Carr University campus during the Open Studios event (Nov. 2nd, 2023). This second survey aimed to collect insights on ways that people identify the feeling of lacking wellness, and methods that they practice to improve their wellness. It was designed and printed on paper with 4 questions inquiring about the age, the occupation (students or faculty or other), multiple choice on ways to identify the feeling of lacking wellness, and a ranking list with a variety of activities for emotion improving when feeling unwellness.

1. Methods to identify the feeling of unwellness: Out of 9 participants, 8 people state that they identify the feeling of being unwellness through signs of the body. 8 people identify the feeling of unwellness through emotions that they are experiencing. 3 people through the lack of engagement, 2 people with mental/spiritual struggles, and 1 person identified with the environment they might be in.
2. Methods/activities that will improve your feelings: Out of the 12 options, doing exercise seems to be the most popular activity that people would do when feeling unwellness, followed up by entertainment (2nd), sleep (3rd), being in nature (3rd), and Talking/being with people (family, friends, pets,etc.) (3rd).

SUMMATIVE DESIGN EXPLORATION

Through understanding the findings from both auto-ethnographic research and participatory research, I began my summative design project which aims to reframe wellness as an accessible and un-privileged practice for the everyday. The goal for this summative design is to integrate wellness into daily routines and promote to young adults the mindset of carrying wellness throughout each experience. To better explain my design concepts, I created a user profile and scenario to illustrate how this design piece functions, based on insights collected from the participatory workshop.

Understanding concepts through scenarios: Being mindful of wellness practices through busy work/school life

Amy is a 25-year-old international grad student in Vancouver, BC. Outside of school, she has a part-time job at a retail brand. She is often stressed out about her financial situation and her school work. She seeks to find a work/life balance, but it has been difficult for her. She notices a few challenges hindering her overall well-being:

- **Work Dominating Personal Life:** Amy felt that she had been prioritizing her career more than her personal life. As a young adult new to the industry, she thinks she should always say yes to opportunities. She constantly feels stressed about not getting work done, which has been affecting her productivity and motivation.

Amy's primary goals are:

- **A large amount of time spent on the Phone:** Amy realizes she's spending a great amount of time daily on her phone. The first thing she does when she wakes up is to check on social media. Going on the phone and checking out the feeds is her way of taking a break from work. She finds that her phone has become a huge part of her everyday life, and it has been difficult for her to not use it. Due to the large amounts of time spent online, she felt lazy to practice other hobbies during her free time.
- **Minimum Relaxation Time:** Amy is a full-time student and a part-time retail worker. Often, she has a very packed schedule. It is difficult to take the time to relax and take breaks in life parallel with the assignments and work she committed to. She finds it complex to balance the stress from work/school, leaving her feeling exhausted and drained.
- **Lack of Motivation for Hobbies:** Amy enjoys hiking and crafting but with the laziness and lack of connections she has in the city, she finds it hard to practice activities of her passion. She usually takes breaks by being in the online space, and browsing social media. One main thing that has stopped her from pursuing her hobbies is the amount of preparation and organization she needs to put in for the activities.
- **Achieving Work-Life Balance:** She wants to find the time in life to practice her hobbies, and potentially build connections with communities with the same interests.
- Amy understands that it is hard to stay away from accessing her phone, but she wants to find a more meaningful way with her phone during breaks, not just browsing through social media feeds.

While she has been struggling, she discovered the Wellness Design Lab Care Kit. In this care kit, Amy has access to the Wellness Design Lab app and a set of sensory objects (clay, soap, essential oil, etc.).

In the Wellness Design Lab app, Amy will be going through a set of questions to set up her profile. Through her answers, the app will gain a basic understanding of Amy's wellness goals, the ways she defines her unwellness, and possible activities and wellness methods that align with her interests. On the main page of the app, Amy is able to track her everyday moods, receive suggestions on the activities of her interest and potentially lead her to practice activities in real life rather than spending her time on her phone. The app will only be used as a guide to jumpstart activities that help create a state of happiness for users to balance temporary work/school stress.



Figure 33: The Wellness Design Lab Care Kit overview.



In the Wellness Design Lab app, Amy will be asked to go through a set of questions to set up her profile. Through her answers, the app will gain a basic understanding of her wellness

goals, daily routines, and possible activities and wellness methods that align with her interests.



On the main page of the app, Amy can track her everyday moods, receive suggestions on the activities of her interest and potentially lead her to practice activities in real life rather than spending her time on her phone. She is

also able to create a reminder for activities and more. The app will only be used as a guide to jumpstart activities that help create a state of happiness for users to balance temporary work/school stress.



In the app, Amy can also connect with her friends, to see other's wellness journeys, or to chat with the app AI Welly.



