Campcomm

Personal Project, Spring 2018

My Purpose

College students go through a lot: dealing with working part-time jobs, looking for off-campus housing, maintaining social relationships, finding summer internships, and much more. Juggling all of these activities naturally lead to extreme stress, and even more severe mental health issues seen in today's universities.

By no means do I see this project as a way to solve mental health. I understand the complexities and various factors that play into mental health, and that there will never really be an end-all-be-all solution. As someone exploring and battling their own mental health issues — especially going into college — it's a way for me to gain perspective, and make sense of what exactly I'm fighting. I believe design gives us the tools to educate not only others, but also ourselves, and that was my goal going into this project.

User Research

I sent out a **user survey** to college students through various Facebook groups, targeting groups that attract a wide demographic and variety of student identities. Through such I hoped to gain insight from a diverse set of students, and create a primary persona that I could target for my product. I got a total of **50 responses** from my user survey.

I also conducted **10 in-person interviews**, and developed an interview guide created to gain a high variety of insights. This helped me accumulate and narrow down important factors in student mental health.

Key Insights

Through reading and parsing through the data, my research revealed **key insights** into college students:
- College students cite the main factors of their stress as coursework, pressure to succeed, and social life. Thus, many college students don't feel like they have time to take things slow and think about their mental health issues
- The various factors involved in student stress evolve into more severe mental health issues
- People that do try and seek someone else for consolation or advice prefer people who: 1) Can relate to their issues--a sense of empathy; 2) Can give sound advice; 3) Won't worry about them too much.
- Many people are unsure of whether they have an mental health issues. Found that time, embarrassment, and lack of a reliable system are reasons why people do not seek help from others
- A lot of people don't trust university counseling or therapy. Many participants were in situations where they felt it didn't work, or think that it can't tell them something they don't already know.

Persona & Journey Map

Based on my research and key insights, I established my **target audience** through Billy:

BILLY

Bio

Billy is a university student studying computer science. His parents are very strict, and growing up he's always been stressed trying to reach his parents' expectations. He always has a heavy classload, and usually studies all day, and take breaks to go workout or eat. On weekends, he works a part-time internship in Downtown Berkeley in the day, and uses his free time at night to catch up and drink with friends.

"I'm not sure how to understand my mental health issues when I can't even find the time and energy to do so."

Goals

- Put his mental health and stress in check

- Find time for himself to destress

- Feel free to voice his feelings to people who understand him

- Not waste his time trying to understand his issues for naught

Frustrations

- Never has time to check on his mental health, and gauge how his stress has been affecting him

- Feels like people close to him just don't understand, or don't have time to listen to his issues

- Hates when people don't take him seriously, and lack the empathy to try and understand him

From the user persona, I illustrated a typical day in the life of a college student, form the perspective of someone like Billy through a **journey map.** In the map, I highlight the user's mood, location, touch points, and design opportunities.

