



Academy of Music and Drama

Habit changes

How habit changes can change my artistic process and expression

Natasja Jean-Charles

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Author: *Natasja Jean-Charles*

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Supervisor: *Tina Glenvik*

Examinator: *Victoria Brattström*

Abstract

Nyckelord: *Vanor, Kreativ process, Förändring av vanor, Kreativt Uttryck.*

Keywords: *Habits, Creative process, Habit changes, Creative expression.*

The objective with this research is to see how a change of habits affect my artistic process and expression. Realizing that the habits I have developed over the years have become an obstacle to my creativity, I wanted to see if there are any changes to my attitude after implementing habitual changes in my creative process and in my personal life. In this paper you will be following my process and my reflection on the results that are presented during my process.

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“My identity is not my obstacle

My identity is my **superpower**

I am ready to stop resisting And start existing as my full and **authentic self**. Change will come when each of us who has the **courage** to question our own fundamental values and beliefs and then see to it, that our actions lead to our **best intentions**”¹

- America Ferrera, Actress, *April 2019*, TedTalk Vancouver

¹ My identity is a superpower -- not an obstacle [online video], TED ,June 29th 2019,<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjquHTj4HIY>, 06/05/2019

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 background

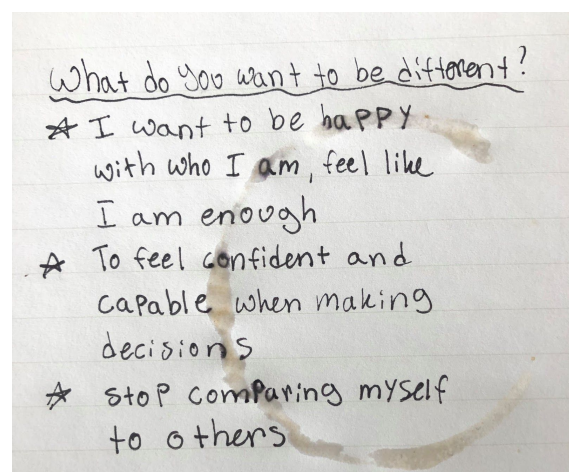
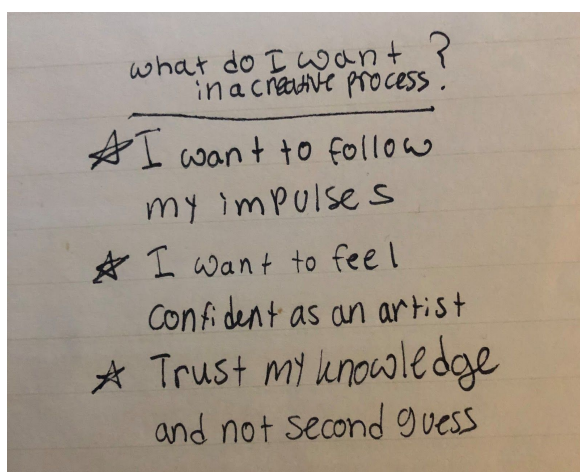
During my teen years, I lacked confidence. When I started with musical theatre I placed my fear of people's judgement in a creative situation thinking I would be judged as a bad actress if I did not perform the correct way. That thought limited my creative freedom.

I am a third year student in the three year bachelor degree program in musical theatre at *Academy of music and drama in Gothenburg (AMD)*. Before I got accepted to *AMD* I studied two years at the musical theatre program at *Ballet academy in Gothenburg (BA)*. During my time there I felt as though I had wasted my opportunity to learn and evolve my skills because of my hesitations creatively. A few weeks before attending *AMD* I promised to make up for all the lost time at *BA*, by not fearing judgement and be more free when working creatively. A few months into to my new found attitude of facing my fear, I found myself taking one step forward and then one step back, the old patterns did not go away as easily as I thought. I contemplated to myself: "How can I be so sure that something has to be different and find it so difficult to take the action to do it?"

Referring to the two images provided below, image one: "what do I want in a creative process?" was taken my first year at *AMD* 2017 and image two: "what do you want to be different (in your personal life)" taken early 2019, closing to the end of my second year at *AMD*. There is a one and a half year gap in between the two. As you can see my goal has not changed. I had a thought that early spring (2019): If I changed certain habits that are an obstacle to my creativity will that affect my creative process?

Picture one taken after acting class 2017

Picture two taken early spring 2019



1.2 Question and Objective

I chose this subject because when performing you have to be comfortable exploring different choices without hesitation or fear of judgement and wrongness. This should transition to any creative process that I undertake.

The objective with this research is to see how a change of habits affect my creative process and expression. Realizing that the habits I have developed over the years have become an obstacle to my creativity, I wanted to see if there are any changes to my attitude after implementing habitual changes in a creative process and in my personal life. After a few months of habit exploring, I made a recording with me singing “*Esmeraldas bön*” from the *Hunchback of Notre Dame* composed by Alan Menken, the same song I sung in the beginning of my second year at AMD. With help to reach a conclusion to my research I had three outside viewers to comment on the changes they saw in my creative expression. I have been documenting my creative process while doing the habit change challenge during my internship in *Fiddler on the roof* at Stockholms Stadsteater.

This experiment is not about changing who I am. I do not believe you have to shape your person for your profession. This research is what I need to achieve my goal and it may not be so for everyone else. Therefore my project revolves around the question:

How can habit changes change my artistic expression and process?

