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ATHLETIVISM

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SENIOR CAPSTONE 2022



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WHAT IS ATHLETIVISM?

Athletivism is a portmanteau of the words "athlete" and "activism," and refers to the behaviors, qualities, and choices of athletes engaged in activism within the realm of sports.

Athletivism embodies the specific tactics—Leadership, Absence, Entrepreneurship, Adornment, and Action—that sports activists use to make a difference. Oftentimes, the players using these techniques are misunderstood, criticized, and the recipients of outrage; a common reason being that many people don't realize or acknowledge the strong link that exists between sports and society. The goal of Athletivism and its interactive web-based timeline is to visualize the tactics; demonstrate how sports activism has been impacted by historical events; show how sports activists peacefully disrupt society; and validate the right of athletes to use their platforms as role models and as civic engagers working to create change.

LEADERSHIP

ACHIEVERS & ORGANIZERS

ABSENCE

POWER IN CHOOSING PRESENCE

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

BUSINESS WITH PURPOSE

ADORNMENT

STATEMENT ATTIRE

ACTION

MOMENTOUS MOVEMENTS

THE RATIONALE OF ATHLETIVISM

The separation between sports and activism never existed peacefully. The history of sports shows that athletes have been taking part in society as more than just players for decades, using whatever platforms they have for their activism about whichever issues they believe in. In a perfect democracy, it should bother no one that because of the importance of sports in American culture, media, and consciousness in today's world (and the resulting spotlight put on athletes), sports and activism are contingent on each other. However, this is not the case; many people don't acknowledge this dependency and therefore get angry when athletes become athlete activists, sports games mean a lot more, and politics are brought into the equation.

Many Americans are aware of quarterback Colin Kaepernick's decision to kneel during the Star-Spangled Banner before a 2016 NFL game. This moment is one of the most recognized forms of

not only activism, but also controversy and condemnation. A chunk of Americans thought the action was disrespectful. Another part applauded the sentiment, but didn't believe that Kaepernick chose the right time to demonstrate. In the years since, Kaepernick's decision has come under scrutiny multiple times as the issues he first knelt for are put in the national spotlight once more. Since 2016, Kaepernick has grown to be more understood by sports fans and other athletes alike, with some players inspired to kneel themselves.

The increasing support for Kaepernick shows that tolerance for athlete activism has come a long way. For some, Kaepernick has defined "athletivism". However, history indicates that sports activism is not limited solely to kneeling, and that there are various forms that advocacy in the sports world could take. As sports fans, it is the least we can do to understand these tactics

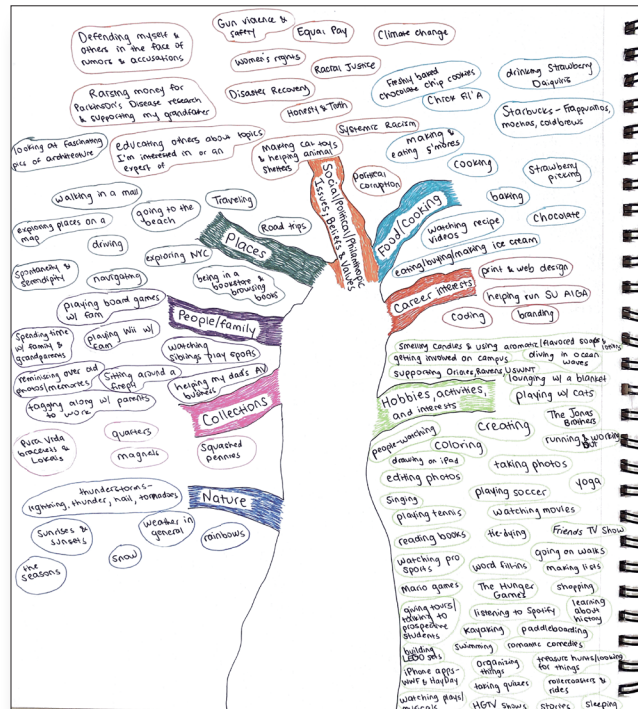
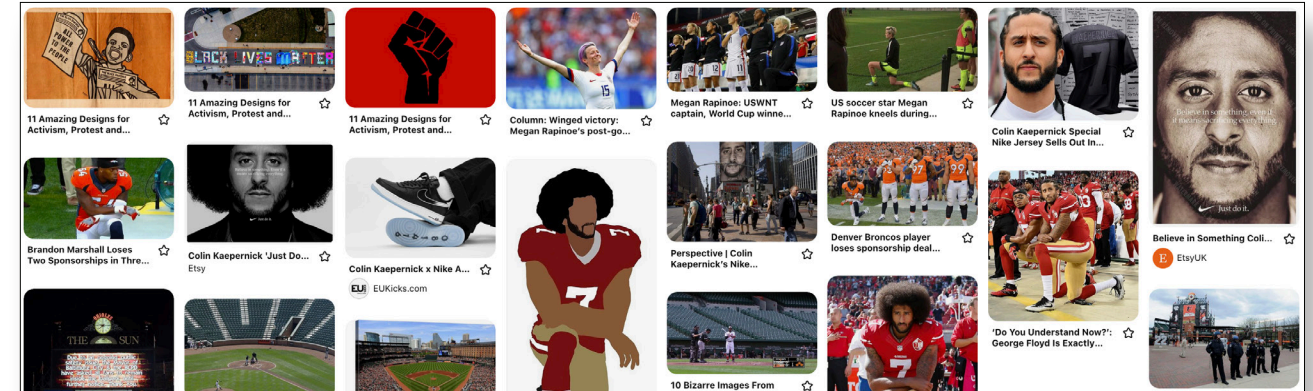
and to learn about what athletes are fighting for. Additionally, we should recognize and commend players who use their platforms while using their sacrifices as motivation for changemaking.