COLLEGE STUDENT JOURNEY MAP
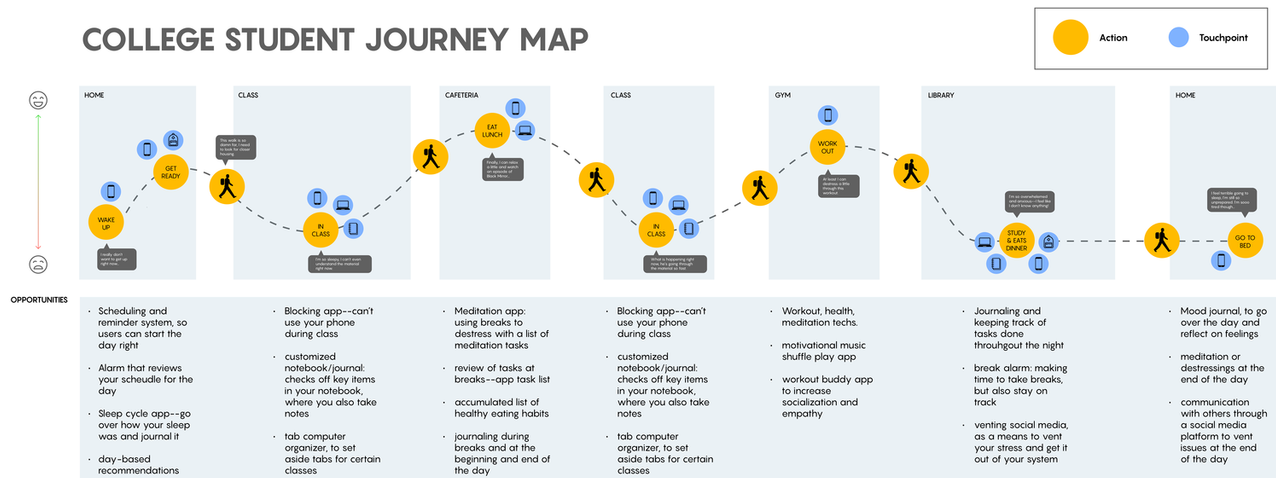
The overall work of my user research revealed to me the **excruciating amount of time individuals spend alone**, and I think was a problem space that I felt resonated most with my findings. As one of my interviewees said, "I just don't have time to develop social relationships that make me comfortable enough to open up to them. It's a vicious cycle." Because of this, I focused my product on the following: **How might we allow students a mean to voice their mental health concerns?**

Ideation + Prototyping

Based on the journey map I created, it came to me that students spend almost all day on their phones: whether it be to check social media during breaks, find places to get dinner, text friends, etc. It made sense, then, to create a mobile application as a solution to my HMW.

After exploring various ideas and assessing my design opportunities, I decided that a social media platform would a be an interesting solution to interacting with people about mental health issues, whether it be venting stress, or asking for advice.

Task Flow

My research revealed that time is a deterring factor in both social interaction and individual self-care. In the following task flow, I wanted to the user both have access to communication with others, as well as a way to assess their own progress. In the following task flow, I illustrate three different key functions:

1. **Profile:** tracking progress, see saved messages/posts

2. **Post Status**: statuses serve both as a platform to interact with other users, as well as a way to track one's own feelings throughout certain periods of time, and track their mood.
3. **Chat**: the chat option is imperative to creating constructive discussions with people that relate to your issues, and give you a safe space to voice your issues in.
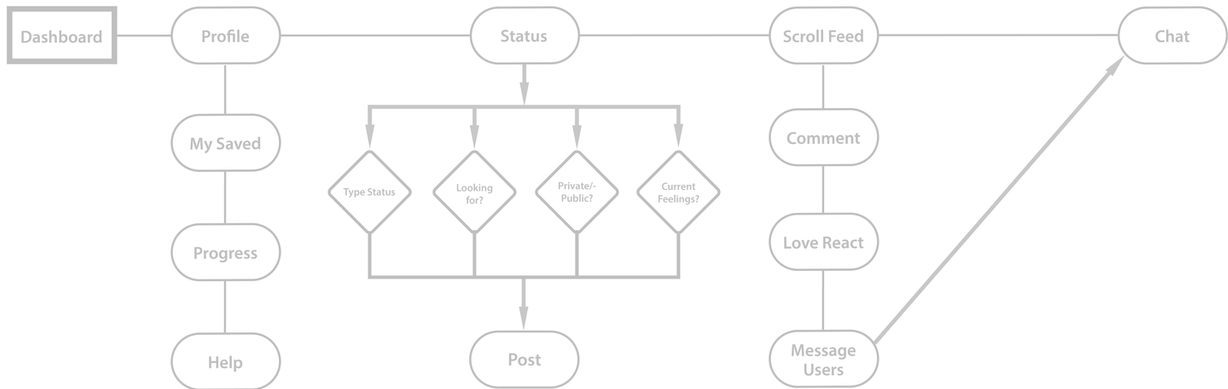
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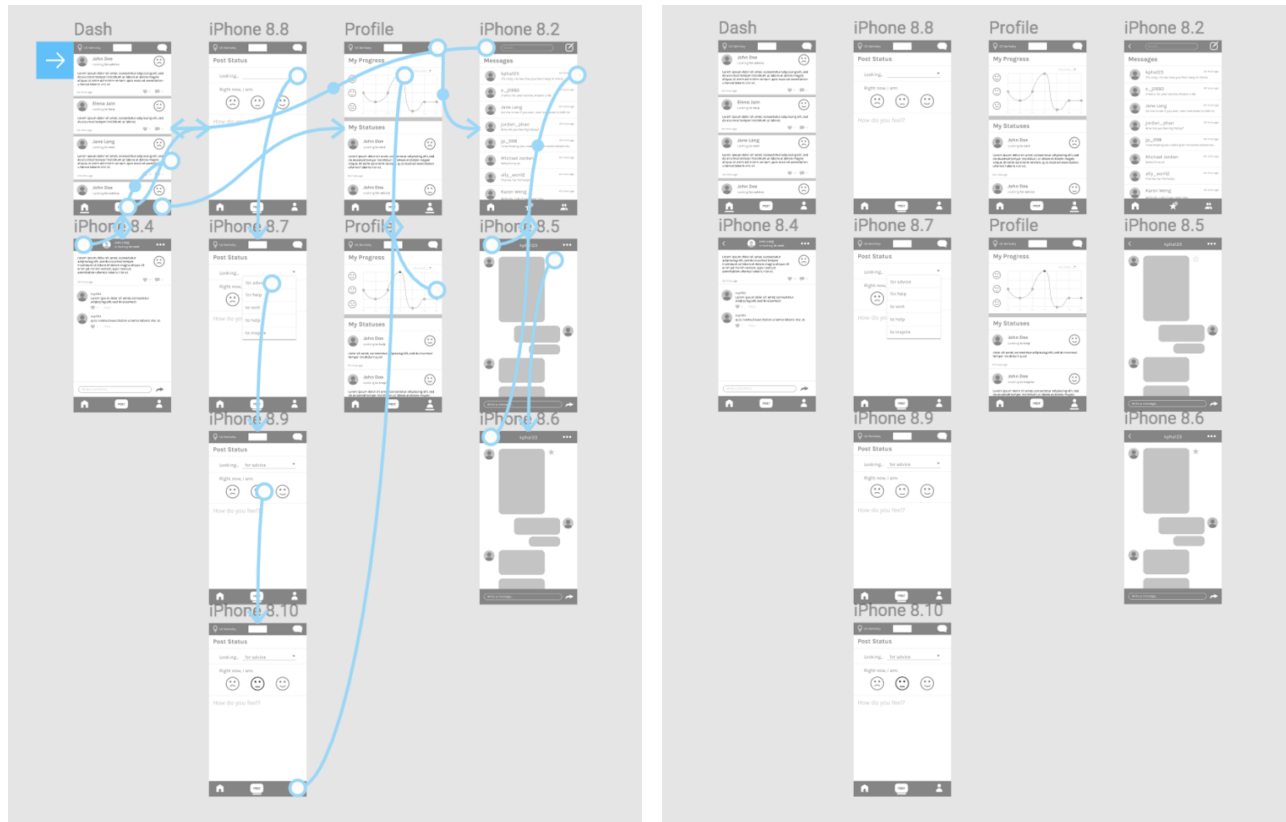
User Testing

With 5 different college students, I tested my low-fi prototypes to identify any issues in navigation and usability. I took them through a variety of tasks, asking them to voice their mental processes as they went through the flow. Through observations and a post interview, I was able to gain some interesting insights.

From my user testing I gained the following **key insights:**
1. People noted that they were initially not very interested in the feed feature. They naturally assumed that it was filled with people they had no particular connection to, and were turned off by that.
2. The "saved messages" feature didn't stand out enough initially, and participants had a hard time navigating it.
3. Overall, people enjoyed the simplicity of the app, and it made the navigation easier than had it not been created so straightforwardly. This alleviated my doubts that the app didn't have enough useful features.