1.3 Method

I used autoethnography² as a research method. Mainly because I used myself as an object and my own experiences to integrate them into a cultural context. The cultural context in my case is: how me, as a musical artist, can change my habits that are an obstacle to myself in a creative process.

My step by step plan:

- Research what is written about habits to broaden my understanding.
- Research different habit related books and pick the one that is suitable for me.
- Use myself as a test subject for the research.
- Write a weekly journal about my habit stacking journey.
- Reflect and document how my new habits are affecting my creative expression during the rehearsal period of *Fiddler on the roof*.
- Find a conclusion, according to my notes from rehearsing *Fiddler on the roof* and my viewers comments on the videos.

²A form of self-reflection and writing that explores the researcher's personal experiences and connects this autobiographical story to a wider cultural-political-and social meanings and understandings
<https://www.collinsdictionary.com/submission/10957/Autoethnography>

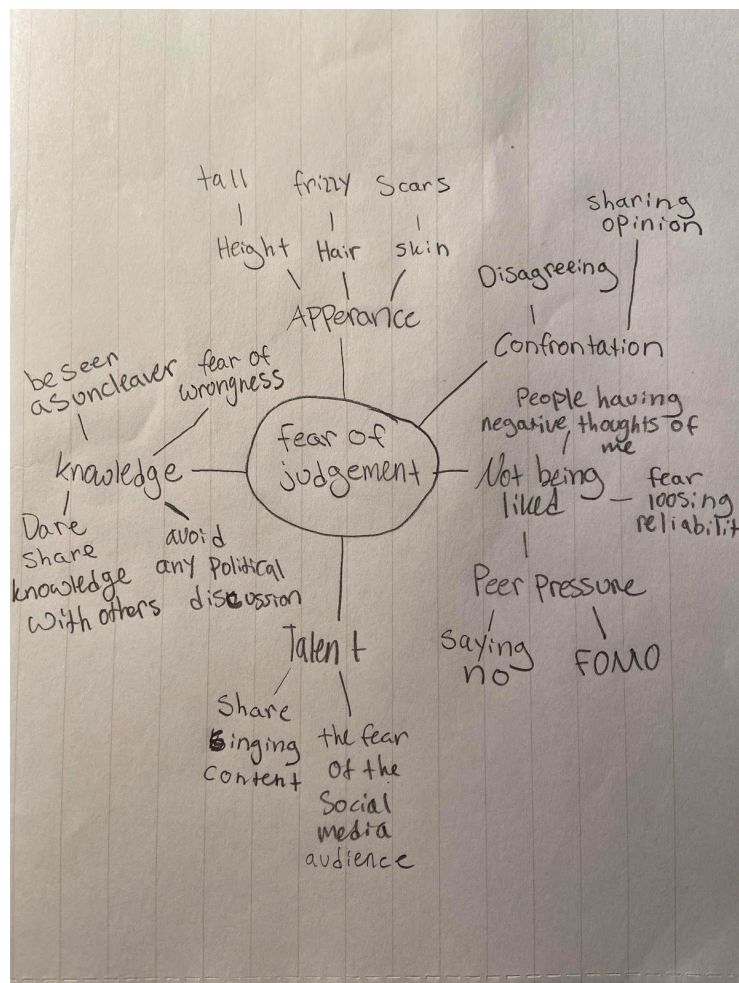
1.3.1 Identifying habits and how to tackle them

Habit: A thing that you do often and almost without thinking, especially something that is hard to stop doing³.

In order for me to study this I had to identify the habits I wished to amend. The habits that were identified were: Fear of judgment and Doubting impulses.

I created a mind map where I put the identified habits in the centre of the mind map. Each reason for why the habits mentioned occurred, I found counteraction to that habit. If you look at mind map shown below, you will see that I had a fear of being judged for my height. I am 178 cm and the tallest in my group of friends. As a way to contradict this habit would be to straighten my back, keep my head up or wearing high heeled shoes. This is to not hide my height but to embrace it by making myself taller.

Example of Mind map “fear of judgement” below. This is mind map was written summer 2019 and was a working process during the habit challenge experiment.



³ <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/habit?q=habit>

S.J Scott Habit stacking steps that are found in his book *Habit stacking*⁴, is the method I used as a guide though my habit challenge. Stacking habits is when you add one habit change to another. S.J Scott is a blogger and self help author of a series of habit related titles, the purpose of his work is to show “how continuous habit development can lead to a better life”⁵. S.J Scott presents 13 steps/guidelines to habit stacking, I only used four out of the 13 steps for they were the most suitable for this research.

This is how I will tackle these habits:

Step one: *Create small and enjoyable rewards*

Completing habit is an accomplishment and should be rewarded (2017, page 75). Once in a while I will reward myself with an activity or item that makes me happy. An example is going to the movie theatre or buying myself a new piece of clothing.

Step two: *Focus on repetition*

Repetition is key and it's crucial to stick to your routine because repetition builds muscle memory. (2017, Page 76). I have come up with some solutions to this in my mind map as mentioned above. I will write down my new habits or habit change in a small transportable notebook to look back on as a reminder.

Step three: *Expect setbacks*

There will come times when you will experience a setback in your habit stacking routine such as boredom or lack of motivation. Setbacks are a good thing, they teach you resiliency. You should expect setbacks during your journey and when you are faced with them you'll have two choices: either give up or find a way to overcome them (2017, page 78). For this step I can not do much but expect the setbacks and not give in to them when that happens.

