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Creative Resilience Against Racism Among Asian Americans: Development of a Method

Capstone Thesis

Lesley University

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Art Therapy

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Abstract

The experience of racism is inevitable and can become internalized when racism is persistent. As an Asian American woman, I am interested in exploring how art can be used as a form of resilience against internalized racism among Asian Americans. Racism against Asian Americans and recent immigrants from Asia has always existed throughout the history of the United States. Systematic laws, institutional policies, and cultural norms have set rules and narratives to put Asian Americans at a disadvantage. In addition, Asian Americans may have difficulty opening the conversation about racism. Internalized racism can cause physical and mental harm. I used the development of a method for my thesis through an intermodal transfer approach with the arts. The result was that the participant was able to explore their “core” identity compared to their identity based on their physical appearance. If there is an opportunity to continue the series of workshops, it would be best to have consistent group members while the workshop scaffolds identity, discusses systematic racism and challenges, and leads on utilizing art as a form of resilience against internalized racism. Further research on individual and group formats is recommended.

Keywords: Asian Americans, internalized racism, identity formation, art therapy, intermodal transfer

Creative Resilience Against Racism Among Asian Americans: Development of a Method

Introduction

Growing up in the United States, one of the earliest memories I have was being discriminated against based on my racial appearance. In that event, I learned what race was, but I was not taught how to address the experience of racism. As I have interacted with people in my life, I always felt there was this pre-conception of my identity as a person based on my racial features. Only when I went into higher education did I learn the different facets of racism: the history of colonialism, systematic racism, and the effect of the model minority myth stereotype. All these expectations are compounded by categorizing individuals based on appearance in the America I was raised in. Having personally experienced the effect of systematic racism and the internalization of racism, it became difficult to connect with my intersectional identity. Thus, building resilience against racism among Asian Americans is important for my scope of practice. As an Asian American from an immigrant family with an interest in the expressive arts and mental health wellness, I am curious about the utilization of art to explore internalized racism among Asian Americans. Thinking of the integration of art, identity, and resilience ignited a question in me about how art therapy can be a form of advocacy and resiliency against racism for Asian Americans.

Recurrent experiences of racial trauma, microaggressions, and racist incidents can lead to a common reaction that is called internalized racism (Chopra, 2021, p. 504). The racist message typically from the dominant White culture can get ingrained into racial minorities, which can lead to feeling of inferiority, self-loathing, and a negative view of their own racial/ethnic group while White culture is superior and the standard norm (Chopra, 2021, p. 504). According to Kim

and Epstein (2021), the adverse effects of racial discrimination on physical health are cardiovascular disease, diabetes, chronic pain, high blood pressure, thyroid disease, dementia, and shortened lifespan. "Racism is also interlocked with other systems of oppression and privileges, including nativism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and ableism, to shape experiences and identities for Asian Americans" (Yoo et al., 2021, p. 318). Regarding mental health, the experience of racial discrimination can cause depression, anxiety, sleep problems, and a high risk for drug use (Kim & Epstein, 2021, p. 103). Asian Americans experience not only negative racial slurs but also "positive traits" or stereotypes based on the structural, systemic racism developed through White-constructed concepts known as the model minority. The description of the positive traits stereotypes that Asians are academically and financially more successful by being hard workers, which promotes meritocracy and disregards other racial ethnicities' struggles and disadvantages set up by systematic racism (Kim & Epstein, 2021, p. 104). The model minority trope plays down the Asian American racial, prejudice, and discriminatory experiences and rationalizes racism. This leads to internalizing the model minority traits to meet the unrealistic standard Asian Americans place on themselves while denying racial hostility. Thus, the model minority myth makes sharing the adversity of racism difficult and increases somatic distress (Kim & Epstein, 2021, p. 104). Cooper et al. (2022) mentioned that the U.S has a long-standing historical racial propaganda against Asians and Asian Americans such as the 1883 Chinese Exclusion Act, subjugated knowledge that 90% of rail workers were Chinese immigrants working on the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869, the Japanese encampment, and the instigation of Anti-Asian sentiment from former president Donald Trump of using racial slurs such as of the "China virus" or "kung-flu virus." In the times of early Asian immigration to the U.S., Asian immigrants were set up at a disadvantage by institutional racism to limit citizenship and land

ownership with the reason for “legal prohibitions.” Asian immigrants in the U.S. also experienced exploitation, discrimination, segregation, and racial ideology that dehumanized and degraded the identities of Asian immigrants (Chopra, 2021, p. 503). “Asian American racial identity was a means for collective action coined by activists Yuji Ichioka and Emma Gee after forming the Asian American Political Alliance at UC Berkeley in 1968” (Yoo et al., 2021, p. 318). Racism against Asian Americans has been an intrinsic facet of racial relations in the United States and affects many Asian Americans. Thus, the topic of racism and resilience is critical for the well-being of Asian-American health.