I used these insights to tweak my prototypes more, before moving onto the final iteration.
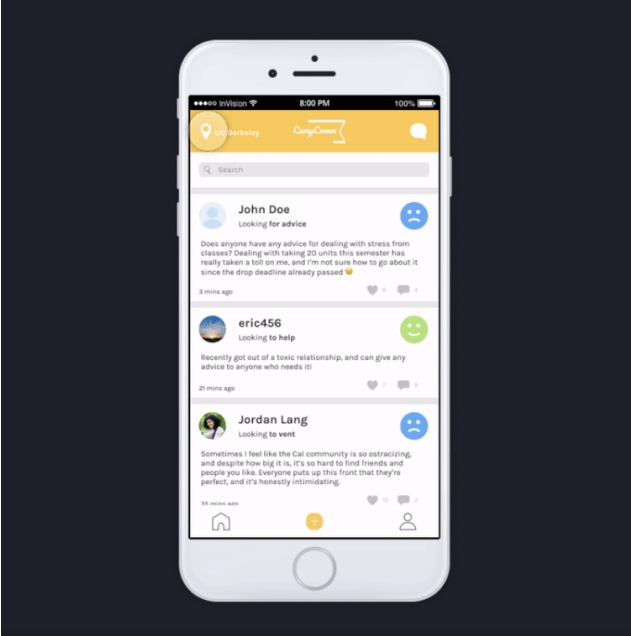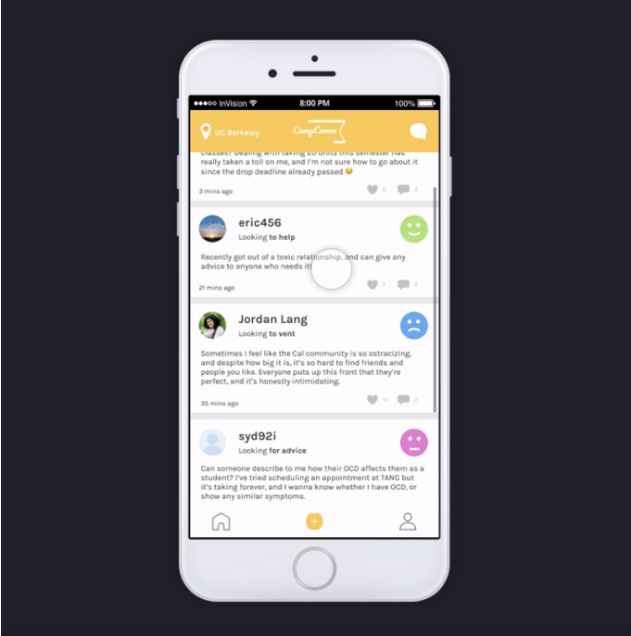
Final Solution

Drawing from the user research and usability testing, I wanted to create a solution that focuses on community communication and personal experiences-- conversations based around personal stories, for the purpose of gaining insights into one's own mental health.