Step four: *Build one routine at a time*

You shouldn't try to build more than one habit at a time because each additional new action will increase the difficulty to stick with your stacks. When you feel the habit has become a permanent behaviour you can add a new habit to your routine (2017, page 80). (i.e. Habit stacking). I will follow this instruction to the best of my ability. If I would feel the need to add a second habit even though the previous habit or change has not yet synced into my daily life style, I will see if it is achievable or creates more obstacles.

⁴ Scott, S. *Habit stacking* (pp.64-82). Oldtown Publishing LLC.

⁵ Scott, S. *Habit stacking* (pp.16). Oldtown Publishing LLC.

1.3.2 My influencers

We are shaped by the culture we are surrounded by. All social cultures have norms and codes so that the communication goes well in society. Julian, the author of a social guidebook to Norway has noted in his ted talk held at TEDx that the social culture in Scandinavia is very framed, organized and polite⁶.

We have been conditioned in our daily lives by social codes, these may however detrimental to our stage presence. Being aware of these social codes, I am able to to work against them and that will benefit my creative freedom.

When working on my habit changes I felt the need to surround myself with people who inspire me. For in past experiences I have appreciated the influence certain people have over me. This is another necessity for being able to start working on my habit changes. Here are some of the people who has helped and will help me in my habit change challenges.

Sara Svensson Ekman; Mom

My mom is my guardian angel. I can always turn to her for aid, advice and comfort. Mom is a career woman, she is headstrong about what she wants and goes for it. She wants nothing but success for me and my career. She encourages me to not give up on my goals and not let anything distract me from achieving them. Having expectations pushes my ambition levels higher, I become more determined and I prioritise my necessities. An example of this would be: I prioritise going to the gym to get stronger and healthier than going on a shopping spree.

Quang

Quang is my oldest and best friend. He inspires me everyday with his knowledge, his independence, social skills, humor, and kindness. Quang brings out my competitive side. He pushes me to do better and I want to do better because of that. To have that competitive side Quang brings out form me is important to have because it drives my determination to be the best I can be and not settle for good enough. An example of this would be: I am in a Ballet Class and mentally I decide before the class begins “yesterday I did two pirouettes, today I will top that and do three pirouettes.”

These people contribute different characteristics that I wished to adopt that I see are important to habitual changes.

⁶ Bourrelle, J. (2015). How Culture Drives Behaviours | Julien S. Bourrelle | TEDxTrondheim. Retrieved 10 December 2019, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-Yy6poJ2zs>

“Those who say **yes** are rewarded by the **adventures** they have.

Those who say **no** are rewarded by the **safety they attain**”⁷

- Keith Johnstone, author and pioneer of improvisational theatre, 12th of september 2015 at TEDxYYC

⁷ Johnstone, K. (2015). Don't Do Your Best | Keith Johnstone | TEDxYYC. Retrieved 22 November 2019, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bz9mo4qW9bc&feature=emb_logo

2 THE PROCESS

In this chapter I am going to explain the description of the behaviour I want research and how I decided to work with the behaviour using habit changes. I will also reflect on the outcome of each habit change personally and professionally (professionally being my internship in *Fiddler on the roof*).

2.1 Spontaneous behaviour

I want to explore spontaneous behaviour because I have always been a person that thrives by routine. I order the same meals and follow my daily morning routine. The benefits of having a routine kind of lifestyle is what has given me discipline. I am committed and I am one you can rely on to meet deadlines. Another benefit to my lifestyle is the attainable safety of the predictable. However I am also aware that the lack of spontaneous activity can be a disadvantage in life when it comes to adapting to change which is why I have chosen to implement more spontaneous activities into my lifestyle.

I wanted to do some research to find out how spontaneity can help a person. According to blogger “GLEN” in his article “The Power of Being Spontaneous” spontaneity is something to embrace and a trait to possess in your daily life⁸. In another research, therapist and arthur Leon F Seltzer (Ph.D.) encourages his clients to be more spontaneous, he says “In a sense we are telling them to trust themselves more, to have more confidence in their ability to appropriately do something without first having to mull it over⁹”.

2.1.1 Habit Change: Spontaneous activity

Following Leon's quote is what I base this research on. I would like to implement more spontaneous behaviour to eliminate doubt and gain more confidence in my abilities. The result I am hoping to see after this experiment is that I will be more open and trusting to spontaneous activity. I also want to see how this habit change will affect the outcome of my creativity rehearsing *Fiddler on the roof*

I kept a journal to document the happenings during this research and as referenced below I started leaving my comfort zone. Encouraging spontaneous behavior, socially.

Journal documentation 14th of July 2019 (one month into the habit challenge):
finally, I have moved to Stockholm, I'm ready to be spontaneous and all that! I actually did jump in and play beach volleyball with my friend Sara, even though I had never done it! I played with people I had never met and you know what? I had fun! I scored some points and I met someone new, his name is Martinez and he knows a lot about dogs. Then the same day I

⁸ The Power of Being Spontaneous | LifeDev. (2008). Retrieved 11 November 2019, from <https://lifedev.net/2008/01/29/the-power-of-spontaneity-and-how-to-wield-it/>

⁹Seltzer, L. (2009). The Wisdom of Spontaneity (Part 1). Retrieved 14 December 2019, from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/evolution-the-self/200903/the-wisdom-spontaneity-part-1>

decided to tag along with Sara to meet her friends from her church to play outdoor games! I made it to the final and I socialized with new people too! I overcame my fear today!!