In the Wellness Design Lab kit, I will be embedding user-customizable sensory artifacts like handmade soap, fragrance bags, and things that are part of the everyday life to remind people of calmness and wellness throughout their day. In the interview with Japanese designer Kenya Hara on Typeradio (2020), He spoke about the importance of embedding senses in designs and technology. He explains that when design allows people to access all their senses it brings them peace and therefore brings peace to the world. Sight is not solitary, design needs to include all senses combined (Hara, Müller, 2007). Our senses are also associated with memories. Scents, textures, colour, weight, temperature, shape, and sound, all enlighten different stories and emotions from people to people. The sensory artifacts in this care kit not only act as a reminder for people to practice their wellness but also as a tool to remind people of the joyful moments in the past.

One of Amy's passions is heading into the mountains and hiking. So in her customized care kit, Amy can find a bar of sandy textured handmade soap with the scent of fresh forest, and pressed florals. These artifact hopes to create a sense of calmness while she's at work, and throughout her day.

CONCLUSION

This exploratory design research invests in the topic of wellness through a series of practices and methods. As the design researcher, I don't claim to offer medical expertise in the physical or mental health area, rather my thesis's focus is on wellness — which I've defined as a state of happiness that people experience while practicing activities they truly enjoy doing. In my practice, I recognize the limitation of the research data collected only covers a small scope of students and that might not be applicable to every young adult's scenarios. However, setting up case studies, understanding the struggles participants undergo in their everyday lives in the participatory workshop, and my personal wellness journey, helped me realize the importance of carrying the mindset of wellness throughout every experience.

For the next step of this research, I aim to look into promoting this wellness kit to Emily Carr University's student wellness services. Currently, there is a student wellness program in the university during specific hours that includes: cook&connect, skillshare workshop, wellness breakfast (grab and go), dog therapy, etc. But outside of these hours, many students are responsible for managing their wellness. It will be beneficial to include services like the Wellness Design Lab kit for students to access whenever they need to.

I hope by creating the Wellness Design Lab kit, the audiences can use it as a wellness guide and life-coaching support through the magical but uncertain period of early adulthood.



END NOTE



*Life is not measured by time,
but measured by moments.
Some are big, but most are small.*

— Armin Houman



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APPENDIX 1: RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL

PANEL ON
RESEARCH ETHICS

Navigating the ethics of human research

TCPS 2: CORE

Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Blair Yu

*has completed the Tri-Council Policy Statement:
Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans
Course on Research Ethics (TCPS 2: CORE)*

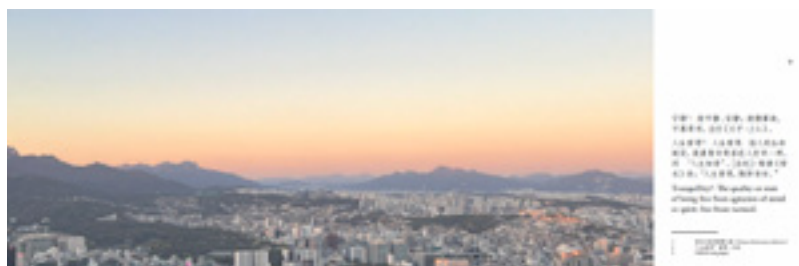
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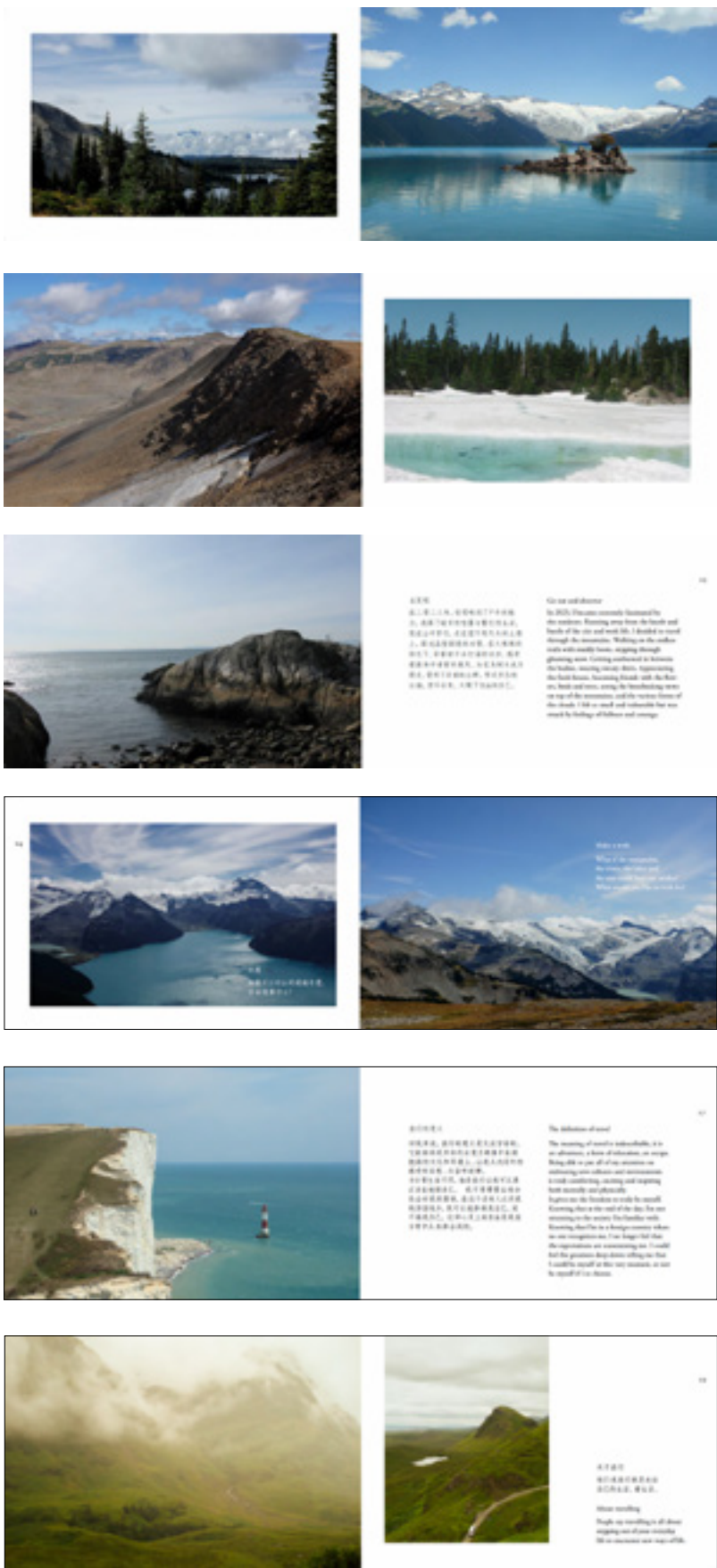
APPENDIX 2: WORKSHOP AND SURVEY MATERIALS