When LeBron James proclaimed "I am more than just an athlete" in response to Fox News host Laura Ingraham's comment to "shut up and dribble", he was speaking for athletes of all eras across the globe. In order to fully understand how athletes have transcended their roles to make waves in society, it is essential to look back into the past and see the athletes who came before Kaepernick, James, and those currently in the news today.

Athletivism is an ever-changing concept. Everyday, new athletes choose to use their statuses, voices, and social media pages to elevate their messages and concerns about the world. The topic of athletivism is also a very broad

one; it encompasses the intersection of culture, entertainment, sports, politics, and society, and there are many perspectives from which it can be analyzed. For my graphic design senior capstone project—a yearlong process that started with a thorough research phase and progressed towards prototyping and designing—I am emphasizing the similarities and differences in how athletes have protested in the 20th and 21st centuries. Other directions I contemplated taking this project include analyzing the changes in the risks and stakes involved in sports activism, digging deep into the tolerances that affect opinions on sports activists, and examining power dynamics and generational influences on activism of a time period. Ultimately, my project simplifies what sports activism can actually look like, and provides a mindset that simultaneously justifies and supports athletes as influential individuals in society.

THE BEGINNING



KEY IMAGERY

One of my early Pinterest boards served the purpose of providing some imagery that was crucial to a basic understanding of sports activism. Many of my pins featured Colin Kaepernick and the Orioles crowdless game, giving me an idea of how they are depicted and setting a bold yet somber tone.

FRAMING PASSIONS

I created a Passions Tree with eight "branches" so I could understand my passions better. Then, I designed an infographic using cake slices as a metaphor for everyone having different stories. This piece was a way for me to conceptually frame my research—every person, every athlete, has their own story (their own slice), comprised of unique passions and experiences.

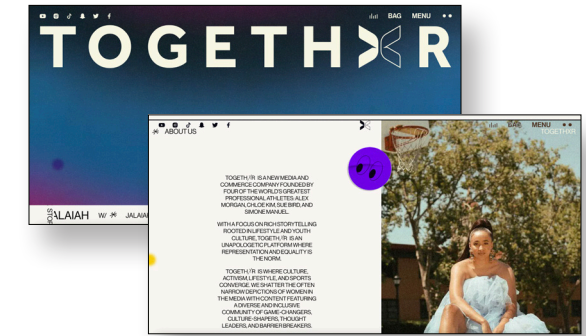
Back in the fall semester of senior year, we were required to list one hundred passions as a way to identify possible topics that we could explore further. I categorized my passions into eight topics in order to draw connections between similar ideas. I noticed that sports that I play, sports teams that I follow, and social issues encompassed a bunch of my passions, so I started to find more and more sources in my research that somehow related to these.

A lot of my early sources focused on reading. However, I soon found a fascinating excerpt from a book about the crowdless Baltimore Orioles game during the 2015 Freddie Gray protests. After that, I stumbled upon an article about soccer star Megan Rapinoe's accolades, which introduced me to her history and activism. I began to seriously consider the intersection of sports and society as my research topic; it wasn't long until I read about Colin Kaepernick.

FOCUSING MY RESEARCH

As the semester progressed, I continued to research different aspects of sports activism. I was particularly interested in an article published by The Christian Science Monitor about the four activism waves and how the current wave is distinct from the previous three. I also gained a lot of information from a 2020 Harper's Bazaar article that chronicled the role of fashion in activism in the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA). However, my research took a turn towards athlete entrepreneurship, and how companies run by athletes tied into activism by serving communities.

I found design exemplars that not only showed how different athletes used their companies to promote equality and change, but that also showed how these athletes brand and market their unique campaigns to their target audiences.



DESIGN EXEMPLARS

TOGETHXR (above), a media and content company aimed at promoting equality through representation of women and other diverse groups, showed me how athletes can have an impact in today's social media-driven world. Uninterrupted (left), LeBron James' company that calls itself "a collaborative movement", demonstrated how content and products can work together with social justice campaigns within an organization to call attention to issues.

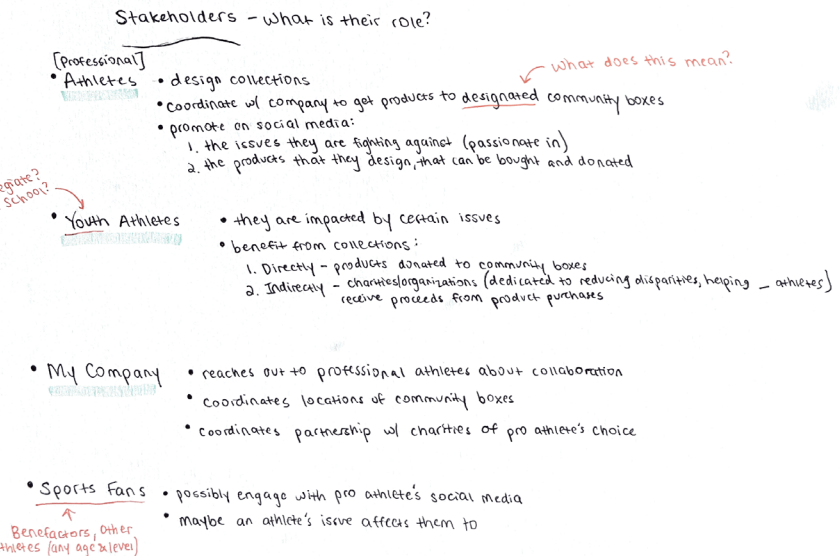
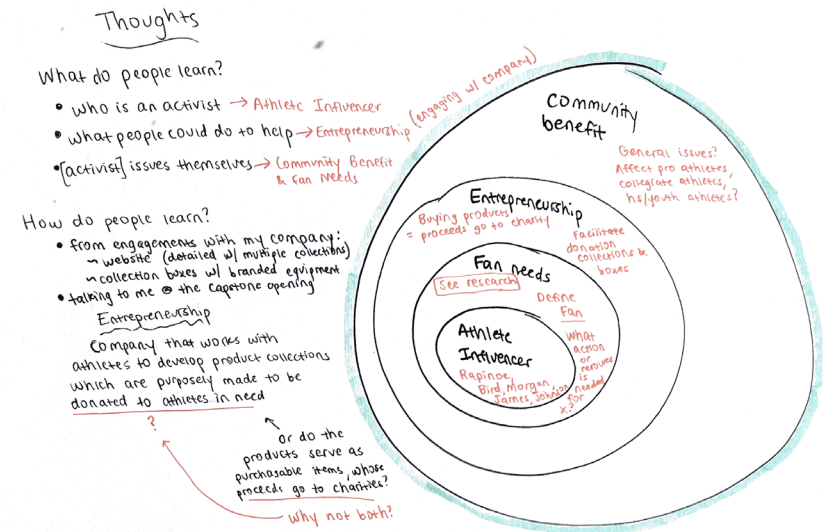
TRANSITION FROM SEMESTERS