Racism can be a difficult subject to talk about, mainly if one is not acclimated to having a social justice racial dialogue. According to Young et al. (2021), Asian American households with first-immigrant parents may not know how to have a dialogue about racism with their child due to parents not being familiar with racial dynamics in the United States. To increase improvement in communication and understating the impact of racial discrimination, “...educators and community outreach leaders can develop educational materials that outline the negative impacts of racial discrimination and provide training for how Asian American families can have constructive conversations about race” (Young et al., 2021, p.1037). In consideration of addressing internalized racism and having difficulty processing emotions, it may be helpful to use art as a therapeutic tool to process and aid in self-expression (“Healing Through Art,” 2020). Art therapy can help individuals express topics through creative voices that may be challenging to express verbally. Art can be a tool to help re-narrate views and inner voices, such as internal racism (Goerdts, 2021). In art therapy, it is best for the clinician to approach the client with a balance of the client’s cultural heritage and the Western world and help find harmony (Potash, 2021). At the same time, there is an identified need for art therapists to “include training

experiences involving different cultures and subcultural groups, and to increase training experiences that examine destructive prejudices and attitudes that interfere with understanding cultural reference points” (Potash, 2021, p. 201). As an Asian American, I recognize that all Asian Americans represent individual perspectives with similar experiences. Asian Americans are not a monolithic group, and my thesis paper may not represent the entirety of Asian American individuals. At the same time, racism has been prevalent, and “anti-Asian stereotypes and racism persist in the U.S. today, often with little backlash from the public” (Chopra, 2021, p. 504). My life goal is to bridge the gaps in the lack of understanding and awareness of internalized racism among Asian Americans. During my research for my thesis paper, I used keywords to search on the Lesley University Library Database and Google Scholar to search for peer-reviewed articles. Keywords that were used in various combinations were Asian American, internalized racism, and art therapy. I was not able to find an article that explicitly uses art therapy to explore and process internalized racism among Asian Americans. I was surprised when I found an article that utilized dance/movement therapy with Asian Americans in 1997. However, I did not use that article, as I find the year it was published to be outdated, and it uses dance/movement therapy, which is not as relevant to my thesis. In the combination of “internalized racism” and “Asian American,” there were quite a few articles that showed up in the research. Especially regarding the impact of COVID-19 and the coordination to the increase of Asian hate crimes. Other methods of research were using the Google internet search engine and going to my local library. The experience in this literature review research has educated me on Asian American history and the long-term impact of systematic racism and oppression. I am deeply grateful for the privilege of my intersectionality as an Asian American woman and a scholar in higher education to have access and support to articles that shed light on the domino

effect of systematic racism. The next section of the paper will be an in-depth exploration on the meaning of Asian American identity, internalize racism, and the benefit of creative intervention.

Literature Review

What does it mean to be Asian American? I have been contemplating this question for the majority of my life. Yoo et al. (2021) reported that there is no clear description of how to understand the meaning of identity, either as a national identity or cultural one. Those who self-identify as Asian American are left on their own to find what it means to be “Asian” and “American” without accessible guidance. The image of the quintessential Asian American is often assumed to be that of East Asians (i.e. Korean, Chinese, Japanese), primarily U.S born and economically ascended compared to other ethnic groups. However, the range of Asian Americans comes from various ethnic groups with individualized cultural backgrounds. They all possess their own rich histories, languages, and experiences (Hwang, 2021; Chopra, 2021). For the purpose of this paper, the term Asian American will be used to refer to those who have Asian ancestry and self-identify as Asian American. This paper may not cover all unique experiences related to the lives of Asian Americans, and as such, there will be gaps in its scope. Instead, the topic of the paper will relate to how art can be a form of resilience against internalized racism among Asian Americans. In another part of this paper, it will endeavor to address the most recent global xenophobia against Asian and Anti-Asian sentiment: *the COVID-19 pandemic*.

Recent Events

It was President Trump who instigated the peak of anti-Asian sentiment during a pandemic with racial slurs such as “Chinese Virus.” “The temporal patterns seen herein provide further evidence of a specific effect of the pandemic on anti-Asian sentiment slurs, and not just a

general rise in racial tensions” (Nguyen et al., 2020, p. 9). Through repetitive anti-Asian sentiment, the political tendency to weaponize COVID-19 and blame AAPI people lead to an increase in hate crimes, signifying the racial scapegoating of Asian Americans (Cheng et al., 2021). According to Chopra (2021), between March 19, 2020, and February 28, 2021, close to 3,800 reported hate incidents have been reported. “These incidents include verbal harassment, shunning, physical assault, discrimination, and refusal of service, and online harassment, with Asian women reporting incidents 2.3 times more than men” (Chopra, 2021, p. 503). Finding the statistics of reported hate crimes makes me contemplate the years of unreported hate crimes and incidents against Asian Americans. How accessible is it for Asian Americans to disclose their racial experience? Chopra (2021) mentioned that despite the increased media reports and awareness of systematic and political racism in the U.S. being discussed, there is still a lack of public discussion about internalized racism.