This journal documentation shows how I took the chances in seizing the opportunity to put my habit change to the test by taking on spontaneous activity. This experimenting continued in a span of two months, listed below are some of the other activities I participated in:

- I started participating in more activities like hot yoga, taking gym classes (even those that were maybe to challenging for me), taking long walks and hikes in nature.
- I took on new responsibilities like: babysitting. I started a new health diet and took the initiative in organising social events.
- I started hobbies I pushed aside because of doubt and limited time. I started learning spanish on the duolingo app, reading more self help and traveling books and I started writing music.
- I also took on challenges that I would normally would not want to do. For example: I went on rides in an amusement park and I got my first tattoo.

2.1.2 The outcome: Personally

Step one: Creating small enjoyable rewards

When I would complete this habit I would reward myself with something small like a baked good or an encouragement speech. Most of the time the reward would be in the spontaneous action I took. For example when the spontaneous act: “went on the rides at the amusement park”, it became a challenge and a reward at the same time because I feared the rollercoasters but I was socialising with my friends.

Step two: Focus on repetition

My curiosity was the drive and way to keep up the repetition to Spontaneous behavior. I kept my curiosity alive by writing a list of things I wanted to do or try, so I could look back and check off the list of activities I had written down.

Step three: Expect setbacks

The setbacks I experienced in this habit was doubting a spontaneous activity because of the uneasy feeling of the outcome. For example: When getting my tattoo, I worried about the regret for getting the tattoo after it was done. I had to overcome that by reminding myself of step one: the rewards and how it feels after completing a habit.

Step four: Build one habit at a time

I did not add an extra habit because I wanted to focus on only completing spontaneous activities. If I would have added more habits my priorities would be scattered.

Through this experiment, I have gained more knowledge and experience in knowing what I like and what I do not like. After doing my acts of spontaneous activities I discovered that me taking long walks or being in nature is a good way for me to relax and settle my thoughts. I know now because of all the rides I rode the time I was at an amusement park that my stomach can only handle five rides before surrendering. I have gained more confidence to follow through on thoughts and actions.

2.1.3 Outcome professionally; Spontaneous activity: Fiddler on the roof

My main job in “*Fiddler on the roof*” was ensemble and understudy¹⁰. I was understudying three roles, the two daughters: Chava and Tzeitel and Grandma Tzeitel. Grandma Tzeitel was my smallest understudy part. The interpretation of this character was very free, that being; her movement, and the vocal style. The opportunity to have unlimited freedom can be intimidating. This character required theatre improvisation and spontaneous activity, improvisation is built on spontaneous activity and acting on the first thing that comes to mind. This is when I could put my spontaneous habit change to the test. While I was working with this character during rehearsal it felt liberating to work in a non constricted way. I had certainty to act on my impulses with no hesitation. This is all thanks to me exploring my spontaneous actions in my personal life.

Step one: Creating small enjoyable rewards

The same day after rehearsal I rewarded myself with a new T-Shirt. As mentioned before completing a spontaneous act and the feeling after completing one is a reward in itself.

Step two: Focus on repetition

I only had the opportunity to exercise this habit when at rehearsals and during the show period of *Fiddler on the roof* which made repetition difficult due to rehearsal scheduling and infrequent performances. I kept up the repetition of spontaneous activity when rehearsing the role of grandma Tzeitel by aiming to explore different sides of her to prevent repetition of old choices I made for the character in the past.

Step three: Expect setbacks

The setback was thinking my improvisation should be outside the box and unique. Thinking like this did not take me in the opposite direction of what I wanted to achieve. I ended up not following impulses, but instead planning my every move ahead.

Step four: Build one habit at a time

I did not add an extra habit because I wanted to focus on only completing spontaneous activities. If I would have added more habits my priorities would be scattered.

¹⁰ understudy: if an actor or actress with a bigger role in a musical or play should fall ill and can not attend today's performance, the understudy will fill in that actor or actresses spot as their role. For more information on understudies read Walfrid Lindsgårds “Understudy, Hur är det att spela en roll som inte är min”

“It is not about what they think of you, It is about what you think of yourself”

- Dr Aziz quoting David Burnes¹¹

¹¹Gazipura, A. (2013). Self-Confidence: How To Stop Worrying About What People Will Think Of You. Retrieved 15 July 2019, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4pZWiiU3m6U&t=354s>

2.2 Perceived reaction of others

Dr Aziz Gazipura, a confidence coach, believes in the bystander effect¹² is a universal issue. He, however, uses the term bystander effect as a psychological term for shyness and confidence. He starts giving an example of a man at a cafe gathering up the courage to talk to a person he fancies but then suddenly stops because of someone standing behind him in the line at the supermarket. The man started to worry about this person standing behind him hearing the conversation and then judge him for being a loser, pathetic and weird. What this man was doing in this situation was projecting insecurities onto another person. He took what was in his mind: his insecurities and doubt and placed it onto the person standing behind him. Dr. Aziz then introduces a technique by David Burnes, professor in the department of Psychiatry and behavioural sciences called “The feared fantasy and acceptance paradox”¹³. “The Feared Fantasy and Acceptance Paradox is a powerful and innovative exposure technique that can help people overcome the fear of being judged or rejected. It can also help people modify Self-Defeating Beliefs like Perfectionism and the Achievement Addiction, and the Approval Addiction.”¹⁴

The feared fantasy is a practise where you imagine the worst case scenario you can think of where you could be judged for something. Then you imagine a critical person coming up to you and saying how they felt about you doing what you were doing. With a pen and paper you write this scenario you have created in your head by writing what the critics says and how you would respond. This is to show how unlikely this is to happen and teaching you how to respond to criticism. for example, you can listen to what the critic is saying but instead of reacting badly you counter argue against you critic. After doing this exercise for a while you should look back at the scenario thinking how ridiculous the critic sounds.

