

A Qualitative Study—*Art of Mind: From art to health youth health-related needs assessment through art expressions*

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Overview

Background/Rational

The American culture encourages the sharing of emotions and problems; in contrast, many Asian American (AA) cultures view sharing problems as a sign of weakness or discourage it for fear of losing face. The ensuing silence teaches Americanized Asian youth that their problems, especially unseen ones, are not worthy of discussion. Given the frequent language and cultural barriers between youth and parent, AA youth may feel isolated linguistically, ideologically and emotionally.

Literatures have suggested art-based expression to be effective in conveying messages and facilitating communication as seen in art therapy¹, photo-voice² and drama-based presentation³. To corroborate the efforts in serving the AA youth, the Chinese Community Health Resource Center (CCHRC), with its co-sponsors: the San Francisco Youth Commission- Health and Wellness Committee and the American Red Cross Youth for Chinese Elderly (YCE) program, presented the Art of Mind (AOM) project by integrating the advantages of art-based expression to facilitate communication and assess health-related (including mental health) needs of the AA youth community.

Youth of transitional age encounters an array of physical, mental, emotional and social changes. As youth learn to adapt to these changes, guidance and communication are keys that help to facilitate and nurture positive growth through transition into adulthood. Many health- and mental-related issues can worsen with the lack of attention and/or treatment. Recent studies among AA youth reported increased prevalence of issues such as suicide^{4 5}, clinical depression⁶, mental health, domestic violence,⁷ teen dating violence⁸, hepatitis B, and obesity⁹. These results suggest areas needing for increased awareness and education. With cancer and cardiovascular disease as the leading causes of death in the overall AA population¹⁰, these topics also need to be addressed in disease prevention.

To further understand health-related needs of the youth community, CCHRC and its co-sponsors utilized an innovative approach in the format of an art competition, the AOM project, as a venue to assess health-related concerns among AA youth. Instead of using a conventional format (i.e. written survey), CCHRC invited AA youth aged 13-18 to use various art medium(s) to express

¹ Northern California Art Therapy Association

² Bessell, Deese, & Medina, 2007; Wang & Pies, 2004; Wilson et al., 2007

³ Cheney, Kohler, & Muilenburg, 2006; Cueva, Kuhnley, Lanier, & Dignan, 2003; Stephens-Hernandez et al., 2007

⁴ From the SAAY Report, which lists as its reference: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2000). WISQARS (Web-based Statistics Query and Reporting System). Retrieved February 3, 2003. <http://webapp.cdc.gov/cgi-bin/broker.exe>

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ American Psychological Association (2003). Women and Depression. Retrieved: June 8, 2009.

<http://www.apa.org/ppo/issues/pwomenanddepress.html>

⁷ <http://www.apilegaloutreach.org/about.html>

⁸ California Student Survey Brief 4, "Teen Dating Violence," 2003-2004, Access date September 2008,

<http://www.stdhivtraining.org/resource.php?id=219&ret=clinical_resources>.

⁹ Asian American Justice Center. Health Inequities in the Asian American Community. Accessed June, 22, 2009.

¹⁰ Asian American Health Initiative, 2005. <<http://www.aahiinfo.org/english/asianAmericans.php#profiles>>

health-related concerns that were significant to them; which otherwise are often undermined or disregarded. Through the AOM project, CCHRC empowered youth via project involvement as committee members to spearhead project design, development, implementation, promotion, competition judging, results dissemination and evaluation.

As incentives to partake in the AOM project, scholarships were granted to the top ten artists and community service hours were honored with each artwork submission. Artworks were submitted via an interactive youth health website: www.TeensInCharge.org, and the top ten artworks were identified by a judging panel of youth and professionals based on purpose, fundamentals of art, creativity and artistic potential. The AOM project was granted IRB approval by Chinese Hospital, San Francisco, to conduct the study.

The 74 submitted artworks reflected the following categories of youth health-related concerns: Body image and eating disorder (n=6), substance abuse (n=12), depression and mental health (n=23), and nutrition and health (including diseases) (n=33). In addition, the impact evaluations of the AOM project for its randomly selected participants via in-person interviews revealed insights of experiences and suggested positive changes (n=3).

The AOM project findings were summarized and compiled into an educational booklet featuring AOM youth artists and their artworks. This booklet also highlighted health-related concerns of AA youth and available community resources. In hopes to reduce language and culture barriers which hinder youth-parent communication, CCHRC and the AOM committee decided to translate the project findings into different Asian languages to outreach to and communicate with parents with limited English proficiency, starting with Chinese (which represents over 80% of the AOM project participants).

To continue to raise awareness of and facilitate communication on health-related issues among AA youth, the AOM project findings were and will continue to be disseminated among youth and their peers, parents, providers, community-based organizations and policy makers of the AA community via the followings venues:

- A Community Education and Media Press Conference (in November 2009) was conducted to raise awareness and to initiate dialogue on youth health concerns by outreaching to youth and their peers, parents, providers, community-based organizations, policy makers and local media in the San Francisco AA community.
- A featured section on the Interactive Youth-friendly Website, www.TeensInCharge.org to outreach to web users.
- Limited amount of Printed Educational Booklets are available at CCHRC and its Co-sponsor Organization for local community based organizations.
- Through Local and National Presentations of project findings, at conferences and meetings, to raise awareness and facilitate understanding health-related concerns among AA youth.

The Challenges

The promotion of the project posed a challenge. The low preliminary participation rate in AOM was indicative that “word-of-mouth” promotions were not sufficient. CCHRC and the planning committee then incorporated additional promotion efforts in the following areas: online social networks, youth-related websites, ad placement on search engine, local school district, and local youth gatherings.

Lessons Learned

- Empower youth by providing opportunities to initiate, develop, implement and voice concerns of significance.

- Outreach to youth by collaborating with youth-based programs/organization and utilizing youth-preferred methods such as online social networks, youth-related websites, ad placement on search engine, local school district, local hangouts, and word-of-mouth.
- Adapt similar project education and assessment format to outreach to other youth populations.
- Youth have a lot to say when provided with the appropriate venue for their voices to be heard:

My message to other teens is to "believe in yourself. Whenever you face a problem, remember to do 20% reflection of the actual problem and 80% resolving the problem. Sometimes when we look too deep into the actual problem and we sink ourselves into the problem and then we become the problem. We think like we're not being talkative enough [...] just really put yourself into that place and be free to open up and start talking". *Male, 17 years of age.*

I think the most effective way to cope with stress is to "talk it out with people you're comfortable with because if you keep to yourself, it will be bottled up; If you talk to someone else, you wouldn't be as alone". *Female, 13 years of age.*

Through participating in the AOM project, "I learned to express myself more and communicate. I did research on online and talked to my friends about teen problems and learned about stress, depression. And set goals for myself to talk more". *Female, 15 years of age.*

All in all, the AOM provided positive, teen-friendly outlet for youth to express concerns/ emotions through artistic expression. Through the creative process, youth voiced concerns and had a chance to experience self-discovery, empowerment, personal fulfillment, relaxation and stress relief. The AOM also fostered positive peer influence by encouraging youth to share health information with friends and to invite friends to utilize the art expression to communicate concerns. Moreover, parents, providers/community workers, and policy makers have better insights on the concerns and needs of the AA youth community.