Internalized Racism

There are various meanings of internalized racism that are beyond the scope of this paper to explore and deepen the various categories of internalized racism. Through my research on the meaning of internalized racism, I have found Chopra’s writing to be most relevant to my paper. Repeated experiences of racial trauma, discrimination, microaggressions, and racist incidents often lead to internalized racism (Chopra, 2021, p. 504). The definition of internalized racism is when people of color deem the self as inferior, distance themselves and one’s race, due to the result of self-loathing stemming from internalized or adopted racial beliefs from the dominant White cultural norm (Chopra, 2021, p. 504). “Moreover, there are also a multitude of terms used to describe IR [internalized racism], including but not limited to internalized oppression, appropriated racial oppression, colonized mentality, racial self-hatred, internalized Whiteness,

and internalized White supremacy” (Hwang, 2021, p.598). Camp and Carter analyzed five elements regarding internalized racism: “negative beliefs about one’s own race, beliefs that reinforce the racial status quo, embracing Eurocentric standards for beauty and behavior, criticizing members of one’s own racial/ethnic group, and painful emotions, such as shame and embarrassment” (as cited in Chopra, 2021, p. 504). Another aspect of internalized racism is that in order to survive White American spaces, Asian Americans must assimilate themselves to White standards. However, according to Banks and Stephen, “internalized racism includes more than devaluation of the self and acceptance of messages of racial inferiority; it includes a broader range of ways people from marginalized groups learn to accept and take on the tools of oppression” (as cited in Chopra, 2021, p. 504). Individuals who experience internalized racism are connected to increased stress, anxiety, depression, hopelessness, body dissatisfaction, problems with physical health, life satisfaction, decreased mental wellness, and collective and personal self-esteem (Chopra, 2021, p. 504). Colorism and internalized racism due to societal and ideological racism can be recreated within Asian American families, leading to intergenerational trauma (Chopra, 2021, p. 506). Asian American families wish for their children to be successful in the White dominant society and culture and may implement family lessons that integrate with racial inferiority, causing harmful experiences for Asian American children (Chopra, 2021, p. 506). Asian American family members were often seen as unaffectionate or “destructive,” which drew away the disadvantage of systematic racism for people of color and the advantages of White privilege (Chopra, 2021, p. 506). On the other hand, Asian Americans may unconsciously be partaking in interethnic conflict and distance themselves from their parents, who are not as assimilated to the dominant Western American culture (Hwang, 2021, p. 600). “Internalized racism can manifest as “intra ethnic othering” when Asian Americans seek to

distance themselves from others of their race/ethnicity and project their perceived inadequacies onto others of the same group” (Pyke & Dang, as cited in Chopra, 2021, p. 505). The feeling of shame is often accompanied by the behavior of distancing (Chopra, 2021, p. 505). “This is problematic because healthy child–parent attachments are the cornerstone for individual and family well-being and identity formation” (Hwang, 2021, p.600). Asian Americans who believe their parents are “too foreign,” perpetual foreigner stereotypes (PFS) can increase distance, vulnerability to conflict, and “child-parent othering” as Asian American youths are pressured to assimilate into the dominant group (Hwang, 2021, p. 600). According to Hwang (2021), the *perpetual foreigner stereotype* has a significant impact on contributing to and reinforcing internalized racism. As a way to restrict Asian populations from immigrating to the United States historically, the perpetual foreigner emerged from xenophobia against Asians and anti-Asian sentiment. “To date, the PFS stereotype continues to exacerbate xenophobia, reinforcing interracial othering and causing other groups to assume that [Asian Americans] are not American” (Hwang, 2021, p. 600). The perpetual foreigner stereotypes fortify the narrative that Asian Americans are a “Yellow Peril” who cannot be trusted and not “American” (Hwang, 2021, p. 600). Within Asian American populations, perpetual foreigner stereotypes lower the sense of belonging to American culture, life satisfaction, hope, and increase identity conflict (Hwang, 2021, p. 600 - 601). Looking on the other side of the perpetual foreigner stereotype, the model minority stereotype also contributes to the invisibility and oppression of Asian Americans (Cheng et al., 2021, p. 630). “One manifestation of internalized racism for Asian Americans is internalizing the model minority myth, the idea that Asian Americans are educationally, professionally, and financially successful due solely to their strong work ethic and perseverance” (Chopra, 2021, p. 506). To provide additional context, the model minority was originally created

in the 1960s to create conflict within ethnic groups and promote meritocracy while dismissing racial inequities. Kim and Epstein (2021) suggested that the stereotypes from the model minority mold Asian Americans in a positive light; however, it places emphasis on Asian Americans to uphold the standard created by the White-constructed lens and concept. Thus, dismissing the reality of racial hostility, discrimination, and negative experiences (Kim & Epstein, 2021, p. 104). The stereotypes can have deleterious effects that depersonalize and evoke negative emotions (Hwang, 2021, p. 599). Asian Americans who are pressured to assimilate to the model minority stereotypes experience increased anxiety, depression, and risk of impostor feelings (Hwang, 2021, p. 601). According to Chopra (2021), Asian Americans who internalize negative stereotypes are connected to a decrease in quality of life, life satisfaction, and self-esteem. This brings the question back to how art can be a form of resilience against internalized racism among Asian Americans. Healing from internalized racism must address both the individual and the larger context of oppression.