This experiment is about liberating yourself, becoming free and being able to do what you want to do without fearing judgement. Projecting your insecurities is an incredibly restricting way of living, says Dr Aziz

The feared fantasy matched the research I wanted to do for the next habit change. When looking back on my mind map (page four), the section “not being liked” and “fear of wrongness” are one of my bigger setbacks to my creativity and my personal achievements. I tackled this habit with the help of David Burnes technique. by doing this I was able to look back on the scenarios I had written and remind myself of the probability of this happening is most likely non existent, and if it would happen I would be prepared with how to respond. After doing the task, I performed certain acts to face my fear of wrongness and need to be liked which will be mentioned below. The outcome of both experiments was to allow myself

¹² A person who is standing near and watching something that is happening but is not taking part in it - <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/bystander>

¹³ Gazipura, A. (2013). Self-Confidence: How To Stop Worrying About What People Will Think Of You. Retrieved 15 July 2019, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4pZWiiU3m6U&t=354s>

¹⁴ Burnes, D. (2018). Feared Fantasy | Feeling Good. Retrieved 15 July 2019, from <https://feelinggood.com/tag/feared-fantasy/>

to not adapt my behaviours and habits because of my need to be liked and to allow my exploration and curiosity to take place without fearing wrongness.

2.2.1 Habit change: Need to be liked.

I had a habit to set aside my own plans and responsibilities to assist other people with their needs. This had an effect on my studies and my health: My eating habits changed, I stopped going to the gym and because of all the stress I ended up getting severe stomach aches. It became exhausting worrying about how I was perceived in my everyday life. To tackle this habit I had a simple task: put my own needs first. The outcome was: being able to put my needs first before others without the fear of being judged for it.

The feared fantasy: Need to be liked

Scenario one:

Critic: Why can you not help me out with this simple task, it will not take a long time

My response: I just really need to do my school work tonight.

Critic: I have been there for you when I have had plenty of deadlines piling up and you can not be there for me this one time? I can not believe how selfish you are being.

My response: I understand that you are upset, but I do not think I am being selfish for caring about my school work.

Scenario two:

Critic: Do you want to go to the mall?

My response: I would like to go, but I have to go to the gym.

Critic: But you went to the gym yesterday

My response: yes, but I have a goal to go three times a week and I want to stick to that.

Critic: Fine, you will be missing out just so you know. I will not even bother to ask you next time because you never want to do anything.

My response: That is not true, I want to hang out with you. But I need to follow through on my plans because it is important to me.

Scenario three

Critic: Do you want something to drink?

My response: No thank you, I can not be drinking because I have to work on Monday.

Critic: You are such a bore, why can you not just be fun for once.

My response: I do not think I am being boring and I do not appreciate you peer pressuring me on something I do not want to do.

After writing these scenarios in David Burnes technique I started to take these actions.

- I set a time schedule on my days and divided that time for different chores and plans. After this action I would look back on the schedule to see when I had a free gap to

plan social events. I did this to make sure I would tend to all my needs first before planning anything else.

- I Set an alarm for when I had to start getting ready for bedtime. When that alarm rang, I put a stop to what I was doing. I did this to keep a strict sleeping routine because I needed a certain amount of sleep to function properly the next day without any setbacks due to lack of sleep.
- When I felt under the weather at a party I would decide to go home and get some rest.

2.2.2 Habit change; need to be liked: showcase talent

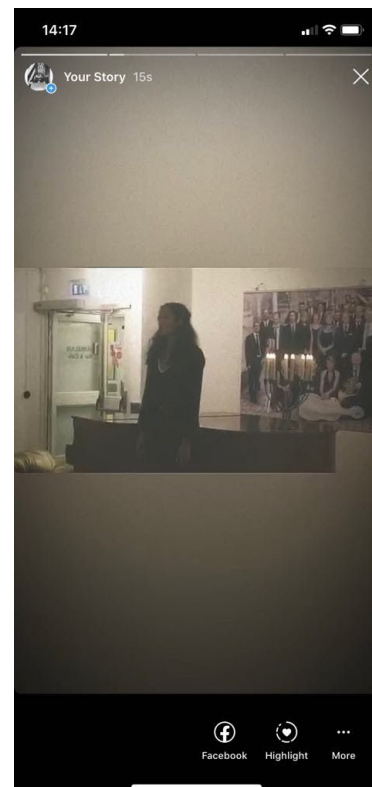
I continued with habit change: need to be liked, by exploring the fear of posting singing videos of myself on social media. I did not dare to post videos of me singing on social media because of the probability of being judged on my talent.

The feared fantasy: Showcase talent

Critic: I just saw the video you posted in your Instagram account. It was horrible, you did not sing that song well.

My response: I hear your opinion, but I posted this video because I think I sang this song well and I will not let your opinion think any less.

I felt the need to post videos on social media because it is an audience that I am not particularly comfortable with. The outcome with this habit is to be proud of the talent I have and not give in to the fear of people's judgement. For this habit I needed video material of me singing to post on my social media page: Instagram. I posted one video a month. Picture provided to your right is a screenshot of an instagram post *October 2019 where I am singing Turning tables by Adele.



2.2.3 Habit change: Fear of wrongness

I have a memory from when I was younger in math class: The teacher asked for the answer to a math equation, I raised my hand confidently and presented my answer. The answer I gave was the incorrect and because of that everyone in my class laughed at me. From then on I had hesitations regarding my own knowledge a fear being wrong.

