

Thesis Proposal

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Revised Thesis Statement

According to a National Health Interview Study, “The percentage of adults who practice yoga has increased substantially, from 5.1% in 2002 to 6.1% in 2007 and 9.5% in 2012.” (nccih) The same study found that “8.0% of U.S. adults (18 million) used meditation” (nccih) After conducting my own survey I discovered that the majority of people when asked why they didn’t practice yoga or meditation answered that they didn’t know how to start or didn’t have time to make it to the allotted class times. As used in the previous sentence, to begin a yoga or meditation “practice” is to be mindfully starting one’s own journey into how yoga and meditation can best suit them and their needs. I intend to provide those who don’t know how to begin with a simple and affordable yoga and meditation kit as well as a website. The kit will include: a set of 31 meditation cards, a Book of Poses Vol I, a set of crystal identification cards, and a set of essential oil information cards. The website will give the consumer information on how to use essential oils, how to use crystals, recipes, and a shop in which the kit itself can be purchased. I intend to extensively research how yoga and meditation and how combining the two can create an experience that is both easy to understand and easy to use. I will also explore how the product can fit into the current market and how it can stand out to those not in the community of yoga and meditation as well as those with an already present practice. My research will include what kind of kits currently exist, as well as stress studies, and the physical and mental benefits of yoga and meditation. The history of yoga and meditation will also be explored to learn more about the practice and it’s roots.

Academic Literature Review

The History of Yoga

The yoga that is currently practiced in the United States is rooted in earlier practices, but has greatly lost touch with this history of yoga practice. When yoga began is not quite clear due to the fact that it started so long ago, and some of the texts are believed to have been lost or destroyed. “ The term ‘yoga,’ however, is found in ancient India’s earliest known scripts — the Vedas. They date from the Vedic period, which began in 1500 BCE. Composed in Vedic Sanskrit, the Vedas are the oldest writings of Hinduism and Sanskrit literature.” (Medical Daily) “During the Vedic period, Vedic priests who were ascetic — severely self-disciplined and avoidant of any forms of indulgence — conducted sacrifices, or yajna, in poses that some researchers believe are precursors to the yoga poses, or asanas, we experience now.” (Medical Daily) This tells us that yoga practice began at least 5000 years ago, and is often believed to have started before that.

There are different types of yoga which are believed to have began in the Medieval time period (500-1500 AD). Many of these types of yoga are still recognized in the modern world.

“Bhakti yoga is a spiritual pathway within Hinduism that appeared during this time, a type of yoga that focused on living through love and devotion toward God.” (Medical Daily)

“Tantra was also a genre that arrived around the 5th century, exhibited in medieval Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu traditions.” (Medical Daily)

“Hatha yoga appeared in Buddhist texts around the 8th century, and it emerged from tantra. It’s known as the common “psychophysical yoga,” a combination of bodily postures, breathing, and meditation — possibly the closest to what we today associate with yoga.” (Medical Daily)

History of Meditation

Meditation was also introduced around the same time that yoga was said to have began, approximately 1500 BC. Meditation also started in the same culture, but was brought to a new level by Buddhism around 600 BC; in order to reach enlightenment, one must meditate about selflessness. In fact, the Buddha meditated under the Bodhi tree in order to reach his enlightenment.

“The English word ‘meditation’ stems from meditatum, a Latin term meaning ‘to ponder’.” (Mindworks)

Naturally, meditation moved into the western world, like yoga. Once it had reached western culture,

“It gained popularity in the mid-20th century and it was in the 1960s and 1970s that professors and researchers began to test the effects of meditation and learn about its benefits. Up until that point however, meditation was still considered a religious practice and therefore not appropriate for healthcare settings.” (PositivePsychologyProgram)

Stress Effects

Our culture is one of great stress, and stress often can lead to other health issues along with other physical symptoms.

According to the American Psychological Association, “When muscles are taut and tense for long periods of time, this may trigger other reactions of the body and even promote stress-related disorders. For example, both tension-type headache and migraine headache are associated with chronic muscle tension in the area of the shoulders, neck and head.” For people that work at desks or computers everyday, this muscle tension is greatly increased, which can lead to more headaches and migraines.

