

# Music and Personal Well-being in the Life of a Rap Musician

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## Abstract

This study evaluates the role of music in the personal well-being of a musician by looking at the example of a selected performer, the Czech rap singer Meiton, who has publicly discussed his mental health issues and their reflection in his music. According to the concept of personal well-being and PERMA model (Seligman 2011), people can improve the quality of their lives through activities that lead to positive emotion, engagement (*flow*), meaning, accomplishment and positive relations. Through qualitative research based on Meiton's song lyrics and interviews with the singer, I used the method of narrative, thematic and phenomenological analysis to explore how music-making helps create personal well-being in his life in relation to the concept of positive psychology. The findings demonstrated the ways in which music-making contributes to different aspects of health, as defined by the PERMA model, and develops his personality. Through making music, Meiton processes the adverse experiences and aspects of his life, which helps him to cope with the pressure of life and reduce his level of anxiety. In this regard, ventilation of emotions, acceptance and attentional deployment have proven to be the key adaptive mechanisms of emotion regulation.

Keywords: case study, well-being, PERMA model, emotion regulation, rap music

## 1. Introduction

The aim of this case study is to explore the role of music-making for personal well-being in the life of a rap musician. From this, the following research questions are derived: (1) What role does music-making play in Meiton's life story? (2) What is the significance of music-making for Meiton's personal well-being? (3) Which themes relating to personal well-being are explored in Meiton's musical compositions? (4) What emotion regulation strategies has Meiton used over the course of his life, and how do these strategies pertain to personal well-being?

The paper starts with a theoretical overview of positive psychology, the PERMA model, music making and emotion regulation. This is followed by the methodology section and research findings, including Meiton's life story and an analysis of his song lyrics with their connection to well-being. The final part discusses the relevance of the research findings and provides the conclusions.

### 1.1. Positive psychology and the PERMA model of personal well-being

In its constitutional preamble, the World Health Organization defines health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (World Health Organization [WHO] 2005: 1). This

approach suggests that each person should be able to mobilize their personal and psychological resources that can help them to cope with the challenges of life without relying solely on external support (MacDonald et al. 2012). These findings go hand in hand with research in the field of positive psychology. In the area of mental health, it is very common that a person does not suffer from any mental illness but still experiences dissatisfaction and distress. Seligman (2011: 221) writes that mental health is not merely the absence of a mental disorder, but the presence of thriving. The degree of optimal thriving is therefore the primary criterion for measuring personal well-being, which is seen as a central theme of positive psychology.

Seligman (2011) offered a theory of personal well-being which demonstrates that increased levels of thriving are achieved primarily through five elements: Positive Emotion, Engagement, Positive Relations, Meaning, and Accomplishment. The acronym PERMA, which consists of the initial letters of the five elements in English, has been adopted for these individual elements. Each of these elements meets three necessary conditions to be included among the components of personal well-being: (1) it contributes significantly to mental well-being, (2) it is a worthy goal of human endeavour in

its own right, (3) it is defined and measured independently of the other elements.

*Positive emotion* can take the form of joy, enthusiasm, ecstasy, contentment, etc. The main factors of this component include happiness and life satisfaction as subjective metrics. These emotions can be best utilized during difficult moments in life, as experiences that evoke positive emotions are able to mitigate negative emotions (Seligman 2002: 10–12). The results of expert studies demonstrate that positive emotions can contribute to overall levels of personal well-being (e.g. Berridge, Kringelbach 2011; Lyubomirsky et al. 2005; Robinson, Hippel 2006; Vallerand 2012).

*Engagement or flow* is defined as a state in which people are so absorbed in an activity that nothing else seems to be important (Csikszentmihalyi 1991: 4). In his research, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi interviewed thousands of people from all over the world of all age groups and with different lifestyles. He found that the characteristic of the state of *flow* that people mention most often is forgetting all the unpleasant aspects of life (Csikszentmihalyi 1991: 71). According to Seligman (2002: 116), notwithstanding the vast differences in the activities involved in the state of *flow*, there are strikingly similar traits: (1) The task is challenging and requires certain skills. (2) We are focused. (3) There are clear goals. (4) We receive immediate feedback. (5) We are deeply engaged without making a great effort. (6) We feel we have the situation under control. (7) The sense of self fades into the background. (8) Time stops. The state of engagement can be achieved if one correctly recognizes, develops and applies one's personality strengths (Seligman 2002: 119).

*Positive relations* or social support are a person's belief that he or she is respected and loved by others. This has been recognized as one of the most influential factors affecting personal well-being among people across all ages and cultures (Reis, Gable 2003). The main human strength is the ability to be loved, and loneliness is a very crippling condition. The absence of positive relations has a major impact on personal well-being (Seligman 2011: 20–23). Hicks and King (2009) found in their research, for example, that positive relations contribute significantly to mental well-being and sense of purpose in

life. A number of other studies have reached similar conclusions (e.g. Baumeister, Leary 1995; Berridge, Kringelbach 2011).

*Meaning* is defined as applying our unique strengths and virtues in service to something larger than ourselves (Seligman 2011: 17). Wang et al. (2007) found in their research that people who perceive their lives as meaningful are less prone to depressive and suicidal thoughts. Similarly, Frankl (1988: 17–18) speaks about the need for meaning in life and its fulfilment. According to him, man is a creature who searches for meaning (*logos*) and one of the tasks of psychotherapy is to help people find meaning. Meaning in life can therefore be extremely important for personal well-being (Byron, Miller-Perrin 2009; Cotton Bronk et al. 2009; Steger et al. 2009).