Inspired by modern social media and long 1:00 AM talks with your best friend, I created **CampComm, a social media platform that encourages self-expression and mental de-stressing, based around the individual's school campus.**
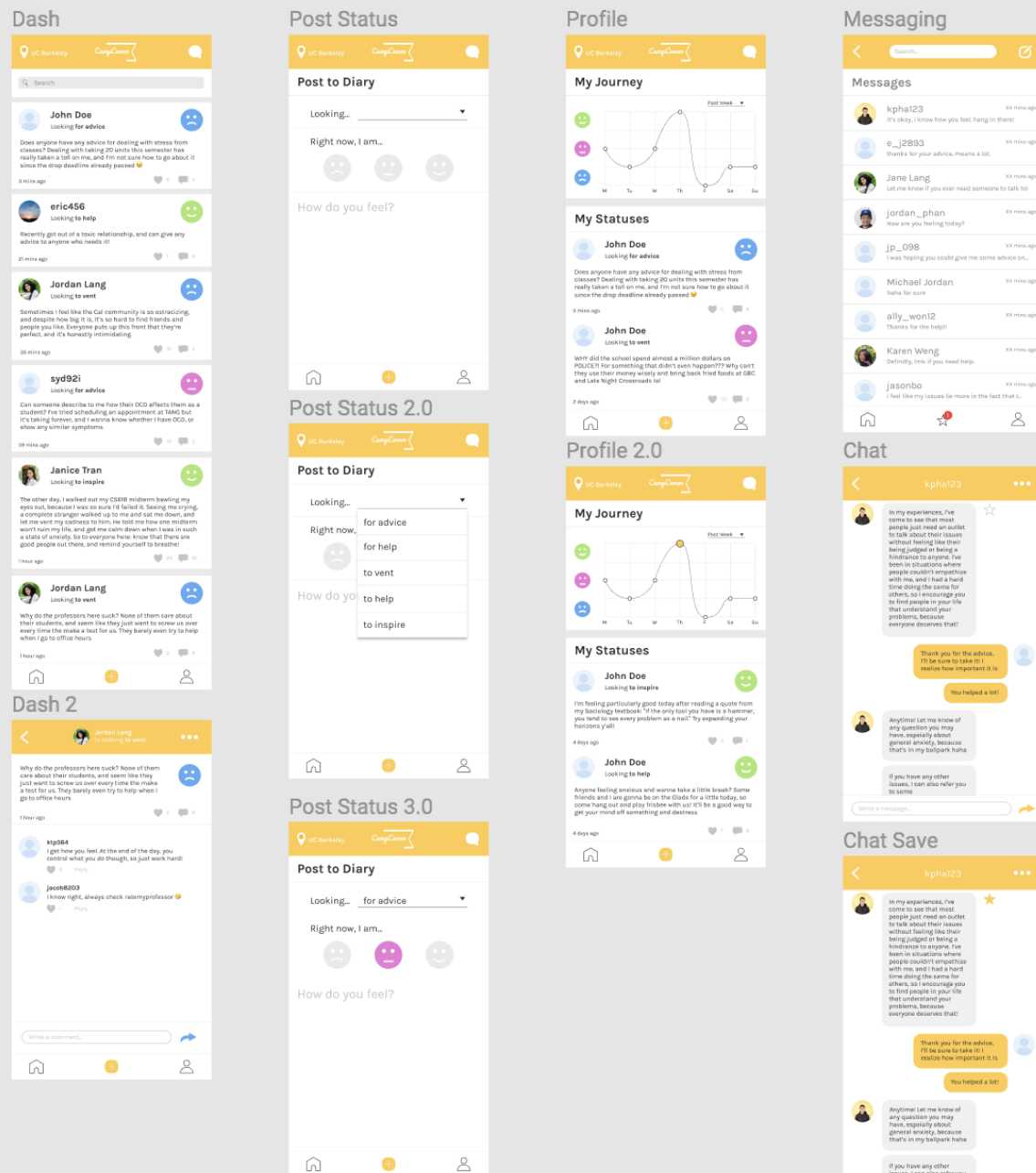
Using a familiar social media interface, CampComm normalizes the freedom to express one's own feelings to others. Especially in a stressful college environment, it's common for individuals to feel guilty or feel afraid to voice their own opinions, when others may not be empathetic or simply do not have the time to care about other people's problems. In addition, people outside of one's campus do not understand the particular issues unique to that campus, and thus cannot provide the empathy needed in that situation. CampComm groups users by their university, and provides a safe space for students to be open.

CampComm utilizes three main features: 1) the feed; 2) the profile; and 3) instant messaging.
Feel free to explore the design on InVision.

Dash

Post Status

Profile

Messaging

Dash 2

Post Status 2.0

Profile 2.0

Chat

Post Status 3.0

Chat Save

Reflections

This project was really fun and insightful, both professionally and personally. Based on my results, there are a few points that I feel could have been improved on:

1. A **wider range of participants** in the user testing. If I had to do it again, I'd reach out to college students from a wider variety of campuses, to get a more accurate depiction of the typical college student and their mental health.
2. I'd use **context scenarios** to dive deeper into the users pain points and needs. Why do students have a hard time voicing their feelings? How does it relate to fear and guilt? What are the factors that contribute to seeking a source to vent vs. seeing constructive advice? These are the sorts of questions I'd try to answer.

Being able to use this project as a way to understand mental health as a whole, as well as my own mental health, was almost cathartic. I'm glad I was able to have genuine conversations with people, and use design as a way to express these different experiences.

Thanks for reading!