By the end of the fall semester, I was wholly engaged in my topic of activism through athlete entrepreneurship. My main touchpoint was even a collection of branded products inspired by my design exemplars. I presented my idea virtually to a focus group panel, who suggested that I narrow down my idea and determine who exactly my audience would be.

The "Takeaways" slide of my presentation detailed some key points that I wanted people to take away from my project. I kept these intended impacts in mind when I designed my shoebox exhibit in the spring semester, a direct interpretation of my product campaign idea.

Takeaways

- Increase in the interactions between athletes and people that involve discussions about activist issues
- More interest in athlete brands, which would be inclusive, accessible, and connection-forming
- Increased motivation to get involved in any kind of activism
- Understanding of, endorsement of, and engagement with sports activists and the issues that they fight for

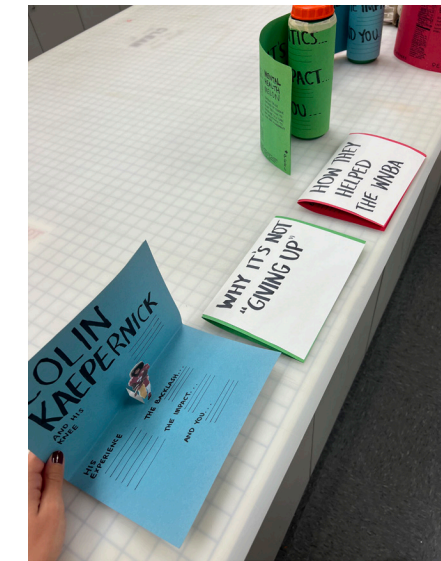
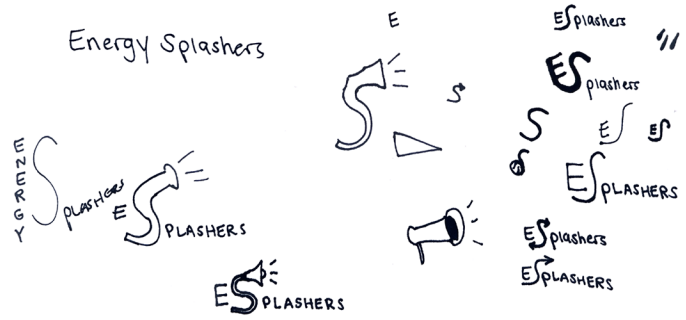


THINKING THROUGH

In the first few weeks of the spring semester, I prioritized working through the details of my entrepreneurship concept. This involved identifying what and how my audience learns, along with the roles of everyone who is affected or a part of the company. I also reincorporated the venn diagram that my professor and I developed in the fall, which helped me realize how everything should fit together. However, this planning also revealed multiple challenges, and I discovered that this route would not have the direct impact I desired—which was educating about sports activists to motivate understanding and interest in issues.