The last element of the PERMA model relates to *accomplishment*. Seligman (2011: 18–19) explains that achieving success is most often a goal in itself, regardless of whether it brings positive emotions, a sense of meaning or improved interpersonal relations. Accomplishment can be broadened in terms of time horizon to "successful life", where a person strives to achieve his or her personal victory, which can increase social status. The importance of success for personal well-being is demonstrated by the results of other studies (e.g. Avey et al. 2011; Croom 2012; Hassanzadeh, Mahdinejad 2013).

These specific skills, emphasized by positive psychology (concerning questions regarding how to experience more positive emotions, more engagement, more meaning, more accomplishment, and better interpersonal relations), are self-sustaining and promote optimal thriving. They also help to cope with and to prevent anxiety and depression (Seligman 2011: 54).

## 1.2. The role of musical activities in personal well-being

Approaches to health and personal well-being emphasize the extent to which individuals can influence their own medical condition. As music forms an essential part of people's lives, its importance should be taken into account and it should be considered a universal source of possible treatment with implications for health and personal well-being (MacDonald et al. 2012: 7). Koelsch (2009) explains that the positive influence of musical activities on the psyche often

results from the effect of music on behaviour, perception, emotions, attention, and cognitive processes. The importance of musical activities, in the context of human health, can therefore be considered from many different perspectives.

Ascenso et al. (2017) explored the personal well-being of six professional musicians. Based on interviews and the journal entries of participants, they concluded that participation in musical activities is relevant to all elements of the PERMA model and may influence personal well-being to some extent. Similar results were also presented by Millar and Warwick (2019), who studied the relationship between the personal well-being of young refugees and musical activities by means of participant observation of one-to-one music lessons, group music workshops and semi-structured interviews. Research findings suggest that musical activities can positively influence personal well-being in young people through improved social relationships, self-knowledge, development of emotional expression, a sense of freedom of action, and positive self-identification.

The results of a survey involving 601 professional musicians are also of interest. Respondents completed a self-assessment questionnaire designed to assess the five components of the PERMA model (the PERMA-Profiler questionnaire). Musicians scored significantly higher on positive emotions, relations and meaning compared to the general population (Ascenso et al. 2018). Musical activities can therefore have a positive effect on the individual components of personal well-being as defined by the PERMA model, as demonstrated by research findings from other studies (e.g. Croom 2012; Davidson 2011; DeMarco et al. 2012; Hays 2005; Hays, Minichiello 2005; Hwang, Oh 2013; Lamont 2011; Packer, Ballantyne 2011; Rabinowitch et al. 2013).

### 1.3. Emotion regulation in relation to musical activities

One aspect where music contributes to well-being is the regulation of emotions. Emotion regulation refers to a heterogeneous set of processes by which individuals may dampen, maintain or intensify emotions according to their goals (Gross, Thompson 2007). The predominant model for emotion regulation is the process model developed by Gross (1998). This modal model constitutes an emotion generation process that

includes four phases: (1) the situation that elicited the emotion, (2) attention to that situation, (3) appraisal of the meaning of the situation given one's current goals, and, finally, (4) an emotional response tendency that includes behavioural, physiological and experiential components. Each step in the emotional generation process is seen as a potential regulatory site. From this assumption, the corresponding emotion regulation categories of situation selection (e.g. avoidance of the situation altogether), situation modification (e.g. changing or avoiding specific stimuli in a situation), attentional deployment (e.g. distraction, rumination, mindfulness), cognitive change (e.g. reappraisal, acceptance), and response modulation (e.g. experiential avoidance, expressive suppression) follow. It is also assumed that strategies used prior to the actual emotional response often lead to more successful emotion regulation than strategies focused on the response (Gross 1998, 2015). In this regard, Aldao and Nolen-Hoeksema (2012) mention more adaptive strategies (e.g. acceptance, problem-solving, reappraisal, mindfulness), as opposed to maladaptive strategies (e.g. expressive suppression, experiential avoidance, behavioural avoidance, rumination). It appears that coping with negative emotions by means of the avoidance strategy is one of the less adaptive ways. Denial and suppression of negative emotions have been associated with a number of health issues, such as the development of chronic diseases or increased mortality in cancer patients (Epping-Jordan et al. 1994). If negative emotions are not suppressed and are talked about, however, then this strategy is likely to have a positive effect on health (Panagopoulou et al. 2006). Pennebaker and Chung (2007) found, for example, that it is healthy for people to deal with their personal traumas in journals or essays. The author of the study believes that expressive writing about emotional states helps people find meaning in events and understand them.

Music making is important for personal well-being, especially in terms of regulating one's own moods (Chin, Rickard 2014) or inducing engagement (de Manzano et al. 2010). For instance, rapping, songwriting and composition helped marginalized people to find their voice and increased social inclusion, intercultural connections, and empowerment (Bartleet et al.

2016; Habron et al. 2013). A number of studies, or even books, have also described the use of rapping for self-regulation, the development of emotional coping strategies, and behaviour change (Hadley, Yancy 2011; Viega 2013). The use of rap in music therapy facilitates the expression of authentic personal emotions, helping to transform them and reduce aggressive states (Short 2013).

## 2. Materials and Methods

The main research strategy of this case study is biographical narrative inquiry, which examines the life experiences of an individual in an everyday context, and focuses on the meaning the research subject gives to the stories he or she tells (Joeng-Hee 2016). In our case, it is the life story of the rap musician Meiton. I also collected Meiton's published songs in textual form for the purpose of the research and then subjected them to a thematic analysis. Narrative interview and phenomenological research were conducted to obtain relevant information.

