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Senior Thesis

Erasing the Stigma of Mental Health

Studies have shown that the rate of depression and anxiety is rapidly increasing among Americans, specifically the youth. Despite this rise in adolescent depression there has not been an equal increase in mental health treatment. I intend to direct those suffering from these mental issues to the welcoming and healing community of Amudi. I plan to start a campaign all about being in the moment and with those around you. What makes this campaign special is you may purchase yoga inspired bracelets made with natural crystals that when worn signify not only your value for natural medicines and meditation but your support for those with depression and anxiety. The hope is that people will visibly have something in common and can feel comfortable getting to know those within this community.

The first leading cause of death among young adults is substance or alcohol abuse. The second is suicide mainly among college students. In a survey done by Kognito between 2012 and 2017 over 51,000 students were surveyed for mental health and the percentage of those showing signs of depression was 31% and those that had already been diagnosed with similar mental illness was 32%. Among those students surveyed only 21% reported non-suicidal. In 2016 the percentage of undergraduates who seriously considered suicide was 11% and for those who were graduates 6% of them had the same thoughts. (Support Students in Distress?, 2018)

Upon looking into how colleges plan to handle these issues I found little increase in United States campuses implementing a stronger mental health department. (Teen Depression on the Rise, n.d.) How can we fix these numbers, when at least half of our student body doesn't know, how to see signs of psychological distress, approach students with these issues or how to direct them to adequate help? (Support Students in Distress?, 2018) Canada's mental health association has had some strong campaigns targeting the stigma including *Stop the Stigma*, *Call Bulls#!t*, *Healthy Minds Anti- Stigma* and many more. (Around the world, 2016) Although many campaigns have tried to help, they only focus on the stigma of mental health but seem to fall short on targeting campuses and helping students with tangible solutions.

Yoga is an ancient Buddhist practice of meditation with breathing techniques and movements of the body to slow down and look inward to oneself. Yoga is looked at as the nature of one's mind and the emotions that live in our bodies and how they affect our behavior. It is something still practiced today not only by Buddhist but also by people seeking a healthy workout. What many people don't realize is yoga is more about the mind than your body in the physical sense. It has many benefits to mental health. It can calm a person down from fight or flight to rest and digest. This can be important for people who suffer from depression and anxiety, many decisions can become quick and not thought out with this illness. Yoga gives people the tools to gain a sense of self and ways to calm oneself down without relying on outside influences.

A large part of yoga is meditation, this is key to handling anxiety and depression. Learning how to find your breath in the heat of the moment and come back to your center can be huge in fight or flight situations. Knowing how to take time to think things through and find a personal safe space is crucial with suicidal thoughts. Understanding how to fight those negative thoughts from within

is a large part of combating mental illness. Yoga is aimed to uplift and broaden consciousness. (Brief History of Yoga, 2015)

With my campaign I want to create a movement that not only spreads awareness, targets college students, but gives them a physical community to confide in on campus that isn't a hospital and is free of the stigma. Through a small survey I took of local college students within students expressed their frustrations with less face to face interaction and too much screen time. I believe minimizing the screen time is key to getting people to talk and make new connections, one of the main symptoms of depression is loneliness and hopelessness. I feel that by giving students a physical community stigma free will get students to talk more to one another about these issues. We need to get students to realize they are not alone, many of them are going through the same thing, they are just afraid that by speaking up they will look like the outcast. By wearing these bracelets we can create our own community of healing and show support, show people that we are open to talking about these issues.

Many other companies are campaign driven or "companies that give back," some of the ones I will be looking to as reference include, Pura Vida Bracelets, Love your Melon, Toms, Ivory Ella and Feed. (Companies that Give Back, 2017) These companies all have a strong purpose and sell things to raise awareness and money for a good cause. The beautifully branded items from these companies are so distinct to their individual voice, when purchasing their items, you become part of their community and wearing their apparel shows that you too believe in their mission. Whether it's to support local artisans, raise money to support children with cancer, provide shoes for less fortunate, fight against elephant poaching or feed the homeless they all are causes that affect so many people in positive ways.

For this specific campaign I will create a website that explains our mission and shows a cohesive brand that is not directed to a specific gender but branded with Buddhist values and yoga in mind. I imagine muted colors and very simplistic user interface with minimal pages. The website will contain an about or our mission page, with subsections of mental health statistics showing the issue, how the bracelets came to be and how they are made. Another tab will be join the meditation or purchasing page, showing the different colors of bracelets that are available to purchase. The final tab will be community showing the college mental health departments that have received funds raised by selling these awareness bracelets. I also plan to create a simplistic package and pamphlet to go with it so when purchased the buyer can read all about our mission and how important meditation can be to those with depression and anxiety. Along with the website, pamphlet and packaging I hope to get a variety of colors of bracelets and do a few photoshoots of people wearing them, these photos will go into the look book and into the advertisements on all social media platforms. For the photos I want the look and feel of them to be very cohesive so just looking at a photo of our bracelets and students can tell it's our brand without the logo.

I hope to make a difference among the united states student body and help those struggling with mental illness. These bracelets are not limited to those only fighting against depression and anxiety but for those who support them as well. They are intended to be

simplistic and serve as a constant reminder of the community around them and that no one fights depression and anxiety alone. Going through depression isn't a race is a long journey that you learn and grow as you travel through life. The focus is to keep all students mentally healthy and create a community outside of the mental health departments that promotes conversation and makes mental health less of an embarrassing thing and more of something to be understood.

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