THE POP-UP EXHIBIT

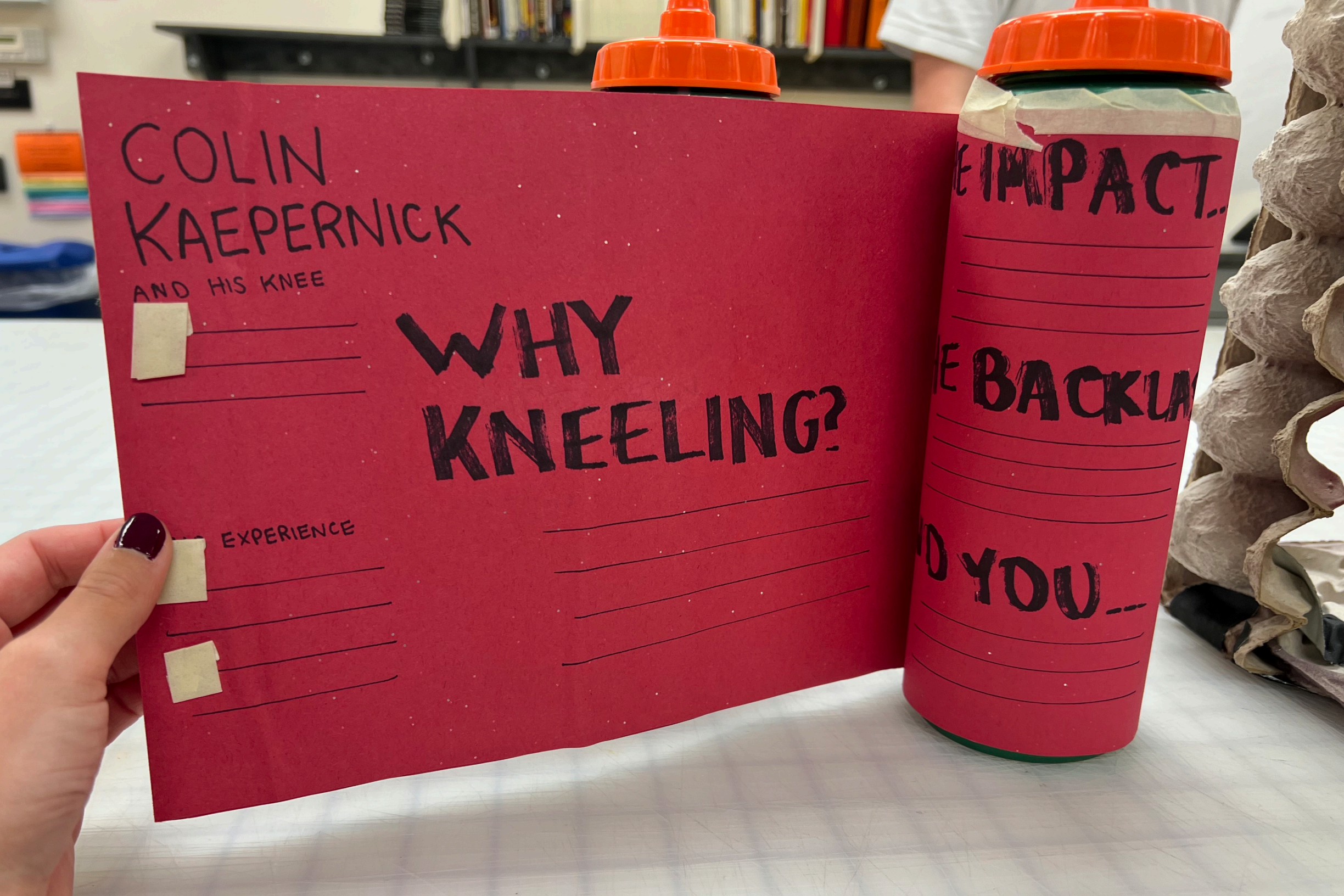
- Sports Drinks**
- Racism/police brutality/BLM
 ~ Colin Kaepernick & Megan Rapinoe
Knelling in a Puddle *Black Lives Matter Berry*
 - Black Power/mental health
 ~ Simone Biles & Naomi Osaka
Mental Health MeOn
 - LGBTQIA+ rights/representation
 ~ Adam Rippon & Lashia Clarendon
Tree to Self Strawberry
Be Yourself Blueberry
- Names**
- Energy Changemakers
 - Activist Energy
 - Energy Splashes... make a splash
 - The Ripple Line... causing waves of change



NAME GAMES

The pop-up exhibit allowed me to play around with ways to educate through different interactions. Other than the sports drink idea, I also considered a three-dimensional pop-up card using paper art and a shelf of hanging activist trading cards. All three projects required the use of attention-getting word choice that conveyed a lot of information in few words. For the sports drink idea specifically, I pondered clever names for individual flavors and for the company brand itself.

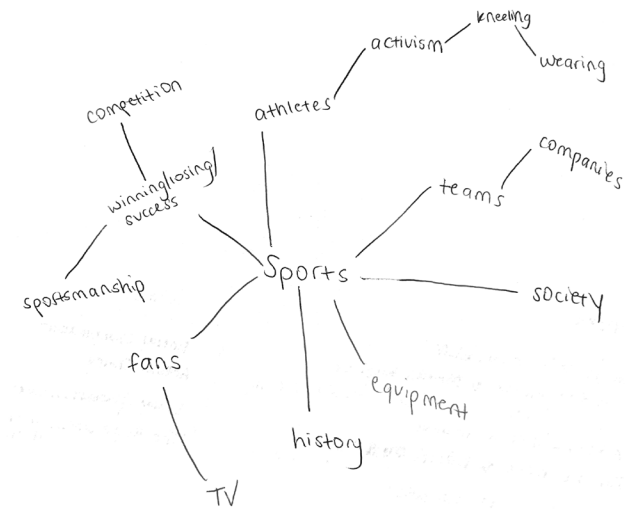
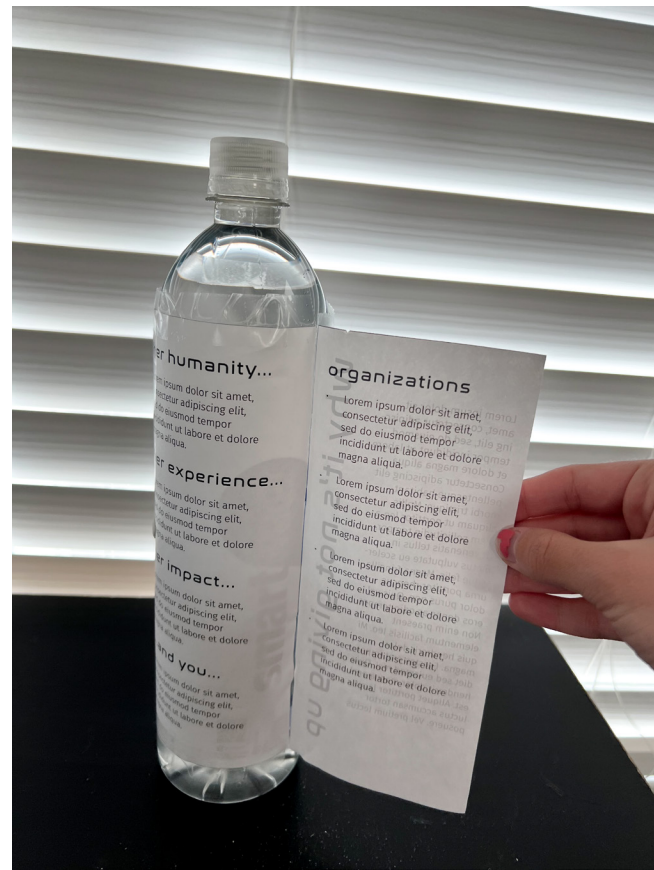
Between the shoebox exercise and the pop-up exhibit, I brainstormed new touchpoint options that achieved a similar effect. Instead of using a collection of miscellaneous products to educate people about activists and their issues in general, I explored the possibility of creating a branded sports drink campaign that would highlight certain activists on the packaging, which would also feature a digital educational component.