### 2.1. Participant selection and case study subject overview

The identification of a person suitable to achieve the objectives of this study was made by purposeful selection, i.e. cases that can most effectively illuminate the research questions and enhance the understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Sargeant 2012). I approached a Czech musician who performs under the pseudonym Meiton by text message via the social network Instagram and invited him to collaborate on this case study. Meiton, whose real name is Michal, was born in Ostrava in 1993 and has been actively involved in music since the age of fourteen.

Meiton's musical compositions are publicly available and his lyrics suggest that music may serve as a means for him to regulate his own moods and emotions. In his songs, he primarily addresses his mental states and the issues he suffers from. Meiton personally produces all the visual content for his songs. Most of this visual material symbolically expresses the theme of the song or the title of the album (see Figures 1–4 in the appendix 1). Meiton's interest in web

design and graphics has led him to work in the IT sector, with his musical activities complementing his primary career. His songs cannot be classified into one particular musical genre, as they use elements of pop, metal and rap music. However, rap is the most prevalent musical aspect in Meiton's compositions. He has released a total of ten albums and a number of singles. On the music platform Spotify, Meiton's music currently attracts approximately 38,000 listeners per month, and his Instagram profile has around 2,500 followers. These figures indicate a certain level of reach; however, within the context of the Czech music scene, he is not considered a mainstream artist. Nevertheless, the artistic value and quality of his compositions have secured him several notable collaborations with prominent Czech rappers, such as Schyzo and PTK.<sup>1</sup>

### 2.2. Ethical approval and researcher's position

Meiton signed an informed consent. He also approved the final form of the article and provided consent to include all the information contained in the text.

I was already familiar with Meiton's musical output before I began my research work. However, I did not know him personally. My relationship with this kind of music is positive and I consider myself an active listener of his music.

### 2.3. Data collection process

*Narrative interview* was used to cover Meiton's life story. The narrative interview is based on the free narration of life situations. It assumes that there are subjective meaning structures to certain events that emerge in free narration, which are less likely to emerge in targeted questioning. The interview itself is then divided into two core phases: the *narration phase* and the *conversation phase*. These phases include stimulation, narration, questioning to clarify ambiguities, and generalising questions (Goodson, Gill 2011: 35–55).

*Phenomenological research* seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it (Neubauer 2019). It employs idiographic single case studies (Tellis 1997) and usually involves small numbers of participants to enable in-depth exploration of personal stories.

<sup>1</sup> The above information was obtained from Meiton's profiles on Instagram and Spotify and from an interview with him.

Following this method, I used a semi-structured interview to obtain information regarding the role of music-making in Meiton's personal well-being.

By mutual agreement, the interviews with Meiton were conducted through video calls via the Discord Internet communication platform. Four interviews were conducted during March and April 2022 at weekly intervals, and each session lasted approximately 90 minutes. The interviews were recorded by the computer's internal audio system. These recordings, transcribed into text form, then formed the basis for the analysis.

#### 2.4. Data analysis

The processing and evaluation of the findings of the study were based on a verbatim transcription of the interviews conducted and a verbatim transcription of Meiton's song lyrics.

The first phase of the research was to conduct a *narrative analysis of the life story*, which consists of three successive steps: broadening, burrowing into the specific data, and restorying. Joeng-Hee (2016: 206–207) suggests this as one of the possible approaches to narrative data. (1) Broadening refers to a general description of the social, historical or cultural context of the research subject. In the case of this study, it refers to the environment and social background in which Meiton grew up. (2) In the following phase, I noted the impact of certain life events on Meiton's mental state and his musical production (focusing on specific dates). (3) The last step was to retell the story.

*Thematic document analysis* is a research strategy based on an analysis of the existing material, which is a source of information relevant to the objectives of the study (Fereday, Muir-Cochrane 2006). The aim of this analysis was to identify certain themes that run throughout Meiton's entire musical career. The first step consisted of repeated readings of Meiton's texts in order to gain insight and make myself closely familiar with their content. I then identified the keywords of each song. This combined approach served as both an indicative objective and a supporting quantitative method to present the analysis. The

Internet-based program Sketch Engine was used for this purpose. In this study, keywords refer to the most frequent nouns and their synonyms that appeared at least twice in a song. If certain words appeared in the lyrics with the same frequency, the words that thematically fit the concept of the song were recorded. Keywords with meanings related to personal well-being were then collected. These terms were used to define the individual themes that Meiton addresses in his songs, which also contribute to answering the stated research questions.

*Phenomenological analysis* was applied to the interviews, which concerned the importance of music-making for Meiton's personal well-being. The aim of this analysis was to uncover the inner meanings of his experience of music-making in relation to his personal well-being. The various steps of the phenomenological analysis were carried out in accordance with the description provided by Howitt (2019). In the initial phase, I listened repeatedly to the recorded interviews conducted with Meiton in an attempt to shed my own preconceptions and perceive his personal experience of music-making and the relationship it has to his personal well-being. In the second step of the analysis, I focused on Meiton's specific statements characterizing his experience of given phenomena. This was followed by grouping the units of meaning into themes. The interviews were then summarized and the preliminary results were written up in consultation with Meiton himself. In a follow-up interview, Meiton verified the formulated findings, thus commenting on whether the essence of the interviews was indeed captured. The final stage of the analysis involved making minor adjustments and assembling a final report containing a description of Meiton's experience of the roles that music-making plays in his personal well-being.

### 3. Findings<sup>2</sup>

Based on the narrative interview that was conducted with Meiton, his life story was assembled and is presented in the following subsection.

<sup>2</sup> All verbatim quotes provided in the research findings are based on interviews conducted with Meiton in Czech. Meiton had the possibility to check the English wording and approve the English version of the quotations. In addition to the interviews, in the thematic analysis subsection, I also cite lyrics from his songs.

