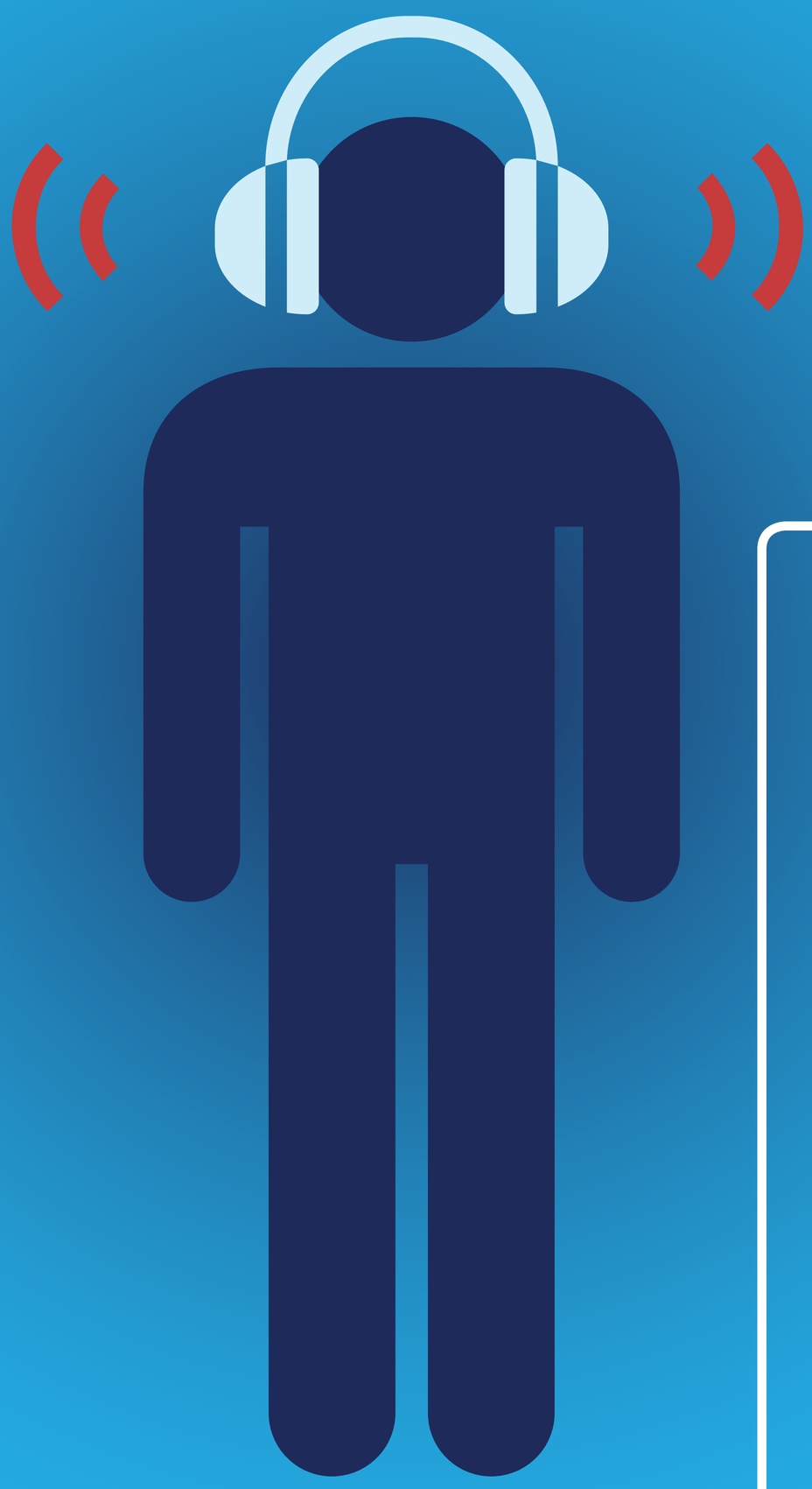
UNDERSTANDING
NOISE INDUCED HEARING LOSS

PROBLEM: Hearing loss is a major public health problem in the United States. One in 8 American adults recently reported having hearing trouble, and this number rises to 50% of individuals aged 75 years or older. Hearing impairment imposes a substantial burden on individuals and society, and is associated with poor quality of life, depression, greater difficulties with functional activities, and lower income. Studying and understanding the impact that headphone use has on Noise Induced Hearing Loss and exploring what can be done to spread the word about protecting hearing health is the goal in uncovering exposure problems and possible solutions for today's generations.

APPROACH: Among research tools like informational interviewing, photo observations, behavioral mapping, and contextual inquiries, a digital ethnography toolkit was deployed to participants around the world to probe for evocative information. Research insights and motivation for change explored below.



PERSONAL

Headphone users plug in to seal out the world and invoke a sense of privacy. Mood and attitude are set through music & volume.

EMOTIONAL

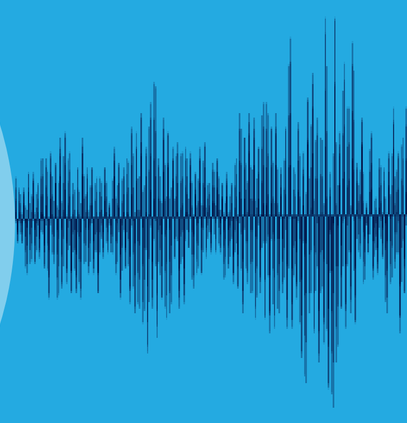
CULTURAL

Headphone use has become a cultural wave & is accepted as part of daily life. Hearing health is not.

RITUAL

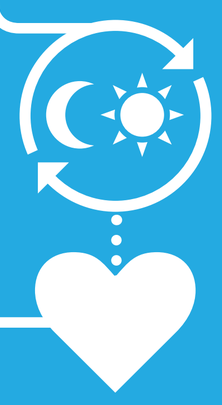
PHYSICAL

Routine helps dictate headphone use and plays a major role in when, where, and for how long users listen.



PROCESS:

INTERVIEWS: Shed light on hearing health knowledge.
PHOTO OBSERVATION: Showcased mannerisms, behaviors.
USER EXPERIENCE: Mapped and uncovered routine, habit.
CULTURAL PROBE: Gathered new insight about hearing importance and value systems of participants.
CONTEXTUAL INQUIRY: Exposed true headphone culture.
THICK DESCRIPTION: Discovered connection & meaning.



TAKE AWAYS:

Research uncovered headphone use as a ritualistic and emotion evoking activity - embedded in a culture of constant media connection and daily routine. Morning, afternoon, and night are paired with specific activities, music, and listening styles to instill or erase feelings and set the tone for the day.

RECOMMENDATION:

The ideal headphone offering would supply both great quality sound and protect hearing health - doing both intuitively. Appealing to a user's need for ritual and emotional connection through a product that is able to learn habits and individual needs is the first step in creating a culture of hearing health awareness. Further, headphones can play an active role in making a user's day and tasks more enjoyable, seamless, and personal through intuitive alerts and media selection - all while maintaining proper levels. This direct connection would place hearing health education in users' hands, providing a record of hearing health and making the issue real and tangible. Supporting existing listening habits with a nurturing and knowledgeable device has the power to change NIHL statistics for the better and reverse its current trend.

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