Fostering Critical Consciousness with Art-making

Developing a critical consciousness (or conscientization) can help address internalized racism to enhance collective and individual awareness (Hwang, 2021, p. 603). I recognize various approaches to internalized racism, such as psychoeducation. For this paper, I will explore an art therapy approach to addressing internalized racism among Asian Americans through critical consciousness and identity reformation. According to Chopra (2021), creative forms such as dance, creative writing, art, and theater can help combat stereotypes. In the lens of Asian culture, seeking mental health support is often stigmatized and can result in feeling shame. Evading professional help for mental health concerns is common in Asian culture, and often associate shame with their mental health needs (Chau & Holliday-Moore, 2019). Shik (2013)

suggested that using art as an alternative voice to express emotions can help overcome cultural stigma and language barriers regarding mental health. The use of art as a therapeutic tool processes thoughts, emotions, self-reflection, and expresses individuals' voices through creative means. According to the American Art Therapy Association (AATA), "art therapy is an integrative mental health and human services profession that enriches the lives of individuals, families, and communities through active artmaking, creative process, applied psychological theory, and human experience within a psychotherapeutic relationship" (2017, p. 1). There is an increasing amount of evidence and research proven to have positive health results (social cohesion, reduced stress level, promote healthy behaviors and emotions) due to arts-based interventions (Baumann et al., 2021, p. 112). A creative project that was based in New York "...embraced street art to initiate conversations about mental illness; the project led to a creative outlet for community members, strengthened social networks, and reduced mental health stigma through the amplification of voices that may have otherwise remained silenced" (Gordon, as cited in Baumann, 2021, p. 112). Shin et al. (2022) used an art-based intervention to empower students against anti-Asian racism.

Even though Shin et al. (2022) utilized an art education lens, the use of art-based intervention has proven effective in exploring internalized racism and raising resiliency, which is relevant to the purpose of this thesis paper in exploring the use of art as resiliency against internalized racism among Asian Americans. In the art-based intervention, the first step was to build awareness of how Asian Americans are portrayed in North American pop culture and media by providing journals and articles for students to review and converse over particular examples that were popular historically (Shin et al., 2022, p. 99). From the clinician's lens, it is imperative to invite or create space for clients to explore and discuss difficult topics such as

racism. “By inviting such conversations with an attitude of openness and curiosity, clients are given the space to break the silence and heal some of the shame around these subjects” (Chopra, 2021, p. 508). Thus, utilizing art-based intervention could be an opportunity to open challenging conversations that may be difficult to verbalize. After students read historical and current pop culture racism, they discussed ways to “...address anti-Asian or other racism in the art classroom, sharing three art-based anti-racism approaches: art interventions/subverting racism; anti-racial gazing; and anti-racist memes” by diligently exploring and examining three Asian American contemporary artists who also aligned with the authors’ teaching strategies (Shin et al., 2022, p. 99). In the Shin et al. (2022) intervention, students were prompted to think about what they learned from class by reflecting on addressing anti-Asian racism in art education. The final step was to have students create artwork to address anti-Asian racism creatively and artistically (Shin et al., 2022, p. 99).

“These step-by-step instructions and strategies encouraged our students to reflect, explore, navigate, and expand the theme of anti-Asian racism and to explore pedagogical implications in personalized and artistic ways” (Shin et al., 2022, p. 99). In the feedback section of the intervention, one of the students reported that the art-based intervention helped him analyze and reflect on discrimination and stereotypes against Asian Americans. The student also reflected on how to influence societal cultural mindset to be more “accepting” and “understanding” (Shin et al., 2022, p. 100). It is essential for Asian Americans to equip themselves with critical consciousness to mitigate internalized racism. Critical consciousness means to critically reflect on systemic racism, inequities, societal oppression, and followed by the action to address and confront structures that are socially oppressive (Cheng et al., 2021, p. 628). Such as the student utilizing critical consciousness to reflect on and address their art piece

on the stereotypes and discrimination against Asian Americans. Shin et al. (2022) concluded that students became aware that the use of art is empowering and can be used as a form of advocacy for societal change. Empowerment and identity exploration come from the ability to critically examine information about one's racial/ethnic group (such as cultural traditions and history) while adapting a more prosperous commitment to one's identity and new understandings (Cheng et al., 2021, p. 637). Art can be used symbolically or as a metaphor that integrates narrative and storytelling (Shik, 2013). After reviewing the literature and analyzing my own art therapy paradigm, for my method, I want to use various art mediums for participants to begin exploring identity formation and an approach to start thinking of racial identity and using art as a metaphor for therapeutic approach. "Identity formation (or 'identity development') is the process where we begin to develop an understanding of who we are and how we fit into the world around us." (*Importance of Identity...*, n.d.). Art can be a less intrusive method to explore racial trauma without reliving traumatic experiences (Shik, 2013).

