

Assessment 3 Context

Journal entry

Monday

This morning, my alarm went off way too early. I didn't feel like I had slept at all, but even if I did, it would have only been for a few hours. I finally got that big work project finished around 3:00 this morning. I can't believe they moved the deadline up on me! Got the kids up, fed, and out the door to school. Joe forgot his homework assignment for biochem, so about halfway to work, I had to turn around and take that to him at school. I would have let him suffer through it, except that he's riding on a D in that class—I think that class will be the death of all of us!

Thank goodness for Red Bull and coffee. I'd never make it through the day. Four meetings, six new projects. Seriously? Deb ordered gourmet burgers for all of us today in honor of her birthday, and someone brought in a gigantic chocolate cake. I know I've gained 30 pounds this year from working in this job. Food everywhere!

Walked in the door after work—kids have dumped their school stuff everywhere. Frozen pizza boxes are all over the kitchen. Gotta get dinner on quick so I can work on my classes. I have to get this degree finished quick so I can find a job that doesn't drive me completely insane.

Doctor's appointment tomorrow to check up on the high blood pressure diagnosis from a few weeks ago and to get results from my fasting blood test. I hope I don't end up like dad—heart disease and diabetes. . .

Does any of this sound familiar? Do you ever feel stressed by responsibilities at work, school, and home?

Feeling stress is an accepted way of way of life for most of us. We often feel like there is little we can do about it, even though we know the consequences can be dire. But how do we even know this? It seems almost like common sense that stress could lead us to not just feeling physically bad but to serious diseases and even death. If we would like to thank someone for helping us understand stress and inspiring over half a century's worth of research on it, we should thank Hans Selye (1907–1982).

Perhaps you studied Selye or his theory, the general adaptation syndrome. Basically, the theory divides the stress response into these stages: alarm reaction, resistance, and exhaustion (Rice, 2012). Alarm reaction is the body's initial response to a stressor—specifically our autonomic nervous system. Alarm phase might be described as "fight or flight." Resistance is when the body adapts to the stressor by intensifying various bodily processes to maintain "usual homeostasis" in addition to adapting to the stressor. When the body is unable to keep up with the demand of the stressor, we go into the phase of exhaustion, when there is damage to the body that could result in death. Selye characterized stress as biological and supported this with an abundance of empirical medical research. The theory also proposed that regardless of the stressor, the body basically had the same response (Rice, 2012).

Selye's work in stress and endocrinology earned him 10 Nobel Prize nominations, and he is often credited with coining the term "stress" in this context (Szabo, Tache, & Somogyi, 2012). His work, in other words, was not shoddy; yet it inspired decades of research and proposal of even more theories, such as the allostatic load theory, the psychophysiological model, and two Roy's adaptation model (Rice, 2012). Stress theories and the accompanying research led to theories and research on coping—what we can do to decrease the stress response.

The theories describe aspects of the phenomenon of stress and make predictions about it. Selye predicted that if the body's processes remained in resistance too long, illness, disease, and eventual death would occur. This provided a framework or lens through which we could explain why stress makes us physically sick.

Theories are another tool of researchers—in fact, theories are one of the most important tools in the toolkit. Regardless of the topic or methodology used by a researcher, a theoretical framework is a necessity to guide the researcher to ask meaningful questions and interpret the data. Theories also provide a discipline a way in which to organize a body of knowledge by pulling together a number of observations of a phenomenon and proposing an explanation for it.

No matter what the field, each of the sciences use hundreds—perhaps thousands—of theories to try to explain why things happen.

References

- Rice, V. H. (2012). Theories of stress and relationship to health. In *Handbook of stress, coping, and health* (2nd ed., pp. 22–42). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Szabo, S., Tache, Y., & Somogyi, A. (2012). The legacy of Hans Selye and the origins of stress research: A retrospective 75 years after his landmark brief "letter" to the editors of *Nature*. *Stress*, 15(5), 472–478.