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ACAM 320J
11 December 2024

Community Engaged Research Project

Over this semester, we have worked with Love Intersections to co-create a workshop that focuses on learning about traditional herbs and spices as 'medicines'.

This research will bring together a diverse group of elders, residents, artists and activists to explore contemporary issues of race, labour, and social justice. This workshop is designed as a place of co-creation, where participants will share stories and make art together by facilitating dialogue and reflection. The methodology draws from Love Intersection's previous workshop models, which engage aesthetic and sensory activities to foster deeper engagement with issues of justice and community care. These workshops will also serve as experimental spaces for testing two distinct methods, including food-based practices, as a way to activate familial and community memories that stimulate collective imagination and art-making.

This workshop process is designed to use artmaking as a means to facilitate dialogue around racial justice, organizational resilience, and community nourishment. Centred on sensory engagement, the workshop utilizes collaging, allowing participants to connect to stories of ancestry, healing, and community through a tactile experience. This exercise provides a break from cerebral, conversation-heavy spaces, shifting the focus toward embodied, arts-based reflection.

Love Intersections is a collective of queer artists of colour located in Chinatown. Racial and social justice is very important to them. A lot of their practices are also focused on collaborative art-making and relational storytelling. Through these practices, they are able to foster deep and meaningful communal relationships. This event will create a safe space for the community to be vulnerable and comfortable enough and share their stories while making art collectively. Most aspects of this project fit into the focus of Love Intersections.

How the project is tied to racial justice

This project will help participants connect with their cultural roots while fostering dialogue around racial justice, organizational resilience and community nourishment through the process of artmaking. The participants will be engaging and exploring the sensories of traditional herbs to make connections to their own personal stories. Through these connections, the participants will be able to feel more connections to their ancestors and cultural heritage. These sensory engagements might also bring memories and feelings. They can then express their feelings through making art. This will allow the participants to share these stories and feelings in an easier way and through the sharing creating of more bonding experiences for the community.

The results and reflections of this event can provide lots of information about traditional and community healing. This could be very valuable to policymakers involved in healthcare. Living in Canada, we are taught to prioritize western medicine over cultural medicine because a

lot of cultural medicine is “unscientific” and based on “superstition”. However, we believe that cultural medicines bring lots of value and healing to those who partake in it. This event will also act as a great prompt for people to reflect on their distant memories and share their personal experiences and histories. This will also allow the participants and policymakers to realize and recognize how the personal intersects with the broader political and structural issues.

This event will provide an opportunity for people to share their seemingly isolated experiences and help people to articulate and express their emotions. Hearing other people’s stories will also help the participants realize that they are not alone. It will provide people, especially elders, a safe space to share their lived experiences. This will also help the youth of the community understand where the elders are coming from. Similarly, hearing from the youth could also help the elderly to have a better perspective of the lives of the younger generation. This can help people from the community better understand each other. Having shared experiences and collective knowledge will also foster better community solidarity.

This project is important to pay attention to because Chinatown is a historic community that faces issues such as gentrification and safety. Li & Li (2011) state that “Vancouver’s Chinatown today shows many signs of a low-income area with a high percentage of elderly population, while at the same time accommodating a relatively high concentration of immigrants” (p. 19). The Chinatown community is a group of people who have many shared experiences when it comes to traditional medicines and healing. With this project, we aim to learn more about experiences of health as it relates to gentrification and help communicate the importance of this historic neighbourhood so that it can be protected.

In addition to gentrification, this project has a strong focus on health and healing. Vancouver and the Lower Mainland comprises of a large Asian demographic. A study done by Tiwari & Wang (2008) found that Asian immigrants were less likely to access mental health services compared to white people, while also having higher rates of depression. This workshop will give members of the Asian community an opportunity to come together and share their experiences and memories around spices and healing. While doing the demo workshop, Clay and Rayna both found that the sensory aspect of the workshop was able to unlock past memories and emotions in a safe way. And we hope it can help other participants in the same way. Having communities come together and share stories about health and healing can help to inform health-related policies that are reflective of Vancouver’s demographics. In the Lower Mainland, there is often a lack of culturally specific care, leaving people of marginalized communities left behind to figure out care that feels right to them. By listening to stories of medicines from these communities, we can create policies and initiatives to make sure everyone feels included in their healthcare.

The Planning Process

Overview of the event

Guests will be divided into small groups of 5 or 6 people, preferably with people they already know. Event facilitators will lead the groups in the sensory activity and discussion questions. Lastly, people will reflect on their experiences and make collages either in groups or individually.

Guiding Questions for activity

What memories or stories does the smell remind you of?

What personal or ancestral connections come to mind as you touch and smell the herbs?

What cultural or familial story does this “medicine” remind you of?

What “medicine” do you personally offer or bring?

What “medicine” does your art practice offer to the community?

What “medicine” is missing in your art practice or community?

What “medicine” is needed to sustain your work and community in a just and sustainable way?

Guests

We want to start by inviting the ACAM community and their families because the community is relatively small and tight-knit. The smaller size means that these guests would be more comfortable sharing their collective experiences and stories with one another. By opening the invitation to families of the ACAM community we hope to promote intergenerational bonding with the different age groups and build community strength. In later workshops, we will open the event to the Chinatown community and the broader Asian community in Vancouver.

We want this event to be invite-only because we want people to be comfortable enough to share those personal stories and by making this event invite-only we can select people who are already comfortable with sharing. We want to extend the invite to the rest of the ACAM community because we also want to foster community building and bonding.

Venue

We want the venue to be easily accessible to all members of the community so we suggest holding the event in a community center. This was a room can be booked, giving the guests privacy to share their stories with other members of the group. One potential community center is the Strathcona Community Centre near Chinatown which is accessible by transit and car and is wheelchair accessible.

<https://vancouver.ca/parks-recreation-culture/strathcona-community-centre-room-rentals.aspx>

How results are being communicated

The results from this workshop will be gathered through photos and feedback/reflections from the participants. To communicate the results to an academic audience, the photos and participant reflections can be compiled into a report.

Getting consent from guests

Since the topic of the event may touch on sensitive topics for some participants, we suggest having a consent form explaining this as well as asking for permission to share the participant's artwork and reflections.

Sources Cited

Mahieus, L., & McCann, E. (2023). "Hot+Noisy" public space: Conviviality, "Unapologetic Asianness," and the future of Vancouver's Chinatown. *Urban Planning*, 8(4).
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Tiwari, S. K., & Wang, J. (2008). Ethnic differences in mental health service use among white, Chinese, South Asian and south east Asian populations living in Canada. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 43(11), 866-871. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-008-0373-6>