Intermodal Experience

This capstone thesis focuses on utilizing art-based approaches to address internalized racism among Asian Americans. After reading the Shin et al. (2022) study and how their intervention scaffolded in developing a critical consciousness of anti-Asian racism and empowering individuals through art, I was inspired to use an intermodal transfer approach rather than focusing on one singular art approach. Intermodal transfer is the idea of transitioning one art medium or form to another. Intermodal expressive arts invite the idea that creativity, imagination, and play are interrelated through the arts (Knill et al., 2005, p. 119). The intermodal approach can provide opportunities for various creative personal expressions through different art mediums. "An intermodal transfer supports the focusing process, revealing the "quite-right"

image, movement, sound and rhythm, or word. The process discloses the “felt sense” (Gendlin, 1981) and can allow for a shift in awareness” (Knill et al., 2005, p. 126). According to Malchiodi (2007), a felt sense is when an individual is undergoing a somatic awareness of an experience, circumstance, environment, or relationship, and it helps to make meaning to understand the world. These techniques extend expression, intensify group involvement or individuation, and offer fewer threatening modes for finding words than those habitually used in conversation (Knill et al., 2005, p. 130).

Creating an Intervention

This section of the paper introduces various art forms that were utilized in the intervention for my thesis. There are two parts to the warm-up of the directive: the first is a self-portrait sketch, and the second is using clay to create a self-portrait. “Self-portraits can contain a struggle for identity and self-actualization” and, as a warm-up tool, can help reduce anxiety (Muri, 2007, p 335-.337). “Clay-work enables the client to encounter the constructive and destructive aspects of the self, in processes of psychic change and identity formation, or in becoming himself/herself” (Sholt & Gavron, 2006, p. 68). Interacting with clay can be an effective method to support expressing emotions through a kinesthetic or tactile approach (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). The sensory qualities of art expression are helpful in decreasing stress and reflecting and reframing the felt sense of traumatic memories, loss, and grief (Malchiodi, 2007, p. 14). The warm-up can help start the process of thinking about self and identity development. Building positive racial/ethnic identity development is necessary to deconstruct internalized racism and critically reflect on racism (Cheng et al., 2021, p. 634). Transitioning to the directive of the intervention is designing a mask. The masks are used “(a) to represent two sides of a conflict or dilemma, (b) to express one’s identity in a group, (c) to explore dreams and

imagery, or (d) to express a social role” (Landy, as cited in Trepal-Wollenzier, 2002). Integrating creative imagination during mask-making can bring out tangible and emotional responses while the creator externalizes their feelings and thoughts onto the mask that symbolizes self-representation (Stephens & Higgins, 2023, p. 176). The creative process of mask-making can support individuals in exploring identity boundaries and roles that may be unclear or transitioning (Stephens & Higgins, 2023, p. 176). According to Osborne and Sablonniere (2014), having a solid sense of self-conceptualization and self-knowledge is connected to positive self-esteem. “A growth-oriented, nondefensive, and affirming racial/ethnic identity is rarely possible if one’s identity is rigidly built upon stereotypes (e.g., model minority) and worldviews shaped by White-oriented social systems” (Cheng et al., 2021, p. 634). The mask-making can provide an exploration of identity and an opportunity to develop critical reflection on racial identities by symbolically exploring elements of their identities on the inside and outside of the mask and addressing internal struggle (Stephens & Higgins, 2023, p. 176). Indeed, the critical milestone in racial/ethnic identity development is dismantling internalized racism and adopting a critical understanding of race and oppression (Cheng et al., 2021). Mask-making is a creative metaphor that can be used in consideration to narrative therapy. Kaufka mentioned that projecting oppressed issues can be an influential method in the healing process from internalized racism that is connected to self-inferiority, self-hate, and shame by helping with recreating an individual’s story and acknowledging an individual’s experience, which is an essential piece (as cited in Chopra, 2021, p. 508). The last intermodal transition is the writing reflection section of the intervention session. A reflective writing describing the art piece can help “reconcile differences in interpretation of meaning that often arise between individuals who view the mask and the artist creating the mask” (Stephens & Hugging, 2023, p. 177).