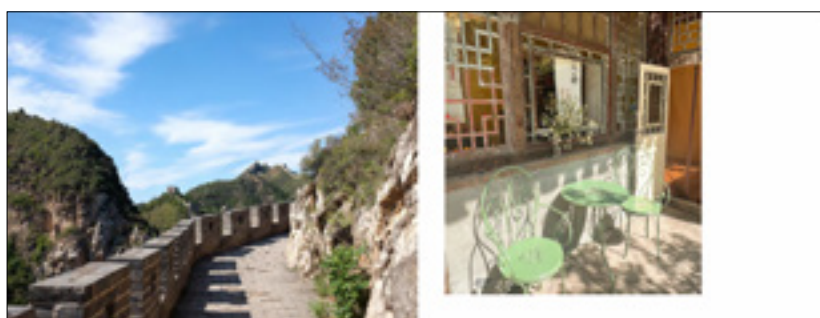
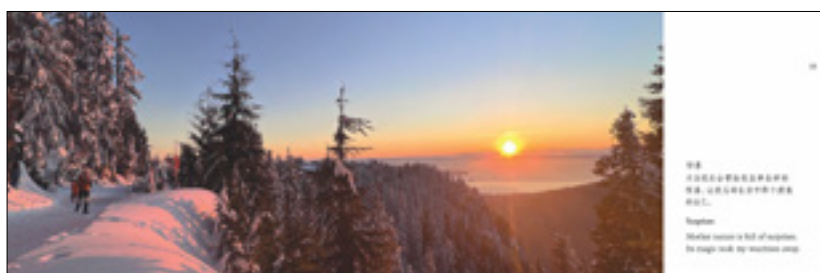
1. How would you describe your wellness during the pandemic (2019-2022) How would you describe your wellness now? Has anything changed?
2. Wellness can be anything that makes you feel good about yourself, that includes giving yourself time, space, attention, etc. What does wellness currently look like for you?
3. Wellness also includes making promises to ourselves, it could be reading a book that you've been wanting, starting a new routine, or learning how to crochet... what are some promises you have made to yourself? Did you keep them? How did you keep them, or what stops you from keeping them?
4. Did you promise yourself a lot of "I have to.." or "I should.." during school/work life? What is one promise that you can reward yourself with?
5. Oftentimes, we put others' priorities above ourselves. What are some promises you made to others and kept at the cost of your own desires (during school/work)? Were you happy about these promises? Did you mean to make that promise? And what made you grant your time and energy to that promise?
6. Was it hard to say no to a promise? How do you feel when you said no, or how do you feel when you didn't say no?
7. Flashback to your favourite memories, what comes to mind first? When did you feel most joyful?
8. What is one action that you are afraid of taking? Or what is something you are worrying about at the moment in your life?
9. What is one song that comforts you? brings you joy and warmth? or a song you love? What story does this song hold?
10. What do you want to tell yourself? Write yourself a postcard.

APPENDIX 3: WELLNESS JOURNAL DESIGN, UI DESIGN

APPENDIX 4: PARTICIPATORY WORKSHOP POSTCARD DESIGN







The Participatory Workshop Asset