Stress has also been proven to cause:

- Asthma attacks
- Panic attacks
- Heartburn
- Heart disease
- Nutrient deficiencies

“Symptoms of stress can affect us physically, behaviorally, emotionally and cognitively.”

(Dartmouth) Although some amount of stress is simply unavoidable, many people in United States suffer from chronic stress. “Concerns about money, work and the economy top the list of most frequently cited sources of stress. Fears about job stability are on the rise, with 49 percent

of respondents citing such fears as a source of stress — up from 44 percent last year.” (American Psychological Association) And not only is stress affecting adults in this country, but kids as well. “Almost a third of children reported that in the last month they had experienced a physical health symptom often associated with stress, such as headaches, stomach aches or trouble falling or staying asleep.” (American Psychological Association)

Benefits of Yoga

Yoga has not only been around for thousands of years, but the benefits on both mental and physical levels is outstanding. Benefits of yoga according to the American Osteopathic Association include:

- Less chronic pain including back pain
- Headache and migraine relief
- Carpal tunnel relief
- Reduced blood pressure
- Reduced insomnia
- Weight reduction
- Improved breathing
- Improved energy
- Cardio and circulatory systems
- Protection from injury

Aside from the physical benefits of yoga, there are many mental benefits as well. Yoga can help to reduce stress and stress related symptoms. “Stress can reveal itself in many ways, including back or neck pain, sleeping problems, headaches, drug abuse, and an inability to concentrate,” says Dr. Nevins. “Yoga can be very effective in developing coping skills and reaching a more positive outlook on life.” (American Osteopathic Association) Yoga can also help improve awareness of your body and what symptoms arise in order to keep your health at a good place.

Benefits of Meditation

Meditation can also have many positive effects on a person’s health and well-being. “Meditation reduces stress, fosters clear thinking and increases our capacity for empathy and compassion.” (The Art of Living) Meditation not only has these mental benefits, it also has the ability to change your brain.

“In fact, MRI images show a complete change in the brain’s different departments, which results in a relaxation response in the rest of the body. When meditating, beta waves, which indicate a state where information is being processed, decrease, and are replaced by alpha waves, which are associated with total brain coherence. The frontal and parietal lobes, which deal with reasoning, planning, and processing sensory information, slow down. And without a glut incoming stimuli, the nervous system is able to rest, resulting in relaxation and improved functioning in the entire body.” (The art of living)

The physical symptom relief that meditation can provide includes:

- Lowers high blood pressure
- Lowers the levels of blood lactate, reducing anxiety attacks

- Decreases tension-related pain, such as, tension headaches, ulcers, insomnia, muscle and joint problems
- Increases serotonin production that improves mood and behavior
- Improves the immune system
- Increases the energy level, as you gain an inner source of energy

(The Art of Living)

Visual Research

Common symbols of the yoga community

Since yoga and meditation was derived from Buddhist and Hindu traditions, many of the common images found in the community are stemmed from these religions.

Lotus Flower

The origin of the lotus flower stems from the Buddhist and Hindu traditions. Buddhist tradition in particular is extremely centered around the idea of rebirth and reaching Nirvana. The lotus flower is one of the most common symbols of rebirth. There are also different meanings attached to different colors of the lotus flower.

“It grows in muddy water, and it is this environment that gives forth the flower’s first and most literal meaning: rising and blooming above the murk to achieve enlightenment. It resembles the purifying of the spirit which is born into murkiness. The third meaning refers to faithfulness. Those who are working to rise above the muddy waters will need to be faithful followers.” (Buddhists.org)

White lotus: purity of mind and spirit

Red lotus: compassion and love

Blue lotus: wisdom and logic

Pink lotus: the history of Buddha (the Buddha is most often shown as sitting on a pink lotus flower)

Purple lotus: spiritual awakening

“The stage of growth the lotus flower is in represents a different stage of enlightenment. A closed lotus flower represents the time before a Buddhist follower found Buddha or enlightenment. A lotus flower fully bloomed and open represents full enlightenment and self-awareness.” (Buddhists.org)

Bodhi Tree

The Bodhi tree, although not necessarily depicted in yoga, was the tree in which the Buddha sat under to meditate. This meditation under the Bodhi tree led him into enlightenment. The Bodhi tree in which the Buddha sat under is now a religious site in which Buddhists go to visit to feel the closest to the Buddha.