Methods

When I first developed my intervention, my target participants were late adolescent-age participants in an afterschool program at my internship site in Massachusetts. The initial reasoning was that the students and I had built some rapport since I was providing support at my internship teen program. My internship site focuses on providing services for Asian immigrant families and the Asian population in the local areas of Boston and Quincy. During the creation of my intervention relating to my thesis topic, I also wanted to take into consideration the students' needs as the discussion of racism can cause discomfort. The program and students had limited availability, so there was only enough capacity to conduct the intervention once. After consulting with professors from my university, I think it makes more sense to have this intervention as the first workshop of a series that leads to an open discussion of internalized racism in future workshops. In this first workshop, the focus is on strengthening a sense of self, self-esteem, and confidence as a starting point. "Having a clear and confident understanding of one's cultural identity thus creates a sense of continuity, of understanding that one's cultural group has had a continuous and meaningful existence" (Usborne & Sablonniere, 2014, p. 448). The meaning of continuity expands to confidently understanding with a symbolic and meaningful narrative in the group's values, traditions, and norms that have evolved and what has remained unchanged throughout history (Usborne & Sablonniere, 2014, p. 448). Starting with a workshop that focuses on a solid sense of self is ultimately what I want to do that aligns with my and the students' interests. The students in the youth program consist of high school juniors and seniors, and I wanted to take into consideration their schoolwork and long hours at school. Bringing up racism with these students who are currently in the process of transitioning from high school to college may not be appropriate. The students already have to think about adjusting to the last year of

their high school or college life, so I think it is unnecessary to bring up any additional worries and it might not be therapeutic for them. I received support from a staff member who is leading a program for the youth. The staff helped schedule a date for me to facilitate the intervention. The staff member marketed the intervention for two weeks during her workshops and on social media platforms. No students signed up to participate, which may be due to the timing of my intervention, which was when the students had just completed their mid-term exams. The intervention was canceled due to no students signing up. The staff who helped me market my intervention voluntarily asked if they could participate. I was surprised by her interest in the intervention, and we scheduled a day and time for the intervention. The intervention I developed was originally meant for group setting, however since only one participant signed up, I decided to make slight adjustments to make it an individual session. Further details of the modification will be stated later in the paper.

In my intervention, I began by checking in with the staff and asking how they were feeling. Then, I shared the purpose and theme of the workshop. I also explained to her that this is the start of a series of workshops that scaffolds into a discussion on internalized racism, and my focus on developing this first workshop is on identity. I discussed group agreements (respecting space, confidentiality, and safety). Regarding confidentiality, I told her I would not be sharing identifiable information about her in my thesis, and privacy of her artwork. I also emphasized that the disclosure of the information is up to how much the participant wants to share, and I may share general information about the creative experience to help process my experience as the facilitator in my thesis. When I discussed safety, I explained that she is free to take breaks as needed and adjust her space to her comfort needs. Then, I briefly shared the syllabus of the directive (warm-up, directive, closure). Sharing the individual guidelines took approximately 5

minutes. The warm-up consists of two parts, each approximately 5 minutes. I provided a paper and pencil for the participant and asked her to sketch a self-portrait for 5 minutes. I also mentioned that she may use a photo or mirror as a reference.

In the second part of the warm-up, I provided a brown Play-Doh from the internship site. The prompt was to create a self-portrait; this time, I mentioned it could be in any way she interpreted. I elaborated by inviting the participant to think about the following prompts: “Who am I? What makes me “me”? Things that have shaped you today, such as friends, family, school, roles you play, your interests and things you find dissonant, your morals, and beliefs.” The goal was to have participant(s) begin thinking about the question of “Who am I?” and their identities. When transitioning to the directive, I had all the art materials laid out on the other side of the table. I invited the client to pick out a blank full-face mask to decorate and use any of the materials that were on the table she saw fit. The materials provided on the table were acrylic paint, paint brushes, markers, glue, various beads, small styrofoam balls, glitter, colored pencils, and scissors. The wide range of materials was inspired by Stephens and Higgins’s (2023) mask-making intervention, which provided various materials to encourage contemplation while artistically layering the mask. Prompts that were given were, “On the inside of the mask, what are some personal elements of your identity? How do you see yourself? How would your close friends describe you that other people may not see? On the outside of the mask, how do you think others see you? What are you comfortable sharing with the world? What mask do you wear in certain places, situations, or around certain people?” The directive was approximately 30 minutes. When 10 minutes passed in the mask-making directive, I provided additional prompts, “What are some identities that are essential to you? You can also reflect on experiences that have impacted who you are today. How do you feel when they are ignored or “not seen”? What social