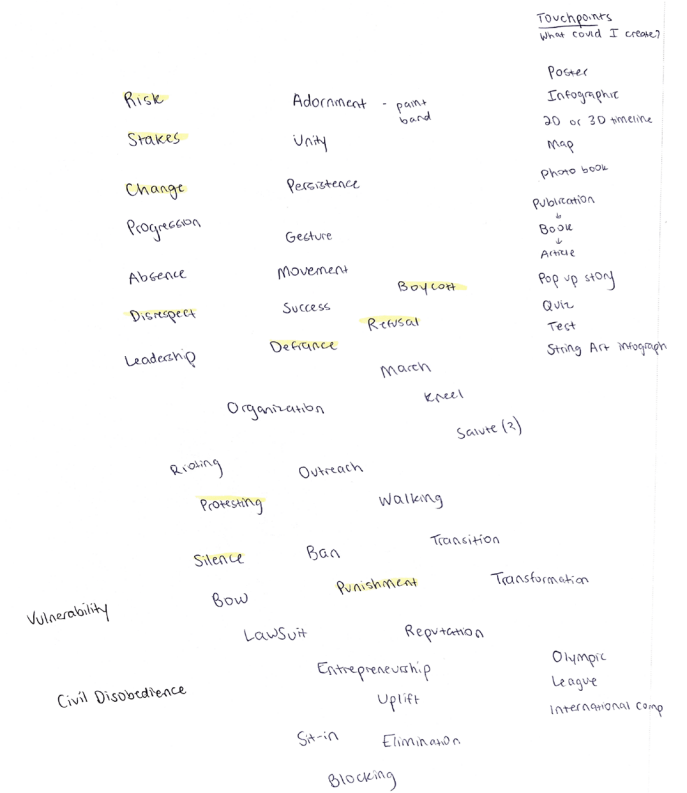
FOLDIN' FUN

The touchpoint that received the best feedback was the sports drink campaign. Guests remarked that it was the most interactive, unique, and fun to learn from option, because it allowed them to actually hold an object and unfold a flap. One guest's suggestions were especially valuable; she helped me envision what the drink brand would look like as an expanded campaign with a website, posters, and takeaway items.

PROTOTYPE 2, BUT...

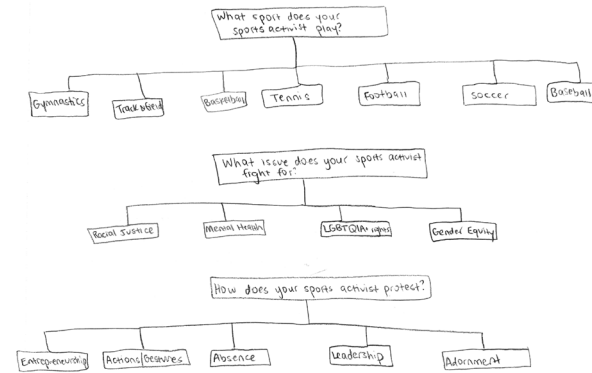


Not long after the pop-up exhibit, I developed a neater prototype using a more practical bottle shape and label design. This second version simplified the unrestricted sports drink concept I had first created into something that was more organized and safer. But...it lost its flair. I found that not only did I feel constrained when designing for a bottle, but I also wasn't achieving what I wanted to in the best way. Why had I desired to only feature a few activists, when their stories are just a small part of the larger story I wanted to attempt to tell? Like my original product collection idea, I went back to thinking that somehow, I would have to generalize sports activism so I could share the most amount of beneficial, relevant information in a condensed manner. Although this part of the process was difficult, since I was undecided in both my specific topic and touchpoints, it helped to make mind maps and to freely jot down key ideas that I wanted to emphasize in my project.

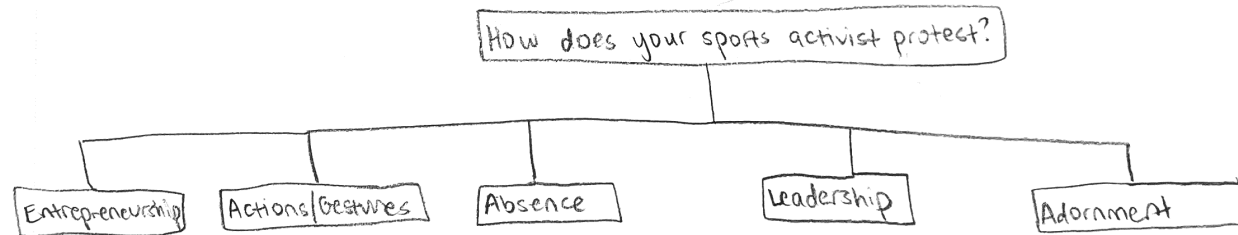


SEEING WHAT IS OUT THERE

Mindmapping helped me figure out what I wanted my project to be about, while searching for exemplars of installations and interactive experiences guided me towards the type of exhibit I wanted to produce. For a long time, I had been inspired by AMPT! (top image), the thesis project of 2017 MICA graduate student Gurleen Saini that animates the movements of amputee football players. I could apply this demonstration of movement to physical acts of activism, such as kneeling. The model plane example (bottom right image), which is a hands-on experience that consists of portable dioramas of 3D-printed model planes, is similar to AMPT! in that it relies on visualizing movement as a means of educating. Lastly, I was also attracted to the Pick-Your-Path-esque interactive experience in the Futures Exhibit (bottom left image) at the Smithsonian's Arts and Industries Building in Washington, D.C. I liked how guests had to participate to shape their future in a digital manner. I applied this customization feature to my own project.



