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## **I. Topic, Exigence, and Invention**

### **A. Topic & Exigence**

On a day-to-day basis at the Monmouth College cafeteria, it's not difficult to look around and observe that most of the tables are crowded with sugary drinks and acidic foods, which are often part of the college student goal to relieve stress. But the fact is that the average student's preferences for sugar, acid, and mental stress all lead to physical signs of stress—not visible in a student's posture or the bluish-blackish bags under his eyes, but in the detailed bumps and grooves of his mouth. On the surface, oral hygiene may not seem an exceptionally important topic to a majority of Monmouth College students, but it is my campaign strategy to raise the importance of the subject. This is a significant issue because a great deal of college students experience stress daily, as well as intake foods that risk their oral health, and, in addition, neglect oral hygiene altogether.

The topic of oral hygiene's significance is extremely important for everyone, but very much so in the case of my audience, college students (specifically Monmouth College scholars). As the latest energy drinks are becoming more popular with their multitude of sugars and acids, and as students' schedules become more and more crammed with school activities, oral hygiene is often put "on the back burner," so to speak. One might think the simple grooming techniques of brushing and flossing would be an easy, routine daily task. The ADA (American Dental Association), however, provides evidence suggesting otherwise. In February 2012, it was found that nearly 10 percent of the US population actually flosses daily while 32 percent of the population brushes their teeth only once a day (Schwartz). In addition, "71 percent of the

population said in a recent study they would be less likely to date or marry someone with bad breath, a bad smile, or poor oral hygiene habits overall,” according to RemixYourHealth.com. In a recent study involving undergraduate students conducted at the University of Kentucky, it was discovered that more than two-thirds of college students suffer from oral diseases. Such diseases are not only painful and uncomfortable but add functional problems. It was also noticed that a great deal of students did not have the means or the right knowledge to become a patient under a dental practice close to the college, which significantly contributed to a lack of oral hygiene.

The results of the study only add to my foundational argument in the following ways:

“It was found that 21.5% of participants suffered from dental problems during their college years. Fifty-two percent of participants reported going to bed at least once a week without brushing their teeth. Of this 52%, 26.2% reported dental problems. On the other hand, of the 48% of participants who always brushed their teeth before bed, only 16.7% reported dental problems. In addition, it was found that the prevalence of dental problems increased with the consumption of coffee/tea and sugar-sweetened beverages. Also, those participants who reported utilizing dental services less were more likely to have dental problems” (Quinn).

My general hope for the campaign is that students will be considerably motivated to change or better their oral hygiene habits with the help of my message design. Main persuasive goals for my campaign will be discussed later on within my preliminary strategy segment.

## **B. Invention**

The issues central to my topic of oral hygiene importance are that lack of oral hygiene increases tooth decay, and also that there are chances for suffering cardiovascular disease, gum disease, cavities, stained teeth, and bad breath. Not paying attention to stress levels can also lead to bruxism, which is the grinding and wearing away of teeth due to high stress. Most of these hygiene-related afflictions also result in social anxiety and self-image/esteem issues for students, if not prevented. There are no valid arguments asserting that these oral ailments are good or beneficial for anyone, so there should be no reason why my campaign would be greatly resisted.

If students believe that acidic foods and beverages are main contributors to tooth wear, and if they then value the many advantages of simply having teeth, they will begin to place a lower value on eating these harmful foods. The behavior hoped for would be that the students maintain a healthier diet. On the whole, if students believe that preserving their oral health prevents a multitude of well-being obstacles, they will value taking special care of their mouths' condition. Therefore, their attitudes would be to favor methods like brushing twice a day, flossing more frequently, and adjusting their diets to contain less harmful foods. In the end, their anticipated behavior would be to ultimately use the aforementioned beneficial methods (and others) that will better the condition of their oral hygiene.

## **II. Audience Analysis**

### **A. Characteristics of the Audience & Key Dimensions**

The demographic that I plan on targeting for my campaign is Monmouth College students. Research shows that oral hygiene is severely lacking across the nation, and this institution needs to be made aware of this fact and reflect upon and/or change their oral hygiene habits. While living the college experience is an enjoyable one much of the time, the combination of stress and being made free from parental discretion leave students with new, liberating ventures. One of these is deciding which health students will continue with or drop once they begin their college lifestyle. In many instances, college students consider their health, especially their oral health, to be unessential when they are under pressure in several areas of their lives. Studies, papers, exams, sports, platonic love, intimate love, and other factors sometimes play a much bigger role to this demographic than the simple act of brushing, flossing, and maintaining a balanced diet. Students also are not as receptive to being treated by a dentist with whom they are unfamiliar (presumably he/she would have a practice) located close to

campus, and they are also unsure of which dentist has the best reputation in the area, as would be the case if they went to a local practice.

*1. Attitude toward topic*

Because oral hygiene can be a sensitive subject for some students (they don't *really* want others to know how often they brush/floss), I believe students tend to shy away from the subject—more so than if the conversation turns to their sex lives. If a student doesn't keep up with a healthy oral routine, his closest friends will probably be the last to know. Most students' attitudes toward having good hygiene, however, are positive ones. This type of hygiene is something most, if not all, college students would like to achieve daily, but it is not as central to their values or intense as perhaps it should be. As a whole, Monmouth College students believe that not habitually maintaining oral hygiene is a "big deal," as one male sophomore explained to me. This is due to the fact that a vast majority does not understand the shocking implications with which it is associated.

