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Creating a Nontraditional Wellness Blog

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Author Note

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Abstract

This service learning project researched sources of shame humans feel about their bodies. So often what we see in the media is curated, seemingly perfect, and fake. I created a non-traditional wellness blog and website called tawnsclaimtoshame.com where I used my background in psychology, biology, anatomy, as well as research, to debunk how culture and the media defines the perfect body. The link for my blog was shared on multiple social media platforms and accessed by many different stakeholders. My blog addresses eating disorders, diet culture, the medicalization of fatness, implicit biases about weight, disparities in sex education, the flaws of using BMI as an indicator of health, and more. The blog also provides resources for those struggling with mental health and eating disorders.

Keywords: body image, intuitive eating, social constructs, wellness blog, addressing shame, eating disorders, service learning

Introduction to my Capstone Project

I was inspired to do a service learning project by the intellectual curiosity I have developed during my time at BSU. As someone who has struggled with disordered eating and obsessive exercise habits in the past, I really wanted to create something that my past self could have used to navigate feelings of shame and create a better relationship with food and fitness. By pairing my own lived experiences with my intellectual curiosity, I was able to dive deeper into subjects others might not have thought of to address. I debunked a number of the reasons that humans feel pressure from society to act, look, and be perfect. Creating the blog and sharing my own story was a vulnerable and scary place to be. However, I believe that it was paramount to drawing readers in, creating community, and the overall success of the blog.

I began by creating and designing a website for the blog through a web development company called Wix. Then, I purchased a domain name in order to publish my website. I shared my own story, which has its own section of the blog in which readers can learn about the blogger. I joined relevant pages and groups on facebook, then asked what people might want to hear about. I also announced to my Instagram followers that I was starting a blog of this sort, and asked them for suggestions as well. From there, I began researching and writing posts based on recommendations. Every time I published a new post I shared it on Instagram, Facebook, and to interested friends, coworkers, and acquaintances.

Elements coming together

I wanted my blog to be a place for me to share stories and educate my readers, but also to create a safe place for others to share their own stories. While they have yet to be published, I have other people -from pharmacists to beauty pageant winners- who have expressed interest in

writing pieces and collaborating with me on my blog. As I have learned during my time at BSU, taking other people's perspectives can be extremely powerful. This is a unique opportunity for me to not only hear other's perspectives, but to share them with the stakeholders of my blog. This has created a collaborative and innovative new space for people to talk about and address their own shame. I believe that this is a step in the right direction, and towards bringing even more relatable content to the blog.

In my first blog post I discussed the downfalls of abstinence-only until marriage (AOUM) sex education in America, which perpetuates a lot of shame around sexuality and sexual anatomy. As of 2020, 15 U.S. states didn't require sex education to be medically accurate and 9 states required sex education instruction that explicitly denounces LGBTQ identities ("The Siecus State Profiles", 2020). I learned that the benefits of comprehensive sex education include more medically accurate anatomic and physiologic teachings, cultivating body autonomy, discussing affirmative consent, creating more positive attitudes towards the LGBTQ community, and more (Clark & Stitzlein, 2018). Sharing that in my blog was important because, as a bisexual woman, I felt a lot of shame around my sexuality growing up.

In another post I touched on how to navigate complimenting someone else's weight loss. I pointed out that you never know what people are going through, and that a compliment of that manner could be complimenting a variety of eating disorders and medical conditions. Our attitudes towards being thin are influenced by implicit biases that are fabricated by the media, diet culture, and inherent fat phobia. I also addressed the medicalization of fatness and the medical bias against weight by providing evidence that the number on the scale and BMI are not veracious measures of health.

In an additional blog post -instead of spouting out numbers and statistics- I chose to talk about how the ideal human body is socially constructed, as a way to address shame. Using history and examples of other socially constructed subjects, I gave my readers a better understanding of why we feel the pressure to look a certain way and maintain a specific weight. Over time, the beauty standards and body ideals have changed drastically and are often unattainable both socioeconomically and through natural means. I shared my own personal experiences with coming to terms that my body is unique and no matter what, it deserves nourishment, movement, and rest. My readers got a glimpse into how these realizations helped me create better relationships around exercise, relaxation, and food. Every blog post included resources for mental health and eating disorders.

Results

At the end of each blog post I included a poll that asked the following questions: Did this post address shame that you can relate to? Do you feel like you learned something new? So far, 100% of those who have responded have said yes to both questions. I have access to visitor analytics through my Wix creator account. My blog had 724 blog page visits from 399 unique visitors, implying that there were some returning visitors. People who visited the blog were mostly from the United States. However, the blog was also viewed in 9 other countries including Italy, Portugal, Jamaica, Poland, New Zealand, Belgium, Canada, Ireland, and Slovenia.

I truly believe that sharing my own story helped others not feel alone, and even surprised some of readers who already knew me. I found people in my life -more casual acquaintances you could say- calling me out of the blue and opening up to me about their struggles with shame. The

power of shared experiences and diverse perspectives is both profound and beneficial to human connection.

From the verbal and digital feedback I received, it seems as though the blog really did make a positive impact on those who read it. Some of the most meaningful feedback I received were messages from strangers. Someone said, “I’ve been really struggling with my eating and health habits again and your blog really saved me yesterday. I appreciate you.”(Anonymous #1, 2023). Another person said “I’m obsessed with your blog! You’re doing amazing and talking about GREAT topics.” (Anonymous #3, 2023). Finally, someone else said “Thanks so much for the last post you made on your blog! Hit my heart close.” (Anonymous #2, 2023). The same person sent a long and elaborative message about their past trauma of being bullied in grade school about different aspects of their body. They mentioned how they wished they had consumed content like this blog earlier in their life.

Section 4: Conclusion

When I started this project, I expected that people might reach out to me if they were struggling with feelings of shame, body dysmorphia, eating disorders, etc. However, I didn’t realize the sheer volume of people that would in fact reach out. The amount of people who read the blog surprised me. The outreach was far more than I anticipated. I certainly didn’t expect there to be such a ripple effect where people were viewing it internationally. If I could do anything differently, I would have put less pressure on making my blog posts long and “perfect”. Rather, I would have written a larger quantity of shorter posts in order to reach the goals of the schedule I created for myself. I have really fallen in love with blogging, and the community I

have created through it. I'm happy to say that this project is something I am passionate about, that I have so much more to say, and that I plan to continue it.

References

Anonymous #1, social media message to author, March, 2023.

Anonymous #2, social media message to author, April, 2023

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Section 6: Appendix

<https://www.tawnsclaimtoshame.com/>