### 3.1. Meiton's life story

Meiton's life story is closely tied to the Ostrava environment, as he has spent his entire life in this city. He grew up with his younger brother, four years his junior, in a family with both his parents. He describes his childhood as trouble free during kindergarten and primary school. Although he perceived himself as a shy, introverted boy who was withdrawn, he was not diagnosed with any mental illnesses at that time.

In his teenage years, around the age of 15, Meiton was exposed to various addictive substances, primarily alcohol and marijuana. This period of his life had a profoundly adverse effect on his mental state. "I found a bunch of people to go out with, smoke and drink with. Overall, this is one of the things that really took an extreme toll on me mentally." Meiton experienced his first panic attack when he was under the influence of marijuana. Over the following months, the panic attacks became increasingly frequent. "It happened all the time, I felt generally worse in my head. There was that general anxiety you get throughout the day and it was such a depressing time." It was during this time that he sought medical help and began composing his own music, as yet only instrumental.

In the first year of his studies at secondary industrial school, Meiton broke ties with the friends with whom he had been used to taking addictive substances. "I could see that something wasn't right, that I didn't feel comfortable among them because it was very toxic for me." Meiton describes this part of his life as a dark period. During this period of crisis, however, he began to focus more on music. The following quote expresses what music meant to him: "Even then, it was a filter to keep myself occupied, to keep my mind off my misery."

He released these vocal-instrumental songs under the pseudonym Deadline from Devil.<sup>3</sup> A total of three albums were released in 2013 (*In Memory of Our Hearts*, *Sedative*, *Forever EP*). Meiton's songs, released when he went under the name Deadline from Devil, mostly tend towards nu-metal, which combines elements of heavy metal with elements taken from hip hop, grunge

and electronic music. During 2014, Meiton's music developed and became increasingly distinctive in style. "I wanted to make the music differently. It was similar genre-wise, but I think I shifted it closer to myself." Thus began a new period in his musical career, in which he performed under the pseudonym My Old Enemy. His first musical album, released in this way, was entitled *Lycanthropy* (2014). In the process of writing songs, Meiton released some of the hatred from his past and the issues that angered him at the time. *Lycanthropy* was followed by another project – *EP Journey Away* (2014).

After finishing high school, Meiton released his album *Placebo* (2015), which leaned towards rap. This shift towards rap, which was not entirely typical of his musical work prior to 2014, became a clear impulse for him to no longer release his songs under the pseudonym My Old Enemy. A new phase of his musical career was consequently launched, and the Meiton nickname now began to serve as an artistic name. After the release of *Placebo*, Meiton became a member of Illegal Music, a music company that unites select performers. Each of these musicians handled the recording of their songs independently in their own studios. However, the songs were released on a single and common platform. Meiton's album *Infusion* (2016) was released under the auspices of this music label. The title of the album represents the infusion of emotions that are put into the music. It is therefore a projection of his own feelings into musical compositions.

Meiton began actively addressing his mental health issues around 2017. He found a psychiatrist who prescribed him medication, specifically antidepressants and an anxiolytic for emergency relief. Group therapy was also recommended, and Meiton participated actively in this. For approximately 45 days, he attended a day centre, which included peer-to-peer discussions between group members, treatment under the guidance of a therapist, and various types of relaxation exercises, such as music therapy.

At the time of starting group therapy, Meiton began working on a new music album called *Alice* (2018). He wrote some songs during therapy and

<sup>3</sup> All referenced song titles have been translated from Czech into English. Deadline from the Devil is Meiton's pseudonym, the only case where Meiton himself used English.

some others after it ended, so that the entire album is influenced by this healing process. *Alice* was also the album that marked the point at which Meiton became more aware that he was no longer writing music primarily for himself. "Even after *Infusion*, for example, and then after *Alenka*, an awful lot of people started writing to me saying that my music had saved their lives or helped them get through a dark time."

When the group therapy was over, the therapist offered Meiton additional individual therapy. The singer took advantage of this opportunity and attended individual therapy for approximately two years (up until 2019). This therapy helped him to some extent.

Meiton left Illegal Music by mutual agreement with the other members of the label. In the first half of 2020, he founded his own record label Dead Garden Records s.r.o. Under the umbrella of Dead Garden Records s.r.o., Meiton released a smaller music project entitled *Monsters EP* (2019). The title of the album refers to the inner demons that he needed to get out of his system. The *Monsters EP* was followed by two singles, after which came a two-year hiatus. "I was thinking I was going to stop with this shit and wouldn't do anything else because I just couldn't make music. I was going through a dark period when it came to creativity. I wasn't in the mood to write or make music." Meiton wanted to bring something new to the table with each project, but his lack of inspiration prevented him from releasing more songs during this period. His inability to write a new song was consequently reflected in his personal life. "It frustrated me a lot. I was often out of sorts." Meiton's sudden burst of renewed creativity came towards the end of 2021, when he wrote an entire new album in less than six months and released it under the title *Mirrors* (2022). The album *Mirrors* is Meiton's last musical project to date.

### 3.2. A thematic analysis of Meiton's lyrics

The themes that Meiton addresses in his songs were selected on the basis of the keywords and the overall concept of the songs; the themes identified also serve to answer the research questions. Based on the keywords of the songs, it is apparent that he addresses his own negative emotions in his lyrics. These keywords include pain, hate, fear, crying, phobias, and depression.

The findings of the subsequent phenomenological analysis demonstrated that he was thus ridding himself of negative psychological states.

The themes identified are: (1) coping with life events, (2) the use of medication, (3) the positive impact of music-making on mental health, (4) fear of performing, (5) memories of growing up.