Mentioned in my background I had a fear of being wrong in creative situations because in my head it meant I was a terrible actress and untalented. Here is an example that is similar to Dr. Aziz's example of describing when someone projects insecurities. I project my insecurities

on the person that gave me constructive feedback on a performance. Seeing it more as criticism than feedback.

Feared fantasy: Fear of wrongness

Scenario one

Critic: This is not what I wanted you to do, I gave you an easy instruction.

My response: I misunderstood, what was it you wanted me to try

Critic: I should not have to repeat myself, are you incapable of following instructions

My response: No I am not.

Critic: Then how come you did not do what I wanted you to do?

My response: It was a misunderstanding on my part, but if you could tell me what you wish to be different and I will work in the direction that you wish to the best of my ability.

Feared fantasy: scenario two

Critic: This section of the monologue you recited was unclear and the emotion you wanted to portray did not come through.

My response: Ok, do you have any advice to how I work on this section?

Feared fantasy: scenario three

Critic: Your singing technique is not trained enough to sing this song. the way you chose to sing this piece did not benefit this piece at all

My response: I understand, although I may not agree with you on everything, but I would like to hear more about what you have to say because it can be helpful.

My habit of fearing wrongness is an obstacle to receiving feedback and following through on exploration in a creative process. I explored this habit while rehearsing for fiddler on the roof by changing my way of receiving feedback without projecting any insecurities and allowing myself to make mistakes while learning the choreography in the musical.

2.2.4 Outcome personally: need to be liked

Step one: Create small enjoyable rewards

With this habit I did not create small rewards. The rewarding part was the results this habit change gave: the opportunity of being fully present in social events or assisting someone in need. I did not need to worry about my own priorities because I would already have completed them.

Step two: Focus on repetition

If I would be asked to assist someone, I would look at my calendar and my to do list to make a decision if I am available. If not available then I would have to decline. This would however depended on if the person in question was in an emergency.

Step three: Expect the setbacks

The setback of this habit was the struggle with feeling guilty for saying no to people. I thought by doing this I would lose my reliability like likability.

Step four: Build one routine at a time

I did not add an extra habit because I wanted to focus on this habit. If I would have added more my priorities would be scattered and I would lose focus.

2.2.5 Outcome personally: not being liked: Showcase talent

Step one: Create small enjoyable rewards

When posting a video on social media I would reward myself by buying a pack of Ballerina cookies and I would not buy those cookies unless I posted a video.

Step two: Focus on repetition

I started off by posting one minute videos (not an entire song) a month. To focus on the repetition I would add reminders in my phone calendar notifying me to post a video. In addition to that I would add three or four other reminders during the month reminding me to post more videos.

Step three: Expect setbacks

Instagram has two ways to post a picture or video, you can either post on something called an Instagram story, which means the picture or video you posted will only be visible for 24 hours. The other posting option is called Instagram feed. The post on your feed becomes permanent and does not disappear. The difference between the two posting options is: when you post something on your Instagram story you alone receive your viewers reactions and comments, while on your Instagram feed the reactions and comments are visible to both your followers and yourself.

The setback for this habit was the pressure of posting videos on my Instagram feed, the fear of not receiving a bountiful amount of likes or comments on how good I was and the humiliation of my followers seeing the little response to the posted videos. I faced this setback by reminding myself why I was doing this habit change, to not give in to my fear of judgement, that I should be proud of my talent, share it.

Step four: Build one routine at a time

I did not want to overload my process with too many habits. This was as a precaution to lower the pressure of not giving each habit the time needed.

2.2.6 Outcome professionally: Fiddler of the roof: Fear of wrongness

Stage one: Create small enjoyable rewards

I did not use this step for this habit because I did not feel the need to reward myself with materialistic things.

Stage two: Focus on repetition

When it came to habit change: “*facing wrongness*” I only had the opportunity to exercise this habit when at rehearsals and during the show period of *Fiddler on the roof* which made repetition difficult due to rehearsal scheduling and infrequent performances. I kept up the repetition of this habit by dancing these choreographies in all rehearsal days, I focused on exploring different ways to reach what our choreographer wanted. It put me in an uncomfortable situation but also pushed me to leave my comfort zone and put my thought of being correct” to the side. To receiving feedback I would tell myself: this is constructive feedback and not an attack on you as a performer.

Stage three: Expect setbacks

I got so stuck in my head with thoughts of how it appears on the outside, dancing with correct technique and looking good. The style of the choreography was rough and non technical. My dancing background is technical Jazz and Ballet where the focus is on technique and straight lines. The Choreographer wanted me to think the opposite of what I normally would do when I am dancing. There were times when my confidence was struck, I felt awful about my dancing. I would compare myself to my coworkers and get frustrated that I did not dance the way they did.

Stage four: Build one routine at a time

I did not want to overload my process with too many habits. This was a precaution to lower the pressure of not giving each habit the time it needed.

One day during rehearsal, my body was exhausted from all the times we had rehearsed a musical number. After we danced the number one last time, the choreographer came up to me and said: “That was better”. In mind during, I remember the feeling of being blank during the whole number. It was as if my brain had shot off and I think that was the source to my experiment. It became an even more eye opening experience when my mind went blank. It proved that the fears and obstacles you imagine are all in your head and if you can turn that off it creates wonders. I could experiment and explore options without any pressure or limitations.

