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Computation and the World

From mechanical devices that regulate a person’s vitals to educational apps that help kids young and old learn new content; each day brings something new and exciting to help expand our worldview and capabilities. To help transform our current societal state, I would attempt to create a piece of software that helps people develop social-emotional stability and assists with the monitoring of vitals and the establishment of routines and a skillset to help them work through heightened states of anxiety, etc.

Many of the students and parents I work with each day struggle to regulate their emotions and find functionality in periods of distress. Their lives are in a constant state of chaos; leaving them (in their opinion) no choice but to live in a heightened state of anxiety, impeding their ability to see past the immediate moment and continue to function. Kids, young and old, are being called on to do more than ever before and the number of people with mental instabilities or illnesses is on the rise. To top it off, the constant messaging through social media and “reality” television focuses on the celebration of dysfunction. Instead of showing people applying grit and self-regulation, or asking for help when they are struggling; people see over-reaction and outlandish behavior, substance abuse, and self-harm behaviors as the norm, instead of learning to recognize when they are in a state of need and how to help themselves get out of it.

If I had the ability, I would like to create a version of a health app that is a mix of a monitoring device, a counselor or educator who can help provide suggestions of things to try to walk them through a struggle, and a game (for lack of a better term) where the user works through a series of “levels” where they face different struggles in the day-to-day and are challenged to “beat” the stressor by finding ways to alleviate the anxieties. It has long been my belief that if we want a functioning society, we need to help people help themselves by educating them and modeling for them what functionality is and how to achieve it.

In a monitoring aspect, it would liken the apps that track your exercise and activity; however, this app will instead monitor vitals like heart rate, blood pressure, the release of endorphins, etc., and could send out a notification to say things like, “You appear to be in a current state of anxiety, your pulse has quickened, your breathing is too shallow, etc. Please consider taking a few deep breaths or taking a short walk, etc.” If the level of anxiety increases—as shown through the vitals—it could recommend a more progressive course of action up to the point where it encourages outside assistance (i.e. please consult a physician or notify someone you need assistance) and offers them phone numbers and/or locations of places and people nearby trained to help.

In an educational aspect, there could be a collection of videos to watch or articles/blogs to read that offer information about what anxiety and depression are and different tools for working through them. There could be a spot for the user to take a “snapshot” of their vitals when in a heightened state of anxiety and journalize what is happening, their emotions, etc. to share out with a professional, or to look at later, in an attempt to identify potential stressors.

In a “gaming” aspect, the app could be similar to an RPG where the different levels provide a stressful situation and the person has to regulate their vitals by working through a series of activities to help them calm down and make the situation improve for the person (a little bit like that scene in Divergent when Tris has to face her fears and the only way to escape them is to regulate her vitals and calm herself down).

I feel that an app like this would be helpful because a lot of people my age and younger struggle with the development and application of coping skills. They are at a 0 or a 10 and don’t really know how to function in any other capacity. Many of them do not, or did not, have any instruction on how to handle stressful situations and navigate through something when they are feeling frustrated but still need to continue to function. This is one of the main things I see as being hard for my students and I think that if we were to provide them with something like this, they might be able to develop the skills so many seem to be lacking and we, as a society, would be healthier, happier, and more able to function in times of anxiety and stress. ☺