#### 3.2.1. Coping with life events

Meiton channels his inner states into his songs, adding: "It's sometimes hard to live with mental illness, social phobia and anxiety disorder in my case. Some days I feel like I'm underwater and other people aren't." The specific theme of being underwater is very characteristic of his lyrics. References to the relationship between Meiton and his girlfriend, which indicates that she also plays a key role in his coping with life, are also another typical feature of the texts. "Icarus", for example, was written by Meiton for his girlfriend. At the beginning of the lyrics, he makes mention of his psychological problems and also a "plea for help" as he needs someone to lean on and not to be alone. The song then goes on with words indicating that Meiton found support in his relationship with his girlfriend and expressing his gratitude to her.

Please forgive me, it's not easy to deal with this life and be happy at the same time. I don't even know when it started, the first anxiety attack, life is a theatre. [...] Please catch me when I fall again, you're my light in a dark corridor, stop for a moment. [...] When you're here, I'm not alone and I'd like to thank you, I'm not scared any more ("Icarus", 2014).

The songs "Placebo" and "Compass" help us understand Meiton's mental states. In the first of these, one observes his frustration with his current psychological state. "Tomorrow might be better, but today everything's fucked up and my head is fucked up. I don't want any more promises" ("Placebo", 2015). The other song delivers a similar message. It does not refer, however, to his current state of mind, but to the long-term issues resulting from specific psychiatric diagnoses: "You know, it's not funny any more, I'm drowning, I have to leave, and the only thing left is more empty days. [...] The mental illness, depression, anxiety, feelings that you have within. This will slowly bury you in the ground, I haven't felt well for a long time" ("Compass", 2016).

### 3.2.2. Taking medication

The theme of medication use is crucial due to Meiton's awareness of the importance of prescribed medication in his life, and how he perceives its help. He describes the help he has received through medication in the song "Life Is Just a Game". He is aware that he would not have been able to function in life, as he does now, without it: "I used to think I could do it on my own. Without help, without pills, I would be able to keep standing, but a few years passed and they are lost in time, and I found out later that I couldn't make it" ("Life Is Just a Game", 2014). The prescribed drugs and therapy often did not have the desired effect on Meiton's psyche, a theme that became typical of many texts. "The meds don't work any more, so you have to fight. And sometimes when it comes, you act like a psychopath" ("Ocean", 2015). "I can't write, I have nightmares and I'm scared. I can't sleep, so I'm looking forward to the morning. They told me medication would help – the meds didn't work, I don't know why, but your eyes are crying" ("Trains", 2019). Meiton is also aware that the long-term use of medication entails a number of adverse side effects. It is clear from some of the texts that, even if the prescribed pills are doing their job, he does not have a positive relationship with medication, as it is a "double-edged weapon" to which one can develop an addiction that interferes and dulls consciousness; for example: "The psychiatrists are busy, so there's no help to be had. It's bad to take medication, drugs actually, I'm high" ("Starring", 2016). "So I'm downing the pills again, I'm downing the small and round pills. They're gonna take your soul and wipe out the light and give you some of that love" ("Angels and Demons", 2022).

### 3.2.3. The positive impact of music-making on mental health

In the song "Don't Say Anything" (2014), Meiton once again explores the theme of being underwater, followed by lyrics that imply that making music is his own world, a world into which he escapes from the "drowning": "Maybe it's too late to change anything, maybe this is already hell, I really don't know. I don't wanna keep drowning, I don't wanna deal with it, so I write these things, we all have our worlds." He has similar sentiments in the song "Ad Astra" (2022):

"It's that stupid fear that makes me write and get those tracks out, the crap that's inside me, no [...] We're screaming underwater, trying to be free." Specific references to music acting as a filter for Meiton, helping him rid himself of negative mental states, are evidenced by the following lyrics. "And you're smiling, everything's ok, it's gonna be alright. It's just the music – the filter that makes me free." ("Placebo", 2015). "It's embarrassing, so I use music as a filter, fucking albums I'm still writing" ("Chinese Whispers", 2018). Music-making also often brings a sense of happiness or positive emotions to Meiton, as can be observed in several lyrics, such as: "It's not our fault, it's a given. It's probably better than being miserable, so we write the music and all those states are moulded into tones, we're happy for a while" ("I'm Forgetting", 2017). "For me, music is my life, without it I wouldn't be whole. I've always hated silence, is it a gift? I really don't know." ("Trains", 2019). One could also argue that if Meiton is not composing and ridding himself of his emotions by writing, he's not feeling at his best, as demonstrated once again by a number of songs, for example, "I feel like I'm running down a dark corridor all my life with no end in sight. And when I'm not making music, the silence burns me. And when I'm not making hits, I feel helpless" ("Scars", 2022).

### 3.2.4. Fear of concerts

Throughout his musical career, Meiton has never held a concert where he would perform live in front of people. His fear of performing in public is due to a social phobia he has been diagnosed with. This is a theme he also addresses in his compositions, as can be seen in the following quotations.

For example: "I don't want concerts, I can't stand your faces. You think it's funny – a socio-phobic in front of people" ("Compass", 2016). "I don't want to lecture you, I felt it was obvious I wasn't going to do the gigs, even though I'm eating the pills" ("I'm Lost", 2017). "I guess I can't get over it, it's a no-go, that I should be singing those tracks live, I'm really scared. Collapses, ambulance, me, shaking hands and cold" ("Well", 2019).