Chakras

The chakras are an extremely important part of yoga. In total, there are seven chakras. Each chakra relates to a part of the body, and if a chakra is not in balance it can affect

that part of the body. The seven chakras are located along the spine, or center of the body.

“To visualize a chakra in the body, imagine a swirling wheel of energy where matter and consciousness meet. This invisible energy, called Prana, is vital life force, which keeps us vibrant, healthy, and alive.” (The chopra center)

The chakras go from 1-7 starting at the bottom.

Root Chakra (red):

“The Muladhara is the chakra of stability, security, and our basic needs. It encompasses the first three vertebrae, the bladder, and the colon. When this chakra is open, we feel safe and fearless.” (The chopra center)

Sacral Chakra (orange):

“The Svadhithana chakra is our creativity and sexual center. It is located above the pubic bone, below the navel, and is responsible for our creative expression.” (The chopra center)

Solar Plexus Chakra (yellow):

“The Manipura chakra means lustrous gem and it’s the area from the navel to the breastbone. The third chakra is our source of personal power.” (The chopra center)

Heart Chakra (green):

“Located at the heart center, the fourth chakra, anahata is at the middle of the seven and unites the lower chakras of matter and the upper chakras of spirit. The fourth is also spiritual but serves as a bridge between our body, mind, emotions, and spirit. The heart chakra is our source of love and connection.” (The chopra center)

Throat Chakra (blue):

“The Vishuddha chakra is the fifth chakra, located in the area of the throat. This is our source of verbal expression and the ability to speak our highest truth. The fifth chakra includes the neck, thyroid, and parathyroid glands, jaw, mouth, and tongue.” (The chopra center)

Third Eye Chakra (indigo):

“The Ajna chakra is located in between the eyebrows. It is also referred to as the “third eye” chakra. Ajna is our center of intuition. We all have a sense of intuition but we may not listen to it or heed its warnings. Focus on opening the sixth chakra will help you hone this ability.” (The chopra center)

Crown Chakra (violet):

“The Sahaswara chakra or the “thousand petal lotus” chakra is located at the crown of the head. This is the chakra of enlightenment and spiritual connection to our higher selves, others, and ultimately, to the divine. It is located at the crown of the head.” (The chopra center)

Data Analysis

Question 1:

Out of the 116 responses I received, more people do not practice yoga than do. Although this didn't surprise me, the people who said they do practice yoga mainly practice in spurts rather than regularly. Those who responded no were asked to give their reasoning as to why they don't. The majority of answers consisted of not having the time to be able to do it. Others said they exercised in different ways such as running or weight lifting. The answers that stuck out the most to me were these:

"Not one in our town that is at my level"

"Physical limitations"

"Classes not offered at time I can attend"

"Painful joints"

"Hurt my shoulder first time I took a class"

"Until recently, I was 5'2" and almost 200 lbs. felt like with my body shape and lack of coordination, i would have looked and felt ridiculous and inept doing yoga. I have done some basic yoga relaxation positions at home"

Yoga is for everyone and the surprising amount of people that feel their physical limitations meant they couldn't do yoga is something that I would like to address in my kit.

Question 2:

Out of the 116 responses I received, the majority of people said they did meditate. This was very interesting to me compared to the responses of practicing yoga. The most people who said yes also responded that they meditate once a day. Again, those who answered no were asked to give their reasoning as to why they don't meditate. The majority of the responses consisted of not knowing how to or not having the time. The responses that were particularly interesting to me were:

"I use prayer", "I pray", "Have never tried. I pray daily.", and "I use prayer instead of meditation."

"I did when I was struggling but haven't needed to now"

"Hard to focus on nothing"

The responses about praying rather than meditating were the most interesting to me. My mother who is a yoga teacher and devote Christian actually struggled with this when she first started practicing yoga and meditating. She felt that it was somehow going against her religion because yoga and meditation started as a primarily Buddhist and Hindu practice. Although as it moved into the Western culture, meditation and yoga became much more about the health benefits rather than religious. My mom actually uses meditation to pray and has found it greatly enhances her relationship to God. I would like to focus in on this somehow in my kit in order to make those who pray feel they can also practice yoga and meditate.