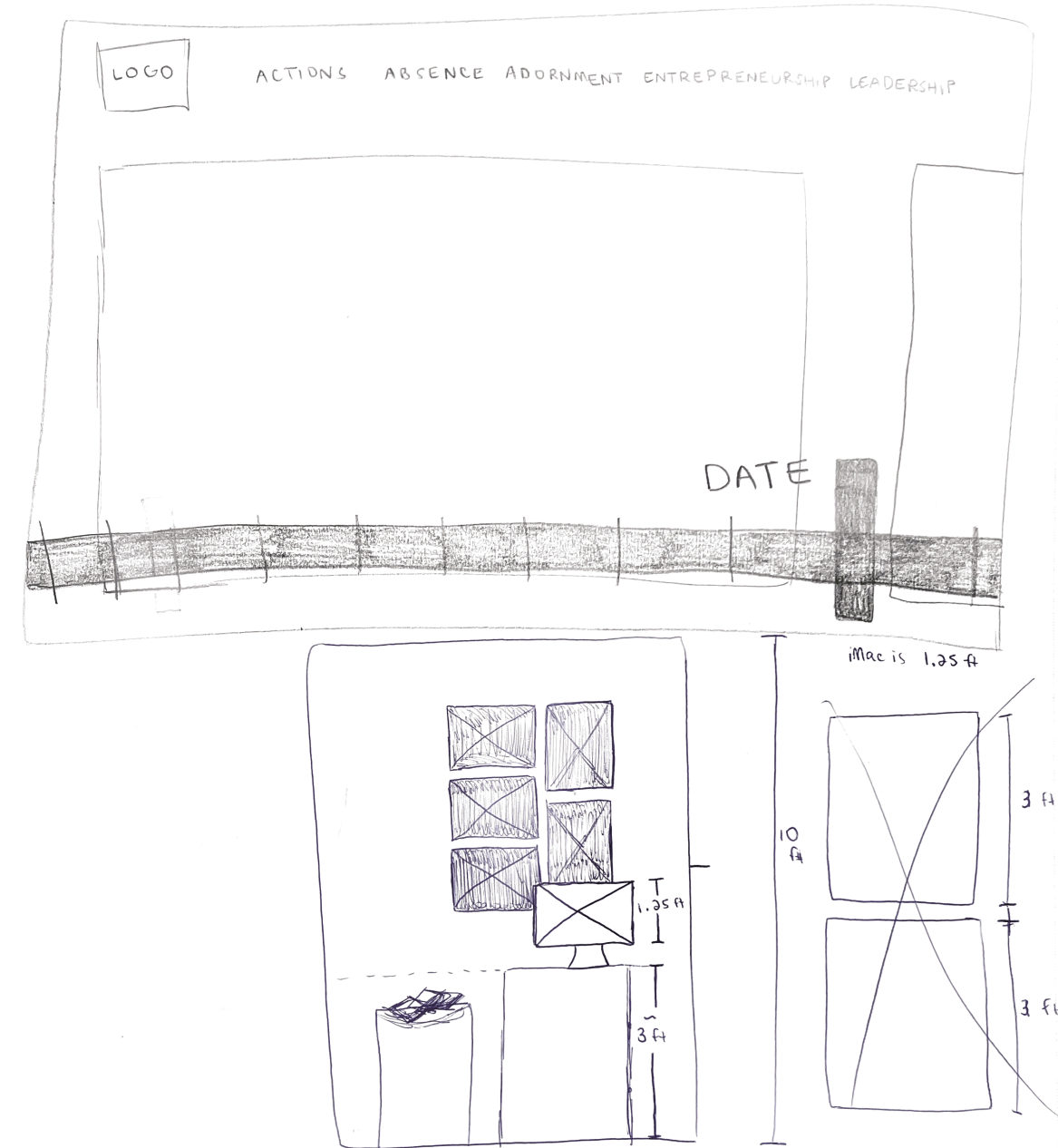
THE TACTICS EMERGE



Ultimately, I kept just the last part of the Pick-Your-Path idea. This was where the tactics of athleticism first emerged. I decided on the phrases “entrepreneurship”, “action”, “absence”, “leadership”, and “adornment” to describe the ways that sports activists protested. I realized that after researching athlete entrepreneurship in the fall, learning more about the action of kneeling that Kaepernick performed, and reading about the WNBA’s fashion sense in the Harper’s Bazaar article, I was drawn to the tactics themselves and I enjoyed seeing how athletes in the past and present made them their own. Rather than creating a physical experience that required overt movements or controls by guests, I chose to pursue the interactive timeline idea. Each tactic

would receive its own timeline. People could scroll through the timeline on their own and learn about the tactic that most interests them. In addition, this touchpoint would allow more athletes to be featured, plus the historical context would aid in understanding of the tactic, of the sports activist, and possibly of the issue—the first step towards acceptance.