### 3.2.5. Memories of growing up

Meiton often revisits his past in his lyrics. In particular, he recalls the moments he spent with

a group of people with whom he used addictive substances of various types. It was during this “dark period” that he had his first panic attack. As he says: “I go back to the past more because of the bad things I am trying to process.” In the song “Never Again” (2013), for example, Meiton expresses his desire to distance himself from the people who started experimenting with addictive substances: “We are what we do. It’s just me, and I don’t want to be different. I’ll never go back to being one of you. Junk took your dreams, I’m long gone.” There are similar lyrics in other Meiton texts, for example: “The wrecks that stand on the corner used to be my friends. Sometimes I wonder what happened, that now I am here and they are standing aside” (“You’ll Be Their Goal”, 2014). Meiton described in our interview that he did not feel comfortable with the people in the group, for example, because of the frequent taunts about his person. A typical example of a lyric in which he mentions this topic is the song “Found and Lost” (2022): “Memories of bad days, bad childhoods and bad dreams are left [...] The first panic at fifteen, well, I guess, it was a long time ago, but I still remember it clearly. Nobody helped me, they laughed and left me like that when you think you’re really going to die.”

### 3.3. Phenomenological analysis and the PERMA model of personal well-being

The following section explores Meiton’s experience of the importance of music making to his personal well-being in relation to the PERMA model.

#### 3.3.1. Music-making and positive emotions

Meiton’s musical production is deeply connected with emotions. He generally feels better after finishing a song. He usually projects his negative emotions, such as frustration and stress, into his songs so as to get rid of them. In connection with this regulation of his own moods, one can mention the song “Chill” (2022), in which Meiton deals with his internal struggles. He made the following comments on the process of writing this song: “I woke up in the morning and felt the need to write, to get it out. I wrote it in the morning and the track was done in less than a day. It was something that frustrated me for a really long time.” It is the ability to regulate his own emotions through music-making that helps

Meiton. He also enjoys creating his next piece of art, as it brings him positive emotions, and he adds: “I enjoy making music, but when you hear the end result afterwards, that’s probably what brings you the rush of happiness.” He also experiences pleasant feelings after finishing an album, for example, when he can hold a finished CD in his hand: “When I first saw a pressed CD of *Mirrors*, it was a great feeling, because you hold in your hand two years of work or so, and you don’t realize such things until you physically see it.”

Making music does not always, however, make Meiton feel better, as he says: “It annoys me when I can’t make music.” It is the lack of inspiration that then leads to frustration and stress. Meiton realizes that another unpleasant aspect of music-making that he experiences is other people’s negative comments or their inability to understand and think about the true meaning of the songs released. The positive emotions, however, outweigh the negative ones, and Meiton is aware of the fact that music has definitely given him more than it has taken away; as he says: “Overall, music has made my life better.”

#### 3.3.2. Music-making and engagement (flow)

Meiton’s songwriting very much depends on his current state of mind and source of inspiration. Sometimes he can spend ten minutes writing a song and leave it unfinished because he finds that he simply cannot make music. If, however, he is in an ideal state when composing, he experiences feelings that are consistent with the definition of the state of *flow*. Meiton describes his state as follows: “When the muse is with me, I can’t describe exactly what feelings I experience. I get into a mode where I’m just functioning automatically, and I often don’t realize what it sounds like until it’s completely done.” Meiton perceives himself as completely immersed in the activity, adding: “It’s like tunnel vision, I’m focused on this particular thing and nothing else really exists around me.” When he is in this state of preoccupation with his own activity, songwriting is not a difficult task for him. He also realizes that songwriting moves him forward mentally. “You write something and you think about why you wrote it. You think about it for a long time and you actually realize that something has come to the surface that you didn’t know was

there. You get rid of it somehow and then you process it." Making music therefore positively influences Meiton's personal growth.

### 3.3.3. Music-making and meaning

Meiton finds many things important in his life, such as his partner, family, friends, and the positive attitude towards music that he has had since childhood. Making music fulfils him and makes him feel that he is accomplished in a certain activity. By means of his musical activities, Meiton found his strengths, which he worked on and developed further. He also adds: "Music is such a big part of my life that I can't imagine what I would do without it. My life would probably be much emptier." Meiton sees a purpose in composing music for many reasons. One of them, for example, is to help other people. "Every time I get a message like that, that my work has helped someone, it really makes me happy." Below are three examples of the messages of this type that he has received.

I've been listening to your work for about five years now and it's incredible how many times your songs have helped me. You are phenomenal and I hope you continue with your work.

Your music has more than helped me. It's taught me how to survive all the moments and I've found that you just have to wait out the rough moments and then you'll be fine again.

I discovered your music a few days ago and I just want to say thank you. I've struggled with mental disorders myself since I was a kid, and your music makes me feel an understanding that you just don't find often. So thank you and I appreciate you as an artist.

### 3.3.4. Music-making and accomplishment

The greatest success of Meiton's musical career came after the release of *Infusion* (2016), but he never let it affect him much; as he says: "I try to keep my feet on the ground and be humble about it." He has never, however, composed music for success alone, but for his own enjoyment and for other people. He is grateful for the success his music has brought him, especially in terms of increased self-esteem and the feeling that he has accomplished something. Meiton sees the

release, for example, of the album *Mirrors* (2022) as one of his greatest achievements in terms of overcoming a creative crisis. He tries to bring something new and improve his music with every album he releases. He succeeded with the release of *Mirrors*; as he says: "I see it as a success that I finished *Mirrors*". It is this sense of successful performance that interacts with the positive emotions, as constant improvement in musical activities makes Meiton happier. He enjoys tackling things related to music and it fills him with a sense of accomplishment when his work is heading in the right direction.