Question 3:

I also asked people to rate their stress level on a regular basis. I included regular basis because it is understandable that everyone at some point has days where they feel particularly stressed or not stressed. The majority of the responses were between a 3 and 4 on a scale of 5. I wasn't particularly shocked by these responses because I feel we live in a stressful culture, and whether it's a student or just someone who works full-time, stress seems to be on the rise

Question 4:

The next question consisted of what common ailments people suffer from and asked them to select all that applied. The list consisted of anxiety, depression, back discomfort/pain, neck discomfort/pain, headaches/migraines, chronic fatigue, stress, sleeping problems, and the option for people to enter in any others that they suffered from. Each of the following were entered in under the "other" category with one person each. Crohn's, sleep teeth grinding, high blood pressure, thyroid disease, and arthritis/joint pain.

The top three ailments that people suffered from were:

Anxiety- 62 people

Depression- 61 people

Stress- 64 people

This tells me that my kit should include poses and meditations that can help those suffering from anxiety, depression, and stress. A fairly large amount of people also said they struggle with back and neck problems which will also be an important part of my kit.

Question 5/6:

I then asked people to respond to the questions:

Do you think meditation can fix any of these?

Do you think yoga can fix any of these?

With the answer options being yes, no, and maybe.

The majority of people on both questions responded that they did think yoga and meditation can fix the ailments they suffered from. The next highest response was maybe, and only a small portion said no.

This was what I was expecting, but compared to the amount of people who responded on the first two questions (if they practice yoga or meditate) the amount of people that believed yoga and meditation could help them but don't actually practice either was very interesting.

This told me that I need to hone in on the reasonings people gave me for not practicing yoga and meditation to be able to help them fix what they are suffering from.

Question 7:

The next question was if people had explored the benefits of crystals and essential oils. Although crystals aren't for everyone, essential oils can play a huge role in holistic healing. 44.8% of people said that they had never explored the benefits of either. 31.9% of people said they had explored essential oils but not crystals. 20.7% of people said they had explored both. And only a small percentage of people had only explored the benefits of crystal healing.

In my kit I intend to include a booklet that outlines crystal healing and a booklet that outlines the benefits of essential oils. The fact that the majority of people said they had not explored the benefits of either means that I need to make sure my brochures are easy to read and user friendly. The booklets will be aimed at those who are just beginning looking into this stuff and the app can then include further investigation into the benefits of both.

Question 8:

My last question on my survey asked people if they had tried yoga DVDs or videos. The answers pretty much lined up with those who practice yoga. 54.3% of people said they hadn't tried them and 45.7% of people said that had.

I then followed that up with asking those who had tried them if they liked them, why or why not?

The answers that really stuck out to me were:

"no .. too easy to skip the stuff i don't want to do"

"Need personal instructions"

"It was okay. Just not the same as having a yoga instructor right there watching you and coaching you."

"No I need someone to work with to learn poses"

The answers I received on this question will greatly help shape what I include on my app as well as what poses are included in the booklets. I will be working closely with a certified yoga teacher, she and I will make sure to include what not to do so people feel they can practice at home.

Plan for Further Investigation

Aside from the research I have already done I would like to look more into current practices of yoga. I will attend various kinds of meditations and yoga classes in order to have a better understanding of what is out there in terms of classes. I will be working closely with a certified yoga instructor and will be gaining as much information as I can regarding what issues she sees with yoga currently and what she and I can do to help fix that with the kit and app. I will also further look into how different kinds of yoga and different yoga poses help with ailments. I may also further my data research by constructing a new survey regarding what issues people have with current yoga and get an outside perspective on what I can do to change it.

I also plan to look into more of the symbols currently used in the yoga community in order to gain a better understanding of where my kit will fit in.

Committee and Mentors

I will be working closely with Colleen, especially for the app, as well as a certified yoga instructor. I feel it will be very important for me to work with a yoga instructor who has been practicing much longer than I have to get opinions on what is currently wrong in the market. As well as helping me to gather material for my kit and app.

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