2.3 Reflection on the process as a whole

The Habit challenge has given me the power to control my own habits. Having this habit challenge in the back of my head through the whole research period, made me more aware of the habits I have developed in the past when in a creative situation and with that awareness I could work against them no matter what situation I was in. I have also learned to appreciate some of my old habits even though I wanted to change them. Habits make you who you are, you can practise new habits but the old ones never really disappear. The difference is: I can now choose not to follow through with a habit I deem unfit for certain situations.

What I experienced most challenging during my process was motivation to keep pushing myself to the direction I wanted the habit changes to take me. It became draining to constantly reflect and correct every action required for the habit changes. The habits I was

exploring were habits deeply rooted in my system. There were moments when I felt nothing was working. I wanted to leave myself alone and just accept that some habits are not overcomable. I knew when reading about step: the setbacks, I would be having a difficult time with them. But as SJ. Scott writes:

You should expect challenges to come up with this routine, when they do you have two choices: give up or find a way to overcome them (2017, page 78).

I knew that giving up was never an option.

The exercise of *Feared fantasy* was a help to realise that my fears are all in my head. Mentioned in chapter 2.2 Perceived reaction of others I quoted Dr. Aziz saying :

“After doing this exercise for a while you should look back at your scenarios and see how ridiculous the critic sounds.”

After recently re-reading my scenarios, I heard how ridiculous this critic sounded. I felt ridiculous for making myself worry about a situation that is not likely to happen. *Feared fantasy* is an exercise that I will continue to use in the future as a way calm myself down when projecting an insecurity in a personal or creative situation. When I did this exercise during the rehearsal of *Fiddler of the roof* it showed positive results: I became more comfortable with trying new ideas without shooting them down, I trusted my own ability and knowledge about my own instrument and processing a character, I could give more freedom and space for my creativity and not worry about how it is perceived from the outside.

I have gotten to know myself on a whole new personal level and discovered parts of myself I did not know I had in me or did not believe I could have in in. I have become more motivational, disciplined, open minded, adventurous, curious, brave and confident.

3 THE VIDEOS

The whole purpose with this research is to see how my creative process and expression has changed with the help of habit changing. During my process I have documented my experiences while rehearsing *Fiddler on the roof* to reflect the changes this research has given my creative process. While planning my method for this research it was supposed to be me watching the videos and take note of the change in my creative expression. But reflecting on my own performance got my mind trapped in the same thoughts and I found difficulty reaching a conclusion. That is why I decided it would be better to have viewers who are not aware of my habit challenge process to watch the videos.

There are two videos of me singinging “*Esmeraldas bön (God help the outcasts)*” from the Hunchback of Notre Dame composed by Alan Menken. The video “BEFORE” is from the 4th of October 2018 and the other video “AFTER” is from the 14th of January 2020, Which is over a year between the two videos (when I had not yet started this research). Before singing AFTER I did not look at the BEFORE video. I did this to prevent any recollection how I performed the song back then to have fresh new start on how to interpret the song.

Link to the videos are available in Sources (Chapter 5)

3.1 presenting the Videos

I chose three impartial viewers to watch the videos. The instruction I gave them was to watch the “BEFORE” first and the “AFTER” second . After watching both of the videos they wrote down their interpretation of both videos and comment on the differences they saw regarding acting through song and vocal presentation. The three people I have chosen all have experience within the musical theatre genre and are all aware of the acting through song process.

I want to leave their names anonymous for this research, they are given the names:

“VIEWER ONE”

“VIEWER TWO”

“VIEWER THREE”

3.2 Viewers response

3.2.1 VIEWER ONE response

BEFORE

My spontaneous impression: A young woman, fair, beautiful. The singing brings out the message of the song through you, nothing extravagant with the emotion the audience should feel. Its safe. The singing gives me goosebumps. Your beautiful voice reaches out, I am drawn and I want to look and listen to you.

AFTER and the CHANGES

young woman but with a difficult past. There is another certainty in your posture and gaze. This portrait of Esmeralda is more convincing to me. There is a side to Esmeralda that is both tender, young, old and heartfelt, she touches me. Bit by bit you find a way to honestly convey the songs lyrics so that she becomes real and I really feel with her. Such as when you sing "Yes I know I'm just an outcast I shouldn't speak to you". It is powerful. However I do miss the cleanness of your voice in the BEFORE recording.

If I had seen a mix of these two versions at an audition, I would have given you the part as Esmeralda. I had then gotten a young woman with an old woman's life experiences. A powerful role character. As an audience we would come to know her, the joy and glow of life, in spite of miserable conditions and not always not so beautiful but still beautiful.

3.2.2 VIEWERS TWO response

BEFORE

Your thought or action starts in the beginning of the song. It feels like you have an active statement or a lift off that suits well. The given circumstances are interpreted as urgent. You are aware of the space around you and you use directions most being to God. I experience that you have a clear goal and nuances in activities to reach the goal. What interested me was when the urgency rises slightly, I was experiencing that the urgency was also represented vocally as it does through most of the song

AFTER

I experience the character exploring something in this song. It shows in several ways: You move around in the room and portray a clear picture by acknowledging all areas in the room. The first part of the song (recitative) I no longer see a assured / determined outlook from the character but more doubt. Towards the end of the song I experience a security that gradually grows with the character. I would guess that the goal with song song is shaped around finding out if God exists / hears me, and the obstacle is something in the style of her own insecurity about her faith in god existence. It becomes a very human expression, and the search for a

discovery and thus a security in character. It is interesting to be part of the journey as a listener.