### 3.3.5. Music-making and positive relations

Meiton realizes that voluntary isolation deepens his problems, so he needs people around him who can support him. He has created such a community of people through his music, as some of his former fans have become his true friends. He launched a fan site entitled Meiton Squad on the communication platform called Discord. Initially, communication on this server was only through text messages, but over time, Meiton began making video calls and then in-person meetings with people close to him. This created a group of about seven people who started going on holiday together and seeing each other regularly. "I do not view it as a relationship between me and the listener at all, because I see them as true friends. We all really like each other there. Some of us have similar problems, for example, and we're just friends." Through making music, he has also made a number of friends outside of the Meiton Squad, whom he appreciates a great deal. He adds wryly: "I don't make friends like other people do, I guess, as I think about it, but yeah, I met another good friend from Slovakia through music."

Meiton also receives psychological support from other people through text messages that others send him. Here are two such messages:

You'll definitely pull through! I don't really know what to write to you because I feel the same, but I believe you can do it. I believe in you ♡

I don't know if the music helped you. If your life was worse, better, or the same. But your music helped me. Hang on!!

Undeniably, music-making shapes Meiton's relationships with other people. He has made many friends through it and also gained support from some of his fans, for example, when his mental state is less than ideal.

#### 4. Discussion and Conclusion

This case study illustrates the importance of music for personal well-being in the life of a musician in view of the PERMA model of personal well-being. The findings show that music-making is of considerable importance in Meiton's life story and is strongly related to his personal well-being.

The analysis of Meiton's song lyrics demonstrates that the lyrics of most of the published songs correspond to events that he actually experienced himself. These include, for example, memories of adolescence, during which time his mental health problems first became more pronounced in the form of panic attacks (see the lyrics to "Never Again", "You Will Be Their Goal", "Ice Cold", "Lost and Found"). Music also served as Meiton's diary, in which he recorded thoughts and feelings about his mental state (see the lyrics to "Icarus", "Placebo", "Chinese Whispers") and experiences, such as taking medication (see the lyrics to "Life is Just a Game", "Ocean", "Starring", "Angels and Demons"). He also uses his music as a means of communication with his fans, for example, when he writes that he is unable to perform live in front of people at a concert (see the lyrics to "Compass", "I'm Lost", "Well"). Through his music, Meiton processes the negative events that have occurred in his life, which helps him cope with the difficulties of life (see the lyrics of the songs "Don't Say Anything", "Ad Astra", "Chinese Whispers", "I'm Forgetting", "Trains", "Lost and Found").

Meiton practices selected aspects of expressive writing in the context of his musical activities, and this is beneficial for the management of his emotional states. In expressive writing, one should write about fears, dreams, unhealthy ways of living, things one avoids, and one's own experiences (Pennebaker 1997; 2004). The thematic analysis of the songs and the phenomenological analysis related to the PERMA model, in particular, show that writing musical texts is beneficial for Meiton in several ways.

These aspects include (1) the venting of emotions, which reduces the tension and intensity of emotional states. Rather than trying to suppress his negative emotions, Meiton instead embraces them, thus utilizing the adaptive mechanism of emotion regulation as part of cognitive change – i.e. acceptance (2). It also appears from the results of this paper that writing musical lyrics allows Meiton to distance himself from the situation (3), enabling him to explore his feelings and thoughts from a different perspective. Looking back on a written song also makes Meiton more aware of his emotional reactions and behavioural patterns, which may lead to greater self-awareness and self-knowledge (4). Moreover, in Meiton's case, the importance of developing emotional perception (5) is shown, which may have resulted from frequently describing his own experience. Musical creation provides wider possibilities than verbal expression alone for interpreting one's own emotional states. Indeed, the frequent practice of musical activities can refine the ability to be aware of and understand one's emotions (Huron 2006).

The findings of the paper demonstrate that the different roles of music-making in Meiton's life story are also intertwined with his personal well-being. He began to focus more on music-making around the age of fifteen when he was going through a difficult period marked by substance abuse and the development of psychiatric diagnoses. He cut off contact with the so-called friends with whom he was accustomed to taking addictive substances, and music, in his words, served as a way for him to "keep his mind off his misery". In this context, one can talk about avoidance of the situation altogether (severing of ties) and attentional deployment (music-making as a distraction) in relation to emotion regulation. When he states that he "uses music as a filter", he means getting rid of negative mental states, relieving stress and being able to relax. These findings are consistent with research describing the use of rapping for self-regulation, the development of emotional coping strategies (Hadley, Yancy 2011; Viegas 2013), and a reduction in aggressive states (Short 2013).

The study also supports the assumption of the beneficial effect of musical activities for different elements of mental health as per the PERMA model, which has been pointed out in previous

research (e.g. Ascenso et al. 2017; Ascenso et al. 2018; Millar, Warwick 2019). These studies do not, however, exclusively address music-making. This research, which takes into account all aspects of the PERMA model of personal well-being in a particular musician with psychological problems and their interconnection in the context of music-making, can further enrich knowledge in the field of positive psychology.

It has been found that music-making brings Meiton many positive emotions, and that these outweigh the negative ones. The positive emotions include, for example, the feeling of happiness, which in his case is particularly associated with the final form of a song/album. It was also determined that Meiton sometimes experiences a state of *flow* during the creative process. Within this state, the ordering of thoughts occurs as one's consciousness is focused on a single goal while being engaged. For Meiton, that goal is the creation of a musical song. This state of engagement then creates the psychological capital that drives him mentally. These findings are consistent with those reported by Seligman (2002; 2011).

The results of this article also demonstrate the meaning that Meiton finds in his music-making. Many people perceive his musical activities to be very important, as they have helped them many times with their own mental health problems. Thus, the above findings support the claim that meaning can be defined as applying our unique strengths and virtues in service to something larger than ourselves (Seligman 2011: 17). Meiton experiences a more successful life as a result of his music-making, gaining confidence and a sense of accomplishment. He has never, however, composed music for success alone. Nevertheless, success has opened up opportunities for him to meet other people, which brings us to the final

element of the PERMA model of personal well-being. Through his music, Meiton has found a number of close friends with whom he feels comfortable and whose presence helps him cope with difficult periods in his life. Another aspect of positive relations is the supportive messages that Meiton receives from his fans. Studies confirm that seeking emotional support from other people is an adaptive strategy that helps people cope with the pressure of emotional and physical stressors (Pakenham et al. 2007).