My early sketches show my vision of what the timeline would look like. As seen on the right, the web page would feature cards that scroll horizontally, with timeline markers towards the bottom of the screen. The bottom sketch was my very first consideration of how the computer would fit in front of my wall space.



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TYPE TRIALS

I finally had a topic and a touchpoint idea. Now, I could start exploring typefaces that convey the brand's personality. At this point, I had settled on the name "Sportivism" for my project. I experimented with multiple widths of sans-serif typefaces and played around with the tracking to conjure athletic brand imagery while maintaining originality and seriousness.

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DESIGNING FOR THE CONCEPT



WHAT IS ATHLETIVISM

Athleticism: The physical qualities that are characteristic of athletes, such as strength, fitness, and agility

Activism: The policy or action of using vigorous campaigning to bring about political or social change

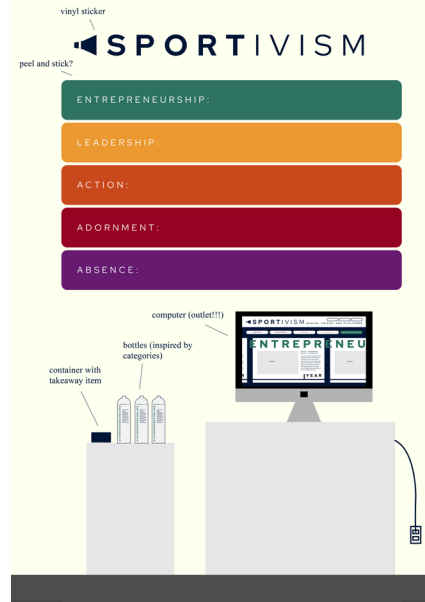
qualities that ~~change~~

Athletivism: The techniques of sports activists employed to bring about change. methods implemented make a difference. manner exercised induce change. fashion practiced engender conversation. means applied foster a better world. tactics executed. strategy administered enacted.

After sketching layouts for the website, I brought my ideas into the computer to establish style guidelines and identify consistent visual elements that would be present in each timeline. During this time, I was also experimenting with Bootstrap code snippets that would allow the cards to horizontally scroll. Throughout this phase of making draft after draft of the logo and main website page, I decided that the name "Sportivism" was a little too obvious of a combination, plus it pulls a tad too much from the company that I work at, Sporticulture. It didn't take long for me to get on board with "Athletivism"; a word that makes people think of "athleticism" but that has its own meaning in the context of my project.

◀ WEB ELEMENTS

This draft of my website looks relatively similar to the finished product. Here, the buttons are rounded, and the color palette is a muted rainbow that does little to attract peoples' attention. However, the timeline card looks almost exactly like it does in the real thing.

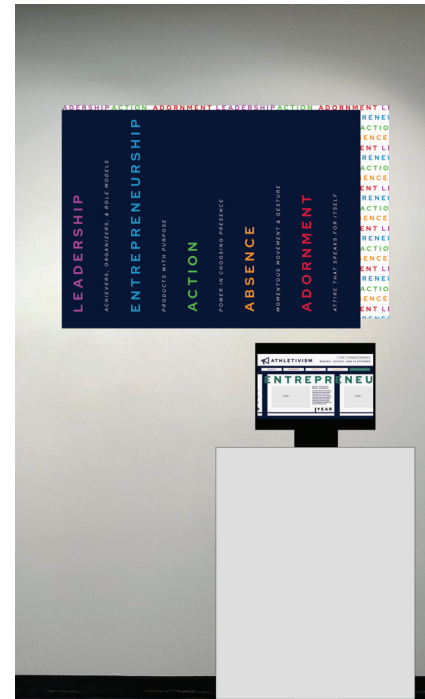


VARIATION 1

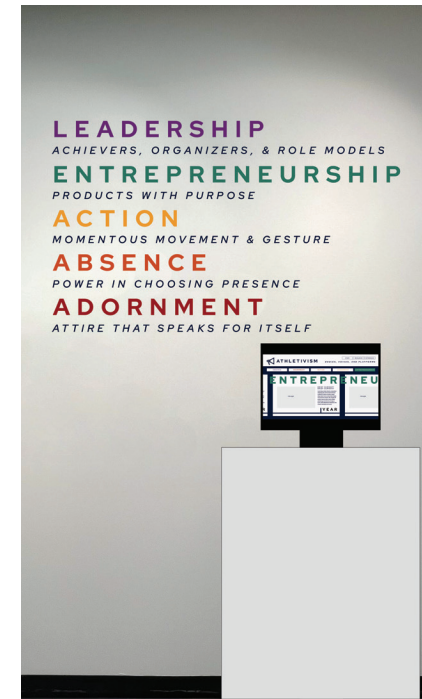
As the Capstone gallery opening was drawing closer, I shifted my focus to my wall graphics. I wanted these graphics to merely be an introduction to the concept of Athletivism and to get people to want to scroll through the timeline on the website. It is evident when looking at the progression of variations that my intention for the wall stayed consistent while I was figuring out the hierarchy and how typography and patterns would work together on a life-size scale.