*2. Attitude toward relevant behaviors and message proposed*

Although Monmouth College students may fully understand me and recognize the dangers of poor oral hygiene, there will still be the percentage that does not follow through and change their routines. The reason for this is that they will still want to relieve stress by gravitating toward unhealthy foods/beverages, they may continue to be lazy in brushing/flossing/finding a local dentist, and they might not find more ways to stress relieve. In a conversation with themselves at 3:00 in the morning, they may say, "It's 3:00 a.m., I have to get my sleep—I'll brush my teeth in the morning." Through my campaign, they will come to understand that it is crucial that they realize that continued

incidents like the one just mentioned, can lead to serious oral health complications. Although Monmouth College students will be aware of these issues through my campaign, in the end, they might not follow through with a better hygiene plan due to giving in to unhealthy foods and lazy habits.

### *3. Relevant audience beliefs*

Much of the time, college students believe that if they neglect to brush their teeth here, or don't take the time to floss there, it will not matter in the long run. But the truth is that buildup of plaque can lead to inflamed gums, and even heart disease. Not establishing familiarity with a local dentist can also have an impact as well, a fact that many students disregard. It has become normal to neglect such a simple thing as oral hygiene in a college environment, that few students take the time to consider its importance. While men and women alike are to blame for this behavior, I feel it is necessary to "zone in" on men, who, because of their high metabolisms, often drink more beer, eat more pizza, and get less sleep.

### *4. Relevant audience values and their saliency*

College students value their teeth because, well, they are simply essential for existence. Once parental supervision and household standards are left behind for the college world, students often have a difficult time managing their responsibilities, oral hygiene being one of them. These values can become less valued over time with a new college family that certainly has different priorities than a primary family group. Students should come to realize that oral hygiene is just as important away from home as it is within their homes.

5. *Situational variables*

While the topic of obtaining and developing first-rate oral hygiene habits is a year-round one, the message might be more effective if given at the beginning of the school year when college students begin to form lasting routines for the year.

Another appropriate time to address oral health could be right before the winter holidays when students will go home to home-cooked, and yes, even more unhealthy foods than the college cafeteria offers.

**B. Segments**

1. *Freshmen*

The incoming students of Monmouth College are part of an audience I would really like to focus on creating a difference with. Freshmen students come to college with preconceived notions about the college lifestyle, and by catching their attention early, I can at least offer some well-grounded advice that they can carry through their four-year college careers. Students neglect oral hygiene essentials due to not following a balanced diet, laziness/exhaustion, and lacking the foresight to see the dangers of bad hygiene. These things can be prevented if I may freshman aware of these risks to their oral health. Through informing them of the pros of a healthy lifestyle for their teeth and gums, I hope to change their perception that oral hygiene is “no big deal.”

2. *Athletes*

While student athletes are the demographic within my audience that contain some of the most physically fit young adults on campus, they are a segment of my campaign

plan for multiple reasons. Those involved in campus sports have high metabolisms, so they can burn off sugars and unhealthy foods more easily than those who are not as active. But this does not mean that sugar does not affect their teeth in an any less harmful way. In fact, athletes consume often consume more sugary/acidic foods, such as carbohydrates to maintain a strong metabolism, which just puts them at a higher risk for oral diseases and disorders. Students involved in sports also wear mouth guards much of the time; the importance of keeping these guards clean and free of malignant bacteria must be heightened.

### *3. Pre-dental Students*

My second specific segment I would like to target is Monmouth College's pre-dental students. As young adults who will soon be entering the study of dentistry, taking part in a campaign advocating the benefits of good oral hygiene, will offer credibility in my argument. Their background in health studies will assist in establishing trust and perhaps even change. This segment will not only see volunteering for this cause as beneficial for the student body, but will understand that it may open opportunities for them later in their careers. The fact that they can say, "I was part of an organization to improve college level students' oral hygiene," is a quality that future employers may consider exceptional.

## **III. Preliminary Strategy**

## **A. Goals**

The main goal of my campaign is to raise awareness of the risks of bad oral hygiene and the methods to prevent these risks. In the end, I am anticipating that 30 % of students will become aware of my campaign and its implications. Of this percentage, my goal is that at least 100% of these students will comprehend my advocacy for good oral hygiene, while 50% of the 30% will actually take action to improve their oral health regimens. Many students already have a favorable attitude toward this subject, so I would like to persuade the audience members who do not see it in a favorable light, to change their minds. My goal for the segment of pre-dentistry students is that at least 25% of the pre-professional program members will join my campaign to volunteer and serve as credible speakers or advocates. In addition, by the end of my campaign efforts, I anticipate 20% of freshmen and athletes to alter their oral health routine completely.

## **B. Obstacles**

One of the obstacles that could prevent my message from being successful and from effectively reaching my audience could be that the audience members have created too many detrimental habits to their oral health and are unwilling to change at this point. Another obstacle that would keep me from achieving my campaign goals are the audience members who will not even consider changing due to the fact that they believe they are doing enough to keep up their hygiene. A last barrier to my goals could be students who do not consider the topic to be of great importance, even after my explanation and informal presentations and messages involving text and images.

## Works Cited

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