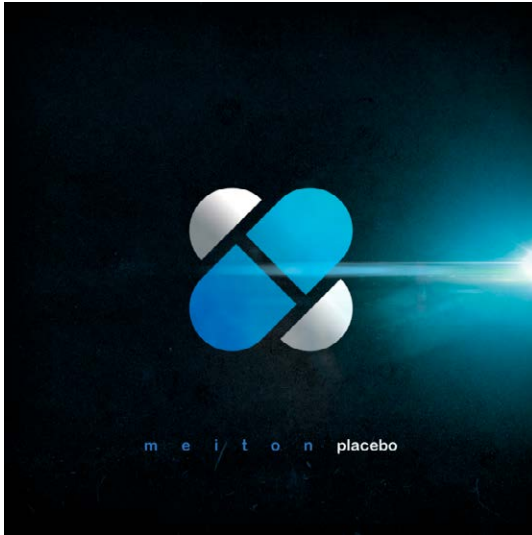
I believe that the contribution of my research lies in its holistic approach, as it offers a case study demonstrating the importance of music-making for all aspects of health and their interconnection. However, further research into the interdependence of the different elements of the PERMA model in relation to participation in musical activities, which should be conducted on a larger research population, is clearly required. Another important aspect of the paper relates to the lack of research conducted in the field of popular music in relation to well-being.

The limitations of this study lie in its focus on a single musician, as the findings cannot be generalized and universally applied. Interest in music is a very subjective and individual matter, and not every person is able to pursue it through active creation. My findings, however, support Seligman's (2002, 2011) assumptions that people can improve the quality of their lives by discovering their own distinctive strengths. It is by developing these that one can achieve personal well-being.

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## Appendix 1.

1) The thematic image for Meiton's music album *Placebo* (2015) expresses that music is a kind of help for people. Music, however, cannot completely cure a person.



2) The heart symbol associated with the album *Infusion* (2016) represents the infusion of Meiton's emotions into his music.



3) The album *Alenka* (2018) and its thematic illustration of a rabbit reference Lewis Carroll's fairy tale *Alice in Wonderland*. Meiton often feels like he is "falling down the rabbit hole into the unknown".



4) *Mirrors* (2022) is an album title that reflects Meiton's exploration of self and the understanding that things are not always what they seem.



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## Muusika ja isiklik heaolu räppmuusiku elus

—  
David Čelakovský

Uuringus vaatlen empiirilisel muusikaloomes kasulikku mõju inimese vaimsele tervisele, keskendudes Tšehhi muusikule Meitonile (esmajoones tegev räpis), kes on korduvalt kajastanud oma loomingus ka isiklike psühholoogilisi probleeme. Lähtun Ameerika psühholoogi Martin Seligmani isikliku heaolu kontseptsioonist, PERMA mudelist, mille kohaselt saavad inimesed oma elukvaliteeti parandada tegevustega, mis toetavad positiivseid suhteid, kaasahaaratust (*flow*), tähenduslikkust, saavutust ja positiivseid emotsioone. Sellest lähtuvalt kasutan kvalitatiivses uuringus, mis põhineb intervjuudel Meitoniga ja laulutekstide analüüsil, narratiivset, temaatilist ja fenomenoloogilist analüüsi, et uurida, kuidas muusikaloomine toetab muusiku isiklikku heaolu.

Artikli uurimisküsimused on: 1) Millist rolli mängib muusikaloomine Meitoni biograafias? 2) Milline on muusikaloomise tähendus Meitoni isiklikus heaolus? 3) Milliseid isikliku heaoluga seotud teemasid Meiton oma muusikas käsitleb? 4) Milliseid emotsioonide reguleerimise strateegiaid on ta oma elu jooksul kasutanud ja kuidas seostuvad need isikliku heaoluga?

Tulemused näitavad, kuidas kombineeruvad vaimse tervise teemad muusiku loomingus isikliku elulooga, ning laulutekstidest ilmneb, et muusikukarjäär on tihedalt seotud elulooga. Meitoni huvi muusika vastu täiskasvanueas, mil muusika toimus n.-ö. filtrina, aidates vabaneda ebameeldivatest psühholoogilistest seisunditest. Muusika loomine vähendas ka ärevust, mis on teda noorukieast saadik saatnud. Selles kontekstis on emotsioonide ventileerimine, aktsepteerimine ja muusika kaudu tähelepanu juhtimine olnud peamised emotsioonide reguleerimise mehhanismid. Laulutekstide kirjutamine on mitmel viisil kasulik, aidates mh. emotsioone välja elada, tekitades kognitiivseid muutusi, võimaldades teatud olukordadest eemalduda, end paremini tunda ja emotsionaalset taju arendada.

Naastes PERMA mudeli juurde, on muusikaloomine selle kõigi komponentide puhul asjakohane. Meitoni puhul hõlmab see rõõmu kogemist pärast loo valmimist, *flow'* seisundit muusikaloomise käigus ja tähenduslikkuse tunnet, mida ta teisi aidates kogeb. Positiivne tagasiside fännidelt aitab tõsta Meitoni enesehinnangut, samuti on oluline sõprade vastastikune emotsionaalne tugi kogukonnas, mis on kujunenud Meitoni muusika ümber.

Tõlkinud Brigitta Davidjants