BLOCKY ORDER



VERTICAL OVERLAP



STRAIGHT DEFINE



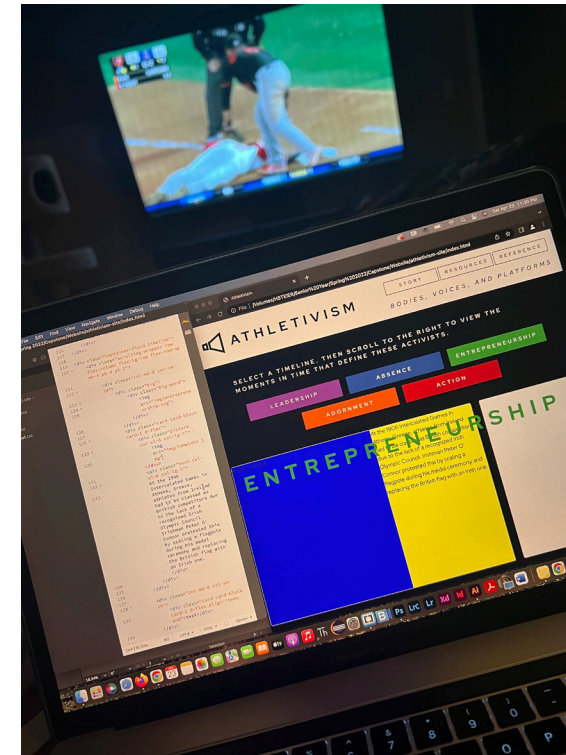
PATTERNS



PATTERNS ANGLED

This wall version is close to what my final wall graphic looked like. I arrived at this variation after learning about unfamiliar capabilities of Adobe Illustrator and after talking with both of my professors on how to balance readability with creativity.

WORKING ON THE WALL



It was so exciting to implement my digital designs into a physical space. I worked with Janine Mills, the studio manager of the School of Design, to proof my colors, which was essential as the default setting on Photoshop did not yield the correct colors in any sense. After the graphics were printed full-size on sticky paper, I carefully trimmed the edges, then climbed on the ladder to stick the paper to the wall (with help, of course). By day, I was installing my exhibit; by night, I was continuing to code my timeline using HTML, CSS, and the Bootstrap framework. Luckily, the Baltimore Orioles were on a west coast road trip, so I was able to watch the game as I worked late into the night.

INSTALLATION: COMPLETE





NEURSHIP
PURPOSE
ADORNMENT
ATTIRE
ACTION
MOVEMENTS



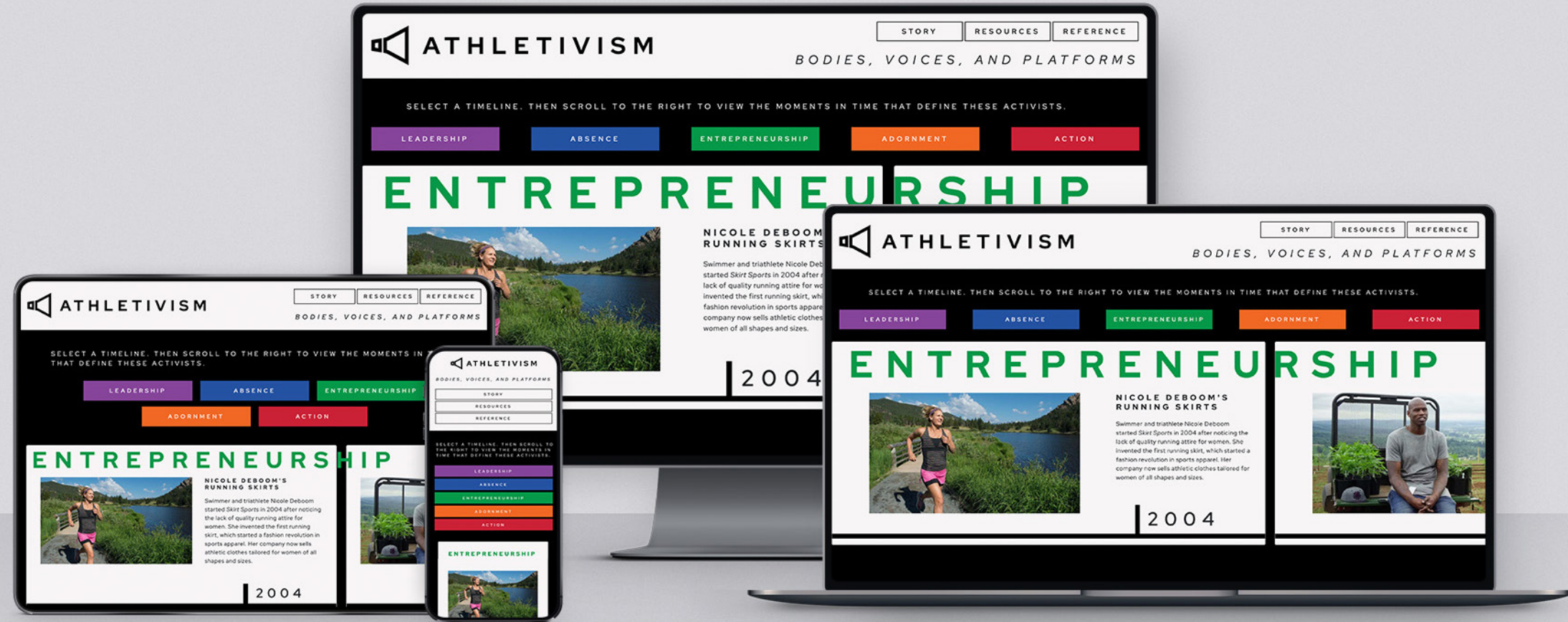
ATHLETIVISM
LEADERSHIP
1908



PHOTO BY JALEN THOMAS



PHOTO BY JALEN THOMAS



FINAL PRODUCT

The final Athletivism site is responsive, meaning that it can be viewed on any screen size and device and still work. For computers with touchpads, simply use your fingers to scroll to the left and right. A computer mouse with a rollable ball works also; just roll the ball in the direction of time you want to explore. No touchpad or mouse? Arrow keys advance the timeline just fine. Finally, on touch screens, the timeline scrolls vertically, providing the same educational experience as it is on desktop. My website allows guests to get a general understanding of the tactics themselves, while offering specific examples of athletes.

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