support did you have to support you in your identity development of understanding more about yourself?” The goal of the directive was to encourage participant(s) to explore the various identities and engagement of society in response to their identities. After the mask-making directive, I invited the participant to journal their experience for 10 minutes. I gave a few minutes for the participant to clear some space to write. The participant already had a pencil, and I provided paper for them to write. The prompt for the journaling section was “Describe your art piece. How are the items arranged? How do they connect? How is the inside and outside of the mask different or similar?” After two minutes of writing, I provided additional prompts, “What was the art process like? What stood out for you? How might someone view this? What do you find intriguing about your piece? Were there any connections with the inside and outside of the mask?” These questions were inspired by Stephens and Higgins's (2021) intervention, where they provided prompts for reflective journaling in their intervention. In the final closing piece of the workshop, I asked if the participant would like to share their thoughts or experiences with me. I also asked about their plan for self-care outside of work today. At the end of the workshop, I shared about the benefits of having a strong sense of identity and how it can help individuals when navigating through personal or systematic challenges. I thanked the participant for voluntarily participating in the intervention. During the intervention, I used paper and pencil to jot down notes of what I observed and my thoughts as a facilitator. I also wrote the start time of each activity to help me organize my notes.

Results

The participant and I had a pre-existing relationship since we both worked closely with each other. The participant had previously mentioned that she identified as Chinese American and is in her late twenties. When I first provided the first warm-up directive, “Sketch a self-

portrait of yourself,” the participant directly followed the directive and drew a self-portrait that consisted of typical facial features (eyes, mouth, nose, hair). When I saw her self-portrait, it evoked a positive feeling as the self-portrait appeared to be smiling. The mouth was smiling, the eyes were closed, making short arched lines, and there were multiple vertical short lines under the eyes that made the portrait appear as if it was blushing. I noticed she drew a necklace that I see her wearing daily. When given the second part of the warm-up, I also mentioned that she may interpret the creation of her self-portrait in any way. To my surprise, she created small symbolic creations. Then, in the mask-making session, I informed the participant that it would be 30 minutes in this section of the workshop. I did not plan to make art in the original intervention I had developed. However, since the workshop only consisted of me (the facilitator) and the staff (participant), I decided to partake in the art-making process in the mask section. When I mentioned I would be joining the mask-making section, the participant responded, “Great. That will be less awkward.” I was surprised to hear her comment as she did not mention she was nervous or show any indication that she felt awkward in the beginning. The participant went to pick a mask and began picking out various art materials on the table. The participant went back to her seat and began drawing on the inside of the masks with a red marker. When the participant attempted to draw the mask on the inside, the color did not stick to the mask well, and some colors were smudged on the participant’s hand. She giggled and mentioned that the color was not sticking on the mask well. I attempted to paint red acrylic paint with a brush on the inside of my mask to see if it had a better result of sticking to the mask. The acrylic paint stuck well to the mask, and I told the participant she could try using the acrylic paint for a more pigmented result. The participant reported “okay” and continued decorating her mask. The participant incorporated collage by cutting pages from magazines and gluing them to her mask. By the end of the mask-

making section, I noticed there was a collage glued on the forehead of the mask, red lines that outline the eye area of the mask. On the right side of the mask, there was a row of three small blue irregular shapes that resembled tears. On the left side of the cheek, there was a red square, and on the mouth was a collage of a person with their mouth wide open. Inside the mask were collages, musical symbols, a row of three small blue irregular shapes, and the perimeter of the mask was shaded with a red marker. After the mask-making section, I asked if the participant would like to take two minutes to clear some space for journaling. The participant took a few minutes to clear space in her area of the table. Then, I provided the participant with a paper and prompts. During the 10 minutes of the writing section, I quietly cleaned and cleared the table, which created additional space in the participant's area. I noticed the participant was quietly and diligently journaling. As the final activity of the workshop, I asked the participant if she would like to share her thoughts and reminded them that how much she disclosed was up to her. The participant reported that she felt calm in the art process. Then, she shared that it was interesting for her to reflect on personalities, characteristics, and life experiences through a creative lens. When discussing the mask-making process, she mentioned she was reflecting on her identity and how she was thinking about her presenting East Asian physical features and the associations with stereotypes. She reported she was surprised by what she decided to put on her mask versus what she decided not to put on the mask and the thoughts that had emerged. The participant shared that it opened up doors she didn't expect. When she mentioned how she did not expect certain thoughts to emerge, I was thinking about how she may be exploring her unconsciousness. The client reported she felt she was exploring the core essence of her identity rather than exploring at a superficial or surface level of her identity. As I was providing prompts throughout the workshop, I noticed the participant would occasionally nod or make a "hmm" sound. Before the

end of each activity in this workshop, I informed the participant when she had a few minutes left of the activity for the participant to wrap up and help transition to the next activity. At the end of the workshop, I mentioned, “Having a strong sense of identity can lead to having better self-esteem and confidence. Knowing what our identity is within the community can provide better support in navigating difficulties rather than personal or systematic challenges.” Before the participant left, I thanked the participant for voluntarily partaking in the intervention.