I find the vocal mapping similar to version BEFORE, but there is a larger ruthlessness about "perfection" in this version. The Emotion affects the tones in build up parts of the song and I experience more speech qualities in the beginning. That speech could be a result of what I would guess that the goal is shaped around.

CHANGES

The differences between the two versions I find most noticeable are the acting choices. The vocal mapping is similar in both versions: The difference is when the speech technique is used more at the beginning In AFTER and the emotion controlled the notes you took. From an acting perspective though, I experienced two different characters and the journeys they went through.

The beginning of version AFTER where you are wandering around and casting glances at the environment around you, I got a clear picture that you could be in a church for the first time and that the thought: "May I be here?" took place. In BEFORE I experience a woman who demands something from God and that she is filled with a lot of desperation and frustration. In AFTER I however experienced a much more insecure woman, who is trying to find out if there is a God who can help her and tries to take her place before God. It is more interesting for me to see AFTER's journey from the interpretative view, as it is incredibly wonderful as a listener / viewer to see someone discover something and go through a change. It also provides more space for dynamics in e.g. the activities as I saw more nuances in you; You were more mobile and active in your body language. You interpreted as a human being in a much more organic way. In comparison, AFTER portrayed as a more human and dynamic performance to me.

3.2.3 VIEWER THREE response

BEFORE

What I see in BEFORE is a clear direction: her facing God. The singing technique and the colors in her tones mirror the sincerity, the genuine and warmth in the character that also goes hand in hand with the situation. She used activities such as praying and demanding but I wish she varied a bit more with her choices. I interpret in the climax of the song that she got stuck perfecting the song technique, rather than what her character wanted in the climax of the song.

AFTER and CHANGES

I see a big difference in the beginning of AFTER. She uses the whole room to her advantage observing her environment and to me it became she was in search for answers before she had started to sing. As a spectator, I get illustrations in my head about where she could be. She also uses several directions as if God is everywhere in this room, or rather that the character Esmeralda searches for God everywhere. I experience her to be more focused on the words in the song and from that she used the activities that were automatically found in the text. As a

spectator I hear the words with more clarity and get transferred into her story. This is especially strong in the beginning “Ja jag vet jag är för simpel jag ska va utanför. När jag ser din blick så tror jag ändå att du kanske hör” (translation: Yes I know I’m just an outcast, I shouldn't speak to you, then I see you face and wonder, were you once and outcast too)¹⁵.

Vocally it felt less sung and I believe that is because of her focus on the words and the situation that is portrayed. I experience a build up emotionally before the climax. With the build up it changed singing technique that felt more natural to the climax.

What caught my attention were the last phrases. In BEFORE I saw that Esmeralda had gotten contact with god in the end of the song. However in AFTER I experienced that she was beginning to doubt whether if God has ever listened. I interpreted this by the body expression: She looks down rather than up and goes into her own thoughts. This experience was a strong point for me. It felt like I got to meet a character with the finest of souls, whose only wish is to make things better for her people.

3.3 My comment on viewers comments

VIEWER THREES comment on video BEFORE : “I interpret in the climax of the song that she got stuck perfecting the song technique, rather than what her character wanted in the climax of the song.” It was interesting that she commented this, because it is relevant to how I used used to work creatively before my habit research. I would work on making myself look and sound pleasant to the ear and eyes before portraying the emotion of the character. My thought process to doing this was: “ If it looks and sounds good it can not be wrong”. The comments from VIEWER THREE and VIEWER TWO on AFTER that stuck out the most to me was: “Vocally it felt less sung and I believe that is because of her focus on the words and the situation that is portrayed.” and “There is a larger ruthlessness about "perfection" in this version.” These comments show that I put more focus on the characters story and her emotional journey and letting the emotion come first and the appearance of it second.

What all three viewers are unanimous about in their comments in video AFTER is the change of body language and portraying an image of my environment:

VIEWER THREE: “I see a big difference in the beginning of AFTER. She uses the whole room to her advantage observing her environment and to me it became she was in search for answers before she had started to sing.”

VIEWER TWO: “I experience the character exploring something in this song. It shows in several ways: You move around in the room and portray a clear picture by acknowledging all areas in the room.”

¹⁵ Jean-Charles, N. Esmeraldas bön *AFTER* [Video], 00:35-00:56 Retrieved from <https://vimeo.com/388088874>

As I was recording AFTER I remember visualising the Notre Dame church in Paris and as I was visualising I got the impulse to take in what I was visualising and that is when I started moving around in the room. Reading the comments confirmed that I followed my impulses to explore different ways to make clear for the viewer that I was in a large room searching for a sign from god (that being the goal of the song).

Reviewing the comments as a whole, the viewers seem to connect more with the character in AFTER rather than the BEFORE. With the help of habit changes I have given myself the chance to explore different ways of performing this song and by allowing my impulses to take place. It resulted in a version that is more intimate and exciting to watch because you can see how I am actively working on exploring and striving towards goal in the song.

4 CONCLUSION

My overall conclusion is: yes, habit changes can change my artistic expression and process. Awareness was the the beginning for me, I decided I did not want to feel limited because of my own insecurities. With the help of my research I have learned how to take control of my insecurities, which lead to the change of my creative process and expression.

I am hoping when people read about my research, it will spark a flame in their will to take on obstacles they feel are stopping them from achieving their goals.

“Today **you are You**, that is **truer than true**. There is no one alive who is youer than You”

- Dr seuss

5 SOURCES

The videos

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