Discussion

Art can be used to ignite the thought process in identity development, systematic racism, and social justice. My intervention was created with the intention of it being the first one in a series of workshops that would lead to a discussion on using the creative arts as a form of fostering resilience against internalized racism among Asian Americans. The original target participants did not sign up for the workshop, however one of my coworkers was interested. The workshop was ultimately conducted as an individual session using an intermodal transfer approach. The participant reported it being a “calming” experience and the use of art to reflect and explore their identity was “interesting.” Overall, the participant was able to explore their internal identity, as evidenced by the participant mentioning she was exploring her “core” identity while reflecting on her external identity that is based on her appearance. The feedback and what I observed in this workshop supported my intervention as a first series workshop in exploring identity and building a foundation that can lead to a discussion about internalized racism in future workshops.

One highlight of this intervention was witnessing the symbolic transition of the creation in each activity. To elaborate, the first warm-up, the self-portrait was seen smiling and invoked positive energy in my observation. The second warm-up was the clay piece, the participant

created symbols that presented as a self-portrait. Utilizing clay to create a tangible symbolic creation allowed an opening to visually see one's inner reality is essential to the therapeutic process (Sholt et al., 2006). Clay-work can allow a contained space to explore parts of themselves that are unconscious that could be frightening or unpleasant (Sholt et al., 2006).

I was surprised to see the result of the main directive related to the mask, which had symbols that were presented as teardrops and a collage that had a mouth wide open placed on the mouth area. The mask piece invoked the opposite feeling compared to the warm-up sketch, and I felt there was a sense of vulnerability from the mask. In the therapeutic use of a mask, the mask can provide a contained space for clients to project a part of their identity or concern (Trepal-Wollenzier, 2002). Working with a mask can potentially uncover the hidden or constrained parts of the self. During the closure of the workshop, the participant shared that she was surprised by what she decided to put on the mask and what she did not put on the mask. Reflecting on the experience, I was intrigued by the contrast of emotions that were shown in the self-portrait warm-up sketch compared to the mask creation. "Art-making in expressive arts therapy means entering into a liminal or transitional space in which the play of possibilities leads to surprising results" (Levine, 2004, p. 72).

Continuation of Workshop

As mentioned above, this intervention was developed as a first one in a series of workshops in mind that will lead to a discussion on internalized racism. Conducting more than one workshop would be a challenge as initially, the target participant had limited availability, and the staff who voluntarily participated did not have much availability either. If I were to continue the series, my second workshop would focus on the exploration of social awareness and Asian American representation in society. I would ask participants to create a collage that

resonates with their intersectional identities from magazines and discuss the process. In the third workshop, the main activity would be to create a comic in which they had overcome systematic challenges or a time where they had helped someone overcome systematic challenges. This can lead to the topic of how art can be a form of resilience against internalized racism among Asian Americans. In the role of a clinician, it is imperative to hold the space to process difficult feelings, listen with empathy, and provide support in building critical reflection (Chopra, 2021). These interventions are blueprints of what I plan to do if time allows for more workshops and further research will be needed before conducting.

Limitations and Exploration

One of the limitations of this intervention was that this was done as an individual session once with an individual who had a pre-existing relationship with me. The results of this intervention may differ if the individual and I did not have a pre-existing relationship as coworkers. The intervention was originally created for a group setting. Group setting may provide a sense of inclusion and community through artmaking. In my original intervention for a group format, I planned to have participants in pairs or groups of three to have space for discussion and vulnerability where it may be difficult to share in a large group. I think it would be important to set group guidelines to be mindful of what is being shared as it is not group therapy. The intervention itself could be done in an individual or group setting as long as the intervention is modified appropriately for participant(s) use. Additional research should be explored in regards to individual versus group format. In this intervention, I decided to partake in the masking section. Further research may need to be done to explore the effect of facilitators making art during intervention. If the intervention was used on a specific Asian American group, further research needs to be done if the intervention is appropriate for the specific Asian

population use. I am curious about the future exploration of this intervention with Asian American young adult individuals who have a more solidified sense of identity and are still on the path of developing their identity as an adult.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the intervention aligns with my interests and the well-being of the participant(s). In the intervention I conducted, the participant was able to explore their identities through the intermodal approach. This intervention was created as a first one in a series that explored identity and would eventually lead to future workshops that will directly discuss internalized racism. The intervention itself could run on its own as a focus on identity development for Asian Americans. Facilitators need to make adjustments in the intervention in consideration of the group or individual setting. I am curious how this intervention may be translated to a specific age population in Asian American communities as young adults' identity development may be more solidified compared to late adolescence. In my current art therapy and clinical training as a future Asian American art therapist, it is essential for me to open space for creative voices to process systematic challenges, thoughts, and emotions that are difficult to verbalize. The findings from my research have influence me so that I will forever incorporate the use of art as a bridge to create a safe space to discuss social injustice against Asian Americans in my practice with Asian American community members. I am proud to be an Asian American, and it is my passion to advocate for the needs of the Asian American community.

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

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In the judgment of the following signatory this thesis meets the academic standards that have been established for the above degree.

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